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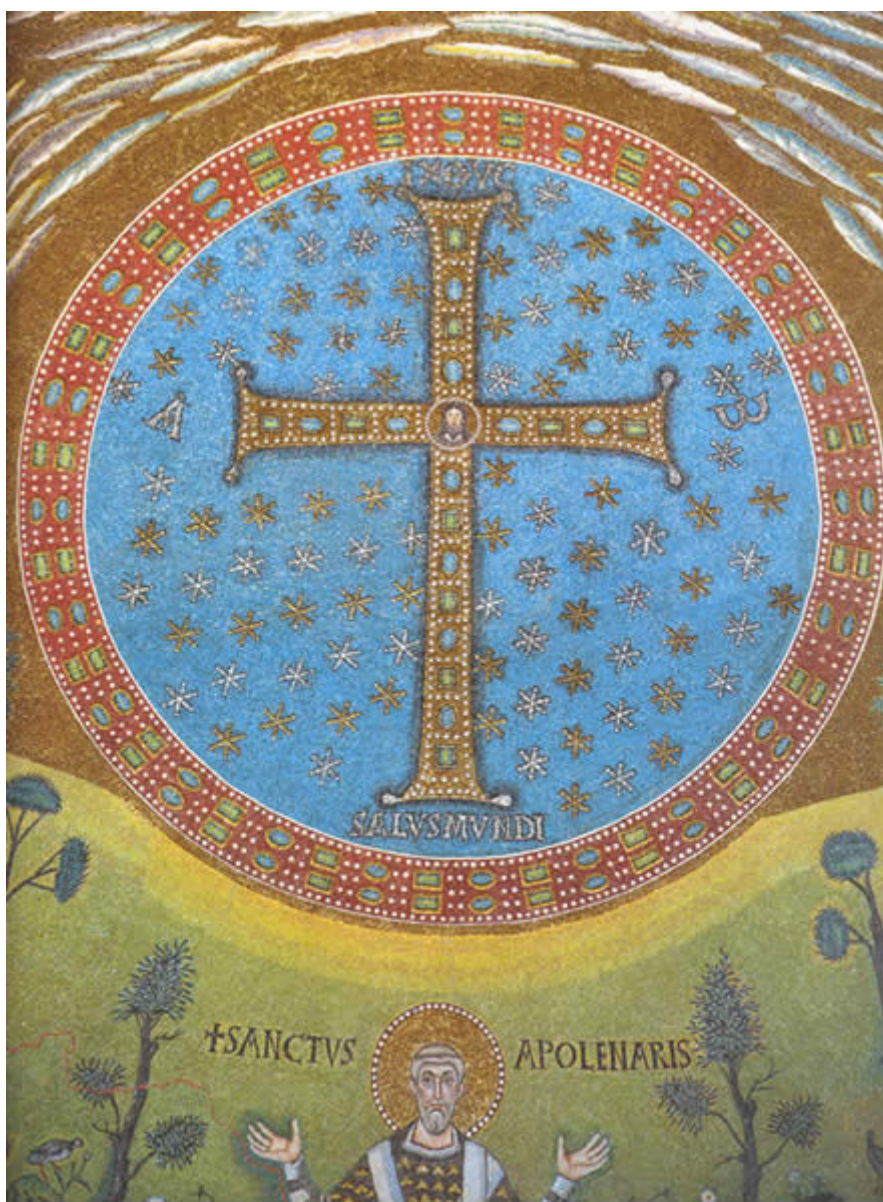
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The Patristic Concept of the Cosmic Christ

by

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For Min

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Abbreviations

General

ANF The Ante-Nicene Fathers (A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds., 1884 ff.)

NPNF² The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series (P. Schaff & H. Wace, eds., 1890 ff.)

Patristic Texts

Justin Martyr	<i>1 Apol.</i>	First Apology
	<i>2 Apol.</i>	Second Apology
	<i>Dial.</i>	Dialogue with Trypho the Jew
Clement of Alexandria	<i>Prot.</i>	Protreptikos
	<i>Paed.</i>	Paedagogus
	<i>Strom.</i>	Stromateis
Irenaeus	<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	Adversus Haereses
	<i>Dem.</i>	Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching
Athanasius	<i>CG</i>	Contra Gentes
	<i>DI</i>	De Incarnatione
Basil of Caesarea	<i>DSS</i>	De Spiritu Sancto
	<i>Hex.</i>	Hexaemeron
Gregory of Nyssa	<i>Eccl. hom.</i>	Homilies on Ecclesiastes
	<i>Or. cat.</i>	Catechetical Oration
	<i>In. Ps.</i>	On the Inscriptions on the Psalms

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to survey the Patristic understanding of the ‘cosmic Christ’ over a period ranging from Justin Martyr to the end of the fourth century. Particular attention will be paid to those authors in this timeframe who are acknowledged as possessing a strongly ‘cosmic’ view of the person and work of Christ.¹ The predominant figures in this work are Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and the Cappadocians (particularly Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa).

Two authors have been largely excluded from this survey for different reasons. Origen is already the subject of a work examining his cosmic Christology² and Athanasius has already been covered in a previous paper.³ However, Athanasius’ contribution in *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione* provides a useful context on a number of occasions and will therefore be cited in brief.

Before commencing, it must immediately be admitted that none of these authors would have recognised themselves as possessing a particularly ‘cosmic’ understanding of Christ. Instead, they merely sought to work out and explain their understanding of the person and work of Christ. In the process however, a collection of shared concerns, ideas and thoughts can be seen to emerge. These are sparked by certain passages of scripture along with interaction with contemporary culture (especially Greek philosophy, as might be expected).

But what does it mean to speak of the ‘cosmic Christ’? J. Lyons provides a succinct summary:

To refer to Christ as cosmic immediately suggests that he has a wider significance than God who becomes man in order to reveal himself to and to save human persons. ‘Cosmic’ implies that Christ is involved in some kind of universe.⁴

In this paper, we shall examine the cosmic concept of Christ under the broad headings of four chapters. Firstly, we shall consider what the various authors had to say about the particular interaction of Christ with creation as instrument in work of creation. Special attention will be paid to the implication of his role as cosmic creator on his relationship with God the Father. Secondly, we shall examine the view possessed by a number of authors on the role of Christ as bringer of cosmic order and harmony. The third chapter will consider the implications of the ‘manifestations’ of Christ (both before and during the incarnation) on his cosmic nature. Finally we shall consider what the various authors had to say about the cosmic dimensions of the cross.

It will be noted that throughout this paper the favourite term used by all the authors when referring to the person of Christ and his cosmic work is ‘Logos’ or Word. By use of this term (as H. Chadwick explains) they were following in the footsteps of St. John who used the same term at the start of his gospel with the intention of showing him as ‘the principle of rationality and order in the cosmos and in mankind’.⁵ The terms ‘Son’ and ‘Christ’ are still used on occasion when describing his cosmic role, but the implicit and explicit connections, forged in the contemporary world of Greek philosophy by the use of the term ‘Logos’ were too good to ignore.

¹ For a more comprehensive list, see J.A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p.2

² Ibid.

³ See *The Cosmic Christ in Athanasius’ Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*

⁴ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p1

⁵ H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 1966), p.3

The Cosmic Christ and the Status of the Son

From the beginning of Christianity, the person of Christ has always been perceived as possessing a special role with respect to creation. Scripture witnesses to his 'instrumental' role in creation in passages such as John 1:3 - 'through him all things came to be; without him no created thing came into being' and Colossians 1:16:

In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him.⁶

Christ therefore undoubtedly had a special role as the one 'through whom' creation came to be, and this was taken as an undisputed fact throughout the period in question. However, at different times, and in response to different challenges, the fact of Christ's cosmic agency was interpreted in different ways. As we shall see in this chapter, this is especially true with regard to what his cosmic agency had to say about his relationship with the Father.

For the purposes of this chapter, the authors will be divided into three groups. We will initially consider Justin & Clement together, followed by Irenaeus, and finally Athanasius & the Cappadocians will also be considered as a group. This grouping reflects the different approaches taken, and conclusions reached, by the various authors as they wrestled with the implications of the Son's cosmic agency on his relationship with the Father.

Justin & Clement

For Justin, God is utterly transcendent, a position he sets out in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. It is axiomatic for Justin that God 'remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holding personal intercourse with none'.⁷ It is inconceivable that God should leave heaven and be seen on earth. Even 'he who has but the smallest intelligence will not venture to assert that the Maker and Father of all things, having left all supercelestial matters, was visible on a little portion of the earth.'⁸

Barnard summarises Justin's perspective on the transcendence of God by saying that for Justin, God resides:

... far above the heavens, and is incapable of coming into immediate contact with any of his creatures, yet is observant of them although removed from them and unapproachable by them. God is the Universal Father, transcendent in his nature, who can act only through an intermediate being.⁹

For Justin, the most common title for this intermediate being is the Logos, described as a 'power' of the Father,¹⁰ and an emissary to creation. In Justin's thought, the world was certainly made through the instrumentality of the Word,¹¹ but the Word is clearly subordinate to God (the Father).

Again, Barnard provides a neat summary of the subordinate role and nature of the Logos who is 'generated for the purpose of creation and revelation, as the agent and servant of the Father'¹² and who as 'the medium between the Transcendent God and the finite universe'¹³ is subordinate to the Father.

⁶ Colossians 1:16

⁷ *Dial.* 56 (ANF, Vol.1, p.223a)

⁸ *Dial.* 60 (ANF, Vol.1, p.227a)

⁹ L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), p.81

¹⁰ 1 *Apol.* 23 (ANF, Vol.1, p.170b); 1 *Apol.* 32 (p.173b); 2 *Apol.* 10 (p.192a)

¹¹ 1 *Apol.* 59 (ANF, Vol.1, p.182b); 1 *Apol.* 64 (p.185a); 2 *Apol.* 6 (p.190a)

¹² Barnard, *Justin Martyr*, p.91

¹³ *Ibid.*

The views of Clement of Alexandria on the transcendence of God and the subordinate nature of the Logos are similar to Justin's, and most plainly set out in the *Protreptikos* ('Exhortation'). For Clement, all men have an innate sense of the clearly transcendent God who is 'somewhere above in tracts of heaven'¹⁴ even if they are reluctant to admit it. Indeed, Clement's stress on the transcendence of God is the cause of his attack on two seemingly different groups – idolators and philosophers. The error they have in common, and which to Clement is abhorrent, is the confusion of the uncreated and transcendent Divinity with created matter.

For Clement, idolators are involved in 'defaming the super-celestial region'¹⁵ and have 'dragged religion to the ground'.¹⁶ Whilst he also attacks the similar 'idolatry' of philosophical schools such as the Stoics ('those of the Porch')¹⁷ who 'say that the Divinity pervades all matter, even the vilest, and thus clumsily disgrace philosophy'.¹⁸ According to Clement, God clearly belongs to the super-celestial region and is not to be tainted by association with the world especially by an immanent presence.

