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## **THE NICENE AND POST NICENE FATHERS**

### **SAINT ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC (293-373)**

#### **BIOGRAPHY:**

It is impossible to do justice to this great saint with the time constraints we have, so only a summary will be given. An excellent account of the life of Saint Athanasius is given in *The Holy Fire*, a book by SAINT VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS.

#### **SAINT ATHANASIUS AND ARIANISM:**

As an 18 year old deacon at Alexandria, he could foresee the danger to the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, posed by a Lybian priest called Arius. Arius propagated an innocent sounding hymn among the people of Alexandria. The hymn said, "There was a time when the Father was and the Son was not."

Saint Athanasius could see the enormous implications. If the Son came into being later than the Father, then he was created and cannot be equal to the father in His divinity, and the whole belief in the Holy Trinity would be destroyed. He started to fight, what would become the battle of his whole life, to uphold the biblical truth of the divinity of the Son. Declaring that the Logos is Co-eternal and Co-Essential with the Father.

Before he was 20, he had already written his masterpiece, “Concerning the incarnation of the Word of God,” A classic that is relevant today as it was relevant 16 centuries ago.<sup>1</sup>

### **SAINT ATHANASIUS AT NICAEA:**

We here about him at Nicea, the first Ecumenical council that was held to discuss this heresy that divided the whole church, as a deacon standing beside Saint Alexander 19<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, refuting Arius until the heresy was condemned by the 318 bishops assembled there. The greatest trophy that SS. Athanasius and Alexander brought back with them from Nicea was the Creed.

### **SAINT ATHANASIUS AS POPE:**

When Saint Alexander reposed in the Lord (328), Saint Athanasius was chosen to succeed him as the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria, while yet to reach 30 years of age. For the next 40 years, he made his life mission the eradication of the error of Arianism.

When Constantine, the Roman Emperor then offered to mediate between him and Arius, he firmly but politely told him, “Matters of the state are adjudicated by Emperors, matters of faith are adjudicated by bishops of the Church”, thus becoming the first in history to uphold the doctrine of separation between Church and state. (Compare this to Augustine, who invited the emperor to intervene between him and the Donatists.)

Five Times exiled from his seat in Alexandria, he spent many years as a fugitive from one emperor or another. 16 Roman Emperors in all, he had to contend with, but in the end, he outlived them all.

There came a time, during his life long struggle to uphold the Biblical truth, when it seemed that all was lost; when even his friends would look at him with pity saying, alas, the world is against Athanasius. But he was never shaken, “and Athanasius is against the world,” he would answer.

His victory was in the end complete, and the last 7 years of his life were spent in peace, being consulted by other bishops around the world, who revered him and considered him “the bishop of the world.” Here is what the editors of the Nicene series say about him:

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<sup>1</sup>The Arian heresy is propagated today by the teachings of the Mormons and Jehovah’s witnesses.

Athanasius is the grandest figure of the primitive ages since the Apostles fell asleep. Raised up to complete their testimony to the eternal Logos, and to suffer like them. ... He is the perpetual *gnomon* of the Alexandrian School. Its testimony, its prescription, its harmony and unity are all summed up in him.<sup>1</sup>

### **HIS WRITINGS:**

His two earliest works, *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation of the Word of God* are really one book, the former being an introduction to the latter. The two books show clearly the anthropology and soteriology of Saint Athanasius. We shall treat some excerpts from both books.

### **MAN WAS CREATED AFTER THE IMAGE OF GOD:**

God Maker of all and King of all, that has His Being beyond all substance and human discovery, inasmuch as He is good and exceeding. noble, made, through His own Word our Saviour Jesus Christ, the human race after His own image, and constituted man able to see and know realities by means of this assimilation to Himself ... having nothing to hinder his knowledge of the Deity, he ever beholds, by his purity, the Image of the Father, God the Word, after Whose image he himself is made.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Athanasius is telling us that man was created in the image of his own creator, the Word, who is himself the image or *icon* of God the Father. Because of this, man is capable of knowing the deity, God the Word, and through this he can get to the knowledge of God the Father. But this divine knowledge is contingent on man keeping his purity.

