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Was the Tomus ad Antiochenos *a Pacific Document?*

by TOM ELLIOTT

The Tomus ad Antiochenos *is still thought to represent Athanasius at the summit of his career, generously trying to make peace between two groups of Catholics in Antioch. However, in the light of the resurrected* Epistula catholica *of the Synod at Alexandria in 362, another interpretation is more likely – namely, that the* Tomus *is another piece of ecclesiastical politics of the sort attacked by Edward Schwartz a century ago. This interpretation suits the end of Athanasius' career much better than the older view.*

The *Tomus ad Antiochenos* is a letter written by St Athanasius and sent to Antioch by the remains of a council of bishops which had been held in Alexandria under the presidency of Athanasius in 362, after the death of the emperor Constantius II. Readers, from St Jerome, who said that this council 'snatched the whole world out of the jaws of Satan',[1] to Archibald Robertson, whose excellent biography of Athanasius, published in 1891, declared that the *Tomus* represented the crown of Athanasius' career, have thought that the letter was genuinely pacific. Those who have read much of that biography will recognise that that is high praise indeed, and it has been echoed by many scholars during the twentieth century, including Martin Tetz.[2] Even more recently T. D. Barnes, who described the *Tomus* as 'an attempt to persuade the two pro-Nicene groups in the church of Antioch to lay aside their quarrel',[3] has applied 'modern research methods' to the study of Athanasius, and approved this verdict. Now it was always possible to take a

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[1] *Adversus Luciferianos* 20. That the *Tomus* is directed against Arianism rather than Apollinarianism has been demonstrated by Alvyn Pettersen in 'The Arian context of Athanasius of Alexandria's *Tomus ad Antiochenos VII*', this JOURNAL xli (1990), 183–98.

[2] Martin Tetz, 'Ein enzyklisches Schreiben der Synode von Alexandrien (362)', *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* lxxix (1988), 262–81.

[3] Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: theology and politics in the Constantinian empire*, Cambridge, MA–London 1993, 156.

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different view of the *Tomus*, but as of 1988, so far as I know, only Bishop Hanson had done so:[4] even Eduard Schwartz did not attempt it. However, I think that it can now be demonstrated that Hanson's view should be developed.

Constantius died of a fever in Cilicia on 3 November 361 on his way west to deal with the usurper Julian. He was a sturdy man[5] in his mid-forties, and no one could have expected him to die of natural causes so early. This was a great stroke of luck for Athanasius, for if Constantius had lived another ten years Athanasius probably would have been forgotten, or would have exploded with frustration in exile. Bishop George of Alexandria chose this of all moments to return to his see, on 26 November. Four days later, when the news of the emperor's death reached Alexandria, he was thrown into prison. On 24 December an Alexandrine mob lynched him.[6] This too was very convenient for Athanasius.

On 9 February 362 Julian's edict allowing bishops exiled by Constantius to return to their cities was published at Alexandria, and on 21 February Athanasius re-entered the city.[7]

Two bishops in exile in the Thebaid were Eusebius of Vercellae in Italy and Lucifer of Calaris in Sardinia. Athanasius had communicated with Lucifer by letter,[8] and perhaps also in person during his exile, and had probably corresponded with Eusebius too, since they were soon together in Alexandria, where they planned to hold a council of bishops to deal with the state of the churches, one of several being held in various parts of the empire because of restlessness at the results of Constantius' religious policies. The bishops in exile in Egypt apparently decided that Athanasius should succeed George. The council met, presumably soon after Easter, which was on 21 March in 362.

Lucifer was not present: he had gone straight to Antioch, with which he had had some acquaintance during the early years of his exile.[9] But why did he not stop in Alexandria? Was a council presided over by Athanasius not sufficiently orthodox to attract him?

The answer to this must be sought in Lucifer's actions in Antioch, and in the reactions of various bishops to them. He found the city without its orthodox bishop, Meletius, who had not yet returned from exile in Armenia. He and a couple of confederates consecrated Paulinus, the leader of the old Eustathian irreconcilables, bishop of Antioch. Some church historians refer

[4] Bishop Hanson's criticisms of the *Tomus* are exceptional: *The search for the Christian doctrine of God*, Edinburgh 1988, 639–53.

