

‘For this reason the Father loves me’: Drawing Divinity into Himself to Minister Divinity to Us

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‘Restore to me the joy of your salvation’ (Ps. 50/51:12). With this verse Khaled Anatolios opens his magnificent book *Deification through the Cross*: the verse captures exquisitely both the issues that he addresses and their resolution in ‘doxological contrition’.¹ The primary issue he addresses is that despite the fact that salvation is right at the heart of the gospel proclamation, there is a complete ‘befuddlement’ in contemporary theology regarding in what this salvation consists, resulting in a lack of joy. The salvific efficacy of Christ’s suffering and death is identified as ‘atonement’, and this in turn (despite the occasional reminder that etymologically it has the sense of ‘at-one-ment’) is equated with ‘penal substitution’, vigorously affirmed by some as the primary content of the gospel, or rejected by many as irreconcilable with the God of love and forgiveness so clearly proclaimed in the New Testament. And yet the New Testament does, of course, affirm the salvific efficacy of the suffering and death of Christ. This tension leads to the modern tendency to affirm a variety of different ‘models of salvation’, which, as Anatolios demonstrates, results in a complete lack of coherence in understanding the very salvation proclaimed by the gospel. Combined with all this, Anatolios argues, is ‘the dearth of soteriological experience’, especially in the case of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, where any claim to an experience of ‘being saved’ is looked upon with suspicion. Yet it is in fact through the experience given to us in liturgy that Anatolios is able to elaborate a very rich understanding of that experience of salvation, though in a different key to personal claims about ‘being saved’, one that is both corporate and contrite, a ‘doxological contrition’.

In the first part of the work, Anatolios deliberately starts with the liturgy, as that which gives the surest guide to how Scripture is heard and read by

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¹ Khaled Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

Christians. He provides an exceptionally fine analysis of the liturgical texts, primarily from the Lenten and Paschal periods, to give a rich description of what he means by ‘doxological contrition’, a repentance that is not a prerequisite for (or ‘human work’ resulting in) salvation, but the fruit of the encounter with God and the salvation he gives. With this as his touchstone, Anatolios then shows how this motif is at play in the key episodes recounted in the Scriptures – in the Exodus and the Golden Calf, the Exile and Restoration, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, and paradigmatically in and through Jesus’s work of salvation. This is then taken up in his analysis of Patristic texts, showing how the syntax of trinitarian and christological doctrine, and the hermeneutic for scriptural interpretation this embodies, provides not just another ‘model of salvation’, but a framework, centered upon the integration of the human being into the life of the Trinity, that regulates and informs every ‘model of salvation’. But this is not just the hackneyed claim that the East was focused upon the correlation between incarnation and deification (so leaving little place or even concern for the suffering and death of Christ), while the West was more interested in ideas of justification and ‘atonement’; Anatolios rightfully points out the inadequacy of such binaries, and instead shows how the trinitarian and christological syntax brings both together, giving deeper meaning to each, so that it is precisely in the suffering and death of Christ that divine life is given and deification, through the cross, is achieved.

The second part of the work then develops this foundation in a constructive manner: expounding a vision of the Trinity as mutual glorification, on the basis of Christ’s prayer in the Gospel of John and select passages from the Fathers (noting that such are indeed sparse, though Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘circle of glory’ stands out²), and, corresponding to this, a ‘doxological anthropology’, in which human existence is seen in terms of participation in the intra-trinitarian life of glory, sin as a ‘divine identity theft’, and salvation as our reintegration into that divine life yet which continues to be characterized as ‘doxological contrition’, for, as he puts it:

even in the final state of human glorification and deification, there will still be a glorified contrition in which humanity will repent of its sins not in sorrow and shame but only in eternal gratitude for God’s salvation and in everlasting praise of the glory of his love and mercy.³

In expounding the trinitarian life of glory into which we are invited, one of the figures Anatolios turns to, or rather returns, is Athanasius and his exposition of the words of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22–31, the text that lay behind so much fourth-century theological reflection and is at the heart of the resulting trinitarian and christological syntax. The distinction between

² Anatolios, *Deification*, p. 185.

