

**ST. ATHANASIUS, FATHER OF ORTHODOXY: WHOSE ELOQUENT WORDS
STILL CALL THE JEWISH NATION TO CHRIST!**

by

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St. Athanasius (+373 A.D.) accompanied St. Alexander (+328 A.D.) as his deacon to the Council of Nicaea in 325, succeeded him as Bishop of Alexandria in 328 and became known across the world as the defender of the faith of Nicaea against the Arians. He suffered exile five times because of his zeal.¹

Consider:

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. (Matt. 28:19)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John. 1:1)

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John. 17:21)

St. Athanasius did not confess some new or novel idea of the Trinity in his famous Defense of the Faith. The Holy Trinitarian Truth had been confessed from the Church's very beginning. Listen to the words of St. Irenaeus (+202 A.D.) of Lyon, who was a disciple of St. Polycarp (+156 A.D.) of Smyrna, the latter a disciple of the Apostle John the Theologian:

Although the Church is dispersed throughout the whole inhabited world, to the ends of the earth, it has received faith in the one God the Father Almighty,... and in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, Who was incarnate for the sake of our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit Who has proclaimed the economy of our salvation through the prophets... Having received such a preaching and such a faith, the Church, although it is dispersed throughout the entire world, as we have said, carefully preserves this faith as if dwelling in a single house. It believes this (everywhere) identically, as if it had a single soul and a single heart, and it preaches it with one voice, teaching and transmitting it as if with a single mouth. Although there are many dialects in the world, the power of Tradition is one and the same. None of the leaders of the churches will contradict this, nor will anyone, whether powerful in words or unskilled in words, weaken the Tradition.²

Indeed, the Trinity of God had been revealed in a veiled way in the Old Testament writings³ The Holy Trinity was completely revealed in the New Testament in the coming of the Son of God and the sending down of the Holy Spirit, and the manifestation of God in Trinity was accomplished at the Lord's Baptism. The action of the Trinity is apparent:

The Son of God, having become man, accepted baptism by water; the Father testified of Him; and the Holy Spirit confirmed the truth spoken by the voice of God by His manifestation in the form of a dove...⁴

Around the year 318 A.D. Arius, a priest of Alexandria and his followers, called Arians, began preaching a false Christ; a Christ that was created not uncreated, a creature through whom all else was made, superior, yes, to all other created things, including the Holy Spirit, but inferior to God the Father. Arius denied the Lord's Divinity. To an Arian, since the Son of God was considered fashioned and made he could change or be changed, even as the devil changed.

At the First Ecumenical Council, the word *homousios* was adopted in order to attain real unity of faith. What the Council intended it to mean was set forth by St. Athanasius:

That the Son is not only like to the Father, but that, as his image, he is the same as the Father; that he is of the Father; and that the resemblance of the Son to the Father, and his immutability, are different from ours: for in us they are something acquired, and arise from our fulfilling the divine commands. Moreover, they wished to indicate by this that his generation is different from that of human nature; that the Son is not only like to the Father, but inseparable from the substance of the Father, that he and the Father are one and the same, as the Son himself said: 'The Logos is always in the Father, and, the Father always in the Logos,' as the sun and its splendour are inseparable.⁵

St. Athanasius is renowned not only as the defender of the truth *contra mundum* at the First Ecumenical Council but also for his exposition of the positive contents of the faith as he had received it before the Arian heresy had arisen. In *De Incarnatione*, St. Athanasius set forth a powerful statement of the traditional faith of the Church. He had probably written it in 318 A.D. just before the outbreak of the Arian heresy. There was nothing speculative or original in it, simply the proclamation of the true Faith of the Church as he knew it.

"Therein lies its value" remarked C.S. Lewis. In his Introduction to the St. Vladimir's Seminary Press edition, he 'summed up' admirably:

He stood for the Trinitarian Doctrine, 'whole and undefiled,' when it looked as if all the civilised world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius—into one of those 'sensible' synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today and which, then as now, included among their devotees many cultivated clergymen.

