



THE STUDENT'S COMPANION TO THE

THEOLOGICIANS



EDITED BY

Ian S. Markham

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The Student's Companion to the Theologians

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Preface

From the outside, theology looks difficult. How exactly do we reflect on ultimate questions? How can we have any confidence that our claims are true? These are obvious and legitimate questions. The temptation is to decide that these questions are impossible to answer and dismiss the entire subject area.

This is a temptation that is important to resist. From the outside the talk of space being curved sounds bizarre, but in Einstein's world the sun's gravity really does create a geometry of spheres. Naturally, it takes some time to understand the discourse. To start with it will sound odd and, in the case of Einstein, there is some complicated mathematics that one will need to grasp. However, if one does this work and gets inside a world, then it becomes intelligible.

This *Companion* is an introduction to the remarkable world of theology and theologians. You are being invited to 'understand'—to step inside—and thereby start to appreciate a discourse that those within certainly appreciate is difficult. These articles are intended to provide a way in to the connections, links, and influences that create a distinctive approach to the Christian faith. This is a book dedicated to Christian theology, although there are entries describing theologians who have been influenced by other faith traditions. It explores a world where the disclosure of God in Jesus is in some way (and as you will discover the ways are very various) a revelation to humanity about the nature of God.

Theology is not just about doctrine. Theology emerges out of life and story. So in every case, we touch on the factors in a person's life that shapes that theology. For some forms of theology (black and

feminist), the experience shapes the theology in very distinctive ways.

Welcome to this world. Please step inside and learn to appreciate the challenging world of theology.

I. Purpose of This Book

The primary purpose of this reference work is to introduce the remarkable world of theology to a thoughtful interested reader. However, the approach and selection have been shaped by a particular audience in mind. This audience is the student who is taking introductory classes in theology.

As every professor knows, one never moves beyond the basics unless one can assume the basics. Depth in any discipline requires one to assume that students have learned certain key concepts and heard of certain key people. However, in a world where countless practical considerations make it difficult to insist that certain courses need to be taken in a particular order, professors find themselves constantly revisiting the basics.

The purpose of this substantial reference work is to free up the professor from this task. The professor can invite the student to read the substantial introductory articles on this or that theologian, and then assume a basic map of positions and views in the mind of the student. So the goal of this book is to provide students with accurate, informed, accessible articles on all the key people in our discipline. Articles are structured in a similar way: after a brief survey of the life, a description of the theology follows, culminating in a brief discussion of the significance of that theologian.

To help the students there is a glossary, which includes the terms that most often appear in the various articles. In addition, there is a timeline, thereby ensuring that students locate the theologian in the appropriate context of world events.

II. Selection

It is inevitable that selection is difficult. Who precisely one includes and excludes will be hotly contested. The criterion for inclusion is the introductory theology course—theologians that are included are the ones that are likely to be mentioned in such a course. Now, given the introductory theology course comes from a variety of different perspectives, this *Companion* has attempted to make sure that key people in the main approaches are included. So, for example, Martin Luther, James Packer, and C. S. Lewis are important for the evangelicals; Julian of Norwich, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are important for the feminists; Thomas Aquinas, Serge Laugier de Beaurecueil, and Richard John Neuhaus are important for the Roman Catholics; and Martin Luther King Jr. and James Cone are important for those approaching the discipline from the perspective of black theology.

Naturally, all these approaches are in conversation with the broad center of the Christian tradition. So, naturally, there are some theologians who are included simply because they have shaped the tradition in a major way—Aquinas, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. The key theologians of the New Testament are there: Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the author of the Apocalypse of John. Some are included because they were a particular influence at a particular time—thus John Nelson Darby and the Left Behind theology or Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism. Others are included because they represent a particular approach—Richard Swinburne takes an analytical philosophical approach and Keith Ward has

produced a systematic theology which takes comparative theology seriously. Others are there because they represent a school—James Cone is the main representative of black theology and Rosemary Radford Ruether was the first to provide a feminist systematic theology.

The length of articles varies. Those in the “Early Centuries” and “Middle Ages” are longer than those in the “Enlightenment and Modern Period”; this is partly because modernity has had such a dramatic impact on the sheer variety of approaches that one needed more (and therefore shorter) articles for this period. Given that we are living in the modern period, it is especially important that students have a sense of trajectories that are currently emerging.

Inevitably there will be those who feel that this *Companion* needed to include this or that person—and a project of this nature could easily be twice the size. There are many important voices that are not included. Therefore, in certain key areas, there is a general description of a theological approach, which ensures that a range of theologians in that area are identified and described (e.g., black theology, liberal theology, and Vatican II).

III. Invitation to Participation

Theology is not a discipline that one observes from afar. Instead, it is one that every reader is invited to join. This is the hard work of making sense of what we learn in Christ about God and God’s relations to the world. Each Christian is invited to engage with these writers and join the conversation. These theologians are very diverse—from evangelical to liberal and from Catholic to Protestant. As one agrees and disagrees, one arrives at a greater sense of what one believes. This process is the act of participation in the conversation.

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Virginia Theological Seminary

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Timeline

	Dates	Theologian	Event
R O M A N E M P I R E	c.35–c.110	Ignatius of Antioch	life of Jesus, 0–33
	c.85–c.160	Marcion	
	2nd century	Irenaeus of Lyons	
	c.155–c.225	Tertullian	Roman Empire begins to decline, 180
	c.185–254	Origen	
	c.256–336	Arius	
	c.295–373	Athanasius	Emp. Diocletian divides Rom. Emp. into two, 285
	c.306–73)	Ephrem the Syrian	Constantine grants toleration of Christians, 313
	c.329–c.524	Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa & Gregory of Nazianzus	Council of Nicaea, 325
	c.354–430	Augustine of Hippo	barbarian invasions of Europe, 360 to 600
	c.378–444	Cyril of Alexandria	
	c.381–c.451	Nestorius of Constantinople	Council of Constantinople, 381 sack of Rome, 410 St Patrick in Ireland, 430 fall of the Western Roman Empire, 480
	c.475–c.524	Boethius	Buddhism in Japan, 540

B Y Z A N T I N E E M P I R E	F R A N K I S H E M P I R E	H O L Y R O M A N E M P I R E	580–662	Maximos the Confessor	<p>spread of Islam to Africa and Asia, 660</p> <p>birth of Islam, 622</p> <p>Hinduism dominates over Islam in India, 700</p> <p>Charlemagne helps to spread Christianity, 780</p> <p>Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor, 800</p> <p>Monks write Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 890</p> <p>Fatimid University founded in Cairo, 975</p> <p>Orthodox Christianity in Kiev, 990</p>
			1033–1109	St Anselm of Canterbury	Crusaders take Jerusalem, 1099
			1079–1142	Peter Abelard	
			1090–1153	Bernard of Clairvaux	
			c.1217–74	Bonaventure	Genghis Khan, Mogul ruler, 1210
			c.1224–74	Thomas Aquinas	
			c.1266–1308	Duns Scotus	
			c.1280–c.1349	William Ockham	the Black Death, 1320–60
			1342–c.1416	Julian of Norwich	<p>Joan of Arc, 1430</p> <p>Gutenberg Bible printed, 1455</p> <p>Ottomans take Constantinople, 1455</p>
			1483–1546	Martin Luther	
			1497–1560	Philip Melanchthon	
			1509–64	John Calvin	Reformation begins, 1505
			1515–82	Teresa of Ávila	<p>Tyndale translates NT into English, 1526</p> <p>Calvin starts church reform, 1535</p>