³ Anatolios, *Deification*, p. 383.

creating and begetting in these verses – ‘The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works . . . before all the hills he begets me’ (Prov. 8:22, 25) – are fundamental, and we will return to them. But equally important are the concluding verses: ‘I was the one in whom he took delight; and each day I was rejoicing in his presence at every moment, when he rejoiced having consummated the world and rejoiced among the sons of men’ (Prov. 8:30–1). As Athanasius comments in the concluding words of his second treatise against the Arians:

In whom, then, does the Father rejoice, except by seeing himself in his own Image [βλέπων ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ εἰκόνι], who is his Word? If he also ‘rejoiced in the sons of men, having consummated the world’, as it is written in these same Proverbs, yet this also has the same meaning [ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει διάνοιαν]. For even thus he rejoiced, joy not being added to him, but seeing again the works that came to be in accordance with his own image, so that even the basis of God’s rejoicing is his own Image [εὐφραίνεται γὰρ καὶ οὕτως οὐκ ἐπιγενομένης αὐτῷ χαρᾶς, ἀλλὰ πάλιν βλέπων κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ εἰκόνα γενόμενα τὰ ἔργα, ὥστε καὶ τὸ οὕτως χαίρειν τὸν θεὸν τῆς εἰκότος αὐτοῦ τῇ πρόφασιν εἶναι]. And how does the Son also rejoice, except by seeing himself in the Father? For to say this is the same as to say, ‘The one who has seen me has seen the Father’ and ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me’.⁴

Clearly the relationship between humanity and God is bound up with, and an expression of, the relationship between Father and Son. As Anatolios comments on this passage:

The starting point of Athanasius’ argument is that God’s delight in humanity does not introduce delight into the divine life, but is simply a reflection and outward extension of the mutual eternal delight of the Father and the Son. It is clearly essential to the logic of this argument that the mutual rejoicing and delight of the Father and the Son is eternal and belongs to the order of theology and not economy.⁵

As the basis or occasion for God’s delight is his own Image, the delight God also has in his works is not an addition; it ‘has the same meaning’, and so is an extension or perhaps an incorporation: in the consummation of the world his works come to be according to his own Image, and so God ‘again sees’ his Image, and delights similarly, so that the basis for this (second) rejoicing

⁴ Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* (CAr) 2.82.2–3, quoting Jn 14:9–10. CAr 1 and 2 in K. Metzler and K. Savvidis, eds., *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 1, pt 1, fasc. 2 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1998). CAr 3 in K. Metzler and K. Savvidis, eds., *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 1, pt 1, fasc. 3 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2000). ET NPNF 4, pp. 306–431, modified.

⁵ Anatolios, *Deification*, p. 182.

is ‘again’ his own Image. Theology and economy, while conceptually distinct, cannot be separated.

But is there more, from Athanasius’s reflections on this passage from Proverbs, that we can say, pertaining to the theme of deification through the cross? The earlier verses – ‘The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works . . . before the hills he begets me’ – also points to a clear distinction between theology and economy, begetting and creating, one that is essential for Athanasius. Yet they are also intrinsically bound up together. The distinction between begetting and creating is one that is, of course, deeply ingrained in Nicene theology (‘begotten not made’), and relatively easy to grasp. As Athanasius succinctly puts it:

God’s creating is second to his begetting, for the Son is proper [ἴδιον] to and truly from that divine and everlastingly existent essence, whereas those things that are from the will have come to be constituted from outside [ἔξωθεν], and are made though his proper offspring, who is from [the essence]. (*CAr* 2.2.6)

That Christ is the Son means that God is Father, and as God creates through his Son, creating is ‘second’ to begetting (a point forcefully made by Origen in *On First Principles* 1.2.10: the title ‘Father’ is ‘older’ in God than that of ‘Almighty’ and ‘Maker’): One God Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth.⁶ Yet what is the content of this ‘begetting’ of the Son and the ‘creating’ of the world that are thus contrasted in this hierarchy of titles?

