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ABSTRACT

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF ATHANASIUS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE NICENE HOMOOUSION

By: Athanasius G. Paparnakis Degree: Master of Arts Year: September 1993

In this thesis we attempt to investigate St. Athanasius' defence of the biblical character of the crucial Nicene term "homoousios" which has been called into question from the very first moment of its emergence in the official ecclesiastical documents until today.

In the *Introduction* we explore two themes: first, the position of the "homoousios" in modern Athanasian scholarship in which we identify three main problems: a) that very little attention has been paid to the relations of the term with the Bible, b) that it is still regarded as a doctrinal development which marked the beginning of importation into the Christian doctrine of ideas alien to the genuine biblical message and c) that the twofold option between "generic" and "numerical" identity is the prevailing view of understanding the meaning of the term. Second, we briefly explore the data provided by the Athanasian pro-homoousion texts which show that he dealt with two problems: a) that the term was not biblical and b) that it implied division of God. As a result, he relates the term with two fundamental biblical doctrines: the natural generation of the Son from the Father and the unity of essence of the Son with the Father. His main argument is that the objections raised against the "homoousion" spring out of objection to these biblical doctrines and although the term is not included in the Scriptures it fully preserves their message. In view of this, we divided our thesis into two corresponding parts.

In the first part we look into the biblical evidence which Athanasius recalls as the source of the doctrine of the *Generation of the Son from the Father*. We follow his attempt to establish it starting from the conception of the Father as Begetter, going to the act of begetting and finally to the Son as the Offspring of the Father. In the first chapter we investigate his interpretation of the biblical texts to which he refers with regard to the first two points: the Son has the beginning of his existence in the being (=essence) of the Father and therefore the biblical verb which describes his generation is "to beget" and not "to create". We investigate the understanding of the Son as Offspring in the second chapter together with the other *Christological titles* 'Word' and 'Wisdom' with which he establishes the indivisible nature of the divine generation. In the third chapter we look into the *Biblical Paradigms* 'light-fulness', 'fountain-river' and 'image' which illustrate his understanding emphasizing the spiritual dimension of divine generation.

In the second part we look into the biblical doctrine of the *Unity of the Son with the Father* which Athanasius mainly bases on the Gospel of St. John. He identifies absolute community of attributes between Father and Son in the biblical descriptions of them except the designations 'Father' and 'Son' which are uniquely attributed to them individually. Thus Athanasius concludes in explaining his understanding as unity of being, essence or divinity and duality of names or persons. Both are equally real and true without subordination of the one to the other. The 'homoousion' is understood to maintain both the distinction and the unity of the Father and the Son.

Finally in the *Conclusions* we summarize the results of our discussion focusing on the meaning of the 'homoousion' and the hermeneutical principles that arise out of Athanasius exegesis.

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION
OF ATHANASIUS' UNDERSTANDING
OF THE NICENE "HOMOOUSION"

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFRO:	<i>Epistola ad Afros Episcopos</i>
ANT:	<i>Tomus ad Antiochenos</i>
APO1-2:	<i>Contra Apollinarem I-II</i>
CAR1-3:	<i>Contra Arianos I-III</i>
DECR:	<i>Epistola de Decretis Nicaenae Synodi</i>
DION:	<i>Epistola de sententiae Dionysii</i>
EPI:	<i>Epistola ad Epictetum</i>
GENT:	<i>Contra Gentes</i>
INC:	<i>De Incarnatione Verbi</i>
SER1-4:	<i>Epistolae ad Serapionem I-IV</i>
SYNO:	<i>Epistola de Synodis Arimini et Seleuciaae</i>

* The references to the Old Testament are given from the Septuagint text. The English translation is taken from the R.S.V. edition. In cases where the Septuagint varies from the English translation, which is based on the Hebrew, appropriate modifications were made by myself.

** The references to the Athanasian texts are given from J. Migne's *Patrologiae Graecae Cursus Completus*, tom. 25-28, Paris 1857. For the Arian texts I used H.-G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke, Urkunde 6*.

*** The English translation of the Athanasian texts is taken from H. Wace - P. Schaff, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. IV, Oxford 1892, and has been slightly modified where appropriate. The translation of the *Epistles to Serapion* is taken from C. R. B. Shapland, *The Letters of St. Athanasius concerning the Holy Spirit*, London 1951.

1. INTRODUCTION

The affirmation that the Son is “homoousios”¹ with the Father was the response of the Church to the Arian challenge. Although proclaimed by the majority of Christian bishops through an Ecumenical Council at Nicea (325), it was by no means immediately accepted. Indeed the term “homoousios” was to appear at the centre of numerous theological debates during the following decades and suffer several contradicting interpretations and renderings. On one side of the battleground were the Arians, extreme and moderate. They read in the “homoousios” the doctrines of the division of God and ‘ditheism’, which derived from a generic understanding of the term and had already been condemned by the Church. They backed their arguments with the fact that the term itself was not included in the Scriptures. Arius and his followers carried this view to extremes and were eventually to be expelled from the Church as heretics. Eusebius of Caesarea and his companions had their own reasons for maintaining a more moderate attitude and complied eventually with the decisions of the Council. On the other side of the battleground was a party of Nicene fathers, who unreservedly employed the “homoousios” and, being guided by their anti-Arian zeal, stretched its meaning to the other, unitarian, extreme. Their most representative figure is Marcellus of Ancyra, who developed a

¹ The term has been traditionally translated in English as “consubstantial” that comes from the latin “consubstantialis” (cf. also Athanasius’ *De Synodis*, 28, Migne P.G. 26,741B). Modern English speaking scholars, however, use different translations, aiming to a more precise rendering of its meaning. The following have been suggested: “Coessential” (Schaff-Wace), “Consubstantial” (Pollard, Lonergan, Williams, Kelly), “Of One essence or substance” (Bright, Mühlenberg, Barnes, O’Donnell, Tacelli, Fouyas), “Of the same Substance” (Kelly), “One in being” (Kelly), “Of one being” (Torrance, Heron). But, it is also being used to a large extent untranslated probably in order to avoid further explanations due to the English terms. In this thesis we will follow the latter method, because we will see the term is more inclusive of the notions which the translations tend to single out.



unitarian interpretation of the term, based on what he understood from it as being a “numerical” identification of the Son with the Father.²

St. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria (326-373), although not a member of the Council, is acknowledged as the person who expressed the Nicene doctrine in its fullness and maintained the balance between the two tendencies. He defended the legitimacy of the term “homoousios” and through it expounded the Nicene doctrine as the genuine expression of the Church’s faith. To accomplish this task on safe and firm grounds, he appealed to the authority of biblical revelation. He drew from it the texts and the doctrines which he used both as sources and as boundaries for the correct understanding of the term and its significance. In this way, Athanasius laid the foundations upon which the Cappadocian Fathers would give the final answer to the Trinitarian problem through the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the biblical grounds upon which Athanasius claims to have based his understanding of the “homoousios” and look into the exegesis of the particular biblical texts he used. It pays special attention to the way in which Athanasius handles the biblical material in connection to the “homoousios” and to the points of difference of his exegesis from the one that the Arians proposed with the view to find out which one does justice to the biblical text and doctrine. Finally, it attempts a comprehensive summary of the meaning of the “homoousios” and an evaluation of the Athanasian exegesis. It is necessary, however, taking into consideration the data of modern investigation, firstly to draw the main guidelines for the meaning of the term as understood by Athanasius.

² We use this terminology ('generic'-'numerical' identity) because, as we shall see, it is the prevailing one among modern scholars. For further details on the views of the pro-Nicenes see R.P.C. Hanson, who explores extensively their teaching in the second and third part of his *The search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (pp. 208ff), and gives a brief summary of the most important of them in pp. 824ff; also J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 240ff.

1. The data of the Athanasian texts

Because of its vital importance for the Trinitarian dogma, the way that Athanasius and his contemporaries understood the term “homoousios” has been the subject of much investigation in modern scholarship. It not only constitutes a special chapter in most of the systematic handbooks and histories of dogma but is also the subject-matter of special essays, which examine it from almost every possible angle, among them theological, philosophical, historical, ecclesiastical and political.³ Extensive as this scholarship has been, it cannot be said to have been exhaustive: the biblical significance of the term has been neither fully appreciated nor as yet appropriately investigated.⁴ C. Kannengiesser, who acknowledges the nature of the dispute during the fourth century controversy as “essentially one of hermeneutics”, underlines the fact that “Arius’ teaching led to conflicts within the ecclesiastical community about the interpretation of certain biblical passages...Even when it was entangled in the political relations between bishops of different Eastern provinces, the controversy of the Alexandrians remained as essentially hermeneutical dispute”.⁵ Commenting on the state of research today in 1985, he remarks that “a rich field of hermeneutical discoveries is still waiting for exploration, if someone would undertake a comprehensive research on the role of the Bible in Athanasius’ thought and writings”.⁶ In 1988 and in the latest edition of his *The Search for the Christian*

³ For a complete list of all these essays see our *Bibliography, 1*.

⁴ There is only one essay, which directly examines the relationships of the “homoousios” with the biblical revelation. It is by T.F. Torrance, “The evangelical significance of the *homoousios*” (in *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 132ff), but the discussion is general and does not go into details. It only deals with the affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the core of the biblical message in its relation to the ‘homoousion’. However, references to the biblical links of the term are made to many of the essays we have taken into consideration, but none of them takes up the task for a full investigation.

⁵ He also remarks: “Since the beginning of the twentieth century, writers have been so obsessed by the political and denominational aspect of Athanasius’ work that they have completely overlooked another characteristic, his frequent resource to the Bible. Though writers constantly repeat that Athanasius was a man of the Bible, no one has ever tried to study him seriously under this aspect”; See C. Kannengiesser, *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic hermeneutics in Alexandrian Christology: the Arian Crisis*, pp. 1-3. R.P.C. Hanson also agrees with this, asserting that “It would of course be absurd to deny that discussion and dispute between 318 and 381 were conducted largely in terms of Greek philosophy. The reason for this was, paradoxically, because the dispute was about the interpretation of the Bible” (*The Search*, p. xx-xxi).

⁶ “The Athanasian Decade 1974-84: A bibliographical report”, *Theological Studies*, 46 (1985) 539;

doctrine of God, Prof. Hanson gave a comprehensive but short account of the exegetical differentiations over the biblical texts that appeared during the controversy. However, it is illuminating enough of the exegetical problems of the interpretations to which these texts were subjected during the controversy.⁷ Also, the importance and interpretation of the *Gospel of St. John* in the first four centuries and especially in the Arian controversy has been thoroughly investigated by Prof. T.E. Pollard in his treatise *Johannine Christology and the early Church*.⁸ Among the biblical texts that most frequently appear in the debates, *John 10:30* and *Prov. 8:22* have attracted special attention, hence the studies by T.E. Pollard,⁹ V. Marangoni,¹⁰ and A. Clayton.¹¹

As we have said, the essays, which especially investigate the “homoousios”, mainly focus on a literal, philosophical and theological analysis of its meaning and usage. In this account the reader faces a twofold option, as Prof. J.N.D. Kelly, who has dominated the field since the 1960’s, presents it,

“Are we to understand ‘of the same nature’ in the ‘generic’ sense in which Origen, for example, had employed *ὁμοούσιος*, or are we to take it as having the meaning accepted by later Catholic theology, viz. numerical identity of substance? The root word *οὐσία* could signify the kind of substance or stuff common to several individuals of a class, or it could connote an individual thing as such”.¹²

other works on the biblical aspect of Athanasius are produced by V. Olson, *Athanasius’ use of Scripture with special reference to the doctrine of the Trinity*, PhD thesis, St. Andrews 1966; H.J. Sieben, “Herméneutique de l’exégèse dogmatique d’Athanasie”, *Politique et théologie*, Paris 1974; H. Nordberg, “On the Bible text of St. Athanasius”, *Arctos. Acta Philologica Fennica*, 7 (1962) 119-141; T.F. Torrance, “The hermeneutics of St. Athanasius”, *Eccl. Ph.*, 52:1-53:1 (1970-71).

⁷ pp. 832-838 and the analysis of biblical exegesis during the controversy in *The influence of the Scripture* in pp. 824-849.

⁸ Cambridge 1970; see also his articles “The exegesis of John X. 30 in the early Trinitarian controversies”, *New Testament Studies*, 3 (1957) 334-349; “The exegesis of Scripture and the Arian Controversy”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 41 (1958-59) 414-429; “That they all may be one (John xvii. 21) - and the unity of the Church”, *The Expository Times*, 70 (1959) 149-150.

⁹ “The exegesis of John X. 30 in the early Trinitarian controversies”, *New Testament Studies*, 3 (1957) 334-349.

¹⁰ “Juan 10,30 en la argumentacion escrituristica de San Atanasio”, *Stromata*, 26 (1970) 3-57 and “Un solo dios y el dios Trino: En torno a la interpretación atanasiana de Jn. 10:30”, *Stromata*, 29 (1973) 279-95.

¹¹ *The Orthodox Recovery of a Heretical Proof Text: St. Athanasius of Alexandria's Exegesis of Proverbs 8.22f in conflict with the Arians*, PhD Dissertation, Perkins School of Theology, 1987.

¹² *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 243; also R.P.C. Hanson, *The search*, p. 170; P. Schepens in a brief literary investigation of words compound with the prefix “ὄμοϋς” also identifies two kinds of unity, which he calls “numerical” and “specific unity” (“ΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΣ”, *Rech. Sc. Relig.*, 35 (1948) 289-90).

Although from the study of the sources scholars discern a strong generic meaning of the term both in Athanasius and his contemporary environment,¹³ the emphasis that was given to the unity of the Son with the Father by the Nicenes and Athanasius, in response to the Arians, appears to have led them to accept the “numerical identity” of the two persons of the Trinity as the primary meaning of the term.¹⁴ As a consequence, their attempts to indicate the distinction of the two persons followed suit, and therefore G.L. Prestige, for example, called the three persons “three distinct presentations” of a single object, i.e., the numerical One God.¹⁵

This twofold option has been legitimately criticised by Prof. G.C. Stead, who points out the danger of reading either generic or numerical identity in the “homoousios”. He observes that this approach follows in the main the guidelines of an Aristotelian pattern of logic, namely the distinction between “first” and “second substance” (πρώτη, δεύτερα οὐσία) “with which most of the dogmatic theologians have linked the 'homoousios'”, but it cannot be adequately applied to this context.¹⁶ He asserts that the definition “generic

¹³ J.N.D. Kelly has comprehensively gathered the extant evidence about the use of the 'homoousion' in the earlier and contemporary environment which shows its 'generic' meaning (so in Porphyrius, Plotinus, Tertullian, Valentinians, Irenaeus, Heracleon, Origen, etc.); so also R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-202. An extensive investigation of this evidence before Nicea, especially in the Valentinian system, has been produced by L.M. Mendizábal in "El Homoousios preniceno extraecclesiástico" (*Estudios eclesiásticos*, 30 (1956) 147-196).

¹⁴ Prof. Kelly justifies this point as follows, “As later theologians perceived, since the divine nature is immaterial and indivisible, it follows that the Persons of the Godhead Who share it must have, or rather be, one identical substance” (*Doctrines, ibid.*). Since, however, the dominant sense was the generic one, he is in doubt of whether the numerical identity could be “an entirely novel and unexpected sense”. He seems however to avoid answering to the point drawing attention to the fact that the Nicenes merely intended to affirm the full divinity of the Son in view of the Arian problem and therefore the objective was “more limited than is sometimes supposed” (pp. 235-236). The same point of view is also taken by R.P.C. Hanson who argues that “the word *homoousios* when it was inserted in N did not have the great importance in the eyes of the people at that time which it was later supported to have”, because it had a rather looser meaning (*op. cit.*, pp. 436-437).

¹⁵ *God in Patristic thought*, p. 168.

¹⁶ C. Stead also considers it “misleading”, see “The significance of the homoousios”, *Studia Patristica*, 3 (1961) 398 and 410. The association with the Aristotelian philosophy is also denied by G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, pp. 63-64, R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 197, C. Konstantinidis, “Ousia and hypostasis in Athanasius the Great”, *Theologia*, p. 571. For the history and the meaning of the term “ousia” see also T.B. Strong, “The history of the theological term ‘substance’”, *The J.T.S.*, 2 (1900), 3 (1901), 4 (1902); C. Stead, “The Concept of Divine Substance”, *Vig. Chr.*, 29 (1975) 1-14 and especially his book on *Divine Substance*, Oxford 1977.

sense” is “a phrase to be abandoned” and he tends to accept some sort of combination of the two, which is “elastic” towards both directions.¹⁷ All the accounts scholars give of the meaning of the term in Athanasius, while they are in the main comprehensive and representative, seem to lack the appropriate terminology at the final formulation. It is no surprise therefore to find Prof. C. Stead remarking that, in the last analysis, the problem is a matter of “care with which we choose our descriptive terms”.¹⁸

Prof. Hanson, on the other hand, taking into consideration all the relevant evidence and bibliography produced so far, denies that ‘numerical identity’ was suggested by the “homoousios” and points out that the results of recent studies tend to show that the term “was of a much looser, more flexible, indeed less specific and therefore less controversial significance”.¹⁹ In his interpretation this suggests that the “homoousios” was a highly confusing term that puzzled rather than helped the Church in a struggle to express her faith, leaving “a dangerous legacy of confusion for the future”.²⁰ As it concerns its relation with the Bible, Hanson regards the “homoousios” as marking the beginning of the

¹⁷ *Divine Substance*, p. 247-8. We draw special attention to his learned article “The significance of the homoousios” in which he very carefully examines and analyses the meaning of ‘sameness’, ‘likeness’ and ‘identity’ in their numerical and generic sense. The ‘numerical identity’ has already been strongly criticised earlier by E.R. Craven who prefers the term “specific oneness”. He extensively analyses it against “numerical identity” supported by Shedd in his *History of Christian Doctrine* (See: “The Nicene doctrine of the homoousion”, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 41 (1884) 698-760). Craven, however, considers ‘specific’ to mean ‘homogeneity’, which has the same meaning with the term ‘generic’ as used here. But, we think that his whole argument lends to his term ‘specific’ a wider sense, because although he defends the ‘homoousios’ as applying to the Father and the Son generic identification between members of the same species, at the end he remarks that Father and Son are counted as one because they are immaterial. This concept we think is not included in a mere ‘homogeneity’ of beings because of divisions which bodily beings suffer. ‘Specific’ has a wider sense and designates the peculiar character of the Father and Son ‘homogeneity’. In this account it probably comes closer to Stead’s view.

¹⁸ *Div. Sub.*, p. 266 and the preceding analysis in pp.242-266; also “The significance of the homoousios”, *Stud. Patr.*, 3 (1961) 397-412. The problem of terminology seems to be the reason for him not formulating a final definition of the meaning of the “homoousios”.

¹⁹ R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search*, p. 170 and 202.

²⁰ *ibid.* It is Prof. Hanson’s conviction, which, in consequence, regulates his approach to the subject, that the case at the time was not the traditionally accepted “defence of orthodoxy against heresy and error”, but “a search for orthodoxy, a search conducted by the method of trial and error” (*The Search*, p. xix-xx). Therefore, throughout his book, he tends to portray the situation over theological and other issues as being confused and perplexed by contradicting interpretations of rival parties.

importation into the Church of Hellenistic pagan terms and associated philosophy that ultimately “blurred the New Testament” message.²¹

However, those Athanasian texts in which the defence of the “homoousios” is direct, handle the term from a rather different point of view and with different presuppositions. Neither can they fit into the two-sided pattern of generic-numerical identity, nor can they be represented fully and accurately with the more “flexible” rendering. First of all, it has to be strongly emphasized that the character of those writings is primarily and predominantly biblical. Athanasius’ principal concern was to establish firmly the legitimacy of the term on biblical evidence alone. His appeal directly to the Bible for the justification of his arguments is extensive and constant.²² Therefore, the

²¹ As it concerns the relations of the ‘homoousios’ with the Bible and philosophy, Prof. Hanson acknowledges that the subjects of dispute in the Arian controversy “were not those raised by Greek theology or philosophy and as such could only have been raised by people thinking in Greek terms. It was not simply a quarrel about Greek ideas... but arise directly from the earliest Christian tradition”. The use of philosophical terms was unavoidable since “the deepest questions which face Christianity cannot be answered in purely biblical language, because the questions are about the meaning of biblical language itself”. But he finds also unavoidable the fact that obscured philosophy was introduced together with them, since, as he points out, “No other alternative was available, even though this expression brought with it unavoidably a certain distortion and blurring of the thought of the New Testament” (*ibid.*, p. 426). Therefore he emphatically asserts that “The pro-Nicenes are at their worst, their most grotesque, when they try to show that the new terms borrowed from the pagan philosophy of the day were really to be found in the Scripture” (*ibid.*, 846). This argument, from our point of view, echoes the theory of the so called “hellenisation” of the Gospel by the early Church which has been introduced namely by A. Harnack (*History of Dogma*, transl. by N. Buchanan, v. I, pp. 49ff & 107ff) and has highly influenced the majority of modern scholars (see the accounts of the scholarly opinions by Werner, *The Formation*, pp. 3ff. and the presentation of the views of Baur, Harnack, Loofs, Seeberg etc.; R. Williams, *Arius*, pp. 6-8; 21-25; E. Mühlberg, “The Divinity of Jesus”, pp. 136ff). We believe that the main guidelines of this theory are still manipulated in different ways in a great number of modern textbooks and essays from moderate to extreme expressions (Cf. O. Cullman, *The Christology*, pp. 4-5; J. Bernard, *The Gospel of John*, v. I, pp. 365-366; and R.P.C. Hanson above). A large number, however, of others have opposed to this view; for e.g. see the relevant discussion in S. Laeuchli, “The Case”, p. 409f; G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, pp. 41-43; E. Mühlberg, “The Divinity of Jesus”, p. 145f; A. Heron, “Homoousios”, p. 73f; H. Wolfson, *The philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Cambridge: Harvard Un. Pr., 1956, v. I, p. 362. For a collection of the most recent studies and the diverse approaches to the Nicene Creed today see *Faith to Creed, Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, ed. by M. Him, Michigan: Eerdmans 1991.

²² C. Kannengiesser regards as especially important the biblical aspect of Athanasius’ writings. As he explains, “I emphasize this because it is important for our contemporary critical interest in early Christology that the initiative of Athanasius in this domain would never have taken on lasting historical significance if it had not benefited from his very original method of having recourse to the Bible as a theologian” (“Athanasius of Alexandria and the foundation of traditional Christology”, *Theological Studies*, 34 (1973) 103-113; C. Stead also underlines the biblical character of Athanasius’ doctrine above any discussion on the other grounds; see “The significance of the homoousios”, p. 410.

material for the investigation of the meaning of the “homoousios” is primarily biblical, and it is biblical data which give the content and the direction for understanding them and the various expressions with which it is associated. The problem which Athanasius is addressing lies originally in the question of whether the term represents biblical teaching and, in consequence, the faith of the Church. The positive answer to this question would have two consequences: firstly, that Athanasius appears not to attempt to settle a fixed, in some ways novel meaning for the term, but to establish it as being in accordance with the traditional teaching of the Church; secondly, that the term itself is not an import or development, but it represents a doctrine that has been handed down to the Church by God in his Christ through the Apostles and the Fathers.²³ Athanasius was as a result very careful to insist on the insertion of the “homoousios” in the Creed as the outcome of an exegetical process during which the Nicenes “collected the mind of the Scripture” and “expressed more clearly” its “obvious teaching”.²⁴

This implies that he treats the term as having a meaning already defined to a certain extent and investigates whether it is viable for theological use, namely for answering the

²³ Athanasius’ famous statement, “The sound faith, which Christ gave, the apostles preached and the fathers who met at Nicea handed down” (AFRO 1:26,1029A), expresses the heart of his faith and his theology. This side seems to have been disregarded in modern scholarship, where the prevailing view has been the so-called “development of dogma”. The “homoousios” is considered a development that did not exist in the Bible and therefore it lacks the interest for its biblical links. Prof. M. Wiles, for example, argues that the doctrine of the eternal generation has been introduced by Origen in a cosmological context and developed by Athanasius in the anti-Arian context (“Eternal Generation”, *Journ. Theol. Stud.*, p. 291). Also, J.N.D. Kelly believes that the Nicene Creed and its later development in Constantinople was a “revolution against a prior Origenistic view of the Godhead dominating the Church”. The Nicene Creed was a “turning point” inasmuch as it constitutes a turn from the traditional ecclesiastical faith (see J.N.D. Kelly, “The Nicene Creed: A turning point”, pp. 29-39). However, if Athanasius is correct in his claims of the biblicality of the term, then the problem rather turns out to be a matter of emphasis, which depends on the particular demands of every period and not of development. The formulation of the dogmas, is not a matter of exchange of ideas in the course of history, but a matter of representation of the multifold and ever existing divine revelation according to the particular demands. G.D. Dragas argues: “The so-called problem of the Development of Dogma, of which we have been today totally informed, finds its solution in the Dogma of the Church by means of which she preserves her faith in the total Christ, the eternal Son of God who has become truly man for her and for the whole world. And she does this constantly as she faces new challenges from partial anthropological and theological human discoveries. In doing this she interprets the Dogma of her faith in new language and categories appropriate to the demands of the times. But her message is at root the *datum* of the Eternal Son become man who reveals the Triune God and his man as his adopted Son” (*Athanasiana*, p. 46).

²⁴ DECR 20:25,452B; SYNO 45:26,773D; AFRO 5-6:26,1037Af.

theological dilemma of compromising the unity of God with the duality of the Father and the Son.²⁵ We could characterize the way in which Athanasius employs it as simple and natural as opposed to sophisticated definition of philosophers.²⁶ This means that in spite of the hermeneutical differences²⁷ the fact of the matter remains that the word ‘homoousios’ is a compound adjective, which consists of the prefix “homo-” (ὁμοῦ, together, co-) and the noun “essence” (οὐσία, essence, being). It presupposes two distinct beings and describes some kind of unity between them. The dominant sense of this unity was the “generic” in its wider application; i.e., the “homoousios” designated two beings that were classed in the same category of species, because they had the same origins or consisted of the same “stuff” or “material”.²⁸ The Sabellian version of the “homoousios”, which implied absolute identification of the Son with the Father in a single being and denied the distinction between them, was rather elaborate and it appears not to Athanasius at all.²⁹ Besides, it was already condemned at an earlier Council at Antioch in 268 and therefore out of the question from the very beginning. The term is not employed by Athanasius in an anti-Sabellian, but in an anti-Arian sense, and therefore it has to be examined under this

²⁵ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson (*op. cit.*, p. xx): "It was the problem of how to reconcile two factors which were part of the very fabric of Christianity: monotheism and the worship of Jesus Christ as divine".

²⁶ Explaining the reasons for the condemnation of the “homoousios” at the Antiochean Council of 268, Athanasius says that the fathers of the Council “understood it simply” (οὕτως ὡς ἐξειλήφασιν) in the context of their concern against Paul of Samosata and he ascribes the same motives also to the Nicenes (SYNO 45:26,772A). He follows the same tradition and therefore he does not get involved in discussion about the meaning of the term in philosophical terms, but as a vehicle which carries biblical doctrine. In fact, he denies any links with Greek philosophy, which he regards as a negative element in theology, because the philosophers “do not know the Son” (CAR1 34:26,81B; also CAR3 16:26,356B, SYNO 35:26753B, 51:26,784C *et al.*).

²⁷ For these differences especially concerning the people who took part in the Council see J.N.D. Kelly, *Doctrines*, pp. 248-253 and R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 190. Although their conclusion is that the meaning of the term varied, we do not see any of these variations to wander off the main guidelines of the concept of generic identity, since 'common species' applies to living beings and 'common stuff or material' to lifeless things.

²⁸ Although scholars set the twofold option between generic and numerical identity, they do not produce sufficient evidence for the second meaning in the pre- and extra-Athanasian context, except for the Sabellian version. Cf. especially the essay by P. Galtier, "L' ὁμοούσιος de Paul de Samosate", *RSR*, pp. 31-45.

²⁹ J.N.D. Kelly lays great emphasis on Eusebius' reaction to the term, which he regards as major evidence of not reading the Sabellian sense of numerical identity in the “homoousios” at Nicea. His objections rather focused on the “materialistic flavour” of the term and the associated divisions (*Doctrines*, p. 236). R.P.C. Hanson (*ibid.*, p. 202) and E.R. Craven (*The Nicene*, p. 730) also deny 'numerical identity'.

light. Bearing this in mind, we might be confident of two things. First, that during the debate the absolute distinction between the Father and the Son was taken for granted by all parties and was never called into question. Second that although they shared common ground on this, the two sides were, nevertheless, diametrically opposed in their efforts: the primary objective of Athanasius was to maintain united those that Arius tore apart, while Arius was keen to keep completely separated those that Athanasius held as essentially united. Interestingly, each claimed for its opponents' teaching the same consequences, namely ascription of bodily passions to God.³⁰

Thus, the real problem seems to arise not from what the "homoousios" actually means, but from the terms under which it should be acceptable. Both Athanasius and the Arians were aware of the generic sense of the term, but they had different presuppositions: the Arians began from the application of the term to created beings and transferred the associated divisions to God, i.e., they defined the features of the process of divine begetting according to the features of human begetting. On the one hand, considering the Son begotten from the Father, they argued that the "homoousios" implied division of the ousia of God because an offspring exists as "part" of its father.³¹ On the other hand, considering "ingeneratedness" (ἀγέννητον) the primary characteristic of the essence of God, they argued that the "homoousios" would suggest "two ingenerate" divine beings.³² For Arius, the term carried materialistic connotations and as a consequence portrayed the Father as "composite, divisible, mutable and body, and in addition to these, the bodiless God suffering all the passions of a body".³³

³⁰ For Arius' statement see his *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria*, Opitz, H.G., *Athanasius Werke, Urkunde 6*, 3:1:1, p. 13; for Athanasius' counter argument see CAR2 34:26,220A.

³¹ Cf. the expressions "consubstantial part" (ὁμοούσιον μέρος), "part of God" (μέρος θεοῦ), "part of the Ingenerate" (μέρος ἀγεννήτου) in his *Letter to Alexander*, *ibid.* and *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia*, *ibid.*, pp. 2-3; also in Athanasius CAR1 15:26,44A, CAR2 32:26,216C, 34:26,220A, DECR 13:25,463A.

³² Arius' *Letter to Alexander*, and to *Eusebius*; also Athanasius in CAR1 22:26,57C.

³³ *Letter to Alexander*, *ibid.*

Athanasius' argument points in exactly the opposite direction. While he defended the generic sense of the *homoousios* as applicable to God, he was scrupulous enough in making the clarifications necessary to clear away those connotations of division which the Arians so emphasized as grounds for denying the natural divinity of the Son. The regulative concept of his arguments is that the presuppositions for accepting the term are to be defined by the nature of the beings concerned. Athanasius' identification of the divisions as involving bodily beings and occurring in space and time excluded the divine being which is of spiritual nature and exists beyond such definitions. His basis for the justification of those clarifications was dual. First, the absolute distinction between two categories of existence or "essence": the created, to which human beings belong and the uncreated, which refers to God alone. Second, the understanding of human language as limited to description of the divine reality because the latter cannot be comprehended by the human mind.³⁴ The particular words employed, he argues, should be understood in a provisional sense and under certain qualifications. The images from the natural world, which the Scripture takes up to describe God, cannot be pushed too far and they convey a meaning only as long as the understanding of God as spiritual and bodiless existence is not affected or contorted by the features of the created existence.³⁵ According to his hermeneutical principle priority belongs to the realities which lie behind the particular words and define the extent of the meaning of the words, but not vice versa.³⁶ In this sense, he regards the "*homoousios*" as yet another descriptive term of this reality and therefore it is the nature of God itself which defines its meaning. It maintains the generic continuity of

³⁴ CAR2 32:26,216B; DECR 12:25,436Df; For a full analysis of Athanasius' understanding of the economical nature of the human language and its significance for the interpretation of Scripture see T.F. Torrance, "The hermeneutics", *EPh*, 52:2-3 (1970) 87-106.

³⁵ DECR 24:25,457B; SYNO 42:26,768A-B *et al.*

³⁶ "Let them not dispute about the words that the biblical writers use of the Word himself, for there need be no question about them since they are confessedly used in accordance with his nature. For words do not detract from nature; rather does nature draw the words to itself and transform them. For words are not prior to essences, but essences come first and words come second" CAR2 3:26,152C; cf T.F. Torrance, "The hermeneutics", *EPh*, 53:1 (1971) 136.

the Son from the Father and with it the distinction of the former from the latter as ‘begotten’ (γεννητός) from ‘unbegotten’ (ἀγέν[ν]ητος). This distinction denies the Sabellian sense of absolute numerical identification in a single being. At the same time the “homoousios” affirms the unity of the Son with the Father in their inner being which, in turn, rejects the Arian sense of division. Also, on the one hand, because the “homoousios” refers to “the one of whom the offspring is”, the doctrine of the generation ensures the unity of the divine being in the sense of dispelling the suspicion of a monotheism that derives from an absolute unity of two separate divine beings, as if “another and another” (ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο).³⁷ On the other hand, the doctrine of the unity excludes any division of God on account of the generation, because it refers the generation to the spiritual reality which does not suffer bodily divisions.³⁸ Athanasius summarizes the meaning of the “homoousios” in the following statement:

“They [the Nicenes] were compelled immediately to collect the mind of the Scripture and what they were saying earlier, they said and wrote again with more clarity, that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father; [in this way,] they would indicate that the Son is not simply like the Father, but has identical likeness, which he received from the Father and that the likeness and immutability of the Son is different than our imitation, as it is called, which we acquire through the observance of the commandments. For it is possible, the bodies, which are like one another, be divided and distant the one from the other, as the human sons are from their begetters, according to what is written about Adam and Seth, who was begotten from him ‘in his own likeness, after his image’. But because the generation of the Son from the Father is different from human nature, he is not only like, but also indivisible from the essence of the Father and he and the Father are one, as he said, and the Word is always in the Father and the Father in the Word, as it is the effulgence in the light for this is what the term designates. The Council having understood this, wrote the *homoousios* correctly, so that it would abolish the wickedness of the heretics and show that the Son is other than the creatures”.³⁹

³⁷ SYNO 42:26,768B.

³⁸ This is also the conclusion of E.R. Craven, who summarizes the specific oneness designated by the ‘homoousion’ in two points: a) that “division of substance is not implied in the generation of immaterial substances” and b) that “the generated substance is to be regarded as referred back to that which generates and so is to be counted one with it” (“The Nicene”, p. 760).

³⁹ DECR 20:25,452B-C.

To meet the demands of this thesis, we have collected the biblical material, which Athanasius produces as containing the doctrine of the eternal generation and of the unity of the Son with the Father, and we have examined the manner in which he interprets it in relation to the “homoousios”. We started from those works where the defence of the “homoousios” is the primary objective and then we compared their data with those in the wider context of Athanasius’ dogmatic and anti-Arian output. We think, therefore, that before anything else it is necessary to give a brief account of the data which these texts provide.

The first text and the one that marks the beginning of Athanasius’ involvement with the defence of the “homoousios” is the *Epistola de Decretis Nicaenae Synodi* (c. 350). The occasion of the Epistle is explicitly stated at the very beginning, where Athanasius says that the Arians intensely objected to the two terms “from the substance” and “homoousios”, on the grounds of their being non-biblical.⁴⁰ Therefore he attempts to establish these terms directly on biblical evidence in a collective and comprehensive manner. The core of his argument is that although the terms themselves are not included in the Scripture, their meaning is in accordance with it. He claims that although the Nicene fathers wanted in the first instance to maintain the biblical vocabulary and profess the unqualified divinity of the Son in biblical terms, it was the Arians that construed the meaning of the words and led the Nicenes to look for other terms outside the biblical vocabulary. The “homoousios” came about as the result of an intensive exegetical procedure and designated both the likeness (ὁμοιότης) of the Son with the Father, similar to that which human sons acquire from their fathers through the natural process of begetting and the indivisible unity of essence (ἀδιαίρετος τῆς οὐσίας) of the Son with the Father, who never existed without his Son.⁴¹ Throughout the treatise, Athanasius

⁴⁰ DECR 1:25,416A: “Why did those who gathered at Nicea used unscriptural terms, i.e. *from the substance* and *homoousios*?”.

moves between the two themes, constantly shifting the emphasis from the one to the other and backing up his arguments with extensive biblical quotations and exegetical comments.

In chs. 6-15, he discusses the meaning of the Christological title “Son” and of the associated title “Only-begotten” in terms of generation. He discerns two senses of biblical sonship: it is “sonship by grace” (Deut. 13:19-14:1 and Jn. 1: :12), which is a gift of God on account of virtue and good deeds, and “sonship by nature”, which is the result of the natural process of begetting. He considers groundless the Arian understanding of the sonship of the Son as “by grace” and proves the point by means of the distinction between God’s acts of creating creatures and begetting a Son. The central verses for the generation of the Son are Mat. 3:17 and Jn. 1:18, which he associates with the paradigms of ‘light’ and ‘effulgence’ (Heb. 1:3), ‘fountain’ and ‘river of light’ (Ps. 35:10⁴²), of ‘life’ (Jer. 2:13) and of ‘wisdom’ (Bar. 3:12). In chs. 13-14, he deals with Prov. 8:22, which was the crucial Arian proof text on the creaturehood of the Son. He juxtaposes the biblical teaching of the natural generation of the Son, which he draws from Ps. 109:3, Ps. 2:7, Prov. 8:25 and Jn. 1:18. In chs. 15-18, he gives a comprehensive overview of the biblical teaching of Christ as the offspring of God. This is achieved through an exegetical synthesis of the predicates “power” (δύναμις, 1 Cor. 1:24), “hand” (χείρ, Is. 48:13, 51:16), “word” (λόγος, Jn. 1:1-3), “wisdom” (σοφία, 1 Cor. 1:24, Ps. 103:24, Prov. 3:19), “only-begotten son” (μονογενῆς υἱός, Jn. 1:14, Heb. 1:1-2), and “image” (εἰκόν, Col. 1:15), as bearing witness to the “homoousios”, each from its own angle. In ch. 19-24 he gives an account of the proceedings of the Nicene Council and the exegetical debate that took place over the controversial terms. First, he deals with the phrase “from the substance of the Father”,

⁴¹ DECR 19-20:25,448Df.

⁴² We will follow the numbering of the *Septuagint* version, which was the text in use by Athanasius. We used the edition of the LXX text by A. Rahlfs, *Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη κατὰ τοὺς Ο', Ἀποστολικὴ Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, Ἀθήναι 1981, which is an one-volume reprint of the 1935 edition in Stuttgart by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

which he regards as an illustration of 1 Cor. 8:6 that serves to distinguish the generation of the Son from the creation of the world which the Arians confused. In ch. 20 he deals with the meaning of the “homoousios” as an expression of the Son’s likeness with the Father. He regards it as a likeness of generic continuity (Gen 5:3) and of unity of essence (Jn. 10:30, 14:10 and Heb. 1:3) that refutes the Arian conception of it, claiming to be also biblically based, as being a moral unity. In chs. 21-24, he elaborates further on the natural generation of the Son, drawing the main guidelines for its correct understanding, apart from its connotations of divisions, on the basis of Ps. 44:2, 109:3, Jn. 8:42, 6:46 and Jn. 10:30, 14:10, 1:18. He illustrates the combination of the two groups of verses with the analysis of the paradigm of ‘light’ and ‘effulgence’ (Heb. 1:3). In chs. 25-28, he establishes the above as being a genuine expression of biblical teaching by virtue of their continuity in the tradition as passed down by the accredited “fathers” Theognostus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Dionysius of Rome and Origen.

The second text written about the same period is the *Epistola de sententiae Dionysii* (c. 350). Here he defends the teaching of the Alexandrian bishop against the Arian allegations: a) that in his *Epistle to Euphanor and Ammonius* Dionysius had held that the Son was a creature and alien to the Father; and b) that he neither used nor accepted the “homoousios”. Athanasius’ defence is divided into two corresponding parts. In the first part (chs. 1-17), Athanasius takes into account all the epistles of the bishop and explains that having set out with the particular purpose of sweeping away the Sabellian unitarianism, Dionysius stressed the distinction between Father and Son in the strongest possible terms. He wanted to leave no doubt that it was the Son who was incarnate, not the Father, and that as a man dressed with a created body the Son was alien to the Godhead of the Father. The bishop had chosen the biblical image of the vine-dresser and the vine as a vehicle to illustrate this fundamental distinction, while at the same time acknowledging

biblical witness to the divinity of the Son. The whole argument of Athanasius is based on the distinction between those biblical texts which refer to the divine nature of Christ and those which refer to his human nature. The first ones describe his glory as God and Creator of the world (τὰ θεϊκὰ τοῦ σωτήρος), while the second ones describe his weakness as a mere man (τὰ ἀνθρώπινα τοῦ σωτήρος). The “homoousios” gave a compact expression to the teaching of the first group which Athanasius considered in the light of three presuppositions: a) faith in the idea of God as Creator of the world, b) faith in the oneness of God and c) faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. He asserts that the biblical texts also present the Son as being the eternal Creator of all things (Jn. 1:1-3, 1 Cor. 8:6b), the Father as affirming the generation of the Son from himself (Ps. 44:2, Mat. 3:17, 17:5) and Jesus Christ as claiming unity with the Father (Jn. 10:30, 14:10).

In the second part of the treatise (chs. 18-27) Athanasius follows the same pattern of argument giving his answer to the second Arian allegation. The important point here for us is that he links the whole discussion with the term “homoousios”, which he uses both in the context of the humanity and of the divinity of the Son. The Son is *homoousios* with human beings on account of his incarnation and the human body he assumed and therefore necessarily alien to the Father, but he is also *homoousios* with the Father as true God and therefore necessarily alien to the creatures. Since Athanasius is using the term in its generic sense to indicate beings that belong to the same “species”, he employs a range of alternative terms, like “of the same nature” (ὁμοφυῆς), “of the same species” (ὁμογενής) and “congenial” (συγγενής). He qualifies the generic identification of the Son with the Father with the notion of eternal unity and coexistence drawn out of the exegesis of the biblical paradigms 'fountain-river', 'light-effulgence' and 'mind-word'. “Homoousios with the Father” is an expression designating the eternal existence of the Son as the natural offspring of the latter.

The second part of Athanasius' *Epistola de Synodis Arimini et Seleucia* (chs 32-55, circa 359) follows a long exposition of the various Arian teachings and the credal statements which they suggested as alternatives to the Nicene (chs 1-31) and includes a comprehensive defence of the superiority of the Nicene terminology as the genuine expression of biblical teaching against the various Arian decrees holding similar claims. The Arians rejected the terms "from the substance" and "homoousios" on the grounds of their being "ambiguous" and "not contained in the Scriptures".⁴³ Athanasius defends them, developing his argument around two key verses, Mat. 3:17 and Jn. 10:30. The first is the centre of chs. 33-42, where he deals with the generation of the Son and expounds on the meaning of the three elements involved: the begetter, the act of begetting and the offspring. As it concerns the first, he justifies the ascription of the term "essence" (οὐσία) to the Father on the basis of Ex. 3:14, because it denotes his personal involvement in the generation of the Son. As for the second, he explains that the concept of the Son's generation should be understood in a "spiritual" sense and apart from any suspicion of divisions which occur and belong to bodily beings. This understanding is based on the paradigms 'fountain-river' (Ps. 35:10, Jer. 2:13, Bar. 3:12), 'light-effulgence' and the Christological titles 'Son' and 'Word', which denote the "impassible" (ἀπαθής) and "indivisible" (ἀμέριστον) nature of this generation. As for the third, he argues that Col. 1:15 and Jn. 1:16 demand the Son to be the real offspring of the Father and to belong to the same ontological category with him.

After an interpolation in chs. 43-47 referring to the condemnation of the "homoousios" at an earlier Council called against Paul of Samosata (Antioch 268), Athanasius returns to the meaning of the "homoousios" in relation to the unity of the Son with the Father on the basis of Jn. 10:30, 14:9 and Heb. 1:3. By virtue of the generic

⁴³ SYNO 37:26,760B; 40:26,764A.

identification of the Son with the Father, he argues that according to the biblical evidence the Son has all the attributes of the Father's essence except the very name Father on account of which the one is distinguished from the other. Jn. 16:15 affirms community of attributes, which Athanasius demonstrates through a long list of biblical verses, paying particular attention to include those which are uniquely and solely divine. This identity, he continues, implies equality which refers to their inner being, because the divine attributes cannot be possessed by a being that is "different" or "alien" to the Father's kind of essence (έτεροούσιον, άλλοτριούσιον).

In the following chapters (52-54) Athanasius explains how the meaning of unity in essence (ένότητα κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν) of the Father and the Son secures the oneness of God. On the basis of Gen. 32:31, Jer. 1:11, Ex. 3:16 and Col. 1:17 he argues that the Son is "homoousios" with the Father, because "there is only one God, for there is one kind of Godhead", (έναν θεόν ένός όντος είδους θεότητας) and that, as Son, he carries the "peculiarity and resemblance of the paternal essence" (τὴν ιδιότητα καὶ τὴν έμφέρεια τῆς πατρικῆς οὐσίας). In fact, the Son is the very "illuminating and creating, the Father's most own" (φωτιστικόν, δημιουργικόν, ιδιαίτατον), without whom he neither creates nor is known. Therefore, although the Son is acknowledged as a distinct divine being, the fact that he is generically identified with the Father and also that both are bodiless and immaterial and exist beyond temporal and spatial divisions, does not allow us to consider him a second separate God, but contemplate the oneness of God who is acknowledged as the Father and the Son.

