

**MA Assessed Essay
Cover Sheet**



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Introduction

As J.A. Lyons has pointed out,¹ the first occurrences of the term 'cosmic Christ' are found no earlier than the start of the twentieth century. With this in mind, the task of searching for the 'cosmic Christ' in a work written somewhere between 318AD and the 350's² may seem anachronistic.

However, despite the recent origin of the term, the concept embodied by it can be found in various passages of the New Testament³ and also in a number of patristic texts (particularly those by eastern authors).⁴

Before proceeding, a brief explanation of the concept of the 'cosmic Christ' will provide a setting for this essay. Lyons provides a succinct summary of the term:

When the epithet 'cosmic' is used of Christ, he is said to be the instrument in God's creative activity, the source and goal of all things, the bond and sustaining power of the whole creation; he is called the head and ruler of the universe; and his redemptive influence and his body are considered to extend to the limits of the created order.⁵

As we shall see, many of these aspects can be found in Athanasius' description of the person and work of Christ, or rather the Word, in *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* ('Against the Pagans' and 'On the Incarnation').⁶ As will become apparent, the cosmic aspect of the Word is not only an essential part of Athanasius' understanding of the person of the Word himself but also forms an essential part of his apologetic.

We will first investigate the 'cosmic Word' in *Contra Gentes* and then in *De Incarnatione* before drawing the various strands together in the conclusion.

The Cosmic Word in *Contra Gentes*

For the purposes of this essay, *Contra Gentes* can be divided into three sections. The first section, and the bulk of the work (CG 8-29), consists of a thorough refutation of idolatry on rational grounds.

¹ J. A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p.1

² For a discussion of the dating of the work, see K. Anatolios, *Athanasius - The coherence of his thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.26-30

³ Those specifically mentioned or alluded to by Athanasius include John 1:1-18, Rom. 8:19-23 and Col. 1:15-20

⁴ e.g. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor

⁵ J.A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, pp.1-2

⁶ It should be noted that Athanasius' preferred term throughout this double-treatise is 'Word', so this exercise actually becomes an investigation of the 'cosmic Word' in this text.

Having accomplished this task, Athanasius then proceeds in the second section (CG 30-39) to construct a more 'rational' world-view. As Khaled Anatolios has pointed out,⁷ it is particularly during CG 35-39 where Athanasius starts to introduce concepts and language which would be very familiar to someone versed in Stoic philosophy.⁸ Athanasius' argument is based on the evidence of the apparent structure, order, symmetry, system and harmony in creation, along with the apparent 'unity of opposites' which all point to a single creator God.

The stage is now set for his Word-centred vision of reality, which is described in the third section (CG 40-47). At this point, the broadly Stoic concepts and language previously used by Athanasius become qualified and 'corrected' as he reveals the character of not just the underlying *principle* of reason in the cosmos but the *person* of reason himself – The *Logos*, The Word, the Son of the Father. In this process the cosmic dimensions of the Word become apparent and it is to these which we now turn.

As described above, after the gradual build-up in CG 35-39, Athanasius arrives at a point in CG 40 where he is ready to reveal the identity of this single creator who guides and structures the universe:

Who then is he, if not the all-holy Father of Christ, beyond all created being, who as supreme steersman, through his own wisdom and his own Word, our Lord and Saviour Christ, guides and orders the universe for our salvation, and acts as seems best to him?⁹

The 'generic' God about whom Athanasius has been speaking in Stoic terms in CG 35-39, is now fully revealed as the Father of Christ. At the same time, the one through whom the universe is guided and ordered is also revealed - the Father's own Word. However, despite his cosmic role in guiding and ordering the universe, the Word is clearly no (Stoic) impersonal 'rational principle'. Instead, the Word is immediately identified by his relationship as Son of the Father, which for Athanasius guarantees his equal divinity. We shall return to this subject later.

