

DIVINE

MEANING

Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics

THOMAS F. TORRANCE

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To
my dear friends
Ina and George Dragas
εὐχαριστῶ τῶ Θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ μνεῖᾳ ὑμῶν

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PREFACE

Like my studies in *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (1988) which appeared as a Monograph Supplement to the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, now published by T & T Clark Ltd of Edinburgh, most of the studies in this book were prepared some years ago to form the first of a three volume work on the history of hermeneutical thought in which particular attention was devoted to the epistemological issues involved. My long engagement with the conceptual interrelations between Christian theology and natural science delayed the revision and publication of these volumes, but they led me to see even more clearly that in theological inquiry as in natural scientific inquiry our concern is essentially hermeneutic, in which we seek to penetrate into the intrinsic intelligibility of the field in question in order to let it disclose and interpret itself to us. This is what the Greek fathers spoke of as the operation of a heuristic science (εὐρετική ἐπιστήμη) in which biblical interpretation and theological inquiry were inseparably intertwined with one another, and in which faith, the informal conceptual assent of the mind to objective reality, opens the way for understanding and guides its formulation. My studies of the way in which the Greek fathers pursued their heuristic hermeneutics led me to appreciate what they were doing in the early centuries of the Church, especially in their Christian conception of the contingent rational order immanent throughout the universe of visible and invisible reality created by God, and their struggle to secure the integrity of this understanding in the face of the dualist and determinist frames of thought then prevailing in the Graeco-Roman world. I came to realise that theologians in the early centuries of the Christian Church were in fact laying the first foundations upon which our understanding of empirico-theoretic science is now based. I have written much about this elsewhere, for example, in *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford, 1981). I am not concerned with drawing out that interconnection here, but simply with trying to elucidate the kind of depth-interpretation in which the Greek fathers were engaged as they sought to understand the biblical writings in the light of the divine realities to which they refer. Some readers may think that I am reading

back modern scientific modes of thought into the writings of these ancient theologians, but it was in fact from the Greek fathers particularly that I learned first to understand something of the created intelligibility impressed by the Word or Logos of God upon what was later called 'the books of nature' as well as the books of Holy Scripture. There has been a much greater impact on the history of theological inquiry by the thinking of the Early Church especially in the East than most people realise. This is reflected in the way of thinking that I developed in *Theological Science and Space, Time and Incarnation* (both London, 1969), in which I was more deeply indebted to Athanasius the Great than to Karl Barth, Albert Einstein, James Clerk Maxwell, or Michael Polanyi, but it is the cross-fertilisation of these interconnections that has meant so much to me, and helped me to understand more deeply the truths of divine revelation mediated to us through the Holy Scriptures.

Since the various studies now published in this volume were written over a span of years there is inevitably some overlap in their content as the same basic issues rise again and again in different contexts. They are now brought together, however, at the urgent pressure of my younger son, the Rev. Dr Iain Richard Torrance, who has himself contributed notably to patristic theology in his book *Christology after Chalcedon*, published by the Canterbury Press in 1988. As there seems to be so little available in this field dealing with epistemological and hermeneutical issues, others also have asked me to make more widely available essays that have been published in Athens in periodicals to which they do not have ready access, notably *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, *Abba Salama, Texts and Studies*, and *Ekklesia kai Theologia*, edited by the learned and indefatigable Archbishop Dr Methodios Fouyas of Athens, formerly of Addis Ababa and London, to whom the world of patristic scholarship is so deeply indebted. I am most grateful to him for allowing me to reproduce them here as Chapters 5, 6, 8, 9 and 12. I wish also to acknowledge my gratitude to the editors and the publisher of *The Ecumenical World of Orthodox Civilization, Russia and Orthodoxy: Volume III, Essays in honor of Georges Florovsky* (Mouton, The Hague, 1974), for permission to reprint 'The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology'. Chapter 7, 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology', was first published in *Theology in Reconciliation*, by Geoffrey Chapman, London, and William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, in 1975. Chapter 11, 'The Logic and Analogic of Biblical and Theological

Statements in the Greek Fathers', appeared in an earlier collection of my essays entitled *Theology in Reconstruction* in 1965. I have examined and discussed some of these questions in epistemology and interpretation in a more modern setting in my little book *Reality and Evangelical Theology*. This was originally published by The Westminster Press (Philadelphia, 1982), but is now out of print.

I would like to point out to readers that throughout the pages of this book the word 'man' is used in the concrete biblical way which is *inclusive* of man and woman, male and female human being.

Edinburgh,
July, 1994

INTRODUCTION: BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

The source of all our knowledge of God is his active revelation of himself. We do not know God against his will, or behind his back, as it were, but in accordance with the way in which he has elected to disclose himself and communicate his truth in the historical-theological context of the worshipping people of God, the Church of the Old and New Covenants. That is the immediate empirical fact with which the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are bound up. They were composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and in the providence of God have been handed on to us as the written form of the Word of God. They are the Scriptures of the people of Israel, for Israel was the selected medium of God's revelation in which his Word operated prophetically in the life and understanding of a particular historical community in order to provide within mankind a place where divine revelation might be translated appropriately into human speech and where it might be assimilated and understood in a communicable form by all humanity. And they are the Scriptures of the Christian Church, for the Church was the appointed sphere in which the historical self-revelation of God through Israel, gathered up and transcended and fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, is given an evangelical form in the apostolic witness and tradition, *kerygma* and *didache*, through which the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ himself continues to meet men and women as the living Word of God and to impart himself to them as the Way, the Truth and the Life, apart from whom, as our Lord claimed, no one has access to the Father.

This means that the Church must always turn to the Holy Scriptures as the immediate source and norm of all revealed knowledge of God and of his saving purpose in Jesus Christ. Since all the doctrinal formulations of the Church take shape within the matrix of the biblical revelation where they have their kerygmatic and didactic basis, regular examination and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures are in order, so that the Church

may clarify and purify its knowledge of God's self-revelation mediated through them, and put all its biblical exposition, all preaching of the Gospel, and all theological statements about its understanding of the content of God's self-revelation into question through referring them back to their divine ground. They are to be regarded as authentic rheological statements, accurately related to 'the truth as it is in Jesus',¹ and thus as statements framed in obedient response to the Word of the Truth of God addressing the Church through the Scriptures, that is, in what St Paul called 'the obedience of faith' (ὕπακοή πίστεως).² This is the all-important reference that tests whether its theological statements derive from true hearing of the Word of God or are simply thought up, whether they are genuine audits corresponding to the Word of God or are no more than speculative constructs out of the Church's creative spirituality. Hence the making and testing of the doctrinal formulations in the Church involves critical inquiry into their conformity to the content of divine revelation and careful interpretation of the Holy Scriptures through which that divine revelation is mediated. That is the relevance of hermeneutics to theological activity and the relevance of theology to hermeneutical activity.

Quite clearly our understanding and interpretation of the witness and testimony of the Holy Scriptures cannot be divorced from a doctrine of Holy Scripture, for at no point may form and content be separated from one another although they may and must be distinguished. This is not the place to offer a proper account of that doctrine, but in our concern to probe into the hermeneutics of the Early Church we will not be able to avoid dealing with certain essential elements in a doctrine of Holy Scripture as they bear upon the problem of its interpretation. Hence it may be worth noting at this point, if only very briefly, several significant features of Holy Scripture in order to indicate the way in which they are to be regarded.

(a) We acknowledge the Scriptures to be the written form of the Word of God because in and through them we hear the Word of God in his divine Majesty and Grace. Admittedly, no theoretic proof can be given for this because it is the Word of *God* with which we have to do in the Scriptures. At no point can we bring God under the compulsion of our

¹ Ephesians 4.21.

² Romans 1.5, 16.26, etc.

theoretical demonstrations or constrain him to yield answers to us in accordance with our empirical stipulations. Our inquiry will necessarily take a self-critical form in which we seek to allow the Word of God to be its own evidence in declaring itself to us, and to call all our presuppositions into question before it, so that we may listen to it and seek to understand it without imposing ourselves upon it. Because it is the Word of God that we encounter, we approach it in humility before its divine majesty, and with receptiveness before its divine Grace, thus yielding to it as is proper precedence and ascendancy over us in all our knowing and interpretation.

(b) In the Bible we hear the Word of God speaking through the mouth of men, through human prophets and apostles, but above all through the mouth of his Son incarnate Jesus Christ. The Bible is a human book written by human beings, and yet in and through it, it is God's Word that we hear. Thus God's Word comes to us in a happening which is both divine and human and in such a way that we hear the divine and the human at the same time – the divine and the human belong essentially together so that while they may be distinguished they are not to be separated from one another. The pattern for our understanding of this relation between the divine and the human is supplied in the heart of divine revelation in Jesus Christ himself, who unites divine and human natures in his one Person. But whereas in Jesus Christ the divine Word and human word are united within one Person, that is, hypostatically, in the Bible the divine Word and the human word are only united through dependence upon and participation in Christ, that is, sacramentally. 'In the written word there is no such thing as a personal union, but that which is human is used by God as an instrument which remains outside his own Person.'³ There is thus analogical unlikeness as well as likeness in the relation between the divine and the human in Christ and the relation between the divine (that is, Christ himself) and the human in the Bible. Strictly speaking then, for Christians, the real text with which we have to do in the New Testament Scriptures is the *humanity* of Jesus Christ, for it is in the humanity of the Word of God incarnate in him, that we meet and are addressed by the Word of the living God.

(c) The Word of God does not come to us in the Bible in such a way

³ Darwell Stone, *Outlines of Christian Dogma*, London, 1927, p. 130.

that we meet it face to face unveiled of its divine Glory and Majesty, but only in such a way that 'we see through a glass darkly', and 'know in part'.⁴ Moreover, the holy sinless Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ comes to us veiled in *our* humanity, for it was 'in the concrete likeness of the flesh of sin' (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας),⁵ yet of course without sinning, which he has assumed for our sakes in order that he may communicate with us where we are in our sin, poverty and darkness and lift us up into the riches and light of the Truth of God. The written form which the Word of God has taken in the Bible is in accord with the actual way taken by the Word of God when he became incarnate in Jesus Christ in the likeness of our flesh of sin but in such a way as to condemn sin in the flesh. Just as the incarnate Son identified himself with us in our estrangement from God, entering into the depths of our ignorance and darkness, making the contradictions and questions of man in his God-forsakenness his own and struggling with them that he might bring the Truth of God to bear upon us where we are, and bring out of the depth of our lost estate under the divine judgment a true and obedient answer from man to God, so we must think of the Word of God in the Scriptures not only as accommodating himself to us in our weakness and littleness but as condescending to enter into our alienated and contradictory ways of thought and speech in order to teach us with his message and to restore us to converse with God in truth. Thus the Word of God comes to us in the Bible not nakedly and directly with clear compelling self-demonstration of the kind that we can read it off easily without the pain and struggle of self-renunciation and decision, but it comes to us in the limitation and imperfection, the ambiguities and contradictions of our fallen ways of thought and speech, seeking us in the questionable forms of our humanity where we have to let ourselves be questioned down to the roots of our being in order to hear it as God's Word. It is not a Word that we can hear by our clear-sightedness or master by our reason, but one that we can hear only through judgment of the very humanity in which it is clothed and to which it is addressed and therefore only through crucifixion and repentance. It is because the Word of God comes to us in this way that either we are offended at it and reject it in

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13.12: βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἑσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι . . . ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους.

⁵ Romans 8.3. The expression ἐν ὁμοιώματι here has to be understood in the same realist, non-docetic, way as the ἐν ὁμοιώματι of Philipians 2.7.

order to cling to ourselves, or we believe in it through a decision against ourselves and so hear it by committing ourselves to its action upon us.⁶ Therefore the hearing of the Word of God does not necessarily follow when linguistic and historical and psychological or other necessary examination and interpretation of the text are completed.

(d) The Word of God comes to us in the Bible and can be heard as such only within our experience of God's saving activity in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has come to redeem the very humanity to which he addresses himself. Therefore the act of his revelation is inseparable from the act of his reconciliation, and the act of his self-impartment is inseparable from the act of his atoning propitiation. We may draw near to God through the Cross of Christ because it is through the Cross that God himself has drawn near to us.⁷ Correspondingly we cannot hear the Word without being reconciled to God or receive the Word without receiving the atonement set forth in the blood of Christ. It is not otherwise in the activity of the Word in the human speech of the Bible. Just as Jesus Christ laid hold of our disobedient and self-willed humanity and throughout the whole course of his earthly life bent it back in obedience to the will of God, bringing it to acquiesce in the judgments of God, and thereby presented our humanity in himself to the divine judgment in order to expiate sin and reconcile us to the Father and thus to be the one Mediator between God and man, so in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments the Word of God has laid hold of our wayward and recalcitrant human speech in order to struggle with it and bend it back into obedience to God's Truth that it may be restored as a vehicle of genuine communication between God and man.

The extraordinary fact about the Bible is that in the hands of God it is the instrument he uses to convey to us his revelation and reconciliation and yet it belongs to the very sphere where redemption is necessary. The Bible stands above us speaking to us the Word of God and yet the Bible belongs to history which comes under the judgment of God and requires the cleansing and atoning activity of the Cross.⁸ When we hear the Word of God in the Bible, therefore, we hear it in such a way that the human word of Holy Scripture

⁶ See E. Gaugler, *Was ist uns die Bibel?*, Basel, 1942, p. 3; and H. Vogel, *Gott in Christo*, Berlin, 1951, pp. 110f.

⁷ Ephesians 2.12-22.

⁸ Thus according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, even *the book* itself, that is, the *Torah*, was not exempt from being cleansed by the atoning blood of the covenant, 9.19f.

bows under the divine judgment, for that is part of its function in the communication of divine revelation and reconciliation. Considered merely in itself it is imperfect and inadequate and its text may be faulty and errant, but it is precisely in its imperfection and inadequacy and faultiness and errancy that God's inerrant Holy Word has laid hold of it that it may serve his reconciling revelation and the inerrant communication of his Truth. Therefore the Bible has to be heard as Word of God within the ambiguity of its poverty and riches, its weakness and power, and heard in such a way that we acknowledge that in itself in its human expression, the Bible comprises the word of man with all the limitations and imperfection of human flesh, in order to allow the human expression to fulfil its divinely appointed and holy function for us, in pointing beyond itself, to what it is not in itself, but to what God has marvellously made it to be in the adoption of his Grace.⁹ The Bible itself will pass away with this world, but the Word of God which it has been inspired to convey to us does not pass away but endures for ever.

We can go no further in indicating the lineaments of a doctrine of Holy Scripture, but it will be apparent that if it is really the Word of God which we hear in and through the Bible we will be unable to ensure hearing of that Word through bringing to it some hermeneutical method, as if all we had to do were to apply its rules carefully in order to hear it. But if the Word of God does come to us through the medium of these documents and Scriptures then it is absolutely necessary that we learn to read what actually lies in front of us – which is not at all easy – in order that we may listen to what it says. Therefore we must not neglect the requirement for a disciplined and controlled interpretation of the Bible, that is, for scientific hermeneutics. That is of course a universal requirement whenever human communication, oral or written, is involved. There are therefore general principles of hermeneutics that are universally applicable and equally relevant to the tragedies of Aeschylus and the songs of Deutero-Isaiah. A scientific hermeneutics will take into account differences in history and race and language and worship and thought in order to provide careful interpretation of some piece of writing in its actual context,¹⁰ but if we hear the Word of the

⁹ See *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth* (ed. T. H. L. Parker), London, 1956, pp. 21–27.

¹⁰ For the intimate relation of language and its structure to thought and the formation of concepts see the instructive studies by Otto Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2nd edit., Providence, 1957, pp. 29ff; and of Friedrich Waismann, *Introduction to Mathematical Thinking*, New York, 1959, pp. 49ff.

living God in and through the writings of the Old and New Testaments it will not be scientific to neglect the bearing of that fact upon the speech that is used or the documents that are composed and employed for that communication. Thus within the field of general hermeneutics there arises biblical hermeneutics which is concerned with the interpretation of texts related to the Word of God. On the other hand, in these very texts where we are concerned with God's Word to *man*, we are also confronted with sheer humanity in a way unparalleled for its range and depth and stark realism, and therefore we are the more deeply concerned with the issues of human communication, of speaking and hearing and reading and translating. No documents in all history have been or continue to be subjected to such searching examination and historico-critical inquiry as the Holy Scriptures. It is for this reason that biblical hermeneutics has exercised a powerful impact on the general science of hermeneutics so that the histories of general and biblical hermeneutics inevitably run together.

But there is also a theological reason for this. It is in the Bible where we are summoned by God to hear his Word that we learn what hearing really means. God's Word comes to us penetrating into the depths of human life, cutting through all our shams and hypocrisies, through all our passions and self-will, finding its way through the defences which we build up in our selfishness over against one another, and against God, and stands us face to face with God where we learn to listen in humility without interjecting ourselves and mixing our own speaking into our hearing, where we learn to be really open to the Other and to receive what he communicates by letting ourselves be told what we cannot tell ourselves and without pretending that we can tell it to ourselves. It is in this openness toward God's self-communication that we learn to be open toward others, to speak to them not for our sakes, for the sake of displaying ourselves, but for their sake to communicate with them, and to listen to what they want to say to us as a real communication without interpreting it as an act of self-display on their part. Really to listen to others and honestly to speak to others in respect for their humanity, is not easy for human beings, for they make themselves into walls of partition and will only hear one another through the screen of their own self-understanding and self-expression. Now it is because in the Bible we hear a Word that cuts through all those screens and pretences, and so may learn what pure hearing is, that the interpretation of the Bible has

something fundamental to offer to every human attempt to listen or interpret the communication of another.

We may express this in a more theological way. Christian theology holds that God has made man for communion with himself, and that it belongs to man's proper nature, in distinction from all other creatures, to be the creature whom God addresses personally in his creative Word and enables to respond personally to him. It is on that ground that man is made to be the creature who communicates personally with his fellow man in the reciprocal relation of speaking and hearing, and therefore we fail to communicate properly with one another when our basic and constitutive communication with God is damaged or perverted. *Et ipsi dediscimus bene loqui ubi cum deo loqui desinimus.*¹¹ On the other hand, to be schooled in communication with God, to be opened in love and truth by that communication, will have its profound effect in every sphere where we have communication with one another. It is on this ground that Karl Barth has claimed that there is no such thing as 'special hermeneutics',¹² for in biblical hermeneutics we are concerned with something basic that is valid for the exposition of every human word, and can therefore lay claim to universal recognition. 'It is not at all that the word of man in the Bible has an abnormal significance and function. We see from the Bible what its normal significance and function is. It is from the word of man in the Bible that we must learn what has to be learned concerning the word of man in general.'¹³ Barth admits that because we are concerned in the Bible with God's revelation, which is distinguished from everything else by a majesty belonging to it and lacking in other human communication, we may speak of biblical hermeneutics as a special form of a universally valid hermeneutics. And yet, he says, if we are to deal with it in this way, as a hermeneutics prescribed by revelation as the content of the biblical word, we must remember that 'we are not dealing with a mysterious thing apart which applies only to the Bible'.¹⁴ In other words, in the Bible we are concerned with human speech that is assimilated to the communication of God's Word that reconciles and renews, and therefore in our interpretation of it we are concerned with a basic form of communication that has healing and redemptive significance. Hence, Barth, concludes, if biblical

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutio*, 3.23.5.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2, Edinburgh, 1956, p. 466.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 466.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 472.

hermeneutics dares to be a special hermeneutics this is for the sake of a better general hermeneutics.¹⁵

However, we must not forget what Schleiermacher called 'the language-moulding power of Christianity'¹⁶ and the sheer impact of divine revelation upon the forms of thought and speech in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, which gives biblical hermeneutics a special place with *idiomata* of its own that have to be studied and interpreted. This does not mean – and in this Barth is surely right – that the human word in the Bible is in any way less than human or somehow superhuman, but rather that it is even more fully human inasmuch as it is in touch with the Word which creates and moulds the human and is essentially humanising Word. It is after all in Jesus Christ alone that true humanity is to be found, humanity that is not dehumanised by sin or perverted by estrangement. The word that is assimilated to his human life and history and serves the communication of his Word is as such redeemed from our inhumanity and restored to human fullness.

My concern in the following studies in the field of patristic hermeneutics is not with actual exegetical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, but rather with the epistemological ingredients and implications of hermeneutics, and therefore with the thought-world in which it is pursued. No attempt is made in this book to examine the writings of all the Greek fathers in the early centuries of the Church, far less to develop a systematic account of their hermeneutical theory and practice. The different chapters represent no more than *soundings* taken in the first three centuries, but it is hoped that precisely as soundings they may serve to open up the field for further study in a more theological way than has been done before. My concern has been to bring to light the functioning of what Athenagoras of Athens called 'the real theological logos (φυσικός και θεολογικός λόγος)'¹⁷ and thus to disclose something of the way in which biblical hermeneutics is essentially a theological pursuit, for the only adequate and appropriate interpretation of the divine revelation mediated to us, as the great Greek fathers realised, is *theological*, and cannot but be under the impact of the dynamic Word of the living God.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'Die sprachbildende kraft des Christentums', *Hermeneutik und Kritik mit besonderer Beziehung auf das Neue Testaments (Sämmtliche Werke, I.7)*, Berlin, 1938, p. 68.

¹⁷ Athenagoras, *An intercession on behalf of Christians* (Πρεσβεία τῶν Χριστιανῶν), 13.1. For the double meaning of the terms φυσικός and λόγος in this expression, see Chapter 2 below.

Chapter 1

THE COMPLEX BACKGROUND OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In the Christian era hermeneutics in all fields of literature has been greatly influenced by the traditional biblical emphasis upon *word* (דבר, λόγος). Because the Word of God has primary place in all constitutive relations between God, the world, and man, *word* came to have a principal role in the realm of biblical life and thought. It is not surprising, therefore, that right from the start it is the primacy of *word* that characterises biblical hermeneutics, nor is it surprising that when this biblical way of life was rediscovered at the Reformation, renewed concentration upon the Word of God should leave its mark upon the basic structures of life and thought in the West, and should affect the whole subsequent tradition of hermeneutical theory and activity.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this story: even biblical hermeneutics does not merely go back to the biblical tradition. Other influences were contributed from the outside, notably from Hellenism. That is apparent even in the hermeneutics of Judaism. After the 'sealing up' or cessation of the prophetic activity which characterised some of the later Hebrew Scriptures and the Apocrypha, and involved the reconstruction and redaction of the whole tradition, Judaism was faced with the question of formal interpretation of the Scriptures, as we can see in the institution of the Scribes as interpreters of the law.

Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament was carried out in two ways designed to transmit the practical and the theoretical teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and to bridge the gulf, as it were, between the ancient times and the present. This was done by providing expository material elucidating and supplementing the old records through *Haggadah* (הגדה) and *Halakah* (הלכה).¹ *Haggadah* took the form of narrative, often largely cultic and dramatic, designed for inspiration and

¹ See Emil Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, Edinburgh, 1908, I, i, pp. 117ff; II, pp. 327ff; Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah*, Oxford, 1933, Introduction, pp. xxixff.

edification. One of the most important of these is the *Passover Haggadah* in which the Passover is vividly interpreted as a participation in the original events of redemption of Israel out of Egypt and is made to point ahead to its messianic fulfilment at the end.² *Halakah*, on the other hand, was concerned with the interpretation of the *Torah* and in providing on that basis or even apart from its precepts for action and conduct in order to ensure translation into historical happening and conduct in the present of the Law once for all given in the historical events of the past. *Halakah* came to be more highly prized in Judaism than *Haggadah*, and with the overthrow of the Temple and the diminishing significance of the cult, *Halakah* became rather severely ethical, laying down accepted decisions for a way of life. If *Haggadah* can be said to correspond to the kerygmatic material in the Old Testament, *Halakah* can be said to correspond to its didactic material, but in Judaism they are more sharply divided, and the Halakhic teaching carries within itself a distinction between the ethical and the theoretical. This is due, however, to an ingredient in traditional Judaism that derives not from the Old Testament itself, but from Hellenic sources, especially from the dualism between body and spirit which unbiblical though it was came to characterise Pharisaic Judaism even in New Testament times. It was under the influence of this Hellenic influence that the ethic of Judaism changed into a form that has ever since characterised Rabbinic teaching.

Judaism added a third method of interpreting the Old Testament when again under the influence of Hellenism it adopted the use of allegory. Taken up by Aristobulus this was developed by Philo of Alexandria which enabled him not only to give a more ethico-mystical interpretation of the Old Testament but to relate its teaching to Greek philosophy, and especially to interpret the Old Testament *logos* more in line with its significance in the Platonic tradition, as 'rationality'. In other words, Philo makes a transition toward Hellenic thought in his association of *images* and *ideas* through allegorical interpretation of events.

Hellenism had an even stronger influence in Christian hermeneutics, supplying it not only with its terminology but with many of its basic

² See the new edition of the *Passover Haggadah* by Cecil Roth, The Soncino Press, London, 1934.

philosophical questions that communication of thought from one person to another, from one language to another, and not least from one world of thought to another, always raises. Different as the Hellenic tradition and the biblical tradition (especially in its Hebraic roots) were, it was through the conflation of these two traditions that what may be called the science of hermeneutics arose.

It is from Hellenism that we derive our term *hermeneutics*, from the word ἑρμηνεύειν, meaning, first, to bring news or to convey a message, and, then, to interpret or explain or to translate from one language to another. Hence it came also to denote translation from one way of speaking or thinking into another and more understandable form, yet without losing altogether the original sense of conveying information. In the religious realm the question of hermeneutics arose very early in connection with the understanding of the poets who were sometimes spoken of as interpreters (ἑρμηνῆς) of the gods, or in connection with the meaning of prophetic oracles.³ An attempt was made to distinguish the mythical stories told about them and some hidden meaning or underlying sense (ὑπόνοια). Because the mystery rites were held to hold concealed significance interpretation was also required to bring it into the open, but the word used was ἐξηγεῖσθαι from which we get our familiar 'exegesis'.

Something similar to this is found in the works of Plato who used myth (μῦθος) to suggest in a narrative form a speculative notion that could not be reduced to exact statement; it was a dramatic image in temporal form of a timeless or eternal idea. Plato's interest lay not in the interpretation of poetical texts but in the understanding and knowledge of the truth. He distinguished real knowledge which is dependent on thinking from opinion or belief for which we are dependent on the reports of our senses. The object of knowledge in the proper sense is what is eternal and wholly intelligible, that is, 'ideas' or 'forms'; but the objects of sense-experience such as natural events or actual facts, which cannot be considered fully real, must be treated outwith the range of scientific knowledge or ἐπιστήμη. True knowledge, however, if it begins with sense-experience must reach beyond it into the realm where thinking is

³ See, for example, Plato, *Ion* 534 E; *Symposium* 202 E; *Epinomis* 975 O. In this last passage, as Ebeling remarks (*Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd edit. Tübingen, 1959, Bd. iii, p. 243), we have the first occurrence of the expression ἑρμηνευτική τέχνη.

by the mind itself apart from sense-experience. It is only of the noumenal world that we can have knowledge, whereas of the world of phenomena we can offer only opinion or conjecture.

These views were set out in many of Plato's dialogues but they are also found in the *Timaeus*, a work in which he expounded his cosmological theory, and one that fascinated and influenced countless people for centuries, and not least the world of gnostic and Neo-Platonic thought in the early centuries of the Christian era when the Hellenic mind was struggling with the biblical doctrines of creation and incarnation. In this work Plato drew a momentous distinction by asking: 'What is that which always is and has no becoming (τι τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον) and what is that which is always becoming and never is (τι τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν αἰεὶ, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε)? That which is apprehended rationally by the mind (νοῆσει μετὰ λόγου) is always in the same state, but that which is conjectured through opinion by sense without reason (μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου) is ever becoming and perishing and never really is (ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν).'⁴ This was a distinction between the real world of noetic realities (τὰ νοητά) or rationality (τὸ λογιστικόν) and the visible world of what has become (τὸ γεγονός) or sense-objects (τὰ αἰσθητά). This tangible, sensible world has been formed by a good craftsman (ὁ δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός), assumed to be God, to become a moving image (εἰκῶν) of an eternal model (παράδειγμα), assumed to be different from God himself. In making the visible cosmos (κόσμος) God put mind (νοῦς) into it, and as mind can exist only in a soul he gave it a soul (ψύχη) and it became a 'living being truly endowed with soul and mind by the providence of God' (ξῦλον ἔμψυχον ἔννοον τε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν).⁵

This cosmological theory contained serious problems that drew to them a great deal of speculation down the ages, but in the early centuries of the Christian era, the theory took two basic forms, a Stoic form in which God came to be thought of in terms of a cosmic soul informing a cosmic body, and a Neo-Platonic form in which the distinction between the two realms was thrown into a sharp χωρισμός between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός. And this was certainly in line with Plato's original intention in differentiating so absolutely between the

⁴ *Timaeus*, 27 D – 28 A.

⁵ *Timaeus*, 30 B; also see 28 B – 30 B, 37 A – C, 48 E, 51 D, etc.

world of sense or becoming which is visible and changing, and the world of mind or being which is invisible and unchangeable.

The meaning Plato gave to λόγος was in line with his whole outlook.⁶ Because man stands between the two worlds, the intelligible and the sensible, as one who thinks and acts, who forms opinions and speaks, *logos* refers to the inner speech or conversation which he holds with himself, asking questions of himself and answering them, and refers also to the external speech or utterance of his opinion in audible words or sentences addressed to others. *Logos* is both thought and spoken. Thus conceived, the inner word (διάλογος) and the outer word (λόγος εἰρημένος) are closely related, but related in such a way that Plato distinguishes sharply between them, for the inner *logos* is purely noetic (διάνοια) and is directed to the world of being and intelligible forms, to the εἶδος of things, whereas external speech is merely a sort of image (ὡσπερ εἶδωλον) of thought that is uttered in the sensible realm and is only a passing phenomenal event. No doubt it does have a sort of participation (μέθεξις) in the realm of external forms but only as a transient sign or suggestion from which the thought passes in order to contemplate the world of being or reality. Thus in spite of the fact that speech is used metaphorically to describe thought, it is clear that in the intelligible world *logos* is ultimately concerned with the ineffable (ἄρρητον) reality which can be contemplated only in vision (θεωρία), and can be spoken of only indirectly by way of myth (μύθος). Hence in the Platonic tradition λόγος was taken to refer to the eternal reason, the supreme mind immanent in all things, from which all rationality derives, and through participation in which alone man can have knowledge of intelligible and eternal realities. But a *logos* of God in the other sense, of speech, a λόγος θεῖος, is wanting to us.⁷

This Platonic distinction between a realm of sense and a realm of pure thought has had an immense influence upon the history of hermeneutics, for even when one is concerned with the meaning of a text it tends to carry the whole activity of interpretation beyond to the understanding of a supersensible and purely intelligible reality. In other words, it tends to lead straight into a sharp distinction between a crude literal sense and an underlying spiritual or philosophical meaning (ὑπόνοια). Because of the

⁶ See especially *Theaitetos*, 189ff, and *Sophistes*, 268ff.

⁷ *Phaedo*, 85 C-D.

auditive element which is so powerful in the Hebrew, *word* plays little part in this thought, the visual image or figure represented in the latter was often regarded as mere shadow (σκιά) quite disparate from the reality that casts it, and therefore once it has played its part it is regarded as something to be left behind in the attainment of knowledge of the real.

Hellenism had another important contribution to make to the history of hermeneutics, through the teaching of Aristotle, notably in his work *περι ἑρμηνείας* or *de interpretatione* which later had a considerable influence upon mediaeval thought. Under the direction of Aristotle attention was given more to form and method, and because form and matter may not be divorced from one another, there resulted a more realistic form of exegesis with serious consideration of the straightforward sense interpreted according to the rules of grammar and logic.

One of the most lasting fruits of this teaching was the emphasis laid upon formal analysis of the text, in which the individual statements were to be interpreted in relation to the whole, and the whole was interpreted as gathering up the particulars. It was through this analytic and synthetic examination that meaning was determined. At the same time attention came to be paid also to the author himself in his use of speech, that is, to questions of rhetoric and philology, and it was realised that interpretation or translation from one language to another, or from one thought-world to another thought-world, required some knowledge of the historical and ideological background. Thus in order to bridge the gap between the reader and the letter of older documents some attention to historical matters and philosophical developments was unavoidable.

We cannot follow through in detail the development and pursuit of this instruction in the schools of Athens and Alexandria, but it may be sufficient to say that while the Platonic distinction between sense and thought was dominant and ultimately determinative, attention was given to methodological scrutiny of the text, and rules for correct procedure according to grammar, rhetoric and logic became the common equipment of the schools throughout the Graeco-Roman world. Thus observation and analytical thinking went together on the one hand, but on the other hand when the mind passed beyond the realm of sense it continued to think in visual terms through the relations of images to ideas, while the relation of images to events and the emphasis upon the auditive mode of thinking so characteristic of the Hebraic tradition had little place in it.

When hermeneutics of this sort was directed to the venerated texts of Hellenism such as the poetical works of Hesiod or Homer, it looked for hidden meanings secreted in them by the inspiration of the gods, that is, for a 'mystical' sense.⁸ It was in this connection that the study of the ancient myths was cultivated and through them Orphic and Pythagorean mysticism gained a powerful place in Hellenistic culture. The crudities of the 'stories' of the gods came under severe attack from the philosophers of the Academy, but it was always possible to seek an allegorical meaning cloaked under the garment of narrative. Moreover in the mystery rites and people's dreams, as the ancients seem to have been aware, one idea or one set of ideas might stand for others. To interpret them was regarded as an esoteric gift, so that understanding and interpretation of them was held to be accessible only to the few.

Three developments in this direction were of special significance for the rise of hermeneutics in the early Church.

(i) The spread of Stoic allegorical thought. 'Platonism', as Edwyn Bevan has said, 'had banished God from the material world, had left it a dark mass from which the soul must detach itself if it would find him, and yet this is the world which encloses us on every side, with which we have primarily to do. Zeno came, as it were, to men asking where they could find God, struck his hand upon the solid earth and answered "here". There was nothing that was not, in its ultimate origin, God; it was he in whom man lived and moved and had his being.'⁹ This was not a view of the universe that can be described as *materialist* in the modern sense of that term, but one which held the *nature of things* everywhere to be inherently rational, and therefore thought of the whole material world to be constituted in accordance with a rational purpose (*πρόνοια*). Hence the close connections posited by the Stoics between *physics*, *ethics* and *logic*. In line with their cosmological outlook, in which they thought of a world-soul permeating the whole world-body, they could use vivid, pictorial language to express their philosophical ideas. Thus in comparing philosophy to an animal, they spoke of ethics as the flesh, logic as the bones and sinews, and physics as the soul. On the other hand they applied this in reverse, so to speak, to interpret the crude patterns and

⁸ See the interesting chapter on 'Homère chez les Pères de l'Église', in Jean Daniélou, *Message évangélique et Culture hellénistique*, Tournai, 1961, pp. 73ff.

⁹ E. R. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, Cambridge, 1959, p. 41.

mythical stories of the gods in such a way as to make them yield a 'real' or 'natural' (φυσικός) meaning which was their scientific truth, that is, what was in accordance with the nature (φύσις) of the realities intended. This is discerned, however, only through tracing the reference (ἀναφορά) of sensible signs to intelligible or 'natural' signs (σημεία), that is, the mental facts expressed by the sensible signs, for it is they that are true or false. This was the purpose of allegorical interpretation, to make μῦθος yield ἀλήθεια, and so to show that the crudities of classical literature were often only mythological ways of conveying philosophical truth.

Behind this lay an interesting semantic theory in which the Stoics distinguished, not two things, but three things: (i) that which signifies (τὸ σημαίνον), the sensible or corporeal sign such as the spoken or written word; (ii) that which is signified or meant (τὸ σημαϊνόμενον or τὸ λεκτόν), the idea in the mind that subsists with our thought of something; and (iii) the external object (τὸ πρᾶγμα, or τὸ τυγχανόν). This had the effect not only of positing a screen of ideas in the middle between the speaker, or thinker, and the external realities, but of erecting a highly intellectualist view of truth. As far as interpretation was concerned it had the effect of concentrating attention upon linguistic expressions (λέξεις) since the significates (λεκτά) which carried truth or falsehood were abstracted from them, rather than upon things (πράγματα). On the other hand, since the external realities signified, whether sensible or noetic, were regarded as corporeal like the things signifying, allegorical interpretation, through a rationalising process, was tied down to a rather material outlook on reality.¹⁰ Although allegorical interpretation of this kind went back to the great Stoic philosophers like Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, the centuries immediately before and after the birth of Christ saw a widespread application of Stoic allegorising to pagan literature along cosmological and ethical lines (φυσικῶς and ἠθικῶς) which laid the basis for much that was to follow.

(ii) The rise of Jewish allegorical exegesis. The important centre for this was Alexandria. There for some time Stoic, Platonic and Pythagorean thought had been brought together, for example, by Poseidonius, and on this basis attempts were made to work out a symbolic interpretation of Egyptian mythology, for example, by Plutarch. But in Alexandria there

¹⁰ For the Stoic view of meaning and truth, see W. and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic*, Oxford, 1962, pp. 138ff.

was also a Jewish allegorising tradition going back to the *Letter of Aristeas* and to Aristobulus, and even earlier sources, but reaching its height in the influential work of Philo in the earlier part of the first century AD.¹¹ Philo had behind him the older work of Palestinian Jewish scholars who expounded the Scriptures with the aid of *midrashim* (מדרשׁים) through which they extended the Old Testament concept of the parable or *mashal* (משל) in order to set forth the more recondite meaning behind the sacred texts.¹² Their purpose was to make interpretation of the Old Testament books consistent with the doctrine of the transcendence of God by searching out the real ethical basis behind the laws and rituals and resolving the difficulties for belief in God which a merely literal understanding of many biblical passages appeared to create, but also to draw out the predictive elements in the Scriptures and to relate them to historical and eschatological fulfilment. It would be surprising if this interest in searching out the secrets and mysteries of the Law kept itself entirely distinct from the hermeneutical devices of Stoic and Pythagorean philosophers wherever Judaism made effective contact with Hellenism, but, as Wolfson has pointed out, 'no direct conscious attempt to interpret Scripture in terms of philosophy is to be found in these midrashic interpretations, though some of them . . . reflect certain philosophic concepts which have infiltrated into Judaism.'¹³

It was quite otherwise with Philo, who was a philosopher in the Greek sense as well as an interpreter of the Old Testament writings. What is distinctive of his work is that he not only brought together the earlier midrashic interpretation and Stoic allegorisation, but combined them with the philosophical theory of the χωρισμός between the κόσμος αισθητός and the κόσμος νοητός.¹⁴ Philo made considerable use of this distinction to guard the utter transcendence of God from corruption through Stoic notions of the 'corporeality' of God and through a literal interpretation of Scriptural anthropomorphisms, but it had the effect of altering the essential cast of his thought by throwing it into an

¹¹ See H. A. A. Kennedy, *Philo's Contribution to Religion*, London, 1919, pp. 32ff.

¹² See A. S. Herbert, 'The Parable (MĀŠĀL) in the Old Testament', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 7.2, 1954, pp. 180ff.

¹³ H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964, p. 29.

¹⁴ See *De Abrahamo*, 68, 88; *De gigantibus*, 54; *De opificio mundi*, 10, 12, 15ff; *Quaestiones in Exodum*, II, 90; *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, III; *De somniis*, I, 185ff, etc. And cf. H. A. A. Kennedy, op.cit., pp. 63ff.

epistemological framework that was alien to the biblical and Judaic tradition.¹⁵ In fact Philo's thought absorbed into it the profound change in cosmological outlook which under the impact of Platonic thought and the new astronomy yielded the Ptolemaic view of the universe. In Philo's writings this is apparent in his conception of the sensible world of time and space as imaging in transient shadows a heavenly world of timeless ideas and paradigmatic essences which God first formed as the instrument of his creation of all things and their providential ordering in accordance with his will. The true meaning of human life within this world is to be found in a 'migration' of the soul from the phenomenal world of sense and time to the noumenal world of intelligible realities. In his exposition of this Philo offers extended allegorical interpretation of the migration of Abraham and the exodus of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land or the entry of the high priest into the Holy of Holies.¹⁶

Philo's understanding of the Scripture was part and parcel of his religious philosophy, for he distinguished in it a literal or external meaning which he referred to as the 'body' (σῶμα) and an inner meaning which he referred to as the 'soul' (ψύχη), the literal meaning being related like 'shadows' to 'the things that really exist'.¹⁷ To speak of this inner or hidden or intelligible meaning of the text he could use the technical terms ὑπόνοια and ἀλληγορία, but thought of these as describing the 'real' truth, the 'natural' meaning that was actually in accordance with the nature of the realities indicated, that is, the nature of God.¹⁸ Hence Philo speaks of allegorists as φυσικοὶ ἄνδρες.¹⁹ How Philo actually thought of the relation of the literal to the allegorical meaning is not always clear, for sometimes the literal sense seems to be left behind altogether, but we may defer to the judgment of two scholars who have subjected Philo's views to careful examination. "The allegorical method as applied by Philo to the Old Testament is thus a special type of midrashic method, which has two characteristics. First, it must be an

¹⁵ Cf. H. A. A. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 40: "Without realising what had happened, Philo, by his adoption of the allegorical method, had emptied his basal doctrine of all genuine value."

¹⁶ See especially the *De Abrahamo*, *De migratione Abrahami*, *De vita Mosis*, and cf. the recent account of this by S. G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews*, Zürich, 1965, pp. 29ff., 62f.

¹⁷ See *De Abrahamo* 36, 200; 41, 236; *De migratione Abrahami*, 2, 12; 16. 93; *De confusione linguarum*, 38, 190.

¹⁸ *De Abr.* 20, 99; *De somniis*, I. 120; *De posteritate Caini*, 2.7.

¹⁹ *De Abr.* 20, 99; *De vita Mosis*, 2, 103.

interpretation in which a term is changed from its literal meaning to something else, though the literal meaning is not always necessarily rejected. Second, that something else which the term is made to mean must be of what is described by him as philosophical.²⁰ 'So Philo occupies a middle position in Alexandrian Judaism, defending the legitimacy of allegory against its literalist objectors as an indispensable apologetic and hermeneutical tool on the one hand, and on the other hand pleading for respect of the literal meaning of Scripture against left-wing allegorists.'²¹ Certainly Philo himself can say: 'Both elements demand attention, the most diligent search for hidden meanings, and the preservation of those on the surface which cannot be challenged.'²²

Nevertheless, the extent to which Philo developed the contrast between the sensible world and the intelligible world meant that the real truth could not be found through an allegorical exegesis that supplemented the literal meaning in order to make it point beyond itself altogether, or that left it behind as the understanding penetrated through it into the intelligible world, for only in that world may we know things that really are in accordance with the truth of their natures. This implied that reality in this world of sense and time can only take on a form of meaning that is symbolic, or that the sensible world is to be regarded as real only in so far as it is symbolic.²³ Thus the purpose of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, as far as Philo was concerned, was to establish their ἀλήθεια over against all mythology,²⁴ and this meant for him the reality of God as God over against all anthropomorphic and geomorphic conceptions of him.²⁵

(iii) The influence of gnosticism. Gnosticism was a syncretistic movement intensely interested in the cosmic drama of creation and redemption that broke out among (very imperfect) Christian converts of the second generation who had not properly broken free from pagan religious ideas or mythological and astrological speculation. Alexandrian gnosticism (following Basilides and Valentinus) seems to have been influenced by Egyptian and

²⁰ H. A. Wolfson, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

²¹ S. G. Sowers, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

²² *De migr. Abr.* 20.89.

²³ *De migr. Abr.* 12; *De mutatione nominum* 62-65; *De somn.* I, 185ff.

²⁴ *De praemiis et poenis*, 2.8; *De fuga et inventione*, 179; *De agricultura*, 96ff; *Legum allegoriarum*, Lib. II. 19.

²⁵ *De confusione linguarum*, 21, 98; *De migr. Abr.* 23, 113; *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*, 53, 59-68; *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I. 55; II. 54; *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, 91-101; *De somn.* I, 40, 237.

Philonic conceptions reposing upon a philosophical syncretism. Although the gnostics soon divided up into different sects elaborating various theomorphic and mythological systems, they all appear to have been concerned with the entanglement of human beings in the tension between light and darkness, spirit and matter, order and disorder, good and evil, and to have been obsessed with an esoteric and non-rational knowledge of the way of salvation.²⁶ This was the *gnosis* (γνώσις) that gave them their name. Through initiation into it freedom from Fate (εἰμαρμένη) was attained, and the deep secrets of existence and destiny revealed: 'Who we are and what we become, where we have come from and where we are going, where we are hastening to and whereby we are redeemed, and what the meaning of our birth is and the meaning of rebirth.'²⁷

Basic to the whole outlook of gnosticism was the Pythagorean and Platonic, Posidonian and Philonic gulf between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός, although this was infinitely widened,²⁸ and in certain aspects deeply affected by oriental dualism particularly apparent in Mandaean and Marcionite gnosticism. In Valentinian gnosticism, which was widely influential, the two worlds were differentiated as the πλήρωμα of Light and noumenal essences, and the κένωμα of shadow and privation. *Pleroma* was the fullness of that which is, or true being, whereas *kenoma* was the realism of emptiness and non-being, the shadowy and evanescent counterpart of the world of ideas and essences above, but beyond both worlds was the *Monad* or Universal Being, exalted and remote, supreme over all and unknowable.²⁹ According to the more philosophically minded Basilides we cannot know what God is but only what he is not, for he is absolutely ineffable and inaccessible. Hence we cannot properly think of him as existing (οὐκ ὦν θεός) so much as altogether nothing (οὐδέν). It is in accordance with the predetermination of this 'non-existent' God that all things have their existence, but in a non-existent way for he formed them out of non-existents.³⁰ This is

²⁶ Cf. the teaching of Poseidonius 'that the soul might receive direct enlightenment from beings not in the body, apart from all processes of reason' (E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, p. 117). This idea was prevalent in the Hermetic literature.

²⁷ *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, 78.2. See also Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 26.3, 10, 13; *The Gospel of Truth*, 22.16ff; 25.10ff; *The Gospel of Thomas*, 1-4, 50.

²⁸ Cf. R. Maclaren Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, London, 1968, p. 211.

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.1ff, especially 4.1ff; 6.1ff, 8.1ff, 14.1ff; Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, 7.21-24.

³⁰ Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 7.8-9; 10. Cf. *Apocryphon Ioannis*, 22.19ff; *The Gospel of Truth*, 17.8, 22; 18.32.

difficult to conceive rationally but the difficulty arises out of the epistemological dualism imposed upon thought by the vast gulf between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, and the complete transcendence of God over the world of intelligible realities.³¹ In the nature of the case the gnostics had to have recourse to imaginative and mythological construction. The situation was somewhat different with Marcion who sought to avoid mythological speculation, while working within the same dichotomy, but only at the expense of positing the myth of an ultimate dualism between two supreme Beings, the Creator God of the Old Testament and the Redeemer God of the New Testament.³² Thus in one way or another a vast gulf, a fundamental *χωρισμός*, was characteristic of the various forms of gnostic thought.³³

The gnostics differed also in their views of creation. For the most part they did not attribute it to the God of the New Testament but to one whom they called *Demiurge* (*ὁ δημιουργός*) who through some kind of disturbance and disorder in the supramundane world became the creator and ruler of the visible and material world which was therefore regarded as existing in tension and conflict with the invisible and spiritual world above. In Valentinian gnosticism the antithesis between the eternity and permanence of the upper world and the temporality and transience of the creaturely world is put down to the unsuccessful attempt of the Demiurge to imitate the limitless, eternal, infinite and timeless nature of the former by extension in time, ages and immense numbers of years in the latter, imagining that he could represent infinity by quantity. Time and history thus belong to fallen existence and must pass away with it.³⁴ Some gnostics identified this creator with the God of the Old Testament who seeks to subject man to himself, but others identified him with the pre-existent Christ or an emanation from the pre-existent *Logos*.³⁵ Moreover, throughout the various systems human beings were regarded (as in Orphism and Stoicism) as fallen seeds of light or sparks of the divine that had become entangled in matter and evil and darkness, but

³¹ Cf. Philo, *De opif. mund.* 7, 29; 10, 36; 21, 66; 44, 129f; 46, 134.

³² Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.16; 27.1f; 2.1, 4; Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 7.17.1ff; 10.15; Tertullian, *Adv. haer.* 1.2f.

³³ Thus Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, 1963, pp. 250f.

³⁴ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.17.2; 2.5.1f; 7.1f.

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.4f, 7f, 11; 2.3–8, 13f; Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 5.17.1ff, 19.1ff; 6.13, 14, 35; 7.23–25; Origen, *In Ioannis Evangelium* 2.8.

yearn for redemption out of non-existence back into the *pleroma* of true being and for restoration from self-estrangement in this sensible world back into the divine world to which they properly belong. The great drama of redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) was carried out through emission or prolation from God of an intermediate but supramundane being, that is, *Aeon* or *Nous*, called Christ, and through a movement on his part of descent into the *kenoma* and of ascent again into the *pleroma*, in the course of which he united himself temporally to Jesus imparting to men through him the gift of *gnosis* and the *Paraclete* by means of which they could win free from subjection to the material world and be gathered back into union with God.³⁶

Behind this lay a more complicated conception of the relation of redemption to the creation which we may give in its Basilidean form. Basilides related the saving descent and ascent of Christ to the primordial act of creation in which the world of non-existence came into being through the depositing of a cosmic Germ or Seed that contained in itself a conglomeration of cosmic seeds, thus constituting the multitude of forms and substances. But this Seed is also a three-fold Sonship (υἰότης) of the same substance with the non-existent God (ὁμοούσιος τῷ οὐκ ὄντι θεῷ). The first sonship was more rarified (λεπτομερές) and soon after being deposited in creation flowered and returned to the non-existent God, while the second sonship which was more dense (παχυμερεστέρα) ascended only to an intermediate sphere of being (ὄν μεθόριον), these two corresponding apparently to the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively. The third sonship, however, was left behind in the world of non-existents where it receives and imparts benefits among the formless mass of men, and corresponds to the multiplicity of the sons of God, imprisoned for a while in the material world, over whom the whole creation groans and travails until people, formed and purified by the following of Jesus, attain manifestation and ascent to the blessed Sonship of divine Light. The world will endure until all the sons of light are gathered up and the whole sonship attains to the non-existent God.³⁷

³⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.4f; 2.14.

³⁷ Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 7, 10-15; 10.10. Valentinus had a more elaborate mythological counterpart to these three sonships, Hippolytus, *op.cit.* 6.24ff, 10.9; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1-8; 2.18f. For succinct accounts of these mythologies see R. Macl. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem*, London, 1958, pp. 125-136, and for a selection of the relevant literature, see R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism, An Anthology*, London, 1961, pp. 143ff.

There is no salvation for the world itself, and so no salvation can be actualised within creation, for the created world is alien to God and must finally perish altogether.³⁸

Because of the radical dualism that ran throughout the whole multiform system of gnostic thought the attitude to Christ could only be docetic. His historical 'corporeal' nature fell not only within the realm of non-existence but of phantasmal appearance, his spiritual-nature alone being real, the one possible, the other impossible. According to Valentinus four natures are to be ascribed to Christ, or, apart from his nature as Saviour, three natures which he called the psychical (ψυχικός, *animalis*), the corporeal (σωματικός, *corporealis*), and the spiritual (πνευματικός, *spiritualis*). In line with his view that the flesh is not saved but cast aside like a leathern tunic, Valentinus claimed that the corporeal nature was possessed only out of economy (ἐκ τῆς οἰκονομίας), that is, merely for a temporary dispensational purpose, but there was nothing material about it for it was constructed 'economically' (κατ' οἰκονομίαν) out of the psychical.³⁹ A somewhat similar distinction obtained among men themselves, for they were divided into three kinds, those who are merely earthly, carnal or material (χοικοί, σαρκικοί, ὕλικοί), those who are psychical or animal (ψυχικοί), and others again who are spiritual (πνευματικοί). The 'hulics' (or 'block-heads') who are engrossed in material existence are the unbelievers who go into corruption and perdition. The 'psychics' refer to ordinary believers such as are found in the Church (the ἐκκλησιαστικοί) who may advance to an intermediate position with the Demiurge through faith and good works, although they may fall back into perdition if they choose evil; but the 'pneumatics' are those who are impregnated with seeds of divine light, and it is especially for them that the Saviour came.⁴⁰ It was his function to bring the hidden knowledge of God and of the origin and destiny of mankind, that is, supersensible *gnosis* which when mediated to the 'pneumatics' enables the spiritual element in them to partake of redemption.

The gnostics held that they were the πνευματικοί or spiritual élite of

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.17.2.

³⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.6.2, 7.2f, 21.2; Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 10.9; Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*, 26. A similar view was held by Basilides, Hippolytus, *op.cit.*, 7.27.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.6.1ff, 7.5, 8.3, 13, 6, 21.1ff; 3.15.2; Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 5.1.

the race (ἡ ἐκλογή)⁴¹ who in virtue of their spiritual nature and mystic knowledge of the deep things of God (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) were capable of divine enlightenment, rebirth into the *pleroma* and ultimate union with God. Owing to the dualistic and docetic character of this outlook the emphasis fell naturally upon the 'pneumatic' and 'spiritual' side of things, so that the gnostics operated with sharp distinctions,⁴² for example, in their separation between Christ and Jesus, water-baptism and spirit-baptism, or between mere faith (ψιλή πίστις) and perfect knowledge (τελεία γνῶσις), arrogating the latter exclusively to themselves, and concentrating upon graduated initiation into higher and higher spheres of *gnosis*. Although this knowledge of the depths is available to gnostics in this world, by its very nature it involves a movement that carries them beyond it, for it cannot be actualised in what is material or temporal. To partake of it is at the same time to engage in ascent out of the material world. This is how Irenaeus described the gnostic concept of redemption:

The mystery of the inexpressible and invisible power must not be performed by means of visible and corruptible creaturely things, nor must the mystery of unthinkable and incorporeal realities be performed by means of sensible and corporeal things. Knowledge (*gnosis*) of the ineffable Greatness is itself perfect redemption, for since both defect and passion came through lack of knowledge, the whole system of what was thus formed is destroyed by knowledge. Thus knowledge is the redemption of the inner man. This is not corporeal, for the body is corruptible, nor is it psychical for the psyche is the fruit of defect and is but the lodging of the spirit. Redemption must therefore be of a spiritual kind, for the gnostics affirm that the inner and spiritual man is redeemed through knowledge, and as they reach knowledge of Universal Being they need nothing else, for that is true redemption.⁴³

As far as hermeneutics is concerned, gnosticism presents intractable difficulties, indeed inherent self-contradictions. If the hiatus between the lower and the upper world is extended so far that not only is this world the sphere of the non-existents, but God himself of whom we think in correlativity with ourselves is God-non-existent (οὐκ ὄν θεός) and Nothing (οὐδέν), then what kind of thinking is this? This is as much

⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 4.26, 165.3.

⁴² Cf. Jude 19: οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ ἀποδιόριζοντες, ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες.

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.21.4; cf. 2.18.6.

a problem in Valentinian as in Basilidean gnosticism, for the 'God' of the Valentinians is by definition unthinkable and incomprehensible, as it says in *The Gospel of Truth*.⁴⁴ However, if we can think and speak only within *kenoma* or the emptiness of non-existence, then how can we offer any account at all of the things that really are, since our relation to them can be only through a sort of vast vacuum or blank? If we say that this may be done through a special knowledge or *gnosis*, then how do we even know this, for either we know it somehow already, or if we do not, we do not even know what it is we are to know. In other words, if we seek to know God by pushing abstraction of him to the limit of an infinite discrepancy between what he is and what we can think or say of him, then our thoughts and statements can only be about nothing, and we are simply engaged in empty movements of thought and speech within the *kenoma*. These are in fact some of the arguments that Irenaeus brought against the gnostics in the second book of his work *Against the Heresies*.⁴⁵

But Irenaeus goes further in his critique. He argues that within the shadowy existence of this sensible world where we make use of transient and temporal images, or within the vacuum of non-existence where we can only make use of forms that partake of non-existence, it is not possible to give any account of real things, things that really are, and so are shut up to offering a purely imaginary or mythological account of them. But even this would not be possible unless the shadows and images (*σκιαί* and *εἰκόνες*) that have to be taken from the sensible world for this purpose are somehow correlated to the realities (even if they are *οὐκ ὄντα*) of the supersensible and intelligible world. Moreover, if they on their part are regarded as images and shadows of what is beyond in the Father himself and are presumably correlated to him, then again problems arise.⁴⁶ God must have in himself some likeness of the shadows and the images, and indeed some of the emptiness that reflects him, or of the defect with which all that is sensible and creaturely is bound up, which it would be impiety to think. But in any case, asks Irenaeus, how do shadows cast shadows, and how can shadow and vacuum be related rationally together?⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *The Gospel of Truth*, 17.4-9, 22; 128, 32; cf. *The Apocryphon of John*, 17.7ff.

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2, 3ff, 7f, 10, 13f. Even Valentinus himself, the actual producer of this vacuity, Irenaeus says, becomes a vacuum, 2.4.1.

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.14.3; cf. Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 5.19.1ff.

⁴⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.4, 1-3, 7.1-7, 8.1-3, 15.1f, 16.1f, 17.2.

Now in order to get out of this difficulty the gnostics claim that, although knowledge of the truth comes to us in the form of these images and types,⁴⁸ they are actually superior to the sensible and material world, for far from being derived from it the whole world of creation was formed for them. In this way, argues Irenaeus, they convert these images into archetypes and then make the upper world of God conform to them; thus in fact they project upon God the patterns of their own creaturely thinking. But this can be regarded in another way. If shadows cannot cast shadows, then the *ιδεαί* and the *παραδείγματα* in the intelligible world are substantial essences or 'bodies', and as such they cast shadows and are imaged in the lower world. But is that not to make them into supramundane beings and gods? That is just what the gnostics did do, and Irenaeus shows that they have in this way lapsed back into heathen pluralism. Thus it becomes apparent that *gnosis* by its very nature operates through mythological hypostatizations and objectifying modes of thought that project into God human forms and feelings, and human, mental, psychological and even physiological processes.⁴⁹ Such people, Irenaeus insists, will be compelled continually to find out types of types and images of images and will never be able to fix their mind on the one and true God. They throw their thoughts *beyond God*, surmounting the Master himself in their own hearts, being indeed elated in their own assumptions, but in reality turning away from the true God.⁵⁰

This progressive mythologisation is very evident in the development of Valentinian gnosticism from its original form evident in documents such as *The Gospel of Truth*. In it Christian teaching is already extrapolated from the New Testament setting into an alien mythical framework, but in the teaching of Valentinus, as set out by Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian, we find that incipient mythology is greatly elaborated with the help of cruder and more popular mythology such as we find in the *Apocryphon of John* and in the Ophite gnostic tradition, but all this undergoes further elaboration in the thought of Ptolemaeus, a pupil of Valentinus.⁵¹ The same process can be seen at work when we compare the teaching of Valentinus with that of the earlier Basilides as he replaces

⁴⁸ Cf. *The Gospel of Philip*, 115.67, 69; 133, 12–16; 134, 12f.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.13, 3f, 8; 18, 3ff.

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4. 19, 1.

⁵¹ See Tertullian, *Adv. Valent.* I, 14, 33; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer., praef.* and 1.1.1f. Cf. also R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism, An Anthology*, London, 1961, pp. 163ff.

the latter's God-non-existent with the *Protopater* (προπάτωρ) of Depth (βύθος) and Silence (σιγή) out of whom there evolve tiers of supra-mundane beings which in spite of their philosophical and theological names are little more than an ingenious sophistication of heathen astrology and Egyptian mythology.

Yet all this, and this is our concern with it, is held to be 'justified' through allegorical variations upon biblical texts and themes. This is *allegorising in reverse*, for the biblical accounts of events in the life of the Lord and other New Testament figures, and the sayings and parables and sentences that are taken from the Scriptures, are reinterpreted as allegorical presentations of mythical aeons and processes that crowd the intermediate realm between the incomprehensible God and the material world. In this way the gnostics brought to the Scriptures their own preconceived framework of hypotheses and quarried at random from biblical passages, forming them into strange new patterns of their own in order to find support for their notions. Thus, as Irenaeus declared, twisting the natural sense of the Scriptures to a non-natural sense, and breaking up the order and connection of things inherent in the Scriptures themselves.⁵² This same point was made by Tertullian,⁵³ who was no less emphatic in his condemnation of the methods of Valentinus. If he did not, like Marcion, cut out of the Scriptures only what suited his own subject matter, he was even more cunning in his use of interpolation and distortion in doing violence to the truth. 'Valentinus abstained from excision, since he did not invent Scriptures to square with his own subject-matter, but invented matter that could be adapted to the Scriptures. Nevertheless he took away more, and added more, by taking away the proper meaning of the particular words, and by adding fantastic arrangements of things that bore no relation to the facts.'⁵⁴

What Tertullian means here can be seen not only in the twisting of the

⁵² Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.8, 1-2, 9.4; see further 1.3, 18ff; 2.10, 13f, 14, 20f, etc.

⁵³ Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 9: 'No divine saying is so unconnected and diffuse that its words are only to be insisted on, and their connection left undetermined.' And *ibid.* 14: 'so long as its form exists in its proper order, you may investigate and discuss, and indulge all your passion for curiosity into what appears doubtful and obscure.'

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *De praescr. haer.* 38. Cf. also 17. 'Truth is just as much opposed by an adulteration of its meaning as by corruption of the text.' Tertullian notes the Valentinian alteration of the text of John 1.13 from the original singular to the plural, to avoid reference to the Virgin Birth of Jesus and so distorts the meaning out of a docetic interest, *De carne Christi*, 19, 24.

evangelical kerygma and economy into unreasonable patterns, but in the progressive displacement of Jesus by a mythological system even from the place that he was given in *The Gospel of Truth*. Gnosticism was not interested in Christology but only in cosmological orientation and the kind of self-knowledge that went with it.⁵⁵ Behind it all there lay, as Irenaeus saw so clearly, the epistemological dualism which by positing an infinite discrepancy between God and human knowing of him, takes away all ground for positive control of man's thinking about God, and throws him back upon himself and the fancies of his own imagination. Thus by the *very gnosis* which they think they have discovered about God, they change the conception of God himself, and exalt their own opinions above the greatness of the Creator – which is only to make man himself in his own imagination and self-understanding the measure of God.⁵⁶

As we look back over these various developments of thought that arise from the cleavage between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, we can see that there are two different, though related, forms of allegorical interpretation. One is designed as a means of demythologising biblical statements of the acts of God in history or the presence of God in space and time, which can be conceived only mythologically within a framework that assumes an abstraction between idea and phenomenon, timeless reality and contingent happening. Another makes this abstraction so complete that it must assume that God is so utterly unknowable and unspeakable that we can have no conceptual knowledge of him, formed within the limits of our creaturely existence and yet objectively grounded in what he is in himself or in his self-revelation, but in spite of that assumes that we may have some kind of symbolic knowledge of God gained in hidden ways.⁵⁷ Although related to his incomprehensible, non-existent Being, this can be thought out only through correlation with forms of thought drawn from other areas of experience where formal or

⁵⁵ *The Gospel of Thomas*, 1–4, 50, 67. This is very evident in the various formulae gnostics used in ritual restoration from alienation, see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.21, 5; Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 13, etc.

⁵⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.14, 3f, 16.1–3.

⁵⁷ This is very clear in the *Apocryphon of John* 22.19–26. For the hidden nature of this knowledge see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.3.2, 30.4; *The Gospel of Truth*, 18.10f; *The Gospel of Thomas*, 1f (cf. the comments by B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas*, London, 1961, pp. 95f, 101f, 114f).

conceptual knowledge arises. The former method of allegorical interpretation strips off myth, by detaching from it all reference to space and time, leaving us with only a symbolical relation to the other world. The latter method of allegorical interpretation sublimates mythology by developing mytho-poetic thinking in a semi-philosophical manner, lifting it above space and time into a realm of the imagination. Yet both of these forms of allegorical interpretation appear to pass over into each other, for both of them operate with a mode of thinking in which the forms of thought used are detachable and changeable, and can be rationalised only when assimilated to other forms of thought that do not arise on the same ground and are not necessarily related to the subject-matter in question. Thus like the ebionite and docetic heresies in the early Church, they presuppose a conception of God who is infinitely separated from us in the lower world of sense and time, who does not interact with creation, and is inaccessible to any kind of objective knowledge operating with forms of thought deriving from him. By definition this God cannot really involve himself by word or act in our mundane existence except by way of some sort of paradoxical relation of the non-existent Being to non-existents.⁵⁸ The basic presupposition of all this way of thinking is a doctrine of the complete abstraction of God, Creator or Redeemer, from creaturely and human being. Given that as an axiomatic assumption, every statement is bound to be interpreted in a different light and to be accorded a different meaning.⁵⁹ Thus even one like Valentinus, as Tertullian said, can employ biblical statements and formally adapt his matter to them, yet in such a way that the real substance of the Gospel is taken away and its proper meaning altered.

There is a further issue arising out of the *χωρισμός* between the *κόσμος αίσθητός* and the *κόσμος νοητός* that demands our consideration: its hidden challenge to the rationality of the universe. Stoic thought was no doubt an attempt to overcome this threat, but in many ways it went too far, for it brought together the visible and invisible worlds in such a way as more or less to make them the obverse of one another, spirit being but the insideness of things, as it were. This had the effect of yielding a notion of universal law in the realm of spirit as well as in the realm of matter, and

⁵⁸ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.18.2, 21.4.

⁵⁹ This shift in meaning is apparent in the gnostic use of not only of theological terms but of traditional philosophical and cosmological terms such as *cosmos* – see H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Boston, 1958, pp. 252f.

tended (especially when blended with Pythagorean elements) to the identification of *πρόνοια* with *εἰρημαμένη*, of providence with fate. In so doing, however, it overlooked the irrational character of evil and could only proclaim a merciless gospel of 'courage to be' to men and women caught in the toils of the necessity of things or subjected to a harsh lot in life. In the face of this the gnostic movement appears as a widespread revolt in the longing for emancipation from the shackles of fate and in the conviction that man is not at home in a materialist and pitiless existence. But if the Stoics stood for a dogmatic philosophy of the inevitable nature of things which corresponded to a rational science of nature, then the gnostics stood for a reaction against the scientific logic that tied ethics and physics ineluctably together on the ground of the rationality of the universal system of being. What helped gnosticism in many ways was the kind of thought fostered by Philo and new trends in Prolemaic cosmology that seemed to lift the heavens high up from the earth and to promise the human spirit detachment from its slavery in a deterministic material existence. But gnosticism carried this further, for it pushed the idea of redemption out of the created world altogether, in the belief that the world of space and time was alien to God and that God was alien to it, and that so long as man is imprisoned in material existence he is estranged from himself as well as from God. Hence he must achieve liberation from creaturely being, detachment from matter, transcendence over space and time, and all that ties him down to earthiness, if he is to be saved from final estrangement, but this involves taking off into a empyrean realm on the wing of super-terrestrial forms of knowledge unobstructed by this-worldly objectivities and earth-bound rationalities.

Reaction to gnosticism was very sharp, not only on the part of the Church but on the part of the champions of classical Hellenism, as we can see in the critique of men like Celsus, Plorinus, Victorinus, or Porphyry. They interpreted it as a flight from science, a repudiation of the rationality of the universe, a disruption of the cosmic harmony, and indeed a sort of blasphemy. There were powerful speculative tendencies in gnostic thought not unlike elements in Neo-Platonic philosophy, but Plotinus felt that the *contradiction* introduced by the gnostics into the relation between the visible and the invisible worlds would only result in confusion and darkness, and foster impiety. That was one of the main points felt so deeply by Irenaeus. By separating the creation from God and by making it alien to him, they made it impossible for people to

know God within the range of our knowledge in the world with which we are connected in the scheme of things, and then they threw their thought speculatively above and beyond the Creator himself, which is at once irrational and impious (*irrationale est et impium*). The root problem lies in the contradiction the gnostics posited between the two worlds. How can things below be the images of things above if they are contrary to them and have nothing in common with them? (*Unde autem et haec illorum imagines, cum sint illis contraria, et in nullo possunt eis communicare?*)⁶⁰

That problem was brought to its sharpest point by Cerdo and Marcion, who not only separated the two worlds, the visible and the invisible, completely from one another, but assigned to each a God of its own, with 'an immense interval separating one from another', and so turned the difference between them into an *ultimate antithesis* dividing the two supreme Beings from each other.⁶¹ Such a bitheism (even when shorn of mythology) was of course inherently self-contradictory, as the Church fathers were not slow to point out, but it gave the Church a serious problem because Marcion backed it up on the one hand with a forceful presentation of the evangelical message of free grace, especially in its Pauline form, and on the other hand with a shrewd discernment of evil as a dark irrational power from which we can be delivered by the sheer act of an alien but merciful God. Salvation was therefore by *faith*, not by esoteric *knowledge*. There were elements of truth here that the Church of the second century still had to grasp properly, and conflict with Marcion served to deepen its understanding of the Gospel. But Marcionism had two far-reaching doctrines which left their mark upon the Church for centuries even when Marcionism itself was utterly rejected. These were the aspects which, together with the continuation of gnostic tendencies, were to affect interpretation of the Scriptures.

The first was Marcion's antithesis between creation and redemption. That was latent in all gnosticism but in Marcion's thought it was part of an ultimate dualism which severed the creation from the activity and concern of the Father. This made Marcion's theology essentially contradictory, as

⁶⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.7, 6f; 8.1-3; 10.1f; 25.3f; 26.1f; 27.1; 28.2-9.

⁶¹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.27.1f; 2.1, 4; 3.12, 12; 25.3; Hippolytus, *Ref. omn. haer.* 7.37.1f; 10.19.1f; Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 41.1, and especially Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem*, 1.1-6; cf. *Con. Noetum*, 11. See E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and his Influence*, London, 1948, pp. 66f.

both Tertullian and Irenaeus showed.⁶² Marcion's dualism implied an ultimate monism while denying it, and was inherently irrational. But if the true God is separated from creation then he is utterly *unknowable* in any circumstances by creaturely beings, although what Marcion taught was that he was quite unknown (ὁ ἄγνωστος θεός) until Christ came.⁶³ On the other hand, Marcion's dualism made impossible anything but a thoroughly docetic view of Jesus Christ, which undermined the actuality and therefore the reality of his revelation of God. But it meant also that redemption is not and cannot be actualised within the sphere of our creaturely being in space and time.⁶⁴ This implied that all biblical passages that spoke of divine acts of salvation within our visible and sensible world had to be cut away, or be radically reinterpreted. The history of the effects of this is to be seen both in the monophysite tendencies in Christology and in the penchant for allegorical exegesis.

The second was Marcion's antithesis between the Law and the Gospel, and between the Old Testament and the New Testament, which Tertullian called Marcion's 'special and principal work'.⁶⁵ This was consistent with the separation between the two supreme Beings, for according to Marcion, 'the God of the Old Testament' was 'the God of creation', and 'the God of the New Testament' was 'the God of the Gospel'. This was to throw 'mercy' into antithesis with 'justice', to disengage the saving truth of the Gospel from all providential fulfilment of God's purpose within history and indeed to remove the divine 'goodness' from any essential involvement with time. Hermeneutically it demanded an exegesis of the New Testament that cut its statements away from the Old Testament and translated them out of their Judaic background into a very different world of timeless ideas. F. C. Burkitt pointed out that to understand Valentinus and Basilides rightly one must 'consider them as Christians who were striving to set forth the living essence of their religion in a form uncontaminated by the Jewish envelope in which they had received it',⁶⁶ but this anti-Judaic element

⁶² Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.1f; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.27.1.

⁶³ This was generally held by the gnostics, cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.11.1; 2.1; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.24f. Cf. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, Leipzig, 1913, pp. 65ff, and Blackman, *op.cit.*, pp. 54f.

⁶⁴ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.31.1; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.13, and in detail, bk. 2, regarding the Creator and bk. 3, regarding the Incarnation.

⁶⁵ Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.22, and in detail in books 4 and 5.

⁶⁶ F. C. Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis*, Cambridge, 1932, pp. 27f.

was far stronger in Marcion. It brought to the surface the difficulty which those reared in the old classical traditions had in assimilating the Old Testament into a philosophical framework that was, at certain essential points, quite alien to it. That marks, although in an extreme form, the damaging cleavage between the Gentile Church and Israel which has sadly persisted throughout the centuries and has constantly tempted the Church to distort the image of Christ by forcing upon him a Gentile mask and so to make of him a baffling and bewildering figure. But it was a Jew who contributed to this, Philo of Alexandria, who offered the Church an interpretation of the Old Testament which, as we have seen, allegorised its basic message and expounded it in a form to make it acceptable within the Hellenic disjunction between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Cf. E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, Cambridge, 1959, p. 94: 'The Philosophy which Philo expounds is essentially the popular Greek philosophy, a blend of Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism, slightly modified by the Hebrew belief in God.' See also W. W. Harvey, in his edition of Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* vol. I, Cambridge, 1957, p. 288.

Chapter 2

*PHUSIKOS KAI THEOLOGIKOS LOGOS: ST PAUL AND ATHENAGORAS AT ATHENS*¹

In the early Christian treatise *On the Resurrection of the Dead* written in the last quarter of the second century, Athenagoras of Athens drew a distinction between two kinds of theological discourse or argument (λόγος), 'on behalf of the truth' (ὕπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας) and 'concerning the truth' (περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας)² in which he clearly had in mind St Paul's missionary address to the Athenians on Mars' Hill.³ Owing to its nature, discourse concerning the truth is of primary importance for it provides necessary knowledge of the actual subject-matter, while discourse on behalf of the truth is of secondary importance for it does not establish the truth but is useful in opening the way for it by removing the undergrowth of false and hostile opinion. It is in this light that Athenagoras' two extant works are to be appreciated, *Presbeia Christianon* (Πρεσβεία Χριστιανῶν), which is admittedly of an apologetic nature, and *Peri tes anastaseos ton nekron* (Περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῶν νεκρῶν), in which he offered a reasoned account of the truth of the resurrection.⁴ Through both of them he sought to bring the biblical and evangelical understanding of the Word or *Logos* of God to bear upon the mind of his contemporaries at the heart of ancient classical culture in Athens.

It is to be admitted, however, that in neither treatise was Athenagoras really concerned with actual doctrinal content, so much as with establishing Christian beliefs in creation and resurrection as reasonable. Thus he did not bring the Incarnation, Crucifixion or Resurrection of Jesus Christ himself into the picture as St Athanasius did in his twin

¹ Revised version of an address delivered in the University of Athens, 12 December 1985, and printed in *SJT*, vol. 41, 1988, pp. 11–26.

² Athenagoras, *Peri anastaseos*, 1.3; 11.3; cf. *Presbeia*, 9.1.

³ Acts 17.16–31.

⁴ I have used the fine edition by W. R. Schoedel, *Oxford Early Christian Texts*, edit. by H. Chadwick, 1972. The connection between the two works is clearly made at the end of the first, *Presbeia*, 37.

treatises *Against the Greeks* and *On the Incarnation of the Word*, in which he clearly observed a similar distinction between arguments on behalf of and concerning the truth. Like Athenagoras Athanasius had in mind St Luke's account of St Paul's encounter with the Athenians, but he had in mind as well the Apostle's own account of the reaction of Corinthians to the Gospel, for the slander and mockery with which Jews and Greeks sought to defend themselves from the proclamation of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus only showed the critical state into which they were thrown by the cutting edge of the Word of the Truth of the Gospel. That was how Athanasius evidently interpreted the reaction of the Athenians to St Paul's preaching of 'Jesus and the resurrection'.⁵

Neither with Athenagoras nor with Athanasius, however, was the difference between ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀληθείας and ὁ λόγος ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας sharply maintained.⁶ Each adopted an explicitly Christian approach in both treatises. While one work was clearly more concerned with refutation and preparatory argument than the other, nevertheless apologetic and doctrinal accounts were allowed freely to interpenetrate one another in bringing to light the inherent reasonableness of the Christian Faith. The *logos* on behalf of the truth and the *logos* concerning the truth were alike intended to cut through disorderly and irrational notions so that divine truth may be grasped on the ground of its own compelling self-evidence and thereby command the assent of faith. There is here little if anything of the dualism between 'natural' and 'supernatural' knowledge of God so characteristic of philosophical and theological works in later centuries, for that was ruled out by the fact that the *Logos* by whom the whole universe is made and regulated is the eternal Word of God who became flesh in Jesus Christ. In him knowledge of the Incarnation of the Word and of creation by the Word bear intrinsically upon one another. Thus in line with emphasis on the oneness of God and the oneness of his activity in space and time a unifying providence was held to overarch all creation and history, bringing the loving purpose of God for mankind to its consummation in judgment and resurrection. While this general theological account was more fully and precisely worked out by Athanasius,⁷ it is with Athena-

⁵ Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, 1, and *De Incarnatione*, 1.

⁶ See Athenagoras, *Peri anastaseos*, 1.3-5; 11.1-6.

⁷ See my assessment of Athanasius' theological reasoning, *Theology in Reconciliation*, London, 1975, pp. 255ff, and reissued below in Chapter 7.

goras that we discern how the profound shift in Greek thought demanded by the Christian Gospel began to be brought about, as in the very conception of φυσικός καὶ θεολογικός λόγος.

It is to St Paul himself, however, that we must turn first, for it was he who supplied these early Christian thinkers with the paradigms that evidently governed the ways in which they challenged Greek philosophy and commended the Christian Faith, and who together with St John injected into the milieu of the Hellenic world the biblical concept of the Word of God which transformed the understanding of *logos* by giving it a realist and theological character. In this Christian use *logos* certainly retained in appropriate contexts the sense of reason, discourse, or argument, but informing it and empowering it was the revealed Word of the living God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ in space and time and is proclaimed through the Word of the Gospel as the Creator of the universe and the Saviour of mankind.

It is highly significant that St Paul's missionary encounter with the Athenians began in the market place with his proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection and ended on the Areopagus with his word about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.⁸ Everything else in the content of his disputation⁹ and address, and in the reaction of the philosophers, must be understood within those brackets. While he certainly linked his address with Greek ideas, he deliberately gave them a Christian sense. Thus what he said *on behalf of* the truth in opening the way for it and what he said *concerning* the truth itself cannot be isolated from one another, for what he proclaimed was not just some new teaching he had picked up that might be assimilated into a stock of previously held ideas and interpreted in accordance with them, but the act of God in raising Jesus from the dead, an absolutely decisive event which left the destiny of humanity objectively different ever afterwards.¹⁰

St Paul was not trying to commend the Gospel to the Greeks from within the frame of their religious thought, but bringing the Gospel to bear upon it in such a way as to expose its anthropomorphic and idolatrous distortion of the truth about God, and to relate that truth to the reality of the created world. He called for repentance and a radical

⁸ There seems to be an implied contrast with Socrates' visits to the market place – cf. Plato, *Apology*, 31 A.

⁹ Cf. Philostratus on the disputations of Apollonius, *Vita Apollonii Tyanæ*, 4.19.

¹⁰ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2, Edinburgh, 1956, pp. 305ff; II.1, pp. 121ff.

change of mind in view of the impending judgment appointed by God.¹¹ Thus the Apostle did not play down the contradiction between divine revelation and pagan religion. Nevertheless, pointing to the altar with the inscription to the *Unknown God* (Ἄγνωστω Θεῷ) he declared that he whom they 'ignorantly worshipped' was none other the Creator of the cosmos and everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, who does not dwell in temples made with human hands. Nor is he served by human hands as though he were in need, for he it is who gives to all life and breath and everything. Paul therefore claimed the Athenians for God even though he had become unknown to them, for it was God's intention that we should seek him if haply we might feel after him and find him (ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὑρομεν), though he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being. Indeed as their own poets, Cleanthes and Aratus, have said, 'We also are his offspring'.¹²

There may be an allusion here to a passage in Plato's *Phaedo*,¹³ but, whether that is the case or not, we may refer to it in order to throw into relief the contrast St Paul drew between the Greek and Christian approaches to the truth. In their discussion of the immortality of the soul Socrates and his friends, shortly before he was to drink the hemlock, raised the question about what lay beyond death. In view of the fact that there is no divine word (λόγος θεῖος) from the other side, it was suggested by Simmias that the best a man can do is to make a frail bark out of human notions (λόγοι) with which to sail through life. The message announced by St Paul, on the other hand, was that those times of ignorance are now past, for a divine *Word* (Λόγος) has actually come to us from the other side of death, a revelation of the truth setting aside all human ignorance and superstition, the Word of God embodied in Jesus Christ whom God has raised from the dead. He is the very Man whom God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness. The moment had arrived for men to repent and have faith in the God who created the world, who has made of one blood all nations dwelling on the earth, the Lord of human history who has assigned to them the times and

¹¹ For St Paul's own assessment of this kind of preaching see Romans 1.16–32. Cf. also Acts 14.15–17.

¹² Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*, 1; Aratus, *Phenomena*, 5.

¹³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 85 CD; cf. 99 B where ψηλαφάω is used to speak of people who feel or grope about in the dark in vague guesses at truth.

limits of their habitations. He it is who has now raised Jesus from the dead. That was the disturbing content of the *καινή διδαχή* that St Paul delivered to the men of Athens on the Areopagus, the very place historically linked to the destiny and glory of their city.

Now in this address in the heart and capital of classical culture, the Apostle to the Gentiles showed the Early Church how arguments on behalf of and concerning the truth are to be integrated in the service of the Gospel. But he also supplied a general theological pattern which might be used in expounding the Word of the Truth of God in such a way that it could penetrate into the foundations of the prevailing culture, evangelise them, and thus put down its own roots in the construction of a Christian culture. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead must be given the primacy, and be allowed to function as a regulative belief throughout, for in him the Word of God has come among men with power and the fundamental purpose of God for mankind is revealed and realised. Fundamental attention must thus be given to the Christian doctrines of creation, providence and judgment, since it is through them that the saving message of the Gospel can be brought to bear effectively on the Gentile world of thought. That was evidently the guiding pattern taken by Athenagoras of Athens to whom we now turn. Our task, however, is not to offer a detailed account of his arguments so much as to single out for consideration several themes of crucial significance in the development of a Christian frame of mind.¹⁴

Creation

Of primary importance in Athenagoras' argument on behalf of the truth was his refutation of the charge of 'atheism' as irrational, for it opened up the way for his positive account of Christian belief in God as the Creator of the universe and the one ultimate Source of all its rational order. The charge of atheism levelled against Christians had arisen out of the horrified reaction of Greeks to the idea that the rational forms of the cosmos which they regarded as eternal and divine were brought into

¹⁴ For further development in the Greek thought-world of a Christian frame of mind through 'The Three Hierarchs', Basil, Nazianzen and Chrysostom, see 'The Greek Christian Mind', Ch. 1 of *The Christian Frame of Mind*, Edinburgh, 1985, and Colorado Springs, 1989.

being out of nothing – to the Greek mind that was sheer impiety and atheism. But Athenagoras showed that this was an absurd and logically contradictory charge, since Christians believed in the one only God who is above and beyond all created being, who through his *Logos* has impressed upon the cosmos its natural law, and who governs all things visible and invisible by exercising his providence over them.¹⁵ ‘Most of those accusing us of atheism’, Athenagoras claimed, ‘have not the ghost of an idea of what God is, and are without any apprehension of the *Logos* that is both real and theological (τοῦ φυσικοῦ καὶ θεολογικοῦ λόγου)’ – or, as it might well be expressed, ‘without any conception of scientific and theological argument.’¹⁶

For Athenagoras the doctrine of God as the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, who made all things out of nothing, was of supreme importance in establishing the Christian Faith, for it had the effect of setting all human understanding and life upon a new basis altogether disparate from that on which Greek religion and philosophy rested. This was apparent in its rejection of the notions of the eternity and divinity of the celestial circles of Greek science and of the radical dualism between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός so central to Greek epistemology,¹⁷ by teaching that both *kosmoi* were brought from non-being into being and as such comprise one created cosmos under the unifying and ordering power of God’s Word.¹⁸ This meant that Christians rejected every form of Greek polymorphism and polytheism, for they involved conceptions of the being, nature and activity of God governed by cosmological theory quite incompatible with biblical belief in the oneness of God and of his creation.¹⁹ But Christians also rejected every form of Greek anthropomorphism and idolatry, for they arose out of mythological ways of thinking about God by way of projecting human fantasies and illusory creaturely images into Deity.²⁰

In the course of his argumentation Athenagoras made considerable use of citations and ideas taken from classical Greek poets, tragedians and

¹⁵ *Presbeia*, 3ff, 6ff, 10ff, 15f, 30f.

¹⁶ *Presbeia*, 13.1.

¹⁷ Unlike Irenaeus his contemporary or Achanasius later, Athenagoras was not always clear or consistent about this – compare *Presbeia*, 15–16 with 19.1–2; and 4.1; 6.1; 15.1; 24.1 with 10.3; 15.3; 19.4.

¹⁸ *Presbeia*, 8; 13; 15–16; 25.2f.

¹⁹ *Presbeia*, 8–10.

²⁰ *Presbeia*, 5–6; 15–23; 28.

philosophers from Thales to Plato and Aristotle. Thus, for example, he cited the statement of Plato: 'To find the Maker and Father of this universe is a hard task, but when he is found it is impossible to declare him to all'.²¹ Then he added: 'If Plato, then, is not an atheist when he understands the uncreated God to be Creator of all things, neither are we atheists when we acknowledge and affirm as God him by whose Word all things have been created and are upheld by his Spirit.'²² On the other hand, Athenagoras made it clear how radically the Christian doctrine of God as Creator differs from that of Plato, according to whom neither matter nor form was created by God. The decisive point for Athenagoras, upon which everything hinged, is the immense gulf between uncreated and created being, the latter in comparison to the former being rather like non-being.²³ This vast divergence between Christian and Greek approaches to the truth made it impossible for Christian teaching to be built upon the foundations of Greek thought, even when at its best in Plato.²⁴

Like St Paul, then, Athenagoras did not seek to establish knowledge of God on any ground independent of or apart from divine revelation, for opinions reached on any other ground would be no more than mere 'guess-work'. While he could appeal to notions of the divine found in Greek literature he deliberately gave them a very different slant within a Christian frame of reference and understanding. He insisted that true knowledge of God is 'not man-made but taught by God'. It cannot be derived from created being, for there is no likeness between uncreated and created being.²⁵ We learn about God only from God.²⁶ Athenagoras was particularly concerned in his argument on behalf of the truth to show that Christian teaching about the one God who created this universe and gave it its rational order is essentially reasonable and internally logical, in contrast to heathen conceptions of God.²⁷ It is significant, however, that at this very juncture his theological argument (*logos*) carried him into the distinctively Christian doctrine of the Trinity, with careful stress both on

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 28 C.

²² *Presbeia*, 6.2.

²³ *Presbeia*, 4.1f, 7-8.

²⁴ *Presbeia*, 23.5-7.

²⁵ Cf. Athanasius who deployed the same argument, *Con. Arianos*, 1.57; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.9, 15, etc.

²⁶ *Presbeia*, 7-12.

²⁷ Cf. the powerful discussion in *Presbeia*, 8.

the oneness (ἐνότης, ἕνωσις) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and on their distinction in unity (διαιρέσις ἐνούμενον), for it is on that Unity and Trinity that all true knowledge of God as he is in himself is based.²⁸ That is to say, Athenagoras' defence of the truth necessarily passed over into a real account (*logos*) of the truth on its own proper ground in God's self-revelation. Moreover it seems clear that it was on this Trinitarian basis that Athenagoras was able to integrate Christian understanding of God as Creator and Lord of heaven and earth with New Testament teaching about the Word and the Spirit of God, which together provided the general theological structure that Christians needed in their interaction with classical Hellenic culture. But at the same time it offered a Christian understanding of the Word or *Logos* of God that was both *real* in God himself and *real* also in its bearing upon the nature of the created order in the universe to which we human beings belong.

Providence

For Athenagoras the Christian doctrines of creation and providence (πρόνοια) belong inseparably together, for in making all things God formed them into an orderly intelligible cosmos over which he remains transcendent and within which he is everywhere actively present conserving it and exercising his continuous providential care and control. Like the creation, providence is properly to be understood in the light of the unified operation of the Holy Trinity.²⁹ It was above all in the light of the resurrection of Jesus, however, that Christians developed their essentially dynamic conception of providence which distinguished it sharply from Stoic and other Hellenic notions of πρόνοια, for it was in the resurrection that God's untrammelled power in creation and re-creation became revealed, that is, his sovereign interaction with and total control over created being.³⁰

Of far-reaching significance in this outlook was what we now speak of as the *contingent* nature of the creation and its rational order. On the one

²⁸ *Presbeia*, 10.2–5. See also 4.2; 6.2; 12.3; 18.2.

²⁹ *Presbeia*, 8–10; 12; 15; 18; 24–25.

³⁰ *Presbeia*, 19; 36–37; *Peri anastaseos*, 2–11; 14f; 18.

hand, this has to do with the fact that while God created the universe out of nothing he remains utterly free in relation to it, for it did not come into being because God needed it. There is, therefore, no necessary relation between God and the cosmos, as was commonly held.³¹ On the other hand, this understanding of the universe as contingent has to do with the fact that all that is not God has been freely brought by God into being from non-being through his wisdom and goodness, and as such is totally dependent on his creative presence and power for continued existence. There is, therefore, no necessity inherent in the existence or continuance of the creation.³²

On the one hand, then, this Christian outlook upon God and the creation had the effect of breaking the oppressive link in people's minds between God and an all-controlling impersonal necessity, and of overthrowing the equation of providence (πρόνοια) with destiny, fate, or chance/necessity (εἰμαρμένη, μοῖρα, τύχη) made in different ways by Aristotelians, Stoics, Epicureans and tragedians, and so often associated with astrology and divination.³³ Although God is utterly transcendent he is not shut off from contact with natures different from his own. Nor does he hold himself aloof from his creation, but is freely present and at work within it, intervening creatively and personally in the events of the world and in the affairs of mankind, in the exercise not just of a general but of a particular providence.³⁴

And on the other hand, this Christian view of God and his creation gave rise to a more dynamic and flexible conception of natural law, not one reflecting the blind cosmic determinism of eternally circling heavenly bodies, by which even Deity was regarded as circumscribed and limited, but one answering faithfully within the creation to the rational and purposeful will of the living God, the Lord of all being.³⁵ As we have seen, the fact that matter and form were equally created by God, and are unceasingly sustained in existence by him, means that God has endowed the universe with a common rational order in heaven and earth that is open to the constant disposition and control of his mind and wisdom. That is to say, natural laws are to be understood as contingent

³¹ *Presbeia*, 7ff; 13; 16; *Peri anastaseos*, d 12.3.

³² *Presbeia*, 4; 6-10; 15; 24ff; *Peri anastaseos*, 12-14.

³³ *Presbeia*, 6.3-4; 20.3; 22.12; 25.2; *Peri anastaseos*, 19.1-3.

³⁴ *Presbeia*, 7-10; 25; 31; *Peri anastaseos*, 18-19.

³⁵ *Presbeia*, 3; 25.2; 26.1.

rational structures arising in the world under the order-generating impact of God's Word and Spirit.³⁶ Thus Christian thought would have nothing to do with the Greek notion of irrational accident (συμβεβηκός) in empirical events or of blind chance (τύχη) operating as a purposeless necessity in the nature of things, but replaced them with the concept of freely happening events under the orderly and providential over-ruling of the Creator and Conservator of the universe. Athenagoras saw very clearly that everything here depended ultimately on the doctrine of divine creation. 'How does God exercise providence if he does not make anything? If he does not make anything, he does not exercise providence over anything at all.'³⁷

Athenagoras held that within the one rational order pervading the whole of created reality an essential unity underlies physical and human existence due to their ground in the one creative *Logos* of God. This is evident in the very nature of man himself who is composed of body and soul indivisibly united in one being.³⁸ Thus it is understandable that he should link together as equivalents νόμος φύσεως, φυσικός λόγος, and θεῖος λόγος, for the laws regulating physical and human reality and behaviour have a common rationality (λόγος, λογισμός) and are in fact ultimately one under the creative power of God's Word.³⁹ This unitary understanding of the created order implies that what we call 'moral law' (an expression which Athenagoras did not use) should be thought of not only as deriving from the transcendent Rationality of God but as being given by God an ontological ground in his creation of the universe and its rational order. Thus Athenagoras says: 'In accordance with the One who made him, man himself has a well-ordered existence, judged both by his nature with its origin in one common logos (κοινὸν λόγον), and his physical formation which does not transgress the law given to it, and judged by the end (τελεῖ) of life which remains one and the same for all.'⁴⁰ Moreover, the fact that there runs throughout God's creation a

³⁶ *Presbeia*, 7-8; 15-16; 24-25. This was the conception of 'the laws of nature' expounded by St Basil in his influential *Hexaemeron*. See G. D. Dragas, 'St Basil the Great's Doctrine of Creation', *Ekklesia kai Theologia*, Athens, III, 1982, pp. 1113f, 1120f.

³⁷ *Presbeia*, 8.8. The rigid determinism of Epicurus rested upon the opposite teaching: 'Out of nothing, nothing comes; into nothing, nothing can be turned.' Diogenes Laertius, *De vitis philosophorum*, X.38.

³⁸ *Presbeia*, 11-12; *Peri anastaseos*, 13-15.

³⁹ *Presbeia*, 3.3; 24.2-3.

⁴⁰ *Presbeia*, 25.4. Cf. *Peri anastaseos*, 12ff.

common rationality (κοινὸν λογισμόν)⁴¹ implies that there is an inner connection between natural and moral law, for God has given the constitution of the universe an immanent moral slant,⁴² by framing it in such a way that it allows for free moral decisions, and serves the cause of truth and justice, by bringing retribution upon infringement of its laws. Far from being a closed determinist system, or an end in itself, therefore, the universe is endowed with a stable open structure in virtue of which it serves the supreme purpose of God in the creation of man for a rational life in communion with himself.⁴³

It is quite apparent that Athenagoras operated with a *teleological* understanding of the laws of created being, in that he looked for the inner reason (λόγος) or ultimate end (τέλος) for these laws in God's creative Word and providential purpose.⁴⁴ In other words, the laws governing physical and human existence were not regarded as accounts of necessary sequences or structures immanent in the cosmos, but as transcriptions of God's will in the rational order of the creation and as manifestations of his divine goodness and wisdom in making man both for his own sake and for the contemplation and worship of God.⁴⁵ The effect of this theological and teleological understanding of the creation was to stress the God-given destiny of man made in the image of God, but it also had the effect of stressing man's accountability in soul and body before 'the Great Judge'. Since it is to God who made both man and the world that he is called to render an account of his life, man must answer for his behaviour in body as well as soul, for it is as man, and not simply as soul, that he received understanding and reason, and it is as man that he is answerable before his Maker. 'If it was man and not the soul by itself that received the laws, then man and not the soul by itself must also be subject to punishment for sins committed.'⁴⁶ This strong psycho-physical conception of human being, reinforces Athenagoras' claim that the end of man and the end of the whole created order, served by the laws given to it, coincide in the fulfilment of God's creative

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See G. D. Dragas, *op.cit.* p. 1102, who finds a similar idea in Basil's teaching, that God has imbued the world with a 'moral dimension'.

⁴³ *Peri anastaseos*, 12-15.

⁴⁴ Cf. W. R. Schoedel, *op.cit.* p. xxxi.

⁴⁵ *Peri anastaseos*, 5ff; 12-13; 18-19; 24-25.

⁴⁶ *Peri anastaseos*, 23.1. Also *Presbeia*, 12; 24.4-5; 25.4; cf. 31.4; *Peri anastaseos*, 15-16; 18-23.

purpose. The importance he gave, not to ethics as such, but to actual accountability before God in soul and body, and thus to *judgment face to face* with the Creator, marks out a radical difference between the Christian and Hellenic frames of thought.

Resurrection

For Athenagoras creation, providence and resurrection are profoundly interrelated. As we have seen, he insisted that it is in virtue of his creation of all things visible and invisible in the universe that God exercises his providence over them. Likewise he held that it is by the same power he exhibited in creating bodies out of nothing that God reconstitutes them in resurrection after their dissolution in death. While it is in the resurrection that God's total creative power is revealed to us, it is in the creation that the inner reasons for the resurrection of the dead are to be found. Thus it is in the light of God's wisdom and power in creation, and therefore in providence, that the essential truth and reasonableness of resurrection are properly to be understood.⁴⁷

The inner connection between resurrection and creation led Athenagoras to co-ordinate God's creative activity in the resurrection of the dead with his creative activity in the formation and functioning of the laws or powers of nature. His creative activity is always purposeful and order-generating, whether in respect of different species brought into existence or in the organic processes of animal digestion and nutrition. While God has given his creatures different natures, he interacts with each in accordance with its nature (*κατὰ φύσιν*) and not in any way contrary to nature (*παρὰ φύσιν*), nevertheless in his power and wisdom he guides and furthers everything in accordance with his will and in harmony with his supreme end in creation.⁴⁸

In this discussion of the functioning of natural laws Athenagoras was concerned to refute objections raised on naturalistic grounds to the basic idea of resurrection.⁴⁹ But in so doing he made it clear that, since the resurrection and creation belong essentially together in the actualisation

⁴⁷ *Peri anastaseos*, 3–5.

⁴⁸ *Peri anastaseos*, 3–8.

⁴⁹ E.g. the alleged impossibility of reconstituting human bodies after they had been devoured and digested by wild animals, *Peri anastaseos*, 4–9.

of God's fundamental purpose, in any true understanding of the resurrection physical and theological principles must come together. This is evidently the kind of realist truth that Athenagoras intended by his striking expression φυσικὸς καὶ θεολογικὸς λόγος, to which I have already referred.⁵⁰ He did not argue for the truth of the resurrection on the ground of natural laws, but sought to show that the resurrection of the dead is altogether consistent with the 'natural principles' or fundamental reasons underlying those laws which derive from God himself in his creation of the universe and its rational order.⁵¹ The importance of this 'realist and theological *logos*' lay in Athenagoras' acceptance of the fact that the resurrection, as an act of God within the structures of creation has empirical correlates without which it would be meaningless. The problem was how to think out that correlation in a way that would do justice to the physical structures of the creation as well as the astonishing act of God in raising the dead. The answer he gave was grounded in his teleological interpretation of the functioning of natural law under God's wise all-seeing directing and overruling of what he had created.

What Athenagoras set out to do in this work, was 'to show the truth of the argument concerning the resurrection (τὸν περὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως λόγον), both from the cause (ἀπὸ τῆς αἰτίας αὐτῆς) according to which and on account of which the first man came into being and those who followed him (although they did not come into being in the same way), and from the common nature (ἀπὸ τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως) of all men as men; and further, from the judgment of their Maker upon them in accordance with the time each has lived and the laws by which he behaved – a judgment the justice of which is beyond dispute.'⁵²

So far as the cause or reason for man's origin is concerned, Athenagoras insisted that man came into being either in an utterly random way, which he rejected as irrational, or for some definite purpose or end, which is what any rational person would hold. It cannot be said that man was brought into being for the use of God, since God is wholly self-sufficient and is in need of nothing. Nevertheless, Athenagoras argued, the ultimate reason is that God freely created man for his own sake and

⁵⁰ *Presbeia*, 13.1.

⁵¹ *Peri anastaseos*, 11.1f; 18.1f.

⁵² *Peri anastaseos*, 11.7.

out of his goodness and wisdom which are discerned throughout the creation. So far as man himself is concerned, however, the reason for his creation (in sharp distinction from that of irrational creatures that are extinguished at death) is that man made in the image of God is intended to survive death and live in unending vision and contemplation of God's magnificence and wisdom, according to the purpose of his Maker and the nature he has received from him. 'The reason for man's creation, then, pledges his eternal survival, and his eternal survival pledges his resurrection, without which he could not survive as man. Hence, from what has been said, it is clear that the resurrection is definitely proved by the reason for man's creation and the purpose of his Maker.'⁵³

Athenagoras then followed this argument by linking it closely to another drawn from the nature of men thus brought into being, the just judgment of God upon them, and the ultimate end of their life. The central point of this line of reasoning is that since soul and body united to each other make up the whole nature of man, they must be regarded as having a common end in survival and eternal existence before God. 'It is not the soul by itself but man who has been endowed with understanding and reason. It is man, then, consisting of soul and body who must continue for ever, but he cannot continue unless he rises again. If the resurrection were not to take place, the nature of men as men would not continue.'⁵⁴ Like other early Christian thinkers in the second century, Athenagoras taught that the soul as well as the body has been created out of nothing, and as such has no inherent immortality, but it is not the purpose of God that the soul should cease to exist as the reason for man's creation makes clear. That is to say, the immortality of the soul depends on its relation to God and the end to which man in the unity of his being as soul and body has been destined through divine creation.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, the union of the body with the soul in the wholeness of man's nature that demands the resurrection of the body, for unless man rises from the dead as a whole, the purpose of God in creation would be in vain, which is quite unthinkable.

The two arguments for the resurrection from the *reason* for man's creation and from his *nature* as man, Athenagoras regarded as primary.

⁵³ *Peri anastaseos*, 13.2.

⁵⁴ *Peri anastaseos*, 15.6.

⁵⁵ *Peri anastaseos*, 13.7-16.3. Cf. Theophilus, *Pros Autolikon*, 24 & 27; Justin Martyr, *Dialogos*, 5-6; Pseudo-Justin, *Peri anastaseos*, 8; Irenaeus, *Kata haereseis*, 2.34.

But there are secondary arguments to be adduced in support, those which draw their persuasive force from God's providence over us as he stands Guardian of our human way of life. This is not a way of arguing from the origin of man in creation, but from the final end proper to him, for which he has been destined by God. It has to do, therefore, with justice and judgment, reward and punishment, for everyone must render an account of his way of life to God. The main thrust of this argument is that providence and judgment apply to the *whole man*, and thus neither to the soul by itself nor to the body by itself, but to both together. This would not be possible or just without the resurrection of man in the wholeness of his human being, for reward and punishment relate to the actual deeds of man as man in his bodily existence.⁵⁶

Epilogue

The significance of Athenagoras lies in his robust engagement with Greek philosophy and culture through his realist understanding and deployment of the concept of *logos*, and in the general pattern he adopted in presenting the Christian position. While the arguments of his twin treatises in defence and in exposition of the truth inevitably interlocked, their main purpose was not to offer Christian teaching but to break through the conceptual barriers of Hellenism in such a way as to make room for Christian convictions. He was not concerned with doctrinal detail but with fundamental principle, in a sustained attempt to transpose Greek thought into an altogether different perspective, within which dualist and determinist conceptions of the world that shut God out from direct personal intervention in human affairs, would lose their force, and be replaced by a dynamic teleological view of God's interaction with the world of space and time. To this end Athenagoras deployed with striking effect Christian teaching about creation and resurrection that left a permanent mark upon the development of a distinctively Christian culture within Hellenism.

While the approach he adopted lacked the evangelical and soteriological dimension found in the twin treatises of St Athanasius, Athenagoras opened up the line which Athanasius was to follow in his trenchant

⁵⁶ *Peri anastaseos*, 18–25.

epistemological and theological reconstruction of the foundations of classical thought and culture. It was in Athanasius' deployment of the doctrines of Incarnation and Redemption that there became established in a definitive way the Christocentric view of the relation of God to the world. This was an understanding that in and through the incarnate person and work of Jesus Christ his Son God has for ever bound and united the universe to himself, and continues unceasingly to bring about the salvation of mankind by direct personal intervention in human existence and history.

Two points at least in Athenagoras' own contribution may be singled out for special appreciation. He helped to lay the basis for the radically Christian conception of the contingent nature of the universe and its rational order, which in its developed form has done more than anything else to open up the way for our modern scientific understanding of nature and its unitary inherent intelligibility. And in linking so closely together Christian teaching about creation and resurrection, he integrated physical and theological ingredients in our knowledge of God and his interaction with the universe in a remarkably concrete way that has much to offer us in the ongoing dialogue between Christian theology and natural science. In his own day, however, it provided the Church with an understanding of God's dynamic and positive relation to the universe of space and time and the unitary rational order that pervaded it, and thus undermined the dualist and monist cosmologies that prevailed in the Graeco-Roman world within which the Church was fulfilling its evangelical mission in the second and third centuries. It thereby opened up a way within the framework of Hellenism for a realist understanding and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

KERYGMATIC PROCLAMATION
OF THE GOSPEL: IRENAEUS,
*THE DEMONSTRATION OF
APOSTOLIC PREACHING*

One of the most significant pieces of writing that have come down to us from the first century after the death of the Apostles is the *Dialogue with Trypho* by Justin Martyr. In the *Apologies* that bear his name Justin sought to commend the Christian faith to the world of Greek thought in which he explored the relation between the biblical Word or *Logos* and the Platonic *logos* or reason; but in the *Dialogue*, which recounts a discussion he had with a Jewish Rabbi, Justin operated with a Hebraic notion of the Word of God which, in accordance with the Prologue of the Gospel according to St John, he identified with the Incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ There are two features of this work to which I want to draw attention, for they characterise the earliest preaching of the Gospel in Greek Patristic literature. On the one hand, it probes into the difference and yet the profound connection between the teaching of the Christian Gospel handed down from the Apostles in the New Testament Scriptures and the teaching of biblical Judaism handed down in the Old Testament Scriptures, for what had been foretold by the Prophets under inspiration of the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled in the Advent of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. On the other hand, it sets out an account of the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ as not only 'Word' but as the Mind and Will of God in creating and saving action. Through the prophetic Spirit the Word of God entered into the course of time and created a patterned series of historical events that led up to the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ. It is through this same prophetic Spirit (τὸ προφητικὸν Πνεῦμα) that the Word continues to be heard in the Scriptures speaking directly from the Person of the Father (ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου τοῦ Πατρός) and from

¹ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 43–44.

the Person of Christ (ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ), in such a way that the words spoken are filled with divine power and grace.²

The points to which I wish to draw attention here have to do with the relation of the New Testament Revelation to its historical roots in the Old Testament Revelation in the one economy of redemption climactically fulfilled in the Incarnation, and the bearing of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit on historical facts and events in such a way that in Jesus Christ event and message, the Word and the words, the Truth and truths, are intrinsically integrated, and cannot be torn apart without serious dismemberment of the Faith. In the Gospel, as Justin reminds us, we have to do not simply with things spoken (τὰ εἰρημένα) but with things done (τὰ γεγενημένα), and it is in the inherent relation between them that the statements of Holy Scripture have their persuasive and demonstrative power.³ It is when we consider what is written in the Scriptures in the light of the divine realities and actual events to which they refer that we come to believe and understand. Thus in his *Apology* directed to the Greeks Justin wrote: 'We will offer demonstration not by way of believing mere statements but of being compulsorily persuaded (κατ' ἀνάγκην πειθόμενοι) by those who prophesied these things before they came to pass, for we have seen with our own eyes events that happened and are happening (διὰ τὸ καὶ ὄψει ὡς προεφητεύθη δρᾶν γεγόμενα καὶ γινόμενα). We think that this will appear even to you as the greatest and truest demonstration.'⁴ It was in line with this conviction that the Greek fathers were concerned in their Christian mission primarily with the exposition of biblical writings and the presentation of the economy of redemption. To a certain extent this interpretative concern with γεγράμμενα and γεγόμενα reflects the two-fold concern of Judaism with *Halakah* or the interpretation of the written *Torah* designed to provide moral principles by which the Word and ordinances of God may be applied to the daily life of his people, and with *Haggadah* or the narrative and dramatic presentation of the redemptive events of the triumphant Exodus of Israel from Egypt celebrated in the rite of the Passover. In early Christian preaching, however, the two-fold concern with γεγράμμενα and γεγόμενα is evident in the pastoral attention given

² See my essay 'Early Patristic Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures', *EKKΛΗΣΙΑ καὶ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, ed. Methodios Fouyas, Athens, 1988, pp. 138ff.

³ *Ibid.* p. 140.

⁴ *Apol.* 1.30.1; also 1.33.1.

to expositions of the truth of the apostolic *kerygma* and to Paschal Homilies on the saving events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In order to highlight that dual emphasis in the homiletic and catechetical proclamation of the early Greek fathers I would like to centre discussion of the theology of Christian preaching on two significant texts of the second century: the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* by Irenaeus of Lyons (formerly of Smyrna), and the *Homily on the Pascha* by Melito of Sardis.⁵

*The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*⁶

Only an Armenian translation of this important little work survives, but we do know from Eusebius its original Greek title: Εἰς ἐπίδειξιν τοῦ ἀποστολικοῦ κηρύγματος, and are able to check its main conceptions through many cross-references to the earlier work of Irenaeus *Exposure and Overthrow of Knowledge falsely so-called*, commonly cited as *Against Hereses*. This is not itself a sermon, but an explanatory exposition of the saving content of the apostolic *kerygma* and of 'all the members of the body of truth' which it comprises. As such it is designed to provide people with a brief presentation of divine things, and thus to confirm faith by showing that it does not rest on statements about the truth but upon the truth itself on which those very statements are grounded. To show that faith and understanding the truth belong essentially together, Irenaeus cites the LXX version of Isaiah 7.9: 'If you do not believe, you will not understand.' He then goes on to explain what this means. 'Faith is produced by the truth, for faith rests on things that truly are. For in the things that are, as they are, we believe, and believing in things that are, as they are, we keep firm confidence in them. Since faith is intimately bound up with our salvation, we must take great care to have a true understanding of the things that are.'⁷ That is to say, properly understood, faith is ontologically grounded in the objective truth of things (i.e. the ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων, as Clement of Alexandria expressed it somewhat

⁵ St John Chrysostom Lectures delivered at Hellenic College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, USA, 21–22 October 1991.

⁶ See the edition by J. Armitage Robinson, *St Irenaeus, The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, Translated from the Armenian with Introduction and Notes*, London, SPCK, 1920.

⁷ *Epideixis* or *Demonstratio* 3.

later) and takes its rationality from the truth itself, as the mind assents to and thinks of the given realities strictly in accordance with their intrinsic nature and intelligibility.⁸ The purpose of the *Epideixis* or *Demonstratio*, therefore, is to offer a summary account of the structure of Christian belief through bringing to light the inner connection of the saving truths it embodies, and thus enable the believer both to withstand falsehood and confidently to offer sound and pure teaching to any inquirer.

Before we proceed further we must consider what is meant by 'the *kerygma* of the Apostles' and by 'the body of the truth'.

Kerygma, as Irenaeus understood it, is not just what we call 'preaching' but official, apostolic proclamation of the Gospel, and even then it refers not so much to the proclaiming of the Gospel by the Apostles as to the evangelical realities proclaimed by them. It is authoritative proclamation, proclamation that derives its authority, not just from the Apostles as duly commissioned witnesses and ambassadors (important as they were in the Church founded on them by Christ), but from the truth itself which they proclaimed. That is to say, the authority of the apostolic *kerygma* is derived from and grounded in the self-revelation and self-proclamation of Christ which under the inspiration of his Spirit took shape in the apostolic mind and embodied itself in the apostolic proclamation and teaching in such a way that it is actually the living and dynamic Word and Truth which Christ is that continues to be communicated through the *kerygma* of the Apostles. Christ himself in his risen power and self-evidencing reality continues to be present in the witness and teaching the Apostles. This does not mean that Christ the Word was resolved into the apostolic word, but it does mean that after the foundation of his Church upon the Apostles we have access to the self-proclamation and self-communication of Christ only in the form which, under the creative impact of the risen Lord and his Spirit, it has assumed once for all in the apostolic witness and tradition. That is to say, throughout all history we have access to Christ, before he comes again, only through the apostolic proclamation and interpretation of the Gospel mediated to us in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament and through baptismal incorporation into Christ in the midst of his Church where he continues to make himself known from faith to faith and to be savingly at work in the power of his indwelling Spirit. That is why in

⁸ See my essay on 'The Deposit of Faith', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 36, Edinburgh, 1983, pp. 4ff.

the *Demonstratio* Irenaeus laid great stress upon the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church, and in which significantly he said nothing about the organisation and ministry of the Church or of apostolic succession in its ecclesiastical sense.

What did Irenaeus mean by 'the body of truth' (τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίον)?⁹ Basic to his understanding of this was Irenaeus' concept of *embodied truth* or *embodied doctrine*, for the theological foundation and the historical foundation of the Faith were identical in the saving and revealing acts of God in Jesus Christ, the Word and Son of God made flesh. It was the indivisible reality and wholeness of the Truth embodied in Jesus Christ that constituted for Irenaeus what he called the 'rule of faith' or 'canon of truth' received through Baptism. In Jesus Christ the Person of the Saviour, saving acts, and the message of salvation are identically one and the same. Jesus Christ is himself the Way, the Truth and the Life, apart from whom there is no access to the Father and no way of salvation. It is because of its personal nature that the truth embodied in Christ may be received and understood by a living human being compounded of soul and body, only through baptismal incorporation into Jesus Christ, which affects him in the wholeness of his being as soul and body, thereby governing his daily life as well as his knowledge of the truth. Thus the proclamation of Christ is more than the message of who he is and what he has done, for it is itself the power of God constantly at work among people and effectively operative in the faith of the Church. Regarded in another way, however, the body of truth which constitutes the theological content of the apostolic proclamation, manifests an intrinsic order or structure reflecting the economic design of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ and the essential pattern of the self-revelation of the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It is through bringing 'the order of the rule (or canon) of our faith' given with Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ the three 'heads' of the Faith, to bear upon the body of the truth, that the three 'members' of its organic structure become disclosed.¹¹ In this way the objective substance of the harmonious structure of the Faith is found to be grounded in the ultimate truth of the Deity of the Father, of the

⁹ See *Adversus haereses*, 1.1.20 which gives us the Greek for this expression.

¹⁰ Cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.1.20.

¹¹ *Dem.* 3-7.

Son and of the Holy Spirit.¹² It is in that light that in the *Demonstratio* Irenaeus set out to expound the basic truths proclaimed by the Apostles in such a way that each is given its appropriate place within the organic whole much like the different members within a living body.¹³ It was in line with this clarification of the substance of the Faith worked out by Irenaeus in his two books *Against the Heresies* and *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* or *Epideixis* that there began to emerge explicit formulations of trinitarian belief that were eventually to take shape in the Nicene Creed.

What Irenaeus gives us in the *Demonstratio* is the theological content of the apostolic *kerygma* which enables preaching to keep close to the truth revealed in the Gospel, and helps to steer people away from damaging error. He does not provide his readers with theological propositions or definitions, for he is not concerned with *dogmata* but with *kerygmata*, that is, with kerygmatic declarations of saving truth directed to the confirmation of the faithful in their grasp of salvation. His purpose is to clarify and deepen their understanding of the *kerygmata* by showing that they are grounded in belief in the one God revealed in the Old Testament as 'I am he who is' (Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν) and in the New Testament as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In so doing Irenaeus takes his guidance from the Faith handed down in the Church through the Presbyters who were disciples of the Apostles. 'First of all, it bids us bear in mind', he writes, 'that we have received baptism for the remission of sins, in the name of God the Father, and in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was incarnate and died and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit of God.'¹⁴ Apart from that, no explicit formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity is given, but the teaching throughout is definitely and inherently trinitarian. While his declared intention is to order his exposition in accordance with 'the three heads' of this baptismal rule of faith, what Irenaeus actually does do, is to throw the central focus on the Father and the Son, but all through to present the Spirit as the relation between the Father and Son, who as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son is himself also Lord and God, so that what he says of the Holy Spirit is embedded in his teaching about the Father and Son, and is not

¹² *Dem.* 4-7, 10, 47, 100.

¹³ Cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.15.

¹⁴ *Dem.* 3.

given in separate chapters. Far from neglecting the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, this actually gives it a pervading place in all the coherent convictions of the Church. The effect of this is to show the direct bearing of these convictions upon the daily life of the faithful. This approach is very much in line with the Scriptures of the New Testament in which, while there is no formally explicit teaching about the Holy Trinity, belief in and worship of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit clearly belong to the saving content of the Gospel which the Apostles proclaimed and taught.

What are the main theological points which Irenaeus wants to stress in his explication of the kerygmic declarations of the Apostles made within this biblical and trinitarian frame of faith?

