

# ATHANASIUS AGAINST THE WORLD

Christian Biographies  
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# EARLY LIFE

Born in Alexandria, 296 A.D., the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the ancient West.

Raised in a wealthy family, received a classical ancient education.

- The Catechetical School of Alexandria laid a foundation for later universities

Converted early in life, devoted himself to study of the Scriptures.

Ordained a deacon in 319 and assigned as secretary to the Patriarch of Alexandria



# THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

## The Threat of Arius

- Presbyter of Alexandria
- Denied the full deity of Christ: argued that Christ was a created being, though in many ways like God.
- In particular, denied the eternity of God's Son: "There was a time when the Son was not."

## Synod of Alexandria (321)

- Arius declared a heretic, stripped of office
- Deposition written by Athanasius

Arius responded by traveling through the empire spreading his views

The controversy spurred the emperor Constantine to call the first church council

# THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA, 325 A.D.

Summoned by Constantine (who desired political unity).

Attended by 318 bishops, with Athanasius present

Decided against Arius (and 2 other bishops), declaring them anathema

Resulted in the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God of God,  
Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made;  
being of one substance with the Father.



# DEFENDER OF ORTHODOXY

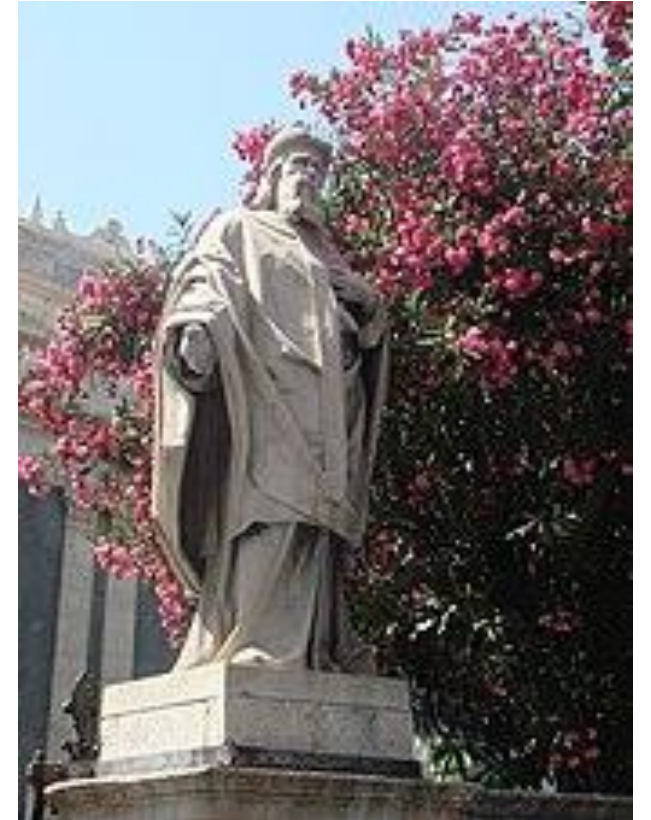
Athanasius succeeded Alexander as Patriarch, 328, at age 30.

After Nicaea, sympathy rose for Arius, so that Constantine ordered his reinstatement. Athanasius refused (336). Athanasius was exiled to Trier, in Germany.

- Because of his resolute refusal to compromise Scripture, Athanasius has been compared to Luther.

After Constantine's death (337)

- Constantius (eastern emperor) restored Athanasius
- Seeking unity, the emperor demanded an accommodation: *homoiousios* instead of *homoousios*.
- Athanasius refused, seeing Christ's true deity on the line. "If His substitutionary death was to be of value, Jesus must be fully God. Athanasius understood that only a fully divine Savior can reconcile sinners to God" (Lawson, 149).



# ATHANASIUS CONTRA MUNDUM

During his 45 years as patriarch, exiled 5 times for a total of 17 years.

Replaced by an Arian, the people accepted only Athanasius as bishop, who kept in touch with them via Festal Letters.

