

2. Incomprehensibility of God in the First Phase of the Arian Controversy

2.1 The knowledge of God in Arius

2.1.1 The problem of Platonism of Arius

We can observe that in the 3rd century, the use of negative terms ascribed to God by Christian writers was expanding. But, likewise, Christians widely used philosophical terms and concepts to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is also clear that Christian writers had problems, similar to Philo's, concerning the Biblical doctrine of creation which had been absent in ancient thought, and must have been distinguished from the idea of the construction of the Universe already present in Plato. The situation seemed to be similar at the beginning of the 4th century when Christian writers became more aware of the problems with the use of the Platonic thought to explain the dogmas, especially given the rise of new heresies and most of all Arianism. We face here a difficult problem of the philosophical sources of Arius, which seems to be of utmost importance when one tries to understand the role of negative theology in his system. The question of what type of Platonism influenced Arius is crucial for our discussion because of profound differences between Middle-Platonism and Neoplatonism as regards negative theology. As we have seen above, for Middle Platonists, the supreme principle was, among other ways of describing it, the subject of ἀφάρεσις, but despite all negative terms ascribed to it, the One belonged to the world of intellect and could be called a being. For Plotinus, as we will yet see in detail, the One stayed absolutely above intellect and being, and thus negative terms became of greatest importance to describe the principle which stayed totally beyond understanding. So, if Arius knew Plotinus, he would have encountered negative theology in a much-developed state. The answer to this question is complicated not only because of a small number of fragments from Arius' works which have survived, but also because of how little we know about philosophical schools in Alexandria in the later part of the 3rd century. As Henri-Irénée Marrou points out, there is a gap in our knowledge covering the period between the passing of Plotinus in

244–6 AD and the time of Synesius, Hypatia, and Hierocles.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, there is a problem whether the *Enneads* (written in Rome) were known and popular in Alexandria at the beginning of the 4th century. Although scholars generally agree that we can trace a Platonic background in fragments of Arius' works, the discussion continues whether it was Middle-Platonism or Neoplatonism of Plotinus.

It seems that for now the discussion on the philosophical background of Arius' theology shows that the influence is twofold. On one hand, Arius certainly was more reliable as regards philosophical and dialectical techniques than his critics.¹⁴⁹ On the other, his doctrine was not a product of a dialogue or great influence of Non-Christian Platonism. As G.C. Stead shows, scholars have cut corners when finding Platonic sources in Arius, because almost all concepts and terms that he uses had been already present in earlier Christian tradition, and he certainly could have conceived them himself as the one who reasserted the traditional Christian teaching.¹⁵⁰ Even if we agree that he could have seen his own teaching as a development of the Christian tradition, this does not mean that there is no philosophical background in it. Platonism is present in Arius' doctrine because it was already incorporated in Christian teaching, and negative theology followed suit. However, one main doubt still remains, namely whether Arius was influenced by Plotinus. On one hand, Rowan Williams claims that such influence can be confirmed, and on the other hand, he sees it within the topic of comprehensibility of God.¹⁵¹ He argues not only for the influence of Plotinus, but also the influence of Neoplatonic philosophers who were

148 H.I. Marrou, *Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neo-Platonism*, in: *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano, Oxford 1963, pp. 126–150.

149 C.G. Stead agrees at this point with the conclusions of P. Henry, cf. C.G. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, JTS, vol. XV, pt. 1, 1964, p. 16.

150 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 19; 30. That also explains why other heterodox Christian writers of the first half of the 4th century did not perceive themselves as “Arians.” In their eyes, they were also defenders of the core of Christian teaching. See, R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy, 318–381*, Grand Rapids 2005, pp. 123–128.

151 R. Williams broadly argues philosophical sources of Arius in his work, *Arius Heresy and Tradition*, Grand Rapids 2002, pp. 181–234.

contemporary to Arius, such as Iamblichus and Porphyry.¹⁵² But his claims were the subject of severe criticism by Christopher Stead, who claims that all points of influence underlined by Williams can be found already in Middle-Platonic texts and because of that there is no hard evidence that Arius knew Porphyry, Iamblichus, and even Plotinus.¹⁵³ Although he found no arguments to absolutely exclude the possibility of such influence and in a revised edition of his book, Williams only makes note of Steeds' criticism but does not accept it.¹⁵⁴ However, there is yet another strong confirmation of the influence of Plotinus on Arius. Raul Morlley confirms that the thought of Arius is well organized, so we can see it as a system, and this "Arius' system is much like that of Plotinus..."¹⁵⁵ So the question still remains unsolved, and cautious Williams' remarks describe it well when he says "we can catch a glimpse of Arius' metaphysics and cosmology."¹⁵⁶

2.1.2 Monad and Dyad – the problem of creation

The central problem of entire Arianism is the understanding of creation, since the main claim is that the Logos was not eternally generated but created by the Father. Since the comprehension of this issue underlies specific understanding of the relationship between God and the Universe, it is also of utmost importance for the way the knowledge of God can be perceived. In his seminal article, H.A. Wolfson suggests that we can trace the origins of the Arian conflict in the interpretation of the beginning of the prologue to the Gospel of John (J: 1, 1–4). Those words were like an outline which from the time of Apologists began to be filled with interpretations by Christians. We have already seen a stage of this process in Clement of Alexandria, but those interpretations referred to Greek philosophy and especially Philo of

152 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 31; 194; 225.

153 C.G. Stead finds four main arguments for Neoplatonic influence in Williams' book, and he repels them one by one. Cf. C. Stead, *Was Arius a Neoplatonist?*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 39–52.

154 Cf. R. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 262–264.

155 R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, in: *Platonism in the Late Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 205; 215.

156 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

Alexandria.¹⁵⁷ The main outcome of this process is the understanding of the Logos as the ideal pattern of creation and the perfect mind whose thoughts are ideas. The Prologue also introduces the two stages of existence of the Logos: first – the existence with God the Father; second – the Logos that was with God is also God through whom all things were made. As Wolfson suggests, we can find a similar concept in Philo who wants to harmonize different statements of Plato by saying of ideas that they are eternal and simultaneously that they are created by God.¹⁵⁸ But the Fathers of the Church differed with Philo in two main points. Firstly, for them, the Logos was not created but generated, and secondly, the Logos was not only divine but was perceived as equal to God in divinity.

H.A. Wolfson points out that in the 2nd century, two interpretations of the status of the Logos existed simultaneously. For some Apologists, the Logos was eternal in the thought of God and then was generated, and hence was with God. Others claimed that at the beginning, before the creation of the Universe, the Logos came into being and was with God.¹⁵⁹ For H.A. Wolfson, it was Irenaeus and Origen who rejected this two-staged theory and claimed that the Logos was eternally generated by God. While Irenaeus made it in opposition to the Gnostics, Origen based his claims on purely philosophical grounds. Origen is more important here because his thought is a testimony of the transition from the Philonic to Plotinian interpretation of the Prologue.¹⁶⁰ At the beginning of the 4th century, both theories of generation of the Logos existed, and in both, the Logos was perceived as God, but this was changed by Arius, who gave a new meaning to the twofold-stage theory. H.A. Wolfson sees in Arius' opinions references to Philo's interpretation of creation, especially when he claims that at the beginning: "For God was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor

157 Cf. H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, DOP, vol. 12 (1958), p. 13. H.A. Wolfson sees the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria as the main reference which serves to understand the problem, and he presents Arius as influenced in his claims mainly by Philo.

158 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

159 The second theory is based on the understanding of the term ἦν which could mean not "was" but rather "became" (ἐγένετο). Wolfson points out that in the Septuagint the term "to be" (εἶναι) also means "to become." *Ibid.*, p. 14.

160 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the Wisdom.”¹⁶¹ Then the Logos was created as the means to create the Universe, and thus the Logos came to the second stage of existence. At the first stage, the Logos is described by Arius as “a property (ἰδίαν) coexistent with God,”¹⁶² while in the second stage, it is described as “the Son.” For A.H. Wolfson, such statements are similar to Philo’s for whom the Logos is primarily a property of God and then becomes a separate being.¹⁶³ Therefore, Arius simply accepted the twofold-stage theory, which was not usually perceived as heterodox, but the problem lay in his interpretation of that theory. He claimed that the only sound conclusion is that the Logos came to existence “out of things that were not (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων),”¹⁶⁴ and that meant that he was created by the Father *ex nihilo*. We shall come back to this important expression, but it is worth mentioning that in the eyes of A.H. Wolfson, Arius had two main religious reasons to make such a claim. Firstly, he wanted to preserve monotheism and the perception of God as the one, which was to be destroyed by Orthodox statements on three hypostases. Secondly, he defended the understanding of God as the Creator and not merely the craftsmen of the Universe. With respect to both, Arius can be perceived as the one who returns to the Old Testament and the Philonic conception of God. Wolfson concludes that from the philosophical point of view, Arius presented the anti-mythological Platonic-Aristotelian position and his opponents based their opinions on the Stoico-Neoplatonic rationalization of mythology.¹⁶⁵ Although such conclusion based on Arius’

161 *Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 5. μόνος ὁ Θεός, καὶ οὐπω ἦν ὁ Λόγος καὶ ἡ σοφία (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 308).

162 *Ibid.* I, 5. Δύο γοῦν σοφίας, εἶναι, μίαν μὲν τῆν ἰδίαν καὶ συνυπάρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

163 A.H. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 16. Wolfson sees other similarities between Philo and Arius in naming the Logos as “a co-worker” (συνεργός) of God in making the Universe.

164 *Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 5 (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

165 A.H. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20. It seems that Wolfson’s conclusions are too general, and he is also wrong in interpreting the Orthodox position as claiming that God was perceived as “consisting of three inseparable substances, called hypostases or persons.” (p. 19). Such an understanding of the Orthodox view would certainly lead to a conclusion that it endangered the unity of God, but it is sufficient to claim that there is one substance and three hypostases to undermine Wolfson’s argumentation.

possible intentions seems to me pure speculation, Wolfson is right in pointing out the philosophical background of the entire controversy and the importance of ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων.