[5] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 21.16, 5–7, 19.

[6] *Historia acephala* vi.8.

[7] Ibid. vii.10. The chronology implies that Athanasius had to wait for Julian's edict.

[8] Athanasius, *Letters* 50, 51. Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.6, admits that Eusebius and Lucifer had consulted prior to the Council of Alexandria in 362.

[9] Lucifer was at Eleutheropolis in Palestine after 355.

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to this consecration as 'sudden', which removes the problem of considering whether Athanasius had a role in it.

Paulinus seems to have enjoyed his new-found episcopal status, and when it began to prove a major nuisance to the orthodox cause in the east he would not give it up. When Eusebius of Vercellae arrived in Antioch after the council in Alexandria he did nothing to improve the situation,[10] and went home. Lucifer was upset by something after Eusebius' arrival, and went back to Sardinia in a rage.[11]

Meletius did not find the consecration of Paulinus amusing. When Athanasius went to Antioch after visiting the Emperor Jovian in 363, he presumably recognised Paulinus as its bishop.[12] Meletius would not see Athanasius, and never had any use for him. This was a man praised by both St Basil and his brother Gregory for the sweetness of his disposition.[13] If he had discovered that Athanasius was in league with Lucifer, his well-known disdain could be readily explained. As for Athanasius, he would never abandon Paulinus, no matter how earnestly Basil of Caesarea besought him to do so.[14] At one point he was heard to complain that Meletius was mean to him:[15] other than that, he just kept quiet, and thereby persuaded Professor Barnes that he was an elder statesman.[16]

The *Epistula catholica* of the Council of Alexandria was edited in 1988 by Martin Tetz,[17] who rescued it from the oblivion to which it had been consigned after Bernard de Montfaucon had rejected it in 1698 as an un-Athanasian forgery.[18] Tetz argued that the text as we have it, ending with 'Amen' was not the whole text,[19] but I prefer to accept it as complete, rather than to hazard what it might have been. This text, about a page long in Tetz's edition, is addressed by Athanasius and συνεπίσκοποι to those defending the faith and salvation, and the orthodox bishops in Egypt, Syria, Cilicia, Phoenicia and Arabia. It begins by deploring the troubles brought about by Arianism, troubles from which the bishops feel that they themselves have escaped, and from which they wish to save others. They shun the

[10] Rufinus' language in his *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.31 implies that Eusebius wanted to improve matters. See also n. 11 below.

[11] Socrates (*HE* 3.9) says that Lucifer became upset over Eusebius' disapproval of his consecration of Paulinus, and began to disapprove of the conciliatory policies of the council at Alexandria.

[12] Hanson asserts this in *Search*, 652, but does not cite any authority.

[13] See Basil's letters in n. 14 below, and Gregory of Nyssa, *Funeral oration on Meletius*.

[14] The story of the schism at Antioch may be read in Basil's letters 61, 66, 67, 68, 69, 80, 82, 89, 90, 92. 7. All references to Basil's letters are to the Loeb edition, by Roy J. Deferrari, Cambridge, MA. 1962, vol. ii.

[15] Idem, letter 89.

[16] See Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, ch. xvii. If Athanasius had been recognised as such an 'elder statesman' it is odd that the ecclesiastical historian Socrates should have written so much of his history by using Rufinus, before he found out about Athanasius.

[17] Tetz, 'Ein enzyklisches Schreiben', 262–81, text at pp. 271–3.

[18] Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Opera omnia*, ii, Paris 1698, 28–30.

[19] Tetz, 'Ein enzyklisches Schreiben', 278.

