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II. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

WHY CHRIST MUST ALSO BE GOD: ATHANASIUS, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

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ABSTRACT. Does it make sense to celebrate jubilees like "Two thousand years of Christianity", "Seventeen hundred years Edict of Milan" or "Five hundred years of Reformation in Europe and the World" in times like ours, when Christian traditions are open to doubt and wide-spread suspicion, even in the formerly "Christian Occident"? No doubt, the critique must be taken seriously, if it proves to be valid. If not, Christians are free or, what is more, obliged to criticize the critics, e.g. as far as one of the principal items of the Christian tradition is concerned, the Christology, interpreted by one of the major Church Fathers, Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 294-373), who was convinced, that Jesus Christ must be no less than God himself (αὐτὸς ὁ θεός) in order to be our Saviour.

Keywords: Athanasius of Alexandria, Christology, actuality and relevance of the Church Fathers, how to meet modern criticism

1.

The 600th anniversary of Luther's act of posting his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg church and a Jubilee will be celebrated in Germany and worldwide in 2017. Just 17 years earlier– after extensive preparations – people in Rome, Geneva, London, and other centres of what in the bygone days was referred to as the 'Western Christendom' looked back on '2000 years of Christianity'. Does that make sense? At the beginning of the last century, the majority of the people in my country – even those who rejected official Christianity – could relatively easily agree that the effects of the advent of Christianity and especially the social changes it generated are overwhelmingly positive. Even after the end of the Second World War in 1945 the 'essential Christian cultural and moral values' could still be passionately and wholeheartedly evoked.

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However, the number of the critical voices raised against Christianity had by that time already been steadily growing, seeking only to find a comprehensive list of sins in the history of the Church and Christianity; that very history was considered by Franz Overbeck, who was a church historian himself, to be the best school of atheism,.

How should this state of facts be addressed? Which would be the appropriate response to this criticism? I believe we should focus on pointing out that it all comes down to nuances! The fault of global verdicts and sweeping statements in this context is that they can be more or less easily refuted when analysed in detail.

One should also never forget the blatant injustice visited upon the dissidents, the 'heretics', by the Church especially during the time of the alliance between 'throne and altar', between Church and secular power. With that said, there is no reason to complain that even in the former 'Western Christendom' Christians and all their past and present actions are being more and more severely criticised. This should serve as an opportunity for critical self-examination rather than as a means of self-pity. If instead of avoiding the criticism of their ideology, religion, and Church, Christians would accept it as a challenge, if instead of paying the critics back in kind they would refute the unjust and misleading reproaches, then and only then could this be seen as a sign of respect.

Lastly, Christians would be ill advised and indeed helpless if they were to follow the instigations of their critics and keep their faith out of the equation because it only disguises the pure struggle for power. Those who bear up under the demand for the 'real records', the real results and impact of the church history, will see no reason for that.

2.

After we have become acquainted with the present state of affairs, let us now approach our topic 'from the outside in' and let us first talk about the general historical framework of the life, work, and religious views of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria. Evoking that context means recalling those radical changes that occurred in the history of the church and that of the world between the 23rd of February 303 and the 28th of February 380. - What is the meaning of this?

In the early hours of February 23rd 303 the prefect of Nicomedia (present-day Izmit in Turkey, on the coast of Asia Minor opposite Istanbul) appeared in front of the church of the imperial palace together with a number of other officials. The doors were forced open in a search for the simulacrum Dei,

God's image – what else is there to find in a temple? – but they only came across the Holy Scriptures, which were immediately burned. The church was then plundered. Since it seemed too dangerous to set it on fire, as the flames could easily spread to the adjacent palace, a contingent of soldiers marched in and levelled the sacred building to the ground in a matter of hours. An imperial edict was issued the following day by which all Christians, regardless of station, age or gender, were deprived of all legal protection. According to the eyewitness account of Lactantius (*De Mortibus Persecutorum* 10-15), this was the beginning of Diocletian's persecution against the Christians, one that left a mark in history as the uttermost gruesome and systematic attempt to exterminate Christianity in the first centuries of the common era.

