

On the Incarnation of the Word

Modern English version · SermonIndex

Athanasius of Alexandria · c. AD 318–337

A short book by Athanasius, later bishop of Alexandria, on why the eternal Word of God became man: to renew the image of God in humanity, to defeat death and corruption, and to bring us back to the knowledge of the Father. It is the second half of a pair with his *Against the Greeks*. The date is debated, between about AD 318 and the 330s.

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Chapter 1

1.1 In the earlier treatise we gave an adequate account, choosing a few points out of many, of the error of the pagans about idols and their superstitious worship, and of how these things were first invented: out of wickedness, men devised for themselves the worship of idols. By God's grace we also said a little about the divinity of the Father's Word, about his providence and power over all things, and about how the good Father orders everything through him, so that all things are moved by him and receive life in him. Now, blessed Macarius, true lover of Christ, let us follow on in order, in keeping with the faith of true religion. Let us tell about the Word's becoming man and make known his divine appearing among us. The Jews slander it, the Greeks mock it, but we worship it. Then, because of the Word's apparent lowliness, your reverence toward him will be all the greater and fuller.

Translator's note. The Greek word of address, Makarie, means "blessed one." The older translation takes it as a man's name, Macarius, and adds "worthy of that name" to bring out the pun. Nothing else is known of such a person, and some readers take the word simply as a warm form of address ("blessed friend").

1.2 For the more he is mocked by unbelievers, the greater the witness he gives to his Godhead. What men cannot grasp and call

impossible, he shows to be possible. What men mock as unfitting, he in his goodness makes fitting. What men in their clever reasoning laugh at as merely human, he by his power shows to be divine. By his supposed lowliness, through the cross, he overthrows the illusion of the idols. And those who mock and disbelieve he wins over in an unseen way, so that they come to recognize his divinity and power.

1.3 To give this account we need to remember what was said before. Then you will be able to know why the Father's Word, so great and so exalted, appeared in a body. And you will not suppose that the Saviour wore a body because his nature required it. Rather, he is bodiless by nature and is the Word, yet out of the love for mankind and the goodness of his own Father, he appeared to us in a human body for our salvation.

1.4 As we give this account, it is fitting first to speak about the creation of the universe and about God, its Creator. In this way it can rightly be seen that its renewal was brought about by the same Word who created it in the beginning. For it will not appear contradictory if the Father worked its salvation in the very one through whom he made it.

Chapter 2

2.1 Many people have understood the making of the world and the creation of all things in different ways, and each has defined it as he pleased. Some say that everything came into being on its own, by chance, as the Epicureans do. They tell the myth, to their own refutation, that there is no providence over the universe, and in saying so they flatly contradict what is plain and visible.

Translator's note. The Greek phrase *kath' heautōn* means "against themselves." It probably means that the Epicureans' claim tells against them, since it contradicts what anyone can see. The older translation's "in their self-contempt" is a loose interpretation.

2.2 For if, as they say, everything came into being on its own without providence, then everything would have been made simply and been all alike, with no differences. Everything would have to be sun, or moon, as if it were all one body. Among human beings the whole body would have to be a hand, or an eye, or a foot. But this is not how it is. We see one thing as the sun, another as the moon, another as the earth. Likewise in human bodies we see one part as a foot, another as a hand, another as a head. Such an arrangement shows that these things did not come into being on their own. It shows that a cause came before them. From that cause we can come to know God, who arranged and made all things.

2.3 Others, among them Plato, who is highly regarded among the Greeks, say that God made the universe out of matter that already existed and had never come into being. They hold that God could

not have made anything unless matter lay ready beforehand, just as a carpenter must have the wood at hand in order to do his work.

2.4 Those who say this do not realize that they are ascribing weakness to God. If he is not himself the cause of matter, but makes the things that exist only out of matter already lying there, then he turns out to be weak. He would be unable to make anything that has been made without the matter. In the same way, it is certainly a weakness in the carpenter that he cannot make any of the things he needs without timber. On their view, if the matter had not existed, God would have made nothing. And how could he still be called maker and craftsman, if his ability to make comes from something else, that is, from the matter? If that is how things are, then on their account God is only a skilled workman and not a creator who brings things into being, since he works on matter that lies ready and is not himself the cause of that matter. He could not be called a creator at all if he does not create the matter from which the created things have come.

Translator's note. The older translation adds “out of nothing” in “Creator out of nothing.” The Greek says only that God would be a craftsman (technitēs) and not a creator “unto being” (ktistēs eis to einai), that is, one who brings things into existence.

2.5 The heretics, for their part, invent for themselves another creator of all things, other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are utterly blind, even about the very words they speak.

Translator's note. Athanasius probably has in mind groups such as the Marcionites and some Gnostic teachers, who distinguished the creator of the world from the Father of Jesus Christ.

2.6 The Lord says to the Jews, “Have you not read that the one who created them from the beginning made them male and female?” And he said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Then, pointing to the Creator, he says, “So what God has joined together, let no man separate.” How then can these people bring in a creation that is foreign to the Father? And if, as John says, including everything, “All things came to be through him, and without him not one thing came to be,” how could the creator be anyone other than the Father of Christ?

Translator's note. The Gospel passages are [Matthew 19:4-6](#) (compare [Mark 10:6-9](#)) and [John 1:3](#). Athanasius' wording of Matthew differs slightly from the standard Greek text, and I have translated his Greek as he gave it.

Scripture: [Matthew 19:4-6](#); [John 1:3](#)

Chapter 3

3.1 This is the kind of fable these people tell. But the God-inspired teaching and the faith that follows Christ condemn their empty talk

as godlessness. This teaching knows that things did not come about by chance, because they are not without providence. Nor were they made from pre-existing matter, because God is not weak. Instead, God made the whole universe, which had no existence of any kind, out of nothing, and brought it into being through the Word. So he says through Moses, "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth." And in that most useful book, the Shepherd, he says, "First of all, believe that God is one, who created and put together all things, and made them to exist out of what was not."

Translator's note. "The Shepherd" is the Shepherd of Hermas, an early Christian writing that is not in the Bible. Here Athanasius calls it a "most useful book" rather than Scripture. Later, in his Festal Letter 39 (AD 367), he listed it among books to be read by new believers, though it was not part of the canon. The quotation is from its Mandate 1.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:1](#)

3.2 Paul points to the same thing when he says, "By faith we understand that the ages were put in order by the word of God, so that what is seen has not come from things that appear."

Translator's note. [Hebrews 11:3](#). Like the church of Alexandria generally, Athanasius counted Hebrews among Paul's letters.

Scripture: [Hebrews 11:3](#)

3.3 For God is good, or rather he is the very source of goodness, and one who is good could never be jealous of anything. So, begrudging existence to no one, he made all things out of nothing through his own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. Among them, above all the things on earth, he had mercy on the human race. He saw that, by the terms of its own origin, it could not remain forever. So he gave human beings something more. He did not simply create them, as he did all the animals on earth that lack reason. He made them according to his own image, and gave them a share in the power of his own Word. In this way, having in themselves, as it were, shadows of the Word, and being made rational, they would be able to remain in blessedness and live the true life, the real life of the saints in paradise.

Translator's note. "Rational" translates *logikoi*, which is related to *Logos* (Word): humans are "word-endowed" or reasoning beings because they share in the Word.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:27](#)

3.4 But God also knew that human choice could turn either way. So he acted ahead of time and made the grace given to them secure by a law and by a place. He brought them into his own paradise and gave them a law. If they kept the grace and stayed good, they would have the life of paradise, free from grief, pain and worry, and they would also have the promise of incorruption in heaven. But if they broke the law, turned away and became wicked, they were to know that they would undergo the natural corruption of death. They

would no longer live in paradise, but from then on, outside it, they would die and remain in death and corruption.

3.5 The divine Scripture also gives warning of this. It says in the person of God: “From every tree in the garden you shall eat for food; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. But on the day you eat from it, you shall die by death.” What else could “you shall die by death” mean than this: not merely to die, but also to remain in the corruption of death?

Translator’s note. [Genesis 2:16-17](#) (Greek Old Testament). “You shall die by death” (thanatō apothaneisthe) is the Greek translators’ rendering of a Hebrew idiom that repeats the verb for emphasis (“dying you shall die”). Athanasius reads it as a death that lasts on in corruption, not a single event.

Scripture: [Genesis 2:16-17](#)

Chapter 4

4.1 Perhaps you are wondering why, when we set out to speak about the Word becoming man, we are now describing the origin of human beings. But this is not foreign to the purpose of our account.

4.2 When we speak of the Savior’s appearing among us, we must also speak of the origin of human beings. In this way you will know that our plight was the reason for his coming down, and that our transgression called out the Word’s love for mankind. So the Lord came all the way to us and appeared among men.

4.3 We were the occasion of his taking a body. For our salvation he showed such love for mankind that he was born and appeared in a human body.

4.4 This, then, is how God made man, and he wanted him to remain in incorruption. But people neglected and turned away from the contemplation of God. They reasoned out and devised evil for themselves, as was said earlier. So they incurred the sentence of death with which they had been threatened. From then on they no longer stayed as they had been made, but were being corrupted according to their own reasonings, and death ruled over them as king. For the transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural condition. Just as they had come into being out of nothing, so they were bound, as one would expect, to undergo in time corruption into non-being.

Translator’s note. The word “not” (mē) before “being” in the last clause is supplied by editors; it gives the sense “corruption into non-being.”

4.5 Human beings by nature once did not exist, and they were called into existence by the presence and the love for humanity of the Word. So it followed that when they were emptied of the knowledge of God and turned back to things that are not, they would also be emptied of existence forever. (Evil things are not, but

good things are, since they come from God who is.) And this means being dissolved and remaining in death and corruption.

4.6 Man is by nature mortal, since he was made out of nothing. But he was made like Him who is. Because of that likeness, if he had kept it by keeping God in his thoughts, he would have blunted his natural corruption and remained incorrupt. As Wisdom says: “Attention to the laws is the confirmation of incorruption.” Being incorrupt, he would from then on have lived as God. Holy Scripture points to this somewhere when it says: “I said, You are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High; but you die like men, and fall like one of the rulers.”

Translator’s note. The Wisdom quotation is Wisdom of Solomon 6:18. The second quotation is [Psalm 82:6-7](#) ([Psalm 81](#) in the Greek Old Testament), in its Greek wording.

Chapter 5

5.1 God did not only make us out of nothing. He also freely gave us a life according to God, by the grace of the Word. But men turned away from eternal things and, on the devil’s advice, turned to the things of corruption. So they became the cause of their own corruption in death. As I said before, they were by nature corruptible, but by the grace of sharing in the Word they would have escaped what is natural to them, if they had remained good.

5.2 Because the Word was with them, even their natural corruption did not come near them. Wisdom says the same: “God created man for incorruption, and as an image of His own eternity; but through the devil’s envy death entered into the world.” When this happened, men began to die. From then on corruption flourished against them and had more than its natural power over the whole race. This was because it also had on its side against them the threat God had made over the transgression of the commandment.

5.3 Even in their wrongdoing, men did not stay within fixed limits. Little by little they pushed further, and at last went beyond all measure. At the beginning they were the inventors of wickedness and brought death and corruption on themselves. Later they turned to injustice and went beyond every kind of lawlessness. They did not stop at one evil, but devised one new evil after another, and became insatiable in sinning.

5.4 There were adulteries and thefts everywhere, and the whole earth was full of murders and robberies. No one cared about the law when it came to corruption and injustice. Every kind of evil was practiced, by individuals and by whole groups together. City made war on city, and nation rose against nation. The entire inhabited world was torn apart by factions and battles, each one striving to outdo the others in lawlessness.

| Scripture: [Matthew 24:7](#)

5.5 Even sins against nature were not far from them. As the Apostle, Christ's witness, said: "Their women exchanged the natural use for that which is against nature. In the same way the men also, leaving the natural use of the woman, were inflamed in their desire for one another, men committing shameless acts with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error."

| Scripture: [Romans 1:26-27](#)

Chapter 6

6.1 For these reasons death had gained still more power, and corruption remained upon human beings. So the human race was being destroyed. Man, who was rational and made in the image, was disappearing, and the work that God had made was being lost.

6.2 For death, as I said before, now had power over us by law. It was impossible to escape that law, because God had laid it down on account of the transgression. And what was happening was truly both absurd and unfitting.

6.3 First, it was absurd that God, having spoken, should prove false. He had given the law that man would die the death if he broke the commandment. So it would be absurd if, after the transgression, man did not die and God's word were broken. God would not be truthful if, after he had said that we would die, man did not die.

| Scripture: [Genesis 2:17](#)

6.4 It was also unfitting that creatures who had once been made rational and had shared in his Word should be lost, and should turn back again into non-existence through corruption.

6.5 For it was not worthy of God's goodness that the things he had made should be destroyed because of the deception the devil practiced on human beings.

6.6 Above all, it was most unfitting that God's craftsmanship in human beings should be wiped out, whether through their own carelessness or through the deception of demons.

6.7 So, with rational creatures being corrupted and such works being lost, what ought God to do, being good? Should he let corruption have power over them and death rule them? Then what was the point of their being made in the first place? It would have been better for them not to have been made than, once made, to be neglected and destroyed.

6.8 For such neglect shows weakness rather than goodness in God, if after making his own work he looks on while it is destroyed. It would show weakness more than if he had never made man at the

beginning.

6.9 If he had not made them, there would have been no one to accuse him of weakness. But since he had made them and brought them into being, it would be most absurd for his works to be destroyed, and especially before the eyes of their Maker.

6.10 So it was necessary not to let human beings be swept away by corruption, because that would be unfitting and unworthy of God's goodness.

Chapter 7

7.1 But just as this had to happen, so on the other side what is right for God stands against it: God must be seen to be truthful in the law he gave about death. For it would have been absurd for God, the Father of truth, to appear a liar for the sake of our benefit and survival.

7.2 So what ought to happen, or what ought God to do about this? Should he demand repentance from human beings for the transgression? One might say that this would be worthy of God, arguing that just as they fell into corruption through the transgression, so through repentance they might return to incorruption.

7.3 But repentance would not preserve what is right for God. He would still be untruthful if death did not keep its hold on human beings. Nor does repentance call people back from what is natural to them; it only makes them stop sinning.

7.4 If there had been only a misdeed and no corruption following it, repentance would have been fine. But once the transgression had come first, human beings were held fast in natural corruption, and they were deprived of the grace of being in the image. What else needed to happen? What was needed for such grace and such a recall, other than the Word of God, who in the beginning had made everything out of nothing?

7.5 For it belonged to him once more to bring the corruptible into incorruption, and to uphold, on behalf of all, what was due to the Father. For he is the Word of the Father and above all things. So he alone was able to create all things anew, and he alone was fit to suffer on behalf of all and to act as ambassador for all before the Father.

Chapter 8

8.1 For this reason the incorporeal, incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes into our land, though he was not far away before. For no part of creation was ever left empty of him; he fills

all things in every place, while remaining with his own Father. But now he comes, stooping down in his love for humanity and showing himself to us.

8.2 He saw the rational race perishing, and death reigning over them through corruption. He saw that the threat attached to the transgression kept corruption in force against us, and that it would be out of place for the law to be set aside before it was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things he had made were disappearing. He saw the surpassing wickedness of men, how little by little they had increased it against themselves until it was unbearable. And he saw that all men were liable to death. So he had mercy on our race and pity on our weakness; he stooped down to our corruption and could not bear death's rule over us. He would not let what had been made perish, nor let the Father's work among men come to nothing. So he takes for himself a body, and that body is not different from ours.

8.3 For he did not simply want to be in a body, nor did he want merely to appear. If he had wanted only to appear, he could have made his divine appearing by some other, better means. But he takes what is ours, and not just in any way: he takes it from a pure and undefiled virgin who had not known a man, a body clean and truly untouched by union with men. For he himself is mighty and the Maker of all things. In the Virgin he prepares the body as a temple for himself and makes it his own, as an instrument, making himself known in it and living in it.