Having identified the Word as the guiding and ordering principle, Athanasius is keen to ensure that there is no misunderstanding in the mind of his Stoic reader and is quick to exclude an interpretation of his use of the term *logos* in terms of the Stoic *logos spermatikos*:

By Word I do not mean the word involved and innate in every creature, which some are accustomed to call seminal ... But I mean the living and acting God, the very Word of the good God of the universe, who is other than created things and all creation; he is rather the sole and individual Word of the good Father, who has ordered all this universe and illuminates it by his providence.¹⁰

⁷ K. Anatolios, *Athanasius - The coherence of his thought*, p.49

⁸ The scope of this essay prevents a thorough examination of the nuances of Stoic thought. For a fuller discussion of the development of Stoicism in the timeframe under consideration see C. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.40-53

⁹ CG 40; Thomson, p.111

¹⁰ CG 40; Thomson, p.111

The Word to whom Athanasius is referring is not some lifeless principle without reason or the ability to think. Instead, this is the 'living and acting God' - life itself. The transcendence of the Word is also affirmed, as a corrective balance to the extreme Stoic immanentist position - the Word is firmly 'other than created things and all creation'. The order of the universe (which the Stoics would readily admit) is due to the cosmic role of the Word.

Moving onto *CG* 41, Athanasius explains why the Word is present in creation - the entire cosmos needs stability:

The nature of created things, having come into being from nothing, is unstable, and is weak and mortal when considered by itself ... So seeing that all created nature according to its own definition is in a state of flux and dissolution, therefore to prevent this happening and the universe dissolving back into nothing, after making everything by his own eternal Word and bringing creation into existence, he did not abandon it to be carried away and suffer through its own nature, lest it run the risk of returning to nothing.¹¹

It is axiomatic for Athanasius that since creation was made 'out of nothing' or non-being (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων), it is inherently (and ontologically) unstable. This instability naturally leads to creation being in a state of 'flux and dissolution' - again a favourite Stoic concept. If unchecked, this entropic dissolution would result in creation returning to its source - nothingness. However, the providence and goodness of God cannot allow this and Athanasius sees the cosmic presence of the Word as key in preventing this:

But being good, he governs and establishes the whole world through his Word who is himself God, in order that creation ... may be able to remain firm, since it shares in the Word who is truly from the Father and is aided by him to exist, and lest it suffer what would happen, I mean a relapse into non-existence, if it were not protected by the Word. *'For he is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, because through him and in him subsist all things, visible and invisible, and he is the head of the church'*, as the servants of the truth teach in the holy writings.¹²

The presence of the Word is the stabilising factor in the cosmos – the preservative of the universe - preventing its crumbling into nothing. It is only by virtue of the fact that creation shares in 'true being' by sharing in the Word that it continues to 'be' at all. The presence of the Word is required to ensure the very *continued existence* of creation, contrary to its nature. For Athanasius this is the clear implication of the Colossians 1:15-18 text which he quotes.¹³

However, the influence of the Word in the cosmos is not restricted to providing order and stability, but also extends to binding opposing 'elements' of creation together in harmony:

¹¹ *CG* 41; Thomson, pp.113-115

¹² *CG* 41; Thomson, p. 115

¹³ It is also worth noting at this point that from this argument, creation could only be stabilised by the presence of true 'being' (true God). An Arian (created) Son whose source was *ex nihilo* would not be able to maintain the ontological stability of the cosmos in this manner.

The principles of all perceptible substance, the hot and cold, the moist and dry, he mixes together, ensuring that they do not oppose each other but produce a single euphonious harmony ... By obedience to this Word of God things on earth receive life and things in heaven subsist.¹⁴

The amazing harmonious union of the opposites in creation is attributable to their joint obedience to the Word.¹⁵ The 'master who unites and binds the elements together'¹⁶ described by Athanasius in *CG* 38 is now fully revealed as not simply God or even the Word, but the *cosmic* Word. He is the one who, by virtue of his presence in creation, continually holds opposite natures together in tension, preventing the natural chaos which should be the result of their mutual co-existence.

However, not only does the universe lack the chaos which it ought to suffer by rights, but it actually possess a positive *presence* of harmony. This is due to the skilful playing of the Word 'holding the universe like a lyre'¹⁷ and producing a single world and single order - an allusion to the concept of unity (as opposed to the chaos of multiplicity) which was so pleasing to Greek thought. The theme of the Word's orchestration of creation is continued in *CG* 43 where 3 further analogies for his ordering power are set out. The Word is described as like a leader of a chorus, like a soul guiding the body and like a king in a city where the inhabitants undertake their allotted tasks in an orderly manner.