On the 28th of February 380 Theodosius (who had just been proclaimed emperor) issued an edict in Thessalonica addressed to the people in Constantinople – an 'orthodox' bishop, with whom he could have conferred, was apparently not present there –, that claimed full legal validity beyond its narrow target group: 'It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation (*Cunctos populos, quos clementiae nostrae regit temperamentum*), should continue to profess the faith which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter (…) and which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness'. This faith is later on described as the faith in the *one* Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity (*sub parili maiestate et sub pia trinitate*). Only those who abided by this religious law could call themselves Christians; all the rest were considered heretics and could be given over to the divine and the secular justice. However, it was not specified what that actually meant and how far exactly the rule of secular justice stretched in this matter. It is nevertheless beyond a doubt that a crucial step was taken with this edict of Theodosius (*Cunctos populos*, Cod. Theod. XVI 1, 2) not only towards ending the Trinitarian theological debates – generally referred to as the 'Arian controversy' – but also towards the unification of Church and State. To some extent, this edict laid down the foundation for the state church.

This is the radical change we usually refer to when speaking of the 'Constantinian shift', a break whose consequences are still felt to this day. From a small group of Galilean Jews, the Church became a reality present in the entire Roman Empire. This was the Church Diocletian and his co-emperors had declared war on: the persecution of Christians at the hands of the Roman state had never before been undertaken as a decisive life-and-death struggle as it was during their reign.

But Diocletian failed at this and his heirs changed the tack: Christianity was first granted equal rights and soon thereafter elevated to the privileged religion of the Empire.

Still, it is neither possible nor necessary to go into details here about this development from the persecution of Christians, to its cessation ordered by Galerius, the co-emperor of Diocletian, and to the official legalization of Christianity by Constantine (together with the tolerance granted to the 'unbelievers', namely to the pagans and Jews). What can and needs to be discussed in depth here is above all the further development of the Church up until the establishment of the Catholic imperial Church or the 'state Christianity' in the century of Constantine, i.e. under Theodosius, and the reaction of the Church to the so called 'Constantinian shift' should also be addressed. Finally, what cannot and should not be discussed here is the series of repercussions felt in almost all fields of church life, which were triggered by this political change of direction.

However, we should at least in passing ask the question if it is adequate to unilaterally describe the 'Constantinian shift' as the beginning or the origin of the 'secularisation' of the Church; or if the 'Constantinian shift' – by choice and exterior pressure – also brought about or at least contributed to getting the Church out of the isolation it had lingered in until then? Undoubtedly, the imperial Church of the end of the 4th century is practically nowhere to be found nowadays. In this respect, it makes perfect sense to speak of the 'end of Constantine's age'. 'But who would wish to contest that Christians bear the responsibility for the world, or that they must also take over the political responsibility – as Christians and not with a troubled conscience or in opposition to the Church order – there where they merely form a minority or sometimes even there where they are persecuted?' In other words, who could or who would seriously wish to return before the time of the 'Constantinian shift' (G. Kretschmar, Der Weg zur Reichskirche, in: *Verkündigung und Forschung* 13, 1968, 3-44 [here p 39f.])?

The separation of the Church and the world had not yet been overcome at the end of Constantine and Athanasius's century. But from the time of Constantine this separation was no longer theologically justifiable, so the Church could no longer remain just an alternative to the 'world' in the long run. What it meant to live as a Christian 'in the world but not from this world' under these circumstances was an unsolved problem. Since we have to deal with these issues even today – or yet again – I believe there is absolutely no reason to look down with conceit on all the weaknesses and shortcomings of the decisions taken by the Church at the beginning of the 'Constantinian age', even on those with which Athanasius of Alexandria was involved.

3.

I choose to stay a little bit longer on the subject of the circumstances and to speak briefly about the origin of the imperial synodal authority, which designates the right the 'Christian' emperor had to convene councils, to take part in their

consultations, in any given form, and to 'ratify' their decisions, that is to grant them the legal validity of imperial laws. It is more likely that the measures taken by the state in the context of the restitution of Church property confiscated during the persecution were a decisive step (Constantine was forced to take part in this process against his will and to act as an arbitrator between the various church parties and their competing claims of ownership). Furthermore, another element that played an essential role was the fact that Constantine considered himself 'bishop (overseer) of the external issues (of the Church)' or 'bishop of those outside the Church' – both interpretations are possible – and that he claimed to lead his subjects in their faith in the one true God and to watch over the unity of their faith, which was also the basis and guaranteed the state's unity and welfare. Our question is how did the Church react to this imperial synodal authority?

