

# Oh Sweet Exchange!

## The Soteriological Significance of the Incarnation in the *Epistle to Diognetus*

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Among the variegated collection known as the Apostolic Fathers is the widely esteemed *Epistle to Diognetus*, which is generally considered to be a “persuasive and attractive apology for the Christian code of life.”<sup>1</sup> In this vein J.B. Lightfoot offered the epistle his most fervent approbation, declaring it to be “the noblest of early Christian writings.”<sup>2</sup> C.C. Bunsen more elaborately stated that *Diognetus* is “after Scripture, the finest monument we know of sound Christian feeling, noble courage, and manly eloquence”; E. Norden considered it to be “one of the most brilliant things ever written by Christians in the Greek language”;<sup>3</sup> and J.M. Sailer similarly labeled it “eine Perle des christlichen Alterthums.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the sentiments of E.J. Goodspeed, that *Diognetus* “lacks entirely the convincing and gripping quality of early Christian literature,” and is nothing more than “a showy piece of Christian apologetic” are exceptional in their low regard for the epistle.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these mostly positive views of *Diognetus*, the epistle is an enigmatic work whose origins are shrouded in mystery. It is surprisingly not mentioned by any ancient author, and the lone manuscript attesting *Diognetus* (dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century) was destroyed in 1870.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the text presents a lacuna of unknown length at the end of chapter 10, and the sharp distinction in style and content between chapters 1–10 and 11–12 is universally acknowledged.<sup>7</sup> This leads to questions regarding the integrity of the epistle, with

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1 F.L. Cross, *The Early Christian Fathers*, London 1960, 27.

2 J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, London 1876, 156.

3 Cited in L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background*, Oxford 1960, 172.

4 H.E. Lona, *An Diognet: Übersetzt und erklärt* (KfA 8), Freiburg 2001, 5.

5 E.J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, Chicago 1942, 148. Notably, the revised edition of Goodspeed's classic work by R.M. Grant (1966) omits these comments.

6 Cf. M.W. Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Grand Rapids 2007, 688–689.

7 Though see the recent reappraisal by C.E. Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus' Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of Ad Diognetum* (WUNT 186), Tübingen 2006, 114–126.

most scholars viewing the last two chapters as a separate document of some sort, perhaps a Paschal homily like that of Melito of Sardis (*Peri Pascha*).<sup>8</sup> These issues render it exceptionally difficult to make definitive statements regarding authorship<sup>9</sup> and recipient(s) of the epistle, though a higher degree of likelihood can be annexed to a date for the epistle in the mid to late second century, at least for chapters 1–10. A second century date is derived from a number of factors including the polemics against both Judaism and Paganism, the lack of mention of the Holy Spirit, the absence of ascetism and sacerdotalism, and the apparent lack of interest in early heresies.<sup>10</sup>

### 1. *Soteriological Focus*

If a second century date is correct, then the significance of *Diognetus* as an *early* masterpiece of Christian apologia should be recognized. In this light, the present study has a particular focus on the *soteriology* of the epistle.<sup>11</sup> A soteriological focus is evident in the epistle itself, especially chapters 7–9, which detail the planning and accomplishment of salvation. Indeed, the argument of these chapters may well be the high point of the entire epistle,<sup>12</sup> and likely represents “a clearer exposition of the meaning of the Atonement from one point of view than any before Irenaeus.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, these chapters are well deserving of extensive consideration. In particular it will be asked below what can be said regarding the climactic proclamation in 9,5 (ὡ τῆς γλυκείας ἀνταλλαγῆς, ὡ τῆς ἀνεξιχνιάστου δημιουργίας, ὡ τῶν ἀπροσδοκῆτων εὐεργεσιῶν· ἵνα ἀνομία μὲν πολλῶν ἐν δικαίῳ ἐνὶ κρυβῇ, δικαιοσύνη δὲ ἐνὸς πολλοῦς ἀνόμους δικαιοῶσῃ) as a summary of the epistle’s soteriological perspective.<sup>14</sup>

Before considering the relevant texts, a couple of additional preliminary points are in order. First, the present investigation will build on a number of earlier studies. Chief among these is the contribution by H.G. Meecham, who observed almost 70 years ago that the core of the epistle’s teaching is in its

8 Cf. H.G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus: The Greek Text with Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Manchester 1949, 64–68.

9 Suggestions cover a wide range of candidates, including Marcion, Justin Martyr, Hippolytus of Rome, Pantaenus, Melito of Sardis, Quadratus, and Polycarp of Smyrna.

10 So Meecham, *Diognetus* (see n. 8), 18–19; B.D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers (LCL) II*, Cambridge, Mass. 2003, 127.

11 Although *Diognetus* may have been originally presented orally (so Hill, *Lost Teaching of Polycarp* [see n.7], 103–106), the term “epistle” will be retained in this study given its traditional association with the document.

