On Luke 10 22 (Matt 11 27)

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 296–373)

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§1. This Text Refers Not to the Eternal Word But to the Incarnate.
"All things were delivered to Me by My Father. And none knoweth Who the Son is, save the Father; and Who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."

And from not perceiving this they of the sect of Arius, Eusebius and his fellows, indulge impiety against the Lord. For they say, if all things were delivered (meaning by 'all' the Lordship of Creation), there was once a time when He had them not. But if He had them not, He is not of the Father, for if He were, He would on that account have had them always, and would not have required to receive them. But this point will furnish all the clearer an exposure of their folly. For the expression in question does not refer to the Lordship over Creation, nor to presiding over the works of God, but is meant to reveal in part the intention of the Incarnation (thj oikonomiaj). For if when He was speaking they 'were delivered' to Him, clearly before He received them, creation was void of the Word. What then becomes of the text "in Him all things consist" (Col. i. 17)? But if simultaneously with the origin of the Creation it was all 'delivered' to Him, such delivery were superfluous, for 'all things were made by Him' (Joh. i. 3), and it would be unnecessary for those things of which the Lord Himself was the artificer to be delivered over to Him. For in making them He was Lord of the things which were being originated. But even supposing they were 'delivered' to Him after they were originated, see the monstrosity.

For if they 'were delivered,' and upon His receiving them the Father retired, then we are in peril of falling into the fabulous tales which some tell, that He gave over [His works] to the Son, and Himself departed. Or if, while the Son has them, the Father has them also, we ought to say, not 'were delivered,' but that He took Him as partner, as Paul did Silvanus. But this is even more monstrous; for God is not imperfect , nor did He summon the Son to help Him in His need; but, being Father of the Word, He makes all things by His means, and without delivering creation over to Him, by His means and in Him exercises Providence over it, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father (Matt. x. 29), nor is the grass clothed without God (ib. vi. 30), but at once the Father worketh, and the Son worketh hitherto (cf. Job. v. 17). Vain, therefore, is the opinion of the impious. For the expression is not what they think, but designates the Incarnation.

§2. Sense in Which, and End For Which All Things Were Delivered to the Incarnate Son.

For whereas man sinned, and is fallen, and by his fall all things are in confusion: death prevailed from Adam to Moses (cf. Rom. v. 14), the earth was cursed, Hades was opened, Paradise shut, Heaven offended, man, lastly, corrupted and brutalised (cf. Ps. xlix. 12), while the devil was exulting against us;-then God, in His loving-kindness, not willing man made in His own image to perish, said, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go?' (Isa. vi. 8). But while all held their peace, the Son said, 'Here am I, send Me.' And then it was that, saying 'Go Thou,' He 'delivered' to Him man, that the Word Himself might be made Flesh, and by taking the Flesh, restore it wholly. For to Him, as to a physician, man 'was delivered' to heal the bite of the serpent; as to life, to raise what was dead; as to light, to illumine the darkness; and, because He was Word, to renew the rational nature (to logikon). Since then all things 'were delivered' to Him, and He is made Man, straightway all things were set right and perfected. Earth receives blessing instead of a curse, Paradise was opened to the robber, Hades cowered, the tombs were opened and the dead raised, the gates of Heaven were lifted up to await Him that 'cometh from Edom' (Ps. xxiv. 7, Isa. lxiii. I).

Why, the Saviour Himself expressly signifies in what sense 'all things were delivered' to Him, when He continues, as Matthew tells us: 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt. xi. 28). Yes, ye 'were delivered' to Me to give rest to those who had laboured, and life to the dead. And what is written in John's Gospel harmonises with this: 'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand' (Joh. iii. 35). Given, in order that, just as all things were made by Him, so in Him all things might be renewed. For they were not 'delivered' unto Him, that being poor, He might be made rich, nor did He receive all things that He might receive power which before He lacked: far be the thought: but in order that as Saviour He might rather set all things right. For it was fitting that while 'through Him' all things came into being at the beginning, 'in Him' (note the change of phrase) all things should be set right (cf. Joh. i. 3, Eph. i. 10). For at the beginning they came into being 'through' Him; but afterwards, all having fallen, the Word has been made Flesh, and put it on, in order that 'in Him' all should be set right. Suffering Himself, He gave us rest, hungering Himself, He nourished us, and going down into Hades He brought us back thence.