Wolfson's understanding of Arius was criticized by G.C. Stead, who agrees that he accepted the two-stage theory of the generation of the Logos, but only in a certain sense. However, looking for the philosophical background of Arius in his article, G.C. Stead agrees that it was undoubtedly Platonism.¹⁶⁶ He points out the beginning of Arius' letter to Alexander, which contains an unprecedented cumulation of the term μονάς,¹⁶⁷ which has its Platonic background, but can also be referred to Philo, and moreover it was already present in theological literature since it had also been used by Clement and Origen.¹⁶⁸ This term was so important for Arius because it stressed the divine simplicity as a bare unity without any distinctions, and it also allowed him to argue that the Trinity cannot be understood as a kind of any distinctions within the being of God, but the Son and the Spirit must be conceived as separate and subordinate created beings.¹⁶⁹ The Platonic background of the understanding of God as an indivisible monad would be even greater if we could read the fragment of *Thalia*, in which Arius seems to apply the term δυάς to the Logos, as the evocation of the Middle-Platonic Second Principle. This line reads: "Understand that the Monad [always] was; but the Dyad was not, before it was in existence."¹⁷⁰ Christopher Stead once again questions Neoplatonic references so strongly claimed by Rowan Williams¹⁷¹ and shows that it could simply mean "the Second" or

166 C.G. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

167 *De Synodis* 16, 2, 3–4. μόνον ἀγέννητον, μόνον αἰδίου, μόνον ἄναρχον, μόνον ἀληθινόν, μόνον ἀθανασίαν ἔχοντα, μόνον σοφόν, μόνον ἀγαθόν, μόνον δυνάστην, πάντων κριτήν, διοικητήν, οἰκονόμον, ἀτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον, δίκαιον καὶ ἀγαθόν (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243).

168 C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

169 *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

170 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 28. σύνεες ὅτι ἡ μονάς ἦν, ἡ δυάς δὲ οὐκ ἦν, πρὶν ὑπάρξει (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

171 Rowan Williams does not think that Stead's arguments on "uncomplimentary" understanding of δυάς forced him to change his conclusions. He underlines that it is not necessary to translate δυάς as Second God and says: "I am not sure that we need to resort to this explanation" (R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 191).

“Twofold”, and most of all “in Platonic circles duality implies imperfection, matter, the world of senses, the left hand, the female principle.” Nevertheless, he also finds some uses of *δυάς* in Philo and Chaldean Oracles,¹⁷² so references to Middle-Platonic principles seem plausible. Moreover, along this line, we have the Dyad contrasted with the Monad and that opens up the interpretation that Arius understood the relationship between the Father and the Logos in the Platonic fashion. So *δυάς* could be read as a being which is inferior to *μονάς*, that is the Father. The act of creation is then seen by Arius as the emergence of the plurality from the unity, and this is consistent with the general theological claim that the Logos is a creation. The main borderline between the Creator and the creation runs between the unity and the plurality, since the Logos cannot be called the Monad like the Father: it must belong to the created reality. If we interpret this in the Neoplatonic fashion, we can resolve Stead’s objection as to the Dyad being related to matter and imperfection, because Plotinus also claimed that intellectual matter existed as the cause of differentiation of ideas.¹⁷³ For Plotinus, intellectual matter is so important because it also allows for arguing the passivity of the second principle which is not in itself the active principle of multiplication. Moreover, for Plotinus, the Dyad is the first product of the process which comes from the One but is indefinite until it turns back to the Source in contemplation. Only then it becomes the Intellect and differentiates itself from the One.¹⁷⁴ Once again, at every moment of the process, the Intellect is shaped and acted upon by the One itself. As Rowan Williams notes, the Neoplatonic understanding of first principle serves well Arius’ purpose because it is a “sharp rejection of ‘correlativity’ of Father and Son.”¹⁷⁵ As we will see below, such a view is also consistent with negative theology of Arius, because like the One, God the Father as *μονάς* must remain unknown and is best described in negative terms.

There is yet another mode of expressing the difference between the Father and the Son which was used by Arius. He was one of the first who stressed the understanding of the act of the creation of the Son as the act

172 C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

173 Cf. R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

174 Plotinus, *Enn.* V, 1, 5 V, 4, 2 (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 2, pp. 191–192; 235–238).

175 R. Williams, *op. cit.* p. 196.

of God's will. Although there are many aspects of the Arian teaching which will develop or even disappear in the second half of the 4th century, the problem of the will of the Father constantly reappears in the Neo-Arian teaching and almost all successors of Arius claim that God created the Son out of His will and wish (βούλημα καὶ θέλημα).¹⁷⁶ Arius' understanding of the generation of the Son as the act of will is proclaimed many times in the preserved fragments,¹⁷⁷ and this statement can be explained by reference to Plato's *Timaeus*, where he says that lesser gods have been brought into being (γεγένησθε) and will be preserved by divine will (βουλήσεως).¹⁷⁸ This fragment was of great importance in the debate on the eternity of the cosmos, and was rejected by the philosophers who shared the Aristotelian view of its eternity.¹⁷⁹ This passage, however, was used by Christian writers to describe the generation of the Logos for the works of creation. We see such teaching in Philo and also in Christian Apologists, but Origen, who faced the gnostic doctrines, admits it more guardedly.¹⁸⁰ Such a notion was certainly unacceptable for his critics and most of all Arius, who, by underlining the importance of God's will, tried to show a partition between the Father and the Son. Consequently, for him, the act of creation is perceived as more arbitrary. There can be nothing that would restrain God in His act of creation – it must be perceived as absolutely free. Such a notion psychologizes the act of creation and, as R. Mortley notes, it simply makes the gap between the Father and the Son even greater, since this act is perceived as “a matter of psychological autonomy, and not of nature.”¹⁸¹

How, then, did Arius understand the universe? Although, as we have seen, we can find many references to philosophical sources in the doctrine

176 We can see such a strong emphasis of God's will in Arius, Astorius, and Eusebius of Nicomedia (R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 214). We shall also see that this topic is of utmost importance to Eunomius.

177 Cf. e.g., *De Synodis* 16, 2, 8 (Opitz, vol. 2, pp. 243; 33; NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 458) ὑποστήσαντα ἰδίῳ θελήματι ἄτρεπτον (“He made Him subsist at His own will”); *Epistula ad episcopos Aegipti at Libyae* 12. ὅτε γὰρ γέγονεν, ὅτε βεβούληται αὐτὸν ὁ Θεὸς δημιουργῆσαι. (PG 25, 564 B). “For He has then originated when God has chosen to produce Him” (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 229).

178 *Tim.*, 41 A-B.

179 Cf. G.C. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

180 Cf. *ibid.* p. 28.

181 R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

of Arius, they no longer seem to position the universe in the Platonic way as divided into a sensual and a noetic realm.¹⁸² We observe here a very important shift in perspective, from the Greek to the Christian worldview, and the dividing line now is drawn between the Creator and the creation. This results in a dualistic vision of the Universe, which is shared by Arius and Athanasius. The borderline between the Creator and the creation lies in a different place in both cases, but this does not change the fact that it was evidently a dualistic worldview.¹⁸³

2.1.3 Creation *ex nihilo*? The problem of a “non-being”

Another issue which arises when one is studying the fragment of Arius’ doctrine of Creation which could be referred to philosophical sources and has an influence on negative speaking of God is the question of *creatio ex nihilo*. Athanasius starts his summary of the claims put forth by Arius with the sentence: “Arius and those with him thought and professed thus: ‘God made the Son out of nothing and called Him His Son’.”¹⁸⁴ Although this claim was understood by almost all scholars as the statement that the Son was created *ex nihilo*, G.C. Stead put those opinions in doubt. He noted that the expression “ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων” alone is not enough to understand Arius’ doctrine in such a way. The term τὰ οὐκ ὄντα does not necessarily mean non-being in a sense that something does not exist,¹⁸⁵ but can mean

182 H. A. Wolfson suggests that it was an Orthodox Father who first dispelled the Platonic view of the universe while Arians still understood it as divided into noetic and sensual, but this opinion seems false. See H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

183 Commenting on dualism of both sides of the discussion, Stead says: “Arius’ divergence from Alexander and Athanasius may be indicated as follows; the latter are prepared to do violence to their philosophic a dualism in order to establish a position for the Son which is theologically and devotionally adequate. Arius does his best (at least initially) to establish such a position while keeping his basic dualism intact.” G.C. Stead, *Platonism of Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

184 *De Synodis* 15, 1, 1–2. “Ἀρειος καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ φρονήσαντες καὶ λέγοντες ‘ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων πεποιήκε τὸν υἱὸν ὁ θεὸς καὶ κέκληκεν αὐτῷ υἱόν (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242); Cf. *Orat. cont. Arian.* I, 9, (Bright, p. 9).

185 Cf. C.G. Stead, *The Word “From Nothing”*, in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, Burlington 2000, pp. 679–680.

that it is indeterminate, bad, or “anything which is distinguishable from ὁ ὄν, the One ultimate reality.”¹⁸⁶ It seems that both Arius and Athanasius understood this expression as the description of a change, since any *x* must change from something which is non-*x*. For G.C. Stead, this expression is then a strong divergence from Origen, who understood God as related not only to the Son but also to the world on principle, and, therefore, claiming that the Logos was made by the Father from “non-being” could be a criticism of Alexander’s Origenistic doctrine.¹⁸⁷ Going further down in the consideration of what this expression of Arius would really mean, we can say that the Logos pre-existed in the thought of God and then he was generated. Arius wanted to express that using the Aristotelian terminology.¹⁸⁸ Such an understanding is certainly based on the philosophical meaning of “non-being,” but I doubt that it can be applied here in such a manner. Nevertheless, even if we reject it, the main purpose of the use of ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων is still plausible. It was a very strong claim of the transcendence of the Father who stays unrelated to all creations, even the Son. Since the creations can be called “beings,” the Creator in this sense must be totally different and thus He must be described as “non-being”; so, because of His remoteness from the world, He can be properly described only in negative terms.

The interpretation proposed by G.C. Stead can be undermined when we turn to one of the most philosophizing late opponent of Arius – Marius Victorinus. In his eyes, it is necessary to refute the claim that the Logos was made by God ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, because it means that the Son was generated *de nihilo*.¹⁸⁹ But Victorinus also feels compelled to clarify fully the meaning of “non-being”; therefore, he defines four types of non-being. He does it in reply to a probably imagined character who defends the Arian position – Candidus,¹⁹⁰ and the consideration of the meaning of “non-being” is the main part of his letter. Victorinus explains that there is:

186 G.C. Stead, *The Platonism of Arius...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

188 G.C. Stead, *The Word “From Nothing”*, *op. cit.* p. 681.

189 *Adv. Ar.* 2, 10, 34–36. “Hinc ergo exclusus Arius, qui protulit ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν. Sententia eius fuit et illa ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων esse filium id est de nihilo” (SC 68, p. 424).

