

The Importance of Athanasius and the Views of His Character

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ABSTRACT

Athanasius is the one of the most important figures in church history. He is known for firmly standing for the faith in a time when the Arian heresy threatened to forever impact the church. However, during the fourth century Athanasius was able to effectively combat this trend and he suffered greatly for it as he was exiled five times during his forty-five years as the bishop of Alexandria. His first exile came in AD 335 and this is the most important one to understand as many of the charges brought against him were reiterated later on. Most church historians and Christian writers through the centuries viewed Athanasius as a hero and believed the charges against him were fabricated. However, in the late nineteenth century a shift began towards a negative view of the character of Athanasius and this has continued to the present day. Many modern authors point to three items of evidence that have been discovered as the reason for the evolving perspective on Athanasius. This paper will investigate the validity of the original claims against Athanasius brought in 335 as well as the credibility of the items of this new line of evidence.

BACKGROUND

Athanasius is a major theologian and church leader from the first centuries of Christian history. One of the main elements of truth that he was adamant about was the deity of Christ. Athanasius believed that Jesus was fully God, not a created being, had always existed and was of the same substance as God the Father. “In the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, Athanasius stands in a category of his own. Thomas R. Torrance holds that Athanasius’

contribution is of more importance than that of any other theologian.”¹ This orthodox position was decided upon by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. At the time of Nicaea Athanasius was a deacon in the church of Alexandria serving under the bishop, Alexander.² However, Athanasius had already proven himself to be an able theologian as he had written brilliant works years before the Council of Nicaea convened. In addition, there is evidence that Athanasius, even from the position of deacon, was a leader in the discussions at Nicaea.³ Thus, Athanasius was a supporter and defender of the orthodox position of Christ being fully God from the early stages.

One of the chief reasons the Council of Nicaea was convened was because of the controversy created by a man named Arius. He had been a priest at a local church in Alexandria and, thus, came under the authority of Bishop Alexander. Arius proposed the idea that the Son was somehow a created being and did not share the same essence as the Father.⁴ Of course, this belief would change the aspect of salvation in that it was necessary that God would give Himself as a sacrifice for sins. Thus, in the years prior to Nicaea a tremendous conflict had developed between bishop Alexander and Arius which resulted in Arius being refused his position in the Alexandrian church.⁵ However, Arius would not accept this and took the conflict to other areas which increased the scope of the trouble and necessitated, at least in the mind of Emperor Constantine, calling the Council of Nicaea.⁶

With the decision of the Council of Nicaea the orthodox followers had a great victory and were hoping that the conflict over Arianism would fade away. However, Arius and his followers

¹ Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33-34.

² Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 25. *The Greek Ecclesiastical Historians* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844).

³ Athanasius, *Orations of S. Athanasius* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okedon and Welsh, 1980), 5.

⁴ Michael R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, *Arianism after Arius* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1993), 4.

⁵ Karl Baus, *History of the Church: Volume II* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 17.

⁶ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 15. *The Greek Ecclesiastical Historians* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844).

were not willing to allow the controversy to end and began to garner support from others. The churches and bishops in the east were much more likely to be sympathetic to Arius and this became a stronghold for him. One man in particular, named Eusebius of Nicomedia, became a powerful advocate of the Arian idea. Eusebius had great power in the Imperial Court and he began to work that power in favor of the Arians and against the supporters of the Nicene Creed. He was so close to Constantine that he was present to baptize him shortly before his death. The Arians and Eusebians were able to use this power by bringing false accusations against several of the Nicene bishops which resulted in many of them being exiled from their see.

While the Arians and Eusebians were expanding their power base the life of Athanasius was changing greatly. Bishop Alexander died in 328 and Athanasius was chosen to succeed him as bishop. Thus, at the age of, most likely, thirty years old, Athanasius became the bishop of one of the most important and influential churches in the world. As well as being an important bishop, his Nicene faith made him a primary target of the Arians. However, Athanasius was not the first of the Nicene bishops to be exiled on false charges as there had been several before him. Eusebius even warned Athanasius of the persecution that was coming if he did not relent and allow the Arians to have communion in the church of Alexandria.⁷ However, Athanasius would not, in good conscience, allow those he considered to be heretics to have a part of the church. It is at this point that Athanasius became the recipient of a variety of charges and had to answer for each one of them.

One of the first charges to be brought against Athanasius was that he had imposed an illegal tax on the people of Alexandria but he had representatives at the Imperial Court that were able to

⁷ Lynn Harold Hough, *Athanasius the Hero* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1906), 65.

successfully refute this accusation.⁸ The other indictments against him included that he ordered an altar to be smashed and a sacred chalice to be broken, supplied funds to a man who wanted to commit treason against Constantine and that he had a man murdered and was using his severed hand to perform magic incantations.⁹ The charge of the murdered man, Arsenius by name, is an interesting one. The Arians alleged that Athanasius had ordered the murder of Arsenius. However, Athanasius knew this was not true and sent men to search for him before he was brought to trial for the murder. They found Arsenius in hiding and Athanasius was able to present him alive and with both hands at the trial.¹⁰ Thus, this should have effectively ended the merit of any of the indictments. Any group that would falsely charge someone with murder should lose all credibility and nothing they subsequently claimed should be believed. However, this was not the case as the charges against the Nicene bishops were not about seeking truth but rather had the goal of silencing an opponent. Moreover, the Arian followers were willing to do anything to accomplish having the Nicene adherents exiled.

The willingness to traverse to any dishonest lengths is a primary difference between the Nicene adherents and the Arians, or Eusebians as they were later called. Those who held to the orthodox position approved at Nicaea desired to uphold what they considered to be the true faith. However, the Arian forces wanted to gain political power by having their ideas become dominant and they were willing to manipulate and falsely accuse for this to happen. The Nicene bishops were in the majority but the Arian followers were more adept at political maneuvering and were able to enforce their views from a numerically weaker position. The situation

⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁰ Socrates, Chapter 32. Translated by A. C. Zenos, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 2* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890).

continued until it reached a low point in the late 350s when Constantine's son, Constantius, was emperor. Constantius was fully committed to Arian beliefs and desired for all the churches in the empire to be unified.¹¹ Thus, many bishops, such as Athanasius, were exiled and other bishops, such as Hosius of Cordoba and Liberius of Rome, were tortured until they would subscribe to the Arian doctrine. However, Athanasius held strong to the faith and never accepted the false Arian doctrine even though he suffered greatly for it.

Now that an overarching perspective of the situation has been presented, the critical point that this paper will explore is the Council of Tyre that was held in 335. In this council the majority of the charges against Athanasius were brought that would stay with him the rest of his life. This paper will explore each of these indictments and make a judgment from this vantage point in history of whether or not Athanasius should have been deposed. The current information will be considered and argued in making this determination. This is important to explore because, as mentioned previously, in recent years there has been a great movement to put Athanasius back on trial and declare him guilty.

An interesting aspect of the Council of Tyre is that even after Athanasius had proven the dishonesty of his accusers by presenting Arsenius alive, it still seemed likely that they would find him guilty. At this point, Athanasius left Tyre by boat, which was apparently at night and a daring escape, to present his case directly to Constantine. When he arrived at Constantinople he confronted Constantine on a road outside of the city and he agreed to see Athanasius at the court.¹² Constantine also summoned some of Athanasius' accusers to come from Tyre but apparently they were already on their way as both Athanasius and his accusers appeared shortly

¹¹ R. Wheeler Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1912), 151.

¹² Socrates, Chapter 34.

thereafter in the Imperial Court. While in the Court the bishops representing the Council of Tyre did not mention any of the charges brought at Tyre, but instead brought the new indictment that Athanasius had altered the grain shipments coming from Alexandria to Constantinople.

Athanasius protested that he was not a powerful man that could do such an act and the exchange between Constantine and Athanasius became enraged. The result was that Constantine banished Athanasius to the area that is now northern Europe. After the death of Constantine, his son Constantinus returned Athanasius to his see in Alexandria and stated that the real reason that Constantine had banished him was to protect him from his enemies.¹³ However, this is also disputed and Constantine's true motive is lost to history.

After this initial exile that lasted from 335 to 337, Athanasius was allowed to return to Alexandria but the harassment did not end there. Athanasius would continue to be accused because of his Nicene beliefs which would result in his being banished four more times and spending parts of his life in hiding. An example of one of these was the third banishment in 356 which was particularly harrowing as soldiers were sent to seize him at night in a church but he was incredibly able to escape by walking through the midst of them. Thus, throughout his life Athanasius clung to his orthodox beliefs against tremendous odds and through great suffering. He is credited with keeping the church in line with correct biblical beliefs through a dark period and was viewed by most in the subsequent centuries as a hero of the church.

This is the traditional view of Athanasius. However, in the last century and a half this outlook has been challenged. "In the last one hundred years the character and, therefore, the reliability of Athanasius as a witness and recorder of the theological disputes and ecclesiastical events of the

¹³ Duane W. H. Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 172.

fourth century have commanded considerable scrutiny and often, a high degree of criticism.”¹⁴ Thus, many authors in the last century have taken a dim view of Athanasius. They write that he used treachery and violence to keep control of the people and against his opponents. The most extreme, represented by Timothy Barnes, has even gone as far as to state that Athanasius was a gangster. This paper will seek to explore the reasons for this change in perspectives on Athanasius.

Modern authors tend to base their negative opinion of Athanasius on three pieces of evidence that were either not available before or have been examined to determine a new outlook. One of these new pieces of evidence is the writing of a fifth century church historian named Philostorgius. He wrote quite a negative perspective of the character and actions of Athanasius. However, upon closer review of his writing it is often understood to be a late Arian apology. This source will be explored to determine if it is indeed a cause to reevaluate the traditional view of Athanasius.

A second piece of evidence that the critics have made use of is the *London Papyrus 1914*. This document was a fourth century Egyptian letter discovered by H. I. Bell in the twentieth century and published in 1924. The letter will be examined to determine if it is useful in gaining a perspective on Athanasius. A third source that is depended upon to change the perspective on Athanasius is a festal oration given by Gregory Nazianzen some seven years after the death of Athanasius. In this oration, the critics believe that Gregory both eulogized and defended Athanasius. The charge then becomes that if Gregory was defending Athanasius then there must

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

have been some reason for it. The validity of this argument and the contents of this oration will be explored.

Most of the criticism and recent negative perspectives of Athanasius had their genesis with the German critical schools and it is important to explore the allegations against Athanasius to determine their validity. In fact, Eginhard Meijering traverses as far as to write that different theological backgrounds result in varying judgments on Athanasius.¹⁵ It appears that if one is able to cast a negative shadow on the character of Athanasius then it would be much easier to also question the truth of his theological claims. When the character of a person cannot be trusted then it is more difficult to trust in the validity of the constructs he espoused theologically. Thus, a study in which the evidence is explored, and a determination is made, is important in preserving or discrediting the traditional favorable sentiment on the character of Athanasius.

LIMITATIONS

This project will attempt to study the reasons for Athanasius' banishment in 335 and how any information that has been presented in recent decades might influence that determination. Relatedly, the evidence that modern critics use to allow a negative evaluation of Athanasius will also be explored. However, the scope of this study will only encompass the three sources that have been previously discussed--the history by Philostorgius, the *London Papyrus 1914* and the festal oration of Gregory Nazianzen. As well, only the evidence that was presented at the

¹⁵ Eginhard Meijering, "The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiographies," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 278.

Council of Tyre will be considered. The reasoning for this is that much of what happened in subsequent exiles was based on the original indictments brought in 335.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The most critical resources for a historical study of this nature are those that are nearest to the time of the events. There were several church histories that were written within a century of the events and have been preserved. The first of these is by Athanasius and is titled the *The History of the Arians*. Of course, this was written within the lifetime of Athanasius in the late 350s. Although *The History of the Arians* is the most direct history, at times the events are also related in such sources as his various *Festal Letters* and *Orations Against the Arians*. Another important history of the events of the fourth century was written by Sozomen in the early 440s. Sozomen was born in Gaza in about 400 and later was a lawyer in Constantinople when he wrote his history. Another important history from the time was written by Socrates. Socrates was born in Constantinople in about 380 and died in approximately 339 so that his history is slightly earlier than that of Sozomen. Another fifth century historian was Theodoret. He was born in Antioch in the early 390s and became the bishop of Cyrrhus. Theodoret wrote his history in about 350 so that all three of these histories were written within a few years of each other. These four ancient sources will be studied as well as any information that can be gleaned from the Arian sources.

In addition to studying the ancient sources several important and representative Christian historical writers will be examined from later time periods with an emphasis on the epoch of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Representative of the positive views of Athanasius prevalent in the nineteenth century was John Henry Cardinal Newman. Newman had

the most knowledge about Athanasius of anyone in the early 1800s and he had a favorable view of him.¹⁶ In addition, two representative and important church histories of the early twentieth century are by Lynn Harold Hough, written in 1906, and R. Wheeler Bush, written in 1912. These will be studied in detail to determine the prevailing attitude about Athanasius in this time period. As well, several church historians, who judge Athanasius favorably, from more recent times will also be examined.

Finally, several representative authors from the last century, when the negative persuasion on Athanasius began to form in force, will be represented in this study. It is important to note that a majority of the twentieth century negative evaluations of Athanasius had their foundation in the predominantly German critical school.¹⁷ The first modern author to approach the political career of Athanasius from a critical standpoint was Eduard Schwartz who wrote several critical histories on the life of Athanasius between 1904 and 1911. The work of Schwartz opened the debate for a negative outlook on Athanasius which was carried through the twentieth century by a variety of authors such as Hans-Georg Opitz and W. Schneemelcher. One of the modern authors writing from a neutral perspective on Athanasius is Khaled Anatolios who has written several books about different aspects of Athanasius in the past twenty years and he generally serves as a beneficial source. However, perhaps the most prolific current writer on the topic of Athanasius is Timothy Barnes. Barnes himself states that he has a negative view of Athanasius as he writes early on in one of his books: “This study starts from the presumption that Athanasius consistently misrepresented central facts about his episcopal career...”¹⁸ His works will be studied in detail and the validity of his claims scrutinized.

¹⁶ Arnold, 15.

¹⁷ Ibid, 13.

¹⁸ Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

THESIS STATEMENT

Athanasius is an important figure in church history and there is a great variety of opinions about him in recent times. The most important factor that influences the convictions about him is the individual's theological ideas. Thus, in recent years a new verdict on Athanasius has developed in which documents produced by his opponents are given greater weight. This paper will explore whether or not these new documents and opinions are valid in allowing a change in the traditional view of Athanasius as a hero of church history.

OUTLINE

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- II. Background
 - A. Early Life
 - B. Arian Conflict
 - i. Beginnings of the Arian Conflict
 - ii. Council of Nicaea
 - C. Early Ministry
 - i. Aftermath of Nicaea
 - ii. Athanasius as Bishop
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 - iv. Homoousios
 - v. Holy Spirit
 - vi. Doctrines of God
 - vii. Human Body

- viii. Christ's Power
- ix. Asceticism
- x. Role as Pastor
- xi. Role of Scripture

D. The Theological Impact of Athanasius

IV. Fourth Century Influences

A. Arius

- i. Arius' Background
- ii. Theological Views of Arius
- iii. The Writings of Arius
- iv. Death of Arius

B. Constantine and His Sons

- i. Constantine
- ii. Constantine and Church Policies
- iii. Personal Life
- iv. Constantinus
- v. Constans
- vi. Constantius

C. Other Influences

- i. Eusebius
- ii. The Meletians

V. Allegations Against Athanasius

A. Early Allegations

- B. The Start of the Trouble
 - i. Actions Against the Orthodox
 - ii. Ordination
- C. Allegations at Tyre
 - i. The Murder of Arsenius
 - ii. The Broken Chalice
 - iii. The Broken Chalice and the Council at Tyre
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 - v. Treason
 - vi. Illicit Affair
- D. General and Later Charges
 - i. Violence
 - ii. Diverting Corn Shipments
 - iii. Verbal Abuses
- E. Evaluation
- VI. Later Sources of Indictment
 - A. New Information
 - B. Philostorgius
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- iv. Alternate View
- v. Evaluation of LP 1914

D. Funeral Oration

- i. Gregory's Eulogy
- ii. Evaluation of Oration 21

E. New Information Evaluated

VII. Positive views of Athanasius

A. Historical View

B. Specific Groups

- i. Use of Athanasius Among Reformed Theologians
- ii. Athanasius in the Roman Catholic System

C. Athanasius Through the Centuries

- i. Eighteenth Century
- ii. Nineteenth Century
- iii. Early Twentieth Century
- iv. Recent Times

D. Specific Authors

- i. Khaled Anatolios
- ii. Duane W. H. Arnold

E. Positive Views Through Time

VIII. Negative Perspectives

A. Critical Views of Athanasius

B. Background

- i. Tübingen School
- ii. Otto Seeck
- iii. Eduard Schwartz and Followers

C. Recent Authors

- i. David M. Gwynn
- ii. R. P. C. Hanson
- iii. Frances Young
- iv. William Rusch
- v. The Perspective of Barnes

D. Athanasius as a Gangster

E. Inadequate Argument

IX. Evaluation

A. Multiple Outlooks

B. Reasoning for the Attacks

C. Accomplishments

D. Character Traits

E. Lessons from Athanasius

F. A Life Well-Lived

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CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND OF ATHANASIUS

AN INFLUENTIAL FIGURE

The influence that Athanasius had on the church of the fourth century is difficult to fathom. His impact on the church was great and all the more amazing when one considers that he most likely came from humble origins. Ancient sources divulge that he was small in stature, inclined to stoop, had aquiline features with auburn hair and beard.¹⁹ This is certainly not the image of what one would think of as a hero but he is considered to be one both by people of his own time and those living throughout the subsequent centuries. This chapter will seek to explore the major points of Athanasius' life and his impact on the church.

EARLY LIFE

The most likely date of Athanasius' birth is AD 296.²⁰ However, this date is widely disputed with some proffering an earlier date due to the fact that Athanasius had penned brilliant and lasting works by 319. However, other critics would desire to opt for a later date because they want to agree with the opponents of the time that said that Athanasius had not reached the minimum age requirement of thirty by the time he became bishop of Alexandria in 328. Despite the wrangling for both an earlier and later date it seems most likely that Athanasius was born somewhere close to 296.

¹⁹ R. Wheeler Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1912), 61-62.

²⁰ Thomas Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1. Many accept 296 as the most likely date for his birth. However, there are others that prefer a later date closer to 300. An interesting point in this debate is that if he was not born until 300 then he was not of the proper age of thirty when he became bishop. His being under the age of thirty is the stance that many of his opponents stood upon during the early years of his ministry.

Many believe that Athanasius was from a family of Greek origins.²¹ However, there is little reliable information about his childhood.²² He seems to have grown up in relative obscurity at the time but there are some later sources of information. One source about his childhood was written in the tenth century and so, of course, the reliability is in question. Thus, much of the information about his early years may be merely legend, but it is the best source that can be obtained. The tenth century source discloses that Athanasius' mother was a wealthy woman who worshipped idols. However, Athanasius rebutted this by stating that he came from a poor family. In spite of the controversy here it does seem clear that at some point in his childhood his mother became a Christian convert and both she and Athanasius were baptized at the same time.²³ Bush believed that Athanasius' parents were poor and pious Christians who wanted a good education for their son.²⁴

However, a facet of the formative years of Athanasius that can be known with more certainty is his relationship with Bishop Alexander. He took the young boy into his home and trained him. The narrative of how they met is of interest, even if it is fanciful. Tradition intimates that Athanasius and some other children were playing a game close to the shore which was in a place where Bishop Alexander could see them. The basis of the game was that the children were each role playing a certain office in the church and the role of Athanasius was bishop. Alexander was so impressed with the children that he called for them. Subsequently, he educated all of them,

²¹ Lynn Harold Hough, *Athanasius the Hero* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1906), 36.

²² Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, 1. Little is known about Athanasius' family although he is believed to be from Alexandria originally. At one point later in life he speaks of an aunt. He also hid in the family tomb during one of his exiles. Thus, it is surmised that he is from the Alexandria area although there is little concrete information about him before his interaction with Alexander.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 18.

but it is believed that he gave special attention to Athanasius.²⁵ In this way Athanasius had a tremendous boon in his young life as he came under the tutelage and influence of the bishop.

Athanasius grew up during a time when the church was travailing through great persecution. A major persecution occurred in 303 under Maximian, but Athanasius does not remember this persecution.²⁶ This also lends credence to the notion that he was not born before 296 as he would have certainly remembered the persecution if he had been older. However, Athanasius does remember the persecution of 311 under Maximian II and he had even been taught by some of the Christians that were martyred during that persecution.²⁷ Thus, it seems that having observed the suffering and martyrdom of Christian friends created a willingness in him to suffer for the truth when the time inevitably came. As well, the fact that Athanasius did not remember the persecution in 303 but did remember the persecution of 311 lends substance to the idea that he was born in 296.

From an early age, it was obvious that Athanasius had a tremendous aptitude and was well served by being under the special care of the bishop. In his early years, he exhibited being morally and intellectually superior to others of his own age. Moreover, it is believed that he wrote two great works that are still used today-*Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation*-by the time he was in his early twenties. He was a leading deacon under Bishop Alexander by the time he was in his mid-twenties. Hough writes of these early promotions: “So when we find Athanasius ordained deacon and made chief of the deacons of Alexandria, we are to think of his

²⁵ Ibid., 20-21. Little is known of Bishop Alexander’s early life but he was believed to have been born in about 250 in Alexandria. As a priest he suffered persecution under Galerius and Maximinus. He became bishop in 313 when the previous bishop, Achillas, needed to be replaced. Alexander is believed to have had a quiet and calm nature that desired to avoid conflict.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

promotion, not as the result of clever machinations on the part of an ambitious young ecclesiastic, but the deserved reward of faithful service, and the recognition of unusual ability.”²⁸

ARIAN CONFLICT

Beginnings of the Arian Conflict

One of the factors that would come to dominate the young life of Athanasius was the controversy that was brewing between Arius and Bishop Alexander. Arius had originally been ordained as a priest by Bishop Peter but Peter later excommunicated him. Legend divulges that Bishop Peter was warned in a vision from heaven not to readmit Arius.²⁹ Thus, Bishop Peter believed that Arius would eventually cause schism in the church and excommunicated him. Of course, Peter was correct and one of the greatest schisms ever known in the church developed around the teachings of Arius.

The basis of the Arian conflict was in the view of the nature of Christ. Bishop Alexander espoused and supported the teaching that Jesus had always been the Son and that God had always been the Father. Alexander also believed that Jesus was the exact representation of the Father and that they were of the same essence. In contrast, Arius felt that there was somehow a conflict with the monotheistic idea in this teaching. “Arius saw his bishop’s teaching as implying two ultimate principles in the universe, and he taught that Alexander compromised the

²⁸ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 40. Hough also intimates his belief that Athanasius was subject to fleshly temptations as a youth because he grew up in a modern and secular city like Alexandria. Also, because he was raised under Bishop Alexander he believes that he may have been tempted to be prideful and to lose the true sense of Christian humility. Hough indicates that because Athanasius wrote these great theological works at a young age it is part of the proof that he was able to avoid these pitfalls.

²⁹ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 43.

biblical insistence on the Father being alone God and alone immortal.”³⁰ Thus, Arius presented the alternate idea that Jesus was a created being and was not of the same essence as the Father. These two ideas were different at their core and their proponents became dogmatic enough to have open conflict.

The vision that Peter had been given did not change the fate of Arius for an extended period of time. Despite being excommunicated by Bishop Peter, Arius was reinstated by the next bishop, Achillas, after Peter was martyred.³¹ Thus, by 313 Arius had established himself as a popular preacher at the Church of Baucalis which was situated near the harbor.³² It seems that when Alexander first became bishop that he held Arius in high regard because he perceived him to be a knowledgeable man.³³ However, additional stress was added to the situation as Arius had a possibility of being the next Bishop of Alexandria and he most likely was bitter towards Alexander.³⁴ Moreover, Arius began to seek opportunities to have conflict with Alexander.³⁵ When Arius understood that Alexander was a man of great character and that he could not bring charges in this way he then resolved to oppose the doctrines of Alexander.³⁶ When the trouble first began over Arius’ teaching, Bishop Alexander was actually reluctant to act quickly.³⁷ It does appear that Arius attempted to present inclinations of a fortified front with his bishop but still refused to recant his teachings.³⁸ In time, however, Alexander perceived that Arius and his

³⁰ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

³¹ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 15.

³² Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

³³ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 15.

³⁴ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 43. However, Philostorgius, a fifth century historian to be discussed in some detail later, states that Arius revealed humility at this time and that he willingly gave his votes for bishop to Alexander.

³⁵ Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 15.

³⁸ Franz Dunzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2007), 46.

instruction were a liability to the doctrine of the church and, thus, he decided to act on the situation. After two councils of the local clergy had met Alexander sided against Arius.³⁹ Arius refused to accept the other position and Alexander rejected him from fellowship along with all those who sided with him. Those who supported Arius varied in their reasoning with some of them supporting him because they believed in his doctrine and some supporting him because they perceived that he had been unjustly excommunicated.⁴⁰ Whatever the case, Arius refused to allow the conflict to dissolve and it became such a distraction that Emperor Constantine called for a church council to be convened at Nicaea with the matter to be one of the important topics decided upon.⁴¹ Athanasius was involved in the conflict from the beginning as he supported the orthodox position of his bishop, but he was to become even more of a primary figure as the conflict grew in scope and caught the attention of the entire Roman Empire.

Council of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea was important both for the decision the church at large would declare and for Athanasius personally as he became a prominent spokesman for the orthodox movement. Emperor Constantine was heavily involved at Nicaea as he both called for the council and attended. However, how much influence Constantine actually had on the outcomes has been debated for centuries. Both the supporters of Alexander, or the orthodox, and the Arian faction believed, or at least espoused to believe, that they were supporting the true teachings of Christianity. The bishops that attended did not merely want to include Scripture in their

³⁹ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicaea* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 69.

decisions, but they desired to unfold explicitly that which was implicit. Thusly, when trying to comprehend the importance of the Council of Nicaea it needs to be understood that it was the first time in centuries that the church as a whole had undertaken the task of creating a statement of faith and that Athanasius was an integral part of this.

The council convened on May 20, 325 with about the 230 bishops attending.⁴² The majority of the bishops that were present came from the east, but there were some, possibly five or six, that came from the west.⁴³ However, these numbers are in dispute as Bush states that there were 318 bishops present with 310 being from the east and eight from the west.⁴⁴ Those attending probably had no foreshadowing that it would come to be looked at as a turning point in history by future generations. “What made the council such an extraordinarily important turning point was not just the doctrinal question at stake but the way in which political and social forces combined with the critical theological issue.”⁴⁵ Moreover, for three reasons the church would be forever changed after this council—the novel status of the church that would spur an emperor to call a church council, the theological issues in question and the new feature of theological decisions being combined with political power.

The Council of Nicaea also was notable because the various participants had different agendas. To begin with, the primary goal of Constantine was to find stability. He believed embracing Christianity could produce unity in the empire and he wrote of his reasons for the council: “My design then was, first to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity (that is, to clarify doctrine for

⁴² Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 48.

⁴³ Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 65.

⁴⁴ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 57.

⁴⁵ Noll, *Turning Points*, 48.

the sake of the church); and second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease (that is, to end religious strife for the sake of the empire.)”⁴⁶ Secondly, those who followed Bishop Alexander desired to settle the orthodox beliefs concerning Christ in a definitive way. Thirdly, the Arians were pushing for their beliefs about the deity of Christ to be legitimized as they believed it to be the correct view. Thus, the outcomes of the council that each party would see as a success did not coincide with one another. This, in turn, led to a situation that was ripe for conflict and that is exactly what occurred as the council ended, after much heated arguing, with Arius, and his followers who would not recant, being condemned. Constantine condemned any books that Arius had written to be destroyed and declared that he and his followers were ungodly.⁴⁷ Therefore, the idea that the Son was full deity and eternally existent became the official position of the church. One thing that also became clear during the council was that Athanasius emerged as a leader and one of the most important proponents of the orthodox position.⁴⁸

EARLY MINISTRY

Aftermath of Nicaea

Directly following the council, Bishop Alexander, Athanasius and the other orthodox believers were hoping for a time of peace that would be free from religious wrangling. For a short period this seemed like a possibility, but Arius and his constituents would not allow the controversy to end. However, they were doing this at their own peril as Constantine declared

⁴⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁷ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Chapter 17.

that those who refused to burn Arius' books should receive the death penalty and that those who spoke well of him would be punished.⁴⁹

One of the most important advocates of Arius was Eusebius. He was so prevalent because he was politically connected and used political intrigue and relationships to promote Arian views. Arius also had help from Constantia, who was Constantine's sister.⁵⁰ She had a presbyter working in her home who was an Arian and she held him in high esteem. This man would speak to Constantia about why he believed the condemnation of Arius was unjust. When Constantia died she recommended the presbyter to Constantine and the presbyter was also able to influence him.⁵¹ Therefore, the result of this interaction was that Constantine wrote Arius an amiable letter and requested his presence. Subsequently, when he came to see him he asked Arius if he would agree to the Nicene Creed.⁵² Arius assented that he would and he was allowed to return to Alexandria. Thus, with Arius being back in Alexandria, and now having some measure of political contact, it would lead to difficult times for those who supported the Nicene Creed.

Athanasius as Bishop

Bishop Alexander died in 328 and Athanasius was not present in Alexandria at the time. However, Bishop Alexander had made it clear that he wanted Athanasius to succeed him as bishop. This was a customary practice as each bishop was expected to recommend someone who would replace them after their death. In addition to Alexander, the laity of Alexandria also wanted Athanasius to be the next bishop as they referred to him as 'the good,' 'the pious' and

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Socrates, Chapter 25.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

‘one of the ascetics.’⁵³ It appears that the most likely reason that Athanasius was not in Alexandria was because he did not desire to be appointed the new bishop.⁵⁴ In fact, Sozomen actually states that Athanasius sought to decline being appointed bishop by flight.⁵⁵ As well, Apolinarius writes that Bishop Alexander was aware that Athanasius did not desire to enter the theological conflict. Apolinarius quotes him as saying: “O Athanasius, you think to escape, but you will not escape.”⁵⁶ Thus, an interesting aspect of Athanasius’ character is revealed. It is known that he enjoyed the ascetic life and that he, also, did not desire to be a part of the growing theological conflict. However, once he did enter the fray he was a formidable opponent and was willing to suffer for what he deemed to be the true doctrine of the church. In spite of his probable desire to not become bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius accepted the new post.

However, those that did not agree with the Nicene Creed perceived, correctly as it turns out, that Athanasius would be a strong advocate against Arianism and, thus, they attempted to hinder him from becoming bishop. There were two ways that his opponents tried to blockade him from becoming bishop. The first was to claim that Athanasius was not yet thirty years old and, therefore, below the legal age to become bishop. However, it is credible that Athanasius was born in 296 and, thusly, he would have been of sufficient age. A second charge that they tried to bring against him is that he had not been properly elected by enough bishops. One of the stories regarding his ordination is that seven bishops had secretly ordained him and another fanciful tale was that he had lured two bishops into a church and then proceeded to force them to ordain

⁵³ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 60.

⁵⁴ Bush, *St Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 80. There are two accounts of why Athanasius was not present when Alexander died. The first is that he had been sent by Alexander to the Emperor’s Court in order that he might complete the transaction of some type of special mission. The second is that Athanasius intentionally left the city when Alexander became very ill because he wanted to avoid being the next bishop.

⁵⁵ Sozomen, Book II, Chapter 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

him.⁵⁷ Of course, the question is then if he had to be that dishonest to force two other bishops to ordain him against their will, then why not simply lie and say that he had been ordained when he had not. One major weakness that can be ascertained in these charges is that they are in conflict with one another. Furthermore, these charges can be discarded because the Egyptian bishops formally gave testimony to the fact that a majority of them had ordained Athanasius as the next bishop and that they had publicly done this in front of the laity of Alexandria.⁵⁸

Therefore, despite his opponents' efforts and his own unwillingness, the desires of Alexander and the laity prevailed and Athanasius became the next bishop of Alexandria in 328. "For a brief moment he was allowed, quietly and without molestation, to carry out the work which he had so much at heart, namely, the evangelization of the heathen, and the edification of the Christian Church."⁵⁹ However, this time of reprieve was not to last as the enemy forces were not content to have their views taken out of contention.

Attacks by the Arians

The Arians, being led by Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, began to work against those who were especially strong in the Nicene position and within a couple of years ten of them were exiled.⁶⁰ It is at this point that the Arian movement becomes as much led by Eusebius as by Arius. An example of one of the bishops that they besieged was Bishop Eustathius of Antioch. Antioch was an important church and the Arians desired to infiltrate there, but Eustathius was a

⁵⁷ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

⁵⁸ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 81. Gibbon states concerning this that it is unlikely that the bishops would attest that the people desired, and even openly prayed, for Athanasius to be the next bishop if it were not a matter that was known to be true by all those involved.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁰ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 64.

strong proponent of the Nicene Creed. Theodoret states that Eusebius eliminated the problem by bribing a woman to say that her baby was that of Bishop Eustathius.⁶¹ The result of these false charges were that Eustathius was deposed and replaced in Antioch by an Anti-Nicene bishop.⁶² Consequently, the orthodox in Antioch then left the official church of Antioch and formed alternate assemblies among themselves where they could worship how they saw fit. Moreover, in a just a few short years the Arian party had labored behind the scenes through personal relationships with Constantine and his family to remove some of the strongest advocates of the Nicene faith.

The next target for the Arians was a popular, pious and powerful young bishop of an important church named Athanasius. In addition, to his Nicene beliefs the Arians were also strongly opposed to Athanasius because he would not allow Arius to be received back into the Alexandrian church. For Athanasius, it would be a breach of his conscience to allow a bishop into fellowship when he knew the man did not accept the orthodox faith and desired to teach heretical ideas. Athanasius viewed himself as the one that was responsible for protecting the congregation in Alexandria from false teachings. Eusebius had such an influence on the situation that he persuaded Constantine to command Athanasius to receive Arius into communion. However, in spite of these threats, Athanasius still refused.

Athanasius did not proceed into the situation blindly for he knew what had happened to other Nicene bishops who refused to compromise. As well, he was personally warned. Eusebius, a man of influence in the imperial court, wrote to Athanasius and said that he should receive Arius

⁶¹ Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 20.

⁶² Ibid., Chapter 21.

into communion and that if he refused there would be tremendous consequences.⁶³ However, his opponents had a difficulty in that Athanasius' theological opinions were impeccable and so they had to devise another avenue. Hough wrote of this: "There could be no thought of attacking his theological opinions. He must be involved in difficulty with the emperor. He must be accused of personal misdoings, and so humiliated and overthrown."⁶⁴ The first step in this plan was to find people in Alexandria who would be willing to falsely testify against him. They found this in the Meletian party.

The Meletians were a rival group of bishops that had emerged in Egypt some twenty years prior. The major contention stemmed from allowing bishops who had denied the faith during persecution to return to fellowship. The Meletians believed they should not be forgiven and received back and, therefore, they began to ordain their own clergy and form another church. More about the Meletians will be discussed later, but it is pertinent now to understand that they were rivals of the recognized church who were willing to sabotage it. Moreover, Eusebius and his followers proffered bribes to Meletians to lie against Athanasius. Thus, Athanasius, whose chief desire was to lead the people into truth, became the subject of an assault by rival factions.

⁶³ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 65. Hough intimates his idea that the threats were not so much found in the letter but rather the carrier of the letter made threats. This, of course, would be more in line with the covert nature of the enemy as they generally tried to not leave any traces of their true motivations. As well, Hough remarks that when the threats were made it would have been easy for Athanasius to have relented and allowed Arius back into communion by giving the reason that the peace of the Church was important. However, Athanasius would not allow himself to be consoled with allowing heresy to grow unchecked simply because it would be easier for him personally.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Charges Against Athanasius

The Arian and Meletian factions began to bring allegations against Athanasius shortly after he had been warned to allow Arius to take communion. As well, he made a difference between those he considered to be schismatics and those he considered to be heretics.⁶⁵ He thought of the Meletians as schismatics and commanded they keep communion in a separate place while he believed the Arians to be heretics and they were not allowed to practice communion with the church.⁶⁶ Thus, for his refusal to compromise Athanasius came under direct attack. The first of the accusations was delivered by three Meletian bishops directly into Constantine's court as they alleged that Athanasius had levied a tax upon Egypt to pay for church expenses.⁶⁷ However, there were two Alexandrian bishops in the court at the time and they were able to disprove the allegations.⁶⁸ The two men from Alexandria who proved the charge to be a fabrication were Alypius and Macarius, the latter of which would prove a principle figure in another scandal.⁶⁹

Athanasius was summoned to come to court by Constantine but when he arrived there was a different allegation that required a response.⁷⁰ The current charge that needed an answer was that Athanasius had sent a chest full of gold to a man named Philumenus who was plotting treason against Constantine.⁷¹ Constantine investigated these claims and found them to be untrue and subsequently exonerated Athanasius.⁷² However, his opponents did not halt after these

⁶⁵ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 126.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 67.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Socrates, Chapter 27. Little is known about Alypius, but Macarius would figure quite prominently in a later allegation. Ischyras alleged Macarius had come into his church and broke a sacred chalice. More about this allegation will be discussed in the chapter that covers the charges against Athanasius.

⁷⁰ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 67.

⁷¹ Socrates, Chapter 27.

⁷² Ibid.

charges had been proven slanderous as they continued to bring novel allegations. The other charges included that Athanasius had ordered Macarius to break the chalice of a priest named Ischyras who was operating outside of the official church, that he had ordered a man named Arsenius to be murdered and had severed his hand to use in magic incantations and that Athanasius had taken a woman's virginity.⁷³ These charges will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. Suffice to say at this point that both Ischyras and Arsenius were promised favors for their help and each of the charges were eventually proven false.

In light of this, Constantine called for a council to be held in Caesarea to discuss all of the charges.⁷⁴ However, Athanasius distrusted the ones who were slated to try his case and so he refused to attend. As well, this was a very stressful time for Athanasius as numerous false accusations were being brought and he suffered a long illness with the cause being the weight from these adversarial barrages.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this extended illness would be merely one of the many hardships that Athanasius would endure for his remaining true to the Nicene faith.

The adversaries continually petitioned Constantine over these matters and they would not be refused so Constantine finally relented and called for another council to be held at Tyre. Athanasius was commanded to be in attendance and was informed that if he attempted to refuse he would be transported there involuntarily.⁷⁶ The Council of Tyre convened in 335 with between 110 and 150 bishops attending.⁷⁷ In 335 there were approximately 90 to 100 bishops in Egypt and Libya and Athanasius chose 47 of them to attend the council with him.⁷⁸ Thus, at the

⁷³ Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 28.

⁷⁴ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 70.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁶ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 101.

⁷⁷ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 153.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

Council of Tyre Athanasius and his supporters were heavily outnumbered.⁷⁹ It is of interest that only ten years after Nicaea that the church had been divided in this manner. Those who were from the east were expected to vote that Athanasius was guilty of the charges and those from Egypt and Libya were anticipated to vote that he was not guilty. Thus, the idea of allegations being false or honest was more a construct of the individual's theological leanings and geographic position rather than any real evaluation about the verity of the charges.

The Council of Tyre and Results

As the meeting of the council progressed Athanasius was called upon to defend himself and he adequately did so against each charge. However, as connoted before, the majority of the constituents desired to see him deposed so at a certain point Athanasius began to understand that the council would decide against him regardless of the truth of the evidence. At one point in the meeting Athanasius even had to flee for his very life.⁸⁰ The council decided that they would send a delegation to the Mareotis, which was the very place of the supposed infraction, to investigate the affair of the smashed chalice.⁸¹ However, Athanasius did not trust that this delegation would truly explore the facts.⁸² As well, Athanasius requested that bishops who were hostile to him not be sent but Dionysius sent the very ones that Athanasius desired to have excluded.⁸³ Therefore, he departed in secrecy, and most likely by night, with a group of five of his bishops. As well, Athanasius chronicles this journey as a daring escape by boat under the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁰ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 71.

⁸¹ Ibid., 72.

⁸² Socrates, Chapter 31.

⁸³ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 158.

cover of darkness from the harbor of Tyre. This was the first of several brave and adventuresome escapes that Athanasius would have as he absconded imperial and Arian forces.

After Athanasius made his daring escape he traveled to Constantinople to plead his case before Constantine. There is an interesting tale as to how he first made contact with Constantine when he arrived. It seems that Constantine was returning from a journey on his horse and that a lone figure blocked the path of his entourage.⁸⁴ Constantine did not recognize Athanasius as he looked so disheveled and travel worn. However, when he finally perceived that it was, in fact, Athanasius he refused to grant him a meeting but Athanasius revealed the resilience in his personality and persisted until he was permitted a meeting.

The bishops that had been meeting at Tyre must have perceived that this was a possibility as they also traveled to Constantinople. When they arrived they divulged that, just as Athanasius had predicted, the Council of Tyre had decided to depose him. As well, the majority of the delegates to the Council of Tyre declared the Arians and Meletians to be orthodox and then left for a church council in Jerusalem.⁸⁵ The fact that the same church council would both condemn Athanasius and decide to declare the Arians orthodox in the same meeting reiterates the idea that the council was more about doctrinal debates than whether Athanasius was actually guilty of the allegations. It appears that the opponents would do anything to destroy the Nicene faith and that they were not above using bogus accusations against the leading Nicene bishops.

It is also a very interesting story of what happened next as the two parties were before Constantine. First of all, Constantine did not accept the findings of the Council of Tyre and he set aside Athanasius' condemnation on November 6, 335. However, the Eusebians would not

⁸⁴ Socrates, Chapter 34.

⁸⁵ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 106.

allow the situation to rest dormant and they both brought a new charge and would not allow Athanasius to discuss the original charges from Tyre that had been proven fictitious.⁸⁶ This new charge involved Athanasius halting the grain shipments from Egypt to Constantinople and this was considered treason.⁸⁷ However, Athanasius denied that he had stopped the grain shipments and said that, furthermore, he was a poor man who did not have the power to halt them. When Athanasius and Constantine were discussing the grain shipments allegations they became angry with one another and the argument escalated.⁸⁸ The confrontation terminated with Athanasius invoking the judgment of God and saying that God would judge between him and Constantine.⁸⁹ Constantine responded by banishing Athanasius to Treves, which is in modern day Belgium. The result of this deposition was that there were riots by the common people in the streets of Alexandria.⁹⁰ This incident reveals two aspects of Athanasius' character. One is that he did have a temper. The other is that Athanasius believed in divine judgment as he invoked the judgment of God in the situation and, therefore, it is unlikely that he was an evil man as he himself would fear divine retribution. As well, the reaction of the Alexandrians reveals that he was a beloved leader.

⁸⁶ Socrates, Chapter 35.

⁸⁷ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 169. It is uncertain if Athanasius was able to give an answer to this charge. When Athanasius wrote about this incident it was some twenty years later and he stated that Constantine was quickly angered but not if he was allowed to present a defense to this charge.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 13.

EXILES

First Exile and Return

Athanasius spent two years in Treves and it appears that these were relatively calm years. Of course, Athanasius desired to be with his congregation in Alexandria but if one had to be banished then Treves was an agreeable place. As well, it may have been beneficial for him to have a reprieve from the constant assaults by his enemies. Treves itself was a tranquil city with abundant beautiful scenery. Hough writes of these years: “Better to be an exile in Gaul than a false bishop seated in full power in Alexandria.”⁹¹ Another important aspect of the city is that Constantinus, Constantine’s oldest son, resided there and he believed in the Nicene faith. The friendship that was forged with Constantinus would be beneficial for Athanasius. Athanasius’ exile in Treves was shortened when Constantine died in 337.

The three sons of Constantine now needed to decide the fate of those who remained in exile at their father’s command. The three met in Viminacium in 338 and decided that Athanasius should be returned to Alexandria.⁹² The day that Athanasius returned to Alexandria in 338 the clergy declared it to be the most jubilant day of their lives and, afterwards, it was observed as an annual festival.⁹³ However, not everyone was pleased at his return and the Eusebians had two immediate charges. One was that Athanasius had misappropriated cornmeal that was intended to

⁹¹ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 74.

⁹² Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 114. It is also known that Constantinus wrote to the Alexandrian Church that his intention was to send Athanasius back. He also expressed that he had a high opinion of Athanasius’ character as while he was in Treves he observed that Athanasius trusted in help to come from God and endured suffering with little complaint.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

aid widows and the other was that he had instigated bloodshed on the day of this return.

Athanasius was able to disprove both of these allegations.⁹⁴

Concerning the first exile to Treves there was also a question about the authentic reason for it. Of course, the most obvious idea is that Constantine was angry with Athanasius in light of their confrontation and so banished him for this reason. Another possibility is that Constantine actually believed that Athanasius was guilty of the accusations brought against him and for that reason he banished him. A third potential reason is that Athanasius was banished in order to restore unity to the church as Constantine knew that Athanasius would never accept Arius into communion. Sozomen and Socrates both give credence to this third perspective.⁹⁵ However, a fourth possibility also receives support in the ancient writings. This fourth prospective idea is that Constantine sent Athanasius to Treves to guard him from his enemies. Theodoret wrote that Constantine stated that Athanasius was sent to Treves to protect him.⁹⁶ It complicates the matter further when it is recognized that Sozomen quotes a letter that stated that Constantine sent him to Treves to protect him. Constantine's motivations seem to be lost in history. However, it is more certain that Constantine intended for the exile to be temporary.⁹⁷ One reason for believing this intention is because the see remained vacant for the duration of Athanasius' exile.⁹⁸ As well, when the Meletian leader, John Arcaph, assumed being the leading bishop in Alexandria he was also banished by Constantine.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁹⁵ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 171. Sozomen also states that Constantine may not have truly believed that Athanasius had been guilty of wrongdoing.

⁹⁶ Theodoret, Book 2, Chapter 1.

⁹⁷ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 172.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 172.

The Roman Exile

Although Athanasius was well received by the laity of Alexandria and the clergy of Egypt, his enemies were persistent and he was soon banished once again. Of the three sons of Constantine, Constantius was entrusted with the care of the eastern part of the Empire and he was responsible for his exile. One of the putative reasons for his exile was brought by Eusebius who charged that Athanasius had been restored by a civil authority but had been expelled by the Church Council of Tyre and, therefore, his restoration was invalid.⁹⁹ When the opposition came to depose Athanasius they brought a plentitude of soldiers and he voluntarily left for the safety of the people.¹⁰⁰ Before he left Athanasius assembled the people in a church at night and, with soldiers waiting to come for him, he slipped out and left for Rome just as the congregation sung a final hymn.¹⁰¹ Thus, on this occasion of his exile Athanasius spent his time in Rome and was befriended by Julius, the Bishop of Rome.¹⁰²

While Athanasius was in exile, returning to Alexandria for a brief time and subsequently being banished again, there were other important occurrences with the characters in this drama. First of all, Arius died during this time and the details of his death are legendary. It seems that, with the aid of Constantine and Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius was finally going to have an opportunity to receive communion in the orthodox church and this was to transpire in

⁹⁹ Bush, *St Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 117. Bush remarked: "The Eusebians urgently asserted that Athanasius had violated the ecclesiastical law by being restored to his diocese by the civil power, when he had been expelled by a decree of the Council of Tyre. It seems strange and almost unaccountable, that men who had depended so greatly on the Imperial authority and on the support of the State, should bring forward such an accusation against Athanasius." It does seem strange indeed. This goes to further reveal the changing landscape of ecclesiastical politics in the early fourth century. At some points bishops wanted to appeal to the secular authority but when that did not benefit their cause they would alter their course and desire that the ecclesiastical councils should be followed rather than the secular.

¹⁰⁰ Sozomen, Book 3, Chapter 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 122.

Constantinople. However, Alexander, who was the bishop of Constantinople, supported the Nicene Creed and did not desire to admit Arius into fellowship.¹⁰³ Eusebius of Nicomedia threatened him with exile if he did not allow Arius into fellowship.¹⁰⁴ Tradition intimates that Alexander fasted for days and petitioned God that if Arius was not being truthful in accepting the Nicene Creed that he should die. At the very time that he was walking to receive communion Arius died in a sudden and violent method as it is said that his bowels spilled out of him.¹⁰⁵ Constantine was so affected by the violent and sudden death of Arius that he came to believe even more strongly in the Nicene faith.¹⁰⁶ Another noteworthy event of this period was that Eusebius became bishop of Constantinople after the death of Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, in 337. Thus, an already powerful Eusebius now had an even more influential position and he utilized this to influence both Constantine and his second son Constantius, who reigned from Constantinople. Indeed, Eusebius was so intimate with Constantine that he baptized him shortly before his death.

It is also of interest that during this second exile that Athanasius was officially replaced as bishop. The first man to potentially attain the see was a man named Pistus, but he was soon discredited based on his Arian views.¹⁰⁷ The second potential replacement for Athanasius was a man named Eusebius who would eventually become the Bishop of Emesa. However, he wisely perceived how the laity of Alexandria admired Athanasius and so he declined to accept the position.¹⁰⁸ Finally, Gregory of Cappadocia became the next bishop in March of 339.

