

# TRIUNE GOD

## Review of Eternal Generation

Eternal generation teaches that Father God has eternally given life to His only Son (Jn. 1:14 & 5:26). The life the Father gives to the Son is reciprocated in the love of the Son; their love (in communion with the Spirit) draws them into one will—of the one true God. The Son is God from God; light from life; life from life; & love from love.

In knowing our Triune God, this doctrine holds two important biblical pieces together: (1) How can the Son and the Father be distinct yet one? & (2) How can the Son be one with the Father yet “from” the Father?

Of metaphors to understand this, a flame is helpful. Much as a flame gives forth light, so the Father gives life to His Son. Their essence is the same, yet their relationship is distinct.

1. What does it mean that the Father “eternally generates” the Son?
2. How does the flame/light analogy clarify this teaching?
3. Is the sending of the Son relevant or arbitrary to God’s nature?

## Arius vs. Athanasius

For our study today, I would like to do something a bit different. Below I have writings from two early “church fathers,” Arius and Athanasius (who, by the way, was the first one to offer the list of the 66 books in our Bibles). Read the sections from Arius and Athanasius, asking which one accords with the Biblical teaching of eternal generation.

Don’t be intimidated by their writing. Learning to read writers from earlier times takes skill, and we will work through these writings together in class.

## ATHANASIUS

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/28161.htm>

*Athanasius, Discourse 1, Against the Arians, Chapters 3-5*

8. If then the use of certain phrases of divine Scripture changes, in their opinion, the blasphemy of the Thalia into reverent language, of course they ought also to deny Christ with the present Jews, when they see how they study the Law and the Prophets; perhaps too they will deny the Law and the Prophets like Manichees, because the latter read some portions of the Gospels. If such bewilderment and empty speaking be from ignorance, Scripture will teach them, that the devil, the author of heresies, because of the ill savour which attaches to evil, borrows Scripture language, as a cloak wherewith to sow the ground with his own poison also, and to seduce the simple. Thus he deceived Eve; thus he framed former heresies; thus he persuaded Arius at this time to make a show of speaking against those former ones, that he might introduce his own without observation. And yet, after all, the man of craft did not escape. For being irreligious towards the Word of God, he lost his all at once, and betrayed to all men his ignorance of other heresies too; and having not a particle of truth in his belief, does but pretend to it. For how can he speak truth concerning the Father, who denies the Son, that reveals concerning Him? Or how can he be orthodox concerning the Spirit, while he speaks profanely of the Word that supplies the Spirit? And who will trust him concerning the Resurrection, denying, as he does, Christ for us the first-begotten from the dead? And how shall he not err in respect to His incarnate presence, who is simply ignorant of the Son's genuine and true generation from the Father? For thus, the former Jews also, denying the Word, and saying, 'We have no king but Cæsar John 19:15,' were immediately stripped of all they had, and forfeited the light of the Lamp, the odour of ointment, knowledge of prophecy, and the Truth itself; till now they understand nothing, but are walking as in darkness. For who was ever yet a hearer of such a doctrine? Or whence or from whom did the abettors and hirelings of the heresy gain it? Who thus expounded to them when they were at school? Who told them, 'Abandon the worship of the creation, and then draw near and worship a creature and a work?' But if they themselves own that they have heard it now for the first time, how can they deny that this heresy is foreign, and not from our fathers? But what is not from our fathers, but has come to light in this day, how can it be but that of which the blessed Paul has

foretold, that 'in the latter times some shall depart from the sound faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, in the hypocrisy of liars; cauterized in their own conscience, and turning from the truth ?'