190 Since we know that Candidus is a fictitious character (*cf.* P. Nautin, *Candidus l’Arien*, in *L’Homme devant Dieu, Mélanges offerts au H. de Lubac*, t. 1, Paris

“[non-being] according to negation, so that absolutely and in all ways there is the privation of existence; according to difference from another nature; according to ‘to be’ which is not yet but which can be and will be; according to ‘to be’ which is above all existents.”¹⁹¹

We shall come back to a more extensive explanation of the meaning of those four types, but for now let us note that among them only one (non-being according to negation) describes something which simply does not exist. Speaking on God the Father, Victorinus says that He is both a “non-being” (τὸ μὴ ὄν) and a “being” (ὄν). He is a being because He is the Father of a being, and because the cause must be superior to its effect, He is also a non-being.¹⁹² Therefore, He must be named a non-being “according to ‘to be’ which is above all existents,” and the best way to describe the Father is the term a “total pre-being” (*totum προόν*).¹⁹³ For Marius Victorinus, the difference between the Father and the Son is then described by a distinction between non-being and being, but unlike Arius, he does not view this distinction as discontinuation but it seems to be rather the best explanation of the relationship between persons which dwells inside the substance of God. Therefore, the Logos is described as a first being and is called an “absolutely perfect being” (*omnimodis perfectum ὄν*), which was generated eternally by the Father.¹⁹⁴ Finally, he says that we can also call the Father by the name of *Logos*, “but *Logos* [is] silent and repose (*silens et requiescens*)”; therefore, it is better to say that “the *Logos* is unbegotten rather than made from nonexistent.”¹⁹⁵ Marius Victorinus admits then that the Son can be

1964, pp. 309; 317), we may ascribe the conviction of the importance of the explanation how to understand the *Logos* made from non-being to Victorinus.

191 *Ad Cand.* 4, 1–5. “Quod quidem intellegitur et vocatur quattuor modis: iuxta negationem, omnino omnimodis ut privatio sit existentis, iuxta alterius ad alium naturam, iuxta nondum esse, quod futurum est et potest esse, iuxta quod omnia que sunt, est esse” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, pp. 63–64).

192 *Ad Cand.* 4, 5–10 (SC 68, p. 136).

193 *Ad Cand.* 2, 28 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 62).

194 *Ad Cand.* 15, 3 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 72).

195 *Ad Cand.* 17, 11–15. “Propterea deus et λόγος, quoniam circa deum et in principio fuit, sicuti et deus non genitus est λόγος, cum deus ipse λόγος sit, sed silens et requiescens λόγος. Ut videas necessitatem cognoscendi multo magis non genitum esse λόγον quam ipsum fieri ex his quae non sunt” (SC 68, pp. 154–156; tr. Clark, p. 74).

called the one generated from non-being, but this non-being must not be understood as something which does not exist. He sees the philosophical background of the expression ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, but simultaneously claims that Arius completely misunderstood it. Therefore, if G.C. Stead's interpretation is correct, it would mean that Marius Victorinus misinterpreted this expression in Arius.

But there is yet another thing which for Victorinus is the effect of calling the Father a "non-being." He completely agrees with Arius that this is a basis of negative theology, which must be applied to the Father. Because he is above every ὄν, he is also above all knowledge (*supra omnem cognoscentiam*).¹⁹⁶ We shall see a more detailed analysis of negative theology of Marius Victorinus further on in this chapter, but here it has to be mentioned that he seems to have believed that such application of negative theology may be reconciled with the Orthodox view. It is then possible to apply negative terms to the Father, and at the same time, it may be claimed that the Logos is the object of positive knowledge, and such an expression does not destroy consubstantiality of the divine persons.

2.1.4 The attributes of God from Arius' perspective

Arian claims regarding the transcendence of God also had a profound impact on the teaching on his attributes. Since God the Father is perceived as a *monad*, he is most of all simple and cannot be divided in any way. It is the Logos which may be perceived as the principle of multiplicity. Since the Son is a first creation, He also must be different in the aspect of having attributes which were perceived as naturally ascribable to God's essence. The fragment of the Proverbs 8:22 was in this case the most problematic one. It is the only place in the Holy Scripture where the Wisdom of God says of itself: "The Lord created me at the beginning of His way for His works." (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ).¹⁹⁷ Arius and

196 *Ad Cand.* 13, 8. (SC 68, p. 148).

197 This fragment may be understood in this way only in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew text. Other translations were proposed by Orthodox writers. Since at the time another version of the text existed, refutation of the Arian understanding of this passage may be made solely on the philological ground, cf. T. Stepien, *Created or Uncreated Wisdom? Arguments on Christ*

his successors interpreted this fragment by identifying the Wisdom with the Son and the Logos, and therefore He may be also understood as having been created. Since it is the only sentence in the Scripture which calls the Son by the name of creation, Arius cannot omit the problem of the manner in which we can call the Son of God the Wisdom.¹⁹⁸ To sustain his claims, he must explain that the Wisdom which is the Son is different from the one that that Father has as an attribute of his own nature: “Accordingly, he says that there are two wisdoms: first, the attribute coexistent with God, and next, that in this wisdom the Son was originated, and was only named Wisdom and Word as partaking of it. ‘For Wisdom,’ saith he, ‘by the will of the wise God, had its existence in Wisdom.’”¹⁹⁹ Here we see a division and, to some extent – a connection between the wisdoms of the Father and the Son, but there are two Wisdoms of God, not one. However, there is a problem of the meaning of the Wisdom of the Father, which is not simply an attribute (ιδίωv) but rather a “coexistent attribute” (τῆν ιδίαν καὶ συνπαρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ). It seems that on one hand Arius wanted to put emphasis on two wisdoms, but on the other, he also wanted the simplicity of God to remain intact, and thus he calls wisdom a “coexistent attribute.” But this results in a rather odd conception of an attribute of God being somehow different from God’s essence. It seems that such claims had its earlier formulation in the Alexandrian tradition, but Arius goes much further in the understanding of the Son as the one who only participates in the attributes of the Father,²⁰⁰ and only thanks to that participation can be called God.²⁰¹ The attributes of

as the Wisdom of God in the Polemic of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa against Eunomius, in: *Sophia. the Wisdom of God*, ed. Th. Hainthaler, F. Mali, G. Emmenegger, M.L. Ostermann, Innsbruck, Wien 2017, pp. 147–155.

- 198 G.C. Stead notes that Arius too much relied on this fragment, and this made him vulnerable to the arguments of his critics, C.G. Stead, *The Word ‘From Nothing’* in: *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, op. cit., p. 683.
- 199 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 5. Δύο γοῦν σοφίας φησὶν εἶναι, μίαν μὲν τὴν ιδίαν καὶ συνπαρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ, τὸν δὲ Υἱὸν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ σοφίᾳ γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ ταύτης μετέχοντα ὠνομάσθαι μόνον Σοφίαν καὶ Λόγον. Ἡ Σοφία γάρ, φησὶ, τῇ σοφίᾳ ὑπῆρξε σοφοῦ Θεοῦ θελήσει (Bright, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).
- 200 Cf. C.G. Stead, *Platonism of Arius*, op. cit., p. 21.
- 201 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 9; καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθινὸς Θεὸς ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλὰ μετοχῆ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐθεοποιήθη· (Bright, p. 9). “Christ is not very God, but He, as others, was made God by participation” (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 311).

the Son are parallel to the Father, but they are generated. Similarly, we can call him the name of Wisdom, Logos, and Power only because all of them were given to him by the grace of God.²⁰² Therefore, the Father gives to the Son what he possesses in his own nature upon with the first act of creation. C.G. Stead proposes to understand this as a “two-level theory” in which God the Father simply has wisdom, power, etc., while the Son, being the perfect creature, learns wisdom. This also means that the ingenerated Logos as well as all attributes are possessed by the Father in his indistinguishable unity, while in the Son as the first creation those attributes differ and are obtained not possessed as such.²⁰³

Despite all of the uncertainty of such reconstruction of Arius’ teaching on the attributes of God, we can see that it is plausible in the context of other parts of his teaching. As regards the Wisdom of God as well as other attributes, Arius wants to secure the transcendent position of the Father by saying that His attributes are completely different from those which are possessed by the Son. Therefore, even if we can know the Wisdom which the Son is, we cannot have a proper knowledge of the Wisdom of the Father. It could be only the cognition based on the participation of the Son’s multiple names and attributes in the true attributes of the simple, remote, and transcendent God.

2.1.5 Negative theology of Arius

Since it expresses rather the lack of knowledge, negative language seems to be the best choice to speak about the Father who alone is the Creator of the Universe and is utterly transcendent. In the preserved fragments of Arius’ works, we find a very frequent use of negative terms, especially in the longest preserved fragment of *Thalia*. This text, quoted by Athanasius, begins as follows: “God Himself then, in His own nature, is ineffable by

202 *Orat. con. Arian.* I, 9 (Bright, p. 9).

203 G.C. Stead refers here to the “two-level theory” proposed by A.H. Wolfson, saying that such theory can be plausible only in case of the attributes of God without speaking of the generation of the Logos as such. Cf. C.G. Stead, *Platonism of Arius, op. cit.*, p. 20.

all men.”²⁰⁴ How, then, can we even speak about such ineffable God? The following verses show the mode of speaking about the Father; namely, that we can do it only because we know the Son of God:

“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.”²⁰⁵

Such a mode of speaking is obviously a negative one, and we can apply one term to the Father because he is not of what we know about the Logos. Robert Mortley suggests that this implies a kind of a relationship between the Father and the Son. He underlines the causal meaning of “because” (διὰ), which is of utmost importance especially in the first verse of this fragment.²⁰⁶ We find many philosophical references to this phrase, which go back to *Phedrus* of Plato, where he speaks of the ungenerated principle, which is the source of any motion.²⁰⁷ Mortley also suggests, referring to Plotinus, that there is a clear link between the ἀρχὴ and the ἀγέννητον in Platonic literature.²⁰⁸ This similarity is important because here unbegotten is used as a negation of begotten. Therefore, we observe the use of negative theology, which is similar to Medioplatonic *aphairesis*. We cannot have a

204 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 9. Αὐτὸς γοῦν ὁ θεὸς καθὼ ἐστὶν ἄρητος ἅπασιν ὑπάρχει (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

205 *De Synodis* 15, 3, 13–16: ἀγέννητον δὲ αὐτὸν φαμεν διὰ τὸν τὴν φύσιν γεννητὸν· τοῦτον ἀναρχον ἀνυμνοῦμεν διὰ τὸν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα, αἰδίον δὲ αὐτὸν σέβομεν διὰ τὸν ἐν χρόνοις γεγάοτα (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

206 Cf. R. Morley, *Alien God in Arius*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

207 *Phaed.* 245 C-E. “Now, a source is ungenerated, because everything that is generated is necessarily generated from a source, but there is nothing for a source to be generated from. For if a source were generated from anything, it would stop being a source. Since a source is ungenerated, it is also necessarily imperishable, because a defunct source can never be generated from anything else nor can it bring about generation in anything else, given that everything is generated from a source. And so it is a self-mover that is a source of motion, and a self-mover can neither perish nor be generated, or else the entire universe and the whole of e creation will inevitably run down and stop, and will never again find anything to act as a source of motion and generation” (tr. R. Waterfield, pp. 27–28).