Moreover, Gregory proved to be an enemy to those of the Nicene faith. As well, the Eusebians

¹⁰³ Socrates, Chapter 37.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Chapter 38.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 16.

urged Gregory to persecute those of the Nicene faith and to seize their property.¹⁰⁹ Sadly, during this time Bishop Potammon was beaten in such a severe fashion that he never recovered.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, Athanasius was in Rome and he and Bishop Julius were laboring to get Athanasius back to Alexandria and to defend the Nicene faith. Bishop Julius desired to have a synod at Rome that would be recognized by the eastern churches. The synod was held in Rome in 341 and it did decide to reinstate Athanasius.¹¹¹ However, the eastern bishops both refused to attend and to accept their declaration. With progress impeded between the eastern and western portions of the church, Constans, Constantine's third son and now ruler of the western empire following the death of Constantinus in 340, proclaimed a church council at Sardica in 343.¹¹² As the date for this council approached it was evident that the church was divided with the west being for Athanasius and the east being against him.¹¹³ As well, during the time when these plans were taking place the Arian cause lost one of its most effective proponents as Eusebius died.¹¹⁴

About 170 bishops met at the Council of Sardica near the end of 343 with the majority of them being from the western church.¹¹⁵ The council was presided by Hosius, the bishop of Cordova, who had also presided over Nicaea and was originally sent by Constantine to investigate the conflict between Bishop Alexander and Arius. Hosius was a widely respected figure in the church. It seems that at some point the Eusebian faction, probably understanding

¹⁰⁹ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 123.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 4. However, this synod became complicated because it also supported Marcellus. Those in the eastern churches considered Marcellus to be too far in the other direction and shading dangerously close to Sabellianism. Moreover, the east then demanded that Athanasius' condemnation at Tyre be upheld.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 95.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 134.

that they were outnumbered, left the council. The results of the council were that they found in favor of Athanasius and reversed the decision that had been made at the Council of Tyre.¹¹⁶ Thus, Athanasius and other Nicene bishops were found innocent at the Council of Sardica.¹¹⁷ Of course, this did not mend the rift that existed between Nicene and Arian bishops, but a shocking event was about to surface that would capture the attention of Constantius.¹¹⁸ In 344 it was manifest that the bishop of Antioch, Stephen, was guilty of a diabolical plot against another aged bishop, Euphrates of Cologne, who was visiting in his city with the intention being to slander his name.¹¹⁹ This incident began to turn the mind of Constantius towards allowing Athanasius to return as he began to understand the extremes of deceitful actions of which the Anti-Nicene faction was capable.¹²⁰ The two had a meeting and it went well so that Constantius dismissed the orders to persecute those of the Nicene faith in Alexandria and removed the orders to behead Athanasius if he was discovered near the city.¹²¹ As well, the bishop that had replaced Athanasius, Gregory, died in 345.¹²² Thus, this juncture in time seemed to be ripe for Athanasius to return to Alexandria and he did so in 346. On his way to return after this extended exile Athanasius bid farewell to Bishop Julius and the church at Rome, traveled to present greetings to Constans as emperor of the west and finally visited Constantius as prelate in the east. The exchange between Constantius and Athanasius was memorable as Bright describes when Athanasius asked to confront his accusers: “Constantius, probably much embarrassed, assured

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, Book 3, Chapter 17.

¹¹⁸ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 4.

¹¹⁹ William Bright, *Introduction to the Historical Writings of St. Athanasius* (London: Oxford University Press, 1881), xxxiv. Euphrates bishop of Cologne had come to visit Antioch. One night bishop Stephen of Antioch hired a prostitute to go into the room of the aged bishop. However, the prostitute had some scruples and when she saw that the victim was an aged and innocent bishop she left and told others about the plot that Stephen had instigated. The result was that Stephen was deposed from his see.

¹²⁰ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 139.

¹²¹ Bright, *Introduction to the Historical Writings of St. Athanasius*, xxxiv.

¹²² Ibid.

him that those charges were buried in oblivion, and called God to witness that he would never again give credit to them.”¹²³ In spite of calling on God in his oath, Constantius would come to break this promise. Also, it should be noted that both bishops from the east and west tended to decide on Athanasius’ fate based on their theological leanings rather any true desire to determine his guilt or innocence in the allegations.

The Quiet Between Exiles

Athanasius returned to Alexandria with great fanfare. The laity and clergy alike were again pleased at his rejoinder. In this interval Athanasius was given ten years to share with his congregants. Gregory, to be discussed later, intimates that when Athanasius returned to his duties as bishop that he was kind towards all of his former opponents.¹²⁴ As well, he even allowed Arsenius, who had maliciously accused him of murder, to be a bishop.¹²⁵ It is at points in his life such as this, when Athanasius exhibits grace to others, that one can discern the genuine heart of the man. Moreover, from 346 to 356 Athanasius and the congregants of Alexandria enjoyed a time of relative tranquility.

However, as normally seemed to be the case for Athanasius, trouble was brewing that brought renewed suffering. The difficulties began in earnest with the death of Constans, Constantine’s youngest son. Constans had ruled the western part of the Roman Empire and had proved to be an advocate of the Nicene faith. As well, Constans had provided a buffer for Athanasius and other orthodox bishops in the east as his older brother, Constantius, who ruled the east, was

¹²³ *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

¹²⁴ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 146.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

inclined towards Arian beliefs. Constans had been slain by rebels under the command of Magnentius, who had usurped authority and seized the title of emperor in the spring of 350.¹²⁶

For a period of time there was a viable anxiety on the part of Constantius and those in the east that Magnentius could possibly apprehend the whole of the Roman Empire, as that certainly appeared to be his intentions. This anxiety probably kept Constantius and the Eusebian faction from moving too strongly to assert their Arian beliefs. Constantius even sent a letter to Athanasius that promised his continued friendship.¹²⁷ However, they were maneuvering in more subtle manners. In 351 Constantius and the Arians called for the Council of Sirmium and they adopted a creed that neglected to include the Nicene idea of homoousios.¹²⁸ For his part, Athanasius bravely responded to this by becoming even more vehement in his support of the term and concept.¹²⁹ One of the methods that Athanasius chose to retain the idea of homoousios as an important notion was to send a copy of his book *On the Council of Nicaea* to the bishop of Rome.¹³⁰ The hope was that this would create a rallying-cry to defend the Nicene Creed.¹³¹

Situations were also occurring that would bring to a rapid closure the pretended armistice between the Arians and the Nicene supporters. Magnentius suffered a sound defeat at the battle of Mursa and then ultimate defeat at Mons Seleucus.¹³² He responded to these defeats by committing suicide. Constantius was now the ruler of all Christendom as the Roman Empire was

¹²⁶ Ibid., 147.

¹²⁷ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 105.

¹²⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 25.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 112.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 105. Hough also intimates that the relationship between Constantius and the Christians in Alexandria had become so amiable that they actually prayed for him to be victorious. Moreover, these prayers for victory were made at the request of Athanasius. This would seem to dispel rumors that at this time Athanasius was not loyal to Constantius.

once more united under one ruler.¹³³ This would not bode well for the Nicene believers, and most especially Athanasius.

Once the empire was firmly in his grasp, Constantius began to traverse towards the entire Christian Church embracing the Arian belief system. To enhance this movement away from Nicene beliefs Constantius summoned the Council of Arles in 353 and the Council of Milan in 355.¹³⁴ The aspiration of these two councils was to: "...to place pressure on the western bishops to reject Athanasius and to accept a doctrine that was contrary to that of Nicaea. Most of the bishops succumbed to Constantius' coercion."¹³⁵ Another event that portended trouble for the Nicene believers during this time was the death of the Roman Bishop Julius who had been such a strong advocate of Athanasius and Nicaea. Liberius succeeded Julius as the prelate over Rome and he appeared just as staunch in his Nicene faith as he wrote to Hosius of Cordoba, another bulwark of the orthodox faith, about his intentions: "I have resolved rather to die for God than abandon the truth."¹³⁶ The resolve and faithfulness of Liberius, Hosius and Athanasius would soon be tested.

Subsequent to Constantius corralling the power in all of the Empire and selecting the two councils that commenced to officially turn the church away from the Nicene faith, he began to persecute individual bishops who refused to relent their orthodox faith. Constantius commenced a severe persecution against the orthodox, which Athanasius stated in *Ad Mon*, was greater than the hardships faced under the persecution of Maximian.¹³⁷ However, the numerous banishments

¹³³ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁴ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 5.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 107.

¹³⁷ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 153. Maximian was born in 250 and died in 310. He was Augustus from 286 to 305. He was the military might of an alliance with Diocletian and, thus, many attributed the severe persecution to him. He died by suicide in a rebellion against Constantine.

of those of the Nicene faith had a positive influence as they acted as missionaries to the countries where were sent and, thus, the message of the gospel was spread to new locations.¹³⁸ One of the primary targets was Liberius, Bishop of Rome, as he held such a vital see. However, Liberius not only refused to rejoiner the Arian faction but he also had the fortitude to rebuke Constantius for his cruelty, dishonesty and persecution.¹³⁹ In response to this courageous action, Liberius was banished to Berea in Thrace and Felix was appointed as his successor to the bishopric of Rome.¹⁴⁰ However, after two years of banishment and threats of death the resolve of Liberius was crushed and he accepted the Creed of the Council of Sirmium and, furthermore, renounced Athanasius.¹⁴¹ Thus, for his subservience Liberius was allowed to return to his see.

Constantius contrived a similar course of action with the aged and venerable Bishop Hosius. Hosius, similar to the case of Liberius, acted forcefully in favor of the Nicene faith in the beginning of the persecution as he wrote a strong letter to Constantius that compared the Arian forces and their tactics unfavorably to those of Athanasius. Hosius was detained for a year at Sirmium and treated so severely that it actually amounted to torture.¹⁴² Hosius finally relented under the pressure of the torture, deprivation and his age of one hundred years. He signed an Arian confession but refused to adhere to a condemnation of Athanasius.¹⁴³ Athanasius responded to the faltering of his longtime friend and ally in the Nicene cause by stating that he did not blame Hosius due to the torture he endured and his advanced age. Consistently, this

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Theodoret, Book 2, Chapter 16 and 17.

¹⁴⁰ Sozomen, Book 4, Chapter 11.

¹⁴¹ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 154.

¹⁴² Socrates, Book 2, Chapter 31.

¹⁴³ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 154.

uncloaks the nature of Athanasius as he refuses to verbally assault an old confidant who vacillated.

Similar to Liberius and Hosius, Constantius and the Eusebians besieged Athanasius in an attempt to trigger him to recant the orthodox faith. However, Athanasius stood as the bulwark for the Nicene faith and refused to shift allegiance. Constantius became so exasperated with Athanasius that he sent his secretary, Diogenes, to forcefully apprehend him. However, due to popular support from the laity of Alexandria the plot was foiled in the beginning. The subsequent tactic Diogenes attempted was to secure the aid of the Roman commander of Alexandria, Syrianus, and utilize military force in the venture.¹⁴⁴ At midnight on February 8, 356, Syrianus and his military faction launched a surprise offensive on Athanasius while he was celebrating with his congregants at the Church of Theonas.¹⁴⁵ Athanasius' escape from this harrowing situation is both amazing and legendary. On that night, Syrianus had brought five thousand men with him and they surrounded the Church of Theonas. When Athanasius knew that they were outside he stated that his chief desire was for the safety of the people so he sat down on his throne and requested that Psalm 136 be read, then have the people respond with 'His mercy endureth forever' and then for everyone to depart. However, the soldiers broke into the church and a wild scene ensued with the soldiers trying to gain entrance and the congregants traversing in the other direction. Somehow in the melee Athanasius was whisked away by the monks and some of the clergy. Athanasius states that it was the hand of God that was responsible for the escape and he went right through the midst of his enemies.¹⁴⁶ Athanasius, thus, disappeared without a trace into the cold winter's night.

¹⁴⁴ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Sozomen, Book 4, Chapter 10.

Third Exile

As mentioned in the last section, the third exile began in 356 with a harrowing escape. Athanasius would spend much of this exile in hiding among the monks as the forces of Constantius continued to search for him.¹⁴⁷ Hough wrote of how the Egyptian people cared for Athanasius during this exile: “The whole country became his protector. The emperor pursued him in vain. Egypt opened its sheltering arms and held him safe.”¹⁴⁸ This is yet another testimony of how the people cherished their spiritual leader. The new bishop appointed in Alexandria, George, severely persecuted the Nicene Christians.¹⁴⁹ As well, George was a very base man with a violent temper and it was believed that the Arians had ordained him before he even professed to be a Christian.¹⁵⁰ One particularly cruel incident of persecution involved an Imperial officer, Sebastian, who sympathized with Bishop George, with 3,000 soldiers locating Nicene Christian worshipping in the countryside at night. When the believers would not accept an Arian Creed they were beaten so severely that many of them died. As well, the Arians exiled twenty-five Nicene bishops into the desert hoping they would die along the way and, also, banished many of the orthodox laity and beat them with thorns so severely that some of them died.¹⁵¹ Such was the bleak situation for orthodox Christianity in the late 350s, with the Nicene Christians being persecuted severely and the most noble and stalwart of bishops being forced to recant the Nicene faith.

¹⁴⁷ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 112. Hough goes on to state that it was not just certain portions of Egypt that wanted to protect Athanasius but that the all of Egypt became his protector.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Sozomen, Book 3, Chapter 7.

¹⁵¹ Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, Book VIII, Chapter 72.

At the time when the outlook seemed very dim for orthodox Christianity, Athanasius, although he was hiding in the desert, did not remain silent and took his argument to the manuscript and entered the most prolific period of writing in his career. His writings during this time period included *Defense before Constantius*, *Defense of His Flight*, *History of the Arians*, *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*, *Life of Antony* and *Letters to Serapion*.¹⁵² However, while Athanasius was busy writing among the ascetics, the Arian forces were attempting to further their cause through councils. One particularly strong Arian leaning council was the Council of Sirmium in 357 which denied Nicaea and emphasized the subordination of the Son and became known to its opponents as the “Blasphemy of Sirmium.”¹⁵³

An Abbreviated Stay in Alexandria

The theological landscape changed again in 361 as the result of death, just as it had changed when Constantine died in 337. Constantius, the last of the sons of Constantine, died in November of 361.¹⁵⁴ Julian would replace him as Emperor and one of his primary acts was to restore all of the bishops that Constantine had exiled. As well, the people of Alexandria became so exasperated with the cruelties of the current bishop, George, that they rebelled and assassinated him through an angry mob.¹⁵⁵ Thus, Athanasius was able to return once again to Alexandria in 362 after his six years in seclusion and desert asceticism. One of the first decisions of Athanasius when he was returned to his rightful position was what he recommended should be

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Anatoliois, *Athanasius*, 28.

¹⁵⁴ Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine*, 152.

¹⁵⁵ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 114. George was a former pork contractor and did not have a stellar reputation. Hough also declares that a substitute creed was offered to the people of Alexandria and that it varied from the Nicene formula. When Athanasius heard about the new creed that was being promoted he wrote a letter to the Egyptian and Libyan clergy urging them to be steadfast and to reject the new creed.

done with the majority of Nicene bishops who had recanted their orthodox faith under persecution. In characteristic grace, Athanasius urged that all of those who would once again profess the Nicene Creed would be restored to their position.¹⁵⁶

Julian, the new Roman Emperor, was an interesting character. He became known as Julian the Apostate and his background reveals the reasoning for the moniker. He was raised as a Christian and yet had seen his father and several brothers slaughtered by Constantius, who was putatively a Christian.¹⁵⁷ This event most likely began to taint his view of the reality of Christian conversion. As well, he was spurred by the influence of Neoplatonist instructors so that by the time he was appointed Caesar in 355 he had become a pagan, but somewhat discreetly as he still existed under the power of his Christian cousin.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, once Julian came into power, he was actually marching against Constantius when he died, he used his imperial dominion to discourage the practice and customs of Christianity. Christians could no longer teach in imperial schools or command a high public office.¹⁵⁹ In his mind, Julian believed that he could restore the empire to pagan worship. Another fanciful idea of Julian was that he could restore both Nicene and Arian bishops back to the ecclesiastical positions and that this would create confusion and a weakened church. However, this did not operate in the way Julian had aspired in relation to Athanasius as he was joyfully received upon his return to Alexandria.¹⁶⁰ Thus, when Julian understood that this stratagem would not be successful he banished Athanasius just a few months after his return.

¹⁵⁶ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 188.

¹⁵⁷ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), 141.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Fourth Exile and Return

Athanasius had been returned to Alexandria for a brief eight months when the fourth exile began. However, he was not discouraged at this new turn of events but further revealed his fortitude as he told his followers upon his leaving that this dark cloud would also soon pass.¹⁶¹ An interesting narrative from this period of time is that Athanasius was escaping on a boat and the soldiers were also pursuing him. Athanasius turned around and passed their boat going the other way. The servicemen even asked Athanasius if he had seen the man they were looking for, as it was dark and they could not see who was on the boat, and he told them to proceed on in the direction they were traveling as he escaped in the opposite direction.¹⁶² Thus, at several moments in his life Athanasius was miraculously spared. Sozomen even traverses to the length of stating that Athanasius eluded capture in these circumstances because he had the ability to see the future, or prophesy.¹⁶³ However, his enemies viewed it in a different way as they accused him of sorcery.¹⁶⁴

Athanasius was again hidden by the people of Alexandria and by the ascetics. It is believed that he spent his fourth exile wandering through upper Egypt.¹⁶⁵ Part of his time was spent in Memphis and this is where he wrote the Festal Letter of 363. However, this exile was to last less than a year. It ended when Julian was killed by a stray arrow from one of his soldiers.¹⁶⁶ Thus,

¹⁶¹ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 134. One of the elements that Julian was particularly angry about was that Athanasius had baptized Greek ladies while he was bishop in Alexandria. Of course, Julian was especially against this because it meant that Christianity was making inroads into paganism. In addition to being exiled Julian related a threat that would be more severe.

¹⁶² Theodoret, Book 3, Chapter 5.

¹⁶³ Sozomen, Book 4, Chapter 10.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 194.

¹⁶⁶ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 136.

the plot by Julian to return the Roman Empire to paganism came to a quick and inglorious termination.

The next emperor was Jovian. He was a Christian by profession and he proved to be favorable to the Nicene believers.¹⁶⁷ In fact, Jovian not only restored Athanasius to his see in Alexandria but he also entreated him to write his idea of the Nicene faith.¹⁶⁸ Athanasius responded by convening a Council and producing a Synodal Letter which included the Nicene Creed, the biblical basis and agreement of the Creed and declared that a majority of churches agreed with it.¹⁶⁹ Athanasius then took his Synodal Letter to Antioch where both he and the letter were received warmly by Emperor Jovian. Jovian would prove himself both favorable to the Nicene faith and tolerant of the Arian faction.¹⁷⁰ At this point, Athanasius' hope for the victory of the true faith probably seemed the highest it had been in well over thirty years.

Fifth Exile and Return

However, the time of hopefulness of 363 would traverse on another detour as Jovian died in February of 364.¹⁷¹ His successor was Valentinian I and in a short amount of time he assigned the east, and Alexandria, to his brother Valens.¹⁷² It would have been favorable for Athanasius if Valentinian had ruled the entire empire as he held to the Nicene faith while Valens was an Arian.¹⁷³ In the spring of 365 Valens began measures that would involve Athanasius as he

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 198.

¹⁶⁹ Theodoret, Book 3, Chapter 3.

¹⁷⁰ Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 199.

¹⁷¹ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 136.

¹⁷² Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 200.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

declared that all bishops that had been expelled by Constantius should once again be exiled.¹⁷⁴

The popular opinion of the people of Alexandria was robust against the exile of Athanasius so that there were once again riots and protests. However, Athanasius was again led by one of his beneficial premonitions and he disappeared on the very night that the officials broke into the Church of Dionysius in search of him.¹⁷⁵ Thus, Athanasius began his fifth exile in fall of 365. This exile was spent in the concealment of his father's tomb.¹⁷⁶

LAST YEARS

The fifth exile would only last four months. On February 1, 366 an imperial notary ventured to Athanasius' place of concealment and intimated that he would be allowed to once again return to Alexandria as bishop.¹⁷⁷ This would be his final exile and it would usher in a time of relative peace until the end of his life. However, although Athanasius was personally at peace there were still Nicene believers being persecuted. For instance, eighty Nicene presbyters went to the emperor to complain of their sufferings and all perished when the emperor placed them on a boat and set it on fire.¹⁷⁸

Two instances of how Athanasius administered in these final years have survived. The first is that he accepted a bishop whose ordination was irregular because it seemed the practical avenue to proceed. As well, he excommunicated the governor of Libya because of immorality and made it a record of public knowledge.¹⁷⁹ A further significant event of these years was in the Festival

¹⁷⁴ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 137.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷⁶ Socrates, Book 4, Chapter 13.

¹⁷⁷ Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 203.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

¹⁷⁹ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 139.

Letter of 367. In this letter Athanasius presents the first time the modern New Testament had been attested to in full. This will be discussed later in more detail later. In 369, Athanasius called for a council at Alexandria and the decision was to excommunicate two Arian bishops, who had been outspoken in their opposition to the Nicene faith, named Ursacius and Valens.¹⁸⁰

To the end of his life Athanasius retained an interest in theological matters. He would weigh the currents of theological drift and attempt to intercede whenever he foresaw that the Nicene faith might be compromised. For instance, he wrote two works in opposition to the theological views of Apollinaris. However, characteristic of Athanasius' grace, he did not mention the erring theologian by name as he was a personal friend. He was not interested in maligning or humiliating his friend but merely to combat the potential heresy.¹⁸¹ As well, Athanasius wrote several letters in these closing years which indicated his continued opposition to anything that might contradict the Nicene faith. These letters include the *Letter to Adelphius* which combats an Arian heresy that worshipped Christ's manhood, the *Letter to Maximus* which attacks those who stated that Jesus was merely a saint and the *Letter to Epictetus* which combatted those who said the body of Jesus was not truly human.¹⁸² In each of these Athanasius continued to deal favorably with friends and associates in the Nicene faith while renouncing their particular theological problem. Bush writes of this phenomenon: "His strong desire to think the best he could of those who had been associated with him by the ties of friendship or of common work, induced him to cast aside suspicions, which afterwards, perhaps, proved to be unhappily just."¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 205.

¹⁸¹ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 140.

¹⁸² Bush, *Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 209.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 211.

As well, in his final years Athanasius built a church which was called by his name and dedicated in 370.¹⁸⁴

Athanasius passed from the earth on May 2, 373. He had lived a long and full life. As well, he had stood for the truth when few others would. Hough writes of his death: “Very full of peace on that May morning must have seemed the chamber where lay the silent form of the great bishop. How often he must have longed with a sad eagerness, in many hard and terrible years, for quiet and repose. But he had not faltered. He had borne his burden, so very hard a burden. He marched breast forward, he had not lost courage, but had fought with unflagging heroism and unfailing devotion.”¹⁸⁵

Thus, ended the life of Athanasius and his legacy seemed to have been cemented. Many of those in subsequent centuries would count him as a hero of the church. However, in later years critics would emerge that would challenge this heroic view of Athanasius. The rest of this paper is dedicated to determining if the critics have rightly questioned the reputation of Athanasius and determined it to be lacking in good character.

¹⁸⁴ Hough, *Athanasius the Hero*, 140.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

CHAPTER III: THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

A COGENT THEOLOGICAL MIND

In addition to having an exemplary life that was an encouragement to many, Athanasius also had a tremendous impact through his theological writings and ideas. Most importantly, he was a major figure in the defense of the trinity and the idea that Jesus was fully God and not a created being. As well, later in his episcopate, he also was instrumental in promoting the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius also supported asceticism both through his writings and actions. This is of keen interest because at various times he lived an ascetic life and he also advocated the movement to become more prevalent. It is also noteworthy that Athanasius always desired the ascetics to ultimately be under the banner of the orthodox church. In addition, Athanasius was important because he was the first one to include in a document the New Testament books that are recognized today. He is also utilized as a key historical writer of the fourth century. Thus, Athanasius was influential in many respects. The first area in this chapter to be considered will be the theological influences on Athanasius. Next, the major and most influential of his writings will be reviewed. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an assessment of his most impactful theological ideas. The hope is that Athanasius' importance as a crucial theologian in a tumultuous time will be expressed.

THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Influences on Athanasius

The theological influences on Athanasius are complex. First of all, Athanasius was impacted by the Scriptures and was the type of theologian that attempted to support his ideas with a clear

delineation of them. In his writing he referred often to the Bible and supported his premises with Scripture. As well, in his writings he demonstrated a great knowledge of and dependence upon Scriptures.

Beyond this, he was also significantly shaped by writers of the first and second century. Several of these works were part of the apocryphal writings and were not truly inspired Scripture but, nevertheless, the authors proffered influential theological ideas. In this vein, Athanasius was influenced by such books as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Clement's letter to the Corinthians and the *Epistle of Barnabas*.¹⁸⁶ Justin was also influential on Athanasius. One idea that was particularly significant was that Justin was an advocate for the full divinity of Christ, as he intimated that his miracles proved this fact, and Athanasius followed in this idea.¹⁸⁷ Another of the second century theologians that Athanasius followed was Irenaeus. One of the stances that he shared with Irenaeus was to battle against the idea of modalism.¹⁸⁸ Basically, modalism espouses the construct that God exists in different modes at different points in history, but this will be investigated more fully later in the chapter. Another area that indicates their similarity is that Irenaeus utilizes several prophetic Scriptures to prove the divinity and resurrection of Christ and Athanasius uses these exact same biblical passages in his apologetic against the Jews. Finally, some present the idea that Athanasius was heavily influenced by Origen from the third century. In addition, Origen had spent a considerable amount of time in Alexandria and, therefore, it is hypothesized that his influence in the city remained. Moreover, since Origen is known for

¹⁸⁶ Robert Case II. "Will the Real Athanasius Please Stand Up?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19:4 (1976): 284.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 287. Athanasius was a strong advocate for the full divinity of Christ and this was revealed both through his early and later writings. For more information on his theological ideas in this respect see *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* by Khaled Anatolios.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 289. Modalism was an idea that had been presented several times by different theologians in the early centuries of church history. Modalism espoused the idea that God exists as God the Father at one point in history, as God the Son at another time and as God the Holy Spirit at still different times. However, God never exists as more than one at a time. There was always a fear among orthodox Christians of slipping into this heresy.

developing heretical ideas then it would follow, if he were in fact influenced by Origen, that Athanasius was impacted, at least to some degree, by heresies. However, Case writes: “It seems clear to me, in the final analysis, that when Athanasius stood against the world he was standing not in a stream polluted with heresy but in the stream of solid orthodoxy of Irenaeus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Paul and John.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, it seems lucid, both from evidence of his writings and his theological stances, that Athanasius was impacted by previous theologians but that these influences were orthodox and followed in a truthful interpretation of Scripture.

Of course, when discussing the theological influences on Athanasius one must consider his contemporaries. Bishop Alexander immediately preceded Athanasius as bishop and they shared the same conviction about many monumental topics. However, it is uncertain if Alexander influenced him beyond providing leadership and encouragement and this is because not as much is known about the views that Alexander held. As well, it appears that Antony had an impact on Athanasius. However, again it is unclear if he impacted his theology or if they simply held the same stances. It does, although, seem apparent that Antony did, at least, have a spiritual impact on Athanasius in that he was an encouragement to him, and to many other contemporaries and individuals in subsequent centuries, to live a life completely devoted to serving God. In addition to Alexander and Antony, evidence of influence can be perceived in the martyrs that Athanasius knew as a child. However, once more it is not evident that they influenced his actual theological ideas but most assuredly shaped his devotion to theological teachings and to dedicating his life to the cause of Christ.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 295.

Theological Method

One of the important aspects in understanding Athanasius, and any theologian, is his theological method. His theological writings cover a period that is more than four decades long. Throughout these years he was in great tumult and yet he maintained a consistency in his theological wording and was fairly consistent in his theological view.¹⁹⁰ A division in his work that becomes obvious as one studies is that in his later works he puts a strong emphasis on combatting Arianism while Arius is not even mentioned in his early works. As well, the later works tend to be more properly theological as they focus on how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to one another.¹⁹¹ In addition, the works that he completed towards the end of his life had a propensity to utilize exegesis more readily and to refute the proof texts that the Arians used.¹⁹² Thus, in later years Athanasius would grow to have an even stronger emphasis on Scriptures and their proper interpretation.

Early Years

Now that the influences on his theology have been examined, his paramount writings will be discussed. An interesting aspect of Athanasius' life is that he was an able theologian from his early years as he had already written two brilliant works before the Arian controversy even

¹⁹⁰ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 39. It is an interesting point about Athanasius' theology in that he does not seem to change his stance on major doctrines but does seem to emphasize new topics as time progresses. Anatolios addresses this more pointedly in *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

began.¹⁹³ Before 318 he wrote *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation*.¹⁹⁴ Thus, he demonstrated a keen theological mind from the earliest that is known about him and this level of intelligence may have been something that Bishop Alexander was able to discern and part of the reason Athanasius was brought under his care at a young age. Bush wrote of Athanasius on the basis of these two early works: “We may remark that, even at this early stage of his literary career, his style of writing was grave, logical, argumentative and clear, full of vigor and energy.”¹⁹⁵ As well, it is known that he was taught by some that became martyrs in the persecution of 311 and this could have provided the basis for a deeper interest in and development of theological thinking.¹⁹⁶ Whatever the reason, it is clear that Athanasius had a mind with the acumen for deep theological thought early in his life.

Against the Heathen(or *Contra Gentes*) was Athanasius’ very first work and it was penned when he was no more than in his early twenties.¹⁹⁷ In this work, Athanasius indicated his penchant for seeing the Bible as an historical narrative. As well, the work reveals Athanasius’ soteriological ideas at an early age and these conceptions would remain constant throughout his

¹⁹³ Lynn Harold Hough, *Athanasius the Hero* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1906), 35. It is surprising that Athanasius had written these works before he was in his middle twenties. As well, for those who desired to say that he became a bishop before he was of the correct age of thirty, it makes it even more amazing as he would have been perhaps not even age twenty. As well, there are those who date the two works later, some in the 330s and some in the 360s. However, if these later dates are accurate then it must be adequately explained why nothing is mentioned about Arius when he was so prevalent in Athanasius’ later writings. Additionally, these early works indicate that Athanasius held his primary views about the trinity and the divinity of the Son before the Arian controversy began and, thus, his theology was deeply held rather than being reactionary.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁵ R. Wheeler Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, (London: Society for Christian Knowledge, 1912), 38. Moreover, that Athanasius wrote in a logical format stands out especially in this time period.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹⁷ However, these early dates are not without dispute. For example, in 1961 H. Nordberg argued for a date of 362-363 in his article ‘A Reconsideration of the Date of S. Athanasius’ *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*’, *Studia Patristica* 3. Others opt for the date of 335-336 such as K. Anatolios in *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London, 1998).

life.¹⁹⁸ He tended to see the Bible as a unified whole and that the story of salvation is revealed as the Bible progresses.¹⁹⁹ The piece was written as an introduction to the Christian faith and appears to have been written at the request of a man named Macarius, most likely the same Macarius that would later be a controversial follower of Athanasius in the alleged breaking of the chalice incident.²⁰⁰ Some of the major themes of *Against the Heathen* were that God is good and the creator of all, Christianity is a logical belief system and man was made with a free will.²⁰¹ Moreover, Athanasius notes that this free will was the overarching cause of sin entering into the world.

The second work, *On the Incarnation* or *De Incarnatione*, was written as a sequel and companion piece to *Against the Heathen*. In the work Athanasius demonstrates his: "...deep spiritual earnestness and loyal devotion to the Eternal Word of God which inspires the argument of the treatise..."²⁰² The major focus of the piece is on the work of redemption and the relation of the Incarnation.²⁰³ Athanasius writes on the topic of redemption and death: "The Word, perceiving that death could not be abolished except by the death of all; and since He Himself, the Immortal Word, could not die, took a body capable of death, and in it made a sufficient death for

¹⁹⁸ Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 11.

¹⁹⁹ J. D. Ernst, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 131.

²⁰⁰ Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, 12.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰² T. Herbert Bindley, *Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London: Unwin Brothers, 1887), 6.

²⁰³ Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, 27. Weinandy writes more pointedly on this topic: "Moreover, human beings were created in the Son's image and so he makes present to them the Father, in that they can come to know the Father immediately through his Word and mediately through creation, which bears witness to Wisdom's divine governance. Now in the light of sin and death, it will be the same Son of God as the Word and Wisdom of the Father, who will restore humankind to immortality and so re-establish its communal relationship to the Father through his Incarnation and the work of redemption. Thus, Athanasius tells Macarius that we 'will follow the faith of our religion, and set forth also what relates to the Word's becoming man and to his divine appearing amongst us.'" For more on this see Weinandy chapter 3

all: He by the resurrection abolished corruption, and by the self-sacrifice obliterated death.”²⁰⁴

In this work Athanasius also demonstrates an understanding of and use of prophecy as, for example he writes: “The Cross, too, is conspicuously mentioned by Moses (Deut. xxviii. 66), and the Prophets (Jer. Xi. 19; Psa. xxii. 16-18); and likewise is the turning of the nations to the knowledge of God foretold (Isaiah xi. 10). The facts of Christ’s life alone-His virgin-birth, with the witness of the star-satisfy the prophecies.”²⁰⁵

A further positive characteristic of *On the Incarnation* is the application to practical theology. Mohler, a nineteenth century historian to be discussed later, was especially impressed with the final part of the work because Athanasius is able to clearly reveal how Christianity changes daily life. Wilgenburg writes: “According to Mohler, Athanasius shows the right perspective on Christianity, though his focus is on Christ’s deeds and conduct instead of his doctrine as such.”²⁰⁶ These characteristics that were developed early would serve him well in his life’s work as Bishop of Alexandria and defender of the Nicene faith.

A further noteworthy characteristic of these early writings, as well as later writings, is that Athanasius wrote in a scientific form for the readers to follow.²⁰⁷ This was a new mode of presenting religious truth that previous theological authors had rarely employed. Bush writes of this phenomenon: “We can trace in his treatise, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” an attempt which was then novel-though it was the natural result of the tone of mind and the philosophic theories that prevailed in Alexandria-an attempt to put forward the subject of Christianity in

²⁰⁴ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, Chapter IX. Translated by T. Herbert Bindley, *Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London: Unwin Brothers, 1887), 24.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁶ Arwin van Wilgenburg. “The Redemption of Athanasius within Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology.” *Church History and Religious Culture* 90.2-3 (2010): 316.

²⁰⁷ Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times*, 33.

general, and of the Incarnation of Christ in particular, in a scientific form before his readers. This was, indeed, a new mode of handling religious truth. As yet theological writings had not assumed that shape in the church.”²⁰⁸ This is all the more amazing because Athanasius was able to write in a logical method that was previously untried at such a young age. Thus, his natural acumen for leadership and fostering new paths was revealed. As well, these early writings presented his soteriological vision in a cogent way and this idea, once he presented it in these early writings, is then presented throughout the rest of his ecclesiastical career.²⁰⁹ It is obvious that he had a powerful intellect for theological ideas and, thus, it can be seen that Athanasius, even at this youthful stage, had a brilliant theological mind, had a high view of Scripture, had a firm grasp on the meaning of salvation and was adept at defending his faith. .

Later Important Works

In addition to *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation* Athanasius also had several other important works. One of these was the three volumes of his widely known and used compositions referred to as *Orations Against the Arians*. The first of these books was written in 339-340 while Athanasius was enduring his second exile. In this work it becomes clear that Athanasius is trying to thwart a growing acceptance of Arian doctrine. As well, it seems plausible that he wrote this in anticipation of a theological battle between pro-Nicene and anti-

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 39. Anatolios also intimates his understanding that Athanasius believed that the incarnation was consistent and certain. Indeed, he even believed that the incarnation, and subsequent meaning for soteriology, was reasonable for God. Anatolios wrote: “The systematic task of demonstrating a rational coherence between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the incarnation is thus integral to the apologetic design of this treatise, as is that of demonstrating the coherence of those two doctrines to that of creation. In short, Athanasius wants to show that the fact of the incarnation is consistent with who God is, and with God’s general way of relating to creation from the beginning.”

Nicene forces at a future church council that never took place.²¹⁰ Athanasius attacks both of his major Arian opponents in this treatise, namely Arius and Asterius.²¹¹ The overarching theme of the writing is to denounce the idea that the Son is not eternal and of the same essence as the Father and that the Son is somehow capable of morphing. This belief was at the core of the conflict between the orthodox and the Arians and he attacks it forthrightly. Athanasius writes on the theme of the Son being changeable: “For if the Word is changeable and alterable where will he end up and what kind of end will there be to his progress? Or how can the changeable be like (homoios) the unchangeable? And how can the one who has seen the changeable be considered to have seen the Unchangeable (cf Jn 14:9)? Or what level should he come to in order that one can see the Father in him? Clearly, one will not always see the Father in him, since the Son is always changing, and is changeable by nature.”²¹² The major defense in these volumes is that Athanasius analyzes various texts from Scripture that are disputed and demonstrates how they teach that the Son is fully divine.²¹³

Another important polemical work was the *Letters to Serapion*, to be discussed later in detail. Suffice to say at this point, that in these Athanasius writes a compelling treatise on the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. This idea of the Holy Spirit being fully divine, just as the Father and Son are, is one that Athanasius tended to emphasize later in his oeuvres. As well, it is noteworthy that this did not appear to be a development of doctrine, as there is no evidence of

²¹⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹¹ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 4. The primary defensive strategy that Athanasius employed in these treatises was to analyze texts that were questionable. Thus, Athanasius demonstrated that he was not reluctant to enter debate on the veracity of his claims and to do it very specifically. Athanasius believed that he could prove the truthfulness of his claims by a thorough analysis of Scripture as it related to the disputed areas. Moreover, the overarching theme of the passages that were analyzed were proffered to uphold the doctrine of the full divinity of the Son. As well, these works were utilized to provide the basis for defenses of the Nicene Creed that would be more fully and specifically addressed in his later writing.

²¹² Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*. 1:35. Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 92.

²¹³ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 4.

there being a time when he did not believe in the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, but simply a change in emphasis.

In addition, Athanasius was an important historian of the early fourth century. Several of his works are used to garner historical information about the period. Many favor his historical renditions of the time period because he was actually there as a witness to the majority of them. His most important works used to garner historical data of the period include the *Encyclical Letter of 339*, *Defense Against the Arians*, *On the Council of Nicaea*, *Defense Before Constantius*, *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya of 356*, *Defense of His Flight*, *History of the Arians* and *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*.²¹⁴ Some of these will be discussed in more detail later.

Another type of writing that Athanasius employed were the *Festal Letters*. These were annual letters that he would write to the churches of Egypt. It is noteworthy to mention that Athanasius would normally send these letters each year that he was able to, but some years he was prevented due to being in exile. The official purpose of these annual letters was to set the proper date of Easter so that all the churches would celebrate on the same day. However, Athanasius also used them to encourage the believers and explore other theological themes.

²¹⁴ Timothy Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6. As well as Athanasius being an important author to piece together the history of the fourth century, he is also an important enough figure that people attempt to understand his personal history. Two of the most important other historians that were contemporary to him and useful to coordinate his personal history were Hilary, bishop of Poitiers located in Gaul, and Lucifer, bishop of Caralis in Sardinia. Of these two Barnes believes that Hilary is by far the most useful. Barnes writes of Hilary's contributions: "The fragments of Hilary's historical-apologetic work directed against the bishops Ursacius of Singidunum and Valens of Mursa preserve many indispensable documents which would otherwise be completely lost, above all the long and revealing letter of the eastern bishops who attended the Council of Serdica in 343."

They should best be viewed as a letter from a pastor to his congregation to encourage, admonish and teach those who are under his care and in them he displayed his pastor's heart.²¹⁵

One of the letters that is important is *Festal Letter 39* written in 367. This letter is noteworthy because it is the earliest surviving list of the twenty-seven books that are used today in the New Testament.²¹⁶ The books of the Old Testament are also mentioned and they are identical to the canon of the Hebrew Bible. As well, in this letter Athanasius mentions other popular Christian writings such as the *Didache* and *Shepherd of Hermas*, but he distinguishes them from the books found in the New Testament canon.²¹⁷ Athanasius connotes the idea that any books read beyond the canon of the Old and New Testaments that he mentions should be considered to be apocryphal. Ehrman and Jacobs write of Athanasius' ideas of the canon found in *Festal Letter 39*: "For him, the concept of canon is driven by his understanding of the disparate scriptural books as a single, coherent Bible, the Word of God that conveys Christian teaching in a perfect, complete form."²¹⁸ Thus, Athanasius held the same view of Scripture that most evangelicals have in current times.

Another *Festal Letter* of interest that reveals his themes intended to admonish and encourage is the third one written in 331. It is also worth noting that Athanasius was a new bishop at the time who had not yet been exiled but had been called before emperor Constantine to answer

²¹⁵ Jack N. Sparks, *The Resurrection Letters* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 14. Sparks ties Athanasius concern about the true doctrine with the idea of his having a pastor's heart. Athanasius fought so vehemently for Christ being fully God not because he wanted to win some theological battle but because he truly cared for the Christian flock that had been placed under his care and he believed that in defending the doctrine he was defending them and protecting their eternal souls. Sparks also intimates his idea that all of Athanasius' efforts were not in vain because the true orthodox idea triumphed in the final analysis and many were spared from believing a horrible deception.

²¹⁶ Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 422.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

some charges against him. It was while he was away that he was able to send the letter.²¹⁹ The theme of this third letter is thankfulness. Athanasius presents the distinction between a person who chooses to be unthankful and one who chooses to be thankful. He attributes being unthankful to wickedness. Moreover, Athanasius speaks of his own difficulties in the letter and declares that he refuses to complain but rather says that the more he is persecuted the more he will praise the Lord.²²⁰ Through this letter Athanasius reveals his true desire to please God. Athanasius wrote: “All right then, brothers and sisters, if they interfere with our speaking of the word of the Lord, we will proclaim it all the more. And if we are persecuted we will sing Psalms, because God counts us worthy to be despised and to work eagerly for the truth. Yes, the more we are harassed, the more we will give thanks!”²²¹ Thus, this letter serves as a beneficial example of the overarching attitude of the letters and also provides a glimpse into Athanasius’ encouragement displayed in the letters.

Athanasius is also known for writing on the topic of asceticism as he was a proponent both in encouragement and his personal life. Assuredly, the most famous of these ascetic writings is *Life of Antony*. Interestingly, Athanasius and Antony were also personal friends and the treatise presents a positive image of the most famous of all ascetics. It is also, arguably, Athanasius’ most famous work. *Life of Antony* was a widely read book of the time and it aided in spreading the ascetic idea. In the work Athanasius provides a detailed account of Antony’s life and some of the critical points in his becoming fully dedicated to serving God. The piece tends to focus on

²¹⁹ Sparks, *The Resurrection Letters*, 68.

²²⁰ Ibid. Sparks also states that Athanasius emphasizes the point that people who are faithful to God are also thankful. Those who complain about their own circumstances are not being faithful to God because God commands us to be thankful in all circumstances. As well, Athanasius reveals his proclivity for relating his points back to Scripture as he provides a list of Old Testament characters who were thankful even though they were suffering through difficult circumstances.

²²¹ Athanasius, *Festal Letter III*, 331. Jack Sparks, *The Resurrection Letters* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 74.

the spiritual aspects of his struggles and the many occasions when Antony was attacked by unseen forces in his sacred quest. One element of particular interest that Athanasius presents is that Antony still dealt with temptations even though he had renounced the world and had not seen another human being for a long period of time. Thus, revealing that the true nature of sin is internal rather than being caused by outside agents. Moreover, *Life of Antony* was not his only work that focused on ascetic ideas as Athanasius also wrote several other tomes on the subject of asceticism which include *Discourse on Virginity, Love and Self-Control* and *On Sickness and Health*.

Athanasius also wrote several works on the topic of biblical exegesis. These were written mostly on the books of the Old Testament. The most important is the *Epistle to Marcellinus*. The topic of this writing is how to incorporate *Psalms* into the daily spiritual practices of an individual. In addition, he wrote commentaries on *Genesis* and *Song of Solomon*, of which fragments of the latter still remain. It is also obvious that Athanasius encouraged sound biblical exegesis as he utilizes this in several of his writings and he is able to refute ideas that are not in correspondence with orthodoxy.

As well Athanasius penned an important work in defense of his actions named *Defense Before Constantius*. It was written while Athanasius was in exile, partly before and partly after Easter, in 356.²²² Athanasius was hopeful that it would lead Constantius to allow him to plead his case in his presence. The work has been referred to as brilliant for its oratorical

²²² Theodoret, Book 2, Chapter 24. Timothy Barnes believes that Athanasius began *Defense before Constantius* in 353 and had added to it later in the 350s. Barnes states Athanasius was utilizing it as an attempt to get Constantius' officials to halt the persecution and harshness towards the orthodox. Moreover, Athanasius refers to Constantius as pious, patient and kind. He also declares that he knows that Constantius disapproves of the actions of his representatives. In reality, Athanasius knew full well how Constantius really felt about him but he was hoping to deter those who might arrest him. For more on this see *Athanasius and Constantius* chapter 14 by Barnes.

elaboration.²²³ In the work Athanasius attempts to defend himself on four charges. The first was that he had attempted to influence Constans against Constantius and Athanasius flatly denied this. In fact, Athanasius declared in the treatise that he never spoke to Constans without others being present.²²⁴ The second charge that Athanasius emphatically denied was that he had consorted with Magnentius. The final two allegations that Athanasius denied in the work were less treasonous as opponents alleged that he used a new church before Constantius had given him permission and that he declined to present himself when Constantius had beckoned for him. Moreover, Athanasius also provides responses to these criticisms. Thus, *Defense Before Constantius* is an important personal polemic that serves to reveal the type of allegations that Athanasius needed to answer and also to present a glimpse into his relations with the emperors.

Another important defensive work was *Defense of his Flight*. In this work Athanasius declares that he was referred to as a coward for fleeing during persecution.²²⁵ This remark is related to the lapse of Hosius in the summer of 357 and Liberius in spring of 358 and is believed to have been written between these two events.²²⁶ An important historical point from the piece is that Athanasius names five bishops that had been recently mistreated for the simple reason that they would not subscribe to Arianism.²²⁷ Moreover, using the actual names of the five bishops allows the reader to investigate for himself and discover the veracity of his statements. As well, he intimates that Paul of Constantinople had actually been murdered by strangulation in

²²³ William Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 63. *Defense before Constantius* is also interesting because it was written as a hypothesis in which Athanasius imagines a possible future in which Constantius might return to his policies of about 345. In the 340s Constantius had been much more tolerant of Nicene beliefs and had promised that they could exist. As well, Athanasius reveals his versatility in this work as he is able to write in this hypothetical way.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Athanasius, *Defense of His Flight*, Chapter 1.

²²⁶ Bright, *Historical Writings of Athanasius*, 66.

²²⁷ Athanasius, *Defense of His Flight*, Chapter 4.

approximately 350.²²⁸ Athanasius once again reveals his forgiving nature as he has an entire chapter dedicated to speaking well of Hosius, and this is after he had lapsed and signed an Arian creed in the face of persecution and banishment.²²⁹ Central to the work is that Athanasius defends himself in his flight by bringing up biblical characters that also fled when it was possible, such as when Paul left Damascus by being secretly lowered down in a basket.²³⁰ Thus, Athanasius is able to both present cogent biblical examples and state abuses made by the Arians against Nicene believers in the 350s.

One of the most important works of Athanasius for historical purposes is *Defense Against the Arians*. For centuries historians have used this piece to garner information about the history of the conflicts between the Orthodox and the Arians. In particular, Athanasius includes a great deal of detail about the Council of Tyre. As well, Athanasius includes a large amount of information about the allegations that were brought against him and how both he and his opponents maneuvered in accordance with them. Most pointedly he intimates a lot of facts about the allegations of the murder of Arsenius and the putative broken chalice. *Defense Against the Arians* is the most widely used source for information about these two charges. One of the major aids the work provides is in relaying the intricacies of the aforementioned allegations of the early 330s.²³¹

²²⁸ Bright, *Historical Writings of Athanasius*, 66.

²²⁹ Athanasius, *Defense of His Flight*, Chapter 5.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11

²³¹ Bright, *Defense Against the Arians*, 38.

THEOLOGICAL IDEAS

Incarnation

After the review of his most important writings the focus now turns to a review of the aspects that the works reveal about his theology. One of the central points of Athanasius' theology, as mentioned before, is the incarnation. There were two reasons that he put such an emphasis on this. The first reason is that he firmly believed that the incarnation of God in the form of Jesus Christ was an historical event. The second reason Athanasius stressed the incarnation is that it was of supreme importance for the time in which he lived. During the early part of the fourth century the concepts of the nature of God the Father and the Son were being explored and interpreted by the Church and Church Councils. Thus, Athanasius lived at a key moment in history when the stakes were very high and he felt this weight and, therefore, stressed the incarnation so strongly. As well, it was very important that the opponents of Arianism have a strong basis for believing that Jesus is God in the same way that the Father is God. Athanasius was one of the primary theologians that provided this base.

One of the aspects of the incarnation that Athanasius embraced was the vulgarity of it. Athanasius held to the belief that God becoming a man was a principal part of the salvation ethos. However, there were many people of that time period that believed that God becoming a man was somehow vulgar and, therefore, they desired to reject it. However, quite to the contrary, Athanasius relished this idea and even emphasized it. As well, he used this as a basis for salvation being offered to everyone regardless of their position in society. "Athanasius rejoices in the vulgarity of the incarnation, in the vulgarity of the language of the Gospels,

virtually taunts his upper-class pagan interlocutors with it because it works.”²³² In addition, the fact that Athanasius embraced this facet enhances his image as the champion of the common man. He was dearly loved by those in his congregation and see. One of the reasons that Athanasius was so admired is that he was not a theologian that pandered to the desires of the socially powerful, but, rather he believed that the salvation that was offered through Christ was for common people everywhere.

In addition, in his theology Athanasius emphasized the relationship that the Son and Father had and have. Even though the Son is eternal just as the Father is, He is still obedient to the Father.²³³ As well, the Son is of the same essence as the Father but He is compliant. In his works Athanasius embraced both of these ideas. Thus, in the theology of Athanasius, the Father and Son have a relationship in which one is obedient to the other but this does influence their value or essence. This emphasis by Athanasius aids in living out practical theology as the one who is commanded to be submissive does not have a lesser value. Rather, they can follow the example of Jesus and be meek as He was.

As well, in the theology that Athanasius espoused there is an emphasis on the incarnation as it is related to atonement. Athanasius believed that the atonement and incarnation were closely

²³² Sara Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy: 325-345* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65. Parvis also wrote about how Athanasius was in between two theological systems in the fourth century. One was a system that she described as platonizing and contemplative. Parvis believed that this old way of thinking in Alexandria was coming to an end. The other system followed more in line with the teachings of Irenaeus and it was earthy and immanent. She says that Athanasius had a great ability to have these systems in balance and to relate to individuals on both sides. It was his ability to move between the two that allowed Athanasius to hold the church together in Alexandria as well as he did.

