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The intimate connection between Christ and Christians in Athanasius

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Abstract

The Middle Platonic concept of 'participation' in the Forms is important for understanding the connection that Athanasius finds between Christians and Christ. Yet, Athanasius adapts this concept to his Johannine view of the Word of God incarnate in Christ. He turns to the language of bodily creation and kinship rather than contemplation to express the relationship between Christ and Christians. For Athanasius, evil makes it impossible for humans to contemplate the divine Word by which they were created. Therefore, the Word embodied a new humanity in Christ. The Holy Spirit enables Christians to participate in Christ, becoming thereby part of a new humanity and children of God.

When Athanasius talks about Christians' connection with Christ, he is making some assumptions about reality. This article will interpret what Athanasius has said in the light of those assumptions. Many of the assumptions rest on Platonism, or Middle Platonism, to be more precise.[1] However, Athanasius by no means leaves these philosophical assumptions as they are. Rather, he gives them a Johannine and Pauline shape.[2] This article will not address Athanasius' conscious references to philosophy, but the

[1] E. P. Meijering has made a detailed study of *Contra Gentes*, *On the Incarnation*, and *Orations 1–3 Against the Arians*, drawing connections chapter-by-chapter between these works and those of Plato and the Middle Platonists. See his *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968). Meijering, however, does not use this information to 'unpack' Athanasius' teaching of any particular theological subject-matter; rather, Meijering's interest is in Athanasius' attitude toward philosophy in general and its place in Christian theology.

See also Bruno Salleron, *Matière et Corps du Christ chez Saint Athanase D'Alexandrie (Extracts)*, (Rome: Pontificia Universita' Lateranense, 1967). Salleron sees both Platonism and Stoicism in Athanasius' work, which accords with the philosophical synthesis made by the Middle Platonists. Salleron sees a shift in emphasis from Platonism to Stoicism over the course of Athanasius' life.

[2] Louis Bouyer traces the Alexandrian interpretation of the Johannine concept of 'Word' up to Athanasius' time in his *L'Incarnation et l'Église-Corps du Christ dans la Théologie de Saint Athanase*, Unam Sanctam 11 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1943), 52–8. Already in 1894, Hermann Sträter noted both the Platonic and the Pauline character of Athanasius' teaching on our participation in Christ's body. See his *Die Erlösungslehre des hl. Athanasius* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1894), 175–6.

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(perhaps unconscious) assumptions coloring his theology as he breathed in his atmosphere.[3] What Athanasius says about the connection between Christ and Christians revolves around the central concept of 'participation', μετοχή.[4] This is the concept that Plato uses to describe how individual, earthly, time-bound entities relate to the eternal Forms or Ideas. Briefly, for Plato, the Forms are utter reality, and tend to be abstract mathematical, moral or aesthetic concepts, such as Justice, Beauty, Wisdom, Similarity, Unity, etc. Things that exist in the less real world of the senses approach the more real world of the Forms when they are 'participating' in the Forms, that is, when they are just, beautiful, wise, alike, whole, etc.[5] Plato's student, Aristotle, rejected Plato's theory of Forms as existing outside of any particular things. Aristotle taught that the Forms are embedded in particular things, which can be grouped into species and genera according to what Forms they exhibit. Later, the Middle Platonists, synthesizing Plato, Aristotle and

[3] Athanasius was an educated person and he was clearly familiar with the major teachings of the Greek philosophy of his time but he was not a teacher of philosophy. Most of his direct references to philosophical texts (in this case, Plato and the Stoics) are found in his earliest work, *Contra Gentes*, which is designed to convince educated Greeks of the truth of the Christian faith. It can be found in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus*, series graeca, vols. 25–7, *S. P. N. Athanasii Opera* (Paris, 1884 ff.), 25 : 4–96. (Hereafter cited as PG.) In English, see Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., vol. 4, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Archibald Robertson (Grand Rapids, MI : Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 4–30. (Hereafter cited as NPNF.) In his *Life of Antony*, Athanasius presents a discussion between Antony and some visiting Greek philosophers. For a modern English translation, see the one by Robert C. Gregg in the Classics of Western Spirituality (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), especially §§ 74–80, pp. 84–9; PG 26 : 945–6.

[4] Athanasius does not adhere strictly to one word in conveying this concept. He also uses μετουσία, μέθεξις and συνὼν, as George Dragas points out in his 'Holy Spirit and Tradition: the Writings of Saint Athanasius', in *Athanasiana: Essays in the Theology of Saint Athanasius*, vol. 1 (London: Greek Archdiocese of Thyatira and Great Britain, 1980), 86.

