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extract

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The Homoousion as Shield of the Son's Divinity

Joseph S. O'LEARY

A new, exciting story about Nicaea is in circulation, but though brilliantly argued it remains a tall tale, one that sends me back to the common understanding of the Nicene Creed and its significance. Against the new theories, I appeal to a close reading of the Creed itself, for it well explains its own purpose.

Building on P. F. Beatrice, Elizabeth Digeser, and his mentor Dale Tuggy, Kegan Chandler argues that Constantine's personal interpretation of the *homoousion* was derived from the *Poimandres*, quoted fourteen times by his counsellor Lactantius. Beatrice wrote:

As can be clearly seen in the *Poimandres*, and even more clearly in an inscription mentioned exclusively in the *Theosophia* [a Hermetic fragment in a sixth-century text], in the theological language of Egyptian paganism the word *homoousios* meant that the Nous-Father and the Logos-Son, who are two distinct beings, share the same perfection of the divine nature.¹

This is alleged to show the “real Egyptian, pre-Christian roots” of the “theological use of *homoousios*”.² The central and distinctive doctrine of the Christian creed was pre-programmed in ancient Egypt.³

1 Pier Franco Beatrice, “The Word »*Homoousios*« from Hellenism to Christianity”, in *Church History* 71 (2002), 243-72; 243.

2 Ibid., 263.

3 “The very concept in fact of a Trinity comes from Egypt, and was a permanent feature of Egyptian theology”, says Gerald Bostock, “Origen's Unique Doctrine of the Trinity: Its Jewish and Egyptian Sources”, *Origeniana Duodecima*, Peeters, Leuven 2019, 519-33; 530.

There are lots of problems with this proposal. For a start, the alleged resemblance of the *Poimandres* to the Nicene Creed is illusory. The Hermetic text does not present “the Egyptian and Hermetic theology of the »consubstantiality« of the Logos-Son with the Nous-Father”.⁴ *Poimandres* identifies himself as “Nous, your God” (or “the first God” in a textual variant) and identifies the shining Logos coming from Nous as the Son of God. “What in you sees and hears is the *logos* of the Lord, while the *nous* is the Father God” (*Poim.* 6).⁵ Before Nous comes the *proarchē* (*Poim.*, 8), which corresponds to what Valentinians, according to Irenaeus, call “*Proarchon kai Propatora kai Buthon*” (*haer.* 1.1.1). The Nous generates a second Nous who is the Demiurge. The divine Logos unites with this Demiurge-Nous, being *homoousios* with it (as is merely parenthetically remarked) (*Poim.*, 10). Do we really “already detect here in this pagan document the language of Nicaea?”⁶ Stead⁷ clarifies that the *homoousios* refers to the “common derivation” of the Logos and the Demiurge Mind “from the supreme God who is intelligence, light, and life”. The Logos is not said to be consubstantial with the supreme God, the first Nous, still less with the still more transcendent *proarchē*, as a Nicene parallel would require.

It is not clear that Gnostics took the word *homoousios* from Hermetic sources, or that *Poimandres* dates to the first century CE at the latest.⁸ The way the text refers to the *proarchē* suggests that it

4 Beatrice, *Homoousios*, 265.

5 *Nous* is introduced as a proper name, as in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.3. See A.-J. Festugière (ed.), *Hermès Trismégiste, I, Poimandrès; Traités II-XII*, Belles Lettres, Paris 1991, 8.

6 Kegan A. Chandler, *Constantine and the Divine Mind: The Imperial Quest for Primitive Monotheism*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon 2019, 101.

7 Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977, 202.

8 Beatrice, 263. Stead (201) tentatively assigns the *Poimandres* to the second century and considers it merely conceivable that it is the earliest text to use *homoousios*.

comes later, and is influenced by rather than influencing Valentinus. Robert Grant classes the *Hermetica* with philosophical gnosticizing alongside Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles*.⁹

The word itself is a fairly ordinary one despite its late emergence in second century Valentinian and Hermetic texts and means “of the same substance or essence” in a generic sense, as in the *Letter to Flora* 7.8: “it is in the nature of the Good to engender and produce only beings similar and of the same nature (*homoousia*) as itself”.¹⁰ Plotinus and Porphyry, also use it unselfconsciously to refer to a generic kinship of human and animal souls or of the human soul with the divine.¹¹

Homoousios occurs only once in *Poimandres* and never in Lactantius. It had been controverted in older church debates (the two Dionysii, and the affair of Paul of Samosata in Antioch in 268 CE) but not because of its Gnostic provenance, which Irenaeus had taken in his stride, in fact using the term in a positive theological way.¹² Methodius used it in alleging that Origen saw the firmament

9 Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York 1959, 147-150.

10 Gilles Quispel (ed.), Ptolémée, *Lettre à Flora*, Sources Chrétiennes 24 bis Cerf, Paris 1966, 7. Quispel (103) queries Harnack's linkage of this to the Nicene formula (*Dogmengeschichte* 1.285). Valentinians did see the Son as consubstantial to the Father, since as a general rule what is born of God is God, but there is no special reference to Christ. Stead (192) sees Ptolomaeus as voicing a commonplace (citing Plato, *Rep.* 379bc, *Tim.* 29e, Philo, *Opif.* 140, *Aet. Mund.* 44, Athanasius, *c. Gent.* 6), which may indicate that the term *homoousios* would be familiar to his readers. Since the inquiring Flora is spared technical diction such as *psukhikos*, *homoousios* may have been a simpler word.

11 John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longman, Harlow, Essex 1972, 244, referring to *Enn.* 4.7.10 and *De abstinentia* 1.19.

12 Jonatan Simons, “God and *eiusdem substantiae*, in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.17-8”, in *Studia Patristica* 109 (2021), 55-65. Simons takes issue with Stead's claim (*Divine Substance*, 201) that Irenaeus positively states “the inequality of consubstantials” and claims instead that the nine occurrences of *eiusdem substantiae* in *Haer.* 2.17-18 do entail “equality of status between the Father

as “consubstantial with the angels” (*De Resurrectione* 2.30). The term aroused unease only in Trinitarian contexts.

The decisive catchword of the Nicene confession, namely, *homoousios* (“of one substance”), comes from no less a person than the emperor himself. To the present day no one has cleared up the problem of where the emperor got the term.¹³

But the obscurity attaching to the term hardly obliges one to reach back to the *Poimandres*, for the term was a buzzword ever since Arius had used it in his provocative letter to Alexander around 318 CE. But the term circulated in Arian texts before the Council, probably in reaction to orthodox usage, for instance by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria:

A letter was publicly read and ignominiously torn, in which their patron, Eusebius of Nicomedia, ingenuously confessed that the admission of the HOMOOUSSION, or Consubstantial, a word already familiar to the Platonists, was incompatible with the principles of their theological system. The fortunate opportunity was eagerly embraced by the bishops, who governed the resolutions of the synod, and, according to the lively expressions of Ambrose [*De Fide* 3.15.125] they used the sword, which heresy itself had drawn from the scabbard, to cut off the head of the hated monster.¹⁴

and his creative powers” (p. 56). But while Irenaeus may unselfconsciously use *homoousios* in discussing theological topics (though the only text of those cited by Simons that lends substance to this is *Haer.* 4.9.1-2), in 2.17-18 he is expounding the Gnostic system, and certainly not making it his own.

- 13 Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*, Fortress, Philadelphia 1985, 5, quoted, Chandler (100), italicizing the last sentence. Lohse says that Constantine himself had only a rudimentary “theology” (52) and subscribes to the common view (promoted by Harnack and Friedrich Loofs) that Ossius was his source, and that the term translates Tertullian’s *una substantia*.
- 14 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 21, 3. Against the tendency to dismiss Ambrose as coming too late, the account of Theodoret (*Hist. Eccl.* 1.8.1) refers to the witness of Eustathius, and another participant in the Council seems to refer to the incident in *De Decretis* 3. See Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, *El símbolo niceno* Consejo Superior de Investigaciones

Mark Edwards represents the standard understanding of the *homoousion*. He says that:

while the term [*homoousios*] is not employed in any surviving work from his [Alexander's] hand, there is some reason to believe that he sanctioned the use of it by his colleagues. There is no doubt that before the Council he had already declared the Son to be "from the Father's essence", and it is all but certain that when this phrase was challenged, together with the *homoousion* at Nicaea, it was he who produced a conciliatory exegesis of both innovations, relying on the theology that had already been expounded in his letters.¹⁵

Edwards credits Philostorgius's story that Alexander and Ossius of Cordoba had concerted a plan to introduce the *homoousion*: an anonymous life of Constantine corroborates it; as does Ambrose of Milan, who was acquainted both with documents and with witnesses of the council proceedings.

While it seems a stretch to say the term was a hallmark of orthodoxy before Nicaea,¹⁶ the term was well known in connection with Trinitarian theology, being sometimes suspected of Sabellianism, and original Gnostic senses were no longer operative.

The rejection of *homoousios* at Antioch [in 268 CE] is good evidence that before Nicaea the use of the term was not well-established among the Catholics, and was seen as foreign to the Catholic faith.¹⁷

Cientificas, Madrid 1947, 31; Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381*, T&T Clark, London 1988, 210.

15 Mark Edwards, "Alexander of Alexandria and the Homoousion", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 66 (2012), 482-502, 482. see also Mark Edwards, "Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine", in Simon Swain et al. (eds.), *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, 211-235.

16 Wolfgang Bienert, "Das vornicänische *homoousios* als Ausdruck der Rechtgläubigkeit", in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1979), Heft 2-3: 5-29.

17 Chandler, 105.

The threatening idea of two *ousiai* in God, about which Osius quizzed Eusebius of Caesarea at the Antiochene synod that preceded the Council, is doubtless the theological motive that prompted Alexander and Osius to rally to the term. There was no need for Constantine to re-introduce it on a quite other, Hermetic basis. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*.

Chandler claims that the term was actually designed to accommodate Arians and their sympathisers:

In its original Hermetic-gnostic meaning (describing two beings of kindred substance) it appears surprisingly conducive to Eusebian theology. The modalist bishop Marcellus of Ancyra would write against Eusebius and the Arians, strongly arguing that they were in fact crypto-Hermeticists and gnostics, evidently because Eusebius's doctrine was akin to the Hermetic doctrine of two gods.¹⁸

The Hermetic usage of *homoousion* indeed accommodates perhaps as many as four gods, but its Nicene sense, even if blurry, clearly intends to exclude any such ditheistic reading of the preceding clause "God from God".

What Chandler goes on to say is supposititious. Marcellus:

stops short of directly criticizing the word *homoousios*, perhaps because of Constantine's authorship, and the fact that the emperor was the real crypto-Hermeticist actively infusing Christian confession with borrowed and alien elements. But Marcellus's critique of his opponents' alleged crypto-Hermeticizing may help us to explain why Constantine reacted so harshly towards Marcellus.¹⁹

That the close ally of Athanasius should wish to criticize Nicaea and should interpret it in a subordinationist sense strains credulity, as does the idea that Constantine was widely viewed as a Hermeticist secret agent. Nor can one imagine the emperor scanning abstruse

18 Chandler, 120.

19 Ibid.

theological literature ready to be piqued if his pet theories were slighted. The deposition of Marcellus by a council held in Constantinople in 336 CE, in connection with a book of his judged heretical that he refused to withdraw, is perhaps best explained in Eusebius's *Contra Marcellum*, composed immediately afterward. His overtly Sabellian interpretation of the *homoousion* must have been the chief issue.²⁰

Constantine, it is alleged, wanted to shore up the tradition of pagan monotheism,²¹ and Christianity was an instrument in this task. It is hard to see how the term *homoousios* would contribute to this. Rather than copper-fasten the Son's true divinity, as its place in a string of anti-Arian clauses indicates, the word would engineer a sudden swerve to a new topic, defending divine unity as if it might have been compromised by the previous clauses; there is no ancient warrant for this interpretation. The whole point of Constantine's initiative in planning and summoning the Council and then, when the need arose, insisting on the *homoousios* was to cement the unity of the Church, which obliged him to suppress the Arian threat, centred on the divine status of the eternal Son.