²³³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 198. Torrance also believed that Athanasius closely followed Irenaeus in this respect. Torrance wrote: “In the teaching of Irenaeus and Athanasius, there was considerable stress upon the obedience of the incarnate Son, and consequently upon the saving significance of the humanity of Christ, both in regard to revelation and in regard to reconciliation. Also, in their writings notably in that of Athanasius there is found a full and satisfying account of the atonement in which incarnation and atonement are closely associated and are mutually involved.”

associated to one another.²³⁴ Since Jesus was God come in the flesh, it is the sole way that there can be atonement for sins. Thus, to atone for the sins of man it took the death of the fully incarnate God. There could be no other sacrifice that could accomplish it. Therefore, for Athanasius the concept of the incarnation is central to all theology. The atonement is the focal doctrine of Christianity and, thus, when the Arians espoused the idea that Jesus was not God in the same way that the Father is fully God, Athanasius thought that this would lead to the undermining of all of Christianity. The atonement would not have been possible if Jesus had not been fully God. Athanasius understood that if it was a created being that had been sacrificed then the atonement would not be valid. It had to be God Himself that became the sacrifice. The sins of the created could only be atoned for by the Creator.

Athanasius, likewise, argued the tenet of why the incarnation was necessary. In his writings he gave two reasons for the incarnation. The first presented was in relation to the appearance of sin. "...because sin appeared, and by depriving man of the Logos, deprived him of the principle of life."²³⁵ Thusly, Athanasius believed the relationship of man with the Logos was severed when sin appeared in the world. Athanasius penned in *De Incarnatione*: "Our creation and God's Incarnation are closely allied, for man's fall necessitated the Incarnation."²³⁶ Therefore, Athanasius connotes that the effects of sin were overcome by the incarnation of the Logos. A second reason that the incarnation was important is that it was necessary for the revelation of God.²³⁷ Athanasius espoused the idea that God could only truly be known by mankind if He was

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Robert L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: Methuen and Co., 1902), 348.

²³⁶ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, Chapter IV. Bindley, 22.

²³⁷ Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 348. Ottley goes on to state that Athanasius believed that man was made to have a knowledge of God. As well, God created man with a share of the Logos but this was lost when man chose to sin. Thus, in order for this to be restored it was necessary for the Logos to have a human body so that mankind could again have the possibility of being renewed in relation to His image.

to become incarnate. In *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius intimates that the Logos is the main agent for revealing God as well as being the creator.²³⁸

Another aspect of the incarnation that was important for Athanasius is that when the Word became incarnate it was the only way for death to be abolished. He wrote in *De Incarnatione*: “The Word, perceiving that death could not be abolished except by the death of all; and since He Himself, the Immortal Word, could not die, took a body capable of death...”²³⁹ Therefore, the incarnation is of primary importance for terminating death’s reign among people. For Athanasius it was necessary for God to incarnate into a body that was capable of death.

As well, Athanasius had to face active critics of the incarnation that were prevalent during his ministry and he was able to answer most of their arguments. One of the primary arguments that was popular with the critics was that it was below the nature of the Logos to appear in the form of a human body. Thus, they attempted to convey the idea that the body of Jesus was a not a real human body but, alternately, a spiritual one or that God was never incarnate. Either argument would destroy the idea of the incarnation. Athanasius was able to refute this idea when he wrote: “If the Logos is in all things in the world...why could he not also dwell in a man whom he moved, through whom he manifested Himself, even as he manifests Himself through the world?”²⁴⁰ Another argument that the opponents employed is that they questioned why the Logos did not assume a body that was different from other human beings, such as a shining body. Likewise, Athanasius was able to answer this query by writing: “Because His coming had not an epideitical, but a curative purpose.”²⁴¹ Thus, Athanasius was saying that the real purpose

²³⁸ Ibid., 344.

²³⁹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, Chapter IX. Bindley, 24.

²⁴⁰ James Ridgeway, *S. Athanasius on the Incarnation* (London: James Parker and Co., 1880), xxv.

²⁴¹ Ibid., xxvi.

of the Logos becoming incarnate was to cure the sin problem of the world by His death and resurrection, and this was in contrast to it simply being ceremonial. Jesus needed to have a real body that could suffer rather than simply coming to earth to reveal what God was like.

Therefore, through these examples it is evident that Athanasius had a brilliant theological mind and he was able to refute the arguments of critics and other theologians of his day that desired to deny the incarnation. Moreover, Athanasius held firmly to the idea that the incarnation was not just a peripheral doctrine of Scripture but a central one. As mentioned before, he stressed the incarnation both because of its centrality to salvation and because his opponents of the time were promoting divergent views so vehemently.

Good News

Another crucial area of Athanasius' theology was his emphasis on and view of the gospel. More pointedly, Athanasius tended to emphasize the idea of good news in his theological writing. The good news was that God had spanned the gulf that had existed between man and God.²⁴² Man no longer had to exist in separation from his creator. Now, through the atoning life, death and resurrection of Jesus man could have the gulf between themselves and God removed and live in harmony with Him. Athanasius believed that this aspect of the salvation narrative needed to be emphasized to everyone. Thus, for Athanasius, the salvation narrative did not involve sadness or following rules but, instead, that through the incarnation the relationship

²⁴² Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Last Years of the Arian Controversy: 324-345*, 64. Parvis writes on this theme: "For Athanasius, the Good News is that the Word really did become incarnate, really did come down to our level, the immeasurable gulf that had to be crossed between God and creatures, what is and what belongs to the world was coming to be and passing away, only serving to show God's still more immeasurable generosity. Yes, it is unfitting, yes, it is ridiculous, just as the Jews and the pagans say, to imagine God entering the material world, and one part of it at that..."

between God and man could be restored. As well, this harkens back to the previously mentioned idea that Athanasius had a place for the common man in his theology and, thus, the atonement was for everyone.

In retrospect, for Athanasius to emphasize the idea that the gospel was the good news of the atonement for everyone came at a critical point in church history. In the previous centuries people asked the question of how the wealthy could be saved. However, during the time of Athanasius the church became endorsed by the Emperor and this meant that many of the socially powerful and elite began to flock towards the church as they viewed it as now more socially acceptable and even for membership to be encouraged. Christianity was developing into the religion of the elite. In subsequent epochs the view of Christianity would change in this aspect. The wealthy would begin to look at the poor with disdain and wonder why they did not share in the riches of others. However, at this time Athanasius kept the emphasis on the idea that the gospel was for everyone and this negated the idea that the powerful would desire to make it an exclusive social entity. Moreover, Athanasius and his theological system came at a beneficial time to preserve the idea of the atonement being for all people. He lived at a time when the idea of the gospel being only for the elite was beginning to germinate and yet he defended the idea that the gospel was for everyone.

The Trinity

Another theological concept that Athanasius held as vitally important was the idea of the trinity. He thought of the trinity as a major structural point in the Christian religion. In his theological system, Athanasius presented the idea that each member of the Godhead is of the

same essence. In addition, each person in the Godhead is eternal. This would logically mean that no person in the Godhead was created by another member but rather each of the three has an existence that is without beginning. Moreover, Athanasius also held firmly to the position of monotheism so that the Godhead has three persons but He is only one God. In his theological writing it was important that these two ideas, three eternal persons in the Godhead and monotheism, be held in tension. This statement by Athanasius was characteristic of his views on this topic: “The Father did not reign from everlasting by Himself, and the Son by Himself, but both in One make only One Creator and Monarch of the Universe.”²⁴³ This, of course, leads to the modern orthodox position in Christianity of monotheism and three persons in the Godhead. It was critical for Athanasius to propagate this belief during the pivotal years of his theological writings.

As well, it is evidenced in his writings that Athanasius did not allow for any form of modalism. Modalism was also a way of understanding the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that was prevalent at the time, and still appears in certain circles to this day. In modalism it is believed that God exists as the Father at one point in history, as the Son at another point and then as the Holy Spirit, but God is never more than one at a time. This doctrine is contrary to the teaching found in Scripture and a construct that is dangerous to the understanding of God. As well, it is interesting that modalism is one of the ideas that most likely drove the Arians to their position as Arius originally accused Bishop Alexander of encouraging this opinion. There was a fear during that period of history that modalism would come to dominate Christianity and this led some to traverse to the opposite extreme instead of maintaining a balance. However, Athanasius was able to brilliantly refute the teachings of both modalism and

²⁴³ Edwin Davies, *Gems from the Fathers* (New York: James Pitt and Co., 1899), 170.

Arianism by maintaining the balance and avoiding the extreme ideas that God either existed in different forms at different times in history or that the Son was of a different essence than the Father.

A theological idea that receives its basis from the construct of the trinity, and that Athanasius emphasized, is the supremacy of Christ. It is evident that since Athanasius held that all three persons in the Godhead are equal then he had a high view of Christ. Of course, having a high view of Christ may seem automatic to most Christians living in modern times but one must also remember that Athanasius lived in a different world where these ideas needed to have cogent arguments as many of the ideas that orthodox Christianity affirms today were being heavily questioned. Thus, it is important to understand that Athanasius was a leading theologian and writer that espoused the idea that Christ was superior to any other being, biblical character or human being. For instance, in affirming this idea Athanasius wrote: “Again, does Scripture tell of anyone who was pierced in hands and feet or hung upon a tree at all, and by means of a cross perfected his sacrifice for the salvation of all? It was not Abraham, for he died in his bed, as did also Isaac and Jacob. Moses and Aaron died in the mountain and David ended his days in his house, without anybody having plotted against him.”²⁴⁴ Again, it needs to be reiterated that this high view of Christ may seem to logically follow for modern Christians but Athanasius held firmly to the biblical position when this idea was very much in question.

²⁴⁴ Saint Athanasius, *The Incarnation* (London: The Centenary Press, 1944), 1969.

Homoousios

Another central tenet of Athanasius' theology was the idea of homoousios. It was an idea that was bitterly contested throughout most of his life and, also, an idea that involved suffering for Athanasius and most of the those who affirmed it. In short, homoousios is the idea that Jesus is of the same essence as the Father. This was the doctrinal stance that was approved by the Council of Nicaea. The importance of this stronghold of Christian faith is critical. "Athanasius fought so hard for the deity of Christ because he saw that our salvation depends on it."²⁴⁵

The opposing theological viewpoint that the Arians and other opponents favored was the idea of homoiousios. The difference in the meaning of the two words is great even though the variance between them seems small. To add the *iota* and make it homoiousios meant that Jesus was of a different substance than the Father and, thus, it naturally follows that Jesus was not fully God in the same sense that the Father is God. "Orthodoxy, however, was persuaded that everything that is important depends on excluding the *iota*, on confessing Christ as of the same substance as the Father, not as of like substance."²⁴⁶ Thus, Athanasius argued against and rejected the idea that the Father and Jesus were merely of a similar substance as he was able to perceive that the acceptance of this construct would result in the termination of orthodox Christianity. In addition, Christianity would also lose the potency as a change agent in the world if Jesus were merely another created being. A typical quote from Athanasius is found in the

²⁴⁵ Troy Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2006), 32. Lane also points out a useful and rather unique characteristic about how Athanasius viewed theology. He knew when to stand firm when everyone else was beginning to be weakened. At the same time in conjunction with this Athanasius was wise enough to realize when flexibility was needed.

²⁴⁶ Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), 108. Athanasius felt that this was so critical because if the Son was of similar substance as the Father then it would possibly be presented that he had been created by the Father and a created being would not be able to become incarnate and to suffer and die for the sins of mankind.

Contra Arianos: "...we are forced to say that the Son is entirely that which is 'of the substance of the Father.'"²⁴⁷

An interesting aspect of the conflict between the advocates of homoousios and homoiousios is those who adhered to and supported their doctrine. Those who affirmed the idea of homoousios were almost exclusively Christian while the supporters of homoiousios, generally referred to as Arians, had difficulty when it came to garnering support from Christians. However, they were able to gather endorsement among Jews and pagans.²⁴⁸ Moreover, the Jews and pagans did not believe in the basic tenets of Christianity and, thus, it is easily comprehended why they would be willing to support a theological system that does not affirm that Jesus is fully God. Therefore, it followed that the Arians were willing to seek support from groups that did not believe in the truth of Christianity.

Holy Spirit

It is also important to understand that Athanasius not only embraced the idea of Jesus being fully God, but that he also believed that the Holy Spirit is fully God as He is a part of the trinity. In Athanasius' theological system the idea of the trinity meant that all three members of the Godhead were equally God. Another key point about the Holy Spirit is that all of the persons of the trinity were of the same substance rather than merely the same essence. Therefore, it

²⁴⁷ Henry Bettensen, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 381.

²⁴⁸ Brown, *Heresies*, 118. Brown goes on to intimate that this questionable practice of Christians seeking support from those who did not follow the Christian faith seems to have its genesis with the Arians. He wrote of a modern example in how Hans Kung, a Roman Catholic in the Swiss Church, sought support from those who were not Catholic or Christian in continuing his independent views that are at variance with the those that the pope endorses.

coherently follows that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have always existed, were not created and are all equally God.

As well, Athanasius was a pioneer in the theology of the Holy Spirit as he became the first theologian to devote serious attention to the place of the Holy Spirit in the trinity.²⁴⁹ Additionally, as was so common place for that period of time, he was struggling with another heretical group over this doctrine. Tropicis was the name the opposing group was known by and they were an Egyptian group that espoused the belief that the Father and Son were indeed fully God but that the Holy Spirit had been subsequently created out of nothing.²⁵⁰ Therefore, because of this stance they denied the truth of the doctrine of the trinity. Their original battle had been with a man named Bishop Serapion and he, in turn, asked Athanasius to get involved in the conflict and attempt to quiet it. Athanasius does this by writing his *Letters to Serapion*. The primary intention of these works is to present the case for the deity of the Holy Spirit. Weinandy writes of these letters: “Athanasius, in his four letters to Serapion, wants not only to refute their false interpretation of Scripture and their theology which issues from it, but also to present a positive scriptural understanding, founded upon right faith, that testifies to the Holy Spirit’s true divine status.”²⁵¹ Therefore, Athanasius was an important figure in theology because he defended the full deity of both the Son and the Holy Spirit.

²⁴⁹ Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, 34.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, 108. One of the arguments that the opponents used in Athanasius’ time period is that if the Holy Spirit proceeded from God then He would have been a brother to the Son. As well, if the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son then He would be a Grandson to the Father. They argued that this leaves only one conclusion being that the Holy Spirit was a created being. Athanasius was able to refute these arguments. For more information on this see Weinandy.

Doctrine of God

Another principle aspect of Athanasius' theology that may not be appreciated as much by Christians today is his doctrine of God. In his theology Athanasius exhibited a high view of God and this was contrary to other prevailing teachers of that time period. As well, it should be understood that it is because of men like Athanasius and the stance they took that it is so automatic for Christians today to have a high view of God. Individuals like Athanasius had to fight the battles at that critical time in history. A major tenet of Athanasius in this regard is that God is not part of the world, nor is He is the world.²⁵² This was an important theological construct because many Eastern belief systems, in addition to some modern Western ones, espouse the idea that God is either somehow the world as a whole or part of the world. However, Athanasius was crucial on this point because in his teachings he accentuated the notion that God is a completely distinct entity from the world He created.

Athanasius also espoused the idea that God is not dependent on another. Thus, in his theology, God is the creator of all and He is totally independent of all other entities. As well, Athanasius made the cogent point that He would not be God if He were dependent on any other creature.²⁵³ Athanasius followed the scriptural mandate in this as the Scriptures teach that God is not subject to the control of any other and that He is sovereign.

As well, Athanasius importantly declares that God is a whole and, therefore, He does not exist in parts.²⁵⁴ This concept is important because the idea of the trinity dictates that God is a unity while being in three persons at the same time. In addition, Athanasius stresses the view that God

²⁵² Ridgeway, *S. Athanasius on the Incarnation*, xiv.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

has a distinct personality.²⁵⁵ An important work that Athanasius argues for and presents this idea in is the aforementioned *Contra Gentes*. This concept serves to reiterate the point that God is completely separate from the world He created.

Athanasius was such a strong proponent of God's divinity that he reacts strongly to opponents who would assert deity to any other being. An example of this was his writing in *De Synodis*. In the third Synod of Sirmium, held in 359, the Arian faction allowed an alarming statement. In the superscription to the creed they asserted that Constantius, who was emperor at the time, was eternal. Thus, in *De Synodis* Athanasius mocked the Arian party because they were not willing to ascribe eternality to Christ but they were willing to ascribe it to a mortal man such as Constantius.²⁵⁶ In this exchange Athanasius revealed both his penchant for defending the doctrine of God and for being clever with words in dealing with his opponents.

In addition, Athanasius presents two basic truths about God in *Contra Gentes*. One of these concepts is that God is both transcendent and self-sufficient. God is, as stated before, dependent on no other creature and is the cause of everything that exists.²⁵⁷ A second point that Athanasius denotes is that God is immanent. Athanasius presents the idea that order and rationality in the universe is provided by God. Therefore, the immanence of God is the basis for all epistemology. Thus, Athanasius combined in his theology the important concepts that God is separate from the world and at the same time the sustainer of the world. Part of the reason he is able to hold these

²⁵⁵ Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 344. Ottley goes on to declare that Athanasius' primary concern and purpose in writing *On the Incarnation* was not only to declare God's distinct personality but also His transcendence. From this stance Athanasius is then able to powerfully argue for the existence of the Son or the Word. Thus, Athanasius was important in revealing relation between the Logos and the world.

²⁵⁶ Arwin van Wilgenburg. "The Redemption of Athanasius within Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology." *Church History and Religious Culture* 90.2-3 (2010): 319.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

concepts in balance is because he has a high view of God. Athanasius wrote in *De Incarnatione*: “The true doctrine is that God brought the universe into being out of nothing.”²⁵⁸

Human Body

The idea that Jesus had a human body was a concept that Athanasius also incorporated into his theology. This was a critical doctrine of the time as there were rival factions, both during the fourth century and earlier, that espoused the idea that Jesus did not have a human body. An important reason for these groups to believe this dualism was an idea which taught that all flesh is evil. Thus, since all flesh is evil, Jesus being incarnate could not possibly take on the form of a human body but only appeared to have one. As strange as this doctrine may seem to a modern reader this construct was quite prevalent in the early fourth century. Athanasius was so crucial at this juncture because he held firm to the position that Jesus had a human body and the times necessitated an individual with some theological influence to espouse this. He wrote in *De Incarnatione*: “The human actions attributed to Him are those of the body of God the Word; they prove the hypostatic union, and the reality of His body.”²⁵⁹

Christ’s Power

Athanasius believed that real moral transformation in the life of an individual could only be achieved by the power of Christ. Furthermore, he used this construct to argue against the pagans by espousing that nothing in their teachings creates a true desire in an individual to live a pure

²⁵⁸ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, Chapter III. Bindley, 21.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter XVIII. Bindley, 29.

moral life.²⁶⁰ Athanasius firmly believed that the only thing that has true transformational power is the impact of the resurrected Christ. “Only the power of the incarnate Christ can meet people where they really are.”²⁶¹ Thus, the idea of being transformed by Christ was important in the teachings of Athanasius. In addition, this pervades and enhances the idea so prevalent in his teachings that the gospel is accessible to all classes of people.

Asceticism

An interesting aspect of Athanasius’ life and theology were his teachings about asceticism. Throughout his life Athanasius had contact with ascetics as well as living the life of an ascetic at various times. In fact, it may even be perceived from his life that if Athanasius could have chosen he would have preferred the life of an ascetic over the life of a famous but troubled bishop. Thus, Athanasius viewed asceticism in a positive way and he encouraged others to both embrace it for themselves and to have an encouraging view of the lifestyle. Moreover, this beneficial framework that Athanasius held asceticism in served to lend credibility to the movement as many Christians respected his views. At this time in history, as the church was being made legal, and even favored, by Constantine, many Christians were choosing the ascetic lifestyle as they viewed the new situation as a corruption of the true church.

Antony, as mentioned before, was one of the monks that Athanasius had a close relationship with. In fact, Athanasius even believed him to be the first monk.²⁶² Antony was also a man that

²⁶⁰ Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy: 325-345*, 62.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁶² Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, 32. Lane goes on to say of this phenomenon: “In the second and third centuries there were those who lived an especially ascetic life—remaining single, embracing poverty and devoting themselves to prayer and fasting. Such people remained within the normal congregations and are called ‘domestic ascetics’ because they practiced their asceticism at home, within society. But in the fourth century as

was greatly revered for his spiritual life and many Egyptian Christians would traverse into the desert to see him and seek advice and prayer. At one point, Antony revealed his support for Athanasius as he made a rare appearance in Alexandria to buttress him in his stance against the Arians. In his few days in Alexandria Antony made it abundantly clear that he supported the orthodox position and Athanasius as he upheld it.²⁶³ This was of particular interest to the people of Alexandria as both Arius and Athanasius had previously claimed that Antony supported their position. While he was in the city the people treated Antony as if he were a celebrity and listened to his words of wisdom and encouragement to embrace the orthodox position.

Athanasius living the ascetic lifestyle at times and encouraging it in others is a surprising finding in the life of a famous bishop. Through his encouragement of asceticism Athanasius was able to have an impact on future generations. For example, some years later *Life of Antony* would have an effect on the salvation experience of Augustine who would become a very influential theologian in his own right.²⁶⁴ Thus, in his embracing of asceticism Athanasius was able to have an influence through both his theology and his personal actions.

Role as Pastor

One important aspect of Athanasius as a theologian is intertwined with his role as a pastor. Athanasius took his call to be a pastor seriously and one of his primary motivations was to defend his flock, or his followers, from the ravenous wolves who would come and teach false doctrine with the result of them being stolen away from the faith. Thus, Athanasius was able to

the moral standards of the church became diluted by the increasing number of superficial pagan converts, the ascetics began to withdraw from society, especially into the deserts of Egypt and Syria.”

²⁶³ Robert T. Meyer, *The Life of Saint Antony* (New York: New Press, 1950), 6.

²⁶⁴ Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, 32.

put his great intellect to work in protecting his perception of the truth and, thus, his congregation. Anatolios writes of Athanasius in this regard: “Here, as in many other places, Athanasius is at pains to disqualify those who do not accept the full divinity of the Son from any claim to the name of “Christians,” and he clearly considers it to be his pastoral duty to do so.”²⁶⁵ As well, Athanasius reveals his true heart of a pastor in the way he reacts to how the Arian heresy has deceived many Christians. Athanasius appears to be “manifestly shaken”²⁶⁶ by the very idea that so many in his see have been deceived into even the possibility of accepting Arianism as a form of true Christianity. Anatolios also aptly summarized Athanasius’ apparent feelings on this: “However, from the point of view of Athanasius’ own self-understanding, he is a persecuted shepherd of an embattled flock who is not only at pains to provide his people with cogent and persuasive reasons for denying “Arian” doctrine, but who is also quite desperate to coach them in the appropriate affective repugnance which they ought to feel toward such “blasphemy.””²⁶⁷ Such was how Athanasius viewed himself as the protector of true Christians both in Alexandria and other parts of the empire. Thus, Athanasius is somewhat unique in his theological stances that is coupled with his pastor’s heart. As well, it seems that this theological acumen combined with sincere care and love for his people is part of what made him such an endeared figure for his followers.

²⁶⁵ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 36-37.

²⁶⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 36.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Role of Scripture

A further distinctive of Athanasius' theological background is that he heavily used Scripture, as previously mentioned. Moreover, Athanasius utilizes Scripture in his writings and to help him to persevere through difficult circumstances. In fact, it is this penchant for turning to Scripture that allows him to have the inner fortitude and optimism through the harrowing events. An example of this comes from his thirteenth festal letter: "What does this mean, my beloved, but that we also should "glory in afflictions" (Romans 5:3) when enemies cause us suffering and that we should not become downcast in spirit when we are persecuted but should rather press forward toward the crown of the upward calling in Jesus Christ our Lord (Phil 3:14)? I entreat you, therefore, that when we are afflicted and injured, we should not be troubled but rather give our cheek to the one who strikes us (Mt 5:29)..."²⁶⁸ Thus, it is understood when reviewing his writings that Athanasius had a tremendous admiration and respect for Scripture and that he used it as a basis for gaining strength in his own life circumstances.

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ATHANASIUS

Athanasius not only had an influence on the people of his time, and subsequent centuries as well, through his exemplary life but also through his theological prowess. He was able to combine his impeccable life, his brilliant theological mind and true love for the people in a unique fashion and these characteristics made him a beloved bishop. Closely akin to this was that Athanasius went against the prevailing tides of his epoch by espousing that salvation was for the common man and not just the elite. As well, a critical idea that Athanasius embraced was the

²⁶⁸ Athanasius, *Festal Letter XIII:6*.

incarnation. He rightly believed that the incarnation was a crucial doctrine that was central to Christianity and he aptly defended it through his personal and ecclesiastical struggles as well as his astute theological treatises. Similarly, he defended the doctrine of the trinity both through written word and action. In a similar vein, he stood against modalism while maintaining the balance with the teaching that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were fully God. In fact, Athanasius was monumental in promoting the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is fully God and of the same essence as the Father and Son. All of this is coupled with a high view of both God the Father and Christ and this came at a time when these doctrines were being challenged by various entities and heresies. It is difficult to fathom the impact that Athanasius' theological stances have had on the history of Christianity, particularly since he existed in such a pivotal time period.

CHAPTER IV: FOURTH CENTURY INFLUENCES

A VARIETY OF INFLUENCES

This chapter includes information on some of the major characters that are critical to understanding the dynamics of the politics and church policies of the fourth century. The major theological characters that had a great impact on the life of Athanasius, and on all of Christendom, were Arius and Eusebius. Both of these men stood outside of the bounds of orthodoxy and, thus, they became the major individual opponents that Athanasius would confront in his battle to preserve the idea of Christ being fully God and of the same essence as the Father. As well, another important diverse theological group were the Meletians. As stated before, the Meletians had developed as a result of a schism over lapsed believers and more of their background and impact will be delved into here. Finally, a study of fourth century Christianity would not be complete without a reckoning of Constantine and his sons. Constantine is considered the first Christian emperor and his impact on the church and politics of the church in the fourth century is tremendous. Additionally, after his death each of his sons, Constantinus, Constantius and Constans, would become pivotal figures in the life of the church. The theological leanings of these three sons between orthodox and Arian beliefs impacted ecclesiastical politics for over twenty years. The fourth century was a time of great change as it is the first observed instance of the secular ruler having an impact on the interior of ecclesiastical life.

ARIUS

Arius' Background

The first of the primary personalities to be discussed is Arius. Arius is one of the important theological figures from the fourth century and it is paramount to understand him and his views in order to have a clearer outlook on Athanasius. An important construct of Arius is that he was one of the chief theological rivals of Athanasius. They each had differing views on the nature and origin of Jesus. In fact, Arius was such a driving force in his life that it would be difficult to theorize how Athanasius' life would have been different if they had never known each other.

Arius was a native of Libya but had been in Alexandria for a number of years at the time the conflict developed between him and Bishop Alexander.²⁶⁹ It is also of significance to note that no Libyan was ever known to oppose Arianism.²⁷⁰ This lends even more credence to the notion that many bishops living in the fourth century made their ecclesiastical decisions based on politics rather than a consideration of the veracity of an idea. Had the Libyan bishops simply been a majority favoring Arius it would be easier to explain. However, since it appears to be unanimous it presents the impression that it is more likely that political expediency, rather than truth, was the real motivation. Again, this is important to understand when considering the main topic of the paper as bishops living in a certain geographic area tended to either believe completely in Athanasius' innocence or his guilt.

²⁶⁹ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 42.

²⁷⁰ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 1.

Arius was most likely born in 256 so that he was already a seasoned individual by the time the conflict with Alexander, and by association orthodoxy, fully developed.²⁷¹ At one point he was taunted by Constantine for being worn in body and pale in complexion.²⁷² His physical appearance is described by Leithart: “A charismatic preacher, Arius was tall, stooped and curved—as one ancient historian put it—like a snake, wore the garb of an ascetic and a philosopher, and oversaw a large number of devoted virgins in the Alexandrian church.”²⁷³ Arius was also known to have procured support for his ideas with his winsome personality.²⁷⁴ As well, Arius seemed to appeal his teachings to the common laymen. Moreover, he made use of pithy sayings put into the form of a rhyme that were easy to remember and, apparently, had an impact on common people. An example of such a whimsical utterance was: “There was a time when he was not.”²⁷⁵ This was in reference to Christ, and Arius utilized this saying, and other similar ones, to help spread his beliefs and attach them in the minds of the people. Much about his background and the beginning of the conflict have been previously discussed so there is no need to reiterate them here.

There is some conflict as to how Arius received his education and who influenced him. Some believe that Arius sat under the teachings of Lucian and received his education at the school of

²⁷¹ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 3. Arius is believed to have been of Berber descent and his father’s name is listed as Ammonius. As a young man he most likely studied in Antioch and was under the tutelage of Lucian. When he returned to Alexandria he became involved in the conflict involving Bishop Peter and the lapsed bishops. He supported Meletius and his rival church over Peter and the orthodox and was excommunicated, most likely in 311. However, he was reinstated by Achillas who was the next bishop and given the church at Baucalis to pastor. Baucalis was an area of Alexandria close to the coast. It was while he was at Baucalis that the conflict with Alexander began in earnest.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 5. However, Warren H. Carroll presents a different impression of him as he states that women doted over him and men were impressed with his look of being intellectually superior. Also, Carroll believes that instead of having appearing worn in body that he was rather distinguished looking.

²⁷³ Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 165.

²⁷⁴ Franz Dunzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2007), 41.

²⁷⁵ Karl Bihlmeyer, *Church History* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1968), 247.

Antioch.²⁷⁶ Lucian had a private academy in Antioch and this academy was maintained largely because he was a theological outsider.²⁷⁷ As well, Lucian seems to have been influenced by a man named Paul of Samosata. Cairns remarks of Samosata: “This able but unscrupulous man taught that Christ was not divine but merely a good man who, by righteousness and by the penetration of his being by the divine Logos at baptism, achieved divinity and saviorhood.”²⁷⁸ Paul of Samosata and his teachings were condemned at the Synod of Antioch in 268.²⁷⁹ Moreover, Lucian became a martyr and this fact seemed to gain some measure of credibility for his views without many people trying to comprehend the real import of his stances.²⁸⁰ Thus, these facts about Paul of Samosata and Lucian aid in explaining two aspects. First, it appears likely that, even though these views were condemned previously in 268, they were still having an impact in the next century through Arius, albeit not in as extreme a form. Secondly, if it were true that Arius’ views had their germination in Antioch then it would assist in understanding how the eastern churches in the empire came to support his position over that of the Nicene believers. However, others believe that it cannot be known with clarity that Arius even had a relationship with Lucian. Rather, they think it most probable that Arius was influenced by Origen, a speculative theologian of the previous century.²⁸¹ Whatever the catalyst for his theology, it is

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), 107.

²⁷⁸ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 131. Paul of Samosata lived from 200 to 275 and was bishop of Antioch from 260 to 268. One of the key points of his teaching was adoptionism in which he believed that at some point God the Father adopted the Son. Paul of Samosata was also alleged to have been involved in a tremendous amount of corruption as well as bringing young women in to live with him and fulfill his pleasures. He was deposed by a council in 268. For more information on Paul of Samosata see *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon.

²⁷⁹ Brown, *Heresies*, 111.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Dunzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church*, 42. Origen was born in 184 and died in 253. He was likely born in Alexandria. Origen’s father was martyred in 202 during the persecution of Septimius Severus. Legend tells that he wanted to be martyred like his father had been but when he sought to leave the house his mother had hidden his clothes so that he did not go out and sacrifice himself. Another interesting incident in Origen’s life is that he had castrated himself in order to protect himself from temptation. As time

clear that Arius had developed a strong penchant for subordinationism as he viewed this as a major component of theology. “Not only did he subordinate the Son to the Father in nature, but he denied that the Son had a divine nature or any of the divine attributes, especially eternity.”²⁸²

Socrates suggests that Arius began to voice his unorthodox beliefs in response to a sermon by Alexander in which the bishop tended too strongly, at least in Arius’ opinion, towards Sabellianism.²⁸³ Sabellian ideas were feared in the church as they presented God as being in different modes at different times in history. However, it seems unlikely that any of Alexander’s actions or sermons actually influenced Arius in his beliefs. In fact, Rufinus states that Bishop Alexander was known to be of a quiet and gentle nature and was reluctant to become involved in the conflict with Arius.²⁸⁴ In contrast, Arius reveals the qualities of being zealous and headstrong to the point of a fault. Cairns remarks on this aspect: “The era is also an excellent illustration of how intense zeal for a doctrine may unwittingly lead an individual or church into error unless there is a balanced study of the Bible.”²⁸⁵

As well, Arius appears to have been a diverse character with aspects that one might not expect of someone who was branded a heretic. He was known to be a proficient and persuasive writer. As well, those who study his writings believe that he was most likely influenced by

progressed he became known more and more for having heretical and speculative ideas and he was anathematized by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.

²⁸² Bihlmeyer, *Church History*, 247.

²⁸³ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 5. Sabellianism is similar to Modalism which was discussed earlier. In short, Sabellius believed that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit existed in different modes at various points in history. Sabellius was most likely born around 215 and was surmised to have been educated in Rome. However, many propose that he was actually Libyan as his ideas tended to be strongest there. One of the aspects that tended to be negative for those in Athanasius’ time was that Sabellius had also made use of the term homoousios in the previous century. Thus, many in Alexandria and the eastern church feared that modalism would become the prevalent belief. Tertullian also used the term Patripassionism to describe modalism, and by association Sabellianism, as he stated that since modalism made no clear distinction between the Father and the Son then it meant that the Father had in fact suffered.

²⁸⁴ Rufinus, Book 1, Chapter 1.

²⁸⁵ Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 131.

Neoplatanism and had a philosophical education.²⁸⁶ Some would even traverse as far as to say that Arius was so influenced by philosophy that his belief system was as much a philosophy as a religion.²⁸⁷ In addition, Arius revealed contrasting characteristics as he was understood to be a popular preacher and was well liked by people, while at the same time thought to be deceptive. Williams quotes Epiphanius: “He was...counterfeited like a guileful serpent, and well able to deceive any unsuspecting heart...he spoke gently, and people found him persuasive and flattering.”²⁸⁸ Finally, and somewhat oddly for how many think of him, Arius was an ascetic by reputation. Thusly, Arius is painted as a man of diverse, and sometimes surprising, individual constructs.

Sozomen believed that Arius had contact with the schismatic Meletians even before the conflict with Bishop Alexander came into prominence.²⁸⁹ If this is true it would more easily explain the ease at which an alliance formed between them. In fact, the Meletians would become involved in many of the scandals that would develop in the late 320s and early 330s. Whatever the case, Arius began in earnest to promote his views near the year 318 and, thereafter, there was an undeniable connection between his movement and the Meletians.

A further idea that is critical to understanding Arius and Arianism is that there is often a disconnect between the two. Many modern scholars reject a cohesive belief system referred to as Arianism. Rather they surmise that Arians were a diverse group that were generally opposed to

²⁸⁶ Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 30.

²⁸⁷ Henry Melville Gwatkin, *Studies of Arianism* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1900), 16.

²⁸⁸ Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 30.

²⁸⁹ Sozomen, Book 1, Chapter 15. That Arius had contact with the Meletians before 318 is fairly certain from two lines of thought. The first is that he is believed to have joined Meletius in rebellion against Bishop Peter of Alexandria and to have been deposed for this. The second line of thought is that the Christian community was not that large in Alexandria, especially before 320, and it seems difficult to fathom that Arius would not have had any contact with the Meletians at least at some point in his career.

the decisions of the Council of Nicaea. J. Rebecca Lyman remarks: “Second, scholars have begun to unravel the assumed theological ties between Arius and those later called ‘Arians.’ They now reject a coherent movement called ‘Ariansim,’ but rather study the variety of doctrines and alliances of those opposed to Nicaea.”²⁹⁰ Thus, it can be ascertained that those in later decades of the fourth century referred to as Arians may not have necessarily held Arius’ beliefs, but rather may have been united by a more common core belief of opposing the Nicene Creed and the idea of homoousios. Many adherents to Arianism believed in the full divinity of Christ but were fearful that the homoousios construct would tip the delicate theological balance in the direction of modalism.

Theological Views of Arius

It should be duly noted that Arius and those in his theological camp held Christ in high esteem. They asserted that Jesus was the word of God, the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁹¹ However, the Nicene believers held to the doctrine that Jesus was God come in the flesh. In contrast, Arius continually affirmed the construct that Jesus was not God.²⁹² In fact, Gregg and Groh remarked that if those who opposed Arius could state their difficulty with the

²⁹⁰ Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 238. The Arians encompassed a variety of adherents and their main thread was to oppose orthodox views of Christ that were espoused in the Nicene Creed. Many of these individuals and groups feared that the balance would be shifted too strongly towards modalism so that God would be viewed in different modes at various points in history and this would destroy the Christian basis. Thus, many who may not have agreed with Arius on a doctrine, such as Christ being changeable, may have found themselves battling on the same side as him as they sought to protect the world from other heresies.

²⁹¹ Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Ariansim-A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 1.

²⁹² Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 340. Although Arius and his followers did hold Christ in high esteem they would not affirm that He is God in the same sense that the Father is God. They persisted in presenting their belief that Christ was not fully God but merely a created being and, as well, they attempted to foster this idea in others. Thus, Nicene believers could not allow them to have fellowship.

movement in one statement it could read something like this: "...no matter how the Arians huff and puff, what they preach is a creature promoted to the status of a god."²⁹³ Thus, this became the central contention between Arius and his opponents. For all the wrangling Arius did about having a high view of Christ, in the end he could simply not affirm that Jesus is God and in the minds of the Nicene followers this made him of the utmost danger. Partridge sums it up neatly: "...Arianism in that, while it affirms Christ's status as Son of God and Savior, it denies his full divinity, and therefore also denies the Trinitarian orthodoxy of Western Christianity."²⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that Arius not only denied the divinity of Christ but also, somewhat strangely, the humanity of Jesus. Arius believed that the humanity of the Logos was not a real humanity in the same fashion that it is for other humans. Interestingly, Arius postulated that Jesus was somehow only attached to a human body. According to Arius, the historical Christ did not have a human soul.²⁹⁵ Of course, this is in direct contrast to the doctrine of the incarnation and it follows that Jesus could not truly know the feelings of a human being because he remained aloof. As well, this doctrine of Arius was vocalized in previous centuries as the theological and philosophical ideas of Docetism and Gnosticism.²⁹⁶ The Gnostics believed that Jesus was not human because there exists a separation between the spirit and the material body. Pearson notes: "The human body and the lower emotive soul belong to this world, whereas the higher self (the mind or spirit) is consubstantial with the transcendent God from which it originated."²⁹⁷ Thus, it

²⁹³ Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism-A View of Salvation*, 1.

²⁹⁴ Christopher Partridge, *New Religions: A Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74. This idea of Jesus not having a human soul or body finds much of its roots in Gnostic beliefs that the body is somehow evil and at dualistic odds with the spirit.

²⁹⁵ Alfred Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1933), 326.

²⁹⁶ Karen L King, *What is Gnosticism?* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 26.

²⁹⁷ Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 13.

is entirely possible that the Docetic heresy had influenced Arius and that his teachings about the humanity of Christ were merely a rehashing of previous heretical ideas.

Another central tenet of Arius' belief system was the idea of the eternity of Jesus. Arius believed that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. It also seems incoherent that Arius affirmed the truth of Scripture that Jesus created the world while at the same time he also believed that Jesus was created by God and that God presented Him with the task of creating the world. The denial of the eternity of Christ became one of the ideas that those of the Nicene faith, with Athanasius as their spokesman, would oppose most vehemently.

Additionally, a teaching that was central to the Arian theology was the idea of the promotion of Jesus. Arius instructed the doctrine that Jesus had been promoted to the status of God at some time in history.²⁹⁸ Of course, Arius asserted that God the Father alone had the authority to elevate Jesus to the status of God. Thus, Jesus has a different station in existence than the Father because he was not God from the beginning of time. Therefore, Arius intimated that although Jesus did have a status that was above all other creatures, in the final analysis it was the same type of relationship of dependence. It is of interest that this idea had unintended consequences for Arius in that Christianity must now have a similar type of worship to pagans. Harrison explains: "In demanding worship for a created Christ, the Arians were in effect asserting the central principle of heathenism and idolatry, the worship of a creature."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Greg and Groh, *Early Arianism-A View of Salvation*, 1.

²⁹⁹ Everett F. Harrison, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 63. This idea is of keen interest as it would serve to relate Arius' brand of Christianity very closely with pagan ideas of worshipping something that is created rather than God alone. It would be enlightening to discover how Arians would justify worshipping a created being. A possible effect of this can be seen when Julian the Apostate, who had been raised in an Arian Christian environment, desired to return to paganism when he became emperor. Perhaps he did not see such a great difference in worshipping a created Jesus and worshipping something else that had been created by God.

The Arians also had a variant view on the Holy Spirit. However, it is only by implication that it is believed that Arius also held this view. Nevertheless, the majority of Arians supposed that the Holy Spirit was the greatest and first of the creatures that were called into existence by the Son.³⁰⁰ Thus, it follows that in Arian teaching the Holy Spirit was not eternal, but depended on God the Father for His existence just as the Son depended on Him.

As stated previously, Arius depended heavily upon philosophy. Arianism rarely referred to Scripture as its foundation but instead the movement tended to utilize philosophical ideas to support the conclusions that it rendered about the nature of Jesus. Arianism appeared to be the philosophy of the time period simply being applied to Christianity. Gwatkin observes: “Nevertheless, this plausible Arian confession will not bear examination. It is only the philosophy of the day put into Christian dress.”³⁰¹

The Writings of Arius

Most of the teachings and writings of Arius are lost to history. All that remain are three letters, a few fragments of other letters and some passages that were preserved from the *Thalia*, which appears to be his most significant work.³⁰² However, even at the time when the *Thalia* was written it may have been difficult to obtain the true beliefs of Arius as Socrates stated of the work: “...the character of the book is loose and dissolute...”³⁰³ Therefore, the ideas of Arius are

³⁰⁰ Robert C. Gregg, *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1985), 182. In this scenario then there would tend to be a line of creation in that God the Father created the Son and then the Son created the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit is directly dependent on the Son rather than the Father.

³⁰¹ Henry Melville Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 2006), 4.

³⁰² Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 6.

³⁰³ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 9.

mostly ascertained from what others wrote about him and one of the primary sources of information about him is Athanasius. However, some of his stances can also be gleaned from his surviving letters.

The earliest of Arius' letters to survive is one written to Eusebius of Nicomedia shortly after 318. In this letter one of the primary ideas that created such a problem was the teaching that Jesus was a created being. Arius wrote: "And before he was begotten, or created or determined or established, he did not exist. For he was not unbegotten."³⁰⁴ It is obvious from this letter that Arius believed that the Son was a created being and that there was a time when he did not exist. He had enjoyed a friendship with Eusebius long before the letter was written and he was to become one of his staunchest supporters.

Another letter was written by Arius in about 320 to Bishop Alexander and seems to be a confession of faith. The purpose of his writing the letter appears to be the hope that Alexander will recognize the orthodoxy of Arius and remove the excommunication. Arius writes about the Son: "...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."³⁰⁵ Of course, this was not the type of recantation that Alexander sought as Arius still persisted in stating that Jesus was a created being, which was one of the major reasons that Alexander defrocked him.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. It is of keen interest that Eusebius and Arius had a relationship before 318. It makes their collusion when the crisis at the Council of Nicaea occurred easier to understand.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 7. In this letter Arius seems unwilling to admit that the Son always existed and persisted in his idea that the Father gave Him existence. One must wonder when he wrote the letter, which was putatively aimed at reconciliation, if he understood that the central problem that the orthodox had with his doctrine was that he thought that the Son was a created being. If he did in fact know that this was the problem the orthodox saw in his doctrine then the question is why he would write the letter and clearly put his unorthodox view in writing.

The third letter that is preserved is one that Arius wrote to Constantine while he was in exile, most likely in 327. In the manuscript, he pleads to be able to return and for the excommunication to be reversed. An interesting point here is that Arius writes to Constantine, a secular leader, about a church matter, presumably thinking that he could have an effect. This reveals how much the role of the emperor in church politics was changing.³⁰⁶ However, this letter has little theological material as the major thrust is Arius pleading to be reinstated.³⁰⁷ Of the remaining fragments of his letters there is scant information that can be garnered about Arius. However, one interesting construct that Arius does connote is that he believes that the Son and the Word are not the same. Rather, the Word is somehow more related to God than to the Son.³⁰⁸

Fortunately, more information can be gleaned from Arius' major known theological work, the *Thalia*. The catalyst for the work appears to have been desiring to present to the followers of Eusebius something to unify the opposition to the Nicene faction.³⁰⁹ An interesting aspect of the *Thalia* is that it was written in verse with a metrical pattern.³¹⁰ Thus, critics tend to trust quotations from the work that are given in verse and to question quotations that have been taken out of the metrical pattern as not being original. As well, all that is preserved from the *Thalia* has been obtained from Athanasius' writing and, owing to Athanasius and Arius being bitter

³⁰⁶ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 26. Writing to a secular leader about a church doctrinal matter would likely have not occurred twenty years prior to this. This reveals how much the Roman world had truly changed in the short time since Constantine had embraced Christianity.

³⁰⁷ Hanson, *The Search for the Doctrine of God*, 8.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 10. A further curious point about Arius' theology is that he disdains any statement that says that the Son is from the Father. He thought that to say this would be akin to saying that God could somehow be broken into pieces. For more information on this see Hanson.

³⁰⁹ Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 63. Williams also intimates that Athanasius divulges that a reason for producing the *Thalia* was the result of Arius' contact with a Lucianist group of theologians. However, in contrast to the views of Athanasius, Philostorgius wrote that there had been a theological disagreement between Lucianist advocates and Arius. Of course, when weighing these alternate views it must be remembered that Athanasius wrote in the same time period and Philostorgius was writing a century later. For more information on this see Williams.

³¹⁰ Hanson, *The Search for the Doctrine of God*, 10.

rivals, critics question the validity of all that Athanasius quotes from the *Thalia*. Nevertheless, Athanasius' quotes of the *Thalia* are the best that can be obtained. *Athanasius* quotes Arius as stating: "God was not eternally a father. There was [a time] when God was all alone, and was not yet a father; only later did he become a father."³¹¹ In this passage Arius again makes it clear that he does not believe in the eternity of the Son. In addition, Arius is presented as believing that the Son could change and choose to not be good. Athanasius quotes the *Thalia* as saying: "...Like all others, the Word himself also is subject to change (treptos); he goes on being good as long as he wants to, by his own free will. And then, when he wants to, he too, just like us, is able to change his ways, because he is changeable by nature."³¹² Thus, the theology of Arius is quite different from orthodox theology as it intimates that the Word can change and decide to not be good and the Son is created. It is understandable why Athanasius perceived the need to battle against Arianism at all costs.

Death of Arius

Arius was over eighty years old at the time of his death.³¹³ The details of his death are that he was walking to receive communion and that he had stomach pain and the sudden urge to relieve himself. Arius thus retired to a public place that was set aside for people to relieve such emergencies. After a time when there was no response those people waiting outside for him

³¹¹ Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 100. Athanasius also states several other doctrinal stances that Arius supposedly wrote in the *Thalia*. One of them is that everything that had been made by God the Father has been made out of nothing. Thus, it logically follows that the Son was also created out of nothing. As well, Athanasius states that Arius believed that the only reason God the Father made the Son and the Holy Spirit was because He wanted to create mankind. As well, Athanasius presents Arius as stating that the Son is subject to change. Furthermore, Arius seemed to proffer the idea that God made the Son the kind of being He is because He knew in advance that the Son would be good. For information on this see Williams.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 633.

entered the privy and found him dead still being on the seat.³¹⁴ There are several theories that existed subsequently concerning the death of Arius. One theory regarded it as divine judgment in payment for his fostering heretical ideas. A second theory attributed his death to being poisoned by enemies as they could not bear to witness him receive communion in the Nicene church. Still another reason is given for his death as the excessive jubilation that he felt in the victory that he had waited so long to achieve.³¹⁵ A further theory involved the idea that someone had used black magic to put a spell on Arius.³¹⁶ Of course, the true reason of his death will never be known but it can certainly be said that it had an impact on the people, especially Constantine, of the period as it encouraged many to be impeded in embracing Arian beliefs as they viewed his death as a curse.

CONSTANTINE AND HIS SONS

Constantine

Constantine is a pivotal figure in church history and, relatedly, the history of the Roman Empire. He was born in 272 to a Roman army officer. Thus, the military came natural for Constantine and this would be his avenue for usurping power in the empire. He was the son of Augustus and upon his death Constantine had himself declared emperor by his troops.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 29. There are also more fanciful tales that his bowels gushed out of him in a grotesque and painful manner. However, it is not known how much of these accounts are embellished and how much are reality. For instance, the Arians also have an account of an orthodox bishop who agreed to the Nicene Creed and then his genitals rotted and fell off, presumably because he was guilty of sexual immorality.

³¹⁵ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 633.

³¹⁶ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 29.

³¹⁷ David L. Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1897), 70.

However, there were several foes who needed to be vanquished on his way to attaining the sole rule of the Roman Empire.