Perhaps, indeed, we should heed the words of Gregory the Theologian, when he warns us: ‘You explain the ingeneracy of the Father and I will give you a biological account of the Son’s begetting [τὴν γέννησιν τοῦ υἱοῦ φυσιολογήσω] and the Spirit’s proceeding – and we will both go mad for prying into the secrets of God.’⁷ Or perhaps Gregory’s rhetorical quip put an end to further reflection, much in the same way as his quip about Apollinarius (‘Whoever has set his hope on a human being without mind is actually mindless himself and unworthy of being saved in his entirety: what is not assumed is not healed’⁸), resulted in a simplified caricature of Apollinarius’ Son of Man Christology.

Athanasius, however, did not live to hear Gregory’s caution! Unburdened, he in fact gives an account, a definition even, of the ‘begetting’ of the Son,

⁶ Origen, *On First Principles (Princ.)* 1.2.10. Ed. and ET John Behr, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Cf. John Behr, ‘One God Father Almighty’, *Modern Theology* 34 (2018), pp. 320–30.

⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 31.8. Ed. and French trans. P. Gallay, with M. Jourjon, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27–31 (Discours Théologiques)*, SC 250 (Paris: Cerf, 1978); ET L. Wickham and F. Williams, trans., *St Gregory of Nazianzus: On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, Popular Patristics Series 23 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002).

⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 101.32. Ed. and French trans. P. Gallay with M. Jourjon, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres Théologiques*, SC 208 (Paris: Cerf, 1974); ET Wickham and Williams, *St Gregory of Nazianzus*.

and one which, intriguingly, maintains not only the distinction but also the intimate connection between the Son's relationship to the Father and the relation between created beings and God. He reports that those who resisted saying that the Son is from the essence of the Father were fearful lest it result in a division of that essence, and so they resort to saying that the Son is such as he is by participation. But, Athanasius asks them, 'of what is he a participant?' (*CAr* 1.15.4): it cannot be a participation in the Spirit, for the Spirit 'receives' from the Son (cf. Jn 16:14); but neither can it be by participating 'in something external provided by the Father', for, in that case, there would be an intervening principle between the Father and the Son. And so, Athanasius points out, 'what-is-participated (τὸ μετεχόμενον) is not external, but from the essence of the Father' (*Arians* 1.15.6). Yet if this 'what-is-participated' is other than the Son, that would again interpose something between the Father and Son. And so, Athanasius then concludes:

We must say that what is 'from the essence of the Father' and proper to him is entirely the Son. For it is the same thing to say that God is wholly 'participated' and that he 'begets' [τὸ γὰρ ὅλως »μετέχεσθαι« τὸν θεὸν ἴσον ἐστὶ λέγειν ὅτι καὶ »γεννᾶ«]; for what does 'to beget' signify, except a Son? And so all things participate in the Son himself [αὐτοῦ γοῦν τοῦ υἱοῦ μετέχει τὰ πάντα] according to the grace of the Spirit coming from him; from this it is clear that the Son himself participates of nothing [ὅτι αὐτὸς μὲν ὁ υἱὸς οὐδενὸς μετέχει], but that-which-is-participated-in from the Father is the Son [τὸ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μετεχόμενον, τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὁ υἱός]. For, as participating in the Son himself, we are said to participate of God, and this is what Peter said, 'that you may be partakers of the divine nature' [2 Pet 1:4]; as the Apostle says also, 'Do you not know that you are a temple of God?' [1 Cor 3:16] and, 'We are the temple of the living God' [2 Cor 6:16]. And seeing the Son, we see the Father [cf. Jn 14:9]; for the thought and comprehension of the Son is knowledge of the Father, because he is the proper Offspring from his essence. And since no one of us would ever call 'being-participated-in' a passion or division of God's essence (for it has been granted and acknowledged, that God is participated-in, and to be participated-in is the same thing as to beget [δεδώκατε γὰρ καὶ ὁμολογήκατε μετέχεσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ταῦτόν εἶναι μετέχεσθαι καὶ γεννᾶν]), therefore that which is begotten is neither a passion nor division of that blessed essence. (*CAr*. 1.16)

