

"We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible"

Here is the summary of this chapter taken from the Foreward.

The second and the third chapters are devoted to the doctrine of God, and to our knowledge of him as Father and Creator. The basic clue to the understanding of the Nicene approach is taken from Athanasius: 'It is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works and call him Unoriginate'. To know God in any precise way we must know him in accordance with his nature, as he has revealed himself – that is, in Jesus Christ his incarnate Son in whom he has communicated not just something about himself but his very Self. Jesus Christ does not reveal the Father by being Father but by being Son of the Father, and it is through

Athanasius 373

Better to signify God from Son and call him Father; rather than from his works and call Him 'Unoriginate'

Precise knowledge of God:
[1] in accord with his nature
[2] as revealed in Son who reveals God's self, not something about Him.

This contrasts with Judaism: sees God as unnameable.

Christ in the one Spirit whom he mediates that we are given access to God as he really is in himself. In contrast with Judaism and its stress on the unnameability of God, the Christian Faith is concerned with God as he has named himself in Jesus Christ, and incarnated in him his own Word, so that in Christ we know God as he is in his own inner being, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the *arche* (ἀρχή), the Origin or Principle, of all our knowledge of God, and of what he has done and continues to do in the universe, so that it is in terms of the relation of Jesus the incarnate Son to the Father, that we have to work out a Christian understanding of the creation. It is the Fatherhood of God, revealed in the Son, that determines how we are to understand God as Almighty Creator, and not the other way round. It was through thinking out the inner relation of the incarnation to the creation that early Christian theology so transformed the foundations of Greek philosophy, science and culture, that it laid the original basis on which the great enterprise of empirico-theoretical science now rests.

Know God in his inner being, as F,S and HS.

Jesus Christ Origin of fall our knowledge of God

Our understanding of creation worked out in terms of relation of Jesus the incarnate Son to the Father; not the reverse.

thinking this way transformed the foundations of Greek philosophy. Basis for empirical science of today.

Dualistic way of thinking

The spread of the Christian Church beyond Palestine carried with it the need to engage the dualistic thinking [see p. 21 of these notes] of the Graeco-Roman civilisation. Arising in Plato [428-348 BC], and firmed up by Aristotle [384-322 BC] it became a cosmology under Ptolemy [Claudius Ptolemaeus 100-170 AD] the astronomer, mathematician and geographer known for his earth-centred [geocentric] model of the universe.

This dualism had the effect of:

- bifurcating human experience
- affecting basic habits of mind in religion, science and philosophy.
- as a dichotomous way of thinking, it led to splits or a separations between

- the world of the senses and the mind,
- action and reflection
- event and idea
- becoming and being
- the material and the spiritual
- the visible and the invisible
- the temporal and the eternal

Greek and Hebrew ways of thinking

The Hellenistic way of thinking [μυθολογῆν] took its starting centre from the human mind whereas the Hebrew was a theological way of thinking [θεολογῆν] that took its centre from God. Particularly the doctrines of providence, incarnation and redemption had to grapple with the dualistic way of thinking in order to be understood aright and so take root.

Church had to transform the foundations of Graeco-Roman thought

The Christians had to lay a different basis for thinking, particularly about the created world and the transcendental areas of Hebrew thought as it met the Greek. This transformation of thought was not the church's main task. That task was evangelism and spreading among the nations the knowledge of God mediated through his Son.

What it did mean was that there was a *concentration upon the Father/Son relationship* which was found in the Gospel and highlighted in the creeds.

So, when dichotomous ways of thinking [splitting things into two opposites in a dualistic way] turned up in the *Thalia*, the writings of Arius [256-336 AD], the presbyter of Alexandria in Egypt, it was found that this undermined the deity of Christ, and cut the essential bond [of one being] between him and the Father, the church took care to articulate a oneness of being between the incarnate Son and the Father. In considering the Access to the Father, we need to see that it turns upon this shared oneness of being.

Calling God "Father" and not "Unoriginate".

"It would be more godly and true to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate". Athanasius Contra Arians 1.34.

This puts the centre of our starting point at the Father/Son relation and gives it a primacy over the creature/Creator relation. We understand the latter by the former. Our authentic knowledge of God is found in the Father/Son relation, not from his works, for then, we can only say what God is not and we must think in vague and general terms as well.

This means that the access to God is through a Son begotten of his own nature and not through God's works which, being made out of nothing, are completely different from his nature.

