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Historical Theology Survey
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Report #2

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*
100% read, 891 words written

“The Saviour has worn a body...” (Schaff & Wace, p. 36) The Word that made the creation is the one who came in the body to renew the creation. We may know God exists through the diversity of bodies and parts pointing to a creating intellect. The highest aspect of the Word’s creation is the race of men. These were made after His own image “giving them a portion even of the power of His own Word.” (p. 37) Men had at least to some extent a reflection of the Word and were created rational.

We entered into transgression, however, and no longer remained as we were made. We lost the knowledge of God and “were turned back to what was not.” (p. 38) We are in a state of disintegration and abide in death and corruption. We had through the fall “become insatiable in sinning.” (p. 39)

Something had to be done about this. Repentance in and of itself, however, is insufficient for restoring man to incorruption. Corruption is a condition of our very nature, nothing we do can change this. The Word that created all things is the One who restores to incorruption. He did this in three aspects: 1. He recreated the corrupted; 2. He suffered on behalf of all; 3. And taught men of the Father (p. 40 & 47)

Thus, the Word “condescended to our corruption” (p. 40) and He took “unto Himself a body no different sort from ours.” (p. 40). Athanasius leaves no room for docetic interpretation. This body “He gave...over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father.” (p. 40) Christ banished death from us “like straw from the fire.” (p. 40)

It was “impossible for the Word to suffer death,” so “He takes to Himself a body capable of death.” (p. 40) Furthermore, this He does “in the stead of all.” (p. 40) Here is the vicarious satisfaction language: “As an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent.” (p. 41) He “satisfied the debt by His death.” (p. 41) Athanasius uses a simile to illustrate this: We are in a city or town, but the enemy will no longer come to attack us, because of the King who takes up residence with us.

This work of Christ described above is the first cause for the Word taking on flesh, the second reason is that we would know the Father. Here, there is restoration of the image of God. Christ is *the* Image and by beholding Him we are restored to God’s image.

Besides the great elaboration of the work of Christ, He elaborates much on His Person. He verifies that Christ is God and became a man. The two natures are always affirmed. Furthermore, “while He moved the body, was the universe left void of His working and Providence.” (p. 45)

Two marvels have come to pass: 1) The death of all was accomplished in the Lord’s body; and 2) Death and corruption were wholly done away by reason of the Word that was united with it. (p. 47)

As a “noble wrestler” accepts any opponent given him, Christ accepted the type of death his enemies put upon Him. This actually served the truth of His resurrection. There was no doubt that He had actually died. The cross was not random. By the cross Christ became the curse spoken of in Deuteronomy 21, His hands were spread out so as to depict that His sacrifice was for all men (Jew and Gentile), *and* while He was lifted up (in the air), it symbolizes the fact that Christ defeated the prince of the powers of the air.

One proof of Christ defeating death is how His followers now consider death. They “rush upon it” and no longer fear it. (p. 51) We also see the power of the resurrection through the changed lives of Christ’s disciples. In addition, the power of the cross is seen in the way that it is overcoming superstition, satanic arts and idolatry. This leads to how the person and work of Christ ought now turn both the Jews and the Greeks. For the Jews, their own Scriptures are fulfilled (e.g. Athanasius calls attention to Isaiah 53), even the Old Testament teaches of the cross! Jews ought also mind the miracles Christ wrought, but ultimately that there is no more prophecy, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Gentiles are converted. For the Greeks, if the creation is made, it isn’t absurd that the Word be in it. It is reasonable to consider that if God would want to be known that He would find a way for man to contemplate Him. It would be insufficient to simply speak a word and save via fiat, because something had to be done for man’s body and substance. Furthermore, the false worship of the Greeks is fading and is inferior to Christ who showed power over nature and death. Finally, the Greeks should also consider the change in men who come to Christ.

In all of this, Athanasius concludes, “For He was made man that we might be made God.” (p. 65) That is, we are restored to His image and ought now search the Scriptures while living lives of honor and purity.

Athanasius, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*

100% read; 567 words written

Athanasius defends the use of the Nicene terms “of the essence” and “one in essence” against the Arians, esp. against Eusebius of Caesarea, Acacius and others in this letter. The Arians behave as the Jews did and demand “signs” and then evade the truth in their “defect of reason”. (Schaff and Wace, p. 150)

Athanasius wants them to “defend themselves against the proofs of heresy which have been advanced,” and then find fault with the work of the Catholic, ecumenical council in Nicea. (p. 151) What is exposed, however, is that the Arians fight against God. In themselves, they are unstable, change their minds constantly, but most tragically commit sacrilege against the Son by claiming that He is a mere creature.