In the second *Epistle to Serapion* (c. 360) Athanasius deals again with the "homoousios" of the Son. The major importance of this work lies in the fact that it is an abridged version of his main arguments⁴⁴ and, as would be expected, he uses those which

⁴⁴ Athanasius clearly says in the beginning of this Epistle that, "Because, as you write, some of the brothers wanted them epitomised, so that they would have them handy and in brief in order to be able to

he regarded as his most representative or striking. The epistle is brief and its structure clear. In chs. 2-5, he develops the theme of the unity of the Son with the Father around the key verses Jn. 10:30 and 14:9,10, in the light of Jn. 16:15. He sets forth a clear and simple option: the Son would either be *homoousios* with the Father or *homoousios* with the creatures. Apparently, the sense here is again “generic”: the Son will belong either to the divine “species” or to the created. He goes through a long list of biblical quotations in order to compare the attributes of the Son with those of the Father and the creatures respectively and show where the Son belongs. The conclusion that he has all the divine attributes that none of the creatures could have is established on the doctrine of the generation, which he expounds in the following chapter. Using as his basis Ps. 44:2 he makes the distinction between God’s begetting a Son and creating creatures. The emphasis falls on the contrast of Ps. 44:2 with Ps. 148:5, which shows that the Son is the very Word of God, while the creatures are the results of his speaking. In chapters 7-9, he handles the two Arian proof texts Prov. 8:22 and Mark 13:32 on the basis of the distinction between the biblical verses that refer to the divine nature of the Son and those that refer to his human nature. He classes both Arian proof texts in the second category and brings out the difference by comparing Prov. 8:22 and Mk.13:32 with a long list of verses which he attributes to the first category (Jn. 1:3, Ps. 32:6, 106:20, 103:24, 44:7-8, Prov. 3:19, Is, 61:1, Mat. 16:16 and Mat. 11:27, Jn. 16:30).

The *Tomus ad Antiochenos* (362) was the result of the Alexandrine Council of 362 under Athanasius and deals with three matters: the two Trinitarian formulae, “one hypostasis” and “three hypostases” and a heresy related to the Incarnation. The importance of this work stems from the fact that it puts well on the way the distinction between “ousia” and “hypostasis”, upon which the Cappadocians established the Trinitarian dogma.

answer to those who ask about our faith and refute the heretics, I did so, knowing that you will complement whatever might be missing”.

The “homoousios” appears as a technical term that expresses both the unity and the distinction of the persons of the Trinity. However, because of the nature of the work no biblical texts are included.

In the *Epistola ad Epictetum* (362) Athanasius gives a full answer to the heresy concerning the Incarnation condemned at the Council of 362. He interprets Jn. 1:3 as being against the conclusions of two opposing tendencies the first one of which held that the Word of God changed into body during the Incarnation, while the second held that his body was divinised. The important point for us is that Athanasius makes all the comparisons among the elements involved in the discussion and describes all those changes through the term “homoousios”. Thus, we meet the phrases: “the Word is homoousios with the Father”, “the Word is homoousios with the body that was made of soil”, “the body is homoousios with the Godhead of the Word”, etc. Apparently, the “homoousios” in this account denotes two elements that consist of the same “material” and therefore they belong to the same kind of being or species.⁴⁵

The final work is the *Epistola ad Afros Episcopos* (369). Here Athanasius urges the African bishops to accept the Nicene formulation as the expression of the Apostolic faith because it has been handed down to them through the accredited fathers of an Ecumenical Council. This being his purpose, he pays particular attention to underlining the biblical character of the two crucial terms “from the substance” and “homoousios”. First, as in the *De Synodis*, he justifies the use of the term “ousia” for the Father on the basis of Ex. 3:14, Jer. 23:18,22, 9:10 and Heb. 1:3. He gives the well-known definition with which he tries to clear the confusion: “for *hypostasis* and *ousia* is existence; for it is and exists”. For Athanasius, the context within which the term is used is defined by the twofold option of “being” or “not being”, “existence” or “nothing”. Both “ousia” and “hypostasis” designate

⁴⁵ See the analysis of this use of the 'homoousios' with reference to *Contra Apollinarem I* and *Ad Epictetum* by G.D. Dragas, "The Homoousion in Athanasius' *Contra Apollinarem I*", *Arianism*, p. 233-242.

the reality of existence and consequently the term “from the essence” denotes that the Son does not come “out of nothing”, as the Arians alleged, but out of the living existence of the Father. As in the *De Decretis* and *De Synodis*, so here, he gives an account of the proceedings at Nicea, referring first to the generation, which he illustrates through the Christological titles ‘Only-begotten Son’, ‘Word’, ‘Power’, ‘Wisdom’, ‘true God’ (1 Jn. 5:20) and the paradigm ‘light and effulgence’. The “homoousios” designates the likeness of the Son with the Father, because he is begotten from the Father and still one with Him. He illustrates the point through the familiar paradigms fountain-river (Jer. 2:13, Bar. 3:12), light-effulgence (Ps. 35:10, Heb. 1:3), character-*hypostasis* (Heb. 1:3), and also Jn. 10:30 and 14:9. On the basis of Jn. 16:15, he compares the qualities of the Son with those of the Father and the creatures respectively, and asserts that the identification of those purely divine qualities that emerges from that comparison, can only be understood and accepted through a unity of being to which the “homoousios” alone gives full expression.

This brief exposition of the Athanasian texts has drawn the guidelines of his arguments for the “homoousios” as the expression of the two fundamental biblical doctrines of eternal generation and unity of the Son with the Father. Taking for granted the clear distinction between the two individual divine persons the Father and the Son, Athanasius understands that the ‘homoousios’ expresses the generic identification of the latter with the former, maintaining also the oneness of God in view of the duality of the persons. However, it is not the first time that these doctrines featured in his writings. In fact, it seems that all the pro-homoousios arguments of those texts are to a certain extent abridged versions of a full argument deployed in the Three Orations *Contra Arianos* (c. 340).⁴⁶ The striking difference lies in the amount of emphasis put on the actual term

⁴⁶ The years around 340 is the most commonly accepted date, although many place it at a later stage (for a brief discussion on the various opinions on dating these texts see G.D. Dragas, *Contra Apollinarem*, pp. 444-445; also J.N.D. Kelly, *Creeeds*, pp. 260-261). However, there is a general consensus that it is the first of the Athanasian writings. We accept the unity of the three texts, following the majority of the scholarly opinion. C. Kannengiesser has questioned the authenticity and relativity of the third oration to the

“homoousios”, which appears only once at the beginning of the first Oration and never again. This fact, especially because it concerns a major anti-Arian treatise has greatly puzzled scholars, who have propounded various explanations. Many of them inclined to think that Athanasius avoided the term because of its greatly problematic and complex ambiguity.⁴⁷

From our point of view, that they have made too much of a problem which offers a rather simple explanation when we consider the chronological order of Athanasius' writings. First of all, the fact that the “homoousios” appears in the treatise even once suggests that it is indeed included in Athanasius' vocabulary of terms which denote the true divinity of the Son. What we have to bear in mind is that the important point for Athanasius is his consistent interest in what the terms stand for and not in the terms themselves for their own sake, so that in the *Contra Arianos* he prefers to share the emphasis among many similar expressions.⁴⁸ Since the *Contra Arianos* is commonly

first two (“Athanasius of Alexandria *Three Orations*”, pp. 986-987), without however being able to prevail on the scholarly opinion yet, since, as R.P.C. Hanson observes, “this position can hardly be described as established” (*op. cit.*, p. 418).

⁴⁷ So J.N.D. Kelly, who observes “a noticeable reluctance” on the part of Athanasius to use the term, because, he explains, it was “a strange, novel term, in the company of which no great body of churchmen felt entirely at home” (*Doctrines*, p. 243; Cf. also *Creeds*, p. 257-258). The contradicting interpretations the ‘homoousios’ suffered from the members of the Council obscured the situation so much that “it is impossible to pick one’s way with any confidence through the deliberations of the Council” (*Doctrines*, p. 253). R.P.C. Hanson considers ambiguity to lie in the loose meaning it initially had at the time it was used in the Creed. In fact, he observes unbalanced use of it in the Athanasian writings which he attributes to Athanasius’ “incapacity to define effectively what God is as Three in distinction of what he is as One”, because he was short of appropriate vocabulary which would secure his views from being regarded as Sabellian. We do not think that Athanasius was particularly worried not to be accused as Sabellian, as we have already stated earlier, since he seems to consider the case being closed; he had to deal with the Arians. He conveys the distinction among the divine persons with their names themselves, Father, Son and Spirit, and at that stage an ontological term, like *hypostasis*, was not absolutely necessary, as Hanson seems to regard it as the only way of defining the distinction of the divine persons. (See his chapter on the ‘homoousion’ in *The Search*, pp.436-445). The defence of the term as it is later undertaken by Athanasius is attributed by J.N.D. Kelly to influence from the West after his exile there (J.Kelly, *ibid.*; it is emphatically upheld by J.F. Bethune-Baker, *The meaning*, pp. 11ff), while R.P.C. Hanson, denying this, rather discerns political reasons (*ibid.*).

⁴⁸ So R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p.437; J.N.D. Kelly comments, “It was not that he was personally unhappy about it, but that he wanted above all things to promote the doctrine for which it stood. That this doctrine was his own all along, and that his thought did not undergo any significant theological evolution, is born out by a careful study of his vocabulary.” (*Creeds*, p. 260); A. Heron also observes at this point the continuity of Athanasius’ thought saying “There was no substantial change in his position when he came more and more to use *homoousios* in his writings: it served simply to focus and concentrate the entire debate with Arianism”, (“Homoousios”, p. 67).

accepted as the first anti-Arian treatise of Athanasius, we would incline to see his method of deploying and of establishing his arguments through a variety of terms as a sign of wise strategy rather than hesitancy of using a term that has the approval of an Ecumenical Council. The lack of frequent reference to it should not be attributed to Athanasius' reservations against it, but to the fact that the controversy was still at its first stages and the terminology was not yet fixed. The 'homoousios' was not charged with all that significance that appears to have later, therefore the variety of terms which Athanasius used in order to address larger groups of people and many different schools of thought. The focus on the "homoousios" emerges gradually and is mostly the result of the Arian reactions to it, as can be deduced from the main defensive treatises of the "homoousios", *De Decretis*, *De Sententia* and *De Synodis*. Since Athanasius was primarily interested in the abolition of the Arian heresy, it is obvious that he would choose the weapons which would prove most effective for his battle.⁴⁹ This attitude becomes clearer when we consider his approval of the earlier repudiation of the "homoousios" on the ground that it effectively abolished the heresy of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata and also when he does not hesitate to challenge his opponents to accept the Nicene doctrine regardless of the particular terms even at a later stage (*De Synodis*, 362), when he was already wholeheartedly defending them. Therefore, we believe that the *Contra Arianos* is legitimately entitled to be regarded as a pro-homoousios work of Athanasius. As a matter of fact, it a very important one because he produces in it his full biblical and theological account of the doctrines of the generation and unity and especially through an also extensive refutation of, probably, the majority, or at least, of the most important Arian proof texts. In the context of the generation, he deals in particular with Prov. 8:22 (CAR2 44-82), Acts 2:36 (CAR2 11-18) and Deut. 32:6,18

⁴⁹ R.P.C. Hanson comments characteristically "[the *homoousios*] was a word, ...which serious and wholehearted Arians could not stomach; Arius in his *Thalia* had specifically rejected it, and in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, had attacked the idea that the Son is a 'consubstantial part' (*meros homoousios*) of the Father" (*op. cit.*, p. 167). J.N.D. Kelly also cites St. Ambrose's witness to the insertion of the term in the Creed because "it struck terror into the adversaries hearts" (*Creeds*, p. 253).

(CAR2 58-59) and in the context of the unity with Jn. 17:11,20-23 (CAR3 17-25). He examines all their implications for the biblical exegesis and the Church's faith, and, in fact, on the basis of all the biblical data we saw employed in his other works which appear for the first time in the *Contra Arianos*. Thus, the actual term "homoousios" may appear only once but its constituent doctrines are central to these texts.

2. The structure of this thesis

In this thesis we will attempt to present systematically the biblical material and data which the Athanasian texts provide.⁵⁰ The brief exposition in the foregoing pages has made evident to a large extent the structure and contents of this thesis. It is divided into two parts according to Athanasius' focus on the two themes of the generation and of the unity of the Son with the Father. In each part we examine the biblical grounds upon which Athanasius bases these doctrines, dividing the biblical data into three chapters. The first chapter contains the main biblical texts which constitute the backbone of his arguments. We attempt a comprehensive presentation of their interpretation and theological application. The second chapter contains the biblical Christological titles, which derive from larger sets of texts from both Testaments. We focus our attention on the manner in which he employs these titles in order to develop the two doctrines and we look especially at the features which he chooses from them to serve his purpose better. Finally, the third chapter contains the interpretation of the biblical paradigms and their Christological application, which basically serves as an illustration of the previous sections. We pay special attention to the way in which Athanasius takes them up from the natural world and qualifies them in order to use them as theological statements on the divine reality. The anti-Arian nature of the

⁵⁰ The limited scope of this thesis did not allow an exhaustive presentation of all the biblical material in the Athanasian writings which sums up to approximately 4360 references. We tried to focus our attention to the most frequently recurrent texts and gather around them all the relevant arguments and other biblical verses associated with them.

Athanasian texts made necessary in most places to compare the Athanasian interpretation with that of the Arians in order to make out which of the two approaches does more justice to the biblical text. For this reason we also take into account and discuss the data which modern theological research on the 'homoousion' and current biblical scholarship concerning the texts under consideration provide. At the end we attempt an overall assessment of the Athanasian exegesis and a summary of the main points that define the biblical ground on which the "homoousios" stands.

**2. THE "HOMOOUSION" AND THE
GENERATION OF THE SON FROM THE
FATHER**

The concept of the generic continuity of the Father in the Son⁵¹ is present in Athanasius' thought from his early writings and appears to be central to his understanding of the divine sonship of Jesus Christ. It appears for the first time in his early classic treatise *Contra Gentes*: "And being the good offspring of Him that is good, and true Son, he is the Father's Power and Wisdom and Word, not being so by participation, nor as if these attributes were imparted to him from without, as they are to those who participate in him and are made wise by him and receive power and reason in him; but he is the very wisdom, very word, and very own power of the Father, very light, very truth, very righteousness, very virtue and in truth his character and effulgence and image. And to sum all up, he is the wholly perfect fruit of the Father and he is alone the Son and unvarying image of the Father".⁵² This teaching, not yet found in the sophisticated debates which were to follow, is probably echoed in his later *Contra Arianos* with reference to the catechetical practice of the Church, which marks the initiation into Christian theological understanding, "Who hears of a son and does not conceive that which is proper to the father's essence? Who heard in his first catechising, that God has a Son and has made all things through his own Word, and did not understand it in the sense as we now mean it?... For what is sown in every soul from the beginning is that God has a Son, the Word, the Wisdom, the Power, that is, his image and effulgence...".⁵³

⁵¹ A. Robertson characteristically calls it: "the full unbroken continuation of Being of the Father in the Son", *NPNF*, p. xxxii.

⁵² GENT 46:25,93B-C.

⁵³ CAR2 34:26,220A-B; cf. also CAR1 8:26,28B, where he makes similar complaints "For who was ever yet a hearer of such a doctrine? From where and from whom did the abettors and hirelings of the

The doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father became fundamental in Athanasius teaching and unfolded its implications to their full extent, when he became involved in the Arian controversy. The doctrine of generation was the answer which the Church developed against the Arian teaching which alienated the Son from the Father in his being and regarded him as a creature and not true God by nature.⁵⁴

Athanasius, giving a brief outline of this Arian doctrine says:

"So, they say what others held and dared to maintain before them; 'not always Father, not always Son', for the Son was not before he was begotten, and as others he was also made out of non-existence. In consequence, God was not always Father of the Son, but when the Son came to be and was created, then God was called his Father. For the Word is a creature and a work, foreign and unlike the Father in essence. The Son is neither by nature the Father's true Word, nor his only and true Wisdom, but being a creature and one of the works, he is improperly called Word and Wisdom, because by the word which is in the Father was he made, as were all things. Therefore, the Son is not true God".⁵⁵

Taking for granted the absolute distinction of the two individuals Father and Son, Athanasius opposes to their ontological alienation by setting two objectives. Firstly, he had to prove that the kind of the Son's essence is not different from that of the Father, in the way that the essence of creatures is different in virtue of the fact that it consists of 'elements' that have been created by the Father. The Son belongs to the same species with the Father, because He is begotten from him and therefore carries all the generic or essential attributes of the Father and consequently he is "homoousios" with him. Secondly, he had also to show that these two generically identified beings do not constitute two

heresy gain it? Who thus expounded to them when they were at school?"

⁵⁴ For this reason we believe that the "emergence" of the doctrine of generation in the Church is only a matter of emphasis, which aimed at meeting particular demands and therefore we do not share M. Wiles' argument that it was a matter of import or development, because it is not emphasized by the Apologists (*Eternal Generation*, p. 291). They had different themes to deal with, as for example the 'logos' of the philosophers. The Arians called into question the origins of the Son and his very existence. It is natural then for Athanasius to answer to them through the doctrine of the Son's generation.

⁵⁵ DECR 6:25,425A-B, also in CAR1 5-6:26,21Aff; As R.P.C. Hanson (*op. cit.*, p. 10) and R. Williams (*Arius*, p. 99) have suggested this presentation of the Arian teaching is based on Athanasius' free reproduction of Arian sources and does not render exact words of Arius. They both hint to possible "distortion" or "misinterpretation", for which however no sufficient evidence is produced, since the whole of Athanasius' presentation is coherent and also corresponds to the directly Arian poor evidence.

separate Gods, so as to conclude in ditheism, but on account of the biblical doctrine of their absolute unity, which is based on the immaterial and bodiless nature of God that exists beyond space and time which creates divisions, they are the One God who was revealed in the Old Testament through the prophets and in the New through the Son. Thus he appeals to both Testaments, emphasising mainly the oneness of God as unity of being of the Son with the Father in the New, and the oneness of God as unity of act of the Father through the Son in the Old. As the Son is united with the Father in the revelation of the New Testament, so is he present in the act of the Father in the revelation of the Old.

The notion of the Son's generic continuity from the Father is clearly presented in his first anti-Arian treatises (*Contra Arianos*), in which he remarks: "For whatever the begetter is, it is necessary that the offspring is the same".⁵⁶ In the *Contra Arianos*, as we have already pointed out, Athanasius establishes this teaching using a variety of similar expressions among which the most prominent and recurrent is the other controversial Nicene term "from the essence of the Father" (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς). When in the course of the debate the discussion came to focus on the "homoousion", Athanasius used the term "from the essence" to acknowledge the transition to the "homoousion" and to move away from using a multiplicity of terms towards using a single term. His basis was the common element of the generic sense, which both terms conveyed. The beginning of this link is apparent in the *De Decretis*, where, in the defence of both terms, he argues that both "from the essence" and "homoousios" expresses the "likeness" (ὁμοιότης) of the Son with the Father which also "human sons acquire from their begetters, according to what is written about Adam and Seth, who was begotten from the former 'in his own likeness, after his image'".⁵⁷ The same point is more plainly repeated even later in the *De Synodis*,

⁵⁶ CAR2 35:26,221A: "ὁποῖος γὰρ ἂν ἢ ὁ γεννῶν, τοιοῦτον ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸ γέννημα εἶναι".
⁵⁷ DECR 20:25,452B.

where he says: "thus, the mind of the offspring and of the *homoousios* is one and anyone who thinks of the Son as offspring, rightly thinks of him as *homoousios*".⁵⁸

The notion "offspring" is the most appropriate one among the other attributes of the Son which oppose the Arian point of view, because it goes back to the 'beginnings' or 'origins' of his existence and defines the nature of his being. The manner of the Son's generation determines the ontological category to which he belongs, and distinguishes it from the sonship, which is a gift that human beings receive from God. To acknowledge the Son from the Father as offspring and not as creature immediately implies that he is "homoousios" with the Father. Athanasius asserts that the Scriptures provide all the evidence sufficient for this, but, as he remarks, it takes a great deal of care and discernment to ensure that the outcome of such an inquiry into the biblical texts will be understood appropriately to God's own self-revelation and God's nature,

"It belongs to discerning men, as Paul has commanded, to be careful at their study and discriminate and dispose of what is written according to the nature of each subject and avoid any confusion of sense, so as neither to conceive of the things of God in a human way, nor to ascribe the things of man to God".⁵⁹

The whole debate, therefore, as Dr G. D. Dragas remarks, was not simply a matter of understanding the meaning of the divine sonship of Jesus Christ, but concerned the understanding of the divine nature as a whole.⁶⁰ Athanasius himself often argues that if the Son was not a real Son, then neither would the Father be a real Father and this would be enough to change the conception of God altogether. Thus, his argument on the divine sonship aims not only at the clarification of the understanding of Jesus Christ as Son and the difference between him and the creatures, in general, and human beings as sons, in particular, but also of the manner of this generation and of the Begetter himself. Athanasius primarily uses the Bible in order to define and describe the three elements

⁵⁸ SYNO 42:26,768B-C.

⁵⁹ DECR 10:25,433B.

⁶⁰ *Athanasiana*, p. 58.

involved in the doctrine of generation, i.e., the Father, the Son and the act of begetting, and to illustrate their relations to each other.

The presentation of the material will follow the pattern which we have set from the beginning. First of all, we will look into the interpretation of those *biblical verses* with which Athanasius defines and clarifies both the understanding of the Father as Begetter and the act of begetting. This will serve as the basis upon which we shall present a comprehensive overview of his understanding of the *Christological titles* "Son" and "Word" in the context of the divine generation. And, finally, we shall look into the manner in which he employs the *biblical paradigms* 'fountain-river', 'light-effulgence' and 'image' to illustrate the above.

2.1 The Biblical Texts

2.1.1 The starting point of the debate: 1 Cor. 8:6 and 2 Cor. 5:17-18

According to Athanasius' account of the proceedings of the Council of Nicea, the debate on the generation was initially expressed as an hermeneutical disagreement over the two Pauline verses 1 Cor. 8:6a ("Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things") and 2 Cor. 5:17-18 ("The old has passed away, behold the new has come; all this is from God").⁶¹ While the Nicenes and the Arians shared common ground when they acknowledged God the Father as the ultimate source from which everything originates, their views of the origins of the Son and creation were entirely different. The Arians followed a strict monotheism and stressed the distinction between the 'One God' and 'all things', differentiating ontologically only the Father from every other being among which they included the Son.⁶²

⁶¹ The Arian biblical argument on the generation of the Son, which is contained in the later works of Athanasius (from DECR onwards), where he defends the "homousion", consists only of the verses 1 Cor 8:6a, 2 Cor 5:17-18 and Prov 8:22 (CAR2 44-57ff, DECR 13-14, DION 10-11, SER2 7-8). But in fact their appeal to the Bible was much more extensive, as we can see in the *Three Orations Contra Arianos*, where Athanasius refutes their views step by step in lengthy expositions. We think that there are three reasons for this, a) it is the fact that in the *CAR* Athanasius attempts an overall and detailed refutation of the Arian doctrine, therefore he includes all the main points, b) they were used in the Council, whose "minutes" Athanasius presents (DECR, AFRO), and c) the Arian insistence on these particular texts, and especially on Prov 8:22 which in the course of the debate appeared to be the "cornerstone" of the Arian doctrine. Therefore, we regarded as essential to our investigation and in order to give a complete account of the Arian biblical argument on the subject, to include all evidence produced in *CAR*.

⁶² Their exegetical contention was that "the phrase *from God* belongs also to us and in this respect the Word of God does not differ from us at all" (DECR 19:25,448D). Athanasius, elsewhere, records the Arian argument in their own words: "Let us assent. For we are also from God, for *there is One God from whom are all things and the old has passed away, behold, the new has come; all things are from God*"; AFRO 5:26,1037B; Cf. also CAR1 19:26,52C; SYNO 35:26,756A. Arian monotheism has been fully explained and expounded by almost all scholars with various degrees of emphasis put on it; for more details on the traditional view of Arius see: H. Gwatkin, *Studies in Arianism*, pp. 20ff; W. Barnes, "Arius and Arianism", pp. 19ff; S. Laeuchli, "The Case", pp. 404ff; Meinhold, "The Ecumenical Council", pp. 94-97; S. Papadopoulos, *St. Athanasius*, pp. 108-109ff; G. Florovsky, *The Fathers of the East*, pp. 20-24; T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 118ff, 133ff; A. Heron, "Homousios", pp. 59f, 68f; J.N.D. Kelly, *Doctrines*, pp. 226ff; *Creeeds*, pp. 231ff; C. Kannengiesser, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 5ff; T.E. Pollard, *Joh. Christology*, pp. 141ff, 187ff; G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, pp. 49ff. A number of recent studies, however, try to create a more "sympathetic" approach of Arius; see: M. Wiles, "In Defense", pp. 339ff; R. Williams, "The logic", pp. 56ff; and *Arius*, pp. 95-117; Gregg-Groh, *Arianism. A view*, pp. 1-130 and "The centrality", pp. 305-31. Cf. also the collection of the Papers of the 9th Intern. Conf. of Patr. Studies,

Athanasius however replies that the alleged identification of the generation of the Son with the generation of the creatures is not only without foundation in these two verses, but in fact they are a profound manifestation of the divinity of the Son.⁶³ Turning to the context of 1 Cor. 8:6a, he asserts that the emphasis does not fall on a distinction between "God" and "all things", because, as verse 5 suggests, the intention of the Apostle is not to explain the relations between the Father and the Son, but between the Christian God and the pagan gods. St. Paul is dealing with the particular problem of food offered to idols and directs his argument against Hellenistic polytheism, making clear that the ontological beginning and origin of all created beings is found in the will and the creative activity of the one God the Father and not in "another creator", "chance", "combination of atoms", "angels" or "with no cause" according to the various contradicting pagan cosmo-theories of his time.

When one looks at the second half of the verse which the Arians, for obvious reasons, omitted, the way the wording parallels the first part puts the Son on a par with the Father. Athanasius, laying emphasis on the phrase "and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things", argues that rather than putting the Son apart from the creation, it acknowledges him to be the Creator of all in the same way as the Father is. The phrases "from whom" and "through whom" carry the same theological significance and imply that the Father cannot be considered separately from the Son, "for he who dares to call him, through whom are all things, one of that all, surely will have similar speculations concerning God, from whom are all".⁶⁴ Since the act of creation is distinctively and uniquely divine, Athanasius asserts that the claim that the One who creates is also a creature cannot be based on "any religious argument from human reason; for what man,

Oxford 1983 in R. Gregg, *Arianism*, Philadelphia 1985.

⁶³ We shall follow the exegesis in DECR19:25,449A-B; SYNO35:26,765A. Although Athanasius seems to have had in mind mostly the first verse, his arguments can be applied to both verses.

⁶⁴ CAR1 19:26,52C.

Greek or barbarian, presumes to call one, whom he confesses to be God, a created thing or to say that he was not before he was made?".⁶⁵ Thus, he concludes that although the general theological statement "from God" applies both to the Son and to the creatures, the fact that according to 1 Cor. 8:6b the creatures have been created "through" the Son differentiates both their origins and their nature: the Son is manifested to be co-Creator who acted in one indivisible act with the Father. Such a status cannot be possessed by any creature, but only by a being which is essentially like God and bears the uniquely divine attributes of his being. The fact that the Son appears to possess these attributes which the Arians essentially attribute only to the Father, implies that they have been transmitted to the Son. Such a transmission can only take place through the natural process of generation, because they are attributes of essence and being. Therefore Athanasius shifts the emphasis from the Son as Creator to the Son as offspring saying,

"For what is called God's work, is all done through the Son and it is not possible that the things created should have one origin with their Creator. The phrase 'of God', which occurs in the passage, has a different sense in the case of the works, from what it bears when used of the Son; for He is offspring and they are creatures and therefore He, the Son, is the proper offspring of his essence, but they are the handiwork of his will".⁶⁶

The Arians' interpretation of these verses as grounds for identifying the generation of the Son with the creation of the world 'from God' and for distinguishing the Father from any other being, arose from a confusion of the notions 'offspring' and 'creature' and the verbs 'to create' and 'to beget'. Arius himself bears witness to that in the famous statement of his *Letter to Alexander*, saying, "[the Son is] perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures, offspring, but not as one of the offsprings ... created before the ages ... begotten timelessly before everything".⁶⁷ The fact that he concentrated his teaching in the

⁶⁵ DION2:25,481B.

⁶⁶ SYNO 35:26,756B; The counter argument of the Arians at this point was the development of a "mediator-creator" teaching, which we shall discuss later on.

⁶⁷ Cf. his *Letter to Alexander*, H-G. Opitz, *A.W., Urk. 6*, 3:1:1, pp. 12-13. Athanasius also bears witness to this in many places saying that whenever the Arians hear "offspring and Word and Wisdom, they are quick to misconstrue and deny the natural and genuine generation of the Son from the Father; also, when they hear words and terms proper to a creature, they straight away regard him to be a creature and

phrases "out of non-existence" (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων) and "there was [time] when he was not" (ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν) shows that the regulative concept which defined the meaning of both was the notion of creation with the connotations of which he understood the generation of the Son.

What becomes apparent from the above Athanasian text is that the decisive factor which defines the distinction between offspring and creature, is the person of the Father and his role in the generation of the Son and the creation of the world. Athanasius discerns two elements, "essence" and "will" the first of which relates the Father to the Son and the second the Father to the world. His next step was to explain those relations of the Father according to biblical evidence and to vindicate the Nicene term "from the essence" (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας).

2.1.2 The Father as the 'beginning' of the Son

Athanasius does not consider meaningless the biblical use of both verbs 'to create' and 'to beget', therefore he maintains the distinction between the two concepts, on the grounds of the entirely different connotations and implications they carry. The first crucial difference he discerns is related to the 'out of non-existence' principle, which implies that the outcomes of creation and generation have their ontological beginning in different starting points.⁶⁸ On the one hand, generation implies that the beginning of the existence of its object is located in the subject itself, from which it is produced and whose attributes it bears. Athanasius expresses this intimacy of relation with the term "ἴδιος" ("proper" or

deny the Word"; and a little later, "you claim that offspring and creature have the same meaning", CAR2 4:26,153C; Cf. also CAR2 20:26,189A: "you identified the offspring with the creature, when you wrote *begotten or made*"; also CAR2 58:26,269C.

⁶⁸ The term 'beginning' has double meaning in Athanasius, as we shall see during our discussion: it indicates the ontological beginning or origin and the temporal beginning. While the Son has the first in the Father, he does not have the second because he is eternal. Cf. the conclusions of E. Meijering in "Athanasius on the Father as the origin of the Son" after an extensive discussion of the relevant Athanasian texts. For a well argued exposition of the doctrine of creation see G. Florovsky, "The concept of creation in Saint Athanasius", *T. u. U.*, 81 (1962) 36-57.

"own"). On the other hand, the verb 'to create' implies that its object has a beginning in existence from nothing through the act of God, so that both its beginning and its existence are alien to the essence of God. Again Athanasius uses the adverb "outside" (ἐξωθεν) to convey this concept.⁶⁹ To illustrate the difference he uses the parallel of the relationships of a father to his son and to his house.⁷⁰ The latter is the result of the act of creation, originates outside and exists apart from their builder, while the beginning of a son is in his father, he originates from the essence of his father and therefore he is also "homoousios" with him.⁷¹ In contrast to this and for reasons which we shall see later, Arius' fear of any creaturely affection of God made him anxious to preserve the essence of the Father in his absolute transcendence and safe from any involvement with the Son or any other being.⁷²

The task for Athanasius was to show that the Father is portrayed in the Bible as personally involved in the generation of the Son, whereas he is distanced from the creatures, which are the result of his creative act and exist "outside" him. To prove the point, he adduced to three verses from the book of Psalms, Ps. 2:7 ("you are my Son, today I have begotten you"), Ps. 44:2 ("My heart uttered a good word"), and Ps. 109:3 ("from the womb before the morning star I begot you"),⁷³ which he combined with the names "God"

⁶⁹ "The Son is something proper to God and truly from that blessed and eternal essence; on the contrary, what is from his will, comes into consistence from without and is created through his proper offspring who is from that [essence]" (CAR2 2:26,152B). Arius, however, refrained from defining the creation of the Son as 'out of non-existence'. It is mainly Athanasius that stresses the point, since there is no other reference in the extant Arian documents except for the *Letter to Eusebius*; Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, "Who taught ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων;", *Arianism*, p. 125. As for the term "ἴδιος" we gave two translations because we think that only the translation into "proper" does not render the full significance of the Greek. The latter also includes the notions of "possessing the same thing", "similarity", "identity". Cf. especially the most persuasive analysis of the understanding of the term by Arius in R. Williams, *The Logic*, pp. 58-62. The conclusion one can easily draw out of this study is that Arius and Athanasius used it in diametrically opposite way: it shows the strict philosophical presuppositions which Arius applied and which seem to be totally absent in Athanasius.

⁷⁰ SYNO 41:26,768A; CAR2 2:26,152A.

⁷¹ In the SER2 6 he characteristically argues "For, as mad one would be, if he said that a house or a ship is *homoousios* with its builder, so appropriate it is for one to say that every son is *homoousios* with his father" (26,617B).

⁷² Cf. for this Arius' letter to Constantine as it is reconstructed by R.Hanson, *The Search*, p. 9. He appears in it to claim "No! I do not wish God to be involved with the suffering of insults".

⁷³ Because Athanasius uses the LXX text, we will always refer to it both as text and reference. The English translations of these verses vary because they follow the Hebrew text, but without great differences; the basic meaning which matches the LXX translation is rendered by all of them. For the

and "Father", especially in those verses in which the Father is directly related to the Son, like Mat. 3:17 (and parallels), Jn. 8:42 and Jn. 6:46. His objective was to justify the Nicene term "essence", which was used in order to show this distinction.

2.1.2.1 *Mat 3:17, 17:5 (and parallels)*

The apocalyptic character of the Baptism and Transfiguration narratives in the Synoptic Gospels (Mat. 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35) in which the Father plainly declares Jesus Christ to be his own Son, constitutes the foundations upon which Athanasius bases the Son's generic identification with the Father. The verses have been traditionally interpreted in Trinitarian terms⁷⁴ and Athanasius maintains this trend by taking the Fatherly declaration literally as designation of Jesus Christ's natural sonship.⁷⁵ There are two elements in this verse that he combines with regard to the generation of the Son. Firstly, it is the initiative of the Father to relate himself personally with Jesus Christ in terms of Father-Son. This is a unique and unprecedented occurrence in the whole Bible indicating the different relation of the Son from the relation of other beings with the Father which for Athanasius is due to their different status. He argues that if the generation of the Son did not differ essentially from the creation of other beings and he were indeed a creature, the Bible would contain statements of comparison between him and the others

translation and interpretation of these verses we consulted the following, D. Hay, *Glory*, pp. 155ff; H-J. Kraus, *Theology*, pp. 107ff; H-J. Kraus, *Psalms i-ii*; J. Giannakopoulos, *Psalms*; C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*; Kissane, *Psalms*; Dahood, *Psalms*.

⁷⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the four Gospels*, I (St. Matthew), i, pp. 114-115, ii, pp. 604-605, in which he presents in the form of catena the interpretations of Augustine, Hilary, Jerome *et al.* The same interpretation also appears in the appropriate passages in the commentaries of Mark and Luke.

⁷⁵ The power of this witness to Jesus and its unprecedented character seems to be acknowledged by the majority of biblical scholarship as an indication of the intention of the sacred authors to designate Jesus Christ's unique sonship and relation to the Father with reference to kinship of nature and essence, upon which his messianic ministry of death and resurrection is founded (Cullmann, p. 276f, Bonsriven, p. 23f, Goppelt, I, p. 199f, Richardson, p. 178f and 181f, Dunn, p. 49). Although all of them underline the significance of these texts for this ministry which was to follow, their limitation only to this purpose, that is, as a witness to Christ's sonship which is to be recognised in his death, is not adequate to express their force and especially when this is asserted on the grounds of denying indication of his pre-existent status (J.D.G. Dunn, p. 48, 50ff), since it goes beyond the questions which even the Arians themselves had risen and requires special consideration (for the witness of the NT to the pre-existence of Christ cf. L. Goppelt, *Theology of the NT*, II, pp. 73-79 in contrast to J.D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9 and *passim*).

and also similar declarations for others as well. He categorically asserts that it is the only case in which God the Father refers to another being in such terms and declares that Jesus Christ is his own and only Son.⁷⁶ It is the very name 'Son', secondly, that refers the relation of the Father with the Son to the generation of the latter from the essence of the former and not to creation of any kind, because, as Athanasius characteristically argues, "if you too have said that the Son is from God, it follows that you have said that he is from the 'essence' of the Father. And since the Scriptures precede you which say, that the Lord is Son of the Father, and the Father himself precedes them, who says 'This is my beloved Son...'" and a son is no other than the offspring from his father, is it not evident that the fathers have suitably said that the Son is from the Father's essence?... If he is a son, he is not a creature, and if a creature then not a son",⁷⁷ for "no one would ever call his own offsprings creatures or his creatures offsprings".⁷⁸ For Athanasius, this functions as the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of other biblical texts and especially Old Testament ones, as the link especially to *Ps. 2:7* and others indicates,⁷⁹ since it appears that the explicit divine revelation of the status of the Son illumines all the implicit ones contained in other places and especially in the Old Testament.

⁷⁶ CAR2 23:26,196A: "Moreover if, as the heretics hold, the Son were a creature or work, but not as one of the creatures, because of his excelling them in glory, it would be natural that Scripture should describe and display him by a comparison in his favour with the other works;... But he is not in fact thus referred to; but the Father shews him to be his own proper and only Son saying..."; also DECR 11:25,436A: "the Father shews only him to be from himself, saying...".

⁷⁷ SYNO 35-36:26,753Dff; also DECR 11, DION 2, EPI 12 and passim.

⁷⁸ DECR 13:25,445C.

⁷⁹ The link between Mat. 3:17 and Ps. 2:7 is apparent and all scholars make reference to it: it is taken as designation of Christ's unique sonship (Cf. Richardson, Bonsriven, Dunn, Goppelt, Cullmann).

2.1.2.2 Ps 2:7; 44(45):2; 109(110):3⁸⁰

In the *Epistle to Marcellinus*, where Athanasius expounds on the great importance of the Psalter for the ecclesiastical and private life, he attributes to these psalms a prophetic and messianic character, which constitutes the basis of his interpretation. He specifies their Christological significance as having particular reference to the generation of the Son saying,

"When you want to sing in private about the Saviour, you can find appropriate [passages] in all psalms; but you have especially 44 and 109 indicating his genuine generation from the Father and his incarnate presence".⁸¹

His Christological approach to these psalms has been defined by their New Testament use, which created a consistent exegetical tradition up to his time.⁸² Although only his reference to Ps. 2:7 matches the New Testament ones, both Ps. 109 (v. 1) and Ps. 44 (v. 7) are cited and interpreted in intensely messianic terms by Jesus Christ himself and by the Apostles Peter and Paul. *Ps. 109:1*, in particular, is in the centre of the Christological debate between Jesus Christ and the Pharisees recorded in the synoptics (Mat. 22:44, Mk. 12:36, Lk. 20:42). There Jesus attacks the Pharisees' simplistic view of the Messiah as mere man, which left the verse in an unresolved mystery for the Jewish interpreters. He stresses two points: first, that David speaks "in Spirit", a fact that renders to the psalm a revelatory character, and second that David addresses the Messiah as "his Lord", while no one denied that the Messiah would be one of his descendants. Although

⁸⁰ We will examine the three verses together because Athanasius uses them in the same context and for the same purpose.

⁸¹ MARC 26:27,37B; Cf. also MARC 14-15:27,28Af.

⁸² These psalms belong to the category of the 'royal psalms' because they were linked to Jewish rituals concerning the consecration of the king. Very soon they acquired messianic significance due to the exceeding majesty of the king as he is presented in them. D. Hay has collected all evidence concerning the interpretation of Ps. 109 both in Jewish and Christian contexts. In the Christian Church the psalm was consistently interpreted up to the time of Nicea in two respects: "in applying the entire psalm to Jesus, and in arguing explicitly for his divinity on the basis of the first and third verses" (*Glory*, pp. 45-51). Its application merely to the Jewish king, employed by several modern scholars who are reluctant to extend its significance beyond its particular historical context, is not adequate to render the full meaning of it (see H. Kraus who wants to avoid "Christological impose" on the psalm, *Theology*, p. 114-120).

Jesus did not give the answer to his question ("If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?"), the text leaves a clear idea of his argument which even Masters of the Law were unable to dispute: the Messiah is a descendant of David and yet he is greater than David, because being the Son of God himself he has got divine origins. The hermeneutical significance of this point is that the dialogue that follows is not considered to be between God and David any longer, but between God and the Messiah, who is his own Son. The same exegetical standpoint is taken by both the Apostles Peter and Paul. St. Peter contends that the psalm applies to God and his Son, the Messiah, and not to God and David (Acts 2:34). St. Paul also applies the sitting at the right hand of God (v. 1) to the Son and not to David (1 Cor 15:26, Heb. 1:3,13) and on the basis of v. 4 (Heb. 5:6, 7:17) considers the high-priesthood of the Son to originate *par excellence* directly from the Father. *Ps. 44:7* is used only once, by St. Paul, in Heb. 1:8 to indicate the Father exalting his Son above all beings. Finally, *Ps. 2:7* is used three times, again by St. Paul, who emphasizes the divine sonship of Jesus Christ as the cause of his resurrection (Acts 13:33), his superiority over the angels (Heb. 1:5) and his high-priesthood (Heb. 5:5).

Athanasius, observing this hermeneutical tradition, introduces these verses into his argument either with the claim that it is the Father speaking, or David "on behalf of the Father" (ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ Θεοῦ),⁸³ that lends to it a distinctive authority. He lays the emphasis on the terms 'heart' and 'womb', which in the language of the Bible and especially of the Psalms designate the "inner man" and the centre of the human existence.⁸⁴ As they are naturally linked to the Christological titles 'Son' and 'Word', Athanasius uses them to illustrate the different nature of the Son's generation from the creation of the other

⁸³ DION 2; CAR2 23; CAR3 59; DECR 13, 21; MARC 5.

⁸⁴ "Heart" in the Old Testament designates "the innermost part of man" and is the seat of mental or spiritual powers and capacities, rational functions, religious and moral conduct. "Womb" (γαστήρ) is always associated with the process of birth-giving; for further details cf. E. Kittel, *Dictionary*, v. 3, pp. 605-613.

beings. The Son is described as coming from the 'womb' of the Father as 'son' and from the 'heart' of the Father as 'word', while creatures, as we have said, according to the doctrine of creation, have been brought into existence "out of non-existence" through the creative Word of the Father. Therefore Athanasius argues "who ... will dare even to say that the Word, who is from the heart of God, is made out of non-existence...?".⁸⁵ On this ground, he also objects to any other conception of the Son as originating from any source which is "other than" (ἄλλοθεν) or "external to" (ἔξωθεν) the Father. To reinforce the identification of the Father as the source and establish the distinction between him and nothing as the origin of the Son, he uses the personal pronoun "himself" (αὐτός), asserting "whence else can one consider the Son...but from the Father himself?" and elsewhere, "...it indicates the Father himself".⁸⁶ Based on this principle, he will use the term "essence" to render the same meaning, as we shall see later.

2.1.2.3 *Jn. 8:42 and Jn. 6:46*

Although *Jn. 8:42* ("I proceeded and came forth from God") and *Jn. 6:46* ("Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God") are also included in the same list of verses for the generation of the Son,⁸⁷ their relevance to the subject is not obvious at first sight.⁸⁸ In fact they come from a very important and distinctive context in the Johannine Gospel, which justifies their selection by Athanasius. The central theme in both contexts is the identity of Jesus Christ, which is gradually revealed in the course of a theological debate between him and the Jews. Both verses focus on Christ's divine origins from God in his attempt to differentiate himself from all other righteous people of Israel.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ DION 2:25,481B; also CAR3 67:26,464C: "If the Word is in the heart, where is the will?".

⁸⁶ DECR 21:25,453B; 13:25,437D.

⁸⁷ DECR 21:25,453B.

⁸⁸ Commentators hardly find any association of the verses with the particular theme of the generation. C.K. Barrett discerns a hint by implication to the divine generation of Jesus as intended by John, but he does not consider it "the main contention" of 8:42 (*The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 288).