O T T O M A N E M P I R E	H O L Y			Henry VIII breaks from Rome, 1534	
		1554–1600	Richard Hooker	Sikhs build temple at Amritsar, 1605 Europe's 30 y. war betw. Catholics & Protestants, 1620–50	
	R O M A N				North America settled by Europeans, 1610
		1724–1804	Immanuel Kant		
	E M P I R E				American Revolution, 1775–83 French Revolution, 1789–99
		1768–1834	Friedrich Schleiermacher		
	E M P I R E				
		1770–1831	Georg Hegel		
		1800–82	John Nelson Darby		Napoleonic Wars, 1799–1815 Francis II gives up title of Holy Roman Emp., 1800
		1801–90	John Henry Newman		Industrial Revolution begins, 1810
		1802–75	Gottfried Thomasius		
		1813–55	Søren Kierkegaard		Crimean War, 1853–56
		1851–1921	B. B. Warfield		
		1886–1968	Karl Barth		
		1886–1965	Paul Tillich		
		1886–1960	John Baillie		
		1887–1954	Donald Baillie		
		1889–1966	Emil Brunner		
		1892–1971	Reinhold Niebuhr		
	1893–1979	Georges Florovsky			

1898–1963	C. S. Lewis	
1904–68	A. M. Farrer	
1904–84	Karl Rahner	
1905–88	Hans Urs von Balthasar	
1906–45	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	
1913–94	Donald MacKinnon	First World War, 1914–18
1917–2005	Serge Laugier de Beaucueil	Russian Revolution, 1917
1920–99	Charles Philip Price	Gandhi marches against British rule in India, 1920s
1922–88	Hans Frei	
1922–2012	John Hick	
1923–	George Lindbeck	
1926–	Jürgen Moltmann	
1926–	James Packer	
1928–	Gustavo Gutiérrez	
1928–	Wolfhart Pannenberg	
1929–2003	Dorothee Sölle	
1929–68	Martin Luther King, Jr.	
1934–	Richard Swinburne	
1936–	Rosemary Radford Ruether	
1936–	Richard John Neuhaus	
1938–	James Cone	
1938–	Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza	
1938–	Keith Ward	
1940–	Stanley Hauerwas	Second World War, 1939–45

1941–2003	Colin Gunton	
1941–	Elizabeth Johnson	State of Israel formed, 1948
1952–	John Milbank	USA civil rights protests, 1960s Vatican II, 1962–65 Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966 to mid-1970s

The following are the relevant dates for each empire:

Roman Empire	(pre-)zero to 480
Frankish Empire	480 to 825
Byzantine Empire	525 to 1455
Holy Roman Empire	825 to 1815
Ottoman Empire	1305 to 1910

Early Centuries

The Apocalypse of John

Kenneth G. C. Newport

Among the books of the Bible there can be few that have been so widely utilized as the Apocalypse of John. From early times this book has been a favorite for those believers and communities who wait expectantly for “the end” (however that is conceived), for it has long been assumed that this is what the Apocalypse, or “Revelation,” is really all about. Down through the Christian centuries, therefore, careful attention has been paid to this book and much energy expended upon trying to understand more precisely what it is about the end that the book of “Revelation” actually reveals. The most widely accepted interpretation is that it reveals the events that will occur as the end of the world approaches; it is, in short, and to use the title of this book that has now become synonymous with its presumed contents, a timetable of the Apocalypse (Froom, 1946–54).

While it is true that interest in the book has a long and distinguished history (Sir Isaac Newton, for example, was fascinated by it, as his posthumously published *Observations upon the Prophecies* [1733] clearly shows), in recent times there has been no let-up in interpretative endeavor. And there are some extreme examples of the same: infamously, it was this book above all others that led David Koresh and his Branch Davidian community to self-destruct in Waco in 1993 (Newport, 2006). It is this book, too, which inspires much of the thinking in the now massively successful, and, one suspects, influential, *Left Behind*

series. Contemporary evidence shows also how the Apocalypse of John has left its mark on many aspects of popular culture and in the genres of music, literature, and art (Kovacs and Rowland, 2003; Newport and Walliss, forthcoming).

There has been a great deal of discussion regarding the authorship of this book. “John” is named as the author in four places (1.1, 4, 9; 22.8), with no further identifying information. Assuming that the work is not consciously pseudepigraphical, the traditional view is that the “John” in question is the author of the gospel of John (not that that book names “John” as its author), himself taken to be the brother of James, one of Jesus’ disciples (see Matt. 4:21). There are problems with this view, however, not the least of which is that the Greek of the Apocalypse is a very strange Greek indeed and not at all like that found in the Gospel. In fact, it would seem that whoever the author of the Apocalypse was, he (or just perhaps she) was much more at home linguistically in a Semitic rather than Hellenistic context, thinking in Aramaic perhaps, and with a thorough acquaintance of Hebrew, but writing in Greek (Thompson, 1985). And there are other indications that a thoroughly Semitic mind is at work here. For example, although the Hebrew Scriptures are never directly quoted, more verses than not in Revelation show the influence of the Hebrew texts (Moyise, 1996). Indeed, so soaked through with Jewish thought, literature, and language is the book of

Revelation that some have even suggested that it originated as Jewish text that has been edited by a later Christian writer (Massyngberde Ford, 1975).

There is in fact little question that the author of the Apocalypse was a Jew. However, like Paul and most of the other early Christians, this Jew had come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah and indicates that it was as a result of this belief that he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos, a Greek Island in the Aegean Sea (Rev. 1:9). The fact that the author was an exile is important for an understanding of the text, as is the commonly held view that his exile coincided with a period of persecution of the Christian church at the hands of the Roman state. Again there is some dispute here: was this, as is most commonly thought, a period of persecution toward the end of the first century ce or an earlier one, perhaps in the 60s? In either case the experience has left its mark on the author whose theology is understandably reflective of it. This is a text born of suffering – both communal and individual. It is one also which comes from a period during which there is great external pressure to conform to society's norms. The message that comes loud and clear in response is "I [Jesus] am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (Rev. 3:11).

Certainly the "end of the world" and the return of Jesus is a theme of significant importance to the author of the Apocalypse. However, some, most famously Rowland (1972), have raised a fundamental challenge to the notion that "apocalyptic" literature really has "the end" as its principal concern. The Greek word *apocalypsis* (the word used in Rev. 1:1), it is argued, is rather about "drawing back the veil," so as to "un-cover—*apo-kaluptein*" something. This act of "uncovering" might of course include aspects of revealing what is to come (see Rev. 1:1 and 4:1), but more central to the genre's concern is the act of taking the seer "behind the scenes" of this world so as to put on show the heavenly reality behind the earthly façade. In the Apocalypse, John is hence taken through a door into heaven (Rev. 4:1, 2) and given in effect a tour of God's dwelling place, the purpose of which is to reassure him, as the one who is to speak to God's persecuted and distressed community, that whatever the outward appearance, God is in control and that all things will, in the end, work to God's

glory and achieve God's purpose. The great beasts of Revelation as depicted so graphically in chapter 13 and via the Whore of Babylon motif of Rev. 17–18, then, may appear to be in control to the untrained eye as they (in the form of the Roman state) persecute the saints; but in fact God guards every soul that is slain. They rest under the altar (Rev. 6:9) dressed in white robes awaiting vindication. Satan does his work now (Rev. 12), but he will be bound (Rev. 20); the wicked prosper in the present, but their final end is certain. The righteous suffer now, but will inherit eternal life.

It would appear, then, that the author of the Apocalypse calls for endurance in the face of two major challenges: persecution and assimilation. The people of God will suffer physically; they will be slain and trodden upon by the unrighteous who individually and collectively are instruments in the hands of Satan (for as Rev. 12 and 13 reveal, it is none other than this "old serpent" who is at work behind the scenes) and in this context the promise of reward is held out to those that endure to the end. As important as this theme is, however, perhaps an equal concern to the author is the pressure to conform to practices that, while widespread and accepted in the larger society, are not to be engaged in by the people of God. In the "letters to the seven churches" found in Rev. 2–3, there are dire warnings to those who do assimilate and compromise their distinctiveness—to those who are in danger of losing their "first love" and have become "lukewarm" (Rev. 2:4; 3:16). It is this uncompromising call to purity of faith and endurance under stress that is perhaps the most fundamental concern to the author. The "end of the world" is of course a key part of this, for by showing that God in the end will win out, that wrongs will eventually be righted, that the wicked will be slain, that Satan will be destroyed and that the righteous will be granted access to the new Jerusalem and the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev. 21), John shores up the community and gives hope and confidence for the future. But the theology of the future, with its rewards and paradisaical bliss, is very much invoked to serve present needs and determine behavior in the here and now.