[5] For summaries of Plato's (evolving) teaching on the Forms and on participation in them, and of Aristotle's attitude toward them, see Paul Edwards, editor-in-chief, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6 (New York: The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1967), s.v. 'Plato' by Gilbert Ryle; ibid., vol. 1, s.v. 'Aristotle' by G. B. Kerferd; M. Annice, 'Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation', *New Scholasticism* 26 (January 1952): 49–79; Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 18–30 (Plato), 33–8 (Aristotle), 43–53 (the Stoics), and 54–6 on Middle Platonism's adaptations of Plato's ontology of the Forms through synthesis with Aristotle and Stoicism; and Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 15–59 (Plato), 64–73 (Stoicism and Middle Platonism), 93–6 (Aristotle).

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the Stoic philosophers united all the Forms in the Mind of the One, whom the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (*c.* 25 BC – *c.* 45 AD) identified as the God of Moses. God's Mind (or Reason or Word, Λόγος) contains the pattern for the world, writes Philo, and the genus for each particular thing. In the Λόγος, all things cohere in an orderly way[6] and each rational (λογικός) thing participates in the divine Λόγος.[7] Elements of each of these views infuse Athanasius' use of the notion of participation, yet they are transformed (so to speak!) christologically.[8] This transformation becomes more pronounced in Athanasius' writing over the years.[9] The result is a very tightly coherent view of the connection between Christ and Christians.

One fundamental assumption on which Athanasius' view is based is adopted from the Platonic tradition untouched: the description of God as incorruptible and unchangeable.[10] Athanasius constantly asserts that God is Being, not becoming, and is therefore not subject to experience. God alone is ἄπαθής.[11] Only God is and is what God is by nature. God is

[6] Philo gets this idea from the Stoic philosophers. For a discussion of the difference between the Athanasian view of the Λόγος and the Stoic view, see Philip Tolbert, 'St. Athanasius: Father of Orthodoxy or Stoic Philosopher?', *Coptic Church Review* 15 (Fall 1994): 63–72.

[7] Philo, *On the Creation*, §§ 16–25, in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 4–5; and *The Special Laws*, I, §§ 45–50, in ibid., 538.

[8] In *Johannine Christology and the Early Church*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, ed. Matthew Black, no. 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 192–202, T. E. Pollard traces the Johannine and Pauline bases for Athanasius' equation of Word=Son=Wisdom=Image=Jesus Christ, noting especially the first chapter of the Gospel according to John.

The Greek term for 'word' and 'reason' is the same: Λόγος. For Athanasius, one of the primary benefits of the incarnation is that the Savior, who was 'the Word' become 'flesh', restored human reason, which is confused without him. Athanasius' most famous discussion of this point is in *On the Incarnation*, §§ 11–16, PG 25 : 113–25. NPNF, 42–5.

[9] Bouyer, in *L'Incarnation et l'Église-Corps du Christ*, and Salleron, in *Matière et Corps du Christ*, are especially helpful in tracing this development in Athanasius' thought.

[10] See Friedo Ricken, 'Zur Rezeption der platonischen Ontologie bei Eusebios von Kaisareia, Areios und Athanasios', *Theologie und Philosophie* 53 (1978): 350–1. See also Régis Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu d'après Saint Athanase*, Théologie 25 (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1952), 112–13.

Athanasius compresses the points that follow into §§ 14–22 of his *Discourse 1 Against the Arians*. PG 26 : 40–60. NPNF, 314–19.

[11] For example, see *Discourse* 1, § 28. PG 26 : 69–72. NPNF, 322–23; and *Discourse* 2, § 34. PG 26 : 220. NPNF, 366–67.

The word ἄπαθής is best understood as 'not subject to experience' or as 'unconditioned'. The older English translations, such as those in NPNF, translate it either as 'without suffering' or 'without affection'. I avoid 'without suffering'

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inseparable from and coterminous with God's attributes, such as Wisdom, Power, Word/Rationality, etc. God does not 'participate' in any external Form. The Father is the realm of the Forms. The Son is the Image (εἰκών) of the Father.[12] To say that the Son is the Image of the Father is not to say that the Son participates in the Father the way a less perfect entity participates in a Form, not even as a prototype. In fact, Athanasius calls the Λόγος the Form of the Father.[13] For Athanasius, the Image is a full and perfect one; the Image of God is God.[14]

The difference between God's φύσις (nature) and the φύσις of created things cannot even be imagined. God is not subject to experience, but all creatures are because they *have* to be. Because creatures are created out of nothing, it is their nature to be alterable, changeable and influenced externally. They owe their existence to the experience of being brought into

because a current English reader would hear in that just an assertion that God lacks the experience of pain rather than an assertion that God is not swayed by the impact of other things, painful or pleasant. I avoid 'without affection' because the English word 'affection' has changed in meaning so much that a current reader cannot help but read that as 'without love and care', which is not at all what Athanasius means. One of his favorite adjectives to describe God is φιλάνθρωπος, a lover of humans.

See Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu*, 110.

[12] Several authors point out that Athanasius is careful to call only the Father's own Son by nature the 'Image of God'. Human beings are created '*according to* the Image'. See A.-G. Hamman, *L'Homme, Image de Dieu*, Relais-études 2 (Paris: Desclée, 1987), 164–6; J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'Homme dans la Théologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 39; and Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu*, 104 and 132–40, for example.

[13] *Discourse* 3, § 16. PG 26 : 353–57. NPNF, 403.

[14] Athanasius differs from the philosophers by making such a close identification between the Image and that which is imaged. (Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu*, 91 and 121.)

Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 191–3, cites a confusing section of *Discourse 1* (§§ 15–16, PG 26 : 44–5. NPNF, 315–16), in which Athanasius seems to suggest that the Son *does* participate in the Father, but Widdicombe notes that Athanasius never makes that claim anywhere else, and, in fact, explicitly rejects the idea that the Son participates in the Father, as Bernard also observes in *L'Image de Dieu*, 121. For examples of passages where Athanasius rejects the idea that the Son participates in the Father, see his *Letter to the Bishops of Africa*, § 7, PG 26 : 1041. NPNF, 492; *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*, § 51, PG 26 : 784. NPNF, 477; and *De Decretis*, §§ 9–10, PG 25 : 432. NPNF, 155–6.

On pages 193–4 of *Fatherhood of God*, Widdicombe picks out the concept of ἴδιος as the particularly Athanasian replacement for 'participation' as a description of how the Son relates to the Father: The Son simply *is* the Father's *own*. I note that, in contrast to this, the word Athanasius uses to describe Christians' relationship to God is ἰδιοποίησις: the Son *makes* Christians his own, and thus, the Father's own. See, for example, *Discourse* 3, § 33, PG 26 : 393. NPNF, 411–12.

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being out of nothing. They did not always exist but are affected by God's creative Word. Everything they are and even the fact that they are is received by them. That they are and are what they are is not by nature, but by God, who created them with that invariably variable[15] nature. They are shaped by forces outside of themselves. This is what it means to be παθητός. Thus, to be παθητός is creaturely, not evil, as long as the changing is growth and the influence is God.[16]

It is the nature of created things to participate in external Forms because the Word of God, in whom all Forms cohere, orders all things and connects them to himself, so that they reflect the Word's unity and participate in the Word's life. The Forms of created things spring from the eternal Form, but that we are given this participation in eternal Form is always a gift of grace given to us in the realm of time; eternity is not natural to us.[17] What the

[15] Charles Kannengiesser, *Le Verbe de Dieu selon Athanase d'Alexandrie*, Jésus et Jésus-Christ 45 (Proost, France: Desclée, 1990), 117.

[16] *Contra Gentes* contains Athanasius' most thorough discussion of creation. Here the nature of creatures prior to sin is described. See especially §§ 2–4 and 41, PG 25 : 5–12 and 81–84. NPNF, 4–6 and 26. See also *Letter 2 to Serapion*, §§ 3–4, PG 25 : 612. In English, see *The Letters of Saint Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit*, translated with introduction and notes by C. R. B. Shapland (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 154–8. (Hereafter cited as Shapland.)

[17] *Contra Gentes*, §§ 35–44, PG 25 : 69–88. NPNF, 22–28.

