

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES IN *CONTRA ARIANOS*
OF ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

by

MARVIN D. JONES

submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

THEOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: DR. JAFTA

AUGUST 2004

Twenty-three years of ministry have brought many experiences both rewarding and challenging. I must say that the rewards have been considerable and the challenges very few. The goodness and grace of Jesus Christ is seen in the preciousness of three people. I dedicate this work to them.

First, my lovely wife was there in the beginning with encouragement and optimism awaiting each new endeavor with hope and excitement.

To Stacy, thank you for so much encouragement and support. Thank you for the selflessness and partnership that you give as we serve Him together.

Second, he came into our lives as a reminder of the faithfulness of our Lord. He is a sensitive young man who has learned so much about the Lord and delights his "dad" with his presence.

To Marshall, my son, thank you for your constant love, keen wit, and playful attitude. You are a wonderful person, who no doubt, has been called of the Lord for great accomplishments in the Kingdom.

Third, she was born so that the legacy of a father would be passed to a daughter. She has compassion and fire all rolled into one. She can cry for a person's hurt, comfort their need and be angry for the injustice that produced the pain. She is willfully strong and quietly vulnerable. She is my little girl and she is God's blessing to me.

To McKenzie, thank you for reminder that life can be serious and fun. Your strong but tender spirit is a constant reminder of God's justice and mercy. You seek adventure and yet you love the finer qualities that life offers. You are a delightful person who understands the necessity of standing strong when tested. The Kingdom of heaven needs people such as you.

Student number: 3318-567-0

I declare that Hermeneutical Principles in *Contra Arianos* of Anthanasius of Alexandria is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of completed references.

Mr. M Jones
SIGNATURE
(Mr. M Jones)

9/30/04
DATE

The Summary

To accomplish the purpose of this thesis an examination of the hermeneutical method expounded by Athanasius will be made. There are three books that comprise *Contra Arianos* so the progression of this thesis will follow the progression of the stated Athanasian work.

This thesis will also review the relevant passages that Athanasius utilizes to present his case for the Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. This review will adequately demonstrate the Athanasian Trinitarian concept of eternal, functional subordination of the Son to the Father.

The thesis will also review the word "*homoousios*" in order to support the conclusions of *Contra Arianos*. The word "*homoousios*" was the term that became the official recognized position of orthodox Christology at the Council of Nicea. The need for such a review arises from the academic concern that the word "*homoousios*" may exclude the idea of functional subordination. A review of this word (along with its history) seems appropriate. However, the conclusion (and defense of that conclusion) that will be presented is that *homoousios* is not mutually incompatible with the idea of "functional subordination" in a temporal or eternal relationship. This term and concept will

adequately demonstrate that an eternal, functional subordination relationship exists between the Father and Son from the Athanasian point of view.

Historical and background studies, which will help interpret and clarify cultural meanings, will also be employed to enhance the study of this thesis.

Finally, certain conclusions will be presented showing the results of the study. The conclusions will attempt to answer questions that have undoubtedly arisen in the mind of the informed reader of ancient theology and may help identify and even address contemporary issues concerning the Christological and Trinitarian doctrines.

Key Terms

Athanasius, Arius, *Contra Arianos*, Eternal Sonship, Subordination, Subordinationism, Trinity, Trinitarianism, Hermeneutics, and Ontological.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Need	1
The Purpose	4
The Summary	5
Key Terms	7
The Limitations of the Thesis	7
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 1	9
<i>Contra Arianos</i> (CA 1.1)	9
Case Against the Arians (CA 1.2-10)	11
External Evidence (CA 1.3)	13
Internal Evidence: Unscriptural Theology (CA 1.4-7)	15
Internal Evidence: A Deficient Hermeneutic (CA 1.8-10)	20
Conclusion of CA 1.1-10	31
Hermeneutical Principles of CA 1.1-10	32
Orthodox Teachings of the Son Interacting with the Teaching of Arianism (CA 1.11-36)	37
The Focus of Orthodoxy is the Eternal Status of the Son	37
Building the Case of Eternal Sonship	

(CA 1.11-3)	40
Arian Objections to Eternal Sonship (CA 1.14-6)	47
The Arians' Unlikely Triad (CA 1.17-8)	57
Biblical Imagery Supports Eternal Sonship (CA 1.19-20)	61
Divine Attributes Reveal Eternal Sonship (CA 1.21-22a)	70
The Review of the Proof Questions (CA 1.22b-36)	75
The First Proof Question (CA 1.24-26a)	77
The Second Proof Question (CA 1.26b-29)	79
The Third Proof Question (CA 1.30-4)	84
The Fourth Proof Question (CA 1.35-6)	88
Evaluating the Arian Exposition (CA 1.37-64)	91
The Problem of the Arian Interpretation	91
Response to the Arian Interpretation (CA 1.37-9)	92
Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11 (CA 1.40-5)	102
Interpretation of Psalm 44:7-8 (CA 1.46-52)	109
A Review of the Arian Interpretation of Hebrews 1:4; 3:1; Acts 2:36; and Proverbs 8:22 (CA 1.52-64)	119
Interpretation of Hebrews 1:4 (CA 1.53-64)	120
3. INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 2	135
Opening Statement of the Arian Interpretation (CA 2.1)	135

Critique of the Arian Son as a Work (CA 2.2-6)	137
The Exposition Begins	144
Hebrews 3:2 (CA 2.7-11a)	144
Acts 2:36 (CA 2.11b-18a)	149
Opening Statements on Proverbs 8:22 (CA 2.18-82)	154
Clarifying Arius' Answer to Alexander (CA 2.18b-24a)	156
Addressing the Arian Son/Creature as a Creator (CA 24b-30)	164
Addressing the Arian Son/Creature as a Creation (CA 2.31-6)	171
Addressing the Issue of the Two Arian Wisdoms (CA 2.37-43)	182
The Exposition of Proverbs 8:22	193
Proverbs 8:22 and Proper Interpretation (CA 2.44-9)	193
The Meaning of the Son's Works (CA 2.50-6)	200
Natural Sonship, Proverbs 8:25 (CA 2.57-61a)	206
The Meaning of Firstborn (CA 2.61b-4)	211
The Meaning of "The Beginning of Ways" (CA 2.65-72)	216
The Interpretation of Proverbs 8:23 (CA 2.73-77a)	227
Proverbs 8:22 Revisited (CA 2.77b-82)	230
4. INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 3	236
Opening Statement of the Arian Interpretation	

of the Gospel Texts (CA 3.1-25)	236
Asterius and the Gospel of John (CA 3.2-6)	239
Examining John 10:30 (CA 3.7-9)	253
The Arian Monad of John 10:30 (CA 3.10-6)	254
The Arian Uses of John 17:11 (CA 3.17-25)	262
Interacting with the Arian Interpretation of the Gospel Texts (CA 3.26-67)	270
The Eternal Son and the Scriptural Witness in the Gospels (CA 3.30-5)	273
Matthew 11:27 and John 3:35 (CA 3.36-41)	283
Mark 13:32 and Luke 2:52 (CA 3.42-53)	289
Matthew 26:38-39 and John 12:27 (CA 3.54-58a)	298
Refuting Sonship <i>Per</i> the Will of God (CA 3.58b-67)	301
5. SUMMARY OF THE THESIS	307
The Theological Concept of Eternal Sonship as Revealed in <i>Contra Arianos</i>	307
Eternal Sonship from the Negative Aspect	308
Eternal Sonship from the Positive Aspect	313
Eternal Subordination	318
Conclusion	320
BIBLIOGRAPHY	321

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Need

The theological debate¹ concerning the person of Jesus Christ and his relationship to God the Father has gendered interest in the writings of Athanasius.

The issue of Athanasius' concept of the subordination² of God the Son to God the Father (and the

¹ The debate this thesis refers to is the debate concerning gender roles, subordination, and the reference to the Trinity for a guiding model for male-female relationships. This debate has produced two factions: the Egalitarians and the Complementarians. Complementarians understand the Scriptures to depict a functional subordination that exists in the relationship between the male and female genders. This position maintains an ontological equality while proposing subordination in the specific function of the female to the male. Egalitarians, on the other hand, understand the Scriptures to reveal that male and female are created equal (as Complementarians do) yet they do not perceive that a functional subordination exists or even must exist within the relationship of males and females.

² The term 'subordination' must be defined in precise terms or this thesis will be very confusing. Subordination can be heretical if the meaning is "ontological subordination." The basic idea is that God the Son is inferior to that of God the Father in essence. R. C. and C. C. Kroeger, states that subordination is "A Doctrine that assigns an inferiority of being, status, **or role** [emphasis added] to the Son or Holy Spirit within the Trinity" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Ewell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], s.v. "subordinationism,"). Most other dictionaries are more theologically acumen in their definition of subordination. For example H. E. W. Turner, states, "There is an orthodox Subordinationism in the sense that the Trinity must begin with the Father or lead up to the Father, but this is concerned with order of thought and unity in derivation and does **not affect the ontological status** [emphasis added] of the three Persons" (*A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983], s.v.

equality of the Son to the Father) has been broached by Egalitarians and Complementarians alike. For example, the Egalitarian position is represented by Kevin Giles and he makes the claim in his book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*,³ that he is relating to the Athanasian hermeneutic. Giles comes to the conclusion that Athanasius understood the subordination of Christ to be temporal and not eternal. He writes:

. . . Athanasius rejects not only any suggestion whatsoever that the Son is subordinate in *being* to the Father, but also any suggestion whatsoever that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father in *function, role or work*. He is opposed to ontological subordinationism as he is to functional subordinationism because he clearly saw that the latter implied the former, as demonstrated by the Arians.⁴

"Subordinationism,"). Turner articulates an understanding of subordination that differentiates between the function and the essence of the Son to the Father. Another example of accurate theological precision in defining the term 'subordinationism' is Millard J. Erickson's definition Erickson states, "The doctrine that in essence and status the Son is inferior to the Father, or the Spirit is inferior to the Father and Son. This is to be distinguished from functional subordination, **which sees the role of the Son or the Spirit as temporarily subordinated to the Father during a period of ministry,**" (emphasis added) (*Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986], 161). For the purpose of clarity this thesis will utilize the definition of subordination in the sense that the Son is of "equal essence to the Father yet functionally subordinate in role."

³ Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 3-4, 8, 35-7, and 46.

⁴ Ibid., 38.

Giles also declares that traditional Christianity does not support the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. He states, "It is my argument that tradition should be followed but that it does not support in any way the eternal subordination of the Son in being or function."⁵

Giles appeals to Athanasius simply because it is the Athanasian position which is deemed to be the orthodox position.⁶ Therefore, Giles refers to the Nicene champion in order to leverage his theological position and thus add credibility to his work.

On the opposite side of the debate is the Complementarian position represented by Peter R. Schemm, Jr. and Stephen D. Kovach who state, "For Athanasius then, there are at least three ways to defend the eternal relationship between the Father and Son. The Son's eternity is affirmed by Scripture, by virtue of being the offspring of the Father, and by the immutability of the Godhead."⁷

Schemm and Kovach present the case for an Athanasian understanding of an eternal relationship that exists between Father and Son.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶ See footnote 12 for comments on the Council of Nicea.

⁷ Peter R. Schemm, Jr. and Stephen D. Kovach, "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (September 1999): 467.

Both positions appeal to Athanasius to justify their conclusions. Both sets of theologians refer to the same work, *Contra Arianos*. Yet, both sets of authors come to vastly different conclusions concerning Athanasius' concept of subordination and the eternal relationship of God the Son to God the Father.

The need for this work is monumental. Unfortunately, none of the above mentioned theologians have evaluated or researched the work of Athanasius' *Contra Arianos*. There is only passing references made from both positions without the benefit of a scholarly inductive study of the work cited.

The Purpose

The primary intent of the thesis is to examine the *Contra Arianos* and determine that Athanasius does address the functional subordination⁸ of the Son to the Father as being an eternal relationship.

The secondary intent of this thesis is to reexamine and evaluate the Athanasian approach to the Arian

⁸ Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "Kevin Giles's *The Trinity and Subordinationism*," *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7 (Fall 2002): 67-78, argues for this term in his book review entitled, "Kevin Giles's *The Trinity and Subordinationism*." Schemm states that the term '*functional subordination*', in his opinion, qualifies the idea of the Son being subordinate in role only and not in reference to ontological issues (see footnote six, page 77).

controversy and review his hermeneutic of the biblical texts he presents as the orthodox teaching of the Scriptures as found in the Athanasian work, *Contra Arianos*.

The Summary

To accomplish the purpose of this thesis an examination of the hermeneutical method expounded by Athanasius will be made. There are three books⁹ that comprise *Contra Arianos* so the progression of this thesis will follow the progression of the stated Athanasian work.

This thesis will also review the relevant passages that Athanasius utilizes to present his case for the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. This review will adequately demonstrate the Athanasian Trinitarian concept of eternal, functional subordination of the Son to the Father.

⁹ Most Scholars propose that *Contra Arianos* 3 chapter 30 and 4 are not original to Athanasius. The reason for such assumptions is that style and language differ from the previous books. This thesis accepts the general consensus that Book 4 is not a legitimate work of Athanasius.

The thesis will also review the word "*homoousios*"¹⁰ in order to support the conclusions of *Contra Arianos*.¹¹ The word "*homoousios*" was the term that became the official recognized position of orthodox Christology at the Council of Nicea.¹² The need for such a review arises from the academic concern¹³ that the word "*homoousios*" may exclude the idea of functional subordination. A review of this word (along with its history) seems appropriate. However, the conclusion (and defense of that conclusion) that will be presented is that *homoousios* is not mutually incompatible

¹⁰ G. W. H. Lampe states that the term is defined as "of the same substance or stuff" (*A Patristic Greek Lexicon* [Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1961], 958-959). It also has the meaning of "same metaphysical essence." Lampe continues, ". . . thus the term was used as definition of full and absolute deity of Son; but according to Athanasius it implied also substantial identity of Father and Son as solution of problem of divine unity . . . Athanasius balances two senses of *homoousios*: of *stuff* as against Arius, and of *one content* as against objection that former means existence of two gods . . . term is not confined to collaterals but applies equally to derivation and derived; hence denial of theory that if Father and Son are *homoousios* they must be collateral, requiring assumption of antecedent common source." The thesis will utilize Lampe's definition of "same substance" for clarity and purpose.

¹¹ This comparison will be brief but adequate to demonstrate that the Athanasian understanding and his meaning of *homoousios* includes an "ontological equality and a functional subordination."

¹² E. A. Livingston, ed., states that Nicea is "the first ecumenical Council, summoned by the Emperor Constantine, mainly to deal with the Arian controversy" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], s.v. "Nicea, First Council of,"). The importance of this council is that Nicea started the process of determining orthodox Christology.

¹³ The concern comes from this writer's own studies in Athanasius. The word "*homoousios*" is defined as "same substance." Since this is the accepted definition, the question concerning subordination seems to be negated by the definition and usage of *homoousios*.

with the idea of "functional subordination" in a temporal or eternal relationship. This term and concept will adequately demonstrate that an eternal, functional subordination relationship exists between the Father and Son from the Athanasian point of view.

Historical and background studies, which will help interpret and clarify cultural meanings, will also be employed to enhance the study of this thesis.

Finally, certain conclusions will be presented showing the results of the study. The conclusions will attempt to answer questions that have undoubtedly arisen in the mind of the informed reader of ancient theology and may help identify and even address contemporary issues concerning the Christological and Trinitarian doctrines.

Key Terms

Athanasius, Arius, *Contra Arianos*, Eternal Sonship, Subordination, Subordinationism, Trinity, Trinitarianism, Hermeneutics, and Ontological.

Limitations of the Thesis

This thesis will be confined to the above purpose and procedures. Hence, this study will not be exhaustive in

dealing with the totality of the Athanasian thought nor will it present a systematic theology¹⁴ of Athanasius.

The thesis will not review the textual criticism of *Contra Arianos* in order to identify the authenticity of all three books. The legitimacy of such a work is warranted but beyond the purpose of this thesis.

¹⁴ For such a work see Khahled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (London: Routledge Publication, 1998). Another fine work on this subject is Alvyn Pettersen, *Athanasius* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995). Both of these works have synthesized the writings of Athanasius and both have produced a systematic approach to his work.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 1

*Contra Arianos*¹ (1.1)

In the opening sections 1.1-10, Athanasius reveals the basis of his polemic against the Arians. This section serves as the prelude to the rest of the work. CA 1.1 reveals that the Arian heresy is an *epinoew* (invention)² and contrived apart from Christianity.

The most interesting accusation made is that the content of Arianism is depicted in scriptural language but devoid of the scriptural meaning. Thus, Athanasius can claim that "those who consider Arians Christians are in

¹ Henceforth CA.

² The insight into the Athanasian usage of this word is a direct result of a conversation with Dr. Craig Blaising in the fall of 2002 at Houston, Texas. Dr. Blaising is the current Executive Vice President and Provost at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. Cardinal Newman, in his notes concerning *Contra Arianos*, describes both *epinoew* and *επινοησασαι* as "a technical word, and has occurred again and again, as descriptive a heretical teaching in opposition to the received traditional doctrine" (Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Select Writings and letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, NPNF 4, [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1994], 306). Apparently Athanasius uses this word to describe the thinking of the Arians—they invented a heresy.

great error.”³ Apparently there was still an Arian presence within the Christian Church that continued to utilize the words of Scripture but arrived at a different meaning or interpretation of those passages than orthodox Christianity would/did allow.⁴ The great danger in Arianism is that it conceals itself in the language of Christianity and must be exposed so that it can be seen for its own heretical novelties.

The work, *Contra Arianos*, is directed to those who have believed the Arian heresy instead of the Christian faith. The reference to 1 John 2:20 includes a reference to departure of the faith because of the Anti-Christ at work deceiving God’s people (1 John 2:22). Athanasius attributes the work of Arius as being a product that is satanically undermining the Christian faith.

Athanasius writes in order to correct those who have accepted Arianism with the truth of Christianity. The opportunity exists for Athanasius to reveal proper

³ Athanasius, “Orations Against the Arians, Book I,” in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, trans. and ed. William G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 63.

⁴ The Arian heresy is predicated upon a method of interpretation that questioned the orthodox meaning of certain biblical passages. Charles Kannengiesser states, “The Crisis [referring to the Arian Crisis] is essentially one of hermeneutics” (*Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics* [Berkeley: Center For Hermeneutical Studies, 1982], 1).

doctrines that, in his opinion, will direct the reader back to the truth of Christianity.

Case Against the Arians (CA 1.2-10)

In CA 1.2, Athanasius makes the claim that "a Christian would not endure hearing these things; he would not grant that anyone who dares to say this is of sound mind."⁵ Basically, Athanasius asserts that to accept the Arian heresy proves that an individual is mentally unbalanced or, in fact, deceived. He refers to absurd comparisons: Caiaphas a Christian, Judas Iscariot an apostle, and the demanding of the death of Barabbas instead of the Savior.⁶ Accepting the Arian heresy is comparable to accepting any of the above absurdities.

Athanasius also charges Arius with plagiarism⁷ and an effeminate character. This feminine quality stands in stark contrast to the 1 Timothy 2:11-14 admonition for a "woman not to teach," then the application is that "Eve being deceived" is a work of the evil one. The point is that the work of Arius originates in the heart of Satan.

⁵ Athanasius, 63.

⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁷ Ibid., 64.

The accusation of plagiarism demonstrates that Arianism is an **epinoew** (invention) and not a revelation as is the case of Christianity. Once again there is the Athanasian contrast of **epinoew** (invention) and **αληθεια** (truth). The Arians have produced a doctrine that is contrived and invented which stands in contrast to the revelation of Christian **αληθεια** (truth).

The basic issue at stake is the epistemological framework of Arianism: the starting point for Arianism is a satanic **epinoew** (invention) that is the opposite of the revealed **αληθεια** (truth) of Christianity. Thus, there are two different systems of religion that are not conducive or compatible with one another: one is an **epinoew** (invention), whereas, the other is a revealed **αληθεια** (truth).

Athanasius begins to prove his theory by examining the lineage and the name of the heresy. The concept of accepting Arianism is questionable since there is no lineage from Christianity, meaning there is no tradition from or within Christianity that includes Arianism. The lack of tradition⁸ in the Arian lineage is a very strong

⁸ Meredith B. Handspicker, states, "Formally, then, tradition implies a handing down of certain material from one generation to another, with the assumption that this material is kept relatively intact; materially, when speaking of Christian tradition, the term implies certain crucial events which are, with their interpretation, the founding events of the Christian faith. . . . Tradition, or

argument against the validity of Arius and his teachings. This is revealed in the fact that the name "Arians" is a name for the adherents of the heresy that is not found within the lineage of Christianity. Thus, the name "Arian" signifies a contrasting religious system. Arianism has its own name, its own adherent, and its own doctrinal formulation. This Arian system is different than the orthodoxy of Christianity and thus can truly be called a heresy.

Athanasius anticipates that the reader may desire more reliable and even external evidence for his position that Arianism is an alternative, but deficient, competing religious system.

External Evidence (CA 1.3)

In CA 1.3, Athanasius gives his evidence in the heretical teachings and subsequent ex-communication of Marcion.⁹ The excommunication of Marcion is a legal and

paradosis, is peculiarly that which is handed down; it is as such distinguished from that which is written down. Such a division does not indicate a twofold source of Christian doctrine, but points to two aspects of its propagation" ("Athanasius on Tradition and Scripture," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 3 [1962]: 14-7). Later in the thesis the subject of tradition will be more thoroughly developed.

⁹ Phillip Schaff gives insight to the reason for the excommunication of Marcion: "Marcion formed a canon of his own, which consisted of only eleven books, an abridged and mutilated Gospel of Luke, and ten of Paul's epistles. He put Galatians first in order, and called Ephesians the Epistle to the Laodicaeans. He rejected the pastoral epistles, in which the forerunners of Gnosticism are

ecclesiastical illustration that one party can claim Christianity but the evidence for such a claim is to be found in the content of the teaching (the teaching is found acceptable or unacceptable by the Church). He gives further evidence in that the Meletians¹⁰ were also expelled by Peter the Bishop because of their heretical doctrines. The common thread in each and every case is the expulsion of the party from the Christian Church.

Athanasius sees a *tuπος* (pattern)¹¹ in this practice.

condemned, the Epistle to the Hebrews, Matthew, Mark, John and the Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and the Apocalypse" (*History of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1956], 2:484). Marcion held a low view of the Scriptures and thus was renounced by the church in order to protect the church from Marcionites. Athanasius may reference Marcion in comparison to Arius in that they both disregard the teachings of the Scriptures.

¹⁰ Schaff reveals valuable insight into the relationship between the Meletians and the Arians: "The Meletians were followers of Melitus, bishop of Lycopolis in Thebais, who, according to one statement, from zeal for strict discipline, according to another, from sheer arrogance, rebelled against his metropolitan, Peter of Alexandria, and during his absence encroached upon his diocese with ordinations, excommunications, and the like . . . The Meletians afterwards made common cause with the Arians" (2:197). Kenneth Scott Latourette, who gives more insight into the nature of the Melitians, states, "At a council of synod held by Athanasius in Alexandria in 362, in an effort to win over the Meletians, who were numerous in Egypt and who were apparently *homoiosians* . . ." (*A History of Christianity* [San Francisco: Prince Press, 1999], 1:161). The Meletians were the middle party that could secure an orthodox position within Christianity. At the time of the writing of *Contra Arianos* the possibility of dialogue seemed remote. The term '*homoiosion*' means "of like substance or essence" (Lampe, 955).

¹¹ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (BAG), defines the meaning of this Greek word as "pattern, rule or standard" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979], 830). This concept will be developed later in the thesis. Suffice it to say that the Athanasian hermeneutic is committed to the normal practice of filtering its interpretation through the means of a traditional/creedal hermeneutic.

Those who are expelled form a following that inherit the name of the one expelled. Arius was expelled by Alexander, and, subsequently, his followers are known as Arians and not Christians. In fact, the followers of Arianism think like Arius and acknowledge him as the source of their teachings. On the other hand, the name "Christian" is for those who remain in the ecclesiastical structure. Athanasius offers one last proof for his position: the acceptance of the Greeks who forsake idols and confirm to the name of Christian stands in opposition to those who forsake Christ and are now known as Arians. This practice offers external proof that the Arians are not Christian.

The rhetorical question, which began in CA 1.2, has now been given a negative answer. There is nothing that one can find that is similar to the pious faith of Christianity. In order to demonstrate his point Athanasius sets up the reader so that an investigation can be inquired into the contents of the Arian publication, the *Thalia*.

**Internal Evidence: Unscriptural Theology
(CA 1.4-7)**

CA 1.4 offers certain internal evidence¹² to corroborate the Athanasian claim that Arianism is a heresy.

¹² The idea of "internal evidence" refers to the Scriptures for support or lack of support for the Arian position. The goal of Athanasius is to review the Arian heresy from the scriptural

The internal evidence that Athanasius deduces is based upon two factors: (1) the unscriptural theology of the Arians, and (2) the heretical hermeneutic employed to support the deficient theological claims of the Arians.

Athanasius introduces CA 1.4 with a rhetorical question that is designed to introduce the deficient Arian theology. Athanasius asks, "How can non-Christians be Christians?"¹³ His position is that non-Christians can never be known as Christians. He reveals that the Arians invented new evils¹⁴ and, in the process, abandoned the very words that would confirm their Christianity—the Holy Scriptures.

The invention of the *Thalia*, in the mind of Athanasius, has replaced the Scriptures. Therefore, the *Thalia* must be examined for its contents if such a claim of heresy by Athanasius is to be found correct.

A valid point of concern has been raised by Francis Young. She states, "This [referring to the *Thalia*] survives only in quotations made by opponents for the purpose of

standpoint and determine if orthodoxy has been misunderstood and thus the Arians are correct, or if the Arians are found to be in error and thus in opposition to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. That is the schematic format and presentation of *Contra Arianos*.

¹³ Athanasius, 65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 65.

refuting the views expressed. . . ." ¹⁵ Her point is well taken. The representation of the *Thalia* may have an overt bias simply because it is the goal of Athanasius to refute and discredit the Arian system which is found in the contents of the *Thalia*.

Athanasius gives attention to the literary prose of the *Thalia*. He makes the point that "many individuals have written many works and the greatest number of homilies on the Old and New Testaments, a *Thalia* is discovered in none of them." ¹⁶ Apparently the literary prose of the *Thalia* was designed to entreat the reader of its contents to a song or even a jesting play. One obvious reason may be that poetic style or prose may help the communication of the Arian position. The style of the *Thalia*, according to Athanasius, is comedy or play that includes dancing to songs that are loose and dissolute. ¹⁷ Apparently, Athanasius views these actions as blasphemous and not appropriate when considering the nature of the triune God.

Athanasius then compares Arius to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the guardians of religious trust in

¹⁵ Francis Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 60.

¹⁶ Athanasius, 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

Israel who fell into error¹⁸ by interpreting the law but denying the Son and then giving the Son a status that is inferior to his proper being.

The theological statements of Arius are revealed in CA 1.5-6. These statements are fragments of the *Thalia* and are, nonetheless, also the same statements that prompted the excommunication of Arius by the Council of Nicea.¹⁹ Thus, Athanasius deems it necessary to review the statements in order to expose the heretical theology of the Arians.

Charles Kannengiesser clarifies the arrangement of the fragments as they appear in CA 1.5-6.

1. The Divine Monarchy (pg. 26, 21 a5-13).²⁰
2. The Origin of the Son (pg. 26, 21 a13-b19).
3. The Created Nature of the Word (pg. 26, 21d1-24a8).
4. The Limited Knowledge of the Son-Word (pg. 26, 24 a10-b3).
5. The Dissimilar Glories of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (pg. 26, 24 b3-14).

Athanasius groups the fragments into a theological arrangement which, in fact, reveals the Arian's heretical system. Athanasius wants the reader to understand Arius from the position of the Council of Nicea—these are the

¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub. 1994), 309.

²⁰ Kannengiesser, 14. The referencing system which follows is Kannengiesser's.

same statements which brought about the Arian condemnation, yet they are not isolated fragments. The statements in CA 1.5-6 represent the heretical thinking and deficient theology of the Arian heresy.

CA 1.7 is the personal summary of Athanasius concerning the Arian theological system. Athanasius attributes the Arian heresy as being under the judgment of Hosea 7:13, 15. Hosea warns the adulterers that they will be destroyed because of their imagined mischief. Apparently, Athanasius groups Arius and his teaching with an adulterer who abandoned the Lord but will be judged by the Lord for his actions.

CA 1.4-7 reveals the internal evidence of the Arian heresy. Athanasius interacts with the *Thalia* to produce the internal evidence for his position that the Arians are heretical. His position is based upon the fact that the Arians are not working with the Holy Scriptures but in fact have replaced them with the writing of Arius, the *Thalia*. The logic of Athanasius is correct. The Arians have invented a religious system that is contradictory to Christianity. On the basis that they have invented a new system, Arianism cannot legitimately claim Christianity simply because the Scriptures, which govern Arianism, are

not utilized to guide and govern Christianity—Arianism uses the *Thalia*, a new wisdom.²¹

**Internal Evidence: A Deficient Hermeneutic
(CA 1.8-10)**

CA 1.8-10 presents the internal evidence that support the Athanasian position stating that Arianism is a heresy. In this section the Arians are accused of a deficient hermeneutic when working with the Holy Scriptures.

The hermeneutical issue is at the heart of *Contra Arianos*. James D. Ernest declares, "Primarily, however, Athanasius's dispute with the Arians took the form of a battle over the interpretation of the Bible."²² The hermeneutic of the Arian position is written in the *Thalia* but the question becomes one of meaning: Does the witness of the *Thalia* prove the Arians are correct in the interpretation of the passages they utilize? Athanasius begins this section with a question that is designed to show the corrupt hermeneutic of the Arian party.

CA 1.8 references the framework of the Trinity, which the Arian party denies in its true form. Thus the

²¹ CA 1.4.

²² James D. Ernest, "Athanasius of Alexandria: The Scope of Scripture in Polemical and Pastoral Context," *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993): 341.

"Rule of Faith"²³ that is a consistent in the orthodox hermeneutic is lacking with the Arian hermeneutic. However, the greater problem is that the Arians are working with this deficient rule of faith. Therefore, Athanasius begins to develop a methodological framework that guides his exegesis.²⁴

²³ The concept of a "rule of faith" is a form of interpretation that was popularized by Irenaeus. However, Irenaeus used the term 'canon of Faith'. J. N. D. Kelly states, "Irenaeus admittedly suggested that a firm grasp of 'canon of truth' received at baptism would prevent a man from distorting the sense of Scripture. But this 'canon,' so far from being something distinct from Scripture, was simply a condensation of the message contained in it. Being by its very nature **normative in form** [emphasis added], it provided a man with a handy clue to the Scriptures . . ." (*Early Christian Doctrines* [San Francisco: Harper Publications, 1996], 39). It must be stated that the concept of a stable hermeneutic is the purpose behind the "canon of Faith." Kelly also states that Tertullian was instrumental in developing this same concept which became the normative for a hermeneutic. "This unwritten tradition [ecclesiastical and apostolic succession in the Churches teachings] he considered to be virtually identical with 'the rule of faith' (*regula fidei*), which he preferred to Scripture as a standard when disputing with the Gnostics. By this he did not mean, as scholars have imagined, a formal creed, but rather the intrinsic shape and pattern of the revelation itself. His citation from it shows that, fully formulated, it made explicit the cardinal truths about God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit," (40). The basic concept of this hermeneutic is that it kept one from theological error. Thus, theological speculation was tolerated only as long as the finished result was in conformity with the "rule of faith." Athanasius continues this hermeneutical approach when dealing with the Arians. He is persuaded that their theology is outside the "rule of faith." This is the basis of his refutation with the Arians in CA 1.8.

²⁴ Erickson defines this term as follows, "The obtaining of the meaning of a passage by drawing the meaning out from rather than reading into the text" (53). Wayne Grudem's, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) reveals more understanding of the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis. He states, "Another technical term often used in discussions of biblical interpretation is 'exegesis,' a term that refers more to the actual practice of interpreting Scripture, not to theories and principles about how it should be done: *exegesis is the process of interpreting a text of Scripture*. Consequently, when one studies principles of interpretation, that is, 'hermeneutics,' but when one applies those principles and begins actually explaining a biblical text, he or she

The foundation of the Athanasian exegesis is the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Scriptures. From the Athanasian viewpoint, an attack on the Scriptures is an attack on Jesus Christ. The Scriptures reveal the person and work of Christ and to destroy one is to destroy the other. Therefore, he states:

. . . let them understand from Scriptures that the devil, that designer of heresy, on account of the peculiar ill smell of evil, borrows the language of Scripture so that with Scripture as a veil, sowing his own poison, he might outwit the guileless. . . . How could he speak the truth about the Father, denying the Son who reveals Him? How could he think correctly about the Spirit when he slanders the Word who equips the Spirit?²⁵

In the mind and thought of Athanasius one cannot develop a proper hermeneutic by denouncing the Son, which reveals the Father. The fact that Arius did try and develop such a hermeneutic introduces the problem of epistemology. This is the very foundation of the Athanasian argument. Athanasius charges Arius with sin against the *Logos*,²⁶

is doing 'exegesis'" (108-9). Athanasius exegetes the specific text that the Arians utilize to form their heresy (CA 1.37, etc.), however, he employs the "Rule of Faith" as his interpretative method or hermeneutic.

²⁵ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 69.

²⁶ BAG gives the following definition for *logos*: "Our literature shows traces of a way of thinking that was widespread in contemporary syncretism, as well as in Jewish wisdom literature and Philo, the most prominent feature of which is the concept of Logos, the independent, personified 'Word' (of God): John 1:1a,b,c, 14. It is the distinct teaching of the Fourth Gospel that this divine 'Word' took on human form in a historic person, that is, in Jesus" (478-9). Erickson states, "A Greek term for 'Word' used in the prologue to the

which renders epistemology impossible. The revelatory function of the *Logos* is rendered useless in that a creature cannot possibly reveal the Father—especially since the *ousia* (essence)²⁷ is different. Aloys Grillmeier states, “It follows from this difference and alien character that the Father himself cannot be truly known by the Son. . . .”²⁸ Grillmeier continues:

. . . the gulf between the creation and the transcendent God is unbridgeable, because the “Son” too is the other side of the gulf and therefore cannot know the Father as he is in himself, but only in the way in which he has the right (*wl' qemil' ejstin*), that is, only with creaturely knowledge. Arius would have found it difficult to lay the foundations for a theology of revelation.²⁹

The result is that Arius has the Christian Church worshipping something that is inferior to the Godhead. The

Gospel of John to refer to Christ. In later theology, it is used of reason or the reason of God” (98). A. T. Robertson gives an accurate definition concerning the definition of the *Logos*: “*Logos* is from *lego*, old word in Homer to lay by, to collect, to put words side by side, to speak, to express an opinion. *Logos* is common for reason as well. Heraclitus used it for the principle, which controls the universe. The Stoics employed it for the soul of the world and Marcus Aurelius used *spermatikos logos* for the generative principle in nature” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932], 4:3-4). The idea of *logos* does seem to be that of *wisdom, controlling principle* or *specific communication*. The idea of *specific or direct communication* goes well with the Athanasian usage and presentation of the Son in relationship and submission to the Father.

²⁷ Lampe defines this word as “(1) *being* or *reality* and (2) *substance* or *essence*” (980-5).

²⁸ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 1:228.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:228-9.

ontological unity is now, *per* Arius, thwarted. In CA 1.6, the charge of an "alien Logos"³⁰ is substantiated by the improper method, which produces an improper meaning of the Arian hermeneutic.

Athanasius utilizes the Trinitarian revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in order to renounce the Arian heresy and reveal the proper orthodox hermeneutic which allows the unity of the Godhead to be maintained.

The Athanasian framework recognizes the epistemological issue is further compounded simply because the soteriological work of the Son is now in jeopardy. Athanasius states, "Who will believe him when he speaks about the resurrection when he denies the statement, 'From the dead, Christ became for the firstborn.'"³¹

The methodological framework of Athanasius is Christological and, thus, soteriological. Kannengiesser states:

In any case the fundamental intuition of Athanasius over which no doubt could be entertained and which motivates his entire refutation of Arianism is essentially Christological . . . he refused a systematic Christology which he did not consider sufficiently inspired by Scripture.³²

³⁰ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 67.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³² Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius and Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973): 112-3.

The theological hermeneutic of Athanasius not only allows the unity of the Godhead to remain intact but also allows the preservation of the soteriology of the Son. Young states, "His lifelong fight against the Arians was entirely motivated by soteriological concerns."³³

The Arian hermeneutic does not allow for a Trinitarian interpretative method. In fact, it destroys the Trinity. The destruction of the Trinity renders soteriology questionable, if not impossible, since there is no unity with the redeemed and the redeemer. The second person of the Godhead is not a creature unlike the Father and not entirely like humanity.

Based upon the fact that the Godhead has been dismantled and the soteriology of the Son questioned, Athanasius claims that Arius did not learn his hermeneutical method and the subsequent heretical theology from the Fathers.³⁴ The argument of Athanasius is that the Arians do not have the tradition of/from Christianity, nor do they have the same interpretative hermeneutic of the

³³ Young, 72.

³⁴ The Fathers were generally acknowledged to be those men who lived shortly after the close of the Apostolic Age. The appeal to the Fathers became increasingly popular as a method of determining what was faithful to Christian tradition. The Fathers formed a bridge between the New Testament writers and the Apologist of the second century. Justin Martyr, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp are a representation of the men classified as the Fathers.

Fathers concerning the Scriptures. Thus, any attempt by the Arians to legitimize their deviant Christianity will fail simply on the basis that they cannot pass the test of ecclesiastical tradition and a proper hermeneutic of the Scriptures. Andrew Louth comments on the Athanasian use of tradition and Scripture:

But this idea of the scope of faith applied to the Scripture does not mean the squeezing of Scripture into an alien framework provided by Tradition. Scripture and Tradition are interwoven: each interpreted by the other. That this is so is seen in that Athanasius often determines the "scope of Scripture" by comparing Scripture with itself. Seeing the scope of divine Scripture is as much seeing Scripture as a whole, seeing Scripture in accordance with apostolic tradition.³⁵

Athanasius is more Christian theologian than he is traditionalist. His particular method of interpretation is similar to a systematic approach. Systematic theology looks at the totality of scriptural teaching and deduces a presentation based upon the whole. In his method, Athanasius looks at the purpose of the Scriptures and formulates his doctrine based upon the faithful transmission of its lineage. "Therefore, not merely the genesis, but also the succeeding lineage of a doctrine is

³⁵ Andrew Louth, "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 392.

important if we are to affirm it as being of the 'faith of the Catholic Church.'"³⁶

In appealing to the concept of Scripture and tradition and by using the interpretative Scope of Faith method, Athanasius is not citing the Fathers as authorities but only acknowledging their faithfulness in the transmission of the tradition. Athanasius' method of interpretation understands the Scriptures to have an innate unity.

The appeal of the Fathers as a lineage is indicative of an orthodox hermeneutic. The obvious thought is that Christ handed down the proper teachings along with the proper hermeneutic to the apostles who, in turn, taught the Fathers. Thus, when Athanasius appeals to the Fathers (tradition) and, at the same time, argues for the use of a proper interpretative framework (the Scriptures), he views the two methods as teaching the same concept. When the Arian hermeneutic violates either one of those traditions, the result will be a deviant hermeneutical method producing a deviant theology that is devoid of Christianity.

One further point concerning tradition needs additional comment. The Fathers represented and

³⁶ Handspicker, 15.

communicated a Trinitarian theology.³⁷ The fact that Arius and his followers deny the ontological unity of the Godhead strongly suggests that Arius did not only invent a new religious system but also rejects the orthodox expression of the Christian faith. Thus, Athanasius can state that "Arius's heresy was accounted a greater error than other heresies because it has been called the enemy of Christ and considered the forerunner of the Anti-Christ."³⁸

In CA 1.9, Athanasius appeals to the Nicene formula as the norm for a hermeneutical interpretative method. The fact that Athanasius utilizes the Nicene formula and its word "*homoousian*" is indicative that Scriptures can be contextualized.³⁹ Thus, Athanasius can use the word

³⁷ This is supported by Kelly, who states, "In spite of incoherencies, however, the lineaments of a Trinitarian doctrine are clearly discernible in the Apologist" (1030).

³⁸ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 69.

³⁹ Erickson defines "Contextualization of Theology" as, "the attempt to adapt the expression of theology to a given time, place, culture, or audience" (36). The process of theology is to be relevant to the culture that works with the specific biblical issues. Another contribution that helps clarify the meaning of contextualization is Grudem's, *Systematic Theology*. Grudem gives excellent insight to the nature of systematic theology and contextualization. He writes, ". . . systematic theology focuses on summarizing each doctrine as it should be understood by present-day Christians. This will sometimes involve the use of terms and even concepts that were not themselves used by any individual biblical author, but that are the proper result of combining the teachings of two or more biblical authors on a particular subject . . . Defining systematic theology to include 'what the whole Bible teaches us today' implies that application to life is a necessary part of the proper pursuit of systematic theology" (23). The fact that the Council of Nicea and Athanasius use the term '*homoousios*' reveals the willingness of that generation of theologians

"*homoousian*" without the tension of trying to justify extra biblical terminology simply because the word is understood to have a biblical definition that communicates the concept of Trinitarian thought. "Therefore he is true God, *homoousios* with the true Father. . . . He is the image of the Father's *hypostasis*."⁴⁰ This is classic Trinitarian thought! Thomas F. Torrance gives insight into the Athanasian hermeneutic. He states:

This is the doctrine of God as Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Athanasius should equate *theologia*, in its deepest sense as the knowledge and worship of God as he is known both through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit and as he is eternally in himself, with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.⁴¹

The novel issue that Athanasius achieves is to link the *homoousian* with the concept of being a "light on a lampstand."⁴² The use of such metaphors is a distinct method that helps Athanasius issue a challenge to the reader to make a decision concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. Athanasius presents the orthodox position by utilizing the Nicene word "*homoousios*" and yet, he also

to apply terminology that is extra-biblical when the term (in this case, '*homoousios*') reflects the biblical meaning.

⁴⁰ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 70.

⁴¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 8.

⁴² Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 70.

presents the heretical teachings of the Arian position. The contrast of both views can only be seen against the interpretative mode of the Scriptures, which *homoousios* represents, and the confessional nature of the Nicene Creed, which also belongs to the Church.

The question Athanasius poses is designed to force the reader to make a decision—either Jesus Christ is *homoousios* with the Father, and thus, the true light, or he is not—in which case, the Arians have a valid option.

The effect of using the word "*homoousion*" is to demonstrate that the Arians are not within the confines of the confessional creed as established by the church, but, in fact, are beyond the boundaries of both confession/church and the Scriptures. The word "*homoousios*" not only refers to the orthodox victory of Nicea (which expelled Arius) but the meaning of the word directly confronts the Arian position concerning the *Logos*: Athanasius declares that the *Logos* is the *homoousios* (same substance) as the Father. Thus, Athanasius begins to establish the basis of his hermeneutical method by, once again, using a Trinitarian framework (that which belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son and the Holy Spirit) that supports his Christology.