When Constantine first came into political prominence it was during a time of great persecution for Christians. This cruelty to Christians seemed to have an impact on Constantine and to influence his views towards the belief system. This persecution was instigated by Emperor Diocletian in an attempt to rid the Roman Empire of Christians in the early fourth century.³¹⁸ Moreover, the persecutions seemed to germinate a desire to join the Christians rather than to persecute them. Another factor in his turn towards Christianity came from his family. Constantine intimated that his father had been a religious man and had always called upon Christ for help in a difficult circumstance.³¹⁹ In addition, one of his relatives, Anastasia, had been given a Christian name.³²⁰

A pivotal instance in his journey towards embracing Christianity occurred at the battle of the Milvian Bridge.³²¹ In 312, Constantine, with a small army of forty thousand, entered Italy and began to move on his rival Maxentius' location in Rome.³²² Maxentius was generally despised by both Christians and pagans and the people had requested that Constantine intervene on their behalf.³²³ When they reached the outskirts of Rome, Maxentius and his troops left the city walls and came out to meet them near the Milvian bridge. The bridge itself had already been destroyed

³¹⁸ John F. Hurst, *History of the Christian Church* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1897), 175. Diocletian created a particularly brutal persecution of Christians in 303. Many believe that this was the harshest of all of the persecutions perpetrated upon the early church and refer to it as the Great Persecution. Interestingly, Diocletian's wife, Prisca, was a Christian and was killed as a martyr in this persecution. Of course, the persecution was unsuccessful as Christianity continued to grow. It is noteworthy that Christianity would have a preferred spot just twenty years after enduring such a severe persecution.

³¹⁹ Andrew Alfoldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 7.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

³²¹ Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years*, 70.

³²² Leithard, *Defending Constantine*, 65.

³²³ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 20.

but there was a pontoon bridge in its place. Constantine and his soldiers viewed a cross in the sky along with the inscription ‘In this conquer.’³²⁴ The resulting battle was a great victory for Constantine and Maxentius was killed. As well, it is of interest to note that Hosius of Cordoba, who would figure prominently in the life of Athanasius, was probably with Constantine when he entered Rome in 312 and, subsequently, became one of his favorite bishops.³²⁵ Many thought of this as the moment when Constantine was converted and came to embrace Christianity. Moreover, from his writings it can be ascertained that Constantine also thought of this as a significant moment. In a surviving letter to an African governor written near the end of 312 he states that the victory over Maxentius was because of the Christian God’s intervention. In another letter to the Synod of Arles written the next year, he emphasizes the same point of God’s intervention. As well, it appears that for a time Constantine struggled with banishing his former belief system.³²⁶ Previously, he had worshipped the Sun-god and it seems apparent that he dabbled in this some years after 312. In retrospect, the important idea here is that Constantine’s dependence on his previous belief system steadily declined after the Milvian bridge experience until he appeared to solely depend upon Christ.

³²⁴ Norman H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1975), 7.

³²⁵ Alfoldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, 14. Hosius, or Osius, was the bishop from Cordoba, Spain. He was most likely born in 257 and died in 357 at nearly one hundred. Hosius became bishop of Cordoba in 295 and due to his close relationship with Constantine became his ecclesiastical advisor from 312 to 326. As well, Hosius barely escaped being a martyr in the persecution of the early 300s under Diocletian. Hosius remained influential in the church throughout his life and was highly respected. One of his most questionable actions, to be discussed elsewhere in this paper, was his signing an Arian creed, although he was under extreme duress when he signed it.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Constantine seemed to carry over many of his pagan beliefs into his Christian life after his conversion and, thus, many people question his conversion. However, the best that can be deduced from a study of his life is that Constantine slowly came to embrace Christianity as his life progressed until he was willing to submit to Christian baptism at the end of his life.

However, his personal conversion may not have been Constantine's only strategy in encouraging Christianity. Constantine was a very astute politician and he came to conclude that this seemingly fledgling Christian belief system would come to dominate the world.³²⁷ Furthermore, he thought that the Roman Empire could be preserved and prolonged by uniting with Christianity. Thus, the vision that Constantine had for Christianity was that it would become the cement of the Roman world.³²⁸ He would come to depend on it to create cohesiveness in his empire. Therefore, it is noteworthy why Constantine viewed church unity throughout the empire as so critical. For the east to have the Arian belief system and for the Nicene followers to hold tenaciously to their views in the west would not create the cement that Constantine desired. Thus, he called for the Council of Nicaea to decide the matter and when he deduced that favoring the orthodox beliefs would probably not work he began to favor the Arians in hopes that they could provide the cement. Therefore, for Constantine his Christianity had two facets. One was his personal salvation, which he did seem to be concerned about, and the other was the political aspect of desiring a unified Christianity.

Constantine and Church Policies

One of the most significant events in the history of the church and the Roman Empire occurred in 313. In that year Constantine issued the Edict of Milan and created a situation in which Christianity now was endowed with all the rights and privileges that other religions in the

³²⁷ Robert A. Baker and John M. Landers, *A Summary of Christian History* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 58.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

empire enjoyed.³²⁹ Additionally, Constantine was to bestow an even more elevated status on the church ten years later. In 323 Constantine gave forth an edict that resulted in Christianity becoming not only legal, but the preferred religion in the empire.³³⁰ Thus, Constantine uplifted Christianity from being a persecuted religion to being the preferred religion in little more than ten years. After this edict in 323 Constantine bent even more in favor of Christianity as he began to utilize the proceeds from the burgeoning economy to construct churches.³³¹

One of the first conflicts that Constantine would experience was with the Donatists. The Donatists were a schismatic group in North Africa. A central construct of this group is that they tended to unite together other movements that had previously been ostracized, such as Novatianism and Montanism.³³² Of course, because of his unity mindset, Constantine viewed the Donatists as a threat and could not allow the situation to remain dormant. He felt that he should intervene in the circumstance and attempt to halt the schism. However, in the beginning

³²⁹ Hurst, *History of the Christian Church*, 177. For Christianity to have these rights was a monumental change. However, there was a disparity in how Christians viewed this as some viewed it as a great blessing and others viewed it as the beginning of the downfall of Christianity. Indeed, it did create a revolution in Christianity, most especially after they were declared the preferred religion in 323, as now many of the elite desired to be a part of the church. This change in the church produced an outflow from it and enhanced the ascetic movement. Ascetics hoped to escape the worldliness in the church that they believed had become prevalent.

³³⁰ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 58.

³³¹ Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years*, 71.

³³² Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 60. The Donatists schism began in Africa in 311 and was impactful for the next one hundred years. The basis for the conflict was that the Donatists believed that moral purity was necessary in order for the ministrations of bishops to be effective and this led to them desiring to separate from the larger church as they perceived that many of the leaders and bishops were not pure both due to lapsing during persecution and moral failings. Thus, they desired to form their own church with separate clergy. However, even after their decline their impact was felt for centuries as even fifteenth century church reformers such as Hus and Wycliffe were branded as Donatists by the Catholic Church because they called for purity among the clergy. The Novatianists had a similar basis as the Donatists and they had their zenith of influence in the middle of the third century. With Novatian, who eventually became a martyr himself, as their leader they opposed receiving back into fellowship those Christians that had lapsed in their faith during persecution. The Montanists were somewhat different from both the Donatists and Novatianists as their schism was not based on receiving the lapsed back into communion but was, rather, based on their founder and leader, Montanus, espousing new revelations that were not approved by the official church. Montanism was most prevalent in the second century. Thus, each of these movements had in common that they attempted to exist outside of the orthodox church and, thus, it was natural for them to unite.

of the conflict he revealed a hesitancy because of his enhanced fear of God.³³³ He tried successively harsher measures, such as argument, threat and finally physical persecution, but all to no avail. Thus, even with a powerful emperor's intervention the schism would not be resolved. Baker and Landers remark: "The cry of the Donatists later on, 'What has the emperor to do with the church?' was one that symbolized the greatest dilemma of the new alliance between church and state."³³⁴ Thus, this early incident reveals that Constantine would be willing to intervene in church difficulties even to the point of persecution, but it also reveals that such intervention was often futile in approaching the heart of the controversy.

Constantine also exhibited that he was willing to work in favor of Christianity by working against paganism. He sent edicts out that the pagan temples should be defaced and that many of the idols and statues should be brought out and made into public displays.³³⁵ As well, there was an inherent threat that those worshippers who resisted might be subject to violence.³³⁶ Thus, Constantine encouraged the people to embrace Christianity by destroying the base of pagan worship.

The major theological conflict that both Constantine and Athanasius had to navigate was the Arian conflict. When the conflict was at its zenith Constantine was creating the situation in which Christianity was the preferred religion. Thus, in Constantine's mind something had to be attempted to establish peace and unity among all Christians. To begin with, Constantine called for peace and tolerance between the two parties. When this did not have the desired effect, he

³³³ Alfoldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*, 38.

³³⁴ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 60. This resistance to the intervention by the emperor is also viewed in how the Nicene and Arian forces reacted later in the fourth century. It seems that when the emperor was favoring them they tended to invite the intervention but when he was encouraging their opponents they disdained his interference.

³³⁵ Sozomen, Book II, Chapter 5.

³³⁶ Ibid.

sent Hosius to mediate the conflict between Bishop Alexander and Arius. However, this did not accomplish the desired end and so he called for the Council of Nicaea. The Council would become a pivotal point in the history of the church. Noll remarks: “What made the council such an extraordinarily important turning point was not just the doctrinal question at stake but the way in which political and social forces combined with the critical theological issue.”³³⁷

The official records of the Council of Nicaea have been lost so there is no method of ascertaining exactly what role Constantine played. However, Constantine’s reasoning for requesting the Council does survive as he wrote: “My design then was, first, to bring the diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity (that is, to clarify doctrine for the sake of the church); and second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease (that is, to end religious strife for the sake of the empire).”³³⁸ Although his exact impact is not known it is obvious that his very presence at the Council was influential as he was in the background, but present and listening, at the majority of the meetings. Additionally, it is known with certainty that Constantine did speak at the Council and this is consequential in itself.³³⁹ Moreover, many felt that the incidence of a secular authority speaking at a church council was both inappropriate and unexpected. It is also believed that Constantine exerted pressure on the bishops to accept the Nicene Creed and that he had a measure of control when the doctrinal issues were being

³³⁷ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 48.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51. Constantine here reveals his true desire for Christianity to become the adhesive that would serve to unite the empire. He not only wants the doctrine to be decided once and for all so that truth will be declared, but he also blatantly states that he also desires for there to be unity in order to aid the empire. Thus, Constantine reveals a tremendously significant idea in which the government would attempt to benefit from and influence church decisions. Once this precedent was set in motion it only became more prevalent in the subsequent centuries to the point that in the late middle ages when the church would often be synonymous with the political entity or, if separate, then often times more powerful. This build up in church power, and ultimate corruption, for over one thousand years eventually led to the need for the Reformation.

³³⁹ William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 21.

discussed. Thus, it appears evident that at the first ecumenical council after Christianity had become the preferred religion that Constantine was the controlling force.

Throughout the remaining years of his life Constantine had a leading role in church politics as he tried to resolve the Arian controversy. He received accusations in his court against various bishops and would attempt to ascertain the veracity of the charges. Of course, that he would be involved in this way was quite a modification in policy compared with just a few decades earlier. In 335 he commanded that Athanasius attend the Council of Tyre and then later banished him to Treves. These actions alone are not a difficulty as the secular ruler often heard allegations against his subjects, but the keen difference here is that Constantine had an increased interest in any matters that related to bishops or church politics. Thus, it is obvious that Constantine attempted to influence church politics as the first Christian emperor.

Personal Life

One of the central issues about the personal life of Constantine was if his conversion was real or, in other words, did it create a true change in the man. Zosimus, writing some 170 years after Constantine's death, did not think so as he intimated that after his putative conversion Constantine led a luxurious lifestyle, wasted his finances and was untrustworthy in his alliances.³⁴⁰ As well, there were major scandals in his personal life as he supposedly had both

³⁴⁰ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 80. Although Zosimus is most likely speaking from the best evidence that existed 170 years later, it is also true that some of the faults he points out might be found in many developing Christian lives. Two of his charges involved living a luxurious life and it is difficult to imagine an emperor who would not do this. Thus, this alone is not evidence that his conversion was not genuine as it often takes time for the converted to become more like Christ. However, other allegations of dishonesty and execution are more serious and will be considered later.

his son, Crispus, and wife, Fausta, assassinated in 326 and 327, respectively.³⁴¹ Also, Constantine had his brother-in-law Licinius executed after he had promised him security if he surrendered. However, it is also believed that Licinius broke the covenant due to his continued plotting against Constantine.³⁴² There are varieties of embellishments about the reason for these deaths and the truth cannot be ascertained with certainty. However, perhaps modern judgments about the personal change in the life of a fourth century monarch are not valid. He was certainly revered as a model Christian leader during his lifetime. As well, his personal writings attest to his steadfast practice of Christianity.³⁴³

At the termination of his life Constantine received Christian baptism at a time when he was ill and thought the end was impending. However, the record of this is found only in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*.³⁴⁴ Eusebius' work intimates that Constantine did not receive baptism until the end of his life because he had hoped to be baptized in the Jordan river. As well, Eusebius wrote: "At the conclusion of the ceremony he arrayed himself in shining imperial vestments, brilliant as the light...refusing to clothe himself with the purple anymore."³⁴⁵ It is also noteworthy to mention that the beliefs of the fourth century were that sin would be dealt with severely after baptism had been given and so the thought of some was to wait to be baptized until later in life. As well, it is of interest to note, once again, that Eusebius of Nicomedia was close enough to Constantine to baptize him. In retrospect, an overall view of Constantine reveals that he was the

³⁴¹ Christopher Bush Coleman, *Constantine the Great and Christianity* (New York: AMS Press, 1914), 92.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 82.

³⁴⁴ Coleman, *Constantine the Great and Christianity*, 87. It is also important to understand that this is not the same Eusebius of Nicomedia that baptized Constantine. This writer was Eusebius of Caesarea and is known as the Father of Church History. He was born in about 260 and died in about 340. He became bishop of Caesarea in 314 and was greatly respected by Constantine. In fact, Constantine admired him so much that he was invited to bring his church creed to Nicaea but it was ultimately not used in full. He died just before Constantine in early 340.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 88.

first Christian emperor and began the custom of the secular authority becoming involved in ecclesiastical affairs.

Constantinus

After the death of Constantine in 337 the Roman Empire was divided among his three sons. Constantinus was the eldest of Constantine's remaining sons, being born in 316, and was raised as a Christian. At a young age he was thrust into military command and had important victories, with his father overseeing in the background, over the Alemanni and Goths.³⁴⁶ As well, he was the ruler over Gaul and Treves at the time of Athanasius' exile there. Constantinus and Athanasius formed a bond of friendship and Constantinus was considered to be of the Nicene faith.

At the time of Constantine's death, Constantinus received the rule of Britannia, Gaul and Hispania. However, Constantinus was not pleased with his assignment as he felt that with his perceived rights of primogeniture he should receive more. As well, to complicate the situation, he had been the protector of his younger brother Constans and, subsequent to the division of the empire, attempted to continue in this role. Therefore, in 340 he attempted to invade Italy over a land dispute and was killed in battle.³⁴⁷ After his death his younger brother Constans obtained

³⁴⁶ Hans Lietzmann, *From Constantine to Julian* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), 137. Constantinus, or Constantine II, was made Caesar at the age of only one year. He was used to the rigors of battle as he accompanied his father to war against the Sarmatians at the age of only seven. This continued as he was made the commander of Gaul at the age of ten and at fifteen he led a successful campaign against the Goths. His being the ruler of Gaul, and Treves, was beneficial for Athanasius when he was exiled there in 335 and he and Constantinus became friends. Upon his father's death when he was twenty-one, 337, he felt that he was given a smaller portion of the kingdom than he should have received as the oldest son. This led to his invasion of Italy, which was ruled by his younger brother Constans, and death in battle.

³⁴⁷ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 65.

the territories that he had commanded. It is important to understand for this study that Constantinus was a supporter of Athanasius and the Nicene faith. When he departed the scene, Athanasius lost both a theological supporter and friend. This left him and the orthodox church in a more precarious position after 340 as now there was one emperor, Constans, who supported the Nicene faith and one emperor, Constantius, who supported the Arian faith.

Constans

Constans was the youngest son of Constantine as he was born in 323. When Constantine died he received the central portion of the empire which included Italy and North Africa.³⁴⁸ An important factor for the purposes of this study is that he was of the Nicene faith and supported Athanasius as much as possible.³⁴⁹ Due to his youth he was not expected to be a strong leader. However, as mentioned before, he successfully battled against his older brother and added his deceased brother's territory to his own. At this point he was now more powerful than his remaining brother Constantius. However, Constans did not fulfill the promise of his youth. He is reported to have been a homosexual that allowed himself to be degenerated into many vile associations.³⁵⁰ Both the civilian population and his own soldiers soon became exasperated with him.

³⁴⁸ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), 137.

³⁴⁹ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 65. Constans was not popular with his military leaders as many of them despised him because he preferred his barbarian body guards and lived an immoral lifestyle. Thus, almost from the time he became emperor in 337 there were those in his command who were seeking to create a change in leadership. This was achieved by Magnentius in 350 when he assassinated Constans while he was still in his twenties. When Dalmatius died Constans received the territories of Thrace and Macedonia. His older brother, Constantinus, asked to be given the provinces he believed were his. When Constans refused to relent a war developed and Constantinus was killed. Thus, Constans received an even greater allotment of land and this was beneficial for Athanasius as Constans favored a Nicene view.

³⁵⁰ Lietzmann, *From Constantine to Julian*, 183.

Although Constans may not have been exemplary in his personal life he did support Athanasius. After he was banished a second time from Alexandria in 338, Constans allowed him to come to Rome for respite from the eastern emperor Constantius.³⁵¹ As well, Constans aided Athanasius by helping to persuade Constantius to allow him to return from his second exile in 346.³⁵² In fact, Constans felt so strongly about this topic that he threatened war on his older brother, Constantius, if Athanasius was not permitted to return to Alexandria.³⁵³ Constans was also a driving force, as his father had been, in desiring the eastern and western churches to come together. Thus, he supported the Council of Serdica to bring the two factions of bishops together but this never materialized as both sides refused to meet with the other side for putative valid reasons.³⁵⁴

It may have been the disgust that the soldiers felt for Constans personally that led to his death but this cannot be deduced with certainty. Whatever the case, Constans was murdered in a coup attempt by Magnentius in 350.³⁵⁵ His murderer was one of his field officers and referred to as both a barbarian and rival.³⁵⁶ Magnentius desired to rule the entire Roman Empire and he began his quest with assassinating Constans and seizing control of the west. When Constans was killed it exposed Athanasius more fully to the enmity that was fostered in Constantius.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 131.

³⁵² Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 12.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵⁶ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 38.

³⁵⁷ Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, 131.

Constantius

Constantius was the second of Constantine's remaining sons being born in 317, a short time after Constantinus. Upon the death of his father he was presented with control of the eastern part of the empire. As well, he inherited the Persian war from his father and this kept him occupied for much of the next thirteen years. Therefore, he could little more than be a spectator to the events that happened in the western portion of the empire.³⁵⁸ However, even in these early troubled years Constantius was proceeding to expand the Arian faith. Interestingly, one of the methods he endorsed was sending a missionary. Constantius, with the strong encouragement of Eusebius, sent a man named Ulfilas to spread the Arian faith in Gaul.³⁵⁹ The result was that the Visigoths came to embrace an Arian brand of the faith and brought that with them when they later successfully invaded the heart of the Roman Empire.

A glimpse of the heart of the young Constantius can be obtained by looking at the events that occurred when Constantine died. All of the Constantine's brothers and nephews, with the exception of two young nephews of seven and ten, were assassinated. Constantius witnessed all of these murders but was either unable or unwilling to prevent them.³⁶⁰ He did make use of this advantage in building his empire, but it is believed that later he suffered greatly from remorse.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Lietzmann, *From Constantine to Julian*, 182. Constantius was born in 317 and became emperor in the east in 337 at the age of twenty. His mother was Fausta, and his grandfather was Maximian who was known as a great persecutor of Christians, and she would later be put to death by her husband and Constantius' father, Constantine. In 350 he became the ruler of the entire Roman Empire as both his older brother, Constantinus, and younger brother, Constans, had either been killed in battle or assassinated. He was an able leader and politician. To aid him in ruling the entire empire he promoted his cousin, Constantius Gallus, to the role of Caesar in 351 but would have him executed three years later. In 355 he promoted his last remaining cousin, Julian, to Caesar and Julian would succeed him to be ruler after his death in 361. Constantius followed in his father's pattern and was baptized just before his death by Bishop Euzoios of Antioch in November 361.

³⁵⁹ Aland, *A History of Christianity*, 221.

³⁶⁰ Lietzmann, *From Constantine to Julius*, 182.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

After the death of Constans in 350, Constantius once more began to travail stalwartly for the Arian cause. However, he had to wait to fully pursue this goal until his new rival, Magnentius, was defeated. In the three years after Constans' death, Constantius needed Athanasius to help hold the empire together as he knew that if Athanasius were to attempt to persuade the western portion of the empire to accept Magnentius it could be disastrous for him. Thus, he did not present a strong force against Athanasius in these first few years. However, Magnentius was thoroughly defeated in 353 and committed suicide.³⁶² This left Constantius in control of the entire empire and he banished Athanasius when he was no longer useful politically. As well, he was harsh with pagan and Jewish adherents as he commanded the death penalty for all those who practiced pagan sacrifices or became a Jewish proselyte.³⁶³

Constantius worked through both church councils and persecution to influence the advance of the Arian idea. For his part, it may be that Constantius understood that uniting the Roman Empire under one belief system was needed, just as his father had felt, and since he subscribed to Arian beliefs it would appear logical to him that the entire empire should embrace Arianism. At synods held in Arles in 353 and Milan in 355 he forced bishops from the west to abandon fellowship with Athanasius and to have full communion with the predominantly Arian churches of the east.³⁶⁴ As well, he called for a synod at his imperial residence at Sirmium that declared that Nicene terms such as *substantia* and *homoousios* could not be mentioned. Hence, it allowed Arianism to obtain a more prominent position in the theology of the empire.³⁶⁵ A final ploy was made when the synod convened in Constantinople in 360 about which Walker remarks: "This

³⁶² Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 139.

³⁶³ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 65.

³⁶⁴ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 139.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

formula—a vacuous compromise which in effect marked the official triumph of the Arian cause—forbade the use of the term *ousia* and ‘hypostasis’ and contented itself with the statement that ‘the Son is like the Father’³⁶⁶ Thus, the victory for Arianism seemed complete and the Nicene cause was the in the midst of the dark days aforementioned.

As well, as intimated before, Constantius also used persecution and intimidation to forward his Arian views. Most of the bishops were disposed to do what the supreme and sole ruler of the empire bid them to do and reluctantly, as least for most of those in the west, moved to an Arian stance. However, there were three important bishops that would not accept the Arian ideology—Athanasius, Hosius of Cordoba and Liberius of Rome. Hosius and Liberius were exiled and tortured until they accepted the Arian creeds. However, as mentioned before, Athanasius remained in hiding and did not have to face the fury of Constantius directly. It is noteworthy for this study that Athanasius was singled out more than any other for persecution by Constantius and the Arians. Baker and Landers remark: “Athanasius, not the Roman bishop, was singled out as the target in the persecution of Nicene Christianity.”³⁶⁷

However, the theological and political tides would soon shift once more as Constantius died in 361. He also followed his father in the timing of his baptism as he waited until shortly before his death.³⁶⁸ He only lived to be forty-four and yet he lived the longest of Constantine’s sons. Thus, ended an era in church history as Christianity had become both legal and preferred in the

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 139-140. With this Constantius was attempting to expel orthodox beliefs by strong arm measures. He would no longer even allow them to mention the terms of orthodox belief but had to refer to the Son being of like substance to the Father.

³⁶⁷ Baker and Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, 116. It is of interest to note that Athanasius was spared direct torture or persecution as he was able to remain in hiding. As well, it was during these troubled days that he did some of the most prolific writing for the orthodox cause. It was frustrating for Constantius and the Arian forces as Athanasius was writing treatises in favor of orthodoxy from a hidden position and they could not utilize their force to squelch him.

³⁶⁸ Aland, *A History of Christianity*, 79.

Roman Empire at the behest of Constantine and his sons. Of the sons, Constantinus and Constans favored the Nicene faith and Constantius the Arian version, but due to his longer life the latter had a more profound effect on the church. As well, a notable difference between Constantine and his sons was the attitude towards pagan worship. While Constantine employed a neutral position with respect to paganism, his sons actively attempted to persecute pagan believers and remove them from the empire.³⁶⁹

OTHER INFLUENCES

Eusebius

Another impactful personality on the life of Athanasius to be studied here was Eusebius. Eusebius was the possessor of a very forceful personality.³⁷⁰ Moreover, he was an important theologian and political figure during the early life of Athanasius, as he died some thirty years before Athanasius. It is because of his influence that the Arian faction and belief system prospered against their Nicene foes who were far superior in number. In fact, later in the controversy Athanasius began to refer to the faction as the Eusebians rather than the Arians. One factor that is of utmost importance in understanding him is that he was an excellent politician. He was tremendously adept at making friendships with the correct people and, then, later using those relationships to further his agenda.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. Constantius' history with pagans is somewhat incongruent. He passed several edicts concerning them such as the death penalty for anyone doing pagan sacrifice, the banning of sacrifices, the closing of pagan temples and laws against soothsayers and magicians. However, he also did not enforce these with regularity and also did some measures, such as not disbanding pagan priestly colleges and allowing pagan schools to continue, that seemed quite tolerant of paganism. In fact, it was not until twenty years after his death that any Roman Senator would complain about being treated negatively for his choice to continue in pagan worship.

³⁷⁰ Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 222.

Eusebius was at first the bishop of Berytus.³⁷¹ Moreover, even at this early stage of his career Eusebius had political contacts as he was related to Julius Julianus, who was the prefect to the eastern Emperor Licinius. Licinius was in power in the east from 315 to 324 and it may have been this connection to him that led to Eusebius being given the opportunity to be the bishop of Nicomedia. Nicomedia served as the capitol for Licinius after 314 and it is probable that Licinius translated Eusebius to this position to have him close to him. As well, Eusebius was thought to be favored by Constantia, who was the wife of Licinius and the half-sister of Constantine. Licinius and Constantine were rivals, even though they were related, and Eusebius developed personal ties to each of them. Thus, by the relationship with his half-sister the connection to Constantine is also strengthened. It is also possible, based on a reference in a letter by Constantine, that Eusebius attempted to intercede for Licinius when he was defeated by Constantine. It appears that Eusebius was willing to proceed to great lengths to aid a friend, as this was also exemplified in his support of Arius. This loyalty to friendships was something that endeared Eusebius to individuals and allowed him to increase his political influence.

Eusebius began to figure more prominently in the Arian drama when Arius was banished from Alexandria and went to him in hopes of a sympathetic ear. As well, it should be remembered that they had a relationship even before the controversy between Alexander and Arius began. Arius selected a beneficial ally when he pursued Eusebius as he promptly called

³⁷¹ David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemics of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116. Little is known about the background of Eusebius or his year of birth. However, he is believed to have been distantly related to Constantine. As well, at one point early in his career he almost suffered persecution because of his close relations with Licinius. A further interesting point is that he served as tutor for Julian the Apostate when he was young. Julian became emperor in the early 360s and attempted to turn the empire back to pagan worship. However, his reign was very short and his influence did not endure. See *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* by Frances Young.

for a council to be held in Bithynia.³⁷² This council reversed the decision made at Alexandria and declared Arius to be orthodox. In addition, Eusebius presumably summoned and led another council at Caesarea which also found Arius innocent and recommended that he return to Alexandria and attempt to reconcile with his bishop.³⁷³ Of course, this reconciliation never happened. However, this is another instance that reveals Eusebius as an astute and involved politician as well as possessing a dominating and action orientated personality.

Eusebius was also an important figure at the Council of Nicaea as it is probable that he gave the opening address.³⁷⁴ That he was considered important enough to present the opening address at such an important event as the Council of Nicaea reveals how he was viewed by the emperor and other church leaders and was also a great boon for his prestige. However, he was not powerful enough to control the outcome as he would have opted for a Creed more akin to Arius' ideas. Eusebius did sign the Nicene Creed, although he secretly did not adhere to it, but refused to sign the anathemas.³⁷⁵ In spite of signing the Nicene Creed he was banished later in 325 with the most probable cause being that he received friends of Arius.

However, when the situation began to change Eusebius was received back into the church a short two years later in 327 and this is when his political power increased significantly. Somehow shortly after this, either because of the exile or by some other means, Eusebius became

³⁷² Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 166. That Eusebius was able to call this council and encourage the bishops to attend further reveals his political prowess even at this early stage. It would be difficult to imagine how the scenario in the early fourth century might have been different if Eusebius had not chosen to support Arius and his views. In regards to this relationship there is always the question of how strongly Eusebius actually believed in Arius' ideas and how much he was desiring to support a friend.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemics of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, 117.

³⁷⁵ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 629. At this point Eusebius displays his political cunning as he adhered to only what he had to, the Nicene Creed, in order to avoid problems but refused to sign the anathemas as this refusal, presumably, would not result in his being excommunicated or banished.

a prominent person in Constantine's court. In fact, over the next ten years Eusebius managed to create a tremendous reversal in his political fortunes as he traverses from being exiled to being the bishop closest to Constantine. One of Eusebius' strategies, that in retrospect proved effective, was to ignore the term Homoousios, or accept it with certain interpretations, until the term could be safely denounced.³⁷⁶ Eusebius knew that it could not be completely denied without impunity as long as Constantine was aware of it but he bided his time. This successful strategy reveals a notable difference between Eusebius and Athanasius. Athanasius was not willing to compromise the truth, at least as he viewed it, and accept Arius back into fellowship because his true aim was not political, but instead, to preserve correct doctrine. In contrast, Eusebius was willing to make concessions on truth, at least as he viewed it, in order to further advance his political career and to attempt to have an overall victory.

Another political strategy of Eusebius was to utilize the Meletians and their natural adversarial relationship with whoever was the current bishop of Alexandria.³⁷⁷ Behind the scenes Eusebius motivated the Meletians to bring false charges against Athanasius and, thus, formed a politically expedient alliance with them. Eusebius also utilized his relationship with the emperor as he and Constantine shared such a close bond that Constantine allowed Eusebius to baptize him before his death in 337.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Willaim Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 10.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷⁸ Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemics of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, 118. The baptism of Constantine is quite controversial on a couple of fronts. One is that he allowed a bishop of the Arian faith to preside over his baptism and this opens the question of what Constantine really held as the true doctrine. As well, Constantine was baptized near the end of his life and many would question why it did not happen earlier if he was, in fact, a true convert to Christianity. The reason for this will be discussed later in this chapter.

After the death of Constantine, Eusebius established himself as a significant influence on Constantius. Moreover, Constantius promoted him to be the bishop of Constantinople. As well, his appointment to Constantinople revealed overlaying signs of a political maneuver as he replaced a Nicene bishop, Paul, after his second exile.³⁷⁹ Thus, Eusebius had now maneuvered his way from being a banished outsider who supported Arius in the late 320s to the bishopric of one of the most important churches in little more than ten years. It is surmised that Eusebius had a tremendous influence on Constantius in the late 330s and helped to steer him even more completely towards an Arian mindset. Eusebius died in late 341 or early 342 but the mantle of the Arian, or Eusebian as it came to be called, cause would be carried on by others.

The Meletians

An important and influential group during Athanasius' life were the Meletians. The history of the Meletians began with the Diocletian persecutions when Bishop Peter was in place in Alexandria. These persecutions began in 303 and continued intermittently for the next ten years. As the persecutions persisted many of the bishops and lay people either denied the faith by making pagan sacrifices, surrendered Scripture or vacated their churches rather than face death or physical mutilation. The persecution was so vicious that even Bishop Peter was incarcerated and later martyred. Bishop Peter wanted to receive those who had lapsed under persecution back into the church while Meletius believed they were unworthy to be received back into fellowship. Arnold surmises that the Meletian schism began in earnest in 305.³⁸⁰ At that time there were

³⁷⁹ Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius*, 10.

³⁸⁰ Duane Arnold, "Athanasius and the Meletians at the Synod of Tyre, 335," *Coptic Church Review* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 68.

four bishops who were imprisoned and they complained that Meletius was appointing bishops to replace them in a manner that was against both the canons and custom.³⁸¹

An interesting putative true event reveals the crux of the controversy. The anecdote states that while Peter was in prison into his cell was placed Bishop Meletius of Lycopolis.³⁸² The conflict was so acute between the two men that Peter hung a curtain down the center of the cell and urged those who agreed with him to remain on his side of the curtain.³⁸³ Peter argued that the Christians and bishops who had lapsed by offering pagan sacrifices and surrendering Scriptures should be forgiven. However, Meletius thought that these believers were now disqualified from being a bishop as they had recanted the faith under pressure. As well, an alternate rendering of the problem intimates that the conflict between Meletius and Peter began when Peter brought Meletius before an episcopal synod on the allegations of various crimes including sacrificing to idols.³⁸⁴ Socrates intimated that Meletius had both denied the faith and sacrificed to idols.³⁸⁵ Of course, if this were true it would serve to better explain why Meletius was so adamant in opposing Peter. Whatever the genesis of the conflict, it was severe enough for Meletius to form a rival church system and appoint his own bishops. Thus, the idea of accepting fallen bishops back into fellowship may have simply been a convenient ploy to further oppose Peter and the orthodox.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 165. Little is known about the birth or origin of Meletius. He was bishop of Lycopolis but for how long is not known. The major problem that the orthodox church had with Meletius is that he was ordaining bishops on his own without the permission of the leading orthodox bishop, Peter in the beginning but later Achillas, Alexander and Athanasius, in Alexandria. When the conflict began Meletius held a high office and may have even been second to Bishop Peter. He was jealous of Peter's position and desired to override him and become the leading bishop by intrigue and, thus, when the persecutions began he saw it as his opportunity to supplant him.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius*, 39.

³⁸⁵ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 6.

Another potential aspect of the conflict is that Meletius desired to fill a void in the churches that had been orphaned of their bishops. Moreover, Meletius appeared to maintain that Peter was not fulfilling this obligation but leaving the churches vacant. Of course, if it were true that Meletius merely wanted to fill a void that Peter had left in not appointing new bishops, then Meletius takes on a more heroic character, at least in the beginning, while if it were true that the rift began because of his own crimes, then he is viewed as a villain. In retrospect, the true reason for the schism is lost to history and it can only be surmised

Whatever the case with Meletius, many Christians living at the time felt that the official church under Peter had not attempted vigorously enough to resist the persecution. As well, under Peter there was little done to heal the church at large as the positions of bishops that had been murdered during the persecutions were left unattended.³⁸⁶ In light of these circumstances, Meletius was spurred to action and he began to travel throughout the country comforting the churches without bishops and appointing clergy to inhabit those positions.³⁸⁷ These new appointments were done by Meletius while Peter was hiding for fear of his life.³⁸⁸ In fact, Peter actually fled the persecution several times and left the church devoid of leadership.³⁸⁹ Of course, Peter viewed these new appointments as an affront to his authority.³⁹⁰ Thus, a rival church developed out of, at least to the Meletian way of thinking, necessity. At that point, then, there were the bishops appointed by the official church under Bishops Peter, Achillas and Alexander

³⁸⁶ Aland, *A History of Christianity*, 164.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁸⁸ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 136. Peter became bishop of Alexandria in 300 and he was martyred in November of 311. One of Peter's most important theological contributions is that he most likely initiated the reaction in disdain of the teachings of Origen and his subordinationist views, which are of particular interest since Origen did much of his work from Alexandria. During the beginning of the persecution of 303 Peter went into hiding to avoid being captured and tortured. Eusebius states that when his martyrdom occurred it was unexpected and, thus, he was most likely not imprisoned shortly before it took place.

³⁸⁹ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 164.

³⁹⁰ Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 136.

in addition to bishops appointed by Meletius. In the course of time the rift between the two factions continued to grow until at instances it could become verbally vicious and physically violent. As the tension increased the Meletian factions formed their own church and they presented themselves by the moniker the church of the martyrs. It is believed that Arius was originally a member of this schismatic church.³⁹¹ However, the difficulty with his teachings began in earnest when he became a presbyter of the official church under the leadership of Bishop Alexander.

Meletius was at the point of death in the late 320s and he appointed John Archaph to be the new leader of the Meletian faction.³⁹² This appointment in itself was contrary to what had been mandated in the agreement at Nicaea and stirred up new dissension between the orthodox and Meletians.³⁹³ As well, John moved to continue the schism, rather than to maneuver for reconciliation, as he appointed new bishops.³⁹⁴ Additionally, he began to move by dishonest means to encourage the downfall of Athanasius. Eusebius actually promised the Meletians that he would work for their political favor if they would work to depose Athanasius.³⁹⁵ One of the first schemes that the Meletians were a central part of was to accuse Athanasius of extracting a tax on the Egyptians to pay for linen vestments for his church. In fact, two of the three Meletian bishops that brought the accusation had been absolved by Bishop Alexander.³⁹⁶ Thus, Athanasius began to question if they had been too lenient in allowing the Meletian bishops back

³⁹¹ Aland, *A History of Christianity*, 165. The Meletian church had a great veneration of the martyrs and preferred to be called The Church of the Martyrs. However, there is no evidence that Arius joined them in their veneration of the martyrs.

³⁹² Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius*, 41.

³⁹³ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 21.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., Chapter 21-22.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., Chapter 22.

³⁹⁶ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 71.

into the church.³⁹⁷ At the Nicene Council they had not been treated severely for their treasonous act of forming a rival church and their future actions did not indicate that they were grateful for the leniency.

One of the key disturbances that had its genesis with Archaph was the aforementioned putative death of Arsenius. In the early 330s he accused Athanasius of ordering a certain bishop named Plusanos to lash Arsenius to a pillar in his house and then to set the house on fire.³⁹⁸ Thus, Athanasius was accused of a particularly cruel method of disposing of an opponent. As intimated previously, this charge was proven false but the salient point here is that the Meletians were just as much an enemy as the Arians and were capable of great trickery. Thus, for the importance of this study it appears probable that Athanasius had a similar amount of difficulties from the Meletians and Arians.

The result of finding Arsenius alive and the allegations of murder false was that Constantine was now wroth with the Meletians, and especially Archaph. He stipulated that if false accusations were brought again then it would not be handled by church law but they would be treated as intriguers dangerous to the state.³⁹⁹ This seemed to calm the Meletians for a time as John Archaph sent a formal letter of apology and Arsenius returned to being a subject of Athanasius. However, this faux peace would not endure for long as the charges against Athanasius were refreshed and the trial was set for Tyre in 335. Once again, the Meletians brought charges against Athanasius as at the trial there were a myriad of Meletians who accused him of violence against them. It appears that whenever the Meletians believed that they had an opportunity to seize power in Alexandria that they would work in protest against Athanasius and

³⁹⁷ Bright, *Historical Writings of St. Athanasius*, 41.

³⁹⁸ Lietzmann, *From Constantine to Julian*, 131.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

whenever they felt it was more politically expedient to reveal a tenuous friendship with Athanasius then they would do just that.

Moreover, Athanasius was shrewd enough to compile all of his opponents together under the general moniker of Arians.⁴⁰⁰ Athanasius appeared to believe that battling only one common opponent, or appearing to, was less complex than writing against them separately, especially since they were working in unison. In fact, Sozomen states that the Meletians were generally called Arians in Egypt and that, although they had a difference in beliefs, they worked together in secret to overthrow the orthodox churches in Egypt.⁴⁰¹ This tendency to work in unison also revealed itself when Athanasius was exiled in 335. John Archaph attempted to install himself as the new bishop of Alexandria. When Constantine began to understand what was occurring he also exiled Archaph and the Meletians lost an excellent opportunity to seize the power which they had been waiting so long to achieve. The Meletians continued to be a problem for Athanasius as the years progressed both because of false accusations and attempting to have a rival church. John Archaph and several other Meletian bishops eventually apologized and requested that Athanasius receive them back into the communion of the orthodox church. With his characteristic grace for the repentant, Athanasius did receive Archaph and many other Meletian bishops back into fellowship.

⁴⁰⁰ Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 165. That Constantine would threaten this revealed just how much the state authority had delved into church matters. Of course, it would be distasteful to bring false charges against anyone, but when Constantine states that because charges are brought against a leading bishop then it threatens the state, he divulges that the secular authority viewed church unity as a matter that the emperor felt it was his responsibility to maintain.

⁴⁰¹ Sozomen, Book II, Chapter 21.

COMPLEX EPOCH

Athanasius lived in a very complex period in history with many influences on the church. One of the most salient events of the early fourth century was that it was the first time in the Roman Empire that Christianity had been made legal and later preferred. As well, Constantine and his sons each had an impact on church policies as they attempted to manipulate church politics in hopes that Christianity would become an entity that could provide stability and cohesiveness for the entire empire. Thus, any schism in the church was of great concern to Constantine and his sons. Alexandria was rife with schisms and some of the chief ones included Arianism and the Meletian severance. It is also noteworthy that a key church official who was in favor of Arianism, named Eusebius, had found a vehicle to promote his beliefs by garnering political power from a close relationship with Constantine. Thus, the factors that influenced the life of Athanasius were complicated, but he was proven capable of maneuvering these treacherous circumstances and remaining true to the orthodox faith.

CHAPTER V: ALLEGATIONS AGAINST ATHANASIUS

EARLY ALLEGATIONS

The trial at Tyre in 335 was a pivotal point in the career of Athanasius. It led to his banishment and many of the accusations assembled there never left him. In fact, many of those allegations are still discussed today. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to studying the veracity of these charges with the view towards determining the overarching character of Athanasius. In addition, allegations against other orthodox bishops of the era will be investigated. There were a variety of accusations against Athanasius that were discussed at the Council of Tyre. The allegations included murder, breaking a sacred chalice, treason, fornication, imposing taxes and violence. Each of these allegations will be discussed individually. Moreover, each is critically important because if any one of them could have been proven true it would have most likely led to Athanasius being exiled. Thus, the Council, or trial, at Tyre was a momentous event in Athanasius' life and deserves to be scrutinized closely.

THE START OF TROUBLE

Actions Against the Orthodox

One of the key components to understanding the allegations against Athanasius, and how ridiculous that some of them were, was that he had been forewarned that this would happen. As mentioned before, by 330 Eusebius was a covert political leader of both the Arians and Meletians. As previously stated, Sozomen states that Eusebius threatened Athanasius with ill

treatment.⁴⁰² However, the threat was not put overtly into writing so that it could not be traced back to him. Athanasius refused to relent and allow the Arians into communion and, thus, Eusebius fulfilled his threats with a myriad of charges against Athanasius. Sozomen writes: “Athanasius, however, wrote to the emperor and convinced him that the Arians ought not to be received into communion by the Catholic Church; and Eusebius perceiving that his schemes could never be carried into execution while Athanasius strove in opposition, determined to resort to any means in order to get rid of him.”⁴⁰³ Several of these allegations were unquestionably proven to be false but that did not cause Eusebius and his allies to stop proliferating more charges. Moreover, Socrates intimates that Eusebius and the Arians were emboldened to attack Athanasius in the early 330s because Constantine had sent him a letter that threatened his removal if he did not receive Arius back into fellowship.⁴⁰⁴ Thus, the Eusebians perceived it to be a favorable time to add accusations against Athanasius in order to widen the rift between him and Constantine. Socrates states that the chief conspirators against Athanasius were Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Ursacius of Singidnum, and Valens of Mursa in Upper Pannonia.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 18. Sozomen presents the idea that Eusebius was covert in this as he alluded to it in a letter but would never actually state it. Apparently, this letter is lost to history but it would have been a great benefit for studying the allegations against Athanasius and the political environment of the era. This is another incidence in which Eusebius displays his penchant for political wisdom as he apparently is able to make a threat without it being proven.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 22.

⁴⁰⁴ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 27. Socrates states that when Arius returned to Alexandria he said he would relent and simply live a quiet life. Instead, he went about the city and brought his teachings back into the forefront by trying to convince others of their veracity. Thus, Arius revealed that he was not willing to repent and that he would continue to propagate his ideas. Of course, because Athanasius viewed these ideas as heretical he could not allow this to happen in good conscience.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. Of course, this is by no means a complete list of those who opposed and conspired against Athanasius but Socrates only means to list some of the most prominent ones. Two that were also prominent that were left off of this abbreviated list were Arius and John Archaph. As well, Arsenius and Ischyrras could be added to the list but they were most likely not a leading intellect in the attacks but became pawns who were useful for a time.

Another factor to consider concerning the allegations against Athanasius is what occurred with other Nicene bishops in and around the same time period. It appears unlikely that suddenly there would be a multitude of orthodox bishops that would have committed offenses worthy of dismissal. Rather it is much more probable that the Arian and Meletian factions, being led by Eusebius, had gained a political advantage and were seeking to eliminate their theological opponents by whatever means necessary, including false allegations. One of the grandest prizes of all was the bishop of Alexandria as the bishop of that church was the most prominent bishop in Egypt and responsible for appointing most of the clergy. “Alexandria was the undisputed religious capital of Egypt. From the earliest times the Bishop of Alexandria had appointed virtually all the other Egyptian bishops, and by tradition had exercised absolute authority over them.”⁴⁰⁶ Thus, whatever religious faction held that see had a distinct advantage in Egyptian church life and that is one of the reasons they pursued the removal of Athanasius with such ardor. Thus, one can understand the background of the reasoning behind the opponents bringing the plentitude of charges against Athanasius.

One of the men who was deposed prior to Athanasius was the aforementioned Eustathius, who was bishop of Antioch and was most likely deposed in 330 or 331.⁴⁰⁷ It is ascertained that Eustathius was deposed for two reasons.⁴⁰⁸ The most general was that he held to the Nicene faith. Hanson writes on this topic: “The real motive was of course his championing of the

⁴⁰⁶ Alwyn Pettersen, *Athanasius* (Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1995), 5.

⁴⁰⁷ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 210. Eustathius was often referred to as The Great. He was born in Pamphylia but his year of birth is unknown. It is known that he was bishop of Beroea in about 320 and became the bishop of Antioch, an important position in the early fourth century, shortly before the Council of Nicaea in 325. Eustathius was also opposed to the teaching of Origen and accused Eusebius of Nicomedia of following in his teachings. Eusebius then accused Eustathius of Sabellianism. Charges were brought against Eustathius in about 330 for the putative reason of adultery and he was exiled to Thrace. The common people rebelled against having Eustathius banished but to no avail. He died while in exile in Thrace most likely in the year 337.

⁴⁰⁸ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 19.

Nicene formula and his opposition to those who disliked it and the theology it seemed to represent, which is mentioned several times by the historians.”⁴⁰⁹ It is noteworthy that Hanson would declare this as he is generally negative towards Athanasius. However, the more specific logic in condemning Eustathius is that he had accused Eusebius and Paulinus, bishop of Tyre, of favoring the teaching of Arius and, thus, personally incurred the influential wrath of Eusebius. Of course, these were not the reasons that were officially presented, but rather they accused him of defiling his position by committing unholy deeds.⁴¹⁰ As well, Hanson believes that an additional important allegation his opponents brought was that he was guilty of Sabellianism, or the belief that God appears in different modes at different times in history.⁴¹¹ Whatever the reasoning, the result was that a Nicene bishop had crossed the Arians, and specifically Eusebius, and had been deposed for it. Sozomen intimates that Eustathius was a gracious man and received his exile well.⁴¹²

Paul of Constantinople was another bishop who is believed to have been mistreated because of his Nicene faith.⁴¹³ At first, he was expelled from the church at Constantinople. However, no

⁴⁰⁹ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 210-211.

⁴¹⁰ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 24. Believing in the ideas of Sabellius was a common charge that the Arians made against the Nicene believers.

⁴¹¹ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 211.

⁴¹² Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 19.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, Book 3, Chapter 3. Paul was originally from Thessalonica and he was a presbyter at Constantinople. As well, he became secretary under the aged bishop of Constantinople, Alexander. When Bishop Alexander of Constantinople died in 337 the Arian and Nicene forces came into open conflict. The Nicene forces were able to prevail and they ordained Paul to be the next bishop later in 337. Bishop Paul suffered greatly for his Nicene faith as he was exiled three times between 337 and 351. In about 339 Constantius returned to Constantinople and saw that Paul was now the bishop. This angered him and he immediately had Paul exiled and replaced him with Eusebius. Paul spent his first exile in Rome where he spent time with Athanasius who was also in exile. Eusebius died in 341 and Paul was again placed as bishop. However, Constantius was in Antioch and when he heard of this he ordered his general of cavalry, Hermogenes, to expel Paul. However, the people were so fond of Paul that they killed Hermogenes and dragged his body through the streets. Historians intimate that the people burned the house where Hermogenes was staying and then tied a rope around his feet. They proceeded to drag his body out from under the burning house and drag it through the streets triumphantly. When Constantius returned he had Paul expelled for a second time. Paul went to Trier for this second exile but returned in 344 with letters of recommendation from Constans. In fact, Constans threatened war if Paul was not reinstated. Constantius

allegations were ever proven that should have resulted in his expulsion. Rather, it seems, that much like Athanasius, he was a Nicene bishop in a powerful church and that is why his opponents worked to have him removed. Paul had been considered for bishop of Constantinople after the death of Alexander, bishop of Constantinople, but Eusebius was appointed to the see instead after Paul had served for a short time. However, after the death of Eusebius in 341 Paul was ordained as the new bishop. In contrast, the Arians chose to ordain Macedonius at the same time.⁴¹⁴ Thus, conditions in Constantinople were ripe for conflict. Constantius, who favored the Arians, sent his general Hermogenes to expel Paul. However, the people favored Paul and, thus, rebelled and killed Hermogenes.⁴¹⁵ When this event was known to Constantius he entered Constantinople and expelled Paul himself.⁴¹⁶ After Paul was expelled from the church, his opponents sought even more stringent penalties and he was then banished entirely from Constantinople. After being expelled from his church Paul met Athanasius and other Nicene bishops who had been deposed on various charges. These deposed bishops included Asclepas of Gaza, Marcellus of Ancyra, a city of the Lesser Galatia, and Lucius of Adrianople.⁴¹⁷ Ultimately, Paul was exiled and his persecution increased until he was strangled to death by his opponents. It should be reiterated that it is unlikely that these bishops all committed deeds

relented but when Constans died in 350 Bishop Paul was once again exiled. Legend intimates that Paul was ultimately taken to Cucusus in Cappadocia and placed in a small dark cell. They left him without food for several days and when they returned they were dismayed to find him still alive so they strangled him. Thus, Paul was most likely murdered in about 351.

