

## **Athanasius - Apologia Contra Arianos (Defence Against the Arians)**

### **Chapter 4.**

Imperial and Ecclesiastical Acts in Consequence of the Decision of the Council of Sardica.

51. When the most religious Emperor Constantius heard of these things, he sent for me, having written privately to his brother Constans of blessed memory, and to me three several times in the following terms.

Constantius Victor Augustus to Athanasius [642] . Our benignant clemency will not suffer you to be any longer tempest-tossed by the wild waves of the sea; for our unwearied piety has not lost sight of you, while you have been bereft of your native home, deprived of your goods, and have been wandering in savage wildernesses. And although I have for a long time deferred expressing by letter the purpose of my mind concerning you, principally because I expected that you would appear before us of your own accord, and would seek a relief of your sufferings; yet forasmuch as fear, it may be, has prevented you from fulfilling your intentions, we have therefore addressed to your fortitude letters full of our bounty, to the end that you may use all speed and without fear present yourself in our presence, thereby to obtain the enjoyment of your wishes, and that, having experience of our kindness, you may be restored again to your own. For this purpose I have besought my lord and brother Constans Victor Augustus, in your behalf, that he would give you permission to come, in order that you may be restored to your country with the consent of us both, receiving this as a pledge of our favour.

The Second Letter.

Although we made it very plain to you in a former letter that you may without hesitation come to our Court, because we greatly wished to send you home, yet, we have further sent this present letter to your fortitude to exhort you without any distrust or apprehension, to place yourself in the public conveyances [643] , and to hasten to us, that you may enjoy the fulfilment of your wishes.

The Third Letter.

Our pleasure was, while we abode at Edessa, and your Presbyters were there, that, on one of them being sent to you, you should make haste to come to our Court, in order that you might see our face, and straightway proceed to Alexandria. But as a very long period has elapsed since you received letters from us, and you have not yet come, we therefore hasten to remind you again, that you may endeavour even now to present yourself before us with speed, and so may be restored to your country, and obtain the accomplishment of your prayers. And for your fuller information we have sent

Achitas the Deacon, from whom you will be able to learn the purpose of our soul, that you may now secure the objects of your prayers.

Such was the tenor of the Emperor's letters; on receiving which I went up to Rome to bid farewell to the Church and the Bishop: for I was at Aquileia [644] when the above was written. The Church was filled with all joy, and the Bishop Julius rejoiced with me in my return and wrote to the Church [645] ; and as we passed along, the Bishops of every place sent us on our way in peace. The letter of Julius was as follows.

52. Julius to the Presbyters, Deacons, and people residing at Alexandria [646] .

I congratulate you, beloved brethren, that you now behold the fruit of your faith before your eyes; for any one may see that such indeed is the case with respect to my brother and fellow-Bishop Athanasius, whom for the innocency of his life, and by reason of your prayers, God is restoring to you again. Wherefore it is easy to perceive, that you have continually offered up to God pure prayers and full of love. Being mindful of the heavenly promises, and of the conversation that leads to them, which you have learnt from the teaching of my brother aforesaid, you knew certainly and understood by the right faith that is in you, that he, whom you always had as present in your most pious minds, would not be separated from you for ever. Wherefore there is no need that I should use many words in writing to you; for your faith has already anticipated whatever I could say to you, and has by the grace of God procured the accomplishment of the common prayers of you all. Therefore, I repeat again, I congratulate you, because you have preserved your souls unconquered in the faith; and I also congratulate no less my brother Athanasius, in that, though he is enduring many afflictions, he has at no time been forgetful of your love and earnest desires towards him. For although for a season he seemed to be withdrawn from you in body, yet he has continued to live as always present with you in spirit [647] .