### **MAN WAS CREATED RATIONAL:**

He did not barely create man, as He did all the irrational creatures on the earth, but made them after His own image, giving them a portion even of the power of His own Word; so that having as it were a kind of reflexion of the Word, and being made rational,

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<sup>1</sup>ANF vol. 6, p. 303

<sup>2</sup>Against the Heathen: section 2

they might be able to abide ever in blessedness, living the true life which belongs to the saints in paradise.<sup>1</sup>

Here we are told the meaning of being created in the image of the *Logos*, we were created rational or *logicon*. Saint Athanasius even tells us that this means that we can reflect the image of the *Logos*, like a mirror. And so, we can even have a share of the power of the *Logos*, a grace that enables us to live a saintly life.

### **THE MEANING OF RATIONAL:**

Man alone thinks of things external to himself, and reasons about things not actually present, and exercises reflection, and chooses by judgment the better of alternative reasonings. For the irrational animals see only what is present, and are impelled solely by what meets their eye ... Hence, because it is distinct, it acts as judge of the senses, and while they apprehend their objects, the intelligence distinguishes, recollects, and shews them what is best. For the sole function of the eye is to see, of the ears to hear, of the mouth to taste, of the nostrils to apprehend smells, and of the hands to touch. But what one ought to see and hear, what one ought to touch, taste and smell, is a question beyond the senses, and belonging to the soul and to the intelligence which resides in it. ... this alone is peculiar to mankind, and this is what is rational in the soul of mankind, by means of which it differs from the brutes, and shews that it is truly distinct from what is to be seen in the body. Often, for example, when the body is lying on the earth, man imagines and contemplates what is in the heavens.<sup>2</sup>

This rationality of man resides in his soul and the “intelligence which resides in it.” Such rationality enables man to make intelligent decisions about what is perceived by the senses and to exert control on the senses. It also enables man to think in an abstract manner, about things that are not perceived by the senses, like contemplating heavenly things that he cannot see. This is what makes man different from irrational creatures.

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<sup>1</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 3

<sup>2</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 31

## **MAN'S SOUL CREATED IMMORTAL AND AWARE OF ITS OWN IMMORTALITY:**

But that the soul is made immortal is a further point in the Church's teaching which you must know ... For this is the reason why the soul thinks of and bears in mind things immortal and eternal, namely, because it is itself immortal. And just as, the body being mortal, its senses also have mortal things as their objects, so, since the soul contemplates and beholds immortal things, it follows that it is immortal and lives for ever.<sup>1</sup>

Although the body is created mortal by its own nature, the soul, however is created immortal. It is aware of its own immortality and so, its object of contemplation is in (or should be) in immortal and eternal things, unlike the body, which being mortal "its senses have mortal things as their objects." The soul has its immortality "since it contemplates and beholds immortal things." It follows therefore, that if the soul ceases from contemplating immortal things, it loses its immortality.

## **MAN CREATED WITH A FREE WILL:**

But knowing once more how the will of man could sway to either side, in anticipation He secured the grace given them by a law and by the spot where He placed them. For He brought them into His own garden, and gave them a law: so that, if they kept the grace and remained good, they might still keep the life in paradise without sorrow or pain or care besides having the promise of incorruption in heaven; but that if they transgressed and turned back, and became evil, they might know that they were incurring that corruption in death which was theirs by nature: no longer to live in paradise, but cast out of it from that time forth to die and to abide in death and in corruption.<sup>2</sup>

Man was created with a free will that could sway either way. God brought man to paradise with the promise that if they kept the grace (of being

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<sup>1</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 33

<sup>2</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 3

created in the image of God) they can, first, keep living in paradise, and, second, have the promise of incorruption (immortality of both body and soul) and being promoted to live in heaven. If, on the other hand, they of their own free will would choose to become evil, they will lose the right to continue living in paradise as well as the promise of immortality.

### **THE NATURE OF EVIL:**

In the beginning wickedness did not exist. Nor indeed does it exist even now in those who are holy, nor does it in any way belong to their nature. But men later on began to contrive it and to elaborate it to their own hurt.<sup>1</sup>

The truth of the Church's theology must be manifest: that evil has not from the beginning been with God or in God, nor has any substantive existence; but that men, in default of the vision of good, began to devise and imagine for themselves what was not, after their own pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

Evil has no substantial existence. It is simply the opposite of good, in the same way that darkness has no substantial existence, being only the opposite of light. This is an important consideration, for if evil had an existence, it would have to have been created (by God), which is incompatible with the nature of God. It was man and not God who "created" evil, when, instead of contemplating God, for which reason he was created, he started to contemplate evil which has no existence.