This question must be viewed as the key point in the discussion over the relationship between the State and the Church in late Antiquity because the conciliar sphere is where the highly nuanced and problematic reactions of the Church are clearly expressed. It is surely not enough to note that the Church found in the imperial synod an organ of its legal unity that it did not (yet) know how to develop and use on its own. It is also not enough to state that these councils were more or less completely dependent on the will of the emperor – as it often happened and still happens under the influence of the early Church research conducted by the otherwise outstanding scholar of the antiquity Eduard Schwartz and his arguably too one-sided representation of the 4th century history. It can be pointed out that admittedly the imperial 'approval' expedited the enforcement of the conciliary decisions considerably. Nevertheless, accepting or rejecting the resolutions of a synod ultimately depended on their Church-wide 'reception'. In other words, it was never possible (at least not in the long run) to force the will of a minority upon the majority – even though there was such a thing as imperial 'synodal authority' and the use of the state's means of coercion (for instance the imposition of fines, the expropriation of church property or the exile of recalcitrant clergymen)!

And precisely because of this, bishops widely accepted the imperial rule over the Church as far as we know – bishop Athanasius of Alexandria makes no exception. The following question was occasionally asked: 'What has the emperor to do with the Church?', but usually in the context of conflicts and mostly by those who were the first ones to call on the emperor to be their arbiter, and who were left with nothing, since they lost …

Soon enough the imperial synodal authority – first employed by Constantine – certainly led to increased pressure being put on the Church, which in this way learned how to think more earnestly about the 'blessings' of a 'Christian emperorship', as Eusebius of Caesarea (who was unfairly denounced

by Jakob Burckhardt as the 'most nauseating court orator of all time'). Many voices were raised in a multifaceted opposition against a statement attributed to one of Constantine's sons: 'My will must count as a canon (so as church law)'. This sentence already hinted at the reason behind the separation of powers, which would become so important in the distant future. At that time in the Antiquity the issue had undoubtedly not been thought out yet, not had a theory on the relationship of Church and state been developed. However, the particular tension that was felt at that moment and formulated to some extent, guided the theologians and the churchmen (including Athanasius) towards opposing the perfect integration of the Church within the state apparatus as the ideological basis of the empire's unity, without questioning the synergy of their respective authorities; it also taught them to recognize or at least to infer the danger of having an emperor rule over the Church. These aspects have been remembered for centuries, so when the Catholic Church and the omnipotent Prussian state were faced off in the *Kulturkampf*, the Catholic journalist J. Görres was able to send his own 'Athanasius' in the arena where the public opinion was being shaped (in 1838, in the context of the Cologne church dispute).

Nevertheless, a serious problem remains, namely the state's use of coercive power for enforcing synodal decisions, more precisely when fighting against 'false teachings'. During the doctrinal controversies generated – rather than resolved – by the council of Nicaea, many bishops learned it the hard way what it meant to come into conflict with the official church policy and were none the wiser for it either! 'Compel them to come in' (cogite intrare) – loosely referring to Luke 14, 23 – is a phrase that has been used by and since Augustine as the biblical ground for the use of force against heretics and non-believers. This 'merciful rigour', which sought to save heretics from damnation even against their will, remained the Christian legal title of an intolerant state for over a thousand years.

But even in this respect, the fact Augustine was so much under the impression that the need to have the non-believers enter the Church – even forcibly – or to have them 'convert' to the Catholic truth was a *good deed*, can be seen as an unequivocal indication of the 'secularisation' of the Church in the 'Constantinian era', and this is what we are in effect debating.

I would like to conclude this train of thought by saying that studying the history of the imperial church in late antiquity could open one's eyes to the fact that the 'pluralism' with which the churches (all around the world) have had to live with since the 'age of Constantine' has not only been a burden – a very heavy one to bear at times – but also a blessing; also that this pluralism should not only be accepted as their lot but also affirmed, but only with the condition that in doing so, the *issue of the truth* is not entirely forgotten!

4.

And finally, we come around to Athanasius. We hardly know anything certain about his origins, childhood, and youth. He is thought to come from a non-Christian family in Alexandria, the second biggest city in the Roman Empire at that time and the capital of Egypt, a cultural and economic centre of the Mediterranean world. After having accompanied his bishop, as a deacon, to the great Council of Nicaea (325) – later considered to be the first ecumenical council –, he later succeeded him; he was ordained bishop on the 8th of June 328, in a somewhat less than 'canonical' fashion, since he had not yet reached the required 'canonical age' of 30 years; what's more, the ordination was performed although he did not have the consent of all the bishops within the eparchy, which was compulsory according to the 4th canon of Nicaea. It was obviously a swift move intended to forestall a counter initiative – a method that seems to have coincided with the will of the church people.

