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Summary of Letter

Life of St. Athanasius

- St. Athanasius was born in the year 297 AD, to pagan parents, in the city of Alexandria.
- At the age of 9 years old, Pope Alexander noticed him precisely and accurately pretending to play the role of a bishop in the sacrament of baptism. It is stated Pope Alexander even acknowledged this baptism as real and sealed it with the sacrament of Chrismation himself.
- The patriarch looked after the spiritual upbringing of St. Athanasius and in time brought him into the clergy by ordaining him a deacon.
- As a deacon, in the year 325 AD, he accompanied Pope Alexander to the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea where St. Athanasius Contra Mundum (Against the World) boldly refuted the heresy of Arius. Due to the rise of the Arian heresy, St. Athanasius authored the Nicene Creed.
- After Pope Alexander departed, St. Athanasius hid in the mountains, for he believed himself to be unworthy of the papacy. The people found him and brought him to the bishops to be ordained the 20th Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.
- Prior to, during and after his five exiles he was persistent in preserving the true faith. He achieved this objective by preaching and offering the world a variety of writings.
- St. Athanasius departed on May 15th, (7th day of Bashans), 373 AD

The Exiles of St. Athanasius

First Exile: July 335 – November 337

He was exiled to France for his refusal to accept Arius back to the Church, among other things. Emperor Constantine cleared St. Athanasius of all charges shortly before the Emperor's death.

Second Exile: April 339 – October 346

His second exile was in Rome. He was excommunicated by the Arians, and willingly accepted it for the protection of the people.

Third Exile: February 356 – February 362

The Arians exiled him to the Egyptian Desert. When soldiers went to the church where he was praying Vespers, God blinded them from recognizing him from the rest of the people and the lamps were extinguished. He escaped to the desert, and remained with the monks, until the death of the Emperor.

Fourth Exile: October 362– June 363

He had assembled a council to provide the conditions for the acceptance of Arians who wished to return. He also gave attention to the preaching of pagans. The Emperor did not like this because he loved the pagans. So he sent soldiers for St. Athanasius, so he hid himself in Upper Egypt.

Fifth Exile: October 367 – January 368

The Arian Emperor ordered the exile of St. Athanasius. St. Athanasius hid in his fathers tomb for four months, until he was returned to his Throne, and completed his papacy.

The Works of St. Athanasius

This table illustrates a summary of a majority of the works of St. Athanasius. Organized chronologically, this table has been studied by scholars and presented as an accurate estimate. Primarily writing in Greek or Coptic, this great saint authored a variety of works such as the Nicene Creed, theological treatises, monastic letters, paschal letters, etc. Many of St. Athanasius' works were also written during his exiles and those specific works are highlighted below.

326-328	Against the Heathen
326-328	On the Incarnation
337-339	First letter to Virgins (in Coptic)
329-373	Festal Letters, written annually on the Feast of the Resurrection
337-345	Orations against the Arians
340	Homily on Matthew 11:27
343-344	Letter to the clergy of Alexandria (and the Parembola)
350-356	Defense of the Nicene Council
356	Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya
356-360	Letter to Serapion on the death of Arius
356-362	Life of Anthony
357	Defense against the Arians (This work excerpts many documents from 328-347)
357-258	History of the Arians
358-360	First letter to the Monks
359-360	Letters to Serapion on The Holy Spirit
362	Synodal Letter to the People of Antioch
370	Letter to Marcellinus

St. Athanasius and St. Anthony



St. Athanasius wearing the tunic of palm branches he received from St. Anthony

The Arians confronted St. Anthony on top of his mountain. "When St. Anthony had questioned them and learned their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of a serpent." (Life of Antony). When the Arians left the mountain, they went back to Alexandria where they asserted that St. Anthony's opinions were the same as theirs. St. Anthony was then summoned by St. Athanasius to give an account of what was happening. St. Anthony refused all of what the Arians had said about him and went to teach the people of the city the true faith of God. St. Athanasius escorted him throughout the

city of Alexandria, where people rejoiced in him. This was the beginning of their relationship, in which both saints became very close. At the time of St. Anthony's departure from the world, he requested that his spiritual sons give St. Athanasius, "one sheepskin and the garment whereon I am laid, which he himself gave me new, but which with me has grown old." (Life of Anthony) Among the garments that St. Athanasius received was St. Paul the First Hermit's Tunic (which was made out of palm leaves) in which St. Paul himself gave to St. Anthony at the time of his departure. St. Athanasius wore the tunic of palm branches over his liturgical garments during countless feasts. Between 356-362 AD, St. Athanasius wrote the book "Life of Anthony", just after the departure of St. Anthony.

St. Athanasius and Monasticism

- St. Athanasius' book on the "Life of Anthony" helped spread monasticism throughout the world, as well as refuted the Arian heresy.
- It was said of him that, "wherever St. Athanasius went he spread the knowledge of monasticism" (The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers).
- During his second exile, St. Athanasius brought with him to Rome two monks from the Egyptian desert, one of whom was St. Ammonius; the other St. Isidore.
- After the publication and translation of the Life of Anthony by St. Athanasius to Latin, the knowledge of Egyptian Monasticism spread into various areas where people wanted to imitate this lifestyle.
- The Life of Anthony had an impact on Italy, and the first Italian monks aimed at reproducing exactly what was done in Egypt. Some of the first Italian Monks were St. Jerome, St. Rufinus, and St. Eustochium.
- As St. Athanasius preached the teachings of monasticism in Rome, many went to Egypt and Palestine to devote themselves in the new way of life St. Athanasius paved.
- "From Rome, monasticism gradually spread over all Italy and the isles of the Mediterranean, even to the rugged rocks of the Gorgon and the Capraja, where the hermits, in voluntary exile from the world, took the place of the criminals and political victims" (The Rise and Progress of Monasticism).

