

Creation and the Fall

I–V

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

In an earlier book, I covered some of the main points about pagan idol worship — where those misguided fears came from in the first place. I also showed, with God's help, that the Word of the Father is divine in his own right: everything that exists owes its being to his will and power, and it's through him that the Father orders creation, moves all things, and gives them their being.

Now, Macarius — you who truly love Christ — we need to go a step further in our faith and consider something else: the Word becoming human, and his appearing among us in bodily form. Jews scoff at this mystery. Greeks mock it. We worship it. And honestly, the more your love for the Word grows, the more you'll find yourself amazed that he seems, in his humanity, to count for so little. Because here's the strange truth: the more unbelievers sneer at him, the more clearly his divinity shows through. What they rule out as impossible for a man, he demonstrates is entirely possible. What they deride as beneath God, his goodness makes fitting. What these so-called wise men laugh off as "merely human," he reveals, through his own power, to be divine after all. So it is that what looks like utter poverty and weakness on the cross ends up toppling the whole pompous show of idol worship — and quietly, without fanfare, wins over the mockers and the doubters to recognize him as God.

Let's start, though, by recalling something already established: why the Word of the Father — so great, so exalted — chose to reveal himself in a human body at all. He didn't take on a body because it belonged to his nature; as the Word, he has no body of his own. He was made visible in a human body for one reason only: because of his Father's love and goodness, for the sake of saving us. So we need to begin with the creation of the world and with God as its Maker. Here's the first thing to grasp: the renewal of creation was carried out by the very same Word who made it in the beginning. There's no contradiction between creation and salvation — the Father used the same Agent for both, saving the world through the very Word who made it.

II. Competing theories of creation

People have proposed all kinds of theories about how the universe came to be, each shaped by their own preferences. Some — the Epicureans among them — claim everything came about by chance, self-generated, with no Mind behind any of it. But this contradicts everything we actually observe, including our own existence. If everything really had come about automatically, with no guiding intelligence, we'd expect total uniformity — everything would be the same kind of thing. Instead, we see the sun, moon, and earth as distinct realities, and even within a single human body we find different parts: hands, eyes, feet, each doing something different. This variety points not to random chance but to a purposeful Cause — and through that Cause we come to know God, the Designer and Maker of everything.

Others follow Plato's view: that God shaped the world out of pre-existing, uncreated matter, the way a carpenter builds furniture from wood that already exists. But this misses something important. To say God isn't the source of matter itself is to put a limit on him — just as a carpenter is limited by needing wood before he can build anything. If God could only work with matter he didn't create, what would even make him worthy of the title "Maker"? He'd be a craftsman, not a Creator.

Then there are the Gnostics, who've invented some other "Artificer" of the universe, distinct from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They simply ignore what Scripture plainly says. Jesus himself, reminding the Jewish leaders of the creation account in Genesis — "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'" — used that very fact to argue that a man should leave his parents and be united to his wife, adding: "what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4–6). How do you get a separate, non-Fatherly creator out of that? And John states it even more directly: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). So how could the Maker of all things be someone other than the Father of Christ?

III. The Christian answer

These are the theories people put forward — but the foolishness in all of them is exposed by the plain teaching of the Christian faith. Because God is Mind, the universe didn't create itself. Because God is infinite, not limited, the universe wasn't shaped from some pre-existing material — it was brought into being out of absolute nothing, through the Word. Genesis says exactly this:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). And that valuable early Christian text, *The Shepherd*, puts it this way: "First of all, believe that God is one, that he created and set in order all things, bringing them out of non-existence into being." Paul agrees: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Hebrews 11:3).

God is good — more than that, he's the very source of all goodness, and someone who is truly good could never be stingy or begrudging about anything. So, grudging existence to no one, he made everything out of nothing, through his own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. And of all his earthly creatures, he reserved special mercy for the human race. To us — creatures who, like all animals, were naturally fleeting and impermanent — he gave a gift the other creatures didn't receive: he stamped us with his own image, giving us a share in the reasoning nature of the Word himself. This meant that, by reflecting him and by becoming reasonable beings who express something of the mind of God (even if only in a limited way), we could go on living forever in the blessed life of the saints in paradise.

But because human will could turn either way, God secured this gift by attaching two conditions to it from the start: a law, and a place. He set humanity in his own paradise and gave a single command. If people guarded this grace and kept the beauty of their original innocence, the life of paradise would be theirs — free from sorrow, pain, and anxiety — followed by the promise of immortality in heaven. But if they went astray and became corrupt, throwing away the beauty they'd been given, they would

fall under the natural law of death. They would no longer live in paradise but, dying outside it, would remain in death and corruption from then on. This is exactly what Scripture tells us God commanded: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:16–17). Not just die — but *remain* in a state of death and corruption.

IV. Why this matters for the story of the Incarnation

You might be wondering why we're talking about the origin of humanity when what we set out to discuss was the Word becoming human. Here's why it matters: it was our own sorry state that brought the Word down to us. Our sin is what called out his love, moved him to hurry to our aid and appear among us. We are the reason he took on human form; it was for our salvation that, in his great love, he was born and revealed in a human body.

God had made humanity — as embodied spirits — intending that we remain free from decay. But instead of contemplating God, people turned toward evil of their own devising, and so they inevitably fell under the law of death. Rather than staying in the condition God had created them in, they were becoming entirely corrupted, and death took complete control over them. Because breaking the commandment was pulling them back toward their original nature — and since they had come into being out of nothing, they were now, through corruption, heading back toward nothing again.

It was the Word's presence and love that had called humanity into existence in the first place. So naturally, when people lost the knowledge of God, they lost their hold on existence along with it — because God alone truly exists; evil is non-being, the negation and opposite of good. By nature, of course, humans are mortal, since we were made from nothing. But we also carry the likeness of the One who truly is — and if we preserve that likeness through constant contemplation of him, our mortal nature is robbed of its power, and we remain free from decay. As Wisdom puts it: "Keeping the law is the guarantee of immortality" (Wisdom 6:18). And being free from decay, we would then live as God intended — as Scripture says: "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you'; but you will die like mere mortals, you will fall like every other ruler" (Psalm 82:6–7).

V. Corruption spreads

So this was humanity's situation: God had not only made people out of nothing, but had graciously given them a share in his own life through the grace of the Word. But turning from eternal things to things that decay — through the devil's scheming — people became the cause of their own downfall into death. As I said, though they were naturally subject to decay, the grace that came from their union with the Word had made it possible for them to escape that natural law, as long as they kept the beauty of the innocence they'd been created with. In other words, the Word's presence with them shielded them even from their own natural corruptibility — as Wisdom also says: "God created mankind for immortality and made them an image of his own eternity; but through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wisdom 2:23–24).

Once this happened, people began to die, and corruption spread and took hold of them to an even greater degree than would have been natural — because this was the punishment God had warned them about for breaking his command. In fact, their sin went far beyond any reasonable limit. Having invented wickedness at the start and thereby entangled themselves in death and decay, people kept sliding from bad to worse. They never settled for one kind of evil, but kept dreaming up new sins with an appetite that couldn't be satisfied. Adultery and theft were everywhere. Murder and violence filled the earth. Law gave way to corruption and injustice. Every kind of wrongdoing was committed, by individuals and by whole societies. Cities fought cities, nations rose against nations, and the whole earth was torn apart by conflict and war, each side trying to outdo the other in wickedness. Even behavior that went against nature itself was common — as the apostle Paul writes: "Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:26–27).

The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution in the Incarnation

VI–X

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

We saw in the last chapter that death and corruption had gotten an ever-tighter grip on humanity, and the whole human race was heading toward ruin. Man — created in God's image, reflecting the Word himself through the gift of reason — was disappearing. God's work was being undone. The law of death that followed from that first disobedience had humanity firmly in its grip, and there was no way out. What was happening was, frankly, both monstrous and completely wrong. It would have been unthinkable for God to break his word and let a person who'd sinned simply not die. But it was equally unthinkable that creatures who once shared in the nature of the Word should perish and slide back into nothingness through corruption. It didn't fit God's goodness to let the devil's deception undo his own handiwork. And it was entirely unfitting for God's work in humanity to vanish — whether through people's own carelessness or the devil's trickery.

So here's the question: given that his own reasonable creatures were, in fact, perishing, and such noble work was heading toward ruin — what was a good God supposed to do? Just let corruption and death have their way? If so, what was the point of creating people in the first place? Surely it would have been better never to have made them at all than to create them and

then let them be neglected and destroyed. And such indifference toward the ruin of his own handiwork, happening right in front of him, wouldn't reflect goodness in God — it would look more like weakness, more so, in fact, than if he'd never created humanity to begin with. So it was simply impossible for God to abandon humanity to corruption. That would have been unworthy of him.

VII. But that's not the whole problem

True as that is, it's only half the puzzle. As we've already said, it was unthinkable for God — the Father of Truth — to go back on his word about death just to keep us alive. He couldn't contradict himself. So what was God supposed to do? Demand repentance for the transgression? You might think that sounds fitting — after all, if the fall into corruption came through disobedience, couldn't a return to incorruption come through repentance?

But repentance wouldn't actually solve the problem. It wouldn't preserve God's consistency, because even if death no longer held power over humanity, God would still be going back on his word. And repentance doesn't undo what's already happened to our nature — it only stops us from sinning further. If this had simply been a one-time offense, without the corruption that followed, repentance might have been enough. But once the transgression had begun, people fell under the power of a corruption that was now proper to their nature. They lost the grace that had belonged to them as creatures made in God's image. Repentance, in other words, wasn't up to the task.

So who — or what — could actually meet this need? Only the Word of God himself, the one who had made everything out of nothing in the beginning. It was his job, and his alone, both to

bring what was corruptible back to incorruption and to preserve the Father's consistency of character throughout. Because he alone, being the Word of the Father, above all things, was capable both of re-creating everything and of being a worthy sacrifice on everyone's behalf — a fitting ambassador to the Father for us all.

VIII. The Word takes on a body

So the incorporeal, incorruptible, immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense he'd never really been far away — no part of creation had ever existed without him, since even while remaining united to the Father, he fills all things. But now he entered the world in an entirely new way: stooping down to our level, out of love, to reveal himself to us directly. He saw the human race — reasoning beings, like himself, expressing the Father's mind — wasting away into nonexistence, with death reigning everywhere through corruption. He saw that corruption held us all the more tightly because it was the direct penalty for our transgression. He saw how unthinkable it would be for the law to be revoked before it had run its course. He saw how wrong it was for his own creation to be vanishing. He saw humanity's wickedness mounting against them, and their shared vulnerability to death. Seeing all this — and moved by compassion for our weakness, unwilling to let death win, unwilling to let his Father's work in us come to nothing — he took on a body. A human body, just like ours.

He didn't merely want to *become* embodied, or simply appear in some vague form — if that had been the goal, he could have shown his divine majesty in some far easier way. No, he took our

actual body — and more than that, he took it from a pure, untouched virgin, without any human father involved. A body free from any contact with a man. He, the Mighty One, the Maker of all things, prepared this body for himself within the virgin, as a temple, and claimed it as his own — the instrument through which he would be known and in which he would dwell. So, having taken on a body like ours — since all our bodies were subject to the corruption of death — he handed his own body over to death, in place of everyone, and offered it to the Father. He did this purely out of love for us, so that in his death, everyone might die *with* him, and so the law of death might be abolished, once its penalty had been fully paid in his one body — leaving it with no more power over the rest of us. This was so he could turn back toward incorruption those who had turned toward corruption, and bring them to life through death, by both his bodily union with us and the grace of his resurrection. In this way he made death disappear from us as completely as straw vanishes in fire.