The newly elected bishop did not neglect to notify the emperor of his appointment and he accepted it. In return, Constantine advocated even more vigorously than he had done with Athanasius's predecessor for the readmission of Arius in the church community (who had been banned at Nicaea), after being convinced that Arius conformed to the teachings agreed upon at the council. But since his efforts were to no avail – although he threatened to remove Athanasius from his see and to exile him –, and the bishop of Alexandria continued to deny Arius church communion and reinstatement in his former office, Constantine surprisingly contented himself or at least accepted that he had to wait a few years in order to attain his once hidden goal. In the meantime he did not hesitate to support the unjustly accused (Arius) who was opposed by people from Egypt and other provinces and to assure him, in his letters, of his 'highest' benevolence. If we look at it in the long term, Athanasius was the biggest disruptive element in the imperial unification policy.

In the end it happened as it was supposed to: the accusations brought against the 'pope' of Alexandria, the 'new pharaoh' did not fail to have the desired effect, making his position at court impossible in the end. His opponents knew how to use their chance. At their urging, the emperor summoned a tribunal of the bishops; still, this court could not engage into any negotiations since Athanasius refused to appear before a tribunal that had already decided his dismissal. However, this proved to be a grave tactical mistake. This affront finally provided his enemies with the sound legal grounds they needed and enraged the emperor, who was already sick of the quarrels involving Athanasius. Moreover, it was one of the main charges brought against him at the synod of Tyre (July/September 335), which led to his being removed from his office and later exiled to Trier.

All in all, Athanasius had to go into exile five times, proving he was quite a controversial figure even during his lifetime. He has essentially remained so to this day! On the occasion of a synod in Milan (355) emperor Constantius II – son of Constantine – is reported to have said to Liberius, the bishop of Rome, that no success, not even the victory against his usurpers Magnentius and Silvanus 'equals the ejection of this vile man from the government of the Church' (Theodoret, Church History II, 16, 21). We can only speculate what reasons were behind the hatred expressed here. The opponents of Athanasius have always claimed that the events concerning his person are about unadulterated power struggles of ecclesiastic politics. They carefully avoided going into the theological background of their rivalry and in short, treated Athanasius as a stubborn trouble-maker. The image of Athanasius as a pure hierarch plays a substantial role even in the more recent Athanasian scholarship, including the research of Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt and that of the German scholar Eduard Schwartz. This view simply has little to do with the facts; what's more, it is biased: just as biased as the views the propaganda of Athanasius and his faction wanted to spread. In this respect, every debate is immediately pushed in the theological area. *However*, there is no need to choose between Athanasius the 'ecclesiastic politician' and Athanasius the 'theologian', since he was obviously both! Recently a question was rightfully asked: shouldn't the interpretation of Athanasius actually go beyond the boundaries of these pseudo-alternatives and include completely different aspects (other than 'theology' and 'church politics'), namely the dimensions of worship and divine services (Dietrich Ritschl)? The significance of asceticism and spirituality were referenced – the way they were represented in the very influential 'Life of St. Anthony' (Vita Antonii, composed after 356), the most powerful writing of the great church father and also one that offers the safest access into his theology for the historical evaluation (according to my professor in Göttingen, Hermann Doerries).

Undoubtedly, the intransigence with which Athanasius advocated his cause was to blame for the fact that for years – long into the sole reign of Constantius II – the questions of faith were concealed behind personal and disciplinary issues. Conversely, Athanasius was credited when the actual theological significance of the dispute was finally worked out, even though his argumentation had its faults and he cannot be spared the reproach that being influenced by the rhetorical conventions of the Antiquity, he often approached the spoken or the written word as means of persuasion (rather than of reasoning) and he failed to show the respect due to words as divine gifts for the humankind and as images and instruments of the divine Logos (George Christopher Stead). Nevertheless: if the source material allows for such a conclusion, then it is hardly exaggerated to say that Athanasius as an individual had the main part in the enforcement of the 'Nicene creed' in the realm of the Greek-speaking Christianity, because 'Arianism' could be defeated on theological grounds.

5.