9. For, behold, we take divine Scripture, and thence discourse with freedom of the religious Faith, and set it up as a light upon its candlestick, saying:— Very Son of the Father, natural and genuine, proper to His essence, Wisdom Only-begotten, and Very and Only Word of God is He; not a creature or work, but an offspring proper to the Father's essence. Wherefore He is very God, existing one in essence with the very Father; while other beings, to whom He said, 'I said you are Gods ,' had this grace from the Father, only by participation of the Word, through the Spirit. For He is the expression of the Father's Person, and Light from Light, and Power, and very Image of the Father's essence. For this too the Lord has said, 'He that has seen Me, has seen the Father John 14:9.' And He ever was and is and never was not. For the Father being everlasting, His Word and His Wisdom must be everlasting. On the other hand, what have these persons to show us from the infamous Thalia? Or, first of all, let them read it themselves, and copy the tone of the writer; at least the mockery which they will encounter from others may instruct them how low they have fallen; and then let them proceed to explain themselves. For what can they say from it, but that 'God was not always a Father, but became so afterwards; the Son was not always, for He was not before His generation; He is not from the Father, but He, as others, has come into subsistence out of nothing; He is not proper to the Father's essence, for He is a creature and work?' And 'Christ is not very God, but He, as others, was made God by participation; the Son has not exact knowledge of the Father, nor does the Word see the Father perfectly; and neither exactly understands nor knows the Father. He is not the very and only Word of the Father, but is in name only called Word and Wisdom, and is called by grace Son and Power. He is not unalterable, as the Father is, but alterable in nature, as the creatures, and He comes short of apprehending the perfect knowledge of the Father.' Wonderful this heresy, not plausible even, but making speculations against Him that is, that He be not, and everywhere putting forward blasphemy for reverent language! Were any one, after inquiring into both sides, to be asked, whether of the two he would follow in faith, or whether of the two spoke fitly of God — or rather let them say themselves, these abettors of irreligion, what, if a man be asked concerning God (for

'the Word was God?'), it were fit to answer. For from this one question the whole case on both sides may be determined, what is fitting to say — He was, or He was not; always, or before His birth; eternal, or from this and from then; true, or by adoption, and from participation and in idea ; to call Him one of things originated, or to unite Him to the Father; to consider Him unlike the Father in essence, or like and proper to Him; a creature, or Him through whom the creatures were originated; that He is the Father's Word, or that there is another word beside Him, and that by this other He was originated, and by another wisdom; and that He is only named Wisdom and Word, and has become a partaker of this wisdom, and second to it?

10. Which of the two theologies sets forth our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Son of the Father, this which you vomited forth, or that which we have spoken and maintain from the Scriptures? If the Saviour be not God, nor Word, nor Son, you shall have leave to say what you will, and so shall the Gentiles, and the present Jews. But if He be Word of the Father and true Son, and God from God, and 'over all blessed for ever Romans 9:5,' is it not becoming to obliterate and blot out those other phrases and that Arian Thalia, as but a pattern of evil, a store of all irreligion, into which, whoever falls, 'knows not that giants perish with her, and reaches the depths of Hades ?' This they know themselves, and in their craft they conceal it, not having the courage to speak out, but uttering something else. For if they speak, a condemnation will follow; and if they be suspected, proofs from Scripture will be cast at them from every side. Wherefore, in their craft, as children of this world, after feeding their so-called lamp from the wild olive, and fearing lest it should soon be quenched (for it is said, 'the light of the wicked shall be put out Job 18:5,') they hide it under the bushel of their hypocrisy, and make a different profession, and boast of patronage of friends and authority of Constantius, that what with their hypocrisy and their professions, those who come to them may be kept from seeing how foul their heresy is. Is it not detestable even in this, that it dares not speak out, but is kept hidden by its own friends, and fostered as serpents are? For from what sources have they got together these words? Or from whom have they received what they venture to say ? Not any one man can they specify who has supplied it. For who is there in all mankind, Greek or Barbarian, who ventures to rank among creatures One whom he confesses the while to be God and says, that He was not till He was made? Or who is there, who to the God in whom he has put faith, refuses to give credit, when

He says, 'This is My beloved Son Matthew 3:17,' on the pretence that He is not a Son, but a creature? Rather, such madness would rouse an universal indignation. Nor does Scripture afford them any pretext; for it has been often shown, and it shall be shown now, that their doctrine is alien to the divine oracles. Therefore, since all that remains is to say that from the devil came their mania (for of such opinions he alone is sower), proceed we to resist him — for with him is our real conflict, and they are but instruments — that, the Lord aiding us, and the enemy, as he is wont, being overcome with arguments, they may be put to shame, when they see him without resource who sowed this heresy in them, and may learn, though late, that, as being Arians, they are not Christians.