⁸⁹ Only B.F. Westcott, following the patristic tradition, makes remarkable exegetical comments on

Obviously, this matches with Athanasius' intention to differentiate the generation of the Son "from God" from the creation of all other beings "from God". The first verse (8:42) focuses on the understanding of the Fatherhood of God. Jesus disputes the claim of the Jews that they are sons of God on the ground that they do not recognise him who "comes from" the Father. Athanasius observes that this evidence of the Son about himself is a consistent biblical statement since there is no other indication of his originating from anywhere else, but from the Father alone.⁹⁰ The second verse (6:46) focuses on the possibility of the knowledge of God by human beings. Again, Jesus differentiates himself from any other being on the grounds of his relation to the Father. Athanasius illustrates the point with Ex. 33:20 ("You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live") and argues that since none of the creatures can have knowledge of the Father, but only the Son, it follows that he is alone the Father's own and true Son. Such a knowledge is due to his fully divine being and can only derive from a natural generation "from the Father", because, to put it in Athanasian words, "how would he be the only one to know [the Father], if he were not the only one proper (ἰδιος) to him? How would he be proper, if he were a creature and not a real Son from him?"⁹¹

Both the verses from the Psalms and the Gospel of John, appear to have been interpreted in like manner and for the same theological purpose before Athanasius.⁹² This is suggested by a specific objection by Arius in his *Letter to Alexander*, in which he states:

the theological significance of these statements with reference to their coherent meaning and their relation to parallel verses. He considers the designation of the divinity of Jesus the result of his natural generation from the Father and the primary objective of these texts. Commenting on 8:42 in parallel examination with 16:27-28,30, 13:3 and 17:8, he observes: "The words can only be interpreted of the true divinity of the Son, of which the Father is the source and fountain. The connection described is internal and essential, and not that of presence or external fellowship" (*The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 136).

⁹⁰ DECR 21:25,453B.

⁹¹ CAR2 22:26,193B. Cf. also B.F. Westcott, "The phrase implies not only mission (xvi 27f., *came forth from*), but also a present relation of close dependence" (*The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 105; and also 103-104).

⁹² They were used by Dionysius of Rome (DECR 26), Dionysius (DION 23) and Alexander of Alexandria (*Letter to his clerics*, Opitz, *Urk. 4b*, pp. 6-11).

"If the terms 'from him' and 'from the womb' and 'I have come from the Father' are considered by some to mean that the Son is *homoousion part* of him or projection, then the Father is composite and divisible and mutable and according to them he is a body, suffering all the bodily consequences of these, in spite of him being bodiless".⁹³ This text suggests that while the "homoousion" was probably a natural term to employ in interpreting these verses Arius automatically associated it with divisions in the being of God. It appears that his objection mostly refers to the word "part", on account of which he also rejects the "homoousion". However, although he attributes this interpretation to heretics, he somehow comes himself to accept the heretical view that the 'homoousion' *indeed* implies this division in spite of the contention of his 'orthodox' rivals that this is not necessary since it depends on how one understands this process to take place. According to Athanasius the problem lies in the fact that both Arius and the other heretics apply the same pattern of logic in their approach to Scripture, which uses anthropomorphic models to conceptualise the incomprehensible mode of the divine existence.⁹⁴

It is interesting, though, that on the basis of these verses both Arius and Athanasius deny "compositeness" of the divine "ousia", but on account of entirely opposite reasoning: Arius argues that if the Son *is* "homoousion part" of the Father, then God is composite; Athanasius argues that if the Son *is not* "homoousios" with the Father, then God is composite. The crucial point is that while the "homoousion" answers the question "what" the Son is, the "part" answers the question "how" the Son is what he is. As it appears the difference was a matter of hermeneutics and theological priorities: Arius was keen to answer the second question and modified the answer to the first according to the second, whereas Athanasius first answered the question "what" and then qualified the question

⁹³ H. Opitz dates the *Letter* at 320; see *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ "The Arians, having turned to themselves and understanding nothing else except themselves like the Sadducees, they accepted the God-inspired Scripture according to human conceptions; for hearing the Son to be wisdom and effulgence and word of the Father, they always ask: how can this exist? As if nothing could exist that they cannot understand", SER2 1:26,609A.

"how" appropriately to the divine nature. Basically, Athanasius denies any answers to the question "how", because he believes that the mystery of God can be communicated only through faith, neither through logic and most certainly nor through explanations.⁹⁵ The background and reasons for this difference will become obvious in the examination of his understanding of the term "essence" and of the nature of the Son's generation.

2.1.2.4 Ex. 3:14 and the term "essence" (οὐσία) indicating the Father

With these texts Athanasius defines the boundaries of the context and meaning of the term "essence". It is understood as entailing the personal involvement of the Father in the generation of the Son and thus distinguishing the divine acts of begetting a Son and creating creatures. He pays much attention to the vindication of the Nicene term "from the essence of the Father", which constitutes the first step towards the "homoousion". The doctrine of creation includes the 'out of non-existence' (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων) definition, i.e., places the existential 'beginning' of the creatures in the 'nothing', which becomes also an element of their consistence. Thus, creatures are related to God as far as they are brought into existence through the divine act of creation and are sustained by it in order not to return to the non-being condition. Athanasius constantly asserts that creatures originate from and exist "outside" of (ἐξωθεν) their Creator, while a son is an offspring of the essence of its father, as the example of the son of a builder in contrast to his house or ship.⁹⁶ For his part, Arius was aware of the implications of the doctrine of creation and

⁹⁵ Cf. "Nor must we ask why the word of God is not such as our word, considering God is not such as we, as has been said before; nor again is it right to seek how the word is from God or how is he God's radiance or how God begets and what is the manner of his begetting...It is all one as if they sought where God is and how God is and of what nature the Father is. But to ask such questions is irreligious and argues an ignorance of God, so it is not holy to venture such questions concerning the generation of the Son of God, not to measure God and his wisdom by our own nature and infirmity" CAR2 36:26,224A. Any of these approaches involve also for Athanasius soteriological implications: "For it is better when one is in doubt to be silent and believe than to disbelieve on account of doubt; for one who is in doubt may in some way obtain mercy, because though one has questioned, one has yet kept quiet; but when one is lead by doubts into forming for one's self doctrines which beseem not and utters what is unworthy to God, such daring incurs a sentence without mercy", CAR2 36:26,224B; Cf. also CAR3 1:26,324A, CAR3 18:26,360C, DECR 18:25,448B.

regarded as more appropriate to relate the Son with the Father only under these terms. Therefore, while he equated the notions of 'creature' and 'offspring', he also added that the Son was also 'out of non-existence'. Thus, he resulted in lending meaning only to the concept of creation and used the terms related to the 'offspring' without any particular significance and out of their proper context.

As we shall see later, according to the extant evidence, Arius tried to justify his point biblically, appealing only to certain texts which contained the verb 'to create', but there is nothing to show how he supported the 'out of non-existence' teaching. It appears then that this emerged as an implication of his view concerning the creation of the Son and the impossibility of the eternal existence of two 'ingenerate' beings simultaneously.⁹⁷ His premise, that is, was rather cosmological and philosophical, but not biblical. On the contrary, Athanasius asserts that there is no indication in the Bible that the 'beginning' of the Son's existence was in 'nothing', but rather in the Father, who is a concrete being. With this argument Athanasius defines the context in which he employs the term: it is the fundamental existential distinction between 'being' and 'non being'.⁹⁸

The fact that Athanasius employs the term 'essence' bearing in mind this distinction throughout the debate is made evident by two texts, one at the very beginning and the other at the end of his theological career, which draw a consistent line of understanding. It functions as the underlying regulative principle that determines the various shades of meaning the term gradually acquires according to the different contexts in which it appears in the Athanasian works. The first text is included in the early *GENT*, in which Athanasius uses the characteristic phrase that "God substantiated the world" (οὐσιώσας τὴν κτίσιν).

⁹⁶ Cf. DECR 13:25,437C; AFRO 6:26,617B.

⁹⁷ Arius' *Letter to Alexander*, *op. cit.* ("two ingenerate beginnings").

⁹⁸ This point seem to be underestimated by many scholars who insist on the lack of distinction between 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' by Athanasius. It was not a problem that he addressed and the equal use in this context does not imply the confusion which can be created in the context of the unity of the Son with the Father.

By this he denotes the creative act of God that called beings out of non-existence into existence (τὸ εἶναι), i.e., gave to them "essence" (οὐσία) or ordered so that they would become "essences", and sustains them so that they will not return to "not being" (μὴ εἶναι) again. On the other hand, unlike created beings, God is the one who always exists (ὧν ἐστὶ).⁹⁹ The second text is included in the late *AFRO* where the same idea appears as a technical formulation:

"Now, subsistence [ὑπόστασις] is substance [οὐσία] and means nothing else but the being itself, which Jeremias calls existence saying, *and they did not hear the voice of existence*. For subsistence and substance is existence [ὑπαρξις]; for it is and exists".¹⁰⁰

The term 'essence' designates for Athanasius merely the *isness* of a being without going into further details, therefore the equivalent biblical text from which he draws this definition of the existence of God is Ex. 3:14: "I am who I am". He associates it with Jer. 23:18, 23:22,¹⁰¹ Jer. 9:10, Heb. 1:3 and the divine names "God", "Lord" etc., for which he especially quotes Ex. 20:2, Gen. 1:1, Deut. 6:4 and 2 Sam. 7:8 (2 Cor. 6:18). The view of Athanasius is that the multiple occurrences of the verb "to be" (ἐγὼ εἰμί) in all these verses, as well as the ontological terms "subsistence" (ὑπόστασις) and "existence" (ὑπαρξις) vindicate his intention of putting on a par the term "essence" (οὐσία). He asserts that, as in the biblical verses, so in the Nicene Creed, all these terms serve to point out that it is the Father himself from whom the existence of the Son originates and not the "nothing". The relation of the term "ousia" to the notion of "being" implies that Athanasius did not identify the terms "ousia" and "hypostasis", as it is usually accepted, according to

⁹⁹ GENT 41:25,81C-84A.

¹⁰⁰ AFRO 4:26,1036B; For the same understanding comp. also DECR 22:25,453Cf: "and that it is of what they speak"; and SYNO 34:26,753Af, "you do not believe it to be, but you take it not to be". Although the particular term "existence" appears in the late *AFRO*, it is clear from the above that the context and the meaning that he renders to "ousia" is the same.

¹⁰¹ R.P.C. Hanson points out the LXX mistranslation of the original Hebrew 'counsel' into 'hypostasis', which indicates for him "the almost desperate desire of the theologians to base their doctrine on Scripture" (*op. cit.*, p. 847). We think that he overstates the fact, since, at least as Athanasius uses this verse, there is no special doctrine to be based on it, but simply an indication of the particular fact of the existence of God which in any case was not called into question. Its function in Athanasius is to give more emphasis and not to support doctrine.

the distinction between the "general" and the "individual", as were later technically defined, but rather points to a third notion, i.e., existence, that includes both.¹⁰² As Athanasius had to deal with doubts about the very existence of the Father and the Son his argument moves between the notions "to be" and "not to be" and both terms "ousia" and "hypostasis" are appropriate and suitable for him to denote existence. This is illustrated by means of two distinctions which Athanasius makes.

Firstly, he distinguishes an "ousia" from a "name" or "words". "Ousia" is what lies behind particular words or names and supplies to them their content or their correspondence to reality and existence.¹⁰³ He renders this idea by using the term "truth" (ἀλήθεια): 'essence' is the element that determines whether a name is true and real, i.e., 'possesses' "isness". Therefore the "ousia" does not stand alone but always belongs to a name (the essence of the Father or of the Son, etc.).¹⁰⁴ For Athanasius, then, to consider the Son a creature deprives the term 'Son' of its reality: "Holding such ideas you need to consider the Word and the title Son not as a substance, but as a name only and in consequence hold your own views as far as names only and talk not of what you believe to exist [εἶναι], but of what you think not to exist [μὴ εἶναι]".¹⁰⁵

Secondly, arguing against the semi-Arians, who refused to apply the term to God, under the excuse of avoiding friction, Athanasius argues that if "ousia" does not point to the being of God or God himself, then it must denote "something else" (ἕτερον τι) that

¹⁰² The identification of the two terms, therefore, as it is supported by most of scholars today should not be understood in the sense of eliminating the distinction between the two, but as using both to denote the same reality. The reality in this context is not God, but the Father in particular. The distinction between 'ousia' and 'hypostasis' applies when they refer to the being of God which is not 'monosemantic' but 'dysemantic' (G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, p. 60) and there they have to be juxtaposed. In fact, Athanasius himself, as it is evident from the *ANT*, felt necessary to qualify only the formula "one hypostasis" as being "one ousia", but not the formula "three hypostases". This shows that he was aware of the danger of denying the reality of the two persons if he used the two terms without discrimination in this context of describing their unity. Cf. also our discussion in the second part of this thesis on the unity of the Son with the Father.

¹⁰³ CAR2 3:26,152C; Cf. his hermeneutical principle concerning the relation between 'words' and 'realities' in CAR2 3:26,152C.

¹⁰⁴ Comp. the similar applications of the term 'nature' (φύσις) in the detailed analysis by G.D. Dragas, "Nature and Grace", *Athanasiana*, p. 101ff.

¹⁰⁵ SYNO 34:26,753B.

stands along with God. This suggests the term 'τί' to be equivalent to 'essence' and in consequence to define the compositeness of the divine essence as a unity of the Father as 'τί' with another 'τί' beside the Father that would be conceived of as "accidental" (συμβεβηκός), "surrounding" (περιβολή), or "complementing" (συμπληροῦν) the essence of the Father.¹⁰⁶

The designation of the Father as an objective reality through the term "ousia" can be seen in the anathema, which were an integral and very important part of the Nicene Creed. In them it is stated: "And those who ... declare that the Son of God is from some other *hypostasis* or *ousia* ... the Catholic Church anathematizes". This statement does not seem to indicate concern about whether the Son comes from the *ousia* or the *hypostasis* of the Father or with what happens to it after the generation. Concern is that "from some other" objectively denotes a being altogether other than the Father. The parallel use of the two terms in this context does not contribute to the confusion related to the 'homoousios', as some writers take it,¹⁰⁷ because they are used in order to indicate existence as distinguished from non existence, and in this sense both are appropriate. This difficulty appears in the context of the understanding of unity of the Son with the Father in one being, although, as we noted, the Sabellian identification of the Son with the Father in one *hypostasis* is not one of the main concerns of Athanasius.

These explanations make evident the different approaches to the divine essence made by Arius and Athanasius, as can be seen from their disagreement about the interpretation of its compositeness. Athanasius deals with the divine 'ousia' from a

¹⁰⁶ DECR 22:25,453D; SYNO 35:26,753C.

¹⁰⁷ The anathema of the Creed is generally taken as evidence for the identification of the two terms as synonymus and therefore interchangeable, see E. Craven, *op. cit.*, pp. 711ff; J.N.D. Kelly, *Creeds*, p. 250; R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189 and also cf. the account he provides of views of scholars on the subject pp. 181-207; C. Stead, realising the possibility of misinterpretation, has pointed out that the intention of the anathema was simply to ensure that the Son was not derived from source other than the Father and not to establish equality of the Son with the Father (*Div Sub.*, pp. 233-242), but he does not exclude the equation of the two terms, as it is from our point of view appropriate in this context.

distance, views it altogether as a perfect entity complete in itself, seen from the outside, rather than the inside and therefore he defines 'compositeness' as a combination of God with 'something else'. Arius, on the other hand, attempts to go inside the divine essence, view it from within and explain how it lives and acts. He defines compositeness as occurring in the very consistency of the essence of God and attributes divisions and alterations to it. The tenor of Arius' doctrine is to conceptualise the divine essence and make it fully comprehensible to the human mind, while Athanasius maintains the distance between God and man on the ground that God is an altogether incomprehensible existence. There can be no explanation of *how* it is, only *that* it is. The crucial point is that Arius' understanding and analysis of terms would be applicable if the notions of generation, offspring etc., were attributed to God by human initiative or were inventions of human logic. But if these notions are associated with God by the Bible itself which contains God's self-revelation it is a fatal hermeneutical error to interpret them according to human models of being, which, for Athanasius, equals to measure God with human gauge.¹⁰⁸ This principle is clearly defined by Athanasius when he says, "For the saints wishing us thus to understand, have given these paradigms and it is unseemly and very impious, when Scripture contains such paradigms, to form ideas concerning our Lord from others, which are neither in Scripture, nor have any religious bearing".¹⁰⁹ It is for this reason that the whole effort of Athanasius focused on demonstrating the biblical grounds of the doctrine of the Son's generation so that it would be established beyond doubt on authoritative grounds. He asserts and goes on to prove that the Bible uses only the verb 'to beget' to describe the origins of the Son's existence and that it also gives the features of this generation.

¹⁰⁸ "The Arians, being engrossed in themselves, and thinking with the Sadducees that there is nothing greater or beyond themselves, have met the inspired Scripture with human arguments. When they hear that the Son is the Wisdom, Radiance and Word of the Father, they are accustomed to rejoin, 'How can this be?', as though nothing can be unless they understand it" (SER2 1:26,609A).

¹⁰⁹ DECR 12:25,437A.

All in all, the question of the generic understanding of the "homoousion" focuses on the meaning of generation and the manner in which it is applied to God. First of all, for Athanasius, the personal involvement of the Father distinguishes this generation from the creation of the creatures and associates it with the concept of "begetting" which excludes the Arian alternative verb "creating". While "to beget" is the term which describes the origin of a being directly from another one, "create" indicates that the origin of a being depends on the act of its creator and exists outside him. While the first is a feature of nature that pertains to the essence of the subject, the second is a technical skill that pertains to the acts of the subject. The outcomes of these two processes differ ontologically as much as the processes themselves. Although Athanasius admits that even this description is not adequate to express the fullness of the divine reality, since divine generation is different from human generation, it is still the only appropriate one in contrast to the notion of creation, which is -by definition- false in that it carries connotations altogether inappropriate to the biblical descriptions and the divine nature. On these grounds he goes on to explain the witness of the Bible to the generation comparing his exegesis with the alternative interpretations proposed by the Arians. He maintains the ontological difference between the two verbs on the basis of the group of verses which we look into next.

2.1.3 The generation of the Son

The biblical texts in which Athanasius finds the verb 'to beget' as the description of the origins of the being of the Son are the three verses from the Psalms (2:7, 44:2, 109:3), to which he adds Prov. 8:25 and Jn. 1:18. As we said his objective is twofold: a) he wants to prove that the Bible maintains the difference between the verbs "to create" and "to beget", using the first for the production of the creatures and the second for the generation of the Son and b) to explain the meaning of the concept of generation and set forth the qualifications for its application to the divine nature, because it comes from the created dimension and carries connotations which are not appropriate to God.

2.1.3.1 The verb 'to beget' in Ps. 2:7, 44:2, 109:3, Prov. 8:25

The argument which Athanasius bases on these verses, and especially on the two verbs 'begot' and 'uttered', is that the Bible uses this language for the Son because it wants to emphasize that his nature is different from the nature of creatures.¹¹⁰ Thus, he constantly points out that the Scripture describes the creation of the world with the verb "to create" and the generation of the Son with the verb "to beget". The "begot" and "uttered" of the three psalmic verses together with the "beget" of Prov. 8:25 are the references for the latter and he juxtaposes them to the verses which refer to the creation of the other beings, among which the commonest ones are the following:

Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"

Ps. 73:2: "Remember your congregation, which you have possessed from the beginning"

Ps. 101:26: "In the beginning you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands"

Ps. 118:73: "Your hands have made and fashioned me"

Mat. 19:4: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female"

¹¹⁰ To emphasize the point, he often uses the characteristic phrase "the Scripture knows", as in the following passage: "Moreover, because the Scripture knows the nature of each [being], says through Moses about the creatures 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. About the Son, however, it indicates not anybody else, but the Father himself saying 'from the womb before the morning star I begat you' and again 'you are my son, this day I have begotten you'" (DECR 13:25,437D).

Comparing these two groups of verses Athanasius points out three differences, which distinguish the meaning of one verb from the other.

The first difference refers to the temporal category, which the "to create" verses introduce. Athanasius observes that the verb "to create" designates a beginning in time for beings that did not exist and therefore that "the creatures have been created from the very beginning and they have the beginning of their existence at intervals" ("διαστηματικὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ εἶναι ἔχει").¹¹¹ God "began to create" (ἤρξατο ποιεῖν, Gen. 2:3) beings from the very beginning and therefore he also stopped (κατέπαυσεν). The biblical verses which refer to this event include appropriate definitions, such as "in the beginning" (ἐν ἀρχῇ, Gen. 1:1), "from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, Mat. 19:4), "at the beginning" (κατ' ἀρχάς, Ps. 101:26), which define a starting point. On the other hand, none of the "to beget" verses include such definitions because according to Jn. 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word") the 'beginning' of the Son is combined with the verb 'was' and thus it is placed in eternity. In particular Athanasius argues:

"The creatures began to be made, but the Word of God, not having beginning of being [ἀρχὴν τοῦ εἶναι], obviously did not begin to exist, nor begin to come to be [γίνεσθαι], but was ever. The works have their beginning in their making [ἐν τῷ ποιεῖσθαι] and their beginning precedes their coming to be, but the Word, not being of those that come to be [τῶν γινομένων], rather comes to be himself the creator of those which have a beginning. The 'being' [τό εἶναι] of those which came to be [γενητῶν] is measured by their becoming and from some beginning does God begin to make them through his word, that it may be known that they were not [τὸ μὴ εἶναι], before their becoming. The Word has his being in no other beginning than the Father, whom they allow to be without beginning, so that he too exists without beginning [ἀνάρχως] in the Father, being his offspring and not his creature".¹¹²

The second difference is the one which we examined in the previous section and which refers to some sort of "spatial" category. The verb "to create" implies that beings, which are created, originate from somewhere different than their creator and exist apart

¹¹¹ CAR2 57:26,269A-B.

¹¹² *ibid.*

and in distance from him (ἐξῶθεν). The verb "to create" shifts the emphasis from the being to the act of God, the point of communication between God and created beings since they owe their existence to it. The relationship does not incur any involvement with the being of God, as the verb 'to beget' does.¹¹³ Athanasius shows this distinction by contrasting Ps. 148:5 ("he spoke and they were made, he commanded and they were created") with Ps. 44:2 ("My heart uttered a good word") the outcome of which is characteristically clear: the Son is the very Word, the speaking act of God, while the creatures are the result of this act. Therefore, the Son cannot be considered both being created and begotten, and in consequence a creature and an offspring.¹¹⁴ "If he is a son, he is not a creature and if he is a creature, he is not a son, because there is a great difference between them. And it is not possible to be both a son and a creature, so that his essence will not be considered from God and outside of God".¹¹⁵

Closely related to this last idea is a third difference that refers to the insistence of the Arians on introducing not the act, but the will of God as the link between the Father and the Son.¹¹⁶ Athanasius does not discern any difference between the two concepts, because the will of God is associated in the Bible with the creation of the world and not with the generation of the Son. To prove the point he contrasts Ps. 2:7, 44:2, 109:3 and Prov. 8:25 with another group which consists of Ps. 110:2 and 134:6.¹¹⁷ From this contrast he draws the conclusion: "All everywhere tell us of the being of the Word, but none of his

¹¹³ "For what man of right understanding does not perceive, that what are created and made are external to the maker; but the son, as the foregoing argument had shown, exists not externally but from the Father who begat him", DECR 13:25,439C; SER2 6:26,617A; CAR2 58:26,269B; Cf. also the comprehensive discussion on the relation between begetting and creating by S. Papadopoulos in *Athanasius of Alexandria*, pp. 110-114.

¹¹⁴ The diametrically opposite standpoints of Athanasius and Arius are apparent at this point. Cf. the famous Arian statement: "[the Son is] perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures, offspring, but not as one of the offsprings" (*Letter to Alexander, op. cit.*).

¹¹⁵ DECR 13:25,440A.

¹¹⁶ Cf. the discussion of Athanasius on the subject in CAR3 59ff:26,448Aff.

¹¹⁷ Ps. 110:2: "The works of the Lord are great; sought out all of them that have pleasure there in"; 134:6: "Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and earth".

being by will nor at all for his making", and "if the Word is in the heart where is the will? and if the Son in the Father where is good pleasure?... Let them learn that the Son is begotten not by will but by nature and truth".¹¹⁸ The reason for this is the fact that the generation of the Son pertains to the nature of God, which is not defined or determined by his will, because it is above it. There is no indication that the will of God is in between the Father and the Son, for the above texts relate them directly and intimately.

From these explanations, Athanasius insists that the verb "to create" cannot replace the verb "to beget" for the generation of the Son, as the Arians alleged. The Bible never does so, he says, because of the sharp ontological differentiation between these words: Whereas the verb "to beget" relates the Son intimately and directly with the Father, the verb "to create" alienates him from what the Father is in his being. The Arians, however, would not agree on that, since, as we have said, they held the two verbs to be interchangeable. To support their view they adduced to a number of biblical texts which in turn Athanasius was obliged to examine. The comparison of the arguments from both sides will make evident the accuracy of interpretation of the biblical texts in question although the lack of original Arian documents makes it impossible to reconstruct their full biblical argument and the precise interpretation of the biblical texts they employed.¹¹⁹ The information available comes, mainly, from Athanasius himself, which, in spite of doubts raised against the objectivity of his evidence,¹²⁰ we regard as quite reliable. The very fact

¹¹⁸ CAR3 60:448C; CAR3 67:26,464C-465B; also CAR3 59:26,448A.

¹¹⁹ For a collection and evaluation of evidence for the Arian documents see G. Bardy, *Recherches sur saint Lucien*, pp. 170ff; C. Kannengiesser, *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic hermeneutics*, pp. 5-17; R. Williams, *Arius*, pp. 95-105; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search*, pp. 5-15ff.

¹²⁰ R.P.C. Hanson consider Athanasius the "bitterest and most prejudiced enemy" of Arius, who has made "virtually impossible to distinguish between the views of Arius and those of his early supporters", and also that because Athanasius was "a fierce opponent of Arius certainly would not have stopped short of misinterpreting what he said" (*The Search*, p. 6 and 10). R. Williams, being more moderate, suggests "caution" in handling the evidence concerning Arius provided by Athanasius on the grounds of the lack of "presenting to us the systematic thought of Arius" which includes some degree of "possible distortion" (*Arius*, p. 95 and 99). We do not share these views, because we believe that since Athanasius was so much concerned with the abolition of Arianism as a matter of life or death, he knew that in order to succeed in his battle he should be based on the most realistic and objective grounds. He could not have argued against a teaching that had never been taught by Arius. What Athanasius, however, adds to the original Arian

that he was so mindful to refute the exegesis of the biblical texts which the Arians employed, suggests that he had to undertake this task in the most objective manner to ensure that his work would be effective.

2.1.3.2 The verb 'to create' in Heb. 1:4, 3:2, Acts 2:36, Deut. 32:2,18

According to the *Contra Arianos*, the Arians alluded to certain biblical passages, which, in one way or another, rendered to the Son either created nature, or features of created nature.¹²¹ These verses betray an attempt on the part of the Arians to collect those verses, which contained verbs like "to create", "to make", "to become" etc., instead of the verb "to beget", and to apply them to the generation of the Son.¹²² Athanasius acknowledges their tendency saying that "they only catch words like *he made* or *he has been made*".¹²³ He deals extensively with these verses of which the most important ones were Heb 1:4 ("having become [γενόμενος] as much greater than the angels as the name he has obtained), Heb 3:2 ("being faithful to the One who made him [τῷ ποιήσαντι]"), Acts 2:36 ("God has made him [ἐποίησεν] both Lord and Christ"),¹²⁴ and Deut. 32:6 ("is not he your father who possessed you and made you and created you?") in parallel with Deut. 32:18 ("and you forgot the God who begot you").¹²⁵ The most prominent place among them belongs to Prov. 8:22 ("The Lord created me the beginning of his ways unto his works"), which in the course of the debate turned out to be the "cornerstone" of the

doctrine are the consequences of this doctrine, which the Arians themselves would not say boldly.

¹²¹ Prof. J.N.D. Kelly points out that "the Arians amassed a formidable array of Scriptural texts in support of their thesis" which he divides into four categories: a) those which presented the son as a creature; b) those which presented God the Father as the sole veritable God; c) those which implied Christ's inferiority to the Father and d) those which ascribe ignorance, weakness, suffering or development to the Son of God (*Doctrines*, pp. 229-230).

¹²² C. Kannengiesser makes this observation saying, "Scriptural texts must certainly be interpreted when they speak of divine generation through various analogies, but Arius gives them a changed interpretation by construing them as definitions without analogy or metaphor of the origin of the Son" (*Holy Scripture*, p. 7).

¹²³ CAR2 11:26,169B; NPNF, p. 354.

¹²⁴ CAR1 53:26,121B; CAR2 1-18:26,148Aff.

¹²⁵ CAR2 58-60:26,269Cff.

Arian biblical argument.¹²⁶ Athanasius records a rather triumphant overtone in the Arian interpretation: "Behold, here it is! *he created* and therefore he is a creature".¹²⁷ Notwithstanding what we have said so far about Athanasius' understanding of the use and the significance of the verbs "to create" and "to beget", we believe that we have to look briefly into the main points of his response to these objections and find out how he vindicates his interpretation against the Arian one.

The starting point for such an inquiry is a hermeneutic principle which Athanasius establishes clearly still from the very beginning of his exegetical work as the foundation upon which he builds his arguments: the person of Jesus Christ and the event of his Incarnation, is the basis of all theology and the golden hermeneutical key to all biblical texts in question from either Testament. He accuses the Arians of having failed to understand this with the result that they misinterpreted the Scripture. It is characteristic that he brings forth this principle at the very beginning of his first anti-Arian treatise (*CARI* 8), immediately after the presentation of the Arian teaching and before the beginning of his refutation. In particular, he asserts,

"How can he [Arius] speak truth concerning the Father, denying the Son who reveals him? How can he be orthodox concerning the Spirit, while he speaks profanely of the Word who supplies the Spirit? Who will trust him concerning the resurrection, denying, as he does, Christ who is for us the firstborn from the dead? How shall he not err in respect to his incarnate presence, being simply ignorant of the Son's genuine and true generation from the Father?"¹²⁸

Athanasius considers the event of the Incarnation as the core of biblical revelation, upon which everything stands or falls. He calls the truth of God becoming man, "the scope

¹²⁶ Its great importance is evident from the fact that Athanasius pays much attention and deals with it several times and in various periods of the controversy dedicating large parts of his works to the refutation of the Arian interpretation; Cf. *CAR2* 44-57ff (mainly), *DECR* 13-14, *DION* 10-11, *SER2* 7-8; also *CAR1* 53, *CAR2* 1. 4. 11. 18. 60. 65. 66. 72. 77. 82, *CAR3* 1; *DECR* 26, *ENCY* 17, *SER1* 3, *SYNO* 26. He also points out the great Arian interest in it with the characteristic phrase: "they were putting about [ἄνω καὶ κάτω] in every quarter this passage saying that the Son was one of the creatures and they reckoned him with things originated", *DECR* 13:25,437B and *CAR1* 53:26,121C; Cf. also *CAR2* 1; *CAR3* 1.

¹²⁷ *SER2* 7:26,620A.

¹²⁸ *CAR1* 8:26,28A; *NPNF*, p. 310; Cf. also G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, p. 67; T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian*, pp. 136-137; J.N.D. Kelly, *Creeeds*, pp. 211f. 234f.

of the Scripture" (σκοπὸς τῆς Γραφῆς) and "the character of Christianity" (χαρακτήρ τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ). With reference to biblical exegesis, he argues that it runs through the Bible from its first to its last book and divides the biblical statements about Christ into two categories: those that refer to his divine nature and those that refer to his human nature. Correct identification and categorisation of the texts ensures successful interpretation and accordance with truth. He asserts:

"The character of faith in Christ is this: the Son of God, who is Logos and God (for the Word was in the beginning and the Word was God) and Wisdom and Power of the Father (for Christ is God's power and God's wisdom), he himself at the end of the ages became man for our salvation. For John, having said 'In the beginning was the Word', also said a little later 'and the Word became flesh', which is the same as to say that he became man... It is necessary then, when one studies the Scripture, to try and to discern when it speaks about the divine and when it speaks about the human properties of the Word".¹²⁹

Starting out from this premise, he applies this principle almost blindfold and argues that all the verses which the Arians claim for their support refer to the human nature of Christ and not to his eternal generation from the Father.¹³⁰ In these cases the use of the verb "to create" and its synonyms is highly appropriate and legitimate, because the Son as a human being was indeed created by God. The main factor in each case which makes his point evident is the context within which the verses appear.

Heb. 1:4:¹³¹ Athanasius makes two literary observations concerning the participle "having been made" (γενόμενος) and the comparative adjective "superior" (κρείττων), that together formed a phrase on which the Arians based their allegations that although the

¹²⁹ SER2 7:26,620C; CAR3 29:26,385A; DECR The exegetical function of this principle is expounded in detail by T.F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics*, *EPH* 52:1 (1970) 454ff; S. Agouridis, *The Fathers of the Church as Interpreters*, *1st O.H.C.*, pp. 86ff. The translation, though, of the term "σκοπὸς" as "scope" is not accurate, because it has a wider meaning indicating the goal in a race-course and the bounds of this course (T.F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics*, *ibid*), and also "the general drift of Scripture doctrine" (T.E. Pollard, *Johannanine Christology*, p. 186 n. 3).

¹³⁰ The argument of Athanasius is as follows: "whenever they hear *offspring* and *Word* and *Wisdom*, they are quick to misconstrue and deny the natural and genuine generation of the Son from the Father; when they hear words and terms proper to a creature, they straight away regard him to be a creature and they deny the Word, although it is possible because of him becoming man to refer all these terms to his humanity", CAR2 4:26,153C; Cf. also CAR2 20:26,189A; CAR3 35:26,400A; SER2 1:26,609A.

¹³¹ Cf. CAR1 54-64:26,124Bff.

Son is said to be "begotten", he is still a creature because he is compared with the angels and confessed to be "superior". As for the participle, Athanasius points out that it does not stand alone (ἀπολλελυμένως), but is combined with the adjective "superior". This implies that the comparison does not refer to the being of the Son and the angels, but to his ministry (διακονία) as a human being after his Incarnation, which compared to the ministry of the angels was far greater. Moreover, the participle alone can refer to offsprings as for example in Job 1:2 and Gen. 21:5,¹³² but it does not necessarily imply created nature, while a created object can never be called an offspring. As for the adjective, Athanasius observes that it does not imply comparison but distinction of the Son from the angels which refers to nature.¹³³ The adjective κρείττων compares elements of a different nature, like the 'divine' and 'earthly house' in Ps. 83:11, 'wisdom' and 'stones' in Prov. 8:10-11 and 'people' and 'name' in Is. 56:4-5. On the contrary, for elements of the same nature the Bible uses adjectives like "greater" (μείζων), "more" (μᾶλλον) and "more honourable" (τιμιώτερος), as in the case of Rachel and Leah in Gen. 29:17, Joseph and his brothers in Gen. 37:3-4, the stars in 1 Cor. 15:41 and the Son and the Father in Jn. 14:28.¹³⁴ The Arian exegesis is a strange one to attempt in any case, because as Athanasius observes the verse emerges from a context which greatly exalts the superiority of the Son not only from the angels but from any other being. Verses 5-13 clearly vindicate the use of κρείττων as applying to beings of different nature: the Son is the Lord, who is being worshipped, while the angels are servants, who are sent for διακονία. Also, verses 1:1-2 refer the whole text to the Incarnation and the presence of the Son as human being on

¹³² Job 1:2 "They were born [ἐγένοντο] to him seven sons and three daughters"; Gen 21:5 "Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born [ἐγένετο] to him".

¹³³ "Son that the word *superior* is not used to compare [συγκριτικῶς], but to contrast [διακριτικῶς], because of the difference of his nature from them" (CAR1 55).

¹³⁴ It is characteristic that Athanasius uses a great variety of terms to express the similarity and dissimilarity of nature which are descriptive of generic relations. So, we meet the terms ὁμογενῆ, συγγενῆ, ἑτεροοῦσια, ἑτερογενῆ.

earth, while in 2:1-3 the Apostle explains the reason for the comparison: the ministry of the angels, who gave the Law, was incomplete, because death was not yet abolished. It was the ministry of the Son of God, who became man and suffered death that abolished it. Therefore, as a result, the punishment for "neglect" of the gift of the Son's ministry will be greater than the punishment for neglect of the gift of the angel's ministry. The Son differs from the angels as a Lord (κύριος) from his servants (δούλους).

*Heb. 3:2:*¹³⁵ It appears to have been an important verse for the Arians, especially the participle "τῷ ποιήσαντι" ("the one who made him"), judging by Athanasius' characteristic comment that the Arians used it as "a great aid" ("μέγα βοήθημα") to their heresy.¹³⁶ Applying the same hermeneutical method as before he argues that the participle alone is not adequate to establish the creaturehood of the Son. Condemning the Arian tendency to treat biblical language as if it were technical with fixed meanings to its words, he points out two principles. First, that priority belongs to the realities which the words express and not to the words themselves so that the words do not define realities, but only 'point to' (σημαίνειν) them and, in fact, are defined by them.¹³⁷ On this principle, the use of the participle alone is not sufficient to establish reality of created nature for the Son. Second, he calls attention to the "peculiarity" or "custom" (ιδίωμα) of Scripture, according to which the words used to describe various situations are not restricted by technical rules, but are flexible and often influenced by several factors, such as affection or condescension. He lists a lot of examples of this inconsistency of language towards the corresponding realities, which, he argues, exist without anyone, including the Arians,

¹³⁵ CAR2 2-10:26,149Bff.

¹³⁶ CAR2 4:26,153D; the complete exegesis of the verse is included in CAR2 1-10:26,148Aff.

¹³⁷ "Let them not dispute about the words that the biblical writers use of the Word himself, for there need be no question about them since they are confessedly used in accordance with his nature. For words do not detract from nature; rather does nature draw the words to itself and transform them. For words are not prior to essences, but essences are first and words come second", CAR2 3:26,152C; cf. T.F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics", *EPh* 53:1 (1971) 136.

confusing them as a result of this.¹³⁸ Therefore, he accuses the Arians of using "double measures" (δισσὰ σταθμά) in their exegesis, because in the case of the Son, they deny his sonship and consider him a creature on account of the particular word "he made" (ἐποίησεν), while in other cases they do not do so. Anyhow, when Jn. 1:3 and Ps. 103:24 give the Son the status as the Creator of the world, Arian insistence on the verb "he made" would demand a search for the Word or Wisdom in which he was made, because it would be "madness" (μανία) to suggest that he created himself.

As for the adjective "faithful" (πιστόν), which the Arians understood in the same context and alleged that it implied reward of faith for the Son believing in God, Athanasius argues that the word has two meanings in Scripture. It is used anthropologically and denotes human beings' faith in God (τὸ πιστεύειν) and it is also used theologically denoting the "trustworthiness" of God (τὸ ἀξιόπιστον). In this case, it denotes the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ, because of his immutability as the Son of God. Athanasius turns again to the context (2:10-3:3) and, as in the previous verse for the angels, so, here, he supports his interpretation explaining the Apostle's comparison of the High-priesthood of the Son with the High-priesthood of Aaron. Verse 3:2 refers to the Incarnation of the Son by virtue of which he became High priest: he put on human body exactly as Aaron put on the appropriate vestments when he became High priest and just as Aaron did not cease to be a man after his becoming High priest, so the Son did not cease to be God after his becoming man.¹³⁹

Acts 2:36: Athanasius interprets the participle "the one who made him" (τῷ ποιήσαντι) by means of the distinction between the titles "Lord" and "Christ" associated

¹³⁸ The verses quoted by Athanasius in this account are Philemon 16 (Paul who calls Onesimus "brother", although he is a slave), Gen. 18:12 (Sara who calls Abraham "lord", although he is her husband), 1 Reg. 1:19 (Bathsheba who calls Solomon "servant", although he is her son), Is. 38:19 ("make children"), 2 Reg. 20:18 ("your children will come out from you"), Gen. 4:1 ("I possessed a man by God"), Gen. 48:5 ("you sons who were made to you") and Jod 1:2 ("sons were made to him").

¹³⁹ Cf. G.D. Dragas, *Contra Apollinarem*, p. 464.

with it and "Son" and "Logos", with which one normally refers to the Son as God. He observes that the second pair derives from the relation of the Son with the Father, while the first refers to his relation with human beings. The verse does not say that "God made him Son or Logos", but that "God made him Lord and Christ" which refers to his relation to human beings.¹⁴⁰ Athanasius recalls the context (ἀκολουθία) and the particular circumstances (διὰ τὸ καὶ πῶς) of the verse drawing the attention to two points. Firstly, he focuses on little phrase that immediately follows, "this Jesus whom you crucified". This shows that the Petrine speech refers to the earthly life of Jesus Christ and not to his relationship with the Father. Secondly, the phrase does not stand alone, but is defined as "among you". This specification explicitly relates the titles "Lord and Christ" to human beings and designates the Lordship that the Son possesses over them. According to the witness of Acts 2:22,¹⁴¹ Jn. 10:38¹⁴² and Jn. 5:18,¹⁴³ Jesus Christ manifested his Lordship with his miracles and, above all, his victory over death through his bodily death and resurrection, all of which derive from his unique relation with the Father as Son. This Lordship, however, was not acquired during his human life, but belonged to him, as Athanasius shows from Ps 109:1,¹⁴⁴ Ps 44:7,¹⁴⁵ Ps. 144:3¹⁴⁶ and Gen. 19:24,¹⁴⁷ to highlight the idea of Christ as the Image and the Word of God before his Incarnation. Therefore, the verb "he made him Lord" stands for "he *proved* him to be Lord". Athanasius justifies this interpretation explaining that the Petrine argument aims at proving the divine Lordship of Jesus against the Jewish Christological misconception of Christ as mere man and

¹⁴⁰ Cf. CAR2 11-18:26,169Aff; G.D. Dragas, *Contra Apollinarem*, pp. 470-471.

¹⁴¹ "A man attested by God with mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did through him".

¹⁴² "If I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father".

¹⁴³ "They sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but also called God his Father making himself equal with God".

¹⁴⁴ "The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand".

¹⁴⁵ "Your divine throne endures for ever and ever; your royal scepter is a scepter of equity".

¹⁴⁶ "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom".

¹⁴⁷ "And the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven".

descendant of David, who would not suffer. Concluding his argument, Athanasius brings forth the liturgical argument and asserts that the Lord of redemption could only be the Lord of creation, because if he were a creature his followers would become "man-worshippers" ("ἀνθρωπολάτραι").

*Deut. 32:6 and 32:18:*¹⁴⁸ The Arians wanted to establish the point that when God is the subject the Bible uses alternatively the two verbs "to create" and "to beget" without the ontological distinction Athanasius claimed. Applying some sort of equation, they argued that since the verb in 32:6 is "created" and the verb in 32:18 is "begot",¹⁴⁹ and both have the same object, the Jewish people, they should be understood as parallels. According to Athanasius reply, "*offspring and work you take to mean the same thing*",¹⁵⁰ the Arians based on them, and extended to the Son, their understanding of the interchangeable meaning of the terms 'offspring' and 'creature'. Athanasius follows the order of appearance of the verses and explains that the verb "to create" appears before "to beget", because it refers to a different situation. The 'created' refers to the ontological beginning of human beings (here the Jewish people) and chronologically precedes the 'begot', which refers to their adoption by God on account of which they are called "sons" (Is. 1:2: "Sons have I brought up"). This adoption, which John (1:12) and Paul (Gal. 4:6) also witness, does not appoint human beings sons of God "by nature" (φύσει), but "by status" (θέσει). Their creation precedes their adoption, because "from the beginning we were creatures by nature and God is our Creator through the Word; but afterwards we were made sons and

¹⁴⁸ See CAR2 58-60:26,272Aff.

¹⁴⁹ 32:6: "is not he your father who possessed you and made you and created you?" and 32:18: "And you forgot the God who begot you".

¹⁵⁰ CAR2 58:26,269Cf; Cf. Arius' declaration in his *Letter to Alexander* on 'offspring and creature'. Arius did not distinguish ontologically the two terms, therefore we could argue that he would not initially reject the biblical verses which Athanasius used for the generation of the Son as offspring. Although Arius had organised a doctrinal teaching following strictly logical methods, his attitude towards external challenges was highly compromising, even if it concerned diametrically opposite concepts, such as 'creature' and 'offspring'. He could easily and most efficiently manipulate the ecclesiastical language and the arguments of his rivals. Cf. the illuminating observations concerning the confusion and the debate over the language by S. Laeuchli in "The Case", pp. 410-416.

thenceforward God the Creator becomes our Father also".¹⁵¹ Turning to the Son and drawing attention to Jn. 10:35 Athanasius gives the Christological dimension of his exegesis and establishes this adoption on the natural sonship of the Son, who enabled man to receive this divine grace through his incarnation. The same order, though, does not apply to the Son, but rather the opposite. Contrasting Deut. 32:6,18 with Prov. 8:22,25, Athanasius argues that whereas the Son was eternally Son of God by nature and became a created human being, human beings first were created and then adopted by God, according to the divine plan of their salvation.

2.1.3.3 *Prov. 8:25 in contrast to Prov. 8:22*

We will also examine separately Prov. 8:25 ("before the mountains he begets me") with regard to the generation of the Son, because it acquired a prominent position in the overall biblical argumentation of Athanasius on account of its use as the "counter verse" to Prov. 8:22 ("The Lord created me the beginning of his ways unto his works"), the "cornerstone" of Arian biblical argument.¹⁵² The most important and fierce exegetical debate focused on these two texts and their interpretation played a crucial role for the outcome of the controversial issue of the Son's generation.¹⁵³ Both belong to one of the rare acknowledged Old Testament passages where the Wisdom of God is personified and so both Arius and Athanasius turned to it for evidence of their views.¹⁵⁴ The pattern of

¹⁵¹ CAR2 59:26,273B; Cf. chs 58-60:26,269Cff.