8.4 In this way he took from us a body like ours. Because all were liable to the corruption of death, he handed it over to death in place of all and offered it to the Father. He did this out of love for humanity. He did it, first, so that, since all had died in him, the law that brought corruption on human beings might be dissolved. For its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and it no longer had any ground against people like him. Second, he did it so that he might turn back to incorruption those who had turned back to corruption, and give them life out of death. He did this by making the body his own and by the grace of the resurrection, wiping out death from them as fire burns up straw.

| Scripture: [2 Corinthians 5:14](#)

Chapter 9

9.1 The Word saw that the corruption of human beings could not be undone in any other way than by death itself. But it was not possible for the Word to die, since he is immortal and the Son of the Father. For this reason he takes for himself a body that can die. This body would share in the Word who is over all, and so be enough to die in place of all. Because the Word dwelt in it, it would stay incorruptible, and from then on corruption would cease for

everyone through the grace of the resurrection. So he offered to death the body he had taken for himself, as an offering and sacrifice free from every blemish. By offering this equivalent, he at once removed death from all who are like him.

9.2 For the Word of God is above all. So it was fitting that he offer his own temple and bodily instrument as a life given in exchange for all, and so pay in his death what was owed. In this way the incorruptible Son of God, united with all through a body like theirs, fittingly clothed all with incorruption by the promise of the resurrection. For the corruption that comes through death no longer has any ground against men, because the Word dwells among them through his one body.

Scripture: [1 Timothy 2:6](#); [1 Corinthians 15:53](#)

9.3 Think of a great king who enters a great city and lives in one of its houses. Such a city is counted worthy of great honor. No enemy or bandit attacks and destroys it any more; instead it is thought worthy of every care, because the king lives in one of its houses. So it has been with the King of all.

9.4 When he came to our country and made his home in one body among others like it, every plot the enemies had against humanity came to an end. The corruption of death, which had long been strong against people, was wiped out. The human race would have been destroyed if the Son of God, the Master and Savior of all, had not come to put an end to death.

Translator's note. The Greek “τέλος” can mean “end” or “goal.” The older English “to meet the end of death” is unclear. The sense here is that he came to bring death to its end.

Chapter 10

10.0 Truly, this great work is especially fitting to the goodness of God.

10.1 Suppose a king builds a house or a city, and the inhabitants neglect it, so that bandits attack it. The king does not overlook it at all. He defends it as his own work and rescues it. He is looking not at the neglect of the people living there but at what is fitting for himself. Much more, then, did God the Word, the Word of the all-good Father, refuse to overlook the human race. That race was made through him and was sliding into corruption. He wiped out the death that had come upon them by offering his own body. He corrected their neglect by his own teaching. He set right everything that concerned human beings by his own power.

10.2 Anyone who reads the writings of the Savior's own men, who spoke about God, can be assured of this. They say: “For the love of Christ constrains us, since we have judged this: that if one died for all, then all died. And he died for all, so that we would no longer live

for ourselves, but for the one who died for us and rose from the dead,” our Lord Jesus Christ. And again: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Translator’s note. The quotations are from [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](#) and [Hebrews 2:9](#). In the first, Athanasius’s wording differs slightly from the standard text of 2 Corinthians: he has “we” and “us” where Paul has “those who live” and “them,” and “rose from the dead” where Paul has “was raised.” The words “our Lord Jesus Christ” are Athanasius’s own, added after the quotation to name the one meant.

Scripture: [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](#); [Hebrews 2:9](#)

10.3 Then the writer also shows why no one other than God the Word himself had to become man. He says: “For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the founder of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” By this he means that no one else could bring human beings back from the corruption that had come upon them except the Word of God, who had also made them in the beginning.

Translator’s note. The quotation is from [Hebrews 2:10](#). The Greek word “ἀρχηγός” can mean “founder,” “leader” or “pioneer.”

Scripture: [Hebrews 2:10](#)

10.4 The writers also show that the Word took a body for himself in order to offer a sacrifice on behalf of bodies like his own. They say: “Since, then, the children share in blood and flesh, he himself likewise took part in the same, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and set free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Translator’s note. The quotation is from [Hebrews 2:14-15](#).

Scripture: [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)

10.5 By the sacrifice of his own body he put an end to the law that stood against us. He also made a fresh beginning of life for us by giving us the hope of resurrection. Since death came to rule over human beings through human beings, the reverse has now come about through the Word of God becoming man: the abolishing of death and the resurrection of life. As the Christ-bearing man says: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive,” and what follows. So we no longer die as people under condemnation. Instead, as people who are being raised, we wait for the resurrection of all together. God, who brought it about and gave it freely, will show it in its own times.

Translator’s note. “Will show it in its own times” borrows the wording of [1 Timothy 6:15](#), where it refers to Christ’s appearing.

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:21-22](#); [1 Timothy 6:15](#)

10.6 This, then, is the first reason for the Savior becoming man. But from the following points as well, one can see that it was fitting for him to make his gracious coming to us.

Chapter 11

11.1 God has power over all things. When he made the human race through his own Word, he also saw the weakness of their nature. It was not able, on its own, to know the Maker or to form any idea of God at all. He is uncreated, while they had been made out of nothing. He is without a body, while human beings had been formed here below, in a body. In every way, created things fall far short of grasping and knowing the one who made them. So God took pity on the human race, since he is good. He did not leave them without knowledge of himself, so that even their very existence would not be useless to them.

11.2 For what good is it to created beings if they do not know their own Maker? And how could they be rational if they did not know the Word of the Father, in whom they came into being? They would be no different from the animals without reason if they knew nothing beyond earthly things. And why would God have made them at all, if he did not want to be known by them?

Translator's note. In Greek, "rational" (logikoi) comes from the same root as "Word" (Logos). For Athanasius, to be rational is to share in the Word, which is why the older English adds "(and Reason)."

11.3 So that this would not happen, God, being good, gives them a share in his own image, our Lord Jesus Christ. He makes them according to his own image and likeness. He did this so that by such grace they might grasp the image, that is, the Word of the Father, and through him be able to form an idea of the Father himself. Then, knowing their Maker, they might live the happy and truly blessed life.

Translator's note. "According to his own image and likeness" echoes [Genesis 1:26](#).

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26](#)

11.4 But human beings, in their folly, once again made light even of the grace given them. They turned away from God so far, and so clouded their own souls, that they not only forgot their idea of God but also invented one thing after another in its place. They shaped idols for themselves instead of the truth. They honored things that do not exist above the God who does exist, serving the creation instead of the Creator. Worst of all, they transferred the honor due to God to wood and stones, to every kind of material, and to human beings. And they did even more than this, as we said earlier.

Translator's note. "Serving the creation instead of the Creator" echoes

| [Romans 1:25](#).

| Scripture: [Romans 1:25](#)

11.5 Their impiety went so far that they came to worship demons and proclaimed them gods, fulfilling their desires. As was said before, they offered sacrifices of irrational animals and slaughtered human beings as offerings due to the demons. In this way they bound themselves all the more tightly by the demons' frenzies.

| *Translator's note.* "Their desires" could mean either the people's own desires or the demons' desires. The Greek does not make clear which.

11.6 For this reason magic was taught among them, oracles in one place after another led people astray, and everyone attributed the causes of their birth and existence to the stars and to everything in the sky. They gave no thought to anything beyond what could be seen.

11.7 In short, everything was full of ungodliness and lawlessness, and God alone, and his Word, went unknown. Yet God had not hidden himself out of sight from human beings, nor given them knowledge of himself in only one way. He had spread that knowledge out for them in many different ways and through many means.

Chapter 12

12.1 The grace of being made in the image was by itself enough to let people know God the Word, and through him the Father. But God knew human weakness and made provision even for their carelessness. If they would not take the trouble to know God by themselves, they could still, through the works of creation, avoid being ignorant of their Maker.

12.2 But human carelessness gradually slid down to worse things. So once again God made provision for this weakness of theirs. He sent a law and prophets, men they knew, so that even if they were unwilling to look up to heaven and know the Maker, they could be taught by those close at hand. For people can learn about higher things more directly from other people.

12.3 So they could have looked up at the vastness of heaven, considered the harmony of creation, and known its Ruler, the Word of the Father. By his providence over all things he makes the Father known to all, and he moves all things for this purpose, that through him everyone may know God.

12.4 Or if that was too much trouble for them, they could at least have met with the holy men, and through them learned about God, the Maker of all things and the Father of Christ. They could have learned that the worship of idols is godlessness and full of every kind of impiety.

12.5 Or, by coming to know the law, they could have stopped all lawlessness and lived a virtuous life. For the law was not for the Jews alone, and the prophets were not sent for them alone. They were sent to the Jews and persecuted by the Jews, but for the whole world they were a holy school of the knowledge of God and of the conduct of the soul.

12.6 God's goodness and love for humanity were that great. Even so, people were overcome by the pleasures of the moment and by the illusions and deceptions of demons, and they did not lift up their heads toward the truth. Instead they loaded themselves with still more evils and sins, until they no longer seemed rational but, judging by their behavior, were thought to be without reason.

Chapter 13

13.1 Human beings had thus become irrational, and demonic deception was casting its shadow everywhere and hiding the knowledge of the true God. What, then, was God to do? Was he to stay silent about so great a matter, let people be led astray by demons, and let them not know him?

13.2 And what was the point of man being made in God's image from the beginning? It would have been better for him simply to be made without reason, like the animals, than to be made rational and then live the life of the animals.

Translator's note. The Greek word for "without reason" (alogos) is the opposite of "rational" (logikos), and both are built on logos, "reason" or "word." Earlier in the book (section 3), Athanasius says humans were made rational by being given a share in the Word (Logos). So to become "without reason" is, for him, to lose that share.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:27](#)

13.3 And what need was there at all for him to receive any notion of God from the beginning? If he is not worthy to receive it even now, it should not have been given to him at the beginning either.

13.4 What benefit is it to God who made them, or what glory would it be to him, if the people he made do not worship him, but think that others made them? For then God would be found to have made them for others and not for himself.

13.5 Think again of a human king. He does not let the lands he has founded be handed over to serve others, or go over to other rulers. He reminds them by letters, and often sends messages to them through friends. If need be, he finally comes himself and puts them to shame by his presence. He does all this only so that they will not serve others and his work will not be wasted.

13.6 Will God not much more spare his own creatures, so that they are not led away from him to serve things that do not exist? This is

especially so because such error becomes for them a cause of ruin and destruction, and it was not right that those who had once shared in God's image should perish.

13.7 What then was God to do? What had to happen, if not to renew once more what was made after the image, so that through it people might again be able to know him? But how could this have happened, unless the very Image of God, our Savior Jesus Christ, came among us? It could not be done through human beings, since they themselves were only made after the image. Nor could it be done through angels, since they are not images either. So the Word of God came in his own person, so that, being the Image of the Father, he could re-create the man made after the image.

Translator's note. The Greek here reads "tisai," which is probably a copying error. Standard editions read "anaktisai" ("re-create"), which the older translation follows ("create afresh").

13.8 But again, this could not have happened unless death and corruption were done away with.

13.9 So it was fitting that he took a mortal body, so that death might be completely destroyed in it, and people made after the image might be renewed again. There was no one else for this need but the Image of the Father.

Chapter 14

14.1 Consider a likeness painted on a wooden panel, which has been blotted out by dirt from outside. The person whose likeness it is must come again, so that the portrait can be renewed on the same material. For the sake of his portrait, the panel it was painted on is not thrown away, but the likeness is re-drawn on it.

Translator's note. The Greek text given here breaks off in the middle of a word (ana-ty-). Standard editions complete it as "anatypoutai," "is traced out again," which is how the last clause is translated.

14.2 In the same way the all-holy Son of the Father, who is the Image of the Father, came to our region to renew the man made after himself, and to find him, as one who was lost, through the forgiveness of sins. As he himself says in the Gospels: "I came to find and to save the lost." So he also said to his own people, "Unless someone is born again." He did not mean birth from a woman, as they supposed. He meant the soul being born again and re-created according to the image.

Translator's note. "According to the image" echoes [Genesis 1:26-27](#), where man is made "according to the image" of God.

Scripture: [Luke 19:10](#); [John 3:3-4](#)

14.3 But idol-madness and godlessness held the world, and the knowledge of God was hidden. Whose task was it to teach the world

about the Father? Someone might say, a human being's. But it was not possible for human beings to go through the whole world under the sun. They were not strong enough by nature to run so far. They could not make themselves believable on this matter. And they were not able by themselves to stand against the deceit and illusions of the demons.

14.4 All people were struck and troubled in soul by demonic deceit and the emptiness of idols. How then could human beings win over the soul and mind of others, when they cannot even see another person's soul and mind? And how can anyone re-educate what he cannot see?

14.5 But perhaps someone will say that creation was enough. If creation had been enough, such great evils would not have happened. Creation was there, and yet people were still wallowing in the same error about God.

14.6 So who was needed again but the Word of God, who sees both soul and mind, who moves everything in creation, and who makes the Father known through it? He taught about the Father through his own providence and ordering of the universe, so it was for him to renew that same teaching.

Translator's note. The Greek as given here breaks off at "didas-." The word is almost certainly didaskontos, "teaching," as the older English has it.

14.7 How, then, could this be done? Perhaps someone will say that it was possible to use the same means as before, so that he might again show the truth about him through the works of creation. But that was no longer safe. No, indeed. People had overlooked it before, and now their eyes were no longer turned upward but downward.

Translator's note. "About him" in the Greek could mean the Father, as the older translation takes it, or the Word himself.

14.8 So, wanting to help people, he fittingly came to stay among them as a man. He took for himself a body like theirs and taught them from below, that is, through the works of the body. He did this so that those who had refused to know him from his care and rule over all things might at least come to know, from the works of his own body, the Word of God who is in the body, and through him the Father.

Translator's note. The Greek has no verb in "from below, that is, through the works of the body." "Taught" is supplied, as in the older translation.

Chapter 15

15.1 A good teacher cares for his own students. When some of them cannot learn from higher matters, he comes down to their level and teaches them by simpler means. So it was with the Word

of God. Paul says the same: “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through its wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of the message preached.”

| *Translator’s note.* The quotation is 1 Corinthians 1:21.

| *Scripture:* [1 Corinthians 1:21](#)

15.2 People had turned away from looking to God. Their eyes were turned downward, as if they were sunk in the depths. They searched for God in created things and in what the senses can perceive, and they invented gods for themselves out of mortal men and demons. For this reason the Word of God, the Savior of all, who loves mankind, took a body for himself. He lived as a man among men and reached out to the senses of all people. He did this so that those who imagined that God is in bodily things might learn the truth from what the Lord does through the works of his body, and through him might reason their way to the Father.

| *Translator’s note.* The verb rendered “reached out to” (*proslambanei*) can mean “take to oneself,” “lay hold of,” or “receive”; the older translation renders it “meets ... half-way.”

15.3 They were human, and all their thinking was human. So wherever they turned their senses, they found themselves reached there and taught the truth from every side.

15.4 If they were struck with awe at creation, they saw it confessing Christ as Lord. If their minds were already inclined to men, so that they thought them gods, then, when they compared them with the works of the Savior, the Savior alone appeared among men as the Son of God. For nothing like the works of the Word of God had been done by those others.

| *Scripture:* [Philippians 2:11](#)

15.5 If they were already inclined to demons, they saw the demons driven out by the Lord. So they came to know that this one alone is the Word of God, and that the demons are not gods.

| *Translator’s note.* The older translation says the demons were cast out “by the Word” and adds that he “was God.” The Greek says “by the Lord” and “that this one alone is the Word of God.”

15.6 If their minds were already held fast by the dead, so that they worshiped heroes and the gods the poets speak of, then, seeing the Savior’s resurrection, they would admit that those were false. They would admit that the Lord alone is true, the Word of the Father, who is lord even of death.

15.7 For this reason He was born, appeared as a man, died and rose again. By His own works He dulled and overshadowed the works of all the men who had ever lived. He did this so that, wherever people had been carried away, He could lead them back

up from there and teach them about His own true Father. As He Himself says, “I came to save and to find what was lost.”

