

That Jesus Christ Is God

From the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

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From "THE HISTORY OF HERESIES, AND THEIR REFUTATION"; OR, "THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH."

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF Saint ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BY THE REV. JOHN T. MULLOCK, OF THE ORDER OF Saint FRANCIS, in 1847.

REFUTATION of THE HERESY OF ARIUS, WHO DENIED THE DIVINITY OF THE WORD. - THE DIVINITY OF THE WORD PROVED FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

1. The Dogma of the Catholic Church is, that the Divine Word, that is, the Person of the Son of God, is, by his nature, God, as the Father is God, and in all things is equal to the Father, is perfect and eternal, like the Father, and is consubstantial with the Father. Arius, on the contrary, blasphemously asserted that the "Word was neither God, not eternal, nor consubstantial, nor like unto the Father; but a mere creature, created in time, but of higher excellence than all other creatures; so that even by him, as by an instrument, God created all other things. Several of the followers of Arius softened down his doctrine; some said that the Word was like the Father, others that he was created from eternity, but none of them would ever admit that he was consubstantial with the Father. When we prove the Catholic doctrine, however, expressed in the proposition at the beginning of this chapter, we shall have refuted, not alone the Arians, Anomeans, Eunomians, and Aerians, who followed in every thing the doctrine of Arius, but also the Basilians, who were Semi-Arians. {We might add the Jehovah Witnesses, who have sadly followed Arius in his great Trinitarian error.}

All these will be proved to be in error, when we show that the Word is in all things, not only like unto the Father, but consubstantial to the Father, that is of the very same substance as the Father, as likewise will be proved to be in error those who laid the foundations of this heresy, by teaching that Christ was only a mere man, born like all others, from Joseph and Mary, and having no existence before his birth. By proving the Catholic truth that the Word is true God, like the Father, all these heretics will be put down, for as the Word in Christ assumed human nature in one Person, as Saint John says: "The Word was made flesh;" if we prove that the Word is true God, it is manifest that Christ is not a mere man, but man and God.

2. There are many texts of Scripture to prove this, which may be divided into three classes. In the first class are included all those texts in which the Word is called God, not by grace or predestination, as the Socinians say, but true God in Nature and substance. {The Socinians are those 16th century Protestants who question the reality of the Trinity. The Unitarians and the Jehovah Witnesses are their chief modern followers.} In the Gospel of Saint John we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning

with God. All things were made by him, and without him was made nothing that was made" (John 1.)

Saint Hilary (On the Trinity, number 10) looked on this passage as proving so clearly the Divinity of the Word, that he says, "When I hear the Word was God, I hear it not only said but proved that the Word is God. Here the thing signified is a substance where it is said 'was God'. For to be, to exist, is not accidental, but substantial."

Objection 1. The holy doctor had previously met the objection of those who said that even Moses was called God by Pharaoh (Exodus 8), and that judges were called Gods in the 81st Psalm of the Vulgate (Psalm 82 in the Hebrew), by saying : It is one thing to be, as it were, appointed a God, another to be God himself; in Pharaoh's case a God was appointed as it were (that is Moses), but neither in name or Nature was he a God, as the Just are also called God: "I said you are gods." Now the expression "I said," refers more to the person speaking than to the name of the thing itself; it is, then, the person who speaks who imposes the name, but it is not naturally the name of the thing itself. But here he says the Word is God, the thing itself exists in the Word; the substance of the Word is announced in the very name.

Thus, says the Saint, the name of God given to Pharaoh and the Judges mentioned by David in the 81st Psalm (Psalm 82) was only given them by the Lord as a mark of their authority, but was not their proper name; but when Saint John speaks of the Word, he does not say that he was called God, but that he was in reality God:

"The Word was God."

3. Objection 2. The Socinians next object that the text of Saint John should not be read with the same punctuation as we read it, but thus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was. God the same was in the beginning," et cetera, but this travesty of the text is totally opposed to all the copies of the Scriptures we know, to the sense of all the Councils, and to all antiquity. We never find the text cut up in this way; it always was written, "The Word was God." Besides, if we allowed this Socinian reading of the text, the whole sense would be lost; it would be, in fact, ridiculous, as if Saint John wanted to assert that God existed, after saying already that the Word was with God. There are, however, many other texts in which the Word is called God, and the learned Socinians themselves are so convinced of the weakness of this argument, as calculated only to make their cause ridiculous, that they tried other means of invalidating it, but, as we shall presently see, without succeeding.