Already in autumn 324 his around 70 year old theological counsellor Ossius of Cordoba traveled to Alexandria at the emperor's behest with a personal letter from the emperor to Bishop Alexander and Arius.²²

Constantine hoped to clear up this minor dogmatic squabble so as to celebrate untroubled a *megalē kai hieratikē sunodos* celebrating

20 Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 229-230.

21 Discussed in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, and Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds.), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

22 Hans Christoph Brennecke, "Nicæa I", *TRE* 24, 429-441; 430. The Antiochene synod held that winter 'belongs in the imperial pacification politics, of which Ossius travelled as the exponent' (ibid.).

church unity.²³ Clearly he delegated the direction of the synod, especially in the dogmatic debates, to his theological advisor Ossius.²⁴ If Constantine had aimed to propagate Hermetic ideas he would have made a bigger effort to defend the *homoousios* in the years after Nicaea when that word was in disfavour. It is hard to explain “why the man who imposed the term *homoousion* on 250 bishops should have been ready to waive it, less than a decade later, in his dealings with the two friendless presbyters Arius and Euzoios”.²⁵

One writer surmises that Ossius “probably mentioned to the emperor that the Platonic concept of a first and second Deity was somewhat similar to the Christian belief in God the Father and his Son the Word”.²⁶ Chandler says: “That such things were mentioned to the emperor is certain. However, as we will see, we can more confidently pin such conversations on Lactantius”.²⁷ But Lactantius had died around 320, and the imagined conversation is in any case no more than the pretty picture of a popular historian.

Constantine, it is argued, “believed that Christianity could be expressed through the conceptual and terminological forms of paganism and Gnosticism”.²⁸ Hanson undercuts such exalted images

23 Communiqué of 56 bishops at Antioch (quoted, Brennecke, p. 430); the three other bishops there were placed under a temporary ban, including Eusebius of Caesarea and Narcissus of Neronias (he spoke of three *ousiai* in God). See Hanson, 146-151; Kelly, 208-210.

24 Brennecke, 432.

25 Edwards, “Alexander”, 494.

26 Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire: Roman Imperial Biographies*, Routledge, London and New York 2004, 112–113. Odahl exaggerates the depth and speed of Constantine’s Christian conversion (Chandler, 140).

27 Chandler, 100.

28 Chandler, citing Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, “Platonism in the Palace: The Character of Constantine’s Theology”, in M. Shane Bjornlie (ed.) *The Life and Legacy of Constantine: Traditions Through the Ages*, Routledge, New York 2017, 49-61; 51.

of Constantine's theological competence by quoting his letters, one "written in the usual blustering imperial style" to Arius and Alexander in 324 dismissing "a controversy of futile irrelevance", and another to the rehabilitated Arius in 333, which is incoherent and full of blustering abuse.²⁹ His theologically more respectable public utterances may have drawn on clerical advisers and ghostwriters. On his role at Nicaea, Edwards remarks on how hard it is "to credit the Emperor with the dialectical aptitude or even the command of Greek that would have been required of an interlocutor at this conference". Ossius, too, had a summary Latin theology and was at sea in dealing with Greek subtleties such as the talk of two or three divine *ousiai* that shocked him at the Council of Antioch.³⁰ So we keep being thrown back on the proximate context, namely the quarrel between Alexander and the Arians.

Even if Constantine's Christianity may have been "deeply entangled with ideas that came from contemporary philosophical circles, specifically late Platonist groups which also valued Hermetic wisdom",³¹ this did not necessarily affect his promotion of *homoousios* at Nicaea. Indeed Chandler admits as much when he writes: "It seems obvious that the value the council members found in this foggy language was in its ability to oust the trouble-maker Arius". He adds that "Dale Tuggy has catalogued at least nine possible interpretations of the word which would have been available to the bishops at Nicaea".³² But these do not capture the impact of the term as expressing the unity in being of the Son with the Father. Tully's senses "1. Same individual entity; 2. Same universal essence" may be in the same ballpark as this but do not quite hit the mark. "Same individual entity" is excluded by the designation of the Son as "God from God" and "Same universal essence" is nebulous.

29 Hanson, 9, 137, 189.

30 Ibid., 188.

31 Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, "Platonism in the Palace", 49.

32 Chandler, 106.

The purpose of the term is clear: to affirm the divinity of the Son, and this purpose robes the term with sacral majesty as the Council comes to be fully accepted throughout the Church. “The reason why Nicaea’s so-called champion, Athanasius, deliberately avoided even speaking of *homoousios* for fifteen years after the council was because Athanasius knew that the term stood under an *evil odor*”.³³ This is overdrawn. Theologians seem never to have revelled in the term, since it was felt to be clunky and opaque as well as unscriptural (a sentiment now relived by millions obliged to use the word “consubstantial” in the current translation of the Roman Missal instead of the previous “of one being with” or “one in being with”).

Sieben’s nuanced study of Athanasius’s attitudes to the Council of Nicaea shows that he first envisaged the Council in its negative function as a judgement against the Arians.³⁴ This is not surprising given the number of clauses consciously directed at Arianism in both Creed and anathemas. Later Athanasius highlights the Creed’s positive teaching as a remembering of the apostolic paradosis (both passive and active), not a new “definition of dogma” warranted by “automatic” conditions of infallible authority.³⁵ Athanasius never mentions the Holy Spirit or the idea that a council gathered in the name of Christ (Mt 18:20).³⁶ The backbone of the Creed is of course the traditional kerygma, and the anti-Arian notes merely defend and clarify this.

Nicaea’s creed, however, clearly anathematizes anyone who says that the Son was not eternal (in other words, that there was a time when God was not a Father). Given the emperor’s Christology, how could he endorse such a creed? Through Eusebius’s letter, we see that even Constantine

33 Chandler, 107.

34 Hermann Josef Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee der alten Kirche*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1979, 25-67; 38.

35 Ibid., 47-48.

36 Ibid., 66-67.

appears to have read the language of the creed in his own way for the sake of unity. During the proceedings, he could see that the majority of the bishops wanted to say that the Son existed eternally and that God was eternally a Father, so he, like Eusebius and others, interpreted the language to accommodate his views.³⁷

But at this point in the argument there seems to be no effective presence of Constantine's alleged personal theology in the *homoousion* at all, and no evidence that he read this theology into the term or used it as a Trojan horse for foisting it on the Council.

Whatever *homoousios* had originally meant, or even what it meant to Constantine personally, for the sake of unity (which we must not forget was always Constantine's chief prize), the emperor appears to have allowed the word to be interpreted in new ways at Nicaea, as evidenced by his stripping the term of its usual material sense. This might even be said to represent Constantine's (and Nicaea's) great theological achievement—the shift in the meaning of *homoousios* away from its typical materialistic connotations towards immateriality. And it is right to say that Constantine, in addition to enabling this shift in meaning, also enabled other interpretations of this language by encouraging the bishops to think of it in a “divine” and “ineffable” way.³⁸

Again, nothing is left of any particularly Gnostic or hermetic or pagan connotation. “What it meant to Constantine personally” is postulated on the basis of supposing that he was versed in Hermetic texts. Others would claim that a simple “theology of victory” was the unvarying backbone of Constantine's religious thought, which is reflected in Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, composed in Trier when Constantine was resident there in 313-15.³⁹

37 Chandler, 113.

38 Chandler, 118-119.

39 See François Heim, *La théologie de la victoire, de Constantin à Théodose*, Beauchesne, Paris 1992.

Moreover, the material connotations of *homoousios* were perhaps exaggerated in Arius's captious objections. We do not hear of such material associations in the reports of how *homoousios* was interpreted by the two Dionysii or Paul of Samosata. "The orthodox supporters of the Nicene Creed are against all expectations strikingly reticent about *homoousios* in a way that reminds us of Dionysius of Rome."⁴⁰ But the term aroused unease back in the third century because it was unbiblical, or because it suggested Sabellianism, not because it sounded materialistic. At Nicaea "it could still be given different meanings, and we know this at least by its aforementioned limited appearance in Sabellian circles in the third century as a term of identification."⁴¹ People did not call it Valentinian or Hermetic and the Arian talking point was to link it with Manicheanism.

Eusebius makes much of Constantine's explanation that the term did not mean "of the same being as" according to what we experience in our bodies, as if the Son had come to be by dividing or breaking off from the Father.⁴² Eusebius may have given Constantine an easy target to correct, so as to be able to claim that his subscription was due to imperial insight. His real unease may have come from his subordinationism,⁴³ which could not be openly expressed at the Council. That Constantine stripped the *homoousion* of materialism even as he introduced it, in a brilliant theological innovation, is unlikely. Eusebius tells his faithful that he queried both the expressions

40 Beatrice, 255. Dionysius of Alexandria was ready to accept the term "in a general sense, meaning »of similar nature« (*homophuês*) or »of similar kind« (*homogenês*)" (Hanson, 192).

41 Chandler, 105.

42 *Ep. ad dioecesanos* 7 (in PG 20.1535-1544).

43 "He is, together with Lactantius, the last great non-heretical subordinationist", says Aloys Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche: Von der Apostolischen Zeit zum Konzil von Chalcedon (451)*, 3rd ed., Herder, Freiburg 1990, 300.

ek tēs ousias and *homoousios* and was assured that the former did not imply the Son was part of the Father.⁴⁴ The latter term might be more indigestible, but he subscribed for the sake of church unity and peace and because he identified a sense that expressed right understanding: “*oude tēn phōnēn tou homoousiou paraitoumenoi, tou tēs eirēnēs skopou pro ophthalmōn hēmin keimonou, kai tou mē tēs orthēs ekspesein dianoiās*”.⁴⁵ In contrast to the claim that Constantine invented a new sense for *homoousios*, Eusebius tells us: “some learned and eminent bishops and writers have used the term »of the same being as«, in their theological teaching concerning the Father and Son”.⁴⁶

To conclude, let us read the Creed:

Πιστεύομεν

εἰς ἓνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα
πάντων ὀρατῶν τε καὶ ἀορατῶν ποιητὴν·
καὶ εἰς ἓνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν
τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ
τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρός
Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ,
Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός,
Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,
γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα,
ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί,
δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο
τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ,...

Τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας Ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν,
καὶ Πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν,
καὶ ὅτι Ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο,
ἢ Ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι

44 *Ep. ad dioecesanos* 5.

45 *Ibid.*, 10.

46 *Ep.* 13.

ἢ κτιστόν
ἢ τρεπτόν
ἢ ἀλλοιωτόν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
τούτους ἀναθεματίζει ἡ ἀγία καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.⁴⁷

The text of the Creed itself shows the motivation for adopting the term *homoousios*, and provides the immediate and necessary, or even sufficient context for understanding the term. It begins with “we believe” rather than the “I believe” of baptismal confessions, as one of the first of the declaratory creeds abounding in the years from 325 to 381, in which a group of bishops seek agreement and definition on their understanding of the faith. That declaratory intent is most apparent in the first half of the second article and the anathemas connected with it. At issue is the divinity of the Son, and there is no need to bring in extraneous concerns such as pagan monotheism or Hermetism.