(1) The doctrine of God the Father

The accent here falls definitely upon the transcendence of the eternal Lord God Almighty, one God the Father, the invisible Creator of all things, above whom and after whom there is no other God. Thus in contrast to the mythological and philosophical notions prevailing in the ancient world, Irenaeus taught that God has created and fashioned all things, making to exist what did not exist, and holding them all together without being himself contained by anything. He thereby rejected any idea of a necessary relation between God and the world, or between God and man, and insisted that all created things depend on the Word and Spirit of God both for their being and for their form. Since God is rational (*λογικός*) he created all that he had made through his Word or *Λόγος*, and since God is Spirit he has adorned all things. Through the creative Word of God the whole universe is perpetually sustained, ordered and disposed.¹⁵ What Irenaeus was doing here was to direct his readers to the historical self-revelation of God given through the interaction of his Word and Spirit with the people of Israel leading up to the Incarnation of his Word in Jesus Christ, and thereby to bring the Judaeo-Christian conception of the transcendent God contained in the teaching of the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures to bear upon the mind of his contemporaries in such a way as to present it in a

¹⁵ *Dem.* 3-6, 44.

rational form which would be conducive to faith and understanding, but without in any way compromising the truth of the Gospel. This called for an ἐπίδειξις or a demonstrative presentation of the saving truth of the Gospel in its inseparable relation to the historical facts and events of its economic mediation in the world of empirical reality, and a justification of that world as the good creation of God the Father.

A fundamental problem which Irenaeus clearly had in mind has to do with the dualist outlook prevailing in Hellenic philosophy and religion, which separated a realm of intelligible ideas from a realm of sensible events. The former only was held to be properly real, while the latter was regarded as less than real and not subject to knowledge in any proper sense. From within that dualist perspective the biblical and Christian teaching about God's self-revelation in history or about the Word of God being made flesh in Jesus Christ who died and rose again from the dead as the Saviour of the world, appeared crudely materialistic and irrational to the Greek mind, and as such could be given at best only a mythological interpretation. The biblical revelation of God's interaction with mankind either had to be rejected as unworthy of rational knowledge or had to be reinterpreted in some philosophically symbolic way of presenting esoteric knowledge or *gnosis*. Moreover, the idea that God had created the world out of nothing in form as well as matter led the Greeks to charge Christians with the impiety of atheism, for they held that rational forms pervading the universe were eternal and divine. Thus Irenaeus had to present a doctrine of God as the one and only Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth who is the source of all rationality, and a doctrine of the creation in which God gives reality to the world of sensible being thereby relating the world to God in a positive and not just a negative way. But that involved a rejection of the radical dualism in Hellenic philosophy and religion, and a unitary (but not a monistic) understanding of the whole universe of intelligible and sensible realities which God through his Word had endowed with a created rational order, with appropriate laws and limits within which the world should abide in accordance with the determination given it by the Creator.¹⁶ This view of the rational nature of the universe to its divine Lawgiver carries with it a conception of divine judgment upon all that transgresses the laws imposed on it by the creative Word and Spirit. This applies particularly

¹⁶ *Dem.* 10: cf. 15.

to man who has been given by God both authority and freedom within the creation, but for whom a law has been provided by God in order that he might perceive that he had over him the Lord of all, and be restrained from exalting and uplifting himself and thereby overpassing his measure. Should he transgress against his divine Maker judgment would inevitably fall upon him, which applies to believers as well as unbelievers, as the Old Testament account of God's relations with mankind and the people of Israel shows.¹⁷ It is this conception of a rationally ordered, lawful universe that Irenaeus seeks to set forth in the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, in which he combines exposition of the coherent body of Christian truth with epistemological and apologetic argument, and also with practical religious exhortation.

However, since this work is addressed more to believers than to those outside the Church, Irenaeus takes care throughout to warn them against the fallacious and corrupting conceptions of the gnostics who operated with a damaging dualism between the spiritual and the material and differentiated the Creator from God the Father, and thus separated creation from redemption.¹⁸ And so he makes a great point of insisting that it is God the *Father* who is the Creator, which deeply affects both the doctrine of God and our understanding of his relation to the world and to mankind. The fact that as Father God is merciful, compassionate and very tender, good, just, the God of all, both of Jews and Gentiles and of all who believe, leads Irenaeus to present the Christian doctrine of God in its relation to the self-revelation of God to the ancient Patriarchs and to the Old Testament account of God's activity in the creation of the world and of mankind, and particularly in his historical relations with the people of Israel leading up to the coming of Christ long foretold by their prophets. The God whom Christians worship is 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the living, although the sublimity and greatness of this God is unspeakable'.¹⁹

Further, the rejection of the dualism that gave rise to the gnostic separation of God the Father from God the Creator, carried with it a rejection of the Greek dualist conception of man as soul imprisoned in a body and the presentation of a different, biblical conception of man 'as a

¹⁷ *Dem.* 8, 11f.

¹⁸ *Dem.* 5ff, 8; cf. 99.

¹⁹ *Dem.* 8, also 24f.

living being compounded of soul and flesh'.²⁰ Thus both cosmological and anthropological dualisms were set aside for a new understanding of a dispensation of love and compassion between God the Father and the world which he has bound to himself in a covenant bond, and of a loving relation between God the Father and man established and revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word and Son of God, in whom a covenant of adoption has been opened up in which human beings made after the image of God have him as their Father.²¹ It is because man is created body and soul by God that his physical as well as his spiritual being comes under the impact of the saving renewal of Christ, who in order to complete and gather up all things in himself, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and to establish 'a community of union between God and man' – the Greek for which, as we know from *Adversus haereses* is *κοινωνία καὶ ἔνωσις*.²² This is precisely what is set forth in 'baptism for the remission of sins' in which 'God the Father bestows on us regeneration through his Son by the Holy Spirit. For as many as have the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is to the Son; and the Son brings them to the Father, and the Father causes them to possess incorruption.'²³ 'This baptism', says Irenaeus, 'is the seal of eternal life, and is the new birth unto God, that we should no longer be the sons of mortal men, but of the eternal and perpetual God.'²⁴ Since man has been created by God as a unitary being of body and soul the gift of eternal life sealed through his baptismal incorporation into Christ involves resurrection of the whole man in body and in soul alike.

(2) The Doctrine of God the Son

It is against the backcloth of Hellenic and gnostic dualism that Irenaeus provides an *ἐπίδειξις* of his Christology, demonstrating the oneness of God and man in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and the oneness of the person and the work of Christ in the redemption of mankind. He

²⁰ *Dem.* 2.

²¹ *Dem.* 8 & 22.

²² *Dem.* 6; cf. 31.

²³ *Dem.* 3 & 7.

²⁴ *Dem.* 3; cf. 41f.

constantly keeps in view the concrete reality of the incarnate presence of the Son of God in the space and time of the created world, and the indivisible relation in Christ between Saviour, salvation and the message of salvation. In his presentation of the dispensation of the Incarnation or the economy of redemption within the history of God's interaction with mankind from the very beginning as recorded in the Scriptures, Irenaeus gives immense attention to typological interpretation of prophetic testimonies culled from the Old Testament in order to show the continuity of God's redemptive purposes in history. At no point, however, does he engage in allegorical exegesis (such as we find in Origen's writings) which presupposes the very disjunction between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός which he rejected, and which yields a spiritualised notion of truth detached from history. He is concerned, instead, with the remarkable relation between shadow and reality or type and fulfilment actualised in the Incarnation.²⁵ Moreover, by showing the correspondence between the predictions of the ancient prophets and their fulfilment in the saving events of the Gospel he provides his readers with a convincing demonstration of the truth proclaimed in the New Testament. While this way of handling the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures may not accord very well with the hermeneutical demands of some modern scholars (due to their rationalistic Enlightenment view of time in their so-called 'historico-critical method'), there is no doubt that Irenaeus did the Church a great service in anchoring the message of the Gospel in the long history of God's self-revealing and redemptive interaction with mankind through tracing out its evangelical roots, and not least the mystery of Christ's Passion,²⁶ in the life, worship, and suffering of ancient Israel, and thereby establishing the understanding of the incarnate economy as grounded firmly in historical as well as divine reality. Thus Irenaeus operated with a conception of real time within the dynamic events and dispositions of the divinely created order.

It was a primary concern of Irenaeus to exhibit and maintain the divine and human reality of Jesus Christ. In his previous work, *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus had shown that a dualist approach to Christ led either to docetic heresy in which his humanity was depreciated or to ebionite heresy in

²⁵ See, for example, *Dem.* 46.

²⁶ Cf. *Dem.* 25f, 74ff.

which his deity was depreciated, against both of which he insisted on an understanding of Jesus Christ as both God and man, indeed as God-man. In fact, if one extant fragment²⁷ attributed to him is authentic, Irenaeus anticipated consiliar Christology in speaking of 'the Word of God become one with the flesh by a hypostatic and physical union (οὐτῶ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου ἐνώσει, τῇ καθ' ὑπόστασιν φυσικῇ, ἐνωθέντος τῇ σαρκί)'. While he does not use that language in the *Epidexis*, it is the same basic teaching that he puts forward about 'the Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord . . . who was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man'.²⁸ This was important for two primary reasons. (a) Our knowledge of the invisible reality of God the Father depends on the visible reality of God the Incarnate Son.²⁹ (b) The saving union between man and God depends on the reality of the oneness between God and man in Christ himself.³⁰ If the Lord Jesus Christ is not both God and Man then the Gospel of God's revealing and saving acts in Jesus Christ proclaimed by the Apostles is empty of substance.

On the one hand, then, Irenaeus laid great stress upon the eternal existence of the Son and Word of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, who pre-existed with the Father before ever the creation came to be.³¹ Judging by a statement in his previous work, Irenaeus even anticipated the teaching of Athanasius and Hilary in putting forward a doctrine of the indwelling or containing of the Son and the Father in one another, due doubtless to the impact of the Fourth Gospel on his thought.³² The Lord Jesus Christ is identical with the Word of God through whom, with the Spirit, all created reality was brought into being, and man was made after the image of God; he is the Word of God who walked and talked with man in the Garden of Eden, the Word through whom God made himself known to Abraham and Moses and the prophets, all before the Incarnation.³³ On the other hand, Irenaeus

²⁷ No. xxvii, printed in Harvey's edition of the *Adversus haereses*, II. Cambridge, 1857, p. 493.

²⁸ *Dem.* 6 & 31ff.

²⁹ *Dem.* 5, 47, 84, 91f, 97.

³⁰ *Dem.* 6, 31, 40.

³¹ *Dem.* 10, 30, 43, 51f.

³² *Adv. haer.* 3.6.2.

³³ *Dem.* 5ff, 10f, 12, 24ff.

laid great stress upon the fact that the eternal Word and Son of God was actually made flesh in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in such a way that as the Creator Word through whom mankind had originally been brought into being he penetrated back into the very beginning of the human race and gathered it all up in his incarnate existence in order to heal, redeem, and restore it in himself, thereby bringing the divine purpose of creation to its destined fulfilment and end.³⁴

This doctrine of recapitulation or ἀνακεφαλαίωσις, of course, was one of Irenaeus' major contributions to early Church theology, which he expounded at length in *Adversus haereses*, and brings forward here in the heart of his account of the dispensation of the Incarnation and the economy of redemption.³⁵ In it Irenaeus shows how in his Incarnation the Son of God laid hold of our fallen, disobedient, corrupt, diseased humanity that had fallen under the judgment of God, and united it to himself in such a way as to undo its sin and guilt, reverse the process of its corruption, and so redeem, heal, and renew it in himself, restoring it to its true end in union with God. It will be sufficient for us here to draw attention to three of its soteriological features.

(a) Irenaeus links the virgin birth of Jesus and his bodily resurrection closely together: both of which Christ underwent on our behalf. Of particular interest is the prominence he gives to the birth of Jesus in that 'he hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained. And he manifested the resurrection, himself becoming the firstborn of the dead' . . . 'And this our Lord Jesus Christ truly fulfilled when he gloriously achieved our redemption, that he might truly raise us up, setting us free unto the Father. And if any man will not receive his birth from a virgin, how shall he receive his resurrection from the dead?'³⁶ The significance of this has to do with the fact that, while in becoming man the Son of God took flesh from our fallen and corrupt humanity, he cleansed, redeemed and renewed it in the very act of his incarnational assumption of it. The virginal conception and birth of Jesus are thus bracketed with the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a primary event in the economy of redemption. It is thus noteworthy that in his earlier work Irenaeus

³⁴ *Dem.* 5, 10, 24, 29ff.

³⁵ *Dem.* 5, 30-37, 99.

³⁶ *Dem.* 38; cf. 39, 53.

related infant baptism closely to the virgin birth of Jesus as a participation in his birth from above.³⁷

(b) Nowhere does Irenaeus separate Incarnation and redemption from each other, as though the Incarnation were only a precondition of atonement, and as though the saving work of Christ in his Passion were some kind of redemptive transaction external to his person or apart from and in addition to his Incarnation. All through his teaching the Incarnation and redemption are presented as intrinsically interrelated and as indeed the obverse of one another. This is particularly apparent in the saving and justifying import Irenaeus discerns in the whole course of the obedience which Christ yielded to God on our behalf, in order to reverse the disobedience of mankind and free all who believe in him from death and judgment.³⁸ This understanding of the saving obedience of Christ was pressed home by Irenaeus in his account of the vicarious abasement and humiliation of the suffering servant as described in the prophecies of Isaiah.³⁹

(c) Tied in with these soteriological conceptions is the central importance Irenaeus gives to a saving union with Christ, for it is through that union that participation in the renewing and regenerating power of the Saviour takes effect. To be redeemed and restored people need to be united to a Saviour who is himself united to God. 'So then he united man with God, and established a community of union between God and man; since we could not in any other way participate in incorruption, save by his coming among us.'⁴⁰ This participation takes place through the operation of the Holy Spirit by whom Jesus himself was born of the Virgin Mary, and by whom God the Father bestows on us new birth through his Son. The concept of union and communion with the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit is thus absolutely integral to Irenaeus' understanding of Christian life and faith.

³⁷ Cf. John 1.13, in the singular, and 3.3ff. See my essay 'Ein vernachlässigter Gesichtspunkt der Tauflehre', *Evangelische Theologie*, München, 1956, 10, pp. 433-467 & 11, pp. 481-492.

³⁸ *Dem.* 31-37.

³⁹ See especially *Dem.* 69ff.

⁴⁰ *Dem.* 31; cf. 6 & 37, 40.

(3) The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

As has been indicated earlier, in spite of the fact that Irenaeus speaks of the doctrine of the Spirit as the third 'head' of the rule of faith or the apostolic proclamation of the truth, he does not devote separate chapters to it in the *Epideixis*, but interweaves what he says about the Spirit with his teaching about the Father and the Son. This is clear, for example, in his comment upon St Paul's statement about 'One God, the Father, who is over all and through all and in us all'.⁴¹ 'For "over all" is the Father; and "through all" is the Son, for through him all things were made by the Father; and "in us all" is the Spirit, who cries "Abba Father" and fashions man into the likeness of God. Now the Spirit shows forth the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God; and the Word utters the Spirit, and therefore is himself the announcer of the prophets, and leads and draws man to the Father.'⁴² In the following chapter, in which Irenaeus refers to 'the order of the rule of our faith', he writes, after summarising the first and second 'head': 'And the third head is: The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.'⁴³ 'And for this reason', he adds, 'the baptism of our regeneration proceeds through these three heads: God the Father bestowing on us regeneration through his Son and by the Holy Spirit.'⁴⁴

In these few sentences we have the characteristic traits of Irenaeus' doctrine of God the Spirit: its trinitarian structure, and the bracketing together of the Spirit with the Word. Since God is Spirit, there was clearly no problem about the Deity of the Spirit as far as Irenaeus was concerned, so that he directed no special attention to defending it. For a fuller understanding of his conception of the Holy Spirit we must turn particularly to his discussion of the role of the Spirit in the original creation of man and his re-creation through the Incarnation, on the one hand, and to his discussion of the operation of the Spirit in the prophetic

⁴¹ Ephesians 4.6.

⁴² *Dem.* 5.

⁴³ *Dem.* 6.

⁴⁴ *Dem.* 7.

proclamation of the coming of the Son of God and its fulfilment in the dispensation of his Incarnation, on the other hand.

In the *Adversus haereses* Irenaeus spoke of the Word or Son of God and the Spirit as the 'two hands' of God. He makes only a passing allusion to that expression in the *Epideixis*,⁴⁵ but he does nevertheless make much of the conjoint operation of the Word and the Spirit in creation. This is very interestingly expressed in a passage to which reference has already been made: 'Since God is rational he created all things that are made by *Word* and since God is Spirit he adorned all things by *Spirit*: as also the prophet says: "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and by his Spirit all their power."⁴⁶ Since, then, the Word establishes, that is to say, gives body and grants the reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of power; rightly and fittingly is the Word called the Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God.⁴⁷ Irenaeus, as we have noted, taught that in bringing the universe into existence God created both matter and form out of nothing. Here he speaks of the distinctive work of the Spirit as 'adorning' and giving 'form' to things, where he evidently has in mind the Greek conception of the universe as *cosmos*, a term derived from κοσμεῖν meaning to arrange or adorn, but also the Old Testament notion of divine Wisdom (*hokmah*) as the source of beauty and skill. Thus while it is through the Word and the Spirit together that God creates all things, it is specifically in the operation of the Spirit that Irenaeus discerns the beauty, form and order of the cosmos, and it is to the Holy Spirit who is the Wisdom of the Father, yet always in close conjunction with the Word, that he attributes the powers operating in the cosmos.⁴⁸

This is not a point that he develops further so far as the doctrine of creation is concerned, but he does trace to the activity of the Spirit, along with that of the Word, the orderly working out of the saving purpose of God in the restoring, reintegrating and recreating of the human race. Irenaeus' special concern here is with the relation of the Spirit to prophecy, and yet not just to prophecy as such but to the Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy. It is in prophecy that the Holy Spirit brings the Word of God to bear creatively upon empirical events so that they are

⁴⁵ *Dem.* 11.

⁴⁶ Psalm 33.6.

⁴⁷ *Dem.* 5.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Dem.* 10.

made to point beyond themselves in prefiguring the future, and sometimes even in such a realistic way that 'the Spirit of God through the prophets recounts things that are to be as having taken place'.⁴⁹ The prophetic Spirit and the Word of God inhere in one another and function through one another so closely, as divine agents in the economy of redemption as it moves toward its end in the Incarnation, that for people not to receive the Spirit is tantamount, Irenaeus holds, to rejecting prophecy.⁵⁰

So far as Christian preaching is concerned, special attention may be given to two aspects of the Irenaeian doctrine of the Spirit: (1) the bearing of the conjoint activity of the Spirit and the Word on the understanding and use of Holy Scripture; and (2) the impact of the Holy Spirit upon the lives of people through their union with Christ.

(1) The Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture. Irenaeus thought of the Spirit as so directly present to the ancient prophets that he could say: 'The Spirit shows forth the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God; and the Word utters the Spirit, and therefore is himself the announcer of the prophets.'⁵¹ And again: 'It is not a man who speaks the prophecies; but the Spirit of God, assimilating and likening himself to the persons represented, speaks in the prophets and utters the words sometimes from Christ and sometimes from the Father.'⁵² In another passage he writes: 'Hither were the prophets sent by God through the Holy Spirit; and they instructed the people and turned them to the God of their fathers, the Almighty; and they became heralds of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God . . .'⁵³ It is thus understandable that Irenaeus should relate the activity of the Holy Spirit directly to the Evangelists and Apostles who were also heralds of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, but after it had taken place, when they were endowed with the Spirit for their mission in the world.⁵⁴ Thus the conjoint operation of the Spirit and the Word applies to the New Testament Scriptures as well, and indeed in a fuller way, for in them the truth of the Gospel proclaimed beforehand has been actualised in and through Jesus Christ the Word made flesh. That is to say, the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament have to be read and expounded as the uttering by the Spirit of the Word of God now become bodily reality in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ *Dem.* 67.

⁵⁰ *Dem.* 100.

⁵¹ *Dem.* 5.

⁵² *Dem.* 49.

⁵³ *Dem.* 30.

⁵⁴ *Cf. Dem.* 30, 41.

(2) The Holy Spirit and union with Christ. It was under the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and it is by the same power that we who are regenerated through the Spirit are made to participate in the birth of Jesus from above. We have already noted this point in the close relation which Irenaeus held to obtain between infant baptism and the virginal conception and birth of Jesus. At this point we consider the way in which, through his rejection of Hellenic and gnostic dualism, he linked the Spirit to body, not only in the creation and formation of man after the image of God, but in the renewing and reforming of man in body and soul in the dispensation of the Incarnation. When speaking of the way in which we partake of incorruption through being renewed in fellowship or *κοινωνία* with God, Irenaeus laid stress upon the relation of the Spirit to the body of Christ, both in his birth and in his resurrection, for that governs the nature of our communion with God in and through Christ. Far from being antithetical, Spirit and body are compatible with one another. While Irenaeus makes use of a rather strange analogy of body and shadow to show something of the way in which Christ's body was formed through the overshadowing of the Virgin Mary by his Spirit, the point that he wants to emphasise is the fact that it is through the body and Spirit of Christ that man, in the wholeness of his body and soul reality, is brought into renewing and saving fellowship with God. As the Word and Spirit were inseparably at work in the birth of Jesus the 'true man', so the Word and the Spirit are inseparably at work in our regeneration as human beings and in the union and communion with God into which are initiated. In that union and communion Christ himself is directly, personally and actively present through the Spirit, in such a way that Irenaeus can speak of the Spirit as 'the Spirit of our face, the Lord Christ', in which he clearly has in mind the Hebrew word for face (*פנים*) used for the presence of God and the Greek word for face (*πρόσωπον*) used for person. Because of the conjoint operation and presence of the Spirit and the Word in establishing our union with Christ we are to think of it as spiritual and bodily reality, for it is the whole man who will be saved – although, of course, it is only with the visible return of Christ and the resurrection of the body that this will become fully realised and apparent to us.⁵⁵ In the *Epideixis* Irenaeus does not discuss the Eucharist, as he does in his larger work, but

⁵⁵ *Dem.* 6f, 31, 38, 40–42, 71f, 84f, 97.

it is above all in the Eucharistic communion, as he showed there, that our union with Christ in his saving Passion and resurrection takes place here and now in anticipation of complete fulfilment in the future with the glorious return of Christ and the unveiling of the new heaven and the new earth. It is not least in this great hope that the kerygmatic preaching of Irenaeus of Lyons and the dramatic proclamation of Melito of Sardis bear so revealingly upon one another in the evangelical message of the Early Church.

Chapter 4

DRAMATIC PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: MELITO OF SARDIS, *HOMILY ON THE PASSION*¹

Eusebius of Caesarea once asked 'Who does not know the books of Irenaeus and Melito which proclaim Christ as God and Man?'² Already the two names had been connected together in their basic Christology. Much less of Melito's than of Irenaeus' writings survive, but it is clear that both were concerned to uphold the whole biblical tradition of the Faith against the attacks by people like Marcion who wanted to divide sharply between the God of creation presented in the Old Testament Scriptures and the God of redemption presented in the New Testament Scriptures, which gave rise to a docetic approach to the humanity of Christ and a spiritualistic notion of the Incarnation and salvation. Both Irenaeus and Melito interpreted the proclamation of the Gospel in the light of the unity of divine revelation mediated through the prophets and apostles, Israel and the Church, but without any Judaising of the Christian faith like the Ebionites. Irenaeus had a deeper sense of the substantial oneness (*unius substantiae* = ὁμοούσιος) of the old and new covenants in the one overarching covenant of grace,³ but Melito, who had evidently visited Palestine,⁴ made more of the difference between Christians and Jews. He was rather sharp in his criticism of the Jews because of their ingratitude and rejection of Christ as the very Saviour whose coming had been prefigured in Israel and foretold by their ancient prophets.⁵ While he was just as emphatic as Irenaeus in relating the eternal truth of the Gospel to its foreshadowing in biblical Judaism, he could also speak of the Passover in the Exodus narrative as 'the Passover

¹ I have made use of the Oxford Christian Texts edition of the *Peri Pascha*, with the text and translation by Stuart Hall, Oxford, 1979. My references are to his line numbering of the *Peri Pascha*. Occasionally I have preferred an alternative reading and adjusted the translation of the text accordingly.

² Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.28.5.

³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.21.2 & 4.

⁴ *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26.14.

⁵ *Peri Pascha*, cf. 505ff, 583ff, 628ff, 693ff, 730ff.

of the Lord, an eternal memorial for the sons of Israel'.⁶ It had more than just historical significance.

In the *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* Irenaeus takes his cue from the rule of faith or canon of truth handed down from the Apostles along with baptism which gives his proclamation of the Gospel a trinitarian structure. While this was a structure of a kerygmatic and not of a dogmatic kind, it clearly paved the way for the dogmatic formulations in the Nicene Creed. In the *Homily on the Pascha* there are passing references to the ordinances (δόγματα) of the Gospel and to the Church as the depository (ἀποδοχεῖον) of the truth,⁷ but here we find a different way of proclaiming the Gospel in a more dramatic and cultic form at the celebration of the Eucharist, after the reading and interpretation of the words of the Scripture.⁸ In his homily, if homily it is, Melito takes his cue from the structure of salvation as prefigured in the dramatic account of the redemptive events in the history of Israel celebrated in the institution of the Passover. It does not have the doctrinal edge of Irenaeus' presentation in the *Epideixis*, but it is complementary to it and not without its own kerygmatic force. Irenaeus on his part does not overlook the significance of the dramatic events in the redemption of Israel out of Egypt celebrated in the Passover, for along with Melito he sees in them divinely intended anticipations of the saving acts of God in Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. Thus as he moved from his presentation of the doctrine of God to his presentation of Christology he also took his cue from the Exodus narrative. 'He saved the children of Israel, revealing in a mystery the suffering of Christ by the sacrifice of a lamb without spot, and giving its blood to be smeared on the houses of the Hebrews as a sure precaution. And the name of this mystery is "Passion", the source of deliverance.'⁹

The Greek word used by Irenaeus here for the *passion* of Christ would be πάσχα which is the New Testament translation for פסח or *pesach*, the Hebrew word for passover (or its Aramaic equivalent), as in St Paul's statement that 'Christ our passover (πάσχα) is sacrificed for us.'¹⁰ There is a similar passage in *Adversus haereses* where Irenaeus declares that 'Moses was not ignorant of the day of Christ's passion, for he foretold it

⁶ *PP.* 80f.

⁷ *PP.* 258 ff.

⁸ *PP.* 1f, 65f.

⁹ Irenaeus, *Dem.* 25.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:7.

in a figurative way (*figurativim*) by the name given to the Passover'. He adds that 'at that very festival, proclaimed by Moses such a long time before, our Lord suffered, thus fulfilling the passover.'¹¹ Irenaeus, who knew Hebrew, was not claiming that πάσχα meant 'passion' as if it were derived from πάσχειν, 'to suffer', but that is how πάσχα was often interpreted in the Early Church. This is the way Melito himself understood πάσχα.¹² According to Gregory the Theologian this mistaken idea is due to its sound, not to its etymology.¹³ However, *Pascha* understood in this way soon came into common use by Christians to refer to the Passion of Christ, but significantly to the Passion as understood from the perspective of his resurrection. Thus it came to refer at once both to the sacrificial death of Christ as the Lamb of God and to his triumphant resurrection from the grave, celebrated in a single festival. It is in this unitary sense that Melito uses it in the *Peri Pascha*, and likewise many others, from Hippolytus and Origen to John Chrysostom, in their Paschal Homilies. At the same time, of course, the term *Pascha* continued to be used in certain contexts of the Jewish Passover, with reference to the Passover lamb and the Passover meal.

The *Homily on the Pascha* opens with the sentence: 'The Scripture of the Hebrew Exodus has been read, and the words of the mystery have been expounded, how the sheep is sacrificed and how the people is saved.' This seems to indicate a context in which the Eucharist is being celebrated in relation to the biblical account of the Passover, as an exultant celebration of redemption through the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and understood as a fulfilment of the original passover. It has been suggested that here the Paschal Festival may have arisen liturgically out of a Christian adaptation of the traditional Jewish rite of the Passover. Be that as it may, what we are given by Melito is a kind of 'Haggadic' proclamation of the saving events of Christ's death and resurrection which takes its interpretative clue from the Old Testament account of the redemption of the people of Israel from the tyranny of Egypt and of the eternal memorial (μνημόσυνον αἰώνιον)¹⁴ of that redemption in the feast of the Passover. The primary interest of Melito,

¹¹ *Adv. haer.* 4.20.1 – see Harvey, *in loc.* II, p. 178.

¹² Thus *Peri Pascha*, 303f. ἀπό τοῦ πάθειν τὸ πάσχειν; cf. 451f & 478f. And see Exodus 12.26.

¹³ Gregory Nazianzen, *Easter Oration*, Or. 45.10–11.

¹⁴ Pp. 81.

however, is not in the liturgy but in what he calls 'the structure of the mystery'.¹⁵

There is no doubt that from the very beginning it was the redemption of Israel out of Egypt in the Passover and the Exodus into covenant relation with *Yahweh* that constituted the paradigm instance of divine redemption, not only for the people of Israel, to which the Psalmists and Prophets unceasingly pointed, but also for the Church's understanding of the salvation consummated in Christ. It was precisely in relation to that Old Testament paradigm that on the night when he was betrayed Jesus himself interpreted the Supper which he shared with his disciples as he inaugurated the new covenant in his body and blood. It was when the Lord Jesus rose again from dead, ascended to the Father and poured out his Spirit upon the disciples, that he filled the Holy Supper which they continued to celebrate with his presence in such a way that it became *the Lord's Supper* or *the Eucharist*, not just a continuation of what is called 'the Last Supper'.

There is a significant analogy here between the institution and celebration of the Passover in Judaism and the institution of the Holy Supper in the Church. According to the Jewish tradition codified later in the Mishnah tractate *Pesachim*¹⁶ two Passovers are to be distinguished, 'the Passover of Egypt' (Exod. 12.1-14) which took place once for all in the night before the Exodus, and 'the Passover of the Generations' (Exod. 12.14-20) or 'the Passover of the Future', instituted as a memorial to be kept throughout all the generations to come.¹⁷ A parallel distinction is to be made in respect of the historical Supper celebrated by Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Room before he was crucified, which took place once and for all, and the Lord's Supper, in which the historical Supper is transformed through the presence of the risen Lord, a memorial before God which is continually to be made throughout the generations in proclamation of Christ's death until he comes again.

Melito does not note this parallel between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, but it does bear upon his persistent theme of the comparison (*παραβολή*) or correspondence between the mystery of salvation pre-figured in the history of Israel and its final fulfilment in the reality of the

¹⁵ *PP.* 302f.

¹⁶ *Pesachim*, 9.5, edition by H. Danby, *The Mishnah*, Oxford, 1933, pp. 150f.

¹⁷ Cf. Cecil Roth, *The Haggadah*, new edition, London, 1934, p. 55.

salvation accomplished in the Passion and resurrection of Christ by which we have been delivered from the tyrannical bondage of our sin and guilt. It is from the pattern of the mystery of the Pascha¹⁸ which is Christ himself (τὸ τοῦ πάσχα μυστήριον, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστός)¹⁹ that Melito takes his cue in framing his celebration of the Pascha, and it is by giving attention to the structure of the mystery (ἀκούσατε καὶ τὴν κατασκευὴν τοῦ μυστηρίου)²⁰ that his distinctive way of proclaiming the truth of the Gospel is to be appreciated.

Before we proceed further there is another comparison which we must note between the Jewish and the Christian rite. In the *Pesachim* it is laid down that 'in every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written, "And thou shall tell thy son in that day saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt".'²¹ That injunction is incorporated in the Passover Haggadah, the second half of which concentrates on the Passover of the Future, the redemption that is yet to be, in which these words are added: 'Not our fathers only did the Holy One, blessed be he, redeem, but us also he redeemed with them; as it is said, "And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore to our fathers".'²² There is both likeness and unlikeness to this in what Melito writes. For Christians redemption has already been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ so that they must regard *themselves* as included among the redeemed. The saving events of the cross and resurrection remain real for them; but the type that throughout the history of Israel prefigured their salvation fades away like a shadow before the reality of its fulfilment, so that the continuing force of the ancient rites and institutions passes into the Gospel.²³

The mystery of the Passover is new and old, eternal and temporal, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal; old according to the law, but new according to the Word; temporal in respect of the type, eternal in respect of grace; corruptible in respect of the sacrifice of the sheep, incorruptible because of the life of the Lord; mortal because of the

¹⁸ *PP.* 10, 65, 396, 448.

¹⁹ *PP.* 448.

²⁰ *PP.* 302.

²¹ Exodus 13.8 – *Pes.* 10.5.

²² Deuteronomy. 6.31 – *Haggadah*, new edition by Cecil Roth, London, 1934, p. 36.

²³ *PP.* 255–300.

burial in the ground, immortal because of the resurrection from the dead. Ancient is the law, but new is the Word; temporary is the type, eternal is grace; corruptible is the sheep, incorruptible is the Lord, sacrificed as a lamb, resurrected as God (σφαγείς ὡς ἄμνος, ἀναστάς ὡς θεός).²⁴

It was not the intention of Melito, like Irenaeus, to present his readers with a compendium of the truth of the Gospel, but to focus attention on the Passion of Christ who as God and Man saves his people through suffering with them and for them. This is presented in a biblical scenario of historical depth in the experiences of the ancient people of God, in the prefiguring of Christ's Passion in Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, yet not just as the Saviour whose suffering was anticipated and typified in their suffering, but as the Saviour who was himself directly present and operative in those historical figures and events, in actual sharing of the suffering they involved. Thus the mystery of the Lord was proclaimed by the prophetic voice, and the mystery of the Pascha became revealed in the Passion of Christ.²⁵ It was as the Old Testament types, arranged beforehand by the Lord, in the Patriarchs, in the Prophets and in the whole people, were fulfilled in the sacrifice and suffering of Christ that his divine reality and nature as the Saviour of the world became manifest. However, with their fulfilment the temporal function of the type as type ceased.

Whenever the object typified arises, the material that once typified it is set aside as something rendered useless, for as the image of the reality it gives way to it as it manifests itself in its own nature (παραχωρήσαν τῷ φύσει ἀληθεῖ τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰκόνα). That which was once of value becomes valueless, when that which is of value in its own nature (φύσει) becomes manifest . . . The type was of value before the truth, and the parable was admirable before its interpretation. Thus the people was held in honour before the Church was raised up, and the Law was admired before the light of the Gospel shone forth. But from the time that the Church arose, and the Gospel shone forth upon the people of the earth, the type was made empty, giving up its image to the emergence of the truth in its own nature (ὁ τύπος κενούται τῷ φύσει ἀληθεῖ τὴν εἰκόνα παραδούς) and parables are fulfilled, being made clear by the interpretation. Thus the Law was also fulfilled when the light of the Gospel shone forth, and the people lost their significance when the Church was raised up, and the type was done away

²⁴ *PP.* 5–26.

²⁵ *PP.* 396–425.

when the Lord became manifest, and today things once held to be of worth have become worthless, since what is really of great worth has been revealed.²⁶

Like Irenaeus, Melito did not engage in the kind of mystico-allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures in which attempts are made to pass from what is regarded as merely external and historical to what is held to be spiritual and divine reality, for the divine reality was regarded by Melito as already present and operative in the events anticipating it in the history of Israel. Thus, it was part of the mystery of the Pascha that Christ himself was already savingly present in the Passover lamb which was sacrificed in the homes of the children of Israel in Egypt to protect them from the judgment of the destroying angel.²⁷ There was in fact a two-way relation in Melito's thought between Christ and the historical types. Christ is believed because he became manifest as the reality prefigured in Israel, as the force of the mystery (τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ μυστηρίου) occurring in the types,²⁸ and the types themselves are believed because of their fulfilment in Christ, although at the same time their transient character is made clear, for, rather like an artist's preliminary sketch when it has performed its function, they are set aside in the manifestation of his eternal reality in which all the truth of the types is gathered up and concentrated.²⁹ The stress is laid by Melito here on grace (χάρις) as the characteristic feature of the new era that arrives with the Gospel.³⁰ The purpose of the *Peri Pascha*, then, is to proclaim Christ as the divine Saviour of mankind through a dramatic presentation of his Passion set out in its historical relation to the saving acts of God in Israel in such a way that he will be believed and worshipped, and the Holy Scriptures which prophesied his coming will be respected for the truth they have already announced and is enshrined in them if only in parabolic or typical form. Even if it is only in this 'haggadic' way that the theology of Melito's preaching is given, we may nevertheless offer some ordered account of the leading theological convictions he adduced in the course of this proclamation of the Pascha.

²⁶ *PP.* 235–240, 266–279.

²⁷ *PP.* 65ff.

²⁸ *PP.* 216f; cf. 608ff.

²⁹ *PP.* 224ff.

³⁰ *PP.* 14, 22, 44, 57, 297, 412.

1. Christology

As we have already noted from a remark of Eusebius,³¹ Melito does not hesitate to speak of Christ in the most downright way as 'God and Man'.³² Thus in the *Peri Pascha* he speaks of Christ as he who was slain and buried as a man but rose again from the dead as God, 'being in reality [or by nature] God and Man (φύσει θεὸς ὢν καὶ ἄνθρωπος)'.³³ While asserting the Deity of the Son, Melito distinguishes him from the Father as he whom the Father sends, he who reveals the Father and sits at his right hand,³⁴ but at the same time he insists on the reality and perfection of Christ's humanity.³⁵ It is due to this unrelieved stress by Melito upon the deity and humanity of Christ at the same time that his proclamation of the saving Passion of Christ is cast from beginning to end in such a paradoxical form, and there is called forth from him doxological awe before the strange inexplicable mystery of the Incarnation and the divine salvation it brings. Since his doctrine of God and his doctrine of Christ are given in soteriological contexts they have a distinctly dynamic character, for God's being and his activity are essentially one. Thus, as we shall see, Jesus Christ is not only our Saviour but is himself our salvation.

In what is said about the Incarnation considerable prominence is given to the birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary, to the reality of his existence in the flesh and to his physical suffering as the Incarnate Son, which reflects a distinct anti-docetic intention. 'This is he who was made flesh in the Virgin (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐν παρθένῳ σαρκωθείς).'³⁶ 'This is he who having come from heaven to earth for the sake of the sufferer, and clothed himself in him through a virgin's womb, came forth as a man, accepted the passions of the sufferer, through the body that could suffer, and overcame them.'³⁷ It was thus in the body of the Incarnate Son of God that the mystery of salvation or the mystery of the Pascha was consummated. Although Melito was not given to making direct verbal

³¹ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.24.5.

³² See S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments*, Oxford, 1979, Fragment 6, pp. 70f.

³³ *PP.* 54.

³⁴ *PP.* 537f, 780–803, New Fr. II, Hall, pp. 94f.

³⁵ *PP.* 34ff, 49ff, Fr. 6 & New Fr. II, Hall, pp. 70f, 94f.

³⁶ *PP.* 489, 784; see also 50, 309, 397, 451ff, 496, 748, *Fragments*, Hall, pp. 58f, 80ff, 84ff, 88, 92.

³⁷ *PP.* 451–456.

citations from the New Testament, as he did from the Old Testament³⁸ it is clearly with reference to the Prologue of St John's Gospel that he identifies Christ, the one who became flesh of the Virgin Mary,³⁹ with the divine Lord, the eternally pre-existing Word, by whom all things are created, established and arranged in heaven and earth, and the earth itself is hung in the heavens.⁴⁰ While the Word became man in Jesus Christ within our bodily existence he did not relinquish his transcendent and creative role in the universe for even in the man Christ he has embraced all things,⁴¹ and is everywhere present as Almighty God.⁴² Moreover, by him as the triumphant Lamb and exalted Lord all things are sovereignly and redemptively ordered throughout history⁴³. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.⁴⁴ In Melito's theology everything hinges on the nature of Christ as both God and man (θεὸς γὰρ ὢν ὁμοῦ τε καὶ ἄνθρωπος τέλειος ὁ αὐτὸς δύο αὐτοῦ οὐσίας ἐπιστώσατο ἡμῖν),⁴⁵ for it is upon the actual presence of the Lord God in Christ operating within our human and physical existence, that our salvation from sin and perdition depends.⁴⁶ That is why Melito can speak in such downright terms of the death of Christ on the Cross as the murder of God, and of the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb of God as the very Passion of God, for it was God himself in Christ who was condemned and judged in our place; and God himself who came down to us and acted for us and our salvation in this immediate way.⁴⁷

2. Soteriology

There is no suggestion in the *Peri Pascha* that the atonement is something done by God outside of Christ as if in some external relation

³⁸ See *PP.* 72ff, 311ff, 425ff, 513ff.

³⁹ See John 1.13–14.

⁴⁰ *PP.* 308ff, 451f, 562, 585f, 591ff, 710ff, 781ff, 791; Fr. 2, 6, Hall, pp. 64, 70; Fr. 15, Hall, p. 84; New Fr. II, Hall pp. 86ff, 94.

⁴¹ *PP.* 35f; Fr. 14, Hall, p. 80; Fr. 15, Hall, p. 82; New Fr. II, Hall, pp. 89, 94; cf. Colossians 1.15ff.

⁴² *PP.* 294ff; New Fr. II, Hall, 94.

⁴³ *PP.* 398ff & *passim*.

⁴⁴ *PP.* 791ff.

⁴⁵ *PP.* Fr. 6, Hall, p. 70.

⁴⁶ *PP.* New Fr. II, Hall, pp. 92ff.

⁴⁷ See especially the opening and closing strophes of *Peri Pascha*, and 710ff.

to the Incarnation or in addition to it, but as something done within the ontological depths of the Incarnation, for the assumption of the flesh by God in Jesus Christ is itself a redemptive act and of the very essence of God's saving work. This takes place, not just in some impersonal physical way, but in an intensely personal and intimate way within the incarnate Lord and his coexistence with us in our fallen suffering condition as sinners. Incarnation is thus intrinsically atoning, and atonement is essentially incarnational, for the saving act and the divine-human being of the Saviour are inseparable. As Saviour, Christ embodies the act and the fact of our salvation in his own Person. This is made very clear by Melito in a series of 'I am' statements put into the mouth of Christ who personally and directly identifies himself in his vicarious death and resurrection with divine salvation and stands forth as our divine Vindicator in the face of all accusation and judgment.⁴⁸

Who is he who challenges me? Let him stand against me. I freed the condemned, I brought the dead to life, I raised up the buried. Who is against me? I am the Christ. I am the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy and trod down hades, and bound the strong one and lifted man to the heights of heaven. I am the one, says the Christ. Come then, all you families of men who are stained with sins, and receive forgiveness of sins, for I am your forgiveness, I am the Pascha of salvation, I am the lamb slain for you; I am your ransom, I am your life, I am your light, I am your salvation, I am your resurrection, I am your king.⁴⁹

Here triumphant reconciliation through the personal life and being of Christ and reconciliation through the Passion and resurrection of Christ interpenetrate each other.

This intensely personal and ontological conception of salvation is not presented by Melito without traces of a structured pattern in his conception of God's redemptive acts governed by the paradigm instance of his deliverance of the people of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt into enduring covenant relationship with God finalised at Mount Sinai. As we have already noted, that was the supreme pattern of redemption enacted once for all in the history of Israel to which Psalmists and Prophets regularly pointed back, in holding out the promise of a new exodus, a new deliverance, and a new covenant in the future, a hope which classical

⁴⁸ Cf. Romans 8.31ff.

⁴⁹ *PP.* 754ff.

Judaism enshrined in the Passover Haggadah. That very paradigm instance of divine redemption was used by Jesus in interpreting his own atoning sacrifice as the Passover Lamb and in his inauguration of the new covenant in his body and blood for the remission of sins, and was built in that new form into the kerygmatic and didactic account of the atonement in the New Testament Scriptures. Thus through the regular celebration of the Christian Pascha, the ancient pattern of divine redemption became indelibly etched in the Church's understanding of the atoning sacrifice of Christ as Easter Lamb of God, and the main Hebrew terms and images used to speak of divine salvation (from the Hebrew roots נאל / פדה / כפר) reminted through Christological interpretation and translated into Greek, carried the central forms of thought traditionally used by the Church in interpreting and expressing something of the indescribable mystery of Christ's Passion or the ineffable truth of atonement in its different but profoundly interrelated aspects. These aspects had to do with the mighty acts of divine salvation through deliverance from oppression and judgment, through expiatory sacrifice offered in atonement for sin and in propitiatory reconciliation with God, and through redemption out of destitution and debt in virtue of a bond of affinity or covenant love. The great prophets adapted these various conceptions to speak of the ultimate redemption of God's people through his anointed servant who is afflicted with the judgments of God as he bears the iniquities of his wayward people, makes himself an offering for sin, intercedes for transgressors, and mediates a new covenant between *Yahweh* and Israel. Those 'evangelical' oracles, appropriated by Jesus to speak of himself who came not to be served but to serve and give himself a ransom for many, were taken up and developed by the Apostles to fill out the atoning significance of Christ's Passion as he had interpreted it in the Holy Supper. It was his whole life, and above all that life poured out in the supreme sacrifice of death on the Cross, that made atonement for sin, and constituted the price of redemption for mankind. It is surely in this light, and in the light of his appeal to the ancient types prefiguring the Mystery of Salvation consummated in Christ, and anticipating its eternal force, that Melito's soteriological conceptions in the *Peri Pascha* are to be understood.

Melito does not make any systematic use of these various ingredients in the apostolic teaching of atonement handed down in the deposit of Faith. Nor does he distinguish them from one another in their particular

emphases, for they naturally run into each other and modify each other within his hortatory presentation of the saving Passion of Christ, but all the characteristic points in the doctrine of atonement are found there in some implicit or explicit form.⁵⁰

The dramatic aspect of redemption is certainly prominent, that is, the mighty act of God's saving deliverance out of the oppression of evil and out of the judgment of God upon it. This is given not only in the parabolic account of the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, from the house of bondage and the power of death, with emphasis on the cost of redemption through the substitutionary offering of a life for a life in the Passover Lamb,⁵¹ but in what has actually taken place in Christ who came from heaven to become man in order to take our desperate condition upon himself, to be judged in our place, and to ransom us from the power of evil through his own blood, thereby destroying the power of death over us, and thus through his own death and resurrection to be the Pascha of our salvation.⁵² In a fragment comparing Isaac and Christ, the truth of redemption is given quite succinct expression: 'On behalf of Isaac the righteous one, a ram appeared for slaughter, so that Isaac might be released from bonds. That ram, slain, ransomed Isaac; so also the Lord, slain, saved us, and bound, released us, and sacrificed, ransomed us (οὕτως καὶ ὁ κύριος σφαγείς ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς καὶ δεθείς ἔλυσε καὶ τυθείς ἔλυτρώσατο).'⁵³

Closely interlocked with this dramatic aspect of atonement is the cultic or priestly aspect of redemption through atoning sacrifice for the expiation of sin and guilt whereby God incarnate in Christ draws us near to himself, cleansing us through his blood and sanctifying and healing us by the power of his Spirit, ransoming us from the service of the world, delivering us from slavery to liberty, from darkness to light, and thereby constituting us a new priesthood and a special people belonging to himself for ever.⁵⁴ In line with the main intention of the *Peri Pascha* the specific sacrifice Melito has in mind here is that of the Passover lamb

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Fr. 10, Hall, p. 76.

⁵¹ *PP.* 1-64.

⁵² *PP.* 450-479, 534ff, 747ff; Fr. 13, Hall, pp. 80f; New Fr. II, Hall, p. 89. See also the fragment of Alexander of Alexandria, *De anima et corpore et passione Domini, passim*, which is clearly indebted to Melito's *Peri Pascha*, *PG* 18, 585-604.

⁵³ *PP.* Fr. 10, Hall, p. 76.

⁵⁴ *PP.* 460-478.

rather than that of the day of atonement, but the concept of vicarious sacrifice and atoning propitiation underlying both is the same.⁵⁵ Particularly noteworthy is the way in which redemption through the blood of sacrifice and redemption through the Spirit of the Lord are interrelated in the mystery of atonement, in which there is evidently an allusion to the Levitical liturgy about the shedding of blood given by God on the altar (for it is the blood that atones by reason of the life in it), and to the saving power in the shedding of Christ's blood on the Cross and in the pouring out of his Spirit that followed it.⁵⁶ In other words, Calvary and Pentecost belong inseparably together in the unitary act of atoning redemption.

The third main aspect of atonement as redemption out of destitution or forfeited rights is more ontological in character, for it depends on the nature of the redeemer who stands in for someone in need on the ground of a kinship with him or in virtue of some other bond of association or covenant love. He was known as the *go'el* or kinsman-redeemer who claims the cause of another as his own, and stands in for him when he cannot redeem himself. It was in virtue of such a relationship, for example, that Boaz redeemed Ruth from her poverty and widowhood into the fellowship of Israelite society in Bethlehem. In the biblical narrative this conception of redemption was applied to God's advocacy of Israel in its deliverance from Pharaoh in virtue of his special relation with Israel as his 'first-born son' established through election and covenant, but it was also applied in Deuteronomy-Isaiah to the redemption of Israel in the future. It is on the ground of this bond and because of the blood of the covenant shed in forging it that God out of his love takes the cause of his people freely on himself as their Advocate, justifying them in the face of accusation and securing their redemption in himself, and thus delivers them out of destitution, forfeiture and thralldom into the grace and freedom of their new inheritance in communion with himself. What was thus prefigured in God's relations with his ancient people was found to be fulfilled in the Gospel with the actual coming of the Son of God in the flesh and the physical reality of Christ's saving Passion on the Cross. Since in this type of redemption the focus is on the being and nature of the Advocate-Redeemer Melito concentrates, as we have seen, on the

⁵⁵ *PP.* 67ff.

⁵⁶ *PP.* 100f, 206, 465f; cf. Leviticus 17.11f.

incarnate Person of the Redeemer, Mediator of God and man, who sums up and is intensively in himself all that he undertakes in atoning activity on our behalf. It is in virtue of his incarnational identification with us in our lost and destitute condition that he makes our cause his own and claims for us the salvation he has achieved in invading the tyranny of sin, judgment and death to which we were subjected, destroying their hold upon us and thereby setting us free for fellowship with the Father.⁵⁷

3. Anthropology

Throughout the *Peri Pascha* there is a consistent opposition to the kind of cosmological and anthropological dualisms stemming from Hellenism that infected the gnostic, and not least the Marcionite, conception of creation and redemption, driving a chasm between the creation and redemption, and thus seriously distorting the realist biblical message of divine salvation. While all such dualism is rejected in principle, but not of course belief in the interaction between God and man, Melito recognises that in actual fact the original relation between the Creator and his creation has been severely damaged, and that a sinful division has entered into and corrupted the nature of man as body and soul. All flesh has fallen under the power of sin and everybody has been subjected to its divisive and incarcerating force in death from which he cannot escape. It was in view of that disastrous state of affairs, that God sent his incorporeal Son to become man within the physical creation in order to redeem it and reintegrate man in soul and body within himself and in his relation to the Creator. We learn that Melito once wrote a treatise devoted to this theme, called *Soul and Body*, which has not survived except in some illuminating fragments⁵⁸ which complement what he says about the fall and restoration of man in the *Peri Pascha*. We also get some help in our understanding of Melito's anthropology from a work of Alexander, the predecessor of Athanasius in the Patriarchal See of Alexandria, called 'On the Soul and Body and the Passion of the Lord'⁵⁹ which is clearly indebted in its forms of speech and of thought

⁵⁷ *PP.* 747–803; see also New Fr. II, Hall, pp. 86ff.

⁵⁸ *PP.* Fr. 13 and New Frs. II & III, Hall, pp. 80f, 86–96.

⁵⁹ See above at note 52.

to Melito and not least to the *Peri Pascha*. As with Melito the fall of the creature into sin, bondage, corruption and death was so grave that an almighty act of redemption and re-creation on the part of the Creator himself was undertaken in order to do away with the divisive force and destructive power of evil and restore the situation.

Therefore God sent down from heaven his incorporeal Son to take flesh upon him in the virgin's womb; and thus he was made man, just as you are, to save lost man, and collect all his scattered members. For Christ, when he had joined manhood to his person, united that which death by the separation of the body had dispersed. Christ suffered that we should live for ever. For else why should Christ have died? Had he committed anything worthy of death? Why did he clothe himself in flesh who was invested with glory? And since he was God, why did he become man? And since he reigned in heaven, why did he come down to earth, and become incarnate in the virgin's womb?⁶⁰

The reason and pattern of that redemption had already been disclosed in the emancipation of Israel from Egyptian servitude, but it was in and through the body of the incarnate Lord that the redemption and re-creation of man was actually brought about and realised within his physical existence in this world. In order to accomplish this, as we have seen, Christ himself had to take a body that could suffer, so that he could really share in the suffering of mankind, thereby penetrating into the fallen state of affairs in which man is not only separated from God but divided within himself. Thus through his incarnate oneness with fallen man Christ came to achieve bodily and spiritual salvation for him in such a way as to overcome the corrupting disruption within man and reunite his soul and body in accordance with God's original creative purpose when he made man after his own image and likeness and beautifully harmonised his body and his soul within him. This is the reason, says Melito, why the mystery of the Pascha was fulfilled in the body of the Lord.⁶¹

It was because the fall of man was a fall within what God had created, involving a breach within creation, that the redemption and restoration of the human creature had to involve the creation itself, for in some way the whole creation had fallen and had to be set on a new basis, and the

⁶⁰ *De anima*, 5.

⁶¹ *PP.* 311ff & 379ff; cf. also *New Fr.* II. I, Hall, pp. 87ff, and Alexander's *De anima et corpore*.

dualism that had corrupted its constitution had to be done away.⁶² This explains why Melito regarded the redemption of man as such a creation-shaking operation. The atonement was an event not just of a moral rectification between man and God, but an event of the profoundest ontological kind reaching into the very foundations of creation. Indeed, the atonement accomplished in Christ, man upon earth and God in heaven, bound and judged and put to death in Israel for our sakes, was such a mighty paradoxical act of the Creator that the whole creation was aghast and trembled, while the very heavens were afraid.⁶³

The powers of heaven were astonished and the angels shuddered, and the hosts of heaven were alarmed, and mountains were shaken, and the sea became still, and the deeps trembled and God's whole creation was stupified. But when our Lord arose from the dead, having trodden death under his feet and bound the strong one, and released man, then all creation understood that it was for man's sake that the judge was judged, and the invisible became visible, and the immeasurable was measured, and the impassible suffered and the immortal died and the heavenly one was buried. For our Lord, having become man, was judged in order to bestow kindness, and bound in order to release, was apprehended in order to set free; suffered in order to have compassion, died in order to make alive, was buried in order to raise up.⁶⁴

All that is embraced in what Melito regarded as the Paschal Mystery fulfilled and for ever finalised in the death and resurrection of Christ the incarnate Lord and Saviour. Its full fruit, of course, is yet to be realised, for what Christ has done teaches throughout all history from time into eternity, for the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ is the Alpha as well as the Omega. Hence, the focus of faith and worship sustained in the Church on earth through participation in the paschal mystery of salvation is directed wholly toward him as the triumphant and exalted Lord.

The *Homily on the Passion* is a very remarkable piece of early Christian communication in which the central message of the Gospel is proclaimed with vivid literary grace and unique hortatory thrust. Salvation is frankly recognised as an ultimately inexplicable divine mystery, for it is

⁶² *PP.* 325ff, 379–395.

⁶³ *PP.* 716ff.

⁶⁴ *PP.* Fr. 23, Hall, pp. 80f; *New Fr.* II, pp. 89f.

accomplished by nothing less than the direct action of the Lord God Almighty himself in the physical conditions of time and place on earth, but it is presented with a profound sense of its relevance for the desperate plight of men in their earthly and historical existence. In and through the Incarnation of his Son God the Creator has come to take our actual human nature in body and soul upon himself and make himself fully one with us in order to make our sin and guilt and suffering and death his own, thereby sharing to the full in the abject misery, ruin and thralldom of mankind, in order to redeem us and set us free. He has come to substitute himself for us ('soul for soul, body for body, blood for blood, man for man, death for death', as Fragment II expresses it,⁶⁵ in the depth of our perdition, submitting himself to the condemnation of our sin and guilt, and Judge though he himself is, allowing himself to be judged and put to death in our place. Thus through actual corporeal union with us, in our place and in our stead, Christ has offered himself in atoning sacrifice as the Paschal Lamb of God, thereby making our cause his own in such a way as to justify us in the face of all condemnation and protect us through his blood from the destruction of death and hell. Thus he has come to redeem us through his Passion from all servitude to the powers of this world and to restore us to union with God through being united to him who died and rose again and sits at the right hand of the Father. 'To him be glory and power for ever.'⁶⁶

To use a Pauline expression, what Melito does in the *Peri Pascha* is to 'placard' Christ before the eyes of those he addresses as 'O beloved'⁶⁷, for from beginning to end the homily concentrates on Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. He himself clothed with all his saving Passion is the mystery of divine salvation. It was he who unrecognised by the people of Israel was present with them throughout all their historical ordeal of suffering, and it was through his grace that the prefigurations and foreshadowings among them of his advent in the flesh were already effective through the power of the mystery of salvation that was finalised in the redeeming Passion of Christ in death and resurrection in Jerusalem in the midst of Israel, effective not only for the people of Israel but for all the families of mankind who are embroiled in sins. 'Precious was the

⁶⁵ *PP.* New Fr. II, Hall, p. 88.

⁶⁶ *PP.* 791ff.

⁶⁷ *PP.* 6 - see Galatians 3.1.

Jerusalem below, but it is now of no account because of the Jerusalem above; precious was the narrow inheritance, but it is of no account now because of the wide dimension of grace. For the glory of God is not established in one place or in one insignificant spot, but his grace overflows from end to end of the inhabited world – and there God almighty has taken up his dwelling through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.⁶⁸ Hence for all his concentration on the Passion of Christ and its once for all fulfilment in his crucifixion and resurrection, the message of the Gospel proclaimed by Melito is so exultant with thanksgiving and joy that it is punctuated throughout with outbursts of doxological praise and thanksgiving. 'This is Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.'⁶⁹

The *Peri Pascha* of Melito of Sardis is a delightful documentary gem that has fortunately survived from the Greek fathers of the second century. It undoubtedly has a genre all of its own, but it does open a window through which we may discern something of the freshness and beauty and the power of the theology and practice of early Christian understanding of the Holy Scripture and proclamation of the Gospel.

⁶⁸ *PP.* 290ff.

⁶⁹ *PP.* 63f, 300, 457f, 803.

Chapter 5

EARLY PATRISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES*

What happened when the Christian Gospel deriving from a Hebraic source began to be preached in the Hellenic world of thought? How was it interpreted and how was it understood? We recall the characteristic outlook of the Hebrews in which word and event, word and image cannot be separated from each other for the spiritual and the material are bound together in God's creation. It is in the material historical realm that God's Word comes to us and is at work, so that the material realm is sanctified and given an essential place in reality. This was brought to its fulfilment in the most concrete way in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ for in him divine and human nature are for ever united, so that the Incarnation makes finally impossible any dichotomy between word and event, the audible and the visible, the spiritual and the material. Everything attains its fullest and final meaning by reference to the Incarnation, historical life, death and resurrection in body, of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

That was the Gospel proclaimed in the Hellenic world, but Hellenic thought, as we know, operated with a radical dichotomy between a realm of ideas and a realm of events, an intelligible world and a sensible world. For it the realm of ideas was fundamentally real, whereas the realm of events was at best only half-real, real only in so far as it participated in the realm of ideas, but in so far as it was sensible it was less than real and not the subject for knowledge in the proper sense. In taking its stand within the realm of ideas, the realm of the truly real, Greek culture could only look upon the Christian Gospel as utterly materialistic and unthinkable. To this Greek mind any notion of an actual incarnation was fundamentally irrational, in fact, impossible. But the Greeks had their notions of theophany, of mythologically conceived divine appearances among men, and it was naturally in that light that they interpreted the Incarnation, but the death of Jesus as the Son of God, and atonement through his

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death, the idea, as Melito of Sardis dramatically expressed it,¹ that God should be bound and judged and slain in order to bring forgiveness of sins, was simply irrational and impossible.

The stumbling-block in all this was the historical and eschatological message of the Bible, that knowledge of God and salvation are grounded upon the action of the eternal God in time. What was here essential to the Hebraic and Christian teaching appeared inevitably fictitious and unreal to the Hellenic mind. To it the historical realism of the Christian *kerygma* could be conceived only mythologically, that is, only if it was first transposed into myth through analytical thinking operating with its radical dichotomy between sense and thought, for then it could take this 'myth' as a symbol to suggest a purely intelligible reality. This was the problem that lay embedded in the gnostic attempts to interpret the Christian Gospel, but it was no less acute in the very heart of the Church itself.

To see how the Church began to tackle this question it is instructive to look at Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, and Irenaeus. Justin Martyr left us with two very different writings, his *Apologies* and his *Dialogue with Trypho*. In the *Apologies* Justin sought as a philosopher to commend the Christian faith to the world of Greek culture and thought by assimilating the biblical Word or *Logos* to the Platonic *logos* or reason, though the latter undergoes considerable transformation in its identification with the Son of God. In his *Dialogue*, however, which recounts a discussion with a Jewish Rabbi, Justin sought to commend the Gospel as a biblical theologian, and in this account the philosophical notion of the *logos* comes very little into the picture, for the Word or *Logos* of God is identified with the Incarnate Son. Both these accounts are held side by side by Justin Martyr without much embarrassment – but clearly they could not be left like that very long in a somewhat uneasy juxtaposition.

Justin's chief instrument was not allegory, for unlike Philo he did not operate with the χωρισμός between a sensible and an intelligible world, as is evident from his insistence that sensation (αἴσθησις) continues after death, not only for those resurrected to life but for the damned.² On the contrary, what he did was to bring the two disparate ways of understanding *logos*, as reason and speech, together in his notion of the *Word* of

¹ Melito of Sardis, *Homily on the Passion*, 174f.

² *Apology*, 1.18–52. See also the criticism of Plato in the pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 7, 29, 30.

God which is brought to bear upon us in history through the prophetic Spirit (τὸ προφητικὸν πνεῦμα).³ *Logos in Justin's thought is not merely 'word' or 'speech' but the divine Mind or Reason expressing itself and acting upon us as Word.* Through the divine Word the Holy Spirit enters into the course of time and creates a patterned series of events, that are providentially directed, leading up to the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ.⁴ It is through the same prophetic Spirit that this Word continues to be heard in the Scriptures speaking personally, from the person of the Father (ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Πατρὸς), from the person of Christ (ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ), or directly as the prophetic Spirit.⁵ 'We have not believed', Justin says, 'empty myths or words without demonstration (οὐ κενοῖς ἐπιστεύσαμεν μύθοις οὐδὲ ἀναποδείκτοις λόγοις) but words filled with the divine Spirit and big with power and flourishing with grace' (ἀλλὰ μεστοῖς πνεύματος θείου καὶ δυνάμει βρύουσι καὶ τεθληδὸσι χάριτι),⁶ 'Such are the words of the Saviour which possess in themselves (δέος γάρ τι ἔχουσιν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς) an awesome power, for they can silence those who turn out of the right path and be the sweetest rest to those who study them diligently.'⁷

The distinctive feature of this Word is its relation through the Spirit to historical *facts* and *events*. It is when we allow the Scriptures to direct us to these facts and events that our minds fall under the power of their truth and we are *compelled* to believe for they carry in themselves their own demonstration.⁸ This is not, of course, any kind of logical proof, but the kind of demonstration that arises immediately out of the facts and events themselves through their self-evidence. This is particularly well expressed in a fragment of a lost work on the resurrection that has survived through John of Damascus and attributed to Justin.

The Word of truth is free, and carries its own authority, disdaining to fall under any skilful argument, or to endure the logical scrutiny for its hearers. But it would be believed of its own sake, and for the confidence due to him who sends it. Now the Word of truth is sent from God, wherefore the freedom claimed by the truth is not arrogant. For being sent with authority, it were not fit that it should be required to produce proof of what is said,

³ *Apology* 1.6 and *passim* in both *Apology* and *Dialogue*.

⁴ *Apology*, 1.44.11; cf. *Apology* 2.4f.

⁵ *Apology*, 1.31-39; *Dialogue*, 102.1, etc.

⁶ *Dialogue*, 9.1.

⁷ *Dialogue*, 8.2.

⁸ See, for example, the discussion in *Dialogue* 67.

since neither is there any proof beyond itself, which is God. For every proof is more powerful and trustworthy than that which it proves; since what is disbelieved, until proof is produced, gets credit when such proof is produced, and is recognised as being what it was stated to be. But nothing is more powerful or more trustworthy than the truth; so that he who requires proof of this, is like one who wishes it demonstrated why the things that appear to the senses do appear. For the test of those things which are received through the reason, is sense; but of sense itself there is no test beyond itself. As then we bring those things which reason hunts after, to sense, and by it judge what kind of things they are, whether the things spoken be true or false, and then sit in judgment no longer, giving full credit to its decision; so also we refer all that is said regarding men and the world to the truth, and by it judge whether it be worthless or no. But the utterances of truth we judge by no separate test, giving full credit to itself. And God, the Father of the universe, who is the perfect intelligence, is the Truth. And the Word, being his Son, came to us, having put on flesh, revealing both himself and the Father, giving to us in himself resurrection from the dead and eternal life afterwards. And this is Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. He, therefore, is himself both the faith and the proof of himself and of all things.⁹

If this is the Word of divine truth that we hear in the Scriptures, two things are required for a right interpretation and understanding of them. First, we need to receive the grace of understanding (χάρις τοῦ νοῆσαι).¹⁰ 'If a man does not receive by the great grace of God understanding of the things spoken and the things done (νοῆσαι τὰ εἰρημένα καὶ γεγενημένα) by the prophets, it will not profit him at all to appear to speak the words and deeds himself, unless he can offer some account of them' (εἰ μὴ λόγον ἔχει καὶ περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποδιδόναι).¹¹ Justin insists that he himself possesses no faculty for the interpretation of the Scriptures, for it is only by the grace of God granted to him that he has any understanding of them.¹² Hence he prays that the gates of light may be opened to others, for these things are not discerned or understood by all, but only by him to whom God and his Christ have given understanding.¹³ Justin does not have in mind, here, any esoteric knowledge, but simply the response of *faith*.

⁹ *De resurrectione*, 1.1f, from the *Sacra Parallela* of John of Damascus. E.T. from *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. 2, pp. 341f. This is not generally accepted as Justin's own work, but like the *Cohortatio ad Graecos* was at least written under his influence.

¹⁰ *Dialogue*, 119.1.

¹¹ *Dialogue*, 92.1.

¹² *Dialogue*, 58.1.

¹³ *Dialogue*, 7.3.

In the second place, what is needed is an engagement of our minds with the facts and events that are indicated or pointed out by the Scriptures, in such a way that we allow ourselves to be drawn into the sphere of those facts and events and come under the power of their persuasion. That is to say, we have to put ourselves in the place where the biblical witness directs us to the *words and deeds* that lie behind them, for that is the only place where we can apprehend them in their own connection and be compelled to agree. Two passages, from the *Dialogue* and the *Apology*, will suffice to make this clear. In the first Justin is speaking of the prophets who spoke by the divine Spirit and foretold events that are now taking place.

Their writings are still extant and he who has come upon them is greatly aided in his knowledge of the beginning and the end of things, and of what a philosopher ought to know, once he has come to believe them. For they have not composed their words with demonstrative argument, for they were trustworthy witnesses of the truth above all demonstration, but the events that happened and those that are happening compel agreement (τὰ δὲ ἀποβάντα καὶ ἀποβαίνοντα ἐξαναγκάζει συντίθεσθαι) with the statements made by them. In any case they were entitled to be believed even on account of the miracles they performed since they both glorified the Creator of all things as God and Father and announced the Christ who came from him as his Son.¹⁴

In the second passage, Justin is concerned to show that Christ is acknowledged to be Son of God, man though he is, not because he was a wonder-worker, but because we are persuaded by the events themselves.

We will now offer demonstration, not by way of believing mere statements but of being compulsorily persuaded (κατ' ἀνάγκην πειθόμενοι) by those who prophesied these things before they came to pass, for we have seen with our own eyes events that happened and are happening (διὰ τὸ καὶ ὄψει ὡς προφητεῦσθαι ὄραν γινόμενα καὶ γινόμενα). We think that this will appear even to you as the greatest and truest demonstration.¹⁵

From these passages it becomes clear that Justin will not have any argument from miracles that is separated from the proclamation of God

¹⁴ *Dialogue*, 7.2.

¹⁵ *Apology*, 1.30; see also 1.53.1.

himself and of his Son, for the compelling force of the truth is in the coincidence of the events and the Word. On the other hand it is not a question of mere credence to statement but of a conviction compelled by the facts themselves in the face of faithful witnesses to them. In neither event is Justin prepared simply to credit the testimony of others, for compelling faith arises as we ourselves are implicated in the events themselves, for it is in that empirical relation that we fall under the power of the truth in its direct self-evidence. Again this does not take place without our discerning the inner rational connection of things, or without our being able to offer a rational account of them (λόγον περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποδιδόναι). Thus the two things that Justin is seeking to bring out are: the profound connection of the Christian faith with the past, discerned in the relation between the New Testament and the Old Testament, and therefore the integration of it with the providential activity of the Creator in the world of actual facts and events and so with the fulfilment of the divine purpose in creation and history; and the nature of the demonstration that challenges faith in all this as we ourselves encounter the facts and events for ourselves in studying the Scriptures and in our own experience, for it is the compelling force of the self-evident Truth of God himself.

These are the convictions that determine Justin's approach to the Scriptures and their interpretation, and in the heart of them all is the conviction that the Word of God is sent to us not as an inanimate power, but as a Person begotten of the substance of the Father who continues to speak to us in the Scriptures. 'He is the *Logos* because he carries communications from the Father to men (καὶ λόγον καλοῦσιν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰς παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμιλίας φέρει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) but also because this is a power that is indivisible and inseparable from the Father' (ἄτμητον δὲ καὶ ἀχώριστον τοῦ πατρὸς ταύτην τὴν δύναμιν).¹⁶ Thus in all that he does in the *Dialogue* by way of interpreting the Scriptures and discussing with Trypho their inner connections, Justin seeks to confront him with this Word by offering from the Scriptures and the facts themselves both demonstrations and communications (ἀπό τε τῶν γραφῶν καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων τὰς τε ἀποδείξεις καὶ τὰς ὁμιλίας).¹⁷ That is the function of an interpreter, as Justin sees it, one who is really engaged in bringing the good

¹⁶ *Dialogue*, 128.2f; cf. 95.1.

¹⁷ *Dialogue*, 28.2.

news from God to men from out of the Scriptures in such a way that they will be persuaded of the truth and believe it on its own authority.

Now so far as Justin's actual handling of the Scriptures is concerned, we may set forth his exegetical methods under four heads.

(i) The Scriptures have to be interpreted as forms of witness that 'signify', 'point out', 'announce', 'declare', 'predict' things, as well as communicate truth – hence his frequent use of terms like *καταγγελία*, *προαγγελία*, *προδηλώσις* or *σημαίνω*, *σημείον*, *σύμβολον*, etc.¹⁸ But these are used to show that the Scriptures direct us to evidence as well as inform us, and are in their own way tangible evidence for the realities to which they testify. It is when we look at the Scriptures in this way, both at the things that are said and at the events they point out, that we come to believe and understand. In contrast to Philo, therefore, Justin uses 'symbol' not as a symbolic cipher of some supersensible reality, but as an ostensive sign (*σύμβολον δηλωτικόν*) of events in the stream of history.¹⁹

(ii) Of special importance, however, is the relation between past and present and future, and therefore interest tends to focus on the *predictive* elements in the biblical testimony. It is here that we get into the inner connection of things, attain knowledge of 'beginnings and ends' (*περι ἀρχῶν καὶ περὶ τέλους*),²⁰ which we must understand if we are really to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures. Now the question arises why these predictions were not understood until the predicted events actually took place. Justin's answer is given partly in the point we have already noted, that we ourselves have to be implicated empirically with these events in the present before we can understand them, but partly also in the fact, on which he constantly insists, that it was made cryptic through the hardness of men's hearts.²¹ It was this hardness in Jewish hearts that made them separate the ethical element in the teaching of the Old Testament from the predictive element that points forward to Christ.²² Put the other way round, however, this means that the prophetic truth was offered to men in a hidden way so that men must take great pains to find out and learn it.²³ This is the reason why biblical teaching is so often

¹⁸ See the recent work of W. A. Shotwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr*, London, 1965, pp. 14ff.

¹⁹ *Apology*, 1.32.5.

²⁰ *Dialogue*, 7.2.

²¹ *Dialogue*, 27.4, etc.

²² *Dialogue*, 44.2; 45.3.

²³ *Dialogue*, 90.2.

couched in the form of parable and mystery.²⁴ By this however, Justin does not refer to some private or occult knowledge that is given only to the initiated few, but to an open mystery, one that may not be known to many, but ought to be known, and can be known by all. It is something that is openly proclaimed in the Gospel, while there is nothing in it which careful study and proper interpretation will not make clear.

(iii) Important clues to the understanding of the Scriptures are to be found in the distinction between *two covenants* and *two advents*. The first covenant refers to the old law with its circumcision, baptism and proselytes, made with historical Israel, but there is another covenant, the new and eternal covenant, with its baptism and its proselytes, inaugurated in Jesus Christ who enlightens all who come to him and constitutes them a third Israel (Τρίτος Ἰσραήλ).²⁵ And what is this divine covenant but Christ himself? (τίς ἡ διαθήκη τοῦ Θεοῦ; οὐχ ὁ Χριστός;) ²⁶ Similarly we must distinguish between the first advent (ἡ πρώτη παρουσία), of Christ, in which he came in humiliation, obscurity, and passion for the sake of our forgiveness and salvation, and the second advent (ἡ δευτέρα παρουσία), in which he will come again in glory and power to judge and renew the creation.²⁷ Justin uses these distinctions in order to make clear the proper reference of different biblical statements, for it is in the light of that reference that the intention and meaning become clear. The fact that the old covenant carries within it already the promise of the new and points ahead to it, implies that many Old Testament statements have a double meaning, for in addition to their obvious sense they may have a hidden or predictive sense, which is revealed only in the light of the new covenant. But within the new covenant, and in our present existence in the time between the advents, we have to discern the immediate reference or statements in the economy of Christ's Passion, and look out also for a possible reference to the future advent in glory.²⁸ Of special significance here is the notion of the economy (οἰκονομία) for it describes

²⁴ *Dialogue*, 52.1: 68.6, 78, 10, 115.1, etc.

²⁵ *Dialogue*, 2.4; 24.1; 67.9; 119.3; 122.5.

²⁶ *Dialogue*, 123.5; cf. 130.4; 138.2.

²⁷ *Apology*. 1.52.3; *Dialogue*, 14.7; 31.1; 32.2.f; 40.4; 45.4; 49.2, 7; 52.1; 110.2; 111.121.3; cf. also 83.4; 85.1f; 86.1; 120.3.

²⁸ Justin is the first to speak of two advents, and so to use παρουσία in the plural but in one passage he speaks of the interval in the midst of the parousia, using *parousia* as in the New Testament to refer to the whole coming of Christ that stretches from his Incarnation to final manifestation - ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ χρόνῳ, *Dialogue* 51.2.

the mode of the saving events within the new covenant inaugurated by the Incarnation and taking the form of humiliation and suffering in accordance with the will of the Father.²⁹ In this sense οἰκονομία is more or less equivalent to τὸ σωτήριον τοῦτο μυστήριον.³⁰

(iv) The overlap of the two covenants and of the two conditions of the *parousia* means that the truth is often set out in the form of parables and types and symbols as the statements point ahead to new and other events.³¹ In order to elucidate this Justin has recourse to the methods of exegesis elaborated in the current schools of rhetoric and to the methods developed by the Rabbinic schools in Palestinian Judaism, but it is significant that he shows very little direct indebtedness to Philo of Alexandria,³² while his typological and even his tropological exegesis cannot be equated with the allegorical interpretation that operates on the assumption of a radical disjunction between the sensible and the intelligible realms. Justin does not think in that way, for all his interpretation, in spite of the rather fanciful 'types' he often adduces, is historically rooted and conditioned.

Typology of this kind, which must not be confused with allegory, was an important part of early Church exegesis, for it was a reflection of the deep connections between the Christian Gospel and the ancient past, and an important tool in its battle against gnostic and Marcionite attempts to cut it away from its historical sources and its ground in the fulfilment in space and time of God's creative and redemptive acts.³³ Patristic typology had its roots in Palestinian Judaism. It had its significance within the inseparable relation of word and event and the dramatic images that it involved, and it arose through the use of cultic patterns to point ahead to the enactment and fulfilment in decisive events within the history of the covenant people of God. It was the fulfilment of the ancient promises and figures in the birth and life and

²⁹ *Dialogue*, 30.3; 45.4; 67.6; 87.5; 103.3; 120.1; cf. 134.2.

³⁰ *Dialogue*, 74.3.

³¹ Cf. *Apology* 1.60.3; *Dialogue*, 49.1; 42.4; 52.1; 63.2; 68.6, etc.

³² The relation of Justin to Philo has been thoroughly examined and clarified by W. A. Shortwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr*, London, 1965.

³³ Justin was keenly aware of the gnostic problem and of the necessity of combatting it. His own treatise against them (cf. *Apology*, 1.26.8) has not survived, but his views have, *Apology*, 1.26; 56; 58; *Dialogue*, 35; 120. See also Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.6.2 where Justin's work against Marcion is cited, and 4.31–36 where he takes over Justin's argument regarding the two testaments and two advents, in opposition to Marcion.

death of Jesus Christ that brought it into prominence in early Christianity, for with that fulfilment it was possible to interpret the history of Israel as the pre-history of the Incarnation, and to see how the patterns of Israel's life, manifested in the great events of its history and reflected in the cult, partially realised in the ordeal of suffering, and interpreted by the prophets, all converged in the fact of Christ. Such interpretation of the Old Testament which set forth an account of the acts of God in the old and new economies of Israel and the Incarnation as the fulfilment of the one saving purpose became essential from the start of the Church's life, for it not only assimilated the Old Testament revelation with the New Testament revelation but preserved the unity of the doctrine of God. This is one of the points strongly made by Irenaeus, who tells us also that it belonged to the original constitution of the Church and the basic system of its doctrine.³⁴

The typological interpretation which was developed to maintain this harmony between the Testaments and the unity of God in creation and redemption was severely restricted in the New Testament itself to the great theological figures like Adam or Moses or the Servant, to the decisive events of the Covenant and the main aspects of the sacrificial cultus, but it was considerably expanded outside the New Testament. Perhaps the best illustration of this typology outside the New Testament is to be found in the *Homily on the Pascha* in which Melito of Sardis interpreted the Passion of Christ in the light of the Passover celebrated by Israel on the night of its exodus from Egypt. It was a sort of Christian *Haggadah*, offered in rhythmic, liturgical style, designed to reveal the ordered pattern of God's redemptive activity adumbrated in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. In the Old Testament we see the type (τύπος), but in the New Testament we have the reality (ἀλήθεια).

This distinction between τύπος and ἀλήθεια is not that between the sensible and the intelligible, or the phenomenal and the noumenal, but between the preparatory action of God in history pointing forward to, and offering some preliminary knowledge of, his final action in the Incarnation and Atonement through which all things are changed and brought to their fulfilment. What happened in the Old Testament was an acted parable, a work of preparation.

³⁴ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.33.1-15; 36.1-8. Irenaeus, through rather a strange 'allegorical' interpretation, even relates the pouring out of the Spirit to the unity of the two synagogues or churches in the work of the Father for the whole human race, 4.31.2.

Is it not instituted because of what is to come which you see through the typical image? When something is sketched out beforehand, in wax or clay or wood, is it not done just in order that what is to be raised up in the future – greater in magnitude, mightier in power, beautiful in form and rich in adornment – may be seen through a small and perishable sketch? But whenever the object typified arises, the material that once typified it is destroyed as something rendered useless, for as the image of the reality it gives way to it as it manifests itself in its own nature (*παρὰχρησάν τῷ φύσει ἀληθεῖ τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰκόνα*). That which was once of value becomes valueless, when that which is of value in its own nature (*φύσει*) becomes manifest.³⁵ Each thing has its own moment. There is the time proper to the type, and the time proper to the material. You make for the reality its type, for this is what you desire, to see in it the image of what is to come to pass. You advance the material by cutting a way forward through the type, for this is what you desire, because of what is to come to pass in it. You bring the work to its completion, for this is the only thing you love, to behold in it alone the type and the reality.

Hence as with corruptible patterns (*παρὰδείγμασιν*) so with the incorruptible; as with the earthly, so it is surely with the heavenly. For the salvation and the reality of the Lord were typified beforehand in the people, and the ordinances (*δόγματα*) of the Gospel were proclaimed beforehand by the Law. Hence the people became the anticipatory sketch of the Church, and the Law the writing of a parable, but the Gospel became the explication and fulfilment of the Law, and the Church the storehouse of the truth. The type was of value before the truth, and the parable was admirable before its interpretation (*πρὸ τῆς ἐρμηνείας*). That is, the people was held in honour before the Church was raised up, and the Law was admired before the light of the Gospel shone forth. But from the time that the Church arose, and the Gospel shone forth upon the people of the earth, the type was made empty, giving up its image to the emergence of the truth in its own nature (*ὁ τύπος κενούται τῇ φύσει ἀληθεῖ τὴν εἰκόνα παραδούς*), and parables are fulfilled, being made clear by the interpretation (*καὶ παραβολαὶ πληροῦνται ὑπὸ τῆς ἐρμηνείας φωτισθεῖσαι*). Thus the Law was also fulfilled when the light of the Gospel shone forth, and the people lost their significance when the Church was raised up, and the type was done away when the Lord became manifest.³⁶

The interpretation (*ἐρμηνεία*) that Melito is concerned with is not something that he puts upon the biblical narrative, but rather one that is

³⁵ Melito's use of *ἀλήθεια* appears to bear out the contention of Heidegger that it denotes the arising or manifesting of real being. Cf. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 14ff, etc.

³⁶ Melito, *Peri Pascha*, 6.4 – 7.4.

already embedded in the historical connection between the people of God in the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament; it is an interpretation that takes place through the action of God who brings his preliminary revelation to fulfilment in the reality of the Incarnation and the Atonement. Thus typology is the recognising and the expressing in words of the interpretation that has already taken place in Christ, for it is in him that the mystery of God is revealed and fulfilled in our human nature, and the reality of his saving acts is manifested. In his homily Melito is speaking about the Passion of Christ as the fulfilment of the Passover, in order to set forth the truth that comes to view in the Christian Passover.

It is not surprising therefore that this very way of thinking developed most rapidly in the Early Church in connection with the sacraments, or mysteries as they were often called. Because Baptism and the Eucharist succeeded to and replaced the rites of circumcision and Passover under the Old Covenant they naturally became the focal points where the Old Testament patterns and motifs were reinterpreted to bring them into line with the Christian rites and to provide biblical justification for them, especially in the face of attacks from the side of Judaism. Thus from the very start there developed a tradition of sacramental and cultic typology which was assimilated into the liturgy and from there exercised a permanent and powerful influence upon exegesis.³⁷

In the Hellenic world typology of this kind could easily, and often did, pass over into allegory. There are grounds for saying that this was beginning to happen in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, in his claim to find mystical meanings not only in the oracular utterances of the prophets but in isolated texts, and cultic images. But, as we have seen, this had a strong Christological orientation for it was fulfilment in the reality of Jesus Christ that was his main concern – he did not use the types as images of timeless ideas.³⁸ Typology, as Justin Martyr, Melito, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian and others like them use it, with

³⁷ See the illuminating discussions of Per Lundberg, *La Typologia Baptismale dans l'Ancienne Église*, Uppsala, 1942; and Jean Daniélou, *Sacramentum Futuri*, Paris, 1950, and *Bible et Liturgie*, Paris, 1958: The influence of St Paul, 2 Corinthians 10f, as well as of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, on this development was not inconsiderable.

³⁸ R. P. C. Hanson finds several instances of 'well-developed allegory' in Justin's writings, *Allegory and Event*, London, 1959, p. 107, but Justin makes no attempt to re-edit the biblical teaching or allegorise any of it away.

comparatively restrained allegorism,³⁹ might well be regarded as a counterpart in the Early Church to some modern phenomenological interpretations of motifs and patterns in the life and worship of Israel, except that this patristic typology was more rooted in history and bound up with the fulfilment of the Covenant in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ Once these motifs and types became detached from history or were extracted from their setting in the actual narrative or context, they tended to become timeless ideas which could be artificially associated with or read into other texts through the allegorical principle of letting one idea stand symbolically for another.⁴¹

The problem raised by Justin Martyr's two-fold presentation of the Gospel, in his argument with the Greeks on the one hand and in his argument with the Jews on the other hand, remained. Biblical theology and scientific thinking had to be brought together, in such a way that scientific tools had to be used to interpret and expound the Faith without distorting it. But the problem became much more acute with the spread of gnostic speculation and religion, not only because they metamorphosed the Christian message into a high-flown philosophical mythology, nor merely because they elaborated religious ceremonies as ritual counterparts to mythical heavenly patterns, but because this combination of myth and ritual revealed that heretical ideas were at work, operating with quite a different framework, that menaced the very nature of Christianity as a historical religion and attacked its foundations in the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Church was forced to do some radical thinking in order to make clear its answer to the great questions as to the ground of knowledge and the essential nature of the Christian

³⁹ Hanson points out that Irenaeus is the first to apply allegory to the New Testament, *op.cit.*, pp. 112f, and that Hippolytus shows some signs of allegorising biblical material 'not into Christological, but into psychological statements', which recalls the practice of Philo, *op.cit.*, p. 117. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that Irenaeus, at any rate, can reject allegorisation that eliminates the historical involvement of the truth – see *Adv. haer.* 5.35.1–2.

⁴⁰ The aspect of typology that is mostly alien to modern thought is the desire to find meaning even in incidental minutiae, on the principle that with God nothing is empty or without significance (*nihil vacuum neque sine signo apud Deum*). Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.31.3, but this was done for homiletic not for doctrinal purposes, *Adv. haer.* 4.31.1.

⁴¹ The artificial association of texts judged to have common meanings was encouraged by the early Christian collection of *Testimonies* – see Cyprian, *Testimonia*, Books 1–3, where many of the favourite texts for typological correlates with the New Testament writings are found.

Faith, but it had to work out a proper way to interpret the Scriptures in accordance with the nature of their message and to develop the understanding of the Faith in its own interior connections. Over against gnosticism in particular it became increasingly evident that *interpreting* the Scriptures and faithful *understanding* of their material content could not be held apart – they had to go together if interpretation was not to operate from an alien centre of reference or to bring to the Scriptures a pre-conceived system. The proper framework for their interpretation must be built up from out of the Scriptures themselves, for only then could it proceed in accordance with the rule of truth.

This is the kind of hermeneutics that we find in the extant writings of Irenaeus who contributed so much in the chaotic debates of the second century to set the teaching of the Church squarely on its biblical foundations.⁴² In defence of the Gospel against heretics and gnostics he appealed for rationality and order in knowledge, for rationality and order belonged to the very nature of things as God made them. True knowledge arises as we seek to know things in accordance with their actual natures – a principle that applies to knowledge of God as much as to knowledge of creaturely realities. At this point Irenaeus was applying the disciplined, scientific approach in knowledge that had been handed down in the Aristotelian and Stoic philosophies. Characteristic of his thought is the way in which he applied this to show the relation between believing and understanding. Thus, for example, after citing Isaiah 7.9 ‘If you do not believe, neither shall you understand’ in his introduction to *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* (Εἰς ἐπίδειξιν τοῦ ἀποστολικοῦ κηρύγματος) he adds: ‘And faith is produced by the truth; for faith rests on things that truly are. For in things that are, as they are, we believe; and believing in things that are, as they are, we keep firm confidence in them. Since then faith is the perpetuation of our salvation, we must needs bestow much pains on the maintenance thereof, in order that we may have a true comprehension of the things that are.’⁴³ That is to say, faith derives its rationality from the truth itself, as the mind assents to and thinks of the given realities strictly in accordance with what they actually are. That is the sober and disciplined thinking that Irenaeus applied to the interpretation of the Scriptures, clearing a way through the arbitrary speculations and

⁴² See *Adv. haer.* 2.35.4; 3.12.9f.

⁴³ *Demonstr.* 3, tr. by J. Armitage Robinson from the Armenian, *St Irenaeus, The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, London, 1920, p. 72.

wild fancies of the gnostics, in order to set free the subject-matter of the Scriptures for an orderly and connected understanding of it out of itself. On its critical side, this will involve 'the dissolving of every false assumption (*πάσα ἡ ὑπόθεσις*) which they falsely dream up and inflict upon the Scriptures, distorting them into a meaning against their nature', (*ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν εἰς τὸ παρὰ φύσιν*), and on its positive side, 'the restoring of each statement to its proper order and the fitting of it in the body of the truth' (*ἐν ἑκάστον δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων ἀποδοῦς τῇ ἰδίᾳ τάξει καὶ προσαρμόσας τῷ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίῳ*).⁴⁴

In the course of his second book *Against the Heresies* Irenaeus devoted a series of chapters to the elucidation of controlled method and inquiry (*inventionis disciplina*) rejected by the gnostics but necessary for a proper knowledge and interpretation. We can do no better than follow his argument through these chapters.⁴⁵

It develops out of his criticism of the gnostic attempt in pseudo-Pythagorean manner to apply number to the interpretation of the Scriptures and to knowledge of God. What gnostics did was to invent a numerate system and then to choose out of the Scriptures whatever agreed with the numbers adopted in their system. Irenaeus does not reject a place for types in the Old Testament, but denies any connection between the numbers that occur with the utmost variety in the Scriptures and the heavenly realm, while to apply number to God he sees as the height of irrationality.⁴⁶ But gnostics were sinning against sound method when they forced creation against its inherent pattern to change itself into types of things that have no real existence. In that way we can get any meaning we want out of nature or out of the Scriptures. The proper method is to attend to the arrangement of created things, in nature and in history, and to harmonise our thought with what actually exists or with reason, for in this way we operate with a rule (*regula*) derived from the nature of things, e.g. in subordinating creaturely realities to God, for that is in accordance with their nature, instead of subordinating God to them. This is what Irenaeus refers to frequently as the rule of truth.⁴⁷

This involves a number of epistemological principles that are of

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.9.2-4. See 2.27.1 and *Demonstr.* 1, and cf. *Adv. haer.* 1.14.3.

⁴⁵ *Adv. haer.* 2.25-28.

⁴⁶ *Adv. haer.* 2.24.1f; 1.3.1-6.

⁴⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.24.1 - 25.2; 28.1.

considerable importance for the *understanding* that must go along with a proper *interpretation of the Scriptures*.

(i) In our actual knowledge of God, which we gain through learning from the Scriptures and in being taught by the truth, we know beyond a doubt that God is not as men are, and that his thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. God cannot be known or comprehended in his own greatness and glory, so that even in knowing him we are aware that he is indescribable (*inenarrabilis*) and transcends all expressions we bring to speak of him.⁴⁸

(ii) On his part man can only attain knowledge that is proportionate to his creaturely existence within the scheme of things in this world. Man is a creature infinitely inferior to God, who can know only in part, and who cannot have experience or cognition of all things like God. He must restrict his thought to the limits of his littleness for he has no power to rise above himself in investigating the origin of things. Hence he must preserve the proper order of knowledge (*ordinem scientiae*) without seeking to rise above God or to throw his thoughts beyond him, for that would be to make oneself greater than God and be utter madness.⁴⁹ It is presumption of this sort that lies at the root of error, for when we imagine that we can lay God open to our knowledge we cannot but frame an impious hypothesis that is antithetical to him.⁵⁰ We must leave to God the things that fall within his sphere of knowledge alone, and keep ourselves to what falls within the range of our own knowledge.⁵¹

(iii) Through his love and infinite mercy God has come within reach of human knowledge – not that we can know his greatness or essence, for no man can ever measure or handle that, but that we may know God through his works and his Word.⁵² ‘The Lord himself has taught us that no one can know God without God teaching him, that is, no one can know God without God, and that is the will of the Father that he should be known’ (ἐδίδαξεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Κύριος, ὅτι θεὸν εἰδέναι οὐδεὶς δύναται, μὴ οὐχὶ θεοῦ διδάξαντος, τούτέστιν, ἄνευ θεοῦ μὴ γινώσκεισθαι τὸν θεόν· αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ γινώσκεισθαι τὸν θεόν, θέλημα εἶναι τοῦ πατρὸς).⁵³ This

⁴⁸ *Adv. haer.* 2.13.3–4; 28.6; 4.19.3; 20.1–9.

⁴⁹ *Adv. haer.* 2.25.3–4; 26.3; 28.3,5; cf. 94.39.2–3.

⁵⁰ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.7.

⁵¹ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.2, 3, 4.

⁵² *Adv. haer.* 3.24.2; 4.5.1; cf. 2.6.6; 3.25.1.

⁵³ *Adv. haer.* 4.6.4. cf. 4.20.7.

knowledge of God was made possible through the incarnation of his Word in Jesus Christ, so that in him

God who is incomprehensible reveals himself through what is comprehensible, the invisible through what is visible, and God the Father who cannot be measured has subjected himself through measurement in the Incarnate Son and so brought himself within the capacity of those who believe. In the Word made flesh, then, God has revealed himself in such a way that at the same time he preserved the invisibility of the Father lest men should at any time become despisers of God.⁵⁴

That is to say, when man *actually* knows God in Jesus Christ, he knows that his knowledge of God, while genuinely knowledge of *God*, derives from his own eternal Word and Son, is only in part, for he whom he knows is infinitely greater than his knowing of him – thus the objectivity of the believer's knowledge of God reaches out indefinitely beyond him into the infinity and eternity of God.⁵⁵ Man's knowledge of God, so far as he is capable of it in this world, falls within the range of his creaturely existence, but it is a knowledge of One who though he objectivises himself for men does not bring himself wholly within the measures of their comprehension. But the Father is shown forth through the Word who has been made visible and palpable. 'The Father is the invisible of the Son, and the Son is the visible of the Father.' 'The Son is the knowledge of the Father, but the knowledge of the Son is in the Father, and has been revealed through the Son.'⁵⁶

(iv) The true way to know God is in accordance with the way of *love* which he has taken in making himself known to us. It is through his love that God has drawn near to us, and it is through love that we attain nearness to him, without presuming upon our own knowledge or capacity for knowledge.⁵⁷ It is in his love that God has incarnated his Son for us, sent us his Word and Spirit, and it is in love that we follow the Word, and through union and communion with Christ are led up to the Father, for it is Christ who declares the Father and interprets his Word to us.⁵⁸ Moreover, it is in Jesus Christ that 'the Spirit of God has

⁵⁴ *Adv. haer.* 3.11.5; 4.4.2; 6.1–7; 20.1–11; 5.1.1.

⁵⁵ *Adv. haer.* 2.6.6; 13.3f; 8; 25.3; 28.4–6; 30.9; 3.9.8; 4.20.3.

⁵⁶ *Adv. haer.* 4.6.6, 7; 9.2; cf. 3.13.2; 4.6.3; 7.4; 16.5; 20.8–11.

⁵⁷ *Adv. haer.* 2.26.1; cf. 2.13.4; 4.12.2; 33.8.

⁵⁸ *Adv. haer.* 4.20.1, 4, 5, 7, 11; cf. 4.6.4.

become accustomed to dwell with human kind', and in Christ that 'our human nature has been adapted to bear the Spirit', so that it is through partaking of the Spirit in union with Christ in love that we are lifted up to know the things of God beyond our natural human capacities. To know God we have to be adapted to him, and that takes place as we are assimilated to Christ through the Spirit and are initiated into the knowledge of the Father by the Son.⁵⁹

It is with these theological principles which he has taken from the material content of the Scriptures, that Irenaeus proceeds to clarify the *disciplina inventionis* in which understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures are so deeply implicated in each other.

What is required is the healthy mind (ὁ υγιής νοῦς) that does not court danger and is devoted to piety and love of the truth. This is the mind that concentrates upon what God has placed in the authority of men and has subjected to our knowledge (ὅσα ἐν τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσίᾳ δέδωκεν ὁ θεός, καὶ ὑποτέταχε τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ γνώσει) and will advance his learning easily through daily study. These are the things that fall under our direct observation (τά τε ὑπ' ὄψιν πίπτοντα τὴν ἡμετέραν), and are manifestly and unambiguously declared in plain terms in the divine Scriptures (καὶ ὅσα φανερώς καὶ ἀμφιβόλως αὐτοτελεξεῖ ἐν ταῖς θείαις γραφαῖς λέλεκται).⁶⁰

We must take our starting-point not from words and expressions but from the truth itself, and that means from what is manifestly, evidently the truth, 'acknowledged to be such by all', about which we cannot but think in the same way at all times. This is the truth which Irenaeus claims is to be found throughout the Catholic Church deriving everywhere from the Apostles. Unless it is upon such well-grounded knowledge (*scientia stabilita*) that we make our stand for further inquiry, our questions will all be in the air and will get us nowhere.⁶¹

No question can be solved by another which itself awaits solution. Nor among those who have sense, can one ambiguity be explained by another ambiguity, or enigmas by another greater enigma. Rather do things of this kind receive their solution from those that are manifest and consistent and clear.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Adv. haer.* 3.17.1f; 4.6.2f, 7; 14.1-2; 20.4-7.

⁶⁰ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.1.

⁶¹ *Adv. haer.* 3.24.2.

⁶² *Adv. haer.* 2.10.1.

Hence parables ought not to be adjusted to ambiguous statements. Thus he who explains them will do so without running the risk of error, and the parables will receive a similar interpretation from all, and the whole body (*corpus integrum*, i.e. of what is learned) will repose upon the truth itself, with a mutual harmony of its members and without any contradiction of its parts.⁶³

Irenaeus then insists that when we do not proceed in this way, interpretation is determined by subjective inclinations without any rule of truth (*regula fidei*), and there will be as many conflicting meanings as there are interpreters. 'No inquiry of this kind will ever come to a finding, for it has rejected the very method of discovery' (*ipsam inventionis abjecerit disciplinam*).⁶⁴

This presupposes that all the Scriptures, the prophecies and the Gospels alike, can be understood (*audiri*) clearly, unambiguously and in the same way by all men, even though they do not believe them. There is thus an objective standard available to all, the evident truth itself which all sane minded men, and of course believers, acknowledge. 'Those who shut their eyes to what is so clearly disclosed, only put fetters on themselves and then everyone thinks that through dark interpretations of the parables he has found out a God of his own.' Moreover what is admittedly said openly, expressly and without controversy about God in the Scriptures is given a different meaning by the heretics in accordance with a secret tradition of interpretation through 'arguments, enigmas and parables' alleged to go back to Jesus' private teaching to certain of the disciples. This double way of treating the Scriptures throws up the mad idea that there is one Being who is proclaimed as God, and that there is another Being known through parables and enigmas, who is proclaimed as Father.⁶⁵ But this conflicts not only with the rule of truth but with the rule of faith openly handed down through the Church from the Apostles in respect of what is acknowledged by all at all times and in the same way. Hence in the next book Irenaeus sets out to destroy the idea of a

⁶³ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.1.

⁶⁴ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.2. Irenaeus likens those who obscure the interpretation of the parables in this way to the five foolish virgins who let their lamps go out and were excluded from the marriage-chamber, Matthew 25.5f.

⁶⁵ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.2.

secret tradition which the gnostics used as an essential hermeneutical principle.⁶⁶

Parables do, of course, admit of many interpretations, but what lover of the truth will not acknowledge that to claim that inquiry about God must start from enigmas and parables to the neglect of what is certain, indubitable and true, is the part of men who throw themselves into danger and are destitute of reason? Is this not to build upon the uncertainty of shifting sand rather than upon rock that is firm and strong and openly located?⁶⁷

Having therefore the truth itself as our rule (*regulam ipsam veritatem*) and the testimony concerning God openly located (*positum in aperto*), we ought not to throw away firm and true knowledge of God (*firmam et veram de Deo scientiam*) by letting ourselves be diverted from the right path of questioning into various and diverse solutions. Rather ought we to give the solution to our questions its proper direction by activity in which we inquire into the mystery and economy of the living God (*per inquisitionem mysterii et dispositionis existentis Dei*), and grow in love for him who has done and continues to do such great things for us, without ever lapsing from the persuasion in which it is clearly proclaimed that he alone is God and Father who not only made this world and formed man but gave increase to his own creation . . .⁶⁸

Now if we come up against questions in our investigation of the Scriptures for which we cannot find any solution or explanation, we must beware of presumption, for it is with God himself our Creator that we have to do. There are many things in the creation the truth of which only God can declare, and there are many things in the Scriptures which we must be content to leave in his hands, not only in this present world but in the world to come, for the knowledge of God will ever remain inexhaustible.

No doubt the Scriptures themselves are perfect since they have been spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit (*Scripturae quidem perfectae sunt, quippe a Verbo Dei et Spiritu ejus dictae*) but we who seek to interpret them are far inferior to the Word and Spirit, and to that degree our knowledge will fall short of the mysteries of God. There is much in this world even at our very feet that surpasses our knowledge, but how much more is this the case with spiritual and heavenly things which we can know only by divine revelation?

⁶⁶ *Adv. haer.* 3. praef., 1, 2 et seq. It is in this connection that Irenaeus expounded his doctrine of presbyteral and episcopal succession in the tradition of the truth.

⁶⁷ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.3 – the reference is to Matthew 7.25.

⁶⁸ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.1.

God transcends all our knowledge of him. Irenaeus is anxious, therefore, to insist that in interpreting the Scriptures we must leave room for the majesty and mystery of God, and maintain restraint and reserve in our explanations. Otherwise we will only start inventing. If we do not let the Scriptures point indefinitely beyond themselves, and so 'reserve nothing for God', but make the Scriptures terminate upon some object quite within our comprehension or solution, then we will fall into the greatest impiety such as reaching out after some god beyond the God who really exists, or asking what God was doing before he made the world.⁶⁹

Accordingly, so long as we respect the open reference of the Scriptures to God, and leave to God the questions that are beyond us, then we will preserve our faith and not run the risk of error. The Scriptures given to us by God will be found consistent. 'The parables will agree with what is given in direct, explicit speech, and what is plainly stated will serve to explain the parables. and so through a great variety of expressions one harmonious theme will be heard in praise of the God who created all things.'⁷⁰ On the other hand, if nothing is reserved for God, and the analogical reference of biblical statements to the transcendence of God is not respected, then people will project their human ideas into God, understanding him as if he were a compound being subject to the same kind of psychological distinctions which we find in men, such as those between thought, mind, intention, word, not to speak of various human feelings, or the same kind of processes that are found in men in the way they produce their thoughts and express their words. To read all this back into God because the Scriptures use human language in speaking of him is to lapse into mythology like the gnostics and to engage like them in presumptuous speculation. But all this is to forget that God cannot be described in human terms, and that even biblical language is not meant to be *descriptive* of God. This applies, for example, to the relation of the Son to the Father, in which we are concerned with a mode of generation that is utterly unspeakable, even when we use a term like generation to indicate it.⁷¹

Likewise Irenaeus claims that when it comes to questions as to ultimate origin, as to how God created matter or as to how evil arose and why evil should have arisen, we must suspend our thought, for here

⁶⁹ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.2-3.

⁷⁰ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.3

⁷¹ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.3f, 8; 28.4-6; 30.9.

we are up against questions that are quite beyond us, and are improper. We must be content to leave them in the hands of God, for once we start to make *conjectures* we make our interpretation of the Scriptures yield what we want. We must refrain from trying to search out *the depths of God* or from presuming to investigate his sublime nature (*alitudinem*), for otherwise we will be committed to endless suppositions and we will impose upon God systems and mythologies of our own devising. Rather does it belong to us to keep ourselves within our limits, to remember that while we are in this world we can know only *in part*, and therefore to concentrate upon what God has placed within the range of our comprehension. We must keep our interpretation of the Scriptures tied down to what is actually set before us, without raising speculative questions or seeking some kind of *perfect knowledge* beyond.⁷² All through these sections Irenaeus has been greatly concerned to reject the gnostic distinction between the Redeemer God and the Creator God, for such a distinction between redemption and creation gives the interpreter of the Scriptures an excuse for taking off into realms of fancy and imagination uncontrolled by the observable, tangible world in which we have our existence. But if there is only one God, and he who redeems us is he who has created us and maintains us in our creaturely existence then we cannot take our feet off the ground or seek any kind of meaning or knowledge through detachment from the actualities of our life on earth. It is one and the same God who confronts us in creation and in redemption, and he is antecedently in his own eternal Being what he is towards us in acts of creation, redemption and recreation. The Word and Son of God who is the agent of creation and redemption and who alone reveals the Father eternally coexists with the Father and is God of God and Light from eternity.⁷³ Therefore Irenaeus rejects any kind of interpretation that attempts to get behind the divine revelation for it can only start the dangerous question as to whether there is another God above God (*an super Deum alter sit Deus*),⁷⁴ and rejects the employment of what is falsely called 'knowledge' (*gnosis*) for it can only pervert interpretation of the Scriptures.⁷⁵

⁷² *Adv. haer.* 28.7-9.

⁷³ *Adv. haer.* 2.13.8; 25.3; 30.9; 3.11.8; 4.20.3.

⁷⁴ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.8. At these points Irenaeus has Valentinus, Ptolemaeus and Basilides as well as Marcion in mind.

⁷⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.12.12, and Book 1.3.6; 6.1 cf., 8.1ff, etc.

In drawing together what Irenaeus has to say about interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures it would not be unfair to say that he works, in the main, with three hermeneutical principles.

(1) *The rule of truth.* In using the term 'rule' (κανών, *regula*) Irenaeus has in mind the straight rod employed by carpenters and builders both to keep things straight and to measure them. Thus unlike the so-called Lesbian rule, mentioned by Aristotle, which was pliant and made of lead and could be bent to fit the curves of a moulding,⁷⁶ the rule of truth (ὁ κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας *regula veritatis*) is an inflexible (ἀκλινης) standard that cannot be adapted to different circumstances or adjusted to suit people's ideas.⁷⁷ But Irenaeus appears to use the expression 'rule of truth' in two senses, to refer to the truth itself or the truth of what really is, and to refer to that truth as it is acknowledged to be what it is, in accordance with the nature (κατὰ φύσιν) of what actually and always is the case. In the second sense it can become equivalent to 'the rule of faith', e.g. as handed on and received in baptism, which we may call Irenaeus' third hermeneutical principle and which we shall consider below. In its ultimate sense the rule of truth refers to the truth itself in its own self-evidence as the unalterable principle of our judgment of what is true.⁷⁸

This truth is compelling in that it requires of us assent or acknowledgment (*agnitio*) but it does not compel us against our wills or 'enslave us by necessity'. This is the kind of truth which we meet with in ethical questions, where we are compelled to distinguish between good and evil in much the same way in which we distinguish black and white or darkness and light. Knowledge of the truth is to be distinguished from mere opinion or conjecture for it is firmly grounded in the nature of something and is a perception of what it actually is (*quale sit*). This is so deeply rooted in the nature of things that to reject the knowledge of good and evil is irrational and tantamount to destroying oneself as a man.⁷⁹ This is why for Irenaeus acknowledgment of the truth is bound up with the acknowledgment of the *God who really is*, the *Creator* of all that is, and the *Author* of our redemption or salvation and of our new being.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 5.10.7, 1137 b.

⁷⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.9.4.

⁷⁸ See above, p. 112.

⁷⁹ *Adv. haer.* 4.39.1-3.

⁸⁰ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.2-7; cf. 3.13.2; 4.11.3.

This is the kind of truth we meet in the Holy Scriptures for in them God has plainly set forth his witness, where it can be recognised by all, and even receive unwilling testimony from those who refuse to believe. As such it becomes a means of judgment for the salvation of the believing and the condemnation of the unbelieving. Reaction to the truth does not change it. It remains the unalterable rule which we can only obey, for we do not make God but God makes us, and the light of the truth does not fail when men blind themselves to it but remains what it ever was, so that it is their own fault if they do not see.⁸¹ Thus it is one and the same God who inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe and reject him, but who grants fuller and greater enlightenment of mind to those who believe in him and follow him.⁸² Hence if we do not come to the Scriptures with a depraved intention but with a sound mind,⁸³ and have the truth itself as our rule, then we will be able to discern truth from error in the many discordant interpretations that are offered for Scriptural statements – that is so long as one lets himself be led by the self-evident truth of God which is always the same.⁸⁴ Unlike error which is plausible and appears true but which needs to be disguised, the true is without disguise (*sine fuce autem est veritas*) and on that account is believed by children.⁸⁵ This is why Irenaeus rejects the basic hermeneutical notion of the gnostics that the truth comes to us disguised in enigmas and parables and must be allegorised in order to be disclosed.⁸⁶

The rule of truth is God's Word which is always one and the same (*semper enim idipsum verbum Dei*) uttered by the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of light in all the Scriptures of the prophets and Apostles alike.⁸⁷ It is sent to us in clear, unambiguous statements and in straightforward speech. Thus, for example, St Paul who brought to us the words of the Lord (*sermone Domini*) which he taught about the Father not through parables but through straight-forward speech (*non per parabolas and simpliciter ipsis dictionibus docuit de Patre*).⁸⁸ Exegetically, this means that we must use the plain and unambiguous statements in the Scriptures as

⁸¹ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.1; 4.6.7; 39.2–3.

⁸² *Adv. haer.* 4.29.1–2; 39.3.

⁸³ *Adv. haer.* 2.27.1f; 35.4.

⁸⁴ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.4; 2.28.1f; 4.35.1–4.

⁸⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.15.5.

⁸⁶ *Adv. haer.* 3.12.11; 4.19.1; 5.35.1–2.

⁸⁷ *Adv. haer.* 4.35.2, 4.

⁸⁸ *Adv. haer.* 4.41.4.

the standard by which to interpret others that are not so clear or that may be parabolic in character, for it is then that we get through to their natural sense, but it will not do to interpret oblique statements by means of other oblique statements.⁸⁹ In that event, as is abundantly apparent in the interpretations of the gnostics, people allow their own preconceived ideas to govern their exegesis and they invent things. That is to conflict sharply with the actual way in which the Word of God has been mediated to us, for it did not come addressing people in accordance with their present opinion but in accordance with the manifestation of the truth (*non secundum praesentem opinionem colloquebantur eis, sed secundum veritatis manifestationem*). When the Lord taught the disciples he did not address them in accordance with their prior opinion (*secundum pristinam opinionem*), nor did he reply to them in accordance with the assumption of his questioners (*neque secundum suspicionem interrogantium*) but according to saving doctrine, without dissimulation or respect of person.⁹⁰ He was himself the Truth and there was no lie in him, and likewise the disciples were disciples of the truth and were above all falsehood. Hence with the advent of Christ and the revelation of the truth our preconceived notions and ideas were called in question, for the truth was known out of itself. If this were not so we would not be led by the rule of truth but be engulfed in the relativity of our own ideas.⁹¹ Irenaeus applies this to the Apostles themselves and to their interpretation of the teaching of Christ to show that their *kerygma* was not an invention of their own or a distortion of the *kerygma* of Christ, for they were faithful disciples and were led by the rule of truth.⁹² The rule of truth is thus embedded in the Scriptures themselves, and is apparent in their internal harmony and consistency.

(2) *Order and connection.* Irenaeus had a profound respect for definite sequence and consequence in the things of space and time, and for the divine purpose and economy in the disposition of creation and redemption, all of which is reflected in interpretation of Scripture and exposition of doctrine. That is what one would expect from his view of the rule of truth: orderly understanding controlled from the inherent order and connection of what is known. Thus along with his expression 'the rule of

⁸⁹ *Adv. haer.* 1.9.4; 2.10.1; 27.1-3; 28.1-3.

⁹⁰ *Adv. haer.* 3.5.1-2; 12.6; 13.2; 24.1.

⁹¹ *Adv. haer.* 3.5.1; 13.6, 9.

⁹² *Adv. haer.* 1.10.1f; 11.1; 12.1-6, 11-15; *Demonstratio*, see above, pp. 60f.

truth' he uses another, 'the body of truth' (τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίον), that is, the organic connection of the knowledge of the truth in which by means of the rule of truth the names, expressions, parables taken from the Scriptures are fitted in their proper place in the whole.⁹³ It is essential to discern this inner organic connection for the heretics have violently torn biblical passages away from their context, in disregard for the order and connection of the Scriptures (τὴν τάξιν καὶ εἰρμόν τῶν γραφῶν) thereby destroying and dismembering the truth while adapting what they pick out of the Scriptures to their own baseless fictions.⁹⁴ This is not just an order in the statements (*ordinatio dictorum*) but an order in the thought. Hence with one like St Paul who frequently employs *hyperbaton*, in which he inverts the natural order of words and phrases, one must become acquainted with his style or habit (*consuetudo*) and penetrate through the lection to the inner connection in the truth if we are to understand him properly.⁹⁵ What the Apostles and the apostolic church proclaimed has an inner consistency that derives from the truth which they proclaimed, so that their *kerygma* can be called 'the *kerygma* of the truth' (τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς ἀληθείας) which shines everywhere and enlightens all men who willingly come to knowledge of truth (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας).⁹⁶

The order and connection go deeper than the words into the events and realities they signify in the providential purpose and saving activity of God. There is nothing meaningless or accidental with God, in creation or in history.⁹⁷ God does all things by measure and in order (ἅπαντα μέτρῳ καὶ τάξει ὁ θεὸς ποιεῖ).⁹⁸

As with the Father there is nothing inconsistent, so with the Son nothing is incomplete or out of time. For all things were foreknown by the Father but they are fulfilled by the Son in consistent and orderly sequence and at the proper time (*sicut congruum et consequens est, apto tempore*).⁹⁹

The Son declares the Father from the beginning, since he was with the Father from the beginning. He also showed to the human race prophetic visions and diversities of gifts, and his own ministrations, and the glorifying

⁹³ *Adv. haer.* 1.9.4; 2.27.1.

⁹⁴ *Adv. haer.* 1.8.1–2; cf. 1.9.2, 3, 4.

⁹⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.7.1–2.

⁹⁶ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.2.

⁹⁷ *Adv. haer.* 2.25.1; 4.15.2; 18.1; 21.3.

⁹⁸ *Adv. haer.* 4.4.2.

⁹⁹ *Adv. haer.* 3.16.7.

of the Father, in orderly sequence and connection and at the proper time (*consequenter et composite, apto tempore*) for the benefit of men. For where there is orderly sequence (*consequentia, ἀκολουθία*), there is steadfastness (*constantia, εὐστάθεια*), and where there is steadfastness, there is timeliness (*pro tempore*) and where there is timeliness, there is also utility (*utilitas*).¹⁰⁰

This means that interpretation must penetrate through the text of the Scriptures into the actual pattern of the saving events as proclaimed in the Old and New Testaments and discern how the various passages and statements refer to and reveal that inner sequence and consequence in the operations of God. This takes us deep into the Gospel, into the co-ordinated work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and into the interconnection between redemption and creation running throughout all history from the very beginning to the final consummation.¹⁰¹

This is the essential subject-matter of the faith (ἡ ὑπόθεσις τῆς πίστεως) which cannot be changed, for it ever remains one and the same (μιάς γὰρ καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς πίστεως οὐσης), and must be allowed to come to view if the Scriptures are to be understood and interpreted aright in accordance with the rule of truth. Thus statements that are made in parables have to be worked out and related to the real subject-matter of the faith. The operation and economy of God (τὴν πραγματείαν καὶ οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ) that have taken place in human nature have to be expounded, and the longsuffering of God in regard to the defection of angels and the disobedience of men must be clearly shown. At the same time it must be related why one and the same God has made things temporal and things eternal, things heavenly and things earthly, and why God, though invisible, manifested himself to the prophets not in one form but in different ways to different people, why several covenants were given to mankind, and the special character of each of the covenants must be taught. It must be inquired why 'God has concluded every man in unbelief that he may have mercy on all' (Rom. 11.32), and thanks must be offered for the fact that the Word of God became flesh and suffered. Again it must be related why the *parousia* of the Son of God took place in these last times, that is, why the beginning appeared at the end (ἐν τῷ τέλει ἐφάνη ἡ ἀρχή). All that is set down in the Scriptures regarding the end and the things to come must be unfolded, nor must silence be

¹⁰⁰ *Adv. haer.* 4.20.7.