This is indeed a fascinating, and unique, passage.⁹ His point is that while human beings participate in the Son by the grace of the Spirit, and in so

⁹ On this passage, see Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 105–9; John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), pp. 236–8.

doing participate in God himself, the Son does not participate (for that would imply a point of origin other than the Father): he is, rather, ‘that-which-is-participated-in from the Father’. The difference between human participation in God and the participation in the Father that is the Son does not turn upon the legitimacy of using the language of participation, but how that language is used. This distinction, moreover, does not rest upon a belief that there is a part of the human being (say, for instance, the ‘body’ as opposed to the ‘intellect’) that does not, or cannot, participate in God, or that there is a ‘part’ of God, as it were, in which we do not participate, for participating in God we become ‘partakers of the divine nature’. But neither is it simply a question of the ‘whence’ – the principle that we participate in God from the outside, whereas the Son has no point of origin other than the Father from which he might be said to have come to participate in God. Rather, the distinction is that while we come to participate in the Son, by the grace of the Spirit, the Son is ‘that-which-is-participated-in from the Father’s essence’ and this, moreover, is his begetting. Yet this language describing the begetting of the Son would also seem to imply those who are participating in the Son, for Athanasius immediately connects this begetting of the Son with all things participating in the Son and, in this way, human participation in the divine nature. As such, while the conceptual distinction between the orders of theology and economy remains, they cannot be separated; Athanasius seamlessly interweaves the begetting of the Son, as ‘that-which-is-participated-in from the Father’, together with our participation in the Son so as to become, ourselves, partakers in the divine nature, the temple of the living God.

Athanasius’ language seems to foreshadow Proclus’s distinction between the one, the participated (*τὸ μετεχόμενον*) and the participants (*τὸ μετέχον*).¹⁰ But as background for this way of conceptualizing the Son’s relation to the Father and our relation to the Father through the Son and the Spirit, in the language and framework of participation, we must look to Origen, who had used such terminology as a way of resolving the difficulties of those afraid of proclaiming two Gods. Origen proposes this resolution to their predicament:

We must say to them that at one time God, with the article, is very God, wherefore also the Savior says in his prayer to the Father, ‘That they may know you the only true God’ [Jn 17:3]. On the other hand, everything besides the very God, which is made God by participation in his divinity [*μετοχῆ τῆς εἰκείνου θεότητος θεοποιούμενον*], would more properly not be said to be ‘the God’, but ‘God’. To be sure, his ‘firstborn of every creature’ [Col 1:15], inasmuch as he was the first to be with God, drawing divinity into himself [*ἅτε πρῶτος τῷ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εἶναι πάσας τῆς*

¹⁰ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 24. Ed. and ET E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992 [1933]).

θεότητος εἰς ἑαυτόν], is more honored than any other gods besides him (of whom God is God as it is said, 'The God of gods, the Lord has spoken, and he has called the earth' [Ps 49/50:1]). It was by his ministry that they became gods, for he drew from God that they might be deified, sharing ungrudgingly also with them according to his goodness [διακονήσας τὸ γενέσθαι θεοῖς, ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄρυσά<μενος> εἰς τὸ θεοποιηθῆναι αὐτούς, ἀφθόνως κἀκείνοις κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ χρηστότητα μεταδιδοῦς]. *The God*, therefore, is the true God; the others are gods formed according to him as images of the prototype. But again, the archetypal image of the many images is *the Word with the God*, who was 'in the beginning'. By being 'with *the God*' he always continues to be 'God'. But he would not have this if he were not with God, and he would not remain God if he did not continue in unceasing contemplation of the depth of the Father [τῷ εἶναι »πρὸς τὸν θεὸν« ἀεὶ μένων »θεός«, οὐκ ἂν δ' αὐτὸ ἐσχηκὼς εἰ μὴ πρὸς θεὸν ἦν, καὶ οὐκ ἂν μείνας θεός, εἰ μὴ παρέμενε τῇ ἄδιαλείπτῳ θέᾳ τοῦ πατρικοῦ βάθους].¹¹

