

0295-0373 – Athanasius – Deposition Of Arius

Depositio Arii

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Depositio Arii.

Introduction to the ‘Deposition of Arius’ and Encyclical Letter of Alexander.

The following documents form the fittest opening to the series of Anti-Arian writings of Athanasius. They are included in the Benedictine edition of his works, and in the Oxford Collection of *Historical Tracts*, of which the present translation is a revision. The possibility that the Encyclical Letter was drawn up by Athanasius himself, now deacon and Secretary to Bishop Alexander (Prolegg. ch. ii. §2), is a further reason for its inclusion. The Athanasian authorship is maintained by Newman on the following grounds, which his notes will be found to bear out. (1) Total dissimilarity of style as compared with Alexander’s letter to his namesake of Byzantium (given by Theodoret, *H. E.* i. 4). That piece is in an elaborate and involved style, full of compound words, with nothing of the Athanasian simplicity and vigour. (2) Remarkable identity of style with that of Athanasius, extending to his most characteristic expressions. (3) Distinctness of the ‘theological view’ and terminology of Alexander as compared with Athanasius; the Encyclical coinciding with the latter against the former. (4) Athanasian use of certain texts. These arguments are of great weight, and make out at least a *prima facie* case for Newman’s view. The latter has the weight of Böhringer’s opinion on its side, while the counter-arguments of Kölling (vol. 1. p. 105) are trivial. Gwatkin, *Studies*, 29, note 4, misses the points (Nos. 1 and 3) of Newman’s argument, which may fairly be said to hold the field. The deposition of Arius at Alexandria took place (Prolegg, *ubi supra*) in 320 or 321; more likely the latter. Whether the Encyclical was drawn up at the Synod which deposed Arius, as is generally supposed, or some two years later, as has been inferred from the references to Eusebius of Nicomedia (D. C. B. i. 80, cf. Prolegg. *ubi supra*, note 1), is a question that may for our present purpose be left open. In any case it is one of the earliest documents of the Arian controversy. It should be noted that the μ does not occur in this document, a fact of importance in the history of the adoption of the word as a test at Nicæa, cf. Prolegg. ch. ii. §3 (1) and (2) b. At this stage the Alexandrians were content with the formulæ ὁμοιος κατ’ οὐσίαν (Athan.), ἀπαρλλακτος εἰκῶν, ἀπηκριβωμένη ἐμφέρεια (Alex. in Thdt.), which were afterwards found inadequate.

The letter, after stating the circumstances which call it forth, and recording the doctrine propounded by Arius, and his deposition, points out some of the leading texts which condemn the doctrine (§§3, 4). The Arians are then (§5) compared to other heretics, and the bishops of the Church generally warned (§6) against the intrigues of Eusebius of Nicomedia. The letter is signed by the sixteen presbyters of Alexandria, and the twenty-four deacons (Athanasius signs fourth), as well as by eighteen presbyters and twenty deacons of the Mareotis. The scriptural argument of the Epistle

is the germ of the polemic developed in the successive Anti-Arian treatises which form the bulk of the present volume.



Deposition of Arius.

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 Pistus³⁵², and the Deacons Serapion, Parammon, Zosimus, and Irenæus, 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 body³⁵³ 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 lawless³⁵⁴ men, enemies of Christ, teaching an apostasy, which one

³⁵² Cf. *Apol. Ar.* §24.

³⁵³ (Eph. iv. 4.) St. Alexander in Theod. begins his Epistle to his namesake of Constantinople with some moral reflections, concerning ambition and avarice. Athan. indeed uses a similar introduction to his *Ep. Æg.*, but it is not addressed to an individual.

³⁵⁴ παράνομοι. vid. *Hist. Ar.* §71 init. 75 fin. 79.

may justly suspect and designate as a forerunner³⁵⁵ of Antichrist. I was desirous³⁵⁶ 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 defile³⁵⁷ the ears³⁵⁸ of the simple³⁵⁹. 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 eye³⁶⁰ 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 cavils³⁶¹ 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 malevolence³⁶², 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: Euzoïus, 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 Father³⁶³, 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

355 πρόδρομον Ἀντιχρίστου. vid *Orat.* i. 7. *Vit. Ant.* 69. note on *de Syn.* 5.

