

Trinitarian Reality as Christian Truth: Reflections on Greek Patristic Discussion

An Introduction

During the Enlightenment the mystery of the trinitarian reality of God came to be regarded as an unwanted remnant of ecclesiastical dogma whose loss would be without significance for the life of Christian faith. During the 18th and 19th centuries meaningful reflection on the Trinity was to a large extent absent from or at least peripheral to theological discourse.¹ The 20th century, on the other hand, has witnessed a remarkable renaissance of trinitarian interest (Barth, Rahner, Jenson, LaCugna, et al.). Nonetheless, within many churches the impact or the influence of this central doctrine of traditional Christian faith is hardly discernible. Rather the relativism of postmodernism and the populism of contemporary church life often evacuate the specificity and particularity of the Church's creedal and liturgical proclamation. We must understand that the trinitarian confession of God was always and necessarily will always be doxological and hymnic. Nothing is further from the truth than the belief that the confession of the Trinity was speculative and tangential to the central confession that "Jesus is Savior and Lord." Rather, the trinitarian dogma was nothing other than the exposition of the Gospel of the cross of Jesus in terms of the reality of God Himself. It articulated the confession that God is **such** that the events of the incarnate life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth for the salvation of humankind were the direct, unmediated revelation and activity of God who in His own reality is love, mercy, and life. The trinitarian dogma articulated the belief that God is **such** that He can and that He has communicated

¹ An exception to this trend was the Lutheran, Johannes von Hofmann (1810-1877). See, Matthew L. Becker, "The Self-Giving God: The Trinity in Johannes von Hofmann's Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* xii/4 (2003):417-46.

precisely Himself, so that He might be known by the world and so that He might give Himself for the life of the world. Christian faith is, therefore, nothing other than participation in the life of God Himself. Christian faith is nothing other than to possess God, because God through God and in God has offered Himself to us to be possessed. Eternal life, then, is not merely to be with God, but to live in God by a union with Him which is of Him. Trinitarian faith, therefore, grounds the reality of Christian faith, which faith is lived in the reality of the Church and expressed in Christian liturgy. In a most precise manner, trinitarian faith defined, identified, and specified what Christians say when they speak and what Christians do when they act. It was Truth, spoken and lived.

The Trinity as Guide to Thought, Life, and Worship

“We do not worship a creature. Far be the thought. For such an error belongs to heathens and Arians. But we worship the Lord of Creation, Incarnate, the Word of God. For if the flesh also is in itself a part of the created world, yet it has become God’s body (ἀλλὰ θεοῦ γέγονε σῶμα). And we do not divide the body from the Word and worship it by itself, nor when we wish to worship the Word do we set Him apart from the Flesh.”²

As Athanasius goes on to tell Bishop Adelphius, the leper of whom Matthew 8 speaks was not a Judaizing Arian who wished to worship the Word apart from the flesh. The leper “recognized that [Jesus] was God,” and so prayed, “Lord, if You will, You can make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). The leper, says Athanasius, “worshipped God in the body” (τὸν θεόν ἐν σώματι ὄντα).

² Athanasius, *Ad Adelphium* 3 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:575; Greek: PG 26:1073-76).

Behind and at the basis of this monumental claim of Athanasius lies the assertion of the Council of Nicaea that the man Jesus, of whom the Gospels speak, was none other than God, the divine Son of the divine Father, the Word through whom God speaks Himself forth and in whom God makes Himself known. To understand the Nicene Creed and the theology which upholds it, one must understand that the trinitarian theology of the fourth century served one singular purpose, namely, to specify that God was to be known and worshiped in the man Jesus of Nazareth, and in him alone. Through the Nicene fathers, the claim of the Gospel of John, “no one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known” (John 1:18), and the assertion of Irenaeus that “the revelation of the Son is knowledge of the Father,” received extended theological explanation. Moreover, it is impossible to overemphasize the radicality and the exclusivity of the claim the man Jesus is the revelation of the Father. To know Jesus is absolutely coincident with knowing God as He is according to His own intrinsic and personal Life. *How* God is God is revealed in the incarnate life of the Word of God, that is, in Jesus. In other words, the evangelical narratives of the New Testament are the definition of God. To speak rightly of God is to speak of the man Jesus according to the evangelical narratives of the four canonical Gospels.