Instead, like Justin, he uses the concept of the (subordinate) Logos as the agent of God's work of creation and immanence in creation. The Word is 'the arm of the Lord, the power of the universe'¹⁹ and is 'diffused over the whole face of the earth'.²⁰ The following passage from the *Stromateis* summarises Clement's understanding of the immanence of the Son who is:

... always everywhere, and being contained nowhere; complete mind, the complete paternal light; all eyes, seeing all things, hearing all things, knowing all things, by His power scrutinizing the powers. To Him is placed in subjection all the host of angels and gods; He, the paternal Word, exhibiting the holy administration for Him who put [all] in subjection to Him.²¹

The Word is all-pervading, undivided, all-seeing and all-knowing, and undertakes the role of cosmic administrator on behalf of the transcendent God. The (subordinate) Word acts on behalf of God the Father in tasks connected with creation.

Both of these early authors possess a clear distinction between God and the Logos, and especially with regard to the Logos' direct interaction with creation compared to the Father's lack of such contact. The traditional scholarly explanation for this sharp distinction, is the degree to which both authors are influenced by contemporary philosophy. For example, commenting on Justin, Grillmeier says that he 'takes up the speculations of the Platonist school about the Platonic world-soul and uses them as a foundation for his teaching on the *Logos spermatikos*'.²²

In a similar vein Lilla provides an account of various influences on Clement, seeing his concept of the Logos as 'closely dependent on ... Jewish-Alexandrine philosophy'²³ as well as influenced by the Stoic Logos and the Platonic world-soul.

¹⁴ *Prot.* 6 (ANF, Vol.2, p.191b)

¹⁵ *Prot.* 4 (ANF, Vol.2, p.188a)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Prot.* 5 (ANF Vol.2, p.191a)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Prot.* 12 (ANF, Vol.2, p.205b)

²⁰ *Prot.* 10 (ANF, Vol.2, p.202b)

²¹ *Strom.* 7.2 (ANF, Vol.2, p.524a)

²² A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition Vol 1* (London: Mowbrays, 1975²), p.93

²³ S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), p.231

However, the extent of the philosophical influence on such authors has more recently been questioned by (for example) R. Lyman who points out that the mere *use* of common philosophical terms such as 'Logos' does not necessarily mean the wholesale importing of all the associated concepts. Instead, Lyman argues (following D.C. Trakatellis) that:

The hierarchical pattern of action between the Father and the Son in Justin's cosmology owes as much to the language of Jesus's obedience and agency in the New Testament as to the second principle of Middle Platonism.²⁴

At the very least, Lyman reminds us of the scriptural basis for an understanding of the Son's instrumental role in creation, as well as the influence of philosophy.

So, in both Justin and Clement's systems, the utter transcendence of God is stressed - he is totally 'other' than creation and is unable to have direct contact with it. The work of creating, sustaining, inspiring and being immanently present in creation are thus clearly tasks delegated to the subordinate Logos. The Logos is the cosmic agent by which God's continuing involvement with creation can be affirmed, but without the dangers of either contaminating God by contact with creation, or having to address the problem of creation withstanding the direct touch of God. The understanding of Christ's 'cosmic' role therefore comes at the price of a subordinate understanding of his nature. The formulation of Christ's cosmic role in such terms was not destined to survive.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus was a contemporary of Clement of Alexandria, and like both Justin and Clement, used the concept of the Logos to explain the working of God in the world. However, his concept of the Logos and its cosmic role needs to be considered separately from that of Justin and Clement for reasons which will become clear.

In the same vein as Justin and Clement, a number of passages in Irenaeus' work describe the traditional 'solo' agency of the Word in creation. For Irenaeus, 'the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God',²⁵ the Word is 'the Artificer of all, He that sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things'.²⁶ He is also the one 'who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made'²⁷ and the one through whom, and by whom, all things were made.²⁸

However, the most striking aspect of Irenaeus' system is the *dual* agency he sees in the manner in which God interacts with creation. It is not just the Word who is involved in creation, but also the Spirit. In referring to God's dealings with creation via this dual agency, Irenaeus' favourite metaphor is to refer to the Son and Spirit as the 'hands of God'.

²⁴ J. R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.24

²⁵ *Adv. Haer.* 5.18.3 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.546b-547a)

²⁶ *Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8 (ANF, Vol.1, p.428b)

²⁷ *Adv. Haer.* 3.18.1 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.445b-446a)

²⁸ *Adv. Haer.* 5.18.2 (ANF, Vol.1, p.546b); *Demonstration 6* (J. A. Robinson (trans.) & I. M. MacKenzie, *Irenaeus' Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), p.3)

The following passage concisely sets out the main themes in Irenaeus' understanding of the way God interacts with creation:

And this is He of whom the Scripture says, "And God formed man, taking clay of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life." It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, "Let Us make man after Our image and likeness."²⁹

Irenaeus is clear that neither angels 'nor any Power remotely distant from the Father' were needed in creation, a point which he reiterates on numerous occasions.³⁰ The agency of no mere subordinate(s) was required. Instead the one God with (by implication) the *closely connected* Son and Spirit as his two ever-present 'hands', are completely sufficient for the task.

Such anthropomorphic language emphasises that the Son and Spirit are inseparable 'organic' parts of God and lessens the sense of mere instrumentality which might accompany their role as agents of the Divine. As MacKenzie observes:

The 'hands of God' are not mere instrumental appendages, as it were, for it is with these hands that the Father converses. They are divine and co-equal, inherent in the life of God.³¹

MacKenzie goes on to stress that this dual agency of Son and Spirit 'does not insinuate any subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father; rather, it underlines the variety of function within the Godhead ... 'Ministering' does not imply 'servitude'.³²

Irenaeus' formulation of the dual agency of the Son and Spirit, with its heightened stress on the involvement of the entire 'Godhead' in creation is sharply different from the picture of the subordinate creator-Logos in the systems of Justin and Clement. The reasons behind his different model are twofold.

The first reason is the context for his main work *Adversus Haereses* ('Against Heresies') which is a refutation of the various Gnostic systems (and Docetic ideas) current at the time. The Gnostic position saw matter as evil and as a means of entrapment for the spirit, with the implication that its origin cannot reside with a good God. The Gnostic solution to the problem of the existence of evil in creation was to attribute creation to another being (or beings) besides the good God. Irenaeus' response to these speculations, was to affirm the *unified* action of the one God in the making and sustaining of creation. In the process, the agency of the Son and Spirit were affirmed, but the sense of intimate 'connectedness' of the Son and Spirit with the Father were also affirmed – they could be no 'mere' instruments as was perhaps Justin and Clement's view of the Logos.

²⁹ *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.1 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.487b-488a)

³⁰ See, for example, *Adv. Haer.* 1.22.1 (ANF, Vol.1, p.347a); 2.2.4 (p.361b); 2.2.5 (pp.361b-362a); 4.7.4 (p.470b); 5.18.2 (p.546b)

³¹ I. M. MacKenzie, *Irenaeus' Demonstration*, p.84

³² *Ibid.*, p.86

The second explanation for the different system of Irenaeus, as Grillmeier points out, is the fact that his Logos concept ‘betrays less of the influence of the Greek philosophers than does that of the Apologists before him and, still more, that of the Alexandrians after him.’³³ Irenaeus acknowledges and uses the concept of the Logos, but perhaps his particular (internal) apologetic concerns steer him away from importing some other aspects of the Logos doctrine from the philosophical schools of the day.

Irenaeus’ explanation of the Logos/Son’s role as Divine co-worker in creation is therefore a significant advance on the solo subordinate agency of the Word as portrayed by the more philosophically influenced Justin and Clement. His explanation may fall short of an explicit full-blown Trinity of three equal persons, as formulated by Athanasius and the Cappadocians, yet it represents a significant step forward towards their understanding of Christ as cosmic co-worker.

Athanasius and the Cappadocians

The transition from the second half of the second century to the fourth century sees the formation of the cloud which was to hang over fourth century theological debate – the Arian controversy. The Son’s instrumental role in creation, and the associated passages of scripture, were used by the Arians as evidence for his subordinate nature. Indeed, very early on in the controversy,³⁴ bishop Alexander of Alexandria in his encyclical letter mentions one of the shocking concepts in Arius’ doctrine:

[The Son] was made on our account, in order that God might create us by him, as by an instrument; nor would he ever have existed, unless God had wished to create us.³⁵

Alexander’s attack in this passage is on two grounds. Firstly that the Son was only made for a purpose (rather than possessing existence by rights) and secondly that this was *purely* to fulfil an instrumental role in creation. The Son’s instrumental role in creation was certainly problematic in the early days of Arian controversy, as Gregg and Groh comment:

What most troubled the orthodox spokesmen, in the end, was the portrait of the Son of God as an underworker and assistant, with its clear message that this creaturely Son was one “under orders” and thus obliged to bend his will to the purposes of his Master.³⁶

Certainly, as we have seen in the works of Justin and Clement, before the fourth century, the Son’s role as creator and sustainer of the cosmos was compatible with, if not taken to imply, his subordinate nature. So, there is some grounds for the Arian appeal to the ‘traditional’ interpretation of Christ’s cosmic role in terms of ‘underworker’ as justifying his secondary status.

However, in the light of the Creed of Nicaea in 325 AD which affirmed not only the status of the Son as equal (‘of one being’) with the Father but also his instrumental role in creation, the challenge for the ‘orthodox’³⁷ (chiefly Athanasius and the Cappadocians) was to develop an understanding of the cosmic dimensions to Christ (particularly his instrumental role in creation) whilst affirming his full equality with the Father.

³³ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p.103

³⁴ c.319 AD, according to R.P.C Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), p.16

³⁵ *The Epistle of Alexander Bishop of Alexandria* in Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.6 (NPNF², Vol.2, p.4a)

³⁶ R.C. Gregg and D.E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (London: SCM Press, 1981), pp.116-7

³⁷ The term ‘orthodox’ is used throughout to indicate the views which prevailed after the Arian controversy.

The case for the orthodox understanding of the Son's instrumentality is put well by Basil in *De Spiritu Sancto* ('On the Holy Spirit'). Despite its title, chapters 1-8 actually concern the Son and defend his deity and equality with the Father – especially in relation to his cosmic agency and instrumentality. Basil is forced to admit that scripture speaks of the Son in instrumental terms – 'We acknowledge that the word of truth has in many places made use of these expressions'.³⁸ However, he is also adamant that the use of phrases such as 'of him', 'through him' and 'to him' in scripture (when properly understood) is not intended to indicate the Son's subordinate nature. Instead, it must be realised that that 'Scripture varies its expressions as occasion requires, according to the circumstances of the case'.³⁹

The response of Athanasius and the Cappadocians to the idea of the Son's cosmic instrumentality rested on three main points. The first two of these are also well illustrated by Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*. Firstly, according to Basil, the problem with the Arian interpretation of such passages is that they are taken to indicate that 'the Creator of the universe (i.e. the Son) may be regarded as of no higher dignity than an instrument'⁴⁰ and that the Arians are unashamed in 'applying to the Creator of the universe language belonging to a hammer or a saw'.⁴¹ The Son is not, however, to be numbered along with other 'lifeless instruments (ἀψυχὰ ὀργάνα)'.⁴² Basil's argument is that instrumental language concerning the Son does not imply that he is *merely* an instrument.

