The Doctrine of SANCTIFICATION in St. Athanasius' Paschal Letters

M.A. Thesis

BY
Fr. MATTHIAS F. WAHBA

FOREWORD BY
THE RIGHT REVEREND
BISHOP KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

IN ST. ATHANASIUS' PASCHAL LETTERS

M. A. THESIS

ACCEPTED BY THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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by

Fr. Matthias F. Wahba

Foreword by
The Right Reverend
Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia

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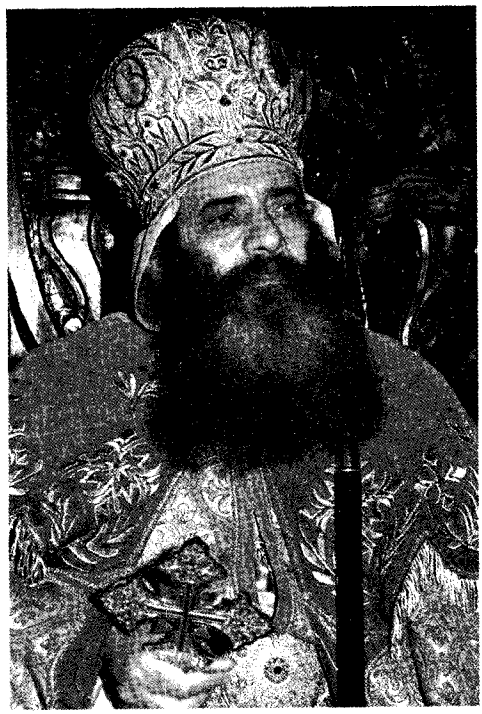
ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT

The 20th Pope of the Coptic Church
(328-373)



TO THE GREAT SCHOLAR
H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

The 117th Pope of the Coptic Church
(1971)

I present the book

FOREWORD

One of the most remarkable features in the long episcopate of St. Athanasius of Alexandria is the support and loyalty that he won from his flock. Much more than a controversialist, he was a true pastor, close to his people, whether clergy, monks or laity. St. Cyprian's celebrated saying - "The Church is the people united to the bishop, the flock clinging to its shepherd; the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop" - was true of St. Athanasius to a pre-eminent degree. When he returned from exile late in 346, after an absence of seven years, the people, together with the civic authorities, are said to have streamed out like a second Nile to meet him a hundred miles from Alexandria.

It is this pastoral side of St. Athanasius that is chiefly in evidence in his Paschal Letters, presented here by Fr. Matthias Wahba with clarity and sympathetic care. The Paschal Letters have been somewhat neglected in recent scholarship, and it is valuable to have a systematic presentation of their teaching on salvation and sanctification. St. Athanasius' understanding of the Christian life is here set before us in all its richness. The abundant quotations help us to appreciate what Fr

Matthias rightly calls his 'warmth, vigour and simplicity'. St. Athanasius' approach is strongly Scriptural, and it is always theological, never merely moralistic.

At the heart of the Paschal Letters stands the truth on which St. Athanasius constantly insisted in all his writings, both controversial and pastoral: we humans can live a divine life, since the Word of God has Himself become human. 'He became man that we might be made God': the Incarnation of the Logos is the foundation of the whole of St. Athanasius' theology. He never ceased to contemplate with wonder the mystery of the Word made flesh: 'The victories achieved by the Saviour through His Incarnation are so great and so many that, if one wished to describe them, it would be like gazing across the open sea and trying to count the waves.' The Word, as he puts it in his Paschal Letters, is 'all things on our behalf'; 'He is the only Saviour and Sanctifier. He is the Shephered, the High Priest, the Way, the Door and everything, all at once.'

As a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Fr. Matthias feels an especial closeness to St. Athanasius. But the Archbishop of Alexandria is also our common father. Along with St. Cyril of Alexandria, he is part of the shared Patristic inheritance that belongs to all of us, whether non-Chalcedonians or Chalcedonians. Reading St.

Athanasius and St. Cyril, we rediscover our unity. At a time when Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthdox are drawing closer to each other in mutual dialogue, Fr. Matthias' scholarly study has thus a practical ecumenical value. Through his original research he has made St. Athanasius better Known to us, and we are deeply grateful to him.

BISHOP KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

SOME OF THE WRITINGS OF ST. ATHANASIUS

Ad Ant.	Letter to the Church of Antioch.
Ad Cons.	Defence before Constantius.
Ad Ep. Aeg.	Circular to the Bishops of Egypt.
Ad Ser.	To Serapion.
Ap. Con. Ar.	Defence Against the Arians.
Con. Ar.	Discourses Against the Arians
Con. Gen.	Against the Heathen.
De Dec.	Defence of the Nicene Council.
De Dion.	Defence of Dionysius of Alexandria.
De Inc.	On the Incarnation.
Ex. Fid.	Statement of Faith.
FL Cop.	Festal Letters, Coptic Text.
FL Syr.	Festal Letters, Syriac Text.
Hist. Ar.	History of the Arians.
Vit. An.	Life of St. Antony.

The translation of the LNPF *(Literature of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers)* is used. Unless indicated, LNPF always refer to the 2nd series, vol. IV, *St. Athanasius: Seclect works and Letters,* edited by A. Robertson.

Fl Cop. refers to the French translation of the Coptic text published by L-Th. Lefort in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 151, pp. 1-45.

PREFACE
TOPIC AND METHOD

In the Christian tradition, sanctification is the ultimate purpose of God and the Church toward man. Every church has developed its doctrine and methods of sanctification. It is therefore important to refer to the Church Fathers who wrote before the first division of the Church at the council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). Among them is St. Athanasius of Alexandria (+373 A.D.) who was of great importance in the history of Christian thinking. His spiritual doctrine is of particular relevance, not only for the Coptic Church but also for Christian Churches of all traditions.

The topic of our research is sanctification of the human person in St. Athanasius' Paschal Letters. We will endeavour to present objectively, as far as the sources permit, the doctrine of Athanasius on this topic. A few particular studies are based upon the Letters (see J. Quasten, Patrology, Utrecht, 1975, vol. 3, p. 54), but none of which directly deals with the spirituality of the Letters. We will analyze the letters to illustrate the elements of sanctification which they bear. After a brief examination of the life and uniqueness of Athanasius, we will underline

the historical importance of his Paschal Letters, and the great consideration given to them in the past by other churches. In the second chapter, we will discuss, according to the Letters, the general concept of sanctification. Then, following the method of Athanasius himself, it will be necessary to recognize the origin of man and the result of the Fall, to show that "our transgression called forth the loving kindness of the Word, that the Lord should make haste to help us"[1].

After that, it will be relevant to discuss Incarnation and Salvation as the remedy for sin and the basis of restoration and sanctification of man. For Athanasuis, sacraments are the main source of sanctification by means of which God can provide man with the holy life based on the grace of Salvation. Then, what is the part of man? Sanctification implies a sort of co-operation between God and man. This will be the last chapter of our thesis.

We observe that the Letters, written in a particular context, do not necessarily express the whole of Athanasius' spirituality. Some major concepts, such as the creation of man in the image of God, the Incarnation as the basis of sanctification, and the divinity of Christ, are considered by Athanasius as essential principles taken for granted and discussed in other circumstances. Other

(1) *De Inc.* 4:1-2, p. 38.

concepts, such as Baptism and Confirmation, are considered outside the context of the Letters which are confined only to announcing the date of Easter and elaborating on the meaning of Resurrection and the way of being prepared for it through Lent. But all these concepts are alluded to in the Letters in the meantime.

I wish to acknowledge the effort and co-operation of my supervisor Dr. Emilien Lamirande who encouraged me to finish this research and helped me so much by his sincere guidance and intelligent remarks.

Fr. Matthias F. Wahba
Copitc Priest

University of Ottawa
2 May, 1985
The Feast of St. Athanasius
(According to the Gregorian Calendar)

INTRODUCTION
ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT
(298-373 A.D.)

According to tradition, St. Athanasius the Great is the 20th Bishop of Alexandria and the successor of St. Mark the Evangelist who founded the Coptic Church of Alexandria, where he was martyred in 68 A.D. Athanansius had the official title of Patriarch of Alexandria[1] and was also called Pope, a title given to his successors to this day[2].

St. Athanasius is one of the most forceful figures in all Ecclesiastical history. He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, About 298 A.D. He lived as an ascetic, since he was an attendant of St. Antony the Great[3]. He was ordained a deacon by Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria[4]. In the year 325 A.D., he accompanied his bishop to the Council of Nicea, and once distinguished himself there by his zeal and ability in refuting Arianism and affirming the eternal

(1) Council of Nicea, canon 6.
(2) This is the title used in the *Festal Index* which was written shortly after his death, cf. INPF. Ser. vol. 4, pp. 502-505
(3) *Vit. Ant.* prologue, p. 195.
(4) *Ap. con. Ar.* 6, p. 103.

Deity of Christ[5]. In the year 328 A.D., he was ordained Bishop of Alexandria, after the death of Alexander[6].

Nicea, for Athanasius, proclaimed the Church's tradition against the personal theories of his opponents[7]. How could sinful humanity be redeemed if Christ was not fully God? Later on, during his third exile, he wrote that the Word would never have made man divine if He were merely divine by participation and not Himself the essential God, the Father's veritable Image[8].

The Christian Church exalts his valiant struggle for faith against the Arians who were the most aggressive schismatic group. They regarded him as their chief enemy, doing everything to destroy him. To silence St. Athanasius, the Arians enlisted the aid of the secular powers and the corrupt ecclesiastical authorities.

Athanasius was banished five times from his Episcopal see, and spent more than seventeen years in exile[9]; but all this suffering could not break his resistance. This long period of confessorship is summarized in the traditional

(6) *Festal Index* 1, p. 503. (5) *Ibid*

(7) *De Synodis* 5, p. 452-3; W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, London, 1984, p. 524.

(8) *De Synodis* 51, p. 477.

(9) *Historia Acephala* XII 17, p. 499; A. Robertson, in LNPF, p. 497.

phrase: "Athanasius contra mundum, et mundus contra Athanasium". Every student of the fourth century Church history knows that it was Athanasius, rather than the council of Nicea itself, that saved Christian monotheism and rescued faith in the Godhead of Christ[10].

Athanasius' pastoral care is shown by his episcopal visitations[11] and his Paschal Letters[12]. He encouraged Monasticism[13] which was founded in his time by his teacher St. Antony[14]. After Antony's death, he wrote about his life and sent it to "the monks in foreign parts"[15]. He was the first Pope who ordained bishops from amongst the monks[16].

On the 2nd of May, 373 A.D.[17], this great hero of faith departed from this life in a wonderful manner, but before the conclusion of the Arian war. He had secured

(10) G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, London, 1936, p. XXXI.
(11) *Ap. Con. Ar.* 74, p. 139.
(12) Cf. infra. Ch. 1.
(13) *De Inc.* 48:2, p. 62; *Ap. ad Con.* p. 252.
(14) *Vit. An. 14-16,* p. 200; 44-45, p. 208.
(15) *Ibid.* Prologue, p. 195.
(16) *Ad Dracontium* 7, p. 559.
(17) According to the Gregorian calendar which is 13 days behind the Julian calendar. Following the Julian calendar, the Coptic Church celebrates St. Athanasius' feast on the 15th of May (7 Pachon).

the final victory for orthodoxy, but like Moses, was called away from the earthly scene before the goal was reached[18].

In his memorial, one of his contemporaries, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, said: "In praising Athanasius I shall be praising virute"[19]. He calls him "the pillar of the Church"[20]. The Greek Church considers him "the Father of orthodoxy", whereas the Roman Catholic Church counts him among the four great Fathers of the East[21].

We see that in Athanasius, Eastern and Western thought may meet. Since he is known in both parts, he could very well serve today as an advocate of ecumenical understanding between the East and the West[22].

(18) P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* Michigan, 1979, vol. 3, p. 888.

(19) Greg. Naz. Or. 21, trans. Browne and Swallow, in *LNPF.* ser. 2, vol. 7, p. 268

(21) Quasten, *Patrology,* Utrecht-Antwerp, 1975, vol. 3, p. 20.

(22) D. Ritschl, "Athanasius, Source of new questions", in *Konzepte,* 184 (1977-1978), p. 77.

CHAPTER I
THE PASCHAL LETTERS

I.1. The Importance of the Paschal Letters

Among the surviving correspondence of St. Athanasius are his paschal Letters which are highly important and worthy to rank with the other deep, vital and spiritual writings of that great father of the Coptic Church. The same warmth, vigour and simplicity pervades them as his other writings[1]. The Paschal Letters reveal not only his pastoral fidelity and perpetual striving to exhort the faithul, even during his exile when these letters were the only means of communication, but they also present a surprisingly rich source for the history of the Church, the Trinitarian controversies, the Arian heresy and the beginnings of Monasticism[2].

The use and abuse of fasting and the festival itself occupy an essential place throughout the Letters. They insist repeatedly on the joyfulness of the Christian Pascha as intended to colour the whole life of the Christians. They insist also upon purity and charity, especially towards the

(1) A. Robertson, in *LNPF, op. cit.*, p. 501.
(2) J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, p. 4.

poor[3]. They show the powerful effect of the Eucharist, through which the Christian is feeding upon the Word[4]. One has to prepare for it by amendment of life, repentance and confession[5]. The Canon of the Holy Scriptures in Letter 39 is of great importance.

(3) *FL Syr.* Syr. 1:11, p. 510; 45, p. 553.
(4) *Ibid. 4.3, p. 516.*
(5) *Ibid.* 7:10, p. 527.

I.2. Meaning of "Pascha"

"Paschal Letters" are the equivalent of "Festal Letters", "Easter Letters" and "Resurrection Letters". The term "Pascha" is the Aramaic derivation of the Hebrew "Pesach", which means Passover, a name formerly in fairly wide circulation both for the Jewish Passover and for the Christian Festival of Easter[6]. The lamb eaten at the Jewish Passover was called the Paschal lamb. The lambs were slain in the temple on the afternoon of the 14th day of Nisan[7], and then taken by the people to their homes and eaten during the night (cf. Exod. 12). For the Christians, Christ Himself is their Passover who was sacrificed for them (1 Cor. 5:7). Seeing Jesus coming towards him, John the Baptist said "Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Joh 1:29). Therefore, according to Athanasius, the Passover of the Jews is not the true festival because they denied the Lord of the Passover[8]: "These things", he says, "were typical, and done as a shadow". And he adds: "But let us pass on to the meaning, and henceforth, leaving the

(6) F.L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford, 1984, p. 1036.

(7) The opening month in the Jewish year, roughly corresponding to the month of April.

(8) *FL Syr.* 6:2, p. 520.

figure at a distance, come to the truth"[9]. The Bishop explains: "Henceforth, the feast of the Passover is ours, not that of the stranger, nor is it any longer of the Jews, for the time of shadows is abolished, and those former things have ceased"[10]. He comments further "We no longer slay a material lamb, but the true Lamb that was slain, even our Lord Jesus Christ"[11].

(9) *Ibid.* 1:3, p. 507.
(10) *Ibid.* 19:1, p. 544.
(11) *Ibid.* 1:9, P. 509.

I.3. The Occasion of the Paschal Letters

During the third century and up to the ninth century, it was the annual custom of the Popes of Alexandria to send a circular letter announcing the beginning of Lent and the correct date of Easter to all churches[12]. This letter was issued usually shortly after the Epiphany and read in the churches during the Easter season specially on Palm Sunday[13]. St. Dionysius the great, Pope of Alexandria (died 264 A.D.), is the first Bishop known to have sent such letters "in which he gives utterance to words specially suited to a solemn occasion with reference to the festival of the Pascha"[14]. We have fragments of the Paschal Letters of St. Dionysius and of St. Theophilus (died 412 A.D.), and a collection of the Letters of St. Cyril of Alexandria (died 444 A.D.)[15]. These letters took the form of pastoral epistles. They contained, in addition to the topic mentioned, a discussion of current ecclesiastical affairs or problems of Christian life, and an exhortation to the faithful to observe the Lent and Easter season

(12) J. Quasten, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 108.
(13) P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, p. 893.
(14) Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, 7:20.
(15) A. Robertson, in *LNPF, op. cit.*, p. 500.

carefully and spiritually. In his first Paschal letter, Athanasius wrote:

> Putting off the old man and his deeds, let us put on the new man, which is created in God (Eph. 4:22-24) in humbleness of mind, and a pure conscience; in meditation of the law by night and by day (Ps. 1:2). And casting away all hypocrisy and fraud, putting far from us all pride and deceit, let us take upon us love towards God and towards our neighbour, being new creatures and receiving the new wine, even the Holy Spirit, we may properly keep the feast[16].

(16) *FL Syr.* 1:9, p. 509.

I.4. Paschal controversies

The early church faced a complex question as to the date of "Pasch", the Christian Passover, whether it should be observed after the Jewish manner on the 14th day of Nisan, the lunar month, whatever the day of the week, or always on the following Sunday[17]. The former practice was the ancient tradition rooted in Asia Minor, where it was believed to derive from St. John the Apostle, and upheld by St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis[18] an early Christian Apologist (died 190 A.D.). On a visit to Rome (c. 155 A.D.), the Apostolic Father St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (c. 69 - c. 155 A.D.) sought to persuade Anicetus to conform to the approval of the Quartodeciman usage[19]. Though the Bishop of Rome refused, he had no opposition to Polycarp's continuing his own custom. Thirty or forty years later, a more rigid line was taken up by Victor Bishop of Rome (died 198 A.D.) who apparently tried to suppress Quartodecimanism[20]. When Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus (2nd century), and the other Bishops of Asia refused to comply, Victor,

(17) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 1036,1050.
(18) Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* 4:26:3.
(19) The 14th day of Nisan.
(20) Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* 5:23,24.

according to Eusebius, excommunicated them. This action was met with a sharp rebuke from St. Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons[21] (c. 130 - c. 200 A.D.). Exactly which move Victor took, is still a matter of debate.

At the Council of Nicea, the Easter problem was discussed again. St. Athanasius reported that "the Council was summoned because of the Arian heresy, and because of Easter, in that they from Syria, Cilicia and Mesopotamia differed from us and kept the feast at the same season as the Jews". The decision of Nicea was in favour of the Alexandrian practice of celebrating Easter after the vernal equinox. St. Athanasius comments: "But thanks be to the Lord, harmony has resulted not only as to the faith, but also as to the Sacred Feast"[22].

The Alexandrian See was requested to undertake the duty of announcing the correct date to the principal foreign churches as well as to its Suffragan Sees[23]. This was probably due to the astronomical learning for which Alexandria was famous[24]. Stanley writes that it is interesting to see how the ancient wisdom of Egypt (Acts

(21) *Ibid.* 5:24.
(22) *Ad Afros* 2, p. 488-90; cf. Socrates, *Eccles. Hist.* 1:8.
(23) A. Robertson, in *LNPF*, p. 500.
(24) *Ibid.*

7:22) still maintained its fame, even in Christian theology. By a direct succession, the Bishop of Alexandria had inherited the traditions of astronomical science that first appeared in the 14th century before the Christian era on the painted ceilings of the temples of Thebes. On them, therefore, was imposed the duty of announcing the exact day for the celebration of each successive Easter to all towns and monasteries within their own jurisdiction, as well as those of the Western Church through the Bishop of Rome, and to the Syrian Church through the Bishop of Antioch. Stanley adds: "The Coptic Church still looks with pride to the age when its jurisdiction was thus acknowledged by all Christian Sees"[25].

(25) A.P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church*, New York, 1862, pp. 251-253.

I.5 Number of Paschal Letters

As Athanasius was a Bishop for 45 years, he would have written as many Paschal Letters, if he had not been prevented several times by flight or sickness. The number 45 is confirmed by the "Festal Index"[26]. Fragments in Cosmas Indicopleustes, purporting to be taken from the 2nd, 5th, 6th, 22nd, 24th, 28th, 29th, 40th and 45th letters, also confirm the number and tally with the order of the Letters in every case where the Letters is preserved entirely, while Letter 39, preserved by a different writer, also tallies with the reference to it in the "Index"[27]. This clinches the reckoning of the "Index" and the "Historia Acephala"[28]that Athanasius was a Bishop for 45 Easters. Moreover, the number is confirmed also by the statement of St. Cyril of Alexandria that Athanasius graced the See of Alexandria fully 46 years[29].

