The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, True God of True God, Begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man;

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried;

And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

And ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the Resurrection of the dead,

And the Life of the age to come. Amen.
Selections from Athanasius’ *De Incarnatione*

4. You are wondering, perhaps, for what possible reason, having proposed to speak of the Incarnation of the Word, we are at present treating of the origin of mankind. But this, too, properly belongs to the aim of our treatise. 2. For in speaking of the appearance of the Savior amongst us, we must needs speak also of the origin of men, that you may know that the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appear among men. 3. For of His becoming Incarnate we were the object, and for our salvation He dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born even in a human body. 4. Thus, then, God has made man, and willed that he should abide in incorruption; but men, having despised and rejected the contemplation of God, and devised and contrived evil for themselves (as was said in the former treatise), received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; and from thenceforth no longer remained as they were made, but were being corrupted according to their devices; and death had the mastery over them as king. For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time. 5. For if, out of a former normal state of non-existence, they were called into being by the Presence and loving-kindness of the Word, it followed naturally that when men were bereft of the knowledge of God and were turned back to what was not (for what is evil is not, but what is good is), they should, since they derive their being from God who IS, be everlastingly bereft even of being; in other words, that they should be disintegrated and abide in death and corruption. 6. For man is by nature mortal, inasmuch as he is made out of what is not; but by reason of his likeness to Him that is (and if he still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) he would stay his natural corruption, and remain incorrupt; as Wisdom says: “The taking heed to His laws is the assurance of immortality;” but being incorrupt, he would live henceforth as God, to which I suppose the divine Scripture refers, when it says: “I have said ye are gods, and ye are all sons of the most Highest; but ye die like men, and fall as one of the princes.”

6. For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God’s image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution. 2. For death, as I said above, gained from that time forth a legal hold over us, and it was impossible to evade the law, since it had been laid down by God because of the transgression, and the result was in truth at once monstrous and unseemly. 3. For it were monstrous, firstly, that God, having spoken, should prove false—that, when once He had ordained that man, if he transgressed the commandment, should die the death, after the transgression man should not die, but God’s word should be broken. For God would not be true, if, when He had said we should die, man died not. 4. Again, it were unseemly that creatures once made rational, and having partaken of the Word, should go to ruin, and turn again toward non-existence by the way of corruption. 5. For it were not worthy of God’s goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil. 6. Especially it was unseemly to the last degree that God’s handicraft among men should be done away, either because of their own carelessness, or because of the deceitfulness of evil spirits. 7. So, as the rational creatures were wasting and such works in course of ruin, what was God in His goodness to do? Suffer corruption to prevail against them and death to hold them fast? And
where were the profit of their having been made, to begin with? For better were they not made, than once made, left to neglect and ruin. 8. For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God’s part—if, that is, He allows His own work to be ruined when once He had made it—more so than if He had never made man at all. 9. For if He had not made them, none could impute weakness; but once He had made them, and created them out of nothing, it were most monstrous for the work to be ruined, and that before the eyes of the Maker. 10. It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God’s goodness.

7. But just as this consequence must needs hold, so, too, on the other side the just claims of God lie against it: that God should appear true to the law He had laid down concerning death. For it were monstrous for God, the Father of truth, to appear a liar for our profit and preservation. 2. So here, once more, what possible course was God to take? To demand repentance of men for their transgression? For this one might pronounce worthy of God; as though, just as from transgression men have become set towards corruption, so from repentance they may once more be set in the way of incorruption. 3. But repentance would, firstly, fail to guard the just claim of God. For He would still be none the more true, if men did not remain in the grasp of death; nor, secondly, does repentance call men back from what is their nature—it merely stays them from acts of sin. 4. Now, if there were merely a misdemeanor in question, and not a consequent corruption, repentance were well enough. But if, when transgression had once gained a start, men became involved in that corruption which was their nature, and were deprived of the grace which they had, being in the image of God, what further step was needed? or what was required for such grace and such recall, but the Word of God, which had also at the beginning made everything out of naught? 5. For His it was once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all. For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.

