

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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BEING OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER

In church history, Arius (256 AD-336 AD) has been referred to as the *Heresiarch*, or the *chief heretic*. What did Arius teach that earned him this ignominious title? He declared: "That the Son is not unbegotten nor in any way a part of an Unbegotten, nor derived from some (alien) substratum, but that he exists by will and counsel before times and before ages, full of truth, and grace, God, Only-begotten, unaltering. And before he was begotten, or created or determined or established, *he did not exist*. For he was not unbegotten (or unoriginated)."1 (emphasis mine). Arius, as Allison points out: "was eager to preserve the unity of the Godhead against the surrounding polytheism. He thought that the unity of God could be preserved only by excluding all distinctions from within the divine nature, making Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit into two inferior deities. He seized upon each scriptural formulation that suggested inferiority or a subordinate status for Christ. *Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good* (Matt. 19:17); . . . *for the Father is greater than I* (John 14:28). . . . *nevertheless not my will but thine be done* (Luke 22:32). In addition to arguments from many texts, a different and lesser deity than God himself fitted the Alexandrian assumption (and Docetic tendency) that it was both inappropriate and impossible for God himself to take the bodily form of a man, to be born of a woman, to be hungry and thirsty, to weep, to suffer, and to die. Jesus Christ was, according to Arius, just such an intermediate deity between God and humanity, one who was neither fully God nor fully human. The very fact that scripture repeatedly refers to the relationships as *Father and Son* implied, for Arius, both the inferiority of the latter and a priority of the Father *before* the Son was *begotten*. Arius took the symbolism of Father literally, inferring the kind of relationship human fathers have with human sons, and saw Christ as a subordinate deity other than the Father."2

"In contrast to this Arian approach, Athanasias argued that the Son's begetting did not indicate the Son's creation. Athanasius distinguished between the Son's begetting, which was eternal, and the Arian argument that the Son was created – which does not accurately describe the Son. The Son is not a creature, nor is he changeable, for the divine Trinity is always perfect. Nor is there ever a time when the Son is not the Son, he is eternally the Son, lest we suppose that God's essence or the Son himself changes. The Father and the Son share the same essence. In contrast to the Arian reading of Proverbs 8 (and other texts), the Son's divinity was well-established in orthodox Christian tradition and coheres with the rule of faith. For Athanasius, Proverbs 8:22, which speaks of wisdom as the first of God's works, does not refer to the Son's creation as the Wisdom of God. Rather, it refers to the incarnation of the Wisdom of God, when he took a created nature. This is the theology of the incarnation of the second Adam. We must distinguish between the Son in his divine essence and the Son's role in the economy of redemption as an incarnate man."3 The language used in the Nicene Creed specifically addresses this issue. Cary observes, "It turns out that the word *created*, used in older translations (*begotten not created*), is also a technical term in theology. As Christian theology has traditionally used the term, creating is a unique kind of making, and only God can do it. Human beings make many things, but in the Bible and the traditional vocabulary of Christian

theology, only God *creates*. Only God the Creator makes things out of nothing, needing no materials to work with. A human artist makes a pot out of clay or a house out of wood, but God is an artist who makes both pots and clay, houses and wood, and every element and particle that the clay and the wood are made out of. As Maker of all things, he cannot possibly have materials to work with except what he himself has made. He is the only Creator, the only Maker who makes things out of nothing. All things, visible and invisible, are his creation, and everything that has being, other than the Creator himself, is his creature. Every being is either creature or Creator, and there is no third category.”⁴ Hebrews 1 was considered a critical text in the early church in the debate over the deity of Christ. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6). Who is this Son? He is Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). He is “God-with-us” and His name is Jesus (Matthew 1:21-23). The epistle to the Hebrews begins by declaring the grandeur and greatness of God’s Son. Hebrews is, in many ways, a unique book. It is, for example, the only New Testament book that calls Jesus Christ a great High Priest. The writer, throughout the book, uses what is known as *a fortiori* argument. This phrase simply signifies “all the more,” and means that something must be admitted for a still stronger reason. In other words, the logic in one argument follows with even greater necessity than another already accepted argument (“if this is true, and it is, then how much more so this!” cf. Hebrews 2:1-3.)