The theologians of Nicaea would not think in negative terms about God for;

[a] if we only start with the created works in relation to the Creator we inevitably lump the Son as one of the creatures, which leads us to think and speak of God in a way that is far removed from himself.

[b] if we attempt to reach knowledge of God from outside of God, then we cannot operate from any point in God. So we have no test or control by which to evaluate our thinking. It just ends up with private opinions [κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον νοῦν = according to our own mind] about God. This is what Athanasius accused the Arians of doing; dreaming up ideas of God without any basis in the reality of what God had revealed.

The school of Alexandria was well established in a scientific knowledge that came from enquiry into the nature of the reality being studied. Such forerunners as Clement of Alexandria [150-215 AD] who taught at the Catechetical School of Alexandria; Anatolius [early 3C-July 3 283AD] who

grew up in Alexandria and became bishop of Laodicea on the Syrian Coast; and Athanasius himself had laid down these foundational truths:

[a] scientific knowledge was according to the nature of the thing investigated.

[b] the knowledge was constrained by this essential nature, not by any convention of thought

[c] to know things this way was to know according to truth and reality. In this way real, exact and scientific knowledge was impressed upon the mind. ["cataleptic claims" are those that seize the investigator.]

Only God can reveal God - He can only be accurately known out of himself.

- [The Biblical idea is based in such texts as we looked at in Seminar 1 [👤 p.6-9]
- These ways of enquiry apply particularly to God - for He may be known only out of Himself. So we must allow God's own nature to determine how we think and speak of him. Only in Jesus Christ have we the Son of God who is of the same nature [ὁμοφυής] and being [ὁμοούσιος] as God. He is God "of God", the one way of access to the Father.
- Further, whoever knows God as Father through the Son, also knows God as Creator, for it is through the Word that God has created all things.
- *The incarnation*, where God's own self-revelation takes place through his self-giving to us Jesus Christ his Son, is the bridge - the point of access - which is both within God and also within our creaturely existence.
- This takes place in space-time and so within the bounds of which we can apprehend.
- And yet, it is knowledge coming from a genre in God's own being.
- So our knowledge of God as Father is "grounded" in the very being and nature of God.

We can have accurate, positive knowledge even though God is inexhaustible.

We have already distinguished [👤 ,page 17] between the apprehending of God and the comprehending of Him. Here we note, with Hilary of Poitiers [310-367AD], that even though we cannot embrace all that God is within our knowing of him, nevertheless he leaves something of himself within our grasp and it is true knowledge of him that we have.

"Piety and precision, godliness and exactness, belong together and condition one another, for knowledge of God arises and takes shape in our mind under the determination of his revealed nature, and is maintained in the experience of worship, prayer, holiness and godliness. Thus empirical and theoretical, religious and theological elements blend indivisibly together in theological understanding and formulation."TFT [1988] 54

Can only know God through communion with him in his inner relations

Irenaeus [125-202AD] in *Adversus haer.* 4.11.1-5 vol 2.pp 158-62, had made clear that, strictly speaking, only God can know himself. So, if we are to truly know God it can only be through some incredible way, through sharing in the knowledge which God has of Himself. So we can only know Him if He brings us into communion with him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the incarnation, God does not make known to us something about himself, but makes himself known according to his own divine nature as Father.

It is through the giving of his Spirit at Pentecost that we enter into the communion of the mutual relation of the Father and the Son [John 14.23].

"Through Jesus Christ we are given access to the Father in one Spirit [Ephesians 2.18]."

Nicene focus on the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son

As nothing else could have done, this focus opened up a way to knowing God.

*"In Jesus Christ, the Son of God took our human nature upon himself and made it his own so completely that he came among us as man; and by what he was as man, he revealed to us what he was as God...only with the incarnation of the Son that true knowledge of God has been brought within the range of our human understanding in a positive way, for it is only through sharing in the Son's knowledge of the Father that our thought and speech of God may really have God as their object and so have positive content."*TFT [1988] 55

The Father is known only to the Son and vice versa 🙏 p.6-9 [Matthew 11.27, 28.18; John 7.29; 10.15; 17.25]. Each has perfect and complete knowledge of the Other.

The work of the Spirit not left out

We are *contingent* beings. We are creatures confined within the limited range of our creaturely awareness and perception. However, under the impact of the incarnation and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, our minds and capacities are opened and our thoughts are expanded for beyond their finite limits until they are made appropriate to their divine object of adoration. The Spirit *actualises* [makes a reality of it for us] the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ and so enables us to receive and apprehend beyond ourselves.

db 1. When we say something is *contingent* upon something else we mean that it is dependent upon it, it is conditioned by it, subject to it, hangs on it etc. This is the first sense in which TFT means this adjective. To say that we are contingent beings means that we are enclosed by many things that are dependent on many other things. Such is the way God has made the universe.

