
The Achievements of the Incarnation

The achievements of the Incarnation are more than the waves of the sea

The achievements of the Saviour effected through his incarnation are of such a kind and so great that if anyone wished to expound them he would be like those who gaze at the vast expanse of the sea and wish to count the number of its waves.

For as one cannot grasp all the waves with his eyes, since the successive waves elude the perception of him who tries to count them; so also he who tries to comprehend all the accomplishments of Christ in the body is unable to grasp them all in his reckoning, for those that pass before his mind are more than he thinks he has grasped.

So it is better not to view or speak of all of which one cannot even express a part, but to recall one part, leaving you to wonder at the whole. For they are all equally amazing, and wherever anyone looks, there to his exceeding wonder he sees the divinity of the Word.¹

The Incarnation as supreme revelation

For as a good teacher who cares for his pupils always condescends to teach by simpler means those who cannot profit by more advanced things, so does the Word of God...

For because men had turned away from the contemplation of God, and were sunk as it were in an abyss with their eyes cast down, and they were seeking God in creation and sensible things, and had set up mortal men and demons as gods for themselves; for this reason the merciful and universal Saviour, the Word of God, took to himself a body and lived as a man among men...

For since men's reason had descended to sensible things, the Word submitted to being revealed through a body, in order that he might bring men to himself as a man and turn their senses to himself, and that thenceforth, although they saw him as a man, he might persuade them through the works he did that he was not merely a man but God, and the Word and Wisdom of the true God.²

¹ *DI* 54 (Thomson, pp.269-71)

² *DI* 15-16 (Thomson, p.169-73)

Renewal of the image

For as when a figure which has been painted on wood is spoilt by dirt, it is necessary for him whose portrait it is to come again so that the picture can be renewed in the same material - for because of his portrait the material on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the portrait is redone on it - even so the all-holy Son of the Father, who is the image of the Father, came to our realms to renew man who had been made in his likeness, and, as one lost, to find him through the forgiveness of sins.³

The annihilation of death

So the Word of God came in his own person, in order that, as he is the image of his Father, he might be able to restore man who is in the image. In any other way it could not have been done, without the destruction of death and corruption. So he was justified in taking a mortal body, in order that in it death could be destroyed and men might be again renewed in the image. For this, then, none other than the image of the Father was required.⁴

Effective Solidarity... with universal impact

As when a great king has entered some great city and dwelt in one of the houses in it, such a city is then greatly honoured, and no longer does any enemy or bandit come against it, but it is rather treated with regard because of the king who has taken up residence in one of its houses; so also is the case with the King of all. For since he has come to our realm and has dwelt in a body similar to ours, now every machination of the enemy against men has ceased and the corruption of death, which formerly had power over them, has been destroyed.⁵

³ *DI* 14 (Thomson, p.167)

⁴ *DI* 13 (Thomson, p.167)

⁵ *DI* 9 (Thomson, p.155)

The “internalisation” of grace

If he had spoken and undone the curse, merely in accordance with his capacity to do so, the power of he who thus issued the command would have been displayed but humanity would nevertheless have remained as Adam was before the transgression, receiving grace externally and not having it mingled with the body. For such was Adam when he was placed in paradise.

In fact, perhaps humanity would have become worse because it had by now learned to transgress. So, this being the situation with humanity, if it were again deceived by the serpent, there would be again a need for God to command and undo the curse. The need would then become limitless, and humanity would remain none the less in slavery and liability to sin. Forever sinning, it would be forever in need of pardon and it would be never freed. Being, on its own, mere flesh, it would be forever defeated by the law through the weakness of the flesh.⁶

Union of God with humanity

If the Son was a creature, humanity would have remained none the less mortal and not united to God. It was not a creature that united creatures to God, for in that case this creature would be itself in search of one to unite it to God.⁷

Recapitulation

He suffered to prepare freedom from suffering for those who suffer in him. He descended so that he may raise us up. He took upon himself the ordeal of being born that we might love him who is unbegotten; He went down to corruption that corruption might put on immortality. He became weak for us that we might rise with power. He descended to death that He might grant us immortality and give life to the dead. Finally he became human that we who die as human beings might live again and that death may no longer have sovereignty over us; for the apostolic word proclaims, “Death shall not have dominion over us.”⁸

⁶ CA 2.68 (Anatolios, p.162)

⁷ CA 2.69 (Anatolios, p.162)

⁸ *Festal Letter* 10.8 (Anatolios, p.70)

The Incarnation was required to enable us to become children of God and to “make humanity receptive of divinity”

The love of God for humanity is such that by grace he becomes Father of those in relation to whom he had previously only been Maker. He becomes their Father when created human beings receive “into their hearts the Spirit of the Son, crying out, ‘Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6), as the apostle says. These are the ones who, by receiving the Word, receive authority from him “to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). Being creatures by nature, they would not become “sons” except by receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son. So it was in order to bring this about and to make humanity receptive of divinity that “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14).⁹

The Incarnation did not diminish the divinity of the Word but elevated humanity

For the flesh did not detract from the glory of the Word. Far from it! Rather, it is the flesh which was glorified by the Word. Nor was the Son’s divinity diminished because he who is in the form of God received the form of a servant (cf. Phil 2:6-7). Rather, he became the Liberator of all flesh and of all creation (cf. Rom 8:21). And if God sent his Son born of a woman (cf. Gal 4:4), this is not a deed that brings shame but glory and great grace.

He became a human being that we might be divinized in him; he came to be in a woman and was begotten of a virgin in order to transport our errant race into himself and in order that from then on we may become a holy race and “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), as the blessed Peter has written.¹⁰

Deification

He was made man that we might be made God.¹¹

⁹ CA 2.59 (Anatolios, p.153)

¹⁰ *Letter to Adelphius* 4 (Anatolios, p.238)

¹¹ *DI* 54 (NPNF², Vol.4, p.65b)