In this Athanasius follows the church's departure from the view of Origen of Alexandria that human souls are pre-existent. In *Phaedrus*, §§ 245–256 (in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1937), 250–60), Plato describes souls 'falling' into matter. Athanasius never uses the word κάθοδος (fall) in this way. In the majority of places where this word occurs in Athanasius' writing, it has to do with the descent of the Word into what is human and the descent of the Spirit into the human as a result. (*On the Incarnation*, § 4, PG 25 : 104. NPNF, 38; *Discourse 1*, §§ 47 and 49, PG 26 : 108 and 113–16. NPNF, 333 and 335; *Discourse 2*, § 7, PG 26:161. NPNF, 351–2; *Discourse 3*, § 39, PG 26 : 408. NPNF, 415; *Letter 3 to Serapion*, § 6, PG 26 : 633. Shapland, 175–6.) The remaining two occurrences describe the consequences of the Word's and Spirit's descent: idols fall (*On the Incarnation*, § 36, PG 25 : 157. NPNF, 55), and Christians are not afraid of falling into Hades through death (*On the Incarnation*, § 29, PG 25 : 145. NPNF, 52). When the Word becomes flesh, it is precisely *not* as a soul falling into the material world. (See note 26.) The incarnation is much more radical than that: it is the descent of the Son of God into humans, motivated out of sheer love. The intent of the incarnation is not to lift humans gradually out of matter, but to divinize them in it.

The language domain that Athanasius prefers, when speaking about the movement into human sinfulness, is that of wandering, straying, erring, becoming lost. The devil has deceived us and led us away from the path (ἀπατάω), and our lives are now aberrant (πλάνη) because we are lost (ἀπόλλυμι). To get an idea of the frequency of Athanasius' use of these terms, see Guido Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum* (Berlin: Walter de

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Word creates is a genus, actualized in an individual prototype.[18] Adam is the prototype of 'humanity'.[19] God made humans reflect the Word in their minds and see the Word reflected in the rest of creation, called into being through the Word.[20]

Charles Kannengiesser points out that in *Contra Gentes*, especially in § 2,[21] Athanasius describes Adam and Eve in ecstatic contemplation of God with their reasonable minds (νοῦς). With the onset of sin, however, Athanasius no longer speaks of a human νοῦς because humans cannot perceive spiritual things anymore; they are no longer λογικοί (rational, 'worded') since they have turned away from participation in the Λόγος. In the time of sin (and not before) Athanasius speaks of the human soul (ψυχή), which is the part of us that experiences constant change and suffers because it is not always influenced by what is good.[22] E. P. Meijering calls attention to Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellinus*, in which he says that the soul has three 'movements'

Gruyter & Co., 1952). The language of being lost and being found is very Johannine. For Athanasius' discussion of John 14 : 3–6, where Jesus calls himself the Way, see *Discourse* 2, §§ 65–70, PG 26 : 285–96. NPNF, 383–7. Pollard, *Johannine Christology*, unfolds this Athanasian passage beautifully on pages 214–15.

The consequence of being lost is corruption or disintegration (φθορά). Athanasius attaches corruption and being lost in a way that will be made clear shortly in his description of evil.

On the relationship between nature and grace in Athanasius' thought, see Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu*, 110; Dragas, 'The Eternal Son', in *Athanasiana*, 57–8; Dragas, 'Nature and Grace according to St. Athanasius', in ibid., 142.

[18] In this, Athanasius is Middle Platonic and not Aristotelian. Aristotle established categories in which the primary substance (οὐσία) is the individual and the secondary substance is the species and genus. But for Athanasius, the genus is the starting-point (genus – genesis – origin). As Christopher Stead points out, Middle Platonism extended the definition of a Form to include not only abstract mathematical relations and moral and aesthetic ideals, but also genera, such as 'humanity'. This expansion of the theory of Forms 'was later to be called a theory of universals' (*Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 19).

[19] *De Decretis*, §§ 8–9, PG 25 : 435–8. NPNF, 155–6; *Discourse* 2, §§ 48 and 61, PG 26 : 248–9 and 276–7. NPNF, 374–5 and 381.

Although Athanasius shows many signs of having been influenced by Irenaeus' understanding of salvation as recapitulation, Irenaeus weaves Eve explicitly into his history of salvation, while Athanasius does not. Perhaps it is because Athanasius sees the generic form as actualized in an individual prototype that he has difficulty consciously recognizing what he seems to instinctively grasp when he refers directly to the story in Genesis: that this individual prototype is dual, male and female.

[20] *Contra Gentes*, §§ 30–4, PG 25 : 60–9. NPNF, 20–2; *On the Incarnation*, § 3, PG 25 : 100–1. NPNF, 37–8.

[21] PG 25 : 5–8. NPNF, 4.

[22] Kannengiesser, *Le Verbe de Dieu*, 124–9.