4. Objection 3. It is astonishing to see how numerous are the cavils of the Arians. The Word, they say, is called God, not the God the fountain of all nature, whose name is always written in Greek with the article (o Theos), such, however, is not the case in the text; but we may remark that in this very chapter, Saint John, speaking of the supreme God, "there was a man sent from God, whose name was John," does not use the article, neither is it used in the 12th, 13th, or 18th verses. In many other parts of the Scriptures, where the name of God is mentioned, the article is omitted, as in Saint Matthew 14:33, and 27:43; in Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, 8:4 and 6; to the Romans, 1:7; to the Ephesians, 4:6; and on the other hand we see that in the Acts of the Apostles, 7:43; in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 4:4, and in that to the Galatians, 4:8, they speak of an Idol as God, and use the article, and it is most certain that neither Saint Luke nor Saint Paul ever intended to speak of an Idol as the supreme God. Besides, as Saint John Chrysostom teaches, from whom this whole answer, we may say, is taken, the Word is called God, sometimes even with the

addition of that article, on whose omission in Saint John they lay such stress, as is the case in the original of that text of Saint Paul, Romans 9:5: "Christ, according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed for ever."

Saint Thomas remarks, that in the first cited passage the article is omitted in the name of God, as the name there stands in the position not of a subject, but a predicate.

5. Objection 4. They object, fourthly, that in the text of Saint John the Word is called God, not because he is so by Nature and Substance, but only by Dignity and Authority, just as they say the name of God is given in the Scriptures to the angels and to judges. We have already answered this objection by Saint Hilary (see our Number 2, above), that it is one thing to give to an object the name of God, another to say that he is God. But there is, besides, another answer. It is not true that the name of God is an appellative name, so that it can be positively and absolutely applied to one who is not God by Nature; for although some creatures are called Gods, it never happened that any one of them was called "God," absolutely, or was called true God, or the highest God, or singularly God, as Jesus Christ is called by Saint John: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and he has given us understanding, that we may know the true God, and may be in his true Son" (1 John Epistle 5:20). And Saint Paul says "Looking for the blessed hope and the coming of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Epistle to Titus, 2:13), and to the Romans, 9:5: "Of whom is Christ, according to the flesh, who is over all things God, blessed for ever." We likewise read in Saint Luke, that Zachary, prophesying regarding his Son, says "And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest, for you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways" (Luke 1:76), and again, in verse 78:

"Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high has visited us."

6. Another most convincing proof of the Divinity of the Word is deduced from the 1st chapter of Saint John, already quoted. In it, these words occur: "All things were made by him, and without him was made nothing that was made." Now any one denying the Divinity of the Word must admit from these words that either the Word was eternal, or that the Word was made by himself. It is evidently repugnant to reason to say the Word made himself. Therefore we must admit that the Word was not made, otherwise Saint John would be stating a falsehood when he says, "Without him was made nothing that was made." This is the argument of Saint Augustine (On the Trinity, Chapter 6), and from these words he clearly proves that the Word is of the same substance as the Father.

7. We shall now investigate the passages of the second class, in which the Divine Nature and the very substance of the Father is attributed to the Word. First, the Incarnate Word, himself, says: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The Arians say that Christ here does not speak of the unity of Nature but of Will, and Calvin, though he professes not to be an Arian, explains it in the same manner. "The ancients," he says, "abused this passage, in order to prove that Christ is consubstantial with the Father, for here Christ does not dispute of the unity of substance, but of the consent he had with the Father." The Holy Fathers, however, more deserving of credit than Calvin and the Arians, always understood it of the unity of substance. Here are the words of Saint Athanasius (Against the Arians, number 9): "If the two are one they must be so according to the Divinity, inasmuch as the Son is consubstantial to the Father they are, therefore, two, as Father and Son, but only one as God is one."

Hear also, Saint Cyprian: "The Lord says, I and the Father are one, and again it is written of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." Saint Ambrose takes it in the

same sense, as do Saint Augustine and Saint John Chrysostom, as we shall see presently; why the very Jews took it in this sense, for they took up stones to stone him, as Saint John relates, (10:32): "Many good works I have shown you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me? The Jews answered him: For a good work we stone you not, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God." "See," says Saint Augustine "how the Jews understood what the Arians will not understand, for they are vexed to find that these words I and the Father are one, cannot be understood, unless the equality of the Son with the Father be admitted." Saint John Chrysostom here remarks that if the Jews erred in believing that our Saviour wished to announce himself as equal in power to the Father, he could immediately have explained the mistake, but he did not do so, but, quite the contrary, he confirms what he before said the more he is pressed; he does not excuse himself, but reprehends them; he again says he is equal to the Father: "If I do not the works of my Father" he says, "believe me not; but if I do, though you will not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37-38).