208 Cf. Plotinus *Enn.* V, 4, 1, 18; (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 2, p. 234) II, 4, 5, 26 (vol. 1, p. 169); R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

clear concept of the source, so we must negate our conceptions by cutting off what we know of a lesser being. There is one more reference to Plotinus here, because he also underlines that we can be taught by such negations.²⁰⁹ But we must also admit that the use of negative theology in the case of Arius is different. Discussing the way of predication on the Good, Plotinus underlines that we must obtain some knowledge of the Good before we can look and thus: “We come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions (ἀναλογίαι τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις), by our understanding of its subsequents, of all what is derived from the Good, by the upward steps towards it.”²¹⁰ To obtain this knowledge, our negative terms must necessarily contain some positive knowledge,²¹¹ and thus the outcome of this knowledge seems to be uncertain as something between the positive and the negative. R. Mortley suggests that the use of negative theology by Arius is different because it seems to be a “watertight logical argument” like a logical demonstration which resembles rather the negative method of Proclus.²¹² The goal of Arius here seems to lay in showing the total incognoscibility of the Father and a way to achieve the goal of separating the Father from the Son. So the use of negative theology is very important in the argumentation and serves to show inferiority of the Son. The Logos must not be equal to the Father since we can know, understand, and have a conception of the Son, while we cannot have any positive knowledge about the Father. Therefore, the Son must be a created being because our created intellects can conceive him.

For Arius, then, God the Father is not only incomprehensible, but is completely alien not only to our knowledge, but also to the Son. Robert Mortley points out in his seminal article the importance of Arius’ frequently calling God the Father “alien God” (ξένος). In Athanasius’ account, we read that “alien is the Son to the Father according to essence,”²¹³ and

209 Cf. R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

210 *Enn.* VI, 7, 36 (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 3, pp. 229–230).

211 *Enn.* VI, 7, 38 (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 3, p. 232).

212 Cf. R. Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

213 *De synodis* 15, 3, 20. ξένος τοῦ υἱοῦ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὁ πατήρ, ὅτι ἄναρχος ὑπάρχει (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242); Cf. *Or. con. Arian.* I, 6. Καὶ πάντων ξένον καὶ ἀνομοίων ὄντων τοῦ Θεοῦ κατ’ οὐσίαν, οὕτω καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἀλλότριος μὲν καὶ ἀνόμιος κατὰ πάντα τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας καὶ ιδιότητός ἐστι· τῶν δὲ γενητῶν καὶ κτισμάτων ἴδιος καὶ εἷς αὐτῶν τυγχάνει (Bright, p. 6). “And, whereas all beings are foreign

in another fragment, where Alexander sums up Arian teaching, we have an even stronger confirmation that the Logos is “foreign, alien from, and separated from the essence of God.”²¹⁴ Such a peculiar vocabulary and radical statements caught the attention of Athanasius and provoked strong opposition, as the claim of total difference between the Father and the Son. Mortley says that although the term ξένος was almost non-existent in Platonic literature, we can trace many references to the second term used by Arius – ἀλλότριος. It was present in the negative vocabulary of Middle-Platonism, Valentinian Gnosticism, and once again we can find it in Plotinus. This word is used very often and is “a specific characteristic of his language,” especially in his rejection of the Gnostics.²¹⁵ While the latter, according to Plotinus, confessed total difference and discontinuity between the intellectual and the material world, he wants to argue rather for continuity between them. There must be some link between the Soul and the material universe because the sensual reality is built by a rational design, and it must somehow correspond to the maker.²¹⁶ Here, we have not only the confirmation of possible references to the philosophical vocabulary, but also we can see that for Arius, those terms serve the same purpose – to show the lack of continuity between the Father and the Son, between the first creation and the Creator,²¹⁷ and this gap can be best described in negative terms. A radical difference between the Father and the Logos is also expressed by Arius in his claims on the knowledge that the Son has of the Father:

and different from God in essence, so too is ‘the Word alien and unlike in all things to the Father’s essence and propriety,’ but belongs to things originated and created, and is one of these” (tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 309).

214 *De decretis Niceane synodi* 6, 1, 4–5. ξένος τε και ἀλλότριος και ἀπεσχοινισμέος ἐστιν ὁ λόγος τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίας; (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 5; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 70).

215 R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

216 *Enn.* II, 9, 11–12 (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 1, pp. 219–221).

217 R. Mortley claims that such a view would certainly seem strange for Plotinus. “We can assert, then, that the separation between Father and Son envisaged by Arius would have been a disturbing otherness for Plotinus. He would concede no doubt that such a degree of otherness could exist, but would regret it, and probably consider it to constitute a separation only between principles which are very distant from each other” *op. cit.*, p. 208.

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.²¹⁸

The Son cannot see the Father and cannot comprehend him, and cannot have a clear conception not only of the essence of the Father, but also of his own essence.²¹⁹ Such is for Arius the effect of putting a borderline between the Creator and the creation, between those two persons. It is significant that in this text, the conception that the Son does not have the knowledge is expressed by the term *καταλήψις*, which has obvious Stoic reference. As related by Stobaeus, the main Stoic definition of knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) was expressed as “a cognition (*καταλήψις*) that is secure and unshakable by reason.”²²⁰ The main criteria which cognition must fulfil to be knowledge is to be sure and secure, which is possible when the object was grasped

218 *De synodis* 15, 3, 34–43. συνελόντι εἰπεῖν τῷ υἱῷ ὁ θεὸς ἄρρητος ὑπάρχει· ἔστι γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ὃ ἐστὶ τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἄλεκτος, ὥστε οὐδὲν τῶν λεγομένων κατὰ τε κατάληψιν συνίει ἐξειπεῖν ὁ υἱός. ἀδύνατα γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν πατέρα τε ἐξιχνιάσει, ὅς ἐστιν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ. αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίαν οὐκ οἶδεν, υἱὸς γὰρ ὧν θελήσει πατὴρ ὑπῆρξεν ἀληθῶς. τίς γοῦν λόγος συγχωρεῖ τὸν ἐκ πατρὸς ὄντα αὐτὸν τὸν γεννήσαντα γινῶναι ἐν καταλήψει; δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι τὸ ἀρχὴν ἔχον, τὸν ἀναρχον, ὡς ἔστιν, ἐμπερινοῆσαι ἢ ἐμπεριδράζασθαι οὐχ οἶόν τέ ἐστιν; (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 458).

219 It seems that the claim of incomprehensibility of the Father not only to men but also to the Logos was common among Arians, cf. D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians. The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, Oxford 2007, p. 204.

220 Stobaeus, *Ant.* II, 7, 51. εἶναι δὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμην κατάληψιν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου· (Wachsmuth/Hense, pp. 73; 19–21).

firmly by reason.²²¹ Arius uses this term to confirm that the Son cannot have the grasp of the essence of the Father and even of his own essence. As Williams notes, it is a puzzle to scholars what was the origin of Arius' claim of the Son's ignorance of his own οὐσία, and he proposes that the most probable point of reference is Plotinus, who provided the conceptual framework to such claim.²²² But there is still a possibility of the vision of the Father, and the lack of knowledge is not complete. In another fragment of *Thalia*, Arius claims: "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."²²³ So a kind of vision is possible, but it is limited; we find here another similarity to *Enneads*, where Plotinus describes how the Intellect sees the One.²²⁴ Arius and Plotinus use a similar language here, and the vision of the One is also possible according to the power (δύναμις) of the One, not the Intellect itself. Although some scholars understood that fragment according to the well-known doctrine that God is known thanks to His "powers," Williams disagrees with that and claims that the knowledge of the Intellect primarily concerns the Intellect itself and that it comes from the One: "Thus the activity of nous, its knowing of itself and of the One, depends on the One's capacity; it is 'according to the One's dunamis.'"²²⁵ However, it is impossible for the Intellect to see the One because the knowledge of the One is identical with its being. That is why going forward in the grasping of the One means getting closer to the Supreme Principle. That is similar to what Arius says about the knowledge of the Son, who sees the Father according to the δύναμις of the Father's own self-perception, and while this perception is simple, the knowledge of the Logos is a "multiple and determinate image of the Father's simple vision."²²⁶ This view seems to be consistent with what has previously been

221 Cf. R. Brouwer, *The Early Stoic on Wisdom, Sagehood and Socrates*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 30–32.

222 Cf. R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

223 *De synodis* 15, 3, 14–15. ῥητῶς δὲ λέξω, πῶς τῷ υἱῷ ὁράται ὁ ἀόρατος· τῇ δυνάμει ἢ δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἰδεῖν· ἰδίοις τε μέτροις (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 242; tr. NPNF II, vol. 4, p. 457).

