

Rushdoony's comments on the Nicene Creed (from *The Foundations of Social Order* pgs. 12-17)

Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, stated his position in his *Thalia*:

God Himself then, in His own nature, is ineffable by all men. Equal or like Himself He alone has none, or one in glory. And Ingenerate we call Him, because of Him who is generate by nature. We praise Him as without beginning because of Him who has a beginning. And adore Him as everlasting, because of Him who in time has come to be. The Unbegun made the Son a beginning of things originated; and advanced Him as a Son to Himself by adoption. He has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence. For He is not equal, no, nor one in essence with Him. Wise is God, for He is the teacher of Wisdom. There is full proof that God is invisible to all beings; both to things which are through the Son, and to the Son He is invisible. I will say it expressly, how by the Son is seen the Invisible; by that power by which God sees, and in His own measure, the Son endures to see the Father, as is lawful. Thus there is a Triad, not in equal glories. Not intermingling with each other are their subsistences. One more glorious than the other in their glories unto immensity. Foreign from the Son in essence is the Father, for He is without beginning. Understand that the Monad was; but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence. It follows at once that, though the Son was not, the Father was God. Hence the Son, not being (for He existed at the will of the Father), is God Only-begotten, and He is alien from either. Wisdom existed as Wisdom by the will of the Wise God. Hence He is conceived in numberless conceptions: Spirit, Power, Wisdom, God's glory, Truth, Image, and Word. Understand that He is conceived to be Radiance and Light. One equal to the Son, the Superior is able to beget; but one more excellent, or superior, or greater, He is not able. At God's will the Son is what and whatsoever He is. And when and since He was, from that time He has subsisted from God. He, being a strong God, praises in His degree the Superior. To speak in brief, God is ineffable to His Son. For He is to Himself what He is, that is, unspeakable. So that nothing which is called comprehensible does the Son know to speak about; for it is impossible for Him to investigate the Father, who is by Himself. For the Son does not know His own essence, For, being Son, He really existed, at the will of the Father. What argument then allows, that He who is from the Father should know His own parent by comprehension? For it is plain that for that which hath a beginning to conceive how the Unbegun is, or to grasp the idea, is not possible.

To analyze Arius' *Thalia*, first this statement in effect not only eliminates Christ but God as well. God is unknowable even to Christ, who is the greatest of all creatures. A god who is so unknowable and who cannot reveal himself is thus an irrelevant god because of his radical incoherence. Despite all the fulsome glorification of God Arius, in effect both here and in his Letter to Bishop Alexander, Arius is eliminating God except as a limiting concept. Dead or alive, Arius' god is irrelevant.

Second, Christ is eliminated by Arius. Although called the greatest of creatures, He is still a creature. Arius' Jesus cannot know God and therefore cannot reveal Him. And, although Arius' Jesus or Son cannot be surpassed, i.e., his god cannot create a superior one, still he can create one equal to the Son. The door is thus thrown wide open to other sons of god to rank equal with god, and, because of their timeliness in history, rank higher than Jesus with men. Thus, not only is God the Father eliminated, but God the Son. And because there can by definition be none other equal to God, God the Holy Spirit is eliminated. And this unknowable and unrevealed god being irrelevant, man stand essentially alone as his own god.

Third, the Bible is also eliminated. An incoherent god cannot reveal himself. A revelation either in Christ or in the Bible is ruled out. How can a god be declared when by definition he is beyond self-declaration, either in his son or his word? Arius' god, like man, lacks full self-consciousness; his own being is full of brute factuality and replete with chaos in effect, "For He is to Himself what he is, that is, unspeakable"

Fourth, the Biblical answer to the problem of the one and many is denied. In the triune God, one God, three persons, there is an equal ultimacy of the one and the many. Unity and particularity are equally important. Arius restored the pagan emphasis on unity, and that unity was the empire. Everywhere pagan statism found Arianism to be an ideal doctrine, and for a few centuries Arianism flourished in Europe as the established faith. In the name of Christianity, Arianism established anti-Christianity. By professing Arian "Christianity," rulers could outlaw or oppose orthodox Christianity as subversive.