IX. Why the Word had to take a body capable of dying

The Word understood that corruption could only be gotten rid of through death. But he himself, as the Word, immortal and the Father's Son, wasn't the kind of being who could die. So for this reason, he took on a body capable of dying — a body that, because it belonged to the Word who is above everything, could serve, in dying, as a sufficient exchange for all of us. And that same body, remaining incorruptible through the Word's presence within it, could then put an end to corruption for everyone else too, through the grace of the resurrection. By handing over to death the body he had taken — an offering and sacrifice free of

any flaw — he immediately abolished death for his human brothers and sisters by offering an adequate substitute. Since the Word of God was above all things, when he offered his own body — his "temple" — as a substitute for the life of everyone, he satisfied in death everything that death demanded. And because the immortal Son of God had joined himself to our human nature, everyone was now clothed with incorruption, through the promise of resurrection. Humanity is bound together in such a way that, because the Word dwelt in one single human body, the corruption tied to death has lost its grip on all of us.

Think of it like this: when a great king enters a large city and takes up residence in one of its houses, that whole city is honored because of his presence there — even enemies and robbers stop bothering it. It's the same with the King of everything. He has entered our country and dwelt in one body among the many, and as a result, the enemy's schemes against humanity have been defeated, and the corruption of death, which used to hold us all in its power, has simply ceased to be. Because the human race would have perished completely had the Lord and Savior of all — the Son of God — not come among us to put an end to death.

X. A supremely fitting act

This whole rescue was, in fact, entirely worthy of God's goodness. Think of a king who's founded a city: he doesn't abandon it when careless citizens let robbers attack it — he defends it and saves it from ruin, out of regard for his own honor as much as for the people's sake. In the same way — even more so — the Word of the all-good Father didn't forget the human race he'd called into

being. Instead, by offering his own body, he wiped out the death humanity had brought on itself, and corrected our carelessness through his own teaching. In this way, by his own power, he restored our whole nature.

The Savior's own inspired followers confirm this. Paul writes: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). And elsewhere: "But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). The same writer explains why it had to be God the Word, and no one else, who became human: "In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered" (Hebrews 2:10). What he means is that rescuing humanity from corruption was properly the job only of the one who had made us in the first place.

He also points out that the Word took on a human body specifically in order to offer it as a sacrifice for other human bodies: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14–15). Through the sacrifice of his own body, he accomplished two things at once: he ended the law of death

that stood in our way, and he made a fresh start for us by giving us the hope of resurrection. Through one man, death gained its power over humanity; through the Word made man, death has been destroyed and life has been raised up again. As Paul, that faithful servant of Christ, puts it: "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). So now, when we die, we no longer die as people condemned — we're already, in a sense, rising, awaiting the general resurrection of all, "which God will bring about in his own time" (1 Timothy 6:15).

This, then, is the first reason the Savior became human. But there's more to say about why his presence among us was so entirely fitting, and we'll turn to that next.

The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution in the Incarnation, Continued

XI–XVIII

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

When God Almighty was making humanity through his own Word, he saw that people, limited as they were by nature, couldn't have any knowledge of their Maker on their own — the Incorporeal, Uncreated One. So he took pity on us and didn't leave us without some knowledge of himself, so that our very existence wouldn't turn out pointless. What use is existence to a creature that can't know its Maker? How could people count as reasoning beings if they had no knowledge of the Word and Reason of the Father, through whom they'd received their being in the first place? They'd be no better than animals if all they knew was earthly things — and why would God have made them at all, if he hadn't intended for them to know him? But in fact, the good God gave us a share in his own image — that is, in our Lord Jesus Christ — and made us after that same image and likeness. Why? So that, through this gift of God-likeness within us, we might be able to perceive the Image itself — the Word — and through him, come to know the Father. That knowledge of our Maker is, for humanity, the only truly happy and blessed life there is.

But, as we've already seen, foolish humanity thought little of the grace it had received and turned away from God. People defiled their own souls so thoroughly that they didn't just lose their

grasp of God — they went and invented other gods for themselves, of every kind. They made idols in place of the truth and honored things that don't exist, rather than the God who does — "worshiping created things rather than the Creator," as Paul puts it (Romans 1:25). Worse still, they transferred the honor due to God onto material objects like wood and stone, and even onto human beings — and beyond even that, as we mentioned in our earlier book. In fact, they became so irreverent that they worshiped evil spirits as gods, to satisfy their own appetites. They sacrificed animals and even other people to these so-called deities, binding themselves ever more tightly under their destructive influence. Magic arts were taught among them, oracles in various places led people astray, and the cause of everything in human life was traced to the stars — as if nothing existed except what could be seen. In short, godlessness and lawlessness were everywhere, and neither God nor his Word was known. Yet he hadn't hidden himself from view, nor limited the knowledge of himself to a single channel — he'd made it available in many forms and many ways.

XII. Three paths to knowing God

God knew humanity's limitations. Even though being made in his image was, in principle, enough to give people knowledge of the Word — and through the Word, of the Father — as a safeguard against our neglect of that gift, he also gave us the created world itself as a way of knowing its Maker. And that's still not all. Since human neglect of this inner grace tends only to grow worse over time, God made further provision against this weakness by giving a law, and by sending prophets — men people actually knew. That way, even if people were slow to look

up toward heaven, they could still learn about their Maker from people close at hand, since we can learn directly about higher things from other people.

So three paths lay open to humanity for coming to know God. People could look up at the vastness of the sky and, by reflecting on the harmony of creation, come to know its Ruler — the Word of the Father, whose all-governing care makes the Father known to everyone. Or, if that was beyond them, they could talk with holy people and, through them, learn to know God, the Maker of all things, the Father of Christ, and recognize idol worship for the denial of truth that it is. Or, third, they could simply stop being lukewarm and live a good life just by following the law. Because the law wasn't given only for the Jewish people, and it wasn't only for their sake that God sent the prophets — even though it was to the Jews that the prophets were sent, and by the Jews that they were persecuted. The law and the prophets were meant to be a sacred school teaching the whole world the knowledge of God and how to live a spiritual life.

So great were God's goodness and love. And yet people, weighed down by the pleasures of the moment and deceived by evil spirits, didn't lift their heads toward the truth. They were so burdened by their own wickedness that they seemed more like animals than reasoning beings who reflected the very likeness of the Word.

XIII. What was God to do?

So what was God to do, faced with this dehumanizing of humanity — this near-universal concealment of the knowledge of himself by the schemes of evil spirits? Was he supposed to stay

silent in the face of such a grave wrong, and let people go on being deceived and kept in ignorance of him? If so, what was the point of ever having made them in his own image? It would have been better if they'd always been animals than for them to fall back into that condition after having once shared in the Word's nature. And again — if things stood as they did, what was the point of ever giving humanity the knowledge of God at all? Surely it would have been better for God never to have given it than for people to end up unworthy of it later. And what possible benefit would it be to God himself, who made them, if once made they didn't worship him but regarded other things as their makers instead? That would be as if he'd made them for someone else, not for himself. Even an earthly king — a mere man — doesn't let territory he's settled slip away to other rulers without a fight; he sends letters, envoys, even visits in person, to call his people back to their allegiance, rather than let his work go to waste. How much more, then, will God be patient and diligent with his own creatures, so they aren't led away from him into serving things that don't even exist — especially since such error means sheer ruin for them, and it isn't right that those who once bore his image should be destroyed.

So what was God to do? What else could he possibly do, being God, except renew his image in humanity, so that through it people might once again come to know him? And how could this happen, except through the coming of the very Image himself — our Savior Jesus Christ? Human beings couldn't have done it, since we're only made *after* the image. Angels couldn't have done it either, since they aren't the image of God. The Word of God came in his own person, because he alone — the Image of the

Father — could re-create humanity, made as we are after that image.

But to bring about this re-creation, he first had to deal with death and corruption. So he took on a human body, so that in it, death might be destroyed once and for all, and people might be renewed according to the image. Only the Image of the Father was sufficient for this task. Here's an illustration to make the point clearer.

XIV. The portrait that's been painted over

You know what happens when a portrait painted on a wooden panel gets ruined by stains from the outside. The artist doesn't throw the panel away — the subject of the portrait comes and sits for it again, and the likeness gets redrawn on the very same material. It was the same with the holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and lived among us, so that he could renew humanity, made in his own likeness, and seek out his lost sheep — just as he says in the Gospel: "I came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). This also explains his words to the Jewish leaders: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (John 3:3) — he wasn't talking about ordinary physical birth from a mother, as they assumed, but about the rebirth and re-creation of the soul in God's image.

And that's not the only thing only the Word could do. When the madness of idolatry and irreligion had filled the world and the knowledge of God was hidden, whose job was it to teach the world about the Father? Would you say it was up to human beings? But people can't travel everywhere in the world, and even

if they could, their words wouldn't carry enough weight, nor would they, on their own, be any match for evil spirits. What's more, since even the best people were themselves confused and clouded by evil, how could they possibly straighten out the minds of others? You can't fix in someone else what's crooked in yourself. Maybe you'll say, then, that creation itself should have been enough to teach people about the Father. But if that had really been sufficient, such enormous evils would never have taken hold. Creation was there the whole time, but it didn't stop humanity from wallowing in error.

So once again, it was the Word of God — the one who sees everything within us and moves all things in creation — who alone could meet the need. It was his job, and his alone, since his ordering of the universe already reveals the Father, to renew that same teaching. But how was he to do it? Through the same means as before — through creation? That approach had already proven insufficient. People had stopped paying attention to the heavens, and now they were looking in the opposite direction entirely. So, quite naturally and fittingly, wanting to do good for humanity, he came to dwell among us as a man, taking a body like everyone else's — and through the actions he performed in that body, meeting people on their own level, he taught those who wouldn't learn any other way to know him, the Word of God, and through him, the Father.

XV. Meeting us halfway

He deals with us the way a good teacher deals with students — coming down to their level and using simple methods. Paul makes the same point: "For since in the wisdom of God the world

through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). People had turned away from contemplating God above and were looking for him in exactly the wrong direction — down among created, physical things. So the Savior of us all, the Word of God, in his great love, took on a body and moved among us as a man, meeting our senses, so to speak, halfway. He became, himself, something our senses could grasp, so that those who were looking for God among physical things might apprehend the Father through the works that he, the Word of God, performed in the body. Whichever direction people — being fundamentally physical, sense-driven creatures — looked in the material world, they found themselves being taught the truth. Were they in awe of creation? They saw it confessing Christ as Lord. Did their minds tend toward worshiping other people as gods? The uniqueness of the Savior's works marked him out, alone among human beings, as the Son of God. Were they drawn to evil spirits? They saw those spirits driven out by the Lord, and learned that the Word of God alone was truly God, and that the evil spirits weren't gods at all. Were they inclined toward hero-worship and honoring the dead? Then the fact that the Savior rose from the dead exposed how false those other deities were, and revealed that the Word of the Father is the one true Lord — Lord even over death. This is why he was born and revealed as a man, why he died and rose again: so that, by outshining every other human deed through his own works, he might call people back from every path of error to know the Father. As he says himself, "I came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

XVI. Present in all things, yet unconfined

When the minds of people had sunk all the way down to the level of merely physical things, the Word agreed to appear in a body, so that he, as a man, could draw their senses toward himself, and convince them, through his human actions, that he wasn't merely a man but also God — the Word and Wisdom of the true God. This is what Paul is getting at when he says: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17–19). The Word reveals himself in every direction at once — above, in creation; below, in the incarnation; in the depths, in the realm of the dead; and across the whole breadth of the world. Everything has been filled with the knowledge of God.

