

THE FIRST TO THE THIRD CENTURY

The Triune God

INITIAL CONFESSIONS

- There is evidence of a triadic formula in 1 Clem 8, 19, 20; *Didache* 10; *Shepherd of Hermas*, Visions, 1.1.3 (Rusch, introduction)
- Christ is referred to as God; he is presented as preexistent (2 Clem 3, 9); the *Shepherd of Hermas* refers to him as a supreme angel (*Similitudes*, 8.3.3 and 9.1.1) (Rush, introduction)
- Ignatius of Antioch (d. between 98-117)
 - The prophets “were inspired by his grace to convince unbelievers that God is one, and that he has revealed himself in his Son Jesus Christ, who is his Word issuing from the silence and who won the complete approval of him who sent him.” (Mag 8)
 - The unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit is mirrored in the unity of the Church (Mag 12)
 - “Our God Jesus Christ, indeed, has revealed himself more clearly by returning to the Father” (Rom 3)

APOLOGISTS

- The apologists (Aristides, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch) develop the understanding of the Logos as intimately related to the Father. They drew upon the Stoic idea of the *Logos indiathetos* and the *Logos prophorikos*. (Rusch, introduction)
- They were concerned to show that the expression of the word did not leave the Father without reason and that it did not involve the dividing of the divinity (Rusch, introduction)
- “The Apologists utilized a picture of a man putting forth his thought and spirit in external activity. This representation allowed them to recognize, although dimly, the eternal plurality in the Godhead and to show how the Word and the Spirit, truly manifested in space and time, could also be within the being of the Father.” (Rusch, introduction)

DEVELOPMENTS

IRENAEUS OF LYONS

Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, particularly book 3. English translation available on-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book3.html>.

- Son is with the Father before creation (Rusch, introduction)
 - “For we could not have learned about God in any other way, if our teacher, existing as the Word, had not become a human being, since no one could have told us about the Father except his very own Son.” (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 5.1.1)
- Son and Spirit are the hands of the Father (4.20.2, 5.1.3)
- Importance of Tradition
 - Keeping to the Tradition and not inventing levels of divinity
 - Christ proclaimed the Father; the Son is the revelation of the Father
 - The Scripture (Old Testament) names only God the Father and his Son as God
- “There is, therefore, one God the Father, as we have shown, and one Christ Jesus our lord, who comes through a universal plan and recapitulates all things in himself. But in every way he is also a human, a creation of God; he, therefore, recapitulated humanity in

himself. The invisible became visible, the unchangeable became subject to change, and the Word became human, recapitulating everything in himself." (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.16.6)

- "The Word of God became human, in keeping with Moses' words, 'God, his works are true' (Dt. 32.4). If he only appeared as though he were flesh, without having become flesh, then his work was not true. But he actually was what he appeared to be, namely, God, recapitulating in himself the model of humanity formed long ago, in order to kill sin, destroy death, and give life to humanity. And for this reason his works are true." (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.18.7)
- "Who else can reign in the house of Jacob uninterruptedly and forever except Jesus Christ, our lord, Son of the most high God, who promised through the law and the prophets to make his own salvation visible to all flesh, so that he would become a son of man in order that the human being might become a Son of God?" (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.10.2)
- Only a Son of God who is both human and divine can save humans
 - "For if a human being had not conquered humanity's enemy, then that enemy would not have been overcome justly; but, at the same time, if God had not bestowed salvation, our possession of it would not have been secure. And if humanity had not been united to God, it could not have achieved a sharing of incorruptibility . . . For how could we share in God's filial adoption, if we had not received from God, through the Son, communion with God, and if God's word had not become flesh and shared that with us?" (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.18.7)
- He recapitulates all in himself
 - "There is, therefore, one God the Father, as we have shown, and one Christ Jesus our lord, who comes through a universal plan and recapitulates all things in himself. But in every way he is also a human, a creation of God; he, therefore, recapitulated humanity in himself. The invisible became visible, the unchangeable became subject to change, and the Word became human, recapitulating everything in himself." (Irenaeus, *Against heresies*, 3.16.6)
- God became humans so that humans might be lifted to God
- Role of the Spirit
 - The Spirit descends on the Son and is sent forth (3.17.1-2)

Adversus Praxean

"Now, from this one passage of the epistle of the inspired apostle, we have been already able to show that the Father and the Son are two separate Persons, not only by the mention of their separate names as Father and the Son, but also by the fact that He who delivered up the kingdom, and He to whom it is delivered up -- and in like manner, He who subjected (all things), and He to whom they were subjected -- must necessarily be two different Beings." (4)

"Then, therefore, does the Word also Himself assume His own form and glorious garb, His own sound and vocal utterance, when God says, "Let there be light." This is the perfect nativity of the Word, when He proceeds forth from God -- formed by Him first to devise and think out all things under the name of Wisdom." (7)