This immense concentration of Nicene theology on the vicarious humanity of Christ had great implications for the totality of theological discourse and dogma. We will briefly discuss a few issues of premier importance. We might well begin with a quotation from Athanasius which brings us directly to the center of Nicene orthodoxy:

“Therefore it is more pious and accurate to signify God from the Son and call

Him Father, than to name Him from His works only and call Him Unoriginate.”³

(Οὐκοῦν εὐσεβέστερον καὶ ἀληθές μᾶλλον ἂν εἴη τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ
σημαίνειν καὶ πατέρα λέγειν ἢ ἐκ μόνων τῶν ἔργων ὀνομάζειν καὶ λέγειν
αὐτὸν ἀγέννητον)

Opposed to all pagan polytheism, the Arians desired to define and to name God in His transcendent otherness from all things created. Wishing to distinguish God from all creaturely existence, they asserted that the defining attribute of God was that He was “unoriginate,” “unbegotten.” God alone has no cause; God alone has no source; God alone is His own cause and His own source. He simply is. On the other hand, all other things, namely all creatures, have a cause; they have a source. They are, therefore, “begotten,” or “created,” which is to say that they exist on the basis of the will of another. Consequently, claimed the Arians, God is rightly said to be Maker and Creator, and we worship Him rightly and sufficiently when we name Him “Creator.”

In response to this, Athanasius argued that such an account of God does not speak of God as He is in His inner reality. To speak of God as “Creator” is not to speak of God as He is according to His own nature, but only as God is in relationship to His works:

“What likeness is there between Son and work, that they should parallel a father’s with a maker’s function?... A work is external to the nature, but a son is the proper offspring of the essence (τὸ ποίημα ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποιούντος ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς ἰδίον τῆς οὐσίας γέννημά ἐστι). It follows that a work need not have been always, for the workman frames it when he will; but an offspring is not subject to will, but is proper to the essence.... And therefore the Unoriginate is specified not by contrast to the Son, but to the things which through the Son came

³ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

to be.... And as the word ‘Unoriginate’ is specified relatively to things originate, so the word ‘Father’ is indicative of the Son.”⁴

The language of the Arians speaks of God as “Unbegotten” and “Uncreated” and so emphasizes the self-sufficiency of God in His transcendence by contrasting Him with what He is not. The Arians defined God according to His absolute difference and distance from us and so used negative terms which are the opposite of everything created and human. So understood, God is essentially unknowable and unknown. It is as though one attempted to infer the personality of Harrison Ford by watching the Indiana Jones movies. Harrison Ford may be acting, but in his acting Harrison Ford is not identified or specified according to his own intrinsic and personal reality. Harrison Ford is neither knowable nor known in the role he plays in the Indiana Jones movies. In a similar manner, according to Arian thinking, in the creation of all things, in the narrative of the Old Testament, and finally in the narrative of the Gospels God is working, but He is not specified nor identified according to His own intrinsic and personal reality in these works.