This is also why he didn't offer the sacrifice on everyone's behalf right away, the moment he arrived. If he'd surrendered his body to death and then immediately raised it again, he'd have stopped being something our senses could perceive at all. Instead, he remained in his body and let himself be seen in it, performing deeds and giving signs that showed him to be not merely a man but also God the Word. So there were two things the Savior accomplished for us by becoming human: he banished death from us and made us new again, and — invisible and imperceptible as he is in himself — he became visible through his works, and revealed himself as the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of all creation.

Here's a paradox worth examining more closely. The Word wasn't confined by his body, and his presence in the body didn't prevent him from being present everywhere else too. When he moved his body, he didn't stop directing the whole universe with his mind and power. No — the marvelous truth is this: far from being contained by anything, the Word, in fact, contained everything within himself. He's present everywhere in creation, yet remains distinct from it — ordering it, directing it, giving it life, holding it together — while he himself remains the Uncontained One, existing entirely in his Father. And what's true of the whole is true of the part. Living in a human body, to which he himself gave life, he was still the source of life for the entire universe, present in every part of it, yet also beyond the whole. He was revealed both through the works of his body and through his activity throughout the world. A soul, after all, can perceive things outside the body it inhabits, but it can't move or act on them directly — a person can't relocate objects just by thinking about them, and neither of us can move the sun and stars simply by sitting at home and looking at them. But with the Word of God incarnate, it was different. His body wasn't a limitation for him — it was an instrument, so that he was both in it and in all things, and also beyond all things, resting in the Father alone. All at the same time — and this is the wonder of it — as a man he was living a genuinely human life, as the Word he was sustaining the life of the whole universe, and as the Son he remained in constant union with the Father. Not even his birth from a virgin changed him in any way, and he wasn't defiled by being in a body — quite the opposite, he sanctified the body by dwelling in it. Being present in everything doesn't mean he

shares the nature of everything — only that he gives all things their existence and sustains them in it. Just as the sun isn't tainted when its rays touch dirty ground, but instead purifies and brightens it, so the one who made the sun isn't defiled by being made known through a body — rather the body is cleansed and given new life by his presence in it, "he who committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

XVIII. Signs that pointed beyond a merely human life

So when writers on this sacred subject speak of him eating, drinking, and being born, understand that his body — as a body — was born and sustained with the food proper to its own nature, while God the Word, united to that body, was at the very same time ordering the universe and revealing himself, through his bodily actions, as more than merely a man — as God. Those acts are rightly called his own acts, because the body that performed them genuinely belonged to him and no one else. It was also appropriate that they be attributed to him as a man, in order to show that his body was a real body and not merely an illusion. From ordinary acts like being born and eating, he was recognized as truly present in the body. But through his extraordinary acts, performed through that same body, he proved himself to be the Son of God. That's the meaning behind his words to the unbelieving Jewish leaders: "Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37-38).

Invisible in himself, he's known through the works of creation. In the same way, even though his divinity is veiled in human nature, his bodily acts still show him to be not merely a man but the Power and Word of God. Speaking with authority to evil spirits and driving them out isn't a human act — it's a divine one. And who could watch him healing every kind of disease and still think of him as a mere man, and not also God? He cleansed those with leprosy, made the lame walk, opened the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind — there was no sickness or weakness he didn't drive away. Even the most casual observer could see these were the acts of God. Take the healing of the man born blind — who but the Father, the Maker of humanity, the one who governs a person's entire being, could have restored a faculty denied from birth? The one who did this must surely be, himself, the Lord over how life begins. This is proven, in fact, right at the outset of his becoming human: he formed his own body from the virgin, which is no small proof of his divinity, since whoever made that body was also the Maker of everything else. And wouldn't anyone reasonably conclude, from the fact that this body was conceived by a virgin alone, without any human father, that the one who appeared in it must also be the Maker and Lord of everything else?

Consider, too, the miracle at Cana. Wouldn't anyone who saw water transformed into wine understand that whoever did that must be the Lord and Maker of the water he transformed? For the same reason, he walked on the sea as if it were dry land — to show onlookers that he had mastery over everything. And the feeding of the crowds, when he multiplied so little into so much — five loaves feeding five thousand mouths — didn't that prove

Chapter 3 · The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution in the Incarnation, Continued

him to be none other than the very Lord whose mind governs everything?

The Death of Christ

XIX–XXV

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

The Savior thought it right to do all these things, so that by recognizing his bodily acts as the works of God, people who were blind to his presence in creation might come to know the Father again. As I said before, who could see his authority over evil spirits, and their obedience to it, and still doubt that he was the Son, the Wisdom and the Power of God? Even creation itself broke its silence at his command — remarkably enough — confessing with one voice, before the cross, that monument to his victory, that the one who suffered there in the body was not merely a man, but the Son of God and Savior of all. The sun hid its face, the earth shook, the mountains split apart, and everyone was struck with awe. These things showed that Christ on the cross was God, and that all creation was his servant, testifying by its fear to the presence of its Master.

So it was that God the Word revealed himself to humanity through his works. Now we need to turn to the end of his earthly life and the nature of his bodily death — this, after all, is the very center of our faith. You hear it spoken of everywhere, and by it, no less than by his other deeds, Christ is revealed as God and Son of God.

XX. A debt that had to be paid

We've dealt, as best our understanding allows, with the reasons behind his bodily appearing. We've seen that changing the corruptible into the incorruptible belonged to no one but the Savior himself, who in the beginning made everything out of nothing; that only the Image of the Father could re-create the likeness of that image in humanity; that only our Lord Jesus Christ could give mortals immortality; and that only the Word — who orders all things and is alone the Father's true and only Son — could teach people about him and put an end to idol worship. But beyond all that, there was a debt owed that had to be paid. As I said before, everyone owed a death. This, then, is the second reason the Word lived among us: having proven his divinity through his works, he could offer the sacrifice on everyone's behalf, surrendering his own body to death in place of all, to settle humanity's account with death and free us from that original transgression. In the same act, he showed himself more powerful than death, displaying his own incorruptible body as the first fruits of the resurrection.

Don't be surprised if we go over some of this ground again. We're talking about the good pleasure of God, and the things he in his loving wisdom decided to do — and it's better to say the same thing several different ways than to risk leaving something important out. The Word's body, then — though it was uniquely formed from a virgin — was a real human body, and so, like any other body, it was mortal and subject to death. But the Word's indwelling presence freed it from this natural liability, so that corruption couldn't touch it. And so two opposite marvels happened at once: the death of everyone was accomplished in the Lord's body, and yet, because the Word was in it, death and

corruption were, in that very same act, utterly wiped out. Death had to happen — death on behalf of everyone — so that the debt owed by all could be paid in full. So the Word, incapable of death in himself, took on a mortal body, so he could offer it as his own in place of everyone, and by suffering through his union with it, "break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14–15).

XXI. Why we no longer need to fear death

So take heart. Now that the one Savior of everyone has died on our behalf, those of us who believe in Christ no longer die the way people used to die — under the full weight of the law's threat. That condemnation has come to an end. By the grace of the resurrection, corruption has been driven out and abolished, and we're released from our mortal bodies, each in God's own good time, so that we may receive a better resurrection. Like seeds planted in the ground, we don't perish when we're laid to rest — we rise again, just as they do, since death has been rendered powerless by the Savior's grace. That's why the blessed apostle Paul, through whom we all have the assurance of resurrection, says: "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'" (1 Corinthians 15:53–55).

Why the cross, and not a quiet death?

Now, someone might ask: "If the crucial thing was simply that he surrender his body to death on everyone's behalf, why didn't he do it privately, as a man, rather than going all the way to public crucifixion? Wouldn't it have been more fitting for him to lay his body aside with honor, rather than endure such a shameful death?" But look closely at this argument, and you'll see how merely human a way of thinking it is — whereas what the Savior did was truly divine, and worthy of his divinity, for several reasons.

Here's the first. Ordinary human death results from natural weakness. People are inherently fragile — eventually they fall ill, and once worn down, they die. But the Lord isn't like that. He isn't weak; he's the Power of God, the Word of God, Life itself. If he'd died quietly in his bed like everyone else, it would have looked as though that were simply his nature — as if he were, in fact, no different from other people. But because he was himself the Word, Life, and Power, his body was made strong, and because his death had to happen anyway, he didn't bring it about himself, but took the occasion from others. How could he fall sick, when he healed the sick? How could the body through which others were made strong grow weak and fail? You might ask, then, "Why didn't he prevent death, the way he prevented sickness?" Because it was precisely in order to be able to die that he'd taken on a body in the first place — and to prevent death would have been to prevent the resurrection too. And as for the suggestion that illness would have been unfitting evidence of weakness — you might ask, "Didn't he hunger, then?" Yes, he hungered, because that was simply a property of his body. But he didn't die of hunger, because the one whose body hungered

was the Lord. In the same way, though he died to ransom everyone, his body didn't decay — it rose in perfect soundness, because it belonged to none other than Life itself.

XXII

Someone else might say it would have been better for the Lord to avoid the plots of his enemies entirely and simply guard his body from death altogether. But see how unfitting that, too, would have been. Just as it wasn't right for him to hand his own body over to death by his own hand — being Word and Life — it also wasn't consistent with who he was for him to dodge a death inflicted by others. Instead, he pursued it fully, staying true to his nature: he neither laid aside his body of his own accord, nor fled from the Jewish leaders who were plotting against him. And this showed no weakness or limitation in the Word — he both waited for death, in order to defeat it, and hastened to accomplish it, as an offering on behalf of all. Since the death he came to accomplish was the death of all humanity — not just his own — he didn't lay his body aside through some private act of dying, since that simply wasn't fitting for him as Life. Instead, he accepted death at other people's hands, in order to destroy it completely, in his own body.

There's more to consider about why the Lord's death had to happen this way. The whole purpose of his coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was meant to stand as the monument to his victory over death — assurance to everyone that he had himself conquered corruption, and that their own bodies too would eventually be made incorruptible. And it was as a pledge of that future resurrection that he kept his body free

from decay. But here again — if his body had fallen sick, and the Word had simply left it that way, how unfitting that would have been! Should the one who healed the bodies of others neglect to keep his own healthy? How would people believe his healing miracles, if that were the case? They'd either mock him as powerless to drive off disease, or think him lacking in basic human feeling, since he could heal but chose not to.