11. At his suggestion then you have maintained and you think, that 'there was once when the Son was not;' this is the first cloke of your views of doctrine which has to be stripped off. Say then what was once when the Son was not, O slanderous and irreligious men? If you say the Father, your blasphemy is but greater; for it is impious to say that He was 'once,' or to signify Him by the word 'once.' For He is ever, and is now, and as the Son is, so is He, and is Himself He that is, and Father of the Son. But if you say that the Son was once, when He Himself was not, the answer is foolish and unmeaning. For how could He both be and not be? In this difficulty, you can but answer, that there was a time when the Word was not; for your very adverb 'once' naturally signifies this. And your other, 'The Son was not before His generation,' is equivalent to saying, 'There was once when He was not,' for both the one and the other signify that there is a time before the Word. Whence then this your discovery? Why do you, as 'the heathen, rage, and imagine vain phrases against the Lord and against His Christ.' for no holy Scripture has used such language of the Saviour, but rather 'always' and 'eternal' and 'coexistent always with the Father.' For, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God John 1:1.' And in the Apocalypse he thus speaks; 'Who is and who was and who is to come.' Now who can rob 'who is' and 'who was' of eternity? This too in confutation of the Jews has Paul written in his Epistle to the Romans, 'Of whom as concerning the flesh is Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever Romans 9:5;' while silencing the Greeks, he has said, 'The visible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal Power and Godhead;' and what the Power of God is, he

teaches us elsewhere himself, 'Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.' Surely in these words he does not designate the Father, as you often whisper one to another, affirming that the Father is 'His eternal power.' This is not so; for he says not, 'God Himself is the power,' but 'His is the power.' Very plain is it to all that 'His' is not 'He;' yet not something alien but rather proper to Him. Study too the context and 'turn to the Lord.' now 'the Lord is that Spirit ;' and you will see that it is the Son who is signified.

12. For after making mention of the creation, he naturally speaks of the Framer's Power as seen in it, which Power, I say, is the Word of God, by whom all things have been made. If indeed the creation is sufficient of itself alone, without the Son, to make God known, see that you fall not, from thinking that without the Son it has come to be. But if through the Son it has come to be, and 'in Him all things consist Colossians 1:17,' it must follow that he who contemplates the creation rightly, is contemplating also the Word who framed it, and through Him begins to apprehend the Father. And if, as the Saviour also says, 'No one knows the Father, save the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal Him Matthew 11:27,' and if on Philip's asking, 'Show us the Father,' He said not, 'Behold the creation,' but, 'He that has seen Me, has seen the Father John 14:8-9,' reasonably does Paul — while accusing the Greeks of contemplating the harmony and order of the creation without reflecting on the Framing Word within it (for the creatures witness to their own Framer) so as through the creation to apprehend the true God, and abandon their worship of it — reasonably has he said, 'His Eternal Power and Godhead Romans 1:20,' thereby signifying the Son. And where the sacred writers say, 'Who exists before the ages,' and 'By whom He made the ages Hebrews 1:2,' they thereby as clearly preach the eternal and everlasting being of the Son, even while they are designating God Himself. Thus, if Isaiah says, 'The Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth Isaiah 40:28;' and Susanna said, 'O Everlasting God ;' and Baruch wrote, 'I will cry unto the Everlasting in my days,' and shortly after, 'My hope is in the Everlasting, that He will save you, and joy has come unto me from the Holy One ;' yet forasmuch as the Apostle, writing to the Hebrews, says, 'Who being the radiance of His glory and the Expression of His Person Hebrews 1:3;' and David too in the eighty-ninth Psalm, 'And the brightness of the Lord be upon us,' and, 'In Your Light shall we see Light ,' who has so little sense as to doubt of the eternity of the Son ? For when did man see light without the brightness of its radiance, that he may say of the Son, 'There was

once, when He was not,' or 'Before His generation He was not.' And the words addressed to the Son in the hundred and forty-fourth Psalm, 'Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages ,' forbid any one to imagine any interval at all in which the Word did not exist. For if every interval in the ages is measured, and of all the ages the Word is King and Maker, therefore, whereas no interval at all exists prior to Him , it were madness to say, 'There was once when the Everlasting was not,' and 'From nothing is the Son.' And whereas the Lord Himself says, 'I am the Truth ,' not 'I became the Truth.' but always, 'I am — I am the Shepherd, — I am the Light,'— and again, 'Call Me not, Lord and Master? And you call Me well, for so I am,' who, hearing such language from God, and the Wisdom, and Word of the Father, speaking of Himself, will any longer hesitate about the truth, and not immediately believe that in the phrase 'I am,' is signified that the Son is eternal and without beginning?