### **THE FALL:**

The soul, departing from the contemplation of what is good and from moving in its sphere, wanders away and moves toward its contraries. ... not knowing that she is made not merely to move, but to move in the right direction.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 2

<sup>2</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 7

<sup>3</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 4

The soul is in a state of motion. It has to move in one direction or the other. If the soul stops contemplating what is good (God) it has to move in the opposite direction, which is the wrong direction.

(the soul) having experience of diversities of pleasures, and girt about with oblivion of things divine; being pleased moreover and having in view the passions of the body, and nothing but things present and opinions about them, ceased to think that anything existed beyond what is seen, or that anything was good save things temporal and bodily; so turning away and forgetting that she was in the image of the good God, she no longer, by the power which is in her, sees God the Word after whose likeness she is made; but having departed from herself, imagines and feigns what is not.<sup>1</sup>

By ceasing from contemplating God, and contemplating material things, the soul discovers and experiences pleasures. And, in doing so, she forgets that she was created in the image of God, and even though she has the power within her to see the *Logos*, in whose likeness she was made, she becomes unable to do so, being totally occupied by seeing temporal and bodily things.

### **BY STAYING AWAY FROM SIN THE SOUL CAN GO BACK TO CONTEMPLATING GOD:**

But turn back they can, if they lay aside the filth of all lust which they have put on, and wash it away persistently ... For the soul is made after the image and likeness of God ... Whence also when it gets rid of all the filth of sin which covers it and retains only the likeness of the Image in its purity, then surely this latter being thoroughly brightened, the soul beholds as in a mirror the Image of the Father, even the Word, and by His means reaches the idea of the Father, Whose Image the Saviour is.<sup>2</sup>

The fall did not erase the image of God in man, it just sullied it. But even in his fallen state, man can by repentance go back to contemplating God,

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<sup>1</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 8

<sup>2</sup>Against the Heathen: Section 34

and even seeing as in a mirror the image *icon* of God, who is the *Logos*, and by this means he can form an idea of the Father, whose image the *Logos* is.

### **ANOTHER WAY FOR FALLEN MAN TO CONTEMPLATE GOD:**

But even if it cannot pierce the cloud which sin draws over its vision, ... yet it is further possible to attain to the knowledge of God from the things which are seen, since Creation, as though in written characters, declares in a loud voice, by its order and harmony, its own Lord and Creator.<sup>1</sup>

Even without repentance, man can, by contemplating the created things, reach to contemplating and knowledge of the Creator. (See Romans 1:20)

### **DEATH; THE RESULT OF THE FALL:**

Thus, then, God has made man, and willed that he should abide in incorruption; but men, having despised and rejected the contemplation of God, and devised and contrived evil for themselves, received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; ... and death had the mastery over them as king. For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time. ... For man is by nature mortal, inasmuch as he is made out of what is not; but by reason of his likeness to Him that is (and if he still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) he would stay his natural corruption, and remain incorrupt.<sup>2</sup>

God willed that man abide in incorruption (immortality) but man by exercising his own free will, received the condemnation of death. Had man kept God (WHO IS) in his knowledge, he would have become immortal like God, in whose image he was created. But since man

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid

<sup>2</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 4

rejected the knowledge of God (WHO IS) and was delighted by the knowledge of evil (which is not), he started on a journey that would end in nothingness.

### **BECAUSE OF DEATH, REPENTANCE ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO UNDO THE DAMAGE OF THE FALL:**

Now, if there were merely a misdemeanour in question, and not a consequent corruption, repentance were well enough. But if, when transgression had once gained a start, men became involved in that corruption which was their nature, and were deprived of the grace which they had, being in the image of God, what further step was needed? or what was required for such grace and such recall, but the Word of God, which had also at the beginning made everything out of nought? For His it was once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all. For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.<sup>1</sup>

Had man committed a minor offence and not one that carried the sentence of death, repentance alone would have sufficed. But since man became permanently mortal, it was the lot of the *Logos*, his creator, to die for him, thus “bring the corruptible to incorruption”, by “recreating everything” and becoming an ambassador for all with the Father.

### **THE INCARNATION:**

For being Himself mighty, and Artificer of everything, He prepares the body in the Virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own ... And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone, and that, secondly,

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<sup>1</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 7

whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them.<sup>1</sup>

Here Saint Athanasius clarifies a few matters about the incarnation. First that the *Logos* who is the “artificer” or maker of everything is the one that created the body in the Virgin’s womb, the body that He made His very own. Second, that by taking a body of the exact same nature as our own, he appropriated to Himself our human nature, so that when he offered His body to die, the whole of humanity died with Him, and obviously, when he was resurrected, the whole of humanity was resurrected with him, becoming once and for all immortal.

