

Who Do People Say That I AM?

Arianism and its Aftermath

Who Is Jesus?

- Then Jesus called his disciples together and said unto them: "What about you? Whom do you say that I am?"

They answered him, saying, "You are the Christ, the eschatological manifestation of the kerygma that is the ground of our being, whose meaning we discover in our interpersonal relationships."

And Jesus said unto them, "What?"

Theological Free for All

- First 4 centuries were characterized by constant struggle and controversy over the nature of Christ, i.e., the relationship of Jesus to God the Father, as well as the relationship of Jesus' human nature with his divine nature
- The NT witness was not consistent or systematic, nor were any of the later theological terms found in Scripture
- No central authority at this time; no real defined dogmas or doctrines beyond the primitive creeds
- Unfair to label any person or group 'heretic' at this point (although their contemporaries did not hesitate to do so – and much worse!)
- We will use the terms 'orthodox' and 'heterodox', without prejudice to either

Groping for Words

- Early Christians experienced and encountered God in various ways – Easter and Pentecost was a radical change in perspective
- Triadic formulas – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit used in cultic ways
- Their encounters seemed to be with different aspects of the divine mystery
- For almost all Christians, the transcendence and oneness of God was never the issue – but how the other encounters, i.e., the Son and Holy Spirit, related to that transcendent reality

Early Attempts to Express the Mystery

- Modalism: Latin West; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three faces or modes of appearance of one divine being manifesting in history. No real distinction between three; like three masks. Extreme form – Patripassionism
- Subordinationism: Eastern and Greek-speaking Church. There was an irreducible distinction of Father, Son, and Spirit – their unity is conceived in terms of derivation and subordination – a single ‘monarchy’ of power and glory, possessed by the Father from all eternity and given to the Son he begets and the Spirit he sends forth. Origenism and Neo-Platonism

God and the Bible – Old Testament

- **OT:** God – no name (Ex 3:13ff); no form (Deut 4:12, 15ff); no likeness (Isa 40:18, 25); Hidden God (Isa 45:15); no one is able to see God's face and live (Ex 33:20)
- With regard to Israel: 'Father' (Mal 2:10); Israel sometimes called God's 'son' (Ex 4:22; Jer 3:22; Hos 11:1); compared to Mother in Isa 42:14; 49:15; 66:13) Creator : Job – both father and mother (38:28ff. Majority of imagery is male.
- 'Sons of God': spirits in the heavenly court (Gen 6:1-4; Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps 29:1; 82:1; 89:6; Wis 5:5); King David as 'son of Yahweh': 2 Sam 7; Ps 2; Ps 89; In Wisdom literature, the just person is a child of God (Wis 2:13-20; Sir 23:1, 4)
- Spirit of God: creative power (Gen 1:2); power of God in prophets (2 Kgs 2:9); king (Isa 11:1); servant of Yahweh (Isa 42:1ff); on Israel (Ezek 37)

Trinity and NT - Synoptics

- Jesus calls God your Father in heaven (15 times in Sermon on Mount)
- My Father – ‘Abba’ – 20 times in Matt, mainly in prayers. Only once in Mark, in Gethsemane
- The Father – and the Son – God and Jesus in relation only in Matt 11:25-27 and Lk 10:21
- Holy Spirit: Jesus leaves baptism for desert ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’, will baptize in the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:8, 12)
- ‘Spirit of your Father’ is promised to disciples in persecution (Matt 10:20)

Trinity and NT – John

- ‘The Father’ or ‘my Father’ - 123 times in John. Once does he speak of ‘my Father’ and ‘your Father’ in 20:17 (post resurrection)
- ‘Son’ or ‘Son of God’ used as title for Jesus (1:34, 49; 3:18; 10:36; etc). ‘The Son’ 3:17, 35; 5:19ff; etc.)
- Divinity of Jesus in fourth gospel: ‘my Lord and my God’ – post-resurrection (20:28); divine Logos – ‘with God’ and ‘divine’ (1:1-3; Jesus claims powers of God in judging and giving life (5:16-29); eternal name of God (8:56); has role as revealing God (1:18; 6:46; 3:13) attacked by opponents for ‘making himself God’ (5:18; 10:33); always shared glory of the Father (17:5)
- Holy Spirit – promised as ‘another advocate’ (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; given by Jesus and the Father after the exaltation or glorification of Jesus (7:38; 20:22)