¹⁰¹ *Adv. haer.* 4.38.3.

maintained about why God incorporated the Gentiles who had lost all hope of salvation into the same body and made them fellow-heirs and partakers with the saints. Again it must be announced how 'this mortal must put on immortality, and this corruptible put on incorruption' (1 Cor. 15.54), and so on.¹⁰²

Such, then, are the order and connection in the events and realities to which the order and connection in the Scriptures go back, but that order and connection manifest the pattern of God's plan of salvation as it is actualised in creation and redemption through series of events and sequences of time. Irenaeus can speak of this as 'the universal dispensation of God and the compact operation that is concerned with the salvation of man', where the Latin terms *dispensatio* and *operatio* probably represent the Greek οἰκονομία and πραγματεία.¹⁰³ By this he refers to the planned and orderly arrangement of events in the whole course of human history from the beginning to the end of time in which God has been directly at work through his Word and Son in the fulfilment of his purpose of love in creation and redemption. In sharp contrast to the gnostics who conceived of a divine activity in our world as a *merely temporary device* to achieve some end,¹⁰⁴ Irenaeus thinks of the economic activity of God as one in which he binds together creation and redemption, the temporal and the eternal, in the *permanent actualisation* of the divine will within a renewed creation centred in and gathered up in the Incarnate Son. This universal economy took the form of *economic ministrations* within the conditions and limitations of human existence and history, which Irenaeus could speak of also as *covenants*. On occasion he can speak of four universal covenants (τέσσαρες καθολικαὶ διαθήκαι) given to the human race, under Adam, Noah, Moses and Christ, but in the last one man is recreated and all things are summed up by the Gospel carrying man into the heavenly Kingdom,¹⁰⁵ although as a rule he speaks only of two, the old and the new, or indeed of the divine covenant which has an old and a new form, for there is only one God and one salvation, and both covenants have one and the same Householder, the Word of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶ The two covenants have

¹⁰² *Adv. haer.* 1.10.3.

¹⁰³ *Adv. haer.* 3.24.1.

¹⁰⁴ *Adv. haer.* 1.6.1; 9.2, 3; 15.3; 3.10.3, 8, etc.

¹⁰⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.11.8.

¹⁰⁶ *Adv. haer.* 4.9.1-3.

their unity and harmony,¹⁰⁷ and their important differences, for not only was there a succession in time from one to the other but with the new covenant all things became new through the advent of Christ in the flesh.¹⁰⁸ Each covenant in its own special form, the one legal and the other evangelical, was adapted by God to the times in the progressive fulfilment of his purpose for the benefit of the whole human race.¹⁰⁹

It is in the new covenant, however, that the real pattern of the events is disclosed and God's eternal purpose hid from the ages is revealed, for in the incarnation of his beloved Son the mystery of God's will is set forth and all things are gathered up to a head.¹¹⁰ In the whole course of Christ's life from birth to Passion and resurrection there is presented an epitome of God's saving acts, so that it is to the pattern enshrined in the humanity of Jesus Christ that Irenaeus turns for his precise understanding of the universal economy of God. The principal term he uses to express this is ἀνακεφαλαίωσις or *recapitulatio*, which he applies both to what happened in the life of Jesus himself and to what God accomplished through him and will accomplish in the final actualisation of his saving will within creation.¹¹¹ 'Recapitulation' means that redemptive activity of God in Jesus Christ was not just a transcendent act that touched our existence in space and time at one point, but an activity that passed into our existence and is at work within it, penetrating back to the beginning in the original creation retracing and re-affirming in it the divine Will, and reaching forward to the consummation in the new creation in which all things are gathered up, thus *connecting the end with the beginning*. The whole continuum of existence in space and time is affected by recapitulation, for it has retroactive effect upon the past in undoing evil and predeterminative effect upon the future in restoring creation to its true end, thus giving direction and unity to the whole of history.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Adv. haer.* 3.12.2.

¹⁰⁸ *Adv. haer.* 3.10.2, 5; 12.5, 11, 14; 17.2; 4.4.2; 9.1f; 16.5; 17.1, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Adv. haer.* 3.12.11.

¹¹⁰ See Ephesians 1.9f. It was from this Ephesian Epistle that Irenaeus took his doctrine of recapitulation. Cf. also Romans 13.9.

¹¹¹ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.1. Irenaeus accuses the gnostics of distorting the Pauline concept of recapitulation. 1.3.4; 9.2.

¹¹² See especially *Adv. haer.* 3.16.6f; 18.1f; 7; 21.10; 22.1f; 23.1; 4.38.1; 40.3; 5.20.2; 21.1f; 23.2. It must be added that in his use of ἀνακεφαλαίωσις the mathematical as well as the oratorical analogy is not far from his mind, of a series or sequence that adds up to a conclusion or is gathered up to a head, thus connecting the end with the beginning.

Since all things are summed up and concentrated in Jesus Christ he is the central point of reference for all understanding of the Christian *kerygma*. But that central point has to be discerned both in relation to the transcendent act of God and in relation to the succession of history, that is, in relation to the *descent and ascent* of the Son of God and to his *two-fold advent*. In the descending of the Son *God himself* has come down to involve himself in our affliction and to save us, and in the ascending of the Incarnate Son *we* are lifted up to God, and through union and communion with Christ in the Spirit we are made to partake of the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son.¹¹³ In his first advent he came in humiliation, obedience and suffering to reconcile us to God, but in his second advent his will come again 'in the same flesh in which he suffered' to reveal the glory of the Father and to bring all things to their consummation, 'raising up anew all flesh of the whole human race.'¹¹⁴ This means that between the advents the Christian Church, like the people of God in the former covenant, passes through the world in a state of pilgrimage, 'following the Word which always preserves the lineaments of future things, and points out beforehand the things to come.'¹¹⁵ But no more than the Old Testament Scriptures, which typically prefigured and predicted the realities in the first advent of Christ, can be interpreted allegorically, can the Christian Church offer allegorical interpretations of the events of the second advent, for Christ will come again in the flesh, and will renew the creation.¹¹⁶

It is, then, to the *Incarnation* that Irenaeus turns for the clue to the interpretation of the history of creation and redemption and therefore for the clue to the interpretation of the Scriptures. The essential order and connection of things is embodied in Jesus Christ and it is by reference to him that the economic ministrations of God in humanity and the historical covenants are to be understood aright, and therefore the interconnection between the scriptures of the prophets and the scriptures of the Apostles, 'the Gospel and the Apostles.'¹¹⁷ Even the Scriptures of the old covenant have to be read in the light of Christ's advent in the flesh, for his coming connected the end with the beginning

¹¹³ *Adv. haer.* 3.6.2; 17.1.4, 18.2, 3; 4.12.4; 5.1, 1; 21.1.

¹¹⁴ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.1-3; 3.4.2; 16.3-9; 4.22.2; 4.27.2; 33.1; 5.1.1; 27.1; 32.1.

¹¹⁵ *Adv. haer.* 4.20.11f; 21.1f.

¹¹⁶ *Adv. haer.* 5.32.1f; 35.25.1f; 36.1f.

¹¹⁷ That is, the two Testaments in our sense, *Adv. haer.* 3.12.14; 17.2; 4.33.14.

and made the beginning predictive of the end, thus showing that the faith of the patriarchs and prophets and ours is *one and the same*. They sowed the seed, the word about Christ (*sermonem de Christo*), but it is in us that the fruit is reaped and received, and only in the Church is the truth of the things prefigured realised.¹¹⁸ 'Certain facts had to be announced beforehand by the fathers in a paternal manner, (*paternaliter*), and others prefigured by the prophets in a legal manner (*legaliter*), but others delineated according to the pattern of Christ (*deformari secundum formationem Christi*) by those who perceived the adoption, for in one God are all things shown forth.'¹¹⁹

'If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures attentively he will find in them the word about Christ and a prefiguring of the new calling (*Si quis igitur intentus legat Scripturas, inveniet in iisdem de Christo sermonem et novae vocationis praefigurationem.*)'¹²⁰ Christ was, as it were, the treasure hid in the field, yet he was hidden in the world and in the Scriptures since he was pointed out by types and parables (διὰ τύπων καὶ παραβολῶν ἐσημαίνετο) for his human nature, could not be grasped before his actual advent. The difficulty is that

every prophecy before its fulfilment is enigma and contradiction (αἰνγμα καὶ ἀντιλογία) to people, although when the time has arrived, and what was prophesied has come to pass, it meets with a very accurate interpretation (τότε τῆς ἀκριβεστάτης ἐπέτυχεν ἐξηγήσεως). That is why when the law is read by the Jews at the present time it appears like a myth (μῦθος οὖν), for they do not have the exegetical clue to all things, which is the *parousia* of the Son of God from heaven (οὐ γὰρ ἔχουσι τὴν ἐξήγησιν τῶν πάντων, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἢ κατ' οὐρανὸν παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ). When it is read by Christians it is indeed a treasure hid in a field but revealed and explained by the Cross of Christ. Not only does it manifest the wisdom of God and enrich the understanding of men, but opens up the whole eschatological perspective that takes in the advent of Christ and the future inheritance of those who love God and advance in the vision of God and the hearing of his words.¹²¹

(3) *The rule of faith*. The truth is not only what it is in its own self-evidence but also what it must be in men's acknowledgment of it in

¹¹⁸ *Adv. haer.* 4.7.2; 20.7–12; 21.1–3; 22.1–2; 23.1–2; 24.1–2; 25.1–3; 28.1f; 30.1–4; 32.2; 34.1–4.

¹¹⁹ *Adv. haer.* 4.25.3; 28.1.

¹²⁰ *Adv. haer.* 4.26.1.

¹²¹ *Adv. haer.* 4.26.1; cf. 1.10.1.

accordance with its own nature. It is as the truth is recognised and acknowledged, and as it receives the testimony from all men due to it, that it acts as an instrument of judgment (*iudicium*) in exposing what is false and in establishing what is in accordance with it.¹²² Thus the rule of truth (*regula veritatis*) passes over into the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) and is indistinguishable from it, for they are the obverse of one another. The 'words of the Lord' can be spoken of as the rule of truth for the Word of God that is heard in them is always one and the same uttered by the Spirit of truth, but equally the Lord's words as received and understood and set down in writing by the Apostles can be spoken of as the rule of truth.¹²³ But more specifically it is the concise statement of the faith, the *kerygma* of the truth, that is 'the rule of truth' or 'the rule of faith' handed on in baptism and universally used throughout the apostolic Church as the criterion for the interpretation of the Scriptures and for distinguishing the authentic doctrine from spurious innovations.¹²⁴

The connection between the rule of faith and the rule of truth is important for it means that the rule of faith is not just a formal summary of doctrine handed down in the ecclesiastical tradition, but that which is constantly imposed upon the Church by the truth itself and as such has objective and universal validity. On the other hand, because this is the way the truth acts upon men, that which is universally acknowledged and is one and the same in all places and all times must derive from the truth and be rooted in the very nature of things, in the words and acts of God.¹²⁵ Thus in contrast to the teachings of the heretics which are everywhere discordant with each other, the preaching of the Church is everywhere the same and the truth proclaimed by it is constant (βεβαίαν τὴν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας κηρυσσομένην ἀλήθειαν).¹²⁶ It is because *truth* is always one and the same that the *faith* is always one and the same.¹²⁷

In so far as the rule of faith is the rule of truth Irenaeus looks upon it as imparted to the Church by the Spirit,¹²⁸ and in so far as the rule of truth

¹²² *Adv. haer.* 4.6.7.

¹²³ *Adv. haer.* 4.35.1-4; v. *praef.*

¹²⁴ *Adv. haer.* 1.9.4, 5. See also the *Dem.* 1-8.

¹²⁵ *Adv. haer.* 2.9.1; 27.1-3; 28.1-9; 3.24.1-2; 4.35.1-4.

¹²⁶ *Adv. haer.* 1.9.5; 10.1-3; cf. 3.24.1; 5.20.1-2.

¹²⁷ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.2; cf. 3 *praef.*; 3.3.

¹²⁸ *Adv. haer.* 3.4.1f; 21.4; 24.1; 4.33.7, 15; 35.2; *Dem.* 5f.

is the rule of faith he looks upon it as formed and handed down to us by the Apostles acting under the guiding of the Spirit.¹²⁹ It is in this two-fold origin that the Church has its source and continues to look to it as its norm and rule. This is the precious deposit entrusted by God to the Church through the Spirit, which is the constant source of the Church's renewal. 'For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace, but the Spirit is Truth.'¹³⁰ He who thinks within the boundaries of this truth will find all things consistent.

He has a sound faith in one God Almighty, of whom are all things, and in the Son of God Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom are all things, and in his economies through which the Son of God became man, and has a firm faith in the Spirit of God who gives us the knowledge of the truth, who has expounded the economies of the Father and the Son, and dwells in every generation of men according to the will of the Father.¹³¹

Apparently the gnostics had drawn up their own rules of truth, which they sought to justify by appealing to a secret tradition of unwritten teaching and interpretation, comprising new scriptures, or even, like Marcion, by mutilating the Gospels and Epistles, but they distorted everything by denying the central fact of the Christian *kerygma*, namely, that the Son of God had come in the flesh, and therefore by taking away from him the ability to suffer.¹³² This drew from Irenaeus a rejection of the notion of secret tradition, and his doctrine of the apostolic tradition, of what had been simply and openly taught and had been continuously held.¹³³ 'The doctrine of the Apostles is open and firm, and keeps nothing in reserve. Nor did they say some things in private and other things in public.'¹³⁴ He insisted, therefore, in taking into account *the entire mind of the Apostles* concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to show what they did and what they did not hold, and in this way to take away all ground for heretical notions,¹³⁵ and at the same time to set forth

¹²⁹ *Adv. haer.* 2.35.4; 3 *praef.*, 1.1f; 2.1f; 3.1f; 5.1f; 11.1; 12.1f, § ff; 15.1; 16.1; 21.3f; 24.1; 4.32.1; 32.1, 7, 8.

¹³⁰ *Adv. haer.* 3.24.1; cf. 3 *praef.* & 1.1.

¹³¹ *Adv. haer.* 4.33.7.

¹³² *Adv. haer.* 1.20.1; 3.1; 11.3, 7, 9; 12.1, 2; cf. 1.8.1; 9.4.

¹³³ *Adv. haer.* 3.14.2.

¹³⁴ *Adv. haer.* 3.15.1. cf. 3.

¹³⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.16.1.

the teaching of the Church in such a way that it was seen to rest securely on its own proper foundations.¹³⁶

What he did was to trace back the preaching and teaching of the Church in all its main centres to their common source in the apostolic foundation, to show that their preaching and teaching which had come down to us in the Gospels and Epistles, together with the Acts and the Apocalypse, were grounded from beyond themselves in the Words of the Lord and indeed in Jesus Christ himself as the Truth, and to show that had the Apostles known of any hidden mysteries they would certainly have communicated them to those to whom they entrusted the Churches they had founded.¹³⁷ At the same time he showed that the continuity and universality of the preaching and teaching of the Church from the earlier times corresponded to the nature of the truth which just because it is the truth is not only always the same but is always acknowledged to be the same by healthy minds, so that understanding of it remained constant and did not change with the times, and formulation of it manifested everywhere an essential unity, though it is implied that some latitude in non-essential matters is to be found.¹³⁸ This is 'the ancient apostolic tradition', 'the tradition of the truth', 'that we believe has been handed down to us in the Scriptures to be the pillar and ground of our faith'.¹³⁹

Throughout this argument Irenaeus offers several summaries of the apostolic faith or several examples of the rule of faith that are of great importance as source material for the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.¹⁴⁰

This is the *kerygma* and this is the faith which the Church has received, and although scattered throughout the whole world, carefully preserves it as if it dwelt in one house, and believes it as if were one mind and the same heart, and proclaims and teaches these things and hands them down in uniform agreement. There are different dialects throughout the world, but the force of the tradition is one and the same (ἀλλ' ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως μία καὶ

¹³⁶ *Adv. haer.* 3.24.1–2.

¹³⁷ See especially the argument in the opening chapters of Book 3.1–4. Contrast the ἄγραφος παράδοσις of Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.15.131, and cf. 7.16.95; 17.107.

¹³⁸ *Adv. haer.* 1.9.4; 10.1–2; 2.27.1f; 28.1f, 7f; 2.38.4; 3.2.1; 24.1–2; 4.33.7–8; 5.20.2.

¹³⁹ *Adv. haer.* 3.1.1; 2.3, 4; 4.1; 5.1.

¹⁴⁰ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.1, 2, 3; 22.1; 2.30.9; 4.33.7; cf. 2.35.4; 3.11.1; 12.5. See F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *Irenaeus of Lugdunum, A Study of his Teaching*, Cambridge, 1914, pp. 69ff; and Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, London, 1949, pp. 35ff. 48ff.

ἢ αὐτή). The churches that have been founded in Germany do not believe or hand on anything different, nor do those in the Iberias or among the Celts, nor do those in the East, in Egypt, in Libya, nor those founded in the middle regions of the world. But as the sun, the creation of God, is one and the same in all the world, so also the *kerygma* of truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men willing to come to the knowledge of the truth. Nor among those who preside in the churches will any one, however mighty in speech, say anything different from this, for no one is above the Master, nor again will anyone, however weak in speech, diminish the tradition. For since the faith is one and the same he who treats it powerfully does not add to it, nor does one of little ability detract from it.¹⁴¹

Thus in all the preaching and teaching of the Church there is an underlying subject matter (ἢ τῆς πίστεως ὑπόθεσις) which does not change with being handled, and it is by reference to it that the Scriptures are to be interpreted, the doctrines of the faith are expounded in their coherence, and errors are detected and avoided.¹⁴² It is in this way also that the Church deals with those tendencies that give rise to schisms and lacerate the Body of Christ.¹⁴³ Hence Irenaeus pleads for a passionate devotion for what is committed to the Church, and for a firm grasp of the tradition of truth.¹⁴⁴

Because of the inseparable relation of the Church to the *kerygma* and the faith which are one and the same in the foundation of the Church, in its continuity and universality throughout the world, Irenaeus thinks of the constitution of the Church and the rule of faith as structured together in the truth, yet in such a way that the Church always and everywhere arises out of the truth itself which is none other than Jesus Christ and is always subordinate to him as the truth.¹⁴⁵

True knowledge is the teaching of the Apostles and the ancient system of the Church throughout all the world (γνώσις ἀληθῆς ἢ τῶν ἀποστόλων διδασχὴ καὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς ἐκκλησίας σύστημα κατὰ παντός τοῦ κόσμου) the imprint of the Body of Christ (*character corporis Christi*) according to the successions of bishops by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place and has come even to us, guarded by the fullest and undistorted treatment of the Scriptures (*custodita sine fictione scrip-*

¹⁴¹ *Adv. haer.* 1.10.2.

¹⁴² *Adv. haer.* 1.9.2-5; 10.3.

¹⁴³ *Adv. haer.* 4.33.7.

¹⁴⁴ *Adv. haer.* 3.4.1.

¹⁴⁵ *Adv. haer.* 3.1-5; 24.1-2; 4.25.1-5; 35.1f; 5.20.1f.

tuarum tractatione plenissima), without permitting any addition or curtailment. This reading is without falsification and is a lawful and careful exposition in accordance with the Scriptures, without peril or blasphemy. And there is in it the principal gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge and pre-eminent over all the other gifts.¹⁴⁶

In tracing the teaching and constitution of the Church back through the rule of faith to the apostolic foundation Irenaeus makes clear that it is ultimately in the Scriptures themselves that the canonical test of truth is lodged, but those Scriptures have to be interpreted *from out of themselves* and the truths they enshrine.¹⁴⁷ The gnostics had proved themselves to be 'evil exegetes of the good word of revelation' by subjecting it to crafty questions and constructions, so that they adapted 'the same language of revelation' to their own inventions and systems of ideas.¹⁴⁸

And not only from the evangelical and apostolic scriptures do they try to develop their demonstrations, perverting the interpretations and adulterating the expositions (*παρatreποντες τας ερμηνειας και ραδιουργουντες τας εξηγησεις*), but also from the law and the prophets since in them many parables and allegories are spoken and what is doubtful can be drawn into many senses through their exegesis (*και εις πολλα ελκειν δυναμενων το αμφιβολον δια της εξηγησεως*). But others cleverly and craftily adapting the Scriptures to their own creation, lead away captive from the truth those who do not preserve steadfast their faith in one God and Father Almighty and in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God.¹⁴⁹

The answer that Irenaeus gave to this was that the Scriptures must be interpreted in accordance with their own *system of truth*, that is, according to the rule of truth or faith already developed by the Apostles themselves who gave us the Scriptures,¹⁵⁰ and in harmony with the traditional method of exegesis found in the history and fellowship of the universal Church, that is, in harmony with the presbyters of the past and the present among whom is to be found the apostolic tradition of doctrine.¹⁵¹ In other words, interpretation of the Scriptures must be controlled through theological consistency and agreement, and must be

¹⁴⁶ *Adv. haer.* 4.33.8.

¹⁴⁷ *Adv. haer.* 3.12.9.

¹⁴⁸ *Adv. haer. 1 praef.* 1-2; 3.6; 8.1f; 9.1ff; 18.1f; 19.1f; 20.1f; 21.1ff; 22.1, etc.

¹⁴⁹ *Adv. haer.* 1.3.6; see also 1.8.1; 2.35.3; 3.5.1; 14.2; 15.1, 2; 4.35.1.

¹⁵⁰ *Adv. haer.* 3.1.1; 3.1f; 4.1f; 5.1f; 11.1, 7f; 12.1-12.

¹⁵¹ *Adv. haer.* 3.21.3-4; 4.36.1-5; 27.1ff; 32.1, 8; 5.20.1-2.

tested through appeal to the history of exegesis in the Church. Private interpretation is to be restrained and judgments have to be formed within the unity of the Church and its faith. But in all this it must be remembered that the Scriptures are 'spiritual', 'dominical' and 'divine', and must be interpreted in such a way that we respect their nature as they came from 'the Word and Spirit of God'.¹⁵² They contain spiritual things that can be discerned only spiritually. Therefore the interpreter must himself be a spiritual disciple who is cognisant of the same Spirit of Truth who inspired the prophets and Apostles, and who through the Spirit is not blind to the truth.¹⁵³ There is no suggestion, however, that the Christian disciple has any private revelation or individual insight of his own, and certainly no 'private' or 'perfect' *gnosis*, for as a spiritual disciple he can have his place only in the continuity and unity of the Spirit's work throughout the whole Church.¹⁵⁴

Therefore where the *charismata* of the Lord have been placed, there he ought to learn the truth, among those where there is the succession of the Church from the apostles, where there are soundness and blamelessness of life and purity and incorruptibility of speech. For they also guard our faith in the one God who made all things, they foster that love which we have for the Son of God who wrought such great dispensations for our sakes, and they expound the Scriptures to us without danger, without blaspheming God, dishonouring the patriarchs or despising the prophets.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Adv. haer.* 2.28.2, 3; 25.4; 5.20.2.

¹⁵³ *Adv. haer.* 2.28.2, 3; 4.23.1, 7, 14, 15; 5.20.1.

¹⁵⁴ *Adv. haer.* 3.24.1.

¹⁵⁵ *Adv. haer.* 4.26.5.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA*

'If you will not believe, you will not understand' (ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μὴ συνήτε). Clement's liking for this prophetic statement gives us a useful clue to his thought.¹ He did not interpret it to mean that we must first believe blindly in submission to authority and wait for understanding later, but that faith itself is the basic form of understanding and its continual source. In his faith the believer has already acquired a power of rational judgment (κρίσιν εὐλογον τὴν πίστιν κεκτημένος) which yields for him the full fruit of persuasion.² Although we can become believers without learning, the element of judgment in faith requires to be cultivated and trained if we are to attain clarity in apprehension and accuracy in understanding.³ It is for this reason that we must make use of human knowledge or philosophy, not for its own sake but to help us in our inquiry into the divine revelation and in attaining a scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the realities in which we believe, for philosophy is concerned with investigation into the truth and nature of things (περὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς τῶν ὄντων φύσεως).⁴

Clement's basic understanding of faith is taken from the Scriptures themselves. (i) Faith arises through hearing (δρ ἀκοῆς) and can be defined as obedience to the Word (ἡ τοῦ λόγου ὑπακοή).⁵ It is generated in time (ἐν χρόνῳ γεννωμένη) through the Word that is proclaimed to us by the Apostles, for that Word creates in us the new eye, the new ear, and

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¹ Is. 7.9; *Stromateis*, 1.1.8.2; 2.2.8.2; 4.17.4; 4.21.134.4.

² *Strom.* 1.1.8.2; f. 2.4.12.1; 15.5; 7.16.95.5.

³ *Strom.* 1.6.33.1f; 35.1f; see also 6.1.31f.

⁴ *Strom.* 1.5.32.4; For Clement's relation to philosophy, see W. Völker, *Der wahre Gnostiker nach Clemens Alexandrinus*, Berlin, 1952, pp. 332–352; and E. F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*, Cambridge, 1957, pp. 121 ff.

⁵ *Paedagogos*, 1.7.58f; 13.101.1; *Protreptikos*, 9.84, 6; *Strom.* 2.6.25.1f.

the new heart which we need to apprehend what is given.⁶ (ii) Faith is a form of knowledge in which we are in immediate touch with the truth itself in its own nature, but in theology that truth is the Lord himself, as he himself said, 'I am the truth.'⁷ In faith we are up against the self-evident reality of God in his own words and deeds. 'He who has believed the Word knows the matter to be true for the Word is truth' (καὶ ὁ τῷ λόγῳ πιστεύσας οἶδεν τὸ πρᾶγμα ἀληθές, ἀλήθεια γὰρ ὁ λόγος).⁸ Clement speaks of this self-evidencing quality of the truth not only as ἐναργής (clearly manifest) but as πιστός (believed from itself, faithful), for it manifests itself as a reality in its own right that is completely trustworthy and reliable.⁹ As such it evokes faith from men which stands firm because of the faithfulness of its object. Thus faith consists in a mutual relation between the faithfulness of God and the answering faith of man, and it moves 'from faith to faith'.¹⁰ Faith is, in fact, a divine power deriving from the force of the truth itself (καὶ ἡ δύναμις τις τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἰσχύς οὕσα τῆς ἀληθείας).¹¹

(iii) Faith is perfect and complete in itself, for it is faith in Christ who is both 'foundation and superstructure'. Since it is directed in the truth to ultimate origins and ultimate ends, it is 'a compendious knowledge of essentials' in which the end is already given with the beginning. Thus knowledge starts from faith and is perfected in faith. It moves from immediate apprehension of ultimate truth to full understanding, i.e. from πρόληψις to κατάληψις.¹²

In working out his full understanding of this Clement has recourse to the kind of faith (πίστις) and assent (συγκατάθεσις) which, according to Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy,¹³ we are bound to accord to primary realities or first principles (τὰ πρῶτα, αἱ ἀρχαί) whether in immediate apprehension or in the course of demonstrative argument.¹⁴ This

⁶ *Paed.* 1.6.25.1ff; 28.1f; *Strom.* 1.1.4–5; 2.3.10–11; 4.13–15; 5.1–2; 6.25.3.

⁷ John 14.6; *Strom.* 1.5.32.4; 2.4.12.1; 5.3.16.1; *Excerpta ex Theod.* 61.1.

⁸ *Strom.* 2.4.12.1.

⁹ *Strom.* 2.4.12.2f, 16.3; 8.3.6.7, 7.1ff.

¹⁰ *Strom.* 2.6.25.1f, 26.1f, 29.1f; 20, 126, 3; 5.1, 2.3f, 13.1; *Quis dives salvetur* 8.5.

¹¹ *Strom.* 2.9, 48.4.

¹² *Paed.* 1.6, 25–30; *Strom.* 2.2, 8.9; 4, 16–17; 6, 27, 30; 11, 49; 6.24, 153f; 7.10, 55, 57.

¹³ Cf. Völker, *op.cit.*, pp. 232f, and H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Cambridge, MA, 1964, pp. 112ff.

¹⁴ *Strom.* 2.4, 13.4, 14.1f; 5, 23.1f; 11, 48–52; 12, 63–65; 8.3, 6–7.

allowed Clement to apply to biblical interpretation and to theology the rational process of questioning and answering and establishing proof that were designed to yield scientific knowledge. He expounds this method of inquiry (ἡ μέθοδος τῆς εὐρέσεως)¹⁵ at length in the eighth book of the *Stromateis*, but makes use of it throughout. In scientific knowledge of this kind we trace out the connections in the material content of our knowing with the ultimate realities and the absolute presuppositions which are more knowable in their own nature. These first principles are universal and simple and indemonstrable, but they are known immediately like the facts of sense-perception and like them command our faith (πίστις), for they are believed not on the strength of anything else but of themselves.¹⁶ When this scientific method is applied to the Scriptures it clears the ground of misunderstanding and false opinion and brings us directly up against the realities signified so that we can apprehend them out of themselves in their own truth. In this way we are directed above all to the *Logos*. We hear the voice of the Lord (ἡ τοῦ κυρίου φωνή) speaking to us through the Scriptures, which is the only valid demonstration, for in him we are thrust back upon the ultimate and indemonstrable truth.¹⁷

The result of this is what Clement calls *gnosis*, i.e. the scientific knowledge of the reality in itself (γνώσις δὲ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ ὄντος αὐτοῦ), or the knowledge that corresponds with events (ἐπιστήμη σύμφωνος τοῖς γενομένοις).¹⁸ Basic to everything is πίστις, for πίστις is the placing of our mind upon that which is (τὴν περὶ ὄν στάσιν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν). But that is just what ἐπιστήμη is, for ἐπιστήμη, to give it its etymology, Clement says, is derived from στάσις, and refers to the standing of our mind upon objective realities (ἵστησιν ἡμῶν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι τὴν ψυχὴν).¹⁹ Hence true knowledge is founded on faith.²⁰ Even if a process of reasoning is involved, it is only to cut a way through what is ambiguous and debatable in order that we may grasp what really is (τὸ ὄντως ὄν). Scientific knowledge is therefore not basically different from faith, but is faith

¹⁵ *Strom.* 8.4.9.6; see 8.1.1.1f.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Topica* 1.100 a-b; *Analytica priora*, 2.16.64 b; see *Strom.* 2.4.13.1ff; 5.12.81-82; 8.3.6-7.

¹⁷ *Strom.* 1.6.33-35; 9.43-45; 20.97-100; 28.176-179; 2.2.8-9; 4.12-17; 11.48-49; 5.1.5-6; 7.16.93-98; 8.3.6-7.

¹⁸ *Strom.* 2.17.76.3.

¹⁹ *Strom.* 4.22.143.2-3.

²⁰ *Strom.* 2.4.12-14; 6.31.3; 5.15.1f; 8.3.7.

drawn out in its rational connection with the reality upon which it reposes, while in this way faith itself is accurately understood as it reposes directly on that reality (ἀκριβῆς πίστις).²¹

This kind of knowledge is not to be attained by those whose minds are already pre-occupied and are not first emptied.²² In taking its stand upon these objective realities faith engages in a critical movement of the reason (κρίσις, κρίμα, κριτήριον, δοκιμασία) through which we allow preconceived opinions to be questioned and set aside, and the truth to come to view in its distinction from what is false. This is the Aristotelian notion of faith (πίστις) as a judgment of the truth operating in and with our scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). According to Clement, it is even superior to this knowledge and is its criterion (κυριώτερον οὖν τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἢ πίστις καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῆς κριτήριον).²³ Faith is a compulsive assumption or acknowledgment of the truth forced upon us from the side of objective reality – what Aristotelians and Stoics meant by ‘strong assumption’ (ὑπόληψις σφοδρά or ἰσχυρά),²⁴ although Clement hesitates to use this term, as he wants to distinguish faith from mere supposition (i.e. ἀσθενὴ ὑπόληψις) or conjecture (εἰκασία or opinion, δόξα, οἴσις).²⁵ Thus he contrasts ‘scientific faith’ (ἐπιστημονικὴ πίστις) with ‘conjectural’ or ‘notional faith’ (δοξαστικὴ πίστις).²⁶ Clement is also aware that faith has a voluntary relation to the truth (ἐκούσιος πίστις, πρόληψις, ὑπόληψις)²⁷ and here makes use of the Stoic notion of faith as a willing assent (ἐκούσιος συγκατάθεσις) to bring out the element of freedom or choice (αἴρεσις, προαίρεσις), for we are *persuaded* and not just compelled to believe.²⁸ Faith is in our power (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν);²⁹ but it is firm (βέβαια) for it is assent that reposes on what is strong (συγκατάθεσις ἰσχυρῶ τινι) as its

²¹ *Strom.* 2.4.13–17; 9.45.6; 11.48–49.

²² *Strom.* 1.1.8.1.

²³ *Strom.* 2.4.15.5. See also 1.1.4.1, 8.2; 2.2, 7.1f, 9.6; 4.12.1; 12.55.1; 4.23.147.2; 5.9.56.1ff; 7.16.95.4f; 8.3.8.6; *Quis div. salv.* 14.4.

²⁴ See H. A. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 116, 121; and Völker, *op. cit.*, pp. 232f; cf. also Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, 7.248, 257.

²⁵ *Strom.* 2.4.16.1. See also 1.11.54.3f; 2.2.9.1, 13.2f; 4.3.2f; 6.27.4, 28.1f; 12.48.1ff; 7.11.62.6.

²⁶ *Paed.* 2.10.106.1; *Strom.* 1.8.42.1f; 2.4.16.1; 11.48.1ff; 6.10.81.1ff; 8.3.5.3.

²⁷ *Strom.* 2.2.8.4; 3.11.2; 5.27.4, 28.1.

²⁸ *Paed.* 1.6.33.3; *Strom.* 1.18.89.1; 2.2.8.1ff, 9.1f; 6.27.2; 12.54.1f, 55.1f; 5.1.3.2; 13.86.1f; 7.2.12.1; 8.51.1; 11.68.2; 15.91.8; 8.5.16.2.

²⁹ *Strom.* 2.12, 54.5; cf. 5.1, 3.2.

unshakable ground or foundation (θεμέλιος).³⁰

On the other hand, Clement distinguishes faith from the Basilidean notion of πίστις as something 'natural' or 'necessary', and therefore as restricted to an exclusive few. Faith does not arise by nature (φύσει) but under the revelation of the truth.³¹ It is therefore to be differentiated again from speculative opinion reached through our own conceiving.³² Because there is a moment of free-will in belief and unbelief, we have to be on our guard against wilful misconceptions and arbitrary preconceptions that have their source in self-conceit and self-love. That kind of choice (αἵρεσις) is the root of error, for it carries within it a deliberate will to overbear the truth in unbelief.³³

This grounding of faith in what is objective and ultimate, in assent to primary realities, Clement speaks of as πρόληψις διανοίας, i.e. as a grasping of what is prior and independent of us but self-evident.³⁴ It is not to be mistaken for ἡ πρόληψις τῆς οἰήσεως, the false presupposition that lies behind unbelief.³⁵ There are, then, two kinds of preconception, one which is our recognition and grasp of prior, objective reality, and the other which is merely a preconceived idea or opinion of our own.³⁶ The first is the presumption with which we operate in scientific knowledge, our acknowledgment of the first principles or self-evident realities; the second is the regular cause of error, the presupposing of a notion that is not objectively derived from reality.³⁷ It is because faith at the foundation of our knowledge involves a true πρόληψις in its advance to κατάληψις, and because scientific inquiry that operates on this basis requires of us an appropriate habit of mind (ἔξις) and an established determination (κατάστασις) of the reason toward the reality we seek to understand, that progress in knowledge always depends upon prior knowledge (πρόγνωσις).³⁸

³⁰ *Strom.* 2.2.9.2; 2.5.27.4.28.1; 4.23.143.2f; 6.9.77.1f; 17.155.4; 7.11.64.3. See also 2.11.48.4; 12.53.5. and *Paed.* 1.6.38.1; *Strom.* 2.3.11.2; 5.1.5.2; 5.4.26.1f; 6.15.122.2f; 17.152.1f; 154.2f; 7.9.55.5f.

³¹ *Strom.* 2.3.10.1f.

³² *Strom.* 6.17.155.1f; 7.15.90–92.

³³ *Strom.* 5.3.18.5; 7.10.55f; 15.92: 16.93.98–100, 103.

³⁴ *Strom.* 2.2, 8.4; 4.16.3, 17.1ff; 5.28.1; 5.14, 133.9.

³⁵ *Strom.* 1.18.88.5f; cf. 6.17.150.1, and 7.

³⁶ Cf. here Clement's distinction between two kinds of πρόγνωσις *Strom.* 2.11.48.2, 8.3.5.2.

³⁷ *Strom.* 2.4.8.4f; 9.1ff, 13–17; 11.49.1f.

³⁸ *Strom.* 2.2.9.2f; 4.14.1ff; 17.76.1ff; 8.3.5.1ff; 8.1ff; 4.9.1; 5.16.3.

How, then, do the realities we cognise in theology differ from those we seek to determine in philosophy? Clement distinguishes 'Hellenic truth' rather sharply from the truth which we encounter in the Scriptures, which not only has a divine origin but is God himself, and he distinguishes 'Hellenic philosophy' from 'Barbarian philosophy' or the knowledge we are given in the Judaeo-Christian tradition which is a wisdom taught to us directly by God himself.³⁹ While all truth everywhere comes from God, Christians alone have the substance of the truth – others have only its accidents.⁴⁰ What Clement takes over from Greek philosophy and science is their *method*, but not their content. Philosophy is spoken of as only a 'concausing' or 'co-operating' agent in theological knowledge.⁴¹ The contrast involved can be set out in the following way.

(a) The reality with which philosophy or science is concerned is passive, whereas the reality that gives rise to theology is active and dynamic. This means that in faith we have to do with a self-operating wisdom (αὐτουργῶ σοφία) mediated to us through the Word.⁴² Faith is the strength and power of the truth, or a grace (χάρις) from God.⁴³ Hence in interpreting the truth we have to do with a truth that interprets itself (ἡ ἀλήθεια ἑαυτὴν ἐρμηνεύει).⁴⁴ The primary reason for this difference is that God himself is the truth of theological knowledge, God in his Word and Son revealing himself and saving us,⁴⁵ God who is known only by his own power.⁴⁶

(b) Greek philosophy is concerned mainly with words and terms and the conceptions they express, but 'Barbarian philosophy' is concerned with things or objective subject-matter (πράγματα).⁴⁷

Certainly Hellenic philosophy seeks to investigate the nature and truth of things, but actually it tends to run out into linguistic and eristic

³⁹ *Strom.* 1.20.97.1ff; 6.11.91.1f; 15.121–123; 17.149–161; 18.162.1ff.

⁴⁰ *Strom.* 6.17.150.1ff; 15.1.1ff; cf. 1.5.29.1ff; 13.57.1ff; 2.2.4.1ff; 4.12.1; 165.3ff; 166.1ff. See Osborn's valuable discussion of Clement's understanding of truth, *op.cit.*, pp. 113–126.

⁴¹ *Strom.* 1.20.97.4; 98. ff; 28.176.1ff.

⁴² *Strom.* 1.20.99.1.

⁴³ *Strom.* 1.6.38.5; 7.10.55.3.

⁴⁴ *Strom.* 1.6.38.4.

⁴⁵ *Strom.* 1.6.38ff; 20.98.3.1ff; 2.6.30.1f; 11.48.4.49.1f; 7.16.94f.

⁴⁶ *Strom.* 4.25.156.1ff; 5.10.65.2; 11.71.5.

⁴⁷ *Strom.* 2.1.3.2; 6.10.82.1ff; 15.132.3; 17.151.1ff; 18.162.1ff; 7.11.60.3f; 16.95.4ff; 96.1ff; 8.8.23–24.

argumentation which is useless.⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, that 'Hellenic truth' is to be neglected, for we must bring everything we can learn to bear upon the investigation of the Scriptures, but it must be with a view to letting 'the truth that is according to the *Logos*' manifest itself.⁴⁹

Clement accepts the Platonic definition of dialectic as 'a heuristic science for laying bare realities' (τῆς τῶν ὄντων διαγνώσεως εὐρετική τις ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη),⁵⁰ but adapts it for theological use.

The true dialectic (ἡ ἀληθὴς διαλεκτική) is that which, mixed with true philosophy, in examining things and testing forces and authorities comes immediately up against the Supreme Being and dares to aspire to the God of all things, professing not an empirical knowledge of things mortal but a scientific knowledge of things divine and heavenly, one which carries with it an appropriate mode of activity regarding both words and deeds in human relations (περὶ τε τοῦς λόγους καὶ πράξεις οἰκεία χρήσις). Therefore the Scripture wanting us to become dialecticians of this sort rightly exhorts us 'Be approved moneychangers', rejecting some things but retaining what is good. For this which really is dialectic is the form of thought that distinguishes the noetic realities (τὰ νοητὰ διακριτική) and points out purely and distinctly the substance of each real thing, or it is the power that distinguishes the kinds of objects descending to their individual properties, presenting each real thing to be seen purely as it actually is. Wherefore this is the only dialectic that leads to the true wisdom (ἐπὶ τὴν ἀληθῆ σοφίαν), that is, the divine power that knows real things in accordance with what they are, that holds what is perfect and is freed from all passion – yet not without the Saviour who by the divine Word has removed for us the darkening ignorance that arises out of an evil way of life bringing cataract to the eye of the soul, and that bestows the best gifts enabling us to know God and man.⁵¹

In another passage Clement speaks of this wisdom as τεχνικὴ σοφία, since it provides an empirical knowledge of what pertains to life.⁵² What he means is that since the kind of Reality with which we are concerned in theology is dynamic and active in its own nature, knowledge of it requires on our part an active mode of rationality and life appropriate to it. To know the truth affects our life and determines our actual existence as well as our thought, and even our destiny. 'We define wisdom', he says,

⁴⁸ *Strom.* 1.5. and 8.6.162.1ff.

⁴⁹ *Strom.* 1.9.20.28 etc.

⁵⁰ *Strom.* 1.28.176.3; cf. Plato, *Politicus*, 287 A.

⁵¹ *Strom.* 1.28.177.178.1.

⁵² *Strom.* 6.7.54.1.

as a sure and irrefragable apprehension as to things present, past and future, which the Lord has taught us through his own *parousia* as well as through the prophets. And it is irrefragable since it has been communicated to us by the *Logos* and as such is wholly true to God's will as it is known in the Son. In one respect it is *eternal*, but in another respect it is deployed *in time*; in one respect it is one and the same, in another it is many and moves hither and thither, and, while on the one hand it is without any movement or passion, on the other hand it is characterised by passionate intention, from one point of view complete but from another still to be completed.⁵³

One of the supreme characteristics of σοφία is that it affects the character of the human knower and adapts him to its own divine perfection. While reaching us from the eternal being and reality of God himself, and while remaining eternal and unchangeable truth, it enters into our human life in time and acts upon us in order to fulfil within us its perfect will.⁵⁴ It brings us under its commanding purpose and requires of us a way of life corresponding to it – hence the immensely practical and ethical slant (πρᾶξις, ἀγάπη) of all Clement's teaching.⁵⁵ It is principally, however, in connection with baptism that Clement expounds this relation between the saving truth of God and the condition of human being in which it is divinely actualised.⁵⁶ All this means that in order to develop knowledge of the divine wisdom we must grow in grace, advance in moral perfection, acquiring more and more and more the inner condition of mind or the disposition of soul appropriate to such perfection.⁵⁷ This is the other aspect of what Clement calls *gnosis* which we will consider later, but so far as the application of human knowledge and scientific method to the Scriptures is concerned it means that we must learn to interpret them in their proper perspective in accordance with the realities (τὰ πράγματα καὶ τὰ γινόμενα) they signify – i.e. in the magnitude of the truth (τὸ μεγαλεῖον τῆς ἀληθείας), and penetrating into the depth of the things (μέχρι τοῦ βάθους τῶν πραγμάτων) in God.⁵⁸ A theological mode of perception or vision (τὸ

⁵³ *Strom.* 6.7.54.1–3, 67.1–3.

⁵⁴ *Paed.* 1.6.25–30; *Protr.* 1.1.2.

⁵⁵ Cf., for example, *Strom.* 7.2.5ff.

⁵⁶ See especially *Paed.* 1.5–6. In *Strom.* 4.6.47.1 he speaks of this as καθολικὴ κίνησις καὶ μετάθεσις κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ σωτήρος.

⁵⁷ See *Strom.* 7.14.84.1f.

⁵⁸ *Strom.* 7.16.97.4.

θεολογικὸν εἶδος, ἐποπτεία),⁵⁹ is required, and the power of spiritual and critical discernment,⁶⁰ if we are to penetrate behind the surface not only to the things immediately signified but to their source in the eternal truth and will of God.⁶¹

By contrast with this, philosophy taken by itself lacks depth, for it is concerned with partial truths or with copies of truth, and with nothing more than this world. While 'the forms of truth' are two; 'names and things', philosophets occupy themselves with the former and fail to advance beyond them.⁶² Clement likens such philosophy to

geometry that treats of measures and magnitudes and forms by delineation on plane surfaces, or to a painting that appears to take in the whole field of vision in the scene represented, but in order to do so falsifies the visual impression by an artistic use of signs in accordance with the incidence of the lines of vision.

By this means the appearances of higher and lower positions are saved; some things appear in the foreground, some in the background, and others in other ways, yet all is depicted on a smooth and level surface. That is the way in which philosophers endeavour to express the truth, by copying it after the manner of a painting.⁶³

Then Clement goes on to point out that philosophers never get beyond the earth, and that the actual source of their error lies in their own self-love and conceit.⁶⁴ The only way in which we can transcend our earth-bound knowledge and its errors is by means of a 'true philosophy' mediated to us in the teaching of the Lord, for what is imparted and revealed by the Son is Wisdom that derives from God. In his *Parousia* the truth of God has been *handed over* as a given reality, and it is the part of faith to follow in that divine *tradition* (παράδοσις).⁶⁵ That given reality and tradition are embodied in Jesus Christ, for he is himself the Truth who has come to us from God.⁶⁶

In applying this to the study of the Scriptures Clement is concerned to

⁵⁹ *Strom.* 1.28.176.2; 4.1.3.2; 6.14.108.1; 7.12.68.4; *Paed.* 1.7.54.1.

⁶⁰ *Strom.* 2.4.15.5; 6.17.154.3f; 7.15.93; 16.93–95.100f.

⁶¹ See again *Strom.* 2.2.9.1ff, or 7.1.1ff.

⁶² *Strom.* 6.17.151.1f; cf. Plato, *Politicus*, 261 C.

⁶³ *Strom.* 6.7.56.1.

⁶⁴ *Strom.* 6.7.56.2. The same applies, Clement holds, to heretics, *Strom.* 7.15.92; 16.93–108.

⁶⁵ *Strom.* 6.7; 59.3.61.1f; 70.3; 15.122.1f; cf. 2.11.48.1ff.

⁶⁶ *Strom.* 1.5.32.4; 11.52.1f; 20.97.4.98.3; 2.6.25.3.

make clear that only when we understand the things they signify in their dimension of depth in which they go back into the ultimate and eternal truth of God do we really understand them. Hence we must be careful not to concentrate so much upon the words (λέξεις) that we miss the things (πράγματα).⁶⁷ The right way to break through to the truth is the way of faith (ὁδὸς ἡ πίστις), for, unless we believe we will not understand.⁶⁸

If we are to penetrate beyond mere words to the things they signify, and get at 'the truth like the real face behind the masks' (καθάπερ ὑπὸ τοῖς μορμολυκείοις τὸ πρόσωπον τὸ ἀληθινόν),⁶⁹ we must take 'the way of faith', for 'how could the mind engage in transcendental insight (ὑπερφῶα θεωρίαν) into these things while unbelief about acquiring knowledge of them is struggling within the mind?'⁷⁰ And so Clement cites the words of Isaiah (7.9) which we have already noted, 'If you will not believe, you will not understand', but he is anxious to make it clear that 'belief' or 'faith' of this kind is the mode of rational and scientific knowledge in which we willingly let our minds fall under the compulsive self-evidence of the real, for the one proof of an unknown reality is its own witness to itself and the acknowledgment it evokes from us.

Faith which the Greeks disparage, thinking it worthless and barbarous, is a voluntary preconception, the assent of religious experience (πρόληψις, ἐκούσιος ἔστι, θεοσεβείας συγκατάθεσις). As the divine apostle expressed it, 'faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων) '... For hereby the elders obtained a good report, but without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb. 11.2, 6). Others, however, have defined faith to be a conceptual assent to an invisible object (ἀφανοῦς πραγματος ἔννοητικὴν συγκατάθεσιν), since the demonstration of an unknown object is an evident assent (τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ἀγνωμένου πραγματος φανεράν συγκατάθεσιν).⁷¹

Clement then goes on to point out that although an element of *choice* (or *desire*) enters into faith, it is nevertheless 'dianoetic' (διανοητική), i.e.

⁶⁷ *Strom.* 2.1.3.2.

⁶⁸ *Strom.* 2.1.4.2. It is faith in Christ which is the key that opens the rational gates of the *Logos*, for it is only through him that God is seen, δι' ὃν μόνον θεὸς ἐποπτεύεται, *Protr.* 1.10.2f.

⁶⁹ *Strom.* 2.1.3.2.5.

⁷⁰ *Strom.* 2.2.8.3; cf. *Ecl. proph.* 13.4-9.

⁷¹ *Strom.* 2.2.8.4-9.1.

it is rationally determined from beyond it by its object. Likewise faith gives rise to *action*, but once again faith must be understood here as the foundation of rational choice (θεμέλιος ἔμφορος προαιρέσεως) made whenever ground for it has already been supplied by the *demonstration* that comes through faith (προσποδεικνύτος τινὸς αὐτῷ διὰ τῆς πίστεως τὴν ἀπόδειξιν).⁷²

Readiness to follow the facts (συνέπεσθαι τῷ συμφέροντι) is the first principle of understanding. Accordingly unswerving choice furnishes a considerable impetus toward knowledge (γνώσιν). Thereupon the exercise of faith gives rise to scientific knowledge reposing upon a sure foundation (ἐπιστήμη θεμελίῳ βεβαίῳ ἐπερηρισμένη). Hence the exponents of philosophy define scientific knowledge as a state that cannot be overthrown by argument (ἔξιν ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου). Is there then any established position such as this that is true other than that of religious experience where the only teacher is the *Logos*? I think not. Theophrastus says that perception (αἴσθησις) is the source of faith, for from it the first principles teach out to the *logos* that is in us and to our thought. Therefore he who believes the divine Scriptures with the exercise of a sure judgment (τὴν κρίσιν βεβαίαν ἔχων) receives a demonstration that cannot be gainsaid. Faith is not further established by demonstration.⁷³

What Clement means is that in the last analysis faith rests upon the demonstration that God himself provides in the immediacy of his own Word and Truth, and apart from that no other demonstration can add anything to the validity or certainty of faith.⁷⁴

It is on this ground that we must apply the scientific processes of questioning and answering to the Scriptures. We knock at the door of truth according to what appears (κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον). As an opening is made through what confronts us there results scientific perception (ἐπιστημονικὴ θεωρία). To those who knock in this way the object under investigation is opened up, and to those who ask questions in this way of the Scriptures there is given the gift of divine knowledge in a form in which it can be clearly grasped (καταληπτικῶς).⁷⁵ But it is most

⁷² I.e. ἐναργῆς ἀπόδειξις *Strom.* 7.16.102.1 (cf. *Exc. ex. Theod.* 75.1); 8.3.7.1–8; 4.14.1f.; and see *Strom.* 2.2.9.6; 5.25.3.7.16.95.8.

⁷³ *Strom.* 2.2.9.3–6; see also 7.9.57.3–4.

⁷⁴ *Strom.* 7.16.95.6–9.96.1f.

⁷⁵ *Strom.* 8.1.1.3–11.1. For the concept of 'kataleptic' perception or apprehension in Stoic thought, i.e. the kind that leaves no room for doubt, see E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, Cambridge, 1959, pp. 35ff. cf. also *Strom.* 7.9.57.3: ἰσχυρὰ καὶ βέβαιος. . . εἰς τὸ ἀμετάπτωτον καὶ μετ' ἐπισιτήμης καταληπτόν.

important to clarify the terms, so that each question may be treated aright in accordance with its own proper reference, i.e. without diverting it away to some other starting-point or principle that is admittedly not signified by the term in question. We have to make clear the relation between the terms and the things signified by them, and develop a mode of demonstration in accordance with the nature of what is signified. It is in this way that we investigate its nature accurately. Such a testing of the reference of terms and statements is necessary if we are not to stray past the reality being investigated, and if our examination of that reality is to be really about it in its own genus.⁷⁶

In a scientific approach, therefore, we must press our inquiry through to the point where we let the realities exhibit themselves in their own self-evidence if they are to command our assent. But in our case, e.g. in the interpretation of the Scriptures, where we are concerned with sense-perception (αἴσθησις) as well as understanding (νοῦς), self-evidence (τὸ ἐναργές) is common to both. 'But sense-perception is the ladder to knowledge (ἐπιβάθρα τῆς ἐπιστήμης) while faith passing through objects of sense leaves assumed opinion (ὑπόληψιν) behind, presses on to what is free from deception and reposes in the truth.'⁷⁷ Otherwise we merely lapse back uncritically into our own prior assumptions and preconceived opinions without exercising the criterion of faith.⁷⁸ The one kind of preconception that is required is a grasping at what is evident and a corresponding conception of it (πρόληψιν δὲ ἀποδίδωσιν ἐπιβολὴν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐναργές καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἐναργῆ τοῦ πράγματος ἐπίνοιαν).⁷⁹ But that is precisely what faith is, and Clement shows that without this no one ever learns anything, for no one ever advances in knowledge without πρόληψις through which he reaches back to ultimate and prior realities which he cannot know by art or intellectual effort and cannot prove except out of themselves.⁸⁰

How can one learn about what he is inquiring into without having a πρόληψις of what he is aiming at? But he who has learned has already turned his πρόληψις into a κατάληψις (i.e. his proleptic grasp into an apprehension that leaves no room for doubt). But if he who learns, learns

⁷⁶ *Strom.* 8.1.2.2f; 2.3-4.

⁷⁷ *Strom.* 2.4.13.2f.

⁷⁸ *Strom.* 2.2.8.4ff, 9.1ff; 2.4.12.1f, 15.4f, 16.1f.

⁷⁹ *Strom.* 2.4.16.3.

⁸⁰ *Strom.* 2.4, 13.4, 17.1ff; 16.76.1ff, 77.1ff.

not without a *πρόληψις* which takes in the things that are said that man has ears to hear the truth. 'Blessed is he who speaks to the ears of those who hear', as certainly he is blessed who is a man of obedience. Now to hear and obey is to understand. If, then, faith is nothing else but a *πρόληψις* by the mind of the things that are said, and this is called obedience and understanding and persuasion, no one will ever learn without faith, since no one learns without *πρόληψις*. Consequently the statement of the prophet, 'Unless you believe you will not understand', is shown to be true more than ever.⁸¹

Now if we fail in this scientific approach that throws us back finally upon the indication that some reality gives us of itself, we are unable to know it in its own truth or to learn anything new about it. Then all we are concerned with in our 'demonstrations' is the syllogistic connection of ideas we already have, and we make no advance to knowledge of what is beyond them.⁸² That is what happens when we seek to interpret the Scriptures only 'in the flat', as it were, only on the plane of this-worldly realities, but when that happens we can only give a 'mythical' account of their content.

In his thought at these points, where he relates what the Scriptures say to the realities or events that transcend them, Clement links closely together the concepts of *οικονομία* and *πρόνοια* thus interpreting the whole economy of salvation, as it is set out in the Scriptures, from its source and direction in the eternal will and providence of God.⁸³ 'The philosophy which is in accordance with divine tradition', he says, 'establishes and confirms the *πρόνοια*, but take away that *πρόνοια* and the *οικονομία* concerning the Saviour appears to be but myth (*μῦθος*) according to the elements of this world and not according to Christ.' Clement adds that it is through men's worldly wisdom that they are led to think mythically (*μυθῶδες*) 'that the Son of God should speak to men, that God should have a Son, and especially that the Son should have suffered'. But what actually leads men to disbelieve is their own preconceived opinion (*ἡ πρόληψις τῆς οἰήσεως*)⁸⁴ which has obstructed them from investigating and apprehending the realities signified by the Scriptures in accordance with their own nature.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Strom.* 2.4.17.1-4.

⁸² *Strom.* 8.3.5.1-4.14.4.

⁸³ *Strom.* 7.7.42.1f.

⁸⁴ *Strom.* 1.11.52.1-2; 18.88.5-6.

⁸⁵ *Strom.* 6.17.150.1ff; 7.16.93.1f.

The demonstration that rests on opinion is merely human, and is the result of rhetorical arguments and dialectical syllogisms. But the highest demonstration induces scientific faith (ἐπιστημονικὴν πίστιν) by adducing and opening up the Scriptures for the souls that desire to learn. The result of this is γνῶσις,⁸⁶ i.e. the knowledge that is of the thing in itself, or the knowledge that corresponds with what takes place.⁸⁷

Gnostics and gnosticising Christians differentiated sharply between *phenomena* and *noumena*, assigning faith (πίστις) to the realm of the phenomenal and knowledge (γνῶσις) to the realm of the noumenal. Clement undoubtedly shared some of the Platonic convictions that lay behind this distinction but he refused to agree that faith has reference only to the Son, whereas knowledge has reference to the Father, for that would drive a wedge deep into the heart of the Christian faith.

In order to believe truly in the Son we must believe that he is the *Son*, that he came, and how, and why, we must believe concerning his passion, and we must know (γινῶναι) who is the Son of God. Now there is no faith without knowledge, and no knowledge without faith. Nor is the Father without the Son, for the Son is with the Father. And the Son is the true Teacher concerning the Father. In order to believe in the Son we must know the Father with whom also is the Son. Again, in order that we may know the Father, we must believe in the Son, that it is the Son of God who teaches – from faith to knowledge, through the Son to the Father. The knowledge (γνῶσις) of the Son and the Father that is according to the rule of knowledge – which is truly *gnostic* – is the apprehension and the comprehension of the truth through the truth.⁸⁸

This also involves the movement from faith to faith within which God's righteousness is revealed, and within which we advance from initial to complete understanding, but everything depends on the relation of faithfulness between what is revealed to us of God in Jesus Christ in time and what God is in himself in his own eternal Being.⁸⁹ It is that whole revelation of God to his creation and its covenanted renewal in Jesus Christ, and the relation of the eternal Father to the life and work of the Incarnate Son in time, and therefore the inner connection between faith and understanding, that Clement seeks to express and maintain in saying

⁸⁶ *Strom.* 2.11.94.3.

⁸⁷ *Strom.* 2.17.76.3.

⁸⁸ *Strom.* 5.1.1.4; cf. *Paed.* 1.6.25.1ff; 7.53.1f; *Quis div. salu.* 8.1f.

⁸⁹ See *Paed.* 1.8.74.1; 9.88.2f.

that the whole of prophecy and the economy of the Saviour took place in accordance with the divine πρόνοια.⁹⁰

The concept of πρόνοια (divine foresight and providence) had been given wide circulation through the Stoic philosophers in their view that the universe was permeated in all its parts by an intelligent purpose which gave it order and reliability. In this event atheism could only mean a rejection of the rationality of the universe. With this Clement was in full agreement. The real difficulty that lay in the Stoic view, however, was its pantheistic interchange between 'God' and 'nature' which threatened to reduce the concept of providence to that of mere necessity or fate.⁹¹ But granted that there is a divine πρόνοια, a providential care and ordering of human life and destiny involving recompense and punishment, it would be impious to think that prophecy and the economy of the Saviour did not take place in accordance with it.⁹² Certainly the philosophical notion of providence was too general and related neither to the Son of God nor to the worship of God, but once it was related to the Son of God, 'his *parousia* among us and his teaching to us', the whole concept became radically changed, for it was then geared into the knowledge of the living God and to the economy of salvation (ἡ οἰκονομία σωτηρίας). As such it is known not abstractly but directly out of the truth of God that has been delivered over to us (as a tradition) in Jesus Christ.⁹³ God cannot be known as he is (ὡς ἔχει) in himself, but only from what belongs to him (ἀπὸ τῶν οικείων). He himself is above all speech, all conception, and all thought, but he has accommodated himself to the weakness of men and has *given* us knowledge of himself in and through his Son in a form that is open to investigation and appropriate demonstration.⁹⁴ God as such is indemonstrable and cannot be objectified in knowledge, but 'the Son is wisdom and knowledge and truth and whatever is akin to this. Proof and description can be given of him.'⁹⁵ He is the truth manifested in Person. As the Son he is the very Face of the

⁹⁰ *Strom.* 5.1, 6.1f; also see 4, 23, 148. 2, 149. 5.

⁹¹ *Strom.* 2.19, 101. 1, cf. *Exc. ex Theod.* 6.9.1–7.8. 2. See E. Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, pp. 42ff; and E. F. Osborn, *op.cit.*, pp. 102f.

⁹² *Strom.* 6.6.2f; 6.6.48.1f; 15.122.2; 17.153.1f. Cf. 2.2.4.3; 4.11; 78–81, 86f; 15.13, 83.1f; 7.2.6–9; 7.48.1ff; 10.60.1ff.

⁹³ *Strom.* 6.15.121.4f, 123.2.124.3.

⁹⁴ *Strom.* 2.16.72.4, 77.4; 4.25.156.1f; 5.10.65.2; 11.71.5; 12.78.1f, 81.5f.

⁹⁵ *Strom.* 4.25.156.1f.

Father through whom the Father is known (πρόσωπον δὲ πατὴρ ὁ υἱὸς δι' οὗ γνωρίζεται ὁ πατήρ). He is as much of the Father as can be surely grasped and as men can see who are taught by the Son. The rest of the Father is unknown (ἔστι δὲ καὶ ὄσον καταληπτὸν τοῦ πατρός. δι' υἱοῦ δεδιδαμένοι θεωροῦσι, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἄγνωστὸν ἔστι τοῦ πατρός).⁹⁶

He is both the object and the power of faith, bearing with him and in him his own demonstration. It is in this Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that we really understand the divine πρόνοια.⁹⁷

At the same time the conception of οἰκονομία here undergoes a change. This was a notion that derived from St Paul and had already been given theological exposition; notably, in the works of Irenaeus, as the saving action of God in history reaching through the old covenant to its fulfilment in the new covenant in the Incarnation and the redemptive obedience of Jesus Christ.⁹⁸ Clement's own thought is in line with this.⁹⁹ He thinks of the two covenants as related to one another through a rational sequence (ἀκολουθία).¹⁰⁰ 'Although they are economically established as two in name and time, in accordance with the span of each and the advance from one to the other, they are one in power, the old and the new being dispensed through the Son by the one God.' That 'the just shall live by faith' applies to the old as well as the new. In saying that 'the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith' (Rom. 1.17) the apostle teaches the one salvation which from prophecy to Gospel is perfected by one and the same Lord.¹⁰¹ 'The Lord of the universe has in fact ordered all things both generally and particularly for the salvation of the universe, the creation itself and the time that came into being with creaturely existents all falling within the purpose of his will.'¹⁰² Clement even extends the range of the covenant purpose of God to the Greeks bringing their philosophy into his providential purpose as a 'propaedeutic'.¹⁰³ But with the renewal of the one covenant and the coming of the universal calling (ἡ κλησις ἡ καθολικὴ) all things converge and there

⁹⁶ *Exc. ex Theod.* 23.5; cf. 10.6, 7.1, 12.1.

⁹⁷ *Strom.* 6.15.122.2ff.

⁹⁸ E.g. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.8.1, 18.1, 39.1, 49.1; 5.18.1, etc.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Strom.* 6.13.106.3f, 107.1f; 7.5f, 17.107.1ff.

¹⁰⁰ *Strom.* 7.15.91.8; cf. 3.12.86.1.

¹⁰¹ *Strom.* 2.6.29.2f; see also 6.6.49.2f; 7.6.34.2.

¹⁰² *Strom.* 7.2.12.2.

¹⁰³ *Strom.* 6.5.39-43; 8.62-68; 17.153. 1f.

is only one new people through Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴ It is significant that, as Clement expounds this fact that 'the Son of God is the Ruler and Saviour of all, who in accordance with the will of the Father holds the helm of the universe in his hands', he develops the mode and fulfilment of the economic πρόνοια by penetrating into the interior logic of the Incarnation and its relation to the will of God in a passage that may have been in Athanasius' mind when he wrote the *De incarnatione*. It is thus ultimately in the incarnate life and work of the Son that we discern the saving purpose of God for all creation and see how it is all determined and overruled by God's own eternal Will and Word.¹⁰⁵

Clement saw clearly that unless the whole economy of salvation as set forth in the Old and New Testaments is established in eternal works and words (ἐν αἰώνιαις ἔργοις καὶ λόγοις),¹⁰⁶ i.e. unless our knowledge of God in the biblical revelation is rooted through Jesus Christ objectively in the eternal being and will of God, in accordance with his economic foreordering (κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομικὴν προδιατύπωσιν),¹⁰⁷ then it can be interpreted only as having this-worldly reference, and in the last analysis as nothing more than a dramatic representation in transient patterns of the human imagination of what is timeless and ultimately unknowable. 'The entire economy that prophesied of the Lord appears', he says,

as if it were really a parable to those who have not learned the truth (τοῖς μὴ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐγνωκόσιν), whenever someone says, and others hear, that the Son of God the Maker of the universe assumed flesh and was conceived in the virgin's womb (from which his sensible body was begotten) and subsequently, as was indeed the case, suffered and rose again, being 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness', as the apostle says.¹⁰⁸

The position that Clement assumes here, in his rejection of any mythical interpretation of the *kerygma* or any reduction of biblical statements to a merely parabolic reference beyond this world, is much the same as that which he took up in his refutation of heathen polytheism and atheism in the *Protrepticus*. In both cases he relies upon the basic act of *faith* and its rational apprehension of God the Creator and Ruler of the

¹⁰⁴ *Strom.* 4.23.149.5; 6.17.159.8f; cf. *Paed.* 1.6, 30.2.

¹⁰⁵ *Strom.* 7.2.5–12; see also *Protr.* 10, 110.1ff; 11, 111ff.

¹⁰⁶ *Strom.* 6.15.122.2; cf. 7.9.52.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Paed.* 1.6, 25.3.

¹⁰⁸ *Strom.* 6.15.127.1.

universe, for in it we are given an understanding of the divine providence that compels us not only to reject all irrational superstition and atheism but to acknowledge that the economy of salvation is grounded in the eternal will of God or in an eternal covenant. It is the kind of πίστις in which we apprehend God as the First Principle in the light of which we may distinguish objective realities from our own arbitrary prescriptions, and thus we may rely upon faith, in its correlativity to the Voice of God and the Word of truth, as an unchanging criterion (ἀμεταπτώτω κριτηρίῳ τῇ πίστει ἐπαναπανώμεθα) to judge the truth of things.¹⁰⁹ Clement speaks of this faith as a *grace*

which from what is indemonstrable conducts us back to what is universal and simple (ἡ πίστις δὲ χάρις ἐξ ἀναποδείκτων εἰς τὸ καθόλον ἀναβιβάζουσα τὸ ἀπολοῦν) and which is not in any way to be confounded with matter. But those who do not believe, as is to be expected, 'drag everything down from heaven, and the realm of the invisible, to earth, crudely grasping with their hands rocks and oaks', as Plato says. For in clinging to such things, they insist that that alone exists that can be touched and handled, defining σῶμα and οὐσία to be identical.¹¹⁰

The errors in this way of thinking are easily brought to light through Clement's scientific approach to faith and knowledge: failure to apprehend the reality in question in accordance with its own nature, lack of rational judgment (embedded in genuine πίστις) employed by scientific knowledge in testing the true and the false, failure to penetrate through to the thing itself and grasp it in its own self-evidence and therefore a failure to reach a clear understanding of it, and all through a fatal substitution of conjecture for the basic element of assent or acknowledgment in faith which is the foundation of all knowledge.

As to him who has hands, it is natural to grasp, and to him who has sound eyes to see the light, so it is the natural prerogative of him who has received faith to apprehend knowledge. And when he has embraced in faith the foundation of the truth, he receives in addition the power to advance further in investigation, and to attain a spirit of perception into the nature of things.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Strom.* 2.4.12.1f, 13.4f.

¹¹⁰ *Strom.* 2.4.14.3.

¹¹¹ *Strom.* 6.17.152-154; cf. *Paed.* 1.6, 25-30.

Thus when people insist upon looking at the *kerygma* as myth, and then set about reinterpreting it, they are guilty of serious error in operating uncritically with a preconceived opinion as to the relation between this world of sense and time and the world of the divine will and activity, and in a failure to engage in the kind of heuristic science (εὐρετική ἐπιστήμη) that is demanded of us whenever we seek to know what is new and independent of us and beyond the ideas we have already acquired in this-worldly experience.

Now it is one thing to point out the errors and misinterpretations that result from a false approach in theology when we confound the nature of divine things with the nature of material realities, but it is another thing to apply scientific method to divine things in such a way that we are faithful to their nature and their truth. This was the concern that dominated Clement's thought, to make room in philosophy and science for the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and indeed for the truth as the Lord himself defined it: Ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ ἀλήθεια (John 14.6).

The part that philosophy can play here is that of προπαιδεία, for through the application of its method of inquiry into the truth and nature of things (ξήτησιν περὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς τῶν ὄντων φύσεως) we are brought to know Christ out of himself and in accordance with his own nature. True philosophy trains the mind, rouses the understanding, and begets in us a shrewdness in inquiry that leads us to repose in Christ, and yet this is something into which we are initiated not so much by discovering it as by receiving it from the truth itself.¹¹² Prior training, then, makes us ready to see things as they ought to be seen, and that must apply to *noetic realities* (τὰ νοητά) for we must be trained in mind to apprehend them in accordance with their noetic natures.¹¹³ This is the work of the disciplined thinker.

With a firm control over himself and all his thought, and through a genuine approach to the truth he attains a firm grasp of divine science (βεβαίαν κατάληψιν τῆς θείας ἐπιστήμης). For the knowledge and sure grasp of noetic realities must necessarily be called scientific knowledge (ἡ γὰρ τῶν νοητῶν γνῶσις καὶ κατάληψις βεβαία δεόντως ἂν λέγοιτο ἐπιστήμη). Its function in regard to divine things is to discern what is the First Cause (τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον) and that 'through which all things were made and without which nothing has been made' – and then in that light to see the

¹¹² *Strom.* 1.5.32.4; 6.17.153.1f; 7.7.44.3f.

¹¹³ Cf. also *Strom.* 2.17.76.1f, 77.1f; *Eclogae propheticae*, 28.2f, 32.3.

interconnection of things in the universe and to investigate what man himself is and what accords with his nature.¹¹⁴

Demonstrative argument plays its important part here for it implants in us *accurate faith* (ἀκριβῆ πίστιν, i.e. a rational assent that corresponds precisely to the nature of the reality apprehended) so that we are unable to think of the demonstrated reality as being other than it actually is, and therefore do not succumb to those who would impose upon us with their deceitful distortions. Now all this means that so far as noetic realities are concerned the soul must be purged from sensible things so that it can see through to their truth (ἀλήθειαν διδεῖν).¹¹⁵

This certainly implies that 'while sight, hearing and speaking contribute toward the truth, it is the mind that is fitted to cognise it';¹¹⁶ that we must learn to distinguish the proper criteria for the understanding of noetic realities from other criteria;¹¹⁷ and hence that we must not confuse the study of the Ruler and Creator of all things with natural science (ἡ φυσικὴ θεωρία) that is directed to the sensible cosmos of all contingent events.¹¹⁸ 'Bound in this earthly body', Clement says, 'we apprehend the objects of sense by means of the body, yet we grasp noetic objects through the rational faculty. But if anyone expects to apprehend all things through sensible means (αἰσθητῶς) he has fallen from the truth.'¹¹⁹ Herein lies the difficulty, however, 'for great is the crowd that keeps to things of the sense as if they were only things that exist (πολὺς γὰρ ὁ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ὡς μόνοις οὐσι προσανέχων)'.¹²⁰

It was this very confusion that led so many in the second and third centuries to misinterpret the Scriptures, and contributed not a little to the rise of heresies like Arianism in the fourth century. Sometimes it involved a projection of anthropomorphic and geomorphic images upon God and sometimes it meant a dragging of the thought of God down on to the plane of earthly and creaturely things where he could not be distinguished from nature. Its roots went very deep, and we can see Clement combatting it in several forms, as when it made faith something

¹¹⁴ *Strom.* 7.3.17.1ff; cf. 6.18.162.4, 165.1.

¹¹⁵ *Strom.* 1.6.33.1-3; cf. 5.11.73.2.

¹¹⁶ *Strom.* 1.20.99.3.

¹¹⁷ *Strom.* 2.11.50.1.

¹¹⁸ *Strom.* 2.2.5.1f; cf. also 1.28.176.1f.

¹¹⁹ *Strom.* 5.1.7.4f.

¹²⁰ *Strom.* 5.6.33.4.

'natural' and therefore a necessary quality of only certain human beings, which had the effect of eliminating human freedom and of destroying genuine faith and making it impossible for prayer;¹²¹ or as when it thought of God as having a 'natural' relation to us, as though we were of the same essence as God or were part of him, which had the effect of binding God so necessarily to the depth of our creaturely being that he could not be detached from our evil and could not be free even to have mercy upon us.¹²²

In order to avoid these errors Clement made use of the sharp distinction between the invisible realities of God and the visible, tangible realities of our physical existence, insisting that faith needs intellectual and ascetic training (*γυμνασία*) to wean its apprehension of the divine truth from entanglement in men's minds with creaturely and sensible being. This involved the assertion of the transcendent reality of God over all thought and speech about him.¹²³ This too had profound implications. It meant that in interpreting the Scriptures we must constantly distinguish the words and names from the things, and the signs from the things signified (*τὰ σημαίνόμενα*), and seek to bring out the true meaning not by concentrating on terms and statements as such but through a scientific interrogation of the signs (*σημεῖα*) and indications (*τεκμήρια*) and witness (*μαρτυρία*) they enshrine until the mind apprehends *through* them the realities they indicate or point out to us.¹²⁴ It also meant that our human statements about God are to be made and understood as signitive or indicative of God, and therefore by their very nature falling short of him. This is of course the appropriate kind of statement for all self-evident being that we cannot and must not try to reduce to mere ideas, but it is certainly the appropriate kind of statement about God.¹²⁵ Another way of putting this is to say that there is a difference between truths and the truth itself and a difference between the things we declare about God which are 'myriads' and God himself in his own reality.¹²⁶ This is particularly clear when we think of our attempts to express God through 'names', such as 'the One, the Good, or

¹²¹ *Strom.* 2.3.10–11; 7.7.41.1ff.

¹²² *Strom.* 2.16.74–75; 5.14.89; 7.7.42.

¹²³ *Strom.* 5.10.65.2; 11.71.5; 12.78.1f.

¹²⁴ *Strom.* 2.1.3.2; 6.10.82.3f; 15.121.4.122.1f; 132.1f; 17.151.1f; 7.1.1f; 11.60; 16.93–98; 8.1.3, and 9.

¹²⁵ *Strom.* 2.2.6.4.

¹²⁶ *Strom.* 6.17.150.4–7.

Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, God, Creator, or Lord'. We are not here supplying God with an actual 'name', Clement says, but we use 'names' in our deficiency in order that our minds may have these as points of support and as means of preventing us from erring. Not one *expresses* God, but they are altogether indicative (ἐνδεικτικά) of the Power of the Almighty. At the same time, Clement insists that all this is not with reference to the inscrutability of God, but to the fact that he transcends all the limitations of our thought and speech.¹²⁷

Now clearly there is a profound truth here that must be conserved, for God is greater than can be conceived. All our statements about him, no matter how true, fall short of him and can but point away to him far beyond themselves; indeed, if they did not, they could not be true. Hence a real discrepancy between the statements and the Being of God to whom they point must be part of their truth or adequacy. Nevertheless unless 'God in his eternal transcendence and antecedence' and 'God as we know him in his economic condescension to our weakness in Jesus Christ' can be held steadfastly together, our knowledge cannot but fall apart. That is the difficulty with any separation of the world of God's eternal wisdom and will and the world of contingent human existence in history, for it forces the complete disengagement of knowledge (γνώσις) from the structure of faith (πίστις) in space and time. This in turn can only be a contradictory and empty movement of thought, for it takes away the actual ground upon which our knowledge rests in the first place and which it needs in order to be a movement of rational thought at all. How does Clement deal with this problem, for clearly something more than his notion of a covenanted connection between the divine πρόνοια and the human οἰκονομία is needed?

This he finds in the eternity and pre-existence of the *Logos* or Son. He who reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ and in him reveals the Father is none other than the eternal Counsellor and Wisdom of the transcendent and ineffable God. He is the pre-existent Word (ὁ προὖν λόγος), the pre-existent Saviour (ὁ προὖν σωτήρ), so that it is he who exists in him who exists (ὁ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὢν), i.e. in God himself, the *Logos* who was with God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν), who has come among us and who is God and Man (θεός

¹²⁷ *Strom.* 5.12.81.4f. Clement does not, of course, leave his thought there, for he reminds us that this 'invisible and ineffable God has been declared to us by the Only Begotten God'. 'It remains for us to apprehend the Unknown by divine grace and by the Word that comes from him', 82.3-4.

τε καὶ ἄνθρωπος).¹²⁸ This means that all the activity of the Word and Son on earth, in his human economy, has reference back to the Almighty (πᾶσα δὲ ἡ κυρίου ἐνέργεια ἐπὶ τὸν παντοκράτορα τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει), so that the Son is, so to speak, a certain activity of the Father (καὶ ἔστιν ὡς εἰπεῖν πατρικὴ τις ἐνέργεια ὁ υἱός).¹²⁹ The effect of this should be to give the *kerygma* of the saving action of God in history objective permanent validity in the eternal will of God, and thus ground in the mind and work of God himself the structured conceptuality of faith in space and time. But how is this *reference back* to the Father to be understood on the assumption of a radical disjunction between the realm of sensible existence and the world of pure intelligible being, and of God himself exalted beyond that? What if the two realms were forced so far apart that in spite of everything the testimony of the Scriptures and the theological statements of the Church became detached from any objective ground in the eternal being and truth of God, and even πίστις and γνῶσις finally fell apart? How could Clement then meet the charge that the ancient prophecy and the evangelical *kerygma* were μυθῶδες?¹³⁰

Undoubtedly it is at this very point that Clement's thought becomes highly problematical, for he took over the philosophical assumption of a χωρισμός between the two worlds, the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός, a distinction which, as is known, had long become fashionable in Alexandria through Philo and Valentinian Gnosticism,¹³¹ but which went back to Platonic and Pythagorean thought. Clement claims that this distinction is also known to 'Barbarian philosophy', the κόσμος νοητός being the archetypal realm (τὸ μὲν ἀρχέτυπον), and the κόσμος αἰσθητός being the image of what is called the model (τὸν δὲ εἰκόνα τοῦ καλουμένου παραδείγματος).¹³² Applied to the interpretation of the Old Testament it could mean, for example, as it had earlier meant for Philo, that in the Tabernacle the division made by the veil between the innermost part, the holy of holies, and the outer courts, could be regarded as a symbol of the division between the noetic and the sensible worlds. Thus a 'mystic interpretation' of the ritual of the high priest

¹²⁸ *Protr.* 1.7.1f; see also *Strom.* 7.2, 6.7 etc.

¹²⁹ *Strom.* 7.2, 7.7.

¹³⁰ See his discussion of Valentinian Gnosticism at this point, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 1.1f, 6.1f, 7f, 10.1f.

¹³¹ See the *Exc. ex Theod.*, *passim*, especially 27, 59, 81.

¹³² *Strom.* 5.14, 99.4.

applied to Christ would mean that 'when the Lord has come alone into the noetic world, he enters by penetrating through his sufferings into ineffable γνώσις, ascending above every name that is made known through speech'.¹³³ It was by 'putting off the robe of his flesh' that Christ entered into the invisible realm of the intelligible realities.¹³⁴ But Clement allows ideas of this kind also to influence his understanding of the historical Jesus whom he held to be impassible (ἀπαθής) and inaccessible to any movement of feeling in pleasure or pain.¹³⁵ Yet this does not mean, apparently, that Christ did not actually suffer in the body, but that he was characterised by a divine ἀπάθεια of spirit or mind in the midst of all his sufferings.¹³⁶

In congruence with this, Clement teaches that it is the part of the believer to detach himself steadily from absorption in the world of sense in order to attain the habit of mind (σχέσις) appropriate for the contemplation of noetic realities and for the acquisition of true knowledge (γνώσις) of God. This movement across the chasm that divides the two cosmic realms entails 'an unrepentant abstraction' (ἀμετανόητος χωρισμός)¹³⁷ from the body and its passions, which is spoken of as the sacrifice acceptable to God and as the true devotion (θεοσέβεια). It is compared to the Socratic practice of death (μελέτη θανάτου) or the Pythagorean withdrawal through disciplined silence from sensible things for the contemplation of God with the bare mind (ψιλῶ τῷ νῶ). The 'gnostic' soul (τὴν γνωστικὴν ψυχὴν, i.e. the knowing soul) must be consecrated to the light, stripped of its material layer, free from the frivolity of the body and its passions and the empty and false assumptions (αἱ κεναὶ καὶ ψευδεῖς ὑπολήψεις) that go with them, as well as divested of all carnal desires.¹³⁸ This is not meant to imply any disparagement of physical existence,¹³⁹ but it does involve for the 'gnostic' soul such an advance into a state of impassibility that he becomes like his Teacher, and through the knowledge he gives, is initiated into the beatific vision face to face.¹⁴⁰ In this way the 'gnostic' soul is devoted to an assimilation to the

¹³³ *Strom.* 5.6.34.7, 37.1ff, 39.1ff.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Strom.* 5.6.39.3f.

¹³⁵ *Strom.* 6.9.71.2.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Strom.* 6.8.70.2.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Strom.* 4.3.12.1.5; 7.12.71.3.

¹³⁸ *Strom.* 5.11.67.1ff.

¹³⁹ *Strom.* 4.26.162.1f; cf. *Strom.* 3 *passim*.

¹⁴⁰ *Strom.* 4.23.147.1f; 6.9.72.2; 12.102.1f; 7.3.13ff, 16; 10.57.1ff; 14.84.f.

divine described in Platonic terms (τὴν πρὸς τὸν θεῖον ἑξομοίωσιν).¹⁴¹ 'This is, as far as can be, a preserving of the mind in a state of correspondence with the same things, i.e. a habit of mind in its relation to mind (αὕτη γὰρ ἡ κατὰ δύναμιν ἑξομοίωσις πρὸς θεὸν τὸ φυλάττειν τὸν νοῦν ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ σχέσει· αὕτη δὲ νοῦ σχέσις ὡς νοῦ).'¹⁴²

Gnosis of this kind, in contrast to fragmentary philosophy, is the truly perfect science (ἡ τελεία ὄντως ἐπιστήμη) that stretches beyond the cosmos to deal with noetic objects and objects still more spiritual than those, 'which the eye has not seen nor the ear heard and which have not entered into the heart of men' until the Teacher revealed them, unveiling the holy of holies . . .¹⁴³ Such knowledge becomes a direct vision of existences on the part of the soul,¹⁴⁴ and ultimately involves an identity between the knowing soul and the object of his vision – that is, whenever the purification *gnosis* brings has left nothing spurious in the soul to obstruct its power. When, therefore, he who participates gnostically in the holy, has come to dwell in contemplation, communing in purity with the divine, he enters more closely into a state of impassible identity (ἐν ἔξει ταυτότητος ἀπαθοῦς), so as no longer to have science and possess knowledge, but to be science and knowledge (ἐπιστήμην δὲ εἶναι καὶ γνῶσιν).¹⁴⁵

Clement's theology is not easy to interpret consistently. On the one hand, it is deeply traditional, and he takes pains to apply to it rigorous scientific method (ἐπιστήμη) in order to let the truth disclose itself in its own light and nature, unobstructed and undistorted by preconceived opinion. On the other hand, however, he operates with philosophical and cosmological assumptions that have far-reaching epistemological implications (γνῶσις) and that determine from behind both his understanding of the saving economy in the heart of the *kerygma* and his interpretation of the Scriptures where that is set forth. These did not fit well together, and they have given rise to different interpretations of his thought, but the problem Clement's thought presents is much the same as that which faced the Church in the second and third centuries and

¹⁴¹ *Strom.* 4.23.148.1; cf. 2.22.131–136.

¹⁴² *Strom.* 4.22.139.4; cf. 6.12.104.2; 17.150.3.

¹⁴³ *Strom.* 6.8.68.1f; cf. *Quis div. salv.* 20–24.

¹⁴⁴ *Strom.* 6.8.69.3; 7.7.40ff.

¹⁴⁵ *Strom.* 4.6.39.4f; 23.149.8; 25.157.1; 6.9.78–79; cf. Osborn, *op.cit.*, pp. 45f, 92f.

which lay behind the great debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. Hence it will be important to discern the tensions introduced into his thought, especially in his understanding of the faith and in his interpretation of the Scriptures.

(1) 'Gnostic' abstraction affected Clement's understanding of the Gospel at a very basic point, in regard to *faith*. He rejected the distinction that heretical gnostics drew between πίστις and γνῶσις,¹⁴⁶ on the ground that faith wants nothing and is complete in itself, while advance in knowledge must be from faith to faith. When, therefore, he says that 'knowledge is more than faith' (πλέον δέ ἐστι τοῦ πιστεῦσαι τὸ γνῶναι)¹⁴⁷ or that 'trust is more than faith' (πλείον ἐστι τῆς πίστεως τὸ πεποιθέναι),¹⁴⁸ he probably means no more than is implied in the text 'If you will not believe, you will not understand', namely, that faith must go on to seek understanding. 'Faith is in itself a compendious knowledge of essentials', whereas *gnosis* is a sure and strong demonstration of what is received through faith and known only on the foundation of faith.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless Clement can say that *gnosis* is the perfection of faith that 'goes beyond catechetical instruction', and can distinguish 'common faith' (ἡ κοινὴ πίστις) from 'gnostic perfection' (γνωστικὴ τελειότης).¹⁵⁰

Elsewhere Clement speaks of two kinds of faith (πίστεως δ' οὐσης διττῆς), the faith of the ordinary believer and that of the scientific believer. The difficulty about this is that it tends to fall into line with the current distinction in the philosophical schools between mere opinion and exact knowledge, as is evident in the terms Clement uses, δοξαστικὴ πίστις and ἐπιστημονικὴ πίστις. It is in accordance with this that he draws a distinction between two kinds of knowledge (διττὴ ἢ γνῶσις καὶ ἢ πρόγνωσις), one commonly called knowledge which is apparent in all men and is not to be called knowledge in the proper sense for it comes naturally through the senses, and the other which is knowledge in the proper sense for it bears the imprint of reason and judgment and is a cognition of noetic things that arises from the bare activity of the soul (κατὰ ψιλὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνέργειαν).¹⁵¹ This has the advantage, as has been

¹⁴⁶ *Paed.* 1.6, 25–26, 29–31; *Strom.* 5.1.1ff.

¹⁴⁷ *Strom.* 6.14.109.2.

¹⁴⁸ *Strom.* 5.12.85.2; Cf. *Quis div. salv.* 38.3; *Strom.* 7.2.5.1.

¹⁴⁹ *Strom.* 7.10.55.57.

¹⁵⁰ *Strom.* 5.4.26.1; 6.18.165.1. But cf. *Eclogae propheticæ*, 28.3: ὡς γὰρ οὐκ ἐστι πιστεῦσαι ἄνευ κατηχήσεως, οὕτως οὐδὲ καταλαβέσθαι ἄνευ γνώσεως.

¹⁵¹ *Strom.* 2.10.48.1ff; 6.1.3.1ff; 8.3.5.2; cf. 5.1.7.4.

noted above, of calling in question, on the ground of faith as rational assent to the truth and knowledge out of the truth itself, all prior knowledge that does not arise in this way, but when it is associated with the χωρισμός between the sensible and the intelligible worlds it has the effect of relegating the faith of the ordinary believer to mere opinion, and of insisting that it must be subjected to scientific treatment through ἐπιστήμη before it can be accepted as knowledge in the proper sense.¹⁵² The tendency is to imply that faith is merely a this-worldly response to phenomena, whereas *gnosis* is the rational insight reaching out beyond this world of sense and time to what is timeless and eternally true. This is certainly the implication, but to be fair to Clement we must note that he has other statements which imply a profound inner connection between πίστις and γνῶσις which would reject any depreciation of faith.¹⁵³ Knowledge, he says, is 'faithful', and faith becomes 'gnostic' by a divine and reciprocal correspondence (πιστὴ τοίνυν ἢ γνῶσις, γνωστικὴ δὲ ἢ πίστις θεία τινὶ ἀκολουθία τε καὶ ἀντακολουθία γίνεται).¹⁵⁴

Clement's intention in this doctrine of *gnosis* was certainly a scientific one, the knowledge of realities themselves (γνῶσις δὲ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ ὄντος αὐτοῦ),¹⁵⁵ in accordance with their own natures, but in applying to it the principle that we can only 'know like by like' he held that we can know noetic realities only through laying aside the body (ἀποτίθεται τὸ σῶμα),¹⁵⁶ know impassible Being by becoming impassible ourselves, and know what is steadfast and immutable by becoming assimilated to it in our own natures.¹⁵⁷ In so far as this meant that we cannot know God who is love without being joined to him in love, or that we cannot see God without becoming like him, it was of course very right, but for Clement it meant rather more, that we cannot know God who is wholly and purely intelligible without the abstraction of the spirit from the body and its flight into intelligible being (εἰς τὴν νοητὴν οὐσίαν).¹⁵⁸ The emphasis is upon knowledge by the *mind alone* (τῷ νῷ ὄρᾶ τὰ νοητά) in contrast to knowledge gained when we are bound

¹⁵² *Strom.* 7.16.95.1ff.

¹⁵³ *Strom.* 7.10.55ff.

¹⁵⁴ *Strom.* 2.4.16.3; cf. 5.1.1.1ff. See again Völker, *op.cit.*, pp. 369ff.

¹⁵⁵ *Strom.* 2.17.76.3.

¹⁵⁶ *Exc. ex. Theod.* 27, 1–2.

¹⁵⁷ See especially *Strom.* 4.22.135.23, 152; 6.8.62–10, 83; 7.11.68–12, 72.

¹⁵⁸ *Strom.* 7.3.13; 7, 40, 44.

to the earthly body.¹⁵⁹ In this event the descent of the Saviour is interpreted as the coming of the divine Teacher to aid us when we have become too enfeebled to apprehend intelligible realities. He is the secret and sacred means of making known the great Providence (τὸ ἀπόρητον τῆς μεγάλης προνοίας ἄγιον γνώρισμα).¹⁶⁰ It is essential to Clement's thought that *gnosis* involves a progressive abstraction from the space-time structure of our creaturely being and therefore from the form of knowledge mediated within it, which puts a serious question mark to what we are initially given through the divine condescension and is apprehended by faith in time.

Clement certainly holds that the πρόνοια has come to us from God, set in motion by the divine pity for our weakness, and manifest in οἰκονομίαι to this end, but he is anxious that this should not be thought of as ministrative or in any menial way (ὕπηρετική as though it implied some sort of inferiority or subordination).¹⁶¹ It would appear, then, that he is unwilling to admit that the *servant form* of the divine economy involves the divine Being himself through the Incarnation in our structured life in space and time, although the economy could not have taken place apart from the body.¹⁶² Hence, as the obverse of this, Clement holds that knowledge of the divine involves a movement of abstraction from the somatic space-time structure of our initial knowledge. Beginning with an analysis of the underlying realities, it abstracts from the body its physical properties, it does away with the διάστασις of depth, then of breadth and of length. 'The point that remains is unity (μονάς), having as it were position, but if we take a way the position, then unity alone remains in our thought.' In this way, he claims, we are to abstract all that is corporeal and incorporeal and

cast ourselves upon the greatness of Christ and then move forward through holiness into the yawning immensity (εἰς τὸ ἀχανές), and if so, we may somehow approach a conception of the Almighty, knowing not what he is but what he is not. Form and motion, or standing, a throne or place, right hand or left hand, are not at all to be thought of as belonging to the Father of the universe, even if these things are written.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ *Strom.* 5.1.7f, 3.16.1 see also 1.6, 331, 2.10, 50.1f; 5.11.73.2; and *Exc. ex Theod.* 5.3.

¹⁶⁰ *Strom.* 5.1.7.8.

¹⁶¹ *Strom.* 7.7.42.7; but cf. *Exc. ex Theod.* 19.5.23.1f.

¹⁶² *Strom.* 3.17.103.3.

¹⁶³ *Strom.* 5.11.7.1ff; cf. 5.11.68.1f.

Clement like Philo refers to the experience recorded of Moses who, 'when persuaded that God could not be known by human wisdom, said "Manifest Thyself to me" (ἐμφάνισόν μοι σεαυτόν), and pressed to enter into the thick darkness (εἰς τὸν γνόφον) where God's voice was'. Clement's comment throws not a little light on his own views. He explains that Moses entered

into the inaccessible and invisible ideas about Being (εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας), for God is not in darkness or in place but exalted above space and time and the peculiar nature of contingent things. He never dwells in a part either as containing or as contained by it, either through limitation or division. 'For what house will you build me, says the Lord'. No, he has not even built one for himself, since he cannot be contained. And though heaven is called his throne, he is not even contained in this way, but he does rest delighted in his creation (ἐπαναπαύεται δὲ τερπόμενος τῇ δημιουργίᾳ).

It is by demonstrative illustrations (παραδείγματα) of this kind, Clement adds, 'that the hidden truth is pointed out (δέδεικται) and becomes manifest to us'.¹⁶⁴

There can be little doubt that the assumption of χωρισμός between the two cosmic worlds had the effect of refracting the reference in our knowing of God in space and time to the Being of God above all space and time, and therefore of refracting the reference of the economic activity in space and time to the eternal Will of God. In fact it introduces a connection of a different kind, the relation of image to archetype (εἰκὼν to ἀρχέτυπος) and of shadow to reality (σκιά to ἀλήθεια).¹⁶⁵ Pushed to its extreme point the χωρισμός between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός means that the signs, words, statements, images and conceptions arising within the world have only a this-worldly reference, i.e. as only πρὸς τὰ φαινόμενα σύμβολα,¹⁶⁶ but Clement does not push it as far as that. There is a place for symbols with a reference beyond this world and indeed for symbols with a double reference, to things in the sensible world and things in the noetic world, and he who has the gift of understanding can pass from one to the other.¹⁶⁷ There is an agreement

¹⁶⁴ *Strom.* 2.2.6.1ff.

¹⁶⁵ *Protr.* 4.49.2; 10.88.3; 12.120.4; *Strom* 1.1.14.1; 26.170.4; 2.8.38.5; 5.14.93.4; 6.7.58.3, 59.3; 9.79.1, and fragment, *GCS*, Berlin, 1970, 3, p. 218.3f; *Exc. ex Theod.* 14.1.18.2, etc.

¹⁶⁶ *Strom.* 5.6.32.2.

¹⁶⁷ *Strom.* 5.6.37-40; 6.11.86-87.

(συνθήκη) that runs from heaven to earth, and in man there is an implanted fellowship for heaven (πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν κοινωνία)¹⁶⁸ and indeed man himself is an image (εἰκὼν) made after the heavenly archetype (ἀρχέτυπος).¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless the refraction between the two worlds is very damaging, for it means that 'genuine knowledge' can be reached only by getting behind images and symbols or by transcending them altogether since they are detachable and expendable reflections or images of the real world which is purely intelligible. It does have some advantage, as we have seen, in making it clear that God is above the whole world, the noetic realm as well, and it can also express the fact through the Son who is the eternal Wisdom and Word of God all things that are made are imaged forth from the invisible God for he fashioned all contingent existence after himself (τετύπωκεν δὲ τὰ μεθ' ἑαυτὴν ἅπαντα γενόμενα),¹⁷⁰ but it implies that he came into closer relation with our world only by putting on the economy like a holy garment, and that in order to re-enter the noetic world he had to put it off. Similarly, adds Clement, he who believes in him puts on and off this consecrated garment, leaving the world of sense behind.¹⁷¹

Thus it appears that Clement's philosophical assumptions have the effect of making purely transient the time-element in the οἰκονομία for it tends to become only the passing form that the work of the Son takes as he puts on our manhood, runs his human course (τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα διατρέχων)¹⁷² and returns back to the Father. That is to say, the basic significance of the οἰκονομία changes, for instead of referring properly to a saving movement within history from one covenant to another as it is all gathered up and fulfilled in the incarnation and work of Christ, it is little more than the temporal reflection of the timeless pattern of the divine πρόνοια. Clement certainly insists that the human economy of the Saviour is not myth or parable,¹⁷³ but when he places it within the framework of the χωρισμός between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός, it becomes very like myth. Moreover this is linked closely with his account of the 'gnostic' whose way of life is a sort of

¹⁶⁸ *Strom.* 5.6.32.2; *Protr.* 2, 25.3.

¹⁶⁹ *Protr.* 12, 120.4.

¹⁷⁰ *Strom.* 5.6.38.6f.

¹⁷¹ *Strom.* 5.6, 39–40; see also *Exc. ex Theod.*, 27.1–6.

¹⁷² *Quis div. salv.* 8.36f.

¹⁷³ *Strom.* 1.11.52.1–2; 18.88.5–6; 6.15.27.1.

counterpart (ἀντίστροφος) to the divine πρόνοια or a return back of that πρόνοια on itself (ἀντεπιστροφή).¹⁷⁴ He uses gnostic mythical language to speak of the scattering of the seeds of light, but when he uses of the 'gnostic's' experience in this way language similar to that used of Christ (. . . ὡσπερ ἐπὶ ξενιτείαν ἐνταῦθα πεμπόμενον ὑπὸ μεγάλης οἰκονομίας καὶ ἀναλογίας τοῦ πατρὸς)¹⁷⁵ it is difficult not to think that Clement has lapsed into a process of mythologising.

(2) 'Gnostic' abstraction of this kind could not but affect Clément's treatment of the Scriptures and their interpretation. He does give the Scriptures a very definite and full place for in them God's voice is to be heard, and it is through them that we encounter the only authentic truth, that revealed by the Son, truth that carries in itself its own divine power and self-evidence.¹⁷⁶ When we did not know the truth, and did not even know how to go about investigating it, it was God who spoke and came to our aid *in writing* (ἐγγράφως).¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, the God of the universe is above all speech, all conception and all thought and can never be committed to writing (οὐκ ἄν ποτε γραφῇ παραδοθῆι) being ineffable by his own power.¹⁷⁸ The apparent contradiction between these statements results from the acceptance of the χωρισμός between the two realms of meaning, the sensible and the noetic. Thus corresponding to the two-fold faith and two-fold knowledge there is a two-fold meaning in the Scripture, the literal and the non-literal, one corresponding to the body and the realm of the sensible, the other corresponding to the soul and the realm of the intelligible. Although, as we shall see, Clement can also speak of a three-fold and a four-fold division, corresponding to traditional divisions in the arts and sciences,¹⁷⁹ nevertheless there is a primary division on one side of which he sets the obvious meaning of the letter which is open to all through common understanding,¹⁸⁰ and on the other side of which he sets a secret and hidden meaning which is accessible only to a few who practise 'gnostic' discipline, love and

¹⁷⁴ *Strom.* 7.7.42.2.

¹⁷⁵ *Quis div. salv.* 36.2; cf. also *Protr.* 11, *passim*; *Strom.* 7.2.6ff. *Exc. ex Theod.* 26–40, 53.

¹⁷⁶ *Strom.* 1.20.97–98.

¹⁷⁷ *Strom.* 5.1.5.4.

¹⁷⁸ *Strom.* 5.10.65.1–2.

¹⁷⁹ *Strom.* 1.28.176.1f, 179.3.

¹⁸⁰ *Strom.* 1.9.43–45; 28.176–179; 5.6.32–34; 10.60–66; 6.15.124–132; 7.1.1; 16.93–, 18, 111.

contemplation, together with science.¹⁸¹ In the nature of the case some form of 'symbolic interpretation' (τὸ τῆς συμβολικῆς ἐρμηνείας εἶδος),¹⁸² or 'mystical interpretation' (μυστικὴ ἐρμηνεία)¹⁸³ will be needed if the hidden meaning is to be brought to light.

Since 'the Scriptures hide the sense' (ἐπικρύπτονται τὸν νοῦν αἱ γραφαί) they are said to have a *parabolic* character (παραβολικός γὰρ ὁ χαρακτήρ ὑπάρχει τῶν γραφῶν) – a parable being defined as 'a metaphorical account taken from some thing that is not the proper subject but which answers to it through some similarity and which leads him who understands it to the true and proper thing'. Thus the Old Testament prophecy 'while declaring ideas that were beyond the multitude gave the signs signified a form (ἐσχημάτισε τὰ σημαινόμενα) in expressions capable of leading to other conceptions'.¹⁸⁴ 'They were veiled in parables as mysteries preserved for elect men who were admitted to knowledge of them on the ground of their faith. The Lord himself who though not of this world came among men as one of this world, for he was the Bearer of all excellence, and it was his aim to lead man the foster child of the world up to intelligible and proper realities through *gnosis* from world to world.'¹⁸⁵ 'The Scripture, through which his teaching is delivered to us, is clear to all when taken according to the bare reading (κατὰ τὴν ψιλὴν ἀνάγνωσιν) and this is faith occupying the position of the rudiments, and is thus figuratively spoken of as according to the letter (πρὸς γράμμα ἀλληγορεῖται). But the "gnostic" unfolding of the Scriptures with the advance of faith (προκοπούσης ἤδη τῆς πίστεως), is likened to reading according to joined letters (κατὰ τὰς συλλαβάς).'¹⁸⁶ Or, as Clement expresses it elsewhere, 'the "gnostic"¹⁸⁷ does not yield his ears but his soul to the objects that are pointed out by what is spoken (οὐ γὰρ τὰς ἀκοάς, ἀλλὰ τὴν ψυχὴν παρίστησι τοῖς ὑπὸ τῶν λεγομένων δηλουμένοις πράγμασι)'.¹⁸⁸ As an instance of this kind of understanding Clement refers to the occasion when Jesus told Peter that flesh and blood

¹⁸¹ Clement is not consistent in the way in which he classifies the 'literal' or 'historical' meaning.

¹⁸² *Strom.* 4.1.3.2.

¹⁸³ *Strom.* 5.6.37.1.

¹⁸⁴ *Strom.* 6.15.126.1, 3f; 127.4.

¹⁸⁵ *Strom.* 6.15.126.2f.

¹⁸⁶ *Strom.* 6.15.131.3.

¹⁸⁷ *Strom.* 6.15.132.3.

¹⁸⁸ *Strom.* 7.11.60.3: cf. also 5.1.2.1.

did not reveal the truth to him but his Father in heaven, and adds: 'showing that the "gnostic" recognised the Son of the Almighty, not by his flesh conceived in the womb, but by his Father's own power'.¹⁸⁹

In speaking of the Scriptures as having parabolic character it is not Clement's intention to neglect the obvious meaning, for that must first be expounded (τὸ φαινόμενον πρῶτον καὶ δι' ὃ λέλεκται τῆς παραβολῆς),¹⁹⁰ but what he asks for is an understanding of the teaching of Jesus that will not merely read the meaning off the surface, but will perceive the depth of his words (τοῦ βάθους τῶν λόγων),¹⁹¹ penetrate through to the underlying meaning and interpretation (cf. κατὰ τὴν ὑπόνοιαν καὶ τὸν σαφητισμόν),¹⁹² Accordingly, when in the *Quis dives salvetur?* Clement expounds Jesus' own words at length (Mark 10. 17–31) he prefaces his interpretation by saying that 'since the Saviour did not teach anything in a merely human manner (οὐδὲν ἀνθρωπίνως) but everything by a divine and mystical wisdom (θεῖα σοφία καὶ μυστικῆ) we must not attend to his words in a carnal way (μὴ σαρκικῶς ἀκροᾶσθαι τῶν λεγομένων) but search out and master their hidden meaning (ἐν τοῖς κεκρουμένων νοῦν) with an appropriate inquiry and understanding.' He remarks that in spite of their apparent simplicity the words of Jesus have a measureless range of intention behind them (διὰ τὴν υπερβάλλουσαν τῆς φρονήσεως ἐν αὐτοῖς ὑπερβολὴν) which calls forth from us more concentration than his obviously enigmatic utterances.¹⁹³

Compared to the prophetic utterances the teaching of Jesus sets forth the truth simply (ἀπλῶς).¹⁹⁴ The *parousia* means that the Light of the truth, the Word, breaks the mystic silence of the prophetic enigmas by becoming Gospel (. . . ἵνα τῆς ἀληθείας τὸ φῶς, ὁ λόγος, τῶν προφητικῶν αἰνιγματικῶν τὴν μυστικὴν σιωπὴν, εὐαγγέλιον γενόμενος).¹⁹⁵ 'He who from the beginning announced himself prophetically now summons us to salvation plainly (ἐναργῶς, i.e. clearly or evidently); the Word himself now speaks to you plainly' (καὶ αὐτὸς ἤδη σοὶ ἐναργῶς ὁ

¹⁸⁹ *Strom.* 6.15.132.4.

¹⁹⁰ *Quis div. salv.* 27.1.

¹⁹¹ *Quis div. salv.* 20.4.

¹⁹² *Quis div. salv.* 26.1; cf. *Exc. ex Theod.* 66: ὁ σωτὴρ τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐδίδασκεν τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τυπικῶς καὶ μυστικῶς, τὰ δὲ ὕστερα παραβολικῶς καὶ ἠνιγμένως, τὰ δὲ τρίτα σαφῶς καὶ γυμνῶς κατὰ μόνας.

¹⁹³ *Quis div. salv.* 5.2–4

¹⁹⁴ *Quis div. salv.* 5.4; cf. ἀθθεντικῶς καὶ αὐτολεξεῖ, *Strom.* 6.15.128.1.

¹⁹⁵ *Protr.* 1.10.1.

λόγος λαλεῖ).¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, when we see that what Jesus opened up to the inner circle of disciples needs a great deal of thought, it becomes evident that even the straightforward teaching that was not in question for the ordinary hearers veiled things in a wonderful and supercelestial depth of meaning (ἔσκεπασμένα δὲ θαυμαστῶ καὶ ὑπερουρανίῳ διανοίας βάθει). Hence in interpreting what he said we have to direct our understanding to the very Spirit of the Saviour and the ineffable meaning of his mind (τὸ τῆς γνώμης ἀπόρρητον).¹⁹⁷ The language that Clement uses to speak of this is drawn from the Pythagorean tradition in which a distinction was made between the hearers (ἀκουστικοί) and the disciples (μαθηματικοί),¹⁹⁸ and suggests that he is working here with their sharp distinction between the sensible and the noetic realms.¹⁹⁹ It was this as much as anything that gave rise to the view that even the plain statements of Jesus have not so much a direct as an oblique and enigmatic meaning, and therefore have to be subjected to allegorical interpretation. Thus in spite of the fact that Clement can say that the *events* of the incarnation of the Son of God and his birth of the virgin and his suffering are not to be taken in a parabolic sense, his way of interpreting the biblical *statements* bears within it a serious threat to his understanding of the Gospel, for the assumption of the χωρισμός between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός constantly tends to cut the bond between the οἰκονομία and the divine πρόνοια by cutting the connection between the literal and the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. The difficulty in Clement's views becomes very apparent when we find him speaking of biblical language not only as *figurative* and *parabolic* but as *enigmatic*. What does this mean?

In his scientific approach Clement thinks of biblical and theological language in accordance with the realities to which they intend to refer, and grants that those realities far transcend the words and statements themselves and are indeed hidden from those who do not yield to them the rational assent of faith. Thus religious language is not thought of as descriptive of God for God remains ineffable and is veiled in mystery, but as signifying God or as directing us by signs and symbols to the knowledge of God. Thus he distinguishes between words and things

¹⁹⁶ *Protr.* 1.7.3, 8.4.

¹⁹⁷ *Quis div. salu.* 5.4.

¹⁹⁸ *Strom.* 5.9, 59.1.

¹⁹⁹ *Quis div. salu.* 5, 18, 20, 26, 27.

(ὀνόματα and πράγματα), signs and things signified (σημεῖα and τὰ σημαίνόμενα), but also between words and signs (ὀνόματα and σύμβολα), and conceptions (νοήματα) and the subject-matter (τὰ ὑποκείμενα πράγματα, or simply τὰ ὑποκείμενα),²⁰⁰ or in a passage we have already cited, between the body of the Scriptures, the expressions and the words (τὸ σῶμα τῶν γραφῶν, τὰς λέξεις καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα) and the thoughts and things disclosed by the words (τὰς διανοίας καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων δηλούμενα).²⁰¹ He does not neglect statements (τὰ λεγόμενα) or the sequence of the truth (τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκολουθίαν,²⁰² and he insists that stray expressions must not be wrested from the body and texture (τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὸ ὕφος) of the Scripture without paying attention to what is signified by them (οὐ τὸ σημαίνόμενον ἀπ' αὐτῶν σκοποῦντες) – that is what the heretics do when they pervert the expression itself and change the things signified (τὰ σημαίνόμενα ὑπαλλάττοντες) through attending only to the words.²⁰³

Particularly important is Clement's stress upon the fact that we must know the *things* in order to have a proper understanding of the words signifying them, for words cannot be understood apart from what they signify.²⁰⁴ He cites Pythagoras to the effect that it is not only the man most skilled in words but the most experienced who leads the wise in relating words to things (τὸ θέμενον τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασι).

Therefore it is necessary for the Scriptures to be accurately investigated (δεῖ τοῖνυν τὰς γραφὰς ἀκριβῶς διερευνημένους) and since they profess to speak in parables for there to be traced out from the words the meanings (ἀπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων θηρᾶσθαι τὰς δόξας) which the Holy Spirit holds about the things and which he teaches by impressing his mind as it were upon the speech (εἰς τὰς λέξεις ὡς εἰπεῖν τὴν αὐτοῦ διάνοιαν ἐκτυπωσάμενον). This is necessary in order that the words spoken with many significations may be disclosed to us after being subjected to exact questioning, and that what is concealed under coverings may come to view and shine out (ἐκφαίνεται καὶ ἀναλάμψη) when someone gropes for it and considers it well. Black lead to those who rub it breaks out into white after being black, and is like white

²⁰⁰ *Paed.* 2.2, 24.2; *Strom.* 1.28.177.3; 2.7.32.1; 5.11.71.1f; 6.15.121.4; 8.6.21.1f; 8.23.1f.

²⁰¹ *Strom.* 6.15.132.2.

²⁰² *Strom.* 28.179.4; 7.15.91.7; 16.103.1; 8.4.16.2.

²⁰³ *Strom.* 7.16.96.1f.

²⁰⁴ *Strom.* 8.4.9ff; 6.17f. Hence it is the 'gnostic', Clement claims, who really knows how to use language, *Strom.* 6.15.116.3.

lead. Similarly with *gnosis*, for as it lets lustre and brightness fall upon the things (φέγγος καὶ λαμπρότητα καταχέουσα τῶν πραγμάτων) it is really divine wisdom, the uncorrupted light that enlightens the pure among men, like the pupil of the eye for vision and sure grasp of the truth (εἰς ὄψιν καὶ κατάληψιν τῆς ἀληθείας βεβαίαν).²⁰⁵

Clement piles up his verbs in this passage (διερευνᾶν, θηρᾶσθαι, ἐξετάζειν, ψηλαφᾶν, καταμανθάνειν) to emphasise the questioning or interrogating that is required if things signified are to come to view in their own light and truth. In this event words, statements and ideas must be tested for their truth or falsity in order to clarify their actual reference.²⁰⁶ That is why the knowledge of faith arising out of the Scriptures must be traced back to its source in the self-evidencing truth and the prime cause (τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον) in God himself, for unless that is brought to light the intended end of the reference is not reached. Naturally this necessitates a theological interpretation, for the references of various statements must be related coherently to one another, and this is where demonstration (ἀπόδειξις in both senses of the term) is a necessary tool for constructive and accurate understanding.²⁰⁷

So far, then, we must say that when Clement thinks of the meaning of the Scriptures in accordance with the relation between words and signs and the realities to which they refer, he thinks of that as a direct relation, even though the realities utterly transcend the statements made, and can be apprehended only by those who follow their 'endeiktic' acts. But actually Clement is not so concerned with the literal meaning or the direct reference of the Scriptures, for his real interest lies in the *indirect meaning* or in the *hidden sense* that is not gained through following the direct reference of biblical statements. Then the Scriptures are studied not so much for the references they promote or the truths they convey as for the *disposition* and *insight* they arouse or inject in the soul, i.e. for *gnosis*.

This other interest is apparent in Clement's view that the Scriptures 'kindle the living spark in the soul and adapt the eye for contemplation (πρὸς θεωρίαν), inserting something into it, like a farmer engaged in ingrafting, and exciting what is inherent in it'.²⁰⁸ A 'gnostic' insight is

²⁰⁵ *Eclogae propheticae*, 32.1–3.

²⁰⁶ *Strom.* 2.4.12.1; 12.50.1ff; 7.15.92ff; 8.1.1.3ff.

²⁰⁷ *Strom.* 2.4.12.3ff, 14.3ff; 2.6.25.2; 7.15.91.1ff; 16.93–105; 8.2.3–4.14.

²⁰⁸ *Strom.* 1.1.10.4; see also 6.17.150.1; *Protr.* 11.113.2, 114.1, 117.2.

imparted through a sort of inoculation (ἐνοφθαλμισμός) in the soul.²⁰⁹ Certainly instruction is needed for the eye is already clouded (τετραγμένος) and the mind so confused by opinions not in accordance with the nature of things that it is unable to discern the light of the truth accurately.²¹⁰ The Scriptures have to meet the two main failings of men, ignorance and weakness, and they offer a two-fold training (παιδεία) to cope with them: 'knowledge and evident demonstration from the witness of the Scriptures (ἡ γνώσις τε καὶ ἡ τῆς ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν ἐναργῆς ἀπόδειξις), and rational discipline from faith and fear (ἡ κατὰ λόγον ἄσκησις ἐκ πίστεως καὶ φόβου) and both of these develop into perfect love (εἰς τὴν τελείαν ἀγάπην)'. For the end of the 'gnostic' is partly scientific contemplation (ἡ θεωρία ἢ ἐπιστημονική) and partly action (πράξις).²¹¹

Both these forms of training are directed to the cultivation of a state in the soul through which it may eventually attain union or oneness with the object of knowledge in love. Hence Clement bends all the teaching of the Scriptures, all the worship of the Church, all the discipline of godliness, to the achievement of a moral purity of soul and a power of insight through which it will reach the final vision of God. This is a movement through *faith, knowledge and love*. *Faith* is an implicit trust in God, a hanging upon the Lord, but a good inhering in man (πίστις μὲν οὖν ἐνδιαθετὸν τί ἐστιν ἀγαθόν). *Knowledge* is an insight that affects man in his disposition, manner of life and speech (κατὰ τὸν τρόπον καὶ τὸν βίον καὶ τὸν λόγον), and is the principle of inner illumination by means of which the 'gnostic' can penetrate through to the hidden and higher reaches of understanding. It carries him through mystic stages (τὰς προκοπὰς τὰς μυστικὰς), translating him into a divine and holy state that is akin to the soul, and restores him to the crowning rest after teaching the pure in heart to attain to the supreme vision of God face to face with him in certain knowledge and direct apprehension (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον ἐπιστημονικῶς καὶ καταληπτικῶς τὸν θεὸν ἐποπτεύειν). Essential to this is the way of intellectual *love* in which there is established at once a relation of mutual friendship between that which knows and that which is known, and which reaches out to an ultimate union in concord, fellowship and even oneness with the object known that

²⁰⁹ *Strom.* 6.15.119.4.