For Nicene theology, however, the order of Being precedes the order of will. To say that God is Father is to say that God **is** by way of a relation. There is no reality which we might call ‘God’ which is prior to God **as God the Father**; there is no reality which we might call ‘God’ which is prior to God **as God the Son**. Nor does God first come into relation by becoming the Creator of the world. There is a relation **in which** God exists (Father-Son) and this relation is prior to the relation **into which** God comes as the Creator of the world (God-World). If one might speak in this way, the starting point of Nicene theology for the knowledge of God is not the fact that God is Creator of all things; rather, the starting point is the Father-Son relationship, in which relationship God

⁴ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.29, 33 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:323, 325; Greek: PG 26:72, 80).

is. God does not simply exist **as God**; God exists **as Father and Son**, and this relationship is made known only in the incarnation of the Son:

“For how can he speak truth concerning the Father, who denies the Son, that reveals concerning Him? Or how can he be orthodox concerning the Spirit, while he speaks profanely of the Word that supplies the Spirit?”⁵

“And thus he who looks at the Son, sees the Father; for in the Father’s Godhead is and is contemplated the Son; and the Father’s Form which is in Him (i.e. in Christ) shows in Him the Father; and thus the Father is in the Son.”⁶

This priority and centrality of the Father-Son relation had direct implications for the Church’s understanding of creation. For the Arians, the Logos through whom the world was created was himself a creature.⁷ To be sure, this Word was “monogenes.” But to the Arians, this simply meant that of all creatures the Word alone was directly created by God. All other creatures were created through the Word. The result, however, was that the world was one step removed from the ultimate source of all creation; the world was not directly created by God and was, therefore, not held in being by the power and reality of God himself. As such, the world was inherently unstable and prone to dissolution. For the Nicene fathers, on the other hand, the Logos through whom the world was made was one in essence with the Father and, therefore, the energy/act of the Logos through which

⁵ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.8 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:310; Greek: PG 26:28).

⁶ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.6 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:396; Greek: PG 26:332). Also Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle* 38.8: “All things that are the Father’s are seen in the Son, and all things that are the Son’s are the Father’s; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the person of the Son becomes as it were Form and Face of the knowledge of the Father, and the Person of the Father is known in the Form of the Son” (NPNF, 2nd series, 8.141).

⁷ According to Arius, the Word was “monogenes,” that is, alone directly created by God. All other things were created through the Word. The Word, therefore, was a middle figure between God and the world. For the fathers of Nicaea, “monogenes” did not refer to him who was the first and unique creation of God, but to Him who was “from the essence of the Father” (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς) and who was therefore “of the same essence with the Father” (ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρί).

the world was made was also that of the Father. The Father is, strictly speaking, the Creator of the world.⁸ Moreover, the Arian claim that God was transcendentally alone made them incapable of proclaiming a God who was perfect in love and joy. God might begin to bestow goodness on that which he willed to create, but that goodness itself could only be secondary to the unknown reality of God Himself.⁹ In the Arian scheme, that goodness itself, as it were, comes into being. For Athanasius, on the other hand, the Father-Son relation is the constitutive reality of that God who creates the world, and is, therefore, pre-existent to the world and indeed to the act of creation itself. As Athanasius expressed it, the divine essence is itself fruitful; the nature of God is itself generative (γεννητική φύσις).¹⁰ He accuses the Arians of proclaiming a God who is as barren as a light which does not lighten and as a fountain which does not give forth water. However, God does not need another who is not God in order to exist in the freedom of love, nor does God need another who is not God in order to delight in the perfection of joy. God does not become more perfect in love in that He creates the world. He is Himself perfect love. However, when God the Father creates through God the Son a true other is created which is distinct from God, and because this other is distinct, this other is the recipient of nothing less than divine love and goodness. The Father-Son relation is the ultimate ground of created reality as the object of divine care and benevolence. Because God is perfect in the relation of the Father and the Son, God is free to create as the expression of

⁸ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.33: “And they [the Arians], when they call Him Unoriginate, name Him only from His works, and know not the Son any more than the Greeks; but he who calls God ‘Father,’ names Him from the Word; and knowing the Word, he acknowledges Him to be Framer of all, and understands that through Him all things have been made” (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:82).

⁹ Note the abstract description of God which Arius gives to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria: “God, being the cause of all things, is Unbegun and Sole” (ὁ θεός...ἔστιν ἀναρχος μονώτατος; *De Synodis* 16; NPNF, 2nd series, 4:458; Greek: PG 26:709).

