

## THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURY ISSUES

### CHRISTOLOGY

- Reading: Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*; Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*; Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians*

#### Tertullian of Carthage

*Against Praxeas* and *On the Flesh of Christ*

#### On the Distinction between Father and Son

- Sun and its rays
- Fountain and stream
- Father, Son, and Spirit are *trinitas*

#### How the Son took flesh

- The proposal that the Son is the flesh and the Father the Spirit of Christ is irrational
- The Word is enfleshed
- Put on flesh: comes to be within human flesh
- The Word did not turn into flesh
  - If he were a merging of Spirit and Flesh, he would be something in between (*tertium quid*)

#### Two natures

- Jesus is God and a human being
- Two ways of being, conjoined
- The properties of each were preserved; He had the simultaneous qualities of both God and human (*communicatio idiomatum*)

#### The flesh he took is our flesh

- The resurrection of Jesus promises the resurrection of our flesh because Jesus himself was flesh
- It is necessary to understand that Jesus' flesh was real, true, flesh
  - Christ's flesh must be real flesh, not something else
  - Christ came to free our whole person, flesh and soul, and not just the soul
  - Christ became what he would save
- Birth is neither impossible nor unsuitable to God
  - To be human is to be born
  - Why is it more comforting to believe Christ to be a deceiver and to only appear human or appear to have been born?
- Bodies can be taken to manifest God, but Jesus's body became the dwelling place of God
- Human bodily processes, such as being born, cannot be unworthy of God for God is creator
  - If you do not admit Christ has a body, this is because you find bodiliness itself distasteful; thus you cannot love anyone
  - Christ's taking flesh shows God's love for humanity
  - Jesus must have all that belongs to a human being to be called human

### **Can God change? Can God at some point become human?**

- God is able to both change into things and remain what he is

### **Suffering**

- Jesus must have truly suffered and died
- Christ's suffering redeems us; if he did not suffer, we are not redeemed

## CONTROVERSY

### **Sabellianism (Modalism)**

- God is one
- The names Father, Son, and Spirit are God's manifestations to us
- The Father incarnate is called the Son

### **Arius**

#### **General points**

- There is only one God. Anything other than God is a creature.
- The Son suffered for our salvation; therefore, he is not God.
- The Son is the highest creature.
- The Spirit is second to the Son.
- The Father is infinitely greater than the Son; the Son is infinitely greater than the Spirit.
- There was when he was not.

#### **Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia (318) (Hanson, 6, in Rusch, chapter 2)**

- The Son is not unbegotten (*agenetos*) nor derived from some other substratum
- He is from nothing
- He exists before time
- Before he was begotten or created or determined or established he did not exist
- The Son derives from non-existence because he is not a portion of God (Hanson, 7)
- He sets himself apart from certain Philogonius, Hellanicus, and Macarius who teach that the Son was belched forth by God as an issue or is unoriginated (Hanson, 7)

#### **Letter of Profession of Faith to Alexander (320) (Hanson, 7-8; Rusch, chapter 3)**

- The Father is unique
- The Son is begotten before time and all was made through Him
- He is a perfect creature but above all creatures
- He is not a part of the Father like the Gnostics or Manicheans hold
- Nor an emanation of the Father
- He is not the same as the Father as Sabellius held
- The Son did not exist before he was begotten
- He was created before times and ages
- His being is not parallel to that of the Father
- There are three hypostases
- The Father is the Son's God

## INITIAL RESPONSE

### Council of Nicea (325)

We believe in one God Father Almighty Maker of all things, seen and unseen:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, begotten as only-begotten of the Father, that is of the substance (*ousia*) of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten (*gennethenta*) not made (*ou poiethenta*), consubstantial (*homousious*) with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, both things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and became man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead:

And in the Holy Spirit.

But those who say, "there was a time when he did not exist", and "Before being begotten he did not exist", and that he came into being from non-existence, or who allege that the Son of God is of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*, or is alterable or changeable, these the Catholic and Apostolic Church condemns.

### Athanasius of Alexandria

*Orations Against the Arians* (339-345)

The Word is truly God

- Homousious with the Father
- Image of the Father's hypostasis
- Proper to the *ousia* of the Father
- Power and wisdom of the Father

The Son is unoriginated

- He is originated unoriginately
- "The Father and Son were not begotten from some preexisted first cause so that they might be called brothers. The Father is the origin of the Son and begat him, and the Father is Father and did not become anyone's son. The Son is Son and not a brother. If he is called the everlasting offspring of the Father, he is called so correctly. The Father's substance was not once imperfect so that what is peculiar (*idios*) to it should subsequently come into existence." (1.14)

The Father is directly related to the world

- The Father himself creates through the Son
- The Son is not a lesser mediator, but the Father himself, yet not identical with the Father
- God redeems in the Son