Having spent some time stressing the Word's involvement in creation, Athanasius is keen to redress the divine immanence/ transcendence balance. Therefore at the same time as describing how the Word moves the universe and obtains harmonious music from it, Athanasius also makes it clear that 'he himself remains unmoved with the Father but by his intrinsic being moves everything as seems good to the Father.'¹⁸ This is a clear reference to the Aristotelian concept of God as the 'Unmoved Mover' which therefore positions the Word as both transcendent and divine.

On the topic of movement, the provision of movement, light and life to the entire cosmos are frequently attributed to the Word in *Contra Gentes* and are often mentioned together.¹⁹ A typical example is in *CG* 44 where the Word not only makes the heavens and stars move, but is also the one who 'illuminates and vivifies':

For it is by the will and power of the commander and leader of the universe, the divine Word of the Father, that the heaven revolves, the stars move, the sun shines, the moon rotates, the air is illuminated by the sun ... in a word everything lives and moves ... The Word of God, who works these wonders and marvels, illuminates and vivifies.²⁰

¹⁴ *CG* 42; Thomson, pp.115-117

¹⁵ This passage is strikingly similar to Origen's *Peri Archon* (2.1.2) where God is also described as the one who brings harmony and unity from diversity.

¹⁶ *CG* 38; Thomson, p.103

¹⁷ *CG* 42; Thomson, p.117

¹⁸ *CG* 42; Thomson, p.117

¹⁹ See for example *CG* 40; Thomson, p.113, *CG* 42; Thomson, p.115

²⁰ *CG* 44; Thomson, p.121-123

The universe is set in continual motion by the will and power of the unmoved Word. The Word illuminates and vivifies all, the definition of which Athanasius expressly widens (a few lines later) to include ‘the invisible powers’. The cosmic influence of the Word extends everywhere.

So far in our survey of Athanasius’ cosmic Word, we have seen his description of the Word’s role in the provision of order, stability, harmony, movement and life – the principles required to keep the cosmos ‘ticking over’. However, taking his cue from John 1:1,3 Athanasius explains that the Word is also the one through whom all of creation came to ‘be’ in the first place:

There is nothing existing or created which did not come into being and subsist in him and through him, as the theologian says: *‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made.’*²¹

There is the danger that the picture painted so far of the Word as the source of the cosmos, as well as its principle of subsistence, may create the impression of a subordinate demiurge. Perhaps the Word is a semi-divine being, positioned between the (true) God and creation, and used by God to create and interact with the cosmos? Athanasius is clearly aware that his description of the cosmic work and presence of the Word could result in this interpretation. It is perhaps for this reason that he stresses the equality of the Word with the Father, and states that, although creation can be said to participate or ‘share’ in the Word,²² the Word does not acquire his divine properties by similar (mere) participation in the Father:

His holy disciples teach that ... he is the power of the Father and his wisdom and Word; not so by participation, nor do these properties accrue to him from outside in the way of those who participate in him and are given wisdom by him, having their power and reason in him; but he is absolute wisdom, very Word ... In short, he is the supremely perfect issue of the Father, and is alone Son, the express image of the Father.²³

The Word does not possess wisdom, power, reason and all the other properties which are ‘proper to the Father’ (ἰδία του Πατρος) as ‘external properties’ but he actually *is* these things by virtue of his being the Son. The Word is also the Son of the Father and as such has equality of being for Athanasius. There is no sense of the Word’s cosmic role implying a subordinate nature, merely that this role is compatible with his status as Son of the Father.

Indeed, Athanasius explains that it was the Father’s exuberant pride in his amazing offspring which practically compelled him to reveal the Son to creation:

²¹ CG 42; Thomson, p.117

²² CG 41; Thomson, p.115

²³ CG 46; Thomson, p.131

Having such a good Son and creator as his offspring, the Father did not hide him away from created beings, but reveals him to all every day through the subsistence and life of the universe which he brings about. In him and through him he reveals himself, as the Saviour says: ‘*I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.*’ So of necessity the Word is in his begetter and the begotten coexists eternally with the Father.²⁴

The cosmic presence of the Word as ‘subsistence and life of the universe’ is the way that the Father chooses to reveal the Word and thereby himself. For Athanasius, the superlative revelation of the superlative Word is best accomplished by his role as the principle of subsistence in the cosmos.