Conclusion of CA 1.1-10

The purpose of CA 1.1-10 serves to establish a basis for the rest of the polemic. Athanasius lays out his case that the Arians are ecclesiastically outside the realm of proper theology. He writes from the position that the ecumenical Council of Nicea has condemned the Arians. The emperor presided over this council so the ramifications for the Arians are very severe: they are not only condemned by ecclesiastical authorities but also by legal authorities. Arius and Arianism are condemned by both church and state.

Athanasius also produces evidence that the Arians are beyond the Christian faith based upon the fact that they have no ancestry to the Fathers or the Church's teachings. This appeal to tradition argues for the Arian heresy to be an *epinoew* (invention), and, consequently, inventions of heresy are not within the realm of Christianity.

He also displays evidence that the Arians cannot possibly claim a new revelation (*via* the *Thalia*) simply because the teachings of Arius contradict the revelation of the Scriptures. Yet Athanasius does not presume that his evidence will stop the spread of the Arian heresy. He knows that he is not dealing with Arius or the Arian bishops that were a part of Nicea. He is writing against the Arian

presence that is continually troubling the church with its heresy. He, therefore, lays a foundation in *CA* 1.1-10 that will enable him to begin to build a case, *Contra Arianos*, and thus provided further proof that Arianism is not only a heresy—it demands the worship of another god!

Hermeneutical Principles of *CA* 1.1-10

The teachings of the Arian heresy can only be combated when tested against a proper method or hermeneutic. The Arian crisis is predicated upon a hermeneutic that differs from that of Christianity. Francis Young has properly observed that Arius interpreted Scripture from a very narrow and literal mindset but was also “a reactionary, a rather literal-minded conservative who appealed to scripture and tradition as the basis of his faith.”⁴³

In direct opposition to Arius’s hermeneutic, Athanasius begins to utilize the familiar “Scope of Scripture” method. At this point only a brief survey will be necessary, as Athanasius will reveal more about his approach in *CA* 2. This hermeneutical method demonstrates

⁴³ Young, 64. She does not sympathize with Arius but does reveal the fact that the doctrine of Arianism arose because of the literalistic methodology of interpretation—as employed by Arius.

that methodology must precede the practice of theology.⁴⁴

A proper hermeneutic will allow for the progression of theological advancement but not at the expense of theological deviancy.

The Scope of Scripture refers to the totality of the teachings of the Scripture. For Athanasius this means a Christological starting point of reference. He interprets the Scripture through the divine revelation and personage of Jesus Christ. Therefore, any theology must pass through the test of God the Father's ultimate expression of His revelation. Any theology that seeks to affirm the person of Christ is valid as it expresses the biblical concept of Jesus. Thus, Athanasius argues forcefully that Arianism did not worship the same *Logos*, and hence, is not to be accounted as the Christian faith.

The rationale for Athanasius' hermeneutic is that the Scriptures reveal the Son, who in turn reveals the Father. Should one or the other components break down,

⁴⁴ Most scholars grant this concept. For example, Kevin Giles states, "I began my work with one goal in mind—to determine what was the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity—but as I progressed in my reading, I discovered that the debate about the Trinity was in essence a debate about theological method, something right at the forefront of evangelical thinking today" (2). Giles is correct! The debate in the fourth century revolved around methodology (hermeneutics) more so than conclusion of the position. Both Athanasius and Arius utilized the same Scriptures but both came to vastly differing conclusions. The only possible answer is that their methodology was different, and thus the conclusions followed the paths of their methods.

revelation and communication cease to exist. This is the basis for his exegesis.

The Arian hermeneutic jeopardized epistemology and soteriology: the Son cannot know God (for he is not *homoousios* with the Father) nor can the Son know that God provides a relationship that is redemptive in scope.

The Arian rule of faith seeks to employ a hermeneutic that forces the Scripture to lose its intended meaning. This is the emphasis that Athanasius will constantly use to dialogue with the various Arian interpretations. Athanasius purports that an intrinsic relationship exists between the written **logia** (the Scriptures) and the **logo"** (Christ) so that any alien hermeneutical rule will result in an unwarranted and unprecedented interpretation that is corrupt and demeaning to both **logia** (the Scriptures) and **logo"** (Christ). However, the Athanasian hermeneutic binds the written **logia** (the Scriptures) and the **logo"** (Christ) together so that the Scriptures (which are from the Father) can only find meaning in the Son (also from the Father).

The Scope of Scripture is of such nature that should one be found to be false there is no basis for the other to be true. The Scope of Faith is a tradition that is from Christianity. Hence, the standard or **tupo"** (rule) of

Athanasius includes a Trinitarian framework and soteriological position.

Not only does Athanasius use the Scope of Faith but he also utilizes a Christological methodology. The Christological hermeneutic expresses the epistemological knowledge of the Father. The Athanasian hermeneutic supports the fact that one can know God only when one knows the Son. Should the Son be de-elevated in *ousia* (essence) then the result is the knowledge of God is destroyed.

The reference point for the Athanasian hermeneutic is that God the Father and God the Son are the same *hypostasis*. The basis for this position is the unity of the Godhead. There is no doubt that Athanasius is combating an ontological subordination with the Trinity. Should Arianism continue to have a presence within the church, there will be an idolatrous worship and theological confusion. Thus, Athanasius could state that the church could question the person it worships. He writes, "Who said, leaving the worship of creation, come to worship a creature and a work?"⁴⁵ Athanasius' concern for idolatry reveals the intimate nature between God the Son and God the Father as

⁴⁵ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 70.

the Trinity manifests itself for adoration from Christianity.

In order to refute the false practices of Arianism, Athanasius establishes this hermeneutical foundation so that his interaction with the same Scriptures (that the Arians employ) can be interpreted to reveal their orthodox meaning.

Another insight concerning the Athanasian hermeneutic is valid at this point. The methodology of the Athanasian hermeneutic is not just to produce a system of theology that is cold and lifeless. His approach was to establish the correct doctrine of God in order to relate to God in personal faith. Thus, *Contra Arianos* is no mere theological exercise—it is a matter of knowing God verses not knowing God. Therefore, the word "*homoousios*" is not used widely but the concept of *homoousios* is ever present on his mind and presented in *Contra Arianos*.⁴⁶

For the above stated reasons, Athanasius does not deal with the Eternal Sonship issue at this point in his polemic. His purpose, now, is to demonstrate that the *Logos* is ontologically equal to the Father. The argument for a functional subordination can only be presented when the relationships within the Trinity (primarily the

⁴⁶ This concept will be demonstrated later in the thesis.

relationship between Father and Son) have been properly established. The issue of Eternal Sonship will be addressed as the unity and function of the Trinity is discussed in the next sections.

The remainder of *Contra Arianos* is to interact with the Arian hermeneutic and refute their heresy using the Scope (Rule) of Faith, which encompasses a Christological/Trinitarian hermeneutic and produces an orthodox exegesis. Athanasius is confident that the Arian heresy will be exposed by this interpretative methodology.

**Orthodox Teachings of the Son Interacting
With the Teachings of Arianism (CA 1.11-36)**

**The Focus of Orthodoxy is the Eternal
Status of the Son**

The interaction of Athanasius with the teachings of Arianism focuses upon the nature and status of the Son. Athanasius charges the Arians with incorrect doctrinal thinking when he questions their position. He writes, "It is necessary to strip off this layer of your thinking. Tell them, O evil and impious ones, what was once when the Son was not."⁴⁷ Athanasius expects that the Arians will not answer his question with a reference to "the Father."⁴⁸ For

⁴⁷ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 73.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 73.

that matter, the Arians propagated the concept of radical monotheism, which was the start of their theological deviancy:

According to the traditional view of Arius and his partisans as cosmologians preoccupied with a particular idea of God, the logical sequence of the statement is as follows: the singularity and uniqueness of God as first principle requires that **he alone be counted as without beginning and eternal** [emphasis added], so that all things, even the Son, are preceded by him. Thus, a doctrine of God is understood to control description so the Son as posterior, secondary to God, and having a beginning (*ἀρχή*); God's transcendence dictates the Son's subordinate status.⁴⁹

In order to preserve the Monad concept the Arians had to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son and thus concluded that the Son is not eternal. R. P. C. Hanson confirms this position taken by the Arians when he states:

There is no common nature shared by Father, Son and Spirit, no divine "substance" which they all possess. The Son is not ingenerate nor eternal nor invisible nor immortal as the Father is. He does not possess the Father's negative attributes and only possesses the positive ones by participation. . . . In the end there is only one God who is good, wise, etc. We cannot number the Three, because the Father is incomparable. The three are not equal, their difference of nature entails a difference of degree. . . .⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 82.

⁵⁰ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 104.

In the mind of Athanasius this is most blasphemous, as it does not depict the credible teachings of the Scriptures. Athanasius writes:

Nowhere have the Scriptures said such things about the Savior; rather, they have used such words as "always," "everlasting," and "always coexisting with the Father."⁵¹

The concept of Eternal Sonship has now been called into question. Athanasius wants to know from what source⁵² can the Arians cite as proof of their position? The question is more rhetorical⁵³ than actual but it does serve to prove his point—that there is no scriptural source for the deviant theology of the Arian position. Athanasius reveals that the epistemological starting place for Arianism is not within the revelation of the Scriptures. More pointedly, the Scriptures cannot be the source of the Arian theology as they affirm the eternality of the Son.

Athanasius demonstrates the eternality of the Son by referencing the teachings of the nature of the Son. Athanasius states, "Who would take away the eternal from

⁵¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 73.

⁵² Ibid., 73.

⁵³ For an excellent article on the this subject see G. Christopher Stead, "Rhetorical Method in Athanasius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 121-137. Stead offers his opinion that Athanasius was very familiar with rhetorical method and utilized Aristotle's twenty-eight topics or methods of argument.

'who is' and 'who was?'"⁵⁴ The basic thrust of this argument is that the scriptural witness presents the eternality of the Son as a truth to be accepted.

This truth stands in contrast to the Arian position that the Son was created in time. Again, the ontological issue comes into focus. Samuel Laeuchli recognizes this concept when he writes, "The ontological issue becomes very apparent when Arius grapples with the problem of time in his creature-Christology."⁵⁵ The ontological position of Arianism would no doubt declare that the Son is not eternal but a very powerful and created deity.

The central tenet of Arianism is that the Son has a beginning, and thus is not eternal nor ontologically equal to God the Father. It is this tenet that Athanasius begins to address in the remainder of *Contra Arianos*.

Building the Case for Eternal Sonship (CA 1.11-13)

The argumentation for the eternality of the Son is none other than the biblical witness. For that matter, Athanasius demonstrates the eternal nature of the Son by citing the Scriptures.

⁵⁴ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 73.

⁵⁵ Samuel Laeuchli, "The Case of Athanasius Against Arius," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 30 (June 1959): 407.

He presents his proof by citing John 1:1. The thrust of this verse declares the eternal nature of the Word with God and as God. He then cites Revelation 1:8, which is the witness and testimony of Christ himself. In CA 1.12, Athanasius references John 8:12; 10:4; 13:13; and 14:6. These Scriptures are employed to demonstrate the eternal nature of the Son. The use of John 14:6 clearly states that the Lord did not become truth but existed as truth. The εἰμῶν ("I am") statements do not have temporal qualifiers, nor does the language indicate a reference to a beginning. Athanasius states:

Who, hearing such a phrase from God and Wisdom and Word of the Father, speaking about himself, still had doubts about the truth and will not immediately believe that in the expression "I am" is indicated that the Son is everlasting and without beginning before every age? ⁵⁶

The logical impact of these verses of the Johannine writings is that they support the opening statement of the Gospel of John (1:1), that is, the Word is eternal.

This strikes at the heart of Arianism. However, Athanasius wants to build a solid case. Athanasius utilizes the hermeneutical method that employs the whole teachings

⁵⁶ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 75.

of the Scripture (this is an example of using the Scope of Scripture to reveal the teachings about the Son).

The statements of Paul add force to the argument for the Son's eternality. Athanasius cited Romans 1:20 and 9:5. The force of these verses supports the eternal nature of the Son, while at the same time depicting the ontological unity of the Godhead. Alvyn Pettersen confirms the Athanasian position. Pettersen writes:

. . . Athanasius' God the Father never was without God the Son, his true Logos, where "true" does not carry simply the sense of the genuine, authentic Logos, over against a "veracious" Logos, one who might be supposed to be a Logos, and who indeed, in a sense, but not the ultimate, eternal and essential sense, is a Logos. . . . So being very God, he is truly the Father's Son and Logos, who genuinely and fully reveals his Father.⁵⁷

The appeal to nature or "natural theology" (Romans 1:20) compels the argument for the eternal existence of the Son. This verse seems unusual in that there is ambiguity as to who is the subject of the word "his." Apparently the Arians were distinguishing between "power of God" and the "Logos." Athanasius, however, counters the Arians with the approach that the Son is the reference of natural theology. He does this by interpreting Romans 1:20 with 1 Corinthians 1:24, which states, "Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God" are one and the same. The focal point is aimed at

⁵⁷ Pettersen, 167-8.

the Arian position, as they would agree that the Son created the world.

The crux of the issue is that Athanasius sees the Arian methodology in light of paganism—both **epinoew** (invent) an idolatrous religion that is false and counter to the truth of God. Their approach was to utilize biblical language that describes the creation and then apply the same language to the Creator. This is very much in the thought flow of Romans 1:20, which describes the pagans as essentially inventing a false system of theology and applying that theology as a means of worshipping their newly invented god.

Athanasius depicts the concept of creation as addressing the eternal nature of Christ in that “he who views creation correctly sees the Word, who crafted it, and through him begins to discern the Father.”⁵⁸ Athanasius’ rationale is convincing in that the Arians were presented a hermeneutical obstacle. Should the Arians continue with their insistence that the *Logos* created the universe (and they are correct in their insistence), and Athanasius demonstrate that the *Logos* is equal to the Father and the same essence of the Father, then this leaves the Arians

⁵⁸ Athanasius, “Orations Against the Arians, Book I,” 74.

with few options: they can review their position to modify it or abandon it all together. He states, "Recognize the sequence of the words and 'turn to the Lord' ('the Lord is the Spirit') [2 Cor. 3:16-17], and you will see that it is the Son who is signified."⁵⁹

Athanasius utilizes the Psalms and Hebrews to construct the final portion of his argument. The interpretation of Hebrews 1:3 is given the foundation of the Psalms, which speak of the eternal order of the Godhead. The Psalms review the eternality of God by using the analogy of light and its radiance, which is a simultaneous act. Psalm 90:17 refers to the "brilliance of the Lord be upon us." The word "brilliance" is a metaphor for the *Logos*, and the point that Athanasius wants to make is that eternal existence of the *Logos* is revealed in the Scriptures. The reflective image of the hypostasis is eternal in that the Son exists with the Father and reflects the Father. This is an eternal relationship that has always existed.

The language of the Scripture reveals that the time issue of Arius is a problem simply because there is no

⁵⁹ Ibid., 77.

evidence from a biblical position that supports the central Arian tenet: There was a time when he was not!

The interesting note is that Athanasius addresses the issue of time once again and in CA 1.13 connects the issue of time with creation.

The second portion of Athanasius' argument is the review of texts which demonstrate that the Arian use of language is inappropriate simply because the Arian language refers to created beings and creatures that are time bound. Athanasius states, "Those things which the Arians utter—'he was not,' 'before,' and 'when'—the same scriptures declare about creatures."⁶⁰ The Greek prepositions **prin** (before) and **pro** (before) are specifically utilized to govern plants (Genesis 2:5) and mountains (Proverbs 8:25) and water (Proverbs 8:24). These same prepositions are used in connection with Abraham (John 8:58—especially his existence), Jeremiah's birth (Jeremiah 1:5), and the entire creation of the earth (Proverbs 8:23). The use of such language is inappropriate when referring to the *Logos*.

The origination of the Arian *Logos* is time bound, whereas, Athanasius depicts the Scriptures as teaching the eternal Son is not created in time but, in fact, creates

⁶⁰ Ibid., 75.

time. His question is pointed, “. . . why do you blaspheme the Word as subsequent to times, through whom the ages came into being?”⁶¹

Khaled Anatolios refers to this aspect of Athanasius as “the unlikeness between God and Creation.”⁶² He also states:

Given this absolutely strict conception of the ontological dissimilarity between created and Creator, it is understandable that Athanasius considers as objectively meaningless and subjectively duplicitous the Arian qualification that the Son is “a creature, but not as one of the creatures.”⁶³

The epistemology of the Arians has been questioned, but for clarification purposes, a review of the Athanasian epistemology also seems warranted. The Scriptures are informing the theology of Athanasius. The only authority to ferret out the knowledge of the Son is the scriptural text itself. He takes for granted that the revelation of the Scriptures is a product of the Father and the *Logos*.⁶⁴ Therefore, when one reads the words of Christ one is

⁶¹ Ibid., 76.

⁶² Anatolios, 100. This is a subtitle to a section in his excellent book.

⁶³ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁴ To the best of this writer’s knowledge, Athanasius never develops a correlative doctrine concerning Christ and the Scriptures, but he does assume that one reveals the other. Any attempt at re-interpreting the Scriptures will in fact do harm to the person of Christ. Thus, in his presupposition, the Scriptures are the words of Christ, and he views them as one and the same.

actually hearing the Father and the *Logos* speak about Himself. The language of the Scripture is not pliable so that the words can be stretched into a different meaning. The Athanasian hermeneutic is bound to the text but not in a generic sense. It is bound to the specific words of the text that have a specific meaning.

The Arian hermeneutic, on the other hand, does a violation to the person of the *Logos*, and thus the epistemological starting point for the Arians is counter to the epistemological starting point for the Christian community. The Arians seem to utilize the words with a context to give them false meaning. Thus, the words can be interpreted with a new meaning and present the Son, who is incarnated, as having a beginning.⁶⁵

Arian Objections to Eternal Sonship (CA 1.14-6)

Athanasius reviews the Arian objects to the orthodox teachings of eternal, divine Sonship. The Arian thesis rejects the title "Son" on the grounds that the Son's eternality would place Him as a brother to God the Father instead of a son. Therefore, the Arians continue to reject the orthodoxy of the scriptural teachings.

⁶⁵ Later Athanasius will deal extensively with the Arian exegesis of specific text. This thesis will review those texts when encountered.

Athanasius anticipates this argument from the Arians as he writes:

If we only said that he exists everlastingly, and is not the Son, their assumed caution would be somewhat plausible. But if when we say that he is eternal we confess that he is the Son from the Father, how is he who was begotten able to be called a brother of him who has begotten? If our faith is in the Father and Son, what sort of brother is there between them? . . . The Father and Son were not begotten from some preexisted first cause so that they might be called brothers.⁶⁶

Athanasius addresses two very important issues in his response to the Arian objection. First, Athanasius argues for Eternal Sonship based upon the revelation that Father and Son were not cogenerated by a "preexisted first cause."⁶⁷ In order for a "brotherhood" to be viable there would have to be another cause for the existence of both Father and Son, and thus they are misnamed. Second, the divine order of the relationships in the Godhead is eternal. The Father is always Father and the Son is always son—eternally! The notion of a "brotherhood" replaces the ordered relationships of the eternal Godhead. Wolfhart Pannenberg states:

Athanasius had developed the thought that the idea of distinct persons already implies relations and cannot be achieved without them. Most illuminating in this regard was his success in applying this thought to the

⁶⁶ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 76-7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 77.

relations between the Father and Son. The Father cannot be thought of as Father without the Son. This was his decisive argument for the full deity of the Son.⁶⁸

A return to the contemporary debate concerning gender roles and the appeal to the Trinity is warranted. Kevin Giles quotes Pannenberg, in his book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*. Giles represents Pannenberg as defending the position that "eternal subordination" is the root of the Athanasian argument. In order to be fair to Giles the whole context of his statement is as follows:

In Athanasius we find the most thorough repudiation of the idea that the Son is in any way eternally subordinated to the Father. For Athanasius, without any caveats, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in being *and action* [emphasis his]. **Wolfhart Pannenberg rightly concluded, "Athanasius vanquished subordinationism,"** [emphasis added].⁶⁹

Giles does not understand Pannenberg on this issue. Pannenberg's statement in its full context is as follows:

Only with Origen's doctrine of the eternal begetting of the Son did the concept emerge of an eternal trinity in God. But in Origen, too, this idea went hand in hand with that of the inferiority of the Son, a creature, to the Father. The Arians particularly stress this inferiority in opposition to Sabellianism. They so debased the thought that there could be brought against them another doctrine of Origen, that of the essential unity of the Logos with the Father

⁶⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 1:279.

⁶⁹ Giles, 40-1.

and his eternal generation, which means that there was no time when he was not. Defending the Nicene belief in the *homoousion* of the Son (and Spirit) with the Father, their equal deity, Athanasius vanquished Subordinationism, insisting that we cannot think of the Father as Father without the Son and Spirit.⁷⁰

Pannenberg argues for the "vanquishing of subordinationism" in the ontological essence of the differing members of the Trinity while acknowledging the equal yet distinct relationships within the Trinity. Giles misunderstands Pannenberg on this point. Pannenberg writes:

We may thus say of the richly structured nexus of relationship that binds together the Father, Son and Spirit what trinitarian theology from the time of Athanasius has said about the trinitarian relations, namely, that they constitute the different distinctions of the persons. The persons simply are what they are in their relations to one another, which both distinguish them from one another and bring them into communion with one another.⁷¹

Pannenberg understands and accepts the Athanasian concept of "Eternal Sonship," as he refers to it as a "structured relationship."⁷²

Returning to CA 1:14, Athanasius argues for "Proper Sonship." The concept of "Proper Sonship" is that the Son is a Son by nature, linked or generated by the Father, and not a Son by participation or external to the Father.

⁷⁰ Pannenberg, 1:275.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:320.

⁷² Ibid., 1:321.

Therefore, the Son exists eternally and ontologically as Son. Athanasius states:

. . . but He is God's offspring, and as being proper Son of God, who is ever, He exists eternally. For, whereas it is proper to men to beget in time, from the imperfection of their nature, God's offspring is eternal, for His nature is ever perfect.⁷³

The persuasiveness of the Athanasian argument is that Athanasius argues for Eternal Sonship predicated upon the concept of the mutual essence or *homoousia*.⁷⁴

Athanasius states:

But if on the other hand, while they acknowledge with us the name "Son," from an unwillingness to be publicly and generally condemned, **they deny that the Son is the proper offspring of the father's essence**, [emphasis added] on the ground that this must imply parts and divisions. . . .⁷⁵

Athanasius utilizes the definition of "proper" in order to reveal the existent relationship between Father and Son. Alvyn Pettersen gives some insight into the Athanasian usage of "proper":

"Proper" stresses the natural oneness of a characteristic and its subject. The characteristic does not accrue from without, but is part of the subject's very definition. . . . When then Athanasius uses "proper" of the Son's and Spirit's relation to the Father, he does so to stress their correlativity with the Father, and their common distinction from creation . . . Hence, repeatedly, Athanasius notes

⁷³ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 315.

⁷⁴ This term has been defined earlier in the thesis.

⁷⁵ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 315.

that the Son is "not foreign, but proper to the Father's essence."⁷⁶

The idea that flows from the usage of "proper" is that Eternal Sonship is viable because the Father generated the Son from eternity, and this generation is based upon the same characteristics that pertain to the Father. The Son is the Father's essence by nature and not by participation. The generation of the Son insists upon the eternal state of the Son as son, and thus secures the relationship of Son to the Father because of their same characteristics, which are proper to both Father and Son.

R. P. C. Hanson concurs:

For Athanasius a necessary corollary of the revelatory relation of the Son to the Father was their full ontological unity which could only be properly defended against distortion and misunderstanding if it was set out in some terms which closely connected the Son to the *ousia* of the Father.⁷⁷

The argument of CA 1:15-16 is that of divine Sonship. The crux of this segment deals with the *Logos* as Son to the Father. The issue Athanasius addresses is the nature of Sonship simply because the issue of "participation" speaks to the heart of the Eternal Sonship: If the Son participated in the *ousia* (essence) of the Father by grace and not by nature, then there is no basis for

⁷⁶ Pettersen, 145.

⁷⁷ Hanson, 426-7.

Eternal Sonship, and the Arians have a case—the son is not eternal. However, if the Son does not participate but is “partaken,”⁷⁸ as is proper to the **ousia** (essence), then the Son must be a part of the **ousia** (essence) and, consequently, the eternal Son.

Athanasius demonstrates that the Arians not only have a problem with the Son but also with God the Father. He questions if the Arians are “greatly deceived in inferring corporeal things about the incorporeal and, because of the weakness of their peculiar nature, in denying that which is peculiar by nature to the Father?”⁷⁹

Athanasius charges the Arians with thinking of God in a material way and denying the truth about the incorporeal nature of God. Thus, the divisions within the **ousia** (essence) are because the Arian thoughts of the generation of the Father and Son are material. In other words, in the Arian mindset, they have applied human functions to deity. Therefore, the Son has no option but to “participate”⁸⁰ as a son by grace and not by nature or essence. Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh concur as they write, “This is not a participation due to common essence;

⁷⁸ Athanasius, “Orations Against the Arians, Book I,” 79.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 78.

as alien and dissimilar *ousia*, Father, Son, and Spirit cannot have substantial participation in each other."⁸¹ This would naturally lead to the conclusion that the Son is created. It is at this point that Athanasius begins to attack the logic of the Arians and demonstrates their lack of a scriptural referent for their position.

The faulty conclusions of the Arians place the Son in the same position as human believers (who have not the *Logos* by nature) who need grace to participate or partake of redemption. To demonstrate his point, Athanasius utilizes John 16:14-15: "all things partake of the Spirit." The concept is that the Holy Spirit receives grace from the Son and then reveals grace to the believers. The believers, then, participate in Sonship. The Arians applied this process to the Son, Himself, and had the Son participating in His own grace (He redeems Himself)—which does not make sense and is not scriptural.

The crux of the argument by Athanasius is not easily revealed. The basis of the argument gives validity and credibility to the reality of the Son. If the Son is not a reality then the argument for Sonship is mute. However, since there is reality to the Son's existence,

⁸¹ Gregg, 57.

this can only lead to the conclusion that the Son must be eternal and participate in the Father. This conclusion is a well-defined argument that leaves the Arians very little choice but to reexamine their proposed theological method.

Athanasius asserts that the Son participates in the Father. He writes:

Therefore he partakes of the Father. This is the only possibility, and it is necessary to say it. But what is participated then, or where does it come from? If it is external, contrived by the Father, he would be a partaker not of the Father but of an external which came into existence.⁸²

The participation of the Son in the Father has two options: (1) the Son is external and participates from that position, or (2) the Son participates because he is the same **ousia** (essence) as the Father. The option that Athanasius presents is the latter one.

The rationale for his position is that the former option contains too many theological absurdities. For the Son to participate in the Father by an external relationship means that which produced the Son is the actual father of the Son and not the Father himself. This allows for the consideration of multiple persons of the Godhead and thus propels the Godhead beyond the Trinity and gives a complicated relationship between Father and Son as

⁸² Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 78.

it allows for a mediator to come between or intervene for Father and Son. Athanasius considers this absurdity based upon the revelation of the Father's confession in Matthew 3:17, "This is my beloved Son."

The latter option of the Son's participation in the Father is the Nicene position. Athanasius writes:

Therefore, because these considerations are patently absurd and contrary to truth, it is necessary to say that the Son is "from the substance [*ousia*] of the Father," altogether peculiar [*proper*] to him.⁸³

Athanasius champions the Nicene position as he refutes theological considerations of the Arians based upon the lack of scriptural revelation.

In CA 1:16, Athanasius examines the concept of "proper" Sonship. The participation of the Son in the Father is deemed generation and concludes that believers also participate in the Father because they have participated in the Son.

The essential difference between the believer's participation in the Son and the Son's participation in the Father is one of *ousia* (essence). For the believer to participate in the Son is by the means of grace. "Thus all things partake of the Son according to the grace of the

⁸³ Ibid., 78-9.

Spirit, which comes into existence from him.”⁸⁴ This participation by grace means that the believer is not of the same **ousia** (essence) as the Trinity, but participates *via* adoption by grace. In order to support his argument Athanasius utilizes 2 Peter 1:4; 1 Corinthians 3:16; and 2 Corinthians 6:16.

The Son, on the other hand, is the same **ousia** (essence) of the Father, and thus the Son’s participation of the Father is also the revelation of the Trinitarian formula. To think of the Son as external to the Godhead is to commit “blasphemes against the Father himself. . . .”⁸⁵

The Arians’ Unlikely Triad (CA 1.17-8)

This section marks a transition to the Athanasian consideration concerning the nature of the **ousia** (essence) that comprises the Trinity. Seemingly, Athanasius desires to review the Trinity of the Arians, and then contrast their view with the orthodox position in order to demonstrate that the Arians have embraced a faulty and theologically unorthodox position of the Godhead.

The rationale for this section is to demonstrate that the central Arian thesis, God was once without the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 79.

Son, is deviant and false. This consideration follows the affirmation that the Son is eternal, which allows Athanasius the platform of refuting the basic tenet of Arianism.

Athanasius reviews the Arians' tenet of the creation of the Word and comes to the conclusion that the premise is faulty because it demonstrates: (1) an ontological change of the **ousia** (essence) of the Trinity, and (2) a gradation in the numeric change within the Trinity.

First, Athanasius states that if the Word is created then there would be a logical necessity of a different **ousia** (essence) because of the lack of eternality of the alleged created *Logos*. Athanasius states:

It is the same thing as saying that God is not within him, or that he does not have his peculiar fashioning Word within him, but **that the one by whom he fashions is external** [emphasis added], a stranger and unlike in substance.⁸⁶

Athanasius depicts the Arians as demonstrating that God is a creator who created the Son. The problem of this created Son means that the Son is not the same **ousia** (essence) but, in fact, an external creation from the **ousia**

⁸⁶ Ibid., 80.

(essence), which means that the Arians have a created and different *Logos* that is unlike the Father's substance.

The second problem of this created *Logos* is the affect upon the status of the Trinity. The ontological addition of a new and external member to the Arian perception of a monad implies that God was not always a Trinity. In the previous section, Athanasius demonstrates the Son's eternity, but now he examines the problems associated with the Arian position of a created Son in relation to the Trinity. There seems to be a gradation to the Trinity. That in itself poses a problem to the eternity of the Trinitarian *ousia* (essence). J. Rebecca Lyman recognizes this problem as she writes the following:

The eternal self expression of God was therefore Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet this was not a hierarchy of decreasing essences intervening between the Father and the world, for the only division lay between uncreated and created being.⁸⁷

The Trinity progresses to a gradated existence. If the Arian position is correct the only conclusion that can be reached is that God must have existed as a Monad at some point in time. Athanasius writes:

If the Word is not everlasting with the Father, the Triad is not everlasting, but a monad was first, and later by addition it became a Triad, and according to

⁸⁷ J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 133.

them, as time went on, the knowledge of the teaching about God increased and was solidified.⁸⁸

The Trinity, according to the Arians, no longer has an eternal, unchangeable **ousia** (essence). This proposition contradicts the orthodox theology of the Nicene formula. The nature of the **ousia** (essence) is not mutable. For that matter, not only does the Arian **ousia** (essence) change, but the Triad became complete with the addition of the Son.

The greater problem of the changeable Triad is the Triad is complete numerically but not substantively. Athanasius states, ". . . the Triad is discovered to be unlike itself, composed of strange and foreign natures and substances."⁸⁹ Thus any union among the Trinity, according to the Arian system, is predicated upon a union of external essences. The foregone conclusion of such a union by addition is that "obviously, things added can be taken away."⁹⁰

Athanasius utilizes the confession of the Christian faith to emphasize the deviant theology of the Arians. He writes:

But the Christian faith knows an unmoved, perfect, constant, blessed Triad. It neither adds something

⁸⁸ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 80.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 80.

more to the Triad nor considers that it has a need—each of these possibilities is impious. . . . On guard it worships the individual oneness of its Godhead and flees the blasphemies of the Arians, and confesses and knows that the Son always is.⁹¹

Athanasius argues for the eternality of the Trinity based upon the Christian confession. The summary of the Christian faith is based upon the eternal Trinity having eternal structured relationships within the Trinity. Again Lyman states:

Thus, the divine, unchanging Father required an eternal, co-essential Son, to be consistent with the definitions of divine essence. If the Son were not eternal, a change would have occurred in the Godhead, and God would not be eternally Father or presumable true God.⁹²

Athanasius' declaration demonstrates not only the eternal **ousia** (essence) of the Trinity but also the eternality of the Son which is said to be a part of the Christian faith.

Biblical Imagery Supports Eternal Sonship (CA 1.19-20)

Athanasius reviews the specific issue of the Son's co-eternality with the Father from specific texts containing biblical imagery. This review is established by the transitional statement at the end of CA 1.18. He

⁹¹ Ibid., 81.

⁹² Lyman, 147.

states, "He is everlasting as the Father, whose everlasting Word he is. Let us look at this again."⁹³

Apparently Athanasius is concerned with the language of biblical imagery. In order to review his hermeneutics of such imagery it is helpful to note that the possibility of misinterpretation is quite likely. In order to avoid such misinterpretation, Athanasius reveals a careful analysis detailing the employment and meaning of the biblical imagery as applied to the relationship between the Father and Son.

David Dockery comments on the hermeneutics of Athanasius. Dockery states:

Often Athanasius, by way of analogy, found his theological interpretations where the biblical text did not specifically address those matters. Upon reflection, twentieth-century interpreters may have difficulty with Athanasius's struggle with the Arians over texts which appear useless to prove the truth of either case. . . .⁹⁴

Dockery goes on to state:

Athanasius was not an original thinker like Origen, though his writings have come to be regarded as the essential statement of the Alexandrian position on the key Christological controversies of the time. He was deeply indebted to Origen for his allegorical hermeneutics, but both his analogical and allegorical readings of Scripture were shaped by the developing

⁹³ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 81.

⁹⁴ David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 98-9.

rule of faith than his own creativity of imagination.⁹⁵

Athanasius follows the Alexandrian School of Interpretation,⁹⁶ whereas Arius was a student of the Antiochene School of Interpretation.⁹⁷ The difference for Athanasius is that he does not consistently adhere to the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁹⁶ The Alexandrian School of Interpretation was more allegorical in methodology. J. N. D. Kelly comments on the allegorical method of interpretation. Kelly writes: "Since the fathers employed both typology and allegorical the distinction between the two methods needs to be clearly brought out. In allegorical exegesis the sacred text is treated as a mere symbol, or allegory, of spiritual truth. The literal, historical sense, if it is regarded at all, plays a relatively minor role, and the aim of the exegete is to elicit the moral, theological or mystical meaning which each passage, indeed each verse and even each word, is presumed to contain. . . . Typological exegesis worked along very different lines. Essentially it was a technique for bringing out the correspondence between the two Testaments, and took as its guiding principle the idea that the events and personages of the old were 'types' of, i.e. prefigured and anticipated, the events of and personages of the New. The typologist took history seriously; it was the scene of the progressive unfolding of God's consistent redemptive purpose" (70-1). Athanasius uses the typological method of interpretation in order to demonstrate that the Old Testament prefigured and illustrated the life of Christ, which is found more abundantly in the New Testament. In this writer's opinion, Athanasius does not strictly follow the Alexandrian School of Interpretation.

⁹⁷ This Antiochene School of Interpretation was more literal in scope and practice. The Bible was interpreted from a very literal position without consideration of biblical imagery. Gerald Bray states: "For the representatives of this school, the spiritual sense (*theoria*) of Scripture was not allegorical, but was to be sought in the literal sense itself. This type of exegesis corresponded with their Christology, which stressed that the humanity of Christ was not modified in any way by his divinity. The greatest exponent of the Antiochene exegetical method was Theodore of Mopsuestia, who rebuked the allegorizers for their tendency to lapse into fables far removed from historical fact" (*Biblical Interpretation Past & Present* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996], 106-7). According to David Dockery, the progression of the teachers of the Antiochene School is as follows: "Lucian of Antioch, who in turn taught Paul of Samosata whose own pupil was Arius. Others notables who were prominent in this school were Diodore of Tarsus and John Chrysostom" (106-13).

Alexandrian School simply because he does submit to the authority of the biblical text. Therefore, when the tradition of the Alexandrian School is in tension with the revelation of the Scriptures, Athanasius chooses the biblical revelation over and above the Alexandrian School of Interpretation.

Apparently Athanasius gives these illustrations as examples that are analogous to the relationship between Father and Son. These illustrations are a small portion of the larger picture, but serve to validate his theological expression concerning the Father and Son. Yet, these same images and illustrations may be used to negate any theological position that is counter to them.

In CA 1.19, Athanasius reveals God in the use of the analogies of σοφία (wisdom) and ζωὴ (life). The imagery is found in Jeremiah 2:13; 17:12-13; and Baruch 3:12, where God the Father is depicted as a *fountain* and σοφία (wisdom) and ζωὴ (life) are properties that belong to the fountain. Thus if ζωὴ (life) is absent from the fountain there is an incompleteness to the fountain and the Father "could not rejoice."⁹⁸ Athanasius draws the conclusion that a fountain without water is lifeless. He states, "There was once when

⁹⁸ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 81.

the fountain was dry, without life and wisdom. But this would not be a fountain for that which is not begotten from itself is not a fountain."⁹⁹

It is interesting that Athanasius considers the imageries of Jeremiah in a soteriological fashion. He writes:

God promises to those who do his will that they will be as a fountain whose water has not failed, saying by the prophet Isaiah, "And you will be satisfied, just as your soul desires, and your bones will be fattened and it will be as a garden well watered as a fountain that has not failed."¹⁰⁰

The theological implication is pointed. Should the Arians insist that the Son is not eternal then not only is God the Father insulted but their own salvation is to be questioned.

The striking point to note is Athanasius' conclusion concerning the σοφία (wisdom) and ζωή (life). He states:

And if the fountain is everlasting, wisdom must be everlasting, for in it all things came into existence, as David sings in the Psalter, "In wisdom you made all things" (Ps. 104:24). Solomon says, "God by Wisdom founded the earth, and he prepared the heavens in thoughtfulness" (Prov. 3:19). And this Wisdom is the Word, and "through him" as John says, "all things came into existence," (John 1:3).¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 82.

The Arians theological hermeneutic and corresponding theology contradicts the imagery of the revelation of the Scriptures. They have the Son as a creation that is different to the Father. Athanasius uses the Scriptures and their images to come to the conclusion that the Son is eternal.

Athanasius also argues for the eternality of the Son based upon 1 Corinthians 8:6. The idea is that "all things" are from the Father and the Son. The conclusion is that you cannot think a certain way about the Father and yet not think the same about the Son. The underlying thought is the Arian expression of the eternal Father and the created Son. The Arians are applying properties to the Son that are only applicable to creation or creatures. Athanasius states, "Such terms are fittingly said about creatures, but the Son himself is such one as is the Father, of whose substance his is a peculiar offspring, Word and Wisdom."¹⁰²

This sets up Athanasius to review the properties of an uncreated being in contrast to a created being in CA 1.20. He insists that there is no similarity between the created and the creator. He writes:

¹⁰² Ibid., 82.

The other things such as are originated have no resemblance according to substance with their maker. They are external to him, having come into existence by his grace and will, by his Word, so that they have the potential of ceasing to be, if their maker would wish it, for this is the nature of originated things.¹⁰³

The rationale for Athanasius is that the Son can be attributed to be deity based upon the fact that he is eternal and does not belong to the order of the created. He demonstrates this by reviewing various images to present a coherent theological expression of the Son's eternality.

For example, Athanasius presents the Son as the "image of God."¹⁰⁴ This expression may have a foundation in Greek philosophy and even Greek science. The idea of image represents a corresponding reality.¹⁰⁵ The meaning becomes one of eternal status: the Son must be eternally existent with the Father for this image to have any meaning. Thus,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵ Lampe gives more insight to the exact definition of *eikwn*: "2.a. image as representing a reality, 2.a.i., material reflecting spiritual reality, 2.a.iii., OT as type of NT reality. iv., NT reflecting as divine realities in contrast to mere shades in OT" (412). The meaning that Hermann Martin Kleinknecht, gives is as follows: "The peculiarity of the expression is related to that of the ancient concept, which does not limit image to a functional representation present to human sense but also thinks of it in terms of an emanation, of a revelation of the being with a substantial participation (*metochē*) in the object. Image is not to be understood as a magnitude, which is alien to the reality and present only in the consciousness. It has a share in the reality. Indeed, it is the reality. Thus, *eikwn*, does not imply a weakening or a feeble copy of something. It implies the illumination of its inner core and essence" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, s.v. "The Greek use of *eikwn*,").

Athanasius can say that the Son is the proper image of God the Father. Athanasius writes:

Anyone would see more clearly the heresy's absurdity if he would consider that the Son is "image" and "reflection of the Father," and "characteristic mark" and "truth." If when there is light, there is image.
 . . . ¹⁰⁶

This review, of the Son existing as the image of the Father, strikes a blow at subordinationism. The Arian concept of participation by grace is eliminated. The focus of the Athanasian argument is upon the ontological process to which the Arians adhered. Since the Son is the image of the Father there is no process involved whereby the Son came into existence. The word "eikwn" correlates to the existing reality of the Son as He, indeed, did coexist with the Father.

The idea of sun and ray from Hebrews 1:3 also speaks of divine unity. This concept refers to the idea of *homoousia*. The thought flow is that the ray is not the sun but derives from it as it is a property of the sun. In similar fashion, the Son is not the Father and the Father not the Son as they each have their own identity. Their unity is found in their *ousia* (essence), and thus their

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 83.

individual identity could be properly expressed as a property of their *unity of ousia* (essence).

When one considers the ray in comparison to the sun it is easy to see the Athanasian argument for unity and individuality. The ray enables one to see the sun because of the property of the ray in the first place. Again, in like fashion, one is able to see the Father because of the Son's ability to reveal the Father's image. In order for this to happen the Son must be of the same *ousia* (essence) and have the same properties as the Father. The Son does so while still maintaining His individual position within the Godhead. For that matter, the *ousia* (essence) allows the Father to rejoice and see His own image (His own corresponding reality) in the Son. Athanasius writes:

When, therefore, did the Father not see himself in his own image? Or when did he not rejoice that someone would dare to say, "The image is from nothing" and "The Father was not rejoicing before the image came into existence?" How would the maker and creator see himself in a created and originated substance? The substance of the Father must necessarily be the substance of the image.¹⁰⁷

Athanasius reviews the imagery of the Scriptures to reveal the Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. Yet, this section is preliminary to an investigation of the attributes of the Son. Athanasius has laid the foundation

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 83-4.

for such an investigation so that the reader can now appreciate this analysis of the Son's attributes as the second person of the eternal Godhead.

**Divine Attributes Reveal Eternal Sonship
(CA 1.21-22)**

Athanasius reviews the New Testament teachings of John 14:6-11 to examine the attributes of the Father and Son. He argues that the Son has the same attributes as the Father. This passage also reveals the mutuality of the Trinitarian relationship between Father and Son. The interesting feature of the Johannine passage is that ontology and epistemology are related in the person of the Son. The Son is called *αληθεια* (truth) of God but is followed by the theological expression of mutual relationship: "He who has seen me has seen my father . . . Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? . . . Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. . . ." ¹⁰⁸

The focus of this passage is that it links the Son to the Father's attributes. The Son exists in the Father ontologically and then expresses the Father epistemologically. Athanasius affirms that the attributes

¹⁰⁸ John 14:9-11 (NASB).

of the Father will also be seen in the image.¹⁰⁹ These attributes are defined as eternal and omnipotent, and being such, they are essential to that which possesses them. The argument flows from the fact that God the Father possesses such attributes and the image of the Father, the Son, must possess them if epistemology is valid. The conclusion is that true knowledge (epistemology) of God is possible because the Son's ontological **ousia** (essence) is the same as the Father's.