Origen's language of the Son being 'God' by participation in the divinity of the very God is certainly turned around by Athanasius: being from the essence of the Father, the Son does not participate in God but is instead that which is participated-in. But what is striking is that both explain the Son's relationship to God in terms that also include the Son's relationship to others: for Athanasius, the Son's begetting is his being 'that-which-is-partaken-in from the Father', so that others can become partakers of the divine nature; for Origen, the Son draws divinity into himself to minister it to others, deifying them, so that he is distinct as being 'the first to be with God' and is thus 'the firstborn of every creature'. Remaining in this 'unceasing contemplation of the depths of the Father', he remains God, ministering divinity to others.

What Origen might mean by this language of 'drawing divinity into himself' so as to minister it to others, and 'the unceasing contemplation of the depths of the Father', is perhaps made clearer by the analogies he gives in *On First Principles* 2.6.6, which was written around the same time as this passage from the *Commentary on John*, though only preserved in Rufinus' translation. Drawing from Stoic physics, Origen points out that while iron is capable of being both hot or cold, if it is placed in a fire and never removed from it, it burns incessantly, never becoming cold: it has become 'wholly fire'.¹² In the same way, the soul of Jesus:

¹¹ Origen, *Commentary on John (Com Jn)*, 2.17–18. Ed. Erwin Preuschen, GCS 10, Origenes Werke 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903); ET R.E. Heine, FC 80, 89 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989, 1993).

¹² Origen, *Princ.* 2.6.6. See especially Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione*, 3.218.1–2, reporting the teaching of Chrysippus. Ed. and ET Robert E. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: A Study of the De Mixtione with Preliminary Essays, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Philosophia Antiqua 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

which, like iron in the fire, was placed in the Word forever, in Wisdom forever, in God forever, is God in all that it does, feels, and understands; and therefore it can be called neither alterable or changeable, since, being ceaselessly kindled, it came to possess immutability from its union with the Word of God. To all the saints some warmth of the Word of God must indeed be supposed to have passed; but in this soul it must be believed that the divine fire itself essentially rested, from which some warmth may have passed to others. (*Princ.* 2.6.6)

And then, in addition to this analogy, Origen draws upon scriptural verses to make the same point:

Finally, the fact that it says, ‘God, your God, anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows’ [Ps 44/45:8/7], shows that that soul is anointed in one way, with the oil of gladness, that is, with the Word of God and Wisdom, and his fellows, that is, the holy prophets and apostles, in another way. For they are said to have ‘run in the fragrance of his ointment’ [Song 1:4], while that soul was the vessel containing the ointment itself, of whose glowing heat all the prophets and apostles are made worthy partakers. Therefore, as the fragrance of the ointment is one thing, and the substance of the ointment another, so also Christ is one thing and his fellows another. And just as the vessel itself, which contains the substance of the ointment, can in no way accept any foul smell, yet it is possible that those who participate in its fragrance, if they move a little way from its glowing heat, may accept any foul smell that comes upon them, so also, in the same way, it was impossible that Christ, being as it were the very vessel in which was the substance of the ointment, should accept an odor of an opposite kind, while his fellows, in proportion to their proximity to the vessel, will be partakers and receivers of his fragrance. (*Princ.* 2.6.6)

The distinction between Christ and ‘his fellows’, or ‘his participants’ (τοὺς μετόχους σου), is maintained: Christ is not only the vessel containing the ointment (‘the whole fulness of divinity dwells in him bodily’, as Paul says, Col. 2:9), but also, therefore, the very ‘substance of the ointment’, compared to the fragrance in which his fellows/participants run, sharing in the warmth that he ministers to them.