224 Cf. *Enn.* V, 3, 7 (Henry/Schwyzler, vol. 2, pp. 215–216).

225 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

226 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

said about the distinction of *monad* and *dyad*. As the first creation, the Son is the principle of multiplicity since He contains paradigms of all creations. Moreover, Arius seems to be quite sure what the simplicity of God means. It can be seen especially in the letter to Alexander. As we have seen above, he started this letter with a very frequent use of the term *μονάς* applied to many titles of God. He confesses that God is:

“alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, alone Unbegun, alone True, alone having Immortality, alone Wise, alone Good, alone Sovereign; Judge, Governor, and Providence of all, unalterable and unchangeable...”²²⁷

This term is used not only to show that any perception of God must be simple (*μόνον*), but it seems to be also the principle of Arius’ negative theology. Having refuted multiple opinions of Valentinus, Manichaeus, Sabellius, and Hieracas, he summarizes his teaching by pointing out that those opinions would have put in doubt the simplicity of God, while He: “is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all.”²²⁸ Therefore, he is convinced that simplicity is the attribute which cannot be refuted, and we can ascribe it to God with certainty – God can be called by many names, but all of them are descriptions of his simplicity, and this is the rule which allows to disprove any other opinion which is contrary to it. We could even say that negative theology drove Arius too far, and we (and even the Logos) cannot know God, but simultaneously we know how to understand His simplicity.

The problem of the Son’s knowledge of the Father was one of the most important issues in the 4th-century theology, and “Arius’ opponents rightly treated his views in this area as crucial.”²²⁹ For the Orthodox, Arius’ claims seemed to deny any knowledge that the Son had about the essence of the Father, which for them had a profound soteriological effect. It contradicted the role of the Son as the revealer of the Father, and since the Son does not know his own οὐσία, even the role of the Logos as the paradigm of creation is also put in doubt.²³⁰ It is, then, evident why the Orthodox writers opposed such views with strong claims that since the essence of the Father

227 *De Synodis* 16, 2, 3–4 (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243).

228 *De Synodis* 16, 4, 8. ἄλλ’ ὡς μονὰς καὶ ἀρχὴ πάντων, οὕτως ὁ θεὸς πρὸ πάντων ἐστὶ (Opitz, vol. 2, p. 243; tr. NPNF, s. 2, vol. 4, p. 458).

229 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

230 Cf. R. Mortley, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

was wholly communicated to the Son, He must have had a full and perfect knowledge of the Father which no creature can possess.²³¹

Finally, we must conclude that the similarities between Arius' and Plotinus' systems and modes of expression do not evidently confirm that he knew the *Enneads*. In my opinion, for Arius, the emphasizing of negative theology seems very useful in his demonstration of the differences between the Father and the Logos. Moreover, he could be convinced that such a strong emphasis on negative theology is aligned with the earlier tradition of Clement of Alexandria and even Origen. Therefore, we can say that it was a natural development of the Middle-Platonic negative language, which was certainly known to Arius since it was already incorporated in the Christian doctrine. However, some fragments of Arius' writings strongly suggest that negative theology was very important to him and even was used as a tool to support his claims of the inferiority of the Son. This is quite contrary to what we will see in the case of Eunomius.

2.2 The transcendence and knowledge of God in Athanasius

One of the most important consequences of Arius' theology was the view of God who is distinct and remote to all creation. Such discontinuity was something new, especially to Greek thinkers who, while claiming the need of negative theology, at the same time put a stress on continuation which must exist between the First Principle and its effects. However, this was also an idea that was in a sense new to Christian thinkers and could be perceived as drawing all conclusions from the Biblical doctrine of creation, which in Arius' opinion supported the inferiority of the Son of God. Orthodox writers saw his claims of the creation of the Son from non-being as producing the first being from nothingness. Although they disagreed that the Son was created this way, radicalization of *creatio ex nihilo* became the fact in the 4th century, and both Arius and Athanasius shared that conviction.²³²

231 Cf. R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

232 Cf. A. Louth, *The Origins...*, *op. cit.*, p. 73. We see the evolution of the doctrine of creation even in the writings of Athanasius and his departure from the Origenistic view of the path of the soul to God. Because of the lack of the Platonic understanding of the kinship of the soul to God, also the Platonic doctrine of contemplation is transformed (pp. 75–76). Such a view was also

We can see, then, that the central problem which lay in the background of the discussion was the meaning of the Biblical doctrine of creation. This doctrine started to acquire its true Christian meaning and stood apart from the similar Platonic interpretation in *Timaeus*.

The outcome of this process, initiated by Arius' doctrine, was a change in the perception of the Universe which was very important for negative theology. In his general description of Post-Nicaean Orthodoxy, Andrew Louth shows this change as a shift from the Greek to the truly Christian worldview. In Middle-Platonism and Neoplatonism, the world was understood in a hierarchical way. The tendency to explain the process of creation by multiplying the elements which are in between may be observed even in Philo. This process had its continuation in Neoplatonism and elements of the noetic realm grew to vast number of beings and Gods. Although earlier Christian writers treated the Logos as such being "in between," in the 4th century, the doctrine of creation clearly meant that: "There is no intermediate zone between God and the World."²³³ The world, then, is no longer divided into sensual and intellectual, but it is seen rather as having two "parts" which are totally incompatible: the Creator and the creation. This does not mean that the division into noetic and sensual completely disappeared, but it lost its importance. As we shall see, Gregory of Nyssa frequently uses this division, but it is not central in his worldview.

2.2.1 The knowledge of the image of God

In this Christian universe seen in a new way, the transcendence of God must be also seen differently. The lack of continuity between the Creator and the creation made Him more remote than ever before. Such a kind of transcendence could not have appeared in any Greek view because of the lack of the doctrine of creation seen in such a manner. The transcendence of

shared by other important theological figures of the 4th century, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, who, in his claims on the transcendence of God, frequently quoted Middle-Platonic Numenius of Apamea. However, J.M. Robertson notes that one of the primary reasons for Eusebius to confirm God's transcendence with such emphasis was his involvement in the Arian controversy, *cf. Christ as Mediator... op. cit.*, pp. 39–43.

233 A. Louth, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

God usually affects the claims as to the possibility of knowing Him, because if He is so remote, the ways of attaining positive knowledge significantly shrink, and negative theology seems to be the only one left.²³⁴ If in the 4th century the transcendence of God was apparently affirmed with such emphasis, the result would seem to be the outburst of negative theology. We must not forget that Christians have the ultimate source of the knowledge of God, which is the Logos, but even if we admit that there is a division between natural knowledge and one obtained by the Revelation (which was non-existent in the 4th century), this would result in strengthening the problem of consubstantiality of the Divine Persons. The need to resolve the dialectical puzzle of the unknown Father and the known Logos becomes more important than ever. But can we say that Athanasius was aware of the problem, and can we observe the strengthening of negative theology in his writings?

To answer this question, we must note that in the writings of Athanasius, the problem is presented in a completely new perspective. In *De Incarnatione*, he draws the situation of man who rather worships idols, the natural elements and the stars, is driven by pleasures and does not want to know the truth, namely the Word of God. This was the state of sin and hence also the state of the lack of knowledge of God, which was caused not by the hiddenness of God, but by man turning away from Him:

“Everything was completely filled with impiety and vice, and only God was ignored and his Word, although he had not hidden himself invisibly from men nor given them knowledge of himself in one way only, but had unfolded it to them in various fashions and in manifold ways.”²³⁵

Athanasius enumerates the ways in which man can obtain the knowledge of God, and those ways are listed according to the history of Salvation of man. First of all, God made himself known according to the “grace of the Divine Image” (κατ’ εἰκόνα χάρις), and this knowledge was sufficient to know the truth.²³⁶ But since man was careless and did not want to know God by himself, He made a prevision for their carelessness and made Him

234 Cf. J.R. Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford 1993, p. 129.

235 *De Inc.* 11, 38–42 (Thomson, pp. 160–161).

236 Cf. J. M. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

known by means of the creations. This, however, was not enough for man, who continued to “sink gradually to the worse,” and, therefore, God sent the law and the prophets to instruct man, since man is able to learn more easily of the higher things this way.²³⁷ This, however, was also not sufficient to make man turn away from sin and corporal pleasures. Therefore, the Son of God came down to this world to restore the image which had been contaminated and dimmed by the deeds of man: “So the Word of God came in His own person, in order that, as He is the image of His Father, He might be able to restore man who is in the image.”²³⁸ We can see that the whole problem of the possibility to know God is presented in a moral perspective. Sin is the main obstacle to obtaining the knowledge of God. Even if man has any natural powers to know God, he cannot make use of them because of the sin and turning away from God. Man had the means to perfect his knowledge of God because he was created in His image, but he did not make use of them as he was driven down by his animal nature, and this made God intervene and provide provisions (προενοήσατο) to help him. Even the way of knowing the Creator from the creations is a way provided by grace.

Athanasius is then very optimistic as concerns the possibility of man having the knowledge of God, but this optimism is based on the image of the Logos that is in the soul, so this is never a direct cognition, and it does not deny the transcendence of God. Describing the state of grace in paradise, Athanasius confirms that God is beyond human cognition when he says:

“For God, the creator of the universe and king of all, who is beyond all being and human thought (ὁ ὑπερέκεινα πάσης οὐσίας καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπινοίας ὑπάρχων), since he is good and bountiful...”

but he adds:

“...has made mankind in his own image through his own Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ; and he also made man perceptive and understanding (ἐννοιαν καὶ γνῶσιν) of reality through his similarity to him, giving him also a conception and knowledge of his own eternity, so that as long as he kept this likeness he might never abandon his concept of God (Θεοῦ φαντασίας).”²³⁹

237 *De Inc.* 12, 1–7 (Thomson, pp. 162–163).

238 *De Inc.* 13, 29–32 (Thomson, pp. 166–167).

239 *Con. Gen.* 2, 5–13 (Thomson, pp. 6–7).

So the very act of creation is sufficient to give man the knowledge of God, who resides in the soul, and if man is able to preserve his soul pure without turning to sensual things, the soul can reflect the Logos, the paradigm of its creation whom it is alike.²⁴⁰ Such an optimistic view on man's knowledge of God is possible only, thanks to the Logos and its image in the soul, and even in the state of primal happiness it is based on the grace of God, not on natural human powers. Man can realize his blessed life by: "special power given him by the Father's word (ἐκ τοῦ πατρικοῦ Λόγου δύναμιν)."²⁴¹ We can observe that such a description of Adam's knowledge of God resembles the claims that Arius put forth on the Son of God, who, as we have seen, can know God only, thanks to the Father's own power (δύναμις), which was granted to him, but Athanasius underlines that for Adam grace is given from the Father and the Logos.