12 W. Eltester, *Das Mysterium des Christentums: Anmerkungen zum Diognetbrief*, ZNW 61 (1970) 278–293, here 283.

13 H.G. Meecham, *The Theology of the Epistle to Diognetus*, ET 54 (1943) 97–101, here 99.

14 This study will follow the Greek text found in Holmes (ed.), *Apostolic Fathers* (see n. 6).

Theology and in the redemption God effects in his Son.<sup>15</sup> Another helpful offering is the 1970 article by J.T. Lienhard, which focuses on the *Christology of Diognetus*.<sup>16</sup> Particularly relevant is Lienhard's articulation of the distinctions maintained between the Father and Son in *Diognetus*, along with the specific activities attributed to the Son.<sup>17</sup> We will return to these in the exegesis below.

Second, the soteriology of *Diognetus* has a distinctly *christological* focus, and the *Incarnation* of the Son is one of the key christological emphases of the letter.<sup>18</sup> As W. Eltester astutely observes: "Der Diognetbrief bestimmt das Mysterium des Christentums als die Menschwerdung Gottes."<sup>19</sup> It argued here that the centrality of the Son's Incarnation as a paradigmatic, epoch-altering event entails more than simply a once-for-all assumption of flesh, but has significant soteriological implications.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the driving focus of the following study will be to reconsider the key passages in Diogn. 9, focusing particularly on how the Incarnation may relate to the epistle's soteriological perspective. Although the interjection in 9,5 (along with 9,2) is often considered to be one of the key statements in *Diognetus*,<sup>21</sup> few firm conclusions have been reached as to what the "sweet exchange" might refer.<sup>22</sup> This is due in large part to the author's use of the rare word ἀνταλλάγῃ. Nevertheless, as a part of the investigation to follow ἀνταλλάγῃ will be revisited in the context of the letter to see if perhaps more can be said positively about the import of this term in *Diognetus*. One final word of introduction: due to the uncertainty surrounding Diogn. 11–12, these chapters will not be considered in detail in the present study in order to, following Lienhard, "avoid the possibility of conflating two distinct Christologies."<sup>23</sup>

15 Meecham, *Theology* (see n. 13), 97–101.

16 J.T. Lienhard, *The Christology of the Epistle to Diognetus*, *VigChr* 24 (1970) 280–289.

17 See especially Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 281–285.

18 Cf. Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 289; J.B. Lightfoot, *Historical Essays*, London 1896, 8; Meecham, *Theology* (see n. 13), 97, 100 n. 7; R.G. Tanner, *The Epistle to Diognetus and Contemporary Greek Thought*, in: *Papers Presented to the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford, 1975*, Berlin 1984 (*StPatr* 15), 495–508, especially 499.

19 Eltester, *Mysterium* (see n. 12), 293.

20 Cf. V.A. Spence Little, *The Christology of the Apologists*, London 1934, 68: "[The Christology of *Diognetus*'s] most prominent feature is Christ's soteriological work."

21 See again Eltester, *Mysterium* (see n. 12), 283.

22 Cf. Meecham, *Epistle to Diognetus* (see n. 8), 130; H.I. Marrou, *À Diognète* (*SC* 33), Paris 1997, 200; Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 272.

23 Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 280.

## 2. Soteriology of *Diognetus* 7–9

### 2.1 Two Ages, Revelation, and Incarnation

One of the striking features of the soteriological perspective of *Diognetus* is its two-age structure.<sup>24</sup> The first age, which was characterized by unrighteousness and ignorance of God, came to an end with the Incarnation of the Son,<sup>25</sup> and this Incarnation has inaugurated an age of righteousness (8,11; 9,1). This age of righteousness is also marked by true knowledge of God, since revelation of the divine comes only through God's beloved child (8,1.5.11). Significantly, this incarnational revelation "is not so much of the mind of the Father as of His will to save, which purpose He effects in the Son."<sup>26</sup> This relationship between the Incarnation of the Son and (salvific) knowledge fits well with the present thesis – that the *Incarnation* of the Son, and his *actions* therein, are of central soteriological significance.

This focus on the *activeness* of the Son is seen first of all in the author's articulation of a pre-temporal plan involving the Father and the Son. The first indication of this is found in 8,9, where the Father is said to have conceived a magnificent plan, which he communicated only to his child (ἐννοήσας δὲ μεγάλην καὶ ἄφραστον ἔννοιαν ἀνεκοινώσατο μόνῳ τῷ παιδί). Although the notion of a divine plan here originates with the Father, who clearly has a primary role, a second mention of the blessed intrigue indicates that the Son also plays a key part in its planning: Πάντ' οὖν ἤδη παρ' ἐαυτῷ σὺν τῷ παιδί οἰκονομικῶς<sup>27</sup> (9,1a). It also becomes clear by this second mention of the divine counsel that the program envisioned is not *creation*, but *redemption*, since it makes those who are unable to enter the Kingdom of God by their own ability worthy to enter through God's power. Additional references to this same plan are found in 8,10–11, which speak of God's wise resolution (τὴν σοφὴν αὐτοῦ βουλήν) which he revealed through his beloved child (διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ παιδός), adding that the benefits (εὐεργεσιῶν) of this plan were prepared from the beginning.<sup>28</sup> The salient point is that a divine resolution for redemption was planned by the Father *and* the Son, and this plan was to be enacted at the proper time.<sup>29</sup>

24 See R. Brändle, *Die Ethik der "Schrift an Diognet": Eine Wiederaufnahme paulinischer und johanneischer Theologie am Ausgang des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (ATHANT 64), Zürich 1975, 65–66; Marrou, *Diognète* (see n. 22), 201; Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 285.