The Son is of the *ousia* of the Father

- It is like a person and a person's wisdom
- There was never when the Son did not exist
- Everything the Father is, he is

The inferior things said of Jesus refer to his humanity

- He took flesh from the Virgin *theotokos*
- The Logos did not take on a human being but became a human being
- If he only appeared in a human being, then this would be no different than the past
- The Old Testament points to the destiny of flesh to be the dwelling place of God

- The Logos acted in the flesh, by means of the flesh
- He thus properly is said to have borne the weaknesses of the flesh and suffered
- Thus he can be said to have taken on our failings and our suffering and removed them
- “We human beings, however, were set free from the passions which belonged to us and were filled with the righteousness of the Logos.”

The Logos can properly be said to suffer in his humanity

- The Logos suffered because the suffering humanity was his
- The divine acts in the human and the human is attributed to the divine: *communicatio idiomatum*
- The human acts according to its properties and the divine acts according to its properties
- He fully took on the body; it became properly his, even though the passions did not touch his deity

In Jesus, humanity is united to divinity

- “We appeal not to something which has come into existence or to some ordinary human being but to the true Son who is by nature derived from God, and to this Son as he has become human and yet remains nothing other than our Lord and God and Savior.”
- “If the works of the Logos’ Godhead had not been done by means of the body, humanity would not have been divinized. Furthermore, if the properties of the flesh had not been reckoned to the Logos, humanity would not have been completely liberated from them.”
- God becomes human so that humans might become divinized. Thus it is necessary that Jesus be truly God and to have truly become human.
- “The purpose of this is that we may have our origin relocated in him and that we may no longer return to earth because mere earth is what we are, but may be carried by him into the heavens because we are joined to the Logos who comes from heaven.”
- The flesh says, “I am indeed mortal by nature, taken from the earth. In the latter days, however, I have become the flesh of the Logos, and he himself has borne my passions, impassible though he is. So I am free of them. I am no longer enslaved to them, for the Lord has set me free from them.”

The Son is distinct from the Father, in contrast to what Sabellius argued

- “We ought to understand that this is so [analogy of light and radiance] in the case of the Son, only more so, for when the Father has given everything to the Son, he still possesses everything in the Son, and when the Son possesses the, the Father still possesses them. The Son’s deity is the deity of the Father, and in this way the Father carries out his providential care for all things in the Son.”

### Terms

- ousia: being/essence/substance – perhaps general being
- hypostasis: being/essence/substance – perhaps specific being
- prosopon/persona: mask/person
- homousios: one (in) being
- homoiousios: like in being
- homoios: like
- anomos: unlike
- gennetos (begotten) – agennetos (unbegotten)
- genetos (made) – agenetos (unoriginated)

## Continuing problems

### Issues

- Is the Son the same as the Father?
- If he is different, how is he not a creature?

### Opinions

- Homoiousians: The Son's being is like the Father's being; he is divine but not the Father (traditional/conservative position)
- Homoians: The Son's is like the Father; he is not divine in the way the Father is divine
- Anomians: The Son is not the Father; only the Father is unoriginate; therefore the Son has an origin and is thus a creature: Aetius, Eunomius
- Temporal Sabellians: The Son is distinct from the Father for the purpose of the economy; after creation is perfected the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father and he will cease to be distinct from the Father: Marcellus of Ancyra

## Cappadocian Fathers

### Basil of Caesarea

- Distinction between ways of talking about being
- *ousia* (substance – general)
- *hypostasis* (substance – specific)
- Inapplicability of names to God
- Ungenerate is no better than any other name
- Only Revelation can provide names: Father, Son, Spirit

### Gregory of Nazianzus

- Equally one God
- Unlike in being is heresy
- Like in being (*homoiousios*) is insufficient
- Only consubstantial will suffice (*homoousios*)
- Words cannot express and the mind cannot conceive how the Son is generated or how the three are one; yet we know it is true
- The Son assumes what he is not in order to lift it to sharing in the divine life
- The two natures become one entity, the Son of God and human nature is made new

### Gregory of Nyssa

- The everlastingness of the Son secures the everlastingness of the Father
- The god-ness of God shows that he is beyond time and space; there is nothing that can be known of him other than his infiniteness. Thus if the Son and Spirit are God, they share in this infinite ungraspability. There are no differences in uncreated reality because this is God.
- To make the Son less than the Father is to question the nobility of creation

## Council of Constantinople (381)

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### The Dogma of the Trinity

- God is one substance (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*)
- Everything the Father is the Son is, except being Father and being Son
- Everything the Son is the Spirit is, except being Son and being Spirit
- Everything the Father is the Spirit is, except being Father and being Spirit
- The Son and Spirit each have a Mission, but share in all that it is to be divine

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