It is worth noting that Athanasius is convinced that the place in the soul where this knowledge of God resides is intellect (νοῦς), and he frequently uses the terms like ἔννοια, κατανοεῖν and λογίζεσθαι to describe it. He understands the intellect not only as the eye of the soul, but for him it is the only source of good intentions. So the soul can preserve its pure state when it listens to the intellect, but when it abandons the guidance of the νοῦς, it becomes corrupted and unable to sustain the cleanness of the image and the knowledge of God.²⁴² It can then contemplate the image of the Logos that is the same with the world of the intellectual objects only when it is free from sensual images. Even for man in the present state of sin the crucial move to obtain any knowledge of God is the ascent from sensual to intellectual objects, but this is not possible without special assistance of the incarnate Logos.²⁴³

240 Cf. G.C. Stead, *The Knowledge of God in Eusebius and Athanasius*, in: *Knowledge of God in Graeco-Roman World*, *op. cit.*, p. 233. G. C. Stead sees here the reference to the *Republic* 509 b, where God is said to be beyond human cognition, but this is contradicted in a fragment of Athanasius, which reads that God gave man the knowledge of His own eternity.

241 *Con. Gen.* 2, 13–14 (Thomson, pp. 6–7).

242 Cf. C.G. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

243 Athanasius uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe the contemplation of the Logos with the pure eye of the Soul. It seems that with this metaphor Athanasius confirms that it is possible for man to obtain the knowledge of

This optimistic theory, however, also confirms the transcendence of God. We cannot know him directly and even in the primal state of innocence man was able to know God only thanks to the image which he had in himself. The thought of Athanasius seems to develop to the point where there is no possibility of any knowledge of God which can be obtained by “purely” natural powers, so He stays totally out of reach of human mind and thus is absolutely transcendent.²⁴⁴

2.2.2 Knowing God from the creations

This total inability of the natural knowledge of God seems to contradict Athanasius’ statements on the creations which reveal the Creator. Can we, then, call this knowledge natural? Having in mind the remark on the development of the doctrine of Athanasius, it is worth having a closer look at the fragments of *Contra Gentes*, where he explains his way of the cognition of God.

Before Athanasius comes to the topic, he underlines the primary place of the knowledge which the soul can have based on the image of the Logos that is present within it. The “soul’s teaching” is insufficient because the possibility of seeing this image has been lost because of “external influences which disturb its mind.”²⁴⁵ Therefore, the presence of God’s actions in the creations could be seen as the help God gives to fallen mankind. The image in the soul cannot be seen, but the order of the Universe can be observed and the existence of God deduced therefrom. Athanasius begins with the statement that God “is by nature invisible and incomprehensible, being

God even without the intervention (incarnation) of the Logos; nevertheless, the source of the knowledge is still the image of the Logos in the soul of man. Cf. A. Hamilton, *Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror*, VCh, vol. 34, no. 1 (1980), pp. 17–18.

244 G.C. Stead sees the development of the doctrine of Athanasius noticing: “As in the *Contra Gentes*, they have an ability which is sufficient, *αὐταρκής*, to provide the knowledge of God; but in the *De Incarnatione* this is not the natural purity of the soul, but a special gift of grace, *ἡ κατ’ εἰκόνα χάρις*, designed to offset its inherent weakness” *op. cit.*, p. 237.

245 *Con. Gen.* 34, 27–28 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).

above all created being,”²⁴⁶ and, therefore, man can miss the way to obtain the needed knowledge. It was necessary for man that God made Himself visible in His creations, and consequently He established the order of the Universe by means of His Word. Athanasius gives an example of a sculptor who, even if he does not stand next to his work, is present because sculpture testifies that he worked on this piece of stone. We can not only recognize the necessary existence of the maker, but also the character of his style since:

“...from his works that an artist is often known, even when he is not seen; and people can say about Phidias the sculptor that his works through their symmetry and the mutual proportion of their parts reveal Phidias to observers, even when he is not present.”²⁴⁷

In a similar way, the order of nature, raining in fruitful seasons, the courses of the stars, Sun shining at day and Moon at night, the exact number of days, etc., make man to admit that there must be the maker and ruler who is distinct from them.²⁴⁸ God is also the one who makes the opposites in nature combined and having an order, and Athanasius enlists many examples which testify to such unity in multiplicity and harmony of nature,²⁴⁹ which must have been made by the wise Creator and ruler.²⁵⁰ But what the man can see in the order of nature is not exactly the God Himself but rather the Logos. And through Him we can see the Father Himself.²⁵¹ So it seems that what Athanasius says here takes us back to the same image of the Logos which man has in his soul. Man cannot see this image because of sin, but the order of the universe is but another image of the Logos, which is independent from our nature and, therefore, can always testify to the existence of the Word despite the fall of man. So, once again, this view of the knowledge of God is very optimistic, and even the fall of man does not make him totally incapable of obtaining the knowledge which he must have

246 *Con. Gen.* 35, 2–3 (Thomson, pp. 94–95). ἐπειδὴ ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατάληπτός ἐστι τὴν φύσιν, ἐπέκεινα πάσης γενητῆς οὐσίας ὑπάρχων. Athanasius puts a stress on the invisibility of God often using the argument that God is ἀόρατος but makes Himself visible in His works.

247 *Con. Gen.* 35, 2 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).

248 *Con. Gen.* 35, 8–12, (Thomson, pp. 94–97).

249 *Con. Gen.* 36, 1–35, (Thomson, pp. 98–101).

250 *Con. Gen.* 38, 1–7 (Thomson, pp. 102–103).

251 *Con. Gen.* 44, 1–45, 5 (Thomson, pp. 120–123).

to turn back to God. However, this is yet another help, which the Creator provided to make man know Him and this kind of natural cognition is possible because of the providence of God who made use of the powers present in human nature, since he is “good and loving to mankind. (ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ὢν καὶ φιλόανθρωπος).”²⁵²

Therefore, negative theology which is natural in the fallen state of the soul, which cannot see invisible God, is something God overcomes by Himself.²⁵³ This kind of speaking of God does not actually tell us anything useful and does not bring us closer to Him. Negative theology is rather an obstacle than a tool in the ascent to the Maker, and man cannot use it on his path to God. Therefore, what is striking here, according to Athanasius, we cannot have the knowledge of God based on any mystical experience. We can see it best in the *Life of Anthony*, where he makes no references to the darkness of Sinai.²⁵⁴ So there is an absence of negative theology with the simultaneous stress on the transcendence of God which can be overcome only by the Logos and its Incarnation. We can say that Athanasius is reluctant to employ negative theology, which seems to be the obvious consequence of such a frequent use of it, which we have observed in Arius. However, a negative language seems to be the obvious choice of speaking about God who is the sole Creator and Governor of the Universe and thus is utterly transcendent to all human concepts. Nevertheless, we can say that at the starting point of Athanasius’ theology, he fully agrees with Arius that God is utterly transcendent and incomprehensible. Therefore, we can even say that his attitude to the problem of the possibility of having the knowledge of God is apophatic.²⁵⁵ But Athanasius proposes a way to overcome that

252 *Con. Gen.* 35, 5–8 (Thomson, pp. 94–95).

253 J.R. Lyman notes: “One can speak only negatively with assurance because of divine transcendence and incomprehensibility; yet what is revealed is absolute, for essences precede words, and the terms applied to God in Scripture reveal the essential divine nature” *op. cit.*, p. 129.

254 *Cf.* G.C. Stead, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

255 *Cf.* K. Anatolios, *Athanasius. The Coherence of His Thought*, London, New York 2005, p. 99. The author also notes that the use of negative terms by Athanasius refers to the Middle-Platonic rather than the Neoplatonic understanding of God, since he is described as a true being (τὸν ὄντως ὄντα Θεὸν), p. 40.

state of unknowing by stressing on the Incarnation. For Arius, this state is permanent, and by denying the divine nature of the Son, he ultimately fails to establish his role as a mediator who passes the knowledge of God to man and allows him to be saved.²⁵⁶ Athanasius, on the contrary, simultaneously admits the transcendence of God while underlining and exposing the role of the Logos, which is God and the only means to gain true knowledge and return back to the unity with the Creator. Providing the knowledge of God to man was for Athanasius the main reason for the incarnation of the Logos.²⁵⁷ However, this also means that the Bishop of Alexandria seems to be successful in overcoming the contradiction between the incomprehensible Father, who must be described by negative terms, and the conceivable Logos, which can be described in a positive way.

2.3 Positive and negative theology reconciled in Marius Victorinus

Marius Victorinus is the figure of special interest for understanding the influence which the Arian controversy had on negative theology. He lived in the West, in the Latin speaking part of Africa, almost exactly in the same period when in the East, the discussion between Eunomius, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa took place.²⁵⁸ He not only used sophisticated Neoplatonic philosophy to defend the Orthodox position, but he is also an example of a different solution to the problem of how to reconcile negative theology with the Divinity of the Logos. As we have seen, for Athanasius, a negative language was to be overcome by the incarnation and revelation of the Logos. We have also suggested above that Marius Victorinus seemed to be convinced that negative theology can never be abandoned in our cognition of the Father.

The corpus of *Theological treatises on the Trinity* by Marius Victorinus begins with the letter of Candidus who presents Arian arguments against consubstantiality of the Son. Most of the scholars agree that Candidus was probably an invented figure, and if it is true, it was Marius Victorinus himself who presented his understanding of Arian arguments in this letter.²⁵⁹

256 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

257 Cf. J.M. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

258 Cf. P. Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident*, Louvain 1934, pp. 44–45.

259 Cf. P. Nautin, *Candidus l'Arien...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 309; 317.

The entire argumentation of the letter seems to be based on the statement, which can be found at its very beginning that God is unchangeable and, therefore, any claims of the generation of the Son who is consubstantial with the Father violate His unchangeability.

“If therefore God is unchanging and unchangeable, but whatever is unchanging and unchangeable is neither begotten nor begetting; if then this is so, God is unbegotten. For begetting is begetting through alteration and through change.”²⁶⁰

Begetting means a change, therefore the generated Logos, since it is the effect of a change, cannot be God. Such a claim would mean that it came to be God ensuing from something previous and more profound than God. Candidus argues that such things as existence, existentiality, potentiality substance or being would be somehow prior to the “to be” (*esse*) of God.²⁶¹ The Son could neither be generated from pre-existent substance, because God is simple, and that would ruin His simplicity.²⁶² Without going further into Candidus’ (or Victorinus’) philosophical distinctions, we can say that in his answer Victorinus must explain how the generation of God is not a change and does not ruin God’s simplicity. To show this, he rather surprisingly goes into various distinctions of the kinds of being and non-being. Although the term “non-being” does not appear in Candidus’ letter, as we have seen above, it was a well-known claim of Arius that the Son was created by the Father from non-being.