"Surely it was a marvelous thing that a man, alone in such a desert, feared neither the demons who rose up against him, nor the fierceness of the four-footed beasts and creeping things, for all they were so many. But in truth, as it is written, 'He trusted in the Lord as Mount Zion,' with a mind unshaken and undisturbed; so that the demons rather fled from him, and the wild beasts, as it is written, 'kept peace with him.'"

-St. Athanasius, *Life of Anthony*

Letter to Bishop Serapion

On the Holy Trinity

Written by St. Athanasius

INTRODUCTION

[2.1.1.] I thought what I wrote was ever so brief, and I accused myself of great lethargy for not being able to write as much as is humanly possible against those who are impious toward the Holy Spirit. But some of the brothers, as you write, have requested an epitome of what I have written, so that they might have a brief and readily accessible arsenal from which they can both answer those who ask questions about our faith and refute the impious. On account of this request I have undertaken the present work, confident that if I have omitted something you will supply what is lacking in good conscience.

THE SON IS NOT A CREATURE

The insolent speculation of the Arians

[2.1.2-3.] The Arians, being self-absorbed and thinking, like the Sadducees, that there is nothing greater than or external to themselves, understand the inspired Scriptures with human reasoning. So, when they hear that the Son of the Father is Wisdom and Radiance and Word, they are in the habit of saying, "How can this be?", as if what they cannot conceive cannot be. Indeed, they should also occupy their mind with the same sort of questions about the universe. How can creation come into existence when it did not exist? How can a rational human being be formed from the

dust of the earth¹? How can what is corruptible become incorruptible²? How was the earth “*founded upon the sea,*” and how did God “*set it upon the rivers*” (Ps 23:2)? There is nothing left for them to do except to say to themselves: *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die* (1 Cor 15:32). Let them do this, so that it may be clear that when they perish, the insanity of their heresy will perish along with them!

The scriptural account of the Son's relation to the Father

[2.2.1.] So then, this opinion of the Arians is mortal and corruptible. But the true account, which even they should ponder, goes like this: If God is Fountain and Light and Father, it is not right to say that the Fountain has been exhausted or that the Light is without its brilliance or that God is without the Word, lest God be deprived of his Wisdom, his Word, and his Splendor.

[2.2.2-3.] Therefore, if the Father is eternal, the Son must also be eternal. For there can be no doubt that whatever we conceive as being in the Father is also in the Son, as the Lord himself said: *All that the Father has is mine* (Jn 16:15) and “all that is mine is the Father's.”³ And so, the Father is eternal; the Son is also eternal. For the ages came to be through him⁴. As the Father is, so must the Son be, who, as Paul said, *is God over all blessed forever. Amen* (Rom 9:5). In the case of the Father it is not right to say, “There was once when he was not.” In the case of the Son it is not right to say, “There was once when he was not.” The Father is Almighty; the Son is also Almighty, as John said: *Thus he speaks: The one who is and who was*

¹ See Genesis 2:7

² See 1 Corinthians 15:42,53-54

³ See John 17:10

⁴ See Hebrews 1:2

and who is to come, the Almighty (Rev 1:8). The Father is Light; the Son is Radiance and true Light. The Father is true God; the Son is true God. For such is what John wrote: *We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life* (1 Jn 5:20).

[2.2.3.-2.3.1.] And in sum, there is nothing that the Father has which does not also belong to the Son. Thus the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son.⁵ For what the Father has is in the Son and furthermore is perceived in the Son. This is how one should understand the passage: *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30). For there are not some things in the Father and other things in the Son, but that which is in the Father is in the Son. And what you see in the Son is what you see in the Father. This is the correct understanding of the passage: *He who sees me sees the Father* (Jn 14:9). Now that these points are thus demonstrated, whoever says that the Son is a creature is impious. For he will be also compelled to say that the abundant Fountain is a creature, that Wisdom is a creature, and that the Word, in whom all that is the Father's exists, is a creature.

***Creatures are servants, whereas the Word
is almighty like the Father***

[2.3.1-2.] One can see particularly well how corrupt the heresy of the Ariomaniacs is from the following consideration. With those whom we are like and with whom we have identity we are the same in substance. For example, since we human beings are alike and have identity, we are the same as each other in substance. For everyone has the same mortality, corruptibility, mutability, and status of coming from nothing. In a similar way, the angels too, and all other things, are among themselves the same in nature with each other. So let our curious opponents investigate whether there

⁵ See John 14:10

is some likeness between the Son and creatures, or whether what belongs to the Son can be found in those who have come into existence, so that they may dare to call God the Word a creature. But nothing of the sort will be found by these utterly reckless men who wander from the road of piety. Among creatures none is almighty and none is ruled by another. For each belongs to God himself. *The heavens proclaim the glory of God* (Ps 18:2). And *the Lord's is the earth and its fullness* (Ps 23:1). *The sea fled at his sight* (Ps 113:3). And all things are the servants of the one who made them, *doing his word* (Ps 102:20) and obeying his command. But the Son is almighty, just as the Father is – this has been written and demonstrated.