53. Wherefore he returns to you now more illustrious than when he went away from you. Fire tries and purifies the precious materials, gold and silver: but how can one describe the worth of such a man, who, having passed victorious through the perils of so many tribulations, is now restored to you, being pronounced innocent not by our voice only, but by the voice of the whole Council [648] ? Receive therefore, beloved brethren, with all godly honour and rejoicing, your Bishop Athanasius, together with those who have been partners with him in so many labours. And rejoice that you now obtain the fulfilment of your prayers, after that in your salutary letter you have given meat and drink to your Pastor, who, so to speak, longed and thirsted after your godliness. For while he sojourned in a foreign land, you were his consolation; and you refreshed him during his persecutions by your most faithful minds and spirits. And it delights me now to conceive and figure to my mind the joy of every one of you at his return, and the pious greetings of the concourse, and the glorious festivity of those that run to meet him. What a day will that be to you, when my brother comes back again, and your former sufferings terminate, and his much-prized and desired return

inspires you all with an exhilaration of perfect joy! The like joy it is ours to feel in a very great degree, since it has been granted us by God, to be able to make the acquaintance of so eminent a man. It is fitting therefore that I should conclude my letter with a prayer. May Almighty God, and His Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, afford you continual grace, giving you a reward for the admirable faith which you displayed in your noble confession in behalf of your Bishop, that He may impart unto you and unto them that are with you, both here and hereafter, those better things, which the eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him [649] , ' through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom to Almighty God be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I pray, dearly beloved brethren, for your health and strength in the Lord.

54. The Emperor, when I came to him [650] with these letters, received me kindly, and sent me forth to my country and Church addressing the following to the Bishops, Presbyters, and People.

Constantius, Victor, Maximus, Augustus, to the Bishops and Presbyters of the Catholic Church.

The most reverend Athanasius has not been deserted by the grace of God, but although for a brief season he was subjected to trial to which human nature is liable, he has obtained from the all-surveying Providence such an answer to his prayers as was meet, and is restored by the will of the Most High, and by our sentence, at once to his country and to the Church, over which by divine permission he presided. Wherefore, in accordance with this, it is fitting that it should be provided by our clemency, that all the decrees which have heretofore been passed against those who held communion with him, be now consigned to oblivion, and that all suspicions respecting them be henceforward set at rest, and that immunity, such as the Clergy who are associated with him formerly enjoyed, be duly confirmed to them. Moreover to our other acts of favour towards him we have thought good to add the following, that all persons of the sacred catalogue [651] should understand, that an assurance of safety is given to all who adhere to him, whether Bishops, or other Clergy. And union with him will be a sufficient guarantee, in the case of any person, of an upright intention. For whoever, acting according to a better judgment and part, shall choose to hold communion with him, we order, in imitation of that Providence which has already gone before, that all such should have the advantage of the grace which by the will of the Most High is now offered to them from us. May God preserve you.

The Second Letter.

Constantius, Victor, Maximus, Augustus, to the people of the Catholic Church at Alexandria.

55. Having in view your welfare in all respects, and knowing that you have for a long time been deprived of episcopal superintendence, we have thought good to send back to you your Bishop Athanasius, a man known to all men for the uprightness that is in him, and for the good disposition of his personal character. Receive him, as you are wont to receive every one, in a suitable manner, and, using his advocacy as your succour in your prayers to God, endeavour to preserve continually that unanimity and peace according to the order of the Church which is at the same time becoming in you, and most advantageous for us. For it is not becoming that any dissension or faction should be raised among you, contrary to the prosperity of our times. We desire that this offence may be altogether removed from you, and we exhort you to continue stedfastly in your accustomed prayers, and to make him, as we said before, your advocate and helper towards God. So that, when this your determination, beloved, has influenced the prayers of all men, even those heathen who are still addicted to the false worship of idols may eagerly desire to come to the knowledge of our sacred religion. Again therefore we exhort you to continue in these things, and gladly to receive your Bishop, who is sent back to you by the decree of the Most High, and by our decision, and determine to greet him cordially with all your soul and with all your mind. For this is what is both becoming in you, and agreeable to our clemency. In order that all occasions of disturbance and sedition may be taken away from those who are maliciously disposed, we have by letter commanded the magistrates who are among you to subject to the vengeance of the law all whom they find to be factious. Wherefore taking into consideration both these things, our decision in accordance with the will of the Most High, and our regard for you and for concord among you, and the punishment that awaits the disorderly, observe such things as are proper and suitable to the order of our sacred religion, and receiving the afore-mentioned Bishop with all reverence and honour, take care to offer up with him your prayers to God, the Father of all, in behalf of yourselves, and for the well-being of your whole lives.

