

## COMMENTS ON THE ORTHODOXY OF THE HISTORICAL—PATRISTICAL AGE

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA:

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|  | <p><b>Quote:</b></p> <p>Even after the elimination of Gnosticism...the Trinitarians and the Unitarians continued to confront each other, the latter (the Unitarians) at the beginning of the 3rd century <b>still forming the large majority</b>. (e.a.)—11th edition, 1910-11, Vol. XXXIII (33), p. 963; and <i>ibid.</i>, 1892, Vol. XXI (21), p. 127.</p> |  |
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Why could it be said that circa the year 200 the “Unitarians (those believing God to be one person) were still forming the large majority”? Because they had the original Christian understanding of God as a monad; a single individual. The new idea (to “Christianity”) of God as more than one person, a doctrine of a minority deviating from the Bible teaching, found relatively few adherents. Historical confirmation of this accurate account of the situation includes these statements:

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA:

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|  | <p><b>Quote:</b></p> <p>Unitarianism as a theological movement ... antedated Trinitarianism by many decades. Christianity derived from Judaism and Judaism was strictly Unitarian. The road which led from Jerusalem (the location of the first Christian congregation) to Nicea was scarcely a straight one. Fourth century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding God; it (Trinitarianism) was, on the contrary, <b>a deviation from this teaching</b>. It (Trinitarianism) therefore developed against</p> |  |
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constant Unitarian or at least anti-Trinitarian opposition, and it was never wholly victorious...Earl Morse Wilbur, in the introduction to his History of Unitarianism enumerates a number of anti-Trinitarian groups which deserve attention in this connection; among others he refers to the Ebionites, the Sabellians, the Samosatarians, and the Arians...it must be reemphasized that the concept God, understood as a single, undivided personality, precedes the Nicean notion of a Deity defined as three persons sharing one essence.

***Unitarianism is the early norm, Trinitarianism a latter deviation from this norm.*** It is therefore more proper to speak of Trinitarianism as an anti-Unitarian movement than of Unitarianism as an anti-Trinitarian mode of theological speculation. (e.a.)—1956, Vol. 27, p. 294L.

**Quote:**

Arius denied that Christ was an unoriginated being, but was created out of nothing and therefore in essence must be different from the Father. He also affirmed that though Christ were the Son of God ... were he in the truest sense a son, he must have come after the Father, therefore the time obviously was when he was not, and hence (the Son was) a finite being. These doctrines...contained ***nothing essentially new or original in thought and had been more or less prevalent in the Church for three or four generations.*** (e.a.)—ibid., Vol. 2, p. 250.

“Three or four generations” takes us back to the “period of origins” of the Christian congregation.

The book The Formation of Christian Dogma, by Martin Werner, D.D., professor of systematic

theology, history of doctrine and history of philosophy, at the University of Bern, supplies the following:

**Quote:**

Eusebius of Caesarea has written as one who originally stood close to Arianism...Christ-ians (to him "Arians") seek, so he maintains, to support monotheism...they have knowledge of a heavenly realm of 'divine powers' (dynameis), archangels, angels, and incorporeal pure spirits, with which God surrounds himself. The Logos-Christ was the oldest of these beings, God had set him at the head of the whole creation as the supreme 'director'. In that the Logos-Christ belongs to these divine powers, which stand subordinate to God the Father, the Scriptures (Wisdom of Solomon and Hebrews) ascribe to him 'divinity'. In his function as the supreme director of the creation he was, as any other angelic-being, fundamentally an 'organ of the divine activity'. The view of Eusebius here simply revolved about the combination of Angel-Christology and Logos-doctrine which was found in the West from Justin to Lactantius.

With the Angel-Christology Arianism was also given certain other theses against which the Church in its new and antagonistic theology (the Trinity doctrine) sharply contended. These theses in previous expositions of doctrinal history have been set forth in a completely unjustified manner exclusively as the doctrine of Arius. These theses concerned here are, namely that the Logos was a creature (ktisma) and God alone was to be reckoned as agennetos; ("ungenerated", "unoriginated") that he, (the Logos-Christ) ex ouk onton, ("from not being") was created before Time, and that it can thus be said: en ptoe, hote ouk en, kai ouk en prin genetai; ("at sometime, he was not, and he did not exist before he came to be") that the Son-Logos is,