XXIII

Then again, suppose he had, without any illness, simply hidden his body somewhere and then suddenly reappeared claiming he'd risen from the dead. People would have written him off as a mere teller of tall tales — since there'd been no witness to his death, no one would believe in his resurrection either. Death had to come before resurrection, since there can be no resurrection without it. A secret, unwitnessed death would have left the resurrection utterly unsupported by any proof. And besides — why would he die secretly, when he proclaimed his rising so publicly? Why drive out evil spirits, heal the man blind from birth, and turn water into wine, all in public, to convince people he was the Word — and then not also publicly demonstrate the incorruptibility of his own dead body, so people could believe he was truly Life itself? And how could his disciples have spoken so boldly about the resurrection, unless they could state as fact that he had first actually died? How could their listeners have believed them, unless they too had witnessed his death? If the religious leaders at the time refused to believe, even though the events had happened right before their eyes, and tried to make others deny them too — imagine how many excuses for disbelief they'd have invented, had it all happened in secret! How could

the defeat of death have been made known at all, if the Lord hadn't confronted it openly, before everyone's eyes, and proven by his body's incorruption that it had been annulled and made powerless?

XXIV

There's one more objection worth answering. Some might argue that, even granting the necessity of a public death for people to later believe in the resurrection, it would surely have been better for him to arrange a more honorable death for himself, rather than suffer the disgrace of the cross. But even this would have given people grounds to suspect that his power over death applied only to that one particular kind of death he'd chosen. And that, too, would give an excuse for disbelieving the resurrection. So death came to his body not by his own choosing, but through the actions of his enemies — precisely so the Savior could utterly defeat death in whatever form it was thrown at him. Think of a strong, confident wrestler: he doesn't pick his own opponents, in case people think he's afraid of some of them. Instead he lets the spectators choose — and all the more if they're hostile ones — so he can overthrow whoever they match against him, and thereby prove his strength beyond doubt. It was the same with Christ. He, the Life of everyone, our Lord and Savior, didn't arrange his own manner of death, in case it looked as though he feared some other kind. No — he accepted and endured on the cross a death inflicted by others, and by his own worst enemies at that: a death that was, to them, the most terrible and unthinkable kind imaginable. He did this so that, by conquering even this particular death, he would be recognized, beyond doubt, as Life itself — and death's power would be

recognized as finally, completely broken. What a marvelous paradox has come about here: the very death they meant as disgrace and dishonor has become the glorious monument to death's own defeat. That's also why he wasn't beheaded, like John, nor sawn in half, like Isaiah — even in death, he kept his body whole and undivided, so that no one afterward would have grounds to divide the church.

XXV. Why crucifixion, specifically

So much for the objections raised outside the church. But if any sincere Christian wants to know why he suffered death on a cross specifically, and not some other way, here's the answer: no other way would have served us as well — the Lord offered, for our sake, the one death that was supremely fitting. He'd come to bear the curse that rested on us, and how could he "become a curse" (Galatians 3:13) except by accepting the accursed death — the death of the cross, since it's written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole" (Galatians 3:13). And again, the Lord's death is the ransom of everyone, and by it "the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14) is torn down, and the call goes out to the Gentiles too. How could he have called us if he hadn't been crucified — since only on a cross does a person die with arms stretched wide open? And here again we see the fittingness of his death, and of those outstretched arms: it was so he could draw his ancient people to himself with one arm, and the Gentiles with the other, joining both together in himself. He foretold this very manner of his redeeming death: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

There's one more reason. The air is the domain of the devil, the enemy of our race, who — having fallen from heaven — works, along with the other spirits who shared in his rebellion, both to keep souls from the truth and to hinder those trying to follow it. Paul refers to this when he speaks of "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2). But the Lord came to overthrow the devil, purify the air, and open up "a new and living way" for us into heaven, "through the curtain, that is, his body" (Hebrews 10:20). This had to happen through death — and by what other kind of death could it happen, except a death in the air itself: that is, on a cross? Here again you can see how right and fitting it was that the Lord should suffer this way. Being thus "lifted up," he cleansed the air of every hostile influence of the enemy. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," he says (Luke 10:18) — and so he reopened the road to heaven, saying again, "Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors" (Psalm 24:7). It wasn't the Word himself who needed the gates opened — he's Lord of all, and none of his own works were closed to their Maker. No, it was we who needed it, we whom he carried in his own body — the body he first offered to death on behalf of everyone, and then, through it, made a path to heaven.

The Resurrection

XXVI–XXXII

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

So the death on the cross was, in fact, entirely fitting for us — and we can see how reasonable it was, and why the salvation of the world could have happened in no other way. Even on the cross, he didn't hide himself from view — instead, he made the whole of creation bear witness to its Maker's presence. Then, once it was clear he had truly died, he didn't let his body linger long in that state, but raised it up on the third day, imperishable and incorruptible — the pledge and proof of his victory.

He certainly had the power to raise his body and display it alive immediately after death. But the all-wise Savior didn't do this, in case people denied that he'd really and completely died. There's another reason too: if the gap between his death and resurrection had been only two days, the full glory of his incorruption might not have been so evident. So he waited a full day to show his body was genuinely dead, and then, on the third day, showed it to be incorruptible for everyone to see. He didn't wait any longer than that, in case people forgot about it and started doubting whether it was really the same body. No — while the whole event was still fresh, while people's eyes were still fixed on it and their minds were still reeling, while those who'd put him to death were still right there, themselves witnesses to the fact of it — the Son of God, after three days, revealed his once-dead body as immortal and incorruptible. And

it became clear to everyone that his body hadn't died from any natural weakness, but so that, through it, death might be destroyed by the Savior's power.

XXVII. A living proof: the disciples no longer fear death

There's a striking proof of this defeat of death and its conquest by the cross, and it's right in front of us, still happening today: all of Christ's followers hold death in contempt. They go on the offensive against it, and instead of fearing it, by the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ, they trample it underfoot as though it were already dead. Before the Savior's coming, even the holiest people were afraid of death and mourned the dead as those who simply perish. But now that the Savior has raised his body, death is no longer terrifying. All who believe in Christ tread on it as though it were nothing, and would rather die than deny their faith in him — knowing full well that when they die, they don't actually perish, but truly live, becoming incorruptible through the resurrection. Meanwhile, the devil, who once gleefully exulted in death, is now the one who — with the pains of death untied — remains truly, permanently dead. There's proof of this too: people who, before believing in Christ, find death horrifying and are terrified of it, once converted, come to despise it so completely that they run eagerly to meet it, becoming witnesses themselves to the Savior's resurrection from it. Even children now hurry toward death without fear, and not just men — women, too, train themselves through bodily discipline to face it. Death has become so powerless that even those who used to be taken in by it now mock it as a dead thing, stripped of all its former strength. Death has become like a tyrant who's been thoroughly defeated by the rightful king — bound hand and foot, with passersby sneering at

him, hitting him, mocking him, no longer afraid of his cruelty and rage, because of the king who conquered him. That's how death has been conquered and exposed for what it is, by the Savior on the cross. It's bound hand and foot, and everyone in Christ walks right over it and jeers at it as witnesses to him, scoffing, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Do you think this is a small proof of death's powerlessness? Or a minor sign of the Savior's victory over it, when boys and young girls who belong to Christ look past this present life and train themselves to die well? Everyone, by nature, fears death and bodily dissolution — that's simply human. The real marvel is that someone wrapped up in the faith of the cross casts off that natural fear, and for the cross's sake is no longer a coward in the face of it. Fire's natural property is to burn. But suppose there were a substance — like the Indian asbestos people talk about — that had no fear of being burned, and instead exposed the powerlessness of fire by proving itself fireproof. If someone doubted this, all he'd need to do is wrap himself in the material and touch the flame. Or, going back to our earlier image: if anyone wanted to see the once-fearsome tyrant now bound and helpless, all he had to do was travel into the territory of the tyrant's conqueror. In just the same way, if anyone still doubts that death has been conquered — after so much evidence, so many martyrdoms in Christ, so much daily scorn of death shown by his most devoted followers — he does well to marvel at something so great, but he shouldn't stubbornly cling to disbelief in the face of such plain facts. He needs to do what the person testing the asbestos does, what the person entering the

conqueror's territory does. He needs to embrace faith in Christ, this disbeliever in death's defeat, and come to Christ's teaching. Then he'll see just how powerless and thoroughly beaten death really is. Plenty of former unbelievers and scoffers, after all, once they came to believe, went on to scorn death so completely that they themselves became martyrs for Christ's sake.

XXIX. The evidence is ongoing, visible, and undeniable

If it's by the sign of the cross and faith in Christ that death gets trampled underfoot, then it's clear that Christ himself — and no one else — is the great victor over death, the one who has stripped it of its power. Death used to be strong and terrifying, but now, since the Savior's coming and the death and resurrection of his body, it's held in contempt. And it's obviously the very Christ who was lifted up on the cross who has destroyed and defeated it. When the sun rises after the night and lights up the whole world, nobody doubts that it's the sun that's driven away the darkness. It's equally clear that, since this scorn and trampling of death has followed directly from the Savior's appearing in the body and his death on the cross, it's he himself who brought death to nothing, and who daily raises new monuments to his victory in his own followers. How could you think otherwise, seeing naturally weak people rushing eagerly toward death, unafraid of decay, unafraid even of descending into the realm of the dead — indeed, provoking it with eager hearts, refusing to shrink back from torture, choosing instead to run toward death for Christ's sake, rather than cling to this present life? If you see with your own eyes men, women, and even children joyfully welcoming death for the sake of Christ's faith, how could you possibly be so foolish, so blind, so incapable

of putting the pieces together, as not to realize that Christ — to whom all of these bear witness — is the one who gives each of them the victory, rendering death completely powerless for anyone who holds his faith and bears the sign of the cross? No one in their right mind doubts a snake is dead when they see it trampled underfoot, especially knowing how dangerous it used to be. And no one who sees children mocking a lion doubts that the animal is either dead or stripped of all its strength. We can see these things with our own eyes — and it's the very same with the defeat of death. Stop doubting, then, once you see death mocked and scorned by those who believe in Christ, that Christ destroyed death, and that the corruption tied to it has been undone and brought to an end.

XXX. Present, active proof of a living Christ

What we've said so far is no small proof that death has been destroyed, and that the Lord's cross is the monument to his victory. But the resurrection of the body to immortality — which flows from the work of Christ, the common Savior and true Life of everyone — is even more clearly proven by actions than by words, for anyone whose judgment is sound. If, as we've shown, death has been destroyed and everyone tramples on it because of Christ, how much more did he himself first trample and destroy it in his own body! Once death had been slain by him, what other outcome could there be except the resurrection of his body, and its open display as the monument to his victory? How could death's destruction have been shown at all, if the Lord's body hadn't been raised? But if even this doesn't satisfy someone, let him look for proof in present facts. Dead people can't do anything effective — their power to influence others ends at the grave.

Meaningful deeds and actions belong only to the living. So look at the facts of this case. The Savior is at work powerfully among people. Every single day, invisibly, he's persuading countless numbers all over the world — inside and outside the Greek-speaking world — to accept his faith and follow his teaching. Can anyone, faced with this, still doubt that he's risen and alive — or rather, that he himself is Life? Does a dead man prick people's consciences, so they throw off the traditions of their ancestors and bow before the teaching of Christ? If he's no longer active in the world, as he'd have to be if he were dead, how is it that he causes the living to stop their harmful ways — the adulterer from adultery, the murderer from murder, the unjust from greed — while the ungodly and profane become religious instead? If he didn't rise, and remains dead, how is it that he routs, persecutes, and overthrows the false gods that unbelievers think are alive, and the evil spirits they worship? Wherever Christ's name is spoken, idolatry crumbles and the fraud of evil spirits is exposed — no such spirit can bear that name, but flees the moment it's spoken. This is the work of one who lives, not one who's dead. More than that — it's the work of God. It would be absurd to say the evil spirits he drives out, and the idols he destroys, are alive, but that he who does the driving out and destroying — the one they themselves acknowledge to be the Son of God — is dead.