Translator’s note. Compare [Luke 19:10](#), “to seek and to save what was lost.” Athanasius quotes loosely, giving “to save and to find.”

Scripture: [Luke 19:10](#)

Chapter 16

16.1 For once human minds had fallen to things perceived by the senses, the Word submitted to appearing through a body. He did this to bring people over to Himself as a man, and to turn their senses toward Himself. Then, as they saw Him as a man, He would persuade them by the works He did that He is not only a man but also God, and the Word and Wisdom of the true God.

Translator’s note. The older translation says the Word “disguised Himself.” That is an interpretation. The Greek says more simply that He “submitted himself to appear through a body.”

16.2 Paul wanted to point to this when he said, “rooted and grounded in love, so that you may have strength to grasp, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.”

Translator’s note. [Ephesians 3:17-19](#).

Scripture: [Ephesians 3:17-19](#)

16.3 For the Word spread Himself out everywhere, above and below, in depth and in breadth: above, in creation; below, in becoming man; in the depth, in Hades; in the breadth, in the world. So everything has been filled with the knowledge of God.

Translator’s note. Where the older translation says the Word was “revealing Himself” everywhere, the Greek says He “spread Himself out” or “unfolded Himself.” This picks up the four dimensions in the Ephesians passage just quoted.

Scripture: [Isaiah 11:9](#)

16.4 For this reason, when He came, He did not immediately complete the sacrifice on behalf of all by giving His body over to death and raising it again, for by doing that He would have made Himself invisible. Instead, He made Himself plainly visible through the body by remaining in it, doing such works and giving such signs as made Him known no longer as a man, but as God the Word.

Translator’s note. The older translation’s “visible enough” adds the word “enough.” The Greek says simply that He made Himself visible through the body by remaining in it.

16.5 For the Saviour showed His love for mankind in two ways through becoming man. He removed death from us and made us

new. And though He was unseen and invisible, He made Himself plain by His works and made Himself known as the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the universe.

Chapter 17

17.1 For He was not shut up inside the body. Nor was He present in the body while absent everywhere else. Nor did He move the body while the rest of the universe was left empty of His activity and care. Rather, and this is most astonishing, being the Word, He was not contained by anything; instead, He Himself contained all things. Just as, being in all creation, He is outside the whole in His being, yet is in all things by His powers, ordering everything, extending His care over all things and in all things, giving life to each thing and to all together, enclosing the whole without being enclosed, but being wholly and in every respect in His Father alone —

17.2 so also, while in the human body and Himself giving it life, He was fittingly giving life to the whole universe as well. He was within all things, and yet He was outside the whole. And though He was known from the body through His works, He was not hidden from the working of the universe either.

17.3 Now it is the work of the soul to contemplate in its thoughts even things outside its own body, but not to act outside its own body or to move, by its presence, things that are far from it. A man who thinks about distant things never thereby moves or transports them. If someone sits in his own house and reasons about the heavens, he does not thereby move the sun or turn the sky around. He sees them moving and existing, but he has no power to act on them.

17.4 The Word of God in the man was not like that. He was not bound to the body; rather He Himself held it in control. So He was in the body, and He was in all things, and He was outside all things that exist, and He rested in the Father alone.

17.5 And this was the wonder: He lived as a man, He gave life to all things as the Word, and He was with the Father as the Son. So when the Virgin gave birth, He Himself suffered nothing, and by being in a body He was not defiled. On the contrary, He made the body holy as well.

Translator's note. The older translation adds "any change" and "[His glory] dulled." The Greek says only that He Himself did not suffer when the Virgin gave birth, nor was He defiled by being in a body.

17.6 For He does not share in the nature of all things by being in them; instead, all things are given life and fed by Him.

17.7 Consider the sun, which He made and which we see travelling across the sky. It is not defiled when it touches bodies on earth, and

the darkness does not make it disappear. Instead it lights them and cleans them. How much less, then, was the all-holy Word of God, the Maker and Lord of the sun, defiled when He was made known in a body! Instead, being incorruptible, He gave life to the body, which was mortal, and made it clean. For it says, “He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.”

Translator’s note. The closing words echo [1 Peter 2:22](#) (and [Isaiah 53:9](#)). Athanasius says only “it says,” without naming a source.

Scripture: [1 Peter 2:22](#); [Isaiah 53:9](#)

Chapter 18

18.1 So when the sacred writers speak of Him eating, drinking and being born, understand this: the body, as a body, was born and was fed with food suited to it. But God the Word Himself, who was united with the body while ordering all things, made Himself known by the works He did in the body, not as a man but as God the Word. These things are said about Him because the body that ate, was born and suffered belonged to no one else but the Lord. And since He had become man, it was fitting that these things be said of Him as of a man, so that He would be shown to have a body in truth and not in appearance only.

Translator’s note. The Greek word here, *theologoi* (“those who speak of God”), refers to the writers of Scripture, not to theologians in the modern sense.

18.2 But just as He was recognized as bodily present from these things, so by the works He did through the body He made Himself known as the Son of God. For this reason He cried out to the unbelieving Jews: “If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe me, believe my works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.”

Translator’s note. [John 10:37-38](#).

Scripture: [John 10:37-38](#)

18.3 For though He is invisible, He is known by the works of creation. In the same way, now that He has become man and is not seen as God in the body, it can be known from His works that the one doing them is not a man, but the Power and Word of God.

Scripture: [Romans 1:20](#)

18.4 For He gave orders to the demons and they were driven out. That is not a human work, but a divine one. Or who could watch Him healing the diseases to which the human race is subject, and still think Him a man and not God? He cleansed lepers, made the lame walk, opened the ears of the deaf, and gave sight to the blind. In short, He drove every disease and every sickness away from

people. From these works even the most casual observer could see His divinity. Who could see Him give back what was missing to those whose birth had left them lacking, and open the eyes of the man born blind, and not realize that the birth of human beings was under His control, and that He was its Maker and Creator? The one who gives back what a man did not receive at birth must clearly be Lord of human birth as well.

Translator's note. Compare [Matthew 11:5](#) and [4:23](#) for the list of healings. The man born blind is in [John 9](#).

Scripture: [Matthew 11:5](#); [Matthew 4:23](#); [John 9:1](#)

18.5 For this reason, when He first came down to us, He formed His body for Himself from a virgin. In this way He gave everyone no small sign of His divinity: the One who formed this body is also the Maker of all the others. For who could see a body come from a virgin alone, without a man, and not conclude that the One who appears in it is the Maker and Lord of other bodies too?

18.6 Or who could see the nature of water changed and turned into wine, and not understand that the one who did this is Lord and Creator of the nature of all water? For this reason also He stepped onto the sea as its master and walked on it as on dry land, giving those who saw it a sign of His lordship over all things. And when He fed so great a crowd from so little, supplying abundance Himself where there was nothing, so that five thousand were filled from five loaves and as much again was left over, what else did He make known but that He is the Lord whose providence governs all things?

Translator's note. Compare [John 2:1-11](#) (water into wine), [Matthew 14:13-21](#) (the feeding of the five thousand) and [Matthew 14:22-33](#) (walking on the sea).

Scripture: [John 2:9](#); [Matthew 14:25](#); [Matthew 14:20-21](#)

Chapter 19

19.1 The Saviour thought it good to do all these things for this reason. Men had not known His providence in all things, and had not perceived His divinity through creation. So at least from the works of His body they might look up again and, through Him, gain an idea of the knowledge of the Father. From particular acts they would reason out, as I said before, His providence over the whole.

19.2 For who could see His authority over demons, or see the demons confess that He is their Lord, and still be doubtful in his mind whether this is the Son of God, and His Wisdom and His Power?

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:24](#)

19.3 He even made creation itself break its silence. The marvel is that at His death, or rather at the very trophy of victory over death,

the cross, all creation confessed that the One who was known in the body and suffered there was not merely a man, but the Son of God and Saviour of all. The sun turned away, the earth shook, the mountains were split, and all were struck with fear. These things showed that Christ on the cross was God, and that all creation was His servant, bearing witness by its fear to the presence of its Master.

Translator's note. Compare [Matthew 27:45](#), 51-54 and [Luke 23:44-45](#), which speak of darkness, an earthquake and rocks being split; Athanasius says "mountains" where Matthew has "rocks."

Scripture: [Matthew 27:45](#); [Matthew 27:51](#)

19.4 In this way, then, God the Word showed himself to people through his works. It is fitting next to tell of the end of his life and sojourn in the body, and to describe what the death of his body was like. This is especially so because it is the main point of our faith, and everyone without exception talks about it constantly. You will then see that from this also, no less than from the rest, Christ is known to be God and the Son of God.

Chapter 20

20.1 We have now said in part, as far as we were able and as far as we could understand it, why he appeared in a body. No one else could change the corruptible into incorruption except the Savior himself, who in the beginning also made all things out of nothing. No one else could re-create in human beings what is made according to the image, except the Image of the Father. No one else could make the mortal immortal, except our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Life itself. And no one else could teach about the Father and tear down the worship of idols, except the Word who orders all things and who alone is the true, only-begotten Son of the Father.

Translator's note. The Greek says "what is according to the image" (to kat' eikona), and the sentence is rendered that way here.

20.2 But the debt owed by all still had to be paid. As I said before, all owed it to die, and that was the main reason he came among us. So, after the proofs of his deity from his works, he went on to offer the sacrifice on behalf of all. He handed over his own temple to death in place of all. By this he would set everyone free from guilt for the old transgression, and also show himself stronger than death, displaying his own body incorruptible as the firstfruits of the resurrection of all.

Translator's note. "His own temple" means his body. Athanasius uses this image for Christ's body several times in the book. Compare [John 2:21](#), where Jesus "was speaking about the temple of his body."

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:20](#)

20.3 Do not be surprised that we often say the same things about

the same subjects. We are speaking of God's good pleasure, so we explain the same thought in several ways. We do not want to seem to leave something out and be blamed for speaking inadequately. It is better to be criticized for repeating ourselves than to omit something that ought to be written down.

20.4 Now the body shared the common nature of all, for it was a human body. It was formed by a new kind of miracle, from a virgin alone. Even so, it was mortal, and therefore it died, as bodies like it do. But because the Word had come upon it, it no longer decayed according to its own nature. Because the Word of God dwelt in it, it was beyond the reach of corruption.

20.5 So two astonishing things happened at once. The death of all was fulfilled in the Lord's body, and death and corruption were wiped out because of the Word who was with that body. Death was needed, and death had to be suffered on behalf of all, so that the debt owed by all might be paid.

20.6 So, as I said before, the Word could not die, because he was immortal. He therefore took for himself a body that could die. He did this to offer it as his own in place of all. Because he had come into that body, its suffering on behalf of all was his own suffering. In this way he would put an end to the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by fear of death.

Translator's note. The last part is taken almost word for word from [Hebrews 2:14-15](#) and worked into Athanasius's own sentence. Only the words "through death" are missing.

Scripture: [Hebrews 2:14-15](#)

Chapter 21

21.1 Indeed, now that the common Savior of all has died for us, we who believe in Christ no longer die the death that the law threatened, as people did before. That sentence has ended. Corruption has been stopped and wiped out by the grace of the resurrection. So now we are dissolved only because our bodies are mortal, at the time God has set for each of us, so that we may gain a better resurrection.

Translator's note. "A better resurrection" echoes [Hebrews 11:35](#).

Scripture: [Hebrews 11:35](#)

21.2 We are like seeds thrown into the ground. We do not perish when we are dissolved, but as if sown, we will rise again, since death has been brought to nothing by the grace of the Savior. This is why the blessed Paul, who became a guarantor of the resurrection for all, says: "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this mortal puts on immortality, then the word that is written will

come to pass: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your sting?'"

Translator's note. This is 1 Corinthians 15:53-55 as it stands in Athanasius's text, which lacks Paul's "when this corruptible puts on incorruption" and his question "Where, O death, is your victory?"

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:53-55](#)

21.3 Someone might say: "If it was necessary for him to give his body to death in place of all, why did he not lay it down privately, as a man might? Why did he go as far as being crucified? It would have been more fitting to lay his body aside with honor than to endure a death like this, with such shame."

21.4 But see whether this objection is not merely human. What the Savior did is truly divine, and for many reasons worthy of his deity. First, the death that comes to human beings comes because of the weakness of their nature. They cannot last for long, so they break down in time. That is why illnesses come upon them, and they grow weak and die. But the Lord is not weak. He is the Power of God, the Word of God, and Life itself.

21.5 If he had laid aside his body somewhere in private, on a bed, as people usually do, he too would have been thought to suffer this because of the weakness of his nature, and to have nothing more than other men. But he was Life and the Word of God, and the death on behalf of all had to take place. So, because he was life and power, the body was kept strong in him.

21.6 But since death had to take place, he did not take the occasion for it from himself. He received it from others, so that he could complete the sacrifice. For it was not right that the Lord, who healed the diseases of others, should fall sick himself. Nor was it right for that body to lose its strength, when in it he strengthened the weaknesses of others.

21.7 Why then did he not prevent death, as he prevented sickness? Because he had the body for this very purpose. It was unfitting for him to prevent death, so that the resurrection would not be hindered. But it was again unfitting for sickness to come before his death, so that it would not be thought a weakness of the One who was in the body. Did he not hunger, then? Yes, he hungered, because hunger belongs to the body. But he did not perish from hunger, because of the Lord who wore that body. So even though he died as the ransom for all, he did not see corruption. For his body rose again whole, since it belonged to no one else but to Life itself.

Translator's note. "Did not see corruption" echoes the wording of [Psalm 16:10](#) as it is used in [Acts 2:27](#), 2:31 and 13:35-37.

Scripture: [1 Timothy 2:6](#); [Acts 2:31](#)

Chapter 22

22.1 “But,” someone might say, “he should have hidden from the plot of the Jews, so as to keep his body immortal altogether.” Let such a person hear that this too was unfitting for the Lord. The Word of God, being Life, could not properly give death to his own body from himself. In the same way it was not suitable for him to run away from the death that others gave. Rather, he should pursue it until he had destroyed it. So it was reasonable that he neither laid his body aside by himself, nor fled from the Jews when they plotted against him.

22.2 This did not show weakness in the Word. On the contrary, it made him known as Savior and Life. He waited for death in order to destroy it, and he hurried to complete the death offered to him for the salvation of all.

22.3 And besides, the Savior came to complete not his own death but the death of men. So he did not lay aside his body by a death of his own, for being Life he had none. He received the death that came from men, so that he might completely abolish it when it came against him in his own body.

22.4 Then there is this too, from which one can reasonably see why the Lord’s body met such an end. The Lord was especially concerned about the resurrection of the body, which he was going to bring about. This was to be the trophy of victory over death. He would show it to all and convince all that he had removed corruption, and that from then on their bodies would be incorruptible. As a pledge and a sign of the resurrection that will come to all, he kept his own body incorrupt.

22.5 Again, suppose the body had been sick, and the Word had been separated from it in the sight of all. It would have been unfitting for the one who healed the diseases of others to overlook his own instrument wasting away in sickness. How would people have believed that he drove out the weaknesses of others, if his own temple was weak in him? Either he would have been laughed at as unable to drive out sickness, or, if he was able but did not do it, he would have been thought unloving toward others too.

Chapter 23

23.1 Suppose instead that he had hidden his body away, without any sickness or pain, in private and by himself, in a corner, or in a desert place, or in a house, or anywhere at all. Then suppose he had suddenly appeared again and said that he had been raised from the dead. Everyone would have thought he was telling tales. His words about the resurrection would have been believed much less, since there would have been no one at all to bear witness to his death. But death must come before resurrection, for there can be no

resurrection unless death comes first. So if the death of his body had taken place somewhere in secret, with the death not seen and not before witnesses, his resurrection too would have been unseen and without witnesses.

Translator's note. "In a corner" is the Greek phrase also used in [Acts 26:26](#), there meaning something done in secret.