8. For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, howbeit he was not far from us before. For no part of Creation is left void of Him: He has filled all things everywhere, remaining present with His own Father. But He comes in condescension to show loving-kindness upon us, and to visit us. 2. And seeing the race of rational creatures in the way to perish, and death reigning over them by corruption; seeing, too, that the threat against transgression gave a firm hold to the corruption which was upon us, and that it was monstrous that before the law was fulfilled it should fall through: seeing, once more, the unseemliness of what was come to pass: that the things whereof He Himself was Artificer were passing away: seeing, further, the exceeding wickedness of men, and how by little and little they had increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves: and seeing, lastly, how all men were under penalty of death: He took pity on our race, and had mercy on our infirmity, and condescended to our corruption, and, unable to bear that death should have the mastery—lest the creature should perish, and His Father’s handiwork in men be spent for naught—He takes unto Himself a body, and that of no different sort from ours. 3. For He did not simply will to become embodied, or will merely to appear. For if He willed merely to appear, He was able to effect His divine appearance by some other and higher means as well. But He takes a body of our kind, and not merely so, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, knowing not a man, a body clean and in very truth pure from intercourse of men. For being Himself mighty, and Artificer of everything,
He prepares the body in the Virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling. 4. And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father—doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord’s body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire.

9. For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent. 2. For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering His own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt by His death. And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection. For the actual corruption in death has no longer holding-ground against men, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among them. 3. And like as when a great king has entered into some large city and taken up his abode in one of the houses there, such city is at all events held worthy of high honor, nor does any enemy or bandit any longer descend upon it and subject it; but, on the contrary, it is thought entitled to all care, because of the king’s having taken up his residence in a single house there: so, too, has it been with the Monarch of all. 4. For now that He has come to our realm, and taken up his abode in one body among His peers, henceforth the whole conspiracy of the enemy against mankind is checked, and the corruption of death which before was prevailing against them is done away. For the race of men had gone to ruin, had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to meet the end of death.

10. Now in truth this great work was peculiarly suited to God’s goodness. 1. For if a king, having founded a house or city, if it be beset by bandits from the carelessness of its inmates, does not by any means neglect it, but avenges and reclaims it as his own work, having regard not to the carelessness of the inhabitants, but to what beseems himself; much more did God the Word of the all-good Father not neglect the race of men, His work, going to corruption: but, while He blotted out the death which had ensued by the offering of His own body, He corrected their neglect by His own teaching, restoring all that was man’s by His own power. 2. And of this one may be assured at the hands of the Savior’s own inspired writers, if one happen upon their writings, where they say: “For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died, and He died for all that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him Who for our sakes died and rose again,” our Lord Jesus Christ. And, again: “But228 we behold Him, Who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the
suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He should taste of
death for every man.” 3. Then He also points out the reason why it was necessary for none other
than God the Word Himself to become incarnate; as follows: “For it became Him, for Whom are
all things, and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the
Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering;” by which words He means, that it belonged
to none other to bring man back from the corruption which had begun, than the Word of God,
Who had also made them from the beginning. 4. And that it was in order to the sacrifice for
bodies such as His own that the Word Himself also assumed a body, to this, also, they refer in
these words: “Forasmuch then as the children are the sharers in blood and flesh, He also Himself
in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might bring to naught Him that had
the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them who, through fear of death, were all
their lifetime subject to bondage.” 5. For by the sacrifice of His own body, He both put an end to
the law which was against us, and made a new beginning of life for us, by the hope of
resurrection which He has given us. For since from man it was that death prevailed over men, for
this cause conversely, by the Word of God being made man has come about the destruction of
death and the resurrection of life; as the man which bore Christ says: “For since by man came
death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ
shall all be made alive:” and so forth. For no longer now do we die as subject to condemnation;
but as men who rise from the dead we await the general resurrection of all, “which in its own
times He shall show,” even God, Who has also wrought it, and bestowed it upon us. 6. This then
is the first cause of the Savior’s being made man. But one might see from the following reasons
also, that His gracious coming amongst us was fitting to have taken place.