25 The letter avoids the more precise terms such as "Jesus" or "Christ." For sake of clarity, and in accordance with accepted practice, this study will capitalize "Father" and "Son" when speaking of divine persons.

26 Meecham, *Theology* (see n. 13), 100.

27 This emendation was proposed by Lachmann in place of οἰκονομικῶς.

28 "From the beginning" likely refers to the beginning of the world, if not before (so BDAG, s. v., ἀρχή, I, b).

29 Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.*, 3.16.7.

It is important to underscore the active role of the Son in the planning of redemption. The statement in 8,9 that God communicated his redemptive plan to his Son may seem to contrast with the statement in 9,1 that the Son was also active in the planning. This has led some to label the Son's filial relationship as one of *subordination*, even implying that the Son has a divinity that is derived from the Father.<sup>30</sup> Further supporting this perspective is the way in which the Son is *sent from* the Father (7,2.4–5.6; 10,2; cf. 9,2), and at least two texts indicate that the Son is used as an *instrument* of the Father (7,2; 8,11).<sup>31</sup> However, other texts warn against a strict subordinationism at the expense of unity. The *unity* of the Father and Son is implied in those texts that, when compared, seem to assign the same roles to both Father and Son (7,2/8,7; 7,4/9,6; 8,5/9,6; 8,9/9,1). Nevertheless, some actions are proper only to the Son (7,6; 9,3.5).<sup>32</sup> Thus it is best to make a distinction between the persons of the Father and Son, while also recognizing a basic unity of the Father and Son as evidenced in their works *ad extra*.<sup>33</sup> This interplay between what we might label *ontology* and *function* (to which we will return below) appears to be summarized well in 7,4 which, speaking of the Father's sending of the Son, reads: ὡς θεὸν ἔπεμψεν, ὡς ἄνθρωπον<sup>34</sup> πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἔπεμψεν.

Additionally, in contrast to the idleness of idols disparaged in the polemic against paganism (2,2–8; cf. 3,3),<sup>35</sup> the author is keen to show Diognetus that God was not oblivious to the world in the former age of unrighteousness but was (actively!) creating the “now” epoch of righteousness (9,1). In *Diognetus* the true God is active and has been from the beginning (7,2; 8,7–11; 9,1.6; 10,2), and as one who is united with this God, the Son has in some sense been active in creation (7,2) and redemption (9,1) even before his Incarnation. Yet, as we will see below, the author emphasizes the soteriological (i.e., redemptive) rather than the creational significance of the Incarnation.

## 2.2 Righteousness and Ability

Consonant with the soteriological focus of the Incarnation in *Diognetus* is the epistle's doctrine of *righteousness*. As noted above, it is the Incarnation of the Son that brought about the “now” age of righteousness (9,1). Not surprisingly, righteous(ness) therefore also characterizes the Son (9,2–5), such that what can

30 So Little, *Christology* (see n. 20), 71; Meecham, *Theology* (see n. 13), 100.

31 Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 281–283.

32 Cf. Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 283–284.

33 Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 284; Marrou, *Diognète* (see n. 22), 191. Cf. Meecham, *Theology* (see n. 13), 100.

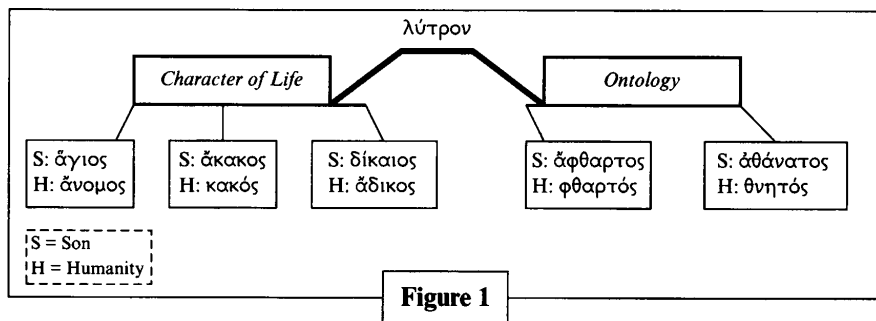
34 Following the emendation of Lachmann; omitted in *Argentoratensis Graecus* ix.