But, in a second sense, he also means that we are created beings along with the universe. We speak of it is a contingent universe which means that the universe has been given a distinctive existence of its own, utterly different from God's. And yet it depends on Him entirely for its origin and its order and for what it continues to be.

Regarded by itself, the universe is what is; it is this one and only universe that has come into being. But from God's side, considering his free creation it is only one of any number of possible universes he might have made. This means that we must think of the universe and its infinite variability as bound up with God's free unlimited creativity and rationality. He is its free creative ground or base, and through actualising, bringing it into existence, then this one possibility among many means now that he has ruled out the others. This is the only sort of necessity the universe has, that it cannot now be other than it is.

2. To *actualise* is to make it real, in this case to ourselves as it comes into our experience by trusting it to be so. It is already real in God's life and communion, but the Holy Spirit makes it real to us as an actual happening.

Scriptural statements

TFT wants us to not think of accuracy or precise knowledge of God as something associated with stringing together biblical statements. We are not content to simply repeat the bible verse or the passage, we need to have a "freedom of discourse" on the basis of the Holy Scriptures when we pass beyond what they literally say to the truth that God intends them to convey, and then try and express that as accurately as we can."

db Consider this from Karl Barth [1886-1968] : in discussing the Church's talk about God - what he calls dogmatics - Barth shows that "Christian speech must be tested by its conformity to Christ" [§1 p.12]. He asks, concerning Christian talk, "Does Christian utterance derive from Him? Does it lead to Him? Is it conformable to Him? [p.3].

What is relevant here is that Barth then goes on to speak about the difference between exegesis and dogmatics in a helpful way.

"Exegetical theology investigates biblical teaching as the basis of our talk about God. Dogmatics, too, must constantly keep it in view. But only in God and not for us is the true basis of Christian utterance identical with its true content. Hence dogmatics as such does not ask what the apostles and prophets said but what must we say on the basis of the apostles and prophets. This task is not taken from us because it is first necessary that we should know the biblical basis." Church Dogmatics Vol1.1, Section #1, pages 3-15.

When Athanasius and Hilary somewhat tremulously worked to make their statements accurate to Scripture, they then found that, if they had done their work well, then the Scriptures were also opened in a more intelligible way.

Key texts of Scripture they used

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father; and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" [Luke 10.22 and Matthew 11.27]

db "All things have been handed to me by my Father"

At a time around 335 AD, but certainly not later than the Summer of AD 342, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, published a small article [In illud 'omnia' is its Latin title] explaining how we are to understand the expression "All things have been handed to me by my Father" in Luke 10.22 [Matthew 11.27]. His explanation was a reply to Arius, who had argued along these lines:

- [1] If all things had been delivered to the Son by the Father, then it follows that once He was lacking them.
- [2] "All things" includes his divine Sonship.
- [3] Therefore there must have been a time when the Son was not .

Athanasius met this argument by denying [2] above, the minor premise, of Arius' reasoning. Athanasius showed that "all things" refers to Christ's work as God's mediator to us and our Mediator to God. It does not refer to his essential nature as the Word of God.

Athanasius deals with this in 4 steps:

Step 1: The text refers not to the eternal Word but to the incarnate Word

Referring to the expression in Colossians 1.17 "...in Him all things consist" and also that "all things were made through him" [John 1.3] Athanasius maintained that:

- [a] it would be superfluous for the Father to have given the Word all things, since they were made through him.
- [b] Nor are we to think of the Father as giving over the creation to the Son. For while it is true that the Father exercises His providence over creation through the Son, He does not retire from His creation. Every sparrow who falls, falls in the knowledge of the Father [Matthew 10.29]. Both the Father and the Son are working in the sustaining of the world [John 5.17]

Step 2: The reasons why "all things" were handed over to the Son of Man

[a] Humanity was fallen, and 'all things' were in confusion, death prevailing, and the earth cursed, Hades was opened, Paradise was shut, heaven offended and man was corrupted and brutalized. In these circumstances, God, was not willing that humans should perish.

[b] So He sent his Son, the Word of God, and delivered to Him humanity, that He might be made flesh and taking flesh, restore it wholly; in both the physical sense and also to restore the rational nature of humanity.

