

***THE PERSONALITY OF
ST. ATHANASIUS
THE APOSTOLIC
AND
THE CHURCH
ENVIRONMENT***

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*When I praise Athanasius I praise virtue.
When I mention virtue I point to him, as he
possessed of all virtues.*

He was a true pillar of the Church.

*His life and conduct were examples for
bishops.*

*And his doctrine presents the rule of the
Orthodox faith¹.*

St. Gregory Nazianzen

¹ *Oratione, 21.*

A DIVINE PROVIDENCE

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AMONG THE AGES

How often I longed to write about the personality of St. Athanasius the Apostolic. Every time I wanted to write about him, God's ultimate care and concern for His Church and for every human being manifested to me. This concern is for every one's permanent edification and everlasting glory.

Since the beginning of creation, Satan knew how to aim his arrow towards our first parents in order to degrade human nature. God on the other hand planned for the salvation of humanity to attain overwhelming glory, not to return man to the Garden of Eden, but to God's bosom to share His eternal glory.

When the devil stirred Pharaoh up to humiliate God's people, God prepared Moses to free His people with a divine hand, taking them to the Promised Land.

When Haman thought he would crucify the faithful Mordecai, God prepared Esther, the orphan queen, to crucify Haman on the same cross he prepared for Mordecai, while Haman and his people were glorified.

Pelagius¹ wanted to destroy faith claiming that man, with his free will, can obtain salvation, ignoring God's free grace. God had prepared St. Augustine² to draw the believers' hearts towards His precious grace.

Nestorius³ and his followers devoted their efforts to show Jesus Christ as two persons with two

¹ *Pelagius: A British theologian and exegete, taught in Rome in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. Pelagianism is the heresy that holds that man can take the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts, apart from Divine grace.*

² *St. Augustine (354-430): Bishop of Hippo Regius (modern Annaba, on the coast of Algeria). In adolescence he lost his faith. At the age of 17 he took a concubine with whom he lived for 15 years. She bore him a son, Adeodatus (d. 389). In 373, when he was 18, Augustine was led away to Menichaeism. In 387, under the influence of the bibliography of St. Anthony the Great, he returned to his mother's faith, and was baptized by St. Ambrose of Milan. He returned to Africa. In 391 he was ordained priest against his will. In 395 he became coadjutor bishop, and was in sole charge on Valerius' death. He died on 28th of August, 430 when the Vandals were besieging Hippo. Augustine's influence on the theology of the Western Church is immense.*

³ *On April 10, 428, Nestorius, a monk of Antioch and disciple of Theodore was consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople. In his sermons he drew a plain distinction between the man Jesus born of Mary, and the Son of God who dwelt in him. There were two distinct persons in Christ, who were united not hypostatically but only morally. St. Cyril of Alexandria sent letters to Nestorius in which he explains the nature of Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, one Person, and declared St. Mary's right to be called "Theotokos." The Council of Ephesus excommunicated him in 431.*

separate natures. God prepared St. Cyril¹ the Great to defend the oneness of the Person of Jesus Christ, and the real unity of His divinity with His humanity.

Thus, when I want to speak about St. Athanasius the Apostolic, I speak of him as a gift of divine providence to the Church. At the time when Arius was on the point of deceiving the Christian world, denying the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and His equality to the Father in the same essence.

In the last days, Satan will devote all his power to destroy the Christian faith through the Antichrist. God will send his two prophets, Elijah and Enoch, to give witness to the truth and support the believers.

ST. ATHANASIUS' FATHERHOOD

Several of the church leaders from East and West, stood praising our great St. Athanasius the Apostolic as the greatest defender of Christ's divinity. God gave him power to stand against

¹ *St. Cyril was born in Alexandria, between 375 and 380., and received his classical and theological training at Alexandria, besides the instructions he had received from his uncle, Pope Theophilus. His uncle sent him to St. Makarius' Monastery. After 5 years his uncle summoned him, appointed him deacon, then a priest to assist him in taking care of his people. On October 15, 412, he was elected and consecrated the Pope of Alexandria. He was occupied in refuting the charges of the impious Julian mentioned in his book: Against the Gallilians." He struggled against Nestorism.*

Arianism and to preserve the faith of the Church, from generation to generation until today.

It gives me pleasure to write about St. Athanasius and his theological stand. But what really concerned me was that few people were looking at him as a father and shepherd. His heart was full of fatherly love, desiring that whole world to enjoy the work of the Holy Trinity and taste the same sweetness, which filled his inner soul.

When I was asked to talk about him in a celebration for his commemoration in our church in Mississauga, Canada, I was eager that everybody would realize what was beyond this personality to feel the heavenly richness and bear his fiery spirit.