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ringleaders of Arianism, but they recognise that there are many bishops who bowed to the necessity of dissimulating their orthodoxy for fear of the powerful in the big cities. These men will be received if they think that the Son of God cannot be a creature of God and that the Holy Spirit is not to be numbered among the creatures; that our faith is not in the sojourn of a creature or the presence among us of a slave; and that we have received grace of the spirit of God, through which we are divinised and made temples of God. Of others who want communion with them only orthodoxy, that is, belief in the consubstantiality of the Trinity[20] and belief that true god became man of Mary is required.[21] The Nicene Creed is cited as justification for these requirements. This epistle is straightforward and to the point, and would have done more good in Antioch than the much longer *Tomus*. The question that should therefore be asked is why the *Tomus* was ever written.

The *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, long thought to be the only document to survive from the Council of Alexandria, is addressed by Athanasius and the bishops present in Alexandria from Italy, Arabia, Egypt and Libya, namely, Eusebius, Asterius, a dozen more (Gaius, Agathus, Ammonius, Agathodaemon, Dracontius, Paphnutius, another Marcus, Zoilus, Menas, George, Lucius, Macarius) 'and the rest' and addressed to Eusebius, Lucifer, Asterius, Kymatius and Anatolius. Eusebius and Asterius were both senders from Alexandria and recipients in Antioch, and they account for the bishops from Italy and Arabia. The *Tomus*, so much longer and later than the *Epistula catholica*,[22] is presumably a truer reflection of Athanasius' purposes at this point. Its address effectively gets rid of the need to deal with Meletius' followers, who are presumably 'those formerly separated from us[23] by jealousy,[24] but now wishing for peace' (ch. 1), and in section 3 the words 'do ye call to yourselves those who assemble in the old church and those who are seceding from the Arians' are clearly directed to the followers of Paulinus. The followers of Meletius are to be welcomed if they anathematise the Arian heresy and confess the Nicene faith. The Nicene Creed is not here something appealed to by bishops, but a formula to be subscribed by every believer. Believers must also renounce the view that the Holy Spirit is a creature and separate from the essence of Christ, and then anathematise the Arian heresy, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Valentinus, Basilides and the Manichaeans. Having done this they are to require nothing else of Paulinus and his

[20] For description of the Trinity as *homoousios* see Cyril of Jerusalem's *Letter to Constantius* of May 351, *PG* xxxiii.1176a.

[21] Athanasius mentions Mary by name only in *Tomus* 7 and in a couple of letters to Epictetus and to Maximus in about 371.

[22] This is demonstrated by the address to Eusebius, who had signed the document and was taking it to Antioch: Tetz, 'Ein enzyklisches Schreiben', 277–8.

[23] The pronoun seems to reveal an earlier association.

[24] This is a typically Athanasian insult. Contrast the language with that of the *Epistula catholica*.

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supporters (such as, for example, the abandonment of his adventurous bishopric). Finally, they are to adopt the view that Christ had a human mind as well as a human soul.[25] If these conditions are fulfilled then Catholics are to be received into communion. In case anyone thinks that the conditions were either generous or realistic, let it be noted that Athanasius himself had adopted the view that Christ had a human mind only weeks, or days, earlier, presumably under pressure from the council that had just met. Laymen in Antioch had to do some professional theological thinking in a hurry. The presence of this requirement in the *Tomus* shows conclusively that the document was never meant to make unity easy for the two orthodox groups in Antioch. The same may be said for the list of heretics to be anathematised: how many can have heard of Basilides? How many lay people would have found the Nicene Creed useful, when it was such a trial to their bishops?

Athanasius then proceeds to his denial of the existence of the creed of the western Council of Serdica in 342 (ch. 5), and by this lie gets rid of that one-hypostasis embarrassment.[26] This was a cause of some perplexity to Eusebius of Vercellae, who made it clear when he signed the *Tomus* (ch. 10) that the western creed of Serdica had been of some importance to him.

Renunciation of the creed of Serdica would probably not have improved Lucifer's mood when Eusebius turned up in Antioch with the freshly-minted *Tomus*. Lucifer was later to act like a man who had been double-crossed by Athanasius; his actions in Antioch suit such an interpretation. If he had gone to Antioch to consecrate Paulinus as a result of an agreement with Athanasius, he could have sent his two deacons to Alexandria along with those of the recently-consecrated Paulinus, either before or after he received the *Epistula catholica*. When the result of that was the *Tomus*, which would not satisfy the old fireball, the result was, eventually, the *Luciferiani*. He had consecrated someone he had accepted as the only honest cleric in town only to find Athanasius apparently trying to associate Paulinus with adherents of a hated heretic. Athanasius was probably satisfied to have used Lucifer in such an adventure, and to have got rid of him when he was no longer needed.