[c] Since then, that 'all things' were 'delivered' [handed over] to Him to fix, restore and make whole. They were not given to Him because He was poor and lacked them, but in order that He, as the patient is handed over to the physician, might set things right.

[d] Unlike the physician who is apart from us, and so treats us, the Word is a physician who works through His own life for us. Suffering himself, He gave us rest; hungering himself, He nourished us, and going down into Hades, He brought us back from there. This was why the Word was made flesh – so that united to man – 'all things' might be renewed in Him.

Step 3: By "all things" is meant the redemptive attributes and power of Christ

What was 'delivered' to Him were things that He did not previously possess. For He was not man previously, but became man for the sake of saving man. The Word was not in the beginning flesh, but has been made flesh subsequent to the beginning. In this flesh he reconciled the hatred against us [Ephesians 2.15-16; Colossians 1.20, 2.14].

Step 4: The essential, pre-creation, relation of the Son to the Father is shown in John 16.15.

That which the Father 'has' belongs to the Son [John 16.15]; the expression "...are mine" teaches his unity with the Father.

The Incarnation is something "new" in God

An implication follows from Athanasius' Step 2 above. While not stated in Athanasius' *In illud omnia*, the implication is developed by John of Damascus [De fide Orthodoxa 4.6]. In seeing that the Son was given "all things" for our redemption, things He did not formerly possess, means that in the Incarnation something new has taken place in God.

While we must hold the unchangeableness of God alongside this new movement in God, nevertheless this is a breathtaking fact. The Incarnation happened in space and time, it is not a myth. Further, it is not something strange to the Being of God, for God is so wonderfully free in Himself that He can do something new without ceasing to be what He is eternally, in Himself, in His own unchangeable Being. What He does is inherent to who He is.

TFT's main points here are:

- There is a mutual knowing between the Father and the Son
- This knowing involved as mutual relation being between them
- Not just between the eternal Son and the eternal Father but also between the incarnate Son and the Father
- "...anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" We are given access to the closed circle of the divine knowing between the Father and the Son only through 'cognitive union' with Christ. This means through an interrelation of *knowing* [because He chooses to reveal to us] and *being* [because he took flesh such as ours] between us and the incarnate Son.
- In our case this union is one in which we participate [share] through grace and not one of nature.
- 'cognitive union' which includes "knowing" and "being" is found own the teaching of
 - Paul - in his use of sonship and union with Christ
 - John - mutual indwelling [John 14.23 and 1 John]
- TFT speaks of how the mutual knowing between the Father and the incarnate Son constitutes the "ontological ground" for our knowing of God.
 - db** The Greek present participle 'being' is *ὄντως* and it is from this that the English words ontology, ontic and ontological come. So 'ontological ground' means a basis is found in the being of God, Father and Son, for our knowing of God. For if we may indwell Christ and He indwells us, and we are in union of life with Him, then we have a knowledge which is objectively rooted [grounded] in Their life and being.
- On the same grounds, we know the Holy Spirit who comes to us from the Father and the Son, as *res* Spirit of the Father and the Son. He belongs to the one Being of God for there is this mutual knowing between the Spirit and the Father and the Spirit and the Son as we saw there was between the Father and the Son.
- So we are given knowledge of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. Christ centred theology and God centred theology coincide.
- The Son reveals the Father by being Son: so the mutual knowing of the Father and Son has been inserted into the realm of contingent reality where we human beings belong. In this way we share the knowledge of God which He has of Himself.
- Knowledge of the Father and the Son are coincident - we do not first meet the Son and then meet the Father. So Christ met people humbly, holding back knowledge of himself so that his revelation by *word* would take place only in step with his revelation in *act*. For this reason the church had to reject both docetic and adoptionist [ebionite] approaches to the understanding of Christ.

db 1. Docetism, derived from the Greek word *δοκεῖν* = to seem, is the doctrine that the phenomenon of Christ, his historical and bodily existence, and above all the human form of Jesus, was mere semblance without any true reality. Broadly it is taken as the belief that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that his human form was an illusion.

Well, if his body was not truly incarnate like ours, if he did not come into the contingent reality we inhabit, but only seemed to do so, then the mutual knowing of the Father and the Son cannot connect with us at all.

2. Adoptionism, sometimes called dynamic monarchianism, holds that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism, his resurrection, or his ascension. According to Epiphanius's account of the Ebionites, the group believed that Jesus was chosen on account of his sinless devotion to the will of God. What this means for us is that Jesus was a true, but fallen human who was elevated [adopted] into the Godhead. In which case he did not have any mutual knowing of God the Father as an eternal Son to bring to his incarnation. And so he cannot introduce to us any sharing in the being of God.