It is to his glory that he did not move with the times; it is to his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away.⁶

St. Athanasius' Message About The Jews:

In his classic spiritual work, St. Athanasius challenged both the Jews and Gentiles with three chapters respectively entitled "Refutation of the Jews", "Refutation of the Gentiles" and "Refutation of the Gentiles – continued". Since the Jewish nation has continued its defiance of Christ and refuses to accept Him as their Messiah [except for a relatively few Messianic Jews], we concentrate the Saint's and our comments on them.

In the face of the clear evidence that Christ is the Saviour foretold by the Old Testament, why has the Jewish nation remained obdurate? St. Athanasius opens his Chapter VI, "Refutation of the Jews" with this comment:

We have dealt thus far with the Incarnation of our Saviour and have found clear proof of the resurrection of His Body and His victory over death.⁷

Then he lists and discusses the various Scriptural references prophesying Christ's coming as the Messiah, including the Prophets foretelling the marvel of the Virgin and Christ's Birth from her:

*Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they should call His name **Emmanuel**.* [Isaiah 7:14]

He further points out⁸ that the Jews trusted Moses implicitly:

A star shall arise out of Jacob, a Man shall spring out of Israel; and crush the princes of Moab... [Numbers 24:17]

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How goodly are thy habitations, Jacob, and thy tents, Israel! as shady groves, and as gardens by a river, and as tents which God pitched, and as cedars by the waters. There shall come a Man out of his seed, and he shall rule over many nations; ... [Numbers 24:5-7]

Apparently, they didn't trust Moses enough!

The Scriptural words above mean that a Man was foretold to appear. And he was to be the Lord of all:

Behold, the Lord sits on a swift cloud and shall come to Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence... [Isaiah 19:1]

The Father calls the Son back from Egypt⁹:

Then I loved him, and called My Son out of Egypt. [Hosea 11:1]

Scripture predicted His Birth; that He was to be a Man who would rule over the people; and He was to be the Lord of all; and that the Father would call the Son out of Egypt. It also foretold His death. See Isaiah 53:3-5 and

... Like a sheep He was led to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb before its shearer, so He opened not His mouth; in His humiliation His judgment was taken away. [Isaiah 53:7-8]

Moses was the first to prophesy about His Cross¹⁰:

And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. [Deut. 28:66]

Then the Prophets followed¹¹:

*But I as an innocent lamb led to the slaughter, knew not: against me they devised an evil device, saying, 'Come and let us put **wood** (emphasis supplied) into His bread, and let us utterly destroy him from off the land of the living'... [Jer. 11:19]*

...

They pierced My hands and My feet. They counted all My bones; and they observed and looked upon Me. They parted My garments among themselves, and cast lots upon my raiment. [Psalm 22:16-18]

[Also see Isaiah 53:8-10]

Why has the Jewish nation turned away from Christ? It is crystal clear that Christ is the Messiah, theirs as well as ours. All they need to do is repent and come to Him. A few further quotes from St. Athanasius will provide some 'icing for the cake':

Both from the confession of the evil spirits and from the daily witness of His works, it is manifest, then, and let none presume to doubt it, that the Saviour has raised His own body, and that he is very Son of God, having His being from God as from a Father, Whose Word and Wisdom and Whose Power He is. He it is Who has destroyed death and freely graced us all with incorruption through the promise of the resurrection, having raised His own body as its first-fruits, and displayed it by the sign of the cross as the monument to His victory over death and its corruption.¹²

...

Moreover the Scriptures are not silent even about His death. On the contrary, they refer to it with the utmost clearness. They have not feared to speak also of the cause of it. He endures it, they say, not for His own sake, but for

the sake of bringing immortality and salvation to all, and they record also the plotting of the Jews against Him and all the indignities which he suffered at their hands. Certainly nobody who reads the Scriptures can plead ignorance of the facts as an excuse for error!¹³

...