***Creatures are mutable, whereas the Son
is immutable like the Father***

[2.3.3.] Again, among creatures, none is immutable by nature. For some angels did not keep to their own rank⁶, and *the stars are not pure in his sight* (Job 25:5). And the devil fell from heaven⁷, Adam transgressed⁸, and *all things* (Jn 1:3) are changeable. But the Son is immutable and unchangeable, just as the Father is. Paul has reminded us of this, citing Psalm 101: *And in the beginning, O Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish but you will remain; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle you will roll them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end* (Heb 1:10-12; Ps 101:26-28). And again he says: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Heb 13:8).

⁶ See Jude 1:6

⁷ See Luke 10:18

⁸ See Genesis 3

*Creatures are made from nothing,
whereas the Son makes all things*

[2.4.1-2.] And again, all that has come into existence did not exist and then was brought into existence. For God *made the earth when it was nothing* (Is 40:23). And he is *the one who calls into existence the things that do not exist* (Rom 4:17). These are the things which have been made and the creatures. Thus there is a beginning to their coming into existence. For *in the beginning God made heaven and earth and all that is in them* (Gen 1:1). And again: *My hand made all these things* (Is 66:2). But the Son is “*He Who Is*” (Ex 3:4) and *God over all* (Rom 9:5), just as is the Father – this has been shown. Just as the Son is not made but makes, so too he is not created but creates and does the works of the Father. For through him the ages came into existence⁹, and *all things came to be through him and without him not one thing came to be* (Jn 1:3). And, as the Apostle showed, using the same psalm: *in the beginning you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands* (Heb 1:10; Ps 101:26).

[2.4.3-4.] And again, no creature is God by nature, but to each of those things that have been brought into being he gave a name that corresponds to what it has become. He named one the heaven and another the earth, some the heavenly lights and others the stars, oth-ers the sea, the deeps, the quadrupeds, and moreover, human beings and before them angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, powers, rulers, authorities, dominions, and paradise. And thus each of these remains. But if some have been called gods, they are not gods by nature but by participation in the Son. For so he spoke: *if he called them gods to whom the Word of God came* (Jn 10:35). Hence, since they are not gods by nature, there comes a time

⁹ See Hebrews 1:2

when some of them change and hear him say: *I said: you are gods and all of you the sons of the Most High, but you will die like men* (Ps 81:6-7). Such was the one who heard: *You are a human being, and not a god* (Ezek 28:2).

[2.4.5.] But the Son is true God, just as the Father is. For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son – this is what John wrote this, as has been shown¹⁰. And David sings in the psalm: *Your throne, O God, will endure forever and ever; a scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom* (Ps 44:7). And the Prophet Isaiah cries out: *Egypt has toiled, and the merchandise of the Ethiopians, and the Sabeans, men of stature, will pass over to you, and they shall follow after you bound in fetters, and make supplication to you, because God is in you. For you are the God of Israel, and we did not know it* (Is 45:14-15). Who is the God in whom God is, if not the Son who says: *I am in the Father and the Father is in me* (Jn 14:10)?

The Son is the same as the Father in substance

[2.5.1-3.] Since all of this is true and written in Scripture, who cannot see, inasmuch as the Son has no likeness to creatures but has all that belongs to the Father, that the Son must be the same as the Father in substance? For if he were to have any likeness to creatures or any kinship with them, then he would be the same as them in substance. Likewise, since he is foreign in substance to those who have come into existence and is the proper Word of the Father, and since he is different from them, and since all that is proper to the Father is his, it follows that he must be the same as the Father in substance. This is what the fathers thought, when at the Council of Nicaea, they confessed that the Son is “the same as the Father in substance” and “from the substance of the Father.” For it was

¹⁰ See John 14:10

perfectly clear to them that no created substance would ever say: *All that the Father has is mine* (Jn 16:15). Since a created substance has a beginning to its coming into existence, the phrases "he is" and "he was eternally" cannot be said of a created substance. But since these phrases can be said of the Son, and since all the things mentioned earlier that belong to the Father are the Son's, the substance of the Son must not be created, but he must be the same as the Father in substance. His substance cannot be created above all for this reason: it is capable of receiving the distinguishing marks of God. Now his distinguishing marks are the characteristics by which God is recognized. For example, that he is almighty, that he is, that he is immutable, and the other things mentioned earlier. Therefore, God himself will not appear to be the same as creatures in substance, as these fools want him to be, as if he possessed what creatures can possess.

