
ST. ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA – SOME TEXTS TO CONSIDER

The Night School, 21 February 2017 with Fr. Rick Ganz, SJ

ON THE INCARNATION (C. 318 CE)

Genesis 1:27 – God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

10. The fitness of the Incarnation

In fact this great work was especially befitting God's goodness. For if an emperor, who has founded a house or a city, when from the carelessness of its inhabitants it is besieged by bandits, does not by any means neglect it, but avenges and preserves it as his own work; regarding not the carelessness of the inhabitants, but what is befitting his own person: much more did God, the Word of the all-good Father, not overlook the human race called into being by Him, which was utterly going to corruption; but He abolished the death they had incurred by the offering of His own body, and corrected their carelessness by His own teaching, completely restoring the whole nature of man by His power.¹

13. The Fitness of the Renewal [of the Image]

What, then, must God do? or what else was it right to do, but to renew again the grace by which they had been made after His Image, so that through it men might be able once more to know Him? But how could this have been done except by the coming of the very Image Himself of God, our Saviour Jesus Christ? For it could not be through men, seeing that they are only made after the Image: nor through angels, for not even they are (God's) images. Therefore the Word of God came in His own Person, in order that, as He was the Image of the Father, He might be able to re-create the man made after the Image. But this re-creation could not otherwise have taken place unless death and corruption had been entirely abolished. Whence He naturally took a mortal body, in order that in it death might be finally abolished, and that men might be again renewed after the Image. To satisfy this need was the part of no other than the Image of the Father.²

43. The reason for God's Assumption of a Human Nature

Some may then ask, why did He not manifest Himself by means of other and nobler parts of creation, and use some nobler instrument, such as sun or moon or stars or fire or air, instead of mere man? The answer is this. The Lord did

¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, [*Athanasius: On the Incarnation of the Word of God*](#), trans. T. Herbert Bindley, Second Edition Revised. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1903), 58.

² Athanasius of Alexandria, [*Athanasius: On the Incarnation of the Word of God*](#), trans. T. Herbert Bindley, Second Edition Revised. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1903), 66.



not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.

THE LIFE OF ANTONY (C. 356 CE)

*Proverbs 3: ²⁶ For the LORD will be your confidence,
and will keep your foot from the snare.³*

4. Leading his life in this way, Antony was loved by all. He was sincerely obedient to those men of zeal he visited, and he considered carefully the advantage in zeal and in ascetic living that each held in relation to him. He observed the graciousness of one, the eagerness for prayers in another; he took careful note of one's freedom from anger, and the human concern of another. And he paid attention to one while he lived a watchful life, or one who pursued studies, as also he admired one for patience, and another for fastings and sleeping on the ground. The gentleness of one and the long-suffering of yet another he watched closely. He marked, likewise, the piety toward Christ and the mutual love of them all. And having been filled in this manner, he returned to his own place of discipline, from that time gathering the attributes of each in himself, and striving to manifest in himself what was best from all.⁴

22. "First we ought to understand this: The demons were not created as the figures we now identify by 'demon,' for God made nothing bad. They were made good, but falling from the heavenly wisdom and thereafter wandering around the earth, they deceived the Greeks through apparitions. And envious of us Christians, they meddle with all things in their desire to frustrate our journey into heaven, so that we might not ascend to the place from which they themselves fell. Therefore much prayer and asceticism is needed so that one who receives through the Spirit the gift of discrimination of spirits might be able to recognize their traits⁴⁶—for example, which of them are less wicked, and which more; and in what kind of pursuit each of them exerts himself, and how each of them is overturned and expelled. For numerous are their treacheries and the moves in their plot. The blessed apostle and his companions recognized these when they said, *We are not ignorant of his designs,*⁴⁷ and on the basis of our testings by them, we ought to set each other on the right path, away from them. Therefore I, having had my share of trial from them, address you as my children.⁵

³ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Pr 3:26.

⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, [Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus](#), ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Robert C. Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 32–33.

*⁴⁶ See 1 Cor. 12:7, 10.

*⁴⁷ 2 Cor. 2:11.

⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, [Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus](#), ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Robert C. Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 47–48.