²¹⁰ *Strom.* 7.16.99.1; 1.28.178.1.

²¹¹ *Strom.* 7.16.102.1.

surpasses all scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).²¹² It is through love that we reach at last to the fulness of God's presence, but faith passes away before the persuasive autopsy of direct vision (ὅταν αὐτοψία πεισθῶμεν ἰδόντες θεόν).²¹³

Although Clement can speak of Christ here as both 'the foundation and the superstructure',²¹⁴ his main concern is not with Christology but with the moral disposition of the soul of the 'gnostic': 'in the development of his response and advance in love until he does good not for regard or out of fear of punishment but for its own sake, and chooses knowledge not because he desires to be saved but for its own sake'.²¹⁵ Now Clement holds that this love (ἀγάπη) and even faith (πίστις) and knowledge (γνώσις) are not matters of formal instruction and are not gained like wisdom (σοφία) that is implanted by teaching²¹⁶ – they derive through communion with God and arise in the soul as it is kindled in that union with him.²¹⁷ This is correlative to the fact that God is not capable of being taught or expressed by man, but can be known only through his power.²¹⁸ They are not communicable from man to man, at least not directly, but may be gained through moral discipline of the soul and persistence in the way of love. The Scriptures play their part in starting it off through imparting to the soul in faith a 'knowledge of insight' that inheres in it and which when cultivated leads to full vision and unity with God.²¹⁹

Although 'this knowledge of insight' or *gnosis* is not learned through verbal instruction, it is gained within a continuity of worship and religious experience of God (θεοσέβεια) and 'is handed down by tradition according to the grace of God and entrusted as a deposit to those who show themselves worthy of the teaching'.²²⁰ This is certainly

²¹² *Strom.* 7.10.55.1 – 57.3; *Exc. ex Theod.* 27.3f.; and *Protr.* 9.88.2: σπεύσωμεν εἰς σωτηρίαν, ἐπὶ τὴν παλιγγενεσίαν. εἰς μίαν ἀγάπην συναχθῆναι οἱ πολλοὶ κατὰ τῆς μοναδικῆς οὐσίας ἔνωσιν σπεύσωμεν· ἀγαθοεργοῦμενοι ἀναλόγως ἐνότητα διώκωμεν, τὴν ἀγάπην ἐκζητοῦντες μονάδα.

²¹³ *Quis div. salv.* 38.3.

²¹⁴ *Strom.* 7.10.55.5; cf. 5.4.26.3f.

²¹⁵ *Strom.* 4.22.136.2f, 145.2f.; 6.11.98.3f.

²¹⁶ But cf. *Strom.* 6.7.61.1.

²¹⁷ *Strom.* 7.10.55f.

²¹⁸ *Strom.* 5.11.21.5.

²¹⁹ *Strom.* 4.22.140.1; 5.6.40.2; 6.12.102.1f; 17.150.1, 155.3; 7.2.5.1ff; 10.55–57. 'Knowledge of insight' is the rendering given to γνώσις by F. J. A. Hort and J. B. Mayor in their edition of Clement's Seventh Book of the *Stromateis*, London, 1902, p. 97.

²²⁰ *Strom.* 7.10.55.6.

linked with the apostolic tradition of the New Testament revelation, but Clement is concerned in *gnosis* not so much with the explicit or written tradition as with the inner enlightenment or insight that aids the communication of the truth and without which it cannot rightly be understood or received, far less passed on. *Gnosis* is that which has come down by succession to a few having been handed on unwritten from the Apostles (ἡ γνώσις δὲ αὐτῆ ἢ κατὰ διαδοχὰς εἰς ὀλίγους ἐκ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀγράφως παραδοθεῖσα κατελήλυθεν).²²¹ Clement recognises that the truth cannot be identified with the written statements of the Scriptures, even though they are given by inspiration from God,²²² for the truth is to be traced back to the ineffable God himself. To understand the written Scriptures, therefore, we need to understand the proper relation of what is written to the unwritten truth, and that is not itself something that can be handed on in written tradition.

The source of this *gnosis* is traced back to the Lord himself who is said to have imparted it to the Apostles when he expounded to them the prophetic Scriptures. It is the understanding and practice of this godly tradition according to the teaching of the Lord that has come down to us from the Apostles themselves (ἡ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου διδασκαλίαν διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων αὐτοῦ τῆς θεοσεβοῦς παραδόσεως σύνεσις τε καὶ συνάσκησις).²²³ 'It was spoken from the beginning', Clement claims, 'to those who understood. Now that the Saviour has taught the apostles, the unwritten rendering of the written has been delivered as tradition to us also, inscribed by the power of God on new hearts like new writing in a new book.'²²⁴

By unwritten tradition Clement is not referring to secret oral traditions of truth or teaching,²²⁵ but to a mode of enlightened insight (σαφήνεια) that develops along with a way of life and inheres in the souls of those who live 'gnostically'. It is an insight (γνώσις) that is open only to those whose faith has reached an advanced state, who have grown old in the Scriptures, and who preserve the apostolic and ecclesiastical way of treating doctrines aright.²²⁶ Although Clement speaks of this as 'the

²²¹ *Strom.* 6.7.61.3.

²²² See *Protr.* 9.87, 1f, 5.10, 64.5.

²²³ *Strom.* 6.15.124.4; 6.7.61.1ff; 8.68.2ff; 7.16.103.4f; 17.106.2, 108.2f; *Ecl. proph.* 27.1f.

²²⁴ *Strom.* 6.15.131.5, with reference to Isaiah 8.1.

²²⁵ But see *Strom.* 1.1.13.2

²²⁶ *Strom.* 4.15.131.3; 7.16.104.1ff.

canon of truth', or 'the rule of faith', 'the evangelical canon', 'the ecclesiastical canon', or even as 'the criterion of truth' derived from the truth itself,²²⁷ it is a hermeneutical principle that depends upon the spiritual condition of the soul which enables it both to receive and to hand on the Scriptures in a manner worthy of God and the Lord.²²⁸ This principle is a 'gift for interpreting prophecy',²²⁹ for 'discerning the hidden relation between signs and events', and for 'understanding the involutions of words and the solution of enigmas'.²³⁰ It operates 'by receiving and preserving the clear explanation of the Scriptures offered by the Lord (σαφηνισθεῖσαν τὴν τῶν γραφῶν ἐξήγησιν) according to the ecclesiastical canon, and the ecclesiastical canon is the concord and harmony of the law and the prophets in the covenant handed down in accordance with the *parousia* of the Lord'.²³¹ 'With the *parousia* of the Son the strings of the old economy are unloosed by the unveiling of the meaning of the symbols'.²³² In other words *gnosis*, the knowledge of insight, is here identified with an interpretation²³³ operating through a mystical insight into the nature of things, rising up to the theological vision (ἐπὶ τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος).²³⁴

Clement claims that this kind of 'symbolical interpretation' (τὸ τῆς συμβολικῆς ἐρμηνείας εἶδος) is 'very useful as a help to right theology and godliness' (πρὸς τὴν ὀρθὴν θεολογίαν καὶ πρὸς εὐσέβειαν),²³⁵ but actually it makes everything extremely problematic. Not only does it treat biblical language as *tropical*—a 'trope' being defined as a departure from the direct sense (παρὰ τὸν ὀρθόν), or a form of speech transferred from what is proper to what is not (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου ἐπὶ τὸ μὴ κύριον),²³⁶ but as *enigmatic*, for a turn (στροφή) is given to the verbal sign concealing the intended meaning behind it so well that a special insight into the torsions of words and solutions of enigmas (στροφᾶς λόγων καὶ λύσεις αἰνι-

²²⁷ *Strom.* 3.9.66.1; 4.3.15.4; 13.98.3; 5.1.1.4; 6.15.124.5, 125.2, 131.1; 7.17.41.3; 16.94.5, 105.5, etc.

²²⁸ *Strom.* 6.15.124.3.

²²⁹ See here the *Eclogae propheticae*.

²³⁰ *Strom.* 6.7.61.1f; 8.68.1ff; 11.92.3.

²³¹ *Strom.* 6.15.125.2f.

²³² *Strom.* 5.8.55.3.

²³³ *Strom.* 5.8.46.1; 6.15.125.2f; *Quis div. salu.* 5.2f.

²³⁴ *Strom.* 4.1.3.2.

²³⁵ *Strom.* 5.8.46.1.

²³⁶ *Strom.* 6.15.129.2, 3.

γμάτων) is required if the meaning is to be understood.²³⁷ 'The truth has been hidden in the Scriptures so that it may not be open to all indiscriminately, but may shine its light only on those who are initiated into *gnosis* and seek the truth through love.'²³⁸ Other reasons Clement gives for the hidden and enigmatic sense of Scriptural statements are to provoke inquiry, and not to give occasion for blasphemy or misunderstanding when things are said beyond what most people can take in.²³⁹ Nevertheless a refraction has been introduced into the relation between signs and things signified and between symbols and their realities which obstructs straightforward investigation or scientific interpretation. The meaning is so *indirectly* or *obliquely* related to the signs and symbols that it is only accessible to those who possess the 'gnostic' cipher. This means, of course, that if the great mass of people are to understand the Scriptures they need special teachers and interpreters who are familiar with the mysteries of 'gnostic' understanding and tropological exegesis.²⁴⁰ To the modern mind Clement appears to be working with non-rational connections,²⁴¹ but he has been deeply influenced by the Pythagorean philosophy of symbolism that claimed to penetrate into the underlying connections of the universe by a science of harmony and proportion, in which attempts were made to extend into other spheres of knowledge the kind of connection discovered between number and music.²⁴² But the message of the Scriptures is not one to which we can 'tune in' in this way.

Undoubtedly Clement had a considerable contribution to make to the question of understanding and interpreting the Scriptures, even though it is hard to bring his wide-ranging ideas into any consistent hermeneutics. It will serve our purpose, however, if we seek now to focus attention upon four points in his thought.

(i) The Holy Scripture has a *manifold meaning*. When he analyses this, Clement appears to hold that there is a four-fold sense. There is the bare reading of the Scriptures, according to the letter of the law, that is open

²³⁷ *Strom.* 6.11.92.3.

²³⁸ *Strom.* 6.15.129.4.

²³⁹ *Strom.* 6.15.126.1f, 127.4; see also 5.9.56–59; 10.60–66.

²⁴⁰ *Paed.* 3, 97.1; *Strom.* 5.9.56.1ff.

²⁴¹ Clement was aware of a similar reaction in his own day: οἶδα δὲ ἐγὼ ὅτι τῆς γνώσεως μυστήρια τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς χλεῦθν φέρει καὶ μάλιστα μὴ κεκατμμένα σοφιστικῆ τροπολογίᾳ . . . *Eclogae propheticae*, 35.1.

²⁴² Cf. Osborn, *op.cit.*, pp. 173f. Certainly musical analogies are never far from Clement's thought.

to all in faith, and then there is the deeper reading which he speaks of as a 'gnostic' unfolding of the Scriptures in which we penetrate through 'the concealing speech' to the hidden signification.²⁴³ This he divides into three senses which he tries to bring into some kind of correspondence with *ethics*, *physics* and *metaphysics* or *dialectics* (i.e. the heuristic science devoted to the uncovering of realities). Thus in a passage where he is clearly indebted to Philo, Clement speaks of the Mosaic philosophy as divided into four parts, the *historical*, the *legislative*, the *physical* and the *theological*. The first two he brings together under ethics, thus strangely taking the historical sense of the Scripture into the group of three transferred senses; under *physics* he puts the ceremonial aspect of the Scriptures (τὸ ἱερουργικόν), i.e. where it exhibits a sign (ὡς σημεῖον ἐμφαίνουσιν) such as a high-priestly garment in the signification of the economy of the flesh put on by the Son in his incarnation; under *dialectics* or rather under *true dialectics* (ἡ ἀληθῆς διαλεκτική), 'the science of divine and heavenly things', he brings theological or mystical vision (τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος, ἡ ἐποπτεία), i.e. vision of the mysteries and insight into prophecy. But under this third aspect of the Scripture Clement brings theological discrimination in which, like experienced money-changers, we are to reject some things while retaining what is good,

for this really is dialectic thought that lays open intelligible realities, pointing out the subject-matter of each purely and distinctly, or the power of distinguishing the kinds of objects, determining their natures and special properties, bringing forward each reality for disclosure in accordance with what it is. This is the only way to that wisdom which is a divine power for knowing (δύναμις θεία . . . γνωστική) realities in accordance with what they actually are by grasping them in their wholeness and doing it quite dispassionately.

But this does not happen, Clement adds, 'apart from the Saviour who through his divine Word takes away the darkening ignorance that arises out of our evil life and brings cataract to the eyes of the soul, and who bestows the best gifts enabling us to know God and man'. Then Clement anchors this theological knowledge in the revelation of the Father through the Son and in the mutual relations of the Father and the

²⁴³ *Srom.* 6.15.131.3f., 132.1ff; cf. 5.8.53.3; *Quis div. salv.* 5, 20, 26.

Son in knowledge and revelation. He concludes this account by remarking that the whole of Scripture is not all alike for our understanding, but those who hunt out the rational connection of the divine teaching (τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς θείας διδασκαλίας) must come to it with the utmost skill in dialectical method.²⁴⁴

This means that even in the heart of his employment of the four-fold or three-fold meaning of the Holy Scriptures Clement is concerned to make it serve genuine theological activity that is rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and seeks to subordinate what we can learn from human knowledge, especially by way of method, to that end. Nevertheless he has laid the basis for the kind of allegorical exegesis that regards the imagery of the Scriptures as only obliquely, and detachably, related to the ultimate realities beyond, and therefore that can 'take off', as it were, into a world of mystic and speculative interpretation that is not rigidly controlled by the text or an objectively grounded conceptuality, so much as controlled by a moral disposition of the soul and the principle of 'gnostic' insight cultivated in it.

(ii) The interpretation of the Scripture requires a *hermeneutical tradition*. Clement thinks of this as going back to the Lord himself who as the divine Teacher from beginning to end is the source of our knowledge (ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς τέλος ἡγούμενον τῆς γνώσεως).²⁴⁵ He is the source of the διδασκαλία and the σαφήνεια, teaching about divine things and enlightened insight into prophecy,²⁴⁶ and that has been handed down through the Apostles.²⁴⁷ This is continued in the Church.²⁴⁸ This can be taken, however, in an objective and in a subjective sense. The objective sense appears when Clement speaks of 'the ecclesiastical canon' (ὁ κανὼν ἐκκλησιαστικός) which may well refer to 'the rule of faith'

²⁴⁴ *Strom.* 1.28.176-179.

²⁴⁵ *Strom.* 7.16.95.3.

²⁴⁶ *Protr.* 9, 112.1; *Paed.* 2, 8.76.3; *Strom.* 1.1.12.3; 18.90.1; 20.99.4; 6.9.71.3; 15.124.3, 127.3; 7.X.57.3; 14.88.3; 15.90.5; 16.95.3; 6.7, and *Strom.* 1.9.45.1; 20.99.4f., 4.21.134.3; 6.7, 59.3.61.2; 8.68.3; 15.123.1, 124.4, 125.2f., 127.5, 131.5.

²⁴⁷ *Strom.* 1.1.11.3; 6.7.61.3; 8.68.1f.; 15.127.5; 131.2; 7.16.103.5; 17.106.4, 108.1, etc.

²⁴⁸ *Eclogae propheticæ*, 23.1: ὡσπερ διὰ τοῦ σώματος ὁ σωτὴρ ἐλάλει καὶ ἴατο, οὕτως καὶ πρότερον μὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν, νῦν δὲ διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν διδασκάλων· ἡ ἐκκλησία γὰρ ὑπηρετεῖ τῇ τοῦ κυρίου ἐνεργείᾳ, ἔνθεν καὶ τότε ἄνθρωπον ἀνέλαβεν, ἵνα δι' αὐτοῦ ὑπηρετήσῃ τῷ θελήματι τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ πάντοτε ἄνθρωπον ὁ φιλόανθρωπος ἐνδύεται θεὸς εἰς τὴν ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν, πρότερον μὲν τοὺς προφήτας, νῦν δὲ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. τὸ γὰρ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ ἐξυπηρετεῖν κατάλληλον πρὸς τὴν ὁμοίαν σωτηρίαν.

delivered in baptism,²⁴⁹ but which in Clement's mind, at any rate, is more concerned with a traditional mode of interpreting Scripture, e.g. in relation to the teaching of the two Testaments, than with a body of doctrine.²⁵⁰ It is of particular importance as a means of keeping biblical interpretation rooted in the apostolic teaching and of guarding believers against heretical notions. In this sense he also speaks of it as 'the canon of truth' (ὁ κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας).²⁵¹

On the other hand, Clement can speak of a tradition of *gnosis* (ἡ γνῶσις δὲ ἐκ παραδόσεως διαδομένη κατὰ χάριν θεοῦ),²⁵² and here the more subjective aspect of the hermeneutical tradition is apparent. It is a 'gnostic tradition' (ἡ γνωστικὴ παράδοσις).²⁵³ This has to do not so much with *gnosis* handed down through the Scriptures (ἐν γνώσει τῇ διὰ τῶν γραφῶν παραδομένη)²⁵⁴ although they stimulate it, as with that which cannot be written down, except upon the renewed heart, and yet which has devolved upon us (ἡ τῆς ἐγγράφου ἄγραφος ἤδη καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς διαδίδοται παράδοσις),²⁵⁵ i.e., one in which insight and enlightenment are imparted for the understanding of the Scriptures. The Scriptures cannot be understood all at once, or by individuals on their own, but only in a continuity of study and meditation in which we learn from one another. This is the point which Clement makes when he says that

only to those who often have recourse to the Scriptures and put them to the test in faith and life will they yield what is really philosophy and the true theology. Moreover they wish us to require an interpreter and a guide (ἐξηγητοῦ τινος καὶ καθηγητοῦ), for thus those who received the Scriptures from people who knew well and would study them more carefully, and those worthy of them would each profit from what was received and be less liable to be deceived.²⁵⁶

God himself is at work in this way through human tradition and through the Church.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁹ *Strom.* 7.15.90.2; cf. also *Paed.* 1.6.25ff; *Strom.* 1.6.35.2; 4.15.98.3.

²⁵⁰ *Strom.* 1.19.96.1; 6.15.125.3; 18.165.1f; 7.7.41.3; 15.90.2; 16.5.

²⁵¹ *Strom.* 6.15, 124.5, 125.2; 7.16, 94.5; cf. 3.9, 66.1.

²⁵² *Strom.* 7.10.55.6; cf. 1.12.56.2; 6.7.61–62.

²⁵³ *Strom.* 11.15.2 (cf. 1.1.11.3); 5.10.63.2, 64.5; 6.7.61.1f; 7.7.41.3.

²⁵⁴ *Strom.* 7.16.105.1.

²⁵⁵ *Strom.* 6.15.131.5; 5.10.62.1; *Eclog. proph.* 27.1f.

²⁵⁶ *Strom.* 5.9.56.3f.

²⁵⁷ *Eclogae propheticæ*, 16.1: ὡσπερ αἱ θεραπεῖαι καὶ προφητεῖαι καὶ τὰ σημεῖα, οὕτως καὶ ἡ γνωστικὴ διδασκαλία δι' ἀνθρώπων ἐνεργοῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιτελεῖται. ὁ γὰρ θεὸς δι' ἀνθρώπων τὴν δύναμιν ἐπιδείκνυται. See also 23.1–3.

Clement is claiming that the Scriptures are rightly received and handed on only in faith, for their content is to be apprehended and interpreted only in direct religious experience of the realities they bring to bear upon us, and therefore in accordance with their saving impact upon men from the beginning and the appropriate response they have provoked toward themselves. That is to say, the Scriptures are not understood apart from the continuity of the worship of God, the life of prayer and the way of love in the Church.²⁵⁸ All this is very right and sound provided that it is held along with some of Clement's scientific principles, such as: that we know things truly only through modes of the understanding adapted in accordance with their natures, that only through a disposing of our souls in love in which we are weaned from self-love can we conduct investigations without the distortion effected through self-conceit and our own preconceived opinions, and that there is something in all true questions which is previously known, the self-evident reality which is believed without additional demonstration from some other ground and which must be made the criterion (κριτήριον) of apparent discoveries as well as the starting-point (ὄρμητήριον) of their investigation.²⁵⁹ But if this hermeneutical tradition is isolated as something on its own then it becomes not a scientific principle but a dangerous form of presupposition.

(iii) Interpretation requires *insight* and *judgment*, and not a little training in their exercise through long and close familiarity with the subject-matter. If the interpreter lacks penetration and discernment nothing else can make up for it. In all his rational activity, even in the recognition or assent called forth from him by objective realities, man is flung back upon the powers of his own mind in which he controls his choices, discriminates between the genuine and the false, and forms his own judgments.²⁶⁰ This rational power (ὁ λογισμός, τὸ ἡγεμονικόν, τὸ κριτήριον)²⁶¹ must be brought into play in biblical interpretation as in all scientific work, but it must be used with an 'eye' to the particular field

²⁵⁸ *Strom.* 6.7.61.1f; 8.68.1ff, 69.1ff, 9.73.3 – 79.2; 7.7.35.1 – 49.8; 12.73.1ff, 76.1ff.

²⁵⁹ *Strom.* 8.3.8.6., Cf. 5.3.18.3: ἐνέχυρον γὰρ τῆς ἀληθείας τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ἀπαιτοῦσιν οἱ πολλοὶ οὐκ ἀρκοῦμενοι ψιλῇ τῇ ἐκ πίστεως σωτηρίᾳ.

²⁶⁰ Cf. *Quis div. salu.* 14.4: νοῦς ἀνθρώπου καὶ κριτήριον ἐλεῦθερον ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ καὶ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον.

²⁶¹ *Strom.* 2.2.7.1f; 11.50.1f, 51.6; 4.6.39.2; 6.16.134.2; 135.1, 136.1; 7.16.93.2, 94.6.

of knowledge under investigation and the nature of its subject-matter, in sense-perception (αἴσθησις μὲν αἰσθητῶν), in linguistics (λεγομένων δὲ ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων ὁ λόγος), or in pure intellection (νοητῶν δὲ νοῦς). It belongs to the special skill of the 'gnostic' who is so tuned into the natures of things that he does not make mistakes in these various fields, whether κατὰ λόγον, or κατὰ διάνοιαν or κατὰ αἴσθησιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν.²⁶² *Gnosis*, as we have seen, is the form of knowledge in which we pierce through to the truth of things by seeing them in their own essences and are able to grasp them accurately.²⁶³ A 'gnostic' interpretation of Scripture, therefore, will be one that penetrates through the words and statements to the intelligible realities beyond which are apprehended spiritually or by the mind alone in a superterrestrial or angelic mode of vision, that is, apart from all sensible 'seeing' or 'hearing'.²⁶⁴ But this requires training if keenness of sight and sharpness of judgment are to be attained.²⁶⁵

In the last analysis, therefore, everything depends upon immediate (προσεχῆς) contact with the essence of things and the habit of mind and insight of the soul attained through direct experience or vision, i.e. the γνῶσις that results from θεωρία, ἐποπτεία, κτλ.²⁶⁶ This is what Clement calls 'that perfect science',²⁶⁷ and when he attains it the gnostic knows things directly in themselves and all at once in such a way that he is independent of space and time (χρόνου καὶ τόπου μὴ προσδεόμενον).²⁶⁸ In this way the future is already present for him (ἐνεστώς ἤδη τὸ μέλλον). He has no need for conjecture for he has a reliable grasp of things past, present and future, 'having learned from the truth itself the most exact truth from the foundation of the world to the end'.²⁶⁹ This is the point

²⁶² *Strom.* 2.10.50.1–2; see also 6.17.155.3f.

²⁶³ See above, p. 132.

²⁶⁴ *Protr.* 68.4; *Strom.* 1.6.33.1; 2.10.50.1; 5.11.73.2; 7.10.57.2, 5; 7.7.37.2; 10.57.2, 5; 12.76.5; *Ecl. proph.* 57.1ff.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *Ecl. proph.* 28.3: ἀναγκαῖα γὰρ ἡ γνῶσις καὶ πρὸς ψυχῆς γυμνασίαν καὶ πρὸς σεμνότητα ἦθους, ἀξιεντροπτοτέρους ποιοῦσα τοὺς πιστοὺς καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀκριβεῖς θεατὰς, ὧς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι πιστεῦσαι ἄνευ κατηχήσεως, οὕτως οὐδὲ καταλαβέσθαι ἄνευ γνώσεως.

²⁶⁶ *Protr.* 6.69.1; *Paed.* 1.28.1, 54.1; 2.1.3; *Strom.* 2.10, 47.4; 4.22, 136.4; 5.6, 36.4; 10.66.2; 6.54.1; 12.98.3; 18, 162.4; 7.2; 3.13.1, 17.1f; 9.56.2–6; 10.57.1f; 13.83.3.

²⁶⁷ *Strom.* 6.8.68.1ff.

²⁶⁸ *Strom.* 6.9.73.4.

²⁶⁹ *Strom.* 6.9.77.1, 78.5.

in 'the gnostic tradition' in which the believer enters into the secrets of prophecy, for he can grasp how things were and how they shall be, and therefore unfold the prophetic utterances of the past from his insight into the final consummation or restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) of all things.²⁷⁰ This is, of course, an immense claim for the 'gnostic', that by direct experience of the ultimate divine realities, he becomes independent of space and time and can see things 'like the angels' all at once in a moment of time,²⁷¹ but what is perhaps more significant is that through this kind of immediacy and the internal powers of the soul that go with it 'the gnostic makes up for the absence of the apostles' (τὴν ἀποστολικὴν ἀπουσίαν ἀνταναπληροῦ).²⁷² He thus becomes his own apostle, self-sufficient without need of others (αὐτάρκης μὲν γενόμενος ἀνευδεῖς τε τῶν ἄλλων) through his own direct access to divine grace and knowledge. Moreover, he possesses in his soul the abiding power of the objects of his vision (ἔμμονον δὲ τὴν τῶν θεωρητῶν δύναμιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κεκτημένος), i.e. the clear-sighted penetration of knowledge (τὴν διορατικὴν τῆς ἐπιστήμης δριμύτητα).²⁷³ This can become such a habit of nature that it is incapable of being lost.²⁷⁴ Certainly a discerning judgment, together with an intuitive apprehension of the realities signified, must be an important factor in the interpretation of any text, but when this becomes an independent hermeneutical principle to which the 'gnostic' may appeal by 'turning in upon himself' or looking 'in the depth of his mind' (ἐν βάθει τοῦ νοῦ),²⁷⁵ then the Scriptures are entirely at the mercy of the interpreter's own subjectivity and individuality.

(iv) Interpretation does not take place apart from *presuppositions* and *assumptions*, but everything depends on whether these arise out of the nature of what is being investigated or whether they are imposed upon the subject-matter from some alien source. As we have seen, Clement insisted on the proper place of πρόληψις διανοίας or the primary and intuitive apprehension of a reality in its own self-evidence, whether in the case of first principles or some definite object into which we are inquiring, and he insisted too that only as we allow such a πρόληψις

²⁷⁰ *Strom.* 6.7.61.1-3; 8.68.1 - 70.4; 9.73.1 - 79.2; 7.9.56.2-6; 10.57.1-5.

²⁷¹ *Strom.* 6.8.69.3; 7.7.37.2.

²⁷² *Strom.* 7.12.77.4; 7.36.1 - 49.8.

²⁷³ *Strom.* 7.7.44.6.

²⁷⁴ *Strom.* 7.7.46.9.

²⁷⁵ *Strom.* 4.22.139.1ff; *Protr.* 6.68.4.

to guide and direct inquiry can we reach a proper and indubitable grasp or κατάληψις of it.²⁷⁶ But it is another thing altogether to bring philosophical assumptions to our interpretation and then to allow them, without critical testing, to guide the interpretation, for then they will inevitably predetermine its results. That is surely what Clement did when he allowed the notion of a χωρισμός between the κόσμος αίσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός an integral place in his thought, for it affected everything in his understanding, and gave his statements, even when couched in realist biblical language, a rather different signification. What it did was to change the relation between sign and thing signified, giving primacy to vision rather than audition, and substituting a symbolical relation for a conceptual reference. This had the effect of subjecting biblical statements about divine realities and events to the same sort of treatment that the philosophers and poets of Hellenism gave to their own religious language which they regarded as essentially symbolical and enigmatic.²⁷⁷ But it also had the effect of importing a radical dualism into the subject-matter itself as in a gnostic distinction between 'sensible' and 'noetic' baptism, or between the 'psychical' and the 'spiritual' Christ.²⁷⁸ In other words, the literal and historical meaning of biblical statements was made to be itself a symbolic reflection of a purely intelligible reality in a timeless world beyond. This was what converted the older *typology*, which was rooted and grounded in the temporal connections and patterns of divine acts in history, into *allegory* that yielded a meaning independent of space and time altogether.

Clement's attitude to the Scripture and its interpretation has been trenchantly summed up by R. P. C. Hanson:

Clement of Alexandria does not indeed show quite the same tendency to undermine historical narratives by allegory as Philo does, or as Origen does after him. He has, in fact, a stronger grasp upon the doctrine of the Incarnation than Origen. But in most other respects he has surrendered wholeheartedly to the Philonic tradition of exegesis. The temptation to use this tradition for much the same purposes as Philo used it, to introduce into the biblical text a philosophical system which is not there, was too great for him. He is the first Christian writer to use allegory for this purpose and he provided an example which Origen followed with deplorable eagerness. His

²⁷⁶ *Strom.* 2.4.16–17.

²⁷⁷ See the detailed discussion in *Strom.* 5.4–9.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Ecl. proph.* 5.1 – 8.2; *Exc. ex Theod.* 47.1f; 59.3f; 61.1f; 62.1f; 81.1f.

indifference, perhaps his deliberate indifference, to traditional Christian interpretation, meant that he forfeited the safeguards which it contained, weakened though they had been in the development of Christian exposition since New Testament times against a gradual estrangement from the realities of history in interpreting Scripture.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, London, 1959, p. 120. Cf. also E. Molland, *The Gospel in Alexandrian Theology*, Oslo, 1938, p. 83.

Chapter 7

ATHANASIUS: A STUDY IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF CLASSICAL THEOLOGY*

The account of Athanasius' theology usually advanced by patristic scholars is one that takes its departure mainly from the thought associated with the Catechetical School in Alexandria, and in particular from the teaching of Clement and Origen. That background must certainly be taken into account, for especially through the great Origen it made an immeasurable impact upon the Church. Even in thinking of that background, however, there is a difference that must be noted: Alexandrian Christianity never really expelled the Gnostics, and never offered the sharp critical front to the tradition of Basileides and Valentinus which we find in the teaching of Irenaeus. As far as I understand Athanasius, however, he stands squarely in the tradition of Irenaeus, and develops the biblical-theological understanding of the Gospel which we see reflected in his works, and in the works of others of the same school of thought, such as Melito of Sardis.

There are two other streams of thought upon which I would especially like to direct attention, for they have far more importance for the understanding of Athanasius' theology than is usually assumed.¹ I refer in the first place to the Episcopal tradition and its school in Alexandria, which must be placed alongside that of the Catechetical School as a factor of profound influence on Athanasius' mind; and indeed must be accorded the primacy in determining the shape of his theology. It was this Episcopal tradition going back through Alexander, Peter, Dionysius and Demetrius, allegedly to St Mark, which embodied the teaching of those Christian Jews who streamed into Alexandria before and after the fall of Jerusalem in the first century, and gave it such a distinctly Hebraic cast of mind, which, as Sellers has shown, was one of

* Reprinted from *Theology in Reconciliation*, London, 1973, pp. 215–266.

¹ See the important essay by A. T. Ehrhardt, 'Origen, Theologian in the Cataclysm of the Ancient World', in *Oikumene, Studia Paleochristiani in Onore del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, Catania, 1964, pp. 273–321.

the outstanding characteristics of Athanasius' theological outlook, in which there is very little if any trace of Hellenistic rationalism to be found.² That is not to say that Athanasius did not have a philosophical cast of mind, for he was profoundly aware of the epistemological issues at stake in communicating and articulating the Judaeo-Christian Religion within the world of Greek culture. What was said of St Alexander his patron and predecessor in the See of Alexandria, must certainly be said of Athanasius as well: φιλοσοφῶν ἐθεολόγει.³

In the second place, I want to refer to the scientific tradition in Alexandria, where, as is well known, Greek science had reached its highest peak of development and had advanced furthest in the direction of what we know as empirical science, as is clearly evidenced by the great discoveries of men like Heron and his successors, the so-called 'mechanists' who along with the 'dogmatics' (those who asked the scientific questions that yield positive answers), were singled out for attack by Sextus Empiricus. This scientific background Athanasius shared, of course, with Clement and Origen,⁴ but Athanasius' own writings reveal a remarkable understanding of the scientific approach and its heuristic method, ἡ μέθοδος τῆς εὐρέσεως, operating through εὐρετική ἐπιστήμη. The discussion of this goes back as far as Clement's *Stromateis* where, in the concluding book, he offered a careful analysis of what scientific questioning and scientific proof are about. There are two kinds of demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) he claimed: that which we use in geometry and kindred sciences in which we argue necessarily to certain conclusions from fixed premisses or axioms, and a different kind of demonstration in which through questioning we allow our minds to fall under the compelling evidence of the reality of things, where it is the basic assent (πίστις, συγκατάθεσις) of the mind to the evidence which is the decisive factor – that is to say, the sheer fidelity of mind (what we today call the 'scientific conscience' at least in certain contexts) to the nature of what we are investigating.⁵ It must also be noted that already in Alexandria

² R. V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*, SPCK, London, 1940, ch. 1.

³ Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.5.

⁴ Cf. Gregory Thaumaturgos, *The Panegyric on Origen*, 8. Incidentally, the extant fragments of Alexander's writings supply us with a remarkable clue for the interpretation of the theology of Athanasius.

⁵ See 'The Implications of OIKONOMIA for Knowledge and Speech of God in Early Christian Theology', in *OIKONOMIA, Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie* (ed. by F. Christ), Hamburg-Bergstedt, 1967, pp. 223ff.

there had been developing in the time of Athanasius a conscious philosophy of science, particularly evident in the extant fragments of Anatolius (i.e., ἐπιστημονική θεωρία as distinct from ἐπιστήμη θεωρητική), in which rigorous attention was given not only to the nature of scientific inquiry but to the proper development of scientific terms – what Gregory of Nazianzus was later to call τὸ καινοτομεῖν τὰ ὀνόματα.⁶ All these features are clearly seen in the writings of Athanasius: indeed it was he in the East and Hilary, his later contemporary in the West, who, more than any other Christian theologians known to me, gave the most serious attention to the nature of the change that language and technical terms must undergo when they are appropriately employed in the service of knowledge and speech about God.

When in this light we examine Athanasius' early writings, and not least the *Contra Gentes*, we find a profound change in philosophico-theological orientation from that which dominated the Catechetical School, and the Origenist tradition which was later to have such an effect on the Cappadocians. Athanasius entirely rejected the cosmological and epistemological dualism of Hellenism, Gnosticism and Origenism – nowhere in his writings, for example, do we come across him deploying the χωρισμός between the κόσμος αἰσθητός, and the κόσμος νοητός, which we find in Origen's *Commentary on St John's Gospel*. He set aside the philosophical notion of the *Logos* as an impersonal cosmological principle, and rejected along with that the Stoic notion of the λόγου σπερματικοί.⁷ Above all, perhaps, he rejected the Platonic doctrine of God as 'beyond knowledge and being' which had been combined in Alexandria with a transcendentalist Judaism in its notion of the 'namelessness' of God and with an intellectual mysticism such as we find in Neoplatonism.⁸

On the other hand, there is a clear and deep link with the epoch-making thought of Origen in his attack upon Greek, especially on Aristotelian and Stoic, notions of God. Greek philosophy had come to hold that we can know only what is limited, for what is unlimited is beyond rational grasp, and must be regarded as irrational. In this case knowledge of God could only be knowledge of a finite, limited and intra-

⁶ Cited from G. Florovsky, 'The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius', *Studia Patristica*, 6, Berlin, 1962, p. 38.

⁷ *Contra Gentes*, 40.

⁸ *Contra Gentes*, 2, 35, 40.

mundane deity. Origen had turned that way of thinking upside down, while accepting the fact that *we* can know only what is limited. He taught that God, the infinite and eternal God, has created all things out of nothing, creating space and time in and with the creation of the universe, and that it is he who by creating the universe and comprehending it gave it beginning and end, and imparted to it its own innate order, distributing, as he said, number to souls and logos to things,⁹ which made them accessible to rational knowledge and inquiry, while God himself remained transcendent over them all. However, because Origen still worked with the Philonic and Neoplatonic dichotomy between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός he was forced to speak of God as finally beyond being and knowing and so lapsed into the old Platonic doctrine of God.¹⁰ This concept of God as beyond being (ὑπερέκεινα οὐσίας, ὑπερούσιος), was to have a damaging effect in the development of Greek theology even when it was maintained in the modified form of οὐσία ὑπερούσιος which we find in the teaching of John of Damascus.

The task of Athanasius, then, while working within the Origenist reversal of the Aristotelian-Stoic relation of the human reason to God, was how to bring to faithful expression and articulation the Hebraic-Christian understanding of God. This he did by insisting that while God is beyond all *created* being and all human devising (ἐπίνοια), he nevertheless remains Being in his own transcendent way and in accordance with his own transcendent nature as Creator of all other being.¹¹ He is the One who really and truly is God (ὁ ὄντως ὢν θεός).¹² In speaking of the being or οὐσία of God, Athanasius used the term in its simplest sense as that which *is* and subsists by itself,¹³ but allowed that to be changed and transformed by the nature of God. Thus the οὐσία of God as Athanasius understands it is both *being and presence*, presence in being,¹⁴ and *being and activity*, activity in being,¹⁵ the transcendent

⁹ Origen, *De principiis*, GCS edn. by Koetschau, vol. 5, Leipzig, 1913, 360: 10f.

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 6.509B; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.38.

¹¹ *Contra Gentes*, 35.1, 40.2. The statement in *Contra Gentes* 2 must be understood in this light; cf. also *De Incarnatione*, 17; *Contra Arianos*, 1.20, 3.22; *De decretis*, 11; *In illud omnia*, 1.

¹² See *Contra Gentes*, 9, 30, 47.

¹³ *Contra Arianos*, 1.11, 2.10, 3.63; *De decretis*, 22; *De synodis*, 35; *Ad Afros*, 8; *Ad Serapionem*, 2.5.

¹⁴ *De Incarnatione*, 8; *De synodis*, 25.

¹⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 2.2, 38: ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια.

Being of God the Creator who is actively, creatively present in all that he has made, upholding it by the Word of his power and by his Spirit. God creates all things through the *Logos*, his own eternal Son, and continuously maintains them in their created being so that they do not lapse back into nothing. All created existence is brought into being by the grace and pleasure of God, by God's creative power and will, as entirely other than God, and yet continuously dependent upon the gift of his grace. That applies no less to the invisible realm of rational souls than to the visible realm of phenomena. And to all that he has made God assigns its proper order and function, thus conferring upon contingent existence an inherent intelligibility through his creative *Logos*, who is the one fountain and source of all the rationality that pervades the created cosmos. That is not to say that the rationality of creatures, things or souls, is an uncreated participation in the transcendent Rationality of God, or even a mimesis of that Rationality in some sort of Platonic μέθεξις for it is a participation only by God's grace;¹⁶ even in their contingent state in which they are naturally mutable and labile, i.e., corruptible and liable to dissolution, they are sustained in their creaturely structure or intelligibility by the continuous creative action of the divine *Logos* upon them from above and beyond all created existence.¹⁷ Thus Athanasius insisted that the creation must be regarded not only as having taken place through the *Logos* but in the *Logos* which nevertheless remains utterly transcendent over it all.¹⁸

In the light of that 'theological philosophising', then, I would like to single out certain elements in Athanasius' theology for special discussion. Some selection must be made, but I would like to direct fuller attention to his *doctrine of God*, his *doctrine of the Incarnate Son or Logos*, the *doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, and then we shall discuss at greater length his *theological language and method*.

1. The doctrine of God

As I have indicated already, Athanasius' problem was to establish the Hebraic and Christian doctrine of God within the culture, philosophy

¹⁶ For Athanasius' cautious use of the language of participation, see *Contra Gentes*, 46; *De Incarnatione*, 5f, etc.; *Contra Arianos*, 1.16; *De decretis*, 31.

¹⁷ *Contra Gentes*, 41f; *De Incarnatione*, 4; *Contra Arianos*, 1.36, 58.

¹⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 2.31.

and scientific outlook of the Graeco-Roman world, but it became evident to him that this could be done only on a foundation in which there was a profounder reconstruction of the basic principles of knowledge and the Hellenic view of God and the world. The fundamental problem had been set by Origen himself in his failure, as Georges Florovsky has expressed it, to distinguish between the ontological and cosmological dimensions, and therefore in the logical link which Origen maintained between the eternal generation of the Son and the creation of the world.¹⁹ Athanasius discerned, especially in debates with Arians, that such a link led, on the one hand, to a depreciation of the nature and status of the Son, and, on the other hand, precisely because of his eternal generation, to a doctrine of the eternity of the world. Lying in the background here is probably the document usually (but apparently falsely) attributed to Philo of Alexandria, *De aeternitate mundi*.²⁰ Athanasius had to destroy both errors, and he did so by cutting through the confusion between the generation of the Son or *Logos* and the creation of the universe, the former as belonging to the inner nature of God (φύσει) and the latter as having to do with God's activity (βουλήσει) 'outside of' himself (ἔξωθεν). This meant a doctrine of God as always God the Father of the Son, and of the Son as coeternal with the Father and intrinsic to the Being of God as God, apart altogether from the creation of the universe and therefore apart altogether from God as Creator. When Origen transposed the doctrine of God as Father from Plato's *Timaeus* on to Christian soil, it yielded a doctrine of God παντοκράτωρ in which God and πάντα, the universe, belonged necessarily and logically together: for God to be Creator or *Pantocrator* meant the eternal coexistence of the creation at least in the mind of God. With Athanasius, however, the sharp distinction between generation and creation meant that while generation takes place timelessly and eternally within the being or *ousia* of God, the creation takes place by a free act of God's will, in bringing into existence out of nothing something beyond and outside the being of God, yet wholly and contingently dependent upon the being of God.²¹ As Georges Florovsky has expressed it, in

¹⁹ Op.cit., p. 39.

²⁰ See Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Beginning*, Manchester, 1968, pp. 195ff; cf. also pp. 17ff.

²¹ *De Incarnatione*, 2, 3, 5, 17, 42; *Contra Arianos*, 2.1, 22, 24, 29, 35; 3.59ff. *De decretis*, 10, etc. Cf. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 1.8.

generation there is an identity of nature (φύσις) but in creation there is a disparity of natures (φύσεις).²² According to Athanasius, if that sharp distinction is not drawn, then there is finally no distinction between *theology* and *cosmology*. That is the kind of confusion found in traditional Aristotelian and Stoic thought, and it is not surprising that over against that background Basilides in Alexandria should have advanced the fatal and fateful principle (we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not) which was to have such damaging effects in the way in which many theologians in East and West alike were to misconceive and misuse the so-called 'apophatic' element in Christian theology.²³

In the theology of Athanasius himself, then, we find a sharp distinction between God and the creation, the Being of God and the being of created existents – that is to say, between the φύσις of the uncreated and unoriginate and the φύσις of the created and originate. It was on this ground that Athanasius corrected and developed the doctrines advanced by Origen, the creation of the world out of nothing and the inherent apprehensibility of contingent existence, by insisting that while the creation is utterly contingent upon the creative power and presence of God for its creaturely being and continuity, it must nevertheless, and for that very reason, be respected in its distinctively creaturely or contingent existence and creaturely or contingent rationality. This doctrine comes to sharp and simple formulation in the statement that there is no likeness between the eternal Being of God and the being of created reality: οὐδὲν ὅμοιον κατ' οὐσίαν ἔχει πρὸς τὰ πεποιηκότα.²⁴ On the other hand, this did not imply for Athanasius a lapse back into the old cosmological dualism between God and the world, for God is held to be unceasingly and creatively present in the universe, maintaining it in existence by grace, granting it its created order and function, and thus continuously interacting with what he has made. On this ground the Western distinction between the supernatural and the natural, with the need for some intervening realm of causal grace, does not arise: nor does the later Western distinction between supernatural and natural theology arise, for the cosmological and epistemological dualisms that gave rise to those divisions had been cut completely

²² Op.cit., p. 52.

²³ For Athanasius' cautious and limited use of this, see *Ad monachos*, 1.2.

²⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 1.20; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.9, 24; 2.5; cf. also *Contra Gentes*, 9; *Contra Arianos*, 2.21, 41; *De decretis*, 11.

away. Nevertheless, because *this* is the orderly world of space and time which God has created and in which he has placed us, it is through his on-going and out-going interaction with the created universe that God reveals himself to us by his Word and Spirit, as it was in this world of space and time that the Word became flesh in the Incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ. All this means, of course, as Athanasius showed very early in his life,²⁵ that we do not know God in disjunction from his relation to the world, as if this world were not his creation or the sphere of his activity towards us. Nor is this to say that knowledge of God is reached by way of logical inference from the world, but rather that we can know God only in and through the world as he who is its Creator and who transcends it altogether – yet in such a way that *our* knowledge of God is correlated with the world as his creation and the medium of his self-revelation and self-communication to mankind. Everything would go wrong if the creaturely reality of this world were confused with or mistaken for the reality of God, or if the contingent rationality of this world were denied its reality and overwhelmed by the transcendent rationality of God.

There are several implications in all this for Athanasius' doctrine of God which we must note. It implies a breathtaking understanding of God in his own *internal relations*. Since the *Logos* is internal to the eternal Being of God, essentially and eternally *enousios* in God, truly to know God in and through the *Logos* is to know him in the inner reality of his own Being.²⁶ That is the epistemological centrality of the Incarnation, for it has opened up for us knowledge of God *in himself*; but to know God in himself, in the interior relations of his own Being like that, makes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity absolutely basic and essential in the Christian understanding of God. This will also become apparent when we come to Athanasius' doctrine of the Spirit. Epistemologically, therefore, the Incarnation of the Son or *Logos* of God meant two things for Athanasius:

(i) It meant that physical and creaturely beings, without losing their contingent and material nature, may actually know God, who according to his own divine nature is immaterial (ἀσώματος), through Jesus Christ. 'Through the Inhomination of the Word the universal Providence has

²⁵ *Contra Gentes*, 35ff.

²⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 1.9ff, 14ff, 24f; 2.1f, 22, 31ff; 3.1ff, 15ff, 24f; 4.1, 5, 9; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.14, 19ff, 25; 3.5f.

been made known, and the Leader and Maker of all things, the Word of God himself. For he was made man (ἐνανθρώπησεν) that we might be made divine (θεοποιηθῶμεν) and he manifested himself through a body (διὰ σώματος), that we might receive a conception (ἐννοιαν) of the invisible Father.²⁷

(ii) It meant further that our knowing of the Father through the Son, who is correlated with the Father in a relation of mutual knowing and being, is objectively grounded within the eternal Being of God himself, in his knowing of himself: hence the great importance for Athanasius of the Gospel passages in Matthew 11.27 and Luke 10.22.²⁸ It is this access, granted to us through and in Christ, to knowledge of God *in his own Being*, which comes to articulation in the expressions 'gods' (θεοί) and 'deification' (θεοποίησις) made with reference back to the teaching of the Lord in John 10.34f.²⁹

There is also implied the breathtaking fact, noted by John of Damascus with reference to the teaching of St Athanasius, that in the creation of the world and above all in the Incarnation of the Son something *new* has taken place in God.³⁰ This is held together with an immense sense of the unchangeableness of God, his invariant reliability, his eternal stability, as the transcendent ground of all being and salvation and revelation, for God's eternal *ousia* remains the same and quite unalterable; but it does mean that while before his sojourn in the flesh God was not man, but only God in God, now after the Incarnation he has become man and as such even shares with us our suffering.³¹ Here we may speak only with reverence and awe, in the attitude, to cite Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion*, of the Cherubim who cover their faces before the ineffable majesty of God.³² The creation was not eternal, and the Incarnation is not some timeless event in God to be interpreted in mythological ways, but something that happened in the fulness of time

²⁷ *De Incarnatione*, 54; cf. 18; *Contra Arianos*, 1.6, etc.

²⁸ *In illud, omnia*, and *Contra Arianos*, 1.12, 39f; 2.22f; 3.26ff. etc.

²⁹ *Contra Arianos*, 1.38; *Ad Afros*, 7; *De synodis*, 51.

³⁰ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 4.6, with reference to *Contra Apollinarium*, 2.1; cf. also the same theme in 1.1ff and 1.15ff regarding the newness and unchangeableness of God in Christ. This is a theme common to the *Ad Serapionem* and the *Ad Apollinarium* in a rather distinctive way, although the emphasis has naturally shifted from the Son to the Spirit – cf. especially the 4th Letter to Serapion.

³¹ *Ad Epictetum*, 6; *Contra Arianos*, 2.8ff; 4.15f.

³² *Ad Serapionem*, 1.17; cf. *In illud, omnia*, 6.

which had not happened before, even for God. It is not something strange to the Being of God, but God is so wonderfully and transcendently *free* in his own eternal Being that he can do something new without changing in his *ousia* and can go outside of himself in the Incarnation without ceasing to be what he is eternally in himself in his own ineffable Being, for his *energeia* inheres in his eternal *ousia*. That is an entirely different conception of God from that which developed in later theology when the *energeia* of God was distinguished from his *ousia*,³³ and when the immutability of God was assimilated to some Aristotelian notion of the Unmoved Mover, and the Being of God was interpreted in terms of Neoplatonised Aristotelian substance, as with Porphyry and Boethius and the mediaeval traditions which took their cue from them.

2. The doctrine of the Son

Athanasius' full doctrine of the Son is developed over against the radical dualism between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός, and between God and the creation, that lay at the heart of Arian theology.³⁴ The great line of separation (χωρισμός) or demarcation which the Arians drew between God and the creation ran between the eternal unknowable Being of God the Father and the *Logos* or the Son. And so they held in their doctrine of creation, that God first created the *Logos* or the Son as the principle by which he created the rest of the universe; in other words, they interpreted Christ in terms of a cosmological principle which Athanasius found he had to reject entirely.³⁵ And they held in their doctrine of revelation that since the Son or *Logos* belongs finally to this side of the separation between God and the universe, and does not inhere eternally in the Being of God, he constitutes in the last analysis a detached and therefore only a changeable image of God. This was a position which,

³³ This cannot be traced back to the statement of Athanasius in the *De Incarnatione*, 17 where he speaks of God as outside the world κατ' οὐσίαν, but in all things by his own powers (ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεσι), where something rather different is in view – cf. *De decretis*, 11.

³⁴ While in his early writings Athanasius could speak of man as made to contemplate divine and intelligible realities (*ta noeta*) in contrast to sensible realities (*ta aistheta*), he nowhere operates with epistemological dualism (*chorismos*), far less a cosmological dualism, of the Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition. Cf. *Contra Gentes*, 2 and 8.

³⁵ Cf. *Contra Gentes*, 40f; *De decretis*, 11; *Expositio fidei*, 1.

as Athanasius discerned, implied the ultimate unknowability of God and which he did not hesitate to denounce as a form of atheism. It was, in fact, he claimed a kind of madness (*μανία*), for the radical detachment or disjunction between God and this world, and the ultimate separation between the Father and his own *Logos*, not only meant that the Arians were thrown back upon themselves, obsessed with their own self-understanding and humanly thought-up ideas, but implied a doctrine of God as ultimately irrational or deprived of his own *Logos* (*ἄλογος*).³⁶ Athanasius on his part, however, thought into each other so consistently the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son as the divine *Logos* becoming man in this world and the doctrine of God in his dynamic relation to the world which he had made and continues to uphold through the *Logos*, that he advanced a doctrine of the saving *parousia* of God in the flesh which entailed the inseparable unity of the act and being of God in Jesus Christ. Central to this position was the way in which the conceptions of the 'Son' and the '*Logos*' were completely wedded in his thought, making clear both the hypostatic existence of the *Logos* and the inseparability of the Son from the Father, in being as in act.³⁷ Moreover, Athanasius' consistent rejection of cosmological and epistemological dualism in his doctrine of Christ as well as in his doctrine of God enabled him to develop the Irenaean (and even Origenist) understanding of salvation as the redemption of the *whole man*,³⁸ which rather makes irrelevant the disorienting distinction between a *Logos-sarx* and a *Logos-anthropos* approach which some scholars have employed as a framework for the interpretation of Patristic Christology.³⁹ The stress upon body and flesh (*σῶμα* and *σάρξ*) in the Incarnation was intended to bring home, against all dualism and docetism,⁴⁰ full correlation in the economy of the Incarnate Word or Son of divine reality with the space and time existence in our creaturely world, parallel to the

³⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 1.1, 4ff, 14, 35ff, 51, 62; 2.1ff, 7; 3.15, 51ff, 65; *De decretis*, 1.15, 20, 26; *De synodis*, 15f.

³⁷ See especially *De synodis*, 41.

³⁸ *Ad Epictetum*, 7; see Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 5.9.1; and Origen, *Dialektos, Sources Chrétiennes*, 67, p. 70.

³⁹ See especially J. Liébaert, *La doctrine christologique de saint Cyrille avant la querelle nestorienne*, Lille, 1951; and Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition, From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (AD 451)*, tr. by J. S. Bowden, London, 1965.

⁴⁰ See the statements by Athanasius as to the biblical equivalents of 'flesh' and 'man', indicating that 'flesh' includes mental qualities and activities as much as 'man'. *Contra Arianos*, 2.53f; 3.20, 30, 34f, 53; *Ad Epictetum*, 8; *Ad Serapionem*, 2.7; cf. also *De Incarnatione*, 15.

correlation of God with the world in the whole economy of his creation and providence. This is a doctrine of Christ that really transcends the monophysite/diophysite contrapositions which came upon the scene later on, although their roots are found in the monist/dualist modes of thought which Athanasius combatted throughout his own times.

There are several aspects of Athanasius' understanding of Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, which I would like to emphasise.

(i) The *Logos* is *internal* to the Being of God, for God was never without what is properly his own: he is *enousios Logos*, and as such belongs in his own Being to the divine side of the demarcation between the Creator and the creation, himself uncreated and unoriginated, coessential and coeternal with the Creator. In his generation as the Son of the Father he is *of the Being* of God the Father, God of God, sharing with the Father an identity of nature through eternal generation in which he is eternally Son of the eternal Father. He is proper to the Father as the Father is proper to the Son. While the Father is the Father and not the Son and the Son is the Son and not the Father, 'he and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead'.⁴¹ It is precisely as such that the eternal Son of the Father became man, taking upon himself our human being and nature and making them his own. Put the other way round, it is of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, that we have to confess that he is of the same Being, and of the same nature, as God the Father – and so Athanasius affirmed the Nicene *homoousios* expressing identity and equality of Being and of nature between the Son and the Father.⁴² 'And so, since they are one, and the Godhead itself is one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except his being said to be the Father.'⁴³ It was thus understandable that in consonance with the teaching of Athanasius one could say of Christ the Son, what he said of the Son and of the Father, that he is *μία φύσις*.⁴⁴ What that means we shall consider shortly, but it does not detract from the conviction that the incarnated Son shares with us our created being and nature, on the one hand, and shares with the Father his eternal Being and Nature, on the other hand.

⁴¹ *Contra Arianos*, 3.4.

⁴² *Contra Arianos*, 1.22; *De decretis*, 23.

⁴³ *Contra Arianos*, 3.4 (cf. also *De synodis*, 49): . . . τὰ αὐτὰ λέγεται περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ, ὅσα λέγεται καὶ περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς, χωρὶς τοῦ λέγεσθαι πατὴρ.

⁴⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 3.4.

(ii) In the Incarnation God the Son did not simply come into man, but came *as man*. This is the decisive point for Athanasius' Christology, where he clearly and explicitly identifies the 'become flesh' with 'become man',⁴⁵ meaning by 'man' (as indeed by 'flesh' and 'body'), not just a physical entity, but man in his wholeness and integrity as human being. 'He did not take a body without a soul, nor without sense and intelligence', he says.⁴⁶ At the same time, while in his early writings he is found speaking of 'the *Logos* in man', as a way of describing the Incarnation, he took increasing care not to use expressions suggesting a dualism which might split the one reality of the Son, or divide between the Being of the Son and the Being of the Father, laying it down as a principle that 'He became man and did not just come into man' (Ἀνθρώπος δὲ γέγονε, καὶ οὐκ εἰς ἄνθρωπον ἦλθε).⁴⁷ That is to say the Incarnation (ἐνανθρώπησις) is to be understood as a real becoming – σὰρξ ἐγένετο, ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο, so that Athanasius could say that Jesus Christ *is* God the Son, *is* the eternal *Logos* in the Being of God.⁴⁸

The significance of this can be brought out by recalling the problem of Western Mediaeval theology as formulated in the proposition of Perer Lombard: *Deus non factus est aliquid*. Behind that there would appear to lie a different doctrine of God, a God who is not free to 'go outside of himself', and to become 'what he is not', without ceasing to be what he eternally is. That is to say, in contrast, Athanasius' doctrine of the Incarnation decidedly affected his doctrine of God, and his doctrine of God decidedly affected his doctrine of the Incarnation. We can even express this by saying that the doctrine of the coming and presence of God in the flesh, his *parousia*, affected his understanding of the *ousia* of God on the one hand, and his understanding of the *ousia* in creation on the other hand. It was not for nothing that the Nicene Creed, which Athanasius championed with such persistence all through his life, immediately after it affirms the *homoousios* of the Incarnate Son, adds 'by whom the worlds were made'.

(iii) This understanding of Jesus Christ not as God *in man*, but as God *as man*, meant that Athanasius had to understand the humanity of Jesus

⁴⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 3.30 (cf. 34–5); *Ad Epictetum*, 8; *Ad Serapionem*, 2.7–9.

⁴⁶ *Ad Antiochenos*, 7; cf. *Ad Epictetum*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 3.30, cf. 38, 47; *Ad Epictetum*, 2.

⁴⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 3.30; *Ad Epictetum*, 7; *Ad Antiochenos*, 7; *Ad Serapionem*, 2.7ff.

Christ in a profoundly *vicarious manner*. In the great debates of the fourth century the Arians searched through the New Testament for every possible passage in which the creatureliness, the human mortality and weakness, the obedience and servility of Jesus, were stressed over against the Father. Instead of rejecting these passages or trying to escape their full implication, Athanasius pounced upon them all, and even stressed their significance, to show that it was precisely such humanity which the eternal Son assumed and appropriated from us, even going so far as to recall that he took our flesh of sin, our body of corruption subjected to slavery and divine condemnation, thus taking upon himself the curse of our sin and guilt together with the darkness and ignorance into which we have fallen, *all for our sake*.⁴⁹ And Athanasius piled up the various Greek prepositions, to make clear the fulness and the depth of the *vicarious humanity* of Jesus Christ, and so to insist that in the Incarnation the Son of God *ministered not only of the things of God to man but ministered of the things of man to God*.⁵⁰ That is to say, he understood the humanity of Jesus Christ as the humanity of him who is not only Apostle from God but High Priest taken from among men, and the saving work of Christ in terms of his *human* as well as his divine agency – it is the human priesthood and the saving mediatorship of Jesus Christ in and through his human kinship with us that Athanasius found so significant. That is certainly one of the major emphases of Athanasius in the *Contra Arianos*, as well as in other writings where he expounds the doctrine of the saving humanity of Christ in terms of his obedient life and self-sanctification on our behalf, and yet it is so often completely omitted by patristic scholars, as in the work of A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. But to omit such a major ingredient in Athanasius' doctrine of Christ is seriously to distort it and to import into it false problems for which false solutions are then sought – that is nowhere more apparent than in the discussion of recent years as to the relation of Athanasian to Apollinarian thought!⁵¹ In other words, those who claim that the teaching of Athanasius presupposes that the manhood of Christ was incomplete, lacking a rational soul,

⁴⁹ *Contra Arianos*, 3.39–40; 4.6–7.

⁵⁰ See especially *Contra Arianos*, 1.41ff, 50ff; 2.7ff, 12ff, 50f, 65ff, 74ff; 3.30ff, 38f; 4.6ff.

⁵¹ For what Athanasius understood by the rational human soul, see *Contra Gentes*, 13, 18, 30–35, 38, 43–7; *De Incarnatione*, 9, 11–12, 14, 17, 57; *Contra Arianos*, 2.35; *De decretis*, 9, 12f; *Ad Marcellinum*, 27; *Festal Letter*, 6, all of which is consistent with the teaching of the *Contra Apollinarium*.

or that the saving work of Christ was deficient in respect of his human agency, are ignoring the bulk of the evidence, especially in the *Contra Arianos*, where the teaching of Athanasius about the humanity of Christ is expounded at length in terms of his life and death as obedient servant and faithful priest acting in our name before the Father, in our place and on our behalf, in such a way that our human being is renewed and sanctified in Jesus Christ himself.

(iv) According to Athanasius, therefore, redemption is understood as taking place within the mediatorial life and person of the Incarnate Son. Just as he thought of the *Logos* as internal to the Being of God, so he thinks of our salvation as taking place in the *inner relations of the Mediator* (μεσίτης), and not simply in Christ's external relations with sinners. It was precisely because in his inhomination (ἐνανθρώπησις) the Son of God appropriated from us our body and soul and made them his own, that he could claim that 'the salvation of soul and body were worked out in the *Logos* himself'.⁵² Hence Athanasius could say: 'The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the *whole man* was brought about. . . . Truly our salvation is not merely apparent, nor does it extend to the body only, but the whole body and soul alike, has truly obtained salvation in the Word himself.'⁵³ This included the redeeming and sanctifying of man in his human affections and in his mind in Jesus Christ for they have been renewed in him *for our sakes*.⁵⁴ Here the patristic principle early enunciated in different forms by Irenaeus and Origen, that it is what the Incarnate Son has taken up into himself from us that is saved, plays a fundamental and essential role in Athanasius' soteriology, although after the promulgation of Apollinarian ideas it had to be stressed more explicitly, as indeed it was especially by Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria. This is a point where the teaching of the Eastern Church diverges somewhat from that of the Western Church – and incidentally helps to explain why Western scholars are so often found interpreting the theology of the Greek fathers within an alien conceptual scheme (e.g., a dualist body/soul anthropology). In the Western Church, owing partly to the reintroduction of dualism into theology through St Augustine, and partly to the anthropocentric and forensic cast of mind deriving from

⁵² *Ad Antiochenos*, 7; *Contra Arianos*, 2.56; 3.22.

⁵³ *Ad Epictetum*, 7.

⁵⁴ *De Incarnatione*, 15; *Contra Arianos*, 2.53, 56; 3.27f, 30, 33ff, 38f, 43f, 52f; 4.6; *Ad Antiochenos*, 7; *Ad Epictetum*, 7; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.6, 9; 2.9.

Tertullian, the doctrine of redemption tends to be expounded in terms of external relations between Christ and sinful people, and so the judicial element assumes a role of predominant significance. This is even more pronounced in Protestant theology, where the rehabilitation of Augustinian dualism, in the new dynamic outlook of the post-Reformation world, led to an increasing number of monographs on the atonement. That sort of thing did not, and could not, arise in Greek patristic theology because in its non-dualist outlook Incarnation and Redemption are inseparably one. For Athanasius, it is everywhere apparent, the incarnational assumption of our fallen Adamic humanity from the Virgin Mary was essentially a sanctifying and redeeming event, for what Christ took up into himself, the whole man, he healed and renewed through his own holy life of obedient Sonship in the flesh, and his vicarious death and resurrection. Central to this understanding of salvation is the fact that our *mind* is sanctified and renewed *in* Christ, which is of course as far removed as anything could be from the teaching of Apollinaris.⁵⁵ It is thus the full measure of the extent to which the Son of God condescended in becoming *man*, and *man for our sakes*, which is the measure of the extent of our exaltation in Christ, through union with him who is by nature Son of God, making us sons of God by grace, which Athanasius sometimes called *theopoesis*.⁵⁶ Yet that conception at the heart of Athanasius' doctrine of redemption and sanctification of our humanity is found only in the body of a full-orbed account of what Western theology calls 'atonement', for the acts of God *towards us*, *on our behalf*, and *in us*, are one and indivisible through the Son and in the Spirit.⁵⁷ While that is supremely characteristic of his mature soteriology found in the *Contra Arianos*, even in the early *De Incarnatione* the conception of salvation by sanctifying exaltation and *theopoesis* through the Incarnation of the Word or Son of God is structured together with conceptions of atoning expiation, priestly propitiation, and substitutionary sacrifice and victory over the forces of evil, which together constitute what he means by redemption.⁵⁸ Yet all is understood as having taken place within the incarnate life of the Mediator, in whom and in whose saving work on our behalf we are given to participate in the Spirit

⁵⁵ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.9, 2.9; *Contra Arianos*, 2:56, 3:30, 34, 53; see also *De Incarnatione*, 14.

⁵⁶ See especially *Contra Arianos*, 1.37ff; 2.59ff; 3.17ff, 32ff, 38ff; 4.33ff.

⁵⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 1.41ff, 60, 64; 2.7ff, 47f, 51ff, 65f, 69f, 74ff; 3.30ff, 57f; 4.6ff.

⁵⁸ *De Incarnatione*, 8–10, 16, 20–9, 31, 34, 36–7, 40–5, 54.

who is regarded as co-active with the Son in all acts of redemption and sanctification as well as in all acts of creation.

3. The doctrine of the Spirit

Athanasius' approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is entirely in line with his approach to the doctrine of the Son or *Logos*. Just as he turned sharply away from any conception of the *Logos* in terms of a cosmological principle, or of 'seminal reasons' (the *logoi spermatikoi*), immanent in the universe, and as occupying an intermediate status between God and the creation, so he would have nothing to do with any attempt to reach an understanding of the Spirit beginning from manifestations or operations of the Spirit in creaturely existence, in man or in the world, but from the propriety of the Spirit to the being of God on the divine side of the line of demarcation between the Creator and the creature. Precisely because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, he developed the doctrine of the Spirit from his essential relation to the one God and his one undivided activity as God, and specifically from his inherence in the being of the eternal Son. 'The Spirit is not outside the Word, but, being in the Word, is in God through him' (οὐ γὰρ ἔκτός ἐστι τοῦ λόγου τὸ πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ὄν, ἐν τῷ θεῷ δι' αὐτοῦ ἐστίν).⁵⁹ The operations of the Spirit are not on a lower level than the operations of the Son, as if they were limited to the many spiritual manifestations within us, so that a proper understanding of the gifts and diverse operations of the Spirit is reached from the perspective of their source and ground in the divine Trinity, from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. It is one God who works all things in all. 'For the Father himself works through the Word and in the Spirit and gives all things.'⁶⁰ This explains why in the order of Athanasius' development of formulated doctrine, controlled knowledge of the Spirit is taken from our knowledge of the Son and of the Father through the Son.⁶¹

It is not surprising, therefore, that the foundation of Athanasius' doctrine of the Spirit, in its essential points, is already found in the *Contra Arianos* in which he established the mutual relation of the Son

⁵⁹ *Ad Serapionem*, 3.5; cf. 1.14.

⁶⁰ *Ad Serapionem*, 3.5.

⁶¹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.2, 20; 3.1–5; 4.4, 17.

and the Father as constituting the epistemic ground for all our knowledge of God, for that mutual relation included the relation of the Spirit to the Son and to the Father and therefore the inseparable place of the Spirit in the triune God. These essential points are: the sending of the Spirit from the Son as his very own from whom the Spirit on his part receives;⁶² the equality of the Spirit with the Son in giving and in participating;⁶³ the mutual relation of the Spirit and the Son in God's gift of the Spirit in which the Deity of the Spirit is evident;⁶⁴ in the Spirit the one God is present and active as he is in the Son, for Father, Son and Spirit are one Godhead in a Triad;⁶⁵ as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell in one another, so God is in us by the indwelling of the Spirit and by participation of the Spirit we are in God, and thus our being in the Father is not ours but is the Spirit's who is in us and dwells in us.⁶⁶

For since the Word is in the Father, and his Spirit is given from the Word, he wills that we should receive the Spirit, that when we receive him, having thus the Spirit of the Word who is in the Father, we too may be found on account of the Spirit to become one in the Word, and through him in the Father . . . For what the Word has by nature in the Father, he wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevocably . . . It is the Spirit then who is in God, and not we, viewed in our own selves; and as we are sons and 'gods' because of the Word in us, so we shall be accounted to have become one in Son and in Father, because the same Spirit is in us who is in the Word who is in the Father.⁶⁷

These are the same points which Athanasius took up again and argued out in some detail in his *Letters to Serapion* in refutation of a semi-Arian denial of the deity of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit bears the same relation in being and act to God as the Son does to the Father in being *homoousios* with the Father, the Spirit is *homoousios* not only with the Son but with the Father.⁶⁸ Moreover, since the Spirit is in himself in accordance with his own nature what he does and bestows upon us from God, he is himself of God and in God and to be confessed as God with

⁶² *Contra Arianos*, 1.47f.; 3.44.

⁶³ *Contra Arianos*, 1.50, 56.

⁶⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 2.18.

⁶⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 3.15.

⁶⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 3.24.

⁶⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 3.25.

⁶⁸ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.27; 2.3, 5; 3.1.

the Word;⁶⁹ and since the Spirit shares indivisibly with the presence and activity of the Father and the Son in all the acts of the Godhead, he belongs essentially to the divine Triad through an identity of *ousia*.⁷⁰

There is, then, a Triad, holy and complete, confessed to be one God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, having nothing foreign or external mixed with it, nor composed of one that creates, and one that is originated, but all creative; and it is self-consistent and in nature indivisible, and its activity is one. The Father does all things through the Word and in the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy Triad is preserved. Thus one God is preached in the Church, 'who is over all', and 'through all and in all' – 'over all', as Father, as beginning, as fountain; 'through all', through the Word; 'in all', in the Holy Spirit. It is a Triad not only in name and form of speech, but in truth and actual existence (ὕπαρξει). For as the Father is he who he is, so also his Word is one who is and God over all. And the Holy Spirit is not without actual existence but exists and has true being (οὐκ ἀνοπαρκτόν ἐστιν ἀλλ' ὑπάρχει καὶ ὑφέστηκεν ἀληθῶς).⁷¹

Thus the essence of this formulation of the doctrine of the Spirit is not only the fact that knowledge of the Spirit is to be taken from knowledge of the Son, but that the Spirit has the same co-ordination and unity of being and activity with the Son and through the Son with the Father as the Son has with the Father. There is not only a single divine activity at work in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but one and the same Godhead.⁷²

Three elucidatory comments may be offered upon this doctrine of the Spirit.

(i) The stress upon the fact that the Spirit is of and in the Son and with the Son is always in God, so that for us to be in the Spirit is to be in God, gives the doctrine of the Spirit a *profound objectivity*.⁷³ It is indeed a distinctive mark of Athanasius' understanding of the Holy Spirit that it does not carry with it a concept of psychological inwardness in our experience of him or even a notion of sacramental inwardness such as we have in the teaching of St Cyril of Jerusalem or of St Augustine. While the mutual indwelling of the Spirit and the Son in the Godhead has its

⁶⁹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.31; 3.2.

⁷⁰ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.20, 25, 27; 3.2, 5, 6; 4.3.

⁷¹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.20; cf. 1.14.

⁷² *Ad Serapionem*, 1.28, 30–1; 3.5–7.

⁷³ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.19, 21, 27, 30; 3.1, 2, 5.

countertpart in a mutual indwelling of the Spirit and the Son in us and of us through them in the Father, this is essentially an 'objective inwardness': 'Our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit's who is in us and dwells in us';⁷⁴ 'It is the Spirit who is in God, and not we viewed in our own selves'.⁷⁵ For us to be in the Spirit or to have the Spirit dwelling within us means that we are made partakers of God beyond ourselves and even share in the inwardness of God himself. That is to say, the Athanasian doctrine of *theopoiesis* (or *theosis*) through the Spirit, in which we are sanctified, renewed and enlightened through adoption in the Incarnate Son to be sons of God, does not import any inner deification of our human nature, but the assuming of us into the sphere of the direct and immediate activity of God himself in such a way that our human being is brought to its *teleiosis* in relation to the Creator and we find our real life hid with Christ in God.⁷⁶ Crucial to this whole position is the inherent relation in being and act between the Spirit and the Son – for the Son is in the Spirit as the Spirit is in the Son⁷⁷ – that is, not only a mission of the Spirit from (παρὰ) the Son but a community of being and act between the Spirit and the Son, for the mission of the Spirit from the Son follows from that community in being and act in which the Spirit receives of (ἐκ) the Son.⁷⁸ It is through his proper relation to the being of the Son that the Spirit is said to proceed from the Father.⁷⁹ Thus while Athanasius neither speaks explicitly of a double 'procession' of the Spirit nor rejects it, at the heart of his position is an understanding of a profound ontological relation between the Spirit and the Son which does not lend itself to the later tendency towards a subjectification of the Spirit in the Church. Since this union of the Spirit and the Son means that it is through and from the Son that the Spirit is given to us, it follows, Athanasius argued, that the Incarnation itself is the ground of our ability to receive the Spirit. Expressed the other way round, this means that we human beings are enabled to receive the Spirit in and through the

⁷⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 3.24.

⁷⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 3.25.

⁷⁶ *De Incarnationis*, 54; *Contra Arianos*, 1.9, 39, 50; 2.70; 3.19, 33, 53; *De decretis*, 14; *De synodis*, 51; *Ad Adelpbos*, 4; *Ad Maximum*, 2; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.24; 2.4.

⁷⁷ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.21; cf. 19, 20, 27, 30.

⁷⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 1.15, 47; 3.24–5, 44; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.2, 15, 20, 25; 3.1f, 5; 4.2f.

⁷⁹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.20; '... who is said to proceed from the Father (ἐκ πατρὸς λέγεται ἐκπορεύεσθαι), because he is from the Word (παρὰ τοῦ λόγου) who is confessed to be from the Father (ἐκ πατρὸς), that he shines forth and is sent and is given.' Cf. 1.15.

Incarnation of the Son, for when he came into man, man himself received in him. Thus our receiving of the Spirit is objectively grounded in and derives from the self-sanctification of Christ through his own Spirit, and is not a different receiving of the Spirit from his.⁸⁰

(ii) It is in the Spirit that we have to do with God, who is Spirit, in *the unity of his being and his act*. While Athanasius holds that the distinctions between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternal distinctions, the Father always being Father, the Son always the only Son, and the Holy Spirit always the Holy Spirit, there is yet *one* divine activity and *one* divine being in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁸¹ It is this unity of activity (ἐνέργεια), unity of being (οὐσία), and unity of Godhead (Θεότης) which force themselves upon our understanding when we know God in the Spirit, and know the Spirit who realises and actualises the power of the Godhead to be one with God in the identity of his eternal Being.⁸² That is to say, it is particularly as the theology of Athanasius moves from the doctrine of the Son to the doctrine of the Spirit that we find him thinking of the one Being of God in his Acts, and of his one Activity in his Being. It must be said, then, that the very basis of Athanasius' doctrine of the One triune God in the co-activity and co-essentiality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, depends upon his holding together the Being of God in his Act and his Act in his Being – that is, in declining to have anything to do with the distinction between his being (*ousia*) and his activities (*energeiai*) which developed in later thought, starting with the Cappadocians and becoming characteristic of Byzantine theology. From Athanasius' point of view, however, diversity in activity could only call in question the unity of Being in God,⁸³ while the unity of activity would be evidence for the unity of being only if there were no separation between them – that is, if the activity inhered in the very Being of God as ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια.⁸⁴ In other words, separation between the activity and the being would imply that God is not after all *in himself* always and reliably what he is towards us through the Son and in the Spirit,⁸⁵ and so

⁸⁰ *Contra Arianos*, 1.50; 4.6.

⁸¹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.14, 20, 30; 3.6; 4.6; cf. *Contra Arianos*, 3.15.

⁸² *Ad Serapionem*, 1.14, 19f, 28, 30; 3.6.

⁸³ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.27; 3.3.

⁸⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 2.2; cf. 2.28; 3.65; 4.1f.

⁸⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 1.17–20, 28, 36 – cf. the discussion of this point by E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 66f, 124f.

far as the Spirit is concerned that he is not by nature what he imparts to us.⁸⁶ Once again, it is the propriety of the Spirit to the Son, and his oneness in being with the Son, which is crucial in Athanasius' thought; for the intrinsic oneness of God's Act and his Being is discerned from the fact that the Spirit *is* the activity (*energeia*) of the Son, who is not outside of him but in him as he is in the Father;⁸⁷ and it is from the Son who is the one Form of Godhead (ἐν εἶδος θεότητος) that we discern that there is only one Godhead, in the Father who is above all things, in the Son who pervades all things, and in the Spirit who is active in all things through the Word.⁸⁸ The inherent unity of Being and Act which this entails forces upon us an understanding of God in which movement belongs to his eternal Being. If God is he who is in his activity towards us through the Son and in the Spirit, then it belongs to the essential nature of his eternal Being to move and energise and act. When, therefore, it is said of the *Logos* or Son of God who inheres in his eternal Being that he *became* man or became flesh, that *becoming* must be regarded not as something adventitious or accidental to God, an idea which Athanasius rejects,⁸⁹ but as the outgoing movement of the divine Being in condescension and love, the coming-and-presence (*parousia*) of the Being (*ousia*) of God himself among us in Jesus Christ. It is, however, essentially an *active presence*, a presence in which God himself is active through the Son and an activity in which God himself is immediately present in the Spirit. What is decisive, of course, is the intimate relation of the Spirit to Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

(iii) While God remains ultimately ineffable, beyond all created being, *he is not closed to us*, but makes himself accessible to us and knowable by us through his Word and in his Spirit. This follows from the previous point: for if the activity which God directs towards us is finally separated from his

⁸⁶ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.23–4. 'If he makes men divine, it is not to be doubted that his nature is of God.'

⁸⁷ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.20f, 30; 3.2, 5; 4.3f.

⁸⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 3–6, 15–16; *De synodis*, 52 – the term εἶδος in these passages is the equivalent of ὑπόστασις, or οὐσία, or φύσις. For the use of the terms by Athanasius see below, pp. 202ff.

⁸⁹ *Contra Arianos*, 1.17f, 20, 27f, 36; 2.38, 45; 3.65; 4.2; *De decretis*, 22; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.26; 3.3f; *Ad Afros*, 8.

⁹⁰ Cf. the closing words of *Festal Letter*, 14: 'Let us keep the festival to the Spirit, who is always near us, in Jesus Christ, through whom and with whom to the Father be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

Being, then he is finally inscrutable to us as he is in himself; but if his activity and his Being instead of being separated inhere in each other, then God really does make himself accessible to us and known by us through his activity towards us. That is to say, God really does reveal himself to us through his activity towards us, if he thereby does not just communicate something about himself but communicates *himself* to us in such a way that we participate in him, which is precisely what God does through his Word and in his Spirit. Nevertheless, while in this way we are enabled to apprehend God in himself we are unable to comprehend (καταλαβεῖν) him, for we cannot grasp what he is (τί ἐστι θεός) or seize his divine Being with our minds. Finite creatures are quite unable to get behind God's Being and know what it is for the specifically divine manner of being eludes them, but they can say what he is not, for God is not as man.⁹¹ This ineffability of God applies also to the Son, for even in our knowing of him, he remains far from what we are by nature able to comprehend. That is to say, the kind of ineffability which Athanasius has in mind is not the negative ineffability of mere apophaticism, but the ineffability of God who in making himself known to us through the Son reveals that he infinitely transcends the grasp of our minds. The only knowledge of God proportionate to God is that which obtains between the Son and the Father, where there is a mutual relation of being as well as knowing between them. No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him.⁹² Such is the knowledge of God mediated to us through Christ, but it is a knowledge which is realised only through the activity of the Spirit and only as *in the Spirit* we participate in the Son and through him in God.⁹³ That is to say, it is through the Son and in the Spirit that a way is opened up for us to the Father, and we come to know him in some real measure *as he is in himself* since the Son and the Spirit are proper to the Being of God and dwell within his Being; and it is in the Spirit that our knowing of God really is knowing, since through participating in his Spirit (μετέχοντες τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ) we are made partakers of God.⁹⁴ This does not mean that by receiving the Spirit we lose our own proper being, any more than that the Lord when he became man for our sakes became less

⁹¹ *Ad monachos*, 2; cf. *De decretis*, 22 and *De synodis*, 35: ἀκατάληπτος οὐσία.

⁹² *Contra Arianos*, 2.22, with reference to Matthew 11.27; and *In illud, omnia*, on Luke 10.22. Cf. *Contra Arianos*, 1.6, *De synodis*, 15, and Origen, *De Principiis*, 4.4.

⁹³ *Contra Arianos*, 1.15–16.

⁹⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 3.19.

God.⁹⁵ That is the characteristic emphasis of Athanasius in his *Letters to Serapion Concerning the Holy Spirit*: in the Spirit we have participation in God and therefore in the Spirit, creatures though we are, we are lifted up to know God in his own Being as he discloses himself to us through his Word.⁹⁶ It is therefore in the Spirit that we have access to his intrinsic intelligibility and his essential knowability, for inter-relation with God in the Spirit imports a two-fold openness: (a) an openness on the part of God in which by the inherent movement of his eternal Being he is able to relate himself to what is not himself and to become open to created realities beyond himself; and (b) an openness on the part of God's creation, for through the Spirit God is able to take possession of his creatures and to be present to them in such a way that they are lifted up to the level of participation in him where they are opened out for union and communion with God far beyond the limits of their creaturely existence – which is another way of describing *theopoesis*. To *be* in the Spirit is to *be* in God, for the Spirit is not external but internal to the Godhead; but since it is only the Spirit of God who knows what is in God and it is he who joins us to the *Logos* in God, through the Spirit we are exalted to know God in his inner intelligible relations as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet in such a way that we are restrained by the sheer holiness and majesty of the divine Being from transgressing the bounds of our creaturely being in inquiring beyond what is given through the Son and received by the Spirit, and therefore from thinking presumptuously and illegitimately of God. Before the transcendent intelligibility and ineffability of the Godhead we veil our faces like the Cherubim, and faith and a pious and reverent use of reason together with worship, wonder and silence inform the movement on our part to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit answering to the movement on God's part from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit.⁹⁷

4. Athanasius' theological language and method

There is little doubt that for St Athanasius method and material content always go together – that is part at least of the significance of the

⁹⁵ *De decretis*, 14.

⁹⁶ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.23–9.

⁹⁷ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.15–20, 24; 4.2–7.

intimate relation between the Spirit and the Word in his thought. Particularly striking is the centrality and the epistemological significance of the *homoousion* (applied in the first place to the Son, and then, as we have seen to the Spirit), for that tells us that through the Son and in the Spirit God has communicated to us *himself*, so that how we know God and what we know of him are inseparable. Through the Word made flesh, we human beings with our created minds are enabled by the Spirit to know and think of God in such a way that our knowledge and thought of him repose upon his divine reality, or, to express it the other way round, that his divine reality through Jesus Christ and in his Spirit determines the way in which we know and think truly of him. It is because in Jesus Christ the Word of God who is internal to the Being of God has become man, and assumed our human nature into union with himself, without any diminishing or swallowing up of that human nature, that genuine theological activity can be an enterprise of men on earth, in which God himself is by his grace the proper object of their thought.

Moreover, it is because it is in Jesus Christ the *Logos*, by whom all men have been created and in and through whom they continue to exist as men, that human nature is fully established in Jesus Christ, and the created intelligibility of contingent existence, far from being suppressed, is upheld and maintained. To say of Athanasius' thought, as Grillmeier does, that 'the bright Light of the *Logos* swallows up all created light', is to charge him with a kind of epistemological monophysitism which is the exact contrary of the truth.⁹⁸

On the other hand, if God and the world are separated, as in the Arian scheme of things, and if the *cosmos noetos* and the *cosmos aisthetos* are disjoined from one another, then theology in the strict and proper sense is impossible, and there can be only mythology. Mythology is possible only on the axiomatic assumption of a radical dichotomy or *chorismos* between God and the world, for then our attempts to think of God are only *epinoetic* acts grounded in our own this-worldly self-knowledge and projected into God across the great gulf between us.⁹⁹ But when that kind of gulf is eliminated by the condescension of the living and loving God who interacts with our world and human existence, and becomes

⁹⁸ Op.cit., p. 215.

⁹⁹ *Contra Gentes*, 19: τὰτα μὲν οὕτως ἐκεῖνοι μυθολογοῦσιν· οὐ γὰρ θεολογοῦσι. For Athanasius' teaching here, see *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, pp. 34ff.

incarnate in Jesus Christ, then a *dianoetic* way of thinking is possible, in which our thoughts, while remaining fully human, nevertheless repose upon the reality of God himself and are determined by his hypostatic self-communication to us in this world. Jesus Christ himself, the Word made flesh, is here not only the Life and the Truth but also the one *Way* to the Father: 'through Jesus Christ we have access to the Father in one Spirit'. That is why the relation between the Incarnate Son and the Father constitutes the epistemological heart of Athanasius' theology, for, as he so often cited from the words of Jesus, 'no man knows the Son except the Father, and no man knows the Father except the Son'. There is then, as we have just seen, a mutual and exclusive relation between the knowledge of the Father and the knowledge of the Son, but through the Spirit that relation has been inserted, as it were, into human flesh, in the Incarnation so that we through the same Spirit may participate in the relation of the Son to the Father and of the Father to the Son, and know and love the triune God as he is in himself, even though he infinitely transcends our conceiving and speaking of him.

It was to *theologia* of this kind that Athanasius assimilated the scientific method that had been developed in Alexandria, namely, rigorous knowledge according to the inherent structure or nature (κατὰ φύσιν)¹⁰⁰ of the realities investigated, together with the development of the appropriate questions and the apposite vocabulary demanded by the nature of the realities as they become disclosed to us.¹⁰¹ It is in this way that theology adapts its method to its proper subject-matter, and allows its proper subject-matter to determine the appropriate forms of thought and speech about God. So far as scientific theology is concerned, this means that we are forced to adapt our common language to the nature and reality of God who is disclosed to us in Jesus Christ, and even where necessary to coin new terms, to express what we thus apprehend. Hence Athanasius insisted that when our ordinary terms are applied to God they must be *stretched* beyond their natural sense and reference and must be employed in such a way that they indicate more than the actual terms can naturally specify.¹⁰² Theological terms, therefore, which by

¹⁰⁰ See especially the eighth book of Clement's *Stromateis*, *passim*; e.g., 8.4. 16: ἡ μέθοδος τῆς εὐρέσεως.

¹⁰¹ *Contra Arianos*, 1.5; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.15f, 18f; 4.2f.

¹⁰² *Contra Arianos*, 1.23f; 4.27; *De synodis*, 42; *De decretis*, 12; *Ad Marcellinum*, 11–13; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.8–9, 16–20.

function and use are deployed to refer to God in his relation to the world, in the nature of the case must have an elastic quality, terminating on God himself at one end and upon the world or man at the other end.¹⁰³ To use modern scientific language, theological terms inevitably embody a relation of differentiability like the variational principles of physics, conformable to the precise nature and force of the realities to which they are used to refer. Indeed, in developing a theological understanding of space in respect of the dynamic relation between the 'place' (τόπος) of God which is to be understood strictly in accordance with the nature of God as God, and the place (τόπος) of man in this created world which is to be interpreted strictly in accordance with the nature of man as man, Athanasius projected something rather like what we now call topological language.¹⁰⁴

Here we have a marked characteristic of Athanasius' mind and method. He disliked the habit of indulging in logical distinctions and/or of engaging in analytical methods resulting in distinctions that did not really correspond to the facts.¹⁰⁵ His was the kind of mind which thinks connections, and preferably connections in things rather than connections that are merely mental or notional, for basic concepts and terms have their meaning in the realities signified and in their objective interrelations. Thus, for example, where others might operate with a faculty psychology involving a tripartite, or bipartite, division in the soul, Athanasius preferred to speak of the soul or of the self as a rational agent functioning in different ways.¹⁰⁶ That is to say, he preferred a functional use of language in which the surface meaning of terms varied in accordance with the realities intended and the general scope of thought or discourse.¹⁰⁷ This is particularly evident in his differential use of terms

¹⁰³ *Contra Arianos*, 1.54f; 2.1-8; 3.18; *De decretis*, 10-11; *De sententia Dionysii*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ See 'The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology', in Andrew Blane, *The Ecumenical World of Orthodox Civilisation, Essays in Honor of Georges Florovsky*, The Hague, 1974, pp. 61ff (reprinted here as Chapter 10); and *Space, Time and Incarnation*, London, 1969, pp. 14ff.

¹⁰⁵ C. Kannengiesser has pointed out that Athanasius was the only one in 'the whole Origenist tradition' who did not make a distinction between *kat' eikona* and *kath' homoiosin* with respect to Genesis 1.26, *Theological Studies*, 34.1, 1973, p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ *Contra Gentes*, 2ff, 19, 23, 26, 30ff; *Ad Marcellinum*, 27; *Contra Arianos*, 3.35. See E. P. Meijering, op.cit., p. 22. A faculty psychology would not be able to make much sense of the statement that Christ 'delivered his own body to death as an ἀντίψυχον, for the salvation of all', *De Incarnatione*, 9, 37, 49 - which is of course the antithesis of Apollinarianism.

¹⁰⁷ *De Sententia Dionysii*, 9; *De decretis*, 11.

used to speak of the being and subsistence of persons in the Holy Trinity – he preferred to speak concretely of the relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, avoiding as much as possible the employment of fixed terms, and he took care to use human language referring to God in such a way that the natural images and analogies they might carry over from their this-worldly usage would not be read back into the Deity but would be critically controlled by the self-revelation of the divine Being which they were employed to express. Thus in the *De synodis* Athanasius showed the greatest caution in the use of technical terms, while at the same time he was prepared to clarify actual questions through rigorous analysis and technical terminology.¹⁰⁸ That had the effect of laying a foundation on which further technical terms could be elaborated by the drawing of distinctions – e.g., his own detailed support of the *homoousion* later on in his life.¹⁰⁹ But in the variable situations in which he found himself, confronted with different uses and conflicting interpretations of theological concepts and terms, Athanasius preferred to keep to concrete speech in which verbs were often used instead of abstract nouns, so that thought about God would not be trapped in artificial distinctions. Yet he was clearly prepared, as we see in the *Ad Antiochenos*, for further clarification and precision in the use of apposite theological terms, within this or that context of discussion, provided that the realities signified were kept clearly in view and were allowed to have priority over the terms signifying them. Room is left, however, for modification or variation in actual use of terms, if, in obedience to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the same truths are actually intended.¹¹⁰

It is in this way, I believe, that we are to interpret the subsequent development of the difficult terms *ousia* (οὐσία), *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασις), and *physis* (φύσις), which have caused so much misunderstanding and difficulty in ancient as in modern times.

Ousia, as we have seen, refers to *that which is*. As such it can be used pre-eminently of God as he who is who he is, to speak of the *ousia* of him who is.¹¹¹ In the nature of the case, however, *ousia* has to be understood in one way in accordance with the Being of God who is beyond all

¹⁰⁸ *De synodis*, 40ff, 5.11.

¹⁰⁹ *De synodis*, 33–54.

¹¹⁰ *Ad Antiochenos*, 3, 5–9; see *De decretis*, 20ff; *De sententia Dionysii*, 7ff; *De synodis*, 33ff.

¹¹¹ *De decretis*, 22; cf. the fragment of Clement's lost *Peri Pronoias*, in *GCS*, vol. 3, Berlin, 1970, p. 219.

created being and who is the creative source of all being other than God, and yet in a very different way of created being.¹¹² We are able to link these two together in theological understanding and statement *not* because of some alleged likeness in being (ὁμοιον κατ' οὐσίαν) between the Creator and the creature, but because the Creator Word has himself become creature, without ceasing to be the Creator, and has established and dynamically maintains through himself a relation between them which is the constant ground of our knowledge of God in his interaction with man in this world. But the doctrine that both the *Logos* and the Spirit are eternally inherent in the one Being of God means that we know God, as far as we may, in his inner triadic relations, and so when we use the term *ousia* of this God we are using it to signify something more than his transcendent existence or self-existence, namely something about him as he is in himself. It is *ousia* used in this way that finds its place in the theology of Athanasius, referring to being in its internal reality, i.e., not being in its external relations but in its interior reality.¹¹³ It remains true, however, that for Athanasius the precise meaning of the word is to be found in its actual use. Hence, when we come to investigate created realities with a contingent intelligibility of their own which God has conferred on them, through his creation of them, here too we really know things when we know them in their internal relations and not simply in their external relations to other things, i.e., in accordance with their nature (κατὰ φύσιν) and not otherwise. Thus Athanasius' theology would appear to have affected his general epistemology, and provided a deeper scientific and philosophical understanding of what knowledge actually is.

Hypostasis was a term which Athanasius used with considerable hesitation, except where it was merely the equivalent of *ousia* in its simplest sense of 'very being' (αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν) which again is the equivalent of existence (ὑπαρξίς).¹¹⁴ Used in this way 'one *hypostasis*' was more or less synonymous with 'one *ousia*' which was an acknowledged Nicene usage where it was *ousia* and *homoousios* that were the predominant terms.¹¹⁵ In

¹¹² *De decretis*, 10–11.

¹¹³ See especially *De synodis*, 34, and cf. the comment of G. L. Prestige on this passage, *God in Patristic Thought*, London, 1952, p. 195. In view of this Prestige speaks of *ousia* as signifying being in its 'inner constitutive relations'.

¹¹⁴ *Ad Afros*, 4 – i.e., in the New Testament sense of Hebrews 1.3.

¹¹⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 3.65, 66; 4.1, 33; *De decretis*, 19–31; *De Synodis*, 33–54.

this sense it was natural to speak of the person of Christ in terms of *ousia* but not as external to the Father or as created, but as *ousia* indivisibly from the *ousia* of the Father.¹¹⁶ Yet the distinctive nuance of *hypostasis* lay in its indication of self-supported or independent reality,¹¹⁷ i.e. of something in its objective identity or distinctive self-manifestation – which was the ground, as we shall see, for Athanasius' hesitation to use it of the Son or of the Spirit. In respect of this distinctive nuance, then, *hypostasis* refers to the reality that actually supports our knowledge of it, or to express it theologically the other way round, it refers to the Being of God as the objective reality upon which our thought and speech of him actually terminate and by which they are controlled from beyond themselves – which in some contexts would make *hypostasis* and *ousia* once more virtually synonymous.¹¹⁸ In the nature of the case, however, *hypostasis* on the Athanasian scientific principle must be understood in accordance with the nature of the reality or being with which we are concerned – which is why some Alexandrians particularly could use *hypostasis* interchangeably with *physis* in their doctrine of Christ. Thus *hypostasis* is to be understood in one way of inanimate and impersonal things, and in another way, quite appropriately, of personal realities or beings; and again, in one way of created things and in another and entirely appropriate way of the Creator himself. Thus it is understandable that, as a strictly theological term, *hypostasis* came to be associated with 'name' or *onoma* (ὄνομα) used in its concrete sense and above all with 'face' or *prosopon* (πρόσωπον) to refer to what we know as self-identifying personal being or reality. This was applicable above all to the *Logos*, who, far from being any impersonal cosmological principle, is God the Son, the divine *Autologos* (one of Athanasius' favourite terms),¹¹⁹ come to us in Jesus Christ, revealing *himself* to us *face to face* and speaking to us directly in person – ἐκ προσώπου.¹²⁰ It was in this way that *hypostasis* came to be stretched, changed and developed to such an extent

¹¹⁶ *De decretis*, 25.

¹¹⁷ See *Contra Gentes*, 6–7, where ὑπόστασις = ἐν ὑποστάσει καθ' ἑαυτὴν εἶναι = οὐσία.

¹¹⁸ *De decretis*, 27; *De synodis*, 41; *Ad Antiochenos*, 6; *Ad Afros*, 4, 9. Cf. especially the Nicene anathema: ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας; *De synodis*, 35; cf. *De decretis*, 20, and the notes by Robertson, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, Oxford, 1892, pp. 32f. and 77ff.

¹¹⁹ *Contra Gentes*, 40, 46; *De Incarnatione*, 54; *Contra Arianos*, 4.2 etc.

¹²⁰ This expression is also applied by Athanasius to God speaking in the Scripture, *De Incarnatione*, 3.

that it became suitable for theological speech expressing the objective, identifiable self-manifestations of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that is, as three *hypostaseis* and one *ousia*, a formalisation which on occasion Athanasius himself could use.¹²¹ That was a development in which the Cappadocians (Basil, Nyssen and Nazianzen), Didymus the Blind and Cyril (both of Alexandria) had their part to play, on the solid biblico-theological foundation laid for them by Athanasius.

In his own use of *hypostasis*, however, Athanasius retained the freedom to vary its sense in accordance with the precise demands of the nature of that which it was intended to signify and which had to be allowed to show through the term used. That is why he declined to be committed to a fixed formalisation of the term *hypostasis* for all contexts which might have violated his semantic principle that terms are not prior to realities but realities come first and terms second.¹²² When it came to thinking of three *hypostaseis* in God, he preferred to think concretely in terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which while certainly distinct in the otherness of each (ἄλλος ὁ πατήρ, ἄλλος ὁ υἱός), are three in one indivisible Godhead, rather than in terms of three partitive *hypostaseis* which might suffer from Aristotelian polymorphism making them into three separated *hypostaseis* (equivalent to three *ousiai*) or ‘Gods’.¹²³ Athanasius’ refusal to have anything to do with partitive language to speak of the divine Persons was entirely consistent with his adherence to the *homousion* of Nicaea which meant not merely that the *ousia* of the Son was of the *ousia* of God, but that there was an indivisible and continuous relation of being of the Father in the Son, so that the being of the Godhead is whole or complete not in the Father alone but in the Son and in the Holy Spirit as much as in the Godhead.¹²⁴ The *homousion* of the Son and of the Spirit stood for the indivisible unity of the Being of the Godhead in three co-equal Persons: hence Athanasius’ constant emphasis upon the simple, uncompounded and undivided nature or being of God, in sharp opposition to the Arian separation of the Son

¹²¹ *Expositio fidei*, 2; *In illud, omnia*, 6; *Ad Antiochenos*, 6f.

¹²² *Contra Arianos*, 2.3; καὶ γὰρ οὐ πρότεροι τῶν οὐσιῶν αἱ λέξεις, ἀλλὰ αἱ οὐσίαι πρῶται, καὶ δεύτεροι τούτων αἱ λέξεις. Cf. *Contra Gentes*, 21: οὐ δίκαιον τὰ σημαίνοντα τοῦ σημαينوμένου προτιμᾶν; also *De decretis*, 10–11; *De sententia Dionysii*, 9.

¹²³ *Expositio fidei*, 2; *De decretis*, 4; cf. *Contra Gentes*, 28, 41.

¹²⁴ *De decretis*, 16ff; 22f; *Ad episcopos*, 17f; *Contra Arianos*, 1.16, 28; 2.33; 3.1ff; *Ad Afros*, 4f.

from the Father, and the semi-Arian separation of the Spirit from the Godhead.¹²⁵ It was in entire consistency with this whole approach that when Athanasius spoke of three distinct but undivided subsistences in the one Being of God, he preferred to use verbs (ὀφιστάναι and ὑπάρχειν) together with the personal pronoun (αὐτός), and associated with them the word 'subsistence' (ὑπαρξις) which, unlike the Arian use of *hypostasis*, would not imply that faith has three 'objects', for while we believe in and worship each of the three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one God, we do not believe in or worship the three alongside of one another.¹²⁶ Nevertheless he made it clear in the *Ad Antiochenos* that it was satisfactory for those who did not reject the unity of the *ousia* to speak of three *hypostaseis* or persons in God, but was also prepared to uphold the Nicene identification of *hypostasis* and *ousia* in a context where it was necessary to reject Sabellianism which questioned the objective hypostatic reality of the Son and the Spirit.¹²⁷

What then of the word *physis*? Athanasius appears to have used this term in several related ways.¹²⁸ This does not imply any ambiguity in his thought, but once again a proper variation in accordance with the demands of reality (which is not unlike the variation we employ today in our use of a word like 'subject'), throughout which, as Professor J. A. B. Holland has shown, there prevails, especially in adverbial forms of this term, the sense of what is 'aboriginally true'.¹²⁹ On the one hand, then, Athanasius uses it differentially of uncreated and created being, that is in such a way that the *physis* of God is as sharply distinguished from the *physis* of man as the *ousia* of the Creator is from the *ousia* of the creature.¹³⁰ In this sense it was consonant with Athanasian theology to speak not only of the inequality of Christ's divine nature to ours (τὸ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀνόμοιον τῆς φύσεως) but of divine and human natures with

¹²⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 1.15, 28; 2.34, 38; 3.3f, 15, 36; 4.2; *De decretis*, 11; *De synodis*, 34f; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.2f, 14, 28; 2.2.

¹²⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 4.3; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.28; *Ad Afros*, 4.

¹²⁷ *Ad Antiochenos*, 6; cf. *Ad Afros*, 4.

¹²⁸ For fuller references in Athanasius' works, see G. Müller, *Lexikon Athanasianum*, Berlin, 1952, pp. 1553–9.

¹²⁹ J. A. B. Holland, *The Development of the Trinitarian Theology of Athanasius, in his Conflict with Contemporary Heresies*, 1963 (unpublished thesis in Edinburgh University Library), pp. 79f, 210, 555, 589, 732, etc., 1038, 1070–81, 1222f, 1293f.

¹³⁰ *Contra Gentes*, 35, 40f; *De Incarnatione*, 2ff; *Contra Arianos*, 1.14f, 20, 24, 26, 28f, 36f, 51f, 57f, 61; 2.24, 29; 3.9, 14, 16, 20, 22f, 60ff, etc.

respect to the Incarnate Son.¹³¹ On the other hand, Athanasius used *physis* more or less as the equivalent or as the synonym of reality (ἀλήθεια, οὐσία), as we see in the very frequent use of the expression 'in accordance with nature' (κατὰ φύσιν) where to think in accordance with the nature of things is to think truly (ἀληθῶς) of them.¹³² It was in this sense of the term that he could use the expression *mia physis*, that is, one undivided reality, one οὐσία οὐ ὑπόστασις, in contrast to what is one governed 'by will' (βουλήσει).¹³³

As Athanasius used it in these ways, *physis* had an overall slant deriving from the Christian understanding of God in his active relation to the world he has created and continues to sustain by his creative presence within it. It has a distinctively dynamic rather than a static sense, for the old Greek idea of an unchanging nature known only through static patterns and immutable relations (e.g. in classical mathematics or geometry) is set aside. *Physis* describes actual reality which confronts us in its own independent being, and which is known in accordance with its own inherent force or natural force in virtue of which it continues to be what it actually and properly is. This concrete use of *physis* as synonymous with what a thing actually and essentially is, with reality, understandably excludes any abstract notion of *physis* as signifying some general or universal 'nature', and so it operates outwith the orbit of the Aristotelian distinction between primary and secondary *ousia*. To know God *kata physin*, in accordance with his own nature, is to know him under the impact of his distinctively divine *energeia*, that is, to know him through a living empirical relation determined by *theopoiesis*. Thus Athanasius insisted that *theologia* and *theosebeia*, theology and godliness, belong inseparably together: for genuine knowledge of God arises only within an intellectual experience of his transcendent reality and majesty, and is maintained in the continuous context of worship, prayer, holiness and godly living. That is to say, God being God, the empirical and the

¹³¹ *De Incarnatione*, 34; *Contra Arianos*, 1.55ff; 2.70; 3.16, 20, 34, 62; *De decretis*, 11ff, 20ff; *In illud, omnia*, 6.

¹³² *Contra Arianos*, 1.27, 37; 2.2ff, 31, 50, 58f, 65, 70, 72; 3.9f, 19ff, 25, 34, 60ff; 4.1; *De synodis*, 52f; *De sententia Dionysii*, 23f, 26; *De vita Antonii*, 14; *Ad Afro.*, 8; cf. also *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.5f, 9ff, 16f; 2.9.

¹³³ *Contra Arianos*, 3.4, 18, 22, 59ff; *Ad Antiochenos*, 6; cf. *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.5f, 2.13; and cf. a similar expression 'of one nature' (ὁμοφύτης), *Contra Arianos*, 1.58; *De sententia Dionysii*, 18; *De synodis*, 48, 52; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.17; and 'identity of nature' (ταυτότης τῆς φύσεως) *Contra Arianos*, 3.22; cf. *De synodis*, 50.

theoretical, the religious and the theological, are ultimately and finally indivisible in our experience and knowledge of him.

There is, however, still another way of using *physis* found among the fathers, mostly of the Greek Antiochene sort. This derives from a more Aristotelian, biological or vitalist approach, in which the stress is on the relation of *physis* (= nature) to *phuo* (to produce or grow). It is this naturalistic sense of the word *physis*, corresponding to the Aristotelian 'second substance',¹³⁴ that is properly translated by the Latin *natura*. Serious difficulties and misunderstandings arose among the fathers when this vitalistic or naturalistic sense of *physis* was employed of the divine and the human *physeis* in the one Person of Christ, as though it were the equivalent of the word *physis* in its other meaning as *reality*. Problems such as these are found in the differences between the so-called Eastern 'monophysites' and the 'Chalcedonians' who, as far as I can see, basically intend the same thing! Indeed more actual monophysitism may be found in the West than in those who today are usually called 'monophysite'.¹³⁵

If the development of an apposite theological language was an essential part of Athanasius' theological activity, this was due not only to the fact that forms of speech rightly used refer to realities beyond themselves, but also to the fact that his rejection of cosmological and epistemological dualism carried with it an end to the abstraction of form from being or structure from substance, which had for centuries been so characteristic of Greek thought. Now what we are concerned with in theology is a field created by the interaction of the divine *Logos* who inheres in the Being of God and the world of created being on which God through creation has conferred intelligibility in such a way that there too, form inheres in being, and *logos* inheres in human being. Thus unity of *Logos* and Being in God in accordance with the unique nature of God, and the unity of *logos* and being in man in accordance with the utterly different creaturely nature of man, alone mean that a different method of inquiry and argument must be found from that which obtained in Aristotelian

¹³⁴ Cf. Clement of Alexandria (fragment from the *Peri Pronoias*, GCS, vol. 3, p. 219): φύσις λέγεται παρά τὸ πεφυκέναι. πρώτη οὐσία ἐστὶ πᾶν τὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ ὄφραστός, οἶον, λίθος. δευτέρα δὲ οὐσία ἀξητική καθὸ ἀξεί και φθίνει, τὸ φυτόν.

¹³⁵ In the ancient Church a distinction must be drawn between Greek 'monophysites' who were Apollinarian and Eutychian, and the Syrian and Coptic 'monophysites' who were Cyrillian – although Greek theologians are also found in the latter group, e.g., Severus of Antioch or John Philoponos of Alexandria.

science, where classical geometry constituted the model of scientific argumentation and demonstration, for here we cannot operate as in classical geometry with the separation of form from being, or therefore with the abstract interrelation of idealised forms through necessary logical processes. But in theology properly so-called we are concerned with the *economy* (οἰκονομία)¹³⁶ set up by God's gracious condescension to interact with us in our world of space and time, without, of course, ceasing to be what he eternally is in himself apart from the creation and the Incarnation. This again forces theology to develop a different method of inquiry and an appropriate mode of argumentation, through which it will allow the field established between God and man to become disclosed to our minds and inquiries in its inner dynamic structures. Theology is concerned to penetrate into the inherent order, the innate coherence, the essential pattern of God's self-communication to us in revelation and reconciliation, and in and through that to rise in the Spirit to an understanding of God in his Triune Being (as far as that is allowed for finite creatures) which Athanasius called *theologia* in its strictest sense (ἐν τριάδι ἡ θεολογία τελεία ἐστὶ).¹³⁷ Theology thus moves from discerning the orderly structure of the saving *οἰκονομία* (for example in what we call 'the economic Trinity') to the inner relations of God in himself (which we call 'the ontological Trinity' or 'the immanent Trinity').

Operating with what we have called the unity of form and being, and therefore of method and content or subject-matter, Athanasius set about trying to order theological understanding of the ways and acts of God in accordance with their proper principle (ἀρχή) as it becomes revealed to us in the Incarnation where Jesus Christ has to be regarded as the principle or *arche* of all God's ways and works, and the one through whom we have mediated to us a knowledge of God in the Spirit in which we apprehend God in accordance with his own inner

¹³⁶ See the following passages from the *Contra Arianos*, 1.55; 2.6, 9, 11ff, 44, 51ff, 75ff; and also *In illud, omnia*, 1; *De decretis*, 1, 25; *De sententia Dionysii*, 6, 24; *Ad episcopos*, 2; *Ad Antiochenos*, 7; *Ad Serapionem*, 2.7 etc.; *Ad Palladium*. The frequent interpretation of κατὰ οἰκονομίαν to mean 'in a qualified sense', or 'by way of reserve' is inadmissible, being determined from behind by an abstract Hellenic notion of the immutability or impassibility of God quite different from that found in the thought of Athanasius or Cyril of Alexandria, who take seriously the *parousia* of the divine Being within the structures of space and time.

¹³⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 1.18.

nature.¹³⁸ What Athanasius did, then, was to lay hold of the inherent structure of what we know of God in this way, and sought to organise and develop with scientific rigour and precision, as far as it is possible, a consistent structure in the order of knowing controlled by the order of divine being and activity. Of especially enlightening significance here are several key expressions: *economy*, already noted, which expresses the way in which God orders his eternal purpose in Christ revealed to us in the Incarnation, i.e. the dynamic pattern that arises as the order of redemption intersects, as it were, with the order of creation; the concept of *order* (τάξις) itself, to which we are led through reflection upon the unity and stability and consistency of God's activity towards us, moving through the Son and in the Spirit to what Athanasius called the 'co-ordination and unity' or 'the order and nature' in the one Being of the holy Trinity, where we find our worship and our mind falling under the inherent pattern (εἶδος) of the Godhead as he is in his own interior relations,¹³⁹ and, not least significant, along with these two, the constantly repeated formula: *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit, or *to* the Father, *through* (and *with*) the Son and *in* the Spirit.¹⁴⁰ That is to say, what Athanasius sought to do, was to develop an organic structure in theological understanding of God through discerning the co-ordination between the concrete pattern taken by the divine condescension in the Incarnation of the Son, and the inherent order of trinitarian relations in the Godhead, linking them together through the pattern of God's interaction with us described in terms of *from* (or *to*) *the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit*.

The theology of St Athanasius is thus at once Christocentric and theocentric. While the heart of his theological thinking was certainly Christological, for he had woven the central facts of the Gospel into its basic fabric, and while that Christological slant remained whether he was writing of the Trinity or of the Spirit, it is Christocentric because of the essential mutuality or correlativity in our knowledge of the Father and of the Son, for the Father is not eternally Father apart from the Son, and the Son is not eternally Son apart from the Father. That is part of the profound

¹³⁸ *Expositio Fidei*, 1f. with reference to Proverbs 8. 22, which Athanasius reinterpreted during debates with Arians and to which he gave primary theological significance in this way – see especially *Contra Arianos*, 2.18ff.

¹³⁹ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.20f; 4ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Ad Serapionem*, 1.6, 9, 12, 14, 20, 24, 28, 30f; 3.5; 4.6, etc.

significance of the *homoousion*. At this point, however, the Athanasian doctrine of God has to be distinguished somewhat from that which came to prevail in later Greek thought through the Cappadocian stress upon the idea that the Father alone is the *arche* (ἀρχή), *pege* (πηγή), or *aitia* (αἰτία), i.e. source or principle, fount or cause of Godhead, together with the tendency to distinguish the divine *energeiai* from the divine *ousia*. That way of thinking implied that while the Deity of the Son and the Deity of the Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal with the Deity of the Father, for there is only one Godhead, nevertheless the Son and the Spirit have a *derived* Deity, while that of the Father is *underived* Deity. That is particularly evident in the teaching of John of Damascus.¹⁴¹ In contrast, as we have seen, for Athanasius the 'whole Godhead' is complete in the Son and in the Spirit as much as it is in the Father.¹⁴² God is God the Son as much as he is God the Father, and the Son of God is God precisely as the Father is God, for each is whole and proper to the other, so that *the same things are said of each except that one is called Father and the other Son*.¹⁴³ Thus while the Son is certainly *of* the Father he is not thought of as derived or caused, for he is Son *of* the Father as the Father is Father *of* the Son: thus the *of* belongs to the full mutuality of the Father and of the Son within the one unchangeable Being of the one God, without any kind of superiority or inferiority being implied, even though it is denied in the same breath.¹⁴⁴ That is to say, while Athanasius made considerable use of the 'analogies' of source, light and radiance, and fountain, water and river, as conceptual aids in apprehending and articulating the trinity of God, he insisted on using them (as indeed he used the terms 'father' and 'son') only as paradeigmatic pointers to the inner relations in God and therefore without reading their creaturely images and relations into God. Consequently his doctrine of the Trinity was not trapped in the causal priority or superiority of source, fountain or cause as

¹⁴¹ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 1.8 i.e., superiority of the Father in respect of αἰτιότης.

¹⁴² See A. Robertson, op.cit., p. xxxii; and also *Contra Arianos*, 2.33ff, 41, 49; 3.1ff, 21; 4.1; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.14ff.

¹⁴³ *Contra Arianos* 3.3–4; see also 2.54 and *De synodis*, 46. For Athanasius' use of the terms 'source', 'fountain', or 'cause', see *Contra Arianos*, 2.54; 3.1; 4.3; *De decretis*, 16; *De synodis*, 46; *Ad Antiochenos*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ See E. P. Meijering, 'The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, Oegstgeest, July 1973, pp. 229ff, where he contrasts Gregory's notion of 'causal superiority in God', with reference to the Father, to the view of Athanasius.

applied to the Father alone. The implications of this for his understanding of the divine *ousia* are considerable, for together with his doctrine of the inherence of the one divine *energeia* in the *ousia*, it radically altered the Hellenic notion of *ousia*, taking it completely away from the ambit of Aristotelian, Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas. But wherever in the history of patristic thought the *energeia* draws somewhat apart from the *ousia*, the notion of *ousia* tends to slide back in the direction of Hellenic thought, affecting the relation of the Father to the Son and the Spirit. It is quite otherwise with Athanasius.

That is why Christocentrism and Theocentrism cannot be opposed or set off against one another in interpreting Athanasius' thought. Because Jesus Christ is himself both the one Image and Reality of God, he is the one place where we really know the Father – so that the centrality of Christ stands for the centrality of a theology that is directed to the Father through the Son as it arises from the Father through the Son.¹⁴⁵ Moreover the intrinsic mutuality of indwelling between the Son and the Spirit, each receiving from the other, means that the Athanasian Christocentrism, through the Son, makes Pneumatology no less central in the organic structure of his theology. In view of all this it is understandable that it is Athanasian theology above all, in which there is no separation between the Activity and the Being of God in the Trinity or in the Incarnation or in the work of the Spirit, that carries theology consistently forward from 'the economic Trinity' into 'the ontological Trinity', for what God is in the economy of his saving operations towards us in Jesus Christ he is antecedently and inherently and eternally in himself as the Triune God.¹⁴⁶ While, therefore, it is the Christological and soteriological pattern that controls Athanasian theology in the foreground, as it were, it is ultimately the Trinity that supplies it with its essential and permanent 'grammar', the *taxis* and *physis* of the Godhead. If it was Christological and soteriological in its method, in accordance with the saving 'economy' of God in Jesus Christ, Athanasius' theology was certainly theocentric in its full scope and trinitarian in its ultimate end.

¹⁴⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 1.33; 2.22, 33ff; 3.1, 11, 15ff, 23ff; 4.1ff, 22; *De synodis*, 26, 41ff, 48ff; *Ad Serapionem*, 3.4.