Athanasius then proceeds to demonstrate the ignorance of the Arian position. He writes:

But, O enemies of Christ, this is not an image of a characteristic mark, for what sort of resemblance is there between things which are from nothing and the one who rendered the things which are nothing into being? How is it that which is not able to be, similar to him who is, since it is inferior because once it was not and it has its own reference to things originated?¹¹⁰

The idea behind such a statement seems to strike at one of the basic tenets of Arianism: that the Son is a creature since He was begotten!

One can almost hear the Arian objection to the idea of image bearing the same attributes as the Father; that would require the Son to beget a son himself and thus He

¹⁰⁹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 84.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 84.

would then become a father to His own son. Athanasius sees the problem with the Arian objection: they have assigned physical, human properties and attributes to the Godhead. The Arians gave the divine **ousia** (essence) alien and foreign properties. Essentially, the Arians do not understand the **ousia** (essence) of God because they have an improper epistemology of God.

In human terms the idea of father and son are common terms applied to individuals as the title warrants. However, the terms cannot be applied to deity in the same understanding for that would mean that God is maturing or processing in a personal way. The conclusion is that 'Father' and 'Son' are proper terms, which apply to their internal Trinitarian relationship and are not common terms. Again, Athanasius appeals to the meaning of **ousia** (essence). The **ousia** (essence) is immutable, and thus the subsistence of God the Father and God the Son are unchangeable. The relationship between Father and Son must also be unchanging. Athanasius writes, ". . . the Father is properly father and the Son properly son, and for them and them alone is it that the Father is always father and the Son always son."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Ibid., 85.

In a clever argument, Athanasius reveals that the Trinitarian relationships are unchangeable and eternal. He, once again, reveals the Son's eternal status as an unchangeable function of his deity. "But if the Father is immutable and he remains what he is, the image necessarily remains what it is and will not be mutated. But he is Son from the Father."¹¹² Lyman concurs as she writes:

Fatherhood therefore described God's essential self-expression in the Son, and revealed an interior relationship: God was always Father, but not always Creator . . . yet scriptural, hence divine fatherhood must be defined properly by the qualities of eternity and essential communication, not temporal priority.¹¹³

Athanasius declares the eternal nature of the Son is a matter of fact as the epistemology of the Scriptures demands an ontological unity. Laeuchli declares, "Eternity and perfection are parallel issues in the argument, and the eternity of the Son is absolutely necessary if He is to have perfection with the Father."¹¹⁴

The idea of Sonship and Fatherhood are points of theological departure for the Arians and Athanasius. According to Gregg and Groh, the Arians understood Fatherhood and Sonship in terms of humanities procreative

¹¹² Ibid., 134.

¹¹³ Lyman, 134.

¹¹⁴ Laeuchli, 408.

concept of *begetting*, which is a physical property. "The Arian understanding of the terms 'Son' and 'Father' derive from empirical rather than theoretical notions of sonship."¹¹⁵ The terms 'Father' and 'Son' are descriptive of the relationship between the two and do not correspond to an eternal reality. The Father, according to the Arians, became Father but, on the other hand, was always creator. Thus the Arians conclude, "There was a time when the Son was not." This simply means that the Father created the Son, and thus Fatherhood was also a byproduct of the Son's creation. The terms 'Father' and 'Son' also point to sequences of time elapsing and even underscore the importance of the Father empowering the Son, who is a dependent creature of His Father. The result is that the **ousia** (essence) of the Arian god is not compatible with itself, and therefore, the terms 'Father' and 'Son' cannot have an eternal reference. They have a processional, sequential and even chronological time reference.

It is at this point that two different religious systems are evident. The Arians and the orthodox parties do not worship the same **ousia** (essence)!

¹¹⁵ Gregg and Groh, 84.

Athanasius recognizes this problem of theological epistemology, and he utilizes the method of asking the Arian's own proof questions¹¹⁶ in order to ascertain the truth of the eternal status of the Son. These test questions mark a change in format for *Contra Arianos*.

**The Review of the Proof Questions
(CA 1.22b-36)**

Athanasius leaves his polemic against the central Arian thesis and introduces a series of Arian proof questions¹¹⁷ that will direct the format of *Contra Arianos* for the next fourteen sections. These questions are asked from the vantage point of the Council of Nicea having already discredited the central Arian thesis. Thus, Athanasius reviews the same questions the Arians were asking but he knows the answers to these questions are considered from a discredited ecclesiastical position. He simply asks them for the sake of clarity.

The idea of clarification will be utilized to further disparage the Arian tenet that *there was a time when the son was not*. Athanasius intends to demonstrate the

¹¹⁶ Not one scholar calls these questions "proof questions." That is simply this writer's designated term to underscore the thrust of the Arian system of propaganda.

¹¹⁷ The Arians utilized the strategy of proof questions as they asked these questions in the open market place to propagate their own position. These questions were designed to *prove* the Arian theological position.

eternal status of the Son by using these Arian proof questions to elucidate the utter failure of the Arian position and thereby communicate that the orthodoxy of Christianity is not found with the Arian teachings.

Athanasius identifies these questions with Arius.

He writes:

Arius and his supporters, placing the Son among the originated ones—a view in accord with the teaching of Eusebius—and thinking that he is of a kind that such things have come into existence through him, turned away from the truth and heaped up for themselves pet words of villainy. They went around when they had just made up this heresy—and they continue even now—meeting young children in the market.¹¹⁸

Athanasius believes that Arius not only asked these questions but his followers did the same. It seems possible that these questions may have been recorded in the *Thalia* but no such proof exists.

Whether or not this is accurate, Athanasius does offer a question-answer methodology that is reflective in scope and critical in analysis. This particular methodology allows for a proper assessment of the theological dialogue of the orthodox party and the Arians. The design of the approach is to review the Arian proof questions and then demonstrate that the expected answers of the Arians are not accurate simply because the questions are misleading. They

¹¹⁸ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 85.

are not proper and accurate because the theology of the Arians attributes human characteristics to the nature of deity.

Consequently, Athanasius quotes Romans 1:20 assigning the Arians to the plight of the idolaters as they, themselves, fall under the condemnation of devaluing the nature of God. The conclusion that Athanasius wants to reach is that the Trinity cannot be thought of as having human properties as that theological evaluation constitutes idolatry. Simply stated, the *ousia* (essence) cannot reproduce in the fashion of earthly humanity and still be thought of as divine.

The First Proof Question: CA 1.24-26a

Athanasius charges the Arians with a silly question that is not logically tenable. He writes:

They do not indicate about whom they are inquiring so that the individual asked may answer. They simply say, "He who is," "Him who is not." Therefore who is he who is, and what are the things which are not, O Arians? Or who is the one who is once who is the one who is not?¹¹⁹

Athanasius answers the question from the position that the Arians are asking about the Creator making the Word from preexistent material. He uses the illustration of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

the carpenter, goldsmith, and potter "according to his peculiar skill, works on existing and previously existing material as he makes the vessels he wishes."¹²⁰

The purpose of the Arian proof question is clear. It is designed to prove that the Son did not exist at one time. Yet since the question is so vague Athanasius clarifies the question: "But if they talk about God and his Word, let them finish their questioning and then ask, 'Was the God who is, once Wordless?'"¹²¹

Athanasius gives a rebuttal based upon the previous section (CA 1.11-22a). The Father-Son relationship is eternal and ordered but of the same **ousia** (essence) and supports his conclusion as he quotes John 1:1; Hebrews 1:3; and Romans 9:5. Athanasius considers the Arians and their question as that which "waste their efforts and dare to deal cunningly about God and he who is from him."¹²²

It seems the question is really designed to inquire about the existence of God rather than the attributes of God. However, such a question must take into consideration the attributes of God as they are known, which is the emphasis of CA 1.20. The Arians fail to do this simply

¹²⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹²¹ Ibid., 87.

¹²² Ibid., 87.

because they do not understand the nature of God. The first proof question fails to consider the Trinitarian **ousia** (essence). The question is judged as faulty and inappropriate.

The Second Proof Question CA 1.26b-29

Athanasius reverses the order of his examination of the questions that he introduced earlier. The second question is actually the fourth question. However, the rationale seems to allow him to use the third question as a platform for his evaluation of the Arian exposition of the Scriptures.

The question the Arians posed is recorded by Athanasius: "Did he who is have need of him who is not, for the fashioning of all, or did he have need of him who is?"¹²³ Again, Athanasius evaluates this question from the position of the Council of Nicea that has anathematized the Arian heresy. This question deals with the generation of the Son. According to the Arians, the Son was made by the Father.

It is this question in which Athanasius reveals the fallacy of the Arians in their use of analogies. He states:

¹²³ Ibid., 89.

It is not right to measure the generation of the God by the nature of men. Nevertheless, in order that they might judge themselves in this matter, it is good to meet them on the same basis, thus: If they ask about the parents of the Son, let them consider well the origin of the begotten child.¹²⁴

The argument that Athanasius gives is that the Son is from the same substance as the Father. This is present also in human relationships. Athanasius states the following:

If the parent did not have a son before he begot him, but having had him, he had him neither as external nor as foreign, but from himself and peculiar to his substance and as unchangeable image, the parent is seen in the Son and the son is beheld in the parent.¹²⁵

The relationship that exists between Father/Son is ideal. The idea of human generation follows the pattern of the divine generation. Thus the prototype of and the pattern for humanity is seen in the eternal relationship between Father and Son and not found in the human concept of reproducing offspring in time.

The thrust of Athanasius' critique is that the divine relationship must be understood on its own nature and not have a forced and false analogy applied it. For that matter, it is the divine relationship that must inform the human relations if meaning is to be found at all. The

¹²⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 89.

Arians inverted the process by reviewing earthly matters and comparing them and even assigning them to the Godhead.

Gregg and Groh concur when they write:

The central point in the Arian system is that Christ gains and holds his sonship in the same way as other creatures—thus it is asserted that what is predicated of the redeemer can and must be predicated of the redeemed.¹²⁶

Athanasius does demonstrate that there is a proper way to review divine/human relationships. The concept of Fatherhood is pivotal for Athanasius and the subsequent human understanding of divine/human relationships.

Petterson gives the following insight.

Athanasius will not allow God's Fatherhood, in any sense whatsoever, to be dependent upon creation. For it is defined by none and defines all else. So Athanasius stresses God's Fatherhood as that which defines God as the Source and End of creation, and which underwrites men and women becoming his sons and daughters.¹²⁷

The proper analogy for the divine and human generation is that each produces that which is proper to its parent. In other words, a human son is proper to its human parents, whereas, a divine Son is proper to his divine Father. The process of reproduction in humans takes place in time and reveals a maturation of the parent. In fact, Athanasius recognizes a presence of the Son in the

¹²⁶ Gregg and Groh, 67.

¹²⁷ Petterson, 164.

Father prior to His conception. He utilizes the illustration of Levi, as the great-grandson of Abraham, being present in his great-grandfather's loins.¹²⁸

The point Athanasius makes is that even in human generation there is a sense in which the Son is present even before His conception: the Son is present in the Father's loins.

The fact that children come from within the parents is an analogy of divine generation. One must remember that the analogy does serve as an example but the actual generations of the two beings (human and divine) are quite different in function. The Son is from the Father's **ousia** (essence), and because of that fact, human generation does not apply since there is a difference in the **ousia** (essence) of divine beings as compared to that of human beings.

The obvious point of Athanasius is that the divine **ousia** (essence) generates eternally as in keeping with its nature. The force of such an argument is hard to miss. The divine Son eternally exists with the divine Father. Again, the **ousia** (essence) references not only a divine, eternal Father but a divine, eternal Son.

¹²⁸ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 90.

In CA 1.29, Athanasius gives another reason for the eternality of the Son: it is the eternal nature of the Father. Athanasius states:

A person might be a maker, and may be so called, even if the works do not yet exist, but he would not be called father, nor would he be a father, if a **son does not exist**. . . . But the Son, being not a work but peculiar to the Father's substance, **always is**. Since the **Father always is**, it is necessary that what is peculiar to his substance always is, and this is his Word and Wisdom [emphases added].¹²⁹

The power of the Father to create is an essential aspect of the Trinity. The idea is that creation is not eternal nor are humans eternal since they are an aspect of creation. There is a fundamental difference between the Father and his creation. That is the point of Athanasius. For the word "father" to have any meaning there must be a corresponding reality to the term. In order to have a corresponding reality to the term 'father,' there must be a son. Since the nature of the Father is eternal and the title reflects an eternal relationship-the corresponding reality is that the Son confirms the title of "Father."

The emphasis for Athanasius is that the Father is distinct from his creation. Anatolios states:

The crucial distinction is that "father" necessarily connotes an actual relation by which God's very being is constituted and described, whereas, "maker" only

¹²⁹ Ibid., 92.

necessarily connotes a potency inherent in the agent.¹³⁰

The point to note is that the eternal Son is the agent of creation. Athanasius states, "Wherefore the works were fashioned through his Word when he wished, but the Son is always the peculiar offspring of the Father's substance."¹³¹

The conclusion of the question is that the Son is an integral part of the Father and is expressed in the eternal order of their relationship. Their mutual and reciprocal presence enjoys one another from eternity.

The Third Proof Question CA 1.30-4

Again, Athanasius reverses the order of his initial presentation of the questions. In his presentation this is actually the second proof question, but he addresses it as the third question.

This question addresses the eternity of the Son in relation to the eternity of the Father. Athanasius states:

These things cheer the faithful but annoy the heretical, because they see their heresy is destroyed. Their asking, "**Is the Ungenerated one or two?**" [emphasis added] discloses that their thought is not accurate but suspect and full of deceit. They ask

¹³⁰ Anatolios, 119.

¹³¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 93.

about this not for honor of the Father but for dishonor of the Word.¹³²

The question is designed to demonstrate that the Son was not existent until his creation by the Father. The Arian position is that the Son is an original work of the Father. Athanasius reveals that the Arians have four different meanings for the word "unoriginated."¹³³

Athanasius then demonstrates that the Arians do not agree on the definitions of their own term. He admonishes, ". . . it is necessary to ask in addition what meaning of 'unoriginated' is intended, so that those asked might answer correctly."¹³⁴ He attributes the deceitfulness of Asterius as the culprit for the confusion of semantics. Athanasius states, "When all fails, if they wish to ask the question with another meaning of the term. . . ."¹³⁵

The ironic issue that Athanasius reveals is that Asterius actually adheres to *two* unoriginated beings. Athanasius declares:

Although he [Asterius] did not accurately discern the word of the apostle, he recognized that there were two wisdoms, but in maintaining that an unoriginated wisdom exists together with him, he says that the

¹³² Ibid., 93.

¹³³ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 93.

unoriginated is not simply one but there is also another unoriginated with him. Therefore if they are persuaded by Asterius, let them not ask again, "Is the unoriginated one or two?" lest they having changed their position might fight him.¹³⁶

Athanasius acknowledges that the Arians have confused the terms by applying them improperly. The Arians were trying to establish a relationship between **agennhtoc** (begotten) and **uiol'** (son). Athanasius appeals to the Scripture to give meaning to the idea of the Son's relation to the Father. He states that the Father exercises "power" and that the Son is **kurioç** (Lord) of the Father's **basileuei** (kingdom). The force of this relationship is established by Athanasius as he writes, "He who names God maker, fashioner, and unoriginated sees and detects the creatures and originated things; but he, who calls God Father, immediately knows and views the Son."¹³⁷

The ontological difference between God and creation is a central theme for Athanasius. He reveals that creation is dependent upon the Creator for its existence. Creation exists because of the eternality of the Son. He states, ". . . he who calls God 'Father' indicates him from the Son, recognizing that since there is a Son, of necessity

¹³⁶ Ibid., 95.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 97.

through the Son all originated things were created."¹³⁸

Anatolios verifies the Son as Creator of creation in

Athanasian thought as he states:

We are now in a position to grasp the fundamental point of convergence between Athanasius's Trinitarian theology and his conception of the relation between God and the world. This is that the relation between God and the world is both contained in and superseded by the relation between the Father and the Son. A correct understanding of the Athanasian position is one that takes note simultaneously of both these elements: on the one hand, the containment and continuity and, on the other, the precedence, both chronologically and ontologically, of the intra-divine relation over the relation *ad extra*.¹³⁹

The Christian orthodoxy of Father/Son relation surpasses the Arian rationale of the Son as creature who also creates. The Arians attempted to pit the Son as originated against the Son as eternal **ousia** (essence). This violates not only Trinitarian theology but subsequently dishonors the Son and offends the Father in the process.

The answer to the Arian question is that the term 'unoriginated' is unscriptural and does not reveal the Son. In fact, the Arians do not know about the nature of the Son anymore than the Greeks.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹³⁹ Anatolios, 120.

¹⁴⁰ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 97.

The Fourth Proof Question CA 1.35-6

This question is the third in the initial presentation but it serves to prepare the reader for a change in approach of *Contra Arianos*. The Arians presented several Scriptures for their position that the Son changed in his nature. This question gives Athanasius the platform to address the Arian hermeneutic of their interpretation of the Scriptures.

The basic question the Arians asked in the open market concerns the mutability of the Son:

Here the nonsensical questions they utter: Has he free will or has he not? By choice, according to free will, is he good? And is he able, if he wishes, to be mutated, being of a mutable nature? Or, as stone and wood, has he not the free will choice of being moved or inclining in each of two ways?¹⁴¹

The question is designed by the Arians to prove that the Son, by grace, and not by his **ousia** (essence) with the Father, changed for the better so that the Father exalted him (in fact, the Arians utilized Philippians 2:5-11 as a proof text for their deviant theology). The Arians were asking such a question to demonstrate that there is no eternality to the nature of the Son.

Once again, Athanasius reviews the Arian understanding of the Son as described in the specific

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 97.

Scripture of John 14:9-10, and comes to the conclusion that the Arians are deficient in their knowledge of the Father and Son. The rationale is that the Arian Son cannot lead to the Father because they are so unlike one another. The Arians know that the Father's **ousia** (essence) is unchangeable, whereas the Son is progressing in His nature. Athanasius writes:

But if according to their opinion the Son is mutable and not always the same, but is of an always changing nature, how is such a one able to be the image of the Father, without the similarity of his immutability . . . But perhaps being mutable and daily making progress, he is not yet perfect.¹⁴²

The Arians embraced the created nature of the Son. If this were the case, then of course the will and even nature of the son could change for the better. For that matter, the possibility existed that the Son could change for the worse.¹⁴³

This question of mutability reveals the demarcation line that so permeated the crisis.

At an early state of the controversy, then the battle lines were drawn between orthodox and Arian in terms of whether the Son was conceived to have a creaturely nature—and that meant a mutable nature and will—or

¹⁴² Ibid., 98.

¹⁴³ Arius never makes this claim. However, the conclusion is based upon the fact that change does not have to be for the better. The logic is that change of will and nature is neutral, and thus any positive or negative influence might produce a change either for the good or for the bad.

whether he was thought to be divine by nature and so unchangeable in essence and inclination. This way of formulating the question was guaranteed to raise the most far-reaching controversy in the churches since the Gnostic crisis.¹⁴⁴

Athanasius understands that the Son's immutability is taught in the Scriptures. Thus, any formulation of a mutable Son is not orthodox. He cites Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 102:26-28; Malachi 3:6; and Deuteronomy 32:39, as examples of teaching the immutability of the Son.

For Athanasius the unchangeableness of the Son is an argument for the eternal nature of the Son. Should the Son change then you have a movement within the Trinity. The status of the Son would also be unchangeable in that the relationships of the Trinity are expressed in the function of the members of the Trinity. "But the Son being from the Father and peculiar to his substance is unchangeable and immutable as the Father himself."¹⁴⁵ The rationale of Athanasius is that the Son exists eternally in the Trinity as unchangeable.

The answer to this question is that the Son is immutable. However, Athanasius does not give a forward answer simply because he addresses this issue once again as

¹⁴⁴ Gregg and Groh, 162.

¹⁴⁵ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 99.

he reviews the Arian hermeneutic and critiques their interpretation of the biblical text.

**Evaluating the Arian Exposition
(CA 1.37-64)**

The Problem of the Arian Interpretation

In CA 1.36, Athanasius reveals that the Arians use the incarnation of the Son to espouse their doctrine that the Son is changeable. He addresses the Arian interpretation on the basis that it is a theological and epistemological problem. Athanasius writes:

It is not right to say that from the substance of the Immutable was begotten a mutable Word and a changeable Wisdom. How is he still the Word if mutable? Or how is Wisdom a changeable thing, unless as an accident in substance?¹⁴⁶

The idea is that there is a dichotomy between the one essence that is immutable and the other essence, which is mutable. They cannot be of the same *ousia* (essence). This presents a theological issue which progresses into an epistemological problem. Again Athanasius writes:

If, therefore, the lord himself says this and discloses his immutability, and the saints, having learned this, bear witness to it, and our thought about God acknowledge this as pious, from where did the impious contrive these things?¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 99-100.

The epistemological issue does not concern the revelation of the Father to the Son but is directed towards the Arians. Athanasius questions the source of such teachings, as they do not come from the revelation of the Son or the Father. The only place these false teachings could originate is "from their heart, as from corruption, they vomited them forth."¹⁴⁸

**Response to the Arian Interpretation
(CA 1.37-9)**

In CA 1.37, Athanasius declares that Arius forced an interpretation upon the text that is misleading. In order to correct the fallacy, Athanasius interacts with the same text that Arius has misinterpreted: Philippians 2:9-10 and Psalm 44:7-8.

Athanasius begins his interaction with the Philippian passage with an apparent understanding that the argument of Arius is centered on the interpretation and meaning of the Son's exaltation. Arius portrays the Son's exaltation as the time in which Christ actually became the Son. The Arians interpret the giving of an *ecarisato* (new name) as a gift of grace. In other words, at the time of the Lord's exaltation is when Jesus became full deity

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

simply because the Father declared Him to be a son. The new position and new name, the name "Son," is based upon an act of grace from the Father to the Son, and it functions as a reward for the Son's obedience. According to Arius, this act of grace, originating from the Father, denounces any concept of *homoousia* between the Father and the Son.

Rebecca Lyman notes:

. . . if the Son were not of the unchanging divine essence of the Father, his relationship would be an exterior one of adoption or mere participation, like the rest of creation. . . . To be the Son, he had to be the natural, hence eternal, offspring of the Father.¹⁴⁹

Athanasius vehemently argues against this position by distinguishing between Sonship by nature and Sonship by grace. Arius proposed that the Sonship of the Lord was Sonship by grace. Athanasius denies the Arian proposition. In other words, Jesus Christ, by His nature, held the position of Sonship and was granted the title that accompanied his status. Peter Widdicombe articulates the Athanasian thought very well as he writes, "The Father is able to rejoice in the Son only if the Son is perfect and does not need to be promoted to divine status."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Lyman, 147-8.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 207

Athanasius does follow the logic of the Arian interpretation as he writes, "If on account of this he was exalted, and received grace and on account of this he was anointed, he received a reward of his purpose. He, having acted by purpose, is entirely of a mutable nature."¹⁵¹ However, he does ask a critical and pivotal question: What was the Son before he became a son? There seem to be only two answers for his question: 1) the Son was a created being, or 2) he had no existence and was not incarnated but only a man who earned such titles as *Son of God*.¹⁵² If this scenario is true then the fleshly body improved the status of the Son. "Obviously he himself in no way improved the flesh, rather, he himself through it was improved—if accordingly to their malice then he was exalted and called Son when he became man."¹⁵³

Athanasius seems to be willing to grant the Arian premise if it can stand the test of validation. He is certain, though, the Arian argument cannot pass this test. The barrage of questions simply is used to demonstrate the fallacy of the Arian heresy. It seems that Athanasius interprets the Arian heresy as another version of Paul of

¹⁵¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 100.

¹⁵² Ibid., 101.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 101.

Samosata's heresy¹⁵⁴ even though Athanasius also calls it a current Jewish fabrication.¹⁵⁵ Thus, he views the Arian heresy as one that can be combated with the same logical approach and the utilization of appropriate hermeneutics as they were employed in earlier arguments.

In the latter portion of CA 1.38, Athanasius begins to quote scriptural references that depict the eternal nature of the Son. He utilizes John 17:5 and Psalm 18:9-13. The idea is that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, the highest Lord ever worshipped, and whatever is advanced is because he advances it. The consequence is that the Son descended in order to promote and improve. Thus, the Son's

¹⁵⁴ Harold O. J. Brown states, "Paul (of Samosata) who also served as Queen Zenobia's treasurer, taught that Jesus was born of a virgin and that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon him at his baptism. He did call Jesus God . . . but by this Paul only meant that through his moral perfection and the miraculous powers granted him at his baptism Jesus was able to remain in constant union with God" (*Heresies* [Garden City, NY: Double Day Press, 1984], 98). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, 1990 ed., s.v. "Paul of Samosata," states the following: "He taught a form of Dynamic Monarchianism, in which the Godhead was a closely knit Trinity of Father, Wisdom, and Word, and until creation formed a single hypostasis. From the incarnation, he held, the Word rested upon the human Jesus as one person upon another, and the Incarnate Christ differed only in degree from the Prophets." The theology of Paul of Samosata is that the Son was God because of moral perfection. This would simply mean that the Son was not the same substance as the Father but shared in the Godhead because of his moral attainments. This is known as the *adoption* (particularly Dynamic Monarchianism) heresy. Arius' version is slightly different in that the Son was a creation of the Father prior to the creation of humanity.

¹⁵⁵ It is interesting to note the systematic approach of the work, *Contra Arianos*. In CA 1.1, Athanasius states that the Arian heresy is akin to earlier heresies but pictures the Arian heresy as the final (or current) one.

exaltation is not because of a reward, it is because of his nature. Again, Athanasius argues for the concept of Eternal Sonship as part of the divine **ousia** (essence).

The main thrust of Athanasius' argument is soteriological. The *improvement* he speaks of is the improvement of humanity. The fact is every Christian is a son by grace and not by nature. This grace comes through the giver of grace, the Son. In CA 1.39, Athanasius writes, "Then, not being man, He later became God; but being God, He later became man, that instead He might deify us."¹⁵⁶

In his work, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius stresses the need for the incarnation as a solution to the plight of humanity. Athanasius states:

You are wondering perhaps, for what possible reason, having proposed to speak of the Incarnation of the Word, we are at present treating of the origin of mankind. But this, too, properly belongs to the aim of our treatise. For in speaking of the appearance of the Saviour amongst us, we must needs speak also of the origin of men, that you may know the reason of **His coming down** [emphasis added] was because of us, and that our transgression called for the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appear among men.¹⁵⁷

Athanasius reveals the rationale of the incarnation as the solution to the plight of fallen humanity. The

¹⁵⁶ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 102.

¹⁵⁷ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, eds. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub. 1994), 38.

thought flow of Athanasius seems to be that the Son's work for humanity is predicated upon the goodness of God to redeem fallen humanity.

The Athanasian concept of the fall of humanity seems to be directed by the ontological category of humans: since humans were created out of nothing then logic demands that humans return to the nothingness which is inherent of their nature. This concept is in direct opposition to that of the Arians, where the Son is exalted because of obedience. Frances Young states, "If that law was broken, man would be turned out of paradise and left to inevitable submergence under the forces of death and corruption; he would return to the nothingness from which he came."¹⁵⁸

The fall of humanity put God in a dilemma: humanity must die and forfeit the life given by the *Logos* simply because God cannot break his command to punish sin. Therefore, God cannot grant pardon to the offender unless restitution is made. The incarnation of the *Logos* is the solution to the dilemma of humanity's restoration to God. Athanasius demonstrates that humanity must pay for restitution, but does not have the means to do so. The incarnation means the *Logos* takes bodily form and dies,

¹⁵⁸ Young, 71.

which then pays the sin debt of humanity. At the same time, the issue of knowing God¹⁵⁹ is certainly possible through the incarnation of the Word. Khaled Anatolis, commenting on Athanasius' work, *On the Incarnation*, states, "God, who is invisible and unknowable by nature, became visible and knowable and preeminently accessible through the humanity of Christ."¹⁶⁰ Apparently, Athanasius views humanity's salvation possible only when the incarnation of the *Logos* takes place. "Full divinity and true humanity are central to Athanasius' understanding of secure salvation. So, too, is the *Logos* 'drawing near' in assuming a mortal body, the realm where mortal corruption then held sway. Thereby there is the transference of human mortal corruptibility to God."¹⁶¹

The incarnation is only possible if God the Son existed with the Father throughout eternity. In *CA* 1.39, the fact that Athanasius reviews is the eternal nature of the Son—he existed as God the Son. The Son has the same title as other men, yet by employing John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16-17, Athanasius demonstrates that God the Son existed before these earthly men. They came into

¹⁵⁹ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," 39.

¹⁶⁰ Anatolis, 37

¹⁶¹ Pettersen, 93.

existence because of Him and, consequently, the Son is placed before them because of his eternal **ousia** (essence). The eternal status of the Son is further demonstrated by the use of Matthew 11:27—only the Son knows and is known by the Father. Couple this with the fact that the concepts of adoption and deification also reveal the eternal nature of the Son. The idea is that the Son became man in order to solidify the salvation offer to humanity and could only do so because he is the true, eternal God the Son. Athanasius states:

And if all—as many as were called sons and gods, either on earth or in heaven—were adopted and deified through the Word, and the Son himself is the Word, it is clear through him that they all are, and he himself before all, or rather that he himself only is true Son and he alone is true God from true God, not receiving these things as a reward for virtue or being another in addition to them, but being these things by nature according to substance.¹⁶²

The argument of CA 1.37-39 solidifies the eternal status of the Son in biblical language. The rationale for such a review forces the Arians to either concede the point or retreat to their heresy. Athanasius reveals that the issue of soteriology is a product of the eternal nature of the Son. Athanasius does not stress that soteriology is a reason for establishing the product or work of the Son

¹⁶² Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 102-103.

before the establishment of the person of Christ as God the Son.

The major point of the argument is to distinguish between Sonship by nature and Sonship by grace. At this point, Athanasius states that the Son can only offer salvation since He is true God. This issue awaits further development, and Athanasius explains this concept later in *Contra Arianos*.

The interesting issue that Athanasius details is the idea of substitutionary atonement.¹⁶³ He explains that God must become a man in order to deify¹⁶⁴ fallen humanity.

¹⁶³ *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983) s.v. "Substitution" gives the definition as follows: "The penal suffering of Christ in the place of his people, by virtue of which they are saved . . . Christ's substitution for sinners is the highest exhibition of God's mercy." Nowhere does Athanasius develop this concept. For that matter, the term 'substitutionary atonement' was not a theological concept in the Athanasian era. This writer acknowledges reading a theological method back into an era where the term is unknown. However, the concept of "substitutionary atonement" seems appropriate since the meaning of the first sentence of *CA* 1.39 illustrates this doctrine.

¹⁶⁴ Lampe, 630-1. A word for deification is "Θεωσις," which means "deification or divination but with the idea of a work of grace." Another word used is "Θεοπήσις." This word has the meaning of "making divine." The better definition seems to be that of "Θεοποίησις." The definition is from page 630 and it is as follows: "B. Christological, 1) Christ defied by his father, 2) his humanity deified by union with the Logos." The concept of deification is directly linked to the Athanasian concept of soteriology. The issue of deification takes place in the sphere of humanity's union with Jesus Christ. This union of humanity to Jesus lifted or exalted humans to a better state of existence than even the original state of humanity's creation. Human beings are in union with the humanity of Jesus and, as such, are resolved to a more pure relationship with God. Alvyn Pettersen states, "Deification is rather our being brought into a holy communion, with one another and with God, through the grace made secure in and through Christ's assumption of humanity. It is that process in which people, creatures of the Creator and fellow creatures

Humanity is saved from the deterioration and ultimate death of the body and from the irrationality of the *epinoew* (invention).

The fall of humanity directed man away from God. In the incarnation, the Son becomes a man so that the soteriological impact is a restoration of humanity back to God. This does not mean a change in *ousia* (essence); there is no ontological change in the *Logos*. In fact, the opposite is true: God the Son added humanity to His deity without ceasing to exist as God the Son.

The salvation of humanity is a restoration of the body and the proper renewal of the mind.¹⁶⁵ This is the basis of *knowing God* as Athanasius stresses by using Matthew 11:27.

As one reads this section, CA 1.39, one gains a sense that Athanasius communicates that the only proper way to think about God is on the basis of humanity's restoration back to God.¹⁶⁶ Accepting grace from the Son is

of all creation, are transformed" (106). Athanasius suggests that humanity's deification is predicated upon the humanity of Christ as the humanity is enjoined to the Logos. Keith Edward North states, "Which such a deification is not 'earned by merit' in the Arian sense, it is the joint work of God, whose grace makes it possible, and the individual believer, who follows in the path that the Savior has opened up" ("Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology," [Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1980], 130).

¹⁶⁵ Romans 12:1-2.

¹⁶⁶ This concept will be developed later in this chapter.

required before any proper theological methodology about God can be devised and utilized. Therefore, the Arians are considered to be heretical on the basis of their defective concept of the Son and their lack of an adequate soteriology.

**Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11
(CA 1.40-5)**

Athanasius reviews the entire text in question to demonstrate that the context does not allow for the Arian interpretation. The Arians used this text to propagate the mutability and subsequent exaltation of the human Jesus on the basis of his obedience and not on the basis of his deity. The Arians utilized this text to reveal that the Son was a son by nature and not by grace.

Athanasius does not only review the text and apply systematic theology, but he does solid exegesis of the Philippian text in question. Athanasius treats the Philippians 2:5-11 text as one that demonstrates that Jesus was still God even when He humbled Himself. He makes the point that the context will show that the Arian interpretation to be false.

In order to support his exegesis, Athanasius applies the text through a series of questions directed to the thought of the Arian heresy. The basic question is

simple: What reward, what progress could He attain, through His humiliation, when he was already God? Arius states that a man became God and thus received a reward. Athanasius demonstrates that a clear reading of the text underscores the fact that Jesus Christ was always divine.

The proper understanding, according to Athanasius, of the Philippian text is that the human flesh of Jesus is exalted, but not the divine nature. The rationale of Athanasius is very clear: you cannot exalt that which is already exalted, however, that which is not exalted, the human body, can be exalted. Athanasius understands this text as the exaltation of the human nature of Jesus Christ. Again, the principle behind this is a clear reading of the text itself. For example, when Jesus was humbled even to the point of death, God rewarded the faithfulness of His Son by exalting the very part of Him that died, which is His humanity. Athanasius states:

The statement "He will be highly exalted." He was always and is "equal to God" (Phil. 2:6), but the exaltation is of the humanity. These things were not said before, only when the Word became flesh, that it might become clear that "he was humbled" and "he will be exalted" are said about the human nature.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting that Athanasius quotes John 1:14 as a complementary passage to Philipians 2:5-11.

¹⁶⁷ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 104.

Apparently he understands these two passages to demonstrate the life of the Son/*Logos*. The idea of these two passages presents the life of the *Logos* in different stages: He was God and He became God/Man. By citing these two passages of Scripture, Athanasius is able to present his case for interpreting Philippians 2:5-11.

The logic of Athanasius is that he seeks to demonstrate the Arian methodology or hermeneutic is severely lacking in its basic understanding of Jesus Christ. Arius believes the incarnation is the evidence of the Son, who being greater than all other aspects of creation has the capacity to mutate and become divine. It seems as if Arius has another epistemological concept of God the Father.

Not only does Athanasius ask the Arians about the impossibility of the Son attaining a reward that He already has by His very nature, but Athanasius confronts the Arians with the task of explaining how the immutable Father can produce an offspring that is mutable. Athanasius states:

And if as David sings in the Psalter, in Psalm 71, "His grace remains before the sun and before the moon into generations and generations" (Ps. 71:71, 5), how did he receive that which he always had, even before receiving it now? Or how is he exalted, being most highly exalted before his exaltation?¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 104.

Athanasius' point is that the Word became lesser by becoming man than what He actually was before His incarnation. This is in contrast to the Arians who claim that the Son was given the status of Son because of merit. Athanasius, on the other hand, presents the case for the Word's divinity as not existing in a diminished state by the addition of humanity: the *Logos* is divine and eternal. What actually took place, according to Athanasius, is not that the Word was exalted but that the human body of our Lord was exalted in accordance with the existing exalted state of His *Logos*. Athanasius states:

Where there is "the humble condition," there may also be exaltation. If on account of the assumption of flesh "he was humbled" was written, it is clear that "he will be exalted" was written for some reason.¹⁶⁹

Athanasius addresses the very reason for the exaltation. In *CA* 1.37, Athanasius claims that Arius states that the exaltation was proof that Jesus attained deity. Athanasius argues that the *Logos* does not change and, therefore, did not attain deity because He already was deity. Athanasius demonstrates this by his interpretation of the Lord's death. He depicts the Lord's death as the final act of obedience of the Son to God the Father. The

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 104.

death of Christ focuses upon the purpose of the incarnation—that very purpose is humanity's salvation. In Athanasian thought, salvation is directly related to the incarnation. Charles Kannengiesser states:

. . . the fundamental intuition of Athanasius over which no doubt could be entertained and which motivates his entire refutation of Arianism is essentially Christological. . . . Athanasius insists that the Arians are mistaken in their concept of theology, because they believe they are able to form a Christian idea of God by first developing in isolation the theory of the divinity of the Father and Son, without taking into consideration right from the start the mystery of the incarnation of the Son.¹⁷⁰

The incarnation derives its purpose in the salvation of humanity. The accomplishment of humanity's salvation was by means of the incarnated Jesus dying in obedience to the requirement of God the Father. Therefore, the exaltation of the Lord's body was not only for His flesh to be deified but it was for humanity's deification. Athanasius states:

And as he himself, hallowing all, says again to the Father, "On our behalf he hallows himself" (John 17:19)—not that the word may become holy, but that he himself in himself might hallow all of us—thus the present statement "he will highly exalt him" is to be taken, not in order that he himself might be exalted, for he is the highest, but in order that he himself on our behalf "might become righteousness" (I Cor. 1:30) and that we might be exalted in him and enter into the gates of heaven, which he himself has again opened on our behalf.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Kannengiesser, 112.

¹⁷¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 105.

The interesting issue concerning the incarnation is that Athanasius reveals that Jesus Christ is still Lord even though He condescended to become human. The exaltation is not a reward but is an acknowledgement of His faithful work: securing humanity's salvation. The means by which humanity's salvation is secured occurred when grace was transferred from the *Logos* through the incarnation to humanity.

But on account of us and on our behalf, this too was written about him. For just as man Christ died and was exalted, so as man he is said "to receive" that which as God he always had, in order that such a grace given might come even to us. Having received a body, the Word was not diminished so that he should seek "to receive" grace; rather, he deified that which he put on, and more, he offered this to the human race.¹⁷²

The salvation of humanity is predicated upon the bodily sacrifice of the Son. Humanity's identification with the Lord's body is the means of soteriology. Athanasius writes:

If the Lord had not become man, we would not, having been redeemed from sins, rise from the dead, but we would remain dead beneath the earth. We would not be exalted in heaven, but we would lie in Hades, Then the statements "he has highly exalted" and "he offered" are on our account.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ibid., 105.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 107.

Athanasius closes his exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11 by a reference to the Trinity. This reference strikes at the very heart of the Arian heresy. Athanasius distinguishes between "who" became incarnated and "how" grace was transferred. He appeals to the teachings of the Scriptures by use of the phrases, "to be exalted," and "God offered Him."¹⁷⁴ These phrases refer to the fact that two persons of the Godhead are actively procuring humanity's salvation. Grace, which brings salvation to humanity, is transferred by the power of the Holy Spirit. It must be understood that Athanasius does not actively address the Trinity as he closes his exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11. He does, however, quote 1 John 3:24 in support of the Holy Spirit giving grace to humanity. Thus, Athanasius is thoroughly entrenched in a Trinitarian approach to theology.

Athanasius depicts the entire controversy not only as a Christological problem but more as a Trinitarian issue: to question the divinity of Jesus Christ is to openly attack the Godhead itself. Thus, Athanasius strikes at the heart of Arianism with the hermeneutical approach that recognizes the Trinity of the Godhead and at the same

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 108.

time preserves the unity of the Godhead. The interesting aspect of this approach is that Athanasius understands the eternality of the Son and the Holy Spirit as essential members of the Trinity. The implication is that if either of the members of the Trinity should be deemed non-members because of mutability, then the whole structure of the Godhead is dismantled, not to mention the demise of the soteriological plan for humanity.

Another element of thought for Athanasius is the consideration of the dual natures of Jesus Christ. The crux of the Arian argument misses this point. The Arians build their argument (Sonship by grace) on the presupposition that the Scriptures teach that Jesus was created. The Arians confuse the two natures of Jesus and never develop the distinctiveness of his humanity or his deity.

Interpretation of Psalm 44:7-8 (CA 1.46-52)

Athanasius also examines Psalm 44:7-8 in order to review and exegetically discredit the Arian Christology, which depicts the mutability of the Son. Athanasius and the Arians attribute this passage as a reference to the Son.

The Arian teaching relied upon Psalm 44:8 as a scriptural proof for the Son being a man who was "anointed." The Arians interpreted this to mean that he was

a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and this in turn meant that the Son was a created being. Athanasius quotes verse seven in order to give the full context of the passage, which he believes will adequately demonstrate the Son is God because of the title, "God," and position of the throne.

Athanasius then interprets the "anointing" of the Son via the orthodox position. He understands the anointing to be of the Holy Spirit¹⁷⁵ and that seems to be the commonly understood interpretation—even by the Arians. The major issue is the rationale for the anointing. The reason for this action is to anoint the humanity of the Son with the Spirit so that the Son, in turn, could reveal the intimacy of the Holy Spirit's life upon humanity. The model for this life is the Son himself. Athanasius writes:

But the Savior, on the contrary, being God and always ruling the kingdom of the Father, himself the supplier of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless is now said to be "anointed," that again, being said as a man anointed by the Spirit, he might supply us men with the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit, just as with the exaltation and resurrection.¹⁷⁶

The next logical step is to give an explanation of the anointing of the Son. First, he recalls John 17:17. The ministry of sanctification comes from the Sanctifier who also sanctifies himself. Athanasius writes, "He is not

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 109.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 110.

sanctified by another, but he sanctifies himself, that we may be sanctified in truth."¹⁷⁷

Athanasius comments that the Son "gave the Spirit to himself"¹⁷⁸ so that he as a man is sanctified in the same Spirit (He both gave and received the Spirit), and thus can sanctify all.