For example, at the time of the creation of all things, their creation consisted in a fiat, such as 'let [the earth] bring forth,' 'let there be' (Gen. i. 3, Gen. i. II), but at the restoration it was fitting that all things should be 'delivered' to Him, in order that He might be made man, and all things be renewed in Him. For man, being in Him, was quickened for this was why the Word was united to man, namely, that against man the curse might no longer prevail. This is the reason why they record the request made on behalf of mankind in the seventy-first Psalm: 'Give the King Thy judgment, O God' (Ps. lxxii. I): asking that both the judgment of death which hung over us may be delivered to the Son, and that He may then, by dying for us, abolish it for us in Himself. This was what He signified, saying Himself, in the eighty-seventh Psalm: 'Thine indignation lieth hard upon me' (Ps. lxxxviii. 7). For He

bore the indignation which lay upon us, as also He says in the hundred and thirty-seventh: 'Lord, Thou shalt do vengeance for me' (Ps. cxxxviii. 8, LXX.).

§3. By 'All Things' Is Meant the Redemptive Attributes and Power of Christ.
Thus, then, we may understand all things to have been delivered to the Saviour, and, if it be necessary to follow up understanding by explanation, that hath been delivered unto Him which He did not previously possess. For He was not man previously, but became man for the sake of saving man. And the Word was not in the beginning flesh, but has been made flesh subsequently (cf. Joh. i. 1 sqq.), in which Flesh, as the Apostle says, He reconciled the enmity which was against us (Col. i. 20, ii. 14, Eph. ii. 15, 16) and destroyed the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might make the two into one new man, making peace, and reconcile both in one body to the Father. That, however, which the Father has, belongs also to the Son, as also He says in John, 'All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine' (Joh. xvi. 15), expressions which could not be improved. For when He became that which He was not, 'all things were delivered' to Him. But when He desires to declare His unity with the Father, He teaches it without any reserve, saying: 'All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine.' And one cannot but admire the exactness of the language. For He has not said 'all things whatsoever the Father hath, He hath given to Me,' lest He should appear at one time not to have possessed these things; but 'are Mine.' For these things, being in the Father's power, are equally in that of the Son.

But we must in turn examine what things 'the Father hath.' For if Creation is meant, the Father had nothing before creation, and proves to have received something additional from Creation; but far be it to think this. For just as He exists before creation, so before creation also He has what He has, which we also believe to belong to the Son (Joh. xvi. 15). For if the Son is in the Father, then all things that the Father has belong to the Son. So this expression is subversive of the perversity of the heterodox in saying that 'if all things have been delivered to the Son, then the Father has ceased to have power over what is delivered, having appointed the Son in His place. For, in fact, the Father judgeth none, but hath given all judgment to the Son' (Joh. v. 22). But 'let the mouth of them that speak wickedness be stopped' (Ps. lxiii. II), (for although He has given all judgment to the Son, He is not, therefore, stripped of lordship: nor, because it is said that all things are delivered by the Father to the Son, is He any the less over all), separating as they clearly do the Only-begotten from God, Who is by nature inseparable from Him, even though in their madness they separate Him by their words, not perceiving, the impious men, that the Light can never be separated from the sun, in which it resides by nature.

For one must use a poor simile drawn from tangible and familiar objects to put our idea into words, since it is over bold to intrude upon the incomprehensible nature [of God].

§4. The Text John XVI. 15, Shews Clearly the Essential Relation of the Son to the Father.
As then the light from the Sun which illumines the world could never be supposed, by men of sound mind, to do so without the Sun, since the Sun's light is united to the Sun by nature;

and as, if the Light were to say: I have received from the Sun the power of illumining all things, and of giving growth and strength to them by the heat that is in me, no one will be mad enough to think that the mention of the Sun is meant to separate him from what is his nature, namely the light; so piety would have us perceive that the Divine Essence of the Word is united by nature to His own Father. For the text before us will put our problem in the clearest possible light, seeing that the Saviour said, 'All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine;' which shews that He is ever with the Father. For 'whatsoever He hath' shews that the Father wields the Lordship, while 'are Mine' shews the inseparable union. It is necessary, then, that we should perceive that in the Father reside Everlastingness, Eternity, Immortality. Now these reside in Him not as adventitious attributes, but, as it were, in a well-spring they reside in Him, and in the Son. When then you wish to perceive what relates to the Son, learn what is in the Father, for this is what you must believe to be in the Son. If then the Father is a thing created or made, these qualities belong also to the Son.