Many were concerned about the theology of St. Athanasius, and wrote hundreds of books about it, but I would like to talk about his unseen touches that played a role in his life, which many may have never thought of.

God is capable to grant me, and all his beloved people to enjoy what our saint experienced, so we can share the same procession of our Lord Jesus Christ, and have endless victories.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

- 1. The Child Athanasius and The Fatherhood of Pope Alexander.**
- 2. The Child Athanasius and The Family Ecclesiastical Atmosphere.**
- 3. The Adolescent Athanasius and The Martyrs.**
- 4. Athanasius, The Disciple of The Great Anthony.**
- 5. Athanasius and His Interaction with The Alexandrian Theological Thoughts.**
 - His Soterological Theological View.**
 - His Biblical View.**
 - His Heavenly View.**
 - His Ecumenical View.**
 - Athanasius' Concept of the Unity in the New Life.**

1
THE CHILD ATHANASIUS
AND THE
FATHERHOOD OF POPE
ALEXANDER¹

Once, as Pope Alexander was looking out of the Patriarchate's window; he was attracted by a group of kids playing together by the seashore. One of them was pretending to baptize the children one by one, three times in a pretty serious manner, as if practicing precisely the ceremony of baptism.

The Pope did not only watch what the little child did, but as a father full of love towards his children, longing to increase their talents, he called them all. The children at first were afraid thinking in themselves, "Why would the Pope call us? May be he wants to scold us for pretending to practice baptism by the beach? Or what?"

When the Pope met the children cheerfully, the children were extremely happy and felt his kindly fatherhood. He asked them what they were doing. They were scared at first, but when they saw his kindly looks and treatment, they told him that

¹ *Ruffinus: H.E. 1:14*

Athanasius was fascinated by the Pope baptizing the children, so he played the role of a bishop baptizing children.

The Pope was happy, especially with the little Athanasius. He called his mother and asked her to take care in upbringing him, as he will play an important role in the Church. His mother in return asked him if he would accept Athanasius as one of his disciples.

The kindly touches and care, which Pope Alexander showed to Athanasius affected his life, as well as, his behavior and theological thoughts.

What the saint has experienced from his fatherly manner opened his eyes towards heaven to see the Kind Lord among the entire humanity, desiring the salvation of everyone. Therefore, the theology of Pope Athanasius entirely revolved around “**Man’s Salvation.**”

This kindness created a close relationship between theology and the pastoral work in St. Athanasius’ point of view. According to St. Athanasius, there is no separation between theology and pastorship. This kindness adds a tremendous sweet touch to theology.

The world needs to enjoy the lovingly fatherhood of the Church leaders as a reflection of

God's Fatherhood, to examine theology not as philosophical thoughts, but as an experience of God's considerable love.

What the Church is presently suffering from is due to the isolation of theology from fatherly love. Thus theology became a rigid philosophy trying to attain scientific degrees. At the same time, the ministry became a pure social work without theological thoughts, losing its entity and taste as a result of its complete isolation.

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*O Lord, grant me a truthful fatherhood,
So I may hold in my soul every child.
It is true that the youngest child is more precious
than the entire world.
I hope I would never despise any child,
But I see You Lord working in everyone.
You raise from the youngsters great leaders,
To be Your agents, and ambassadors to Your
Heavens.*

2

***THE CHILD ATHANASIUS
AND THE
FAMILY ECCLESIASTICAL
ENVIRONMENT***

We do not know anything about the child Athanasius' family. We only know that when the Patriarch Alexander called his mother and told her about what he saw and how her son, even while playing was seriously performing the role of the bishop baptizing children, she did not underestimate the matter. The Pope asked her to take care of him so that he might become a true leader serving his Lord Jesus Christ. She asked him joyfully to accept him as his disciple in the Lord Jesus!

In the Old Testament, the priest would not offer the Lord a sacrifice with blame. This mother, whom we do not know anything about, except her loving heart offered her son a sacrifice of love to the Lord. She offered him as a disciple to the Lord without blemish, thus the Lord would accept him as an offering.

✠ ✠ ✠

May all our houses be converted to a Holy

Church.

*And we offer our lives and our children as a
sacrifice of love.*

Accept it, O You the Unique Sacrifice.

With You, our children become without blemish,

Carrying Your righteousness, O Holy One,

*So that their lives may witness to Your great
work.*

3

THE ADOLESCENT ATHANASIUS AND THE MARTYRS

St. Athanasius was born around the year 297. He lived during the violent martyrdom period (303-311), and he was 7 to 15 years, and was acquainted with many of Alexandria's martyrs and believers. He learned from them the Orthodox faith and the great love of the Holy Bible.