The "Index" informs us that for several years, because of his adversities, the Pope was unable to write. Often in

(26) *Festal Index, in LNPF,* pp. 503-506. About this Index, see below, ch. 1.7.

(27) A. Robertson, in *LNPF,* vol. 4, p. 500.

(28) *Ibid.* p. 496-9.

(29) Ep. 1, referred to by A. Robertson, in *LNPF, op. cit,* p.500.

these circumstances, he sent a few cordial lines to his friend Serapion, Bishop of Thmuis[30], (Letter 12, year 340) or to the clergy of Alexandria (Letters 17 and 18, years 345 and 346), in order that Easter might be kept on its true date.

Before Easter of the year 340, as the "Index" relates, the Arians announced the Easter celebration for the 27 Phamenoth[31] (23 March). In that case, they fasted for Lent one week longer. The "index" records: "They were ridiculed on account of this error. Then altering it in the middle of the fast, they kept it with us (the Orthodox) on 4 Pharmuthi (30 March) as above. He (Athanasius) gave notice of it to the presbyters of Alexandria in a short note, not being able to send a letter as usual, on account of his flight and treachery"[32].

(30) The right hand of Athanasius and the attendant of St. Antony (died c. 360 A.D.), cf. *Vit An.* 82, 91, pp. 217, 220; *Ad Ser.*, pp. 454-456.

(31) Cf. the months of the Egyptian year in *LNPF*, p. 501.

(32) *Festal Index*, XII, in *LNPF*, p. 503.

I.6. Letter 39

The 39th Paschal Letter of 367 A.D.[33], restored from Greek, Syriac and Coptic fragments, has attracted great attention in ancient and modern times. Athanasius, in this letter, meant to condemn the attempt of the heretics to introduce apocryphal works as inspired Scriptures.

He enumerates all the books of the Old and New Testament and declares them, for the first time, to be the only canonical ones accepted by the Church. The New Testament Canon comprises the twenty seven books which are accepted today; but in the older order, viz., Gospels, Acts, Catholic Epistles, Pauline Epistles, Apocalypse. The Epistle of the Hebrews is included as of St. Paul before the Pastoral Epistles, i.e., between Thessalonians and Timothy. The number of the Old Testament books is twenty two, corresponding to the Alexandrian Jewish reckoning. The deutero-canonical books of the Old Testament, included in the Septuagint, are excluded from the Canon. Athanasius says:

> There are other books besides these not included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for

(33) Cf. *LNPF, op. cit.*, pp. 551-552; prologue pp. IXXIII, IV; Quasten *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 54.

instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Ester, Judith, Tobit and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles and the Shepherd[34].

Thus they are classed, together with the "Didache" and the "Shepherd of Hermas", as of a secondary rank serving only for instructing the catechumens[35]. In practice, Athanansius accepted several of these latter books as Scripture specially the book of Wisdom[36]. He considered "The Shepherd" most profitable but not as Scripture[37].

(34) *FL Syr.* 39:7, p. 552.
(35) Quasten, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
(36) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506; 10:4, p. 528; 11:3, p. 533; 19:5, p. 546.
(37) *de Decr.* 4, p. 152-3.

I.7. The Index of Paschal Letters

Two almost contemporary chronicles are prefixed to the Letters[38]. One of them, the "Historia Acephala", is preserved in the manuscripts as Letters 46 and 47. The other, the "Chronicon praevium", is the Index to the Festal (Paschal) Letters. They constitute the primary source for chronological details, along with the notices scattered in the other writings of Athanasius. They are independent of each other and both belong to the generation after the death of Athanasius.

The "Festal Index" is of uncertain date. It is apparently posterior to the "Historia Acephala". The writer of the index uses the Egyptian year from August 29 to August 28. Its prologue shows the data it provides: "An index of the months of each year, and of the days, and of the indications, and of the Consulates, and of the Governors in Alexandria, and of all the Epacts, and of those (days) which are named of the Gods and the reason (any Letter) was not sent, and the returns from exile [39] from the Festal Letters of Pope Athanasius" [40]. We can derive most important help from the study of the "Index".

(38) Cf. *LNPF. op. cit.*, pp. 495-506.
(39) Probably he means the answers from abroad.
(40) *LNPF, op. cit.*, p. 503.

I.8. The Original Text and its Translations

Shortly after Athanasius' death, the Paschal letters were brought together by one of his friends; and the collection was given wide distribution [41]. Unfortunately the Greek original is lost; only fragments have been found, and they have never been assembled in a critical edition[42].

Before 1842, we only had from the Paschal Letters some allusions in Jerome[43] or others, and some fragments in Cosmas Indicopleustes. That year, Archdeacon Tattam found a large number of Syriac manuscripts in the Monastery of the Theotokos [44] in the Nitrian Desert of Egypt. When they were brought into the

(41) Quasten, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 53.

(42) Until recently it had been taken for granted that the Letters were originally written in Greek, but it has been suggested that Athanasius could have issued the Letters to the people in their own Coptic lanaguage, cf. L. Th_Lefort, *Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, in *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques* (Acadèmie royale de Belgique), 1955, vol. 41, pp. 184-185; *La chasse aux reliques des martyrs en Egypte au IVe siècle* in *La Nouvelle Clio, 1954, vol. 6, p. 225, note 1.*

(43) *De viris illustre.* 87, cf. A. Robertson in *LNPF*, p. 500.

(44) It is called *the Monastery of the Syrians* untill now because of the Syriac monks who were living in it.

British Museum, W. Cureton discovered the text of twenty-seven Paschal Letters, among them twelve are complete. Another consignment of manuscripts from the same source produced some further portions[45]. This Syriac translation is published by W. Cureton, "The Festal Letters of Athanasius", London, 1848, and reprinted by Mai, "Nova Patrum Bibliotheca", vol. VI, Rome, 1853.

An early Coptic text with a French translation has also been published by L.Th. Lefort in "Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium", vol. 150, pp. 1-72; vol. 151. pp. 1-54 [46]. Unfortunately this text is less complete although it contains material not represented in the Syriac.

The Latin translation provided in Migne, "Patrologia Graeca", vol. 26, columns 1351-1432, is rather unreliable, being made from an Italian version of the Syriac.

There are three English translations of the Syriac:

1. Henry Burgess, *The Festal Letters of St. Athanasius Bishop of Alexandria*, London, Oxford University Press, 1845.

(45) *LNPF. op. cit.*, p. 500.

(46) See the introduction to this edition, pp. I-XVIII; Id., *Les lettres festales de saint Athanase*, dans *Bulletin de la Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques*, Acadèmie Royale de Belgique, 1953, vol. 39, pp. 643-646.

2. Miss Payne - Smith revised Burgess' version: *St. Athanasius, Selected Works and letters, Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers,* ser. 2, vol. 4, pp. 500 - 553.
3. Jack N. Sparks, *The Resurrection Letters, St. Athanasius Bishop of Alexandria, from 328 - 373 A.D.*, paraphrased and introduced by Sparks, Nashville, Thomas Nelson publishers, 1979. Although the translator may have perfectly succeeded in helping modern readers to the content of the Letters by presenting them in the language of our day, it seems advisable, for the purpose of this thesis, to continue to use the Burgess translation as revised for the Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers collection, together with the French translation from the Coptic.

The Syriac and Coptic texts: A comparison

Text	Year	Letter No.
Syriac and Cotpic	329,330	1,2
Syriac only	331 - 333	3,4,5
Syriac and Coptic	334	6
Syriac only	335	7
missing	336 - 337	8,9
Syriac only	338 - 342	10 - 14
missing	343,344	15,16
Syriac only	345 - 348	17 - 20
missing	349	21

Syriac only	350	22
missing	351	23
Syriac and Coptic	352	24
Coptic only	353 - 354	25,26
Syriac and Coptic	355 - 357	27 - 29
missing	358 - 363	30 - 35
Coptic only	364 - 366	36 - 38
Syriac and Coptic	367,368	39,40
Coptic only	369	41
Syriac and Coptic	370,371	42,43
Syriac only	372,373	44,45

We conclude that:

11 letters are in both Syriac and Coptic.
16 letters are in Syriac only.
6 letters are in Coptic only.
12 letters are missing.

CHAPTER II
ATHANASIUS' GENERAL CONCEPT OF SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE LETTERS

II.1. Introduction

In his Paschal Letters, St. Athanasius recognizes the reality and power of sin in the human life, and its destruction by the Word who became flesh in order to meet and overcome it on its own ground. If the dogmatic works of Athanasius deal especially with the salvation accomplished by the Divine Word, the Festal Letters underline more clearly the appropriation of this salvation and the life based upon grace. It is remarkable to note that the starting point in Athanasius' life and writings is the triumph of grace. Even in the middle of terrible afflictions and persecutions, the tone is always that of victory and encouragement[1].

For Athanasius, the Eternal Word is the pivot of the round world and of them that dwell in it. The whole owes

(1) J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la théologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, Leiden, 1968, p. 140.

Him its existence and its destiny. It was "for us men and for our salvation" that the Word came down from heaven and became flesh[2]. Athanasius believes that men are wasting away in decay, and that if the process is to be arrested, a living antidote has to enter into them and stop the destruction[3]. The antidote is, for him, the Word Incarnate[4].

(2) The Nicene Creed.

(3) W.C. De Pauley, *The Idea of Man in Athanasius*, in *Thèology*, 1962 v. XII, p. 331.

(4) J.-B. Berchem, *Le Christ sanctificateur d'après saint Athanase* in *Angelicum*, 15(1938), pp. 515-558.

II.2. The Arian controversy

St. Athanasius in his writings shows himself clearly to be within the theological tradition which describes Redemption as Deification. This tradition is closely associated with the Logos Christology[5], as St. Athanasius writes in his "De Incarnatione": "The Word became flesh that we might be deified"[6]. The Christological implications of this doctrine are used with great effect in the Arian controversy. The Logos who deifies cannot be the same substance with those whom He deifies. Therefore, He cannot be like men, a creature, nor could He deify christians if He were god by participation only and not by full identity of substance[7].

The Paschal Letter for 338 A.D. is Athanasius' first writing after his liberation from the first exile (335-337 A.D.) in June 337 A.D. (before his return to Alexandria in November). In it Athanasius speaks openly for the first time about Arius and his failure to recognize the Divinity

(5) H.E. Turner, *The patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, London, 1952, p. 87.
(6) *De Inc. 54:3, p. 65; Ad Adelphium* 4, p. 576.
(7) *De Synodis* 51, p. 477.

and the saving work of Christ[8]. We trace the demarcation line in 337 A.D., since, after that year, the writings of Athanasius reveal a direct and open controversy with the Arians. This does not mean that, in his earlier works, the allusions to Arianism are lacking; but it is expressed incidentally and in cryptic terms. Indeed, the theological presuppositions from which Athanasius will attack Arianism are already formed in his spirit and have their origin in his doctrine of the restoring character of the Incarnate Logos. But it is evident that the objective of his first writings is different than those of the anti-Arian writings[9].

The paschal letters gave Athanasius the occasion to expose - sometimes in detail - the sources of Christian Salvation and the consequence of Sanctification which it provides for those who receive it. Even before the direct polemic against the Arians in the Letter of 338 A.D., Athanansius sums up, in the sixth Letter (334 A.D.), the practical conception of Sanctification in one forceful verse: "The Word became flesh that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in spirit should worship God Who is Spirit"[10].

(8) Cf. *FL Syr.* 10, pp. 527-532
(9) J. Roldanus, *op. cit. pp.* 11-12.
(10) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 520.

II.3. Healing and Formative Power

The tenth Letter (338 A.D.) shows, on one side, the weakness of man, and on the other, the healing and formative power of Christ:

> "but God, being rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in follies and sins, quickened us with Christ" (Eph 2:4,5). For the might of man and all creatures is weak and poor; but the Might which is above man, and uncreated, is rich and incomprehensible, and has no beginning, but is eternal[11].

Athanasius continues describing the different methods of healing which God works in man through His Word:

> He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in divers manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us, but since He is rich and manifold, he varies according to the indivual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word and the Power and the Wisdom of God[12].

(11) *FL Syr.* 10:4, p. 528.
(12) *Ibid.*

As a theologian, Athanasius used to appeal to the teaching of the Holy Scripture in support of his ideas[13]. In this case he quotes a verse to show that Divine Wisdom can powerfully pass into souls fashioning saints:

> Solomon testified concerning Wisdom, that being one, it can do all things; and remaining in itself, it makes all things new; and passing upon holy souls, fashions the friends of god and prophets (Wisdom 7:27) [14].

The same sentence is cited in the first Letter to prove that while many people of the Old Testament were praying for the coming Christ saying with the Psalmist "O that the salvation of God were come out of Sion" (Ps. 14:7), the Wisdom of God, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was already acting in the souls, fashioning the friends of God and the Prophets[15].

(13) H.E. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 88; W.C. De Pauly, *op. cit.*, p. 331.
(14) *Fl Syr.* 10:4, p. 528.
(15) *Ibid.* 1:1, p. 506.

II.4. Restoration of Man

Restoration, as the main purpose of Incarnation, marks off the Soteriology of Athanasius, especially in his two dogmatic books: "Against the Heathen" and "Incarnation of the Word"[16]. The Paschal Letters reflect the pastoral and practical corresponding attitude.

Commenting on the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-37), St. Athanasius syas:

> This is the work of the Father's loving - kindness and goodness, that not only should He make him alive from the dead, but that he should render His grace illustrious through the Spirit. Therefore, instead of corruption, He clothes him with an incorruptible garment; instead of hunger, He kills the fatted calf; instead of journeys, [the Father] watches for his return, provides shoes for his feet; and, what is most wonderful, places a divine signet-ring upon his hands; whilst by all these things He begat him afresh in the image of the glory of Christ[17].

(16) A. Robertson, in *LNPF. op. cit.*, ser. 2, v. 4, p. 33.
(17) *FL Syr.* 7:10, p. 527.

We may notice the ideas connected with restoration: make alive from death, replace corruption by an incorruptible garment, and beget afresh in the image of the glory of Christ. All this is seen as the manifestation of grace.

II.5. Spiritual Nourishment and Grafting

Continuing his comments, St. Athanasius clarifies another aspect of Sanctification as he speaks of the nourishment of the soul of the repentant, for which Christ is the bread of life. By the gracious gifts of the Father, the Lord Jesus nourishes those who repent and come back to Him. He promises: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall not thirst" (John 6:35)[18].

St. Athanasius exhorts his people to have their souls nourished with the Divine Food, the Word[19]. Again he declares: "God is the God of living, not of the dead, and He by His living Word, quickens all men, and gives Him to be food and life to the saints"[20]. Other comparisons or images occur frequently in the Paschal Letters as we shall see in more detail.

The work of sanctification is described also as a grafting. The Lord cursed the Jews under the figure of the fig tree (Matt. 21:19). He spared them, for He did not curse the

(18) *Ibid.*
(19) *Ibid.* 1:7, p. 508.
(20) *Ibid.* 7:4, p. 525.

root but said that no one would ever again eat fruit from it. He preserved the root so that the Christians could be grafted in. They too, as St. Paul says, "if they do not persist in their unbelief, can be grafted back into their own olive tree" (Rom. 11:23)[21].

When the Lord condemned the Jews, he took away their feasts, the value of the sacrificial lamb, and the true Passover[22]. But all that they lost was passed on to the Christians[23]. They are grafted in their own Passover, Christ who is sacrificed (1Cor. 5:7)[24]. Therefore, they are nourished by the condiments of salvation, and planted in the vineyard of the Lord[25].

(21) *Ibid* 6:6, p. 521.
(22) *Ibid.*
(23) *Ibid.* 6:7, p. 521.
(24) *Ibid.* 10:10, p. 531.
(25) *FL Cop.* 27, p. 18.

II.6. Pilot of Souls and Sun of Righeousness

Using analogies which belong to his style, Athanasius discribes the Lord as the Pilot of Souls, or the Mind who guides them and without whom they fall:

> For where there is sagacity, there the Word, who is the Pilot of Souls, is with the vessel; 'For he that has understanding shall possess guidance' (Prov. 1:5, Septuagint) but they who are without guidance fall like the leaves[26].

For example, Judas, being a traitor, fell away from the Pilot and perished with the jews; but the other disciples stayed with the Lord. When the sea was agitated, they did not fall away but they awoke the Lord, their Pilot, who was sailing with them, and they were saved (Mark 4:35-41)[27]. The world is like a sea on which the believers float along, carried by their own free will as if by the wind. It is under the pilotage of the Lord that man will be saved from the perilous storms of sin[28].

The Lord is also spoken of as "the Sun of Righteousness", whose divine beams rise upon true

(26) *FL Syr.* 19:6, p. 547.
(27) *Ibid.*
(28) *Ibid.* 19;7, p. 547.

Christians[29]. It is mentioned in the prophecy of Malachy: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness rise with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2)[30]. When the Sun rises in the life of the Christian, it sanctifies the soul and heals it from sin.

The same idea is expressed once again: the faithful are described as having been glorioulsly illumined with the light of truth by looking upon the Sun of Righteousness[31]. The Lord is the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world (John 1:9); therefore He is capable of overcoming the darkness of sin[32].

(29) Ibid. 1:1, p. 506.
(30) *Ibid.*
(31) *Ibid.* 5:4, p. 518-519.
(32) *Ibid.* 3:4, p. 514.

II.7. Salvation in Him Alone

The manifold aspects of Christ's salvation and sanctification are summed up in the 14th Letter. Christ is all things to men, and He is burdened in several ways for their salvation. He hungered and thirsted, yet He nourishes them and gives them His saving gifts[33]. He changed their sufferings for His happiness. Being Life, He died to make them alive. Being the Word, He became flesh, so that the flesh might be guided by the Word. Being the fountain of life, He thirsted their thirst, in order to call them saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37)[34].

The perception of the sufficacy of Christ for Sanctification is always present in St. Athanasius' mind. He commences the same letter: "The Word is near, Who is all things on our behalf"[35]. The Lord Jesus Christ promised that He would be with the believers forever, "Lo, I am with you all the days of the world" (Matt. 28:20)[36].

(33) Cf. *Commentary on Luke 10:22*, verse 3, p. 88.
(34) *Fl Syr.* 14:4, p. 543.
(35) *FL Syr.* 14;1, p. 541.
(36) *Ibid.*

At the same time, Athanasius always calls Christ: the Saviour[38], Our Lord and Saviour[39], Man-loving Word[40], who seeks and finds which is lost [41]. It is very rare that Athanasius mentions Christ without such titles.

In the "Life of Antony", Sanctification is presented as the victory of the Saviour's work, "Who condemns sin in the flesh, that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3,4)[42]. Athanasius has in mind that Christ's work of Sanctification is the mystery of the visions and marvels of Antony[43], the chastity of the virgins and young men[44], and the spiritual struggle of the saints mentioned frequently throughout the Letters.

(37) *Ibid.* 2:5; 3:4.
(38) *Ibid.* 1:8; 2:4; 3:5; 4:4; 14;4.
(39) *Ibid.* 10;5; 9:27.
(40) *Ibid.* 2:3; 3:4.
(41) *Ibid.* 2:3.
(42) *Vit Ant.* 7, p. 197.
(43) *Ibid.* 60, p. 212.
(44) *De Inc.* 48:2; p. 62.

II.8. Conclusion

We conclude that Sanctification, for Athanasius, is the will of God; so that "the salvation of men should be spread everywhere"[45]. It is the role of Christ Who came down from heaven to cure the weakness of man. Salvation is in Him alone: "He is the only Saviour and Sanctifier. He is the Shepherd, the High Priest, the Way, the Door and everything, all at once [to man]"[46]. He is the Feast and the Holiday, for, according to St. Paul, "Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7)[47]. He is the Pilot of souls and the Sun of Righteousness, Who is capable of restoring man by His healing and formative power, and through the nourishment of His grace.