Returning to the *Commentary on John*, Origen specifies when and how, in the terms of the analogies, the iron enters the fire or the vessel receives the ointment:

The high exaltation of the Son of Man which occurred when he glorified God in his own death consisted in the fact that he was no longer different from the Word but was the same with him [ἡ δὲ ὑπερύψωσις τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γενομένη αὐτῷ δοξάσαντι τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ θανάτῳ, αὕτη ἦν, τὸ μηκέτι ἕτερον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ λόγου ἀλλὰ τὸν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ]. For if ‘he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit’ [1 Cor. 6:17], so that it is no

longer said that 'they are two' [Matt. 19:6; Gen. 2:2], even in the case of this man and the spirit, might we not much more say that the humanity of Jesus became one with the Word [τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τοῦ λόγου λέγοιμεν γεγόνεναι ἓν] when he who did not consider 'equality with God' something to be grasped was highly exalted [Phil. 2:6, 9], the Word, however, remaining in his own grandeur, or even being restored to it, when he was again with God, God the Word being human [μένοντος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ ὕψει ἢ καὶ ἀποκαθισταμένου ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦ λόγου, ὅτε πάλιν ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, θεὸς λόγος ὢν ἄνθρωπος;]! (*Com Jn* 32.325–6)

The identity of the Son of Man with, or rather as, the Word of God is wrought upon the cross. This implies no change in the Word of God, just as the fire does not change when the iron enters into it – with the exception that the fire is now embodied, and so, as embodied (although in a body now known by the properties of the fire), the fire has taken form, to be the image in which the fire can, as it were, see itself, and also, and thereby, become accessible to others. The glorification of God by exaltation of Son of Man ascending the cross into the heavens provides us, in return or reverse, with the descent of the heavenly fire, in the form of the Spirit, setting our hearts and minds aflame, burning to follow him.

If something like this lies behind Athanasius' description of the Son as 'that-which-is-participated-in from the Father' (and is then further developed by Gregory of Nyssa's reflections on Peter's statement that 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'¹³), what more can we say, first, about Athanasius' statement that this constitutes the Son's begetting; and, second, about the Father's delight both in his own Image and also, and with 'the same meaning', his delight in those who come to be in accordance with his Image in the consummation of the world; and third, how all this relates to the theme of deification through the cross?

With regard to the first point, there is one passage where Origen seems to connect the Son's begetting and his drawing divinity into himself. Commenting on Christ's words that 'No one is good but God alone' (Mk 10:18 etc.), Origen emphasizes that this should not be taken to imply that the Son and Spirit are not 'good'. Rather,

¹³ Acts 2:36, analyzed in detail by Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.3. Ed. W. Jaeger, *Contra Eunomium libri*, GNO 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002 [1960], pp. 107–33); ET Stuart G. Hall, in Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin, eds., *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III; An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the 12th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Leuven, 14–17 September 2010)*, Supplements to *Vigilae Christianae* 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 106–21. Cf. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 'Contra Eunomium III 3', in Leemans and Cassin, *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III*, pp. 293–312; Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, pp. 435–58.

as we have said above, the primal goodness is recognized in the God and Father, from whom both the Son, being begotten, and the Spirit, proceeding, without doubt draw into themselves the nature of his goodness [*sine dubio bonitatis eius naturam in se refert*], which exists in the source, from whom the Son is born and the Spirit proceeds. (*Princ.* 1.2.13)

The Son is not simply begotten from the Father, for if that were the case, he would be a passive outcome of God's activity (and thus not true God of true God); rather his being begotten is correlated to his drawing divinity into himself to minister it to others. This is, of course, what we have in apostolic preaching: 'We bring you good news that what God has promised to the fathers this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today have I begotten you' (Acts 13:32–3; Ps. 2:7).