... indeed all Scripture teems with disproof of Jewish unbelief. For example, which of the righteous men and holy prophets and patriarchs of whom the Divine Scriptures tell ever had his bodily birth from a virgin only? Was not Abel born of Adam, Enoch of Jared, Noah of Lamech, Abraham of Terah, Isaac of Abraham, and Jacob of Isaac? Was not Judah begotten by Jacob and Moses and Aaron by Ameram? Was not Samuel the son of Elkanah, David of Jesse, Solomon of David, Hezekiah of Ahaz, Josiah of Amon, Isaiah of Amos, Jeremiah of Hilkiyah and Ezekiel of Buzi? Had not each of these a father as author of his being? So who is He that is born of a virgin only, that sign of which the prophet makes so much? Again, which of all those people had his birth announced to the world by a star in the heavens? When Moses was born his parents hid him. David was unknown even in his own neighbourhood, so that mighty Samuel himself was ignorant of his existence and asked whether Jesse had yet another son. Abraham again became known to his neighbours as a great man only after his birth. *But with Christ it was otherwise. The witness to His birth was not man, but a star shining in the heavens whence He was coming down* (emphasis supplied).¹⁴

...

But did any of the holy prophets or of the early patriarchs die on the cross for the salvation of all? Was any of them wounded and killed for the healing of all? Did the idols of Egypt fall down before any righteous man or king that came there? Abraham came there certainly, but idolatry prevailed just the same; and Moses was born there, but the mistaken worship was unchanged.¹⁵

...

Again does Scripture tell of anyone (note: anyone else) who was pierced in hands and feet or hung upon a tree at all, and by means of a cross perfected his sacrifice for the salvation of all?...¹⁶

...

Who is it, then, of Whom Holy Writ thus speaks? Who is there so great that even the prophets foretell of Him such mighty things? There is indeed no one in the Scriptures at all, save the common Saviour of all, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is that proceeded from a virgin and appeared as man on earth, He it is Whose earthly lineage cannot be declared, because He alone derives His body from no human father, but from a virgin alone.¹⁷

...

The Jews are afflicted like some demented person who sees the earth lit up by the sun, but denies the sun that lights it up! What more is there for the Expected One to do when he comes? To call the heathen? But they are called already. To put an end to prophet and king and vision? But this too has already happened. To expose the God-denyingness of idols? It is already exposed and condemned. Or to destroy death? It is already destroyed. What then has not come to pass that the Christ must do? What is there left out or unfulfilled that the Jews should disbelieve so light-heartedly? The plain fact is, as I say, that there is no longer any king or prophet nor Jerusalem nor sacrifice nor vision among them; yet the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the Gentiles, forsaking atheism, are now taking refuge with the God of Abraham through the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Surely, then, it must be plain even to the most shameless that the Christ has come, and that he has enlightened all men everywhere, and given them the true and divine teaching about His Father (emphasis supplied).

Thus the Jews may be refuted by these and other arguments from the Divine teaching.¹⁸

The Lord calls upon the Jewish people to redeem their future in Him. St. James the Just, Christ's appointed Head of the Church in Jerusalem, who held the Bishopric of the Church for 30 years before his martyrdom, cries out to them from the Church Triumphant to come to Christ and follow His Royal Path. It is never too late. They will be graciously received when they come willingly to the Lord.

St. Athanasius stirs the heart with his eloquent elucidation of the Incarnation. His masterpiece, written when he was not yet 20 years of age, is spiritually amazing. The evidence of Christ as our Saviour is overwhelming.

And remember his personal example. Only follow the True Orthodox Path. Never compromise it, no matter what. *Be contra mundum*. That's what it takes!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

¹ Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, (Second Edition), **APPENDIX III**, FATHERS AND TEACHERS OF THE CHURCH, Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, CA, 1994, p.387.

² *id.*, p. 79.

³ *id.*, pp. 75-77.

⁴ *id.* p.77.

⁵ *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Second Series)*, Volume XIV, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, The First Ecumenical Council, citing Athanas, *De Decret. Syn. Nic., c. xix. et seq.*, p.4, fn 1.

⁶ *St. Athanasius ON THE INCARNATION The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (tr/ed A Religious of C.S.M.V.), St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Crestwood, New York, 1993. p. 9. [Reprint-Original Edition published in 1944 by the Centenary Press]

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸ *id.*, p. 65.

⁹ *id.*

¹⁰ *id.*, see St. Athanasius' discussion on pp. 66-67.

¹¹ *id.*, p. 67.

¹² *id.*, pp. 63-64.

¹³ *id.*, p. 65.

¹⁴ *id.*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁵ *id.*, p. 68-69.

¹⁶ *id.*, p. 69.

¹⁷ *id.*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸ *id.*, p. 75.