

"One God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible."

Here is the summary of this chapter taken from the Foreward.

The second and the third chapters are devoted to the doctrine of God, and to our knowledge of him as Father and Creator. The basic clue to the understanding of the Nicene approach is taken from Athanasius: 'It is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works and call him Unoriginate'. To know God in any precise way we must know him in accordance with his nature, as he has revealed himself – that is, in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son in whom he has communicated not just something about himself but his very Self. Jesus Christ does not reveal the Father by being Father but by being Son of the Father, and it is through

Christ in the one Spirit whom he mediates that we are given access to God as he really is in himself. In contrast with Judaism and its stress on the unnameability of God, the Christian Faith is concerned with God as he has named himself in Jesus Christ, and incarnated in him his own Word, so that in Christ we know God as he is in his own inner being, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the *arche* (ἀρχή), the Origin or Principle, of all our knowledge of God, and of what he has done and continues to do in the universe, so that it is in terms of the relation of Jesus the incarnate Son to the Father, that we have to work out a Christian understanding of the creation. It is the Fatherhood of God, revealed in the Son, that determines how we are to understand God as Almighty Creator, and not the other way round. It was through thinking out the inner relation of the incarnation to the creation that early Christian theology so transformed the foundations of Greek philosophy, science and culture, that it laid the original basis on which the great enterprise of empirico-theoretical science now rests.

Athanasius 373

Better to signify God from Son and call him Father; better than from his works = Unoriginate

precise knowledge of God:
[1] in accord with his nature
[2] as revealed in Son who reveals God's self, not something about Him.

This contrasts with Judaism: sees God as unnameable.

Know God in his inner being, as F,S and HS.

Jesus Christ Origin of fall our knowledge of God

Our understanding of creation worked out in terms of relation of Jesus the incarnate Son to the Father; not the reverse.

thinking this way transformed the foundations of Greek philosophy. Basis for empirical science of today Christ-centred, Word-centred doctrine of Creation

We have been paying attention to the quotation from Athanasius

"It would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate". Athanasius Contra Arians 1.34. [📖, page 16 of these notes]

So, this means that

- our understanding of God the Creator is to be taken from the Son, for it is through the Son and Word, who is eternally in God and proper to his essential nature that God the Creator is the Creator and Maker of everything [TFT 76]

db This has the effect in regards to the Bible, of reading back from the NT, back through the OT and taking our starting point from the passages of the NT which speak of the incarnate Word of God as present before the 'foundation of the world'. [Thinking of John's Gospel, Colossians 1.15-23; 3.1-4; Hebrews 1; 2.5-18; 3.1-6;

4.14-16; 5.5-10; 6.17-7.25; 9.8-28; 12.18-29]. This means that we do not derive our starting point in thinking about creation as from Genesis, but take our beginning from within the inner relations of God Himself.

- to name God only from his works [as we see in Romans 1.18ff] is to go no further than the Greeks.
- For Athanasius [296-373], God as Creator is governed by the co-inherent relation between the Father and the Son and the inseparable activity in which they are engaged.
- Hilary of Poitiers [315-367]
 - "revelation is not of the Father manifested as God, but of God manifested as Father" De Trinitate 3.22
 - "...The very centre of saving faith is belief not merely in God, but in God as Father; not merely in Christ but in Christ as the Son of God; in him not as a creature, but as God the Creator, born of God" De Trinitate 1.17
 - "It is to the Father that all existence owes its origin. In Christ and through Christ he is Source of all" De Trinitate

The works of the Son are the works of the Father

Almightiness and creatorship are not abstract qualities, derived from what we imagine God is not [aphoristically]. Rather, it is only the light that comes to us from the self-revelation of God and his giving of himself in Christ, his Son and incarnate Offspring of his divine nature, that we can have any real understanding of who God is. It is not from his works.

Rather, we learn that the works of the Son are the works of the Father [Hilary, De Trinitate 7.17;8.4]

" 17 ¶ But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,

23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. John 5.17-23 NASB1960

db 1. This text is central. Hilary speaks of that answer our Lord gave the Jews who were so incensed that made himself equal with God. "Jesus", says Hilary, "asserts his birth" so as to "reveal the powers of his nature". He taught them that his works "must be regarded as the works of the Father who was working in Him all that he [himself] worked" [De Trinitate 7.17].

On John 5.19 Hilary's comment is this.