"It is not by way of diversity that the Son differs from the Father, but by distribution: it is not by division that He is different, but by distinction; because the Father is not the same as the Son, since they differ one from the other in the mode of their being. For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, ... Thus the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, inasmuch as He who begets is one, and He who is begotten is another; He, too, who sends is one, and He who is sent is another; and He, again, who makes is one, and He through whom the thing is made is another....even as we say that the Son is also distinct from the Father; so that He showed a third degree in the Paraclete, as we believe the second degree is in the Son, by reason of the order observed in the Economy." (9)

- The Spirit leads one to the Son, who presents him to the Father (5.36.2)
- The Spirit keeps the Church in the truth
- The Spirit seals and makes possible the unity expressed in the liturgy (3.17.2)
- The Spirit sanctifies the person, making them into the dwelling place of God (Bobrinskoy, 208-209)

TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE

- God is one, but there is also a threeness in God (*trinitas*)
- The unity of God is economically Three; unity does not mean that the three are one person. (2)
- There is a unity of substance, condition, power and three in form, degree, and aspect (2)
- There is number in God without division (2)
- Threeness in God does not contradict unity; it actually supports it (3)
- True monarchy is the monarchy of the Father, with the Son and the Spirit always acting in union with the Father (3)
- The Son derives from the substance of the Father; the Spirit from the substance of the Father through the Son (4)
- The three are three separate persons, three separate beings (4)
- Before creation, God was alone, but always with his reason; he begot the Word just as our reason brings forth words in its operation within us (5)
- The Son and Spirit are not separate from the Father (8)
 - Father→Son→Spirit
 - Root→tree→fruit
 - Source→river→stream
 - Sun→ray→apex of the ray
- The Son is a derivation of the Father's substance and a portion of the whole while the Father is the entire substance (9)
- The one substance is God; there are three coherent persons: "But although I must everywhere hold one only substance in three coherent and inseparable (Persons), yet I am bound to acknowledge, from the necessity of the case, that He who issues a command is different from Him who executes it." (12)
- Scripture speaks of two as God, but never of gods; therefore the three are God not gods (13)

ATTEMPTS AT PRECISION

- Economic Trinitarianism
 - Examples
 - Justin Martyr, at times Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian
 - Common outlook
 - God is one yet he is also three in relation to the economy

Adversus Praxean

This heresy thinks that "one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person. As if in this way also one were not All, in that All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. How they are susceptible of number without division, will be shown as our treatise proceeds." (2)

"Although He is the one only God, He must yet be believed in with His own *oikonomia*. The numerical order and distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the Unity; whereas the Unity which derives the Trinity out of its own self is so far from being destroyed, that it is actually supported by it." (3)

"But as for me, who derive the Son from no other source but from the substance of the Father, and (represent Him) as doing nothing without the Father's will, and as having received all power from the Father, how can I be possibly destroying the Monarchy from the faith, when I preserve it in the Son just as it was committed to Him by the Father?"

The same remark (I wish also to be formally) made by me with respect to the third degree in the Godhead, because I believe the Spirit to proceed from no other source than from the Father through the Son." (4)

- Strengths
 - Upholds the biblical witness of a threeness in God
 - Does not reduce the threeness to mere appearance or time
 - Suggests that the threeness precedes creation
- Weaknesses
 - The Son and Spirit are the agents of the Father
 - The Son and the Spirit solve the problem of the Father's relationship to creation
 - It is unclear whether the Son and Spirit are as fully God as the Father is
 - It is unclear whether the Son and Spirit are eternally distinct from the Father
- Monarchianism
 - Dynamic Monarchianism
 - Examples
 - Theodotus, Asclepiodatus, Artemas in Rome
 - Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch
 - Condemned by a council in Antioch in 268
 - Common outlook
 - Son and Spirit are names for Jesus and the grace of the apostles
 - Son and Spirit are not entities, at least not divine entities
 - Jesus was a mere man who was made equal to the Father and thus called Son
 - Modalist Monarchianism
 - Examples
 - Noetus of Smyrna
 - Praxeas of Rome
 - Sabellius
 - Common outlook
 - God is one; what is experienced and Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God
 - There are no numerical distinctions in God
 - The Father, Son, and Spirit are different names for God
 - They all refer to the one God
 - They are different ways in which we see God.
 - They are different *prosopa* or masks
- Subordinationism
 - Radical Subordinationism
 - Examples
 - Dionysius of Alexandria
 - Common outlook
 - Only the Father is God
 - The Son is subordinate, not eternal, thus perhaps a creature
 - Platonist Subordinationism
 - Examples
 - Clement of Alexandria
 - Origen of Alexandria
 - Common outlook
 - The Father is the fullness of God, beyond all access by creatures
 - The Son mediates the Father to creatures
 - The Spirit mediates the Son in sanctification
 - The Son and Spirit are divine and eternal but not as fully divine as the Father

ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

- God is beyond being; he is alone and ingenerate
- God brings an immaterial creation into being; this is only possible through the mediation of the Son
 - The Son mediates between unity and plurality
 - The expressed Word is eternal
 - The Son and Spirit participate in the divinity of the Father, which means they are not the fullness of God, like the Father. This does not mean, though, that they are somehow subordinate to the Father in being.
- The generation of the Son is like the emergence of the will from the mind; he exists by a continuous exercise of the Father's will
- They exist in a union of love
- The Father and Son are other in subsistence (hypostasis)
- The Father is truly God, the Son is a second God
- The Holy Spirit is also an active, personal subsistence; he is originated by the Father through the Son
- The Father relates to creation as a whole; the Son to rational creatures; the Spirit to holy creatures
- Origen introduces into Trinitarian discourse the important distinction between words about Christ and the reality of the Son. While the Valentinians held that different words referred to different realities—and thus Word, Wisdom, Son refer to different divinities—Origen developed the idea that the names are *epinoiai*: they are ways that our language refer to the Son but are incomplete in our perception. For this reason, different names can refer to the same reality. (See Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity*).
- "The believers see that the divine and human natures began to be interwoven in Jesus, so that the human nature, by its participation in the divine, becomes divine, not only in Jesus, but also in all who, with faith, take up the life which Jesus taught, a life that leads everyone who lives according to Jesus' commands to a loving relationship with God and union with Jesus." (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.28)
- "The one whom we think and believe to be God and Son of God from the beginning is the true Word, absolute wisdom, and absolute truth; we say that his mortal body and the human soul that is in him received the highest dignity, not only through fellowship with him, but also through union and blending with him, and that, by participating in his divinity, they were transformed into God." (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.41)

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

Triune God

ARIANISM AND THE COUNCIL OF NICEA I

Texts collected in William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), chapters 1-7.

LIFE OF ARIUS

- 318 Arius, priest in Alexandria, publically criticizes his bishop, Alexander
- 319 Alexander summons a council of bishops who draw up a Confession of Orthodoxy for Arius to sign; he refuses
- 319 Arius gains support; he writes his *Thalia*; Arius and his supporters travel around gaining supporters
- 320 Many bishops beyond Egypt join Arius, including Eusebius of Caesarea
- 324 A council is held at Alexandria, led by Ossius of Cordova on the celebration of Easter
- 325 A council meets at Antioch condemning Arius
- 325 The council at Nicea begins in May and continues through July
- 327 Arius appeals to Constantine
- 332 Arius signs a profession of faith and is readmitted to communion by Constantine
- 336 Arius dies

ARIUS

LETTER TO EUSEBIUS OF NICOMEDIA (318)

See Hanson, 6; text in Rusch, chapter 2

- He disagrees with Alexander, who states: "'Always God always Son,' 'At the same time Father, at the same time Son,' 'The Son ingenerably coexists with God,' 'Ever-begotten, ungenerated-created, neither in thought nor in some moment of time does God proceed the Son,' 'Always God always Son,' 'The Son is from God himself.'"
- Arius's own claim, he says, is in agreement with Eusebius of Caesarea, "Theodotus, Paulinus, Athanasius, Gregory, Aetius, and all the bishops throughout the East" who "say that God without beginning exists before the Son" (ο θεος του υιου αναρχος).
- Those who condemn this orthodox statement hold that the Son is a "belching" or "an emanation."
- "The Son is not unbegotten (*agennetos*) or a portion of the unbegotten in any manner or from any substratum, but by the will and counsel of the Father he subsisted before times and ages, full of grace and truth, God, only-begotten, unchangeable."
- "And before he was begotten or created or defined or established, he was not. For he was not unbegotten. But we are persecuted because we say, 'The Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning.' Because of this we are persecuted because we say, 'He is from nothing.' But we speak thus inasmuch as he is neither part of God nor from any substratum. On account of this we are persecuted. You know the rest. I pray that you are strong in the Lord, recalling our afflictions, fellow pupil of Lucian, truly 'Eusebius'."