35 Although *Diognetus* does not contain any explicit references to the Old Testament, the author almost certainly was influenced by it (see Lona, *Diognet* [see n. 4], 49–51). Thus, *Diogn. 2* may well draw upon *Isa 40–55*, which denigrates idols and focuses on the God of Israel as the one who truly acts.

be predicated of righteousness can also be predicated of the Son. We will explore this in what follows.

Before considering in greater detail the meaning of righteousness in Diogn. 9, we should consider the contrast drawn between the righteousness of the Son and the lawless deeds of humanity. This is evident beginning in 9,1 where the former age of unrighteousness is distinguished by a number of activities that, as part of the unrighteous age, stand in contrast to the righteous age inaugurated by the Son. These include undisciplined passions (ἀτάκτοις φοραῖς), pleasures (ἡδοναῖς), and lusts (ἐπιθυμίαις), and are described more generally as sins and deeds unworthy of life (ἐργων ἀνάξιοι ζωῆς). The sum of these is the impossibility of humanity to enter the Kingdom of God based on its own ability. Instead, humanity must rely on the power of God to be made worthy.

Similar thoughts are recorded in the verses that follow. Diogn. 9,2 speaks of the filling up of unrighteousness (πεπλήρωτο μὲν ἡ ἡμετέρα ἀδικία), which again implies a consummation of sinful deeds that leads to punishment and even to death (κόλασις καὶ θάνατος). Further on in 9,2 the Son is described as a ransom (λύτρον), a term to which we will return below. However, at this juncture it will be beneficial to heed the description the author himself gives to λύτρον. Five contrasting couplets, all utilizing an alpha privative, are offered to explain the qualities of the Son as λύτρον (see Figure 1).<sup>36</sup>



The emphasis in the first three pairs is on the defining character of life, or deeds, of those in view. Put differently, the *holiness* of the Son is not to be viewed abstractly, but in direct contrast to the lawlessness of those he came to redeem. Similarly, the *lawlessness* of humanity describes not primarily humanity's abstract state, but characterizes deeds that run contrary to the law (of God).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> The author for these descriptions of the Son is most likely drawing upon New Testament language and imagery (Rom 5,6–8; Heb 7,26; 1Pet 3,18; so Lona, Diognet [see n. 4], 267–8). Cf. similarly 1 Clem. 21,6; 49,6; Ign., Rom. 6:1; Ign., Smyrn. 1,2; Pol., Phil. 9,2.

<sup>37</sup> Thus it appears that specific deeds are in view, even if these are conveyed in more general terms.

These first three couplets may also have more of a judicial, or even forensic, connotation.<sup>38</sup> The upshot of this is that, just as *lawless*, *wicked*, and *unrighteous* best describe the deeds of sinful humanity in 9,2, so *holy*, *innocent*, and *righteous* are best taken as referring not to the Son's *ontological* nature, but to the character of his actions. On the other hand, the final two couplets have more of an ontological focus on the *natures* of those in view. Thus, humanity's being is *corruptible* and *mortal*, whereas the Son's being is *incorruptible* and *immortal*.<sup>39</sup> Viewing the five couplets in this way best accentuates the symmetry of contrasts made.

Additionally, although it is not explicitly stated, these first three statements regarding the character of the Son are best taken as describing the life of the Son *incarnate*.<sup>40</sup> The reasons for this are twofold. First, the three couplets contrasting the character of life of the Son with humanity are best understood as descriptive of the (outward) deeds of the respective parties, perhaps in relation to God's law. Second, one is able to detect a movement in Diogn. 8–9 from the planning of redemption (8,9), to the sending/revealing of the Son (8,10–11), to acknowledgement of the Son's participation in the planning of redemption (9,1), and finally to the Son's accomplishment of redemption in accord with the Father's design (9,2–6). This final stage – the *accomplishment* of redemption – is contingent upon the revelation through the beloved child (8,11), and thus is best understood as concurrent with the life of the Son incarnate.

In 9,3 the Son's righteousness is identified as something that “covers” (καλύπτει) sins. It is not inconsequential that a positive soteriological accomplishment is attributed to (the Son's) righteousness: righteousness in this instance is *active*. It is to be noted that the contrast between the Son and humanity, though here more subtle, seems to continue from 9,2 as *righteousness* is able to offset *sins*. Since the plural *sins* most likely underscores particular behaviors and not simply “sin” as an ethereal concept, it raises the possibility that righteousness may also refer to a certain kind of behavior. If the author intended a continued contrast between the Son and humanity, perhaps a plurality of righteous deeds (in opposition to a plurality of sinful deeds) is intended by δικαιοσύνη in 9,3.