This particular exegesis of Psalm 44:7-8 gives a firm Christological presentation. The incarnation of our Lord directly reveals the divine Son living in a dynamic human relationship with himself. The divine Son lives in harmony with his humanity and as such can receive grace from the Holy Spirit. Athanasius presents the Son as one person who has the nature of eternity joined in union with the nature of human personhood for the salvific purposes of humanity. The anointing of the Holy Spirit seems to verify the humanity of the Son by giving grace while at the same time also validating the eternal Son as now human. The anointing serves as a declaration that the eternal Son is now revealed in human flesh and thus sanctifies humanity. Athanasius writes:

But if on our account he sanctifies himself and does this when he became man, it is very obvious that the descent of the Spirit on him in the Jordan was a

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 110.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 110.

descent on us because of his bearing our body. Again, it happened not for the Word's improvement but for our sanctification. . . .¹⁷⁹

Athanasius argues for the eternality of the Son by referencing the two natures¹⁸⁰ of the incarnation and the subsequent movement of the Holy Spirit validating the incarnate God/Man. This is a clear presentation of the Trinity in relation to the Christology of the Son: the Holy Spirit anoints the Son as a man while acknowledging the divine nature. The result is that the Spirit is given to the Son and secures the work of grace in his own humanity and then gives the same Spirit to the salvation for humanity. Thus, there could be no improvement of the eternal Son because He existed in eternity as God. The incarnation is the evidence of the eternal Son living in a created body that is sanctified by the process of the human

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 110.

¹⁸⁰ The theological development of the hypostatic union or the "two natures" of the Son is not fully developed in length by Athanasius. However, he does address the issue, but his primary concern is more with the Trinitarian relationship than it is with Christology. Yet, he anticipates the Council of Chalcedon where the orthodox position of Jesus Christ is established. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, 1990 ed., s.v. "Chalcedon, The Definition of," states the following: "It reaffirmed the Christological Definitions of Nicea and Constantinople and formally repudiated the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches. It expressly excluded the views of those who imply that the Humanity of Jesus is separable from His Divine Person and of those who confuse the Divine and Human natures in one. It affirmed the existence of One Person in Two Natures, which are united unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably."

flesh receiving the effective sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Athanasius understands the anointing to take place at the Jordan River as Christ is baptized. This is the scriptural referent informing his theological presentation. Another presentation of the anointing is Christ's referring to Isaiah 61:1 as a fulfilled prophecy (Luke 4:18-21). Athanasius also finds support from Acts 10:38, where Peter declares to Cornelius that Christ was anointed "with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸¹ The point of this emphasis is that Scripture places the anointing and then confirms the anointing at the baptism of Jesus. The focus of Athanasius' argument may not seem so clear but the point is valid: it is not the *Logos* that was anointed, but the humanity of the Son that received the Holy Spirit's approval.

The implication is that the *σωμα* (body) of the Son is not eternal and thus is anointed, but the eternal Son, the *Logos* does not need anointing as He is God. Athanasius states, "It is the **flesh anointed** [emphasis added] in him and by him so that the sanctification occurring to the Lord as man may occur to all men from him."¹⁸² The primary purpose of the incarnation is soteriological. This can only

¹⁸¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 111.

¹⁸² Ibid., 111.

be accomplished by uniting the eternal nature of the Son with the fleshly body of creation.

Athanasius comments upon the fact that as the eternal Son existed on earth as a man there was no mutation involved in the process. "When he became man (for again the same thing must be said) he was not mutated, but as it has been written, 'The Word of God remains forever,' [Isa. 40:8]." The point of the incarnation is not the changeableness of the Son but the change in humanity. Humanity's grace comes from Him and as such it is we who are changed by his incarnation. Athanasius writes:

Then the one improved is not the Word, regarded as Word, for he had all things and always has them, but men, who have in him and through him the beginning of their reception. When now he is said to be anointed humanly, we are the ones anointed in him also, when he is baptized, we are the ones baptized in him.¹⁸³

The point is that the eternal Son is still the same but humanity has changed for the better. Athanasius cites the scriptural references of Isaiah 40:8 and Hebrews 13:8 to support his position. This doctrine stands in contrast to the Arian doctrine of the changeable nature of the Son. Athanasius investigates the dual natures of Christ as a way of clarifying the eternal status of the Son and addressing the humanity of Jesus as true flesh that was sanctified by

¹⁸³ Ibid., 112.

the *Logos* yet capable of receiving and imparting the Holy Spirit. The soteriological basis for this work of grace to humanity is that the eternal Son never changes, which is a product of his eternal nature.

In CA 1.50, Athanasius addresses the Arian objection that the Son speaks of the Spirit in such a way as to seem subordinate to Him. Athanasius attributes these statements to His human nature but does so as to acknowledge the equality with the Spirit. He cites John 16:7, 13, and 14, as scriptural proof for his position, yet comments on John 20:22, to validate his theology.

Athanasius writes:

Therefore the Lord, as a man, spoke such things to the Jews; but to the disciples, showing his deity and majesty and signifying that he was not less than the Spirit but equal, he gave the Spirit and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) and "I will send him and he will glorify me," (John 16:7,14).¹⁸⁴

The work of grace that comes from the Holy Spirit can only be attributed to the fullness and deity of Jesus Christ, which means that there is no difference in the essence of the individual members of the Godhead. The rationale for the Son receiving the Spirit is the flesh of the Son:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 114.

For since flesh has been sanctified in him and he is said as man to have received (the Spirit) on account of flesh, we have the grace of the Spirit which follows, receiving it from his fullness (John 1:16).¹⁸⁵

In CA 1.51, Athanasius reviews the Arian interpretation of Psalm 44:8. The Arians interpreted the Psalm to mean that the Father rewarded the Son on the basis of His volition to choose righteousness. The heart of the Arian interpretation lacked merit simply because a volitional act to choose righteousness could also result in a changed status since the will could just as easily choose to disregard righteousness. Thus, the changeable nature of the Arian Christ could feasibly change for the worse. Athanasius uses this argument against the Arian interpretation. He sees the faulty logic of the Arians as he writes:

Since the nature of originated things is mutable, and some have transgressed and others have disobeyed, as has been said, and their action is unsure, often it is possible that he who now is good afterward is mutated and becomes another, so that he who now is righteous after a little while is found unrighteous.¹⁸⁶

Athanasius pinpointed the issue of the Arian mutability issue: if their version of the Son was not eternal and even changeable, then there is no basis for an

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 115.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 115.

eternal righteousness. Athanasius proceeds to present two arguments that strike at the Arian interpretation.

First, Athanasius gives the rationale for an immutable Savior who is righteous in his essence and not just his volitions. He uses typology to contrast the first Adam with the second Adam. Athanasius states:

Because the first man, Adam (I Cor. 15:45), was mutated and "through sin death entered into the world" (Rom. 5:12), it was fitting that the second Adam be immutable, so that if again the serpent would attack, the guile of the serpent might be weakened, and since the Lord is immutable and unchangeable, the serpent might become feeble in its attacks against all.¹⁸⁷

The underlying principle for this approach is that the Son (and Savior) can only be immutable if he is eternal in his nature. Athanasius states, "Therefore it is reasonable that the Lord who is always by nature immutable. . . ." ¹⁸⁸

The crux of this first argument is that a savior is needed that is more stable than the first Adam, who represents humanity. The second Adam could take the assault of the evil one but the first Adam did mutate and fall to the attack. The point is that an immutable eternal Savior

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 115.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 115.

could give grace to those who are mutable and at the same time destroy the power of sin in his flesh.¹⁸⁹

The second argument that Athanasius presents is based upon the relationships that exist within the Godhead. Athanasius builds the case that Father and Son are equal in essence.

For the Word of God is immutable, constantly in one state, not superficially but as the Father is. How is he like the Father, unless he is thus? Of how are all things which are the Father's the Son's, unless he also has the immutability and unchangeableness of the Father?¹⁹⁰

This argument is reminiscent of the orthodoxy of the Council of Nicea and it is probable that Athanasius is writing from this ecclesiastical vantage point.

The point is made that the Scriptures, which affirm the immutability of the Father, also declare the immutability of the Son. The methodology employed is based upon the **ousia** (essence) of the Godhead. Athanasius clearly understands the Arians to embrace a creaturely Savior. The eternality of the Arian Christ is certainly questioned, which then allows the volition of the Son to be circumspect. The Arian interpretation fails when considered

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 116.

that a fixed relationship of the same essence cannot mutate.

This is one of the fundamental differences in the Arian scheme. The Arians present a Son that is not eternal but mutable. According to the Arians, the key element of God is not his essence but his will. Thus, the Son can morally change to a better state and receive his position and title *via* grace. In other words, the Son attains Sonship status by participation in the Father's will.

In the Arian scheme the Father and Son's relationship is one that is adoptive in scope. The Father adopted the Son based upon the Son's ability to mutate for the better. The thrust of CA 1.46-52 informs the reader that from a scriptural and ecclesiastical position there is no basis for this interpretation.

**A Review of the Arian Interpretation of
Hebrews 1:4; 3:1; Acts 2:36; and Proverbs
8:22 (CA 1.52-1.64)**

CA 1.53 begins with a list of passages that the Arians utilized to teach the creation of the Son. This list occupies a prominent role in the remainder of CA 1.53 to the end of CA 2.

Athanasius reviews the Hebrew passages along with the Acts passages through the interpretive grid of John

1:14. The basis of this interpretive grid is that the Son did become flesh. In the Athanasian concept, this in no way contradicts the eternal status of the Son. The incarnation of the Son is the crux of the theological debate with the Arians.

The Arians adhere to a deviant position that the Son was adopted because of merit, whereas the Athanasian position is that the Son is eternal and thus, as God, incarnated but not mutated. This is an example of his *Scope of Scripture*¹⁹¹ hermeneutic employed to form the interpretive grid for biblical studies.

Interpretation of Hebrews 1:4 (CA 1.53-64)

The Arians used this text to prove the origination of the Son. The Arian interpretation no doubt stated that the Son was *kreittwn γενομενος* (made better than) the angels and this meant that an origination or creation of the Son had taken place. Therefore, this text meant that the Son could not be eternal.

Athanasius claims that the Arians misunderstood the meaning of the text. He writes:

First it is necessary to examine this. And it is necessary, as it is fitting to do for all of divine Scripture, even here to expound faithfully the time

¹⁹¹ This term has been addressed earlier in the Scriptures.

when the apostle spoke and the person and subject about which he wrote, lest the reader, being ignorant of these and other matters, might miss the true meaning.¹⁹²

In CA 1.55, Athanasius understands the contrast within the language of the Hebrew text. He reviews the contrast of the "former days" with the "last days." He contrasts the "ministry of the angels" with the "ministry of the Son."

In the review of the contrasts presented in the Hebrew text, Athanasius understands that *kreittwn γενομενος* (made better than) is contrasting and not comparing the ministry of Christ to the former ministries of the angels and the prophets. The end result is that *kreittwn* is defined to mean a "distinction in kind or nature." He writes:

This is the reason why throughout he did not compare and he did not say "having become a greater" or "having become more honorable," lest someone consider him and them as of the same genus. But he said "better," that the difference of the Son's nature from things begotten should be known.¹⁹³

Athanasius adds support to his interpretation when he builds his case with texts such as Proverbs 8:10-11 and Isaiah 56:4-5. These texts also use the word "*kreittwn*" with the same meaning.

¹⁹² Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 118.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 119.

The significance of this argument is that the Son cannot be compared to angels since his nature is ontologically different than their nature. The end result is that the two very different natures can only be contrasted for their differences. Athanasius writes:

Thus, there is no relationship between the Son and the angels, and since there is no relationship, then "better" is said not in comparison but in contrast, on account of the difference in his nature from them.¹⁹⁴

The value of this argument is that the Son is eternal and any comparison to the Son would have to come from another entity that has the same nature. Angels, servants and the prophets do not and cannot be categorized with the nature of the Son.

In CA 1.56, Athanasius would allow the Arians their heretical theology should the text demonstrate their position. He writes, "If he simply said, 'having become' and was silent, there would be a case for the Arians."¹⁹⁵ The text, however, does not remain silent. Athanasius argues for the meaning of *γενομενος* to be used of natural Sonship. His proof is John 1:3; Psalm 103:24; Job 1:2; Genesis 21:5; and Deuteronomy 21:15. These verses also reveal the idea of natural Sonship.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 120.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 120.

He drives home the point that there are two different natures in contrast in the scriptural passage of Hebrews and thus they cannot be compared as if they were the same genus.¹⁹⁶ He cites the analogy of comparing God to men or wood to stone in *CA* 1.57, and the absurdity of such a comparison since there are clearly different elements involved in the comparisons. He states:

And still they would hear, if they then would learn, that comparison confessedly does happen among things of one genus, not among things of different kinds. Then no one would compare God to men or man to irrational things, or wood to stone, but man is compared to man, and wood to wood, and stone to stone.¹⁹⁷

This analogy is specific at the end of *CA* 1.57, as Athanasius contrasts the eternal Son with the creation of angels. The Son is eternal in that he is declared God's Son, whereas, the angels are created and thus had a beginning to their existence.

CA 1.58 summarizes the theology of the orthodox position. Athanasius clearly sees a line of demarcation between things originated and the unoriginated Son but he does more than imply a demarcation between the Son, and the originated—he stresses there is a demarcation between the originated and the Trinity. He states:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 121.

. . . in the prior sections it has been shown that the Son is the offspring of the Father's substance, and that he is the fashioner and things are fashioned by him, and that he himself is the reflection, Word, image, and wisdom of the Father, and that originated things stand and serve below the Triad. . . .¹⁹⁸

The point of this statement is that the Trinity is eternal, and thus the originated beings must serve the purpose of the eternal Godhead as they are created for such service and status.

The Arians did not have a manner in which to categorize the Son's being any different from the originated beings. In the Arian system, the Son could only be different in morality or in degree of His being as compared to the angels, however, the Son could not and did not differ in the essence of His being when compared to the angels. The Arians forced a comparison when a contrast was in view.

In CA 1.59-61, Athanasius demonstrates the difference between the orthodox position and the Arian heresy as a matter of hermeneutics. He argues that the meaning of Hebrews 1:4 has been vastly misinterpreted by the Arians. The contrast between the Son and the angels is seen not only in the differences of their respective

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 123.

essence but also in their differing ministries. Athanasius writes:

But looking to the incarnate sojourn of the Word and the economy effected by him, the apostle wished to show that he is not like the previous ones, in order that the more he differed in nature from those sent ahead by him, so much the more the grace, which occurred from him and through him became better than the ministry through angels.¹⁹⁹

The idea is that the work of the Son is greater than the work of angels and even has greater effects. This is confirmed by Hebrews 2:1-3. The passage illustrates that the words of the angels are not established but the ministry of the Son did establish salvation and judgment. The contrast of grace and law serves to strengthen the argument of Athanasius. "The Law 'was spoken through angels' and 'has perfected no one,' needing the sojourning of the Word that 'has perfected the work' of the Father (John 17:4)."²⁰⁰

This contrast is completed when Athanasius returns to the issue of the Son's essence contrasted to the angels' essence. Again Athanasius writes:

Both in these verses and throughout the whole work, he attributes "better" to the Lord, the one who is better and other in comparison with ***originated things***. Better is the sacrifice through him, better the hope in him; and better the promises through him, not great

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 124.

compared to small, but they are **other in nature**, since he who manages the economy is **better than originated things** [emphases added].²⁰¹

Athanasius makes the argument that the pattern of contrast between the originated things and the eternal Son is found throughout the Scope of Scripture and he adds support to his argument by citing Romans 5:14; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Isaiah 11:9; Matthew 28:19; John 6:45; and Isaiah 54:13.

Athanasius does address the incarnation of the Son. He explains to the reader the concept of "surety" is nothing more than a reference to salvation. The issue that Athanasius stresses is "how" the ministry of the Son "became better" than the ministry of the Law. Therefore, he introduces this section with a reference to Romans 8:3, which depicts the inability of the Law in contrast to the Father's total accomplishment in Christ the eternal Son. The basis of this accomplishment is the *σαρξ* (body) of Christ. Athanasius writes:

As being Word, "he became flesh," and the "becoming" we infer to the flesh (for it is originated and happens to be a creature). This is the case with "he has become," that we might expound it according to the second conclusion: for this reason he became man.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid., 125.

²⁰² Ibid., 125.

The thrust of the argument is that God accomplished what the Law could not do: God accomplished humanity's salvation. The substance of the eternal Son did not "become"²⁰³ but "having become is in reference to the ministry of the covenant, according to which death, once ruling, has been abolished."²⁰⁴ The dual natures of the eternal Son are evidence in the redemption of humanity. The eternal Son became flesh in order to abolish the sin principle that prevented humanity from participation in God. The end of sin means that the eternal Son can now receive humanity based upon the fact that the *σαρξ* (body) of Christ healed the wounds of humanity via the atonement. Athanasius states:

Having rendered the flesh capable of the Word, he caused us to walk "no longer according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4) and to say often, "We are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9) and "The Son of God came into the world not to judge the world but that he might redeem all and that the world should be saved through him," (John 17:3).²⁰⁵

The purpose for this argument is to persuade the reader that the Arian Christology cannot account for the salvation of humanity if the Son is a creature and thus

²⁰³ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 125.

made in time. The incarnation of the Son is the means of God's grace communicated to ontological inferior beings. The end result is that the Son is "better" than the angels or the Law in that He could redeem humanity and thus make them "better" because of Him.

The thrust of the argument is clear: only an eternal Son could accomplish a better ministry! The angels, who are created, could not take on a dual nature nor could the Law accomplish what a dual nature required simply because humanity was too corrupt in their existence. The solution is that the eternal Son must "become" flesh and provide salvation for all of humanity. Athanasius states:

For once, as guilty, the world was judged by the Law, but now the Word received on himself the judgment, having suffered in the body on behalf of all, and he has freely given salvation to all.²⁰⁶

Athanasius states that the only means of salvation is by the eternal Son. However, he makes the point that the Son is at the right hand of the Father and that position also demonstrates the eternality of the divine Son. He writes:

Therefore, as has been said, "better" could not have happened through any other than the Son, who, "sits at the right hand of the Father." ***What does that signify other than the genuineness of the Son and that the***

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 125.

deity of the Father is the same as the Son's [emphasis added].²⁰⁷

The reference to Hebrews 1:3 may also include references to Hebrews 8:1 and 12:2, as the language of the "throne" is included in this section. The point is clear though: the Son is eternal and is an intricate part of the Trinity. As such the Son's eternality demands the angels to worship Him. This action of worship depicts a distinction between the Son who is worshipped and those who do the worshipping. This distinction is based upon the ontological difference in the creator/creature motif. Athanasius cites John 1:1; 14:9; 14:10; 16:5; and Psalm 16:8, to support his conclusion that the Father and Son mutually possess one another in an eternal relationship. The fact that the Father is seen in the Son demonstrates the reality of the Trinity—there is one God with three persons subsisting in the Triad. This is not only classic Athanasius it is also classic, orthodox, Trinitarian theology.

In *CA*. 1.62-64, he concludes his discussion of the Arian interpretation of Hebrews 1:4 with some very pertinent summations. The first has already been alluded to earlier but there is a distinction between the created

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

angels and the uncreated Son. However, the confusion of the Arians reveals an interpretive problem: if the Arians are correct then the angels must be considered sons or the Son must be considered an angel. Athanasius writes:

If the Son is one of the angels, let "having become" be used of him and them, and let the Son not differ at all from angels in nature. Let them be "sons," or let him be an "angel," and let them together all sit on the right hand of the Father.²⁰⁸

The issue at stake is that the Son did not change in essence simply because he took on humanity. In fact, the unity of the Father and Son is the focus of Athanasius as he reveals the nature of their relationship: it is eternal! In an abrupt manner, Athanasius proves this by turning his attention to the Father instead of the Son. He writes:

But if they say that the words are spoken in reference to the Father, when even here "become" and "he has become" are written, will they the more attempt to say that **God is originated**? Yes, they will dare just as they discuss such things about His Word, for the **sequence carries them to suppose such things even about the Father** as they imagine about His Word [emphases added].²⁰⁹

The point is that since both Father and Son are intricately unified in essence, both must either be eternal in their being or created in their being. However, both

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 126.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 127-8.

conclusions force the Arians to reconsider their Christological formula in view of a Trinitarian God.

Once again Athanasius addressed the dual natures of the Son and contemplates the Son's human fleshly properties. "For neither is the Son one of the originated nor does the thing written and said thus 'become' and 'he became' signify a beginning of being but an aid which has occurred to those in need."²¹⁰ The incarnation is the means by which God chose to redeem humanity, and thus the *σαρξ* (body) of Christ is the focal point for soteriology.

The Athanasian concept of soteriology is greatly detailed in another work entitled, *The Incarnation of the Word*. In the Athanasian concept, salvation is more akin to the concept of recreation. That which needed to be restored or recreated was the fallen image of God within humanity.

But if, when transgression had once gained a start, men became involved in that corruption which was their nature, and were deprived of grace which they had, **being in the image of God**, what further step was needed? Or what require for such grace and such **recall** but the Word of God . . . [emphases added].²¹¹

Athanasius reveals that the image of God was distorted but not lost when humanity fell from his original state of creation. Soteriology means a restoration or a

²¹⁰ Ibid., 128.

²¹¹ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," 38.

recreation of the human soul. "Restoration, then, means overcoming people's liability to death and restoring their character as true reflections and images of God."²¹² The incarnation of the Word is essential to this process.

The relationship of the Word to humanity is predicated upon the condition of human nature. The ontological nature of the Word had to undertake the ontological nature of humanity. The meaning of the incarnation brought two distinct entities together which was the soteriological solution for the plight of humanity.

Francis Young states:

The Logos took on a human body capable of dying; when the Logos died the debt owed by all humanity, the debt to God's honour was paid and death itself was overcome. Man's corrupt nature was re-created when the body of the Logos was raised and clothed in incorruptibility. The indwelling Logos restored the lost image of God to mankind, and God was reconciled to himself.²¹³

The incarnation of the *Logos* is widely adhered to, as the supreme communication of God to humanity, whereas, Athanasius argues the incarnation is an extreme condensation of God to humanity. In the incarnation, Athanasius depicts God as rescuing His own creation (in *Contra Arianos* the same concept is utilized but the wording

²¹² Richard Norris, ed., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 18.

²¹³ Young, 71.

employed is "aiding humanity"). Yet, the incarnation did not ontologically change the deity of the *Logos*. In the work, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Athanasius writes:

For He was not, as might be imagined, circumscribed in the body, nor, while present in the body, was He absent elsewhere; nor, while He moved the body, was the universe left void of His working and Providence; but, thing most marvelous, Word as He was, so far from being contained by anything, He rather contained all things Himself, and just as while present in the whole of Creation, He is at once distant in being from the universe, and present in all things by is own power, - giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing His own providence, and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included, but being in his own Father alone wholly and in every respect.²¹⁴

Athanasius depicts a remarkable conclusion that has set the standard for Christology: the incarnation is a coherency between two distinct natures! What is more remarkable is that even though Athanasius depicts cohesion of the divine nature and human nature, he nonetheless ascribes separate functions to each nature. Again he writes:

Accordingly, when inspired writers on this matter speak of Him as eating and being born, understand that the body, as body, was born, and sustained with food corresponding to its nature, while God, the word Himself, Who was united with the body, while ordering all things, also by the works He did in the body showed Himself to be not man, but God the Word. But these things are said of Him, because the actual body which ate, was born, and suffered, belonged to none

²¹⁴ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," 45.

other but to the Lord: and because, having become man, it was proper for these things to be predicated of Him as man, to show Him to have a body in truth, and not in seeming.²¹⁵

Athanasius depicts the Lord's body as belonging to the genus of humanity. Thus, the Lord did not simply share in the properties of humanity—the Lord became human! The dual natures of our Lord are both divine and human with each having its own corresponding properties. In matters of application, Athanasius would credit the hunger of Jesus to His humanity, and at the same time ascribe His miracles to His deity. Therefore, avoiding the confusion or mixture of the two natures.

Athanasius aptly demonstrates that the image of God in humanity can only be redeemed by the Originator of that particular image, which is God. At the same time, the humanity of Jesus becomes qualified to be our mediator to God.

For Athanasius, Jesus Christ is God who has become the man for other men; he is the man who stands in between us in our sinfulness and the Father in his holy love and mediates within that broken relationship. Thus he is the man who dies on the cross and whose death, "all died."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ibid., 45-6.

²¹⁶ Trevor A. Hart, "The Two Soteriological Traditions of Alexandria," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61:3 (1989): 253.

The Athanasian concept of soteriology conveys humanity being absorbed into the humanity of Jesus (again this is spoken of as "aid" in *Contra Arianos*). Pettersen comments on this process by stating, "Salvation through incarnation is then not simply the renewal of the former creation, which had fallen, but the preservation of the new, which had come into being through the Christ."²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Pettersen, 105.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 2

Opening Statement of the Arian Interpretation (CA 2.1)

CA 2.1 introduces the texts that form the heart of the Arian heresy. The problematic passage is Proverbs 8:22 (this text was mentioned in CA 1.53), however, Athanasius associates Hebrews 3:1-2 and Acts 2:36 with the Arian misunderstanding of Proverbs 8:22.

Athanasius deems it necessary to review and evaluate these texts simply because the Arians misunderstand the basic meaning of each text cited above. He states that the Arians still *epinoew* (invent) new expedients for their irreligion."¹ The process that led to the invention of the Arian heresy is their faulty hermeneutics. Athanasius writes:

Thus they misunderstand the passage in the Proverbs, "The Lord hath created me a beginning of His ways for His works," and the words of the Apostle, "Who was faithful to Him that made Him, and straightway argue, that the Son of God is a work and a creature."²

¹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 348.

² Ibid., 348.

The issue that Athanasius raises is that the Arian faulty hermeneutic leads to a faulty theology. The faulty theology, in turn, is evidence of an epistemological problem concerning Christianity. Athanasius states:

. . . they are accustomed to allege the aforesaid passages of divine Scripture, which have a good meaning, but are by them practiced on, let us proceed afresh to take up the question of the sense of these, to remind the faithful, and to show from each of these passages that **they have no knowledge at all of Christianity** [emphasis added].³

The apparent misunderstanding of the Arians is that they attribute the meaning of the word "poiew" (make) to the divinity of the Son and not to the Son's humanity.

Athanasius writes:

For all these texts have the same force and meaning, a religious one, declarative of the divinity of the Word, even those of them which speak humanly concerning Him, as having become the Son of man.⁴

The focal point of Athanasius is that the Son has dual natures and the interpreter of these Scriptures must be sensitive to understand the context of each passage as it relates to either nature of the Son. This is where the Arians were careless in their hermeneutical approach. They confused the two natures of the Son. The Arian hermeneutic and subsequent theology is in direct discord with the

³ Ibid., 348-9.

⁴ Ibid., 349.

Council of Nicea. They confused the two natures of Christ simply because they lacked the proper hermeneutic to interpret the Scriptures. As a result they *epinoew* (invented) a foreign son, misconstrued the nature of the Trinity, and established an alternate but novel religion that rivals orthodox Christianity.

CA 2 deals exclusively with Hebrews 3:1-2; Acts 2:36; and with the majority of the work devoted to Proverbs 8:22. In CA 2 Athanasius strives to critique, evaluate, and correct these passages in order to demonstrate the proper relationship of the Son to the Father and the equally important orthodox hermeneutic that lays the Trinitarian foundation for all of Christianity.

Critique of the Arian Son as a Work (CA 2.2-6)

CA 2.2 addresses the issue of the Son's relationship to the Father. Athanasius declares that if the Son is created He cannot be called the *Yuioc* (*Son*) because a created being does not have a paternal relationship within the Trinity. Should this be the case, the Son cannot have terms applied to Him that suggest such a relationship. Those terms are stated as 'Word', 'Wisdom', 'Radiance', and 'Image'. Athanasius asserts that these terms would indicate an eternal relationship that does not exist should the

Arian's interpretation of the Son be proven correct. He writes:

. . . and let Him, as they would have it, be without generative nature, so that there be neither Word, nor Wisdom, no, nor Image, of His proper substance. For if He be not Son, neither is He Image.⁵

The Arian doctrine of the Son leads to an inevitable question: "But if He be not Son, how then say you that God is a Creator?"⁶

The divine action of creation was through the Son. Therefore, the Wisdom and Word could not create since the Son does not possess these attributes. The logic of Athanasius is astute and insightful as he couples creation with an Arian God who cannot generate. Athanasius writes:

For if the Divine Essence be not fruitful itself, but barren, as the hold, as a light that lighten not, and a dry fountain, are they not ashamed to speak of His possessing framing energy?⁷

The doctrine of creation is untenable simply because the Father is stagnate, while creation is an act of a stagnate God. This type of thinking is irrational. Creation would require God to be active outside or external of Himself without having the ability to be active internally.

⁵ Ibid., 349.

⁶ Ibid., 349.

⁷ Ibid., 349.

God cannot generate a Son, therefore, how could God be active in any sense?

This logical inference is based upon the will of the Father to create. The will to create is external, and it is not a product of a relationship that is eternal. Again, Athanasius declares:

If then that which comes first, which is according to nature, did not exist, as they would have it in their folly, how could that which is second come to be, which is according to will? For the Word is first, and then the creature.⁸

The point Athanasius makes is that the Son is eternal and He can fill the need of Creator because of His eternal relationship with the Father. Peter Widdicombe concurs with Athanasius as he writes:

Only by recognizing that the divine nature is inherently generative is it possible to account for the existence of creation at all. This, says Athanasius, is what his opponents fail to do. . . . The divine act of bringing things into existence from nothing can only be conceived if fatherhood is understood to be the primary attribute of divine being.⁹

Since creation had a definite beginning, logic would dictate that there was a Creator who would come before creation. The Arians had to struggle with the notion that there was an intermediary between creation and the Creator.

⁸ Ibid., 349.

⁹ Widdicombe, 187.

They could not account for creation if the Son was also a created being. Athanasius claims that the Son was eternal in relation to the Father and thus could create.

In order to clarify the Son's identity Athanasius addresses the terms¹⁰ in relation to the Son's status as eternal. He does so by writing:

For terms do not disparage His Nature; rather that nature draws to Itself those terms and changes them. For terms are not prior to essences, but essences are first, and terms second.¹¹

Widdicombe's comments on this section are insightful as they illuminate Athanasius' meaning. Widdicombe writes:

Thus the language of divine essence must interpret and control all terminology of willing or purposing, for it is the superior and prior category for understanding characteristics of the divine. Essences are prior to "terms" and being is prior to understanding or willing. . . .¹²

Widdicombe makes the point that the Son is eternal and thus His existence is the foundation for any epistemology. This is also the point of Athanasius: mere language does not have the power to change the Son. Consequently, those terms must be interpreted in the ontological consideration of the Son's eternal position. In

¹⁰ By use of the word "terms" Athanasius reviews such terms as 'poiew'. He charges the Arians with a simple misunderstanding of meaning but also demonstrates that the eternal Son is who defines those terms.

¹¹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 349.

¹² Widdicombe, 172.

order to validate his point, Athanasius uses hermeneutical precision when addressing those terms. He states:

Wherefore also when the essence is a work or creature, then the words "He made," and "He became," and "He created," are used of it properly, and designate the work. But when the Essence is an Offspring and Son, then "He made," and "He became," and "He created," no longer properly belong to it, nor designate a work; but "He made" we use without question for "He begat."¹³

The Athanasian hermeneutic demonstrates that the Scriptures speak of the Son as both divine and human. Therefore, when the subject of the Son's human nature is emphasized it is proper to speak of the Son as made or created (since His earthly body was not eternal). However, when the subject of the Son emphasizes the divine nature, those terms are not relevant to the divine nature as the Son is eternal.

In order to validate his point, Athanasius offers the example of human analogies. He demonstrates that the human relationship between father and son adequately portrays the eternal relationship between the divine Father and Son. He writes:

Thus fathers often call sons born of them their servants, yet without denying the genuineness of their nature; and often they affectionately call their own servants children, yet without putting of sight their purchase of them originally; for they use one

¹³ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 349.

appellation from their authority as being fathers, but in the other they speak from affection.¹⁴

Athanasius reveals that even in human relations the terminology may intertwine but the nature of the Son is never in question. He uses this point to demonstrate that the nature of the Son is eternal and constant, and any terminology employed must be defined by the nature of the Son. The analogy of human relationships is an example of the divine relationship.

The principle issue that comes to the forefront is the changing Arian hermeneutic. The Arians interpret the human analogies correctly but when addressing the Son they use improper terms and confuse the two natures. Athanasius writes:

. . . whenever they hear "Offspring," and "Word," and "Wisdom," forcibly misinterpret and deny the generation, natural and genuine, of the Son from the Father; but on hearing words and terms proper to a work, forthwith drop down to the notion of His being by nature a work, and deny the Word; and this, though it is possible, from His having been made man, to **refer all these terms to His humanity?** [emphasis added] Are they not proved to be an "abomination" also "unto the Lord," as having "diverse weights" with them and with this estimating those other instances, and with that blaspheming the Lord?¹⁵

Thus, their hermeneutical approach does not have the same standards of interpretation but very different

¹⁴ Ibid., 349.

¹⁵ Ibid., 350.

standards. The Arians do not make a distinction between the dual natures of the Son. For that matter, they confuse the two natures. One can almost sense that Athanasius has the Nicene formula in mind as he approaches the Arian hermeneutic: the two natures of the Son are not to be confused or commingled. In the orthodox formula of Nicea, there is no rationale for the Arian hermeneutic. In fact, it is irrational. It is not found to be consistent with the Council of Nicea.

Athanasius concludes his general comments with a logical deduction from the book of Ecclesiastes. If the Arian hermeneutic and subsequent Arian son were found to be correct, there would be an obvious problem with the Son who is to be a judge of all works but who would have to be judged as a work. Athanasius writes:

If then the Word be a work, ***do you mean that He as will as others will be brought into judgment?***
 [emphasis added] and what room is there for judgment, when the Judge is on trial? Who will give to the just their blessing, who to the unworthy their punishment, the Lord, as you must suppose, standing on trial with the rest? By what law shall He, the Lawgiver, Himself be judged? ¹⁶

This statement is further proof that the Arian hermeneutic leads to confusion and irrational thoughts

¹⁶ Ibid., 351.

about the nature and work of the Son. An eternal Son could never be considered a work that must be judged!

The Exposition Begins

Hebrews 3:2 (CA 2.7-11a)

Athanasius addresses Hebrews 3:1-2 with the intention of clarifying the use of the word "poiew" (make). The Arians applied this term to the divinity of the Son and concluded that the Son was a creation of the Father, thus negating any ontological relationship between them.

Athanasius does say that the word "poiew" (make) has a place in its usage. He writes, "I ought to show from it also how the heretics lack reason; viz. by considering . . . the occasion when it was used and for what purpose."¹⁷

The purpose of poiew (make) is used to describe the humanity of the Son. Again Athanasius states:

Now the Apostle is not discussing things before the creation when he thus speaks, but when "the Word became flesh;" for thus it is written, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Jesus, who was faithful to Him who made Him." Now when became He "Apostle" but when He put on our flesh?¹⁸

The meaning of poiew (make) is found in the context of the Hebrew passage. The conclusion is that poiew (make)

¹⁷ Ibid., 351.

¹⁸ Ibid., 351.

refers to the humanity of Jesus and not His divinity. Athanasius supports this conclusion with references to the High Priest ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus was *poiew* (make-made) an Apostle and a High Priest. He was not *poiew* (make-made) a Son. The rationale for appealing to the apostleship and High Priest ministry of Jesus Christ is that the incarnate ministry illustrates the Son's humanity. In other words, the death, resurrection, and present intercessory ministry of Jesus all belong to the sphere of His humanity which definitely had a beginning. Therefore, *poiew* (make) refers to this beginning of the flesh and subsequent ministry but not to the eternal *Logos*. Athanasius stresses this point as he writes:

Not then as wishing to signify the Essence of the Word nor His natural generation from the Father, did the Apostle say, "Who was faithful to Him that made Him"—(perish the thought! For the Word is not made but makes)—**but as signifying His descent to mankind and High-priesthood** [emphasis added] which did "become"—as one may easily see from the account given of the Law of Aaron.¹⁹

The context declares that the High Priest ministry of Jesus Christ was not eternal but a continuation of Aaron's earthly priesthood. Athanasius uses typology to verify the meaning of *poiew* (make) within the context of Hebrews 3:1-2, as he understands there is a strong

¹⁹ Ibid., 352.

comparison between Aaron and the *Logos*: the *Logos* put on humanity just as Aaron put on his robe.²⁰ The thought is that when the *Logos* put on or added humanity He "became" a High Priest. Once again, Athanasius demonstrates that the *Υἱοῦ* (Son) is eternal and the addition of humanity in no way changed or altered the nature and relationship of the *Λογῶς* to the Father. Athanasius demonstrates this by, once again, appealing to the typology of the Aaronic priesthood. He states:

As then Aaron was the same and did not change by putting on the high-priestly dress, but remaining the same was only robed, so that, had any one seen him offering, and had said, "Lo, Aaron has this day become high-priest," he had not implied that he then had been born man, for man he was even before he became high-priest, but that he had been made high-priest in his ministry, on putting on the garments made and prepared for the high-priesthood. . . .²¹

The analogy is that when Aaron put on the garments, at that point, he acted as High Priest but he always existed as a man. This Old Testament typology refers to the eternal Son. He was always the eternal Son of the Father, but when He put on humanity His deity was not altered nor created anew. Only the Lord's body was *poiew* (make-made). Athanasius confirms:

²⁰ Ibid., 352.

²¹ Ibid., 352.

. . . in the same way it is possible in the Lord's instance also to understand aright, that He did not become other than Himself on taking flesh, but, being the same as before, He was robed in it; and the expressions "He became" and "He was made," must not be understood as if the Word, considered as the Word, were made, but that the Word, being Framer of all, afterwards was made High Priest, **by putting on a body which was originate, and made, and such as He can offer for us;** [emphasis added] wherefore He is said to be made.²²

Athanasius also refers to Hebrews 2:14-18²³ as a referent for the whole passage referring to the humanity of Jesus. The same person and the same human nature are in view as the One who was made lower than the angels but from the seed of Abraham. The incarnation of the Son is depicted in the whole context, which in turn, supplies the meaning of the word "poiew" (make).

In CA 2.10, Athanasius ceases with typology and comparisons and utilizes a contrasting method. He compares the faithfulness of the Son to the faithlessness of the pagan Greek gods. "Now the so-called gods of the Greeks, unworthy the name, are faithful neither in their essence nor in their promises. . . ." ²⁴

The incarnate ministry of Jesus is deemed faithful based upon the fact that He does not change. This argues

²² Ibid., 352.

²³ CA 2.8.

²⁴ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 353.

for the eternality of the unchanging Son. Athanasius

states:

. . . but the God of all, being one really and indeed and true is faithful, who is ever the same, and says, "See, now, that I, even I am He," and I "change not;" and therefore His Son is "faithful," being ever the same and unchanging, deceiving neither in His essence nor in His promise. . . .²⁵

The contrast is that the Son is eternal and does not change in His ontological essence, whereas "the local deities come to naught in course of time, and undergo a natural dissolution. . . ." ²⁶

The Son is found faithful in that the addition of humanity did not change His divine essence. Therefore, there is not a natural dissolution of the divine nature. In CA 2.11, Athanasius concludes his exposition with a summary of his argument. He states:

Hence it holds that the Apostle's expression, 'He made,' does not prove that the Word is made, but that body, which He took like ours. . . . All these terms happen to be proper to man's constitution; and such as these do not designate the Essence of the Word, but that He has become man.²⁷

Athanasius interacts with the Hebrew passage simply to denounce the Arian hermeneutic as leading to an unorthodox theology. Not only does he denounce the Arian

²⁵ Ibid., 353.

²⁶ Ibid., 353.

²⁷ Ibid., 354.

hermeneutic but he also rejects the conclusions of the Arian hermeneutic as they are lacking in theological content and are inconsistent and misleading.

Acts 2:36 (CA 2.11b-18a)

Athanasius is going to work with one of the passages that the Arians misconstrued. The word "epoinse" was used by the Arians to demonstrate the creation of the Son/*Logos*. It is interesting that Athanasius states that Acts 2:36 has the same meaning as the Hebrew passage.²⁸

The meaning of Acts 2:36 and proper interpretation is found in the context. He appeals to the Arians to "search whether it is anywhere written, 'God made Himself a Son,' or 'He created Himself a Word,' that they should have such notions."²⁹ *Evidently* Athanasius believes that the Arians cannot find support for their erroneous interpretation, and it is certainly not found in Acts 2:36.

The orthodox interpretation is found in the semantics of the context. The verse describes the death of Jesus as being the platform for His exaltation. Athanasius understands the meaning of the word "epoinse" is defined by

²⁸ Ibid., 354.

²⁹ Ibid., 354.

the beginning of Peter's sermon, or in other words, the context. He writes:

Consequently the term which he uses in the end, "made," this He has explained in the beginning by "manifested," for by the signs and wonders which the Lord did, He was manifested to be not merely man, but God in a body and Lord also, the Christ.³⁰

The word "apodeidemenon" (manifest, reveal, approve, set forth) is the interpretative rule for the word "epoinse." The meaning Athanasius tries to establish is that *poiew* takes on the meaning of "reveal." He uses John 5:16-18 and 10:38 to support his conclusions. The idea is that Jesus reveals Himself to be equal with God and His works confirm His revelation. The fact that Jesus is Lord is not because He was made into deity but that His Lordship is now revealed to humanity. Athanasius writes:

. . . it is plain that He who is now displayed as Lord and King, does not then begin to be King and Lord, **but begins to show His Lordship**, [emphasis added] and to extend it even over the disobedient.³¹

In CA 2.13, Athanasius continues with this interpretation with several texts that also reveal the eternal Lordship of the Son. He also states that if one should embrace the deviant theological position that the Son was not Lord, it is tantamount to "reviving the

³⁰ Ibid., 354.

³¹ Ibid., 355.

statements of the Samosatene."³² The only option for Athanasius is that one embraces heresy or orthodoxy.

To validate his argument, Athanasius reviews the issue of "becoming" in the sense that it does not relate to the Lord's deity, but the actualized and realized Lordship of the Son. The concept is that the Son is eternal and His Lordship is eternal, but humanity's actualization of the Son's Lordship takes place in the process of time.

Athanasius writes:

. . . here too is a way in which Peter's language evidently does not signify that the Essence of the Word is a work, **but the after-subjection of all things** [emphasis added], and the Savior's Lordship which came to be over all.³³

Athanasius states that the eternal Lordship of the Son is a process being actualized by humanity. However, it does not deter or negate the eternal reality of the Son's Lordship. For that matter, the only way the Son's Lordship could be realized by humanity is if He existed from all eternity as Son and Lord. This argument strengthens the case for Eternal Sonship. CA 2.14 opens with this

³² Ibid., 355. The word "Samosatene" is a reference to Paul of Samosta. He has been addressed earlier in the thesis.

³³ Ibid., 355.

declaration: "For the Son of God indeed, being Himself the Word, is Lord of all. . . ." ³⁴

The review of the Son's eternal Lordship leads to a review of the Son's soteriology in CA 2.14. Athanasius semantically connects soteriology with the concept of the issue of the Son "becoming" Lord. Athanasius summarizes:

. . . God being good and Father of the Lord, in pity, and desiring to be known by all, makes His own Son put on Him a human body and become man, and be called Jesus, that in this body offering himself for all, He might deliver all from false worship and corruption, and might Himself become Lord and King. ³⁵

The idea is the Son's salvation offer is the basis for humanity's submission to the eternal Son's Lordship. The Son becomes actualized as Lord when the individual experiences salvation. However, Athanasius cautions that the process of salvation does not mean there is a process of the Son "becoming" Lord or attaining Lordship. He writes:

. . . so Christ also being by nature Lord and King everlasting, does not become Lord more than He was at the time He is sent forth, nor then begins to be Lord and King, but what He is ever. . . . ³⁶

The idea is that the eternal Son is also eternal Lord. The incarnation is the means in which the Lordship of

³⁴ Ibid., 355.