¹⁴⁶ This is clearly the logic of the transition in Athanasius' argument in *Contra Arianos* from book 2 to book 3, in which he moved from the economic and saving condescension of God in the Incarnate Son to the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, and then of

This interrelation of the Christocentric and theocentric emphases in Athanasian theology is also consistent with his basic understanding of the *mediatorial* function of Jesus Christ, for it belonged to the full scope of his economy as the Incarnate Son not only to realise the manward movement of the Father's love, but to fulfil on our behalf, and from out of the fulness of our human nature which he assumed, the Godward movement of that economy, both through his humanly receiving from the Father and in his humanly offering to the Father.¹⁴⁷ That was a movement towards the Father which he carried through our weakness and ignorance – not that that weakness and ignorance belonged to him from his divine nature, but that he assumed and made his own what is ours, in order to redeem us from it.¹⁴⁸ This is consistent with Athanasius' point that our human mind and soul have been sanctified and renewed *in* the Incarnate Son, which we have already discussed. The bearing of all that upon our discussion here is that what Christ thus undertook to do on our behalf, in fulfilling the Godward movement of the human mind, makes the Incarnation once again the natural and proper point from which theological activity of this kind takes its start – hence the enormous significance of the *De Incarnatione* as securing, so to speak, Athanasius' base of operations, even though it contained ideas he had to leave behind, as he penetrated more deeply into an understanding of what Incarnation meant.¹⁴⁹ That is to say, he took his starting point at the place where God the *Logos* not only interacts with us in space and time but assumes our human being and reality into such an inseparable union with himself, that in and through Jesus Christ there takes place a real communication of God himself to us and at the same time a real reception and appropriation of that divine self-communication by man. It is, therefore, in the hypostatic reality of Jesus Christ who is

the Holy Spirit, 3.1ff, 15, 19ff, while the soteriological interest remains, 30ff.

¹⁴⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 2.7ff, 16, 31, 71; 3.31f, 38f; 4.3ff, 22.

¹⁴⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 3.43ff. Ignorance, as Athanasius points out, is proper to manhood, and in showing ignorance Christ manifested his real humanity. It is illegitimate to argue that this was only a feigned ignorance, as some people do, because it was overcome by the wisdom of the Son, for that movement from ignorance to understanding is as much part of Christ's mediatorial work as his self-sanctification on our behalf or his movement from the corruption of our human nature which he assumed but overcame by renewing our human nature in himself.

¹⁴⁹ It is a constant tragedy that the text-books offering an account of Athanasius' soteriology almost regularly stop with the *De Incarnatione*, as though that were the only significant work Athanasius wrote!

consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the ultimate Being of God as he is in himself, that human theological inquiry may by the grace of God find its point of entry into genuine knowledge of God. In practical terms, this implies, as Athanasius showed in a short discussion specially devoted to the import of Luke 10.22 (Matt. 11.27), a sharing in what Christ, the Incarnate Son, received as man when all things were handed over to him by the Father, and thereby a partaking on our part of the mutual relation of knowing between the Father and the Son. While that is something marvellous that can take place only in the Spirit, *human* activity in understanding, explanation and articulation is required, if we are to grasp something of the rationale of the divine economy (τινα νοῦν τῆς οἰκονομίας).¹⁵⁰ Unless that kind of human mental activity is involved, theology can only lapse into some sort of epistemological monophysitism and pseudo-mysticism.

The *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* together provide a good example of this kind of rational activity in which an attempt is made through heuristic argumentation within the field of God–man–world or God–world–man inter-connections to find a way into the central unity or order of things which is then allowed as the inquiry proceeds to throw light upon the whole complex of connections with which we are concerned in theology, and not least upon the distinctive kind of intelligible connection appropriate to its actual subject-matter. All *a priori* argumentation is set aside, and with it any argumentation from an epistemological or cosmological system people may have inherited or attained prior to or independently of their actual knowledge of God as the Father of Jesus Christ. Nor is this an attempt to derive knowledge of God abstractively from the words of Holy Scripture or to develop it out of the manuals of earlier theologians,¹⁵¹ but rather an attempt within the field of faith in God through Christ to penetrate into its own intrinsic order and intelligibility, by argument that operates on the actual ground on which faith has arisen, and with reasons and evidence derived from the material content of the faith. The *Contra Gentes* and the *De Incarnatione*, even apart from Athanasius' later and major works, have thus great methodological significance for the history of Christian

¹⁵⁰ *In illud, omnia*, 1.3. The argument moves from 'the economy according to the flesh' to the essential and inseparable relation of the Son to the Father, and then into an understanding of the *Trisagion*.

¹⁵¹ *Contra Gentes*, 1.

theology, for they broke new ground and put forward a new scientific method in showing how a conjunctive and synthetic mode of thought could penetrate into the intrinsic subject-matter of theology with positive results: in disclosing the organic way in which creation and redemption are to be understood from a point of central reference (or *skopos*) in the Incarnation of the Word or Son of God, and in developing an intelligible structure of understanding reaching back to a creative centre in God, which throws an integrating light upon all theological relations and connections.

The first thing Athanasius sought to do in the *Contra Gentes* was to lay bare the inherent reasonableness of worship and faith in Christ the Saviour and of knowledge of the Father through him, by showing up the inconsistent and contradictory character of erroneous approaches and then by letting the truth shine in its own light in such a way as to command trust or faith in it.¹⁵² It is truth itself that is the final judge of the rightness or wrongness of our ideas about it.¹⁵³ Hence theological activity must break through all disorderly and irrational into orderly and rational connections, to the point where the mind assents in faith to the self-evidence of reality itself.¹⁵⁴ That is to say, it must seek to understand things in their own compulsive movement and in their innate coherence, and develop forms of thought in harmony with the ordering and sustaining activity of God¹⁵⁵ that becomes manifest to us when through obedience to him we do not stray from the perspective of the truth.¹⁵⁶

The intention is to get on to the way of the truth that leads to the really existent God as the proper object of faith and knowledge,¹⁵⁷ but that way opens up to us only as we let our thinking fall into line with the appropriate order or pattern of connection that pervades the universal relation of God to the creation, and then only as we learn to attend away from ourselves in contemplation (*θεωρία*) of what is outside of, other than, or above ourselves – indeed the capacity to think diacritically and objectively in accordance with what is beyond us is the

¹⁵² *Contra Gentes*, 1.7.

¹⁵³ *Contra Gentes*, 17, 20; *De Incarnatione*, 29.

¹⁵⁴ *Contra Gentes*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ A variety of verbs is used to describe this in the *Contra Gentes*: διακοσμεῖν 44, 43ff; επιβιβάνειν, 42; τηρεῖν, 42; ἐπιστατεῖν, 44; ἡγεμονεύειν 44; κινεῖν, 44; συνέχειν, 44.

¹⁵⁶ *Contra Gentes*, 5, 29.

¹⁵⁷ *Contra Gentes*, 9, 30, 47.

essence of human rationality.¹⁵⁸ Athanasius is convinced that when our mind acts in that way, it is in tune with the rational order that pervades the created universe, and is already on the way of truth that leads to the really existent God.¹⁵⁹ This does not mean that he thinks of the human soul as being able to reach God by logical reasoning, but rather that through communing with the providential and regulating activity of God in the symmetry (συμμετρία), order (τάξις), concord (ὁμόνοια), harmony (ἁρμονία), symphony (συμφωνία) and system (σύνταξις) of the cosmos, which cry aloud for God, the human soul is directed through its own rational nature as by a mirror to look away from creaturely rationalities to the uncreated and creative *Logos* of God¹⁶⁰ That is not some immanent reason in the universe, but the *Autologos* of the living and acting God who is other than created things and all creation, the good Word of the good Father, who has established the order of all things, reconciling opposites into a single harmony.¹⁶¹ That is the *Logos* in accordance with whose image man has been created by grace, the *Logos* of the Father who has condescended to created things in Jesus Christ.¹⁶² It is in and through him, therefore, that we are really able to discern the fitting order of things, how by the will of God the Word the whole universe is regulated, with everything taking place in its own appropriate way, resulting in one common order everywhere.¹⁶³

The immense emphasis that Athanasius lays upon the *one common order* in the one created cosmos, the fact that by the intrinsic rationality of things (λόγου ὄντος φυσικοῦ)¹⁶⁴ there is not finally chaos or disorder but one harmonious system of the cosmos (κόσμου παναρμόνιος συντάξις) enlightened and regulated by the one *Logos*, pointing to the fact that God is one and not many (ἓνα καὶ οὐ πολλούς), is a sustained rejection of the dualism, pluralism and polymorphism of Hellenic philosophy, religion and science.¹⁶⁵ The entire universe of visible and invisible, celestial and terrestrial, realities is a cosmic unity due to the all-embracing providential and integrating activity of the divine *Logos*, so that a single rational order

¹⁵⁸ *Contra Gentes*, 8, 19, 23, 30.

¹⁵⁹ *Contra Gentes*, 29ff, 47.

¹⁶⁰ *Contra Gentes*, 8, 34ff, 38ff, 42, 44.

¹⁶¹ *Contra Gentes*, 40f, 46.

¹⁶² *Contra Gentes*, 35ff, 40f.

¹⁶³ *Contra Gentes*, 41, 43f.

¹⁶⁴ *Contra Gentes*, 39.

¹⁶⁵ *Contra Gentes*, 35, 38, 39, 40, 42, 44, 46; cf. *Contra Arianos*, 3.16.

pervades all created existence contingent upon the transcendent rationality of God, the Lord of creation who is himself beyond all created being.¹⁶⁶

Having thus tuned in to the central and creative order of things in God's relation to the universe, and grasped something of man's intelligible relatedness to it all, at least in a general way, Athanasius turned in the *De Incarnatione* to concentrate upon the specific relation of God to man and man to God discerned in the Inhomination of his *Logos* in Jesus Christ. Man himself is a part of the whole cosmos, so that when the *Logos* became incarnate in man, God revealed himself through a part of the whole, and thus provided not only the essential clue for our understanding of the relation of God to the world in the light of his redeeming and renewing activity in Jesus Christ, but also the essential way of truth along which we may travel in knowing the invisible Father himself.¹⁶⁷ And so Athanasius set himself to the distinctively theological task of inquiring into the ordering force and distinctive pattern of grace manifested in the life and work of the Incarnate *Logos* in order to learn from the *Logos* himself, as far as it is possible for human nature, the inner movement and reason for God's redeeming and renewing activity in the cosmos. Hence it is the humanity which Christ assumed from us and what he did for us and on our behalf in it that presents us with the key for deeper theoretic insight into the saving economy of God.

While all this is possible only because the *Autologos* has condescended to us in our physical existence and made himself known to us there, that through him we may attain some conceptual grasp of God the Father, we are unable to bring within the compass of our finite minds the multifarious activities of the *Logos*, far less to conceive of their integrated wholeness, so that we have great difficulty in grasping the economy of God towards us in its inner relations and connections. Athanasius likened this difficulty to that which we have when trying to take into our gaze the vast expanse of the ocean and its innumerable waves.

As one cannot grasp all the waves with one's eyes, for successive waves baffle the perception of anyone who attempts it, so he who tries to grasp all the achievements of Christ in the body is unable to bring them within the compass of his reasoning, since what comes before his mind greatly transcends what he thinks he conceives. Hence it is better not to try to

¹⁶⁶ *Contra Gentes*, 35ff, 40; *De Incarnatione*, 2.

¹⁶⁷ *De Incarnatione*, 42, 56f.

speak of the whole when one cannot be precise about a part, but yet to bring to mind one part while leaving you to wonder at the whole.¹⁶⁸

Two comments may be offered about this. (a) Here we have a kind of order which is at once simple and complex, with a scope and range that utterly surpasses what a human mind can master through an analysis of its particular components. Nevertheless, some advance into an understanding of its structured relations may be possible if and as we develop the appropriate conceptual instrumentality through which we tune our thinking into the power of its intrinsic order or pattern of intelligibility. To do that we will have to operate with some essential part of the whole where the organic structure of the whole reveals itself, even though as a whole its range indefinitely transcends what we can bring within the compass of our comprehension.¹⁶⁹ (b) Here then we are in a situation where forms of thought and speech which we must use indicate far more than can be formalised,¹⁷⁰ so that in faithfulness to the distinctive subject-matter of theology we must operate with appropriate and open structures of thought – open structures, that is, which are correlated to the unlimited reality of God.¹⁷¹ The dynamic patterns of connection intrinsic to the field of interaction between the living God and his creation elude all attempts to contain and construe them within a limited or constructive framework of causal and logical relations, for the kind of order they involve is not amenable to causal or logical explanation. While we must certainly think consistently (κατ' ἀκολουθίαν) we must allow the distinctive nature (φύσις) of what we are thinking about to determine what are the suitable or fitting connections in terms of which we may interpret it aright.¹⁷² Theology that proceeds strictly by thinking κατὰ φύσιν of God in his economic condescension to us in Jesus Christ, cannot proceed by determining certain fixed positions and then arguing deductively from them as axioms in the old Euclidean or Aristotelian way, for that would involve operating with a kind of *necessity* which is

¹⁶⁸ *De Incarnatione*, 54; cf. also 56 and 57.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *De Incarnatione*, 42, in which Athanasius points out that the Logos reveals himself to us in the universe by operating through a part of the whole.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Ad Monachos*, 1f.

¹⁷¹ Hence the act of conceiving (καταλαβῆναι) takes place only in so far as human nature is able to learn about God the Word: καθ' ὅσον ἐφικτόν ἐστι τῇ ἀνθρώπων φύσει περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου μανθάνειν -- *De Incarnatione*, 57; cf. *Contra Arianos*, 2.32.

¹⁷² *De Incarnatione*, 1f, 36, etc.

alien to the nature of God and the activity of his Spirit. Nevertheless, some way must be found to discern the coherent sequence of relation or chain of connection (ἀκολουθία or εἰρμός) in God's saving *economy*, and to develop that as a basic *clue* (πρόφασις, πρόληψις, or υπόθεσις) for our understanding, in the most appropriate and accurate way possible, of the essential pattern of truth as it is in Jesus Christ.¹⁷³

That is what Athanasius was engaged in doing in the *De Incarnatione*. Certainly, as in the *Contra Gentes*, and as later on in the *Contra Arianos*, for example, he made considerable use of logico-deductive argumentation to clarify thought and most of all to demolish the distorting deviations that were thrown up by heretics, in exposing their inner self-contradiction, but that method was not suitable and could not be employed in positive apprehension or articulation of the truth of God which is revealed in the person and work of his Incarnate Son. Here we have to do with an order of a higher kind which has its own proper intelligibility and which is to be understood and interpreted only through *appropriate* modes of thought and *appropriate* kinds of connection. That is the significance, in the development of his argument, of Athanasius' recurring emphasis upon terms expressing (in adjectival, verbal or adverbial form) what is *suitable* or *fitting*,¹⁷⁴ what is in *place* or *appropriate*,¹⁷⁵ what is *worthy* or *properly in accordance with*,¹⁷⁶ what is *required* or *needful*,¹⁷⁷ or what is *necessary* in the sense of what is in accordance with the nature of God and of man in their interrelations¹⁷⁸ – this is an extension of the biblical 'it behoved' or 'ought', for example, as applied to Christ.¹⁷⁹ Quite evidently Athanasius was grappling for the appropriate kind of connection in thought with which to express the structure of orderly relations inherent in the field of God's interaction with man, in a determination to allow an 'empirico-theological fit' to shape his thought and argument at the decisive points. In other words, he was penetrating

¹⁷³ See *De Incarnatione*, 1–4; and also 'The Hermeneutics of St Athanasius', Chapter 8, pp. 229–288.

¹⁷⁴ *De Incarnatione*, 1f, 6, 8, 10, 21f, 25, 33, 42.

¹⁷⁵ *De Incarnatione*, 6, 7, 8, 42f.

¹⁷⁶ *De Incarnatione*, 1, 6, 7, 13, 32, 42.

¹⁷⁷ *De Incarnatione*, 2, 6ff, 10, 13f, 21ff, 30, 37, 44.

¹⁷⁸ *De Incarnatione*, 2, 6f, 10, 13, 21f, 24f, 30, 37.

¹⁷⁹ See Luke 24.26, 46, or Hebrews 2.17; 5.3, etc.

into the inner reason (τὸ εὐλογον),¹⁸⁰ the religiously or theologically sufficient reason of things, both in respect of God in terms of what is worthy of him, and in respect of man in terms of what is needful for him. Thus in the *De Incarnatione*, as in the *Contra Gentes*, he proceeded first largely by negatives, setting aside first this and then that notion or argument in which his mind, so to speak, shouldered its way through unsuitable or unfitting or inappropriate ideas and relations, in order to let the real reason manifest itself and thrust itself upon him in its own truth and light.

His method was to direct questions hard upon each other, questions which become continuously refined and more penetrating in the process, before which the nature of things becomes disclosed in their own empirical and objective reality and in their inner relations, and which are progressively brought to expression and articulation in appropriate forms of thought adapted from or coined out of ordinary forms of thought and speech. That is how the relational concepts, which we have already discussed, came into existence and operation. Such a method does mean that theological activity must elbow its way, as it were, through a crowd of ordinary concepts and presuppositions which obscure the nature of reality of the field in question, until it comes up against the ultimately *simple but profound pattern of the truth in its own self-evidence*, which then becomes the controlling factor in theological construction. At the same time, the success of this method in allowing coherent and consistent theological construction to develop which will serve the clearer and fuller disclosure of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, inevitably plays a role in testing its appropriateness and fidelity to the truth.

In the course of that kind of theological inquiry in the *De Incarnatione*, the inner reason for which he was looking came to light as *the love of God towards man* (φιλανθρωπία) actualised in the saving condescension of his Son to us in our creaturely and fallen condition where we have become captive to corruption and irrationality. But the 'logic' of it was discerned in the active relation of the divine philanthropy to the need, sin, and instability of human being, in which the *Logos* or Son of God became man, sharing to the full our physical condition in mortal flesh where we exist under the condemnation of the divine law and the threat or menace

¹⁸⁰ *De Incarnatione*, 7, 10, 22, 25, 31; cf. 1f, 4, 21, 34, 45.

of non-being. In that situation the Incarnate Son of the Father came to men and appropriated human nature to himself in order to act not only for man but from the side of man and thus to restore his relation to the Father through atoning reconciliation and sanctifying re-creation, which is evidently the *primary reason* for the Incarnation of the Saviour.¹⁸¹ The inherent intelligibility of this truth derived from insight into the abasement and crucifixion of the Son of God is then developed and greatly reinforced in a lengthy discussion in which Athanasius shows how in this way, so apparently absurd to the Greek mind, the Creator has effected the restoration of rationality and rational understanding in man through and in the *Logos*. But uniting himself to man in the Incarnation the *Logos* has not only integrated human nature again into the central order of things in God, but has made man to participate by grace in his own image as Word of the Father, so that the new being of man in Jesus Christ is one characterised by the distinctive pattern of grace (ἡ κατ' εἰκόνα χάρις) deriving from God himself.¹⁸² 'Hence his death on the cross on our behalf was appropriate and fitting, and its ground was revealed to be altogether reasonable: moreover it admits of right reasons why the salvation of all had to take place in no other way except through the cross.'¹⁸³ At this point the truth becomes compellingly demonstrative through its own self-evidence, and commands the assent of faith.¹⁸⁴ Athanasius then proceeds to argue in much the same way for the resurrection of Christ, showing how in the last analysis it demonstrates itself by its own self-evidence and reality.¹⁸⁵ Thus the resurrection and the crucifixion together enable us to understand the Incarnation of the Word in accordance with its own sufficient reason (κατὰ τὴν εὐλογον ἀκολουθίαν).¹⁸⁶ Self-evident proofs (ἀποδείξεις ἐναργεῖς) of this kind are then set out in some detail to refute the charge of Jews as to the impropriety of the cross and the Incarnation of the Word of God,¹⁸⁷ and

¹⁸¹ *De Incarnatione*, 7–10.

¹⁸² *De Incarnatione*, 11–25.

¹⁸³ *De Incarnatione*, 26: πρέπων οὖν καὶ ἀρμόζων ὁ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ γέγονε θάνατος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν· καὶ ἡ αἰτία τούτου εὐλογος ἐφάνη κατὰ πάντα, καὶ δικαίους ἔχει τοὺς λογισμούς, ὅτι μὴ ἄλλως, ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἔδει γενέσθαι τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν πάντων. Cf. *De Vita Antonii*, 77; and Clement, *Stromateis*, 8.7, 3–4.

¹⁸⁴ *De Incarnatione*, 27–29.

¹⁸⁵ *De Incarnatione*, 30ff, 40.

¹⁸⁶ *De Incarnatione*, 31.

¹⁸⁷ *De Incarnatione*, 33–40.

to refute the charge of the Greeks as to the absurdity and irrationality of the Christian teaching that in Jesus Christ the Creator Word of God has himself become man.¹⁸⁸ In both cases Athanasius is concerned to show the appropriateness and intelligibility of God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ and its intrinsic coherence with the order which through the presence and activity of the *Logos* pervades the whole universe, but this also had the effect of establishing knowledge of Christ as God the Word and the Power of God.¹⁸⁹

Athanasius concluded his discussion in the *De Incarnatione* by pointing out that what he offered within this brief compass to the lover of Christ was 'the basic grammar and distinctive pattern (στοιχείωσιν καὶ χαρακτηῖρα) of the faith in accordance with Christ and his divine manifestation towards us'; and then urged him to take his clue (πρόφασιν) from this and go on genuinely to apply his mind to the words of the Scriptures, for in so doing he would learn more completely and clearly the exactness or precision (ἀκρίβειαν) of what had been said.¹⁹⁰ For inquiry and knowledge of this kind, however, integrity of life, purity of soul and virtue in Christ are needed, in order that the mind, journeying along this road, may be able to reach and grasp its objective, as far as it is possible for human nature to learn of the Word of God.¹⁹¹ That is to say, inquiry and understanding are not separate from a corresponding way of life (ἀγωγή τῆς συζήσεως),¹⁹² so that only if we get inside that way of life can we attain disposition of mind (φρόνημα) in worthy accordance with God's self-revelation in Christ and develop the appropriate modes of thought and speech which it requires. In short, the road to God the Father is one which we take not only *through* but *with* Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit.¹⁹³

It should now be clear that what Athanasius was doing in the *De Incarnatione* was to find a way of understanding the interaction of God with the world in creation and redemption from a point of central reference in the Incarnation of the Word or Son of God, in such a way as to let it give inner cohesion and structure to all Christian understanding.

¹⁸⁸ *De Incarnatione*, 41–55.

¹⁸⁹ *De Incarnatione*, 55.

¹⁹⁰ *De Incarnatione*, 56; see *Contra Arianos*, 28f; *De decretis*, 32.

¹⁹¹ *De Incarnatione*, 57.

¹⁹² *De Incarnatione*, 57.

¹⁹³ *De Incarnatione*, 57.

That was how he went on in later years to pierce through the theological confusion of Arians and semi-Arians in developing the doctrines of the Son and of the Spirit and of the holy Trinity, in the course of which he brought to light the immense epistemological significance of the *homoousion* and the structural centrality of the Father–Son–Spirit relation, both for the basic knowledge of God and for the organic pattern integrating all the doctrines of the Christian faith. That is a theological method which left its mark upon the on-going formulation of Christian theology in East and West, evident in the great Ecumenical Councils, but so far as individual theologians were concerned, its influence is particularly discernible in the writings of Hilary, and later on in the work of Anselm who developed it in a more consciously rigorous form. The significance of the Athanasian method can be indicated by comparing it to the way in which we operate today, not with fixed axioms from which we proceed by logico-deductive processes to conclusions, but with ‘fluid axioms’ in field-physics as progressively refined conceptual instruments by means of which we seek to lay bare the inner intelligible structure of the space-time metrical field in some area of scientific investigation. It was, as far as I am aware, Athanasius who first began to develop this kind of scientific method operating with relational concepts in his attempt to think faithfully and worthily of God in accordance with his nature revealed in Christ and in accordance with the nature of his economic activity in our human and historical existence.

The continuing relevance of Athanasius’ theological achievement may be pointed out by relating it to the basic problems that confront us in modern theology, and indeed have been confronting us for centuries, for they are essentially the same as those which Athanasius faced in the fourth century. Our problems today have largely been created (a) by the axiomatic assumption of a radical dichotomy between a realm of phenomena and a realm of noumena, together with (b) a container conception of space which, whether cast in its strict Newtonian or in its Kantian form, leads to the concept of a mechanistic universe with its closed continuum of cause and effect. On those assumptions the Judaeo-Christian teaching about God acting in history and becoming himself incarnate in space and time, can only be distorted into some sort of mythology which then demands demythologisation. Athanasius had to cope with basically the same problems in the dualistic cosmology and epistemology prevalent in his own day, and in the widespread container

conception of space which with variations between the philosophical schools prevailed everywhere in the civilised world of his day. Following Origen, he met that difficult situation by a profound reconstruction of the very basis of Greek philosophy and science, and proceeded to develop the appropriate theological method we have been discussing, by means of which he was able to lay down securely the scientific foundations upon which all classical Catholic theology has been built. That is the historic achievement of Athanasius which challenges us to do the same sort of thing in our twentieth-century context of philosophy and science. We will be able to do this, not by blindly following in the steps of the great Alexandrian theologian, but by getting to grips with the axiomatic assumptions and obsolete notions of space and time that still pervade our own human culture. Here, however, we have an ally of far-reaching importance, such as Athanasius did not have, namely, a scientific and cosmological reconstruction of our basic attitude to the universe which, ever since the rise of relativity theory, has decisively undermined the damaging dualisms that have afflicted Western philosophy and science and have caused deep splits in our culture with consequent widespread disintegration of form in the arts and social sciences. Modern thought has advanced to the point where it is now possible in a new and much profounder way to articulate the Judaeo-Christian teaching about God's interaction with this world, for it can supply us with a powerful understanding of the unity of form and being, or of structure and substance, in a dynamic, continuous indivisible field, together with appropriate conceptual instruments which, *mutatis mutandis*, we must learn to adapt and apply in accurate and rigorous scientific theology, in much the same way as that exhibited by Athanasius in his own day. At the same time, this opens up the possibility for a reconstruction of classical Catholic and Evangelical theology on its own proper scientific basis, within the context of the world disclosed through modern science, which may not only serve an ecumenical purpose in the world-wide union of Christ's Church, but also a cultural purpose in pointing the way to a profounder integration of human life and thought.

Chapter 8

THE HERMENEUTICS OF ATHANASIUS*

Introduction: The Theological Background

Athanasius was trained in the Alexandrian tradition and inherited from it a powerful doctrine of the *Logos*, which came to the fore in his two early treatises, *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, but he developed it in his own way, through sustained biblical study and relentless faithfulness to the teaching of the New Testament, by subordinating it to the doctrine of the Son. Right from the start his affinities with the teaching of the early Apologists, and with Clement and Origen, were surprisingly slight, and all through his life he moved further and further away from them in his struggle with Arians and Semi-Arians, Sabellians and Macedonians, etc., in the direction that had already been pointed out by Irenaeus in his refutation of Valentinus and Marcion. The Incarnation of the *Logos* meant for Athanasius the coming of God himself in his own Being into human life and existence, in order to redeem humanity from corruption and error and to restore it to communion with himself by adoption in and through Jesus Christ.¹ Thus the whole notion of the *Logos* as taught by the Alexandrians, Hellenic, Jewish or Christian, was modified and radically altered by its identification with the Incarnate Son of God and a very serious doctrine of Atonement. As von Harnack has rightly said, 'the *Logos* of the philosophers was no longer the *Logos* whom Athanasius knew and adored'.² The notion of a *Logos* as some intervenient divine element between God and the world, or as some immanent divine principle bound up with the world, or indeed any independent *Logos* doctrine, has no place in the theology of Athanasius. The old *Logos* doctrine is discarded; Nature and Revelation no longer continue to be regarded

* Reprinted from *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, Addis Ababa, 1970, No. 1, pp. 446-468; Nos. 2-5, pp. 89-106; No. 4, pp. 237-249; 1971, No. 1, pp. 133-149.

¹ See *Contra Gentes*, 40.1f, 45ff; *Expositio Fidei*, 1.

² A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 4, London, Edinburgh, Oxford, 1898, p. 29.

as identical. Christ is not interpreted by a *Logos* idea, but Christ the Incarnate Son of the Father, is the one and only *Logos* or Mind and Word of God, through whom all things were made, and through whom alone the Father is known. What Jesus Christ is and has done and continues to do, that is the *Logos* of the Father.

The outstanding emphasis in this theology is the consubstantiality of the Incarnate Son. He is ὁμοούσιος with the Father, of the same substance as he. But the Son has taken a human body in and through which he has appropriated human nature for himself, including human life and action and feeling, human thought and speech. In him the *Logos*, the eternal Reason and Word of God, the Son of the Father, is fully incarnate in human life and being, and as such is the source of all our knowledge of God and of our continuing communion with him. This Christological and soteriological doctrine of the *Logos* determined the whole perspective of hermeneutics. That does not mean that some independent notion is brought to the Scripture *ab extra* as the principle of its interpretation. Athanasius' doctrine of the *Logos* arises out of the exegesis of the Scriptures, although at the same time it affects the doctrine of Scripture and determines its proper and regular interpretation.

In discarding the philosophical doctrine of the *Logos* Athanasius also discarded the dichotomy between a κόσμος αἰσθητός and a κόσμος νοητός, and therefore the principle so dearly loved in the Platonic and Neo-Platonic tradition that the sensible world is a symbolic reflection of the invisible realities of the intelligible world, which, as we have seen, exercised such a powerful influence upon Alexandrian exegesis. Athanasius thus rejected the fundamental ground upon which all allegorical exegesis and all tropical theology ultimately rest — that is the type of exegesis and the type of theology which derive the meaning of the saving acts of God in Jesus Christ not through a direct and realistic interpretation of them, but through an oblique or metaphorical re-interpretation.³ Of course a serious treatment of the acts of God in history in Israel and in Jesus Christ meant that the main lines of God's saving purpose in historical Israel were to be traced to their fulfilment in the Incarnation — and therefore a measure of typological exegesis was inevitable. But this

³ *Contra Arianos*, 2.44 is often cited as evidence that Athanasius sanctioned the oblique interpretation of Scripture according to a hidden meaning. But this is an abuse of the passage, which speaks explicitly and only of the *proverbial* utterances in the Scriptures, or of our Lord's *parables*.

mode of exegesis was the antithesis of allegory, and it arose out of the hermeneutic activity already in operation in the New Testament text. Its pursuit was Christologically controlled for it was itself the product of divine action in human history.

It was consistent of Athanasius that he should not operate with the Origenist distinction between the *letter* and the *spirit*,⁴ but should return to a more strictly Pauline distinction which was conceived rather differently as the contrast between a legalist and a spiritual handling of the Law or the Scriptures. 'Consult the Scriptures', Athanasius says,⁵ 'and you will find that the meaning in the divine words (τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς θείοις λόγοις νοῦν) is also called "spirit", as Paul writes: "Who also has made us able ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills but the spirit gives life".⁶ For what is spoken is characterised by letter but the meaning which is in it is called "spirit"? And thus the law also is spiritual so that, as he says again, we are not to serve "in the oldness of the letter" but "in the newness of spirit".⁷ Quite evidently the letter of the law refers to the divine Word in written form. But it must not be treated legalistically as mere letter. We do not pay attention therefore to words only but to what is expressed, and receive it in a different spirit, with 'the new heart and the new mind' which we are given by the Spirit of God when God puts his Spirit within us.⁸ When we understand the divine words of the Scripture in this way we receive the mind that was remade and renewed in Jesus Christ (τὸν ἐν Χριστῷ κτισθέντα καὶ ἀνακαινισθέντα νοῦν).⁹

This is a particularly interesting passage for it is evidence that Athanasius cannot be interpreted as agreeing with the heretical notion associated with his friend Apollinaris of Laodicea, and of course it is in line with his immense insistence upon the vicarious role of the human nature of Christ, not just of Christ as 'body' or 'flesh' but explicitly and of Christ as fully 'man'.¹⁰ The passage cited from the *Ad Serapionem*

⁴ Cf. Origen, *Commentary on Rom.* 6.11.

⁵ *Ad Serapionem*, 1–8.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 3.6.

⁷ Romans 7.6.

⁸ The reference is to Ezekiel 36.20.

⁹ *Ad Ser.* 1.9.

¹⁰ Hence right from the start Athanasius consistently spoke of the Incarnation not only as ἐνσάρκωσις or ἐνσωμάτωσις but as ἐνανθρώπησις. Cf. *Con. Ar.* 1.41 ff; 2.7 ff, 47 ff, 61 ff, 71 ff, 3.19 ff, 31 ff, etc.

calls for comparison with another in the *Contra Apollinarium* which, if Athanasius did not actually write it himself, is certainly Athanasian and entirely consistent with his teaching elsewhere. In this passage a similar distinction is drawn between the first Adam and second Adam, and expounded as a distinction between the same body 'under the authority and nature of spirit' (ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ καὶ φύσει πνεύματος). The first is spoken of as psychical but the second as spiritual, for God the Word is Spirit (πνεῦμα γὰρ ὁ Θεὸς λόγος).¹¹ It is in this sense that we are to understand other words of St Paul to the effect that the spiritual man discerns spiritual things of the Spirit.¹² That is to say, if we are to interpret the words of Holy Scripture not according to the letter merely, as an external law, which any rational or natural person can do, but according to the creative and renewing power of the Spirit, which is their real meaning, then we must interpret them, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, under the authority and nature of God's Spirit who inscribes the divine Word in our heart and through his presence within us renews us after the likeness of Christ and makes us share in his Mind.

There is no allegorical or tropical interpretation here, for the meaning is found in the real and creative activity of God's Spirit. That is not metaphor but reality (ἀλήθεια). But it is significant that in the passages we have been considering Athanasius relates the divine words to the divine acts (ῥήματα ἢ γεγράμμενα τὸ γενόμενα) for the meaning of the words written is not found in the letters as such but in the divine actions which they express,¹³ and the written words are the instrument of the Spirit who writes them in our minds and lives if we receive them in accordance with his power and nature. That is to say, the words have to be read and interpreted as directing us to the *Logos the Spirit who speaks* to us and *acts* upon us through them. Hence to understand what

¹¹ *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.8. I myself find it very difficult to see the force of the arguments against the Athanasian authorship of the *Con. Apollinarium*, for they appear to rest on the use of the words *flesh* and *body* abstracted from the substance of Athanasian soteriology which from end to end teaches that our full human nature is redeemed and sanctified through its assumption by the Son, involving both his expiatory work for sin in it, and his reception, as man in our place, of the Spirit and Grace of God.

¹² 1. Corinthians 2.14.

¹³ Cf. the use of σημαίνω and δηλόω in *In illud, omnia*, 1f, where Athanasius interprets the language of the Gospels as pointing to the activity of God in the Incarnation or 'the economy according to the flesh'.

Athanasius means we have to look more closely at his notion of *logos* and of the *Logos* in this connection.

In the *Contra Gentes* an analogy is drawn between the human *logos* and the divine in this way. When a word proceeds from men, we infer that the mind is its source, and by thinking about the words, we see with our reason the mind which it reveals. In an incomparably greater way we receive a knowledge of the Father as we see the power of the Word, for the Word is the Father's Interpreter and Messenger.¹⁴

Later on, in the *Contra Arianos*, he insists that because God is not such as we men are, his Word is not like our word. Thus no argument can be made from man's word to God's but it does help us to understand the nature of the divine Word when we set it in contrast to the human word. When man's word is spoken it is over and does not continue, for it has no being. But God's Word exists and ever is. It is not merely pronounced, and is not something temporary that passes away, but is everlasting for it is the form of the divine Being and is God himself. Moreover man's words do not avail for operation, for man works not by words but by his hands. But God's Word is his hand. God himself is at work in and through it. His Word is his own Being in activity¹⁵. Hence God's Word is his Son, his own and proper Word. The Word is really God the Son, and the Son is really, and not just noetically (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν), the Word of God, but his own proper Wisdom and Power.¹⁶

Because the relation between this *Logos* of God and men is not just a noetic relation, but one in which God works and creates, no relation of question and answer is involved.¹⁷ Since this is the case we cannot understand the nature of God and his Word by subjecting him to our own questions. No argument of ours can penetrate into the Truth of God. Rather do we respect God's nature, not by asking 'impious questions' like that, but by yielding to his creative activity upon us, and thinking under the operation of his Word upon us.¹⁸ We may think out from a centre in God's Word, but we cannot think our way into him through our own reasoning. We are able to do this because he has come among us and speaks

¹⁴ *Con. Gentes*, 45. See also *De sententia Dionysii*, 23, 24.

¹⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.35, 36; cf. 31.

¹⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.37.

¹⁷ *Con. Ar.* 2.31: όταν δὲ ἐργάζεται αὐτός, καὶ κτίζει ὁ λόγος, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκεῖ ἐρώτησις καὶ ἀπόκρισις; cf. *Ad Serap.* 1.15.

¹⁸ *Con. Ar.* 1.24, 2.36.

to us in and through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. He speaks to us and of himself in human ways, yet it is through his own Word who is consubstantial with himself that he thus speaks, and not through another. Jesus Christ is the Word and Form (εἶδος) of Godhead.¹⁹

That is the *Logos*, God himself speaking to us and acting upon us in Jesus Christ, whom we must hear and understand if we are to interpret the divine words of Holy Scripture according to their proper sense and nature. Apart from the *Logos* of God there is no truly *logical* thinking or speaking for the *Logos* is the source of all rationality in thought and speech.²⁰ Applied to the interpretation of Holy Scripture, that means that only when we discern the relation between the words (λόγοι) and the Word (λόγος) are we engaged in rational exegesis in accordance with the speaking and acting of God upon us in Jesus Christ. Thus Athanasius keeps on insisting that interpretation of the Scriptures must be carried out in accordance with a right (ὀρθός, *rectus*) theological judgment (γνώμη, διάνοια, φρόνημα), in which by thinking out of the divine Word and not out of a centre in ourselves we refer human forms of thought and speech in the Scriptures beyond themselves to the divine reality they signify. To confuse the human and the divine, to mix up the truth of God with ourselves, is the way of mythology, while to be so engrossed with one's own human nature as to base doctrine upon self-knowledge is the source of heresy, and in fact the way that leads to atheism.²¹ But if we think from a centre in the Incarnate Word, following the ways and works of God himself,²² then interpretation must allow the Incarnation to provide us with the basic centre of reference or object (the *scope*), and so we must frame our understanding and order our statements in accordance with the nature and mode of God's saving work (or *economy*). Interpretation will be exact and faithful in so far as it operates within the boundaries of the ways and acts of God.

Hence interpretation is proper and correct when it does the following: (1) keeps to the scope of the divine revelation in the Scriptures (2) respects the economical nature of God's acts and words (3) keeps to the

¹⁹ *Con. Ar.* 3.6, 14–16.

²⁰ This is a recurring theme of the *De Incarnatione*, but cf. also *De decretis Nicaenae Synodis*, 2; *Con. Ar.* 1.35, etc.

²¹ *De decretis Nicaenae Synodis*, 14ff; *Con. Ar.* 1.1f, 2.1, 18, 43f, 52; 3.8, 10, 17, 67; *Ad Serapionem*, 1.1f, 29ff; 3.2, 4.6. (See also *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.22.)

²² *Expositio Fidei*, 4.

orderly connection signified by the words and sentences of Holy Scripture in order that they may yield their own interpretation, and (4) checks and proves its statements in accordance with the rule of faith that arises out of the Church's understanding of the *kerygma* as mediated to us through the apostolic writings.

1. The scope of Divine Scripture

Athanasios uses σκοπός (scope) in two allied ways. Primarily it refers to the object on which the eye is fixed, but it may also refer to the goal or end toward which attention is or ought to be directed.²³ Applied to the Scriptures σκοπός refers to the objective realities indicated by the words or to the principal end at which they aim. The two senses cannot really be held apart, for it is the objective reference of the Scriptures that gives them their line of direction and their ultimate coherence, and at the same time determines the way in which they are to be approached. Σκοπός²⁴ thus can be used in a wide sense to describe the general perspective or frame of reference within which the Scriptures are rightly to be interpreted (κατὰ σκοπόν), and in a deeper sense to denote the basic pattern of meaning that is perceived when the interpreter not only looks at the written words but looks through them at the objective centre of reference beyond πρὸς σκοπόν.

Of fundamental significance is the fact that the language of Scripture points away from itself to independent realities and is to be understood by acts in which we look through it, refer it back to its source, discriminate the realities indicated and so determine the meaning of what is written according to the nature of the things signified (κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου τῶν σημαινομένων φύσιν τὰ γεγραμμένα διαγινώσκειν).²⁵ It is in this way that we avoid confusing the meaning (διάνοιαν) either through conceiving of divine things in a merely human way or through attributing human things to God. Hence

²³ *Con. Geni.* 30; *De Synodis*, 46.

²⁴ In profane usage σκοπός was frequently used both for the goal (and turning post, *meta*) in the race-course, and of the bounds of the course. Applied in this way to the chariot-course of Christian obedience σκοπός refers both to the *goal* of truth and to the *way* from which faith must not swerve, *Con. Geni.* 5.30. With σκοπός used in this way Athanasios employs the verbs ἀκολουθέω, διώκω, πολιτεύομαι, σκοπέω, τυγχάνω.

²⁵ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 10.

biblical and theological language must be used with discrimination, in which we understand the same terms in one sense of God and in another of men, for it is not just the grammatical connection of the words that gives them their meaning but the nature of the reality to which they refer.²⁶ This does not mean that we can neglect the peculiarities (ιδιώματα) of biblical language, for it is only by noting them carefully and following them in their semantic intention that we can be directed to consider and understand the realities they set before us. When in that way we really hear what the Scriptures have to say and encounter for ourselves the divine realities they point to in direct religious experience (εὐσέβεια),²⁷ then we may speak freely out of the divine Scriptures about this godly faith (ἐκ τῶν θείων γραφῶν παρρησιαζόμεθα περὶ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πίστεως).²⁸ This is how Athanasius justifies the use of the term ὁμοούσιος, for, although it is not a biblical term, it conveys the actual meaning of what the Bible has to say about Jesus Christ. 'Wherefore, if a person is ready to learn, let him know that even if the terms are not found as such in the Scriptures, nevertheless, as has been said already, they derive their meaning (διάνουαν), from the Scriptures, and by expressing it communicate it to those who have their hearing unimpaired for divine experience' (καὶ ταύτην ἐκφωνοῦμεναι σημαίνουσι τοῖς ἔχουσιν εἰς εὐσέβειαν τὴν ἀκοὴν ὀλόκληρον). 'This is what you are to consider (σκοπεῖν) and what the uninstructed are to give ear to (κατακούειν)'.²⁹

That is what Athanasius means by keeping to the scope (σκοπός) of divine Scripture. The interpreter does not bring his own private opinion (ὁ ἴδιος νοῦς) to the text, but submits himself to what he actually hears in and through it, that is, to the Word of truth, and so understands it within its own frame of reference, according to its own habits of speech and thought, and in accordance with the activity of the Word of truth in

²⁶ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 11, 21.

²⁷ For the meaning of εὐσέβεια in Athanasius' thought one must refer to 1 Timothy 3.16 which had a great influence on him. In his appeals to εὐσέβεια Athanasius refers to *the source of our actual experience of God*, especially in relation to the Incarnation. See *Ad episcopos Aegypti* where ἡ τῆς εὐσεβείας διάνουα is held in contrast to Arians who think διὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἑαυτῶν τῆς ἀσεβείας ἀρεσκίαν, 48&22, etc. See also *De Synod.* 6 where he likens the doctrine of Nicaea to τὴν ἐν θείαις γραφαῖς καταγγελομένην εἰς Χριστὸν εὐσέβειαν. There experience of God is Christocentric, reached on ground provided by Christ.

²⁸ *Con. Ar.* 1.9; see also *De sent. Dion.* 9; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20f, *De Synod.* 39.

²⁹ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 21. See also 22, and *Ad Afros*, 4-6.

becoming flesh.³⁰ The interpreter operates therefore on two levels, (a) that of the Scriptures in which he keeps to *the scope of biblical usage*, and (b) that of the objective reality in which he keeps to *the scope of faith or doctrine*.

(a) The interpreter must make himself thoroughly familiar with all the Scriptures in order to become acquainted with its customary modes of speaking. This is indeed one of the most striking characteristics of Athanasius' own exegesis. He has so steeped himself in all the sacred Scriptures, assimilated their forms of speech and thought, and attained such a mastery of their general tenor, that he can quickly discern the distinctive slant of a particular passage and bring out its natural and proper meaning without artifice.³¹ When he has to challenge the exegesis of others or interprets some more difficult passage he appeals to characteristic biblical usage – 'the scope and character of holy Scripture'.³² He uses a number of different words to describe this, such as *ιδίωμα*³³ or *τάξις*,³⁴ or *ἔθος*,³⁵ or *συνήθεια*.³⁶ 'According to the *ethos* of the Scripture' is an expression that is found not infrequently in his commentary on the Psalms.³⁷ What Athanasius is concerned with here is not peculiarity of linguistic expression but customary ways in which the Scriptures speak of divine or human things, for it is properly in the light of the whole trend that the slant of a particular passage is to be judged.

Far from being anything haphazard, this involves accurate investigation of the occasion, the persons and the special concern of the passage.³⁸ Thus in clarifying the understanding of Hebrews 1.4 after Arian distortion of the passage, Athanasius writes: 'As it is right and necessary to do in all divine Scripture, so here also we must take careful note of the occasion of which the Apostle wrote, and the person, and the object of his writing, lest the reader in ignorance of any of these things should

³⁰ *Con. Ar.* 1.37, 52f; 3.28, 35, etc. *Ad Ser. de morte Arii*, 5.

³¹ Cf. what Athanasius has to say in this respect about the fathers of Nicaea, *Ad Afros*, 4–6.

³² *Con. Ar.* 3.29.

³³ *Fragmenta in Job*, (*Athanasii Opera*, PG,3, p. 1343), *Con. Ar.* 11.4.

³⁴ *Fragmenta in Lucam*, 29 op.cit. p. 1397.

³⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.53, 3.18, 30; 4.27, 33.

³⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.17; 3.30; *Ad Marcellinum*, 11.27.

³⁷ *In Psalm.* 27.1; 40.4; 56.2; 75.7, etc.

³⁸ *De decr. Nicae. Syn.* 14, and *Ad Ser.* 2–3, 8.

miss this or that and be wide of the true meaning.³⁹ That is to say, the whole context, in time and place, the purpose of writing, the nature of the referents, as well as the connection of the sentences in the passage have to be taken into account – everything must be accurately observed and carefully pondered before a proper exposition can be offered. Relentless faithfulness to every aspect of biblical witness is required. No interpretation is adequate which hunts out stray expressions and passes over the truth that is to be found throughout.⁴⁰ It is the whole Scripture that has to be searched if we are to understand any part of it, but throughout particular attention must be paid to the specific reference of statements.⁴¹

(b) The interpreter, however, must operate at a deeper level than that of customary biblical usage, just because it is of the nature of biblical statements to refer to divine realities. He must concern himself with *the scope of faith*. It became more and more clear to Athanasius in his debates with the Arians that interpretation does not just follow on the sense of the words spoken or written but the objective meaning that lies behind them and which they are meant to express.⁴² The Arians appealed to the Scriptures to justify their own errors, but as Athanasius tirelessly points out they were simply putting on biblical language like sheep's clothing in order to maintain their own inventions.⁴³ It is of the utmost importance therefore to penetrate through the words and statements of the Scriptures to their real meaning which is rooted in the Word himself. In order to do that we have to take the Word seriously, follow him and become his disciples – interpretation must operate within the scope of faith, under the direction of the Word made flesh, and in accordance with his truth. In other words, interpretation has to be in accordance both with the words of Scripture and with what has taken place in Jesus Christ, and must be kept within the limits set by the nature of the things signified.⁴⁴ Used in this way *the scope of faith* means that a theological interpretation of the Scriptures is necessary if we are really to reach a right mind (διδύναται) about what they have to

³⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.54. Cf. also 55.

⁴⁰ *De sent. Dion.* 4.

⁴¹ *Ad episc. Aegi.* 5.

⁴² *Ad Ser. de morte Arii.* 5.

⁴³ *Ad episc. Aegi.* 4, 8f, 12ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Con. Apoll.* 1.8f, 13; 2.15, 19.

say.⁴⁵ How for example can we interpret the lowly and human things the Scriptures have to say about the Son or Word of God, unless we understand that he condescended to become man for our sakes? This is the burden of a section of the *Contra Arianos* where Athanasius is seeking to correct the Arian misunderstanding of certain biblical passages.⁴⁶ The unsoundness of their interpretation (διάνοια) can easily be seen, he says, 'if we take the scope of the faith that prevails among Christians, and using it as a rule (ὡςπερ κανόνι χρῆσάμενοι) turn to consider, as the Apostle says, the reading of the inspired Scripture. For the enemies of Christ through ignorance of this scope have wandered away from the path of truth, striking against a stumblingstone, thinking beyond what they ought.'⁴⁷ Athanasius is alluding here to what St Paul called the *analogy of faith*⁴⁸ and rightly takes it in its objective sense, for it is Christ himself, not just the coherence of biblical *loci*, which is the criterion for Christian understanding. Hence Athanasius goes on to say:

Now this scope and character of Holy Scripture, as we have often said, is twofold in its announcement about the Saviour namely, that he was eternally God and is the Son, as the Word and Radiance (ἀπαύγασμα) and Wisdom of the Father, and afterwards for our sake took flesh of the Virgin Mary, the bearer of God, and became man. And this is what is signified throughout all inspired Scripture, as the Lord himself has said, 'Search the scriptures, for they are they which testify of me.'⁴⁹

Thus all interpretation must look to the objective reality signified by the Scriptures, but that object or scope is Jesus Christ himself.⁵⁰ Since he is both God and man, keeping to the scope means that we must interpret the biblical statements in accordance with his divine and human natures, and in accordance with the saving purpose of his Incarnation.⁵¹ Hence at the end of this section when he has turned to the content of the biblical statements, namely, the Incarnation and atonement, as supplying the proper criterion for their detailed exegesis, he refers to his method again as keeping to the scope of faith (τὸν σκοπὸν τῆς πίστεως ἔχοντες). Moreover, he insisted that by pursuing this method it could be shown

⁴⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.44, 53; 3.26, 28.

⁴⁶ *Con. Ar.* 3.26–35.

⁴⁷ *Con. Ar.* 3.28; cf. 1.37, 52.

⁴⁸ Romans 12.3.

⁴⁹ *Con. Ar.* 3.29.

⁵⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.16.

⁵¹ *De Inc.* 4.

that what was misinterpreted by the Arians has a right signification (ὀρθῆν ἔχοντα τὴν διάνοιαν).⁵² Here the word 'right' (ὀρθός), as elsewhere in the usage of Athanasius, refers to the object of faith, the scope in the objective sense, and to what is in conformity with the general perspective of faith, i.e. within the scope of the Church's faithfulness to the apostolic *kerygma* and the prophetic testimony. The orthodoxy of a theological statement is its correspondence with the truth in this two-fold reference, in depth and in breadth.⁵³

There are three points here which we must note, although they overlap with what follows regarding the economical nature of biblical and theological statements.

(i) Because biblical language is to be interpreted in accordance with its objective reference to Christ the Word made flesh, their proper σκοπός, the various images and analogies that are found in that language have to be understood within the limits of that scope, and therefore in accordance with the nature of what is being signified, whether God or man, or the Word of God become man, etc. They are to be checked and understood within the limits of the Gospel (εὐαγγελικὸς ὄρος) and the fulfilled economy (οἰκονομία) of the Incarnation.⁵⁴ To transgress those limits posited by the very nature of what is signified is to fall into error both in exegesis and doctrine. Interpreters must beware of devising their own forms of expression in case they are actually doing violence to the essential conceptuality (διάνοια) of the Word. The Scriptures are entirely sufficient for our understanding of the Truth,⁵⁵ and we must keep within their scope even when we have to form new expressions for purposes of theological clarification, such as ὁμοούσιος. This is a line of argument that Athanasius adopts throughout the *Ad Serapionem*.⁵⁶

(ii) Because the scope of faith concerns what we have derived from the

⁵² *Con. Ar.* 2.35.

⁵³ See *Con. Ar.* 1.37 (and cf. *Con. Apoll.* 2.4.15); *Ad Ser. de morte Arian.* 5. In his notes on some of these passages Newman jumps too quickly to the conclusion that ὀρθός and σκοπός refer to the role of faith or the tradition of the Church, without giving adequate attention to their objective reference which is primary. Consequently he forces upon Athanasius an alien slant that comes from later Roman notions. See J. H. Newman, *Select Treatises of St Athanasius*, London, 1881, vol. 2, pp. 250f, 311f, 452f, etc.

⁵⁴ This is the language used in the *Con. Apoll.* 2.4, 5 which is consistent with Athanasius' own thought.

⁵⁵ *Con. Gent.* 1; *De Inc.* 5; *De Decr. Nic. Syn.* 27, 32; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 4.

⁵⁶ *Ad Ser.* 1.14f, 17, 2 – 3.2.7f. See the excellent notes of Shapland, *The Letters of St Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit*, London, 1951, pp. 99, 154f, 162.

Apostles through the fathers, and because it concerns not only what has been written in the Scriptures but the divine acts that have been fulfilled in the economy of salvation, to keep to the scope of faith is equivalent to thinking in accordance with the experience of God (εὐσέβεια)⁵⁷ or the faith (πίστις)⁵⁸ that prevails among Christians or in the Church. This can then be called the *ecclesiastical scope* and regarded as the anchor of faith (τὸν σκοπὸν τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν ὡς ἄγκυραν τῆς πίστεως).⁵⁹ Athanasius is not appealing here to the Church as the criterion to be used in the interpretation of Scripture but to the *kerygma* it proclaims.⁶⁰ He is pointing to the fact that within the Church which is founded upon the Apostles and through them upon Jesus Christ himself the faith and mind and language are brought into conformity with the nature of Christ and changed – it is therefore in that *changed sense* of our ordinary human terms that we are to interpret the Scriptures. Thus toward the beginning of the second oration against the Arians he says: ‘If he is the Son of God, as indeed he is, . . . let them not dispute about the expressions (λέξεις) which the biblical writers use of the Word himself, for there need be no question about them since they are confessedly used in accordance with his nature. For these expressions do not detract from his nature, rather does the nature draw the expressions to itself and transform them. For expressions are not prior to essences (οὐσίαι), but essences come first and their expressions come second.’⁶¹ That is what he calls the *ecclesiastical sense*⁶² or *mind*⁶³ – it is one that arises compulsively out of the nature of the Word and his saving action, rather than out of any conception which we form on our own.⁶⁴ It is identical therefore with the apostolic mind.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Cf. 1 Timothy 3.16, 4.8. See *Con. Ar.* 1.7, 2.44, etc. where εὐσέβεια is contrasted with ἀσέβεια, the true piety of the apostolic Church grounded on the mystery of the Incarnate *Logos* with the impiety of the heretics who impose their self-willed religious opinions upon the Scriptures. See also *Ad episc. Aeg.*

⁵⁸ *Con. Ar.* 3.28f; *Con. Gent.* 30; *Vita Antonii*, 77f.

⁵⁹ *Con. Ar.* 3.58.

⁶⁰ *Con. Ar.* 3.10.

⁶¹ *Con. Ar.* 2.3. cf. also 4 and 5.

⁶² *Con. Ar.* 1.44. Cf. also *Con. Gent.* 6f, 33; *Ad. Ser.* 4.15.

⁶³ *Con. Ar.* 2.31; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 17.

⁶⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.3f; 3.7f, 10, 17.

⁶⁵ This is Athanasius’ judgment of the Nicene fathers when they wrote ‘“Thus believes the Catholic Church” and immediately confessed how they believed in order to show that their mind was not something new but apostolic (ὅτι μὴ νεώτερον, ἀλλ’ ἀποστολικόν ἐστιν αὐτῶν τὸ φρόνημα). What they wrote they had not discerned out of themselves but was the same as the apostles taught.’ *De Syn.* 5.

But it is only by making use of the scope of Scripture and faith as a canon of interpretation that we can disengage the good or right sense of the text from false or alien senses imposed upon it.⁶⁶ When we search the Scriptures in this way we ground our understanding and our theological judgments once again on Jesus Christ directly, the one foundation of the Church.⁶⁷ Only then are our statements in harmony with Holy Scripture and congruous with the divine economy.⁶⁸

(iii) We have now to note more specifically the place occupied by *tradition* (παράδοσις) in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. By tradition Athanasius refers to the evangelical content of the faith as it has come from Christ and continues to be handed on in accordance with his command in the true Name. 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.⁶⁹ 'The apostles went forth and taught thus. And this is the *kerygma* that extends into the whole Church under heaven.'⁷⁰ Tradition is thus the same as ἡ ἀποστολική παράδοσις, and is identical in content with the Holy Scripture.⁷¹ 'Let us look at the very tradition and teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, but which the apostles proclaimed and the fathers kept. For it is upon this that the Church is founded, and anyone who falls away from it would not and should not be called Christian.'⁷² There is no suggestion anywhere in the writings of Athanasius that this tradition has any content other than that which is given in the apostolic *kerygma* or prophetic testimony. Consequently when it is handed on, it must be transmitted without new or additional elements which could only be the speculations or inventions of men superimposed upon the one foundation laid by Christ in the Apostles. 'According to the apostolic faith handed on to us by the fathers, I have handed it on without contriving any extraneous element, but what I learned I expounded in harmony with the Holy Scriptures.'⁷³ It is in this

⁶⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.1; 3.28.

⁶⁷ *Con. Ar.* 2.73, and 74.

⁶⁸ Thus also *Con. Apol.* 2.4, 15.

⁶⁹ Matthew 28.19. Cf. *Ad Ser.* 1.6, 11, 28; 2.6; 4.5; and *Con. Ar.* 2.40ff; *Epist. encl.* 1.

⁷⁰ *Ad Ser.* 1.28.

⁷¹ *Ad Adelphium*, 6; *Historia Arianorum*, 14; *Apologia con. Ar.* 30; *De Syn.* 23; cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.1.

⁷² *Ad Ser.* 1.28.

⁷³ *Ad Ser.* 1.33. See *Fest. Epist.* 3.5; 19.6; *De Syn.* 5f; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 4.

connection that he can speak of a traditional or received interpretation.⁷⁴

The command of Christ to baptise in the triune Name and teach what he had commanded was accompanied by his promise to remain with the disciples, confirming their preaching and teaching by his presence. Thus Athanasius identifies the real content of the tradition with Jesus Christ himself. The written form of the tradition,⁷⁵ the Holy Scripture, must be taken to 'speak out of the person of God' (λέγουσα ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ Θεοῦ),⁷⁶ and Christ himself who said 'I am the Truth' promised to be present as Lord in the midst of the Church's tradition.⁷⁷ Athanasius insists, therefore, that the tradition is received and handed on only *in faith* (ἐν ἀκοῇ πίστεως).⁷⁸ It is not something that is reducible to words, but derives from the act of the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit.⁷⁹ Just as for Athanasius the *scope* refers not simply to the coherent tenor of biblical usage and teaching but to coherent faith in Christ, for he is the object of faith signified by the Scriptures, so tradition refers not simply to the formal content of the apostolic teaching handed down to us but to Christ himself the Lord of that tradition who is known only through faith, and who can be delivered to others only through the hearing of faith on their part. That is what he calls τὰ πίστει παραδοθέντα.⁸⁰ 'Godhead is not handed on by the demonstration of words but by faith, and by godly and reverent reasoning' (ἐν πίστει καὶ εὐσεβεῖ λογισμῶ μετ' εὐλαβείας).⁸¹ That is to say, because the content of tradition is the apostolic *kerygma* through which Christ himself comes to each generation by the power of his Spirit requiring on the part of those who hand it on and those who receive it rational apprehension, because in its substance it is ultimately identical with the living Lord himself, indeed with the triune God, the interpretation and apprehension which its handing on requires cannot take place except in direct religious experience, i.e. by faith. What Athanasius himself can do formally, for example, in perpetuating the Christian tradition is to provide a clue (πρόφασις)⁸² which will serve as a

⁷⁴ *De Syn.* 45; *Con. gent.* 1; cf. *Con. Ar.* 4.54.

⁷⁵ Cf. ἡ Θεία γραφή παραδέδωκε of the doubtful *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 3.

⁷⁶ *De Inc.* 3 (and cf. further *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 18).

⁷⁷ *Ad Ser.* 1.33.

⁷⁸ *Ad Ser.* 1.17, 20.

⁷⁹ *Ad Ser.* 1.17f, 28ff.

⁸⁰ *Ad Ser.* 1.17 – see the notes of Shapland in loc. cit., op.cit. pp. 104f, and 114f.

⁸¹ *Ad Ser.* 1.20. Cf. 4.5: τὰ τῆ πίστει παραδιδόμεναι ἀπεριέργαστον ἔχει τὴν γνώσιν.

⁸² *De Inc.* 56. See the notes of Robertson, vol. 4, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Oxford, 1892, p. lxxiv.

guide to the understanding of the Scriptures, but beyond that the hearer or reader must enter himself into the continuity of religious experience (εὐσέβεια) and faith (πίστις)⁸³ for it is only within that sacred tradition that he can apprehend the true meaning of the biblical terms and statements as they refer to God, and distinguish them from the profane conceptions and opinions of man's own devising.⁸⁴

For the investigation and true knowledge of the Scriptures there is needed a good life and a pure soul, and that virtue which is according to Christ, in order that the mind, guiding its path by it, may be able to attain what it yearns for, to comprehend it, and as far as it is compatible with the nature of men to learn about the Word of God. For apart from a pure mind and an imitation of the life lived by the saints, no one would be able to understand their statements . . . He who wishes to comprehend the mind of the divines (τῶν θεολόγων τὴν διάνοιαν) must first purify and cleanse his soul by his way of living, and approach the saints themselves by emulating their actions, so that through assimilation with them in a common mode of life, they may understand what has been revealed to them from God.⁸⁵

Athanasius thus refuses to isolate the understanding of the Scriptures from the continuity of faith and life in the Church, for since the Christian way of life is itself the product of the *kerygma* which has been handed down it furnishes a guide to the correct understanding of the biblical message.⁸⁶ But it is characteristic of Athanasius that he should not detract from the place of the mind in this receiving and handing on of the apostolic tradition – it requires a godly and humble use of the reason, that is, a rational activity that is in accordance with the nature of the divine *Logos* himself. Apart from true reasoning the apostolic *kerygma* cannot be adequately received or passed on without being mixed up with human inventions and so distorted to suit the self-will of men. The understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures, guided as it is by the life and faith of the Church, requires a reasoning process (λογισμός), if it is to be true and adequate.⁸⁷ In order to see what Athanasius means by that we must first examine more closely the way in which he understands the nature of biblical forms of thought and speech.

⁸³ *Con. Gent.* 30; *Ad Dracontium* 4.

⁸⁴ See *De sent. Dion.* 2, 12, 23f; *De Syn.* 6f.

⁸⁵ *De Inc.* 57; cf. *Ad episc. Aeg.* 9, 13, 14; *Con. Ar.* 3.19f. and 4.21; *Ad Afros*, 11.

⁸⁶ *De Syn.* 47; *De actis Nic. Syn.* 4.

⁸⁷ Cf. *De Syn.* 40.

2. The economical nature of biblical statements

In his very early works Athanasius is committed to the conviction that God has created man to know and love him, and for that purpose has bound him in a rational relation with himself through his Word, but he is equally convinced of the fact that of himself man is quite incapable of knowing his Maker or of reaching any conception of him. God knows, he says, the entire incapacity of created beings to comprehend and know their Creator (. . . καὶ ὄλωσ πολλήν εἶναι τὴν τῶν γενητῶν ἔλλειψιν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πεποιηκότος κατάληψιν καὶ γνῶσιν.⁸⁸

Far from diminishing through the years, these convictions grew as more and more he wrestled with the biblical revelation of the transcendent greatness and majesty of God and of his incredible condescension in making himself known to man. The deeper his knowledge of God became the more convinced he was that man knows God by grace through his Word alone and not by any inherent powers of his own. This carried with it the sharpest contrast between theology and mythology, that is, a way of knowing and speaking of God that derives from God's own self-revealing, and any and every way of man's own devising in which he projects his human conceptions and images into God.⁸⁹

These convictions together with his understanding of the Incarnation of the Word lie behind Athanasius' view of the nature of biblical and theological statements, but in order to determine his view more precisely it may help to throw his basic thoughts into a series.

(a) We already have had occasion to note that while the word of man is properly to be understood only in the light of the Word of God, God's Word is not to be compared with man's.⁹⁰ The fact that God is something beyond comparison (Θεὸς ἀσύγκριτόν ἐστιν πρᾶγμα)⁹¹ is quite basic to all the theology of Athanasius, but it is not a conviction that he achieves *a priori*; rather does it arise for him out of his actual knowledge of God which includes the knowledge that he is not as man (ὁ δὲ Θεὸς οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐστι).⁹² Moreover this means that the

⁸⁸ *De Inc.* 11.

⁸⁹ *Con. Gent.* 19; *Con. Ar.* 1.1ff.

⁹⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.34ff.

⁹¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.57.

⁹² *Con. Ar.* 2.35; see 1.20–23.

transcendence of God over us, or the incomparability of the Word of God with our word, is not explicable from the side of man – that is why certain kinds of question are both irrational and impertinent when directed to God for they presuppose that he is not utterly transcendent but is to be understood in the light of our preconceptions or through comparison of what we already know and can know on our own. ‘It is not fitting to inquire into the Godhead in this way, for God is not as man that any one should dare to ask human questions about him.’⁹³

We must not ask why (διὰ τί) the Word of God is not such as ours since God is not such as we are, as has been said already; but neither is it fitting to ask how (πῶς) the Word is from God, or how he is the Radiance of God, or how God begets, or what is the mode (τις ὁ τρόπος) of his begetting. For anyone daring to ask such questions would be mad, since a fact (πράγμα) ineffable and proper to God’s nature, known to him alone and the Son, requires to be explained in words (λόγοις αὐτοῦ ἐρμηνευθῆναι). It is precisely as if such people should ask where God is, and how he is God, and what kind of Father he is. But as this kind of inquiry is irreligious (ἀσεβές) belonging to those who are ignorant of God, so it is altogether improper to dare either to ask such things of the generation of the Son of God or to measure God and his Wisdom by our own nature and infirmity.⁹⁴

Biblical and theological statements about God are by their very nature acts of recognition expressing what is heard⁹⁵ and pointing above and beyond to their divine object (τὰ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον λαλεῖν καὶ σημαίνειν).⁹⁶ By their very nature therefore true statements about God acknowledge their own inadequacy or their limits, ‘Thus far human knowledge goes, for at this point the Cherubim cover themselves with their wings. He who seeks and wants to inquire beyond this point refuses to listen to him who says “Be not overwise lest you should be confounded”’.⁹⁷ On the other hand true statements about God point to more than can be put into words or even desiderated.⁹⁸ They are not derived therefore from out of man’s own thoughts or governed by what he is able to conceive, but are

⁹³ *Ad Ser.* 1.15; οὐδ’ οὕτως ἐρωτᾶν περὶ τῆς θεότητος πρέπει. οὐκ ἔστι γὰρ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὁ Θεός, ἵνα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα περὶ αὐτοῦ τις τολμήσῃ ἐρωτᾶν. see also *Con. Ar.* 1.24.

⁹⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.36. Cf. *Ad Ser.* 1.17 (and also *Ad Apol.* 2.19).

⁹⁵ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 21, 22; *Con. Ar.* 2.32f; *Ad Ser.* 2.9.

⁹⁶ *Con. Ar.* 4.27; cf. 1.23f; *De Syn.* 42; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12; *Ad Marcellinum*, 11–13.

⁹⁷ *Ad Ser.* 1.17 – the reference is to Ecclesiastes 7.16. Cf. *In illud, omnia*, 6.

⁹⁸ *Ad monachos*, 1.1, *PG* 4, p. 691; *Ad Ser.* 1.17, 18; 2.1; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12; *Con. Ar.* 2.36.

derived from God's Word and are enunciated by way of acknowledgment and confession of him as God. Athanasius' term for this is *θεολογεῖν*, which is contrasted with *μυθολογεῖν*.⁹⁹

(b) There is a proper mode of inquiry which follows the ways and works of God and learns from him. Speaking of the Arians Athanasius says: 'Let them engage in inquiry as those who are ready to learn, in order that through knowledge of what they were previously ignorant they may purify their hearing by the fountain of truth and godly doctrines.'¹⁰⁰ The questions and the statements that such an inquiry involves must be in accordance with the nature of the subject, otherwise there will be confusion.¹⁰¹ Negatively, this means that Athanasius rejects any and every inquiry that operates with conceptions that are alien to the realities being investigated or are not objectively grounded in them – Athanasius' term for this false way of going about things is *ἐπινοεῖν*, which he regularly applies to heretical teaching.¹⁰² Thus *ἐπινοία* is 'the view taken by the mind of an object independent of (whether or not correspondent to) the object itself.'¹⁰³ Athanasius goes so far as to say that the devising of conceptual forms apart from the objective reality, and then their imposition upon that reality *ab extra*, is a form of mental derangement, or *μανία*, for it involves a *warped mind*.¹⁰⁴ Nothing is more inimical to Christ, for it involves the invention of false modes of thought or tropes which do not correspond to the Word made flesh, and to the divine nature of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁵ It involves a failure to distinguish the conceptuality that derives from man's knowledge of himself from that which derives from God's self-revelation, or to distinguish the spirit of man from the Spirit of God.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, it operates with the absurd and fatal notion that only what man is able to conceive or understand for himself is true.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ *Con. Gent.* 19; *Con. Ar.* 1.10, 17; 2.50, 72; *Ad Ser.* 1.28, 29, 31; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 31 (and cf. also *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 3.19; *Con. Apol.* 2.18).

¹⁰⁰ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 2; *Ad Ser.* 4.1.

¹⁰¹ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 10, 21.

¹⁰² E.g. *Ad episc. Aeg.* 3ff.

¹⁰³ See *Con. Ar.* 1.1, and Robertson's note in loc.; also Newman, *St Athanasius*, vol. 2, London, 1881, article *ἐπινοία*, pp. 407f.

¹⁰⁴ *Ad Ser.* 1.17; 4.1–7; *Con. Ar.* 1.1, 37, etc.

¹⁰⁵ *Ad Ser.* 1.7, 10, 17; *Con. Ar. passim*.

¹⁰⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.18, 37; 3.8, 10.7, 55;

¹⁰⁷ *Ad Ser.* 1.17; 2.1.

If we are to know God truly, it must be from a source (*ἀρχή*) in God himself, and in accordance with his ways and works.¹⁰⁸ That means, it must be according to the way that God has taken in making himself known to us, and in accordance with the means he has provided for our access to him, in the Incarnation of the Word. Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God is that divinely provided *ἀρχή*.¹⁰⁹ He is the only *εἶδος* of Godhead,¹¹⁰ and therefore all true knowledge of God must take its rise from him and be from first to last in conformity with the image and reality of God which he is. It is in him as the *Logos* of God that all true conceptuality on our knowledge of God is to be found, that is, not as something that is detachable from God or accidentally related to him, but as ultimately and objectively grounded in him.¹¹¹ Fundamental to the whole theology of Athanasius, and not least to his theological epistemology, is therefore the doctrine of the *ὁμοούσιον* or the consubstantiality of the Incarnate Word with eternal God. Hence his constant charge against the Arians that in operating with a detachable conceptuality in their knowledge of God, and in denying the consubstantiality of the Incarnate Word, they were depriving God of his *Logos* by reducing it merely to man's way of thinking of God or speaking of him.¹¹² For Athanasius this was the height of irrationality. Since they deny the *Logos* it is not surprising, he says, that they should ask illogical questions, and lapse into absurd contradictions.¹¹³

(c) God is incomparable. Nothing that we already know can tell us anything true about him. No human forms of thought and speech are adequate with respect to him, for they all fall far short of the Creator. Yet if we are to know God truly or at all it must be in accordance with his divine nature, and in accordance with his ways and works in making himself known to us. Now the biblical writers all speak of God in human language and often use very human images. Above all the Evangelists and Apostles speak of the Word and Son of God in this way (*ἀνθρωπίνως*).¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ *Expositio Fidei* 1 and 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.48; 2.47f.

¹¹⁰ *Con. Ar.* 3.6.16; *De Syn.* 52.

¹¹¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.20, 23; *De sent. Dion.* 24.

¹¹² *Con. Ar.* 1.9, 25; 2.32, 57; 3.54; 4.3.

¹¹³ *Con. Ar.* 1.14, 19, 24, 25, 35, 40, 62; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 1, 12, 15.

¹¹⁴ *Ad Ser.* 1.4; *De sent. Dion.* 9; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 13 (cf. also *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 1.8; 3.37f).

How are we to understand that? It was to this use of human terms and images to speak of the Saviour that the Arians appealed in justification of their refusal to acknowledge Christ as God, and of their basic tenet that since he is God's Son, he must have had a beginning and could not be eternal. Athanasius replied, not by playing down the importance of these human terms and images, but by taking them even more seriously, for he insisted that when taken in their proper or right sense, i.e. in strict accord with the nature and work of the Incarnate Son, far from giving the Arians any ground for their heresy, they reveal the very foundation of true faith and knowledge of God, and at the same time show us the essential nature of true theological language and statement.¹¹⁵

Everything hinges upon the Incarnation, for in Jesus Christ God who is only like God, and is not to be known through comparison with created things, has himself entered his creation, tempering his revelation to men that by means of things they know he might make himself known to them, and lift them up to understand divine things.¹¹⁶ Man is not only a creature, who has lapsed back into corruption and irrationality, for his mind which has been made to know God is now deflected away from its proper object in the divine *Logos*, and turned down toward earthly and merely human things.¹¹⁷ In the Incarnation God has acted both in order to reveal himself to man and in order to save him, restoring man to communion and union with himself. That is why the New Testament speaks in such realistic human ways of the Son of God. He became man, appropriating human nature for himself, but he did that not for his own sake, but *for our sake*.¹¹⁸

This evangelical statement, which is the essential heart of the *kerygma*, has two sides to it. On the one hand, this means that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son and Word of God who has condescended to us, becoming one with us, in order to lift us up to God.¹¹⁹ He is not just man somehow promoted to divine status, but God himself, God the Word become flesh, God the Son become man.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Jesus Christ is not just some instrument brought into being by God in order to meet

¹¹⁵ *Con. Ar.* 1.37ff; 2.19ff; 3.26f, 37f, 4.6ff.

¹¹⁶ *Con. Gent.* 47; *De Inc.* 13ff; *Ad Ser.* 2.1ff; *Sermo maior de fide*, 35.

¹¹⁷ This is one of the recurring themes of *De Inc.*

¹¹⁸ *Con. Ar.* 1.48; 2.8f, 47, 51ff, 73ff; 3.31ff.

¹¹⁹ *De Inc.* 15; *Con. Ar.* 2.51, 62, 64, 78, 81 etc.

¹²⁰ *Con. Ar.* 1.37.

human need,¹²¹ nor when he is spoken of as the Word and Wisdom of God, is that just a human way of thinking and speaking of him;¹²² Jesus Christ is the revelation and the reality of the eternal Word of the Father, and even in his incarnate Person is consubstantial with the Godhead.¹²³ This means that on the one hand, the Son of God has descended into our human ignorance, in order that as Word of God he might penetrate into our human modes of knowing and speaking, and in and through that community with us, impart to us knowledge of the true God,¹²⁴ but it means on the other hand that within our ignorance and darkness the Son of God has lived out a life in which through his obedience to the Father, he has appropriated for us in our human modes the Truth of God, and perfected in the humanity which he took from us man's knowing of God and speaking of him.¹²⁵ Christ is thus both the Word of God to man, and the word of man to God, for in and through his incarnate life he has grounded and perfected man's knowledge of God.¹²⁶ He ministers both the things of God to men and the things of men toward God, in praying and knowing, in receiving and appropriating.¹²⁷ Hence we have a true and faithful knowledge of God when through union with Christ by the power of the Spirit we receive the mind that was remade and renewed in him.¹²⁸

There can be no doubt that these two doctrines, the divine condescension (συγκατάβασις) of the Word eternal to man, and the consubstantiality (ὁμοουσία) of the Incarnate Word to the Father, determine for Athanasius the nature of biblical and theological language about God. They justify the use of human forms of thought and speech about God, nor all human forms but those that are rooted in Jesus Christ, and they insist that these forms of thought and speech, and the basic conceptuality they involve, derive from a divinely provided source (ἀρχή) which has objective depth and eternal reality in the Godhead. The fact that in Jesus Christ God's Word comes to us in a human form, making itself accessible to us and enabling us to understand it, does not mean that God is modelling himself on man, or that his Word takes its pattern from

¹²¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.26; 2.30; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 7; *De Syn.* 27.

¹²² *De sent. Dion.* 23f; *Con. Ar.* 1.5ff; 2.19f, 37f; *Ad Epict.* 2.7.

¹²³ *Con. Ar.* 1.9; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20, 22; *De sent. Dion.* 18f; *Ad Afr.* 5f; *Ad Ser.* 2.5.

¹²⁴ *Con. Ar.* 3.37ff; *Ad Ser.* 2.9 (cf. also *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 8f).

¹²⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.8f; 3.38ff; 4.6f.

¹²⁶ *Ad Ser.* 1.6.

¹²⁷ *Con. Ar.* 4.6f.

¹²⁸ *Ad Ser.* 1.9.

man, but rather that God's Word through whom man was created to be in the image of God is moulding and adapting man's mind to God.¹²⁹ Or to express it the other way round, the image of God in the Incarnate Word through which we human beings are able to know him is not one that is imposed by men upon God through the speculative power of their own conceiving, but one that is inscribed by God himself. *It is not an image external to God but internal to him, and rooted in his own Being.* It is that consubstantial image and Word that is manifested and revealed in Jesus Christ.¹³⁰

(d) It is in and through Jesus Christ, therefore, that our minds may know God truly, i.e. in such a way that the noetic forms and images involved correspond to objective Reality in God, and that far from being independent of that Reality or detachable from him (ὡς ἐπίνοιαί), they derive from him and are compulsorily related to his self-revelation (ὡς διάνοιαί). Jesus Christ thus supplies the centre and basic frame of reference for theological statements, for he is the one place where we men may really know God the Father, and he is the one place where human forms of thought and speech are secured beyond the infinite hiatus between the creature and the Creator in God himself, and in spite of the fact there is no likeness inhering in the being of creaturely realities to God.¹³¹ What is of utmost importance for Athanasius here is the relation of the Father to the Son and the relation of the Son to the Father, for in the nature of the case it is in that basic relationship or reciprocity in the Godhead that all true theological language is rooted and shaped.¹³² 'All things were delivered to me by my Father. And no one knows who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son wills to reveal him.'¹³³

Because God became man and communes with him in and through the humanity of Christ, that does not import a general justification of human forms of thought and speech in their application to God. Rather does it mean that in and through Jesus Christ certain human forms of thought and speech are laid hold of and adapted for knowledge of God.

¹²⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.23.

¹³⁰ *Con. Ar.* 1.20.

¹³¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.20f.

¹³² *In illud, omnia*, 1ff; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12; *Ad epis. Aeg.* 16; *Con. Ar.* 1.12.36-39; 2.22; 3.26, 35f, 44; 4.16, 23.

¹³³ Luke 10.22, or Matthew 11.27.

In the sanctified and renewed humanity of Christ God has provided for us the source and principle (ἀρχή),¹³⁴ the exemplar (τύπος)¹³⁵ or the archetype (ἀρχέτυπος)¹³⁶ the Original or First-Born (πρωτότοκος),¹³⁷ in fact the Proper, Dominical Man (ὁ κυριακὸς ἄνθρωπος)¹³⁸ the Lord the Guide (ὁδηγὸς ὁ Κύριος) who takes us to the Father.¹³⁹ It is therefore by reference to him who is the Scope of all Biblical Revelation, *the Word of Truth*, that all theological language is to be judged and rightly employed. In so far as human forms of thought and speech are appropriated by Christ, they are transformed by his nature as they are made to apply to him, and are to be interpreted by us in that altered sense.¹⁴⁰ Hence we must be careful to ascertain the proper reference of biblical terms to person, time, place, action, etc., in order to determine their strict meaning according to the nature of what they are made to signify.¹⁴¹

The critical point in the interpretation of biblical language and its employment in theological statements arises with the conflict between God's ways of imaging himself for us which are mediated to us through the biblical writers and our ways of imaging God from the things we already know, i.e. in the light of our preconceptions.¹⁴² This is where careful attention to the scope of Scripture and the scope of faith, and the necessity of a proper method in theological inquiry, come in, if we are to be discriminating and exact in our handling of language in its semantic intention.¹⁴³ The various images and representations which that language carries must be discerned in their objective reference, and their reasonable ground and cause traced out and grasped, so that we really penetrate to what is meant and do not interpret the expressions by themselves.¹⁴⁴ In this way we are prevented from projecting the tensions and contrarities that have their place within human life into our knowledge of God,¹⁴⁵ and of pushing the analogical elements in our

¹³⁴ *Expositio Fidei*, 1f.

¹³⁵ *De Inc.* 13f; *Con. Ar.* 1.51; 2.5, 76, 78; 3.20.

¹³⁶ *Con. Apol.* 2.5; cf. *Apolgia de Fuga*, 13.

¹³⁷ *Con. Ar.* 2.60ff.

¹³⁸ *Expositio Fidei*, 1, 4; *Sermo minor de fide*, 4, 19, 21, 26, 28, 31; *In Psalm.* 40.5.

¹³⁹ *Con. Ar.* 2.61f, *Epist. Fest.* 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.3; *De Syn.* 42.

¹⁴¹ *De sent. Dion.* 2.3; *De Syn.* 42.8f; *Ad Ser.* 1.16; 2.6, 8; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 10ff.

¹⁴² *Sermo major de fide*, 22. cf. *Con. Ar.* 1.20f; *Ad Ser. de morte Arii*, 5.

¹⁴³ *Con. Ar.* 3.28f.

¹⁴⁴ *Ad Afr.* 17; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 4; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 14.

¹⁴⁵ *Con. Ar.* 3.63; *Con. Ar.* 1.21

language when applied to God beyond their proper limits.¹⁴⁶ Moreover in testing these expressions and images through their correlation with the objective realities which they are taken to serve, we allow the human modes of thought and speech which we have to use to be modified and corrected by relation to one another within their common frame of reference – and for Athanasius that means, within the scope set by Christ himself and his relation as the Incarnate Son with the heavenly Father. According to Athanasius¹⁴⁷ and Eusebius¹⁴⁸ this was the procedure adopted at Nicaea, when they subjected the meaning of words to the careful scrutiny of reason, and collected the sense of the Scriptures.¹⁴⁹ The result was the *homoousion* which was adopted to cut through the self-contradictions and confusions that had arisen in the Church through forced interpretations of biblical language and the misuse of biblical images, and to lay bare the central nerve of the evangelical and apostolic message in the directness and simplicity of the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father. The *homoousion* is thus a supreme example of a strict theological statement arising out of the examination of biblical statements, derived by following through the ostensive reference of biblical images, and giving compressed expression, in exact and equivalent language, not so much to the biblical words themselves but to the meaning or reality they were designed to point out or convey. Once established it served as a further guide to the Scriptures, although of course it continued to be subordinate to the inspired teaching of the Apostles and to what the Church learned from the Scriptures which mediated it. It is when the Church is engaged in this theological interpretation that it keeps its feet upon the apostolic foundation and is able to hand on to the next generation the true teaching as it has received it from the previous generation without perverting it.

For that is really doctrine (διδασκαλία) as the fathers have delivered it, and that is truly the sure sign of doctors (διδασκάλων) to confess with one another the same things and not to be at variance either with themselves or with their fathers. Those who are not affected in this way are to be called evil rather than true doctors. Hence Greeks who do not confess the same things, but are at variance with one another, do not have truth for their

¹⁴⁶ *Ad Ser.* 1.15–17 (cf. Shapland's note 15, p. 99); 4.6.

¹⁴⁷ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20; *Ad Afr.* 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Epistola Eusebii* (appended by Athanasius to the *De decretis*), 5.

¹⁴⁹ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20; *Ad Afr.* 6.

doctrine. But the saints and those who are in reality heralds of the truth, agree with each other and do not differ from one another. For even if they existed in different times, nevertheless they all pressed toward the same end, being prophets of the one God, and evangelists announcing the Word harmoniously.¹⁵⁰

(e) We must now seek to determine more precisely what is the nature of the reference of biblical expressions (λέξεις) and statements (λόγοι) back (ἀνα-) to their source. It is the question as to the ana-logical relation between what is written (γεγράμμενα) and the nature of the realities signified (ἡ τῶν σημαινομένων φύσις).¹⁵¹ There can be no question here of any comparison or proportion on the same level, but of a para-bolic reference from one level to another that utterly transcends it.¹⁵² As Athanasius understands it, if human terms are to be used for divine revelation they must somehow be brought into a parallel relation to the divine realities, even if they have no inherent likeness in being to them,¹⁵³ in order to serve their signification. But if so, that involves an activity on the part of God whereby he descends to us and draws our human terms to himself, giving them an adaptation which will enable them to point to divine realities however far they may be removed from one another.¹⁵⁴ As we have already seen this involves the doctrine of *condescension* of the Word to man and the corresponding doctrine of the *consubstantiality* of the Incarnate Word to the Father.¹⁵⁵ What we are now to probe into is the counterpart to this in the nature of the reference of biblical statements from the level of human things to the level of divine things. Here we have to examine two of the principal terms in the theological vocabulary of Athanasius, παράδειγμα and οἰκονομία, which we have deliberately omitted from our discussion until now.

(i) παράδειγμα

In classical usage παράδειγμα meant the pattern or model of something to be executed – hence in its technical application it might be used of an

¹⁵⁰ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 4.

¹⁵¹ This was inevitably also one of the basic issues at Nicaea, *De decr. Nic. Syn.*, especially 10, 11, 20–24.

¹⁵² *Con. Ar.* 1.55ff.

¹⁵³ *Con. Ar.* 1.20. See also the whole argument of *Con. Ar.* 17–36.

¹⁵⁴ *Con. Ar.* 3.19ff.

¹⁵⁵ See again *Sermo maior de fide*, 32–35.

architect's plan, or an argument from precedent or example, or of the form or exemplar in the real world of material things. Athanasius uses it in none of these technical ways. He makes use of its basic and more literal sense as a representation in one medium of something in another. This is a common usage in patristic literature where παράδειγμα is usually rendered by 'illustration'. Athanasius uses it to refer to some aspect of the visible or physical world which is adopted and adapted to point out something that cannot be reduced to words or to point upward to a divine reality that is ultimately ineffable, or to reflect the glory of God which we are unable to see. He does not think of παράδειγμα as a simile of man's choosing or devising, but rather as an image taken from human things which divine Revelation has laid hold of and uses in a special way for its particular purpose – that is why we cannot really understand παραδείγματα apart from the condescending grace of God in divine οἰκονομία. Shapland puts it rightly when he says: 'Athanasius regularly uses it of those material analogies, sanctioned by Scripture, through which we may apprehend and express the truth concerning the divine nature.'¹⁵⁶

The following two citations make clear what Athanasius has in mind. 'For such illustrations (παραδείγματα) and such images (εἰκόνας) has the Scripture proposed, in that, since human nature is unable to comprehend the things of God, we may be able from these to reach as far as possible some understanding, however slightly and dimly.'¹⁵⁷ 'The divine Scripture, by way of relieving the impossibility of interpretation through statements (τῆς διὰ λόγων ἐρμηνείας) and of comprehending such things, has given us such illustrations (παραδείγματα) as these, so that it may be legitimate, because of the unbelief of presumptuous men, to speak more simply and without danger, and to think in justifiable ways. . .'¹⁵⁸

As examples we may cite the image and radiance (εἰκὼν and ἀπαύγασμα), spring and river (πηγή and ποταμός), substance and expression (ὕπόστασις and χαρακτήρ).¹⁵⁹ The images used are not arbitrary, for they are drawn from the world which God has created through his Word, and which he has provided to direct man's gaze

¹⁵⁶ Op.cit., p. 108, n. 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Con. Ar.* 2.32.

¹⁵⁸ *Ad. Ser.* 1.20.

¹⁵⁹ *Ad Ser.* 1.19f; *Con. Ar.* 2.33; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20f; *De Syn.* 41f.

upward to the Creator, but even so they are meaningful only when interpreted in the light of God's Word, and indeed understood through what we hear in the Scriptures.¹⁶⁰ The godly and true way of using them is not by argument from the works of God in creation to the Uncreated or Unoriginate, which is unscriptural and suspicious and leads to many different notions (and to serious error as in the case of the Arians), but to interpret and speak of the Father from the Son.¹⁶¹ Considered in themselves alone, biblical expressions, images, and analogies, are poor and mean and faint, and convey nothing and may be cast away.¹⁶² However, when they are employed by divine Revelation to point us beyond what we know and beyond what we can express in our own thoughts and words, then they are sufficient and suitable,¹⁶³ but they must be taken and understood as they are given, within the scope of Scripture, and within the relation of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son which they are adapted to express.¹⁶⁴ Thus although they may be used to give our minds some hold on the knowledge of the Son and the Father, they are to be interpreted themselves in the light of that to which they point, for they do not explain the divine reality but are made to reflect it.

The function of the *παραδείγματα* is essentially analogical in a polar relation between man and God established by God in his grace.¹⁶⁵ Hence they can be used as analogies applied from the side of man to God or from the side of God to man. When used from the side of man toward God they are to be taken as poor similes drawn from tangible and familiar things to put our ideas into words, since it is presumptuous to intrude upon the incomprehensible nature of God.¹⁶⁶ They are not our own inventions, and would not be suitable if they were, for then they could only reflect ourselves, but are provided by the divine Revelation to relieve

¹⁶⁰ *De Inc.* 3, 11; *Con. Ar.* 1.11, 12; 2.32, 78ff; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 15. In these passages Athanasius is influenced not only by the argument of St Paul in Romans 1.18f, but also by the famous citation from Wisdom 13.5 which St Paul omitted, evidently deliberately: ἐκ γὰρ μεγέθους καὶ καλλονῆς κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως ὁ γενεσιουργὸς αὐτῶν θεωρεῖται. But Athanasius clearly prefers the term παράδειγμα τοῦ ἀναλογίας – cf. *Con. Ar.* 2.22; 3.65.

¹⁶¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.34. Cf. again the argument of 1.20f.

¹⁶² *In illud, omnia*, 3; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 11.12; *De Syn.* 51.

¹⁶³ *Ad Ser.* 1.19; *Con. Ar.* 4.27; *De decr. nic. Syn.* 12; *Ad Marcellinum*, 13.

¹⁶⁴ *Ad Ser.* 1.17, 20; 2.7ff.

¹⁶⁵ *Con. Ar.* 1.20 and cf. the κατ' εἰκόνα χάρις of the *De Inc.* 3–7, 11f.

¹⁶⁶ *In illud, omnia*, 3.

our perplexity in trying to understand what transcends our senses and is above man – without them we could only remain dumb.¹⁶⁷ Hence we must allow them to guide us; we must keep our thinking in the direction they set us, and use them as *pointers*, for their analogical function is essentially *ostensive*. These analogical images do not yield truth out of themselves, and can therefore never be pressed, and no one of them can be given an importance on its own – all have to be used together in pointing us to knowledge of what is transcendent of us.¹⁶⁸ The παραδείγματα are in no sense arguments, types or exemplars from which we could draw inferences.¹⁶⁹ Nor are they attempts at explanations but only certain parallels which divine Revelation has established for its use.¹⁷⁰ Hence images and expressions that are involved have to be taken in a *different sense* from that which they normally have, otherwise we fail to follow them through in their ostensive acts of communication.¹⁷¹

The παραδείγματα, however, may be used the other way round, from the side of God toward man. Then they are images, and exemplars and patterns that have to be followed and imitated, for they have a normative and archetypal function – indeed it would be quite irreligious to depart from them.¹⁷² This is in fact the primary form of the relation, for it is God's act in condescending to man, revealing himself to man and restoring man to the image of God, that constitutes the polar relation within which the παραδείγματα have their place and their function and their only meaning.¹⁷³ Within that context the παραδείγματα may be used argumentatively in order to make clear what they are employed to show or point out.¹⁷⁴ From this side of the analogical relation Athanasius prefers to use the term εἰκὼν rather than παράδειγμα, but when he does use the latter, it refers to the exemplar in God (the relation of the Son to the Father) or the divine pattern or

¹⁶⁷ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12; *Con. Ar.* 2.36; 4.27; *De Syn.* 41, 42.

¹⁶⁸ *Con. Ar.* 1.26–28; 2.23; 3.3; 4.8, 24; *De Syn.* 41f. See Robertson's notes, 2 op.cit., p. 322, and 1 p. 472.

¹⁶⁹ It was inferential argument from παραδείγματα that frequently led heretics into their errors; cf. *Con. Ar.* 1.26; 2.74; 4.2, 25.

¹⁷⁰ *Con. Ar.* 3.15.

¹⁷¹ *De Syn.* 42; *Con. Ar.* 1.21–26.

¹⁷² *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12.

¹⁷³ *Con. Ar.* 2.78f; 3.10f.

¹⁷⁴ *De sent. Dion.* 15, 18, 22; *Con. Ar.* 3.15; *De Syn.* 41f.

archetype of human relations.¹⁷⁵ But παράδειγμα is also in place, for the relation between the Son and the Father is one of identity or exact likeness or equality, and the relation among men which must imitate it, or indeed the relation between the Church and Christ, is not one of identity or exact likeness or equality but only a kind of *parallel*, with some kind of likeness. Here is no comparison between God and man, but a mimetic relation (κατὰ μίμησιν) between man and God, although man and God remain utterly distant from one another even when conjoined through union with Christ. This is expounded by Athanasius in a sustained discussion of the use of *as* in the New Testament, in statements like the following: 'And the glory that thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be in Thee as I am'; and: 'As thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they may all be one.'¹⁷⁶ 'In using this particle *as* he signifies those who become distantly (πόρρωθεν), as he is in the Father (distantly not in place but in nature, for in place nothing is far from God, but by nature all things are far from him). And, as I have already said, he who uses *as* signifies not identity nor equality, but a pattern of what is signified, viewed in a certain respect (ἀλλὰ παράδειγμα τοῦ λεγομένου κατὰ τι θεωρούμενον).'¹⁷⁷ Christ alone is the exact Seal (σφραγίς ἰσότυπος) of the Father,¹⁷⁸ the only Form (εἶδος) of Godhead,¹⁷⁹ but within the relation between man and God which he has constituted by his Incarnation, in revelation and atonement, human and worldly images can be adapted and employed as παραδείγματα to convey to man an understanding beyond what they can attain or express.¹⁸⁰ The validity of the παραδείγματα, therefore, rests upon the saving and revealing acts of God, so that they are to be interpreted not simply through examining the words and expressions of the Scriptures but in following the indications they give by penetrating

¹⁷⁵ *Con. Ar.* 3.23f. In this use παράδειγμα is formally nearer to the technical philosophical notion of the intelligible forms or patterns of material things, but its content is very different.

¹⁷⁶ *Con. Ar.* 3.19–25 – the references are to John 17.21f.

¹⁷⁷ *Con. Ar.* 3.22 – see also 21; ὁ δὲ λέγων 'καθὼς' οὐ ταυτότητα δεικνύσιν, ἀλλ' εἰκόνα καὶ παράδειγμα τοῦ λεγομένου.

¹⁷⁸ *In illud, omnia*, 5. Cf. also ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκὼν, the unvarying or exact image – *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20, 24, 38; *Con. Ar.* 2.23; 3.36, etc.

¹⁷⁹ *Con. Ar.* 3.6.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *De Syn.* 42: ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν παραδείγματα καὶ τὰς τοιαύτας λέξεις ἀκούομεν ἁρμαζόντως δὲ περὶ Θεοῦ νοοῦμεν οὐ γὰρ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ὁ Θεός. Also *Con. Ar.* 3.15.

to the acts that lie behind them. Athanasius constantly insists, as we have seen, that in interpreting the Scriptures we have to have regard not only to τὰ γεγραμμένα but to τὰ γινόμενα, that is, into what he calls the divine economy, οἰκονομία. 'What is written and done economically (τὰ κατ' οἰκονομίαν γραφόμενα καὶ γινόμενα) must not be taken in a false tropical sense and forced by every one into a meaning of his own.'¹⁸¹ Thus far from treating the παραδείγματα as if they had only a notional or putative significance, they must be understood, ostensive though their function is, to be rooted in real acts of God and to refer to an objective pattern of meaning in the divine self-revelation, i.e. in Jesus who is the only Form or Pattern of divine Being and Nature.¹⁸²

(ii) οἰκονομία

All of the παραδείγματα imply relations, material or human relations which are somehow parallel to divine relations. The connection between the human relations and those divine relations to which they point is not one that rests upon an inherent likeness in material or human relations as such to the divine,¹⁸³ but upon acts in which God out of pure grace condescends to man and assimilates those relations to himself in the Incarnation. It is in accordance with that connection that the παραδείγματα have their place and function, and it is therefore within that frame of reference, κατ' οἰκονομίαν, that biblical and theological statements are validly made.¹⁸⁴ Thus to interpret these statements by tracing their reference back to their source in God we have to follow the ordered line of the divine action that governs it, i.e. οἰκονομία, and not the line of our own notions, i.e. κατ' ἐπίνοιαν.

In classical Greek οἰκονομία is used for the management of domestic life, or husbandry, the handling of a subject, or the adaptation of means to an end. The dominant sense is that of the ordering of a household. In the New Testament οἰκονομία has a two-fold sense, deriving from the classical usage, as management or stewardship, depending on whether it is viewed from the side of

¹⁸¹ *De sent. Dion.* 6.

¹⁸² *Con. Ar.* 3.15f.

¹⁸³ *Con. Ar.* 1.20.

¹⁸⁴ *De sent. Dion.* 9f.

the householder or the servant of the household. Applied to God, as for example by St Paul, it refers to the ordering and fulfilment of God's saving purpose for mankind, i.e. the dispensation of his grace which has taken the form of the Incarnation of his Son in Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of salvation in and through him. Applied to man, it refers to the stewardship of God's servants in the Kingdom, or of the Apostles as stewards of the Gospel. The noun οἰκονόμος and the verb οἰκονομεῖν are found used in this sense. But of course the supreme Servant in God's House is Jesus Christ, who fulfilled his mission, as Athanasius reminds us time without number, 'in the form of a servant'. Thus in early patristic literature, as in Ignatius or Irenaeus, οἰκονομία and οἰκονομεῖν came to be given a special theological sense to refer to the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose in the humiliation and Incarnation and passion of Jesus Christ. Here both senses of divine management and incarnate stewardship were brought together to describe the way of his condescension and obedience and the way of his saving revelation.

It is this sense of οἰκονομία which Athanasius took over from Irenaeus, applying it like him to the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father, and to the ordered way of humiliation, revelation and redemption, but he deepened it and filled it out with his developed understanding of the Incarnation and Atonement, and drew out its profound epistemological implications for biblical interpretation and theological statement. Since οἰκονομία refers to the way God has acted for us and our salvation, and we know no other divine method of revealing and saving, it must be in strict accordance with that οἰκονομία that we are to think and speak of him in all his ways and works.¹⁸⁵ To think and speak *economically* is to think and speak *truly* of God, and above all of the relation of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son, and all that we may know and receive out of that fulness.

In its fullest sense οἰκονομία describes the entire dispensation of divine revelation and salvation, from the eternal purpose of God to its fulfilment in the Incarnation, from the promises made to the prophets to their fulfilment in the *kerygma* of the Apostles, but in its more succinct sense it refers directly to the saving acts of God in the

¹⁸⁵ In an applied sense οἰκονομία can refer to God's providential ordering of events, but the use of οἰκονομία here relates to God's *saving* purpose. Cf. *Apol. de fuga sua*, 19, 20, 22.

Incarnation (αἱ ἐν τῇ οἰκονομίᾳ πράξεις γινόμεναι): 'His birth of the virgin, his miraculous acts, his ascent on the cross, his death which took place economically (οἰκονομικῶς), his rising from the dead, and his ascension into the heavens'.¹⁸⁶ 'The whole mystery of the economy' (τὸ πᾶν τῆς οἰκονομίας μυστήριον)¹⁸⁷ is a favourite theme of the *Contra Apollinarium* where it is expounded in forms that are entirely consistent with Athanasius' thought. It is used to refer to the very substance of the Christian faith, and is the foundation upon which stand is taken against heretics. 'Remaining what he was, he took the form of a servant, one that was not different in actual existence but was demonstrated and manifested by his passion and resurrection, and the whole economy.'¹⁸⁸ 'Let there be set before us the dogmas of the heretics and the judgment of your own intelligence and the account (λόγος) of our faith, and the formulation (ὅρος) of the Gospel and the *kerygma* of the apostles, and the considered understanding of the fulfilled economy.'¹⁸⁹ That is made the ground of appeal: 'the genuineness of the economy has taken place, and the truth has been manifested, and the grace is attested'.¹⁹⁰

In the undoubted teaching of Athanasius the ultimate Subject of the economy is God himself, for it is he who in these last days has spoken to us by his Son, fulfilling what he had promised by the prophets,¹⁹¹ but the immediate Subject of the economy is the Son or Word of God considered both as divine Agent and as Servant on earth.¹⁹² Consequently Athanasius speaks of it most frequently as *his human economy* or *his economy according to the flesh*, or *the economy of his manhood toward us*.¹⁹³ The basic characteristic of the economy and which the very word 'economy' is especially meant to convey, is the fact that the Son of God without ceasing to be God became man, that the Eternal and Changeless One appropriated our creaturely human nature as his very own.¹⁹⁴ That human nature was not originally the nature of God but now he has

¹⁸⁶ *In Psalm.* 67.25.

¹⁸⁷ *Con. Apol.* 1.3; cf. 2.17.

¹⁸⁸ *Con. Apol.* 2.1.

¹⁸⁹ *Con. Apol.* 2.4.

¹⁹⁰ *Con. Apol.* 2.3; also 1.3.

¹⁹¹ *Con. Ar.* 1.55.

¹⁹² *Con. Ar.* 1.55, 59.

¹⁹³ *Ad Anri.* 7; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 25; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 2; *Con. Ar.* 2.6ff. etc.

¹⁹⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.8-9.

made it so much his own that it is his by nature, as it were.¹⁹⁵

The doctrine of the economy, then, is meant to set forth the act of divine condescension in which the οὐσία or being of Godhead is held together with the humanity of the flesh which he assumed for our sakes, in order to be one with us.¹⁹⁶ The emphasis falls here upon the *reality* of the economy which was tested in the temptations of Jesus and on the cross,¹⁹⁷ upon the vicarious nature of the economic life and acts of the Incarnate Son, i.e. his descent into our need and ignorance for our sakes,¹⁹⁸ his suffering and death on the cross in order to atone for us;¹⁹⁹ and upon the fact that, though our creaturely nature was alien to the pre-existent Son of God, he has taken it up into himself and made it his very own, so that his assumption and appropriation of our human nature is reality even for God.²⁰⁰

In some respects the Athanasian doctrine of the economy of the Son sets forth precisely what the Chalcedonian definition of the union of the two natures in the One Person, without confusion and without separation, achieved later,²⁰¹ but in the economical way of stating it, the accent falls much more upon the divine *action*, upon the fact that very God entered into the works he had created, uniting himself with the works of his creation, and as such operating within them for our salvation. The economy took place for the works (εἰς τὰ ἔργα) which the Son effected in the flesh.²⁰² While he acted as man in these works, he who so acted was none other than the Word that was in the beginning and through whom all creaturely works came into being. But Eternal Son though he was, and while remaining what he ever was, he entered himself into the works of his creation in order to fulfil the economy of their restoration.²⁰³ Hence for him the economy meant that 'he gave himself to this condescension and assimilation to the works' (δέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς

¹⁹⁵ Cf. a similar statement in *Con. Apol.* 1.3, 4 where the appropriation of creaturely human nature by God means that it has come, with the servitude and passion of the Incarnate Son, to belong to God by nature ἴδια δὲ Θεοῦ κατὰ φύσιν γέγονεν.

¹⁹⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.9, 12, 45, 51, 53, 75, 76; *Ad Epict.* 6; cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.2ff, 11f, 2.3, 9, 13f.

¹⁹⁷ *Ad epis. Aeg.* 2; cf. *Con. Apol.* 1, 2, 3, 13, 17; 2.3, 9, 11, 13f, 15f.

¹⁹⁸ *Con. Ar.* 3.38ff; *Ad Ser.* 1.7-9.

¹⁹⁹ *Con. Ar.* 2.51ff, 73ff; cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.3, 11, 18; 2.3, 11, 12.

²⁰⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.11ff, 51ff; 3.31f, 38f; *Ad Epict.* 6f; *Ad Adel.* 3f; *De Syn.* 54; *De sent. Dion.* 23f; cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.5, 7, 12, 17; 2.2, 7, 11, 15-17.

²⁰¹ Cf. again *Con. Apol.* 1.7; 2.2, 10.

²⁰² *Con. Ar.* 2.53; *Ad Adel.* 8.

²⁰³ *Con. Ar.* 2.6.

τὸ συγκαταβῆναι καὶ ὁμοιωθῆναι τοῖς ἔργοις).²⁰⁴ That is what Athanasius called *the economy of the Saviour*,²⁰⁵ i.e. the consubstantiality of the Saving Agent in human nature on earth with the Godhead, the reality of the divine Person and Being in the acts of condescension and salvation even though they have to be fulfilled in the flesh in time.²⁰⁶ That is the ultimate point he always reaches whether he is repudiating error to the left or to the right, that is, in the direction of Arius or in the direction of Sabellius.²⁰⁷

In his own Alexandrian tradition Athanasius found the tendency to allow the radical dichotomy posited by the Platonists between the intelligible and the sensible world to break up the inner unity of the saving acts of God in Christ by separating the historical acts of Christ in the flesh from the operations of God the Son or Word, and so to offer a tropological exegesis of the Gospel, which strangely through its allegorical procedure made the passion in the flesh an image of some passion in the Godhead. That was damaging both to the reality of the Incarnate Son and the reality of the eternal nature of the Godhead.²⁰⁸ Hence what Athanasius kept on pointing out is that each error passes into or implies the other. Both are rooted in the failure to take seriously the fact that the Incarnation of God himself was reality, so that the human acts were regarded as related to him by some kind of fiction or convention (θέσει), rather than by nature (φύσει), i.e. by appropriated nature, but so really appropriated that it became God's own by nature.²⁰⁹ That is the full force of the economy, the *inseparability* between the life and acts of Christ in the body and the being and person of the eternal Son who is God.²¹⁰

This has immense epistemological consequences – and that is our main concern here – which Athanasius saw very clearly and was not slow to draw them out in his examination of Arian and Apollonian exegesis.

²⁰⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.51, cf. 62. According to Athanasius the act of creation itself involved a συγκατάβασις, *Con. Ar.* 2.78f; *Con. Gen.* 47.

²⁰⁵ E.g. *Ad Antiochenos*, 7.

²⁰⁶ *Con. Ar.* 4.31.

²⁰⁷ See especially *Ad Epict.* and *Ad Adel.*

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.3f.

²⁰⁹ *Ad Epict.* 2, 7. Similar language is found in *Con. Apol.* 1.10, 12, 17; 2.5. Athanasius contrasts φαντασία and δόκησις with ἀλήθεια and φύσις, *Ad Epict.* 7; *Ad Adel.* 2; *Con. Ar.* 3.32, etc. Cf. again *Con. Apol.* 1.2, 3; 2.5, 12.

²¹⁰ Cf. *Con. Apol.* 2.14–15 where the terms used are χωρισμός and χωρίζεσθαι.

If any kind of a separation (χωρισμός) is to be acknowledged between 'the Incarnate Word' and 'the eternal Word', then all the imagery of biblical and Christian thinking is detachable from the Being and nature of God, and of only transient, tropological or mythological significance. The image of God which is manifested in Jesus could not be said, then, to be ultimately valid or real, for if it is not the reality of God as well as his image, then it neither is an exact nor an unchangeable image (κατ' οὐσίαν ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκὼν), but is only creaturely and relative.²¹¹ That was why at Nicaea the fathers insisted that there was here a relation of identity, rejecting the ὁμοιούσιος for the ὁμοούσιος to speak of the inseparable (ἀδιαίρετος) relation of the life and work of Christ on earth to the Being and Person of the Eternal Son of God.²¹²

Christ is the *Only Begotten* Son of God, who alone in the flesh is hypostatically one with the divine and eternal Word, perfect God and perfect Man (Μονογενῆ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν . . . , καὶ διὰ τὸ μόνην αἰεὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγου ἔνωσιν ἔχειν καθ' ὑπόστασιν μετὰ τῆς σαρκός. Εἰς γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκ δύο τῶν ἐναντίων, τέλειος Θεὸς καὶ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος).²¹³ Unless there is identity in the midst of the difference of natures, the human and the divine, in Christ, then everything is engulfed in change and relativity, and the road has been taken back into paganism and indeed to atheism, as Athanasius is never weary of reminding us.²¹⁴ Unless the Incarnation imports an inseparable unity, an identity by assumption and grace making the human nature of the Incarnate Son God's own in the economy, then there is no criterion by which to judge between image and image, fiction and reality – and we are lost in the morass of mythology and allegory.²¹⁵ 'The inventors of new doctrines and fictions represent that there is another Word, and another Wisdom of the Father, and that he (Christ) is only called the Word and Wisdom conceptually on account of things endued with reason, while they perceive not the absurdity of this. But if he is styled the Word and the Wisdom by a fiction on our own account, what he really is they cannot tell.'²¹⁶

²¹¹ See Newman's notes on this, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 370ff.

²¹² *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 20; *De Syn.* 38; cf. *Sermo maior de fide*, 14, ἀτρεπτος ἐξ ἀτρεπτοῦ ἐστιν. Cf. also 27.

²¹³ *In Psalm.* 21.21. Cf. *In illud, omnia* where Athanasius speaks of the Son as τὸν Μονογενῆ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀχώριστον τῆ φύσει. Cf. also *Con. Ar.* 4.10; *In sent. Dion.* 17, where both ἀδιαίρετος and ἀχώριστος are used.

²¹⁴ *Con. Ar.* 1.17f.

²¹⁵ See *Con. Ar.* 2.37; 4.1, 15; *In sent. Dion.* 25.

²¹⁶ *Ad epis. Aeg.* 13f.

We may state the problem in another way. The παραδείγματα point ostensibly to divine realities beyond us, and necessarily fall far short of them. They are not for that reason false or invalid, provided that they are economically rooted in God's own acts of self-revelation and condescension and are governed by them, but if they do not take the economy seriously, then we are liable to fall into errors on both sides. On the one hand, we will be tempted to treat these biblical images as merely names (ὀνόματα) or conventional terms which we find convenient to use,²¹⁷ which have no relation to reality, but only the force or significance we put into them in accordance with our presuppositions or desires. On the other hand, we will be tempted to push the analogical reference in the images beyond their proper limits,²¹⁸ in an attempt to break through to God by the power of our own thinking, but then we project ourselves upon God or imagine that through our own treatment of images we are able to bring the mystery of the eternal Being of God within the compass of our own conceiving and imagining. Whichever way we take, we lapse back into paganism. But the very essence of the Christian Gospel is in direct antithesis to both errors, for it is identical with the fact that the eternal God, without ceasing to be God or without becoming other than he who he is, has yet become man, and has so appropriated our human nature as his own in Jesus Christ, that he has established between us the basis for revelation on his part and true knowledge on our part. Hence everything hinges upon the fact that the essential images of God which are mediated to us in and through Jesus Christ, are the images of One who is coessential or consubstantial with Godhead. It is in and through him who is both the Image and the Reality of God in his own Person and Being that the imagery and conceptuality of the Christian faith are objectively and eternally grounded in God himself.²¹⁹ That is the epistemological importance of the divine economy. It means that the images we use of the Father in relation to the Son and of the Son in relation to the Father, are not detachable imitations of divine Reality

²¹⁷ *Con. Ar.* 1.9, 21; 2.37f; 3.11, 18; 4.2, 15; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 10.

²¹⁸ See the censure of Arian reasoning in *Ad episc. Aeg.* 12, where it is alleged of Christ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ γινώσκει καὶ βλέπει ἀναλόγως οἶδε τοῖς ἰδίοις μέτροις καὶ βλέπει, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς γινώσκομεν καὶ βλέπομεν κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν. In regard to the misuse of the term 'son' see *Con. Ar.* 1.22ff, or *Ad Ser.* 1.16f.

²¹⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.20, 21; 2.33ff; 3.3ff; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12, 15, 17, 23.

and therefore mutable and relative, but are derived from within the Godhead, and are permanent. Far from being merely noetic or imaginary they are economically rooted in the divine self-giving, and are ultimately real and valid.²²⁰ Hence apart from the economy we can only think and speak of God *in accordance* with our own natures, and not *in fact*.

This epistemological significance of the economy comes to view very clearly in Athanasius' defence of Dionysius. Although Dionysius was accused of speaking humanly of the Son of God, he was but following the Apostles, using human language economically (κατ' οἰκονομίαν).

Did the Apostles when they used this language know Christ to be only man and nothing more? God forbid. It is impossible to entertain such a notion. But even in this respect they have acted as wise master-builders and stewards (οἰκονόμοι) of God's mysteries, and they have good reason for it. For when the Jews at that time, mistaken themselves and misleading the Gentiles, thought that the Christ was coming only as a mere man of the seed of David, after the likeness of the other descendants of David, and believed neither that he was God nor that the Word became flesh, then the blessed Apostles very wisely first expounded to the Jews the human characteristics of the Saviour in order that they might convince them from the visible facts and the miracles that were done that the Christ had come, and then went on to lead them up (ἀναγάγωσι) to faith in his Godhead, by showing that the works that were done were not of man but of God. . . . But what else does it mean to speak of him as the Prince of Life, and Son of God, the Radiance and Express Image (ἀπαύγασμα καὶ χαρακτήρ), on equality with God, Lord and Bishop of Souls, than that he was in the body God's Word, through whom all things were made, and is indivisible from the Father (ἀδιαίρετος τοῦ πατρός), as is the radiance from the light? . . . As therefore Apostles are not to be accused on account of their human language about the Lord (for the Lord has become man also), but are rather worthy of admiration because of their regard for the economy and because their teaching took account of the times διὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν καὶ τὴν ἐν καιρῷ διδασκαλίαν,²²¹ so Dionysius is not an Arian because of his letter to Euphranor and Ammonius against Sabellius. For even if he used humble words and analogies (ταπεινοῖς λόγοις καὶ παραδείγμασιν), yet even they are from the Gospels and have their justification (πρόφασιν) in the parousia of the Saviour in flesh, which is the reason why these and similar things are written. For as he is the Word of God, so afterwards the Word was made flesh, and while the Word was in

²²⁰ *In illud, omnia*, 1, 4; *Con. Ar.* 2.35, 36; *De Syn.* 38; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 17, 20, 21.

²²¹ For the meaning of this see *Con. Ar.* 1.54–55. It is the eschatological relevance of the economy that he has in mind.

the beginning, yet the Virgin at the consummation of the Ages gave birth to him. The Lord became Man. He who is signified by both statements is One, for the Word was made flesh. But the words that are spoken about his Godhead, and about his becoming Man, have their proper interpretation and in each case are congruent with what is actually said (ἰδίαν καὶ κατάλληλον ἔχει πρὸς ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων τὴν ἐρμηνείαν). He who writes of the human characteristics of the Word knows also those that concern his Godhead, and he who expounds those concerning his Godhead is not ignorant of those that are proper to his *parousia* in the flesh, but judging each like an expert and approved money-changer, he will proceed in a way that is properly in accordance with religious experience (κατ' ὀρθὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας).²²²

The error to which Dionysius stood opposed is described by Athanasius in the words of Arius. 'The Word is not the Father's own, but the Word in God is different. But this one, the Lord, is a stranger and foreign to the Being of the Father (ξένος μὲν καὶ ἀλλότριος ἔστι τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας). He is said to be Word only in accordance with a way of thinking (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν δὲ μόνον), and is not by nature and of a truth God's Son (κατὰ φύσιν καὶ ἀληθινὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ υἱός), but he as a creature is called Son by adoption (κατὰ θέσιν, i.e. by a convention).'²²³ To this κατ' ἐπίνοιαν Dionysius opposed a κατ' οἰκονομίαν in order to show that the Word we encounter in the human nature of Jesus Christ is the true Word of God by nature (ἀληθινὸν καὶ φύσει λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ). Far from treating him as foreign to God Dionysius taught that *he is the Father's proper Word and inseparable from his Being* (ἴδιον καὶ ἀδιαίρετον τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας)²²⁴ In order to show how closely he regarded the unity of the Incarnate Word with the Being of Godhead, Dionysius borrowed language applicable to men taking his cue from Psalm 45.1: 'My heart uttered a good word'.