“The Son of God, born of the Father only-begotten, that is, from the substance (*ek tēs ousias*) of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father.” “The Son of God” begins “the series of propositions in which there is struggle against Arianism”⁴⁸ as they explicate its fundamental sense and shield it from distortion. The title already implies an affirmation of what previous tradition, notably Origen, had clarified: “the divine, natural, and proper sonship in contraposition to the adoptive”.⁴⁹ Efforts to make the meaning of the first article depend on the second seem unconvincing, e.g. Heinrich Vogel: “Only under the sign of the second article, only in the light falling from this centre

47 The text here is as given in T. Herbert Bindley, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith*, Methuen, London 1906, 17-18.

48 Ortiz de Urbina, *El símbolo niceno*, 105.

49 *Ibid.*, 119.

were the utterances of faith of the first article possible and realizable”⁵⁰ a claim backed by an inapposite citation of the Augustinian axiom, “*opera sanctae trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisae*”. Barthian Christocentrism lies in the back-ground of such claims. According to Barth “the clause »the one« Lord moves Jesus Christ immediately to the Father, of whom the confession emphatically said in the first article: he is *one* God”, and thus already says that “Jesus Christ is himself this being, not merely his legate or plenipotentiary, but identical with him”.⁵¹

As the lawyerly “that is” (*toutestin*) indicates, the aim is to affirm the true divinity of the Logos, his generation from the very being of God. The phrase to which it is attached, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ, must already have defining dogmatic purpose which *ek tēs ousias* explicates. One writer sees the *toutestin* as governing all the clauses down to *homoousion τῷ πατρὶ*.⁵² It cannot govern the clauses *Theon ek theou*, etc., which are doxological in style. “Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ, Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός” were in the creed Eusebius of Caesarea presented at Nicaea,⁵³ but Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ is added with defining dogmatic purpose. Canon John N. D. Kelly writes: “the absolute

50 Heinrich Vogel, *Das nicaenische Glaubensbekenntnis*, Lettner, Berlin 1963.

51 Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/1, Zollikon: Evangelische Buchhandlung 1939, 445-446. But the correlation of “one God” and “one Lord” is found in 1 Cor 8:6, as noted in Reinhart Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nikäa-Konstantinopel: Historische und theologische Grundlagen*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1996, 227, and the Creed may not be making any new dogmatic observation here. The same pairing of “one God” and “one Lord” occurs in the Creed of Caesarea (read by Eusebius at Nicaea) and the Creed of the Council of Antioch (texts in Kelly, 182, 209-210).

52 Fran O'Rourke, *Joyce, Aristotle, and Aquinas*, University of Florida Press, Gainesville 2022, 116.

53 “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, Only-begotten Son, first-born of every creature, begotten from the Father before all the ages, by whom also all things were made” (Eusebius, *Ep. ad dioecesanos* 4).

uniqueness of the divine Father was one of the staple Arian articles” and Eusebius of Caesarea had read from John 17:3 “not that the Father alone is God but that He alone is true God”.⁵⁴ Note that the second part of the second article dealing with the Incarnation does not have defining dogmatic purpose; it is kerygma, homology, doxology; for a defining of the dogma of the Incarnation we must await Ephesus and Chalcedon.⁵⁵

The text doubles back to make again a quasi-legal clarification, sharply underlining the contrast between begotten and made, with a sharp argumentative negation, γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα. It is the same mode of lawyerly argumentative precision that ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ is then added. It must be in the same line of thinking as all the marked dogmatic emphases so far. We cannot imagine Constantine getting worried about (pagan) monotheism at this juncture and adding the *homoousion* with this new concern in mind. But the word might be meant to ward off a possible misunderstanding, as if the second *theos alethinos*, though of the essence of the Father, constituted a second essence. “That is, of the essence of the Father”, “begotten, not made”, and now “homoousion” all have in common a perceptible aim to forestall heresy by a decisive thrust, in a manner that smacks of dogmatic reflection rather than kerygma or doxology.

54 Kelly, 237. The phrase was ineffectual against the slippery Arians (Athanasius, *Ep. ad Afros* 5). The words “God from God” were omitted from the Constantinopolitan Creed, but the result of this trimming is aesthetically and theologically displeasing and the words are restored in the familiar Latin version, which as Barth remarks consciously enacts the sharpening of thought from lesser to more heightened definition, against Calvin’s view of the passage as a *battologia*, more suited to a song than a creed (*Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, 451). For the texts see Heinrich Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer (eds.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Herder, Freiburg 1976, 52-53, 66-67.

55 As Barth says, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, 448. The third article of the Constantinopolitan creed has defining dogmatic purpose, though it looks like pure doxology and only the Pneumatomachian context reveals the purpose.

These dry specifications are clumsily inserted “technical catchwords”:

If they are detached from the body of the creed to which they adhere so loosely, they leave behind a complete and, to all appearances, independent formulary... a complete creed of the familiar Eastern type with the anti-Arian clauses added, to all seeming, almost as an afterthought. They have been interpolated with a gaucherie and disregard for stylistic grace which are hard to reconcile with Harnack's picture of a new formula.... The very variety of competing claims conduced inevitably to clumsy workmanship.⁵⁶

This aesthetic burden is another aspect of the brokenness and inadequacy of the Nicene witness. Yet the clumsy but hallowed phrases become joyful when chanted. Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* makes the words “*consubstantialem Patri per quem omnia facta sunt*” a single triumphant phrase, as if the *quem* referred to the Father.

Homoousios is not just a stronger way of saying *ek tēs ousias*, but adds the note of unity or sameness of being. But like *ek tēs ousias* (and like “begotten not made”) it is a relational statement, focusing the Son in his relation to the Father, and not making a metaphysical statement about the divine *ousia per se*. *Ek tēs ousias* is found in Alexander of Alexandria and is hardly a Hermetic phrase. *Homoousion* is just as firmly grounded in the biblical relation first named, τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς μονογενῆ. Barth's decision for “the *tautotēs* of Athanasius or for the Augustinian-Western interpretation of the *homoousios*”⁵⁷ is not fully protected against modalism, as he admits (nor against monophysitism for that matter); more emphasis on the relational character of the term would have helped.

Space for Constantine's personal innovation is still more firmly excluded when we note the close links between the credal text and

⁵⁶ Kelly, 229.

⁵⁷ *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 1/2, 462.

the anathemas, especially the reference to “Ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσιᾶς”. The *homoousion* could be seen as a direct riposte: the Son is *homos* not *heteros* in *ousia*. Concern with the unity of God, or with monotheism, is not found in the word *homoousios*. Rather it is the status of the Son that it in question. If he is *heteroousios tō Patri*, he cannot be “true God”. (The reference to creation in the first article ensures monotheism and might even have had Marcion in its sights in an early phase of the formation of the creed.)

Eusebius attributes to Constantine a personal Trinitarian theology, wherein the Son “even before he was actually generated, was in potency (*dunamei*) in the Father ungenerated”.⁵⁸ This theologoumenon is a foreign body in Nicene discussion, but recalls an old account of the generation of the Logos on the model of the *logos endiathetos/prophorikos* distinction (Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.10).⁵⁹ But Hanson sees a likeness with a fragment of Asterius the Sophist quoted by Athanasius, *De synodis* 19: “Before the production of the Son the Father had a pre-existent capacity (*epistēmēn*) to produce, just as before a physician cures he has a capacity to heal”.⁶⁰ The mental milieu from which the theologoumenon stems is not Hermeticism but probably Latin Trinitarian theology in the line of Tertullian, transmitted to Constantine by Lactantius or Ossius.

If the term *homoousios* still carried a Gnostic or Hermetic meaning, imposed on the Council by Constantine, this would embarrass all who recite the Creed today. But embarrassment has surrounded the Creed from the start, from its role as the trophy of an often brutal emperor and from the suspicion of imposing an increasingly unintelligible metaphysics on the simplicity of scriptural faith. “The triumph of the Nicene Creed was a triumph of the priests over the faith of

58 *Ep. ad dioecesanos* 10. Kelly (240) sees this as Eusebius’s “ingenious attempt to get around the Nicene teaching of the eternal sonship”.

59 See Ortiz de Urbina, *El Símbolo niceno*, 131.

60 Hanson, 33, 166.

the Christian people".⁶¹ Despite all this, the Creed itself commands minds and hearts after 1700 years. So often dismissed as archaic and inaccessible, its very brokenness and inadequacy, as Barth underlines, make its sturdy persistence all the more indicative of an underlying encounter with an irreducible revealed reality.

Abstract

A flurry of revisionist theses about the Nicene Creed, which foreground the alleged theological initiative of the Emperor Constantine, who allegedly saw Christianity as an instrument for boosting "pagan monotheism" and whose thought was allegedly nourished by Hermeticism, mediated by his tutor Lactantius seem rather to refer us back to standard accounts of the Creed, and to the roles of Alexander of Alexandria and Ossius of Cordoba. Close study of the actual text of the Creed, including the anathemas, confirms that the homoousion fits perfectly into a string of clauses, all intended to defend the full divinity of the Son against the Arian claims. The texture of the Creed and the all too human circumstances of its composition deserve our close study, as illustrating how the brokenness and fragility of historical formations paradoxically testify to the reality they attest.

61 Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1980, vol. II, p. 283. For more devastating comment, see Jacob Burkhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Doubleday, New York 1956 [1852], 295-307.



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Could a woman become a gnostic? Clement of Alexandria on femininity and masculinity of human soul

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And is not woman translated into man,
when she has become
equally brave, virile and perfect?
Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VI,100,3¹

Introduction; Clement's respect for women, femininity and marriage; Divine femininity; Femininity of the human soul; He who does not become feminine does not grow into a man; Conclusion

Introduction

At a conference devoted to Clement of Alexandria a few years ago, a colleague voiced aloud a question that is politely omitted in the literature due to political correctness: according to Clement, can a woman become a “gnostic” (i.e. the one, who knows God, or a good theologian)? What would Clement say if he saw how many women were studying his work and attending conferences on his ideas? Wouldn't he be shocked?

This question is perfectly relevant. Clement never uses the term ἡ γυνωστικὴ as “female gnostic”, and there is no indication that he counted women as the usual readers of his theological writing, the

1 Transl. W. Wilson, modified.

Stromata. When he says that not only men but also women should seek wisdom (φιλοσοφεῖν), he does not mean intensive study, but rather the practical application of virtue.² Moreover, he claims that men are better in this respect and that they have primacy in everything – unless they become effeminate (*Strom.* IV,62,4).³ In physical strength and moral qualities, a woman can never be equal to a man (*Paed.* II,33,2).⁴ Not that she cannot attain perfection (*Strom.* IV,118,1): By “putting off the flesh” she can become “brave, virile and perfect”, that is, she can turn into a man (*Strom.* VI,100,3).

Nevertheless, in this paper I would like to show that despite some of Clement’s statements proclaiming the traditional superiority of masculinity,⁵ Clement is in fact very positive about femininity, and that in a sense the correct answer to the above-mentioned question

- 2 *Strom.* IV,1,1; 58,3; 62,4; cf. I,93; 99,1. Clement, on the other hand, gives Greek female philosophers and poets (*Strom.* I,80,4; IV,120,3; 121,2–122,4) and Hebrew prophetesses (*Strom.* I,136,1) as models; he does not chastise them for speaking or even writing instead of spinning or holding a cooking spoon. Cf. Judith L. Kovacs, *Becoming the Perfect Man. Clement of Alexandria on the Philosophical Life of Women*, in S. Ahearne-Kroll – P. Holloway – J. Kelhoffer (eds.), *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, Tübingen 2010, 389–413.
- 3 Our author criticizes the loss of masculinity and effeminacy in many places (e.g. *Strom.* II,81,3; *Paed.* II,48,1; 56,3; 59,1; 65,1; 99,1; 105,3; 113,2; 115,2; III,13,1–2; 16,2; 18,1; 69,2; 73,5) and also makes very harsh condemnations of bisexual practice (*Paed.* II,69,1; II,87,3; III,15,1–2; 23,1,3).
- 4 Euripides, fr. 545, 545a, 546 TrGF, from the tragedy *Oedipus*, in: *Strom.* IV,63,2–3 a 125,1: “A woman is always worse than her husband, even when the worst villain marries an honest one”, “every sensible woman is her husband’s servant”, and “when a man speaks, his wife should think he is right, even if he is not, and try to say only what pleases her husband.”
- 5 As Judith L. Kovacs points out (*Becoming the Perfect Man*, 409), Clement in *Strom.* IV,62,4 seems to be directly following Socrates’ words from Plato’s *Republica* 455c. As for the biblical tradition, see, e.g. Sir 42:14 (NRS): “Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace.”

would even be: “Only a woman can become a good theologian according to Clement.” The chosen topic, however, will not lead us to a banal argument about the supremacy of one or the other genders, but surprisingly brings us right to the core of Clement’s soteriology.