³⁵ Ibid., 355.

³⁶ Ibid., 356.

the eternal Son is actualized and put into effect for the redemption of humanity. Charles Kannengiesser gives insight into the Athanasian concept of the incarnation and the corresponding soteriological doctrine. Kannengiesser states:

. . . Athanasius insists that the Arians are mistaken in the concept of theology, because they believe they are able to form a Christian idea of God by first developing in isolation the theory of the divinity of the Father and Son, without taking into consideration right from the start the mystery of the incarnation of the Son . . . he remained faithful throughout his life to this fundamental intuition: that which is first in the exposition of the Christian faith is not God as such, nor the universe in its divine origin, but the historical event of salvation accomplished in Christ.³⁷

Athanasius continues his exposition on Acts 2:36 in CA 2.15-16. However, he casts the interpretation of Acts 2:36 in its Jewish context. He recalls Peter's sermon and gives the conclusion that "the Jews, most of them, hearing this, came to themselves and forthwith acknowledged the Christ, as it is written in the Acts."³⁸

He concludes his exposition with the insight of the Son giving or sending the Holy Spirit.³⁹ The ability to send

³⁷ Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," 112.

³⁸ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 357.

³⁹ For an excellent article on the Holy Spirit as God see, Theodore C. Campbell's, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974): 408-440.

the Holy Spirit demonstrates, *per* Athanasius, that the Son is both eternal Lord and eternal Son. Athanasius writes:

. . . He had poured the Spirit on us; now to give the Spirit with authority, is not in the power of creature or work, but the Spirit is God's Gift. For the creatures are hallowed by the Holy Spirit; but the Son in that He is not hallowed by the Spirit, but on the contrary Himself the Giver of it to all, is therefore no creature, but true Son of the Father.⁴⁰

The fact that the Son could give the Spirit demonstrates the eternal Son's ontological existence as eternal God. The idea of *epoinse* in Acts 2:36 is that the Son is actualized by humanity at the time of salvation, and this in no way contradicts the eternality of the Son. In fact, the case for Eternal Sonship is strengthened by this argument. The actualization of the Lordship of the Son in time could only take place if the Son is both Lord and eternal.

**Opening Statements on Proverbs 8:22
(CA 2.18-82)**

In this section Athanasius reviews the primary text of the Arian theology. In CA 1.53, Athanasius sets the agenda by reviewing all the problematic texts of the Arians. They include the texts of Hebrews 3:1-2; Acts 2:36; and Proverbs 8:22. The Hebrews and Acts texts dealt with

⁴⁰ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 357.

the issue of **poiew** (make) and seemingly demanded less attention than **ktizw** (created), which is found in Proverbs 8:22. He addressed Hebrews 3:1-2 and Acts 2:36 first so that He could build a case against **ktizw** (created) and thus treat the word in the same manner as he did **poiew** (make). The rationale is that the Proverbs text uses **ktizw** (created) and demands even more attention as the rest of Book 2 is consumed with Athanasius' attention of the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. Athanasius demonstrates that the previous texts of Hebrews and Acts do not set an interpretive precedent for the Arian position nor will Proverbs 8:22.

Athanasius recalls the proof questions of CA 1.22 in order to address the Arians' own questions, and thus demonstrate that they can be answered and corrected from the orthodox position. The goal of Athanasius is not only to reveal the fallacies of the Arian heresy but also to dialogue with their proof questions and show that they lead to nothing more than mere fantasy.⁴¹ He does this by interacting with the very text the Arians propagated as their proof answer to their proof questions: Proverbs 8:22.

⁴¹ Ibid., 358.

In his introduction to Proverbs 8:22, Athanasius reviews Arius' answer to the question of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, concerning Arius' Christology. Athanasius recalls Arius' answer, "He is a creature, but not as one of the creatures; a work, but not as one of the works; an offspring, but not as one of the offsprings."⁴²

Arius' answer provides an introduction to the deviant Arian teaching about the creation of the Son. Athanasius shows the confusion of the Arian heresy by recalling the perplexing and conflicted terms of Arius' answer. The first approach to dealing with Proverbs 8:22 is to give a proper clarification to Arius' answer to Bishop Alexander and then reject the premise of the Arian answer.

**Clarifying Arius' Answer to Alexander
(CA 2.18b-24)**

It must be assumed that Arius gave his answer to Alexander in order to establish the relationship of the Son to the rest of the created world. The rationale for this statement is that Arius' answer does not address the relationship between Father and Son but between Son and creatures. Apparently Bishop Alexander wanted to know the difference between the Son as created and the creatures as

⁴² Ibid., 358.

created. Athanasius reviews the Arian answer and concludes that the answer itself is evidence of the *epinoew* (invent) that leads to irreligion.⁴³ He writes:

Let every one consider the profligacy and craft of this heresy; for knowing the bitterness of its own malignity, it makes an effort to trick itself out with fair words, and says, what indeed it means, that he is a creature. . . . However, in this writing, they rather convict themselves of irreligion. . . .⁴⁴

The revealing issue of Arius' answer is that the Son is deemed to be nothing more than a creature and this is of course, irreligious. In other words, the Father, according to Arius, created the Son. The Son, in turn, does not and cannot possess the same *ousia* (essence) of the Father. The Arian answer is called irreligious because it exceeds the boundaries of the orthodox formula of Nicea.

The confused wording of the Arian answer is not an obstacle for Athanasius. In fact, in CA 2.20, Athanasius clarifies the Arian answer with a direct challenge to their premise. He states:

Let the Word then be excepted from the works, and as Creator be restored to the Father, and be confessed to be Son by nature; **or** [emphasis added] if simply He be a creature, then let Him be assigned the same condition as the rest one with another. . . .⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., 358.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 358.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 359.

This challenge strikes at the heart of the Arian Christology. This use of logic forces the Arians to either admit that the Son is a creature and thus shares in the genus of creation's essence, or they must confess that the Son is a son by nature and has the same *ousia* (essence) as the Father. Athanasius sees no qualitative difference in creation. He does not allow for different essences of creation, nor does he allow for the stratification in the essence of the created *ousia* (essence) as he writes, "For though the Son excels the rest on a comparison, still a creature He is nevertheless, as they are."⁴⁶

Should the Arians continue to insist that their answer to Bishop Alexander is correct, they must answer the challenge of the different essences within creation! In other words, how can the Son be qualitatively different from creation if He is also a creature? The Arians cannot answer this challenge, nor do they admit that the Son is the same *ousia* (essence) of the Father. Athanasius regards all of creation as being the same ontological substance but having different modes of existence. Widdicombe gives insight into this issue:

This radical dissimilarity means that for Athanasius all originate things are things to be thought of as

⁴⁶ Ibid., 359.

ontologically the same, relative to the unoriginated. Thus, while he acknowledges that Genesis states that no creature is like another, he concludes that they are all fundamentally alike in that they are all creatures; they all share the "same condition," having all had a beginning to their existence. . . .⁴⁷

Athanasius constructs a biblical model to review the Arian answer. He utilizes texts such as Psalm 19:1 and 1 Esdras 4, along with John 1:2; 5:17; and 14:16. These texts pose a theological precedent that states the standard for the proper evaluation of the Arian answer. The logic of these verses brings a decisive conclusion: the works of God reveal that glory and truth belong to God and the Son shares in that glory and truth with the Father because it is the Son who works the Father's works. Athanasius writes:

. . . it follows that the Word is not a creature, but alone proper to the Father . . . and the Word "hitherto" shows His eternal existence in the Father as the Word; for it is proper to the Word to work the Father's works and not to be external to Him.⁴⁸

The biblical model that Athanasius proposes is based upon the logical interpretation of the Scriptures. The reason he can deem the Arians irrational is that they misconstrue the biblical witness. Athanasius argues from a biblically informed theology and with the conviction that the Scriptures can be understood through the medium of

⁴⁷ Widdecombe, 151.

⁴⁸ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 359.

human thought. Andrew Louth, commenting on the Athanasian works, *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, makes the following general observation about the use of Athanasian logic. He states:

It is the place of reason to discover the sense of Scripture . . . for Athanasius, submission to the Word does not mean that man's reason is constrained in an unnatural way: it is constrained, but only so as to find its true autonomy: it is brought into submission to him "whose service is perfect freedom."⁴⁹

Athanasius uses logic, supported by the Scriptures, to come to the conclusion that if the Son were created then He would have to have been involved in His own creation.

. . . and what the Son created, that is the creation of the Father, and yet the Son be the Father's work or creature, then either He will work His own self, and will be His own creator (since what the Father worked is the Son's work also), which is absurd and impossible. . . .⁵⁰

Athanasius states that the Arians' answer to Bishop Alexander, which is based upon their interpretative hermeneutic, will only lead to absurd conclusions.

The conclusion of CA 2.21 centers upon the creative power of God. Athanasius does not hesitate to declare that God alone has the power to create out of nothing. However, he does pose an interesting thought to the Arians,

⁴⁹ Andrew Louth, "Reason and Revelation in Athanasius," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 392.

⁵⁰ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 359.

". . . if He, a creature, withal frames a creature, the same will be conceivable in the case of every creature, viz. the power to frame others."⁵¹ Athanasius' point is that this would denounce the scriptural doctrine that all things were created through the *Logos*.

In CA 2.22, Athanasius returns to the epistemological theme of the Son knowing and thus doing the work of the Father. His argumentation is based upon John 14:9-10; Matthew 11:27; and John 6:46. These passages speak of the Son knowing the Father and doing the works of the Father. In true Athanasian form, the Son cannot know the Father unless the Son is proper to the Father. In other words, the Son is unoriginated. "How then did He alone know, except that He alone was proper to Him? And how proper, if He were a creature, and not a true Son from Him?"⁵² The issue at hand is that since the Son knows the Father this would dictate that the Son could not be a creature simply because creatures cannot know the Father based upon revelation of the Scriptures.

Since the Son performed the works of the Father, that aspect indicates relational and mutual deity of both Father and Son. Therefore, the Son can know the Father

⁵¹ Ibid., 359.

⁵² Ibid., 360.

because they have the same ontological properties of the Godhead. In fact, the epistemology of the Son is based upon the mutual deity of shared properties of or within the Godhead. This line of reasoning negates the Son being a creation of the Father simply because a creature is a different ontological substance than the Father, and thus cannot do the works of the Father much less share in the properties of the Godhead. However, since the Son is the same ontological substance as the Father, this places the Son above the creatures and all of creation. This is an argument for the full deity of the Son eternally existing as God the Son in relation to the Trinity and in relation to creation.

The Arian position would lead one to a divine/creature. That is the subject matter of CA 2.23.

Athanasius writes:

Moreover if, as the heretics hold, the Son were creature or work, but not as one of the creatures, because of His excelling them in glory, it were natural that Scripture should describe and display Him by comparison in His favor with the other works. . . .

⁵³

Athanasius argues that the Arian position would lead to a creature that is divine by having a better substance

⁵³ Ibid., 360.

than the creature but inferior to the Father. George Dion Dragas confirms this as he writes:

God is uncreated in the Father, but he is Creator in the Son. Arius finds the two incompatible, hence he divides the Father from the Son placing the latter on the side of creation, if only to end with a mythological image of the mediator-creator who is neither eternal, nor temporal, neither true God nor true creature, but a divine-creature!⁵⁴

Dragas understands the implication of the Arian Son/Creature as well as Athanasius: there is no common mediator should the Son not be eternal. For that matter, the Son would also have to worship the Father just as creation instead of being worshipped. The fact of the matter is that the Son is worshipped, which is also proof of the eternal divinity of the Son. Athanasius writes in *CA* 2.24:

But now since He is not a creature, but the proper offspring of the Essence of that God who is worshipped, and His Son by nature, therefore He is worshipped and is believed to be God. . . .⁵⁵

In the Athanasian scheme, the Son can mediate to the Father for all creation and that is done through the means of the Son's soteriological accomplishments.

⁵⁴ George Dion Dragas, *Athanasiana* (London, 1980), 55.

⁵⁵ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 361.

**Addressing the Arian Son/Creature as a Creator
(CA 2.24b-30)**

The Arians concluded that the Son mediated to the Father as a creature but still possessed the ability to create. Another way of stating this is that the Son mediated creation as a creature.

The basic questions that Athanasius poses to the Arian position are: Why did the Father create the Son only to have the Son create creation? Why did the Father need the Son to create for Him? Why does the creature (the Son) do the work that can only belong to the Father? Can the Father only create the Son and not everything else?⁵⁶

One of the basic differences between Arius' and Athanasius' theology is their concept of God's immanence and transcendence.⁵⁷ Arius understood God as being closed to humanity. That is, God could not relate to creation except through a created mediator. Athanasius, on the other hand, understood God as relating to humanity, and subsequently all of creation, through the person of the Son. This simply

⁵⁶ These questions are paraphrased by this writer. Athanasius builds a paradigm of questions to solidify his argument against the Arian Son/Creature position. In an effort to maintain clarity, a paraphrase was used so that the thrust of the Athanasian argument could be established.

⁵⁷ In *A Dictionary of Theological Terms* (3rd ed., s.v.), "immanence" is defined as "a word used to convey the idea of God indwelling His creation and its processes." "Transcendence" is defined as "the theological term that emphasizes the distinction of God from His creation, and His sovereign exaltation over it."

means that God is open in His ability to relate to creation. Dragas comments:

St. Athanasius sees God's being as transcendentally immanent or immanently transcendent. In other words, God's being is not an abstract and barren conception, something unmoved. It is being in doing, in involvement, in act, but this act is divine and eternal and other than that of created existence, although it creates the latter and is revealed in and through it. . . . It is in fact God's Son that creation has its possibility, God's Son represents that dynamic openness of God's nature and particularly His openness to man.⁵⁸

Apparently the Arian position requires God to be unable to relate to any part of creation and thus God is dependent upon a mediator to not only create but to interact with creation. Athanasius states:

For if they ***shall assign the toil of making all things as the reason why God made the Son only***, the whole creation will cry out against them as saying unworthy things of God. . . . ***And if God made the Son alone, as not deigning to make the rest***, but committed them to the Son as an assistant, this on the other hand is unworthy of God, for in Him there is not pride [emphases added].⁵⁹

Athanasius uses the argument of God's providence to state that God is not only in control of creation, but in fact, God is Creator of creation. Athanasius reasons, "For what things are the subjects of His Providence, of those He

⁵⁸ Dragas, 55.

⁵⁹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 362.

is Maker through His proper Word."⁶⁰ Rebecca Lyman, commenting on CA 2.24 states, ". . . the Son and the Father, being of one nature, have one will, with little sense of separate agency: the Son represents the Father and is the paternal will."⁶¹

In CA 2.26, Athanasius uses a clever argument to state that the Arian Son could not endure God's creation. This is based upon the premise that creation itself required a mediator to create it because creation could not endure God's ability. Athanasius states:

. . . how . . . could He alone endure to be made by the unoriginate and unmitigated Essence of God, as you say? For it follows either that, if He could endure it, all could endure it, or, it being endurable by none, it was not endurable by the Word. . . .⁶²

This rationale gives a specific challenge to the Arians. Either all can endure God's ability or none can. Their premise is absurd! If the Son can endure the creative process, what makes the Son qualitatively different? The Arians have no answer for this question. Athanasius presses the point when he writes:

And again, if because originate nature could not endure to be God's own handywork, there arose a need of a mediator, it must follow, that, the Word being

⁶⁰ Ibid., 362.

⁶¹ Lyman, 137.

⁶² Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 362.

originate and creature, there is need of medium in His framing also, since He too is of that originate nature which, endures not to be made of God, but needs a medium.⁶³

Athanasius' point is that there must be an endless succession of mediators in order to create the Son! Should this be the case, how can any type, order, or specific creation, take place? The answer is that creation cannot exist in this format.

Khaled Anatolis comes to an interesting conclusion concerning this issue. He believes that Arius and Athanasius have an "overlap"⁶⁴ in their theology as they related God to His creation. He stresses that in *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius utilizes the same concept, i.e. that God the Father does not know creation. Anatolis writes:

Athanasius is so far conscious of sharing the Arian conception of the need for a bridge between the created and uncreated that he allows himself to use the same language of creation's innate incapacity to withstand the "untempered" hand of God. He also agrees that this bridge is to be located in the Son. However, the decisive difference is that for Athanasius this bridge cannot be conceived as coming from anywhere outside God, but rather in terms of divine love and condescension.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., 362.

⁶⁴ Anatolis, 111.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 112.

Anatolis understands Arius and Athanasius to have the same concept of God and creation in that they are two different substances. Arius and Athanasius approached the problem of relating to creation in vastly different ways. Arius chose to conclude that the Son was a creature above creation, whereas, Athanasius concluded that the Son condescended to creation. Anatolis continues:

Thus, if the Son admittedly does mediate between creation's incapacity to know God and the splendor of the Father, it is precisely in virtue of his full divinity, his unlikeness to creation, and his representation of the condescending divine love.⁶⁶

Anatolis has adequately demonstrated that both Arius and Athanasius view creation and its relationship to God in the same manner. However, the difference in solving that dynamic relationship is the basis that forms either orthodox theology or heresy.

In CA 2.27, Athanasius gives three examples that the Arians use to defend their position. The first example is the leadership of Moses. Athanasius states:

But again they allege this:-Behold, they through Moses too did He lead the people from Egypt, and through him He gave the law, yet he was a man; so that it is possible for like to be brought into being by like.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁶⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 362.

Athanasius states that the Arians have misapplied the Moses passages in that Moses did not "frame the world, not to call into being things which were not, or to fashion men like himself."⁶⁸ The idea is that the same substance or same kind can perform ministries to the same kind but cannot create one another. That alone is the work of God.

The second Arian example that Athanasius negates is the fact that the Son is one of many in His ministry.

Athanasius states the opposite as he writes:

. . . but while the creatures are many, the Word is one, any one will collect from this, that the Son differs from all, and is not on a level with the creatures, but proper to the Father. Hence there are not many Words, but one only Word of the Father, and one Image of the one God.⁶⁹

The fact that there is only "one sun and one earth and one water"⁷⁰ is analogous to having only one Son.

The last example the Arians utilized to defend their position is that the Father taught the Son how to create other creatures. Athanasius responds to this by stating that if the assertion were true, the Father must be weak and jealous. Athanasius writes:

For if the power of framing accrues to any one from teaching, these insensate men are ascribing jealousy

⁶⁸ Ibid., 362.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 362.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 363.

and weakness to God;-jealousy, in that He has not taught many how to frame, so that there may be around Him, as Archangels and Angels many, so framers many; and weakness, in that He could not make by Himself, but needed a fellow-worker, or under-worker. . . .⁷¹

The concept is that God is jealous and did not share the knowledge of how to create with other beings and weakness in that He needed another to accomplish His own creative desires.

In CA 2.30, Athanasius demonstrates the inverted pattern of the Arian theology. In effect, Athanasius states that the Son, according to the irreligion of the Arians,⁷² "is made for us; so that He owes thanks to us, not we to Him."⁷³ This inversion of the Son simply means that the Arians did not view the Son as eternal. Athanasius, on the other hand, understands the Son to be eternal. Therefore, he reviews these Arian examples and refutes them on the basis that they do not reflect the teaching of the Scriptures. The Arian son/creature cannot create simply because he belongs to the same substance as creation. There is not ontological difference. However, the orthodox Son is revealed as being ontologically different from creation, but as having the same substances as the Father and being

⁷¹ Ibid., 363.

⁷² Ibid., 364.

⁷³ Ibid., 364.

proper to the Father. Therefore, the Son could create as the Mediator of the Father. E. P. Meijering states, "The eternal unity of Father and Son is reflected in the unity of decision and action."⁷⁴

**Addressing the Arian Son/Creature as a Creation
(CA 2.31-6)**

To some extent Athanasius digresses as he reviews this issue in that he addressed the topic in the Hebrews 3:1-2 and Acts 2:36 texts. The dimension here is that the Son is reviewed in the background of the Trinity.

Athanasius understands the Son's eternality means that the Son is proper⁷⁵ to the Father. This simply means that there is ontological equality. The ontological equality of the Son to the Father is the basis for the unity of the Trinity. The logical expression of this union is the divine action of creation. Athanasius states, "For since the Word is the Son of God by nature proper to His essence, and is from Him, and in Him, as He said Himself, the creatures could not have come to be, except through

⁷⁴ E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius, Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1968), 90.

⁷⁵ This term has already been addressed in the thesis.

Him."⁷⁶ The logical order of creation is an evidence of the relationship that exists within the Trinity.

Athanasius also examines the eternal relationship of the Father and Son by reviewing their communication. He compares the communication of humans to that of the Godhead:

For when God commands others, whether the Angels, or converses with Moses, or commands Abraham, then the hearer answers; and the one says, "Whereby shall I know?" and the other, "Send some one else;" and again, "if they ask me, what is His Name, what shall I say to them?"⁷⁷

The concept is that even though creation is a logical evidence of the relationship of the Trinity, it is not an ontological part of the Trinity. The lack of understanding within the communication of God to humanity is further evidence that creation is temporal and belongs to the genus of a different ontological substance. The Son, on the other hand, is eternal. This is evidenced by the communication that exists between Father and Son.

Athanasius writes:

But when that Word Himself works and creates, then there is no questioning and answer, for the Father is in Him and the Word in the Father; but it suffices to will, and the work is done; so that the word, "He said" is a token of the will for our sake, and "It was so," denotes the work which is done through the Word

⁷⁶ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 364.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 365.

and the Wisdom, in which Wisdom also is the Will of the Father.⁷⁸

The communication between Father and Son is different in that the Son knows the will of the Father, whereas, humanity has to learn the will of the Father. Athanasius connects "Word" and "Wisdom" together in an effort to negate the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22.

Peter Widdecombe addresses an issue as he comments on CA 2.31. He also concurs that there was/is perfect communication between the Father and Son without creation. The Father did not need the Son to create for Him.

Widdecombe states:

Earlier, in *Contra Arianos* II. 31, arguing against the supposed Arian claim that the Word was brought into existence in order to create, he [Athanasius] maintains that had God decided not to create, the Word nevertheless would have been "with God and the Father in him." Creation does not need to exist for the divine life to be what it is.⁷⁹

Peter Widdicombe understands the Athanasian concept that the Son is eternal with the Father. Therefore, the paternal will of the Father is accomplished in the Son and creation is an expression of the relationship of eternal love.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 365.

⁷⁹ Widdecombe, 207.

In CA 2.32, Athanasius has the insight to state that the Arians do not have an argument with the orthodox party but their argument is with God Himself. For Athanasius this is the crux of the entire debate. The course of *Contra Arianos* has been to defend the nature of the Godhead: an attack on the Son is an attack on the Trinity.

Arius and the Arians conceived of a Son that was of a different substance from the Father. This Arian Son had to be created simply because His substance was different to the Father's. Consequently the Son, according to Arius, could not be eternal. This Arian theology stands in direct opposition to the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity, which was confirmed by the ecclesiastical Council of Nicea. Therefore, Athanasius can say, "It is plain from this that the Arians are not fighting with us about their heresy; but while they pretend us, their real fight is against the Godhead Itself."⁸⁰

The interesting point that Athanasius makes is that even though he writes from an ecclesiastical orthodox position, he states that the real argument that the Arians have is not with the earthly church but with the heavenly Godhead!

⁸⁰ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 365.

The debate of the Arians is demonstrated in terms that are a mixture of Scripture and fiction. Athanasius quotes the Scriptures of Matthew 17:5; Proverbs 8:25; Psalm 57:4; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:24; John 1:1; and Luke 1:2. These verses serve to form the basis of establishing the Son as the eternal Word of the Father. The Arians, on the other hand, contrived a created Son. In opposition to their *epinoew* (invention) Son, Athanasius contrasts the scriptural truth of the Son so that there is no mistake in the identity of the person who is God the Son resident in the Trinity.

The meaning that Athanasius is trying to establish is that Arius is not only arguing against the Trinity but that he also has a disregard for the words of the Scriptures as he rejects them. Athanasius writes:

For they neither feared the voice of the Father, nor revered the Savior's words, nor trusted the Saints. . . . All these passages proscribe in every light the Arian heresy, and signify the eternity of the Word. . . .⁸¹

His statement simply means that the Arians rejected every form of orthodox teaching that was available to them. Once they rejected the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church, there was no choice except to embark on a fantasy

⁸¹ Ibid., 365.

or fiction that would enable them to lead to contrive or *epinoew* (invent) a new religion.

Since the Arians rejected the Scriptures, Athanasius gives insight into the relationship of the Scriptures to the Trinity. He does so in order that they may understand the severity of their rejection. He states:

For such illustrations and such images has Scripture proposed, that, considering the inability of human nature to comprehend God, we might be able to form ideas even from these however, poorly and dimly, and as far as is attainable . . . but hearing the Scriptures we believe. . . .⁸²

Athanasius affirms that the Scriptures are the product of God. They were recorded for the purposes of proper theological reflection and contemplation. Humanity is to gain an understanding of the Godhead from the teachings of the Scriptures. Should the Scriptures be rejected, there is no basis for a proper understanding concerning the nature and work of God. The reason that Athanasius can claim that the Arians have an argument against God is on the basis that they not only reject the Son and the Trinity, but they also reject the revelation of God. In other words, they reject the Scriptures of the Lord. This, in turn, leads to a fight or conflict with all that is sacred. The Arians have subverted the authority of

⁸² Ibid., 365-6.

God. Consequently, they have no choice but to contrive or *epinoew* (invent) their own religious system with their own *epinoew* (invent) yet uniquely, Arian Son.

It would do well to remember this passage is still an introduction to Proverbs 8:22. In CA 2.33, Athanasius reviews the basis for rejecting the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. He utilizes the analogy of the sun's essence to the rays produced by the sun. The rays are produced by the sun and are of themselves complete, and thus lack nothing. The sun is not diminished, nor divided or impaired. Concerning the relationship of the Son to the Father, Athanasius writes:

We understand in like manner that the Son is begotten not from without but from the Father, and while the Father remains whole, the Expression of His Subsistence is ever, and preserves the Father's likeness and unvarying Image, so that he who sees Him, sees in Him the Subsistence too, of which He is the Expression.⁸³

The point Athanasius is stressing is that the Father was at no time existing without the Son. The Arians insisted the Father made the Son at a point in time. They used Proverbs 8:22 as a proof-text to support their claim. Athanasius rejects their interpretation based not only upon

⁸³ Ibid., 366.

the scriptural revelation but also the simple yet various analogies that are so very familiar to the Arians.

The Son is not an attribute or an extension of the Father, but a unique Person that is generated by the Father. Dragas states:

The point of divergence between St. Athanasius and Arius is not merely the conception of divine Sonship, but the understanding of divine nature. St. Athanasius finds a dynamic view of God's nature in the Scriptures, a nature which includes in its constitution or essence the generation of the Son. . . . Put simply, St. Athanasius sees God's nature not as abstract and static being, but as being-in-doing, or being-in-act as the being of the Father who eternally begets the Son and sends forth the Spirit.⁸⁴

The significance of Dragas' statement is that he understands Athanasius to reason that the Son is eternal because of the Father's generation of the Son. The Father generates the Son eternally and did not make Him in time. "Athanasius defended eternal, essential generation as proper to God."⁸⁵

The fact that God generates the Son argues for a separate person who is coeternal and coequal. This is the classic orthodox formula for the Trinity.⁸⁶ Athanasius does

⁸⁴ Dragas, 58.

⁸⁵ Lyman, 135.

⁸⁶ Grudem states, "We may define the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God" (226). Charles Hodge states, "(1.) That there is one divine Being. (2.) The Father, Son, and Spirit are divine. (3.) The Father, Son, and Spirit

not thoroughly develop this doctrine but he certainly lays the foundation for it.

Athanasius asks the Arians to attempt to make the impossible to become possible. In other words, can they separate the sun from its radiance or is radiance not proper to light? Is radiance a part of light by division or can it be that radiance did not exist at one time?⁸⁷ The point is that since originated or created substances have proper matters, they in turn are analogous of their Creator. The conclusion is the Son is eternal and proper to the Father.

In CA 2.34, Athanasius states that when the church heard the teachings of Arianism they were shocked at the content since it was in opposition to the Christian faith. He states:

Who on the rise of this odious heresy so the Arians, **was not at once startled** [emphasis added] at what he heard, as strange, and a second sowing, besides that Word which had been sown from the beginning?⁸⁸

are, in the sense just stated, distinct persons. (4.) Attributes being inseparable from substance, the Scriptures, in saying that the Father, Son, and Spirit possess the same attributes, say they are the same in substance; and, if the same in substance, they are equal in power and glory" (*Systematic Theology*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986], 1:444). Concerning the "Trinity," Carl F. H. Henry states, "The Christian doctrine of God is distinguished by its emphasis on divine three-in-oneness, that is, the eternal coexistence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the inner personal life of the Godhead" (*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, vol. 5 s.v.).

⁸⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 366.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 366.

The theology of the Arians is contradictive to the revelation of God. The response of the orthodox Church was nothing less than shock and dismay at the content. The reason for this response is that from the beginning the gospel was "sown in every soul"⁸⁹ that God had a Son who was eternal. Arianism is now questioning that seed and even replacing it with a "second sowing."⁹⁰ This is an obvious reference not only to the Proverbs 8:22 interpretation but also to the entire Arian theology as evidenced by restating the Arian premise, (there was once when He was not, etc.).

In CA 2.35, Athanasius returns to his argument that human analogies do not apply to the divine Godhead. He contrasts the eternality of the Son with the temporal nature of humanity. This contrast, once again, strikes at the heart of the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. He states:

Now man, begotten in time, in time also himself begets the child; and whereas from nothing he came to be, therefore his word also is over and continues not. But God is not as man, as Scripture has said; but is existing and is ever; therefore also His Word is existing and is everlasting with the Father, as radiance of light.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 366.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 366.

⁹¹ Ibid., 367.

The obvious point is that the *Logos* was not called into being but existed with the Father from all eternity.

The problem of the Arian theological speculation is that it is not guided by the divine revelation of the Scriptures. Athanasius vividly portrays this in CA 2.36. He states:

Not is a person at liberty on that account to swerve in his thoughts from the truth, not, if any one is perplexed in such inquiries, ought he to disbelieve what is written. For it is better in perplexity to be silent and believe, than to disbelieve on account of the perplexity.⁹²

The complex theologizing of the Arians has led to doubt and even disbelief. The mere speculations of the Arians have not only contradicted the Scriptures but have done considerable damage to the reputation of God's character and nature. Athanasius admonishes that it would be better to have kept silent than to lead many astray. The penalty for the Arian speculation is severe divine judgment. The rationale for such a statement is that the Arians have formed deviant theological doctrines about God. He states:

. . . for he who is perplexed may in some way obtain mercy, because, though he has questioned, he has yet kept quiet; but when a man is led by his perplexity into forming for himself doctrines which beseeem not,

⁹² Ibid., 367.

and utters what is unworthy of God, such daring incurs a sentence without mercy.⁹³

Athanasius understands that the deviant theology of the Arians is under divine condemnation because it leads one to contemplate the nature of God in a negative manner. The endless digression of the Arian theology has speculated itself into a degenerate mire in which the true nature of God cannot be found. Should this be the case, Athanasius fears there is no forgiveness simply because there is no way a person can relate to or know the God who possesses the ability to forgive. This is based upon the fact that the Logos is deemed a creature and not God. Thus, epistemologically, any act of forgiveness is impossible for such deviant theological speculation.

**Addressing the Issue of the Two Arian Wisdoms
(CA 2.37-43)**

The Arians contrived a separate entity from the Son and called this entity Wisdom. The thought flow of the Arians is based upon the faulty interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. The context of the passage speaks of Wisdom, and Arius treats this text as speaking of Wisdom being different from the Son. Athanasius states:

⁹³ Ibid., 367.

Wherefore, I am in wonder how, whereas God is one, these men introduce, after their private notions, many images and wisdoms and words, **and say that the Father's proper and natural Word is other than the Son, by whom He even made the Son.** . . [emphasis added].⁹⁴

The first issue here is that there is an intermediate agency that made the Son. The greater issue is the status of the Trinity. Arius dismantles the Trinity when he insists upon the Wisdom of God being separate from the Son. Apparently the many names⁹⁵ mentioned by Athanasius seem to refer to the fact that the Arians interpreted *sofia* (wisdom) as a name that is to be interpreted in the same manner as *Logos*. The *Thalia* apparently contained this specific interpretation since Athanasius references the work. The main concern for Athanasius is that the natural Word and Wisdom of the Father is different from the Son. Athanasius quotes Asterius⁹⁶ as adhering to the teachings of the *Thalia*. Athanasius states that Asterius "teaches that there is another power and wisdom of God manifested through Christ."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid., 368.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 368.

⁹⁶ Livingston, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of The Christian Church*, s.v. "Asterius," states, "the Sophist, Arian theologian." The importance of Asterius is that he was the promoter of the Arian doctrine.

⁹⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 368.

CA 2.38 accuses the Arians of embracing a son that is not a reality but a fabrication or notion. Yet it is the Arians and particularly Asterius who have stated that the *sofia* (wisdom) actually exists with God the Father. This is the orthodox position. However, the Arians are so confused that they did not grasp proper orthodox theology.

Athanasius states:

Is not this portentous, to say that Wisdom coexists with the Father, yet not to say that this is the Christ, but that there are many created powers and wisdoms, of which one is the Lord whom they go on to compare to the caterpillar and locust?⁹⁸

The concept is that the Arians embrace the concept of *sofia* (wisdom) as being coeternal with the Father but at the same time not existing with the Father. Thus, God had to call forth Wisdom! The issue here is that the Arians are guilty of their own accusations! They have interpreted Proverbs 8:22 to mean that there are two Unoriginates.⁹⁹ The Arians did not understand that if Wisdom is eternal yet separate from the Son and from God, then there are two divine beings that collaborated together. They are guilty of their own accusations against the orthodox.

In CA 2.39-40, Athanasius points to the improper methodology of the Arians. He asks:

⁹⁸ Ibid., 369.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 369.

For where at all have they found in divine Scripture, or from whom have they heard, that there is another Word and another Wisdom besides this Son, that they should frame to themselves such a doctrine?¹⁰⁰

There is no source for their theological position. Athanasius concludes that the Arian notion of a separate *sofia* (wisdom) is nothing more than their *epinoew* (invention).

In CA 2.40, Athanasius demonstrates that Asterius argues for the oneness of the Word and Wisdom. This is a contradiction of the Arian position. Athanasius quotes Asterius as saying, "God the Word is one, but many are the things rational; and one is the essence and nature of Wisdom, but many are the things wise and beautiful. . . ."¹⁰¹ This is a denial of the Arian position. The fact that Asterius claims, "God the Word is one" is a denial of the creation of the *Logos*. The impact of these statements leaves no doubt that the Arian theology is not only disjointed but possesses much tension in methodology as well as in content. There is no systematic harmony, nor rationality, and certainly no truthful content in the Arian theology. Athanasius compares the Arian heresy to that of the Manichees, "who make to themselves another God, after

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 369.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 369.

denying Him that is."¹⁰² Their theological system is not conducive to extracting meaning from the Scriptures but allows no choice but for the Arians to **epinoew** (invent) their own god and thus their own religion.

In a comparative statement Athanasius recapitulates very succinctly the orthodox position. He states:

But let the other heresies and the Manichees also know that the Father of the Christ is One, and is Lord and Maker of creation through His proper Word. And let the Ariomanicas know in particular, that the Word of God is One, being the only Son proper and genuine from His Essence, and having with His Father the oneness of Godhead indivisible. . . .¹⁰³

Athanasius proves his point by reviewing the baptismal formula. The interesting issue is that the baptismal formula is only found in the Scriptures (the tradition of the Church is not to be discounted here, however, even though the tradition of the Church had this formula it is nonetheless found within the confines of the Scriptures).

The baptismal formula addresses the theological issue of the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. Athanasius reviews the premise that the Son is a creature, but he does so in view of the ontological relationship of the Father and Son. The act of baptism creates certain

¹⁰² Ibid., 370.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 370.

undeniable circumstances for the Arians. There are two possibilities that Athanasius presents: should the Son be deemed a creature then His grace is normative to a created being; on the other hand, if creation needs grace from its Creator the Son must also need grace and therefore cannot give grace since he is ontologically different from the Father.

The baptismal formula yields an explanation of Proper Sonship. The formula names the Father and Son simply because the Son is the One who also bestows grace.

Athanasius writes:

. . . it is necessary to state, as I think and believe, that the Son is named with the Father, not as if the Father were not all-sufficient . . . but, since He is God's Word and own Wisdom, and being His Radiance, is ever with the Father, therefore it is impossible, if the Father bestows grace, that He should not give it in the Son. . . .¹⁰⁴

The act of baptism reveals the eternality of the Son, as He is ontologically the same as the Father. Being such, the Son can administer grace as it comes from the Father through Him.

The appeal to the ordinance of baptism is nothing less than an ecclesiastical approach to the Arian heresy. Baptism is designed to reveal the process of soteriology on

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 370.

a personal level. It is the confession not only of the Church, but the confession of the individual believer as he or she unites with Christ personally and within the established ecumenical structure.

Athanasius understands this and writes from the perspective that the Arian heresy has no soteriological value and is deemed to be beyond the theological boundaries of the ecclesia (church).

The ecclesia (church) disapproves and does not permit the Arian heresy to be acknowledged as viable theology within the confines of the Church. In fact, the whole of Arian theology is irrational simply because it is incapable of being harmonious with the ordinance of the Church, which is nothing less than the theology of the Church in practice.

Again, Athanasius utilizes the theology of the Church in a developed Trinitarian sense as he defends the eternal nature of the Son. He writes:

. . . and the Lord Himself says, "What I see the Father do, that do I also;" so when baptism is given, whom the Father baptizes, him the Son baptizes; and whom the Son baptizes, he is consecrated in the Holy Ghost.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 370.

The ordinance of baptism is a scriptural hallmark of Trinitarian theology. The Son is named as cohesive part of the Godhead along with the person of the Holy Spirit. The act of baptism declares communion with God and depicts community with the *ecclesia* (church).

The concept of communion with God is a key ingredient in the Athanasian argument. The ordinance of baptism cannot be revealed as acceptable Trinitarian theology in the scheme of the Arian heresy simply because a Son/Creature is united in fellowship with the Creator in securing the consecration of the saints. Athanasius writes:

For what fellowship is there between creature and Creator? Of why is a thing made classed with the Maker in the consecration of all of us? Or why, as you hold, is faith in one Creator and in one creature delivered to us?¹⁰⁶

The ordinance baptism, in the Arian heresy, unites a creature with Creator. Therein lies the difficulty in that the creature is not needed. The rationale is that if God made the creature a Son, then certainly God can make all sons. The reason the ordinance of baptism denies the eternality of the Son, from the Arian position, is that the ontological unity of the Godhead is fused with different essences. This is the point in CA 2.42 as Athanasius

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 370.

states, "For the Arians do not baptize into the Father and Son, but into Creator and creature, and Maker and work."¹⁰⁷

The ordinance of baptism is an evidence that the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 is theologically deficient. The eternal Son is the Wisdom of God and as such is an active participant in the *ecclesia* (church), which is the focus of the Church's theological content and the soteriological basis for humanity's communion with the Godhead.

The interesting note is that Athanasius links proper theology as being achieved within the confines of the *ecclesia* (church). The Trinitarian focus of theology is only accomplished as one stays in communion with the triune God and is aided by the community of believers. The point is that the Arians cannot develop theology simply because they are not a part of the *ecclesia* (church), nor are they counted as Christians. To demonstrate his point, Athanasius writes:

In thinking to be baptized into the name of one who exists not, they will receive nothing; and ranking themselves with a creature, from the creation they will have no help, and believing in one unlike and foreign to the Father in essence, **to the Father they will not be joined** [emphasis added], not having His own Son by nature. . . .¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 371.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 371-2.

Athanasius believes that the Arians have used names and titles without the benefit of the knowledge of the corresponding reality to which the names and titles refer.¹⁰⁹ The Arian soteriology is based upon a relationship with a creature and, therefore, the soteriological relationship of the Arians to the Godhead is in question.

Rolan Williams states:

If "Father" and "Son" are replaceable terms, if they can be rendered as "creator" and "creature", then the baptized is deprived of a real contract with the Godhead: the threefold divine naming in baptism does not tell the truth about God, if the non-Nicenes are to be believed.¹¹⁰

However, there is more at stake than just the Arians. Athanasius gives a pastoral warning of those following the Arians. He is concerned that their eternal destiny is also at stake. The Arians and their followers will be judged at the Father's throne and no hope and no help can be offered to devotees of the Arian heresy.¹¹¹

The introduction to the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 is the basis for Athanasius to review the Eternal Sonship of the *Logos*. The Arians cannot have an

¹⁰⁹ This argument will be more developed in Book 3 of *Contra Arianos*.

¹¹⁰ Rowan Williams, "Baptism and the Arian Controversy" in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, eds. Michel R. Barnes & Daniel H. Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 151-2.

¹¹¹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 372.

eternal Son since they accept the Son's creation through the means of another eternal being called Wisdom or *sofia*. The Arians have come to this theological conclusion based upon an improper hermeneutic which has led to a deficient theology. Athanasius may seem harsh as he writes of the eternal condemnation, but, in his perspective, soteriology is affected by the theology of the Arians and was the rationale for the Arian denouncement at the Council of Nicea in 325. Thus, he has the advantage of writing from an ecclesiastical position and not from mere personal opinion.¹¹²

This introduction serves to give Athanasius the ability to demonstrate the eternal nature of the Son as he considers the exposition of Proverbs 8:22. CA 2.43 concludes the introduction to the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 but also sets the platform for the exposition (of the same passage) which begins in CA 2.44.

¹¹² In order to be objective about Athanasius' perspective it must be admitted that he probably does write from a personal opinion. He simply has the support of the decision from the Council of Nicea as he considers the Arian heresy.

The Exposition of Proverbs 8:22

Proverbs 8:22 and Proper Interpretation (CA 2.44-9)

Athanasius reviews the main passage¹¹³ of the Arian controversy and attempts to do his own exposition of Proverbs 8:22 in order to correct the faulty interpretation of the Arians.

The entire Arian debate revolves around the procedure of interpretation of the Christological passages. It is certainly Athanasius' goal to give an anti-Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22, but at the same time also present the orthodox position.

In the process of interpreting the Scriptures, Athanasius understands that the text, especially Proverbs 8:22, is from the Son, reveals the Son, and then allows the reader of the Scripture to encounter the Son.

It must be noted that Athanasius also believes the Proverbs 8:22 passage to reveal the natural Sonship of Christ. Thus, his interpretation of the verb "create" will reflect his presupposition. However, it is also his opinion that if the Scriptures speak of the Son as being eternal,

¹¹³ The rationale for Proverbs 8:22 being the main passage of the Arian heresy is nothing less than objectively verifying the amount of time and focus dedicated to its treatment. Athanasius spends approximately 50% of Book 2 (sections 39-82) reviewing, critiquing, and doing expositional work on Proverbs 8:22.

and not a creation, then the challenge to interpretation is to understand the verb "create" in the context of his famous "Scope of Scripture."¹¹⁴ Therefore, any meaning of the word "create" must be understood in background of the totality of the scriptural witness and teachings about the Son.