So those who disbelieve in the resurrection have no support in the facts, if the gods and evil spirits they worship don't drive away this supposedly dead Christ. In fact, it's he who exposes them as the dead ones. We all agree that a dead person can't do anything — yet the Savior works powerfully every single day,

drawing people to faith, persuading them toward virtue, teaching them about immortality, awakening their longing for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, giving them strength in the face of death, showing himself to each of them, and driving out the worship of idols — while the gods and evil spirits of unbelievers can do none of these things, but instead go silent and empty at Christ's presence, all their pretense exposed as hollow. By the sign of the cross, on the other hand, all magic is stopped, all sorcery confounded, every idol abandoned and deserted, and every mindless pleasure comes to an end, as the eye of faith looks up from earth toward heaven. So who, then, should we call dead? Should we call Christ dead, when he accomplishes all this? But the dead can't accomplish anything. Or should we call death itself dead — since it accomplishes nothing at all, lying as lifeless and powerless as the evil spirits and idols? The Son of God, "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), is at work every day, bringing about the salvation of everyone — while death is proven, day after day, to be stripped of all its strength. It's the idols and evil spirits who are dead — not him. There's no room left for doubt about the resurrection of his body.

Really, anyone who doubts the Lord's bodily resurrection must simply not understand the power of the Word and Wisdom of God. If he took on a body at all, and made it truly his own for a purpose, as we've shown he did, what was the Lord supposed to do with it — what was ultimately to become of the body the Word had descended into? It was mortal, offered up to death on everyone's behalf, so of course it had to die — that, in fact, was exactly why the Savior had prepared it for himself in the first place. But on the other hand, it couldn't remain dead, because it

had become the very temple of Life. So it died, being mortal, but lived again because of the Life within it — and its resurrection is made known through its ongoing works.

XXXII. Known through his works, as God always is

It's entirely consistent with the nature of the invisible God that he should be known this way, through his works. Those who doubt the Lord's resurrection simply because they can't see him with their own eyes might as well deny the basic laws of nature altogether. They'd have grounds for doubt if the evidence were missing — but when the evidence cries out so plainly, why do they go on deliberately denying a risen life that's so clearly displayed? Even if their reasoning falters, surely their own eyes can offer them undeniable proof of the power and divinity of Christ. A blind man can't see the sun, but he knows it's above the earth from the warmth it gives off. In the same way, let those still caught in the blindness of unbelief recognize the divinity of Christ, and the resurrection he's brought about, through the power he's shown at work in others. He obviously wouldn't be driving out evil spirits and stripping idols of their power if he were dead, since evil spirits wouldn't obey someone who was dead. And if simply speaking his name drives them out, he clearly isn't dead — all the more so since those spirits, who perceive things human beings can't, would know if he were dead, and would refuse to obey him. But as a matter of fact, what unbelieving people doubt, the evil spirits already know — that he is God — and that's exactly why they flee from him and fall at his feet, crying out just as they did when he was still in the body: "We know who you are — the Holy One of God!" and, "What do

you want with me, Son of God? I beg you, don't torture me!" (Mark 1:24, 5:7).

Both from the confessions of evil spirits and from the daily witness of his ongoing works, it's clear — and no one should presume to doubt it — that the Savior has raised his own body, that he is truly the Son of God, having his being from God as from a Father, whose Word and Wisdom and Power he is. He is the one who, in these last days, took on a body for the salvation of everyone, and taught the world about the Father. He is the one who has destroyed death, and freely granted us all incorruption through the promise of the resurrection — having raised his own body as the first fruits of that promise, and displayed it, by the sign of the cross, as the monument to his victory over death and its corruption.

Refutation of the Jews

XXXIII-XL

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

We've now dealt with the incarnation of our Savior, and found clear proof of his bodily resurrection and his victory over death. Let's go further and examine the unbelief and mockery with which Jewish and Gentile critics regard these same facts. In both cases, it seems, the objection comes down to the same thing: the supposed unfitness of the cross, and of the Word becoming human at all. But we won't hesitate to take up the argument against these objections, since the evidence on our side is remarkably clear.

First, then, the Jewish objections. Their unbelief is refuted by the very Scriptures they themselves read — because from cover to cover, the inspired Book teaches these things clearly, both in its overall message and in its actual wording. Prophets foretold the wonder of the virgin and of the birth that would come from her, saying: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" — which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). And Moses, the towering figure the Jewish people trust so deeply, also recognized this truth. He puts it this way: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17), and again: "How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! ... A man will come forth from his seed, and he will rule over many nations" (Numbers 24:5–7). And Isaiah says: "Before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the

right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste" (Isaiah 8:4). So these texts foretell a man's appearing. And Scripture goes further, proclaiming that this coming one is Lord over everyone: "See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him" (Isaiah 19:1). And it's from Egypt, too, that the Father calls him back, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1).

XXXIV. Scripture is just as clear about his death

Nor is Scripture silent about his death — quite the opposite, it speaks about it with total clarity. It doesn't shy away from explaining why he suffered either: not for his own sake, Scripture says, but to bring immortality and salvation to everyone. It records, too, the plotting of Jewish leaders against him, and all the abuse he endured at their hands. No one who actually reads the Scriptures can plead ignorance as an excuse. Consider this passage: "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain ... surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3–5). Marvel at the Word's love for us — it's for our sake that he's dishonored, so that we might be brought to honor. It continues: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:6–7). And then Scripture anticipates the guess that, given his suffering, he might have been just an ordinary man,

and points out the power at work on his behalf: "Who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living ... he was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (Isaiah 53:8–10).

XXXV. And about the cross specifically

You've now heard the prophecy of his death — and perhaps you'd like to know what's said about the cross as well. This too is not passed over in silence — in fact, the sacred writers proclaim it with total clarity. Moses foretells it first, and loudly: "You will see your life hanging in doubt before you, and you will not believe" (Deuteronomy 28:66). After him, the prophets add their own testimony: "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living'" (Jeremiah 11:19). And again: "They pierce my hands and my feet ... they divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment" (Psalm 22:16–18). A death that's "lifted up" and takes place on wood can only mean death on a cross — and it's only in that kind of death that the hands and feet are pierced. Beyond this, since the Savior came to dwell among humanity, every nation on earth has begun to know God — and Scripture points this out too. "The Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples," it says, "the nations will rally to him" (Isaiah 11:10).

These are just a few pieces of evidence for what's already happened — the whole of Scripture, really, refutes Jewish unbelief. Which of the righteous people, holy prophets, or

patriarchs the Scriptures tell us about was ever born of a virgin alone? Wasn't Abel born of Adam, Enoch of Jared, Noah of Lamech, Abraham of Terah, Isaac of Abraham, Jacob of Isaac? Weren't Judah and Moses and Aaron each fathered in the ordinary way? Wasn't Samuel the son of Elkanah, David of Jesse, Solomon of David? Every one of them had a father as the source of his existence. So who is this that's born of a virgin alone — the sign the prophet makes so much of? And again, which of these people had their birth announced to the world by a star in the sky? When Moses was born, his parents had to hide him. David was unknown even in his own town, so much so that Samuel himself didn't know he existed and had to ask whether Jesse had yet another son. Abraham only became well known to his neighbors well after his birth. But with Christ, it was different — the one who bore witness to his birth wasn't a person, but a star shining in the heavens from which he was descending.

XXXVI. What king reigned before he could even speak?

What king in history ever reigned and claimed victories over his enemies before he was old enough to talk? David was thirty when he came to the throne. Solomon was a grown young man. Even Joash and Josiah, who began their reigns at age seven, were already able to speak. So who is it, then, who was reigning and defeating enemies almost before birth? Let the Jewish people, who've studied all this, tell us whether there was ever such a king in Israel or Judah — a king all the nations set their hope on, and had peace with, instead of being at war on every side. As long as Jerusalem stood, there was constant conflict — everyone fought against Israel. The Assyrians oppressed them, the Egyptians persecuted them, the Babylonians attacked them, and

even their neighbors, the Syrians, were at war with them. So it's worth asking who this figure is that the nations are meant to set their hope on. There has to be someone, since the prophet surely wasn't lying. But did any of the holy prophets or early patriarchs die on a cross for everyone's salvation? Was any of them wounded and killed for the healing of all people? Did the idols of Egypt fall down before any righteous person or king who visited there? Abraham went to Egypt, certainly, but idol worship carried on there unchanged. Moses was born there too, and the false worship remained just as it was.

XXXVII. No one else matches the pattern

Does Scripture tell of anyone else pierced in hands and feet, or hung on a tree, who by way of a cross completed a sacrifice for the salvation of everyone? It wasn't Abraham — he died in his bed, as did Isaac and Jacob. Moses and Aaron died on a mountain. David ended his life peacefully in his own house, with no one plotting against him — Saul had sought his life earlier, but he was kept safe. Isaiah was sawn in half, but he wasn't hung on a tree. Jeremiah was mistreated, but he didn't die under condemnation. Ezekiel suffered, but not on the people's behalf — only to give them a sign of what was coming. Every one of these figures, even in suffering, remained mere men like anyone else. But the one Scripture describes as suffering for everyone is called not merely a man, but the Life of all — even though he genuinely shared our human nature. "You will see your life hanging in doubt before you," they say — and, "Who can speak of his descendants?" We can trace the lineage of every one of the saints from the very start and see exactly how each one came to be. But Scripture insists we can't declare the lineage of the one

who is Life. So who is Scripture describing, that even the prophets say such extraordinary things about him? There's no one else in Scripture it could be, except the one Savior of all, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who came from a virgin and appeared as a man on earth. His earthly lineage can't be traced, because alone among everyone, he takes his body not from a human father but from a virgin alone. We can trace the paternal line of David and Moses and every one of the patriarchs — but not the Savior, since it was he himself who caused the star to announce his birth in the body. It was fitting that the Word, coming down from heaven, should have his sign in heaven too, and fitting that the King of creation, at his arrival, should be recognized by the whole world. He was born in Judea, and yet people from Persia came to worship him. He's the one who won victory over his demonic foes and gathered his trophies from the idol-worshippers even before he appeared bodily — namely, every people who, from every region, have abandoned the traditions of their ancestors and the false worship of idols, and are now placing their hope in Christ, transferring their loyalty to him. We can see it happening right now, right here in Egypt — fulfilling yet another prophecy, since at no other time have the Egyptians ceased their false worship, except when the Lord of all, riding as on a cloud, came down here in the flesh, brought idol worship to nothing, and won everyone over to himself, and through himself, to the Father. He's the one who was crucified with the sun and moon as witnesses — and by his death, salvation has come to all people, and all creation has been redeemed. He is the Life of all, and he's the one who, like a

sheep, gave up his own body to death — his life for ours, and our salvation.