The author of the Apocalypse does of course have other important theological concerns which are

worked out in this text. It is a contentious but nevertheless arguable view that outside of the Gospel of John, the Apocalypse contains the “highest” christology in the New Testament (though Col. 1:15ff. and perhaps Phil. 2:6–11 may be contenders here). Certainly the portrait of Jesus which the author presents is a powerful one. He is “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 17:14; 19:16); he is “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5); and the description of him in the latter part of chapter 1 is truly a description of a being the likeness of which (at the very least) borders on the divine. What is more, while the instruction from the angel to whom John offers worship is “You must not do that! ... Worship God!,” when worship is offered to Christ, it is apparently appropriate and accepted (Rev. 5). And yet this is also the lamb who was slain (Rev. 5), whose blood cleanses sinners from their sins (Rev. 1:5). The Christ here is, then, recognizable as the Christ of the church: a divine Christ whose blood was spilt to bring redemption; and one ought not to underestimate the extent to which within the New Testament, 2000

years of Christian tradition notwithstanding, this reasonably clear dual testimony is distinctive.

The author of the Apocalypse is hence a figure in Christian history who should not be ignored. His influence has been significant, and not only in theological backwaters inhabited by the eschatologically obsessed, the millennially extreme, and/or the religiously volatile. The author speaks not just from the landscape of first-century Christianity in general, but from the specific context of a persecuted community and a social setting where a blurring of the boundaries between those who are “called out,” “the *ekklesia*—the Church,” and the society from which they are called to stand in righteous relief is a real danger, and probably an actual fact. The author’s voice is a clear one, a clarion call to distinctiveness and perseverance in difficult times. It is perhaps not a voice the full impact of which is acceptable today, as Christians seek to maintain a rather more moderate balance between distinctiveness and inclusivity. But it is a voice that is worth hearing, for the questions it addresses continue to echo in contexts entirely distant from, but similar to, John’s own.

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Arius (c.256–336)

Alastair H. B. Logan

I. Life

Arius (*Areios* meaning “warlike,” after the Greek god Ares) is a figure about whom we know very little for certain. What survives is preserved by his bitter opponents such as Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296–373 CE) and Epiphanius of Salamis (c.315–403 CE) or by church historians of varying degrees of objectivity writing a century or more later, such as the lawyers Socrates (380–450 CE) and Sozomen (early fifth century CE), the “Arian” Philostorgius (c.368–c.439 CE), also a layman, and the Catholic bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus (393–466 CE). We do not know when he was born: the traditional dating of 256 seems too early even though Epiphanius calls him an “old man” at the outbreak of the controversy, a remark echoed perhaps by Emperor Constantine’s abusive description of him in a letter of 333 as wasted and lifeless. We can be fairly certain that he was a Libyan, from the evidence of Epiphanius and his own testimony in a letter to Constantine. Certainly Libyan bishops were among his staunchest supporters and we find in Arius an unequivocal condemnation of the modalist heresy of the Libyan Sabellius, very widespread there in the latter part of the third century and vigorously refuted by Dionysius of Alexandria (247–64 CE).

As regards his education, both Socrates and Sozomen remark on his dialectical skill, while contemporary opponents such as Athanasius and

Marcellus of Ancyra (c.284–c.374 CE) claim he got his ideas from the devil and Greek philosophy. From his description in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. 341 CE) of the latter as a “fellow Lucianist,” it has been deduced that he was a pupil of Lucian of Antioch, a shadowy figure who was most probably the presbyter, teacher, and biblical critic martyred in Nicomedia in 312. However, we know very little about Lucian. Strikingly, Philostorgius in his lists of his pupils, which include Eusebius of Nicomedia and the Cappadocian sophist Asterius and seem to center on Asia Minor, makes no mention of Arius. The idea of a Lucianic school in Antioch devoted to a literal exegesis of scripture is discounted nowadays, as is the claim that Arius learnt from it to practice such a form of exegesis. He *may* have attended lectures by Lucian but seems not to have been a devoted pupil. As we shall see, there are clear differences between his ideas and those of the Lucianists under Eusebius of Nicomedia, and his term “fellow Lucianist” may well have been intended to secure Eusebius’s support for his rather different theology.

Recent scholarship has tended to focus on an Alexandrian theological and philosophical background for Arius’s views. Arius sees himself in his confession to his bishop Alexander (313–28 CE) as a theological traditionalist, while the opening of his poem *Thalia* (“Banquet”) presents him as standing in a line of wise sages, taught by God and inspired by the

Holy Spirit. This is very likely an allusion to the scholarly tradition of learned presbyters in Alexandria going back to Clement (*c.*150–*c.*215 CE) and Origen (185–254 CE), over against and sometimes at odds with the bishop. One is particularly reminded of Origen's role as teacher and his speculative theology and the strained relations between him and bishop Demetrius. However, there seems to have been a reaction in Alexandria both against Origen's more speculative views (such as the eternity of rational creatures) and against his allegorical interpretation. His influence on Arius seems limited.

Some scholars have sought to explain distinctive, radical features of Arius's views, particularly the absolute transcendence of God and the Son's ignorance of him and of his own being, in terms of Arius's acquaintance with contemporary philosophy, Platonic or Aristotelian. Thus Williams (2001, 209–13) and Kannengiesser (1991, I, 35–40) note the remarkable similarities between Arius and Plotinus, also an Alexandrian, if developing his Neoplatonism in Rome in the 260s. Arius would thus be one of the first Christian theologians to assimilate Neoplatonic ideas, long before the Cappadocians, Marius Victorinus, and Augustine. However, how exactly Arius might have come across such ideas is not at all clear, and some scholars still prefer to situate Arius in the milieu of late Middle Platonism as represented in Alexandria (Stead 1997, 39–52; 1999, 101–8). This would take in figures like Philo. Aspects of Arius's views also recall Jewish–Hellenistic wisdom speculation.

Most scholars discount the association of Arius with the schismatic Egyptian bishop Melitius and his ordination as deacon by him, which rests on scanty evidence. It seems most likely that Arius was ordained deacon by Peter (300–12 CE) and presbyter by Peter's successor, Achilles (312–13 CE). It was Achilles's successor, Alexander, who in all probability appointed Arius as priest of the Baucalis church with authority to expound the Scriptures. Alexandrian presbyters, as Williams points out (2001, 42–4), had particular autonomy, and we are told that they preached in their churches on Wednesdays and Fridays. Epiphanius suggests that individual presbyters by their exposition of scripture attracted rival followings. Thus he notes that Arius, tall and gaunt, with his charming speech

and garb resembling that of a philosopher and ascetic, succeeded in attracting 700 women vowed to virginity as well as seven presbyters and 12 deacons to his church and group. It was thus as a scholarly but persuasive preacher and scriptural expositor, a senior presbyter in the Alexandrian church, that Arius provoked the doctrinal controversy that was to rock and split the church, in both East and West.

Modern scholars are divided on when the controversy broke out. Besides the classic treatment of the sources by the German scholar Hans-Georg Opitz (1934), who traces the outbreak to 318 and whose ordering and dating of the material many scholars still tend to accept, Rowan Williams in his classic monograph of 1987, rearranging and redating Opitz's documents (2001, 48–58), suggests 321 for the outbreak. More recently Sara Parvis (2006, 68–9) has argued for the shortest possible time scale, suggesting the spring of 322. The evidence seems too fragmentary to decide the matter. As to how the controversy arose, the ancient church historians, Socrates and Sozomen, are divided: Socrates attributes it to a too ambitious discourse by Alexander to his clergy on Unity in Trinity, which Arius vehemently countered, thinking it smacked too much of Sabellianism, while Sozomen derives it from Arius's preaching in church, sparking protests and leading to an inquiry chaired by Alexander as judge between the two opposing groups. Both accounts have anachronistic features, though Sozomen's seems closer to Epiphanius's version which has the schismatic Melitius inform Alexander of Arius's heterodoxy, leading to Alexander's examination of him before the presbytery and some other bishops. Conversely Arius in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia seems to bear out Socrates' version in that he talks of Alexander as having driven him and his supporters out for not agreeing with Alexander's public preaching about the coeternity of Father and Son.