23.2 Or why, when He had risen, did He proclaim the resurrection, yet cause His death to happen out of sight? Or why did He drive out demons in the sight of all, make the man blind from birth see, and change the water into wine, so that through these things He would be believed to be the Word of God? Why, then, would He not show His mortal body to be incorruptible in the sight of all, so that He would be believed to be Himself the Life?

Translator's note. The Greek text printed here reads "you drove out" (second person). This seems to be a slip for "he drove out," and the translation follows the sense.

Scripture: [John 9:1](#); [John 2:9](#)

23.3 How could His disciples have spoken boldly about the resurrection if they could not say that He had first died? And how could they have been believed, when they said that death came first and then the resurrection, unless the people before whom they spoke so boldly could themselves witness to His death? Even as it was, His death and resurrection took place in the sight of everyone, and still the Pharisees of that time would not believe. They even forced those who had seen the resurrection to deny it. If these things had happened in secret, surely they would have thought up many more excuses for unbelief.

Scripture: [Matthew 28:12-15](#)

23.4 And how could the end of death, and the victory over it, have been shown, unless He had called death out before the eyes of all and proved it dead, now emptied of its power by the incorruption of His body?

Chapter 24

24.1 We must also answer in advance what others might say. Someone may perhaps object: "If His death had to take place in the sight of all, and with witnesses, so that the account of His resurrection would be believed, then He should at least have devised some glorious death for Himself, if only to avoid the shame of the cross."

24.2 But if He had done this, He would have given grounds for suspecting that He had power only over the death He had devised for Himself, and not over every death. There would still have been just as much of an excuse for disbelieving the resurrection. So death came upon His body not by His own choosing but by the

plotting of others, so that whatever death they brought against the Saviour, He might completely destroy it.

24.3 Think of a noble wrestler, great in skill and courage. He does not choose his opponents himself, lest he give the impression that he is afraid of some of them. He leaves the choice to the spectators, especially if they happen to be his enemies, so that whoever they match him against, he may throw him and be believed stronger than them all. In the same way, Christ, who is the Life of all, our Lord and Saviour, did not devise a death for His own body, so that He would not appear to be afraid of some other death. Instead He accepted and endured on the cross the death that others inflicted, above all His enemies. They thought it terrible, shameful and something to be avoided. He did this so that, once this death was destroyed, He Himself might be believed to be the Life, and the power of death might be completely brought to nothing.

| Scripture: [Hebrews 2:14](#)

24.4 So something amazing and unexpected has happened. The death they thought would bring Him disgrace became a trophy of victory over death itself. For this reason He did not undergo the death of John, whose head was cut off, nor was He sawn in two as Isaiah was. In this way He kept His body undivided and whole even in death, so that those who want to divide the Church would have no pretext.

| *Translator's note.* Athanasius refers to a tradition about Isaiah being sawn in two; it is not told in the Old Testament itself, though [Hebrews 11:37](#) may allude to such a tradition.

| Scripture: [Matthew 14:10](#); [Hebrews 11:37](#)

Chapter 25

25.1 That is our answer to those outside the Church who pile up arguments for themselves. But suppose someone from among us asks, not out of love of arguing but out of eagerness to learn, why He endured the cross and not some other kind of death. Let him also hear that no other way than this was good for us, and that the Lord rightly suffered this for our sake.

25.2 He came to bear the curse that lay upon us. How else could He have become a curse, unless He accepted the death that is marked out as a curse? That death is the cross. For so it is written: "Cursed is he who hangs on a tree."

| *Translator's note.* "Become a curse" echoes [Galatians 3:13](#), which quotes [Deuteronomy 21:23](#). Athanasius's wording of the quotation lacks the "everyone" found in Galatians.

| Scripture: [Galatians 3:13](#); [Deuteronomy 21:23](#)

25.3 Again, the Lord's death is the ransom for all. By His death the

dividing wall that separated us is broken down, and the calling of the nations comes about. How could He have called us to Himself if He had not been crucified? For only on the cross does a person die with his arms stretched out. So it was fitting for the Lord to endure this too, and to stretch out His hands, so that with one hand He might draw the ancient people and with the other those from the nations, and join both together in Himself.

Translator's note. "The dividing wall" uses the wording of [Ephesians 2:14](#), and "join both together in Himself" echoes the same passage ([Ephesians 2:14-16](#)).

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:14](#); [1 Timothy 2:6](#)

25.4 This is what He Himself said, showing by what kind of death He would ransom all: "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to Myself."

Translator's note. [John 12:32](#). "Draw" is the same verb Athanasius used just above for the outstretched hands drawing both peoples.

Scripture: [John 12:32-33](#)

25.5 Again, the devil is the enemy of our race. He fell from heaven and now roams about in the air down here. There he rules over the demons who are with him, since they are like him in disobedience. Through them he produces illusions in people who are deceived, and he tries to block those who are going up. The apostle speaks of this: "according to the ruler of the power of the air, of the one now working in the sons of disobedience." But the Lord came to throw the devil down, to clear the air, and to build for us a road up into heaven. As the apostle said, this road is "through the veil, that is, his flesh." This had to happen through death. What other death could accomplish it than one that takes place in the air, that is, the cross? Only a man who is put to death on a cross dies in the air. So it was fitting that the Lord endured this death.

Translator's note. The veil quotation is from [Hebrews 10:20](#).

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:2](#); [Hebrews 10:20](#)

25.6 Lifted up in this way, he cleared the air of the devil's plotting and of every plot of the demons. He said, "I was watching Satan fall like lightning." And he made a new road up into heaven, as he says again: "Lift up your gates, you rulers, and be lifted up, you everlasting gates." The Word himself did not need the gates opened, since he is Lord of all. Nothing he had made was shut against its Maker. We were the ones who needed it, and he carried us up through his own body. Just as he offered that body to death on behalf of all, so through it he again made a road up into the heavens.

Translator's note. The second quotation is [Psalm 24:7](#) (Psalm 23:7 in the Greek Old Testament). It follows the Greek version, which addresses "rulers." The Hebrew reads "Lift up your heads, O gates."

Chapter 26

26.1 So the death on the cross for our sake was fitting and suitable. The reason for it has been shown to be reasonable in every way, and the arguments for it are sound: the salvation of all had to come through the cross and in no other way. Even on the cross he did not leave himself hidden. On the contrary, he made creation bear witness to the presence of its Maker. But he did not allow the temple of his body to remain dead for long. He only showed it dead, by letting death come into contact with it, and then raised it straight away on the third day. He carried away, as trophies and victories over death, the incorruption and freedom from suffering that came to his body.

Translator's note. Creation bearing witness probably refers to the signs at the crucifixion: the darkness and the earthquake ([Matthew 27:45](#), 51). Athanasius mentions these earlier in the book (chapter 19).

Scripture: [John 2:21](#)

26.2 He could have raised his body at the very moment of death and shown it alive. But the Saviour, with good foresight, did not do this. Someone could have said that he had not died at all, or that death had not fully touched him, if he had shown the resurrection immediately.

26.3 Perhaps, too, if the interval between his death and resurrection had been only two days, the fame of his incorruption would have been unclear. So that his body might be shown to be dead, the Word waited through one day in between, and on the third day showed it incorruptible to everyone.

Translator's note. The Greek of the opening clause is obscure. This version takes it to mean an interval of only "two days," but other readings of the phrase are possible.

26.4 So, to prove that death had really taken place in the body, he raised it on the third day.

26.5 But he also did not want to raise it after a long time, when it had completely decayed, and so be disbelieved, as though he had brought back some other body and not the same one. Over time a person might come to distrust what he saw, and forget what had happened. For this reason he did not wait longer than three days, and he did not keep in suspense for long those who had heard him speak about the resurrection.

26.6 Instead, the word was still ringing in their ears, their eyes were still watching for it, and their minds were still hanging on it. Those who had put him to death were still alive on earth and on the spot, and they were witnesses of the death of the Lord's body. Then, after an interval of three days, the Son of God himself showed that

the body that had been dead was immortal and incorruptible. It was made plain to everyone that the body had not died because of any weakness in the nature of the Word who lived in it. It died so that death might be wiped out in it by the power of the Saviour.

Chapter 27

27.1 That death has been destroyed, that the cross has become the victory over it, and that it has no more strength but is truly dead: there is no small sign and a clear proof of this. All the disciples of Christ despise death. They all go on the attack against it and no longer fear it. By the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ they trample it down as something dead.

27.2 Long ago, before the Saviour's divine coming among us, death was terrible even to the saints, and everyone mourned the dead as if they were perishing. But now that the Saviour has raised his body, death is no longer terrible. All who believe in Christ trample it underfoot as if it were nothing, and they would rather die than deny their faith in Christ. For they truly know that when they die they are not destroyed. They live, and through the resurrection they become incorruptible.

27.3 But the devil, who once wickedly exulted in death, was left as the only one truly dead once death's pains were loosed. Here is the proof. Before people believe in Christ, they see death as terrible and are afraid of it. But when they pass over to faith in him and to his teaching, they despise death so much that they eagerly rush toward it and become witnesses of the resurrection that the Saviour accomplished against it. Even those still young in years hurry to die, and not only men but women train themselves against death by their disciplines. So weak has death become that even the women who were once deceived by it now make sport of it as something dead and powerless.

Translator's note. The women "once deceived" may allude to Eve ([Genesis 3:13](#); compare [1 Timothy 2:14](#)).

Scripture: [Acts 2:24](#)

27.4 When a tyrant has been defeated by a true king and bound hand and foot, everyone who passes by makes fun of him, striking him and jeering at him. They no longer fear his madness and savagery, because of the king who conquered him. So too death has been conquered and publicly shamed by the Saviour on the cross, and bound hand and foot. All who are in Christ, as they pass by, trample on it. As witnesses to Christ they mock death, taunting it with what was written against it long ago: "Where is your victory, O death? Where is your sting, O Hades?"

Translator's note. The quotation is 1 Corinthians 15:55, which draws on [Hosea 13:14](#). Athanasius has "Hades" in the second line, as many manuscripts of 1 Corinthians do. Most modern Bibles read "death" in both

lines.

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:55](#); [Hosea 13:14](#)

Chapter 28

28.1 Is this, then, a small proof of death's weakness? Is it a small demonstration of the Saviour's victory over it, when boys and young girls in Christ look down on this present life and train themselves to die?

28.2 By nature a human being is afraid of death and of the dissolution of the body. But here is the most astonishing thing: the person who has put on faith in the cross despises even what is natural, and for Christ's sake is not afraid of death.

28.3 Fire by nature burns. Suppose someone said there was a material that does not fear its burning but even shows the fire to be weak. The asbestos of the Indians is said to be like this. Then suppose a person who did not believe the report wanted to test it. He would put on the unburnable material and touch it to the fire, and he would then be convinced that the fire was weak.

Translator's note. "Asbestos" translates the Greek amianton, which means "undefiled." It was an ancient name for asbestos, which could be woven into fireproof cloth. Here it is said to come from India.

28.4 Or suppose someone wanted to see a tyrant in chains. He would go into the land and realm of those who had defeated him, and there he would see the man who terrified others reduced to weakness. In the same way, someone may still be unbelieving after all this: after so many martyrs in Christ, and after the daily mockery of death by those who shine in Christ. Even so, if he still has doubts in his mind about whether death has been abolished and brought to an end, he does well to wonder at so great a matter. But let him not be hard in unbelief, or shameless in the face of what is so plain.

28.5 As the man who takes the fireproof material knows that fire cannot touch it, and as the man who wants to see the tyrant bound goes into the realm of the conqueror, so let the one who doubts the victory over death take up the faith of Christ and come fully into his teaching. Then he will see death's weakness and the victory over it. For many who once disbelieved and mocked later believed, and then despised death so much that they became martyrs of Christ.

Chapter 29

29.1 Now if death is trampled down by the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ, then it is clear, with truth as judge, that no one else but Christ himself has displayed trophies and victories over death and made it weak.

29.2 Death was strong before, and that is why it was terrifying. But

now, since the Saviour's coming among us and the death and resurrection of his body, death is despised. So it is plain that death has been abolished and defeated by the very Christ who went up on the cross.

29.3 Suppose the sun rises after the night and the whole earth is lit up by it. No one doubts that the sun which spread its light everywhere is the same sun that drove out the darkness and lit up everything. In the same way, death is now despised and trampled underfoot. This has been so ever since the Saviour's saving appearance in the body and the end he met on the cross. So it is perfectly clear that he is the Saviour who appeared in the body, who abolished death, and who displays trophies of victory over it every day in his own disciples.

| Scripture: [2 Timothy 1:10](#)

29.4 Look at what happens. People who are weak by nature rush forward to meet death. They are not afraid of its corruption, and they do not dread going down to Hades. With eager hearts they challenge death, and they do not shrink from torture. For Christ's sake they would rather rush into death than go on living here. Or suppose someone watches men, women and young children charging and leaping into death out of devotion to Christ. Who would be so foolish, so unbelieving, or so crippled in mind as to fail to understand and reason this out? Christ is the one these people bear witness to, and he himself gives each of them the victory over death. He weakens death in each one who holds his faith and wears the sign of the cross.

29.5 Think of someone who sees a serpent trampled underfoot, especially if he knows how savage it used to be. He no longer doubts that it is dead and has lost all its strength. Only a man whose mind is twisted, or whose bodily senses are unsound, would think otherwise. And who, seeing a lion being played with by children, does not know that it is either dead or has lost all its power?

29.6 These things can be seen with our own eyes, and we know they are true. In the same way, death is now mocked and despised by those who believe in Christ. So let no one doubt any longer, and let no one be unbelieving, that death has been abolished by Christ, and that its corruption has been dissolved and brought to an end.

Chapter 30

30.1 What has been said so far is no small proof that death has been abolished, and that the Lord's cross is a trophy of victory over it. Then there is the resurrection of the body to immortality that followed, accomplished by Christ, the common Saviour and true Life of all. For those whose mind's eye is healthy, the proof of it from what we can see is clearer than any argument.

30.2 As our argument has shown, death has been abolished, and because of the Lord everyone tramples it underfoot. Much more, then, did he himself first trample it in his own body and abolish it. Now that death had been put to death by him, what had to happen but that his body rise, and that this be shown as a trophy against death? How could death have been shown to be abolished unless the Lord's body had risen? But if anyone finds this proof of his resurrection insufficient, let him be convinced of what we say by what happens before his eyes.

30.3 When a man has died, he can accomplish nothing. His influence reaches only as far as the grave, and then it stops. Actions, and effective work among people, belong only to the living. So let anyone who wishes look, and let him be the judge, confessing the truth from what he sees.

30.4 The Saviour is doing so many things among people. Every day, from every direction, he is invisibly persuading so great a multitude, both of those who live in Greece and of those in foreign lands, to come over to his faith, and all to obey his teaching. Will anyone still be in doubt whether a resurrection was accomplished by the Saviour, and whether Christ is alive, or rather whether he is himself the Life?

| Scripture: [John 11:25](#)

30.5 Is it the work of a dead man to pierce people's minds, so that they renounce their ancestral laws and bow in worship to the teaching of Christ? Or, if he is not active (for inactivity is the mark of a dead man), how does he stop active, living people from their activity, so that the adulterer no longer commits adultery, the murderer no longer murders, the wrongdoer no longer grasps for more, and the ungodly person begins to live in godliness? And if he has not risen but is dead, how does he himself drive out, pursue and overthrow the false gods that unbelievers say are alive, and the demons they worship?

30.6 Wherever Christ and faith in him are named, from that place all idolatry is torn down, every deception of demons is exposed, and no demon can bear even the name. The moment it hears it, it flees and is gone. This is not the work of a dead man but of one who lives, and above all of God.

30.7 Besides, it would be ridiculous to say that the demons he pursues and the idols he brings to nothing are alive, while the one who drives them away, who by his own power keeps them from even appearing, and who is acknowledged by all to be the Son of God, is dead.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek says only "acknowledged by all." This could mean all people, or it could refer back to the demons, who in the Gospels confess Jesus as Son of God ([Mark 3:11](#); [Luke 4:41](#)).

Chapter 31

31.1 Those who disbelieve the resurrection provide strong proof against themselves. They call Christ dead, yet all the demons and all the gods they worship do not drive him out. On the contrary, Christ shows all of them to be dead.