Athanasius spent all his life defending the absolute divinity of Christ against Arianism. He asserted that Christ could not sanctify man if He were not God with full identity of substance with the Father.

That is the general concept of Sanctification according to Athanasius' Paschal Letters. Now remain the elements of the Economy of Christ to sanctify man. But Christ can

(45) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506.
(46) *Ibid.* 14:1, p. 541.
(47) *Ibid.*

not oppose Sanctification to man for, "being called to the great and heavenly Supper", man must prepare and cleanse himself "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1)[48]. Therefore, Sanctification is a mutual operation between God and man.

(48) *Ibid.* 40, p. 552.

CHAPTER III
CREATION AND FALL

In order to better understand the sanctifying work of Christ, it is necessary to discuss first the Creation and Fall of man[1].

(1) Cf. *De Inc.*4, p. 38.

III.1. Creation

III.1.a. Origin of Man

The second Letter affirms that man was created in the image of God: By understanding, man at the beginning was rational and in the image of God[2]. We read further in the same letter: "We bear His image"[3]. This phrase shows that man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27); he has a rational soul by which he is different from the animals[4]. According to the "De Incarnatione", the image of God is understood as "a kind of reflexion of the Word", for God gave man "a portion even of the power of His Word"[5].

But, on the other hand, Athanasius establishes a line of distinction between God the Creator and man the creature, although he bears His image. The worship of the universe or any part of it is condemned and refuted[6].

(2) *FL Syr.* 2:2, p. 510.
(3) *Ibid.* 2:5, p. 511.
(4) *Con. Gen.* 30-31; p. 20.
(5) *De Inc.* 3:3, p. 37.
(6) J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la thèologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie,* p. 39; *Con. Gen.* 27;1,p. 18.

Athanasius rejects any divine hierarchy. There is nothing between God and creature which can be called Divine[7]. Those who speak of a Divine Being which is not equal to the Father are considered idolaters. Therefore, the Arians are accused of idolatry like pagans because they worship the creature instead of the One who created everything[8].

III.1.b. Revelation and knowledge of God

Stating that man is "rational and in the image of God"[9], Athanasius means that man's reason is an image of God's reason. This fact implies that God has given every man the possibility of gaining, at least partially, true revelation and knowledge of Himself. It is possible for him to have the direct knowledge of God by his reason created in God's image[10]. If he fails to know God by reason, he can know the Father through God's Logos, for it is the Lord who reveals His Father to those whom He wants (Luke 10:22)[11]. But the history of revelation

(7) E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or antithesis*, Leiden 1968, p. 130.
(8) *FL Cop.* 41, p. 42.
(9) *FL Syr.* 2:2, p. 510.
(10) Cf. the theory of the four stages of revelation: *Con. Gen. 30-34, pp. 20-22; De Inc.* 11-13, pp. 42-43.
(11) *Fl Cop.* 39, p 32.

shows that man failed to acquire the right knowledge of God. Human reason points in the right direction, but man does not follow his reason. Therefore he falls into sin, and his vessel suffers shipwreck in the stormy sea of this world[12].

(12) *FL Syr.* 19:7, p. 547.

III.2. The Fall

III.2.a. Declination:

As long as men bear the image of God[13], they bear the Word and abide in incorruption[14]. But after the Fall, they are expressed as descending or "inclining downwards" [15]. Their disgrace is depicted as that "they bear not the likeness of the conversation of the saints, nor of that right understanding, by which man at the beginning was rational and in the image of God"[16]. Men barely measure up to the level of animals, and their uncontrolled drive toward lust and pleasure can be compared to the behaviour of lustful stallions (Jer. 5:8). Because of their trickiness, crimes and sins, they are called a generation of vipers (Luke 3:17)[17].

Man freely embraced, at the devil's suggestion (Gen. 3:5), the things of the senses which were akin to his lower nature. The essence of sin lies in the fact that men, having come so low as to crawl in the dust like snakes, "their

(13) *FL Syr.* 2:5, p. 511.
(14) Cf. *De Inc.* 4:4, 5:1-2, p. 38.
(15) *FL Syr.* 1:5, p. 508.
(16) *Ibid.* 2:2, p. 510.
(17) *Ibid.*

minds are set on nothing beyond visible things", considering such things above every thing else. Thus they take pleasure in these sensual things, serving not God but their own lusts[18]. In a sentence, they are changed from the likeness of God "into the likeness of fools"[19].

The absence of the close relation to the Logos means that men are, in some ways, deprived of reason. As they live in sin, they are not much different from animals. The Psalmist says to them, "Do not be like the horse or like the mule which have no understanding" (Ps. 32:9)[20]. Therefore, they gave way to several kinds of moral corruption. The worst of these corruptions is idolatry. Men had become so foolish and so lacking in understanding that they link God to themselves, thinking that they could invent something equivalent to Him; as St. Paul said, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the corruptible image of man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:22-23). The prophet asks, "To what have you likened the Lord, and with what have you compared Him?" (Is. 40:18). So David prayed about them saying, "All those that make them (idols) are

(18) *Ibid.*
(19) *Ibid.* 2:3, pp. 510-511.
(20) *Ibid.*; cf. *Con, Ar.* 3:18, p. 404.

like them, and all those who put their trust in them" (Ps. 115:8) [21].

The heretics, the schismatics and all those who are aliens from the Catholic★ Church are as bad as idolaters. They are sinners and excluded from taking part in praising God with the saints. So, although these wicked men intrude into the Church of saints, God rejects them, for "praise is not pretty in the mouth of a sinner"(Ecclesiasticus. 15:9). There is no communion between righteousness and iniquity, nor between light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14) (22).

There are several kinds of sin in result of the fall of man. Now what is the nature of sin?

III.2.b. Nature of Sin

The main concept of sin is that it is darkness and non - existence of light and virtue:

> Apart fom light there is darkness,
> and apart from blessing there is curse;
> the devil also is apart from the saints,
> and sin from virtue[23].

★ "Catholic" means universal.

(21) *FL Syr.* 2:3, p. 511; cf. *Con. Gen.* 19:1-2, 26:2.

(22) *FL Syr.* 7:4, 524-5.

(23) *FL Syr.* 10:4, p. 529.

This means that good is, while evil is not; for virtue is light but sin is darkness; insofar as darkness is the absence of light, sin is the absence of virtue[24]. Athanasius qualifies evil as non-being, using the style and expressions of Platonism, but refusing the view of those who regard matter as the principle of evil[25].

Then sin is darkness; and sinners, such as the Jews, the Arians and all wicked, are deprived from light, life and grace which they could have had through the Saviour[26]. They live in darkness: "For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, nor dwell in a body that is subject unto sin; but will remove from thoughts that are without understanding" (Wisdom 1:4,5). Therefore they, being without understanding, walk in darkness, not having that "Light which lights every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9)[27]. They are so blind to the truth that they grope about in dark, as Isaiah says: "They hear indeed but do not understand; they see indeed but they do not perceive, for their heart has grown fat, and their ears have grown dull" (Isaiah 6:9,10)[28].

(24) For more details, cf. *Con. Gen.*, 4, p. 5-6.
(25) E.P. Meijering,*op. cit.*, pp. 1-11, 14.
(26) *FL Syr.* 10:5, p. 529.
(27) *Ibid.* 3:4, p. 514.
(28) *Ibid.* 2:3, p. 511.

Also, as sinners are deprived from life, they are dead, for they "kill the soul with lusts, and say nothing but: 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'(Is. 22:13)". They bury their souls in sins and foolishness, feeding them on things that are dead. They are like young eagles that dive upon the carcasses of the dead and eat them. The Law ordered not to eat the eagle nor any other bird which feeds on a dead carcass (Lev. 11:13), as a figurative directive against those who kill their souls[29].

Therefore, it is not surprising that there are two sorts of nourishment with which the soul can be fed. God "by His living Word quickens all men and gives Him [Christ] to be food and life to the saints, as the Lord declares, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:48)"[30]. Sin, on the other hand, has its own special "bread" too; the bread of death for all those "who are lovers of pleasure and lack understanding" [31]. For virtues and vices are the food of the soul, and it can feed on either one, turning to which one it wants. If it is bent towards moral excellence, it will be fed by virtue and "the word of truth" (1 Tim. 4:6); but if the soul inclines towards evil, it is nourished by sin and

(29) *Ibid.* 7:2, p. 524.
(30) *Ibid.* 7:4, p. 525.
(31) *Ibid.* 7:5, p. 525.

the devil, for the devil is the food of impure people who "work the deeds of darkness"[32].

But the pleasure of sin in its nature is temporal; and the lover of pleasure rejoices for a little while, but afterwards passes a sorrowful life, like Esau who enjoyed one short meal but was afterward condemned for his behaviour [33].

The final result is that through righteousness, man comes into God's presence, as Moses who entered the cloud where God was (Ex. 19:20). On the other hand, by the practice of evil, a person leaves the presence of God as Cain (Gen. 4:16) (34). This elaborates the fact that sin is the absence of God and absence of good.

We finally conclude this chapter by saying that the results of the fall may be summarized in two main points: death and obscurity of the image through which man can know the Word of the Father. These two results correspond to the two greatest reasons for the Incarnation, namely the regaining of immortality and the restoration of God's image in fallen man[35].

(32) *Ibid.* 1:5, p. 508.
(33) *Ibid.* 10:5, p. 530.
(34) *Ibid.* 10.4, p. 528.
(35) Cf. C.N. Tsirpanlis, *Aspects of Athanasian Soteriology*, in *Kleronomia* 8(1976), p. 65.

CHAPTER IV
SANCTIFICATION THROUGH SALVATION

St. Athanasius' conception of salvation is wider than the limitations of mere redemption or liberation from sin. Salvation took its first step by Incarnation. The Bishop calls the motive of Incarnation the need of man. The Incarnation would not have taken place without it[1]. This need of man, for Athanasius, is Sanctification and Deification, as he writes in his 4th Letter:

> Let us keep our whole mind from guile; not giving up ourselves to excess, and to lusts, but occupying ourselves entirely with our Lord, and with divine doctrines; so that, being altogether pure, we may be able to partake of the Word[2].

Athanasius considers the Incarnation of the Word as a part of the original plan of God, and that our salvation already began through Incarnation[3].

(1) Cf. *Con Ar.* 2:56, p. 378.
(2) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519; cf., (2 Pet. 1:4).
(3) Cf. *Con. Ar.* 2:56, p. 378.

After we study the Incarnation and its consequence for Sanctification, we will discuss the other steps which Christ has taken to sanctify man: Redemption, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost.

IV.1. Incarnation

On reading St. Athanasius, one is immediately struck by the importance he attaches to the mystery of the Incarnation. Athanasius' doctrine is dominated by one idea, the Incarnation. All his other doctrines center around this one[4] .

IV.1.a. Meaning and Necessity of Incarnation

We can trace the general meaning of Incarnation and its necessity for Sanctification of mankind in every Paschal Letter. But as the Letters are confined to a special content, it is relevant, if we ask for more details, to refer to other works of Athanasius, especially "On the Incarnation" and "The First Discourse Against the Arians".

Athanasius teaches that before the Incarnation, Christ worked from above upon man's conscience. According to the first Letter, the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ "passed upon the holy

(4) D. Unger, *A Special Aspect of Athanasius Soteriology in Franciscan Studies*, 6(1946), p. 190: C.N. Tsirpanlis, *Aspects of Athanasian Socteriology*, p. 66. See also *J. B. Berchem, L'Incarnation dans le plan divin d'après saint Athanase*, in *Echos d'Orient*, 33(1934), pp. 316-330.

souls, fashioning the friends of God and the prophets" (Wisdom 7:27) [5]. So that, the prophets of the Old Testament were asking for salvation which is more than mere "passing" from outside. They were praying for Him and saying: "O that the salvation of God were come out of Sion!" (Ps. 14:7). But after Incarnation, Christ intensified His influence by bringing Himself in contact with man's senses through His human life [6].

By the Incarnation, God the Word became near, and "His habitation" with man became perpetual, as He said, "Lo, I am with you all the days of the world" (Matt. 28:20)[7]. The gulf between God and creature can only be overcome by the Incarnate God. There are no other Divine Beings between God and man[8].

Incarnation means that Life came down to the dead, and God came to men. He manifested Himself to those who are in need of Him. Thus He became the light for

(5) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506.
(6) Pauly, *The idea of man in Athanasius*, p. 337.
(7) *FL Syr.* 14:1, p. 541-542.
(8) Here Athanasius is in clear opposition to Platonism which bridges the gulf between the highest Divine Principle and man with inferior divine principles; cf. E. P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, p. 129-130; *surpa* Ch. III.1.a.

the blind, the stick for the lame, and, in a word, the physician for everything and for everyone[9].

It is the Word alone who is qualified to restore man, since He is the Incarnate God:

> The Word became flesh, that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in spirit should worship God, who is Spirit[10].

This phrase sums up the necessity of Incarnation that man can live not according to sensual lust but that in spirit he should worship God. That leads us to discuss the purpose of Incarnation.

IV.1.b. Purpose of Incarnation

The phrase of the Nicene Creed: "for us and for our salvation", is constantly on the lips of Athanasius. It does express the work of the Incarnate Word rather succinctly[11].

(9) *FL Cop* 39, p. 31-32.
(10) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 520; cf.*De Inc.* 1, 6, 7, pp. 36-40, 44, p. 60: *Con. Ar.* 1:43, p. 331; 2:56, p. 378-379; *Apol. De Fuga* 13, p. 259.
(11) D. Unger, *A Special Aspect of Athanasius Soteriology* p. 39.

A similar expression is found in the 6th Letter:

> For our sake the Word came down, and being incorruptible, put on a corruptible body for the salvation of us all[12].

St. Athanasius makes the Incarnation depend upon the work of restoration. He believes that when man was created, and need arose of the economy of his restoration, then it was that the Word took upon Himself this condescension and assimilation to man. Athanasius writes in the second Letter that the man-loving God came down for this very reason to seek and find what was lost, and to restrain man from sin[13].

The desire of the soul for salvation is described in the person of the spouse of the Canticles who prays, "O that you were like a brother to me, that nursed at my mother's breasts" (Cant. 8:1). The meaning of that prayer is "O that you were like the children of men, and would take upon you human passions for our sake". It is God who became man to save mankind, for He knows their affairs better than they do. He is the only One in whom they may be healed[14]

(12) *FL Syr.* 6:4.
(13) *FL Syr.* 2:3, p. 510; cf. *De Inc.*, 4:3, p. 38, p. 40; *Con. Ar.* 1:47-48, p. 333-5.
(14) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506.

Another purpose of the Incarnation is to bring men to know God. The knowledge of God is an important element of Sanctification, for "the grace arises from knowledge"[15]. Incarnation is another grace added to creation[16], and it enables men to know God and His image in which they are created. For not only do they bear His image, but He gives them His life which He lived on earth as "an example and pattern" of heavenly behaviour, so that as He has begun they should go on[17].

It is through the Incarnation of Christ that man has the knowledge of God:

> Being the Word, He became flesh, that He might instruct the flesh in the Word[18].

Although, sanctification of man started by Incarnation, it will be completed and fulfilled by Redemption. For, "it is truly a subject of joy that we can see the signs of victory against death, even our own incorruptibility, through the body of the Lord"[19]. That is the reason of man's joy in

(15) *Ibid.* 7:1, p. 523; cf. infra, p. 131f.
(16) cf. *supra,* p. 24.
(17) *FL Syr.* 2:5, p. 511; cf. *De Inc.* 14:8, p. 44.
(18) *FL syr.* 14:4, p. 543.
(19) *Ibid.* 11:14, p. 538.

being sanctified and delivered from sin: "We rejoice not in ourselves but in the Lord Who bore our griefs. 'I will rejoice in your Salvation' (Ps. 9:14)"[20].

(20) *Ibid.* 6:7, p. 521.

IV.2. Redemption

IV.2.a. God Himself is the Redeemer

Athanasius asserts that God the Word Himself, who created the world, became flesh to save man:

> Being life, He died that He might make us alive, being the Word, He became flesh, that He might instruct the flesh in the Word[21] .

So, the Bishop stresses the ontological Godhead of the Son because he believed that only God could redeem man. Therefore, Christ, as the Redeemer, must be God:

> For He is the Word and the power and the Wisdom of God, as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that, 'being one, it can do all things, and remaining in itself, it makes all things new; and passing upon holy souls, fashions the friends of God and prophets' (Wisdom 7:27)[22].

As the Son is one with the Father, He can be an acceptable offering to the Father on our behalf:

(21) *FL Syr.* 14:4, p. 543; Cf. *De Inc.* 1:4, p. 36; 20:1, p. 47; *Con. Gen.* 1:5, p. 4.
(22)*FL Syr.* 10:4, p. 528; cf. 1:1, p. 506.

'I am in the Father, and the Father in me' (John 14:11). This is the Lord Who is manifested in the Father, and in Whom also the Father is manifested; Who, being truly the Son of the Father, at last became incarnate for our sakes, that he might offer Himself to the Father in our stead[23].

That is why each of the blessed Evangelists, before recording the words and deeds of the Lord, placed at the beginning of his Gospel those things concerning Christ to be known as God. For example, John said explicitly that in the beginning was God the Word (John 1:1); and Matthew wrote that Christ is Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23), the Son of the living God[24].

Athanasius exclaims: How could we consider the One Who reconciled us to His Father to be a stranger to His Father? [25]. He also cites another reason why the Saviour is not a creature. For if He were a creature, death would have held Him. but if, as the Scriptures positively state, He was not held by death, then He is not a creature but the Lord of creatures. For the Lord set out over death to abolish death, and being Lord, He accomplished His

(23) *Ibid.* 10:10, p. 531.
(24) *Ibid.* 11:4, p. 533.
(25) *Ibid.* 10:9, p. 531.

aim; and unless He is the Lord, we could not have passed from death to life[26].

The Jews and heretics could not understand the relation between Salvation and the divinity of Christ; and because He assumed a human nature, they denied His Godhead:

> Because of His coming down which was on behalf of man, they have denied His essential Godhead; and seeing that He came forth from the Virgin, they doubt His being truly the Son of God; and considering Him as become incarnate in time, they deny His eternity; and looking upon Him as having suffered for us, they do not believe in Him as the incorruptible Son from the incorruptible Father. And finally, because He endured for our sakes, they deny things which concern His essential eternity[27].

The Arians and schismatics downgrade Christ; both of them have learned to " rend the seamless coat of God". That is, neither of them feel the least bit bad about dividing the indivisible Son from the Father[28]. Their unbelief in the divinity of the Saviour deprives them of the Grace of Salvation.

(26) *Ibid.* 11:13-14, p. 537.
(27) *Ibid.* 10:9, p. 531.
(28) *Ibid.*

IV.2.b. Vicarious Sacrifice

The human death of the Lord is a vicarious death; for Christ offers His human nature in the stead of all and He offers it to the Father because all were under penalty of the corruption of death. The 10th Letter expresses clearly that Christ offered Himself to the Father instead of mankind, and redeemed mankind through His oblation and sacrifice[29].

This death was prefigured by the sacrifices of the Old Testament, to which Athanasius assigns an educative value:

> By Moses then, God gave commandment respecting sacrifices; and all the book called Leviticus is entirely taken up with the arrangement of these matters, so that He might accept the offerer[30].

Athanasius asserts:

> The mind of God, Who gave the law, did not regard whole burnt - offerings, but those things which were pointed out and prefigured by them. "For the law contained a shadow of good things to come"

(29) *Ibid* 10:10, p. 531; cf. *De Inc.* 8:4, p. 40.
(30) *FL Syr.* 19:3, p. 545.

(Heb. 10:1). And "those things were appointed until the time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10)[31]

It is the Lord Himself to whom the sacrifices of the Old Testament point. He is a vicarious sacrifice as Athanasius explains:

> ... in order that while He might become a sacrifice for us all, we, nourished up in the words of truth and partaking of His living doctrine, might be able with the saints to receive also the joy of Heaven[32].