The 'today' of this Psalm verse recalls the odd present tense of Proverbs 8:25 ('before all the hills he begets me'). Regarding this, Origen, in his ninth homily on Jeremiah, notes the claim of John (in his version) that 'everyone who sins is begotten of the devil', whereas 'the one begotten of God does not sin' (1 Jn 3:8–9), and concludes:

I will not say that the righteous one is begotten just once by God, but that he is always begotten in each good act in which God begets the righteous one [οὐ γὰρ ἅπαξ ἐρῶ τὸν δίκαιον γεγεννηθῆσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ γεννᾶσθαι καθ' ἐκάστην πρᾶξιν ἀγαθὴν, ἐν ἧ ἡ γεννᾷ τὸν δίκαιον ὁ θεός]. If then I set before you, with respect to the Savior, that the Father has not begotten the Son and then severed him from his begetting, but always begets him [οὐχ ἔγέννησεν ὁ πατήρ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατήρ ἀπὸ τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ γεννᾷ αὐτόν], I will also present something similar [παρὰ πλῆσιον] for the righteous one. . . . [Heb 1:3; Wisd. 7:26; 1 John 1:5; 1 Cor. 1:24] . . . If then, the Savior is always begotten – because of this he also says, 'Before all the hills he begets me', and not 'before all the hills he has begotten me', but 'before all the hills he begets me' – and the Savior is always begotten by the Father [ἀεὶ γεννᾶται ὁ σωτήρ ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός], so also, if you possess the 'Spirit of adoption' [Rom 8:15], God always begets you in him [ἀεὶ γεννᾷ σε ἐν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός] according to each of your works, each of your thoughts. And may one so begotten always be a begotten son of God in Christ Jesus [καὶ γεννώμενος οὕτως γίνῃ ἀεὶ γεννώμενος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ].¹⁴

¹⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, 9.4. Ed. Erich Klostermann, rev. P. Nautin, GCS 6, Origenes Werke 3, 2nd edn (Berlin, 1983); ET John Clark Smith, FC 97 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

The distinction between the Son's begetting and our own being begotten of God is not the 'eternality' of the former, for such also applies to us, but rather that it is in Christ Jesus that we receive 'the Spirit of adoption' to become ourselves always/eternally begotten of God, so that our sonship is only ever based on that of Christ. The begetting (both Christ's and ours 'in Christ') is not a once-off, unidirectional act: the righteous one is begotten of God in righteous acts, so holding together both the active dimension and the passive (being begotten), leading us, in Christ, to being always/eternally begotten sons of God in Christ, the Son of God. This is, indeed, an integration., in the most dramatic way possible, into the 'eternal circle of glory', using the phrase of Gregory picked up by Anatolios.

Second, the rejoicing of the Father in seeing himself in his own image, spoken of by Athanasius, can now be given a more concrete content. Inverting our usual reading of Philippians 2, Origen comments:

We must say that the goodness of Christ appeared greater and more divine and truly in obedience with the image of the Father when 'he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross', than if 'he had considered being equal to God robbery' [Phil. 2:8, 6] and had not been willing to become a servant for salvation of the world. (*Com Jn* 1.231)

The delight that the Father has in seeing himself in his own Image is located precisely upon the dynamics of the cross: 'The image of the invisible God' is, according to Paul, precisely the one who reconciles all things to God, 'making peace by the blood of the cross' (Col. 1:15, 20). When, as Origen puts it, the Son of Man is exalted by glorifying God through his own death to become one with the Word, the consuming fire that is God, I suggested earlier, takes concrete form as 'the image of the invisible God', so that the Father can 'see himself in his own image', as Athanasius put it, and so rejoice. In Christ's own words: 'For this reason [διὰ τοῦτο] the Father loves me, because I lay down my life [τὴν ψυχὴν μου] that I may take it again' (Jn 10:17); a love which is traced back to God himself, for 'this is how God loves [οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς] the world that he gave his unique Son' (Jn 3:16); this is the action by which the Father is glorified and Christ in turn is glorified by the Father with the glory that they shared before the world was (Jn 17 passim); this is the love that God is (1 Jn 4:7), and the love that others are invited to share in the same way (Jn 15:13 etc.).

