

# THE COUNCIL OF NICEA AND ATHANASIUS

The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

## THE COUNCIL OF NICEA I

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

### 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

## 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 (*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.

## EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

The problem of subordination: from the Father but not the Father

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 *homoousios* was added.
- "When this document was composed by them, so that the phrases 'from the substance of the Father' and '*homoousios* 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."

## SEMI-MODALISTS

### MARCELLUS OF ANCYRA

- Deposed in 336
- God is a single *prosopon*, a monad
- The Logos is generated only for the Incarnation
- The Spirit is breathed forth only at Pentecost
- Thus the monad becomes a triad for our salvation
- When evil has been conquered, the Son will "deliver the Kingdom to the Father" and God will become a monad once again

## ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Life

- Born c. 296
- Educated by Alexander perhaps
- Deacon at Nicea in 325
- Bishop of Alexandria 17 April 328

- Dispute with the Meletians
- Exiled to Trier 335-337
- 337 returned to Alexandria
- 328-239 Synod in Antioch
- 339-346 Exiled in Rome
- Met Marcellus of Ancyra
- 346 Returns to Alexandria
- 356-362 Exiled
- 362 Returned to Alexandria
- 362-364 Exiled to the desert
- 364 Returned to Alexandria
- 365-366 Exiled to the desert
- 366 Returned to Alexandria
- died 2 May 373

#### Works

- On the Incarnation (c. 330)
- Contra Gentes (c. 330)
- Orations against the Arians (339-343)
- De Decretis (352-353)
- Apologia de Fuga (357)
- Apologia ad Constantinum (357)
- Historia Arianorum ad Monachos (357)
- De Synodis (359)
- Life of Anthony (356)
- Ad Serapionem (357-359)
- Ad Adelphum (c. 370)
- Ad Epictetum (c. 370)

“The Logos became man in order that we might become God” (*On the Incarnation*, 54)

#### ORATIONS AGAINST THE ARIANS

##### Book 1

- “Those who consider Arians Christians are in great error; they have not read the Scriptures, and they do not know Christianity and the faith in it.” (1)
- Arius has created his own religion; his followers are not Christians but Arians. (2)
- Christians do not take their names from their bishops, but from Christ himself. (3)
- Christians are known by their fellowship with authentic bishops; they are known by the name of Christ. (3)
- Arians are not Christians; they are Ariamaniacs (4)
- They have replaced Scripture with the Thalia (4)
- Arius is not even original, using the meter of Socrates (4)
- “Thus from Arius’s words the unmanly character of his soul and the perdition of his thought should be known.” (4)
- Arius says that God was not always a Father and the Son was not always (5)
- The Word came into being from nothing (5)
- In order to create humanity, God made Word and Wisdom (5)
- There are two Words and two Wisdoms; the Son shares in the Father’s own Word and Wisdom (5)
- The Word is mutable by nature; he is given glory by God in anticipation of his merits (5)
- The Word is not true God (6)
- “In all respects the Word is alien and unlike the substance and property of the Father” (6)

- The Son does not know the Father. (6)
- Everyone should be ashamed at Arius's blasphemies (7)
- Arius perverts the Scripture (8)
- Christ is *homoousios* with the Father (9)
- He is the image of the Father's hypostasis (9)
- He belongs to the *ousia* of the Father (9)
- Those who support Arius are guilty of his heresy (10)
- The Son is the power and wisdom of God and thus the Father was never without him (11)
- He is the reflection of the Father's hypostasis (12)
- The Scriptures abundantly attest that the Son was always with the Father (13)
- The Word is unoriginated (14)
- The Son exists everlastingly but this does not mean that he is a second principle along with the Father (14)
- He is not equal; he is not a brother to the Father; the Scriptures speak of the Son (14)
- "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." (14)
- He is the offspring of the Father's substance (15)
- The Son is "from the substance of the Father" and is his own (*idios*) (16)
- God creates through the Son without being distanced from what he creates (17)
- God directly creates the world (17)

### Book 3

- The true humanity of Jesus has implications for his subordination to the Father. This is the meaning of statements like Mt 28:18, Jn 5:22, Jn 3:35-36, Mt 11:27, and Jn 6:37. Arians argue that these statements show that the Son is not "like the Father in essence" or from the nature of the Father. These show a real difference between the two. Athanasius argues that rather than show a real difference on the level of divinity, what they show is the economic subordination in his humanity. (26)
- This is also manifest in Jn 12:27-28, Mt 26:39, Jn 13:21 that speak of Jesus being troubled or suffering. (26)
- One who is truly divine cannot suffer. (26)
- All of these statements of subordination, ignorance, reception of glory show for the Arians that the Son does not properly possess divinity and must receive these qualities from the Father. (26)
- The question is how Jesus can be God and human (27)
- One cannot say that Jesus and God are two gods. (28)
- There was not a time when the Son did not exist. (28)
- Everything that the Father is, he is. (28)
- The Scripture is the guide for reason: Jesus is God and Jesus is human. (29)
- He took flesh from the Virgin theotokos (29)
- The Logos did not take on a human being but became a human being (30)
- If he only appeared in a human being, then this would be no different than the past (30)
- The Old Testament points to the destiny of flesh to be the dwelling place of God (30)
- The Logos acted in the flesh, by means of the flesh (31)
- He thus properly is said to have borne the weaknesses of the flesh and suffered (31)
- Thus he can be said to have taken on our failings and our suffering and removed them (31)
- "We human beings, however, were set free from the passions which belonged to us and were filled with the righteousness of the Logos." (31)
- The Logos suffered because the suffering humanity was his (32)

- The divine acts in the human and the human is attributed to the divine: *communicatio idiomatum* (32)
- The human acts according to its properties and the divine acts according to its properties (32)
- He fully took on the body; it became properly his, even though the passions did not touch his deity (32)
- "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." (32)
- "If the works of the Logos's 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." (33)
- God becomes human so that humans might become divinized. Thus it is necessary that Jesus be truly God and to have truly become human. (33)
- In order to be freed from the corruption of the flesh, this corruption need to be borne by God. (33)
- The fact that the Son has taken a body and continues to be united to that body means that we now have connection with the life of God. We are freed from the passions. (33)
- "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." (33)
- The Logos remains impassable but nonetheless takes on sufferings for our sakes (34)
- All of his limitations are predicated of him "in the flesh" (34)
- He does not hurt but destroys the passions (34)
- 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." (34)
- The two natures retain what is proper to them, both remaining present in Jesus (35)
- The Son is from the Father but is what the Father is (35)
- His divinity he has from eternity; his limitations he has from his incarnation (35)
- Yet the Son is distinct from the Father, in contrast to what Sabellius argued (36)
- "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." (36)
- The ignorance of Christ is either a teaching device or something proper to the flesh which he took on (37)
- "It is plain, therefore, to everyone that not knowing is proper to the flesh, whereas the Logos, insofar as he is the Logos, knows all things even before their origination." (38)
- "For the all-holy Logos of God, who endures everything for our sakes, did this also in order that just as he bore the burden of our ignorance so he might lavish [upon us] knowledge of his Father, the only true Father, and also knowledge of himself, who has been sent on our account to bring salvation to all." (38)
- He became human to lift up humanity. (39)
- The result of the incarnation is that we are given participation in the divine nature (40)
- "He was true God in the flesh, and he was true flesh in the Logos." (41)