I. THE FINAL REVELATION. The opening sentence of this grand epistle is so abrupt that it surprises us. There is no formal introduction. The author plunges straight into the exposition of the major theme, namely the uniqueness and finality of the revelation of God in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer has what G. Vos has called an intense concern with the subject of *the progressive character of revelation*.⁵

A. The Method of Revelation (Hebrews 1:1). The method is one of contrast. Two great revelations are contrasted – the prophets and the Son. Note *how* these are contrasted.

1. Like the Old Testament prophets, Christ spoke the Word of God; but *unlike* them He is the Eternal Word who became the Word Incarnate (John 1:1-14). He is God’s unique Son – the prophets were not. This puts Him in a *different class*.
2. There were *many* prophets. There is *one* Son.
3. The contrast between the *fragmentary* and *incomplete* character of the prophets on the one hand and the *finality* and *completeness* of the word spoken by God in Christ on the other.
4. Finally, note the contrast on “in former times” (in the past, NIV) with “in these last days.” That the revelation in the Son is superior is implicit in the elaborate statement of the qualifications of the Son for revealing divine truth.⁶

II. THE UNIQUE ORGAN OF THE FINAL REVELATION. The author states seven facts which demonstrate the greatness of God’s final revelation in his Son. Those serve to demonstrate the Son’s supremacy over all the created order and illustrate the Son’s ability to effectively and finally “exegete”⁷ the Father. Note how this unfolds: from His past glory through the incarnation on to the majesty of His exaltation.

A. “Appointed Heir of all things” (cf. Psalm 2:8). The word “appointed,” by virtue of its position in the series of facts that antedate the exaltation of the Son, is timeless in force and refers to His appointment in virtue of His eternal Sonship. In fact, Sonship and heirship are closely linked. There was never a time when the Son was not the heir (cf. Matthew 11:27). The entrance upon the inheritance by the Son will occur at the second advent of Christ (Hebrews 2:8; Revelation 11:15).

B. “Through Whom also He made the world.” The term “world” (Greek *aiōn*) literally means “ages.” Note the clear implication – the priority of Christ to the whole created order can only also mean Christ’s pre-existence and co-existence with the Father.

- C. **“And He is the radiance of His glory.”** He is co-essential with the Father. The noun “radiance” (*apaugazō*, to emit brightness, cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4) has both an active sense (radiance) and a passive sense (reflection). In this context, it is used in the active sense. The Son radiates the Father’s Glory (cf. Colossians 1:15; John 1:14; 14:9). Note also that it is in the present tense – denoting his eternal nature.⁸
- D. **“The exact representation of His Being.”** This expression means that the Son is the exact replica of the essence of God. “Being” (some translate this “substance” or “essence”) refers not to his bare essence, but His whole nature with all its attributes; and by “exact representation” we are to understand a correspondence as close as that which an impression gives back to a seal. In his *Oration against the Arians*, Athanasius also explicates the next description of the Son as the “exact representation of his being” (*character tēs hupostasēs autou*): “He is true God, existing consubstantially (*homoousios*) with the true Father.” . . . For he is the “very stamp” of the Father’s “being,” and “light” from “light,” and the “power” and true “image” of the Father’s substance.” Athanasius interprets *character* as “stamp” and/or “image.” This language is also used in the minting of coins. The Father is seen via the Son (cf. John 1:18) – he is imprinted upon his likeness. For Athanasius, Hebrews offers a substantive glimpse of something in accord with later Nicene theology. Early readers, especially but not only Athanasius, found these verses in Hebrews to be influential in their understanding of God.⁹ The language here is so plain that only “a virtuoso in exegetical evasion,” to quote James Denny, could hope to avoid the conclusion that the Son is very God of very God.¹⁰ Athanasius’ use of *homoousios* is critical. *Homoousios* safeguards the point that the Son’s generation is unlike the generation of human beings, and does not involve the creation of one thing that may be separated from its originator. *Homoousios* renders impossible descriptions of the Son as created and rules out such phrases as “there was a time when he was not.”¹¹
- E. **“He sustains all things by the word of His power.”** This marks the Son out as the Governor of the Universe. The word “sustains” (NIV) or “upholds” (NASB) is *pherōn te*, and is not used in a passive sense (like Atlas supporting dead weight on his shoulders), but in the sense of One causing all things forward on their appointed course. The Son is directing all things towards the consummation (cf. Revelation 11:15). The allusion, as noted above, is to Ps. 110:1, where David’s Lord sits down at God’s right hand (see also 1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The right hand signifies power (Exod. 15:6, 12), protection (Pss. 16:8; 73:23; Isa 41:10), and triumph (Pss. 20:6; 21:8). Indeed, it signifies that Jesus shares the same identity as God, as Bauckham argues. The “potent imagery of sitting on the cosmic throne has only one attested significance; it indicates his participation in the unique sovereignty of God over the world.”¹²