For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent.<sup>2</sup>

Since the *Logos* cannot die, being God, he had to take to himself a body capable of dying, a body that was sinless, and thus when that body was offered on behalf of all humanity, it became a blameless sacrifice capable of putting away death from “all His peers”.

For men’s mind having finally fallen to things of sense, the Word disguised Himself by appearing in a body, that He might, as Man, transfer men to Himself, and centre their senses on Himself, and,

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<sup>1</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 8

<sup>2</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 9

men seeing Him thenceforth as Man, persuade them by the works He did that He is not Man only, but also God, and the Word and Wisdom of the true God. ... For by His becoming Man, the Saviour was to accomplish both works of love; first, in putting away death from us and renewing us again; secondly, being unseen and invisible, in manifesting and making Himself known by His works to be the Word of the Father, and the Ruler and King of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

Here Saint Athanasius gives us another reason for the incarnation. The *Logos*, being “unseen and invisible” made himself known by his works to be the Word of the Father.

**ON LUKE X. 22 (MATT. XI. 27)**

In this treatise, Saint Athanasius gives us an excellent explanation of this verse: “All things were delivered to Me by My Father. And none knoweth Who the Son is, save the Father; and Who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.” (LK 10:22)

For whereas man sinned, and is fallen, and by his fall all things are in confusion: death prevailed from Adam to Moses, the earth was cursed, Hades was opened, Paradise shut, Heaven offended, man, lastly, corrupted and brutalised, while the devil was exulting against us;--then God, in His loving-kindness, not willing man made in His own image to perish, said, “Whom shall I send, and who will go?”. But while all held their peace, the Son said, “Here am I, send Me.” And then it was that, saying Go Thou,” He “delivered” to Him man, that the Word Himself might be made Flesh, and by taking the Flesh, restore it wholly. For to Him, as to a physician, man “was delivered” to heal the bite of the serpent; as to life, to raise what was dead; as to light, to illumine the darkness; and, because He was Word, to renew the rational nature *tologikon*. Since then all things “were delivered” to Him, and He is made Man, straightway all things were set right and perfected. Earth receives blessing instead of a curse, Paradise was opened to the robber,

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<sup>1</sup>Incarnation of the Word: section 16

Hades cowered, the tombs were opened and the dead raised, the gates of Heaven were lifted up to await Him that “cometh from Edom”. Thus, then, we may understand all things to have been delivered to the Saviour, and, if it be necessary to follow up understanding by explanation, that hath been delivered unto Him which He did not previously possess. For He was not man previously, but became man for the sake of saving man. And the Word was not in the beginning flesh, but has been made flesh subsequently, in which Flesh, as the Apostle says, He reconciled the enmity which was against us (Col. i. 20, ii. 14, Eph. ii. 15, 16) and destroyed the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might make the two into one new man, making peace, and reconcile both in one body to the Father. That, however, which the Father has, belongs also to the Son, as also He says in John, “All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine” (Joh. xvi. 15), expressions which could not be improved. For when He became that which He was not, “all things were delivered” to Him. But when He desires to declare His unity with the Father, He teaches it without any reserve, saying: “All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine.” And one cannot but admire the exactness of the language. For He has not said “all things whatsoever the Father hath, He hath given to Me,” lest He should appear at one time not to have possessed these things; but “are Mine.” For these things, being in the Father’s power, are equally in that of the Son.

Later on (section 6) he comments on the Trisagion:

For the fact of those venerable living creatures (Isa. vi.; Rev. iv. 8) offering their praises three times, saying “Holy, Holy, Holy,” proves that the Three Subsistences are perfect, just as in saying “Lord,” they declare the One Essence.

Here Saint Athanasius tells us that God is one essence *ousia* in three subsistences *hypostases*.