⁴¹⁴ Socrates, Book 2, Chapter 12.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 13.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 15. Lucius of Adrianople, which is located in modern day northwest Turkey near the borders of Greece and Bulgaria, was deposed from his see in 340 or 341. He went to Rome to seek help in being returned to his see. He returned to Adrianople with letters from Bishop Julius of Rome to reinstate him but the Arian forces ignored them. Lucius was reinstated near the same time as Athanasius and Paul of Constantinople when Constans, emperor in the West, threatened his brother and ruler in the East, Constantius, with war if he did not allow the bishops to return to their churches. Like Paul of Constantinople, he was also banished once again after the death of Constans and Lucius died in exile.

worthy of being deposed at the same time, but it is more likely that they were exiled based on false charges because of their Nicene beliefs. Thus, Athanasius had these examples of Nicene leaders being persecuted when they refused to recant their faith and yet he still bravely carried on the struggle for his orthodox beliefs.⁴¹⁸

Another incident that revealed the lengths to which Arian, or Eusebian, forces would traverse to involved Bishop Stephen of Antioch. It concerned another Nicene bishop named Euphrates and how the Eusebians attempted to falsely accuse him. Euphrates was the bishop of Cologne and he, along with Bishop Vincent of Capua, came to Antioch in the spring of 344. The supposed reason for their visit was to help mend the rift between the Eastern and Western bishops, but the Eusebians proved that they were rejecting the idea of reconciliation. One night while Euphrates and Vincent were in Antioch a prostitute was paid to go into the room of Euphrates to lie with him.⁴¹⁹ Euphrates had no knowledge this was going to happen and the Eusebians hoped to create a scandal against the aged bishop. However, when the prostitute entered the room she found an old man sleeping peacefully and she turned against the men who had paid her to create the scandal. When the truth came to light it was the leading Eusebian bishop, Stephen of Antioch, who had perpetrated the plot.⁴²⁰ Stephen was later deposed for his involvement in this plot and this incident further reveals how that the Eusebians created false allegations against those of the orthodox faith. Thus, it appears the Eusebians would stop at nothing in having their way, even to the point of creating a false accusation against an aged bishop. As well, this incident lends credence to the idea that the allegations brought against Athanasius had also been created by the Eusebians to have him deposed. This episode serves as

⁴¹⁸ Sozomen, Book 3, Chapter 3.

⁴¹⁹ H. M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (Boston: IndyPublish.com, 2006), 25.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

another example of the atrocities that occurred in the early fourth century when forces opposed to the Nicene creed would traverse to great lengths to have orthodox bishops removed. One must remember that this is the type of environment in which the charges against Athanasius were brought and, thus, the veracity of the allegations was questionable.

Ordination

One of primary charges against Athanasius began with the start of his career as bishop. Those opposed to him asserted that his ordination had either been coerced or performed by unqualified people. This is a complex issue but one aspect that is clearly delineated is that the different stories about his supposed incorrect ordination vary greatly. Moreover, it seems prudent to consider the document that is the closest in time to the actual event and, also, one that was attested to by individuals that were actually present when the ordination took place. This document is the *The Synodal Letter of the Egyptian Bishops of AD 338*. Since it is only ten years after the event it is definitely close enough to the time to warrant acceptance. As well, although Athanasius himself presents it, the letter claims to represent the testimony of the entire “holy synod assembled at Alexandria, out of Egypt, the Thebias, Libya, and Pentapolis.”⁴²¹ Therefore, the letter is both early and should represent the statement of those who would have been present at the ordination. A portion of this letter is very telling of how the majority of the clergy and laity in Egypt felt: “Now that the whole multitude and all the people of the Catholic Church assembled together as with one mind and body and cried, shouted, that Athanasius should be Bishop of their Church, made this the subject of their public prayers to Christ, and conjured us to

⁴²¹ Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 33.

grant it for many days and nights, neither departing themselves from the Church, nor suffering us to do so; of all this we are witnesses, and so is the whole city, and the province too. Not a word did they speak against him, as these persons represented, but gave him the most excellent titles they could devise, calling him good, pious, Christian, an ascetic, a genuine Bishop. And that he was elected by a majority of our body in the sight and with acclamations of all the people, we who elect him also testify, who are surely more credible witnesses than those who were not present, and now spread these false accounts.”⁴²² One important point about this statement is that they declare that they are eyewitnesses to what occurred. As well, not only are they witnesses but the entire city and province are also. Moreover, that they would present such a large variety of witnesses who were still alive and able to be contacted is strong evidence for the veracity of their statement. It is similar to there being five hundred witnesses to Christ’s resurrection in I Corinthians 15 who could be contacted to verify the truthfulness of their claims. Thus, because the *The Synodal Letter of the Egyptian Bishops of AD 338* was close to the time of the actual event, written by people who were actually present and spoke of eyewitnesses who could verify the account, it is the document that should be accepted as the true rendering of Athanasius’ ordination.

Additionally, there is another factor that is of interest in judging the viability of Athanasius’ ordination. This second factor involved who the current bishop would have desired to replace him. It can be ascertained, as mentioned previously, that Alexander had definitely chosen Athanasius to succeed him as bishop. Thus, the previous bishop desired Athanasius to become bishop in 328 along with the majority of the parishioners and the orthodox clergy.

⁴²² Ibid., 34.

As well, there were opponents who attempted to present the idea that Athanasius was not ordained correctly and they tender several reasons, and varying stories, why the ordination was not valid. One of these is the claim that Athanasius was not yet thirty years old and, therefore, he was not the minimum age to become a bishop. However, the most probable date for Athanasius' birth is 296 and so he would have been of sufficient age. Timothy Barnes is generally a severe critic of Athanasius and even he wrote: "When Athanasius was elected bishop in 328, some protested that he was below the canonical age (which was presumably thirty). Since the charge was soon dropped, it may be deduced that Athanasius was born in 298 or very shortly before."⁴²³ Thus, this point of opposition should be disregarded.

In addition, there are several other stories about the ordination that are discussed elsewhere in this paper. Some of the versions declare that Athanasius used force to constrain them to ordain him. Still others state that he used trickery to become bishop. However, the important aspect to note about these various renditions of the ordination is that they vary greatly and do not agree on even the basic facts. As well, they are often given by individuals who were not present when the ordination took place. Therefore, these stories should be summarily rejected in favor of the orthodox version for reasons that were aforementioned.

ALLEGATIONS AT TYRE

The Murder of Arsenius

As mentioned previously, one of the most heinous allegations against Athanasius is that he murdered Arsenius. However, the true horror of the charge does not end there as he was also

⁴²³ Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 206.

accused of severing the hand of Arsenius and using it for dark magic. The use of dark magic was something that the people feared greatly in that period of history and an allegation of its practice could be useful against an opponent. Moreover, certain of his opponents actually seemed to believe that Athanasius' success was due to his practicing this dark craft.⁴²⁴ Theodoret states his accusers presented a severed hand at the Council of Tyre, although this hand was ultimately proven not to be that of Arsenius.⁴²⁵

The details of what occurred directly after the accusation of the murder of Arsenius were intricate. To begin with, when Constantine first heard of the putative murder he ordered a trial to be held by his half-brother Dalmatius at Antioch.⁴²⁶ Athanasius was summoned to the trial but instead he decided to initiate a search for Arsenius as he, of course, knew that he was not responsible for the murder. One of Athanasius' trusted deacons traversed to the Thebaid and received a confession from four Meletians bishops that Arsenius was actually being hidden by monks in a monastery at Ptemencyrcis.⁴²⁷ This portion of the search reveals how widespread the political hatred for Athanasius was as these four bishops and the monks would be willing to have

⁴²⁴ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 27. The fourth century was an interesting period in history as Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire while at the same time paganism still had a hold on many of the people. In paganism, black magic and casting spells were practiced and, thus, these elements were still very much in the forefront of the mind of the common man. Therefore, one of the most serious charges against a person was that they practiced black magic. Many people believed that church leaders simply entered the church because it was politically expedient when in reality they still practiced paganism and black magic.

⁴²⁵ Theodoret, Book 1, Chapter 30.

⁴²⁶ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 65. He was also known as Flavius Dalmatius or Dalmatius the Censor. He was the son of Constantius Chlorus and Flavia Maximiana Theodora and, thus, was Constantine's half-brother. He spent his youth in Gallic Tolosa but in the mid-320s he returned to Constantinople and helped Constantine reign by serving in his court. He was appointed censor in 333 and from Antioch he helped to secure the eastern portion of the empire. In 335 he sent soldiers to Tyre to protect Athanasius from being murdered by the angry mobs. Flavius Dalmatius had two sons, Hannibalianus and Dalmatius, who also procured positions as rulers in the 330s. However, Flavius Dalmatius and his two sons were killed in the purge of Constantine's relations that occurred upon his death in 337.

⁴²⁷ William Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 44.

knowledge of such a deception and yet not come immediately forward with the truth. Again, a salient point here is that they desired to have Athanasius removed so the Meletians could come to power and they were not truly interested in the veracity or falsehood of any particular allegation but merely were interested in discovering if it would be successful in bringing them victory. To continue the narrative, somehow the monks at the monastery on the east bank of the Nile heard about the deacon coming and their leader, Pinnes, sent Arsenius away with a monk named Helias. Helias took Arsenius by boat to Lower Egypt and then he hastily returned to the monastery. Of course, when the deacon arrived he found that Arsenius was no longer at the monastery. In a wise ploy, the deacon took Pinnes and Helias with him and forced them to appear before a commanding general and there, under pressure, they admitted the plot in which they took part. A curious letter was then intercepted from Pinnes to John Archaph. In the letter Pinnes urged Archaph to terminate the charade and admit that the supposed death of Arsenius was a sham.⁴²⁸ In retrospect, this admission, and the intercepted letter, should have ended the matter but somehow the Eusebians and Meletians were able to bring the matter to continuing debate and trial at Tyre.

However, Arsenius was not discovered until later hiding in Tyre. Once he was discovered he, along with his priests and deacons, wrote a letter of apology to Athanasius. In it they promised to cease all schism. In his grace that had come to characterize his dealing with opponents, Athanasius received the very man, Arsenius, back into communion that had accused him of murder.

⁴²⁸ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 67.

At the trial in Tyre, Athanasius asked if those present would know the real Arsenius if they were to see him and they answered affirmatively.⁴²⁹ He then brought in a figure wrapped from head to foot in a cloak with only his face visible and it most assuredly was Arsenius. Athanasius moved the cloak to reveal one hand. He then paused for a moment before revealing the other hand, for it seems that Athanasius had a sense of humor.⁴³⁰ When he finally removed the cloak the second hand was revealed. Athanasius then triumphantly questions: ‘Here you see, is Arsenius with his two hands, point out the place where a third has been cut off.’⁴³¹ John Archaph, the leading Meletian bishop, was one of the principal accusers concerning Arsenius and when he understood the direction the trial was taking he made his escape in the tumult that ensued when Arsenius was revealed alive and possessing both hands.⁴³² Thus, Athanasius is able to prove the accusations false of both his having Arsenius murdered and using his severed hand to perform magic. Nevertheless, some of his fanatical accusers do not even stop there but further accuse him of black magic, supposedly in making the hand appear again. However, in the eyes and minds of most of the members of the Council the allegation of the murder of Arsenius had been proven false. A further interesting aspect in the putative murder of Arsenius is that it, from the best that can be ascertained from the writings, seems to have been proven to be a falsification

⁴²⁹ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 29. This historian has the most detailed description of the scene.

⁴³⁰ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 47. It is of keen interest that even when Athanasius presented Arsenius alive and still possessing his two hands that it did not quiet the crowd. Of course, if they had been thinking logically they should have understood that this meant that the opponents had lied about Athanasius. However, exactly the opposite happened as the people were driven into a frenzy and tried to take Athanasius by force. He had to be rescued from this situation by officials but it became obvious after this that Athanasius would not be able to receive a fair trial.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 30. John Archaph was a leading Meletian of the same era as Athanasius. In about 325 Meletius made him the Meletian bishop of Memphis. As well, Meletius entrusted John Archaph with the leading role in the Meletian church as a whole. However, he utilized his power in a negative fashion as he joined forces with the Arians and renewed attacks against the orthodox. He was banished after the Council of Tyre, even though he was not on trial there, to an unknown location. However, Athanasius later received John Archaph back into fellowship with the orthodox church.

in 332 and the Council of Tyre did not occur until 335.⁴³³ Why such a charge found its way to the proceedings at Tyre is difficult to understand. One can only surmise that by this point Eusebius of Nicomedia had a great deal of influence on the thinking of Constantine. It is also noteworthy about the entire Arsenius case that even after he was produced alive in 332 that the opponents still contended it was not him. Thus, it became necessary for Athanasius to produce him alive and whole at the Council of Tyre. As well, the whereabouts of Arsenius from 332 to 335 is not clear but, as mentioned before, it is known that he did apologize for his part in the plot.

However, even though Arsenius had admitted that it was a plot, Athanasius' accusers would not allow it be dormant at the trial. After Arsenius was presented alive they attempted to give a reason for their actions. They stated that Athanasius had ordered a bishop named Plusian to burn Arsenius' home and have him tortured and imprisoned. They maintained that subsequently Arsenius had escaped from a window and had then went missing. Thus, they assumed that he had been murdered. Of course, this story does nothing to explain why the monks were hiding him in a monastery if they, in fact, presumed he was dead and how these putative facts coincide with the allegation that Athanasius had severed Arsenius' hand to use for black magic.⁴³⁴

Thus, it is quite apparent that this charge should not have been used against Athanasius in his exile as it was soundly refuted. Obviously, a person could not be guilty of murdering an individual when they present that person alive at the trial. However, two questions remain in accordance with this allegation. The first is why it was ever an issue at the trial as it should have been known that Arsenius had been found alive. The second is much more sinister. If an

⁴³³ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 47.

⁴³⁴ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 25.

opponent would go to the depths of falsifying a murder, the question then becomes one of whether or not they can be trusted to be truthful in any matter. One must wonder how any other allegations at the Council of Tyre could be taken seriously if the Arian/Meletian/Eusebian alliance would present such a horrible and forthright false charge. The answer to that question, of course, is lost to history but one can only speculate that it was politically motivated, in that, if they could not get one false allegation to be deemed truthful then they would try another one until the task was completed. Thus, the Council of Tyre was not really interested in determining the truth or verity of certain charges, or even the character of Athanasius, but certain individuals had already determined that Athanasius needed to be removed and they would stop at nothing to see this accomplished, even if it meant shaming the good name of the Church.

The Broken Chalice

The charge that Athanasius was responsible for the breaking of a sacred chalice inside a place of worship was one of the most important allegations against him. As well, it proved to be one of the charges that was the most difficult to refute. The alleged action itself was not carried out by Athanasius, but it was contended that he was responsible for one of his associates, Macarius by name, who had been ordered into the home and church of Ischyras and had smashed an altar and broke a sacred chalice. Of course, the enemies of Athanasius tried to paint the picture that Athanasius knew exactly what was going to happen and had ordered Macarius to proceed with the action. However, on the side of Athanasius there are two contentions that needed to be proven. Firstly, that the chalice had in fact been broken, as Athanasius and Macarius contended that it did not happen. Secondly, that even if the chalice had been broken, it

needed to be proven that Athanasius had prior knowledge of it and condoned the action. Thus, the burden of proof was twofold for those who wanted to convict Athanasius of this crime.

To begin with, Ischyras proclaimed himself to be a cleric, but that was disputable. In fact, the very ordination of Ischyras was unclear. It is said that he was ordained by a man named Colluthus and that Colluthus was merely a presbyter himself.⁴³⁵ Thus, if Ischyras had been ordained by Colluthus, who did not have the proper authority, then his own ordination was in question.⁴³⁶ Socrates intimates about the importance of Ischyras not being ordained through the proper channel: “There was in this region a person named Ischyras, who had been guilty of an act deserving of many deaths; for although he had never been admitted to holy orders, he had the audacity to assume the title of presbyter, and to exercise sacred functions belonging to the priesthood.”⁴³⁷ Thus, the actions of Ischyras were very serious for that period of history and Athanasius was completely within his bounds as head of the church to send someone to investigate the charges.

The details of the event in question went something like this. It appears that Ischyras was holding weekly meetings in a private home and that the meetings were not licensed. The services were held in a hamlet in the Mareotis referred to as the The Peace of Secontarurum.⁴³⁸ As well, no church had ever been built in this hamlet.⁴³⁹ Athanasius was touring through the

⁴³⁵ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 74. Ordination by those who themselves were not a part of the orthodox church became a more common occurrence in the early fourth century due to the schism that Meletius had created. Little is known of Colluthus and if he ordained other people. However, the ordination was not valid because Colluthus was reportedly not known to be a part of the orthodox church.

⁴³⁶ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 42.

⁴³⁷ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 27.

⁴³⁸ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 76. The Mareotis was named so because of the lake that was in that region and the villages that surrounded it. It was under the auspices of the church and bishop of Alexandria. At some point in the fourth century the Mareotis had their own bishop. Pistos was mentioned as a bishop in that area in 337.

⁴³⁹ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 42.

Mareotis and visiting several churches. While on this tour he heard that Ischyras was utilizing this meeting in a private home and, in response, he sent one of his most trusted priests in Macarius. Athanasius sent Macarius to merely summon Ischyras to come and see him. At this point the two stories of what happened diverge. One aspect that does seem to be the same in both accounts is that Athanasius never actually came in contact with Ischyras and never went to his home. This is important in establishing the aspect of Athanasius' guilt in relation to his having knowledge of and condoning the alleged actions of Macarius. Thus, since both accounts have this fact in common it should be ascertained that Athanasius did not have contact with Ischyras personally and did not enter his home or any place where the supposed worship was taking place.

According to Macarius, he never actually saw Ischyras because he was sick that day and confined to his cell. However, Macarius relayed that he did speak with his father and admonished Ischyras through him. By order of Athanasius he was called upon to cease from these unauthorized services. Thus, in Macarius' version he never actually saw Ischyras, no service was interrupted and no chalice was broken. Athanasius continues with his version of what happened after Macarius' visit. He intimates that Ischyras was upset about being told he could no longer hold services and so he went to the Meletians. It is also of note that Athanasius states that before this Ischyras was unknown to the Meletians.⁴⁴⁰ The Meletians then consulted with Eusebius about what could be benefited from this situation.⁴⁴¹ Upon consultation with him, they decided to create the fiction of the chalice being broken during a service. This is the version of events that Athanasius intimated as being what truly occurred on that day. Socrates intimates

⁴⁴⁰ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 63.

⁴⁴¹ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 42.

a slightly different version as he states that Ischyrras fled to Nicomedia and that Eusebius offered him a bishopric if he would fabricate a story about Macarius and Athanasius.⁴⁴² Afterwards, according to Socrates, Eusebius asks aid from the Meletians in creating the false accusations. Whatever the order of events, it is clear that the fifth century historians believed the allegations to be falsified.

Of course, the version of the events that Ischyrras reiterated were quite different. He intimates that on the day in question he was conducting service in the church in The Peace of Secontarurum. It is also of interest that in this version they referred to him as a priest and this in itself is in question as was previously discussed. Nevertheless, Ischyrras states that he was in the very act of consecrating the Eucharist when Macarius stormed in and threw down the holy table.⁴⁴³ As well, Macarius seized the chalice and broke it and with this the contents of the chalice were spilt.⁴⁴⁴ In addition, it is mentioned in some versions that Macarius also confiscated the church books and threw them into the fire. To further the misrepresentation, it was often told as if Athanasius had done these acts himself as his enemies putatively held him accountable for what his agent working in his behalf had done.⁴⁴⁵

The subsequent events to the supposed breaking of the chalice are mostly ascertained from the pen of Athanasius. It appears that Constantine heard the charges against Macarius and decided they were falsified. Thus, he sent Athanasius back to Alexandria with a letter that rebuked those who were still jealous of Athanasius. On the part of Ischyrras, Athanasius intimated that his own relatives rebuked him for the falsehood and that he came to Athanasius

⁴⁴² Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 27.

⁴⁴³ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 31.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

and sought to be brought into his communion. When Athanasius asked Ischyras why that he had created such a heinous story, he replied that he had been threatened and beaten by three Meletian bishops. Athanasius wrote that Ischyras stated with tears: “It was against my will; I was constrained, even with blows, by three Meletian bishops.”⁴⁴⁶ Of course, one must believe in the veracity of Athanasius’ version to accept this rendition of events. Furthermore, it appears implausible that Ischyras was threatened in order to force him to make a fabrication, but it is more likely that he created the falsification of his own free will.

At this juncture, the narrative takes a turn decidedly for the truthfulness of Athanasius’ rendition. It seems that Ischyras delivered an absolute retraction of his story. Two elements are important about this retraction. One is that it was written completely in his own hand. Moreover, the construction of the language seems to confirm the authenticity of the confession as it was written in Greek with poor grammar.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, it would seem that if it had been a forgery then the writer would have been more likely to have had an educated person pen a perfectly constructed piece. When a piece of writing contains common grammatical faults, it is more likely to be authentic. The other important factor is that it was delivered by Ischyras in the presence of six deacons and seven priests. These other thirteen men were most likely still alive when Athanasius was defending himself in later years and it would have been easy for one of them to have denied a false story. Furthermore, if Athanasius were the shrewd individual that some current authors encourage readers to believe that he was, then he would have never given such a high number as it would be easy for one of them to turn their allegiance. Thus, because Athanasius uses this high number, and these individuals were probably still alive, it is all the

⁴⁴⁶ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 43.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

more probable that the retraction actually occurred. Moreover, Athanasius included this paper in his *Defense Against the Arians*.⁴⁴⁸ This inclusion is one of the most important elements in his entire work as it makes it seem implausible that the events as Ischyra portrays them actually occurred. However, alternatively Barnes believes that the retraction was forced under threat of violence.⁴⁴⁹ He has no proof of this but it is simply conjecture as he desires to think of Athanasius as guilty. Nevertheless, Barnes' theory is discredited because the retraction had thirteen witnesses and it is quite possible that one of them would eventually reveal the story as falsified.

A further important aspect in evaluating the veracity of the broken chalice incident is how the story changed over time. In order for a rendition of an event to be deemed valid it is important for the story to stay consistent. However, the story had changed so much over time that in the later editions it was Athanasius who personally broke the chalice and destroyed the altar.⁴⁵⁰ Therefore, the allegation loses credibility because it is not consistent through time.

The Broken Chalice and Trial at Tyre

When the charge of the broken chalice was investigated at Tyre the case for the prosecution proved to be weak. When Ischyra was confronted with Macarius himself he could prove nothing. As well, Ischyra was forced to admit that he had only seven people in his congregation.⁴⁵¹ In addition, Athanasius contended that there was not even a Meletian

⁴⁴⁸ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 64.

⁴⁴⁹ Timothy D. Barnes, "The Career of Athanasius," *Studia Patristica* Vol. 21 Issue 1 (1989): 396.

⁴⁵⁰ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 77.

⁴⁵¹ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 72.

congregation in the Mareotis.⁴⁵² Athanasius was also able to present an important piece of evidence from Meletius himself. It seems that back in the 320s when Bishop Alexander received the Meletians back into fellowship that Meletius had to present a list of the all of the Meletian priests or deacons that were a part of his congregations near Alexandria.⁴⁵³ The name of Ischyras does not appear on this list.⁴⁵⁴ Of course, the Meletians could argue that he had been ordained after this but their case had been weakened. Thus, with the case at a stalemate, the accusers decided that perhaps more information could be garnered from a trip to the Mareotis to examine the context of the event and parlay witnesses.⁴⁵⁵ Athanasius argued that this was not necessary as the two who had witnessed the alleged event were already present. Of course, this proved a fruitless argument. Athanasius further pleaded that at least the commission should be manned by bishops that were neutral and not those hostile to him. Dionysius, who presided over the proceedings at Tyre, deemed this request to have more merit. However, the Arians, or Eusebians as they came to be called, still were able to have the men they desired put on the commission which was composed of these six: Theognis, Maris, Macedonius, Theodore, Ursacius and Valens.⁴⁵⁶ This group was decidedly biased against Athanasius. In addition, the Meletians and Eusebians sent two emissaries ahead of the commission to entreat Meletians and Arians to enter the Mareotis for the purpose of swaying the evidence.⁴⁵⁷

While the commission was making their inquiries, they had a companion with them which was highly irregular. Philagrius, the prefect of Egypt, accompanied them and was believed to

⁴⁵² Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 63.

⁴⁵³ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 47. It is very telling that Ischyras' name does not appear on the list as he was not recognized as part of the Meletian clergy.

⁴⁵⁴ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 63.

⁴⁵⁵ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 48.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 77.

have even intimidated the witnesses.⁴⁵⁸ As well, those that the commission allowed as witnesses and those they ignored were suspect. Bright writes of this: "...but the Commissioners not only admitted Heathen soldiers into their court, while they excluded the Catholic clergy of Alexandria and of the Mareotis, but 'examined Jews, Heathens and catechumens.' The result was highly damaging: for whereas such persons could not have been present at the Eucharistic oblation, they proved that Ischyras was at the time physically disabled from celebrating, even if he had been ecclesiastically competent to do so, or if Macarius' visit had taken place on a Sunday."⁴⁵⁹ There were also certain witnesses to the actual occurrences concerning the broken chalice that agreed with Athanasius. They stood bravely against threats by Philagrius, and his armed guards, and were desiring to prove that the fanciful tale told by the Eusebians was indeed untruthful.⁴⁶⁰ Sixteen priests and five deacons of Alexandria and fifteen priests and fifteen deacons of the Mareotis proffered testimony that the broken chalice incident never occurred but their testimony was rejected. In contrast, the relatives of Ischyras were the only ones from the church who were willing to give testimony that the version that Ischyras presented was truthful.⁴⁶¹ Of course, the testimony of his relatives is suspect in this situation. To set the situation as it existed then in context, the only ones that gave testimony, who were from the church, to Ischyras' version of events were his own relatives and, of course, their bias might have been expected.⁴⁶² On the other side, testifying to the truthfulness of the version given by Athanasius and Macarius, were sixteen priests and five deacons of Alexandria in addition to fifteen priests and five deacons of

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁵⁹ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 49. Bright goes on to declare that a sense of fairness was lacking in the minds of the men who could conduct such an investigation. As well, those who were not involved directly but knew of the injustice were equally devoid of a sense of fairness.

⁴⁶⁰ Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, 81.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

the Mareotis.⁴⁶³ However, all of the testimony in favor of Athanasius' version was ignored by the commission.

Moreover, regardless of the true findings, and of logic, the Commission found Athanasius guilty of sacrilege. It is of note that they did not prove either of their allegations. First of all, the idea that the chalice had been broken was definitely in question as they had a retraction by Ischyras in front of witnesses. Additionally, there was also the question of whether the supposed day for the infraction was even on a Sunday when worship would have been taking place. As well, there were witnesses, who were ordained in the Mareotis, who corroborated Macarius' version. For these reasons Macarius, and especially not Athanasius, should not have been convicted of breaking the chalice as there was a greater probability that the allegation was fabricated by the Meletians. Secondly, the other portion of what must be proven in order to convict Athanasius remained without merit. Even if there had been a sufficient amount of reasonable evidence to convict Macarius, it did not logically follow that Athanasius was guilty as well. From what is known of the event, Athanasius merely told Macarius to bring Ischyras to him and there is no evidence that he either asked Macarius to do violence to the worship place of Ischyras or that he condoned it if he discovered it to be true later. Thus, the evidence for the broken chalice has a great deal of questions and it was negligent that Athanasius should have been found guilty of this putative event.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 73-76.

Imposed Taxes

One of the first allegations that was brought against Athanasius involved taxes. As a bishop Athanasius did not have the power to impose taxes on the people. However, Eusebius and his followers alleged that Athanasius had charged a tax of linen tunics and compelled the people of Egypt to pay it to the church at Alexandria.⁴⁶⁴ This accusation had two sides. First of all, it would not be within the realm of Athanasius' power to impose a tax and, thus, they expected to goad Constantine into reacting against him. Furthermore, a subtler part of this type of accusation is that it would mean Athanasius wielded great power in Alexandria, and in fact could control things against the emperor's wishes. Of course, at that time in history, Constantine would not be at liberty to visit Alexandria on a regular basis and so he had to depend on reports to discern what was really occurring there. Thus, an accusation such as this would plant the idea in Constantine's mind that Athanasius had great power. This would mostly likely also influence a part of the decision to ultimately exile Athanasius in 335.

The result of the accusation is that it was proven to be false. There were two presbyters from Alexandria, Apis and Macarius, who were at court when the accusations were brought. These two men were able to prove the accusation about the tax to be false.⁴⁶⁵ However, even though the charge was proven false, the seed was planted with Constantine. As well, Athanasius was still summoned to court to answer for these charges and it was at that time that the charge of treason, to be subsequently discussed, was brought against him.

⁴⁶⁴ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 22.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

Treason

The allegation of treason was also something that was brought against Athanasius. The charge centered on the idea that Athanasius had given some form of payment to a man named Philemenus. The Arians alleged that Philemenus desired to assassinate Emperor Constantine and that Athanasius was proffering payment if he would do it. The payment came in the form of a chest full of gold.⁴⁶⁶ Athanasius first heard of this allegation near the end of 331. At that time, Constantine was residing in a suburb of Nicomedia named Psammathia and the charge was brought before him there.⁴⁶⁷ When Athanasius came before Constantine on the charge of imposed taxes and treason, Sozomen relays this about his findings: “The emperor detected the calumny of his accusers, sent Athanasius home, and wrote to the people of Alexandria to testify that their bishop possessed great moderation and a correct faith; that he had gladly met him, and recognized him to be a man of God; and that, as envy had been the sole cause of his indictment, he had appeared to better advantage than his accusers...”⁴⁶⁸ The result of the treason allegation, much like the taxation charge, is that although it was proven false it planted an idea in Constantine’s thoughts that could later be exploited by Athanasius’ opponents.

Illicit Affair

A further charge that was brought against Athanasius was that he had pursued a woman for sexual contact. The woman appeared before the Council of Tyre and accused Athanasius of

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Bright, *Historical Writings of Saint Athanasius*, 42.

⁴⁶⁸ Sozomen, Book 2, Chapter 22. Moreover, it appears at times such as this that Constantine recognized Athanasius to be a pious bishop. However, it seems that Constantine allowed the opponents to wear him down with allegations until he began to believe that removing Athanasius, even for unjust reasons, would bring peace and stability to the region.

having violated her chastity. In addition, as if this accusation were not enough, she also stated that she had been violated against her will. However, when she appeared before the Council it became apparent that she had never actually seen Athanasius.⁴⁶⁹ Thus, Athanasius and one of his followers created a plan that would expose the deception. Standing next to Athanasius was one of devotees named Timothy. At the appropriate time Timothy approached the woman and asked if they had indeed had a sexual encounter.⁴⁷⁰ The woman believing that she was being addressed by Athanasius affirmed that she had lost her chastity to the man who was speaking to her. However, much to the chagrin of those who were plotting against Athanasius, they then revealed that the man she affirmed was Timothy and not Athanasius.⁴⁷¹ Thus, this accusation of impropriety was proven false. Of course, as stated before, as these various allegations are proven to be lies it becomes more and more apparent that those in command at the Council did not really desire the truth either about specific actions or the character of Athanasius in general. Rather, they were simply attempting to discover a charge for which they could depose him because he was an influential Nicene bishop.

GENERAL AND LATER CHARGES

Violence

One of the general charges against Athanasius is that he was violent with his opponents, in particular the Meletians and Arians. There is no doubt that there were violent outbreaks between the Meletians and the supporters of Athanasius. However, the allegation that Athanasius called

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., Chapter 25.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

for the violence is tempered by several lines of thought. The first of these is that there was violence perpetrated from both sides towards their opponents. Thus, no one living in subsequent times can be certain if the Nicene faction began the violence or if they were merely responding to violence that had been committed against them. Barnard, who is no supporter of Athanasius, even states of this phenomenon: "...Athanasius had adopted such methods against the Meletians 'who themselves had shown much violence and persecution towards the orthodox.'"⁴⁷² A second aspect to consider is that the fourth century was a much different time period from today and that people generally tended to respond with violence to defend themselves and their beliefs. Moreover, it was a time when absolute dogmatism was more acceptable and prevalent. A third, and perhaps most important, facet of the charges concerning Athanasius calling for violence is that there is no evidence that Athanasius called for these outbursts. The Nicene faction was large and diverse, and while Athanasius was influential there was no way that he could have controlled everyone in the movement. In a large movement, such as the Nicene was, there will be always be rogue actions and it is unfair to hold a leader responsible for everyone else. One such rogue act that seemed to occur was the one in 335 that is described in the *London Papyri*, found in 1914 and to be discussed in more detail later, but again there is no conclusive proof that Athanasius either instigated or condoned it. However, it does seem to clearly present the idea that Nicene adherents resorted to violence on the evening in question.

In addition to this, Athanasius advocated non-violence in his writing as he portrayed in the *History of the Arians*: "This is how the devil acts, since there is no truth in him. With "axe and

⁴⁷² Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 78. Nordberg states that the orthodox may have felt it necessary to take violent measures against the most extreme Meletians. A. H. M. Jones takes a darker stance by calling the followers of Athanasius bullies. Of course, these negative appraisals are mostly based on *LP 1914* and the usefulness of this document will be discussed later.

hammer” (Ps 74:6), he breaks the doors of those who do not receive him... For the truth is not proclaimed with swords or darts or soldiers; but by persuasion and advice.”⁴⁷³ Thus, with regards to the allegations of violence, it can never be proven that Athanasius called for it and in his manuscripts, he actually presents a cogent case against resorting to violent means.

Moreover, since the charges cannot be proven they are not sufficient to condemn Athanasius. That violent outbreaks between Athanasius’ supporters and the Meletian and anti-Nicene adherents happened is of little doubt. Anatolios writes of this: “There can be no doubt, however, that outbreaks of violence occurred throughout the conflicts between Athanasius’ supporters and their Meletian and anti-Nicene opponents. For his own part, Athanasius’ public pronouncements on the use of violence tend to repudiate it as a distinctly Arian mode of behavior.”⁴⁷⁴ Moreover, in his writings, Athanasius generally seems to repudiate these actions as something that is most often associated with and instigated by the Arians. In this evaluation of the violence among the religious factions of Egypt in the fourth century, Hanson, who does not look upon Athanasius with complete admiration, seems to concur. He intimated about the violence: “Even allowing for exaggerations, we must accept that Constantius’ troops never had any hesitation in forcing their way into churches and suppressing popular demonstrations ruthlessly.”⁴⁷⁵ Thus, Hanson believes that the violence came from both sides but he seems to lay the blame more firmly upon the anti-Nicene party. As well, it is noteworthy that there is no evidence that Athanasius advocated physical violence against his opponents. This is important because it seems likely that

⁴⁷³ Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, Chapter 33. At this point Athanasius also compared being without violence to being akin to Christ as he wrote: “But our Savior is so gentle that he teaches by saying: “If any one wishes to come after...” and “whoever wishes to be my disciple” (Mt 16:24). When he comes to someone, he does not force them but knocks at the door and says, “Open to me, my sister, my bride” (Song 5:2). If they open, he enters but if they delay and do not wish him to enter, he leaves them.”

⁴⁷⁴ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 35.

⁴⁷⁵ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 319.

if Athanasius had advocated violence in his writing, then it most assuredly would have been saved and produced as evidence by his enemies. Therefore, it can be said that violence did occur on both sides but that there is no evidence that Athanasius led, called for or encouraged the violence. Thus, as a general charge against Athanasius the use of violence is not proven and should not have been a reason for banishment.

Diverting Corn Shipments

As previously stated, when Athanasius left Tyre he went to Constantinople to ask Constantine if he could have an audience in his court along with his accusers. His accusers must have somehow foreseen that Athanasius would travel to Constantinople because they arrived shortly after he did and in too brief a time to come because they had received the summons from Constantine. The bishops who traveled to Constantine were some of Athanasius' oldest and most bitter rivals. These men were Eusebius, Theognis, Maris, Patrophilus, Ursacius, and Valens.⁴⁷⁶ However, when Athanasius and these opposing bishops had their time before Constantine it must have been a shock to Athanasius that they did not desire to reiterate the charges concerning the broken chalice or Arsenius. This factor alone would tend to lead to the conclusion that the allegations had been fabricated. Rather, these bishops brought an entirely novel charge against Athanasius in that they claimed that he had threatened to divert the grain shipments that would go from Alexandria to Constantinople. This was important for two reasons. First of all, Constantinople was a newly established city and it depended heavily upon grain from Egypt. Thus, if Athanasius had been able to halt the grain shipments it would have

⁴⁷⁶ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 35.

been a tremendous difficulty for Constantine and the people of the new city. Thus, Athanasius' accusers were very cunning in that they utilized an element that would be of great importance to Constantine. Secondly, in addition to the grain being an important commodity there was the growing apprehension that Athanasius was, in fact, a forceful individual in Alexandria and had the power to create difficulties for the emperor. Thus, in this light the commodity that was threatened was not as important as the fact that Athanasius had the power to halt any shipments. As well, this enhanced the fears that had been created earlier with the allegations of charging a tax and collusion with a man who was plotting against Constantine. Thus, Athanasius' opponents wisely chose an allegation that would strike apprehension in Constantine with both the philosophical idea that another man was gaining immense power and the practical idea that the grain shipments could be stopped. To add credibility to this allegation Eusebius and his followers stated that four bishops, Adamantius, Anubion, Arbathion and Peter, had themselves heard Athanasius make these threats.⁴⁷⁷ A difficulty with this approach was that these putative eyewitnesses were not present at the trial but Eusebius was merely stating that they said they had heard it. Of course, the result of this allegation was the ultimate putative reason for his exile although there was absolutely no concrete proof of the veracity of the charge.

Verbal Abuses

A charge that is closely related to the allegations of physical violence is that of verbal violence or verbal abuses of opponents. Of this charge, Athanasius is guilty. It is obvious from the numerous extant works from his own pen that he was often verbally harsh with those who

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., Chapter 30.

opposed him. However, this must be tempered by remembering that Athanasius lived in a time where customs, and what was acceptable, were quite different from today.

One interesting facet of this is that he tended to use Scriptures to insult his opponents. For instance, he refers to Constantius, when he was in the bowels of conflict with him, as a precursor to the Antichrist.⁴⁷⁸ References such as this against his opponents were common in his writings. However, when analyzing this from the vantage point of many subsequent centuries, it must be recollected that Athanasius truly did believe himself to be in an epic battle with heretics and that, at least for him, these monikers were quite fitting.

A further factor in considering the verbal abuses by Athanasius is what the opposing forces had perpetrated against him, his followers and his colleagues. His combatants were responsible for various lies about him, even to the point of falsely accusing him of the murder of Arsenius, and for having him banished from his see. As well, they perpetrated lies and torture against his friends, such as torturing Hosius and lying against Eustathius. Perhaps even more heinous was the torturing, and at times murder, of the orthodox laity. After having seen these actions for years Athanasius had every right to be righteously indignant. Thus, while Athanasius did use abusive language towards his antagonists, it must be understood that this was both more acceptable and common during the fourth century, that he truly did view it as a battle against evil and that the Arians and Meletians had perpetrated many acts of violence and dishonesty against both himself and various orthodox figures.

⁴⁷⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 37. Anatolios remarks that Athanasius considers those who do not agree with him to be villains. He wrote: "His opponents on the other hand, are not only portrayed as 'inept' and 'impious' interpreters of Scripture but are also assimilated to biblical personages who deny the lordship of Christ; they are like the Jews and Pontius Pilate. They are generally assimilated to every scriptural image of villainy. Such a polemical strategy, whatever its unattractive features, must be seen in its integral context as indicative of a central feature of Athanasius' own approach to Christian piety."

EVALUATION

It is important to evaluate the accusations against Athanasius based on the information that was readily available in 335. Khaled Anatolios is able to cogently summarize the potential judgment: “It is true, nevertheless, that Athanasius was accused even during his own time of employing violent means to assert and maintain his authority. But it is very hard to evaluate these accusations objectively, especially considering that some of the most egregious of them (such as the “murder” of Arsenius) were proven, as we have seen, to be artificially contrived by his enemies.”⁴⁷⁹ Thus, Anatolios beneficially summarizes the situation as one is not able to make a valid decision that would condemn Athanasius because some of the allegations were proven to be fabrications by his enemies. Moreover, if this were a trial in the truest sense Athanasius would have been found innocent because his opponents were known to have created false evidence. As well, the argument might be presented that Athanasius was such a threat to his opponents that anything they did in order to have him removed was justifiable. However, if these accusers were devoted Christian men they would have presented what evidence they had obtained and trusted that the outcome would be correct instead of attempting to be dishonest.

In retrospect, at the Council of Tyre there was not sufficient evidence to condemn and depose Athanasius. The most heinous allegation of murder was found to be a complete fabrication. There is not enough evidence to securely state that the broken chalice incident actually occurred

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 35. It is of interest that although Anatolios is unwilling to accept much of the claims that Athanasius inspired and condemned violence, nevertheless, he accepts *LP 1914*, more about which will be discussed in detail, as providing proof that the followers of Athanasius did engage in violence. He wrote: “While certain corruptions in the manuscript make the exact construal somewhat in doubt, the document seems to provide clear evidence of violence perpetuated by Athanasius’ supporters.”

and even less evidence that Athanasius was involved in or instigated it. Indeed, if the event transpired at all it appears to have been the actions of an individual, Macarius, making decisions on his own. Similarly, the stories of his false ordination did not coincide with one another. As well, the charges of imposed taxes, treason and fornication were all proven to be falsifications. Finally, the allegations of violence and diverting corn shipments were never proven true or false but were instead brought by individuals who were proven to have lied about other charges. Thus, there is no solid evidence that Athanasius had done wrong. On the contrary, there is a great amount of evidence that he had been falsely accused, and should not have been banished. As well, for the overall focus of this paper, the allegations that were brought to the Council of Tyre in 335 provide no basis for altering the idea that Athanasius was an honorable bishop and worthy of being viewed as an example of a man who travailed for the truth and lived an exemplary life. In the next chapter, new evidence that came to light in the twentieth century will be examined.

CHAPTER VI: LATER SOURCES OF INDICTMENTS

NEW INFORMATION

In the previous chapter the information that was available at the time of the Council of Tyre was investigated and found to be lacking in both the weight to convict Athanasius in 335 and to alter the traditionally positive portrait of him. In this chapter, the new information that has become available since that time will be examined. The first document that critics have utilized in the twentieth century to change the traditional view of Athanasius is the *Church History* of Philostorgius written in the fifth century. However, the only surviving pieces come from the pen of another author in the ninth century. As well, scholars who tend to be critical of Athanasius rely heavily upon the *London Papyrus*. The *London Papyrus* is a series of letters from the fourth century, which came to light in 1914, and one of the letters in particular could possibly contain information about Athanasius. The third historical piece the critics base their alteration of the understanding of Athanasius upon is the funeral oration given by Gregory in 380. Each of these will be investigated in turn to determine their usefulness in providing information concerning the character of Athanasius.

PHILOSTORGIUS

Understanding Philostorgius

An important historical work utilized by modern critics of Athanasius is Philostorgius' *Church History*. It is a history written in the fifth century, with the most likely date being in the early 430s, or some sixty years after the death of Athanasius. Philostorgius' background is that he is believed to have come from an Arian family and is remembered as a layman who was well

traveled.⁴⁸⁰ His lifespan, as can best be discerned, was from 366 to 433. To understand his writing style one notes that his central focus is to pursue the miraculous and to shy away from rationalistic explanations. As well, it is noteworthy that his historical work was suppressed during the Theodosian period that ended with Theodosius' death in 450.⁴⁸¹ Much of what is ascertained about the contents of his putative history is from Photius' critique in the ninth century and, thus, it is probable that some copies of *Church History* still existed until that time period.⁴⁸² Photius was a patriarch in Constantinople and it is likely that he included Philostorgius' work in his *Epitome* to be critical of it. In addition, Philostorgius' historical work being suppressed in the Theodosian period may be why there is only fragments included in another man's work some four hundred years later.

However, according to Young, who is generally critical of Athanasius, Philostorgius' *Church History* is not as much a history of the church as it is a narrow panegyric against all those who were not a part of the Eunomian belief system.⁴⁸³ Moreover, it is important to understand that

⁴⁸⁰ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 31. Young declares Philostorgius' penchant for invoking the supernatural into a variety of circumstances as he writes: "Unlike Socrates, Philostorgius consciously and deliberately set out to disclose the providential designs of God in the course of history. Miracles and portents figure largely in his presentation. Those who are sympathetic to the 'true faith' prosper; disaster attends those rulers who persecute the Eunomians. Illness is a sign of divine punishment; earthquake a scourge of divine wrath. This pattern is truly in the tradition of Eusebius' work, though it is worked out somewhat more crudely, and with an apocalyptic and astrological flavor that Eusebius would certainly have repudiated. The sack of Rome is no brief incident of the past for Philostorgius, but a sign of the approaching end of the world, foreshadowed by the appearance of the comet in 389."

⁴⁸¹ Mario Baghos, "Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians," *Phronema* Vol 28(2) (2013): 59.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 32. Eunomius was born in Dacora in Cappadocia in the early 330s and died in 393. He was bishop of Cyzicus in 360 and he was influenced by Aetius and Eudoxius. However, his views were so extreme towards the Arian side that Emperor Constantius had him removed after being bishop for only one year. His basic teaching was that the Son is unlike the Father in all ways. He even changed the baptismal formula from being in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to being in the name of Christ. The Eunomian views were condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381. However, they continued to be espoused on into the fifth century by men such as Philostorgius.

Philostorgius clearly states his doctrinal allegiance and his bitter hostility against Athanasius.⁴⁸⁴ He was critical of both the Arians and those of the Nicene faith and rarely mentioned any of the influential leaders of the time period for either side. Therefore, Philostorgius has come to be thought of as a writer who is biased towards a certain theological viewpoint, namely that prescribed by Eunomius. As well, it appears that Philostorgius knew Eunomius in Constantinople and he, obviously, had a great impact on him.⁴⁸⁵

Moreover, some researchers have an even harsher outlook on him as they have come to view Philostorgius as an extreme Arian.⁴⁸⁶ Consequently, as an extreme Arian he was naturally hostile to Athanasius. Thus, it seems quite natural and expected that his writings in the subsequent century would portray Athanasius in a negative light. Hanson proffers a synopsis of Philostorgius' views of Athanasius by writing: "Philostorgius represents him as arrogant and inflexible, very ready to resort to violence and even to murder, no respecter of law and unscrupulous in pursuing his own ends, but does so in fairly moderate language." In his overall view point it seems more probable that Philostorgius followed his predecessors in condemning Athanasius because of his opposing beliefs rather than his alleged malevolent actions. Mario Baghos is another writer who has strong opinions about Philostorgius and any idea that he is neutral. He presents a synopsis of what Philostorgius wrote concerning Athanasius: "Philostorgius subjected Rufinus' portrait of the saint to a scathing revision more than twenty five years after the former's work and did not stop short of denouncing Athanasius as having illegitimately attained his bishopric, of setting a prostitute upon the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. 341) at the council of Tyre, of ignoring his 'excommunication' at the hands of

⁴⁸⁴ David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165.

⁴⁸⁵ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 31.

⁴⁸⁶ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 241.

Constantine by returning to his see after the emperor's death, of turning the nominally orthodox emperor Constans against his Arian brother Constantius (r. 337-361), and, having been reinstated to his see by the former, of arrogantly spreading the "consubstantialist [or homoousian] doctrine" of Nicaea."⁴⁸⁷ Of course, Philostorgius reveals his true alliance by emphasizing that Athanasius spread the Nicene position. Philostorgius did not agree with the orthodox theology and it seems likely that he would be engaging in efforts, similar to the 330s, to question the character of the leaders of the Nicene idea. Therefore, it appears clear that many scholars discern that Philostorgius was biased against Athanasius and was not willing to present a neutral view.

Now that the case for Philostorgius being biased has been stated it is important to investigate the alternate view. One crucial aspect in the alternate view is the idea that it is difficult to determine the origin of many of the fragments and whether they are from Philostorgius or Photius. Thus, some scholars accredit several fragments to Philostorgius and they believe this leads to understanding him as being more neutral. His neutrality is important because they utilize this to declare that his history should be deemed more useful for historical purposes. There are also scholars that even broach the idea that Philostorgius' history should be accepted over his contemporary historians such as Theodoret and Socrates. However, it must be remembered that this judgment is based on unstable facts as no one can determine with certainty which statements belong to Philostorgius.

An important individual who believes many of the questionable fragments came from Philostorgius is William Rusch. As well, he was one of the lead scholars in encouraging the notion that this historical record was more trustworthy than orthodox sources. However, as

⁴⁸⁷ Baghos, "Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians," 59.

should be expected, scholars are divided as to the usefulness of these supposed Philostorgian declarations. Rusch is joined by L.W. Barnard in believing that certain statements made in the *Epitome* were originally written by Philostorgius.⁴⁸⁸ In contrast, Arnold has a differing opinion and directly attacks the declaration of Barnard by stating: “The three examples given by Barnard to show that Philostorgius was not “an out and out Arian sympathizer” (Bk. 1,3; 1,9; 2,3) do appear, in this author’s opinion, from a study of Bidez’s text to be interpolations by Photius. In any case, one may, at the very least, assume along with F. Young that the chief purpose of Philostorgius in the *Ecclesiastical History* was the defense of Eunomius...”⁴⁸⁹ In light of this added difficulty of the words that can actually be attributed to Philostorgius and the words Photius inserted, Philostorgius’ *Church History* should not be viewed as a neutral source. As well, the case made by those scholars who declare that he was neutral seems deficient when compared to the idea that he intended to present a diatribe against the Nicene followers, and Athanasius in particular. Moreover, it is difficult to understand how an historical work can be allowed to wield such great influence when there is such uncertainty about the statements the author actually made.