However we reconstruct the origins of the controversy, it seems that Arius was condemned, deposed, and excommunicated by an Alexandrian council and that he instigated a campaign of support from sympathizers, including Palestinian bishops such as Eusebius of Caesarea (*c.*260–339 CE). He seems to have moved to Palestine and been recognized by a council there which allowed him to function as a presbyter with his own congregation. To counter

Alexander's hostile encyclicals to eastern bishops and to widen his support he was urged to write to Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had recently got himself translated there, the seat of the eastern emperor Licinius, from Berytus. Eusebius instigated a vigorous campaign enlisting support from bishops in Bithynia, Cilicia, Syria, and Palestine, the heartlands, with Libya, of support for Arius. This probably provoked Alexander to propose a synod to deal with the issues that had arisen, theological and canonical. This was originally to have met at Ancyra, probably at the behest of its bishop, Marcellus (c.314–36 CE), who had been a target of the Arian propaganda campaign.

But Licinius's renewed campaign of persecution in 323–4, banning Christian councils from meeting, meant a postponement, and things changed radically with the arrival of Constantine in the East in 324, defeating Licinius and assuming sole rule. Faced at once with the Arian crisis, he sent Ossius of Cordoba, his advisor on church affairs, to Alexandria with an exasperated letter for both Alexander and Arius, seeking to resolve the dispute and restore peace and unity to the church. But it was too late, and, when advised by Ossius of his failure, and perhaps alerted by Eusebius of Nicomedia and others to the likely character of the council at Ancyra, he abruptly changed the venue to Nicaea, where he could himself attend and ensure an acceptable outcome. In the meantime Ossius, returning via Antioch, had held a council there in late 324 to resolve the dispute over a new bishop and deal with Arius. The council, representing largely the diocese of Antioch, and reflecting the theology of Alexander, condemned Arius and his views in a rather rambling fashion and provisionally excommunicated Eusebius of Caesarea and two other Palestinian bishops for supporting him. At the Council of Nicaea of May–June 325, attended by some 250 bishops as well as by Constantine, the views of supporters of Arius such as Eusebius of Nicomedia were shouted down although Eusebius of Caesarea was rehabilitated. The Council produced a short, biblically based creed which rejected Arius's views by positive statements (the Son is of the substance [*ousia*] of the Father, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father) and anathemas countering his supposed tenets. He was deposed and excommunicated, as were the two Libyan

bishops who had staunchly supported him and who also refused to subscribe to the creed and the anathemas, Secundus and Theonas, and all three along with an Alexandrian fellow presbyter, Euzoius, were exiled by Constantine at the end of the council, probably to Illyricum.

However, a remarkable volte-face occurred at the end of 327, when Constantine wrote to Arius summoning him to court at Nicomedia, surprised that he had not come earlier. Parvis (2006, 101–7) attributes this to the disgrace and fall of Eustathius of Antioch, a key player at Nicaea, who seems to have committed a serious sexual offense which so horrified the emperor that it opened the way for him to recall Arius. This would have to have been sanctioned by a council, probably meeting in Antioch in the fall of 327. Arius and Euzoius returned and presented the emperor with a neutral creed, which avoided all the contentious terms and issues but which satisfied Constantine and his ecclesiastical advisors. Arius was probably readmitted to communion by a local Bithynian synod and Constantine wrote to Alexander urging him to do the same. However, in the interim Alexander had died and was replaced by Athanasius (328–73 CE). He soon embarked on what was in effect a civil war with Eusebius of Nicomedia and his supporters. Thus when a Bithynian synod of late 328 under Eusebius again appealed to Athanasius to readmit Arius, the latter refused, turning away Arius himself who had returned to Alexandria, and resisting all later attempts to have him readmitted.

Arius rather drops out of sight from 328, perhaps living in Libya, accepted by the church there, but he reappears in 332 or 333, writing a despairing letter to Constantine asking what he was supposed to do if no one in Egypt would receive him back, and supplying another, rather ambiguous, confession of faith claiming the support of all of Libya for his views regarding salvation. However, the effect was far from what he had intended. Constantine, alarmed by the suggestion of a schismatic church in Libya, wrote a very blustering, venomous open letter in 333 to Arius and his supporters, ridiculing his confession, threatening divine judgment on Libya and the Libyans, contemptuously describing him as half dead, feeble in look and pale in complexion, and threatening with punishment all clergy and laity who continued to support him. His letter was

accompanied by an edict comparing Arius with Porphyry, the great pagan critic of Christianity, branding his supporters Porphyrians and demanding, as with the works of Porphyry, the burning of any of his treatises discovered and capital punishment for anyone not surrendering copies. However, at the end of his letter Constantine did invite Arius to his court in Constantinople, an invitation Arius seems to have accepted, with the result that he was encouraged to make his case at a major council summoned by Constantine in 335 for the dedication of his great church in Jerusalem.

This council of about 60 bishops, having met first at Tyre to consider the charges against Athanasius, convened at Jerusalem in September and admitted Arius and Euzoios to communion, the emperor having accepted their orthodoxy and having invited the council to examine their creed. The council, as well as informing the emperor of their actions, wrote to the church in Alexandria and bishops and clergy of Egypt and Libya telling them of their decision, urging them to receive back the two and enclosing the emperor's letter of recommendation based on personal interviews. The bishops speak of Arius's "recantation," which in the light of his enigmatic statements in his letter to Constantine might suggest further concessions on his part. However, Athanasius, who had been condemned and deposed by the Tyre council, did not receive the letter, since he had taken the opportunity to travel secretly to Constantinople to confront the emperor. This ended in failure and led to his first exile. The way was thus open for Arius to return to Alexandria, but this provoked rioting and he was again refused communion. Constantine recalled him once more to Constantinople, where he had influential friends such as Eusebius, now bishop there, who probably helped him escape punishment for what had happened. Finally, in the summer of 336 a council was held in Constantinople to deal with Marcellus, the last prominent foe of Arius, who had attacked Asterius and the Eusebian party and failed to attend the Council of Jerusalem when he understood that Arius would be readmitted by it. Besides condemning and deposing Marcellus, the council pressed the elderly bishop, Alexander, to receive Arius into communion. The emperor also examined Arius who, to his surprise, agreed to subscribe on oath to the creed of Nicaea, and he ordered Alexander to readmit the penitent.

What happened next is only attested in a much later letter of Athanasius, although he claims an eyewitness, his friend the Alexandrian presbyter Macarius. According to Athanasius's account the emperor ordered Alexander on a Saturday to admit Arius at the service the next day. Alexander, accompanied by Macarius, shut himself in the episcopal church (*Hagia Irene*) fasting and praying that either he or Arius might die before morning. Arius himself, answering an urgent call of nature, found a public lavatory and suffered some kind of hemorrhage from which he died.

II. Writings

Very little actually written by Arius survives and all of it in works of his opponents, Athanasius and Epiphanius, if also in later historians such as Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret. Three letters are extant: Arius's creedal statement to Alexander of perhaps 321, his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia of later in 321 or early 322, and his joint creedal statement with Euzoios to Constantine of 327. There are also fragments of his poem, *Thalia*, preserved in two places in Athanasius: in his *First Discourse* of around 340 and his *On the Synods* of 359–61. The former shows unmistakable signs of Athanasius's editing and selection, while the latter is more obviously a unity and may well go back to Arius himself. The date of the work is disputed: it seems to have been inspired by Eusebius and his party's propaganda campaign, and shows signs of being early, perhaps before Arius left Alexandria. The beginning is preserved in Athanasius's *First Discourse* and the content seems mainly in line with what Arius says in his first two letters. With suitable caution it will be used here to supplement the information in the letters in an attempt to reconstruct the main lines of Arius's theology. In addition, phrases from a later letter of Arius of around 332–3 are quoted in Constantine's letter to him of 333. Further writings of a learned Alexandrian presbyter of Arius's stamp such as treatises or scriptural commentaries may well have been destroyed as a result of Constantine's edict of 333; we should not be surprised that what survives is in works by his opponents or others quoting them. Certainly later supposed "Arians" of both East and West appear to know little of or about his writings.