The sacrifice of Isaac was a figure of the sacrifice of Christ. Abraham rejoiced at being able to see, not his own day, but the day of the Lord: "He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). By faith he offered his only son, and in offering his son, "worshipped the Son of God". When God held him back from sacrificing Isaac, Abraham saw the Messiah in the ram (Gen. 22:13). Christ was pointed in Isaiah as a lamb led to slaughter (Is. 53:7), for "He took away the sin of the world". The death of Isaac would not procure redemption to the world but the death of Christ by whose stripes men are all healed (Is. 53:5)[33].

(31) *Ibid.* 19:3, p. 546.
(32) *Ibid.* 28, p. 550.
(33) *Ibid.* 6:8,9, p. 522.

The Passover lamb also is interpreted as a symbol of Christ's vicarious sacrifice. The Lord Who brought His people out of Egypt, later redeemed the whole race of men from death. He was in ancient days sacrificed, "being signified in the lamb", but later, He Himself was slain for man; for "Christ our Passover is sacrificed" (1Cor. 5:7)[34]. Therefore, it is no longer a material lamb slain, but the true lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, adds Athanasius, interpreting the rites of Paschal Lamb in details:

> We are purified by His precious blood, which speaks better things than that of Abel, having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel, holding in our hands the rod and staff of the Lord by which that saint was conforted who said, "Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me" (Ps. 23:4)[35]

Finally, the result of the old Passover points to the fruit of Redemption; for when the old people crossed over Egypt, their enemies sank in the sea. The same will happen with Christians who "pass over from the earth to heaven".

(34) *Ibid.* 10:10, p. 531; 13:7, p. 541.
(35) *Ibid.* 1:9, p. 509.

The devil henceforth falls like lightning from heaven[36]. By His cross, Christ consecrated their road up to heaven and made it free[37]

Redemption then is the fulfillment of the old sacrifices; for man is saved, not by the blood of animals but by the blood of Christ.

IV.2.c. Redemption through Christ's Death

The purpose of the Incarnation is to redeem man; therefore "the Son of the Father became incarnate for our sakes, that He might ... redeem us through His oblation and sacrifice."[38]. God the Father "made the world free by the blood of the Saviour"[39]. For the Saviour, being "the Life" (John 11:25; 14:6), He was hanged on the Cross as Moses says, "Your life shall hang before you" (Deut. 28:66)[40]. Henceforth, man was reconciled to the Father through Christ[41]. For believers, Heaven is no longer high, but Christ "has consecrated a way through His blood, and has made it easy"[42]. For He has come

(36) *Ibid.* 24, pp. 549-550.
(37) *Ibid.* 22, p. 549.
(38) *Ibid.* 10:10, p. 531, cf. Con. Ar. 1:45, p. 332.
(39) *FL Syr.* 5:3, p. 518.
(40) *FL Cop* 24, p. 9.
(41) *FL Syr.* 3:5, p. 515; 10:9, p. 531.
(42) *Ibid.* 43, p. 553.

and opened the door which was once shut. It was shut from the time God cast out Adam from the delight of Paradise, and set the Cherubim and the flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life[43]

By His death, Christ "redeemed the whole race of men from death, and brought them up from the grave"[44]. He abolished death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil (Heb. 2:14)[45]. Therefore, Christ Who took upon Himself to die for all mankind, stretched forth His hands in the air itself, in order that the salvation effected by the Cross might be shown to be for all men everywhere, destroying the devil who was working in the air"[46].

As Christ redeemed man from death, He henceforth redeemed him from sin, which is the sting of death (1Cor. 15:56). He was led as a lamb to slaughter (Is. 53:7), and "took away the sin of the world"[47]. By the stripes of the

(43) *Ibid.* cf. *infra*, Ch. IV.4.
(44) *FL Syr.* 10:10, p. 531.
(45) *Ibid.* 13:7, p. 541, cf. 6:9, p. 522.
(46) *Ibid.* 22, p. 549; cf. *De Inc.* 25, p. 49.
(47) *FL Syr.* 6:8, p. 522.

Saviour (Is. 53:5), all men were healed from sin[48]. He suffered and was nailed on the cross to bear man's sin, as the prophet says (Is. 53:4)[49].

Finally, Christ redeemed men from all their passions and afflictions; for, through the Incarnation, He became like the children of men, and took upon Him the human passions[50], and by His death, He abolished them on behalf of mankind. The relation of Christ's death and men's affliction is shown in this verse:

> He raised us from the dead. Having abolished death, He has brought us from affliction and sighing to rest and gladness[51].

Therefore, Christians celebrate Christ's death as a feast, rejoicing because they obtained rest from their afflictions through His suffering on the cross[52].

> He [Christ] suffered to prepare freedom from suffering.

(48) *Ibid.* 6:9, p. 522.
(49) *Ibid.* 20:1, p. 548.
(50) *Ibid.*
(51) *Ibid.* 6:9, p. 522; cf. *Con. Ar.* 3:33, pp. 411-412; C.N. Tsirpanlis, *Aspects of Athanasian Soteriology*, p. 74; M. Scott, *Athanasius on the Atonement*, p. 53.
(52) *FL Syr 20:1, p. 548; cf. infra,* Ch. V.2.d.

He descended, that He might raise us up...
He went down to corruption, that corruption might put on immortality.
He became weak for us, that we might rise with power.
He descended to death that He might bestow on us immortality and give life to the dead[53]

Christ, then, by offering His body on the cross as a ransom for mankind, paid its debt by His death. He reconciled man with the Father and opened for him the door of Heaven. He encountered death and overcame death, sin and passion, on his behalf. But the victory of the Cross, the fruit of Redemption, and the gift of life to man are fulfilled in His Resurrection.

(53) *FL Syr.* 10:8, p. 531.

IV.3. Resurrection

The fulfillment of the Incarnation and Redemption is marked by the Resurrection of Christ. God, becoming man, destroyed death and gave mankind immortality and incorruption. The 11th Letter states:

> Since His body remained without corruption, there can be no doubt regarding our incorruption[54].

That is why Christ restrained the women with Him from weeping when He was being led to death (Luke 23:28). He wished to show that His death was not an event of sorrow but of joy, and that "He Who dies for us is alive". For it is a matter of joy for man that "through the body of the Lord" he sees the signs of victory over his own corruptibility[55].

The risen Christ has become for Christians the First Fruit of those who have fallen asleep (1Cor. 15:20); because, having undergone death for them and abolished it, they too from Him and because of Him rise. The 6th Letter calls all men to rejoice because death, their enemy, lies weakened, lifeless, bound hand and foot, so that they may

(54) *FL Syr 11:14, p. 538; cf. Con. Ar.* 3:33, 48, pp. 412, 420.
(55) *FL Syr 11:14, pp. 537-8.*

mock it: "Where is your victory, O Death? Where is your sting O Grave? (1Cor. 15:55)[56]. For since He rose gloriously, it is clear that the resurrection of mankind will take place[57].

Finally, Athanasius advises:

> Let us not forget that which Paul delivered, declaring it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:7); I mean His resurrection, whereby "He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14); and raised us up together with Him, having loosed the bands of death, and vouchsafed a blessing instead of curse, joy instead of grief, a feast instead of mourning[58].

This statement sums up the effect of Christ' resurrection through which man overcomes death and receives the blessing and joy of incorruption. But man's salvation is still in need of Christ's Ascension.

(56) *Ibid.* 6:10, p. 522; cf. *Con. Ar.* 2:64, p. 383.
(57) *FL Syr.* 11:14, p. 338; cf. *Con. Ar.* 2:20, 25, pp. 359, 362.
(58) *FL Syr.* 2:7, p. 512.

IV.4. Ascension

As the Lord offered His body to death on behalf of all, so by this He made a new opening of the way up into heaven. He ascended as man and carried up to heaven all mankind in the flesh which He bore. The believers follow Him "as on the threshold of the Jerusalem which is above"[59]. Through Him, they "enter to the holy places", as it is written, "whither also our forerunner Jesus is entered for us, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 6:20; 9:12)[60]. Thus they were strangers before Ascension, but now they are fellow citizens with the saints, and called "children of the Jerusalem which is above"[61]. The Lord, desirous that man should enter, prepared for him the new and abiding way[62].

Athanasius discusses the Lord's ascension from the perspective of the whole salvation history:

> For us the Lord has consecrated a way through His blood, and has made it easy... For not only has He afforded us consolation respecting the distance,

(59) *Ibid.* 14:2, p. 542.
(60) *Ibid.* 45, p. 553; cf. *Con. Ar.* 3:48, p. 420; 4:6, p. 435.
(61) *FL Syr.* 45, p. 553.
(62) *Ibid.*.

> but also in that He has come and opened the door for us which was once shut. ... And He that sits upon the Cherubim, having appeared with greater grace and loving - kindness, led into Paradise with Himself the thief who confessed, and having entered heaven as our forerunner, opened the gates to all[63].

On this earth, as an example, Paul was taken up to the third heaven, and having seen those things which are above, and then descended, he teaches us announcing:

> For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and clouds, and darkness, and a tempest, and to the voice of words, but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven (Heb. 12:18-23)[64].

The Ascension of our Lord creates a new relationship between heaven and earth. Men are not alone in their rejoicing, for in heaven, the whole "Church of the first-born" (Heb. 12:23) rejoices with them. The ancient prophet says, "Rejoice and be glad, you heavens... for

(63) *Ibid.*. 43, p. 553;
(64) *FL Syr 43, p. 553.*

the Lord has had mercy on his people" (Is. 49:13)[65].

Therefore, Athanasius persuades all people to enjoy this new relationship with the heavenly hosts:

> Who would not wish to enjoy the high companionship with these! Who would not desire to be enrolled with these, that he may hear with them, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"? (Matt. 25:34)[66].

Thus. mankind was exalted into heaven from where gifts are given to them from God.

(65) *FL Syr.* 6:9, p. 522.
(66) *Ibid.*. 43, p. 553.

IV.5. Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

IV.4.a. Pentecost:

As St. Paul taught, Calvary results in Pentecost because Easter intervenes[67].

.The paschal Letters describe the days of Pentecost as "showing forth the world to come"[68]. The holy Sunday of Easter "extends its beams, with unobscured grace, to all the seven weeks of Pentecost"[69]. The Christians pass on through the Pentecost "as through a succession of feasts"[70]. It was at one time for the Jews the Feast of Weeks in which they granted forgiveness and settlement of debts, and a day of deliverance in every respect .

On the "great Pentecost"[72], St. Athanasius advises the believers to meditate properly on holy things, in order to be counted worthy of those which are eternal[73]. They must celebrate the Pentecost with prayers, love towards one another, and above all, a peaceable attitude. Then they will indeed be heirs of the kingdom of heaven[74].

(67) W.C. Pauly *op. cit.* p. 335.
(68) *FL Syr.* 4:5, p. 517.
(69) *Ibid.* 6:13, p. 523.
(70) *Ibid.* 14;6, p. 543.
(71) *Ibid.* 1:10, p. 509.
(72) *Ibid.* 2:8, P. 512.
(73) *Ibid.* 10:12, p. 532.
(74) *Ibid.* 5:6, p. 519.

During the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost, they have to sing praises, calling on Christ for they have been delivered from enemies by Him[75]. So they shall celebrate the Pentecost in peace[76] and pray for one another [77], and by doing what is agreeable to God; because the true feast is when the sinners pass from a bad life, to a better one [78].

Athanasius further adds that they shall remember the poor without forgetting hospitality, but they shall dress also those who are naked, and receive in their home those who do not have a home; for above all, if they have love towards God and neighbour, they shall so accomplish the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:40), and inherit the blessing of Christ[79].

In Pentecost, Christians mainly celebrate the coming down of the Holy Spirit which is essential for Sanctification.

IV.5.b. The Holy Spirit

St. Athanasius declares: "We believe in one Holy Spirit, one faith and one resurrection from the dead"[80]. He says that, in the seven weeks of Pentecost, the believers

(75) *Ibid.* 13:8, p. 541.
(76) *FL Cop.* 26, p. 17.
(77) *Ibid.* 42, p. 48.
(78) *Ibid.* 24,13.
(79) *Ibid.* 24, pp. 13-14.
(80) *FL Cop.* 36, p. 27.

receive the grace of the Spirit[81]; and he also teaches them to keep the festival (of the Holy Pentecost) to the Spirit[82].

The grace of the Resurrection is bestowed upon Christians through the Holy Spirit who abides in them, and in whom they have the rebirth, in contrast with the first birth from their parents. The Holy Spirit is described as the New Wine, and when Christians receive Him they will become new creatures[83]. Interpreting the parable of the Prodigal Son, the 9th Letters says:

> This is the work of the Father's loving - kindness and goodness, that not only should He make him alive from the dead, but that He should render His grace illustrious through the Spirit[84].

If the Letters to Serapion limit themselves to mentioning Sanctification from the point of view of illumination and teaching the way of God, the Festal Letters show that these aspects of the work of Christ which He accomplishes by the Spirit, have really played a role in Athanasius' thought [85]. He asserts that Christ is He Who gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Athanasius says:

> He gives them abundantly according to the multitude of His loving - kindness, vouchsafing to

(81) *FL Syr.* 3:6, p. 515.
(82) *Ibid.* 14:6, p. 543.
(83) *Ibid.* 1:9, p. 509; cf. *Con. Ar.* 3:24, 25, pp. 406-407.
(84) *Ibid.* 7:10, p. 527.
(85) J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme*, p. 249.

them at all times the grace of the spirit. And what is it they thirst for? He immediately adds saying "He that believes in Me" (John 7:38). For as cold waters are pleasant to those who are thirsty (Prov. 25:25), so to those who believe in the Lord, the coming of the Spirit is better than all refreshment and delight[86].

Christ "as a river from the fountain gave drink also of old to paradise"[87], but now He gives the same gift of the Holy Spirit to all men. He says, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes on Me, as says the Scripture, rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly" (John 7:37-38). Athanasius comments: "This was not for man to say, but for the living God, Who truly vouchsafes life, and gives the Holy Spirit"[88]

Finally, the Lord, as the "Giver of the Spirit", brings the believers together in mind, in harmony and in the bond

(86) *FL Syr.* 20:1, p. 549; cf. *Con. Ar.* 1:50, pp. 335-336.
(87) *Ibid.* 44, p. 553.
(88) *Ibid.*; cf. 1:3, p. 507; 5:1, p. 517; 7:7, p. 526; 14:4, p. 543; 20:1, p. 549.

of peace[89]. Therefore, the way of Sanctification is that by the Spirit one mortifies the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13)[90].

(89) *Ibid.* 10:2, p. 528.
(90) *Ibid.* 7:10, p. 527.

CHAPTER V
SACRAMENTS AND THE PASCHAL FESTIVAL

Athanasius thinks of Sanctification at the mystical level, an approach which he derives from his Alexandrian predecessors and from which he never retreated[1]. Man is sanctified when he only "partakes of the Word"[2]. In the power of the Sacraments, he partakes of the Body of Christ and meets the power of His immortal humanity.

This chapter will show that the conveyance of this sanctifying power is effected by means of the Sacraments which is an internal process to be carried on in man's life.

(1) C.N. Tsirpanlis, *Aspects of Athanasian Soteriology,* p. 74.
(2) *FL Syr.* 6:5, p. 519.

V. 1. Baptism

As all human beings are from earth and die in Adam, so being regenerated from above by water and the Spirit, they are all quickened and purified in Christ.

In his 24th Letter, St. Athanasius says that it is not the blood of rams, nor the ashes of calves sprinkled that will purify those who are unclean (Heb. 9:13), but that purification was made everywhere by the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5)[3].

Athanasius alludes to Baptism, in the 7th Letter, saying that when we are washed, we are counted worthy of the heavenly calling; and by this calling we are sanctified[4]. In the 3rd Letter, he points to the Red Sea as a symbol of Baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2): "Seeing that the sin which is in us has been cast into the sea, we pass over to the wilderness"[5]. He also writes in the 36th Letter: "Since God, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not separated, we are left with one God, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5) and one resurrection from the dead"[6].

(3) *FL Cop.* 24, p. 13; cf. *Con. Ar.* 1:47, p. 334-5; 3:33, p. 412.
(4) *FL Syr.* 7:9, p. 526.
(5) *Ibid.* 3:5, p. 515.
(6) *FL Cop.* 36, p. 27.

We know that in Christian antiquity, Easter was the great time for Baptism[7]. Certainly, that is what Athanasius refers to in the 24th Letter when he mentions that the accomplishment of the feast of the Passover consists in the washing of regeneration[8]. Moreover, Light has always occupied a prominent place in baptismal imagery, especially in connection with the Paschal Vigil which began in darkness and ended in daylight. From an early date, the glory of the resurrection was symbolised by a Paschal candle[9]. It is possible that Athanasius refers to this custom in the 11th Letter: "Let us rest late in the evening [Paschal eve] and the light of the Lord having first dawned upon us, and the holy Sunday on which our Lord rose shining upon us, we should rejoice and be glad".

(7) *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, p. 437.
(8) *FL Cop.* 24, p. 13.
(9) *Oxford Dictionary. op. cit.*.
(10) Cf. *supra*, the preface.

V.2. Paschal Festival

V.2.a. The great Feast

Easter, or the Paschal Festival, is clearly the main liturgical observance of the Christian year. Athanasius' Paschal Letters are considered as first hand evidence for its celebration[11]. It is proclaimed in the first Letter as the Great Feast which Christians ought to celebrate, lest when the time has passed by, gladness likewise may pass them by[12].

The Letters display other dimensions. They bring vividly before the believer how the fullness of the Divine Economy of the Lord's redemptive work could be commemorated in one festival. The feast is the liturgical counterpart of the close association of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection and the Ascension[13]. "The annual holy feast"[14] is called "our saving Easter-Feast"[15], and again

(11) F.L. Cross, *The Study of Athanasius*, pp. 15-18; L.W. Barnard, *Some Liturgical Elements in Athanasius' Festal Epistles*, p. 337.
(12) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506.
(13) F.L. Cross, *op. cit.* p. 18.
(14) *FL Syr.* 10:1, p. 527.
(15) *Ibid.*

"the saving Feast"[16], "when a commemoration of the death of our Saviour is held"[17]; for "our Passover, Christ, was sacrificed" (1Cor. 5:7)[18]. It is the acceptable time (2 cor. 6:1,2) whence the believers "receive the grace"; and the day of salvation dawns, even the death of the Redeemer[19]. For "the Word came down, and being incorruptible, put on a corruptible body for the salvation of all"[20]. The Feast "extends its beams, with unobscured grace, to all the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost"[21]. For Athanasius, the Paschal Feast is not a common feast but it is "the Lord Who is Himself the Feast", and the nourishment for the heart and encouragement for the soul[22].

In the summer of 335 A.D., Athanasius was summoned to a council at Tyre, where enemies outnumbered friends. He had to flee to Constantinople and was then exiled to

(16) *Ibid.*. 13:1, p. 539.
(17) *Ibid.* 7:1, p. 523.
(18) *Ibid.* 1:3, p. 507; 2:7, p. 512; 3:1, p. 513; 6:2, p. 520; 7:3, p. 524; 10:10, p. 531; 11:14, p. 538; 13:7, p. 541; 14:1, p. 542; 19:1, p. 544; 42, p. 552; *FL Cop.* 24, 27, 28.
(19) *Ibid.* 6:4, p. 520.
(20) *Ibid.*
(21) *Ibid.* 6:13, p. 523.
(22) *FL Syr.* 14:5, p. 543; 10:2, p. 528; *FL Cop.* 28, pp. 21,22.

Gaul. He was still in this country when he began writing his 10th Letter. Therefore he wrote to his people that he was anxious to celebrate the Feast with them, not taking the distance that separated him from them into account. For "the Lord the Giver of the Feast", Who is Himself the believers' Feast, brings all togehter in mind, in harmony, and in the bond of peace[23]. For Athanasius, God is the Giver of the Feast since He first established it, and vouchsafes its celebration year by year[24]. The Feast is a gift of God of all, Who, "after the manner of wise Solomon"(Eccl. 3:7), distributes every thing in its own time and season[25].

