

Emperor Constantine and the Theology of Christianity - 2 (Eirini Artemi)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Arius was influenced by Jewish monotheism and the philosophical concept of transcendence and by the absolute property of God, the cosmological dyalistic perceptions and especially by the teaching of Philo about the «created» Logos, through whom God created the world[15] Generally, using Greek terms, Arianism denied that the Son is of one essence, nature, or substance with God; He is not consubstantial *-homoousios* - with the Father, and therefore not like Him, or equal in dignity, or co-eternal, or within the real sphere of Deity. The Logos which St. John exalts is an attribute, Reason, belonging to the Divine nature, not a person distinct from another, and therefore is a Son merely in figure of speech. These consequences follow upon the principle which Arius maintains in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, that the Son «is no part of the Ingenerate». Hence the Arian sectaries who reasoned logically were styled Anomoeans: they said that the Son was «unlike» the Father. And they defined God as simply the Unoriginate. They are also termed the Exucontians (ex ouk onton), because they held the creation of the Son to be out of nothing[16].



For political reasons, however, unity and harmony were necessary; and in 325 the Emperor convened the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea to settle the Arian controversy. Constantine couldn't understand the doctrinal differences, so he tried to appease the theological opponents. Constantine could not penetrate into the deeper meaning of the «birth of the Son». For this reason, he urged Arius and Alexander to coexist peacefully despite their different teachings about the Triune God. The great theological danger was exposed to the risk Emperor by Hosius, bishop of Cordoba. Hosius appealed Constantine to convene a Council, in order to resolve this theological conflict. Constantine believed that the condemnation of Arianism would bring the desired peace within the empire, so he wrote to the bishops «the devil will no longer have any power against us, since all that which he had malignantly devised for our destruction has been entirely overthrown from the foundations. The splendor of truth has dissipated at the command of God those dissensions, schisms, tumults and so to speak, deadly poisons of discord. Wherefore we all worship one true God, and believe that he is. But in order that this might be done, by divine admonition I assembled at the city of Nicaea most of the bishops; with whom I myself also, who am but one of you, and who rejoice exceedingly in being your fellow-servant, undertook the investigation of the truth»[17].

The evolution of things, however, denied the hopes of Constantine and the condemnation of Arianism was unable to give a definitive end to the theological disputes that had erupted within the Christian Church and by extension within the

Empire. In the First Ecumenical Council, Arianism was condemned. The Council formulated a creed which, although it was revised at the Council of Constantinople in 381-382, has become known as the Nicene Creed. The Creed rejected Arius' doctrine that the Son is not true God but a creature, that He was not begotten of the substance of the Father but was made from nothing, that He was not eternal but rather that 'there was a time when He did not exist.' What was affirmed, it was a belief in one God, the Father almighty, creator of all things; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made and who is the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, born of the substance of the Father. true God from true God, begotten not created, consubstantial with the Father and in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is merely mentioned together with the Son and the Father, to indicate belief in the Triad of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, but He is given no further attention. All the conciliar stress was on the Son, His status, and His relation to the Father. Somewhat surprisingly the Council still used the words *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms. Several points stand out. The Council Fathers did not use the term *Logos* for Christ but the more evangelical word *Son*. So the Creed affirmed the *homoousion* and the doctrine of consubstantiality. A major role at the council was played by Athanasius, Bishop Alexander's deacon, secretary, and, ultimately, successor. Arius was condemned, but Arianism would cause trouble to the empire for many years after the Council. A few years later, Constantine changed his attitude to Arius and his teaching, which was the cause for his conflict with Athanasius.

2. Athanasius' theology

It is referred that Athanasius had a very important role into Nicene Council. His theology was the base for the Creed of the Council. Athanasius was teaching that there isn't any analogy between God and the beings. In *Contra Gentiles*, Athanasius was discussing the means by which God can be known. These are mainly two, the soul and nature. God may be known through the human soul, for «although God Himself is above all, the road which leads to Him is not far, nor even outside ourselves, but is within us, and it is possible to find it by ourselves[18]» It is also possible to know God not only through person's soul but through the creation. The order of the universe shows not only that there is a God but also that he is one. For Athanasius, the Word of God who rules the world is the living *Logos* of God, that is, the Word who is God himself[19].

Also Athanasius underlined that *Logos* of God became man in order to give us the chance to become God[20]. Athanasius's theology was soteriological. The core of Athanasius's doctrine of redemption is that only God himself can save mankind. If

the salvation that we need is really a new creation, only the Creator can bring it. This requires the Savior Logos to be God, for only God can grant an existence similar to his. Athanasius explained that the death was a great problem for the salvation of man. He urged the law of death, which followed from the Transgression, prevailed upon us, and from it there was no escape. The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting. It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption[21]. In Athanasius' mind Christology is relevant to Redemption

.Athanasius underlined that Son of God is eternal. He is not a being, because He is God and for this reason he has the same nature with God Father. In his teaching, the theology is «perfect» and «real» only as glory and word about One and Triune God[22]. Athanasius supported that his theology wasn't anything new, but he was following the theology of Apostles. In the centre of the teaching of Church is the holly Trinity. The three persons of God are not the different three appearances of the same God, but every person is whole God. Every person is homoousios to each other.

Constantine' s death and his successors

Constantine, though he tried to bring peace to the empire, was sometimes defending the Orthodox and the Arians once, did not succeed. The emperor died dressed in white on May 22, 337. A few months ago, he had received baptism and had been officially a member of the Church of Christ. After the death of Constantine, his sons became emperors. The three sons acquired the title of Augustus and divided among themselves the administration of the Empire. Constantine II took the Gaul, Britain and Spain, Constans took Italy, Africa and Illyricum, and Constantius took the entire East. In 340 Constantine II was killed in a battle against his brother Constans. The latter is killed by Maxentius, a pretender to the throne, in 350. These two Augusts were in favour of the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicaea. After the death of the brothers Constantius, became the master of the Empire.

Constantius was an able and conscientious leader and at the same time he was defender of Arianism. His willingness to impose the teaching of Arius across the Empire was the cause of his confliction with the Patriarch of Alexandria, Athanasius. The patriarch was exiled, and Constantius proclaimed Arianism as religion of the empire in the Synod of Sirmium and Rimini in 359 Temporary Arianism seemed to

have won the duel against Orthodoxy, but it was not the end.

After Constantius' death Julian the Apostate entered Constantinople as sole emperor and, despite his rejection of Christianity, his first political act was to preside over Constantine's Christian burial, escorting the body to the Church of the Apostles, where it was placed alongside that of Constantine. This act was a demonstration of his lawful right to the throne. Julian's personal religion was both pagan and philosophical; he viewed the traditional myths as allegories, in which the ancient gods were aspects of a philosophical divinity. In his time, Christians were persecuted. Julian died in 363 and the act of the reliving of the ancient religion died with him.

Meanwhile, other heretics, Macedonius, Marcellus, Eunomius and Apollinarius appeared. They, somewhat like Arius, were misinterpreting Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit, the humanity and deity of Christ and the triadological dogma. The theology of Christianity was in danger for one more time.

[To be continued]

[15] St. Papadopoulos, [...], 114.

[16] W. Barry. «Arianism.» [...]

[17] Socrates, *Ecclesiastic History*, I, 9.

[18] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Gentiles*, 30,1.

[19] Johnson, J.F Saint Athanasius, Advanced Information Elwell Evangelical Dictionary, <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/athanas.htm> (2012).

[20] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Gentiles*, 40,54.

[21] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 6,2.

[22] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Contra Arianos*, 1,18