XXXVIII. Further evidence, for those still unconvinced

Yet the Jewish leaders still won't accept this. This argument doesn't satisfy them. So let them at least be persuaded by other passages from their own scriptures. Of whom, for instance, do the prophets say: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people" (Isaiah 65:1–2)? Who is this person who was "revealed," one might ask the Jewish leaders? If the prophet is talking about himself, they'll need to explain how he was first hidden, in order to be revealed later. And what kind of prophet was this, who wasn't only revealed after being hidden, but also stretched out his hands on a cross? None of the righteous figures in Scripture had these things happen to them — they happened only to the Word of God who, being by nature without a body, appeared in a body for our sake and suffered for us all. And if this isn't enough to convince them, there's more overwhelming evidence to silence the objection. Scripture says: "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come ... he will come to save you.' Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped ... and the mute tongue shout for joy" (Isaiah 35:3–6). What can the Jewish leaders say to this, or how can they even face it? Because this prophecy doesn't just say that God will dwell among us — it also spells out the signs and the timing of his coming. When God comes, it says, the blind will see,

the lame will walk, the deaf will hear, and those who stammer will speak clearly. Can anyone point to when such signs occurred in Israel, or anywhere in Jewish history? Naaman the leper was healed, true — but no deaf person heard, and no lame person walked because of it. Elijah raised someone from the dead, and so did Elisha — but no one blind from birth received sight. Raising the dead is remarkable, certainly, but it isn't what the Savior did. And since Scripture didn't stay silent about the leper or the widow's dead son, surely it would have mentioned a healed lame man or a newly sighted blind man too, if such things had happened. Their silence on these points proves the events never took place — until, that is, the Word of God himself came in the body. Wasn't it then that the lame walked, that those who stammered spoke clearly, that people blind from birth received sight? And the very people who witnessed it testified that nothing like this had ever happened before: "Since the world began it has never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (John 9:32–33).

XXXIX. Daniel's timeline settles the matter

Still, they can't easily argue against the plain facts. So it may be that, without denying what's written, they'll claim they're still waiting for these things to happen — that the Word of God has yet to come. This is a theme they cling to shamelessly, despite all the evidence stacked against them. But they'll be refuted on this very point, more clearly than on any other — and not by us, but by the wise prophet Daniel himself, who specifies the actual timing of the Savior's coming, along with his divine presence among us. "Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your

holy city," he says, "to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Know and understand this: from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes" (Daniel 9:24–25). They might find room to push some of the other prophecies off into the future, but what can they possibly say about this one? How can they face it at all? It explicitly names the Anointed One — the Christ — and declares that the one to be anointed isn't merely a man but the Most Holy One himself. It also says that Jerusalem will stand until his coming, and that afterward, prophet and vision will cease in Israel. David, Solomon, and Hezekiah were all anointed long ago, but Jerusalem and the Temple still stood then, and prophets were actively prophesying — Gad, Asaph, Nathan, later Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and others. Those anointed men were called holy, certainly, but none of them was ever called the Most Holy. And it's no use for the Jewish leaders to point to the exile as a counterexample, arguing Jerusalem didn't exist at that time — because what about the prophets? At the very start of the exile, Daniel and Jeremiah were active, and later Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah prophesied as well.

So the objection amounts to fiction — shifting the present into the future. When did prophecy and vision actually cease in Israel? Wasn't it when Christ came, the Most Holy One? It's a sign, in fact, and clear proof of the Word's coming, that Jerusalem no longer stands, and neither prophet nor vision has been raised up among the Jewish people since. And it's only natural that this should be so — once the one who was being

signified had arrived, what further need was there for anyone to keep signifying him? Once the Truth had come, what more need was there for the shadow? Prophecy had continued for his sake alone, until Righteousness itself arrived, the one who became the ransom for everyone's sins. For that same reason, Jerusalem stood until that same moment, so that people there could rehearse the types before the Truth was fully known. So of course, once the Most Holy One had come, both vision and prophecy were sealed. And the kingdom of Jerusalem ended at that very time too, because kings were only to be anointed there until the Most Holy had himself been anointed. Moses prophesies the same thing: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Genesis 49:10). And that's why the Savior himself kept saying, "All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John" (Matthew 11:13). So if there's still a king, prophet, or vision among the Jewish people, they're right to deny that Christ has come. But if there's neither king nor vision, and if all prophecy has been sealed since that time, and city and Temple have been taken away — how can they be so unreasonable, so willing to ignore the facts, as to deny the Christ who brought all this about? They see the nations abandoning idols and setting their hope, through Christ, on the God of Israel — why do they still deny the Christ who, in his human nature, was born of the line of Jesse and now reigns? If the nations were worshiping some other god, rather than confessing the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, the Jewish leaders would have grounds to argue God hadn't come. But since the nations are honoring the very same God who

gave the law to Moses and the promises to Abraham — the God whose word the Jewish leaders themselves dishonored — why won't they see, why do they refuse to see, that the Lord the Scriptures foretold has appeared in the world in bodily form? Scripture says it again and again: "The Lord our God has revealed himself to us" (Psalm 118:27), and again, "He sent out his word and healed them" (Psalm 107:20). And again, "It was no envoy or angel but his own presence that saved them" (Isaiah 63:9). The Jewish leaders, in their denial, resemble someone deranged, who sees the earth lit up by the sun and yet denies the very sun that lights it. What is there left for their long-awaited one to do, when he finally comes? Call the Gentiles? That's already happened. End prophet, king, and vision? Already done. Expose the emptiness of idols? Already exposed and condemned. Destroy death? Already destroyed. So what is there left undone that the Christ is still supposed to accomplish? What's missing or unfulfilled that would justify the Jewish leaders' continued unbelief? The plain truth, as I've said, is that there's no longer any king or prophet, no Jerusalem, no sacrifice, no vision among them — and yet the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the nations, abandoning godlessness, are now taking refuge with the God of Abraham through the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Surely, then, it must be obvious even to the most stubborn among them that the Christ has come, that he has brought light to people everywhere, and given them the true and divine teaching about his Father.

So much, then, for refuting Jewish unbelief through these and other arguments drawn from the divine teaching.

Refutation of the Gentiles

XLI-XLV

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

Now let's turn to the unbelief of the Gentiles — and this is honestly astonishing, since they mock something that's no fit subject for mockery, all while failing to see how genuinely shameful and ridiculous their own idols are. But our arguments here carry plenty of weight too, so we'll answer them on reasonable grounds — mostly from things we can see for ourselves.

First: what exactly is unfitting or ridiculous in what we believe? Is it simply that we say the Word has been revealed in a body? Well, if the Gentiles genuinely love the truth, they'll agree with us that there's nothing unfitting about this at all. If they deny there's any Word of God whatsoever, that would be a strange position, since they'd be mocking something they don't even understand. But suppose they admit there is a Word of God — that he governs everything, that the Father worked creation through him, that his providence gives light, life, and being to everything, and that he's King over all, known through the works of his providence and, through him, the Father. If they grant all that, then aren't they, without realizing it, turning the mockery back on themselves? Greek philosophers say the universe is one great body — and they're right, since we perceive the universe and all its parts through our senses. But if the Word of God is present in the universe — which is a body — and has entered

into every part of it, what's so surprising or unfitting about our saying that he's entered human nature too? If it were unfitting for him to take on a body at all, it would be equally unfitting for him to have entered the universe and to be giving light and movement, through his providence, to everything within it — since the universe, as we've said, is itself a body. But if it's right and fitting for him to enter the universe and reveal himself through it, then, since humanity is part of that universe along with everything else, it's no less fitting for him to appear in a human body, and to bring light and to work through it. And if it would have been wrong for a single part of the universe to be used to reveal his divinity to people, it would be far more wrong for him to be revealed by the whole universe at once!

XLII. A parallel: the toe and the whole body

Consider a similar case. A person's mind animates and enlivens their entire body. If someone said it was unsuitable for a person's mind to be present even in the toe, we'd think that a strange thing to say — because while they're granting that a person's mind pervades and animates the whole body, they're somehow denying its presence in one part of it. In the same way, no one who accepts that the Word of God is present in the universe as a whole should think it strange that a single human body might be animated and enlightened by him too.

But maybe the objection is really about humanity being a created thing, brought out of non-existence — and that's what strikes them as unfitting about the Savior appearing in our nature. If so, then they'd have to reject his presence in the rest of creation too, since it was also brought from non-being into being by the Word.

But if it's not unsuitable for the Word to be present in creation generally — even though creation, too, is something made — then it's not unsuitable for him to be present in humanity either. Humanity is simply part of creation, as I said, and the same reasoning applies to both. Everything derives its light, movement, and life from the Word — as the Gentile writers themselves put it: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). If that's true, then it's not at all inappropriate for the Word to dwell in a human being. So if, as we say, the Word has used the thing he's present in as a means of revealing himself, what's ridiculous about that? He couldn't have used it if he weren't already present in it — but we've already agreed he's present in both the whole and the parts. So what's incredible about his revealing himself through the very thing he's present in? By his own power he enters completely into each and every part, ordering them all without holding anything back. If he'd wanted to, he could have revealed himself and his Father through the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, fire, or water — and no one could rightly have accused him of acting inappropriately, since he sustains everything as one whole, present and invisibly revealed not only in the totality but in each individual part. Given that, and given that he's chosen to reveal himself through human beings — who are part of that whole — there's nothing ridiculous about his using a human body to reveal the truth and knowledge of the Father. Doesn't a person's mind pervade their entire being, and yet find its expression through just one part — the tongue? Does anyone say the mind has degraded itself because of that? Of course not. Well, then, it's no more degrading for the Word, who pervades all things, to have

appeared in a human body. As I said, if it were unfitting for him to dwell in a single part, it would be equally unfitting for him to exist within the whole.

XLIII. Why a human body, and not something grander?

Some might ask, then, why he didn't reveal himself through some nobler part of creation instead — the sun, moon, stars, fire, or air — rather than a mere human being. Here's the answer: the Lord didn't come to put on a show. He came to heal and to teach suffering people. Someone who just wanted to make an impression would simply appear and dazzle onlookers. But for someone who came to heal and teach, the right approach wasn't merely to be present, but to put himself at the disposal of those who needed him, and to reveal himself in a way people could actually handle — without the divine appearing overwhelming their capacity to receive it.

What's more, nothing else in creation had strayed from the purpose God intended for it — only humanity had. Sun, moon, sky, stars, water, air — none of these had drifted from their proper order. They knew the Word as their Maker and King and remained just as they'd been made. Only human beings, having rejected what's good, invented empty substitutes for the truth, giving the honor due to God, and the knowledge that belongs to him, over to demons and to human beings shaped in stone. Obviously divine goodness couldn't overlook something this serious. But people couldn't recognize him as the one who orders and rules creation as a whole. So what did he do? He took, as his instrument, one part of that whole — a human body — and entered into it. In this way, people who couldn't recognize him in

the totality of creation could recognize him in this one part, and those who couldn't lift their eyes to his unseen power might come to see him in something that looked like themselves. Being human themselves, they'd more naturally and directly come to know his Father through a body that corresponded to their own, and through the divine works performed in it — since by comparing his works to their own, they'd judge his to be more than human, in fact divine. And if, as they claim, it would have been unsuitable for the Word to reveal himself through bodily actions, it would have been equally unsuitable for him to reveal himself through the actions of the wider universe. His presence in creation doesn't mean he shares its nature — rather, everything created shares in his power. In the same way, though he used a body as his instrument, he took on none of its weaknesses, but instead made it holy by dwelling in it. Even Plato — whom the Greeks think so highly of — says that the Maker of the universe, seeing it storm-tossed and in danger of dissolving into chaos, takes the helm of the world's life-force himself and steps in to set everything right. So what's so incredible about our saying that, humanity having gone astray, the Word came down to it and appeared as a man, so that by his innate goodness and his skill as a pilot, he might save it from the storm?