The believers are called by Christ to the Passover, "that Great and Heavenly Supper" which is sufficient to every creature[26]. For Christ is sent to proclaim the feast (cf. Nah. 1:15)[27]. And it is His desire to share the Passover with them as with the disciples (Luke 22:15)[28]. He will

(23) *FL Syr.* 10:2, p. 528.
(24) *Ibid.* 5:2, p. 517.
(25) *Ibid.* 1:1, p. 506.
(26) *FL Syr. 4:2, p. 552; 1:1, p. 506.*
(27) *FL Cop.* 27, p. 18.
(28) *FL Syr.* 14:3, p. 542.; 4:4, p. 516; 20:1, p. 548; *FL Cop.* 24, p. 13.

eat with them if they do not eat hastily like Judas, and if they do not abandon life[29].

V.2.b. The Feast and Paschal Typology

Athanasius strongly emphasises the Old testament types of the Easter Feast[30]. He insists that the Jewish Passover is now replaced by the Christian Easter Festival. He says in the 6th Letter that the Feast is not the temporal Passover which the Jews observe (Gal. 4:10); but the Christians celebrate it for the Lord's sake who suffered for them. The Jewish Feast no longer bore the name of the Lord but their own name, because they denied the Lord of the Passover. On this account, turning away His face from their feast, the Lord says "Your New Moons and your Sabbaths, My soul hateth" (Is. 1:14)[31].

For Athanasius, the gospel of Christ is the fulfillment of the ministration of the Law[32]. The Jews still eat the lamb not understanding that it was only a "type". Now the feast of the Passover is the feast of the Christians: "For

(29) *FL Cop.* 24, p. 13; *FL Syr.* 42, p. 552.
(30) L.W. Barnard, *Some Liturgical Elements in Athanasius*, pp. 338 - 340.
(31) *FL Syr.* 6:2, p. 520.
(32) *Ibid.* 11:1, p. 532.

the time of shadows is abolished, and those former things have ceased"[33].

The former order was limited to a land and to the city of Jerusalem: "As long as Judaea and the city existed, there were a type, and a lamb, and a shadow"[34]. But the Law commanded that the sacrifices should not be carried on anywhere else (Deut. 12:11-14), so that when that city came to an end, these figurative things would also come to an end. Now after the coming of Christ, Jerusalem was destroyed. Thus the Jewish sacrificial system also ended [35].

Athanasius links to the Jews, the Arians who kill the Word, not acknowledging His divinity, and schismatics who "rend the coat" of Christ, all being excluded from the blessing[36].

This Paschal typology is very ancient in the Church, and probably goes back to the New testament time (1Peter 1:18-20). It is found in the pre-Nicene period. in Melito

(33) *Ibid.* 19:1, p. 544.
(34) *Ibid.* 1:7, p. 508.
(35) *Ibid.* 1:7-8, pp. 508-509; 19:2, p. 545.
(36) *Ibid.* 6:6, p.521.

of Sardis[37] who supports the suggestion that the Paschal vigil service developed out of a christianized observance of the Jewish Passover ritual[38]. It is found also in Hyppolytus, Irenaeus and others[39].

Indeed, whole stretches of some of Athanasius' Letters are taken up with expounding the types of the Old Testament Passover. So the events concerning Moses, the Paschal lamb, the Exodus and the deliverance from Egypt are constantly mentioned. We present here but one example;

> Let us keep the Feast as Paul saith, 'Not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1Cor, 5:8); reverently trusting that we are reconciled through Christ, and not departing from faith in Him, nor do we defile ourselves.

Athanasius, quoting constantly (1Cor. 5:7,8)[40], examines the events connected with the old Passover as types of Christian dispensation:

(37) In *Peri pascha*, (Homily on the Passion): English translation by C. Bonner, *Studies and Documents* 12, London, 1940.
(38) *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 1038.
(39) L.W. Barnard, *loc. cit.*, pp. 338-339.
(40) Cf. *supra*. Ch. V.2, note 18.

let us keep the Feast, 'not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor. 5:8) ... Rejoicing in afflictions we ... pass unharmed over the Red sea. Thus ... we shall with Moses sing that great song of praise (Exod. 15:1). Seeing that the sin which is in us has been cast into the sea, we pass over to the wilderness; and being first purified by the fast of forty days..., we shall be able to eat the holy Passover in Jerusalem[41].

V.2.c. Eschatological Aspect of the Feast

The Paschal Festival appears in the Letters not only as a celebration on earth of the mystery of Christian Salvation from Christ's Incarnation to the gift of the Holy Spirit[42], but also as a mystical anticipation of eternal and heavenly feast. Numerous eschatological associations are attached to the Paschal Feast.

The Feast is heavenly and eternal[43]. It is "a symbol of the world to come"[44]. During the Easter vigil service, participants are with the angels hearing their message: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?. He has

(41) *FL Syr.* 3:5, p. 525.
(42) Cf. *supra* p. 100.
(43) *FL Syr.* 4;3, p. 516.
(44) *Ibid.* 1:10, p. 509.

risen!" (Luke 24:5)[45]. The rest, gladness, and joy of the Feast have indeed reached heaven. Believers here below are not alone in their joy, for in heaven the whole "Church of the first born" (Heb. 12:23) rejoices with them[46]. The 6th Letter goes on to elaborate why the heavens rejoice with the participants of the Feast. If there is joy in heaven over one sinner repenting, how great the celebration over the abolition of sin and resurrection of the dead![47].

Beside the angels, the saints who, not only preached the Gospel but also lived it, celebrate the Feast with the Christians[48]. The saints of the Old Testament also keep the Feast in heaven; there, they rejoice in the instruction they once received through symbol, now they understand the truth without symbols[49].

Moreover, Christians here below receive the pledge of everlasting life in heaven[50]. Therefore the calling of the passover is from above. St. paul says, "Our conversation is in Heaven" (Phil. 3:20), "for we have here no abiding city but we seek that which is to come" (Heb. 13:14)[51].

(45) *Ibid.* 3:6, p. 515.
(46) *Ibid.* 6:9, p. 522.
(47) *Ibid.* 6:10, P. 522.
(48) *Ibid.* 2:1, p. 510.
(49) *Ibid.* 14:1, p. 542.
(50) *Ibid.* 1:10, p. 509; *FL Cop.* 24, p. 13; 38, p. 31.
(51) *FL Syr.* 43, p. 553; FL cop. 43, p. 51.

V.2.d. Joy together with Suffering

The dominant note of the Paschal Festival is the co-existence of joy and suffering, as Christ's death and resurrection are commemorated. Athanasius explains:

> let us now keep the feast, my beloved, not as introducing a day of suffering but of joy in Christ, by whom we are fed every day. Let us be mindful of Him Who was sacrificed in the days of the passover[52].

It was God the Father who sent His Son to be slain for man's salvation, and thus gave him a reason for the Holy Feast[53]; so that joy comes along with it[54]. As Christains are committed to celebrate the Feast for the Lord, they rejoice in the Lord Who bore their sorrows. Consequently, the saints who belong to the Lord keep His feasts just as they live for Him, and say, "we will rejoice in Your Salvation" (Ps. 35:9)[55]. Their gladness lasts for the whole seven weeks from Easter until Pentecost; and every day they give glory to the Father, saying, "This is the day

(52) *FL Syr.* 13:7, p. 541.
(53) *Ibid.* 5:2, p. 517.
(54) *Ibid.* 2:1, p. 510.
(55) *Ibid.* 6:7, p. 521.

which the Lord has made: We will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24)[56].

The Feast, as a commemoration of Christ's death, leads the Christians on from the cross through this world to that which is before them, and God produces even now from it the joy of glorious salvation[57]. They consider the Feast not at all as an occasion of distress and mourning but of joy. Athanasius writes:

> It is truly a subject of joy, that we can see the signs of victory against death ... For since He rose gloriously, it is clear that the resurrection of all of us will take place[58].

Athanasius describes the preparation of the Feast, such as fastings and vigils, as occasions of spiritual delight:

> We fast meditating on death, that we may be able to live; and we watch, not as mourners, but as they who wait for the Lord, when He shall have returned from the wedding, so that we may vie with each other in triumph, hastening to announce the sign of victory over death [59].

(56) *Ibid.* 11:15, p. 538. The Psalm is still used every Liturgy in the Coptic Church.
(57) *Ibid.* 5:2, pp. 517-518.
(58) *Ibid.* 11:13, 14, pp. 537-538.
(59) *Ibid.* 5:4, p. 519.

V.2.e. Paschal Festival and Sanctification

The due celebration of the Feast is spoken of in the Letters as producing a permanent sanctifying effect on the Christians[60]. Discerning the time of the Feast every year is one of the duties most urgent on Christians for the practice of virtue[61]; the annual Festal vigils arouse their minds, and bring them "unto the contemplation of good things"[62]. When the Catholic Church everywhere celebrates the Feast togehter with gladness and rejoicing; and when all the faithful in common shout "Amen", the walls of every antagonistic power will fall like those of Jericho, and the gift of the Holy Spirit will be richly poured out upon all[63].

The Feast, for Athanasius, is "constant worship of God, and the recognition of godliness, and unceasing prayers from the whole hearts"[64]. For he who has become like Christ in His death also takes care to live as He did. He must be diligent in virtuous practices; "having mortified his members which are upon earth (Col. 3:5), and

(60) Robertson, in *LNPF. op. cit., p. 506, note 2.*
(61) FL Syr. 1:1, p. 506.
(62) *Ibid.* 4:2, p. 516.
(63) *Ibid.* 11:11, p. 537.
(64) *Ibid.* 11:11, pp. 536-7; 3:2, p. 513.
(65) *Ibid.* 3:2, p. 513.

crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts, he lives in the Spirit, and is conformed to the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25)[66]. He should not approach such a Feast with defiled clothes but with his mind clothed with pure garments. He needs to put on the Lord Jesus (Rom. 13:14), so that he can celebrate the Feast with Him[67].

But, how do the saints rejoice at the Feast?. Athanasius answers:

> One found rest in praying to God, as blessed David (Ps. 119:62, 164), who rose in the night, not once but seven times. Another gave glory in songs of praise, as great Moses who sang a song of praise for victory over Pharaoh and those task-masters (Exod. 15). Others performed worship with unceasing diligence, like great Samuel and blessed Elijah who ... keep the Feast now in Heaven[68].

On the opposite side, the feasts which the unbelievers keep are times of grief rather than joy, for they spend all their time in foolishness and carousing[60]. Unthankful people deprive themselves of the resulting joy of the Feast,

(66) *Ibid.* 7:1, p. 523.
(67) *Ibid.* 4:3, p. 516.
(68) *Ibid.* 14:1, p. 542.
(69) *Ibid.* 13:1, p. 539.

for "joy and gladness are taken from their mouth" (Jer. 7:34). Consequently, the divine Word does not allow them to have peace, "For there is no peace unto the wicked, syas the Lord" (Is. 48:22)[70].

Athanasius explains aspects of the sanctified life due to the Feast:

> Putting off the old man and his deeds, let us put on the new man, which is created in God (Eph. 4:22-24), in humbleness of mind, and a pure conscience; in meditation of the law by night and by day. And casting away all hypocrisy and fraud, putting far from us all pride and deceit, let us take upon us love towards God and towards our neighbour, that being new creatures and receiving the new wine, even the Holy Spirit, we may keep the Feast[72].

Athanasius collects in one passage the virtues with which the faithful celebrate the Feast:

> Let us not celebrate the Feast after an earthly manner, but as keeping a festival in Heaven with the

(70) *Ibid.* 3:2, p. 513.
(71) *Ibid.* 1:3, p. 507; 1:9, p. 509; 3:5, p. 515; 6:1, p. 520.
(72) *Ibid.* 1:9, p. 509; cf. *FL Cop.* 25, pp. 15-16; 26, pp. 16-17; 27, p. 18.

angels. Let us glorify the Lord by chastity, by reighteousness and other virtues. And let us rejoice, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, that we may be inheritors with the saints. Let us keep the Feast then, as Moses. Let us watch like David ... Let us fast like Daniel. Let us pray without ceasing, as Paul commanded[73].

The due observance of the Feast will have its effect in quickening the habitual meditation on the resurrection[74]. The remembrance of "Jesus Christ that He rose from the dead"(2 Tim. 2:8) enables Christians to repent[75], confess their sins, and lead a moral conduct and way of life[67]. By keeping the Feast we perform our vows to the Lord (cf. Ps. 60:9; 75:12; 115:17-18) in the way which Jacob (Ge. 28:20-22), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:12) and Zacchaeus promised and were not negligent, in contrast with other Jews who did not execute their promises (Ps. 17:4; Jer. 9:3)[77].

The Feast consists in virtuous activities and the practice of temperance[78]. It must not be considered as a time to

(73) *FL Syr.* 6:12, p. 523.
(74) *Ibid.* 5:5, p. 519; A. Robertson, *op. cit., p. 519,* note. 17.
(75) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519: 20:2, p. 549.
(76) *Ibid.* 10:11, p. 532.
(77) *FL Cop.* 43, pp. 48-50.
(78) *FL Syr.* 14:5, p. 543.

delight the appetite and overindulge[79]; for it does not consist in wine, meat and costly garments, but in a true faith and a pure life[80].

The last point is that Christians should come to the Paschal Feast "not profanely and without preparation, but with sacramental and doctrinal rites, and prescribed observances"[81]. The festival ceremony is described as "the angelic holiday" to which the saints encourage participants saying: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord" (Is. 2:3). But the ascent to the Feast is not for the impure. "It is for the virtuous and diligent, and those who live according to the aim of the saints"[82]. Athanasius mentions the "watchfulness in prayers" and study of the Scripture"[83]; probably he refers to the readings from the Bible at the Paschal Vigil. And then the singing of Psalms is mentioned, especially "that common and Festal Psalm: "Come, let us rejoice in the Lord (Ps. 95:1)"[84]. The Bishop also mentions the collective worship "when the whole Catholic Church which is in every place... sends up a song of praise and says:

(79) *Ibid.*
(80) *FL Cop.* 38, p. 31.
(81) *FL Syr.* 14:3, p. 542.
(82) *FL Syr.* 6:11, p. 522.
(83) *Ibid.* 14:5, p. 543.
(84) *Ibid.* 6:7, p. 521; 11:11, p. 537.

Amen"[85]. Consequently the Lord "is in the midst of those who in every place are gathered together. He listens to all of them as they cry the same Amen"[86]. The constant exhortations to "salute each other with a kiss" in the end of each Letter refer probably to the liturgical kiss at the Eucharist[87].

(85) *Ibid.* 11:11, 537.
(86) *Ibid.* 10:2, p. 528.
(87) Barnard, *loc. cit.* p. 341.

V.3. Holy Eucharist

V.3.a. The paschal Feast and the Eucharist

Athanasius puts great emphasis on the Paschal Eucharist as the climax of the Feast [88]. He insists that participants, not merely proceed to perform the Festal rites, but be prepared "to draw near to the Divine Lamb, and to touch Heavenly Food"[89]. The announcement year by year of the "blessed Passover" is, for Athanasius, an invitation to eat the food of life[90]. Those who share in the Feast are ascending to the upper room to eat the Last Supper with Christ (cf. Luke 22:12-16)[91]. To keep the Feast means to eat the Passover; and one eats it if he understands the reason for the Feast and acknowledges the Redeemer[92]. Athanasius constantly says: "Let us eat the Passover of the Lord"[93]. Therefore he writes:

> To those who keep the Feast in purity, the Passover is heavenly food; but to those who observe

(88) L.W. Barnard, *loc. cit.* pp. 341-342; Id., *The Figure of Trumpets*, in *Le Museon*, 1983, p. 328.
(89) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519.
(90) *Ibid.* 5:1, p. 517.
(91) *Ibid.* 6:2, p. 523.
(92) *Ibid.* 6:1, p. 520.
(93) *Ibid.* 5:4, p. 519.

> it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and reproach. For it is written: "Whosoever shall eat and drink unworthily, is guilty of the death of our Lord" (1Cor. 11:27)[94].

V.3.b. The Old Passover and the Eucharist

The Old Passover points to the Eucharist; and the Passover Lamb is a symbol of Communion. Athanasius states in the Letters that he does not announce the new Passover as a shadow or a picture or a type but as the real thing:

> The shadow having received its fulfilment, and the types being accomplished, we should no longer consider the Feast typical, neither should we go up to Jerusalem which is here below, to sacrifice the Passover, according to the unseasonable observance of the Jews[95].

When the sons of Israel sacrificed the lamb, the first-born of their enemies died because God struck them. Now, on the opposite, when Christians eat the bread coming from heaven (John 6:41), death is abolished (1Cor. 15:55)[96]. They must be adequately prepared for the

(94) *Ibid.* 5:5, p. 519.
(95) *Ibid.* 4:4, p. 516.
(96) *FL Cop.* 24, p. 12.

Feast, because according to the traditional account, "a man who is of another nation or bought with money, or uncircumcised, will not eat the Passover" (Exod. 12:43-48)[97].

V.3.c. The Eucharist and Sanctification

Athanasius affirms that, in the Eucharist, participants are summoned with the disciples to the Last Supper[98], "to the great and heavenly Supper in that upper room"[99]. He adds that this Supper is "sufficient for every creature"[100]. He gives the reason saying: "For 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed' (1 Cor. 5:7)"[101]. He comments on the dominical words of the institution of the Eucharist:

> The Saviour also, since he was changing the typical for the spiritual, promised them that they should no longer eat the flesh of a lamb, but His own, saying: "Take, eat and drink; this is My body and My blood" (Matt. 16:26-28). When we are thus

(97) *FL Syr.* 14:3, p. 542; cf. 6:11, p. 522.
(98) *FL Syr.* 28, p. 550.
(99) *Ibid.* 40, p. 552; *supra* p. 117.
(100) *Ibid.* 42, p. 552.
(101) *Ibid.*; FL cop. 42, p. 45.

nourished by these things, we also, my beloved, shall truly keep the feast of the Passover[102].

The Lord's Supper is, for Athanasius, a nourishment of life. It is the heavenly food of the divine Lamb[103]; again it is the Word, the divine food which nourishes the souls, and is offered to all without grudging, and is in every one "a well of water flowing to everlasting life" (John 4:14)[104]. The fountain is "His precious blood" of Communion which the Saviour gives to those who thirst (John 7:37)[105].

The Divine Economy of Salvation commemorated in the Eucharist[106] results in the three acts of Sanctification, i.e., reception by Christ of our humanity through Incarnation, its consecration by Incarantion and Redemption, and then its communication of Christ's body by Sacraments, especially the communion as the climax. The Lord's Supper is the doctrine of the Metathesis represented in one transaction: Christ took flesh and blood, i.e. our common humanity, and, consecrating it

(102) *FL Syr.* 4:3, p. 517.
(103) *Ibid.*5:5, p. 519; cf. 1:5, 7, p. 508; 7:2-6, pp. 524-5: the divine food or souls in contrast with the food of sin; cf. also *supra* p. 67.
(104) *Ibid.* 11:14, p. 538.
(105) *Ibid.* 5:1, p. 517; cf. 7:6, p. 525.
(106) Cf, *supra* p. 100.

through Redemption, he gives this consecrated Humanity in the Communion to those from whom He received it in its un-consecrated condition[107].

Athanasius insists that Christians eat the same Lamb, that is the Lord Who is sacrificed for them[108]. The Redemption is the gift conferred through Communion[109]; and by "eating of the Word of the Father, and having the lintels of their hearts sealed with the blood of the New Testament" (Matt. 26:28), they acknowledge the grace of the Saviour Who gave them His sanctified flesh[110].