Another issue that must be addressed is the manner in which Athanasius performs his theological task. The task of doing theology is secondary in and of itself. In other words, Athanasius is not doing theology for the sake of theology. His goal, being of the School of Alexandria, is the pursuit of communion with the Son. The Son is the purpose of all study and the primary focus of Athanasian interpretation. It is his persuasion that doxology and theology are bound together in purpose and content and then expressed in the community of believers or the ecclesia (church).

The Scriptures, the community of believers, and the tradition of the ecclesia (church) are the means by which the Son is encountered and worshipped. This also demonstrates that the reader of the Scriptures can interact with the text from the above orthodox means, but cannot force the

¹¹⁴ This term has been dealt with earlier in the thesis.

text to accept a hermeneutic that is outside the proper means of interpretation. Through the above means, the worshipper of the Son will encounter the Son in an epistemological manner that will impact his mind, heart, and soul. The worshipper will learn more and more about the triune God that he or she worships.

Athanasius begins his exposition by recognizing that the hermeneutical procedure of the Arians missed the genre of Proverbs 8:22. He writes that “. . . what is said in Proverbs, is not said plainly, but is put forth latently. . . .”¹¹⁵

The idea is that the proverbs have another meaning than what is obvious to the reader. Therefore, one has to “unfold the sense”¹¹⁶ of the text in order to understand the meaning. The point that Athanasius stressed was that the true meaning is not clear as it has been hidden in the text, in juxtaposition to the Arian interpretation, of a straight-forward literal meaning.

The Arians and Athanasius both understand Proverbs 8:22 to refer to the Son. That is not the question to be considered. The issue at hand is “how” the text addresses

¹¹⁵ Athanasius, “Against the Arians,” 372.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 372.

the nature of the Son. This is where the difference of opinion is clearly seen.

The Arians focused upon the literal meaning of the word *ktizw* (created) whereas Athanasius focused his attention on the secondary meaning. The basic difference is that Athanasius sees the word *ktizw* (created) as having the same meaning as the word *poiew* (make) in the interpretative process.¹¹⁷ Thus, the word *ktizw* (created) must have another meaning that is not apparent from the Proverbs 8:22 text.

He uses Proverbs 9:1 as a reference in order to construct a meaning for *ktizw* (created). The meaning of "house" is that it refers to the physical body of humanity.¹¹⁸ The rationale for this is to set his interpretation in terms and meanings of soteriology. Basically, Athanasius understands this passage to refer to the human body of the Son so that the "works" of God could be accomplished *via* the body. Athanasius states:

For in this passage, not as signifying the Essence of His Godhead, nor His own everlasting and genuine generation from the Father, . . . but on the other hand His manhood and Economy towards us.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Since the argument for this conclusion has already been considered as he addressed *poiew* (make), Athanasius does not reconstruct the argument again.

¹¹⁸ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 372.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 372.

Once again, the Athanasian interpretation makes a distinction between the human nature of the Son and the divine nature. He clearly understands this passage to refer to the human nature of Jesus Christ.

Athanasius builds a paradigm of Scriptures that reveal *ktizw* to mean something other than "created." He reviews Psalm 50:12 and Ephesians 23:15. The meaning is that God did not literally create a "new heart" for David but renewed his heart.¹²⁰ In the Ephesian passage, the idea is that because of the Son, spiritual renewal takes place for humanity. This spiritual renewal is also witnessed in the writings of Jeremiah 31:22.

The point is made that the word "*ktizw*" must be interpreted to mean "renewal." Athanasius states:

. . . accordingly let "He created" be understood, not of His being a creature, but of that human nature which became His, for to this belongs creation . . . "He created," then indeed not to understand it of the essence and the generation, but the renewal. . . .¹²¹

The Arians had the ability to understand the genre of the Proverbs. Athanasius states that they understood how to interpret the meaning of "house" and yet stumbled at the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 373.

¹²¹ Ibid., 373.

idea of interpreting *ktizw* in the same hermeneutical fashion.¹²²

In CA 2.47, Athanasius appeals to John 1:1, 14; Galatians 3:13; and 2 Corinthians 5:21, as evidence that the Son does not change ontologically. The Son is not transformed into a man by change of nature, nor does He become actual sin and thus become an actual curse. Instead he states that Proverbs 8:22 means "that He put on the created body and that God created for Him for our sakes, preparing for Him the created body. . . ." ¹²³

The soteriological aspect of the work of the Son accomplished in the body is not yet addressed as the attention of Athanasius is upon the validity of the eternal nature of the Son.

This interpretation supports the bulk of the Athanasian theological position. The Son is eternal in the *logos* but does have a body that is prepared in the course of time. This addition of humanity in no way changes the essence or *ousia* of the *Logos*.

In CA 2.48-49, Athanasius offers the explanation that the Son could not be created even first since spiritual beings were created in a simultaneous act.

¹²² Ibid., 374.

¹²³ Ibid., 374.

Athanasius writes, "For as to separate stars or the great lights, not this appeared first, and that second, but in one day and by the same command, they were all called into being."¹²⁴ This concept shatters the Arian interpretation as the Scriptures yield the information that all created beings were created on the same day and at the same time. Therefore, there could not be an ontological difference between the Son and creation. Athanasius states that the Scriptures make it "very plain that He differs in essence and nature from the creatures. . . ."¹²⁵ This being the case, there is no comparison to the nature of the Son to creation. In addition the Son cannot be classified as one of the created beings. Again, Athanasius states:

Hence, He is not classed with creatures in Scripture. . . . For the One creates, and the rest were created; and the One is the own Word and Wisdom of the Father's Essence, and through this Word things which came to be, which before existed not, were made.¹²⁶

The eternal nature of the Son is still intact and thus acted in creation to create the uncreated. The *Logos* possesses the ability to create not in that He possesses Wisdom but in that He, as the *Logos*, is Wisdom. This is further evidence of the eternal nature of the Son.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 375.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 375.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 375.

The Meaning of the Son's Works (CA 2.50-6)

Athanasius reviews the prepositional phrase, "εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ" (for his work). He seems convinced that the meaning of Proverbs 8:22 is directly related between the prepositional phrase and the verb. The prepositional phrase modifies or explains the action or meaning of the verb, κτίσῃ (created). The real issue of grammatical interpretation concerns the meaning of the object of the prepositional phrase. The word "εἰς" is used in reference to time and is translated "for."¹²⁷ Athanasius builds on the meaning of εἰς as a specific point of clarity. He states:

Therefore if He is before all things, yet says "He created me" (not "that I might make the words," but) "**for the works**," [emphasis added] . . . He will seem later than the works, finding them on His creation already in existence before His, for the sake of which He is also brought into being.¹²⁸

This interpretative focus on εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ (for his work) strikes at the heart of the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. If κτίσῃ (created) signifies an ontological creation, then the creation of the Son would be after the rest of creation, which is a contradiction to the Arian theology, not to mention the contradiction of the biblical

¹²⁷ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, 128.

¹²⁸ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 375.

account of creation. Thus, Athanasius can ask, ". . . how is He before all things notwithstanding?"¹²⁹

Next, Athanasius demonstrates that Wisdom can call the Father, "Lord." His explanation of this is that this spoken act reveals the economic relationship of the Son to the Father. This is simply an expression of the role of the Son economically. Athanasius sees the eternality of the Son in this act, even though the Son in his fleshly abode performs it. The economic style of address in no way means that the Son is inferior. He states:

. . . so when the Son, on taking the servants form, says, "The Lord created me a beginning of His ways," let them not deny the eternity of His Godhead, and that "in the beginning was the Word," and "all things were made by Him," and "in Him all things were created."¹³⁰

The Athanasian economic interpretation adds strength to the concept of this thesis: the Son is eternal in His nature and relationship with the Father. Athanasius also evidences this as he reveals that natural servants address their Lords as Father. This in no way denounces their own nature. For that matter, it does not imply an inferiority issue on the part of the servant.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 375.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 376.

In CA. 2.51, Athanasius also states that the economic ministry must follow the eternal being of the Son. In other words, the Son could not do the works of the Father unless His nature is eternal. Athanasius produces John 1:1 and 14 as proof for his rationale. The point of this is that an economic ministry is in time. This also demonstrates that the meaning of Proverbs 8:22 refers to the person of the Word and not the ontological nature of the Word. Therefore, addressing the Father as Lord is appropriate in the economic position of the Son's ministry. Athanasius notes that earthly servants call the Father, "Lord" but that does not change the ontological position of the creature. When the Son, in like manner, addresses the Father as "Lord," that does not change the ontological position of the Son. That action is simply revealing the economic ministry of the Son.

The role of Wisdom is to meet the need of "the works." If the works were not in existence, there would be no need for an economic ministry to them. Isaiah 49:5 shows that the Son was created for the existing need of the works or the need of Israel's redemption. This is further demonstrated in the use of John 8:58 in CA 2.53. Jesus declared that He existed before Abraham, and since Abraham is the Father of Israel in Isaiah 49:5, it is only logical

that the Son existed before all—even before the necessity of the works. Athanasius utilizes Proverbs 8:27 with John 8:58 in order to reveal the eternal nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

In CA. 2.53, Athanasius argues that the phrases, "He created," "He formed," and "He set," all have the same meaning. He states:

"He created" then and "He formed" and "He set," having the same meaning, do not denote the beginning of His being, or of His essence as created, but His beneficent renovation which came to pass for us.¹³¹

Athanasius applies the meaning of these phrases to the Son's incarnation. He utilizes the Philippians 2:6 passage as support for his conclusion. The interesting note about the Athanasian hermeneutic is that he informs the reader that when the Scriptures speak of the Son becoming human there is a cause associated with the act of the incarnation. Again Athanasius writes:

For when He said, "He created." He forthwith added the reason. . . . And this is usual with divine Scripture; for when it signifies the fleshly origination of the Son, it adds also the cause for which He became man. . . .¹³²

Athanasius informs the reader that any proper interpretation must be balanced by the intention of the

¹³¹ Ibid., 377.

¹³² Ibid., 377.

Father's stated purpose. Therefore a theological qualifier within the text is of itself a guide to a proper hermeneutical interpretation. He simply demonstrates that the meaning of Proverbs 8:22 refers to the origin of the Son's humanity and not to the origin of the Son's divinity.

The purpose of the incarnation is addressed in CA 2.55. It is for humanity's redemptive purpose that the Son became human. Athanasius utilizes Ephesians 2:15 to demonstrate the effects of humanity's redemption: the Son created one new man in His own body! The creation of one new person out of the existence of two persons is evidence that the humanity of Jesus affects the soteriology of all humans. The word "kitzw" is used to describe the creation of the new man. Apparently Athanasius understands Ephesians 2:15 to be an adequate explanation of Proverbs 8:22.

Athanasius challenges the Arian soteriology in CA 2.56. He simply states that a creature was not created for humanity. Thus, any salvific purpose and function is ineffective should the Son be deemed a creature. He writes, "And it being so with us, sin has not lost its reign over the flesh, being inherent and not cast out of it."¹³³ The idea is that the Son cannot act as *Savoir* but only as

¹³³ Ibid., 378.

teacher. That is difficult because of the sin that is associated with the created body. Thus, epistemologically the Son can only teach, and that teaching is external to His nature. Since He is deemed a creature He cannot know the Father in an ontological sense. Therefore, the soteriology of the Arians is highly suspect.

The alternate view of the orthodox position is that the Son was created for the works of salvation. Athanasius writes:

. . . so when for our need He became man, consistently does He use language, as ourselves, "The Lord hath create Me," that, by His dwelling in the flesh, sin might perfectly be expelled from the flesh, and we might have a free mind.¹³⁴

The soteriology of the orthodox position is predicated upon the Son being both divine and human. The ontological status of the Son did not change when, in time, he took the form of humanity. The fleshly human body of the Son is the means by which soteriology was accomplished. The incarnated body of the Lord allowed for an epistemology of the Father to be revealed in the Son and expressed to the human recipients who need grace. Therefore, Athanasius can conclude this section with a proclamation and explanation

¹³⁴ Ibid., 378.

of his theological premise: "The Son then is not a creature."¹³⁵

The conclusion of this section is that the Scriptures form a harmonic whole and reveal the eternal nature of the Son as well as the economic ministry of the Son's incarnation. The fact annunciated is that Proverbs 8:22 reveals that the Son's human nature is created for the works that the Father has ordained the Son to accomplish.

**Natural Sonship, Proverbs 8:25
(CA 2.57-61a)**

In an interesting presentation, Athanasius reviews the meaning of Proverbs 8:25 in the following section. The rationale is that Proverbs 8:22 and 25 have the same speaker but a slightly different subject. The Son (or Wisdom) is referred to as begotten.

It is not misleading to state that Athanasius understands the meaning of verse 22 by his interpretation of verse 25. In this section Athanasius demonstrates that the Son is an *offspring*. This simply means that Proverbs 8:22 must refer to the creation of the human body of the Son since *offspring* implies the same substance as the Father.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 379.

Athanasius utilizes Deuteronomy 32:6 and 18 to demonstrate the differences in the natures of an *offspring* and a *creature*. He is articulate to note that the order of the verbs is significant. *Beget* comes after *create* and *make*. Athanasius understands this verb order to be intentional in order to communicate not only the structure of the grammar but the content as well.

The significance of the verb order means that *create* and *make* are used for creatures, whereas, *begat* is used for natural *offspring*. He states his position in the use of negative language. He writes:

For instances Moses did not say of the creation, "In the beginning He begat," nor "In the beginning was," but "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Nor did David say in the Psalm, "Thy hands have 'begotten me,'" but "made me and fashioned me," **everywhere applying the word "made" to the creatures. But to the Son contrariwise; for he has not said "I made," but "I begat," and "He begets me,"** and "My heart uttered a good word" [emphases added].¹³⁶

The meaning of *beget* can only be applied to an *offspring* or natural son and not to a creature. The significance of this position is that Athanasius is establishing an argument for the eternal nature of the Son. Creatures, on the other hand, are *made* and thus they have a

¹³⁶ Ibid., 378-9.

beginning in time and space. The *offspring* or the Son does not have a beginning, as He is eternal. Athanasius writes:

Thus does divine Scripture recognize the difference between the Offspring and things made, and show that the Offspring is a Son, not begun from any beginning, **but eternal** . . . [emphasis added].¹³⁷

This statement directly contradicts the Arian position of a created Son. The grammar of the Deuteronomy texts does not support the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22-25. The term 'beget', when applied to creatures, is adoptive in scope and does not indicate a natural Sonship. Creatures are not the natural children of the Father. This is evidenced as they are adopted as His children. They are God's children by grace only. The rationale for this position is that creatures have a different *ousia* (essence), and they must experience grace in order to become the sons of God. In order to prove his point, Athanasius utilizes John 1:12-13. He notes that *become* precedes the verb *begotten*. The implication is that the sonship of the creature is not natural but adoptive. He writes:

And here to the cautious distinction is well kept up, for first he says "become" because they are not called sons by nature but by adoption; then he says "were begotten," because they too received at any rate the name son.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid., 380.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 380.

This statement reveals the process of grace in the life of the believer. The creature exists in a natural condition that is alienated from the Father. The *ousia* (essence) of the creature is so vastly different to the Son, who possesses the same *ousia* (essence) of the Father, and must transfer grace to the creature in order for adoption to take place. Athanasius writes:

Accordingly this passage also proves, that we are not sons by nature, but the Son who is in us; and again, that God is not our Father by nature, but of that Word in us, in whom we "cry Abba, Father." And so in like manner, the Father calls them sons in whomsoever He sees His own Son, and says "I begat;" . . .¹³⁹

In CA. 2.60, Athanasius returns to Proverbs 8:25 to demonstrate the meaning of "The Lord created Me." Proverbs 8:22 speaks of the *ktizw* (creation) of Wisdom. Verse 25 speaks of the *begetting* of Wisdom. Athanasius claims that there is unnecessary repetitiveness unless the Word is not a creature. However, it seems as if Athanasius concedes to the Arian interpretation. In the John 1:12-13 text, it seems as if *create* has the obvious literal meaning, but *beget* has a symbolic or metaphorical meaning. The question must be asked of the Proverbs 8:22 and 25 text. Can the same meanings of *create* and *beget*, in the Johannine text, be applied to these same two words in the Proverbs texts?

¹³⁹ Ibid., 380.

Athanasius gives his answer based upon a conjunction. Verse 25 starts with the conjunction *de* (but). This sets up a contrast with verse 22. The conjunction *de* (but) reveals that *beget* must precede *create* in time and order. The idea is that the conjunction of verse 25 means that the content of verse 25 must precede the content of verse 22. Athanasius writes:

. . . He has added, not simply "begat me," but with the connection of the conjunction "But," as guarding thereby the term "created," . . . but that "begat me" is prior to "created me." ¹⁴⁰

The literal/metaphorical interpretation is also seen in the ordering of the verses, as verse 25 belongs logically before verse 22. The nature of the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and then in the economy of the Son's ministry was the Son created as a human.

The Athanasian interpretation of Proverbs 8:25 is that the verse refers to the deity of the Son. There is no metaphorical language, nor is there any hint of an economic ministry involved. Proverbs 8:25 proclaims the Son's existence, but it does not give a reason as to the Son's existence. It is hard to miss the point of the Athanasian interpretation that the Son exists eternally.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 381.

The Meaning of Firstborn (CA 2.61b-64)

The word "prwtotokoç" (firstborn) was used by the Arians to depict the status of the Lord. It is somewhat likely that the Arians also used prwtotokoç (firstborn) as a commentary on Proverbs 8:22-25. Regardless, Athanasius examines Colossians 2:15-18 in order to support his exegesis of Proverbs 8:25. He has stated that Proverbs 8:25 is to be interpreted economically, and now he offers Colossians 2:18 as further textual support.

In CA 2.61, he examines prwtotokoç (firstborn). The significance of the word is stated as such:

Whence also is He said to be "First-born from the dead," not that He died before us, for we had died first; but because having undergone death for us and abolished it, He was the first to rise, as man, for our sakes raising His own Body.¹⁴¹

The word "prwtotokoç" (firstborn) is applied to the Son because of humanity's spiritual death. The assumption is that Athanasius understands prwtotokoç (firstborn) in the background of grace being transferred from the Son to humanity. The theological concept is that the *Logos* resides in the believer and now that same believer is free from sin and death. The soteriology of the Son is accomplished *via* His earthly soma (body).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 381.

The term 'prwtotokoç' (firstborn) simply refers to the fact that the Son's economic works are accomplished through the death and subsequent resurrection of the Lord's body.

The act of being the prwtotokoç (firstborn) simply refers to the Son's "condescension to the creatures."¹⁴² The Son took the human body and secured the salvation of humanity with that body. In the process prwtotokoç (firstborn) illustrates grace for salvation from the effects of sin and the resurrection from the state of spiritual death.

In CA 2.62, Athanasius compares the monogenhç (*only-begotten*) with the prwtotokoç (*first-born*). The difference between the two terms is that prwtotokoç refers to the humanity of the Son, whereas, monogenhç refers to the deity of the Son. The obvious fact is that monogenhç (*only-begotten*) states that the Son is proper to the Father. It is a word that points to the Son as having the same ousia (essence) as the Father. On the other hand, prwtotokoç (*firstborn*) is the basis for the Son's brotherhood with humanity. Athanasius states this as he writes, "For the

¹⁴² Ibid., 382.

term 'Only-begotten' is used where there are not brethren, but 'First-born' because of brethren."¹⁴³

The interesting fact is simply there are two terms that apply to the Son, and both seem contradictory unless one takes into account the dual nature of the Son. Dragas states that "Creaturehood and Sonship are qualitatively different, but not incompatible."¹⁴⁴ The Arians failed to consider this possibility and thus confused the terms. Consequently, they confused the two natures of the Son.

The orthodox position considers these terms and understands that they are indicative of the two natures of the Son: His divinity and His humanity. However, Athanasius takes the position that the two terms must be clarified in order to understand the relationship between them. This is also necessary to evaluate the relationship between the two terms so that one can understand the different natures that the words represent. Athanasius writes:

Certainly, those two terms being inconsistent with each other, one should say that the attribute of being Only-begotten has justly the preference in the instance of the Word, in that there is no other word, or Wisdom, but He alone is very Son of the Father.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid., 382.

¹⁴⁴ Dragas, 129-30.

¹⁴⁵ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 382.

Athanasius concludes that "different relations" are in view as the terms are used. The issue of "cause" is the interpretive factor for Athanasius assigning *prwtotokos* (firstborn) to represent the economic status of the Son. The "cause" factor is nothing less than the redemption of the creature/creation motif.

In this vein of thinking, Athanasius reveals that the Arians have misunderstood the term '*prwtotokos*' (firstborn) and applied it to the origination of the Son. The Arians used this term to propagate their doctrine that the Son was created to be the Creator. Athanasius states:

For if He is a creature, He will be First-born of Himself. How then is it possible, O Arians, for Him to be before and after Himself? Next, if He is a creature, and the whole creation through Him came to be, and in Him consists, how can He both create the creation and be one of the things which consists in Him?¹⁴⁶

The point of this statement is that Athanasius reveals the logical inconsistency of the Arian interpretation. The Son would have to be created in order to create. Then, if he is a creature he would have to be created with the rest of creation. This would mean that he is both before creation in his own creation and after

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 383.

creation in that he must wait for creation to be created.

This is sheer silliness!

The issue of Athanasius is that the Scriptures speak of the Son as having two distinct natures. The term 'prwtotokoç' (firstborn) and the term 'monogenhç' (only-begotten) reveal those two natures. This form of interpretation safeguards the divinity of the Son, and yet accounts for the changes in the Son by addition of humanity. Meijering states:

Looking at the way in which Athanasius interprets various Biblical texts it becomes clear to us that he wants to show that all those texts which speak of activity and change in the divine person, do not contradict his ontological conception of God which implies that God is the unchangeable Being.¹⁴⁷

Athanasius argues that the eternal Son is unchanged in His being as represented by the term 'monogenhç' (only-begotten). This foundational understanding of the Son's eternal nature is the basis for understanding the Son as being the prwtotokoç (firstborn) of many brethren.

In conclusion of the consideration of the Son as prwtotokoç (firstborn) of God, Athanasius simply implies that this term is nothing more than a title that reflects the economy of the Son's ministry. He states, ". . . He is the

¹⁴⁷ Meijering, 101.

'First-born of creation,' because of this adoption of all as sons."¹⁴⁸

**The Meaning of "The Beginning of Ways"
(CA 2.65-72)**

Athanasius considers the question as to how the Son relates to the phrase, "the beginning of ways." He counters the Arian notion that the meaning of the term 'beginning' refers to a starting point of the Son's existence. He, therefore, interprets the phrase, "the beginning of ways," from Hebrews 10:20, and demonstrates how the Son can be *the beginning of ways*.

Athanasius considers that there are two "ways." The "first way" into paradise "was lost through Adam."¹⁴⁹ This first way was no longer a valid way by which humanity could communicate or encounter the living God. The result of disobedience meant the corruption and death of all humanity.

The "second way" is the created flesh of the Son. Athanasius states:

. . . therefore the Word of God, who loves man, puts on Him created flesh at the Father's will, that whereas the first man had made it dead through the transgression, He Himself might quicken it in the blood of His own body, and might open "for us a way

¹⁴⁸ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 383.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 384.

new and living," as the Apostles say, "through the veil, that is to say, His flesh. . . ." ¹⁵⁰

The "second way" is the redemption of humanity that is found in the work of the Son. This way is also equated with the new creation of 2 Corinthians 5:17. The soteriological importance of Athanasius' interpretation is predicated upon the human flesh of Jesus being the means of redemption. The human body of Jesus not only renewed the first creation but also preserves the second creation of the renewed individual.

In CA 2.66, Athanasius reviews the process of soteriology. The renewal of the first creation and the subsequent preservation of the second creation is more than any human could accomplish. Redemption required the payment of the offender in that the Law required the death of humanity as just payment. The result is that all of humanity was required to die, and in fact, did die spiritually, which was followed by the body's physical death. This is the condition of the "first way."

The "second way" also required the payment of death to redeem humanity. However, only a sinless being could fulfill the requirements of the law. Athanasius states:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 384.

. . . therefore the perfect Word of God puts around Him an imperfect body, and is said to be created "for the works;" that, paying the debt in our stead, He might, by Himself, perfect what was wanting to man. Now immortality was wanting to him, and the way to paradise.¹⁵¹

Athanasius does not pursue his theory of the atonement simply because that is not his purpose. He does, however, suggest that the Son acted as a substitute for humanity and paid the debt for sin and corruption.

The interesting note is that Athanasius still refutes the Arian concept that the Son is a creature, but He does so in order to validate the soteriological accomplishments of the Son. As stated earlier, Athanasius understands the Arian heresy to undermine the salvation of humanity.

He reviews the issue of the atonement as a means to say that his interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 is in agreement with the teaching of the atonement found in the rest of the Scriptures. For that matter, terms such as 'renewal', 'created', and even 'way' are to be interpreted as economic terms describing the works and not the origination of the Son. These terms are related to the Son's soteriological work.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 384.

In CA 2.67, Athanasius raises the issue that the Son's flesh is the focal point of Proverbs 8:22 when he asked, "When then received He the works to perfect, O God's enemies?"¹⁵²

The economy of Proverbs 8:22 is connected with the undertaking of the work at the time of the incarnation, crucifixion, and following resurrection. Athanasius writes:

Therefore it remains for us, to say that when He has become man, then He took the works. For then He perfected them, by healing our wounds and vouchsafing to us the resurrection from the dead.¹⁵³

The explanation of the Son's soteriological accomplishments establishes the rationale for the creation of the human flesh of the Son. The connection to Proverbs 8:22 only demonstrates that the Arians have a Son/Creature who cannot fulfill the requirements and demands of the atonement. Athanasius does this by stating that death is proper to flesh.¹⁵⁴ The implication is that Proverbs 8:22 must be understood to include the Lord's death. In such a position, this serves to validate the interpretation that Proverbs 8:22 refers to the Son's human body.

¹⁵² Ibid., 384.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 385.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 384.

Athanasius records an Arian objection to this interpretation in CA 2.68. The Arians question the need for a divine Savior. Their contention is that God could "speak the word only and undo the curse."¹⁵⁵ If this is true, then logically, there is no need for a divine Savior. It becomes a mute point.

Athanasius does a quick review of the rationality of the incarnation of the Lord and its implications on the death of the Son. It must be remembered that Athanasius equates the phrase, "the works" as referring to the death of the Son. They miss the point of the Lord's death in Proverbs 8:22, and thus, consequently, they do not understand the text: the incarnation of Proverbs 8:22 is necessary for humanity.

Athanasius reviews some of the historical event of salvation.¹⁵⁶ He considers the flood, the exodus, and the history of the incarnation. The common denominator is the agency of the mediator. He states that the use of the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 385.

¹⁵⁶ The correct theological term for this concept is *heilsgeschichte*, a German word meaning the "history of salvation" (*Dictionary of Theological Terms*, ed. Alan Cairns [Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002], s.v. "*heilsgeschichte*"). It is used by theologians who view the Bible as essentially such a history. It makes God's redemptive purpose the controlling factor in all theological investigation. Athanasius does not review all of salvation history. He only reviews the pertinent issues that are relevant to his topic.

mediator is the best method for humanity's redemption. He writes:

For what He does, that is profitable for men, and was not fitting in any other way; and what is profitable and fitting, for that he provides. Accordingly, He came, not "that He might be ministered unto, but that He might minister," and might work our salvation.¹⁵⁷

Athanasius reviews this history in order to establish that God is working consistently with his own established method. The methodology God utilizes is based upon the benefit that it brings humanity. The interesting feature is that Athanasius gives an explanation for the mediator. It is based upon humanity receiving grace. He writes:

Moreover, the good reason of what He did may be seen thus; if God had but spoken, because it was in His power, and so the curse had been undone, the power had been shown of Him who gave the word, but man had become such as Adam was before the transgression, having received grace from without, and not having it united to the body . . . nay, perhaps had become worse, because he had learned to transgress.¹⁵⁸

Athanasius states that if God had but spoken redemption, then humanity would have been converted from without. In doing so, no internal redemption would have existed. The result is that humanity would be the same as before the fall. However, this time humanity's condition

¹⁵⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 385.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 385-6

would be with the knowledge of knowing how to sin without the ability to conquer sin *via* grace. The implication is that God would have to keep on speaking redemption should humanity continue to rebel.

In CA 2.69-70, Athanasius reveals the relationship that exists between the Son and His soteriological accomplishments. He explains this relationship from the position of the Arian Son/Creature. He writes:

Again, if the Son were a creature, man had remained mortal as before, not being joined to God; for a creature had not joined creatures to God, as seeking itself one to join it; nor would a portion of the creation have been the creation's salvation, as needing salvation itself.¹⁵⁹

If the Son were created He could only be classified as a creature. A creature could not yield grace to forgive sins since he would need grace himself. The Son/Creature would need salvation just as the rest of creation.

The orthodox alternative is that the Father sent the Son to be the sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice is accomplished in the fleshly body that was created for the Son/*Logos*. The death of the Son's body was in place of humanity so that the curse of sin is destroyed.

Athanasius states that the soteriological accomplishments of God would never have happened unless the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 386.

Son were truly God. The salvation of humanity is lacking if the Son were deemed a created creature. Athanasius writes:

For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father's presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body.¹⁶⁰

The incarnation was not a creature of the *Logos* but a creation of the Lord's earthly body. Athanasius reveals the significance of the body as being the medium of grace. He writes:

And we had not been delivered from sin and the curse, unless it had been by natural human flesh, which the Word put on (for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign), so also the man had not been deified, unless the Word who became flesh had been by nature from the Father and true and proper to Him.¹⁶¹

The soteriological concept is that the Son took on flesh so as to identify and be a part of humanity. The fleshly body of the Son was a real human body. The significance is that the Son could take humanity soteriologically and unite humanity with the Godhead. Thus, the Son who has put on the substance of humanity and yet is not ontologically changed as the *Logos* is able to unite humanity with God.

The incarnation did not cause a change in the ontological status of the Son/*Logos*. Humanity was an

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 386.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 386.

addition but not a subtraction to the integrity of the ontological character of the Son. As a result, the relationship between the Son and His work of soteriology is based upon the ontological essence that is inherent to the Son's nature.

In a good use of logic, Athanasius appeals to the Arians to deny the human nature since they deny the divine nature of the Son. He writes:

Therefore let those who deny that the Son is from the Father by nature and proper to His Essence, deny also that He took true human flesh of Mary Ever-Virgin; for in neither case had it been of profit to us men, whether the Word were not true and naturally Son of God, or the flesh not true which He assumed.¹⁶²

Athanasius makes the claim that if the eternal nature of the Son is denied, then logically one must deny the fleshly nature of the Son for that is the medium that unites all of humanity to the Father.

In the context of Proverbs 8:22, the issue at stake is that the interpretation of the passage means that Wisdom received a created body. The emphasis is that the created body is the focal point of the text. Should that premise be denied and the faulty theology of the Arians be asserted, then the creation of the Arian Son cannot provide the salvation of anyone. It is necessary for the interpretation

¹⁶² Ibid., 386-7.

of the passage to be understood as a reference to the created body of the Lord.

In CA 2.71-72, Athanasius considers the difference between the Son and His works. There is no doubt that there is a relationship between the Son and His ability to accomplish soteriology. However, the Son as a work is not one and the same. The Son would be a work of God in the Arian system. This concept has been denounced by Arius several times, but he underscores the importance of this simply because the Arian interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 requires the Son to be a work of the Father. Athanasius uses the analogy that one "who comes into the house, is not part of the house, but is other than the house, so He who is created for the works, must be by nature other than the works."¹⁶³

Athanasius argues for the distinction between the Son/Wisdom and the works. He says that this distinction is emphasized in such passages as Hebrews 4:12-13; John 8:35-36; and Romans 8:19-23. The idea is that the Son can be distinguished from a work in that He is different in kind (Hebrews 4:12-13), has the ability to free humanity from sin (John 8:35-36), and can do the same for all creation,

¹⁶³ Ibid., 387.

who awaits the final consummation of redemption (Romans 8:19-23). Again, this interpretation directly contrasts that of the Arians in that a Son/Creature could not redeem that of which He is a part.

This concept argues for the eternal nature of the Son as being distinct from the Son/Creature of the Arians, which was created in time as a work for the redemption of works. The Arians do not have a consistent, soteriological foundation for humanity's redemption. Their Son/Creature is a work and does not have the ability to unite humanity with God simply because there is no epistemological basis for such unity. Athanasius propagates this concept with his house analogy. He writes:

The servant remains not in the house forever, but the Son remains forever; if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed; it is clearer than the light from these considerations also, that the Word of God is not a creature but true Son, and by nature genuine, of the Father.¹⁶⁴

The phrase, "the beginning of ways," *per* Athanasius, must be interpreted in the context of verse 25 which has a reference to the eternal nature of the Son. The phrase, "the beginning of ways," obviously means that the body of the Lord was created and united to the eternal Son. Thus, there was a unification of flesh to divinity in the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 388.

personhood of the Son. This Son/*Logos* unification serves to demonstrate the soteriology of the Son as He unites humanity to the Godhead in His Son/*Logos* existence.

The Interpretation of Proverbs 8:23
(CA 2.73-77)

Athanasius believes it is necessary to clarify the meaning of verse 23 in relation to verse 22. The Arians used verse 23 in much the same way as verse 22 in that they understood the phrase, "He founded me before the world," as a reference to the creation of the Son.

Athanasius uses Proverbs 3:19 as means to interpret Proverbs 8:23. The content of Proverbs 3:19 established the fact that Wisdom is a natural part of the Godhead. However, there is a double account of the Son as Proverbs 8:23 clearly states that the Son was *founded before the world*.

In a most direct manner, Athanasius charges the Arians to search the Scriptures to consider the naming of the Son. He quotes the Apostle Peter's confession of Jesus Christ as being called the Son of God. He also quotes Satan's questioning of the Son as Son. He states:

This also the Father of the Arian heresy asked as one of his first questions; "If thou be the Son of God;" for he knew that this is the truth and the sovereign principle of our faith; and that, if He himself were Himself the Son, the tyranny of the devil would have its end; but if He were a creature, He too was one of

those descended from that Adam whom he deceived, and he had no cause for anxiety.¹⁶⁵

Athanasius underscores the fact that Satan called Jesus Christ, *Son*, and this reveals the issue that the name "Son" was used by Satan in the orthodox sense. He charges that "the Arians ought, even in imitation of their own father the devil, to take some special pains on this point. . . ." ¹⁶⁶ The idea is that even Satan recognized Jesus Christ as part of the Godhead.

The next step in the development of the interpretation of Proverbs 8:23 is to demonstrate that the passage speaks of the economic sense of the Son. He utilizes 1 Corinthians 3:10-11. Athanasius associates the *foundation* as being the Son. This quite naturally leads to the observation that the *foundation* is the same as the stones that are built on the *foundation*. This is a reference to interpreting Proverbs 8:23 in the economic sense. The other interesting issue is that a foundation must precede or exist prior to the stones which are laid upon the foundation. This refers to the eternal nature of the Son. Athanasius writes:

Therefore the Lord also did not when founded take a beginning of existence; for He was the Word before

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 388.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 388.

that; but when He put on our body, which He severed and took from Mary, then He says "He hath founded me;" as much as to say, "Me, being the Word, He hath enveloped in a body on earth."¹⁶⁷

The interesting point of interpretation is that Athanasius declares that humanity's salvation is not a mere afterthought but a fore-thought within the creative process. He notes the repetitious use of the word "proç" (*before*). He recognizes that proç (*before*) is used approximately five times from verses 23-25. The meaning is that humanity's redemption is the rationale for the incarnation, and that the decision to redeem humanity was made prior to the creation of the World. Athanasius is so convinced of his interpretation that he even states that the Apostle Paul also used the same interpretation when writing 2 Timothy 1:8-10.¹⁶⁸

Athanasius uses a series of questions to demonstrate the validity of his interpretation of verse 23. His purpose is to depict that the Son could not have "stored up the grace which has reached us"¹⁶⁹ if the Son were a creature and created in time. The meaning is clear: the Son is

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 389.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 389.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 389.

eternal and as such He participated in the redemption of humanity, eternally.

The eternal nature of the Son secures humanity in the redemptive process. Therefore, the evidence points to a Son who possesses an eternal nature and can administer grace that is eternal. Athanasius links the eternal security of the believer by grace to the nature of the eternal Son. Since the Son is eternal He can administer grace that is eternal. The recipient of that grace is thereby awarded eternal life. Athanasius states:

Nor in any other way was it fitting that our life should be founded, but in the Lord who is before the ages, and through whom the ages were brought to be; that, ***since it was in Him, we too might be able to inherit that everlasting life*** [emphasis added].¹⁷⁰

This concept underscores the interpretation of Proverbs 8:23. The Son is eternal and Proverbs 8:22-23 reveals that the Son is not a creature. This passage depicts the eternal Son along with His economic being and ministry.

Proverbs 8:22 Revisited (CA 2.77b-82)

Athanasius reviews Proverbs 8:22 once again to illustrate a different but consistent interpretation. He couples Christology with cosmology in an attempt to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 390.

demonstrate that the eternal nature of the Son is revealed throughout creation.

Apparently Proverbs 8:22 has the ability to be understood as referring to *time* as in the sense that the Son in His economy existed before time. It also has the ability to be understood in the sense of the *person* of the Son, which would include both states of existence (the Son's pre-incarnate state and His incarnate state).

In the second interpretation, Athanasius focuses on the person of the Son as He relates to the creation of the creatures. He begins this exposition with the image of God being impressed in humanity. Athanasius states:

But what came into being might not only be, but be good, it pleased God that His own Wisdom should condescend to the creatures, ***so as to introduce an impress and semblance of Its Image on all in common and on each*** [emphasis added], that what was made might be manifestly wise works and worthy of God.¹⁷¹

This image of Wisdom is the means that the creature can know the Father and that knowledge comes from the eternal nature of the Son.

The fact that all creatures have the image of God is evidence of the eternal nature of the Son simply because the Son shared in creation. Athanasius states that Wisdom is speaking of itself as being created and is only

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 390.

expressed in the metaphoric sense. In other words, when creation was created, the sense of Wisdom being created occurs in each creature's creation. It is not that Wisdom was created, but the image of Wisdom is created in each person when the creatures were formed.

Athanasius utilizes two texts to demonstrate his interpretation: Matthew 10:40 and Acts 9:4. These texts form the basis of his theological interpretation. The one who receives the believer also receives the Son. This is confirmed in the negative sense by the lifestyle and subsequent conversion of Saul. The fact that Saul persecuted Christians was deemed as being a persecution against the Lord. The connection between the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer is the image of Wisdom in the creation of the creature. Proverbs 8:22 serves as a way of verifying this connection as the image of Wisdom is impressed on creation.

The rationale for Wisdom being impressed upon all creation is compared to a prince who built a city for his father and inscribed his name on every building. The reason the prince would do this is twofold: (1) the buildings would be marked and secure since they are identified as belonging to the King, and (2) the city dwellers would acknowledge the founder and remember him. The analogy is

clear! The prince inscribing a name on every building is comparative to the Son/Wisdom giving His image to all creatures. The prince who built the city is separate from the city. This also speaks to the issue that the Son is eternal and is not a part of creation simply because He gave His Image to creation.

Another example of Wisdom being given to the creature is the fact that Wisdom can be known at all. The epistemology of the creature can only take place since the image of Wisdom is impressed upon all creation. The search for knowledge is found within the individual as he/she contemplates the Image within. This self-contemplation invokes a fear of God, which is itself the beginning of Wisdom.

In CA 2.81, Athanasius again addresses the eternal nature of the Son as he equates the knowledge of the Father and Son. This demonstrates the eternal relationship of both Father and Son. Athanasius writes:

Hence the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of Him; for the knowledge of Father through Son and of Son from Father is one and the same, and the Father delights in Him, and in the same joy the Son rejoices in the Father, saying, "I was by Him, daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." And this again proves that the Son is not foreign, but proper to the Father's Essence.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Ibid., 392.

The fact that Wisdom was impressed on creation is evident of the Son's eternal nature. The Son must possess the same essence of the Father as they were/are eternally one in being. In the economy of the Son's ministry, Wisdom was impressed upon creation so that at the formation of all creation the Wisdom of God was created in each individual creation. This is also evidence of the Son's nature in that He is not created but gives His eternal image to creation.

The eternality of the Son is the theme of Proverbs 8:22. The Son possesses the same properties as the Father and is the same essence as the Father. Proverbs 8:22 does not support the Arian interpretation that the Son is a creature. In fact, it denies the Arian premise. The passage speaks of the eternal Son as condescending to take on human nature in order to redeem fallen humanity. The Son is and always will be eternal.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITIQUE AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARIAN PASSAGES IN BOOK 3

Opening Statement of the Arian Interpretation of the Gospel Texts (CA 3.1-25)

CA 3.1 serves to introduce the notion that the Arians have properly quoted the various texts of the gospels but have thoroughly misunderstood them. The heart of the Arian controversy is the hermeneutical interpretive process. This is where Athanasius spends most of his time. He attempts to dismantle the Arian interpretation by reviewing the proper hermeneutic, which leads to proper theology.

In this section he attempts to build his theology on a Trinitarian format. He does so by quoting the misinterpretation of the Arians' theology of John 14:10, and giving the orthodox meaning of the passage. He states:

. . .so it is that these men still, as if bedewed with the serpent's poison, not seeing what they ought to see, nor understanding what they read, as if in vomit from the depth of their irreligious heart, have next proceeded to disparage our Lord's words, "I in the Father and the Father in Me;" saying 'How can the One be contained in the Other and the Other in the One?'

or "How at all can the Father who is greater be contained in the Son who is less?"¹

Athanasius quotes the Arian questions in order to address them with a proper theological answer. Athanasius does understand their concept of God. They have come to the conclusion that God is material² and not spiritual, as this is evidenced by the Arian questions. This is the faulty starting point of the Arian interpretation and subsequent theology. The basis of their misunderstanding is seen in that the Arians do not have the accurate definitions of such concepts as *True Father, True Son, Light Invisible, Eternal, Radiance Invisible, Immaterial Expression, and Immaterial Image*.³

Athanasius denounces the Arian explanation of John 14:10. He states:

For when it is said, "I in the Father and the Father in Me," They are not therefore, as these suppose, discharged onto Each Other, filling the One the Other, as in the case of empty vessels, so that the Son fills the emptiness of the Father and the Father that of the Son, and Each of Them by Himself if not complete and perfect (for this is proper to bodies, and therefore the mere assertion of it is full of irreligion), for the Father is full and perfect, and the Son is the Fullness of the Godhead.⁴

¹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 393.

² Ibid., 393.

³ Ibid., 394.

⁴ Ibid., 394.

