

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Controversies versus Unity Fifth Week of Easter Wednesday, May 2, 2018 8:15 AM
Acts 15:1-6; Jn 15:1-8 **St. Athanasius**, bishop and Doctor of the Church (We need to work on faith understanding based on our own prayer experience, and recognizing that others may experience things slightly differently.)

You'll see that in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles there are all these controversies, and that unfortunately is **the history of the Church—controversies**. Must Christians practice the Law? Must Christians be circumcised? Must this, must that—all these arguments. **And they are all based on people trying to do the right thing, but not being able to get their head around the mystery of God, but thinking they do.**

Now today we have the memorial of the great saint **Athanasius**, another man of enormous controversy. He is the actual **primary theological source of the *Nicene Creed***, which affirms the humanity of Christ and the divinity of Christ. Now there were people in the early Church that did not affirm the divinity of Christ, because **there is ambiguity in the gospels**. In one place Jesus says, "The Father and I are one," that indicates unity. Another place it says, "The Father is greater than I." So each one then had a group behind it, and they argued and fought, sometimes viciously. **On one hand the *Nicene Creed* is a very fine reconciliation.**

However we have to keep in mind **we do not really understand the mystery of God. We should always hold it very lightly**. So while we thank the Holy Spirit for all the help in understanding the mystery of God and the mystery of Christ and we acknowledge that, yes, he must indeed be both divine and human, **we cannot exclude totally the opposite views** that "the Father is greater than I." That is in the text of the Holy Scripture.

And it's also based on a long history of **Judaism** regarding God's dealings with people through mediation: angels, including the holy angel Yahweh. **Yahweh is the name of God, yes, but also the name of an intermediary; so there there's ambiguity.** Was really Yahweh God?

Well, yes and no. Yahweh was called “Son of the Most High,” just like Jesus is Son of the Most High in Luke’s Gospel—same title; but what does that mean? The Son of the Most High doesn’t sound like equal to the Most High. And this is how people thought and how they reasoned and how they argued. The point is **we shouldn’t take any position too strongly. God will lead us to understand ultimate unity of everything.** That’s the ultimate perception of the great saints: everything is together, and we are all being brought into unity with God, community with God. All these divisions and everything, they may have some value, but they are not very important.

What’s important is the unity.

And what’s important to the community as we treat one another, however we may understand our own view of God, that **we treat those who don’t understand God the way we do with respect, with humility.** That even the saints didn’t always do, like St. Athanasius himself. So we have great experiences in our past and we will have great ones in the future, but we need to work on unity. **And we need to work on faith understanding based on our own prayer experience, and recognizing that others may experience things slightly differently.**