Truly, he did not enter with them the arena of martyrdom, but his heart was overwhelmed with heavenly love, struggling for the sake of Christ¹.

St. Athanasius was greatly affected by the martyrs he saw in his adolescence. He conceived that their victory over death was due to their piety in Jesus Christ, or through their unity with the Father in His Son by the Holy Spirit. Following their steps, he desired to offer his life as a daily sacrifice, for the sake of his Church faith. In this spirit, he became a true leader, whose authority was never contested².

¹ *The Author: Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Erudition and Theology, 1986, p. 72.*

² *Tixeront - Raemers: Handbook of Patrology, p. 153.*

He believed that he was doing Christ's work, and that final victory would come from God, thus he strived to achieve it. He never gave up even during the worst time.

Pope Athanasius presented to us his views towards his teacher as a martyr without bloodshed, saying: [When martyrdom was completely stopped, when the blessed Bishop Peter was martyred, (St. Anthony) returned to his cell for solitude. He was a martyr by intention everyday, struggling unceasingly in the battles of faith, practicing zealously the ascetic life.]

4
ST. ATHANASIUS
THE DISCIPLE OF
ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT

Constantine the Great became the first Christian emperor in the world. He bestowed all his effort in converting the heathen temples into churches, and in supporting the Church. When the emperor's palace doors were opened to the bishops and some priests, they were attracted to luxury of the emperor's Palace. God did not leave His Church to be attracted by the worldly palaces and their glory, so He assigned the Great Anthony who drew the heart of the Church to the wilderness so that every believer can invade his inner soul, and be in touch with the heavenly kingdom inside him. Among these people was Athanasius, who became a disciple of St. Anthony the Great, without being admitted to the monastic life.

The influence of St. Anthony was manifested not only in the behavior of Pope Athanasius and his theology, but the work of the Holy Spirit has shaped his soul.

Pope Athanasius has left us his famous book,

“*Vita Antonii*” as a record of the life of Anthony. Truly he has engraved the biography of his teacher, in his heart, his behavior and thoughts.

I hope to present here some examples of God’s great work in the life of Pope Athanasius affected by his spiritual father St. Anthony.

DEIFICATION AND THE MONASTIC LIFE

Some scholars believed that St. Anthony, the father of the monastic family, has undermined the body and ignored it, and that the Egyptian monasticism had its effects on the Alexandrian theological way of thinking, which concentrated on “deification.”

“*Deification*” attracted the heart of the School of Alexandria, where believers experienced the wonderful love of God; this love reshaped the heart of man to become an image of his Creator, sharing His divine nature. It does not only affect his spiritual life, but also his body as if it has gradually converted him to the glorious nature, which he would enjoy at the great day of God. The life of the believer becomes like a daily journey, heading towards heaven attracting his brethren with him to share heaven.

The Egyptian monasticism transferred the wilderness and deserts to paradises, and the human beings to angels. St. Athanasius, even in his

theological arguments, aimed to transfer the human soul to a new heaven, glorifying God the Source of its joy.

St. Athanasius says,

[*We are deified, not by sharing human body, but by receiving the body of the Word Himself¹.*]

[*He was made Man that we might become gods².*]

ST. ANTHONY AND THE SPIRIT OF VICTORY

The book “*Vita Antonii*” that his disciple Pope Athanasius has recorded shows the saint’s struggle with demons. The book clarifies the victorious spirit which a believer possesses even over demons and evil spirits.

This marvelous teacher was a living example to his disciple who lived most of his life in a continuous struggle. He had peaceful moments in his service. His annual “*Paschal Letters*” do not reveal a bitter soul due to the continuous resistance of many against him, but a living pride of his continuous struggle, with a great hope to enjoy the ever-lasting victories.

He was told, “All the world is against you,

¹ *Ep. Ad Maximum, 61:2.*

² *De Incarnatione, 54:3.*

Athanasius!” and his spontaneous answer coming from his daily experience was: “***And I am against the world.***” This was not said out of pride, but with trust in the abilities of God working in him.

St. Athanasius believed that Christ Himself shelters him; all his services are in the name of Christ and for His account. That’s why his heart never lost hope, and never carried the spirit of failure, but that of victory.

Many conspiracies were planned against him, but he trusted in Him who rescues the sparrow from the hunter’s trap, having the spirit of victory without any fear. When the Arians planned to destroy him, he headed to Constantinople, with great courage he went to the emperor’s vehicle and held his horse’s saddle. Everyone was alarmed saying: “Who is he who dare stop the emperor’s vehicle?” When Constantine recognized him, he admired his courage and invited him to sit in his vehicle; he resolved the reason for his visit.

Most of his life he experienced troubles but he never lost his peace and faith, always having the spirit of victory.