## **DE DECRETIS (IN DEFENCE OF THE COUNCIL OF NICEA)**

In this treatise, Saint Athanasius explains why the word “*homoousion*” (of one essence) was used even though it is not Biblical, because of the evasiveness of the Arians. (Sections 18-20) Moreover, it had already been

in use in the Church, as is shewn by extracts from Theognostus, the two Dionysii, and Origen (section 25--27)

In chapter III, he introduces the “deification” as one of the objectives of the incarnation:

And if we wish to know the object: attained by this, we shall find it to be as follows: that the Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we partaking of His Spirit, might be deified a gift which we could not otherwise have gained than by His clothing Himself in our created body, for hence we derive our name of “men of God” and “men in Christ.” But as we, by receiving the Spirit, do not lose our own proper substance, so the Lord, when made man for us, and bearing a body, was no less God; for He was not lessened by the envelopment of the body, but rather deified it and rendered it immortal.

We will have more to say about this when we come to the next four books:

#### **FOUR DISCOURSES AGAINST THE ARIANS: (written between 356 and 360)**

In these discourses Saint Athanasius sums up all his arguments against the Arians. Here is an excerpt of what the editors of the Nicene/PostNicene Fathers wrote about them:

We see in these Discourses what strikes us in all the writings of Athanasius from *The Incarnation of the Word* to the end, his firm hold of the Soteriological aspect of the question at issue, of its vital importance to the reality of Redemption and Grace, to the reality of the knowledge of God vouchsafed to sinful man in Christ. The Theology and Christology of Athanasius is rooted in the idea of Redemption: our fellowship with God, our adoption as sons of God, would be unaccomplished, had not Christ imparted to us what was His Own to give. Among other points of interest we may observe the anticipatory rejection of the later heresies of Macedonius, Nestorius and Eutyches, and the frequent use of *Theotokos*.

## **DISCOURSE I**

A summary of Arius teachings and “Thalias” (hymns he used to propagate his heresy)

**Chapter III:** How Arius used the scripture incorrectly to deceive people.

**Chapter IV:** Proofs from the scripture that the Son is eternal.

**Chapter V-VI:** more Arian claims.

**Chapter VII-X:** Answering Arian objections.

**Chapter XI:** explanation of verses misinterpreted by Arians:

Arius and Eusebius used Philemon 2:9-10 “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth.” as “proof” of their heresy. They claimed that the Word was exalted after his incarnation as a reward for his virtues. And since he received something he did not have before, then he is alterable and cannot be of the essence of God. Saint Athanasius countered by saying: “If, as they say, He had His promotion now, how did the Son Himself make mention of that His glory before and above the world, when He said, “Glorify Thou Me, O Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was”? ... Therefore, if, even before the world was made, the Son had that glory, ... it follows that He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son and God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man.” (Section 38) In section 39 he adds:

The term in question, “highly exalted,” does not signify that the essence of the Word was exalted, for He was ever and is equal to God, but the exaltation is of the manhood. ... Since then the Word, being the Image of the Father and immortal, took the form of the servant, and as man underwent for us death in His flesh, that thereby He might offer Himself for us through death to the Father; therefore also, as man, He is said because of us and for us to be highly exalted, that as by His death we all died in Christ, so again in the Christ Himself we might be highly exalted, being raised from the dead, and ascending into heaven.

It is this exaltation Saint Athanasius calls deification *Theopoiesis* (to be made God) In section 42, he further explains:

And so too the words “gave Him a Name which is above every name” are not written because of the Word Himself; for even before He became man He was worshipped, by the Angels and the whole creation in virtue of being proper to the Father; but because of us and for us this too is written of Him. For as Christ died and was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what, as God, He ever had, that even such a grant of grace might reach to us. For the Word was not impaired in receiving a body, that He should seek to receive a grace, but rather He deified that which He put on, and more than that, gave it graciously to the race of man.

This exaltation or deification that the Son received in his humanity, he has transferred to our own humanity.

For, when He is now said to be anointed in a human respect, we it is who in Him are anointed; since also when He is baptized, we it is who in Him are baptized. But on all these things the Saviour throws much light, when He says to the Father, “And the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one.” Because of us then He asked for glory, and the words occur, “took” and “gave” and “highly exalted,” that we might take, and to us might be given, and we might be exalted. in Him; as also for us He sanctifies Himself, that we might be sanctified in Him. (Section 48)

## **DISCOURSE II**

Explains Old Testament texts that Arians misinterpreted to support their heresy.