- Our knowledge of the incarnate Son and our knowledge of God the Father interpenetrate each other, arise together and regulate each other.

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the very depths of God's own being. What man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man that is in him? Even so the things of God knows no one, except the Spirit of God." 1 Corinthians 2.10.

- As Jesus was born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Spirit. he received the Spirit without measure in the human nature He took from us, offered himself to the Father through the Spirit as an atoning self-consecration on our behalf, so he now mediates the Spirit who searches the depths of God's being, so that we can now share in the self-knowledge of God.
- This mutual relation between the agency of the Son and the Holy Spirit had to be stated clearly at Constantinople.
- Epistemologically, [in the order of knowing], the doctrine of the Son comes first, but we cannot know the incarnate Word except by the Spirit as well as the Father and the Son.

The vicarious humanity of the Son

"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" Jn 14.6

- The Arians looked for many statements in Scripture to show the servile and lowly status of the Son; making a great deal from Proverbs 8.22 LXX to show that the lord was a created intermediary.
- Athanasius and the others interpreted it in a soteriological sense, which asks 'what does it say about the way that God saves us?' They showed that the human nature of the incarnate Son of God had been created by God at the beginning of all his ways and works for our salvation.
- Far from rejecting the creaturely and servile condition, they showed that deliberately condescending, he embraced this for our salvation. He is not only the source of all God's ways, but the controlling principle [*ἀρχή*] by which all our knowledge of God is tested.
- This leads to a powerful emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ. [more to follow on this]
- "The soteriological understanding of the incarnate economy - way of working - of the Son puts Jesus Christ into the very centre of our knowledge of God, but in such a way that he is made for us the one in whom we know God the Father."

db Nicaea focussed on the humanity in which the Son of God was born, crucified and rose again and ascended. This happened for our sakes and on our behalf. This is what is called here the "incarnate economy"; the Greek word *οἰκονομία* expresses a way of doing things. So the incarnation was the way God chose to bring our

salvation. "Soteriological" here points to our salvation-understanding; the Greek word σωτήρ simply means Saviour.

"1 ¶ God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
3 And He is the radiance [ἀπαύγασμα] of His glory and the exact representation [χαρακτήρ] of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
4 ¶ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." Hebrews 1.1-4 NASB1960

db This text is central. Jesus Christ is the Radiance of the Father's Glory

The flow of ideas in Hebrews 1.1-4 is as follows:

[1] God has spoken in His Son.

[a] This is a final revelation

[b] Contrasts concerning this "speaking" of the God:

[i] Persons used: in the prophets..in His Son [Prophet]

[ii] Of eras and times: long ago..last days

[iii] Of persons addressed: to whom: the fathers..us

[2] The Son

[a] What the Father did in respect of the Son

[i] appointed Him heir of all things

[ii] made he world through Him

[b] Who He is with respect to the Father

[i] He is the radiance of His glory

[ii] exact representation of His nature

[c] what He does

[i] after He had made purification for sins [Priest]

[ii] sat down at Right Hand of Majesty on high [King]

[iii] having become as superior to angels as His Name is to theirs.

[3] Scriptural quotations showing the mind of the Father with respect to the superiority of the Son over the angels

It is Who the Son is in respect of the Father that we want to focus on here. The text of verse 3 is, "who, being the radiance of God's glory..."

The "being" tells us that what is stated is not about a man who became God, but rather of a Son of God who already shared, as to His own being [essence] the very being and essence of the Father.

The expression "radiance of God's glory" - [NIV] or the "reflection of God's glory" [NASB] "effulgence of His glory" [Westcott] leads us to see the Son as the Person in Whom the essential nature of the Father is presented to men and women. By radiance we are drawn to consider the source of the Son's being. How He is in an unbroken connection with the father as He reveals to men and women the real attributes of the Father.

The noun ἀπαύγασμα, is here translated effulgence, radiance, and reflection. It is derived from a verb which has two distinct meanings. 1. To flash forth, in the sense of radiate; and 2. To flash back, in the sense of reflect.

In the way it is used we can see for the understanding of radiance that any ray which comes from the Sun, is itself distinct from the Sun while it is also participating in and coming from the Sun. It shares the life of the Sun - it is the Sun gone forth. So the Son of God and the Father are of the same essence, or Being. That is the point. They are distinct as persons, yet as the creed says of Christ He is light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made.

