Deposition of Arius

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 296–373)

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Deposition of Arius

S. Alexander's Deposition of Arius and His Companions, and Encyclical Letter on the Subject. Alexander, being assembled with his beloved brethren, the Presbyters and Deacons of Alexandria, and the Mareotis, greets them in the Lord. Although you have already subscribed to the letter I addressed to Arius and his fellows, exhorting them to renounce his impiety, and to submit themselves to the sound Catholic Faith, and have shewn your right-mindedness and agreement in the doctrines of the Catholic Church: yet forasmuch as I have written also to our fellow-ministers in every place concerning Arius and his fellows, and especially since some of you, as the Presbyters Chares and Pistus , and the Deacons Serapion, Parammon, Zosimus, and Irenaeus, have joined Arius and his fellows, and been content to suffer deposition with them, I thought it needful to assemble together you, the Clergy of the city, and to send for you the Clergy of the Mareotis, in order that you may learn what I am now writing, and may testify your agreement thereto, and give your concurrence in the deposition of Arius, Pistus, and their fellows. For it is desirable that you should be made acquainted with what I write, and that each of you should heartily embrace it, as though he had written it himself.

A Copy. To his dearly beloved and most honoured fellow-ministers of the Catholic Church in every place. Alexander sends health in the Lord.

1. As there is one body of the Catholic Church, and a command is given us in the sacred Scriptures to preserve the bond of unity and peace, it is agreeable thereto. that we should write and signify to one another whatever is done by each of us individually; so that whether one member suffer or rejoice, we may either suffer or rejoice with one another. Now there are gone forth in this diocese, at this time, certain lawless men, enemies of Christ, teaching an apostasy, which one may justly suspect and designate as a forerunner of Antichrist. I was desirous to pass such a matter by without notice, in the hope that perhaps the evil would spend itself among its supporters, and not extend to other places to defile the ears of the simple . But seeing that Eusebius, now of Nicomedia, who thinks that the government of the Church rests with him, because retribution has not come upon him for his desertion of Berytus, when he had cast an eye of desire on the Church of the Nicomedians, begins to support these apostates, and has taken upon him to write letters every where in their behalf, if by any means he may draw in certain ignorant persons to this most base and

antichristian heresy; I am therefore constrained, knowing what is written in the law, no longer to hold my peace, but to make it known to you all; that you may understand who the apostates are, and the cavils which their heresy has adopted, and that, should Eusebius write to you, you may pay no attention to him, for he now desires by means of these men to exhibit anew his old malevolence , which has so long been concealed, pretending to write in their favour, while in truth it clearly appears, that he does it to forward his own interests.

2. Now those who became apostates are these, Arius, Achilles, Aeithales, Carpones, another Arius, and Sarmates, sometime Presbyters: Euzoius, Lucius, Julius, Menas, Helladius, and Gaius, sometime Deacons: and with them Secundus and Theonas, sometime called Bishops. And the novelties they have invented and put forth contrary to the Scriptures are these following :-God was not always a Father , but there was a time when God was not a Father. The Word of God was not always, but originated from things that were not; for God that is, has made him that was not, of that which was not; wherefore there was a time when He was not; for the Son is a creature and a work. Neither is He like in essence to the Father; neither is He the true and natural Word of the Father; neither is He His true Wisdom ; but He is one of the things made and created, and is called the Word and Wisdom by an abuse of terms, since He Himself originated by the proper Word of God, and by the Wisdom that is in God, by which God has made not only all other things but Him also. Wherefore He is by nature subject to change and variation as are all rational creatures. And the Word is foreign from the essence of the Father, and is alien and separated therefrom. And the Father cannot be described by the Son, for the Word does not know the Father perfectly and accurately, neither can He see Him perfectly.

Moreover, the Son knows not His own essence as it really is; for He is made for us, that God might create us by Him, as by an instrument; and He would not have existed, had not God wished to create us. Accordingly, when some one asked them, whether the Word of God can possibly change as the devil changed, they were not afraid to say that He can; for being something made and created, His nature is subject to change.

3. Now when Arius and his fellows made these assertions, and shamelessly avowed them, we being assembled with the Bishops of Egypt and Libya, nearly a hundred in number, anathematized both them and their followers. But Eusebius and his fellows admitted them to communion, being desirous to mingle falsehood with the truth, and impiety with piety. But they will not be able to do so, for the truth must prevail; neither is there any "communion of light with darkness," nor any "concord of Christ with Belial . For who ever heard such assertions before ? or who that hears them now is not astonished and does not stop his ears lest they should be defiled with such language? Who that has heard the words of John, "In the beginning was the Word ," will not denounce the saying of these men, that "there was a time when He was not? Or who that has heard in the Gospel, "the Only-begotten Son," and "by Him were all things made ," will not detest their declaration that He is "one of the things that were made. For how can He be one of those things which were made by Himself? or

how can He be the Only-begotten, when, according to them, He is counted as one among the rest, since He is Himself a creature and a work?