Secondly, having dismissed the argument for the mere instrumentality of the Son, Basil goes on to explain that far from implying his subordinate status, the role of Christ as cosmic creator and sustainer actually *proves* his full and equal divinity:

Inasmuch as all created nature, both this visible world and all that is conceived of in the mind, cannot hold together without the care and providence of God, the Creator Word, the Only begotten God, apportioning His succour according to the measure of the needs of each ... Effectually working by the touch of His power ... He calls into being things that were not; He upholds what has been created.⁴³

Basil here sets out the position, shared by Athanasius and the other Cappadocians, that it is only God who can 'call into being things that were not' and 'hold together' creation. As the Word is understood as the Creator, the Word must therefore be fully God. This point is emphasised in this passage by his use of the title 'Creator Word'.⁴⁴ So, within the Godhead consisting of three persons, the task of creating and sustaining can be seen as especially a function of the Son or Word, but it does not imply his subordinate nature. On the contrary, it implies his divinity. The same argument, is found on a number of occasions in the works of Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa.⁴⁵

³⁸ DSS 4.6 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.5a)

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ DSS 2.4 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.4a)

⁴¹ DSS 3.5 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.4b)

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ DSS 8.19 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.13a)

⁴⁴ A phrase also used by Gregory of Nazianzus, e.g. twice in *Or.* 38.11 (NPNF², Vol.7, p.348a)

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa deploys the same argument against Jewish unbelief in *In Ps* 2.79 (R. E. Heine (intro and trans.), *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)), p.145 as well as *Or. cat.* 5 (E. R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954)), p.275

So far, we have examined two of the responses of the orthodox to the Arian view that the instrumentality of the Son implies his subordinate nature and we now turn to Gregory of Nyssa for the classic account of the third response, which he sets out in his treatise ‘On not three Gods’:

But in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

For Gregory, the action of the (single) Divine nature towards creation is always to be seen as a cooperative action between all three persons. The Son, therefore, never acts alone in his cosmic role (as perhaps a subordinate, or one under command might do). Instead, the entire Trinity must be considered as acting together in ‘every operation which extends from God to the Creation’. This is not, however, to deny that the different persons make a unique contribution to the work of creation - the Father is the source of the action which then proceeds through the Son and is brought to perfection in the Spirit.

Such a unified understanding of the creative activity of the entire Trinity is part of Nyssa’s response to those who accuse him of teaching the existence of three Gods. His stress on the unity of action of the Godhead is therefore an attempt to balance his affirmation of three distinct hypostases. However, at the same time, such an approach can also be seen to reduce the emphasis on the particular cosmic role which has been traditionally assigned especially to Christ. This unified approach explains why in some texts, the Cappadocians seem keen to affirm the instrumental role of Christ in creation, whilst in others they steer clear of explicit mention of his cosmic agency.

Another good example of the joint approach of the Trinity in the work of creation is set out in Basil’s *Hexaemeron*. Basil’s favourite terms for the creative Being in this text are all synonyms of the (unified) Godhead. These include simply ‘God’, ‘Creator’,⁴⁷ ‘supreme Artificer’,⁴⁸ ‘supreme artisan’⁴⁹ and ‘Creator and Demiurge’.⁵⁰ The majority of the times the Son is mentioned with regard to the task of creation are to him as ‘co-operator’⁵¹ or ‘fellow worker’⁵² with the Father.

The work of Gregory of Nazianzus also demonstrates the same understanding of Trinitarian co-working as shown by Basil. For example, in a defence of the Son’s instrumental role in creation in *Or.* 30, Gregory explains that in the work of creation, the Father ‘indicates the outline, whilst the Word makes a finished product, of the same realities’.⁵³ However, this does not mean that the Word is a slave, but that he ‘acts with a master’s knowledge’⁵⁴ - just like the Father. The Father and Son have ‘equal authority over their creation’.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ On ‘Not Three Gods’ (NPNF², Vol.5, p.334a)

⁴⁷ *Hex.* 1.2 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.53b); 1.9 (p.57b); 1.11 (p.58b)

⁴⁸ *Hex.* 1.11 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.58b); 2.2 (p.59b)

⁴⁹ *Hex.* 1.7 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.56a)

⁵⁰ *Hex.* 2.2 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.59b)

⁵¹ *Hex.* 3.2 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.65b); twice in 9.6 (pp.106b-107a),

⁵² *Hex.* 3.2 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.65b)

⁵³ *Or.* 30.11 (*On God and Christ*, p.102)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Summary

Justin and Clement possess a very strong sense of the cosmic role played by the Logos, but this could be seen as being tainted by a distinctly subordinate understanding of his nature. The cosmic agency of the Logos was perhaps a way round the ‘problem’ caused by an overemphasis on divine transcendence which distanced God from creation.

Irenaeus’ model of the ‘dual agency’ of the Son and Spirit was forged in response to the challenges posed by Gnosticism, and represented a step in the (ultimately) orthodox direction. The connectedness of the Son and Spirit with the Father, via their description as his ‘hands’, reduced or eliminated the sense of subordinacy that went with their cosmic agency. However, this was also accompanied by a reduction in the sense of the sole cosmic agency of Christ.

Finally, the approach of Athanasius and the Cappadocians was dictated by the backdrop of the Arian controversy in which the Son’s cosmic role was considered problematic. His role as ‘mere’ instrument in creation was taken by the Arians to indicate his subordinate nature. The response of Athanasius and the Cappadocians was threefold. Firstly, they affirmed the instrumentality of the Son in creation but denied that he was a *mere* instrument. Secondly, they advanced the position that his role of cosmic creator and sustainer, far from implying a subordinate nature actually proved his full divinity. Thirdly, they stressed that the work of the Trinity (especially with respect to creation) was to be seen as a joint action produced by the co-operation of all three persons. Thus the instrumentality of the Son was seen as his particular contribution to the Trinitarian action in creation rather than as a delegated task to a subordinate.

As we have seen, the challenges of both Gnosticism (for Irenaeus) and the Arian controversy (for Athanasius and the Cappadocians) led to a tendency to downplay Christ’s unique role as creator and sustainer of the cosmos, as depicted in scripture. Some traces of the unique role played by Christ in creation can still be found in the later authors, particularly in Gregory of Nyssa’s work,⁵⁶ but the predominant emphasis was on the unity of the actions of all three persons of the Godhead.

⁵⁶ See n.45

Christ as the Principle of Cosmic Order and Harmony

Unlike Christ's role as creator and sustainer of the cosmos, scripture says less on Christ's role as the bringer of cosmic order and nothing about his role as bringing (musical) harmony from the universe. The emphasis on order and harmony to be found in the authors studied in this paper can instead be seen as predominantly a result of the influence of the Greek mindset during the Patristic period.

Order and harmony were certainly pleasing concepts to the Greeks, and the phenomenon of cosmic order leading to musical harmony seems to have been an accepted fact, especially in Pythagorean circles.⁵⁷ The Stoic and Middle Platonist concept of the Logos was again closely tied in with cosmic order and harmony, as we shall see, and the passages in which the role of Christ as bringer of order and harmony are most strongly affirmed have strong similarities with the works of Philo and/or Middle Platonist texts of the time. The work of Clement of Alexandria is especially noticeable in this respect.

For the purposes of this paper, the various authors will be considered in three sections. Firstly Clement, on whom philosophical influence is most clearly seen, then (briefly) Athanasius, and finally Irenaeus and the Cappadocians will be considered together.⁵⁸

Clement

At the beginning of his apologetic exhortation to the educated citizens of Alexandria, Clement sets out a description of the person of the Word in terms of his role as the one who brings cosmic order and harmony. Clement's intention is to show that his message is not merely one based on human reasoning but it is the gospel of the cosmic harmoniser-Word himself. The passage is worth quoting in full:

[The Word/Song] also composed the universe into melodious order, and tuned the discord of the elements to harmonious arrangement, so that the whole world might become harmony. It let loose the fluid ocean, and yet has prevented it from encroaching on the land. The earth, again, which had been in a state of commotion, it has established, and fixed the sea as its boundary. The violence of fire it has softened by the atmosphere, as the Dorian is blended with the Lydian strain; and the harsh cold of the air it has moderated by the embrace of fire, harmoniously arranging these the extreme tones of the universe. And this deathless strain, the support of the whole and the harmony of all, reaching from the centre to the circumference, and from the extremities to the central part, has harmonized this universal frame of things, not according to the Thracian music, which is like that invented by Jubal, but according to the paternal counsel of God, which fired the zeal of David.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Heine points out that 'The theory that the universe was a musically harmonious whole was a Pythagorean doctrine' – Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, p.89 n.13

⁵⁸ Justin (in his *First and Second Apology* and the *Dialogue with Trypho*) makes only one specific reference to 'God's ordering all things through Christ' - *2 Apol.* 6 (ANF, Vol.1, p.190a) - without further elaboration.

⁵⁹ *Prot.* 1 (ANF, Vol.2, p.172b)

Clement's account shows that the Word is actively involved in the composition of the universe 'into melodious order'. The Word also ensures that the elemental opposites (earth/ air and fire/ water) were tuned into harmony, rather than clashing discordantly or annihilating each other as was to be expected. But not only are the base 'elements' of creation harmonised, but the bounds of sea and earth are also set by the Word. Such a musically harmonious account of creation would be especially appealing to philosophers such as Numenius who represent the branch of the Middle Platonist tradition which C. Stead describes as 'owning a special respect to Pythagoras'.⁶⁰

Clement's account also depicts the (song of the) Word as the 'support and harmony of all' and explains that his influence is truly universal, reaching 'from the centre to the circumference, and from the extremities to the central part' and harmonising all 'according to the paternal counsel of God'. As with the Word's involvement in creation itself, his task here in creating and maintaining cosmic harmony is clearly a delegated task which he performs on behalf of the Father and under his watchful guise.