Athanasius depicts the individual existence of the Father and Son. There is no exchange of essences from one mode of existence to the other. The distinction of the individuals forms the basis of the Trinity, as they share the same essence but have three distinct personalities.⁵

Again, Athanasius knows that the Arians are thinking in terms of material objects. They are applying the material to the spiritual, and their conclusions are senseless. This is based upon the statements that Athanasius makes concerning the Arians. They read with no understanding and do not see what they should see in the text.

Athanasius states that the Son is not a son by participation but by the fact that He is the offspring of the Father. Thus, the Son is distinct from the Father but has the same nature as the Father. He makes this point by illustrating that the Son has Life. The Son's life is not a gift from the Father, but the Son possesses life on His own accord. As a consequence, the Son is capable of giving life to all things.⁶

⁵ Athanasius does not include the Holy Spirit in his thoughts as his focus was on the relationship between the Father and Son. However, the same thought patterns and distinctions of the Father and Son would apply to the Holy Spirit since He also is God.

⁶ Ibid., 394.

Asterius and the Gospel of John (CA 3.2-6)

Asterius differs from the typical Arian interpretation but comes to the same faulty conclusion: the Son is a creature and does not possess an eternal nature.

Athanasius criticizes the wisdom of Asterius as being one who is "puffed up with persuasive words"⁷ of wisdom but who really deserves condemnation.

Asterius propagated the position that the Son received power from the Father to be the Son. The fallacy of this logic is startling to Athanasius. The Son, who is Power, needs power from the Father to function in power. This rationale leads the Son to creaturely status.

Athanasius states:

. . . he says, lawless man, that the Power of the Father receives power, that from this his irreligion it may follow to say that in a son the Son was made a son, and the Word received a Word's authority; and, far from granting that He spoke this as a Son, He ranks Him with all things made as having learned it as they have.⁸

Asterius expounds upon the Arian theological formation that the Son is a creature, but he really adds no new insight to the issue.

⁷ Ibid., 394.

⁸ Ibid., 394.

Athanasius, on the other hand, understands the issue that Asterius poses. Should the Son be deemed a creature as all others, then the Son would have to claim that He is in the Father, too! The implication being that the Son is one of many that are in the Father as a creature who received grace and is not the giver of grace. Athanasius states:

But if the Lord said this, His words would not rightly have been, "I in the Father and the Father in Me," but rather, "I too am in the Father, and the Father is in Me too," that He may have nothing of His own and by prerogative, relatively to the Father, as a Son, but the same grace common with all.⁹

Athanasius demonstrates that the Arian interpretation is faulty. The rationale for this is to affirm his earlier conclusion: the Son is eternal.

In the backdrop of Asterius' interpretation, Athanasius yields a profound explanation of the Son's relationship to the Father. This explanation advances the cause of Trinitarian thinking for the next several hundred years. Athanasius reviews the plurality of the Godhead and the unity within the Godhead. He does so by examination of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

In CA 3.3, Athanasius gives his explanation of the Trinitarian relationship which is based upon John 14:10. His first insight is one of ontology. This comes as no

⁹ Ibid., 395.

surprise as this has been the mode of thought throughout *Contra Arianos*.

The ontological issue is worth repeating. The Father and Son share the same essence while maintaining separate identities. Athanasius will give further insight into this issue later. At this point, the ontological issue is revisited in a forward manner. The Son has the same essence as the Father.

Athanasius underscores this issue with his epistemological position. Because the Son has the same essence as the Father, the Son sees the Father and whoever sees the Son can see the Father and contemplate the Father. Athanasius states:

For the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to Him, as in the radiance the sun, and in the word the thought, and in the stream the fountain: for whoso thus contemplates the Son, contemplates what is proper to the Father's Essence, and knows that the Father is in the Son.¹⁰

The Arians did miss this interpretation, but the fact is the meaning of John 14:10 is very clear. The text reviews the relationship between Father and Son and demonstrates the ontological unity and the epistemological issues that are associated with the eternal Son's relationship to the Father. Widdicombe states, "There is no

¹⁰ Ibid., 395.

epistemological gap between knowing the Son and knowing the Father because there is no gap between the being of the Father and the Son."¹¹

Athanasius does not develop the doctrine known as *perichoresis*.¹² However, he does present the tenets of this doctrine. Athanasius understands the interrelationship between the Father and Son as being one of the same essence. The eternal unity of both Father and Son serves to simply demonstrate that the all members of the Trinity are eternal.¹³ The Father knows the Son, who in turn knows the Father (and the same can be said of the Holy Spirit). The distinction is made in that the Father confers everything

¹¹ Widdicombe, 205.

¹² Millard Erickson defines *perichoresis*: "It means that each of the three persons shares the life of the others, that each lives in the others . . . these ideas as found in *perichoresis*, mean both permanence of location with respect to another and ongoing interchange or sharing" (*God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995], 229-230). For a more technical definition, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* states that *perichoresis* refers to "Circumincession," which is "a term sometimes employed to describe the mutual indwelling of the three persons in the Godhead and equivalent to the Greek term '*perichoresis*'. The Godhead is a tri-unity, i.e., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are one God, though hypostatically distinctive. They do not share the same divinity as three humans share a common humanity. The divine essence is numerically one and the same and belongs entirely and indivisibly to the Trinitarian persons. There is no tension between the plurality of persons in the Godhead and the absolute unity of the divine essence. God is not one and three, or three and one. He is one in three, and three in one" (ed. Alan Cairns [Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002], s.v. "perichoresis").

¹³ This does not deny a monad, but it does serve to illustrate that the Trinity is essentially one God with three persons. The Arians so wanted to preserve the monad of God that they missed the importance and necessity of the Trinity.

on the life of the Son except for the fact of being Father. Likewise the Son confers everything on the life of the Father except for being the eternally, begotten Son. The ontological unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit gives the added dimension of a shared epistemology. The Son can know (epistemology) the Father simply because they are eternal in their ontological essence.

As stated Athanasius does not develop this doctrine but he does examine its tenets. The rationale for the examination of this doctrinal tenet is seen in the fact that Athanasius builds a solid foundation for the argument of the Son's eternality. Athanasius is attacking the heart of Arianism with a defense of the Trinitarian orthodox position. The perichoresis forms the platform for the next stage in his argument: the individuality of the Son as a person who is also an integral part of the Trinity!

The unity and individuality of the Son is illustrated by the imagery of the sun and its radiance, the word and thought, and the stream and fountain. These entities are two distinctions but are not separate entities that are unrelated. The concept of one entity divided is negated by the use of the imagery. Athanasius avoids the Sabellian heresy and the Arian heresy. He writes in CA 3.4:

For they are one, not as one thing divided into two parts, and these nothing but one, nor as one thing twice named, so that the Same becomes at times Father, at another His own Son, for this Sabellius holding was judged an heretic.¹⁴

This leaves the door open for an explanation of the relationship. Athanasius makes the case for the Father and Son being ontologically the same essence but subsisting in separate personages. He continues:

But they are two, because the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father; but the nature is one; (for the offspring is not unlike its parent, for it is his image), and all that is the Father's is the Son's.¹⁵

CA 3.5 reveals that the Son has the same attributes as the Father. The basic attribute of deity is seen in both the Father and the Son. The texts, John 14:9-10 and 10:30, flow together to demonstrate the attributes of the Son. In fact, Athanasius states that the same sense of meaning is found in all three passages.

The pattern for such a relationship is demonstrated in another analogy of the Emperor. The Emperor's image is not only the image of the Emperor but is also a means where the Emperor is recognized. Athanasius argues that the *form* and *shape* of the Emperor are well represented in the image but also the Emperor contains the *form* and *shape* that the

¹⁴ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 395.

¹⁵ Ibid., 395.

image represents. Athanasius compares the act of worshipping the image tantamount to worshipping the Emperor. This analogy serves to illustrate the relationship between Father and Son. The Son has the image of the Father. The Father also contains the image of the Son, therefore, when the creature worships the Son that is tantamount to worshipping God the Father.

So far Athanasius has utilized the perichoresis to demonstrate the unity of the Godhead. He establishes the issue of Eternal Sonship on the basis of unity with the Father. The immediate force of this theological foundation is that should one deny the eternality of the Son then the Father's eternality must also be denied. The rationale is based upon the text utilized which states, "I and the Father are One."¹⁶ Athanasius has argued against Sabellianism and Arianism so that the establishment of the Trinity could be demonstrated. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be seen as one incoherent to each other.

The logical question must be addressed: in what sense is the Godhead a Trinity? In what sense is the Trinity characterized by three persons? CA 3.6 answers these questions.

¹⁶ John 10:30.

After reviewing the issue that the Son and Father have the same essence, Athanasius continues to move forward with another argument that builds his case that the Son is eternally the Son. He moves beyond the perichoresis to reveal the distinctiveness of the Son in relationship to the Trinity. He writes:

For, a son not being, one cannot say father; whereas when we call God a Maker, we do not of necessity intimate the things which have come to be; for a maker is before his works. But when we call God Father, at once with the Father we signify the Son's existence.¹⁷

This is a profound statement in that it establishes the eternal status of the Son as Son to the Father. The fact that the Father is addressed as *Father* implies the Son's eternal existence since they share the same essence. The force of his argument states that if the Son did not exist we cannot refer to the Father as *Father* but only as *Maker*. The point is the Arians really cannot address the Father as *Father* since they have a created Son. Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, can address Father as *Father* because of the Son's eternal existence. Athanasius builds upon the concept that there must be a corresponding reality to the terms 'Father' and 'Son' or else they are mere titles.

¹⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 396-7.

Since the Son shares the same essence as the Father and has the same attributes, then the eternal status of the Son is the basis upon which Athanasius can truly say that the Son is a separate person within the Godhead. The Trinity exists as one with three persons who mutually share the same properties but are distinct in their subsistence. Thus, in order to call the Son, *Son*, there must be a person who is not only addressed but has a corresponding reality to the name. In other words, the name "Son" has a reality to His being.

The novelty approach of Athanasius is to examine the perichoresis in its infant stage and yet also reveal the individual personages of the Trinity in order to establish the doctrine of Eternal Sonship. Thus, one clearly sees the Trinity existing in the same mutual essence but also one sees the three personages as separate members of the Godhead. Athanasius is clearly Trinitarian in his theological persuasions. The Arians never admitted this concept. In fact, it was denied so that the Arians could embrace a radical monad concept of God.

A return to the contemporary debate is warranted. Kevin Giles builds his argument for egalitarianism on the platform of the perichoresis of the Godhead. Giles states:

The difference of persons is indisputable for Athanasius because Father, Son and Holy Spirit are clearly distinguished in Scripture and they are differentiated by their relations with each other. The Father is eternally the Father of the Son: the Son is eternally the Son of the Father. For Athanasius the difference does not imply subordination.¹⁸

Giles is correct in stating that Athanasius understands the difference of the three persons within the Trinity. Giles goes on to say:

Building on what Scriptures says about the Father and the Son's being "one" and about their each abiding in the other (Jn 10:30, 38; 14:10-11; 17:21), Athanasius spoke of the interpretation, or coinherence, of the persons of the Trinity. Not surprisingly, given his profound emphasis on the unity of the persons, Athanasius rejected the idea that the Son was eternally subordinated either in his being or in his works or function . . . ***Who they are and what they do cannot be separated*** [emphasis added].¹⁹

Giles is confusing at best and misleading at worst. He emphatically states that Athanasius understood the difference in the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. He even admits that Athanasius knows that their relationship is differentiated from each other. This implies two distinct persons. However, in the last quote he states that there is no substantial difference in "who they are or what they do."²⁰

¹⁸ Giles, 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

What does Giles mean? Does he recognize the difference in the persons of the Trinity? It seems as though he does not. If he is to be taken at face value, then he denies the distinctiveness between the Father and the Son since they cannot be separated from one another on the basis of "who they are."

Giles goes on to say that the works of the Father and the Son are not differentiated. The fact that he stated "what they do" is not clearly distinguishable demonstrates that he has misunderstood or misread Athanasius. For that matter, Athanasius goes into great detail about the Son doing the works of the Father.²¹ Clearly Giles does not understand Athanasius. Giles states, "The best of theologians have always argued that this separation cannot be made with God. Who the triune God is (his being) and what the triune God does (his acts) are one."²²

As one reads Giles, it becomes very obvious that he embraces the egalitarian thought process. However, he seems to be unaware of the fact that he reads Athanasius from that same perspective. Since Giles does not distinguish or differentiate between the relationship of the Father and

²¹ Please see chapter 3 for a more in depth analysis of this statement.

²² Ibid., 14.

the Son, he must also conclude that their works are not distinguishable. This position is untenable.²³

Giles has articulated that there is no distinction between the Father and the Son, and there is no difference in their work. Seemingly, he pushes the doctrine of perichoresis a bit too far. Unfortunately, he denies the distinctiveness of the three persons in a practical manner. In theory, I am certain that Giles adheres to the orthodox position on the Trinity. However, his denial of the separateness of the Godhead leads him to a deficient Trinitarian formulation. Without the three personalities being distinct, there is no way one can maintain a viable orthodox position of the Trinity. He takes his position and applies it to the male/female relationships. He sees the equality of both genders (rightly so) without understanding the fundamental differences of both genders (a grave error).

Giles does attempt to embrace an orthodox position of the Trinity. He simply does not articulate the

²³ There are a series of questions that Giles should address concerning the differing members of the Trinity. Does Giles really not see a difference in the work of the Son at Calvary and the approval of God the Father at the same event? Does he not understand the Son declares another Comforter will come who would guide the apostles? Does he not understand that the Holy Spirit was assigned the role of inaugurating and baptizing the Christian Church in Acts 2? The Scriptures reveal over and over the different roles, ministries, and functions (works) of the different persons of the Trinity.

distinction between the three persons of the Trinity. Most theologians argue that they are distinguished in the relationship to one another and their works are different. This is the position of Athanasius. Should those considerations be taken away, how can one come to a distinction of the persons within the Trinity? Giles never addresses this question. Grudem gives insight into the dilemma as he writes:

But if we do not have economic subordination, then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.²⁴

Grudem argues that should there not be an eternal distinction between the members of the Trinity the implication would be that the Trinity itself is not eternal. Giles does not deny Eternal Sonship, but he does not give any room for an eternal distinction between the Father and the Son as he basically emphasizes eternal unity without distinction of persons.

Giles agrees with Athanasius in that there is unity within the Godhead. They must have ontological unity or each person is not fully God. They differ on the meaning and application of roles and function within the Godhead.

²⁴ Grudem, 251.

This is where Athanasius informs the reader that the Father and the Son are united ontologically but distinct in personages. This distinction is based upon the Son doing the works of the Father. Athanasius writes:

Thus what things the Son then wrought are the Father's works, for the Son is the Form of the Godhead of the Father, which wrought the works. And thus he who looks at the Son, sees the Father; for in the Father's Godhead is and is contemplated the Son. . . .²⁵

Athanasius makes a solid case for Eternal Sonship when he examines the issue of the perichoresis. The eternal unity of the Godhead, along with the eternal relationships within the Godhead can only be possible should there be a corresponding reality to each person of the Godhead. Athanasius simply illustrates that the eternal Trinity is comprised of the one God subsisting in three persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one in essence but have individual personalities that form the basis of their relationship. To deny any distinction in roles or functions between the eternal Godhead questions the viability of three persons subsisting as a Trinity. The question could be asked, "Why have three persons subsisting as Trinity when there is no clear distinction among them?" A monad would be acceptable. However, the Scriptures declare a

²⁵ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 396.

Trinity. The revelation of *one God three persons* is best supported by an economic distinction but not an ontological distinction.

The conclusion of Athanasius is that the Son exists eternally as Son because there is an ontological unity within the Godhead. There is distinction within the Godhead because of the corresponding reality to the titles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Dragas states the following:

. . . in the case of man father and son are common names which can be interchangeably applied to any human subject, while in the case of God the names Father and Son are proper names applied uniquely to denote unique subjects.²⁶

The basis for this unique distinction must be their inner relationships that seemingly have structure and order to them. This does not imply ontological inferiority as that issue has been well established by Athanasius. The issue of differentiation must be based upon the economy of the Trinity, which Athanasius argued for in *Contra Arianos* 2 and 3.

Examining John 10:30 (CA 3.7-9)

The Arians interpreted the meaning of John 10:30, as expressing a monad. Therefore, they argued that the Son should not be deemed God. Their assessment would mean that

²⁶ Dragas, 69.

any interpretation of the Son being divine is nonsensical. Since God is a monad there is no basis for the Son to be eternal God.

The basis for the Arian interpretation is their hermeneutical assumptions. They have concluded that the monad of God excludes any expression of a Trinity.

Athanasius states that the language of John 10:30 is not an exclusion of the Son but an exclusive claim against false gods. He states:

This is not the mind of Christians; perish the thought; for not with reference to the Son is it thus written, but for the denial of those falsely called gods, invented by men . . . so it is with "I am," and "I am Only God," and "There is none besides Me," viz. that He may make men renounce falsely called gods, and that they may recognize Him the true God instead.²⁷

The Athanasian interpretation resounds with the Old Testament concept (hence the reference to Deuteronomy 6:4) that there is only one God and all others who compete against God are idols. Those who worship any other God are found to be idol worshippers. The Arians would fall into this category since they have a created Son.

The Arian Monad of John 10:30 (CA 3.10-6)

The Arians denied Eternal Sonship but they must give an account of the unity of the Son with the Father. Their

²⁷ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 397-8.

explanation reveals the basic difference between the orthodox position and the Arians' position: the unity of the Son with the Father is their will. The uniting of the will is by grace of the Father given to the Son. According to the Arians, the Father and Son do not possess the same ontological essence. Their unity can only be one of purpose of will. Athanasius writes:

However here too they introduce their private fictions, and contend that the Son and Father are not is such wise "one," or "like" as the Church preaches, but, as they themselves would have it. For they say, since what the Father wills, the Son wills also, and is not contrary either in what He thinks or in what He judges, but is in all respects concordant with Him. .

. .²⁸

The basis of the Arian interpretation is that since the Son is created He can only share in the will of the Father and not in the Father's essence. Thus, any unity is one of mutual agreement between the Father and the Son.

Athanasius uses the Arian interpretation to say that other created beings could also claim oneness with the Father. For example, fallen angels, spiritual beings, martyrs, apostles, prophets, patriarchs, and many other Christians could qualify for the Arian interpretation. However, the irrationality of this interpretation is seen

²⁸ Ibid., 399.

in that creation is never referred to with exclusive titles. Athanasius writes:

And yet no one of these is Word or Wisdom or Only-begotten Son or Image; nor did any one of them make bold to say, "I and the Father are One," or, "I in the Father and the Father in Me;" but it is said of all them, "Who is like unto Thee among the gods, O Lord? And who shall be likened to the Lord among the sons of God?"²⁹

The idea is that the Arian interpretation allows for all creatures to be one with God but none have ever claimed such ontological unity except the Son-whom they reject. The Scriptures, though, demonstrate the ontological status of the Son and this alone disavows the Arian interpretation.

CA 3.11 still refutes the Arian interpretation of John 10:30. Athanasius argues that the *likeness* and *oneness* of the Godhead must include the essence of the Son or the Son is nothing more than a created being. In such case, the Son would not be like the Father but a product of the Father. This simply means that the Son is not a true Son and the Father is not a true Father. Athanasius writes:

If then in respect to the doctrines and teaching the Son is like the Father, **then the Father according to them will be Father in name only** [emphasis added], and the Son will not be an exact Image, or rather will be seen to have no propriety at all or likeness of the Father. . . .³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., 399.

³⁰ Ibid., 400.

This directly contradicts the Athanasian argument for the Son having a true corresponding reality to the title "Son." This is one of the fundamental differences between the Arian position and the orthodox position. The Arian Son is not a true son in that his nature is one that is created. Consequently, the Arian Son is one of merit or grace. Athanasius argues that the Son is a son by nature and thus the true Son. The idea is that the Son has the properties *likeness* and *oneness* of the Godhead. Alvyn Pettersen comments:

Athanasius' sense of divine oneness stems from the one source and end, the Father. All that the Son and Spirit are and do, they are and do from the Father, the Father himself acting only through the Logos, the Father's only and proper Offspring, and in the Spirit, the Father's only "Spirit of Sonship."³¹

Athanasius quotes the apostle Paul teaching the Thessalonians that grace has one source only—from the Godhead. If the Arians were correct then grace could have two sources that are not related to one another in their essence.

This leads into the basic approach of CA 3.12-14. Grace is from God alone and does not come from any other creature, nor from a cooperative effort of God and creature. However, in contrast, the Son is attributed as

³¹ Pettersen, 182.

giving grace alongside the Father. This is a clever argument for the eternal nature of the Son. Created beings do not participate in the giving of grace. The Son, on the other hand, participates because of the *oneness* of the Godhead. Athanasius states:

No one, for instance, would pray to receive from God and the Angels, or from any other creature, nor would any one say, "may God and the Angel give thee;" but from the Father and the Son, because of Their oneness and the oneness of Their giving. For through the Son is given what is given' and there is nothing but the Father operates it through the Son. . . .³²

The act of praying for grace demonstrates that the church acknowledges the oneness of God. Athanasius is demonstrating that the created Arian Son has no ability to give grace, which questions the soteriology of the Arians. An external Son does not participate with the Father in essence, and thus, subsequently, in the giving of grace.

The rationale is that a created Son cannot express grace since He does not share in the essence of the Father who is the source of grace. Again, this is an argument for the eternal nature of the Son. The Son can give grace because He is one with the Father.

After explaining that creatures do not participate in the giving of grace, Athanasius elaborates on Genesis

³² Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 400.

48:16, where Jacob references, "the Angel which delivered me from all evil."³³ Athanasius sees this reference to the Angel as an Old Testament Christophany.³⁴

The basis for his conclusion is the relationship between Jacob and God. Jacob has a history of contact with the Angel and then when one considers that an angel was employed to "cast out the Amorite,"³⁵ attributed to guarding Jacob from Laban's wickedness, and preserving Jacob from Esau's murderous intention, one can understand the interpretation of Athanasius. Then to support his claim, Athanasius reviews Old Testament history to demonstrate the Angel of the Lord as a predominant theme. The Angel of Genesis 48:16 is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, existing eternally as the Son.

In CA 3.15-16, Athanasius returns to the issue of the Trinity. He states that orthodox Christians worship one God and not three. The Jews and Arians accused Christians of polytheism. Athanasius defends the worship of the Trinity on the basis that there is only one origin and one Father. However, Athanasius accuses the Arians of

³³ Ibid., 400.

³⁴ "A manifestation of God; frequently employed to denote a pre-incarnation appearance of Christ and therefore often called a *Christophany*" (Cairns, s.v. "Theophany").

³⁵ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 400.

worshipping in the mode of polytheism or even atheism. He states:

For either they will say that the Word is not God; or saying that He is God, because it is written, but not proper to the Father's Essence, they will introduce many because of their difference of kind. . . .³⁶

The orthodox, on the other hand, worship the Trinity on the basis of the revelation of the Father. Athanasius states, "For thus we confess God to be one through the Triad. . . ." ³⁷

Athanasius reveals that the Arian system is directly opposed to the orthodox position. The Arians do not actually have a son that has a corresponding reality to him—they have a son in name only. There is no Eternal Sonship in the Arian theology. Athanasius states:

For if it be not so, but the Word is a creature and a work out of nothing, either He is not True God because He is Himself one of the creatures, or if they name Him God from regard for the Scriptures, they must of necessity say that there are two God's, one Creator, the other creature. . . .³⁸

The Arian theology only leads to confusion simply because there is an attempt to synthesize Christianity and idolatry. The end result is far from an organic whole. The Arians have accomplished a sophisticated form of idolatrous

³⁶ Ibid., 402.

³⁷ Ibid., 402.

³⁸ Ibid., 402.

worship simply because they have two faiths because of their two Gods. Once again, Athanasius states:

And it follows of necessity in so great blindness, that, when they worship the Unoriginate, they renounce the originate, and when they come to the creature, they turn from the Creator. For they cannot see the One in the Other, because their natures and operations are foreign and distinct.³⁹

Athanasius is still working from the theological basis that the Son is eternal. As such, the Son also is very much of the eternal Godhead and shares in the same properties as the Father on the basis of His nature and not per grace. Thus, there is an epistemological unity within the Trinity. The Arians, on the other hand, have concocted a son that must have grace to participate with God, and therefore, relate to God. The Son's eternality is denied by the Arians, and consequently, they have no eternal doctrine of the Trinity. R. P. C. Hanson states the following:

He [Athanasius] accuses the Arians with some justice of in effect teaching that God was not always the Trinity because they allot different natures to the Father and Son. As a consequence the Arians really believed in two gods. . . .⁴⁰

Epistemology between Father and Son is non-existent. Their only reasonable explanation for the Arian Son is that He is a creature that was made prior to creation.

³⁹ Ibid., 402.

⁴⁰ Hanson, 424.

The logic of the Arians is that the Son has a higher position than humanity, but cannot be of the Godhead in the sense of having the same essence of the Father. He is God the Son in name only, as there is no corresponding reality to His Sonship in the Arian scheme.

Athanasius closes his address of the Arian monad with an affirmation that the Son is eternal in the Godhead and he quotes John 10:30 for support. He goes on to state:

For thus God is One, and one faith in the Father and Son; for, though the Word be God, the Lord our God is one Lord; for the Son is proper to that One, and inseparable, according to the propriety and peculiarity of His Essence.⁴¹

The Arian Uses of John 17:11 (CA 3.17-25)

The Arians utilized the Lord's prayer for the protection of the apostles as a means of interpreting John 10:30. The Lord prayed that the apostles would be one in unity just as the Son was one with the Father. They construed this to mean that the Son was joined to the Father in such a way as to allow two different essences to be joined together. They readily acknowledge that the Son has a different essence than the Father. The Arian hermeneutic sees no problem with allowing two distinct and foreign substances to be joined together in unity. They

⁴¹ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 403.

posed this as a problem to the orthodox position.

Athanasius quotes them as saying:

Then as having found an evasion, these men of craft add, "If, as we become one in the Father, so also He and the Father are one, and thus He too is in the Father, how pretend you from His saying, 'I and the Father are One,' and 'I in the Father and the Father in Me,' that He is proper and like the Father's Essence? for it follows either that we too are proper to the Father's Essence, or He foreign to it, as we are foreign."⁴²

The Arians depict a son that is created and then joined to the Creator. In the process, they accept the Son/Creature as having a different essence than the Father. They unite a son that is ontologically different to the Father. In their view, this is the biblical hermeneutic that governs their theology. In this scheme, the Arians have a harmonic whole that works as they are reading the Scriptures to formulate this opinion. Consequently, they use the Scriptures to propagate the creation of the Son. This, in turn, denies the Son's eternal nature.

What is most illuminating is that the Arians have a creature united to the Father and this sets the pattern for all believers. The truth of the matter is that the Arians have a theology that is not theocentric but anthropocentric. They have elevated a creature to the

⁴² Ibid., 403.

status of deity. Thus, they read and interpret John 17:11, from a position that exalts humanity at the diminished status of the Son. Their whole interpretive scheme is seen to be faulty. In fact, Athanasius calls this approach akin to Satan's attempt at subverting God's position. He states:

. . . but in this their perverseness I see nothing but unreasoning audacity and recklessness from the devil, since it is saying after his pattern, "We will ascend to heaven, we will be like the Most High." For what is given to man by grace, this they would make equal to the Godhead of the Giver. Thus hearing that men are called sons, they thought themselves equal to the True Son by nature such.⁴³

Athanasius states that these men are so much opposed to the orthodox position that they are now acting as Satan did in his rebellion against the Lord. Their rebellion against the Son is based upon their own self deceit and arrogance. Thus, in their hermeneutics of John 17:11, they have deceived themselves in the meaning of the text. This has led to their own arrogance in the fact that they consider themselves equal to the Godhead.

The comparison of the Arians' rebellion to Satan's rebellion may sound harsh but, in the mind of Athanasius, the reference is nothing more than a hermeneutic that is improper and leads to rebellion. Athanasius equates the Arian theology of uniting a creature with the Godhead as

⁴³ Ibid., 403.

originating from sinful pride. The Arian theology is corrupt because it is anthropocentric. This man-centered theology can only be corrupt because humanity is corrupt. Athanasius concludes that the Arians cannot exalt God simply because they want to be like Him—which is the same sinful and rebellious action of Satan.

Athanasius refers to his earlier arguments that the Son is not a creature but is in fact the Creator. He is attributed this status by the Scriptures. The creatures, on the other hand, are never attributed the same status as the Son. The Son is deemed eternal and has the same properties as the Father, therefore, the creatures are to follow the example of the Son simply because creatures do not have the same essence as their Creator.

Humanity has a great need to learn proper behavior and this strongly indicates the ontological difference between humanity and the Godhead. There is no epistemological innate relationship between humanity and the Godhead.

The basis for humanity's soteriological and epistemological relationship with the Godhead is pure grace. Athanasius states:

. . . we too become sons, not as He in nature and truth, but according to the grace of Him that calleth, and though we are men from the earth, are yet called

gods, not as the True God of His Word, but as has pleased God who has given us that grace. . . .⁴⁴

The fact that men are redeemable *per* grace expounds on the ontological difference between humanity and the Godhead. Humanity needs grace to become a son of God but the Son is a son by nature. Gregg and Groh agree as they write:

Orthodoxy knows a grace which confers sonship on believers; but it never applies this adopting grace to the Christ as the Arians did. . . . Grace is the divine essence brought to human nature through the Christ.⁴⁵

In CA 3.20-23, Athanasius addresses the issue that the creature has to learn the methods and manners of the Father. Primarily, he seems to be addressing the Church as they should follow the example of the Father/Son relationship and become one with each other. Athanasius states, ". . . according to our own nature, and as it is possible for us thence to be molded and to learn how we ought to be one, just as we learned also to be merciful."⁴⁶

The fact that creatures have to learn proper behavior strongly indicates their ontological difference from the Son. This also argues for Eternal Sonship. Since

⁴⁴ Ibid., 404.

⁴⁵ Gregg and Groh, 29.

⁴⁶ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 405.

the Son has the same properties as the Father, He does not have to learn behavior nor does He need an example. Epistemologically, He is one with the Father so there is no need to learn from an example.

In John 17:11, the oneness of uniting the creature with the Father and Son can be accomplished by participation in the above mentioned grace. As sons, humanity is adopted into the communion of the Godhead. Humanity will never be the same ontological essence as the Godhead but can participate in oneness through grace.

In CA 3.21, Athanasius stresses the point that there is an ontological difference between humanity and the Son. He writes:

If, for instance, it were possible for us to become as the Son in the Father, the words ought to run, "that they may be one in Thee," as the Son is in the Father; but, as it is, He has not said this; but by saying "in Us" He has pointed out the distance and difference. . . .⁴⁷

Pointedly, there is no ontological equality between humanity and deity. Even through humanity's redemption there is still an ontological difference in the natures of humanity and deity. The fact that God empowers humanity does not mean the created nature of humanity is changed. It

⁴⁷ Ibid., 405.

simply means that humanity now has eternal life because the Lord's ontological nature provides it. Lyman states:

Participation is therefore equivalent to grace in the sense of an external, transforming relationship with God which allows a certain sharing in the power of God, but not of an ultimate transformation into divinity.⁴⁸

This is also demonstrated by the comparison of the Son to Jonah. The Lord used this comparison in His own earthly ministry to illustrate the similarities of their ministries. The comparison is striking. Jonah was one with the Father in purpose, so humanity is also one with the Father in purpose but not in essence. The salvation of humanity never means there is ontological unity with the Godhead. The Arians misinterpreted this passage.

The unity of humanity can only be accomplished through the Spirit. The unity or oneness that the Arians proposed was that a creature/creator relationship was equal in essence. However, the orthodox position understands that the Holy Spirit does not unite the Son to the Father, but the Spirit gives humanity grace from the Son. This argues for Eternal Sonship as only the Godhead can give grace.

John 17:11 serves to demonstrate that the Godhead can give unity and oneness to creatures but only by their

⁴⁸ Lyman, 145.

participation in grace. Dragas comments on the act of participation. He states:

So we are made sons of God by participation, by personal association and union with the true Son of God and not in any other way. . . . They [the Arians] did not distinguish between sons and the Son. Hence they did not distinguish between the Son's participation in the Being of the Father and our personal participation in the Person of the Son.⁴⁹

There is no ontological unity between the creature and Creator. The creature can only participate in the Godhead *via* the Son through the grace that comes from the Son. The Arians assumed that John 17:11 meant that the Son was created but could be one with the Father in their differing essences, and thus, all humanity could be one with the Father on the same basis. The meaning for the Arians is that a creature can be ontologically equivalent to the Godhead.

The Arians failed to consider the fact that the Son can give unity and oneness to creatures *per* grace because He is divine. The Son does not need grace simply because He is the eternal God who gives grace. Grace is not a product of the creature as the creature can only receive grace. The Godhead is the origination of grace. Athanasius makes this point as he writes, "For what the Word has by nature, as I

⁴⁹ Dragas, 86.

said, in the Father, that He wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevocably. . . ."⁵⁰

**Interacting with the Arian Interpretation
of the Gospel Texts (CA 3:26-67)**

CA 3.26 reviews the Arian hermeneutic of the gospel texts. The Arians understood the gospels to communicate the *ktizw* (created) nature of the Son. The basis for their understanding is that the incarnation presented a problem for the *Logos* in that the *Logos* was limited in function. The human nature of the Son dominated the life of the *Logos* to the extent that the *Logos* was deemed passive in the hypostatic union⁵¹ of the Son.

The Arians followed the theology of Paul of Samosata in that they deny the eternal nature of the Son based upon the faulty interpretation of the Gospel texts. Athanasius lists four primary Arian objections concerning the eternal nature of the Son. The first objection is based upon the meaning of the Son receiving power from the Father. The

⁵⁰ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 407.

⁵¹ This is a theological term that came into use long after the death of Athanasius. He simply expounds on the concept of the term. 'Hypostatic Union' is "a term used to denote the union of perfect human nature with the eternal Logos without confusion of the two natures in the person of the Christ. *Hypostatic* is used to emphasize that it was one subsistence in the divine essence, or, as we would say, one person in the Trinity, namely the Son of God, who took a human nature into union with Himself. The Trinity did not become incarnate; one *hypostasis* did" (Cairns, "Hypostatic Union").

Arians depicted this act of receiving as the Son being powerless, and therefore, not eternal.

The second Arian objection is based upon the interpretation that the Son was intimidated. This emotional weakness indicated to the Arians that the Son was created and not eternal *Logos*.

The third objection was based upon the issue that the Son had a definite lack of knowledge and was in the process of learning about the Father. This seemed to be a denial of the omniscience of the *Logos*.

The last objection argues that the Son could not be eternal since He was abandoned on the cross. These texts, improperly interpreted, lead the Arians to adopt the errant theology of a created Son.

Athanasius responds to these objections stating that the Arians are more akin to the Jews than the Christians. He writes:

If one sets the utterances of both groups alongside each other, one will certainly discover that they meet in a common disbelief, that they are equivalent in their rash impiety, and that they wage a common war against us.⁵²

Athanasius is demonstrating that Arianism is not compatible with Christianity. Since the Arians are not

⁵² Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book III," in *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 85.

Christians, they cannot interpret the Scriptures correctly.

This ability belongs to Christians alone. He states:

We are Christians, O you Arians, we are Christians! It is natural for us to have a close knowledge of the Gospels which concern the Savior—and neither to join the Jews in stoning him if we hear about his divinity and his eternity nor to join you in being offended at utterances of a lowly sort, which, as a human being, he voiced on our account.⁵³

The directness of this statement is supported by the biblical revelation of the Son's eternal nature. Athanasius states that the Arians present "two eternal"⁵⁴ in the created Son and the eternal Father. Athanasius, on the other hand, acknowledges the eternal nature of the Son subsisting in the Godhead. He writes:

On the contrary, you will understand that the Lord is God's true and natural Son and that he is known to be not just eternal but one who exists concurrently with the eternity of the Father.⁵⁵

Athanasius builds this argument of the Son's eternal, nature on Psalms 23-24. The fact that there are everlasting or eternal *things* and *doors* that exist because of the Son—then it is obvious that they have eternal status because the Son has eternal status. In other words, eternal

⁵³ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 86.

creation can only originate from an eternal son. Athanasius demonstrates:

But if he is himself the Creator of the things, which are "everlasting," which of us can any longer doubt that, he is more noble than these everlasting things and that he is made known as Lord not so much from his being eternal as from his being the Son of God? . . . Moreover, since he is the image and radiance of the Father, he also possesses the Father's eternity.⁵⁶

Athanasius depicts that the Arians misunderstood the gospel texts simply because they fail to realize that the Gospels give a "double account"⁵⁷ of the Savior. The meaning of this *double account* argues for the eternal nature of the Son on one hand and the earthly existence of the Son on the other. The gospels reveal both aspects of the fleshly body of the Son and the eternal nature of the Son.

Thus, Athanasius begins his review of the Arian interpretation of the gospel texts with a firm theological foundation that expounds upon the eternal nature of the Son.

**The Eternal Son and the Scriptural Witness
in the Gospels (CA 3.30-5)**

The hermeneutical principle of the *double account* must receive proper interpretation in order to understand the incarnation of the Son. This issue establishes

⁵⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 87.

orthodoxy as it has a direct impact on Christology and particularly Theology Proper.

Athanasius demonstrates that the eternal Son exists in the economy of grace in order to receive a fleshly body united to His eternal *Logos*. The focus is still upon the Son as God existing in a human body. The Trinity did not take on humanity—only God the Son did. The Scriptures reveal the fact that the Godhead of the Trinity in general, and the deity of the Son, in specific, was not diminished or negated. The truth of the orthodox faith is that the Son existed in human body while retaining both sets of divine and human properties that were relevant to each nature.

Athanasius asserts the scriptural teaching that the Word became flesh. This is based upon the John 1:14 text. He interprets the word "σάρξ" as referring to the Lord's humanity.

Athanasius does develop a Christology, but in no way anticipates later Christological issues. He simply uses the texts to demonstrate the fact that the Son was completely human and lacking nothing in His humanity. He contrasts the idea of "becoming human" with the heresy of "coming into a human being."⁵⁸ The distinction is that the Son was a real

⁵⁸ Ibid., 88.

person. The body of the Son did not simply house the *Logos*. There were no dual personalities even though there were dual natures. The *Logos* added humanity to His self-existing deity. Athanasius confirms this when he speaks of the Scriptures as "being in the habit of calling the human being 'flesh'."⁵⁹

The point of this contrast is to note that there was no ontological change of status in the Son. The fact is God the eternal Son took on a new form. This form is none other than a created body, the presence of God in human flesh. This simply means that the Son of God had a real human psyche. The emotions of the Lord were human and so was the passion of the Lord. The humanity of the Lord was in no way artificial or an imitation. Athanasius confirms there was real cohesion in the body of our Lord.

Athanasius acknowledges that the pattern of the Scriptures present the *Logos* coming to the prophets. In this process they still maintained their identities as prophets, but it was the *Logos* that did the work. The analogy is that the *Logos* came, added a body to itself, and now functions through that same body. Athanasius argues

⁵⁹ Ibid., 89.

from the negative aspect but presents his point well. He states:

If this were the way of it, and all he did was to appear in a human being, there would have been nothing extraordinary, nor would those who saw him have been astonished and said, "Where does this man come from?" (Mark 4:41) and "Why do you, who are a human being, make yourself God?" (John 10:33) for since they heard the expression "and the word of the Lord came to" each of the prophets, they had some acquaintance with the idea.⁶⁰

The fact of the incarnation is that by becoming man the *Logos* still retained His divinity and His identity. His identity and divinity were now localized in human form.

In CA 3.31, Athanasius demonstrates that the human body of the Lord and the eternal *Logos* could and did communicate through the differing attributes. Athanasius comments on Galatians 4:4 and states:

For since he pleased to do so, the Father "sent his own Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal.4:4)—on that occasion it is said that he took on flesh and became a human being and suffered on our account in the flesh. . . .⁶¹

The properties that belong to humanity were part of the Lord's human nature. Thus he could be hungry, cold, thirsty, etc. The properties that belong to the *Logos* also were used through instrumentality of the Lord's human body.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁶¹ Ibid., 89.

The *Logos* could experience the weakness of the flesh. He states in CA 3.32:

Consequently, when the flesh was suffering, the *Logos* was not apart from it. That is why the suffering also is said to belong to him. When he was doing the works of the Father in a divine way, the flesh was not external to him. On the contrary, the Lord did these things in a body itself.⁶²

The thrust of this argument is that the human attributes were truly His and not just a creature that inherited the *Logos*. This strikes at the heart of Arianism. The Son is deemed a person and not just a creature. The attributes that the Son exhibited were truly His so that there was no mere charade or pretence concerning the Lord's humanity. Khaled Anatolios comments on CA 3.32. He states:

It becomes clear from this passage that it is crucial for Athanasius, from a soteriological point of view, that the human condition of Jesus Christ be "attributed" or "ascribed" to the Word.⁶³

The communication between the divine and human attributes reveals the completeness of the divine/human Son. Athanasius uses the illustration of Lazarus' death to demonstrate the orthodox position of the God/Man. He states:

And where Lazarus is concerned, he uttered human speech in his capacity as a human being, but it was a divine act when, in his capacity as God, he raised

⁶² Ibid., 90.

⁶³ Anatolios, 142.

Lazarus from the dead. It was in this fashion that these things were done, and they showed that he possessed a body in reality and not as a matter of mere seeming.⁶⁴

The point Athanasius is making is that the human properties of the Lord were very real. He had a body that was flesh, blood, and bone. The emotions, will, and intellect were also human.

The incarnation displayed the perfect humanity of the Son. In no way was the humanity of the Savior any less than human. Athanasius informs the reader of this fact simply because it is a blow to the Arian creaturely son. Athanasius reveals that the Son was perfect in His humanity just as He is in His deity. Athanasius writes:

It was appropriate for the Lord, when he was clothed in human flesh, to put it on in its totality, together with all the passions proper to it, so that just as we say the body was properly His, so also the passions of the body might be said to belong to him alone, even though they did not touch him in his deity.⁶⁵

There is no doubt in the mind of Athanasius that the body of the Lord was completely human. Trevor Hart gives insight into this issue:

There has been considerable scholarly debate in recent years over the question of whether or not Athanasius does actually affirm the full humanity of Christ. Restrictions of space prevent us from even beginning to raise the question in that form, and the simple

⁶⁴ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book III," 90.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 90.

statement must suffice that Athanasius's understanding of the nature of redemption not only suggests, but positively demands a Saviour who is like unto us in all things excepting sin.⁶⁶

Athanasius, true to the Nicene Creed, understands the two natures of the Lord not to co-mingle but to communicate. The fact is he keeps separate the two natures and ascribes the passions of the flesh to the human nature. This allows for the *Logos* to remain a complete entity without the confusion or co-mingling of the two natures into some unrecognizable third kind of creature that is half God and half man.

The rationale for this Christological review is because of the soteriological implications of the Son. Athanasius states this in CA 3.33. He writes:

If the works of the Logos' Godhead had not been done by means of a body, humanity would not have been divinized. Furthermore, if the properties of the flesh had not been reckoned to the Logos, humanity would not have been completely liberated from them.⁶⁷

The issue at hand is the mediating work of the *Logos*. The *Logos* did not take on the passions of humanity but defeated them. This victory over the fleshly passions, enabled humanity to defeat them as well. Humanity's victory of their own passions results from the *Logos* supplying the

⁶⁶ Hart, 253.