¹⁰ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.2 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:349; Greek: PG 26:149).

His own love.¹¹

As one can easily see in the great work of Athanasius against the Arians, the struggle for Nicene orthodoxy was pre-eminently a debate concerning how the Church should read its Scriptures. Believing the personal Word of God to be a creature, the Arians read those texts of the New Testament which speak of Christ's humility to refer directly to the Word and so to demonstrate his subordination. A fourth century Nicene document indicates the Arian approach to reading the New Testament: "Those who wish to understand the Holy Scriptures by an evil method, wish to adduce the human words concerning the poverty of the Son of God to establish their own blasphemy."¹² The Arians adduce a plethora of texts indicating that Christ was given life, that he admits ignorance of the time of the end, and the like.¹³ How can he, they argued, be true God and of the essence of the Father if such limitations are ascribed to him by the Scriptures. To this the Nicene fathers replied that the Arians were ignorant of the fundamental narrative plot of the Scriptures. The Scriptures were the narrative of the salvation of humankind through the gracious condescension of God the Son into the flesh. Marcellus of Ancyra writes simply: "The whole significance of the Christian account is found in the lowly words and deeds."¹⁴ And he quotes the apostle Paul to provide the interpretative key for reading the Scriptures. Marcellus quotes together 2 Cor. 8:9 and Eph. 3:1f.¹⁵ to

¹¹ This point had already been made by Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.38.3: "In the beginning God formed Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have someone upon whom to confer His benefits." For the significance of Nicene theology for the doctrine of creation, see especially George Florovsky, "The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* VI (1962), pp. 36-57.

¹² Marcellus of Ancyra, *De incarn. et contra Arianos* 1 (PG 26:984-85). This text was transmitted in the *corpus* of Athanasius, but most scholars now dispute Athanasian authorship. The attribution to Marcellus is common, but without scholarly consensus.

¹³ Marcellus lists John 5:26; 10:36; Matt. 26:32; Mark 10:18; 13:32; Gal. 1:1.

¹⁴ Marcellus, *De incarn. et contra Arianos* 1 (πᾶσα δὲ ἀκρίβεια τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ ἐν τοῖς εὐτελέσι ῥήμασι καὶ πράγμασιν εὐρίσκεται; PG 26:985).

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how, although He was rich, yet He became poor for our sakes, so that we by His poverty might become rich"; Eph. 3:1f: "So that you may be enabled to understand with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the depth, and the height, in fact to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the whole fullness of God." The

claim that the Scriptures testify to one determinative story line: “God the Son became flesh, so that His flesh might become God the Word.” The “human words concerning the poverty of the Son of God,” therefore, refer to the human nature which God the Son condescended to assume for our sake. This interpretative key for reading and interpreting the Scriptures is explicit already in the Nicene Creed itself which says, “who [God the Son] **for us and for our salvation** came down from heaven and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary.” This One, the incarnate Son, is He who is born, who suffers under Pontius Pilate, who dies, who is buried, and is resurrected from the dead. This One who is true God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, for our salvation became man by taking flesh into Himself, so that in Him and through Him the flesh might receive the things which are the proper possession of the Son of the Father. The Scriptures, argued the Nicene fathers, speak according to this pattern of the humiliation of the Son into the flesh for the salvation of humankind. For the Nicene interpretative process this narrative of salvation¹⁶ demanded a “double account of the Savior”: “that He **was** ever God, and **is** the Son, being the Father’s Word and Radiance and Wisdom; and that **afterward** for us He took flesh of a Virgin, Mary, Mother of God, and was made man.”¹⁷ As Athanasius claims, “this scope is to be found throughout inspired Scriptures, as the Lord Himself has said, ‘Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of Me’.”¹⁸ And to prove his point, Athanasius adduces the Prologue of John’s Gospel. John first speaks of Him who “in the beginning was the Word” and was “with God.” **Next** John says, “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” In Philippians 2 the apostle

richness of Christ is nothing other than the whole fullness of God.