The fact that God is called "Father" ensures that the Son is the same as him in substance

[2.6.1-3.] The impiety of those who call the Word of God a creature can also be refuted in the following manner. Our faith is in Father and Son and Holy Spirit, as the Son himself said to the Apostles: *Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19). He spoke in this way so that on the basis of what we already know we may understand the matters on which we just now spoke. So then, just as we would not call our fathers 'makers' but 'begetters: and just as no one would call us 'creatures' of our fathers but 'sons' by nature who are the same as our fathers in substance, so too, if God is Father, surely he is Father of one who is his Son by nature and who is the same as him in substance. Abraham certainly did not create

Isaac, but begot him. Bezalel and Oholiab did not beget all the products in the tabernacle, but made them¹¹. The shipbuilder and the house builder do not beget what they make, but each produces a work, the former a ship and the latter a house. Isaac does not make Jacob but begets him by nature, and Jacob is the same as him in sub-stance. The same holds true for Jacob and Judah and his brothers. So then, just as it is insane for anyone to claim that the house is the same as the house builder in substance and the ship the same as the shipbuilder in substance, so too it is appropriate for someone to say that every son is the same as his own father in substance.

[2.6.3-5.] So if there is Father and Son, then the Son must be Son by nature and in truth. But this is what it means to be the same as the Father in substance, as has been shown by many passages. Indeed, of the things which have been made it is said: *God spoke and they came to be; he commanded, and they were created* (Ps 148:5). But of the Son it is said: *My heart overflowed with a good Word* (Ps 44:2). Daniel knew the Son of God and knew the works of God. He saw the Son quench the furnace¹², but he said of the works: *Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord* (Dan 3:57 LXX). He listed each of the creatures, but he did not classify the Son with them. For he knew that the Son was not a work, but that through him the works came into existence, and that he is praised and exalted in the Father. So then, just as through him God is revealed to those who know him, so too through him *blessing and honor and glory and might* (Rev 5:13) are confessed to the Father, through him and in him, so that such a confession may be, as the Scriptures say, *acceptable* (1 Pet 2:5). So then, on the basis of many passages and these reasons, it has been

¹¹ See Exodus 26:1-2

¹² See Daniel 3:25

demonstrated and is now demonstrated that only the impious would call the Word of God a creature.

***On the correct interpretation of Proverbs 8.22:
in what sense the Son is created***

[2.7.1.] But our opponents adduce that passage written in Proverbs: *The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways for his works* (Prov 8:22), and say: "Look, he created him, and so he is a creature:" Therefore, we must also demonstrate on the basis of this passage the extent to which they have erred through their ignorance of the plot of the Divine Scripture. So then, if he is a son, let him not be called a creature. But if he is a creature, let him not be called a son. For in what precedes we have already shown how great a difference there is between a creature and a son. Furthermore, since the baptismal initiation is not valid if it is in the Creator and a creature, but only if it is in the Father and the Son, the Lord must not be called a creature, but Son.

[2.7.2.] "But, " our opponents say, "isn't that what's written in the Scriptures?" Yes, that's what's written in the Scriptures! And it must be said. But what is well said is poorly understood by these heretics. For if they had understood and knew the character of Christianity, they would not have called the Lord of glory a creature, nor stumbled over what is well written. So then, these men *neither know nor understand* (Ps 81:5). Thus, as it written, *they grope in the darkness* (Ps 81:5). Nonetheless, we must speak, not only so that in this matter our opponents may be unmasked as the fools that they are, but also so that we do not neglect to refute their impiety and thereby perhaps spark their repentance.

[2.7.3-4.] So the character of faith in Christ is as follows: the Son of God, who is God the Word since *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1), who is the Father's Wisdom and Power since *Christ is God's Power and God's Wisdom* (1 Cor 1:24), became human at the *end of the ages* (Heb 9:26) for our salvation. For John, after he said: *in the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1), a little further on added: *and the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14), which is equivalent to saying: "he became human." And the Lord said of himself: *Why do you seek to kill me, a human being who has spoken the truth to you?* (Jn 7:19+8:40). And Paul, having learned from him, said: *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and humanity, the human being Jesus Christ* (1 Tim 2:5). Having become human, fulfilled his human economy, defeated and abolished our death¹³, now he is seated at the right hand of the Father¹⁴, being in the Father and the Father in him¹⁵, just as he always was and is forever.

[2.8.1.] This is the character of the faith which we have received from the Apostles through the Fathers. Anyone who reads the Scripture must examine and judge where it speaks of the divinity of the Word and where it speaks of his human acts, so that we do not fall prey to the same delirium that has befallen the Arians by understanding the one when the other is meant. So, we know that he is the Word, and so we know that *through him all things were made, and without him not one thing was made* (Jn 1:3), that *by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made* (Ps 32:6), and that *He sends forth his Word and healed all things* (Ps 106:20). We know that he is Wisdom, and so we know that *God by Wisdom founded the earth* (Prov 3:19), and that the Father *made all things in Wisdom* (Ps 103:24). We know that he is God, and so we have come to believe that he is

¹³ See 2 Timothy 1:10

¹⁴ See Colossians 3:1

¹⁵ See John 14:10-11

the Anointed One, the Christ. For *your throne, O God, sings David in the psalm, shall endure forever. A scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom. Your love is for justice; your hatred for evil. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above other kings* (Ps 44:7-8). And in Isaiah he himself says: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me* (Is 61:1). Peter too confessed this: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:16).