LETTER OF PROFESSION OF FAITH TO ALEXANDER (320)

See Hanson, 7-8; text in Rusch, chapter 3

- One God, alone unbegotten
- Only-begotten Son begotten before eternal times
 - Immutable and unchangeable perfect creature of God, submitted to God's will
 - Offspring, but not as one of those born
 - Not an emanation
 - Not of the same substance
 - Not a dividing of God
- Created by the will of God before times and ages
- There are three *hypostases*: God/Father, the Son, and the Spirit
- The Son was not before he was begotten
 - He is not co-everlasting with the Father

SUMMARY

- Themes, taken by Hanson (20-23) from Lorentz's *Arius Iuizans?*
 - God was not always Father; he once was simply God
 - The Son is called God only analogously to our situation
 - The Logos or Son is a creature; God made him out of non-existence (this last element was the most shocking)
 - God is unoriginate (*agenetos*), everything else is originated and thus created (*genetos*); when the Son is said to be begotten (*gennetos*), this is just another way of saying created (*genetos*) (Hill, 43)
 - There are two Logoi and two Wisdoms and several powers of God
 - A superior Logos who is of the Father and not separate from the Father and an exterior Logos, spoken and created by God (Hanson, 10)
 - The Son is variable by nature but remains stable by the gift of God
 - The logos is alien from the divine Being and distinct; he is not true God because he has come into existence.
 - The Son's knowledge of God is imperfect
 - The Son has been created for our sake, as an instrument for creating us
 - A Trinity of dissimilar hypostases exists
- Homoousious is incorrect
 - "It seemed to him that if this word were used to describe the Son's relation to the Father, then inevitably he was being represented as, so to speak, a broken-off piece of the Father, comparable to Mani's idea that bits of God are to be encountered in all sorts of places, even in vegetables and food." (Hanson 24-25)
 - In the same way, the Son is not an issue or a fire lit from another fire
- Soteriology
 - The Son suffers in a way that God cannot
 - "First, the human limitations and weaknesses of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, were a sign of his divine inferiority; his divinity was reduced enough to be able to encounter suffering without ceasing to be divine. And secondly, they insisted that in becoming incarnate the Son had taken to himself, not a complete human individual, but what they called a *σῶμα ἀψυχόν*, a body without a soul." (Hanson, 25)
 - This provided a way of talking about a God who could suffer and thus who could not be the Father (Hanson, 26)
 - He could not be a mere man (*ἀνθρώπος ψιλός*), a man with a human soul, but had to be God (Hanson, 26)

COUNCIL OF ANTIOCH

- Early 325, presided over by Hosius
- Condemned Eusebius of Caesarea
- The Son is begotten, not from nothing but from the Father as a true offspring
- His begetting is ineffable
- He always is
- He is an image of the hypostasis of the Father; not of his will

Decree (Rusch, chapter 5)

- "The faith is...to believe in one God, Father all-sovereign, incomprehensible, immutable, and unchangeable, provider and guide of all, just, good, maker of heaven and earth and all that is in them, Lord of the Law and Prophets and of the New Covenant; and in one Lord Jesus, only-begotten Son, not begotten from nothing but from the Father, not as made but as properly an offspring, begotten ineffably and indescribably, wherefore only the Father who begot and the Son who was begotten know; for no one knows the Father except the Son, or the Son except the Father [cf. Matt 11:27], who always is and not at a prior time was not. We learned from the holy Scriptures that he alone is the image, not clearly as if he was unbegotten from the Father, nor by adoption, for it is impious and blasphemous to say this. The Scriptures say that he was begotten properly and truly as Son, so that we believe that he is immutable and unchangeable; he was begotten, or came into existence, neither by wish nor by adoption so that he appears to be from nothing...He is the image not of the will or of any other thing but of the hypostasis of the Father himself."

COUNCIL OF NICEA (325)

POSITIONS (SEE RUSCH, INTRODUCTION)

- Arians
- Alexander and Athanasius
- Bishops who espoused the traditional Logos theology without the precisions of either Arius or Alexander

CREED

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 (*homousios*) 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.

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

Letter to His Church concerning the Synod at Nicea (Rusch, chapter 8)

- Eusebius says that he presented a summary of the faith as he taught in Caesarea, to which the word *homousios* was added.
- "When this document was composed by them, so that the phrases 'from the substance of the Father' and '*homousios* with the Father' were stated by them, we did not grant this to them without examination. Therefore, interrogations and responses occurred, and the discourse

tested the sense of these phrases. Then, 'from the substance' was confessed by them to be indicative of the Son's being from the Father, not as if he is part of the Father. In this way it seemed good also to us to agree with the sense of the pious teaching suggesting that the Son is from the Father, not part of his substance. We also agreed with the sense, not even refraining from the expression *homoousios*, since the object of peace and the aim of not deviating from the true sense was before our eyes." (9-10)

- "'Homoousios with the Father' indicates that the Son of God bears no resemblance to originated creatures but that he is alike in every way only to the Father who has begotten and that he is not from any other *hypostasis* and substance but from the Father." (13)
- "Still it did not appear outrageous to anathematize 'before he was begotten, he was not,' for the confession of all is that the Son of God was before the generation according to the flesh. Already our emperor, the most beloved of God, affirmed in a discourse that even according to his divine generation he was before all the ages, since even before he was begotten in actuality, he was in the Father ingenerately in potentiality, since the Father is always the Father, both as King always and as Savior always, in potentiality being all things and being always in the same respect and in like manner."

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