¹⁶ What Athanasius called the “scope” (σκοπός) or “character” (χαρακτήρ) or “mind” (διάνοια) of Holy Scripture.

¹⁷ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.29 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:409; Greek: PG 26:385).

¹⁸ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.29 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:409; Greek: PG 26:385).

Paul writes according to the same pattern: Paul first writes that Christ was “in the form of God” and **then** that He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.” The sequence (first-next) corresponds to the pattern (scope) of Scripture which conforms to the truth of the incarnation of the Son of the Father. In an important passage of Nicene exegesis, Athanasius makes the point explicitly. The Arians liked to adduce Prov. 8:22; Isa. 49:5; and Ps. 2:6 to prove that the Word of God was a creature.¹⁹ The verbs “created,” “formed,” and “established” in these passages demonstrated to the Arian mind that the one who was created, formed, and established must be a creature, and that creature was the Word. But argues Athanasius, these verbs “do not denote the beginning of His being, or of His essence as created, but [they denote] His beneficent renovation which came to pass for us.” “Plainly He exists **first** and is formed **afterwards**, and His forming signifies not His beginning of being but His taking manhood.” And then the primary exegetical point: “This is usual with divine Scripture; for when it signifies the fleshly origination of the Son, it adds also the cause for which He became man; but when He speaks or His servants declare anything of His Godhead, all is said in simple diction, and with an absolute sense, and without reason being added.”²⁰ Thus, when Prov. 8:22 says that He was created, the addition of purpose “for the beginning of my ways” gives us the interpretive clue that the Scripture here is referring to the taking of the flesh. The Scriptures are the narrative of the salvation of humankind, and as such present themselves according to the purpose of God who is the Redeemer of humankind. The economy of salvation determines the “scope,” the “character,” the “mind” of Scripture. That is, how God effected the redemption of humankind in Christ determined not only the content but

¹⁹ Prov. 8:22: “The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works”; Isa. 49:5: “And now, thus says the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his own servant”; Ps. 2:6: “But I have been established king by him on Sion his holy mountain.”

²⁰ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.53 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4.377; Greek: PG 26:260).

also the form of apostolic proclamation.

The “homousios” of the Nicene Creed also demanded a different assessment of the nature and reality of the human predicament and of its solution than was possible under Arian assumptions. According to the Arians, the world and human existence were created by the created Logos and were, therefore, directly related only to a being of a secondary order. The world was like a building made by a carpenter who was himself sent by an architect. The architect might determine the layout for the building, but it is the carpenter, and he apart from the active presence of the architect, who carries out the task of constructing the building. Should the building be shaken by an earthquake, the architect is required only minimally, if at all. What is needed is but the coming of the carpenter to restore and to rebuild what was fallen. Yet, the restored building would still be related only to the carpenter, and would, for that reason, be subject to renewed disaster. For the Nicene theology, on the other hand, the world and humankind were related directly to God the Father in God the Word. Human sin entailed a fundamental breach between God and the world which was total and incapable of restoration, as it were, according to the original plan. It was as though the building made by the carpenter had been disintegrated by a nuclear blast. Redemption, therefore, did not simply require a forgiveness of sins and a restoration of the original creation. Rather, redemption entailed the bringing about of something utterly new, a new creation. What was required was a comprehensive reconciliation between God and His creation by which God places His creation on a completely new ground and gives to it a new stability. Salvation is not merely a return to paradise. Salvation is nothing less than the placing of humankind **in** God through the assumption of the flesh from the Virgin Mary **into** the Person of God the Son:

“Man then is perfected **in** Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace. For, on rising from the dead, we shall no longer fear death, but shall ever reign **in** Christ in the heavens. And this has been done, since the very Word of God Himself, who is from the Father, has put on the flesh, and become man.”²¹