A further important piece of information in deciding the historical value of Philostorgius can be found in the declarations of Photius himself. Photius wrote of Philostorgius in these words: “He extols all Arians, but abuses and insults all the orthodox, so that this work is not so much a history as a panegyric of the heretics, and nothing but a barefaced attack upon the orthodox.”⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ L. W. Barnard, “Two Notes on Athanasius,” *OrChrP* 41 (1975): 348-349.

⁴⁸⁹ Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 25. Arnold also intimates that the influence of Seeck and Schwartz, to be discussed later, have led to other scholars tending to distrust the orthodox historians from this time period. He wrote: “This has resulted in nonorthodox sources receiving a greater deal of credence that they might possibly deserve on the basis of both internal and external evidence.”

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26. Photius goes on to declare of Philostorgius: “His style is elegant, his diction often poetical, though not to such an extent to be tedious or disagreeable. His figurative use of words is very expressive and makes the work

Since Photius is the one that had direct access to Philostorgius' history, recalling that all originals are lost, then his opinion should weigh heavily. In addition to the criticism, Photius also states that Philostorgius has an agreeable writing style which indicates that he is willing to make a fair assessment of him although he may not agree with his theological position. Thus, before the historical problems are delved into it is significant to understand that Philostorgius was biased against the Nicene adherents, it is difficult to determine the difference between Philostorgius' and Photius' words and, thus, one cannot declare him to be neutral and worthy of being utilized as a primary historical source and Photius, being the only one that had direct access to his writings, declared Philostorgius to have directly attacked the orthodox.

Historical Problems with Philostorgius

Before the discussion begins of the specific problems with Philostorgius' history it is beneficial to note how two different authors viewed the discrepancies with other histories from the time period. Arnold appears to believe that these disparities are a problem to trusting in the overall veracity of Philostorgius' history.⁴⁹¹ Moreover, Arnold intimates the cogent point that if someone consistently presents incorrect chronological data then it stands to reason that all of their facts are suspect. However, Gwynn holds them as less of a complication as he writes on the topic: "Such chronological errors occur in many orthodox sources as well, such as Rufinus of

both pleasant and agreeable to read; sometimes however these figures are overbold and outrageous, and create an impression of being frigid...In many instances the author introduces appropriate moral reflections of his own. He starts with the devotion of Arius to the heresy and its first beginnings and ends with the recall of the impious Aetius. This Aetius was removed from his office by his brother heretics, since he outdid them in wickedness, as Philostorgius himself unwillingly confesses."

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

Aquileia.”⁴⁹² Thus, two modern authors display completely different evaluations as to the trustworthiness of the history by Philostorgius.

Now that the background of Philostorgius and his history have been examined it is helpful to delve into some specific historical problems. To begin with, Philostorgius asserts that Athanasius ignored the excommunication by Constantine and this can be proven false. Baghos points out that Athanasius was requested to return to Alexandria by Constantine’s son, Constantinus, who had inherited the Western Roman empire after the death of his father.⁴⁹³ Furthermore, this fact is attested to in three different church histories. It is statements such as these that can be proven to be patently false that create an atmosphere of disbelief when considering other statements by made by Philostorgius.

A further example is that Philostorgius intimates that Liberius of Rome did not support the Nicene faith. However, other historical sources state that Liberius was one of the staunchest advocates of the Nicene faith.⁴⁹⁴ Moreover, it is true that Liberius did agree to an Arian creed, as discussed earlier in this paper, but this action was only done under extreme duress from the emperor’s forces. Thus, it appears that at some point Philostorgius either received mistaken information or blatantly ignored the facts.

Additionally, Philostorgius offered the idea that when Constans was assassinated in 350 by Magnentius that it was because of his Nicene faith.⁴⁹⁵ However, other historical records do not present evidence that this was the reason but rather that Magnentius was trying to obtain power

⁴⁹² Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 165-166. Gwynn goes on to state that in Philostorgius’ history that he confuses the Council of Tyre in 335 with the Council of Antioch in 338/9. As well, Philostorgius reverses the prostitute story by saying that it was Athanasius who paid a prostitute to falsely accuse Eusebius.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

for selfish reasons. In addition, some historians intimate that certain of the soldiers under Constans were exasperated at his deplorable moral standards. As well, it logically follows that if Magnentius had been motivated to assassinate Constans because of his Nicene faith then he would have been the natural ally of Constantius, but history divulges that this was definitely not the case.

Another assertion by Philostorgius that is incongruent with other histories concerns the hand of Arsenius. Apparently, he states in his history that one of the factors in Athanasius' conviction in 335 was that the prosecution presented the hand of Arsenius that Athanasius putatively used for black magic.⁴⁹⁶ However, other histories, as covered earlier, state that Athanasius disproved this conjecture by producing Arsenius alive and with two hands. It is also important to note that Athanasius states these to be facts in his own history and if this were not the case there surely would have been those still alive who would dispute this. Therefore, when Philostorgius presents these ideas as truth when they are not found in other historical writings it brings into question the negative evaluation of Athanasius that pervades his writings.

In his history, Philostorgius also states that Athanasius was returned from his second exile because he used persuasion and bribery against Constans. Thus, according to Philostorgius, Athanasius coerced Constans into threatening war against Constantius, who was his brother and ruler in the East.⁴⁹⁷ Gwynn also indicates his idea that Philostorgius may have been influenced in this by a contemporary, Cyril of Alexandria, of his who used bribery to secure help against Nestorius.⁴⁹⁸ One would think that Gwynn admitting that Philostorgius had gotten other stories

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

confused with the facts about Athanasius would create a greater degree of mistrust in everything that he wrote, but Gwynn still held him as a valid historical source.

A further error that Philostorgius made in his history was concerning the consecration of Gregory the Cappadocian. As covered earlier, Gregory was placed in the position of bishop of Alexandria only after Athanasius had returned from his first exile and then went into his second exile. Thus, the other histories place the time of his ascension as the year 341. However, Philostorgius states that Gregory was sent to replace Athanasius as soon as he was deposed after Tyre, which would have been in the year 335. As well, Philostorgius confuses Athanasius' return in 337 with his return in 346.⁴⁹⁹ Thus, it can be ascertained that there are errors involving the historical accuracy of Philostorgius' history concerning the exiles and returns.

Another questionable arena in accepting the veracity of Philostorgius' writing was his penchant for presenting wild tales as history when they were almost certainly fictional. One such anecdote concerns Aetius, who was the bishop of Palestine, and Athanasius traveling to garner support for his Nicene position. Philostorgius wrote: "None of them agreed except Aetius, the bishop of Palestine, who had been denounced for fornication and, hoping to conceal his disgrace by yielding to Athanasius, defected to his doctrine. But he paid a very heavy penalty when his genitals putrefied and swarmed with worms, and thus he died."⁵⁰⁰ It is of interest, as well, that Athanasius did not regard Aetius as orthodox but rather referred to him as an Arian. It is from situations such as this that one can understand exactly how Philostorgius viewed the fourth century.⁵⁰¹ He considered anyone who did not support his Eunomian position to be an adherent to the Nicene orthodoxy. Thus, bizarre incidents such as this being recorded as history also

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁰⁰ Philostorgius, *HE*, III, 12.

⁵⁰¹ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 166.

brings into question his ability to discern between reality and fiction. Thus, it can be understood that Philostorgius had numerous errors in his history and that brings into question his trustworthiness in accordance with the important topic for this study, which is the specifics about Athanasius.

Philostorgius' History

Now that the historical difficulties have been reviewed, and one can understand that Philostorgius had various other instances where his facts were mistaken, it is time to survey the declarations Philostorgius made about Athanasius. In the *Epitome* Photius records two noteworthy passages of Philostorgius' history that made reference to Athanasius. One of these regards his consecration in 328 and the other recounts the events that led to Athanasius returning, after his first exile, to Alexandria.⁵⁰² The account of Athanasius' ordination is a portion of Philostorgius' history which modern critics tend to especially desire to believe and, thusly, this one will be scrutinized closely. The following statement is made concerning the consecration of Athanasius as bishop:

“The impious contriver of lies [i.e. Philostorgius] asserts, that after the death of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, the votes of the prelates were not unanimous, and that there was a diversity of sentiment, and after a considerable amount of time had been spent in altercation, the divine Athanasius suddenly appeared one evening in the church called after Dionysius, and finding there two Egyptian bishops, firmly closed the doors with the assistance of some of his followers, and so was ordained by them, though strongly against the will of the ordainers. For a power

⁵⁰² Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 26.

from above fell upon them, and so constrained their will and powers that what Athanasius wished was done at once. Philostorgius adds, that the remainder of the bishops then present anathematized Athanasius on account of this transaction; and that the latter, having first thoroughly strengthened his cause addressed to the emperor certain letters relating to his ordination, in the name of the entire state; and that the emperor, thinking that the letters in question were written by the assembly of the Alexandrians, ratified the election with his approval. Afterwards, however, upon being informed of the details of the transaction, he sent Athanasius to Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, to give an account of the matter before a synod which was assembled there.”⁵⁰³

Gwynn presents his own interpretation of Philostorgius’ words concerning the matter: “Athanasius broke into the Church of Dionysius in the late afternoon, found two Egyptian bishops, shut the doors and barred them firmly with the help of his supporters, and in this way received ordination. Those ordaining resisted vigorously, but when the violence offered them proved too much for their will and their strength, Athanasius got what he wanted.”⁵⁰⁴ Thus, it is evident that the legality Athanasius’ ordination was called into question. However, an important point to consider, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is that the Arians had several scenarios in which Athanasius was falsely ordained and none of them can be reconciled with one another. Thus, it should be deemed likely that the various stories were contrived and not in correspondence with reality. This is especially true of an Eunomian author like Philostorgius

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 27. One particular point of interest in this quote was when the author wrote that a power from above fell on them. It is not clear if black magic was intended here or if the power was from God. However, since Philostorgius is generally negative towards Athanasius it is probably best to assume that the idea of him using black magic is being referred to here.

⁵⁰⁴ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 165. In this summation, the two bishops that ordained Athanasius were not compelled by a power from above, either black magic or God, but were rather threatened with violence if they did not concur and agree to ordain Athanasius as the new bishop of Alexandria.

who wrote more than a century later, and, thus, Philostorgius' rendition of Athanasius' ordination is not historically useful. As well, when rendering this decision, the various errors that Philostorgius made about other events are a factor.

After this description of his putative illegal ordination, Philostorgius continues on to chronicle the allegations brought against Athanasius at the Synod of Tyre. These accusations include those cited by other historians and are namely those of fraud, immorality and violence against Ischyras. Philostorgius proceeds to state the reason that Athanasius had been deposed as he wrote: "Athanasius, who had hoped to escape trial altogether, went away after having been convicted of a double crime, not merely an illegal ordination but also a foul calumny; and so, by the common consent of all, a sentence of deposition was passed against him."⁵⁰⁵ Of course, this is a completely different reason than what the other historians present. They attribute his final banishment by Constantine in 335 to a conflict between Constantine and Athanasius over restricted grain shipments traversing from Alexandria to Constantinople and the argument that ensued over this topic. Thus, the rendition that Philostorgius presented is quite factually different from other historians of the same time period and that which Athanasius furnished.

The second notable time Philostorgius mentions Athanasius draws much less interest from critics. Basically, as covered previously, Philostorgius asserts that Athanasius returned from his first exile unlawfully. However, other histories clearly state that the new emperor, Constantinus, in place of his father after his death in 337, called for Athanasius to return to Alexandria. Thus, Philostorgius is not accurate the second time he mentions Athanasius.

⁵⁰⁵ Philostorgius, *HE*, II, 11.

Evaluation of Philostorgius

One interesting facet when considering how much influence Philostorgius should have on an interpretation of Athanasius is what Gwynn wrote. Although Gwynn had a generally favorable opinion of Philostorgius, he wrote: “Philostorgius is without question a biased and frequently inaccurate historian, and we cannot take his arguments at face value...it is certainly not self-evident that any of the assertions that Philostorgius makes against Athanasius are correct. It is not always self-evident that they are wrong.”⁵⁰⁶ However, something being not self-evidently wrong does not warrant amending the view of Athanasius that prevailed for some fifteen hundred years. Similar to Gwynn, Rowan Williams also states that Philostorgius is not a reliable source.⁵⁰⁷ Hanson evaluates Philostorgius as an extreme Arian and rancorous towards Athanasius.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, even those authors who are willing to accept Philostorgius’ history as helpful are readily willing to admit that he was inaccurate, unreliable and hostile towards Athanasius and the Nicene position.

A further important aspect to consider in evaluating Philostorgius is that he proffers little new information that was not previously presented by other hostile authors in the fourth century. Thus, in the final analysis all that resulted is a history that is similar to what the adversaries were alleging in Athanasius’ time, but in a later century. Furthermore, it is important to consider that

⁵⁰⁶ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 167. Gwynn also declares that one should not feel compelled to accept Philostorgius’ account simply because it stands in disagreement with the traditional view. He also states that Philostorgius does utilize the same rhetorical techniques and much of the same basic information with his contemporary historians such as Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret.

⁵⁰⁷ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 31. In this particular incident Williams is speaking about information Philostorgius presented in relation to Arians and Lucians. However, it can be presumed that if Williams did not think he was reliable in this aspect, that this opinion generally carried over into other areas as well.

⁵⁰⁸ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 241. However, at the same time Hanson states that Philostorgius is restrained in his criticism of Athanasius and, thus, in his judgment, it makes it more likely that what he is declaring has some semblance to the truth.

there are four other historians, namely Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret, from the same time period that adduce different events. This is substantial as one would have to override four histories that had been trusted for centuries to accommodate Philostorgius' history. As well, it is important to consider the evaluation by Photius as he was the one that actually had access to Philostorgius' writings and, as stated previously, he believed the history to be fanciful, abusive of the orthodox and false. Moreover, many of his erratic historical claims can be proven false. Thus, in light of his inherently negative view of Athanasius, the judgment of modern and ancient authors as inaccurate and his historical inexactness it would be capricious to allow Philostorgius' history to alter the traditional view of Athanasius.

LONDON POPYRUS

London Papyrus 1914 Comes to Light

A second historical document that twentieth century critics believed was useful in diverging the traditional view of Athanasius was the *London Papyrus*. The *London Papyrus 1914* is a letter that was discovered among a broader collection of correspondence from the time period. Sir Harold Idris Bell is the one who is responsible for bringing the finding to light. Bell believed the letter should be dated to May or June of 335, which is just before the crucial Synod of Tyre.⁵⁰⁹ Bell also thought that it would bring new understanding to the character of the epoch in

⁵⁰⁹ Duane Arnold, "Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914," *Studia Patristica* Louvain: Peeters (1989): 378.

which Athanasius lived, as he wrote: “These letters...are of exceptional interest for the light they throw on the life of a Christian community in the reign of Constantine the Great.”⁵¹⁰

However, it is of particular interest to note that at the time of the publishing of the *London Papyrus 1914*, it seems that Bell intended to skew the viewpoints against Athanasius. Bell did not simply publish the correspondence and allow the reader to draw their own conclusion but, rather, sought to color how the new information was regarded. Bell wrote in his initial article about the papyri: “...the other and more interesting [of the papyri], a long letter from an Alexandrine Meletian gives a vivid picture of the sufferings to which the sectaries were exposed at the hands of Athanasius and his adherents.”⁵¹¹ Thus, it is apparent that Bell had already made a decision on the guilt of Athanasius based on this obscure papyri and that he, furthermore, desired to influence the views of the readers. Bell goes on to state that this new letter sheds additional insight on the proceedings at Tyre in 335. Furthermore, Bell declares in his opening statement about the *London Papyrus 1914* that they lend more justification for the attack on Athanasius and that they are among the most important correspondence that is possessed from the fourth century.⁵¹² Moreover, it seems that Bell overstated the importance of the correspondence as he wrote: “It is, of course, like Athanasius’ own narrative, a partisan statement, but it shows what was suspected before, that there was more justification for the attack on Athanasius than the Catholic tradition allows to appear, and it may rank among the

⁵¹⁰ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 71. Bell went on to say: “But it is by virtue of two only of the papyri that the collection boasts its special importance. One of these, the only contract in the series, fixes at last the disputed date of the Synod of Caesarea...the other and more interesting, a long letter from an Alexandrian Meletian, gives a vivid picture of the sufferings to which the sectaries were exposed at the hands of Athanasius and his adherents.” Thus, Bell reveals in this early stage that he already believes the letter is condemning of Athanasius even though the meaning cannot be ascertained due to mutilation.

⁵¹¹ Arnold, “Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914,” 377.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

most precious documents of fourth-century ecclesiastical history.”⁵¹³ It is obvious that Bell was not writing from an unbiased stance and this is the manner in which the *London Papyrus* were entered into the discussion on the character of Athanasius.

Now that an overview of the conditions in which the *London Papyrus 1914* were introduced has been investigated it is important to review the facts of the letter. The author of the letter which Bell published is a man named Callistus and Bell believes he is a part of the Meletian faction, most likely a cleric or monk. Callistus wrote the letter to two men that seem to have been priests in another community.⁵¹⁴ The purpose of the letter seems to be to recount the sufferings that the Meletians had endured by Athanasius and his followers, at least this is what Bell believed, although the evidence for this is far from conclusive. Nevertheless, this is a summary of the initial description of the event that Bell presented and that is accepted by Athanasian scholars:

“On the evening of 24 Pachon (19 May) A.D. 335, almost two months before the Synod of Tyre, a violent altercation took place at Nicopolis, a suburb of Alexandria. It seems that an attack had taken place earlier at the house of one Heraclius the recorder. In the evening however, Isaac of Letopolis (a Meletian bishop in the Breviarium Melitii who was to be active at Tyre and who was also to be accused of violent conduct at a later date) had come to visit Heraclius in Alexandria and was dining with another bishop of uncertain identity in the military camp which adjoined the village. According to Bell’s translation, “the adherents of Athanasius” heard about the visit and with the assistance of the soldiers in the camp attempted to kidnap Isaac. Callistus informed his readers at this point in the narrative that the attackers were in an intoxicated state as

⁵¹³ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 71.

⁵¹⁴ Arnold, “Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914,” 378.

the assault began, but that they still managed to break into the military post in pursuit of Isaac. By the time the would-be kidnappers had made their way to the meeting place of the two bishops, however, Isaac and his companion had been warned and hidden away by yet other soldiers who were sympathetic to their cause.

Their quarry having escaped, the attackers turned on four other “of the brethren” who were coming into the camp and beat them. Finally, they made their way to a hostel near to the east gate of Alexandria (some distance from the camp) and seized the keeper asking him, “Why do you admit Meletian monks to the hostel?” Others who had entertained the visiting bishops received similar rough treatment. The next day the praepositus of the soldiers came and apologized (to whom we are uncertain) for the drunken behavior of his men and presented an offering again as a sign of penance.”⁵¹⁵

The former describes the first portion of the letter which is fairly straightforward. It is important to note about this first, and most clear, part of the correspondence that Athanasius’ name is not mentioned. It is true that the letter states that some Meletians were being harassed by the orthodox but there is no mention that the attack was organized or commanded from a higher official. Rather, it appears to be a rogue attack perpetrated by a group of individuals.

It is the second part of the letter that is more controversial. According to Bell, the second half of the letter describes the attitude displayed by Athanasius and his followers in the months leading up to the Synod of Tyre. Bell describes Athanasius as being ‘very despondent’ overall and especially in relation to the possibility of Macarius being arrested.⁵¹⁶ It is at this point that

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 379. That Athanasius is desperately concerned about Macarius being arrested reveals his devotion to others. Had Athanasius been a hard gangster it is likely he would have been willing to sacrifice Macarius for the good of his own success. However, when he shows true concern for him it further reveals his kind nature.

the letter is severely mutilated so that it is difficult to ascertain what the letter is actually saying. Bell believes that at some point Athanasius sent a failed rescue party for Macarius. As well, Bell assumes that Athanasius is the generator of the actions in the remainder of the letter. However, again it must be remembered that this is only speculation on Bell's part as this portion of the letter is not legible or discernible. The best possibility that Bell, or anyone else for that matter, can offer is a guess.

Whoever was the instigator of the actions in the remainder of the letter was said to have taken a bishop from the Lower Country and confined him in a meat market. As well, this man also imprisons another priest and deacon.⁵¹⁷ The letter also states that the perpetrator scourged Heraclius for four days and exiled seven other bishops. The final portion of the letter is inconsequential as it addresses the distribution of bread and various greetings given to acquaintances who live near those who received the letter. Thus, the important idea from this second portion of the letter is that it is mutilated and it cannot be known with any degree of certainty that the individual that is being spoken about is Athanasius. However, Bell, and several modern historians, pretend as if there is no question that the perpetrator was Athanasius.

Problems with Bell's Summations

There are several reasons why the conjectures of Bell concerning the *London Papyrus 1914*, and more pointedly Athanasius' character, are not valid. First of all, Bell based his

⁵¹⁷ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 75. Callistus went on to state that the bishop who was taken from the Lower Country in the original attack was Heraiscus and he remained in the camp and was scourged several times during a period of four days. The letter also declares that seven other bishops were exiled and this included two by the names of Emes and Peter. Moreover, Bell believes that this is same Peter that is mentioned in the listing of the Meletian bishops or the *Breviarium Militii*.

interpretations on a simplistic view of the religious situation in Egypt during the early part of the fourth century.⁵¹⁸ Bell seemed to support the idea that it was the Meletians in opposition to the orthodox and these were the only two groups in action. However, the situation is much more complex as at times Meletians opposed one another as well. Arnold wrote of these schisms: “We may say, in the light of subsequent actions taken at the Synod of Tyre, that there was a high degree of ill-will between these Meletian and former Meletian communities.”⁵¹⁹ Thus, it is entirely possible that the mutilated section presents the perpetrators of the violence as other Meletians.

In addition, one needs to take into account the Eusebians, Colluthians and Arians as well as other lesser known factions. It is also important to note that these groups were not stable but rather there were fluctuating alliances and conflicts. Additionally, it is also possible that the mutilated section of the letter refers to the trouble between other factions rather than between Athanasius and Meletians as Arnold writes: “For, although Bell assumes Athanasius to be the proponent of the attacks described in the second section of the letter, the mutilated state of the papyrus and the almost incomprehensible grammar of the author makes such an identification highly suspect.”⁵²⁰ Moreover, each of these groups was important to the ecclesiastical and political situation in the 330s. As well, the lines of doctrine among these alliances were alternately blurred and accentuated based on the prevailing needs and enemies at any given time. Thus, for Bell to assume only two stable parties during this time, and to base his evaluations of the *London Papyrus 1914* on this putative situation, does a great disservice to a true understanding of the letter.

⁵¹⁸ Arnold, “Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: a reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914,” 380.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

A second reason why the evaluations of Bell are not coherent for this situation is the apparent knowledge of the Greek language used by the writer Callistus. Arnold intimates on this facet: “Although there are a good many features of his grammar and style which are familiar within his period and geographical setting, we must still note that his repetitious use of words and phrases without connecting particles or conjunctions (II. 9, 10), his omission of connecting words (I. 38), and his use of supplementary clauses without conjunctions (II. 24, 48) all show a basic difficulty with handling the language. The exact meaning, therefore, of the phrase which Bell has translated as ‘the adherents of Athanasius’ could very possibly carry another meaning.”⁵²¹ Thus, the instigators of the violence may not be followers of Athanasius but may rather be those who opposed him in some way. Of course, it is important for a document that is utilized to effectively change the reputation of a man to be abundantly clear in its meaning and yet *LP 1914* possesses questions in this arena.

Implications of the Letter

One of the implications of *LP 1914* is that the actions of Athanasius before Tyre came to be viewed with greater suspicion. In fact, many of the charges of Athanasius being a gangster made by Barnes and Hanson are based on a single line of a papyrus leaf from the *London Papyrus 1914*.⁵²² As well, the fragment of *London Papyrus 1914* in question is capable of a number of

⁵²¹ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 83. Arnold also remarked: “Given our present understanding of the numerous groups who were competing for power in the Egyptian church during this period it is possible to see things differently. The attackers may have indeed been the “adherents of Athanasius,” but more in the literal sense of those who were “close kinfolk” –such as those Meletians who had given him their allegiance. This seems very likely. Conversely, the attackers might have been those who were actually “in competition” with Athanasius and the events recorded in *LP 1914* could be the result of some internecine struggle of which we are unaware.”

⁵²² Duane Arnold, “Athanasius and the Meletians at the Synod of Tyre, 335,” *Coptic Church Review* 10 no 3 (Fall 1989): 68.

variant readings, as discussed before, and many of these different readings would serve to exonerate, rather than condemn, Athanasius.⁵²³ Thus, to mutate the overarching opinion of Athanasius to the negative is not coherent with the actual strength of *LP 1914* given the problems that exist in determining the meaning of the crucial and mutilated section.

A second implication is that *LP 1914* has tended to enhance the idea of Athanasius being responsible for the schism becoming greater between the Meletians and the Nicene. This is related to the manner in which the Meletian schism seemed to escalate in late 328, just after Athanasius is elected bishop of Alexandria, and *LP 1914* would serve to encourage this belief. The scenario for those who take a dim view of the character of Athanasius is that he began to oppress the Meletians when he was elected and this led to the widening schism. However, Arnold points out that the reason for the increasing schism was more likely that the Meletians were frustrated because they could not participate as equals in the election of a new bishop in 328.⁵²⁴ As well, the idea that Athanasius was not oppressing the Meletians is reinforced by the fact, as discussed earlier, that many Meletians had left their faction and joined Athanasius and the orthodox. However, as noted before, if *LP 1914* is fully utilized in the method that Bell prescribes then the idea that Athanasius had submitted the Meletians to oppressive behavior would be encouraged.

Alternate View

As mentioned earlier, there are many historians and critics who give a great deal of credence to *LP 1914* and believe that it is indicative of the true character of Athanasius. For example,

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 69.

Hanson believes that a salient point about the letter is that it was meant only to be seen by two other Meletians and was not intended to be widely viewed. Hanson writes: “It is a factual account written for people under persecution, a private missive not intended for publication nor propaganda, and therefore all the more damning.”⁵²⁵ Moreover, Hanson believes that *LP 1914* gives evidence not only of Athanasius being violent towards his opponents but also of denying them bread. Of course, this also lends reliability to the charge that Athanasius had denied grain shipments to Constantinople as his opponents would later allege.

As well as the notions presented by Hanson, Barnes adds a new idea about *LP 1914*. Barnes believes that the letter indicates that Athanasius tried to forcefully prevent Meletian bishops from attending the Council of Tyre.⁵²⁶ Thus, Barnes intimates, if Athanasius could prevent their voices from being heard then it would proffer two positive elements. The first is that it would prevent the allegations of violence from reaching the council. The second is that the less dissidents that were present in Tyre, the more of a united front in Egypt he could present. Obviously, Barnes viewed *LP 1914* as truthfully relaying the common circumstances in the 330s and he presumes that the subject of the line in question is Athanasius.

Evaluation of *LP 1914*

There are several points of view and important elements that need to be considered when rendering a decision on the usefulness of *LP 1914*. One of those elements is how Bell himself placed the importance of the document in an overall appraisal of Athanasius. First of all, Bell

⁵²⁵ Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 252. Hanson further assumes that the entirety of *LP 1914* refers to Athanasius as he goes on to write: “It can be dated with confidence to a point just before the Council of Tyre, that is late May or early June 335. It describes Athanasius’ state of mind just before embarking in order to attend the Council, and the barbarous treatment which he is meanwhile dealing out to those Meletians who have opposed him.”

⁵²⁶ Timothy D. Barnes, “The Career of Athanasius,” *Studia Patristica* Vol. 21 Issue 1 (1989): 395.

assesses *LP 1914* as confirming what the Meletians declared about him as he wrote that Athanasius: "...was of a masterful temperament, with all the intolerance and all the impatience of youth and even without the evidence of the document to be quoted presently, one need feel little hesitation in accepting as at least partially true the accusation of his enemies that he persecuted the Meletians."⁵²⁷ However, although Bell does make these strong statements he is also more reserved in allowing the contents of *LP 1914* to revise the comprehensive opinion of Athanasius. He writes: "Yet it must not be forgotten that the letter of Callistus also is an *ex parte* statement. The facts he relates can hardly be doubted, but they may have had a justification which he does not allow to appear. And in any case it would be unfair to found on these and similar facts a general condemnation of Athanasius, though we admit faults in his character and errors in his conduct."⁵²⁸ Bell also stated that a fair evaluation between the Meletians and Athanasius should be based on the total personality and the principal issue rather than on small details such as these.⁵²⁹ Therefore, it can be ascertained that while Bell believed *LP 1914* was helpful in confirming the violence Athanasius instigated against his opponents, he also does not think it should negatively cloud the overall evaluation of the character of Athanasius.

⁵²⁷ H.I. Bell, "Athanasius: A Chapter in Church History," *The Congregational Quarterly* 3 no. 2 (April 1925): 164. Bell also declares his belief that Athanasius was a young man and was not temperate as many young men are not and this led to the violence. As well, he noted in 1925 that *LP 1914* only aided in providing proof for what was already suspected about Athanasius' violent tendencies. However, the only two pieces of evidence about his violence before *LP 1914* were from Sozomen, who found them in the now lost minutes of the Council of Tyre and briefly refers to them in his history, and a letter from the Oriental Council of Sardica written in 343. Moreover, the history found in the letter from the Council of Sardica is obviously embellished. However, both of these, the Council of Tyre and Sardica, were actively hostile towards Athanasius and, at least in the case of Tyre for certain, had made accusations against Athanasius that were proven to be false. Thus, neither of these sources should be depended upon as being trustworthy.

⁵²⁸ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 76.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Hanson's argument that the letter was only meant to be seen by two other Meletians is flawed. As mentioned earlier, Hanson believes that this lends credibility to the letter. However, this may not be valid and there is little knowledge of the character of Callistus and his motivations. It is just as likely that he may have wanted to influence the two bishops he was writing to in order to have them be hostile towards Athanasius. In other words, the audience being private or public does not necessarily prove the veracity of the work. As well, the evaluation by Barnes that the letter lends credence to the allegation that Athanasius attempted to prevent Meletians from attending the council is based on the presumption that the subject of the disputed portion of the letter is Athanasius and this has been shown to be unreliable evidence.

One final aspect of *LP 1914* is perhaps the most important. Once again, Bell states it in his own works: "...parts of our letter are by no means clear and admit of more than one interpretation."⁵³⁰ Thus, it is not clear that Athanasius or his followers are even the subject of the letter as the important parts have been mutilated. In order to find the letter condemning of Athanasius, Bell had to make assumptions. One of these assumptions is that the orthodox and the Meletians were the only two parties of importance at the time. As well, if a single letter is going to overturn centuries worth of the traditional view, and the significance of a variety of other authors, it needs to, at the very least, be unquestionable in its meaning and *LP 1914* is not. Above all this, even if the letter were to conclusively condemn Athanasius or his followers, there is still the question of the statements made by Callistus being true. Moreover, in light of the many patently false allegations made by the Eusebians and Meletians, such as the murder of Arsenius and the impropriety, it would be difficult to have complete faith in the idea that these

⁵³⁰ Arnold, "Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius: A reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914," 383.

charges were true. Therefore, in the final analysis, *LP 1914* is not conclusive enough to warrant a change in the view of the character of Athanasius.

FUNERAL ORATION

Gregory's Eulogy

Interestingly, a third piece of writing that has been used to question the character of Athanasius in recent times is a funeral oration. In May of 380, seven years after the death of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus delivered his *Funeral Oration* in honor of Athanasius in Constantinople.⁵³¹ It is also noteworthy that Athanasius and Gregory probably met, a feat that happened with much less regularity in the ancient world, in person in 350 while Gregory was studying in Alexandria and, therefore, he was not merely basing his accolades on the musings of others.⁵³² Moreover, Gregory orchestrated a very positive portrait of Athanasius and presented him as a hero of the church that should be admired. However, critics believe that because Gregory so glowingly spoke of Athanasius that he was trying to covertly provide an answer for the allegations of his wrongdoings. Before traversing into the beliefs of the critics on the funeral oration it is noteworthy to understand what Gregory himself believed about it. Gregory states in the oration: "In praising Athanasius, I shall be praising virtue. To speak of him and to praise virtue are one in the same, because he had, or to speak more correctly has embraced virtue in its entirety in himself. For all who have lived according to God still live unto God, though they have departed hence."⁵³³ Thus, it appears apparent that Gregory meant this as a laudatory statement about the life of Athanasius and not as some type of defense.

⁵³¹ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 3.

⁵³² Rosemary Reuther, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 19.

⁵³³ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 1. Contained in J. Mossay, *Gregoire de Nazianze, Discours 20-23*, Paris, 1980, 110-193.

However, William Rusch began to use the funeral oration as evidence of later ecclesiastical leaders trying to answer the charges against Athanasius. It seems that Rusch envisions the years following Athanasius' death as a period when there were rampant questions about his character. Frances Young, in his own writings, began to follow the ideas of Rusch on this topic. Thus, Young states that Gregory presented the oration, at least in part, because there were: "...criticisms that Gregory Nazianzen felt he had to answer in his panegyric."⁵³⁴ Therefore, both the ideas of Rusch and Young need to be investigated.

Rusch, as mentioned before, believed that *Oration 21* was in part meant to answer the critical nonorthodox accounts of the life of Athanasius. One of the key passages that Rusch deploys in his evaluation comes from section nine of the oration: "...he was sublime in action, lowly in mind; inaccessible in virtue, most accessible in intercourse; gentle, free from anger, sympathetic, sweet in words, sweeter in disposition; angelic in appearance, more angelic in mind; calm in rebuke, persuasive in praise..."⁵³⁵ Of course, upon reading this section one realizes that Gregory was exorbitant in his accolades but this was the common practice of the fourth century, and still is today in many speeches at funerals. Moreover, Rusch discerned it as Gregory attempting to preserve the orthodox memory and viewpoint on Athanasius' life. One element of importance when considering the renderings of Rusch is that he surmised that the history of Philostorgius and *LP 1914* need to be included for an accurate portrayal of the historic Athanasius.⁵³⁶ In a 1974 article Rusch wrote: "One finds no explicit mention of the kind of information provided by

⁵³⁴ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 51. Young also states that there are critics (J. M. Leroux is mentioned) that believe that Athanasius was actually out of touch with the real situation during his later career. Thus, Athanasius was still combatting against the teachings of Arius when the larger threat came from the teachings of Aetius and Eunomius. Thus, some believe that Athanasius only truly had respect in Egypt as opposed to the rest of the empire.

⁵³⁵ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 9.

⁵³⁶ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 90.

Philostorgius, but it is clear that these chapters tend to refute the Philostorgian presentation of Athanasius. The election of the latter is presented as unanimous. He appeared sublime in action, humble in spirit, amiable, sweet, reproving with the tenderness of a father, etc. (see section 9). Cannot the listing of these traits be seen as a record set against the other recollections of Athanasius which were still alive and more in accord with the nonorthodox tradition? In that case, Gregory's *Oration 21* gives witness at the end of the fourth century to those elements of a non-orthodox tradition which continue to slur the memory of a canonized patriarch."⁵³⁷

For his part, Young tends to follow in the course which Rusch had begun. He reiterates and agrees with the idea that the funeral oration is proof that there was a movement to discredit Athanasius.⁵³⁸ Moreover, he accepts the musings of Rusch as valid when he states that the history of Philostorgius, *LP 1914* and the funeral oration form a trio of documents that legitimize the claims that Athanasius resorted to violence. Young even traverses as far as stating that the Council of Tyre was not in reality politically motivated but was rather based on the real threat that Athanasius posed to the Meletians.⁵³⁹

However, Arnold disagrees with the assessment of Rusch and Young. He perceives that Gregory is merely speaking in keeping with the literary genre of a funeral oration.⁵⁴⁰ Moreover,

⁵³⁷ William G. Rusch, "A la recherche de l'Athanase historique," *Politique et theologie* Paris (1974): 176. Translation by D. Arnold. I personally spoke to Rusch and Arnold about this article and copies are no longer available and so the translation by Arnold must be depended upon. When I asked Rusch about his ideas concerning Athanasius in light of this article he seemed affable but reluctant to delve into the topic as it had been so many years since he had studied and written on these ideas.

⁵³⁸ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 51.

⁵³⁹ Ibid. Young also wrote of his relationship with the Meletians: "There seems to have been a pitiless streak in his character. That he resorted to violence to achieve his own ends is implied by a good deal of evidence. When he succeeded Alexander, he inherited a volatile situation...Athanasius managed to antagonize this group rather than facilitate their reconciliation according to the provision of Nicaea, and it was evidence supplied by the Meletians that made Athanasius vulnerable to the attack at the Council of Tyre." However, this view cannot be taken as true since Athanasius was able to win a great deal of Meletians back into the orthodox church.

⁵⁴⁰ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 91. Arnold goes on to remark: "While it seems certain, as has been stated earlier in this section, that there were a number of variant traditions concerning Athanasius still extant in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the argument of Rusch concerning *Oration 21* is

Arnold argues that the listing of Athanasius' laudatory traits should be viewed as a rhetorical device rather than an answer to persisting dissenting opinions about the character of Athanasius. For example, Gregory speaks of his rare combination of action and intellect: "...excelling in action men of intellectual capacity, in intellect men of action; or, if you will, surpassing in intellect men renowned for intellect, in action those of the greatest active power; outstripping those who had moderate reputation in both respect, by his eminence in either, and those who stood highest in one or the other, by his powers in both..."⁵⁴¹ Moreover, it was common to eulogize an individual in this way and this was in keeping with the genre of a funeral oration. As well, this portion cannot be construed to argue against negative evaluations of Athanasius because no one seriously proffered the idea that he lacked intelligence.

As well as *Oration 21* being in line with the expectations of the genre of a funeral oration, Arnold points out that Gregory utilizes a literary technique called *paraleipsis* and he describes it as when the speaker "recounts some facts or events while declaring his intention to pass over them in silence."⁵⁴² Gregory exemplifies this when he wrote: "Come then I pray, you who have been his admirers and witnesses, divide among yourselves his excellences, contend bravely with one another, men and women alike, young men and maidens, old men and children, priests and people...let one praise him in fastings and prayers as if he had been disembodied and immaterial...another his patronage of the needy, another his dauntlessness towards the powerful, or his condescension to the lowly."⁵⁴³ Rosemary Reuther wrote of this phenomenon in

less than satisfactory for a number of reasons. First, it does not seem to take into account the literary genre to which *Oration 21* belongs. The listing of Athanasius' virtues by Gregory in section 9, which Rusch refers to above, continues in section 10 with reference to the Pauline "model for future bishops." These listings, however, need not be seen as an answer to contrary opinions but merely as a rhetorical device."

⁵⁴¹ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 4. Contained in J. Mossay, *Gregoire de Nazianze, Discours 20-23*, Paris, 1980, 110-193.

⁵⁴² Justin Mossay, *Gregoire de Nazianze, Discours 20-23* (Paris: Les Editions Du Cerf, 1980), 92-95. As used by Duane Arnold.

⁵⁴³ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 9.

Gregory's orations: "Thus in the passage following the one quoted above, Gregory declares that he must pass over most of Athanasius' virtues in silence, since they could fill myriad discourses (having, of course, already enumerated all these virtues in considerable detail), and confine his account only to the most important points."⁵⁴⁴ Thus, it becomes clear that Gregory was not employing the funeral oration to offer argument against critics who did not agree with the orthodox tradition but, rather, was simply following the style that he felt was the most appropriate to sufficiently eulogize Athanasius. In other words, it is unlikely that Gregory had an ulterior motive in this oration. This judgment is enhanced by the fact that Gregory eulogized others in the same manner upon their deaths. Thus, one would have to subscribe to the idea that everyone that Gregory gave exorbitant praise to in a funeral oration had somehow struggled with a detrimental reputation, which, of course, seems preposterous.

In addition to the genre of the funeral oration providing evidence against the hypotheses of Rusch and Young, there is also the possibility that it may have had a very different specific purpose. Justin Mossay supposes that Gregory meant the oration to be an encouragement for people in his own time to be redoubtable in the face of similar circumstances in the same way Athanasius had been.⁵⁴⁵ In this vein, Gregory wrote: "What wonder that he, who had already made actual ventures on behalf of the truth, should confess it in writing? Yet this point I will add to what has been said, as it seems to me especially wonderful and cannot with impunity be passed over in a time so fertile in disagreements as this. For his action, if we take note of him, will afford instruction even to the men of this day."⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, Mossay wrote the introduction to the critical text of *Oration 21* and he envisions Gregory's overarching purposes in writing to

⁵⁴⁴ Reuther, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher*, 77. As quoted by Duane Arnold.

⁵⁴⁵ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 92.

⁵⁴⁶ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 35.

be revealing Athanasius as a model bishop, providing information on Athanasius and his relationship with monastic communities and presenting Athanasius as a champion and defender of the trinitarian idea.⁵⁴⁷ Each of these purposes is different from the ideas set forth by Rusch and Young. Thus, Gregory may have desired to utilize the funeral oration as an encouragement to his followers and colleagues to be strong in the face of persecution.

One of the key areas that Gregory addresses in *Oration 21* concerns Athanasius' ordination as bishop in 328. He presents this rendition of events which states that Athanasius was:

“...deemed worthy of the holy office and rank, and after passing through the entire series of orders he was entrusted with the chief rule over people...by the vote of the whole people, not in the evil fashion which has since prevailed, nor by means of bloodshed and oppression but in an apostolic and spiritual manner, he is led up to the throne of Saint Mark...”⁵⁴⁸ Thus, it is noteworthy that just a brief time after his death that ecclesiastical authorities were declaring that Athanasius had been elected as bishop in a legal manner. As well, since Athanasius was deceased he was obviously not there to influence the words spoken about him and, also, the need to be dishonest about his election would have been diminished. Therefore, rather than provide a greater reason to doubt Athanasius' rightful election as bishop, the funeral oration preferably tends to strengthen the idea that it was conducted by the correct means.

Another interesting consideration about *Oration 21* is that Gregory makes statements about Arius. He writes in section thirteen: “The beginning of this madness was Arius (whose name is derived from frenzy), who paid the penalty of his unbridled tongue by his death in a profane spot, brought about by prayer not by disease, when he like Judas Iscariot burst asunder for his

⁵⁴⁷ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 92.

⁵⁴⁸ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 8.

similar treachery to the Word.”⁵⁴⁹ Moreover, it is of keen interest that Gregory would provide information that corroborates the orthodox claim of Arius’ mode of death. As well, it is worth noting that Gregory was alive when Arius died and that he would have doubtless spoken to witnesses of that event. In addition, Gregory authenticates other historical points and provides another source for the rendition of the history of the fourth century that has been believed for centuries.

Evaluation of *Oration 21*

In reconsideration, there are two persuasions on the true purpose of *Oration 21*. Rusch and Young proffer the consideration that Gregory intends to utilize it as a device to defend Athanasius’ character and actions. They also believe it is, therefore, useful in accepting the validity of nonorthodox claims concerning Athanasius. However, in Mossay’s stated purposes there is no mention of it being a defensive piece and Reuther writes of the adulatory statements as merely being rhetorical devices. As well, it is important to consider that Gregory himself states that the oration was meant to lionize Athanasius. Arnold presents a cogent statement for the alternate viewpoint: “The contention of Rusch, and by inference Young, is essentially an argument based upon silence. We have no certain way in which we can ascertain the true and absolute intention of Gregory in *Oration 21*. Upon considered reflection, however, the purposes outlined by Mossay and the rhetorical style elucidated by Reuther appear to be somewhat more persuasive indicators of Gregory’s intention in the writing of the panegyric.”⁵⁵⁰ In this, one needs to agree with Arnold. In summation, upon investigation, it is clear that Gregory’s funeral oration for Athanasius provides no conclusive evidence that the allegations of violence and

⁵⁴⁹ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 21*, section 13.

⁵⁵⁰ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 94.

misconduct should be treated as reliable. Rather, it seems more plausible that Gregory truly did admire Athanasius and intended to feature his overwhelmingly positive traits in *Oration 21*. As well, it seems apparent that Gregory also intended to use the funeral oration as an encouragement for those in his own time who faced battles similar to those Athanasius had experienced. Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this paper, *Oration 21* certainly provides no basis for overturning the traditional portrait of Athanasius as a bishop of exemplary character and incredible fortitude.

NEW INFORMATION EVALUATED

There are several documents that twentieth century critics harnessed, and modern critics are using today, to mutate the traditionally laudatory view of Athanasius. However, when scrutinized closely none of them are conclusive enough to sanction such an alteration. To begin with, Philostorgius is biased against those of the Nicene faith, and many Arians as well, and his history is fraught with errors. In addition, Philostorgius presents very little new information that Arian opponents were not already espousing in the fourth century. Thus, his *Church History* should not be employed to modify the traditional portrait of Athanasius. Secondly, *LP 1914* appears to be the strongest of the three and most likely to offer new information that would alter the outlook on Athanasius. However, when examined more closely one can understand that *LP 1914* never conclusively mentions the name of Athanasius and that critical portions of the letter are mutilated beyond legibility. Also, in order to surmise that Athanasius is the subject of the letter one must make assumptions that are not warranted. Therefore, *LP 1914* does not proffer conclusive evidence to alter the positive evaluations of Athanasius that have existed through the centuries. The third document, Gregory's funeral oration of 380, is perhaps the weakest of the

three. Moreover, there is no sufficient reason, in spite of the writings of recent critics, to believe that Gregory meant his *Oration 21* to be anything but praise for a man of exemplary character. Throughout most of church history Athanasius has been held in high esteem and the documents that are generally accepted as valid help to both create and enhance this view. Therefore, if a document would warrant altering this sentiment then the meaning should be without question. All three of the new documents the critics utilize to revise the traditional opinion of Athanasius are not reliable. Thus, the traditional portrait of Athanasius as a good man, stalwart warrior for truth and hero of the church should not be changed.

CHAPTER VII: POSITIVE VIEWS OF ATHANASIUS

HISTORICAL VIEW

Now that Athanasius' life, theological work and the allegations both in the fourth and twentieth centuries have been investigated, this chapter will focus on those who had a positive outlook on Athanasius in the Reformed and Catholic Churches with an emphasis on the major ideas concerning him in the seventeenth through the twenty-first centuries. Throughout most of church history people have had an overwhelmingly positive view of Athanasius. This began with the orthodox church shortly following the death of Athanasius in 373 and continued until the turn of the twentieth century. Of course, this is not to intimate that there were not detractors throughout church history, but simply to state that the vast majority of both theologians and lay people viewed Athanasius as a church leader who greatly benefited Christianity by providing direction in a time when it was sorely needed. In his own epoch, Athanasius enjoyed tremendous support in the western portion of the Roman Empire in addition to the majority of Egypt. This favorable view was stalwartly continued on into the fifth century by historians and theologians such as Socrates and Theodoret. There was little modification in the evaluation for the next thousand or so years and the next period to be considered here is the perspective about Athanasius by the Reformed Theologians of the sixteenth century.

SPECIFIC GROUPS

The Use of Athanasius Among Reformed Theologians

When considering the impact that Athanasius had on Reformed Theologians it is revealed that those writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had access to his works and

utilized them. The three that made the most significant use of Athanasius were Polanus, Abraham Scultetus and Reiner Bachoff. Goudriaan writes: “Athanasius was an authority who could be counted on to provide support on various issues in the theological discussions of the Reformed period.”⁵⁵¹ Of course, the most significant of the Reformed writers was Calvin but it is uncertain whether Calvin ever read Athanasius and it is similarly unlikely that he was influenced by him. Rather than the early Reformers, it was the later Reformed writers that made use of Athanasius.⁵⁵² However, it should also be noted that there are a proportionately lower number of citations from Athanasius when compared to other Patristic writers and it becomes clear that he was not a significant author in their writings.⁵⁵³

The most significant finding in reviewing the Reformed authors is how they viewed Athanasius in regards to the use of violence. “For Polanus-as for Bachoff-Athanasius was also a relevant authority to cite in order to denounce the use of force and outward coercion in religious matters.”⁵⁵⁴ Thus, it becomes clear that the Reformed Theologians viewed Athanasius as a historic figure who had not engaged in violence. As well, these theologians believed the Arians did participate in violence and that because of this they were ‘not pious.’⁵⁵⁵ Therefore, it can be surmised from the writings of the Reformed Theologians that they tended to discount the Arians for their perceived use of violence, and thus the following idea of not being pious, while at the same time they accepted the writings of Athanasius because they believed he had not engaged in violence. Thus,

⁵⁵¹ Aza Goudriaan, “Athanasius in Reformed Protestantism: Some Aspects of Reception History (1527-1607),” *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 275.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 261.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

it is clear that Protestants in the early seventeenth century had a positive opinion of Athanasius both for his theological ideas and his character.

Athanasius in the Roman Catholic System

In general, Roman Catholic theologians and historians have a high view of Athanasius. This is true both throughout their history and in the more recent times of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, the vast majority of the Roman Catholic Church perceives Athanasius as one of the most important of the early Church Fathers. In addition, many recognize him as the father of orthodoxy in light of the decisive role that he played in the Arian conflict.⁵⁵⁶ Therefore, throughout the history of the Roman Catholic Church Athanasius was held in high regard. However, an interesting phenomenon is that although he was highly esteemed he was rarely mentioned in Catholic literature when in comparison to other prominent theologians of the early centuries such as Augustine.

In the early 1800s a Catholic theologian, Johann Mohler, desired to alter this and bring Athanasius into a more prominent position. Mohler sought to indicate that Athanasius was the central figure of his era, rather than the Cappadocian Fathers, and that his works were truly significant. As well, he sought to point out the deeply personal nature of the Arian conflict for Athanasius and how that he was willing to suffer so greatly for the Nicene idea.⁵⁵⁷ On the topic of the character of Athanasius, Mohler wrote: "...all those who had the occasion to know Athanasius well loved him, and those to whom he was pastor had a touching attachment to him.

⁵⁵⁶ Arwin van Wilgenburg, "The Redemption of Athanasius within Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 312.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 313.