"Lest this making of Himself equal to God, as having the name and nature of God's Son, should withdraw men's faith from the truth that He had been born, He says that the Son can do nothing but what He sees the Father do. ...He displays this nature which is his by birth; a nature which derives its power of action not from successive gifts of strength to do particular deeds, but from knowledge. He shows that this knowledge is not imparted by the Father's performance of any bodily work, as a pattern, that the Son may imitate what the Father has perviously done; but that, by the action of the divine nature, He had come to share the subsistence of of the divine nature, or, in other words, had been born as Son from the Father.

He told them that, because the power and nature of God dwelt consciously within him, it was impossible for Him to do anything which he had not seen the Father doing; that since it is in the might of the Father that God the Only-Begotten performs his works, His liberty of action coincides in its range with his knowledge the powers of the nature of God the Father; a nature inseparable from Himself and lawfully owned Him in virtue of his birth. For God sees not after a bodily fashion, but possesses, by His nature, the vision of Omnipotence."[De Trinitate 7.17]

2. To such texts as

"I and the Father are one" John 10.30

"...if you had known me you would have known my Father also" John 14.7

"...He that has seen me has seen the Father also " John 14.9

"Believe me that the Father is in me, and I in the Father: or else believe for the very work's sake John 14.11-12

Hilary goes on to say,

"He has signified his own birth in the name Father, and declares that in the knowledge of himself the father is known. How avows the unity of nature, when those who see Him see the Father. He bears witness that He is undivided from the Father, when He dwells in the Father who dwells in Him. He possesses the confidence of self-knowledge when he demands credit for his words from the operations of his power. And thus, in this most blessed faith of the perfect birth, every error, as well as that of two Gods as of a single God, is abolished, since They Who are one in essence are not one in person, and He who is not one person with Him Who Is, is yet free from difference from Him that They Two are One God." [De Trinitate 8.4].

The Father understood in two ways which are indivisible

In the early Church, always remembering that the one being of God is known to us only through the Son and the Spirit, the Father is understood as

- [1] the one being [μία οὐσία] of the Godhead. He is the
 - [a] transcendent Fount [πηγή]
 - [b] Source [ἀρχή]
 - [c] Author [αἴτιος]

If we are to understand that God as Father states his very being. If He is to be fruitful in his own being then we understand that the Father eternally generates the eternal Son. It is because God is inherently productive and creative in his own being that he is Creator. So Athanasius insisted that those who deny that the almighty God is Father cannot believe in Him as Creator.

[2] the Father of the Son, whose person [ὑπόστασις] is distinct from the Person of the Son and from the person of the Spirit. The whole being of the Son is proper to the Father's being. Since the Father eternally generated the Son from his own being [ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας] therefore He can be believed in as Creator.

"...whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except Father" Athanasius Contr Arianos 3.3-6

The almightiness of God.

Hilary is showing [page 82] that *almightiness in God* is known through the Son

- the Father as made known to us through the Son infinitely transcends all that we can conceive and express
- nevertheless whatever we think of express about God must be constrained and controlled within the bounds of the revelation of the Father in and through the incarnate Son.
- this conflicts with the idea of limitless, arbitrary power. So we see that it is not in terms of what we think God can do, but in terms of God has done and continues to do in Jesus Christ.
- Hilary was overwhelmed by the power of God expressed in condescension, his self-abasing life on earth, and the cross. This is indescribable majesty beyond human grasp.

The uncreated ἀρχὴ and the created ἀρχὴ

Athanasius sharpened the Nicene teaching about Christology and Soteriology [page 83],

- Christ is the incarnate correlate of the beginning [ἀρχὴ] that God is in his triune being. So God, in his own being is the *uncreated ἀρχὴ*.
- taken from Proverbs 8.22, a text that the Arians made much of, Athanasius turned it to show that in his human nature Jesus Christ, as *the created ἀρχὴ*, had been created by God as the Beginning and Archetype of all God's providential and redemptive operations towards us. He saw Jesus Christ as a new Beginning within the creation, and at the same time, the fundamental Principle or archetypal Pattern of God's gracious provision for his creation.

- As the Beginning ἀρχὴ of all God's ways for us, in space and time, the incarnate Son has a two functions on our behalf:
 - [1] He is the actual Way that God's saving economy has taken in the world, and
 - [2] the one Way that leads us back to the Father.

God the almighty Creator [a Christo-centric approach]

[1] God was not always Creator

We can focus our understanding of the internal relations of God, where we think, *ad intra*, of God's own being concentrating upon the relations between the persons of the Trinity. Or we can think of created beings as made by him out of nothing by an act of will; here our focus, *ad extra*, is upon those created beings who are external to God's own being.