“For though He had no need, nevertheless He is said to have received what He received humanly, that on the other hand, inasmuch as the Lord has received, and the grant is lodged with Him, the grace may remain sure. For while mere man receives, he is liable to lose again (as was shown in the case of Adam, for he received and he lost), but that the grace may be irrevocable, and may be kept sure by men, therefore He Himself appropriates the gift.”²²

It was by way of the Nicene confession of the full deity of the Son that salvation had to be regarded as radical, because the malady was radical. Sin was not only forgiven; sin was undone, made of no effect, and the reality of the sinner so reconstructed that he could not sin again. Salvation is the perfect freedom from Sin/sin and from death, the wages of sin.

The Nicene confession of the full deity of the Son also had great implications for understanding the reality of the Church. As we have seen, Nicene interpretation regarded Prov. 8:22, which speaks of Christ being “created a beginning of ways,” to refer to the incarnation of Christ. “For the Lord’s humanity was created as ‘a beginning of ways,’ and He manifested it to us for our salvation. For by it we have access to the Father. For He is the Way which leads us back to the Father.”²³ However, in the passage of Proverbs,

²¹ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* II.67 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:385; Greek: PG 26:289).

²² Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.38 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:415; Greek: PG 26:405).

²³ Athanasius, *Exp. Fidei* 4 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:85).

Wisdom is also speaking of the Church which is being created in Him, for the Church is the Body of Christ. Christ is the **beginning** of ways, the “ways” being the life of the Church which is brought to salvation through the economy of the enfleshed Son. For the Arians, humankind is related only to the created Word who is himself related to God only according to will. Therefore, reasoned the Arians, the unity of persons with God and with each other within the Church could only be according to the harmony of will and the affection of mutual love. The Arians pointed to such passages as John 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” and John 17:11, “Holy Father, keep them in Your Name which You have given to me, in order that they may be one even as we are one.” The Arians understood such passages to refer only to a unity of will and not to a unity of nature, so that the Father and Son are one not because of what they are (*homoousios*) but because of their unity of will. Since Jesus compares the unity of the Christians with the unity of the Father and the Son, and since the unity among Christians is clearly one of will only, the unity of the Father and the Son must also be one of will only.

The Nicene theologians, however, would not accept the logic of this Arian argument. Typical of their response is the long discussion of Athanasius in *c. Arianos* III.10-25. Contrary to the argument of the Arians, Athanasius claims that the unity among Christians is in reality not merely one of will and of mutual love. Christians do not exist merely in an external relationship with one another so that the categories of ethics, intention, will or experience satisfy to define the reality of the Church. In their unity, Christians are not a mere congregation, an assembly which is one only as an aggregate of persons is one. Rather, the unity which exists among Christians, the unity of the Church, is constituted in the common union they have with the flesh of Christ who is Himself essentially one with the Father. In a paraphrase of John 17:11 (“let them be one

as we are one”) Athanasius integrates the trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial dimensions of Christian unity:

“You, Father, are in me, for I am Your Word, and since You are in me because I am Your Word and I am in them because of the body... therefore I ask that they also may become one according to the body that is in me and according to its perfection; that they too may become perfect, having oneness with it [Christ’s body] and becoming one and the same, so that as it were being carried by me they may be one body and one Spirit and may grow into a perfect man. For partaking of the same thing, we all become one Body, having the one Lord in ourselves.”²⁴

Although the unity among Christians is not the same as that between the Father and the Word—the first being by grace and adoption, the second by nature—nonetheless, the unity among Christians cannot simply be collapsed into an external unity of will and of affection. The unity of the Church is itself a “natural” unity, since in baptism Christians have been united to the humanity of Christ and in Him who is substantially united with Father become, with and in Christ, one with the Father. Therefore, Athanasius can say of the baptized that they participate in eternal life “no longer as men but as proper to the Word.” This is because in baptism “our origin and our infirmity of flesh have been transferred to the Word... so that being born again from above through water and the Spirit, in Christ we are all made alive, the flesh no longer being earthly but having been made Word through the Word of God who for us became flesh.”²⁵ The sacramental implications of this discussion for the central and constitutive significance of baptism and of the Lord’s Supper for the reality of the Church are evident.