Exile permitted him time for writing and he carried on his defense of the deity of Christ by the pen.

- On the Incarnation, Four Orations against the Arians, Letters to the Monks.

The Trinitarian cause was advanced by councils that met throughout the empire to exonerate Athanasius.

Political pressure resulted in the emperor restoring Athanasius from 345-356.



# A SNAPSHOT OF 355 A.D.

In 353, the Arian emperor Constantius forced a council of 300 bishops to denounce Athanasius. Pope Liberius refused to enforce it, demanding another council where a fairer hearing could be given.

In 355, the emperor summoned a council in his capital, Milan. Meeting in the church, Constantius moved them to the palace. There, he ended debate and threatened with exile or death any who did not assent to an Arian statement of faith.

All but 3 bishops submitted (2 of the 3 were papal delegates). The council then voted again to denounce Athanasius.



# SNAPSHOT OF 355 A.D., CONTINUED

Constantius sent word to Pope Liberius of Athanasius' condemnation. The pope refused to comply.

Athanasius fled arrest to the desert of Upper Egypt to live among the monks. Another Arian bishop was sent to Alexandria; the people rejected him.

Constantius exiled Liberius to Thrace. Sent gifts if he would comply. Then sent gold if he would comply. Liberius would not comply. Gifts were left in the church, but Liberius had them thrown away. Finally, the emperor summoned Liberius, who insisted that the emperor yield to Scripture and a valid church council. Constantius banished him.

Athanasius remained in hiding with the monks, writing books and letters to defend the faith.





# AFTER CONSTANTIUS

During a celebration of his 20<sup>th</sup> year as emperor, a delegation of women from the church appealed to him to restore Liberius. When he was restored, he began teaching the Nicene Creed in Rome.

In 361, Constantius died, replaced by Julian the Apostate. Pagan persecution broke out, and since the Arians were in power it was directed against them. When a settlement was reached, Julian ordered that the Nicene bishops be restored, returning Athanasius to Alexandria. He immediately summoned a synod to affirm the Nicene Creed.

- Appealed for unity among those who quarreled only over terminology; refused to accept any who denied the deity of Christ.

In 364, the Arian emperor Valens again banished all the Nicene bishops. Athanasius hid for four months in his father's tomb. But threats of public unrest were so great in Alexandria that the emperor restored him.

In 366, Pope Damasus led a council requiring all bishops to assent to the Nicene Creed.

After the ascension of the Nicene emperor Theodosius, the Council of Constantinople affirmed the Nicene Creed once for all, 381.



**Julian the Apostate/Philosopher**  
(b 331/332; 361–June 26, 363AD)

# FINAL YEARS AND DEATH

Spent his final years preaching and writing, seeking to restore harmony to the church in Alexandria

In 373, he ordained his successor, gathered his churchmen around him, and died peacefully in his bed.

“For fifty years he stood unswervingly by that confession. Every argument that ingenuity could invent was used to prove it false. Bishops met together in great numbers, condemned his views, and invoked upon him the curse of God. Emperors took sides against him, banished him time and time again, and chased him from place to place, setting a reward on his head. . . . But with all this pressure bearing on him, he changed his ground not one inch. . . . His loyalty to the truth made him a great power for good, and a great blessing to the churches of his own, and of all times.” P. Williamson.