For Clement, part of the Word's work as bringer of cosmic harmony is to bring humanity into harmony with God. The achievement of human salvation is also described in terms of harmony and can perhaps be seen as one movement in the cosmic symphony. For example, Clement continues in the *Protreptikos* by exhorting his audience in the following manner:

Let us haste to salvation, to regeneration; let us who are many haste that we may be brought together into one love, according to the union of the essential unity; and let us, by being made good, conformably follow after union, seeking after the good Monad. The union of many in one, issuing in the production of divine harmony out of a medley of sounds and division, becomes one symphony following one choir-leader and teacher, the Word, reaching and resting in the same truth, and crying Abba, Father.⁶¹

Salvation for Clement is a return to the Monad (from the multiplicity of the created world), unity instead of diversity.⁶² In this process, the Word acts like a choir-leader harmonising the 'medley of sounds and division' into one symphony. Just as the Word bring the opposing elements together into cosmic harmony, so he longs to bring diverse humanity into harmony with the Father.

The same sense of salvation and unity is again found in Clement's *Stromateis*, where he describes the supreme unity of the Word:

For He is the circle of all powers rolled and united into one unity. Wherefore the Word is called the Alpha and the Omega, of whom alone the end becomes beginning, and ends again at the original beginning without any break. Wherefore also to believe in Him, and by Him, is to become a unit, being indissolubly united in Him; and to disbelieve is to be separated, disjoined, divided.⁶³

The Word is described in 'circular' terms since, according to Aristotelian thought, the circle is the perfect line without a break and supremely demonstrates the concept of unity.⁶⁴ Clement therefore portrays belief in the Word as a participation in the supreme unity of the Word, which would be a pleasing concept for the Greek mind.

⁶⁰ C. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.66

⁶¹ *Prot.* 9 (ANF, Vol.2, p.197a)

⁶² The idea of the ultimate source as the Monad is a Pythagorean concept - Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, p.56

⁶³ *Strom.* 4.25 (ANF, Vol.2, p.438a)

⁶⁴ E. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p.43

As has already been pointed out,⁶⁵ such language of harmony and unity does not owe its origins directly to scripture, but instead, the opening passage to the *Protreptikos* shows a debt to a number of different sources especially Philo and Middle Platonism.

The influence of Philo on this passage is undeniable, as can be seen from a comparison with a passage from Philo's *De Plantatione*.⁶⁶ In Philo's text it is the 'eternal law of the everlasting God' who fulfils the roles of being the support and foundation of the universe and extends from the centre to the circumference. It also ensures the four 'elements' do not annihilate each other, sets appropriate boundaries between the elements and ensures that universal harmony results. Clement is undoubtedly in debt to Philo for his understanding of the work of the Logos as bringer of cosmic harmony.

An additional source of influence on Clement could be directly from the work of the Middle Platonists. Lilla mentions two authors in particular whose ideas seem similar to those expounded by Clement. The principle of a 'power or Logos which goes through the whole universe, holds it together and is the cause of its harmony' Lilla attributes to Plutarch.⁶⁷ In addition, according to Lilla, Albinus possessed a concept of the world-soul which 'is extended from the centre up to the extremities of the universe, comprehends it in itself, and holds it together; moreover, its $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$... is the cause of the order of the universe'.⁶⁸ So, just as Clement's understanding of the Logos as agent of the transcendent God in the work of creation has been shown to be philosophically influenced, the same can be said for his concept of the Word as bringer of cosmic harmony.

Clement returns to the topic of the ordering of the cosmos by the Word in the *Stromateis*⁶⁹ but this time the analogy he uses is that of a helmsman of a ship. Clement describes the Son as holding 'the helm of the universe' in a tireless manner, and explains that he has been charged with the task of the 'holy administration' of creation. Lilla again provides a useful insight into a potential source of Clement's use of the 'helmsman of the universe' analogy by explaining that 'Numenius compares his demiurge (namely the $\delta\epsilon\upsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$) to the helmsman, in so far as the helmsman guides his ship.'⁷⁰

In summary, Clement possesses a strong sense in which the universe is administered by the Word, who ensures that the 'elemental opposites' do not annihilate each other but are held together in creative tension. The Word actively brings positive order from the universe, and through his orchestration, musical harmony and symphony are miraculously produced out of the potential chaos which the Greek mindset would expect from the multiplicity of creation. His exhortation to salvation is an exhortation to a return to unity resulting in harmony – a harmony which is demonstrated by the universe. A further analogy used by Clement is that of the Word as the helmsman of the universe. In seeing the Word as the person responsible for cosmic order and harmony, Clement's language is clearly influenced by Stoic/ Platonist concepts which have reached him through either Philo, the Middle Platonists, or a combination of routes.

Athanasius

Athanasius' concept of Christ as the principle of cosmic order and harmony will only be covered briefly in this paper, as the topic has been covered in a previous essay.⁷¹

Athanasius possesses a very similar understanding of the role of Christ as the bringer of cosmic order and harmony to that shown by Clement and, moreover, he uses exactly the same analogies.

⁶⁵ See p.4

⁶⁶ *De Plantatione* 8-10 'Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter' in C.D. Yonge (trans), *The Works of Philo* (Hendrickson, 1993), p.191b

⁶⁷ Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, p.211

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.212

⁶⁹ *Strom.* 7.2 (ANF, Vol.2, p.524a)

⁷⁰ Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, p.212

⁷¹ See *The Cosmic Christ in Athanasius' Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*

Athanasius describes the Word as a ‘supreme steersman [who] guides and orders the universe for our salvation’.⁷² The Word mixes the opposing pairs of ‘elements’ together ensuring that ‘euphonious harmony’ rather than discord or annihilation results,⁷³ and he sets the proper boundaries of land and sea ensuring that ‘the sea and the great ocean keep their movement within their proper limits’.⁷⁴ The Word ensures cosmic harmony by his active playing of the universe, and in this role Athanasius describes him as ‘holding the universe like a lyre’⁷⁵ which he plays just like a musician by ‘skilfully combining the bass and the sharp notes’.⁷⁶ The Word is also described as like a leader of a choir, who despite the different ages and genders of the choir manages to ensure that ‘they all produce a single harmony’⁷⁷ just as he ensures the harmony of the cosmos.

In his use of the same analogies as Clement, Athanasius shows the influence of the language of his Alexandrian predecessor. However, in Athanasius’ account there is absolutely no sense of the cosmic ordering and orchestration being a delegated task assigned to a subordinate, as is found with Clement. Instead, Athanasius manages to retain a strong sense of the orchestration of cosmic order and harmony being merely a specific task of the divine Son, without any implied subordinacy.

Irenaeus and the Cappadocians

The concept of the universe as being composed into a state of (musical) harmony is a theme which is also found in the works of Irenaeus and the Cappadocians. However, whereas Clement and Athanasius attribute this work specifically to the person of the Logos or the Son, Irenaeus and the Cappadocians predominantly see this as a work of the entire Godhead working in unison. However, the sense of Christ possessing a special role as the bringer of cosmic order and harmony is not completely absent, but crops up on a number of occasions in Gregory of Nyssa’s work.

For Irenaeus, the demonstrable harmony of the cosmos is due to God’s wisdom which ‘[is shown] in His having made created things parts of one harmonious and consistent whole’.⁷⁸ Again, the sense of amazement is present that the multiplicity evident in creation could be moulded into harmony:

But since created things are various and numerous, they are indeed well fitted and adapted to the whole creation; yet, when viewed individually, are mutually opposite and inharmonious, just as the sound of the lyre, which consists of many and opposite notes, gives rise to one unbroken melody, through means of the interval which separates each one from the others.⁷⁹

Irenaeus uses the analogy of the Lyre to show how diversity can result in harmony, but he is quick to point out that the different strings do not indicate the presence of multiple craftsmen, just as the multiplicity of the universe does not indicate the presence of many creators.⁸⁰ Instead, the melody of the universe is an exhortation to us not to abandon ‘the [one] artist, nor casting off faith in the one God who formed all things’.⁸¹

⁷² CG 40 (R. W. Thomson (ed. and trans.), *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.111) - cf. *Strom.* 7.2 (ANF, Vol.2, p.524a)

⁷³ CG 42 (Thomson, p.115) - cf. *Prot.* 1 (ANF, Vol.2, p.172b)

⁷⁴ CG 42 (Thomson, p.117)- cf. *Prot.* 1 (ANF, Vol.2, p.172b)

⁷⁵ CG 42 (Thomson, p.117) - cf. *Prot.* 1 (ANF, Vol.2, p.172b)

⁷⁶ CG 42 (Thomson, p.117)

⁷⁷ CG 43 (Thomson, p.119) - cf. *Prot.* 9 (ANF, Vol.2, p.197a)

⁷⁸ *Adv. Haer.* 4.38.3 (ANF, Vol.1, p.521b)

⁷⁹ *Adv. Haer.* 2.25.2 (ANF, Vol.1, p.396b)

⁸⁰ The analogy of the beautiful sight and sound of a lyre as proof of the existence of its one creator is also mentioned by Gregory of Nazianzus - *Or.* 28.6 (*On God and Christ*, pp.40-1)

⁸¹ *Adv. Haer.* 2.25.2 (ANF, Vol.1, p.396b)

Irenaeus' concern to stress the unity of God's action in creation means that he assigns the role of cosmic lyre player to the one God, rather than specifically to Christ. Just as the work of creating and sustaining the world needs to be seen as the work of God and his two hands, so the work of generating cosmic harmony is a unified task of the entire Godhead too.

The musical harmony of the universe as a testimony to the creative activity of the *entire* Godhead is a theme continued in the work of the Cappadocians. In the *Hexaemeron*, for example, Basil describes how 'Moses almost shows us the finger of the supreme artisan taking possession of the substance of the universe ... and making a harmonious symphony result from the whole.'⁸²

Shortly afterwards, Basil goes on to explain that it is 'God' who formed the four elements and 'established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony [so that they] ... appeared united in one universal sympathy.'⁸³ And again, the task of setting the boundary between the land and sea is also attributed to God, or rather to God's 'ineffable wisdom'⁸⁴ (but not in the sense of a 'person' of wisdom). Gregory of Nazianzus too, in his discussion on the doctrine of God in *Or.* 28 asks his audience who ordered the universe and 'combined these elements and divided them out'.⁸⁵ His reply to his own question is simply 'God'.

Another passage which provides an excellent demonstration of the shift of the role of cosmic ordering and harmonising from the Son to the unified Godhead is found in Gregory of Nyssa's 'On the soul and the Resurrection'.⁸⁶ In this passage, the same concerns which Philo attributed to the *hypostatic* 'eternal law of the everlasting God' in *De Plantatione* 8-10⁸⁷ and which Clement assigned to the *person* of the Word in *Protreptikos* 1⁸⁸ are here attributed to 'Divine power' – the unified action of the Godhead in creation. The Godhead (as opposed to the Word) ensures that the union of 'elemental opposites' results in harmony rather than discord or annihilation and is present in an all-encompassing manner.

So far, the picture has been painted of the Irenaeian and Cappadocian tendency to attribute cosmic harmony to 'God' (understood as the whole Godhead working in unity) as opposed to Christ. However, despite the general trend to place less focus on the person of Christ as bringer of cosmic order and harmony in these later works, Gregory of Nyssa does still hint at this being a specific role of Christ in his *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* and his *Catechetical Oration*.