Trinity and New Testament - Epistles

- Jesus and relationship to God – formulas similar to catechetical and liturgical traditions
- Christological formulas: 'Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:11; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5)
- Narrative Christological formulas – summaries of Jesus' death and resurrection as a manifestation of his unique relationship with God: (Rom 1:3; 8:34; 1 Cor 15:3-5; 1 Pet 3:18; 2 Tim 2:8)
- Binary formulas: God and the Risen Jesus as center of Christian faith: (1 Cor 8:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Rom 4:24) 'We believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification.' Blessings; (Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 3:11) cf. work of Larry Hurtado – binatarian worship
- Some triadic formulas: coordinated saving activity (2 Cor 13:14; Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 3:11-14)

Arius and Arianism



- Arius – Alexandrian Church 256-336 AD
- Well-educated and cultured
- Seen as a religious and ascetical man
- The ‘heresy’ that he started divided the Church and Empire
- ‘The whole world groaned to find itself Arian’ – St. Jerome
- Caught popular imagination

Teachings of Arius

- God as unoriginate (agennetos) source of all reality 'alone ingenerate, alone eternal, alone without beginning, alone possessing immortality' Athanasius, de Syn 16
- Four premises:
 - The Son is a creature formed out of nothing by fiat (beget) perfect creature, but not self-existent
 - As a creature, the Son must have had a beginning 'we say the son has a beginning whereas God is without beginning' Slogan: There was when he was not.
 - The Son can have no communion or direct knowledge of the Father. As a creature, 'alien from and utterly dissimilar from Father's essence'
 - The Son must be liable to change and even sin
- Consequences:
 - Son of God was more of an honorary title
 - Reduces Son to more or less a demi-god

Arius – Scriptural Texts

- Prov 8 ‘Lord created me’
- Acts 2:3 ‘made Him Lord’
- Rom 8: 29 ‘first-born’
- Col 1:15 ‘first-born of all creation’
- Heb 3:2 ‘Who made him’
- John 14:28 ‘Father greater than I’
- Various texts that illustrate weakness, ignorance, suffering, and development

Arianism

- Central to Arian exegesis and theology was Proverbs 8:22-25
- Emphasis was placed on the verb ἐκτίσέν (create) and γεννᾷ (begotten, brought forth)
- John 1:1 also very important – especially absence of the definite article with θεός (*theos* – a god rather than the god)

Proverbs 8:22-25

- The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth-- (Proverbs 8:22-25 NRS)
- κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ ²³ πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ ²⁴ πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὰς ἀβύσσους ποιῆσαι πρὸ τοῦ προελθεῖν τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων ²⁵ πρὸ τοῦ ὄρη ἐδρασθῆναι πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾶ με (Proverbs 8:22-25 LXT)

Against Arians

- *"And so God Himself, as he really is, is inexpressible to all. He alone has no equal, no one similar ('homoios'), and no one of the same glory. We call Him unbegotten, in contrast to him who by nature is begotten. We praise Him as without beginning, in contrast to him who has a beginning. We worship Him as timeless, in contrast to him who in time has come to exist. He who is without beginning made the Son a beginning of created things. He produced him as a son for Himself, by begetting him. He [the Son] has none of the distinct characteristics of God's own being For he is not equal to, nor is he of the same being ('homousios') as Him."*

Council of Nicea – 325 AD



- Constantine in attendance
- Unity both of Church and Empire a concern
- Results of council: Arianism condemned
- Raises other questions regarding the humanity and divinity of Christ; divinity of Holy Spirit
- 50 years of controversy, excommunications, and theological warfare

Nicea's Solution

- 'begotten, not made'
- 'true God' i.e., not God in an inferior or secondary sense
- Heretical:
 - Father preexists the Son
 - Son a creature produced out of nothingness
 - Son subject to moral change or development
- Athanasius' later thinking reflects Nicea:
 - Arianism undermined Christian doctrine of God by insisting that the Trinity or Triad is not eternal and this is close to polytheism
 - Makes nonsense of liturgical customs (baptismal formulas, prayers to Son, etc.)
 - Soteriology: only if mediator himself was divine could humans hope to reestablish communion with God

The Council Speaks

- Of the same 'substance' as Father (hom~~o~~~~o~~usios)
- Arius denied the hom~~o~~~~o~~usios of the Son – he did not deny the Son's unity with the Father, but his divinity
- Cf. hom~~o~~i~~o~~usios – of similar or like substance
- The issue of the council was not the unity of God, but the Son's co-eternity
- There never was when he was not! (*ouk en hoti ouk en*)
- Son's full divinity and equality with the Father out of whose being he was derived and whose nature he shared

The Trinity

- Trinitarian controversy – relation of Logos to Father (and Holy Spirit)
- Arians – Logos perfect creature, but not consubstantial
- Orthodox (Nicea) Logos consubstantial with Father
- Relation of Logos to humanity (incarnation): How is Logos in Christ?