²⁴ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.22 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:405-406; Greek: PG 26:368-69).

²⁵ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.33 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:412; Greek: PG 26:393-96).

Finally, some words about the character of worship and of prayer in view of Nicene theology. As we have seen, the Arians denied the deity of the Son and, therefore, thought that they could name and specify God as ‘Creator’ or ‘Maker.’ According to the Fathers of Nicaea, however, such a designation was not to specify God according to His own internal reality but was to designate Him only in relation to His works. As Athanasius argues, [the designation “Unbegotten”] “does nothing more than signify all the works, singularly and collectively, which have come to be at the will of God through the Word; but the name ‘Father’ is signified and is established from the Son alone.”²⁶ If the worship of God and if proper prayer to Him arises from the knowledge of Him Who is God and of Him **as** He is God, then there is no proper worship of God merely in the recognition of Him as Creator.²⁷ As Athanasius further argues: “As much as the Word is distinguished from things created, so much and even more should calling God ‘Father’ be distinguished from calling Him ‘Unoriginate.’”²⁸ God **is** Father and Son, and the Father is not known, not even His name “Father,” apart from the Son. The Father is known in the Son and only in the Son: “He only who is really God is worshipped in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁹ Unless one acknowledges God to be Father **in the Son**, there is no address to God as He really is God. And it is important to identify exactly who this Son is in whom and through whom God is known to be and is named “Father.” The Son or the Word is not the divine Son or the divine Word considered in himself. It is Jesus, the Son incarnate, in whom and through whom God is known and is named “Father.”

Again, we quote Athanasius: “We do not worship a creature. Far be the thought. For such

²⁶ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

²⁷ Note the same issue in the discussion of Augustine concerning the Pelagians (*De natura et gratia* 2). The Pelagians argued that worship of the Creator and a right life sufficed for those who, for whatever reason, had not heard the Gospel.

²⁸ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.34 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:326; Greek: PG 26:81).

²⁹ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* I.43 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:331; Greek: PG 26:100).

an error belongs to heathens and Arians. Rather, we worship the Lord of Creation made flesh, the Word of God. For if the flesh also is in itself a part of the created world, yet it has become God's body. So, we neither divide the body from the Word and worship it considered in itself; nor do we wish to worship the Word by setting Him far apart from the flesh. Rather, knowing that 'the Word was made flesh,' we recognize Him who is come in the flesh to be God."³⁰ It is only in the humanity of Christ that the divine Son is known, and it is only in the divine Son that the divine Father is known and is named. True worship names God; it does not merely mention His works. Anything less, and anything other, collapses Christian worship and Christian prayer to the address of the pagan who also knows God as Creator. Once more Athanasius:

"Since the Son is the image of the Father, it is necessary also to understand that the deity and what is proper to the deity of the Father is the Being of the Son. This is what is said, 'Who is in the form of God,' and 'The Father is in me.' However, the form of deity is not in parts. Rather, the fullness of the Father's Godhead is the Being of the Son, and the Son is whole God (ὅλος θεός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός).... Thus what things the Son then did are the Father's works, for the Son is the Form of that Godhead of the Father which did the works.... And he who worships and honors the Son, **in the Son worships and honors the Father**; for one is the Godhead; and therefore one the honor and one the worship which is paid to the Father in and through the Son."³¹

³⁰ Athanasius, *Ad Adelphium* 3 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:575; Greek: PG 26:1073-76)

³¹ Athanasius, *c. Arianos* III.6 (NPNF, 2nd series, 4:396-97; Greek: PG 26:332).