III. Theology

The very limited, sometimes problematic, evidence of Arius's views, primary and secondary, makes it very difficult to reconstruct his theology, but perhaps not impossible. Despite their bias, his opponents could not have got away with entirely misrepresenting his theology, and we have the balancing factor not only of his genuine writings but also of the evidence of other writers sympathetic to him and hostile to the Nicene party, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Philostorgius. As noted above, the primary evidence must be the three letters, supplemented by the *Thalia* and the reports of his opponents, particularly Alexander in his two letters, *hē philarchos* of 321 and *henos sōmatos* of 324/5 (probably written by his deacon Athanasius), Constantine in his letter to Arius, and Athanasius in his *Discourses, Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya* and *On the Synods*.

As a learned presbyter of Alexandria, expounding scripture regularly, claiming to be a wise teacher in a tradition of sages, Arius must surely have taught across the spectrum of Christian theology, as Clement and Origen had done and as his creedal statement and later letter to Constantine imply. Thus even though his surviving statements are almost exclusively concerned with the doctrine of God proper, *theologia* in the strict sense, and in particular with the relation of Father and Son, he also treats christology and alludes to the Holy Spirit and to a trinity of sorts. What is more, although the thesis of the American scholars Gregg and Groh (1981), identifying as central to Arianism a particular type of soteriology, namely by advance, has been strongly criticized, Richard Hanson is surely right to argue (1988, 96–8, 121–2) that Arius must have had a doctrine of salvation, even if it does not seem to feature explicitly in his surviving fragments. Thus in what follows I will sketch out what we can plausibly deduce Arius appears to have believed about (1) God, (2) Christ, and (3) salvation.

In his doctrine of *God* Arius seems to have been very perturbed by developments in Origen's view of the eternal generation of the Son, such as represented by his bishop, Alexander, and the consequent blurring of the distinctions between Father and Son, Creator and creation. Furthermore, this seemed to suggest that

God consisted of two coeternal beings, the heresy of Sabellius according to Arius, about which, as a Libyan, he was particularly sensitive. It also suggested the emanationist theories of Valentinus, and the materialist conceptions of the Son as a consubstantial part of God, which he attributes to the Manichees, who were very influential in Alexandria at this time. Such threats to the Christian doctrine of God must have seemed very real to Arius, part of the atmosphere of the cosmopolitan, pluralist city in which he lived and worked, a city which had just witnessed a powerful pagan backlash against the Christians and their God. Furthermore, the striking absence of any reference to the Logos or Word in the two early letters, and its coming last in a list of the Son's titles in the *Thalia*, might suggest Arius was wary of the Logos doctrine, concerned by certain implications of it as found in his predecessors such as Justin Martyr, with his talk of a "second God," distinct in number and so on. Thus he rejects Hieracas's analogy, echoing that of Justin, of a lamp lit from another. Although we only hear in his opponents' accounts of a distinction drawn by him between the Logos as an attribute immanent in God and the Logos as an improper or courtesy title applied to the Son because of his participation in that immanent Logos, such a view does seem to underlie the views of early supporters of Arius such as Asterius, and thus may well be a genuine feature of his beliefs. Such an idiosyncratic view, rejecting the assumed identity between the immanent and expressed Logos of the earlier Apologists, and the deduction from that of the coeternity of the Son as Word and Wisdom, may well have been designed to avoid the ditheistic implications of the traditional doctrine, and the occurrence of the term in his creed of 327 as applied to the Son may be part of his deliberate attempt to present a more traditional type of formula.

Arius is thus determined to stress the absolute unity, otherness, and transcendence of God, as is clear from his letter to Alexander, with its unparalleled piling up of attributes, negative and positive, each qualified by the adverb "alone." Significantly, the first three of these are the same, if in a different order, in the letter and the *Thalia* as quoted by Athanasius in *On the Synods* 15: "unbegotten" (*agennētos*), "eternal" (*aidios*), "unbegun" (*anarchos*). God too is "unalterable" (*atreptos*) and "unchangeable" (*analloiōtos*). God, as the cause of all

things, says Arius, is unbegun and altogether sole, before all things as monad and beginning (*archē*) of all. This God begat (*gennaō*) an only (*monogenēs*) Son before eternal times, through whom he created time and the universe, begetting him truly and not in appearance, making him subsist by his own will, unalterable (*atreptos*) and unchangeable (*analloiōtos*), a perfect creature (*ktisma*) of God but not as one of the creatures, an offspring (*gennēma*) but not as one of the offspring. Arius then rejects any materialistic interpretation as found in the classic heretics, Valentinus, Mani, and Sabellius, as well as contemporaries such as Hieracas, and insists that the Son was created (note the identification of begetting and creating) by the will of God before times and ages, having his life, being, and glories from the Father, who, Arius insists, did not, in making the Son heir of everything, deprive himself of what he has ingenerately in himself, since he is the source of all things. From this Arius deduces that there are three hypostases, reflecting Origen's terminology, but as we shall see, not his Trinitarian understanding of them. Indeed Arius seems little concerned with the Holy Spirit in his surviving fragments, concentrating on Father and Son.

In his letter Arius once more stresses the uniqueness of God, as unbegun and sole, in contrast to the Son who, as begotten apart from time by the Father, and also, in a further echo of the terminology of Prov. 8.22–5, created and established before ages, did not exist before he was begotten. However, as begotten in this way he is unique, alone made to subsist by the Father, although not eternal, co-eternal or co-originate with the Father. The Father is therefore—logically and perhaps even temporally, in the sense of unmeasured time (Stead 1999, 102–3)—prior to the Son as the source of his being, glories, and life; he is above him as his God. Arius claims to have heard this in Alexander's sermons. But if this account is designed to appeal to Alexander and his Origenist theological views, it also finds an echo and complement in Arius's letter to the Lucianist Eusebius of Nicomedia, similarly designed to appeal to him, a theologian of a rather different stamp. In it he attacks Alexander's Origenist teaching, which he represents as insisting on the co-eternity of Father and eternally begotten Son as both unbegotten. In contrast, Arius insists, appealing to the similar views of Eusebius of Caesarea and

other bishops of Palestine, Syria, and Cilicia, that God alone exists without beginning prior to his Son. The Son is not ingenerate, nor from any lower substrate but subsisted by the will and counsel of God before times and ages, fully God, only-begotten, unchangeable (*analloiōtos*). Arius claims he is persecuted for teaching that the Son had a beginning, while God did not, and that the Son is, therefore, out of nothing: neither a part of God nor from any lower substrate.

To this evidence from the two early letters we could add the data of the *Thalia*. Here Arius teaches that God is in his essence ineffable and invisible to all, including the Son, who only sees him in the manner appropriate to him as a creature. This seems borne out by the claim in *henos sōmatos* that the Son does not perfectly and accurately know or see the Father. Indeed the Son does not even know his own essence. This assertion, however, may also reflect the need to make some concession to the party of Eusebius of Nicomedia, for whom God was knowable through the Son as his exact image, and who, according to Athanasius, pressurized Arius to compose the *Thalia*. Here too Arius may have been forced to modify what he really thought about the incomprehensibility and ineffability of God.