¹⁵² All scholars observe the crucial importance of this verse for the formation or support of the Arian teaching; e.g. cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 434 and passim; R. Williams, *Arius*, pp. 108. Cf. also the significance of Prov. 8 as the personification of Wisdom for the Old Testament conception of wisdom in "Assumptions and problems", pp. 109-112.

¹⁵³ Athanasius discusses in detail the interpretation of Prov 8:22 in CAR2 44ff:26,240Cff, which we intend to follow, taking also into account his observations in the other works, which are a brief summary of the former. Cf. also the exposition of G.D. Dragas, *Contra Apollinarem*, pp. 477ff and P. Sherwood, "St. Athanasius concerning the Wisdom of God", pp. 271-276. For a full investigation of the interpretation of the verse from a linguistic and theological point of view with special reference to the Arian controversy see C.F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of creation", *JTS*, pp. 160-177.

¹⁵⁴ M. Wiles emphasising its importance, asserts that "the original source of the use of the term *generation* in Christian theology lies not so much in the fact of Christ's being known as Son, but rather in the language already employed in the wisdom literature about God and his Wisdom. No doubt the

argumentation is the same as in the previous verses: while the Arians looked solely on the particular verse (22), Athanasius examines 22 and 25 in parallel and compares the manner in which they are expressed and their position in the wider context. He acknowledges that verse 22 is a difficult one, because it is expressed in an obscure way, and, as he remarks, "what is said in proverbs is not said plainly, but is put forth latently, as the Lord himself has taught us in the Gospel...".¹⁵⁵ He marks out the apparent contradiction between the Arian rendering of this verse and the rest of the biblical doctrine, represented mainly by Ps. 103:24, with the following question: "For who, on hearing the Creating Wisdom saying 'The Lord created me the beginning of his ways', does not at once question the meaning and reflect how that creative Wisdom can be created?".¹⁵⁶ In order to safely extract its "hidden mind", he applies the hermeneutical principle of the 'scope of faith' through which he specifies the factors that define the natural context of the biblical texts as being, firstly, the person involved, secondly the occasion, thirdly the time and finally the purpose for which they are said. At the end, the interpretation of these verses appears very powerful for Athanasius in maintaining his point that the verb "to beget" applies to the eternal generation of the Son and carries all the ontological differentiations from the verb "to create". From the comparison of the two verses Athanasius discerns the following differences.

Firstly, he observes that while 8:25 is expressed "loosely" (ἀπολελυμένως), that is, without any specification, 8:22 combines "he created me" with a "cause" (αἰτία), which is "the works".¹⁵⁷ This fact makes, for Athanasius, all the difference and clarifies the

apprehension of God's Wisdom as personified being through the experience of the incarnation determined the selective emphasis placed on the particular term *generation* ..." ("Eternal generation", p. 285). Cf. also the article in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary*, which follows the Arian interpretation concerning the creation of wisdom (pp. 489-492). In contrast H. Jaeger argues for the lack of the concept of created wisdom of Prov. 8 in rabbinic exegesis; Wisdom has religious and spiritual value and denotes "the continuity of God's action in history". However it is not regarded as distinct hypostasis ("The patristic conception of Wisdom", pp. 95-97).

¹⁵⁵ CAR2 44:26,241A.

¹⁵⁶ CAR2 77:26,312A.

meaning of the two verses: 8:25 is similar to Jn 1:1 and refers to the true divinity of the Son who exists eternally and unconditionally; 8:22 refers to the Incarnation of the Son, which indeed took place for a particular purpose.¹⁵⁸ According to the principle of "the scope of Scripture", the verse applies to the human and not to the divine nature of the Son, because all the elements contained in it are appropriate to his becoming man and not to his being the Creator. Examining those elements one by one, he observes, "As it concerns the occasion, one will find and learn that the Lord, being eternal, at length in fullness of the ages became man...; as for the purpose, one will understand that wishing to annul our death, he took on himself a body from the Virgin Mary in order to offer it to the Father a sacrifice for all of us...; as for the person it is the Saviour's ...".¹⁵⁹

Secondly, Athanasius renders to the verb "*he begets me*" the same ontological significance with that in Ps. 2:7, 109:3, and contends that it still maintains it when it applies to the Son and that it designates him to be begotten from the being of the Father and not created as the other beings by the Father's will and act. The verb "he created" alone is not adequate to prove that the Son is a creature, because the verb "to create" and the noun "creature" do not always imply one another.¹⁶⁰ The verb does not have the fixed meaning, which the Arians wanted, since the biblical language uses it flexibly and on various occasions to describe various realities and not simply created beings. In the cases where it designates the ontological beginning of beings, it is followed by an object (Ps

¹⁵⁷ Prov. 8:25 especially appears in a group of verses concerning the natural generation of the Son in DECR 13:25,437Df and in another group concerning his "divinity or eternity" in CAR2 32:26,216A; E. Meijering discusses the subject in "Athanasius on the Father", p. 6f.

¹⁵⁸ He particularly asserts, "Where, however, the cause lies, this cause clarifies the reading properly. So here, as it concerns "he created" he places its cause, which is "unto his works"; willing, though, to denote loosely the generation from the Father, he added immediately 'before the mountains he begets me' without saying 'why' as in 'he created me', but loosely 'he begets me', as in 'In the beginning was the Word'..." , CAR2 56:26,268A.

¹⁵⁹ DECR 13-14; CAR2 44, 77.

¹⁶⁰ "The word *he created* alone does not necessarily signify the essence or the generation, but indicates something else occurring to the one of whom it speaks, and not simply that one who is said to be created is at once in nature and in essence a creature", CAR2 45:26,241C.

104:24, Rom 8:22, Rev 8:9, 1 Tim 4:4, Wisd 9:2, Col 1:15-17, and Deut 4:32); but there are also cases where it refers to already existing beings and in those it stands alone and designates an event in their life, as their renewal by the grace of God (Ps 102:18, Ps 50:12, Eph 2:15, Eph 4:24, Jer 31:22). The determinant for the meaning of the verse is its particular context, which consists of all the elements involved and not simply of single words. He establishes the point on the order in which the verbs emerge, for "he begets" is added after "he created" for three reasons. Firstly, the addition of the verb "he begets" designates the difference in nature between "offspring" and "creature", which is observed in the biblical expression through the use of both verbs. If "creature" and "offspring" were identical (ταὐτόν) the verb "he created" alone would be necessary and sufficient.¹⁶¹ As a consequence, secondly, the fact that the Son is the object of both verbs entails that he is also subject to the same distinction so as to be begotten from the "essence" of the Father and not created like all creatures.

"Thus, the Son is not a creature, because if he was a creature he would not say 'he begets me', because creatures are works of the Creator and external, while the offspring is not external like a work, but he is from the Father and proper to his substance. Therefore the former are creatures, while the latter is only-begotten Son".¹⁶²

The third difference between the two verses Athanasius focused on, is the adversative preposition "δέ", the function of which vindicates his previous arguments. He discerns a three-fold purpose in the whole passage 22-25:¹⁶³ a) it "secures" the correct understanding of the verb "he created", because it introduces the new notion "he begets", which reads together; b) as such, it ensures a coherent meaning between "he created" and "he begets", pointing to the reasons for using them; and c) it necessitates the chronological priority of "he begets" over "he created", which is suggested by the sharp antithesis "he

¹⁶¹ "ὅτι δε οὐ ταὐτόν ἐστὶ κτίσμα καὶ γέννημα, ἀλλὰ διεστήκασι ἀλλήλων τε τῆ φύσει καὶ τῆ ἐκ τῶν λέξεων σημασία"; CAR2 56:26,268A-B; 60:26,276A; DECR 13:25,440A.

¹⁶² DECR *ibid.*

¹⁶³ CAR2 60:*ibid.*

created me... before δὲ everything he begets me". All these arguments demand that 8:25 should refer to a situation prior to the one indicated in 8:22, which can be nothing other than the Son's generation which was followed by his Incarnation.

2.1.3.4 Jn 1:18 in contrast to Prov. 8:22, Col. 1:15, 18, Rom. 8:29

Athanasius fully quotes this verse only a few times, but widely uses and expounds its main concept "Only-begotten Son". He presents its meaning more vividly by contrast to the title "firstborn" (Col. 1:15, 18, Rom. 8:29) which the Arians adduced as a parallel.¹⁶⁴ He classifies it among the verses concerning the divinity of the Son on account of their common feature of being expressed "unconditionally" (ἀπολελυμένως) and without the combination of any reasoning. Jn. 1:18 refers to the divinity of Christ, because it plainly states that *he is*, while Col. 1:15, 18, Rom. 8:29 contain the terms "brothers", "dead" and "creation", which suggest the reason for his being "firstborn", and therefore it refers to his Incarnation. "He is called 'firstborn among many brothers', because of the relationship of the flesh; 'firstborn from the dead', because the resurrection of the dead is from him and after him; 'firstborn of all creation', because of the Father's love to men, due to which not only are all things held together through his word, but also creation... will be delivered from the captivity of corruption".¹⁶⁵

Athanasius uses two elements of the verse in support of his understanding of the Son's relation to the Father: firstly, the expression "*in the bosom of the Father*" (like the terms "heart" and "womb" in Ps. 44:2 and 109:3), bears special ontological significance, because it is an image which points to the inner being of God and relates the Son directly with it. It denotes the generation of the Son in terms of begetting: "for what else can '*in the bosom*' mean, than the true birth of the Son from the Father?".¹⁶⁶ Secondly, on this basis,

¹⁶⁴ For the background of this link see C. Burney, "Christ as the APXH", pp. 173-ff.

¹⁶⁵ CAR2 63:26,281B.

secondly, he justifies the ontological difference between "creature" and "offspring" and the designation of the Word as "Son": a creature is an external product of God that came into existence through his Word, while the Word himself is an offspring because being begotten from the essence of the Father he is in his bosom. The two notions cannot be mixed or confused, because they are separated by a great ontological gap. The wider context of the Prologue of John's gospel provides sufficient evidence for the ontological distinction of the Son from the creatures: "as for creatures John says 'everything was made through him' [Jn 1:3], but, evangelising the Lord, he speaks 'the only-begotten son, who is in the bosom of the Father'; if, then, he is son, he is not creature and if he is creature, he is not son; for there is great difference between them".¹⁶⁷

With these arguments Athanasius has sufficiently shown that the intimate relation which the biblical Father-Son language attributes to God and Jesus Christ is maintained and expressed also through the verb 'to beget' and the derivatives. By these means the Bible denotes the ontological distinction of Christ, who in this way is generically identified with God as his true offspring 'proper' (ἰδιον) to his essence, from the creatures, which are products of the creative act of God. He has also shown that the biblical footings with which the Arians tried to support their teaching are not simply inadequate, but absolutely inappropriate because they do not refer to the being of the Son, but to the ministry he assumed as a human being. On the one hand, Athanasius clearly discerns and distinguishes the pre-existent from the Incarnate Christ, whom in the first instance finds to be described as begotten while in the second as created by the Father. The Arians, on the other hand, using some sort of awkward equation of abstractly selected biblical texts defined the pre-existent (whom they appear to accept) on the merits of the Incarnate Christ, for the fear of attributing ontological division to God through the application of the concept of

¹⁶⁶ DECR 21:25,453C.

¹⁶⁷ DECR 13:25,440A.

generation. The crucial point for Athanasius which skips off this alleged danger is that the association of generation with God is made by *the Bible itself*. This being the authoritative starting point, the understanding of the divine generation ought to be especially qualified in order to be distinguished from human generation.

Therefore the next step in Athanasius' argument is to explain the manner in which the concept of generation applies to the divine nature and to set forth the necessary qualifications for this understanding. He focuses on those points which the Arians used to object to the generation of the Son as inappropriate for God and demonstrates the biblical basis upon which both the generation and its appropriate understanding are founded.

2.1.4 The differences between human and divine generation

Athanasius acknowledges that the doctrine of the generation of the Son had to be explained because, on the one hand, it was an image taken from the natural world and subsequently applied to God, and that it therefore carried implications that were not appropriate to the divinity. The use of such images is a biblical custom by which Scripture condescends to the inability of human mind to perceive and comprehend the divine realities without omitting to provide the necessary data for their correct understanding which have to be synthetically and systematically interpreted.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, he had to deal with the Arians, who exploited the weak points of the notion of generation in support of their views, namely that the two verbs "to create" and "to beget" can be used alternatively in relation to God, on the grounds that both distinguish him from any other being, including the Son. The reservations against the generation were in effect applicable also to the "homoousion", since according to Athanasius the problem was that the term

¹⁶⁸ Athanasius repeats in many places this fundamental principle of his theology. In CAR2 32 he asserts, "For such illustrations and such images has Scripture proposed, that considering the inability of human nature to comprehend God, we might form ideas even from these however poorly and dimly, and as far as it is attainable" (26,216B); also CAR 372.

could be understood for God as for human beings: "Is there any cause of fear, because the offsprings from human beings are coessential that the Son, by being called coessential, might be himself considered as a human offspring too?"¹⁶⁹

Athanasius was trying to overcome two difficulties. The first one refers to the chronological secondariness of the Son with respect to the Father. The Arians alleged that since God is by definition without beginning, the Son as well as the other beings, either begotten or created, which have a beginning, is therefore essentially differentiated from Him. They regarded the "ingenerate" existence (ἀγέννητος, or ἀγένητος)¹⁷⁰ as the primary definition of the essence of God and therefore the Son, who has a "begotten" existence (γεννητός and γενητός), should be essentially differentiated from the Father. In the *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* Arius declares:

"God existed before the Son being ingenerate [ἀνάρχως]...the Son is not Ingenerate, nor in any way a part of the ingenerate, nor derived from some substratum, but that he exists by will and counsel before times and before the ages, full <of grace and truth>, God, Only-begotten, unaltering. And before he was created or determined or established he did not exist, because he was not ingenerate. We are persecuted, because we said that the Son has a beginning, while God is without beginning".¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ SYNO 41:26,756C. These reservations are expressed especially by Eusebius of Caesarea, who in the beginning was reluctant to sign the Nicene decision. Cf. his *Letter to his diocese*, DECR 34. J.N.D. Kelly especially underlines them with regard to the meaning of the 'homoousion' (*Creeds*, pp. 211ff).

¹⁷⁰ At this point he found considerable support from the greek language in which the only difference between "begotten" (γεννητός, γέννημα) and "created" (γενητός, γένημα) is the spelling of one more "n" for the first (Cf. A. Heron, *Homoousios*, p. 60-61). This little detail helped very much for the further confusion of the two verbs. Athanasius many times discusses the term "ingenerate", which he regards as suspicious. In DECR 29 he makes a characteristic comment, "They do and say everything, not to honour God, but to dishonour the Son, being ignorant that he who dishonours the Son, dishonours the Father" (25,469D); Cf. also CAR1 30:26,73A. For the meaning and significance of the term see ; E. Meijering, "Athanasius on the Father", p. 9f.; L. Prestige, "and cognate words in Athanasius", *JTS*, 34 (1933) 258-265; P. Chrestou, *Uncreated and created, Unbegotten and Begotten in the theology of St. Athanasius*, (reprint) Thessaloniki 1974.

¹⁷¹ *Letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia* in H.-G. Opitz, *Urkunde*, 3:1:1, pp. 2-3 (the translation is by R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search*, p. 6). We find similar statements also in his *Letter of Arius and his companions to Alexander of Alexandria* (H.-G. Opitz, *A.W., Urk. 6*, 3:1:1, pp. 12-13) as for example "God, who is the cause of everything, is the only One [sup.μονόωτατος] Ingenerate; then is the Son who is begotten from the Father timelessly..." (*ibid*, pp. 12-13). Athanasius also records the Arian question "Did you have a son before bearing? Now as you did not, so neither was the Son of God before his generation" (CAR1 22:26,57C).

The second difficulty refers to some sort of 'spatial' dimension, which implies division of the being of the begetter into two separate beings. Athanasius points out this implication saying: "for bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relatively to their parents..."¹⁷² The division of the essence of God in this account was the main reservation against the "homoousion" and the generation, and according to the information of Eusebius of Caesarea, probably caused the greatest debate at the Council of Nicea.¹⁷³ As we have said in the *Introduction*, Arius was firmly holding the view that generation of the Son from the essence of the Father, so as to be *homoousios* with him, was already condemned by the Church as heretical, because the Son was understood to exist as a "part" of the Father¹⁷⁴ and since the "ingenerate" was the main characteristic of God, the Son as *homoousios* would be considered a second "ingenerate beginning" beside the Father.¹⁷⁵ Thus it appears that the problem about generation primarily lied in the understanding of the manner in which the divine persons are understood to be individuated and secondly in the selection of the terms which ought to express both their distinction and their unity.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² DECR 20:25,452B.

¹⁷³ Cf. his *Letter to his diocese*, DECR 34. See C. Stead. *Div. Sub.*, p. 258f.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. the terms "part of God" (μέρος θεοῦ), "part of the ingenerate" (μέρος ἀγεννήτου), "co-ingenerate" (συναγέννητος), "projection" (προβολή) and (ἐρυγή) in Arius' *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* (H.-G. Opitz, *Urkunde 6*, 3:1:1, pp. 2-3) and the names of Philogonus, Hellanikus and Macarius. Similar is the famous statement in his *Letter to Alexander* (H-G. Opitz, *A.W., Urk. 6*, 3:1:1, pp. 12-13) where he lists all the available and condemned meanings of the notion "offspring": "We say... an offspring, but not as one of the offsprings; neither as Valentine decreed the offspring to be the projection of the Father, nor as Manichaeus suggested the offspring to be consubstantial part of the Father; neither as Sabellius called it [the Monad] Son-Father, dividing the Monad, nor as Ierakas lamp from lamp or like a torch in two...", because "... according to them the Father is composite and divisible and mutable and body and in addition to these, the bodiless God suffers all the passions of a body". M. Wiles particularly emphasizes the relation of the Arian biblical exegesis to the antimonarchian literature of the 2nd and 3rd centuries (*Spiritual Gospel*, pp. 121f.; also R. Williams, *The logic*, pp. 57-58). Athanasius presents these allegations as follows "They deny that the Son is the proper offspring of the Father's essence, on the ground that this must imply parts and divisions; what is this but to deny that he is very Son and only in name to call him Son at all?" (CAR1 15:26,44A); "How can the Son be from the Father's essence and yet not a part? Since what is said to be of another, is a part of it and what is partitioned, is not a whole" (CAR2 32:26,216C; Cf. also CAR2 34:26,220A; DECR 13:25,463A).

¹⁷⁵ In the same *Letter to Alexander* Arius condemns those who hold that the Son exist together with the Father, because they "introduce two ingenerate beginnings" (*ibid.*). Athanasius also records this view with their question "Is the Ingenerate one or two?" (CAR1 22:26,57C).

¹⁷⁶ Apparently, Arius operated with anthropomorphic models of the divine being and therefore he

A third difficulty referred to the role of the will of the Father in the generation of the Son. Arius emphatically insisted on the view that the Son was the result of the will of God and this is evident in his *Letter to Alexander* where he says that "[the Father] brought [the Son] into being by his own will, immutable and unchangeable, perfect creature of God" and also that "he [the Son] was created before time and before the ages by the will of God and he received life and being from the Father and the glories".¹⁷⁷

To clarify areas of misunderstanding and give their proper meaning, Athanasius discerns two elements in the image of the generation: the first is the nature of the beings involved and to which it points and the second is the manner in which it takes place.¹⁷⁸ As the arguments are set out both by Athanasius and the Arians it becomes evident that the Arians put the emphasis on the second element on account of which they deny the first, while Athanasius pays attention to the first, refusing to get involved in the second with details which are not provided by the biblical evidence. Athanasius complains that the Arians were interested in "how God begets and what is the manner of his birth-giving",

emphasized the numerical part of the confession "One God". He understood the Father as a particular individual, distinctively identifiable from any one else. In this respect, he called God "*Monad*" (*Μονάς*) and as such he logically secured him from any other "second" or "third" individual. The Father was "sole" (*μόνος* and also the superlative *μονώτατος*) eligible to bear all the essentially divine attributes. This fundamental principle is the opening statement of Arius' credal *Letter to Alexander*, "We acknowledge one God, sole ingenerate, sole eternal, sole without beginning, sole true, sole possessing immortality, sole wise, sole good, sole master, judge of everything, administrator, steward, immutable and unchangeable, just and good, god of the law, the prophets and the new testament". On the other hand, R. Williams asserts that it was also one of Arius' main concerns to defend the Son's independent existence, which he regards as being against Alexander's teaching about the "properness" of the Son to the Father. Arius understood this as a degeneration to the status of an impersonal power, since as R. Williams explains, "Τὸ ἴδιον cannot be a substance; and if the Son is said to be *ἴδιος τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας*, this is tantamount to a denial of the independent existence of the Son... 'Father' and 'Son' are shorthand designations of individuals...: the individuals designated 'Father' and 'Son' are unique and particular subsistents, identifiably distinct because possessed of distinct substantial properties. Any language suggesting that the Son is proper to the Father is incomprehensible in this context" (*The Logic*, pp. 57-58,61; Cf. especially his detailed analysis of the notion "proper" in the Arian understanding pp. 58-62).

¹⁷⁷ *Letter to Alexander, op. cit.* In his *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* (H.-G. Opitz, *Urkunde*, 3:1:1, pp. 2-3) he argues: "he came into being ...full <of grace and truth>" (*θελήματι καὶ βουλή ὑπέστη... πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας*).

¹⁷⁸ This important text in which he clearly sets the conditions under which this image should be understood is in CAR1 26:26,65Af. See especially the main point: "if they assume from human images that generation implies time, why not from the same infer that it implies the natural and proper of the sons to their parents?"

which he considers as completely unacceptable, because God is beyond human conception.¹⁷⁹ This is, in turn, the hermeneutical key, which he uses to solve the problem making the distinction between 'words' and 'realities' of which he gives priority to the latter.¹⁸⁰ Scripture, he holds, is concerned to describe the nature of the relations between the Father and the Son, but it does not explain how they exist. According to Paul's advice (1 Tim. 4:13) therefore one should be careful and discerning so that one might not mix the meanings of the words and understand what applies to God according to the human pattern or ascribe to God what applies to men.¹⁸¹ The same degree of discernment is also demanded so that one might not abuse the words either, construing their meaning according to one's prior understanding. The relations between the Father and the Son are described with the verb "to beget", because it conveys simple, equal, intimate and direct relations without the intervention of any intermediary concept. The verb "to create" instead introduces the concept of "nothing" and relates the one to the other with the act and the will of God, and excludes the personal and ontological involvement that the biblical verses demand.

So, all the relevant notions, i.e., father, son, offspring, birth-giving, although understood literally, do not bear any "bodily" sense, because they apply "appropriately" (*ἄρμοζόντως*) to God, who as a bodiless and pure Spirit begets differently from human beings. To render the point more comprehensibly, Athanasius explains the concepts 'creating' and 'being' when they apply to human beings and when they apply to God. God creates out of non-existence and "calls into existence things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17),

¹⁷⁹ The qualifications for approaching the reality of God is reverence and faith in the mystery of God, which excludes the unsafe speculations of logical explanations. In a characteristic text he argues, "For it is better in perplexity to be silent and believe than to disbelieve on account of the perplexity; 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 beseem not, and utters what is unworthy of God, such daring incurs a sentence without mercy", CAR2 36:26,224B; Cf. also DECR 18:25,448B; CAR3 1:26,324A; 18:26,360C; T.F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics", *EPh* 52:1 (1970) 466f.

¹⁸⁰ CAR2 36:26,224B.

¹⁸¹ DECR 10:25,433B; SYNO 41:26,765C and 42:26,768A-B.

while human beings create from pre-existing materials and they are able to do so because they have learnt this art from God whom they imitate. Their being is also different because God is self-existing and is not contained by anything, but on the contrary, contains and governs everything through his Word, while his being is outside and alien to everything. Human beings are enclosed in space and cannot exist on their own, but are sustained by the Word of God.¹⁸²

On this basis, Athanasius argues that the manner of the divine generation is also different. It is an act that pertains to nature, and therefore it is not the act itself that defines nature, but nature defines the manner in which this event takes place.¹⁸³ As generation designates the identity of nature of sons with their fathers so on this basis it can also be validly applied to God, but in view of the purely spiritual nature of God. Athanasius explains this as follows,

"Let every corporeal inference be banished on this subject; and transcending every imagination of sense, let us with pure understanding and with mind alone, apprehend the genuine relation of son to father and the Word's proper relation towards God, and the unvarying likeness of the radiance towards the light: for as the words 'offspring' and 'Son' bear and are meant to bear no human sense, but that is suitable to God, in like manner when we hear the term 'homousios' let us not fall upon human senses and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature and the identity of light; for this is proper to a son as regards a father, and in this is shewn that God is truly Father of the Word".¹⁸⁴

Starting out from this premise, Athanasius provides the biblical data, which direct the effort of the human mind to conceive the differences of divine from human generation and determine the boundaries of its meaning.

First of all Athanasius clears the confusion over the chronological divisions in the act of birth-giving in terms of priority and posteriority. He explains that they are due to the fact that human beings live and operate within a temporal framework and they become

¹⁸² DECR 11:25,433C.

¹⁸³ CAR1 26:26,65C and 27:26,68A; also CAR2 3:26,152b etc.

¹⁸⁴ DECR 24:25,457B.

fathers of sons in time, because they themselves became sons of their fathers at an earlier chronological point. The weakness of human nature demands a process of preparation in order to be able to beget. However, he argues that apart from the temporal categories, one can think of an offspring as always existing with its father, if one directs one's mind to the generic continuity of the human species and thinks that human beings are always potential begetters, and that every offspring exists already "in the loins" of its ancestors. Birth-giving is an attribute of nature and in the last analysis it is not affected by temporal divisions as far as the identity of species is concerned. God is eternal and exists beyond time, therefore there is nothing to prevent him from being eternal Father of an eternal offspring. For this reason biblical evidence not only does not imply any temporal categories, when it speaks about the relations of the Son with the Father, but also many times contains definitions which point out the eternity of the Son. Athanasius proves the point mainly with the following texts:

Jn 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word") manifests the Son as existing always and not having a chronological starting point of existence. This excludes any intervening period of time in the process of his generation: "John, theologising about the Son and acknowledging the difference of the words, did not say 'In the beginning has become' or 'been made', but 'In the beginning was the Word', so that 'offspring' is proclaimed together with 'was' and one might not regard it with intervals, but believe in the Son existing eternally".¹⁸⁵

Although they are inadequate to describe fully the divine reality, the paradigms '*light-effulgence*' (Heb. 1:3: "He is the effulgence of his glory") and '*fountain-river*' (Bar. 3:12 "You have abandoned the fountain of wisdom"), in their theological application, do

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CAR2 58:26,269C.

carry sufficient connotation to suggest that as he can never exist without the other, the Father will never be regarded as existing without his Son.¹⁸⁶

Prov. 8:25 ("Before everything he begets me") contains the specification that the Son is begotten "*before everything*".¹⁸⁷ This does not denote priority in time from other creatures according to the Arian interpretation of *8:22*. As Athanasius argues, the Arians have failed to understand even the manner of God's creating, because he did not bring creatures into existence one after the other, but all "at once" through the one and the same order according to their species. The fact that the Son is before everything signifies that he is different from everything, because he is generated differently, that is by birth and not by creation. The verb "he created" in *8:22* therefore is specified with "the beginning of his ways", while "he begets" in *8:25* with "before everything". The purport is that the Son who is "before everything" cannot be in the same sense "the beginning" of others, but he is acknowledged to be "other" (ἄλλος) than the others since everything that exists was created by God in one instance: "For the one who is before everything, is not the beginning of everything, but other than everything; and if he is other than everything, which also denotes the beginning of everything, then it is clear that he [the Son] is other than creatures; it is also clearly proclaimed that the Word being other than everything and before everything, is afterwards created 'beginning of ways unto works' on account of the Incarnation, so that, as the Apostle said, the one who is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, might be pre-eminent in everything".

The critical presupposition in this issue for both Athanasius and Arius is the understanding of the concept of time and its implications.¹⁸⁸ As we can see from the above,

¹⁸⁶ CAR1 26, 27:26,68A-C; CAR2 32:26,216B; 58:26,269; DECR 12:25,436C-D etc.

¹⁸⁷ CAR2 80:26,317A.

¹⁸⁸ A well argued presentation of the matter has been produced by E. Meijering in his essay "HN ΠΟΤΕ ΟΤΕ ΟΥΚ ΗΝ Ο ΥΙΟΣ. A Discussion on time and eternity", *God, Being, History*, pp. 81-88, to which we refer for more details. We do not share, though, his parallelism of the Arius-Athanasius case with Atticus-'orthodox' Platonists: the same patterns of logic and argument apply almost to all subject-matters of intellectual debates on abstract concepts. But the case between Arius and Athanasius was not merely

Athanasius denies any other temporal category except the one that has its beginning at the creation of the world according to Heb 1:2 ("through whom he created the ages"). In other words, as in the case of ontology, so here, he draws a line between eternity, where God belongs, and time, where creatures belong. For Athanasius, all biblical passages place the Son *before* that point, in effect in eternity.¹⁸⁹ Arius on the other hand somehow introduces a third "kind" of time, which lies in between the previous two and is specified as the period from the creation of the Son to the creation of the world. He appears to hold that all the biblical chronological specifications (*before, when* etc.) which apply to the Son specify that different kind of time to which they belong. However, although he held that "there was [time] when the Son was not", he refused to define this 'time' by using the notion of eternity and placing the generation of the Son somewhere in there. Using the adverb "ἄχρονονως" ("timelessly") he believed that he could avoid defining specific time, which he obviously understood as being lacking in the Bible.¹⁹⁰ Athanasius obviously rejects any such conceptions as groundless on biblical evidence, and especially in respect of Jn. 1:3 and Heb. 1:2:

"Why do you imagine times before the Son? or why do you blaspheme the Word to be after times, by whom even the ages were made? For how did time or age at all subsist when the Word, as you say, had not appeared, 'through' whom 'all things have been made and without whom 'not one thing was made'? or why, when you mean time, you do not say plainly 'a time was, when the Word was not'? But while you drop the word 'time' to deceive the simple... you could not escape discovery".¹⁹¹

The second task for Athanasius was to clear up the already mentioned suspicions of division of the essence of God on account of the generation. He argues that ontological divisions exist in human birth-giving, because human nature itself is composite and

that, nor betrays any direct influences of similar debates in philosophical contexts. Cf. G.D. Dragas critique of contemporary *Dogmengeschichte* in *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. especially CAR2 32:26,216A, where in combination with Mat 3:17, Heb 1:3, 1 Cor 1:24, Bar 3:12, Ps 109:24, Jer 2:1, Jn 1:1 and Lk 1:1, he declares: "All these signify the eternity of the Son and that he is not alien but proper of his substance".

¹⁹⁰ Cf. his *Letter to Alexander*, *op. cit.*: "created before the ages...begotten timelessly before everything".

¹⁹¹ CAR1 13:26,40B.

divided in space. Human offsprings are parts of their parents, because their nature "flows out" (ἀπορρέουσι) of the nature of the latter, which is complemented again by food "flowing into" (ἐπιρρέουσι) them. Human nature is partial and is characterized by constant movement and combination of different parts, therefore birth-giving also has to operate with these parts and perpetuate their divisions. God, on the other hand, is "without parts" (ἀμερής) and "impassible" (ἀπαθής). He does not change, neither is he influenced by "influx" (ἐπιρροή) or "efflux" (ἀπορροή). He is simple and eternal in nature and therefore birth-giving does not divide him. His offspring does not exist as a part of him, nor diminishes his essence exactly as human offsprings do not diminish either the essence or the humanity of their parents, nor do they possess only a part of it.¹⁹²

The point of interest in the question concerning the Son's generation is the kind of his nature, not definitions of the manner in which he exists. On this point, Athanasius recalls the following biblical texts:

In *Mat. 3:17* ("This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased") God is witnessed as the Father of the One and Only Son. The reason for this is the fact that essence of God is "simple" (ἀπλή) and "unchangeable" (ἄτρεπτος): "Being incomposite in nature, He is Father of the one and only Son. This is why he is only-begotten and alone on the Father's bosom and alone is acknowledged by the Father to be from him saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased".¹⁹³

Jn. 1:18 ("The Only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father") introduces a new aspect into the concept of generation. Although generation emphasizes for Athanasius the distinction between the two persons of the Trinity as concrete individuals, the phrase "in the bosom of the Father" signifies the different kind of the divine from the human generation, because it indicates unity of the Father with his offspring and not separation

¹⁹² For the full argument of Athanasius see CAR1 28:26,69Af.

¹⁹³ DECR 11:25,436A.

and division: the Son is begotten and yet not separated from the bosom of the Father. The verb "to beget" in the divine dimension only secures the direct and intimate ontological relations between the Father and the Son, and does not trail divisions according to categories that do not apply to the divine mode of existence.

The Christological title 'Word' and the paradigms 'light-effulgence', 'fountain-river' and 'image', primarily convey the idea of unity of nature between the Son and the Father, because they shift the emphasis on generation from bodily to spiritual understanding:

"As we have said above, so now we repeat, that the divine generation must not be compared to the nature of men, nor the Son considered to be part of God, nor the generation to imply any passion whatsoever. God is not a man. For men beget passibly, having a transitive nature which waits for periods by reason of its weakness. But with God this cannot be; for he is not composed of parts, but being impassible and simple, he is impassibly and indivisibly Father of the Son. This again is strongly evidenced and proved by divine Scripture. For the Word of God is his Son and the Son is the Father's Word and Wisdom; and Word and Wisdom is neither creature nor part of him whose Word he is, nor an offspring passibly begotten. Uniting then the two titles, Scripture speaks of the 'Son' in order to herald the natural and true offspring of his essence".¹⁹⁴

Finally, Athanasius also denies the Arian allegations that the Son came into existence by the will of God. He deploys the following arguments.¹⁹⁵ a) On the basis of *Ps. 113:11* ("Our God in the heavens and on the earth created everything he pleased"), *Ps. 110:2* ("Great are the works of the Lord, everything is according to his will") and *Ps. 134:6* ("Whatever God pleases he does, in heavens and on earth"), which he compares with *Mat. 3:17*, *Ps. 44:2*, *Jn. 1:1*, *Ps. 35:10*, *Heb. 1:3* and *Col. 1:15*, he asserts that the notion of "will" is attached to the verb "to create", not to the verb "to beget" and its related terms. The will of God precedes creatures and relates them to God, while the biblical verses which talk about the generation of the Son relate him to the Father intimately and directly without any intermediary linkage or allusion to the latter's will. b) As a consequence, the concept of generation is conceived of as pertaining to the nature of God and not to his will.

¹⁹⁴ CAR1 28:26,69A.

¹⁹⁵ See CAR3 59ff:26,448Aff.

Nature is above will; it is neither preceded, nor defined by it. A son is an offspring of the essence of his father which has the attribute of begetting by nature and is not determined by the father's will. Thus, Athanasius reverses the Arian argument saying: "I want to ask the irreligious men ... to ask now not the childbearing women, whom they used to ask 'Did you have a son before bearing?', but the fathers and say to them, 'Do you become fathers by your will, or by nature together with your will?', or, 'Are your children like your nature and essence?' ... For they will reply to them 'What we beget, is like not our will, but like ourselves; nor become we parents by previous counsel, but to beget is proper to our nature, since we too are images of our fathers'.¹⁹⁶ c) The allegation that the Son exists by the will of God, also affects the conception of the Father, because he is no longer regarded as the Father eternally, but as Father through will. Since Athanasius considers God's fatherhood an essential attribute of his being the idea of the Son's generation by will presents God as defining his own existence by his will, as if his will preceded his being, Athanasius regards the idea as "shamelessness" (προπέτεια) and "exceeding madness" (ὑπερβάλλουσα μανία). d) *James 1:18* ("Of his own will he brought us forth"), *1 Thes. 5:18* ("for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you") suggest that since the will of God is in Christ, then one must seek in God for another will or word in which Christ was made, because it is not possible that he creates his own existence. Scripture, however, does not provide such evidence. e) Finally, taking as his basis an exegetical synthesis of *Prov. 3:19* ("The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens"), *Ps. 32:6* ("By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made"), *Ps. 113:11* ("Our God in the heavens and on the earth created everything he pleased"), *James 1:18* and *1 Thes. 5:18* and having as regulative principle God's creation of the world, he argues that one must not think of God according to the human model: since the world was created through the "will"

¹⁹⁶ CAR3 67:26,465B.

(βουλή, θέλησις), "understanding" (φρόνησις), "wisdom" (σοφία), "word" (λόγος) and all these are in Christ, then God has no other will than Christ who is the Son. The following text is characteristic and representative of Athanasius' understanding of the Son in relation to all the associated titles:

"The Son of God then, he is the 'Word' and the 'Wisdom', he is the 'understanding' and the living 'counsel' and in him is the good pleasure of the Father; he is truth, light and power of the Father. But if the will of God is wisdom and understanding and the Son is wisdom, he who says that the son is by will, says virtually that wisdom has come into being in wisdom and the son is made in a son and the word created through the word. This is incompatible with God and is opposed to his Scriptures. For the Apostle proclaims the Son to be the very radiance and character, not of the Father's will, but of his essence itself saying, 'who being the radiance of his glory and the character of his subsistence' [hypostasis]. But if, as we have said before, the Father's essence and subsistence is not by will, neither, as is very plain, is the proper one to the Father's subsistence from will. For such as and so as that blessed subsistence is, the same must also be the proper offspring from it. And accordingly the Father himself did not say 'this is my son originated at my will' nor 'the son whom I have by my favour', but simply 'my son' and more than that 'in whom I am well pleased', meaning by this, This is the Son by nature and in him is lodged my will about what pleases me".¹⁹⁷

The arguments presented so far, constitute the background of Athanasius' understanding of the Christological title "Son". It gives a new dimension to the other Christological title "Word", already used in the ecclesiastical literature of the previous centuries. There is a constant interplay in Athanasius' writings between the notions "son" and "word" on the one hand and "generation" on the other: the two former titles bear witness to the natural generation as their presupposition, and at the same time the concept of 'generation' invests them with new meaning and response to reality. The main arguments having already been expounded, we will try in the following section to give a comprehensive overview of the applications of the title Son and the associated title "only-begotten" (Μονογενής) as constituent concepts of the 'homoousion'.

2.2 The Christological Titles

2.2.1 The Only-begotten Son of God (Μονογενής Υιός)

The confession that Jesus Christ is 'the Son of God' is acknowledged today by the majority of specialists as central to the New Testament texts.¹⁹⁸ It was the first compact declaration by the early Christians of what Christianity was all about and very quickly came to be the affirmation of both the true divinity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ. As Dr. I. H. Marshall remarks, "the roots of the New Testament designation of Jesus as the Son of God lie in his own consciousness of being uniquely related to the Father, a consciousness which he expressed both by speaking of God as 'my father' and by referring to himself as the Son".¹⁹⁹ From this premise, the early Christians advanced Jesus' divine sonship as the foundation of their own distinctive identity against their Jewish background and the Hellenistic paganism dominating the culture and philosophy of the time.²⁰⁰ However, as Dr. G. D. Dragas points out "this faith, before it was allowed to unfold its implications for the knowledge of God and man in Christian theology, met with two opposing tendencies, which soon arose against it. The ebionitic or psilanthropic one, which stressed the human side of Christ and made the divine side of the Son of God accidental and the docetic which relativised the reality of his humanity".²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ For example O. Cullmann points out: "According to the whole Gospel tradition, the 'Son of God' title as applied to Jesus express the historical and qualitative uniqueness of his relation to his Father" (p. 275). For the biblical point of view of the theme we consulted the following: O. Cullmann, *The Christology of NT*, A. Richardson, *Introduction to the theology of the NT*, J. Bonsriven, *Theology of the NT*, J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology*, L. Goppelt, *Theology of NT*, I. Marshall, "The divine sonship of Jesus Christ", *Interpretation*, 21 (1967) 88-103, C. Turner, "Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΑΠΗΤΟΣ", *JTS*, 27 (1926) 113-129.

¹⁹⁹ "The Divine sonship", p. 103.

²⁰⁰ Prof. J.D.G. Dunn remarks: "Some movements have no dominant figure in the beginning; but Christianity began with Jesus. And it was the *meaning of Jesus*, of what he had said and done, together with what the first Christians understood him to be and to have been, to be doing and to have done, which was the most significant factor in the new sect's own developing self-understanding and developing sense of distinctiveness over against the other religions, sects and philosophies of the time" (*Christology*, p. ix).

²⁰¹ *Athanasiana*, p. 39; see also the presentation of the questions which those tendencies raised for the sonship of Jesus in the struggle for its acceptance and exact exposition.

As Athanasius also informs us, anyone who wanted to become a member of the Church from any cultural or religious background, faced the kerugma of the divine sonship of Jesus as the most challenging article of Christian catechesis.²⁰² Although it is difficult to trace the complex and mysterious ways which human logic follows to form its ideas, it appears that Arius' doctrine was one more attempt to compromise the confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God with the traditionally accepted monotheistic faith.²⁰³ His understanding of the sonship of Jesus was "the most subtle development" compared to similar earlier Hellenistic or Jewish attempts. This was because, as Dr. G.D. Dragas explains,

"Between these two parties, the theists and the immanentists, others of Jewish Platonic ideology move into the middle position which accept to a certain relative measure a divinity of the Son and even his unique divine Sonship, which they make the hegemonic principle of his humanity but subordinate it to a transcendent and absolute Father who alone can be fully and properly God. This is in fact the most subtle of these developments because it moves in between opposite views, the transcendentalist and the immanentist, and therefore can manipulate more easily the language and

²⁰² "Who hears of a son and does not conceive that which is proper to the father's essence? Who heard in his first catechising, that God has a Son and has made all things through his own Word, and did not understand it in the sense as we now mean it?... For what is sown in every soul from the beginning is that God has a Son, the Word, the Wisdom, the Power, that is, his image and effulgence..." CAR2 34:26, 220A-B; Cf. also CAR1 8:26,28B, where he makes similar complaints "For who was ever yet a hearer of such a doctrine? From where and from whom did the abettors and hirelings of the heresy gain it? Who thus expounded to them when they were at school?"

²⁰³ This is the main problem which R.P.C. Hanson also identifies (*The Search*, p. xx), but we would disagree with him that the "crisis" over this problem "was not created by either Arius or Athanasius", but arised from a vague "earliest Christian tradition". This, of course, is in accordance with Prof. Hanson's tendency to handle all the pesons involved in the controversy in equal terms as a concerted effort through thesis and antithesis to find the Christian doctrine of God, but we think that this is not the case. Taking as a criterion the fact of the later vindication of Athanasius and his acknowledgement as the spokesman of orthodoxy at his time, he cannot be treated in equal terms with Arius. Arius' views can be comprehended and explained, but they were not less heretical in 325 than they were in 381. The "earliest Christian tradition" did not consist of confusion over the divinity of Jesus Christ or the Trinity, but it was a living experience of the Church, which was intellectually challenged by particular people at particular time. It was not at the time of Athanasius that the Christian haith had to be defined or determined, but simply expressed in the appropriate language and demands of the time. Jesus Christ was believed to be the true Son of God by the apostolic Fathers as well as by Athanasius. The difference is that whereas the title 'Son' was enough for the former to express their faith in him (as well as the other biblical terms), it was insufficient for Athanasius to express the same faith because of Arius' twist of meanings (Cf. the initial intention of the Nicenes to maintain the biblical vocabulary and the Arian attitude as described by Athanasius in DECR 19-20). We think that B. Lonergan's definition of the so called 'dogmatic development' as "movement from one kind of clarity to another" renders more accurately the situation (*The Way*, p. 13; He makes a 'dramatic' description of the procedure of receiving and expressing the Christian truth in pp. 5ff; Cf. also note 23 in our *Introduction*).

traditions of the Church ... The Arian crisis was the last and most decisive of the early attacks on the Church's confession of the Son of God".²⁰⁴

Athanasius maintained the traditional ecclesiastical understanding of Jesus Christ's sonship and established it on the strongest possible ontological terms, which would distinguish it from the Arian version that construed both its meaning and significance. The fight took place on biblical grounds and biblical data were used as the starting point of two radically different approaches. On the one hand, priority in Athanasius' argument is given to Jesus Christ as the Son who reveals the Father (Heb. 1:1, Jn. 14:9) and this becomes the regulative principle for his understanding of God. On the other hand, Arius, while dealing with Jesus as the Son of God, turns away, as it were, to an abstract definition of God and of his attributes, and sets it as the regulative principle for his definition of the sonship of Jesus.²⁰⁵ He then turns again to the Bible trying to find footing and support for his understanding. As a consequence, these two different exegetical methods resulted in two contradicting conclusions: Athanasius maintains the significance of the ontological difference between 'son' and 'creature' and fortifies it with reference to the language of 'begetting', explaining its implications and the distinctions at which it aims. Arius eliminates any ontological distinction, equating the concepts 'son' and 'creature' and thus ruling out a considerable part of the most deep and valuable biblical teaching. Prof. T.F. Torrance remarks that "Arianism was the most dangerous heresy for it struck at the very roots of the Church's faith by calling into question the reality of Christ's revelation and saving activity... The oneness between Jesus Christ and God in being, word and act had to do essentially with the integrity of the Gospel message".²⁰⁶

As we have seen, the arguments of Athanasius were as much literal as theological also. The best and most comprehensive account of his understanding of sonship is

²⁰⁴ *Athanasiana*, pp. 47-48.