Clement’s respect for women, femininity and marriage

We do not know whether Clement was a married man, a celibate, or a widower. It is well known, however, that he was a great defender of marriage.⁶ The only reason for celibacy, which he considered appropriate, was (for men who could easily endure solitude) “the desire for holy knowledge” (*Strom.* III,67), that is, the deepest and most concentrated study of theology and prayer. In other cases, in his opinion, the absence of a woman by a man’s side often causes the capacity to love to disappear from his life (τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης οἴχεται παρ’ αὐτοῖς, *Strom.* III,67,2).

If a man remains single simply to avoid cohabitation with a woman and the care of the household, it is “unmanly and weak” (*Strom.* II,142,1). And if it is even done because the man regards a close relationship with a woman as something impure and thinks that by sexual abstinence as such he will be conformed to Christ, then it is a dangerous heresy (*Strom.* III,49; cf. IV,146,2).⁷

6 Cf. e.g. Jean-Paul Broudéhoux, *Mariage et famille chez Clément d’Alexandrie*, Beauchesne, Paris 1970; Miklós Gyurkovics, “La santa prole. Il frutto del matrimonio cristiano nella teologia di Clemente di Alessandria”, in *Augustinianum* 58/1 (2018), 45–65.

7 *Strom.* III,49,3 (translated by the author): “They do not know the reason why the Lord did not marry. First, He had His bride, the Church; secondly, He was not an ordinary man who needed human support, nor did He need to beget children, since He lives forever and is the only Son of God.”

Marriage is not an obstacle to spiritual life. The unmarried man is in many ways beyond temptation, because he has only himself to look after: the married man has to undergo a difficult spiritual struggle, by which he becomes strengthened. Moreover, by his responsibility for his wife and family, he becomes an image of divine providence: the fact that he does not go as far in “saving self-care” as the pious celibate because of family concerns is somehow compensated for (*Strom.* VII,70,7–8; III,79,5).

According to Clement, a woman is to be treated with respect by her husband. She is not to be forced into marriage with the one who courts her (*Strom.* II,137,4), nor is her dignity to be in any way trampled upon in marriage (*Paed.* II,97; *Strom.* III,58,2). It is also necessary to respect her delicacy and not to force her to severe ascetic feats by which she would imitate men: it is all right if (unlike a man) she uses perfumes (*Paed.* II,66,1), wears dresses of soft fabrics (*Paed.* II,102,3; III,1), does not go barefoot but wears shoes that protect her entire feet (*Paed.* II,117,1), and does not engage in strenuous sports such as running (*Paed.* III,49,2).⁸

We said that Clement approves of celibacy in specific cases as a space for the deepest possible study of theology and prayer. He even sees celibacy as a precious gift from God (*Strom.* III,4,3). However, he hardly mentions celibacy for women at all,⁹ insofar as we can judge from his extant works.¹⁰ Nor does he try to convince women of the desirability of marriage, e.g., that they will have emotional support as wives or material security in old age, although he gives similar

8 However, Clement also speaks of women’s martyrdom, both bloody (*Strom.* IV,67,4; 127,2), and bloodless (*Strom.* IV,67,3; 68,1).

9 I have found only two minor allusions to this subject (*Strom.* III,60,4; 88,2–3), which, however, do not sound like a recommendation of virginity as a state of life in the Church (cf. e.g. Tertullian, *De oratione*, 22).

10 Clement’s early writing *On Self-control* has unfortunately not survived, cf. *Paed.* II,94,1.

advice to men.¹¹ Could it be that female celibacy was not popular in the Alexandrian church of Clement's time? Or did Clement consider a woman's voluntary choice of solitude and the most intense study to be such an overly severe asceticism and such an imitation of manhood that he did not even mention the possibility?

Divine femininity

In Clement's book *Which Rich Man Will Be Saved?*, we read an often-quoted statement by which Clement speaks of the womanhood of God, as if anticipating modern feminist theology. He derives this idea, among other things, from the final sentence of the prologue of John's Gospel, John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God. It is the only God (the only Son),¹² being in the bosom of the Father (εις τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς), who has made him known." The term κόλπος, as is well known, denotes in Greek the breast, the bosom, or lap (of woman or man), but often also the womb.¹³

At the same time, Clement considers this verse of Scripture to be the key to understanding what love is:

Look at the mysteries of love, and then you will behold the bosom (κόλπος) of the Father, whom the only God alone has made known (John 1:18). It is he himself, God-love (1 John 4:8, 16), and out of love he was captured (ἐθιράθη) by us: his ineffability (τὸ μὲν ἄρρητον αὐτοῦ) [is] Father, but his compassion (τὸ συμπαθές) for us became Mother: The Father by loving became feminine (ἀγαπήσας ἐθιλύνηθη), of which the mighty sign is He whom He begot of Himself. This fruit born of love

11 *Strom.* II,141,2; III,49,3; IV,125,3.

12 Clement quotes John 1:18 in both important variants: ... μονογενῆς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς... (*Strom.* V,81,3; *Quis div.* 37,1; *Exc.* 6,2; cf. *Exc.* 8,1); μονογενῆς υἱὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς... (*Strom.* I,169,4; cf. *Exc.* 7,3; 9,3).

13 Henry G. Liddell – Robert Scott – Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon with a Supplement*, Oxford 1990, 974.

is love.¹⁴

Clement evidently alludes here to the doctrine of the Valentinian Gnostics about the syzygies of the divine Pleroma, the highest of which, according to some sources, is the pair of the Ineffable Father (or Depth), and the Mother Grace (or Silence).¹⁵ He translates this idea into orthodoxy, as if to say: there is no primordial dyad of Man and Woman from which more and more syzygies emanate. God is one, He is both Father and Mother. He is the μητροπάτωρ of whom Orpheus speaks,¹⁶ he is Love (1John 4:8.16), which virginally begets¹⁷ the only Son. And this Son is also the only Love itself. As the Father, God is ineffable and unsearchable; as the Mother, she allows herself to be “captured”, to be grasped – her compassion is intelligible to us, and from her womb the Son is born, who gives men knowledge of the ineffable Father (cf. also Matt 11:27 par.).

According to Clement, the secret of love is therefore the mother’s bosom or the womb of the Ineffable: “womanhood” or “femininity” which God receives out of love – his compassion for us, his tenderness and grace. Certainly, God was and is and always will be what He is (*Strom.* V,141,2). At the same time, however, we can (figuratively) say that, as the Ineffable Father, He “became” Grace, Compassion, “woman”. Or else: as the Good God, He “became” the Father, the Creator, the Just (*Paed.* I,88,2), “the man”. In God, masculinity and femininity exist inseparably. Similarly, the Word, who “became” the Son and already in the beginning “became” flesh (*Exc.* 19,1–2), is a spiritual body that cannot be understood as merely masculine (*Exc.* 10,1–3): also in the Son, masculinity and femininity are equally

14 *Quis div.* 37,1–2, my translation. On *Quis div.* 36–37 see esp. Carlo Nardi, “Il seme eletto e la maternità di Dio nel *Quis dives salvetur* di Clemente Alessandrino”, in *Prometheus* 11 (1985) 271–286.

15 *Exc.* 29–31, which also speaks of the Father’s compassion.

16 *Orficorum fragmenta* 248a, in: *Strom.* V,125,2; 126,2.

17 Cf. *Exc.* 19,4.

present. We cannot call Him the Daughter, only because of the historical event of the incarnation and birth of the man Jesus.

Those [bodies] which are here are male and female and differ from each other, but there he who is the Only-Begotten and inherently intellectual has been provided with his own form and with his own nature which is exceedingly pure and sovereign and directly enjoys the power of the Father.¹⁸

Femininity of the human soul

The Alexandrian teacher addresses his *Paedagogus*, a writing intended to form catechumens and neophytes, to women as well as to men. In its introduction we read:

Let us recognize that both men and women practise the same sort of virtue. Surely, if there is but one God for both, then there is but one Educator for both. One Church, one virtue, one modesty, one common food, wedlock is common, breath, sight, hearing, knowledge, hope, obedience, love, all are alike [in man and woman]. They who possess life in common, grace in common, and salvation in common have also virtue in common and, therefore, education too.¹⁹

Yes, there is no difference between male and female virtue on the spiritual level. The whole human race needs “the same education and virtue”.²⁰

In his defence of marriage against the teachings of the Encratite Julius Cassian, Clement ironically remarks:

This “expert” thinks too Platonistically when he claims that the soul is divine and came here into existence and death because it became feminine (θηλυθηεϊσσαν) by lust.²¹

18 *Exc.* 10,3, transl. R. P. Casey.

19 *Paed.* I,10,1–2, transl. S. P. Wood.

20 *Strom.* IV,63,1, cf. SVF III,253–254 and Musonius Rufus (fr. 3, 9,5–7 Hense).

21 *Strom.* III,93,3.

It is possible that when Clement says in *Quis div.* 37 that God became feminine by love, this is a provocative allusion to this statement of Cassian about the feminization of the soul. Cassian himself perhaps follows Plato's *Timaeus* (90 e), according to which cowardly and unrighteous men become women in the next birth; but Platonic elements are probably adopted by Cassian, who "came out of the school of Valentinus" (*Strom.* III,92,1), mainly in a form paraphrased and deformed by Valentinian gnosis. The Church in the concept of the Valentinians is the offspring of the virgin mother Wisdom, or her spiritual seed sown in the chosen souls. It is the product of the desire of this "Woman in high", the offspring of her "mating" without a mate (*Exc.* 67–68). Therefore this seed is also "female", i.e. imperfect, infantile, weak and subject to the powers of the world.²² Through the Saviour it is then redeemed from its humiliated, female state and transformed into a man (εἰς ἄνδρα μετατίθεσθαι) by entering into partnership (syzygy) with its personal angel.²³

It is this doctrine that Clement seeks to refute when he asserts in several places in his work that the human soul is saved (not just some seed sown in it) and that "after the putting off (ἀπόθεσις) of the body" the soul is neither female nor male. It is in this context that his statement I mentioned in the introduction occurs:

For souls, themselves by themselves, are equal. Souls are neither male nor female, when they no longer marry nor are given in marriage (Luke 20:35 par.). And is not woman translated into man (μετατίθεται εἰς τὸν ἄνδρα), when she has become equally brave, virile and perfect?²⁴

Yes, Cassian is certainly right that lust is something that degrades the human soul. This defect will not be present in the kingdom

22 *Exc.* 21,3; 68; 79.

23 *Exc.* 21,3; 22,3; 79.