Fifth, as is now apparent, Arianism was humanism and statism. It was popular faith with rulers, in that it made possible the continuation of the pagan exaltation of the state as the divine human order and politics as the way of salvation. The emperor, Constantine the Great, with his essentially Roman concern for religion, turned soon to Arianism for support. One of his coins, a bronze follis of about A.D. 307-308, has on the obverse side of the head of Constantine, and on the reverse side, the sun-god. For the empire, the door was open to Jesus as the great creature of god, but also open to many other divine creatures, all serving to unify the Roman Empire as the divine-human order. The Arian bishops were thus inescapably statist in their orientation of faith. For them, the empire was God's true order, and the emperor God's present manifestation and power on earth.

At the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325, the battle was waged over the key words, *homoousion* (being of one essence, i.e., on with the Father), and *homoiousion* (of like essence), the semi-Arian compromise designed to give a semblance of orthodoxy while essentially destroying orthodoxy. Gibbon treated the difference between the positions with contempt. His hatred of orthodoxy is clearly unconcealed. In a well-known footnote, Gibbons observed, "I cannot forbear reminding the reader that the difference between *Homoousion* and *Homoiousion* is almost invisible to the nicest theological eye." It is impossible to dismiss this as ignorance: Gibbons knew what was at stake, and his allegiance was to statism as man's hope.

The triumph of orthodoxy at Nicea had tremendous importance. Schaff observed:

The council of Nicea is the most important event of the fourth century, and its bloodless intellectual victory over a dangerous error is of far greater consequence to the progress of true civilization, than all the bloody victories of Constantine and his successors.

Lieth's comments are also important:

Theologically, the assertion that the Son is only like God undermine the Christian community's conviction about the finality of Jesus Christ. The claim that he was like God presupposes some standard to determine whether he was like God and the extent to which he was like God. It furthermore left open the possibility that someone else more like God might appear. Christianity would be only one of many possible religions. If God himself is incarnate in Jesus Christ, then this is the final Word. There is nothing further to be said. The cultural significance of the Nicene theology is revealed in the disposition of the political Imperialist to be Arian. Imperialism as a political strategy was more compatible with the notion that Jesus Christ is something less than the full and absolute Word of God.

The Nicene Creed, in its original form, according to Eusebius of Caesarea, reads:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible: And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is of the substance of the Father; God of God, Light of light, true God of true God; begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father; by whom all things were made both which are in heaven and on earth; who for the sake of us men, and on account of our salvation, descended, became incarnate, was made man, suffered and rose again on the third day; he ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit. Those who say "There was a time when he was not," or "He did not exist before he was begotten," or "He was made of nothing" or assert that "He is of other hypostatis, or of another substance or essence than the Father," or that the Son of God is created, that He is mutable, or subject to change, the Catholic Church of anathematizes.

...As is readily apparent, the Nicene Creed is an expansion of the Apostles' Creed and a defense of the Apostles' Creed from the misuse by re-interpretation. In its present form, it incorporates the work of subsequent councils, including Chalcedon.

The most important later addition is the *Filioque* clause, the procession of subordinationism were thereby eliminated in the West; the clause was rejected in the East. By means of this clause, the full equality of the Father and the Son was declared; the Trinity is one God, three persons, with no subordination of one person to another in the substance or being, but only in terms of economy or operation.

Arius, after Nicea, regained power through political influences. On his recall, Alexander, Primate of Alexandria, in tears prostrated himself in the sacrarium, praying, "If Arius comes tomorrow to the church, take me away, and let me not perish with the guilty. But if Thou pittiest Thy Church, as Thou dost pity it, take Arius away, lest when he enters heresy enter with him." The next morning, on his triumphant procession to the church to be formally and publicly reconciled on imperial authority, Arius stopped and left the procession suddenly because of gastric pain.

After waiting some time, his followers investigated and found that the old man Arius had collapsed in blood and fallen headlong into the open latrine. The orthodox party triumphantly recalled the words concerning Judas' death, who "falling headlong, burst asunder in the midst" and died (Act 1:18). Arius' manner of death was used by orthodox to discomfit the heretics and encourage the saints, and it was declared an act of God. The heretics preferred to forget it, and modern heretics have eliminated this and like events from history books as "irrelevant." It was, however, a providential conclusion to the great intellectual and spiritual battle of Nicea.