²⁰⁵ Therefore, Dr. G.D. Dragas rightly observes that "the point of divergence between St. Athanasius and Arius is not merely the conception of divine sonship, but the understanding of the divine nature", *op.cit.*, p.58.

²⁰⁶ T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 119, 132.

deployed in the *DECR*. In the beginning of his exposition, as in any modern biblical textbook, he discerns two meanings of the term 'son' in Scripture.²⁰⁷ The first designates any offspring that comes into existence from its father through the natural process of begetting. Its significance lies in that the offspring shares the same natural characteristics as those possessed by its begetter, and belongs to the same species or kind of existence as its father, with whom it is in effect "homoousios" with its father. "It is necessary", Athanasius remarks, that "whatever the begetter is, the offspring is the same" and also that "as it is madness to call the ship or the house *homoousios* with its builder, so it is appropriate to call every son *homoousios* with his father".²⁰⁸ The second meaning designates the status which human beings acquire as sons through divine adoption. This relationship is again described with the terms 'son', 'father' and 'to beget', and refers to God, who is said to have begotten human beings as sons, according to Deut. 13:19-14:1 ("If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all his commandments which I command you this day, and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God, You are sons of the Lord your God"), Is. 1:2 ("Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me") and Jn. 1:12 ("To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God"). Athanasius calls the former "sonship by nature" (φύσει) and the latter "sonship by status" (θέσει) or "by grace" (χάριτι), because it is a gift granted by God to

²⁰⁷ Scholars discern four main uses of the term 'Son of God' in Israel and the Old Testament: a) for physical descendants, b) for the people of Israel as a whole, c) for the king and d) for persons with special commission from God (See article "ΥΙΟΣ" in Kittel's, *Theological Dictionary*, IV, pp. 340-353; so also -with slight variations of emphasis- O. Cullmann, p. 272-275; Richardson, pp. 148-149; Bonsriven, pp. 19-23; the overview of usage by Goppelt, II, pp. 71-72; and especially the most comprehensive summary of the results of modern investigation in Dunn, pp. 14-16). Although great plurality appears in the use of the term, from the point of view of physical relationship all these fall into the two categories that Athanasius sets, especially when it refers to the 'son of God': that of physical or generic relation (φύσει) and that of conventional or formal relationship, which shorthand Athanasius calls 'by adoption' or 'by appointment' (θέσει).

²⁰⁸ CAR2 35:26,221A: "ὁποῖος γὰρ ἂν ἢ ὁ γεννῶν, τοιοῦτον ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸ γέννημα εἶναι"; Cf. also CAR3 65:26,461B. SER2 6:26,617B; Cf. also *DECR* 13:25,437-440A and 10:25,433A: "for what is naturally begotten from any one and does not accrue to him from without, nature acknowledges as son and this is what the name implies".

those who are virtuous and faithful to him.²⁰⁹ On these grounds he sets the question clearly and plainly: "Now in which of these two senses do they understand the Son of God?"

Although it is not clear what answer Arius would give to the question according to this pattern of meaning, from hints we can gather from both him and Athanasius, he seems to accept the second meaning of sonship, as it is set by Athanasius, by which he held that the Son was first created by God alone and then was adopted as Son receiving the gifts of the divine glory. First of all, Athanasius refutes the Arian interpretation that the Son is called "Only-begotten on the grounds that he alone was created by God while all the rest were created through him."²¹⁰ Secondly, in the *Letter to Alexander* Arius sounds particularly worried not to be misunderstood by his bishop as considering the Son an ordinary human "son" adopted by God in the same way: he explains that he does not believe that the Son "who was before, was afterwards generated or new created into a Son", but that "at the will of God created before times and before ages and gaining life and being from the Father, who gave subsistence to the glories together with him. For, the Father, granting the inheritance of everything to him, did not deprive himself of what he has ingenerately (ἀγεννήτως) in himself".²¹¹ From our point of view this suggests an attempt to draw the Son's creation and adoption by God as close as possible to each other by eliminating the period of "time" which he recognised as having been introduced between them. It appears, that is, that according to Arius the origin of the Son from the Father, which is generation for Athanasius but creation for him, and the Son's adoption by God, (i.e., generation) took place simultaneously. To avoid the specification of that chronological point, he introduced

²⁰⁹ O. Cullmann especially emphasizes the importance of strict obedience to the command of God as necessary qualification for the designation as 'son of God' (p. 275). For the significance of the term in relation to God see Kittel's, *Dictionary, op. cit.*, pp.347-353.

²¹⁰ DECR 7:25,428Bf.

²¹¹ "...according to what yourself, blessed Pope, have forbidden those who introduced these in the middle of the Church and the Council", *op. cit.* In his *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* (H.-G. Opitz, *Urkunde*, 3:1:1, pp. 2-3) he argues: "he came into being...full <of grace and truth>" (ὀπέστη...πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας).

the vague notion of "ἄχρονον" (timelessly). He believed that the likeness with God, which human beings acquire by imitation and virtue according to Athanasius, was an internal acquisition of the Son from the very first moment of his existence granted to him on account of God's prior knowledge of his goodness.²¹² Therefore he is always called Son, he is the Son *par excellence* compared to human sons, and in effect he is the unique "God-like" creature. The only attribute that he did not inherit, was the "ingenerate" mode of existence and therefore he could never be regarded as God generically identical with the Father.²¹³ In this respect and since it did not make any difference to say that the Son was created or begotten and because the common ecclesiastical language accepted the verb "to beget", Arius had no reason to go against it, no matter if he inferred an entirely different situation.²¹⁴

This understanding has virtually also set the context and the main guidelines with which Athanasius employs the Christological title 'Son'. He understands the sonship of

²¹² Cf. also Athanasius' allusion to the Arian view alleging that "because his [the Son's] qualifications were foreknown, as they say, he therefore received grace from the first, the name, and the glory of the name, from his very first beginning ..." (DECR 6:25,425C).

²¹³ In his *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* says "ἀγέννητος γὰρ οὐκ ἦν". Arius had drawn the following conclusion, which lies at the foundations of his doctrine, "So, there are three subsistencies; God, who is the cause of everything, is the only One [sup.μονώτατος] Ingenerate; then is the Son who is begotten from the Father timelessly and is created and founded before the ages, he is alone originated from the Father. He is not eternal or coeternal or Ingenerate with the Father, neither has he got his being together with the Father, as some assert τα προς τι, suggesting two Ingenerate principles, but as monad and source of everything, so is God before everything", *Letter to Alexander*, *op. cit.* and the similar statements in the above quotation; Cf. also Athanasius' quotations from *Thalia* in CAR1 5-6:26,21A: "he [the Son] as others had an origin of creation [ἀρχὴν τοῦ κτίζεσθαι ἔσχε]... and whereas all beings are foreign and different from God in essence, so too is the Word alien and unlike in all things to the Father's essence and property..." and "As all beings are foreign and unlike to God in essence, so too is the Word alien (ἄλλότριος) and unlike (ἀνόμοιος) in all things to the Father's essence and propriety... The essences of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate (μεμερισμένοι) in nature and estranged (ἀπεξενωμένοι) and disconnected (ἀπεσχοινομένοι) and alien and without participation (ἀμέτοχοι) to each other ... utterly unlike from each other in essence and glory for ever. Thus as to likeness of glory and essence he says that the Word is entirely diverse from both the Father and the Holy Spirit" (CAR1 6:26,24A-B). Prof. R. Williams particularly emphasizes the point saying, "Arius and his party never wavered in their commitment to the doctrine of the 'three hypostases', each of which subsists καθ'αυτό. Each is, in its own right, a logical subject, a substance, irreducible to being part of the definition of another subject. The Son therefore has his own properties, his own essential characteristics, which for Arius must logically be other than the essential characteristics of the (essentially eternal) Father" (*The Logic*, p. 61).

²¹⁴ S. Laeuchli, especially discusses the problem of the common language with the different connotations as one of the three main points of the controversy, Cf. *The case*, p. 410; Cf. also the discussion by T.F. Torrance, *Trinitarian*, pp. 111-114.

Jesus Christ according to its first meaning and puts it in opposition to the creature concept as well as to the adoptionist form of sonship. Although the 'Father-Son' language is very common in the biblical texts, he pays particular attention to certain verses which made clearer the distinction. The arguments we have presented so far, have made clear his attitude against the designation of the Son as creature. In the following section we will present an overview of these arguments and their applications together with some additional observations concerning the significance of the associated Christological title "Only-begotten" as bearing witness to the doctrine of the natural generation. We will also look into the way in which he differentiates the designation of human beings as sons of God and establishes the distinction between sonship by nature and sonship by grace.

2.2.1.1 The natural sonship of the Son

Athanasius considers the designation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God emphatically expressed particularly in two texts which he employs with equal emphasis. They are *Mat. 3:17* "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" and *Ps. 2:7* "You are my Son, this day I have begotten you". He appears to have a special preference for these texts, obviously because, being explicit and plain declarations of God the Father towards his Son, they are clothed with a distinctive authority. They refer to Jesus Christ as the Son in a unique and unprecedented manner which Athanasius underlines with emphatic statements, like "The Father revealed his own Word from heaven declaring, This is my beloved Son" and also "Him the Father pointed out both in Jordan and on the Mount, saying 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. Him the Arians denied, but we worship".²¹⁵ On this basis Athanasius handles the verses in the following way.

²¹⁵ CAR3 59:26,448B; EPI 12:26,1069A; Cf. also similar statements in DECR 11, DION 2, SYNO 35, CAR2 23, CAR3 65.

First of all, he asserts that the names 'father' and 'son' have to be natural and with correspondence to reality; they are not metaphors or imaginative, as the Arians believe. The starting point for the correct understanding of these terms is the fact that they are names with which the Father and the Son addressed each other, so they are used by the divine persons themselves rather than being terms which human beings ascribe to them. Therefore, it is an error of hermeneutics to deny their proper meaning on the grounds that they imply division, because this very exegesis implies the imposition of an anthropological model of understanding on the biblical revelation concerning the nature of God. As the nature of God is far superior to the human it is impossible for the human mind to comprehend the mode of its existence or the manner in which it lives.²¹⁶ This is a fundamental hermeneutical principle which Athanasius expresses as follows,

"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 proper offspring of the Father's essence, on the ground that this must imply parts and divisions; what is it but to deny that he is very son and only in name to call him son at all? And is it not a grievous error, to have material thoughts about what is immaterial and because of the weakness of their proper nature to deny what is natural and proper to the Father? It does but remain now, that they should deny him also, because they understand not how God is and what the Father is and they, foolish men, measure by themselves the offspring of the Father".²¹⁷

Apparently, the crucial theme which underlies this argument is the authority of the biblical text as such, both in its 'literal' and 'metaphorical' meaning. The criterion for the distinction between the two and the principle for the approach to the biblical text by the interpreter, are clearly set by Athanasius in the following texts:

²¹⁶ This is the ground upon which Athanasius shows so much persistence on the distinction between words and realities, as we have already referred to earlier. He had many times the opportunity to appeal to the same principle, since the Arian exegesis of the biblical texts was consistent insofar as it persistently inverted the meaning of particular words to the same direction, which obviously falls within the exegetical boundaries which Athanasius has set for this matter. C. Kannengiesser remarks that "The biblical problem, common to Arius and to his recent protectors, is that of the exact theological description of the Son through the images and the letter of Scripture... Scriptural texts must certainly be interpreted when they speak of divine generation through various analogies, but Arius gives them a changed interpretation by construing them as definitions, without analogy or metaphor, of the origin of the Son" (*Holy Scripture*, p. 7).

²¹⁷ CAR1 15:26,44A; Cf. also DECR 10-11

"But since, 'No one knows the Father but the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him', therefore the sacred writers to whom the Son has revealed him have given us a certain image from things visible ...[Heb. 1:3, Ps. 35:10, Bar. 3:12, Jer. 2:13]. For the sacred writers wishing us thus to understand, have given these illustrations; and it is unseemly and most irreligious, when Scripture contains such images, to form ideas concerning our Lord from others which are neither in Scripture, nor have any religious bearing",²¹⁸ and also

"Let every corporeal inference be banished on this subject; and transcending every imagination of sense, let us with pure understanding and with mind alone, apprehend the genuine relation of son to father and the Word's proper relation towards God, and the unvarying likeness of the radiance towards the light: for as the Words 'offspring' and 'Son' bear and are meant to bear no human sense, but one suitable to God, in like manner when we hear the term 'homousios' let us not fall upon human senses and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature and the identity of light; for this is proper to a son as regards a father, and in this is shewn that God is truly Father of the Word".²¹⁹

With the first text Athanasius defines what we called the 'literal' meaning of the biblical text and with the second the 'metaphorical'. On the one hand, the literal meaning refers to the selection of particular terms by Scripture for transmitting the divine revelation which constitutes the only source for developing theological concepts. As he explains, for example, it is the image of the light and the effulgence that has been used to describe the reality of the Son's unity with the Father and not the image of light and fire.²²⁰ Athanasius retains and defends the literal meaning of the biblical vocabulary when alternative terms or notions construe or threaten to abolish it. On the other hand, the understanding of biblical language as metaphor is based on the fact that it refers to realities that transcend the created world and therefore the definition of the terms should follow suit. 'Metaphor' though does not imply twisting of the literal sense of the terms used, but, understanding of the reasons which necessitated their use with reference to the realities which lie behind them. Thus, we see Athanasius objecting to the rendering of 'begetting' as 'creating', to the equation of 'offspring' and 'creature', and to the interpretation of the 'Word' and 'Wisdom of

²¹⁸ DECR 12:25,436Cf.

²¹⁹ DECR 24:25,457B-C.

²²⁰ DECR 23:25,456D.

God' as mere names and not as a real attributes of the Father. Although he defends the literal meaning of these biblical terms, he refers them to the transcendent divine reality and reads in them the identity of being of the Son with the Father upon which he establishes the 'homoousion'. This task, though, demands a deep assimilation of the inner logic which penetrates the biblical statements and a tight grip of the thread which unites the one text with the other unto a coherent whole.²²¹ He calls this hermeneutical method the "collection of the mind of the Scriptures" and it consists of placing the particular biblical texts or terms in the narrower and wider context in which they appear and their harmonisation in order to determine their meaning and function in each occurrence.²²²

On this basis, Athanasius asserts that the 'Father-Son' language in the Bible does not impose human patterns of existence on God, but indicates the nature of their relations. Bearing also in mind the arguments on the 'to beget' language, the description which Athanasius gives for those relations, could be summarized as follows.

a) The Son is regarded as the natural offspring of the Father and not as one of his creatures. As such, their relations are intimate and pertain to their inner being, because the Son is generated from the essence of the Father and he is not a product of his creative activity on account of which he would exist 'outside' of the Father and would have no connection to what the Father is in his being. Athanasius' statement is simple and plain: "If then he is Son, he is not a creature; if creature, not son, for great is the difference between them, and son and creature cannot be the same, unless his essence is considered at once from God and external to God".²²³

²²¹ T.F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics, Eph*, 53 (1971) 148.

²²² This method provides the interpreter with the flexibility to reinterpret and apply the biblical texts on the particular demands of the time using terminology, which might be outside the biblical vocabulary, but conveys the mind of the Scripture. This is highly justifiable by Athanasius, since it is his main argument for the vindication of the insertion of the "homoousios" in the Nicene Creed. See DECR 19-20:25,488D-452B; AFRO 6:26,1040A-C.

²²³ DECR 13:25,440A; Cf. also SER2 7, DION2 etc.

b) The designation of the Son as natural offspring from the essence of the Father does not imply "division" or "partition" of his essence, but only acknowledges the nature of the Son's genuine divinity. Since the Father is pure spirit and exists beyond partitions or divisions which occur to bodily beings, the outcome of the divine generation will also have the same attributes: "But God, being without parts, is Father of the Son without partition or passion, for there is neither effluence of the immaterial, nor influx from without as among men. And being uncompounded in nature, he is Father of the Only Son".²²⁴ Begetting does not necessarily imply division of the essence of the begetter, because it does not diminish it, neither does the offspring share a nature lesser than its father's, but both terms simply indicate that the offspring has the same attributes with its begetter: "And since to be participated no one of us would ever call passion or division of God's essence (for it has been shewn and acknowledged that God is participated and to be participated is the same thing as to beget), therefore that which is begotten is neither passion nor division of that blessed essence. Hence it is not incredible that God could have a Son, the offspring of his own essence, nor do we imply passion or division of God's essence, when we speak of 'Son' and 'Offspring', but rather we acknowledge the genuine and true and Only-begotten of God and so we believe",²²⁵ "for such as [ὅποια ἦ] and so as [ἕως ἄν ἦ] that blessed subsistence [*hypostasis*] is, the proper offspring from it must be the same".²²⁶

c) Addressing the divine persons as 'Father' and 'Son' also denotes their direct and immediate relations. If the Son is not generated naturally from the Father, then he must be Son by participation (ἐκ μετουσίᾳς). This, in turn, implies that there is a mediator between the Father and the Son, which unites them. The only possible candidate for this

²²⁴ DECR 11:25,436A.

²²⁵ CAR1 16:26,45B.

²²⁶ CAR3 65:26,461B. Obviously, this is the point up to which the Athanasian exegesis goes. The incomprehensibility of the divine nature, as we have said repeatedly, does not allow many explanations and definitions of the manner in which it exists.

service would be the Spirit, who according to Jn 16:14-15 "takes" from the Son. Moreover, the Son would be called 'son' of whatever that mediator would be. The directness of the 'Father-Son' language as it is expressed in the biblical texts excludes any mediator: "When the Father says 'This is my beloved son' and when the Son says that God is his own Father, it follows that what is participated is not external, but from the essence of the Father. And as to this again, if what participates in the Father is other than the essence of the Son, an equal impropriety will meet us, because it will lie in between the Father and the essence of the Son, whatever that might be".²²⁷

All in all, to acknowledge the Son as natural offspring or Son of the Father in the real ontological sense, at once includes, for Athanasius, the concept of the "homoousion" without any special reference to it being needed: "Isaac does not make, but begets Jacob naturally and is *homoousios* with him, and so does Jacob for Jude and his brothers. For as mad as one would be to claim that a house or a ship is *homoousios* with its builder, so it is proper for one to say that every son is *homoousios* with his father. If then, they are Father and Son, it is necessary that the Son is truly and naturally a Son. This is the meaning of the Son being *homoousios* with the Father".²²⁸

The second element which Athanasius takes up is the unqualified use of the verb "to be" (ἐστί), not only in Mat. 3:17 but also in all texts which talk about the Son. The verb's particular significance is that it points to the eternity of the Son. Athanasius bases this assertion on two arguments:

a) All the biblical statements which define the status of the Son, talk about his existence using the verb mainly in the simple present tense and unqualified by any limiting chronological definitions or other reasoning. In contrast, the verses which refer to creatures are always combined with chronological definitions that indicate the starting point of their

²²⁷ CAR1 15:26,44C.

²²⁸ SER2 6:26,617B.

existence. So, adverbs like 'when', 'before' etc. clearly define the creature's chronological origin in Gen. 2:5, Deut. 32:8, Jn. 14:28-29, Prov. 8:23-25, Jn. 8:58, Jer. 1:5, Ps. 90:2, Sus. 42, while in contrast 'ever' is applied to the being of the Son to indicate his timelessness: "Thus, it appears that the phrases 'once was not' and 'before it came to be' and 'when' and the like belong to things originate and creatures which come out of non-existence, and are alien to the Word. But if such terms are used in Scripture of things originate, but 'ever' for the Word, it follows, O you enemies of God, that the Son did not come out of non-existence".²²⁹

b) The verb "to be", for the Son, points to and is the result of the perfection of the divine nature. The essence of God has never been imperfect so that it would be liable to change with the generation of the Son. Therefore, because God is perfect and exists beyond time, he also begets perfectly and his offspring is eternal. He does not consist of that same essence which is possessed by human beings and which is imperfect, subject to temporal changes and, on account of which, they beget offsprings inferior to their parents and separated in time and space: "If he is called the eternal offspring of the Father, he is rightly so called. For the essence of the Father was never imperfect, so that what is proper to it should be added afterwards; nor as man from man has the Son been begotten, so as to be later than his Father's existence, but he is God's offspring and as being proper Son of God, who is ever, exists eternally. For whereas it is proper to men to beget in time on account of the imperfection of their nature, God's offspring is eternal, for his nature is ever perfect".²³⁰

²²⁹ CAR1 13:26,40B; CAR3 59.

²³⁰ CAR1 14:26,41B. For Athanasius, then, the argument of Arius that because the Son is begotten in contrast to God who is "unbegotten" or "ingenerate" implies temporal secondariness is groundless. In fact, Athanasius asserts that because he is said to be begotten, it excludes any suspicion of time or chronological starting point, because God exists before time and the concept of generation is proper to the nature of God acquiring its characteristics from it. Unlike with the verb "to create", such implications would be positively plausible. Therefore, he insists so much on the distinction between "to create" and "to beget" and especially on the point that the existence of the Son is never said to have been created, but that is proper to God's essence: "All everywhere tell us about the being [τὸ εἶναι] of the Son, and never of him being created or

Although Athanasius does not make any specific exegetical comments on the adjective "beloved" (ἀγαπητός) it is clear from the contexts in which Mat. 3:17 appears that it emphasizes the uniqueness of the Son as the one and only offspring of the Father.²³¹ The argument is characteristic: "For being uncompounded in nature, he is Father of one only Son. This is why he is Only-begotten and alone in the Father's bosom, and alone is acknowledged by the Father to be from him, saying 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'".²³² Athanasius is very much based on the fact that such a statement about the Son is unprecedented and absolutely unique in the Bible without one single occurrence where it might be applied to another being. This acutely differentiates the Son's natural sonship from the adoptionist form of sonship which applies to human beings and is acquired as a gift of the divine grace.

2.2.1.2 The meaning of sonship "by participation" (ἐκ μετουσίας)

The unique sense of Jesus Christ's sonship becomes the criterion by means of which Athanasius distinguishes it from the sonship which Scripture ascribes to human beings when it calls them sons of God. As we noted earlier, the texts which Athanasius uses as the source for this kind of sonship are *Is 1:2*, *Deut 13:19-14:1* and *Jn 1:12*. The differences which he discerns in these texts from those which refer to the Son are the following.

Firstly, Athanasius observes that these verses state clearly and plainly the reason for which human beings become sons of God: the necessary presupposition is faithfulness

by will" (CAR3 60:448C).

²³¹ Scholars identify the meaning of 'beloved' and 'only-begotten' both of which are used to designate Jesus' unique relation to the Father. A. Richardson explains briefly: "The peculiarly Johannine expression ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός is used of Christ in the NT only at John... and is a synonym for the Synoptic ἀγαπητός, as both μονογενῆς and ἀγαπητός are used in LXX to translate the same Hebrew word meaning 'only'" (*The Christology*, p. 152; so also O. Cullmann, p. 298). See also the special essay by C. Turner which expounds in detail the meaning of the term, "Ο ΥΙΟΣ ΜΟΥ Ο ΑΓΑΠΗΤΟΣ", *JTS*, 27 (1926) 113-129.

²³² DECR 11:25,436A.

to God and obedience to his commandments, which exercises their imitation of his attributes and improves them in virtue and grace (Jn. 1:12, "To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God"). In contrast, as we have seen, the verses which refer to the Son are unqualified and without any reasoning for him being a Son. He is alone the natural offspring belonging to (ἴδιον) the essence of the Father eternally.

Athanasius establishes the second difference on the Christological dimension of human sonship according to Mat. 11:27 ("No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him") and Jn. 10:35 ("If he called them sons to whom the Word of God came"): the sonship which human beings acquire is due to the natural sonship which only the Son possesses. The Incarnation of the Word is the hermeneutical key to the sonship of human beings, because the latter finds its ultimate reason, justification and fulfilment in the assumption of human nature by the Word and in its unification with God: "For because of our relationship to his body, we too have become God's temple and in consequence are made God's sons, so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped and beholders report, as the apostle says, that God is in them of a truth".²³³ He also argues "For there could not be adoption apart from the real Son who says 'No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son will reveal' ... and all that are called sons and gods, whether in earth or in heaven, were adopted and deified through the Word and the Son himself is the Word. It is plain that through him are they all, and he himself before all, or rather he himself only is very Son and he alone is very God from very God ... for he is offspring of the Father's essence".²³⁴

Finally, Athanasius argues that if the Son did not possess his sonship by nature he would not be able to communicate it to human beings. The reason is that he could not give what belongs not to him but to the Giver, and also that since all created beings are in need

²³³ CAR1 43:26,100D.

²³⁴ CAR1 39:26,93A.



of salvation they receive only an amount sufficient for themselves and not for others. Moreover, because the sonship of human beings is not an essential attribute of them but an acquisition from God, it follows that it cannot be permanent but only temporary. Human beings who received the grace of adoption on account of their virtue, were deprived of it when they fell and they received it back when they repented. This kind of sonship is a movable gift; it can be given and taken away. The sonship of the Son is permanent, because it is natural and he possesses it essentially, therefore he is able to communicate it.²³⁵

With these arguments Athanasius maintains the uniqueness of the Son as the Son of God by nature, while all others are called 'sons' of God in the Scriptures because they participate in his sonship. This uniqueness is further emphasized by means of the associated Christological title "Only-begotten" (*Μονογενής*).

2.2.1.3 *The Son as Only-begotten*

Jn. 1:14: "We have beheld this glory, glory as of the Only-begotten Son from the Father"

Jn. 1:18: "The Only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known"

The designation of the Son as "Only-begotten"²³⁶ appears most prominently and explicitly in the Johannine Gospel, but as is clear from what we have said previously, Athanasius studies its presence in the wider biblical context. The Son of God, whose status is at stake, is clearly one and only and this uniqueness in biblical expression also

²³⁵ SYNO 51:26,784B; CAR1 37:26,89A.

²³⁶ DECR 11:25,436A-B. New Testament scholars are divided between two different readings in the verse as "only-begotten son" and "only-begotten god" (D. Fennema, "John 1:18: 'God the only Son'", *NTS* 31 (1985) 124-135, in which the main scholarly discussion is reproduced; the same also in B.A. Mastin, "A neglected feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel", *NTS*, pp. 37ff who produces evidence from all textual authorities). Athanasius uses the former reading in both his quotations and general usage of "only-begotten", in the context of generation and sonship. He uses the form "only-begotten god" (GENT 41), but independently from the Johannine text and as a consequence of the former, as he uses also the forms "only-begotten Word or Wisdom". Although the term "only-begotten god" appears more frequently in Arian documents (SYNO 15, 18, 23) than the Athanasian writings, "only-begotten son" is generally maintained.

constitutes the basis for his absolute ontological differentiation from all others, who are adopted 'sons' of God. This uniqueness, however, was also interpreted differently by the Arians.

Arius differentiated the Son from both the Father and human beings and regarded his uniqueness as being due to his position somewhere in between them. The Son as 'begotten' is inferior to the Father, who is 'ingenerate', and as 'only-begotten' is greater than human beings, because he is uniquely related to the Father. According to Athanasius' evidence, there were two Arian versions of this unique relationship: first, that the Son is called 'Only-begotten' because he was alone created by God through God's Wisdom and Logos as their perfect image, while all other creatures were created through his acting as mediator.²³⁷ Second, that because God foreknew his goodness adopted him as the Son *par excellence* and granted to him all the divine glory and attributes; therefore he alone participates directly in the Father, while all human beings participate in him.²³⁸ Obviously, this was a highly compromising attempt to keep the Son as close as possible to the Father and it was going along with the idea of some sort of 'demigod', as has been successfully characterized.²³⁹ Because of the ambiguity of his teaching, Arius could easily manipulate

²³⁷ DECR 7-8:25,428Bff; CAR1 5:26,21A-B; Cf. R. Williams' analysis of this kind of relation of the Son to God according to Arius. In particular he explains: "The divine λόγος and σοφία create in the Son their closest possible finite image, and the Son may be said to 'share' in these divine powers in so far as he is directly their product. He demonstrates the immediate and unimpeded effect of λόγος and σοφία, and so in some significant measure reflects what they are like" (*The Logic*, p. 74).

²³⁸ DECR 9-10:25,432Bff; CAR1 5:op. cit. We could probably detect here an attempt to insert also the Christological criterion in their teaching. It is indicative, however, of the astute manner in which they played with ideas: the Son was a creature, but not as one of all; he was created in time, but not the time that all know; he is called Wisdom and Logos, but not the real one, which is in God; he possesses all the divine properties, but not essentially because he received them from the Father. This sort of argument always derives from desperate attempts to compromise incompatible qualities and it confuses things so much, that an exceptionally high degree of serious discussion is demanded.

²³⁹ A. Heron, *op. cit.*, p. 70; Gregg-Groh considers this notion "not a demotion of the Son, but a promotion of believers", "The centrality", p. 314; J.L. Neve, *A history*, p. 115. It probably belongs to this category of understanding the interpretation by biblical scholars of the term 'μονογενής' as 'one of its kind' which takes the second component of the adjective as deriving from 'γένος' and not from 'γεννᾶν' (so J. Robinson, *Twelve more NT studies*, p.173. J. Robinson tries to prove that patristic theology abused the Johannine texts by taking them out of context and imposing on them the doctrine of the Trinity that John never intended). This interpretation is of course erroneous not only from the etymological point of view, but especially from the biblical point of view, which does not provide any grounds for supporting it. This has been adequately proved by J. Dahms in his well argued essay "The Johannine use of monogenes

the ecclesiastical language through the "yes...but" pattern, as in his famous statement, "a creature of God, but not as one of the creatures, an offspring, but not as one of the offsprings".²⁴⁰

Athanasius responds to the first Arian version of the "Only-begotten", with three arguments. Firstly, he contests the allegation that only the Son was created by God, and the other creatures through the Son, appealing to the biblical texts where God comes in direct relationships with the creation, in fact where the existence of creation and creatures depends on him. Obviously, Athanasius would have numerous references for this point, but according to his familiar method he chooses the characteristic ones. So, he recalls the examples of God's interference in the Jacob story in Egypt, in the story of Abraham and Abimeleh, of Moses on the Mount Sinai and in the battle with the Amalekites. He also quotes Is. 40:28, Jer. 1:5, Ps. 99:3 and Is. 66:2, where God acts through his Word and his Hand, and he complements them with 1 Cor. 8:6, where God acts through Jesus Christ. Using these texts, he denies the Arian view of the mediating role of the Son in the creation saying: "He is the One who through his own Word has created all things small and great and it is not possible to divide the creation and say this is the Father's and this is the Son's, but they are of One God who uses his own Word as a Hand, and in him does all things. This God himself has shewn us, when he says 'My hand has made all these'".²⁴¹

reconsidered" (*NTS*, 29 (1983) 222-232) in which he shows that "the majority view of modern scholarship has very little to support" this interpretation and that "'only begotten' is the most accurate translation of all". Cf. also T.C. De Kruijf, "The glory of the only son" in *Studies in John*, pp. 111-123, who lends to the term more soteriological than Christological nature.

²⁴⁰ *Letter to Alexander*, op. cit.; Cf. also CAR2 19:26,183C. M. Wiles stresses special emphasis on this point of the Arian doctrine, which he calls the "model qualifier" method. He claims that Arius was especially interested in qualifying the terms he used and equally determined to speak about the Son not only as "one of the creatures", but also as "not as one of the creatures" (*In Defense*, pp. 344f). His intention is to "lighten" the weight of the Arian error asserting that Arius moderated his statements on account of a method which is "common in theology". However, M. Wiles misses the point that what condemned ecclesiastically Arius was not his method, but the result of his method. However, it was this method that provided Arius all the power of creating the so difficult to clear confusion of terms and language.

²⁴¹ DECR 7:25,428C.

Secondly, Athanasius proves the logical inconsistency of the Arian interpretation with two observations: a) if the "absolute hand of the ingenerate" (ἄκρατος χεὶρ τοῦ ἀγενήτου) could not create, because of God's absolute transcendence and immateriality, then it could not create the Son either, who is also "γενητός", and b) If all things were created through a mediator, then the Son would also need a mediator before him. If this is not so and God could himself make a creature, then the creation of the Son as mediator was pointless.

Finally, Athanasius argues that the Son is not the only one witnessed in the Scripture as created by God alone. He alludes to the example of Adam, who among human beings is the only one created by God alone, but he does not belong to a different ontological category from the human beings. He also alludes to Jer. 1:5, Is. 44:2, Ps. 118:73, Is. 49:5 and Ps. 32:9, which witness the continuing creative act of God in the birth of every human being.

With these arguments Athanasius contends that the first Arian version of the "Only-begotten" does not lend to the Son a distinctive attribute, which human beings do not appear to have. The implications of the second interpretation of the term, relating to the concept of participation, are similar. Athanasius argues that the source of every kind of sonship is the Father, not the Son. According to Is. 1:2, which witnesses the beginnings of the sonship of human beings, it is evident that they participate in the Father and not in the Son, therefore they are called 'sons of God' and not 'sons of the Son' or sons of the one in whom they participate.²⁴² The fact, however, that both the Son and human beings participate in the Father, does not equate their sonship, because the Son would not differ from them ontologically as the Only-begotten demands, since there would be other beings of the same nature. Therefore, Athanasius insists that from whatever aspect one examines

²⁴² Cf. the discussion on the link between "begetting" and "participating" by Athanasius in CAR1 14-16:26,41Aff. R. Williams expounds on it in detail from the Arian point of view in *The Logic*, pp. 66ff.

the term, it demands such a radical distinction between the Son and human beings and a relation of the Son to the Father. It is compelling, then, that the terms 'Father' and 'Son' should be understood in their real ontological sense, since, according to the data of nature, "what is naturally begotten from any one and does not accrue to him from without, nature acknowledges him as son, and this is what the name implies".²⁴³

The understanding of the term 'Only-begotten' as applying to the relation between Father and Son and not between human beings and the Son, is even more fully explained when Athanasius advances it against the Arian rendering of the phrase "*the beginning of his ways unto his works*" in Prov. 8:22 and the title "first-born" in Col 1:15, 18 and Rom. 8:29. When Athanasius interprets Prov. 8:22, he faces the same problem with the first version of the 'Only-begotten', which obviously relates the two texts and lends coherence to the Arian exegesis.²⁴⁴ Thus, it appears that the Arians put on a par the words "ways" and "unto his works" and held that the "ways" of the Lord were the creation of the universe, which began with the creation of the Son. He was alone created by God and therefore he is called 'only-begotten', while he mediated to the creation of beings that followed. They supported the point with the adjective "firstborn", which St. Paul uses in Col. 1:15 ("the firstborn of all creation"), Col. 1:18 ("the firstborn from the dead") and Rom. 8:29 ("the firstborn among many children"), as indicative of the relation of the Son to the creation of which he is considered to be the 'first'.²⁴⁵ Since God was "alone" before the creation,²⁴⁶

²⁴³ DECR 10:25,433A.

²⁴⁴ R.P.C. Hanson observes that Prov. 8:22 "always lurks in the background" every time the Arian teaching of the creaturehood of the Son comes up (*The Search*, p. 8).

²⁴⁵ Cf. Athanasius' quotations of the Arian arguments: "he is equated with the creatures and he precedes them in terms of time"; and "if he is first-born of all creation, it is clear that he is indeed one of that creation"; (CAR2 62-63:26,277Cf.).

²⁴⁶ Although it is not stated explicitly, we believe that this is an underlying idea of the Arian doctrine. We have come to this view following the sequence: since Arius held that God is alone without beginning and everything that exists has a beginning, it entails that there was time, somewhere in eternity, when God was all alone. We are accustomed to such "kinds" of time introduced by Arius, especially in relation to the Son's generation (ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν). Thus, God had nothing else, as it were, to deal with apart from himself, since nothing existed. God's first work was the creation of the universe and he started with the Son. For God's utter loneliness as basic concept in the Arian teaching see G.D. Dragas, *op. cit.*, p. 49f and passim (theomonism); A. Heron, *op. cit.*, p. 68 (remote transcendence); T.E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology*, pp.

there were no "ways" in front of him to undertake; they all began with the creation, when he commenced calling beings into existence, starting with the Son. Thus, the biblical expressions "beginning of his ways", "firstborn" and "Only-begotten" are understood as jointly bearing the meaning of the 'first work of God's creation' or 'first creature'. The Arians also found the reason for this distinctive position of the Son in the phrase "*Unto his works*", upon which they developed the concept of the "mediator-creator".²⁴⁷ This is evident in Athanasius' quotation from the *Thalia*: "God, willing to create us, created somebody, whom he called Wisdom and Logos and Son, in order to create us through him".²⁴⁸ This interpretation is exegetically very important, because it appears to be the regulative principle for the further interpretation by the Arians of all those biblical passages, which describe God as creating through his Word, as we shall see later.

Athanasius develops two arguments against the Arian interpretation of 'first-creature' concept.²⁴⁹ a) "first-creature" opposes "only-begotten", because it implies that the creation of the Son was followed by the creation of other creatures similar in nature, from which he differs in virtually nothing. He might have acquired priority in time and superiority in being, according to the Arians, but not the absolute uniqueness that "only-begotten" demands: 'only' does not logically follow 'first'; b) priority in time does not apply to creatures, because none of them was created individually and before the others, but they were all created at once and according to their species; therefore, if the Son was a creature, he should have been created with the rest and not before them. Thus, both statements "only-begotten" and "before the ages", can be properly understood only if the Son is considered "other than creatures" ("ἄλλος τῶν κτισμάτων"), that is, different

189-192; E. Meijering, "Athanasius on the Father", p. 11f.

²⁴⁷ CAR2 71:26,297A; Cf. also the similar statement in CAR1 26:26,65A

²⁴⁸ CAR1 5: *op. cit.*

²⁴⁹ CAR2 48-49:26,249Af.

in nature and essence from the other creatures. In effect, the Son bears the "resemblance" ("ὁμοίωσις") and "image" ("εἰκόνα") of God, who is also One and Only.

Using the same contrast, Athanasius also examines the meaning of the adjective "firstborn" (Col 1:15, 18; Rom. 8:29). First, he argues that it is also incompatible with the "Only-begotten", because it refers to an opposite situation: one is called "only-begotten", because one has no brothers at all, while one is called "firstborn", because one has brothers.²⁵⁰ Thus, in the case of the Son, if, on the one hand, the priority is given to the latter and is applied to his creation by the Father, the former cannot be explained at all, because many other similar creatures followed. On the other hand, if the priority is given to the former as the only Wisdom and Word of God, the latter can be explained on account of his incarnation and the assumption by him of created human nature.

On this ground, Athanasius argues that the "ways" of the Lord cannot be the creation of the world, but the re-creation, the redemptive work of Christ, which aimed to the restoration of the possibility of salvation. Christ is the beginning of these "ways", because through the assumption and the succeeding deification of human body he is the first who became himself "the way" (Jn 14:6) towards immortality and paradise. The first "way", which failed because of Adam, could be restored only by God himself and not by another creature. Therefore, the phrase "unto his works" ("εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ") does not mean "to create the works", but designates the purpose of the Son's incarnation which is "the salvation of the works".

Athanasius establishes the last point on three further clarifications: a) he illustrates the phrase "unto his works" with Jn 5:36 ("for the works that the Father has granted me to accomplish...bear me witness") and Jn 17:4 ("I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you have given me to do"). He observes that the "works" of

²⁵⁰ Athanasius says: "So, if he is first-born, let him not be only-begotten; but if he is only-begotten, as he is indeed, let first-born be explained" CAR2 62:26,280A.

8:22 are the works which the Father gave to Christ and obviously predate his "creation". This entails that the verb "he created me" in 8:22 cannot refer to his ontological beginning, but to his incarnation. The three verses are consequently parallel and the phrase "the Father gave me his works" carries the same purport as the phrase "the Lord created me unto his works"; b) the verb "he created" cannot refer to the ontological beginning of the Son, because its purpose is specified as "unto his works". The verb "to create" means that God calls beings "into existence" ("εἰς τὸ ζῆν") out of non-existence and not "unto" other beings ("εἰς ἔργα"). The Logos of God in turn is never said to come into being, but only that "he was" (Jn 1:3); c) the fact that 8:22 contains the reason for the verb "he created" ("unto his works") denotes that it does not refer to his ontological beginning as divine being, but to his Incarnation. The Bible expresses the statements about the divinity of the Son clearly and plainly without the combination of any reasoning or purpose.²⁵¹ Thus, Athanasius summing up his interpretation of Prov. 8:22 says,

"So, if it said in the Proverbs 'he created' we must not conceive that the whole Word is in nature a creature, but that he put on the created body and that God created him for our sake, preparing for him the created body, as it is written, for us, that in him we might be capable of being renewed and deified".²⁵²

Refuting thus the most powerful Arian argument, Athanasius makes clear that there is no biblical evidence of relating the Son with the notion of creation in any sense. The only language which is used for him in order to describe his relation to the Father is the language of generation and this again in a unique and unprecedented manner. This exclusiveness entails the Son's generic alienation from creatures and identification with the Father, being considered the genuine (γνήσιον) and true (ἀληθῶς) proper to his essence (ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας) offspring, for what is begotten from a human being is also a human

²⁵¹ CAR2 51-52:26,253Cf.

²⁵² CAR2 47:26,248B.

being and what is begotten from God is also God.²⁵³ In this account he is fittingly considered 'homoousios' with the Father:

"Just as we could not call our fathers makers, but begetters, and as no one would call us their creatures, but sons by nature and one in essence [*homoousios*] with them: so, if God be Father, he must be Father of one who is by nature a Son and one in essence with him. Abraham did not create Isaac, he begat him. Bezabel and Eliab did not beget but made all the works of the Tabernacle. The shipwright and the housebuilder do not beget the things they make; they work, the one on the ship, the other on the house. Isaac does not make Jacob; he begets him by nature, a son. And likewise Jacob, Judah and his brethren. Just as one would be mad to say that the house is one in essence with the builder and the ship with the shipwright, so it is correct to say that every son is one in essence with his own father. If then there is Father and Son, the Son must be Son by nature and in truth. But this is to be one in essence with the Father as we have shown from many instances".²⁵⁴

2.2.2 Word (Λόγος) and Wisdom (Σοφία)

Athanasius also speaks about the Word or Wisdom of God in terms of being begotten or generated from the Father.²⁵⁵ The concept of generation and the intimate and direct relationships between Begetter and offspring are the common ground upon which Athanasius joins the two titles "Son" and "Word" and shifts the emphasis from the one to the other. This transition is clearly evident in the following text: "But if he is Son, as the Father says and the Scriptures proclaim, then 'Son' is nothing else but what is generated from the Father, and what is generated from the Father is his Word and Wisdom and Radiance".²⁵⁶ The combination of the two concepts in Athanasius' thought derives from the

²⁵³ "For he is God, being the Son of God" (CAR1 49:26,113C); "For if he is the Word of the Father and true Son of his, he is God of God" (CAR1 10:26,32B).

²⁵⁴ SER2 6:26,617A; for the translation see C.R.B. Shapland, *The Letters of St. Athanasius*, pp. 160-161.

²⁵⁵ In the very comprehensive article in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* (IV, pp. 69ff), it has been presented the multiplicity of meanings and applications of the term 'word' both in the Hellenistic and Jewish contexts. Although the use of the term varies in Scripture it is clear from the arguments that we shall look at in this section the meaning which prevails is that of the speaking act of God for Athanasius and initially for Arius, before developing the mediator teaching. T.E. Pollard argues for the Origenistic cosmological approach to the Word of God by Arius and the soteriological by Athanasius ("Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius", pp. 282-287). Cf. also the analysis of the 'Logos' doctrine by G.C. Zaphiris, "The Word of God as fountain of life", pp. 425ff.

²⁵⁶ CAR1 14:26,41C.

Johannine Christology expressed in full in the Prologue of the Gospel.²⁵⁷ The Christological titles "Son", "Offspring", "Only begotten" and "Word" are the dominant elements of this text and are used alternatively for the specification of the identity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Athanasius' appeal to this text is constant and frequently instant, as it is easily observed throughout his works.²⁵⁸

The use of the Christological titles 'Word' and 'Wisdom' is a very important element in Athanasius' argumentation about the eternal generation, because it reinforces both the understanding of the Father as "generative nature" (γεννητικὴ φύσις)²⁵⁹ and of the different nature of the generation of the Son from human generation. Athanasius mainly develops three points around the concept of the "Word": firstly, he sets it in opposition to the Arian doctrine about the mediator-creator and secondly to the subsequent allegations about the created nature of the Son, because it intensifies the distinction between "offspring" and "creature". Finally, he explains the manner in which God is conceived of as begetting his Word, stressing the significance of the term for the correct understanding of the divine generation.

2.2.2.1 The Word of God as mediator to the creation

The different understanding of the Word of God by Athanasius and Arius is based on two fundamentally different approaches to the being of God and to the exegesis of biblical data. According to Athanasius' presentation of the teaching of the *Thalia*, Arius held that "there are two wisdoms; first the attribute coexistent with God and next the Son

²⁵⁷ See G.C. Zaphiris, *op. cit.*, pp. 444ff.

