

On the Incarnation - by Athanasius

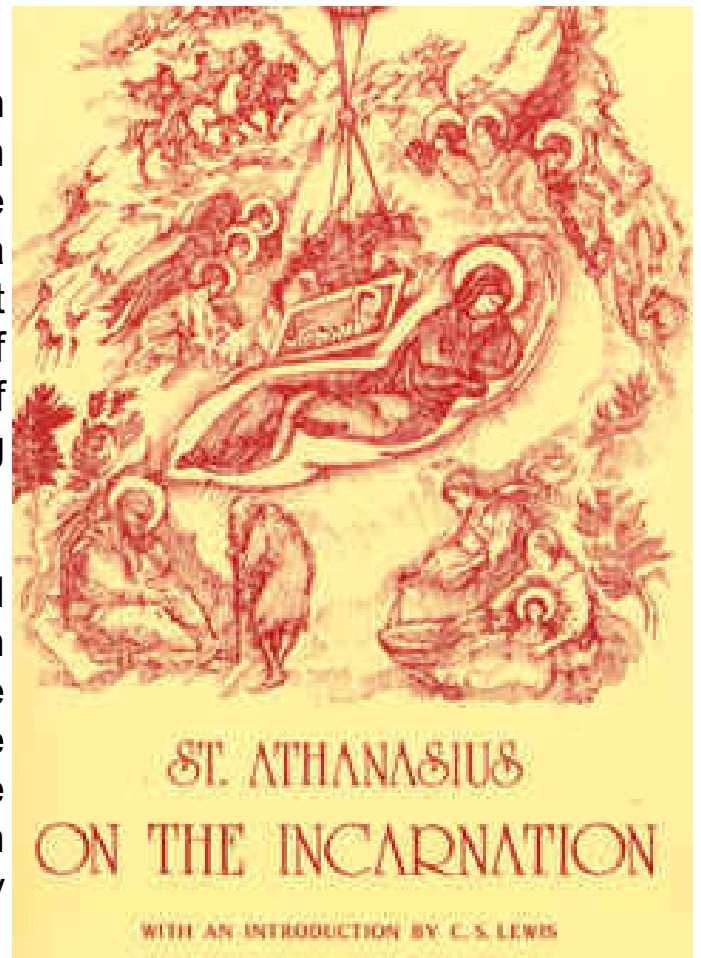
Book Review by Tom Wood

A mere 71 pages in length (approachable for non-readers and readers alike), *On the Incarnation of the Word of God* is worth going through slowly, pencil in hand.

Should you heed my advice, you will find that Athanasius speaks clearly about Christ and has a way of filling you with excitement to discover who Christ is and what He has done. On the very first page, you are squarely confronted with the truth that “the Word of the Father is Himself divine, that all things that are owe their being to His will and power, and that it is through Him that the Father gives order to creation, by Him that all things are moved, and through Him that they receive their being.” I think the excitement comes from the Spirit within you leaping for joy at the exaltation of Christ, making it a most savory experience.

Interestingly, this book was written by Athanasius before either the Arian heresy or the Council of Nicea were even heard of. The fact that it is such a clear articulation of the divinity of Christ and His pre-eminence as the creator of all things speaks to the importance of being saturated with Biblical thinking before storms arise.

The structure of the book is laid out in gospel order with chapters on the Creation and the Fall, the Divine Dilemma and its Solution in the Incarnation, the Death of Christ, the Resurrection, and finally a Refutation of both Jews and Gentiles that deny the Incarnation.



On the Incarnation - by Athanasius

A clear theme emerges throughout: that only the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, is qualified to redeem His creation and to take death and turn it into the instrument that ends corruption and brings eternal life.

The edition you are likely to find today also includes an introduction by C.S. Lewis, where he says it is a breath of fresh air to read old works, such as this one, because different generations experience different errors, and books from the past (or the future if we had access to them!) help us see where our collective thinking has erred. He is particularly punchy when he says: “We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century – the blindness about which posterity will ask ‘But how *could* they have thought that?’ – lies where we have never suspected it, and concerns something about which there is untroubled



agreement between Hitler and President Roosevelt or between Mr. H. G. Wells and Karl Barth. None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books.”

A particularly notable aspect of this book is its relevance to today’s arguments against God and His Son. There is a truth – a Romans 1 kind of truth – that becomes clear when reading the arguments that Athanasius had to deal with in his time. In one refutation against a denial “that there is any Mind behind the universe at all” he asserts the “distinctness of things argues not a spontaneous generation but a prevenient Cause.” So we can see that the rebellion against God today and the suppression of the truth is strikingly similar to 1600 years ago and the arguments of today are, in fact, repackaged bundles of the same old lies.

On the Incarnation - by Athanasius

At the same time, our modern solution to re-bundled lies is the glorious (and old!) truth of the supremacy of Christ over His creation, and His completed work on the cross. For in Christ, “the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.” And He is our perfect mediator, “for He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.” You get the distinct impression that we were made to demonstrate how perfect a mediator He is!

Finally, in refuting specific arguments from both Jews and Gentiles, Athanasius puts forth a compelling case to the Jews, summarized as: “What more is there for their Expected One to do when he comes? To call the heathen? But they are called already. To put an end to prophet and king and vision? But this too has already happened. To expose the God-denyingness of idols? It is already exposed and condemned. Or to destroy death? It is already destroyed. What then has not come to pass that the Christ must do?”

So, I invite you for a time of dwelling on the unique qualifications of the Word of God, and why there *had to be* an Incarnation, that you might treasure and savor Christ more every day.