[2.8.3.] So likewise, we know that he became human, and so we do not deny whatever is said about him that reflects his humanity, for example, that he was hungry, that he was thirsty, that he was slapped, that he wept, that he slept, and finally, that he accepted death on a cross for our sake. For all of this was written about him. Similarly, the Scripture has not refrained from using the phrase, “he created,” but has used it since it applies to human beings. For we human beings have been created and made. But just as, when we hear that he was hungry, slept, and was slapped, we do not deny his divinity, so too, when we hear the phrase, “he created,” it would be consistent to remember that, though he is God, he was created a human being. For being created is proper to human beings, as is the case for the other characteristics mentioned above, such as being hungry, and the like.

***On the correct interpretation of Mark 13.22:
in what sense the Son is ignorant***

[2.9.1-2.] And there is another passage which is well said but poorly understood by our opponents, I mean: *Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels, nor the Son* (Mk 13:32). Now this passage has a correct interpretation. Yet on the basis of *nor the Son*, our opponents think that his ignorance proves that he is a creature. But such is not the case. God forbid! For just as, when he

said: *He created me* (Prov 8:22), he meant it as a reference to his humanity, so too, when he said: *nor the Son*, he meant it as a reference to his humanity. And there is a good reason why he spoke in this way. For he became human, as it is written, and being ignorant is proper to human beings, just like being hungry and all the rest, since they do not know something unless they hear and learn it. Therefore, when he became human, he indicated his human ignorance for two reasons: first, so that he could show that he really has a human body; second, since he had human ignorance in his body, so that he could redeem his humanity from all and cleanse it and so offer it perfect and holy to the Father.

[2.9.3-4.] Will the Arians discover yet another pretext? What else will they concoct to murmur about? They have been convicted of misunderstanding the verse: *The Lord created me* (Prov 8:22). And they have been shown to have no understanding of the verse: *Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels, nor the Son* (Mk 13:32). For when he says *he created*, he signifies his humanity, that he became human and was created. But when he says: *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30), and: *He who sees me sees the Father* (Jn 14:9), and: *I am in the Father and the Father in me* (Jn 14:10), he signifies his eternity and that he is the same as the Father in substance. Likewise, when he says: *No one knows, not even the Son* (Mk 13:32), he again speaks as a human being. For being ignorant is proper to human beings. But when he says: *No one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father* (Mt 11:27), so much more does he know the things which have come into existence! So then, in the Gospel according to John the disciples said to the Lord: *Now we know that you know all things* (Jn 16:30). Thus it is clear that there is nothing of which he is ignorant, seeing that he is the Word *through whom all things were made* (Jn 1:3). But since *that day* is one of

the *all things*, it will certainly come to pass through him, even though the Arians in their ignorance burst ten thousand times!

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT A CREATURE

*We must derive our knowledge about the Spirit
from our knowledge about the Son*

[2.10.1-2.] Perhaps you will wonder why, when I was asked for an epitome and a brief explanation of the letter I had written on the Holy Spirit, you see me, as it were, laying aside what I had said on that subject and writing against those who are impious toward the Son of God and claim that he is a creature. But I know for a fact that you will not blame me when you learn of the reason. On the contrary, Your Reverence will give your approval when you see that the reason I have is a good one. The Lord himself said that the Paraclete *will not speak on his own, but whatever he hears he will speak, for he will take from what is mine and declare it to you* (Jn 16:13-14). And he gave the Spirit to his disciples from himself when *he breathed on them* (Jn 20:22), and in this way the Father *poured him out on all flesh* (Joel 3:1), as had been written. Thus it is with good reason that we speak and write about the Son of God first, so that from our knowledge of the Son we may be able to have true knowledge of the Spirit.

*Because the Spirit is proper to the Son,
he is also proper to the Father*

[2.10.2-4.] For we will find that the way in which we know the Son belongs to the Father corresponds to the way in which the

Spirit belongs to the Son. Just as the Son says: *All that the Father has is mine* (Jn 16:15), so too we will find that all these things through the Son are in the Spirit. Just as the Father indicated the Son, saying: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (Mt 3:17), so too is the Spirit the Son's. For the Apostle says: *He has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: "Abba, Father!"* (Gal 4:6). And it is quite remarkable that, just as the Son says: *all that is mine is the Father's* (Jn 17:10), so too is the Holy Spirit, who is said to be the Son's, also the Father's. For on the one hand the Son himself says: *When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me* (Jn 15:26). And on the other hand Paul writes: *No one knows the things that belong to a human being except the human spirit who is in him. Thus also no one knows the things that belong to God except the Spirit of God who is in him. Now we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God* (1 Cor 2:11-12). And you will find in every passage of Divine Scripture that the Holy Spirit, who is said to be the Son's, is also said to be God's: this is precisely what we wrote in our previous letter. Hence, if the Son is not a creature because of the way in which he belongs to the Father and because he is the proper offspring of the Father's substance, but is the same as the Father in substance, then likewise the Holy Spirit is not a creature – indeed, whoever says such a thing is impious! – because of the way in which the Spirit belongs to the Son, and because he is given from the Son to all people and all that he has is the Son's.

