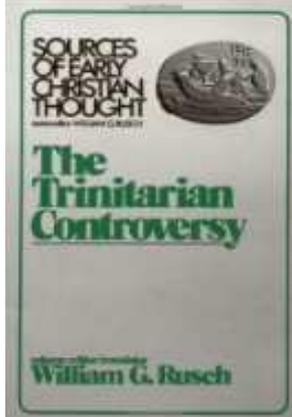


Norris, Richard A., Jr.

The Christological Controversy

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Rusch, William G.

The Trinitarian Controversy

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I've chosen to review *The Christological Controversy* (hereafter CC) and *The Trinitarian Controversy* (hereafter TC) together because my thoughts on each volume are basically the same and singular reviews of each would be much too brief, although even this 'dual review' will be marked by brevity.

Both CC and TC are part of the Sources of Early Christian Thought series edited by William G. Rusch. Other titles in this series are *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* and *Theological Anthropology*. The stated goal of the series is to provide new translations of key texts on the specified topics as well as brief introductions and helpful bibliographies to other relevant literature. I can't speak to the other two volumes in the series but both CC and TC meet this goal.

In terms of the material chosen I particularly appreciated that important texts from both sides of the orthodox/heterodox divide are presented in each volume. I don't think a book on the Trinitarian or Christological controversies of the 4th-5th centuries would be complete without reference to Arius, Nestorius, and Apollinaris. Both TC and CC do well to present writings from each of these heresiarchs.

The introductions to both volumes are brief yet helpful. They cover the major players and events leading up to the texts that are included in the book, so in TC the introduction addresses the biblical background for the doctrine of the Trinity, the contribution of the Apostolic Fathers, as well as the early apologists (i.e., Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, et al.), and other theologians from the second to fifth centuries such as Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine among others. Major concepts such as Monarchianism are given attention and those who played a major role in the formation of Nicene orthodoxy like Alexander of Alexandria, Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, (as well as Constantine and his son Constantius on the political side of things) are also treated. All of this information provides the necessary backdrop against which to read the texts provided in the book.

In CC the cast of characters is largely the same since the so-called controversies are so closely related. We again see Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, and Irenaeus although they seem to factor more prominently in this introduction which of course makes sense given that their contributions to the development of Trinitarian orthodoxy were largely concerned with Christological reflection. The introduction begins by looking at various Christological titles and phrases from the NT as well as the Apostolic Fathers. To my delight Melito of Sardis was given a good amount of attention in the introduction and his *Homily on Passover* is one of the major texts to be presented later in the book. Norris even acknowledges that “*Melito himself is an obscure figure.*” [p. 9] From Wisdom Christology to Logos Theology to the questions and heretical answers of Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eutyches, all of the major stones have been turned.

Concerning the texts chosen I think that the respective authors/translators did a good job, although I think they could have included more material. Each book comes in at under 200 pages and each introduction is around 30 pages. TC includes writings from the two Gregories but sadly there is nothing from the third Cappadocian Basil. Selections from Basil’s *On the Holy Spirit* would have made a lot of sense and been a wonderful addition to this short volume. One also wonders how the authors/translators went about choosing which individual sections of larger writings to include. Augustine’s *On the Trinity* book 9 is featured in TC, but what about the other books of this massive work? What about *City of God* which also presents much of Augustine’s Trinitarian theology? I think that CC does a bit better with the chosen texts and really presents a nice array of focused material, not that TC’s material isn’t focused, but it’s a bit easier to discern why CC’s texts were chosen over others. For example, Tertullian’s *Against Praxeas* 27 makes perfect sense given the nature of the chapter (i.e., it addresses the two natures of Christ as they exist without confusion). Other sections of that work wouldn’t have fit in this volume.

As far as translations go, I’m not qualified to critique them on their accuracy given that I’m not proficient in either Greek or Latin, but from an English reader’s perspective I can say that both volumes are marked improvements over the translations presented in the ANF and both series of NPNF (at least stylistically). The language is not nearly as antiquated (which has never been much of a problem for an old KJV reader such as

myself) as those sets, but it's not so contemporary that Athanasius no longer sounds like Athanasius. I definitely get the feel that the translators were aiming for functional translations over woodenly literal.

Each volume is rounded out with a two page bibliography which I thought was a bit brief given the massive amount of primary and secondary literature on these theologians and controversies, but it does provide a starting place. And even though I think that both volumes would have done better to present more material of relevant literature, more extensive bibliographies, and the occasional translation note, I still believe that these will make handy reference tools for the student of early Church history. The sheer benefit of being able to compare newer translations to the old familiar ones makes each book worth the purchase.