Reflection has the same understanding, provided we know the way the ancients used the image of a mirror. Modern thinking in debt to physics thinks of the mirror as a reflective surface which reflects away from itself the rays of light. The ancients did not so think; they thought of a reflection as an image which was, as you looked at it, was actually in the mirror. Their understanding was that the mirror contained the image, it was one with it. It is in this sense we should understand the idea behind the "reflection" translation above.

- The reason we have exact and precise knowledge of God through the Son is because:
 - Jesus the incarnate Son is the perfect and proportionate image of God, He is the one 'form' [εἶδος] of the Godhead. Hebrews 1 speaks of Him as the 'exact seal' [χαρακτήρ] in whom the Father imparts knowledge of himself as He really is and how He manifests himself.
 - One of the three Cappadocian fathers of this period, Basil [329-379AD] was the bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia. He states
"All things that are the Son's are the Father's; because the whole Son is in the Father and has all the Father in himself. Thus the Person [ὑπόστασις] of the Father is known in the Form of the Son" Basil of Caesarea Ep.38.8
"The Form of the Godhead of the Father is the Being of the Son" Athanasius Contra Arians 3.1.
- So, it is the incarnate Son who is the form of our knowledge of God, it is by the Holy Spirit that we participate in the Son and through him the Father.

Nicaea unfolded this doctrine of the Trinity in the face of:

[a] Judaising tendencies in Sabellianism.

db Sabellianism in the Eastern church or Patripassianism in the Western church is the non-trinitarian or anti-Trinitarian belief that the Heavenly Father, Resurrected Son, and Holy Spirit are three different modes or aspects of one monadic God, as perceived by the believer, rather than three distinct persons within the Godhead—that there are no real or substantial differences among the three, such that there is no substantial identity for the Spirit or the Son.

[b] preserved the Unity of the Godhead from Hellenizing tendencies which were seen in the Arian ideas that cut off the three Persons by a diversity in their natures.

db What was it that Arius taught?

The sources of Arius' teaching, if we take it from his own writings, are very limited. What we have is

[a] three letters he wrote,

[b] a few fragments of another,

[c] some fairly lengthy quotations from the Thalia; verses written in Sotadean metre to set out Arius' teaching.

[d] There are other collections, usually brought forth so that they may be refuted, by his opponents, which summarise the teaching of the Arians, but these statements may or may not be consistent with Arius himself.

[e] Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, written 318 AD.

After stating his opponents views, he gives his own. Arius understands that those who support him are not only Eusebius of Nicomedia but also Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodotus of Laodocia, Paulinus of Tyre, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Gregory, Aetius of Lydda and generally the bishops in the east, with the exception of Philogonius of Antioch and Hellanicus and Macarius.

He claims they all agree with him in believing that God has been existing limitlessly before the Son.

Stating his doctrine more fully Arius writes:

"That the Son is not begotten nor in any way a part of the Unbegotten, nor derived from some alien substratum, but that he exists by will and counsel before times and before ages, full of truth, an grace, God, Only-begotten. And before he was begotten, or created or determined or established, he did not exist. For he was not unbegotten nor unoriginated."

He indicates that he is persecuted because he teaches that "the Son has an origin, but God is unoriginated, and also that the "the Son derives from non existence". The reason why Arius is set on expressing it this way is because he wants to avoid saying that the Son is a part of God or that he is derived from some divine substratum.

[f] Letter to Alexander 320 AD

This letter was sent to Alexander by Arius and his friends. They desire Alexander to recognise that they are orthodox and to withdraw his excommunication of them. [See Athanasius: De Synodis 16 and Epiphanius Pan 69.7]

They set out their beliefs in point form listing the matters which are in dispute. They state the uniqueness of the Father and then write the following:

He who has begotten the only-begotten Son before aeonian times through whom also he made the aeons and everything, who produced him not in appearance but in truth, giving him existence by his own will, unchangeable and unalterable, a perfect creature of God, but not like one of the creatures, a product, but not like one of the things produced, the product of the Father not as Valentinus laid down, an issue, nor as Mani taught a consubstantial part of the Father, nor as Sabellius said, dividing the Monad, a "Sonfather", nor, as Hieracas, a light lit from a light or as a lamp [spread] into two, nor as one who existed before but was later made into a Son by begetting or creation...but, as we hold, created by the will of God before times and before aeons and having received life and being from the father and various kinds of glory, since he gave him existence, alongside himself. For when the Father gave him the inheritance of everything he did not deprive himself of that which he possesses unoriginatedly in himself; for he is the source of all. Consequently there are three existing realities. And God is the cause of them all for he is supremely sole without beginning, and the Son, having been begotten timelessly by the father and created and established before aeons, did not exist before he was begotten, but, begotten timelessly before everything, alone has been given existence by the Father; for he is not external nor co-external not co-unoriginated, with the Father or does he possess being parallel with the Father, as some say who rely on the argument from relations thereby introducing two unoriginated ultimate principles, but as the Monad and origin of everything, so God is prior to everything. Therefore he is prior to the Son, as we have learnt from you [ie Alexander] when you were preaching in the midst of the church."