The following verse (9,4) is structurally and thematically similar to 9,<sup>41</sup> and further reveals the author's perspective on righteousness. Here the author describes humanity as ἄνομος and ἄσέβεια, adjectives which again typify an ethical quality of life. The answer to these problems is to be justified (δικαιωθῆναι), and this by the Son of God alone. Again it is to be noted that justification here appears to be actively attributed to the Son, and this overcomes law-

38 Cf. Lona, Diognet (see n. 4), 267.

39 For *corruptible/incorruptible*, cf. Athanasius, Inc. 8; C. Ar. 3,33.

40 Pace Meecham (Diognetus [see n. 8], 121) who suggests that only in 7,4 is the earthly life of the Son in view.

41 See Lona, Diognet (see n. 4), 269.

lessness and ungodliness.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, both 9,3,4 are presented as rhetorical questions regarding soteriological possibilities. Note the shared roots below:

9,3: τί γὰρ ἄλλο τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἡδυνήθη καλύψαι ἢ ἐκείνου δικαιοσύνη;<sup>43</sup>

9,4: ἐν τίνι δικαιωθῆναι δυνατὸν τοὺς ἀνόμους ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀσεβεῖς ἢ ἐν μόνῳ τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ;

Taken together these verses point to the inability of humanity to cover its own sin; instead, humanity must be justified only through the righteousness of the Son of God. Indeed (skipping 9,5 for a moment), this is precisely the thought expressed in 9,6a where it is stated: ἐλέγξας οὖν ἐν μὲν τῷ πρόσθεν χρόνῳ τὸ ἀδύνατον τῆς ἡμέτερας φύσεως εἰς τὸ τυχεῖν ζωῆς, νῦν δὲ τὸν σωτῆρα δείξας δυνατὸν σῶζειν καὶ τὰ ἀδύνατα.

Here the author notes the inability of “our natures” to attain life, which corresponds to the earlier statement in 9,1 that “we” are: ἀδύνατον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. Interestingly, this passage ascribes inability to “natures” (φύσεως), which may correlate to the *ontology* category from the description of λύττρον in 9,2.

This does not necessarily, however, negate the distinction suggested between *life* and *ontology* in 9,2 (see Figure 1). Instead, an investigation of δυνατός and words that share this root in *Diognetus* suggests that the author in 9,6a may combine and develop the elements of *life* and *ontology* in order to highlight the saving ability of the Son. Diogn. 9 finds a heavy concentration of words from the *δυν* root (9x) in association with words sharing the *δικ* root (10x). Among the prominent usages of *δυν* terms are those texts that speak of the *inability* of humanity to enter the kingdom of God (9,1) or attain life (9,6) in the age of unrighteousness due to the impotence of humanity’s nature (9,6). These ideas correspond to the thoughts of 9,3–4 that the answer to this predicament is to be justified by the righteousness of the Son of God. Moreover, 9,2 further indicates that God had only recently revealed his kindness and power (δύναμις). Given the role of Son as revealer elsewhere in *Diognetus* (8,11) and the focus in Diogn. 9 on the redemption wrought by the Son, this revelation likely refers to the Son’s Incarnation. Taken together, these terms illustrate the need for righteousness in order to enter the Kingdom of God – which comes through the righteous Son – and the inability of men and women to attain it by their own lives (9,2) or nature (9,2.6). This inability of fallen nature to attain life assumes that the (divine) nature of the Son is able positively to accomplish salvation.

42 Lienhard (Christology [see n. 16], 283) and Lona (Diognet [see n. 4], 270) take ἐν with a personal object as *instrumental* in the phrase ἐν μόνῳ τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ. If a *locative* idea is more prominent, it does not necessarily negate the activeness of the righteousness (as we see in 9,3), though it may not be as explicit here.

43 Though there may be some ambiguity in ἐκείνου, contextually it is best to take this as referring to the Son, especially given the parallels with 9,4 that clearly refer to the Son, and the affirmation of the righteousness of the one (= Son) in 9,5.



Lienhard also observes this correlation between ability and righteousness: “In the first age, man lacks righteousness, or is positively unrighteous; and he is powerless to change this situation ... At the beginning of the second age, the Son does come, and by his power and righteousness renders man capable – or gives him the power – to become righteous.”<sup>44</sup> This summary is essentially correct, although more needs to be said regarding how man is *capable* or *has the power* to become righteous. I believe the answer to this question is bound up with the interpretation of 9,5, particularly in the concept of “exchange” (ἀνταλλαγή).

