



1

ORIGINS OF THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

- Primary sources by Arius: Arius, the *Thalia*, preserved by Athanasius of Alexandria (see Hans-Georg Opitz, *Athanasius Werke* (1934)); Arius's letters, including the letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, letter to Alexander of Alexandria, a conciliatory letter written after Nicaea, and a letter preserved by Constantine.
- Primary sources on the Council of Nicaea: Athanasius (Hans-George Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*, vol. 3, pt. I, ed. 1934); Letters of Constantine; Eusebius of Caesarea; Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*.

2

ARIUS'S THEOLOGY

- Arius's theology:
- God is unique and transcendent;
- God is ingenerate and without beginning;
- God is indivisible and unchanging;
- Therefore, God cannot impart His substance to another being.

3

ARIUS'S VIEW OF THE SECOND PERSON OF THE TRINITY

- The Son is a creature (ktisma, poiema),
- Whom God formed out of nothing.
- Scripture says that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God (John 3:16).
- Orthodox Fathers, arguing against Sabellianism and Modalism, conclude from the fact that Jesus is begotten that He, as the Second Person of the Trinity, is distinct, in His Person, from God the Father, Who is Unbegotten.
- Arius, however, concludes from the fact that the Son is begotten that He, the Second Person of the Trinity, is different, in His essential Being, from God.

4

ARIUS'S THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

- The Second Person of the Trinity is:
 - a creature;
 - Whose beginning is before the ages and before the beginning of time;
 - Who cannot fully understand God, the Father (see John 14:28, "the Father is greater than I").
- The result, for Arius, is that the Trinity consists of three, entirely different Beings, not sharing the same essence.

5

THE LINES ARE DRAWN

- Arius's supporters = Lucian of Antioch, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Caesarea
- Arius's opponents = Alexander of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Bishop Hosius of Cordoba in Spain (a close adviser to Constantine on ecclesiastical matters)
- Synod of Antioch elected Eustathius as the next (anti-Arian) bishop and reprimanded bishops, including, Eusebius of Caesarea, who had supported Arius.
- Constantine convokes the Council of Nicaea. About six bishops from the West were present, and approximately 300 from the Greek-speaking provinces in the East.
- Constantine attempts to work with Eusebius of Caesarea to produce a Creed that would be satisfying to both sides.

6

HOMOOUSIOS

- The eastern bishops were troubled by the theological phrase, “homooousios tw patri (the same essence as the Father).”
- Athanasius says that the Son is the image of the Father and is the same essence as the Father.
- Usage of the term prior to Nicaea: i) a Council held in Antioch was wary of the term for its supposed Sabellian undertones. The heretic Paul of Samosata had also used the term in articulating the view that Jesus was merely an inspired man. ii) Orthodox usage: Irenaeus used it four times, Origen used it in the Nicene sense, and Tertullian used it twice.

7

THE COUNCIL ADDRESSES SCHISMS AND HERESIES

- The Melitians of Egypt were a rigorist sect who, like the Donatists in North Africa, opposed the readmittance into the Church of those who had lapsed during the persecutions under Decius and Valerian.
- Canon 6 of Nicaea may have addressed the Melitian problem by asserting Alexandria’s jurisdiction over the region of Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis.
- The Novatians, another rigorist sect, were permitted only priestly status, while the Melitians were permitted bishops, but with limitations.

8

THE DATE FOR EASTER

- In Antioch, the date for Easter was calculated with reference to Passover.
- There is no extant decree on calculating the date for Easter.
- Sources on calculating the date include: Epiphanius's *Panarion*; a synodal letter to the Church of Alexandria; a letter from Constantine to the Churches.
- Conclusion: Easter must be celebrated on the same Sunday by all the Churches, and it must not be calculated with reference to Jewish practice.

9

CONSOLIDATION AFTER THE COUNCIL

- Constantine sought to reconcile the remaining Arians.
- In around 327, Constantine attempts to reverse Arius's condemnation and to permit Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea to return as well (Socrates EH 1.25.7; 1.14.2-6).
- In 335, Constantine called a great liturgy of reconciliation, during which Arius was to be restored.
- Before this event, Athanasius was tried at the Synod of Tyre, which eventually condemned him.
- Arius died before he was reconciled (Sozomen, EH 2.29.5).