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or 'functions',[23] τὸ λογίζεθαι ('being worded', literally), τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν ('being desirous'), and τὸ θυμοιειδές ('being passionate').[24] From this data, I conclude that, for Athanasius, when the soul is functioning in the first way, it is a νοῦς (reasonable mind), and that is what he calls it.[25] It is only when it is not functioning in the first way that he calls it a ψυχή, a soul that has been disconnected from its Form, the Λόγος (Word or Reason) of God.[26] Real humanity, for Athanasius, has something of the divine in it. It is when people lose their realness and their humanity that they lose what is divine. But this divine gift is always, emphatically, seen as a *gift*.

[23] Athanasius gets these distinctions from Plato, who refers to them as the three 'forms' of the soul. See, for example, *The Republic* IV, 435–44 and IX, 580–1; *Phaedrus* 245–6; and *Timaeus* 69–72. The difference between Athanasius and Plato on this point is, of course, that Athanasius links the soul's 'rational' movement directly to the Word of God incarnate, apart from whom this movement is impossible.

[24] PG 27 : 37–40. *The Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, in The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), 124; Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism*, 22.

[25] Sometimes he also calls it a ψυχή λογική, as in *Contra Gentes*, § 34, PG 25 : 68–9. NPNF, 22. There Athanasius says that those who deny the rationality of their soul act as if they have no soul at all; but in this they are deceived.

[26] For many years, Athanasian scholars have struggled over the fact that Athanasius does not use the word ψυχή in connection with Jesus, though he does use it in connection with other humans. Was Jesus truly human for Athanasius, or was Athanasius a proto-Apollinarian, so to speak? Kannengiesser's and Meijering's research is very helpful here in showing that Jesus comes not only to restore to people what they had before sin but to make them even better than that. Jesus does have a νοῦς, as Adam and Eve did at the beginning. The only difference is that Adam and Eve had a reasonable mind because they *participated* in the Λόγος, while Jesus has one because he *is* the Λόγος. Athanasius does not mention a soul in Jesus because the soul is usually connected with sin for Athanasius. (As Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'Homme*, points out on pages 258–64, Athanasius does approve a statement from the Synod at Alexandria, 362 AD, that the Savior did not have a body ἄψυχον (without a soul), but he goes on to specify that neither did the Savior have a body ἀνόητον (mindless, without a νοῦς). PG 26 : 804, § 7. NPNF, 485. See also Athanasius' *Letter to Epictetus*, §§ 7–8, PG 26:1061–3. NPNF, 572–3.) For Athanasius, we are not saved by the Word's living as a human defined according to the humanity of sinful Adam. Rather, we are saved by the Word's embodying a new definition of 'human', a new genus. His coming in the flesh to do what he did in the flesh, receiving the Spirit, healing the body, dying in fear and pain and rising in glory was to make it possible for us to conform to this new image through the Spirit, and to wipe out the old image. This is not strict recapitulation. As Kannengiesser notes, now Jesus gives humans what the νοῦς originally gave to the protoparents, but it does not take us out of this world, since it is centered in the incarnation. Rather, it conforms us to Jesus, who is revealed as God loving the world. The form it takes in us is faith. (Kannengiesser, *Verbe de Dieu*, 129.)

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Sin is not eternal and evil was not created by God. In line with his Platonic ambience, Athanasius speaks of evil as non-Being. It is a negative existence, parasitic on Being, and therefore destructive of it and corrupting, like a virus. Athanasius often talks about evil in an ahistorical way, much as Paul does in Romans 1, because of its continuing ferocity.[27] But, in fact, for Athanasius, evil has a historical beginning as described in Genesis 3.[28] When the serpent (the devil) spoke to Eve about gaining the knowledge of good *and evil* by eating from the tree from which God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat, this knowledge of good *and evil* was still a hypothetical situation. The devil suggested to their imaginations (and ours) an alternative to God. Adam and Eve chose to make it real by actualizing the option of *not* attending only to God. Their minds chose to know this alternative, and from then on humanity has realized evil. Because Adam and Eve willed to acknowledge evil, therefore from that time on it happens and we have all experienced it. Before evil came into the world, our created and susceptible nature was not a problem because the movement of our souls (thus, our νοῦς) was always towards God. The fact that we are mobile and changeable only became problematic when our reasonable minds became detached from God and evil became a powerful influence over us, resulting in decay, the opposite of growth, and finally death, the opposite of living being.[29]