56. Having written these letters, he also commanded that the decrees, which he had formerly sent out against me in consequence of the calumnies of Eusebius and his fellows, should be cancelled and struck out from the Orders of the Duke and the Prefect of Egypt; and Eusebius the Decurion [652] was sent to withdraw them from the Order-books. His letter on this occasion was as follows.

Constantius, Victor, Augustus, to Nestorius [653] . (And in the same terms, to the Governors of Augustamnica, the Thebais, and Libya.)

Whatever Orders are found to have been passed heretofore, tending to the injury and dishonour of those who hold communion with the Bishop Athanasius, we wish them to be now erased. For we desire that whatever immunities his Clergy possessed before, they should again possess the same. And we wish this our Order to be observed, that when the Bishop Athanasius is restored to his Church, those who hold communion with him may enjoy the immunities which they have always enjoyed, and

which the rest of the Clergy enjoy; so that they may have the satisfaction of being on an equal footing with others.

57. Being thus set forward on my journey, as I passed through Syria, I met with the Bishops of Palestine, who when they had called a Council [654] at Jerusalem, received me cordially, and themselves also sent me on my way in peace, and addressed the following letter to the Church and the Bishops.

The Holy Council, assembled at Jerusalem, to the fellow-ministers in Egypt and Libya, and to the Presbyters, Deacons, and People at Alexandria, brethren beloved and greatly longed for, sends health in the Lord.

We cannot give worthy thanks to the God of all, dearly beloved, for the wonderful things which He has done at all times, and especially at this time for your Church, in restoring to you your pastor and lord, and our fellow-minister Athanasius. For who ever hoped that his eyes would see what you are now actually obtaining? Of a truth, your prayers have been heard by the God of all, Who cares for His Church, and has looked upon your tears and groans, and has therefore heard your petitions. For ye were as sheep scattered and fainting, not having a shepherd [655] . Wherefore the true Shepherd, Who careth for His own sheep, has visited you from heaven, and has restored to you him whom you desire. Behold, we also, being ready to do all things for the peace of the Church, and being prompted by the same affection as yourselves, have saluted him before you; and communicating with you through him, we send you these greetings, and our offering of thanksgiving, that you may know that we also are united in the bond of love that joins you to him. You are bound to pray also for the piety of our most God-beloved Emperors, who, when they knew your earnest longings after him, and his innocency, determined to restore him to you with all honour. Wherefore receive him with uplifted hands, and take good heed that you offer up due thanksgiving on his behalf to God Who has bestowed these blessings upon you; so that you may continually rejoice with God and glorify our Lord, in Christ Jesus our Lord, through Whom to the Father be glory for ever. Amen.

I have set down here the names of those who subscribed this letter, although I have mentioned them before [656] . They are these; Maximus, Aetius, Arius, Theodorus [657] , Germanus, Silvanus, Paulus, Patricius, Elpidius, Germanus, Eusebius, Zenobius, Paulus, Macrinus [658] , Petrus, Claudius.

58. When Ursacius and Valens saw all this, they forthwith condemned themselves for what they had done, and going up to Rome, confessed their crime, declared themselves penitent, and sought forgiveness [659] , addressing the following letters to Julius, Bishop of ancient Rome, and to ourselves. Copies of them were sent to me from Paulinus, Bishop of Treveri [660] .

A Translation from the Latin of a Letter [661] to Julius, concerning the recantation of Ursacius and Valens [662] .

Ursacius and Valens to the most blessed lord, pope Julius.