Arius dislikes any idea that the Son is "from" [ἐκ] the Father because this would imply that the Son is a consubstantial part of him and like an issue. This, in turn, would lead to the idea that God is composite and divisible and mutable and even corporeal. This would mean, for Arius, that the Son is broken off from God, like a piece.

[g] Letter sent to Emperor Constantine

Sent jointly by Arius and Euzoius, both in exile. They plead for a return from exile and re-admission to the church.

[h] There is also a letter written by Constantine which quotes fragments from a fourth letter of Arius - a letter lost to us. In these quoted fragments we see that Arius is at pains to not expose God [the Father?] to suffering in the Incarnation

[i] The Thalia

Composed in metrical verse - copying Sodates who wrote humorous and sarcastic material - all of the quotations we have are from Athanasius. Where they retain the metre then perhaps we have an accurate quote. The two passages which are remarked upon occur in Orationes con. Arianos 1.5-6 and also in De Synodis 15. The first claim to be quotations and are full of hostile corrections which come from Athanasius. The second is a favourable treatment in metrical form. Some think that the second is more reliable for it is a favourable quotation, and is metrical.

TFT wants to now to contrast the ideas that the Nicaea fathers worked out in contrast to the Judaistic and Greek understanding.

In contrast to Judaism

What the Nicæan doctrine did was to develop a Hebraeo-Christian understanding of salvation which was governed by the decisive fact that:

- in Jesus Christ God himself personally intervenes in the world, working out the salvation of mankind.

So, if God has come to us as an 'incarnate presence' [ἐνσάρκος παρουσία] then whatever God does and says is exclusively from the Person [ἐκ προσώπου] of Jesus Christ. Here the OT concepts of the Face of God and the Word of God are given expression to mean that in the hearing and seeing of the Lord Jesus Christ we see and hear God the Father face to face.

db TFT is thinking of here such OT passages as:

“So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved.”
Genesis 32.30 NASB 1960

“The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you” Numbers 6.25

“...and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways... 2 Chronicles 7.14

“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant...” Psalm 31.16

And recalling our intimate personal communion with himself we remember Paul’s words, consistent with his understanding that the atoning work of Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile.

“For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Ephesians 2.18

- Judaism had a sharp distaste for anyone to claim that they might know God personally. For them God was so transcendent, unnameable and ineffable [unable to be expressed in words] in an undifferentiated [undivided, unbroken-up] oneness of his being. There can be no knowledge of God in his inner relations, but only knowledge of him from his external relations. True, God was known as a covenant God who related to his people in a positive and saving way. Indeed even persons such as Moses and Jacob were said to ‘see God face to face’ but not as He may be known through Jesus Christ. Judaism was used to manifestations of God [ἐπιφανεία] as through the angels, but each of these manifestations makes clear that the angel, although speaking as God, is not God.
- The incarnate presence implies that we may know God as He is in himself. And so we can enter within the veil, and know God in the inner relations of his own being.
- Nicaea theologians nevertheless remained quite ‘Hebrew’ in their approach to and awe of God.

In contrast to Hellenism

Even as the NT was written in common Greek of the time, and it can be seen that Greek ideas affected the church’s thinking, nevertheless the main thing that happened is that the Christians took over the Greek language and made its thought-forms convey radically different ideas that were quite alien to Hellenism itself.

Athanasius was decisive in this Christianising of Hellenism and it is through the Nicaea theology that we see this process at its height. TFT wants to leave the idea of Creator till the next chapter. But presents three ideas which show the differences between what the Church meant and what Hellenists thought.

1. *Image* [εἰκόν]]

The Greeks stressed the optical sense over the others, and so developed an optical model of thought. So, for example, we might compare that in Greek idea [ἰδέα] and form [εἶδος] and theory [θεωρία] we always being referred to ways of seeing or what is seen. They also thought of sight as a beam projected from the eye to the object - so they thought in images [εἰκόνες, εἶδωλα] projected by human beings beyond themselves in the form of myths.