The Word brought all into existence; if everything were to disintegrate into nothing, it would not be a fulfillment of God's Word. God also spelled out the consequences of turning away, that death would be our sorrow and our punishment; to be relieved of the consequences would also not be a fulfillment of God's Word. Yet humans cannot regain their proper form in their current state. Repentance does not ensure this for long, because evil is still present to destabilize a person. Even a virtuous life will not ensure it because evil exercises its destruction also over the body, so that even the virtuous die.[30] What evil has destroyed is gone and can only be recovered by a new creation, making whole again. Because there is now evil in the world, the cure must be more than a simple restoration of humans to the state in which they were before there was evil. It must also provide them with a sure ongoing means of defeating evil. Evil uses all avenues to infect the human. Therefore, all avenues must be taken over by the Creator, who is the only one able to defeat evil in all its forms. This requires the incarnation. One who cannot be dissolved by evil influences or snuffed out of existence must come

[27] For example, *Discourse* 2, § 81, PG 26 : 317–20. NPNF, 392.

[28] *Contra Gentes*, §§ 2–6, PG 25 : 5–13. NPNF, 4–7.

[29] For a very smooth and succint version of Athanasius' account of human sinfulness, see W.C. de Pauley, 'The Idea of Man in Athanasius', *Theology* 12 (1962) : 331–8.

[30] *Discourse* 3, § 33, PG 26 : 393. NPNF, 411–12.

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to renew us and provide us with a new origin, a new genus embedded in a new exemplar because the old humanity 'in Adam' is dying.[31]

The Word does not create a fresh new exemplar of unwarped humanity, but becomes a human himself, making what is human his own.[32] As Paul Bouyer writes,

> Saint Athanasius has not chosen between a 'collective' incarnation and an 'individual' incarnation, between a Word made humanity and a Word made human, because Jesus and humanity, to be more precise: this new humanity of which he is the second Adam, that is, the Church, are not two, but one. . .[33]

[31] Ibid.; See also *On the Incarnation*, §§ 6–7, PG 25 : 105–9. NPNF, 39–40.

[32] ἰδιοποίησις.

Bruno Salleron traces the increasing depth of Athanasius' articulation of the incarnation. In his first works, he speaks of the Word taking a body as a temple or instrument. However, when he is forced to deal with the Arian interpretation of scriptural texts such as Proverbs 8 : 22, he has to see that 'the Word is not only engaged in the order of "having" but also in the order of "being" by phrases like "the Lord created me"'. (*Matière et Corps du Christ*, 38 : 'le Verbe n'est pas seulement engagé dans l'ordre de l'AVOIR mais encore dans l'ordre de l'ETRE par des phrases comme "le Seigneur M'a créé" . . . ') The 'me' here becomes personal, a person. The 'Arian attack . . . forces Athanasius to push to the maximum . . . the Divine-Human antithesis, and *simultaneously* (for this is the key to the solution) the *Synthesis of Being-Becoming* in the unique 'person' of the divine Word, which synthesis is the nub of the Incarnation, which incarnation, as P. Bouyer has well seen, is the *new dynamic of our divinisation*.' (Ibid., 35–6 : 'l'attaque arienne . . . force Athanase à pousser au maximum . . . l'antithèse Divin-Humain, et *simultanément* (car c'est là la clef de la solution), la *Synthèse Etre-Devenir* dans l'unique "personne" du Verbe Divin, laquelle synthèse est le noeud de l'incarnation, laquelle incarnation, comme le P. Bouyer l'a bien vu, *est le noyau dynamique de Notre Divinisation*'.)

Salleron's conclusions are strengthened in the light of a fascinating word study by George Dragas, who has found that Athanasius never uses the verb 'to assume' (this English word represents a number of Greek words: προσλαβὼν, φορῶν, λαβὼν, ἔσχε and ἐνδυσάμενος) with the noun 'human' (ἄνθρωπος), only with the nouns 'body' (σῶμα) and 'flesh' (σάρξ); he uses the verb 'become' (γενόμενος) with the nouns 'human' and 'flesh'. (Dragas, '"He Became Man": the neglected aspect of St. Athanasius' Christology', in *Athanasiana*, 9–32.) The fact that Athanasius leans so heavily on John 1 : 14 in combating the Arians has surely influenced both his thinking and his word usage here.