Finally, because Communion is a heavenly food, Athanasius exhorts his people to be prepared for it by purifying the body and keeping the mind free from guile. They should not give themselves up to excess and to lusts but occupy themselves entirely with the Lord, and with divine doctrines; so that, being altogether pure, they may be able to partake of the Word[111]. In other words: "the deceitful and he that is not pure of heart, and possesses

(107) M. Scott, *Athanasius on the Atonement*, pp. 67-8.
(108) *FL Cop.* 38, p. 30.
(109) *FL Syr.* 11:14, p. 538.
(110) *Ibid.* 4:3, p. 516.
(111) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519; 6:6, p. 520; *FL Cop.* 42, p. 45.

nothing that is pure ... shall be accounted unworthy to eat the Passover"[112].

Repentance and confession of sins are important for the preparation for Communion[113]. Athanasius recounts the parable of the Prodigal Son to draw believers to repentance before the divine supper. He reminds the participants to be pure, not only in the Holy Week, but also to consider the whole course of life as a feast. He calls those who are far to return confessing their sins, rejecting anything they may have against others, and by the Spirit, mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). This is the condition for participation in the heavenly banquet: "For thus having first nourished the soul here, [they] shall partake with the angels at that heavenly and spiritual table"[114].

Sacraments, in general, represent the richness of God's grace which is ready to regenerate man giving him a new birth and to feed him with the body of Christ. But Sanctification depends not only on God's grace but also on the co-operation of man.

(112) *FL Syr.* 6:11, p. 522.
(113) *Ibid.* 20:2, p. 549; 10:11, p. 532.
(114) *Ibid.* 9:9, 10, pp. 526-7.

CHAPTER VI

SANCTIFICATION: GRACE OF GOD AND PART OF MAN

VI.1. Efficacy of Grace

Athanasius asserts in the Letters what Melville Scott called "the very holy of holies" of the mystery of Salvation. For him, man's redemption was effected not so much upon the Cross, as in the person of the Crucified; and while the Cross was receding into the dim past of history, the humanity of Christ, perfected through suffering, was a lasting present[1].

Athanasius teaches that the Word of God was made man in order to sanctify man; and whatever is written concerning Him in His human nature ought to be considered as applying to the whole race of mankind, because He is its forerunner[2]. He came to communicate immortality and incorruptibility to man, and His grace is

(1) C.N. Tsirpalis, *Aspects of Athanasian Soteriology*, p. 74.

(2) *FL Syr.* 45 p.553; cf. *Con. Ar.* 1:43, 48, pp.331, 334; 2:10, p. 353; *Ap. de Fuga* 13, p. 259; Newman, in *Sanctificateur LNPF.* p. 334, note 7.

able to perfect, vivify and illuminate man's life[3]. The beneficent work of Christ could not, for the Bishop of Alexandria, be expressed in one term, or even be concentrated in one of His actions. He is at the same time Liberator, Animator, Saviour and Sanctifier[4].

Before the Incarnation, Grace reached the saints as if from the outside[5]. It "passed upon holy souls, fashioning the friends of God and the prophets" (Wisdom 7:27)[6]. But since the Incarnation and the death of the Son of God, man received His Grace abundantly[7].

In a comparison between purification in the Old Testament and New Testament, Athanasius writes in Letter 14:

> Of old times, the blood of he-goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled upon those who were unclean, were fit only to purify the flesh; but now, through the Grace of God the Word, every man is thoroughly cleansed[8].

(3) J. B. Berchem, *Le Christ Sanctificateur d'après Saint Athanase,* in *Angelicum 15(1938), p. 513.*
(4) *Ibid.* p. 516.
(5) *Ibid.* p. 557.
(6) *FL Syr.* 1:1, p. 506; cf. *surpa,* pp. 16,31.
(7) *J.B.B. Berchem, loc. cit.,* p. 557; cf. *surpa.* Ch.IV.1.a.
(8) *FL Syr.* 14:2, p. 542.

Sanctification is described as the flame of fire which made Moses and Paul pure and fervent in in the Spirit; and Christ came to cast this fire upon the earth[9]. It is the grace of God which purifies man; for grace comes from God and descends upon man, and if man cleaves to the Saviour, he can, by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13)[10]. The grace of the Lord is "the Lord's means of restoration for the children of men", for "He descended to death so that He could bestow on us immortality"[11].

Athanasius also considers grace as a seed, and when it is sown by Christ, it will be productive, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred (Mark 4:20)[12]. The Lord is therefore "the Sower of grace, and the Bestower of the Spirit". and the fruit in human life is various and rich, "not with virgins alone, not with monks alone, but also with honourable matrimony and the chastity of every one... so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation"[13]. The grace of Incarnation is sown in human hearts to bring fruits of Sanctification[14].

(9) *FL Syr.* 3:4, p. 514.
(10) *FL Syr.* 7:10, p. 527, 14:2, p. 542; FL cop. 36, p. 27.
(11) *FL Syr.* 10:8, p. 531.
(12) *Ibid.* 3:4, p. 514; cf. *infra,* p. 138.
(13) *Ibid.* 10:4, p. 529.

Athanasius expresses the efficacy of grace for Sanctification of man in Pauline languae:

> For our sakes the Word came down, and being incorruptible, put on a corruptible body for the salvation of all of us. Of which Paul was confident, saying, "This corruptible must put on incorruptible" (1Cor 15:53). The Lord too was sacrificed, that by His blood He might abolish death[15].

The Bishop sees in Christ's Salvation the signs of His victory against man's corruption[16]. Since man is, by nature, unable to be saved, God revealed His grace when He freed the world by the blood of Christ, and opened for man the gates of heaven[17]. Christ died, so that man could be free from doing things that lead to death. He gave His life so that man's life must be rescued from the devil's traps. He became incarnate, so that man could avoid being controlled by sin[18]. He purifies the soul, and "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)[19] by His precious blood which speaks better things than that

(14) *Ibid.* 13:5, p. 541.
(15) *Ibid.* 6:4, p. 520.
(16) *Ibid.* 11:14, pp. 537-8.
(17) *Ibid.* 5:3, p. 518.
(18) *Ibid.* 6:1, p. 520
(19) *Ibid.* 14:2, p. 542.

of Abel (Heb. 12:14)[20]. He came for "the common salvation of all"; so, He works in many ways to save everyone[21].

Man is in need of grace in his daily spiritual struggle against sin; and when he anoints his senses with the Holy Spirit, corruption will run away from him, and he shall be found sane in spirit, soul and body[22].

(20) *Ibid.* 1:9, P. 509.
(21) *Ibid.* 10:4, p. 528.
(22) *Ibid.*

VI.2. Divinization

For Athanasius, the divinization of the Christian is not an element more or less secondary and casual, but the main idea of his theology[23]. It is the first condition for living a holy life: "The Word became flesh, that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in Spirit should worship God, who is Spirit"[24].

Athanasius writes also that the Lord (over death) set out to abolish death; and being Lord, He accomplished His aim. Thus Christians have passed from death to life and from corruption to incorruption[24], for they became "able to partake of the Word" (1Pet. 1:14)[26]. The Lord wishes to live in man[27], to feed him with His body [28], and to grant him the gift of the Holy Spirit[29]. The soul, receiving the Lord's power, is divinized by participation in God[30].

(23) J. Gross, *La Divinisation du Chrètien d'après Les Pères Grecs*, Paris, 1938, p. 202; cf. *Con. Ar.* 2:56, pp. 378-379.
(24) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 520; cf. *Ad Epictetum* 9, pp. 573-574.
(25) *FL Syr.* 11:14, pp. 537-8.
(26) *Ibid.* 5:5, p. 519.
(27) *Ibid.* 10:4, pp. 528-9.
(28) Cf. *surpa*,, p. 118ff.
(29) *FL Cop.* 25, p. 16.
(30) Cf. *Con. Ar.* 3:25, p. 407; G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, pp. 73-74.

His consideration of divinization is a most important contribution of Athanasius to theology[31]. Arianism was a teaching about divinization. For Arius, Christ was not divine, but merely a creature divinized in a special way though still like other human beings[32]. St. Athanasius resists this heresy vigorously and insists that Christ could not grant man divinization and incorruptibility unless He Himself is divine and incorruptible[33]. He defended all his life the absolute divinity of the Saviour as the base of man's deification, and spoke of deification as the most evident proof of Christ's divinity. If one has not considered the Son's godhead, he could not understand His work towards man[34].

Finally, we have come to an important question: Does the divinized person remain really a man? In the Letters, Athanasius considers that as the Christian partakes of the Word[35] Who is his heavenly food[36], and has the Holy Spirit in him[37],he has incorruptible life[38] and no longer

(31) D. Unger, *A Special aspect of Athanasius Soteriology*, p. 42.
(32) Con. Ar. 1:9, p. 311.
(33) *FL Syr.* 11:14, p. 538.
(34) *FL Syr.* 10:9, p. 531; cf. J.-B.Berchem, *op. cit.*, p. 515.
(35) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519.
(36) Cf. *surpa.*, p. 119f.
(37) *FL Cop.* 25, P. 16.
(38) *FL Syr.* 11:14, p. 538.

lives in the flesh but in the Spirit. We can find in the other works of Athanasius, a direct answer to our question. Athanasius understands deification as equivalent to immortality. The believers are "men in Christ"; but by receiving the Spirit, they do not lose their own proper substance, as the Lord when made man was no less God[39]. They become sons of God, not as the One Son in nature and truth but according to the grace of God[40]. Therefore, if they have been called gods, they are not so by nature but by participation in the Son[21].

(39) *De Decretis* 14, p. 159.
(40) *Con. Ar.* 3:19, P. 404.
(41) *Epist. ad Serapionem*, 2:4, translated by C.R.B. Shapland, London, 1951, p. 157.

VI.3. Faith and Knowledge

Pure faith and knowledge are essential in the process of sanctification. Through them the Lord's people have embraced the true life and received the joy of heaven. According to St. Paul, the right conversation comes from belief, and grace comes from knowledge: "We believe and therefore speak"(2Cor. 4:13)[42]. The righteous person, fed by faith and knowledge and doing what the Lord commands, always has a healthy soul[43].

By faith man receives grace: "He who believes on Me, as the Scripture says, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). When the woman from Canaan asked for help, He didn't answer her (Matt. 15:22,23) because she was not yet a believer. Thus, when she believed, He immediately granted her the fruit of that faith[44].

Athanasius also refers to the faith of the saints of the Old Testament as interpreted by the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 11:10-26). If man believes in the Lord and

(42) *FL Syr.* 7:1, p. 523.
(43) *Ibid.* 7:8, p. 526.
(44) *Ibid.* 7:7, pp. 525-6; cf. *Vit. Ant.* 9, p. 199; 55, p. 210.

nourishes himself in Him, he will be saved from sin; and, finding the way to pass from earth to heaven, he will see "Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18)[45].

Faith and godliness are so closely allied that they can be considered sisters. Anyone who believes in the Lord is godly, and the person who is godly believes all the more (cf. John 7:17). Contrarily, one who is in a state of wickedness will certainly wander from the faith, and one who falls from godliness falls from the true faith (2 Tim. 2:16-18; 1:13; 1Tim. 4:6). Coming from the same family, faith and knowledge strengthen each other (1 Tim. 6:12). Both of them have the same hope which is everlasting life (1 Tim. 4:7,8)[46].

The method of the great teachers is to give the knowledge of faith first, then they point to things that needed to be corrected. They call the people to know the Lord first, and then to want to do what He told them. Moses (Deut. 6:4), Hermas (The Shephard, Mandate 1), and St. Paul (2 Tim. 2:8), used this method[47].

(45) *FL Cop.* 24, p. 12; 29, p. 24.

(46) *FL Syr.* 11:9, p. 536. This concept reflects the ascetic attitude which Athanasius learned from his spiritual father St. Antony, whence he was *his attendant for a long time*, cf. *Vit. Ant.* prolog, p. 195.

(47) *FL Syr.* 11:4, p. 533.

Athanasius explains also that the Lord Himself is the teacher of all. In fact, the teaching for the service of God does not come from men, but it is the Lord Who reveals His Father to those He wills (Luke 10:22)[48]. St. Paul asserts the same (Gal. 1:11,12; Eph. 1:17). This knowledge is useful if one meditates upon it (1Tim. 4:15); for constant meditation upon the godly teaching strengthens devotion to God and produces love for Him[49]

Finally, the faith as a profession of orthodox belief and the faith as a moral obedience are one and the same thing[50]. Holiness and virtue are based on pure religious knowledge; so, those who are foolish in their thoughts will do wicked deeds (Matt. 12:34). Therefore the Arians are considered pagans since they worship the creature by insisting that Christ, the Only Son, is a creature[51]. Athanasius applies to them the words of the Pslam: "They are corrupt and they commit foolish and wicked acts" (Ps. 14:1). They truly are evil because their thoughts are wicked[52].

(48) *FL Cop.* 39, p. 32.
(49) *FL Syr.* 11:4, pp. 533-4.
(50) J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la thèologie d'Athanase d'Alexandrie*, p. 150.
(51) *FL Cop.* 41, p. 41-2; cf. *Vit. Ant.* 69, p. 214; 82, p. 217.
(52) *FL Syr.* 19:5-6, pp. 546-7.

Faith and knowledge are introduced from God to man and when they take place in one's life, they will be a source of godliness and sanctification.

VI.4. The Holy Scripture and Tradition

As a Biblical theologian[53], Athanasius teaches that the Holy Scripture is sufficient to instruct man perfectly [54]; and if one reads it with attention and good intention, he will be like this tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3)[55].

Among the Paschal Letters, the 39th[56] draws especially our attention because it records the particular books of the Bible which are accepted by the Church and discusses the role of the Holy Scripture for the knowledge of faith and for sanctification. Athanasius writes that the Divine Scriptures are for salvation[57]; he records that they are divinely inspired[58]. According to the Coptic text, it is as if they were "breath of God"[59]. They are

(53) Tsirpanlis, *Aspects of Athanasian' Soteriology*, p. 74.
(54) *FL Cop.* 39, p. 34; cf. *Vita Ant.* 16, p. 200; *Ad Epis. Aegypti* 4, pp. 224-225; *De Synodis* 6, p. 453.
(55) *FL Cop.* 39, p. 34.
(56) Cf. *Supra. p. 36f.*
(57) *FL Syr.* 39:1, p. 551.
(58) *Ibid.* 39:2, p. 551.
(59) *FL Cop.* 39, pp. 35, 36, 40 "souffle de Dieu".

"fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain"; and in them alone, "the doctrine of godliness" is proclaimed. Concerning them the Lord reproaches the Sadducees saying: "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29); and He says to the Jews: "Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me" (John 5:39)[60]. Mentioning the Deuterocanonical Books[61], Athanasius says that they are not part of the Canon but that their reading is useful for "those who newly join the Christians and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness". It is important to say that the theme of the 39th Letter is that Christ alone reveals His Father to men[62] because the words which the Apostles preached were not from them but were those which they heard from Him. It is Christ Who speaks through them[63].

The 14th and 19th Letters show clearly the Christian concept of the Old Testament. The Lord came in the fullness of time to establish and fulfill, not to abolish, the

(60) *FL Syr.* 39:6, p. 552; FL cop. 39, p. 37.

(61) Athanasius includes among those the *Didache of the Apostles* and the *Shephered* of Hermas. The Deuterocanonical Books form another category.

(62) Cf. supra, VI. 6.

(63) *FL Cop.* 39, p. 32; cf. J. Roldanus, *Le Christ et L'homme*, p. 245.

Law given through Moses (Rom. 10:4; 3:31)[64]. God gave the commandments and the Law looking ahead to those things that were figured and pointed out by them (Heb. 10:1;9:10). The whole Law and the commandments of sacrifices were given to the old people so that their minds could be turned away from the idols towards God. They had been taught not to forget that the time was coming when sacrifices of animals would be abolished. Further, they knew that these things should be carried in a pure and spiritual manner with constant prayer, a righteous way of life and godly speech (Ps. 141:2; 50:14; 4:5)[65].

But for Athanasius the Jews contemptuously shoved aside light and grace which they could have had through the Holy Scriptures. They, in their agreeing to act unjustly against the Lord, erred concerning the Scriptures[66]. Christ reproved them because they did not believe (John 5:46). They went on to deal falsely with the Law, interpreting things the way they wanted them rather than understanding the Scripture[67].

(64) *FL Syr.* 14:4, p. 543.
(65) *Ibid.* 19:4, p. 546.
(66) *Ibid.* 10:5, pp. 529-530.
(67) *Ibid.* 19:2, p. 545.

The Holy Scripture is an important element in Sanctification. If man understands the word of God and has his senses trained, he does not wither in the face of trials[68]. Great good comes to man when, enlightened by the grace of God, he makes it his habit to apply the truths of the Holy Scriptures to his life, and meditate on them every time (Ps. 1:1,2; 143:5; 63:6; 19:14; Deut. 6:7). He is not illuminated by mere physical light, but he glows with the radiant brilliance of God[69]. For the word of God which is sown by Him will be productive, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold (Mark 4:20). Thus, for instance, Cleopas and his companion were fired by the words of Christ. Also St. Paul, when caught by this fire, became a preacher of the Gospel[70].

But the Holy Scripture must be understood and interpreted according to the tradition. "For as each of the saints has received, that they impart without alteration, for the confirmation of the doctrine of the mysteries"[71]. St. Paul praised the Corinthians for they had held fast to the traditions just as he had handed them on (1 Cor. 11:2). But all the inventors of heresies refer to the

(68) *Ibid.* 19:7, p. 547.
(69) *Ibid.* 5:1, p. 517; 11:6, p. 535.
(70) *Ibid.* 3:4, p. 514.
(71) *Ibid.* 2:7, p. 512.

Scriptures but do not hold the orthodox faith. They embraced the traditions of men instead of following God's traditions (Matt. 15:3). But, as St. Paul says, "If any one preaches to you anything besides what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). There is no association at all between the orthodox faith and the fancies of human invention. That is why St. Luke, in the beginning of his Gospel, reproves man-made traditions and ideas[72]. Athanasius also gives to his faithful people all that which he had heard from the mouth of his own fathers[73].

Athanasius establishes a very precise distinction between the canonical Scriptures and non-canonical writings, according to the tradition of the Chruch[74].

The holy Scripture, understood and interpreted through tradition, is for Christians guidance, nourishment and sanctification.

(72) *Ibid.* 2:5-7, pp. 511-512.
(73) *FL Cop.* 39, p. 39.
(74) *Ibid.* 39, pp. 36-38.

VI.5. God's Call

In His love of man, God announces to the whole universe: "Come, eat My bread and drink My wine that I have mixed" (Prov. 9:2). It is a heavenly call (John 3:31) towards the heavenly crown (Phil. 3:14; Is. 40:1-11)[75]. The Lord calls those who need nourishment, since He is the true bread; and those who thirst for holiness, since He is the fountain of the living water (John 4:10, 14); and those who are overwhelmed by the load of sin, since He is the rest and the port of Salvation (Matt. 11:28)[76].

God, for example, calls Christians to the Paschal Feast as He called His old people (Deut. 16:1; Nahum 1:15); so that, if they come to Him eagerly, they will experience here a foretaste of the heavenly Feast that is to come[77].

Athanasius refers several times to the blowing of trumpets (Ps. 81:3; Num. 10:8)[78]. He comments that the instruction about the trumpets is a wonderful and

(75) *FL Cop.* 28, p. 22; 38, pp. 29-30.
(76) *Ibid.* 24, p. 12.
(77) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 519.
(78) *Ibid.* 1:2-4, pp. 506-507.

awesome thing for Israel to remind the People of the shock of those voices they heard on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16) and help them to keep the Law. The trumpets, for Athanasius, point to God's call to the spiritual war against the devil and sin, to virginity, to self-denial and abstinence from corporeal lusts, to conjugal harmony in an honourable marriage, to fasting, to the Feast, and to Communion as the climax of the Feast. The trumpet is the call for the whole striving towards Sanctification. Athanasius asserts that God wants the Christians to be prepared to hear and obey every true trumpet call of God, and to accept His invitation eagerly and zealously[79]. They must not treat the call as the shadows and pictures that Israel had, "for they are accomplished", but go quickly to the Lord and persevere "in the exercise of virtue and the practice of temperacne"[80].