What is it all about? In his book "Der Sohn Gottes" (The Son of God - Tübingen 1972) M. Hengel, a New Testament scholar from Tübingen, made an accurate observation, in my opinion: that 'in less than two decades' – namely from 50 A.D. to 70 A.D. – 'more has happened in the field of Christology than in the whole seven centuries that followed, until the dogma of the early church received its final formulation' (p. 11). Already in the earliest Christian sources, namely the New Testament epistles, we encounter a surprising early form of a 'high Christology', under the guise of hymns and other literary structures (still to be reconstructed). I am thinking about the famous Christological hymn from the second chapter of the epistle to the Philippians (v.6-11: '(Christ, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God…'), the hymn in Colossians 1 (v. 15-20: [He] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible…'), the first verses of the epistle to the Hebrews (1,1-4: 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...'), and above all, the Prologue of the Gospel according to John (Jn 1,1-16) or verses such as 1 Tim.3,16 ('God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory', cf. 1 Cor 8,6, Gal 4,4f., Rom 8,3, Jn 3,16f., 1 Jn 4,9).

Behind these fragments, we can only imagine the plethora of densely theological hymns that were incompletely preserved in the New Testament. The Christological type created here surpassed in the first two or three centuries all the other recognizable Christologies (such as messianism, adoptionism, Christo-angelology). To some extent, it is almost certain that the Jewish wisdom doctrine played a major part in the elaboration of this 'high Christology': the functions of the divine Wisdom (gr. Sophia) as well as the features of its essence were assigned to Christ. The Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora in particular, with its efforts to understand the correlations between Wisdom, Torah ('Law') and the Greek Logos (WORD), seems to have passed crucial theological thought patterns to early Christianity. Apparently, the very old idea of the exaltation to divine majesty of the killed and risen Christ was the centre of gravity of that wavelike movement, which gradually seized the qualities of wisdom and Torah and transferred them to Christ: pre-existence (existing before His earthly existence), mediation in the creation of the world, effective action within the course of history, and power of redemption. The significance of Christ is this way extrapolated from the events of His Resurrection and exaltation back to the origins of time (from the Resurrection and exaltation of Christ to His baptism by

John in the river Jordan, to His wondrous birth, and finally to the beginning of the creation of the world, as it is stated in the Prologue of John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…'). The reign of the exalted Christ over the entire world is thus already proclaimed in the dawn of creation.

This process of crowning the Christ with the titles of the Wisdom did not stem from a shift of the Jewish Sophia. Quite to the contrary, one could speak of a common theological concern: the fundamental questions that wish to determine the *cause of the world* and its order, that now lead to new answers, in the light and the horizons of the Christian faith. This interrogation was driven forward in the Jewish theology with regard to the figure of the divine wisdom. In Christianity this occurred in the orbit of Christ's figure, more precisely in the cult and the hymns, so in fully non-polemical forms. For the early Christianity the religious services were a prime source of theological knowledge, the 'law of praying, the law of worship' (*lex orandi*) was followed generally by 'the law of believing' (*lex credendi*)! The expansion of Christ's significance in universal dimensions spanning across time and space originated in the core of the preaching of those early, Greek-speaking Christians, consisting in confessing and understanding the Christ as Lord of heaven and earth. They tried to connect the new knowledge of Christ with those forms of theology with which they were familiar. This led the crucial quest of Christian theological thinking into a territory that had barely been explored up to that point. The mystery of the world order, as it could be previously perceived in wisdom, law, and Logos, now spoke to the Christians through the figure and the history of Christ.

In connection to this issue, in his life-long quarrel with what he considered and designated as 'Arianism', Athanasius advocated the idea that the threefold naming of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as it is found in the 'baptism commandment' of Mt 28, 19, in His all-encompassing salvific action in both time and eternity) should not be confined just within the limitations of its meaning in the history of redemption or revelation. In fact, according to Athanasius, it is unavoidable to confess that God 'in Himself' – not just in his *action* within the creation and towards people – and as per His nature (οὐσία) is the Living God, God in communion, the Trinity.

Perhaps his rationale could be summed up like this: the idea that emerges clearly from the very beginning, already in his early works 'Against the Heathens' and 'On the Incarnation of the Word' and that stands firmly in place in his (three authentic) 'Discourses against Arians' as his chief dogmatic contribution – later on reaching its culmination in 'The Life of St. Anthony' – is the close relation, the interdependence between the Trinity doctrine and salvation, between 'Christology' and soteriology. Athanasius's understanding of Christ, which in this respect is reminiscent of the views of Irenaeus of Lyon, a

church father of the 2nd century, is clarified through his teaching on salvation, and that way, his teaching on salvation is possible only in relation to his Christology.