If the Son is not a creature, then neither is the Spirit

[2.11.1.] So then, these considerations are sufficient to dissuade anyone, however contentious he may be, from continuing

to call *the Spirit of God* (1 Cor 2:11) a creature [who is in God and *scrutinizes the depths of God* (1 Cor 2:10) and is given from the Father through the Son¹⁶]; lest by extrapolating from such an idea he be compelled also to call the Son a creature (who is the Word, the Wisdom, the Character, and the Radiance;¹⁷ when anyone sees him, he sees the Father¹⁸), and in the end hear these words: *Whoever denies the Son does not even have the Father* (1 Jn 2:23). Indeed, not much time will pass before such a person will speak like the fool: *There is no God* (Ps 13:1). Nonetheless, in order to demonstrate the refutation of our impious opponents in a more convincing manner, it is a good idea to demonstrate that the Spirit is not a creature on the basis of those passages which demonstrate that the Son is not a creature.

*Creatures are from nothing, whereas
the Son and the Spirit are from God*

[2.11.2.] Creatures are from nothing and have a beginning to their existence. For *in the beginning God made the heaven and the earth* and all that is in them (Gen 1:1). But the Holy Spirit is and is said to be from God, as the Apostle said¹⁶. And if it is reasonable to conclude that the Son is not a creature because he is not from nothing but from God, then of necessary it must be concluded that the Holy Spirit is not a creature because he is confessed to be from God For creatures are from nothing.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 2:12

¹⁷ See Hebrews 1:3

¹⁸ See John 12:45

Creatures are anointed and sealed by the Son and the Spirit

[2.12.1-3.] And again, the Spirit is said to be and is an anointing and a seal. John writes: *But the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you, since, rather, his anointing – his Spirit – teaches you about everything* (1 Jn 2:27). In the Prophet Isaiah it is written: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me* (Is 61:1). Paul writes: *By believing you have been sealed in him* (Eph 1:13). And again: *Do not sadden the Holy Spirit in whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption* (Eph 4:30). So it is creatures who are anointed by him and sealed in him. But if it is creatures who are anointed by him and sealed in him, then the Spirit cannot be a creature. For that which anoints is unlike that which is anointed. Indeed, this anointing is the breath of the Son, so that whoever has the Spirit can say: *We are the good odor of Christ* (2 Cor 2:15). The seal makes an imprint of the Son, so that whoever has been sealed has the form of Christ, as the Apostle says: *My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you!* (Gal 4:19). But if the Spirit is the good odor and form of the Son, then it is perfectly clear that the Spirit cannot be a creature. For the Son too, *being in the form of God* (Phil 2:6), is not a creature.

*Whoever has the Son has the Spirit,
and thereby is the temple of God*

[2.12.4-5.] And in fact, just as anyone who has seen the Son sees the Father¹⁹, so too anyone who has the Holy Spirit has the Son. When anyone has him, he is the temple of God, as Paul writes: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God*

¹⁹ See John 14:9

dwells in you? (1 Cor 3:16). John says: By this we know that we remain in him, and he in us, because he has given to us of his Spirit (1 Jn 4:13). But if it has been confessed that the Son is not a creature because he is in the Father and the Father in him²⁰, then there is every necessity that the Spirit is not a creature. For the Son is in him, and he is in the Son. Therefore, whoever receives the Spirit is called, the temple of God.

***There is a multitude of creatures but the Son
and the Spirit are each of them one***

[2.12.5.-2.13.1.] Once again, it is good to understand this issue in the light of the following consideration: if the Son is the Word of God, he is one as the Father is one. *For there is one God, from whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6).* Therefore, it is said and written that the Son is “only-begotten”²¹. But there are many different creatures: angels, archangels, cherubim, principalities, powers, and the others, as has been said. But if the Son is not a creature because he does not belong to the many, but is one as the Father is one, then the Spirit too – for we must derive our knowledge of the Spirit from the Son – cannot in any way be a creature. For he does not belong to the many but is himself one. The Apostle knows this, saying: *All these things are worked by the one and the same Spirit, who distributes to each individual as he wills (1 Cor 12:11).* And a little further on: *In the one Spirit all of you have been baptized into one body, and all were made to drink of the one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).*

²⁰ See John 14:11

²¹ See John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, and 3:18

Creatures are circumscribed, whereas the Spirit is omnipresent

[2.13.1-3.] And again, since we must derive our knowledge about the Spirit from the Son, it will be fitting to provide logical demonstrations based on him. So, the Son is everywhere. Because he is in the Father and the Father in him²², he rules and holds all things together. And it is written: *In him all things hold together, both the visible and the invisible, and he is before all things* (Col 1:17). But creatures are in the places assigned to them: sun and moon and the other luminaries are in the firmament²³, angels in heaven, and human beings upon the earth. But if the Son is everywhere because he is not in places assigned to him but in the Father, and if he is not a creature because he is outside of all things, then it cannot follow that the Spirit is a creature, because he is not in places assigned to him but fills all things and is outside of all things. For thus it is written: *The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world* (Wis 1:7). And David sings in the psalm: *Where can I go from your Spirit?* (Ps 138:7). For he is not in a place but outside all things and in the Son, as the Son is in the Father²². For this reason then he is not a creature, as has been shown.