In *Eccl. hom.* 1, Gregory explains that 'the true Ecclesiast [is] he who collects into one body what has been scattered and assembles (ecclesiazon) into one whole those who have been led astray'.⁸⁹ From this, he deduces that 'Ecclesiast' is therefore an appropriate title for the Son. In *Eccl. hom.* 2, Gregory lists the title of 'Ecclesiast' alongside the Son's scriptural titles, and explains the marshalling role of the 'Ecclesiast':

This is the one who calls himself Ecclesiast, just as he calls himself *Physician*, and *Life*, and *Resurrection*, and *Light*, and *Way*, and *Door* and *Truth*, and all the names of his love for human kind ... Let us then hear his words, we who are the Church. As the chorus looks to its conductor, the rowers to the helmsman, and an army in line to its general, so we who belong to the ecclesial congregation (the Church) look to the Ecclesiast.⁹⁰

⁸² *Hex.* 1.7 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.56a)

⁸³ *Hex.* 2.2 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.60a)

⁸⁴ *Hex.* 3.6 (NPNF², Vol.8, p.68b)

⁸⁵ *Or.* 28.16 (*On God and Christ*, p.49)

⁸⁶ *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (NPNF², Vol.5, pp.432b-433a)

⁸⁷ See p.13

⁸⁸ See p.11

⁸⁹ *Eccl. hom.* 1 (S. G. Hall (ed.), *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, p.34)

⁹⁰ *Eccl. hom.* 2 (Hall, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, p.48)

Since the audience for the Ecclesiast is naturally the 'Ecclesia' (Church) Gregory explains the Son's role as conductor, helmsman or general of the *Church*. All eyes are on him as the centre of the Church's attention. But, the influence of The Ecclesiast is even greater than merely calling together the Church. At the start of *Eccl. hom 3*, Gregory summarises his first two homilies on Ecclesiastes by referring to 'this Ecclesiast, who calls together the whole creation'⁹¹ – the collecting, assembling and guiding role of the Ecclesiast is not merely restricted to the Church, but is truly *cosmic* in its extent. His choice of terms to describe the Son's role in *Eccl. hom. 2* echoes the favourite terms of the Middle Platonists, Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius in describing the Logos/Son as the helmsman of the universe. For Gregory Christ is the 'Ecclesiast' of the cosmos.

An additional passage, from Gregory of Nyssa's *Catechetical Oration*, shows that this reference to Christ as sole bringer of cosmic harmony is not an isolated occurrence and is covered in detail in the final section (p.28 ff).

Summary

For the two Alexandrian authors (Clement and Athanasius), the Word is clearly the instrument of cosmic order and harmony. The language used by both authors clearly owes a debt to Philo and/or Middle Platonist thought in their descriptions of the Son as cosmic helmsman and choir leader. However, despite the similarity of their language, the two authors differ in their understanding of what the Son's role as cosmic harmoniser implies about his status. For Clement, the Son is understood as carrying out a (delegated) task on behalf of the Father. For Athanasius, however, the Son's role as cosmic harmoniser is fully compatible with his equal status with the Father.

Clement uses the Word's role as cosmic harmoniser as part of his exhortation to faith in Christ. Belief in the one who is the cosmic harmoniser will result in the achievement of salvation which he describes as the attainment of personal harmony and unity with the Monad. Clement is deliberately portraying salvation in terms appealing to the Greek mindset of the day.

The prime concern for Irenaeus and the Cappadocians, is to show the unity of the Godhead in his dealings with creation, which results in a much reduced emphasis on the sole role of Christ as cosmic harmoniser. Instead, this work is predominantly seen as belonging to the entire Godhead. However, despite this, Gregory of Nyssa's work does show signs of an appreciation of Christ's particular cosmic contribution in this area.

⁹¹ *Eccl. hom. 3* (Hall, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, p.59)

Manifestations of the Cosmic Christ

Having seen how the various authors understand and describe the cosmic role of Christ in creating, sustaining and ensuring harmony, in this chapter we shall investigate how such an understanding affects their view of the various manifestations of Christ.

On a number of occasions in the Old Testament, Patriarchs such as Moses, Abraham and Jacob are recorded as experiencing a theophany (manifestation of the Divine). For the authors under consideration in this paper, these theophanies were manifestations of the Logos. In addition, particularly for Justin and Clement, the Logos was present before the incarnation, in inspiring *all* of humanity (especially by giving the Law to the Hebrews and philosophy to the Greeks).

Most importantly, for all of the authors considered here, the incarnation does not represent God's *novel* interest or manifestation in the world, but must be seen as part of his ongoing providential care and interaction. They share with Teilhard de Chardin the feeling that:

The prodigious expanses of time which preceded the first Christmas were not empty of Christ: they were imbued with the influx of his power ... When Christ first appeared before men in the arms of Mary he had already stirred up the world.⁹²

In this chapter we will examine the manifestations of the Logos both before the incarnation and in the event of the incarnation itself to see what information this provides with respect to the authors' understanding of the cosmic omnipresence and sovereignty of Christ.

Justin

For Justin, as we have seen, the Logos was the agent through whom God's will was accomplished in the task of creation – he is the cosmic creator and the one who brings order to the cosmos. But Justin also draws on, or illustrates, the cosmic role of the Logos when considering three different sorts of interactions with (or manifestations to) humanity.

Firstly, Justin sees that the cosmic presence of the Logos results in a universal impact on humanity:

We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus ... and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias ... and Elias, and many others.⁹³

All people are 'reasonable' (with the dual sense of partaking of the principle of reason and the person of the Logos) and it is this quality which distinguishes us from (irrational) animals. In this passage, Justin explains that the cosmic dimensions of the Logos are made manifest by his universal inspiration of all people. He is not simply present in all of the cosmos, but by virtue of his being the principle of reason, all of humanity also shares in him. In this passage, Justin is making an appeal for the universality of the Christian faith, based on the fact of the Logos' pre-incarnation inspiration of all. So, far from being seen as a novelty, or merely another religion, Christianity is the religion of the Reason of the cosmos, who inspires all.

⁹² Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins, 1965), pp.76-7

⁹³ 1 *Apol.* 46 (ANF, Vol.1, p.178b)

Secondly, Justin sees that the universal presence of the Logos was made especially manifest in the teaching of the Jewish prophets and Greek philosophers (where compatible with Christianity). The best of Greek wisdom was the result of philosophers ‘contemplating some part of the Word’⁹⁴ but any shortcomings in their understanding was due to the fact that ‘they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ’.⁹⁵ This point comes out well in his *Second Apology*, when discussing the teachings of Plato, the Stoics and others:

For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it. But they who contradict themselves on the more important points appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom, and the knowledge which cannot be spoken against. Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians ... For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them.⁹⁶

The ‘spermatic word’ was not only universally present in all people, but he was made especially manifest, before the incarnation, in moments of ‘true’ teaching. Although for Justin all of humanity shares in the Word, some have been particularly inspired and these moments can perhaps be considered as extra special revelations of the Logos. The same applies to the Old Testament prophets who were also especially inspired. Their words were not their own, but they spoke ‘by the Divine Word who moves them.’⁹⁷ The words of the prophets are also therefore to be considered as another special manifestation of the Logos.

The third example of pre-incarnation manifestations of the Logos occurred, according to Justin, in the Old Testament theophanies. Justin sees the cosmic Word as having been made especially manifest in the appearances to the Patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁹⁸

These three types of pre-incarnation manifestations of the Logos are precursors to the supreme manifestation of the Logos, which occurred in the event of the incarnation. For Justin, the incarnation can be considered as compatible with, and a natural extension of, the pre-incarnation manifestations. As L. Barnard explains ‘In Mary’s womb the cosmic Reason had become available to men as a human being of flesh and blood. Justin nowhere argues why this has happened - he accepts it as a fact.’⁹⁹

The main point which Justin draws from the incarnation is one which has direct impact on the work of apology in which he is engaged. Put simply, because the incarnation is a manifestation of the person of cosmic Reason, Christian teaching is the supreme teaching. So, whilst Jewish and philosophical teaching were useful precursors, they can now be seen for what they are - merely partial aspects of the one who is the Reason of the cosmos and who became manifest in the incarnation. This is why ‘Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being, both body, and reason, and soul.’¹⁰⁰

In Justin’s work, we can see the outline of the ideas which were picked up and explored in more depth by Clement, to whom we now turn.

⁹⁴ 2 *Apol.* 10 (ANF, Vol.1, p.191b)

⁹⁵ 2 *Apol.* 10 (ANF, Vol.1, p.191b)

⁹⁶ 2 *Apol.* 12 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.192b-193a)

⁹⁷ 1 *Apol.* 36 (ANF, Vol.1, p.175a)

⁹⁸ *Dial.* 127 (ANF, Vol.1, p.263b)

⁹⁹ Barnard, *Justin Martyr*, p.118

¹⁰⁰ 2 *Apol.* 10 (ANF, Vol.1, p.191b)

Clement

For Clement, the most important title of the Word is ‘Teacher’, and the whole of his second extant work *Paedagogus* concerns the teaching of the Instructor-Word. As H. Chadwick comments, ‘Clement brings everything under the single principle of the education of mankind’.¹⁰¹ The emphasis for Clement is not on the cross, death and resurrection of Christ as restorative or salvific but on the delivery of true teaching to mankind.

This was accomplished before the incarnation by the gift of philosophy for the Greeks and law for the Jews which were provided as ‘schoolmasters’ by the Logos.¹⁰² However, the event of the incarnation sees the advent of the supreme teaching from the Teacher himself. The incarnation is essentially a revelatory mission of the Creator and Teacher-Logos:

This is the New Song, the manifestation of the Word that was in the beginning, and before the beginning. The Saviour, who existed before, has in recent days appeared ... for the Word, who “was with God,” and by whom all things were created, has appeared as our Teacher. The Word, who in the beginning bestowed on us life as Creator when He formed us, taught us to live well when He appeared as our Teacher ... He did not now for the first time pity us for our error; but He pitied us from the first, from the beginning. But now, at His appearance, lost as we already were, He accomplished our salvation.¹⁰³

In this passage, Clement is keen to stress that the event of the incarnation both represents something new, yet also is a demonstration of a timeless ‘old’ reality. The incarnation is undoubtedly a new thing with regard to revelation, indeed Clement describes it as a ‘New Song’. However, the newness is merely with regard to the manifestation of the Word in the incarnation. The incarnation is a novel time-bound *revelation* of the Creator-Word – a visible appearance of the Word who has *always* been concerned for humanity and who existed ‘before the beginning’. In his presentation, Clement was surely conscious that Christianity was seen as a new religion, and Christians were accused of abandoning the faith of their ancestors (i.e. Judaism).¹⁰⁴ By stressing the cosmic dimensions of the Word, Clement seems to be hinting at the antiquity of the Christian faith due to its foundation on the creator of the cosmos himself.