accordingly, in relation to the being of God, to be defined as allotrios ("alien to") and anomois ("unlike"). Col. i, 15 was naturally taken as scriptural evidence for the creatureliness of Christ, but the crucial Old Testament passage of Pro. viii, 22 ff., which was so highly valued by tradition, was also utilized. According to this old Post-Apostolic tradition, the two concepts of 'create' and 'beget', which were used here in juxtaposition, were understood as synonyms in the sense of 'create'....Phil. ii, 5-11 constituted for the Arians an important instance of scriptural evidence, which caused Athanasius considerable embarrassment....Arius... secured a whole series of proof-texts against the thesis of the substantial identity of the Son with the Father, which was maintained by the Athanasian (Trinitarian) neo ("new")-orthodoxy.

***The Arians, truly conscious of their unity with the old tradition of the Church did not fail in establishing the unscriptural nature of the new Nicene formula of the homoousia ('same substance' or 'nature') of the Son and his 'generation' from the ousia ('substance' or 'nature') of the Father.*** And they also laid claim to the tradition of the Church on their own behalf and even charged Alexander the bishop of Alexandria, in the first stage of the conflict, with having expounded himself to them the doctrine, for which he was now condemning them ...The fact alone that previous to the rise of Arius, the old Angel-Christology was still a living force in many circles, explains the ready and widespread sympathy which showed itself for Arian doctrine. If this doctrine, according to the complaint of Hilary and Epiphanius, could infect the communities of almost entire provinces of the Empire, and in the Neletians of Egypt, as well as the Donatists, thought 'arianly', this was all due, not to the Arian missionary activity, but for the most part to a simple process of sympathetic response. It meant that all were now being counted as Arians who hitherto had always thought in terms of the Angel-Christology. (e.a.)

Irenaeus (in the second century) could still interpret Mk. xiii, 32 in the following manner: the Son confessed not to know that which only the Father knew; hence 'we learn from himself that the Father is over all', as he who is greater also than the Son. But the Nicene theologians had now suddenly to deny that Jesus could have said such a thing about the Son. In the long-recognized scriptural testimony for the Logos-doctrine provided by Prov. viii, 22 ff. The exegetes of the second and third centuries had found the creation of the pre-existent Logos-Christ set forth without dispute and equivocation. But now, when the Arians also interpreted the passage in this way, the interpretation was suddenly reckoned as false....A theologian such as Tertullian by virtue of his Subordinationist manner of thinking, could confidently on occasion maintain that, before all creation, God the Father had been originally 'alone', and thus there was a time when 'the Son was not'. When he did so, within the Church of his day such a statement did not inevitably provoke a controversy, and indeed there was none about it. But now, when Arius said the same thing in almost the same words, he raised thereby in the Church a mighty uproar, and such a view was condemned as heresy in the anathemas of Nicaea." (e.a.)—pp. 155-8.

We can see, that, the views of Arius were closer to the understanding of the relationship of the Father and the Son to those of the first century Christians than the views of Athanasius and his followers.

Christianity and the Roman Empire, by noted Roman Catholic scholar William Edward Addis, gives us an insight into the religious turmoil caused by the attempt to introduce the notion that God was more than one person.

**Quote:**

The bulk of Christians, had they been let alone, would have been satisfied with the old belief in one God the Father, and would have distrusted 'the dispensation,' as it was called, by which the sole deity of the Father expanded itself into the deity of the Father and the Son....Tertullian...'All simple people,' he writes, not to call them ignorant and uneducated, (and these always form the greater part of believers) since the rule (of faith) itself transfers them from the many gods of the world to the only true God, take fright at the dispensation....They will have it that we are proclaiming two or three Gods. We, say they, hold to the rule of One....It became, however, more and more clear that the old belief in the **sole godhead of the Father** was no longer tenable in the church. (e.a.)—London, The Sunday School Association, 1893, p. 174.

On this one might ask: 'Why was "the old belief in the sole godhead of the Father" no longer tenable in the church? This was the original Christian belief: Why now change it?' The "old belief in the sole godhead of the Father" was that which had led new believers out of the pagan false teachings into the light of Christianity. The "old belief in the sole godhead of the Father" was, and still is, the Biblical belief!

We have looked back to the Patristics and have seen a pronounced understanding that the Father, Jehovah God was the Highest, no one was His 'equal in all things'.