²⁵⁸ "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? ... but as being the only Word of God was he preached by John 'The word was made flesh' and 'all things were made by him'. Wherefore of him alone our Lord Jesus Christ and of his oneness with the Father are written and set forth the testimonies, both of the Father signifying that the Son is one and of the saints aware of this and saying that the word is one and that he is Only-begotten" (CAR2 39:26,229B).

²⁵⁹ CAR2 2:26,149B-C.

who was originated in this wisdom and was only named Wisdom and Word as participating in it. 'For wisdom, said he, by the will of the wise God, has its existence in Wisdom'. In like manner, he says that there is another Word in God besides the Son and that the Son again, as participating in it, is named Word and Son according to grace".²⁶⁰ Based on an anthropological approach to the mystery of God, Arius applies human patterns and models of existence and regards the "Word" as an impersonal power or attribute of the being of God, which cannot be ontologically identified with Jesus Christ as the "Word" of God and Creator of the world, because the latter is a concrete individual being.²⁶¹ The Son is called "Word" only "καταχρηστικῶς"²⁶² because he acted as mediator to creation on behalf of the Father, having received from God the art of creating.²⁶³ This view implies that in his exegesis of the biblical texts concerning the creation of the world, Arius would identify the New Testament texts, which attribute the creation of the world to Christ, with the Old Testament ones, which attribute the creation of the world to God's Word and Wisdom, but he would not lend to them the same ontological significance. This interpretation is discriminating rather than synthesising, because it obviously has its starting point in cosmological speculation and is primarily

²⁶⁰ CAR1 5:26,21B.

²⁶¹ It can be seen that Christ is in a sense regulative for the final formulation of his view, since he could not relate him as a concrete being with the term "Word", which designated a different ontological reality. T.E. Pollard observes that the Arians drew "a rigid distinction between the *Logos* and the *Son*" ("Logos and Son", p. 284), which R. Williams explains thus: "The point is straightforward: divine properties are eternal and impersonal. Of course God 'has' σοφία and λόγος, but they are qualities belonging to his substance. Thus to say that the Son is ἴδιος to God is to reduce the son to being an impersonal quality... This is indeed 'Sabellianism' in Arian eyes (and is almost certainly the view of Paul of Samosata - the divine Logos is 'internal' to the father's substance and does not subsist in any other way; between Jesus of Nazareth and the impersonal divine quality of rationality there is no intermediary subsistent, no heavenly Son or hypostatic Word). But for Arius, traditional orthodoxy makes it quite clear that there *is* a pre-existent heavenly Son, existing καθ' ὑπόστασιν; the Son is himself an οὐσία, a proper subject of predication" (*The Logic*, pp. 59-60 and cf. the whole of his discussion on the point in pp. 58-62).

²⁶² M. Wiles argues that the term renders the meaning of "in a lesser sense" as distinct from "strict sense" (In defence, pp. 342-343). R. Williams puts more emphasis on the negative connotations of the term and renders it as "speaking in metaphors". He explains the meaning of metaphor according to the Porphyrian theory, which distinguishes between 'metaphor' and 'properly' (κυρίως), 'ἴδιον ὄνομα' and 'ὀνόματι' or 'κατ' ἐπινοίαν' (*op. cit.*, p. 76). R.P.C. Hanson translates as 'loosely' (*The Search*, p. 16).

²⁶³ CAR2 28:26,205C: "But they say, 'though he is a creature and of things originate, yet as from a master and artificer has he learned to frame and thus ministered to God who taught him'".

determined by ontological definition of the biblical terms according to human logic and experience of reality. This is also evident from the argument which Arius advanced against the literal understanding of the Word as the speaking act of God: if this was so, he argued, it would be impossible to identify which one of the many words that God utters is the One and Only Word, which Athanasius and his party supported.²⁶⁴ Holding this end of the string, he developed the rest of his doctrine consistently, ending up with the absolute ontological alienation of the Son from the Father.

The biblical texts which constitute the source for the Word doctrine are witnessed only by Athanasius when he develops his own arguments on the subject. Although there is silence on the Arian side, we could probably take them as standard texts for which the Arians would have no objection. These are the following:

Gen. 1:3,26: "And God said: 'Let there be light'", "And God said: 'Let us make man'"

Ps. 32:4: "For the Word of the Lord is upright and his work is done in faithfulness"

Ps. 32:6: "By the word of God the heavens were made"

Ps. 32:9 (148:5): "For he spoke and they were made, he commanded and they were created"

Ps. 103:24: "In wisdom you have made them all"

Jn. 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word...All things were made through him"

1 Cor. 8:6b: "And one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things"

Col. 1:17: "In him all things consist"

On the basis of these texts Athanasius develops his arguments against the above mentioned Arian understanding of the Word. He primarily finds the origins of the 'Word' doctrine in the description of creation in the first chapter of *Genesis* on which he comments:

"For the Word of God is Framer and Maker and he is the Father's will. Hence it is that the divine Scripture says, not that one heard and answered,

²⁶⁴ DECR 16:25,444A. C. Stead has argued that Athanasius misunderstood the Arian claim, because it is not "a radically reductionist view of the Logos" that considers him a mere creature, but one that intends to exalt him above all creatures: "Contrasted to God the Father he must inevitably be seen as belonging to the created order; but if we consider his place within that order, he appears as first-born and unique. If my argument is sound, there is no need for us to accept Athanasius' claim that Arius regarded the Logos as merely one of the creatures" ("Arius on Gods many words", p. 157). This was exactly the problem: the Son does not belong to the created order in any way however exalted he is.(!)

as to the manner or nature of the things which he wished made; but God only said 'Let it become' and he adds, 'And it became'; for what he thought good and counselled, that immediately the Word began to do and finish...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 and the Wisdom in which Wisdom is also the will of the Father. For 'God said' is explained in the 'Word'.²⁶⁵

There are two fundamental points that can be observed in this text: a) Athanasius finds the ultimate fulfilment and justification of the concept 'Word of God' in the creation of the world, which God brought into existence out of non-existence through oral commands. b) He understands the term 'word' literally as denoting the speaking act of God, and with this he contests the metaphorical sense which the Arians supported. He tries to prove that no concept of 'mediator', i.e., another being, is suggested or implied in the biblical narrative, but that it is the very Word of the Father acting. The main arguments which he deploys are the following.

a) The biblical description of creation does not imply any mediator who would act as a minister or servant of God, obeying his command to create the world. Such an idea would demand a sort of dialogue between God and his 'minister' as happens in the cases when God entrusts special missions to his servants (Gen. 15:8, Ex. 4:13, Zach. 1:3,12). There is no such dialogue or any other indication of anybody else acting with God in the creation of the world, but rather that all creatures were the immediate result of his Word. Athanasius observes that 'God said' is followed by 'it became', because "when God commands others, whether he speaks to angels, or converses with Moses, or commands Abraham, then the hearer answers; ...But when that Word himself works and creates, then there is no questioning and answer, for the Father is in the Word and the Word is in the Father. It suffices to will and the work is done".²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ CAR2 31:26,213B; Cf. also CAR2 20, 22; DECR9; The discussion of Athanasius on the 'mediator' of the Arians is quite extensive and recurrent. Here we will present only the major arguments, which are especially connected with biblical verses.

²⁶⁶ CAR2 31:26,213A.

b) The ministers of God are employed by him in order to communicate his messages and commandments to men, but they are never witnessed to be sent to create. In the creation of beings it is only the Word of God that is present and it is only through the Word that God created and sustains everything. Therefore the ministers of God are many in number, but the Word is One and Only. This contrast of uniqueness with multiplicity holds when one considers the Father-Son and God-creatures relationship: "If then the Son were a creature and one of beings originate, there must have been many such sons that God might have many such ministers, just as there is a multitude of those others. But if this is not to be seen, since 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 belongs to the Father. Hence there are not many words, but one only Word of the one Father, and one image of the one God".²⁶⁷

c) It has never been possible to distinguish between beings created by God and beings created by the Word, because God creates through his Word and the one can never be considered separately from the other. He illustrates this indivisible unity of action through the 'light-effulgence' image and Jn. 5:19 ("For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise"): "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 the grace, that he should not give it in the Son, for the Son is in the father as the radiance in the light. For not as in need, but as a Father in his own Wisdom has God founded the earth... Where the Father is or is named, there plainly is the Son also".²⁶⁸

d) Creativity in its absolute sense belongs only to God and it is not an 'art' that can be taught and learned. As he explains the difference lies in the way in which God and human beings are said to create. When creating refers to the latter it denotes the skill to

²⁶⁷ CAR2 27:26,204C.

²⁶⁸ CAR2 41:26,236A.

reconstruct pre-existing material into new forms (μεταρρυθμίζει), but when it refers to God it carries absolute ontological significance because it denotes creation of beings out of non-existence, according to the Pauline statement (Rom. 4:17). He argues that if the Word-mediator was himself also out of non-existence, he could not be the "creative cause" (ποιητικὸν αἴτιον) of others, since none has ever been possible to be so. Created beings can only reconstruct materials as "artificers" (τεχνίται) and are unable to order 'Let it be' as creators (ποιηταί). If this were possible for the created 'Word', then on the one hand all created beings would be naturally capable of creating, and on the other God would also be regarded as artificer, since he would not have anything more than creatures have. Finally, since all things were created by God through his Word (Gen. 1) and Jesus Christ claims to work the works of the Father (Jn. 5:17), one should look for another Word, which created the mediating creature, because this one could not be Creator and creature at the same time. The Arian teaching about two Words of God is fundamentally erroneous because there is no such evidence in biblical revelation: "If so, who was it by whom God gave command for the Son's creation? for a Word there must be by whom God gave command, and in whom the works are created; but you have no other to shew than the Word you deny, unless indeed you should devise again some new notion".²⁶⁹ Moreover, this inquiry is liable to be extended to an infinite number of creating divine words.²⁷⁰ All these implications, says Athanasius, "neither are written, nor are possible". The fact that God is the only one to be acknowledged as the Creator of every existence is acknowledged not only in the Bible, but also by any "human reason", as he characteristically asserts in a comprehensive summary of the implications of Jn. 1:1, Ps. 44:2, Jn. 1:3, 1 Cor. 8:6b, Col.

²⁶⁹ DECR 9:25,432B.

²⁷⁰ "For if the Son is a creature, by what word and by what wisdom was he made himself? for all the works were made through the word and wisdom as it is written 'In wisdom have you made them all' and 'All things were made by him and without him was not anything made'. But if it is he who is the word and wisdom by which all things come to be, it follows that he is not in the number of works, nor in short of things originate, but the offspring of the Father" (CAR2 5:26,157A).

1:16, which appears in the opening paragraphs of his *De Sententiae Dionysii*: "Nor is there any religious argument from human reason left them in their defence. For what man, Greek or barbarian, presumes to call one, whom he confesses to be God, a created thing or to say that he was not before he was made?"²⁷¹

e) Finally, the distinction of the 'Word' from all created beings is found by Athanasius in the characteristic hymn of the "three martyrs in Babylon" in Dan. 3:57 ("All the works of the Lord, bless the Lord") which contains a list that specifies by name all created beings. He argues that if the name 'word' was taken in the metaphorical sense, which the Arians supported, and belonged to a created being, then according to the hymn it should also be included in the list of the 'works' of the Lord, which are invited to 'bless the Lord'. However, it is neither included here, nor anywhere else in the Bible where the term 'Word of God' occurs is he addressed as a created being: "All other things are both praising and are works, but the Word is not a work, nor of those that praise, but is praised with the Father and worshipped and confessed as God, being his Word and Wisdom and the Framers of the works".²⁷²

Athanasius insistently maintains that the Christological title 'Word' belongs to the divine nature of the Son and occurs always in the context of the creation of the world alone. The biblical data do not provide any grounds for the Arian views therefore he consistently demands biblical references.²⁷³ The silence from the Arian side on this matter, which indirectly emerges from the Athanasian texts, suggests that they had no such backing to appeal to, since their teaching was in effect only partially grounded on the Bible. Nevertheless, it is certain that Athanasius would be very keen to respond to those

²⁷¹ DION 2:26,481B; also CAR2 21-22:192Aff, CAR2 27.

²⁷² CAR2 71:26,300A; SER2

²⁷³ "From what Scripture do they say this?" CAR3 59:26,448B and passim.

texts if they were to appear, as he did in other cases (e.g. the verbs 'to create' and 'to beget').

2.2.2.2 *The Word of God as the offspring of the Father*

Athanasius argues that, as the title "Son", so the "Word" implies that the Son is intimately and immanently related to the Father as bearing a unique and special "peculiarity" (ιδιότης) to the being of the Father.²⁷⁴ Such a relation can only be expressed through the 'to beget' language, because the word is generated from its subject and is not created by it. Therefore, according to the Christological application of Ps 44:2, he asserts that the Word of God springs from the heart of God and as such it can never be alleged as being created or chronologically secondary to the Father: "For what man, when he has heard Him whom he confesses to be God alone say 'This is my beloved Son'; and 'My heart uttered a good word' will venture to say that the Word out of the heart of God has come into being out of non-existence?".²⁷⁵ In this account Athanasius understands the Arian teaching as attributing to God a time that he was "speechless", depriving Him even of his creativity, since the Scriptures witness him to created only through this very Word of his, as he demonstrated above.²⁷⁶ This approach of Athanasius to the Word of God

²⁷⁴ "It has been shewn above and must be believed as true that the Word is from the Father and the Only offspring proper to him and natural. For whence may one conceive the Son to be, who is the Wisdom and the Word, in whom all things came to be, but from God himself?", DECR 21:25,453B; 24:25,457D.

²⁷⁵ DION 2:25,481B; also "If he is an offspring, how do you call him a creature? For no one says that he begets those which he creates, nor one calls creatures his own offsprings" (CAR2 48:26,248C). A little earlier (CAR2 22:26,193B) he explicitly condemns the famous Arian statement "an offspring, but not as one of the offsprings; a creature, but not as one of the creatures" as "impious" (ἄσεβές), "blasphemous" (βλάσφημον) and "senseless" (ἄνόητον).

²⁷⁶ "If God is Maker and Creator and creates his works through the Son and we cannot regard things which come to be except as being through the Word, is it not blasphemous, God being the Maker to say that his framing Word and Wisdom once was not? It is the same as saying that God is not Maker, if he had not his own framing word which is from him, but that by which he frames accrues to him from without and is alien from him and unlike in essence" (CAR1 17:26,47C-48A); also "Whereas God is, he [the Son] was eternally; since then the Father is ever, his radiance ever is, which is his Word. And again God who is has from himself his Word who also is; and neither has the Word been added, whereas he was not before, nor was the Father once without Word. For this assault upon the Son makes the blasphemy recoil upon the Father as if he devised himself a Wisdom and a Word and Son from without, for which ever all these titles you use, you denote the offspring from the Father as he has said (CAR1 25:26,64B; also SER2 2:26,609B).

exhibits a dynamic view of God, which includes life, production and movement, but without change or division. He is not a static being lost in its absolute transcendence, but a being that lives and acts having his being-in-act and his act-in-being.²⁷⁷ Therefore, Athanasius maintains that God is of "generative nature" and includes the generation of the Son in the very constitution of His nature or of his "fruitful essence" (καρπογόνος οὐσία). The following text fully illustrates the point and provides a comprehensive account of his understanding:

If then he is not a Son, let him be called a creature and let all that is said of works be said of him, nor let him and him alone be called son, nor word, nor wisdom; neither let God be called Father, but only Framer and Creator of things, which by him come to be; and let the creature be image and expression of his framing will and let him as they would have it, be without generative nature, so that there be neither word, nor wisdom, nor image of his own essence. For if he is not Son, neither is he image. But if there is not a son, how then say you that God is a Creator? Since all things that come to be are through the Word and in Wisdom and without this nothing can be, whereas you say he had not that in and through which he makes all things. For if the divine nature is not fruitful itself, but barren, as they hold, as a light that does not lighten and a dry fountain, are they not ashamed to speak of his possessing framing energy? Do they not blush to place before it what is by will? But if he frames things that are external to him and before were not, by willing them to be and becomes their Maker, much more will he first be Father of an offspring from his own essence".²⁷⁸

The crucial point in this interpretation of the biblical data is that Athanasius appears not to be concerned at all for the definition of the ontological reality designated by the biblical Christological titles and images either initially or later, even when he seems so insistent on the use of the term "essence" and "homoousios". He regards them not as the objective, but as the means of sorting out the confusion caused by the Arians in the right representation of the biblical faith. He considers it defined by the person of Jesus Christ, who is a concrete being and independent individual. Therefore he interprets the Christological titles only relationally, i.e., as revealing a special feature of Jesus Christ's

²⁷⁷ Cf. the illuminating comments of G.D. Dragas, *Athanasiana*, p. 58 and the analysis of T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 130-132.

²⁷⁸ CAR2 2:26,149B-C.

intimate relation with God the Father. Athanasius applies a synthesising interpretation which is primarily based on the Prologue of St. John's Gospel which identifies the Word through whom God created the world with Jesus Christ as the Only-begotten Son of God. Athanasius, following the same principle of exegesis, extends further this identification to the titles 'Wisdom', 'Hand' and 'Power' with reference to Is. 48:13, 51:16, Ps. 103:24, Prov. 3:19, Jn. 1:1-3, Heb. 1:1-2, 1 Cor. 8:6b and Col.1:12-17. He explains as follows:

"For God's offspring is one and these titles are taken of the generation from the Father. For if you say the Son, you have declared what is from the Father by nature; and if you think of the Word, you are thinking again of what is from Him and of what is inseparable; and speaking of Wisdom, again you mean just as much, what is not from without, but from him and in him; and if you name the power and the hand again you speak of what is proper to essence; and speaking of the image, you signify the Son; for what else is like God, but the offspring from him. Doubtless the things, which came to be through the Word, these are 'founded in Wisdom' and what are 'founded in Wisdom', these are all made by the Hand and came to be through the Son. And we have proof of this not from external sources, but from the Scriptures..."²⁷⁹

The debate on the matter according to these arguments has two very important implications for biblical hermeneutics. The first one refers to the occurrences of the term "Word of God" in the Bible: Athanasius interprets all of them only Christologically, since God has no other Word than the one who is also his Son. Thus, verses, especially from the Old Testament, like Ps. 32:4,6, 44:2, 106:20, acquire particular Christological significance. The second implication refers to the understanding of Christ as the key to the Scriptures. It is obvious that both Athanasius and the Arians acknowledged Christ as Creator of the world, but with a major difference. On the one hand, the Arians failed to understand the Old Testament description of God creating through his Word, because they applied to it ontological definitions which were appropriate to the created nature of beings and not to the spiritual nature of God: consequently the designation of Christ as the Word of God could only in their terms be metaphorical, because the former is a concrete being while the

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DECR 17:25,444C; Cf. also CAR1 16.

latter is an impersonal energy. On the other hand, Athanasius ontologically defines the Old Testament description of God creating through his Word (Gen. 1) through the New Testament confession of Christ to be the Word of God (Jn. 1:3, 1 Cor. 8:6b). The unifying element of the two texts is the conception of God creating, and the identification of the Word of God with Jesus Christ infers the ontological definition of the divine Word. This interpretation denies the models of 'being', 'individual' and 'energy' as they are comprehensible to the human mind according to their definition within the created dimension. As we have already noted, Athanasius understands the Christological titles in terms of relationship. Human language when applied to God carries for him the character of imagery that suggests relations rather than defining ontological or existential categories of the divine reality. So, the literal understanding of the Word of God does not imply that the divine Word is also without concrete existence, but because it is also identified as Son and has been experienced by men as the Christ, it should be acknowledged as "living Word" (ζῶν λόγος) and "substantive Wisdom" (ἐνούσιος σοφία). The Athanasian synthesis of biblical hermeneutics and ontological definitions, so that the one would illustrate the other, is, we believe, characteristically expressed in the following text:

"For the Son is the Father's Word and Wisdom; whence we learn the impassibility and the indivisibility of such a generation from the Father. For not even man's word is part of him, nor proceeds from him according to passion; much less God's Word, whom the Father has declared to be his own Son. If we merely heard of 'Word', we should suppose Him, such as is the word of man, impersonal; but that, hearing that he is Son, we may acknowledge him to be living Word and substantive Wisdom".²⁸⁰

Thus, applied to the doctrine of the divine generation, unlike the concept of the generation of a Son, the generation of the Word is an image that departs from the natural and bodily implications and is conceived only in a spiritual sense. The designation of God's offspring only as 'Son' in Scripture would be insufficient, because no clues would be provided for conceiving the notion of generation apart from division, with which it is

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SYNO 41:26,768A.

associated in the human dimension. The spiritual character of the word's begetting points to the spiritual reality of God and gives a hint of the attributes of that generation, which involves spiritual beings. Generation of word does not imply any division or partition neither in the human nor in the divine reality, because of its immaterial nature. Therefore it denotes the "impassibility" (ἀπαθές) and "indivisibility" (ἀμέριστον) of the Son's generation from the Father. Consequently, the understanding of the "homoousion" follows suit, since it gives expression to this spiritual relation that fits to God's spiritual nature. The problems that remains to apprehend is the manner in which the divine persons are individuated. Athanasius firmly maintains that since the divine nature is an incomprehensible reality for the human mind no one could tell *how* God exists, but only *that* he exists. One confesses the three persons of the Trinity, because this is how they appear in biblical revelation, but one cannot explain how they exist. Accordingly, neither should the Christological titles which describe divine attributes be understood in human terms. The Son of God is not individuated as a human son, neither is the Word of God an impersonal energy like the human word. To understand them according to human models is to "measure" God with the human imperfection, as he accuses the Arians of doing.²⁸¹ These points are fundamental to Athanasius' argumentation from his early anti-Arian works and throughout his writings as the following text from his *De Synodis* shows:

"And is there any cause of fear, lest because the offspring from men are coessential, the Son by being called coessential, is himself considered as a human offspring too? Perish the thought! Not so! But the explanation is easy. For the Son is the Father's Word and Wisdom, whence we learn the impassibility and indivisibility of such a generation from the Father. For not even man's word is a part of him, nor proceeds from him according to

²⁸¹ This very important text is as follows: "Nor must we ask why the word of God is not such as our word, considering God is not such as we, as has been said before; nor again is it right to seek how the word is from God or how is he God's radiance or how God begets and what is the manner of his begetting. For a man must be beside himself to venture on such points; since a thing ineffable and proper to God's nature and known to him alone and to the Son, this he demands to be explained in words. It is all one as if they sought where God is and how God is and of what nature the Father is. But to ask such questions is irreligious and argues an ignorance of God, so it is not holy to venture such questions concerning the generation of the Son of God, not to measure God and his wisdom by our own nature and infirmity" CAR2 36:26,224A.

passion, much less God's word; whom the Father has declared to be his own Son, on the other hand if we merely heard of 'Word' we should suppose him, such as is the word of man, impersonal. But hearing that he is Son we may acknowledge him to be living Word and substantive Wisdom. Accordingly, as in saying 'offspring' we have no human thoughts and though we know God to be a Father, we entertain no material ideas concerning him, but while we listen to these illustrations and terms, we think suitably of God, for he is not as man, so in like manner, when we hear 'coessential', we ought to transcend all sense and according to the Proverb 'spiritually understand what is set before us' ... Else, why should we understand 'offspring' and 'son' in no corporeal way, while we conceive of 'coessential' as after the manner of bodies? Especially since these terms are not here used about different subjects, but of whom 'offspring' is predicated, of him is 'coessential' also ... So the sense of 'offspring' and 'coessential' is one and whoever considers the Son an offspring, rightly considers him also 'coessential'".²⁸²

²⁸² SYNO 41-42:26,765C-768C. The same understanding is exhibited in all his works, of which we selectively give special reference to DECR 11:25,430B (where almost the same words are used) and CAR1 28:26,69Cf; (also DECR3; 20; 23; 24; 30; SER1 26; SER2 5; SYNO 51; AFRO 8).

2.3 The Biblical Paradigms

2.3.1 The biblical paradigms in Athanasius' exegesis

We have already made some hints about the use of certain biblical images or paradigms in Athanasius' argumentation on the generation of the Son. In fact, their role is much more important than we have so far conveyed and his emphasis on them much stronger. The use of natural images for the illustration of the relation between the Father and the Son can be traced back to the New Testament and was a common practice among the ecclesiastical authors during the previous centuries. The "generation", the "father-son" and the "logos-wisdom" concepts are regarded as images, but from a literary point of view they should be characterized more as analogies from the human world than as paradigms.²⁸³ By the term 'paradigm' we denote those images, which are taken from the natural world to express theological truths. The most prominent one, obviously because of its direct Apostolic origins, is the image of the light and its effulgence (φῶς-ἀπαύγασμα) theologically introduced and applied to the Son-Father relation in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (1:3). Together with this, in the same verse goes the second one of the 'character' (χαρακτήρ, often translated as 'impression' or 'stamp') and the 'subsistence' (ὑπόστασις), which, however, does not appear very often in the Athanasian texts. From previous ecclesiastical authors, there were also in use other paradigms, which Athanasius appears to employ very selectively. He takes up and uses quite extensively and exhaustively in parallel with the light-effulgence one, the image of the fountain and river. He introduces

²⁸³ Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The transformation*, p. 97. For the function of paradigms in theology and their understanding see A. Heron, "Logos, Image, Son: Some models and paradigms in Early Christology", pp. 43-47. In particular, he identifies three main functions: a) they are used to crystalise and focus a particular insight; b) to refine, clarify or modify the comprehensibility of a notion; and c) to represent as a sort of map or shorthand description the result of investigation. Cf. also E. Meijering, "HN ΠΟΤΕ ΟΤΕ ΟΥΚ ΗΝ Ο ΥΙΟΣ", pp. 81ff.

this one mostly as implication of his theological views, since its application is not directly theological, but he freshly reinterprets it through his deep hermeneutical insight. In Ps. 35:10 God is described as 'source of life', in Jer. 2:13 as 'source of living waters' and in Bar. 3:12 as 'source of wisdom'. Athanasius interprets these texts Christologically in the light of Jn. 14:6 ("I am the life") and 1 Cor. 1:24 ("Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God"). There is also the image of 'vapour' (ἄτμίς) and power taken from *Sap. Salom.* 7:25 ("he is the vapour of the power of God"), which Athanasius witnesses as being used by Dionysius of Alexandria.²⁸⁴ He does not use it himself probably because of his view of the non canonicity of the book of *Sapientia*.²⁸⁵ He relates the image of the branch coming from the trunk, which Dionysius also used, to the humanity of Christ and to his relationships with human beings.²⁸⁶ The image of fire lit from fire used by Justin, Tertullian and others²⁸⁷ and also elsewhere in a heretical context, as Arius' *Letter to Alexander* records, is not used by Athanasius at all. The criterion of Athanasius' selection of paradigms is based on their Scriptural origin, as he explicitly states. Without the backing of biblical authority they could easily become open to suspicion.²⁸⁸

Before, however, presenting the arguments which Athanasius draws from these paradigms to support his view on the generation of the Son, we first have to explain some principles of his interpretation and understanding of them. First of all, it has to be pointed out that Athanasius ascribes a metaphorical character to human language as a whole, when used in theology. Models of created nature have been used by God as means to communicate the divine messages to human beings in the sacred writings of the Bible. Athanasius discerns a particular procedure in this revelation, which starts from God, passes

²⁸⁴ DION 15:25,504A.

²⁸⁵ See his *39th Festal Letter*: 26,1436-1437A.

²⁸⁶ DION 10:26,493Bf.

²⁸⁷ See R.P.C. Hanson, *ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁸⁸ DECR 12:25,436C-437A.

through his saints, who experienced the direct revelation of God and always appear in the Athanasian texts to have full knowledge of the truth beyond the particular images, and ends at human beings. Therefore the biblical paradigms are the only authoritative source for theology that provide sufficient data for any knowledge of God.²⁸⁹ To draw from other sources is, for Athanasius, "incongruous" and "impious".²⁹⁰

However, although these paradigms have such origins, they still manage to create only a faint idea of the reality of God, because his essence is ultimately incomprehensible and unknowable.²⁹¹ Because of this inadequacy, they have to be understood and interpreted under certain qualifications as metaphors.²⁹² Since, examined individually, they are inadequate for a full description of the divine reality they have to be interpreted synthetically. The logic that lies behind this is simple. All paradigms refer to the same reality, i.e., the Father-Son relation, but the models which they introduce contradict one another if they are taken literally. The same reality of being cannot be described in human terms as word, son and effulgence simultaneously. Therefore, the reader faces the choice: either he has to reject their ascription to the same reality as erroneous, or accept only one of them as viable or regard them as descriptions of the same reality from different points of view. Athanasius goes for the last option and observes that the objective reality which these paradigms designate can be traced by their common feature. This is the intimate and ever-existing relation between the two elements involved in each paradigm. This common feature can also be safely identified, when the biblical paradigms are combined with the "accuracy of the oracles" (τῶν ρητῶν ἢ ἀκριβεία).²⁹³ In this way they will not be pushed too far, neither will they be understood as transferring created features to the uncreated

²⁸⁹ SER1 19:26,573B.

²⁹⁰ DECR 12:25,437A.

²⁹¹ DECR 12:25,436D; CAR2 32:26,216B; CAR3 23:26,372B.

²⁹² CAR3 21-22:26,368-369A.

²⁹³ CAR2 33:26,217B; also CAR1 26:26,65C, CAR2 74:26,304C, CAR3 15:26,352C; DECR12 & 24.

God. The ultimate criterion, which defines the boundaries of interpretation, is the fact that they refer to spiritual beings and therefore have to be understood accordingly.²⁹⁴

This hermeneutical standpoint of Athanasius is illustrated by the following three examples. a) He argues that the fact that the image of the light and the effulgence conveys the theological truth that the Son is "proper offspring of the Father's substance" (τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας ἴδιον γέννημα) and he is "indivisible and united with the Father" (τὸ ἀδιαίρετον καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἐνότητα) is obvious when one considers that it is the effulgence of the light that has been selected to express this relation and not the fire kindled from the heat of the sun: the effulgence always exists together with the light, while the fire is accidental to the sun, which can exist without kindling fire.²⁹⁵

b) The necessity of the combination of the paradigms for their correct understanding is apparent in the interpretation of the father-son and mind-word paradigm, as we have already seen. Both paradigms refer to the Son, but contradict each other if they are taken in human terms. The mind-word paradigm lacks the 'hypostasis', the definition of an individual being (ἀνυπόστατος), but designates an undivided unity of spiritual nature between the two elements. On the other hand, the father-son image provides the definition of the 'hypostasis', but lacks the element of unity, since it intensely implies distinction through division in space and time. The combination of the two paradigms provides a holistic understanding of the Son as "living Word" (ζῶν λόγος) and "substantive Wisdom, energy" (ἐνούσιος σοφία, ἐνέργεια).²⁹⁶

c) Finally, the combination of the paradigms with the accuracy of the biblical statements can be seen in the application of the fountain-river image. The Old Testament texts, Jer. 2:13, Bar. 3:12 and Ps. 35:10, acquire their full theological and dogmatic

²⁹⁴ SYNO 41:26,765C.

²⁹⁵ DECR 23:25,456D.

²⁹⁶ CAR2 2:26,152A; SYNO 41:26,768A.

meaning through their illustration by the New Testament statements Jn. 14:6 and 1 Cor. 1:24. They contain predicates (life, wisdom) uniquely ascribed to the Son, which, being understood under the light of the Old Testament paradigms, designate him as the living offspring of the productive and generative fountain, i.e., the Father.²⁹⁷

2.3.2 'Light-effulgence', 'Fountain-river', 'Hypostasis-character'

Having established this exegetical framework, Athanasius employs the paradigms of the light-effulgence, the fountain-river and the character-hypostasis for supporting the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son. The particular subjects which he illustrates through these paradigms are already known from our earlier discussion. First of all, he argues that the biblical characterization of the Son as the effulgence of light and the river from the fountain excludes all possibilities of regarding him as a created being, because no such notion is connected to or in any way related to these images. The important feature, which these descriptions refer to God, is the idea of the continuously generating existence, which is always considered together with its offspring. The effulgence or river is an attribute of the very nature or existence of the light or fountain, and the former continuously springs from the latter, so that one can never think of them as existing separately. When the effulgence is absent and the light is not light any longer, since it does not shine, and the fountain is fountain, and the river does not exist, but is dry and is called an "empty pit", "for what does not generate from itself is not fountain".²⁹⁸ The description of God, then, as fountain and light can only be true if he is understood as a generating essence whose offspring is none else than the Son. To think of the Father is to think of the Son simultaneously. In his second *Epistle to Serapion* he argues: "If God is father, fountain and light, it is not right to consider the fountain dry, nor the light without shining,

²⁹⁷ CAR2 2:26,149B-C.

²⁹⁸ CAR1 19:26,52A.

nor God without word, which would make God unwise, speechless and dark. Therefore it is necessary that the Son is eternal, the Father being eternal, and whatever we perceive that is in the Father, undoubtedly the same is in the Son".²⁹⁹

Another implication, which comes from the above, is that this immediacy also excludes the suspicion of the Son as creature, because the idea of a created being is linked with two elements: the period of time when the created being did not exist - its Creator being alone without it, and the will of the creator, which caused it to be. The light and fountain paradigms not only do not contain any hint of such notions, but on the contrary positively affirm the opposite, that is, eternal coexistence as a natural attribute. The effulgence is not an acquisition of the light from without after a deliberate creation of its existence, but they naturally coexist as one reality: "Let them in their madness say 'There was once when he was not' and 'before his generation Christ was not' and again let them declare that the fountain did not beget wisdom from itself, but acquired it from without, till they have dared to say 'the Son came of nothing', whence it will follow that there is no longer a fountain, but a sort of pit, as if receiving water from without and usurping the name of fountain".³⁰⁰

Departing from the notion of creature on the basis of these arguments, Athanasius uses the paradigms to illustrate further the concept of the Son's generation. Having followed the explanation of the significance of the Word concept, he makes apparent a different understanding of the generation that pertains to its nature and of the manner in which it takes place. The same understanding is further reinforced by the use of the paradigms, namely by putting aside the elements of temporal secondariness, passion and division, which are associated with the generation in the context of the father-son analogy. Athanasius clearly asserts that the biblical intention of using such images is to carry the

²⁹⁹ SER2 2:26,609B; see also similar statements in CAR2 32, DECR 12.

³⁰⁰ DECR 15:25,441B-C; see also CAR1 27, SYNO 52.

undersanding of the divine existence beyond the human model of generation, which although applicable, is not sufficient to convey in its fullness the meaning of the divine generation. He establishes the foundations of the function of these images in his *De Decretis* saying, "Mean, indeed, and very dim is the illustration compared with what we desire, but yet it is possible from it to understand something above man's nature, instead of thinking the Son's generation to be on a level with ours. For who can ever imagine that the radiance of light ever was not, so that he should dare to say that the Son was not always, or that the Son was not before his generation? Or who is capable of separating the radiance from the sun, or of conceiving of the fountain as ever void of life, that he should madly say 'the son is from nothing', who himself says 'I am the life?'"³⁰¹ The features which Athanasius takes up from these images and applies to the generation of the Son are the following: a) the Son as the effulgence of the divine Light coexists with its source eternally, his generation being a continuous event, and more precisely, an event that transcends the human definition of time, since it takes place in eternity, where no temporal definitions apply. b) The generation of the effulgence from the light does not involve passion or division, since not only is it thought not to diminish the essence of the light, but in fact is the very reason for which the light is perceived to shine and to exist. c) The immaterial nature of the light and its effulgence portrays a more comprehensible picture of God, for the human mind, which comes closer to apprehending his bodiless and purely spiritual nature. Therefore, it represents a generation "appropriate to God" (Θεῷ πρέπον), whose nature becomes in turn the regulative principle for the definition of the notion of generation.³⁰² The following text summarizes Athanasius' understanding of the paradigms in relation to the generation of the Son:

"Yet, though we have already shewn their shallowness, the exact sense of these passages themselves and the force of these paradigms will serve to

³⁰¹ DECR 12:25,437A.

³⁰² CAR1 28, CAR2 33, DECR 12, SYNO 51.

shew the baseless nature of the loathsome tenet. For we see that the Word is ever and is from him and proper to his essence, whose Word he is, and does not admit a before and an after. So again we see that the effulgence from the sun is proper to it and the sun's essence is not divided or impaired, but its essence is whole and its radiance perfect and whole, yet without impairing the essence of light but as true offspring from it. 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... Therefore, let this Christ-opposing heresy attempt first to divide the examples found in things originate and say 'once the sun was without radiance' or 'radiance is not proper to the essence of light' or 'it is indeed proper, but it is a part of light by division. Let it also divide the Word and pronounce that it is foreign to mind or that once it was not or that it was not proper to its essence or that it is by division a part of mind. And so of his expression and the Light and the Power, let it do violence to these as in the case of Word and Radiance and instead let it imagine what it will. But if such extravagance is impossible for them, are they not greatly beside themselves, presumptuously intruding into what is higher than things originate and their own nature and essaying impossibilities?'³⁰³

2.3.3 'Image' (εἰκών, Col. 1:15)

The argument about the possibility of the vision of God through his effulgence, which is the Son, is further reinforced also by the Pauline Christological statement that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (εἰκών), for which Athanasius also demands the generic identity of the Son with the Father as its fundamental connotation. The 'image' paradigm is more suitable to develop the idea of the Son's 'likeness' (ὁμοιότης) to the Father on the basis of their common essential attributes. The argument is based on the absolute ontological distinction between two kinds of being, the created and the uncreated. The comparison of the essential attributes of the Son with those of God the Father and creatures serves to identify the kind of his essence, according to the principle: "Those to whom we are alike and whose identical nature we share, with these we are one in essence [ὁμοούσιοι]"³⁰⁴ The result of this comparison, as we shall also see in detail in the next

³⁰³ CAR2 33:26,217C.

³⁰⁴ SER2 3:26,612B.

part, puts the Son in the same category of being with the Father which, in turn, vindicates his characterization as the 'image' of the Father. For, in order to be the image of the Father, the Son must possess all the essential attributes of the Father which can be transmitted only through generation. So, Athanasius regards it as logically imperative to include the essence of the Father among the connotations of the term 'image', if one thinks of the Son as the "complete" (ὁλόκληρον) and "perfect" (τέλειον) image of the Father. He backs up this argument with *Col. 2:9*, *Jn. 1:16* and *14:9* saying, "For, if the Son is not according to essence like, he is surely unlike and the unlike cannot be an image. And if so, then it does not hold that 'He who has seen the Son, has seen the Father', there being then the greatest possible difference between them, or rather the one being wholly unlike the other. And 'unlike' cannot be possibly be called 'like'. By what artifice then do you call 'unlike' 'like', and consider 'like' to be 'unlike' and pretend to say that the Son is the Father's image? For if the Son is not like the Father in essence something is wanting to the image and it is not a complete image, nor a perfect effulgence. How then do you read 'In him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' and 'from his fulness we received'.³⁰⁵ There are two fundamental points that come out of this text and define the understanding of the Son as the image of the Father: a) it is the fulness of the Son's revelation of the Father according to *Jn. 14:9* that demands his absolute identification with Him, for in order to be the perfect image that resembles Him he has to be alike in every respect ("He is the whole as an icon of the whole").³⁰⁶ "We proceed then to consider the attributes of the Father and we shall come to know whether this image is really his. The Father is eternal, immortal, powerful, light, King, Sovereign, God, Lord, Creator and Maker. These attributes must be in the

³⁰⁵ SYNO 38:26,760C.

³⁰⁶ "ὅλος ἐστὶν ὅλου εἰκὼν καὶ ἀπαύγασμα", CAR3 :26,569. E.R. Craven considers that the link of the concept 'likeness' with the 'homousion' negates its understanding as denoting 'numerical oneness': "It would be impossible, for intrinsic reasons", he argues, "to harmonise the phrase 'the same in [or by] likeness' with the system which affirms *numerical sameness*" ("The Nicene doctrine...", p. 725).

image to make it true that 'he who has seen the Son has seen the Father'.³⁰⁷ b) The notion of 'likeness' of two beings to each other is based on and refers to their generic relations and not to relations of creator and creature, since image of an human being is called only its offspring and not the product of its technical skills.³⁰⁸ Therefore when 'likeness' refers to the being or the essence of elements, which are to be compared, it suggests identity (*ταυτότης*) and not simply 'likeness' (*ὁμοιότης*). This idea of identity is conveyed by Athanasius with the qualifier 'unvarying' (*ἀπαράλλακτος*), whenever he refers to the 'image' and the 'likeness', and with the 'homoousios', which in this account is vindicated against the alternative semi-Arian 'homoiousios'.³⁰⁹

On the basis of this understanding of image Athanasius clears three fundamental objections of the Arians. The first one refers to the designation of human beings as 'images' of God according to 1 Cor. 11:7 ("For a man is the image and the glory of God") - an interpretation which they also presented at the Council of Nicea.³¹⁰ He argues that the predicate image is not attributed to men on their own account, but because they have been created by God according to the Image of God (Gen. 1:26), which is none else than the Word and Son. Therefore, it might be attributed to all of them, but never individually to any of the saints of the Bible or the followers of Christ, otherwise God would be described as having many images. Christ is the only one to be called the image of God and this is proper, because, since God is one, he must have only one image.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ CAR1 21:26,56A. In the next part of this thesis we shall present in full this comparison on the basis of Jn. 16:15 and with reference to the biblical texts which he recalls.

³⁰⁸ "For man too both builds a house and begets a son and no one would reverse things and say that the house or the ship were begotten from the builder and the son were created or made by him; nor again that the house was an image of the maker and the son unlike him who begot him; but rather one will confess that the son is an image of the father, and the house a work of art, unless his mind is disordered and he is beside himself" (DECR 13).

³⁰⁹ Athanasius offers a full explanation of the difference between the two terms in SYNO 53:26,788Bf.

³¹⁰ DECR 20:25,452A.

³¹¹ CAR3 10:26,344A.

The second objection refers to the designation of God as 'Ingenerate' (ἀγένητος), which the Arians regarded as the primary attribute of God that ontologically differentiated him from any other 'generated' being (γεν[ν]ητόν). Athanasius argues that the term 'ingenerate' refers to the relations of God with created beings and not with his Son, who, in turn, is the only image of Him. Because the notion of image coheres with Jn. 16:15 ("All that the Father has is mine"), the Son must also possess the same attribute and be distinguished from created beings as being himself uncreated: "And being his image, he must be distinct from things originated and from everything; for whose image he is, his property and likeness he has, so that he who calls the Father ingenerate and almighty, perceives in the ingenerate and the almighty, his Word and Wisdom who is his Son".³¹²

Thirdly, the Arians inferred from the above that the Son must also have the attribute of begetting, if he is to have all that the Father has. Athanasius responds that this kind of understanding of God imposes on him a human pattern of existence and considers him a bodily being. But even according to that, they should also try to find a father for the Father and sons of the Son, carrying away the inquiry to the infinite. 'Begotten' and 'Unbegotten' or 'Ingenerate' are attributes which distinguish the Son from the Father, who exist as such eternally: "It is not so in the Godhead, for God is not as man. The Father is not from a father, therefore he does not beget one who shall become a father; nor is he the Son from effluence of the Father, nor is he begotten from a father that was begotten. Therefore neither is he begotten so as to beget. Thus it belongs to the Godhead alone that the Father is properly Father and the Son is properly Son and in them, and them only, does it hold that the Father is ever Father and the Son ever Son".³¹³

This use of the Christological titles and paradigms in Athanasius' argumentation about the generation of the Son, as the foregoing exposition has shown, provides us with

³¹² DECR 30:25,472B.

³¹³ CAR1 21:26,56A; SER1 16:26,569B.

greater insight into his understanding of the biblical teaching on the subject. The original notion of the generic continuity from the Father to the Son, with which we began our discussion, has been modified in so far as to detach our conception from the particular event of human generation, which takes place in space and time and is ontologically defined as resulting in two separate individuals, and to direct it to the "peculiarity of nature" (φυσική ιδιότης).³¹⁴ Athanasius holds a dynamic view of the essence of God, which is regarded as "fruitbearing" (καρπογόνος) and "generative" (γεννητική), thus as being the way in which God exists (τρόπος θεότητας).³¹⁵ The offspring of this 'activity' is the Son, who, being generated from God, is himself also God.³¹⁶ The beginning of his existence is in the inner being of the Father, therefore he is "of the same nature" (ὁμοφυής) and "of the same essence" (ὁμοούσιος). He is "simple and pure offspring"³¹⁷, the Father's essence "proper" and "own" (ἴδιον) attribute, who exists simultaneously and always with the Father, since "when light exists, there be withal the effulgence as its image and a subsistence existing, there be of it the entire expression, and a father existing, there be his truth. Let them consider what depths of irreligion they fall into, who make time the measure of the image and the kind [εἶδος] of the Godhead".³¹⁸ The generic identification then, is positively and intensely associated with the 'homoousios', being an intrinsic element of its meaning that maintains its original significance:

"For if the Word were a work and foreign to the Father's essence, so that he is separated from the Father by the difference of nature, he cannot be one in essence with him, but rather he is homogeneous by nature with the works, though he surpasses them in grace. On the other hand, if we confess that he is not a work, but the genuine offspring of the Father's essence, it would follow that he is inseparable from the Father, being connatural, because he

³¹⁴ E.R. Craven, although acknowledging the importance of the Christological titles and paradigms for the illustration of the Son's generation, still considers the father-son analogy as the most important of all, because it renders clearer his firm conviction to the 'homogeneity', which he calls 'specific identity', conveyed by the Nicene-Athanasian 'homoousion' ("The Nicene", p. 754).