So, despite his emphasis throughout *Contra Gentes* on the role of the Word in creating, ordering and sustaining creation, there is no suspicion of subordinationism to which an emphasis on such a role might perhaps give rise. Instead, these actions are simply seen as being accommodated within the remit of the Word/Son.²⁵

Contra Gentes ends on a note of incredulity from Athanasius. Despite the cosmic presence of the Word, the Pagans still reject him and prefer to make gods from creation itself, or more correctly, ‘non-existent beings’ (τὰ οὐκ ὄντα):

But although this is so and nothing exists without him, but heaven and earth and all that is in them depend on him, yet men in their folly, rejecting knowledge of him and belief in him, have honoured non-existent beings rather than reality; and in place of the truly existent God they have deified unrealities, ‘*worshipping creation instead of the creator*’, which is foolish and impious behaviour.²⁶

For Athanasius, mankind’s rejection of the Son is exacerbated by his cosmic aspect. The Son is not only the creator of the cosmos, but the one in whom ‘heaven and earth and all that is in them depend’ – but men preferred idolatry instead! As he goes on to say, the one who rejects the architect in favour of his handiwork is ‘mad beyond all folly’²⁷ and so are ‘those who do not recognise God and do not worship his Word, the Saviour of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the Father orders the universe and contains and provides for all things’.²⁸ Choosing to worship created ‘non-existence’ in the form of idolatry, instead of worshipping the one who is true being itself, the cosmic Word, creator and sustaining principle of the universe, is plain madness.

²⁴ CG 47; Thomson, p.131

²⁵ Lyman has pointed out that in Athanasius’ later works (e.g. *Contra Arianos*), as the issue of the full divinity of the Son becomes more important, he downplays the ‘sense of agency found in Christian cosmology since the Apologists’ - see J. R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.158

²⁶ CG 47; Thomson, p.133

²⁷ CG 47; Thomson, p.133

²⁸ CG 47; Thomson, p.133

The Cosmic Word in *De Incarnatione*

Having refuted idolatry and set out his Christian world-view in *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius' task in the second part of his double treatise is to 'tell of the incarnation of the Word'.²⁹ However, before proceeding with an examination of the text, it is important to realise that, for Athanasius, the Incarnation is a phenomenon which needs to be accommodated within a cosmic understanding of the person and work of the Word and not the other way round.

Athanasius is not seeking to dress the Incarnation in 'cosmic clothes' but rather, the event of the Incarnation must be made to fit within his schema of the cosmic Word. This point is especially brought out in *DI* 16 where the Incarnation is clearly depicted as merely one aspect of the cosmic dimension of the Word:

This [the fact that the incarnate Word was not merely a man] Paul wished to indicate when he said: '*Be firm and grounded in love, that you may be able to understand with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and that you may know the love of Christ which transcends knowledge, in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*' For the Word spread himself everywhere, above and below and in the depth and in the breadth: above, in creation; below, in the incarnation; in the depth, in hell; in breadth, in the world.³⁰

Just as Paul describes the love of Christ as filling all three spatial dimensions in the quotation from Ephesians 3:17-19, so Athanasius sees this corresponding to the cosmic omnipresence of the Word. It is notable that the Incarnation is listed as the manner in which the Word is expressed in one 'location' - 'below'. The Incarnation is undeniably important, indeed it is the very subject of *De Incarnatione*, however Athanasius portrays it here as one *particular* manifestation of the cosmic Word at a *particular* moment. The Word is the guiding, ordering, moving, life-giving principle of the cosmos. This is the starting point. Everything else, even the act of the Incarnation must be seen in this context.

For Athanasius, a cosmic understanding of the Word is not a bolt-on extra or afterthought, but the very grounds from which his apologetic proceeds. Indeed, it actually presents him with a tough challenge in *De Incarnatione*. Having argued so forcefully for the cosmic role of the Word in creating, preserving and ordering the universe during *Contra Gentes*, he is now faced with having to argue that this is not incompatible with the specific manifestation of the Word in the Incarnation.