24 *Strom.* VI,100,3, transl. W. Wilson, modified.

of heaven, for there we will no longer lack anything:²⁵ we will be completely satiated with goodness and will not long for anything. In the eternal rest, people do not “marry and are not given in marriage” (*Strom.* VI,140,1) in the sense that masculinity and femininity are no longer traumatically split by lust:

The Scripture says: “For in this world, they marry and are given in marriage,” for this world is the only place in which the female is distinguished from the male, “but in that other world, no longer” (Luke 20:34–35). There, the rewards of this life, lived in the holy union of wedlock (συζυγία), await not man or woman as such, but the human person, now divided because he is split in two by lust.²⁶

But it would be too hasty to conclude from the above statements that Clement imagined the resurrected human personality as hermaphroditic.²⁷ Although he speaks of the saved soul as neutral, he does not enter into any speculation as to the nature of the human resurrection body.²⁸ His primary concern is not to create eschatological hypotheses, but to deny heterodox interpretations of Scripture that he considered harmful. First: the male-female partnership (συζυγία) is certainly not an eternal principle of divine Pleroma, as the Valentinians think; second: salvation does not mean deliverance from “evil” sexuality, as the Encratites think – it is the healing of man from selfishness and hardness:

Cassian says: When Salome asked when the things she asked would be known, the Lord answered her, “When you trample on the garment of shame and the two become one, and male and female will be neither male nor female”. First of all, we have these words not in the four Gospels that have been handed down to us, but in the *Gospel according to the*

25 Klement, fr. 46 Stählin; cf. *Strom.* III,87,2.

26 *Paed.* I,10,1–3, transl. S. P. Wood, modified.

27 Cf. Kovacs, *Becoming the Perfect Man*, 393.

28 Kovacs, *Becoming the Perfect Man*, 395.

Egyptians. It also seems me that Cassian misunderstands that “male” here means anger and “female” lust.²⁹

Clement here corrects the “overly Platonizing” Cassian by recalling the Platonic motif of the double chariot (*Phaedrus* 246b) in Philo’s interpretation, which was apparently very popular in Alexandria at the time: according to Philo, the horses of the human chariot are lust or greed (ἐπιθυμία), which is femininity, and anger or aggression (θυμός), which is masculinity.³⁰ Greed, this “female” vice, as has already been said, has no access to heavenly rest. And the same applies to anger as a “male” vice: human aggression is also something provisional, a kind of childhood disease of the human race. “We are not brought up for war, but for peace.”³¹ Before we can enter the resurrection, we must “trample on the garment of shame”, i.e., strip off and leave behind the shameful selfish desire and aggression, grow out of these inner movements of which we are right to be ashamed and which (like a piece of cloth) “veil our reason”, Clement goes on to say.³² When we have our reason unveiled and free, our being will be integrated:

Then there will be in you “neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28), as Paul also says. The soul, once it has come out of this form, when the masculine and the feminine are distinguished, is transformed to union (μετατίθεται εἰς ἕνωσιν) and is neutral (οὐθέτερον οὖσα).³³

We can see that here Clement no longer speaks of the transformation of woman into man, but of the transformation of each individual soul “to union”.

29 *Strom.* III,92,2–93,1, cf. *Strom.* III,63,2–3; 64,1.

30 Philo, *De agr.* 73: ἵπποι μὲν οὖν ἐπιθυμία καὶ θυμός εἰσιν, ὁ μὲν ἄρρηγ, ἡ δὲ θήλεια. Cf. Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, Oxford 1971, 98p 7n. Cf. *Strom.* V,53,1 a *Paed.* III,53,2.

31 *Paed.* I,98,4; cf. *Strom.* IV,62,3; VI,72,3.

32 *Strom.* III,93,1–2; cf. e.g. *Paed.* I,5,1–2; 28.

33 *Strom.* III,93,2–3.

He who does not become feminine does not grow into a man

Let us now return to the passage from Clement's book *Which Rich Man Will Be Saved?*, which speaks of the feminization of God. The passage we have quoted goes on to speak of Christ, who, as "the fruit born of love", is himself the love:

Being about giving himself as a ransom, [the Son of God] leaves us a new covenant: "My love I give unto you"³⁴. What does this mean, and how great is this love? For sake of each of us he laid down his life – worth no less than the universe. He demands of us in return our lives for the sake of each other.³⁵ But if we owe our lives to our brethren, and acknowledge the such is our agreement with the Saviour, shall we still hoard away and shut up the things of the world, that are poor, and not truly our own, and that pass away? Shall we keep back from each other what the fire will shortly have? Divinely, indeed, and with inspiration, John says, "He that does not love his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15), seed of Cain, offspring of the devil; he does not have the heart of God (θεοῦ σπλάγχνον οὐκ ἔχει); he does not have hope of better things; he is without seed; he is without children; he is not a branch of the ever living, heavenly vine, he is cut off, he has to expect the fire at once (John 15:5–6).³⁶

Clement here uses the peculiar expression, "He that does not love his brother, does not have the σπλάγχνον of God." The term is usually used in the plural (σπλάγχνα) and means literally "internal organs" (i.e., heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, but often also the womb), and figuratively it means the inner self and emotions, especially anxiety,

34 Cf. John 14:27.

35 John 13:34; 15:13.

36 *Quis div.* 37,4–6, transl. P. M. Barnard (modified).

concern, or love.³⁷ The Septuagint³⁸ and the New Testament writers use the term *σπλάγχνα* in a similar way: they designate by it human tender feelings, love,³⁹ concern for another,⁴⁰ and human and divine mercy, compassion.⁴¹

The singular *σπλάγχνον*, which is generally infrequent and does not occur at all in Greek Scripture,⁴² seems here, like the plural *σπλάγχνα*,

37 Liddell – Scott – Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1628. This expression, even in the singular, is used of the inner self of both women and men, cf. e.g. Euripides, *Médeia* 219–221.

38 In the Septuagint version of Prov 12:10, *σπλάγχνα* is a translation of the Hebrew *רַחֲמִים*, which is also a plural and is used in the sense of “compassion”, “mercy”. The singular *רֶחֶם* means “womb”, W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Wörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Herbert Donner, Berlin – Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2013¹⁸, s. v. (p. 1236). Other occurrences of the term *σπλάγχνα* denoting emotions in the Septuagint: Wis 10:5; Sir 30:7; 33:5; Bar 2:17; 4 Macc 14:13; 15:23,29.

39 2 Cor 7:15; Phlm 1:12.

40 Phlm 1:7; 1:20.

41 About God – Luke 1:78; about human person – Phil 2:1; Col 3:12; 1 John 3:17.

42 Nardi, “Seme eletto”, 283, notes that τὸ *σπλάγχνον κυρίου* is the title of the Messiah in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (VIII,4,5; cf. VI,8,2). I consider it probable, however, that rather than to this Old Testament apocryphon Clement in *Quis div.* 37,6 alludes to the *Shepherd of Hermas* (*Sim.* 9,24,2–4), where he speaks of the faithful dwelling on the seventh mountain (on the vision of the twelve mountains see *Sim.* 9,1,5–10): “They were always simple, and harmless, and blessed, bringing no charges against one another, but always rejoicing greatly because of the servants of God ... always having pity (*σπλάγχνον ἔχοντες*) on every man, and giving aid from their own labour to every man, without reproach and without hesitation. ... And I, the angel of repentance, say to you who are such, Continue to be such as these, and your seed will never be blotted out. ... The whole of your seed will dwell with the Son of God; for you have received of His Spirit” (transl. F. Crombie). Similarly in *Quis div.* 37, the generous giving of possessions and the seed of Cain (as opposed to the elect seed, *Quis div.* 36,2–3) is spoken of; moreover, *Quis div.* 42,18 (and *Strom.* I,85,4) also speaks directly of the Angel of Repentance (cf. *Hermae Pastor, Vis.* 5,1,7; *Mand.* 4,2,2; 12,4,7; 6,1; *Sim.* 9,1,1; 14,3; 23,5; 24,4).

to refer to typically feminine emotions, to mercy, tenderness and compassion.⁴³ It corresponds to the Johannine expression “the Father’s bosom” (κόλπος τοῦ πατρὸς). Precisely because the Father became mother out of love and as the unsearchable gave Himself to be captured – because He “gave birth” to the Word – precisely because God became a woman, it is necessary for every human being to acquire femininity. Whoever does not have in himself God’s σπλάγχνον, that is, the divine womanhood, softness, mercy, compassion – whoever is too masculine – will be rejected like a barren branch, like the seed of Cain.⁴⁴

Clement also touches on the mystery of the Father’s merciful (“feminine”) love in the seventh book of *Stromata*:

But “he that is joined to the Lord”⁴⁵ in Spirit “becomes a spiritual body”⁴⁶ by an excellent (διάφορον) kind of conjunction. Such a one is wholly a son, a holy man, passionless, gnostic, perfect, formed (μορφούμενος) by the teaching of the Lord; in order that in deed, in word, and in spirit itself, being brought close to the Lord, he may receive the mansion that is due to him who has become a man thus (ἀπηνδρωμένω).⁴⁷ Let the specimen suffice to those who have ears.⁴⁸ For it is not required to unfold the mystery, but only to indicate what is sufficient for those who are partakers in knowledge to bring it to mind; who also will comprehend how it was said by the Lord, “Be perfect as your Father” (γίνεσθε ὡς ὁ

43 Cf. Clement of Rome, *Hom.* XII,26,6, according to whom philanthropy is masculine-feminine (ἀρρενόθηλος): its “feminine” (intuitive) component is mercy and its “masculine” (rational) component is love of neighbour. Clement probably knew the source of the Clementine homilies, see Paul Collomp, “Une source de Clément d’Alexandrie et les homélies pseudo-clémentines”, in *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d’histoire anciennes* 37 (1913), 19–46.

44 Nardi, “Seme eletto”, 283.

45 1 Cor 6:14.

46 1 Cor 15:44.

47 cf. Eph 4:13.

48 Matt 11:15.

πατήρ ὁμῶν τέλειοι),⁴⁹ perfectly, by forgiving sins, and forgetting injuries, and living in the habit of passionlessness.⁵⁰

In order to indicate what this perfection or maturity consists of, i.e. what the Pauline “becoming a man” (Eph 4:13) means, Clement links two parallel Gospel statements: Matthew’s version, “You will be perfect/adult, just as your heavenly Father is perfect,” and Luke’s: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.”

The terminology of this passage (“excellent”, “formed”) unmistakably reveals that here Clement is again alluding to the Valentinians.⁵¹ Nor is the verb ἀπανδροῦν (to become a man) likely to be a simple allusion to Eph 4:13: “... until all of us come to the unity (εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα) of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity/manhood (εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον)...”, but is probably intended to remind the reader of the Valentinian exegesis of this verse. Clement notes it in this form: “When the female [being]”, that is, that chosen, excellent, but originally only female seeds of the fallen female aeon of Wisdom, “becomes men (ἀπανδρωθέντα), they unite (ἐνοῦται) with the angels”, i.e., with the angels of the Saviour, who are said to have immersed themselves with him in the waters of the Jordan, and to be the personal saviours and bridegrooms of the female seed, “and to advance into the Pleroma”.⁵²

The orthodox paraphrase of this doctrine is the whole of Clement’s note 27 in his *Excerpts from Theodotus*, according to which the saved soul (of both man and woman) is the betrothed not of an angel, but of the Son of God Himself. Having put off (ἀπόθεσις) all that enveloped

49 Matt 5:48 and Luke 6:36.

50 *Strom.* VII,88,3–4, transl. W. Wilson.

51 Cf. *Exc.* 41,3 (διάφορον σπέρμα); *Strom.* II,10,2; *Exc.* 21,1; 26,1–2; 35,1; 41,1 (διαφέρον σπέρμα); *Exc.* 45,1 (μόρφωσις ἢ κατὰ γνῶσιν).