[33] *L'Incarnation et l'Église*, 126 : 'Saint Athanase n'a pas à opter entre incarnation "collective" et incarnation "individuelle", entre un Verbe fait humanité et le Verbe fait homme, parce que Jésus et l'humanité, précisons: cette humanité nouvelle dont il est le Second Adam, c'est-à-dire l'Église, n'étant pas deux mais un . . . ' Bouyer adds, 'For it is *our humanity*, truly ours, ourselves, and not only a humanity like ours of which he was a piece through his individuation, that the Word took *in Jesus*.' (Ibid.: 'Car c'est

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So, for Athanasius, there is no 'humanity' in which Jesus participates; rather, he *is* humanity, in which we participate. In some respects, this new humanity restores the old humanity to its created goodness. For instance, the new human is embodied, as was the old. The body itself is not evil, but the body and soul of the old human are bound together, cooperating in sin. Athanasius can say that the Word takes on our body,[34] but not our soul because the soul that the Word has is not sinful, but is functioning as it should, as a νοῦς; the Word's body and soul are bound together, cooperating in righteousness. In his body, the Λόγος holds the ἀνθρώπινος (humanity) together and keeps it focussed inward at God. It grows (changes in a positive direction) as humans were created to do. But in other respects, this new humanity is more than the old humanity restored. The following diagram illustrates the contrast between Adam and Jesus.[35]

Adam: first prototype of the generic Form of humanity	Jesus: second prototype of the generic Form of humanity
participates in God by receiving a divine νοῦς from outside by grace.	participates in God through a divine νοῦς embedded in the flesh by grace.[36]
We participate in Adam by co-participating in the humanity that he exemplifies.	We participate in Jesus by receiving his Spirit.
This humanity has turned away from its Creator and we cannot regain it.	This God-ward humanity is always accessible to us because it will never turn away from its Creator.

notre humanité, véritablement la nôtre, nous-mêmes, et pas seulement une humanité semblable à la nôtre mais qui en serait comme sectionnée par son individuation, que le Verbe a prise *en Jésus*.')

[34] Athanasius calls the Word's body 'ours' because the body is created, though the Word is not. The Word's body shares with us its creaturely status. Even after the resurrection, Christ's body is ours because it is still the same one that was created. Furthermore, after the resurrection, the flipside is also true: we are Christ's body because after Christ's resurrection we have been enabled to participate in Christ, the Word made flesh, who is the new human. Here, again, Dragas' study is very important in distinguishing between the terms 'body', 'flesh' and 'human'. The Word assumes our body, the Word assumes our flesh (which is the physical body plus its consciousness and experience), but the Word does not assume our humanity. We, on the other hand, can participate in the Word's body, flesh and humanity.

[35] Athanasius actually rarely uses the name 'Jesus'. He much prefers the titles 'the Lord', and 'the Savior' to refer to the incarnate Word.

[36] George Dragas argues in 'The Eternal Son', in *Athanasiana*, 57–8, from *De Decretis*, § 6 (PG 25 : 433. NPNF, 154) that we are children of God by grace, Christ is the Son of

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So, Jesus is fully human, not according to the old humanity, however, but the new. Though personally guiltless, he experienced all the weakness and curse that has accrued to humanity through sin. He did not suffer necessarily, but out of love. Even though (and sometimes even while) he displayed our weariness, grief, hunger, ignorance, etc., he made his creative intent and capacity known. For instance, at the tomb of Lazarus, he both wept and raised Lazarus from the dead.[37] He took our suffering into himself so that he could advance out of it. Through healing he freed people from subjection to evil external forces. Through resurrection he conquered those evil external forces.[38] Thus, to overcome death is characteristic of the new human. To do it, the new human must face and experience death, not merely illness or the threat of death.[39] Those participating in the new human are raised from death in victory because they are 'wordified'.[40] By receiving the Holy Spirit, the Savior defined humanity as 'capable of receiving the Holy Spirit', his own Spirit, who would mold humans into this new image, which is stable and enduring.[41] He defines humanity in a new way so that it now participates in the Word internally, though we are still of a created and graced nature, not eternally ὁμοούσιος with the Father as the Word/Son is.

The incarnation reverses the work of evil. The incarnate one, after completing this mission, sends his Spirit to us so that we can participate in him and thus become and remain children of God, since it is the Son of God's own Spirit. We are 'con-formed' to Christ when his breath (the Holy Spirit) is in us. When we participate in the Son this way, we are really in his body, since the new humanity of which he is the first-born, the genesis, remains embodied.[42] Our connection to Christ, as Athanasius sees it, is unique, without

humanity by nature and the Son of God by nature *and* by grace, insofar as he is also the Son of humanity.

[37] *Discourse* 3, §§ 26 and 54, PG 26 : 377–80 and 436–7. NPNF, 408 and 423; *Letter to Maximus*, §§ 3–4, PG 26 : 1088–9. NPNF, 579; and *Letter to Adelphius*, § 7, PG 26 : 1080–1. NPNF, 577.