In this way we have learned to distinguish between the generation of the Son by the nature of God, and the creation of the world by the will of God.

Arius' teaching had begun with Origen's, who had blurred the distinction between the inner relations and the external relations of God. This left no clear cut between the Father/Son relation and the Creator/cosmos relation.

Two issues to resolve:

- Origen had a monistic view of the eternity of the world. So God is not seen as transcendent over creation but needing the creation. Further it meant that the incarnation was not a permanent action, for it thought of all historical actions as temporary.
- Arius' dualism had severed the bond of being between the incarnate Son and God the Father. The gospel depended on such a link. This also meant that the Son was among the works, *ad extra*, of God, brought into being by his act of will. So Arius limited human knowledge of God to his external relations with the creation. For Arius, God was primarily a Creator, and not Father. So he thought of God as a father because he was first a Creator.

Athanasius, in answer to these two issues:

- rejected the idea of the eternity of the world and its necessity for God
- rejected the disjunction between the being of the Son and the Father and confirmed the ὁμοούσιον; in this way he showed that the Son belongs to the divine side of the Creator/creature relation.
- showed that, in virtue of his eternal Fatherhood, God was always free to create something utterly different from himself out of nothing by an act of will.

"How can things which did not exist before they were brought into being be co-eternal with God." Athanasius Contra Arianos 1.29; 2.2

- God was always Father, but He was not always Creator or Maker. While this does not mean that God did not have creation in his mind before he actually created, it does mean that He gave it a beginning by an act of will.
- Time relations are implied by creation, and they can't as creaturely matters, be read back into God.
- Beginning is understood in two ways: [1] in regard to the creating act of God and also [2] in regard to what is created [his works].
- The "Word himself became the maker of things that have a beginning" [Athanasius]
- Creation and Incarnation are two new decisive acts willed by God. And so we may say that:
 - God is free to do what He had never done before
 - God is free to be other than He was eternally. ie He is free to be incarnate as a creature within his creation.

That something new had taken place, new even for God, was offensive to the Greek mind, but it was powerfully re-inforced through the incarnation. It contrasted with the categories of necessity, immobility, and impassivity of God as conceived by the Greeks.

[2] God does not will to exist for himself alone

"God always was and always is; or rather, God always is. For was and will be are fragments of our time, and are of changeable nature, but he is eternal being" Gregory of Nazianzen Or. 38.7,45.3

We must not read time related ideas into God.

Nicene theology rejected the idea that He was always Creator as well as Father.

God is Creator in virtue of being eternally Father. However with us: God has become our Father

- not by nature but by grace
- after He is our Creator.

God is not solitary [Hilary] and does not will to exist for Himself alone [Irenaeus]. For, while God is transcendent, He does not hold himself aloof, He intervenes providentially in human affairs.

Plato [428-348BC] thought that the Maker produced the world of his ungrudging goodness, which he did not keep to himself but framed the world to reflect his goodness and order.

Athanasius spoke of God not grudging us existence, but out of his liberality and lavishness had acted; but like Irenaeus, he stressed that:

- God made the world in a way that it was *creatio ex nihilo*
- Wishing them to exist out of his loving kindness [φιλανθρωπία]
- Which loving kindness he has now manifested to the world in Jesus Christ, in whom the very Word has become incarnate.

- Creation was understood, like redemption as an inexplicable act of grace exhibited in His incarnate Son. And it is in this incarnate Son that is hidden the reason for the creation.
- The genesis of the creation is from God [with no attempt to explain the how of it]. What was created was not an emanation from God but a product of his will and an activity of his love. So the love of God became a primary principle ἀρχή in both senses of the word.
- The relation of God to his creation was
 - neither necessary - for God was free
 - nor arbitrary - for there was nothing here of chance or irrational randomness; nothing here is accidental [κατὰ συμβεβηκός]
 - God was free to create or not to create
 - the universe is the intelligent product of the divine Mind and so therefore, it is not sufficient of itself.
 - There was no inner compulsion in God's being to create for there is nothing unfree in God. But the creation flows from the ground of the eternal love that God is. Therefore the universe has its ultimate ground in the beneficent nature and love of God.
 - The manifestation of the divine love in Jesus Christ, the λόγος, Mind, or Reason of God made flesh, made theologians realise the universe has a transcendent reason for its being, is grounded beyond itself in the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 - This implied that they thought to understand the work of the Creator in his undivided activity as Father, Son and Spirit as one God, from Whom, through Whom and in Whom are all things 2 Corinthians 8.6; Romans 11.36.
 - It also implied, as with Karl Barth [1886-1968] today, that the universe is brought into being from the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, constitutes "a temporal analogue"; by which Barth meant something taking place outside of God, [ad extra]

in time and space which is analogous to a created correspondence to that which is in the Trinity.