XLIV. Why a body at all, rather than a mere command?

The Greeks may, once shamed out of this objection, raise another. They might say that if God wanted to instruct and save humanity, he could have done it — not through the Word taking on a body — but simply by willing it, the way he did at creation. The reasonable answer is that the two situations are quite

different. At the beginning, nothing existed yet at all, so all that was needed to bring everything into being was for God's will to be expressed. But once humanity already existed, and it was existing things — not nonexistent ones — that needed to be healed, it followed that the Healer and Savior had to align himself with those already-existing things, in order to heal the specific evil at hand. That's exactly why he became human, and used a body as his human instrument. If this hadn't been the right approach — and if he was going to use an instrument at all — where else could he have taken it from, except from among the things already in existence, needing his divine help through someone like themselves? It wasn't things that didn't exist that needed saving, which a mere creative word could have handled — it was humanity, already existing and already caught up in corruption and ruin. So it was entirely natural and right for the Word to use a human instrument, and through it, unfold himself to everyone.

You should also understand that the corruption that had set in wasn't something external to the body — it had taken root within it. So what was needed was for life to take hold in that same place corruption had, so that just as death had become woven into the body, life could be woven into it too. If death had been merely external to the body, life being restored from outside might have been enough. But since death was internal, woven into the body's very fabric and dominating it as though fused with it, life needed to be woven in just as thoroughly, so that the body, clothed in life, could shed corruption altogether. Suppose the Word had come from outside the body instead of entering it — he'd certainly still have defeated death, since death is

powerless against Life. But the corruption already inherent within the body would have remained there regardless. So the Savior naturally took on a body for himself, so that the body — now interwoven, so to speak, with life — would no longer remain something mortal, enslaved to death, but instead, clothed in immortality and risen from death, would remain immortal from then on. Once it had put on corruption, it couldn't rise again unless it put on life instead. And besides, death, by its very nature, can only appear within a body. So he put on a body, in order to find death there and wipe it out. And really, how else could the Lord have been shown to be Life itself, if he hadn't given life to that which was subject to death? Take an illustration: straw is a substance naturally vulnerable to fire, and it remains vulnerable — fearing the flame that has the natural power to consume it — even if the fire is simply kept away without ever actually burning it. But suppose, instead of just keeping the fire at a distance, someone soaked the straw in a good amount of asbestos, the substance said to be fire's antidote. Then the straw would no longer fear fire, because it's now clothed in something fire can't touch — and so it's safe. It's the same with the body and death. Had death simply been kept away by a command, the body would still have remained mortal and corruptible by nature. To prevent this, the body put on the incorporeal Word of God, and so it now fears neither death nor corruption, since it's clothed with Life as with a garment, and corruption has been thoroughly done away with in it.

XLV. Filling all things with the knowledge of himself

So the Word of God acted consistently by taking on a body and using a human instrument to give that body life. He was equally

consistent in working through humanity to reveal himself everywhere, alongside the rest of his creation, so that nothing was left empty of his divinity and knowledge. This brings me back to the point I made earlier: the Savior did all this so he could fill everything, everywhere, with the knowledge of himself — just as everything is already filled with his presence. As the Scriptures say, "the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:9). If someone looks up to the sky, he sees the Word's ordering there. If he can't look that high, but only as far as other people, he sees, through Christ's works, a power beyond anything human, and learns from it that Christ alone, among human beings, is God the Word. Or if someone has gone astray after demons and lives in fear of them, he can watch this man drive them out, and conclude that he must be their true Master. Or if someone has been so immersed in the natural element of water that he thinks it's divine — as the Egyptians actually worship water — he can see its very nature transformed by Christ, and learn that the Lord is the Creator of all things. And if someone has descended even into the realm of the dead, standing in awe before the heroes he thinks of as gods there, he can still witness Christ's resurrection and his victory over death, and reason from it that Christ alone, of all of them, is truly Lord and God.

Because the Lord touched every part of creation, freeing and undeceiving all of it from every kind of deception. As Paul writes: "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15) — so that no one could go on being deceived, but could find the very Word of God everywhere they looked. In

this way, humanity — surrounded on every side by the works of creation, whether in heaven, in the realm of the dead, among other people, or on the earth, beholding the Word's unfolded divinity — is no longer deceived about God, but worships Christ alone, and through him, rightly comes to know the Father.

On these grounds of reason and principle, then, we'll fairly silence the Gentiles in turn. But if they think these arguments aren't enough to refute them, we'll go on, in the next chapter, to prove our point from the facts themselves.

Refutation of the Gentiles, Continued

XLVI–LV

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

When did people first begin to abandon idol worship, if not since the Word of God himself came among us? When did oracles fall silent and empty of meaning — among the Greeks and everywhere else — except since the Savior revealed himself on earth? When did the figures the poets called gods and heroes start being recognized as simply mortal, except when the Lord took death's own spoils and preserved incorruptible the body he'd taken, raising it from among the dead? When did the deceit and madness of demons fall into contempt, except when the Word, the Power of God, their true Master, humbled himself for the sake of our weakness and appeared on earth? When did magic — its practice and its claims — start being trampled underfoot, if not at the Word's appearing among us? In short, when did Greek wisdom start looking foolish, except when the true Wisdom of God revealed himself on earth? In ancient times, the whole world, everywhere, was led astray by idol worship, and people thought idols were the only gods there were. But now, all over the world, people are abandoning their fear of idols and taking refuge in Christ. By worshiping him as God, they come, through him, to know the Father too — whom they didn't know before. And here's the astonishing part: the objects of worship used to be countless and varied. Each place had its own idol, and the so-called god of one place couldn't cross over to persuade

people elsewhere to worship it — it was barely even revered by its own worshipers. No one worshiped their neighbor's god; everyone had their own idol and thought it was lord of everything. But now Christ alone is worshiped, the same, everywhere, among every people. What the feebleness of idols could never manage — convincing even people close by — he's accomplished. He's persuaded not just those nearby, but literally the entire world, to worship one and the same Lord, and through him, the Father.

XLVII. Oracles silenced, demons exposed, magic defeated

In earlier times, every place was full of fraudulent oracles — the pronouncements at Delphi, Dodona, in Boeotia, Lycia, Libya, Egypt, and those of the Kabiri and the Pythian priestess were considered marvels. But now that Christ has been proclaimed everywhere, that madness has ceased too, and there's no one left to give oracles at all. Demons used to trick people's minds by taking up residence in springs, rivers, trees, or stones, deceiving simple folk through their frauds. But now, since the Word's divine appearing, all that trickery has ended — the sign of the cross, if a person just uses it, drives out these deceptions. People used to regard the figures in the old poems — Zeus, Kronos, Apollo, the heroes — as gods, and went astray worshiping them. But now that the Savior has appeared, those figures have been exposed as merely mortal men, and Christ alone is recognized as the true God, the Word of God, God himself. And what should we say about magic, which people once found so impressive? Before the Word's coming, it was strong and active among the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Indians, filling everyone who saw it with terror and awe. But with the coming of the Truth and the Word's revealing of himself, it's been thoroughly refuted and

destroyed. As for Greek wisdom and the philosophers' endless talk, I don't think we even need an argument — the plain fact is that, for all they wrote, the Greeks failed to convince even a handful of their own neighbors about immortality or how to live virtuously. Christ alone — using plain, everyday language, working through people who weren't skilled speakers — has convinced whole communities across the entire world to despise death, to focus on the things that don't die, to look past the passing things of this life and gaze on the eternal, to think nothing of earthly glory, and to long only for immortality.

XLVIII. Not mere words — actual, ongoing proof

None of this is empty talk — it's backed by real, lived experience. Anyone who wants to can see proof of it in the young women devoted to Christ, in the young men who practice self-control as part of their faith, and in the confident hope of immortality found in that great and joyful company of martyrs. Anyone can also put what we've said to the test another way: right in the presence of demonic fraud, fake oracles, and impressive magic tricks, let a person use the sign of the cross — which all of these mock — and simply speak the name of Christ, and he'll see how demons are routed, oracles fall silent, and every kind of magic and sorcery is thrown into confusion.

So who, then, is this Christ, and how great must he be, that his name and presence overshadow and confound everything around them, that he alone stands strong against everything, and has filled the whole world with his teaching? Let the Greeks answer, since they mock him without hesitation or shame. If he's merely a man, how is it that one man proved stronger than everything

they themselves regard as gods, exposing them as nothing through his own power? If they call him a magician, how is it that a magician manages to destroy all magic, rather than strengthen it? If he'd only defeated a few magicians, or proved himself superior to just one, they might reasonably think he simply had greater skill than the rest. But the fact is, his cross has utterly defeated all magic, conquering the very concept of it. Clearly, then, the Savior is no magician — since the very demons the magicians summon flee from him as from their Master. Who is he, then? Let the Greeks answer, since mockery is their only serious pursuit! Maybe they'll say he's a demon too, and that's why he prevailed. But even so, the joke's still on them — we can refute this the same way as before. How could he be a demon, if he's the one driving demons out? If he only drove out a few specific ones, they might reasonably suppose he prevailed against them through the power of their chief — as the Jewish leaders, wanting to insult him, actually claimed. But since the fact is that at the mere mention of his name, all demonic madness is uprooted and put to flight, it's clear the Greeks are wrong on this point too, and our Lord and Savior isn't, as they claim, some demonic power.

If, then, the Savior is neither a mere man, nor a magician, nor a demon, but has, through his divinity, confounded and overshadowed the opinions of the poets, the delusions of demons, and the wisdom of the Greeks, then it must be obvious to everyone that he is, in truth, the Son of God — the eternally existing Word, Wisdom, and Power of the Father. That's why his works aren't merely human ones — both in themselves, and by

comparison with the works of ordinary people, they're recognized as being beyond human, truly the works of God.

XLIX. Comparing him to the so-called gods

What man ever formed a body for himself out of a virgin alone? What man ever healed as many diseases as this common Lord of all? Who else restored what was lacking in human nature, or gave sight to a man blind from birth? The Greeks made a god out of Asclepius because he practiced medicine and discovered healing herbs by studying nature — he didn't create them himself out of the earth, just found them through observation. But what is that, compared to what the Savior did — not merely healing a wound, but actually shaping the very being of a person and restoring what he himself had formed? Hercules is worshiped as a god among them because he fought other men and killed wild animals through cunning. But what is that, compared to what the Word did in driving away disease, demons, and even death itself? Dionysus is worshiped among them for teaching people to get drunk — yet they mock the true Savior and Lord of all for teaching self-control.

That's enough on that point — what will they say to the other wonders of his divinity? At whose death, ever, was the sun darkened and the earth shaken? People die every day, and always have — when did anything like this happen at any of their deaths? And let's not even get into what he did after his resurrection. Has anyone's teaching, anywhere, at any time, ever spread as one consistent message across the entire world, so that his worship has spread like wildfire across every land? Again, if Christ is merely a man, as they claim, and not God the

Word, why don't the gods of the Greeks stop him from entering their own territories? Or why, instead, does the Word himself, dwelling in our midst, put an end to their worship through his teaching, and expose their fraud?