31.2 If it is true that a dead man does nothing, yet the Saviour does so many things every day, then consider what he does. He draws people to godliness, persuades them to virtue, teaches them about immortality, lifts them to a longing for heaven, reveals the knowledge of the Father, breathes into them power against death, shows himself to each one, and tears down the godlessness of idols. The gods and demons of the unbelievers can do none of this. On the contrary, in the presence of Christ they become dead, and their display is idle and empty. By the sign of the cross all magic stops and all sorcery is made powerless. All idols are abandoned and left desolate, every irrational pleasure is checked, and faith looks up from earth to heaven. Whom, then, could anyone call dead? Christ, who does all these things? But working is not the mark of a dead man. Or is it the one who does nothing at all but lies there as if lifeless? That is the mark of the demons and idols, since they are dead.

31.3 The Son of God is living and active, and every day he works and brings about the salvation of all. Death, meanwhile, is shown every day to have lost its strength, and the idols and demons are shown to be the ones who are dead. As a result, no one can doubt any longer the resurrection of his body.

Translator's note. "Living and active" echoes [Hebrews 4:12](#), where "the word of God is living and active." Athanasius applies the phrase to the Son, the Word.

Scripture: [Hebrews 4:12](#)

31.4 Anyone who doubts the resurrection of the Lord's body seems to be ignorant of the power of the Word and Wisdom of God. For if he took a body at all, and made it his own in the reasonable sequence our argument has shown, what was the Lord to do with it? What end should the body have, once the Word had come upon it? It could not fail to die, since it was mortal and was being offered to death on behalf of all. That is why the Saviour prepared it for himself. But it could not remain dead, because it had become the temple of Life. So it died as mortal, but it rose again because of the Life that was in it. And the works are the sign of the resurrection.

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:24](#)

Chapter 32

32.1 But if people do not believe he has risen because he is not seen, it is time for them to deny the course of nature as well. For it

is the very nature of God not to be seen, yet to be known from his works, as was said above.

| Scripture: [Romans 1:20](#)

32.2 If there were no works, they would be right to disbelieve what does not appear. But if the works cry out and show it plainly, why do they willingly deny the life of the resurrection when it is so clearly seen? Even if their minds have been crippled, they can still see with their outward senses the undeniable power and divinity of Christ.

32.3 A blind man may not see the sun, but when he feels the warmth it gives, he knows there is a sun above the earth. In the same way, those who argue against us may not yet believe, since they are still blind to the truth. Yet at least they know his power through others who believe. So let them not deny the divinity of Christ and the resurrection that he accomplished.

32.4 It is plain that if Christ were dead, he would not be driving out demons and plundering idols. The demons would not obey a dead man. But if they are openly driven out by the naming of his name, it is clear that he is not dead. This is all the more so because the demons see even what people cannot see. If Christ were dead, they could tell, and they would not obey him at all.

32.5 But as it is, the demons see what the ungodly do not believe: that he is God. That is why they flee and fall down before him. They say what they also said when he was in the body: “We know who you are: you are the Holy One of God,” and “Ah, what have we to do with you, Son of God? I beg you, do not torment me.”

| *Translator’s note.* The first saying is from [Mark 1:24](#) and [Luke 4:34](#). The second appears to combine several Gospel passages, probably quoted from memory: “Ah” ([Luke 4:34](#)), “what have we to do with you, Son of God?” ([Matthew 8:29](#)), and “I beg you, do not torment me” ([Luke 8:28](#)).

| Scripture: [Mark 1:24](#); [Luke 4:34](#); [Luke 8:28](#)

32.6 So the demons confess him, and his works bear witness to him every day. Let no one then shamelessly resist the truth. It is evident that the Saviour raised his own body, and that he is the true Son of God. He is the Father’s own Word, Wisdom and Power, coming from him. In later times he took a body for the salvation of all. He taught the world about the Father and abolished death. He gave incorruption to all through the promise of the resurrection, raising his own body as the first-fruits of it. By the sign of the cross he displayed that body as a trophy of victory over death and its corruption.

| *Translator’s note.* “Wisdom and Power” of God recalls [1 Corinthians 1:24](#) (“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”). “First-fruits” recalls [1 Corinthians 15:20](#), where Christ is “the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:24](#); [2 Timothy 1:10](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20](#)

Chapter 33

33.1 Since this is so, and the proof of the resurrection of the body and of the Saviour's victory over death is plain, come, let us now refute the unbelief of the Jews and the mockery of the Greeks.

Translator's note. "Greeks" here, as often in early Christian writers, means pagans in general, that is, non-Jewish, non-Christian people, not an ethnic group.

33.2 For perhaps it is over these matters that the Jews disbelieve and the Greeks laugh, ridiculing the unseemliness of the cross and the Word of God becoming man. But our argument will not hesitate to take on both, especially since the proofs against them are so clear.

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:23](#)

33.3 The Jews in their unbelief can be refuted from the Scriptures they themselves read. Throughout, in short, every God-inspired book teaches about these things, as their very words make plain. For the prophets long ago announced beforehand the wonder of the Virgin and the birth that came from her. They said: "Behold, the Virgin will be with child and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel, which, translated, means 'God with us.'"

Translator's note. The quotation is [Isaiah 7:14](#) in its Greek (Septuagint) form. The words "they will call" and "which, translated, means 'God with us'" come from [Matthew 1:23](#), which Athanasius follows here.

Scripture: [Isaiah 7:14](#); [Matthew 1:23](#)

33.4 Moses too, who was truly great and whom they believe to speak the truth, judged the saying about the Saviour's becoming man to be of great weight. Knowing it to be true, he set it down in these words: "A star will rise out of Jacob, and a man out of Israel, and he will crush the leaders of Moab." And again: "How beautiful are your houses, Jacob, and your tents, Israel: like shady valleys, like gardens by rivers, like tents which the Lord pitched, like cedars beside the waters. A man will come out of his seed and will rule over many nations." And again Isaiah says: "Before the child knows how to call 'father' or 'mother,' he will take the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria before the king of the Assyrians."

Translator's note. The quotations are [Numbers 24:17](#), [Numbers 24:5-7](#) and [Isaiah 8:4](#). Athanasius uses the Greek (Septuagint) form, so some wording differs from English Old Testaments, which follow the Hebrew.

Scripture: [Numbers 24:17](#); [Numbers 24:5-7](#); [Isaiah 8:4](#)

33.5 These words announce beforehand that he will appear as a man. That the one who is coming is Lord of all, they again foretell: "Behold, the Lord sits on a light cloud, and will come into Egypt,

and the handmade idols of Egypt will be shaken.” For it is from there too that the Father calls him back, saying: “Out of Egypt I called my Son.”

Translator’s note. The quotations are [Isaiah 19:1](#) (Septuagint) and [Hosea 11:1](#). The Greek word for “handmade things” (χειροποίητα) is a common biblical term for idols, and the Hebrew of [Isaiah 19:1](#) has “idols.” The Septuagint of [Hosea 11:1](#) reads “I called his children out of Egypt.” Athanasius’s wording, “my Son,” matches [Matthew 2:15](#) and the Hebrew.

Scripture: [Isaiah 19:1](#); [Hosea 11:1](#); [Matthew 2:15](#)

Chapter 34

34.1 His death is not passed over in silence either. It is indicated very clearly in the divine Scriptures. The prophets did not fear to speak of the reason for his death: that he endures it not for his own sake but for the immortality and salvation of all. They also spoke of the plotting of the Jews and the insults they heaped on him. They did this so that no one would be ignorant of these events and so be led astray.

34.2 So they say: “A man in affliction, who knows how to bear weakness, for his face is turned away. He was dishonored and held in no account. He bears our sins and suffers pain for us. And we considered him to be in toil, in affliction, and in ill-treatment. But he was wounded because of our sins and made weak because of our lawless deeds. The discipline that brings our peace was upon him, and by his bruise we were healed.” Marvel at the loving-kindness of the Word: for our sake he is dishonored, so that we might be made honorable. “For all of us,” it says, “like sheep have gone astray; man has gone astray in his own way. And the Lord handed him over for our sins, and because he was ill-treated he does not open his mouth. Like a sheep he was led to slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away.”

Translator’s note. The quotation is [Isaiah 53:3-8](#) in the Greek (Septuagint) form, which differs in places from the Hebrew-based English Bibles; the Greek plēgē means “blow” or “wound,” and mōlōps a “welt” or “bruise” left by a blow.

Scripture: [Isaiah 53:3-8](#)

34.3 Then, so that no one would take him for an ordinary man because of his suffering, Scripture anticipates people’s suspicions. It also tells of the power at work on his behalf and of how his nature is unlike ours, saying: “Who will declare his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. Because of the lawless deeds of the people he was led to death. And I will give the wicked in return for his burial, and the rich in return for his death, because he did no lawlessness, nor was deceit found in his mouth. And the Lord wills to cleanse him from the affliction.”

Translator's note. The quotation is [Isaiah 53:8-10](#) (Septuagint).
“Generation” can mean his birth, his descent, or his contemporaries.
Athanasius reads it as pointing to his unlike nature.

Scripture: [Isaiah 53:8-10](#)

Chapter 35

35.1 But perhaps, having heard the prophecy about his death, you want to learn also what is indicated about the cross. This too is not passed over in silence. The holy men have made it clear, and very plainly.

35.2 Moses is the first to announce it in advance, with a loud voice, saying: “You will see your life hanging before your eyes, and you will not believe.”

Translator's note. Compare [Deuteronomy 28:66](#), which Athanasius quotes freely. There the words describe a person's life “hanging” in doubt under the curse. Athanasius, like other early Christian writers, takes “your life” as a title for Christ hanging on the cross.

Scripture: [Deuteronomy 28:66](#)

35.3 And the prophets after him also bear witness to this, saying: “But I, like a harmless lamb led away to be sacrificed, did not know it. They devised evil against me, saying, ‘Come, let us put wood into his bread and wipe him out from the land of the living.’”

Translator's note. Compare [Jeremiah 11:19](#) (Septuagint). The Greek word for “wood” (xylon) is also used of the cross, which is why Christian writers saw a reference to it here.

Scripture: [Jeremiah 11:19](#)

35.4 And again: “They dug through my hands and my feet; they counted all my bones; they divided my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Translator's note. Psalm 21:17-19 in the Greek numbering ([Psalm 22:16-18](#) in English Bibles); the Greek verb literally means “dug,” which many English Bibles render “pierced.”

35.5 Now a death that is lifted up on high and takes place on wood could be none other than the cross. Again, in no other kind of death are the hands and feet pierced through except on the cross alone.

35.6 And since, through the Savior's coming among us, all the nations everywhere began to know God, the prophets did not leave this unmarked either. Mention of it is also found in the holy writings. For, it says, “There shall be the root of Jesse, even he who rises to rule the nations; in him the nations will hope.” These are a few proofs of what has happened.

Translator's note. [Isaiah 11:10](#) in the Greek Old Testament. Paul quotes the verse in the same form in [Romans 15:12](#).

| Scripture: [Isaiah 11:10](#); [Romans 15:12](#)

35.7 But the whole of Scripture is full of proofs against the unbelief of the Jews. For which of the righteous men, holy prophets and patriarchs recorded in the divine Scriptures ever had the origin of his body from a virgin alone? Or what woman, without a man, has been able by herself to bring a human being into existence? Was not Abel born of Adam, Enoch of Jared, Noah of Lamech, Abraham of Terah, Isaac of Abraham, and Jacob of Isaac? Was not Judah born of Jacob, and Moses and Aaron of Amram? Was not Samuel born of Elkanah, David of Jesse, Solomon of David, Hezekiah of Ahaz, Josiah of Amon, Isaiah of Amoz, Jeremiah of Hilkiah, and Ezekiel of Buzi? Did not each one have a father as the source of his birth? Who, then, is the one born of a virgin alone? For the prophet took great care to point to this sign.

| *Translator's note.* "The prophet" is probably Isaiah, whose sign of the virgin ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) Athanasius cited earlier in the work.

| Scripture: [Isaiah 7:14](#)

35.8 Whose birth was preceded by a star in the heavens, pointing out to the whole world the one who was born? Moses, when he was born, was hidden by his parents. David was not even heard of by his neighbors, since even the great Samuel did not know him, but asked whether Jesse had yet another son. Abraham became known to those nearby only later, after he had become great. But the witness to Christ's birth was not a man. It was a star appearing in heaven, the very place from which he was coming down.

| *Translator's note.* Compare [Matthew 2:2](#), 9 (the star); [Exodus 2:2](#) (Moses hidden); [1 Samuel 16:11](#) (Samuel asks Jesse about his sons).

| Scripture: [Matthew 2:2](#); [Exodus 2:2](#)

Chapter 36

36.1 What king has there ever been who reigned, and won victories over his enemies, before he was strong enough to call out "father" or "mother"? Did not David begin to reign at thirty, and Solomon as a young man? Did not Joash come to the throne at seven years old, and Josiah, who was later still, take up the rule at about seven? Yet even at that age these kings were strong enough to call out "father" or "mother."

| *Translator's note.* Compare [2 Samuel 5:4](#) (David at thirty) and [2 Kings 11:21](#) (Joash at seven). Athanasius gives Josiah's age as "about seven," but [2 Kings 22:1](#) and [2 Chronicles 34:1](#) say he was eight.

| Scripture: [Isaiah 8:4](#)

36.2 Who, then, is the one who reigns and plunders his enemies almost before he is born? And what king like that has there ever been in Israel or in Judah? Let the Jews search and tell us. In what king have all the nations set their hope and found peace? Were the

nations not rather opposed to them on every side?

Scripture: [Isaiah 8:4](#)

36.3 As long as Jerusalem stood, there was unending war against them, and everyone fought against Israel. The Assyrians oppressed them, the Egyptians pursued them, and the Babylonians invaded them. Strangest of all, they even had the Syrians, their neighbors, fighting against them. Did not David make war on the people of Moab and cut down the Syrians? Did not Josiah have to guard against his neighbors, and Hezekiah cower before the arrogance of Sennacherib? Did not Amalek take the field against Moses, and the Amorites oppose him, and the people who lived in Jericho line up in battle against Joshua son of Nun? In short, the nations had no friendly treaties with Israel at all. So it is worth finding out who it is in whom the nations place their hope. There must be such a one, since the prophet cannot have spoken falsely.

Translator's note. Joshua son of Nun: the Greek reads "Jesus son of Naue," because "Joshua" and "Jesus" are the same name in Greek.

36.4 Which of the holy prophets, or of the patriarchs of old, died on a cross for the salvation of all? Who was wounded and killed for the healing of all? Which of the righteous men or kings went down into Egypt so that, by his going down, the idols of the Egyptians came to an end? Abraham went down, and idolatry still prevailed over everyone. Moses was born there, and the worship of those who were led astray went on there just the same.

Translator's note. "Wounded ... for the healing of all" echoes [Isaiah 53:5](#). The idols of Egypt failing at the Lord's coming echoes [Isaiah 19:1](#), which Athanasius links with the child Jesus being taken into Egypt ([Matthew 2:13-15](#)). Abraham's journey to Egypt is in [Genesis 12:10](#).

Scripture: [Isaiah 53:5](#); [Isaiah 19:1](#)

Chapter 37

37.1 Who among those commended in Scripture had his hands and feet pierced, or was hung on wood at all and brought to his end on a cross for the salvation of all? Abraham died in bed, breathing his last. Isaac and Jacob also died in bed, drawing up their feet. Moses and Aaron died on the mountain. David died in his house, having suffered no plot from the people. Even when Saul hunted for him, he was kept safe from harm. Isaiah was sawn in two, but he was not hung on wood. Jeremiah was insulted, but he did not die under a sentence of condemnation. Ezekiel suffered, but not for the people. His suffering was a sign of what would happen to the people.

Translator's note. That Isaiah was sawn in two comes from Jewish tradition, not from the Old Testament itself. [Hebrews 11:37](#) ("they were sawn in two") is usually taken as alluding to it.