### 2.3 The Nature of “Exchange”

It has heretofore been argued that in *Diognetus* the Son is actively involved in redemption, and as the righteous one he is able to justify those who are unable to attain life on their own. We now return to the meaning of λύτρον in 9,2, which sets the stage for an understanding of ἀνταλλαγή in 9,5. It seems to be the case that λύτρον in 9,2 entails some sort of representation, particularly as it pertains to the death of the Son. This is not, as Donaldson suggests, merely a “moral work”<sup>45</sup> – Marrou rightly objects this view can only be adopted by cheapening the meaning of λύτρον.<sup>46</sup> Lona’s view is more apropos: “Der λύτρον-Begriff deutet den Tod Jesu in seiner Heilsrelevanz als Befreiung und als stellvertretende Hingabe.”<sup>47</sup> Pointing to the substitutionary idea is the phrase τὰς ἡμετέρας ἁμαρτίας ἀνεδέξατο,<sup>48</sup> and the phrase in which λύτρον is found: αὐτὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν ἀπέδοτο λύτρον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

But it may also be possible that the substitutionary, sin-bearing function of the Son is not limited to the death of the Son in Diogn. 9. Several factors point to this possibility. First, although the term λύτρον and the New Testament imagery associated with the phrase do evoke passages where a ransom-by-death seems to be in view (Mt 20,28/Mk 10,45), the author of *Diognetus* chooses at least three terms that are best taken as characteristics of the *life* of Jesus in his own exposition of λύτρον (see Figure 1). To be sure, these characteristics (along with the more *ontological* descriptions) almost certainly enabled the Son to serve as a worthy *sacrifice*, but we should not jump too quickly from these descriptions of his life to his death without giving the ethical dimensions full credence. Second, although the sinfulness of man is said to be “concealed” (κρυβῆ, *passive voice*) in one righteous person in 9,5, earlier we have seen the active sense attached to righteousness which “covers” (καλύψαι; 9,3). As noted

44 Lienhard, *Christology* (see n. 16), 285–286.

45 J. Donaldson, *A Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine: From the Death of the Apostles to the Nicene Council. II. The Apologists*, London, 1866, 131.

46 Marrou, *Diognète* (see n. 22), 200 n. 1.

47 Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 267.

48 The subject here is God, but it becomes clear later in this chapter that God bears sins *through* his son (cf. 9,4).

above, this *active* voice may indicate the soteriological role of the Son's Incarnation – perhaps even personified as δικαιοσύνη – which extends beyond only his death. Moreover, as Donaldson notes, it is not only the bearing of sins that is in view in Diogn. 9, but also the planning and accomplishment of redemption. Significantly, the Incarnation of the Son is the means envisioned by which redemption was accomplished.<sup>49</sup> This perspective is not to be neglected. Third, the sustained contrast between the righteousness of the Son and the lawlessness-unrighteousness-guiltiness of humanity in Diogn. 9 must be kept in view, and this contrast is one that is seen in the *deeds* of the respective parties. Indeed, this contrast is also apparent in 9,5, a text which we have not yet considered. Here, in 9,5b, is a contrast between the righteousness of one and the sinfulness of many that evidences an ABBA pattern (the verb associated with each phrase is in parentheses):

ἀνομία πολλῶν  
δικαίῳ ἐνὶ (κρυβῆ)  
δικαιοσύνη ἐνὸς (δικαιώση)  
πολλοὺς ἀνόμους

Again lawlessness (as a character of life) finds its answer in the righteousness of the one (Son), and this righteousness is described both passively (κρυβῆ) and actively (δικαιώση).

These observations lead to a fourth reason, which is the intent of ἀνταλλαγῇ in 9,5. Determining the meaning of this word is difficult, since it is unclear where it is attested before *Diognetus*. Frederick William Danker's recent revision of Walter Bauer's *Wörterbuch* (BDAG) still lists the term as appearing in Aristotle's *Physics*. In this context ἀνταλλαγῇ explains ἀντιπερίστασις, and is described as "an exchange [ἀνταλλαγῇ] of places made when one body is thrust out by another."<sup>50</sup> However, this reference is based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century text of Bekker, and is not universally attested in modern versions.<sup>51</sup> It is thus uncertain how widely this purported Aristotelian usage would have been known in the ancient world (though it does appear in later commentaries on Aristotle).<sup>52</sup> BDAG also lists the word as occurring in Maximus Tyrius, but this involves another text critical uncertainty.<sup>53</sup> In light of this dearth of evidence for the usage of ἀνταλλαγῇ, Lona concludes the term is not found in literature before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.<sup>54</sup>

49 Cf. Donaldson, *Critical History* (see n. 45), 128.

50 BDAG, s. v.

51 See, e.g., the Loeb edition: Aristotle, *Phys.*, 267a, 18 (LCL; Wicksteed and Cornford). It is also not found in the text of *Physics* included in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

52 Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 272 n. 261.

53 Lona, *ibid.* observes that the 1994 edition of Trapp reads ἀλλαγῇ and not ἀνταλλαγῇ.

54 Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 272. Similarly see Marrou, *Diognète* (see n. 22), 200 n. 2; E.H. Blakeney, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, London 1943, 72.