52 *Exc.* 21,3; cf. *Exc.* 79: “When the seed was formed, it was changed to a man (μορφωθέν δὲ μετετέθη εἰς ἄνδρα).”

the soul and was its body, the soul, as a perfect high priest,⁵³ enters the heavenly Holy of Holies and unites herself to the Lord to such an extent that she becomes His body (Exc. 27,3,6). The soul is then no longer a mere bride: she has already given herself to her Bridegroom and become the Word (Exc. 27,5), i.e., she has “became a man” (*Strom.* VII,88,3). She has been transformed “to union” (*Strom.* III,93,2–3).

Conclusion

We have seen that Clement – in response to Valentinian and Encratite teachings – strongly valorises feminine qualities and feelings. He attributes in a certain sense womanhood even to God the Father and God the Son. Clement is even convinced that the very mystery of love lies in God’s femininity and every person should imitate it. This divine “femininity”, this total and fruitful giving of oneself, is clearly displayed in the sacrifice of Christ. The perfect acceptance of salvation then means for the soul a loving, inseparable union with the Son of God – a full acceptance and imitation of the divine self-giving – it means union with the Word. This union may be metaphorically called a marriage, though it is certainly not a male-female couple: masculinity and femininity are equally present in God the Father and God the Son, as well as in each individual saved soul.

What the resurrected human body will look like, whether or to what extent it will retain its masculine or feminine features, is another question, and one that Clement does not ask in his extant work. Nor does his conviction of the gender neutrality of the redeemed soul in any way prevent him from regarding here on earth, in the flesh, the predominance of man, the fragility of woman, and the unambiguous division of social roles as an unquestionable fact.

53 In *Strom.* IV,118,1 Clement explicitly says that this “priestly” perfection can be attained by a woman as well as by a man.

If one is to become a “gnostic” (insofar as this is possible here in the flesh), that is, one to whom Christ’s statement “my sheep know me” (John 10:14) applies, and who can “grasp” God and understand his mystery, according to Clement, intensive study and precise expertise are not the most important things for him (*Strom.* VII,11,3; 55,4). The key is to behold the Father’s bosom, to understand God’s “maternal” self-giving and to accept it as his own: to “become woman” as God himself “became woman”. Thus, even a man busy caring for his family, who is incapable of the great intellectual and spiritual performance he would have the opportunity to make if he lived alone, can be a knower of God (*Strom.* VII,80,4). And this “gnostic” can also be a woman, who (as Clement in his gallantry thought) cannot be asked to make the hard-ascetic efforts that are necessary for the life of a theologian fully immersed in work and prayer.⁵⁴

Abstract

In the works of Clement of Alexandria we can find various and seemingly contradictory statements about womanhood and femininity. What does this patristic author mean when he speaks, on the one hand, of the natural subordination and inferiority of woman to man in all areas of life and of the possible perfection of woman through her transformation into man, and, on the other hand, says that man is to imitate God’s femininity? What does Clement understand by the femininity and masculinity of the human soul, and in what sense does he consider the human soul to be gender-neutral? According to Clement’s theology, is the human soul a bride? And if so, who is her bridegroom? These are the questions that this article attempts to answer.

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The Liturgical Reception and Commemoration of the First Council of Nicaea

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Introduction; 1. Nicaea I and Liturgy; 2. The Liturgical Reception of the Canons; 3. The Liturgical Commemoration of the Council; 4. The Byzantine Rite Akolouthia for the Council of Nicaea I; Concluding Remarks

Introduction

The commemorations of centenaries are opportunities to revisit events of the past and reflect upon their circumstances and their reception, and to understand their meaning for today. With regard to the First Council of Nicaea, it goes without saying that the extant authentic texts of this first ecumenical council had a direct impact on Christian worship and liturgy in the early Church.¹ Whether by regulating the posture of the faithful during worship or imposing a date for the communal celebration of Pascha, the influence of the Council of Nicaea on liturgy was felt in the decades following 325, up

1 For example, the interest in the Council of Nicaea during its last centenary resulted not only in liturgical celebrations commemorating this event, for example at St Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1925, but also in a flurry of publications dedicated to the convocation of Nicaea I. See *Bollettino per la commemorazione del XVI centenario del concilio di Nicea*, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Roma 1925.

until the present day.² And yet, despite the importance of this council as the first council that gathered representatives from all corners of the *oikoumene*, every local church received and commemorated this event and its decisions differently. Some celebrate it liturgically and annually, while others reserve its decisions and memory less for present-day liturgical implementation and veneration, and more for theological treatises and handbooks.

Because much has already been written on early Christian worship before Nicaea,³ rather than looking at the background of the Council of Nicaea, my aim here is to look at the council itself and its reception and commemoration. After an overview of the impact of extant documents of the First Council of Nicaea on liturgical practice in the years after the council, this paper turns to the reception of the council itself through celebrations of the liturgical year, providing an updated synthesis of more recent scholarship on the question over the last century.

1. Nicaea I and Liturgy

The official texts of the council of Nicaea I are limited because the acts of the council have not survived and the only extant authentic

- 2 See, for example, the discussions around a common date of Pascha in D. P. Ogitsky, “Канонические нормы православной пасхалии и проблема датировки Пасхи в условиях нашего времени”, in *Богословские Труды* 7 (1971), 204-211; Idem, “Canonical Norms of the Orthodox Easter Computation and the Problem of the Dating of Pascha in our time”, in *SVTQ* 17/4 (1973), 274-284; World Council of Churches/Middle East Council of Churches Consultation, “Towards a Common Date for Easter” (Aleppo, Syria, 5–10 March 1997), Online: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/towards-a-common-date-for-easter>.
- 3 See, for example, Paul F. Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, second edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

texts are the Creed, the Synodal Letter, and 20 canons.⁴ Although the questions of reception and commemoration are the focus of this paper, two details from the conciliar context require some examination, namely the date of the council and the number of participants at the council.

With regard to the date, there seems to be some confusion in the historical record. According to some accounts, such as that of the historiographer Socrates, the council opened on 20 May.⁵ However, as we shall see from liturgical calendars, the date of 29 May is frequently mentioned as the date of the council. In the year 325, Pascha fell on 18 April,⁶ which would place 29 May exactly 41 days after Pascha, near the date on which it is celebrated today in the Byzantine Rite, on the sixth Sunday after Pascha. However, Eduard Schwartz believes that the date of 20 May was a misinterpretation of some copies of the history of Socrates of Constantinople, and that in fact the council opened on 19 June 325.⁷ How long it lasted is not clear, but some have

4 For the texts of the Creed and canons, see Norman P. Tanner, SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1: *Nicaea I to Lateran V*, Sheed & Ward, London 1990, 1-19; G. Alberigo, *Concilium Nicaenum I–325*, in *The Oecumenical Councils from Nicaea I to Nicaea II (325–787)*, Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta 1, Brepols, Turnhout 2006, 3-15.

5 Καὶ ὁ χρόνος δὲ τῆς συνόδου, ὡς ἐν παρασημειώσεσιν εὐρομεν, ὑπατείας Παυλίνου καὶ Ἰουλιανοῦ τῆ εἰκάδι τοῦ Μαΐου μηνός· τοῦτο δὲ ἦν ἔτος ἑξακοσιοστὸν τριακοστὸν ἕκτον ἀπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνων βασιλέως, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου βασιλείας ἑννεακαίδεκατον ἔτος ἦν. Socrate de Constantinople, *Histoire Ecclésiastique, Livre I*, trans. P. Périchon SJ and P. Maraval, ed. P. Maraval, SC 477, Cerf, Paris 2004, 164 (Book 1, XIII, 12).

6 Venance Grumel, *La chronologie, Traité d'Études Byzantines 1*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1958, 311.

7 See *Die Anktenbeilagen in den Athanasiushandschriften*, in Eduard Schwartz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin, 1959, 78-81. Maraval explains that the date of 20 May was arrived at by Socrates from his misreading of the notes that indicated the kalends of July (i.e. three days before the kalends of July would be 19 June), and not the kalends of June (i.e. three days before

speculated that it ended on or around 25 July.⁸ In any case, it seems that some aspects of the exact convocation and chronology of the council are not firmly established.

With regard to the number of participants, liturgical texts, such as the Synaxarion of Constantinople, mention that there were 232 bishops and 86 presbyters, deacons, and monks, for a total of 318 participants.⁹ This number coincides the number of trained servants from the house of Abraham that he employed in his battle to free his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:14). Pseudo-Barnabas, Clement of Alexandria, and Pseudo-Cyprian all commented on the number 318 well before the Council of Nicaea, noting that its form in Greek (ΤΙΗ) bears similarities to the Cross of Christ (Τ) and the first letters of the name of Jesus (ΙΗ). This combination was further theologized to suggest that the 318 servants of Abraham were bearers of salvation to the captives, themselves saved by the sign and name of Christ.¹⁰ Around 358–359 Hilary of Poitiers (d.c.367) appears to be the first to connect the 318 servants of Abraham in Genesis to the number of fathers gathered in Nicaea.¹¹ By 372, Basil of Caesarea refers to the “318 Fathers of Nicaea” as if it were common knowledge, and from then on the number continues as the standard reference to, and shorthand

the kalends of June would be 20 May). See Socrate de Constantinople, *Histoire Ecclésiastique, Livre I*, trans. P. Périchon SJ and P. Maraval, ed. P. Maraval, SC 477, Cerf, Paris 2004), 164-165 n. 1. For the history of this question, see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 1 n. 4.

8 See, for example, G. Alberigo, *Concilium Nicaenum I*, 6.

9 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, (Athens, Αποστολική Διακονία, 1959), 182. See also the entry for 29 May in Hippolyte Delehaye, *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris. Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Apud Socios Bollandianos, Brussels 1902, col. 716.

10 M. Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham (Gen XIV, 14) et le Nombre des Pères au Concile de Nicée (325)”, in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 61 (1966), 5-43, here 11-12.

11 Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham”, 14-16.

for, the participants of the Council of Nicaea.¹² As Ambrose of Milan later notes, the symbolism of 318 as the sign of the Cross and of Jesus means that Christ acts to place the conciliar assembly under the sign of his passion and his name (*signum suae passionis et nominis*).¹³

Attempts to verify the number of participants at Nicaea has proved extremely difficult, if not impossible. Ernst Honigmann conducted a detailed study of the manuscript sources to arrive at a list of the council fathers of Nicaea. He concludes that there is consensus among the ancient authors that there were about 300 participants, although the number of known names in the lists appears closer to 200.¹⁴ However Michel Aubineau, whose goal was to understand when and how the precise number of 318 fathers at Nicaea was established, shows that there is no independent evidence for this number, with the theological symbolism and exegetical significance obscuring interest in historical reality.¹⁵ Be that as it may, what is important for our interest here is that already within a few decades of the Council of Nicaea, the number of Fathers was set at 318.¹⁶

12 Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham”, 18.

13 Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham”, 20. For other numerology regarding Chalcedon (i.e. 630 or 636 Fathers of Chalcedon, exactly double the number of 318 Father of Nicaea), see Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham”, 25. See also the anti-Chalcedonian reference to the double number of the Fathers of Chalcedon in *Extraits de Timothée Ælure*, in F. Nau (ed.), *Documents pour servir à l’histoire de l’église nestorienne*, PO 13.2, Firmin–Didot, Paris 1919, 204-205 and 222-225.

14 E. Honigmann, “La liste originale des Pères de Nicée”, in *Byzantion* 11 (1936), 429-449; 12 (1937), 323-347; 14 (1939), 17-76; 16 (1942/1943), 20-28; 20 (1950), 63-71.