Clement is also keen to highlight the cosmic credentials of the Teacher to emphasise the importance of his teaching. Naturally this also adds weight to Clement’s own message which is an exhortation to listen to the Instructor. Clement continues in *Protreptikos* 11¹⁰⁵ to explain the implications of the arrival of the Teacher. Whilst philosophy may have proved useful in the past as a guide, the arrival of the Teacher means that mere human learning is obsolete – Christianity is the teaching of the Teacher who possesses cosmic credentials. He has already ‘filled the universe with his holy energies’¹⁰⁶ in his cosmic work, and in the incarnation he has come to fill the world with his teaching. The advent of wisdom and teaching from heaven (conveyed by the Teacher) means an end to mere human speculation. His cosmic credentials serve to back up his message.

¹⁰¹ Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, p.50

¹⁰² *Strom.* 1.5 (ANF, Vol.2, p.305b)

¹⁰³ *Prot.* 1 (ANF, Vol.2, p.173a)

¹⁰⁴ W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p.206

¹⁰⁵ *Prot.* 11 (ANF, Vol.2, p.203a)

¹⁰⁶ *Prot.* 11 (ANF, Vol.2, p.203a)

The extent of the Word's teaching is also emphasised at the conclusion of the last of the three books of the *Paedagogus*. Just before his final closing prayer and hymn to the Paedagogus, Clement ponders the transformative and taming power of the Word. The Word is the one who trains and transforms animals and creates the universe. But his training and transforming work extend still further to embrace humanity, and even further, to the limits of the whole world. He is 'the Creator of the world and of man: and of Himself, now the world's Instructor'.¹⁰⁷ The same being through whom the entire universe subsists, is also the one from whom the universe receives its instruction. The same sentiment is found in the *Stromateis* where the Word is referred to as the 'Teacher of all created beings, the Fellow-counsellor of God, who foreknew all things; and He from above, from the first foundation of the world'.¹⁰⁸ For Clement, the Teacher-Word does not just possess cosmic credentials, but can even be described as the Teacher of the entire cosmos and all created beings.

A final point to make concerns the irresistibility of the Son's teaching. Clement holds a high view of man's free will and therefore it would be inconceivable for the Word to force his teaching onto people. However, there is a strong sense in which Word's teaching is *almost* irresistible. When speaking of the Word who 'holds the helm of the universe'¹⁰⁹ Clement explains that 'all men are His; some through knowledge, and others not yet so; and some as friends, some as faithful servants, some as servants merely'.¹¹⁰ There is a strong sense of inescapability in Clement's description of the Son. The Son is the Lord, Saviour and Teacher of all, whether acknowledged by all or not. All are taught by the Teacher by means of 'corrective discipline' if necessary.

Irenaeus

In the work of Irenaeus, just as with Justin and Clement, we find the same idea expressed that the incarnation was not the start of the Word's revelatory work. Irenaeus explains in *Adv. Haer.* 4.6.6 that 'by means of the creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator; and by means of the world [does He declare] the Lord the Maker of the world'.¹¹¹ The work of the Word as cosmic creator is partly a manifestation of the Father.

Irenaeus continues to expound the same topic in the next paragraph as he comments on Matthew 11:27 ('No man knows the Son, but the Father; nor the Father, save the Son, and those to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him'):

For "shall reveal" was said not with reference to the future alone, as if then [only] the Word had begun to manifest the Father when He was born of Mary, but it applies indifferently throughout all time. For the Son, being present with His own handiwork from the beginning, reveals the Father to all; to whom He wills, and when He wills, and as the Father wills.¹¹²

For Irenaeus, part of the Son's role is to 'manifest' the Father – a task which is naturally accomplished in the incarnation. But Irenaeus also points out that the Son's role as cosmic creator and sustainer is actually also a pre-incarnation revelation of the Father. The Son *perpetually* reveals the Father not merely from his craftsmanship but through 'being present with His own handiwork from the beginning'.

Turning our attention to the event of the incarnation in Irenaeus' work, there are two main passages of particular interest to our current topic (*Adv. Haer.* 3.16.6 and 5.18.3). Both of these passages show that for Irenaeus, the incarnation was an act with cosmic ramifications, but subtle differences in emphasis are present in each.

¹⁰⁷ *Paed.* 3.12 (ANF, Vol.2, p.295a)

¹⁰⁸ *Strom.* 6.7 (ANF, Vol.2, p.493b)

¹⁰⁹ *Strom.* 7.2 (ANF, Vol.2, p.524a)

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Adv. Haer.* 4.6.6 (ANF, Vol.1, p.469a)

¹¹² *Adv. Haer.* 4.6.7 (ANF, Vol.1, p.469b)

The first passage is *Adv. Haer.* 3.16.6 in which Irenaeus outlines the totality of the recapitulation ('summing up') wrought by Christ:

But in every respect, too, He is man, the formation of God; and thus He took up man into Himself, the invisible becoming visible, the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impassible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man, thus summing up all things in Himself: so that as in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things, the Word of God is supreme, so also in things visible and corporeal He might possess the supremacy, and, taking to Himself the pre-eminence, as well as constituting Himself Head of the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at the proper time.¹¹³

In this passage, Irenaeus explains that the incarnation is an act which *actively extends* the supremacy of the Word into the visible realm. The Word is already supreme 'in super-celestial, spiritual, and invisible things' and the event of the incarnation furthers his supremacy into the other half of reality - the 'realm of things visible and corporeal'.

There is a sense in which the incarnation is a 'necessary' act to extend the supremacy of Christ into the visible world. At the point of incarnation, the two realms of the cosmos (visible and invisible) have been brought together in Christ. The incarnation is the ascension of the cosmic king to his (visible) throne and by virtue of his sovereignty in both realms, he becomes the meeting point of the visible & invisible, incomprehensible & comprehensible. The incarnation is required for the totality of recapitulation to be accomplished.

The second passage in which Irenaeus explores the cosmic ramifications and revelatory aspects of the Word's achievement occurs in *Adv. Haer.* 5.18.3:

For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore He came to His own (region)¹¹⁴ in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that He might sum up all things in Himself ... For it is He who has power from the Father over all things, since He is the Word of God, and very man, communicating with invisible beings after the manner of the intellect, and appointing a law observable to the outward senses, that all things should continue each in its own order; and He reigns manifestly over things visible and pertaining to men; and brings in just judgment and worthy upon all.¹¹⁵

This passage demonstrates similar concerns to the previous one, but this time the focus is less on the necessity of the incarnation to extend the reign of the Word. Instead, there is a 'sacramental' feel to the incarnation in this description. The supremacy of Christ is *already an objective reality* in both the invisible world and the visible realm. By virtue of his status as the cosmic creator who governs, arranges, contains and is inherent in all things, the whole visible realm is *already* his.

¹¹³ *Adv. Haer.* 3.16.6 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.442b-443a)

¹¹⁴ The additional word 'region' is included in R.M. Grant's translation of this passage which helps to emphasise the sense of the dominion of Christ. See R.M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.170

¹¹⁵ *Adv. Haer.* 5.18.3 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.546b-547a)

In a sense, the incarnation can be considered as ‘merely’ a visible outward sign of the real situation which means that, as Osborn points out, ‘the life of Christ is indeed a *parousia*, nothing less than an immediate manifestation of God.¹¹⁶ The term *parousia* seems particularly fitting in this context with the connotation of not merely ‘being present’ but also being the technical term for the visitation of a king.¹¹⁷ The incarnation is simply the visitation of the king ‘to His own region in a visible manner’ (in which he was already sovereign in an invisible manner).

The subtly different interpretations given for these two passages are by no means opposed to each other but are totally complimentary. Irenaeus can perhaps be seen to be exploring different aspects of a paradox – Christ is both already sovereign, and yet the incarnation makes his sovereignty manifest. In both passages, however, whatever the interpretation, Irenaeus sees the acts of both incarnation and recapitulation as ‘fitting’ for the creator-Word.

Athanasius & Gregory of Nyssa

In the apologetic works of both Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa,¹¹⁸ the incarnation presented a problem – how could God become man? How could the incarnation be a ‘suitable’ event for the Deity? As part of their defence of the incarnation, both authors appealed to the continuing cosmic presence of the Son to justify the *specific* manifestation of Christ in the incarnation.

Athanasius tackles this topic in *DI 8* (which has been covered in an earlier paper)¹¹⁹ whilst Gregory takes a similar approach in his *Catechetical Oration*. His punch line is:

If, then, all things exist in him and he exists in all things, why are they shocked at a scheme of revelation which teaches that God became man, when we believe that even now he is not external to man?¹²⁰

God (specifically the Word) has been present in all of creation from the beginning, this is necessary for creation simply to remain ‘in being’. Gregory’s defence of the divine suitability of the incarnation rests on the fact of Christ’s ongoing work as cosmic creator and sustainer. The cosmic dimensions of Christ are the very grounds for both Gregory and Athanasius’ defence of the incarnation, and in a sense the incarnation is ‘merely’ one manifestation of Christ who has been made manifest through his work of cosmic creating and sustaining from the beginning.

Summary

For Justin, the Logos has been active throughout history, not just in his creative agency, but also in his inspiration of all people. The Law and the ‘correct’ aspects of Greek philosophy are a result of his pre-incarnate inspirational work as are the words of the prophets. The old Testament theophanies are also manifestations of his cosmic presence before the event of the incarnation, which is the supreme manifestation.

Clement shares Justin’s view that the Logos has been continually at work before the incarnation, but characteristically interprets this as a work of teaching. The incarnation is the supreme manifestation of the Teacher-Logos whose teaching credentials are impeccable due to his role as the Creator-Word. His teaching is also cosmic in its extent – he is the ‘teacher of all created beings’¹²¹ as well as ‘the world’s Instructor’¹²² – and is *almost* irresistible. Both Justin and Clement also hint that Christianity, by being based on the Logos as the immanent principle of reason in the cosmos, is not a new religion.

¹¹⁶ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, p.112

¹¹⁷ G. Abbot-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999)

¹¹⁸ Athanasius: *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione*, Gregory of Nyssa: *Catechetical Oration*

¹¹⁹ See *The Cosmic Christ in Athanasius’ Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, p.17

¹²⁰ *Or. cat.* 25 (Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p.302)

¹²¹ *Strom.* 6.7 (ANF, Vol.2, p.493b)

¹²² *Paed.* 3.12 (ANF, Vol.2, p.295a)

Irenaeus also sees the incarnation as part of the continuing revelatory activity of the Logos. Both his craftsmanship and presence in creation have been a testimony to the Father from the beginning. It is possible to read the 'cosmic' aspect of Irenaeus' description of the incarnation in two subtly distinct but complimentary ways. Either as a necessary act which actively extends his dominion into the visible realm, or as a sacramental manifestation of an underlying reality.