The term, is, however, used in later Christian literature, though infrequently (e.g., Athanasius, Basilus, Epiphanius).<sup>55</sup> More common is the related term ἀντάλλαγμα, which is found in biblical contexts (Ruth 4,7; Job 28,15; 1Kin 20,2; Jer 15,13; Psa 54,20; 88,52; Mt 16,26; Mk 8,37) and Patristic writings, where it most often mean “something given in exchange” or possibly “representative.”<sup>56</sup> However, ἀνταλλαγή refers not to an object (or person?) *given* in exchange, but is an abstract noun referring to the notion of exchange itself. Thus, although later usage of ἀνταλλαγή and similar forms may *inform* an understanding of ἀνταλλαγή in Diogn. 9,5, the particular usage of this word in its present context will be most beneficial when seeking to determine its import.

The best context with which to begin is the three interjections in 9,5:

ὦ τῆς γλυκείας ἀνταλλαγῆς  
 ὦ τῆς ἀνεξιχνιάστου δημιουργίας  
 ὦ τῶν ἀπροσδοκῆτων εὐεργεσιῶν

Since the current question is what precisely is meant by ἀνταλλαγή, not much can be said about the first interjection until we take more contextual features into consideration. The second interjection concerns the “incomprehensible creative work,” and although δημιουργία is often used of *creation*,<sup>57</sup> here the creative activity of *redemption* is in view.<sup>58</sup> It is also to be noted that there is a certain amount of ambiguity regarding the subject of δημιουργία in 9,5. In 8,7 God is called δημιουργός, and the participial form of δημιουργέω in 9,1 most likely also applies to God. However, the focus in 9,3–4, and in the latter parts of 9,5, is on the righteousness of the Son in redemption. Might the “incomprehensible creative work” that receives the author’s approbation in 9,5 refer to the redemptive work of the Son who enables justification (9,4), and who himself is described as the δημιουργός (7,2) earlier in the letter? This possibility must not be dismissed.

The third interjection may also suggest the pro-activity of the Son in redemption. Here the phrase “unexpected benefits” (ἀπροσδοκῆτων εὐεργεσιῶν) recalls εὐεργεσιῶν in 8,11. It was argued above that the benefits in 8,11 referred to those proffered in the redemption that was planned by the Father with the Son, and these were revealed through the beloved child. In 8,11 it is not conclusive whether the blessings (εὐεργεσιῶν) in view refer to those of God, or those of the Son, though the more likely option is that the benefits are the Father’s, and these are *revealed* in his Son. However, it need not follow that the benefits in 9,5 must also refer to those of the Father. Indeed, just as we saw the plausibility of δημιουργ terms applying both to the Father (δημιουργός, 8,7)

<sup>55</sup> So Lona, Diognet (see n. 4), 272 n. 261.

<sup>56</sup> Lampe, s.v.; LSJ, s.v.

<sup>57</sup> See 1 Clem. 20,5–6, which includes both the terms ἀνεξιχνίαστος and δημιουργία in reference to creation.

<sup>58</sup> So Lona, Diognet (see n. 4), 272; cf. BDAG, s.v.

and his work (δημιουργέω, 9,1) and to the Son (δημιουργός, 7,2) and his work (δημιουργία, 9,5), so here εὐεργεσιῶν may refer to the Father's benefits in 8,11, but to the benefits of the Son's righteousness in 9,5.

In further support of these interjections being descriptive of the Son, it is clear that the author in 9,5b is praising the righteousness of the Son. Moreover, by 9,5b it is clear that the Son himself *is* righteousness, which describes his character of life and ability to serve as a λύτρον. Indeed, the interjection in 9,2 (ὦ τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης φιλανθρωπίας καὶ ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ) functions as a framing device with the three interjections in 9,5 to highlight the thoughts in between. Here the two-fold nature of those thoughts (9,2–4) is clear: “In unse-rem Text soll damit die *Menschwerdung* und die *Dahingabe* des Gottessohnes für die Sünde der Menschheit augenfällig unterstrichen werden.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the three interjections in 9,5 climactically celebrate the role of the Son's Incarnation and sacrificial death.

Having considered the contextual features surrounding the term ἀνταλ-λαγή, we may now reconsider the slippery term itself.<sup>60</sup> There seems to be good reason for understanding Diogn. 9,2b–6a as tracing the significance and role of the Son in redemption. This is particularly true of the uses of the δικ terms in 9,3–5, which are very closely identified with the Son. On either side of the interjections in 9,5a one finds descriptions of the Son's righteousness and ability to justify. It is clear in Diogn. 9 that humanity is lawless, unjust, guilty, sinful, and ungodly, and therefore unable to attain life. In contradistinction to these negative deeds is the positive righteousness of the Son that enables humanity to attain God's Kingdom and life. And, as noted throughout this study, it was the Son's active righteousness – his character of life – *in the Incarnation* that enabled him to offset humanity's ineffectual deeds and serve as a λύτρον.