The challenge in *De Incarnatione* is to square the cosmic omnipresence of the Word (as set out in *Contra Gentes*) with the *specific manifestation* of the Word in the event of the Incarnation. Athanasius is aware of the tension implied in affirming both views at the same time, and the misunderstandings that could arise in the mind of his reader. Consequently this paradox is explored and defended at four points in this text, and this topic comprises the vast majority of his comment on the Word's cosmic presence and role in *De Incarnatione*.

²⁹ *DI* 1; Thomson, p.135

³⁰ *DI* 16; Thomson, p.173

The first hint of tension comes as soon as he has set out his reasoning for the necessity of the Incarnation of the Word (*DI* 1-7) with Athanasius taking immediate action to explain that the event of the Incarnation does not contradict the cosmic presence of the Word:

For this reason the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God came to our realm; not that he was previously distant, for no part of creation is left deprived of him, but he fills the universe, being in union with his Father. But in his benevolence [φιλανθρωπια] towards us he condescended to come and be made manifest [επιφανεια].³¹

This passage clearly shows that Athanasius is sensitive to the potential difficulty in his argument. Having just explained in *Contra Gentes* that the Word has been cosmically present from the moment of creation, and is the very principle of its subsistence, how can he now say that the 'Word of God came to our realm' in the moment of the Incarnation? The answer lies in the explanation that it was the philanthropy of the Father which caused a 'manifestation' or epiphany of the Word – a specific visual appearance of the Word, in addition to his hidden sustaining cosmic presence.

Athanasius also takes the opportunity to stress some of the divine properties of the Word (he is incorporeal, incorruptible and immaterial) as well as 'being in union with the Father'. The mention of these factors provides a useful reminder of the Word's true and untainted divinity despite his involvement with the created order in the Incarnation.

The tension between the Word's cosmic presence and the event of the Incarnation bubbles up for a second time in *DI* 17 where Athanasius counters the idea that the Incarnation must imply a spatial limitation of the Word's power and influence:

He was not enclosed in the body, nor was he in the body but nowhere else. Nor did he move the latter while the universe was deprived of his action and providence. But what is most wonderful is that, being the Word, he was not contained by anyone, but rather himself contained everything ... So also being in a human body and giving it life himself, he accordingly gives life to everything, and was both in all and outside all. And although he was known by his body through his works, yet he was not invisible by his action on the universe.³²

Athanasius is clear that although the Word was present in a body, his cosmic influence was not enclosed, bounded or restricted by the event of the Incarnation. Instead, he maintained his 'action and providence' in the universe throughout, continuing to function as 'prime mover' of the universe at the same time as moving his human body. In fact, with regard to being enclosed or bounded, it's actually the other way around - 'he contains the universe and is not contained' - the universe is bounded by the Word. Athanasius acknowledges the difficulty, but still holds to his paradoxical understanding - the cosmic presence/influence of the Word and the Incarnation are not incompatible but must both be affirmed, and the mystery maintained.

³¹ *DI* 8; Thomson, p.151

³² *DI* 17; Thomson, p.175

As an aside, Athanasius' fascination here, is that the Word which gives life to the cosmos can, at the same time, be said to be giving life to a human body. Perhaps, for Athanasius, since the incarnate Christ possesses the Word (the very guiding, animating and life-giving principle of the universe) it might have little need of a human soul (which would perform the same functions for an individual body). Athanasius' heightened cosmic understanding of the Word may therefore be a factor which caused him not to dwell on the human soul in the incarnate Christ. If this line of argument does reflect Athanasius' thinking, this passage may provide a clue to his 'weak' concept of the human soul in Christ (as propounded by Grillmeier³³). Although, as Anatolios has pointed out, Athanasius' Christological focus in *De Incarnatione* is 'not so much on how the divine-human being of Christ is internally constituted, but rather on the fact that Christ unites the extremes of God and the world'.³⁴

The third point at which the tension of holding together both the cosmic presence of the Word and the particularity of the Incarnation becomes apparent, is in the later section of his apology aimed directly at 'the Greeks' (*DI* 41-45):

The philosophers of the Greeks say that the world is a great body; and rightly they say so, for we perceive it and its parts affecting our senses. If then the Word of God is in the world, which is a body, and he has passed into it all and into every part of it, what is wonderful or what is unfitting in our saying that he came in a man?³⁵

Starting from the Stoic position, Athanasius argues that either the *logos* is present in all of the cosmos or not. A simple, logical and effective argument for the particularity of the Incarnation (in one human body) starting from the broad principle of divine immanence – a position with which his Stoic opponents would have no problem.