We have seen that Christ expressly declared in the Council of Caiphas, that he was the true Son of God: "Again the High Priest asked him and said to him: Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed God? And Jesus said to him, I am" (Mark 14:61-62). Who shall then dare to say that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, when he himself has said so?

8. Again, say the Arians, when our Saviour prayed to his Father for all his disciples, he said: "And the glory you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we also are one" (John, 17:22).

Now in this passage, say they, Christ certainly speaks of the unity of will, and not of the unity of substance. But we reply: It is one thing to say that "I and the Father are one," quite another thing, "that they may be one, as we are also one," just as it is one thing to say, "your heavenly Father is perfect," and another to say, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

For the particle 'as' denotes, as Saint Athanasius says, likeness or imitation, but not equality of conjunction. So as our Lord here exhorts us to imitate the Divine perfection as far as we can, he prays that his disciples may be united with God as far as they can, which surely cannot be understood except as a union of the will. When he says, however: "I and the Father are one," there is no allusion to imitation; he there speaks of a union of substance; he there positively and absolutely asserts that he is one and the same with the Father: "We are one."

9. There are, besides, many other texts which most clearly corroborate this. Our Lord says, in Saint John, 16:15, and 17:10; "All things whatsoever the Father has are mine." "And all my things are yours, and yours are mine." Now, as these expressions are used by him without any limitation, they evidently prove his consubstantiality with the Father, for when he asserts that he has every thing the Father has, who will dare to say that the Father has something more than the Son? And if we denied to the Son the same substance as the Father, we would deny him every thing, for then he would be infinitely less than the Father; but Jesus says that he has all the Father has, without exception, consequently he is in every thing equal to the Father: "He has nothing less than the Father," says Saint Augustine, "when he says that All things whatsoever the Father has are mine, he is, therefore, his equal".

10. Saint Paul proves the same when he says, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil, 2:6). Now here the Apostle says Christ humbled himself, "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," and that can only be understood of the two Natures, in which Christ was, for he humbled himself to take the nature of a servant, being already in the Divine Nature, as is proved from the antecedent expressions, "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God." If Christ usurped nothing by declaring himself equal to God, it cannot be denied that he is of the same substance with God, for otherwise it would be a "robbery" to say that he was equal to God.

Saint Augustine, also, explaining that passage of Saint John, 14:28, "The Father is greater than I," says that he is less than the Father, according to the form of a servant, which he took by becoming man, but that, according to the form of God, which he had by Nature, and which he did not lose by becoming man, he was not less than the Father, but his co-equal. "To be equal to God in the form of God," says the Saint, "was, not a robbery, but Nature. He, therefore," says this Father of the Church (in Epistle 66), "is greater, because he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, but not losing the form of God".

11. Another proof is what our Saviour himself says: "For what things whatsoever he (the Father) does, these the Son also does in like manner" (John, 5:19). Hence, Saint Hilary (On the Trinity, number 21) concludes that the Son of God is true God, like the Father. He could not have the same individual operation with the Father, unless he was consubstantial with the Father, for in God there is no distinction between operation and substance.

12. The third class of texts are those in which attributes are attributed to the Word, which cannot apply unless to God by Nature, of the same substance as the Father. First The Word is eternal according to the 1st verse of the Gospel of Saint John: "In the beginning was the Word." The verb 'was' denotes that the Word has always been, and even, as Saint Ambrose remarks, the Evangelist mentions the word "was" four times. Besides the word "was," the other words, "in the beginning," confirm the truth of the eternity of the Word: "In the beginning was the Word," that is to say, the Word existed before all other things. It is on this very text that the First Council of Nicaea founded the condemnation of that proposition of the Arians, "There was a time once when the Word had no existence."