13. It is plain then from the above that the Scriptures declare the Son's eternity; it is equally plain from what follows that the Arian phrases 'He was not,' and 'before' and 'when,' are in the same Scriptures predicated of creatures. Moses, for instance, in his account of the generation of our system, says, 'And every plant of the field, before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground Genesis 2:5.' And in Deuteronomy, 'When the Most High divided to the nations Deuteronomy 32:8.' And the Lord said in His own Person, 'If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father, for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it has come to pass, you might believe John 14:28-29.' And concerning the creation He says by Solomon, 'Or ever the earth was, when there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I brought forth Proverbs 8:23.' And, 'Before Abraham was, I am John 8:58.' And concerning Jeremiah He says, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you Jeremiah 1:5.' And David in the Psalm says, 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, You are, God from everlasting and world without end.' And in Daniel, 'Susanna cried out with a loud voice and said, O everlasting God, that know the secrets, and know all things before they be.' Thus it appears that the phrases 'once was not,' and 'before it came to be,' and 'when,' and the like, belong to things originate and creatures, which

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come out of nothing, but are alien to the Word. But if such terms are used in Scripture of things originate, but 'ever' of the Word, it follows, O you enemies of God, that the Son did not come out of nothing, nor is in the number of originated things at all, but is the Father's Image and Word eternal, never having not been, but being ever, as the eternal Radiance of a Light which is eternal. Why imagine then times before the Son? Or why blaspheme the Word as after times, by whom even the ages were made? For how did time or age at all subsist when the Word, as you say, had not appeared, 'through' whom 'all things have been made and without' whom 'not one thing was made John 1:3?' Or why, when you mean time, do you not plainly say, 'a time was when the Word was not?' But while you drop the word 'time' to deceive the simple, you do not at all conceal your own feeling, nor, even if you did, could you escape discovery. For you still simply mean times, when you say, 'There was when He was not,' and 'He was not before His generation.'

## ARIUS

<https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-6/>

*Confession of faith from Arius and his followers to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria*

(1.) The priests and deacons to our blessed father and bishop, Alexander; greetings in the Lord.

(2.) Our faith from our forefathers, which also we learned from you, blessed father, is this: We acknowledge One God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone without beginning, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign, judge, governor, and provider of all, unalterable and unchangeable, just and good, God of the Law and the Prophets and the New Testament; who begat an only-begotten Son before time and the ages, through whom he made both the ages [Heb 1:2] and all that was made; who begot Him not in appearance, but in reality; and that he made him subsist at his own will, unalterable and unchangeable, the perfect creature (ktisma) of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of the other things begotten; (3.) nor as Valentinus pronounced that the offspring of the Father was an emanation (probolē); nor as the Manicheans taught that the offspring was a one-in-essence-portion (meros homoousion) of the Father; nor as Sabellius, dividing the Monad, speaks of a Son-Father; nor as Hieracas speaks of one torch [lit] from another, or as a lamp divided into two; nor that he who existed before was later generated or created anew into a Son, as you yourself, O blessed father, have often condemned both in church services and in council meetings; but, as we say, he was created at the will of God, before time and before the ages, and came to life and being from the Father, and the glories which coexist in him are from the Father.

(4.) For when giving to him [the Son] the inheritance of all things [Heb 1:2], the Father did not deprive himself of what he has without beginning in himself; for he is the source of all things. Thus there are three subsisting realities (hypostaseis). And God, being the cause of all that happens, is absolutely alone without beginning; but the Son, begotten apart from time by the Father, and created (ktistheis) and founded before the ages, was not in existence before his generation, but was begotten apart from time before all

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things, and he alone came into existence (hypestē) from the Father. For he is neither eternal nor co-eternal nor co-unbegotten with the Father, nor does he have his being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two unbegotten beginnings. But God is before all things as monad and beginning of all. Therefore he is also before the Son, as we have learned also from your public preaching in the church.

(5.) Therefore he thus has his being from God; and glories, and life, and all things have been given over to him; in this way God is his beginning. For he is over him, as his God and being before him. But if the expressions from him [Rom. 11:36] and from the womb [Ps. 109:3 (LXX), 110:3 English] and I came from the Father, and I have come [John 16:28], are understood by some to mean that he is part of him [the Father], one in essence or as an emanation, then the Father is, according to them, compounded and divisible and alterable and material, and, as far as their belief goes, the incorporeal God endures a body.

(6.) I pray that you fare well in the Lord, blessed father. Arius; the priests Aethales, Achilles, Carpones, Sarmatas and Arius; the deacons Euzoios, Lucius, Julius, Menas, Helladius, and Gaius; the bishops Secundas of the Pentapolis, Theonas of Libya, and Pistus whom the Arians [later] set up [as bishop] at Alexandria.