His bishopric lasted for 46 years, about 17 of them spent in exile:

1. In the era of Constantine (335-337) in Trève.
2. In the era of Constantius (339-346) when he

visited Rome.

3. In the era of Constantius (356-362) living in the Egyptian wilderness.

4. In the era of Julian (362-363) living in the Egyptian wilderness.

5. In the era of Valens (365-366) living in the Egyptian wilderness.

In the Council of Tyre in the year 335, he was accused of killing Arsanius the Meletian bishop, of raping a virgin, and of breaking the cup of Eucharist used by Ischyra. All these accusations turned out to be false!

ST. ANTHONY AND THE SPIRIT OF JOY

One of St. Anthony's sayings is: "*as food gives strength to the body, so does joy to the spirit.*" St. Anthony always experienced the spirit of joy which surprised many of the philosophers and believers. A group of believers came to visit him, they all asked him questions and he answered them except one who remained silent. St. Anthony wondered, and asked him about the reason for silence, in spite of all the trouble he went through to come and visit him. The man answered: "My father, I saw your face, so I knew the answer to all my questions." He saw in the permanent smile on his face the rejoicing icon of heaven, finding the answer to all his questions through the joy he shares in Jesus

Christ.

Some of the philosophers came to meet him, thinking they would meet an old man who has serious blunt features without a smile as was the custom with philosophers, especially that he lived in the wilderness for many years. They were surprised to find him an elderly man with a youthful spirit, continuously smiling and joyful. They asked him about the secret of his joy although he lives in a poor cave without books to console him, and without even medicine or a doctor around him. He replied, showing them that he didn't live in his cave alone, but he lived with Christ, who filled his life with joy and consolation. Jesus was his heavenly Bread, his continuous Praise, the Medicine for his soul and the caring Doctor.

The cheerful attitude of St. Anthony while he was in the arena struggling against the evil one had a marvelous effect on his disciple, St. Athanasius. He wrote about his teacher: [His soul was not disturbed, and his outward appearance was calm. The joyful soul he possessed reflected on his features, as it is written, "When the heart is merry the countenance is cheerful, but when it is sorrowful it is cast down" (Prov. 15:13). Anthony was well known, for he was never disturbed, and his soul was always at peace;

he was never downcast, for his mind was joyous¹.]

This was reflected on the personality of his disciple, Pope Athanasius the Apostolic. We see him in the middle of his crisis not writing about his isolation or the grave he hid in, or about being deprived from meeting his people in Alexandria, but he writes in his agony his view towards **His Christ Himself!**

Wherever he was, even hidden inside a tomb, he still lived an endless heavenly feast where the Risen Jesus Christ was transfigured inside him.

With continuous joy, he never sustained from Jesus' work, attracting many through his prayers and letters to share with him his celebration of the everlasting feast.

In a Paschal Letter, St. Athanasius writes:

[The glory of our feast, my brethren, is always near at hand, and never fails those who wish to celebrate it. For the Word is near, He who does everything on our behalf; He promised that His habitation with us should be perennial He said, "I am with you all the days of the world" (Matt. 28:20). For as He is the Shepherd and the High Priest, the Way and the Door, He is everything to us, He is also shown to us as the **Feast, and the Holy Day**, also

¹ *Vita Antonii*, 67.

the blessed Apostle; says“Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed” (1Cor. 5:7)¹.]

ST. ANTHONY AND THE EMPEROR’S HEART

The monks rejoiced when they heard that the first Christian emperor, Constantine, had sent a letter to their father St. Anthony. They came to ask him when he would reply to the emperor. St. Anthony was not concerned with the letter, and told them that he would reply when he would find a convenient time. The days passed and St. Anthony never replied. Finally the monks insisted that he should answer the emperor, because of his great deeds for the Church and its leaders. St. Anthony answered them that he was busy reading God’s message, the Holy Bible, and when he finishes it he would then write to the emperor.

This is the spirit that Pope Athanasius inherited from his teacher. He did not care about having a place in the heart of the emperor, but rather in the bosom of the Father. Pope Athanasius did not desire the vainglory, he never asked for the gates of the emperor’s palace to be opened for him, but he was concerned with his own salvation, and that of his disciples.

¹ *Paschal Letters 14:1.*

ST. ANTHONY AND THE INNER SIGHT

St. Anthony was not admitted to the theological School of Alexandria, but they always interacted together.

St. Anthony visited more than once the Dean of the School, who at his time was St. Didymus the Blind¹. They always met around theological spiritual thought table, or that of the living heavenly life.

St. Anthony asked St. Didymus if he was sorry for losing his sight, but he did not reply; so St. Anthony repeated his question twice and thrice. St. Didymus the Blind showed his sorrow for losing his sight. St. Anthony told him, “I am surprised that a wise man grieves for the loss of what the ants, flies and insects share, and does not rejoice (for the inner sight) which is not revealed except for saints and apostles.”