But what does that mean? It means that when one focuses on the 'benefactions of Christ' they can infer the magnificence of the Benefactor, and conversely, when one is mindful of the divine majesty, they can understand the egregiousness of the salvation He gave us. Athanasius will not even hear of a Christ who is not capable of truly saving mankind. The Apostle bears witness of the real Saviour (Acts 4, 19: 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved'). And yet a hero, or a demi-god, or any sublime 'divine' being – as long as this is not God Himself – has the power and the authority to operate redemption. Who denies that the Logos-Son is 'of the essence of the Father', a phrase introduced by the Nicene Creed, degrades Him to a mere false god one way or another and denies our salvation. Both aspects must be taken into account. When someone denies one or the other, they clearly show they don't know much of either our Lord's dignity (as described in the Scriptures), or of our own perdition and of the single way we may overcome it; they also show they do not know the Christ, because they lack the knowledge of salvation, and that they do not have the knowledge of salvation, because they are deprived of the proper knowledge of the Son and of the triune God.

6.

In order to conclude, allow me to return once more to my introduction: to the anniversary of the Reformation, Christianity's 2000 years-jubilee, and the similar occasions. Such anniversaries should be celebrated without any triumphalism or conceit, but also without exaggerated self-doubt and complexes of inferiority. It should not be concealed, that almost from the very beginning of the faith in the living, tri-personal God has been the 'Christian form of monotheism' and an integral part of the Christian identity; this should not be kept a secret and nevertheless we should also not be oblivious to the inquiries and objections on the part of the Jewish and the Muslim monotheism as far as the Christian tradition of a Trinitarian speaking of God is concerned.

The central issue of the so-called 'Arian controversy' was the relationship of Christ and God, the matter of Him being 'the Son of God', and not so much the nature of God. While the 'Arians' argued that the Son was not really divine – although the Holy Scriptures referred to Him as 'the firstborn of every creature' (Col 1, 15) – their opponents, Athanasius among others, tried to show with the help of extensive exegesis of debatable biblical statements that Christ was 'true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father', as the Nicene Creed said.

There were, however, individual theologians, such as Hilary of Poitiers, the younger contemporary of the bishop of Alexandria who was dubbed 'the Athanasius of the West', who on the one hand subscribed to everything, but on the other hand also transferred the debate to a different area and broadened the discussion on the nature of God.

In his most seminal work, his comprehensive treatise 'On the Trinity' (*De Trinitate*), composed during his exile in the East (356- 360), Hilary said the following: 'we cannot, as true believers, assert that God is One (*unum Deum ... praedicare*), if we mean by it that He is alone (*solus*); for faith in a lonely God denies the Godhead of the Son. If, on the other hand, we assert, as we truly can, that the Son is God, we are in danger, so they fondly imagine, of deserting the truth that God is One. We are in peril on either hand; we may deny the unity or we may maintain the isolation' (VII, 3). To sum up: although the God of the history of salvation is one (*unus*), he is not lonely (*solitarius*); and how God reveals Himself to be in the history of salvation, that is how He is in His eternal Godhead.

This accurate insight of the Latin Church father from the 4th century could be assimilated today in this manner: that the Christian's Trinitarian faith (which also contains the reason 'why Christ must also be God') can be interpreted as 'the summa of the Gospels' (Jörg Baur) or as 'the unimaginably difficult expression of the simple truth that God is living' (Eberhard Jüngel). Moreover, it is necessary to note that the Jews and the Christians distance themselves from Aristotle's 'unmoved mover'-God 'through the historical experience of Passion' and 'the suffering of their God' (Jürgen Moltmann). Even 'the Jewish experience of God' cannot reflect a simple form of monotheism, because based on the experience of divine suffering it must come to the realization that there is 'a Self-differentiation within God' (J. Moltmann in reference to Abraham Heschel, The Prophets, New York 1962). Likewise, the Christian experience of God could probably be summarized (consistent with the Jewish experience or at least opened to it) in these statements: God is love. Love is self-revelation. Self-revelation requires self- differentiation. Self-revelation is fulfilled in self-sacrifice. God's love communicates itself to those who are different from Him. Therein lies our freedom and our salvation' (J. Moltmann, in: Pinkas Lapide - J.M., *Jüdischer Monotheismus - Christliche Trinitätslehre. Ein Gespräch*, 1979, S. 44f.). Similarly, in his teaching on the Holy Trinity Augustine takes as a point of reference the experience of the surprising, responsible, and overwhelming divine love: 'you see the Trinity if you see love (…). Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love' (*De Trinitate* VIII 12,14).

Translated by Aniela Siladi