Scripture: [Genesis 49:33](#)

37.2 Besides, even when these men suffered, they were only men, like everyone else in their common nature. But the one the Scriptures declare will suffer for all is called not simply a man but the Life of all, even though he is like human beings in nature. For it says, “You will see your Life hanging before your eyes,” and “Who will declare his generation?” For one can trace the family line of all the saints back from the beginning and tell who each one was and where he came from. But the divine words indicate that the generation of the one who is Life cannot be told.

Translator’s note. The two quotations are given as Athanasius wrote them. The first follows the Greek Old Testament of [Deuteronomy 28:66](#), which in its original setting describes Israel’s anxious life under the curse; Athanasius reads it as a prophecy of the cross. The second is [Isaiah 53:8](#).

Scripture: [Deuteronomy 28:66](#); [Isaiah 53:8](#)

37.3 Who, then, is the one of whom the divine Scriptures say these things? Who is so great that the prophets foretell so much about him? No one else is found in the Scriptures except the common Savior of all, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. For he is the one who came forth from a virgin and appeared on earth as a man, and whose family line according to the flesh cannot be told. No one can name his father according to the flesh, since his body came not from a man but from a virgin alone.

Scripture: [Isaiah 53:8](#)

37.4 Someone can trace the family line of David, of Moses, and of all the patriarchs through their fathers. But no one can describe the Savior’s family line according to the flesh as coming from a man. He is the one who also made the star mark the birth of his body. For the Word was coming down from heaven, so he had to have his sign from heaven too. And the King of creation, when he came forth, had to be clearly recognized by the whole world.

Translator’s note. The Greek says literally “by the whole inhabited world” (oikoumenē).

37.5 Indeed, he was born in Judea, and men from Persia came to worship him. He is the one who, even before his appearing in the body, won the victory over the demons who opposed him and raised trophies over idolatry. At any rate, all the people of the nations, from everywhere, are renouncing the custom of their fathers and the godlessness of idols. They now set their hope on Christ and enroll themselves under him, as you can see with your own eyes.

Translator’s note. “Trophies” were monuments set up on the battlefield after a military victory.

Scripture: [Matthew 2:1-2](#)

37.6 At no other time has the godlessness of the Egyptians ceased, except when the Lord of all came down there in the body, riding, as it were, on a cloud. He put an end to the error of idols and brought

everyone over to himself, and through himself to the Father.

Translator's note. The cloud image echoes [Isaiah 19:1](#), where the Lord rides on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt tremble. Athanasius probably has in mind the holy family's flight into Egypt ([Matthew 2:13-15](#)). He was himself an Egyptian, from Alexandria.

Scripture: [Isaiah 19:1](#)

37.7 He is the one who was crucified with the sun, creation, and those who put him to death as witnesses. Through his death salvation has come to all, and all creation has been ransomed. He is the Life of all. Like a sheep, he handed over his own body to death as a substitute, for the salvation of all, even if the Jews do not believe it.

Translator's note. "As a substitute" translates antipsychon, literally something given "in place of a life" (psyche).

Chapter 38

38.1 If they do not think these proofs are enough, let them at least be persuaded by other oracles, ones that they themselves possess. Of whom do the prophets speak when they say: "I became visible to those who were not seeking me. I was found by those who were not asking for me. I said, 'Here I am,' to a nation that did not call on my name. I spread out my hands to a disobedient and contradicting people"?

Translator's note. The quotation is [Isaiah 65:1-2](#) in the Greek Old Testament. Paul quotes the same verses in [Romans 10:20-21](#).

Scripture: [Isaiah 65:1-2](#); [Romans 10:20-21](#)

38.2 Who, then, is the one who became visible? One might ask the Jews this. If it is the prophet himself, let them say when he was hidden, so that he could appear later. And what kind of prophet is this, who came into view out of obscurity and also stretched out his hands on a cross? None of the righteous did this. Only the Word of God did, who is bodiless by nature, and who appeared in a body for our sake and suffered on our behalf.

Scripture: [Isaiah 65:1-2](#)

38.3 Or if even this is not enough for them, let them at least be shamed by other passages, seeing how clear the proof is. For Scripture says: "Be strong, you slack hands and paralyzed knees. Take courage, you of little faith in your mind. Be strong, do not fear. Look, our God repays with judgment. He himself will come and save us. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will hear. Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the stammerers will be clear."

Translator's note. The quotation is [Isaiah 35:3-6](#). Where this Greek text of Athanasius has "of little faith," the Greek Old Testament has oligopsychoi,

| “faint-hearted.”

| Scripture: [Isaiah 35:3-6](#)

38.4 What can they say about this? How can they dare to look it in the face at all? The prophecy shows that God is coming to dwell among us, and the signs make known the time of his coming. For the blind seeing again, the lame walking, the deaf hearing, and the tongue of the stammerers becoming clear are said to happen when the divine coming takes place. So let them tell us when such signs ever happened in Israel, or where in Judea anything like this took place.

| Scripture: [Isaiah 35:5-6](#)

38.5 Naaman, a leper, was cleansed, but no deaf man heard and no lame man walked. Elijah and Elisha raised a dead person, but no one blind from birth received sight. To raise a dead person is truly a great thing, but it is not like the wonder worked by the Saviour. Yet if Scripture did not stay silent about the leper and the widow’s dead son, then surely, if a lame man had walked or a blind man had received sight, the account would not have failed to report these things too. Since Scripture is silent about them, it is clear that they had not happened before.

| *Translator’s note.* Naaman: see [2 Kings 5](#). Elijah raised the widow’s son ([1 Kings 17](#)), and in a similar story Elisha raised the Shunammite woman’s son ([2 Kings 4](#)).

38.6 When, then, did these things happen, if not when the Word of God himself came in a body? And when did he come, if not when the lame walked, the stammerers spoke clearly, the deaf heard, and those blind from birth received sight? The Jews who saw it at that time said this very thing, since they had never heard of such things happening at any other time: “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

| *Translator’s note.* The quotation is [John 9:32-33](#), given almost word for word. In John these words are spoken to the Pharisees by the man who had been born blind.

| Scripture: [John 9:32-33](#)

Chapter 39

39.1 But perhaps they too, being unable to keep fighting against plain facts, will not deny what is written. Instead they will insist that they are still waiting for these things, and that the Word of God has not yet come. They keep repeating this over and over, and they do not blush as they shamelessly defy what is plain to see.

39.2 But on this point above all they will be refuted, and not by us. The refutation comes from the very wise Daniel, who marks both

the present time and the divine coming of the Saviour. He says: "Seventy weeks have been cut short for your people and for the holy city, for sin to be brought to an end, and for sins to be sealed up, and for iniquities to be wiped out, and for atonement to be made for iniquities, and for everlasting righteousness to be brought in, and for vision and prophet to be sealed, and for a Holy of Holies to be anointed. You shall know and understand, from the going out of the word to answer and to build Jerusalem, until Christ the leader."

Translator's note. "Holy of Holies" renders the Hebrew phrase "most holy," which many modern Bibles take to mean a most holy place. Athanasius reads it as a person, and his argument in the next sections depends on that reading.

Scripture: [Daniel 9:24-25](#)

39.3 Perhaps with the other prophecies they can at least find excuses and put off what is written to some future time. But what can they say to this, or how can they even face it? For here the Christ is pointed out. The one to be anointed is announced as no mere man but a Holy of Holies. Jerusalem is to stand until his coming, and after that prophet and vision cease in Israel.

Scripture: [Daniel 9:24](#)

39.4 David was anointed long ago, and Solomon, and Hezekiah. Yet in their time Jerusalem and the temple site still stood, and prophets were prophesying: Gad, Asaph and Nathan, and after them Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and others. Besides, these anointed men were themselves called holy, not Holy of Holies. But suppose they bring up the captivity and say that Jerusalem did not exist because of it. What could they say about the prophets? For long ago, when the people went down to Babylon, Daniel and Jeremiah were there, and Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah were prophesying.

Translator's note. Athanasius places Jeremiah in Babylon here, but the Bible records him in Jerusalem and then in Egypt ([Jeremiah 43](#)), though he wrote to the exiles in Babylon ([Jeremiah 29](#)); Ezekiel prophesied among the exiles, and Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in Jerusalem after the return ([Ezra 5:1](#)).

Chapter 40

40.1 So the Jews are talking nonsense, and they are putting off a time that has already come. For when did prophet and vision cease from Israel, if not now, when Christ, the Holy of Holies, has come? It is a sign, and a great mark, of the coming of the Word of God that Jerusalem no longer stands, that no prophet is raised up, and that no vision is revealed to them. And this is very reasonable.

Scripture: [Daniel 9:24](#)

40.2 Once the one who was signified has come, what further need

is there of those who signified him? Once the truth is present, what further need is there of the shadow? This is why they prophesied until the one who is Righteousness itself should come, the one who redeems the sins of all. This is also why Jerusalem stood for so long: so that there they might practise beforehand the types of the truth.

40.3 So when the Holy of Holies had come, it was natural that vision and prophecy were sealed and that the kingdom of Jerusalem came to an end. For kings were anointed among them only until the Holy of Holies was anointed. And Moses prophesies that the kingdom of the Jews would stand until him, saying: “A ruler will not fail from Judah, nor a leader from his loins, until the things reserved for him come, and he is the expectation of the nations.”

Translator’s note. The quotation is [Genesis 49:10](#) from the Greek Old Testament, where the words are Jacob’s blessing on Judah; Athanasius credits them to Moses, traditionally regarded as the author of Genesis.

Scripture: [Genesis 49:10](#); [Daniel 9:24](#)

40.4 So the Saviour himself cried out: “The law and the prophets prophesied until John.” If the Jews now have a king, or a prophet, or a vision, they are right to deny that the Christ has come. But if there is no king and no vision, if all prophecy is now sealed, and the city and the temple have been taken, why do they go so far in ungodliness and transgression that they see what has happened and yet deny the Christ who has done these things? Why, when they see people from the nations abandoning their idols and placing their hope, through Christ, in the God of Israel, do they deny the Christ who was born in the flesh from the root of Jesse and who now reigns? For if the nations were worshipping some other god, and did not confess the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, then once more the Jews would be right to make the excuse that God had not come.

Translator’s note. The quotation is from [Matthew 11:13](#) (compare [Luke 16:16](#)). “Prophecy is sealed” echoes [Daniel 9:24](#) (“to seal up vision and prophet”), which Athanasius discusses in the preceding chapters. “The root of Jesse” is from [Isaiah 11:1](#), 10.

Scripture: [Matthew 11:13](#); [Daniel 9:24](#); [Isaiah 11:10](#)

40.5 But the nations worship the very God who gave the law to Moses and made the promise to Abraham, the God whose word the Jews dishonoured. Why then do the Jews not recognise, or rather why do they willingly overlook, that the Lord foretold by the Scriptures has shone upon the world and appeared to it in bodily form? As the Scripture said: “The Lord God has appeared to us.” And again: “He sent out his Word and healed them.” And again: “Not an envoy, not an angel, but the Lord himself saved them.”

Translator’s note. The quotations are from [Psalm 118:27](#) (117:27 in the Greek Old Testament), [Psalm 107:20](#) (106:20 in the Greek) and [Isaiah 63:9](#). Athanasius quotes [Isaiah 63:9](#) from the Greek Septuagint. Most English Bibles translate the Hebrew, which reads differently (for example,

| “the angel of his presence saved them”).

| Scripture: [Isaiah 63:9](#)

40.6 Their condition is like that of a man whose mind is deranged. He sees the earth lit up by the sun, yet he denies the sun that lights it. For what more could the one they are waiting for do when he comes? Call the nations? They have already been called. Bring an end to prophet, king and vision? That too has already happened. Expose the godlessness of idols? It has already been exposed and condemned. Abolish death? It has already been abolished.

40.7 What, then, that the Christ was to do has not happened? What remains unfulfilled, that the Jews should now rejoice and go on in unbelief? For as we can see, they have no king, no prophet, no Jerusalem, no sacrifice and no vision. The whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and people from the nations are leaving their godlessness and now taking refuge, through the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, with the God of Abraham. So it must be clear, even to the utterly shameless, that Christ has come. He has shone on absolutely everyone with his own light and given them the true and divine teaching about his Father.

| *Translator’s note.* “The whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God” echoes [Isaiah 11:9](#) (compare [Habakkuk 2:14](#)).

| Scripture: [Isaiah 11:9](#)

40.8 From these arguments, and from many more in the divine Scriptures, one could fairly refute the Jews.

Chapter 41

41.1 But one might well be astonished at the Greeks. They laugh at what deserves no mockery, yet they are blind to their own shame, which they have set up in stones and wood and do not see.

| *Translator’s note.* “Greeks” here means pagans, the Gentile idol-worshippers (the older translation says “Gentiles”).

41.2 Still, our account is not short of proofs. So let us also bring these people to shame by sound reasoning, drawing chiefly on what we ourselves can see. For what is absurd in what we say, or worthy of mockery? Is it simply that we say the Word has appeared in a body? Yet even they will agree that this was not absurd, provided they become friends of the truth.

41.3 If they deny altogether that there is a Word of God, they act pointlessly, since they mock what they do not know.

41.4 But suppose they admit that there is a Word of God. Suppose they admit that he is the ruler of the universe, that the Father made the creation in him, that everything receives light, life and existence through his providence, and that he reigns over all, so

that he is known from the works of his providence, and the Father is known through him. Then consider, I beg you, whether they are not unknowingly turning the mockery against themselves.

41.5 The philosophers of the Greeks say that the world is a great body, and they speak truly. For we see it, and its parts, with our senses. So if the Word of God is in the world, which is a body, and has entered into the whole of it and into every one of its parts, what is surprising or absurd if we say that he has entered into a human being too?

Translator's note. The idea of the cosmos as one great living body appears in Plato's *Timaeus* and was common among the Stoics.

41.6 For if it were absurd for him to be in a body at all, it would also be absurd for him to be present in the universe, giving light and movement to all things by his providence. For the whole universe is a body too.

41.7 But if it is fitting for him to enter the world and be made known in the whole, then it is also fitting for him to appear in a human body, and for that body to be lit up by him and to act through him. For the human race is a part of the whole. And if it is unfitting for a part to become his instrument for the knowledge of his divinity, then it would be far more absurd for him to be made known through the whole world.

Chapter 42

42.1 Think of a human being whose whole body is moved and lit up by him. If someone said it was absurd for the man's power to be in the toe as well, he would be thought foolish. For he grants that the man pervades and works in the whole body, yet he denies that he is in a part. In the same way, whoever grants and believes that the Word of God is in the whole universe, and that the whole is lit up and moved by Him, should not think it absurd that a single human body is also moved and lit up by Him.

42.2 Perhaps they think our talk of the Saviour's appearing in a human being is unfitting because the human race is a created thing, made out of nothing. Then it is time for them to throw Him out of creation too, for creation also came from non-being into being through the Word.

42.3 But if it is not absurd for the Word to be in creation, even though creation is something made, then it is not absurd for Him to be in man either. Whatever they conceive about the whole, they must also think about the part. For man, as I said before, is a part of the whole.

42.4 So it is not at all unfitting for the Word to be in man, since all things are lit, moved and given life by Him and in Him, just as their

own writers say: “In him we live and move and have our being.”

Translator’s note. The Greek as printed has “and was” (kai ēn) after “lit and moved”, which makes little sense; it is probably a corruption of “and live” (kai zēn), matching the quotation that follows, and is translated that way here.

Scripture: [Acts 17:28](#)

42.5 What, then, do we say that deserves mockery, if the Word has used that in which He is as an instrument to reveal Himself? For if He were not in it, He could not even have used it. But we have already shown that He is in the whole and in each of its parts. What is hard to believe, then, if He also shows Himself in the things in which He is?

42.6 By His own powers He enters wholly into each thing and into all things, and He orders everything without stint. If He had wished to use a voice through the sun, the moon, the heaven, the earth, the waters or fire, and so make Himself and His Father known, no one could fairly have called it out of place. For He holds all things together at once, is present with all of them and in that very part as well, and shows Himself there invisibly. In the same way, it cannot be out of place that He, who orders all things and gives life to the whole, and who chose to make Himself known through men, has used a human body as His instrument to reveal the truth and to give knowledge of the Father. For humanity too is a part of the whole.