One of their catch phrases is “the Son was not before His generation,” and they thereby deny Christ’s existence before His birth in the flesh. This is the heresy Athanasius writes against.

First Athanasius begins with a crucial distinction. When one uses the word “son,” it may be used in one of two major senses. The first sense is our being made sons of God. The distinction here is clear. God is creator; we are the creation. The second sense is known in the term “Isaac the son of Jacob.” Here we have a “son” who is by nature like the father. The Arians ascribe the word “son” to Christ in the first sense, but orthodox Christianity ascribes the word “son” to Christ in the second sense.

The Arians try to defend themselves by saying that they qualify their use via that the Son was given prerogative over others and is thus “Only-begotten” because Jesus alone was brought about directly by the Father, whereas everything else was brought about by Christ.

Athanasius abolishes this qualification. He does so logically and Scripturally. He writes, “and if a Mediator became necessary that things originate might come to be, and you hold the Son to be originated, then must there have been some medium before Him, for His creation...” (p. 155) and this process would never end. The claim is reduced to an absurdity. Then Athanasius goes on to show many Scriptures that attribute the Father as being directly involved in all creation.

He goes on to explain the abuse of the Proverb that says Christ was born. This is according to His human nature. As per His divine nature, to be begotten is an expression of eternity within the godhead. To this, Athanasius asks, “who is capable of separating the radiance from the sun, or to conceive of the fountain as ever void of life”? (p. 158)

Finally, the names of God are properly ascribed to Christ as the Scriptures show and to try to develop levels of meaning, etc. is proof of heretical thought. Eventually, the Arians contradict themselves in emphasizing that God uses words, why not simply accept His use of *the* Word and accept Christ’s divinity?! The Nicene council did indeed use words not precisely found in Scripture, but they are nevertheless words that convey the true sense of what the Scriptures say. All the fathers agree to this meaning and the Arians show their desperation in their use of the word “unoriginate” which they borrow from the Greeks who do not know the Son. Nothing can cancel the fact that not only did Christ create all things, but that He Himself was never created.

Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*

100% read; 739 words written

Augustine -- Bishop of Hippo -- refutes the teaching of Pelagius in this treatise. Pelagius denies original sin and reduces sin to mere violation of the law. Thus, from his perspective, it is possible for a man not to sin.

Augustine immediately defines what righteousness is: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Schaff, p. 121, Rom. 10:4) In Christ alone is the ungodly man justified. In other words, the Bishop of Hippo genuinely defends Pauline doctrine.

In regards to handling Pelagius, Augustine is masterful. He binds the discussion to Scripture, the final authority and shows in many cases that Pelagius is either ignoring Scripture or offering untenable exegesis.

It is possible for example – from Pelagius’ perspective – according to man’s nature that apart from the hearing the Gospel, a man may be rewarded righteousness through the combination of recognizing God in nature and leading a right life. To this Augustine quotes the Scripture: "Then Christ died in vain." (p. 122, Galatians 2:21) At this juncture, Augustine implicitly rejects Pelagius’ position: "If, however, Christ did not die in vain, then human nature cannot by any means be justified and redeemed from God’s most righteous wrath – in a word, from punishment – except by faith and the sacrament of the blood of Christ." (p. 122) Augustine goes on to explain the necessity of this Gospel because of our condition of original sin.

Augustine explains that the very nature of the word "grace" discounts our manipulation of it. Grace is *gratis* and is therefore called "free"! Thus, Paul teaches in Romans 3:24 that we are justified freely by His blood! This is necessary both for the sin we have derived at birth *and* for our misconduct. Pelagius would deny the former and therefore limit God’s grace for simply enabling our nature to use free will to suffice itself in attaining righteousness. If Pelagius is right Augustine knows the result: the cross of Christ is made of none effect.

Pelagius lets the proverbial cat out of the bag and shows the glaring weakness of his theology, however, when he breaks down his view of sin: "that before all other things we have to inquire what sin is, -- some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body, but the doing of a wrongful thing." (p. 127) Now while we would certainly have acknowledge that he offers an either-or logical fallacy, we can still go after his non-substantive definition as Augustine does. Augustine points out the Psalm where it is written, "heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee" and then he asks, "Now, how can a thing be healed, if it is not wounded nor hurt, nor weakened and corrupted?" (p. 127) Sin may not be substantive, but it permeates our being, so that it is insufficient for Pelagius to draw this simple

distinction and reduce sin to the doing of a wrongful thing. At the same time, however, Pelagius must still deal with substance, because it is our substance that receives the wound. If Pelagius is right, then we have no need of the Physician Christ who comes to heal our spiritual condition that Augustine describes as a “sickness” (p. 128) that has affected every aspect of our lives.