2. *Word* [λόγος]

Such a contrast between Christianity and Greek religion and philosophy is found as the Church used biblical patterns which were dominated by the Word of God which asked for an obedient “hearing of faith” [ὑπακοὴ τῆς πίστεως]. This came into sharp focus as to how the terms “father” and “son” are to be understood as expressing the Father/Son relation at the heart of the Christian gospel.

Are 'father' and 'son' to be understood as visual images, taken from human relations and then projected mythologically onto God? If so then we must [cannot avoid]:

- projecting creaturely gender into God [See Torrance, James B. [1996] p. 87-90 for a wonderfully modern application of the Arian heresy and the Nicene answer.]
- thinking of him as a grandfather as well as father, for the only father we know is one who is the son of another father.

This all leads to anthropomorphic and polymorphic ideas of deity; it leads to polytheism and idolatry.

But if we stay doing our thinking out from a centre in God, then we know him in a way that is controlled by how he has revealed himself in his incarnate Word. This is what controls the creaturely use of the words 'father' and 'son' in Pauls' expression

14 ¶ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, [Ephesians 3.15 NASV1960]

Unique Fatherhood and unique Sonship define each other in a singular and mutual way.

"Just as we cannot ascribe a father to the Father, so we cannot ascribe a brother to the Son" Athanasius .Ad Serapion 1.16

Since God has chosen to name himself as "Father" in and through his "Son" we cannot bypass his self-naming. They are terms sanctioned by divine revelation and are basic to our experience of God. Hence we are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

- The issue that Nicaea clarified was then, "How do creaturely images, latent in the human notions of fatherhood and sonship - and all human terms and concepts used in the Scriptures - bear upon God"?
- Here the church:
 - returned to the 2nd commandment which banned all sensual and pictorial imagery of God as it was found in heathen worship. e.g. of the Baalim and the Astaroth, the nature and sex deities of the old Semitic world.
 - made clear that God was utterly beyond all creaturely imagination.
 - So all images used in speech and thought about God refer to him without imaging him. This need to think in an imageless way is developed in the section on the Holy Spirit.
 - On the one hand, that Jesus Christ is both image and reality of God in his own incarnate person excluded all other images. So the incarnation does not stand for projection what is human into the divine , but of the projection of the divine into the human - so all mythology is shattered.
 - On the other hand, the Nicene theologians paralleled the ὁμοούσιον found between the Father and the Son with the relation also existing between the Son and the Spirit, so prevented us thinking of that oneness of being in any sensual and material way. See also Athanasius' understanding that Son as the sole form [εἶδος] of the Godhead, and the sPirit is the Image [εἰκων] of the Son made it clear that God is to be thought of in an imageless way. All this work helped the faithful to not think of God is human, copying type images. [See the footnote 69 on page 72 for an understanding of Greek icons and their use].

3. Activity [ἐνέργεια].

In what way did Hellenism impact Christianity in respect of the understanding of "word" [λόγος] and "Activity" [ἐνέργεια]?

Athanasius concepts of ἐνούσιος λόγος = 'en-beinged' word and ἐνούσιος ἐνέργεια = 'en-beinged' activity; he meant a Word and activity which was intrinsic to the very being of God as God.

- On the one hand, the Greek idea of λόγος [word], as an abstract cosmological principle, was Christianised by being assimilated with the OT understanding of the Word of the Lord and the NT idea of the Word who became flesh in Jesus Christ. Instead of a the abstract cosmological principle we now have the word of God as that which inheres in the very being God where both the Word and God are one. We have a speaking Word. Far from being dumb in his inner being, God is eloquent speaking being.
- Since the Greek idea of the word was a cosmological principle, its relation to the empirical realities of the world this was also radically altered as it came onto contact with the doctrine of creation out of nothing. For it had to take into account now, that God in creating through his Word had given to things a contingent word and intelligibility of their own.
- On the other hand, the Greek idea of activity was transformed as it met with the biblical conception of the creative and providential activity of the living God. Sharply contrasted with the Aristotelian view of the God is actively immobile.. God is never without his activity, since his act and being are essentially one.

- This dynamic view of God was supremely seen in the incarnation as an invasion into the created realms of space and time. The Nicaea theologians thought of Jesus Christ as one with God in act and being; for he incarnated the active presence of God in human history. This effected the understanding of motion as well.
- So it was that they re-shaped the Greek concepts and made them serve the Christian faith. In this way the thought-forms of the Greek culture received their indelible Christian stamp.

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