New basis for the universe

With the incarnation, and the presence of the Holy Spirit within the creation now, theologians were convinced that the universe had been set on a new basis in space and time.

The created order

was renewed and sanctified in Christ

was intended for a creaturely correlate to the fellowship, communion and faithfulness which are manifested in God himself.

This was so because it was grounded in God's own steadfastness and depended on Him for its continued existence by the presence of his Spirit. This is consistent with the whole reason for which the universe exists is that God wills not to be alone, and that he will not be without us.

[3] Universe was created by God ex nihilo

That God gave the universe and absolute beginning in space and time is the Judeo-Christian idea. It finds strong support in the New Testament Acts 4.24; 14.15; Romans 4.17, Revelation 10.6; 14.7; John 1.1ff Colossians 1.1ff Hebrews 1.1ff etc

The word used for God creating heaven and earth is not *asah* אָשָׂה a word used for both man's making and God's as well; but the word *bara* בָּרָא which is reserved exclusively for what God does in bringing about something new which has not happened before and would not happen otherwise - something unique.

This reference to a new act of God בָּרָא who through his commanding word brings into existence what did not exist previously and giving it a reality and stability before Him.

"He spoke and it came to be, he commanded and it stood forth" Psalm 33.9

Greek thought is aware of the idea of *creation ex nihilo* but rejected it as contradictory. Early theologians started their thinking at the resurrection, because here we have exhibited the power of God over life and death.

Early in the fourth century ideas of creation were weak because of the confusion between the eternal generation of the Son and the creative act of God in bringing the universe into existence. As we have seen, Athanasius disentangled for the Church the twisted lines thought between the ontological and the cosmological dimensions found mixed up in Origen and Arius.

However, with the understanding that God, seen distinctly as Father and then Creator, we now have the amazing issue that the Incarnation in Jesus Christ sees God Himself become a creature within his creation in order to redeem the world. So in the light of this fact we need to probe the creation ex nihilo. It is this starting point that gives us the clue to the Christian understanding of contingency, intelligibility and freedom of God's creation.

[a] The contingency of creation.

Athanasius, in *Contra Gentes* 41, was speaking with Colossians 1.15-18 in mind, which states
15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

16 *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.*

17 *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* NASB 1960

Athanasius asked the **basic question posed by the incarnation**, "What is the relation of the one and only begotten Word of God, who is unchanging, unlimited and not composite in his being

and nature, to things created out of nothing, which are changing, limited and composite in their existence and nature”.

To answer it he looked at the Incarnation itself. He considered that the incarnation was a wonderful union of the Word with created things that showed

- that, on the one hand, concerning these created things that they were weak, mortal, were fleeting and in a state of flux and subject to dissolution even as far as their own laws were concerned.
- that, on the other hand, when these created things were lorded at in the light of the goodness of God, they were maintained in their being by the creating and ordering activity of the Word of God, and so were preserved, by divine grace from lapsing back into nothing.
- The implication of this is that all things consist “through” and “in” Christ [Col 1.15-18; Hebrews 11.1].

Creation ex nihilo

- doesn't mean created out of some 'stuff' [pre-existing] called nothing.
- does mean that creation depends on the will and kindness of God and has no stability apart from that imparted to it by the continuous presence and activity of the Word of God. [So Irenaeus].

Athanasius had difficulty to know how to speak about created things; for they are endowed by God with reality of their own, yet their continuing existence is suspended over the nothingness out of which they were created by the grace of God.

- fleeting and evanescent [ῥευστός]
- intrinsically unstable events, of themselves. [γενητά τυγχάνουσα]
- not necessary and yet, not accidental or by chance [συμβεβηκός or ἐνδεχόμενος]
- a new concept, which was not dependent on older modes of thought, *contingence*, was being born under the impact of the Incarnation.

Contingence is not an easy idea or concept.

For it is grappling with two poles,

- on the one hand, that of creation being ex nihilo, which rests on the absolute distinction between created and uncreated being
- and on the other hand that creation has a reality of its own, a material existence and events - which are real even for God
- What makes it difficult is that the genuine independence of the creation is itself an independence which is dependent. This is so even as the creation operates with a certain measure of autonomy bringing forth fruit etc automatically [Mark 4.28].
- So there is this interlocking of dependence and independence.

