

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 (SEE HANSON, 3-19)

- 256 Arius born in Libya
- 290s Arius ordained deacon by Peter, bishop of Alexandria
Possibly studied with Lucian of Antioch
- 300s Arius ordained priest by Achillas, bishop of Alexandria
- 318 Arius, priest in Alexandria, publicly criticizes his bishop, Alexander
- 318 Some, perhaps Melitius, report Arius to Alexander
- 318 Alexander heard the sides of both supporters and accusers of Arius
- 319 Alexander summoned a council of bishops who draw up a Confession of Orthodoxy for Arius to sign; he refuses
- 319 Arius gained support; he wrote his *Thalia*; Arius and his supporters traveled around gaining supporters
- 320 Many bishops beyond Egypt joined Arius, including Eusebius of Caesarea
- 320 Alexander wrote a letter to all bishops warning them against Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia
- 320 Council was held in Bithynia declaring Arius's views orthodox
- 321 A council was held in Palestine that vindicates Arius
- 322 Licinius banned all meetings of bishops
- 324 The ban was lifted
- 324 Alexander wrote to Alexander of Thessalonica denouncing the unrest caused by Arians; he also wrote to other bishops and wrote a letter to Sylvester, bishop of Rome
- 324 Constantine wrote a letter to Alexander and Arius urging reconciliation
- 324 A council was held at Alexandria, led by Ossius of Cordova, on the celebration of Easter
- 325 A council met at Antioch condemning Arius
- 325 The council at Nicea began in May and continued through July
- 327 Arius appealed to Constantine
- 332 Arius signed a profession of faith and was readmitted to communion by Constantine
- 336 Arius died

ARIUS

Texts

- Surviving texts: three letters, a few fragments of another, long quotations from his work the *Thalia*, written in Sotadean meter (Hanson, 5-6)
- Beyond this, there are only reports from his enemies, particularly Athanasius
- Even though it is said that he wrote other works, "It may be doubted, in view of this total dearth, whether Arius ever wrote any but the most ephemeral works." (Hanson, 6)

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

LETTER TO CONSTANTINE (HANSON, 8-9; RUSCH, CHAPTER 9)

- Pleas for a return from exile for himself and Euzoius
- The Son came into existence before all ages

LETTER QUOTED IN CONSTANTINE'S LETTER TO ARIUS OF 333 (HANSON, 9)

- There is an unoriginated word of God's substance
- Alien nature of the body for the sake of the carrying out of divine activities
- Spirit of eternity was in the superior Word
- God is not involved in suffering
- Christ suffered

QUOTATIONS BY ATHANASIUS OF THE *THALIA: ORATIONES CONTRA ARIANOS* 1.5-6, *DE SYNODIS* 1.5.

- The second seems to be quoting Arius, compiled by one favourable to Arius
- The first is an accusation by Athanasius

- “The Word is, like everybody, changeable in his nature and he remains good in his own freewill as long as he chooses, but when he wishes he too can be changed as we can, for his nature is alterable.” (Hanson, 13, summarizing *Or. Con. Arianos* 1.5-6)
- The Son and the Spirit are unlike the Father; they are not equal (*De Synodis* 15, Hanson, 14)
- There is a Trinity, but these are three realities, unlike each other, possessing glory at different levels (*De Synodis* 15, Hanson, 14)
- God is mysterious to the Son (*De Synodis* 15, Hanson, 15)

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 *σωμα αψυχον*, 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 (*ανθρωπος ψιλος*), 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
- Condemned Eusebius of Caesarea

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.”

ALEXANDER OF ALEXANDRIA

- Letter *Henos somatos* (319) to the bishops explaining his excommunication of Arius (Hanson, 16). Ayers suggests that this may have been written by Athanasius (43)
 - Arius holds that the Logos derives from non-existence
 - He teaches that there was a time when God was not Father
 - He holds that the Son is a creature and a product, unlike the father in substance
 - He claims that the Son is Logos because he is derived from God’s own logos
 - He asserts that the Son is changeable
 - He holds that the Son does not know the Father completely nor does he know his own substance
- Letter (324) to Alexander bishop of Thessalonica (or Byzantium) (Rusch, chapter 4)
 - Arius claims that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist (Hanson, 17)
 - The logos is of the same nature as the Father and eternal, but has a different hypostasis than the Father: Ayers argues that Alexander most often uses *physis* or *pragmata* to talk of the difference in Father and Son and says that he never uses hypostasis in a technical sense, or that there are two or three hypostases.
 - The nature of the Son is to mediate between the Father and creation, while remaining uncreated (Ayers, 44)
 - If the Father were without the Son, then the Father would be without reason and wisdom (quoted in Ayres, 44, n 4)
 - One cannot conceive the relationship between Father and Son
 - He is Son by nature, not by adoption
 - To be begotten is not to be created; his generation is indescribable
 - He is like the Father except in his being begotten
 - He shares in the Father’s incomprehensibility and all of his other qualities (Ayers, 45)
 - In addition to the Father and Son there is one Spirit

ARIUS’S SUPPORTERS

- In Athanasius and later writers “Arius” is synonymous with “Arians” and they do not distinguish between what Arius himself taught and what other similar writers taught (Hanson, 19)
- Who were they?
 - Lucian of Antioch

- Eusebius of Nicomedia
- Asterius
- Paulinus of Tyre
- Athanasius of Anazarbus
- Theognis, bishop of Nicea
- George of Antioch
- Narcissus of Neronias
- Achilleus
- Eusebius of Caesarea

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