St. Anthony was concerned about the inner sight, which made his disciple look to theology not as philosophical thoughts for discussion, but as a source of attaining knowledge, and a real enjoyment of truth. Therefore, St. Athanasius was not

¹ *St. Didymus the Blind (c.313-398): He lost his sight in his infancy. He is the first man who used his fingers in reading 15 centuries before Braille. Much of his vast literary output has been perished because he was considered as Origenist. He was condemned as Origenist at the Council of Constantinople in 553.*

concerned about theological terminology but its meanings¹.

ST. ANTHONY'S OPEN HEART

St. Anthony did not practice monasticism in order to escape from people, but rather with an open heart to God, the Lover of mankind. After almost 20 years of complete isolation, his cave's door was opened and everybody witnessed to his open loving heart towards all humanity. He did not only meet those who longed to the monastic life, but also philosophers and rulers. That's why St. Hilarion² from Palestine told him, "Hail to you O pillar of light, who enlightens the world."

That was the heart of a solitude monk desiring the salvation of everyone, even the atheist philosophers. Moreover was the heart of his disciple, Pope Athanasius, full of the spirit of love and testimony to the gospel of Christ before the multitudes. He learned from his teacher to set his heart to the fiery Holy Spirit, Who inflames the soul

¹ *Tomus ad Antiochenus*, 8.

² *St. Hilarion (c.291-371): The founder of the anchoritic life in Palestine. A native of Palestine and the son of pagan parents, he was converted to Christianity at Alexandria. Under the influence of St. Anthony retired for a short time to the Egyptian desert as a hermit. In 306 he returned to his country, where he settled in the wilderness south of Maiuma, near Gaza, to live a life of extreme asceticism. To escape from vainglory he returned to Egypt in c. 353. Later he went to Libya, Sicily, and Cyprus, where he died.*

with true love.

St. Anthony's heart was inflamed with love, carrying the Church on his arms to offer her to his Christ through his continuous prayers. When the fires of persecution glared, he visited Alexandria to serve the confessors and encourage them during their trials. He also stood by his disciple, Athanasius, to preserve the true faith against Arianism.

ST. ATHANASIUS AND HIS LIFE OF CONTEMPLATION

St. Athanasius' discipleship to St. Anthony for three years has definitely drawn his heart to the life of solitude and meditation. Although God did not permit him to be admitted to the monastic life, he practiced monasticism in his pastoral life. When God allowed him to experience some difficulties, he used to escape to his father's grave or hide in a house or escape to Upper Egypt's monasteries. These times were not times of difficulties, but rather times of joy as he was able to continue with solitary and meditation, without ignoring his fatherly and pastoral role.

ST. ANTHONY AND THE VIGIL SERVICES

St. Athanasius learned practicing the vigils, and saw his teacher as a man of prayer, who devoted all his life to worship. Therefore, the Pope found pleasure in praying and in practicing the vigil

services. When Duce Syrenius tried to arrest him, the Pope was leading his people in a vigil. He repeatedly referred to the practice of prayers and vigils in his writings.

ST. ANTHONY AND PIETY

As he tasted the sweetness of the godly life in his companionship with St. Anthony, he could not separate between theology and the practical behaviour, faith and godliness. The Christian religion according to him urged the person to enjoy the godly life in the Lord. He says: [Faith and godliness are allied to each other, and are sisters. He who believes in God is godly, and he who is godly is more of a believer¹.]

¹ *Paschal Letters 11:9.*

ST. ATHANASIUS
AND HIS INTERACTION WITH
THE ALEXANDRINE IDEAS

St. Mark faced three different dangerous trends in Alexandria:

- The pride of **the Egyptians**, in their scientific and technological achievements, which is still astonishing the modern world, e.g. the architecture of the pyramids and temples, mummification, design and sculptures etc.
- The pride of the **Alexandrian Greek community**, of the Greek Philosophy and the Hellenic culture, which overruled the world, even during the Roman Empire.
- The pride of the **Alexandrian Jewish community**, of their belief that they are exclusively God's chosen people, the receivers of Moses' Law and the possessors of the divine promises etc.

As St. Jerome¹ testifies that St. Mark established the first Scientific Christian Institute in the world, which is the Christian School of Alexandria. I have previously issued the first two volumes about the School of Alexandria. The first

¹ *De Viris Illustribus*, 36

what was before Origen, and the second about Origen, and I hope, if God permitted, to finish this series.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic has interacted with the theological Alexandrian way of thinking, so he carried to the world the ideas of the School of Alexandria: from its various aspects.