³¹⁵ SYNO 52:26,785B.

³¹⁶ "For he is God, being the Son of God" (CAR1 49:26,113C); "For if he is the Word of the Father and true Son of his, he is God of God" (CAR1 10:26,32B).

³¹⁷ SYNO 52:26,788A.

³¹⁸ CAR120:26,53B.

is begotten from Him. And being such, good reason he should be called homoousios".³¹⁹

The interpretation of "homoousion" in the generic context of birth-giving was very important, because Athanasius managed to maintain the balance of the understanding of the Son between two extremes: on the one hand, through the sharp distinction between Father and Son, he delivered "homoousion" from the connotations of the Sabellian "Son-Father", which denied the Son as true being. On the other hand, he maintained the consubstantial nature of the being of the Son with that of the Father against the absolute alienation which Arius supported. However, although Athanasius frequently puts great emphasis on the distinction between Father and Son, he never uses language which could suggest division. In the last section of this first part we have seen the vital importance of the concept of unity between the Begetter and the Offspring. He further expounds on it through another set of appropriate biblical texts that complete the meaning of "homoousios" in the divine dimension, as we will see next.

³¹⁹

SYNO 48:26,777C.

3. THE "HOMOOUSION" AND THE UNITY OF THE SON WITH THE FATHER

In the foregoing pages we followed the development of Athanasius' argument on the generation of the Son and discerned the beginnings of the doctrine of unity as the qualifier of it. The combination of the two doctrines is evident in the extract from the *De Decretis* to which we referred at the outset of our investigation, and which is appropriate to repeat at this point:

“They [the Nicenes] were compelled immediately to collect the mind of the Scripture and what they were saying earlier, they said and wrote again with more clarity, that the Son is *homoousios* with the Father; [in this way,] they would indicate that the Son is not simply like the Father, but has identical likeness, which he received from the Father and that the likeness and immutability of the Son is different than our imitation, as it is called, which we acquire through the observance of the commandments. For it is possible, bodies, which are like one another, be divided and distant the one from the other, as the human sons are from their begetters, according to what is written about Adam and Seth, who was begotten from him ‘in his own likeness, after his image’. But because the generation of the Son from the Father is different from human nature, he is not only like, but also indivisible from the essence of the Father and he and the Father are one, as he said, and the Word is always in the Father and the Father in the Word, as is the effulgence in the light, for this is what the term designates. The Council having understood this, wrote the *homoousios* correctly, so that it would abolish the wickedness of the heretics and show that the Son is other than the creatures”.³²⁰

As we have said, the "homoousios" was the answer to the Arian problem of compromising the oneness of God with the Father-Son duality. According to this text, the content which Athanasius gives to the term is the combination of the doctrines of the generation and unity. Crucially important in the process of understanding both of them was the relation of the term "οὐσία" with the term "one". As in the context of generation, so

here, Athanasius defines "οὐσία" according to the spiritual nature of God which exists beyond the limited definitions of created reality.

In ontological terms, scholars identify this problem as distinction between "ousia" and "hypostasis": are the Father and the Son to be understood as one with reference to the 'ousia' of God, that is, as generically identified as two individuals of the same species, resulting thus in ditheism, or with reference to the "hypostasis" of God, resulting in denial of their duality in the Sabellian sense?³²¹ "Ousia" is generally accepted as conveying both meanings and the distinction between the two terms as not existing at all during the controversy. The Arians rejected both the above options and alienated the Son from the Father ontologically, so that he would not relate with anything that refers to the very being and existence of the Father. As a consequence, they attributed to the Son God-like qualities which were granted to him by God as a token of virtue by means of which he maintained a moral unity with Him.

Thus Athanasius, having to deal directly with the second problem and indirectly with the first, develops his argument clarifying both. First, he wants to prove that the doctrine of unity between the Father and the Son the Bible teaches (the Arians would not deny that), is not adequately interpreted as simply being a unity of a moral nature, but demands a unity which refers to the inner being of the Son. Secondly, he also had to explain the terms in which the duality of persons is compromised with the oneness of God, but he does not appear to use "ousia" and "hypostasis" as synonymous.³²² The 'homoousios' was the most appropriate term to express comprehensively both concepts. In fact, it was the conviction of Athanasius that, having proved the two above points, the acceptance of the 'homoousios' would naturally come out of it.

³²¹ Cf. the inquiries we set at the *Introduction* concerning the 'homoousios'.

³²² This is the prevailing idea among scholars; see: E. Craven, *op. cit.*, p. 711ff; R.P.C. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 445; J.N.D. Kelly, *Creeds*, p. 250; C. Konstandinidis, "Ousia and Hypostasis", p. 579f; T.B. Strong, "The history of substance", pp. 35-39.

As for the first, the primary source for his biblical material is the *Gospel according to John*, which is especially featured as the Gospel of unity between the Father and the Son.³²³ The two main ideas of Athanasius' argument are developed around the key verses Jn. 10:30: "I and the Father are one" and 16:15: "All that the Father has is mine", which he backs up with Jn. 14:9,10. He aims to prove that any kind of external unity manifested in the Bible cannot but flow out of unity of essence and nature, because the Son is begotten and yet has never been separated from the Father. Those verses, which are the most characteristic ones, combined with several others clearly and intensely suggest a mutual indwelling and interaction. The *Prologue* of the Johannine gospel, with the central figure of the Word of God and the paradigms of the 'light-effulgence' and 'fountain-river', complete his biblical argument and the explication of the significance and consequences of the unity of nature of the Son with the Father.

As for the second, he qualifies the meaning of the term "one" when it applies to God and its relation to the 'homoousios'. He extensively explains the unity of God in view of the duality of persons. The term "homoousios" gives compact expression to this understanding and in fact replaces the definition of the term "one" by Arius as "Monad".³²⁴ Athanasius understands "one" in terms of "ὄμο-" (= together, co-) which negates its definition in the human dimension but without losing the significance of oneness. The important point to note here is that, as in the context of generation, the term "οὐσία" is the element of the divine being which can be transferred and communicated, so in the context of unity it is the same element that can be common to and possessed by both persons. There is no similar reference to the term 'hypostasis' whatsoever.³²⁵

³²³ T.E. Pollard has shown the centrality of the Fourth Gospel in the theological controversies of the first four centuries in his PhD thesis *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Arian Controversy* (St. Andrews, 1956). He remarks that "it was the Fourth Gospel that raised in their most acute form the problems which forced the Church to work out its doctrine of the Trinity, and that, at the same time, it was the Fourth Gospel that provided the Church with the data, in their clearest form, from which to construct that doctrine" ("John x. 30", p. 335, n. 1).

³²⁴ See his *Letter to Alexander*, op. cit.

Unlike the doctrine of generation the counter argument of the Arians at this point is very limited and not very much exegetical debate goes on. The Arians completely ruled out any sense of unity in being or essence between the Father and the Son, therefore they advanced only some minor points about some sort of ethical unity without ever mixing the Son with the Father in their inner being. Athanasius develops the full understanding of the dogma of the Trinity clearing the confusion of the alleged contradiction with the dogma of monotheism. As in the first part, so here, we shall maintain the same structure in presenting the material, examining firstly the particular biblical texts, secondly the Christological titles Word and Wisdom and finally the paradigms light and fountain.

³²⁵ It is this point we think that has skipped the attention of scholars who base their view of the identification of the two terms by Athanasius on their alternative use in the generic context of the 'homoousios': the two primary references to the Athanasian works in support of this identification are the defence of the anathema of the Creed ('from another ousia or hypostasis", DECR 20:25,452C) and the explanation of the meaning of 'ousia' in AFRO ('ousia and hypostasis is existence [ὕπαρξις]'; Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Doctrines*, p. 247). But as we have already explained in the appropriate place, this is highly justifiable in that context because both are ontological terms that denote existence as opposed to nothing. The terms are used alternatively only when the main idea conveyed is that of origination or procession, when the Son is said to come from the Father. This does not happen when the main idea is that of the unity of the Son with the Father, that is, when it is rather static and does not include movement. The Son is never stated or even hinted that could possess the 'hypostasis' of the Father, but only his 'ousia'. G.D. Dragas asserts that the case in the above mentioned Athanasian texts is not to "deal with the question of one or three hypostases but with the existential meaning of the term which is rejected by the Arians" ("The homoousios in *Contra Apollinarem I*", *Arianism*, p. 241, n. 37).

3.1 The Biblical Texts

3.1.1 Jn 10:30, 14:9,10

3.1.1.1 *Unity of essence as opposed to unity of will*

Jn 10:30, with 14:9 and 14:10, carries the bulk of Athanasius' argument.³²⁶ It is a characteristic verse, very powerful in its meaning and condensed in its expression with a long exegetical tradition and theological application. As T.E. Pollard has shown, it appears in all the controversies of the first centuries and it was used by the Church leaders against the heresies of the two extremes, both Monarchianism and Arianism. This is due to the fact that it maintains in a remarkable fashion both the distinction and the unity of the Son with the Father in equal terms and does not allow wavering toward either side.³²⁷

The particular context into which the verse emerges in the Johannine gospel is especially important. It is worth taking a brief look at it, because it reveals the background as well as the particular connotations with which the verse is charged, and demonstrates how it played such an important role in the course of the later developments.

Jn. 10:30 belongs to the wider context of the verses 22-39, in which an exceptionally dramatic crisis takes place. The Jews address to Jesus Christ a critical question expressed in a very intense way: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ tell us plainly" (vs. 24). The answer of Jesus consists of three parts; First, he claims his works as witnesses of his identity (vs. 25b); secondly, he explains the reason for

³²⁶ Athanasius argues that the "mind" (= sense) of these three verses is one (CAR3 5:26,329C).

³²⁷ T.E. Pollard commenting on the crucial theological importance of Jn. 10:30 points out that "Both the Western and the Alexandrian Churches sought to refute Monarchianism by maintaining *both* the distinction between the Father and the Son *and* their unity one with another. In both Churches John 10:30, which asserts both the distinction and the unity, was one of the main weapons against the heresy which sought to preserve the unity by denying the distinction...This same text was to prove equally crucial in the Church's resistance to Arianism which strove to preserve the distinction by denying the unity" (*The exegesis of John X. 30*, p. 339).

which they do not accept him as Christ (vs. 26); and thirdly, he distinguishes the Jews from his "own sheep", which enjoy the security of the protection of his Father and himself (vss. 28-29). The high point is the concluding statement "I and the Father are one" (vs. 30), which reveals Christ's full self-confidence and self-consciousness, and seals his answer by giving the reason of the last argument. The full religious significance and theological implications of this statement are crystal clear in the reaction of the Jews; they immediately take up stones to stone him on the accusation of blasphemy: "It is not for a good work that we stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, *make yourself God*" (vs. 33). Jesus, instead of defending himself, repeats his controversial claim pronouncing this time the identity of his works with those of the Father, which reveals a reciprocal indwelling of the one in the other (vs. 37-38; cf. 14:10). The Jews are again stirred up and make an unsuccessful attempt to arrest him.

The Johannine narrative makes obvious that the verse is one of the most characteristic ones which gives a straight forward and authoritative answer by Jesus Christ himself to the question: "What or who is he?". It was professed in the midst of a crisis among the Jews and continues to be in the centre of the theological controversies between Church leaders and dissenters in the following centuries.

The sequence of the text supplies to Athanasius the main guidelines upon which he constructs his arguments. The first point which he takes up, solidly maintains and constantly reiterates is the fundamental principle that Jn. 10:30 refers to the being of the Son and consequently of the Father. It was an answer to the question which he had also to answer against the Arians, of who the Son *is*. It also states that he and the Father *are* one and the Jews understood that he made *himself* God. Clearly all these phrases signify the Son in his very being and existence in relation to the being of the Father.³²⁸ The second

³²⁸ We believe that it is particularly important to emphasize the significance of this point, especially against certain views expressed by a number of modern scholars (19th cent. onwards). From what we said,

point, which closely relates to the previous one as its presupposition and also its proof, is the fact that Jn. 10:30 is expressed without any qualification and unconditionally, or according to Athanasius' expression "loosely" (ἀπολελυμένως). The importance of this observation, as we have noted earlier, is that it leads Athanasius to construct a group of similarly expressed verses, which he ascribes to the divinity of the Son according to the distinction he made on the basis of the "scope of faith".³²⁹ Such verses are Jn. 1:1, 14:9-10, the "I am" verses in Jn. 8:12, 14:6 etc., Prov. 8:25 etc. He justifies this point with the argument that this is an implicit way of expressing the fact that what we know about the being of the Son is that he simply exists as God beyond any reasoning or purpose. To render this observation clearer he compares this group with another group of verses which refer to the Son's humanity and Incarnation: verses like Jn. 6:39, 12:46, 18:37, 1 Jn 3:8, Prov. 8:22 etc.³³⁰ He remarks that all of them include reasoning for his becoming a human being, which is "the need of men" (ἡ τῶν ἀνθρώπων χρεία), i.e., the need of "eternal life", "resurrection", "light", "truth", "abolition of the works of the devil". The Incarnation is an event in the being of the Son and the attributes of created nature which he appears to possess are acquired for a special purpose and they do not belong originally to his being.

it becomes clear that "the question of essences" is set already in the New Testament and more specifically it is set as a Jewish question, not Greek. It appears, therefore, that Athanasius, as the first of the great Fathers who established the dogma of the Church, has fully realized and deeply understood this fundamental doctrine of the Bible, which on the other hand slips away from the attention of modern scholars. It has been argued that the issues of the debates from the 4th century onwards have disorientated the biblical message through its subjection to a course of gradual "Hellenisation". Such an evolution was carried out either through a reproduction of Greek gnostic and pagan philosophies under Christian names (Werner, *The formation*, pp. 3ff; and also in him the views of Baur, Harnack, Loofs, Seeberg etc.; A. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, pp. 49ff & 107f; also cf. R. Williams, *Arius*, pp. 6-8 & 21-25 and E. Mühlberg, *The Divinity*, pp. 136f), or through the imposition on the Bible of notions which were not present in the mind of its sacred authors, but in the mind of the Greek thinking fathers and heretics (O. Cullman, *The Christology*, pp. 4-5; J. Bernard, *The Gospel of John*, v. I, pp. 365f; cf also the account of J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology*, pp. 1-11 and the discussion on the use of the Greek language by R.P.C. Hanson, *The Doctrine*, pp. 41f, 53f and M. Fouyas, *The Homoousion*, pp. 11f). We think that Jn. 10:30 and its interpretation by Athanasius is a characteristic example of the fact that the fathers of the Church simply worked out the implications of what the Apostles expressed condensely in their writings, "clarifying" (λευκότερον εἰπεῖν) their meaning.

³²⁹ Cf. SER2 7:26,620B.

³³⁰ CAR2 54:26,261A-C.

He argues: "For though no works had been created, still the 'Word' of God 'was' and 'the Word was God' [Jn. 1:1]. His becoming man would not have taken place, had not the need of men required it. The Son, then, is not a creature".³³¹ His essential attributes are contained in the first group, of which Prov. 8:25 states the "beginning" of his being, which is begotten from the Father, and Jn. 10:30 states the manner of his existence, which is "inseparable" from the Father.

On these grounds, he argues that the unity suggested by Jn. 10:30 must refer to the nature and being of the Son and the Father. They have never been and they cannot be regarded as separated, because they have never ceased to be one. He made the point even clearer by examining the consequences of the alleged moral or ethical unity, which the Arians supported.³³² For this purpose he deploys the following arguments.

a) Athanasius denies that Jn. 10:30 suggests a unity of likeness which all creatures can have with God. This alleged unity would mean that not only the saints, patriarchs, prophets and apostles have agreement in teaching and dogmas, but also the angels and divine powers, as well as the lifeless nature the sun, the moon and the stars; none of them ever disagrees with the will of God. Those who have disagreed are no longer considered among them, like the devil, who "fell from the heavens" (Is. 14:12, Lk 10:18). The Arian argument implies that any of these beings can claim oneness with the Father, without, however, any such claim ever having been expressed by anybody. Athanasius characterizes such an event as "incongruous" (ἄτοπον) and "immodest" (ἄπρεπον).³³³

b) Human beings achieve likeness with God on account of a constant and voluntary imitation, according to the biblical exhortation (Lk. 6:36, Mat. 5:48, 1 Cor. 11:1, Eph.

³³¹ CAR2 56:26,268A.

³³² We have gathered and we will present in a comprehensive mannner the arguments of Athanasius namely from the following texts: CAR3 10-16; SYNO 48-51; AFRO 7-8. Cf. also T.E. Pollard, *op.cit.*, p. 341ff.

³³³ CAR3 10:26,341A.

5:1). This imitation refers to the virtue and the attributes of God and not to his essence. Also, because it is voluntary it is mutable, since creatures can change any time in virtue of the fact that they have their agreement "by influence" (ἐν κινήσει), "by participation" (ἐν μετουσίᾳ), and "in mind" (ἐν νῶ). The examples of the fall of Lucifer and Adam are sufficient to prove the point. Moreover, they imply that men need the divine grace to achieve and maintain that likeness. Athanasius supports the point with three verses: according to 1 Cor. 11:7 men are "images of God" not in their own right, but because the real image of God, who is the Son, indwelt in them in their creation and through his Incarnation. Also, the steadfast love for Christ in Rom. 8:35 is an "irrevocable" gift of the Spirit and the call of God (Rom. 11:29), without which men are unable to achieve any sort of likeness to the Father. Finally, Jn. 10:35 clearly states that men are called "gods", because of the "coming" of the Word of God to them and not because they are such in their being. Therefore, none of the creatures was ever called "Word", "Wisdom" or "Only-begotten Son" of God, but only the Son who as real God is incomparable among men who are called gods by participation, according to Ps. 82:2 and 85:8.³³⁴ On this basis of these arguments he concludes that "a mutable being cannot be like God, who is truly immutable, neither can a creature be like his Creator... A being which partakes cannot be identical with or similar to the one in whom it participates".³³⁵

c) The previous two arguments have shown that the oneness which Jn. 10:30 demands cannot apply to any creature, because of their mutable nature. Therefore, the oneness of the Son with the Father must be much superior to any sense of oneness that creatures can achieve. It attaches the Son to the Father, bringing the former as close as is

³³⁴ The interpretation of Athanasius is very interesting, because he applies the comparison of these psalmic verses not between the God of Israel and the pagan gods, as one would expect, but between the Son and men, according to its association to Jn. 10:35. Apparently, it is based on the fundamental existential distinction of the Son as the true God from any other occurrence of the title 'god' wherever this might appear. Obviously it is the tenor of his argument that demands this interpretation.

³³⁵ SYNO48:26,777C; AFRO 7:26,1041B-C.

possible to the latter. Athanasius argues that, this being the case, if one still insists on considering the likeness of the Son to the Father in terms of virtue and improvement, which are indicative of quality, then Jn. 10:30 would suggest compositeness in God, since it unites essence with quality. However, the Arian argument is groundless, because the essence of God is by definition "simple" (ἀπλῆ) and unchangeable (Jac. 1:17). The Son must possess the same kind of essence with the Father, so that this unity will be applicable and proper to God. The same kind of essence is maintained through the concept of "natural offspring", which proclaims the Son "ἴδιον" (the same, proper) and "ταυτόν" (identical) with the Father.³³⁶

d) Athanasius detects another consequence for the Father himself, which is based on the distinction between essence and attributes of the essence. He argues that when the Arians claim that the Son is like the Father in respect of teaching and dogmas, they signify two things: first the Father himself, and second the teaching and dogmas which belong to the Father. If the Son is like the Father according to the second, then the very name "Father" loses its meaning and it appears to be attributed to him conventionally. He is not Father in his being, but only by name. Paul had just such a likeness towards Christ because he professed his teaching, but he was also unlike him because he did not bear his nature. Of course, the Arians accepted this point, and therefore preferred the title "Ingenerate" as fittingly describing God in his being. In that case, however, Athanasius argues that Jn. 10:30 again is not applicable and meaningless.³³⁷

e) The next argument exhibits the contradiction and disarray which the Arian argument causes between faith and life. Athanasius argues that if the oneness of the Son with the Father is not in nature and essence and yet the Arians continue to call him "god", it is unavoidable for them to end up with ditheism. They appear to believe in two gods in

³³⁶ AFRO 8:26,1044C.

³³⁷ CAR3 11:26,344B.

spite of their monotheistic convictions, because although they reject two "Ingenerate" gods, they accept one Ingenerate and one Generated, one greater and one lesser god. Moreover, since they attribute divinity to more than one being, they can easily introduce more gods; in this respect they differ from the pagans only in that they accept just one second god, while they produce many more. Consequently, such beliefs also affect their worship through which they express their commitment to God. If the Son is creature, then beside the worship of the Creator they hold the worship of a creature as pagans do.³³⁸

f) Finally, Athanasius argues against the soteriological implications of the Arian argument. A moral or ethical unity of the Son with the Father was never enough to accomplish the great task of the salvation of men. Salvation could be granted only by God himself, therefore Jn. 10:30 must refer the oneness of Son and Father to their being. It is a fundamental argument, which underlies the whole debate and constantly appears in the Athanasian works from the early *On the Incarnation of the Word* to the late *On the Synods*.

In his first oration *Against the Arians* he characteristically argues:

"You were anointed since none else but you could unite man to the Holy Spirit, you the image of the Father, in which we were made in the beginning, for yours is even the Spirit. For the nature of things originate could give no warranty for this, angels having transgressed and men disobeyed. Therefore there was need for God and the Word is God, that those who had become under a curse, he himself might set free. If then he was out of nothing, he would not have been the Christ, being one among the others and having fellowship as the rest. But whereas he is God, as being Son of God and is everlasting king and exists as effulgence and character of the Father, therefore fitly is he the expected Christ".³³⁹

3.1.1.2 Jn. 10:30 in contrast to Jn. 17:11,20-23

Athanasius also engages in the interpretation of Jn. 17:11,20-23, which the Arians quoted in order to support their point about the moral unity of the Son with the Father.

³³⁸ CAR3 16:26,356B; Cf. the argument from worship is fundamental in Athanasius defence of the divinity of the Son as he explains many times with reference to Baptism, prayer, etc. See CAR1 34:26,81B-84A; CR2 41-42:26,233Bff; DECR 31:25,473A-B.

³³⁹ CAR1 49:26,113B-C.

They argued that the oneness of Jn. 10:30 and the mutual indwelling of Jn. 14:10, which the Nicenes used to signify unity in essence, was not a distinctive attribute of the Son. Jn. 17:11,20-23 uses exactly the same language to signify oneness of human beings with the Father. Using some sort of strictly logical equation, they argued that the combination of the two passages Jn. 10:30 and Jn. 17:11,20-23, does not allow the Nicenes to refer the unity of the Son with the Father to their essence. In that case they would be forced to refer the oneness of creatures with the Father also to their essence and to declare them gods like the Father. The other option which they suggested was an inversion of the final argument, that is, an attempt to understand the oneness of the Son with the Father according to the oneness of creatures with the Father, thus avoiding the previous contradiction.

Athanasius, however, suggests a third option as an answer to the problem. He denies the Arian equation and he suggests that the oneness of the Son with the Father should be understood as being different from that of creatures: the Son is one with the Father in his very being, while human beings are relatively one with the Father by grace and through an external imitation of the divine attributes. Therefore, the first Arian option, which suggests equality of human beings with God in essence, strikes Athanasius not simply as odd, but as an extraordinary statement which flows out of an "evil-mind" (κακόνοια), "thoughtless daring and diabolic madness" (ἀλόγιστον τόλμαν καὶ διαβολικὴν ἀπόνοιαν).³⁴⁰ For Athanasius it carries the same weight as the original claim of Lucifer: "We will ascend to heaven, we will be like the Most High" (Is. 14:14). He asserts that the Arian exegetical error lies in the fact that they absolutize realities which are relative and they take attributes which are granted to men by divine condescension to be equal to the attributes of God himself.

³⁴⁰ CAR3 17:26,360A. In the next pages we will follow the sequence of the Athanasian argument in CAR3 17-25.

Athanasius contends that the same case applies also to the interpretation of Jn 17; the Arians accept as reality what Scripture has given as relative image of reality. That means that the oneness of the Son with the Father expressed here has to be understood as the perfect example and the reality which men should aim to accomplish and not as identification. He argues that the method of using images is not alien to Scripture to which "it is a custom to takes the things of nature as images and illustration for people". The aim of this method is to "reveal" realities which are abstract and spiritual through the attributes of images which are visible and comprehensible to human minds. Scripture gives such examples when it wants to describe disposition or moral impulses of the human soul, for which it very frequently uses animals, as in Ps 31:9, Jer. 5:8, Lk 13:32 and Mat 10:16. Obviously, the exhortation of Scripture here is not to become animals as such, but to avoid the bad attributes or acquire the good ones which primarily characterize those animals. In the same pattern, the exhortation in Lk 6:36 and Mat 5:48 for men to become like God does not mean that they will really become like God in his essence. Such a perception is totally impossible and unacceptable. The vast ontological difference between God and men, who are created by God out of nothing, is the safety valve that secures those verses from any misunderstanding. They refer, therefore, to the imitation of God's "beneficent acts" (εὐεργεσία) on account of which men became gods not as the Father or his Word is, but to the degree that God himself has granted.

Athanasius asserts that Jn 17:11,20-23 belongs to the same category. It does not suggest that men will become one with the Father as the Son is, but it uses the image of the Son's oneness with the Father as example of the oneness which they should achieve to the extent that their nature allows. Such an oneness refers to the "unanimity" (ὁμοψυχία) and "consent of spirit" (τῆ τοῦ πνεύματος ἐνότητι) that men can have with one another and

by which they can resemble God, but it can never refer to their essence. He proceeds to prove the point by means of three theological arguments.

a) He focuses on the sharp distinction and total unlikeness of men to the Word recalling the manner with which Scripture addresses them. He argues that the identity of species (φύσις τοῦ γένους) between men and the Word, which the Arians allege, would demand a common name to describe it.³⁴¹ Such a name does not exist in the Bible although men and the Word are generated from the Father. This implies that they are generated differently and consequently they are different in nature. Therefore the names with which they are known are different; the former are called "men" (ἄνθρωποι) and the latter is called "Only-begotten", "Word", "Wisdom". As creatures, men are created from the ground, while the Son is God's own Word and Wisdom and therefore true God. Because the Arians used the Gospel of John, Athanasius recalls the evidence of other Johannine texts to prove his point. 1 Jn. 5:20 and Jn. 1:12 state that the Son is "true God", while men became gods by grace and participation to his true godhead; Jn. 14:6 and 17:17 state that the Son is himself the "Truth", while men become righteous through imitation of his goodness.

b) Presupposing this unlikeness between the Word and men one cannot allege the same kind of unity with the Father, because they belong to different species and their unity has to be according to it. One can be united with another who is similar according to

³⁴¹ Athanasius says "For it is right, that they who have one nature should have a common name"; According to Kittel's account (*Theological dictionary*, "Name") the link between name and nature occurs only in the Hellenistic thought. However, we think that such an emphasis is due to the special philosophical elaboration to which the two notions were subjected in the Hellenistic context. The belief that a name characterizes a certain reality-nature is a fundamental principle in the very structure of every language. Moreover, a closer examination of the Old Testament discloses that similar to the Hellenistic understanding is also Hebrew thought: a name represents or corresponds to the particular personality or character of its bearer; a change in the personality is followed by a change of the corresponding name. Cf. for example the change of the name of God from "God the Almighty" into "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:13-17), which signifies his new function as the God who would lead them out of Egypt (R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, vol. I, London 1978, pp. 338-357 and especially 355ff). Cf also the change of Abram into Abraham (Gen. 17:5) and of Iacob into Israel (Gen. 32:28), which expresses a new reality that applies to them.

species and therefore men are united essentially only with one another and with God as far as their nature allows. Athanasius argues:

"And becoming one as the Father and the Son, we shall not be such as the Father is by nature in the Son and the Son in the Father, but according to our own nature and as it is possible for us to be moulded by them and to learn how we ought to be one, just as we learned to be merciful. For things alike are naturally one with one another, because all beings are ranked together according to species. The Word is unlike us and like the Father, therefore, while he is in nature and truth one with his own Father, we, as being of one kind with each other (for we were all made from one and one is the nature of all men) become one with each other in disposition, having as our model the Son's natural unity with the Father" (ch. 20).

In other words, Athanasius draws two parallel lines of unity between the Son and the Father on the one hand and human beings and the Father on the other, which are according to the kind of their nature.

c) Finally, Athanasius argues that Jn. 17:11, 20-23 neither crosses those lines nor confuses the nature of the Son and the creatures, but introduces the natural and undivided unity as the example of men's unity with each other and with the Father. This unity is the objective of men's imitation of God and applies to their "disposition" (διάθεσιν) towards each other and towards the Father: "So also here, wishing that our disposition to each other should be true, firm and indissoluble, he takes the pattern from himself and says 'that they may be one as we are', whose oneness is indivisible". Such an example was necessitated by the fact that, because the divine nature is unchangeable, it would be "safer" (ἀσφαλεστέρα) for men to contemplate it and make their choices between "good" (βέλπιστα) and "evil" (φάυλα).

Athanasius turns next to the interpretation of the particular verses which demonstrate the exegetical aspect of his arguments. Its characteristic feature is the high degree of care and discernment with which he identifies the subtle variations of meaning which suggest decisive differentiations in sense and implications.

The first point which Athanasius examines, is the expression "in us" in vs. 21. He argues that if it suggested that men will be in the Father as the Son is, it would read "they will be in you as the Son is in the Father". Literally, the phrase "in us" conveys the meaning of example. It stands instead of "Let them learn of us" and occurs in other places in the Bible, like 1 Cor. 4:6 where Paul exemplifies the situation of the Church of Corinth "in" himself and Appolos. As such it implies that real and perfect unity applies between Son and Father and that this unity is presented as example to men. Men are united with the Father through the Son.

Athanasius suggests one more interpretation which also is based on and which emphasizes the principle that men acquire unity with the Father by grace and do not possess it by nature. He argues that "in us" might mean "in our power", because, whatever men are able to accomplish, they do so on account of the grace of God. He remarks that this view is also aligned with the rest of the biblical doctrine, recalling the evidence of Ps. 59:14 and 43:6.

Then, Athanasius turns to vs. 22, which he characterizes as an extension of the previous notion. Again he makes two literary observations: firstly, he argues that the Lord did not say "so that they will be in you as I am", but he said "as we are", making clear that he does not consider himself apart from the Father, because he is fully self-conscious of his natural identity with him (*ἀληθῶς ταυτότητα τῆς φύσεως*). Secondly, the adverb "as" (*καθώς*) also signifies an example or image of the reality to which it refers and not identification with that reality.

Athanasius finds the solution of the problem in vs. 23, where the relationships among the three participants -Father, Son and men- are clearly explained. The hermeneutical key is the double nature of Jesus Christ; as eternal Son of God he is one with the Father and as the Incarnate Son of God he is one with men on account of the

humanity which he took up through his incarnation. Hence, men become one with one another as members of the one body of Christ and one with the Father in the power of Christ's unity with the Father. Athanasius argues as follows:

"Here the Lord asks something greater and perfect for us. It is clear that the Word has come to be in us for he has put on our body. 'And you Father in me' because I am your Word and since you are in me, for I am your Word, and I in them for the body and because you have perfected the salvation of men in me, therefore I ask that they may also become one according to the body that is in me and according to its perfection; that they too may become perfect having oneness with it and having become one in it; that as if all were put on by me, all may be one body and one spirit and may grow up unto a perfect man. For we all, partaking of the same, become one body, having the one Lord in ourselves" (ch. 22).

Finally, summing up his interpretation, Athanasius stresses two points. First, he underlines the significance of the use of exemplifying language in the verses and secondly, he explains in what manner Scripture describes the possibility of man's achieving oneness with the Father.

Elaborating further on the first point and adding to what he said so far, he argues that the adverb "as" (καθώς) excludes any sense of identification or equality, because it is applicable only to different natures, that is, "other and other" (ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο). Therefore, it is a mistake to confuse the relationships of the Son with the Father with those of creatures with the Father, because they are of different kinds. The former are the perfect image, which exist on their own right, while the latter are in need of a perfect image, because they are imperfect in their nature: "If we too become one as the Son in the Father, we shall not be like the Son nor equal to Him; for he and we are but parallel. Therefore and on this account the word "as" is applied to us, because beings which are different from others in nature, became like them, when viewed in a certain relation. Thus, the Son himself is simply and without condition in the Father, because he has this attribute by nature. Ourselves, though, who do not have the nature, we need an image and example".

He explains further the point of achieving oneness with the Father with the evidence of 1 Jn. 4:13: "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit". This verse, says Athanasius, shows clearly that men's participation in God takes place not because they desire it, as the Arians implied, but because God desires it. It is a gift of the Spirit. Because the Spirit is God's Spirit and is granted to men, men unite with the Father in the power of his abiding Spirit. It is never stated, though, that the Son participates to the Father in the same manner. It is rather confessed that he is the one who supplies the Spirit (Jn. 16:7) and the Spirit is the one who takes from him (Jn. 16:14-15). Athanasius, therefore, strongly emphasizes the fact that "On the one hand, the Son is in the Father as his own Word and effulgence. On the other, when we are apart from the Spirit, we are strange and distant from God, whereas when we participate to the Spirit, we are knit into the Godhead. Hence, our being in the Father is not ours, but the Spirit's which is in us and abides in us, as far as by true confession we preserve it in us" (ch. 24).

Concluding his argument Athanasius summarizes his interpretation, underscoring the two crucial points which determine the meaning of the verses and consequently the whole doctrine that flows out of it. First, the very fact that human beings are one with the Father is not an attribute of their own nature, but a gift which is granted by the Spirit. The Spirit, who abides in the Father and is sent through the Son, is the cause of men's oneness. Second, the phrase "as we are" (*καθώς ἡμεῖς*) does not identify the Son's oneness with the Father with that of men, but conveys the meaning of an example. It denotes the "infallibility" (*ἀδιάπτωτος*) and "irrevocability" (*ἀμεταμέλητος*) of the gift of the Spirit to men, which resembles the immutable and indivisible natural unity of the Son with the Father.

The argument of Athanasius so far has clearly shown that he makes a sharp distinction between the likeness of the Son from the likeness of creatures to the Father on account of their different nature (ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο). However, he proceeds further to prove the point by means of a careful comparison of the attributes of the Son with the attributes of creatures and the Father respectively. The comparison takes place on solely biblical grounds through a massive collection of the most characteristic biblical verses which apply to each of the three parts. Jn. 16:15 is the key verse, which reveals that the likeness of the Son to the Father is in essence and not through an imitation of his attributes.

3.1.2 Jn 16:15: identity of attributes

In contrast to those of Arius, the principles adopted by Athanasius neither forcibly affect any of the compared beings, nor subordinate them to a particular mode of existence or description defined by philosophical speculation, but allow them to unfold their identity freely, as has been revealed in the Bible. Such an attitude is due to two fundamental presuppositions which underlie his thought. The first one consists of the sharp ontological distinction between two "kinds" of beings, the uncreated and the created, that is, God and whatever God created. Apparently, any middle condition or "demi-being" is strictly excluded, in contrast to the Arians who inclined to accept the middle position, thus betraying strong influences of Greek philosophy and the same structure of thought which produced the pagan "theogonies". Athanasius' argument is simple: since there are only two kinds of being, the Son will belong either to the one or to the other, or in other words he will "coexist" (ὁμοῦ) either with the Father or with the Father's creatures. It is worthy to note that in the following quotation he uses the terms "of the same nature" (ὁμοφύης) and "of the same species" (ὁμογενής) in parallel with "homoousios".

"If the Word is a creature and foreign to the Father's essence, so that he is separated from him by the difference of nature, he cannot be one in essence

with him [ὁμοούσιος], but rather he is of one species [ὁμογενής] by nature with the creatures, although he surpasses them in grace. On the other hand, if we confess that he is not a creature but the genuine offspring of the Father's essence, it would follow that he is inseparable from the Father, being of one nature [ὁμοφύης], because he is begotten from him. Being such, he should obviously be called of one essence [ὁμοούσιος]"³⁴²

The second principle refers to the attributes that describe every kind of existence and identify them as such. He argues that every being shares the same essential attributes with other beings of the same species, which distinguish species from species and do not allow their identities to mix. On this basis one identifies God, angels, human beings and any other group of beings of the same nature (ὁμοφύη). Therefore, in order to answer the question whether the Son is like the Father or creatures, one has to discern carefully the attributes of each being and classify it to its own category of species. Thus, Athanasius argues, "We are of the same essence [ὁμοούσιοι] with those whom we are alike to and identical with. We are human beings and we have the same likeness and identity and we are of one essence, because mortality, perishability, mutability and [generation] out of nothing apply to all. The same happens to the angels with one another and to all other beings, which are of the same nature"³⁴³

From this premise Athanasius goes on to deploy in full his argument. In the first place, he compares the attributes of the Son with those of the creatures on the basis of the biblical evidence. He underlines the most characteristic attributes of the created nature as the above text showed. The elements which he discerns are the following.³⁴⁴

a) None of the creatures is self-sufficient or can sustain itself or others in existence. They all belong and are under the sway of God. In one word, they are all "slaves", while the Son is called the Lord the Almighty. For the attributes of creatures he uses the following psalmic verses:

Ps 18:1: "The heavens are telling the glory of God"

³⁴² SYNO 48:26,777C; Cf. also SER2 3:612B.

³⁴³ SER2 3:26,612B.

³⁴⁴ Cf. SER3-4:26:612B and AFRO 8:26,1044A.

Ps 23:1: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof"

Ps 113:3: "The sea looked and fled"

Ps 102:21: "Bless the Lord all his hosts, his ministers that do his will"

For the Son considers it enough to use Ap. 1:8: "I am [the one] who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty". Apparently, the contrast is sharp and clear.

b) Creatures have mutable nature (τρεπτά) and they all change (ἀλλοιούμενα), while the Son is immutable and unchangeable. To prove the point Athanasius uses one example from every kind of creatures, that is, he refers to Job 25:5 ("the stars are not clean in his sight") for the lifeless creation, to the fall of Lucifer (Is. 14:12 "How did Lucifer fall from heaven, who dawns in the morning", Lk. 10:18 "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven") for the spiritual angelic beings and the fall of Adam (Gen. 3) for the human beings. Created nature as a whole is by definition imperfect and therefore changeability is one of its attributes, as Athanasius asserts: "and everything is changeable". On the other hand he uses for the Son the Christological application of Ps. 101:26-28 by Paul in Heb. 1:10-12 ("You, Lord, have founded the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain") and the Christological confession in Heb. 13:8 ("Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever").³⁴⁵

c) Creatures have the beginning of their existence at a chronologically and ontologically specified point for they have been created by God out of nothing. The Son, who is the God of all (Rom. 9:5), is not created or made but indeed the Creator and Maker of all beings. He supports this distinction with the following verses:

Rom. 4:17: "[God] who calls into existence things that do not exist"

Gen 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"

Is. 66:2: "My hand has made all these things"

The selection of these verses has been carefully made and aims to demonstrate the main points of God's creative activity, which is creation out of nothing (Rom. 4:7) that

³⁴⁵ Cf. also CAR1 35:26,84Cf.

includes all beings (Gen. 1:1) and has been done by the Hand of God (Is. 66:2). He ascribes the role of divine Creator to the Son through the verses:

Rom 9:5: "Christ, who is God of all be blessed for ever"

Heb 1:2: "through whom he made the ages"

Jn 1:3: "all things were made through him"

Heb 1:10 (Ps 101:26): ""You, Lord, have founded the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands"

d) Finally, and in effect of the previous, he refers to the disputable title "god", which appears to apply not only to the Son, but also to the creatures. Trying to explain how they came to be called "gods" and the difference between this and the Son's godhead, he lays the emphasis on two points. First, he stresses the fact that creatures were not called gods at the very first moment of their existence, which would have implied that it was an essential and immanent attribute of them, but they acquired various names descriptive of their species, like heavens, earth, stars, angels, men etc. Second, the title "god" is attributed to human beings afterwards and is due to the grace of God and participation to his Word according to Jn. 10:35: "He called them gods, to whom the Word of God came". This fact does not abolish creaturehood, because it is a mutable gift. The Bible maintains and emphasizes the distinction, especially in two characteristic verses, which Athanasius quotes *Ps. 81:6-7* ("You are gods and sons of the most high, but you die as men").

On the other hand, the divinity of the Son is essential, because he is only confessed in the Bible as God through various ways. Athanasius quotes again,

1 Jn 5:20: "He is the true God and eternal life"

Ps. 44:7: "Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity".

The point is more powerfully reinforced through a remarkable exegetical transition from the notion of the "God of Israel" (for whom, obviously the Arians would not raise any objection about false godhead), to Jesus Christ as Son of God. He quotes Is. 45:14-15 ("The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia and the Sabceans... shall come over in chains and shall bow down to you... for God is in you. You are the God of Israel, whom

we did not know"), from which he picks up the phrase "for God is in you" to combine with Jn. 14:10 and draw the conclusion: "For who else is that God, in whom God is, than the Son, who says *I am in the Father and the Father is in me?*".

With this account, Athanasius completes the first part of his comparison, from which he reaches the conclusion: "So, let the curious ones investigate whether there is likeness of the Son to the creatures and whether they can find in the creatures those which are in the Son, so that they would dare to call the Word of God creature. But, they will not be able to find anything, the ones who are insolent in everything and in error about piety".³⁴⁶

In the second part of his argument Athanasius compares the attributes of the Son with those of the Father. The situation here appears completely the opposite; he confirms a perfect identification of names, acts and authority. However, he does not allow himself to be carried away to the Sabellian error by overemphasizing the unity at the expense of the distinction between Father and Son on account of a strong anti-Arian concern, as Arius did against the previous heretics. Athanasius considers both extremes equally erroneous, and although the refutation of the Arian positions is constantly his main interest and aim, his clear-sighted and discerning interpretation does justice to the biblical text and does not twist it to fit his views, and so maintain the balance between unity and distinction. This is, from our point of view, the significance of the crucial observation with which he sets out to demonstrate the common attributes between Father and Son from the Bible: "He [the Son] has equality with the Father by titles expressive of unity and what the Scripture says for the Father, it says for the Son too, with the only exception that he is not called Father".³⁴⁷ This single point of distinction carries, for Athanasius, the same weight as the multitude of verses which speak about the unity of the Son with the Father.

³⁴⁶ SER2 3:26,612B.

³⁴⁷ SYNO 49:26,780B.

Having, then, established the distinction between the two, he proceeds to demonstrate the community of attributes, which Father and Son share, specifying the particular ones to which Jn. 16:15 ("all that the Father has is mine") points. In fact the neuter gender of the pronoun "all" (πάντα) extends the common attributes to all those which characterize God as such. Athanasius maintains this neuter gender as well as the use of pronouns, like "all" (πάντα, ὅσα) and "those" (αὐτά, τὰ), avoiding any technical term which could in any way render a limited characterization on philosophical grounds. The only "term" he uses is the noun "τὰ ιδιώματα", or, alternatively, the adjective "τὰ ἴδια", which preserve the general character of the pronouns.³⁴⁸ Another important point is the fact that he takes for granted the consensus with the Arians with regard to those attributes, which are considered as the proper ones for God and thus the Father. Therefore, he does not give any biblical proof those which belong to the Father, but only for those which belong to the Son. In particular, he pinpoints the following.³⁴⁹

a) Eternity (ἀίδιον):

Heb 1:2: "Through whom he also created the ages"

Rom 1:20: "His eternal power and godhead"

Jn 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word"

Jn 1:9: "The true light that enlightens every man who is coming into the world"

b) Creatorship (ποιητής):³⁵⁰

Jn 1:3: "All things were made through him"

Jn 5:19: "For whatever he [the Father] does, the Son does likewise"

c) Common names:

God (Θεός): 1 Jn 5:20: "We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life"

Jn 1:1: "The Word was God"

Phil 2:6: "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"

Ps 117:27: "The Lord God has appeared to us"³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Although we will use the English translation "proper" for "ἴδιος" and "attributes" for "ιδιώματα", as the most commonly accepted, we do not regard either of them as adequate to convey the meaning of the Greek terms, which also include the notions of intimate link between the subject and its attributes, expression of an inner reality and possession.

³⁴⁹ Cf. SYNO 49:26, 780B and SER2 2:26,609B.

³⁵⁰ CAR3 14:26,349C.