# THE ATHANASIAN CREED

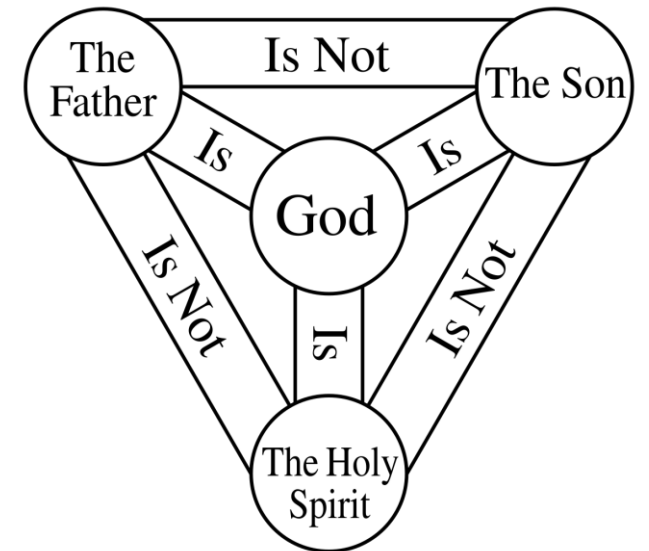
Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith.

Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,  
neither blending their persons  
nor dividing their essence.

For the person of the Father is a distinct person,  
the person of the Son is another,  
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.  
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,  
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal....



# ATHANASIAN CREED, CONT.

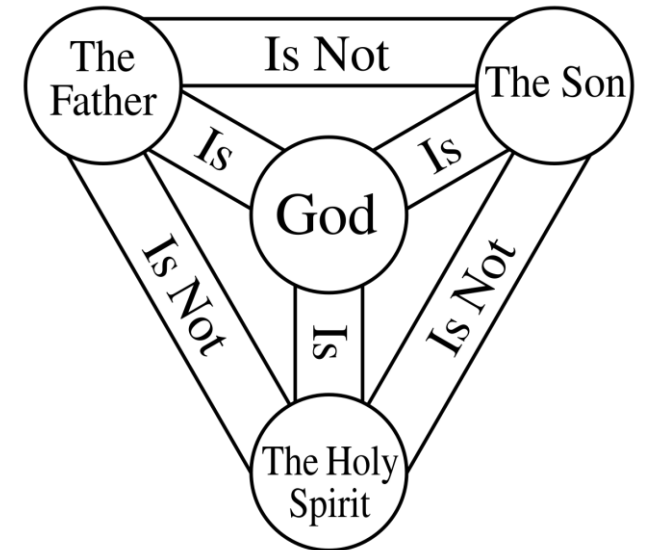
What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,  
the Son is uncreated,  
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable,  
the Son is immeasurable,  
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,  
the Son is eternal,  
the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;  
there is but one eternal being.  
So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;  
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

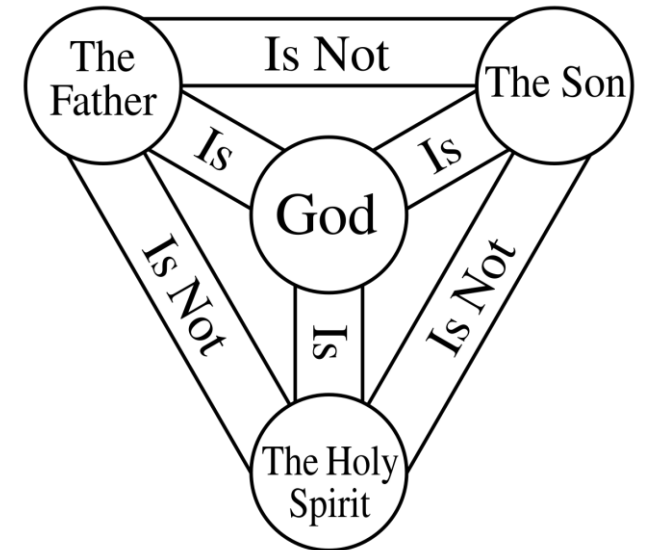


# ATHANASIAN CREED, CONT.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,  
the Son is almighty,  
the Holy Spirit is almighty.  
Yet there are not three almighty beings;  
there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,  
the Son is God,  
the Holy Spirit is God.  
Yet there are not three gods;  
there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,  
the Son is Lord,  
the Holy Spirit is Lord.  
Yet there are not three lords;  
there is but one Lord....



**NEXT WEEK:**

**LADY JANE GREY**

**ROYAL MARTYR OF THE ENGLISH  
REFORMATION**