L. No one has ever accomplished what Christ has

Many kings and tyrants have ruled the earth before him. History also tells of wise men and magicians among the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Indians. But which of them — I won't even say after death, but while still alive — was ever able to fill the whole world with his teaching, and rescue such a vast number of people from the cowardly fear of idols, the way our Savior has won people over from idols to himself? The Greek philosophers wrote plenty of persuasive, skillfully worded works — but what fruit do they have to show for it, compared to the cross of Christ? Their clever ideas were persuasive enough while they lived, but even during their own lifetimes, their apparent influence was undercut by rivalry with each other — they were a jealous bunch, forever arguing against one another. But the Word of God, by the strangest paradox, teaching in simpler language, has put the cleverest sophists to shame, confounding their teachings and drawing everyone to himself, filling his own gatherings. And here's the truly marvelous thing: by going down, as a man, to death, he confounded all the grand pronouncements the wise men made about idols. Whose death, ever, drove out demons, or made demons afraid, except Christ's? Wherever the Savior's name is spoken, every demon is driven out. And who else has ever so completely rid people of their natural vices that the immoral become chaste, murderers set down their weapons, and former cowards become brave? What else, in short, persuaded

barbarians and pagans everywhere to drop their savagery and turn to peace, except faith in Christ and the sign of the cross? What else has ever given people such solid confidence in immortality as Christ's cross and the resurrection of his body? The Greeks told all sorts of fanciful stories, but they never claimed their idols rose from death — it never even occurred to them that a body could exist again after death at all. And it's worth listening carefully to what they say on this point, because through these very claims they've exposed the weakness of their own idols, while unintentionally conceding that a bodily resurrection is possible after all — which is exactly the concession that lets everyone recognize Christ as the Son of God.

LI. Peace where there was only war

Who, among people, has ever taught about virginity, whether after death or during his own lifetime, without treating it as impossible for human beings? Yet Christ our Savior and King of all has taught so persuasively on this subject that even children below the legal age take vows of chastity beyond what the law requires. And who among people has ever managed to reach the Scythians and Ethiopians, the Parthians and Armenians, the peoples beyond Hyrcania, or even the Egyptians and Chaldeans — people devoted to magic and enslaved more than most to the fear of demons, savage in their habits — and preach to them about virtue, self-control, and abandoning idol worship, the way the Lord of all, the Power of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, has? He not only preached through his own disciples, but worked so persuasively on people's understanding that, setting aside their savage habits and abandoning their ancestral gods, they came to know him, and through him, the Father. While they were still

idol worshipers, Greeks and non-Greeks alike were constantly at war with each other, even cruel to their own relatives. No one could travel by land or sea without being armed, because of their endless quarrels. Their entire way of life revolved around weapons — the sword took the place of the walking staff, the main support in daily life. All this time, as I said, they were serving idols and sacrificing to demons, and despite all the superstitious reverence surrounding that worship, nothing could shake their warlike habits. But strangely enough, since coming into Christ's school, moved by genuine remorse, they've laid aside their murderous cruelty and no longer think of war. Instead, peace prevails among them, with nothing left to desire but friendship.

Who, then, has done all this — uniting in peace people who used to hate each other — except the beloved Son of the Father, the common Savior of all, Jesus Christ, who through his own love endured everything for our salvation? Even from the beginning, this peace he would bring was foretold, since Scripture says: "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4). And this isn't in the least unbelievable. Even today's so-called barbarians are naturally savage in their ways, and as long as they sacrifice to idols they rage furiously against each other, unable to bear being weaponless even for an hour. But when they hear Christ's teaching, they immediately turn from fighting to farming, and instead of arming themselves with swords, they raise their hands in prayer. In short, instead of fighting one another, they take up arms against the devil and the demons, overcoming them

through self-discipline and integrity of soul. All this is proof of the Savior's divinity, since he's taught people what they could never learn from idols. It also exposes the weakness and emptiness of demons and idols — the demons, knowing their own vulnerability, always used to set people fighting each other, afraid that if the fighting stopped, people would turn on the demons themselves. But in reality, Christ's disciples, instead of fighting each other, stand united against demons through their habits and their virtuous conduct, chasing them away and mocking their commander, the devil. Even in their youth, they remain chaste. They endure through trials and persevere through hardship. When insulted, they're patient; when robbed, they shrug it off; and remarkably, they even make light of death itself, becoming martyrs for Christ.

LIII. One final, astonishing proof

And here's another proof of the Savior's divinity, and a truly amazing one. What mere man, magician, tyrant, or king was ever able to accomplish so much on his own? Did anyone ever take on the entire system of idol worship, the whole army of demons, all magic, and all Greek wisdom — at a time when all of these were flourishing and deceiving everyone — the way our Lord, the very Word of God, did? Even now, invisibly, he's exposing everyone's errors, single-handedly drawing people away from all of it — so that former idol worshipers now trample their idols underfoot, so-called magicians burn their own books, and the wise now prefer studying the Gospels to any other subject. They're abandoning what they used to worship, and worshiping and confessing as Christ and God the very one they used to mock as crucified. Their so-called gods are routed by the sign of the cross,

and the crucified Savior is now proclaimed throughout the world as God and Son of God. What's more, the gods worshiped by the Greeks are falling into disgrace even among their own people, because of the shameful things those gods were said to do — since those who follow Christ's teaching live more virtuous lives than they do. If these achievements — and others like them — are merely human, let anyone show us similar things accomplished by mere people in earlier times, and we'll be convinced. But if they're shown to be, and clearly are, the works not of human beings but of God, why are unbelievers so irreverent as to not recognize the one who did them? They're like someone who fails to recognize God the Maker through the works of creation itself. If they'd recognized his divinity through his power over the universe, they'd also recognize that Christ's bodily works aren't human, but belong to the Savior of all, the Word of God. And if they had recognized this, as Paul says, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

Just as someone who wants to see God — who by nature is invisible and can't be looked upon directly — can still come to perceive and know him through his works, so too, let anyone who can't see Christ with the eye of understanding at least consider him through his bodily works, and test whether they're the works of a man or of God. If they're human, let him mock. But if they're God's, let him not scoff at things that deserve no mockery — let him instead recognize the truth, and marvel that such humble means have revealed divine realities to us: that through death, deathlessness has become known; that through the Word's incarnation, the Mind behind everything, its Agent and Orderer — the Word of God himself — has been declared. He

took on our humanity so that we might become like God. He revealed himself through a body so we could perceive the mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from human hands so that we might inherit immortality. None of it harmed him, since he's beyond suffering and beyond corruption — but through his own freedom from suffering, he healed and preserved the suffering people for whose sake he endured it all. In short, the Savior's achievements that flow from his incarnation are so many and so great that trying to count them is like standing at the edge of the open sea and trying to count the waves. You can't take in every wave with your eyes, since as you try, the ones behind keep coming and outpace your senses. In the same way, no one can fully grasp everything Christ accomplished in the body — even by trying to list it all — because what lies beyond our grasp always exceeds what we think we've already understood.

Since we can't speak adequately about even part of his work, it's better for us not to attempt the whole. So let's mention just one more thing, and leave the rest for you to marvel at on your own — because truly, everything about it is marvelous, and wherever a person turns their gaze, they see the Word's divinity and are struck with awe.

LV. A summary

Here, in brief, is what we've been saying. Since the Savior came to dwell among us, idolatry hasn't just stopped growing — it's diminishing, gradually fading away. In the same way, Greek wisdom isn't just failing to advance — what used to exist is disappearing. And demons, instead of continuing to deceive

people through their tricks, oracles, and sorceries, are routed by the mere sign of the cross whenever they try. Meanwhile, as idolatry and everything opposed to Christ's faith keeps shrinking, weakening, and falling day by day, look — the Savior's teaching keeps growing everywhere! So worship the Savior, who is "above all" (Ephesians 4:6) and mighty — God the Word — and hold in contempt those who are being defeated and made to vanish by him. When the sun rises, darkness no longer prevails — whatever's left of it anywhere is driven away. In the same way, now that the divine appearing of God's Word has taken place, the darkness of idols prevails no more, and every part of the world, in every direction, is enlightened by his teaching.

Think of it this way too: if a king reigns somewhere but stays hidden in his own palace, never letting himself be seen, it often happens that some rebellious pretenders, taking advantage of his absence, get themselves proclaimed king in his place. Wrapped in the appearance of royalty, each one misleads simple people who, unable to enter the palace and see the real king, are led astray simply by hearing a king's name invoked. But when the real king finally steps out and appears, things change completely. His presence exposes the pretenders for what they are, and people, seeing the real king, abandon those who misled them. It's the same with demons — they used to deceive people, dressing themselves in the honor due to God. But now that the Word of God has been revealed in a body, and has made his own Father known to us, the demons' fraud has been stopped and exposed, and people, turning their eyes to the true God, the Word of the Father, abandon the idols and come to know the true God.

This, then, is proof that Christ is God, the Word and Power of God. Because while merely human things pass away, the reality of Christ endures — and it's plain to everyone that whatever fades is temporary, while he who remains is God, the true and only-begotten Son of God.

Conclusion

LVI–LVII

A modern rendering of Athanasius's On the Incarnation, adapted from the Archibald Robertson translation.

* * *

So here, Macarius, is our gift to you, a lover of Christ — a brief account of the Christian faith and of God's revealing of himself to us in bodily form. This is just a starting point; from here, it's up to you to test its truth for yourself through the study of Scripture. Those writings were written and inspired by God himself. And we, taught by inspired teachers who studied the Scriptures and became martyrs for Christ's divinity, are glad to add whatever we can to your eagerness to learn.

From Scripture, you'll also learn about his second coming — a glorious and truly divine appearing, quite different from the first. He won't come in lowliness this time, but in his own true glory. No longer humiliated, but exalted. No longer to suffer, but to hand out, to all of us, the full fruit of his cross: resurrection and freedom from decay. He won't be judged this time — he'll be the Judge, evaluating everyone according to what they did in the body, whether good or bad. For those who did good, the kingdom of heaven awaits; for those who did evil, outer darkness and eternal fire. The Lord himself says as much: "I say to all of you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). And he gives us this warning to help us prepare for that day: "Be ready, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42). And blessed Paul says: "For we must

all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

LVII. A final word on reading Scripture well

But properly searching and understanding the Scriptures takes a good life and a pure soul — it takes real Christian virtue to guide the mind toward grasping, as much as human nature allows, the truth about God the Word. It's simply not possible to understand what the saints taught unless you have a clear mind and are genuinely trying to live as they lived. Anyone who wants to look at sunlight naturally wipes their eyes clear first, so as to come at least somewhat close to the clarity of what they're looking at. And anyone who wants to see a city or a country actually travels there to see it. In the same way, anyone who wants to understand the minds of the sacred writers has to first clean up their own life, drawing near to the saints by imitating what they did. Joined to them in that shared way of living, such a person will come to understand what God revealed to them — and, from that point on, will escape the danger that awaits sinners at the judgment, receiving instead what's stored up for the saints in the kingdom of heaven. Of that reward, it's written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived — the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9) — for all those who live a godly life and love God the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord. Through him, and with him, to the Father himself, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, be honor and might and glory, now and forever. Amen.