356 καὶ ἐβουλόμην μὲν σιωπῆ....ἐπειδὴ δὲ...ἀνάγκην ἔσχον. vid. *Apol. contra. Ar.* §1 init, *de Decr.* § 2. *Orat.* i. 23 init. *Orat.* ii. init. *Orat.* iii. 1. *ad Serap.* i. 1. 16. ii. 1 init. iii. init. iv. 8 init. *Letters* 52. 2, 59. 3 fin. 61. 1. *contra Apollin.* i. 1 init.

357 ῥυπώση, and infr. ῥύπον. vid *Hist. Ar.* §3. §80, *de Decr.* §2. *Ep. Æg.* 11 fin. *Orat.* i. 10.

358 ἀκοᾶς, and infr. ἀκοᾶς βύει. vid. *Ep. Æg.* §13. *Orat.* i. §7. *Hist. Ar.* §56.

359 ἀκεραίων. *Apol. contr. Ar.* §1. *Ep. Æg.* §18. *Letters* 59. 1, 60. 2 fin. *Orat.* i. 8.

360 μ also used of Eusebius *Apol. contr. Ar.* §6. *Hist. Ar.* §7.

361 ῥημάτια. vid. *de Decr.* §8, 18. *Orat.* i. 10. *de Sent.* §23 init S. Dionysius also uses it. *Ibid.* §18.

362 κακόνιοιαν. vid *Hist. Ar.* §75. *de Decr.* §1. et al.

363 οὐκ αἰὲ πατήρ. This enumeration of Arius's tenets, and particularly the mention of the first, corresponds to *de Decr.* §6. *Ep. Æg.* §12. as being taken from the *Thalia. Orat.* i. §5. and far less with Alex. ap. Theod. p. 731, 2. vid. also *Sent. D.* §16. καταχρηστικῶς, which is found here, occurs *de Decr.* §6.

the Word is foreign from the essence³⁶⁴ 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 Belial³⁶⁵.” For who ever heard such assertions before³⁶⁶? 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 Word³⁶⁷,” 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 made³⁶⁸,” 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 star³⁶⁹?” Or again, how is He “unlike in substance to the Father,” seeing He is the perfect “image” and “brightness³⁷⁰” of the Father, and that He saith,

³⁶⁴ οὐσίαν· οὐσία τοῦ λόγου or τοῦ υἱοῦ is a familiar expression with Athan. e.g. *Orat.* i. 45, ii. 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18 init. 22, 47 init. 56 init. &c., for which Alex. in Theod. uses the word ὑπόστασις e.g. τὴν ἰδιότροπον αὐτοῦ ὑπόστασιν· τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ ἀπεριεργαστοῦ· νεωτέραν τῆς ὑποστάσεως γένεσιν· ἢ τοῦ νονογενοῦς ἀνεκδιήγητος ὑπόστασις· τὴν τοῦ λόγου ὑπόστασιν

³⁶⁵ (2 Cor. vi. 14.) κοινωνία φωτί. This is quoted Alex. ap. Theod. *H. E.* i. 3. p. 738; by S. Athan. in *Letter* 47. It seems to have been a received text in the controversy, as the Sardican Council uses it, *Apol Ar.* 49, and S. Athan. seems to put it into the mouth of St. Anthony, *Vit. Ant.* 69.

³⁶⁶ τίς γὰρ ἤκουσε. *Ep. Æg.* §7 init. *Letter* 59. §2 init. *Orat.* i. 8. *Apol. contr. Ar.* 85 init. *Hist. Ar.* §46 init. §73 init. §74 init. *ad Serap.* iv. 2 init.

³⁶⁷ John i. 1.

³⁶⁸ John i. 3, 14.

³⁶⁹ Ps. xlv. 1. and cx. 3.

³⁷⁰ Heb. i. 3.