Translator’s note. The Greek in the middle of this sentence is difficult and the text appears damaged in places; the translation gives the probable sense.

42.7 The mind is present throughout the whole person, yet it is made known through one part of the body, the tongue. No one says on that account that the being of the mind is made smaller. In the same way, the Word is present through all things, and if He has used a human instrument, this should not seem unfitting. For, as I said before, if it is unfitting to use a body as an instrument, it is also unfitting for Him to be in the whole.

Chapter 43

43.1 “Why then,” they may ask, “did He not appear through other, finer parts of creation? Why did He not use a finer instrument, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, fire or the upper air, instead of man alone?” Let them know that the Lord did not come to put on a display, but to heal and teach those who were suffering.

Translator’s note. “Upper air” translates the Greek aithēr, the bright, pure air of the heavens, which ancient writers distinguished from the ordinary air near the ground.

43.2 Someone who wants to put on a display only appears and

stuns those who see him. But someone who wants to heal and teach does not merely visit. He gives himself to help those in need, and appears in a way that those who need him can bear. He must not overwhelm the very people in need by going beyond what the sufferers require, or God's appearing would be of no use to them.

43.3 Nothing in creation had gone astray in its thoughts about God except man alone. The sun, the moon, the heaven, the stars, the water and the upper air did not depart from their order. They know the Word as their Maker and King, and they remain as they were made. Only men turned away from what is good. They then invented things that do not exist in place of the truth. The honor due to God, and the knowledge of Him, they gave to demons and to men represented in stones.

Translator's note. Literally "to demons and men in stones". This probably means stone images, both of demons and of men who were worshiped as gods. Athanasius discusses such idol worship at length in *Against the Greeks*.

43.4 So it was fitting that He act as He did. It would not have been worthy of God's goodness to overlook so grave a matter. Men could not recognize Him even as He governed and ruled the whole creation. So He took a part of the whole, a human body, as His instrument, and entered into it. Since they could not know Him in the whole, they might at least not fail to know Him in the part. And since they could not look up to His invisible power, they might at least be able to reason about Him and see Him from what was like themselves.

43.5 Being men, they will be able to know His Father more quickly and more directly through a body suited to them and through the divine works done by means of it. They will judge by comparison that what He does is not the work of men but the work of God.

43.6 If, as they say, it is absurd for the Word to be known through the works of a body, then it would also be absurd for Him to be known through the works of the universe. He is in creation, yet He takes no share in anything of creation. Rather, all things share in His power. In the same way, when He used the body as His instrument, He took no share in anything that belongs to the body. Rather, He Himself made the body holy.

Translator's note. "Takes no share in" translates a Greek verb for partaking. Athanasius means that the Word is not changed or affected by being in creation or in the body. It is the other way round: creation and the body receive from Him.

43.7 Even Plato, whom the Greeks so admire, says that the one who begot the world saw it storm-tossed and in danger of sinking into the place of unlikeness. So he took his seat at the helm of the soul, came to its help, and set right all its failures. Then what is hard to believe in what we say? Humanity had gone astray, and the Word took His seat upon it. He appeared as a man so that, by His steering

and His goodness, He might bring it safely through the storm.

Translator's note. Athanasius is loosely recalling Plato's dialogue the Statesman (around 273d–e). There the god takes the helm of the world to keep it from sinking into the boundless realm of "unlikeness." The older English has "the place of chaos," which is a paraphrase; the Greek says "the place of unlikeness."

Chapter 44

44.1 But perhaps they will agree with this out of shame, and then want to say this: if God wished to instruct and save human beings, He should have done it by a mere nod, and His Word should not have touched a body. After all, that is how He acted long ago, when He brought all things into being out of nothing.

44.2 A fitting reply to this objection would be as follows. In the beginning nothing existed anywhere, so all that was needed to create the universe was a nod and His will alone. But once man had been made, what was needed was a cure, not for things that did not exist, but for things that had come into being. It followed that the Physician and Saviour should come among those who had already been made, in order to heal what existed. For this reason He became man and used the body as a human instrument.

44.3 If this were not the right way, how else was the Word to come, wishing to use an instrument? Where was He to get it, except from those who had already come to be and who needed His divinity, through someone like themselves? For it was not things that did not exist that needed saving, in which case a bare command would have been enough. It was man, already made, who was decaying and perishing. So it was right and fitting that the Word used a human instrument, and spread Himself out into all things.

Translator's note. "Spread Himself out into all things" follows the Greek (heauton hēplōsen, "unfolded" or "extended Himself").

44.4 Next, you must also understand this: the corruption that had come was not outside the body but had become attached to it. So it was necessary for life to be woven into the body in place of corruption, so that, just as death had come to be in the body, life too might come to be in it.

44.5 If death were outside the body, life too would have had to come to it from outside. But death was woven into the body and ruled over it as something bound up with it. So life too had to be woven into the body, so that the body, putting on life in exchange, would throw off corruption. Besides, if the Word had come outside the body and not in it, death would certainly have been defeated by Him, quite naturally, since death has no strength against life. Yet the corruption that had attached itself to the body would have remained in it all the same.

44.6 For this reason the Saviour fittingly put on a body. The body would be woven together with life, so that it would no longer stay in death as something mortal. Having put on immortality, it would rise and from then on remain immortal. Once the body had put on corruption, it could not have risen unless it had put on life. And death, for its part, cannot show itself on its own, but only in a body. So He put on a body in order to find death in the body and wipe it out. For how could the Lord ever have been shown to be life, if He had not made the mortal alive?

Translator's note. The language of the body "putting on" immortality echoes [1 Corinthians 15:53-54](#).

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 15:53-54](#)

44.7 Take stubble, which fire naturally destroys. If someone keeps the fire away from the stubble, it is not burned, but it still remains stubble, uneasy at the fire's threat, for fire by nature consumes it. But if someone clothes the stubble with plenty of asbestos, which is said to resist fire, the stubble no longer fears the fire, since it has safety in a covering that cannot burn.

Translator's note. "Asbestos" translates amiantos, literally "undefiled." This was a mineral fibre believed to be proof against fire.

44.8 In the same way one could say of the body and death: if death had been held back from it by His command alone, the body would still have been mortal and corruptible, as the nature of bodies requires. To prevent this, the body put on the bodiless Word of God. So it no longer fears death or corruption, since it has life as its clothing and corruption is made to vanish in it.

Chapter 45

45.1 So it follows that the Word of God took a body and used a human instrument. He did this in order to give life to the body as well, and so that, just as he is known in creation through his works, he might also work in man and show himself everywhere, leaving nothing empty of his own divinity and of the knowledge of him.

45.2 I say again what I said before: the Saviour did this so that, just as he is present and fills everything everywhere, so he might also fill everything with the knowledge of himself. This is what the divine Scripture says too: "The whole earth was filled with the knowledge of the Lord."

Translator's note. [Isaiah 11:9](#), quoted almost word for word from the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint). That version says simply "the whole", and "earth" is understood. Compare [Habakkuk 2:14](#).

Scripture: [Isaiah 11:9](#)

45.3 Suppose someone wants to look up at heaven: he sees its ordered arrangement. Suppose he cannot look up to heaven but

lifts his eyes only to human beings: through the Word's works he sees his power, which is beyond comparison with that of men, and he recognizes him alone among men as God the Word. Suppose someone has turned aside among demons and is terrified of them: he sees the Word driving them out, and judges him to be their master. Suppose someone has sunk himself into the nature of water and thinks it is God, as the Egyptians worship water: he sees that nature changed by the Word, and knows that the Lord is the creator of the waters.

Translator's note. The water "changed" by the Word most naturally recalls the turning of water into wine ([John 2:1-11](#)), though Athanasius does not name a specific miracle.

45.4 Suppose someone has even gone down to Hades and stands in awe of the heroes who went down there, as if they were gods. He sees that Christ's resurrection has taken place, and his victory over death, and he reasons that among them too Christ alone is the true Lord and God.

45.5 For the Lord touched every part of creation. He set them all free from every deception and exposed it, as Paul says: "He stripped off the rulers and the authorities and triumphed on the cross." He did this so that no one could be deceived any longer, but would find the true Word of God everywhere.

Translator's note. [Colossians 2:15](#), in shortened form. Athanasius leaves out Paul's "made a public display of them", and where Paul has "in it" (or "in him") he says plainly "on the cross".

Scripture: [Colossians 2:15](#)

45.6 In this way man is hemmed in on every side. Everywhere he looks, in heaven, in Hades, among men, on earth, he sees the divinity of the Word spread out. So he is no longer deceived about God. He worships the Word alone, and through him knows the Father rightly.

45.7 By these reasonable arguments, then, we shall fittingly put the Greeks to shame too. But if they think the arguments are not enough to shame them, let them at least be convinced of what we say by things that appear before everyone's eyes.

Translator's note. "Greeks" here means pagans in general, not only people from Greece. After answering the Jews (chapters 33-40), Athanasius has been answering the pagans since chapter 41 and here begins to round off that argument.

Chapter 46

46.1 When did people begin to abandon the worship of idols, if not from the time the true Word of God came among men? When did the oracles among the Greeks and everywhere else cease and become empty, if not when the Saviour revealed himself here on

earth?

46.2 When did the so-called gods and heroes of the poets begin to be condemned as mere mortal men, if not from the time the Lord set up his trophy of victory over death? He kept incorrupt the body he had taken, raising it from the dead.

46.3 When were the deceit and frenzy of the demons despised, if not when the Word, the Power of God, who is master of all things and of them too, stooped down for the sake of human weakness and appeared on earth? When did the art of magic and its schools begin to be trampled underfoot, if not when the Word's appearing as God took place among men?

Translator's note. "The Power of God" echoes [1 Corinthians 1:24](#), where Paul calls Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God".

46.4 In short, when did the wisdom of the Greeks become foolish, if not when the true Wisdom of God revealed itself on earth? In the past the whole world and every place was led astray by idol worship, and people regarded nothing but idols as gods. Now, all over the world, people are abandoning the superstition of idols and fleeing to Christ. Worshipping him as God, they come through him to know the Father, whom they did not know.

Translator's note. Compare [1 Corinthians 1:20-24](#), where God makes foolish the wisdom of the world and Christ is "the wisdom of God".

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:20](#)

46.5 And here is the wonder of it. The objects of worship were countless and varied, and each place had its own idol. The so-called god of one place could not cross over into the next district, so as to persuade the neighbours to worship him; he was scarcely worshipped even among his own people. No one worshipped his neighbour's god. Each kept his own idol, thinking it lord of all. Christ alone is worshipped by all as one and the same everywhere. What the weakness of the idols could not do, to persuade even those living nearby, Christ has done. He has persuaded not only those nearby but quite simply the whole world to worship one and the same Lord, and through him God, his Father.

Chapter 47

47.1 In the old days every place was full of the deceit of the oracles. The oracles at Delphi, at Dodona, in Boeotia, in Lycia, in Libya, in Egypt, and among the Cabiri, and the Pythian priestess, were admired by people who were taken in by illusion. But now that Christ is preached everywhere, their madness has ended too, and there is no one left among them to give oracles.

Translator's note. The "Pythia" or Pythoness was the priestess who delivered the oracles at Delphi. The Cabiri were gods honored in a mystery cult, with a well-known center at Samothrace. Athanasius lists

their oracles without saying where they were.

47.2 In the old days demons used to play tricks on people's imaginations. They took possession of springs, rivers, trees, or stones, and by these sorceries they astonished foolish people. But now that the Word has appeared in his divine manifestation, these illusions have stopped. For anyone who simply uses the sign of the cross drives away their deceptions.

47.3 In the old days people took the so-called gods of the poets, Zeus, Cronos, Apollo, and the heroes, to be gods, and they went astray by worshipping them. But now that the Saviour has appeared among men, those others have been exposed as mortal men. Christ alone has been recognized among men as the true God, God the Word of God.

47.4 And what could anyone say about the magic they so admire? Before the Word came to live among us, magic was strong and active among the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and the Indians, and it astonished those who saw it. But at the coming of the Truth and the appearing of the Word, magic too was exposed and completely put out of action.

47.5 As for Greek wisdom and the loud boasting of the philosophers, I think no one needs an argument from us, because the wonder of it is plain to everyone. The wise men of the Greeks wrote so much, and yet they could not persuade even a few people in their own neighborhoods about immortality and a life of virtue. Christ alone has done it, using plain words and working through men who were not clever with the tongue. All over the world he has persuaded whole churches full of people to despise death and set their minds on immortal things. He has persuaded them to look past what is temporary and fix their eyes on what is eternal, to count earthly glory as nothing, and to strive only for immortality.

Scripture: [2 Corinthians 4:18](#)

Chapter 48

48.1 What we are saying here is not just words. Actual experience bears witness that it is true.

48.2 Let anyone who wishes come and see the mark of virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the young men who keep themselves pure in self-control. Let him see the assurance of immortality in so great a company of martyrs.

Translator's note. "Martyrs" here means those who bore witness to Christ by suffering death. The Greek word for "company" (choros) can also mean a choir.

48.3 Let anyone who wants to test what has been said by experience come, even into the very presence of the demons'

illusions, the deceit of the oracles, and the wonders of magic. Let him use the sign of the cross, which they laugh at, and simply name Christ. He will see how by this demons flee, oracles stop, and all magic and sorcery is put out of action.

48.4 Who, then, and how great is this Christ, who by his name and presence has overshadowed and made powerless everything on every side, who alone is strong against all, and who has filled the whole world with his teaching? Let the Greeks answer, those who laugh so freely and are not ashamed.

48.5 If he is a man, how did one man surpass the power of all the gods they have, and by his own power prove that those gods are nothing? If they call him a magician, how can it be that all magic is destroyed by a magician, rather than strengthened? If he had defeated human magicians, or had power over only one, they might fairly suppose that he excelled the others by a better art.

48.6 But if his cross has won the victory over magic altogether, and over the very name of it, then it is plain that the Saviour is not a magician. Even the demons that other magicians call on flee from him as their master.

48.7 So who is he? Let the Greeks tell us, whose only zeal is for mocking. Perhaps they will say that he too was a demon, and that this is why he is strong. But if they say this, they will make themselves a laughingstock, for our earlier proofs can put them to shame again. How can it be that one who drives out demons is himself a demon?

48.8 If he had driven out only some demons, people might fairly have thought he prevailed over the lesser ones by the ruler of the demons. That is just what the Jews said when they wanted to insult him. But every demonic frenzy gives way and is driven off at the naming of his name. So it is clear that they are wrong here too, and that our Lord and Saviour Christ is not, as they suppose, some demonic power.

Translator's note. Athanasius is referring to the charge in the Gospels that Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons ([Matthew 12:24](#); [Mark 3:22](#); [Luke 11:15](#)).

Scripture: [Matthew 12:24](#); [Luke 11:15](#)

48.9 So the Savior is not a mere man, nor a magician, nor some demon. By his own divinity he has abolished and overshadowed the notions found among the poets, the illusions of the demons, and the wisdom of the Greeks. It must therefore be plain, and everyone will admit, that he is truly the Son of God, the Word, Wisdom and Power of the Father. This is why his works are not human works but beyond man. They are recognized as truly God's, both from the facts themselves and from comparing them with what men do.

Translator's note. "Wisdom and Power" of God echoes Paul's description

| of Christ in [1 Corinthians 1:24](#).

| Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:24](#)

Chapter 49

49.1 Who among all the men who ever lived made a body for himself from a virgin alone? Or what man ever healed diseases such as the common Lord of all healed? Who has supplied what was lacking at birth, and made a man blind from birth see?

| *Translator's note.* The man born blind is the healing in [John 9:1-7](#).

| Scripture: [John 9:1](#)

49.2 Among them Asclepius was made a god because he practiced medicine and found herbs for sick bodies. He did not make these herbs himself out of the earth. He discovered them by knowledge drawn from nature. But how does that compare with what the Savior did? He did not merely heal a wound. He formed what birth had left lacking, and restored the creature he had made.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek says he “formed a birth (genesis),” meaning he supplied what the man born blind had lacked from birth, and “restored the thing formed” (the creature).