Now although Arius can and does appeal to biblical texts such as Prov. 8.22–5 to demonstrate the Son's origin from and relation to the Father, this highly abstract view of God as totally transcendent and ineffable, invisible to and prior to the Son, producing him from nothing by a sheer act of will, seems to derive not so much from scripture or even tradition, despite Arius's appeal to it, as from his encounter with contemporary philosophical theology and certain problems thrown up by it. On one side, he rejects all materialistic views of God, insisting, perhaps under the influence of contemporary Platonism, on his utter transcendence, ineffability, and non-communicability. Conversely, his insistence on the absolute gulf between God as Creator and all creation, including the Son, and hence on creation as out of nothing through God's exercise of will, finds no real parallel in pagan philosophy (Hanson, 1988, 98). It may well reflect his rejection of surviving traces of Origen's doctrine of the eternity of the Son and of the created rational beings. Such a doctrine must have seemed to Arius to veer too close to Valentinian emanationism. As with

so many early Christian theologians, from Justin onwards, what Arius seems to reflect is a certain eclecticism, selecting from the spectrum of pagan philosophical thinking what ideas best suited his Christian concerns and seemed to find some support from scripture.

Thus it may be that Arius was seeking a more precise and accurate definition of the terms used to describe God and the divine, distinguishing God in the strict sense (*ho theos*) from everything else created by him, starting with the Son (*theos*, or *monogenēs theos*) and his unique status as only-begotten, created directly by God's free act of will as the instrument (*organon*) by which all else, and particularly the human race, was created. At the same time Arius seems to be seeking to understand more precisely what the terms used to describe God's creative functions in scripture, such as those in Prov. 8:22–5 ("create" or "found" [*ktízō*], "beget" [*gennaō*], "establish" [*themeliō*]) can really signify. Because God cannot share his unique being with anybody else, since he is by definition unalterable and unchangeable, such language must be metaphorical and simply refer to God's creative activity by will out of nothing. Texts that refer to anyone or anything as "from God" thus cannot mean from the actual being of God. The term "beget" used of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and traditionally interpreted in terms of the Son must be glossed as "create" in a spiritual, not material sense, ruling out any appeal to the human analogy of fathers begetting consubstantial sons from their own being.

Thus although Arius does use traditional language going back to Origen when he refers in his letter to Alexander to there being three hypostases, he departs from the Origenist tradition by at once insisting that the three are entirely dissimilar in being, with the Father as infinitely more glorious than the others. If the Son is only-begotten God, mighty God, than whom God cannot beget anyone superior, the Spirit seems much inferior, certainly not called "God" but merely the first being to be created by the Son, the illuminator of God's prophets and sages. These include Arius's teachers, mentioned in Arius's uncontentious creed of 327, which, echoing Eusebius of Caesarea's statement in his letter to his church after Nicaea, cites the baptismal formula of Matt. 28.19 to illustrate the distinction of hypostases. God in the strict sense pre-exists the Son, and only becomes Father when, before

(measured) time, he begets the Son as the beginning (*archē*) of Prov. 8:22. Therefore, as Arius states in the *Thalia*, there was when he was not Father, as there was when the Son was not.

We have already noted and suggested a reason for the virtual absence of the term "*Logos*" in the genuine early writings of Arius, apart from its inclusion as the last in a list of the Son's aspects (*epinoiai*) in the *Thalia*. However, both the encyclical *henos sōmatos* (probably the work of Athanasius) and Athanasius himself in his *First Discourse* of around 340 claim that Arius taught two Words or Wisdoms, distinguishing between the attribute coexistent with God on the one hand, and the Son on the other. The latter was named, but only by a misuse of language or by grace, as Word and Wisdom as having come into existence through and participating in the former. This seems borne out to some extent both by Arius's statement in the *Thalia* that Wisdom existed as wisdom by the will of a wise God and by his reference in his statement of faith preserved by Constantine to "an unoriginated [*anarchos*] and unending word [*logos*] of his substance," and to "the spirit of eternity ... in the superior Word [*Logos*]." But such a doctrine, as indicated, is idiosyncratic and not shared by his contemporaries.

In the light of all this, how are we to understand Arius's doctrine of God, especially as regards the status of the Son? Opinion is divided on this. Some interpreters, particularly relying on the *Thalia*, have tended to stress the subordinate status of the Son in Arius's scheme, emphasizing his created and dependent nature, his not sharing the being of God and having a beginning, his being unchangeable not by nature but only by grace, his inability to see and know God perfectly and accurately or even to know his own essence, the fact that he worships God and that he was created as an instrument specifically to create us. Conversely, others have stressed his unique status as only-begotten God, fully God, mighty God, given the same attributes as God (unalterable and unchangeable) in the two early letters apparently without qualification, and someone than whom God cannot beget anyone more excellent, superior, or greater, through whom God created everything else. Even Arius's insistence in his letter to Alexander on calling the Son a creature (*ktisma*), "but not as one of the creatures," can best be interpreted as marking out the

uniqueness of the Son. Everything hangs on how we evaluate the Son's status, particularly his unchangeability, especially when it comes to christology and soteriology. Is the Son immutable by nature or only by grace and effort of will? It is striking that the latter interpretation is only found in critics such as Athanasius and the authors of the statement of the Council of Antioch of 324.

That issue brings us to consider Arius's *Christology*, as far as it can be reconstructed. Certainly Alexander, in *hē philarchos*, begins his attack on Arius and his supporters by stressing how they "organized a gang to fight Christ," noting how they pick out every scriptural statement about his saving dispensation (*oikonomia*) and his humiliation to support their views, claiming they can become sons of God like him (cf. Isa. 1.2). Other texts cited are Isa. 45(44).8 on the Son's choice and anointing and Heb. 1.9 where this same verse is applied to Christ. Unfortunately there is really no allusion to christology in the early letters and *Thalia*, and we learn nothing of Arius's own distinctive views from his confession of faith to Constantine of 327. This simply echoes the scriptural language of contemporary creeds such as those of Nicaea and of Eusebius of Caesarea. However, there are, as Hanson has noted (1988, 9–10), several tantalizing phrases in Arius's statement of faith preserved in Constantine's letter to him of 333, which relate to christology. After allusions to God and apparently to the Word, Arius refers to "the alien nature of the body as regards the implementation [*oikonomia*] of the divine energies," which would seem to refer to the incarnation. Later on Constantine quotes Arius as saying, "No! I for my part do not wish God to be involved with the suffering of insults," and "whatever you take away from him, in that respect you make him less." Further on he quotes Arius as saying, "Christ suffered for us ... yes, but there is a danger that we may appear to lessen him in some way." From Constantine's response he clearly interprets Arius as rejecting any suffering on the part of God as a result of the incarnation, in what seems an allusion to Phil. 2:6–8. Further, the earlier phrase about the alien body would seem to suggest Arius wanted to distinguish the body of Christ from the divine element or powers involved. On the other hand, he does affirm the suffering of Christ, seeking to distance God from it.

How are we to interpret this seeming paradox? Is he simply reflecting here the traditional Alexandrian doctrine of the interchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) pioneered by Origen? In his statement of faith to Constantine of 327 he has God the Word as subject of the events of the incarnation and passion. Is he then attempting here to distinguish between the body which suffers and the divine element which does not? Or does he really believe, as Hanson argues (1988, 121–2), in a suffering God? We have seen how in his two early letters he insists, without apparent qualification, on the unchangeable nature of the Son.

Can we clarify this from other sources? Hanson (1988, 111) argues that Arius's christology involved a union of human flesh or a human body and the divine Word or Son, with no room for a human soul. He appeals to Eustathius of Antioch's claim that the Arians denied a human soul in Christ to ensure that the divine could change and suffer. He also claims that Lucian of Antioch taught such a christology of a *sōma apsuchon*, seeing Arius as undoubtedly his pupil in this, as were the later Neo-Arians. However, not all scholars are convinced (Rankin, 2000, 985) and, once again, in the light of the silence or ambiguity of our sources, it all depends on how we interpret Arius's view of the Son and also his understanding of salvation. Was the Son, as Gregg and Groh argue (1981, 14–20), essentially a mutable creature, a created Creator and saved savior, who is promoted to divine status through his obedience and saves us by his example? Or is he, as Hanson argues, a suffering God, with a reduced divinity which could become incarnate and suffer? Such a divinity, it should be noted, is nevertheless the only kind of divinity in which we can really participate and thus be saved. For if the Son cannot share in the being of God, who is infinitely superior to him, how can we, who are the creatures of that Son?