“He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father³⁷¹?” 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 Wisdom³⁷². And how is He “subject to change and variation,” Who says, by Himself, “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me³⁷³,” and “I and the Father are One³⁷⁴,” and by the Prophet, “Behold Me, for I am, and I change not³⁷⁵?” 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 things³⁷⁶?”

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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 Father³⁷⁷.” 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 chameleons³⁷⁸, and again shifted their ground, striving to bring upon themselves that sentence, “when the wicked falleth into the depth of evils, he despiseth³⁷⁹.” 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

371 (Joh. xiv. 9, 10; x. 29.) On the concurrence of these three texts in Athan. (though other writers use them too, and Alex. ap. Theod. has two of them), vid. note on *Orat.* i. 34.

372 ἄλογον καὶ ἄσοφον τὸν θεόν. *de Decr.* §15. *Orat.* i. §19. *Ap. Fug.* 27. note, notes on *Or.* i. 19, *de. Decr.* 15, note 6.

373 (Joh. xiv. 9, 10; x. 29.) On the concurrence of these three texts in Athan. (though other writers use them too, and Alex. ap. Theod. has two of them), vid. note on *Orat.* i. 34.

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375 (Mal. iii. 6.) This text is thus applied by Athan. *Orat.* i. 30. ii. 10. In the first of these passages he uses the same apology, nearly in the same words, which is contained in the text.

376 Heb. xiii. 8; ii. 10.

377 John x. 15.

378 χαμαιλέοντες. vid. *de Decr.* §1. *Hist. Ar.* §79.

379 Prov. xviii. 3 [cf. *Orat.* iii. 1, *c. Gent.* 8. 4, &c.]

sprung away. Yet we are not greatly surprised, for Hymenæus and Philetus³⁸⁰ 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 them³⁸¹,” 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 truth³⁸².”

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 boldness³⁸³ 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 destroyers³⁸⁴ of souls; and not even to “bid such God speed³⁸⁵,” 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.

³⁸⁰ 2 Tim. ii. 17.

³⁸¹ Luke xxi. 8.

³⁸² (1 Tim. iv. 1.) Into this text which Athan. also applies to the Arians (cf. note on *Or.* i. 9.), Athan. also introduces, like Alexander here, the word ὑγιανούσης, e.g. *Ep. Æg.* §20, *Orat.* i. 8 fin. *de Decr.* 3, *Hist. Arian.* §78 init. &c. It is quoted without the word by Origen *contr. Cels.* v. 64, but with ὑγίους in *Matth.* t. xiv. 16. Eriphan, has ὑγιανούσης διδασκαλίας, *Haer.* 78. 2. ὑγιοῦς διδ. *ibid.* 23. p. 1055.

³⁸³ προπετεύσαιτο. *vid. de Decr.* §2.

³⁸⁴ φθορέας τῶν ψυχῶν. but S. Alex. in Theod. uses the compound word φθοροποιός. p. 731. Other compound or recondite words (to say nothing of the construction of sentences) found in S. Alexander's Letter in Theod., and unlike the style of the Circular under review, are such as ἡ φίλαρχος καὶ φιλάργυρος πρόθεσις· χριστεμπορίαν· φρενοβλαβοῦς· ἰδιότροπον· ὁμοστοίχοις· συλλαβαίς· θεηγόρους ἀποστόλους· & 135·ντιδιαστολήν τῆς πατρικῆς μαιεύσεως· μελαγχολικὴν· φιλόθεος σαφήνεια ἀνοσιουργίας· φληνάφων μύθων. Instances of theological language in S. Alex. to which the Letter in the text contains no resemblance are ἀχώριστα πράγματα δύο· ὁ υἱὸς 232· τὴν κατὰ πάντα ὁμοίότητα αὐτοῦ ἐκ φύσεως ἀπομαζάμενος· δι' ἐσόπτρου ἀκηλιδώτου καὶ ἐμφύχου θείας εἰκόνας· μειτεύουσα φύσις μονογενῆς· τὰς τῆ ὑποστάσει δύο φύσεις

³⁸⁵ 2 John 10.