THE SPIRIT'S ROLE IN THE COMMON ACTIVITY OF THE TRINITY

The Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit

[2.13.4.-2.14.1.] In addition to all these things, the following consideration will confirm the condemnation of the Arian heresy and once again show that our knowledge of the Spirit is derived

²² See John 14:11

²³ See Genesis 1:14

from the Son. So, the Son is Creator like the Father; he says: *For whatever I see the Father doing, this is what I also do* (Jn 5:19). Indeed, *all things came to be through him, and without him not one thing came to be* (Jn 1:3). But if the Son is Creator like the Father, then he is not a creature. And if he is not one of the created things because all things are cre-ated through him, it is clear that the Spirit is also not creature. For it is written about him in Psalm 103: *You take back your Spirit, they die and they return to their dust; you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth* (Ps 103:29-30). Seeing that this has been written, it is clear that the Spirit is not a creature but is involved in the act of creating. The Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit. For where the Word is, there also is the Spirit, and the things created through the Word have their strength to exist through the Spirit from the Word. Thus it is written in Psalm 32: *By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the Spirit of his mouth all their power* (Ps 32:6).

***The Father gives prophetic inspiration
through the Word in the Spirit***

[2.14.2-4.] It is so certain that the Spirit cannot be divided from the Son that there is no need for us to have any doubts about what is now being said. When the Word came to the Prophet, the Prophet said what he said through the Word in the Spirit. This is what is written in Acts, when Peter says: *Men, brothers, it was fitting for the scripture to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit predicted* (Acts 1:16). And in Zechariah, when the Word came to him²⁴, it is written: *Yet receive my words and my statutes which I commanded to the prophets by my Spirit* (Zech 1:6). And a little further on, when he rebuked the people, he said: *And they made their heart disobedient, so as not to*

²⁴ See Zechariah 1:1

hearken to my law, and the words which the Lord Almighty sent forth by his Spirit by the hands of the prophets of old (Zech 7:12). Moreover, when Christ spoke in Paul – as Paul himself said: Do you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me? (2 Cor 13:3) – nonetheless, it was the Spirit who administered to him what he should say. For Paul himself writes as follows: According to the administration of the Spirit of Jesus Christ with respect to me (Phil 1:19). Again, when Christ was speaking in him, he said: Except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city, saying that imprisonment and afflictions await me (Acts 20:23). For the Spirit is not external to the Word, but is in the Word, and through the Word is in God. Hence the spiritual gifts are given in the Trinity. For as Paul writes to the Corinthians, in their distribution there is the same Spirit and the same Lord and the same God, who works them all in every one (1 Cor 12:6). The Father himself through the Word in the Spirit works and gives all things.

***The unity and indivisibility of the Trinity
is the faith of the Catholic Church***

[2.15.1-4.] Indeed, when Paul prayed for the Corinthians, he prayed in the Trinity, saying: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor 13:13). When we participate in the Spirit, we have the grace of the Word and, in the Word, the love of the Father. Just as there is one grace of the Trinity, so too is the Trinity indivisible. One can see this in the case of holy Mary herself. For when the angel Gabriel was sent to announce that the Word would descend upon her, he said: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you (Lk 1:35). He was very much aware that the Spirit was in the Word. Then he immediately added: And the Power of the Most High will overshadow you (Lk 1:35). For Christ is the Power and the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). Since the*

Spirit was in the Word, it should be dear that through the Word the Spirit was also in God. In addition, when the Spirit comes to us, the Son and the Father will also come and make their home in us²⁵. For the Trinity is indivisible, and there is one divinity of the Trinity, and *there is one God over all, and through all, and in all* (Eph 4:6).

This is the faith of the Catholic Church. For it was in the Trinity that the Lord established and founded the Church, as he said to his disciples: *Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19). If the Spirit were a creature, he would not have ranked him together with the Father, lest the Trinity be inconsistent with itself by being ranked together with something that is foreign and alien to it.

[2.15.5-6.] For what could God have lacked such that he needed to add something alien and be glorified along with it? God forbid! Such is not the case. He himself said: *I am full* (Is 1:11). Therefore the Lord himself ranked the Spirit together with the name of the Father in order to show that the Holy Trinity is not compounded of two different things, that is, Creator and creature, but that there is one divinity in the Trinity. Because Paul learned this, he taught that there is one grace bestowed in the Trinity, saying: *One Lord, one faith, one baptism* (Eph 4:5). Just as there is one baptism, so too is there one faith. For whoever believes in the Father knows the Son in the Father and knows the Spirit inseparably from the Son. And therefore he believes in both the Son and the Holy Spirit. For there is one divinity of the Trinity, and it is manifested by the one Father.

²⁵ See John 14:23

*If the Spirit is a creature, a dyad became
A Trinity when the Spirit was created*

[2.16.1-3.] So then, this is the character of the Catholic faith. But as for those who blaspheme the Spirit and claim that he is a creature, if they do not repent on the basis of what we've said, let them be overcome with shame on the basis of what we're about to say. If there is a Trinity, and if the faith is faith in the Trinity, let them tell us whether the Trinity is always a Trinity or whether there was a point when the Trinity was not a Trinity. So then, if the Trinity is eternal, the Spirit is not a creature since he exists eternally with the Word and is in him. For there was a point when creatures did not exist. But if the Spirit is a creature, and if creatures are from nothing, it is clear that there was a point when the Trinity was not a Trinity, but a dyad. But could anyone utter something more impious than this? Our opponents are claiming that the Trinity has been established by a process of change and progress, that when it was a dyad it waited for the generation of a creature so that this creature could be ranked together with the Father and the Son, and thereby become the Trinity. God forbid that such an idea should ever enter the mind of Christians! For just as the Son is not a creature because he is always a son, so too there is no creature in the Trinity because it is always a Trinity. Hence the Spirit is not a creature. For as the Trinity always was, so it is even now; and as it is now, so it always was: it is the Trinity, and in it are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And *there is one God, the Father who is over all and through all and in all, who is blessed forever. Amen* (Eph 4:6+Rom 9:5).