HIS THEOLOGICAL SOTERIOLOGICAL VIEW

St. Athanasius in all his theological arguments was concerned with “**man’s salvation.**” He sincerely stressed on the fact that only God can save the fallen human race¹.

In all his discourses against the Arians, his main concern was the renewal and regeneration of our nature through the Incarnate Son of God:

[If for our sake He sanctified Himself (John 17:18,19), he did so by becoming Man, obviously when the Spirit’s descent on Him in Jordan it descent on us, because He bears our body².]

[When He is said to be anointed in human respect (Ps. 45:7,8), it is in Him we are anointed; as when He is baptized, it is in Him that we are

¹ *J.N.D. Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines, 1960, p. 284.*

² *Or. Arians Disc. 1:47.*

baptized¹.]

[He was not man and then became God, but He was God, and then became Man to deify us² (we bear His deeds in us).]

Previously I have shown the stereological thought in the theology of St. Athanasius including the following points³:

1. We would have never been redeemed if God the Word (the Logos) had not become Man. For man is in need of the Creator to redeem his fallen nature to its origin, granting it the image of God, restoring it from corruption to incorruption. In Him mankind overcame death and was recreated⁴.
2. As the Son of God is one with the Father in essence (*ousia*), He offered Himself as a Sacrifice, paying the debt of our sins, and achieving the divine justice and mercy
3. The Logos is God who defended Satan not only for Himself, but also for our sake.

¹ *Or. Arians Disc. 1:48.*

² *Or. Arians Disc. 1:39.*

³ *This was previously presented in the (Soteriology) Theology of ST. Athanasius (The Author: The Coptic Orthodox Church as a Church of Education & Theology, 1986, p86-87).*

⁴ *De Incarnatione, 8,9.*

4. Being God, the incarnate Logos He regained for us our honor, granting us to be children of the Father in the Holy Spirit. St. Athanasius says: [He was made Man that we might become gods¹.] [For although there is one Son by nature, True and Only-Begotten, we too become sons, not as He in nature and truth, but according to the grace of Him that calls us, and though we are earthly humans, we are called gods².]
5. The Incarnation presented us to God, the Incarnate Logos reveals the Father to us, and the Father attracts us to the Son (John 17:26; 6:44).

CHRISTOLOGY³

1. St. Athanasius declares that the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his death are not a shame to God but to His Glory, and have given us more reason to worship Him⁴.
2. He took a perfect and complete humanity. He says: [the Saviour did not take a body without soul nor did he take a body without senses or intelligence. For it was not possible when the Lord became Man for our sake, that His body should be without mind, nor was the salvation

¹ *De Incarnatione*, 54:3.

² *Or. Arians*, Disc 3:19.

³ *Quasten: Patrology*, vol. 3, p. 72-76.

⁴ *Or. Arians*, Disc. 1:42.

effected in the Word Himself of the body only, but of the soul as well]

3. The Logos is not an external instrument to achieve creation; God is not in need of a tool for creation or even for salvation. The Logos is one with the Father in essence. [For if the Divine essence is not fruitful in itself, but barren, it will be like light with no brightness, a dry fountain, are they not shamed to speak of His possessing energy¹.]

THE HOLY SPIRIT

In his reply to the Arians, he defends the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Arians believed that the Holy Spirit is less than the Logos. He also wrote about the Holy Spirit in four letters addressed to Bishop Serapion. His theology concerning the Holy Spirit is identical to the theology of Christ. The Holy Spirit must be God, because if He was a creation, we should have no participation of God in Him.

1. He states: [If by sharing the Spirit, we became participants in the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4)... it is not doubted that His nature is of God².]
2. St. Athanasius declares the works of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the Source

¹ *Or. Arians, Disc. 2:2.*

² *Ep. ad Serapion 1:24.*

of the true sanctification; by Him we receive the anointment and the seal to become partakers of Christ and partakers in this divine nature. Through baptism and Chrismation we became the member of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit that designates bishops to lead God's sheep.

3. Through the Holy Spirit we abide in God: [Outside the Spirit we are strangers, and far from God; with the partnership of the Spirit we become attached to His divinity. Our existence in God does not come from us but from the Spirit that is in us and abides in us. Through the right confession we preserve Him inside us, and as John says: "Whoever confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." (1 John 4:15)¹.]

His aim was clear in his controversy against the heretics. He was even eager for their salvation. Quasten says: [Despite his uncompromising hostility towards error and the fierceness with which he opposed it, he had quality, rare in such a character, of being capable even in the heat of battle, of tolerance, and moderation towards those who had in good faith been led astray².]

He says: [Religion is not to impose but to

¹ *Or. Arians, Disc. 3:24.*

² *Quasten: Patrology, vol, 3, p .20.*

persuade¹.]