Finally, both Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa rely on the Word's cosmic omnipresence as the very grounds of their defence of the incarnation in their apologetic works. The specific event of the incarnation is 'fitting' for the Word as he has always been cosmically present from the beginning.

The Cosmic Dimensions of the Cross

The symbol of the cross is important for almost all of the main authors considered in this paper. The only exception is Clement, for whom the cross is surprisingly understated in his work.¹²³ As we have seen, for the Alexandrian teacher, it is the teaching of Christ the Instructor-Logos which is salvific and restorative, rather than the passion and resurrection of the cross and one assumes that this is the reason for his lack of comment on the cosmic dimensions of the cross.

Each of the remaining authors will be considered separately, but as the chapter progresses, the similarities in their understanding of the cosmic dimensions of the cross will become apparent. Throughout this chapter, one particular passage of scripture from Colossians is alluded to on a number of occasions:

He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, to become in all things supreme. For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross—all things, whether on earth or in heaven.¹²⁴

For Paul, Christ is not merely the creator but also the ‘binding agent’ for the cosmos, holding everything together. He is supreme in all things, the cosmic focal point and the one who reconciles all and brings all into unity. The Patristic authors under consideration explore and build on all of these concepts using the cross as their visual aid in the process.

Justin

For Justin, the cross is yet another demonstration of the universality of the presence of Christ the Logos incarnate. In 1 *Apol.* 55, Justin discusses the universality of the shape of the cross in all things, seeing this ‘greatest symbol of his power and rule’¹²⁵ in objects as diverse as a ship’s mast, the shape of a plough, the human form with outstretched arms, and in military banners. It is inconceivable that such earthly things ‘could be administered or have community’¹²⁶ without the geometrical support of the cross in their physical structure. In the same way, Justin hints that the universality of the physical symbol of the cross is an indicator of Christ’s cosmic omnipresence and support.

This hint becomes explicitly stated a few chapters later when Justin explains that Plato plagiarised Moses’ work in the *Timaeus*:

The physiological discussion concerning the Son of God in the *Timaeus* of Plato, where he says, "He placed him crosswise in the universe," he borrowed in like manner from Moses ... (Plato) said that the power next to the first God was placed crosswise in the universe ... (and) he gives the second place to the Logos which is with God, who he said was placed crosswise in the universe.¹²⁷

¹²³ ‘It is noteworthy that Clement’s references to the cross are very few’ – R. Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1990²), p.36

¹²⁴ Colossians 1:17-20

¹²⁵ 1 *Apol.* 55 (ANF, Vol.1, p.181b)

¹²⁶ 1 *Apol.* 55 (ANF, Vol.1, p.181b)

¹²⁷ 1 *Apol.* 60 (ANF, Vol.1, p.183a)

Plato's crosswise reference is to the placing of the 'world-soul' in the universe,¹²⁸ but the mention of the cross shape allows Justin to explicitly connect Plato's concept of the world-soul to his own concept of the Logos thereby inviting direct comparison. As Grillmeier comments:

According to the Platonists, the world-soul is the principle at work in ordering the world, both at creation and in sustaining the world. It has a rational element which is termed Nous, Logos or even ἡ λογικη. Now, according to Justin, Christ as Logos has taken over the working of this cosmological principle.¹²⁹

By deliberate reference to the *Timaeus* in 1 *Apol.* 60, Justin is able to claim Platonic support for the idea of the omnipresence of the Son/ Logos – a useful apologetic tactic. However, Justin seems to be content with using Plato as proof for the Logos as 'the power next to the first God' rather than explicitly capitalising on the connection he makes with Plato's world-soul. The supreme Christian symbol of the cross is used as a bridge to Plato's work, which in turn supports Justin's claim for the cosmic presence of the Logos in the world.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus makes a similar allusion to the *Timaeus*, either indirectly via Justin (since he knew Justin's work) or directly from his own reading of the *Timaeus*. The following passage from *Dem.* 34, occurs in the context of his explanation of the logic of his concept of recapitulation, by which 'the trespass which came by the tree was undone by the tree of obedience':¹³⁰

Now seeing that He is the Word of God Almighty, who in unseen wise in our midst is universally extended in all the world, and encompasses its length and breadth and height and depth – for by the Word of God the whole universe is ordered and disposed – in it is crucified the Son of God, inscribed crosswise upon it all: for it is right that He being made visible, should set upon all things visible the sharing of His cross, that He might show His operation on visible things through a visible form. For He it is who illuminates the height, that is the heavens; and encompasses the deep which is beneath the earth; and stretches and spreads out the length from east to west; and steers across the breadth of north and south; summoning all that are scattered in every quarter to the knowledge of the Father.¹³¹

In contrast to Justin who seems to be merely seeking Platonic support for the omnipresence of the Logos via the connection with the shape of the cross, and leaving the implications to his reader to work out, Irenaeus expends significantly more effort in explicitly unpacking the deeper meaning. Three main points can be seen from this passage.

Firstly, as Osborn rightly comments, 'The cross is an epiphany of cosmic significance for Irenaeus'.¹³² Just as the incarnation has a strong revelatory aspect for Irenaeus, so too the cross is seen as a visible manifestation of an objective invisible spiritual reality – a sacrament. This time, the visible manifestation is of the invisible cosmic ordering of the Word. Just as he is invisibly 'inscribed crosswise upon it all', so the visible manifestation in the crucifixion was 'fitting' – the visible 'inscription' upon creation in the crucifixion paralleling the invisible crosswise inscription. The cross is a visible sign of his invisible 'operation on visible things'. Just as his incarnation was a visible demonstration of the coming of the king to his realm (which was already his), so in the cross we see the objective reality of his hidden cosmic ordering visibly demonstrated.

¹²⁸ *Timaeus* (36BC)

¹²⁹ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p.93

¹³⁰ *Dem.* 34 (Mackenzie, *Irenaeus' Demonstration*, p.11)

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.121

Secondly, besides indicating the universal ordering of the cosmos by the Word, the shape of the cross also indicates the total extent of his cosmic encompassing presence. The cross extends to fill all dimensions, it 'illuminates the height' and 'encompasses the deep' and 'spreads out the length from east to west' and 'across the breadth of north and south'.

The third and final piece of symbolism that Irenaeus draws from the shape of the cross in this passage is an indication of the Son's call to all people to come to a knowledge of the Father. The scripture passage perhaps in the back of his mind at this point is John 12:32, 'And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw everyone to myself'. The outstretched arms of Christ on the cross, the one who 'illuminates' and 'encompasses' the cosmos, form the waiting embrace for the return of all people.

The revelatory and summoning aspects of the cross are also mentioned by Irenaeus in *Adv. Haer.* 5.17.4 in the context of a discussion of Elisha's raising of the iron axe head by a piece of wood.¹³³ The wood Elisha threw into the water raised the iron axe head to the surface, making it visible and returning it to the person who had lost it. Irenaeus provides the following interpretation:

For as we lost [the word of God] by means of a tree, by means of a tree again was it made manifest to all, showing the height, the length, the breadth, the depth in itself; and, as a certain man among our predecessors observed, "Through the extension of the hands of a divine person, gathering together the two peoples to one God." For these were two hands, because there were two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth; but there was one head in the middle, as there is but one God, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.¹³⁴

For Irenaeus, the tree of the cross is a fitting recapitulatory figure as it parallels the tree in the garden of Eden which was the cause of humanity's loss of the Word. The wood of the cross raises the 'axe head' of the Word making him 'manifest to all'. The two meanings which Irenaeus draws from this passage echo those from *Dem.* 34. Firstly, the shape of the cross has a revelatory aspect – it's a demonstration of the cosmic dimensions of the Word. Secondly, the cross is also a place to which people are summoned or gathered. In *Dem.* 34, the summoning was for all people, whereas here the emphasis is on the two different 'halves' of humanity, the Jews and Gentiles. Christ on the cross summons both groups to himself and thereby back to the one God. The description of the cosmic power of the Word hints at his power to achieve this 'gathering together'.

As we have seen, the motif of recapitulation is key in Irenaeus' thought. However, it is important to realise the extent of the recapitulatory work achieved in the life, death and resurrection of Christ according to Irenaeus. The recapitulation wrought by Christ effects not just the restoration of the human condition and the reunion of the two peoples (Jews and Gentiles) but even extends to the entirety of the cosmos. The whole of the *visible* realm is recreated as it witnesses to the manifestation of the (previously invisible) cosmic king in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ.

For Irenaeus, the cosmic dimension to recapitulation is simply the logical outworking of the totality of recapitulation wrought by Christ. This results in his understanding of the literal thousand year earthly reign of Christ (known as millenarianism or chiliasm). Admittedly, as Osborn points out,¹³⁵ Irenaeus only explicitly teaches this towards the end of the fifth book of *Adv. Haer.*, but this does not mean that the concept can be dismissed as a 'foreign body' in his work.

¹³³ 2 Kings 6:6

¹³⁴ *Adv. Haer.* 5.17.4 (ANF, Vol.1, pp.545b-546a)

¹³⁵ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, pp.99-100

Osborn also provides an excellent explanation of how millenarianism fits within Irenaeus' scheme, explaining that:

Irenaeus' eschatology is not an embarrassing postscript but a necessary consequence of a creator God who so surrounds all things (*concludens omnia*) and loves his creature that he becomes incarnate to restore its failings. That restoration completed, Christ inaugurates for ever the renewal of all creation.¹³⁶

For Irenaeus, the creation is not a mistake, nor evil, but a good product of a good creator. Therefore it is fitting for the trajectory of the cosmos (made by the Creator-Word) to lead to its complete renewal by the incarnation, cross and resurrection of the same Creator-Word.

Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus exhibits a similar understanding of the totality of the recapitulation effected by Christ in his second oration (*'In defence of his flight to Pontus'*). In this oration, Gregory outlines the immensity of the priestly role as a reason for his departure after his ordination by his father. As part of the reason for his flight, he explains his unworthiness to testify to the enormity of the work of Christ on the cross:

This is why the heathen rage and the peoples imagine vain things; why tree is set over against tree, hands against hand, the one stretched out in self indulgence, the others in generosity; the one unrestrained, the others fixed by nails, the one expelling Adam, the other reconciling the ends of the earth.¹³⁷

In this passage, which has strong echoes of Irenaeus' thought, Gregory explains that on the cross, Christ was not merely reconciling man and God but 'reconciling the ends of the earth'. The extent of Christ's recapitulatory work is cosmic. The impact of the cross on the cosmos is a topic to which Gregory returns on a number of occasions, and his favourite imagery on these occasions is one of 'cleansing' or 'purifying', which he uses at least three times.¹³⁸

Gregory also describes the effect of the cross in terms of a cosmic recreation in *Or. 45 ('Second Oration on Easter')*:

Many indeed are the miracles of that time: God crucified; the sun darkened and again rekindled; for it was fitting that the creatures should suffer with their Creator; the veil rent; the Blood and Water shed from His Side; the one as from a man, the other as above man ... and yet none of these [signs] equal to the Miracle of my salvation. A few drops of Blood recreate the whole world, and become to all men what rennet is to milk, drawing us together and compressing us into unity.¹³⁹

Gregory paints a picture of the creation suffering in sympathy with its Creator – 'a few drops of Blood' from the cosmic creator is sufficient to recreate the world he made. This passage also demonstrates that for Gregory, just as for Irenaeus, the cross is a gravitational centre, drawing humanity together towards Christ and in the process 'compressing' humanity into unity with each other, just as rennet causes the coagulation of milk to form dense curds.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp.139-40

¹³⁷ *Or. 2.25* (NPNF², Vol.7, p.210a)

¹³⁸ *Or. 38.14* (NPNF², Vol.7, p.349b), *Or. 45.25* (p.432a), *Or. 45.30* (p.433b)

¹³⁹ *Or. 45.29* (NPNF², Vol.7, p.433b)

Gregory of Nazianzus' concern for the cosmic reconciliation and recreation effected by the cross seems to be either directly influenced by Athanasius' account in *CG-DI*, or a sign that they share similar concerns. For example, Athanasius also mentions the co-suffering of the creation at the moment of crucifixion - 'the whole of creation was his handmaid and was witnessing in fear to the coming of her master'.¹⁴⁰ Secondly, Athanasius also sees the impact of Christ's work on the cross as cosmic - 'by his death salvation was effected for all and all creation [κτισις] was saved'.¹⁴¹ And thirdly, there is the therapeutic nature of the cross which 'was not the ruin but the salvation [θεραπειαν] of creation [κτισεως]'.¹⁴²

Gregory of Nyssa

The final author to be considered is Gregory of Nyssa, who expounds 'the mystical meaning of the cross' in his *Catechetical Oration* and in the process draws out many of the same themes as have already been noted in previous authors. Firstly, the shape of the cross indicates the totality of the cosmic pervasiveness of the Deity:

It is the mark of Deity to pervade everything and to extend to every part of the nature of existing things. Nothing, indeed, could continue in existence did it not have its being in that which exists. Now that which is essential and primary being is the divine nature; and the continuance of existing things compels us to believe that it pervades all that is. We learn this from the cross.¹⁴³

The shape of the cross (which extends in all directions) indicates the omnipresence of the Deity. As Gregory explains, and as we have already seen, such cosmic omnipresence is necessary in order to ensure the continuance 'in being' of creation which would otherwise dissolve back into nothing. In his explanation, Gregory provides a similar interpretation to Justin and Irenaeus - the continued existence of the cosmos is supported by Christ, who (for Gregory at least) is the Deity on the cross.

Secondly, the shape of the cross speaks of the convergence of all things onto Christ, and his role in binding all things to himself:

In shape it is divided into four parts in such a way that the four arms converge in the middle. Now He who was extended upon it at the time God's plan was fulfilled in his death is the one who binds all things to himself and makes them one. Through himself he brings the diverse natures of existing things into one accord and harmony.¹⁴⁴

The geometrical shape of the cross shows the convergence of its four arms and this points to the deeper meaning of the convergence of the *entirety of all things* in the person 'extended' on the cross. Christ is the 'binding point' at the centre of the cosmos, the one to whom all things are bound, and in the process become united with each other. The multiplicity inherent in the diversity of created things is therefore harmonised in Christ and this is made manifest by his place at the centre of the cross in the crucifixion. The same sense of Christ as the gravitational centre of the universe, which we saw in the work of Irenaeus and Gregory of Nazianzus is found in Gregory of Nyssa too.

¹⁴⁰ *DI* 19 (Thomson, p.181)

¹⁴¹ *DI* 37 (Thomson, p.227)

¹⁴² *CG* 1 (Thomson, pp.3-5)

¹⁴³ *Or. cat.* 32 (Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, p.311)

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Thirdly, according to Gregory, the shape of the cross shows that creation is not merely attracted to Christ, but is *actively focussed* on Christ:

The eyes of all creation are set on Him and he is its centre, and it finds its harmony in him. Through him the things above are united with those below, and the things at one extremity with those at the other. In consequence it was right that we should not be brought to a knowledge of the Godhead by hearing alone; but that sight too should be our teacher in these sublime matters.¹⁴⁵

Christ is the focal point of the cosmos, and the shape of the cross is a fitting visible manifestation of this invisible reality. In this interpretation, Gregory of Nyssa would seem to be following Irenaeus' approach quite closely.

Summary

Three broad themes can be seen to emerge from a comparison of the different authors' interpretations of the cosmic dimensions of the cross. Firstly, the symbol of the cross is taken as a visible manifestation of the cosmic dimensions of the person of Christ. For Justin, Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa, the shape of the cross indicates the all pervasive presence and support of Christ throughout the cosmos. Justin and Irenaeus in particular seem pleased to be able to justify this from Plato's *Timaeus*. Justin makes no real effort to pursue the cosmic meaning of the cross any further, once a link has been established with Plato. Irenaeus, however, pursues his usual approach, in which the visible sign of the cross is seen as a fitting manifestation of an invisible reality. Gregory of Nyssa expends considerable effort in demonstrating that the symbol of the cross points to Christ as the cosmic principle of subsistence, harmony and unity.

The second theme common to Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa is the cross as a symbol of Christ's drawing all people to himself, specifically as a reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles. This is described most vividly by Gregory of Nazianzus' analogy of Christ as the rennet added to milk to cause coagulation.

The third common theme is the impact of Christ's work on the cross bringing a cosmic benefit. For Irenaeus, his millenarianism is the logical conclusion of the totality of the recapitulation wrought by Christ, whilst both Gregory of Nazianzus and Athanasius share the sense of the recreation/salvation wrought by the cross affecting the entire cosmos.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

Having considered the views of the various authors under broad themes, by way of conclusion, a brief overview of each author will form this concluding chapter. A summary will be given of the main areas of cosmic importance for each author and we shall look for any connecting themes which tie the different authors together.

Justin

For Justin, the most remarkable feature of his 'cosmic Christology' is surely his concept of the *Logos spermatikos* - the idea that the Logos has been ever active not merely through his cosmological agency, but also through his inspiration of all peoples. His 'germinal' presence in humanity parallels his immanence in the cosmos and is the source of all true pre-incarnation wisdom.

Such a concept provided a useful device in his apology. For example, it allowed him to acknowledge that there was genuine inspiration to be found in both Jewish and Greek sources, but to claim them as proto-Christian. In addition, it allowed Justin to hint that Christianity, far from being a new religion, was actually as 'old as the hills' (or rather as old as the Creator-Logos who made the hills). Also, by picking up on Plato's reference to the 'crosswise' inscription of the world-soul in the universe in the *Timaeus*, Justin made an early attempt to claim Platonic justification for Christianity. Again, providing a useful voice of authority for the 'new' Christian religion.

Clement

Clement's use of the cosmic dimensions of the Word are supremely to be found, as might be expected, in connection with his description of the activities and person of the Instructor-Logos. Clement's understanding of both the pre-incarnate and incarnate activities of the Word is primarily that of teaching. In this role he possesses cosmic credentials by virtue of his also being the Creator-Logos. Clement also sees the teaching of the Logos in cosmic terms – he teaches all created beings as well as the entire world. Drawing on inspiration from Philo and Middle Platonism, Clement also has a strong concept of the Logos as bringer of cosmic order and harmony which he expounds in vivid terms.

Just as for Justin, Clement's understanding of the cosmic dimensions to the Logos played a vital part in his apology. His exhortation to his audience was not to listen to his own teaching, but that given by the Creator and Instructor-Logos himself. Clement's understanding of the Logos as cosmic harmoniser, allowed him to portray salvation in terms of achieving unity and harmony – pleasing concepts to the Greek mind.

However, by the standards of later orthodoxy, both Justin and Clement's understanding of the cosmic work of the Logos was placed in the context in which the transcendence of God was overly stressed. The Logos was therefore portrayed as a (necessary) subordinate agent which the transcendent God used to interact with creation. As such a distinctly subordinate understanding of the nature of the Logos/Son was expelled during the Arian controversy, so the understanding of the special role of Christ in the cosmos was downplayed.

Irenaeus

In his battle against the Gnostics, Irenaeus stressed the unity of the one God in his dealings with creation. Such an emphasis led him to formulate the concept of the dual agency of the Son and Spirit in creation which resulted in less emphasis on the sole role of the Son as creator, sustainer and bringer of cosmic harmony. Instead, the cosmic dimensions of the Son are seen most strongly in passages concerning the recapitulation effected by the Son. The cosmic sovereignty of the Son is already assumed and the incarnation, cross and resurrection provide the focal point for the meeting of the two realms of the visible and invisible worlds. Christ as sovereign of both realms is the one suited to link the two together and 'sum up' all things in himself. The totality of the work of the recapitulation wrought by Christ leads to his understanding of a literal recreation of the cosmos.

The cosmic emphasis on the Son, for Irenaeus, provided a key means of affirming the goodness of creation in the face of Gnostic speculation. God was fundamentally and closely tied in with the cosmos via the agency of his two 'hands' and the goodness of creation would ultimately be affirmed in its final recreated destination.

Athanasius & the Cappadocians

In some ways, Athanasius provides a high point in the Patristic understanding of the cosmic dimensions of the Son. He possesses a strong view of the agency of Christ in creation as instrument and creator, and as the one who orchestrates cosmic harmony. Yet his understanding is devoid of any sense of the subordinacy of the Son which accompanies the same view in Clement.

With regard to the Cappadocians, the Arian controversy meant that any view of the Son which could be taken to hint at or imply his subordinate nature was treated carefully. For this reason, the Cappadocians are all very wary of emphasising the cosmic agency of Christ.

With regard to the other cosmic dimensions of Christ, Basil in particular appears to possess less of a cosmic understanding of the Son person and role. Instead, it is left to the two Gregories to explore the cosmic impact of Christ which they do primarily around the focus of the cross. The work of Christ on the cross is seen by both authors as impacting on the entire cosmos and as providing an intense 'gravitational centre' for the universe.

As was explained at the start of this paper, there was no official 'cosmic Christ' doctrine in the Patristic period. Instead, what we have discovered is a common understanding of the scope of the person and work of Christ before, during and after the incarnation. If there is one factor which does seem to tie the various authors together, it would have to be the apologetic context of the majority of these works. The cosmic dimensions of Christ are set out as part of the exhortation to either the Pagan, Jew or Arian to come to a true understanding of Christ – the creator and redeemer of the world.

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