⁶⁷ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book III," 91.

power to the individual to defeat the corrupt flesh. He states:

This explains why he who supplies others with the origin of their being is himself said to have been born; his flesh was born of Mary the mother of God. The purpose of this is that we may have our origin relocated in him and that we may no longer return to earth because mere earth is what we are, but may be carried by Him into the heavens because we are joined to the Logos who comes from heaven.⁶⁸

This soteriological accomplishment is because the sins of humanity were transferred to the humanity of our Lord. The result is that humans do not return to the earth in dust and ashes but are transported to heaven where the *Logos* resides. The temporal body of the Son was the means by which salvation was accomplished. Lyman concurs as she states:

Soteriology in Athanasius thus centers on the communication of the qualities of transcendent divine nature to mutable humanity through the incarnation of the Son. The Word by taking flesh was united to humanity in order to effect a whole transformation for its redemption. . . .⁶⁹

The human body did succumb to death but the *Logos* never did. This simply points to the fact that the *Logos* is eternal and subsists eternally as the Son.

This is the reason that Athanasius makes a clear distinction between the attributes that are of the flesh

⁶⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁹ Lyman, 158.

and the attributes that are of the *Logos*. The *Logos*, for Athanasius, was impassioned. He writes:

Rather, let people see that the *Logos* himself is impassible by nature and that he nevertheless has these passions predicated of him in virtue of the flesh which he took on, since they are proper to the flesh and body itself is proper to the Savior. Furthermore, he himself remains as he is—impassible by nature.⁷⁰

In CA 3.34, Athanasius gives some clarification to the issue at hand; there are two natures each with their own properties. The Arians never completely understood the hermeneutical issue of Christological interpretation. They were confused in themselves as to the meaning of the New Testament language. They came to the conclusion that the two natures were incompatible. Thus, the dual natures of the Son were denied in the Arian theological system.

Athanasius quotes 1 Peter 4:1 to demonstrate his point. The suffering of Christ was in the flesh and not in the *Logos*. The suffering of the Son was germane to the fleshly nature but not of the divine nature. The *Logos* did not suffer, as suffering is not germane to divine nature.

The conclusion is that a proper hermeneutic must precede proper theology. The Arians failed to grasp the dual natures of the Son, and consequently, they

⁷⁰ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book III," 93.

misinterpreted the Son as being a creature instead of the divine eternal Son/*Logos*. Athanasius states:

If we recognize what is proper and peculiar to each, while at the same time perceiving and understanding that both sets of deeds come from one (agent) believe rightly and shall never be led astray. But if anyone sees the things that are done divinely by the *Logos* and denies the body, or if anyone sees the things proper to the body and denies the enfleshed presence of the *Logos* because of his human characteristics—such a person, like a Jewish tavern-keeper who mixes water with the wine, will consider the cross a scandal. . .

.⁷¹

The boundary for Christological interpretation is the recognition that the Son has dual natures. Athanasius closes this section with a reference to the Eternal Sonship of the *Logos*. He quotes John 3:35; Matthew 11:27; John 5:30; John 16:15; and John 17:10. He weaves these texts together to form the illustration that the eternal Father has given the Son the Father's possessions. The Son then possesses that which belongs to the Father. The Father possesses all things eternally, so logically and from a scriptural position, the Son possesses all things eternally. The coherence of the Godhead is once again at the forefront of Athanasius' argumentation. This is a well defined argument for the Eternal Sonship of the *Logos*.

⁷¹ Ibid., 94.

The fact that the Savior had two natures also points to the eternality of the Son. The divine nature was not given *per* grace but was His by nature as Athanasius has well established. The fact that Athanasius reviews both natures simply means that the one nature must be divine as the other is human. This again, points to the fact that the Son exists eternally as the Son.

Athanasius reviews the dual natures of Christ to establish a platform of Christological interpretation within the Gospels. In the Athanasian structure, the Gospels reveal both natures of the Son. To miss either nature is to misinterpret the work of the Son/*Logos* in history and in humanity. The fact of the matter is the eternal Son became human. He retained His eternal deity and added on to His deity humanity. There is still only one subject and one person who possesses two natures.

The subject of the Son's eternal nature occupies the next section in that Athanasius takes time to consider the meaning of the Father's giving all things to His Son.

Matthew 11:27 and John 3:35 (CA 3.36-41)

Athanasius is concerned that that someone may misinterpret the Father handing the Son possessions as

Sabellianism.⁷² The clear distinctive act of the Father giving the Son possessions demonstrates that there are two different entities in mind. The mutual sharing of possessions simply refers to an act within eternity that was between Father and Son as the Son is heir of all the Father's possessions. Thus, there is no monad present within the Godhead but a Trinity. Athanasius states:

Such a person may conclude that the Son is identical with the Father. It was for the sake of avoiding this error that he said "was given me" and "I received" and "was handed over to me," for the sole purpose of showing that he is not the Father but the Logos of the Father and the eternal Son. . . .⁷³

First, Athanasius clearly distinguishes between the Father and the Son. Both, Father and Son existed eternally and mutually together. Their identities are not the same as one is Father and the other is Son. Both share the same essence, and in that essence, they are one together.

Second, Athanasius states that the Son is eternal to the Father as Son. Once again, he understands the Son to have His own identity, and that identity is one of Sonship. This is the crux of the thesis.

The purpose of the thesis was to establish that Athanasius revealed Eternal Sonship in *Contra Arianos*. He

⁷² This term and this concept has been addressed earlier in the thesis.

⁷³ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book III," 95.

has stated that concept in great detail. In this section, though, he argues for Eternal Sonship based upon the Son's distinct identity from the Father's. He is addressing the Arian thesis that *there was a time when the Son was not*. He writes:

The expressions "was given" and "was handed over" do not imply that there was time when [the Son] did not have these things. . . . But that phrase "he has given" he signifies that he is not himself the Father. When he says "in the same manner," he shows the Son's likeness of nature to the Father and the fact that he belongs to the Father.⁷⁴

Athanasius establishes that there are two separate people in dialogue with one another: one gave the other received. This is an eternal transaction, not one that takes place in time. Athanasius goes on to state:

We conclude, rather, that the Logos is trustworthy and that everything he says he has received, he possesses from the Father, although at the same time **he possesses it eternally** [emphasis added].⁷⁵

In CA 3.37, Athanasius addresses the third Arian objection and links his answer to the eternal nature of the Son. The Arians stated that the Son was ignorant. They concluded this on the basis that the Son could not answer questions concerning the Second Coming and that the Son had to learn.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 95-6.

Athanasius replies that a person can ask a question while knowing the answer as in the case of the boy who had bread or in the case where Lazarus was laid to rest. He follows this answer with another explanation that states the humanity of the Son may not know an answer as that is proper to humanity. The fact is that the humanity of the Son was also evidence in certain situations. The particular case of inquiring about Lazarus' tomb is also revealed in context with Jesus knowing about Lazarus' death while no one is witnessed as telling the Lord about the event. This is clear evidence, *per* Athanasius, that both natures were at work in the Son. Athanasius affirms the Son possessed the knowledge of the Father while being the Son and there was a mutual sharing of the knowledge among them.

The issue is that the Son was given all from the Father in their eternal relationship. The knowledge of the *Logos* was not hindered by the Lord's humanity. In fact, the opposite is true. The humanity of the Son was sanctified by the *Logos*. The property of humanity, even though sanctified, was not changed from being human. The Lord's humanity was indeed human in nature. Therefore, the humanity of our Lord could ask a question to learn, whereas, the deity and *Logos* of our Lord knew the answer to

the question posed by the Lord's humanity. Athanasius states this in CA 3.38:

It is plain, therefore, to everyone that not knowing is proper to the flesh, whereas the Logos, insofar as he is Logos, knows all things even before their origination. He has not ceased to be God by reason of becoming human, and he does not flee from the things human because he is God.⁷⁶

The point Athanasius makes is that even though the Son possesses the knowledge of the Father that did not prohibit the Son from experiencing total humanity. The *giving of possessions from the Father* simply was an act within eternity and not at the end of the Lord's earthly life. The Lord's earthly life was lived in the scope of being a true human.

As a human he received authority from the Father. This is accomplished to affirm the economy of the incarnation. As a human, the Son claims the gift from the Father so that grace could be given to humanity. Athanasius informs the reader that the *Logos* possessed the authority from the Father from all eternity. Thus, the Son/*Logos* is eternal but became human. The humanity of the Son is witnessed in the reception of the authority and glorification from the Father.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 97.

In CA 3.39, Athanasius reviews the soteriological implications for humanity. The Lord's condescension to become human is for the benefit of all humanity. He took on the weakness of humanity and became victorious over weak fleshly, human nature. Athanasius states:

If, on the other hand, the aim was for him to redeem the members of the human race, then the Logos did dwell among them, and in order to sanctify and divinize them, the Logos became flesh (for that is why he did it). To whom, then, is it not obvious that the things the Logos says he received when he became flesh are mentioned not on his own account but on account of the flesh? He spoke in flesh, and the gifts bestowed by the Father through the Logos belonged to the flesh.⁷⁷

The basis of this statement is a recapitulation of the Athanasian theme of *Contra Arianos*: The Son both receives and gives, His obedience is *per* a human body but not to His promotion as Son but as a demonstration of Eternal Sonship, and the soteriological accomplishment is for humanity's sake.

In CA 3.40-41, Athanasius concludes this section of receiving and giving by stating that the authority the Son received on earth was His from all eternity. He states:

Furthermore, the authority he said he received after the resurrection is an authority he possessed both before he received it and before the resurrection. . . . But again, he is shown to be in possession of that

⁷⁷ Ibid., 99.

which he says he has received even before he received it. . . .⁷⁸

The authority that the Son received on earth is a solidification of His Eternal Sonship. He both received authority as a human but possessed this authority as the *Logos* from all eternity.

Athanasius closes with a summary about the Lord's becoming man as evidence in the Gospel texts. He states:

He was true God in the flesh, and he was true flesh in the Logos. That is why, by his works, he revealed both the fact that he is God's Son and his own Father and, by the passions of the flesh, that he bore a real body and this body was his very own.⁷⁹

Mark 13:32 and Luke 2:52 (CA 3.42-53)

Athanasius begins to deal with the fourth Arian objection. The Arians have cited Mark 13:32 as a rationale for their conclusion that the Son was created and not eternal. The basis for their conclusion is that the Son did not know certain eschatological facts. They construed that the Son was created because of the limitations of His knowledge.

Once again, Athanasius interprets the passages with the dual nature of Christ in mind. The two natures of the Lord are his controlling hermeneutical method that governs

⁷⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 101.

his theological conclusions. This has been the dominant hermeneutical theme throughout *Contra Arianos*.

Athanasius understands the passage of Mark 13:32 as being an eschatological discourse. He appeals to the divine nature as knowing the answer about the Second Coming. He states:

Through the Word all things have been made, times and seasons and night and day and the whole creation; and is the Framer of all said to be ignorant of His work? And the very context of the lection shows that the Son of God knows that hour and that day. . . .⁸⁰

Athanasius details that the context must be given consideration to determine the meaning. He states that the discourse of the Great Tribulation, the physical events on the earth and in the heavens associated with the Second Coming, and the parable of the fig tree give evidence that the Lord knew the events of His return.

The issue with which Athanasius must deal is the rationale of the Lord to deny His knowledge of the timing of the Second Coming. He even asked this same question in CA 3.42. His answer is predicated upon the dual natures of Christ. He states, "For this as before is not the Word's deficiency, but of that human nature whose property it is to be ignorant."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 416.

⁸¹ Ibid., 417.

The economy of the incarnation revealing the Lord's humanity is what Athanasius believes transpired at the time of this question. The humanity of the Son could be ignorant of the certain events. The Lord assumed human nature and lived the logical implications of that assumption. Again, Athanasius states:

Moreover this is proper to the Saviour's love of man; for since He was made man, He is not ashamed, because of the flesh which is ignorant, to say "I know not," that he may shew that as knowing God, He is but ignorant according to the flesh.⁸²

Athanasius' answer is based upon the semantics of the text. The phrase "know not the Son" simply means that the humanity of the Lord answered the question instead of the deity of the Lord. If the text would have read, "no not the Son of God," then a case for the ignorance of the *Logos* might have been established.

In order to support his conclusion, Athanasius lists the lack of any mention of the Holy Spirit. The angels are mentioned, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the text. The implication is that if the Holy Spirit knew the timing of the Second Coming so would God the Son.

Athanasius reviews the position that the *Logos* is an intricate part of the Father and knows all that the Father

⁸² Ibid., 47.

knows. He knows the various aspects of creation. It is only logical that the *Logos* would know the summation of creation. Therefore, the *Logos* would know the timing of the Second Coming.

The ontological union of Father and Son also points to the fact that the Son must know all things including the Second Coming. The Father does all things through the Son, so then the result is that the Son would have knowledge of His return. Meijering concurs as he writes:

One must ask when the Son made that utterance. It is clear that He did so not when He was creating the earth, but when He had incarnated Himself. Therefore, the fact that He does not know about the day of judgment, the Son takes this ignorance upon Himself. . . . Furthermore, Athanasius argues, the Son Himself will appear on the day of judgment, so He certainly knows when that will be.⁸³

The Arians have dismantled any epistemology between Father and Son by maintaining the creation of the Son. In the Arian system, there is no epistemology or communication between Father and Son.

CA 3.45 returns to Matthew 24:36. This text includes the account of Noah as a parallel to the Second Coming of the Son. The focal point refers to the humanity of the Son not knowing certain events. The people of Noah's day did not know the flood was going to happen. In the same manner,

⁸³ Meijering, 97.

the people in the Lord's era (and in this day) do not know the timing of the Second Coming. However, Athanasius quotes Genesis 7:4, where the Lord informs Noah about His plans to flood the earth. The point is that the *Logos* knew the day when the flood would start. The contrast is seen when divine knowledge is reviewed against human knowledge. The Godhead knows all things, whereas humanity is limited in knowledge.

The *Logos* possesses all the knowledge of the Godhead. This is evidenced by the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. The Bridegroom is the Son who warns the virgins to be watchful of His coming. Athanasius deduces that the Bridegroom must know of His own intentions to come for the virgin bride, whereas, the virgins do not know when the Bridegroom will come. The point made is that the *Logos* must know His own intentions and subsequent actions. Humans do not know the time of the Lord's return to earth. The conclusion is that when the Son said He did not know the time of the Second Coming it was in reference to the humanity of the Son.

Again, Athanasius appeals to the episode of Lazarus. The fact that the Son asked where Lazarus was buried was an indication that the human nature of the Son was at work. However, the fact that the Son could recall the soul of

Lazarus also indicated the work of the *Logos* in the Son.

Athanasius states:

In like manner also about Lazarus He asks humanly, who was on His way to raise him, and knew whence He should recall Lazarus's soul; and it was a greater thing to know where the soul was, than to know where the body lay; but He asked humanly, that He might raise divinely.⁸⁴

The rationale for reviewing the Lazarus episode is that since the Lord knew where to find the soul of Lazarus, then the Lord must also have known the location of the body.

Matthew 16:15 also illustrates the divine/human Son at work. Peter acknowledges the truth about the Son of Man. The Lord responded that the answer came from the Father who revealed it to Peter. Then Athanasius quotes Matthew 11:27, to remind the reader that the Son reveals the Father. The obvious conclusion is that the Son answered the question for Peter. The divine nature could supply the answer to His own question, whereas the human nature did not know the answer but could ask the question.

In CA 3.47, Athanasius utilizes Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 12:2, to add further proof of his premise. The Phrygians (also known as the Montanists) interpreted Paul to actually understand his vision and thus knew it was

⁸⁴ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 419.

he who was *caught up into heaven*. At the same time, the Arians denied that the Lord knew the events but affirmed that Paul knew even when he said he did not know the event. This is the same analogy used of Christ. If Paul knew when he denied having such knowledge, then certainly Christ also knew the time of the Second Coming even when he denied having such knowledge.

In CA 3.48, Athanasius addresses the lingering question of *why* the Lord denied his own knowledge. Athanasius writes, "Why then said He at that time 'I know not,' what He, as Lord, knew?"⁸⁵

Athanasius gives the answer to his question. He states:

On both sides did the Savior secure our advantage; for He has made known what comes before the end, that, as He said Himself, we might not be startled nor scared, when they happen, but from them may expect the end after them. And concerning the day and hour He was not willing to say according to His divine nature, "I know," but after the flesh, "I know not," for the sake of the flesh which was ignorant, as I have said "before" lest they should ask Him further, and then either He should have to pain the disciples by not speaking, or by speaking might act to the prejudice of them and us all.⁸⁶

Athanasius states that the Lord revealed enough information to the disciples so that they would be

⁸⁵ Ibid., 420.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 420.

comforted when the event happened. Therefore, the dialogue of Mark 13:32 did not yield the exact day and time of the Lord's Second Coming so that the disciples would not live in fear or dread. Athanasius quotes Acts 1:7 to further demonstrate that the Lord was acting on the disciples' best interest by concealing all the events of the Second Coming. They simply did not need to know the time of the Kingdom.

In CA 3.51, Athanasius addresses Luke 2:52. The Arians used this text to justify their position that the Lord had to grow in knowledge and increase in wisdom. Athanasius appeals to the same text in order to ascertain the subject of the text. Athanasius writes:

This then is the passage, and since they stumble in it, we are compelled to ask them, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, of the person concerning whom Luke speaks. And the case stands thus. Is Jesus Christ man, all other men, or is He God bearing flesh?⁸⁷

Athanasius puts forward the idea that the text is speaking of the humanity of the Son or the divinity of the Son. For that matter, if the Arian position dictates that the Son is not divine then, once again, Athanasius reminds them that they fall into the error of Paul of Samosata.⁸⁸

The orthodox position is that the Son is God bearing flesh. As stated earlier in the argumentation of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 421.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 421.

Philippians 2:6-11, the Son cannot advance or improve in His divine nature. Athanasius states:

But if He be God bearing flesh, as He truly is, and "the Word became flesh," and being God descended upon earth, what advance had He who existed equal to God? Or how had the Son increase, being ever in the Father?⁸⁹

If the *Logos* advanced then that is evidence of an imperfection in the *Logos*. The implication of the Arian thesis is nonsense: the *Logos* advances others who are dependent on Him, which would mean that the *Logos* advanced later than the angels, archangels, and dominions who depend on the advancement of the *Logos* in the first place!⁹⁰

In CA 3.52, Athanasius concludes that the body and humanity of the Son advanced and increased. He states:

It was not then the Word, considered as the Word, who advanced . . . humanly is He here also said to advance, since advance belongs to man. . . . Of the body then is the advance; for, it advancing, in it advanced also the manifestation of the Godhead to those who saw it.⁹¹

The body of the Lord grew into manhood, but by doing so the Godhead was revealed before all men. The idea of increasing in stature must refer to the body and manhood of the Lord, as the *Logos* cannot increase in wisdom.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 421.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 421.

⁹¹ Ibid., 422.

In CA 3.53, Athanasius informs the Arians that the growing body of the Lord did not impede the grace of the *Logos*. The *Logos* did not advance or change so the grace that comes from the *Logos* was not impaired by the growth of the human body of the Lord.

Matthew 26:38-39 and John 12:27 (CA 3.54-58a)

These passages are in direct response to the second and fourth Arian objections concerning the eternal nature of the Son. These reveal the trouble or sorrow in the Lord's soul at the time of His death. The Arians interpreted the emotional pain of the Lord as evidence that the Son could not have an eternal nature. The rationale is that the Son would not experience such human emotions if He were eternal.

Athanasius does not deny the validity of the Scriptures. He affirms that the emotions of the Lord were experienced and very real. However, he takes the same approach as he did with the earlier texts. The *Logos* is not in view here, but the humanity of the Lord is the subject matter.

In order to demonstrate that the Lord's humanity is the subject, Athanasius recalls several texts dealing with courage. He reviews the calling of Abraham, the calling of

Moses to encounter Pharaoh with courage, and the charge to Joshua to be courageous, and recounts Psalm 118:6 as being ascribed to Christ. The interesting issue that Athanasius states is that it is the Word that supplied courage to all the above mentioned.

The result is that the gospel text of Matthew 26:38-39 refers to the humanity of the Lord. It is the economy of the incarnation that is depicted in the gospels. Athanasius states that the Arians lacked the understanding of the humanity of the Lord and confused the two natures with one another. He writes:

If then they make His human attributes a ground for low thoughts concerning the Son of God, nay consider Him altogether man from the earth, and not from heaven, wherefore not from His divine works recognize the Word who is in the Father, and henceforward renounce their self-willed irreligion.⁹²

In CA 3.56, Athanasius includes the abandonment of the Lord on the cross as referring to His humanity. The crucifixion of the Lord shows agony and fear on one hand and triumph and victory on the other. The reason for both views is that both natures of the Lord are portrayed in the event of the crucifixion. The Lord's humanity could cry out in fear and abandonment, whereas, the *Logos* could rest in the victory of being in the Father.

⁹² Ibid., 423.

In CA 3.57, Athanasius reviews the fact that the Lord did not fear death in the *Logos* but took on humanity in order to "make man undaunted in the face of death."⁹³ Athanasius attributes the Lord's success in doing so as the catalyst for the martyrs' willingness to face their own death.

Athanasius then quotes John 12:27, as the Lord having the ability to give up His life. The concept is that the *Logos* was in control of His own destiny. The economy of the incarnation mandated the Lord experience human life in the same events as the *Logos* experienced life. Athanasius comments on this fact:

Again He said humanly, "Now is My soul troubled;" and He said divinely, "I have power to lay down My life, and power to take it again." For to be troubled was proper to the flesh, and to have power to lay down His life and take it again, when He will, was no property of men but of the Word's power.⁹⁴

This has been the Athanasian hallmark of hermeneutics. Proper interpretation and proper theology must recognize each nature as being capable of expressing itself. The expression of both natures is nothing more than a congruous whole relating to each other and communicating to the world in harmony. The tension of the two natures

⁹³ Ibid., 424.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 424-5.

expressing opposite realities is not valid. That is the reason Athanasius answers the Arians with each nature having its own properties in harmony without confusion with the other nature. Khaled Anatolios comments on CA 3.57. He states:

All this is to say, that for Athanasius, the Word Incarnate does not undergo any merely human experiences. This does not mean that his human experiences are not fully human, but only that they are inseparable from the influence of divinity. There is a combination, therefore, of possibility and Impassibility, of weakness and power, and humanity and divinity, in all the experiences of Jesus Christ, and it is this combination that makes them intrinsically transformative.⁹⁵

In CA 3.58, Athanasius states that if the Arians had given these issues consideration, they would not have been in denial of the orthodox faith, nor would have they denied the eternal nature of the Son.

**Refuting Sonship *Per* the Will of God
(CA 3.58b-67)**

This section seems to take on a different nuance than the rest of Book 3. It seems more to resemble the language of Book 1 and 2.⁹⁶ There is very little connection

⁹⁵ Anatolios, 154.

⁹⁶ This conclusion is not original to this writer. The footnotes of Athanasius, "Against the Arians," reveal this information. This writer read footnote 1 on page 425, and then started reviewing the language of Book 1 and was impressed with the same conclusion.

with the content of Book 3, but there is solidarity in thought and content of its own unit of presentation.

The issue of the Son's existence *per* the will of the Father is the focal point of these paragraphs. Athanasius equates the Arian denial of the Son's existence before His creation equal to the Son's existence *per* the will of the Father. He states:

For he who says, "The Son came to be at the Divine will," has the same meaning as another who says, "once he was not," and "The Son came to be out of nothing," and "He is a creature."⁹⁷

In Athanasius' mind both statements are blasphemous. Thus, he references the Arians as heretics, wicked and deceitful.

He accuses the Arians of learning from Ptolemy the Valentinian. Ptolemy, *per* Athanasius, embraced the concept that God had attributes called "Thought and Will."⁹⁸ These attributes, in succession, thought of the Son then willed Him to existence.⁹⁹ Athanasius sees a lineage of thought progressing from the Valentinians to the Arians as he accuses them of learning the heretical lesson from them.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 426.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 426.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 426.

In CA 3.61, Athanasius does not attempt to discredit the Arian theology of the uncreated Son as that has been accomplished earlier in the work. He does reveal the faulty theology of their conclusion that the Son was willed by the Father. He writes:

For if he too came to be as you maintain, by will, it follows that the will concerning Him consists in some other Word, through whom He in turn comes to be; for it has been shown that God's will is not in the things which he brings into being, but in Him through whom and in whom all things made are brought to be.¹⁰⁰

Athanasius logically shows that God works all things through His *Logos*. If the Son exists *per* the will of God and not *per* his own nature, then there must be another *Logos* that preceded the Son. This is an argument for the eternal Son's existence. There is no need for another Word simply because the Son is eternal in His nature and not because of the will of God.

Athanasius also refutes the conclusions of the Gnostic Valentinians by stating that the Son exists as Wisdom and not because of wisdom. He states:

But if the Word is the Framer of the creatures, and He coexists with the Father, how can to counsel precede the Everlasting as if he were not? For if counsel precedes, how through Him are all things?¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 427.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 427.

The logical conclusion is that the Valentinians have misunderstood the Scriptures and propagated their heresy.

The Son must exist by another Word, and thus the attribute of counsel determines the existence of the lesser Word.

This would mean that the Son, at one point, did not exist.

Meijering states:

Athanasius opposes the doctrine of the Arians that Christ has come into being through a decision of God's will, since that would mean the same as if there was a time which the Son was not, and as if the Son was a creature.¹⁰²

Athanasius argues that the Valentinian heresy of the so-called attributes, *thought* and *counsel*, not only leads to the same theological position of Arianism, but they are one and the same. He also demonstrates that *thought* and *counsel* are not merely attributes but a creating force. The end result is that the Son is still a creature, and the Arians are deceived and deceitful.

In CA 3.62, the focal issue of the Arian argument is addressed. The Arians have adopted an alternative to the orthodox faith concerning the Son. This alternative position has the Son a creature by will of the Father. The Valentinian heresy is now the theology of the Arians.

¹⁰² Meijering, 70.

Athanasius claims that the Arians have adopted the position that the Father begets the Son out of necessity.

He quotes the Arians as saying:

"Unless He has by will come to be, therefore God had a Son by necessity and against His good pleasure." And who is it then who imposes necessity on Him, O men most wicked, who draw everything to the purpose of your heresy?¹⁰³

Athanasius returns to previous arguments by stating that the Son is not a coerced entity that derives His existence simply because the Father willed Him into being. The Son exists as the natural offspring of the Father.

In CA 3.63, Athanasius applies the Arian theology of the Son to the Father. He asks them, did the Father will Himself into existence? The idea is absurd in that that it is impossible for the Father to will Himself into existence. However, the question is valid. What was the Father before *will* took existence?

Athanasius replies that the Father reveals His will in and through the Son. He supports this by referring to Proverbs 3:19 and Proverbs 8:14. The heavens and earth were created by Wisdom, who has strength, power, and will to create.

¹⁰³ Athanasius, "Against the Arians," 427.

In CA 3.64-65, Athanasius states the obvious fact that if Arianism is true, then there would have to be a succession of *Logoi* leading one to embrace polytheism and not orthodox Christianity. Athanasius writes:

And though they fashion another, yet assuredly he too comes into being through some one; and so, while we are thus reckoning up and investigating the succession of them, the many headed heresy of the Atheists is discovered to issue in polytheism and madness unlimited; . . .¹⁰⁴

Athanasius closes Book 3 with a plea not to bring in the doctrine of Valentinus within the confines of the Christian church. He calls upon the Church to reject the pretext of the Arians, and thus reject their false doctrine of the created Son. The rationale is pastoral in that Athanasius understands that the Scriptures are closed to the Arians as they are enemies of the Lord.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 429.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 431.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

The Theological Concept of Eternal Sonship as Revealed in *Contra Arianos*

In the analysis of this study several issues of Athanasius have been observed as he reveals the concept of Eternal Sonship in *Contra Arianos*. It must be noted that Athanasius does not attempt to discredit the Arians as much as he attempts to preserve orthodox doctrine, and thus secure the faith of the Christian Church.

The Arians were the catalyst that prompted his theological endeavor, however, he does not simply do theology. He addressed the Arians with a polemic that stressed the eternal existence of the Son. The eternal existence of the Son was (is) the basis of the Christian faith. His theological work, *Contra Arianos*, was in direct response to the Arian tenet: "There was a time when the Son was not."¹

Although he does not attempt to clarify the Nicene formula, he does give insight into the nature of the Arian

¹ Athanasius, "Orations Against the Arians, Book I," 67.

heresy and the brevity of the doctrinal issues surrounding the fourth century Trinitarian-Christological-Ecclesiological debate concerning Arianism. He utilizes the ecclesiastical conclusion of the Council of Nicea that stressed the Son is the eternal *Logos*.

Athanasius reveals the eternal status of the Son from both positive and negative aspects. The negative aspects are deliberate in that he is addressing the defective theology of the Arian heresy. The positive aspects flow from Athanasius as he contributes to the correct hermeneutic and subsequent proper theological tenets of the orthodox position.

Eternal Sonship from the Negative Aspect

Athanasius argues against the main Arian thesis concerning the creation of the Son. The Arian tenet of "there was a time when the Son was not" was the focal point of the Arian heresy. Athanasius argued against this position, and in the process, demonstrated the eternal nature of the Son as opposed to the created Son of the Arians. He does this from the negative position by denouncing the Arian theology.

Athanasius condemns the Arian heresy on ten main issues. They are listed as follows:

1. The Arian position that "there was a time when the Son was not" has no legacy within Christianity. The theology of the Church does not know of a premise that denies the Son's eternal nature. There is no strand of orthodoxy that adheres to this position. Therefore, the tradition of the Church speaks against the Arian heresy. The implied thesis is that the Church has always accepted the eternal nature of the Son.
2. Along the same lines of the legacy argument, Athanasius reveals that not one Church Father propagated that "there was a time when the Son was not." The appeal to the Church Fathers is also an appeal to tradition. The basis for tradition is that there is not one recognized pastoral authority who teaches the heresy of the Arians. Consequently, the Arians stand alone in their own theological *epinoia* (inventions). Again, the Arian heresy stands in contrast to the teaching of the Fathers. The early pastors of the Christian church taught the believers that the Son is eternal.
3. Athanasius informs the Church (and the Arians) that the Arian heresy is built on the platform of a faulty hermeneutic. He denounces the Arian heresy

for failing to adopt a theology that is consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures. His concept was that the Bible must be interpreted within its total scope. The *Scope of Scripture* was the standard by which theology must be addressed and adopted. The Arian heresy was not found within the total scope of scriptural teachings. The rationale is that the Scriptures teach the eternity of the Son.

4. Since the Arians do not have a legacy within the Church, nor did they learn their heresy from a Church Father, and since the Scriptures do not teach that the Son was created, the Arians *epinoia* (invent) their own religion. They invented their own religion with their own god and worshipped a creature. Athanasius understands the Arians to have contrived their irreligion into a form of religion. Christianity, on the other hand, does not contrive anything but accepts the revelation that the Son is eternal.
5. Athanasius depicts that the Arians have not only invented a new religion, but they have concocted a son with a different *ousia* (essence) than the Father's. In the Arian theology there is no

ontological unity between Father and Son. Since the Son is created, He does not share or have the same essence as God, and thus He is an irreligious *epinoia* (invention). Athanasius denounces this as foreign to the *alhqeia* (truth). The truth about the Son is that He is eternal God simply because He has the same *ousia* (essence) as the Father.

6. Athanasius is Trinitarian in his thought processes. He reveals that the Son is eternal on the basis that the Arians have a changing Trinity. Should the Son be created, the Trinity is not eternal and thus changes numerically and changes in its essence. The differing *ousia* (essence) of the Son logically means that the Trinity is changing and not eternal. The Arians have denied the Trinity in order to adopt a strict monad. This is not consistent with orthodoxy. The Trinity demands an eternal, unchangeable Son.
7. A son that is created denies any epistemology between Father and Son. There is no basis for the Son knowing the Father and the Father knowing the Son. In the Arian scheme both are of two differing *ousia* (essences). The orthodox position embraces

the epistemology of Father and Son simply because the Son is eternal.

8. The Arians have the Christian Church worshipping a creature rather than the Creator. Consequently, there are two different faiths, two different Gods, and two different religions. This means that the Arian have an alternative to the orthodox position: the Son is eternal.
9. Soteriology is impossible if the Son is not eternal. The Arian son was in need of salvation as well, simply because he did not possess the ability to save humanity as he identified with humanity in his own creation. The basis for this conclusion is that the Arian son does not have the ability to save because he also needs grace. The eternal Son does not need grace as He is the giver of grace.
10. Should the Son be deemed a creature, then there is no ontological unity with the Father. Therefore, the Son is external to the Father and nothing more than a creature. In this event, the Son can identify with humanity but not with the divinity of the Father. The eternal Son can identify with the Godhead in that He is a part of the Godhead.

The above list forms the basis of Athanasius' interaction with the defective Arian theology. Athanasius reveals that the eternal Son stands in stark contrast to the creaturely son of the Arians. This contrast, in turn, serves to reveal the true nature of the Son as revealed not only in *Contra Arianos* but also from the Scriptures.

Eternal Sonship from the Positive Aspect

Athanasius argues from the positive aspect for the eternal Son. This is his contribution to the theology of the Christian Church as he reveals the eternal nature of the Son in *Contra Arianos*. Athanasius not only interacts with the Arian heresy to denounce it, but he also gives positive theology in order to protect the Church.

The basis of his contribution to Christian theology is his hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures. He understands that the Scriptures give a double account of the Son's existence on earth. Therefore, the reader of the Scriptures must understand that both attributes of the Son, his divinity and humanity, are recounted in the Scriptures. True to the Council of Nicea's decision, one cannot commingle or blend the attributes into one another. Both natures must be accorded their own properties in order to properly understand and interpret the scriptural accounts

of the Son. With that as his guiding hermeneutic, Athanasius presents ten main points that reveal the eternal nature of the Son. They are listed as follows:

1. Athanasius uses the word "*homoousion*" to present the eternal nature of the Son. Athanasius rarely commented on this word. However, he is thoroughly Nicene in his approach to the Arians. The basis for utilizing this word is that the Son has the same essence as the Father. By definition the Father and the Son are not similar but the same. This means that as the Father is deemed eternal, the Son must also be deemed eternal. Athanasius builds *Contra Arianos* on this premise. He uses the Council of Nicea to wield the orthodox position as he interacts with the defective Arian theology. The purpose of this is to reveal that the Arians are anathematized as they do not concur or conform to the official ecclesiastical position. The end result is that Athanasius argues for the eternal nature of the Son with the full support of the Council of Nicea. The Council of Nicea set the boundaries for the official orthodox Christological position: The Son is eternal God.

2. The epistemological issue is of great importance to Athanasius. Epistemology can take place because both Father and Son have the same essence. The Son can truly know the Father and the Father can know the Son because their natures are the same. No other creature can know the Father except the Son. The rationale for this contribution is that the Son reveals the Father and can only do so because He and the Father are one. Since the Father is eternal, the Son must also be eternal.
3. Utilizing the concept of generation, Athanasius reveals that the Father eternally generates the Son. This simply refers to the fact that the Son is eternal. Generation is not to be seen as accomplished *per* the will of the Father, but generation is accomplished because the Father loves the Son. The Son eternally exists in a love relationship with the Father from all eternity.
4. The Son is the eternal *Logos* and Wisdom of the Father. Because this is true the Son is not *poiew* (make) or *ktizw* (created). His humanity is made, but His divinity is eternal. The Wisdom of God is seen as eternal in Proverbs 8:22 as well as the *poiew* (made) or *ktizw* (created) of His humanity.

Athanasius argues that the Son is the Wisdom of God from all eternity.

5. Athanasius argues that the Philippians 2:6-11 passage refers to the humanity of Jesus being exalted. The divinity of the Son could not advance or be exalted simply because His eternal nature is already exalted as Lord. The concept here is the Lordship of the Son is eternal and not temporal.
6. In the Hebrews passages, Athanasius demonstrates that the Book of Hebrews argues for the status of the eternal Son. The Sonship of Christ is better than Judaism, the Angels, and the ministry of Abraham and Moses, and precedes Melchizedek. The ministries and people mentioned in the book of Hebrews are temporal, whereas, the Son is eternal.
7. The Gospel texts reveal the temporal humanity of the Son and the eternal nature of the Son. An example of this is that the Son, in His divinity, could know where the soul of Lazarus was and could recall it, but in the Son's humanity, He did not know where the body was laid. The Gospels reveal an eternal Son/*Logos* united with humanity. The fact that the Son has both natures (divine and human) demonstrates the hypostatic union. The hypostatic

union illustrates the eternal nature of the Son as *Logos*.

8. The Trinity must have eternal members for it to be eternal. The perichoresis means that the Son relates to the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally. Their relationship to one another provides the basis of unity and cohesiveness with the Triad. The obvious conclusion is that since the Trinity is eternal the Son must also be eternal.
9. The baptismal confession of the Church reveals the eternal nature of the Son. Athanasius unites the worship practice of the Church with the theology of the Church with this issue. The Church practices its theology in the form of this particular ordinance. The confession of baptizing in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simply reveals that God is an eternal Triad. The eternity of the Trinity, as confessed in the baptismal confession, reveals the eternal nature of the Son as the Grace Giver to humanity.
10. The most significant contribution is the differentiation between the Father and Son. Athanasius reveals that in order for the Son to have a distinction from the Father and Holy Spirit,

the Son must have a reality to His title. This was stated in the thesis as a "corresponding reality" to the title of *Son*. This concept fits well with the perichoresis, in that the Trinity could distinguish between their relationships and still have ontological unity. The relationships are eternal, and the names and titles of *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* reveal an eternal *corresponding reality* to each person.

The above points reveal that the orthodox position confesses the eternal nature of the incarnated Son. The Son exists as eternal Wisdom, *Logos*, and Person of God, and as God. This is the confession of the Church and the practice of the Church's theology. The Arians did not succeed in their attempts at replacing the orthodox position. In other words, Athanasius and the Council of Nicea decidedly refuted the heretical notion that *there was a time when the Son was not*.

Athanasius, arguing in defense of orthodox theology, reveals that the Son is eternal.

Eternal Subordination

The one last issue remaining to address is the issue of subordination within the Trinity. Athanasius does not

argue for ontological subordination. He, in fact, refutes any idea of such notions, as this would be nothing more than a sophisticated form of Arianism. The conclusion must be emphatically stated: there is no ontological inferiority within the Godhead!

The eternity of the Godhead reveals one essence existing in equality, mutual love, and respect with regard to all three persons. The theology of the Church is that the one essence of God subsists eternally in three persons. Thus, the ecclesiological confession is that there is ontological unity in the one essence and within the three distinct persons who are a part of the one essence.

Athanasius does reveal a functional subordination *per se*, and an ordered structure within the Trinity. The fact that the Son is eternally Son to the Father defines their relationship. The Son is ontologically the same as the Father but in relationship He functions as a son to the Father. This is the main focus of the structure of *Contra Arianos*.

Athanasius does not define the ordered structure of the Godhead, as it probably would have led to more confusion concerning the Arian heresy. Should he have done so, the result may have been viewed as giving some legitimacy and validity to the Arian position.

The fact that Athanasius argues for distinctiveness within the Trinity and the fact that the Son is ontologically the same as the Father indicates that this ordered structure of the Trinity is eternal in function. Again, Athanasius does not state this conclusion but he strongly implies it throughout *Contra Arianos*.

Conclusion

Finally, it must be noted that the work, *Contra Arianos*, was not written for the conversion of the Arian party to the orthodox position. The focus of the work is directed to the protection of the Church. The soteriology, Christology, and theology of the Christian Church were the primary concern of Athanasius. He writes to reinforce the Nicene position as fully orthodox, and thus seeks to eradicate the Arian heresy so that the Christian Church would not be compromised with doctrinal impurity. He writes with the passion of a pastor who is protecting and shepherding the flock of God, the Church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Athanasius. "Against the Arians." In *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 303-47. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub. 1994.

_____. "On the Incarnation." In *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 31-67. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub. 1994.

_____. "Orations Against the Arians, Book I." In *The Trinitarian Controversy*, trans. and ed. William G. Rusch, 63-129. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

_____. "Orations Against the Arians, Book III." In *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris, Jr., 26-41. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.

Secondary Sources

Anatolios, Khahled. *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*. London: Routledge Publication, 1998.

Bauer, Walter; Arndt, William; and Gingrich, F. Wilbur. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation Past & Present*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996.

Brown, Harold O. J. *Heresies*. Garden City, NY: Double Day Press, 1984.

- Cairns, Alan, ed. *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002.
- Campbell, Theodore C. "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Athanasius." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974): 408-440.
- Dockery, David. *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Dragas, George Dion. *Athanasiana*. London, 1980.
- Erickson, Millard. *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986.
- _____. *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995.
- Ernest, James D. "Athanasius of Alexandria: The Scope of Scripture in Polemical and Pastoral Context." *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993): 341-62.
- Ewell, Walter, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Giles, Kevin. *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002.
- Gregg, Robert C. and Dennis E. Groh. *Early Arianism-A View of Salvation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Grillmeier, Aloys. *Christ in Christian Tradition*. 4 vols. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Handspicker, Meredith B. "Athanasius on Tradition and Scripture." *Andover Newton Quarterly* 3:13-29.
- Hanson, R. P. C. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988.

- Hart, Trevor A. "The Two Soteriological Traditions of Alexandria." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61:3(1989): 239-59.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986.
- Kannengiesser, Charles. *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1982.
- _____. "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology." *Theological Studies* 34 (1973): 103-113.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. San Francisco: Harper Publications, 1996.
- Kittle, Gerhard, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.
- Laeuchli, Samuel. "The Case of Athanasius Against Arius." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 30 (June 1959): 403-20.
- Lampe, G. W. H. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity*. 2 vols. San Francisco: Prince Press, 1999.
- Livingston, E. A., ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Louth, Andrew. "Reason and Revelation in Saint Athanasius." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 385-96.
- Lyman, J. Rebecca. *Christology and Cosmology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Meijering, E. P. *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius, Synthesis or Antithesis?* Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1968.
- Norris, Richard, ed. *The Christological Controversy*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

- North, Keith Edward. "Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology." Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1980.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.
- Pettersen, Alvyn. *Athanasius*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995.
- Richardson, Alan, ed. *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983.
- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. 5 vols. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932.
- Schaff, Phillip. *History of the Christian Church*. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1956.
- Schemm, Jr., Peter R. "Kevin Giles's The Trinity and Subordinationism." *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7 (Fall 2002): 67-78
- Schemm, Jr., Peter R., and Kovach, Stephen D. "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Eternal Subordination of the Son." *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (September 1999): 461-476.
- Stead, Christopher. "Rhetorical Method in Athanasius." *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976): 121-137.
- Tenney, Merrill C. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia of the Bible*. 5 vol. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.
- Torrance, Thomas F. *Trinitarian Perspectives*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994.
- Widdicombe, Peter. *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Williams, Rowan. "Baptism and the Arian Controversy." In *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. Michel R. Barnes & Daniel H. Williams, 149-80. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993.

Young, Francis. *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*. Philadelphia:
Fortress Press, 1983.