HIS BIBLICAL VIEW

The young Anthony chose the way of monasticism when he heard the Gospel's words: "Go, sell all your belongings and distribute them among the poor, and come and follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). He devoted all his life to fulfill this biblical commandment. He lived all his life possessing only the Gospel, written not on paper but inside him.

His disciple, St. Athanasius, devoted all his life to read the Holy Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, and enjoying every word of it. He did not write commentaries or devote his life to the monastic thinking like his teacher, but he led a biblical life, and all his writings depended on the Holy Bible, especially in his arguments with the Arians.

HIS ECUMENICAL CHURCH VIEW

Since its establishment, the School of Alexandria opened its gates to different nationalities, many joined it, learning and living together. Many became bishops and leaders bearing the spirit of true love and the unity of faith and thought.

St. Athanasius had the same thought; he

¹ *Hist. Arians*, 67.

believed in the Church ecumenical life that is based on the spirit of love and the unity of faith. Since his youth, when he was a deacon, he participated in the first Ecumenical Council in Nicea 325, where he issued the Creed, which is rehearsed in most of the churches today. All the world's bishops were attracted with admiration to this young man, as they found in him a living ecumenical heart, desiring to preserve the apostolic faith delivered to the whole world.

John Henry Newman wrote about him as "that extraordinary man... a principal instrument after the Apostles by which the sacred truths of Christianity have been conveyed and secured to the world¹." Lydia Kesich says: [If Athanasius had not stood for our faith, perhaps the Church would not be the same today...²].

HIS CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH AS THE HEAVENLY LIFE

St. Athanasius was brought up in the Alexandrian way of thinking, that we experience the heavenly life in our life in this world. He sees **the Church as the life in Jesus Christ, experiencing the inner joy, and entering heaven**. He says about Christ: [For He lifted the fallen, healed the sick,

¹ *Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, p. 53.

² *L. Kesich: They Walked with God*.

satisfied those who were hungry, and filled the poor, and, what is more wonderful, raised us all from death; abolishing it. He has brought us from affliction and sighing to joy and gladness, the joy, which even reaches heaven.]

He beholds the Church, with her heavenly characteristic sharing the heavenly hosts their heavenly food: [For the Lord is the Food of the exalted spirits, and angels. He is the Joy of all the heavenly host. He is everything to everyone, and He has pity upon us all according to His mercy. He has in fact given us the heavenly food.]

HIS VIEW TO THE ONENESS OF THE NEW LIFE

One of the most important aspects of the Alexandrian theology, even the ecumenical, is the view of the oneness in the new life in Jesus Christ. The believer, whether married or a monk in a monastery, in church or at work, bears one new life, which is the “life in Jesus Christ.”

This is revealed in the behaviour of St. Anthony the anchorite when he met brother Zechaeus, one of St. Pachomius’ disciples. He did not despise the cenobitic order, as a new monastic order. On the contrary, he encouraged him with a big heart saying: “all of you became as Abba Pachomius, I tell you, it was a great ministry he

undertook assembling so many brethren, following the path of the Apostles¹.”

The life of St. Athanasius the Apostolic reveals this oneness of the life in Jesus Christ. He is the excellent theologian in his defending of the divinity of the Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit, with a living Biblical thought and fiery heart. At the same time he was a true shepherd; in his fatherhood he was not involved in dry theological controversies, but rather a soteriological theology, eager to bring every soul to the experience the new life. He is the churchman who is concerned with the communal prayers. He himself led the vigil services of offering praises. He was the ascetic and the worshipper, who practiced asceticism in his private room, and visited the monasteries as a true monk. Wherever he was, either in his bishopric or in his theological controversies, in a monastery or in his exile, hiding in a grave or in a house, he continuously practiced the new life in Jesus Christ.

¹ Cf. *Derwas J. Chitty: The Desert A City*, p.2.

POINTS FROM THE LIFE OF ST. ATHANASIUS

St. Athanasius was characterized as a man of courage, wisdom and quick wit. We mention here some points, which reveal his character:

1. When the Arians tried to kill him, St. Athanasius fled in a boat to Upper Egypt. The soldiers followed him in the ruler's ship, which was certainly faster than his boat. As they approached him, the head sailor was terrified knowing that the Pope's life was in danger. The Pope stood courageously at the edge of the boat and asked the soldiers, "Whom are you seeking for?" They replied: "Athanasius." In complete truth he told them: "Athanasius is quite near you." They thought that he is in another boat near them, so they hurried towards Upper Egypt. He then returned to Memphis and started moving between the monasteries in the area of Thebiad.