## **DISCOURSE III**

Explains texts from the New Testament misinterpreted by the Arians. In section 32, He explains wonderfully the mystery of Godliness:

Whence it was that, when the flesh suffered, the Word was not external to it; and therefore is the passion said to be His: and when He did divinely His Father’s works, the flesh was not external to

Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them. Hence, when made man, He said, “If I do not the works of the Father, believe Me not; but if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know that the Father is in He and I in Him.” And thus when there was need to raise Peter’s wife’s mother, who was sick of a fever, He stretched forth His hand humanly, but He stopped the illness divinely. And in the case of the man blind from the birth, human was the spittle which He gave forth from the flesh, but divinely did He open the eyes through the clay. And in the case of Lazarus, He gave forth a human voice as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise Lazarus from the dead.

Again He said humanly, “Now is My soul troubled;” and He said divinely, “I have power to lay down My life, and power to take it again.” For to be troubled was proper to the flesh, and to have power to lay down His life and take it again, when He will, was no property of men but of the Word’s power. (Section 57)

#### **DISCOURSE IV**

When then He is said to hunger and weep and weary, and to cry Eloi, Eloi, which are our human affections, He receives them from us and offers to the Father, interceding for us, that in Him they may be annulled. And when it is said, “All power is given unto Me,” and I received,” and “Wherefore God highly exalted Him,” these are gifts given from God to us through Him, For the Word was never in want, nor has come into beings; nor again were men sufficient to minister these things for themselves, but through the Word they are given to us; therefore, as if given to Him, they are imparted to us. For this was the reason of His becoming man, that, as being given to Him, they might pass on to us. ( Section 6)

#### **DE SYNODIS (written 359 with addition in 361)**

Written in response to two councils one held in Ariminia (in the West) and one in Seleucia (in the East) The two councils were held by semi Arians, who opposed Arianism but also opposed the *homo-ousion* and wanted to replace it with something else. The Emperor was favouring the semi Arians. Saint Athanasius wrote this document while in his third exile. While he attacked Arianism, he tried to appeal to semi Arians

convincing them that the *homo-ousion* is the only sure way to avoid Arian evasions.

**Part I** gives the history of the two councils. At the Western council of Ariminia, the semiArians were defeated and the Nicene Creed upheld but at the East in Seleucia, the semiArians carried the day and came up with another creed

**Part II** gives a history of the Arian opinions and Thalias.

**In Part III** Saint Athanasius explains the importance of the word *homo-ousion* as a test of orthodoxy, but hints that those who accept the concept but reject the word are not really Arians. This shows the greatness of Saint Athanasius, who is ready to step down from his position as the leading theologian of his age only to emerge as the greatest pastor of his age, trying to unite the church by showing some compromise to win over those who were not really Arians but were offended by the unscriptural word *homo-ousion*. The wisdom of Saint Athanasius prevailed and Arianism was thoroughly defeated. In time, the *homo-ousion* was accepted by all due to the wisdom and magnanimity of this great Saint. The editors of the Nicene/Post Nicene fathers wrote this:

Athanasius was right: he was acting a noble part In the de Synodis “even Athanasius rises above himself.” Driven to bay by the pertinacity of his enemies, exasperated as we see him in the de Fuga and Arian History, yet no sooner is he cheered with the news of hope than the importunate jealousies of forty years are hushed in a moment, as though the Lord had spoken peace to the tumult of the grey old exile”s troubled soul. The charity that hopeth all things is always justified of her works. .... Not only did many of the Semi-Arians accept the *homo-ousion*, but it was from the ranks of the Semi-Arians that the men arose who led the cause of Nicaea to its ultimate victory in the East. ... In the de Synodis we have a worthy conclusion of the anti-Arian writings which are the legacy and the record of the most stirring and eventful period of the noble life of our great bishop.

#### **OTHER ANTI-ARIAN WRITINGS:**

These include the *Apologies against the Arians*, (two parts)

*On the opinions of Dionysius*: The Arians used selective phrases that Saint Dionysius the Great (14<sup>th</sup> Piope of Alexandria) wrote to justify their heresy. Saint Athanasius wrote defending the orthodoxy of Saint

Dionysius and showing how the Arians misinterpreted him.

*Defence of His Flight* : Saint Athanasius wrote this tract to justify his flight when he was persecuted. He gave the example of the Lord who fled to the Land of Egypt. The editors describe it in this way: “The tract has always been justly admired for its lucidity, force, and dignity.”

There are also some letters sent to the bishops dealing with the same topic.