11. God, Who has the power over all things, when He was making the race of men through His
own Word, seeing the weakness of their nature, that it was not sufficient of itself to know its
Maker, nor to get any idea at all of God; because while He was uncreate, the creatures had been
made of naught, and while He was incorporeal, men had been fashioned in a lower way in the
body, and because in every way the things made fell far short of being able to comprehend and
know their Maker—taking pity, I say, on the race of men, inasmuch as He is good, He did not
leave them destitute of the knowledge of Himself, lest they should find no profit in existing at
all. 2. For what profit to the creatures if they knew not their Maker? or how could they be
rational without knowing the Word (and Reason) of the Father, in Whom they received their very
being? For there would be nothing to distinguish them even from brute creatures if they had
knowledge of nothing but earthly things. Nay, why did God make them at all, as He did not wish
to be known by them? 3. Whence, lest this should be so, being good, He gives them a share in
His own Image, our Lord Jesus Christ, and makes them after His own Image and after His
likeness: so that by such grace perceiving the Image, that is, the Word of the Father, they may be
able through Him to get an idea of the Father, and knowing their Maker, live the happy and truly
blessed life. 4. But men once more in their perversity having set at naught, in spite of all this, the
grace given them, so wholly rejected God, and so darkened their soul, as not merely to forget
their idea of God, but also to fashion for themselves one invention after another. For not only did
they grave idols for themselves, instead of the truth, and honor things that were not before the
living God, “and serve the creature rather than the Creator,” but, worst of all, they transferred the
honor of God even to stocks and stones and to every material object and to men, and went even
further than this, as we have said in the former treatise. 5. So far indeed did their impiety go, that
they proceeded to worship devils, and proclaimed them as gods, fulfilling their own lusts. For
they performed, as was said above, offerings of brute animals, and sacrifices of men, as was meet for them, binding themselves down all the faster under their maddening inspirations. 6. For this reason it was also that magic arts were taught among them, and oracles in divers places led men astray, and all men ascribed the influences of their birth and existence to the stars and to all the heavenly bodies, having no thought of anything beyond what was visible. 7. And, in a word, everything was full of irreligion and lawlessness, and God alone, and His Word, was unknown, albeit He had not hidden Himself out of men’s sight, nor given the knowledge of Himself in one way only; but had, on the contrary, unfolded it to them in many forms and by many ways.

13. So then, men having thus become brutalized, and demoniacal deceit thus clouding every place, and hiding the knowledge of the true God, what was God to do? To keep still silence at so great a thing, and suffer men to be led astray by demons and not to know God? 2. And what was the use of man having been originally made in God’s image? For it had been better for him to have been made simply like a brute animal, than, once made rational, for him to live the life of the brutes. 3. Or where was any necessity at all for his receiving the idea of God to begin with? For if he be not fit to receive it even now, it were better it had not been given him at first. 4. Or what profit to God Who has made them, or what glory to Him could it be, if men, made by Him, do not worship Him, but think that others are their makers? For God thus proves to have made these for others instead of for Himself. 5. Once again, a merely human king does not let the lands he has colonized pass to others to serve them, nor go over to other men; but he warns them by letters, and often sends to them by friends, or, if need be, he comes in person, to put them to rebuke in the last resort by his presence, only that they may not serve others and his own work be spent for naught. 6. Shall not God much more spare His own creatures, that they be not led astray from Him and serve things of naught? especially since such going astray proves the cause of their ruin and undoing, and since it was unfitness that they should perish which had once been partakers of God’s image. 7. What then was God to do? or what was to be done save the renewing of that which was in God’s image, so that by it men might once more be able to know Him? But how could this have come to pass save by the presence of the very Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? For by men’s means it was impossible, since they are but made after an image; nor by angels either, for not even they are (God’s) images. Whence the Word of God came in His own person, that, as He was the Image of the Father, He might be able to create afresh the man after the image. 8. But, again, it could not else have taken place had not death and corruption been done away. 9. Whence He took, in natural fitness, a mortal body, that while death might in it be once for all done away, men made after His Image might once more be renewed. None other then was sufficient for this need, save the Image of the Father.