God sustains the universe by Word and Spirit. If He withdraws this then it would vanish into nothing. So the universe is only understood as it is “in God” = embraced by the power and presence of the the Word and Spirit.

The world is in a precarious state, so that God the Son had to unite it to himself in order to save it. And, as the Incarnation revealed, we had become infected with a deep seated corruption [φθορά] which is a corruption of evil that draws judgement on itself.

So the **restoration of God's creation** was the reason for the incarnation of the eternal Son and Word of God, Jesus Christ.

- On the one hand, He took our frail and contingent nature and transferred our origin into himself in order to secure our being from dissolving into nothingness. This was necessary for the contingency of creation was corrupted by a being-destroying tendency that had to be overcome.
- On the other hand, He took our alienated and corrupt nature, including the curse of sin, to redeem us and renew our being in himself. This comes about because the divine and human, the uncreated and created realities /natures are indissolubly related in Jesus Christ.

In this way we can speak of the incarnation as **completing the creation**.

[b] The Intelligibility of the creation

This is an idea even more foreign to the Greek mind. The universe expresses its contingency in its immanent rational order- which is far from being self-explanatory. Its rational order is grounded beyond itself in the transcendent intelligibility of the Creator.

- It is not only the matter of the universe that is brought into being, but also its rational form and order. Even the human soul and mind are made out of nothing.
- There is a distinction to be drawn between the uncreated rationality of God " my ways are higher than your ways" and the created rationality of the created being.
- Created rationality is derived and participates in the uncreated rationality of God
- Athanasius broke with the Greek dualisms such as:
 - intelligible [matters of thought] /sensible [matters apprehended by the senses]
 - divine λόγος / immanent cosmological principle
 - seminal reasons [λόγοι σπερματικοί] eternal forms embedded in nature
 - Athanasius put forward in their place Biblical distinctions
 - between Creator and creature/creation
 - So that rational order is traced back to the Word
 - and so a single rational order pervades the whole of the cosmos which is contingent upon the transcendent rationality of God

In creating ex nihilo

- time and space were created along with it.
- The Incarnation is about God becoming man, and did not come into man. This sets up a sharp conflict with the container views of space.
- Because God presences Himself in space and time, the fathers had to develop relational conceptions of space/time which could be applied variationally:
 - to God in one way accordance with his transcendent Nature
 - to creaturely beings according to their creaturely existence

These relational conceptions of space and time were of an open-textured kind which broke free from the necessitarian and determinative Greek ideas. They saw that the laws of nature point beyond themselves to the transcendent ground of rationality in the Word of God the Creator.

[c] The freedom of creation

God does not grudge his creation its own freedom, but grants it to participate in the freedom which God has.

- There was no necessity for God to create, and no necessity to create different to how He did.
- There was no necessity for the universe to eternally exist.
- Need to think "double contingency" [Florovsky] that:
 - on the one hand God need not have done what He did

- on the other hand the created world need not have happened as it did OR at all.

These were quite new ideas to the ancient world which has thought:

[1] in terms of destiny, fate, astrology, and [2] necessity and rationality.

This **freedom of the universe** arose from a new outlook upon the world found in the history of the Gospel and the Incarnation where God is liberating people from the bonds of sin, guilt and death. This redemption and reconciliation apply to the whole of the creation for Christ is the Head of the whole of creation, through Him all things were created and they all consist in Him. So in Jesus Christ God has established and secured a new relation between the creation and himself. This freedom of the creation however is

- a limited freedom: yet because it is contingent it is no less free
- limited in that the transcendent freedom of God is its ground
- It is the interlocking of dependence and independence in contingency.
- What this means is that scientific discourse cannot merely be logical and deductive, simply using modes of thought: it has to be experimental and let nature itself tell us about itself without imposing our own presuppositions upon it beforehand.
- In its correlation to the freedom of God nature must be regarded as incomplete in itself; even though it can surprise us, it is yet reliable and constant.
- If there is a fidelity and constancy in the Incarnation then Jesus Christ in his redeeming love and grace is the divine pledge for our understanding of freedom, integrity, and reliability of the creation; even in its physical order and behaviour.

So we have a coherent picture of the universe which was

[1] Endowed with a rational orderliness of its own

[2] was neither necessary or arbitrary

[3] while genuinely contingent it was nevertheless - and the Incarnation states this -

stable, reliable constant and open to the providential disposition of the Creator in fulfilment of his own purposes of love.

All this is radically new and linked to the ὁμοούσιον. It all hinges on Jesus Christ.

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