2.3.1 God as non-existent above existents

Victorinus’ answer starts, however, with a long exposition of the impossibility of speaking about God. He explains that paternal intellect (*νοῦς πατρικός*) is innate in our soul, and, therefore, the heavenly spirit can arouse the intellectual figures which are eternally engraved in our soul. Therefore:

260 *Cand.* I, 1, 8–11. “Si igitur deus, inversibile et inmutabile, quod autem inversibile et inmutabile, neque genitum est neque generat aliquid, si igitur hoc sic se habet, ingenitus est deus. Etenim generatio per inversionem et per mutationem generatio est” (SC 68, p. 106; tr. Clark, p. 47).

261 *Cand.* I, 1, 12–16 (SC 68, p. 106; tr. Clark, pp. 47–48).

262 *Cand.* I, 2, 8–9. “Simplex enim quiddam deus. Non igitur praeeistente substantia” (SC 68, p. 108; tr. Clark, p. 48).

“...our soul by the kind of spiritual elevation wishes to see ineffable things and in-structable mysteries of the will or works of God. And yet, dwelling in this body it is difficult for the soul to understand those things, but impossible to express them.”²⁶³

Then Victorinus claims that we can know God to some extent. It is possible thanks to the intellect given by God, but also thanks to the help of the spirit which can make us know God by some kind of intellectual conceptions or rather analogies (*figurationes intellectuales*). This opinion is very similar to what we have seen in Athanasius, who perceived the soul and the image of the Logos implanted in it as the primary source of the human knowledge of God in a similar way. But Victorinus also tries to show that Candidus is too confident in man’s power to grasp the truth about God; while the understanding of God’s mysteries and works is difficult, expressing them (*edicere*) is utterly impossible. He supports his opinion with the quotations from the Holy Scripture,²⁶⁴ and after yet another quotation from the Scripture’s teaching on the Son of God, he passes on to his demonstration.

First, he answers Candidus’ claims that God is the cause of His own *esse*²⁶⁵ by claiming that God is above existents and non-existents (*quae sunt et quae non sunt*)²⁶⁶ which He produces, but He simultaneously is potentially all truly existents (*vere õv*) in order to be able to produce them.²⁶⁷ Therefore, God the Father must be named the “total pre-existent” (*totum*

263 *Ad Cand.* 1, 4–12. “ineffabiles res et investigabilia mysteria dei voluntatum aut operationum quasi quaedam mentis elatio animae nostrae vult quidem videre et etiam nunc in tali sita corpore difficile intellegere solum, edicere autem impossibile” (SC 68, p. 130; tr. Clark, pp. 59–69).

264 Rom 11: 33, Is 40: 13.

265 *Cf. Cand.* I, 3, 10–14 (SC 68, p. 110; tr. Clark, p. 49).

266 There is a problem with terminology which must be mentioned here. The term τὸ μὴ ὄν in the case of Arius is commonly translated as “non-being”, as we have seen above. In case of Victorinus, it was translated by M.T. Clark as “non-existent.” This has its explanation in the complicated Latin terminology which Marius Victorinus creates in his writings. In the text, I quote M.T. Clark’s translation, so I deliberately use a non-existent instead of non-being to preserve the sense and continuity of the text, but we have to remember that it is the same Greek term τὸ μὴ ὄν. It must be also noted that this problem of translation is part of a broader issue, which exceeds the scope of this study, of how to understand and translate the Greek term τὸ ὄν.

267 *Ad Cand.* 2, 16–25 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark, p. 61).

πρόον) which generates the Logos which is “total existent” (*totum öv*). Although we can describe the process of the Son this way, the very act of the generation of the Logos cannot be grasped properly by man’s apprehension, so Victorinus calls it not simply a motion, but rather an “ineffable motion” (*ineloquenti motus*).²⁶⁸ This way Victorinus tries to show that the generation of the Son cannot be understood as a motion which produces a change. The Logos that was produced that way as the “totally perfect existent” is in itself also above existents and truly existents, but is also “the first and universal knowledge (*prima et omnis intellegentia*).”²⁶⁹ Victorinus then seems to think that the Logos is simultaneously the source of knowledge while being also above all beings – consubstantial with the Father. In the next passage, he further explains what he does understand by saying that God is the cause of existents and non-existents. Since God is called πρόον, He is the cause of all modes of being and thus Victorinus defines all types of existents and non-existents one by one.²⁷⁰

Non-existents play a more important role here since it is best to call God the name of one of them. A non-existent (*id quod non est*) is first conceived and named “by way of negation, so that absolutely and in all ways there is privation of existence.”²⁷¹ This mode is what we commonly understand as something that simply does not exist. Victorinus explains that “there is no μη öv according to privation; but it is a kind of fiction to imagine, starting from existents, the privation of them, and this fiction has neither the subsistence nor the existence of things which do exist.”²⁷² Marius Victorinus follows here the long philosophical tradition, which goes back to Plato, of

268 *Ad Cand.* 2, 25–29 (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 62).

269 *Ad Cand.* 2, 31–35 (SC 68, p. 134; tr. Clark p. 63).

270 Marius Victorinus defines the modes of being in *Ad Cand.* 8–8 (SC 68, pp. 138–142; tr. Clark, pp. 64–67). This division and its philosophical background was well described by P. Hadot, *Porphyry et Victorinus*, Paris 1968, pp. 148–167.

271 *Ad Cand.* 4, 2–3 “iuxta negationem, omnino omnimodis ut privatio sit existentis” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, pp. 63–64).

272 *Ad Cand.* 5, 7–11 “nullum μη öv iuxta privationem, sed subintellegentia quaedam est, ab his quae sunt privationem eorum subintellegere, non subsistentis ne ipsius quidem subintellegentiae, neque sic existentis ut eorum quae sunt” (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

making a distinction between absolute and relative non-being.²⁷³ The first one is non-being in the absolute sense. The other three modes of non-being cannot be understood that way, and despite the fact that they are called “non-beings,” they refer to it only relatively. Victorinus explains that those are “non-existents which exist in certain way.”²⁷⁴ The name of non-being “according to difference with another nature”²⁷⁵ has its roots in the *Sophist* of Plato where he enlists the supreme genres, and since there is nothing else which can be the basis of the differentiation of those genres, we can only say that the one is not the other, like rest is not motion.²⁷⁶ The third mode is described “according to ‘to be’ which is not yet but which can be and will be.”²⁷⁷ To understand this mode, we must turn to Aristotle who says in his *Metaphysics* that a being which is in potentiality and not yet actualized is in a sense a non-being, and it will be called properly a being after it passes to the state of action. This mode then serves to describe a motion and change.²⁷⁸ Victorinus, however, groups those two types saying that they express mainly the generation of a being, and we name them “those which after their birth have ‘to be’ and named, but which before their birth were

273 P. Hadot notices that although the primal source of this distinction is Plato’s *Sophist* (237 B; 238 C), Aristotle also evokes this division of ἀπλῶς μὴ ὄν and μὴ ὄν τι in his *Physics* (I, 3, 187 a, 5), cf. P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

274 *Ad Cand.* 5, 11 “Quaedam igitur quae non sunt quodam modo sunt” (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

275 *Ad Cand.* 4, 2–3 “iuxta alterius ad aliud naturam” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

276 In *Sophist*, when searching for the definition of a Sophist the Guest from Elea proposes to redefine the Parmenidean definition of being which must be corrected or even rejected to define the supreme genres (being, motion, stability <or rest, or remaining>, identity and difference), *Sophist* 236 D–264 B (Plato VII, LCL, pp. 236–263).

277 *Ad Cand.* 4, 4–5 “iuxta nondum esse, quod futurum est et potest esse” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

278 In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains that: “But since non-being in the various cases has as many senses as there are categories, and besides this the false is said not to be and so is the potential (μὴ ὄν καὶ τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν), generation proceeds from the latter, man from that which is not man but potentially man, and white from that which is not white but potentially white, and this whether it is one thing that is generated or many” (*Met.* XIV, 2, 1098 a, 26–31).

either within their own potentiality or within another whence they have begotten.”²⁷⁹

Most interesting is the last of the modes which is called by Victorinus a non-existent “according to ‘to be’ which is above all existents.”²⁸⁰ Although, as we have seen, God is above all modes of existents and non-existents, He can be called an existent as far as He is their cause, but Victorinus seems to be more inclined to call Him a non-existent in this last mode. “God is above ὄν, and insofar as he is above, God is called μὴ ὄν, not through privation of all that is His, but as another ὄν, the very one which is μὴ ὄν.”²⁸¹ In another passage, where he summarizes his teaching on the modes of existent and non-existent, Victorinus comes back to the well-known Arian claim (here ascribed to Candidus), that the Logos was created from non-being.²⁸² His answer can be given thanks to the distinctions of non-beings. Although God is not the cause of all types, He is also above all and, therefore, we can speak of him in preeminent or negative terms:

“Necessarily we say that through superiority and preeminence over τῶν ὄντων God is above all existence, above all life, above all knowledge, above every ὄν and the ὄντως ὄντα; indeed he is unknowable, infinite, invisible, without idea, insubstantial,

279 *Ad Cand.* 5, 11 “ut ipsa quae sunt, quae post generationem et sunt et dicuntur et ante generationem aut in potentia sua aut in alio fuerunt, unde generata sunt” (SC 68, p. 138; tr. Clark, p. 64).

280 *Ad Cand.* 4, 5 “iuxta quod supra omnia quae sunt, est esse.” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64). It is significant that this type of non-existent was for the first time named by Porphyrius (P. Hadot, *op. cit.* p. 170), whose philosophy Victorinus uses to such an extent that there are large fragments of Porphyrius’ commentary to Parmenides which have been preserved only, thanks to Victorinus’ quotes.

281 *Ad Cand.* 4, 6–14 “Appellabimus utique omnino ὄν, quoniam eorum quae sunt, pater est. Sed pater eorum quae sunt, non est τὸ ὄν; nondum enim sunt ea quorum pater est, et non licet dicere, nefas est intellegere, eorum quae sunt causam ὄν appellare. Causa enim prior est ab his quorum causa est. Supra ὄν igitur deus est et, iuxta quod supra est, μὴ ὄν deus dicitur, non per privationem universi eius quod sit, sed ut aliud ὄν, ipsum quod est μὴ ὄν” (SC 68, p. 136; tr. Clark, p. 64).