This brings us finally to the issue of Arius's *soteriology*. Hanson is surely right to insist that he must have had one even though he himself seems to make almost no explicit allusion to it in his letters and the *Thalia* excerpts. This must make questionable the claim of Gregg and Groh that a certain view of salvation as reconstructed by them was central to Arius and his theology. What is more, their reconstruction is weakened by its reliance on the claims of opponents and on the genuineness of the *Third Discourse*

(Kannengiesser, 1991, II, 470–1; Rankin, 2000, 984). Williams (2001, 258) has claimed to find no real support for their understanding of salvation by advance in earlier or contemporary thinkers. Moreover, Hanson (1988, 97) has insisted that the Son cannot give an example of human achievement of perfection because he is precisely not a human being. But he has also pointed (1988, 121–2) to what he thinks is the true rationale of Arianism, linking the doctrine of God reciprocally with the doctrine of salvation. As he notes, its elaborate theology of the relation between the Son and the Father was devised to find a way of envisaging a Christian doctrine of God that would make it possible to be faithful to the biblical witness of a God who suffers. This was done by distinguishing between the supreme God who cannot suffer and the Son, a reduced God, who could become incarnate and suffer, thereby giving humanity an example of God suffering as humans suffer.

But is this view, which Hanson dubs “exemplary,” if in a different sense, any more adequate than that of Gregg and Groh? Does it do justice to Arius’s repeated insistence on the unchangeability of the Son and the evidence, if ambiguous, of his statement of faith to Constantine? Arius, while rejecting any kind of suffering on God’s part in the incarnation, yet allows the incarnate Son to suffer, if even here too insisting on a distinction between the body and the divine energies, and perhaps also denying any lessening of the Son’s divinity. Salvation would thus seem, as with Athanasius, to involve some kind of deification—God the Son takes on a human body, to suffer and die in it but also to enable us to share in his divine life. Once more Arius seems to be attempting to define more carefully the meaning and implications of the terms “God” and “divine.”

Some light may be cast on this by examining Arius’s understanding of how we can know God. We have seen his stress in the *Thalia* on God’s ineffability, and invisibility even to the Son, but also his qualification of that: by the power by which God sees, the Son can see the Father. A similar interpretation must apply to the Son’s knowledge—it must correspond to the Son’s nature as created and different in being. The Son can have, if not a comprehensive knowledge of God, yet an appropriate one. So too with us humans: we too can have a knowledge of the ineffable, transcendent

God. Indeed this is exactly what Arius himself claims in the opening lines of the *Thalia* preserved by Athanasius. Arius has learned the truth from God’s sage servants, via the Holy Spirit, and, what is more, he claims to have wisdom and knowledge *learned from God*. So humans can have genuine and appropriate, if not comprehensive, knowledge of God, and can do so, it would seem, through the Son and the Spirit. Such an interpretation illuminates Arius’s doctrine of the three hypostases, his version of the Trinity, and explains why he needs such a doctrine. As the task of the Son, our creator, is to grasp and make known God as far as he understands him, so the task of the Spirit, his first creation, is to communicate that saving knowledge to us.

Salvation then, as with Athanasius writing not long afterwards, would seem to involve both the incarnate Son’s impartation to us of true, divinely inspired wisdom, true knowledge of God, and his overcoming of the power of sin and death, enabling us to share in the divine life, an insight going back at least as far as Irenaeus. But how, for Arius, do we share in the divine life? As we have seen, while he implacably rejects any sharing of God’s being by the Son, he does insist on the Son’s unique status as only-begotten God, fully God, unalterable and unchangeable, who participates in God’s immanent Wisdom and Word. Similarly, while the Son is not a creature like us, but divine, unique, and our creator, yet he can take on human flesh and enable us to participate in him, becoming divine by adoption, not nature. Once more Arius is seeking to clarify and distinguish levels of the divine: God at the top with his supreme unchangeable, unalterable being that cannot be shared; below him the Son, also unchangeable and unalterable (if by grace and will), who can participate in God’s attributes, but who has a lesser, if unique, degree of divinity; and below him, us, his mutable creatures, who can yet participate in the immutable, unchangeable character of his divinity (if only by grace).

IV. Significance

As contemporary scholars agree, Arius is something of a loner, a radical, who, though with a small, keen band of supporters including some significant bishops,

never formed a real party and was soon forgotten. He clearly had to modify his views to find support. Moreover, the lack of evidence, as we have seen, makes it very hard to reconstruct his theological views. Nevertheless he marks a turning point in Christian theology. His protest against contemporary views of Father and Son and radical insistence on the transcendence of God, backed by appeal to scripture and tradition, led to over half a century of heated

theological debate in East and West, resulting in what Hanson calls “the Christian doctrine of God.” Even if the concept of “Arianism” has been shown to be dubious, the issues he raised concerning the doctrines of God, Christ, creation, and salvation exercised the greatest theological minds of several generations and led directly to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed of 381, one of the few threads still holding together the tattered robe of Christendom.

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Athanasius (c.295–373)

Tarmo Toom

I. Life

Athanasius, a fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, was among those polarizing figures who left only very few impartial. His friends regarded him as a saint and his enemies as a despot. Gregory of Nazianzus began his panegyric with words, “In praising Athanasius, I shall be praising virtue” (*Or.* 21.1); but, in their encyclical, the bishops at the Council of Philippopolis called him a “sacrilegious plague” and “criminal” (Hilary of Poitiers, *C. Valens and Ursacius* 1.8, 14). Even today when scholars write about Athanasius, his admirers author hagiographies and his despisers demonologies. Athanasius’s fame/notoriety ranges from being a staunch defender of orthodoxy to being a power-hungry gangster. Accordingly, his steadfastness is interpreted either as heroic resoluteness or autocratic obstinacy.

There are several accounts of Athanasius’s career: a Syriac *Index* to his *Festal Letters*, the so-called *Historia acephala* (i.e., a chronicle of Athanasius’s life), Gregory of Nazianzus’ panegyric to Athanasius (*Or.* 21), and a Coptic eulogy. We also have the *Ecclesiastical Histories* of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, Philostorgius, and the writings of Hilary of Poitiers and Epiphanius of Salamis. In addition, we have Athanasius’s own reports of “how things really were,” which have cast their spell over all the accounts of the early church historians, except Philostorgius. However, the friendly meta-narratives about Athanasius have

probably suppressed the other not-so-friendly shadow-narratives. Thus, Athanasius cannot be taken as the final authority on Athanasius.

Athanasius was born in the 295s CE, that is, during the persecution of Diocletian and right before the great fourth-century theological upheavals. His life turned out to be as turbulent as the times during which he lived. It is significant that the young Athanasius saw Christianity becoming a *legal* religion of the Roman Empire (in the 310s), and he almost saw Christianity becoming the *official* religion of the Roman Empire (in the 380s).

Athanasius was born in Alexandria, in one of the most important ecclesiastical centers of the ancient world (*Apol. sec.* 51). Partisan accounts of his childhood provide little historical evidence, although they can be portentous and entertaining, as is the story about young Athanasius playing baptism at the seashore (Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 10.15).

More reliable information begins with Athanasius’s joining the episcopal household in Alexandria. In 319, he became a deacon and secretary of Alexander of Alexandria, his patron and mentor. A tenth-century Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* reports that, “Athanasius remained like a son with the father Alexander, who educated him with gentleness in every art.” Yet, Athanasius’s classical education seems to have been rather modest. Gregory mentions his “brief study of literature and philosophy,” which was

necessary “so that he might not be utterly unskilled in such subjects, or ignorant of matters which he had determined to despise” (*Or.* 21.6). However, Athanasius’s education in the Scriptures seems to have been more thorough. The above-mentioned Arabic text claims that, “[h]e memorized the gospels.” Gregory reinforces the point that Athanasius understood all the books of the Scriptures “with a depth such as none else has applied even to one of them” (*Or.* 21.6). It is not to pre-judge that thereby his theology was “biblical” and that of his opponents was not. Athanasius had his theological presuppositions like any other reader of the Scriptures. But it remains true that his thought, theological discourse, and aspirations were thoroughly molded by the Scriptures (Ernest, 2004).