### **SAINT ATHANASIUS AND THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:**

Although Saint Athanasius is famous for his defence of the divinity of the Son, he actually made a significant contribution to the theology of the Holy Spirit. In response to a letter from his friend Bishop Serapion of Thmuis (Demyat), Saint Athanasius wrote 4 letters dealing with the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The occasion was the appearance of the “Tropici”, Arians who accepted the divinity of the Son but considered the Holy Spirit a creature. The letters were written during the third exile of Saint Athanasius and they are considered the first real treatise on the Holy Spirit. They are not published in the Nicene/PostNicene collection but are published separately. Here are some quotations from the First Letter to Serapion:

For if they thought correctly of the Word, they would think soundly of the Spirit also, who proceeds from the Father, and, belonging to the Son, is from Him given to the disciples and all who believe in him. ... This is said to proceed from the Father, because it is from the Word, who is confessed to be from the Father, that it shines forth and is sent and is given. The Son is sent from the Father; for he says, “God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son.” (Jn 3:16) The Son sends the Spirit; “If I go away, I will send the Paraclete.” (Jn 16:7) The Son glorifies the Father; “Father, I have glorified Thee.” (Jn 17:4) The Spirit glorifies the Son; “He shall glorify me” (Jn 16:14) The Son says, “The things I heard from the Father speak I unto the world.” (Jn 8:26) The Spirit takes of the Son; He shall take of mine and declare unto you. (Jn 16:14) The Son came in the name of the Father. “The Holy Spirit,” says the Son, “whom the father will send in my name.” (Jn 14:26)

If the Holy Spirit were a creature, we should have no participation of God in him. If indeed we are joined to a creature, we should be

strangers to the divine nature inasmuch as we did not partake therein. But, as it is, the fact of our being called partakers of Christ and partakers of God shows that the unction and seal that is in us belongs, not to the nature of things originate, but to the nature of the Son who, through the Spirit who is in him, joins us to the Father. This John taught us, when he wrote, “Hereby we know that we abide in God and he in us, when He has given us of his Spirit.” (1 Jn 4:13) But if, by participation in the Spirit, we are made “sharers in the divine nature,” we would be mad to say that the Spirit has a created nature and not the nature of God. For it is on this account that those in whom he is are made divine. If he makes humans divine, it is not to be doubted that his nature is of God.<sup>1</sup>

### **SYNOD OF ALEXANDRIA (362)**

After returning from his third exile (during which the letters to Serapion were written,) Saint Athanasius started to reconcile the Arians and the Orthodox. He held a synod at Alexandria in 362. The assembled bishops addressed a letter to the church of Antioch, specifying the conditions on which Arians are to be accepted into communion:

As many then as desire peace with us, ... and those again who are seceding from the Arians, do ye call to yourselves, and receive them as parents their sons, and welcome them as tutors and guardians; and unite them to our beloved Paulinus and his people, without requiring more from them than to anathematise the Arian heresy and confess the faith confessed by the holy fathers at Nicaea, and to anathematise also those who say that the Holy Spirit is a Creature and separate from the Essence of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Here we have a holy synod declaring the divinity of the Holy Spirit twenty years before the second ecumenical council.

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<sup>1</sup>Burns and Fagin: *Message of the Fathers of the Church: The Holy Spirit*, pp 104-108

<sup>2</sup>Synodal letter to the people of Antioch: section 3, N/PNF series II vol IV

### **THE LIFE OF SAINT ANTHONY:**

This classic has exercised great influence upon the development of the ascetic life in the Church. Here is how the editors describe it:

The Vita has undoubtedly exercised a powerful and wide-spread influence. Upon it Jerome modelled his highly idealised tales of Paul and Hilarion; at Rome and all over the West it kindled the flame of monastic aspirations; it awoke in Augustine the resolution to renounce the world and give himself wholly to God.

### **THE LETTERS OF SAINT ATHANASIUS:**

These include the *Paschal letters*, written to the bishops announcing the date of Easter and the beginning of Lent, and the *Personal letters* written to individuals. The latter have some important dogmatic teachings.

### **THE CANONICAL LETTERS:**

Three of Saint Athanasius letters are considered canonical (The canons of Athanasius) :

### **FESTAL LETTER 39:**

Contains the canon of the New Testament as well as that of the Old testament. Saint Athanasius is the first among Church fathers to list the canonical books of the Bible.

### **THE LETTER TO AMUN:**

In this letter Saint Athanasius answers questions about whether involuntary bodily emissions are sinful and whether marital sex is somehow unclean.

### **THE LETTER TO RUFINIANUS:**

A personal letter describing how to deal with repentant Arians, particularly clergy, and also consideration to be shown to those who were coerced into accepting Arianism.