The following authors have given an accurate account of the early Christian teaching concerning the Father and the Son. A review of their findings will reinforce the truth that the Trinity doctrine never was, and cannot be, a part of true Christianity.

John Martin Creed in The Divinity of Jesus Christ, wrote:

**Quote:**

When the writers of the New Testament speak of God they mean the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. When they speak of Jesus Christ, they do not speak of him, nor think of him as God. He is God's Christ, God's Son, God's Wisdom, God's Word. Even the Prologue to St. John (John 1:1-18) which comes nearest to the Nicene Doctrine, must be read in the light of the pronounced subordinationism of the Gospel as a whole; and the Prologue is less explicit in Greek with the anarthros theos (the word "god" at John 1:1c without the article) than it appears in English...The adoring exclamation of St. Thomas "my Lord and my God" (Joh. xx. 28) is still not quite the same as an address to Christ as being without qualification (limitation) God, and it must be balanced by the words of the risen Christ himself to Mary Magdalene (v(erse). 17): "Go unto my brethren and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." Jesus Christ is frequently spoken of in the Ignation Epistles as "our God", "my God", but probably never as "God" without qualification.

Arthur Weigall has written in The Paganism in Our Christianity:

**Quote:**

The early Christian mind stopped short before the revolutionary doctrine that Jesus was God...Throughout the First Century, indeed nobody would have dreamed of regarding Jesus as God...for all the Christians of the First

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| Century and most of those of the Second Century would have regarded it (the Nicene-Athanasian Creed) <b>as sheer blasphemy</b> . (e.a.)—New York and London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928, pp. 181, 186, 189, 190. |  |
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Historian Philip Schaff recounted:

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| The victory of the council of Nicea over <b>the views of the majority of the bishops</b> was a victory only in appearance...An intermediate period of great excitement ensued, during which council was held against council, creed was set forth against creed, and anathema against anathema was hurled. (e.a.)—History Of The Christian Church, Grand Rapids, Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Company, original of 1910, reprinting of 1979, Vol. III, p. 632. |  |
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Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson, who at the time of publication (1981) of his, The Continuity of Christian Doctrine, was Assistant (later full) Church of England Bishop Of Manchester, and Professor of Historical and Contemporary Theology at the University of Manchester, reported:

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| Further, by the beginning of the Arian controversy there already existed a number of different and sometimes diverse theological traditions concerning the Christian doctrine of God which contributed to make the controversy more lasting and more stubborn. Before we look at the example of doctrinal development which this century (the Fourth) displays, I must say something about the Arian |  |
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controversy in whose bosom this development took place. It is now nearly seventy years since the last book in English devoted solely to the subject of the Arian controversy was published. This is a testimony at once to the immense complexity of the subject, to the lack of interest in it to be observed among English-speaking students of theology, and also to the extraordinary unwillingness of English scholars to write books...The consequence is that most students of theology whose only language is English have gained a quite unrealistic and indeed obsolete idea of the causes and nature of the controversy. The account of the controversy that is widely prevalent runs something like this: Early in the fourth century a wicked heretic called Arius started some highly un-orthodox doctrine about the divinity of Christ. This dangerous heresy was soon answered, at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, when the correct reply was given by the orthodox bishops, a reply which had always been available and which had for long been well known by all responsible theologians. But a small band of unorthodox, Arian bishops gained the ear of the emperor who succeeded Constantine and these were by their machinations able to overthrow the plans of the orthodox, prevent the obvious truth being openly acknowledged and prolong the controversy for another forty or fifty years, at the end of which period the villainous heretics were deposed, the suffering and virtuous orthodox reinstated and Catholic truth gloriously vindicated in the new version of the Nicene Creed.

***This is a travesty of truth.*** The only reason this quite unrealistic picture has so long prevailed is because the last author to write books in English upon the subject - Gwatkin - unfortunately gave currency to this misrepresentation. Gwatkin branded Arianism as a thinly disguised form of pagan polytheism produced for the benefit of the pagans who were flooding into the Church, once it had been recognized and given approval by the Emperor Constantine. Gwatkin, who whatever his defects as a theologian was a

good ecclesiastical historian, should have paused to consider chronology. (ea).

