ATHANASIUS ON THE FATHER AS THE ORIGIN
OF THE SON

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Oegstgeest

Introduction. It is well known\(^1\) that Origen’s doctrine of the Father as the ground of divinity represents a hierarchic conception of the Divine which betrays Platonic influence. It appears that Athanasius, too, states firmly that the Son and the Spirit have their ἀρχή in the Father. The present paper intends to show to what degree Athanasius has adopted and to what degree he has adapted Origen’s views on this matter. According to Harnack Athanasius’ doctrine that the Father is the origin of the Son implies a certain subordination of the Son to the Father\(^2\). From this it appears that Athanasius could not dissociate himself completely from the Origenistic tradition\(^3\). Harnack does not seem to be absolutely sure about the importance of this aspect of Athanasian thought. On the one hand he says that this is an important aspect of Athanasius’ doctrine\(^4\), on the other hand, when dealing with the difference between Athanasius and the Cappadocians, he describes it as a “bei Athanasius innerhalb der ganzen Betrachtung unüberwindlicher Rest”\(^5\). In the present paper we first want to analyse briefly the relevant passages in Origen in so far as they are of importance as a background to Athanasius. Secondly we want to analyse more exten-

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2 “Vater und Sohn sind ... ein einziges Wesen, das die Unterscheidung von ἀρχή und γέννημα, also von Prinzip und Abgeleitetem, und in diesem Sinne eine Subordin-nation umschliesst, die aber nicht analog der Unterordnung ist, in welcher die Creatur zu Gott steht.”, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, II, Tübingen 1909\(^4\), p 218.
3 op. cit., p 226, n. 1.
4 op. cit., p 217, n. 1.
5 op. cit., p 266.

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sively the most important passages in Athanasius which deal with the Father as the Ground or the Cause of the Son. Thirdly we intend to compare Athanasius’ thoughts on this matter with Origen’s.

I. Since Origen’s doctrine of the Logos is well known we feel entitled to confine ourselves to a brief analysis of those passages which are of direct importance to the understanding of Athanasius.

It is telling that Origen defends the Logos’ existence from all eternity in connection with the eternity of creation. Since God has always been almighty there must always have been a creation, a product of his almightiness. Since the almighty God creates in His Wisdom, and since He has always created, His Wisdom must be eternal as well. This Wisdom or Logos or Son of God is inferior to the Father. In connection with John 1:1 (θεὸς ἦν δ λόγος) Origen points out that the title θεὸς can only be applied to the ἀγέννητος αἰτία of all that is, the title θεὸς applies primarily to the Logos as the firstborn of creation, secondarily to all believers. In Sapientia Salomonis 7:26 it says that the Wisdom is the image of God’s goodness. In explaining this text Origen says that the primary goodness is found in the Father who is therefore ἀυτοσκεφάλος, the goodness of the Son is derived from the Father’s goodness (the Son can therefore only be called ἀγαθὸς).

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6 De Princ. I 2, 10: ne omnipotens quidem deus dici potest, si non sint in quos exerceat potentatum, et ideo ut omnipotens ostendatur deus, omnia subsistere necess est. Nam si quis est qui velit vel saecula aliqua transisse vel spatia vel quodcumque illud nominare vult, cum nondum facta essent quae facta sunt, sine dubio hoc ostendet, quod in illis vel saeculis vel spatuis omnipotens non erat deus et postmodum omnipotens factus est, ex quo habere coepit in quos ageret potentatum: et per hoc videbitur profec tum quendam accipisse et ex inferioribus ad meliora venisse, si quidem melius esse non dubitatur, esse eum omnipotentem quam non esse. Cf. De Princ. I 2, 9.

7 De Princ. I 2, 10: Manifeste scriptura pronuntiat dicens quia “omnia in sapientia fecisti”, et evangelium ocet quia “omnia per ipsum sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil”, et intelletag ex hoc quia non potest antiquior esse in deo omnipotentis appellatio quam patris, per filium etsiim omnipotentis est pater.

8 In Johannem II 2: τίθησιν (sc. 6 Ἰωάννης) μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἄρθρον, ὅτε θὰ “θεὸς” ὀνομασία ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀγέννητος τάσσεται τῶν ἐλλήνων αἰτίων, σωματί Δὲ αὐτό, ὅτε δὲ λόγος “θεὸς” ὀνομάζεται. . . αὐτοθέου δ θεός ἢτα. . . πάν δὲ τὸ παρὰ τὸ αὐτοθέου μετοχῆ τῆς ἐκείνου θεώτητος θεοποιούμενον οὐκ ἢ τὸ θεός, ἀλλὰ τὸ “θεός” χυμωτέρων ἰδέ σεί τοῦ λαγοτοῦ, οὐ πάντως “ὁ πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως” . . . ἐστὶ τιμίωτερος, τοῖς λοιποῖς παρ’ αὐτὸν θεοτ. . . διακοψήσας τὸ γενέσθαι τόθεος. In a reference to John 17:3 Origen says that only the Father is ἀληθῆς θεὸς, ibid. See also In Joh. II 3.

9 De Princ. I 2, 13: οὗτοι τοῖοι ἥγοιμαι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος καὶ ὢν λειτυθέσθαι στὶ τῇ ἀγαθότητος τοῦ θεοῦ ἢτα, ἀλλ’ οὗ ἀυτοσκεφαλοῦ, καὶ τάχα καὶ οὕς ἄγαθος ἢττ’ οὐχ ἡ ἄπλος ἄγαθος. See also In Joh. XIII 23, XIII 96.