III. **THE SUPREMACY OF THE NEW REVEALER.** Verse 4 is transitional. The contrast with the prophets is completed and the contrast with the angels will occupy vv. 4-14. The participle translated “he became” (NIV) “having become” (NASB) indicates that the writer is moving in the orbit of the Son’s humanity. “What was proposed in the eternal counsels (cf. v. 2, “appointed”) is realized in His resurrection and ascension. His inheritance of the title of Son is by the Father’s eternal appointment. In that sense, that is, as Mediator, He entered into His inheritance of Sonship. And the name *Son* is a measure of His superiority to angels, who are merely messengers (cf. 1:14).”¹³

CONCLUSION: Contemporary Christianity, busy accommodating itself to the mindset of modern culture (modernity), puts little emphasis on theology and even less on doctrinal preaching. Rather, contemporary Christianity simply uses the Bible merely to corroborate the validity of what is already found within its own religious consciousness which, says David F. Wells, “is another way of saying that we are putting ourselves in the place of the Bible.”¹⁴ Many people do not realize that the popular expression, “Christianity is life, *not* doctrine!” was coined by 19th century theological Liberalism. The writer to the Hebrews thought

differently. He begins with one of the most masterful theological statements ever made! C. S. Lewis famously captures the essence of the question on who Jesus is by declaring, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: *I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.* That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”¹⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited in R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Baker Academia, 2005), p. 6. Hanson’s Book is widely considered to be the definite work on the subject of Arianism.

² C. F. Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (Moorehouse Publishing, 1994), p. 84.

³ This section is adopted from B. D. Crowe, *The Lord Jesus Christ: The Biblical Doctrine of The Person and Work of Christ* (Lexham Academia, 2023), p. 181.

⁴ P. Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 74.

⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), p. 68. Note his words: “The unity and continuity of the Old and New Revelation are strictly maintained. In both *God spoke*, the participle *having spoken* is a preparation for the finite verb *hath spoken*. The whole organism of revelation lies in these words. Whatever diversity may exist, still it is all a divine word. The responsibility of people under the New Testament may be greater, but this is not because the New Testament has more authority or more of God in it than the Old Testament.” Pp. 70-71.

⁶ *ep eschatou tōn hemeron toutōn*, literally “at the (latter) end of these days.” This expression is found in the Septuagint and corresponds to the Hebrew *be aharíth hayyamím* (cf. Genesis 49:1 and Daniel 10:14) it “expresses the notion never merely of a simple future which is to follow the present in the course of ordinary historical development, but always that of the end or final period which is to conclude all history and forms the utmost boundary of the speaker’s circle of vision.” Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews I* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 40. Philip Hughes also notes this and adds that the expression “designates the eschatological time of the Messiah.” *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 37N. The word “eschatological” is derived directly from the Greek word *eschatou* in 1:2, and is used theologically to refer to “last things” or “end times.”

⁷ The word “exegete” refers in Biblical studies to someone who does “exegesis,” from the Greek word *exēgeomai*, to explain, interpret, declare. This term is used in John 1:18 in reference to the Son make God (the Father) known.

⁸ “He only,” comments Thomas Goodwin, “is the brightness of His Father’s glory; we all are but stars shining with a borrowed light.” *The Works of Thomas Goodwin V* (James Nichol, 1863), p. 547.

⁹ M. N. Pierce, “Hebrews 1 and The Son Begotten Today” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, eds. F. Sanders & S. R. Swain (Zondervan, 2017), p. 119.

¹⁰ James Denny, *Jesus and the Gospel* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), pp. 40-41.

¹¹ L. Ayres, *Nicea and Its Legacy* (Oxford, 2004), p. 141.

¹² As cited by T. R. Schreiner, *Hebrews: Evangelical Biblical Commentary* (Lexham Academia, 2020), p. 58.

¹³ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., *Believers Bible Bulletin: Special Christmas Message: Hebrews 1:1-4, December 23, 1979* (Believers Chapel).

¹⁴ D. F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 229

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Collier Books, 1943), p. 55.