The third point – how all this relates to ourselves and the theme of deification through the cross – has largely been already addressed, but perhaps more can be said. If it is by being 'that-which-is-participated-in' by others, drawing divinity into himself to minister it to others, that the Son is begotten of God, then two further points arise.

First, that while the difference between the 'whence' is certainly important (that we, having been created by the will of God, come to participate in God from the outside, while the Son is 'from the essence of the Father'), the difference is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, that in our being created we were

(necessarily) passive: ‘no one asked me if I wanted to be born’, protests Kirillov in Dostoevsky’s novel *Demons*; passively and involuntarily we have come into an existence in which we will also die. Necessity and mortality characterize our existence from the beginning. Not only is Christ’s birth as human active and purposive (he willed to become human, for us and our salvation), but this active purposiveness also characterizes his being begotten from the Father, not as a unidirectional and temporally discrete act, but his being ‘that-which-is-participated-in from the Father’, drawing divinity into himself to minister it to others, ascending the cross to draw down the Spirit as tongues of fire. And, in so doing, he opens the womb in which we too can now be born, actively, into life (not passively into death), through a birth, ‘from above’, by our also taking up the cross, and so changing the ground of our existence from necessity and mortality to one of freedom and self-offering love, thereby being constituted as eternally begotten sons of God (or should I say constituting ourselves by giving our ‘Let it be!’): ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High; but you will die like human beings’ (Ps. 81/2: 6–7).

Second, if, as Athanasius puts it, Christ’s being ‘that-which-is-participated-in from the Father’ is his being begotten, we can now see the full force of the passage from Colossians which lies behind so much of this reflection: the Father rejoices in his own Image and also, and with the same meaning, rejoices in those who come to be in accordance with his own Image, if for no other reason than that the Image of the invisible God is also ‘the head of the body, the church, the beginning, the first-born of the dead’ (Col. 1:18), and, as Ignatius of Antioch observed, ‘the head cannot be born without the members, for God promises unity which he himself is’.¹⁵ There is a pattern of thinking here that has deep roots within the Scriptures: Just as Israel is ‘my firstborn Son’ (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9), yet what applies to Israel as a whole holds also for all the sons and daughters of Israel, for ‘you are sons of the Lord your God’ (Deut. 14:1; cf. 32:5, 19; Isa. 43:6), so too Christ is God’s ‘proper’ (ἴδιος) or ‘unique’ (μονογενής) Son (titles not extended to others), ‘his own Son’ given up by God for all, so that ‘the sufferings of the present time’ is a creation ‘groaning in travail’, awaiting ‘the unveiling of the sons of God’, ‘the children of God’, that is, those awaiting for ‘the adoption of sons’, those who are destined to be conformed to ‘his Son’, so that he might be the first-born of many brethren’ (Rom. 8:18–32). And as with the iron in the fire, becoming ‘wholly fire’ in all that it does, feels and understands, so the end to which we are called, when God is ‘all in all’, is one where God will indeed be everything in everyone: we ‘will no longer sense anything else apart from God; [we] will think God, see God, hold God; God will be the mode and measure of [our] every movement; and thus *God* will be *all* to [us]’ (*Princ.* 3.6.3).

¹⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians*, 11. Ed. and ET (modified) Alistair Stewart, Popular Patristics Series 49 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013).

If the reflection traced out in this article holds, then perhaps we can say that the mystery of deification through the cross is indeed one that is at the very heart of God himself, the rejoicing that the Father has in his own Image and also in those who come to be in accordance with the image.