Out mind (νοῦς) utters the word from itself and each is distinct from the other, occupying its own place separated (κεχωρισμένον) from the other, the one dwelling and moving in the heart, and the other on the tongue. Yet, they are not parted from one another (οὐ μὴν διεστήκασιν) not for a moment deprived of one another. The mind is not without the word (ὁ

²²² *De sent. Dion.* 5f, 8f, 13. Cf. *Ad Ser.* 2.7f.

²²³ *De sent. Dion.* 23; see 2, 24. Κατὰ θέσιν was equivalent to saying that 'Son' was merely a name and did not correspond to reality. See also *Con. Ar.* 1.9, 21, 26; 2.19, 37, 38; 3.11, 18; 4.2, 3, 8, 12, 24; *Ad epis. Aeg.* 12-14, 16; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 16, etc.

²²⁴ *De sent. Dion.* 24; *Sermo maior de fide*, 14, 27; *Con. Ar.* 4.12.

νοῦς ἄλογος), and the word is not without the mind (ἄνοος ὁ λόγος), but the mind forms the word and is manifest in it, and the word shows forth the mind having derived from it. The mind is thus the word dwelling within, and the word is the mind issuing forth. The mind passes over into the word, and the word circulates the mind among the hearers, and thus the mind through the word finds a place in the souls of the hearers, entering in along with the word. The mind is like the father of the word, existing in itself, but the word is as it were the son of the mind, not that it would exist before it or derives from some source outside of it, but exists along with it by springing out of it. God the Father, the almighty and universal Mind has the Son before all things as his Word, Interpreter and Messenger (πρῶτον τὸν υἱὸν λόγον ἐρμηνεῖα καὶ ἄγγελον ἑαυτοῦ ἔχει).²²⁵

That is an important passage for our understanding of Athanasius who cited it with full approval, for it shows us not only how important he regarded the inseparability of the Incarnate Word from the eternal Being of God, but, when we remember that he thinks of the Scripture as speaking out of the person of God, it shows us also how he regarded the relation between the words of Holy Scripture and the Word of God which through them circulates among their hearers and finds lodging in their souls.²²⁶ It is thus the inner and inseparable connection between the Incarnate Word and the Eternal Word in God, the consubstantiality of the Incarnate Word, that determines for us the way in which we have to regard what we hear and read in the Bible, and therefore the way in which we have to read and listen to it, and formulate our theological statements about its message.

But there is another side to this which is typically Athanasian which arises out of the close relation between word and act in God. As the Old Testament expresses it God's Word is also his Hand,²²⁷ for it is through his Word that God acts immediately without the separation between his Will and his Acts which characterises human beings.²²⁸ In God's Word his divine Being is in operation; his activity which is consubstantial with himself takes place in and through his Word and is inseparable from that Word.²²⁹ Thus the Incarnate Word does nothing apart from the Father, for he and the Father are at work together, for in him the divine Will and

²²⁵ *De sent. Dion.* 23.

²²⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.39f.

²²⁷ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 7, 17; *Con. Ar.* 2.31, 71 etc.

²²⁸ *Con. Ar.* 3.62.

²²⁹ *Con. Ar.* 2.35.

Counsel are lodged and operate together.²³⁰ This is well brought out by Athanasius in a comment upon the works of God and the kingly power of Christ.

The Father calls him King in regard to his work in time (κατὰ καιρόν), lest anything in the measured character of the Incarnation (τῷ τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως μέτρῳ) should detract from the glory that inheres in him by nature. For even after his economy he remains no less in him, begotten of his Royal Father, and as King and God, he is said to enter into his Royal Rule through becoming flesh. Thus what he knows by nature as God he is said to hear again economically in accordance with his human condition. For Christ is King, whose works the Father himself utters (ὅτι τὰ ἔργα λέγει ὁ πατήρ). Moreover the Word which he speaks he calls also his Tongue (γλῶσσαν) since he utters nothing else than the Will of the Father which is in him. For even with us the tongue transmits the message of the mind across to those who are without. Likewise the tongue is called the pen of a ready-writer, because what is spoken it puts into effect immediately, thus: 'I say, be clean, and immediately he was cleansed' (Matt. 8.3). 'Young man, I say unto thee, arise, and immediately he arose' (Luke 7.14).²³¹

The Word of God is miraculous, creative, and saving, and therefore when we attend to the words of the Scriptures through which it resounds to us, we have to attend at the same time to the acts of God which they signify and which they accompany. To listen to this Word and interpret it involves the hearer and interpreter in its creative and saving activity, and results in the transformation of his life in a discipleship of the Word made flesh.²³² 'For this reason the Saviour not only taught, but he did the things he taught, in order that each one may hear him speaking and while seeing him as in an image and hearing him, may receive from him the παράδειγμα of his acts.'²³³

As we have seen, it is in the fulfilment of the economy that Athanasius understood God's self-representation and his saving activity to operate together as one movement of condescension and self-communication to man. If that is objective fact or word to which the prophets pointed and the Apostles bore witness, it must be in accordance with its nature that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are to be read and understood.

²³⁰ *Con. Ar.* 3.65f.

²³¹ *Fragmenta Comm. in Psalmos*, 76.

²³² *Fragmenta in Lucam*, 29.

²³³ *Ad Marcellinum*, 13.

The eternal Word of God is uttered and incarnated in Jesus Christ, and has therefore taken a form in him in which it is to be seen and heard and experienced in its healing and revealing power. That is the mystery of godliness, τὸ μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας, which is called forth through the apostolic *kerygma* and is found in the Catholic Church, and it is in accord with that experience of God in Christ that the sacred writings are to be interpreted.

There are two important points in these passages which link up with the preceding discussion.

(i) The essential conceptuality of the Scriptures (i.e. its basic forms of thought and speech) is derived from the economy of the divine Word, and in and through him is grounded in the eternal Being of God.

It is for this reason that Athanasius constantly demands that we keep close to what is written in the Scriptures and to what actually took place, and think and speak in accordance with the nature of those realities as they are signified and fulfilled.²³⁴ If we venture to go beyond that, we are only inventing and trying by human wisdom to make definitions beyond the scope of human thought.²³⁵ If in his economic action the Word has condescended to our human nature and appropriated it as the medium of his revelation, and indeed has 'deified' it in and through the humanity of the Word,²³⁶ then to transgress the economy is not only to fight against Christ (χριστομαχεῖν), but to act beyond human nature (ὑπὲρ φύσιν).²³⁷ Certainly the language used in the Scriptures is humble and partakes of our poverty, for all human speech falls short of the glory of God, but since it has been appropriated to direct us to God, and has been adapted in its modes of speech and thought to that end (i.e. κατ' οἰκονομίαν) then we must be careful not to swerve from biblical images and expressions, that is, not to depart from the basic forms of thought and speech that they supply to us, otherwise we shall miss the truth, and lapse from God's ways.²³⁸ This does not mean, as we have already seen, that we must use only biblical

²³⁴ See also *Con. Apol.* 1.8f; 2.14–16, 19 for the same teaching.

²³⁵ Again see *Con. Apol.* 1.13.

²³⁶ By deification Athanasius means that the humanity in Christ has become God's humanity, and that therefore our humanity partakes of that sanctification and exaltation of human nature in Christ through union with him. See, for example, *Con. Ar.* 1.39f; 2.47ff; 67f; 3.19ff, 39ff, or *Ad Adel.* 4f, and *Ad Max.* 2f.

²³⁷ Again cf. *Con. Apol.* 1.9; 2.9.

²³⁸ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 12, 28, 32; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 4f; *Con. Ar.* 1.34 etc; *Ad Ser.* 1.17, 19f; *Sermo maior de fide*, 32ff; and cf. *Con. Apol.* 19; 2.4f, 15, 17, 19.

expressions,²³⁹ but that we have to think and speak in accordance with the nature of the acts of God to which we are directed by what is written in the Scriptures, i.e. economically or in modes that are congruent with the economy of the Word made flesh.

(ii) In the very heart of this economy we are concerned with the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father and of the Father to the Incarnate Son. Hence to interpret the Scriptures in accordance with the nature of the realities they signify, and to formulate theological statements by thinking and speaking freely out of them, we must allow our modes of thought and speech to be determined and shaped by that relation of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father. In Jesus Christ the whole economy was fulfilled, with an exhibition of all that could fulfil and complete it, and therefore it is in him and through him alone that we may think and speak truly of the Father.²⁴⁰

That is the theme of Athanasius' exposition of the saying of our Lord recorded in Luke 10.22 or Matt. 11.27.²⁴¹ 'All things have been delivered unto me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is, save the Father, and who the Father is save the Son, and any one to whom the Son wills to reveal him.' That refers not to the Lordship of the Son over creaturely works, says Athanasius, but to what took place in the Incarnation. The saying of Jesus is meant to reveal something of the purpose of the economy.²⁴² Since in Christ all things are now fulfilled and he is the way back to the Father, we may take that way only through participating in the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father. Hence whether we are concerned to interpret the Scriptures and understand the divine words and acts, or whether we are concerned to make our own theological statements on that basis, we can do so truly only when we are drawn into the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father, through union with Christ, and participate in his restoration (διόρθωσις, κατόρθωσις) of the creation in which all things are reconciled and rectified and directed back to their true end in God. Theological thinking and formulation κατ' οἰκονομίαν participate in that movement of reconciliation and rectification. That was an insight that guided Athanasius in all his exegetical and theological work, for, it is found as early as his *De*

²³⁹ *De Syn.* 39.

²⁴⁰ Cf. the teaching of *Con. Apol.* 2.3f, 15–17.

²⁴¹ *In illud, omnia.* See also *Con. Ar.* 3.26f, 35f, 4.16f.

²⁴² *In illud, omnia*, 1.

Incarnatione. But there too we find as in the conclusion of the *In illud, omnia* the profound realisation that the more we participate in the restorative deeds of Christ (τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατορθώματα), the more we know that our minds are directed up far beyond what we can adequately conceive, or put into words, to the transcendent nature of the Godhead – by their very nature, therefore, our theological statements are opened upward in wonder and worship.²⁴³

We may summarise this section on the nature of biblical and theological statements by saying that the *human economy* of the Word and Son of God represents the *logic* of God's acts of grace, and therefore in *accordance with the economy* (κατ' οἰκονομίαν) describes the *analogic* of biblical and theological statements or their faithful reference back to their source in the divine acts of grace. By linking together the παραδείγματα and the οἰκονομία in this way Athanasius indicated that the analogical reference of our statements about God is grounded objectively in the activity of the divine Being. The true *logic* of theological statements is the economy of the *Logos* of God, and is discerned only in penetrating through the words of the Scriptures to the interior logic of the relationship of the Incarnate Son to the Father.

3. The way to interpret the Holy Scriptures

In discussing the scope of the Scriptures and the nature of the statements they contain we have already noted some of the main features of Athanasian interpretation. We recall two of them.

(a) Interpretation must give careful attention to the whole context of each passage, noting especially the circumstances of time and place, the person to whom the statements refer, and the subject-matter in question.²⁴⁴ This implies a rejection of tropological and allegorical exegesis, for it inevitably distorts the natural sense of the text, and misapplies it to alien ends or notions under the dictation of preconceptions. In its larger form this means that each passage in the Scripture must be investigated and understood in the whole scope of the biblical writings, in accordance with their customary habits of expression and thought, within the

²⁴³ *De Inc.* 54f; *In illud, omnia*, 6; Cf. also *Ad Ser.* 1.17.

²⁴⁴ *Con. Ar.* 1.2, 54f; 11.7ff, 44f; 3.42f; *De Sent. Dion.* 4, 9.

orientation set for us by their subject-matter, and in congruence with the faith and religious experience they mediate, i.e., with the apostolic mind, and the experience and faith of the Church that continue to derive from it and repose upon it as their sole foundation.

(b) In studying the Scriptures we have to pay attention not only to what is written in them but to the acts of God to which they bear witness – i.e. to the whole economy of salvation in the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Incarnate Son of God.²⁴⁵ Interpretation is therefore inevitably theological and takes place properly within the scope of the faith and its basic doctrines. In this kind of interpretation we have to exercise discernment in determining the specific reference of biblical terms and statements within the pattern of the economy, weighing the human language that is used, to see whether it is applied immediately to the Godhead as such, or to God in his human economy or vicarious condescension, then judging in what sense they are appropriate to divine nature. All the time we have to take into account the relation between the Creator and the creature, and therefore the fact that all human statements when directed to God fall short of his glory, and even when used by divine Revelation have their measured economic reference, for there the acknowledgment of their limits is part of their semantic function in directing us to God himself.

We also saw that Athanasius was deeply aware of the fact that interpretation, if it is to be right and adequate, must be carried out in accordance with the nature of the subject. That is why we had to examine so thoroughly the nature of biblical language and statement in order to clarify our understanding of the kind of reference to God they involve.

Athanasius uses many expressions in this connection which let us see the way he approaches the question, such as right, proper, apposite, suitable, congruent, fitting, etc. What he is concerned with is correspondence and consistency, both in the mode of inquiry which must be appropriate to the nature of its object, and in the development of exposition which must keep as close as possible to what is actually learned from the text and congruent in its own consistency with the rationality of the divine Revelation.

This does involve a fundamental conviction about the very nature of

²⁴⁵ See especially *De Sent. Dion.* 6; *Sermo maior de fide*, 24; *Ad Marc.* 11ff. Cf. also *Con. Apol.* 18f; 2.19; *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 1f.

the Holy Scriptures, their inspiration and sufficiency and their reflection of the rationality of the *Logos*.²⁴⁶ They are divine Scriptures, not that they are literally dictated by the Holy Spirit, but that they were written by holy men as they were obedient to the operations of the Spirit who has spoken the Word of God to his people throughout the history of Israel at sundry times and in diverse manners, and has in these last days spoken to us by the Son of God. There is One Spirit and One Word, but while there are diverse operations of the Spirit, there is a unity running throughout all, for it is the One Word which he utters to men, in accordance with the different circumstances of time and place in the divine dispensation or economy. That is the unity or harmony – the symphony of the Spirit – that runs throughout all the Holy Scriptures. Thus while the statements of the Old Testament writers have their own immediate application to the times and circumstances of the writers and people to whom they are addressed, under the direction of the Spirit they may – not all Old Testament statements are involved here – be used to point forward to the Incarnation or the fulfilment of the divine economy in Christ – that is where a measured element of typology is allowed by Athanasius, but it cannot be imposed upon the Scriptures, for to be true it must arise out of the interpretation that is already embedded in the acts of God which the Scriptures recount.²⁴⁷

Athanasius was thus no Biblicist²⁴⁸ – he does not need to prove all his theological statements by the citation of texts, nor does he handle citations either in the way of the fundamentalist or the modern critical scholar. He is concerned, as we have seen, to get inside the scope of the Scripture, and to think freely within the directions its language, imagery, and statements give him, and without swerving from them, to expound as accurately as possible the sense of the Scriptures and draw out their statements constructively in the light of the acts of God in the economy and in accordance with the nature and person of the Incarnate Son and his saving work. But throughout all he is deeply conscious of the fact that he is listening to the Word of God spoken by the Spirit, and is confronted with the harmony of the Spirit's utterance in Old and New Testaments, in words and acts. Hence as an interpreter

²⁴⁶ *Ep. Fest.* 19.3.

²⁴⁷ See above all here, Athanasius' essay on the interpretation of the Psalms, *Ad Marc.* 11ff, and *Sermo maior de fide*, 36ff.

²⁴⁸ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 18f.

he must pray to be enlightened by the same Spirit.²⁴⁹ Prayer is also directed to the Word. 'Breathe upon me, O Word, and teach me thy words, and inscribe thy precepts upon the table of my heart. I am now made ready. Helped by thy Grace, and directed by thine invisible and omnipotent Hand, I can hear divine words and be made a partaker of mysteries.'²⁵⁰ Interpretation thus requires spiritual perception or *Θεωρία*, if the divine acts and words are to be discerned in the historical, prophetic or apostolic statements of the Scriptures.²⁵¹ Far from being a spiritualising form of interpretation this takes seriously the natural or literal sense of terms, but discerns the divine message conveyed in and through them. Athanasius does not have much to say about this. He rather takes it for granted that the interpretation of the divine Scriptures must be in accordance with the mode of their inspiration, by the help of the same Spirit that uttered God's Word through them in the first place.²⁵² But he does insist that this insight cannot be divorced from the critical use of the reason from careful scrutiny and questioning.²⁵³ Just because it is divine Scripture we are interpreting we must take every care to be exact, for the language used in the Scripture at the important points that concern the theologian has an accuracy that calls forth admiration.²⁵⁴

Athanasius is deeply aware that this calls for not a little self-criticism on the part of the interpreter, for the kind of questions he asks can distort what he is seeking to elucidate. That became very apparent to him first in his debates with the Arians and then again in his discussion of the views of the semi-Arian *Tropici* in the exegesis they advanced to justify their doctrine of the Spirit as a creature of God. He points out for example that they put questions to the Scriptures involving inventions on the part of the questioners themselves, which if put to the world of natural objects would bring upon them the charge of mental disorder.²⁵⁵ There are therefore impertinent questions, questions that are not apposite to the nature of the object of inquiry, and when applied to God are impious and irreverent, for they are questions that put God himself into question, and

²⁴⁹ *De Trinitate*, 118.54: φωτισόν με, καὶ ἐπιζητήσω τὴν ἐρμηνείαν τῶν γραφῶν σου.

²⁵⁰ *Fragmenta in Cantica* (*Opera*, PG, 3, p. 1349).

²⁵¹ *In Psalm.* 118.138; *Frag. in Ps.* 98.

²⁵² *Ad Marc.* 11f, 31f; *Frag. in Ps.* 53.

²⁵³ *Ad Ser.* 1.20; 2.8.

²⁵⁴ *In illud, omnia*, 3.

²⁵⁵ *Ad Ser.* 1.17; cf. 1.7, 10.

are basically atheistical.²⁵⁶ They conflict with true godly experience, but conflict also with true reasoning. Hence he insists that the questioners themselves have to be questioned by the questions they themselves pose (ἐρωτώμενοι ὡς ἐρωτῶσιν) and their questions recast in apposite ways.²⁵⁷

The aim of such an inquiry is two-fold, (a) to determine the exact sense (ἀκρίβεια) of the biblical terms and images as they are employed in the text, and (b) to bring to light the coherent pattern of meaning in the statements or the sequence of thought (ἀκολουθία) they involve in view of the realities signified by them. Both are essential for the understanding of any passage.

(a) Serious interpretation does not jump at the first sense of a word, nor is it content with the superficial meaning carried by the word itself,²⁵⁸ but is concerned to discern the relation between the word and the thing signified by it.²⁵⁹ The clarification of that correspondence with reality is necessary if the exact sense of expressions (τῶν ῥητῶν ἀκρίβεια) and the real meaning of the analogies or images (τῶν παραδειγμάτων ἢ διάνοια) is to be determined.²⁶⁰ This involves the subjection of the terms to a critical scrutiny in order to bring to light their 'reasonableness' or 'suitableness'.²⁶¹ Only when we see into their 'sufficiency' or 'appositeness' in this way, and can offer some explanation for them in the light of what they are employed to signify can we give them a fair and proper interpretation.²⁶² That was the kind of biblical investigation to which the fathers gave themselves at Nicaea. Then they set themselves to state as accurately as they could in equivalent language the same truth, but in such a way that it would take the ground from under the feet of those who made much of ambiguity of language.²⁶³

In regard to biblical expressions such an inquiry reveals which of several senses is intended in the text, by noting the personal referent.

²⁵⁶ *De Syn.* 33ff; *Con. Ar.* 124f.

²⁵⁷ *Ad Ser.* 4.1-3.

²⁵⁸ *Con. Ar.* 1.34; 2.44; *Ad Ser.* 1.9; also *De Inc. et con. Ar.* 1.

²⁵⁹ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 10f, 21.; *Ep. Encl.* 1.

²⁶⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.33; cf. 2.74; 3.34, 52.

²⁶¹ *Ad Ser.* 1, 9, 19; 4.3; *Con. Ar.* 4.27; *De sent. Dion.* 9.

²⁶² *Con. Ar.* 2.4; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 14f; *De sent. Dion.* 9; *De Syn.* 33ff.; *Ad Ant.* 8.

²⁶³ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 32; *De Syn.* 27, 45; *Ad Ant.* 6. This demand for accuracy and precision in interpretation is made by Athanasius not only in regard to biblical statements, for it is necessary to be truthful and exact in interpreting all statements, e.g. of another theologian like Dionysius (*De sent. Dion.* 4f, 9f), or of the Councils of the Church *Apol. con. Ar.* 23; *De Syn.* 7, 10, 45, 54; *Ad Afr.* 5.

Thus, for example, Athanasius notes that usually biblical writers use the term faithful (πιστός) in two senses, 'believing' and 'trustworthy'.²⁶⁴ When the subject is God, then clearly the sense of 'believing' is not apposite, and we have to have recourse to the other sense. Again, as we have already had occasion to note, words with an ordinary and straightforward sense, when applied to divine things, undergo a shift in their meaning, and care must be taken to determine precisely what that change involves, if an interpretation is to be offered.²⁶⁵ This was the problem with the Arian use of the word 'son' for they insisted on using it in its application to God in just the same sense as they used it when applied to creaturely human beings.²⁶⁶ The whole difference between the creature and the Creator has to be taken into account in interpreting theological language. Hence we have to look at a passage about the Spirit, for example, exactly, if we are to get its suitable meaning.²⁶⁷

In regard to biblical images or analogies which are drawn from the visible or tangible world around us, we must be particularly careful to discern the objective reference in which they are employed, in order to disenrattle the real διάνοια – that is achieved not by seeking the meaning in the images themselves, but in following through their paradigmatic reference to the divine reality, and thus to transcend the sensible imagination, and apprehend with the mind alone what is revealed through this image, such as the relation of the Father to the Son, or the proper relation of the Word toward God.²⁶⁸ That is, we must not read the παραδείγματα in such a way as to project human distinctions and limitations into the Godhead, but in such a way that while following the directions of the analogies faithfully, we are prepared to leave them behind considered at least in their sensible imagery, and let our minds be determined by the basic conceptuality of the Word which is communicated to us through them.²⁶⁹ There is a reasonable ground and cause why such representations are used of the Lord in the Scriptures, and we must penetrate into that if we are to get at their real meaning.²⁷⁰ Hence

²⁶⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.6.

²⁶⁵ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 11; *De Syn.* 42; *Con. Ar.* 3.28f.

²⁶⁶ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 6f.

²⁶⁷ *Ad Ser.* 1.9: ἀναγκαῖον ἰδεῖν ἀκριβῶς, τὸ λεγόμενον, μὴ ἄρα καὶ περὶ τοῦ λεγομένου κτίζεσθαι πνεύματος οἰκειοτέραν τὴν διάνοιαν.

²⁶⁸ See also 1.16f.

²⁶⁹ *De Syn.* 42, 51; *Ad Marc.* 13; *Con. Ar.* 1.20–21.

²⁷⁰ *Ad episc. Aeg.* 17: ἔχει τὴν πρόφασιν καὶ αἴτιον εὐλογον.

the understanding of the Scriptures in their exact sense requires the kind of inquiry into the nature of biblical images and statements and their objectives and analogical reference in which Athanasius engaged, and which we have discussed above.

(b) Serious interpretation does not chase after isolated expressions passing over the truth that they contain,²⁷¹ nor does it consider merely the words themselves but attends to what they intend to convey in the passages concerned.²⁷² It is the coherence of the sacred writings that we have to take into account, for unless we seek to understand the language used in its consistency we cannot discern adequately its correspondence to the realities signified – that is what happens, for example, when certain images are selected and isolated or are unduly pressed. Thus the language about the Son and about the Word have to be taken together, and the other images that are used to speak of the relation of Son and Word to the Father, if any one of them is to be taken fairly and reasonably in its proper intention and meaning.²⁷³ But we have also to seek out the coherent pattern of meaning in any one book or in any particular passage, for the meaning and reference of each word is discerned in the series of expressions and statements in which it is found.²⁷⁴ Interpretation is then the unfolding of the interpretation (ἐρμηνεία) already embedded in the text.²⁷⁵

In its wider or more general sense, this is what Athanasius means by speaking of the general habit (συνήθεια) of biblical language,²⁷⁶ or the scope of the Scripture,²⁷⁷ but the real pattern of meaning that the theologian is concerned to elucidate is not merely that of biblical statements but of the realities they denote. That will become apparent to him only as he lays bare the inner rational sequence of the biblical statements and passages – that is what he called the ἀκολουθία.

Athanasius uses this term naturally in various senses – of causal or physical sequence or logical implication,²⁷⁸ of the sequence of

²⁷¹ *De sent. Dion.* 4.

²⁷² *Ad epis. Aeg.* 4, 8; *Con. Ar.* 2.4–7.

²⁷³ Cf. *Con. Ar.* 1.22f, 28f.

²⁷⁴ *Con. Ar.* 1.11, 54f; 2. 7ff, 44f; 3. 24f; *De sent. Dion.* 4, 9; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 14; *Ad. Ser.* 2.8.

²⁷⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.58; *Ad Ser.* 1.20.

²⁷⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.17, etc.; *Ad Marc.* 11, 27, etc.

²⁷⁷ *Con. Ar.* 3.28f, 35, 58; *Ad Ser.* 2.7.

²⁷⁸ *De Inc.* 1, 31; *Con. Ar.* 2.41; 4.25; *Frag. in Matt.* 9; *Arg. in Ps.*; *Ad Max.* 13, cf. *Con. Apol.* 2.2, etc.

history,²⁷⁹ or just simply of consistency.²⁸⁰ However, since Athanasios is always concerned throughout biblical exegesis not only with τὰ γεγραμμένα but with τὰ γινόμενα, that is, with the acts of God and the works of the Word, and indeed with their economic pattern in Jesus Christ, he uses ἀκολουθία and ἀκολουθεῖν also of obedient following of the Word, or discipleship. There is ἀκολουθία in the economic life and acts of Christ, for they have reasonable sequence, but there is ἀκολουθία in the lives and minds of those who follow him faithfully and keep within the scope of his economic acts, and are assimilated or brought into conformity to the Word.²⁸¹ Certainly one cannot be a disciple of the *Logos* and remain unreasonable or irrational.²⁸² That kind of discipleship is the object of biblical study, and that is why the wise prefer the interpretation of the Gospels to all other pursuits.²⁸³

We have noted this relation between the more objective and the more subjective aspects of interpretation before. To keep to the scope of the Scripture, for example, also means keeping within the scope of faith, and hence interpretation of the Scripture is properly carried out within the context and tradition of religious experience in the life of the Church. But this does not mean that Athanasios relaxes in the slightest over his insistence on rational and critical inquiry – hence he insists upon the importance of ἀκολουθία in the more technical sense of inner rational sequence (κατὰ τὴν εὐλογον ἀκολουθίαν).²⁸⁴ Unless the interpreter gives heed to that he will mistake the proper meaning.

This use applied to interpretation is already found in the Alexandrian tradition. Thus Clement speaks of the ἀκολουθία of divine teaching,²⁸⁵ and Origen speaks of τὸ ἀκόλουθον τῆς ἐρμηνείας,²⁸⁶ but it was in classical Antiochene exegesis that it became a regular hermeneutical principle. It is to this application of ἀκολουθία that Athanasios turns again and again in order to straighten out tangled and distorted

²⁷⁹ *Arg. in Ps.*: κατὰ ἀκολουθίαν τῶν τῆς ἱστορίας χρόνων.

²⁸⁰ *De Inc.* 20; *De Syn.* 42; *Arg. in Ps.*; *Con. Ar.* 3.1. This is naturally the most frequent sense, where it is the adverb ἀκολουθῶς that is prominent.

²⁸¹ *Frag. in Luc.* 31..

²⁸² *Epist.* 28.

²⁸³ *De Inc.* 53.

²⁸⁴ *De Inc.* 30.

²⁸⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 1.28.

²⁸⁶ Origen, *In Jer. (Opera, PG, 13, p. 425)*; also *De Princ.* 1.33; 4.2.9; *In Ioann.* 13.16 (4.22).

interpretations,²⁸⁷ or to clarify the meaning of a particular term or passage.²⁸⁸ We shall note several examples from his *Orationes contra Arianos*.

(1) Romans 1.20.²⁸⁹ In their attempts to justify their notion that there was once a time when the Son was not, the Arians challenged the orthodox exegesis of this passage which understood 'the eternal power' of God to refer to the Son. They insisted that it referred to the Father. Athanasius first points out the inconsistency of their own statement, and then points to the usage of the Scripture according to which the Saviour is never spoken of as having merely temporal existence, and cites some examples where Christ is spoken of as eternal. He sets beside the text in question, the statement of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 1.24, in which he refers to 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'. Then in an appeal to the actual language used and to the ἀκολουθία, that is, to its place in the sequence with other statements, he shows that the text, while referring to God's power, speaks of it as 'his' and not as 'he', using 'power' here in the same sense as in 1 Corinthians 1.24. Then he goes on to develop the theological idea underlying the passage, in which St Paul making mention of creation naturally speaks of the Creator's power, which is his Word, by whom all things are made – that is, God's Son. This interpretation is supported by similar statements and their teaching from the rest of Scripture, making it clear that far from being an isolated occurrence, this statement in question is congruent with the general scope of biblical teaching.

(2) Hebrews 3.2.²⁹⁰ 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him (τῷ ποιήσαντι αὐτόν)'. This was a favourite text of the Arians, for they interpreted the expression 'appointed' (literally, 'made') to mean that Christ was a creature. They linked it with another from Proverbs 8.22: 'The Lord hath created me a beginning of his ways for his works'. Athanasius has little difficulty in showing from the characteristic language of the Bible

²⁸⁷ Thus by insisting on ἀκολουθία in the arguments of heretics Athanasius constantly points out the absurdities that result from their views, *Con. Ar.* 1.63; 3.1, 2, 64; 4.2, 4, 14, 21; *Ad Ser.* 1.13, 24, etc.

²⁸⁸ On occasion Athanasius can use, instead of ἀκολουθία, εἰρμός with the meaning of series or sequence or continuity. Cf. *Con. Ar.* 3.42.

²⁸⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.11ff.

²⁹⁰ *Con. Ar.* 2.1f, 7f.

that the application of 'faithful' and 'servant' to Christ does not necessarily imply what the Arians claimed, and that here those terms, like others when applied to the Son, change their significance, for it is the subject of which they are predicated that determines their real meaning. But this use of human language of the Son is entirely appropriate, for it refers to his 'human economy and *parousia* in the flesh',²⁹¹

Then he pushes his inquiry deeper, and insists that the terms and the statements must be looked at in their proper context in which consideration is to be given to the occasion and purpose of their use – this involves the Incarnation and the Atonement. In that context where we see the proper meaning of what is written it is easy to show how much the Arian interpretation is lacking in reason. When we understand the passage in the light of Christ's priestly and atoning work on our behalf, the alleged difficulty falls away, for the statements assume a clear meaning.²⁹² Moreover it falls into line with the whole argument of the Epistle, for there is one sequence of thought, and the whole passage (Heb. 2.14f) is concerned with the same person (μία γὰρ ἀκολουθία ἐστὶ, καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀνάγνωσμα τυγχάνει).²⁹³ It is clear that it is not only the sequence of thought in the statements of the epistle that Athanasius has in mind, but the pattern of the 'Word's human economy' in which it is rooted, and which that sequence is intended to show.²⁹⁴

(3) Acts 2.36. 'He hath made both Lord and Christ that same Jesus whom you crucified.'²⁹⁵ This was another stock passage for Arian argumentation, but Athanasius points out that what they are doing in citing such passages is to hunt out expressions like 'he made' or 'he has been made' in order to justify their views of Christ. Once again he starts out by pointing out the absurdity of their view if this is held consistently with other passages of the Scripture, but without going over all the ground again he insists that 'the why and the how' of what is written must be examined (ἀλλ' ἐρευνην διατὶ καὶ πῶς ταῦτα γέγραπται). When that is done, he says, 'the human economy which

²⁹¹ *Con. Ar.* 2.6.

²⁹² *Con. Ar.* 2.7.

²⁹³ *Con. Ar.* 2.8.

²⁹⁴ *Con. Ar.* 2.9.

²⁹⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.11.

he undertook for our sakes will present itself clearly to those who inquire'.²⁹⁶ 'For when Peter said, "he hath made him Lord and Christ", he immediately added "this Jesus whom ye crucified", it becomes manifest to all and should be even to them, if they keep to the ἀκολουθία, that not only the Being of the Word but he according to his humanity is said "to have been made". For what was crucified but the body, and how could reference be made to the bodily aspect of the Word but by saying "he made" (or appointed)? In one way or another then the statement "he made" here gets its proper, and therefore also orthodox meaning (ὀρθῶν ἔχει τὴν διάνοιαν), for, as I have already observed, he has not said "He made him Word", but "he made him Lord", and that indeed, not in general terms, "toward us" and "in our midst", which is the same as saying "he declared him".'²⁹⁷

Athanasius then goes on to support this interpretation from parallels in other biblical passages, to show that what the principle of following the logic of the passage itself has revealed is entirely consistent with other biblical teaching about the same point. Thus the ἀκολουθία is handled within the general σκοπός of the Scriptures and of their message of redemption through Christ, and his grace and economic activity towards us. Indeed if we allow the Scriptures to direct us to Christ himself, in his condescension and humiliation for our sakes as the proper object (σκοπός) of what they have to say, then we shall find the right meaning of their statements.²⁹⁸

These examples show us that in interpreting the Scriptures Athanasius seeks to penetrate beneath the surface meaning of the words into their inner logic, and into the coherent pattern of meaning as it is objectively rooted in the saving acts and person of Christ. Far from detracting from the literal sense of what is written this reinforces it, and so Athanasius is able to take even more seriously the human language of the biblical writers about Christ than the Arians, for, as he keeps on pointing out, if they take that language seriously they must admit that they are worshipping a creature, which is idolatry.²⁹⁹ This kind of interpretation, however, involves laying bare the profound continuities and sequences of biblical teaching, and the building up of a train of

²⁹⁶ *Con. Ar.* 2.12.

²⁹⁷ *Con. Ar.* 2.12. See also 4.35.

²⁹⁸ *Con. Ar.* 2.13–17.

²⁹⁹ *Con. Ar.* 1.9; 2.14; *De Syn.* 50; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 4, 13; *Ad Ser.* 1.29; *Ad adel.* 3.

theological statements in and through which the meaning of the biblical passages and statements is reflected and clarified.

Two remarkable examples of this are the *De Incarnatione* and the *Ad Serapionem*. In both of them he develops an argument in which he throws the biblical teachings into a form that reveals their interior logic, and that in turn casts a flood of light upon the whole biblical message and upon the rest of theology. In the *De Incarnatione* he seeks to lay bare the ἀκολουθία of God's grace, into the inner propriety and reasonableness of the divine movement for our salvation.³⁰⁰ Free and transcendent though it is, for God owes us nothing, it manifests an inner logic of the divine love which overflows towards man (φιλανθρωπία). Characteristic of the treatise is the constant use of words like 'fitting', 'unbefitting', 'proper', 'out of place', 'unseemly', 'it behoved', 'it was necessary', etc. He rejects the notion that God had to act out of a compulsive necessity or determinism, for he is utterly free and transcendent over all. However in reflecting *a posteriori* upon what was manifested in Christ, Athanasius sought to lay bare what we may call the logic of grace, i.e. what was revealed as necessary and fitting κατὰ χάριν within the vicarious and atoning nature of all that was wrought by the Incarnate Son of God. It is when that is brought to view that the real meaning of the biblical teaching is understood.

The other example at which we may glance is the argument Athanasius advanced against the *Tropici* in response to a request from Bishop Serapion to counter the outbreak of a new form of Arian heresy which called in question the Deity of the Spirit. The method Athanasius adopted in his *Ad Serapionem* was to penetrate into the inner logic of the divine economy, into the very heart of the Trinitarian faith of the Church, that is, into the relation of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son, and then from that centre, as the ultimate point of reference and the decisive norm for all theological statements, he cut through the erroneous notions of the heretics and succeeded at the same time in setting out the doctrine of the Spirit upon its proper foundation. Thus in the *Ad Serapionem* Athanasius is concerned with the inner logic in its concrete form as it is revealed in Jesus Christ to be 'from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit'. He shows that when we think from

³⁰⁰ Cf. *De Inc.* 31: εἰ γὰρ ὅλος ἔλαβεν ἑαυτῷ σῶμα, καὶ τούτο ἰδιοποιήσατο κατὰ τὴν εὐλογον ἀκολουθίαν, ὡς ὁ λόγος ἔδειξε τί ἔδει τὸν Κύριον ποιεῖν περὶ τούτου; ἢ ποῖον ἔδει τέλος γένεσθαι τοῦ σώματος, ἀπαξ ἐπιβάντος αὐτῷ τοῦ λόγου; κ.τ.λ.

within that movement, the difficulties and perplexities disappear, and reasonable and legitimate interpretation of biblical passages results, without distortion or violence, and certainly without the need to invent tropes or forms of thought that have no backing in objective reality.

We conclude our discussion of the hermeneutics of Athanasius with three further observations.

(i) It is when the Scriptures are expounded in this way that they afford *proof*. Christian doctrines are not to be established or to be defended simply by appealing to biblical texts, but by listening to the things they signify and reflecting upon the acts of God they attest, and allowing our thought and statements to be objectively determined by them. If we remain content with the kind of superficial meaning which the carnally-minded can get out of biblical statements, e.g. with such a passage as 'The Lord created me the beginning of his ways and for his works', reading it merely κατὰ ἱστορίαν, then we may radically misinterpret it, and if we set up ourselves to teach others we can only be blind leaders of the blind.³⁰¹ Yet taken rightly, in the light of the economic relations between the Incarnate Word and the Godhead, it provides us with proof (ἀπόδειξις) of the humanity of the Saviour without detracting from the invisible Deity of the Word hidden in the bosom of the Father, which no man has seen, but which is revealed in and through Jesus Christ.³⁰² We have an instance of this kind of exposition in the brief *Expositio Fidei*.

Thus while Athanasius is not a Biblicist, yet he appeals to the Scriptures for the demonstration of the faith, regularly and ultimately, as we can see in so many of his discussions.³⁰³ He treats biblical statements, however, not as embodying the truth in themselves, but as pointing, under the direction of the Spirit by whose inspiration they were uttered, to the words and acts of Christ who is himself the Truth. In reading the Scriptures, therefore, we have to give ear to what they say, to the realities and deeds they announce, to the Word himself to which they refer and who speaks through them. It is when we handle the Scripture in that way that it becomes our teacher and leads us into the truth, for in and through it it is the Lord himself who

³⁰¹ *Sermo maior de fide*, 39; cf. *Con. Ar.* 2.44, 73, 77.

³⁰² *Sermo maior de fide*, 30f.

³⁰³ For examples see *Con. Ar.* 1.9f; 2.1ff, 18ff; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 13f; cf. also *Con. Apol.* 1.6ff; 2.8ff.

informs and teaches us.³⁰⁴ Thus while we find general justification for the Christian faith through reading the Scriptures, it is when we allow our minds to come under the compulsion of its doctrine, and particularly of the Word of Truth it mediates, that we may claim to have solid ground for our faith.³⁰⁵ Since heretics also appeal to the Scriptures, although they distort them according to their private judgments and preconceived notions, it is upon this kind of interpretation, which combines exegesis with reasoning, in order to bring out the fundamental meaning exactly, that we have to rely. 'It is indeed sufficient to believe only through hearing what the Lord says, since candid faith is better than an elaborate use of probable arguments. But since they have attempted to profane even this passage (i.e. John 14.10) to their own heresy, it is necessary to discuss their perverse view and to make clear the true meaning (τὴν δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας διάνοιαν δεῖξαι), at least for the assurance of the faithful.'³⁰⁶

(ii) The real difficulties we meet in interpreting the sacred scriptures are not to be found in its use of language, but in the ineffable Being of God whose nature far transcends anything we can imagine or describe. That is why biblical statements are so concerned with 'mysteries', but, as Newman observes, they are mysteries of fact not of words. 'What is commonly called "explaining away" Scripture is this transference of the obscurity from the subject to the words used.'³⁰⁷ But that involves a false understanding of the nature of biblical statements and of its use of language. Since it belongs to the very Nature and Being of God in his transcendence and glory that he cannot be expressed adequately in human speech, we must have regard to the statements of the Scriptures in their divinely given semantic function, interpret them in their reference away from themselves to God's self-revelation, and follow them through in their ostensive activity, for they point out and bear witness to far more than they can convey. It is only by obeying their directives, only by keeping close to the Scriptures, and their chosen images and analogies, only by keeping our thoughts in congruence with the acts of God fulfilled in the human economy of the Word, that we may hear and see and apprehend what far transcends our own powers,

³⁰⁴ *Ad Marc.* 11.

³⁰⁵ *Con. Ar.* 2.5, 35, 73, etc. See the notes of Robertson ad loc., and Newman on ἀλήθεια, op.cit., vol. 2, pp. 362f.

³⁰⁶ *Con. Ar.* 3.1.

³⁰⁷ See Robertson, op.cit., n. 9 to *Con. Ar.* 1.41; and Newman, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 94.

and attain a genuine knowledge of the Truth by the power of the Spirit. If we transfer our interest from the realities signified to the language itself, as though we could excogitate truth out of it, or use it only as the occasion for devising new forms of thought on our own in order to express what we are able to conceive of ourselves, then we shall fall away into heresy, and indeed take the road back into atheism and paganism.³⁰⁸ It is in and through the Scriptures, and into the knowledge of God that is given to us through them, that we really learn that God is not as man, and cannot be known through human comparisons – but we know that only through the wonderful and paradoxical fact of God's condescension to us, in which he makes our human nature his own, in order to lift us up above ourselves to know and love him.³⁰⁹ It is thus the Incarnation that both tells us that we cannot know God from out of our own powers, and yet that we may really know him and are given to know him, without having to leave our human modes of thought and speech behind.

(iii) The other great difficulty in knowing God lies in ourselves, in our self-will which leads us to invent notions to suit our own desires, and in our impurity and insincerity. The real difficulty here lies, then, in being engrossed with ourselves, as we see very clearly in the case of the Arians. This is the problem that lies behind Athanasius' question: Why do we always have to begin over again in biblical interpretation, or in laying down the first principles of the faith? That is not a complaint about the need for constant investigation of the Scriptures or of the need to meditate upon them and to grow thereby in our understanding of the truth, but a complaint against those who must constantly change their opinions and shift their ground, and wander uncertainly without a settled mind in exegesis or doctrine.³¹⁰ It is a complaint Athanasius makes again and again when calls come for the revision of the work of Nicaea, and for constant restatements of the faith, and the devising of new terms. The reason for this attitude of mind lies in the fact that such people are unable to distinguish their own subjective notions, or those they have themselves devised or thought up on their own, from those which arise out of the objective ground of the faith, and in the fact that they deny the eternity and consubstantiality of the Word and Wisdom of

³⁰⁸ *Con. Ar.* 3.15, 64; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 14; *Ad Ser.* 4.6, etc.

³⁰⁹ *De Inc.* 50; *Sermo maior de fide*, 7.

³¹⁰ *De Syn.* 6f, 14, 32f, 37f; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 4ff; *Ad Afr.* 10; *Ad Ant.* 6f; *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 1, 4; *Con Ar.* 1.1f, 2.40, etc.

God, and so operate only with detached images and concepts in their knowledge of God which just because they are detachable inevitably fluctuate and change.³¹¹ For Athanasius this way of thinking from out of a centre in one's self, and which mixes up the subjective and the objective, is a form of madness, or the sign of a deranged mind – the exact antithesis of rational behaviour and reasoning.³¹² Nothing could be more disastrous for biblical interpretation. 'Going out from the conceptions or rather misconceptions that derive from their own hearts they appeal to statements of the divine Scriptures, but they fail to see their meaning for they habitually misunderstand them. By setting up their own impiety as a sort of canon they wrest all the divine oracles into agreement with it.'³¹³ This can only lead to a rampant relativity that inevitably engulfs even the doctrine of God.³¹⁴

On the other hand, if we take seriously the eternity and unalterable nature of the Word, and his coessentiality with the Father, then we are concerned with a basic conceptuality in the divine revelation through Christ which is not only rooted in the Incarnation and the fulfilled economy but in the very Being of God himself. In that case the interpretation of the divine Scriptures that penetrates into the inner rationality of faith objectively and eternally grounded in that way, cannot but force us into agreement and steady advance in understanding, and there will be no need to relay the foundations all the time.³¹⁵

In other words, since true interpretation involves the construction of a consistent line of theological statements through which the inner logic of the biblical message comes to view, then interpretation must go on to build on that foundation, using what has already been done accurately and carefully as its guide, and advance in developing our understanding of the Scriptures. This is not an appeal to the development of tradition in the later sense, but an insistence that if the basic logical economy of the Christian faith is disclosed, as Athanasius felt it had been at Nicaea, then

³¹¹ Cf. *De Syn.* 15: ἐπινοεῖται γοῦν μωρίας ὁσέτις ἐπινοεῖται, cf. *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 16. This was inevitable as soon as it was denied that Christ had an exact and perfect knowledge of the Father, *Con. Ar.* 1.6, 9; *Ad episc. Aeg.* 12.

³¹² See especially *Con. Ar.* 1.11–37, and *Ad Ser.* 2.1. For Arian 'madness' see *Ad Ser.* 1.1, 17, 19f., 24, 29; 2.1; 4.5, 6, 15f. *De sens. Dion.* 1.24; *Con. Ar.* 1.1f., 23ff.; 2.32; 3.63f.; 4.8f.

³¹³ *Con. Ar.* 1.52; cf. 3.17; *Ad Ser. de mort. Ar.* 5.

³¹⁴ *Con. Ar.* 1.17f.; 4.13.

³¹⁵ *Frag. var. Opera*, PG, 2, pp. 1213f.

a decisive step in understanding has been taken upon which it is scientifically impossible to go back, if only because it throws such a flood of light upon the understanding of the Scriptures themselves and opens out the way for further advance upon the same foundation.³¹⁶ If we are really in touch with the Truth, then we are caught up in its movement, and must advance along with it to the *telos* to which it leads us. Not to advance in this way, is a sign that we are not really in touch with the objective realities of God, and their basic unalterable conceptuality in the Word, but are still engrossed with our own subjective notions and the productions of our own piety or, as Athanasius would say, impiety.

When we allow our own piety to act creatively upon its subject-matter, imposing upon it forms of its own devising, then our piety turns into impiety for we have confounded God with our own subjective experience, and faithful interpretation of the Scriptures becomes impossible for it is deflected at the very start from listening to what they actually say. But when in accordance with true piety we allow our thoughts to take forms in accordance with what is given to us from God, so that our minds are opened out towards his self-revelation, then we are in a position to read the Scriptures and listen to what they have to say, and through rational reflection upon their message formulate trains of thought which may provide a medium through which the Scriptures may continue to reflect their meaning, and reflect it ever more profoundly. That is the Athanasian conception of hermeneutics.

³¹⁶ *De decr. Nic. Syn.* 4f; *De sent. Dion.* 6, 27.

Chapter 9

THE GREEK CONCEPTION OF SPACE IN THE BACKGROUND OF EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY*

It is a long time since Rudolf Bultmann published his notorious essay calling for the demythologisation of the New Testament *kerygma* since it presented the event of the redemption in a mythical view of the world quite unacceptable to modern man, for it represents the cosmology of a pre-scientific age. He demanded a similar approach to the statements of the Catholic Creed that speak of the Son of God as coming down from heaven, rising again from the dead, ascending into heaven, sitting on the right hand of the Father and coming again to judge the quick and the dead. 'We no longer believe in the three-storied universe which the creeds take for granted. The only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth which they enshrine – that is, assuming that they contain the truth at all, which is just the question which theology has to ask. No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven.'¹ Bultmann went on to argue that there is no point in trying to save the *kerygma* by selecting some of its features and subtracting others from it, thus reducing the amount of mythology in it. The mythical view of the world must be accepted or rejected in its entirety. If we accept one idea bound up with it, we must accept everything, but it is just this one idea that we cannot accept. Rather must we reinterpret the whole in terms of the real purpose of myth which is, he claimed, not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially.²

* This essay written in 1972 was intended to be part of my contribution to *The Ecumenical World of Orthodox Civilisation, Russia and Orthodoxy, Vol. III, Essays in honor of Georges Florovsky*, edited by Andrew Blane and Thomas E. Best, The Hague, 1973, 'The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology', now reprinted here as Chapter 10. It was originally published in *Ekklesia kai Theologia*, Athens, 1992, vol. xi, pp. 1–24.

¹ *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, tr. R. H. Fuller, London, 1951, p. 4.

² *Op.cit.*, p. 10.

This thesis rests on the assumption that the great credal statements presuppose a view of the universe as a three-storied structure with the earth at the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath, and that they stand or fall with that obsolete cosmology. But is this assumption correct? Does the New Testament really hold that God exists in a spatial relation to this world? Is the Incarnation really construed as a journey through space? Do the Creeds imply that the relation between the actuality of the Incarnate Son in space and time and the God from whom he came must be spatialised? Granted that many of its primary theological statements involve important spatial ingredients, is it true that the teaching of the Early Church as we find it expressed, for example, in the Nicene Creed, involved a mythological synthesis of God and the cosmos, with its confusion between the presence of God and upper space, such as we find in the anonymous *De mundo* of the second century?

An examination of the evidence does reveal that Christian theology made considerable use of the concepts of space that had developed and were still developing in the world of Greek philosophy and science, and, what is more, made its own highly significant contribution to that development. But it does not justify Bultmann's claim that the thought of the Church was moulded in an objective framework taken from popular religious myths and their debased cosmological notions. Nor does there appear any justification for the rather crude way in which Bultmann connects the mental imagery in the Hellenistic language used with the object of thought which statements employing that language intended to signify. It is not primarily with the latter problem that we are concerned here, although it is impossible to set it aside altogether, but with the former. We shall examine the actual notions of space that the Christian Church found in contemporary culture and adapted for itself as it developed its own understanding and articulation of the relation between God and the world that is proclaimed in the Gospel.

On the whole Greek thought yielded a *receptacle* or *container* notion of space. The early Pythagoreans identified space with place (ὁ τόπος), distinguishing it from matter, as that in which movement occurs and things exist. 'Perhaps it is the first of all beings, since everything that exists is in a place and cannot exist without a place. If place has existence in itself and is independent of bodies, then, as Archytas seems

to mean, place determines the volume of bodies.³ As such, space or place was regarded as surrounded by the infinite void (τὸ κενόν). 'Apart from this metaphysical property, space has the physical property of setting frontiers or limits to bodies in it and of preventing bodies from becoming indefinitely large or small. It is also owing to this constraining power that the universe as a whole occupies a finite space.'⁴ In the atomic theory of Leucippus and Democritus, on the other hand, space was identified with the void, yet far from being vacuous non-existence it was held to have a sort of non-corporeal existence as the infinite medium in which an infinite number of invisible, indivisible magnitudes were in motion and in which there had to be an infinite number of places in which such motion took place.⁵ The void or empty space was regarded as distinct from but correlated with matter. In the void itself, as Democritus maintained,⁶ there was no up or down, no middle or end, but since it was the medium in which material atoms were placed as well as moved, it could not but be thought of as an infinite container. The conception of infinite space, however, fell to the logical analysis of Gorgias who showed it to be inherently contradictory, for if it is infinite it is nowhere (εἰ δὲ ἀπειρόν ἐστίν, οὐδεμοῦ ἐστίν). 'For if it is anywhere, that wherein it is different from it, and thus the existent, being encompassed by something, will no longer be infinite, for that which encompasses is larger than that which is encompassed, whereas nothing is larger than the infinite; so that the infinite is not anywhere.'⁷ Space is still thought of here as a receptacle, τὸ ἐμπεριέχον, that which extends round and envelops existents.⁸

While notions such as these continued to pervade Greek literature and culture for many centuries, it is in the teaching of *Plato* and *Aristotle*, and of the *Stoa*, that we find ideas of decisive significance and influence.

Plato's conception of space is set forth in the *Timaeus*,⁹ a dialogue

³ Simplicius, *In Aristotelis categorias commentarium* (ed. by C. Kalbfleisch), Berlin, 1907, p. 337.

⁴ Jammer, *Concepts of Space*, Cambridge, MA, 1954, p. 8.

⁵ See John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy*, Part 1. *From Thales to Plato*, London, 1914, pp. 95ff.

⁶ Thus Cicero, *De fato*, 20.46: *De finibus* 1.6.17.

⁷ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus dogmaticos*, 1.69f, Loeb edit. by R. G. Bury, vol. 2, 'Against the Logicians', London, 1983, p. 37.

⁸ According to A. E. Taylor this language went back to Anaximander and Anaximenes, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Oxford, 1928, p. 86.

⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 49 Af, 52 Af.

devoted to cosmological questions in which thought is carried beyond the Pythagorean tradition with which Timaeus himself was associated. But Plato warns us that all he is able to offer is 'only a likely' story of the formation and constitution of the world in which we live.¹⁰

The nature of the subject matter does not permit of an exact and final account. In natural science where we deal with changing processes we have to be content with 'probabiliry', while no attempt to pass beyond the sensible world to deal with its coming to be what it is, or with its relation to the eternal, can avoid being notions that are themselves grounded in the sensible.¹¹ We can speak only in a very human way of what transcends us. In a word, 'it is an impossible task to find out the maker and father of this universe and if found to speak of him to all men' (τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν).¹²

The concept of space arises in Plato's thought where he finds he must revise his account of the universe to take in a third factor.¹³ He had already drawn a clear distinction between the intelligible world of being and the sensible world of becoming and thus made a separation (χωρισμός) between the eternal model or form and the created copy or image,¹⁴ but now the argument requires him to take into account something that is difficult and only dimly discernible (χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρόν), namely, 'a receptacle and a nurse of all becoming' (πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἶον τιθήνην).¹⁵ In addition, then, to the παραδείγματα, the noetic models or archetypes, and the μιμήματα, the transient instances or sensible events imaging the archetypes, there is the formless, passive medium (the pre-existing chaos) in which they occur, the ὑποδοχή or receptacle. Plato also speaks of this as the mother (μήτηρ), in which generation takes place, the recipient of all things (πανδεχές), the matrix (ἐκμαγεῖον) on which the images are impressed, and finally as space (χώρα).¹⁶ Obviously the notion of receptacle or container is not meant to be taken literally, for it has no shape of its own and does not give shape to what fills it – is simply *that in which* (ἐν ᾧ)

¹⁰ *Timaeus*, 27 D.5 – 28 A.4, 29 B.3 – D.3.

¹¹ Cf. A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work*, new edit. New York, 1936, pp. 440f, 455.

¹² *Timaeus*, 28 C.4.

¹³ *Timaeus*, 48 E.

¹⁴ *Timaeus*, 27 Dff.

¹⁵ *Timaeus*, 49 A.

¹⁶ *Timaeus*, 52 A.

things arise and pass away – far less is it the substrate or stuff out of which things are made.¹⁷ It is the permanent, amorphous element in which sensible events occur, but does not itself appear, nor is it the receptacle of the παραδείγματα, although it partakes in some puzzling way of the intelligible.¹⁸

It is significant that when Plato speaks of the 'receptacle' as χώρα or space he does not use quantitative or volumetric language but refers to it as that which, without decaying, in every case provides a *situation* for whatever comes into being (ἔδραν δὲ παρέχον ὅσα ἔχει γένεσιν πᾶσιν). We do not apprehend it through the senses, but by a kind of spurious reasoning, and then as something that hardly commands assent. We perceive it as in a dream and say everything must be in a place and occupy a space (ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι ποῦ τὸ ὄν ἅπαν ἔν τινι τόπῳ καὶ κατέχον χώραν τινά) but which has no existence either on earth or in heaven.¹⁹ If space is not defined in terms of bodies, it is defined in terms of events that take place within it. But since these events have a mathematical character, for they participate in number, space may appear different from time to time, but actually it does not assume form like any of the things that go in or out of it;²⁰ it can be apprehended, as Taylor expresses it, only 'if we think away all that is characteristic of every determinate figure'.²¹ It is the 'place' where things eventuate or have their location. We can do no better than cite Taylor's admirable summary of Plato's thought.

It is true that χώρα is called, among other metaphors, πάσης γενέσεως ὑποδοχή (49 a 5), and is said to be that 'in which' everything comes to be (49 e 7). But all through, no reference is made to cubic capacity or the like. What is primarily before the mind of Timaeus is simply the consideration that every physical event happens 'somewhere', and again that what happens *here* now is qualitatively different from what happens *here* by and by, and that, in virtue of these differences, χώρα is primarily not that of which bodies take up a greater or a less bulk, but that which exhibits different configurations and different 'sensible' properties in different regions. Situation and figure (that is of the γιγνόμενα), not quantity, are primary.²²

¹⁷ See Taylor's discussion of Aristotle's misunderstanding at this point, *Commentary*, pp. 322f.

¹⁸ *Timaeus*, 51 A–B.

¹⁹ *Timaeus*, 52A–B.

²⁰ *Timaeus*, 50 C and 57D; see further A. E. Taylor, *Philosophical Studies*, London, 1934, pp. 115f.

²¹ *Timaeus*, 50 B–C.

²² A. E. Taylor, *Commentary*, p. 343; also pp. 328f.

Some further remarks may be offered. For Plato there is no μέγα κένον, no great void, outside the world, such as the Atomists and Pythagoreans envisaged, while the concept of space as an *empty* 'receptacle' falls away.²³ The 'receptacle' and its contents are discriminated because there is something permanent and uniform in all change and becoming, but it is not something that corresponds to sensory perception and cannot be treated as the extension of matter. Thus it can be specified only by means of negatives, for it has no quality or fixed character of its own, yet some indication of it may be given in terms of the universal interrelation of events as the continuum implied in their movement and change. To this we may add the interesting observation of Taylor. 'Timaeus, no doubt, formally treats of space and time as distinct and different features of "becoming" in different sections of his discourse. But owing to his freedom from metrical prepossessions, he gives an account of the ὑποδοχή γενέσεως, the "continuum implied in becoming", which is such that it needs only to be supplemented by the recognition that the continuum has four dimensions and not only three to be still appropriate.'²⁴

The fact that Plato brought in the concept of space (χώρα) as a third 'thing' (εἶδος and γένος are the expressions he uses) along with archetype (παράδειγμα) and copy (μίμημα) seems to indicate that he thought of space as helping in some way to bridge the chasm (χωρισμός) between the realms of the intelligible and the sensible (the νοητά and the αἰσθητά). It is suggested that space is to the παραδείγματα what the surface of a mirror is to the objects the mirror reflects,²⁵ and yet, as we have seen, space is not the ὑποδοχή of the παραδείγματα but of the μιμήματα. Apart from this medium 'in which' they occur the events in the sensible realm would not attain their configuration or therefore their apprehensibility, that is, would not be μιμήματα of the παραδείγματα and would not therefore participate in the intelligible forms of the real world. Apart from space we would not be able to penetrate into the rationality lying behind sensible events; space is necessary for the objective reference of our concepts for it is the medium in which they are grounded in 'that which always is and has no becoming'.²⁶ This would not be possible if the κόσμος νοητός and the

²³ *Commentary*, p. 676.

²⁴ *Commentary*, p. 677 – see also pp. 349f.

²⁵ *Op.cit.*, p. 348.

²⁶ *Timaeus*, 28 D. This point is well brought out by F. C. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, part 1 (Image books edit., New York, 1962) pp. 175ff, 188ff, 206f, 229f.

κόσμος αἰσθητός were only parallel to each other. Hence, as Burnet argued, 'the boundary line between the intelligible and the merely sensible is not a fixed one, and the sensible may be made progressively intelligible'. 'Unfortunately', he added, 'his (i.e. Plato's) followers were not able to rise to this point of view, and Plato has been generally credited with an absolute dualism.'²⁷

In Plato's epistemology, then, the χωρισμός directs our διάνοια or thought to an objective ground beyond subjective experience without which it would be inexplicable, but since for this reason the separation between intelligible forms and sensible things must remain, we may not project the concepts that arise in this world, where they refer to sensible objects, across the χωρισμός in order to predicate them of ultimate reality that transcends our world. Rather must we seek to penetrate through them by following the line of transcendental reference indicated by the rational or 'mathematical' traces (ἵχνη) they exhibit until our mind (διάνοια) rests upon the abiding reality beyond. This is what the mathematicians do, for example, when they make their drawings, which are only like shadows or images in water, 'for they use these in an attempt to see those things which cannot be discerned except by thought' (ζητούντες δὲ αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἰδεῖν, ἃ οὐκ ἄλλως ἴδοι τις ἢ διανοίᾳ).²⁸ When this takes place we engage in a movement which Plato speaks of as ἀναιρούσα τὰς ὑποθέσεις, in which we discard the initial concepts we put forward in order to reach the primary principles to which we are directed by means of them.²⁹

This is the problem that faces Plato with regard to the concept of space or indeed with the spatial element in any human concept when it is applied to the intelligible realm. The χωρισμός speaks of a world beyond space and time, and yet a spatial element is involved in the very concept of χωρισμός itself.³⁰ Thus spatial notions have to be used even when we speak of what is beyond space and independent of it. Yet we cannot project a spatial concept beyond the χωρισμός as if we could speak of there being 'place' over there.³¹ This is why when

²⁷ *Greek Philosophy*, London, 1914, Part 1, p. 344.

²⁸ *Republic*, 510 Ef.

²⁹ *Republic*, 533 C.

³⁰ It was this that misled Aristotle into construing Plato's χωρισμός as a *physical separation*.

³¹ Except in a metaphorical sense, e.g. 'intelligible place' (νοητός τόπος). *Republic*, 6.509 D. 7.517 B, or 'supercelestial place' (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος), *Phaedrus*, 247 C. Contrast Aristotle, *Physica*, 3.4, 203 A; 4.209 B.

Plato came to speak of 'space' as the third factor he found he was treating of something which was of a difficult and dimly discernible kind (χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος).³² What he left finally unanswered, however, was the question how far we can discard the very concepts we require in order to reach the objective ground upon which those concepts, in respect of their intelligibility, must rest, if they are to be true at all.

Aristotle's approach to the idea of space is rather different, for he listed it among the categories, i.e. not only the fundamental ways in which we conceive of things but the actual ways in which things exist, and included it in or associated it with the category of *quantity* (τὸ πῶσον or τὸ μέγεθος).³³ Quantities are either discrete or continuous, and space, like lines, surfaces, solids and like time, belongs to the latter class. 'Space is a continuous quantity, for the parts of a solid occupy a certain space, and these have a common boundary; it follows that the parts of space also, which are occupied by the parts of the solid, have the same common boundary as the parts of the solid. Thus, not only time, but space also, is a continuous quantity, for its parts have a common boundary.'³⁴ *Space*, then, appears to be the continuous quantitative whole filled with matter, but that limited part of it which is occupied by a body is said to be its *place*, or its position in space. This approach to the question through a discussion of spatial magnitudes (μεγέθη) led Aristotle to develop a predominantly quantitative or metrical conception of space, and this appears to be reinforced through the attention he devoted to place, or the particular and specific aspect of space (τὸ ποῦ) that concerned him in natural science,³⁵ even though in that context he could distinguish place from quantity.³⁶ It is therefore to the *Physics* that we must turn to get his distinctive views.

'The science of nature (ἡ περὶ φύσεως ἐπιστήμη) is concerned with spatial magnitudes (περὶ μεγέθη) and motion and time.'³⁷ Hence it is

³² *Timaeus*, 49 A.

³³ *Categoriae*, 1 B 25; cf. *Topica*, 103 B 23.

³⁴ *Categoriae*, 5 A 7f. (tr. E. H. Edghill, ed. W. D. Ross, *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1928).

³⁵ Aristotle sometimes uses *χώρα* (space) and *τόπος* (place) as synonyms. In the passage from the *Categoriae* cited above it is *τόπος* and not, as one might expect, *χώρα*, that is found.

³⁶ See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Oxford, 1936, p. 53.

³⁷ *Physica*, 202 B (tr. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, *Works*, vol. 2, Oxford, 1928).

part of the work of physics to determine the nature of space, as well as time, since movement implies change of position in space.

The existence of place is held to be obvious from the fact of mutual replacement. Where water now is, there in turn, when the water has gone out as from a vessel (ὡςπερ ἐξ ἀγγείου), air is present. When therefore another body occupies this same place, the place is thought to be different from all the bodies which came to be in it and replace one another. What now contains air formerly contained water, so that clearly the place or space (ὁ τόπος τὶ καὶ ἡ χώρα) into which and out of which they passed was something different from both.³⁸

That place exists, and that it has a certain force or causal activity (καὶ ἔχει τινὰ δύναμιν) is shown by the fact that the four elements have a natural tendency to move toward, and rest in, their proper places, fire 'up', for example, and earth 'down'. These distinctions between up and down, right and left, before and behind, are not just relative to us, for each is a real distinction in nature (ἐν δὲ τῇ φύσει διώρισται χωρὶς ἑκαστον).³⁹

Aristotle finds it difficult to specify what place or space actually is. Every body is in a place and every place has a body in it, while the dimensions by which a body is bounded are the dimensions of its place or space. It cannot be identified with body because it contains that whose place it is, nor can it be identified with form since it is separable from that whose place it is. It has magnitude but not body (μέγεθος μὲν γὰρ ἔχει, σῶμα δ' οὐδέν). As such it has an influence (δύναμις) on the body and helps to explain its appearance to us, although it is not to be identified with any one of the four causes of anything.⁴⁰ Aristotle then distinguishes between 'common place' (κοινὸς τόπος) and 'proper place' (ἴδιος τόπος), that in which all bodies are found and which they have in common, and that particular place primarily or completely occupied by each body and by no other.⁴¹ Proper place, then, can be defined as 'that which immediately encompasses each body' (τὸ πρῶτον περιέχον τῶν

³⁸ *Physica*, 208 B 1f; κατὰ τὸ γένος, τόπος and χώρα appear to be the same.

³⁹ *Physica*, 208 B 11f. Even 'the theory that the void exists involves the existence of place; for one would define void as place bereft of body'. 208 B 25.

⁴⁰ *Physica*, 209 A 2f.

⁴¹ *Physica*, 209 A 31f. Cf. the distinction between place in the broad sense (ὁ ἐν πλάτει) and place in the exact sense (ὁ πρὸς ἀκρίβειαν) which seems to have been used to distinguish space, or extended place, and place as a precise portion of space – see Sextus Empiricus, 'Outlines of Pyrrhonism', 3.75, 119, 130 (ed. J. B. Bury, vol. 1, London, 1953, pp. 378, 406, 414).

σωμάτων ἕκαστον) and would therefore be a limit or boundary (πέρας). Looked at in this way place might be taken for the form or shape by which either the magnitude (τὸ μέγεθος) or the matter of the magnitude (ἡ ὕλη ἢ τοῦ μεγέθους) is defined.⁴² But Aristotle will not have this, for

the form and the matter are not separate from the thing, whereas the place can be separated. As we pointed out, where air was, water in turn comes to be, the one replacing the other; and similarly with other bodies. Hence the place of a thing is neither a part nor a state of it, but is separable from it. For place is supposed to be something like a vessel – the vessel being a transportable place. But the vessel is no part of the thing. In so far as it is separable from the thing, it is not the form: as containing, it is different from the matter (ἡ μὲν οὖν χωριστός ἐστι τοῦ πράγματος, ταύτη μὲν οὐκ ἐστι τὸ εἶδος· ἡ δὲ περιέχει, ταύτη δ' ἕτερος τῆς ὕλης).⁴³

Moreover if place is the same as the 'form' or 'matter' of a thing, it would be lost whenever there is a change of state as when 'air turns to water', but of course this is not so.

But what do we mean when we say that something is 'in' anything? Aristotle lists eight different ways in which 'in' is to be understood, and concludes that they are all derivative or metaphorical except the last in which we speak of something being *in a place*. This is the strict sense which we use when we speak of something being in a vessel and completely in place (πάντων δὲ κυριώτατον τὸ ὡς ἐν ἀγγείῳ καὶ ὅλως ἐν τόπῳ).⁴⁴ However, when we say that something is *in place* and that this place is *in something else*, we are using the word 'in' in different senses, for if place were in something else in the same way as something is in place, then place would be a material body, which is not the case.⁴⁵ This means that Aristotle must distinguish between a thing's containing vessel and its place, and so concludes that since the primary place of a body contains it without being a constituent part of it, it is to be identified simply with its volume. 'When what surrounds is not separate from the thing, but is in continuity with it, the thing is said to be in what surrounds it, not in the sense of in place, but as a part in a whole. But when the thing is separate and in contact, it is immediately

⁴² *Physica*, 209 B 1f.

⁴³ *Physica*, 209 B 30f. Cf. the exposition by A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, p. 669.

⁴⁴ *Physica*, 210 A 24.

⁴⁵ *Physica*, 21 B 22f.

“in” the inner surface of the surrounding body, and this surface is neither a part of what is in it nor yet greater than its extension, but equal to it; for the extremities of things which touch are coincident.⁴⁶ That is to say, the place of a thing is the inner surface of whatever is in continuous contact with the thing’s outer surface.⁴⁷

Aristotle paves the way for this by listing the essential characteristics of place as they have come out in the discussion. ‘Place is what contains that of which it is the place (τὸν τόπον εἶναι πρῶτον μὲν περιέχον ἐκείνο οὐ τόπος ἐστί). Place is no part of the thing. Place can be left behind by the thing and is separable. In addition, all place admits of the distinction of up and down, and each of the bodies is naturally carried to its appropriate place and rests there, and this makes the place either up or down.’⁴⁸ It is evident, then, that we would not conceive of place apart from a certain kind of movement, that with respect to place (οὐκ ἂν ἐζητεῖτο ὁ τόπος, εἰ μὴ κίνησις τις ἦν ἢ κατὰ τόπον).⁴⁹ Thus, it is because the heavens are in constant motion that we think they must be in place. In addition to locomotion, however, we must take into account increase and diminution, i.e. the occupation of more or less room. Now motion is either *per se* (καθ’ αὐτό), or it is *per accidens* (κατὰ συμβεβηκός), relative in virtue of something conjoined with it.⁵⁰ Place is conceived, then, through the reference of movement to what is absolutely, or at least relatively, at rest. The hand is moved with the body and the water with the cask.⁵¹

This leads Aristotle to set aside the views according to which the place of a thing is identified with its shape, or its matter, or some sort of extension or interval (διάστημα) between the limits of the container and the thing itself. This leaves as the only possibility the view that place is the limit or boundary of the containing body at which it is in contact with the contained body (τὸ πέρας τοῦ περιέχοντος σώματος καθ’ ὃ συνάπτει τῷ περιεχομένῳ) – by contained body is meant what can be moved by way of locomotion (τὸ κινητὸν κατὰ φοράν).⁵²

⁴⁶ *Physica*, 211 A 29f. *Works*, vol. 2, bk. 4.4.

⁴⁷ W. D. Ross, *Aristotle’s Physics*, Oxford, 1936, Introduction, p. 55.

⁴⁸ *Physica*, 210, A 32ff. *Works*, 2, bk. 4.4. ‘We can see already’, Taylor remarks, ‘that τόπος will turn out to be “volume with an up and down in it”.’ *Op.cit.*, p. 671.

⁴⁹ *Physica*, 211 A 12.

⁵⁰ *Physica*, 211 A 17f.

⁵¹ *Physica*, 211 B 3–4.

⁵² *Physica*, 212 B 5f, A 2–6.

As a vessel is a movable place, so a place is an unmoving vessel. And so when in something that is moved that which is in it is moved and changes its place, e.g. a boat in a river, its container serves as a vessel rather than as a place. It is the nature of place to be unmoving; and so the *whole* river is more truly a place because the *whole* river is unmoving. Therefore the innermost unmoving boundary of a container, that is what a thing's place is (ὥστε τὸ τοῦ περιέχοντος πέρας ἀκίνητον πρῶτον, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὁ τόπος).⁵³

This is to say, place is defined as the immobile limit within which a body is contained. Since the containing body is always in immediate limiting contact with what is contained, there can be no void or empty place, and no place outside the universe. There is only μέγεθος. While everything within the universe is in place, the universe itself is not, since it is not encompassed by anything.⁵⁴ It may be said in a sense to be in place, but only as the limit is in the limited.⁵⁵ This certainly carries with it a definite concept of space as the totality of places in the universe, so that for Aristotle actual space is necessarily limited and finite.⁵⁶

Aristotle's thought is clearly governed by his need for a point of absolute rest as the centre of reference for the understanding of change or transition. If everything is in flux we have no standard by which to gage anything. In this context the concept of place merges into that of space, since in order to define place as the first unmoving limit of the container in such a way that it holds good for all movable bodies (for everything within the universe is in motion), we have to make it relative to a centre of absolute immobility. That was supplied in Aristotle's cosmology by the centre (τὸ μέσον) of the material universe which was regarded as unmoving and always at rest, for although it rotated it did not move forward or change place. The inner surface and centre of the celestial system give us 'the up and down' (τὸ μὲν ἄνω τὸ δὲ κάτω) which form the limits of all that falls within them and the ultimate point of reference for all spatial magnitudes and movements.⁵⁷ Thus although from his approach to the notion of place, through the examination of movement and transition, Aristotle might appear to offer a dynamic view of space,

⁵³ *Physica*, 212 B, 14f, tr. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle, Selections*, Oxford, 1927, p. 120.

⁵⁴ *Physica*, 212 B 20f; c.f. 213 A 12f. Cf the critique by Sextus Empiricus of Aristotle at this point, *Adv. Dogmaticos*, 2.20ff (ed. Bury, vol. 3, pp. 224ff – see also vol. 7, London, 1953, pp. 415f).

⁵⁵ *Physica*, 212 B 12–29.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. E. Taylor, *Aristotle*, London, 1943, pp. 96f; and Max Jammer, *op.cit.*, pp. 17f.

⁵⁷ *Physica*, 212 Af.; cf. *De caelo*, 2.14. 296b.

he offered instead rather a static concept grounded finally upon relation to a point of absolute rest.⁵⁸ This was of course in line with his doctrine of 'the unmoved mover', but it had to be broken before modern empirical science could start on its way.

The definition of place as the first unmoved limit of the container involved another difficulty. It equates being in place with having a particular volume, but equates volume with a spatial magnitude. Hence, as Taylor has pointed out, 'Aristotle's views of space are predominantly metrical. He thinks of extension first and foremost as a "quantity" of something, in fact as bulk, not as a complex of relations of situation. Cubic capacity, not direction, is the capital thing with him . . . The trouble, I feel, is that he seems to think that he is *describing* the character of "volume" when he is, in fact, telling us how to determine the magnitude of volume possessed by a given body.'⁵⁹ This confusion would seem to arise almost inevitably from Aristotle's insistence upon the interdependence of the container and the matter it contains, and of the causal force (*δύναμις*) of the limit of the container upon the contained. Further, as Taylor again points out, Aristotle's preoccupation with the notion of volume led to the traditional isolating of space from time with all the paradoxes it involves.⁶⁰

One further aspect of Aristotle's thought must be noted, however, viz., the idea that the soul is the place of forms (*τόπος εἰδῶν*).⁶¹ This is not to hold that ideas can be thought of as localised in any place,⁶² but to recognise that the mind is receptive of intelligible form, without having any positive form of its own, and as such is a noetic but amorphous receptacle of forms, as sense is of sensible forms.⁶³ It is interesting to find, therefore, that corresponding to sensible matter Aristotle is found to speak of 'intelligible matter' by which he seems to mean spatial extension.⁶⁴ As W. D. Ross has pointed out, this came late in Aristotle's thought,⁶⁵ but it did supply a point of connection with a more relational

⁵⁸ Cf. *De caelo*, 2. 3, and the discussion by P. Duhem, *Le Système du Monde*, 1, pp. 215ff, 219ff.

⁵⁹ A.E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Oxford, 1928, pp. 647f.

⁶⁰ *Op.cit.*, p. 677.

⁶¹ *De anima*, 3.4.429 A 27-28; cf. 2.4.417 B, and 3.8.431 B.

⁶² *Physica*, 3.4.203 A; 4.2.209 B - cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 52 B-C.

⁶³ *De Anima*, 3.4-5.

⁶⁴ *Metaphysica*, Z. 1036 A9, 1037 A4; cf. K 1059 B 15.

⁶⁵ Cf. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, London, 1923, p. 167.

notion of space. Certainly the concept of νοητὸς τόπος was to play a significant role in later Greek thought.

We must now glance at the *Stoic* view of space, for although it did not prove as influential as the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle upon subsequent thinking, it did play a significant role in the philosophical culture of the Graeco-Roman world when Christian theology was struggling for scientific expression.

Distinctive of Stoic thought was the place it gave to 'body' (σῶμα) as a unitary and co-ordinating principle in the universe, comprising life and thought as well as matter.⁶⁶ It was not a materialistic but a *physical* principle, expressing the ultimate essence and nature of things which could appear equally as mind and matter. The 'body' is that which we apprehend in all rational thought (τὸ ὑπάρχον, that which is) so that apart from it we cannot reach determinate thought about anything, but it is also the source of motion and activity, 'that which acts and is acted upon', so that apart from it there is only emptiness and nothingness.⁶⁷ 'Body' is the *plenum* and *continuum* apart from which there is neither space nor time.⁶⁸

In this system the Stoics distinguished between the void (κενόν), place (τόπος), and room or space (χώρα).⁶⁹

The Stoics declare that void is that which is capable of being occupied by an existent but is not so occupied, or an interval empty of body (διάστημα ἔρημον σώματος), or an interval unoccupied by body; and that place is an interval occupied by an existent ('existent being here the name they give to body'); and that room is an interval partly occupied by body and partly unoccupied – though some of them say that room is the place of the large body, so that the difference between place and room depends on size (ὡς ἐν μεγέθει τὴν διαφορὰν εἶναι τοῦ τε τόπου καὶ τῆς χώρας).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See the extant passages given by J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 123f.

⁶⁷ *Apud* Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Dogmaticos*, 7.242ff; cf. von Arnim, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 25f, and *Pyrrh. Hypot.* 3.188, von Arnim, *op.cit.*, pp. 3f. See also vol. 1, p. 18; vol. 3, p. 246; and E. V. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, Cambridge, 1911, pp. 143, 157f, 171f.

⁶⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Physicos*, 10.3; Simplicius, *In Arist. categ.* p. 88; von Arnim, *op.cit.*, 2, pp. 164f.

⁶⁹ Aëtius, *Plac.* 1, 20.1, von Arnim, 2, p. 163.

⁷⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrh. Myopot.* 3. 124, ed. R. G. Bury, vol. 1, p. 411, and *Adv. phus.* 2.3f, R. G. Bury, vol. 3, pp. 211f.

This is a reference to Chrysippus who raised the question whether room or *χώρα* is to be explained from the side of the container in respect of its magnitude or from the side of the body contained in respect of its extension. The difference between place or space and the void is to be explained in accordance with the principle that what is 'somatic' is limited or determinate and what is 'not somatic' is unlimited or indeterminate. For as nothingness is no limit, so the void is incapable of being a limit to anything. 'For in accordance with its nature it is unlimited or infinite, but that which has "filling" or content is extended. Take away the "filling" of a thing, and it will be impossible to conceive of its limit' – that is, even think of it any determinate way.⁷¹

It was in line with this that the Stoics drew a distinction between 'the all' and 'the whole', 'the all' comprising the infinite void with the cosmos, but 'the whole' being the cosmos without the void. The latter is therefore the limited or determinate, whereas the former is finally indeterminate since it takes in the unlimited void beyond the cosmos.⁷² This means that space, as distinct from the infinite void, is understood as the determinate extension from body throughout the whole cosmos.⁷³ Where there is no body there is no space, for space exists along with body, and is indeed a function of the body as it extends itself in a continuum throughout 'the whole'. Body is thus a dynamic principle at work in the cosmos, for although body acts upon body, moves through body, continuously extending and making room for itself throughout 'the whole' (i.e. the principle, *σῶμα διὰ σώματος χωρεῖ*),⁷⁴ this could not take place unless it were in itself a source of movement or activity (i.e., the principle that everything that acts is body, *πάν γὰρ τὸ ποιῶν σῶμα ἐστίν*).⁷⁵ Space is thus understood not in terms of a receptacle or its

⁷¹ Stobaeus, *Eclogae*, 1. P. 161, 8, von Arnim, 2, pp. 162f.

⁷² Aëtius, *Plac.* 2, 1.7 Οἱ Στωϊκοὶ διαφέρειν τὸ πᾶν καὶ τὸ ὅλον· πᾶν μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τὸ σὺν τῷ κενῷ ἀπειρόν· ὅλον δὲ χωρὶς τοῦ κενοῦ τὸν κόσμον. Also Achilles, *Isagoge*, 5.129. Petav. Uranol., von Arnim, vol. 2, p. 167; Empiricus, *Adv. phys.* 1.322, ed. R. G. Bury, vol. 3, p. 160.

⁷³ See the fragments cited by von Arnim, 2, pp. 163f, and 170ff.

⁷⁴ Plutarch, *De comm. nos.* c. 37, p. 1077 e; Alexander Aphrod. *De mixtione*, p. 219, 16; Simplicius, *In Aristot. Phys.* p. 530, 9; Themistius, *Paraphr. in Aristot.* 4.1, p. 256; Hippolytus, *Philos.* 2 – all from von Arnim, 2, pp. 151f. Chrysippus also identified this with πνεῦμα, εἶναι τὸ ὄν πνεῦμα κινῶν ἑαυτὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ, Stobaeus, *Eclogae* 1, p. 153.24, von Arnim, 2, p. 152.

⁷⁵ Diogenes Laertius, 7.55, von Arnim, 2, pp. 43f; Aëtius, *Placita*. 4.20, 2, von Arnim, 2, p. 128; see also von Arnim, 3, pp. 212, 252.

limits but in terms of body as an agency creating room for itself and through itself, thus making the cosmos a sphere of operation and place. If this were not so the cosmos could only rest immovable in the unlimited void, for the void by its very nature could not act upon it in any way.⁷⁶ As Jammer has expounded it,

the different parts of the material world are connected, not as Aristotle thought,⁷⁷ by an exterior continent, an upper sphere which forces the parts to stay together, like samples in a box, but by an internal cohesion (ἔξις), which is only another aspect of the tension mentioned before [i.e. the τόνος that pervades the cosmos making it into one field of action]. It is this binding force that holds the world together, and the void without force of its own can do nothing to loosen it.⁷⁸

This ordered universe was regarded by the Stoics as inherently rational, pervaded throughout by reason uttered and active in the form of *logos* (λόγος), the seminal and active principle of all things.⁷⁹ Hence they could speak of the world as 'rational animal' (ζῷον ὁ κόσμος καὶ λογικὸν καὶ ἔμψυχον καὶ νοερόν)⁸⁰, but since in this way the very essence of God is extended throughout the universe, even as 'God' (λέγεται δὲ ἐτέρως κόσμος ὁ Θεός).⁸¹ This is the well-known Stoic conception of God as the world-soul (ἡ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχὴ) in which God was thought of as related to 'the whole' as the soul is to man,⁸² a conception which was given a further extension in the thought of the later Stoics especially as they came to assimilate strong elements of Platonism into their systems. Of special importance here is the contribution of Poseidonius who related the concept of the world-soul to 'the idea of the all-extended'.⁸³ The fact that the Stoics thought in this way both of the

⁷⁶ Simplicius, *In Aristot. caeug.* 98 E, 108 D, von Arnim, 2, pp. 49, 51; see also, 2, pp. 171f.

⁷⁷ Cf. Themistius, *Paraphr. ad Aristot. Phys.* 4.4, von Arnim, 2, p. 163.

⁷⁸ Op.cit. p. 22. See the *fragmenta* cited by von Arnim, 2, pp. 144f, regarding πνεῦμα, τόνος and ἔξις; and further, Arnold, op.cit. pp. 160f.

⁷⁹ Cf. Eusebius, *Praep. evangel.* 15, cited by von Arnim, 1, p. 27; and Diogenes Laertius, 7.135, 136, 139, von Arnim, 1, p. 28, 2, p. 111. Cf. also the equation of ὁ νόμος ὁ κοινός, ὁ ὀρθός λόγος and God, von Arnim, 1, p. 43.

⁸⁰ Von Arnim, 1, 25, 35f; 171ff, 303.

⁸¹ Von Arnim, 1, 25, 43, 120; 2, 168, 303, 306.

⁸² Held by Diogenes, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, von Arnim, 1, 120; 2, 360f; 3, 217, 266f.

⁸³ See Philip Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, The Hague, 1960, pp. 30ff.

soul and of God as body (σῶμα),⁸⁴ forces upon us the question as to the logical status of their conception of space in view of the principle that body extends and makes room for itself through body (σῶμα διὰ σώματος χωρεῖ). The answer seems to be that space or place belongs to the category of what is between a mental conception (νόημα) and external thing (πράγμα).⁸⁵

In order to understand that we may note first the distinction the Stoics drew between truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια) and the true (τὸ ἀληθές), in respect of essence, composition, and force. 'They differ . . . in essence in so far as truth is a body whereas the true is incorporeal' (διαφέρειν . . . οὐσία μὲν παρόσον ἢ μὲν ἀλήθεια σῶμά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀληθές ἀσώματον ὑπῆρχεν).⁸⁶ That is, the truth is 'the truth of being' whereas 'the true' is a judgment (ἀξιῶμα) or the thing said (λεκτόν). By this they meant 'a proposition that subsists and is opposed to something' (ὁ ὑπάρχει τε καὶ ἀντίκειται τινι) – a proposition grounded in the nature of that which is and which cannot be other than it.⁸⁷ This is what the Stoics also spoke of as the criterion of truth, the kind of assent or judgment that we are forced to make (καταληπτικῶς) by that which is (τὸ ὑπάρχον).⁸⁸ They also differ in regard to composition (σύστασις) and force (δύναμις) for truth is bound up in a 'systematic' whole with other events and is thus involved in scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), the true is simple and particular and is not dependent on knowledge, e.g. when true statements may be made by fools, children or even by madmen. What interests us here is the notion of 'the thing said' or λεκτόν which is bound up with the existent that excites in us a kataleptic perception, and yet is itself 'asomatic' (ἀσώματον) or non-corporeal. Like Plato (in the *Cratylus*) the Stoics held that correct terms and statements had a natural (φύσει) and not just a conventional (θέσει) relation to the realities they signified.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Cf. Chrysippus: ὁ θάνατός ἐστι χωρισμός ψυχῆς οὐδὲν δὲ ἀσώματον ἀπὸ σώματος χωρίζεται· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐφάπτεται σώματος ἀσώματον· ἢ δὲ ψυχή καὶ ἐφάπτεται καὶ χωρίζεται τοῦ σώματος. σῶμα ἄρα ἢ ψυχῆ. Nemesius, *De natura hominum*, c.2, von Arnim, vol. 1, pp. 38, 137; cf. 2, 306ff.

⁸⁵ Cf. (3). Cf. Ammonius, *In Aristotelis De Interpretationem*, cited by von Arnim, 2, pp. 488, U and Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. physicos*, 2.218, ed. Bury, 3, p. 318.

⁸⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. logicos*, 1.38f; *Pyrrh. hypot.* 2.80f.

⁸⁷ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. logicos*, 2.10, 85ff.

⁸⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. logicos*, 1.324–6; Diogenes Laertius, 7.46, 49, 50, von Arnim, 2, pp. 21f, also 29ff, 33ff.

⁸⁹ See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.24.

A further distinction made by the Stoics helps us at this point, that between ‘the significate’ (τὸ σημαϊνόμενον, or ‘thing’ signified), ‘the thing signifying’ (τὸ σημαῖνον), and ‘the thing itself’ (τὸ τυγχάνον).⁹⁰ ‘The thing signifying’ is the vocable or verbal sign, the semantic instrument (ἡ σημαντικὴ φωνή).⁹¹ ‘The significate’ is the thing immediately indicated by the sign (αὐτὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς δηλούμενον) and which we apprehend as existing in dependence on our intellect (i.e. the *obiectum mentis* of the Mediaevals), ‘The thing itself, however, is the actual event indicated or the external reality (τυγχάνον δὲ τὸ ἐκτὸς ὑποκείμενον, the *res ad extra*). Two of these are physical entities or bodies (σώματα), the semantic sign (word or voice) and the external event, but ‘the significate’ is not a body but a λεκτόν, a sort of word-event or thought-event that lies between word or thought and the external reality.⁹² When we communicate with others and teach them about something, we do not actually communicate that ‘something’ to them, nor do we merely speak words to them, rather do we communicate to them the thing spoken or conceived that serves to indicate to them the ‘something’ we speak about.⁹³ The λεκτόν, then, is not self-complete (αὐτοτελής) like the truth nor is it completely detached but as bound up with the reality indicated is partly incomplete and partly complete (ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἔλλιπές τὸ δὲ αὐτοτελέες).⁹⁴ It is a middle term in between the sensible and the intelligible.⁹⁵

It was to this class of things that the Stoics assigned *place*. ‘They enumerate four kinds of incorporeals, namely *lekta* and void and place and time. And from this it is evident’, remarks Sextus Empiricus, ‘that in addition to supposing time to be incorporeal, they also regard it as a thing to be conceived as self-existent’ (καθ’ αὐτὸ τι νοούμενον πρᾶγμα).⁹⁶ This

⁹⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 2.11g, R. G. Bury, vol. 2, pp. 245f.

⁹¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 2.80, R. G. Bury, vol. 2, p. 277.

⁹² Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 2.12f.

⁹³ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. ethicos*, 3.224, see also von Arnim, 2, p. 117, n. 330.

⁹⁴ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 2.12, also von Arnim, 2 pp. 68ff., 60ff.

⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 2.10, Ammonius, *In Aristot. de interpret.* cited by von Arnim, 2, p. 48.

⁹⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. phys.* 2.218, R. G. Bury, 3, p. 318. Stoic logic postulated a supreme category, τὸ τι, ‘the something’ or the *quid* under which they included bodily and non-bodily things. *Space* and *time* thought of as τινά or *quiddities* in this sense of ‘existents’ – see von Arnim, 2, p. 117. Cf. the citation from Chrysippus, reported by Stobaeus, *Eclogae* I, von Arnim, 2, pp. 162f., no. 503.

applies equally to the concept of place, and indeed to all the various dimensions.⁹⁷ Place is certainly a function of body, emerging as the body makes room for itself, but it is not itself bodily.⁹⁸ On the other hand *place* is necessary on the subjective side of our experience, for our apprehension of the bodily world. Five things were regarded as necessary for perception to take place: the sense-organ (τὸ αἰσθητήριον), the object of sense (τὸ αἰσθητόν), and place (τὸ τόπος), and the manner (τὸ πῶς) and the intellect (ἡ διάνοια). Even if only one of these is wanting the perception will not be safely effected.⁹⁹ Space, then, is not merely one of the ways in which we must think about the world but is a conception imposed upon us by the nature of that which is. This would seem to be consistent with the Stoic theory of knowledge through kataleptic presentation of the real world in which our conceptions of the world come to be formed as they are shaped and stamped in the mind compulsively both from the side of the existing object (ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος) and in accordance with what it actually is (κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον).¹⁰⁰

In assessment of these views, it must be said, on the one hand, that the notion of space as the room forged for itself by an active agency was a decided advance over the receptacle notion that prevailed generally in Greek thought. It certainly stood closer to the biblical outlook as seen, for example, in the Old Testament conception of salvation (in which the divine presence is thought of as breaking into man's confined and captive existence, leading him out into a larger place, thus creating space or room in his life for God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain). On the other hand, by binding the idea of God to a finite universe, conceived as a determinate and limited sphere set within the infinite void yet having its centre in the earth, the Stoics not only failed to reach, or lost, any understanding of the transcendence of God, but made it too easy for the popular and certainly the pagan mind to confound God with nature, theology with cosmology.

The popular and certainly the most persistent notion of space found in Greek thought from the earliest times was that derived by analogy from the vessel that may hold wine, water, or air or some other 'body'. A receptacle or container of this sort might be called a *place* for place is that into which

⁹⁷ Galenus, *De qualitatibus incorporeis*, 2, von Arnim, 2, p. 127, cf. also 123.

⁹⁸ Plutarch, *De comm. not.* 37, von Arnim, 2, p. 51.

⁹⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 1.424.

¹⁰⁰ See the long discussion of this by Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. log.* 1.227ff.

and out of which things pass, or are made to pass, and which encompasses them when they are in it. This notion of space was applied to the known universe, and what was beyond it was held to be the void. It was within this rather simple but universally held notion of space that the philosophers and scientists put forward their more reasoned views. Plato, as we have seen, treated the receptacle concept of space rather metaphorically and developed something like a relational account of space and pointed out the difficulty of projecting the idea of space conceived within the sensible world beyond its boundary with the intelligible world. Aristotle, on the other hand, who misunderstood Plato, returned to the notion of the receptacle but thought of it and the matter it contained as interdependent, and so defined place as the innermost unmoved limit of the container. Place is what contains and limits that of which it is the place, a predominantly volumetric concept of space. The Stoics preferred to think of space in terms of that which occupies place, and sought to think through the whole container-contained idea by means of an active principle in which they thought of body as making room for itself through an innate source of motion to make up the whole of the ordered universe, which they thought of as set in the infinite void. But this had the effect of identifying God with the immanent rationality that animated the cosmos and even of delimiting him as coincident with the cosmic body as a whole, which, together with the Aristotelian notion of separation between terrestrial and celestial mechanics, had the effect of retarding the science of the heavens until comparatively modern times.

Aristotle's notion of space as limited, static and physical seems to have given trouble to his successors from the start. The concept of the interdependence of the container and the matter it contains appeared inherently contradictory when applied to the case of a body coming to be in a certain place, for place would have to be and not be at the same time! It was difficult to fit in coherently with Aristotle's own cosmology, while the idea that 'there is neither place nor void beyond the heaven' seemed very questionable.¹⁰¹ Simplicius, who has preserved for us in a *corrolarium de loco* something of the Peripatetic views of space after Aristotle,¹⁰² tells us that Aristotle's own pupil and successor, Theophrastus, questioned both

¹⁰¹ Thus Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Pyrrh.* 3.131, Loeb edit., vol. 1, pp. 414ff.

¹⁰² Aristotle, *De caelo*, 1.3, 270ff, 279 A 12. Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Phys.* 2.30ff, Loeb edit., vol. 3, pp. 224ff.

the immobility of space and the idea that the universe itself is not in place. Modifying Aristotle's teaching with Platonism he tried to develop a view of space as 'a system of interconnected relations'.¹⁰³ But we learn that with Strato Aristotle's own emphasis upon experience was taken up and a naturalistic and materialistic tendency set in, and the possibility of empty space even within the composition of matter was admitted.¹⁰⁴ While this (together with Atomism) had some influence on Heron of Alexandria¹⁰⁵ who, at the end of the first century AD, claimed on empirical grounds to be able to offer evidence for vacuum (περι κενού) in matter,¹⁰⁶ by the second century Alexander Aphrodisias went behind Strato to a more Platonic Aristotelianism¹⁰⁷ and in the fourth century Themistius drew closer to Aristotle himself in his view of space.¹⁰⁸ Both were concerned with the problems posed by Aristotelian physics for cosmology in accounting for motion within the universe, when the motion of the universe as a whole was impossible to conceive since motion implies place and place can exist only within the universe. The problem was not eased by Aristotle's rejection of the temporal origin of the universe,¹⁰⁹ so that under sceptical attack it became plain that a very different notion of space was required, not least if room was to be made for a more adequate theology.

The dénouement in the Aristotelian concept of space can be indicated best by citing the argument of Sextus Empiricus.

'Yes', say the Peripatetic philosophers 'but place is the limit of the containing body'. For since earth is contained in water, and water contained in air, and air in fire, and fire in heaven, just as the limit of the vessel is the place of the body in the vessel, so also the limit of water is the place of earth, and the limit of air is the place of water, and the limit of fire will be the place of air, and the limit of heaven will be the place of fire. When we come to heaven itself, however, according to Aristotle, it is not in

¹⁰³ Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum Libros Quattuor Posteriores Commentaria* (ed. H. Diels, Berlin, 1895), pp. 601–645.

¹⁰⁴ *Op.cit.*, pp. 141, 606, 612, 639, 642. This way of expressing Theophrastus' view is taken from Jammer, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ Simplicius, *op.cit.*, pp. 601, 618, 652, 663, 693, 710. Cf. Merlan, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁶ *Opera Heronis Alexandrini*, ed. W. Schmidt, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1899, *Pneumatica*, pp. 4–18.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander's thought is known to us only through Simplicius – see the discussion by P. Duhem, *Le Système du Monde*, vol. 1, Paris, 1913, pp. 297ff, and for the return of Platonism in his thought, see Merlan, *op.cit.* pp. 11ff.

¹⁰⁸ Themistius, *In Aristotelis physica paraphrasis*, ed. H. Schenkl; see Duhem, *op.cit.* pp. 299ff.

¹⁰⁹ *De caelo*, 1.10, 208A; 4.2, 300 B; *Phys.* 8.1 251 B; *Metaphysica* Lambda 3, 1071 B.

place but abides within itself and in its own proper selfhood; for since place is the extreme limit of the containing body, and according to this philosopher nothing exists outside heaven so that its limit should be the place of heaven, it is necessary that heaven, being contained by nothing, should exist in itself and be contained within its own limits, and not exist in place. Hence heaven is not existent anywhere, for that which exists anywhere both exists itself and its 'where' is other than it, but heaven has no other thing besides and outside of itself; and on this account, as existing itself within itself, it will not be anywhere. In respect of these statements of the Peripatetics, it seems likely that the First God is the place of all things (ὁ πρῶτος Θεὸς τόπος εἶναι πάντων). For according to Aristotle, the First God is the limit of heaven. Either, then, God is something other than heaven's limit, or God is just that limit. And if he is other than heaven's limit, something else will exist outside heaven, and its limit will be the place of heaven, and thus the Aristotelians will be granting that heaven is contained in place; but this they will not tolerate, as they are opposed to both these notions, both that anything exists outside heaven and that heaven is contained in place. And if God is identical with heaven's limit, since heaven's limit is the place of all things within heaven, God, according to Aristotle, will be the place of all things; and this, too, is itself a thing contrary to sense.¹¹⁰

The *Stoics*, as we have seen, thought of space as the determinate extension of body throughout the whole cosmos which in its turn was surrounded by the infinite, indeterminate void, but they conceived of this in an active way, for space is the room that body makes for itself continuously throughout the cosmos. They distinguished here between an active principle and a passive principle spoken of as spirit (πνεῦμα) and matter (ὕλη) which fused or penetrated each other (κρᾶσις).¹¹¹ Looked at in this way, as Galen expressed it, one is the dynamic force (συνεκτικὴ δύναμις) that contains the other, spiritual substance (οὐσία πνευματικῆ) containing material substance (οὐσία ὑλικῆ). Thus air and fire can be spoken of as containing and water and earth as that which is contained.¹¹² It was in a similar way that they thought of the soul as fused with body, God with the cosmos.¹¹³ Moreover in construing this inner relation between the containing force and the matter contained in terms of tension (τόνος) and cohesion (ἔξις) they were able to give spatial

¹¹⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*, 2. 30–33, tr. R. G. Bury, Loeb edit., vol. 3, pp. 225ff.

¹¹¹ See Von Arnim, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 151ff.

¹¹² *Op.cit.*, p. 144.

¹¹³ See Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, p. 169.

relation an elastic character (εὐτονία as opposed to ἄτονία).¹¹⁴ In view of this it is not surprising that some modern writers have suggested that the Stoic conception of the extension of matter through the universe can be interpreted through our concept of field.¹¹⁵

It was possible for all this to degenerate into a thoroughgoing materialism, that is to say into a secularisation of the divine, but it could also develop in the other direction into a divinising of the world, that is, into a spiritualistic monism. This was in fact the tendency that set in with the Platonising of Stoic thought, not to speak of the assimilation of Pythagorean ideas, which we find in Poseidonius. It is difficult to assess this accurately as Poseidonius' works do not survive, but his equation of souls and mathematical, and the importance given to his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, evidently gave Stoic thought such a powerful twist that it could be led without too much difficulty into Neoplatonism.¹¹⁶ So far as space is concerned, Poseidonius' thought is given out by Cleomede in the first century AD who is clearly concerned to reject Aristotle's view that the void does not exist and to defend the Stoic view against the attacks of the sceptics.¹¹⁷ Against both, Cleomede maintains that the void is a reality or some sort of substance (ὑπόστασις). Every body must be in something, but that in which it is must be different from that which occupies and fills it, something incorporeal and as it were impalpable. This substance which is of such a kind (τὴν τοιαύτην ὑπόστασιν) that it can receive a body and be occupied by it, we affirm to be void.¹¹⁸ He thus got rid of the idea he attributed to the Peripatetics that the void can receive a body without being anything at all,¹¹⁹ and countered the charge of the sceptics that the void has no reality apart from dimensions (τὸ κενὸν οὐδεμίαν ὑπόστασιν ἔχει παρὰ τὰς διαστάσεις).¹²⁰ The void has certainly no nature (φύσις) and no parts and is not determinable, but as something that receives body it is something capable of receiving body, and as something that can be filled and vacated it must have some reality (ἀναγκαῖον τοῖνυν εἶναι τίνα

¹¹⁴ See von Arnim, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p. 146, and the discussion of this by Alexander Aphrodisias cited by Duhem, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, Paris, 1913, p. 305ff.

¹¹⁵ Jammer, *op.cit.*, p. 21, or Merlan, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Merlan, *op.cit.*, pp. 126ff.

¹¹⁷ *De motu circulari corporum caelestium*, ed. H. Ziegler, 1891.

¹¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, 1, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ *Op.cit.*, pp. 10f.

¹²⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Pyrrh.*, 3.227, Loeb edit., vol. 1, p. 242.

ὑπόστασιν κενού). Our concept of it can only be extremely simple (ἀπλουστάτη αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐπίνοια), since it is incorporeal and impalpable, incapable of receiving or being given form, and is neither passive nor active it is merely that which is receptive of body.¹²¹ Such a conception, unlike that of finite body, cannot break off anywhere (οὐδαμοῦ καταλήγει) but is essentially indefinite.¹²² This idea of indefinite conceivable substance, ὑπόστασις without σχῆμα, beyond the perceptible and tangible world is an important one, which could have the effect of opening out earthbound mentality not only toward the infinite but to a freer science of the heavens, but the absence of direction or dimension in the infinite void carried with it the idea that the earth always remains in the same place, the centre of the universe.¹²³ Here too, apparently, Cleomede was reflecting the teaching of Poseidonius who entertained the heliocentric idea but rejected it on theological grounds.¹²⁴ The great difficulty of Stoic thought all the way through was its profound immanentism and its insistence on understanding the whole cosmos in terms of the compenetration of soul and body. This meant that although Stoics held strongly to the inherent rationality of the universe, they could not develop their concept of providence (πρόνοια) without having it deterministically controlled from behind by fate (εἰμαρμένη), but it also meant that they were continually being forced into the impasse in which they looked for a transcendent explanation of things or a cause outside the world of space or else space would have to be abstracted from substance, but if empty space or the void played the part of cause it could not be the void.¹²⁵ This left them open to the destructive analysis of sceptical questioning.¹²⁶ What was desperately needed was a genuine understanding of real beginning (ἀρχή) or creation out of nothing, but this is what leading Stoic representatives such as Arius Didymus, Panaetius and Poseidonius vigorously rejected.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Cleomede, *De motu circ. corp. cael.* 1.1, p. 8.

¹²² *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹²³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 10, 16.

¹²⁴ See Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

¹²⁵ See the discussion of this by A. Ehrhardt, *The Beginning. A study in the Greek philosophical approach of the concept of Creation from Anaximander to St John*, Manchester, 1968, pp. 156f.

¹²⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 3.119ff, vol. 1, pp. 407ff, and *Against the Physicists*, 2.1ff, vol. 3, pp. 211ff.

¹²⁷ See Ehrhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 154ff, 162ff.

Turning now to the development of *Platonism* we recall that in the *Timaeus*, which fascinated later thought, space (χώρα) had been expounded as the 'difficult and dimly discernible' third factor spanning the intelligible world of being and the sensible world of becoming. As the amorphous medium in which things rise and fall away it could be spoken of as the receptacle (ὑποδοχή), the universal recipient (πανδεχές), or the matrix (ἐκμάγειον) on which images are impressed. Far from being a literal this was a metaphorical way of expressing the strange 'situation' (ἔδρα) in which events come into being and have a mathematical character in relation to the intelligible forms. Because it is concerned with this elusive relation between the sensible and the intelligible the concept of space was primarily epistemological in significance. It was necessary for the objective reference of our thought, for without it we could not penetrate into the rationality lying behind sensible events. Plato had also taught that the cosmos receives its order through the creative activity of an artificer or good (καλός) God, and through a world-soul, itself created by this God, which mediates between the realm of ideas, the eternal mind and the creation, permeating and enveloping the cosmos and giving it its harmony.¹²⁸ It is from this world-soul that individual souls are derived.¹²⁹

The subsequent interpretation of all this was made difficult by several factors. Aristotle's identification of Plato's 'receptacle' with matter, his construing of the χωρισμός between the sensible and intelligible realms as physical separation, and yet his representation of Plato's third dimension as 'mathematicals', and in addition to that the false derivation of 'chaos' from χώρα, with the implication that chaos first came into existence as the place containing whatever comes into being in it.¹³⁰ This made two problems particularly acute, the source of evil and the temporal origin of the universe, which continued to worry Platonic thought well into the Christian era.

Where does disorder come from? Is it to be traced back to the amorphous, chaotic nature of the receptacle resisting the imposition of form and order from the Father and Maker of the universe? Or if the receptacle is quite neutral, is evil due to an evil soul counter-acting the

¹²⁸ *Timaeus*, 34 Bff, 36 E ff.

¹²⁹ *Timaeus*, 41 D; cf. *Philebus* 30 A.

¹³⁰ Sextus Empiricus, *Hyp. Pyrrh.* 3.121, vol. 1, p. 408; cf. Aristotle, *Physica*, 4.1, 208 B; and Philo, *De aeternitate mundi*, 5.19.5.

world-soul which Plato had spoken of as the source of all motion in the cosmos?¹³¹ Plato was aware that evil involves an irrational element that makes it difficult to speak about it,¹³² but he appears to answer both these questions in the affirmative.¹³³ The world is a mixture, begotten of mind (νοῦς) and necessity (ἀνάγκη), the latter being a source of irregularity (πλανωμένη αἰτία) so that it has to be pervaded by mind,¹³⁴ but this did not mean that Plato held matter to be intrinsically evil. On the other hand, Plato does not speak of an evil world-soul but of souls that are infected with evil and have fallen from their original purity.¹³⁵ Thus while Plato works with a dualism between mind and matter, mind and necessity, it is not construed simply in terms of the mixture of being and non-being but in terms of a moral distinction between the good and evil yet without the ultimate dualism between two supreme powers of good and evil. On the other hand the Aristotelian equation of the receptacle with matter, which most Platonists and Stoics accepted, forced thought into the dilemma, either to treat evil as a form of imperfection or to run into an ultimate dualism between good and evil, whether that be in the form of a dualism between mind and matter or between two kinds of matter.¹³⁶

This problem is put on an altogether different basis if it is held that the universe had an absolute beginning, and did not arise simply through the imposition of order upon pre-existing chaos. Plato was aware in the *Timaeus* that the answer to this question supplies a basis for everything else, namely, 'whether it (the cosmos) was always there, with no beginning in its coming into being, or whether it came into being, having taken its origin from some beginning' (πότερον ἦν αἰεὶ, γενέσεως ἀρχὴν ἔχων οὐδεμίαν, ἢ γέγονε, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τινος ἀρξάμενος). Plato answered with a decided γέγονεν – 'it came into being.'¹³⁷ This appears to be in line with the statement in the *Sophistes* that God creates all things

¹³¹ Plato, *Laws*, 10. 894 E – 895 B, 896 A–B.

¹³² Plato, *Timaeus*, 29 A; cf. 48 A–B; and cf. 52 B.

¹³³ Plato, *Laws*, X. 896 C – 898 D, 904 A, 906 A; *Epinomis*, 988 D–E. See the discussion by Ehrhardt, *op.cit.*, pp. 98ff.

¹³⁴ Plato, *Timaeus*, 48 A.

¹³⁵ Plato, *Laws*, 896 E – 898 D; *Republic*, 611 C–D.

¹³⁶ For the later form of this dualism, which cropped up in Plotinus, see Merlan, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹³⁷ *Timaeus*, 28 B; cf. 27 C: ἢ γέγονεν ἢ καὶ ἀγενές ἐτίθ.

without any prior material (πρότερον οὐκ ὄντα).¹³⁸ Certainly Aristotle understood Plato to mean that the world and time took their origin together in the creative work of God,¹³⁹ but he rejected the whole idea on the ground that it was an inherent impossibility. For Aristotle creation out of nothing and the actuality of the universe were mutually exclusive notions.¹⁴⁰ The problem can be put in quite a different way by saying that if the universe of things came out of nothing then it is nothing but nothing in the end.¹⁴¹ This seems to have forced most Platonists to make out that Plato did not really teach creation out of nothing but spoke in that way for argument's sake (θεωρίας ἕνεκα).¹⁴² Yet the Aristotelian view is clearly bound up with the relation of form and matter and the identification of the receptacle of all things with matter, to which it was committed, and required for its maintenance a concept of God as the unmoved mover.¹⁴³ Those Platonists, however, who were influenced by Aristotle and taught the eternity of the cosmos as part of their Platonism, found themselves in another dilemma, either to fall in with the Aristotelian-Stoic view that nature is essentially good, with its minimisation of evil as imperfection impeding the usual course of development, or to take evil more seriously as having its source in an evil world-soul, which was to land their thought back in ultimate dualism.

In order to determine the effect of all this upon the Middle Platonism that lay in the background of early Christian theology we must look into the thought of Plutarch, Albinus, Apuleius and Atticus.

Plutarch frankly accepted the fact that Plato had taught the temporal origin or genesis of the universe and rejected the wresting and tormenting of the sense of his statements in the *Timaeus* in order to conceal what he had written. Plato's purpose had been to refute the atheists of his time by establishing the priority of the soul, the fountain and beginning of

¹³⁸ *Sophistes*, 265 C. This passage is susceptible of another interpretation, however. In view of the foregoing discussion about non-being interpreted as opposition or something different (τὸ ἄλλοτερον), not-being here may simply refer to what was different before the creative imposition of form (see 254 B – 259 D).

¹³⁹ *Physica*, 251 B, *Metaphysica*, 1071 B, *De caelo*, 280 A, 300 B.

¹⁴⁰ *Metaphysica*, 1075 B.

¹⁴¹ This way of stating it is attributed to Heniades of Corinth, see Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. logicos*, 1.53.

¹⁴² Thus Xenocrates as reported by Plutarch, *De animae procreatione e. Timaeo*, 2, 10.

¹⁴³ *Metaphysica*, 1072 A-B.

motion (κινήσεως πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν), over the body,¹⁴⁴ and so spoke of its generation first without any reference to the generation of the body,¹⁴⁵ for the soul which is always in motion is the principal cause in the formation of the world.¹⁴⁶ Plato held the soul to be both created and not created, but he always maintained that the world had a beginning and was created, never that it was uncreated or eternal.¹⁴⁷

Plutarch himself, however, held that the creation of the world was not out of nothing (οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ γένεσις), but out of pre-existent matter characterised by disorder (ἀκοσμία). It had body but was without form, motion but was unintelligible (ἄλογον) and it had soul but was disordered, without rationality (οὐκ ἐχούσης λόγον). This was Plato's notion of space or the receptacle. The essence of the body is nothing else than what was called by him the all-receiving nature, the seat and nurse of all created things (ἢ μὲν οὖν σώματος οὐσία τῆς λεγομένης ὑπ' αὐτοῦ πανδεχοῦς φύσεως, ἕδρας τε καὶ τιθηνῆς τῶν γεννητῶν οὐχ ἕτερα τις ἐστίν.)¹⁴⁸ Commenting on a passage in the *Timaeus* to the effect that being, space and genesis were three distinct things even before the heavens were created, he says, 'Space he referred to as matter since it is the seat and receptacle, being as the intelligible reality, and generation (γένεσις) as nothing but the substance found in change and motion before the world was actually created (γεγονότος), that is, what lies between the forming cause and the thing formed and transmits the images that are impressed upon it.'¹⁴⁹ Thus Plutarch understood creation to be the operation in which God gave disposition and order (διάθεσιν καὶ τάξιν) to underlying amorphous matter through the motion of the world-soul which occupied an intermediate position between the realm of the intelligible and the realm of the sensible, as Plato taught in the *Timaeus*.¹⁵⁰ However, the fact that Plutarch followed Aristotle in identifying Plato's receptacle with matter (ὄλη),¹⁵¹ made it particularly important for him to guard the separation of the soul from the body.

¹⁴⁴ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 2-4; *Platonicae quaestiones*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 21-23.

¹⁴⁶ *De procr. an. e. Tim.* 4, 5, 21, 22.

¹⁴⁷ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 10; but cf. 9 for a respect in which the world could be regarded as eternal.

¹⁴⁸ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 5.

¹⁴⁹ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 24.

¹⁵⁰ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 4-9; *Plat. quaest.* 2-4.

¹⁵¹ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 5, 6, 7, 24.

It is understandable that he should reject the idea held by Poseidonius that the soul and the mathematical are one and the same, for that appeared seriously to diminish the distinction between the soul and matter.¹⁵² He had declined to identify the soul with idea, for the idea is incapable of motion and the soul is always in motion,¹⁵³ but he objected also to the identification of the soul with number, for although it is ordered according to number and proportion, it is an unlimited being (ψυχὴν ἀπειρίαν) that transcends all metric distinctions.¹⁵⁴ It cannot therefore be any kind of substance between the two, for it remains permanently what it is apart from matter and what it was prior to the creation of matter, even although it is through the operation of the soul that matter became sensible and defined by partaking of the intelligible.¹⁵⁵ So far as the notion of the receptacle is concerned, then, Plutarch thinks of the soul as extending throughout the universe enveloped everywhere by body, yet the nature of the universe is such that it is through the intelligible that it contains the sensible (ἡ δὲ τοῦ παντὸς φύσις τῷ νοητῷ περιέχει τὸ αἰσθητὸν).¹⁵⁶ It was on similar grounds that he rejected Aristotle's notion of time as the measure of motion in respect of sooner or later, for time, as Pythagoras said, is the soul of the world, and, as Plato taught, it is the image of the Creator in respect of his eternity. Nevertheless the indefinite motion of the receptacle could be regarded as the formless and rude matter of time.¹⁵⁷

The soul, as Plutarch regarded it, is rather more than a cosmological principle, for it participates in God himself. It is not only the work of God but part of him, 'not only has it come into being by him, but is begotten from him and of him' (οὐδὲ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἀλλ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γέγονεν).¹⁵⁸ If this is the case, and if soul is the source of all motion, how are we to think of the presence of evil in the world? Plutarch appears to have an ambiguous answer to that question. On the one hand he can say that the soul was not altogether (μὴ πᾶν) the work of God but had in it a portion of implanted fate (ἀλλὰ σύμφυτον ἔχουσαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ

¹⁵² *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 22; but cf. *Plat. quaest.* 4.1:

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 3, 6.

¹⁵⁵ *Plat. quaest.* 3.1-2.

¹⁵⁶ *Plat. quaest.* 3.1-2.