Athanasius emerges as the right-hand man of bishop Alexander. When the latter began to impose doctrinal unity on the Egyptian church, young Athanasius was entrusted with significant duties, including drafting Alexander’s encyclicals (e.g., *Encyclical Letter of Alexander*). As a deacon, Athanasius also accompanied Alexander to the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325. Eventually the young deacon became an unwavering defender of the theology of this council.

In 328, Athanasius was consecrated the bishop of Alexandria (*Index* 1). Thus wished the deceased Alexander. But the facts that Athanasius became a bishop of a major see before his canonical age (30) (*Index* 3), and that he was not even a presbyter at that time, clouded the legitimacy of his election and played into the hands of his ecclesiastical enemies. Philostorgius, an anti-Athanasian church historian, contends that Athanasius was ordained at night by two bishops (*Hist. eccl.* 2.11). (A canonical ordination would have required three bishops. All other sources mention six and seven ordaining bishops.)

As a new bishop, Athanasius had to deal with two inherited problems of the Egyptian church: Melitian schism and Arius.

Ecclesiological controversies had troubled Egypt already for some time. Although the Council of Nicaea urged the “schismatic” Melitian church to be reintegrated into the catholic church of Peter of Alexandria and his successor Alexander, the consecration of Athanasius as a new bishop undermined any plans of reconciliation. Athanasius decided to ignore

this decision of the Council of Nicaea completely, despite the warning given by the emperor himself (*Apol. sec.* 59).

On the other hand, the catholic church of Peter and Alexander experienced its own division—not about schism but about heresy. A priest called Arius had begun to spread a teaching that the Son was a lesser God than the Father. Since the Council of Nicaea had condemned Arius, Athanasius stubbornly continued to insist on *that* decision of the Council of Nicaea and refused Arius’s re-admission into the Alexandrian church.

In short, Melitian resistance and “Arian” controversialists found a common goal—to get rid of the troublesome Athanasius. It is a truism that common enemies often unite better than shared convictions.

The outcry against Athanasius led to the summoning of the Synod of Tyre in 335 by Constantine (Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25). The atmosphere was so tense that the presence of a military guard seemed necessary. This synod, which received Melitians into communion and proclaimed Arius orthodox, was anything but friendly towards Athanasius. Melitians and “Arians”—whom Athanasius now grouped as “Eusebians” (*Apol. sec.* 87; *Decr.* 1)—accused the bishop of Alexandria of sacrilege, bribery, rape, and murder. First, Athanasius was indicted for ordering his colleague Macarius to break the Melitian Ischyra’s chalice and overturn his altar in order to prevent him from practicing his priestly office. Second, Athanasius was charged with giving a box of gold to an imperial officer, Philoumenus, who proved to be an enemy of Constantine. Third, Athanasius’s opponents brought forth a woman who delivered “the speech she had been taught” (Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 10.18), saying that Athanasius had violated her. However, the woman confused presbyter Timothy with Athanasius and the scheme misfired. Fourth, Athanasius was blamed for organizing the killing of a Melitian bishop, Arsenius, and cutting off his hand in order to perform magic. This accusation did not stick, though, because Athanasius’s friends managed to capture the hiding Arsenius and bring him in front of the bishops—with two perfectly healthy hands.

Those who tried to dislodge Athanasius almost always insisted that Athanasius used force to suppress his enemies. Such frequent accusations of

heavy-handedness may prove indeed that Athanasius did not hesitate to use his political power whenever it suited him. Intimidation and violence have always been great silencers of opposition. A more recently discovered papyrus letter written by a Melitian called Callistus—perhaps the smoking gun?—suggests that Athanasius and his intoxicated supporters harassed, beat, and chased away Melitians and those who favored them. Considering this evidence credible, Hanson (1988) writes, “It [i.e., the papyrus letter] is a factual account written for people under persecution, a private missive not intended for publication nor propaganda, and therefore all the more damaging” (252; but see Arnold, 1991, 71–89, 179–82).

It might be safe to assume, however, that it was ugly on all sides. (One can get an idea of the low-level ecclesiastical politics from the shocking story narrated in Athanasius’s *H. Ar.* 20). “Expression of religious intolerance was part and parcel of the peculiar nature of the exercise of power in late antiquity” (Brown, 1995, 53). It is estimated that, after the Council of Nicaea, the number of deaths of “the victims of creedal differences” was roughly about 25,000 (MacMullen, 2006, 56).

At “that Synod of his enemies” (i.e., Synod of Tyre) (*Index* 8), the bishop of Alexandria was excommunicated and sent to exile to Trier, in Gaul. Perhaps the deciding factor that turned Constantine against Athanasius was a fabrication of a new accusation that Athanasius withheld grain shipments to Constantinople (*Apol. sec.* 87).

All things considered, Athanasius was accused of *ecclesiastical* disobedience, because he refused to accept Arius into communion after he was restored by his friends in 327. Moreover, defying orders and leaving Tyre before the verdict of the hostile synod was announced also brought about a dangerous accusation of *political* disobedience. His opponents tagged him as a man “who set at naught the commands of the ruler” (Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25). That Athanasius went straight to the emperor to petition his rehabilitation and honorable return did not bring about any lasting imperial reconsiderations. But it disclosed that Athanasius had the audacity to defy hostile synods and even emperors, and also the skill to avoid the fatal consequences of such dangerous audaciousness.

As always, the death of an emperor brings drastic changes. Constantine died in 337. His son Constantinus came to know Athanasius in Trier and decided that his father had protected the bishop from his enemies by sending him to exile (*Apol. sec.* 87). Equipped with this ingenious interpretation of his exile and with an imperial letter, Athanasius returned to his see, only to face the “fire and brimstone” of “Eusebians” (i.e., the followers of Eusebius of Nicomedia whom Athanasius equated with “Arians” for polemical reasons). “Eusebians” continued to accuse Athanasius of violating the decisions of the Synod of Tyre, of using violence in his unstoppable fury against fellow Alexandrians, and of setting aside the funds meant for widows (*Apol. sec.* 3–5, 18). They also managed to install an alternative bishop according to their own liking—Gregory of Cappadocia (*Index* 11). Prefect Philagrius used his soldiers to turn the churches over to Gregory while the condemnation of Athanasius was renewed by the Council of Antioch in 339. Even the show of public solidarity by Saint Anthony did not secure Athanasius’s dominance (*Vit. Ant.* 69–70). The unseated Athanasius went into hiding and then fled to Rome where he sought the protection of Pope Julius and Emperor Constans. The recent events back home provoked Athanasius to write his *Encyclical Letter*, in which he tried to rally every official of importance against Gregory and against “Arians”/“Eusebians” who stood behind the new “anti-bishop.” In Rome, Athanasius also authored his mega-treatise *Orations against the Arians*, which created an impression that to support Athanasius was to support orthodoxy. “The line which divides historical integrity and theological polemic in the writings of the bishop of Alexandria is very thin indeed” (Arnold, 1991, 9).

The western emperor Constans decided to resolve the bickering of the competing theological factions, to overturn the decisions of the Council of Tyre, and to rehabilitate Athanasius by summoning the Council of Sardica (342 or 343). But Pope Julius’s initiative in overturning the conciliar decisions of the eastern bishops only offended the easterners. Instead of a reconciling council, two mutually deposing councils convened in Sardica and Philippopolis. Such a sad development indicated a deep theological divide between the emerging Athanasian pro-Nicenes and their adversaries. The Council of Sardica got