49.3 The Greeks worship Heracles as a god because he fought against men who were his equals and killed wild beasts by trickery. How does that compare with what the Word did, driving diseases, demons and death itself away from men? They worship Dionysus because he became a teacher of drunkenness to men. But the Savior, who really is Lord of the universe, taught self-control, and they mock him for it.

49.4 But let that pass. What can they say about the other wonders of his divinity? At what man's death was the sun darkened and the earth shaken? Look: men are dying even now, and they have died in every age. When did any such wonder happen at their deaths?

| *Translator's note.* See the darkness and the earthquake at the crucifixion in [Matthew 27:45](#), 51 and [Luke 23:44-45](#).

| Scripture: [Matthew 27:45](#); [Matthew 27:51](#); [Luke 23:45](#)

49.5 Or, to set aside what he did through his body and recall what happened after his resurrection: whose teaching, of all the men who have ever lived, has prevailed, one and the same everywhere, from one end of the earth to the other, so that reverence for him has flown across every land?

49.6 And why, if Christ is only a man, as they say, and not God the Word, do their own gods not stop his worship from crossing into the very land where those gods are? Instead, the Word himself comes to stay among them, and by his teaching puts an end to their religion and shames their illusion.

Chapter 50

50.1 Before him there were many kings and tyrants of the earth. Many wise men and magicians are recorded among the Chaldeans, Egyptians and Indians. Which of them, I do not say after death but even while still alive, was ever strong enough to fill the whole earth with his teaching? Which of them taught so great a multitude to turn from the superstition of idols, as many as our Savior has brought over from the idols to himself?

50.2 The philosophers of the Greeks wrote a great deal, with persuasiveness and skill in words. But what have they shown that equals the cross of Christ? Their clever arguments were convincing only until they died. And even the influence they seemed to have while alive, they spent in rivalry with one another, practicing their speeches against each other and quarreling.

50.3 But the Word of God, most surprising of all, taught in plainer words. He overshadowed the very clever sophists and did away with their teachings, drawing everyone to himself, and he has filled his own churches. And the wonder is this: by going down to death as a man, he abolished the grand talk of the wise about idols.

| Scripture: [John 12:32](#)

50.4 Whose death has ever driven away demons? Whose death did demons ever fear as they fear Christ's? Wherever the name of the Savior is named, every demon is driven out from there. And who has ever so removed the passions of the soul from men that the sexually immoral become self-controlled, murderers no longer take up the sword, and those gripped by cowardice become brave?

50.5 And in short, who has persuaded the barbarians, and the people of the various nations, to put away their madness and think of peace? Nothing but faith in Christ and the sign of the cross. And who else has given people such assurance about immortality as the cross of Christ and the resurrection of his body?

50.6 For although the Greeks invented every kind of falsehood, they could not even invent a resurrection for their idols. It never occurred to them at all to ask whether the body could exist again after death. And for this one might give them special credit. By reasoning this way they exposed the weakness of their own idol worship, and they left the power to Christ, so that from this too he might be recognized by all as the Son of God.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek verb (apodechomai) here means to approve of someone or give them credit, so the sense is that one would especially commend them for this.

Chapter 51

51.1 Now what man, whether after his death or even while living,

has taught about virginity and did not think this virtue impossible for human beings? But Christ, our Saviour and King of all, was so powerful in his teaching about it that even children who have not yet reached the lawful age vow a virginity that goes beyond the law.

51.2 What man has ever been able to travel so far as to reach the Scythians, the Ethiopians, the Persians, the Armenians, the Goths, those said to live beyond the Ocean, those beyond Hyrcania, or even to come among the Egyptians and Chaldeans? These are people who practice magic, who are superstitious beyond all natural measure, and who are savage in their ways. Who has ever preached to them at all about virtue and self-control, and against the worship of idols, as the Lord of all has done, the Power of God, our Lord Jesus Christ?

Translator's note. Hyrcania was a region on the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea. "The Power of God" echoes [1 Corinthians 1:24](#).

51.3 He did not only preach through his disciples. He also persuaded these peoples in their minds to change their savage ways, no longer to worship the gods of their fathers, but to come to know him and to worship the Father through him.

51.4 For in earlier times, when they worshiped idols, Greeks and barbarians fought against each other, and they were cruel even to their own relatives. Because of their relentless fighting with one another, no one could cross land or sea at all without arming his hand with swords.

51.5 Indeed, their whole way of life was carried on with weapons. The sword was their walking stick, and the support they leaned on in every need. Yet, as I said before, they were serving idols and offering sacrifices to demons. Even so, nothing in their superstitious worship of idols could re-educate people of that mind.

51.6 But when they have come over to the teaching of Christ, then, wonderfully, they are truly pierced to the heart. They have put away the cruelty of murder and no longer have war on their minds. Everything with them is now peaceful, and from now on what they desire is whatever leads to friendship.

Chapter 52

52.1 Who, then, has done this? Who has joined in peace those who hated one another, if not the beloved Son of the Father, the common Saviour of all, Jesus Christ? In his love he endured everything for our salvation. Long ago, too, the Scripture prophesied the peace that he would bring, saying: "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into sickles, and nation will not take up sword against nation, and they will never again learn to make war."

Translator's note. Athanasius is quoting [Isaiah 2:4](#) in the Greek

Septuagint wording (compare [Micah 4:3](#)); the word translated “spears” (zibyne) means a hunting spear or javelin.

Scripture: [Isaiah 2:4](#)

52.2 Nor is this hard to believe, since even now the barbarians who have savagery born in their nature, while they still sacrifice to their own idols, rage against one another and cannot bear to be without a sword for a single hour.

52.3 But when they hear the teaching of Christ, immediately they turn from wars to farming. Instead of arming their hands with swords, they stretch them out in prayer. In short, instead of fighting among themselves, from then on they arm themselves against the devil and against demons, and they defeat them with self-control and virtue of soul.

52.4 This is a mark of the Saviour’s divinity: what people could not learn among idols, they have learned from him. It is also no small proof of the weakness and nothingness of demons and idols. For the demons knew their own weakness. That is why they used to set people at war against one another, so that, if people stopped quarreling among themselves, they would not turn to fight against the demons.

52.5 Indeed, those who are taught by Christ no longer make war on one another. Instead they take their stand against the demons, with their way of life and their virtuous deeds. They drive the demons off and make a mockery of their leader, the devil. So in youth they are self-controlled, in temptations they endure, in labors they persevere. When they are insulted they are patient, and when they are robbed they take it lightly. And, what is most astonishing, they even despise death and become martyrs of Christ.

Translator’s note. “Martyr” means “witness.” Here it refers to those who die for their testimony to Christ.

Chapter 53

53.1 To name one more proof of the Saviour’s divinity, and a truly astonishing one: what mere man ever managed this, whether magician, tyrant or king? Who has ever been able, on his own, to take on idolatry, the whole host of demons, all magic and all the wisdom of the Greeks, and to stand against all of them with a single decisive stroke? These were powerful, still at their height, and they amazed everyone. Yet our Lord, the true Word of God, did it. Invisibly exposing the error of each person, he alone carries off all people from all of these. So those who used to worship idols now trample them underfoot. Those who were admired for their magic burn their books. And the wise prefer the interpretation of the Gospels above every other study.

Translator’s note. The burning of magic books recalls [Acts 19:19](#), where

| former practitioners of magic in Ephesus burned their books publicly.

| *Scripture:* [Acts 19:19](#)

53.2 For the gods they used to worship they now abandon, and the one they used to mock as crucified they now worship as Christ, confessing Him to be God. The so-called gods among them are driven away by the sign of the cross. The crucified Savior, meanwhile, is proclaimed throughout the whole world as God and Son of God. The gods worshiped among the Greeks are denounced by these same people as shameful. And those who receive the teaching of Christ live a more chaste life than those gods did.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek says only "than those." It most naturally points back to the gods just named. The older translation's "than they" leaves this open.

53.3 If, then, these things and others like them are merely human, let anyone who wishes show that men of earlier times did the like, and so persuade us. But if these are clearly not the works of men but of God, as they are, why are the unbelievers so impious, refusing to recognize the Master who did them?

53.4 Their condition is like that of a man who looks at the works of creation and fails to recognize God as their Maker. For if they knew His divinity from His power over the whole universe, they would have known that the works Christ did through the body are not human either, but belong to the Savior of all, the Word of God. And had they known this, then, as Paul said, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

| *Translator's note.* Athanasius is quoting [1 Corinthians 2:8](#).

| *Scripture:* [1 Corinthians 2:8](#)

Chapter 54

54.1 Suppose someone wants to see God, who is invisible by nature and cannot be seen at all. He grasps and knows Him from His works. In the same way, let the person who cannot see Christ with his mind at least learn of Him from the works of His body. Let him test whether they are human works or God's.

| *Scripture:* [Romans 1:20](#)

54.2 If they are human, let him scoff. But if they are known to be not human but God's, let him not laugh at what deserves no mockery. Let him rather marvel that through so humble a thing the divine has been shown to us. Through death immortality has reached all people. Through the Word becoming man, God's providence over all things has become known, and with it the one who supplies and creates it, the very Word of God.

54.3 For He became man so that we might be made divine. He

showed Himself through a body so that we might gain an idea of the unseen Father. And He endured the insults of men so that we might inherit incorruption. He Himself was not harmed in any way, since He is impassible and incorruptible, the Word Himself and God. But the human beings who were suffering, and for whose sake He endured these things, He guarded and preserved in His own impassibility.

Translator's note. "Impassible" translates "apathe," meaning not subject to suffering.

54.4 In short, the Savior's achievements, accomplished through His becoming man, are so many and so great that to recount them would be like looking out over the open sea and trying to count its waves. The eyes cannot take in all the waves, because the ones coming on escape the notice of the person trying. In the same way, anyone who wants to take in all of Christ's achievements in the body cannot grasp the whole, even in his mind. More of them slip past his thought than he supposes he has gathered.

54.5 So it is better not to try to speak of the whole, since no one can describe even a part of it. Let me mention just one more thing and leave you to marvel at the rest. For all of it is equally wonderful, and wherever a person looks, he sees the divinity of the Word there and is overwhelmed with amazement.

Chapter 55

55.1 After what has been said, it is worth your while to consider this next point, to take it as the starting place for what remains unsaid, and to marvel at it greatly. Since the Savior came to live among us, idolatry has not only stopped growing; what remains of it is shrinking and gradually ceasing. The wisdom of the Greeks no longer advances either; what is left of it is now disappearing. Demons no longer deceive with apparitions, oracles and magic. If they so much as dare to try, they are put to shame by the sign of the cross.

Translator's note. The Greek printed here says literally to take this point as "a beginning of the things not said," not as "the sum of what we have already stated" (the older translation's wording).

55.2 To sum it up, see how the Savior's teaching is growing everywhere, while all idolatry and everything that stands against the faith of Christ is shrinking daily, growing weaker and falling. As you see this, worship the Savior who is over all, God the Word, who is mighty. And condemn those things that are being diminished and wiped out by Him.

Translator's note. "Who is over all" may echo [Romans 9:5](#), which speaks of Christ as "over all, God blessed forever."

55.3 When the sun is present, darkness no longer has strength, and

if any is left anywhere, it is driven away. In the same way, now that the divine appearing of the Word of God has come, the darkness of the idols no longer has strength, and every part of the world in every direction is lit up by His teaching.

55.4 Suppose a king reigns over some country but does not show himself, staying inside his own house. Often some lawless men take advantage of his withdrawal and proclaim themselves king. Each one puts on the appearance of a king and deceives the simple, and so people are led astray by the name. They hear that there is a king but do not see him, chiefly because they cannot get inside the house. But when the true king comes out and appears, then the lawless deceivers are exposed by his presence, and the people, seeing the true king, leave those who had long led them astray.

55.5 In the same way, demons and men used to deceive in former times, clothing themselves with the honour due to God. But when the Word of God appeared in a body and made his own Father known to us, then the deceit of the demons is wiped out and comes to an end. People now look to the true God, the Word of the Father, and abandon the idols, and at last they come to know the true God.

55.6 This is a mark that Christ is God the Word and the Power of God. Human things come to an end, while the word of Christ remains. So it is plain to everyone that the things that come to an end are only temporary, but the one who remains is God, the true Son of God, the only-begotten Word.

Translator's note. "The Power of God" echoes Paul's description of Christ in [1 Corinthians 1:24](#).

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 1:24](#)

Chapter 56

56.1 Let this, then, be our short contribution to you, lover of Christ, as a first outline and sketch of the faith in Christ and of his divine appearing to us. But take your starting point from this. If you read the writings of the Scriptures and give them your sincere attention, you will learn from them, more fully and clearly, the exact details of what has been said.

56.2 For those writings were spoken and written by God through men who spoke of God. We, for our part, have learned from inspired teachers who studied those Scriptures, and who also became witnesses (martyrs) to the deity of Christ, and we pass on what we learned to your eagerness to learn.

Translator's note. "Martyrs" translates the Greek word for "witnesses"; in Athanasius's day it already commonly meant those who died for the faith, and probably carries both senses here.

56.3 You will also learn of his second appearing to us, which is

glorious and truly divine. Then he will no longer come in lowliness but in his own glory, no longer in humble condition but in his own majesty. He will no longer come to suffer, but from then on to give everyone the fruit of his cross. I mean the resurrection and incorruption. He will no longer be judged, but will judge everyone, according to what each did through the body, whether good or bad. For the good, the kingdom of heaven is stored up; for those who did wicked things, eternal fire and the outer darkness.

| Scripture: [2 Corinthians 5:10](#); [Matthew 25:41](#); [Matthew 25:30](#)

56.4 For the Lord himself says it this way: “I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven in the glory of the Father.”

| *Translator’s note.* The words follow [Matthew 26:64](#). Athanasius adds “in the glory of the Father,” a phrase from another saying about the Son of Man’s coming ([Matthew 16:27](#); [Mark 8:38](#)).

| Scripture: [Matthew 26:64](#)

56.5 For this reason, too, there is a saving word that prepares us for that day: “Be ready and watch, for he comes at an hour you do not know.” For as the blessed Paul says, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive what is due for what he did through the body, whether good or bad.

| *Translator’s note.* The saying combines Jesus’ words in [Matthew 24:42](#), 24:44 and 25:13. The Paul quotation is 2 Corinthians 5:10.

| Scripture: [Matthew 24:42](#); [Matthew 24:44](#); [2 Corinthians 5:10](#)

Chapter 57

57.1 But to search the Scriptures and know them truly, one needs a good life, a pure soul, and the virtue that follows Christ. Then the mind, travelling along that path, can reach what it longs for and grasp it, as far as human nature can learn about the Word of God.

57.2 Without a pure mind, and without imitating the lives of the saints, no one could possibly grasp the words of the saints.

57.3 Suppose someone wants to see the light of the sun. He will certainly wipe his eye clean and make it bright, purifying himself until he is almost like the thing he longs for, so that the eye, having become light, may see the light of the sun. Or suppose someone wants to see a city or a country. He will certainly travel to that place to see it. In the same way, anyone who wants to understand the mind of those who spoke about God must first wash and cleanse his soul by the way he lives. He must come to the saints themselves by becoming like them in his actions. Then, sharing with them the way of life they lead, he will understand what God revealed to them. From then on, joined to them, he will escape the danger of sinners and the fire that awaits them on the day of judgment. And he will

receive what is laid up for the saints in the kingdom of heaven: "what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man." These things are prepared for those who live in virtue and love God the Father, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Through him and with him, to the Father himself, together with the Son himself, in the Holy Spirit, be honor and power and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Translator's note. The quotation is from [1 Corinthians 2:9](#), in slightly varied wording. Where Paul ends with "for those who love him," Athanasius adds "those who live in virtue."

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 2:9](#)

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