¹⁵⁷ *Plat. quaest.* 7.4.

¹⁵⁸ *Op.cit.*, 2. 2.

τὴν τοῦ κόσμου μοῖραν).¹⁵⁹ The soul had in itself an unruly element that needed to be persuaded, and it was only when it became wise through consent that it could act upon disorderly and formless matter to give it form and disposition. In this respect Plutarch points to necessity (ἀνάγκη), a dark disorderly principle, at work between God and matter. 'This the soul was of itself, but it partook of mind, reason and rational harmony in order to become the soul of the world' (αὕτη γὰρ ἦν ψυχὴ καθ' ἑαυτήν· νοῦ δὲ καὶ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἀρμονίας ἔμφρονος μετέσχευ, ἵνα κόσμου ψυχὴ γένηται).¹⁶⁰ As such this unruly principle is closely related to the recalcitrant element in the receptacle. On the other hand, however, Plutarch appears to posit here an evil world-soul which he claims to trace back to Plato's *Laws* as a contrary, disorderly and evil-doing soul.¹⁶¹ Irrational though this is, Plutarch declined to think of it as coming upon the scene 'accidentally' or as arising out of nonentity without any prior cause, after the thought of the Epicureans and Stoics, but put it down rather to fate and destiny.¹⁶² The road to some form of ultimate dualism in this connection, between fateful necessity and an evil world-soul was opened up. He rejected the pantheistic monism of the Stoics who identified God with the inherent rationality of nature and traced everything that happened in the world at once to God as its active cause and to matter as its inert cause. Plutarch's thought moved in a different direction, toward the otherness and freedom of God, and hence also toward a doctrine of divine providence, but he was unable to reach a God who was unrestricted by the resistance of primordial matter, and so had to find place for an intermediate realm of the demonic between God and men to cope with ethical and religious problems.¹⁶³

Albinus was a Platonist of a different sort, and of more significance so far as Christian theology is concerned, in spite of his rejection of the temporal origin of the universe. He interpreted Plato's statements in the *Timaeus* not to mean that there was once a time when the universe was not (ὡς ὄντος ποτὲ χρόνου, ἐν ᾧ οὐκ ἦν κόσμος) but to mean simply

¹⁵⁹ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 28, 33.

¹⁶⁰ *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *De an. procr. e. Tim.* 6, 26.

¹⁶³ *De fato*, 9–11. This helps to explain Plutarch's interest in Egyptian mythology, e.g. *De Iside et Osiride*.

that the universe is always in a process of becoming (ἀεὶ ἐν γενέσει) and rests upon a prior cause for its reality (τῆς αὐτοῦ ὑποστάσεως ἀρχικώτερον τι αἴτιον).¹⁶⁴ As he expounds this in terms of three supreme principles, matter, ideas and God, the father and cause of all things, it is evident that Albinus has taken up Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions into his *Epitome* of Plato's teaching.

He defines space (χώρα) as a formless and inertial medium, applying to it all the various metaphors used by Plato, ἐκμαγεῖον, πανδεχές, τιθήνη, μήτηρ, ὑποδοχή, to speak of its relation toward the realm of ideas, but identifies the receptacle with matter, and ideas with forms in the Aristotelian tradition. Although this gives the concept of space a much more clear-cut character, he still applies to it Plato's point that we can barely apprehend what space is and then only by 'bastard reasoning' (νόθῳ λογισμῷ)¹⁶⁵. Although it does not possess the nature of any of the forms (εἶδη) which it receives and as such is neither body nor without body, it is nevertheless potentially a body (δυνάμει δὲ σῶμα) much as copper is before it is formed into a statue.¹⁶⁶ Thus instead of being the transparent medium through which our thought is made to repose objectively upon intelligible reality, space is something objective although shapeless in itself. As matter it is regarded as a primary principle (ἀρχικὸς λόγος).¹⁶⁷

Another primary principle is Idea (ἡ ἰδέα) or paradeigmatic principle (ἀρχὴ παραδειγματική). In regard to God the idea is his thought (νόησις), in regard to us it is the primary intelligible (νοητὸν πρῶτον), in regard to matter it is that by which it is measured (μέτρον), in regard to the sensible world it is its pattern (παράδειγμα), but considered in respect of itself it is substance (οὐσία).¹⁶⁸ That is to say, by bringing Platonic ideas in relation to Aristotelian intelligibles,¹⁶⁹ Albinus has made them the archetypal ideas of God that are creatively related to the world, with which the intelligible forms immanent in the world are correlated. In view of this relation between forms in matter and the eternal ideas or thoughts of God it is under-

¹⁶⁴ *Epitome*, 14.3.

¹⁶⁵ *Epitome*, 8.2. — the whole passage is woven together by Albinus out of language taken from the *Timaeus* 49 A — 52 D.

¹⁶⁶ *Epit.* 8.3 — cf. Aristotle, *Physica*, 2.3, *Metaphysica*, 4.2.

¹⁶⁷ *Epit.* 9.1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Epit.* 4.3–7.

standable that Albinus should reject the idea of a temporal origin of the universe.¹⁷⁰

When we come to the third principle we are up against what Plato called the ineffable or inexpressible (ἄρρητον), God himself. The reason for this is that we men are occupied with sensible as well as intelligible conceptions and are apt to confuse the sensible with the intelligible. To think of the eternal God, however, we must learn to disengage our thought of him from sensible representations or images until we think of him purely in his own reality as transcendent Mind. Here Albinus clearly distinguishes God in the absolute sense as the 'primary God' (πρώτος Θεός) who is eternal, ineffable and perfect in himself, the primary Mind (πρώτος νοῦς) that lies above and behind the mind of the whole heaven and moves it.¹⁷¹

He is the truth because he is the source of all truth as the sun is of all light, and he is the Father because he is the author of all things and informs the heavenly mind and the cosmic soul with order through relation to himself and his own thoughts. For according to his own will he has filled all things with himself, raising up the cosmic soul and turning it to himself, for it is he who is the author of its mind which, after being informed with order by the Father, gives order to the whole of nature in this cosmos.¹⁷²

That is to say, as transcendent Rationality God is the ultimate source of all rationality in the universe, for he begets and awakens in the created world an immanent rationality answering to his own, and it is through this immanent or cosmic rationality that he acts upon the universe.¹⁷³ In this sense Albinus can think of the whole body of the cosmos as encircled, contained and bound together by mind.¹⁷⁴ There is therefore no vacuum destitute of body.¹⁷⁵

In himself this πρώτος Θεός is ineffable whose unity and indivisibility make it impossible for us to speak of him in fragmented and delimiting modes of speech, rather must we try to contemplate him in his oneness and totality as he who does not move and is not moved.¹⁷⁶ Albinus

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Epit.* 9.2–3.

¹⁷¹ *Epit.* 10.1–3. This universal mind is on its part distinguished from the soul (ψυχή).

¹⁷² *Epit.* 10.3.

¹⁷³ *Epit.* 14.3.

¹⁷⁴ *Epit.* 14.4–5. This is the obverse of thinking of it as 'a living and intelligent being'.

¹⁷⁵ *Epit.* 13.3.

¹⁷⁶ *Epit.* 10.4.

envisages three stages in such a movement of thought. First we proceed by way of abstraction (κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν), thinking away all sensible representations until we reach the ultimate point or mark by which God is known (τελευταῖον τὸ σημεῖον). 'Then we proceed by way of analogy (κατὰ ἀναλογία) to reach a conception of him in the following way: the sun is related to our seeing and the things we see, without being sight itself, but by enabling us to see and things to be seen, such is the relation of the primary Mind to the understanding of the soul and its intelligible objects, for it is not the understanding itself, but it enables it to think and the intelligible objects to be thought, by shining the truth around them.'¹⁷⁷ The third step in this movement of thought is not exactly what was later called the *via eminentiae*, but nevertheless an ascending movement in line with the first two steps in which we trace back the shining of the truth, e.g. in respect of the good (τὸ καλόν), to its source and fullness in God.¹⁷⁸ Like Plato, however, Albinus holds that this ascent to God, through stages of goodness or beauty, involves an assimilation as far as possible to God (ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) through moral purity.¹⁷⁹

Thus in spite of his materialising of Plato's notion of space Albinus does not fall back into a concept of God who occupies some region in upper or heavenly space. By distinguishing between the ultimate rationality of God and the begotten rationality that pervades the whole universe he is able to reach a conception of God as transcendent over space and time, even if he does not accept the idea of a temporal origin of the universe or of creation out of nothing. It is not only in his general philosophical position that Albinus has paved the road for Plotinus,¹⁸⁰ for the way in which he thinks of the relation of God to space leads up to the view of Plotinus as he expressed it in connection with the way in which we reach a conception of the supreme Mind.

We begin by posing space (χώραν), a place (τόπον), a chaos (ὡσπερ τι χάος); into this existing container (χώρας) real or fancied, we introduce God and proceed to inquire: we ask, for example, whence and how he comes to be there; we investigate the presence and quality of this newcomer projected into the midst of things here from some height or depth. But the

¹⁷⁷ *Epit.* 10.5.

¹⁷⁸ *Epit.* 10.6.

¹⁷⁹ *Epit.* 28.1-4; cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176 A; *Phaedo*, 82 B.

¹⁸⁰ See Merlan, *op.cit.*, pp. 60f.

difficulty disappears if we eliminate all space before we attempt to conceive God. He must not be set in anything either as enthroned in eternal immanence or as having made some entry into things. He is to be conceived as existing alone, in that existence in which the necessity of discussion forces us to attribute to him, with space (τόπου) and all the rest as later than him, space latest of all. Then we conceive as far as we may the spaceless (τὸ ἄτοπον); we abolish the notion of any environment, we circumscribe him with no limits; we attribute no extension to him; he has no quality since no shape, even shape Intellectual. He holds no relationship but exists in and for himself before anything is.¹⁸¹

Two further points about Albinus' thought may be noted as they have some bearing on our discussion. Like Plutarch he too posited an order of supernatural beings, created gods (οἱ γεννητοὶ θεοὶ) and demons between God and the world,¹⁸² but he did not go so far as Plutarch in relating evil power in the universe to the dark inviolable order of fate or necessity. On the one hand he related fate to the laws laid down by God through his offspring the artificer of the universe,¹⁸³ but the effect of this was not to clamp down a fateful determinism or necessity upon the world, so much as to provide the objective and inviolable structure within which individual souls had freedom to choose to do this or that. The soul is thus without a master (ἄδέσποτον) and it rests with itself to do or not do something, but what follows upon its doing is accomplished in accordance with the order of fate.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, Albinus developed further the old distinction between sheer lack of being (τὸ οὐκ ὄν) and negation of being (τὸ μὴ ὄν). The latter is not a mere negation of being, for it involves relation to being and is in a certain sense dependent on it without being itself a being. Since it does not have any real existence (μηδεμίαν ἔχου ὑπόστασιν) it is unintelligible and un-thinkable.¹⁸⁵ At this point where Albinus is drawing out the thought of Plato in the *Sophistes*,¹⁸⁶ it becomes evident why he could not conceive of

¹⁸¹ *Enneads*, 6, 8.11 (745), tr. S. Mackenna and B. S. Page, *Plotinus on the One and Good*, vol. 5, London, 1930, pp. 224f. For Plotinus' view of space, see also *Enneads*, 2. v. 3; 4.3.20; 4.8.2; 6.1.14; 6.3.12.

¹⁸² *Epit.* 14–16.

¹⁸³ *Epit.* 16.2.

¹⁸⁴ *Epit.* 26.1–3. This did not answer the question as to the place of prayer and its answer in the tension between freedom and necessity or providence and fate. See Maximus Tyrus, *Philosophumena*, 5.3f.

¹⁸⁵ *Epit.* 24.1–2.

¹⁸⁶ Plato, *Sophistes*, 254 A – 259 B; and cf. 238 B.

any creation out of nothing, but it is also evident that this finally denies serious consideration to evil, and in fact could lead into a view of empirical and contingent existents and events as ultimately unreal, for they could have reality only by participating in primary and unchanging being. This was the view of the nature of the empirical world which suffocated any possible advance in Greek thought toward serious empirical science. But it was just at these points that Christian theology stood out in such sharp contrast to the Greek outlook, in the positive relation of God in creation and incarnation.

The thought of *Apuleius*, who lived on into the first quarter of the second century AD, need not detain us long, for it is not so different from that of *Albinus* except that it stands closer to *Plotinus*. His basic outlook is characterised by a sharp distinction between intelligibles that truly exist and sensibles that do not exist truly.¹⁸⁷ The intelligibles take the form of a triad, 'first God', 'mind and forms', and 'soul', that anticipates Neoplatonic thought.¹⁸⁸ God is uncircumscribed (*ἀπερίμετρος*), ineffable and unnameable, whose nature, as *Plato* said, is difficult to discover and to speak to others about.¹⁸⁹ *Apuleius* identifies the receptacle with matter, which is informed by God its artificer to be a magnitude without limit, but since in itself it is not a body nor without a body, it can be apprehended only through thought.¹⁹⁰ That is to say, space (*χώρα*) is more an epistemological than a material principle. Moreover since the cosmos defines all that there is, there is no place left for another universe.¹⁹¹

This universe is not self-existent, for it has a source beyond itself, in God, but although produced it always existed. It appears to have had a temporal origin because the things in which it consists are visible and tangible and are sensibly apprehensible. Yet because it exists through divine causation it is everlasting.¹⁹² Time is the image of eternity, although it is subject to motion whereas eternity is fixed and motionless.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ *De dogmate Platonis*, 1.6, 9.

¹⁸⁸ *De dog. Plat.* 1.6, 9. from another point of view he works with the triad God, ideas, matter, like *Albinus*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ *De dog. Plat.* 1.5; cf. *Timaeus*, 28 C. Contrast *Origen*, *De principiis*, 7.42.

¹⁹⁰ *De dog. Plat.* 1.5. Cf. *Maximus Tyrus*, *Philosophumena*, 11.6.

¹⁹¹ *De dog. Plat.* 1.8.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *De dog. Plat.* 1.10.

Quite clearly, there is no room here for any idea of God occupying some area of space within the sensible universe. In fact he is so transcendental a deity that once again a realm of intermediate beings becomes necessary.¹⁹⁴ Artificer though God is, he operates through the heavenly soul in a way that clearly involves Pythagorean elements in Apuleius' thought¹⁹⁵ and allows room for human freedom.¹⁹⁶ But whatever be the specific way in which this is analysed, Albinus and Apuleius alike are concerned to reject as senseless and atheistic any view of man's understanding of the universe in terms of blind chance or blind fate, such as the Atomists and Epicureans envisaged, or any view of the universe in which the spiritual and the material are merely complementary aspects of the same thing, obverse to each other in a closed monistic system, such as the Stoics envisaged. The ordered universe with its immanent rationality provides a continuing structure within which man lives in responsible freedom and through which his conception of God is to be traced back to the nature (φύσις) of objective and eternal reality which is the ultimate source (ἀρχή and αἰτία) of everything that is.

In *Atticus* we find a Platonist who is sharply opposed to Aristotle, but who has clearly assimilated powerful elements of Stoic thought into his Platonism. He attacked Aristotle vigorously on several accounts, his rejection of the immortality of the soul,¹⁹⁷ and therefore of the ethical and epistemological theories that depend on it,¹⁹⁸ and his rejection of the creation of the universe and of divine providence or the continued activity of the creator,¹⁹⁹ not to speak of Aristotle's theory of ether and the explanation of stellar movements bound up with it.²⁰⁰ A fundamental charge against Aristotle is that he failed to note that in investigating natural phenomena one must not act prescriptively but search out the facts of nature itself (μη συνιδῶν δὲ ὅτι οὐ νομοθετεῖν δεῖ φυσιολογοῦντα τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως αὐτῆς ἐξιστορεῖν)²⁰¹

Atticus insists that Plato held that the universe had a temporal

¹⁹⁴ *De deo Socratis*, cf. Maximus Tyrus, *Philosophumena*, 11.1–12.

¹⁹⁵ *De dog. Plat.* 1.9.

¹⁹⁶ *De dog. Plat.* 1.12.

¹⁹⁷ *Fragmenta*, 808 A – 811 A.

¹⁹⁸ *Frag.* 794 C – 798 B, 809 B, 814 A-D, 815 A – 816 B.

¹⁹⁹ *Frag.* 798 C – 804 A, 814 A.

²⁰⁰ *Frag.* 804 C – 808 C.

²⁰¹ *Frag.* 804 D.

beginning in its creation, recalling not only the statement in the *Timaeus* (γέγονεν),²⁰² but that in the *Sophistes* (πρότερον οὐκ ὄντα)²⁰³ 'According to our report Plato deemed the cosmos to be the finest work by the finest of creators and accorded to the Maker of the universe the power by which he made the cosmos which did not previously exist (οὐκ ὄντα πρότερον ἐποίησε τὸν κόσμον), and after having made it will through his own act of will preserve it in safety for ever.'²⁰⁴ Atticus argues against Aristotle, and those Platonists who followed him at this point, that it does not follow that because something will never perish it must of necessity be uncreated. It is not to be admitted that the sole cause for the imperishability of something comes from its being uncreated, nor that there is no remedy against the destruction of what has been created. This would be to challenge the goodness of God the Creator as well as his power.²⁰⁵ This stress upon the fact that the creation depends upon the good will of God both for its origin and its continued existence is a startling advance over other Greek thought, for it involves a different understanding of the nature of God and of the nature of nature at the same time, which approaches that of Christian theology. Moreover, Atticus, with reference again to Plato, insists that in his goodness God does not grudge the world its creation and existence.²⁰⁶ That is to say, the creation must be traced back to the free and willing decision or mind of the Creator.²⁰⁷ Since this is the case we must not lay down laws in our inquiry into physical matters but investigate them in accordance with their actual nature.²⁰⁸

There is not much in the extant fragments of Atticus' works that has any direct bearing upon space or upon Plato's concept of the receptacle, but he does object to the way in which Aristotle materialised Plato's thought by mixing what is corporeal with what is non-corporeal in nature thus producing an impassible, imperishable and unchangeable essence immanent in all matter,²⁰⁹ that is, in his fusion of form and matter which lay behind the Aristotelian definition of space in terms of the interdependence of the containing vessel and the matter contained in

²⁰² *Timaeus* 28 B – *Frag.* 801 Cff.

²⁰³ *Sophistes*, 265 C – cf. *Frag.* 802 B.

²⁰⁴ *Frag.* 802 A–B; cf. 803 A–B.

²⁰⁵ *Frag.* 802 B–D, 803 B–D, 803 A.

²⁰⁶ *Frag.* B–C, 603 B–C, 798 D. Refer to *Timaeus*, 41 A–B.

²⁰⁷ *Frag.* 802 B, D, 803 C–D.

²⁰⁸ *Frag.* 804 C.

²⁰⁹ *Frag.* 805 B–D.

it. Atticus stands closer to Plato here, but he goes beyond his master in identifying the Platonic ideas with the eternal thoughts of God, while making God transcendent to the realm of the intelligibles.²¹⁰ As permanently contemplated by God the ideas are prior to and separate from the created cosmos but are imposed upon matter to give it order and upon the soul to give it rationality.²¹¹ Our problem is, as Plato insisted, that we are faced with an inherent difficulty here in representing in speech and thought this relation between things (πράγματα) and their patterns (παραδείγματα) in the thoughts or ideas of God²¹² – it was just at this point that Plato adduced his notion of the receptacle or space which is more a relational than an extensional concept, more an epistemological than a physical principle.

In the teaching of Atticus this middle position is also occupied by the cosmic soul through which the universe gains its ordered condition. As such the soul is to be regarded as the beginning of creation (ἀρχὴν γενέσεως) and the pupil of God (θεοῦ παιδευμα), that which presides over the universe (τῶν ἀπάντων προστάτιν).²¹³ In its own nature the soul is substantial (ὑποστάσις) but invisible and concealed (ἀόρατόν τε καὶ ἀφανές) and thus incorporeally existent.²¹⁴ It is separable from the body but not separable from the mind (νοῦς).²¹⁵ Is the soul itself a creature? On Atticus' own argument, it does not follow from the fact that it is immortal and imperishable that it was not created. All he says, however, is that in respect of the body it is its animating principle and in respect of mind it is inseparably correlated with it. If one recalls the passage in the *Phaedrus* which Atticus clearly has in mind here, the soul might be described as the celestial or even supercelestial 'place' of the mind,²¹⁶ or indeed 'noetic place'²¹⁷ which would bring it into line with Plato's space or receptacle in its peculiar and hardly expressible relation between the sensibles and the intelligibles. What Atticus seems to be saying, then, is, to use Aristotle's expression, that 'the soul is the place of forms', except

²¹⁰ *Fragmenta* 815 A – 816 A, cf. also Proclus, *In Timaeum* 1.305.6, 366.9, 391.7, 394.6, 431.14, where Atticus' views are related.

²¹¹ See the whole discussion from 809 A to 814 D of the *Fragmenta*.

²¹² *Frag.* 816 A'.

²¹³ *Frag.* 809 D'.

²¹⁴ *Frag.* 810 B.

²¹⁵ *Frag.* 810 D, 811 A.

²¹⁶ *Frag.* 809, B, where *Phaedrus* 246 B–C but also 247 C seems meant.

²¹⁷ *Republic* 6.509 D, 7.517 B.

that he did not follow Aristotle in holding the forms to be immanent in matter, and could not follow Aristotle in holding that it is not the whole soul but only mind that is imperishable.²¹⁸

In its correlation with body the soul is the means through which divine providence (πρόνοια) is exercised over and throughout the universe, because it is through the soul that the created world is invested with its rational beauty and order as a cosmos.²¹⁹ It is through the soul that the real nature of things (φύσις) comes to view, so that Atticus can equate 'according to nature' (κατὰ φύσιν) and 'according to providence' (κατὰ πρόνοιαν).²²⁰ What room does this leave for evil, since it is through the cosmic soul that the universe is given its principle of inner and all pervading unity, and through the cosmic soul that the goodness of God is brought to bear upon all things in the universe?²²¹ Atticus held with Plato that the sensible cosmos moved in an irregular and disorderly manner before it was reduced to order,²²² but he plays down the concept of necessity over against the transcendent power of God.²²³ He does not give us ground in the *Fragments* cited by Eusebius to attribute to him a doctrine of an evil soul as the principle of matter, for the soul in itself is not irrational (οὐκ ἄλογον),²²⁴ but the irregular and disorderly motion of pre-cosmic matter suggests that it was pervaded by soul as the source of its motion. It would seem to be in this sense, and not in the sense of an evil world-soul as the principle of matter, that one must take the comments of Proclus on the teaching of Atticus.²²⁵ What Atticus is quite clear about is that God is to be regarded as the Guardian as well as the Creator of the universe who cares for its well-being,²²⁶ and that any notion of God as banished from the world, shut up in himself without any active interest in the world or the affairs of men, leaving us with no communion with him (μηδεμίαν ἡμῖν πρὸς αὐτὸ κοινωνίαν), is as good as atheism. If active providence is the touchstone of belief in God then

²¹⁸ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429 A 10 – 430 A 25. See here *Frag.* 810 D, 811 A–C.

²¹⁹ *Frag.* 814 B–C.

²²⁰ *Frag.* 814 A–B. Contrast Aristotle, *Frag.* 800 B–D.

²²¹ *Frag.* 801 C–D, 802 C–D, 803 A–D, 798 C–D.

²²² *Frag.* 801 D.

²²³ *Frag.* 803 D – 804 A. He rejects Aristotle's notion of εἰμαρμένη, *Frag.* 814 B.

²²⁴ *Frag.* 814 A.

²²⁵ Cf. Merlan, *op.cit.*, pp. 76f.

²²⁶ *Frag.* 798 D, 800 A, 801 C.

Aristotle as well as Epicurus must be deemed atheist.²²⁷ It is because Atticus, following Plato, has not materialised the concept of space and has reached a transcendental view of God, that he can think of God as interacting with the physical universe without attributing to him a spatial relation to what goes on within it. But behind this also lies his conviction that a world that is created out of nothing can be given reality by God and maintained in real existence through his providential ordering of everything in it so that it is made to rest upon the power of his own thought and will.

In order to see how Judaeo-Christian thought reacted to these developments and how far it made use of them for its own purpose we shall restrict our attention to Alexandria and consider in particular first the thought of Philo, and then of Clement. Philo antedated the Middle Platonists that we have been considering, Plutarch, Albinus, Apuleius and Atticus, but he belongs to that development and no doubt influenced it (e.g. in Atticus), but Clement, and Origen after him, made contact with it when it was moving into Neoplatonism and used it as an anvil on which to hammer out their own theology.

Philo's great achievement was to bring together the God of the biblical tradition who is the transcendent Creator of the universe as well as the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets, and the God of the Platonic tradition who was prior to but nevertheless correlated with the cosmos, with the result that his thought is brought within the frame of the intelligible-sensible schema and his understanding of creation is harmonised with the account of Plato in the *Timaeus*.²²⁸ Philo offers a summary of his own position over against Greek thought at the end of his work *On the creation of the world*. First, the deity is and truly exists (ὅτι ἔστι τὸ θεῖον καὶ ὑπάρχει), which is directed against atheists and mythologisers. Second, God is one (ὅτι θεὸς εἷς ἔστι), against the polytheists who project mob-rule into deity. Third, the world came into being (ὅτι γενητὸς ὁ κόσμος), against those who deprive God of all pre-eminence by thinking of the world as uncreated and eternal (ἀγένητον καὶ αἰδίον). Fourth, the world also is one (ὅτι καὶ εἷς ἔστιν

²²⁷ *Frag.* 799 B-D.

²²⁸ For an excellent summary of Philo's eclectic position, see H. Chadwick, *The Cambridge History of Early Greek and Early Mediaeval Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1967, Part 2, pp. 137-157.

ὁ κόσμος), against those who think there is an infinite number of worlds, when the world as the one work of God is the universe of all that exists. Fifth, God also exercises providence over the world (ὄτι καὶ προνοεῖ τὸ κόσμου ὁ Θεός), for God cares for what he has made.²²⁹

Of special importance is the fact that while Philo operates with a systematic distinction between the realm of the intelligible (κόσμος νοητός) and the realm of the sensible (κόσμος αἰσθητός),²³⁰ he thinks of God as transcendent over the whole intelligible realm and indeed as the Creator of the ideas.²³¹ It was through thinking out and forming the ideas first that God created the sensible or material world, giving physical realities (οὐσίαι) a correspondence to immaterial ideas.²³² This was in sharp contrast to the teaching of Plato that ideas are not created or generated,²³³ but it is consistent with Philo's stress upon the absolute priority and transcendence of God over everything, for 'He alone is eternal and the Father of all things intelligible and sensible'.²³⁴ Among these intelligible ideas created by God are mind and soul,²³⁵ not the ideas of cosmic mind and cosmic soul which Philo rejected, but the ideas of the individual minds and souls.²³⁶ These ideas are not only the thoughts of God which he forms in his own mind but powers (δυνάμεις) by which he gives form and order to the created world.²³⁷ These ideas are held together by what Philo called the *Logos* (λόγος), 'the Idea of ideas' (ἰδέα ἰδεῶν).²³⁸ This *Logos* has two aspects, for in one respect it is clearly the uncreated *Logos* of God, the active Mind or Thought of God, but in another respect it is the created *Logos* holding within itself the ideas produced by God.²³⁹ That is to say, *Logos* mediates between the

²²⁹ *De opificio mundi*, 61.170–2.

²³⁰ *De opif.* 4.16, 19; 6.25; 18.55, etc.

²³¹ *De opif.* 7.29, 10.36; 21.66; 44.129; 46.134.

²³² *De opif.* 4.16, 18; 7.29; also elsewhere, *Legum allegoriae*, 1.9.21–3, 10.2.4, etc.

²³³ *Timaeus*, 28 A, 29 A, 52 A; *Philebus*, 15 B.

²³⁴ *De virtutibus*, 39.214.

²³⁵ *De opif.* 7.29; 44.129–30; 48.139; *Leg. all.* 1.1.1; 9.21–22; 13.42.

²³⁶ See H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, Cambridge, MA, 1947, pp. 213ff, 306f, 326, 363ff, 390f.

²³⁷ *De mutatione nominum*, 21.122; *De specialibus legibus*, 1.8.45–48; *De cherubim*, 31.106.

²³⁸ *De migratione Abrahae*, 18.103; *De opif.* 6.25; *Quaest. in Exodum*, 11.124.

²³⁹ *De visa Mosis*, 2.25.127; *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit?* 48.230–31; *De opif.* 5.20; 8.30–31; *De somniis* 1.11.62; 2.6.45; *Leg. all.* 3.61.175; *De decalogo*, 11.47, 25.134; *De mutatione nominum*, 31.169; *De migr.* 15.80–81; *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, 18.66; *De plantatione*, 5.18, etc.

uncreated rationality of God and the created rationality (εἰκόνι καὶ ἰδέᾳ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ λόγῳ) with which God has invested the universe,²⁴⁰ by being the image of God on the one hand, and by containing in itself the ideas that are archetypally related to creation on the other hand.²⁴¹

It is from this angle that one must understand Philo's doctrine of absolute creation and active providence. The fact that the intelligible realm as well as the sensible realm was created gives the beginning (ἀρχή) an absolute sense, equivalent to creation out of nothing (γένεονεν ὄντως).²⁴² God 'made all things which before were not' (ἃ πρότερον οὐκ ἦν, ἐποίησεν), so that he is not only a Workman (δημιουργός) but a Creator (κτίστης).²⁴³ 'He brought the world out of non-being into being' (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι).²⁴⁴ This does involve a temporal origin of the universe, but in the sense that time itself came into existence with the creation.²⁴⁵ 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth.' This must not be taken as a beginning in time (ἀρχὴν . . . τὴν κατὰ χρόνον) for there was no time before there was a world (χρόνος γὰρ οὐκ ἦν πρὸ κόσμου) but it came into being immediately either with the world or after it.²⁴⁶ It is in this sense that it can be said that there was a 'time' when the world was not (ἦν ποτε χρόνος ὅτε οὐκ ἦν).²⁴⁷ In reflecting upon this fact, a distinction between temporal and ontic priority,²⁴⁸ he held that time, which is bound up with the movement of the created universe,²⁴⁹ with sequence therefore and number, is the bearer of the order (τάξις) or beauty (καλόν) immanent in the created universe. 'Order is a sequence and chain of things going on before and following after' (τάξις δ' ἀκολουθία καὶ εἰρμός ἐστι προηγουμένων τινῶν καὶ ἐπομένων).²⁵⁰ This is highly significant, for it means that Philo here draws out what Plato had to say about priority in coming into being and space

²⁴⁰ *Quis rer.* 42.205–6, 42.207f; *De somn.* 2.6.45, 28.188; *Quaest in Ex.* 11.68.

²⁴¹ *De spec. leg.* 1.8.81; *De confusione linguarum*, 28.147f; *De somn.* 1.41.240; *De fuga et invent.* 10.101; *De vita Mosis*, 2.13.127; *De opif.* 9.34; *De ebrietate*, 33.133; *Leg. all.* 3.31.96; *Quis rer. div.* 48–230f.

²⁴² *De providentia*, Fragment from Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, 7.21, 336 B.

²⁴³ *De somn.* 1.13.76.

²⁴⁴ *De vita Mosis*, 2.48.267.

²⁴⁵ *De opif.* 7.26; *De sacrif.* 18.68; *Leg. all.* 1.2.2.

²⁴⁶ *De opif.* 7.26; cf. Pseudo-Philo, *De aetern. mundi*, 10.52.53.

²⁴⁷ *De decalogo*, 12.58; cf. *De spec. log.* 1.2.266.

²⁴⁸ He seems to have Aristotle in mind, *Categoriae*, 12, 14a, 26–35.

²⁴⁹ *De opif.* 7.24f; *De somn.*, 1.32.187; *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*, 6.32.

²⁵⁰ *De opif.* 7.28.

as the receptacle of order, and applied it to time in the on-going process of the created universe.²⁵¹ In this way he brings 'the cosmos, destiny, the sequence and correspondence of all things, with their ever-unbroken chain' (ὁ κόσμος, ἡ εἰμαρμένη, ἀκολουθία καὶ ἀναλογία τῶν συμπάντων εἰρμόν ἔχουσα ἀδιάλυτον) under the control of God.²⁵²

In this way Philo's thought of God was emancipated from the inexorable law of necessity (ἀνάγκη) and destiny (μοῖρα or εἰμαρμένη) that dominated Greek thought which allowed him to develop a doctrine of divine providence not only over the cosmos as a whole but actively related to events and persons within it.²⁵³ This followed directly from his doctrine of creation in which it is God himself who gave the universe its order and who remains related to it in his transcendent freedom as its Creator,²⁵⁴ whereas the rejection of divine providence follows from the idea that the world is uncreated.²⁵⁵ Granted, then, that the world has been created out of non-being by God which is the supreme miracle, there should be no difficulty in understanding that God can dispose the order of his own creation for his special purposes.²⁵⁶ In his own self-sufficiency and freedom God guides all things in the direction he pleases according to law and right (κατὰ νόμον καὶ κατὰ δίκην) yet in such a way that they happen at the bidding of the Father (κατὰ πρόσταξιν τοῦ πατρός).²⁵⁷ In this passage Philo also makes the point that God does not need anything beyond himself, either in creating the world or in maintaining it in its law and order, by way of independent powers (αὐτοκρατεῖς), for he acts directly and immediately.

It is here that Philo's doctrine of the *Logos* plays an all-important role, in the interaction between God and the world, for the *Logos* is God's deed (ὁ λόγος ἔργον ἦν αὐτοῦ).²⁵⁸ The *Logos* is the instrument by means of which or through which God created, formed and ordered the

²⁵¹ *Timaeus*, 34 Cff, 37 Dff.

²⁵² *De mutatione nominum*, 23.135.

²⁵³ *De migr.* 33.186.

²⁵⁴ *De opif.* 2.9f. It would be impious to think of God as remaining inactive, 2.7.

²⁵⁵ *De somn.* 2.43.283; *Leg. all.* 3.3.7. Much the same teaching is vigorously upheld in the Ps. Philo, *De aet.* against Aristotelians and Stoics, particularly against the notion that the universe will suffer destruction through conflagration. See Ehrhardt, *op.cit.*, pp. 187f, 192, 195.

²⁵⁶ *De vita Mos.* 1.38.212; 2.48.267.

²⁵⁷ *De opif.* 14.46.

²⁵⁸ *De sacri.* 18.65; *De vita Mos.* 1.51.283; cf. *De decal.* 11.47.

world,²⁵⁹ and the means through which he continues to govern and guide its affairs.²⁶⁰ It is quite clear from Philo's use of *Logos* in these passages that it is not understood as the impersonal rationality immanent in the universe but as the rational activity through which God himself is directly at work in the universe. Moreover in this way Philo's thought severely played down the place of intermediaries between God and the world, while at the same time maintaining the utter transcendence of God over all created existence.²⁶¹ Contrary to what one might have expected, however, Philo is not much troubled with the problem of evil. He is quite adamant about the fact that 'nothing evil is caused by God' (Θεὸς γὰρ οὐδενὸς αἴτιος κακοῦ τὸ παράπαν). When evil occurs in the world it is not to be blamed on God's ordering, but is to be looked on as arising in an incidental way. Earthquakes, thunderbolts, pestilence are not visitations of God but are simply happenings in nature and of a secondary sort.²⁶² When evil is found in man it is to be traced to a conflict between the irrational and the rational soul.²⁶³ All that Philo is concerned to stress here is that we must not think anything unworthy of God, so that wherever evil arises it is to be attributed 'to other makers' (ἑτέροις δημιουργοῖς).²⁶⁴ God himself does not partake of any evil (Θεὸς ὁ πάσης κακίας ἀμέτοχος).²⁶⁵ So that evil angels must be posited to account for elements of evil in the creation.²⁶⁶ Thus Philo is found lapsing into the old Hellenic dualism between good and evil, spirit and matter, that was to gain such mythological power in the rise of Gnosticism.²⁶⁷

In view of this teaching (the absolute transcendence of God over the universe, the genesis of the universe out of non-being, its investment

²⁵⁹ *All. leg.* 3.31.96; 32.99; *De cher.* 35.127; *De migr.* 1.6; *Leg. all.* 1.9.14; *De fuga et inventione*, 18.94-5, 97; *De somn.* 1.41.241; *De sacr.* 3.8-9; *Spec. leg.* 1.16.81; *De imm. dei.* 12.57.

²⁶⁰ *De cher.* 11.36; *De migr.* 12.67; *De mut. nom.* 19.114; 20.116.

²⁶¹ For a discussion of this question, see Wolfson, *op. cit.*, vol. 50, pp. 279ff, 282ff, 292ff.

²⁶² *De providentia*, 2.53-54, Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 8.14.644; *De fuga et invent.* 13.65f.

²⁶³ *Spec. leg.* 4.23.123 ff; *De opif.* 46.134; *Leg. all.* 1.12.31.

²⁶⁴ *De fug. et invent.* 13.70; cf. *De opif.* 24.75; *De confusione linguarum*, 35.179; *Questiones et solutiones in Exodum*, 1.23; 11.33.

²⁶⁵ *De spec. leg.* 2.3.11; *De opif.* 52.139; *De agricultura*, 28.128f.

²⁶⁶ *De conf. ling.* 35.179; *De Abr.* 28.143; *De fug. et invent.* 13.68ff.

²⁶⁷ See especially *De fug. et invent.* 12.62-64.

with a created rationality which is the image and idea of God's own *Logos*, and God's continued interaction with the world of nature, men and events), how does Philo think of the relation of God to *space*? In order to get Philo's answer to that question we must note the three-fold distinction he drew in regard to what is meant by 'place'.

Place is conceived in three ways (τριχῶς δὲ ἐπινοεῖται τόπος): once as space filled by a body (χώρα ὑπὸ σώματος πεπληρωμένη), and in a second way as the divine *Logos* (ὁ θεῖος λόγος), which God himself has filled wholly and completely with immaterial powers (ὅν ἐκπεπλήρωκεν ὅλον δι' ὅλων ἀσώματοις δυνάμεσιν αὐτόος ὁ Θεός). But in a third sense God himself is called place in that he contains all things, is contained by nothing whatsoever (ὁ Θεός καλεῖται τόπος τῷ περιέχειν μὲν τὰ ὅλα, περιέχεσθαι δὲ πρὸς μηδενὸς ἀπλῶς), and is himself a place of refuge for all, and because he is himself his own space (αὐτός ἐστι χώρα ἑαυτοῦ), he who has created room for himself and is contained by himself alone (κεχωρηκῶς ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐμπερόμενος μόνῳ ἑαυτῷ). Now I am not a place but am in a place (ἐν τόπῳ), and so likewise is every existent thing, for that which is contained is different from what contains it (τὸ γὰρ περιεχόμενον διαφέρει τοῦ περιέχοντος), but the Deity who is contained by nothing is necessarily his own place (τὸ δὲ θεῖον ὑπ' οὐδενὸς περιεχόμενον ἀναγκαιῶς ἐστὶν αὐτὸ τόπος ἑαυτοῦ).²⁶⁸

This is a highly important and illuminating passage which draws together much that Philo says in many different works. It may be helpful if we consider each of the three senses of space or place in turn.

(1) Space is regarded as a physical container, which he frequently distinguishes as 'somatic space' (σωματικὴ χώρα).²⁶⁹ 'God . . . produced space (χώρα) and place (τόπος) together with bodies'.²⁷⁰ The language that Philo uses brings together Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic notions. Plato's receptacle (ὑποδοχή, μήτηρ, τιθήνη, ἐκμαγεῖον, χώρα etc.) is interpreted after Aristotle in a material sense (as ὕλη),²⁷¹ and is aligned with Aristotle's notion of the container: 'the container is the measure of what is contained' (ἀεὶ γὰρ τὸ περιέχον τοῦ περιεχομένου μέτρον).²⁷²

²⁶⁸ *De somn.* 1.11.62–64.

²⁶⁹ *De fug. et invent.* 22.124; *De mus. nom.* 14.90; 37.209; *De somn.* 2.6.42.

²⁷⁰ *De Conf. ling.* 27.136. Time also came into existence along with place or space, for 'they are twin brothers', *Quaest. in Gen.* 26.8.187.

²⁷¹ *De plant.* 2.1.5.; *Quis rer.* 32.130; *De cher.* 35.125; *De ebriestate*, 14.61; *Quaest. in Gen.* 4.60.

²⁷² *Quis rer.* 47.227; *De somn.* 1.11.63; *De fug.* 14.75; *De leg. all.* 1.14.44.

Sometimes this is modified through the Stoic notion of space as that which is possessed or occupied by something, in which Philo uses the terms ἐπέχειν and κατέχειν as well as χωρεῖν, although he appears to apply them to an active agent (like the *Logos*) rather than to a material body.²⁷³ Although the spatial receptacle is created along with material existence, in itself it is amorphous, without form, figure or quality, the indefinite stuff (οὐσία, the Stoic term is also used) out of which God formed and framed the world.²⁷⁴ In view of this it is not surprising that Philo should reinterpret Plato's formless medium (ἐκμαγεῖον) to be the reproduction or imprint in the creation of the divine *Logos* or of intelligible archetypal reality.²⁷⁵ Such, then, is the concept of place in the sensible cosmos.

(2) Space can also be applied to the realm of intelligible or immaterial realities as the place in which ideas are contained. There can be no thought of the intelligible cosmos as being in a place (ἐν τινὶ τόπῳ) in the material sense any more than a architect's mental conception of a city occupies space 'out there' (χώραν ἔκτος οὐκ εἶχεν).²⁷⁶ 'The world that consists of ideas could have no other place (ἄλλον ἢν ἔχοι τόπον) than the divine *Logos* which ordered it, for what other place for its powers could there be capable of receiving and containing them (ἱκανός . . . δέξασθαι τε καὶ χωρῆσαι)?'²⁷⁷ This would appear to be closer to Plato's epistemological conception of the receptacle, although it was only rarely that Plato used this kind of language.²⁷⁸ Philo conceives of it, however, in two ways. On the one hand, he thinks of the *Logos* as the place (τόπος) filled with incorporeal powers (ἄσώματοι δυνάμεις) and incorporeal words (ἄσώματοι λόγοι) emanating from God through which he gives order and direction to the universe, but on the other hand, he thinks of it as the place where we meet the *Logos*, and where, although God himself is far removed from created reality and cannot be brought within our cataleptic grasping, we are enlightened and healed by his Word and

²⁷³ *De somn.* 1.11.63ff, 12.68; *Quis rer.* 45.225; *De posteritate Caini*, 2.5; 47.163; *De fug.* 14.75.

²⁷⁴ *De opif.* 5.21ff; *Quis rer.* 27.133f, 140; *De spec. leg.* 1.60.328f; *De plant.* 2.1.3ff; *De somn.* 2.6.45; *De mut.* 23.135.

²⁷⁵ *De opif.* 23.71; 51.146; *De spec. leg.* 2.19.152; 3.15.83; *Quod deus sit imm.* 9.43; *Quis rer.* 12.58; 37.181; 48.231; *De fug.* 2.13; *De mut.* 39.223; *De somn.* 2.31.206.

²⁷⁶ *De opif.* 4.17; 5.20.

²⁷⁷ *De opif.* 5.20; the term περιέχειν is used of this in 4.16.

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Phaedrus*. 247 C, ὑπερουράνιος τόπος.

worship him.²⁷⁹ Although Philo has reached this through an allegorical interpretation of an Old Testament passage (LXX Gen. 28.11, ἀπήνησεν τόπω), it is clearly more than a metaphorical notion of place, for he is struggling to form a relational understanding of place in terms of encounter with God through his *Logos* in which we do not actually reach the Being of God himself (πρὸς τὸν κατὰ τὸ εἶναι Θεὸν ἐλθεῖν).²⁸⁰ But it is typical of Philo that this should be assimilated to the concept of the *Logos* as the place of intelligible ideas, or the Idea of ideas.²⁸¹ It is the concept of place appropriate to the nature of the intelligible cosmos.

(3) The same term 'place' can be applied to God himself who is transcendent to the *Logos* (ὁ πρὸ τοῦ λόγου Θεός), but of course in a different sense appropriate to God in his transcendence over place (πρὸ τόπου).²⁸² Difficult as it is in physics (ἐν φυσιολογίᾳ) the question as to 'place' is most troublesome when we ask 'where' the being itself is and whether it is 'in anything at all' (ποῦ καὶ εἰ συνόλας ἐν τινι τὸ ὄν). Since everything that subsists occupies some space (χώραν), what are we to say of God, he who is (τὸ ὄν)? Some attribute to him this or that space (χώραν), inside the cosmos or outside it (inter-cosmic space). As against this, however, it must be said that the Uncreated One has no resemblance to created things but transcends them altogether (ἀλλὰ τοῖς ὄλοις ὑπερβάλλον), so that even the sharpest mind falls far short of grasping him and acknowledges its inadequacy.²⁸³ Thus if we consider place in relation to the nature of the divine Being, we cannot say that he is 'in a place', for according to the truth of the matter 'he contains but is not contained' (περιέχει γὰρ, ἀλλ' οὐ περιέχεται).²⁸⁴ Nor therefore can we think of the universe fittingly as God's 'room and dwelling place'.²⁸⁵ On the other hand 'there is no place which a man can occupy where God is not', for God fills and penetrates all things.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁹ *De somn.* 1.11.62ff; 12.68ff; 21.127f; 32.184ff.

²⁸⁰ *De somn.* 1.11.66.

²⁸¹ *De migr.* 18.103; *De opif.* 5.20; 6.25; cf. *De spec. leg.* 3.26.207.

²⁸² *De somn.* 1.11.67; 19.117.

²⁸³ *De somn.* 1.32.184.

²⁸⁴ *De somn.* 1.32.185. The fact that God contains all but is not contained is continually mentioned by Philo. It is, he says, the bad man who thinks that God is in a place, not containing but contained (ὁ φαῦλος δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τόπῳ, μὴ περιέχοντα, ἀλλὰ περιεχόμενον), *Leg. all.* 3.2.6.

²⁸⁵ *All. leg.* 1.14.44.

²⁸⁶ *All. leg.* 3.2.4-6; cf. *De fug. et invent.* 14.75.

Spatial language may be used of God symbolically (συμβολικῶς) to refer to him as 'the refuge of the whole universe', for he is the source of all life, or as 'the fatherland' where the Word dwells, or as 'a house',²⁸⁷ the incorporeal space (χώρα) of incorporeal ideas, for he is the archetypal source of every created thing.²⁸⁸ Properly speaking 'God is his own place, and he is full of himself and sufficient for himself (ἐπεὶ αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ τόπος καὶ αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ πλήρης καὶ ἱκανὸς αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ὁ Θεός), but all other things which are wanting, void and empty in themselves he fills and contains while he is contained by nothing, seeing that he himself is the One and the All (ἅτε εἷς καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸς ὢν).'²⁸⁹ We must think of God in himself, then, as exalted above all place and time (ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου). As pure Being he is quite unapproachable to our thoughts so that we cannot form conceptions of him as he is in himself,²⁹⁰ but we may think of him in respect of his power, as the Cause (τὸ αἷτιον) who has brought everything under his control, who extends his powers to the very limits of the universe and as weaving everything together and holding everything fast with invisible bonds, but always in such a way that we think of him as transcendent and beyond everything that he has made, and even as transcending the powers through which he creates and holds the universe together.²⁹¹

Quite evidently Philo's master idea regarding the relation of God to space is that he contains all things but is not himself contained by anything. Three points, however, must be stressed if this is to be clear. (1) While Philo employs Aristotelian language about the container he uses this of God only in the verbal form. That is to say, God's containing of the universe is to be understood in terms of his *power* in creating it, conferring upon it its inherent order, and sustaining it in being. He is the source of the spatial and temporal order of the universe, while remaining himself completely ascendent over it all. (2) It is precisely and only as the absolutely transcendent One that God is to be thought of as immanent in the universe, filling everything with himself. Hence while he speaks of

²⁸⁷ *De fug. et invent.* 14.76.

²⁸⁸ *De cher.* 14.49.

²⁸⁹ *All. leg.* 1.14.44.

²⁹⁰ Cf. *De post. Caini*, where Philo likens Moses' entry into the thick darkness where God was (Exod. 20.21) to entry into conceptions regarding the unapproachable Being of God. The Cause of all is not in darkness nor in any place at all, but 'beyond space and time'.

²⁹¹ *De post. Caini*, 5.14; *De confus. ling.* 27.136f; *Quaest. in Exod.* 24.12.40.

God's incessant interaction with the world and with men he keeps on interjecting expressions to make clear the absolute priority and freedom of God over against all created existence. (3) In speaking of God's interaction with the world, no words expressing movement from place to place, up or down, right or left, forward or backward, are appropriate in respect of his Being as such (κατὰ τὸ εἶναι), for we must not conceive of him in terms of displacement or change of location. 'To suppose that the Deity approaches or departs, descends or ascends, or remains stationary or engages in movements after the fashion of living creatures would be an enormous impiety' – hence we have to take the anthropomorphic language of the Scriptures, e.g. about 'God coming down', figuratively.²⁹²

Philo's treatment of this question is of peculiar interest in view of the problems that faced the Christian Church in regard to the Incarnation. So far as human beings are concerned, it is clear that 'when a person comes down he must leave one place and occupy another', but this kind of change in locality does not apply to God.²⁹³

God has filled all things, containing them without being contained. It belongs to him alone to be everywhere and nowhere: *nowhere*, because he created space and place along with bodies, and it is inadmissible to say that the Maker is contained in any of the things he has created; but *everywhere*, because he has extended his powers through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the cosmos empty, but has given cohesion to everything in it by binding it together with invisible indissoluble bonds.²⁹⁴

When we turn to the early Christian literature of Alexandria we find theologians, Clement and Origen in particular, who stand at the centre of traditional Apostolic Christianity, with the doctrines of God's transcendence over all space and time, the creation of the world of invisible and visible realities, God's providential interaction with the creation and its rational order, his saving economy throughout the history of the human race from the beginning, and above all the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God through which we are given a knowledge of God and his relation to the world of men and things not possible in any other way. They are concerned to expound and maintain

²⁹² *De conf. ling.* 27.134, 139.

²⁹³ *De conf. ling.* 27.135; *De post. Caini*, 2.7.

²⁹⁴ *De conf. ling.* 27.135–136; cf. *All. leg.* 3.17.51f.

this teaching within the whole realm of 'Hellenic truth' in a rational and scientific way, in which they reveal how much they have learned from Middle Platonism in particular, and not least from Philo who had laid down a convincing way of relating biblical revelation to Greek thought and culture.

A similar line was taken elsewhere in the Church quite independently of Alexandrian thought and which had its due measure of influence on it. This is evident, for example, in the way in which an important passage from Hermas was used in Alexandria. 'We believe first of all that God is One who has created and perfected all things and made them to exist out of non-being (καὶ ποιήσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ πάντα), and contains all things, while he himself alone is uncontained (καὶ τὰ πάντα χωρῶν, μόνος δὲ ἀχώρητος ὢν).'²⁹⁵ Clearly the fathers are concerned at every point to rebut any form of mythological synthesis between God and the cosmos, whether it be found in the thought of the Stoics, Aristotelians, Pythagoreans, Atomists, Epicureans, or Platonists, and to rebut equally the mythological corruption of Christian teaching found among Gnostic thinkers of various kinds. There is no need for us here to develop this in detail, for it will be quite sufficient to indicate the basic position they adopted toward the relation between God and space.²⁹⁶

Clement took over from Philo not only his radical disjunction between the two realms of sensible and intelligible realities, but also his idea of a two-fold creation of the realm of ideas as well as the realm of material existents,²⁹⁷ and rejected the old Orphic notion beloved by the Platonists and Pythagoreans that the soul is a spark of the divine in favour of the biblical teaching that the soul as well as the body has been created by God absolutely.²⁹⁸ Clement rejected the concept of the eternity of the world, for time was created by God along with the world,²⁹⁹ and he advanced a much stronger doctrine of the divine providence (πρόνοια) than was found outside the Christian faith or even in the teaching of Philo. It was in the light of God's direct and active engagement in caring

²⁹⁵ Hermas, *The Shepherd*, *Vis. V. Mand.* 1. Cf. here 2 Maccabees 7.14; and Origen, *De principiis*, 1.3.3, who also refers back to Enoch 2.5. See also Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.22.1; 4.20.2; *Demonstration*, 4.

²⁹⁶ Refer to my account of this in *Space, Time and Incarnation*, London, 1969, ch. 1, pp. 1-21.

²⁹⁷ *Stromateis* 2.74-77; 6.114.4f.

²⁹⁸ *Strom.* 5.88; *Paedagogos*, 1.17.

²⁹⁹ *Strom.* 5. 89, 92; 6.142, 145.

and providing for the world, that he set out his understanding of the Incarnation.³⁰⁰

Four cardinal points in this early Christian understanding of the relation of God to space, may be noted here.³⁰¹

(1) There is no natural or necessary relation between God and the creation. Creator though he is God remains in a relation of priority and freedom to what he has willingly made.³⁰² Moreover, there is only one God transcendent to the whole universe beyond all space and time, so that to think of there being two gods after the fashion of Marcion raises the mythological question as to the different place (τόπος) of each god.³⁰³ This is precisely the sort of thing that knowledge of the one and only God makes us think away entirely, that is, all synthesis between him and divisible, differentiated reality.

(2) In respect of his divine Being God must be thought of as remote from us but in respect of his power as very near.³⁰⁴ This is an idea that we find in Philo but Clement expounds it to mean that we cannot think of God as containing the universe any more than we can think of him as being contained by it.³⁰⁵ The whole passage is of the utmost interest.

God is a Being difficult for us to grasp and apprehend, for he always recedes out of reach and draws away from those who pursue him. But the ineffable wonder of it is that he who is distant has come very near. 'I am a God who draws near, says the Lord'. Distant, that is, in respect of his essential being (πόρρω μὲν κατ' οὐσίαν) for how can the creature ever approach the Creator? 'But he is very near in respect of his power (ἐγγυτάτω δὲ δυνάμει) by which he embraces (ἐγκεκόλπισταί) all things'. 'Will anyone do anything in secret', he says, '- without my seeing him?'.³⁰⁶ Now God's power is always present in dynamic interaction with us in our meditation, service and instruction. Hence Moses, convinced that God could never be

³⁰⁰ See my essay on Clement's concept of *oikonomia* in *OIKONOMIA, Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie* (edit. by F. Christ), 1967, pp. 223ff.

³⁰¹ For the development of Christian thought after Clement see 'The Relation of the Incarnation to Space in Nicene Theology'. *The Ecumenical World of Orthodox Civilization, Russia and Orthodoxy, Vol. III, Essays in honor of Georges Florovsky* edit. by A. Blane and T. E. Bird, The Hague, 1973, pp. 43-70, reprinted here as Chapter 10.

³⁰² *Strom.* 2.16.75; 5.11.71; 5.14.141; 7.5, 71ff; *Paed.* 1.8.62; 9.88; *Protrepticus*, 4.63.

³⁰³ *Strom.* 2.2; and 5.1.4 - which follows Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 2.1.4.

³⁰⁴ *Strom.* 4.25.156f; 5.10.65; 5.11.2.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Philo, *De post. Caini*, 6.20.

³⁰⁶ The biblical references are to Jeremiah 23.23, 24.

known by human wisdom, said, 'Shew me thy glory' and strove to enter into the darkness where God's voice was, that is, into the inaccessible and invisible conceptions as to his Being. For God is not in darkness or in place (οὐ γὰρ ἐν γνόφῳ ἢ τόπῳ ὁ Θεός), but above and beyond both space and time (ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου) and the properties of created things.³⁰⁷ Therefore he is never found located in some region, either as containing or as contained (διὸ οὐδ' ἐν μέρει καταγίνεται ποτε οὔτε περιέχων οὔτε περιεχόμενος), by way of limitation or by way of division. 'For what house will ye build me?' says the Lord.³⁰⁸ On the contrary, he has not even built himself one, for he cannot be contained (ἀχώρητος ὢν). Even if the heaven is said to be his throne, not even thus is he contained (οὐδ' οὕτω περιέχεται), but he rests delighted in his creation.³⁰⁹

Here it is the biblical understanding of the transcendence of God over all space and time and over all the universe, who cannot be circumscribed or localised in any way,³¹⁰ that is brought in to correct any misunderstanding from the side of Greek thought of God's relation to the world he has made: in no sense is that to be construed as a spatial relation.

(3) When it comes to the Incarnation of the Son of God, his advent (παρουσία) and his Passion, and the whole economy of salvation (ἡ οἰκονομία σωτηρίας) in human existence and history, Clement has problems to cope with which were unknown to Philo. What he does, however, is not to treat the Incarnation merely as the particularisation of God's immanent activity in the world, but to establish the inner connection (ἀκολουθία) between the saving οἰκονομία in time and the divine πρόνοια of the universe by grounding the former through 'eternal works and words' in the Being and Will of God. The Incarnation is understood in terms of God's 'economic foreordering' of man's salvation. Clement insists that the scientific way to approach this is through a discarding of preconceptions and a heuristic investigation in which we seek to understand it according to its nature (κατὰ φύσιν) and out of its own reality (ἀλήθειαν). He admits that if we approach it with our preconceived opinions the advent of Christ and the Passion of the Son of God will appear mythical (μυθῶδες) or like a parable, but that can

³⁰⁷ This is a reference to Philo, *De post. Caini*, 5.14, and Exodus 30.13.

³⁰⁸ Isaiah 66.1, and Acts 7.49. See *Strom.* 7.5. 68–81.

³⁰⁹ *Strom.* 2.2.5 – 6.3. The latter clause refers to Isaiah 66.23 and Acts 7.49b.

³¹⁰ See especially *Strom.* 1.11.52; 18.88: 6.15.122–127, and *Oikonomia*, op.cit., pp. 225ff.

arise only if we disconnect the οἰκονομία from the divine πρόνοια, and fail to understand it in its own truth.³¹¹

On the other hand, Clement interprets the Incarnate Son in terms of the *Logos* of God. He rejects the Hellenic notion of the λόγος προφορικός,³¹² makes use of Philo's mystical hermeneutic of the ascent of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies or the κόσμος νοητός and his descent from it again into the κόσμος αἰσθητός,³¹³ but follows the New Testament in identifying Christ with the eternal or pre-existent *Logos* or Son of God who is not a mere emanation from God but is himself God as well as Man, the Mediator between God and man.³¹⁴ He is ὁ προὖν λόγος, ὁ προὖν σωτήρ, so that it is he who exists in him who exists (ὁ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὢν), i.e. in God himself the *Logos*, who was with God (πρὸς τὸν Θεόν) who has come among us. This means that all the activity of the Word or Son on earth, in his human economy, has reference back to the Father Almighty (πᾶσα δὲ ἡ κυρίου ἐνέργεια ἐπὶ τὸν παντοκράτορα τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει), so that the Son is, so to speak, a certain activity of the Father (καὶ ἔστιν ὡς εἰπεῖν πατρικὴ τις ἐνέργεια ὁ υἱός).³¹⁵ The effect of this was to give the economy of the Saviour in time objective and permanent validity in the eternal Will of God, and thus to root the structured conceptuality of faith in space and time in the mind and work of God himself, while maintaining that form and motion, standing, or throne or place, right hand or left hand, are not to be thought of as belonging to the Father of the universe in respect of his own eternal Being.³¹⁶

Quite clearly, there are problems here that the Christian Church had yet to work out, but Clement's thought makes it clear that it is impossible to attribute to early Christian theology any mythological synthesis of God and the cosmos which locates him somewhere in upper space. On the other hand, it does demand a closer understanding of the relation between the Incarnation and the creation.³¹⁷

(4) There is a sense in which the holy soul or the Church can be spoken of as 'the temple' (τὸ ἱερόν) of God – not of course that God is

³¹¹ See *Strom.* 7.5.68f, 6.81.

³¹² *Strom.* 5.6.3; 7.2.10.

³¹³ *Strom.* 5.6.34.7; 37.1ff; 39.1ff.

³¹⁴ *Strom.* 3.10.68; 6.7.54; 7.2.4.; cf. 5.6.40.

³¹⁵ *Strom.* 7.2.6–7; *Protr.* 1.4, 7.

³¹⁶ *Strom.* 5.11.71.

³¹⁷ Cf. *Paed.* 1.3.7f.

circumscribed in any place, for by his very nature as the self-existent Being he himself is his own place without reference to anything other than he.³¹⁸ In the strict sense he himself is 'the Temple' (τὸ ἱερόν), but 'the gnostic soul' can be spoken of as 'he in whom God is localised' (ἐν ᾧ ὁ Θεὸς ἐνίδρυται), i.e. in whom knowledge of God (ἡ περὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ γνῶσις) is consecrated, and in whom therefore there is found the divine likeness and holy image of God reflected. Rather than speaking of God as 'localised' (ἰδρύεται) in respect of men, Clement prefers to speak of the soul or the Church as localised in respect of God through receiving knowledge of him,³¹⁹ and engaging in prayer to him.³²⁰ Clement takes great pains to eliminate in every way any thought of a spatial relation between God and men, in spite of the fact that as created beings men are all in a place (ἐν τόπῳ). There is not the slightest suspicion in his thought of any mythological synthesis of God and the cosmos which locates him somewhere in upper space. To think of God in that way, as if he dwelt in the air and the enclosing space (τὸ περιέχον) or even the whole universe of what the Stoics call 'the All' is as ridiculous as to think of him as circumscribed in a temple made with hands.³²¹

³¹⁸ *Strom.* 7.5.67ff.

³¹⁹ *Strom.* 7.5.71–81. Clement's language is evidently indebted to Maximus Tyros, *Philosophumena*, 2.1–10.

³²⁰ *Strom.* 7.6.81ff, 98ff.

³²¹ *Strom.* 7.5.67–69.

Chapter 10

THE RELATION OF THE INCARNATION TO SPACE IN NICENE THEOLOGY*

. . . And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, true God of true God, Light of Light, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end . . .

When the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed speaks about Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified under Pontius Pilate as 'of one substance with the Father' (ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ), it is clearly affirming that God himself in his own being is actively present with us as personal Agent within the space and time of our world. Thus 'came down from heaven' (κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν) is predicated of God himself in the being of the Son. How are we to understand this spatial language in its application to the redemptive movement of God in the *Incarnation* (not to speak of its use in relation to the ascension and the heavenly session of Christ, or indeed of his coming again)?

So far as the statements of the Creed itself are concerned three things may be said right away. (1) In spite of the insistence of the Creed that he who was born of the Virgin Mary is one and the same as he who was born before all worlds, it is not saying that the humanity of Christ was pre-existent or that it came down. Likewise, when the Creed speaks of the historical events in the experience of the Incarnate Son, in suffering and death and resurrection and identifies him with the One through whom all things were made, it is not projecting historical happening into the

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eternal Being of God. (2) The 'came down from (ἐκ) heaven' must be interpreted in accordance with 'God from (ἐκ) God, Light from (ἐκ) Light'.¹ That is to say the *relation* between the actuality of the Incarnate Son in space and time and the God from whom he came cannot be spatialised. God dwelling in heaven is essentially a theological concept like 'God of God', and is no more a spatial concept than God dwelling in Light. (Even if we could conceive of a heaven of heavens we could not think of it as containing God.) It is the biblical way of thinking that is employed here. God is the Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, and thus of the whole realm of space, but the relation between God and space is not itself a spatial relation. Hence the 'came down' of the Creed is not in any sense to be construed as a journey through space. It is true that the mythological synthesis of God and the cosmos,² with its confusion between the presence of God and upper space, is to be found in the anonymous *De mundo* (falsely attributed to Aristotle) that gained currency in the second and third centuries and corrupted proper understanding of Ptolemaic cosmology. But this conception of intervening space between God and man is as far removed from Nicene theology as anything could be.³ God is transcendent to the world he has made and remains transcendent even in the Incarnation of the Son. (3) While the *homoousion* of the Son with the Father expressed the conviction that what he was toward us in his incarnate activity he was inherently, and therefore antecedently and eternally, in himself, the conjunction of 'came down' with 'for us men and our salvation' makes it clear that the involvement of the Son in our lowly condition is to be understood as an act of pure condescension on his part and not as an indication of imperfection in him. He was not creaturely or space-conditioned in his own eternal Being, but he humbled himself to be one with us and to take our finite nature upon himself, *all for our sakes*.⁴ This is what patristic theology called his 'economic condescension', that is, the way in which God chose out of transcendent freedom and grace to effect the salvation of mankind.

These credal affirmations are clearly meant to be positive statements

¹ Hilary, *De Trinitate*, 6.12 (*Patrologia Latina* 10, 165ff – hereafter *PL*).

² Cf. H. Vogel, *Das Nicaenische Glaubensbekenntnis* Berlin, 1963, pp. 74f.

³ See *De mundo* (ed. W. L. Lorimer), 391 Af., 399 A., 400 A., and the like.

⁴ Cf. T. H. Bindley, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith*, ed. F. W. Green, London, 1950, p. 37, and John Burnaby, *The Belief of Christendom*, London, 1959, p. 79.

intelligibly correlated with the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, enshrining concepts that have objective truth corresponding to them because they are grounded finally in the nature and activity of God himself. Thus in spite of the hymnic character of the Creed, its language cannot be treated as if it were merely symbolic (or indeed essentially symbolic), employing simply aesthetic, non-conceptual forms of thought that are related to God in a detached, oblique way, but that derive their meaning and justification mainly through co-ordination with the religious imagination and self-understanding of the Church. Rather is the language to be regarded as essentially signitive, employing conceptual forms that are intended to refer us to God in a direct and cognitive way and that have their meaning and justification precisely in that act of objective intention.⁵ There should be little doubt that the Nicene Fathers were convinced that the disciplined statements they made in formulating the Creed were rightly and properly related to what they signified, namely a basic conceptuality that did not vary with the many forms of man's own devising but one that was controlled by the reality intended.

This makes it all the more important for us to understand carefully the way in which spatial language is used in such statements. If they are merely symbolic, then the spatial element in them can be interpreted quite easily, in a merely metaphorical or tropical sense, yet at the expense of any conceptual correlation. But if they are essentially signitive, then the conceptual content of the statements must have some real correlation with God's own inherent intelligibility through which they fulfil their intention not only of indicating his reality but of affording us, in some measure at least, definite cognitive apprehension of God in his own nature and activity. Of course the words and concepts that we use are human and creaturely, with a human and creaturely content, for they belong to our existence in this world and partake of the limits of nature. If they are to be used to speak of God, they must be stretched and extended beyond the range of the creaturely and phenomenal world for which they were formed in the first place; otherwise they can only serve to exclude everything except purely

⁵ Contrast the approach of Paul Tillich, who constantly opposed 'symbols' to 'signs', and argued that the knowledge of faith was basically 'non-conceptual'. Cf. the admirable discussion of David H. Kelsey, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology*, New Haven, 1967, pp. 41ff.

natural knowledge.⁶ We are aware of something similar to this in the advance of natural science where we must be prepared to do violence to our ordinary forms of speech and thought if we are to apprehend and absorb what is genuinely new.

We have to devise new languages and step up to higher levels of thought in order to push knowledge beyond the limits of ordinary experience, yet all this remains within the limits of nature, for we ourselves belong to nature and are unable to rise above it. We cannot of ourselves transcend the necessities of finite apprehension. Scientific violence is an even more stringent requirement in theology, for a considerable shift in the meaning and reference of our ordinary terms and conceptions is necessary if they are really to indicate God himself. But if that is to happen, the violence to which our ordinary forms of speech and thought are subjected must come from beyond us. They must be opened up from above, as it were, for anything that we do to push our words and concepts beyond the boundary of creaturely being can only take a mythological form, that is, by way of projecting the creaturely content of our concepts as such onto God. To be more precise, if human forms of thought and speech are to have a transcendental reference to what is really beyond them, this reference must be given to these forms by God himself. That is why authentic theological statements have an orientation beyond themselves in the coming of the Word of God and through assimilation to that Word are taken up to a higher level of understanding where they partake of 'a new dimension which they do not possess of their own accord'.⁷

On the other hand these theological statements must retain some genuine connection with our plain, straightforward language, for if the concepts they embody are completely detached from those that are found in our ordinary knowledge and language, then the statements can no longer mean anything to us, much less convey anything to others. This is of course also characteristic of natural science, for the highly abstract denotations which we have to develop therein to lift the range and level of our knowledge cannot be cut adrift from physical language based on

⁶ This point was constantly made by Hilary in his exposition of Nicene theology. See *De Trinitate*, 1.10–19 (*PL* 10. 31–39); 2. 5–7 (*PL* 10.53–57); 3.8 & 24–26 (*PL* 10.80, 92–94); 4.2 & 14 (*PL* 10.97 & 107); 5.1 (*PL* 10.130), etc.

⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, London, 1967, p. 135; also pp. 132–138.

our old concepts of space and time, because it is through this physical language alone that the applicability of scientific concepts and terms to existence, and thus their truth, can be shown.⁸ Thus while scientific concepts need to be extended in order to lay hold of what is really new they cannot be allowed to take off into an arbitrary world of their own, but they must be held in a structure of levels in which lower levels are opened to higher levels and the higher are controlled through co-ordination with the lower. The connection between the levels, by the very nature of the case, can be made only after new knowledge has been gained and new concepts have been formed.⁹

Now it cannot be otherwise in a disciplined theology. The scientific function of theological statements is to offer a rational account of knowledge beyond the limits of merely this-worldly experience through the use of acknowledged concepts taken from this world, and in this way to help our minds get some hold upon such knowledge, even though it is more than we can grasp in terms of this-worldly concepts. Theological statements properly made are operational statements directing us toward what is new and beyond us but which cannot be wholly indicated or explained in terms of the old. Hence as long as theological concepts must retain their creaturely content we cannot claim to lay hold of the divine reality by means of them; nevertheless they must be employed in the service of our knowledge of God in an act of direct intention in which their creaturely content is not ascribed to God, but becomes the medium of transcendental reference to him. This takes place as under his self-revelation, that is, God's own inherent intelligibility forces itself upon our apprehension, stretching and enlarging it so that we are directed through and beyond the creaturely content of our concepts to God himself in his divine mode of being and activity. Theological statements operate, then, with essentially *open concepts* – concepts which, though relatively closed on our side of their reference through their connection with the space-time structures of our world, on God's side are wide open to the infinite objectivity and inexhaustible intelligibility of his divine being. Or to put it another way, the kind of conceptuality characteristic of theology is one in which our acts of cognition are formed under the pressure of the transcendent reality they intend to know so that the

⁸ Cf. the discussion of W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, New York, 1958, pp. 167ff.

⁹ Cf. E. H. Hutten, *The Ideas of Physics*, Edinburgh, 1967, p. 64.

intelligible content of what is disclosed constantly bursts through the forms we bring to it in order to grasp it.

1

It is not possible within the dimensions of this essay to examine in detail the notions of space that the Christian Church found in contemporary culture and adapted for itself as it developed its own understanding and articulation of the relation between God and the world that is proclaimed in the Gospel. But without at least some summary statement of the notion of space prevalent in Greek thought, and in particular as developed in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, our exploration of the relation of the doctrine of incarnation to the idea of space in Nicene theology would obviously lack a critical point of reference.

The popular and most persistent notion of space found in Greek thought from the earliest times was that derived by analogy from the vessel that may hold wine, water, air, or some other 'body'. A receptacle or container of this sort might be called a *place*, for place is that into which and out of which things pass, or are made to pass, or which encompasses them when they are in it. This notion of space was applied to the known universe, and what was beyond it was held to be the void. It was within this rather simple but universally held notion of space that the philosophers and scientists put forward their more reasoned views. Plato treated the receptacle concept of space rather metaphorically and developed something like a relational account of space, pointing out the difficulty of projecting the idea of space conceived within the sensible world beyond its boundary with the intelligible world. Aristotle, on the other hand, who misunderstood Plato, returned to the notion of the receptacle but thought of it and the matter it contained as interdependent, and so defined place as the innermost unmoved limit of the container. Place is what contains and limits that of which it is the place. Thus Aristotle offers a predominantly volumetric concept of space. The Stoics preferred to think of space in terms of that which occupies place, and sought to think through the whole container-contained idea by means of an active principle in which they conceived of body as making room for itself through an innate source of motion to make up

the whole of the ordered universe, which they saw as set in the infinite void. But this had the effect of identifying God with the rationality that animated the cosmos and even of delimiting him as coincident with the cosmic body as a whole, while, when linked with the Aristotelian separation (*χωρισμός*) between terrestrial and celestial mechanics, it had the effect of retarding the science of the heavens until comparatively modern times. Other conceptions of space did gain currency in the ancient world, such as those of the atomists and Epicureans, but, as we see in the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius, they were largely variations upon the old theme of the vessel, with space becoming the infinite container of bodies. But nevertheless the conceptions of the Platonists, the Aristotelians and the Stoics tended to prevail (sometimes assimilated closely to one another) and to provide the general basis for future theories.

What did early Christian theology make of all this? How far was it indebted to Greek notions of space? Or did it merely quarry from them in its search for scientific tools with which to develop its own concepts at those points where the Christian message forced the Church to think out the relation of the saving presence and activity of God to our human existence in the space and time of this world?

2

We shall examine the teaching of Origen by way of answering these questions, not only because he was immensely influential among Nicenes and Arians alike, but because it was in Alexandria, with which he was mostly associated, that the teaching of the different schools in philosophy and science had been merged (e.g. by Poseidonius) as perhaps nowhere else, and because Origen himself was so deeply steeped in this cultural tradition. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the familiar Greek notions of container (*περιεχόν*) and place (*τόπος*) coming naturally to him when he wrote of anthropology, cosmology, or theology. Porphyry spoke of him as essentially Greek in his theology and cosmology, although Christian in his way of life,¹⁰ but in doing so failed to take into account a supreme factor that led Origen

¹⁰ See A. A. T. Ehrhardt, 'Origen, Theologian in the Cataclysm of the Ancient World', *Oikoumene: Studi Palaeocristiani Publicati in Onore del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano 2*, Catania, 1964, p. 283.

to rethink and adapt the ideas he had learned in the schools – his doctrine of God. Unlike the ‘God’ of the Greeks, the God who is revealed and known only through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the God who is a triad in his own unity and eternity, is completely transcendent in substance, existence, and perfection. Yet this transcendent God, and only he, can at once also be fully and freely immanent throughout the created universe without being limited or restricted by it.¹¹ In his own Being, as Father, as Son, or as Holy Spirit, he is αὐτοθεός, and so αὐτοαλήθεια, αὐτοσοφία, αὐτοδικαιοσύνη, αὐτολόγος, αὐτουργός, and the like.¹² This means that we must think of God strictly and consistently in accordance with his self-existent nature and majesty as God, and we must have as our ‘rule of piety’ *to think nothing unworthy of him*.¹³

God created all things out of nothing and gave them their order – all things that are, are made by God, so that there is nothing that is not created except the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁴ He created things invisible as well as visible, non-somatic as well as somatic; he created intelligible as well as sensible realities.¹⁵ As the transcendent source of all that is not God or of all that is outside of him it may even be said that God himself does not participate in being, since all else participates in him (ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ οὐσίας μετέχει ὁ θεός μετέχεται γὰρ μᾶλλον ἢ μετέχει, καὶ μετέχεται ὑπὸ τῶν ἐχόντων ‘πνεῦμα θεοῦ’).¹⁶ There is therefore nothing created or material in God. He is not to be regarded in any sense as ‘body’, so that we cannot worthily think of him through the kind of forms and shapes we derive from the contemplation of created and physical existents. We may know him only by thinking away the created and physical, and – in a simple, intuitive act of the intelligence – by penetrating through all worldly forms and terms, even those supplied to us in the Holy Scriptures.¹⁷ God

¹¹ See especially *De principiis*, 1, Preface and Ch. 4.1f, CGS, vol.5, edit. by P. Koetschau, Leipzig, 1913.

¹² *In Ioannis Evangelium*, 2.2; *Contra Celsum*, 2.141.11ff, CGS, vol. 1 & 2, edit. by P. Koetschau, Leipzig, 1899. Numerous references are listed in vol. 2, pp.451ff.

¹³ *De principiis*, 5.32.18; 73.14f; 132.8; 144.12f; 208.11f; 31f; 227.13f; 228.13f; 241.28; 273.1; 310.18; 322.11, 29; 328.29f; 345.6. Cf. *Contra Celsum*, 2 (7.42), 193.13f.

¹⁴ *De principiis*, 5.9.13f; 50.14f; 271.12ff; 273.1ff; 359.9f.

¹⁵ *De principiis*, 5.21.13f; 86.5ff; 159.4ff; 289.11ff; 347.15f.

¹⁶ *Contra Celsum*, 2, 134–135.

¹⁷ *De principiis*, 5. 20.1ff; 21.10ff; 112.15ff; 131.14ff; 282.12ff; 347.5ff; 350.7ff.

is therefore, so far as our creaturely forms and concepts are concerned, ineffable, indescribable, and incomprehensible, for he transcends even 'eternal intelligence' and is comprehended only by, and through, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Grounded in this doctrine of God, Origen entered into critical dialogue with Greek thought. It is true that there can be no infinite void, for 'God is everywhere and in all things'. Yet this requires some qualification. If we are to think in accordance with God's nature, we cannot speak of him being 'in' things in the same way as we do of created realities.¹⁹ Thus while we must say that 'there is no place empty of God' (οὐδεὶς τόπος κενὸς τοῦ θεοῦ),²⁰ we must also say that 'God is not in a place' (οὐκ ἐν τόπῳ ὁ θεός).²¹ The same applies, as we shall see, to God the Son in the sense that he cannot be confined to a physical place.²² God is not contained by anything, for on the contrary he contains all (θεὸν τὸν περιέχοντα τὰ ὅλα).²³ There is a sense in which one might speak of the universe as 'an immense, monstrous animal held together by the power and reason of God as by one soul' because God fills heaven and earth and by his will 'contains' it from being mastered by corruption.²⁴ 'God is the Parent of all things, filling and containing the entire universe with the fullness of his power.'²⁵ But this is to be conceived not (as did the Stoics) in the manner of a bodily container (οὐχ ὡς σῶμα δὲ περιέχον περιέχει), for it is the 'body' that is contained by the divine power that embraces and encompasses everything.²⁶

On the other hand, Origen does clearly accept the Stoic principle that comprehension and limitation go together, because what is not dereterminate or limited (πεπερασμένον) is incomprehensible. That is why God is incomprehensible, for he is immeasurable and far transcends all our thoughts about him.²⁷ He is Platonist enough to insist that the mind

¹⁸ *De principiis*, 5.20.5ff; 21.10ff; 54.4ff; 55.1ff; 272.7ff; 345.23f; 346.11ff.

¹⁹ *De principiis*, 283.5f. This applies particularly to a rejection of the idea that God is 'in' any evil.

²⁰ *Contra Celsum*, 1.277.29ff.

²¹ *Contra Celsum*, 2.284.14f; 186.8.

²² *De principiis*, 5.191.1ff; 351.1f; 18f.

²³ *Contra Celsum*, 1.365.19; 2.184.17.

²⁴ *De principiis*, 5.108.11ff.; 124.1ff.

²⁵ *De principiis*, 108.30.

²⁶ *Contra Celsum*, 2.141.11f.

²⁷ *De principiis*, 20.7f.

does not need a sensible magnitude in order to think,²⁸ but he is aware of a logical problem in the notion of the infinite – if we are to think mathematically *ad infinitum*, we cannot at the same time put a limit to infinite progression; on the other hand, the finite mind cannot think of what is without beginning and without end. What Origen does is to turn the Stoic principle around by insisting that it is the fact that *God comprehends all things* that limits them, giving them beginning and end, and thus making them comprehensible.²⁹ ‘Every creature, therefore, is distinguished before God by being confined within a certain number or measure, i.e., within number in the case of rational beings or measure in the case of corporeal matter.’³⁰ Moreover, Origen claims, very daringly, if the power of God were infinite (ἄπειρος) in the sense thus indicated, he could not even know himself, since the infinite is by its nature incomprehensible (τῇ γὰρ φύσει τὸ ἄπειρον ἀπερίληπτον). In this sense, then, God’s power is limited (πεπερασμένην), but self-limited, in the limitation of the creation through its subjection to his comprehension, oversight, and providence.³¹ Hence Origen pleads: ‘Let no one stumble at the statement, if we put measures (μέτρα) even to God’s power, for to encompass infinite things happens to be an inherent impossibility (ἄπειρα γὰρ περιλαβεῖν τῇ φύσει ἀδύνατον τυγχάνει). But once those things which God himself has inclosed in his grasp have been limited, factual necessity serves to determine the extent of their limitation. For by his power he contains or comprehends all things (ἐμπεριέχει τὰ πάντα), but he himself is contained or comprehended by the mind of no creature.’³²

Origen seems to have overlooked that the eternity of God is different from any mathematical infinity, for since God is not in a genus with anything he cannot be thought of within the same calculus as an infinite series. But Origen was trying ‘by a logical answer to preserve the rule of piety.’³³ This, however, created a real dilemma for him. By pushing back questions endlessly one after the other we reach the conclusion that God was always almighty and always exercising his power, that there was no

²⁸ *De principiis*, 21.14f.

²⁹ *De principiis*, 272.16f.

³⁰ *De principiis*, 360.10f.

³¹ *De principiis*, 164.3f.

³² *De principiis*, 359.16f; 360.1f.

³³ *De principiis*, 273.1f.

beginning to his power or its exercise. But we cannot even speak of God as almighty without assuming the existence of the universe.³⁴ Either we think of God as progressing to almightiness or we assume that the creation was always there for the exercise of his power and care.³⁵ On the other hand, it would be an impiety to think of matter (or that which underlies bodies) as uncreated and co-eternal with the uncreated God. Origen admits to a conflict in our human thoughts and reasoning, but he seeks an exit from the difficulty by speaking of creation as always present and existent in and through its *prefiguration* in the divine Wisdom.³⁶

Origen further distinguishes in Platonic fashion between the two realms of the intelligible and the sensible, the invisible and the visible.³⁷ In biblical language this is the distinction between heaven and earth, or the other-world and this world. He will not have it, however, that the other-world is simply a realm of thought. For we must take seriously the biblical teaching that the Saviour came from the other-world and that the saints go to it.³⁸ 'But whether that world which the Saviour wishes us to know is one separated and widely divided from this in respect of space, quality, or glory, or whether, as it seems to me more likely, it excels in glory and quality but is nevertheless *contained within the compass of this world*, is not certain, and is, I think, still rather strange for human thoughts and minds.'³⁹ Origen goes on to speak of the other-world as comprising seven 'worlds' or 'heavens', one sphere beyond the other.

Just as with us the heaven contains all things that are under it, so that one, they say, with its vast magnitude and indescribable compass holds together the spaces of the other spheres by a more magnificent ambit, so that all things are within it as this world of ours is under the sun . . . It is within that heaven that the 'earth' which our Saviour promised to the meek and gentle in the Gospel is contained and enclosed.⁴⁰

Origen's difficulty here is reminiscent of that which faced Plato, for like him he will not think of the χωρισμός as local separation or physical distance, yet he is concerned not to discard entirely spatial concepts when

³⁴ *De principiis*, 40.14f; 41.1f; 65.9f; 66.1ff.

³⁵ *De principiis*, 42.1ff; 110.7ff.

³⁶ *De principiis*, 67.3f, 12f.

³⁷ *De principiis*, 91.11f; 92.1f; 289ff; *Contra Celsum*, 2.90.19ff; 198.6ff.

³⁸ *De principiis*, 121.20ff.

³⁹ *De principiis*, 122.7ff; 190.1f.

⁴⁰ *De principiis*, 123.2ff.

speaking of the other-world. Hence he speaks not only of a 'heavenly place' (τόπος οὐράνιος),⁴¹ but of a 'superheavenly place' (τόπος ὑπερουράνιος),⁴² as well as of an 'earthly place' (τόπος περιγείος).⁴³ Earlier in the *De principiis* he had insisted that mind does not need physical space. It acts in accordance with its rational nature, and is not hindered by diversity of places (*ex locorum diversitate*) from fulfilling its own activities. It is not physical but intelligible magnitude that the mind needs (*indiget sane mens magnitudine intelligibili*) for its development and advance.⁴⁴ That is, the concept of place or space must be formed in accordance with the nature of the occupying agent. This, argues Origen, is the principle we must follow in thinking out the nature of spatial concepts in theological statements about God if we are to think worthily of him.

This problem becomes particularly acute when we speak of the Incarnation as the coming of the Son of God from the other-world of God to us in this world, and then of his returning to God. But before we examine Origen's treatment of this there is something else that we must take into account, namely, that in creating rational beings in this world God has involved them in physical existence. Thus bodily nature is needed to support the lives and uphold the movements of spiritual and rational minds. Life without a body is found only in the divine Trinity.⁴⁵ Moreover, bodies are needed for diversity and individuation in this world.⁴⁶ Rational natures of this kind are necessarily subject to change and alteration, for they are endowed with the power of free and voluntary movement.⁴⁷ When somehow rational souls took the way of evil, they embarked on a course of withdrawal from God and of privation. As a punishment, they were incarcerated in their bodies and subjected to futility by being bound to what is not their proper nature.⁴⁸ It is in this

⁴¹ *Contra Celsum*, 1.270.22; 2.89.32; 130.6; 196.3.

⁴² *Contra Celsum*, 2.362.25.

⁴³ *Contra Celsum*, 1.41.25; 111.6; 2.129.24, 28; 201.14. Cf. also σωματικός τόπος 2, 182.32; 183.30f.; 351.4ff.

⁴⁴ *De principiis*, 21.13ff.; 22.4ff.; 23.1ff.

⁴⁵ *De principiis*, 112.2f.; 22.21f.; 86.5f.

⁴⁶ *De principiis*, 109.9f. See also 166.6f., where Origen indicates that God makes use of man's fall in his purpose of diversification. Souls were created alike and equal, of the same nature (169.25; 239.3f.).

⁴⁷ *De principiis*, 165.17ff.

⁴⁸ *De principiis*, 63.10ff.; 81.1ff.; 91.5f.; 96.1f.; 97.1f.; 104.8f.; 160.19f.; 165.22f.; 275.1ff.; 238.19f.; 239.1ff.; *Contra Celsum*, 2.201f.

context that Origen reverts most to the Greek habit of speaking of the material body as confining what it contains within fixed limits.⁴⁹ Now rational souls can move only in two directions, downward or upward; in going downward they become more and more confined within the limits and darkness of material existence, but in going upward they move into openness and light. It is a movement from restrictive space into wide intelligible magnitudes, from earthly space to heavenly space. One is the way of privation, the other the way of fullness in God. Yet this does not involve local transition from one place to another so much as the spiritualisation and illumination of human existence until it is rendered transparent and open to God's fullness.⁵⁰ What rational beings required in their fallen and confined condition was the help of God himself, but if salvation was to come it could not take place by the pressure of some necessity or by force, but by word, by reason, and by teaching.⁵¹ Thus the incarnation of the Son of God is regarded by Origen as the injection of the Word and Wisdom of God into the constrained and captive condition of humanity in order to break man out of his confinement and restore him to the fullness of God. And it is from this ground that he thinks through the problem of spatial and temporal concepts in Christian theology.

Certainly this was the line that Origen later took in debate with Celsus in his attack upon the Christian belief that God himself comes down to men.⁵² So far as God himself is concerned, Origen insists that in coming down to us God who fills heaven and earth does not leave his own seat (τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἔδραν, reverting thereby to the Platonic term), and his coming down or his condescending to us must be understood tropologically or in a figurative sense.⁵³ But in regard to the Incarnation, he has this to say:

Even, then, if the God of the universe descends with Jesus into human life by his power, and even if the Word who 'was in the beginning with God',

⁴⁹ *De principiis*, 5.64.12f; 96.11; 97.3f; 171.3; 260.21; 282.13f.

⁵⁰ *De principiis*, 23.1f; 84.22ff; 85.1ff; 89.12f; 90.1f; 91.1f; 101.28f; 102.1f; 169.18ff; 174.11f; 181.1ff; 182.1f; 190.1ff; 191.5ff; 240.20ff; 241.1ff; 242.12ff; 260.15ff; 261.1ff; 262.17f. Cf. Athanasius, *Contra gentes*, 23, *PG*, 25.48 b.

⁵¹ *De principiis*, 278.24f.

⁵² *Contra Celsum*, 1 (4.2-5), 275.9ff; 277.14ff.

⁵³ *Contra Celsum*, 1.275.14f.; 282.18f.

and who was himself God, comes to us, he does not go away from where he was, nor does he leave his throne, as though one place were deprived of him, and another which previously did not possess him were filled (οὐκ ἔξεδρος γίνεται οὐδὲ καταλείπει τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἔδραν, ὡς τινὰ μὲν τόπον κενὸν αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἔτερον δὲ πλήρη, οὐ πρότερον αὐτὸν ἔχοντα). The power and divinity of God comes to dwell among men through the man whom God wills to choose and in whom he finds room (ἐν ᾧ εὐρίσκει χώραν) without changing from one place (τόπον) to another or leaving his former place (χώραν) empty and filling another. Even supposing that we do say that he leaves one place and fills another, we would not mean this in any spatial sense (οὐ περὶ τόπου τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀποφανόμεθα).⁵⁴

Certainly Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is with us 'locally here below on earth' (μεθ' ἡμῶν τῶν τοπικῶς κάτω ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), but 'He is also with those who cleave to him everywhere, and is indeed also everywhere with those who do not know him.'⁵⁵

In similar manner in the *De principiis* Origen places both these statements side by side because the nature of the case demands it. In the Incarnation the only-begotten Son of God who was God, who was hypostatically the Wisdom and Word of God, came to earth and was made man, although *he still remained what he was*, namely God. Begotten of the Father, he was yet without 'beginning', not only of the sort that can be distinguished by periods of time, but of the other sort conceivable by the mind alone. God of God, Light from Light, he really became man, was born and suffered in truth, and not in appearance only, and truly rose again from the dead.⁵⁶ Origen's characteristic way of expressing this is bipolar: He became man, without ceasing to be God. He emptied himself, but thereby displayed to us the fullness of the Godhead.⁵⁷ 'Although brought within the narrow compass of a human body (*brevissimae insertus humani corporis formae*) the Son of God showed from the likeness of his works and his power to those of God the Father the immense and invisible greatness that was in him.'⁵⁸ He was made in the form of a servant in order to

⁵⁴ *Contra Celsum*, 1.277.26f. (tr. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge, 1953, p. 187).

⁵⁵ *Contra Celsum*, 2.13.9f.

⁵⁶ *De principiis*, 5.10.5f.; 28.13 ff.; 29.11f.; 38.1ff.

⁵⁷ *De principiis*, 38.17f.

⁵⁸ *De principiis*, 39.6; 43.5ff.

subject us in himself to the Father.⁵⁹ As such he is the Mediator, the only-begotten Son of God, yet the first-born of all creation.

Of all the marvellous and splendid things about him there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very Word of the Father, and the very Wisdom of God, in which were created 'all things visible and invisible', can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man (*intra circumscriptionem eius hominis*) who appeared in Judaea; yes, how the Wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a little child and uttered noises like those of crying children; and further, how it was that he was troubled, as we are told, in the hour of death, as he himself confesses when he says, 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death', and how at the last he was led to that death which is considered by men to be the most shameful of all – even though on the third day he rose again.⁶⁰

When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the primal and ineffable nature of Deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder that it knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death. For this reason we pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same person, in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions caused by deceptive fantasies. But to utter these things in human ears and to explain them by words far exceeds the powers we possess either in our moral worth or in mind and speech. I think indeed that it transcends the capacity even of the holy Apostles.⁶¹

The fact that theology must speak in a way appropriate to and worthy of the divine and the human natures of Christ means that theology is forced

⁵⁹ *De principiis*, 79.1ff.; 276.12ff.; 277.1ff.

⁶⁰ *De principiis*, 139.15.

⁶¹ *De principiis*, 140.25f; 141.1ff (tr. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles*, London, 1936, pp. 109f.).

to speak in a rather paradoxical manner about *space*. Earlier in the *De principiis* Origen had come up against a similar problem in relation to *time*. Here, after having said that 'the Holy Spirit would never have been included in the unity of the Trinity, that is, along with God the unchangeable Father, and with his Son, unless he had always been the Holy Spirit', he added: 'Of course these terms which we use such as "always" or "has been", or any similar terms bearing a temporal significance, must be interpreted with reservations and not pressed; for they relate to time; but the matters of which we are now speaking, though described in temporal language for the purposes of discussion, in their essential nature transcend all idea of time'.⁶² The same question is raised in the fourth book with regard to the Son as well.

This phrase that we use, that there never was a time when he did not exist, must be accepted with a reservation. For the very words 'when' or 'never' have a temporal significance, whereas the statements we make about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit must be considered as transcending all time and all ages and all eternity. For it is this Trinity alone which exceeds all comprehension, not only of temporal but even of eternal intelligence. The rest of things, however, which are external to the Trinity, must be measured by ages and periods of time. The fact, therefore, that the Word is God, and was in the beginning with God, must not lead anyone to suppose that this Son of God is contained in any place (*in loco aliquo contineri*); nor must the fact that he is Wisdom, or Truth, or Righteousness, or Sanctification, or Redemption; for all these need no place in which to act or work, but each of them must be understood as referring to those who have a share of the Word's power and effectiveness.⁶³

Origen explains that when we are brought through redemption and sanctification to be 'with Christ', this does not mean that we take leave of physical space, but rather that we will 'remain in some place situated on earth' (*in aliquo loco in terra posito*), for it is we who will be changed, passing through a series of 'abiding places' into the nearer presence and fullness of God in Christ.⁶⁴ 'Christ himself, however, is everywhere and is active throughout the universe. We are not to understand him any longer as being in that narrow limit to which he was confined for us and

⁶² *De principiis*, 54.9f. (tr. G. W. Butterworth, p. 33).

⁶³ *De principiis*, 350.18ff.; 351.1ff. (tr. G. W. Butterworth, p. 316).

⁶⁴ *De principiis*, 190.1f.

for our sakes, i.e., not in that circumscribed state which he had among men when he was located in our body on earth in such a way that he could be thought of as enclosed in some one place (*in uno aliquo circumsaepius loco*).⁶⁵ For saints to reach that place where he now is means that without leaving earth they will have a purified vision enabling them to penetrate even to celestial regions in their understanding of the truth.⁶⁶

Origen acknowledged that this position involves serious problems in regard to biblical interpretation, and so he set himself to deal with that before further consideration of the problem of space and time.⁶⁷ The main point he makes in his hermeneutical discussion is that the Scriptures themselves partake of this two-fold character, for they are both 'somatic' and 'pneumatic' since they refer us beyond sensible and bodily matters to God himself. Hence we have to interpret their statements worthily in accordance with the nature of the God whom they reveal. Biblical statements have thus a two-fold reference: to what is temporal and spatial, and to what is beyond time and space. We cannot break through the physical sense of the Scriptures without the direct help of God and the enlightenment of his Spirit, but when our ears and eyes are trained and adapted to the divine truth we will be able to interpret the Scriptures in accordance with their deeper message, without necessarily disparaging their more obvious sense. If, however, we try to interpret all biblical statements on the same level, we will come up against absurdities and contradictions so impossible as to be quite unworthy of God. On the other hand, we have to remember that we are up against certain necessities of our finite minds, and we have to beware of trying to think beyond rational limits.⁶⁸ No doubt in dealing with the Scriptures, as Philo earlier had done with the Old Testament, Origen went much too far in allegorical interpretations, while at the same time under the influence of Platonic philosophy he tended to disparage the physical and temporal aspects of the Gospel as 'shadow' compared to the timeless 'realities' in God. But his intention was sane and sound, that is, to think consistently as far as he could of God in accordance with the nature of God, since to do anything else would be

⁶⁵ *De principiis*, 191.1-4.

⁶⁶ *De principiis*, 191.5f.

⁶⁷ *De principiis*, 5 (4.1-4), 292ff.

⁶⁸ *De principiis*, 345-346, 350.10f.

an act of impiety. Thus at the end of his 'digression' on hermeneutics, Origen says,

It was intended to show that there are certain things, the significance of which just cannot be explained properly in human language but which are made clear more through simple understanding than through any properties of words. It is to this rule that understanding even of the divine writings must be kept, in order that the things said there may be judged not according to the meanness of the speech but according to the divinity of the Holy Spirit who inspired this composition.⁶⁹

What then do we mean when we speak of the Son of God being 'in' a place, or of Christ being 'in' St Paul, or 'in' Peter or John, whether they are on earth or 'in heaven' as 'in' Michael or Gabriel? From the fact that he is 'in' people in heaven and in earth it is evident that 'the divinity of the Son of God is not shut up in any place, otherwise in so far as it was in one place it would not be in another (*divinitas filii dei non in loco aliquo concluderetur, alioquin in ipso tantum fuisset et in altero non fuisset*); but if in accordance with the majesty of its incorporeal nature it is shut up in no place, then in no place is it understood to be wanting'.⁷⁰ There is a difference, on the other hand, that must be taken into account: He is not present in all beings in the same way, for he is more openly present in some than in others, but this is a presence that is to be understood from the side of their sharing in God's Word and Wisdom, and therefore is one that depends on their merits.⁷¹ We are to be sure talking here of the Son of God through whom all things, visible and invisible, have been made, so that we have to understand his presence primarily in accordance with his own creative agency.⁷²

What then of the *bodily* advent and the *incarnation* of the only-begotten Son of God?

It is not to be thought that all the majesty of his Deity was shut within the limits of a very small body (*intra brevissimi corporis claustra conclusa est*) so that all God's Word, his Wisdom, substantial Truth and Life were divided from the Father or forced and confined within the smallness of his body (*vel a Patris divulsa sit vel intra corporis illius coercita et circumscripta brevitatem*),

⁶⁹ *De principiis*, 347.23f.

⁷⁰ *De principiis*, 351.18f.

⁷¹ *De principiis*, 351.7f; 23f; 352.1f.

⁷² *De principiis*, 352.4ff.

nor is that majesty to be thought of as operating nowhere else. The cautious confession of piety ought to be between these two, in the belief that nothing of Deity was wanting in Christ, and in the conviction that there was no separation at all from the substance of the Father, which is present everywhere.⁷³

Origen sees a clear instance of this in the Gospel when John the Baptist says of Christ in his bodily absence, 'There stands one among you whom you know not, who comes after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.'⁷⁴ 'Certainly it could not be said of one who was absent, so far as his bodily presence was concerned, that he stood in the midst of those to whom he was not present in a bodily way. From this it is shown that the Son of God was both *wholly* present in his body and *wholly* present everywhere (*Unde ostenditur quia et in corpore totus et ubique totus aderat filius dei*).⁷⁵

This does not mean that only part of the Deity of the Son of God was in Christ while the other part was elsewhere or everywhere. That would be to misunderstand the nature of incorporeal and invisible substance, Origen argues, to which partition and division do not apply. 'For he is in all things, and through all things, and above all things, in the mode of which we have already spoken, i.e., in accordance with our understanding of him as Wisdom or Word or Life or Truth, by which all local confinement is undoubtedly excluded (*omnis sine dubio conclusio localis excluditur*).'⁷⁶ Origen thus rejects the application to the Incarnation of any container view of space defined in terms of its immovable limits, and any receptacle view of the self-emptying or *kenosis* of the Son that involves an emptying however partial of material content out of him. The Incarnation involves the *whole* Son of God, so that, difficult though it may be, we must think of him as *wholly* present in the body he assumed, and yet as *wholly* everywhere in accordance with his divine nature. This is explained from the side of the agency of the Son who for the sake of our salvation came among men, assuming not only a physical body but a human soul, in order to fulfil the divine *economy*.⁷⁷ Here in this unique mode of presence and activity in the Incarnation we have

⁷³ *De principiis*, 352.15f.

⁷⁴ John 1.26-27.

⁷⁵ *De principiis*, 5.352.25f. Cf. *Contra Cebum*, 2 (5.12), 13.1ff.

⁷⁶ *De principiis*, 353.5f.

⁷⁷ *De principiis*, 353.8f.

manifested the way in which the saving purpose of God is taken within human and worldly existence.⁷⁸

Origen now sets himself to offer some kind of explanation of this. He reverts to an argument he had developed earlier to show that, far from being eternal and unchangeable, essential matter (the substance underlying every body throughout the universe) is capable of change and can pass from one given quality into another.⁷⁹ He adds to this the idea, already noted, that it is through God's own comprehending of what he had made that he imparts to this creation its rational and determinate qualities.⁸⁰ Now in Jesus Christ it is the Word and Wisdom of God that have become incarnate, that Word and Wisdom through which all things visible and invisible, corporeal and rational, were created and given their order and form. Hence we have to think of the redemptive activity of God in Christ as part of his whole economy, because redemption and creation come together in the Incarnate Son. The work of the Son and of the Father are one and the same, so that in his Incarnation the Son continues the work of the Father.⁸¹ In view of this, it is clear that we are to think of the relation of the Incarnation to space in accordance with the creative and determining agency of the Incarnate One. Even when he unites himself to us in the body and is encompassed in a bounded human life, by his very nature and activity he springs it open; and he can accomplish this for he is himself the Source and Creator of all material body throughout the universe and contains all time and space in the power of his Word.

How does this affect us? In reply Origen concludes the *De principiis* by claiming that we may partake in this liberating and emancipating activity of Christ through rational community or kinship with Christ. 'As the Son and the Father are one, so also the soul which the Son assumed and the Son himself are one (ὡσπερ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἓν εἰσιν, οὕτω καὶ ἦν εἴληφεν ὁ υἱὸς ψυχὴν καὶ αὐτὸς ἓν εἰσιν)⁸² The human soul, then, is not only the medium, as it were, of his union with a creaturely body, but the medium of our union with him.⁸³ We rational beings have thus a kind of

⁷⁸ See *De principiis*, 5.28.1ff and *Contra Celsum*, 2.150.2.

⁷⁹ *De principiis*, 109.9ff; 110.1ff; 111.1ff; 356.21f and 357.1ff. Here Origen claims a certain agreement with the atomists (18f). See also 358.26f and 359.1ff.

⁸⁰ *De principiis*, 45.10ff; 46.1f; 139.1ff.

⁸¹ *De principiis*, 359.16f; 360.1ff.

⁸² *De principiis*, 354.15-16.

⁸³ *De principiis*, 361-364.

'blood-relationship' with God through Christ, and through that relationship we have a share in divine Truth. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not related to the universe like Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover', for they stand in a relation of knowledge to themselves as well as to all created things. By sharing in the incarnate Word and Wisdom of God we are given to share in that divine knowledge. By its nature the rational mind has been placed in a body and must advance from sensible things, which are bodily, to things beyond sense, which are incorporeal and intelligible, but this advance is actually made possible through the bodily Incarnation of the Son of God, and through the rational teaching he imparts to us. And this is the way, as Origen has already explained, in which we may ascend to heavenly places and thus, without leaving our physical location on earth, be emancipated from the narrow confinement of dark material existence, in which we have been involved through evil. To be saved means to have our place on earth opened out to the kind of place where Christ is; to be saved means to be brought to share in the fullness of God and thus to reach true magnitude and space of mind in communion with him.

3

There can be no doubt that Origen did a great deal to help the Christian Church toward an articulate understanding of the Gospel with a philosophical grasp of some of the most difficult problems. But Origen's thought represents the penultimate stage before Nicaea. There was not a little in his teaching that was unacceptable, particularly in the areas of anthropology, angelology, and cosmology, with his grand theory of the creation, fall, and restoration of rational souls, while his allegorical exegesis opened the door to many fancies. But as his teaching was purified of its speculative ideas, it became clear that he had prepared the ground for a scientific theology which could meet the Church's need. Such a theology emerged at Nicaea and was defended and advanced most formidably by Athanasius in the East and Hilary in the West. It will be sufficient for our purpose, in rounding out this essay, to note the principal points regarding our theme that are to be found in the writings of Athanasius.

First (1), it is once again the transcendence of God that is quite

fundamental to Athanasius who maintained it with great force in his youthful *Contra gentes* over against all heathen notions of deity. Yet he insisted no less on the immanence of his transcendent God, while rejecting the philosophical notion of the divine *Logos* as a cosmological principle. The Word of God is the personal, living, and active Self-Word (αὐτολόγος) through whom all things visible and invisible were created out of nothing, and who orders and holds the universe together by binding it into such a relation to God that it is preserved from breaking up into nothingness or dropping out of existence, while at the same time imparting to it light and rationality. He leaves nothing void of his power (μηδὲν ἔρημον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεως)⁸⁴ Since this God is both One and Lord of heaven and earth there can be no other 'god' beside him such as the demiurge of gnostic dualism. 'Where would such a god be, if the one true God fills all things in his embrace of heaven and earth?'⁸⁵ In the nature of the case it is nonsensical to ask such questions about God, whether he is without place (χωρὶς τόπου) or whether he is in place (ἐν τόπῳ). To put these questions is to presuppose that God can be thought of in a way parallel with ourselves.⁸⁶

In the second place (2), for Athanasius it is with the Incarnation that the problem of spatial concepts in theology arises. 'The "asomatic" and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes into our spatial realm although he was not far off before (παραγίνεται εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν χώραν, οὐτι γὰρ μακρὰν ὦν πρότερον). For no part of the creation was void of him (αὐτοῦ κενόν), but he fills all things everywhere, while remaining present with the Father. But he does come in loving and revealing condescension to be with us men.'⁸⁷ Here again we have the paradox that the Son or Word of God is fully present with us in our space and time and yet remains present with the Father. He is actively engaged, deploying himself throughout the universe in all its dimensions, 'above in the act of creation, below in the act of incarnation'.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ *Contra gentes*, 40–42 (PG, 25.81 c, 84 b).

⁸⁵ *Contra gentes*, 6 (PG, 25.43 b).

⁸⁶ *Contra Arianos*, 1.23 (PG, 26.60 b–c).

⁸⁷ *De incarnatione*, 8 (PG, 25.109 a); 14 (PG, 25.120 c); *Sermo major de fide*, 7 (PG, 26.1268 b). See further *Contra Arianos*, 1.43. Our being made 'one body with Christ' has the effect of introducing us into the realms (εἰς χώρας) of the heavenly powers and beings (PG, 26.99 b).

⁸⁸ *De incarnatione*, 16 (PG, 25.124 c).

For he was not shut up in the body (οὐ γὰρ δὴ περικεκλεισμένος ἦν ἐν τῷ σώματι). And he was not in the body in such a way as not to be elsewhere, nor did he move the body in such a way that the universe was left void of his activity and providence. But the most unexpected thing (τὸ παραδοξότατον) is that Word though he is, he was not contained by anything but he himself rather contains all things (οὐ συνείχετο μὲν ὑπό τινος, συνεῖχε δὲ τὰ πάντα μᾶλλον αὐτός). And just as while he is present *in* the whole of creation, he is 'outside' everything in respect of his essential being but is 'in' all things in respect of his own powers (ἐκτός μὲν ἐστι τοῦ παντός κατ' οὐσίαν, ἐν πᾶσι δὲ ἐστι ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεσι),⁸⁹ giving order to the universe, extending his providence to all and in all things without being contained (περιέχων τὰ ὅλα καὶ μὴ περιεχόμενος) but being wholly and in every respect in his Father alone (ἀλλ' ἐν μόνῳ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ πατρὶ ὅλος ὢν κατὰ πάντα) – so also while being present in a human body and giving life to it himself, he was quite consistently giving life to the universe as well: He was 'in' every event and yet 'outside' the universe (ἐν τοῖς πᾶσι ἐγένετο, καὶ ἔξω τῶν ὅλων ἦν). Moreover while he made himself known from the body through his works he was not unmanifest through his activity in the universe.⁹⁰

Athanasius considers here the analogy of the human soul and body, and of its relation in function to what is outside the body.⁹¹ But this analogy does not hold, for man is unable through his thought, for example, to influence the revolution of the heavenly bodies.

Surely the Word of God was not in this man in that way, for he was not bound to his body, but rather was himself master of it in such a way that he was in this particular body and yet was participant in all events, and while

⁸⁹ Cf. Clement, *Seromata*, 2.2: 'He who is himself far off has come very near – oh unspeakable wonder. "I am a God that draws near", says the Lord. He is far off in respect of his essence (πόρρω μὲν κατ' οὐσίαν) – for how can what is begotten ever approach the Unbegotten? – but he is very near in power, that by which all things are embraced. . . . For the power of God is always present, actually impinging upon us, in oversight, beneficence and instruction. . . . For God is not in darkness or in place but is above both space and time, and the property of events (οὐ γὰρ ἐν γνώφῳ ἢ τόπῳ ὁ θεός, ἀλλ' ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου καὶ τῆς τῶν γεγονότων ιδιότητος). Therefore neither does he ever dwell in a part, either as containing or as contained (οὔτε περιέχων οὔτε περιεχόμενος), either by limitation or by division. "For what house will ye build me? saith the Lord." On the contrary, he has not even built one for himself, since he cannot be confined (ἀχώρητος). Even if the heaven is said to be his throne, not even thus is he contained (οὐδ' οὕτω περιέχεται), but he rests delighted in the creatiu.' (Ed. Otto Stählin, *GCS*, 2, Leipzig, 1906, pp. 115–116). Cf. Athanasius, *Sermo major de fide*, 29 (*PG*, 26.1284 b-c).

⁹⁰ *De incarnatione*, 17 (*PG*, 25.125 a-b).

⁹¹ Cf. *De incarnatione*, 42–43 (*PG*, 25.172 a; 173 a) and Plato, *Politicus*, 273 D.

he was outside the universe, he abode in his Father alone. And this was the wonderful thing that while he went about freely as a man, as Word he was the life-giving Source of all things, and as Son he was together with the Father. Hence not even when the virgin gave him birth was he passive, nor was he defiled by being in the body but rather sanctified it. For not even by being in all things does he partake of their nature but on the contrary is himself the source from which they are quickened and sustained.⁹²

A fundamental point here is that when the Word or Son of God became man, assumed from us a human body, and therefore shared our physical space, *he remained* what he ever was,⁹³ so that the spatial ingredient in the concept of the Incarnation must be interpreted from the side of *his active and controlling occupation* of bodily existence and place. Space is a predicate of the Occupant; it is determined by his agency, and is to be understood in accordance with his nature. He cannot therefore have the same space-relation (χώρα) with the Father as we creatures have; otherwise he would be quite incapable (χωρεῖν) of God.⁹⁴

Third (3), according to Athanasius the Son of God through his relation with us fulfils the part of a Mediator (μεσίτης) even in regard to space-relations between men and God, for mere creatures are unable to make 'room' (χωρεῖν) for God in their natures, and far less are they able to endure the Creator in their created beings. But this bridge is supplied in the Incarnation of the Son.⁹⁵ While he took from the virgin Mary a human body, he purified it and made it 'capable of giving room for the whole fullness of the Godhead bodily' (τὸ χωρήσει δυνάμενον ἄχραντον σῶμα πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς), as well as of bearing human suffering when he gave himself willingly for the whole world.⁹⁶ The relation between the Son and the Father cannot be thought out in terms of a receptacle (ἀγγεῖον) notion of room or space. That would mean that we think out the problem simply in terms of bodies and containers, which was precisely what the Arians were guilty of, a material approach, in which they thought of the Father and the Son as each filling

⁹² *De incarnatione*, 17 (PG, 25.125 b-c).

⁹³ This was the point made so strongly by Origen, and was later taken up by the whole Church. Cf. also *Contra Apollinarium*, 2.3, 7, or 16: μένων δ ἦν, which is certainly Athanasian, if not from Athanasius himself (PG, 26.1136 b; 1144 a; 1160 a).

⁹⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 3.18 (PG, 26.360 b); also *Ad Serapionem*, 2, 4 (PG, 26.629 b-d, 632 a); and *De synodis*, 26 (PG, 26.733 b).

⁹⁵ *Contra Arianos*, 2.26 (PG, 26.201 b); *De decretis*, 8 (PG, 25.457 b).

⁹⁶ *Sermo major de fide*, 13 (PG, 26.1269 c).

the emptiness of the other (. . . ὡςπερ ἐν ἀγγείοις κενοῖς ἐξ ἀλλήλων πληρούμενοι ὥστε τὸν μὲν υἱὸν πληροῦν τὸ κενὸν τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸν δὲ πατέρα πληροῦν τὸ κενὸν τοῦ υἱοῦ).⁹⁷ That is to say, a receptacle notion of space can only lead to a false kenoticism which does not do justice to the 'fullness' and 'perfection' of either the Father or the Son, for it fails to think of them in accordance with their natures. The relation of the Father with the Son and the Son with the Father must be thought out in terms of 'abiding' and 'dwelling', in which each wholly rests in the other: 'I in the Father and the Father in Me', as the Lord expressed it.⁹⁸ This is the doctrine of the *περιχώρησις*, in which we are to think of the whole being of the Son as proper to the Father's essence, as God from God, Light from Light.⁹⁹ Creaturely realities are such that they can be divided up in separated places (*ἐν μεμερισμένοις τόποις*), but this is impossible with the Uncreated Source of all being, with Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, who wholly dwell in one another and who each have room fully for the others in the one God.¹⁰⁰ Since then 'the Son was ever with the Father, for he is in the bosom of the Father, and the bosom of the Father was never void of the Deity of the Son',¹⁰¹ it follows that Christ the Incarnate Son is the 'place' where the Father is to be known and to be believed, for he is the 'place' (or the 'locus') where God is to be found. But 'place' here, of course, must be interpreted in accordance with the nature of God and of his activity in revelation and redemption through the Incarnation.

We thus come to the fourth (4) of Athanasius' principles, namely, that 'terms must be taken in one way through their reference to God and understood in another way in their reference to men (*ἄλλως ἐπὶ θεοῦ τὰς λέξεις λαμβάνομεν, καὶ ἑτέρως ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ταύτας διανοοῦμεθα*).'¹⁰² God is not as man and man is not as God. Thus even if the same terms in the Holy Scriptures are used of God and of man, nevertheless we must learn to interpret them *differently* in accordance with the nature of

⁹⁷ *Contra Arianos*, 3.1 (PG, 26.324 b).

⁹⁸ *Contra Arianos*, 3.1 (PG, 26.321 b-c, 324 a). Cf. *De decretis*, 26 (PG, 25.464 a).

⁹⁹ *Contra Arianos*, 3.3 (PG, 26.328 a ff). See A. Robertson's notes, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 4, Athanasius, pp. 393 and 395.

¹⁰⁰ See *Ad Serapionem*, 3.4 (PG, 26.629 b-d, and 632 a). Cf. also Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus*, 51, and Jerome, *Commentaria in Ezekiel*, 3.12: '*Filius locus est Patris, sicut et Pater locus est Filii*'. (Cited by Robertson, *loc. cit.*)

¹⁰¹ *Expositio fidei*, 2 (PG, 25.204 a-c); *Contra Arianos*, 3.4 (PG, 26.377-80).

¹⁰² *De decretis*, 11 (PG, 25.411 c).

each of the subjects indicated (κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου τῶν σημαιομένων φύσιν)¹⁰³ Or as Athanasius puts it elsewhere: 'For terms do not take away from his nature, but rather that Nature changes the terms while attracting them to itself (οὐ γὰρ αἱ λέξεις τὴν φύσιν παραιροῦνται, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἢ φύσις τὰς λέξεις εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἔλκουσα μεταβάλλει). For terms are not prior to essences, but essences are first and terms second.'¹⁰⁴

In accordance with this principle, we have to take into account the difference between the activity of that which is by nature self-existent and that which by nature is contingent and derivative. If, then, men do not create as God creates, we have to think differently of divine and human occupants of space. 'Men who are not capable of self-existence are enclosed in place as contingent things (ἐν τόπῳ τυγχάνοντές εἰσι περιεχόμενοι) and consist in the Word of God. But God is Self-existent, enclosing all things and enclosed by none (ὁ δὲ θεὸς ὧν ἐστι καθ' ἑαυτὸν, περιέχων τὰ πάντα, καὶ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς περιεχόμενος), and he is "in" all things according to his goodness and power, but "without" all things in accordance with his proper nature.'¹⁰⁵ Now since the Son of God cannot be divided from the Father, it follows that even though he became incarnate among us, he remains at the right hand of the Father, for where the Father is, there also is his Word (ἐνθα γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ, ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ τοῦτου λόγος ἐστίν).¹⁰⁶ This cannot but affect the space-relations of Christ, for it is in accordance with his proper nature and substance.