This passage nicely illustrates that it is Athanasius' understanding of the presence of the Word throughout the cosmos which enables him to see connections and establish common ground with the extreme of Stoic immanence. It is only his understanding of the cosmic aspects of the Word which enables his effective apology.

The fourth point at which Athanasius senses his adherence to both a cosmically present and incarnate Word could cause a problem also occurs in his apologetic aimed at the Greeks. Athanasius is sensitive to the charge that the presence of the Word throughout creation might somehow contaminate him - a charge which he vigorously denies:

For as [the Word] is in creation, yet in no way partakes of creation, but rather everything partakes of his power, so also, although he used the body as an instrument, he partook of none of the body's attributes, but rather himself sanctified the body.³⁶

Athanasius is keen to ensure that neither a cosmic presence, nor the act of the Incarnation has tainted the Word. There is no possibility that the Word has been sullied by any aspect of the

³³ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition Vol 1* (London: Mowbrays, 1975²), p.312

³⁴ K. Anatolios, *Athanasius - The coherence of his thought*, p.73

³⁵ *DI* 41; Thomson, p.237

³⁶ *DI* 43; Thomson, p.243

physical creation by virtue of his immanent presence. The potential danger here is that the Word might be thought to have been contaminated by undesirable properties of created matter such as instability, corruptibility, mortality. However, just as the Word is 'in creation, yet in no way partakes of creation' so neither do any of these negative attributes cling to the Word as a result of his Incarnation. Instead, the opposite has taken place and the power of the Word has 'flowed' in the other direction, resulting in the sanctification of the body.

In summary, Athanasius is very much aware of the difficulties inherent in maintaining both a cosmic presence and role for the Word, at the same time as the specific event of the Incarnation. However, despite this, he is not dissuaded from affirming both of these realities and holding them paradoxically together, as his arguments in *De Incarnatione* show.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the numerous references taken from both *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, the search for the cosmic Christ in this work is not a forced exercise, but rather the concept is abundantly present. If we recall Lyons definition of the concept of the cosmic Christ as the creator, bond and sustaining power, head and ruler of the cosmos, then Athanasius' text lacks none of these aspects.

With regard to the source of these ideas for Athanasius, it is important to realise that he primarily derives his cosmic understanding of the Word from Scripture. A number of passages typically used by other authors writing on the topic of the cosmic Christ are directly quoted (e.g. John 1:1,3 and Colossians 1:15).

However, Athanasius also has no objection to using Greek philosophical language and concepts (especially Stoic) where these help with his apology. But, as has been shown, these concepts are always suitably corrected, if required. Hence, although making heavy use of the concept of the Word (*Logos*), this is no Stoic *logos spermatikos*, but a personal Word, the Son of the Father. Despite his focus on the agency of the Word in creating and sustaining the cosmos, he is no mere subordinate demiurge, but the Son of the Father and of 'one being' with him. And also, despite the Word's close involvement with creation, he is not 'contaminated' by his involvement with it.

It is also clear that the understanding of a cosmic dimension to Christ is an essential part of Athanasius' understanding of the person and work of the Word, and not a bolt-on extra. The climax of his apologetic against the pagans (*CG* 40-47) is painted in cosmic Christ terms and this understanding of Christ is maintained (despite the paradoxes) throughout *De Incarnatione*. For Athanasius, the Incarnation is no momentary deep involvement of God with the cosmos for the first time. Instead it is a specific manifestation of an underlying reality present from the start of creation. God is (and always has been) intimately connected with the cosmos via the agency of the Word. The Incarnation, then, must be seen in the context of the cosmic presence and work of the Word.

The final point to make is that a cosmic Christ understanding is vital to Athanasius' apologetic (which is the very purpose of the two works). Like any good apologist, he seeks common ground, a point of agreement from which to start his discussion. The cosmic work and presence of the Word provides a point of contact and overlap between Stoic pantheism and Christianity, and forms the key 'apologetic bridge' in this work.

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