14. For as, when the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from without, he whose likeness it is must needs come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood: for, for the sake of his picture, even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it; 2. in the same way also the most holy Son of the Father, being the Image of the Father, came to our region to renew man once made in His likeness, and find him, as one lost, by the remission of sins; as He says Himself in the Gospels: “I came to find and to save the lost.” Whence He said to the Jews also: “Except a man be born again,” not meaning, as they thought, birth from woman, but speaking of the soul born and created anew in the likeness of God’s image. 3. But since wild idolatry and godlessness occupied the world, and the knowledge of God was hid, whose part was it to teach the world concerning the Father?
Man’s, might one say? But it was not in man’s power to penetrate everywhere beneath the sun; for neither had they the physical strength to run so far, nor would they be able to claim credence in this matter, nor were they sufficient by themselves to withstand the deceit and impositions of evil spirits. 4. For where all were smitten and confused in soul from demoniacal deceit, and the vanity of idols, how was it possible for them to win over man’s soul and man’s mind—whereas they cannot even see them? Or how can a man convert what he does not see? 5. But perhaps one might say creation was enough; but if creation were enough, these great evils would never have come to pass. For creation was there already, and all the same, men were groveling in the same error concerning God. 6. Who, then, was needed, save the Word of God, that sees both soul and mind, and that gives movement to all things in creation, and by them makes known the Father? For He who by His own Providence and ordering of all things was teaching men concerning the Father, He it was that could renew this same teaching as well. 7. How, then, could this have been done? Perhaps one might say, that the same means were open as before, for Him to show forth the truth about the Father once more by means of the work of creation. But this was no longer a sure means. Quite the contrary; for men missed seeing this before, and have turned their eyes no longer upward but downward. 8. Whence, naturally, willing to profit men, He sojourns here as man, taking to Himself a body like the others, and from things of earth, that is by the works of His body [He teaches them], so that they who would not know Him from His Providence and rule over all things, may even from the works done by His actual body know the Word of God which is in the body, and through Him the Father.

16. For men’s mind having finally fallen to things of sense, the Word disguised Himself by appearing in a body, that He might, as Man, transfer men to Himself, and centre their senses on Himself, and, men seeing Him thenceforth as Man, persuade them by the works He did that He is not Man only, but also God, and the Word and Wisdom of the true God. 2. This, too, is what Paul means to point out when he says: “That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length, and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God.” 3. For by the Word revealing Himself everywhere, both above and beneath, and in the depth and in the breadth—above, in the creation; beneath, in becoming man; in the depth, in Hades; and in the breadth, in the world—all things have been filled with the knowledge of God. 4. Now for this cause, also, He did not immediately upon His coming accomplish His sacrifice on behalf of all, by offering His body to death and raising it again, for by this means He would have made Himself invisible. But He made Himself visible enough by what He did, abiding in it, and doing such works, and showing such signs, as made Him known no longer as Man, but as God the Word. 5. For by His becoming Man, the Savior was to accomplish both works of love; first, in putting away death from us and renewing us again; secondly, being unseen and invisible, in manifesting and making Himself known by His works to be the Word of the Father, and the Ruler and King of the universe.

20. We have, then, now stated in part, as far as it was possible, and as ourselves had been able to understand, the reason of His bodily appearing; that it was in the power of none other to turn the corruptible to incorruption, except the Savior Himself, that had at the beginning also made all things out of naught and that none other could create anew the likeness of God’s image for men, save the Image of the Father; and that none other could render the mortal immortal, save our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Very Life; and that none other could teach men of the Father, and
destroy the worship of idols, save the Word, that orders all things and is alone the true Only-begotten Son of the Father. 2. But since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all should be paid again: for, as I have already said, it was owing that all should die, for which especial cause, indeed, He came among us: to this intent, after the proofs of His Godhead from His works, He next offered up His sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding His Temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespass, and further to show Himself more powerful even than death, displaying His own body incorruptible, as first-fruits of the resurrection of all. 3. And do not be surprised if we frequently repeat the same words on the same subject. For since we are speaking of the counsel of God, therefore we expound the same sense in more than one form, lest we should seem to be leaving anything out, and incur the charge of inadequate treatment: for it is better to submit to the blame of repetition than to leave out anything that ought to be set down. 4. The body, then, as sharing the same nature with all, for it was a human body, though by an unparalleled miracle it was formed of a virgin only, yet being mortal, was to die also, conformably to its peers. But by virtue of the union of the Word with it, it was no longer subject to corruption according to its own nature, but by reason of the Word that was come to dwell in it it was placed out of the reach of corruption. 5. And so it was that two marvels came to pass at once, that the death of all was accomplished in the Lord’s body, and that death and corruption were wholly done away by reason of the Word that was united with it. For there was need of death, and death must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that the debt owing from all might be paid. 6. Whence, as I said before, the Word, since it was not possible for Him to die, as He was immortal, took to Himself a body such as could die, that He might offer it as His own in the stead of all, and as suffering, through His union with it, on behalf of all, “Bring to naught Him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”