F.L. Cross suggests that trumpets may reflect some local Paschal practices in Egypt[81]. L.W. Barnard also writes in this regard: "It is certain that trumpets were actually blown at the celebration of the Paschal Feast in Egypt at least until 347 A.D., as is shown by 'Epistle' 19 which

(79) *Ibid.* 1:3, p. 507; 6:1, p. 519.
(80) *Ibid.* 14:5, p. 543.
(81) F.L. Cross, *The Study of St. Athanasius*, Oxford, 1945, p. 17.

records that their use had now ceased"[82]. It seems to me that this is not correct. St. Athanasius explains the use of trumpets in the Old testament saying: "Now these things were typical and done as in a shadow". He adds. "But let us pass on to the meaning, and henceforth, leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth"[83]. The truth, for Athanasius, is that they are spiritual "priestly trumpets", not blown by human priests but by "our Saviour". The trumpets in old times called to feasts only, but the spiritual trumpets call to purity, spirituality, fasting and Communion[84]. The trumpets are not real but they are used by Athanasius in an allegorical way as a symbol of God's call to Sanctification. To prove his idea, Barnard quotes these lines, "For this is the season of the Feast, my brethren, and it is near; being not now proclaimed by trumpets, as the history records, but being made known and brought near to us by the Saviour"[85]. The "history" mentioned by Athanasius refers, for Barnard, to the year 347 A.D., the date of Letter 19, when the use of trumpets had ceased. But, I think, Athanasius means that the history of the Old testament records the material use of trumpets,

(82) L.W. Barnard, *The Figure of Trumpets*, in *Le Museon*, 1983, p. 328.
(83) *FL Syr.* 1:3, p. 507.
(84) *Ibid.*
(85) *Ibid.* 19:1, p. 544.

in comparison with the spiritual trumpets which are "made known ... to us by the Saviour". The allegorical reference to trumpets did not cease in 347 A.D., but it is used also by St. Cyril of Alexandria (died 444 A.D.), a century later, as is mentioned by Cross himself[86].

(86) F.L. Cross, *op. cit., p. 17.*

VI.6. Man's Response and Co-operation

Athanasius affirms man's free will and its part in the response to God's grace. Man's will ought to keep pace with the grace of God, for if it remains idle, the grace would begin to depart and "the enemy" would move in on him. That was what happened to the man from whom the demon went out (Matt. 12:23-45); because turning away from virtue makes room for evil[87].

Man has the choice between faith and corporeal pleasures [88]. To him, the world is like the sea, on which he floats along, carried by his own free will as if by the wind. Every one sets his course according to his will: either he enters into rest with Christ as his Pilot, or falls for the pursuit of pleasure and runs into the perilous storms and gets shipwrecked[89]. All men are called from God to receive His Salvation and to live not for themselves but for Him Who died for them and rose again (2 Cor. 5:15). His grace should not be ignored, for Christ took pleasure in their salvation[90], and praised those who had the gifts

(87) *FL Syr.* 3:3, p. 513.
(88) *Ibid.* 20:2, p. 549.
(89) *Ibid.* 19:7, p. 547.
(90) *Ibid.* 6:4, pp. 520-521.

received (Matt. 25:21-29)[91]. It is not the will of God for His grace to remain useless. He expects the believers to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)[92], and obey Him fervently, running in order to reach Him[93].

Indeed, man's will is weak, "for the might of man and of all creatures is weak and poor"[94]. But the Christian must offer himself to Christ, dedicating himself to live for Him[95], putting the things of the Saviour above the desires of his body[96].

It is a special quality of God's grace that what He asks from man is what He has given him. In other words, holiness is the gift of God. Athanasius advises: "Let us offer to the Lord every virtue, and that true holiness which is in Him"[97].

God's grace is compared with the seed in the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-9); and Christ is called "the Sower of Grace and Bestower of the Spirit". In sowing,

(91) *Ibid.* 3:2, p. 513; 2:1, p. 510; 6:5, p. 521; 11:12, p. 537; 40, p. 552.
(92) *Ibid.* 6:5, p. 521.
(93) *FL Cop.* 28, p. 22.
(94) *FL Syr.* 10:4, p. 528.
(95) *Ibid.*
(96) *Ibid.* 5:4, p. 518.
(97) *Ibid.*

Christ does not force man to something beyond the abilities of his will. By being righteous, man comes into the presence of God (Exod. 19:20; Ps. 43:4), but by becoming evil he leaves His presence as Cain did. It is the part of man to choose which attitude he takes[98].

There are two sorts of food for the soul: virtue and vice. If it bends toward moral excellence, it will be fed by virtue - by righteousness, temperance, meekness and endurance. But if the soul does not incline toward good things but rather to evil, it is nourished by nothing but sin[99].

Through man's positive response, the grace given to him will not remain unprofitable. St. Paul says: "Neglect not the gift that is in you" (1Tim. 4:14). But when someone despises the grace God has given him, and he is wrapped up in the troubles and pleasures of the flesh; then his life is barren[100].

Finally, those who reject God's call are compared with the man who received one talent, tied it up and hid it in the ground. He was thrown out; and because of his attitude, he was described as a wicked and lazy servant

(98) *Ibid.* 10:4, p. 529.
(99) *Ibid.* 1:5, p. 508.
(100) *Ibid.* 3:3, pp. 513-514.

(Matt. 25:26-28)[101]. In that respect, the Jews rejected the Lord and despised His Grace. They are cursed through the miracle of the fig tree (Matt. 21:19)[102], becaue they did not worship the Only Begotten Son. The wicked heretics and the ignorant schismatics are in the same boat: the former because they slay Christ, and the latter because they divide the Church[103].

The free will of man directs his response to God's Grace, either to co-operate with it and bear fruit of Sanctification or reject it and run towards condemnation.

(101) *Ibid.* 3:2, p. 513; 6;5, p. 521.
(102) *Ibid.* 6:5, p. 521.
(103) *Ibid.* 6:6, p. 521, 7:4, pp. 524-525; 11:4, p. 533; 19:5, pp. 546-547; *FL Cop.* 27, pp. 18-19; 36. p. 27; 37, pp. 28-29; 38, p. 31: 39, pp. 33-34.

VI.7. Spiritual Struggle and Perseverance

Affirming man's free will, Athanasius represents Sanctification under the absolute and continuous dependence on Christ. It is achieved by the relation with Christ in the Holy Spirit, through the Sacraments and man's co-operation. The personal work of man, who has to keep the faith and stretch towards God by thoughts and acts, occupies an important place in Athanasius' conception of Sanctification. The state of the Christian is a continuous fight against sin, although this fight might be victorious by means of the presence of Christ inside him. To receive Christ's life requires every time a new preparation which consists in renouncing sin and living according to His commandments. Man cannot get rid of sin unless he is faithful in the exercise of piety. He follows Him, so that if the enemy makes war against him, he fights against sin, fortified by His Grace through which sin and corruption will run away, and he shall be found sanctified completely and preserved balmeless in spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23)[104].

The Christian should be diligent and attentive (Jer. 24:10). He must be "burning like a flame"' so that, by

(104) *FL Cop.* 25, pp. 15-16.

an ardent spirit, "he destorys all carnal sin", remembering God "Who makes His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). The only way he can continue to be partaker of Christ is to cling until the end to the Holy Spirit and quench Him not (1Thess. 5:19). The Lord came in the flesh to bring this kind of fire to the earth (Luke 12:29). He wants man to repent rather than to die (Ezek. 18:23,32). He wishes to have evil and wickedness burned out of him, so that he will be fruitful[105].

Man's part is that he must be constantly thirsty for Christ's grace and ardently desiring Him, asking of Him to drink (cf. John 7:37; Ps. 63:1,2; Is. 26:9)[106]. And as he is longing for Christ, he should be mindful of Him[107]. He needs to maintain purity and cling to the Lord as the Apostles did (John 6:68)[108]; he should seek those things which are above (Col. 3:1)[109]; and while he walks on earth, his dwelling is in heaven (Phil. 3:20)[110].

Athanasius stresses some activities as elements of spiritual struggle. He adivses Christians to be "fervent in

(105) *FL Syr.* 3:3,4, p. 514.
(106) *Ibid.* 5:1, p. 516; 7:5-7, p. 525-526; 20:1, p. 548-549.
(107) *Ibid.* 7:1, p. 523.
(108) *Ibid.* 7:10, p. 527.
(109) *FL Cop.* 43, pp. 50-51.
(110) *FL Syr.* 7:3, p. 524.

the Spirit, in fasting and watching with lying on the ground"[111]. The fast of forty days with watching, mortification, humility and remembering the poor, especially in the Holy Week, is a particular preparation for Easter[112]; but the Christian needs to maintain pure in the whole course of his life[113]. By repentance, as the prodigal son, he can stay away from evil deeds[114].

As a real follower of the Lord, he makes the members of his earthly body dead to fornication, impurity, wicked passions and evil desires (Col. 3:5). Further, he will be able, like St. Paul, to say: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me"(Gal. 2:20)[115]. So the Apostle advises the Christian to present his body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is his reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). What is important is not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by renewal of the mind (cf. Rom. 12:2)[116]. Having become dead to the world and continually engaged in praying, longing for the Lord and waiting entirely for

(111) *Ibid.* 19:8, p. 548; 5:4, p. 518.
(112) *Ibid.* 6:12, p. 523; 3:16, p. 515; *FL Cop.* 25, p. 16; 26, p. 17.
(113) *FL Syr.* 7:10, p. 527.
(114) *Ibid.* 3:4, p. 514; 5:5, p. 519; 7:9, pp. 226-227; 10-11, p. 532; 11:3, p. 533.
(115) *Ibid.* 7:3, p. 524; *FL Cop.* 43, p. 53.
(116) *FL Cop.* 43, p. 53.

Him[117], the faithful comes to an honorable end; for the real life is a life lived in Christ, whence he is dead to the world and lives as it were in heaven[118].

Spiritual struggle and perseverance emphasize the part of man and his co-operation with God's Grace which is ready always to give him "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

(117) *FL Syr.* 20:1, p. 549; 2:7, p. 512; 11:11, p. 537.
(118) *Ibid.* 7:3, p. 524,

VI.8. Attitude Towards Death and Suffering

Before Incarnation and Redemption, death was terrible even for the saints; but now death is no longer such, for all who believe in Christ tread him under as nought. "Death", says Athanasius "is the enemy who lies weakened, lifeless, bound hand and feet", so that the Christian may mock at him:"Where is thy victory, O death?, Where is thy sting, O grave?" (1Cor. 15:55)[119]. Therefore, those who follow Christ do not fear them who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul (Matt. 10:28)[120].

Athanasius explains also that Christ makes Christians able to bear pain. He exchanges their suffering for His happiness[121]; and although He lets them pass through many trials and afflictions, He has not forsaken them. He is an example to them of how to suffer, for He was persecuted, passing from one place to the other, He surrendered Himself to pain and death (cf. Is. 50:6; 1Peter

(119) *FL Syr.* 6:10, p. 522; cf. *De Inc.* 27:2, 4, p. 51.
(120) *FL Cop.* 27, pp. 18-19.
(121) *FL Syr.* 14:4, p. 543.

2:23); so He makes their suffering lighter and easier by carrying their weaknesses (cf. Is. 53:4)[122].

On the other hand, the troubles and difficulties are the Lord's means of correcting and training the believers. Therefore, they shouldn't be too upset by all the problems they have, but consider them a way of training for a virtuous life. Athanasius exclaims:

> How shall patience be looked for, if there be not previously labours and sorrows? Or how can fortitude be tested with no assault from enemies? Or how shall magnanimity be exhibited, unless after contumely and injustice? Or how can long-suffering be proved, unless there has first been the calumny of Antichrist[124]? And, finally, how can a man behold virtue with his eyes, unless the iniquity of the very wicked has previously appeared?[125].

The person who is in Christ meets anger with long-suffering, insults with meekness, and vice with virtue[126].

(122) *Ibid.* 10:3, 11, pp. 528, 532; 14:3, p. 542.
(123) *Ibid.* 10:8, p. 531.
(124) i.e. Arians, A. Robertson, in *LNPF, op. cit.*, p. 530, note 4.
(125) *FL Syr.* 10:7, p. 530.
(126) *Ibid.* 10:8, p. 531.

Suffering is considered as a gift from God (cf. Phil. 1:29), and trouble as an opportunity to imporve oneself. He sees that sometimes God tests the Christian, so his virtues will be revealed as in the case of Job (cf. Job 40:8,9); or He puts him through a trial so that when he sees his own deeds, he will either repent of his wickedness or remain steadfast in the faith. Therefore, the saints accepted a like probation with gladness as Job said, "blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21). But the Psalmist said, "Search me O Lord, and try me: prove my reins and my heart' (Ps. 26:2). The saints, because they saw that troubles are the "divine fire" which would cleanse them, did not shrink from the trials they faced, but grew and were made better, shining like gold that has been refined by fire (Mal. 3:3; 1 Peter 1:7)[127].

Athanasius describes suffering as the way of Sanctification. He says that the door is narrow, and it is impossible for man to enter the kingdom of Heaven without troubles[128]. He cites some examples of saints who experienced suffering on earth, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1[129]. He adds that however narrow the door may be, the Christian should not be discouraged but show

(127) *Ibid.* 13:3, p. 540.
(128) *FL Cop.* 29, p. 23; *FL Syr.* 11:1, p. 532.
(129) *FL Cop.* 29, pp. 23-24.

endurance in troubles, because this is the way in which the fathers fought and were ready to receive the crown of heavenly calling (Phil. 3:14)[130]. For the glory of Heaven is prepared for those "who most readily hearken to the goal of their high calling"[131].

At the end of this chapter, we notice that Athanasius asserts the efficacy of God's Grace for the Sanctification of man as well as the part of man's free will in respect to grace. God is calling man to divinization and glory based on the grace of salvation. He provides him with knowledge and Scriptures. If man co-operates with God's Grace, believing in Him, struggling against sin, and persevering in spiritual activities, his life will be sanctified, he will overcome death and pain, and at last he will be glorified in the eternal life.

(130) *FL Cop.* 26, p. 17.
(131) *FL Syr.* 28, p. 550.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

St. Athanasius recognizes first the power of sin and corruption in man's nature. He asserts that man in the beginning is created rational and in the image of God. He means that man's reason is an image of God's reason; and that it is possible for him to have direct knowledge of God. But man did not follow his reason. After the Fall, he deteriorated and could be linked to the animals with their uncontrollable lusts. As the result of sin, man became corrupt; and if this corruption was to be stopped, a living antidote had to enter and arrest the decay. The antidote was the Incarnate God.

Incarnation means that God came down to man; and the Life came to the dead. He became near; and His habitation with man became perpetual. The Faith of the Nicene Creed: "For us and for our Salvation He came down and was made flesh", is constantly on the lips of the Doctor of the Council of Nicea. The Word became flesh, being incorruptible, put on a corruptible body for the savlation of mankind. Another purpose of the Incarnation is to enable man to know God. The knowledge of God is, for Athanasius, an important element of Sanctification, for grace arises from knowledge.

Sanctification of man has taken its first step through the Incarnation. But it will be completed and fulfilled through Salvation which is the victory over death and corruption through the body of the Lord. The Word Himself Who created man is the Redeemer Who became flesh to save man. Being Life, He died that He might make man alive. So Athanasius stresses the ontological Godhead of the Son, as he believed that only God can redeem man. The human death of the Lord is a vicarious death. Christ offered His human nature to the Father instead of man, and redeemed him from sin, death and corruption, through His oblation and sacrifice.

The fulfillment of Redemption is marked out by the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. Since His body remained without corruption, there can be no doubt regarding man's incorruption. Ascending to heaven as man, He carried up to heaven all mankind in the flesh He bore. He entered heaven as a forerunner of man, and opened a gate to him, creating a new relationship between heaven and earth. At Pentecost, He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in man and sanctify his life. The grace of Resurrection is bestowed upon man by the Holy Spirit, through Whom Christ gives new life. Therefore He calls: "If any man thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).

The conveyance of this new life is affected by means of Sacraments which are an internal process to be carried on in man. Sanctification is effected by Baptism, the washing of regeneration. The fullness of the divine economy of the Lord's redemptive work could be commemorated in one feast. It is the liturgical counterpart of the close association of Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection and Ascension. The due celebration of the Paschal Festival produces a permanent sanctifying effect on the Christians. Athanasius quotes frequently what St. Paul says: "Our passover, Christ, was sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Cor. 5:7,8).

The climax of the Paschal Festival is the Paschal Eucharist. Christians are called to draw near to the Divine Lamb and touch the heavenly food. They have to be prepared for Communion by fasting, repentance and confession.

Athanasius refers several times to the blowing of trumpets as a symbol of God's call to Sanctification through Christ's grace. Grace is described as a flame of fire which makes man pure and fervent. If man receives this gift, strengthened by faith, guided by Scripture and nourished by communion, he is sanctified by participation in God. On the other hand, Athanasius asserts man's free will, that

God's Grace cannot be effective without man's cooperation. If man responds to God's grace, striving against sin and practising repentance, prayer and fasting, he will gain here the life of Sanctification, overcome death and pain, and in the after life, he will enjoy the glory of Heaven.

We conclude our research by clarifying some important points.

[1] Athanasius' spirituality is scriptural as well as theological. He uses forms and concepts of Greek philosophy but fills them with contents taken from the Scripture. At the same time, he knows how to separate Greek thoughts from Christian revelation whenever there is danger that the truth of the gospel might be misunderstood or falsified[1].

He appeals constantly to the teaching of the Bible in support of his ideas. The language of the Scriptures prevades all his writings and teachings. The Paschal Letters, in particular, are full of Biblical examples and direct quotations from the Bible. This reveals the big role which Athanasius gives to the Holy Scriptures for Sanctification. He considers them the foundation of the sanctified life

(1) Cf. E.P. Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platanism in Athanasius*, pp. 114-147; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, p. 66.

which contains the doctrine of godliness. The Bible is compared to the seed of Sanctification which is productive in the life of Christians. Athanasius considers tradition as a guard for interpreting the Bible. For him, the Arians refer to the Scriptures but do not hold to the orthodox faith.

On the other hand, his spirituality is theological rather than moralistic. It is deeply rooted in the main dogma of Christ. It is centered on the person of Christ and on the Church's sacraments. The starting point of Athanasius is the efficacy of God's grace. He represents Sanctification as absolute and continuous dependence on Christ. Christ, for him, is the eternal Word and the pivot of the whole world and of them that dwell in it. He created man in His image; so, He alone is able to sanctify him in His body and remake His image clean and clear after it was dimmed by sin. He is the Pilot of souls and the Son of Righteousness. He is presented as the true olive tree onto which the believers are grafted, and the Bread of Life Who nourishes those who come back and feed on Him.

[2] For Athanasius, Sanctification is essentially related to Salvation. In common Christian usage, Sanctification is the deliverance of the personal life from the power of sin, accomplished by the faithful observance of faith, by the earnest struggle against all temptations to turn away from the living God, and by the practice of Christian piety.

In technical language, it means the operation of the grace by which Salvation is conveyed to man enabling him to free himself from sin[2]. Salvation is the situation created by Christ's redemption for divine sonship, justification, forgiveness and liberation from sin by grace. It is, for the Christian, the power of Christ for Santification; and when he responds to the gift of grace, he is consecrated and sanctified in Him. Christ, as the Saviour, is the source of holiness Who came to save man and sanctify his life. It is Christ Who brings the fulfillment of Salvation, manifested in Resurrection and Pentecost, to enable man to fulfill the command of Sanctification[3].

Therefore, in this thesis, we first discussed the elements of Salvation which are: the Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection, Ascension and the Descent of the Holy Spirit. For Athanasius, Savlation is the base and root of Sanctification; and unless man accepts the Salvation of Christ and is fed upon His body, he can't live the life of Sanctification. Athanasius teaches that the Word of God was made man in order to sanctify man; and whatever is written concerning Him in His human nature ought to

(2) *The New Schaff-Hezzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge"*, edited by S.M. Jackson, 1908-1911, under "Sanctification".