15 Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham”, 41-43.

16 See also J. Rivière, “«Trois cent dix-huit» Un cas de symbolisme arithmétique chez S. Amroise”, in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 6 (1934), 361-367; H. Chadwick, “Les 318 Pères de Nicée”, in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 61 (1966), 808-811; E. Lucchesi, “318 ou 319 pères de Nicée”, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 102 (1984), 394-396.

2. *The Liturgical Reception of the Canons*

Before turning to the decisions of Nicaea, a caveat from liturgical history: even when councils regulate liturgical matters, their influence on liturgical practice is rarely immediate. Whether dealing with modern councils such as Trent or Vatican II, or ancient councils such as Ephesus or Trullo, the changes they impose are not adopted universally overnight.¹⁷ Thus, identifying specifically Nicaean influence on liturgical practice and liturgical reception can be difficult to assess. As Paul Bradshaw notes, “the apparent conversion to Christianity of the emperor Constantine early in the fourth century is usually portrayed as marking a crucial turning-point in the evolution of forms of Christian worship; and it is undoubtedly true that a very clear contrast can be observed between the form and character of liturgical practices in the pre- and post-Constantinian eras.”¹⁸ And yet Bradshaw — and even Alexander Schmemmann — warn against seeing a clear-cut distinction in liturgy before and after the “Constantinian turn.”¹⁹ In fact, more scholars have recently shown that the “Constantinian turn” may in fact not be as clear a division as previously believed. Stefano Parenti, relying on the work of Maxwell Johnson and Bryan Spinks, notes that the “prayer ‘coordinated’ to the Father, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit, is not a consequence of Nicaea but precedes the Trinitarian doctrine defined there.” Parenti continues that “this would not be the first time that the *lex orandi* anticipates the *lex credendi*”, providing several pre-Nicene examples that call into question the “relation of cause–effect” between the dogmas of Nicaea in 325 and developments of, or modifications to, liturgical prayers.²⁰

17 See Anton Baumstark, *On the Historical Development of the Liturgy*, trans. Fritz West, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 2011, 230-243.

18 Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 211.

19 Ibid., 211 n. 1. Bradshaw references Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, The Faith Press Ltd., London 1966, 76.

20 Stefano Parenti, *Lanafora di Crisostomo. Testo e contesti*, Jerusalem

Apart from these interpretative considerations, there is also the problem of the absence of major sources of liturgical texts from the period around Constantine and Nicaea I. As Bradshaw notes again, “virtually all our substantial sources for the pattern and practice of the Eucharist in the fourth century date only from the second half of the century, and thus leave a gap of a hundred years or more from the time of Cyprian [AD 258], our previous major witness. In that intervening period Christianity had undergone major changes”.²¹ Thus, the only references to the Council of Nicaea in liturgical scholarship are to the aftereffects of the condemnation of Arianism (i.e. the adoption of the 25 December feast of Christmas)²² and the “general process of assimilation and liturgical standardization that is characteristic of orthodox Christianity after the Council of Nicaea in 325”.²³

With these consideration in mind, let us turn to the canons of Nicaea I.²⁴ How exactly did they impact liturgical worship? Canons 1, 2, and 3 regulate the life of the clergy and requirements for, or

Theologische Forum 36, Aschendorff, Münster 2020, 143-144. Parenti also presents the work of Maxwell Johnson who lists the prayer of Polycarp (2nd/3rd cent.), the letter of Pope Dionysius of Alexandria (190–265) to Pope Dionysius of Rome, and the Anaphora of Addai and Mari as examples of Trinitarian formulae in liturgical prayer before Nicaea. See *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Christology, Trinity and Liturgical Theology*, Bryan D. Spinks (ed.), Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 2008.

21 Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, 139.

22 Paul F. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 1998, 87. For the history of the Christmas feast, see also Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 2011, 123-130.

23 Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 50.

24 For a bibliography of studies on each of the canons, see Pr. Răzvan Perșă (ed.) *Canoanele Sinodului I Ecumenic de la Niceea (325)*, in *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, vol. 1, Basilica, Bucharest 2022 135-162.

impediments to, admission to ordination and ministry. Canons 4 and 6 specify that other bishops (at least three in total) of the province must take part in ordinations of new bishops, which suggests that this was not the norm in the fourth century.²⁵ Canon 5 makes reference to Lent (τεσσαρακοστῆς) as a time for holding one of two annual synods.²⁶ Canons 6 and 7 acknowledge local traditions (i.e. Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis) and their connections to local bishops (i.e. Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, and Aelia — Jerusalem).²⁷ Canons 8 and 19 deal with readmission of apostate or heretical clergy to the Catholic Church, while canons 9 and 10 regulate the procedures of the ordination of presbyters. Canon 11 regulates penitence and limits participation in the Eucharist to prayer and not communion for two years (δύο δὲ ἔτη χωρὶς προσφορᾶς κοινωνήσουσι τῷ λαῷ τῶν προσευχῶν), with a similar programme repeated in canons 12 and 14. Canon 13 expresses concern for access to the Eucharist (ἐφόδιος, *viaticum*) for those who are dying. Canon 15 and 16 regulate clergy mobility, ordinations, and service in different cities or churches. Canon 17 deals with financial aspects of clergy life, while canon 18 is concerned with order in the Eucharist, particularly the giving and receiving of communion and maintaining respect for the proper order of the clerical hierarchy.²⁸ Canon 19 discusses the state of deaconesses and mentions that they are counted as lay people because they do not receive the imposition

25 Ibid., 207. See also Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Participation of Other Bishops in the Ordination of a Bishop in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus”, in *Studia Patristica* 18/2 (1989), 335-338.

26 Sévérien Salaville, “La τεσσαρακοστή du V^e canon de Nicée (325)”, in *Échos d’Orient* 13 (1910), 65-72.

27 These cities and regions are repeated in the letter of the synod in Nicaea to the Egyptians. See Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 16-19.

28 See Robert F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, vol. VI: The Communion, Thanksgiving, and Concluding Rites, OCA 281, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2008, especially 80-84.

of hands at ordination.²⁹ Canon 20, which discusses kneeling on Sundays and the season of Pentecost, regulates not only lay piety but also gives insights into the liturgical year.³⁰ Overall, we see that almost each of the canons has some impact on the order of the liturgical worship of the Church.

Turning to the Symbol of Faith of Nicaea, the recitation of the Creed in liturgical practice was not immediate and its beginnings are unclear. The first reliable witness of the use of the Creed in the liturgy was in the Great Church of Constantinople in the sixth century, introduced by Patriarch Timothy (511–518).³¹ The relevant passage from the history of Theodore Anagnostes (d. before 550) reads as follows:

Τιμόθεος τὸ τῶν τῆς πίστεως σύμβολον καθ' ἑκάστην σύναξιν λέγεσθαι παρεσκεύασεν ἐπὶ διαβολῇ δῆθεν Μακεδονίου, ὡς αὐτοῦ μὴ δεχομένου τὸ σύμβολον, ἅπαξ τοῦ ἔτους λεγόμενον πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγία παρασκευῇ τοῦ θείου πάθους τῷ καιρῷ τῶν γινομένων ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου κατηχήσεων.³²

Timothy gave the order that the Symbol of Faith of the 318 Fathers should be recited at every synaxis in order to counter Macedonius, because he did not accept the Symbol. Previously it was recited only once a year, on the Holy Friday of the divine passions, during the catechesis of the bishop.

29 See Robert F. Taft, “Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When-And Why?,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998), 27-87, especially 63-70.

30 Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, 72.

31 See Robert F. Taft and Stefano Parenti, *Storia della liturgia di S. Giovanni Crisostomo. Il Grande Ingresso. Edizione italiana rivista, ampliata e aggiornata*, Ανάλεκτα Κρυπτοφέρρης 10, Monastero Esarchico, Grottaferrata 2014, 638. An earlier account that introduces the Creed in Antioch around 489 by Peter the Fuller is considered a later interpolation.

32 *Theodoros Anagnostes Kirchengeschichte*, ed. G. C. Hansen, GCS, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1971, 143, 16-19 (501B).

The background to this account is as follows: in the fifth and sixth century, opponents of the Council of Chalcedon, such as Patriarch Macedonius II of Constantinople (d. c. 517), emphasized their faithfulness to the first three ecumenical councils and thus attempted to paint the Chalcedonians as opponents to Nicaea. One of the ways the anti-Chalcedonians did this was to recite the Symbol of the 318 Fathers of Nicaea as a sign of their faithfulness to tradition and claim their position to be in continuity with orthodoxy. Once Macedonius was ousted as patriarch of Constantinople in 511 and replaced by the pro-Chalcedonian Patriarch Timothy, the Chalcedonians did not dare to be seen as opposing Nicaea and, in the interests also of political unity, continued the practice of reciting the Symbol of Faith at each eucharistic Synaxis. As Taft and Parenti note, the reference to the Creed as that of the “318 Fathers of Nicaea” is most likely shorthand to refer to the Creed in its developed form after Constantinople I, and not to the text as it would have been composed in 325.³³

The recitation of the Symbol of Nicaea is also found in certain prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours.³⁴ Caesarius of Arles (r. 503–542), in his Sermon 6,3, recommended the Creed, among other prayers and psalms, to be learned by heart to counter the diabolical and lascivious songs they do know by heart.³⁵ Both the Byzantine Rite Horologion originating in Palestine and prayer rules from Braga include the

33 Taft and Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso*, 639–641.

34 See Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today*, 2nd revised edition, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 1993, 119, 151, 199, 253–254, 256, 263, 265, 267, 270–271, 274, 324–325.

35 Sermo VI, in *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Sermones*, ed. Germanus Morin, CCSL 103, Brepols, Turnhout 1953, 32; Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 151.

recitation of the Creed during Compline, as a preparation for sleep.³⁶ The Creed could also be a concluding element of the *agrypnia*, as witnessed by John and Sophronius on Sinai in the seventh century,³⁷ a practice which bears similarities to the Creed as a concluding element in the Ethiopian office.³⁸ Perhaps related is the Coptic practice of including the Creed in the morning office, similar to the Byzantine *mesonyktikon* and the Armenian Night-Office.³⁹

While the presence of the Creed in the Liturgy of the Hours is not explained in Greek sources,⁴⁰ its use there could be an expression of faith in response to a concern for orthodoxy. This was an issue among Palestinian monks involved in Christological controversies (as well as Origenism) in the wake of Chalcedon, during the formative period of the Liturgy of the Hours. In the Divine Liturgy, various

36 Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 119. For the place of the Creed in the Byzantine Rite Liturgy of the Hours, see Job Getcha, *The Typikon Decoded: An Explanation of Byzantine Liturgical Practice*, trans. Paul Meyendorff, Orthodox Liturgy Series 3, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers, N.Y. 2012, 67-70 and 92-97.

37 Augusta Longo, "Il Testo Integrale della «Narrazione degli abati Giovanni e Sofronio» attraverso le «ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑΙ» di Nicone", in *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 12-13 (1965-1966), 223-267, here 252; Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 199 and 274.

38 Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 263, 265, 270-271.

39 Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 253; Gabriele Winkler, *Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des armenischen Symbolums. Ein Vergleich mit dem syrischen und griechischen Formelgut unter Einbezug der relevanten georgischen und äthiopischen Quellen*, OCA 262, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2000, 203-211.

40 In general, there are few commentaries on the Liturgy of the Hours in the Byzantine Rite, although this is not the case for other Churches, such as the Armenian tradition. For such a commentary, see Michael Daniel Findikyan, *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i († 735). Critical Edition and Translation with Textual and Liturgical Analysis*, OCA 270, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2004, although here only the Creed within the Eucharistic synaxis is commented upon.