10

THE NICENE CREED

- The Creed rules out Arianism.
- The Son is Begotten, not made (not a creature).
- The Son is true God, not God in a second degree.
- Anathema to those who say that the Father pre-existed the Son, or that the Son was created out of nothingness, or that the Son is subject to moral change or development
- Positive teaching of Nicaea: the Son is “out of” or “from” the Father’s substance (“ek tes ousias tou patrou”) and the Son is the same substance as the Father (“homoousios”)
- The council confirms that the Son is fully divine and shares the same divine nature as the Father

11

EXCURSUS ON THE CANONS

- **Transmission of the Greek Canons:** i) The Collection of 50 Titles, by John Scholastikos, Patriarch of CP (565-77); and ii) The Syntagma of 14 Titles, during the last decades of the 6th century (preserved in a *Historia ecclesiastica*, author unknown).
- **Translation into Latin:** i) the versio Caeciliani; ii) Rufinus of Aquileia’s translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*.
- **Canons addressing the moral character and preparation of the clergy 1, 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 17:**
- Canon 1 prohibits self mutilation.
- Canon 2 address the problem of the preparation of the clergy, as some men were being advanced too quickly. It specifically excludes from the priesthood one who, according to 2 or 3 witnesses, has succumbed to a spiritual sin (“psuxikon ti hamartema”).
- Canon 3 forbids clergy from living with a woman, with certain exceptions.
- Canon 9 addresses the problem of moral character.

12

EXCURSUS ON THE CANONS (CONT.)

- Canon 15 prohibits bishops, priests, and deacons from traveling to other churches and taking up positions there. It is noteworthy that such traveling had been a custom (“sunetheia”), but that it would no longer be permitted.
- Canon 16 continues the reasoning of Canon 15 and establishes that those who continue to refuse to comply will be excommunicated.
- Canon 17 prohibits clergy from charging interest on a loan. Note that the Councils of Elvira (early 300’s), Arles (314), Laodicea (363-4), and the African Councils all had the same rule.

13

EXCURSUS ON THE CANONS (CONT.)

- **Canons dealing with schismatics and the excommunicated 5, 8, (10, 11, 12, 19)**
- Canon 5 addresses the problem of unfair sentences of excommunication. The canon calls for a twice-yearly provincial synod where the bishops address such cases.
- Canon 8 establishes rules for readmitting Novatianist bishops into the Church. Three options are considered for reintegration: give the bishop the rank of priest, bestow the honor of the bishop title without the powers, or make him a chorepiscopus.

14

EXCURSUS ON THE CANONS, CONT.

- **Canons dealing with Church organization 4, 6, 18**
- Canon 4 orders that a bishop be established by all the bishops of a province. If that is not possible, then 3 bishops will suffice. The Metropolitan bishop then confirms the decision.
- Canon 6 confirms that the Bishop of Alexandria has authority over the territories of Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis. It confirms the ancient custom of Alexandria's authority over the entire region. The Bishop of Alexandria has the power to confirm Metropolitan bishops. He can also convoke synods and arbitrate appeals. This canon lays the foundation for the later organization of the patriarchates.
- Canon 18 addresses the problem of Deacons overstepping their rank. Because they worked closely with the Bishops, they often assumed great responsibilities, which sometimes led to pride.

15

EXCURSUS ON THE CANONS, CONT.

- **Canons dealing with the order of penitents and the liturgy 12, 13, 14, 20**
- Note the order of penitents in the East: mourners, hearers, prostrators, and repenters
- Canon 12 addresses Christians who attempt to return to military service.
- Canon 14 addresses catechumens who had lapsed during persecution.

16

THE CANONS IN THE LATER TRADITION

- Leo the Great, Ep. 106.4, states that the canons are universal, they are never to be altered, and they establish boundaries and laws that everyone must obey.
- Quinisextum Council, Canon 2, honors the canons set forth by the 318 fathers at Nicaea, and then goes on to list the canons promulgated by the other councils.