Athanasius then makes his claim that the bishops' enquiries had gone beyond the Nicene Creed in an effort to determine what was meant by those

[25] I translate the words of *Tomus* 7 οὐ σῶμα ἄψυχον οὐδ᾽ἀναισθετον οὐδ᾽ἀνόετον εἶχεν ὁ σώτηρ as 'The saviour did not have a body that was soulless or senseless or mindless', and take it that this refers to human faculties, despite the extensive argument of A. Grillmeier in *Christ in Christian tradition* (Atlanta 1975), 318–28. On the argument advanced in this paper, Athanasius may have been as uncertain as Grillmeier about the theology being advanced by his brother bishops, but still intent on pushing it forward in Antioch, because it would promote confusion and division among Catholics there. For a recent discussion of the phrase, based on more traditional assumptions about the *Tomus* (i.e. as pacific), see Pettersen, 'Arian context', 193–6, written, apparently, without knowledge of Tetz's 1988 article.

[26] Athanasius was completely dependent upon the two western bishops at this point, but he knew perfectly well that he could not sell their precious creed in the east.

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who thought that there were three *hypostases* in the godhead.[27] Having been satisfied that their belief in the Holy Trinity was orthodox, they quizzed those who insisted on one *hypostasis* until satisfied that they were not Sabellians. When everyone was agreed that the Nicene Creed was the best way, they passed on to the question of the human nature of Christ.

They took it that he had a human body, soul and mind. They urge Paulinus to rebuke those who do not agree and to accept those who agree without troubling too much about words.[28]

Finally Athanasius says that although nothing beyond the Nicene Creed was required, they had enquired into these things as well (ch. 9). He then tells Paulinus to read this *Tomus* out in public, and to invite other Christians to hear it.

The *Tomus* is signed by Athanasius, the other bishops assembled, two deacons of Lucifer and two more of Paulinus. These last must have been sent to Alexandria by Paulinus after his consecration, where they were, of course, welcomed by Athanasius. When the *Tomus* reached Antioch it was signed by Paulinus, who, to his credit, approached the doctrine of the Trinity directly. We are left to imagine the effect of hearing such a document upon the Catholics of Antioch. Lucifer's disapproval is on record.

Before the labours of Tetz, Bishop Hanson, in his 1988 book on the Arian controversy, had suspected that the church historians put all the blame on Lucifer for what was in fact an intransigence manifested by Athanasius towards Meletius, and he registered his opinion that the *Tomus* attempted to detach Meletius' followers from him, and unite them with Paulinus, but still he welcomed Athanasius' signal to his followers that *ousia* and *hypostasis* could be used in different senses.[29] Since Athanasius may have been the only eastern bishop denying this, I do not see that he deserves much credit for the admission. His choices were to make it or to allow Paulinus and his supporters to drift into heresy.[30] When, later on, he could speak for himself,[31] he declared that *ousia* meant *hypostasis* and nothing else. I take it that Hanson's suspicions about the traditional view of the *Tomus*, which were based on the addressees (and probably on some of his scepticism regarding Athanasius), have now been confirmed by the contents of the *Epistula catholica* exhibited by Tetz. In 362 the council, in Lucifer's absence, took a realistic view of the terms upon which Christians might be received into communion.

[27] Athanasius was probably the only eastern bishop who did not know the answer to this question.

[28] Paulinus is given fairly wide discretion, which suited Athanasius much better than providing a formula on which both groups could agree.

[29] Hanson, *Search*, 644.

[30] Marcellus of Ancyra was still very much alive: Basil, letter 69.

[31] *Epistula synodica ad afros*, said by Barnes (*Athanasius and Constantius*, 164), following Kannengiesser, to be a forgery. I think that the letter is genuine. The *hypostasis* = *ousia* passage is in ch. iv.