And how can He be "made of things that were not," when the Father saith, "My heart hath uttered a good Word," and "Out of the womb I have begotten Thee before the morning star ? Or again, how is He "unlike in substance to the Father," seeing He is the perfect "image" and "brightness " of the Father, and that He saith, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father ? And if the Son is the "Word" and "Wisdom" of God, how was there "a time when He was not? It is the same as if they should say that God was once without Word and without Wisdom . And how is He "subject to change and variation," Who says, by Himself, "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me ," and "I and the Father are One ; and by the Prophet, "Behold Me, for I am, and I change not ? For although one may refer this expression to the Father, yet it may now be more aptly spoken of the Word, viz., that though He has been made man, He has not changed; but as the Apostle has said, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And who can have persuaded them to say, that He was made for us, whereas Paul writes, "for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things ?"

4. As to their blasphemous position that "the Son knows not the Father perfectly," we ought not to wonder at it; for having once set themselves to fight against Christ, they contradict even His express words, since He says, "As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father ." Now if the Father knows the Son but in part, then it is evident that the Son does not know the Father perfectly; but if it is not lawful to say this, but the Father does know the Son perfectly, then it is evident that as the Father knows His own Word, so also the Word knows His own Father Whose Word He is.

5. By these arguments and references to the sacred Scriptures we frequently overthrew them; but they changed like chameleons , and again shifted their ground, striving to bring upon themselves that sentence, "when the wicked falleth into the depth of evils, he despiseth ." There have been many heresies before them, which, venturing further than they ought, have fallen into folly ; but these men by endeavouring in all their cavils to overthrow the Divinity of the Word, have justified the other in comparison of themselves, as approaching nearer to Antichrist. Wherefore they have been excommunicated and anathematized by the Church. We grieve for their destruction, and especially because, having once been instructed in the doctrines of the Church, they have now sprung away. Yet we are not greatly surprised, for Hymenaeus and Philetus did the same, and before them Judas, who followed the Saviour, but afterwards became a traitor and an apostate. And concerning these same persons, we have not been left without instruction; for our Lord has forewarned us; "Take heed lest any man deceive you: for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and the time draweth near, and they shall deceive many: go ye not after them ;" While Paul, who was taught these things by our Saviour, wrote that "in the latter times some shall depart from the sound faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, which reject the truth ."

6. Since then our Lord and Saviour Jesus, Christ has instructed us by His own mouth, and also hath signified to us by the Apostle concerning such men, we accordingly being personal witnesses of their impiety, have anathematized, as we said, all such, and declared them to be alien from the Catholic Faith and Church. And we have made this known to your piety, dearly beloved and most honoured fellow-ministers, in order that should any of them have the boldness to come unto you, you may not receive them, nor comply with the desire of Eusebius, or any other person writing in their behalf. For it becomes us who are Christians to turn away from all who speak or think any thing against Christ, as being enemies of God, and destroyers of souls; and not even to "bid such God speed ," lest we become partakers of their sins, as the blessed John hath charged us. Salute the brethren that are with you. They that are with me salute you.

Presbyters of Alexandria. 7. I, Colluthus, Presbyter, agree with what is here written, and give my assent to the deposition of Arius and his associates in impiety. Alexander , Presbyter, likewise Dioscorus , Presbyter, likewise Dionysius , Presbyter, likewise Eusebius, Presbyter, likewise Alexander, Presbyter,likewise Nilaras , Presbyter, likewise Arpocration, Presbyter, likewise Agathus, Presbyter Nemesius, Presbyter Longus , Presbyter Silvanus, Presbyter Peroys, Presbyter Apis, Presbyter Proterius, Presbyter Paulus, Presbyter Cyrus, Presbyter, likewise Deacons Ammonius , Deacon, likewise Macarius, Deacon Pistus , Deacon, likewise Athanasius, Deacon Eumenes, Deacon Apollonius , Deacon Olympius, Deacon Aphthonius , Deacon Athanasius , Deacon Macarius, Deacon, likewise Paulus, Deacon Petrus, Deacon Ambytianus, Deacon Gaius , Deacon, likewise Alexander, Deacon Dionysius, Deacon Agathon, Deacon Polybius, Deacon, likewise Theonas, Deacon Marcus, Deacon Comodus, Deacon Serapion , Deacon Nilon, Deacon Romanus, Deacon, likewise Presbyters of the Mareotis. I, Apollonius, Presbyter, agree with what is here written, and give my assent to the deposition of Arius and his associates in impiety.

Ingenius , Presbyter, likewise Ammonius, Presbyter Dioscorus , Presbyter Sostras, Presbyter Theon , Presbyter Tyrannus, Presbyter Copres, Presbyter Ammonas Orion, Presbyter Serenus, Presbyter Didymus, Presbyter Heracles , Presbyter Boccon, , Presbyter Agathus, Presbyter Achillas, Presbyter Paulus, Presbyter Thalelaeus, Presbyter Dionysius, Presbyter, likewise Deacons Sarapion , Deacon, likewise Justus, Deacon, likewise Didymus, Deacon Demetrius , Deacon Maurus , Deacon Alexander, Deacon Marcus , Deacon Comon, Deacon Tryphon , Deacon Ammonius , Deacon Didymus, Deacon Ptollarion , Deacon Seras, Deacon Gaius , Deacon Hierax , Deacon Marcus, Deacon Theonas, Deacon Sarmaton, Deacon Carpon, Deacon Zoilus, Deacon, likewise

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Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them,

and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.