Finally (5), Christ is 'in' us through sharing with us our bodily existence, but he is also 'in' the Father through his oneness with him.¹⁰⁷ But how are we to think of the relation between this 'in' and 'in'? It is evident that in each case we have to respect the divine nature and the human nature. 'As we, while receiving the Spirit do not lose the nature proper to us, so the Lord, while becoming man for our sakes, and putting on a body, was no less God (οὐδὲν ἤττον ἦν θεός), for he was not diminished by the development of the body, but rather "deified" it and

¹⁰³ *De decretis*, 10 (PG, 25.441 b). See also *De sententia Dionysii*, 9 (PG, 25.493 a).

¹⁰⁴ *Contra Arianos*, 2.3 (PG, 26.152 c).

¹⁰⁵ *De decretis*, 11 (PG, 25.441 d). Cf. *Sermo major de fide*, 29 (PG, 26.1284 c): πάντα δὲ χωρεῖ ὁ θεός, ὑπ' οὐδενὸς δὲ οὐ χωρεῖται.

¹⁰⁶ *De decretis*, 11 (PG, 25.444 b).

¹⁰⁷ *De decretis*, 31 (PG, 25.473 c-d): *Contra Arianos*, 3.22 (PG, 26.369 a).

rendered it immortal.¹⁰⁸ 'Deification' did not mean, of course, any change in the nature of human essence, but that without being less human we are by grace made to participate in divine Sonship.¹⁰⁹ The Son is of the Father and in the Father in an *absolute* sense, which we can never be.¹¹⁰

Athanasius then offers an analogical account of this relation through a discussion of Christ's prayer to the Father that *as* the Father was in him and he was in the Father so the disciples might be one in him. Everything turns upon the precise meaning of *as*. It cannot mean that we are to be sons of God as the Father is by nature in the Son and the Son is by nature in the Father, but it must mean according to our own nature. Therefore a *distance* (διάστασις) and a *difference* (διαφορά) are involved.¹¹¹

The *as* signifies not identity, but an image of or a pointer to what is spoken of (ὁ δὲ λέγων καθὼς οὐ ταυτότητα δείκνυσιν, ἀλλ' εἰκόνα καὶ παράδειγμα τοῦ λεγομένου).¹¹² . . . Again, in using the word *as* he signifies those who become distantly (πρόρρωθεν) as he is in the Father – distantly, that is, not in place but in nature (πρόρρωθεν δὲ ἐστὶν οὐ τόπῳ ἀλλὰ τῇ φύσει), for in *place* nothing is far from God, but only in nature are all things far from him (ἀλλὰ μόνῃ τῇ φύσει πάντα μακρὰν ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ). As I have already said, he who uses the particle *as* signifies not identity nor equality, but a pointer to what is said in the light of what is perceived (ἀλλὰ παράδειγμα τοῦ λεγομένου κατὰ τι θεωρούμενον).¹¹³

Athanasius then goes on to show through an illustration that *as* implies one thing and another (ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο), that where a difference exists there is a certain parallel relation.¹¹⁴

We shall not be *as* the Son, nor equal to him for we and he are different (οὐκ ἐσόμεθα ὡσπερ ὁ υἱὸς οὐδὲ ἴσοι αὐτῷ, ἄλλο γὰρ καὶ ἄλλο ἐσμέν). The word *as* is applied to us inasmuch as things differing from others in nature become as they, in view of a certain reference beyond them (ἐπεὶ τὰ μὴ κατὰ φύσιν ὄντα πρὸς ἄλλο τι βλέποντα γίνεται ὡσπερ ἐκεῖνα). Wherefore the

¹⁰⁸ *De decretis*, 14 (PG, 25.448 d).

¹⁰⁹ *Contra Arianos*, 3.19–20 (PG, 26.361–365).

¹¹⁰ *Contra Arianos*, 1.56 (PG, 26.129 b-c); 2.62 (PG, 62.280 a-b); 3.22 (PG, 26.369 a).

¹¹¹ *Contra Arianos*, 3.20–21 (PG, 26.364f).

¹¹² *Contra Arianos*, 3.21–22 (PG, 26.368 c).

¹¹³ *Contra Arianos*, 3.22 (PG, 26.369 b).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.23 (PG, 26.369 c).

Son is simply and without any reservation in the Father, for that belongs essentially to him by nature, but so far as we who are not like that by nature are concerned, an image and a pointer are needed (ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἔχοντες τὸ κατὰ φύσιν δεόμεθα εἰκόνας καὶ παραδείγματος) in order that he may say 'As you are in me and I am in you.'¹¹⁵

Παράδειγμα has been translated here not as 'model' or 'representation' or 'illustration' but as 'pointer', for it is essentially an operational term in which some idea or relation is taken from our this-worldly experience and made to point beyond itself to what is quite new in order to help us get some kind of grasp upon it. The idea or relation only approaches what it indicates and does not claim to represent it. By relating παράδειγμα τὸ εἰκόν, i.e., image or likeness, Athanasius shows that he does not use it in the Platonic sense of an archetype or exemplar, nor does he equate it with the copy (or μίμημα) of the archetype. So far as the notion of imitation (μίμησις) comes into his thought, it is to speak of following Christ in the light of the pattern he has given to us.¹¹⁶ But παράδειγμα refers to an image which under the impact of the divine revelation is made to point beyond its creaturely form and content to the intended reality, without however transgressing the distance or rubbing out the difference between them. It has an objective and transcendental reference, but still is no more than an instrument enabling us to get some hold on the reality revealed and not one through which we capture this reality by conceiving of it. The image fulfils its function while making clear its inadequacy, and by pointing intelligibly to what is really apprehensible although ultimately beyond our comprehension. It succeeds in that function only insofar as we can understand the παράδειγμα itself in the light of the reality it serves.¹¹⁷

In the nature of the case the παράδειγματα that we employ in theology are not those that we choose, but those that are forced upon us through the divine revelation, and which have their ultimate ground, correction, and validity in the interrelation between the Father and the Incarnate Son, that is, the interrelation that bridges the χωρισμός between God and man and

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.23 (PG, 26.372 b).

¹¹⁶ See *Contra Arianos*, 3.19ff (PG, 26.361–368). There can be no imitation apart from the Spirit, for without him we are strange and distant from God – imitation is a reproduction through the Spirit of the likeness of Christ in us.

¹¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of the Athanasian concept of παράδειγμα, see *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, chs. 2 (reprinted here as Chapter 11) and 3.

supplies the epistemological context and basis for all theological concepts, and therefore for our understanding of the relation between their creaturely content and the reality of God himself. It is in Christ that the objective reality of God is intelligibly linked with creaturely and physical forms of thought, so that these forms may be adapted and given an orientation which will enable them to point out or direct our minds to what God really makes known of himself, although in view of his infinite nature they will not be able to seize hold of him as he is in himself. The relation of transcendental reference must remain if they are to be successful in pointing us in the direction they intend, but that relation must also have intelligible or conceptual content if it is not to be blind.

If we understand the *paradeigmatic image* this way and apply it to the spatial concepts in the Nicene theology, we will have a pretty good guide to the way in which it was able to relate the being and activity of the Son of God to bodily place (τόπος) when he entered into our human space (χώρα) and became man, without leaving God's 'place' and without leaving the universe empty of his presence and rule. Since space is regarded here from a central point in the creative and redemptive activity of God in Christ, the concept of space as infinite receptacle, or as infinite substance, or as extension conceived either as the essence of matter or as a necessity of our human apprehension, or certainly the concept of space as the first unmoved limit of the container, all fall away. And in their place emerges a concept of space in terms of the relations between God and the physical universe established in creation and incarnation. Space in this formulation is a sort of differential concept that is essentially open-ended, for it is defined in accordance with the interaction between God and man, eternal and contingent happening. This means that the concept of space in the Nicene Creed is relatively closed, so to speak, on our side where it has to do with physical existence, but is infinitely open on God's side. This is why again and again when Byzantine art sought to express this iconically it deliberately reversed the natural perspective of the dais upon which the figure of the incarnate, risen, and ascended Lord was represented. Not as in Figure 1 but as in Figure 2:

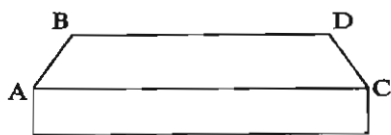


Fig. 1

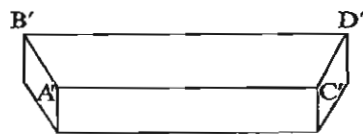


Fig. 2

The Son of God become man could not be presented as one so confined in the limits of the body that the universe was left empty of his government. He could not be represented, therefore, as captured by lines (AB and CD), which when produced upwards meet at some point in finite space, but only within lines (A'B' and C'D'), which when infinitely produced never meet, for on either side they reach out into the absolute openness and eternity of transcendent God.

It must be pointed out, however, that difficulties were bound to arise, and did in fact arise, whenever the receptacle notion of space was raised from the naive popular mind to infect the pious imagination of the Church. We can see something of those results all through the iconoclastic controversies. But the most serious and persistent problems arose when the definition of place as the first unmoved limit of the container was brought back from Aristotelian physics and grafted on to Nicene theology. (Indeed, from these we are not yet free.) The rise of these difficulties is particularly clear in the thought of John of Damascus, with whom the two poles in the Nicene concept of space began to draw apart. On the one hand, he appropriated fully the Aristotelian conception defined by immediate reference to the immovable limit of the container and by ultimate reference to the Unmoved Mover, which tended to give his notion of place or space a closed or rigid character; on the other hand, however, in order to balance this he had both to develop a concept of 'mental place' and to carry his theology much further in an apophatic direction than Athanasius could go, even to claiming, like Basilides, that we cannot know what God is but only what he is not. In other words, the distance that emerges with John of Damascus between the two poles of the Nicene concept tends to be so wide as to call in question the possibility of a fully conceptual connection between their creaturely content and the divine reality to which they point.¹¹⁸

John has other important and interesting things to say on the problem of spatial concepts which we cannot pursue here. Suffice it to say that as his deviation from Nicene theology was carried further in the West, especially after the middle of the twelfth century when so many of the hard-won concepts of the fathers were replaced by Aristotelian concepts, Christian theology was set on a course of inevitable and acute conflict

¹¹⁸ John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* (PG, 94.797f., 850ff., 1008ff.).

between its conceptions of space and those of developing modern science. A clear example of these problems can be seen in the Lutheran acceptance from the late mediaeval tradition of the receptacle notion of space with the consequent difficulties reflected first in the kenoticists and then in the demythologisers. In edifying contrast the Nicene conceptions have proved more fruitful and adaptable, and certainly have a much closer relation to more modern notions of space and time.

THE LOGIC AND ANALOGIC OF BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS IN THE GREEK FATHERS ¹

An examination of the theological writings of the Greek fathers from Irenaeus to the great Alexandrians or Cappadocians reveals three basic insights running throughout their thinking whenever they interpret biblical statements or formulate theological statements of their own: (i) The unapproachableness of God which calls forth from us the attitude of worship and reverence. God's nature and glory are ineffable and his Name, as the Hebrews taught, is unutterable. This means that in our understanding of him, particularly in the forming of conceptions and the formulating of statements, we must break off our activity and let it remain incomplete, for the ineffable and the unutterable is to be honoured, as Basil says, by silence.² (ii) Only by God is God known, and only through God is God revealed – that was an insight that Irenaeus early injected into patristic theology, recalling the biblical statements that only God can fully bear witness to himself. This was taken up later by Athanasius and Basil in their doctrine of the Holy Spirit, for as it is only the Spirit of God who knows the things of God, it is only in the Spirit and by his power that we may really know God and apprehend his Truth. The revelation of the unknowable is the peculiar function of the Spirit. But even in revelation what is revealed remains mystery for it is not the kind of reality that can be brought under our human controlling or dividing and compounding – it transcends us altogether and remains exalted far above us even in being revealed and apprehended. (iii) The application of our ordinary language to speech about God involves a fundamental shift in its meaning. We cannot but use language taken from our common experience in this world when we make theological statements, but even so it is the subject that must be allowed to determine the meaning. It would be inherently wrong to use expressions

¹ Published in *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, pp. 30–45.

² Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18.44.

like 'right hand' or 'bosom' or even 'father' and 'son' as if they are taken to mean when applied to God the same thing that they mean when used of creatures. It is thus one of the most important elements in theological activity to discern the basic change in meaning which our ordinary speech undergoes, lest we should speak in merely human terms of God or speak in unwarranted ways of creatures. This was one of the major issues in the Arian controversy, for the Arians fell into error by refusing to admit the limitations of creaturely images and notions, and by pressing them improperly into use beyond their creaturely reference, and so they distorted the knowledge of God through the misapplication of human and earthly analogies. In order to make the Scriptures suit their preconceived ideas they often interpreted literal statements metaphorically and interpreted metaphorical statements literally.

The Catholic Church took its stand on the biblical teaching that God is beyond comparison (as Athanasius expressed it, Θεός μὲν ἀσύγκριτόν ἐστιν πρᾶγμα)³, and rejected the epistemological principle of the Arians that what people cannot understand cannot be true.⁴ Catholic theology is bound to recognise that there is a measure of impropriety and inadequacy in all human language of God, and therefore must ever be ready to call a halt in speaking of him, in humble acknowledgment of the fact that our human forms of thought and speech are limited or finite and cannot travel beyond a certain point, and be ready at the same time to let the human forms of thought and speech used by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Scriptures point far beyond themselves to the sheer reality and glory of God who alone can bear witness to himself and create in us, beyond any capacity of our own, genuine knowledge of God.

This does not mean that for Athanasius or any of the Greek fathers rational, that is, logical and coherent, thinking has no place. On the contrary, it means that our minds are not to be engrossed like the Arians with themselves, but are directed away toward their proper object (σκοπός) in God to be governed by his Word (λόγος). Consistent thinking in that way involves a thoroughly rational procedure which is reflected in the disciplined mode of theological articulation. It does mean, however, that the primary reference of theological statements is to the reality of God himself infinitely beyond and above us, and that,

³ Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 1.57.

⁴ Athanasius, *Ad Ser.* 1.17; 2.1.

though secondary, the reference of our statements to one another in a train of thought or a logical sequence (ἀκολουθία) cannot be neglected. Hence in arguments with the Arians and Eunomians the Alexandrians and Cappadocians demolish their errors by exposing their intrinsic illogicality and by showing that they are the result of human devising, and without objective foundation in the reality of God himself. Correspondence to objective reality and internal coherence in thought and statement are thus the criteria employed in theological argument.

The two-fold reference of religious language must be kept clearly in view in the interpretation of biblical statements. If we let Athanasius be our guide again here, we may speak of biblical statements as *ostensive* for they employ expressions and relations taken from this world to point beyond to God, and as *sequential* for they function within a coherent pattern of discourse determined by its specific subject-matter. Thus expressions like 'fountain', 'light', or 'begetting' are used in the divine Scripture, by way of relieving the impossibility of apprehending and explaining these matters in words, as *paradeigmata* (παρδείγματα) to point us to the truth of God and give us something for our minds to lay hold of in order that we may think legitimately of God.⁵ Apart from this divine act that lays hold of some of our expressions, images, etc., changing them and making them sufficient and suitable for God's self-revelation, even biblical statements would be empty of objective content or without reference to any given reality. On the other hand, because these statements and the words and images they employ are made to point beyond to a given reality, they manifest among themselves a coherent pattern of reference determined by their common point of reference (σκόπος). Thus the sequence or coherence (ἀκολουθία) they have between one another as human statements is not just a grammatical or formal-logical sequence, but one that is imposed upon them by the subject-matter itself. Hence in interpreting the Scriptures the fathers use the term *scopos* (σκοπός) or 'scope' in two different but allied senses. On the one hand, *scopos* refers to the object to which biblical statements are directed, but that creates a context or a perspective which all biblical statements share and which can be described as their general intention or tenor. Athanasius can speak of Christ himself as the *scope* of the

⁵ Athanasius, *Con. Ar.* 1.20; 2.30; 3.3, 10; *De decr.* 12; *Ad Scr.* 1.19f, etc. I cannot find a suitable translation for this term – certainly 'illustrations' or 'examples' are not adequate, and so I prefer to use the transliteration, *paradeigmata*.

Scriptures, that is, the primary object of their witness even in the Old Testament, but he can also speak of the *scope* of the Scriptures as the fundamental slant given to them by their essential theme, as the perspective within which alone their statements are meaningful and understandable.

This way of regarding and interpreting biblical statements holds good for all the great fathers in the East, not merely for Alexandrians such as Athanasius and Cyril but also for the Antiochene expositors such as Chrysostom, who regularly appeals to the *scopos* and *akolouthia* of biblical statements in order to make clear their meaning. When we put to them the question of the logic and analogic of biblical statements, they constantly say that they have to be interpreted *κατ' εὐσέβειαν* or *κατὰ συνήθειαν*. That is to say, the language of the Scriptures has to be taken in its habitual mode of reverent usage, in which common speech is directed away from ordinary experience to serve the self-revelation of God. The logic of that, however, derives from the reference of these words and statements back or upward (*ἀνά*) to God, and it is only when we get inside that God-ward and godly relationship that we may properly discern their reference or meaning. It is thus in the context of worship and godliness alone, which means within the communion of the Church, indeed within the mind of the Church (*τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸν φρόνημα*), that the Scriptures are rightly to be interpreted in accordance with their inner and real meaning.

Theological statements, that is reflective statements as to the message and content of the biblical statements, are made, however, not just by stringing together biblical citations, but rather by hard exegetical activity in which we interpret biblical statements in the light of the divine Truth to which they direct us from all sides. In this activity we compare the different *paradeigmata*, gathering together from them what they have to say, and summarising them in exact and disciplined (but open-structured) propositions by which we point to the basic pattern of truth in the objective reality and at the same time allow that objective reality to impose its own rationality upon our thinking and articulation of it. The supreme example Athanasius gives of that exegetical and theological activity, is the *homoousion* carefully and devoutly formulated by the Fathers of Nicaea.⁶ The *homoousion* represents, then, the basic logical

⁶ Athanasius, *Ad Afros*, 6, etc.

economy or logical simplicity which is exposed to our scientific inquiry and which we then allow to govern the pattern of our doctrinal formulations, assured that, in this way, our theological statements about God will be made in accordance with the pattern which his own self-communication to us actually has taken place in the Incarnation. The *homoousion* is thus an exceedingly dense or compressed statement, a fundamental dogma, which once it comes to view becomes normative for all faithful theological statements, for it enables them to be made in true correspondence with their proper object and in consistent relation with other faithful statements.

We have referred to the patristic use of 'according to godliness' (κατ' εὐσέβειαν) as expressing the God-ward and devout relationship within which we may properly discern the meaning of biblical statements and go on to make theological statements. But κατ' εὐσέβειαν has a deeper meaning. It refers to 'the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh',⁷ a passage to which the fathers referred again and again in their controversy with Sabellians and Arians alike. The basic logic with which we are concerned is not just some sort of church piety but the logic of God's grace in the Incarnation of the Son. Theological statements can be made truly only when they repose upon that foundation and when they manifest in themselves a 'logic' that corresponds with the actual way which the Word of God has taken in becoming flesh among us, and so raises us up to communion with the eternal God. That is the basic 'logic' that the Fathers of Nicaea sought to express in their formulation of the *homoousion*.

In order to grasp the epistemological significance of the *homoousion* and its continuing importance for theological statement, we must examine more carefully two lines of thought which we find in the fathers – and here I am thinking particularly of Athanasius and Basil, although one could follow through the thought of others at this point in the same way, such as that of Hilary of Poitiers.

(a) The epistemological significance of the *homoousion* becomes clear when we see it against the background of the radical disjunction between the κόσμος αἰσθητός and the κόσμος νοητός which in different ways lay behind Origenism and Gnosticism, and gave rise to the problem of mythology. *Once this disjunction is posited*, as it was axiomatically in the

⁷ 1 Timothy 3.16.

secular culture of the second and third centuries, the following questions must be asked. How are we to understand the biblical statements about the acts of the eternal God within the history of Israel, and so within the κόσμος αἰσθητός? And how are we to regard the *Logos*: does he belong to the eternal side of that disjunction, the κόσμος νοητός, or is he ultimately to be regarded as a creature and therefore as belonging to the κόσμος αἰσθητός?

Then in answer to this first question, it would have to be said that biblical statements about the acts of God himself within space and time can be interpreted only as mythological ways of speaking of something that is eternal and timeless. This is a world of change and decay, of shadow and unreality, but it is the other world, that of the noumenal that is real and changeless. How can God who is impassible and changeless be thought of as entering into our changing world, and living within contingent and temporal existence? It is unthinkable. Yet if we remember, so the Greeks tended to think, that this world partakes of reality in so far as it is a passing reflection of the eternal, then we may interpret the biblical doctrine of the Incarnation or of the crucifixion of the Son of God in some symbolic way as a passing image of some timeless truth in God.

Then, too, in answer to the second question, it would have to be said that the *Logos* belongs to the creaturely side of the disjunction – even if he be regarded as an angelic being and the highest of the angels or spiritual powers, he is nevertheless a created power. In his own being he belongs to this side of that radical disjunction (χωρισμός), to the world of changing, contingent actuality. The *Logos* is thus to be regarded as *detached* from the Being of God (διαίρετος, χωριστός), and as *changeable* (ἄλλοιώτος, τρεπτός). But if we remember, so the Greeks used to think, that there is a mimetic relation between true thought and speech and the eternal forms of the real world, we would have to interpret the *Logos* or Son of God as somehow imaging, albeit in a passing and changeable way, the nature of the eternal Deity. But since (on this assumption) he belongs ultimately to the side of the creature, rather than to the side of the Creator, and is not therefore identical in his being with the eternal God, he could only provide us with one of many *logoi* (λόγοι) or *images* (εἰκονές) of God – there must in fact be myriads of them, as Arius affirmed. Thus in the last resort Jesus Christ could not be regarded as the eternal *Logos* inherent in the Being of God become Man, and as providing us with the one and

only exclusive Image of God, who is at the same time identical with his Reality, but only as a form of man's imaging of God, one of the conceptions he devises for himself and forms in his own mind as he tries to think of God.

Two things may be said in reply to these answers, and here we are following the great Athanasius. First, this Arian or semi-Arian way of thinking converts statements about God into statements of human concern; that is, converts statements that derive from God and only refer to him for they have God himself as their object, into statements that have only this-worldly reference, and so in the last analysis they have only human or earthly meaning. As such they could be given some kind of religious symbolic meaning if they were treated as mythological speculations about God projected out of human religious consciousness, or made to yield a 'spiritual meaning' by allegorical interpretation. Secondly, this way of thinking is an objectifying way of thinking, not an objective way of thinking, to use modern terminology; but to use the old patristic terminology, it is a way of thinking in accordance with our own devising (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν) in which our thoughts and statements are related to God only arbitrarily or by convention (θέσει), and not a way of thinking rationally (κατὰ διάνοιαν) in which our thoughts and statements are related objectively to God in accordance with his Nature and therefore in a real or true way (κατὰ φύσιν and ἀληθῶς). What happens here in 'epinoetic' statements, is that we obtrude ourselves into the place of God and never rise above ourselves, for we only continue to imprison our thoughts of God within our own subjectivities. This way of thinking has what Athanasius spoke of as an element of 'madness' (μανία, was his word) about it, for it means that we are so engrossed with ourselves that we are unable to distinguish objective realities from our own subjective states, or to distinguish God from ourselves.

However, the proper line to take in answer to this whole way of thinking is to call in question its initial assumption of a radical disjunction between the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αἰσθητός which by definition excludes God from any interaction with this empirical world of ours. It is significant that although Athanasius was brought up within the Alexandrian tradition he rejected from the very start this assumption, although it was strongly held by both Clement and Origen who contributed so much to that tradition. This did not mean that the distinction between God and the creature was abolished, far

from it, but that it was regarded, as it is in the biblical witness, as a distinction between the Creator and the creature to whom God gives a reality of its own in relation to himself. This reality of the creaturely world was affirmed by the Incarnation and further by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus while maintaining the distance between the Creator and the creature, the Christian faith taught that God in his own divine Being, God the Word, God the Son, became flesh, and entered into creaturely being in order to become one with us for our sake, without ceasing to be God. The doctrine of the Incarnation thus both maintained the distinction between God the Creator and the creature, and taught that God is yet active within our creaturely existence in space and time in Jesus Christ, revealing himself to us, and reconciling us to himself.

That is the fundamental essence of the Christian Gospel to which the fathers penetrated in their exegetical and theological activity at Nicaea when they formulated the *homoousion*, the doctrine of the consubstantiality, or oneness in being of the incarnate Word and Son of God with the Father. The epistemological significance of that lies in the rejection of the Valentinian and Arian dichotomy that made the *Logos* in the last resort a creature of God and so recast theological statements into statements with only this-worldly reference, and thus lies in the insistence that in Jesus Christ we have a *Logos* that is not of man's devising but one that goes back into the eternal Being of God for he is intrinsically one with and proceeds from the eternal Being of God. The Incarnation means that God has really given *himself* and communicated *himself* in his eternal Word to man. It is out of that Word and in accordance with the way which that Word has taken in the Incarnation that genuine theological statements are made. They are genuine statements in so far as they *derive from* that Word and *refer back* to it: that is their essential *ana-logic*. Theological thinking is thinking of and on the ground of a given Reality, hard objective thinking *kata dianoian*, not *kat' epinoian*, thinking that must be rigorously tested along the line of the two-fold reference we have already discussed. What God is to us in Jesus Christ he really is antecedently and eternally in himself – that is their *ana-logical* reference. But if in Jesus Christ and only in Jesus Christ do we have the one *Logos* of God, his one self-revelation, so that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, without there being any other way to the Father, then all true theological statements will be consistent with one another in so far as

they have this *Logos* as their centre of reference, and through this *Logos* speak of God's acts in creation and redemption, in re-creation and sanctification, and therefore not only in the Son but in the Spirit.

The importance of this can be seen in the rise of the doctrine of the Spirit and in the way that it arose. As Athanasius insisted (and the Cappadocians no less than he), it is from our knowledge of the Son that we must take our knowledge of the Spirit.⁸ If the Incarnation of the Son is the one point where the *Logos* of God has come through to us, then it is at that point too that we may establish true knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Hence Athanasius built up his doctrine of the Spirit from the foundation laid in the doctrine of the relation between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father. The Holy Spirit is not independently knowable – he is very God in all his unapproachable majesty and glory, and is known only on the ground of the Incarnation of the *Logos*, but then really known, and known in himself, although of course inseparably from knowledge of the Son and of the Father. Thus from the *homoousion* of the Son the Greek fathers went on to affirm the *homoousion* of the Spirit, and because they rejected the radical χωρισμός of the Valentinians, Origenists and Arians, they rejected also the impious conception that the Spirit is a creature and affirmed the doctrine of the Spirit as ὁμότιμος, he who is worshipped equally with the Father and the Son as himself very God. And so from Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen came the strongest support for the application of the *homoousion* to the Spirit as well as to the Son.⁹

(b) The other line of thought regarding the *homoousion* we must now examine is that which inquires into the actual way that God in his grace took in incarnating his Word for us in Jesus Christ, and in raising us up to knowledge and communion with himself through Jesus Christ. This line of thought we find in Irenaeus and Hippolytus before Athanasius, but we shall follow the form it takes in the *De Spiritu Sancto* of Basil the Great, in which he relates together the 'economic condescension' of the Son of God to be one with us and his growth and advance in our human nature wheteby he provides for us in himself a way to God.¹⁰

In himself God is incomprehensible to us, and unapproachable in

⁸ Athanasius, *Ad Ser.* 3.1–3.

⁹ See, for example, Athanasius, *De Syn.* 41; *Ad Ser.* 1.27 & 2.5; Gregory Nazianzen, *Theol. Or.* 5.10.

¹⁰ Basil, *De Spir. Sanct.* 8.18f.

thought, but he has condescended to come down to us in our weakness to reveal himself to us and to redeem us in and through the humble ministry of Christ. This is the patristic doctrine of the incarnate economy (οἰκονομία) which refers to the self-humbling of God the Son in becoming man and in being made a servant for our sakes. It is important to note that the Greek fathers understood this realistically. Later on the term 'economical' came to be used also in another sense, as when an act of God was spoken of as '*only* economical' – οἰκονομία then has the sense of *reserve* on the part of God, for he is not to be taken as really being in himself quite what he appears to be in the economic act in question; and so *reserve* also, on the part of man's understanding of the act of God, for he is not to understand it strictly in the realistic way it appears. Unfortunately this later notion is very often read into the earlier patristic teaching (e.g. by J. H. Newman), but that amounts to a serious falsification of their thought. In Irenaeus, for example, economy is understood strictly in the Pauline sense of Ephesians, while with Athanasius κατ' οἰκονομίαν may be used as the equivalent of ἀληθῶς and even sometimes of κατὰ φύσιν. It is in this Pauline and Athanasian sense that we are to take it here in Basil's account of the action of God which he speaks of as 'the economy through the Son'. In his economic condescension God really and truly imparts to us knowledge of himself as he is, for he is antecedently and eternally in his own divine Being what he reveals of himself to us in the Incarnation and Humiliation of Christ. The economic condescension means, then, that the eternal *Logos*, without ceasing to be *Logos*, has adapted himself to us in our weakness and lack of ability in order to effect real communion with us.

But this economic condescension of Christ has its counterpart in a movement of growth or advance (προκοπή) on his part. The fathers have in mind here the Lukan account of the obedience and development of the child Jesus who 'cut his way forward' (προέκοπτεν) as he grew in wisdom and favour with God and with man.¹¹ In other words, Jesus's growth in wisdom was regarded as opening up a way for man to rise to true knowledge of the Father. Jesus Christ is not only the Truth who has accommodated himself to us in order to reveal himself, not only the Word become flesh, but he is also Man hearing and obeying that Word, apprehending that Truth throughout his life on earth, so that he provides

¹¹ Luke 2.52.

for us in his own obedient Sonship within our human nature *the Way* whereby we are carried up to knowledge of God the Father.

We understand by *Way* that *prokope* to perfection which is made stage by stage, and in regular order, through the works of righteousness and the illumination of knowledge, ever longing after what is before, reaching forth unto those things which remain, until we shall have reached the blessed end, the knowledge of God, which the Lord himself bestows on them that have trusted in him. For our Lord is an essentially good *Way*, where erring and straying are unknown, to that which is essentially good, to the Father. For no one, he says, comes to the Father but through me. Such is our way up to God through the Son.¹²

Along with this Basil combines another line of thought. In Jesus Christ the Son of God became incarnate through the Holy Spirit, and it was through the power of the Spirit that he made his advance or *prokope*, as it was through the power of the Spirit that he wrought miracles, and was raised from the dead. This Basil speaks of as 'the economy of the Spirit', for every operation of God in the economy of our salvation was wrought with the co-operation of the Spirit.¹³ The operation of the Spirit is spoken of here as 'the perfecting cause' which brings creatures to their fulfilment in God and so consummates their creation.¹⁴ That operation of the Spirit is what we see taking place in the *prokope* of Jesus Christ, for since he came to share our human nature and we are united to him through the Spirit which he gives us, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we also participate in *prokope*, and so rise through the Son to true knowledge of, and communion with, God the Father. Moreover, this is a movement that continues to take place in the power of the Spirit from our creation to final judgment and renewal, when God's works of creation and redemption will be brought to their ultimate completion.¹⁵

Now we are able to see what the nature of theological activity, as the fathers engage in it, really is. In theological activity we do not only engage in exegesis, interpreting biblical statements, but we penetrate behind the statements (τὰ γεγράμμενα) themselves to the divine actions or events (τὰ γινόμενα) to which they bear witness, and in the light of what they are,

¹² Basil, *De Spir. Sanct.* 18.18.

¹³ Basil, *De Spir. Sanct.* 16.39.

¹⁴ Basil, *De Spir. Sanct.* 16.38.

¹⁵ Basil, *De Spir. Sanct.* 16.39.

we articulate our understanding and formulate our theological statements of the Truth of God as it is in Jesus Christ. Theological activity is one in which, by the power and communion of the Spirit, we know God through conformity to the economic condescension of his Word and through following the Incarnation of the Word in his advance up to the Father. In this way theology not only operates with a divinely given truth, but apprehends it in accordance with its own mode of activity in condescension and ascension, and articulates it in accordance with its own interior and dynamic logic, the movement from grace to glory. The hinge of that movement, and therefore the actual hinge of meaning and apprehension, is the Incarnation and in the Incarnation the identity between the Being of Christ and the Being of God – that is, the *homoousion*. Apart from the *homoousion* there is no real and objective connection between our human knowing and speaking of God and God himself in his own reality and nature, for it is only in Christ, the Offspring of his divine Nature, that God has communicated himself to us. Hence in formulating the *homoousion* the fathers were penetrating down into the depths of the divine logic of grace, and tracing its reference or ana-logic back to its source in the eternal *Logos* in the Being of God the Father.

We must now return to the fact that the doctrine of the *homoousion* was itself gained through hard exegetical and hermeneutical activity. It is not itself a biblical term, but it is by no means a speculative construction, an interpretation put upon the facts by the Fathers of Nicaea; rather is it a truth that was forced upon the understanding of the Church as it allowed the biblical witness to imprint its own patterns upon its mind. We can see the same thing happening in the formulation of the doctrine of the Spirit. The biblical writers nowhere provide us with clear-cut propositions as to the Deity of the Spirit but the acknowledgment of the Deity of the Spirit and his inseparable connection with the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity is forced upon the Church as it penetrates into the interior logic of the biblical witness and through it allows the inherent order and trinitarian pattern of the divine Reality to impose themselves upon its mind. Theological activity, then, is not concerned merely with biblical exegesis or with the kind of biblical theology that builds up what this or that author in the New Testament taught about the Gospel; it is concerned with the Truth at a deeper level, in the necessary and coherent thinking of the Apostles as they mediated the divine revelation in Jesus

Christ to the world of historical understanding and communication. Thus in formulating the *homoousion* the Fathers of Nicaea were penetrating into the interior logic of the apostolic witness, and allowing the truth that was embedded there to come to view in an orderly and articulate way. They allowed the fundamental nature of the subject-matter to shine through to them and to take, in their thought and speech about it, a form through which its truth could be accurately and clearly and unambiguously acknowledged. The *homoousion* is thus an articulation of what the Fathers of Nicaea *had to think* and say when they set themselves to a disciplined and objective inquiry into the biblical witness to Christ, for its basic formulation had already been given by the Apostles themselves. Hence true theological thinking is basically and inescapably apostolic, for it is determined by the form in which the Apostles handed on the Word which they themselves had received.

This is the point which we must now explore more fully: the transition that took place within the apostolic foundation of the Church from the self-witness of Christ to witness to Christ as the Son of God. It was the special task of the Apostles to effect that transition, and so to hand on divine revelation mediated in Christ in such a way that it was a historically communicable Word capable of being heard and understood from generation to generation. The historical Church took shape as in and through the apostolic mission the living Word of God began to grow and multiply among men and women, precisely as we read of its early events in the Acts of the Apostles. In other words, in the apostolic foundation of the Church testimony to the Word of God was given in such a way that through the activity of the Holy Spirit the Word continued to sound forth and be heard as the very Word of God, and thus to fulfil among people what God had begun in the historical Jesus Christ.

He with whom they had to do was the *Logos* and Son of the living God. He was both Word and Person, Word in the form of personal Being and Person who was himself the Word communicated from the Father to mankind. If he were Word only, we would be thrown back upon our own resources to authenticate him; if he were Person only, we would be thrown back on our own resources to interpret him. But as One who is both Word and Person, he interprets and authenticates himself. He is the self-communicating, self-authenticating Word, and the very Truth of God embodied in himself in the form of divine

personal Being; the *Ἀυτολογός*, *Ἀυτοαλήθεια*, *Ἀυτοζωή*, *Ἀυτοβασιλεία*, *Ἀυτοεξουσία*, as the fathers spoke of him. He is in fact *Ἀυτοθεός*, the very *Ἐγώ εἰμι* of the Lord God.

Now when we consider the apostolic witness to this Word, we find that two relationships are involved which are inextricably woven together, corresponding to the two-fold nature of Christ as Word and Person.

(a) There is a relationship to Christ as *Word*. The apostolic witness is by its very nature a *report* (*ἀκοή*) – it derives from and reposes upon the Word of Christ in which he interpreted and communicated himself. The apostolic statements are thus by their very nature ‘hearing-statements’ or ‘recognition-statements’ which at one and the same time point away from themselves to Christ as alone the Word and Truth of God and communicate information about him in such a way that others hearing or reading their report are themselves directed to look away to Christ, and through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit are enabled to meet him, hear him, recognise him, and know him. Through the testimony of the Apostles they are brought under the objective revelation and power of the Word and are summoned to testify to the Word and formulate their own understanding of him. As they do that, they find that they are driven back to the basic reports of the Apostles themselves, for it is the form in which they handed on their Word in tradition that determines the form in which the historical Church continues to grasp and apprehend the truth. The mission of the Apostles was not just to reproduce the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but under the advocacy and leading of the Spirit of Truth sent to them by Christ, and the compulsion of his teaching and his action, as they illuminate one another, to communicate a faithful report of him, by means of which others in historical tradition could be brought under his power, and find their minds compelled to think of him and speak of him in the same basic way.

(b) There is a relationship in person to Christ as *Person*. Because the Word of God is in the form of personal Being, relationship to the Word cannot be in word and understanding only but must itself be intensely personal. Hence just as through the apostolic witness the Word created understanding of Christ in the mind of the Church, so through the Apostles the Person of Christ created the community which received him and which he compacted round himself as his own Body, the Church. Knowledge of Christ and union with Christ went hand in hand together,

so that relation to Christ was grounded and mediated through personal and living communion, within which he himself was present, and within which his Word was operative in the lives of men and women.

We have spoken of the Apostles and their mission in the transition from the self-witness of Christ to witness to Christ – but in order to effect that transmission through the Apostles he sent to them the Holy Spirit and inspired them to give the Word they heard from him the form which he meant it to have in their knowledge of him and in their witness to him. Christ himself was not a Christian. A Christian is one saved by Christ, one who is reconciled to God and united to him *through the mediation* of Christ – hence a *Christian knowledge* of God is one mediated by Christ, the knowledge that sinners have of God in and through Christ's revealing and reconciling work. The Apostles were not sent therefore to hand on the Word in the precise way which Christ himself uttered it or communicated it, but to hand it on in the way in which they, as sinners saved by Christ, whose knowledge of God was mediated and transformed by Christ, had to understand it. The apostolic knowledge of the Word was *Christian* knowledge, and the apostolic understanding of Christ was *Christian* understanding, for that was the knowledge and understanding which Christ meant the whole Church to have of himself. The Apostles were the primary, the foundational Christians (they were chosen, appointed and trained as such), and it is upon their knowledge and understanding of the divine revelation that the whole Church rests, so that the apostolic mind is determinative of all theological activity within the Church.

We have been speaking of *Christian* knowledge and understanding, but the fathers for the most part had another expression. They spoke of *ecclesiastical* knowledge and understanding in this way as identical with, because built on, the apostolic mind. Thus, for example, we find Athanasius using 'apostolic mind' and 'ecclesiastical mind', or 'apostolic tradition' and 'ecclesiastical tradition', quite interchangeably. Hence he can say that theological statements have to be made in accordance with the basic piety (κατὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν) of the Apostles and of the Church, and have to be in accordance with the mind of the Church (ἐκκλησιαστικὸν φρόνημα), if they are to be true and faithful to Christ.

The importance of this we may elucidate in the following way. If the apostolic witness can be said to have a two-fold reference, a *vertical* reference to Christ, and a *horizontal* reference to others to whom witness

is being communicated, then we may speak of the Apostles themselves in their unique relation to Christ as the 'hinges' or 'cardinals', where the vertical and the horizontal references meet, or where the vertical is folded out into the horizontal in such a way that throughout history men and women on the ground of the witness communicated to them horizontally and mediately on the plane of history may be directed vertically, as it were, and immediately to the Lord to meet and know him for themselves, for when that happens Christ himself in accordance with his promise to the Apostles is in the midst of them. When the New Testament speaks of the Church as founded once for all upon the Apostles and Prophets, however, and insists that no other foundation can be laid, then that means that the Apostles are the only 'cardinals' of the faith, the only 'hinges' in which the vertical and the horizontal meet together, or in which the vertical is folded out into the horizontal. In that sense, the Apostles in the nature of the case can have no successors, for it is not given to anyone else to receive the Word directly from Christ and to translate it into Word about Christ in such a way that through their witness the whole historical Church may be directed and determined in its knowledge of Christ and of God through him. Hence, it would be difficult to imagine any error more far-reaching than that of trying to be one's own apostle. This is the difficulty that the whole non-Roman Church has with the Church of Rome, but it is also the difficulty that the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church must always have with scholars who try to penetrate behind the apostolic witness to some *ipsissima verba* of Jesus or some Christ divested of the theological clothes the Apostles are alleged to have put upon him. It was a form of the same basic difficulty with which the Greek fathers wrestled in their encounter with Gnostics and Arians. That is why they laid such emphasis upon the *apostolic tradition*, for it is only within the primary judgment of the Apostles, the prior judgment upon which the whole historical Church rests, the *ekklesiastikon phronema*, and within the attitude of spirit and worship that belongs to it and is correlative to the mystery of the Incarnation, God manifest in the flesh, that genuine theological activity can take place, and true and faithful theological statements be made.

A positive theological statement cannot be elaborated apart from tradition, for apart from tradition it would inevitably go astray right from the start. If its *ana-logic* were wrong, if it had no proper reference back to the source of truth and could not be traced back to the truth in its source,

it would be quite beside the mark no matter how logically and coherently it was constructed. Regarded in this way, however, tradition does not involve the false idea that the truth of a doctrine is only revealed in the future since the truth of a thing is allegedly what becomes of it in history. Tradition, taken in the Athanasian sense, enables theological activity to test the understanding and formulation of a doctrine in the Church by tracing the actual steps taken in reaching it, and therefore to guide it in the effort to penetrate down to the basic judgments in the apostolic mind through which the objective rationality shines out upon us. It is only as doctrine is formulated under the power of that rationality that it can be said to be rightly related (*ὀρθῶς* is the Athanasian expression) to its object, and thus be truly orthodox.

An analogical movement of this kind, when faithfully carried out, calls for another, complementary to it, a movement of logical revision and reconstruction of our previous formulations. As an example of this we may refer to the way in which Athanasius had to recast his handling the *paradeigmata* of 'fountain' or 'source' and light' as he formulated the basic judgments we must make in bringing to articulation the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. At first when he was concerned to establish the *homoousion* of the Son it was sufficient to think in terms of the 'paradeigmatic' relations light—radiance and fountain—river, but when he had to think it out upon the fuller basis of the biblical witness he had to extend his thought to light—radiance—enlightenment, and fountain—river—water in order to speak of the relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So long as we refer only to these *paradeigmata* we are clearly shut up to a doctrine of the procession of the Spirit from the Father, but what happens when we are forced to think out the doctrine of the Spirit on a fuller biblical basis concerned with the intra-Trinitarian relations of Love? Would this not entail a further step in the logical reconstruction of prior formulations? If it did not lead thought to the *filioque* at least it would lead to a critical rethinking of a later doctrine of procession from the Father *only*. All *paradeigmata*, of course, as Athanasius and not least Gregory Nazianzen and Hilary of Poitiers realised, are inherently inadequate and are to be used only in such a way that they point away from themselves to the truth beyond and are thereby changed and relativised by that truth.

Be that as it may, it remains true that rigorous theological activity is inescapably concerned with tradition because of its analogical or indeed

anaphoral reference to the apostolic mind or *phronema*, and in and with that is summoned to engage in a steady movement of repentant rethinking (μετάνοια), that is, in a logical reconstruction of prior knowledge, in order that the whole body of doctrine may repose more and more faithfully and squarely upon the foundation once for all laid by Christ himself in the Apostles, and in order that the understanding of the Church may develop under the power of the objective rationality of the divine Truth that shines forth upon us from that foundation. That would seem to be the way in which the great Greek theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries particularly went to work, and to be the kind of thinking that took place in the ecumenical councils of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Chapter 12

TRANSITION TO THE WEST: THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS ACCORDING TO HILARY OF POITIERS*

In Hilary we are concerned with one who has rightly been called the 'Athanasius of the West'. Hilary was the great champion in the West, as Athanasius had been in the East, of the consubstantiality of the Son: like Athanasius he had suffered exile for his faithfulness to the Nicene dogma, and it was largely owing to his efforts that Arianism was eventually overthrown in the West. But Hilary stood close to Athanasius in another respect, for though he too in his earlier period had been greatly influenced by Origen and the early Alexandrian teaching, like Athanasius he found himself moving far away from it, and indeed rejecting its basic presuppositions. There is no evidence in the writings of Hilary, for example, that he operated as Augustine did later, with a radical disjunction between the sensible world and the intelligible world, while his controversial engagement with the presuppositions and exegesis and arguments of the Arians and the Sabellians alike, drove him into a profound understanding of biblical realism and to exegetical and theological stress upon the concrete acts of God in the history of Israel as well as in the evangelical history mediated to us through the apostolic tradition. No exegete or theologian in the West had a deeper respect for the sacred Scriptures or was more concerned to allow them to shape and direct all his understanding and thinking of God.

The influence of Origenistic exegesis is most apparent in Hilary's first work, the *Commentary on Matthew*, but even here there is a marked difference in the mode of interpretation. The Word of God (*sermo Dei*) is rich with meaning, for beyond the straightforward meaning of the letter itself there is a deeper or spiritual meaning toward which the letter

*Reprinted from *Abba Salama, A Review for the Association on Ethio-Hellenic Studies*, Athens, 1975, vol. vii, pp. 37-69.

itself directs us. Interior discernment of this meaning is necessary for our progress in understanding.¹

This is usually called a form of allegorical exegesis, but actually it is rather different. He makes a distinction between the mere hearing of words and understanding of sentences, and an apprehension of the realities they indicate, and so insists that the inner meaning must not be detached from the facts or the events which they narrate.² The meaning must not be invented but must repose upon the facts themselves.³ Hence we must not accommodate the Scriptures to our thoughts but our thoughts to the Scriptures.⁴

It must be remembered, however, that, as Hilary says, the facts themselves may be figurative, intended by the Spirit to point to inexpressible divine realities or be prophetic of future things.⁵ As an instance of the former we may note his interpretation of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was born of the Virgin Mary, but conceived of the Holy Spirit. Here there is a two-fold significance which we have to grasp, but in the physical procreation we must understand the significance of the heavenly nativity.⁶ That is a point of theological significance which Hilary was later to urge with great force against the Arians that the earthly birth of the Incarnate Son points us to a knowledge of him as the only-begotten of the Father. As an instance of the latter we may point to the way in which Hilary interpreted the details of the death of John the Baptist, in which he sees a prefiguration beyond the events of the moment.⁷ Hilary understands this as a kind of typological interpretation in which the interpreter, realising that these things have happened as examples for our sakes, is like the wise scribe who learns how to take out of his treasure things old and new.⁸ But, for all its apparent extravagance at times (as we would regard it), it is not an interpretation that takes flight away from the *res gestae* which are narrated, but is rather controlled by them.

Hence we do not find Hilary weaving fanciful ideas out of isolated

¹ See *In Matt.* 12.12.

² *In Matt.* 2.2.

³ *In Matt.* 19.4.

⁴ *In Matt.* 7.8.

⁵ *In Matt.* 16.1ff; 19.4; 21.13.

⁶ *In Matt.* 2.2.

⁷ *In Matt.* 14.37.

⁸ *In Matt.* 14.1, 6, etc.

words or expressions in the Scriptures, for although he obviously had a mind of great speculative power, he concentrates his attention on the concrete realities and keeps his thinking within the limits of the truth that is being conveyed through the text.

When we turn to the great exegetical work written at the end of his life, the *Tractatus in Psalmos*, we find that he is even more cautious and careful in his interpretation, although he still concerns himself with the interior meaning (*interior significantia*) and draws out the deep spirituality of the Psalms in a mystical way by relating them to the divine revelation and salvation that have come to us in Christ and to Christian experience of the living presence and acts of God.

The *Tractatus* is not a commentary but a series of homiletical expositions of the Psalms. A deeply pastoral intent runs through them all, for here the Psalms are being used to deepen the spiritual understanding of Hilary's flock and to establish it in the great verities of the Christian faith. Hence he takes the opportunity throughout to teach the Deity of Christ, to unfold the mysteries of the Incarnation and Passion, and to give instruction on the Christian sacraments (see, for example, the expositions of Psalms 52 and 53). This means that we have to allow for the preacher's mode of application in the *Tractatus*, yet all through Hilary is acutely conscious of the problem of hermeneutics that is raised, and seeks to follow carefully thought out principles. It is particularly valuable to compare his handling of the Psalms with that of Origen which, as E. W. Watson has shown, Hilary has before him all the time. Such a comparison makes it clear how persistently he avoids Origen's ingenious speculations and brings everything more down to earth, refuses to read too much dogmatic truth into every passage, and always considers the context and the occasion and the orderly sequence of the original text.⁹

Several of the exegetical characteristics of the *Tractatus* are particularly worth noting.

(i) Hilary always treats the Scriptures with the utmost respect for they mediate to us the Word of God. He compares the interpretation of the sacred writings with the way in which we would interpret the words of a king or expound his precepts in the ears of the people, taking great care to respect the majesty of the king and to ensure that everything is worthily and scrupulously proclaimed and heard. Thus the Scriptures have to be

⁹ E. W. Watson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, Oxford, 1899, pp. xlivf, and lixf.

treated not just as the words of men but as the organ of the Spirit through which God's own Word or speech is heard, and God's decisions and laws are announced. Moreover they have to be expounded as decrees, as royal decisions which actually take effect with their proclamation.¹⁰ This religious respect for the very letter of Holy Scripture can lead Hilary into pedantic exaggeration of the significance of trifling details which are merely matters of style,¹¹ but it does mean that he seeks throughout to keep close to the actual text of the Scriptures themselves.

(ii) Respect for the letter of the Scriptures does not lead him to confound the letter with the truth to which it directs the reader. The truth lies beyond the letter itself, and the literary text is to be understood in the light of it.

This is what lies behind Hilary's esteem for 'the Seventy Interpreters' who translated the Old Testament into Greek for 'they had a knowledge of the Law and the Prophets which transcends the limitations and doubtfulness of the Letter'.¹² What Hilary himself seeks to do, therefore, is not to translate and interpret the words and sentences merely, but to understand the truth which the words and sentences of the text mediate, and to put that into language of his own. He interprets what is meant rather than just the sense of the words – hence he adopted a paraphrastic method in exposition. Thus in the *Tractatus* interpretation of the Truth involves the development of lines of teaching that not infrequently carry us beyond what is actually said in the text itself, yet it is in this teaching that the original message of the Psalms is brought home to the Christian congregation, in a way that mere word for word translation or sentence by sentence interpretation could not do.

(iii) One of the chief principles that guides all Hilary's exegesis, particularly of the Old Testament, is the fact of God's gradual revelation of himself in the history of his people. This is not 'progressive revelation' in the modern sense, but is nearer to what we speak of as *Heilsgeschichte*. This is part of Hilary's doctrine of the 'economic condescension' of God in which he accommodated his revelation to man's feebleness and gradually revealed his Name under chosen conditions of occasion and time.¹³ In the economy or dispensation of God's revealing and saving

¹⁰ *In Ps.* 13.1.

¹¹ *In Ps.* 118 (or 119) α 1; 128.12; 130.8.

¹² *In Ps.* 142.1; see also *in Ps.* 131.24; 133.4; 150.1.

¹³ See *De Trinitate*, 1.30; 4.27f; 5.18f; 24f, etc.

purpose the events that happened to the Patriarchs and Prophets were designed to be types of the evangelical events and to point forward to the fulfilment of our redemption in Christ.

It is through observing this *order of things* which belongs to the nature of the realities proclaimed by the Old Testament Scriptures that they are themselves to be interpreted. This is what Hilary means when he says we are to concern ourselves only with the prophetic meaning of Psalms (*nihil in psalmis nisi propheticum cognoscimus*).¹⁴ An excellent example of this exposition is that of Psalm 67 in which he seeks for the meaning beyond the mere form of the statements themselves by interpreting what is said in the whole context of the Law and Gospel, and of the eschatological relation between them (*lege adumbrata evangelica gesta*).

The prophetic word keeps the order of the divine dispensation and by the works of the Law itself declares that the works of the Gospel are adumbrated through the Law. For very often through the significations of names many things are related and expressed in such a way that they are made to apply not more to things done in the present than to matters that are yet to be indicated in the future. Hence now after such great and clear proclamations of the evangelical hope the order of the statements brought forward conveys to us something that is higher and beyond what can be heard by the ear (*altius quiddam nobis et ultra aurium sensus affert subjectus ordo dictorum*).¹⁵

What Hilary means is that in the Scriptures the statements are so ordered in accordance with the divine economy in the history of God's people that they are made to indicate more than can be specified at the time or actually apprehended by their original hearers – by their very nature they are made to point forward to the fulfilment of God's redemptive purpose, and are only fully understood in the light of its ultimate revelation.

To this eschatological or typological interpretation of the Old Testament narratives Hilary devoted a special work known to us as *De Mysterioris*, in which he was concerned to show how the prophetic patterns of the Old Testament in patriarchal and prophetic times pointed ahead to Christ, so that the saving work of Christ may be discerned and reflected in them as in a mirror. Only fragments of this

¹⁴ *In Ps.* 142.1.

¹⁵ *In Ps.* 67.25.

work remain but they illustrate Hilary's general thesis that in Christ and his advent we have the key (*clavis*) to the knowledge and understanding of the ancient Scriptures.¹⁶

(iv) The search after the spiritual sense of the Old Testament involves the treatment of many of its passages as *allegorica dicta*.¹⁷ Yet it is the Pauline type of 'allegorical' interpretation (cf. 1 Cor. 10, Gal. 4) rather than the Philonic or Origenistic type that is involved. As an instance of this we may refer to the exposition of Psalm 134 which is offered after the pattern of Paul's interpretation of the relation between Christian baptism and the baptism of Israel in the crossing of the Red Sea. What happened physically in Egypt, now takes place spiritually in us (*licet illa in Aegypto corporaliter gesta sint, spiritualiter tamen nunc geruntur in nobis*).¹⁸ But this spiritual understanding does not mean that we can forget the historical events themselves.¹⁹ Hilary will not allow a spiritual interpretation that does damage to the historical truth (*ibid*). As he says in a comment on another Psalm: *quia lex spiritalis est et fides historiae non periclitatur, si rebus effectis inesse connexam sibi intrinsicam significantiam existemus*.²⁰

Even in the *Commentary on Matthew* Hilary could insist that the truth of historical events is not corrupted if the principle of the interior meaning (*interioris intelligentiae ratio*) is subjected to historical happenings²¹ (*Sensus allegoricus nil detrahit litterae veritati*).²²

So far we have been considering only Hilary's exegetical writings, but when we examine his strictly theological works we find a rather different situation. As Watson has said, in the *De Trinitate* there is an advance to almost Athanasian cautiousness in exegesis.²³ The reason for this is that when Hilary was confronted with the heretics' interpretation of the Scriptures he was forced to reflect carefully on the nature of biblical language and to base his own arguments upon sober but precise theological exegesis that respected the nature of the language. This makes the *De Trinitate* a work of first class importance for hermeneutics, especially since it laid the foundations for the victory of the Nicene theology in the West.

¹⁶ *Prolog. in Ps.* 5-6.

¹⁷ *In Ps.* 67.1, cf. *Prolog.* 5.

¹⁸ *In Ps.* 134.18.

¹⁹ *In Ps.* 134.13.

²⁰ *In Ps.* 123.5; cf. *In Ps.* 136.13.

²¹ *In Matt.* 2.2.

²² *In Matt.* 6.1.

²³ *Op.cit.*, p. 61.

We shall now examine what Hilary has to say about the nature of biblical language, and of biblical statements, and then what he has to say about their interpretation and the enunciation of theological statements on the basis of the biblical revelation.

1. The nature of biblical language

Early in the *De Trinitate*, with reference to Exodus 3.14, Hilary speaks of his admiration for the language of the Scriptures, for it offers 'an indication of God so exact that it expresses in speech best adapted to the human understanding the incomprehensible knowledge of the divine nature' (*tam absolutam de Deo significationem, quae naturae divinae incomprehensibilem cognitionem aptissimo ad intelligentiam humanam sermone loqueretur*).²⁴

Biblical language involves a polar relation between man and God, language that man can understand and use, and yet it is used about God who in his divine nature is incomprehensible to man and cannot be expressed in his creaturely speech. What is it, then, that makes the connection in this language between the divine object and human speech about it? It is God himself who forges this connection by speaking to man in man's speech about himself. Hence Hilary says later in the work, 'we must know that God has not spoken (i.e. in the Scriptures) to himself, but to us and has so tempered the language of his utterance to our understanding that our weak nature can grasp it and discern what it means'.²⁵ Elsewhere he speaks in similar terms. 'The divine Word tempers himself in accordance with the habit and nature of our understanding, adapting the common language of things to convey his own teaching and instruction. For he speaks to us, not to himself, and uses what is ours in speaking.'²⁶ The same thing must be said of the Incarnate Word. 'The Lord declared the evangelical faith with the greatest possible simplicity of speech, and adapted his discourses to our understanding, as far as the weakness of our nature allowed it, but for all that did not say anything unworthy of the majesty of his own nature.'²⁷

²⁴ *De Trin.* 1.5.

²⁵ *De Trin.* 8.43.

²⁶ *Tract. in Ps.* 126.6.

²⁷ *De Trin.* 9.40.

There is, then, a basic polarity about biblical language, for the Word of God (*sermo Dei*), when we are very attentive to it, is found to hold a deeper meaning (*plus significationis*) than that which we grasp merely through the hearing of words.²⁸ This is a polarity of course that characterises all *bona fide* languages, for language (*sermo dictus*) by its very nature refers to things (*res*) other than itself, but that to which biblical language refers beyond itself is God, God speaking to us and through our human speech.²⁹

In biblical language therefore we are concerned not only with human speech expressing human thoughts about something, but with God's use of human speech to express his own divine thoughts.³⁰

Here, on the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that there is an infinite distance between man and God, and therefore between human words and thoughts and the Mind and Nature of God.³¹ Hence Hilary emphasises again and again the fact that human words cannot express God.³² In his very nature God is ineffable, inexpressible, indescribable, and infinitely removed from finite and creaturely modes of thinking and speaking.³³ On the other hand, however, we are confronted with the fact that in the human language of the Scriptures it is God himself who speaks to us, and speaks to us in our language, one that is amenable to our nature and our understanding. God himself forges the link between our language and himself, by speaking to us in it, communicating to us his own Word, and by making our hearing effective through the Testimony of the Spirit.³⁴ Thus he makes man's speech beyond anything it is capable of in itself capable of bearing his own utterance to man.³⁵

In this use of human speech, God does not merely express for us his own divine thoughts; he communicates to us *himself*. That is to say, by speaking his own Word to us God supplies speech about him with content in his own Reality, which our speech by itself can never do.³⁶ His

²⁸ *De Trin.* 1.6.

²⁹ *De Trin.* 4.14.

³⁰ *De Trin.* 1.7.

³¹ *De Trin.* 1.6f.

³² *De Trin.* 1.13; 2.5ff; 3.18ff; 4.2; 6.13f; etc.

³³ *De Trin.* 1.6f; 2.7ff; 3.18f; 24; 6.13ff; 8.39f; 11.44ff; 12.24ff.

³⁴ *De Trin.* 2.1.

³⁵ *De Trin.* 2.6f; 15; 8.43.

³⁶ *De Trin.* 2.1.

Word does not refer to something other than itself, nor is it a mere word that when uttered passes away like an empty sound, for his Word is identical with his own Reality.³⁷

God's Word both expresses his own Divine thoughts and conveys himself, so that when he speaks to us through our human language he makes his own self-revelation and self-communication the reality to which that speech refers.³⁸ God is thus his own Interpreter.³⁹ In the language of the Scriptures, therefore, what is said refers to a divine Reality which expresses and interprets itself to us. We for our part may apprehend it only when we give that reality to which the biblical words and statements refer its proper and full place, refusing to subordinate the reality to the language but subordinating the language to the reality to which it intends to direct us.⁴⁰

This infinite gap between the language of man and the Word of God which God himself bridges by speaking to us in our language, is part of the infinite discrepancy between the mind of man and the Mind of God, or between the natural reason and the Nature and Being of God.⁴¹ That is the baffling element in all theological knowledge, the utter transcendence of God over all our knowing and understanding. Unless we acknowledge this, we inevitably go astray in our attempts to know God. This is a point that forced itself upon Hilary as soon as he raised the problem of the nature of biblical language and its interpretation, and it never leaves him from beginning to end of the whole discussion. It is not that Hilary entertains some kind of irrationalism in the knowledge of God – quite the reverse is the case. In knowing God the human mind is confronted with God himself and thinks of him in rational adaptation to his divine objectivity.

Here the reason is turned upward and directed toward knowledge of what is supremely rational. That is the rationality which characterises faith and true knowledge of God.⁴² In his discussion of these problems

³⁷ *De Trin.* 2.15: *Verbum hoc res est, non sonus; natura, non sermo; Deus non inanis.* This is the doctrine that the Logos is *homoousios* with the Father, himself eternal Word, God the Word, which is a principal subject of the whole work. It is the eternal Word that stands behind the Scripture and speaks in it.

³⁸ *De Trin.* 4.1f; 5.20f; 8.43, 52; 9.40.

³⁹ *De Trin.* 4.36.

⁴⁰ *De Trin.* 1.30; 3.22; 4.14; 7.13; 9.69f; 10.1f.

⁴¹ *De Trin.* 1.6, 32; 10.53f; 11.44f; 12.37.

⁴² *De Trin.* 1.8, 22: *ratio fidei; fides rationabilis scientiae, etc.*

Hilary has several very important things to say which bear upon the question of interpretation.

(i) Because the natural reason operates with the structured relations within which man is found in the world around him, and inevitably uses the forms of understanding which it derives from this natural experience, it cannot by itself think its way out of that situation. Through its structural relations with the common objects of thought the reason becomes incapable of heavenly wisdom. 'It thinks that that only is in the nature of things which it either understands within itself or can vouch for out of itself (*hoc solum putet in natura rerum esse, quod aut intra se intelligat, aut praestare possit ex sese*).⁴³ Or as Hilary says later on: 'The mind of man knows only what it understands, and the world believes only so far as it can, since it judges as possible only so far as it can see or do.'⁴⁴ From this fact Hilary draws at least two conclusions. Because of this orientation of the natural reason, inquiry after the truth tends to be dominated by our habits and wishes – we prove only what we wish to believe, and a desire becomes paramount over truth.⁴⁵ But this leads, in the second place, to unbelief which insists on confining knowledge within what man naturally knows and naturally wants to know. It insists that what it does not know and cannot conceive of itself just is not true. 'Hence all unbelief is folly, for it acknowledges only what it attains through its own imperfect perception; measuring all things by its own weak conjectures, it thinks that what it does not understand cannot be. Thus unbelief as to some statements arises out of a person's foible in refusing to believe that something has happened because he lays it down that it cannot happen.'⁴⁶

(ii) It is important to acknowledge the limits of the natural reason. This does not mean that we must narrow down the horizon of knowledge to the range of natural perception, or to what we will accept by using our own opinion as the standard of judgment, knowing only what we can create or form out of our own reason. Rather does it mean that we must recognise that, of ourselves, we are unable to rise above ourselves. 'The imperfect does not conceive the perfect, nor can a being which derives its existence from another obtain perfect knowledge either

⁴³ *De Trin.* 1.12.

⁴⁴ *De Trin.* 8.53.

⁴⁵ *De Trin.* 10.1.

⁴⁶ *De Trin.* 3.24.

of its Creator or of itself, for whatever awareness it can attain of itself does not at all transcend the perception to which it is limited by its nature.⁴⁷ A creature whose origin lies outside of itself has limited powers beyond the bounds of which it cannot pass; the knowledge which a finite being can attain by itself is inevitably limited by the range of finite perception. It is therefore quite foolish for such a person to constitute himself the standard by which he can measure knowledge of the infinite or of God.⁴⁸ This means that in theological knowledge we have to reckon with the absolute priority of God over all our thought, for he who transcends our perception transcends it in every respect.⁴⁹

To say the least this involves on the part of man an openness of mind which is ready to acknowledge that 'what man cannot understand God can be'.⁵⁰

But positively it means that if man is to know God it can only be by way of submission to God's activity in revealing himself, and in communicating to man what he cannot attain of himself – it involves a movement of obedience to a divinely given Reality.⁵¹ That is the meaning of faith, which is the opening up of the reason toward God, in a refusal to confine knowledge of God within the limits of what we can conceive of ourselves.⁵² Faith is the reason yielding itself to the boundless self-revelation of God in a fathomless inquiry.⁵³

(iii) This in turn involves a stretching of the reason, or an enlargement of the powers of the mind. If man is to know God, his thoughts must be expanded till they are worthy of their object, and are in a real measure in conformity to it.⁵⁴ The human reason cannot undertake this of itself, for, as we have seen, whatever is within the range of a limited consciousness is itself limited.⁵⁵ The mind of man is powerless with the ordinary resources of the unaided reason to grasp eternal realities but it may attain such a grasp through the study of divine things.⁵⁶ This is possible

⁴⁷ *De Trin.* 3.24; cf. 5.1.

⁴⁸ *De Trin.* 3.24f.

⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 2.28ff.

⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 3.1.

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 1.13ff; 2.34f; 3.9; 4.14, etc.

⁵² *De Trin.* 1.13ff; 11.44f; 12.24f, 52ff.

⁵³ *De Trin.* 3.18ff; 11.45–47; 12.37.

⁵⁴ *De Trin.* 1.18.

⁵⁵ *De Trin.* 10.53.

⁵⁶ *De Trin.* 1.34.

because of the *Gift of the Spirit*, who enables man by his power to understand and know the given Reality of God.⁵⁷ It is the Spirit who makes the Given really the Given and so enables man to receive and apprehend something beyond himself altogether. This takes place primarily in Jesus Christ himself, for it is in him that the Word of God has been adapted to human nature and understanding has been *promoted* in the Word, and lifted up to partake of the knowledge of God.⁵⁸

Everything thus turns upon the objective reality of the *homoousion*, and of the union between the human nature of Jesus and the eternal Word of God and between the Incarnate Son and the Father. God the Father not only acts in the acts of his Incarnate Son, but speaks in his words, for the Son and the Father are one.⁵⁹

We return to the fact that by the very nature of his intelligence man is incapable of comprehending God. He is unable not only to bring God within the grasp of his reason (*ratio*) but even to provide with intelligible meaning the nature of God as it is manifested to him, since it transcends all forms of human thought.⁶⁰ Hence the Son of God 'being invisible and incorporeal and incomprehensible took upon himself such a measure of matter and lowliness to bring himself within our power to understand, perceive and contemplate him, complying with our weakness rather than surrendering any of his own properties'.⁶¹ Here Hilary does not only think of Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God addressed to us, God speaking to us in our language,⁶² but of Christ as himself 'a witness for us from out of ourselves to divine things' (*ut testis divinarum rerum nobis esset ex nostris*). He has ranged himself with us in our weakness and ignorance and fulfilled from our side through his obedience as the Incarnate Son of the Father true knowledge of God and true speech about him.⁶³ In this way he achieves vicariously in his own Incarnate life our 'exaltation' and 'promotion' to union and communion with God.⁶⁴ He has actualised within our human nature and within its feeble range of

⁵⁷ *De Trin.* 2.1, 29ff, 35f, 10.53f.

⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 1.11.

⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 8.52.

⁶⁰ *De Trin.* 3.1f.

⁶¹ *De Trin.* 3.3.

⁶² *De Trin.* 8.43.

⁶³ *De Trin.* 3.9f.

⁶⁴ *De Trin.* 1.11; 3.15ff.

understanding and speech, understanding and speech of God.⁶⁵

At the heart of this lies the biblical and Nicene doctrine that Christ is not only the Image of God but the Reality and Substance of God, and that because he is both, he is able to image forth among us the Reality and Truth of God, beyond any power we have of perceiving or grasping him.⁶⁶ But it is not enough to say that, Hilary adds, for the human form of Christ as such is no aid toward the mental vision of the incorporeal God.⁶⁷ It is not the kind of image that represents or describes God by reproducing his appearance. The Image is revealing because of the *Word* (*sermo*) which is at work in it.⁶⁸ God speaks to us in Christ. He names himself and reveals himself, communicating with us in words that are not empty but filled with his own divine Reality, and so both speaks to us and teaches us to speak of him.⁶⁹ In Jesus God has forged the language whereby he speaks to us and whereby we may speak to him and of him. 'There remains to human speech about divine things no other word except the Word of God; everything else is restricted and confined, and entangled and obscure. If anyone wishes to point this out [i.e. knowledge of the Father] in other words than those in which God has spoken, he neither understands himself nor lets his readers understand.'⁷⁰ It is only the Word of God with the Image, the Word in the words of Christ, that effects communication between God and man, and only through a corresponding relation between human words and God's Word may men speak truly and properly of God. Thus in Christ, the Incarnate Son, our knowledge is expanded to take in knowledge of the Father.⁷¹

All this is implied in the doctrine of the *human economy* of God, which Hilary shares with Irenaeus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and other fathers. God's condescension to our weakness and our ignorance in the Incarnation has brought to its fulfilment the gradual economic revelation of himself to his people throughout the ages, so that at last in Jesus Christ he has forged and brought to its fulfilment the linkage between man's language and God's Word through which God fully reveals himself and by means of which he may be known and knowledge of him may be

⁶⁵ *De Trin.* 3.18ff.

⁶⁶ *De Trin.* 3.23ff.

⁶⁷ *De Trin.* 7.27.

⁶⁸ *De Trin.* 8.51f.

⁶⁹ *De Trin.* 3.22f; 2.4f; 7.10ff; 9.69f; 10.1f; 6.13f.

⁷⁰ *De Trin.* 7.38; cf. 5.21; 6.13.

⁷¹ *De Trin.* 7.41; cf. 40.6.

formulated in human statements.⁷² It is to this theme that Hilary returns in Books 8 and 9 of the *De Trinitate* in which he explores as deeply as he can the economic condescension of the eternal Word of God. Through a movement of self-humbling or self-emptying for our sakes, God the Son shares with us our weakness and creatureliness in order to lift us up in himself to communion with God and knowledge of him. The aspect of this that particularly concerns us at the moment is the descent of the Son into our ignorance where through his working and speaking and manifesting he reconciled man to God and completed the divine revelation, supplying us in himself as Mediator both with words and statements about God and with a revelation explaining their meaning.⁷³

According to Hilary Christ's ignorance proceeds from the omniscience of his nature – it was essentially an economic or *vicarious ignorance* which he underwent, *for our sakes*.⁷⁴ The Incarnation did not involve an abolition of the distinction between divine and human nature, and will not allow us to confound them in our understanding of Christ.

We must not forget the same distinction in the economy of his ignorance. This is important for Hilary, for it means that through condescending to our ignorance, Christ is able to lift us out of it; by taking our place he is able to lift us up to his place in communion with God.⁷⁵ This lifting up of man by the words and deeds of Christ in our weakness is evident in his own growth and development as a child,⁷⁶ but because it takes place in our human nature and on our behalf, it carries with it what Hilary calls our 'promotion' or 'advance' (*profectus*, that is, the προκοπή of Irenaeus, Athanasius and Basil) to participation in divine nature.⁷⁷ It is in this advance which we are given through the saving exchange which Christ effects with us that we are enabled to know God, and so to transcend our natural weakness and rise above our creaturely ignorance and overcome our human incompetence to speak of God. This is possible only through the *kenosis* of the Eternal Son.

The validity of this argument of Hilary depends on the reality of the human nature of Christ, in mind and soul, and thus involves the

⁷² *De Trin.* 1.29; 4.27; 5.18f, 24.

⁷³ *De Trin.* 8.50ff; 9.1f.

⁷⁴ *De Trin.* 9.62–66.

⁷⁵ *De Trin.* 9.5ff.

⁷⁶ *De Trin.* 10.54.

⁷⁷ *De Trin.* 9.4 see also 1.11.

complete rejection of any form of Apollinarianism.⁷⁸ The words and acts of Christ are words and acts in his human nature, yet they are words and acts of One who did not cease to be God even in his *kenosis*.⁷⁹ This means, as we shall see, when we come to discuss the interpretation of biblical language, that we must take seriously the two-fold nature of Christ's utterances, and so of biblical statements regarding him or centred in him,⁸⁰ but we must now ask how this Christological teaching affects Hilary's view of the human language of the Scriptures which it is yet made to point out or signify.⁸¹

How is it to be regarded as the means through which God speaks to us when in its own nature it is so inadequate? This is the problem of analogy.

2. The analogical reference of biblical and theological statements

Throughout the *De Trinitate* Hilary is deeply conscious of the problem of analogy, both in the way that the Scriptures themselves speak and in the way that the theologian must speak on this biblical basis. Because biblical language refers beyond itself and is not to be understood except from the side of the referents, and because biblical and theological statements refer to the same divine reality, it is hardly possible to keep the discussion of analogy in biblical statements apart from a discussion of analogy in theological statements made in interpreting the biblical statements.

The problem arises in Book 1 when Hilary points out the rationalism of the Sabellians and Arians who insist on reducing all knowledge of God within the scope of the ordinary reason, and have great difficulty in interpreting the birth (*nativitas*) of the only-Begotten Son.⁸² What is the relation here between the term or name (*nomen*) we use and the truth (*veritas*) to which it refers? We can only approach this question by eschewing human conjectures, and by a readiness to learn the truth in such a way that we break down the barriers of prejudice and half-

⁷⁸ *De Trin.* 10.15ff, 51ff.

⁷⁹ *De Trin.* 10.16f, 35, 55f; 11.15f.

⁸⁰ *De Trin.* 9.5f, 15f.

⁸¹ *De Trin.* 2.7.

⁸² *De Trin.* 1.16.

knowledge. We must let our thoughts follow the way God has actually taken in declaring himself to us, and so let them expand until they are worthy of his Being. What we must be careful to avoid is the erection of some arbitrary standard of our own whereby we judge God in his infinity.⁸³ Then Hilary sets down several principles which govern his own treatment of analogy.

(a) There can be no comparison between God and earthly things, so that when we make use of comparisons we must recognise that they do not involve in themselves the drawing of an exact *ratio*.⁸⁴

(b) Such a comparison or analogy cannot be regarded, therefore, as suited to God, but rather as helpful to man, in that it points out the meaning rather than exhausts it (*omnis igitur comparatio homini potius utilis habeatur, quam Deo apta, quia intelligentiam magis significet, quam expleat*). In spite of its inadequacy, then, analogy is necessary because of the weakness of the human understanding.

(c) In going on to speak about God we use the words which God himself uses in speaking to us, tempering their meaning in the light of our own circumstances.⁸⁵

Hilary amplifies these statements later on in the work as the occasion offers; and draws out some important implications for the interpretation of biblical statements.

In comparisons and analogies we use language drawn from our ordinary experience of things in this world; yet when this ordinary language is employed analogically of God it is put under severe strain. 'We are forced to stretch our speech beyond its own humble resources to things that are indescribable.'⁸⁶ This is particularly evident when we come to speak of the Trinity.

The meaning signified is beyond the range of speech, beyond the reach of our perception, beyond the conception of our understanding; wherever inquiry is carried beyond this point, it cannot be articulated, carried through or maintained. The very nature of the reality exhausts the significance of words; the impenetrable light blinds us when we contemplate it; its limitless extent transcends the capacity of the understanding.⁸⁷

⁸³ *De Trin.* 1.18.

⁸⁴ *De Trin.* 1.18; see also *Tract. in Ps.* 118.19.

⁸⁵ *De Trin.* 1.19.

⁸⁶ *De Trin.* 2.2; 4.2.

⁸⁷ *De Trin.* 2.5.

This being so, there can be no argument from the language to the reality it is used to indicate, for we have to pass far beyond the terms employed, looking in the direction they point rather than trying to read the truth off the language itself.⁸⁸

It also follows that we cannot ourselves select the analogies or comparisons that will serve this purpose, for the mind of man would have to comprehend the reality in order to devise analogies suitable to it.⁸⁹ We can but make use of the analogies and terms God himself provides as he condescends to speak to us in our own language, enlightening our understanding by using terms commonly understood, while making them suggest or hint, or point to, what they are incapable of indicating by themselves.⁹⁰ The analogies which we must employ in speaking of God are those which are given to us in the Incarnation or are determined by the relation between the Incarnate Son and the Father. It is when we get inside that relationship, so to speak, that the human analogies employed are made to serve their purpose in God's self-revelation and in our corresponding knowledge and speech of him.⁹¹ It is within the divine revelation mediated through the Son and his growth in knowledge toward God that we are 'educated up' to knowledge and speech of him.⁹²

There are two points here of great importance.

First, we must distinguish between empty analogies which are merely illustrations of our own devising, and filled analogies in which God has supplied the corresponding realities.⁹³ That is done when the Son lives out his life within our flesh, for it is through that union of our human nature with his divine nature that the analogies given to us really enable us to grasp the subject.⁹⁴

Secondly, even so, the analogical language or the imagery employed must not be understood as if it described the nature of God or expressed his Being, or in any way defined him. That is to say, Hilary insists that analogies are essentially signitive, and are not descriptive of God.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ *De Trin.* 2.3f.; 6.9.

⁸⁹ *De Trin.* 3.1f.

⁹⁰ *De Trin.* 4.14; 5.21; 6.13; 7.38; 12.9, etc.

⁹¹ *De Trin.* 2.6f.

⁹² *De Trin.* 6.16; 7.30; 8.16.

⁹³ *De Trin.* 9.69f.

⁹⁴ *De Trin.* 8.16f.

⁹⁵ *De Trin.* 2.1, 5, 7f.

This is very like the view of Athanasius as to the *paradeigmatic* character of essential biblical language, but Hilary's particular contribution to this is the reminder that there are two different ways of employing images. Some images reproduce the appearances of the realities they represent, enabling them to be known through their correspondence or likeness to them – that happens when we use images to speak of comparable realities.⁹⁶ But there are other images which are analogies drawn from human experience to aid our apprehension of God or speech about him in order to direct our attention upward to God, but far from being representations of God, they point away from themselves to God in his otherness and transcendence. Here there is no thought of proportion or ratio or exact correspondence, for the images are in no sense pictures or representations of God.⁹⁷ Analogies are not pictorial conceptions but are steps or instruments we have to use, because of our lowliness and infirmity, in order to be directed beyond the reach of our words and their power of expression or description.⁹⁸ Hence in taking this road we must realise that our thoughts and statements will fall short of their goal, for their subject is inexhaustible. Yet this confession of inadequacy and incompetence belongs to the proper service of faith, for it is an indication that we have allowed ourselves to be directed beyond our reach.⁹⁹ Otherwise we have offered some definition of God, which means that we think we can confine his nature within the limits of our own images and expressions, or we have offered as a description of him something that in point of fact depends on our own arbitrary will.¹⁰⁰ In other words, if we consider that the images we use in our speech of God are representations or descriptive expressions then we are engaged in what Athanasius called thinking κατ' ἐπινοίαν rather than thinking κατὰ διάνοιαν. Analogies and images are valid not on the ground of an inherent correspondence to the Truth, but on the ground of a correspondence which God himself establishes in his Grace. They derive from God's own revelation of himself to us and repose objectively upon his Truth.¹⁰¹ That is to say, they have to be rooted in the

⁹⁶ *De Trin.* 7.37.

⁹⁷ *De Trin.* 2.7; 6.9; 7.28–30, 37; 8.16.

⁹⁸ *De Trin.* 6.9.

⁹⁹ *De Trin.* 2.10.

¹⁰⁰ *De Trin.* 4.2; 8.10; 40.44f.

¹⁰¹ *De Trin.* 7.13; 29f; 9.69; 10.1. Cf. 3.23.

Incarnation, and in the relation of the Incarnate Son to the Father above.¹⁰²

There are three further points about the use we make of analogy that must be noted.

(i) We employ the analogical reference when we perceive, feel or experience (*sentire*) more than we can express (*narrare*). In speaking of the importance of the assimilation of our thoughts of the Father to the thoughts of the Son, for to him only is the Father really known, Hilary adds:

I could feel this of the Father rather than say it, for I do not forget that all speech is inadequate when it comes to those things which ought to be spoken of him. The invisible, the incomprehensible, the eternal must be felt or experienced (*sentendus*).

Even when we say that he is in himself, and from himself, and exists through himself, that he is invisible, incomprehensible and immortal, in all this there is an acknowledgment of his glory, an indication of what we feel, and some sketch of our thought, but speech is powerless before his nature, and words do not express the actual reality . . . Thus our confession of God fails to speak of God as he is in his actuality or his greatness. The perfect knowledge of God is so to know him that while you know that he is not unknown, you know that he cannot be described (*inenarrabilem*). He must be believed; he must be understood; he must be adored, and it is through these offices that he is to be expressed (*eloquendus*).¹⁰³

(ii) We employ the analogical mode of speech not to communicate to others knowledge of God directly, but indirectly, that from their hearing of what we say they may be directed to experience the reality of God for themselves. What is indescribable (*inenarrabile*) cannot be brought within the limits and bounds of some expression. Nevertheless when we come to speak of divine things we must employ ordinary, natural speech in order to express what we experience or perceive with our minds, even though it is unworthy of the majesty of God. We can only speak to others what we experience and understand by using our own circumstances and words, yet without suggesting that any comparison can be drawn between God and human affairs.¹⁰⁴ Hence although we cannot think here of any direct communication which conveys the truth

¹⁰² *De Trin.* 8.13, 16; 9.66ff.

¹⁰³ *De Trin.* 2.7; cf. also 2.6.

¹⁰⁴ *De Trin.* 4.2.

within the compass of statements themselves, we expect, as Hilary says elsewhere, that those who hear will prove and confirm what they hear by their experience.¹⁰⁵ The effect of communication is to direct others to the *veritas* where they must come up against the divine self-revelation for themselves and where they will understand only as the gap between the inadequate human language and the truth is bridged by divine action. In other words, communication serves the purpose of persuading others to look to the realities indicated by our speech, that is, not to stop short at the words or terms we employ but to cast themselves upon the truth which has its own 'force' and 'is its own sufficient witness'.¹⁰⁶

(iii) The analogical reference of biblical and theological statements is governed by the infinite depth of the truth in the Being of God. Statements perform their function truly, then, when they break off, and 'confess', as it were, their own inadequacy, thus directing us beyond to the boundless and unlimited reality of God. That is the point, says Hilary, of St Paul's exclamations in the midst of his epistles, e.g. Romans 2.33–36, where he breaks off to wonder at the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. 'It is to curb our feeble understanding when it strains itself to fathom the depth of the divine nature with its descriptions and definitions, that we must re-echo the language of the Apostle's exclamation, lest we should attempt by rash conjecture to snatch from God more than he has been pleased to reveal to us.'¹⁰⁷ 'What presumption to suppose that words can describe adequately his divine nature, when thought is often too deep for words, and his nature transcends even the conception of thought!'¹⁰⁸ 'His whole Being is a depth which we can never examine or penetrate. We say his whole Being, not to define it as limited, but to understand it in its unlimited boundlessness.'¹⁰⁹

Analogy, which by its very intention is an adaptation to the feebleness of the human mind, and not to the nature of God, remains bound within the limited range of our finite consciousness, and therefore cannot carry us over to God. But when God himself condescends to speak to us in our language, and provides us with analogical images and terms, we are

¹⁰⁵ *Collectanea Antiariana, Corpus Scriptorum*, Leipzig, 1916, 65, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ *De Trin.* 7.4, 10–13; 9.1, 69; cf. 2.4f.; 3.22; 10.1.

¹⁰⁷ *De Trin.* 11.44.

¹⁰⁸ *De Trin.* 11.44.

¹⁰⁹ *De Trin.* 11.47.

meant to find in them the instruments by which we may be raised to understand what is beyond our power of expressing – yet it would be altogether wrong to turn these analogies into ‘standards of comparison for the divine Majesty’. ‘Reverence and reason justify us in using such help, which we find used in God’s witness to himself, while yet we do not aspire to find a parallel to the nature of God.’¹¹⁰ Along with his Word God bestows upon us his *Gift*, the Spirit of Truth who searches the depths of God and reveals him to us. It is in and through the Spirit that we are assimilated to the Mind of Christ, and are made to partake of his knowledge of the Father. It is he alone who really knows the Father, and it is only through communion with the Son in the Spirit that we too may know the Father.¹¹¹ This tells us that in the last resort it is upon the action of God himself that we have to rely, for it is his action alone that spans the chasm between our language and his own Truth, and he alone who creates in us the capacity to partake of God’s knowledge of himself. ‘In discoursing of the things of God, we must assume that God has full knowledge of himself. For he whom we can know only through his own speaking to us is the fitting Witness concerning himself.’¹¹²

3. The Interpretation of biblical statements

If the language of the Scriptures points to divine realities beyond itself, then it is to be understood and interpreted in the light of those realities which it serves. On the other hand, we have to do in the Scriptures with special speech, that is, with ordinary language that God has used as his instrument to speak to us, language with a meaning adapted to the realities it is made by God to signify. Hence we must pay careful attention to that language and the way in which it is used, for it is not through any language but through this language that we come to understand the things of God. Here then we are concerned with a two-way relation between *res* and *verba* and *verba* and *res*. Interpretation must start from within that two-way relationship if it is to do justice either to the realities signified or to the significant terms employed.

We shall let Hilary speak in his own words about this understanding

¹¹⁰ *De Trin.* 7.30.

¹¹¹ *De Trin.* 2.29ff; 8.19ff, 31ff; 9.69, 73; 12.55f.

¹¹² *De Trin.* 1.18.

of hermeneutics, adducing two passages of prime importance which gather up much that he has to say elsewhere in the work.

And you whom an ardent faith and a zeal for a truth unknown to the world and its wise men have summoned to read [the prophets and evangelists] ought to remember that the feeble and foolish opinions of earthly minds must be thrown aside, and that all the narrow limits of finite statement must stretch wide open in a studied readiness to learn. New perceptions of the regenerated mind are needed in which each one is enlightened by his own conscience in accordance with the Gift that comes from heaven. Therefore first of all he must take his stand through faith on the ground of the divine Being (*in substantia Dei*), as holy Jeremias advises (Jer. 23.22, LXX, ἐν ὑποστάσει), that in accordance with what he hears of that Being he will extend the bounds of his own perception to mark the things that are worthy of the Being of God (*ut de substantia Dei audieturus, sensum suum ad ea quae Dei substantiae sint digna moderetur*); he will do that, however, not by any standard of judgment, but by that of infinity. Furthermore, even if he is aware that he has been made a partaker of the divine nature, as the blessed apostle Peter says in his second Epistle (2.14), he must not measure the nature of God by the norms of his own nature but weigh the divine declarations in accordance with the glory of God's self-declaration. For he is the best reader who looks for an understanding of statements from the statements themselves rather than imposes his own understanding upon them, who draws out their own meaning rather than imports one into them; nor does he force upon the statements as their right meaning something he had presumed to understand even before he read them (*Optimus enim lector est, qui dictorum intelligentiam expectet ex dictis potius quam imponat, et retulerit magis quam attulerit, neque cogat id videri dictis continere, quod ante lectionem praesumpserit intelligendum*). When therefore we have to speak of the things of God, let us yield to God his knowledge of himself, and wait upon his statements with dutiful reverence.¹¹³

That passage brings out clearly the principle of objectivity which Hilary advocates so strongly. That is to say, he insists that the interpreter must attend to what is actually written, and instead of reading his own thoughts into the text, let its statements yield to him their own meaning.

In the case of the Scriptures that means that the interpreter must take his stand upon the sure ground of God's self-revelation, where he is face to

¹¹³ *De Trin.* 1.18. This passage ends with the citation, *idoneus sibi testes est, qui nisi per se cognitus non est*, — see above, note 106.

face with the objectivity of the divine *hypostasis*, and allow his own mind to expand in accordance with what God reveals and speaks of himself – respect for the majesty of God and his truth requires of us to be critical of all our own opinions. When we read our own notions into the text, we pervert it and misuse it – that is what the heretics do, who choose their own arbitrary meaning rather than follow the tenor of Scriptures themselves. That is the starting-point for the second passage.

To support their own error and deadly teaching the heretics usurp the testimonies of the divine statements, corrupt perception of their meaning and take advantage of human ignorance to put forth their lies about them. Yet no one ought to be in any doubt about the fact that we must use this divine teaching in order to know about the things of God. For human weakness cannot attain knowledge of heavenly things by itself, nor can the kind of perception that pertains to corporeal things claim to reach understanding of invisible things. Neither what has been created in us and is carnal, nor what has been given to us from God for the use of our own life, can discern the nature and work of the Creator by its own judgment. Our minds do not approach heavenly knowledge nor can we in our feebleness conceive the incomprehensible power by any perception of our own. We must believe what God says of himself. For either he is to be denied after the fashion of the heathen, if his testimonies are rejected, or if we are to believe God as he actually is, we can do no other than understand him in accordance with what he has testified concerning himself. Therefore let human opinion cease and let not the judgment of men pass beyond the limits determined by God. Hence against irreligious and impious propositions about God, let us follow the authoritative pronouncements uttered by God (*ipsas illas divinatorum dictorum auctoritates*). Every point we handle will be under the control of him of whom we are inquiring, nor shall we join up together verbal statements detached from what gave rise to them in such a way as to deceive and mislead inexperienced hearers (*et unumquodque eo ipso, de quo quaeritur, auctore tractabimus, non ad fallendam et male imbuendam audientium imperitiam quasdam verborum enuntiationes subtractis eorum causis coaptantes*). The meaning of statements will be gathered from the circumstances that gave rise to them, for the reality signified is not subjected to speech, but speech to the reality (*Intelligentiam enim dictorum ex causis est assumenda dicendi: quia non sermoni res, sed rei est sermo subjectus*). But we shall attend to everything, setting forth the grounds of what is said at the same time as the force of the statements themselves. Accordingly we shall reflect upon each statement in the order in which it is set out (*Verum omnia editis simul et dicendi causis et dictorum virtutibus prosequemur. Igitur singula secundum propositionis ordinem retractentur*).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *De Trin.* 4.14.

Of fundamental importance in this statement of his views is the realisation that the *res* are not subjected to the *sermo* but the *sermo* to the *res*.¹¹⁵ Interpretation must be under the control of the thing signified, in this case God the Creator himself, so that to interpret the Scriptures aright we must bring ourselves under his authority and creative direction. This does not mean that we may use the God-given gifts for our life in this world, our powers of perception and reason, as standards to determine the meaning of divine realities, nor does it mean, as he insisted in the previous passage, that we may use our own participation in the divine nature in this way. In other words we may not convert our own piety unto a norm for interpretation, or use the adaptation to God that has taken place in us when we believe in him and are regenerated by his power, as a means with which to measure what the Scriptures have to say about the divine Being and Nature. At no point can the interpreter usurp the role and authority of him into whom he inquires but throughout must be humble and teachable, ready to listen, to open up his mind, and be watchful of himself in case he allows his own prejudgments to foreclose the issue and predetermine the results.

All this carries a number of implications which we must now proceed to draw out in a series of points for which we shall also adduce support from further discussion of the hermeneutical problem in the *De Trinitate*.

(a) An initial task of the interpreter is to determine how the sentences in the text are actually to be read within their own sequences and their own circumstances – that is what Hilary calls the *ratio* of the statements themselves.¹¹⁶ This must be done if we are to give a responsible account of the meaning we assign to them.¹¹⁶ Much of this work is concerned with grammar and syntax and the plain reading of the text, and here we must first of all appeal to the judgment of common sense.¹¹⁸ This alone helps us to check the licence of arbitrary interpretation.¹¹⁹

But even at this level it involves going further, for the *ratio* of the sentences themselves must correspond in some way to a *ratio* in the

¹¹⁵ This is the statement of Hilary's that was cited by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*, I.d.V.c.1, and d. 25.c.2., which influenced both Luther and Calvin.

¹¹⁶ *De Trin.* 4.18, 19; 11.7.

¹¹⁷ *De Trin.* 4.19.

¹¹⁸ *De Trin.* 9.59.

¹¹⁹ *De Trin.* 7.16.

grounds (*causas*) that gave rise to them or a *ratio* in the realities or events (*res*) which they speak about.¹²⁰ To bring that to view is an even greater help in exposing distortion or perversion of the meaning. Thus in regard to Christ's own statements, Hilary says, 'We adduce all the grounds of his statements from the statements themselves by attending to the kind of question he was dealing with, the occasions when they took place and the economic reference involved. We subject the words to the grounds and do not prune away the grounds to suit the words' (*causis potius verba subdentes, non causas verbis deputantes*).¹²¹ This method of drawing out the meaning of the words in a straightforward way also prevents an interpretation being foisted upon them through the use of alien statements dragged in from outside.¹²²

(b) Along with this goes an examination of the whole context in which the statements being interpreted are found – that is, not only the orderly sequence (*ordo* or *ratio dictorum*) which they manifest among themselves, but their connection with previous statements already made.¹²³ Thus with reference to the words of Jesus in John 17.3, Hilary says, 'in order to understand this let what we say in answer proceed from statements he made earlier which are in continuous and unbroken connection with this statement'.¹²⁴

In contrast Hilary describes the procedure of heretical interpretation thus:

But all these statements they do not understand in accordance with their *ratio*, they do not distinguish them in reference to the occasions on which they were spoken, nor apprehend them in terms of the sacred events, nor perceive their meaning from the force of the statements. They speak with foolish and unrestrained madness against the nature of his Deity, citing these statements by themselves void of their content to fill the ears of ignorant people, through suppression either of their complete sense or the grounds upon which they rested, when the understanding of the statements should be sought either from what precedes or from what follows.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Cf. *De Trin.* 2.31: *diligenter est contuendum quomodo et qua ratione sit dictum. Omne enim dictum ut dicatur ex causa est, et dicti ratio ex sensu erit intelligenda dicendi.*

¹²¹ *De Trin.* 1.30. Cf. also 32, where the heretics are said to do the opposite, *verbis tantum inhaerentes, causas ipsas dictorum reliquerunt.*

¹²² *De Trin.* 11.7; 9.2.

¹²³ *De Trin.* 2.31; 4.14; 5.31; 7.5.

¹²⁴ *De Trin.* 9.29; cf. 10.49.

¹²⁵ *De Trin.* 9.2.

However, to interpret biblical statements adequately we must make ourselves familiar with the main theme that runs throughout and the kind of statements that are used in its exposition. Thus we have to have an understanding of all the teaching of Christ and the specific nature of his statements in order to interpret any one passage in which they are narrated.¹²⁶

(c) We must consider more fully Hilary's basic principle that interpretation involves the subjection of words and statements to the realities they signify, and not any trimming of the realities signified to fit in with a sense we want to put on the letter. In this way we expound a passage of the Scriptures as the facts themselves explain it when they are completely set out.¹²⁷ This takes place when we trace what is said back to its source, and understand it in the light of its grounds.

'The words enunciate a sense, the sense results from a movement of thought, and the movement of thought is roused by the truth. Wherefore let us seek the sense from the words and understand the thought from the sense, and from the thought let us apprehend the truth' (*Verba sensum enuntiant, sensus rationis est motus, rationis motum veritas incitat. Ex verbis igitur sensum sequamur, ex sensu rationem intelligamus, et ex ratione veritatem apprehendamus*).¹²⁸ This involves, as we have already noted, the laying bare of the *ratio* not only in the statements themselves, but in the realities signified or thought.¹²⁹ Once we penetrate into that underlying *ratio*, the statements interpret themselves, or declare their own meaning to us.¹³⁰ The Truth asserts itself to us and maintains its own ground over against us and our prejudices.¹³¹ But when we are concerned with interpreting divine statements, we must remember that God *names* himself, and that the things of God, within this context of his self-revelation are provided with 'names' which give a true indication of the realities.¹³² This is another way of speaking about the fact that the Scriptures employ God-given analogies which are adapted to reveal the truth to which they

¹²⁶ *De Trin.* 1.32ff; cf. 10.49.

¹²⁷ *De Trin.* 9.47.

¹²⁸ *De Trin.* 5.7.

¹²⁹ *De Trin.* 4.18, 19; 11.7, etc.

¹³⁰ *De Trin.* 4.14.

¹³¹ *De Trin.* 10.1.

¹³² *De Trin.* 3.22; 7.10-13; cf. 2.3f.

point, and are the means of divine self-communication to us.¹³³ When we penetrate behind the mere *verba* and *dicta* of the Scriptures to the divine realities (*res*), we encounter God interpreting himself to us in and through them. Thus in the human words used by Christ, ordinary language though it was, we meet with God speaking in his words, and working through his works, thus giving us a revelation through which the statements are to be understood.¹³⁴

Every true interpreter, faithful to the text and intention of the divine Scriptures, will allow that self-interpretation of God to sound through to him. In other words, interpretation must seek to lay bare the *internal hermeneutic* already embedded within the Scriptures, for then we will not speak otherwise of God than he has spoken of himself for our understanding.¹³⁵

(d) This kind of interpretation, in which we take statements in no other sense than that in which they were spoken, and in which we follow the proper significations of words to the corresponding significations of the realities (*iisdem rerum significationibus*), requires the laying aside of all preconceptions.¹³⁶ Thus to a distorted interpretation of Proverbs 8.22 Hilary replies; 'But we, without importing anything novel, or any foreign preconception will bring out of that passage of the Wisdom literature the truth and logic of its statement' (*Verum nos nihil novum, nihil extrinsecus praesumptum afferentes, ipso illo Sapientiae testimonio veritatem dicti rationemque praestabimus*).¹³⁷ This is always the point of difficulty and error, precisely where we intrude upon the Scripture an arbitrary sense of our own instead of taking it in its exact expression of the truth. But behind this reversal of the straightforward meaning of the text lies a mental distortion in ourselves.¹³⁸ We cannot make the realities themselves or the facts other than they are but we can bring novel doctrine and human glosses to bear upon them, as Sabellius did, for example. Hence we must force the interpretation back upon the level of the realities themselves beyond the mere level of words and statements – yet that involves on our part a self-critical movement in which we allow ourselves

¹³³ *De Trin.* 9.69.

¹³⁴ *De Trin.* 4.36; 8.51f; 10.5f.

¹³⁵ *De Trin.* 5.21: *Loquendum ergo non aliter de Deo est, quam ut ipse ad intelligentiam nostram de se locutus est.* cf. 7.38.

¹³⁶ *De Trin.* 1.38.

¹³⁷ *De Trin.* 1.35.

¹³⁸ *De Trin.* 2.3; 7.4.

and our preconceptions to be called in question.¹³⁹ That is to say we must push our inquiry on to the point where the search for proofs of what we want to believe yields to the search for the truth itself.

Then there is an obstinate battle between the assertion of the truth and the defence of what we are determined to think, in which the truth holds its own ground, and our will resists it (*et inter veri assertionem, et placiti defensionem, pertinax pugna est: dum se et veritas tenet, et tuetur voluntas*). But if the will were not to forestall the reason but were to be moved through the understanding of the truth to will what is true, then people would not search for the doctrine they wanted, but doctrine through its own rationality (*doctrinae ratio*) would determine every will.

Then every exposition of the truth would be without contradiction, for each would defend not what he willed but what is true, because he had begun by willing what is true.¹⁴⁰

(e) Since interpretation involves the yielding of the mind to what is actually presented to it in the text, and what is presented is God revealing and interpreting himself for him, the interpreter can fulfil his task properly only through faith and obedience – yet faith does not derive from our own preconceived opinion, but takes its rise as it comes under the force of what is said in the teaching of Christ.¹⁴¹ That does not mean that everything can be understood immediately it is heard, for what is heard with the ear requires longer reflection in the mind and calls for judgment as to its truth – yet it is through the revelation of God that understanding is given to those who seek it.¹⁴²

Understanding does not come easily, for our human nature is rooted in error. But we must beware of allowing preconceptions arising from this condition to cause us to reject advance in understanding through the grace of revelation. If we have once understood something in our own sense let that not make us ashamed to reach a more proper understanding in changing our mind. Human perception cannot anticipate the revelation of God with its own prior judgment (*Non praejudicat sensus anterior Dei revelationi*).¹⁴³ Everything concerning the things of God will then be dark and difficult and obscure, but he who yields his mind to the

¹³⁹ *De Trin.* 2.3; 7.4.

¹⁴⁰ *De Trin.* 10.1.c.f. 2f.

¹⁴¹ *De Trin.* 7.33; 8.14.

¹⁴² *De Trin.* 11.23.

¹⁴³ *De Trin.* 11.24.

direction of God's Word in faith will be able to think and speak about God rationally.¹⁴⁴ In other words, because the mind of the interpreter must adapt itself to God who speaks through the Scriptures, he cannot prosecute the interpretation of the Scriptures without engaging in theological judgments and enunciating theological statements. Hence interpretation involves the enunciation of correct theological statements on the basis of the biblical revelation, and those statements in turn will enable the interpreter to discern more adequately the *ratio dicti* in the passages he is interpreting.

The whole of the *De Trinitate* is a demonstration of this method and in that respect alone stands so very close to the *Contra Arianos* of Athanasius.

4. The enunciation of theological statements

The making of careful theological judgments and their articulation in controlled statements becomes imperative especially whenever there is a serious conflict in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

This serves to check self-willed and arbitrary exegesis because it throws the interpreter back upon the *ratio dicti* and the *ratio veritatis*, and disciplines his thinking and speaking in accordance with them. But it also serves to deliver the interpreter from making unwarranted use of his own piety as a yardstick for the truth, and delivers him from being engrossed with his own notions and words. It is where the theological assumptions and assertions that go along with conflicting interpretations can be brought clearly into the light over against each other that it is possible to reach the clarification we require if we are to be disenchanted of our own delusions and self-deception.

This is an issue which Hilary sees very clearly.

In regard to things that are very necessary for salvation it is not enough to adduce for the explanation of the faith only what is peculiar to ourselves. As a general rule assertions that we have not tested will deceive us into clinging fondly to the sense of our own statements, unless the counter propositions are demonstrated to be empty of the truth and so serve to affirm our faith precisely in being proved absurd themselves.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ *De Trin.* 7.38f.

¹⁴⁵ *De Trin.* 1.29.

That is to say, exegetical assertions have to be examined and their validity established over against others which question or deny them. Controversy rightly taken will thus contribute to the clarification of our understanding of what the Scriptures have to say, for when our statements are challenged we are forced to test and correct them in accordance with the *res* or the *veritas* to which they refer and upon which they claim to repose.¹⁴⁶

It is not enough to oppose one interpretation of the text of Scriptures with another interpretation, but since a correct interpretation will be determined by the nature of the same realities to which the biblical statements refer, their adequacy to those very realities and their inherent *ratio* must be established. But that means that we must pass beyond the stage of building up theological statements through the citation of biblical statements, and ground theological statements upon the Truth itself through inquiry into the relation between biblical statements and the Truth to which they direct us. Of course we can never leave behind the direction or guidance of the biblical revelation, but we must refuse to be content with reproducing the letter of the biblical statements in our determination to rest our thinking and speaking upon the Truth that asserts itself through those biblical statements. This means that we have to decide what we ourselves must say of the Truth under the direction of the biblical statements and how we are to formulate our statements in such a way that they are established as true through their adequacy to the Truth itself.

As we have already seen, Hilary was aware that unless something like this takes place all through our interpretation of the Scriptures, we are at the mercy of our own arbitrary desires to read into them what we want -- a valid interpretation must be geared into the *self-interpretation of the Truth* that manifests itself in the biblical text. But when controversy forces us to the point where we have to determine what we ourselves are to say about the Truth by passing from the level of biblical statements in themselves to the Truth behind them and in the light of that Truth to inquire into the relation between biblical statements and the realities to which they refer, then we reach the point where Hilary hesitated, just because he was so deeply aware of the inadequacy of human thought and speech to the Reality and Nature of God. At this point, as he felt, we have to speak of the

¹⁴⁶ *De Trin.* 10.1.

unutterable and tread upon holy ground. Yet we are compelled to do this, in the face of false interpretations and teaching, although it will put a great strain upon the poor resources of our languages, to express what is too great for words.¹⁴⁷ "Through the fault of others we are now forced into the fault of committing to the hazards of human speech things that ought to be held back in the veneration of our minds."¹⁴⁸

The need for theological statements beyond the immediate words of the Scriptures is very apparent in Hilary's challenge to Sabellian exegesis of the baptismal formula, which emptied the terms of their real meaning, although the Names remained to witness to the Truth.

The infidelity of these men thrusts us into the quandary and danger of having to make some pronouncement, beyond the statements of Scripture upon these great and profound questions. The Lord said that the nations were to be baptised *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. The form of the faith is clear, but how obscure it all is for the heretics. Nothing must be added on that account to what has already been written, yet a limit to their presumptions must be set. Because their malice urged on by the impulse of diabolical deceitfulness eludes the truth of things (*veritatem rerum*) by speaking of the names in distinction from the *Nature* of God to which they belong, we offer statements about the *Nature* behind the *names*. In proclaiming the majesty and offices of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as we have them in the words of the Scriptures, the names are not deprived of their propriety to the divine Nature, but are confined to their proper function in signifying that Nature.¹⁴⁹

Hence Hilary proceeds, with obvious reluctance, and with a prayer for God's pardon, in his attempt to put into precise terms what he feels compelled by the Truth that confronts him in the Scriptures to say about the Holy Trinity. And so one of the greatest works in patristic theology was written in an effort to be utterly faithful to the biblical revelation and to enunciate understanding of it in such a way that interpretation would be protected from arbitrary distortion, by being subordinated to the control of the Truth of God to which the Scriptures directs us.

As noted earlier, this involves a mode of theological inquiry in which we must take our stand upon the ground of the divine Being himself, as he is revealed to us through the Scriptures, and allow our thoughts to

¹⁴⁷ *De Trin.* 2.2.

¹⁴⁸ *De Trin.* 2.2.

¹⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 2.5.

expand in conformity to his divine Nature, yet always with the realisation that God infinitely transcends the measure of our thoughts of him and speech about him.¹⁵⁰ That does not allow us to give up inquiry as futile, nor to imagine that our forms of thought and speech may not be objectively controlled by the Reality into whom we inquire, but it does mean that we will always be humble about what we claim for our own statements.¹⁵¹ The difficulty about this is that while God by the very majesty and infinity of his nature eludes us a whole (*totum*), and has yet left something (*reliquum*) within our grasp, nevertheless that which we do grasp is so inextricably involved with his entirety (*in toto*) that it remains recondite even in our knowledge of it.¹⁵² This means that theological inquiry is endless but by no means fruitless, for it involves continual advance.¹⁵³

Everything will be in vain, however, unless we take our stand within the relation of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, as we have already had occasion to see, for it is only within the Incarnation of the Son that knowledge of God has been brought within the range of our understanding, and it is only through sharing in the Son's knowledge of the Father that our thoughts and speech of God may be filled with his own divine Reality and so have actual content.¹⁵⁴ There is no need to discuss that again, but what we must now do is to examine the formulation of these theological statements.

(i) Theological statements must be formulated in relation to the matter of inquiry. They take a form in answer to the questions that are raised. 'The reasonableness of the answer given rests entirely upon the fact that it arises necessarily out of the matters being investigated. It is to the subject of inquiry that an answer will be given (*Omnis responsionum ratio necesse est, ut ex interrogationum causis profisciscatur. Ad id enim respondebitur, unde quaeretur*).'¹⁵⁵ The purpose of this questioning, however, as Hilary sees it, is to allow the subject-matter to reveal itself and so to let the truth declare itself to us.¹⁵⁵ This means that theological

¹⁵⁰ *De Trin.* 1.18; 2.5; 3.18f; 12.24f.

¹⁵¹ *De Trin.* 2.7-11.

¹⁵² *De Trin.* 2.6, The way in which Hilary speaks of God and of our grasp of him here found many later echoes, e.g. P. Lombard, *Sent.* 3.22.3; Calvin, *Inst.* 4.17.31.

¹⁵³ *De Trin.* 2.10. *Qui enim pie infinita persequitur, essi non contingat aliquando, tamen proficiet prodeundo. Stat in hoc intelligentia sine verborum.*

¹⁵⁴ *De Trin.* see especially 3.2ff; 6.13ff; 7.33ff; 8.13ff; 50ff; 9.1ff, 15f, 37ff, 62ff; 10.3ff.

¹⁵⁵ *De Trin.* 9.15 & 1.18; 10.1.

statements take an analogical form in which they refer to the objective disclosure of God. Theological statements are not true in themselves but are true in that they refer to the Truth and as such are adequate means in directing others to attend to the Truth. In other words theological statements are not essentially different from biblical statements in their analogical reference, but they are statements which we have to formulate in the light of the whole biblical revelation and formulate as precisely as we can in order to point up the essential elements which we are compelled to acknowledge in faithfulness to the Truth.

Like the basic biblical statements theological statements are essentially signitive and not descriptive of God; they repose upon the independent reality to which they bear witness, and not upon the will of the theologian to give them this or that form.¹⁵⁶ Because theological statements take their form from that to which they refer and upon which they rest, they are two-fold, for the object of their reference is both very God and very Man.¹⁵⁷ Christ the Incarnate Word of God is to be interpreted in the double aspect of his Person as Word and Flesh.¹⁵⁸ While it is in accordance with that biblical witness and the two kinds of statement it involves (*dictorum singulorum genera*) that theological statements are formulated, unless we are prepared to make such assertions we will not be able to do justice to the biblical witness in our interpretation of it.¹⁵⁹ In other words theological statements must keep within the *ordo* of the economic condescension of the Word of God and refuse to overstep the limits set by the divine revelation.¹⁶⁰

(ii) Theological statements must also be formulated in consistent relation with other theological statements. Like Athanasius Hilary was always quick to point out the inconsistencies in the arguments of his opponents, and to claim that true theological statements have a consistency that derives from the mould of the divine revelation and dispensation or economy.¹⁶¹ But Hilary is deeply aware of the danger of forcing theological statements into some 'symmetrical and consistent theory' through the imposition either of our human limitations or our

¹⁵⁶ *De Trin.* 7.10.

¹⁵⁷ *De Trin.* 9.10f.

¹⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 9.13–15.

¹⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 1.32.

¹⁶⁰ *De Trin.* 1.13f; 8.3ff; 10.1ff; 11.44f; 12.24ff, 34, 52f.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *De Trin.* 10.66.

formal logic.¹⁶² To allow that to happen would be the equivalent of denying the reference of theological statements to what is infinitely beyond them; it would assume that finite thoughts can be adequate to the infinite and human words can measure up to the transcendent nature of God.¹⁶³

Hilary rejects, then, the forcing of theological statements into a closed coherence, through the unwarranted assumption that what we cannot conceive cannot be. Thus speaking of attacks upon the Evangelical witness he says: 'Suppose we say that an event did not happen because we are unable to bring it within the grasp of our understanding, then the actual happening of the event falls out with the failure of our perception of it.'¹⁶⁴ That is to say, we make the limits of our apprehension the limits of reality. What we ought to do, however, is to raise the question whether the fact by its very nature lies beyond the region of human explanation.¹⁶⁵ If theological statements by their nature refer to what transcends the limited range of our human consciousness, then they must be left open if they are to perform their task, and not tied down to our limited perceptions.¹⁶⁶

The other kind of false consistency which Hilary rejects is that reached through the illegitimate imposition of our logic upon theological statements, for this is to assume that the ineffable nature of God can be made to submit to the limits of our definitions.¹⁶⁷ This does not mean of course that Hilary rejects the employment of logic any more than he would reject the necessity for grammar, but he does question the propriety of pressing formal logic beyond its proper sphere. Thus he warns his readers against 'the sophism of syllogistical interrogation' in which questions are put which require a merely formal answer, such as 'does anything exist before it is born.'¹⁶⁸ That does not mean that the Christian faith is devoid of reason, far from it, but it does mean that reason must take into account the nature of that into which we inquire and adapt its mode of rationality to it. Thus while we reject the application of human philosophy to divine things, Hilary says, we

¹⁶² *De Trin.* 3.24-26.

¹⁶³ *De Trin.* 3.24-26.

¹⁶⁴ *De Trin.* 3.20.

¹⁶⁵ *De Trin.* 3.20.

¹⁶⁶ *De Trin.* 3.24f; 10.53f; 12.37.

¹⁶⁷ *De Trin.* 4.2; 5.1; 11.45.

¹⁶⁸ *De Trin.* 12.20.

must insist that in proportion as divine things differ from human, so the philosophy of heaven transcends that of earth.¹⁶⁹

Theological statements inevitably go wrong either when we substitute for the divine Referent things within the limited range of our consciousness, or when we think in words and sentences instead of thinking in the light of the realities to which they refer. The first is the error which makes God a creature and converts theological statements into this-worldly statements; the second is the error which substitutes names for things or statements for the realities to which they ought to refer us, that is, what Mediaeval theology called 'nominalism'. Yet these two errors are not so far removed from one another, as Hilary saw, when again and again he showed how Sabellianism and Arianism meet in a common opposition to the Trinitarian faith. He summed up the double problem very clearly in the opening sentences of the tenth book. Whenever we are not prepared to subject our own desires to reason, search for the truth is outweighed by the search for proofs of what we want to believe. 'Then the teaching that is invented will be one which is built upon names rather than the nature of things, and the logic of truth (*ratio veri*) yields to the logic of prejudice (*ratio placiti*) which the will adapts for itself in defence of what pleases it, not one which stimulates the will through the understanding of rational truth.'¹⁷⁰

By way of concluding our discussion of Hilary's thought we may reflect upon something that Hilary sets before us all through. Biblical interpretations cannot be carried out faithfully unless exegetical and theological work go hand in hand, if only because it is impossible to engage in exegesis without epistemological assumptions which require critical testing in hard theological thinking, but also because theological statements must be contained within the limits of the divine revelation mediated to us through the Scriptures. To think and speak about God truly we must allow his Word to teach us how to speak adequately and appropriately of him, and allow his thoughts mediated to us in Jesus Christ to draw ours into them in order that they may be expanded and made worthy of the divine Nature. This involves us in a movement of ceaseless inquiry in which we are thrown more and more upon the ultimate objectivity of the divine Being, and the transcendence of that

¹⁶⁹ *De Trin.* 12.20.

¹⁷⁰ *De Trin.* 10.1.

Being to all our thought and speech about him. It is indeed this absolute priority of God to all our thought and speech about him that forces us into theological interpretation of the Scriptures, that is, an interpretation of them in their objective depth in the Being of God himself. In so far as we engage in that kind of interpretation we do not subject the *res* to the *sermo*, but the *sermo* to the *res*. We are faithful to the nature of thought and speech when we do not tear them away from being, and we are faithful to the language of the biblical revelation when we relate it to the absolute Being of God, for then we are carried beyond ourselves, our own subjective perversions and infidelities, to the Truth itself. That is what happens when we are face to face with Jesus Christ the Word of God.

When we have to do with *what is*, our thought and speech cannot but acknowledge it. When our thought (*sensus*) is directed back to God and carried back ever further and further to understand him *who is*, and understand him from himself, then the very fact that *he is* remains for ever anterior to it, because that which is infinite in God withdraws itself from the unending inquiry of our thought. Thus the direction of our mind backward can never grasp anything anterior to what God is in his own Being, for in the understanding of God who is eternally prior to all thought, it never runs up against anything else than the fact that God always is. That then which was declared of God through Moses [that he eternally is he who he is], the ultimate fact which we cannot transcend in our understanding, the Gospels testify to be proper to the Only-begotten God, for the Word was in the beginning, and the Word was with God, the true Light, the Only-Begotten God in the bosom of the Father, and Jesus Christ, God over all.¹⁷¹

If it is in Jesus Christ that we come up against the ultimate objectivity of the divine Being, the absolute Priority of God, then it is through their reference to him, his words and his acts, that the Scriptures are properly to be interpreted. He is the Beginning of all the ways and works of God.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ *De Trin.* 12.24, cf. 25-34.

¹⁷² *De Trin.* 10.35ff, 55f, 12.34ff.

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