13. The Arians, however, say that Saint Augustine interpreted the expression "in the beginning," by saying it meant the Father himself, and according to this interpretation, they say that the Word might exist in God previous to all created things, but not be eternal at the same time. To this we reply, that although we might admit this interpretation, and that "in the beginning" meant in the Father; still, if we admit that the Word was before all created things, it follows that the Word was eternal, and never made, because as "by him all things were made," if the Word was not eternal, but created, he should have created himself, an impossibility, based on the general maxim admitted by all. No one can give what he has not.

14. They assert, secondly, that the words "in the beginning" must be understood in the same way as in the passage in the 1st chapter of Genesis; "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth;" and as these were created in the beginning, so also the Word was created. The answer to this is, that Moses says: "In the beginning God created;" but Saint John does not say in the beginning the Word was created, but the Word was, and that by him all things were made.

15. They object, in the third place, that by the expression, "the Word," is not understood a person distinct from the Father, but the internal wisdom of the Father distinct from him, and by which all things were made. This explanation, however, cannot stand, for Saint John, speaking of the Word, says: "By him all things were made," and towards the end of the chapter: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us;" now we cannot understand these expressions as referring to the internal wisdom of the Father, but indubitably to the Word, by whom all things were made, and who, being the Son of God, became flesh, as is declared in the same place: "And we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father." This is confirmed by the Apostle of the Hebrews, when he says, that by the Son (called by Saint John the Word) the world was created. "In these days has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also, he made the world" (Hebrews 1:2). Besides, the eternity of the Word is proved by the text of the Apocalypse (1:8): "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, who is, and who was, and who is to come;" and by the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:8): "Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to-day, and the same for ever."

16. Arius always denied that the Word was eternal, but some of his latter followers, convinced by the Scriptures, admitted that he was eternal, but an eternal creature, and not a Divine Person. The answer given by many Theologians to this newly invented error is, that the very existence of an eternal creature is an impossibility. That a creature, they say, should be said to be created, it is necessary that it should be produced out of nothing, so that from a state of non-existence, it passes to a state of existence, so that we must suppose a time in which this creature did not exist.

But this reply is not sufficient to prove the fallacy of the argument, for Saint Thomas teaches, and the doctrine is most probable, that in order to assert that a thing is created, it is not necessary to suppose a time in which it was not, so that its nonexistence preceded its existence; but it is quite enough to suppose a creature, as nothing by its own nature, or by itself, but as having its existence altogether from God. "It is enough," says the Saint, "to say that a thing has come from nothing, that its non-existence should precede its existence, not in duration, but nature, inasmuch, as if left to itself, it never would have been anything, and it altogether derives its existence from another." Supposing then, that it is unnecessary to look for a time in which the thing did not exist, to call it a creature, God, who is eternal, might give to a creature existence from all eternity, which by its own nature it never could have had. It appears to me then, that the fit and proper reply to this argument is, that the Word being (as has been already proved) eternal, never could be called a creature, for it is an article of Faith, as all the Holy Fathers teach, that there never existed, in fact, an eternal creature, since all creatures were created in time, in the beginning, when, as Moses says, God created the world: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The creation of heaven and earth, according to the doctrine of all Fathers and Theologians, comprises the creation of all beings, both material and spiritual.

The Word, on the contrary, had existence before there was any creature, as we see in the book of Proverbs, where Wisdom, that is the Word, thus speaks: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything, from the beginning" (Proverbs 8:22). The Word, therefore, is not a created being, since he existed before God had made anything.

17. The materialists of modern times, however, cannot infer from this, that matter is eternal of itself, for although we admit that matter might exist from eternity, inasmuch as God could, from all eternity, give to it existence, which it had not of itself, (though he did not do so in fact); still, as we have proved in our book on the "Truth of the Faith," it could not exist from itself, it should have

existence from God, for, according to the axiom so frequently repeated, it could not give to itself that (existence) which it had not to give. From Saint John's expression regarding the Word, "by him all things were made," not alone his eternity is proved, but the power of creating likewise, which can belong to none but God; for, in order to create, an infinite power is necessary, which, as all theologians say, God could not communicate to a creature. Returning, however, to the subject of the eternity of the Word, we say, that if the Father should, by the necessity of the Divine Nature, generate the Son, the Father being eternal, the Son should also be eternal, keeping always in mind, the Father the Generator, the Son as the Generated. Thus, the error of the modern materialists, the basis of whose system is, that matter is eternal, falls to the ground.

