Of One Essence With The Father

Rev. Fr. Anthony Cook

I have to begin by confessing that I have found it very difficult to talk about this next clause of the Creed. We have spent a lot of time emphasizing that the Christian Faith is Good News, but this clause is purposely divisive and exclusive, defining out of the Church a large number of people who did not want to leave. This seems almost un-Christian, a contradiction of the essential, loving core of the Faith - so it is vitally important that we understand why it is not so, that it is rather the only possible defense of that Good News.

So - let’s review the fundamentals. The Good News of Jesus Christ is at its core a message of love and reconciliation between God and Man, the message that God loves humankind and has come to us where we are, lost and broken, to save us and restore us to a loving relationship with Him. Jesus Christ, God in our midst, invites all people to peace and unity with Him, and with one another. The only reason anyone will be left out of that blessed joy is if they themselves reject it.

The essence of Arianism was precisely such a rejection. In insisting that Jesus Christ was not God, the Arians denied the basic truth that it was God Who had entered into His own creation and reconciled us with Himself. This is important enough that it bears repeating - in denying that Jesus Christ was truly God, the Arians removed the most essential part of the Christian Gospel - that God had come into the world to save it and us. They didn't deny that someone had come - but whoever Jesus was, in their eyes, the one thing he could not be was God. And thus they struck at the core of the Gospel.

That is why the phrase we are talking about now, “Of One Essence with the Father,” was designed on purpose to be offensive to them. It was intended to be a line in the sand, dividing those who believed that the Son of God was co-eternal with the Father from those who believed He was instead created. It was never intended to further the conversation, to build a better understanding, to move toward reconciliation. On the contrary - it was intended to end the conversation, to be the last word, to abandon any effort to reconcile.

What we need to remember is that this conversation didn’t start from a neutral place, where both sides had an equal claim to the truth - and the conversation had been going on for a fairly long while. Christians had been worshiping Jesus Christ as Uncreated and Eternal God for at least 280 years when the Arians suddenly showed up and said, “Say...we think the Son of God is created, that He had a beginning.” And when the Orthodox responded, “but He is the only-begotten Son of God, so He’s God, not part of creation” the Arians said, “But He was still begotten - so there was some point before He was begotten, which means He’s not eternal, and therefore not God.” And when the Orthodox said, “No...He was begotten of the Father before all ages, and therefore before all ‘points’ as well, so He is Eternal, and He is God,” the Arians said, “Sure, but in that ‘before,’ whatever
For a long time, though, the term homoousios, of one essence, was controversial even with the Orthodox, for the simple reason that it was not found in Scripture. There was a concern that, in the effort to find clarity and end the conversation with the Arians, the Church might accidentally have gone beyond the Rule of Faith and invented something new, something false, something contrary to the reality of God’s revelation to us and presence in our midst. It took time for the Orthodox to consider it, to reflect on it, and to confirm that it was indeed true—so, while the phrase was first expressed in the year 325, it wasn’t until 381 that it was universally adopted throughout the Church as an accurate articulation of the Rule of Faith. And with its adoption, the Church finally abandoned any effort to reconcile with the Arians, accepting that what was needed was not a word to reconcile and bring together, but a word that would serve as a sword, to separate and distinguish between truth and falsehood, a measuring stick to define what the Church knows to be true about God, and what it knows to be false, a boundary line separating what is consistent with God’s presence and revelation to us from what is utterly at odds with the Reality of His Being.

And it is His Being, Who He Is, that we are talking about with this phrase. We translate ὁμοούσιος/homoousios as “consubstantial” or “of one essence,” but these words substance and essence simply mean God’s Being, Who He-Who-Is. This hearkens back once again to Mount Sinai, to the Name by which God names Himself to Moses, so that with this word ὁμοούσιος, the Church affirms that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Himself the One Who Is, of one and the same essence with the Father. So they came up with this phrase: ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρί, of one and the same essence with the Father.

This, finally, did the trick. The Arians could not find a way to explain their way around that statement. They offered to affirm that the Son of God was of a similar essence to the Father, ὁμοιουσιος τῷ Πατρί, but the Orthodox had said what they meant, and meant what they said. The Son of God is of the same essence with the Father, perfectly one and co-eternal with Him. He isn’t just like God, He is God.

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Before we move on to the next clause, that it is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that all things were made, we will spend one more episode on the Arian controversy, and discuss the city in which it first developed, the philosophical background for its development, and the actual conversations that took place at the Council of Nicaea. It will be something of a longer episode, and a bit heavier than normal, but it is good, I think, to look a little deeper into this pivotal period in Church history. We’ll return to the Creed itself the following episode. So next time - Alexandria, Arius, and Nicaea.

The above is the seventeenth installment of our new Adult Education Program, updated weekly at http://theruleoffaith.typepad.com. Comments/questions are welcome, by email or via a comment on the website.
Dear Parishioners:

We pray this letter finds you and your family well.

Our Spring General Assembly will be held on Sunday, April 15, immediately following the Divine Liturgy, approximately at 1 p.m.

The Agenda is as follows:

1. OPENING PRAYER
2. CONFIRMATION OF MEMBERS IN GOOD STANDING PRESENT
3. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR
4. PARLIAMENTARIAN APPOINTED
5. READING AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
6. REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT
7. REPORT OF THE PASTOR
8. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS
9. REPORT OF THE TREASURER--Review of Audit Statements for 2017
10. REPORT OF SAINT GEORGE HOUSING FOR SENIORS
11. OLD BUSINESS
12. NEW BUSINESS
13. CLOSING PRAYER

The Audit Financial Statements for the year 2017 will be distributed during the meeting, and the statement of Cash, Debts, Commitments and Liabilities will also be discussed.

In order for you to be able to attend and participate at the General Assembly, you must have met your full year obligation for the year 2017. A light luncheon will be offered to those in attendance.

Thank you very much.

Yours in the Faith of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Nick Minton
Parish Council President

Rev. Fr. Anthony Cook
Parish Priest

28 Μαρτίου, 2018

Γεία σας, Αγιάσματες και Αγίασμενοι!

Χαίρετε! Η συνέλευση της Ενόπτης μας θα είναι στις 15 Απριλίου, ημέρα της Κυριακής. Ας επικοινωνήσουμε ενεπάγαλτα με τους θειολογούς και εκκλησιαστικούς εργαζόμενους. Σας λαμβάνουμε στο θετικό και στο συνгрαφέα. Ας είμαστε προσεχείς, ας επικοινωνήσουμε καλό και επικίνδυνο και ενέπλακατο.

Αγαπητοί Ενόπτη, Αγάπης,