He knew how to recognize the worth of others, and he highly proclaimed that worth.”⁵⁵⁸ As well, it is particularly interesting that Mohler would exemplify this positive attitude as late as 1849 because he is a German historian and the Germans were so prevalent in casting Athanasius in a negative light some fifty years later.

However, for all the positive evaluations of Athanasius given by Mohler, perhaps the best example of the Roman Catholic attitude about him in the nineteenth century was illustrated by John Henry Cardinal Newman. Newman heaps glowing praise on Athanasius in much of his writing. He refers to Athanasius as the champion of truth when considering his contributions to orthodox belief.⁵⁵⁹ As well, Newman had such a high opinion of Athanasius that he intimated in the preface to *Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians* that his personal religious pilgrimage was so heavily influenced by Athanasius that he declared it began and ended with him.⁵⁶⁰ Thus, it can be seen that the leading Roman Catholic historians held Athanasius in high regard in the nineteenth century. More will be shared about Newman’s important opinions later.

Roman Catholic theologians and historians also had a sustained favorable opinion of Athanasius in the twentieth century. An important Catholic theologian of the twentieth century was Walter Kasper and Wilgenburg wrote of his ideas about Athanasius: “He honors Athanasius not only for being the protagonist of the Christological dogmas, but also for being-together with Ambrose and Hilary-the protagonist of the freedom of the Church against the emperor...”⁵⁶¹

Hans Kung was another influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century and he continued

⁵⁵⁸ J. A. Mohler, *Athanase le Grand et l’église de son temps en lutte avec l’arianisme* (trans. By Zickwolff and Jean Cohen) (Paris, 1849), 108.

⁵⁵⁹ J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: 1890), 26.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁶¹ Wilgenburg, “The Redemption of Athanasius within Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology,” 327.

in the tradition of having an affirmative outlook on Athanasius. However, it is also interesting that Kung sought to downplay the role that Athanasius had at the Council of Nicaea as he wanted to prove that Constantine utilized this council to create an imperial Church.⁵⁶² Kung and Kasper are representative of the predominantly supportive attitudes about Athanasius by Roman Catholics in the twentieth century.

This positive Roman Catholic view of Athanasius has continued on into the twenty-first century. On June 20, 2007 Athanasius was the main topic of a talk presented by Pope Benedictus XVI: “Athanasius was undoubtedly one of the most important and revered early Church Fathers. But this great Saint was above all the impassioned theologian of the Incarnation of the Logos...”⁵⁶³ Thus, from their beginnings until currently Roman Catholics have overall had an approving stance in regards to Athanasius.

ATHANASIUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Eighteenth Century

Now that the general opinions of Reformed and Catholic theologians have been reviewed, it is pertinent to investigate the overall views on Athanasius in later centuries. The eighteenth century, similar to previous centuries, had prominent theologians who generally viewed Athanasius positively. This is important to note because in this century the liberal perspective of Christianity was beginning to become a force. An early church historian from this epoch that had a supportive outlook on Athanasius was Johann Lorenz von Mosheim. He did his major

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 322.

work in the early portion of the century as his death is recorded as 1755. Mosheim is widely regarded as the father of historiography in the Christian Church and so his views have significance.⁵⁶⁴ One critical element to understand about his theology is that the Trinity was of primary importance for salvation to be possible. Mosheim had a generally favorable impression of Athanasius and supported the importance he placed on battling the Arian controversy. Moreover, Mosheim did not believe that the words such as homoousios must be accepted but he did regard them as useful in explaining the orthodox position. As well as being in agreement with much of orthodox doctrine he also had some criticism for the Nicene leaders of the fourth century. For example, he believed that they were too ardent in their view of Son and Father being one and that this tended to instigate the Arian bloc into their heresy.⁵⁶⁵ In addition, Mosheim disdains the orthodox when Bishop Alexander declared that the Son was God the Father's reason. Thus, Mosheim believed that Bishop Alexander presented the impression that he thought the Son was identical to the Father rather than simply of the same substance. Mosheim proclaimed that this type of speculation is also one of the elements that helped to propel the Arians into conflict.⁵⁶⁶ Despite these misgivings about the orthodox of the early fourth century he had a generally commendatory attitude towards Athanasius' theology, although, interestingly, little is shared about the allegations of wrongdoing he faced during his life. Moreover, since Mosheim is silent on the charges against Athanasius it is probable that he was in agreement with the historical view that the claims were falsified.

⁵⁶⁴ Eginhard Meijering, "The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiography of Christian Dogma," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 278.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Throughout the eighteenth century other theologians had generally positive evaluations of the life and work of Athanasius. One of these leaders was Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), who was an Englishman and an important Christian historian from the epoch. He wrote one of the most famous quotations concerning his view of Athanasius as he penned: “Amidst the storms of persecution, the Archbishop of Alexandria was patient of labour, jealous of fame, careless of safety; and although his mind was tainted by the contagion of fanaticism, Athanasius displayed a superiority of character and abilities, which would have qualified him, far better than the degenerate sons of Constantine, for the government of a great monarchy.”⁵⁶⁷ Gibbon making this type of judgment is especially noteworthy because he is known to be generally hostile towards conservative Christianity.⁵⁶⁸ As well, it is particularly interesting that Gibbon would give this type of positive review of Athanasius’ character as he was not supportive of the particular issues for which Athanasius struggled.⁵⁶⁹ Thus, it is ascertained that prominent theologians throughout the eighteenth century had a generally favorable outlook on Athanasius even if they did not particularly agree with the cause for which he was fighting.

Nineteenth Century

In addition to the superlative Roman Catholic views of Athanasius, many other historical writers in the nineteenth century tended to follow the lead of the previous century and had generally approbatory evaluations of Athanasius. One of those important church historians was an Englishman named John Mason Neale who did his foremost writing mid-century. Neale is

⁵⁶⁷ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol III, cap. 21 (ed. J. B. Bury), (London: 1897), 362.

⁵⁶⁸ Timothy D. Barnes, “The Career of Athanasius,” *Studia Patristica* 21, no. 1 (1989): 390.

⁵⁶⁹ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 239.

notable because he undertook to do a minute study of many patriarchates from the east. In his research on Athanasius he had almost everything available that a modern historian would have with the notable exception of Bell's *London Papyri*. For his major work on the topic, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church: The Patriarchate of Alexandria*, he had the major Coptic and Syrian histories as well as the fourth and fifth century histories that are expected. In all of his research Neale found no basis for the critiques and accusations that were prevalent in the fourth century and have begun to surface in the last century.⁵⁷⁰ That such a knowledgeable individual from this epoch would believe that the charges against Athanasius are baseless is significant.

Another important English historian and theologian, but from the late nineteenth century, was Herman Melville Gwatkin. Gwatkin was an Ecclesiastical history professor and wrote two works on the Arian controversy, *Studies of Arianism* in 1882 and *The Arian Controversy* in 1889, just before the turn of the century. He intimated his view of Athanasius' character by writing: "Athanasius... was philosopher, statesman, and saint in one. Few great men have been so free from littleness or weakness."⁵⁷¹ Of course, this reveals his overarching affirmative view of Athanasius. One aspect of the life of the great bishop of Alexandria that he particularly commented on was the accusations of persecution. On this front Gwatkin wrote of Athanasius: "As for the charge of persecution, we must in fairness set aside the Meletians who speak through Epiphanius the explicit denial of the Egyptian bishops. And if we take into account his own pleas for toleration and the comprehensive charity of his *de Synodis* and of the council of Alexandria, we must pronounce the charge unproved."⁵⁷² Thus, Gwatkin writing from the

⁵⁷⁰ Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 16.

⁵⁷¹ H. M. Gwatkin, *The Arian Controversy* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 1889), 49.

⁵⁷² Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 17.

information that he had in the late nineteenth century finds the important charges of persecution to be groundless. In his writing Gwatkin makes the point that although Athanasius did have some who accused him of persecution and unkindness, the vast majority of his contemporaries admired him.

A contemporary of Gwatkin who was perhaps less well known but nonetheless important was Archibald Robertson. He was both a bishop and master of a college and so he was able to present a noteworthy viewpoint. One aspect that he focused on was the idea that Athanasius was able to separate friends from enemies based on the primary principles for which they stood. As well, he commented on the fact that Athanasius was unwilling to mention friends by name when he was writing to expose some error in doctrine into which they had fallen. Thus, Robertson also points out how Athanasius was a gracious man to those who were truly seeking the truth. He wrote in a prolegomena to an edition of Athanasius' writings: "The Arian controversy was to [Athanasius] no battle for ecclesiastical power, nor for theological triumph. It was a religious crisis involving the reality of revelation and redemption."⁵⁷³ Thus, Robertson presents salient points in writing that Athanasius was not power hungry and was truly seeking that the real kernel of Christianity would not be forfeited. Thus, it seems to be the opinion of Robertson that if Athanasius ever did err in conduct, and this has never been satisfactorily proven, it was for the reason of protecting the true doctrine of Christianity.

An additional prime theologian and church historian of the same time period as Gwatkin and Robertson was Adolf von Harnack. In his work, *History of Dogma*, he revealed a similar attitude towards Athanasius as he wrote: "If we measure him by the standard of his time, we can

⁵⁷³ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 18.

discover nothing ignoble or weak about him.”⁵⁷⁴ As well, Harnack is known to have believed that Athanasius remained consistent throughout his writings and this is important because it reveals that he was basing his theology on Scripture rather than on the theological developments of the time period.⁵⁷⁵ Thus, it appears that Harnack displayed an approval of Athanasius in both his personal life and his theological perspectives. It is also of keen interest in the case of Harnack because he was known to be a liberal Christian historiographer and yet he still perpetuated the favorable views of Athanasius. Harnack expressed different opinions than those of Athanasius as he tended to find more importance in the Father than the Son, and he believed that Jesus also perpetuated this idea. Meijering comments on the interesting fact that Harnack viewed Athanasius favorably in penning: “However, the picture he draws of Athanasius is surprisingly positive. In his introduction to the situation of the Church in the fourth century he presents Athanasius as the reformer of origenistic Christianity, which was strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. He compares him to Luther.”⁵⁷⁶ It is also of interest that Meijering notes that the possible reason for Harnack comparing Athanasius to Luther was to appease his father who was perplexed at some of Harnack’s liberal views about the resurrection of Jesus and the trinitarian doctrine. Meijering traverses on to intimate that the kindred spirit that drew Harnack to Athanasius, even though they had differing theological sentiments, was that they both were primarily concerned with the redemption of men through Christ.⁵⁷⁷ Harnack is not only favorable towards Athanasius but he is critical of his primary opponents, the Arians. Harnack declared that the Arians tended to embrace moralism which espoused the view that Jesus was

⁵⁷⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma III*, (ET: 1897), 62.

⁵⁷⁵ Robert Case II, “Will the Real Athanasius Please Stand Up?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19, no. 4 (1976), 295.

⁵⁷⁶ Meijering, “The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiography of Christian Dogma,” 283.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

beneficial only as a good moral example. As well, he proclaimed against Arianism in their cosmological viewpoint of understanding Christ as a type of medial being between the creator God and man, instead of being the incarnation of God. As well, Harnack agreed with Athanasius by stating that the Arians would have morphed Christianity into something that was far from the original and that would have destroyed the basis of the Christian faith.⁵⁷⁸

One of the most important historians of the nineteenth century, and, as mentioned previously, one that had more knowledge about Athanasius than anyone else from the period was John Henry Cardinal Newman. Newman is noted for his commendatory opinion of Athanasius and that he had a tremendous impact on his personal life.⁵⁷⁹ Newman wrote in glowing terms about the bishop of Alexandria as he penned such phrases about him as “the great theologian” and “the champion of truth.”⁵⁸⁰ Newman also placed laudatory praise on Athanasius for his writing abilities and he believed that he was theologically sound because of his penchant for utilizing Scripture. In addition, Newman was persuaded that Athanasius should be praised as the universal Christian in that when he was exiled he was adept enough to create a Christian home and relationships wherever he traveled, from Treves to Ethiopia. A verse from Newman in the *Lyra Apostolica* poses a synopsis of how he felt about Athanasius: “When shall our northern Church her champion see, raised by divine decree, to shield the ancient Truth at his own harm?...like him who stayed the arm, of tyrannous power, and learning’s sophist-tone, keen-vision Seer alone. The many crouched before and idol-priest, Lord of the world’s rank feast. In the dark night, mid the saints trial sore, He stood, then bowed before, the Holy Mysteries,-he

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 285.

⁵⁷⁹ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 15.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

their meetest sign, weak vessel, yet divine!”⁵⁸¹ Thus, the amount of respect and admiration Newman had for Athanasius can be deduced when one considers that he would traverse to the point of composing poetry about him. Newman is a representation of the ideas that many in the nineteenth century had concerning Athanasius.

As well, Mohler, as discussed earlier as representing the Catholic view, is descriptive of the persuasion most in the nineteenth century had concerning the allegations brought against Athanasius in the proceedings at the Council of Tyre as he stated that he was the victim of false accusations.⁵⁸² Therefore, throughout much of nineteenth century the views of important historians remained positive about Athanasius. After these appraisals prevailed during the epoch it is difficult to envision the onslaught on Athanasius’ character that would take place in the subsequent century.

Early Twentieth Century

However, although the tide of liberal opinion was beginning to turn against Athanasius at the dawn of the twentieth century there were still several noteworthy historians who maintained a positive verdict on Athanasius. Thusly, just after the turn of the twentieth century two men wrote biographies of Athanasius that were both laudatory and influential. The first to be published was *Athanasius the Hero* by Lynn Harold Hough. As the title signifies, Hough wrote from an adulatory standpoint about the famous bishop of Alexandria. Hough believed that

⁵⁸¹ John Henry Newman, *Lyra Apostolica* (14th edition) (London: 1867), 121. The *Lyra Apostolica* was a collection of religious poems compiled by John Henry Newman, Richard Hurrell Froude and John Keble.

⁵⁸² Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 15. Mohler is joined in having a positive view of Athanasius in this epoch by John Henry Cardinal Newman. It is believed that Newman had more knowledge about Athanasius than anyone during the early nineteenth century and it is noteworthy that he held a positive attitude towards Athanasius.

Athanasius lived such a quintessential life that he was able to serve as an example to others who lived in subsequent centuries.⁵⁸³ It is also of interest that one of the characteristics that Hough finds most prominent in the life of Athanasius is that of earnestness.⁵⁸⁴ Hough intimates that a person of sincere and intense conviction will always be more valued than one who uses trickery to achieve his goals and Athanasius exemplifies that sincerity. Hough goes on to say that this earnestness was the cradle of all other aspects of his life. The idea of sincerity of belief is one that is rarely viewed as important in political arenas but this earnest belief is the element that drove Athanasius to stand for truth in the theological sense and to gain footholds politically. Hough further traverses on to point out that simplicity was a salient characteristic in Athanasius' life. Of course, it is recorded that Athanasius lived an ascetic life at several junctures but Hough believed his simplicity went beyond that. Hough wrote: "Down under the activity, and the hurry of events, there was a quiet calm, and a clear-eyed single-mindedness which are the very essence of simplicity."⁵⁸⁵ In addition, Hough discusses one of his most prominent and important characteristics being that Athanasius was a man of God.⁵⁸⁶ This inner life of devotion to God and relationship with God is the component that provided the passion for Athanasius' firm stances in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Thus, at the turn of twentieth century

⁵⁸³ Lynn Harold Hough, *Athanasius the Hero* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1906), 157.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 160. Hough went on to write that he believed Athanasius was a great example of earnestness and trueness. He wrote: "Do we understand that without this foundation any structure we build, however pretentious, must ultimately fall? It is like breathing fresh life-giving air to get into the atmosphere of lives like those of Athanasius. In the midst of daring and brilliant falseness he found his way safely because he chose to live the life of a true man full of earnest seeking after the best. His loyalty to that decision helped to carve the gigantic stature of his manhood."

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 161. Hough also declared in glowing terms that Athanasius had a great religious message when his life was observed. As well, Hough emphasized that Athanasius knew the wonder of a secret communion with God that few people were able to experience.

Hough was able to take the available evidence and present a portrait of Athanasius as an admirable Christian who was a hero and worthy to emulate.

A second church historian of the early twentieth that wrote about Athanasius in glowing terms was R. Wheeler Bush. Bush was a Reverend as well as a church historian and so he had a greater penchant to be focused on the spiritual aspects of a man. Relatedly, Bush believed that the noteworthy characteristics of Athanasius were his piety and holiness.⁵⁸⁷ Furthermore, he surmised that these traits were the guiding element for Athanasius in his interactions with others. Bush wrote of his natural temperament by stating that he was inherently sensitive but also focused on the goal that he felt God had set before him.⁵⁸⁸ Bush also comments on his propensity to be tender with others: "...we can trace in him that deep tenderness of disposition which rendered him so faithful and loving a friend, so ready to cast the aegis of his protection over others, so desirous to secure peace and unity-a trait in his character which, in response, caused him to be loved with so true a loyalty and such unalterable affection by those placed under him..."⁵⁸⁹ Of course, this is exemplified in how both the lay people and the ascetics felt about him. As mentioned before, the laity of Alexandria dearly loved Athanasius and were willing to protect him. Moreover, Bush feels that one of the most salient features of Athanasius' character was his ability to remain stalwart against a powerful Arian faction and the emperor in

⁵⁸⁷ R. Wheeler Bush, *St. Athanasius: His Life and Times* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1912), 215. Bush went on to write about his piety and holiness: "This characteristic is conspicuous alike in all his writings and in all his controversies, as well as in all the actions of his life. They were all conducted as a sincere Christian would be likely to conduct them. He felt deeply and overpoweringly that he was Christ's servant; and all that he did bore the impress of his sincere convictions on this point."

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 216. Bush also declared that he was loved by his clergy, his monks and his laity. Moreover, Bush seems to believe that this ability to be loved by those whom he had authority over reveals that Athanasius was truly a kind and considerate man.

his battle for truth.⁵⁹⁰ Athanasius was tenacious in combatting for the truth as he saw it and no one, either in the fourth century or subsequently, would desire to have him as an opponent. Bush wrote his biography of Athanasius in the early part of the twentieth century and it was influential in continuing a complimentary understanding of him among conservative Christians.

After the turn of the century was when the viewpoints on Athanasius began to see substantial revision. Thus, it is of interest for this study to discover if there were still church historians and theologians after the early twentieth century, with Hough and Bush probably being the last substantial authors to write without the novel information, who were willing to speak of Athanasius with admiration after the new findings present in *LP 1914* came to light and the critical view of Athanasius became more prevalent. One of those that did was C. S. Lewis as he maintained a favorable outlook on the life and work of Athanasius and did much of his writing in the middle of the twentieth century. He is exemplary of the many conservative Christians in the twentieth century who held Athanasius in high regard. He wrote: “Athanasius did the same. He stood for the Trinitarian doctrine, “whole and undefiled,” when it looked as if all the civilized world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius...it is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away.”⁵⁹¹ A salient feature of Lewis’ writing is that he opined that Athanasius should be remembered for standing against the prevailing current, when it did not align with God’s standards, and this is a characteristic that Christians in all times should strive to achieve.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. Bush declares of him in this regard: “Again, in all the later struggles in which he was engaged, he stood almost alone and isolated in his conflict with the Arian party, and scarcely obtained any support from those who occupied the highest places either in Church or State. The Arians had gained the ear of emperors; had acquired a potent voice in all the councils of the Church; and numbered in their ranks many of those who were the most distinguished men of the day, either by reason of the offices which they held, or from the talents and learning they possessed. He here stood out with all boldness against any concession to the great or the powerful when the cause of truth was at stake.”

⁵⁹¹ John Behr, *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 14.

Therefore, even though the tide of much of scholarship was turning against Athanasius as the twentieth century progressed there were still those who maintained a positive evaluation of him.

Recent Times

It is also necessary to investigate more recent authors who maintained a view of admiration regarding Athanasius. Although many began to follow the example of the German theological sentiments, one of them that did not follow this wholeheartedly was David Gwynn. Gwynn, who is an important critic of Athanasius in recent times, tends to be more balanced in his approach. Thus, Gwynn demonstrates his desire to understand Athanasius as a real person who may have had good intentions but might also be misguided in his ideas. One area that Gwynn is critical towards Athanasius is in his views of Arianism and this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. It is sufficient to mention now that despite the criticism about how Athanasius viewed Arianism, Gwynn has an overall respectful persuasion about Athanasius. Widdicombe writes of Gwynn's favorable impression of Athanasius: "In contrast to the portrait of Athanasius found in modern scholarship, the figure that emerges here is one of greatness, a figure who, however much he was engaged in theological polemic and political maneuverings, was a man whose sincerity in acting for the well-being of the faithful and whose ultimate effectiveness cannot be gainsaid."⁵⁹² Thus, Gwynn finds the characteristic of sincerity to be important in understanding Athanasius just as those who wrote before *LP 1914* came to light. More will be presented about Gwynn in a subsequent chapter.

⁵⁹² Peter Widdicombe, "Review of Athanasius of Alexandria," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (2012): 719.

Another recent author that viewed Athanasius favorably was Mario Baghos. Baghos states that he intends to represent the Eastern Orthodox traditional viewpoint on Athanasius. He reiterates the point that Athanasius had the love and support of those who were under his pastoral care.⁵⁹³ Baghos also concludes that the negative evaluations of Athanasius are a desire to reiterate the allegations of his enemies brought in the 330s. Baghos makes the point that these charges were soundly refuted in the fourth century. He writes of this topic: “Since the early twentieth century however, St. Athanasius’ legacy has come under criticism by historians manifesting a bias against the Alexandrian milieu, and Christian theology, in general. Highlighting the magnitude of the opposition directed against him in his immediate context, often evaluated on political rather than theological grounds, contemporary depictions of the saint as both senselessly and stubbornly ‘opposed to the world’ have become commonplace, with Timothy D. Barnes’ assertion reflecting this mentality...in fact, what we see with these historians is an attempt to rehabilitate the enemies of Athanasius.”⁵⁹⁴

As well, Baghos believes that much of the reason that Athanasius’ legacy has come under scrutiny is because of the critics having a bias against orthodox theology in general.⁵⁹⁵ At this point, Baghos is able to traverse to the crux of the problem and declares it to be a general turning away from orthodox beliefs that appears to pervade the majority of scholars who are presenting a negative evaluation of Athanasius. In this way, it seems that it is a return to the conflict of the 320s and 330s as people would attack the character of someone based on their theological beliefs. In a 2013 article he wrote: “This only elucidates why the Alexandrine was not

⁵⁹³ Baghos, “Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians,” 56.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

interested in the nuances inhering within Arianism and its branches, but it stands against contemporary criticisms of his character, which, in dissociating him from his theological stance, has permitted many contemporary historians to resurrect the accusations put forth by both Philostorgius and ‘the Eusebians’ before him.”⁵⁹⁶ Thus, Baghos demonstrates his awareness that recent criticisms of Athanasius are merely attempts to revitalize allegations brought in the 330s and, perhaps even more importantly, he believes that these charges are being rehashed because, at base, many modern critics do not agree with his theological ideas. Relatedly, Baghos presents the idea that Athanasius combined all of his opponents into one group because his chief aim was not to battle the individual heretical ideas but rather to defend the theology that he deemed to be the only truth that can be attained by a clear examination and understanding of Scripture.

A further interesting idea related by Baghos is his understanding that the current bias against Athanasius is based on a modern disdain for the allegorical approach that was prevalent in Alexandria. The opposing view to this was the literal approach followed in Antioch. Thus, Baghos surmises that the modern German critical approach had its roots in the literal Antiochene suppositions and this is the reason for the recent devaluing of both the character and theology of Athanasius.⁵⁹⁷ Baghos also has strong ideas, and words, against those who misinterpret the phrase *mundus contra Athanasium*, or Athanasius against the world. Many modern scholars color the phrase with the meaning that Athanasius was arrogant and opposed everyone. However, Baghos penned these words in response: “I would argue that this approach, manifested especially by scholars who are unable to appreciate the significance of a genuine Christian theology-both generally and within St. Athanasius’ immediate epoch (i.e. the faith of

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 61.

Nicaea)-constitutes a re-emergence of a Philostorgian/Eusebian paradigm, albeit in a secular guise...namely, the fierce opposition that he met because of his adherence to the Nicene faith.”⁵⁹⁸ In summation, Baghos believes that current assaults against Athanasius are a desire to rehabilitate the accusations of the 330s, that modern scholars generally have a bias against Athanasius because of his theological opinions and that current critics have a disdain for his use of the allegorical approach. In short, Baghos surmises that Athanasius is scrutinized today for many of the same theological reasons that precipitated the siege in the fourth century.

John Behr is also a modern theologian who has a commendatory attitude towards Athanasius. He has written several books on the topic of Athanasius in the twenty-first century which include *Formation of Christian Theology: The Nicene Faith* in 2004 and *Formation of Christian Theology: The Way of Nicaea* in 2001. Thus, Behr was familiar with the life of Athanasius and the allegations against him and he composed this judgment: “He certainly displayed courage and tenacity of purpose. In addition, he was also capable of being extremely congenial when needed...the standards of his time may have tolerated more violence in the exercise of this purpose that we might do, yet there is no indication of vindictiveness, but rather a desire to make peace, so that by the time of his death he had become reconciled with most of his earlier enemies.”⁵⁹⁹ It is interesting that Behr mentions the potential violence that occurred even when proffering a positive judgment and this is perhaps a key to understanding Athanasius in that people from recent times must remember to adjudicate based on the standards of the early fourth century rather than the norms of today. As well, Behr has a beneficial analysis when he declares that there seems to be no vindictiveness or desiring to harm theological opponents unduly.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁹⁹ Behr, *On the Incarnation*, 18-19.

Instead, it appears that Athanasius most wanted peace to prevail, even with those to whom he had been opposed. At this juncture, it is prudent to reiterate the point of how Athanasius viewed his opponents differently. Those who possessed a destructive theology, such as the followers of Arius, would not be admitted back into fellowship until they had clearly altered their heretical beliefs. However, those who offered false accusations or political opposition, such as Arsenius or the Meletians, were treated differently in that Athanasius would reconcile with them based on their apology. Thus, Athanasius reveals that his chief concern was protecting theological truth. Also, he demonstrates that he desired peace with those that had orthodox beliefs but became political enemies.

SPECIFIC AUTHORS

Khaled Anatolios

Another recent scholar that wrote extensively about Athanasius is Khaled Anatolios. He attempts to present a fair interpretation about Athanasius that is neither too harsh nor laudatory. One topic that Anatolios surmises about is the idea of Athanasius being intransigent.⁶⁰⁰ People of the twenty-first century tend to be less willing to hold stoutly to any certain position and have a greater propensity to be open to altering their judgments. Anatolios points out that this tends to color a modern critics judgment of someone living in the fourth century. In the time of Athanasius, his intransigence would be viewed as a positive characteristic while a modern critic would tend to view this as a negative. Anatolios writes: “It is striking, for example, that a typical modern complaint about Athanasius lays special stress on his intransigence, his

⁶⁰⁰ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 34.

undeniable aura of being sure of himself and his position. But this complaint has its own culturally bound history, having at least as much to do with the Western post-Kantian construction of a virtue of epistemological humility as it does with Athanasius himself. For his closer contemporaries, this “intransigence” was interpreted as a courageous steadfastness and an inspired perception of what was radically at stake.”⁶⁰¹

Related to his intransigence is the bombastic style in which Athanasius confronted his opponents in his writing and Anatolios also approaches this issue. He intimates that this type of rhetoric was common, and almost expected, in the fourth century. As well, a later example of this bombastic style is Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and how he was known for rancorous attacks on his opponents. Again, Anatolios decries the idea of using modern standards of conduct to negatively evaluate a figure from the fourth century.⁶⁰² An individual should be judged based on the standards of their times rather than having modern critics superimpose their values on him from the past.

Anatolios also delves into another agreeable construct of Athanasius’ personality. It is his penchant for reading his particular situation into the world of Scripture.⁶⁰³ It is this idea that seemed to procure in Athanasius a deep desire to conform to the moral code of Christ and other momentous figures in the Bible. Therefore, Athanasius was able to have his behavior improved because he sought to conform to these high standards. Anatolios writes of this aspect: “When he is forced to give an explanation of his own actions, as in the *Defense of His Flight*, Athanasius’ consistent standard is the biblically recounted actions of Jesus Christ and “the saints”...”⁶⁰⁴ It

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 35.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

stands to reason that because Athanasius had these high standards set up for himself to follow that it is unlikely that he would engage in violence, illicit affairs and murder, all of which his opponents accused him. Additionally, this attitude towards biblical characters was able to help Athanasius in times of suffering. He looked, and urged his congregation also, at the trials of biblical characters like Job and Joseph.⁶⁰⁵ These men were able to suffer patiently and were rewarded for it in the conclusion of the matter. Thus, Athanasius was able to traverse through many dark days because he had located that inner strength in biblical characters and applied it to his own life.

Moreover, Anatolios is a modern scholar who has done much research on Athanasius and is able to envision both the positives and negatives in the man with a striking objectivity. He states that Athanasius views himself as persecuted by enemies who are betrayers of Christ, a man struggling to defend the Nicene faith, and encouraging himself and his congregation by attempting to imitate Christ.⁶⁰⁶ Anatolios presents this summation of his views on Athanasius: “What is of enduring significance for the Christian tradition, however, is not ultimately so much the personality of Athanasius-which cannot be wholly reconstructed with any objective certainty-as his central conviction that genuine Christianity stands or falls by the confession of the full divinity of the Word. It is as a theologian who gave consistent and tireless expression to this claim of faith, and not as a paragon of meekness, mildness, and *politesse* in debate (conceived according to modern standards!), that Athanasius continues to be a towering figure among the pioneering architects of the Christian tradition.”⁶⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that Anatolios, who had completed much research and writing on Athanasius, declares that his personality cannot be

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 39.

satisfactorily reconstructed after all these centuries. This is critical to remember when evaluating Athanasius as the best possibility a modern researcher has is still a guess. However, most importantly, a modern researcher can look at the accomplishments of Athanasius theologically and know his value to historic Christianity with certainty.

Duane W. H. Arnold

Although Duane Arnold's views have been presented by inference in other sections, he is an important defender of Athanasius in recent years and it is beneficial for the overall understanding of Athanasian scholarship today to make his views more explicit. Although Barnes, of course, disagrees with Arnold's conclusions he values his work as he stated: "...despite his persistent determination to believe the best of Athanasius whatever the evidence may indicate, Arnold's honest discussion will encourage readers...to reconsider many issues, and may persuade them to change their minds on some questions."⁶⁰⁸

Arnold tends to understand the scholarship on Athanasius to be divided mainly into two groups. The first group is the majority of the scholars that were prevalent before the early twentieth century and a small number of historians from current times, in addition to several scattered throughout the twentieth century. However, interestingly, Arnold notes that most of the modern supporters of Athanasius have been, or are, a part of traditions that view Athanasius with respect and reverence.⁶⁰⁹ The second group encompasses the great majority of scholars since the dawn of the twentieth century. However, Arnold also declares that in recent years a third group

⁶⁰⁸ Timothy Barnes, "Review of The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexnadria," *The Catholic Historical Review* 78, no. 1 (January 1992): 101.

⁶⁰⁹ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 175.

has emerged. This group includes historians such as Leslie W. Barnard and Frances Young and has traversed on more of a centrist path in which they are able to appreciate Athanasius for his positive characteristics while admitting his faults as a bishop and historian.⁶¹⁰ However, in spite of recognizing this middle ground, Arnold tends to focus only on those who view Athanasius as an admirable bishop and those who focus on his negative points. Thus, Arnold's primary topics tend to study the validity for the reasoning between the two alternative perspectives.

Arnold is willing to admit that members of the first group, who admire Athanasius, are able to understand him as a proficient theologian who suffered greatly for the truth, but who also may have had character flaws. These weaknesses might have included such aspects as not doing enough to reconcile with the Meletians, sharing many of the aggressive qualities that were so common in his epoch and his adherents possibly becoming involved in disputes that resulted in violence.⁶¹¹ However, Arnold is always quick to also declare that these supposed problems were based on conjecture more than on valid factual studies. Arnold composed this comment on this topic: "I would argue, however, that much of the evidence provided by Athanasius himself has often been discounted, and great weight has been given to material from sources which upon thoughtful investigation do not always present the clear picture of misconduct on the part of Athanasius in the early years of his episcopate that is often claimed."⁶¹²

An interesting perspective that Arnold demonstrates is that both sides, those modern scholars who praise and those critics who malign, adorn him with too much credit for controlling the events of the late 320s and early 330s. Moreover, Arnold intimates that it was a complex time period with an intricate sequence of events. As well, the epoch had a variety of labyrinthian

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 20-21.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 176.

⁶¹² Ibid.

personalities and influences. For instance, the entire idea that the church had newly become a legal entity, and that the emperor now had both an interest in and influence on the church, was something that had not been experienced before. Additionally, place the Meletians, Arians, Colluthians, Orthodox and various individual personalities into the melee and one can understand that it is difficult to determine the influence that any one individual had with a degree of certainty. Arnold writes: “One too partisan, and the other too critical, both views share a fundamental failing in crediting Athanasius during the early years of his episcopate with more efficiency and power, more influence and ambition (for good or for ill), than he actually possessed. Both views also attribute to the bishop less local pastoral concern than he obviously exercised in maintaining his support with Egypt as clearly demonstrated in so many of his extant writings.”⁶¹³ Therefore, although Arnold is generally favorable towards Athanasius and his theological views, he presents a varying perspective by declaring that both sides present him with too much credit for the events in his early episcopacy. Moreover, Arnold appears to incline towards the notion that Athanasius was an individual who had admirable motivations but was also partially swept about by the prevailing tides of the epoch. Thus, Arnold prefers to understand Athanasius not so much as a beacon to be looked upon in a troubled sea but rather as a ship that was attempting to traverse in the correct direction but which was being swept about by the waves.

As well, Arnold presents the idea that modern scholars have a penchant for imposing their contemporary perspectives and standards of conduct onto the fourth century world. Arnold writes: “Furthermore, the application of modern standards of conduct upon fourth century

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 177.

personalities is sometimes less than helpful in an enquiry of this sort.”⁶¹⁴ This is a major theme throughout his writing on the subject of Athanasius as Arnold believes, similar to Anatolios, that the fourth century had different norms for behavior that were acceptable and that modern critics should not impose standards of their epoch onto men from the fourth century. Arnold intimates that this is especially true of violence and verbal assaults. However, Arnold is not completely excusing physical violence but rather he presents the case that, in the fourth century, when a group that has received physically violent episodes from another group then it is within the realms of societal norms to respond in kind. Moreover, Arnold believes that much of the violence that the orthodox are accused of perpetrating may have actually been instigated by others and that the adherents of Athanasius were merely responding. Arnold also addresses verbal assaults presented through writing by declaring that they are completely within the realm of expected behavior in the fourth century and that characters from that epoch should not be judged with modern ideas on the topic. Thus, although Arnold does not exonerate Athanasius on all allegations of physical violence and verbal assaults he does intimate that leniency should be extended because those living in this epoch have no information on how the violence began.

Another charge against the character of Athanasius that modern critics present is that Athanasius was concerned only with self-promotion and that because of this he allowed the true concerns of the Alexandrian Church, and the church at large, to lapse. However, this seems to be far from the truth as Athanasius dedicated himself to the preservation of, at least as he viewed it, the true church and the church doctrines. Arnold wrote on this subject: “This view, however, ignores the serious manner with which Athanasius approached his responsibilities as he perceived them. Very few can question the support which Athanasius enjoyed within the

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 176.

Egyptian church almost from the outset, or the large number of Meletian clergy who supported him even against their former coreligionists. In synodal gatherings and in the presence of the emperor, Athanasius time and time again frustrated the attempts of his enemies to remove him by means of demonstrable evidence which proved the falsity of their accusations.”⁶¹⁵ Thus, Arnold presents the idea that the reason that Athanasius defended himself with such stalwartness was because he truly believed that by doing this he was benefiting the church at Alexandria.

Arnold also addresses the charge of Athanasius having a gangster or mafia mentality in his see. He attacks this on two fronts. First of all, Arnold perceives that throughout his life he maintained his innocence with great confidence and this is not the actions of an individual who had knowledge that they were in fact guilty. Arnold intimates: “...the consistency with which he proclaimed his innocence and marshaled documents and witnesses to support his claims does suggest some degree of confidence on his part which goes beyond mere bravado or a gangsterlike mentality.”⁶¹⁶ Thus, Arnold perceives that the manner in which Athanasius defended himself throughout his life both reveals that he understood that he was battling for a construct of extreme importance and that, in the aggregate, he believed in his own innocence. Of course, these are not the actions of a gangster or mafia boss. Secondly, Athanasius is willing to suffer for the beliefs he deems to be true. Athanasius was forced to leave his church and home five times in his life, when he could have assented to the demands of the emperor, and these are not the actions of someone who is driven by maintaining a mafia operation.

Additionally, Arnold attacks the ideas of the critics from a somewhat unique perspective. Arnold declares that Athanasius had knowledge of the fact that Eustathius, as mentioned early,

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

and several other orthodox bishops had been removed on falsified charges of misconduct. Thus, Athanasius would have known that his every movement was being closely scrutinized in order to attempt to discover some legitimate reason to convict him. Therefore, a shrewd man like Athanasius, as the critics readily admit that he was, would be careful to not engage in any actions that could later be brought against him. Arnold writes on this: “He also knew, having seen the deposition of Eustathius and having witnessed the other activities of Eusebius of Nicomedia, how ruthless his enemies could be in achieving their ends. It seems reasonable to argue, therefore, that he would not have lightly taken a position or undertaken an extremely provocative action which could have been used later to remove him; it is arguable from the investigations undertaken in this study that he never did so.”⁶¹⁷ With this Arnold makes a valid point that deserves consideration. As well, the idea that Athanasius would have most likely been careful to be unshakeable only on ideas that he felt were critical is a new avenue in contemplating the stands that he did engage in.

Arnold also has strong sentiments on the major sources of evidence that have been utilized by recent critics. First of all, Arnold has the perception that the writings of Philostorgius are biased in the extreme and should be discounted. In addition to his being biased, he contends that Philostorgius is not reliable because he was inaccurate in his historical facts and, therefore, he could not be trusted to securely relay the facts about Athanasius. Arnold penned this summation concerning Philostorgius: “When compared with other contemporary sources, the account of the consecration and election of Athanasius given by Philostorgius is undoubtedly defective both in the details which are offered and its general reporting of events and personalities. It seems very probable that Philostorgius only repeated a random assortment of fraudulent Arian and Meletian

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

calumnies against Athanasius which have been compressed into a single narrative that has little basis in fact.”⁶¹⁸

Arnold also expresses the opinion that *LP 1914* is not a trustworthy document for many of the reasons mentioned in an earlier chapter. However, Arnold presents another cogent idea about the document that is overlooked by most. He points to inconsistencies within the document itself that create a difficulty in believing wholeheartedly in the veracity of it. One of these is the location of the monastery that is mentioned. Arnold poses this question: “What sort of Egyptian monastic community in AD 334 is placed by the eastern gate of the old city wall, well to the west of the hippodrome, effectively within the city itself?”⁶¹⁹ Relatedly, Arnold questions whether Bell translated the word he utilized for ‘hostel,’ as in the context perhaps that word could be more properly translated as ‘monastery.’ Arnold perceives an even more glaring problem with *LP 1914* when the logistics of the proposed events on the night in question are considered. Arnold claims that it is unlikely that soldiers in a drunken state could have covered all of the territory and perpetrated all of the events in a period of only three hours. He writes: “This mystery is compounded when one considers the geography described as being near to the ‘Gate of the Sun’ (*LP 1914*, 11. 15-16), the eastern gate of the old Roman wall of Alexandria, but the reader is asked to believe that the attackers, already in a drunken state (*LP 1914*, 1.9), covered 10-14 kilometers, from the Nicopolis to the wall and back again, in about three hours. During this time they are also alleged to have committed at least two beatings and to have carried away five prisoners. Although such a scenario is not impossible, it does strain credulity.”⁶²⁰ Thus, Arnold presents valid points about the document that need to be considered. As well, in the

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

aggregate it is obvious that Arnold has spent considerable time weighing the factors that should be mused upon concerning Athanasius and his perspectives are worthy of exploration.

POSITIVE VIEWS THROUGH TIME

The evaluations of those that viewed Athanasius with admiration began in his own lifetime and continued for many centuries. In retrospect, it can be said that the majority of historians and scholars viewed Athanasius positively until the dawn of the twentieth century. However, this all began to be altered with the negative evaluations of the German critical school. As well, this evolution in views was accompanied by the finding of new information. However, in spite of the changing tides there were many who maintained a positive outlook on Athanasius into current times. Moreover, one feature that appears to have changed with modern scholars is that even those who are considered to be admirers of Athanasius often are able to consider his possible flaws whereas in times past most viewed only his positives. Thus, the scholarship on Athanasius remains positive from a variety of modern scholars while they also display a penchant for considering his negative aspects. In addition, as can be ascertained by studying the allegations presented at the Council of Tyre and the information that has appeared since then, as previous chapters have done and demonstrated the information to be either biased or baseless, those scholars that maintain a favorable perspective on Athanasius are much closer to understanding the truth about him.

CHAPTER VIII: NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVES

CRITICAL VIEWS ON ATHANASIUS

It is accurate to declare that the negative viewpoints on Athanasius began in his own lifetime as he was brought to trial and exiled several times. However, these critical evaluations that occurred in his own epoch were politically motivated in the aggregate. As well, there were those who continued to harbor a less than stellar perspective of Athanasius into the next century as is exemplified by Philostorgius. Nevertheless, in spite of these critics, the overall evaluation of Athanasius was laudatory throughout most of church history. It was not until the dawn of the twentieth century that the negative perspectives began in earnest to influence the opinion of Athanasius in critical scholarship. The germination of the idea of criticizing admired church figures began with the Tubingen School and was brought to the forefront by men such as Seeck and Schwartz. These adversarial perspectives were continued throughout the twentieth century by various scholars and are best represented by Gwynn, Hanson, Rusch, Young and Barnes. Each of these will be evaluated in turn with a special emphasis on Barnes as probably the most influential of the modern critics.

BACKGROUND

Tubingen School

The beginnings of the revision of Athanasian studies can be traced back over two hundred years. It seems apparent that the Tubingen School of theological thinking has had an appreciable influence on persuasions since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the Tubingen School of thought actually began in the form of German idealism in the late eighteenth century.

Moreover, German idealism was a dominate force in German cultural life from about 1770 to 1840 and it was later that it also had such a tumultuous impact in the reconstruction of ecclesiastical figures.⁶²¹ Harris states that the emergence and influence of the Tübingen School was the single most crucial event in the history of theology since the Reformation.⁶²² Furthermore, Harris declares that little is known of the School and the impact it had on future generations and, therefore, many are not aware of the tremendous revolutions it fostered.

It is critical to contemplate the nature of this movement since it has been so influential on historical studies. Dietrich and Himes state: “German idealism itself can be characterized as a search for a new religious orientation as well as a reaction to the rationalism and natural theology of the Enlightenment.”⁶²³ Thus, German idealism began to leave an impression on the landscape of everything in German life and this included religious studies. Moreover, the Tübingen School developed out of this German Idealism. The leader of the School was Ferdinand Christian Baur and after his death in 1860 it slowly became an entity of the past.⁶²⁴ However, the School had an impact long after the official end of the movement.

One area that members of the School focused on was speculative theology and, thus, many constructs that had been believed before became open to question.⁶²⁵ Dietrich and Himes write of an early leader in the School named Johann Sebastian Drey: “His ecclesiology emphasizing tradition would not be complete without his unique viewpoint on reason and revelation as historically developed in the ever deepening human consciousness.” Thus, leaders in the

⁶²¹ Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1997), 11.

⁶²² Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), v.

⁶²³ Dietrich and Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 11.

⁶²⁴ Harris, *The Tübingen School*, vi.

⁶²⁵ Dietrich and Himes, *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 12.

Tubingen School believed that theology should be evolving with time. Therefore, not only did those who were intellectually influenced by the School, many probably unknowingly, believe that theology was developing but also that the thoughts about historical church figures should be mutating.

It is helpful at this point to explore the comments and ideas that Baur offered about Athanasius. To begin with it is beneficial to understand that Baur was influential in the middle nineteenth century as Meijering declares that he was the most impactful historian of Christian thought from the epoch.⁶²⁶ Baur, following in the line of thinking of Hegel, believed that Christian thought should always be evolving and, thus, he did not agree with the Protestant idea that truth was fully revealed in the beginning and that true Christianity must follow the teachings revealed through Christ and the New Testament.⁶²⁷ Meijering states of Baur's ideas: "There must be a meaningful connection between the beginning and the end, there must be a logic in the process of the Divine Life. One of the means by which Baur manages to show this is that he detects 'seeds' of Hegelian theology in early Christian writers. These writers themselves were, of course, unaware of this, but the Divine Idea or Mind started to express itself in them."⁶²⁸ Therefore, it is clear that Baur did not agree with Athanasius about the ultimate source of truth in the aggregate. However, he did think that Athanasius had some of the 'seeds' of the progressing

⁶²⁶ Eginhard Meijering, "The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiography of Christian Dogma," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 280.

⁶²⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was a philosopher of German descent and an important figure in the propagation of German idealism. He was widely renowned in his day and has continued to be a popular philosophical figure into current times. He is widely known for absolute idealism in which dualisms are overcome, such as in subject and object. He is such an influential figure that many credit his philosophy with being the generator of a number of other philosophies such as German existentialism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and the ideas of Nietzsche. Hegel also attended the Tubingen School from 1788 to 1793 and, thus, became another extension of the influence of this institution. In regards to Jesus the Son, Hegel did believe in his divinity and that He literally died and that God came back to life so that the only death actually died.

⁶²⁸ Meijering, "The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiography of Christian Dogma," 281.

theology in his writing. One of those seeds that Baur proposed is how Athanasius viewed God's nature and God's will in that Athanasius did not want to separate them. A second seed that Baur presented concerned Athanasius argued that the incarnation was eternally prefigured in God. However, Baur understood this in the Hegelian way so that in the Son the Finite and the Infinite come together. Overall, Baur viewed some signs of significance in Athanasius because he thought that he was proficient at speculative theology. However, it should additionally be noted that Baur also perceived there were seeds of the evolving theological truth in Arianism.

Subsequent to this brief study of the teaching of some of the leading scholars in the Tubingen School, one can begin to understand why many in the twentieth century felt the need to speculate on historical figures and they innately believed that historical recollections of them were mutable. In fact, many traversed to the point of seeking this change in perspective even when the evidence did not logically lead to that revision. Therefore, it is understood that Athanasian studies were impacted to the point that many ecclesiastical historians were in a quest for an alteration in perspectives.

Otto Seeck

Now that there is an understanding of the Tubingen School and the impact it had on Athanasian studies, it is important to review some of the historians and ideas that were also influential. One of the first critics that attacked the character, at least in regards to his writings, of Athanasius was Otto Seeck. In 1896, he alleged that Athanasius had forged documents in relation to the Council of Nicaea.⁶²⁹ The charges of forgery were in relation to documents that

⁶²⁹ Otto Seeck, "Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des nicaenischen Konzils," *ZKG* 17 (1896): 1-71.

were attributed to Constantine. However, if one could reasonably conjure doubt about Athanasius' veracity with these documents then the results would be two-fold. The first would be that any or all of the documents in his other writings would also be subject to suspicion. Secondly, if Athanasius was the type of individual that would forge documents then his entire character is called into question and it creates an atmosphere in which it is much more likely to believe the charges that were brought against him by the Eusebians and the Meletians. However, in subsequent years the charges of forgery were soundly refuted by such scholars as S. Rogala and N. H. Baynes.⁶³⁰ Arnold intimates why Seeck should be disregarded in this aspect: "It now seems generally recognized that many of Seeck's charges arose out of his own basic, and often antagonistic, attitude toward what he perceived as the political expediency of the church."⁶³¹

Another allegation presented by Seeck was that Athanasius was not only guilty of forgery in some documents but that the summation of his writing was biased. Seeck believed that Athanasius was inclined to skew situations in his favor when he recollected them in his writing.⁶³² Of course, it is true that Athanasius naturally spoke from his own perspective. However, this does not necessarily signify that he was deliberately untruthful nor does it ineluctably mean that his rendition cannot be trusted. In any case, for many of the events in question Athanasius is one of the few primary, and in several instances the only, sources available. Thus, Seeck was one of the first ones to seriously question the character of Athanasius

⁶³⁰ Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 11. Specifically, Rogala wrote concerning this aspect in *Die Anfänge des arianischen Streits*, *Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur und Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 7, 1, Paderborn, 1907 and Baynes in "Athanasiana," *JEA* 2 (1925): 61-65.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.* Before he made the charges against Athanasius, Seeck had been involved with the research end on the *Dossier* of Opatus with consideration of the Council of Arles, dated in 314. In this study he found a variety of forged documents which he attributed to Constantine. Thus, he already had a proclivity to view many documents as forged.

⁶³² Seeck, "Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des nicaanischen Konzils," 1.

at the turn of the twentieth century, but it appears that his judgments were clouded by his own prejudices. However, even though his work was later proven to be flawed, he was a catalyst for many subsequent historians to voraciously question the previous interpretations of Athanasius.

Eduard Schwartz and Followers

Seeck was one of the first scholars to lead in the modern antagonistic approach to Athanasius. Although his charges of forgery have been proven false, his critical attitude towards Athanasius was continued by several scholars. One of the most important of these was Eduard Schwartz who had a long and influential academic career. David Gwynn writes of his impact: "...the critical reaction to the prevailing hagiography of Athanasius emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century through the work of the great German historians Eduard Schwartz and Otto Seeck."⁶³³ Between 1904 and 1911, Schwartz published several journal articles that seemed to hail the beginning of a new era in Athanasian studies.⁶³⁴ However, Schwartz had an inherent dislike for Athanasius and he did not even endeavor to conceal it as he described him as an obstinate fanatic.⁶³⁵ In fact, he referred to the whole of Athanasius' work as mere propaganda.⁶³⁶ As well, Schwartz assessed the behavior of Athanasius by stating that his actions were not those of a theologian but rather those of a power broker.⁶³⁷ Baynes, who was successful at combatting Seeck's proposal that Athanasius was guilty of forgery, declared the jaundiced outlook that

⁶³³ David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

⁶³⁴ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 12.