Therefore, in light of this focus on the Son's Incarnation and death, it is likely that the “exchange” in view should be viewed as the entirety of the work of the Son in the Incarnation, extending both to a positive accomplishment of righteousness, and serving as a sacrificial λύτρον in his death. The “exchange” in this sense would be a holistic exchange between the lawless deeds of humanity, which lead to death, and the righteous life of the Son, which also led to his death (9,2). Viewing the ἀνταλλαγή in this way best retains the author's own focus on the plurality of lawless deeds that leads to death which could only be offset by the righteousness of the Son who was given for sinners. Thus, this understanding gives due weight to both the Incarnation and sacrifice of the Son, which are highlighted particularly in 9,2b–5.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Eltester, *Mysterium* (see n. 12), 283. Italics added.

<sup>60</sup> Lona (Diognet [see n. 4], 272) includes a brief, but helpful, survey of possibly related literature.

<sup>61</sup> Thus asking whether the “exchange” is a *person* or *state*, as Meecham does, (Diognetus [see n. 8], 130) may not be the best question. Indeed, it is difficult to set up an either/or contrast here since *righteousness*, though it could be a state, is so closely identified with the Son in *Diognetus*.

### 3. *An Early Pauline Interpretation?*

The question, however, may arise whether there is any warrant for this interpretation of ἀνταλλαγή that gleams from such a wide-ranging view of righteousness. Although it is to be admitted that the author of *Diognetus* offers a unique perspective on early Christian doctrine that is surely molded for his audience, we can nevertheless detect a number of shared features with New Testament authors. Particularly relevant for this section of *Diognetus* is the Pauline corpus. Although debate persists regarding the extent to which Pauline influence *in general* is to be found in *Diognetus*, that Diogn. 9 exhibits extensive verbal parallels with Pauline literature is widely accepted.<sup>62</sup>

More specifically, singularly significant for the present study are the parallels between Diogn. 9,5 and Rom 5,12–19, particularly vv. 18–19:<sup>63</sup>

Diogn. 9,5b

ἵνα ἀνομία μὲν πολλῶν ἐν δικαίῳ ἐνὶ κρυβῇ,

δικαιοσύνη δὲ ἐνὸς πολλοὺς ἀνόμους δικαιοῶσι

Rom 5,18b–19

οὕτως καὶ δι' ἐνὸς δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας  
ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς·

ὥσπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς  
ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ  
πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ  
ἐνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

Particularly noteworthy are the contrasts between the *one* and the *many*, and between *disobedience* and *righteousness*. In Diogn. 9,5b the righteousness of one man overcomes the lawlessness of humanity, and it has been argued that this righteousness includes the entire scope of his redemptive life. Similarly, although the δικαίωμα and ὑπακοή of Jesus in Rom 5,18–19 can certainly correspond to his redemptive death, many have taken this to refer to the whole course of obedience of Jesus' life. For example, Charles Cranfield comments that “by Christ's δικαίωμα Paul means not just His atoning death but the obedience of His life as a whole,” and that ὑπακοή “covers His whole life, not just His passion and death.”<sup>64</sup> Regardless of whether this is the best way to read Rom 5,18–19, it appears that the author of *Diognetus* – as one who clearly borrowed Pauline language and concepts – may have read Rom 5,18–19 in a similar way to the view espoused by Cranfield.<sup>65</sup> We can thus conclude that the author

62 Those that endorse Pauline influence in *Diognetus* include Brändle, *Ethik* (see n. 24), especially 65–67; A. Lindemann, *Paulinische Theologie im Brief an Diognet*, in: *Kerygma und Logos*. FS Carl Andresen, Göttingen 1979, 337–50; E. Molland, *Die literatur- und dogmengeschichtliche Stellung des Diognetbriefes*, ZNW 33 (1934) 289–312; Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 271. For a different view, see K. Wengst, “Paulinismus” und “Gnosis” in der Schrift an Diognet, ZKG 90 (1979) 41–62.

63 So, e.g., Meecham, *Diognetus* (see n. 8), 130; Lona, *Diognet* (see n. 4), 53, 273; R.C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, New York 1903, 336 n. 1.

64 C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC) II, Edinburgh 1975–79, 2:289.291.

65 There may also be similarities here to Irenaeus, *Haer.*, 3,18,7; 5,16,3.

of *Diognetus* understood there to be a redemptive element to the entirety of the Son's Incarnation, which he communicated by drawing upon language from Rom 5 in conjunction with the notion of *exchange*.

#### 4. Conclusion

The focus in this study has been on Diogn. 7–9, which couples a soteriological perspective with a deep interest with the righteousness of the Son in the Incarnation. This Son, who not only *accomplished* redemption but was also active in the *planning* of it, is able to serve as a ransom for his people because he counteracts the unrighteousness and lawlessness of humanity through his incarnate life. The γλυκείας ἀνταλλαγῆς of 9,5 thus celebrates the comprehensive redemptive righteousness of the Son that is exchanged for the lawlessness of many. Given the Pauline resonances in Diogn. 9, the author's focus on the Son's righteousness may be an example of an early Christian interpretation of Rom 5. However, whether such an interpretation was commonplace in early Christianity or whether *Diognetus* exhibits a distinct perspective, is a question for another day.

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