Ps 83:8: "The God of gods will be seen in Zion"

Almighty (Παντοκράτωρ): Rom 9:5: "Christ, who is God over all, be blessed for ever"

Ap 1:8: "I am [the one] who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty"

Lord (Κύριος): Gen 19:24: "The Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord"

1 Cor 8:6: "One Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things", like the Father as in Is 45:5: "I am the Lord" and Am 5:16: "Thus says the Lord"

Light (Φῶς): Jn 8:12: "I am the light"

Heb 1:3: "The effulgence of his glory"

d) Equality of honour and mastership over the angels:

Heb 1:6: "Let all God's angels worship him" (Ps 96:7)

Mat 4:11: "Angels came and ministered him"

Mat 24:31: "He will send out his angels"

Jn 5:23: "That they all may honour the Son as they honour the Father"

e) Authority for the remission of sins:

Mic 7:18: "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity"

Mat 9:5: "Your sins are forgiven"

Mark 2:10: "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"

f) Royalty (Βασιλεία):

1 Tim 1:17: "To the Kings of ages"

Ps 23:7: "Lift up your gates, O rulers and be lifted up O eternal gates, that the King of glory may come in"

Dan 4:3: "His kingdom is everlasting"

Dan 7:14: "his kingdom shall not pass away"

Athanasius recapitulates the significance of this community of attributes between Father and Son in the following conclusions:

a) The Son appears to be "like" (ὅμοιος) the Father. This likeness cannot be external or only in appearances, but has to be "in essence" (ὅμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν). It is only in this respect that Athanasius accepts the term "ὅμοιος". He argues that such an understanding is necessary for two reasons. First, because Col. 1:15 and Heb. 1:3 proclaim the Son to be the "image" and "effulgence" of God. If the essence of God were excluded, then neither would the image be complete nor the effulgence perfect. Second, Col. 2:9 and

³⁵¹ Cf. the meaning of the verb "ἐπέφανεν": not "shined" or "gave light" as English translations suggest, but rather "appeared", as in Tit 2:13. This is the meaning that Athanasius supports and constructs the whole argument like this: Christ is the one who appeared, the Psalm states that God will appear, thus Christ is God; Cf. also the next verse Ps 83:7.

Jn. 1:16 suggest that the Son has the fullness of the godhead, which necessarily includes the essence of God.³⁵²

b) The community of attributes provides the content and correspondence to reality of Jn. 14:10 and Jn. 10:30. The kind of relationship that those verses proclaim, that is, mutual indwelling and indivisible unity, can only be meaningful in a unity of attributes. They spring from and manifest that relationship. However, he intensifies the importance of this point arguing also that Jn. 14:9, "whoever sees me sees the Father", implies not only that the Son simply possesses the attributes of the Father, but, furthermore that he does so in his own right. Reversing the order, he asserts that whatever one knows about the attributes of the Father, one knows *because* one has seen them in the Son. In other words, since the Son reveals the Father, any knowledge that human beings can acquire about the Father is due to the fact that they saw the Son. Therefore, the Son has to be full God like the Father, because in the opposite case the knowledge of men about the Father could not be complete.³⁵³

c) The high point of his argument is the fact that Athanasius rejects the fundamental Arian position that the Son carries all the divine attributes even though he is a creature in his nature. For Athanasius, people who hold such views are "mindless" (ἄφρονες). A created being can never in any sense claim that it holds all that God himself holds for two reasons. Firstly, it cannot make this claim because of the way that beings exist. Their nature has a beginning and therefore by definition cannot hold the eternity of God. Secondly, all the attributes described above constitute the elements through which God himself is acknowledged as God; if a created being could possess them then God would appear to differ in nothing from creatures. By the same token, neither could any other being, which is in essence other than the Father also hold them. Athanasius expresses

³⁵² SYNO 38:26,760B.

³⁵³ SER2 2:26,609B-612A.

this otherness with the terms "ἕτεροφυές", "ἄλλοτριούσιον", "ἕτεροούσιον", "ἄνομοιούσιον", "ἄνομοιογενές", which cover any possible ontological status. Whatever belongs essentially to God cannot be shared or possessed by anybody else. Athanasius recalls Is. 42:8 "I give my glory to no other", to which he renders full ontological significance. And he concludes: "But if this is immodest [ἄπρεπές], it is clear that the Son is not unlike in essence, but homoousios with the Father; for if what the Father has is by nature the Son's and the Son himself is from the Father and because of his oneness of godhead and of nature he and the Father are one and that he who has seen the Son has seen the Father, reasonably is he called by the fathers homoousios; for to what is other in essence, it does not belong to possess such attributes".³⁵⁴

d) Consequently, Athanasius also denies the Arian position that all these attributes are acquired by the Son through participation (μετουσία). He asserts that they hold such views because their understanding of the notion of participation is also erroneous. He argues that whoever participates in the Father does so through God's Word. The Word, therefore, does not participate in God in the same way, because what belongs to him is his own, and as such he is the very lightening and deifying power of the Father, without whom the Father does nothing. Therefore, these attributes have to be essential property, so that he will be able to communicate them to the participants. In this respect it is necessary for him to be of exactly the same essence as the Father. Apparently, the soteriological aspect underlies Athanasius' argument once again, as one can see from the following quotation:

"For by participating to him [the Son] we participate to the Father, because the Word is the Father's own [ἴδιος]. So, if he were himself also from participation and the essential Godhead and image of the Father were not his own, he could not deify being deified himself. For it is not possible that he who merely possesses from participation can communicate to others, because what he holds is not his, but belongs to the giver and whatever he has received is barely the grace sufficient for himself".³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ SYNO 50:26,784A.

³⁵⁵ SYNO 51:26,784B.

3.2 The Christological Titles

The major weight of Athanasius' argument for the unity of God is carried by the Christological title 'Word' and the associated titles and paradigms of 'Wisdom', 'power' and 'image'. He argues for his viewpoint against a specific interpretation of the same data used by the Arians who also appealed to a quite extensive set of biblical texts in support of their standpoint. Athanasius particularly underlines the different presuppositions of the Arians in approaching the biblical texts. He demonstrates the legitimacy of his point of view by carefully selecting biblical texts and backing them with exegetical and theological observations that provide a full and coherent account of the biblical doctrine of the Word of God.

3.2.1 Word (Λόγος)

The structure of Athanasius' argument on the doctrine of 'Logos' is dictated by his intention of countering the major Arian objections to what he maintained as its traditional understanding. The Arian understanding of the 'Logos' and of the associated divine titles had been presented at the Council of Nicea and supported with various biblical texts. While Athanasius does witness this in the *De Decretis*,³⁵⁶ he had already, in the *Contra Arianos*, encountered and refuted their interpretation by the Arians on a biblical and theological basis.³⁵⁷ This is probably why in the *De Decretis* he does not get involved in further exegesis of them, but simply produces the response of the Nicenes, which suggested an altogether different approach to the understanding of the 'Word'.

As we explained in the first part of this thesis, the Arians erred inasmuch as they employed an anthropological approach to the biblical designation of the Son as 'Word'.

³⁵⁶ DECR 20:25,452A.

³⁵⁷ CAR2 37-41:26,225Aff.

They viewed the Son and the Father as two sharply distinguished individuals, who in order to maintain their individuality had to be distinguished in their essence as two entirely different beings. Therefore, Arius could not accept the possibility either of attributing to the Son the adjective 'proper' (ἴδιος) to the Father, or of identifying him with the Word of the Father in one ontological reality because this would be literally and rationally inconsistent.³⁵⁸ The term 'word' signifies an impersonal energy of human beings that is proper to their essence. Thus he held that both the Son and the Father are individual beings and have their own essential attributes and therefore Christ can be called 'word', 'wisdom' and 'power' only conventionally or to put it in Athanasius' words "καταχρηστικῶς, or κατὰ μετουσίαν".³⁵⁹ Arius identified two 'words' and 'wisdoms' in God: the one is always existing with him 'ἀγεννήτως' as an energy of his essence, and the other is the Christ who is called after the first one because he participates in it (κατὰ μετουσίαν) in a unique manner.³⁶⁰ Athanasius ascribes the biblical background of this point of view to a literary observation on 1 Cor 1:24 by Asterius the Sophist, who argues that the Apostle preached Christ as "power and wisdom" of God and not as "*the* power and *the* wisdom". The omission of the article, he claimed, implied a distinction between the immanent and coexisting power and wisdom of God itself and Christ, one of those beings called powers of God, exceptionally though superior to them because he is "firstborn" and "only-begotten".

As the Arians explained at the Council of Nicea, creatures which are called 'power' of God are those which serve or are used by God for special missions. They are attributed the same predicates "like", "image", "always", "power" and "in him", which the Nicenes

³⁵⁸ See R. Williams, *The Logic*, pp. 58-62 for a full account of the significance and meaning of the term 'proper' according to Arius.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Arius' *Thalia* in CAR1 5:26,21Af; 9:26,32A.

³⁶⁰ CAR1 32:26,77A; CAR2 37:26,225A.

used to denote the natural divinity of the Son and his unity with the Father. The Arians appealed for support to the following biblical texts:

1 Cor 11:7: "[the man] is the image and glory of God"

2 Cor 4:11: "while we live we are always"

Acts 17:28: "In him we live"

Rom 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Joel 2:25: "the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great power"

Ex 12:41: "All the power [hosts] of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt"

Ps 45:8: "The Lord of powers [hosts] is with us"

On these grounds they argued that the likeness of the Son to God does not differ from the likeness of all those creatures to God. Therefore, none of the names which the Nicenes used for supporting the "homoousios" could be exclusively used only for the Son. The Son could not possess in his being the divine essence, because he would be considered as "homoousion part" of it and consequently a divisive factor for the divine being. The unity between them should be external, as we have already seen, i.e., agreement of teaching, and the title "Word" should not be understood as having ontological significance, but only metaphorical. The Son as the "Word" of God that created the world acted as mediator who received from God the art of creating. This was the only way that Arius could use the term "Word" because, as he argued, if it were to be taken literally, it would be impossible to identify which one of the many words that God utters is the One and Only Word, which Athanasius and his party supported.³⁶¹

As Athanasius explains, such an argument implies an anthropological understanding of the Word of God, who is confused with the words of human beings. Trying to clear the confusion, he argues that although the term 'Word' is to be taken literally it does not apply anthropological patterns of existence to God because it is the biblical description that presents God speaking and the world coming into existence through his Word. Nevertheless, the attributes of the nature of the Word of God are not to

³⁶¹

DECR 16:25,444A.

be defined by the attributes of the human word but by the biblical description itself, so that this image would not impose created mode of existence on the uncreated God. The title 'word' has to be understood both in its literal and metaphorical sense, paying special attention to what point the one or the other should refer.³⁶² He establishes the metaphorical conception of the Word on God's different nature from the human.³⁶³ He asserts that these differences are made evident from the different manner in which the Bible talks about the Word of God and the different attributes of nature which it ascribes to him. The Christological criterion is again the regulative factor that determines the Athanasian interpretation. The identification of the Word of God with Jesus Christ, which the New Testament teaches (Jn. 1:1,3, 1 Cor. 8:6b, Col. 1:16), constitutes the premise from which he starts in listing the differences of the Word of God from the word of human beings and the words of God.

Referring, firstly, to the contrast of the attributes of the Word of God with the words of human beings Athanasius makes the following clarifications.

a) Human word consists of "syllables" and its only effect is to give expression to the mind of the speaker. The divine Word lives and acts (ἐνεργεῖ) with immediate existential effects because He creates beings. Human beings use their hands to produce

³⁶² The understanding of the 'word' in its literary and metaphorical sense is what Athanasius expresses as "to take rightly what is written and to dwell upon our word as an illustration" (CAR2 3626,224B). To discern the degree of metaphor and the right place to apply it to, is the most difficult aspect of the interpreter's task, which requires long experience and deep assimilation of the biblical revelation. In fact, the hermeneutical dispute between Arius and Athanasius, as we have seen in most of cases, lies exactly in the different points to which they applied either of the two methods.

³⁶³ Athanasius' reference to the divine nature brings forth the generic sense of identification of the Father and his Word: "For such as he that begets, the same of necessity is the offspring; and such as is the Word's Father, the same must be also His Word" (CAR2 35). The divine nature however is by definition incomprehensible and therefore the inquiries to it should have constant reference to this: "Nor must we ask why the word of God is not such as our word, considering God is not such as we, as has been said before; nor again is it right to seek how the word is from God or how is he God's radiance or how God begets and what is the manner of his begetting...It is all one as if they sought where God is and how God is and of what nature the Father is. But to ask such questions is irreligious and argues an ignorance of God, so it is not holy to venture such questions concerning the generation of the Son of God, not to measure God and his wisdom by our own nature and infirmity" (CAR2 36:26,224A).

things, because their word does not have 'energy' (οὐδέν εἰσι εἰς ἐνέργειαν), whereas the Word of God is both sufficient and capable of this.³⁶⁴

b) Since human beings are of created nature, come out of nothing and live in time, their word has the same attributes: it is temporary, it appears and disappears, in fact it does not constitute an ontological reality (οὐχ ὑφίσταται). On the contrary, the Word of God according to *Heb. 4:12* ("For the Word of God is living and active sharper than any two-edged sword...") and *Ps. 118:89* ("The Word of God endures for ever") exists eternally. The generic identification with the Father is the only explanation for attributing to the Word such qualities: "Such as is the Word's Father, such must be also His Word".

c) The perishable nature of human words produces multiplicity: human beings 'think and re-think' (λογίζονται καὶ ἐπιλογίζονται) and utter many words which multiply as time and seasons pass away. Their words are imperfect and they need one another to express a full conception. The Word of God, because He belongs to God, is perfect, He does not need complementing elements or second words, and therefore is One and Only: "God's Word is one and the same, as it is written, 'The Word of God endures for ever', not changed, not before or after another, but existing the same always. For it is fitting, whereas God is One, that his Image should be one also and his Word One and One his Wisdom".³⁶⁵

d) The fact that the Bible identifies the Word as the Son of God and both titles with Jesus Christ implies that He is not a mere impersonal energy, but is substantiated into a concrete being and He is identified as an individual who lives and acts like the Father. Athanasius expresses this understanding with the terms 'substantive wisdom' (ἐνούσιος σοφία), 'living word' (ζῶν λόγος), 'substantive energy' (ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια).³⁶⁶ We

³⁶⁴ CAR2 35:26,221C.

³⁶⁵ CAR2 36:26,224C; Cf. also DECR 15.

³⁶⁶ SYNO 41:26,768A.

consider this to be the high-point of Athanasius' argument which suggests a dynamic view of the divine being according to which being and act transcend their definition by human experience and designate an incomprehensible unity of existence.

Maintaining this understanding of the Word of God steadfastly, Athanasius did not ignore the biblical description of God uttering many words that are similar to those that human beings utter. The Arians, who could not think in terms of transcending the biblical data in a way that is not under the control of the human mind, contested the exclusiveness of the Athanasian 'Word' on the grounds that it is impossible to identify one of the divine oracles as *the* Word of God in Athanasius' sense because of the multiplicity of the words of God as they appear in the Bible.³⁶⁷ In view of this objection Athanasius asserts the uniqueness of the Word of God as follows:

"For first, using such language about God, they conceive of him almost as a man speaking and reversing his first words by his second, just as if one word of God were not sufficient for the framing of all things at the Father's will, and for his providential care for all. For his speaking many words would argue a feebleness in them all, each needing the service of the other. But that God should have one Word, which is the true doctrine, both shews the power of God and the perfection of the Word that is from Him".³⁶⁸

And with these explanations he continues,

"For there are not many Words, or each would be imperfect, but one is the Word that he only may be perfect, and because, God being one, his image too must be one, which is the Son. For the Son of God, as may be learnt from the divine oracles themselves, is himself the Word of God, and the Wisdom and the Image and the Hand and the Power; for God's offspring is one and these titles are token of the generation from the Father".³⁶⁹

This synthesizing exegesis of these Christological titles is based on the conception of God creating the world, for evidence of which Athanasius refers, namely, to Is. 48:13, 51:16, Ps. 103:24, Prov. 3:19, Jn. 1:1-3, Heb. 1:1-2, 1 Cor. 8:6b, and Col. 1:12-17. On this

³⁶⁷ DECR 16-17:25,444A-B. Athanasius accuses the Arians of being "ignorant of the truth and inexperienced of the divine Scriptures".

³⁶⁸ DECR 16:25,444A.

³⁶⁹ DECR 17:25,444C.

basis we may observe that the distinctive understanding of the Word of God in contrast to the words of God is founded on two principles.

a) The Word of God finds its meaning in the creation of the world. He is comprehensively understood as the divine act that creates the universe and substantiates the will of God. God's only Word is the one that realizes the biblical phrase "God spoke" in the context of the creation of the world which is indicated by the phrase "and it was so".³⁷⁰

b) The Word of God has its reference directly to God the Father as his offspring on the grounds of which He is identified as the Only-begotten Son of God. Both titles 'Word' and 'Son' attribute to the Father the act of generation and describe in human terms the intimate and mutual relations of the Father to his offspring (Jn. 14:10).³⁷¹

On this basis, the Word of God is distinguished from the many words that God speaks, because the latter are words that God addresses to human beings. Their point of reference, that is, is not the Father himself as in the phrases 'Let us make man' or 'God spoke', but to human beings who are willing to listen and reply to them. Therefore, they are very frequently followed by conversation, as for example, God conversing with Abraham, Moses, Zachariah, etc. Ultimately, Athanasius argues, these words are mediated through the only Word and Wisdom of God who knows the will of the Father and through whom the Father is solely revealed.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ CAR2 31:26,212B.

³⁷¹ "For if God is the Father of a word at all, wherefore is not he that is begotten a Son? And again, who should be the Son of God, but his Word?" (DECR 17:*ibid.*).

³⁷² For the continuation of Athanasius' understanding at this point compare the following statements: "For each of these [words] has the mediator Word and the Wisdom of God which makes known the will of the Father" (CAR2 31:*ibid.*) and "...while all things originated have by participation the grace of God, he is the Father's Wisdom and Word of which all things partake; it follows that he, being the deifying and enlightening power of the Father, in which all things are deified and quickened, is not alien in essence from the Father, but *homoousios*" (SYNO 51:26,784B).

3.2.2 Wisdom (Σοφία)

As he did for the title 'Word', so for the title 'Wisdom', Athanasius tries to prove that the biblical references to it convey a different meaning when they refer to God from the meaning they have in other contexts. He makes similar observations for 'Wisdom' with those of 'Word' especially with reference to the creation of the world. He distinguishes the creative Wisdom of God, which brings things that do not exist into existence, from the wisdom of men which is a reflection of the divine Wisdom.³⁷³ On this distinction he establishes the unity of the divine essence of the Father and the Son.

The verses which he most frequently uses for the Son as the Creative Wisdom of God are the following:

Ps. 103:24: "In wisdom you have created them all"

1 Cor. 1:24: "Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God"

Prov. 3:19: "The Lord by Wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens"

Prov. 8:27: "When he established the heavens I was there"

They appear in the same lists with the other verses on the biblical description of the creation of the world by God through his 'Hand', his 'Word', or Jesus Christ.³⁷⁴ Therefore, he deploys the same arguments as we saw earlier about the Word or the Son as the Creator of the world. All these titles are interchangeable in Athanasius' argument, although there are some peculiarities to each one of them, connected with the special shades of meaning that they convey.

As regards the Wisdom of God, Athanasius deals with the Arian interpretation involving the mediator in the creation, as he did when dealing with the 'Word'. However, with reference to Wisdom, the Arians explained the manner in which this 'mediator' operated: distinguishing two wisdoms of God, the one which is the ingenerate attribute of

³⁷³ Cf. H. Jaeger's analysis of the understanding of 'wisdom' in rabbinical exegetical tradition which denotes both the "active presence of God" and the "capacity for understanding better more deeply what the indwelling divine spirit teaches the soul" ("The Patristic conception of Wisdom", pp. 96-97). For the Athanasian exegesis cf. P. Sherwood, "St. Athanasius concerning the Wisdom of God", pp. 271-276.

³⁷⁴ CAR2 71, DECR 17, SER2 8 etc.

the divine essence and the one which is the generated mediator, they held that the latter learned from the former the art of creating and thus "ministered" God. God needed such a minister because, being uncreated himself, he could not create the world.³⁷⁵ Athanasius regards this description as product of mere speculation which lacks any footing in the biblical description of creation, therefore he abolishes it altogether by denying first of all the fundamental distinction between the two 'wisdoms' of God. For this purpose he deploys the following arguments.³⁷⁶

a) There is no evidence anywhere in the Bible about two 'wisdoms' of God. As the above cited texts show, the Wisdom of God is One and Only, and only in this Wisdom God created the world. On this ground, examining the implications of the Arian mediator-'wisdom', he argues firstly, that the ability of creating out of nothing is not a matter of knowledge, but an attribute of the uncreated nature of God. If it was a matter of knowledge, then it could be equally plausible to argue that God also creates having learned the art of creating. Secondly, the so-called 'wisdom', which learned to create, is not real wisdom (οὐσιώδης σοφία), since it needs lessons of improvement. Moreover, knowledge which has been acquired and is not an attribute of nature, is liable to be lost, because it depends on the ability of the subject to maintain it. The association of such a 'wisdom' with God is an 'impious' act (δυσσεβής) and belongs to Hellenistic mythology, rather than Christian theology. Thirdly, this understanding attributes to God "jealousy" (φθόνον) and "weakness" (ἀσθένεια), because it presents him giving this gift only to one of his numerous ministers and being in need of an assistant for a work that he could not accomplish on his own. The assumption of the Arians that God could not create, is, for Athanasius, fundamentally erroneous, in the first place, because God is by definition

³⁷⁵ "But they say though he is a creature and of things originate, yet as from a master and artificer has he learned to frame and thus ministered God who taught him", CAR2 28:26,205Cf; Cf. also CAR1 32.

³⁷⁶ See CAR2 28-29:26,205Cf.

self-sufficient and without need of anything (ἀνευδεής). He often uses the reference to *Jn. 5:17* ("My father is working still and I am working") to prove the point. In any case, Athanasius argues that even the very teaching of the Arians that God created the Son, abolishes their own argument, since he appears able to create, having already created his Son.

b) The Arian distinction between the two wisdoms of God is according to the model of human wisdom which is also erroneously understood, because they take it for granted and as the basis of interpreting the divine Wisdom. Athanasius argues that human beings are not 'wise' on their own right, because their wisdom is a gift of God granted to them at their creation in his Wisdom (Ps. 103:24).³⁷⁷ It is the Wisdom of God which is the model of human wisdom and in her human beings have to participate (μετέχοντες) in order to be called wise; this is in effect a passion of the imperfect human nature because it is created. In contrast, the creative Wisdom of God does not need to participate in anything else in order to be 'wise', because she draws this attribute directly from God who is by definition the ultimate self-Wisdom (αὐτοσοφία). Athanasius, in other words, also identifies two wisdoms: the uncreated 'Wisdom of God', to which he refers as 'self-Wisdom' (αὐτοσοφία) and 'Only-begotten' (μονογενή), and the created wisdom that exists in the world. He gives more explanations when he interprets Sir. 1,9-10 ("He poured her out upon all his works; she is with all flesh according to his gift and he has given her to them that love him"), which appears to be interpreted by the Arians parallelly with Prov. 8:22 ("The Lord created me") in support of their view that the Wisdom of God is also created.³⁷⁸ He argues that the wisdom which exists in the world (1 Cor 1:21, Wisd. 6:24, Prov. 14:6, 24:3, Eccl. 8:1, 7:10), is not the result of God's "pouring into the world the

³⁷⁷ CAR1 28:26,69C-D.

³⁷⁸ It is not certain that the Arians actually used this text. It rather sounds as Athanasius' selection, but it is in accordance with the main topic that he discusses, i.e., the creation of wisdom.

essence of his self-wisdom" (ἔκχυσις τῆς οὐσίας τῆς αὐτοσοφίας), so that any sort of created wisdom would have the ability to create, but it is the result of God's creating human beings which he equipped with a "type" (τύπος) and "image" (φαντασία) of his own Wisdom, so that they would be able to know him: "For as our word is an image of the Son of God regarded as the Word, so the wisdom which is implanted to us is an image of the same Son regarded as Wisdom; in which wisdom we have the power of knowledge and thought, and become recipients of the All-framing Wisdom".³⁷⁹ Therefore, the wisdom which created the world cannot be created because every notion of created wisdom was created as an image of the uncreated Wisdom of God which pre-exists the world. Prov. 8:22 does not relate the creating Wisdom with the created world as a part of it, because it states that she was created 'for the works' (εἰς ἔργα), which implies that it existed before 'the works' and in consequence before the very event of the creation of 'the works'. This is indicated by the chronological definitions "before the mountains", "before the earth" etc., in the verses that follow. Since it precedes the creation of the world, then, the Wisdom of God is attached to the Father of whom she is offspring (γέννημα) and not creature.

c) On this basis Athanasius asserts that Prov. 8:22 does not refer to the creation of the being of God's Wisdom in order to become the 'beginning of ways' (ἀρχὴ ὁδῶν), but to the work which the Wisdom undertook for the sake of the creation that started with the Incarnation. The Incarnation marks the beginning of God's knowledge through a concrete being, Jesus Christ, who, according to Athanasius' characteristic term, is the 'στοιχείωσις' (= to become an element) of the Wisdom of God for the knowledge of God.³⁸⁰ He illustrates this distinction with two texts: Prov. 1:7 ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom") indicates the knowledge of God which human beings acquire exercising their spiritual power, but in Jn. 14:9 ("He who has seen me has seen the Father") and 1 Jn. 2:23

³⁷⁹ CAR2 78:26,312C.

³⁸⁰ CAR2 80:26,316C.

("He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also") Jesus Christ himself is designated as the knowledge of God.

The soteriological imperative of human beings that necessitated the 'condescension' (οἰκονομία) of the Incarnation of the Word is in effect the regulative principle of Athanasius' interpretation. He further establishes it as the central concept of the controversial passage Prov. 8 by interpreting Prov. 8:23 ("He founded me before the ages") and 9:1 ("The Wisdom built herself a house"), in the light of 2 Tim. 1:8-10³⁸¹ and Eph. 1:3-5.³⁸² The plan for the deliverance of human beings from death through the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ had to be founded before the creation of the world, for two reasons: a) because God would otherwise be proved ignorant of the evolution which was to follow and b) because the life which human beings were destined to live was eternal and beyond time and therefore it had to be established in eternity. Such a mission, however, could solely be accomplished by the Word himself because human beings were created in his image: "Though the earth and the mountains and the shapes of visible nature pass away in the fulness of the present age, we on the contrary may not grow old after their pattern, but may be able to live after them, having the spiritual life and blessing which before these things have been prepared for us in the Word Himself according to election. For thus we shall be capable of a life not temporary, but ever afterwards abide and live in Christ; since even before this our life had been founded and prepared in Christ Jesus. Nor in any other way was it fitting that our life should be founded, but in the Lord who is

³⁸¹ "Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Jesus Christ ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life".

³⁸² "Blessed be Lord the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ".

before 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".³⁸³

The understanding of 'Word' and 'Wisdom' as attributes of essence constitutes for Athanasius a model that secures the unity of the divine being, because it skips off temporal and spatial divisions which bodily beings suffer. With the explanations he gave on the subject he excluded any possibility of division of God or unity of created essence with God, because the biblical description does not portray him as acting in cooperation with another being but always by speaking; neither as having many words which is a sign of weakness but only one, nor as ever being 'speechless' (ἄλογος) or 'unwise' (ἄσοφος). The notions 'word' and 'wisdom' are associated with the concept of generation, because this is the manner in which human word and wisdom are manifested and the divine Word and Wisdom exists. The ontological significance of this model is that there is only one reality to be acknowledged. Therefore, there is also one Wisdom and Word of God who is "proper" to the Father's essence, in whom he does everything. The different attributes which the divine Word and Wisdom exhibits according to the biblical descriptions, in comparison to the human word, designate him to be of different nature also. Thus, he is not a mere attribute or impersonal energy of the essence of the Father, but a concrete being and a distinct individual like the Father, with his own essential attributes which are totally identifiable with the Father's. Therefore he is not a second God, but being the Word and Wisdom of God, God is maintained one and acknowledged as the Father and the Son simultaneously. This understanding of unity of the divine being as the result of the implications of the Wisdom and Word images is clearly exhibited in the following text:

"If God be Maker and Creator, and create His works through the Son, and we cannot regard things which come to be, except as being through the Word, is it not blasphemous, God being Maker, to say that his framing Word and his Wisdom once was not? It is the same as saying that God is not Maker, if he did not have his proper framing Word which is from him,

³⁸³

CAR2 76-77:26,309B.

but that That by which he frames accrues to him from without and is alien from him and unlike in essence... If the Word is not with the Father from everlasting, the Triad is not everlasting; but a Monad was first, and afterwards by addition it became a Triad... But it is not so: perish the thought; the Triad is not originated; but there is an eternal one Godhead in a Triad, and there is one Glory of the Holy Triad... For the Son is eternal, as is the Father, of whom he is the eternal Word".³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ CAR1 16-18:26,45Bf; Cf. also: "If he is the illuminating and creative [attribute] specially proper [ιδιαιτάτον] to the Father, without whom he neither frames nor is known (for all things consist through him and in him), wherefore perceiving the fact, do we decline to use the phrase conveying it? For what is it to be thus connatural [ὁμοφυής] with the Father, but to be *homoousios* with him?" SYNO 52:26,788A; see also CAR2 31:26,212B; CAR3 13:26,349.

3.3 The Biblical Paradigms

The same model of the unity of the divine being is also conveyed for Athanasius by the theological application of the paradigms 'light-effulgence', 'fountain-river' and 'hypostasis-character'. He lays very much emphasis on them as the fact that they are constantly recurrent throughout his anti-Arian works shows. As we have seen, he uses them in the context of the generation of the Son to distinguish it from the spatial and temporal divisions which the bodily model of generation involves. The fact that the generation of effulgence from light and of river from fountain neither affects or diminishes the existence of their sources, nor suggests division of them, is taken further by Athanasius to show that both elements are still considered to constitute one indivisible reality, although they are specifically identified as two elements. The main function of these paradigms is to detach the human mind from a bodily understanding of God and guide it to perceive concepts of purely spiritual nature in a spiritual manner:

"They consider God to be material and they do not understand what is 'true Father' and 'true Son', nor 'light invisible' and 'eternal' and its 'radiance invisible', nor 'invisible subsistence' and 'immaterial expression' and 'immaterial image'. For did they know, they would not dishonour and ridicule the Lord of glory, nor interpreting things immaterial after a material manner, pervert good words",³⁸⁵ and also,

"Let us not fall upon human senses and imagine partitions and divisions of the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature and the identity of light".³⁸⁶

In the theological application of these paradigms, the light-effulgence paradigm which he relates with *Jn. 14:9* ("He who has seen me has seen the Father") and explains through the process of vision, appears to be especially convenient. The argument of Athanasius is that because seeing God involves the same procedure as that of seeing light, that is, as one sees light through its effulgence, so one sees God through his Son, the Son of God must have the same kind of relationship with the Father as the light with the

³⁸⁵ CAR3 1:26,324A.

³⁸⁶ DECR 24:25,457C.

effulgence.³⁸⁷ The features of this relation which he consistently identifies are "eternity" (ἀεί) and "coexistence" (συνυπάρχον),³⁸⁸ "propriety" (ἴδιον) or "attribute of nature" (φυσικὴ ιδιότης),³⁸⁹ and "unity of nature" (ἐνότης φύσεως).³⁹⁰ The unity of nature and being is manifested for Athanasius in the unity of action and revelation. Under the light of the revelation of Christ as the Son of God, the conception of God creating, enlightening or giving his grace to human beings is no longer tied up with the image of an act of an individual human being, but is considered an act that takes effect as a unified act of the Father through the Son. To acknowledge God as Father implies for Athanasius acknowledging the existence of the Son simultaneously, so that God is to be known as Father and Son.³⁹¹ Athanasius sees this is as the significance of the light-effulgence paradigm and therefore it is also very appropriate for him to express this understanding of the divine nature:

"When the Apostle said 'Grace unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ', the blessing was secure, because of the Son's indivisibility from the Father and because the grace given by them is one and the same. For though the Father gives it, the gift is through the Son, and though the Son is said to vouchsafe it, it is the Father who supplies it through and in the Son... And this one may see in the instance of light and effulgence; for what the light enlightens, that the effulgence illumines and what the effulgence illumines from the light is its enlightenment. So also when the Son is beheld, so is the Father, for he is the Father's effulgence. And thus the Father and the Son are one".³⁹²

³⁸⁷ "Who, thus considering the effulgence relatively to the sun and the identity of the light, would not say with confidence, 'Truly the light and the effulgence are one and the one is manifested in the other and the effulgence is in the sun, so that he who sees this, sees that also? But such an oneness and natural property what should it be named by those who believe and see aright but offspring one in essence?' DECR 24:25,457C.

³⁸⁸ DECR 20:25,452A; ENCY:25,568.

³⁸⁹ DECR 24:25,457B.

³⁹⁰ "Let a man venture to make the distinction, that the sun and the effulgence are two lights or two essences, or to say that the effulgence accrued to it over and above and is not a pure and simple offspring from the sun; such, that sun and effulgence are two, but the light is one because the effulgence is an offspring from the sun. But whereas not more divisible, nay less divisible is the nature of the Son towards the Father and the godhead not accruing to the Son, but the Father's godhead being in the Son, so that he that has seen the Son has seen the Father in Him; wherefore should not such an one be called *homoousios*?" SYNO 52:26,788B-C. Cf. the comments by R.P.C. Hanson, "Transformation", p. 102.

³⁹¹ "He who calls God Father, there by conceives and contemplates the Son" CAR1 33:26,80B.

³⁹² CAR3 13:26,349B. R.W. Fox regards the indivisibility of the Son with the Father as the major significance of the 'homoousion' that appeals to "modern mind", because it secures the gift of salvation granted to human beings by God through Christ ("The Athanasian meaning", p. 215).

In the following text Athanasius combines all the biblical titles attributed to the Son, explaining the way in which God acts and reveals himself as one being:

"If then as we have stated and are shewing, what is the offspring of the Father's essence be the Son, we cannot hesitate, rather we must be certain that the same is the Wisdom and the Word of the Father, in and through whom he creates and makes all things; and he is brightness too, in whom he enlightens all things and is revealed to whom he will; and his expression and image also, in whom he is contemplated and known, wherefore 'he and his Father are one' and whoso looks on him looks on the Father; and the Christ in whom all things are redeemed, and the new creation wrought afresh".³⁹³

Although it is not formulated technically, it is clear that the most appropriate term for Athanasius to express this understanding was the term 'essence' and not the term 'hypostasis', because while the former refers to the inner being, to the very existence (τὸ εἶναι) of an object, since it derives from the verb 'to be' (Ex. 3:14), the latter refers to its external manifestation, since it comes from the verb 'to subsist' (ὑφίστημι).³⁹⁴ The 'homoousios' holds together both the unity and the multiplicity of the divine being without mixing or subordinating the one to the other, exactly as the biblical description of the divine persons never does so. The divine persons are portrayed in the Bible to act independently, but not separately, and as the foregoing pages have shown, there are many explicit and implicit ways in which it expresses this kind of operation. Therefore, the prefix 'ὅμο' neither subordinates Father, Son and Spirit to a logically defined 'Monad', eliminating their distinction, nor keeps them apart as three separate individuals, because, combined with the term 'essence', maintains their absolute equality and unites the three in one indivisible existence, one essence and one godhead which acts and manifests itself as the One God, Father, Son and Spirit. In the following text from the *Contra Arianos* the interaction between unity and duality is characteristically explained; although the term

³⁹³ CAR1 16:26,45C.

³⁹⁴ See T.B. Strong, "The history of substance", p. 36.

'homousios' itself is not present, all the biblical doctrine that it stands for are deployed in detail.³⁹⁵

"For the Son is in the Father, as it is allowed us to know, because the whole being of the Son is proper to the Father's essence, as effulgence from light and river from fountain; so that whoever sees the Son, sees what is proper to the Father and knows that the Son's being, because from the Father, is therefore in the Father. For the Father is in the Son, since the Son is what is from the Father and proper to him, as the sun is in the effulgence, and the thought in the word and the fountain in the river. For whoever thus contemplates the Son, contemplates what is proper to the Father's essence and knows that the Father is in the Son. For whereas the form and godhead of the Father is the being of the Son, it follows that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son. On this account and reasonably having said before 'I and the Father are one', he added 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' by way of showing the identity of godhead and the unity of essence. For they are one, not as one being divided into two parts and these nothing but one, nor as one thing twice named, so that the same becomes at one time Father and at another his own Son, for this Sabellius holding was judged an heretic. 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 also. Wherefore neither is the Son another God, for he was not procured from without, else where there many, if a godhead were procured foreign from the Father's; for if the Son is other, as an offspring, still he is the same as God, and he and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature and in the identity of the One godhead, as has been said. For the effulgence is also light, not second to the sun, nor a different light, nor from participation in it, but a whole and proper offspring of it. And such an offspring is necessarily one light; and no one would say that they are two lights, but sun and effulgence two, yet one the light from the sun enlightening in its effulgence all things. So, also the godhead of the Son is the Father's; whence also it is indivisible and thus there is one God and no other but He. And so, since they are one and the Godhead itself one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except his being said to be Father".

4. CONCLUSIONS - ASSESSMENTS

1. The meaning of the "homoousion" and its biblical dimension

1. The meaning of the 'homoousion' in Athanasius is not an 'either...or' case, but rather a 'both...and' one. This means that it does not imply *either* generic *or* numerical identity, as modern textbooks handle the matter, but rather *both* generic *and* numerical identity. The principle that Athanasius applies is that any such terms as the modern 'generic' (i.e., Athanasius' Father-Son, generation) and 'numerical' (i.e., unity, oneness), are terms produced by the human mind and therefore carry connotations from the created world. When they are applied to God they immediately lose their strict meaning and acquire a certain amount of metaphorical nuance or transcendence and therefore more terms are needed in order to describe the divine reality with more precision.

On the one hand, the fact that Athanasius acknowledges the Father and the Son as numerically two clearly and sharply distinct beings in a fully ontological sense, as is also acknowledged by all parties throughout the Arian controversy, immediately implies that the term One Godhead does not denote a single object but a different reality. In human terms two distinct persons can be still united generically, as belonging to one and the same species or as sharing the same kind of essence or being. The 'generic identity' is intrinsically linked with the 'homoousios' and therefore it cannot be abandoned.

On the other hand, the fact that Athanasius also acknowledges the oneness of the Godhead implies that the distinction does not imply a division of the divine being into two gods, but a duality in unity and *vice versa*. Thus, although Athanasius deals with the Father and the Son as two completely distinct individuals even comparing their attributes separately, he never uses language which could imply even the slightest sense of division. In turn, whenever he speaks about the One God he identifies him with the Father and the Son, or with the Trinity.

2. When the 'homoousion' comes to the fore the same idea is conveyed. In fact, it appears to be the most appropriate term for giving a compact expression of this understanding and betrays a wise choice on the part of the Nicenes rather than confusion and ignorance. The terms did not cause confusion, but rather gave expression to the already existing one in the mind of those concerned with the explanation of the mystery of the divine revelation. The selection of this particular term implies the clarity of teaching which the Nicenes wanted to formulate: on the one hand, they wanted to express the oneness of God, but did not choose to use such terms as 'one' (έν-), 'alone' (μόνο-) or derivatives. They chose 'co-' (όμο-), 'together', because it implies both equality and coexistence of the Father and the Son to whom it is applied. The reason for doing so was obviously the fear of avoiding future misunderstandings which could deny the real distinction between the two persons of the Trinity and reintroduce the heresy of Sabellianism. The όμο- maintains the distinction, because it implies two or more beings and puts them on a par with each other. As all compound words with 'όμο-', so the 'homoousios', demanded a common element to be shared between the beings designated as 'όμο-'. This element could not be other than the very being of the Son, who was confessed in the Church as true God. Thus the Nicenes did not choose the term 'hypostasis' (ύπόστασις), but the term 'essence' (ουσία), because this latter designates the very existence of a being, what a being is in itself, and also the element which categorises beings and is shared among them. This in turn implies that the distinction between the two terms was already there, but not yet technically defined.

3. This 'vagueness' of definition the 'homoousion' implies was beneficial in that it did not force the Father and the Son to fit into logical models of existence. Besides, this was in accordance with the 'vagueness' of the biblical statements themselves which does not define either God or his relation to the Son. The strong generic character that the very

title 'Son of God' applied in a unique way to Jesus Christ together with the explicit doctrine of his unity with the Father, especially in the Gospel of John, are the indisputable contents of the biblical message. The 'homoousion' gave full expression to both concepts and their combination. Thus it did not constitute an import from Hellenistic philosophy or development of primitive teaching, but represented a new expression of the traditional faith, since its main connotations were appropriate to the biblical doctrine. Dealing with 'essences' and 'hypostases', Athanasius neither introduced, nor followed philosophical patterns of thought, but rather rejected philosophy and philosophers on the grounds that 'they do not know the Word'.³⁹⁶ He rather reaffirmed in contemporary terminology the answer to the question to which Jesus Christ himself and his Apostles were challenged to respond: "Who do people say that *I am*?" and "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Mat. 16:13, Marc 8:27, Lk. 9:18, Mat. 26:63, Jn. 10:24, etc.). The 'homoousios with the Father', as Athanasius presents it, first of all affirms that the Son is an 'essence', a term that designates his *isness* (εἶναι), the fact that *he is*. Then, 'ὁμο-' denotes that the kind of this *isness* is like the Father's, the Son *is* as the Father *is* and together with the Father. On this ground, Athanasius makes evident the link of the 'homoousios' with the biblical doctrine not only internally, i.e., by expounding the same teaching, but also externally, since most of the biblical texts he uses either come from contexts where the subject matter is the identity of Jesus Christ (e.g. Jn. 6:46, 8:42, 10:30, etc.), or contain as their basic element the verb 'to be' as some sort of definition of his divine status (e.g. Mat. 3:17, Heb. 1:3, etc.).

2. The Athanasian exegesis

As it concerns the method of biblical exegesis by Athanasius we could draw four general but fundamental hermeneutical principles:

³⁹⁶ CAR1 34:26, 81B.

a) Christ is the key to the Scriptures, because he is the 'aim' (σκοπός) of the Old Testament prophesy and the content of the New Testament history. The Incarnation of the Word of God by which God the Creator of the world took up a body and was united with human beings divides biblical data into two categories: those which refer to his divine nature and describe his glory and power as Son of God and those which refer to his humanity and describe his humility and weakness as a human being. Each biblical text has to be carefully examined and placed in its appropriate category so that the doctrinal outcome will be in accordance with this principle which defines the distinctive 'character of Christian faith'.

b) Biblical language and imagery does not define, but describes the divine reality because the latter is incomprehensible to the human mind. Each description seen on its own reveals partially the mystery of God and therefore is inadequate to express the fullness of theological truth. This fullness can be achieved through a synthesizing exegesis of all of them which Athanasius calls 'collection of the mind of Scripture'. Combined biblical images gathered together on the basis of the Christological criterion qualify one another, as they put together the various aspects of truth they convey to construct a more accurate image of God.

c) Decisive factor for determining the precise meaning of biblical texts is their narrower and broader context, with which they have to be in accord. On the basis of Athanasius' exegesis we could identify three concentric circles of contextual reference: The first one is the immediate context of a particular text which comprises its natural environment. It is a decisive one, because it defines its meaning according to the particular circumstances which many times may render a different notion from the one that is at first sight recognisable. The second one is the broader biblical context in its thematic definition which comprises the doctrinal environment. It is a crucial one, because it defines the

interpretation of a particular text according to the overall biblical witness on the same subject. The basis of this is the principle of the unity of biblical witness to the mystery of God that harmonizes biblical texts to a coherent whole. Failure to fulfil this principle suggests revision of exegesis. Finally, there is the circle of the results of previous accredited exegetical attempts which comprise the ecclesiastical environment. This has a double function and a single purpose; it functions both as guide and as a seal of accuracy because it harmonises contemporary exegesis with that of preceding exegetes approved by the Church creating a consistent and unbroken line of biblical interpretation (tradition). Biblical exegesis serves the saving ministry of the Church in the world and not academic speculation of intellectual thinking.

d) The contribution of ontological or philosophical definitions to biblical exegesis is negative, because it blurs the clarity of the biblical message by the imposition of anthropological models of existence to God. Biblical language has to be understood both in its literal and metaphorical sense. The literal sense has the function of negating attempts of associating or ascribing non biblical concepts to God by which, or by implication of which, biblical terms are threatened to be abolished or deprived of this meaning. The metaphorical sense has the function of positively understanding biblical terminology in its spiritual dimension which is defined by the ultimately transcendent being of God. Metaphor in fact consists of the effort which the exegete has to put in order to go beyond the limits of created existence and understand the purely divine reality solely through his spiritual powers. At this point ontological definitions do not apply because they have been defined according to the experience of the created world which involves bodily beings, whereas God is by definition beyond definition. Biblical terms then have to be understood as expressing or describing relations of the divine persons rather than define their mode of being.

Dogmatic theology is the outcome of constructive and comprehensive biblical exegesis by means of which a systematic account of biblical witness is produced. These accounts, after having been tested and approved for their biblical origination, they become a sort of shorthand theological norms that safeguard biblical exegesis by means of making immediately evident its accuracy. The interpreter has greater freedom in using broader vocabulary which is means of clarifying or summing up the meaning of biblical terminology, given the fact that it conveys the same doctrinal pattern. The interaction between biblical and dogmatic theology is constant so that the one tests and verifies the accuracy and genuineness of the other.

We believe that St. Athanasius managed to demonstrate successfully in all its glory the strength of the Church's coherent doctrine and unbroken tradition, and thus he not only laid the foundations of the development which was immediately to follow him, but also deposited basic hermeneutical keys to responding to the contemporary quest for unity of doctrine and life in the Christian Church.

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