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There was nothing novel about the terms, for as long ago as May 351 that well-known 'heretic', Cyril the bishop of Jerusalem[32] had written a letter to that other well-known 'heretic', Constantius II,[33] concluding with the phrase ἅγια καὶ ὁμοούσιος Τριὰς, τὸν ἀληθινὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν *etc.*[34] not realising how suspicious modern scholarship would be about the words which he expected the orthodox emperor to approve. When Paulinus' deacons had brought news of his consecration by Lucifer to Alexandria, Athanasius and a few of his Egyptians sent Eusebius to Antioch with a much longer document than the *Epistula Catholica*, whose main purpose was to strengthen the position of the newly consecrated Paulinus, thereby ensuring the weakness of the orthodox community in Antioch, and the consequent improvement of his own position in the Church in the east, at least as seen from the west. Athanasius had had enough of councils in Antioch.[35]

So far from being a magnanimous offer to his defeated opponents, as modern scholarship believes, the *Tomus* is yet another piece of ecclesiastical politics which, as such, accommodates the dim view of Athanasius presented a century ago by Eduard Schwartz. This is a far cry from Robertson's claim that the *Tomus* represents the crown of Athanasius' career. I think that it serves better as an introduction to the last years of that career, during which he tried to keep the orthodox Christians in Antioch divided. He could do that simply by remaining silent when Basil of Caesarea implored him to drop Paulinus. Many have lamented the fact that Athanasius' letters to Basil no longer exist. Since Basil never mentions them,[36] I doubt that they ever existed. When Paulinus began to imitate Lucifer's old tricks by consecrating Diodorus bishop of Tyre, the elder statesman hailed Diodorus as his beloved fellow minister.[37]

I add one brief note here regarding the *Epistula catholica*. Neither Tetz nor Barnes offers any comment on the fact[38] that the epistle was not written by Athanasius, as if it were to be expected that he would enjoy the opportunity to have others do his writing for him. Robertson depicts Athanasius as a conqueror at this point. But the work of the *sunepiscopoi* may simply reflect the obvious weakness in Athanasius' position in 362, namely the fact that eastern

[32] He was described as such by Jerome and by many others to the present day, even though he was made a doctor of the Church in 1882.

[33] He was described as such by nearly all authors, ancient and modern.

[34] Several scholars have rejected the phrase (*PG* xxxiii.1176a) as an interpolation because it did not suit their notions of Constantius' theology. See, for example, J. Mader, followed by J. Lebon, who discusses the authenticity of the phrase in 'La Position de saint Cyrille de Jerusalem dans les luttes provoquées par l'arianisme', *Revue d'histoire ecclesiastique* xx (1924), 193 n. 2.

[35] They had deposed him in 339 and 349.

[36] Some readers may think that Basil, letter 80, refers to them, but I am not sure.

[37] Letter 64.

[38] This was argued by Monfaucon and Tetz. See Tetz, 'Ein enzyklisches Schreiben', 266–70.

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bishops would not accept a letter from him. That is why it was produced by another hand, and why it looks so sensible. When Athanasius wrote the *Tomus* later there was one bishop who would take delivery, one in Antioch, whose consecration by Lucifer he had, in all probability, arranged earlier. Other bishops in the east were a problematic audience.

In 362 there was a difference between a Nicene believer and a Nicene crank, and Athanasius was a member of the latter, very small, group. It did not much trouble him that Paulinus owed his church in Antioch to the indulgence of another Antiochene bishop, namely Euzoius, the old friend and fellow-traveller of Arius, or that he had been consecrated by a madman. The orthodox cause was now being advanced by bishops who were willing to quote the Nicene Creed correctly,[39] and face the problems which it presented.

[39] For Athanasius' misquotations see *De decretis* 20 and *De synodis* 40 where he quotes the anathema as 'those who say that he was of another *ousia*' instead of 'those who say that he was of another *hypostasis* or *ousia*'. For Basil's correct quotation see letter 125.

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