Alexander³⁸⁶, Presbyter, likewise
 Dioscorus³⁸⁷, Presbyter, likewise
 Dionysius³⁸⁸, Presbyter, likewise
 Eusebius, Presbyter, likewise
 Alexander, Presbyter, likewise
 Nilaras³⁸⁹, Presbyter, likewise
 Arpocraton, Presbyter, likewise
 Agathus, Presbyter
 Nemesius, Presbyter
 Longus³⁹⁰, Presbyter
 Silvanus, Presbyter
 Peroys, Presbyter
 Apis, Presbyter
 Proterius, Presbyter
 Paulus, Presbyter
 Cyrus, Presbyter, likewise

Deacons

Ammonius³⁹¹, Deacon, likewise
 Macarius, Deacon
 Pistus³⁹², Deacon, likewise
 Athanasius, Deacon
 Eumenes, Deacon
 Apollonius³⁹³, Deacon
 Olympius, Deacon
 Aphthonius³⁹⁴, Deacon
 Athanasius³⁹⁵, Deacon

386 Vid. Presbyters, *Apol. Ar.* 73.

387 Vid. Presbyters, *Apol. Ar.* 73.

388 Vid. Presbyters, *Apol. Ar.* 73.

389 Vid. Presbyters, *Apol. Ar.* 73.

390 Vid. Presbyters, *Apol. Ar.* 73.

391 Vid. Presbyters, *ib.*

392 Vid. Presbyters, *ib.*

393 Vid. Presbyters, *ib.*

394 Vid. Presbyters, *ib.*

395 Vid. Presbyters, *ib.*

Macarius, Deacon, likewise
 Paulus, Deacon
 Petrus, Deacon
 Ambytianus, Deacon
 Gaius³⁹⁶, Deacon, likewise
 Alexander, Deacon
 Dionysius, Deacon
 Agathon, Deacon
 Polybius, Deacon, likewise
 Theonas, Deacon
 Marcus, Deacon
 Comodus, Deacon
 Serapion³⁹⁷, 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.

Ingenius³⁹⁸, Presbyter, likewise
 Ammonius, Presbyter
 Dioscorus³⁹⁹, Presbyter
 Sostras, Presbyter
 Theon⁴⁰⁰, Presbyter
 Tyrannus, Presbyter
 Copres, Presbyter
 Ammonas⁴⁰¹, Presbyter
 Orion, Presbyter
 Serenus, Presbyter
 Didymus, Presbyter

³⁹⁶ Vid. Presbyters, ib.

³⁹⁷ Vid. Presbyters, ib.

³⁹⁸ *Apol. Ar. 75.*

³⁹⁹ *Apol. Ar. 75.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Apol. Ar. 75.*

⁴⁰¹ *Apol. Ar. 75.*

Heracles⁴⁰², Presbyter
 Boccon⁴⁰³, Presbyter
 Agathus, Presbyter
 Achilles, Presbyter
 Paulus, Presbyter
 Thalelæus, Presbyter
 Dionysius, Presbyter, likewise

Deacons

Sarapion⁴⁰⁴, Deacon, likewise
 Justus, Deacon, likewise
 Didymus, Deacon
 Demetrius⁴⁰⁵, Deacon
 Maurus⁴⁰⁶, Deacon
 Alexander, Deacon
 Marcus⁴⁰⁷, Deacon
 Comon, Deacon
 Tryphon⁴⁰⁸, Deacon
 Ammonius⁴⁰⁹, Deacon
 Didymus, Deacon
 Ptollarion⁴¹⁰, Deacon
 Seras, Deacon
 Gaius⁴¹¹, Deacon
 Hierax⁴¹², Deacon
 Marcus, Deacon
 Theonas, Deacon

402 Heraclius? ib.

403 *Apol. Ar.* 75.

404 Ib.

405 Ib.

406 Ib.

407 Ib.

408 Ib.

409 Ib.

410 Ib.

411 Ib.

412 Ib.

Sarmaton, Deacon

Carpon, Deacon

Zoilus, Deacon, likewise