CONCLUSION

[2.16.4.] So then, now that I have written this brief summary as you requested, I am sending it. If I have omitted something, please supply what is lacking, as you are a man of good conscience. Read it *to those who are of the household of faith* (Gal 6:10) and refute those who love contention and utter blasphemies. Perhaps, repenting ever so late, they will purify their own souls of the malice that used to be in them. Indeed, it would be a good idea for them, as it written, *to turn aside and not delay* (Prov 9:18a), lest by delaying they hear what was said by the Lord: *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness either in this age or in the age to come* (Mt 12:32).

Summary

Of Letter to Bishop Serapion On the Holy Trinity

This letter starts by stating that it is a summary of the previous letter written. Some of the faithful asked St. Athanasius to provide an epitome, or summary, of his previous letter. The reason they asked St. Athanasius for a summary is to have proofs readily available so they can answer questions if others ask, and to refute the impious who come and try to change the doctrine they were taught.

After he introduces his reasoning behind writing the letter, he begins by saying the Son is not a creature. He begins by stating what is it that the Arians speculated about the Son (Word of God). St. Athanasius states of their belief that, “So when they (Arians) hear that the Son of the Father is Wisdom and Radiance and Word, they are in the habit of saying, ‘How can this be?’ as if what they cannot conceive cannot be”²⁶. St. Athanasius starts by stating the belief of the Arians and then goes into the scriptural account of the Son’s relation to the Father. He makes the point by saying, “If God is Fountain and Light and Father, it is not right to say that the Fountain has been exhausted or that the Light is without its brilliance or that God is without the Word, lest God be deprived of his Wisdom, his Word, his Splendor”.²⁷ St. Athanasius uses scriptural verses such as John 16:15, John 17:10, and Hebrew 1:2. He affirms his statement against the Arians when he says it is not right to say, “There was once when he was not”²⁸, and uses

²⁶ Letter 2, Works on the Spirit – 2.1.1

²⁷ Letter 2, Works on the Spirit – 2.2.2

²⁸ This is a slogan that Athanasius attributed to Arius as kind of an encapsulation of his entire theology

scripture again to make his point in Revelations 1:8. St. Athanasius then goes on defending that the Son is not the same as a creature (created thing). He starts by saying that creatures are servants, whereas the Word is almighty like the Father. Then St. Athanasius speaks about how creatures are mutable whereas the Son is immutable, like the Father. What St. Athanasius means to say here is that angels can change ranks, humans can fall, but the Son does not change, just as the Father does not change. He goes on to use St. Paul's citation of Psalm 101²⁹ to buttress his argument. Also, he affirms his claim in Hebrews 13:8. St. Athanasius then goes on to speak about how Creatures are made from nothing whereas the Son makes all things. He speaks about the Son being the same as the Father in substance as well. He proves this statement by reminding us that this is what we recite in the Nicene creed, "same as the Father in substance" and "from the substance of the Father"³⁰.

After he explains this relationship with the Father and the Son, St. Athanasius moves to explain the relationship of the Holy Spirit, to the Father and Son. He moves to say that the Holy Spirit is also not a creature. He proposes that we must derive our knowledge of the Holy Spirit from the knowledge about the Son. St. Athanasius uses the Scripture (John 15:26 and 1 Corinthians 2:11-12) to show that the Holy spirit is the Son's and the Father's. And since the Son is not created, as discussed before, thus the Holy Spirit cannot be created, as in, a creature³¹. St Athanasius also speaks about how creatures are anointed and sealed by the Son and the Spirit. Using the verses 1 John 2:27, Isaiah 61:1, and Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30, he shows how they both work together and share

²⁹ Hebrews 1:10-12

³⁰ Letter 2, Works on the Spirit – 2.5.2

³¹ Letter 2 Works on the Spirit – 2.10.1

their nature. St. Athanasius then goes on to discuss the Spirit's role in the common activity of the trinity. The Father creates all things through the Word in the Spirit. St. Athanasius uses Psalm 103:29-30 to show that it is clear that the Spirit is involved in the act of creating.³² St. Athanasius continues by saying the unity and indivisibility of the Trinity is the faith of the universal and Apostolic Church, using the examples of St. Paul praying to the Trinity in 2 Corinthians 13:13. According to St. Athanasius, the Trinity is the faith of the Church as said in Matthew 28:19 by the Lord's "Great Commission".

St. Athanasius thus concludes his brief summary by asking the faithful to read this letter to the faithful and to supply what is lacking. He prays that this letter will help turn the heretics back and to repent and see the error of their ways.

³² Letter 2, Works on the spirit – 2.14.1