[38] *In Illud Omnia*, PG 25 : 207–20. NPNF, 87–90.

[39] – like their Savior. See §§ 19–31, *On the Incarnation*, PG 25 : 129–49. NPNF, 46–53.

[40] λογοθείσης – a word coined by Athanasius. (Athanasius seems to have coined words with some frequency to express things otherwise inexpressible.) *Discourse* 3, § 33, PG 26 : 396 A. NPNF, 412.

[41] *Discourse* 1, §§ 46–47, PG 26 : 105–12. NPNF, 333–4; *Discourse* 3, § 24, PG 26 : 373–6. NPNF, 406–7; and *Letter* 3 *to Serapion*, § 3, PG 26 : 628–9. Shapland, 171–3.

[42] Salleron observes that Athanasius has moved from seeing the saving connection between Christ and Christians in terms of spiritual contemplation to seeing it in terms of physical consubstantiality, which makes us siblings of Jesus, children of his Father (*Matière et Corps du Christ*, 38–42). Accompanying this conceptual shift is a shift in language from emphasis on the 'Word' and 'Image' to emphasis on the 'Son' because this more clearly expresses our connection to the Father through him (ibid., 23).

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parallel or analogy, and thus difficult to understand. Athanasius' stress on our participation in Christ's *body* is Pauline. Athanasius does not talk of our sharing a common humanity with Christ in the sense that we merely have attributes in common, nor does he talk of our sharing a common humanity with Christ in the sense that we share with Christ in some Form of humanity external to us both. Rather, Jesus himself *is* the Form of humanity who participates in nothing, but is participated in. Athanasius does not explain how physical bodies can participate in another body; he just asserts it. Philosophy cannot help here. The new reality has created a new language.[43] We do participate in the Son and that Son is incarnate; therefore, we participate in his body. For this reason, Athanasius does not tolerate scorn of the body.[44]

The Form of the old humanity, which ceased to reflect the Form of the source of all Form, has been made over and recovered from death. Those who do not participate in the new humanity, therefore, are still dying. Christians die, too, but for them death is the opportunity for the new humanity, of which they are already a part, to achieve its victory over death in resurrection. Death is not fearful to them because by their faith they know the creative power of the resurrection, which has already begun new life in them according to the new humanity, which is their real selves.[45] They live lives of continued growth and steady adherence to God. This divinization (as evidenced in their power to do what they formerly could not) is a strong proof that the one who accomplished it through the Holy Spirit must be God. Even if they turn away and lose the Spirit, by repentance it is all there for them again. Previously, repentance was insufficient for salvation, but now it is enough and is effective wholly and immediately.[46]

[43] Reality turns the words to itself. *Discourse* 2, § 3, PG 26 : 152. NPNF, 349.

[44] *Letter to Adelphius*, § 3, PG 26 : 1073–6. NPNF, 575–6; and *Letter to Amun*, PG 26 : 1169–76. NPNF, 556–7. The situation with which Amun is dealing is the anxiety of the monks under his care over involuntary secretion of semen. Athanasius insists that the monks need not worry about what is natural. The first sentence of Athanasius' letter begins with, 'All things made by God are beautiful and pure . . . ' (πάντα μεν καλὰ καὶ καθαρὰ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιήματα. PG 26 : 1169. NPNF, 556) and he continues with: 'For what sin or uncleanness does any natural secretion have?' (Τί γὰρ . . . ἔχει ἁμάρτημα ἢ ἀκάθαρτον φνσική τις ἔκκρισις; PG 26 : 1172A. NPNF, 556.) It is not nature that is evil, but that which corrupts nature, along with the will that cooperates in this corruption. That would be the case here if licentiousness were involved, but it is not.

[45] *On the Incarnation*, § 27, PG 25 : 141–4. NPNF, 50–1; *Festal Letter* 4, § 5, PG 26 : 1374–6. NPNF, 515; *Festal Letter* 7, PG 26 : 1390–7. NPNF, 523–7; and *Discourse* 2, § 67, PG 26 : 289. NPNF, 385.

[46] Compare *On the Incarnation*, § 7, PG 25 : 108–9. NPNF, 39–40 with *Festal Letter* 7, §§ 9–10, PG 26 : 1395–6. NPNF, 526–7, and *Discourse* 3, § 25, PG 26 : 376. NPNF, 407. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'Homme*, 157–9, has a very insightful treatment of this point.

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