Whereas it is well known that we have heretofore in letters laid many grievous charges against the Bishop Athanasius, and whereas when we were corrected by the letters of your Goodness, we were unable to render an account of the statement we had made; we do now confess before your Goodness, and in the presence of all the Presbyters our brethren, that all the reports which have heretofore come to your hearing respecting the case of the aforesaid Athanasius, are falsehoods and fabrications, and are utterly inconsistent with his character. Wherefore we earnestly desire communion with the aforesaid Athanasius, especially since your Piety, with your characteristic generosity, has vouchsafed to pardon our error. But we also declare, that if at any time the Eastern Bishops, or even Athanasius himself, ungenerously should wish to bring us to judgment for this matter, we will not depart contrary to your judgment. And as for the heretic Arius and his supporters, who say that once the Son was not, and that the Son was made of that which was not, and who deny that Christ is God and the Son of God before the worlds, we anathematize them both now and for evermore, as also we have set forth in our former declaration at Milan [663] . We have written this with our own hands, and we profess again, that we have renounced for ever, as we said before, the Arian heresy and its authors.

I Ursacius subscribed this my confession in person; and likewise I Valens.

Ursacius and Valens, Bishops, to their lord and brother, the Bishop Athanasius. Having an opportunity of sending by our brother and fellow Presbyter Musaeus, who is coming to your Charity, we salute you affectionately, beloved brother, through him, from Aquileia, and pray you, being as we trust in health, to read our letter. You will also give us confidence, if you will return to us an answer in writing. For know that we are at peace with you, and in communion with the Church, of which the salutation prefixed to this letter is a proof. May Divine Providence preserve you, my Lord, our beloved brother! Such were their letters, and such the sentence and the judgment of the Bishops in my behalf. But in order to prove that they did not act thus to ingratiate themselves, or under compulsion in any quarter, I desire, with your permission, to recount the whole matter from the beginning, so that you may perceive that the bishops wrote as they did with upright and just intentions, and that Ursacius and Valens, though they were slow to do so, at last confessed the truth.

[642] Written a.d. 345.

[643] Gothof. in Cod. Theod. viii. 5. p. 507.

[644] Apol. Const. 3, 15. [

645] "They acquainted Julius the Bishop of Rome with their case; and he, according to the prerogative (pronomia) of the Church in Rome, fortified them with letters in which he spoke his mind, and sent them back to the East, restoring each to his own place, and remarking on those who had violently deposed them. They then set out from Rome, and on the strength (thar& 191;ountes) of the letters of Bishop Julius, take possession of their Churches." Socr. ii. 15. It must be observed, that in the foregoing sentences Socrates has spoken of "(imperial) Rome." Sozomen says, "Whereas the care of all (kedemonias) pertained to him on account of the dignity of his see, he restored each to his own Church." iii. 8. "I answer," says Barrow, "the Pope did not restore them judicially but declaratively, that is, declaring his approbation of their right and innocence, did admit them to communion....Besides, the Pope's proceeding was taxed, and protested against, as irregular;....and, lastly, the restitution of Athanasius and the other Bishops had no complete effect, till it was confirmed by the synod of Sardica, backed by the imperial authority." Suprem. p. 360. ed. 1836.

[646] Written early in 346 a.d.

[647] Athan. here omits a paragraph in his own praise. vid. Socr. ii. 23.

[648] S:35, note 3.

[649] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

[650] [At Antioch September (?) 346. See Prolegg. ch. ii. S:6 (3).]

[651] Vid. Bingh. Antiqu. I. v. 10.

[652] Member of the Curia or Council.

[653] Prefect of Egypt, vid. Vita Ant. 86, Fest. Ind. xvii.-xxiv.

[654] Hist. Arian. 25.

[655] Matt. ix. 36.

[656] S:50.

[657] Theodosius, supr.

[658] Not supr.

[659] Cf. S:20, note 4.

[660] Triberon, Paul *infr.* Hist. Ar. 26.

[661] Hist. Arian. 25. 26.

[662] [Gibbon, ch. xxi. note 108, doubts the fact of this recantation on the ground of the dissimilar tone of the two letters that follow. Newman explains that they treat Julius as a superior, 'Athanasius as an equal;' but surely he was something more than an equal. Fear of Constans, and the desire to secure themselves from attack, would make it important for them at any price to obtain the favour of the first bishop of the West. In order to do this they had to make their peace with Athanasius; but in doing so, they went no further than they could help.]

[663] a.d. 347.