18. Now, it being admitted, that by the Word all things were made, it is a necessary consequence, that the Word was not made by Himself, for otherwise, there would exist a being made, but not made by the Word, and this is opposed to the text of Saint John, who says, that "by him all things were made." This is the great argument of Saint Augustine, against the Arians, when they assert that the Word was made: "How," says the Saint, "can it be possible, that the Word is made, when God by the Word made all things? "If the Word of God himself was made, by what other Word was he made? If you say it was by the Word of the Word, that, I say, is the only Son of God; but, if you say it is not by the Word of the Word, then, you must admit, that that Word, by whom all things were made, was not made himself, for he could not, who made all things, be made by himself."

19. The Arians, too much pressed by this argument to answer it, endeavour to do so by a quibble. Saint John, say they, does not tell us that all things were made by Him, but rather through Him, and hence, they infer that the Word was not the principal cause of the creation of the World, but only an instrument the Father made use of in creating it, and therefore, they agree that the Word is not God. But we answer that the creation of the World, as described by David and Saint Paul, is attributed to the Son of God. "In the beginning, O Lord," says David, "you founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands" (Psalm 101:26 in the Vulgate or Psalm 102:25 in the Hebrew); and Saint Paul, writing to the Hebrews, dictates almost a whole chapter to prove the same thing; see these passages: "But to the Son, your throne, God, is for ever and ever" (1:8), and again, verse 13, "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool." Here Saint Paul declares, that that Son of God, called by Saint John "the Word" has created the heavens and the earth, and is really God, and, as God, was not a simple instrument, but the Creator-in-Chief of the world. Neither will the quibble of the Arians on the words 'by' and 'through', avail, for in many places of the Scriptures we find the word 'through' conjoined with the principal cause: (See Genesis 4:1; Proverbs 8:15; 1 Corinth 1:1).

20. There is another proof of the Divinity of the Word in the 5th chapter of Saint John, where the Father wills that all honour should be given to the Son, the same as to himself: "But he has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son, as they honour the Father" (John 5:22-23). The Divinity of the Word and of the Holy Ghost is also proved by the precept given to the Apostles: "Go ye, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). The Holy Fathers, Saint Athanasius, Saint Hilary, Saint Fulgentius, and several others, made use of this text to convince the Arians; for, Baptism being ordained in the name of the three Divine Persons, it is clear that they have equal power and authority, and are God; for if the Son and the Holy Ghost were creatures we would be baptized in the name of the Father, who is God, and of two creatures; but Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians, states that this is opposed to our Faith, "Lest any should say that you are baptized in my name" (1 Corinth 1:15).

21. Finally, there are two powerful arguments, to prove the Divinity of the Word. The first is taken from the power manifested by the Word in the fact related in the fifth chapter of Saint Luke, where Christ, in healing the man sick of the palsy, pardoned him his sins, saying: "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 5:20). Now, God alone has the power of forgiving sins, and the very Pharisees knew this, for they said: "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke, 5:21).

22. The second proof is taken from the very words of Christ himself, in which he declares himself to be the Son of God. He several times spoke in this manner, but most especially when he asked his disciples what they thought of him: "Jesus says to them, Whom do you think I am? Simon Peter answered and said: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-17.)

He also declared it as we have seen above, when Caiphas asked him, "Are you Christ, the Son of the Blessed God? And Jesus said to him, I am" (Mark 14:61-62).

See now the argument. The Arians say that Christ is not the true Son of God, but they never said he was a liar; on the contrary, they praise him, as the most excellent of all men, and enriched, above all others, with virtues and divine gifts.

Now, if this man (according to them), called himself the Son of God, when he was but a mere creature, or if he even permitted that others should consider him the Son of God, and that so many should be scandalized in hearing him called the Son of God, when he was not so in reality, he ought at least declare the truth, otherwise he was the most impious of men. But no; he never said a word, though the Jews were under the impression that he was guilty of blasphemy, and allowed himself to be condemned and crucified on that charge, for this was the great crime he was accused of before Pilate, "according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). In fine, we reply to all opponents, after Jesus Christ expressly declared himself the Son of God, as we remarked in Saint Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, verse 62, "I am" though this declaration was what cost him his life, who will dare to deny, after it, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

{We have omitted the abundant footnotes which Saint Alphonsus supplied when quoting the Fathers of the Church, in order to allow Alphonsus' argument to flow smoothly. Those readers who would like to consult them, are urged to read the original work in an English translation at:

<http://www.freewebs.com/wallmell/LiguoriHistoryHeresies.pdf>

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