2. The Arians brought a lady to witness in the Council of Tyre, that he committed adultery with her, and that she bore him a child. The Pope did not utter a single word, but he pointed to his disciple who stood there, asking her: "Did I commit a sin with you?" She answered, "Yes, it is you,

Athanasius.” He asked her to confirm that he is the right person who committed the sin with her; she insisted that he was the one. The Arians were embarrassed as their conspiracy was discovered and the Pope was proved innocent in front the entire council.

ST. ATHANASIUS'
BIOGRAPHY
IN LINES

- c. 297 His birth in Upper Egypt
- 312 Appointed a Reader.
- 318 Ordained a deacon and appointed as secretary of Pope Alexander of Alexandria.
- ... Became a disciple of St. Anthony the Great for three years.
- 325 Accompanied the Pope to the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea.
- 328 Became the successor of Pope Alexander.
- 330 Ordained Frementius as the first bishop of Ethiopia, under the name Abbot Salama the First.
- 330 Eusebius, the Arian bishop of Nicomedia asked Constantine to write to Athanasius, bidding him to re-admit Arius into his communion. Athanasius refused the emperor's request.
- 333\4 A council was held at Caesarea, in Palestine, whereof Eusebius, one of the Arian party, was a bishop. The Pope refused to take part in it.
- 335 The Council of Tyre: Athanasius was accused of the following charges:

- Murdering the Melitian bishop Arsanius.
- Raping a virgin.
- Asked his deputy Macarius to break the chalice of a supposed priest called Ischyras.

The deceivers were discovered, but the Arians tried to tear him apart. He fled to Constantinople, but the council deposed him in his absence.

The emperor welcomed him, but he changed his mind, and banished him to Tréve (335 – 337).

337 Constantine died, and his son Constantine the Younger restored the Pope to his Seat.

338 St. Anthony visited him to assure him of his admiration and respect.

339 Constantine the Younger was killed, and Athanasius was accused of raising tumults and seditions, leading to bloodshed, and preventing the export of corn from Egypt to Constantinople.

A council at Antioch deposed Athanasius, and Pistus, an excommunicated priest, was elected as archbishop of Alexandria. Then the Cappadocian Gregory was ordained by force.

Pope Athanasius was forced to flee to Rome, where Pope Julius welcomed him.

342 Athanasius met Constans, the Western

- Emperor, in Milan. The Eusabians stirred up Constantius, the Eastern Emperor, accusing the Pope that he called Constans to summon a council of the Western and Eastern bishops, ignoring him.
- 343 A council was held at Sardica (Sophia), on the borderline of the two empires. The Arian bishops of the East withdrew to Philippi in Thrace, on the opposite side of Sardica, in the eastern limits. They anathematized Athanasius and Julius.
- 346 The return of the exiled bishops to their Seats.
- 350 Constans died in the revolt of Magnentius.
- 353 Constantius became the sole ruler of the whole empire. A national war broke out between Constantius and Magnentius, which lasted for 3 years. The Arians accused Athanasius of having a suspicious relation with the murderer Magnentius. The emperor condemned Athanasius through the two following councils:
- 353 The council held at Arles.
- 355 The council held at Milan, called by Librius, the successor Julius.
- 356 Duke Syrianus invaded the Church of Theonas, and Athanasius fled to the desert (356-362)

- 357 The substitute George of Cappadocia entered Alexandria, and the churches were handed over to the Arians. The people revolted; George escaped and returned to Alexandria the following year. The pagan murdered him and robbed his possessions.
- 362 Julian became emperor, and permitted the exiled bishops to return. Athanasius summoned the "Council of Confessors." The energetic activities of Athanasius displeased Julian, so he ordered Athanasius to leave Egypt, describing him as the enemy of gods. Athanasius escaped to his father's tomb for six months.
The emperor asked the ruler of Alexandria to plan for his murder. Athanasius fled in the Nile to Upper Egypt. When the ruler's ship reached the Pope's boat, he stood and said to the soldiers that Athanasius was not far from them. They did not recognize him and sail very quickly to catch him. He returned to a city near Memphis for a while. He was then traveled to several monasteries in Thebaid.
- 363 Julian was murdered, and all the bishops returned from their exile.
Athanasius summoned a council that sent a letter to the Emperor Jovian, explaining the Nicene faith.

- Athanasius paid a visit to Jovian who welcomed him.
- 364 Jovian died, and his successor Valentinian appointed his brother Valens, who had Arian tendencies, as follower of Augustus in the East.
- Valens commanded all bishops exiled by Constantius to leave their Seats.
- 365 (May 365 – February 366) Athanasius was in a hiding place.
- 369 Athanasius summoned a local council in Alexandria to discuss the Orthodox faith.
- 373 Athanasius departed in the Lord.