⁶³⁵ Eduard Schwartz, "Zur Kirchengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts," *ZNW* 34 (1935): 142-43.

⁶³⁶ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 12.

⁶³⁷ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 240. Hanson also intimates that Schwartz referred to Athanasius as an obstinate fanatic. Hanson also states that Klein referenced Athanasius as creating trouble wherever he ventured on the return from his first exile and that he quickly continued in his dishonest tactics when he returned from the second exile.

Schwartz possessed about Athanasius: “To Schwartz Athanasius was always and in all circumstances the unbending hierarch; ambition, a ruthless will, and a passion for power are his constant characteristics.”⁶³⁸ Each of these charges against Athanasius will be considered. First of all, Schwartz alleges that Athanasius is not amenable to making concessions. This is true in regards to theological issues. However, Athanasius reveals a predisposition to bend when he suffers men such as Arsenius, who accused him of a false murder, and John Archaph, who wanted his position as bishop of Alexandria, to be received back into the Alexandrian Church and to even have positions as bishops. Secondly, Schwartz accuses Athanasius of being propelled by ambition. As well, this proves to be incongruent with the facts when it is remembered that Athanasius attempted to avoid being bishop of Alexandria in the beginning. In addition, the mode in which he embraced the ascetic lifestyle at various times in his life is generally contrary to an individual being ambitious. Thirdly, Schwartz presented the idea that Athanasius possessed a ruthless will. Quite to the contrary, Athanasius was known to be kind to those opponents and friends that had lapsed as exemplified in his treatment of Hosius after he subscribed to an Arian Creed. Finally, Schwartz proposed that Athanasius had a passion for power but again this is not in accordance with the facts as someone who solely desired to have dominion would have conceded to the desires of the emperor rather than expend years away from his see in a powerless position.

It is also noteworthy that although Barnes agreed with much of Schwartz’s ideas, he was also critical of him as he wrote: “...Schwartz pronounced rather than argued: his verdicts are too often both peremptory and arbitrary, and his scholarship is not always impeccable. Schwartz made no real effort to understand Athanasius either as a man or as a writer. Instead, he

⁶³⁸ N. H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Haskell House Publishers, 1955), 367.

denounced him as a power-hungry politician concerned with nothing more noble than his own status, and dismissed him as an unscrupulous pamphleteer with no regard for the truth, as ‘a politician through and through who could not narrate the facts, only polemicise,’ and ‘a prince of the church who as a good politician knew the power of propaganda.’⁶³⁹ It is especially noteworthy that Barnes, a leading critic to be discussed later, held this unappreciative opinion of Schwartz’s scholarship.

Therefore, it appears that the criticisms that Schwartz launched against Athanasius are not concordant with a realistic appraisal of his life. Thus, one of the leading scholars that initiated much of the modern interest in Athanasius was decidedly biased so that all of his findings are suspect. As well, he led the scholars and critics of his time, and subsequent periods, into an open hostility towards Athanasius.

Schwartz was also impactful on one of his students, Hans-Georg Opitz. Opitz carried on his mentor’s critical evaluation of Athanasius as a man who was disposed to do anything to obtain and secure supremacy. Opitz embarked to create a critical edition of the words of Athanasius in the 1930s but, upon his death in 1941, it was left incomplete.⁶⁴⁰ In turn, Opitz was succeeded by W. Schneemelcher who continued with the disdainful appraisals of Athanasius’ character. Arnold writes of this trend: “The assumptions of Schwartz, Opitz, and Schneemelcher concerning the ruthlessness of Athanasius’ character and his willingness to misrepresent persons and events have largely echoed those of Seeck and have continued to exert a strong influence on current Athanasian studies. This is despite the fact that the so-called forgeries of Seeck have long since been recognized as genuine and that Schwartz himself has since been proved to have

⁶³⁹ Timothy Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2-3.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

been in error on ‘several important points’⁶⁴¹ Schneemelcher lived until 2003 so that the influence of Seeck and Schwartz have transferred almost to the immediate time. These scholars represent the prevailing view of the German critical school and their harsh judgments on Athanasius.

RECENT AUTHORS

David M. Gwynn

David Gwynn, as alluded to in the previous chapter, is a critic of Athanasius that incorporates a balanced opinion. One argument that Gwynn offers that is contrary to Athanasius concerns the existence of Arianism. One of the points that Gwynn makes, in which he criticizes him, is that he believes that the Arianism that Athanasius is allegedly combatting in the 330s and 340s did not even exist until the 350s.⁶⁴² This is an interesting idea but seems to be incongruent with the facts of the time. Although it is true that Constantius, the emperor who was in complete dominance in the late 350s, fully supported the Arian position and persecuted those of the Nicene faith, the Arian position also existed in the previous decades. However, it is a valid construct that Arianism may not have been as organized in the 330s and 340s as it was in the 350s. Nevertheless, Gwynn perceives that although much of ‘Arianism’ was created by Athanasius, he also believes that Athanasius did not intentionally misrepresent the topic, but rather, that it was a logical outcropping from his theological assumptions.

⁶⁴¹ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 13.

⁶⁴² Mario Baghos, “Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians,” *Phronema* 28, no.2 (2013): 62.

Another central factor that Gwynn discussed is the idea that Athanasius did not assay to refute, at the trial itself and presumably in his writings, the charges that he instigated violence against the Meletians or the legality of his election as bishop. Moreover, Gwynn perceives that there is a reason why Athanasius disputes the allegation of the murder of Arsenius and the breaking of the chalice and not the other grievances. He writes: “These were charges that Athanasius believed he could refute. There were other charges that he does not mention, including the dispute over the legality of his election and accusations of violence against the Meletians.”⁶⁴³ At this point, Gwynn invokes *LP 1914* into his argument and this has already been revealed to be too frail to be utilized as proof. In addition, there may be a variety of reasons that Athanasius chose to refute those two allegations and one of them is that they were specific and could be proven false or verified, while the other charges were more general in nature. Thus, if Athanasius could prove the two most heinous allegations of violence to be fabrications then it would be supposable that the other charges would likewise wilt under scrutiny.

Gwynn also states his belief that Athanasius has not been honest in his presentation of the events of the early fourth century. He declares: “Athanasius has distorted our knowledge of the fourth-century Christian controversies, of the men he condemns, and of himself.”⁶⁴⁴ Thus, in

⁶⁴³ David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 28. Thus, Gwynn believes that Athanasius would only mention the allegations that he could refute and those that were probably truthful he chose not to mention. Gwynn also seems to garner support for Athanasius being dishonest from his calling his opponents Meletians or Arians as he remarked: “Should we accept Athanasius’ protestations of innocence and his presentation of his accusers as ‘Arians’? This question has increasingly troubled modern scholars, although Christian tradition from the late fourth century onwards strongly embraced the Athanasian line. There are certain factors that might encourage doubts. Athanasius describes his foes as an ‘Arian party’, the ‘Eusebians’, throughout the narrative of the *Apologia contra Arianos*, which he wrote after his first exile. In the documents that he quotes within that work from before 335, and in his own *Festal Letters* from those years, the sole accusers identified are the Meletians. The first attack upon a ‘Eusebian Conspiracy’ occurs in the letters written by Athanasius and his followers at the Council of Tyre itself. This may indicate that at Tyre Athanasius finally recognized the true source of his sufferings. Or it may indicate that Athanasius began to represent his opponents as ‘Arians’ only when he realized his condemnation was imminent, and then reinterpreted his earlier career accordingly.”

⁶⁴⁴ David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the ‘Arian Controversy’* Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

Gwynn's understanding Athanasius is a prime source of misinformation about the era. However, it appears, in this instance, that Gwynn's evaluations are calculated on information that has been proffered by his opponents. Therefore, although Gwynn presents a balanced review of Athanasius his arguments that disfavor him are not convincing as they are predicated on information that has been proven to be unreliable.

R. P. C. Hanson

Another leading critic of the late twentieth century was R.P.C. Hanson. He is acknowledged for an epic work, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, that is chiefly about the period of Athanasius' life and events that dominated the ecclesiastical and political landscape. Hanson intimates his judgment that Athanasius was unscrupulous in his interactions with his opponents. Hanson penned a criticism of Athanasius in which he encouraged the idea that he was the central cause for the trouble in the early fourth century: "The Greek-speaking eastern and the Latin-speaking western areas of the Christian Church were now heading for a major rift... The cause of this was not primarily the doctrine of Arius. Theoretically at this point the Arian Controversy had been settled... The chief causes were the intrigue of Eusebius of Constantinople, the opportunism of Julius of Rome, and the misconduct of Athanasius of Alexandria, and among the three causes we must judge the last to be the most serious."⁶⁴⁵ It is acutely interesting that Hanson would state that the Arian doctrine was not the primary cause of the rift but rather the conduct of Athanasius. However, this perspective is not coherent with the facts because Arius' doctrine was the primary reason that Constantine called the Council of Nicaea and this was long

⁶⁴⁵ R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988), 272-273.

before Athanasius was a bishop or had been accused of wrongdoing. As well, there is also the evidence of the various allegations, and banishments, of other orthodox bishops. Thus, if Athanasius' misconduct was the greatest reason for the problems the church experienced in the early fourth century, then it does not explain why there were false charges against a variety of other orthodox bishops. When Hanson declares these hypotheses, he is simply not considering the body of evidence that that can be constellated from the epoch and it is very shortsighted and simplistic to state that Athanasius was the primary cause of the difficulties.

Furthermore, Hanson contemplates that Athanasius was not truly concerned about theological issues but was rather more interested in controlling his rivals. He writes on this theme: "It seems clear also that Athanasius' first efforts at gangsterism in his diocese had nothing to do with difference of opinion about the subject of the Arian Controversy, but were directed against the Meletians...Once he was in the saddle, he determined to suppress them with a strong hand, and was not at all scrupulous about the methods he used."⁶⁴⁶ However, this is not accurate as Athanasius was tremendously concerned about preserving truth and suffered gallantly for it. When one reviews the life of Athanasius it becomes obvious that, while he was not perfect, being dogmatic about the truth, at least as he believed it to be, was of tectonic importance to him.

Another related allegation against the character of Athanasius that Hanson made is that the trial at Tyre in 335 was not related to doctrine but only the unethical acts of Athanasius. He wrote on this topic: "He had been justly convicted of disgraceful behavior in his see. His conviction had nothing to do with doctrinal issues. No church could be expected to tolerate

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 254.

behavior like this on the part of one of its bishops.”⁶⁴⁷ However, if it were true that the trial at Tyre was not about doctrinal issues then why, as mentioned previously, were several other Nicene bishops removed from office for cognate reasons and why did almost all of the bishops in the east declare him guilty while almost all of the those in the west pronounced he was innocent. As well, if Athanasius was guilty of violence then why create the obviously erroneous charges of murder and sexual immorality. When Hanson promulgates that the trial at Tyre was not politically motivated it simply does not coincide with the facts.

As mentioned before, one of Hanson’s primary sources for his ideas on Athanasius is *LP 1914*. Hanson declared that Bell’s finding was of primary importance: “H. I. Bell has published the papyrus which throws such a lurid light on the behavior of Athanasius in his see; though this was published nearly sixty years ago the significance of it has not yet sunk in everywhere. It is astonishing to read the article in *TRE* on the subject of ‘Athanasius’ by Martin Tetz written as recently as 1977 and find no mention of this document, so important for our estimation of Athanasius’ character.”⁶⁴⁸ However, *LP 1914* was previously debunked as a reasonable source of information and, thus, Hanson’s claims are invalid. In addition to *LP 1914*, Hanson also relied upon Philostorgius’ history in his evaluations of Athanasius. He intimates his belief that Philostorgius’ testimony is worth considering.⁶⁴⁹ However, Philostorgius has also been proven to be an unreliable source of information. It is obvious that Hanson has robust jaundiced

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 255. Hanson also wrote: “It is not surprising that the Meletians, harried unmercifully by Athanasius and unable at first to obtain help from the Emperor, turned to the only help available to them, that of the Eusebians. They thereby gave Athanasius an opportunity of clouding the issue by ascribing all protest against his outrageous conduct to bias towards Ariansim, an opportunity of which he strove earnestly to take advantage.” It must be remembered that Hanson creates this scenario from only three documents in the entire epoch that state that Athanasius, or his followers, may have been violent. As well, if the Meletians were innocent sufferers then why were they the main conspirators in the plot of falsely accusing Athanasius of murdering Arsenius.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

opinions against Athanasius, however, his summations are based on faulty sources and on his strident desire to ignore certain facts.

Frances Young

Frances Young is another modern critic who advances a dim perspective on the character of Athanasius. Writing in 2010 he declares that he accepts the validity of Philostorgius' history, *LP 1914* and the funeral oration of Gregory of Nazianzen in presenting a persuasion of Athanasius as relatively cruel towards opponents and disposed to utilize violence to achieve his goals.⁶⁵⁰ Young proffers this retrospective view of Athanasius: "He may well have been a highly politicized figure, could be tyrannical, and certainly if he was not personally responsible for violence, acts of cruelty were committed in his name. Yet this troublemaker was to become a saint within a generation."⁶⁵¹ As well, Young intimates his belief that the trial at Tyre was about Athanasius' misconduct rather than doctrinal issues as he writes: "...and it was evidence supplied by the Meletians which made Athanasius vulnerable to attack at the Council of Tyre. That he did not scruple to use force in his dealings with this group can hardly be doubted, and his deposition at Tyre was, not on doctrinal considerations, but upon his misconduct in Egypt."⁶⁵² However, Young falters in his analysis for the same reason that Hanson does in that he utilizes sources-Philostorgius, *LP 1914* and the funeral oration-in his opinions that are not valid when submitted to stringent tests of reliability. As well, Young poses that the Council of Tyre was not related to doctrinal issues but this proves not to be true for reasons previously stated. However,

⁶⁵⁰ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 51.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, 51.

to his credit, Young does admit that some of the positive evaluations of Athanasius are credible and the modern attempt to debase him should be tempered as he states: “This ‘deflation’ of Athanasius may go too far; some elements in the good tradition are certainly right. By the end of his life, Athanasius had forged a remarkable alliance with the Coptic monks and had won complete ascendancy over Egypt...Furthermore, he did obstinately hold out for a particular theological position, and with the backing of the West, upheld it whatever the cost.”⁶⁵³ Thus, although he offers some ardent criticisms of Athanasius, Young has the ability to also perceive his contributions to orthodox Christianity, his bravery against tremendous odds and his personal sacrifice.

William Rusch

Another example of a modern critic whose ideas are of interest is William Rusch. Rusch is a Lutheran pastor who has also taught at such schools as Yale Divinity School and New York Theological Seminary. Rusch is notable because he perceives that Philostorgius, *LP 1914* and Gregory’s *Oration 21*, the funeral oration for Athanasius, are all permissible evidence when attempting to construct a portrait of the historical Athanasius. In fact, Rusch appears to be one of the first to suggest that all three are important documents when making a judgment on Athanasius. However, for reasons previously stated, both Philostorgius’ history and *LP 1914* have inherent difficulties which do not allow them to be utilized as dependable sources. As well, Gregory’s funeral oration appears to be meant as laudatory of a great man that Gregory knew personally and not intended as some subtle method of defending his character.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

A further strong opinion that Rusch offers is that the history of Philostorgius is actually preferable to that of the orthodox sources such as Theodoret and Soctrates. Arnold writes of Rusch in the regard: “It is claimed by Rusch in that the *Ecclesiastical History* of Philostorgius, contained in the *Epitome* of Photius, ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, has preserved a genuine historical tradition concerning Athanasius, albeit of a nonorthodox kind.”⁶⁵⁴ For Rusch to make such a declaration shifts the entire paradigm of Athanasian studies and is not warranted. In order for this proposal to be valid Rusch would have to present cogent reasons why four orthodox and generally accepted sources-Theodoret, Socrates, Sozomen and Athanasius-should be rejected in favor of a lone critical history of a century later. Moreover, this is not a valid proposal, as mentioned earlier, because Philostorgius is obviously biased against Athanasius and possesses a variety of historical errors which bring into question the reliability of other historical points that he penned.

The Perspective of Barnes

Timothy Barnes is one the primary modern critics of Athanasius and his ecclesiastical career. Therefore, it is important to understand his perspective on the topic as he will be viewed as the modern culmination of the inimical conviction about Athanasius that initiated in earnest a century ago. One of his consequential works on this topic is *Athanasius and Constantius*. In this piece, Barnes patently states that he begins from the perspective that Athanasius has been dishonest. He wrote: “This study starts from the perspective that Athanasius consistently misrepresents central facts about his ecclesiastical career, in particular about his relationship with emperor Constantine and his three sons, who ruled the Roman Empire after their father’s death in

⁶⁵⁴ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 25.

337, and about his own standing within the Christian church in the eastern half of the empire, which Constantius ruled from 337 to 361.”⁶⁵⁵ Thus, when an author candidly states that they commence with the perspective that another writer has been dishonest, then the conclusions they reach are suspect. The proper perspective in historical analysis should be to enter the study with either an unbiased mind or the perception that the author is being veritable until circumstances prove that to not be true.

Furthermore, Barnes forthrightly refers to Athanasius as a liar. He remarks: “Athanasius may often disregard or prevent the truth, but he is a subtler and more skillful liar that Schwartz realized.”⁶⁵⁶ Of course, every human being records events from their own perspective. People tell the ‘facts’ as they remember them being. However, this does not make them a liar. An example of this comes when Athanasius recorded that Dionysius presided at the Council of Tyre and Barnes comments: “...the imperial *comes* Dionysius presided at the Council of Tyre in 335. That is a barefaced lie: the documents which Athanasius quotes to illustrate the proceedings of the council indicate that Dionysius, though indeed present in Tyre to keep order, not only did not preside, but probably did not attend the majority of sessions.”⁶⁵⁷ However, it should be obvious that an individual can be the reigning authority over a proceeding, or presiding, and yet decide to not attend the majority of meetings. Since he was the prevailing authority over the council it was his decision how involved he personally became. As well, one must remember that the secular authorities being subsumed in ecclesiastical matters was a fairly new phenomenon and so

⁶⁵⁵ Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 2. Barnes traverses on to compare Athanasius to two individuals known to be great deceivers in history which were Frederick Rolfe and Sir Edmund Backhouse. However, Barnes also admits that Athanasius had a nobler motivation than these others in church history who were known to be deceivers. As well, Barnes intimates that Athanasius also had much greater success for a longer period of time. Thus, it is interesting that although Barnes seems to have a disdain for Athanasius, he willingly admitted that his overall cause was worthy of admiration.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁵⁷ Timothy D. Barnes, “The Career of Athanasius,” *Studia Patristica* 21, no. 1 (1989): 391.

Dionysius might have had the impression that his actions were appropriate. All of this transpires into the cogitation of Athanasius recording a fact and not having any control over the actions of the secular authority. Moreover, to anticipate someone to chronicle the events of their life from another's perspective is to hold so altitudinous a standard that it becomes ridiculous to expect an author to attain it. As well, in statements such as these Barnes appears to be captious concerning details. Thus, to refer to the individual being researched as a liar evinces that Barnes is skewed antagonistically towards Athanasius and his writing.

One of the controversial perspectives that Barnes espouses is that the Nicene orthodoxy that Athanasius was allegedly contending for did not even subsist until the 350s.⁶⁵⁸ However, this seems to be incongruent with reality. The idea of Nicene orthodoxy existing before the 350s is given substance by the way the opponents of the period have been proven to persecute those of the Nicene faith. Thus, in this portrayal it seems that Barnes has not faithfully presented the truth nature of the information.

As well, Barnes has placed tremendous effort into studying Athanasius and assaying to reconstruct many of the major elements of his career. However, Barnes concedes that in a variety of instances he is unsuccessful in determining the exact occurrences. Of course, this is presupposed for events that transpired in the fourth century. Moreover, Barnes seems to acknowledge a fatal excrescency in his brand of analysis in that he will not permit himself to believe in Athanasius but appears to have a definite partisanship towards rendering him unscrupulous in his dealings. He articulates of this in a lecture: "I have to admit that progress has been far slower than I hoped, and that I have often been defeated in attempts to unravel

⁶⁵⁸ Mario Baghos, "Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians," 62.

particular episodes. When close to despair, however, I have consoled myself with the thought that Athanasius is so forceful and convincing a pleader that he is certain to get the better of any modern enquirer on some occasions. After all he deceived Schwartz and almost everyone else...”⁶⁵⁹ Thus, Barnes displays two demerits in his methodology that engender suspicion around his conclusions. First of all, he propagates the notion that Athanasius is a consummate deceiver and, thus, he is prejudiced against accepting anything that Athanasius expresses as completely truthful. The second defect unclocked in his method is that he esteems anyone who has examined the facts and reached a disparate conclusion from him to be somehow deceived by Athanasius. Thus, Barnes will not permit himself to exercise faith in the veracity of Athanasius’ declarations nor will he be convinced when other noted and able scholars reach a varying determination. One must wonder concerning the constructs that were the genesis of such an inherent affinity against Athanasius. Whatever the case, it is clear that this disposition colors his judgment of Athanasius.

A further interesting aspect of Barnes is that he does not purport to be a theologian as he contended: “I am not a theologian or historian of dogma.”⁶⁶⁰ In this element could reside a considerable amount of the difficulties with Barnes’ evaluations. Since Barnes is not a theologian it is problematic for him to contemplate the underlying theme of theological issues and their significance for bishops, such as Athanasius, who regarded his resolution to forfend the truth, as he understood it, with extreme sobriety. It frequently appears that those who discover a religious truth to be substantial for themselves possess the ability to understand others who would be amenable to sacrificing tremendously for that truth, while those who do not esteem

⁶⁵⁹ Barnes, “The Career of Athanasius,” 391.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

truth to be crucial often experience a paucity in that ability. This inability to extrapolate that people engage in activities because of their religious beliefs, specifically Christian beliefs, without desirating to personally profit is exemplified when Barnes stated: “Whether true or false, the accusation assumes that Athanasius in some way controlled the supply of grain for widows throughout the Egyptian provinces. It is hard to believe that bishops failed to see the opportunities for patronage inherent in such a situation.”⁶⁶¹ One must ask why would bishops be assumed to use food intended for widows for their personal benefit? A secular person would suppose in this manner and, thus, Barnes exemplifies his incapability to anticipate pure motivations. Thus, it appears arduous for Barnes to comprehend how Athanasius would be inclined to sacrifice so much for a religious idea and it seems that he endeavors to find a secular reason for him to pursue the path on which he embarked.

In his writing, Barnes pens several controversial statements concerning Athanasius. One of them was when he stated that Arius was considered orthodox by two councils. However, he also fails to mention that these two councils were never ratified by the Church.⁶⁶² Thus, Barnes has a penchant for skewing the facts in such a manner that creates an antipathetic aura around Athanasius but encourages appreciative opinions concerning his opponents. Of course, when this is engaged in with regularity, as is the case with Barnes, it creates a sense that they cannot be trusted to have nonpartisan investigations.

Barnes also professes the notion that Athanasius only attached himself to the orthodox cause in order to enhance his opportunity of retaining his position as the bishop in Alexandria. Straw writes of Barnes’ words: “Concomitantly, he sought to garner support for his claim to the see of

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 394.

⁶⁶² Baghos, “Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians,” 64.

Alexandria by identifying his cause with orthodoxy.”⁶⁶³ However, this logic is incongruent with historical records in two respects. First of all, most critics agree that Athanasius wrote two theological works many years before he was bishop or before the conflict was recognized to have become as momentous as it did. In these two treatises Athanasius clearly delineates his theology as being orthodox. Thus, Barnes’ allegation does not provide a response as to why Athanasius had written these documents long before the controversy even began. Secondly, if Athanasius only attached his cause to orthodoxy for political reasons when why maintain a relationship with orthodoxy so stalwartly when it became obvious that the tides were evolving contrary to that set of beliefs. Moreover, had the motivations been truly only political then it is probable Athanasius would have morphed to whatever beliefs would garner the most support.

In the final analysis, it seems that Barnes judged Athanasius inhospitably because he engendered that choice. Barnes offers an antipodal evaluation in spite of an overwhelming amount of evidence to the contrary. He both refuses to consider diametrical information and to heed to other scholars who have read the facts differently. Thus, Barnes is not significantly different from many eastern bishops in the fourth century as they chose to view Athanasius critically in spite of the evidence.

ATHANASIUS AS A GANGSTER

One of the criticisms of Athanasius that is prevalent in recent years is that his actions did not come from pure motivations and this allegation warrants coverage in a separate section.

Although the concept of Athanasius being the categorization of a fourth century ecclesiastical

⁶⁶³ Carole Ellen Straw, “Review of ‘Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 882.

gangster has been mentioned previously it is beneficial at this point to explore a fuller understanding of this allegation. In brief, those critical of him believe that his primary goal was to secure power for himself. Timothy Barnes, most pointedly, traverses so far down this line of thinking that he actually refers to Athanasius as a gangster. However, this is not a valid notion for several reasons.

The first of the reasons why viewing Athanasius as a gangster is not coherent with the facts is because of the sincerity of his beliefs. Athanasius may receive criticism for some of his actions, as he was a man and subject to character flaws like all men, but his sincerity and heart are above critique. From all evidence that can be ascertained Athanasius unfeignedly believed in the truth of the Nicene doctrine and was contending vehemently to secure it. Frances Young, who may be considered a critic of Athanasius, writes of this phenomenon: "...the sincerity of his belief that he was safeguarding the truth of scripture, the tradition of the Church and the faith for which the martyrs had died during his early years...for which he would face all difficulties and every form of persecution."⁶⁶⁴ Therefore, it is observed in an evaluation of his life, that Athanasius believed that he was battling for the truth and was disposed to suffer for it.

A second reason that Athanasius should not be understood to be a gangster is that his actions do not coincide with someone who only has a passion for power. In general, an individual who only desires to have power will compromise their beliefs to achieve it. In fact, for those who desire power all beliefs become peripheral and subservient to the conquest for power. Someone who truly had a gangster mentality would have worked with the rulers to secure his power and

⁶⁶⁴ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 51. Young goes on to admit that Athanasius inherited a shaky local position but this only meant that he utilized tremendous political skills in order to gain complete ascendancy over Egypt by the end of his time. As well, he declares that he stubbornly held onto his theological position regardless of how much it cost him.

would have allowed his beliefs to be dictated by whatever the prevailing winds of truth were at the time. However, Athanasius does not display this. When Constantine was commanding him to receive Arius back into communion the politically expedient path would have been to formally accept his return but then to marginalize him in other ways. However, Athanasius refused to accept Arius into fellowship because it was against his principles. As well, Athanasius comprehended the risks he was taking by traversing in the manner. Socrates quoted a letter in which Constantine told Athanasius: “For if it shall be intimated to me that you have prohibited any of those claiming to be reunited to the church, or have hindered their admission, I will immediately send someone who at my command shall depose you, and drive you into exile.”⁶⁶⁵ A person who truly wanted power would most likely succumb to the emperor’s wishes to protect his position.

Correspondingly, when Constantius was requesting Athanasius to accept the Arian viewpoint in the early 340s it would have been politically more beneficial to him to do this but he refused on the basis of his beliefs. As well, Athanasius refused to repudiate his beliefs in the late 350s even when seemingly other important and stalwart bishops had recanted, such as Liberius and Hosius. As a result, Athanasius was marginalized in the empire and had to live in hiding until Constantius died in 361. These are not the movements of someone whose chief desire is the acquisition of power but rather the demarcations of an individual who had firm beliefs about the truth and was willing to suffer for it, even if that also meant his being removed from power. Thus, it is clear that the notion of Athanasius being a gangster who desired power, as Barnes intimates, is not coherent with the known facts of his life.

⁶⁶⁵ Socrates, Book 1, Chapter 27.

Another argument contradicting the construct of Athanasius being a gangster is garnered from the Meletians themselves. Arnold writes: “Still more surprising, especially if one adheres to the assessment of Hanson, is the large number of Meletian bishops, presbyters and deacons who transferred their full support to Athanasius in the early years of his episcopate.”⁶⁶⁶ It seems unlikely that if Athanasius were truly opposed to the Meletians and manipulated them with disdain that so many of them would have become loyal to him. Rather, this piece of information directs more to the conclusion that Athanasius addressed the Meletians with respect and welcomed them into fellowship. In fact, a noteworthy case of Athanasius welcoming Meletians is comprehended in that Macarius, one of the bishops more proximate to him and implicated in the affair of the broken chalice, was once a Meletian.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, it seems to logically follow that if a former Meletian could ascend to that level of trust, then Athanasius was congenial to the Meletians rather than oppressing them. As well, the sheer numbers of former Meletians among his supporters gives credence to the idea that Athanasius did not demoralize the Meletians. For example, of the forty-seven bishops who journeyed with Athanasius to support him at Tyre, seventeen of them were formerly Meletians. Moreover, all seventeen would volunteer a letter in which they protested the allegations of oppression presented at Tyre.⁶⁶⁸ In all at least two thirds of the bishops listed by Meletius in 328 became loyal to Athanasius and it is improbable this would have transpired if he had truly been intemperate.

A further line of evidence that altercates against Athanasius being onerous is that he eventually garnered the support of the majority of the monastic communities.⁶⁶⁹ These

⁶⁶⁶ Duane Arnold, “Athanasius and the Meletians at the Synod of Tyre, 335,” *Coptic Church Review* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 70.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

communities desired to be independent of the prevailing church structure and it is doubtful that they would offer their support to an oppressive bishop. By their very nature they were seeking to abandon fleshly appetites and to candidly support an evil bishop would traverse contrary to their motive for existing. Thus, their support of Athanasius is another reason to believe that the allegations of Athanasius being burdensome were erroneous. In conclusion, the assertion that Athanasius was merely seeking power, or, in other words, that he was a gangster, can be refuted from a multiplicity of lines of logic and fact.

INADQUATE ARGUMENTS

When the arguments for a negative appraisal of Athanasius are scrutinized they are discovered to be inadequate. There has been a conglomeration of Athanasian critics in the fourth and fifth centuries and again in the previous century. Their contentions for an inimical understanding of Athanasius are based on similar reasoning. The fourth century critics, as well as those in the fifth century, harkened to the allegations presented at the trial of Tyre to formulate their antagonistic evaluations. These declarations are based on falsehoods and none of them are worthy of being accepted as evidence. Twentieth and twenty-first century scholars-such as Seeck, Schwartz, Hanson, Young, Rusch, Gwynn and Barnes-are dependent upon, in addition to information from the Tyre, Philostorgius' history, *LP 1914* and Gregory's funeral oration. However, when each of these sources is examined, as has been presented previously, they are found to be unreliable. Thus, although the critical scholars may rage there is no basis for a modification in the traditionally laudatory sentiment concerning Athanasius.

CHAPTER IX: EVALUATION

MULTIPLE OUTLOOKS

Athanasius is a complex character who had many nuances in his personal life. Add in the fact that he lived seventeen centuries ago and it becomes all the more difficult to ascertain the verity about him and his genuine attributes. However, there are a variety of sources that allow for a reconstruction of the major events of his life and his personality. This paper has sought to persevere through the volume of information and understand the factuality about Athanasius.

There are two extreme opinions concerning Athanasius-the one envisions him as a villain and in the other he is a hero. Of course, the facticity, as with most human beings, is somewhere in the intermediary. However, from this study it has been clarified that those who present Athanasius with laudatory praise are much closer to the truth than those who malign him.

An important method of judging an individual is how his contemporaries related to him. Of course, it must be admitted that Athanasius had many enemies and they exhibited a vehement dislike for him. However, it is important to recognize of this phenomenon that these were mostly opponents who differed from him theologically or politically. Moreover, when one investigates how the majority of his own subordinates and colleagues deemed him it is revealed that he was admired. In fact, it is noteworthy that even his most stalwart modern critics admit that he eventually procured the overwhelming succor of the common Egyptian laity and clergy.⁶⁷⁰

As well, when investigating Athanasius, it is also consequential to consider his character in light of the various allegations against him. When the accusations are closely scrutinized it is ascertained that none of them are significant enough to alter the traditional portrait of

⁶⁷⁰ Khaled Anatolois, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 35.

Athanasius. The majority of the indictments, especially the most heinous of murder, were proven to be falsified by his enemies. Furthermore, the allegations that cannot be demonstrated to be erroneous are likewise questionable because it is difficult to believe indictments that are presented by individuals that have proven to be untruthful in bringing the most serious criminalations. In addition, the sources that modern critics utilize-Philostorgius' history, *LP 1914* and Gregory's funeral oration-are all discovered to be unreliable. Throughout most of church history Athanasius has been recollected as a hero, both for his tenacity through hardships and suffering and his theological views, and, when closely examined, none of the information-either from the fourth, fifth or twentieth centuries-warrants a change in this understanding.

REASONING FOR THE ATTACKS

An important theme in this study has been the onslaughts on Athanasius and it is important to attempt to extrapolate the reasoning behind them. The character of Athanasius was assaulted both in the fourth century and in the last one hundred years. Obviously, as proven in previous chapters, several of the indictments were proven to be blatant untruths and this ushers in the salient point of understanding that if the opponents would forthrightly fabricate in certain allegations then perhaps all of the indictments should be dismissed as being untruthful. This author believes this is best approach to traverse onto. It becomes obvious that they are only endeavoring, by any method possible, to falsely malign Athanasius and have him removed from office. As well, when one also adds in the consideration that a variety of Nicene bishops were also dishonestly accused it becomes increasingly clear that the allegations should all be ignored.

That is a succinct answer for the fourth century indictment but the reasoning for the twentieth century insinuations is more complex. Of course, it is of interest that the indictments against Athanasius have returned to prominent scrutiny after these many centuries when they were soundly refuted in the fourth century. As well, many critics appear to ignore that those who proposed the indictments oppositional to Athanasius were proven to have falsely accused him. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Mario Baghos ascertains that the reasoning for this is that many modern scholars do not ascribe to orthodox beliefs and, thus, their aggressions are somewhat political just as they were in the fourth century. Carole Straw is typical of the reasoning of many modern critics and their outlook on theology. She writes: “But need we ask if orthodoxy is anything more than politics.”⁶⁷¹ Thus, many theologians of today have conformed to the prevailing tendencies of the times, and the leadings of the Tübingen School, into espousing the intellection that ultimate truth is not a valid construct. Therefore, in the opinion of many modern theologians, any theological wrangling is politically based rather than an attempt to discern the truth and foster the propagation of that facticity. Perhaps this is a crucial piece of the conundrum in attempting to understand the mutation in perspectives on Athanasius.

With investigation, it becomes apparent that Athanasius’ opponents in the fourth century assailed him because they disagreed with his theological ideas. As well, it appears that critics in recent years disparage him for both his theological beliefs and the very supposition of concrete constructs. One factor to consider in this arena is that bringing Athanasius under this type of scrutiny creates a question of the veracity of his writings. Arnold writes on this topic: “In the last one hundred years the character and, therefore, the reliability of Athanasius as a witness and

⁶⁷¹ Carole Ellen Straw, “Review of ‘Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 883.

recorder of the theological disputes and ecclesiastical events of the fourth century have come under considerable scrutiny and, often, a high degree of criticism.”⁶⁷² By inference one can also understand that if Athanasius is not reliable in his recording of history and theological disputes then, at least according to the method some select in understanding theology, perhaps he is not reliable in his theological ideas. Baghos believes that the reason for the allegations against his character in these two epochs is related as he writes: “The evaluation of Athanasius strongly tends to depend on how the historian perceives the Nicene faith.”⁶⁷³ Thus, Baghos understands that the underlying reason for the recent exploration of the accusations against Athanasius is that critics desiderate to question the veracity of the Nicene ideas and unchanging constructs in general. An interesting pattern begins to emerge when one studies the opinions concerning Athanasius both in his own time and throughout much of church history. Namely, the way one is convicted about the doctrine of the Trinity often dictates their opinion on Athanasius. Thus, those who assent to the doctrine of the Trinity as a non-mutable idea are more probable to have a favorable outlook on Athanasius and those who find the doctrine disdainful have a higher possibility of being critical of Athanasius. This is of considerable interest because historians and critics should be contemplating their evaluations of historical personalities solely on the basis of facts revealed in the records that remain intact. Thus, for those critics who do not happen to agree with a certain theology to allow that to influence their evaluations is of major concern and presents questions about their other putative illuminations. Meijering writes of this construct: “Since Athanasius played an important part in the controversies in the fourth century which

⁶⁷² Duane Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 11.

⁶⁷³ Mario Baghos, “Apology for Athanasius: The Traditional Portrait of the Saint According to Rufinus and the Byzantine Historians,” *Phronema* 28, no. 2 (2013): 56.

finally led to the formulation of the Trinity, one is inclined to connect one's views of him with the evaluation of this Christian dogma."⁶⁷⁴ Of course, this a tremendous leap and no one can be sure, except the critics themselves, of the base reason for their attacks. However, the musings of Baghos, Arnold and Meijering do cause one to ponder their motivations. Whatever the case, this investigation has proven that the allegations against Athanasius do not have a firm base and that the traditional portrait of Athanasius as a hero of the church, as stated before, should be left intact.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Athanasius had tremendous accomplishments in his lifetime and one of his most prominent ones was fostering the cohesiveness of the church through some of the bleakest days. In the late 350s the Arian heresy had the import of the sole emperor, Constantius, supporting their coalition and it appeared that he would be able to completely annihilate the theological idea that Jesus was of the same essence as the Father and fully God. However, Athanasius was a lone figure among prominent theologians who had not relented and he continued to contend for the veracity of the Nicene doctrines. He persisted in writing treatises altercating in favor of and confirming the deity of the Son and the trinitarian idea. Eventually, the prevailing currents redirected at the death of Constantius, but the true church should forever be grateful to Athanasius for his stalwart stand during this treacherous time.

⁶⁷⁴ Eginhard Meijering, "The Judgment on Athanasius in the Historiography of Christian Dogma," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 277.

A second salient attainment that is grasped when reviewing Athanasius' life is one that cannot be viewed in a moment but rather was an accomplishment over a lifetime in that he remained true to the correct doctrine, as he envisioned it, even though there was tremendous suffering. Athanasius was exiled in five different episodes and spent a plentitude of years in hiding. As well, he suffered greatly as his character was falsely maligned throughout the empire. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the personal hardship for Athanasius when he was accused of such a variety of falsehoods including murder, immorality and plotting to murder the emperor. Athanasius revealed himself to be a man of normal passion as he became ill in the early 330s because of all of the false allegations that were being tendered in opposition of him. Perhaps the suffering that Athanasius endured from these falsified allegations is the most overlooked. As well, Athanasius sustained his suffering well as he related it to biblical characters that had endured so much. When Athanasius was undergoing his first exile in Treves, Constaninus wrote that he waited on God for help and that he did not complain about suffering. It is to the great credit of Athanasius that in all of this anguish he did not waver from the truth and this is one of the most prominent accomplishments of his life that few individuals could replicate.

A third salient achievement of Athanasius was his theological and historical writings. Athanasius is still lauded by many as the foremost writer on the deity of the Son. As well, his works on the deity of the Holy Spirit are noteworthy and serve as a pioneer in that theological arena. One of the amazing aspects of Athanasius' writing is that much of it was completed either when he was in the early twenties or when he was in concealment and in fear for his life. In addition to his theological treatises Athanasius is also one of the foremost authors from the fourth century regarding historical works. Much of the historical details of the important events of the epoch would be irretrievable if not for the resolve of Athanasius. Thus, one of the tectonic

accomplishments for Athanasius was that which he achieved as an author and this was done while serving as a prominent bishop over a multitude of churches and traversing through much personal turmoil.

CHARACTER TRAITS

A further important method of understanding an individual, in addition to their accomplishments, is their prominent personality traits. A characteristic that is difficult to dismiss in Athanasius was his tenacity and strength. It took an individual with a great amount of strength to stand contrary to all of the powerful enemies that Athanasius encountered in his life and yet be able to remain faithful to his beliefs. Tenacity, both physically and intellectually, is one of the characteristics that is most prominent in Athanasius' life

A further salient feature of Athanasius is somewhat related to his strength in that Athanasius was recollected to have a temper. This was most prominently exemplified in the year 335, in Constantinople, when he entered into an argument with Emperor Constantine when the most prudent avenue would have been to remain subjective and silent. However, perhaps part of the reason that Athanasius was able to tenaciously grasp the truth was because he possessed the tandem trait of having a strong temper.

Another important trait in understanding Athanasius is his brilliant mind. Athanasius was competent to complete two books which remain widely utilized today while he was still in his early twenties. Powerful intellects such as that are very rare. As well, to aspire to compose such treatises at such a young age also reveals Athanasius' uniqueness. It is also noteworthy that Athanasius chose to utilize his obvious intellectual abilities to strengthen Christianity instead of

employing it to devise some method for his own financial fortunes. The idea of Athanasius traversing with the choice to exercise his intellect to benefit the church is likewise worthy of consideration in contemplating his authentic nature.

Inherent leadership was also a prominent characteristic that Athanasius possessed. This is surveyed most conspicuously when he was a bellwether at the Council of Nicaea when he only entertained the responsibility of a deacon. As well, at the young age of his early thirties the people of Alexandria recognized his leadership abilities and desiderated him to be their bishop when this auspicious obligation was most often reserved for decisively more senescent men. In addition, Athanasius was leading the struggle for the Nicene faith in the 330s before the age of forty alongside bishops of more advanced age such as Hosius, who was in his seventies. Thus, when endeavoring to understand Athanasius one must recollect his natural leadership abilities.

Athanasius was also known for loving and caring deeply for those under his care. This is most brilliantly displayed when the military forces were aspiring to acquire him from the church and his primary concern was that the congregants were permitted to escape unharmed. As well, the care he had for those in his congregation was evident in his writing. It is noteworthy that the common people loved Athanasius and supported him through arduous times. For example, in his third exile the people of Egypt absconded and protected him. When desiring to understand the true nature of a leader one can investigate the attitudes of those under his authority and for Athanasius these were prestigious retrospections.

A final characteristic in contemplating the genre of individual that Athanasius was is evidenced in his graciousness towards others. One important method to evaluate the character of an individual is to understand how they addressed compatriots who disagreed with them. Athanasius has an exemplary record in how he handled his erring comrades with respect.

Mohler is able to evaluate this characteristic of Athanasius well: “He showed much indulgence for human weakness exercising an influence on faith; he preferred to highlight the truth which had been mixed in with falsehood, and he knew very well how to discover true interior faith contained within an exterior of error. When he had completely understood a person’s character and recognized that the person was inwardly sound, he defended that person against all slander. Each time that he was forced to write against men to whom he was loyal, he fought their false principles, but refused to give their names.”⁶⁷⁵ This trait was particularly interesting regarding his colleagues that had faltered in that he would not mention their names as he did not intend to attack an individual but rather desired to combat that which he perceived to be a heresy. As well, Athanasius exhibited graciousness to opponents such as the Meletians. Henric Nordberg was a critic who wrote in the mid to late twentieth century and was not particularly disposed to view Athanasius in a positive manner. Thus, his thoughts on this topic are particularly convincing. Arnold writes of Nordberg’s opinion: “Henric Nordberg argues convincingly that Athanasius brought several former Meletian bishops and presbyters with him to Tyre, stating that ‘out of 47 Egyptian clericals at Tyre’ accompanying Athanasius ‘probably at least 17 had been earlier supporters of the Meletian church.’ From the evidence presented, it seems clear that Nordberg is fully justified in claiming that in Athanasius’ first few years as bishop he ‘succeeded in winning a number of schismatic leaders.’”⁶⁷⁶ An example of two of these former schismatic Meletians were Macarius and Theon of Nilopolis. Theon was once listed as a Meletian but died as an orthodox bishop and Macarius is the same one who was putatively involved in the Ischyras scandal. It is especially notable that Athanasius shared a close relationship with Macarius who

⁶⁷⁵ J. A. Mohler, *Athanasie le Grand et l’église de son temps en lutte avec l’arianisme* (trans. By Zickwolff and Jean Cohen) (Paris: 1849), 108.

⁶⁷⁶ Arnold, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria*, 62.

was a former Meletian. Therefore, Athanasius was winsome enough to garner support from former opponents and this reveals a desire to connect those who held different ecclesiastical, but not necessarily theological, ideas. As well, known for *LP 1914* that thrust Athanasius in a negative light, Bell shares a similar opinion as he writes: “Of Schwartz, Bell asserts that regarding the popularity Athanasius achieved in later years, ‘the enthusiastic devotion of the Alexandrians, pagans as well as Christians, would be incredible had he been the cold, selfish, unscrupulous schemer portrayed by Schwartz.’”⁶⁷⁷ Thus, even several of those generally critical of Athanasius admit that he was not a selfish schemer, but rather tended to treat others as well as possible in the given situations. Throughout his life Athanasius displayed his penchant for being gracious to those who falsely accused him, had stood against him politically and faltered in following the true doctrines.

LESSONS FROM ATHANASIUS

Athanasius was a tremendous leader and there are several aspects of his life that serve as beneficial examples for Christians in subsequent centuries. A key lesson to be learned from his life is that he did not choose the alternative that was easiest or most beneficial to him personally. In order to be faithful to the truth in his epoch it was necessary for him to embark on decisions that would cause him a myriad of difficulties in his personal life, but he did not hesitate to traverse in the most advantageous path for preserving the true Christian doctrines. Hough wrote of this: “The carrier of the letter had suggestions of terrible consequences if the request was not acceded to. Now we find Athanasius face to face with a difficult problem. Assailed by so wily

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

and unscrupulous a foe, how easy it would have been to find safety in compromise. How many men would have consoled themselves with comforting and seemingly pious thoughts about the peace of the Church, and then have received Arius to communion. Athanasius firmly refused.” Thus, it is understood that Athanasius had alternatives to decide upon and he resolved that supporting truth, as he ardently believed in, was more consequential than his own comfort or sense of peace. Indeed, Athanasius suffered momentarily for not relenting but he also procured a magnanimous victory for the genuine doctrines of Christianity.

A second lesson that can be gleaned from a review of the life of Athanasius is that loyalty to friends and forgiveness of opponents is of critical importance. Athanasius refused to condemn his friends even when they erred as he must have realized that he also might be in need of understanding and forgiveness at some point. When Athanasius extends grace to those who have faltered in the faith, and even signed statements denouncing him, it reveals his authentic heart as a man of forgiveness. Christians from all centuries should regard Athanasius’ example in forgiving others and being gracious to those who have harmed them. It is noteworthy that Athanasius even forgave those who had falsely accused him of murder and this makes the offenses perpetrated against the majority of modern Christians pale in comparison.

A third lesson from Athanasius’ life can be perceived from his faith that God will prevail in the end. There were numerous times in his life when the odds contrary to him and the genuine doctrines appeared insurmountable but his faith was ardent that God remained sovereign and was capable of delivering a victory when all hope appeared to have vanished. This visionary faith allowed Athanasius to not become discouraged at formidable circumstances. When he returned following his fourth exile he was only home for a brief eight months when he was subsequently exiled again. It would have been facile to be discouraged by this but he intimated to his

followers to remain hopeful and steadfast because this dark cloud would also soon pass. Another incident that is especially prominent was in the late 350s, as alluded to earlier, when all of the other known bishops had recanted the Nicene faith and a powerful emperor was attempting to eradicate the idea that Jesus was fully God. It would have been indulgent for Athanasius to have been in despair and to have relinquished the struggle. However, he travailed for the truth because he comprehended that God was in authority. Aspects are never as somber as they appear to be when one is contending for God. Those living in this time should remember this and understand that the battle for truth must still be waged even when it appears as if the society is traversing in a direction far from that which God intended. God is still able to deliver a victory but He desires that Christians would remain in the fray and trust in Him to prevail in the altercation.

A further lesson to be gleaned from a study of Athanasius is to be a theologian but possess a pastor's heart simultaneously. It is often a characteristic of theologians of great intellect to focus solely on theological ideas. However, Athanasius served as an example because he obviously had a brilliant intellect and yet he never disposed of his love and compassion for those in his congregation. Athanasius truly cared for those placed in his stewardship and he believed that every fray he was travailing in was to safeguard their spiritual well-being. He truly understood the idea of Scripture that even if one achieves momentous accomplishments but they do not possess love they will be ineffective. Modern theological scholars and pastors should follow Athanasius' example and never dismiss their passionate heart for the people.

A LIFE WELL-LIVED

In the final analysis when one considers the true character of a man he must envision the entire life's work rather than isolated events. It is true that none of the charges against Athanasius can be substantiated and there is, therefore, no reason to alter the traditionally laudatory view of him. However, this is not to say that Athanasius was a perfect man. If one examined him closely enough he would be sure to find isolated instances in which Athanasius did not act in the manner of a sincere Christian, but this is true of virtually every Christian. No person can claim perfection but with investigative scrutiny each one has flaws. Thus, it is important when judging either a modern person or a historical figure that one discerns the overall impact and contributions the individual made to the Christian cause. In this regard, Athanasius should truly be regarded as an unsurpassed individual for his tenacity in defending Christian orthodoxy, his bravery in confronting difficulties, his love for the common man and his devotion to and exposition of theological truth.

Let us close with this by utilizing the memorable quote by Hough once again: "Very full of peace on that May morning must have seemed the chamber where lay the silent form of the great bishop. How often he must have longed with a sad eagerness, in many hard and terrible years, for quiet and repose. But he had not faltered. He had borne his burden, so very hard a burden. He marched breast forward, he had not lost courage, but had fought with unflagging heroism and unfailing devotion."⁶⁷⁸ Athanasius has found his rest with the Lord. We who are Christians today have many spiritual battles to fight. Let us battle them with all of the fortitude and trust in God that Athanasius displayed.

⁶⁷⁸ Lynn Harold Hough, *Athanasius the Hero* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1906), 141.

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