(3) *Sacramentum mundi; An encyclopedia of theology"*, edtied by Karl Rahner S.J., and others, Burns and Oates, 1968-1970, vol. 5, under: "Holiness", Saints" and "Salvation".

be applied to the whole race of mankind, because He is its forerunner. Being incorruptible, He puts on a corruptible body to sanctify it and render it again to man through the Sacraments. He took flesh and blood, i.e. man's common humanity, and consecrated it through Salvation. He gives this consecrated humanity in Communion to those from whom He received it in its un-consecrated condition.

Connecting Sanctification with Salvation, Athanasius quotes constantly (1Cor. 5:7,8): "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". He comments, "For the Lord died in those days, that we should no longer do the deeds of death. He gave His life, that we might preserve our own from the snares of the devil"[(4)]. The saving death of Christ is, for the Christians, the source of sanctified life and behaviour.

[3] Deification, in Athanasius, is based on the divinity of Christ, which was the core of the Arian Controversy. For him, the Logos who deifies cannot be the same

(4) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 520; *supra*, p. 101, note 18.

substance with those whom he deifies. Therefore, He cannot be a creature nor could He deify man if He were God only by participation and not by full identity of substance[5].

The idea of deification of man occupied an important place in the thought of the Greek Fathers during the first three centuries of Christianity. In the fourth century, due to the theological writings of Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395 A.D.), the progress reached its climax. Deification in Athanasius is not secondary and accidental but the main idea in his theology. For him, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears the likeness of God, and if he preserves that likeness through constant contemplation, he would be as God, i.e., deified[6]. Athanasius repeats here the idea of Clement and Origen that the divine gnosis (knowledge) is a source of immortality. He goes on to elaborate that the deification of the fallen man is the aim of Incaranation. He does not cease to repeat to the Arians that if Christ is not God, man's salvation and deification could not be sure, "for a creature can not join creature to God"[7]. In the person of the Incarnate God, the divinization of man is

(5) *De Synodis* 51, p. 477.
(6) *De Inc.* 4, p. 38.
(7) *Con Ar.* 1:69-70, p. 386.

accomplished; such a thought is influenced by Irenaeus[8], and articulated by Athanasius, in which, beside the role of the Incarnate God, a considerable place is reserved to the deifying action of the Holy Spirit in Whom the Word deifies the creatures[9]. The doctrine of Deification is raised by the Bishop of Alexandria into a real theory and a doctrinal synthesis [10].

[4] We notice that, in the Letters, Sanctification is not explicitly linked to Baptism, while it is not the case in the other works of Athanasius. Baptism, for him, is the re-birth and re-creation of the soul in the image of God[11], "the consecration of all mankind", as the baptized is "consecrated in the Holy Spirit"[12]. There are some allusions to its meaning and effect[13], but not enough in respect to its role as the first act of Sanctification in the life of the Christian. The Letters also mention nothing about the Baptismal rites, although it is known that in Christian antiquity, the observance of the Paschal Vigil

(8) J. Gross, op. Cit. P. 206; R.A. Case, *Will the real Athanasius please stand up?"*, in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 19(1977), pp. 283-295.
(9) *Epist. ad Serap.* 1:23, 25, pp. 124, 129.
(10) J. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
(11) *De Inc.* 14, p. 44.
(12) *Con. Ar.* 2:41, p. 370.
(13) *Supra* pp. 98,99.

service usually was closely associated with Baptism. Probably the matter was different in the Coptic Church who until now celebrates Baptism during Lent. The "Festal Index" informs us that on 18 March, 339 A.D., Athanasius was pursued in the night, and the next day he fled from the church of Theonas after he had baptized many; while Easter in that year was on the 15th of April[14].

[5] More strangely, the Paschal Letters do not give considerable information about the Paschal Liturgy. They tell us more (a) of the significance of the Easter Festival as the main liturgical observance of the Christian year, (b) the prominant place of the Easter Eucharist as the climax of the Festival, (c) the Old Testament types of the Feast, (d) the Eschatological aspect of the Festival Eucharist, (e) the preparation for the Paschal Feast by the trumpets of fasting and purity and the palm branches of victory over sin[15], (f) the "common Festal psalm "come let us rejoice in the Lord" (Ps. 95:1)", and (g) the collective worship "when the whole Catholic Church sends up a song of praise and says: Amen"[16]. The constant exhortation in the end of each Letter to "salute each other with a holy

(14) *Festal Index"* XI, p. 503.
(15) *FL Syr.* 1:4, pp. 507-508; 28, p. 550.
(16) *FL Syr.* 6:7, p. 521; 11:11, p. 537; *supra*, p. 115.

kiss" refers probably to the liturgical kiss at the Eucharist[17].

"However", says Barnard, "it is unfortunate that these Epistles provide only scant information concerning the liturgical life of the Egyptian Church in Athanasius' day"[18]. Liturgical implications are lacking in the Letters, possibly because they are confined to a special content, which is fixing the appropriate time of the Feast and the use and abuse of fasting and the festival itself.

The Letters say that the Arians were celebrating the Feast in their own churches[19], perhaps according to the same rites of the Catholic Church and with the same habit of proclaiming the date of Easter. It is interesting to mention what the "Festal Index" relates that the Arians proclaimed the Easter of 340 A.D., to be on the 23rd of March, while the proper date was on the 30th. Then altering it in the middle of the fast, they were much ridiculed on account of the error[20]. In no place it is mentioned that the Arians differed in the liturgy, but, for Athanasius, it is not so much a matter of rites[21] as of a

(17) Cf. *supra*, pp. 100-115.
(18) L.W. Barnard, *loc. cit*, p. 337.
(19) *FL Syr.* 5:4, p. 518.; 6:7, p. 521; 13:1, p. 539.
(20) *Festal Index* XXI, p. 503.
(21) *FL Syr.* 5:5, p. 519.

true faith. They kept the Feast "in separate places, and in vain imagination"; that is to say that they did not hold the faith of the Catholic Church. Athanasius said that they kept the feast "according to their wills"[22]; so "they remained expelled from the feast because they lived without godliness and knowledge"[23].

[6] The doctrine of Sanctification is expressed in the Paschal Letters in a different way than in the other works of Athanasius. Having a pastoral attitude, the Letters elaborate on the practical side of Sanctification, while the "Apologetical and Dogmatic Writings", as well as the "Historio-Polemical Writings"[24] concern the theoretical aspect. In this context, the Letters are in some way similar to the "Ascetical Writings". According to the "Life of Antony", Sanctification is "the Saviour's work in Antony"[25].

We cite some examples elaborating the practical approach of the Letters to Sanctification.

a - The creation of man is illustrated as man created "in the image of God", but having sinned, he no longer remained as he was but followed the process of corruption

(22) Ibid 6:7, p. 521.
(23) Ibid. 6:6, p. 521.
(24) Cf. J. Quasten, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 20-74.
(25) Verse 7, p. 197.

and death[26]. The Letters explain "God's image" as man's understanding by which he is rational; whence after the Fall he declined and barely measured up to the level of animals[27]. Moreover, the nature of sin is elaborated by the words: "Good is, while evil is not"[28]; meanwhile the Letters show that sin differs from virtue as darkness from light and curse from blessing[29].

b - The main purpose of the Incarnation is effecting the Salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it at first [30]; the Letters stress the practical side; "The Word became flesh that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in the spirit we should worship God, Who is Spirit[31].

c - In the "Historio-Polemical Writings", Athanasius defends the divinity of Christ. He refutes Arius' claim that the Son is a creature of the Father or a medium for the creation of the world, asserting that the Son is entirely God and Creator, recalling repeatedly the comparison of the light issuing from the sun[32]. In the Letters, Christ is the

(26) *Con. Gen.* 34, p. 22; *De Inc.* 4, p. 38.
(27) *FL Syr.* 2:2, p. 510; *supra,* pp. 60, 64.
(28) *Con. Gen.* 4, pp. 5-6.
(29) *FL Syr.* 10:4, p. 529; *supra,* p. 65.
(30) *De Inc.* 1, p. 36.
(31) *FL Syr.* 6:1, p. 520; *supra,* pp. 73.
(32) *Con. Ar.* 2:25, p. 362; 3:3, 4, p. 395.

"Sun of Righteousness" Who is capable of sanctifying man's soul and overcoming the darkness of sin[33]. Moreover, if Christ were not God, he could never redeem man and form the likeness of God in anyone[34]. The Letters introduced Christ as God Himself who redeemed man by his vicarious sacrifice, giving his body in the Eucharist for his sanctification[35].

d - Among the "Dogmatic-Polemical Letters". Athanasius sent four letters to Serapion defending vigorously the divinity of the Holy Spirit[36]. The Paschal Letters at the same time, insist on the grace of the Holy Spirit for sanctifying man's life [37].

[7] In addition to announcing the date of Easter and giving some exhortations to the people, the Paschal Letters contain a discussion of current ecclesiastical affairs and problems. Athanasius wrote in different circumstances and from different places, as it is recorded in the "Festal Index" and "Historia Acephala"[38]. No doubt, his approach to Sanctification has been developed according to these

(33) *Supra*, pp. 53-54.
(34) *De Synodis* 41, p. 472; *De Inc.* 8. p. 40.
(35) *Supra*, pp. 77-86, 118-121.
(36) *Epist. ad. Serap.*, pp. 58-149.
(37) *supra*, 93-96.
(38) Cf. *supra*, p. 38; *LNPF, op. cit.*, pp. 495-506.

circumstances and places. We will analyze the Letters to show these changes and their reflection on Athanasius' thoughts on this topic.

We may easily divide the Letters accordingly into six parts:

a - From his ordination as Bishop of Alexandria to the first exile (letters for the years 329-335 A.D.).

b - From the first exile to his departure to Rome (letters for the years 336-339 A.D.).

c - During the second exile (letters for the years 340-346 A.D.).

d - From his return to Alexandria to the beginning of the third exile (letters for the years 347-356 A.D.).

e - During the third exile (Letters for the years 357-361 A.D.).

f - The last period of his life (letters for the years 362-373 A.D.).

a - The first part contains seven letters which have much to do with the Doctrine of Sanctification. The Arian controversy, though in existence, has not raged yet.

Athanasius forcefully blows the trumpets of the Feast, calling the Christians to Sanctification[39]. He recognizes the weakness of human nature and efficacy of the grace of God[40]. So he asserts the power of the blood and the sacrifice of the Saviour for purification[41]; and introduces the Eucharist as the nourishment applied for a holy life and the divine food which superseded the old Passover of the Jews[42]. He ascribes the elements of Sanctification to the Incarnation[43]. Moreover, the Christian must thirst for Grace and cooperate with the Spirit by fasting and keeping the commandments of the Gospel according to the tradition of the Church[44].

At the same time Athanasius is aware of the resistance of the Arians and the Meletians. In 331 A.D., he was summoned to the Imperial Court of Constantine on account of an accusation they made that he had been appointed when he was too young. He sent his fourth letter from the Emperor's court[45]. So in the fifth letter he asks the

(39) *FL Syr.* 1:2-4, pp. 506-507; 2:5, p. 511.
(40) *Ibid.* 5:3, P. 518.
(41) *Ibid.* 1:9, p. 509; 6:4, p. 520.
(42) *Ibid.* 1:7, p. 508; 5:2-4, pp. 516-517.
(43) *Ibid.* 6:1, p. 520.
(44) *Ibid.* 1:4, p. 507; 2:2-7, pp. 510-512; 3:2, 3, p. 513; 5:1, p. 517; 6:5, P. 521.
(45) *Festal Index* 3, p. 503; *FL Syr.* 4:5, p. 517.

believers to keep the feast with sincerity of soul and purity of body, in order that they become superior to the schismatics in not rending the coat of Christ but eating the Passover in the one Catholic Church[46]. He exclaims in the seventh letter "What communion has righteousness with iniquity and the heretics with the saints?[47]. But, so far, Arianism is expressed incidently and in cryptic terms.

b- With the council of Tyre in 335 A.D., the Letters begin a new stage. Athanasius could excuse himself from attending the council of Caesarea in Palestine; but he was obliged to travel to Tyre. As he felt the effect of the Arian and the Meletian conspiracy, he fled to Constantinople where he presented himself before Constantine who condemned him to exile. On this account, he was unable to write letters for the years 336 and 337 A.D. In both letters for the years 338 and 339 A.D. he speaks openly about Arius and his failure to recognize the divinity and the saving work of Christ. Unless Christ is divine, He cannot sanctify man's life[48]. The pure faith and godliness are allied to each other[49]. "For this cause the Arians have digged a pit of unbelief and advanced in

(46) *FL Syr.* 5:4, pp. 518-519.
(47) *Ibid.* 7:4, pp. 524-525.
(48) *Ibid.* 10:9, p. 531.
(49) *Ibid.* 11:9, p. 536.

ungodliness"[50]. Having experienced the tribulations of the Arians, Athanasius declares, "All those who live in godliness in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12)[51]. To share the holy life with the saints is "to count as nothing the afflictions or the trials which have been enviously directed against us by the party of Eusebius"[52].

c - The Letters for the years 340-346 A.D. clearly reflect the events of the second exile. In the year 339, Athanasius escaped the hands of the soldiers in the Church of Theonas. After one month he fled to Rome; while the churches were handed over to Gregory, the usurper bishop. So the letter for the year 340 A.D. was very short, and from Rome he wrote the letter for the year 341 A.D. showing throughout this letter the importance of pain for Sanctification: "For our Saviour did not redeem us by inactivity, but by suffering for us he abolished death"[53]. In the letter for the year 342 A.D., we notice another tone. Probably he felt the assistance of Julius of Rome, so the letter is full of hope, therefore in this letter Athanasius encourages his people to bear pain: "If we have passed

(50) *Ibid.* 11:10, p. 536.
(51) *Ibid.* 11:9, p. 536.
(52) *Ibid.* 11:12, p. 537; He means the Arians as sustained by Eusebius of Nicomedia.
(53) *Ibid.* 13:2-6, pp. 539-541.

over the Red Sea, heat should again vex us or some bitterness of the water befall us, the Lord will appear to us imparting to us of His sweetness and His life-giving fountain"[54]. The Bishop was unable to write letters for the years 343 and 344 A.D. In both letters for the years 345 and 346, he gave notice in few words to the presbyters of Alexandria, for he was successively at Naissus and Aquileia[55].

d- After the return of Athanasius to his see, the fourth part of the letters for the years 347-356 A.D. reflect a particular character of Sanctification. This period of the years 346-356 A.D. is called the golden decade of his life. The public rejoicing of the Coptic Church of Alexandria had something of the character of a "mission" in modern Church thought. A wave of religious enthusiasm passed over the whole community[56]. The letters for the years 349 and 351 are missing; and the rest, similar to those of the first part, contain several elements about Sanctification[57]. In addition, the writer calls for more zeal[58], and asserts some other points such as the free

(54) *Ibid.* 14:3, p. 543.
(55) Festal Index 16-18, p. 504.
(56) *Hist Ar.* 25, 27, pp. 278-279.
(57) *FL Syr.* 19:8, p. 547; 20:2, p. 549; *FL Cop.* 24, pp. 9-13; 25, p. 14, 26, p. 17.
(58) *FL Syr.* 19:8, p. 548; *FL Cop* 25, p. 15.

will[59] and the glory of heaven as a recompense for those who live in sanctity[60]. Nevertheless, he does not forget the call for endurance[62].

e - The fifth part of the letters, for the years 357-361, is severely influenced by the events of the third exile which kept Athanasius from sending four letters for the years 358 - 361 A.D. The only letter, for the year 357 A.D., of course, explains the expected factor of Sanctification: pain and trials; so it is full of examples of those saints who led a holy life through difficulties and tribulations[62].

f - The last period of Athanasius' life was almost quiet, with the exception of some months during the fourth exile (October 362 - August 363 A.D.) under Julian, and the fifth exile (October 365 - February 366 A.D.) under Valens; so the letters for the years 362 and 363 A.D. have a particular type. The letters for the years 358 and 359 are missing; those for the years 364-366 A.D. represent the period of quiescence and dying out of Arianism. They explain the true faith in Christ which leads to a sanctified life[63], and assert that the true feast consists of a right

(59) *FL Syr.* 19:6, 7, p. 547.
(60) *Ibid.* 28, p. 550.
(61) *FL Cop.* 26, p. 17.
(62) *FL Cop.* 29, pp. 23-25.
(63) *Ibid.* 36, P. 27.

faith and a pure life[64]. The Arians are claimed as similar to the Jews in their unbelief in Christ[65]. The letter for the year 367 contains a Canon of the Scriptures, and condemns the attempt of the heretics to introduce apocryphal works as inspired Scriptures. The Bilbe is depicted as a rich source for Sanctification. Then the last Letters for the years 368-373 A.D. reflect the feelings of an old bishop who spent his life struggling for faith. Now he advises his faithful people to cling to the true faith and tradition of the Church[66], to persevere in prayer and spiritual activities[67], to remember the poor[68], to be thirsty for Christ Who gives water to the saints[69], and to be ready for the Eucharist as the heavenly supper by perfecting holiness in the fear of God[70]. He speaks twice of the Ascension of Christ Who opened the door of the Heavens to the faithful[71]. Before his death he announces a last call:

(64) *Ibid.* 38, p. 31.
(65) *Ibid.* 36, pp. 26-27; 37, pp. 28-29; 38, p. 31.
(66) *Ibid.* 41, pp.41-44; 43, p. 53.
(67) *Ibid.* 42, p. 48; 43, p. 43.
(68) *Ibid.* 42, p. 48: *FL Syr.* 45, P. 552.
(69) *FL Syr.* 44, p. 553.
(70) *Ibid.* 40, p. 552.
(71) *FL Cop.* 43, PP. 51-52; *FL Syr.* 43, p. 553; 45, p. 553.

Let us take up our sacrifices, observing distribution to the poor, and enter into the holy place as it is written; "whither also our forerunner Jesus is entered for us, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 6:20, 9:12)[72].

[8] Finally, I wish to suggest some further points of research to be done which are related to the topic of this thesis.

I. Comparison between the doctrine of Sanctification In St. Athanasius' Paschal Letters and that of St. Dionysius of Alexandria.

Dionysius the great is the first bishop known to have sent such Festal Letters "in which he gives utterance to words specially suited to a solemn occasion with reference to the festival of the Pascha"[73]. Beyond the direct purpose of these lettters, Dionysius took the occasion also to discuss some important ecclesiastical questions of his time. Such a comparison may show the particular Alexandrian view of Sanctification before Athanasius.

(72) *FL Syr.* 45, p. 553.
(73) Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.*, 7:20.

II. The same comparison with the Paschal Letters of St. Cyril of Alexandria.

St. Cyril continued the custom of the Pope of Alexandria of sending the Paschal Letters to the Egyptian Churches. We have twenty nine of them written between 414 and 442 A.D. They exhort the faithful to persevere in some elements of Sanctification. Beside their moral character, they reflect the Christological controversies of that time. The Letters, compared with those of Athanasius, may declare the traditional thought of Sanctification which had an influence on Cyril, and at the same time, reflect a particular theological and spiritual attitude developed by the contemporary events and controversies.

III. The doctrine of Sanctification in the other works of St. Athanasius.

The several writings of Athanasius expose different approaches to the topic. The "Apologetical and Dogmatic Writings" and the "Historio Polemical Writings" provide a theoretical and polemical attitutde, beside the Arian view of Sanctification; while the "Ascetical Writings", similar to the Letters, suggest the practical aspect. On the other hand, the other works of Athanasius include elements which could hardly be found in the Letters which are confined to a special content.

IV. The effect of the political and social changes in the fourth century on the topic.

The fourth century saw some important changes such as the coming of Christian Emperors, the dogmatic controversies, the ecumenical councils, and the beginning of Monasticism. A study is needed to clarify the ecclesiastical and social aspects of Sanctification as influenced by such events.

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GENERAL INDEX

Will, free, 53, 67, 58, 144-147, 148-151, 155, 159, 176.