In this controversy there came to a head a vitally important question which had been waiting for a satisfactory answer for a long time and had never received one...The Council of Nicaea in 325 was of course an attempt to answer it, but it must be recognized that in this respect it failed. The wording of its formulas was ambiguous and open to misunderstanding. The Eastern (Greek speaking) bishops were entirely justified in regarding at least one of its statements as liable to lead to rank heresy, if not actually designed to lead there. It was in fact, ignored by all contestants in the controversy for more than twenty years after it had met.

The first point to observe is that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century involved as least one direct contradiction of **traditional**, not to say Catholic ("universal") doctrine, and one reversal or reduction of a lively tradition of theological thought which had been entertained **widely in the Church since the second century**. The contradiction constituted the abandonment of an economic concept of the Trinity (The doctrine of the Father using His Son and His holy spirit to accomplish His purposes; not a concept of three equal persons. Compare, Gen. 1:2; 2 Pet. 2:21). There can be no doubt at all that the vast majority of the theologians of the Church before the time of Origen, and many after his time, had taught and believed that the Son was **produced** by the Father for the purpose of creating the world, revealing the Father and redeeming mankind in that created world. **Some** of them held that the Son had always been immanent in the Father from eternity and for the purpose of creation was caused to become a distinct though not independent entity from the Father. **But they would all have said that there was time, or possibly a situation, when the Son or Word was not that which he was when as the Father's**

**agent he created the world.** This applies not just to Justin and the other Apologists, but to Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Novation, Lactantius, Aronbius and Victorinus of Pettau. (e.a.).

Now, the champions of the Nicene standpoint during the Arian controversy entirely denied an economic Trinity. This point is clear enough in Athanasius' frequent attacks upon the Arian doctrine (**which had indeed plenty of support in the teaching of earlier ages**) that "there was a time when he (the Son) did not exist." It becomes crystal clear in the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. So frequently do these fathers deny that there is the least interval, and particularly the least interval of time, between the Father and the Son, that it is not worth giving specific references. Here is something which we must honestly call **a direct contradiction between widely received earlier teaching that in its day ranked as orthodox and later orthodox dogma.** (i.e., the new "orthodoxy", the Trinity doctrine) (e.a.).

The Cappadocian Fathers...either reject or throw cold water upon the models and figures which earlier writers such as Justin and Tertullian had used to express the relation of the Son to the Father, as tending to subordinationism such as that of the of ray from the sun, branch from the root.. It is worthwhile emphasizing these two points, first that fourth-century developments of the doctrine of the Trinity meant a contradiction of much traditional, indeed time-hollowed, doctrine, and second that in one respect it represented a reduction, perhaps even a reformation, of existing tradition...the defenders of the Nicene faith...all formally subscribed to the philosophical axiom of the impassibility of God, which is certainly not an axiom honored in either the Old Testament or the New. Their attempt to meet the Arian

argument that as Jesus Christ was manifestly vulnerable to suffering so the Son must have been vulnerable - doing so by taking refuge in a theory of two natures of which only the human one ("the human nature") suffered - was unconvincing and was to make plenty of trouble for later Christological thought. (e.a.).

They (the Cappadocians) were also maintaining a different argument, that is, the co-divinity and unity of all three Persons of the Trinity rather than the divinity of the Son alone, which was the main preoccupation of Athanasius. They have been accused of a philosophical confusion so drastic as to render their account of God as one ousia ("substance", "nature") and the three hypostases ("persons"<sup>1</sup>) virtually worthless. And they were reduced to "affirming a coequal Trinity, whose members stand to one another in relation of cause and effect." We must certainly acknowledge that in the thought of the Cappadocian fathers we can see **a clash between philosophical assumptions and fidelity to the Biblical witness**. (e.a.)—New York, The Seabury Press, 1981, pp. 51, 2, 4-9, 60.

<sup>1</sup> "HUPOSTASIS υ(&)...Heb. 1:3...The A.V. (= Authorized (King James) Version) ὑποστασις "person" is an anachronism; the word was not so rendered till the 4th cen(tury). Most of the earlier Eng. Versions have "substance," (b) in Heb 11:1 it has the meaning of confidence, "assurance" ((English) R(evised).V(ersion, 1881-85).), marg., "the giving substance to," A.V., "substance," something that could not equally be expressed by elpis, hope.—Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 1111. See also: 'Thayer's' Lexicon pp. 644-5.