282 *Ad Cand.* 12, 7–10 “Forte nunc dicis, o Candide: meus hic sermo est et secundum istam rationem dico ex his quae non sunt, natum esse filium dei secundum effectiōnem, non secundum generationem” (SC 68, p. 148; tr. Clark, p. 69).

inconceivable, and because transcendent, he is nothing of existents, and because he is above existents, he has nothing from existents. God is therefore μη ὄν.”²⁸³

Victorinus’ answer to the Arian claim is then simple. It is true when we say that the Logos originated from non-being, but the problem lies in the understanding of non-being, since it is not something that does not exist, but rather the Father is non-being because he transcends all that is. It is worth mentioning what Pierre Hadot has noted. Although there is a long tradition of the classification of the modes of non-being, which especially flourished in the Neoplatonic tradition,²⁸⁴ we cannot identify the source of Victorinus’ own list. Its origins may be Porphyrian, but we do not have any preserved fragment of Porphyry which would prove it. But it is interesting that Victorinus puts them in a hierarchical order from non-existent which simply is not, to non-existent above existent, which is more than being.²⁸⁵

2.3.2 Negative theology in speaking of God as the One

Negative theology appears once more in a place where in his treaty *Adversus Arium* Victorinus describes God as the One (*unum*) and Monad (*unalitas*).²⁸⁶ Victorinus explains that by calling God the One, he means not the Father alone but the Father and the Son who being Two are One.²⁸⁷ Pierre Hadot notes that in Victorinus’ long exposition we can trace the Middle-Platonic systematized methods or ways of speaking of God, especially those of Albinus and Celsus.²⁸⁸ In the text of *Adversus Arium*, we

283 *Ad Cand.* 13, 5–12 “Necessario per praelationem et per eminentiam τῶν ὄντων deum dicemus supra omnem existentiam, supra omnem vitam, supra omnem cognoscantiam, supra omne ὄν et ὄντως ὄντα, quippe inintellegibile, infinitum, invisibile, sine intellectu, insubstantiale, inio cognoscibile, et quod super omnia, nihil de his quae sunt, et quoniam supra quae sunt, nihil ex his quae sunt. Μη ὄν ergo deus est” (SC 68, p. 148; tr. Clark, p. 70).

284 Cf. P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–170.

285 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

286 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 9. Term *unalitas* is commonly translated as “monad”; tr. Clark, p. 171 (French - “la Monade”; tr. P. Hadot, SC 68, p. 343).

287 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 9 (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 171).

288 P. Hadot notes that it is possible that the systematization of theological ways was influenced by Stoics who developed methods of abstract cognition, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

can find the way of eminence (or anteriority), the way of negation, and the way which Pierre Hadot calls “transcendent synthesis.” Marius Victorinus offers a Latin version of the first two ways, which in Greek had technical forms of words beginning with: $\text{-}\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho$ or $\text{-}\pi\rho\omicron$ (way of eminence) and $\text{-}\grave{\alpha}$ (negative way).²⁸⁹

According to the first method, God is described as being above all reality. He is “before all existence, before all existentiality, and absolutely before all inferiors, before the $\acute{\omicron}\nu$ itself; indeed this One is prior to the $\acute{\omicron}\nu$; it is therefore before every entity, substance, subsistence, even before those things which are more powerful.”²⁹⁰ In those terms, we see the echo of the long tradition which had its origin in Plato’s famous phrase $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\iota\upsilon\alpha\varsigma$ οὐσίας and was strengthened and had its continuation in Neoplatonism. This is also an answer to Candidus who defined God primarily as *esse solum*.²⁹¹

According to the second way, Victorinus enumerates various negative terms. God as One is:

“infinite, invisible, wholly indiscernible for every other, both for those within it and those which are after it; for it alone is distinguished and defined only by its own existence, not by act, so that its own constitution and self-knowledge are not something different from it; undivided in every way, without shape, without quality, that is not qualified by any lack of quality yet without colour, without species, without form, lacking all forms, and yet not being that form itself by which all things are formed.”²⁹²

289 Cf. P. Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

290 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, “unum ante omnem existentiam, ante omnem existentia-
tatem et maxime ante omnia inferiora, ante ipsum $\acute{\omicron}\nu$; hoc enim unum ante $\acute{\omicron}\nu$;
ante omnem igitur essentiatem, substantiam, subsistentiam et adhuc omnia
quae potentiora...” (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 172).

291 *Cand.* I, 3, 16. “Ipse est unum et solum. Est enim esse solum. Et vero ipsum
esse, ipsum est et vivere et intellegere” (SC 68, p. 110; tr. Clark, p. 49).

292 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 19–26. “invisibile, indiscernibile universaliter omni alteri et
his quae in ipso et his quae post ipsum, etiam quae ex ipso, soli autem sibi
et discernibile et definitum, ipsa sua existentia, non actu, ut non quiddam
alterum sit ab ipso consistentia et cognoscentia sui, inpartile undique, sine
figura, sine qualitate neque inqualitate, sine qualitate, quale, sine colore, sine
specie, sine forma, omnibus formis carens, neque quod sit ipsa forma qua
formantur omnia...” (SC 68, p. 342; tr. Clark, p. 172).

Then Victorinus passes to the way of transcendent synthesis, which we have seen already when he called God *totum πρῶον* and “non-existent above existent.” Here, he likewise calls God by the names of: first cause of all existents, preknowledge of all knowledge, the strength of all powers, swifter than movement itself, more stable than rest itself, closer than any continuum, more profound than all of discontinuous, more finite than a body, greater than greatness, purer than incorporeal reality, power of all powers, more universal than every genus and species, etc.²⁹³ Those terms can be understood as describing God even more accurately than the negative way. Those are not simply negations, but they express better the One that is above all privation and negation; therefore, God is simultaneously called to be greater than the opposite things as follows: corporal-incorporeal, movement-rest, finite-infinite, and having and non-having qualities. Thanks to such a way of speaking, Victorinus can express that calling God with negative term does not bring us any closer to the understanding of who He is. If we, for example, call God infinite, one can think that infinity is some kind of a concept which allows our intellect to grasp His nature in some way, but infinity as a negative term neither describes Him nor is a kind of a conception. To ensure that such a mistake will never be made, Victorinus explains that God is simultaneously beyond infinity and is finite. Another aspect of using this way of speaking is the reconciliation of opposite terms; God is beyond each of the opposites, and, therefore, he unites them above them. Therefore, we can say that those terms clearly indicate that God is utterly transcendent, and thus He cannot be conceived in any way. Finally, Pierre Hadot notes that it is no longer negative theology since it lacks

293 *Adv. Ar.* I, 49, 26–40. “...et universalium et partilium omnium quae sunt prima causa, omnium principiorum praepincipium, omnium intellegentiarum praecintellegentia, omnium potentiarum fortitudo, ipsa motione celebrior, ipso statu stabilior - motione enim ineloquibili status est, statu autem ineffabili superrelativa motio est - continuatione omni densior, distantia universa altior, definitior universo corpore et maius omni magnitudine, omni incorporali purius, omni intellegentia et corpore penetrabilius, omnium potentissimum, potentia potentiarum, omni genere, omni specie magis totum, vere ὄν totum, vere quae sunt omnia ipsum existens, omni toto maius, corporali et incorporeali, omni parte magis pars, inenarrabili potentia pure existens omnia quae vere sunt” (SC 68, pp. 342–344; tr. Clark, p. 172).

privations and is a way of speaking of the One which coincides with the *maxima*. Such ultimate cognition is more than ignorance, because it does not oppose ignorance; therefore, it transcends both affirmation and negation.²⁹⁴ Therefore, it is the best way to express incompatibility of any human conception, whether negative or positive, and the best way to express the impossibility of having any intellectual grasp of the Ultimate Principle.

However, we must be aware that those ways of describing God are applicable to God the Father, which Victorinus affirms by saying: “This is God, this is the Father, preexisting preintelligence and preexistence keeping itself and its own happiness in an immobile movement...”²⁹⁵ The Son can be also called the One, but in a different aspect. While the Father is totally above our cognition: “This One whom we call the One who is One (*unum unum*) is life, which is infinite movement, creative of others, whether of the truly existents or of the existents, being the Logos of the ‘to be’ of all existents.”²⁹⁶ The Son is then not the same with the absolute One, with the Father, but rather he should be called One-One, that is the Dyad. Without going further into the philosophical references of this claim,²⁹⁷ we can observe once again what we have seen previously in *Ad Candidum*. The negative way is more proper when we try to describe the Father – the One as Monad, and positive theology plays the main role in speaking of the Son who is Dyad. Therefore, we can also observe the way in which Victorinus tries to answer Arian claims.

Arius, who frequently used the term *μονός*, claimed that the absolute simple Father can be spoken of only in negative terms. Victorinus seems to agree fully with such statement. We have seen in *Ad Candidum* that negative theology should be primarily the way of speaking of the Father, whereas

294 *Ibid.*, p. 283.

295 *Adv. Ar.* I, 50, 1–3. “Hic est deus, hic pater, praeintellegentia praeexistens et praeexistencia beatitudinem suam et immobili motione semet ipsum custodiens...” (SC 68, p. 344; tr. Clark, p. 172).

296 *Adv. Ar.* 51, 1–4. “Sed unum istud quod esse dicimus unum unum, vita est, quae sit motio infinita, effectrix aliorum, vel eorum quae vere sunt, vel eorum quae sunt, existens λόγος ad id quod est esse quae sunt omnia” (SC 68, p. 346; tr. Clark, p. 173).

297 Pierre Hadot gives a full philosophical background of this statement in *op. cit.*, pp. 285–288.

the positive way is fitting when we speak of the Son. In *Adversus Arium*, Victorinus uses the same pattern when speaking of the two aspects of God as the One. But Arius claimed that since we can speak of the Logos in a positive way and understand Him, He cannot be consubstantial with the Father. Victorinus strongly disagrees here claiming that positive and negative ways of theology are the two modes of describing the same God; therefore, the Father and the Son are consubstantial. So he claims that the use of negative and positive theologies does not necessarily result in the opposition between the Father and the Son. Where Arius saw discontinuity, Victorinus puts a stress on continuity. Therefore, it is an attempt at systematic reconciliation between positive and negative theology in Marius Victorinus. It is remarkable that he does all those demonstrations and distinctions in an utterly theoretical fashion without pointing out the meaning of negative theology to mystical life. So it seems that in his writings, the systematic and rigorous theology of Arius has met its perfect match.