And if it is permissible to say of the Father 'there was once a time when He was not,' or 'made of nothing,' let these words be applied also to the Son. But if it is impious to ascribe these attributes to the Father, grant that it is impious also to ascribe them to the Son. For what belongs to the Father, belongs to the Son. For he that honoureth the Son, honoureth the Father that sent Him, and he that receiveth the Son, receiveth the Father with Him, because he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father (Matt. x. 40; John xiv. 9). As then the Father is not a creature, so neither is the Son; and as it is not possible to say of Him 'there was a time when He was not,' nor 'made of nothing,' so it is not proper to say the like of the Son either. But rather, as the Father's attributes are Everlastingness, Immortality, Eternity, and the being no creature, it follows that thus also we must think of the Son. For as it is written (Joh. v. 26), 'As the Father hath life in Himself, so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself.' But He uses the word 'gave' in order to point to the Father who gives. As, again, life is in the Father, so also is it in the Son, so as to shew Him to be inseparable and everlasting.

For this is why He speaks with exactness, 'whatsoever the Father hath,' in order namely that by thus mentioning the Father He may avoid being thought to be the Father Himself. For He does not say 'I am the Father,' but 'whatsoever the Father hath.'

§5. The Same Text Further Explained.

For His Only-begotten Son might, ye Arians, be called 'Father' by His Father, yet not in the sense in which you in your error might perhaps understand it, but (while Son of the Father that begat Him) 'Father of the coming age' (Isa. ix. 6, LXX). For it is necessary not to leave any of your surmises open to you. Well then, He says by the prophet, 'A Son is born and given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Angel of Great Counsel, mighty God, Ruler, Father of the coming age' (Isa. ix. 6). The Only-begotten Son of God, then, is at once Father of the coming age, and mighty God, and Ruler. And it is shewn clearly that all things whatsoever the Father hath are His, and that as the Father gives life,

the Son likewise is able to quicken whom He will. For 'the dead,' He says, 'shall hear the voice of the Son, and shall live' (cf. John v. 25), and the will and desire of Father and Son is one, since their nature also is one and indivisible. And the Arians torture themselves to no purpose, from not understanding the saying of our Saviour, 'All things whatsoever the Father hath are Mine.' For from this passage at once the delusion of Sabellius can be upset, and it will expose the folly of our modern Jews.

For this is why the Only begotten, having life in Himself as the Father has, also knows alone Who the Father is, namely, because He is in the Father and the Father in Him. For He is His Image, and consequently, because He is His Image, all that belongs to the Father is in Him. He is an exact seal, shewing in Himself the Father; living Word and true, Power, Wisdom, our Sanctification and Redemption (I Cor. i. 30). For 'in Him we both live and move and have our being' (Acts xvii. 28), and 'no man knoweth Who is the Father, save the Son, and Who is the Son, save the Father' (Luke x. 22).

§6. The Trisagion Wrongly Explained by Arians. Its True Significance.

And how do the impious men venture to speak folly, as they ought not, being men and unable to find out how to describe even what is on the earth? But why do I say 'what is on the earth?' Let them tell us their own nature, if they can discover how to investigate their own nature? Rash they are indeed, and self-willed, not trembling to form opinions of things which angels desire to look into (1 Pet. i. 12), who are so far above them, both in nature and in rank. For what is nearer [God] than the Cherubim or the Seraphim? And yet they, not even seeing Him, nor standing on their feet, nor even with bare, but as it were with veiled faces, offer their praises, with untiring lips doing nought else but glorify the divine and ineffable nature with the Trisagion. And nowhere has any one of the divinely speaking prophets, men specially selected for such vision, reported to us that in the first utterance of the word Holy the voice is raised aloud, while in the second it is lower, but in the third, quite low,-and that consequently the first utterance denotes lordship, the second subordination, and the third marks a yet lower degree. But away with the folly of these haters of God and senseless men. For the Triad, praised, reverenced, and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees (asxhmatistoj). It is united without confusion, just as the Monad also is distinguished without separation. For the fact of those venerable living creatures (Isa.

vi.; Rev. iv. 8) offering their praises three times, saying 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' proves that the Three Subsistences are perfect, just as in saying 'Lord,' they declare the One Essence. They then that depreciate the Only-begotten Son of God blaspheme God, defaming His perfection and accusing Him of imperfection, and render themselves liable to the severest chastisement. For he that blasphemes any one of the Subsistences shall have remission neither in this world nor in that which is to come. But God is able to open the eyes of their heart to contemplate the Sun of Righteousness, in order that coming to know Him whom they formerly set at nought, they may with unswerving piety of mind together with us glorify Him, because to Him belongs the kingdom, even to the Father Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

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