For Pelagius “it is not in our power to be unable to avoid sin.” (p. 140) He tries to maintain the grace of God in this system, “...God is the Author of nature, in which, he declares, this capacity of avoiding sin is inseparably implanted.” (p. 141) However, in this line of thinking, Pelagius sets himself up for a major, logical blunder. Right after stating these things on pp. 140-141, he tries to give some salutary reference to the difference between Christian and non-Christian. Pelagius explains that in the case of unbaptized persons it is possible for the flesh to be contrary. But, he paints himself into a corner, because if God makes both the spirit and body, aren't both good? Why should there be any distinction at all between the regenerate and unregenerate?

Augustine proves how Pelagius is inconsistent. He wants to give credit to God's grace, but why not do so towards Christ? He desires to give some credit to the Creator, but in denying the necessity of Christ's redemption, He also rejects the Creator, because Christ is both!

Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*

100% read; 786 words written

In this treatise addressed to Valentinus and the Monks of Adrumetum, Augustine addresses the relationship between grace and free will and to some extent along the way, continues to refute Pelagius. For Augustine, it is important to maintain that the Scriptures fully maintain the fact that we have free will and the fact that it is only by the grace of God that we are made righteous. Both must be held, because both are revealed in the Bible. These are not contradictory.

Man does indeed have “a free choice of will.” (Schaff, p. 444). “There is, to begin with, the fact that God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will.” (ibid).

The Bible proves this free choice of will through the divine commands. Augustine goes on to quote many Scriptural references that actually acknowledge the will of man. For example, “All that will to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2nd Timothy 3:12)

Here is an outstanding summary of the case for free choice of will: “Now wherever it is said, ‘Do not do this,’ and ‘Do not do that,’ and wherever there is any requirement in the divine admonitions for the work of the will to do anything, or to refrain from doing

anything, there is at once a sufficient proof of free will. No man, therefore, when he sins, can in his heart blame God for it, but every man must impute the fault to himself.” (p. 445)

This reality of the will, however, ought not take us to the “Pelagian heresy.” (p. 446) We cannot understand the fact of the free will in such a way that anyone who leads a good life and performs good works (or thinks they do) “should dare to glory in himself and not in the Lord.” (ibid)

On this second major point, Augustine shows that grace is absolutely necessary for man to do anything that is good. That is, grace helps the free choice of will to the extent that whenever it chooses to do anything truly good, it is on account of that grace from God that enabled and accomplished it. “So that a man is assisted by grace, in order that his will may not be uselessly commanded.” (p. 447)

Thus, “neither was it the grace of God alone, nor was it he himself alone, but it was the grace of God with him.” (p. 449) However, when one considers that all people are only filled with evil will because of original sin, the conversion and effectual call of God is indeed “God’s grace...alone”. (ibid) This shows how grace is grace. It is given even while we were evil. God returns good for evil by His grace!

This grace is also indispensable even after conversion “but that, even after he has become justified by faith, grace should accompany him on his way, and he should lean upon it, lest he fall.” (ibid)

In explaining all of this, Augustine arrives to a crucial insight. That faith itself must be a gift of God! “Even faith itself cannot be had without God’s mercy, and that it is the gift of God.” (p. 450) Furthermore, if this faith is a gift – and it is – then so too, must be all the works that follow faith. Augustine quotes Ephesians 2:10 to solidify this point. In the meantime, we “fear and tremble” (Phil. 2:13) so that we would never boast of the works as our own. Augustine explains further: “It is by grace that anyone is a doer of the law; and without this grace, he who is placed under the law will be only a hearer of the law.” (p. 454)

In establishing this second point, Augustine again pinpoints the relationship between free will and grace. “There is, however, always within us free will, -- but it is not always good; for it is either free from righteousness when it serves sin, -- and then it is evil, -- or else it is free from sin when it serves righteousness, -- and then it is good.” (p. 456) As for the final Pelagian objections: “The Pelagians think that they know something great when they assert that ‘God would not command what He knew could not be done by man.’” But Augustine is masterful in his reply: “But God commands some things which we cannot do, in order that we may know what we ought to ask of Him.” (p. 457) Furthermore, “It is certain that it is we that *will* when we will, but it is He who makes us will what is good.” (ibid) And, it is only grace that makes us lovers of the law.

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Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, pp. 112-201

100% read

(please note: I just realized that I inadvertently listed that I read Cairns, pp. 112-201 last time for Paper #1. This was a typo. I read pp. 39-111 as assigned last time and read 112-201 as I was suppose to for Paper #2 this time! Sorry about the confusion.)