Byzantine commentators explain the recitation of the Symbol of Faith in diverse ways: according to St Maximus the Confessor it is a sign of thanksgiving for salvation;⁴¹ in the *Protheoria* it is seen as a kerygmatic proclamation for the ignorant;⁴² Nicholas Cabasilas explains it as a simple profession of faith;⁴³ and St Symeon of Thessalonika views it as a sign of unity with the angels in heaven.⁴⁴

The information from canons 5 and 20 on the liturgical year — namely the reference to 40 days before Pascha and the 50 days after — is also invaluable. The earliest witness to a fifty-day period after Pascha comes in the second century.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the understanding of the period after Pascha was not universal in the early Church. For some ancient writers, “Pascha” referred to the immediate days of fasting before Pascha and to the feast itself. In the fourth century, Aphrahat and Ephrem only mention a week-long celebration after Pascha.⁴⁶ The development of a fifty-day period after Easter also had an impact on the consolidation of the forty-day period of fasting before Easter (as opposed to after Theophany).⁴⁷ Yet even once a fifty-day post-Paschal

41 Saint Maximus Confessor, *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, Popular Patristics Series 59, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Yonkers, N.Y. 2019, 91. Here the Creed is explained together with the closing of the doors, the entrance of the holy mysteries, and the kiss of peace.

42 Currently the only text is that edited by A. Mai and published by Migne as Theodorus Andidensis, *Commentatio liturgica*, PG 140, 417-468, here 445.

43 Nicolas Cabasilas, *Explication de la Divine Liturgie*, tr. Séverien Salaville, ed. René Bornert, Jean Gouillard and Pierre Périchon, SC 4bis, Cerf, Paris 1967, 168-169.

44 For a summary of these texts and explanations regarding the Nicene Creed, see Taft and Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso*, 644-645.

45 Robert Cabié, *La Pentecôte: L’évolution de la Cinqantaine pascale au cours des cinq premiers siècles*, Desclée & Co., Tournai 1965, 35-45.

46 Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, 69-74, especially 72.

47 Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 182-184; René-Georges Coquin, “Une réforme liturgique du concile de Nicée (325)?”, in *Comptes Rendus, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres* 111/2 (1967), 178-192.

period had been optimistically prescribed by Nicaea, this did not mean that it was immediately and universally adopted.⁴⁸

Along with regulating the liturgical year, the council attempted to bring uniformity to liturgical piety. The main purpose of canon 20 was in fact to prohibit kneeling on Sundays and the fifty days of Pascha as a sign of the resurrection. Irenaeus, Origen, and Tertullian explicitly state that the submissive nature of kneeling is incompatible with the joy that is to be expressed on Sundays and the days from Easter to Pentecost.⁴⁹ Although certain monastic observances in both East and West began to permit kneeling and prostrating in private, outside of common liturgical worship, during the aforementioned days and season, the practice of not kneeling on Sundays was generally observed and respected until the thirteenth century.⁵⁰ At that point, however, particularly in the West, Franciscan piety began to see kneeling not primarily as penitential, and thus incompatible with the day of resurrection, but as reverential towards the Eucharist, and thus necessary for every encounter with the Eucharist regardless of the day or season.⁵¹

48 See the letter of the synod in Nicaea to the Egyptians in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 19; Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 225.

49 Gabriel Radle, “Embodied Eschatology: The Council of Nicaea’s Regulation of Kneeling and Its Reception across Liturgical Traditions”, in *Worship* 90 (2016), 345-371 and 433-461, here 348.

50 Radle, “Embodied Eschatology: The Council of Nicaea’s Regulation of Kneeling”, 357.

51 Grigorios Papathomas and Gabriel Radle have assembled the dossier on this question. See Grigorios Papathomas, *Comment et pourquoi l’Église exclut l’agenouillement lorsqu’elle proclame la Résurrection et la vie du siècle à venir selon la Tradition canonique de l’Église*, in Job Getcha and André Lossky (eds.), *Θυσία αivέσeωc. Mélanges liturgiques offerts à la mémoire de l’archevêque Georges Wagner (1930–1993)*, Analecta Sergiana 2, Editions Saint Serge, Paris 2005, 247-292; Radle, “Embodied Eschatology: The Council of Nicaea’s Regulation of Kneeling”.

With the conclusion of Constantine's banquet offered for all the council participants, the "long, bitter, and controversial" period of reception began, which, as Alberigo notes, involved the council of Constantinople and Chalcedon as well.⁵²

3. *The Liturgical Commemoration of the Council*

Not only did the canons of Nicaea have an impact on worship, but the event of the council itself was commemorated in liturgical worship in various ways, more than just annually.

The first example of the commemoration of the council in the liturgy comes in the form of the remembrance of councils in Diptychs, the eucharistic prayers of the Anaphora. An account in the *Collectio Sabbaitica* describes how on Monday 16 July 518 the pro-Chalcedonian population of Constantinople demanded to hear the public proclamation of the Council of Chalcedon from the lips of Patriarch John, successor of Timothy. Thus, during the liturgy that was celebrated, everyone listened for the recitation of the Creed and then the mention of the Council of Chalcedon in the Diptychs.⁵³

One can indeed find mentions of these church councils in the Diptychs of liturgical books. Many liturgical texts from Jerusalem, such as the eucharistic prayer of the Liturgy of St James, make reference to the 'six synods' in the diptychs of the Anaphora. In Greek, the text is as follows:

52 G. Alberigo, *Concilium Nicaenum I*, 13-14.

53 Cited from Taft and Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso*, 640-642.

Μνήσθητι, Κύριε, τῶν ἁγίων
μεγάλων καὶ οἰκουμενικῶν
ἕξ συνόδων. Τῶν ἐν Νικαίᾳ
τριακοσίων δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ καὶ
τῶν ἐν Κωνσταντίνου πόλει
ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα καὶ τῶν ἐν
Ἐφέσῳ τὸ πρότερον διακοσίων
καὶ τῶν ἐν Καλχηδόνι ἑξακοσίων
τριάκοντα καὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ
πέμπτῃ συνόδῳ ἑκατὸν ἐξήκοντα
τεσσάρων καὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ ἕκτη
συνόδῳ διακοσίων ὀγδοήκοντα
ἑννέα καὶ λοιπῶν ἁγίων συνόδων
καὶ ἐπισκόπων, τῶν ἐν πάσῃ
τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ὀρθοδόξως
ὀρθοτομησάντων τὸν λόγον τῆς
ἀληθείας.⁵⁴

Remember, O Lord, the six
holy, great, and ecumenical
Councils: the 318 [fathers] in
Nicaea, the 150 [fathers] in
Constantinople, the 200 [fathers]
at the first [Council] in Ephesus,
the 630 [fathers] in Chalcedon,
the 164 [fathers] at the holy fifth
Council, and the 289 [fathers] at
the holy sixth Council, and the
remainder of the holy Councils
and bishops who throughout the
inhabited world rightly proclaim
the word of truth.

The Georgian version of this text is virtually identical, except that the Georgians perhaps had a better knowledge of history and geography, because they specify that the fifth and sixth councils took place in Constantinople:

54 Basile-Charles Mercier (ed.), *La Liturgie de Saint Jacques. Édition critique du texte grec avec traduction latine*, PO 26.2, Firmin–Didot et Cie, Paris 1946, 216–218; Alkiviades K. Kazamias, *Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰακώβου τοῦ Ἀδελφοθέου καὶ τὰ νέα σιναιτικὰ χειρόγραφα*, Ἴδρυμα Ὁρους Σινᾶ, Thessalonike 2006, 206.

მოიკსენენ, უფალო,
წმიდანი და დიდინი
სოფლისა ექუსნი კრებანი:
ნიკიას სამასათრვანეთნი,
კოსტანთინეპოლის
ასორმეოცდაათნი,
ეფესოს პირველად
ორასნი, ქალკიდონს
ექუსასოცდაათნი, მეხუთე
კრენად ასამეოცდაოთხნი
და მეექუსე წმიდად კრებად,
მუნვე კოსტანტინეპოლის
ორასოთხმეოცდაცხრანი,
და ესე წმიდანი კრებანი. და
ყოველთა ადგილთა ღირსნი
მამანი ჩუენნი, რომელნი
მართლმადიდებლობით
ეპისკოსობდეს და
რომელთა მართლ
წარუმართებიეს სიტყუად იგი
ჭემმარიტებისად.⁵⁵

Remember, O Lord, the six holy and great ecumenical councils: at Nicaea — 318 [fathers], at Constantinople — 150; at the first [council] in Ephesus — 200, at Chalcedon — 630, at the fifth holy council — 164 and at the sixth holy council, again there, in Constantinople — 289. And these are the holy councils; and our worthy fathers in all places who officiated in orthodoxy as bishops and who have rightly promoted the word of truth.

Also noteworthy is that the seventh council is not mentioned in these manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries and is only added to these lists after the fourteenth century.⁵⁶

Although Jerusalem was known for praying and preserving prolix lists of saints and events in the Holy City's Diptychs, several Greek manuscripts of the Divine Liturgy from other regions also mention

55 *Sinai Geo. N. 58* (10th c.), fol. 29r-29v; *Liturgia Ibero-Graeca Sancti Iacobi. Editio – translatio – retroversio – commentarii* Jerusalem Theologisches Forum 17, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2011, 96-97.

56 Daniel Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, 294-296.

church councils. The Euchologion Grottaferrata Γ.β. XV (11th cent.) includes an expansive list of saints in the Diptychs that includes the mention of groups of saints as well. In this case, the only council mentioned is that of Nicaea and its 318 fathers, inserted between various categories and lists of saints. The same is the case with the Euchologion Vatican gr. 1554 (12th cent.) and Milan Ambrosiana F 3 sup. (13th cent.). Each of them mention only the “318 holy God-bearing Fathers” and no other ecumenical council.⁵⁷

Apart from the commemoration of the Council of Nicaea at every celebration of the Divine Liturgy, commemorations of the council also entered liturgical calendars, to be celebrated as commemorations during the year.

Armenian Tradition

One of the liturgical calendars believed to be the most ancient, the Armenian lectionary of Jerusalem, dated to the fifth century, does not include any commemorations of church councils. It does, however, include the feast of the Enkainia (Dedication) of the Church of the Anastasis (Holy Sepulchre) in Jerusalem on 13 September, which took place in 335, ten years after the Council of Nicaea, and followed on the next day by the feast of the Cross.⁵⁸ Other, later Armenian calendars indicate that the Council of Nicaea is commemorated on the Saturday that precedes the feast of the Cross (*Barekendan*) on 14 September (5 Hori).⁵⁹ Although the Armenian Synaxarion does not provide a text for

57 Parenti, *Lanafora di Crisostomo*, 401-402.

58 See Michael Daniel Findikyan, “Armenian Hymns of the Church and the Cross”, in *Saint Nerses Theological Review* 11 (2006), 63-105.

59 Placido de Meester, “Il concilio di Nicea nella liturgia e nell’iconografia dell’Oriente Cristiano”, in *Bollettino per la commemorazione del XVI centenario del concilio di Nicea*, 128-132. This also appears to be the Saturday of the third week after the feast of the Dormition. See C. Tondini de Quarenghi, “Notice sur le calendrier liturgique de la nation arménienne”, in *Bessarione* 3/1 (1906-1907), 87.

this commemoration, its short hagiographic accounts make frequent mention of the Council of Nicaea in the days around the Exaltation of the Cross, whether the Enkainia of the Church of the Resurrection on 13 September, which praises patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem as one of the principle actors at the council, or the 15 September commemoration of Sts Constantine and Helen, together with the martyr Nicetas the Goth, who is connected to the blessed Theophilus, bishop of the Goths and one of the 318 fathers at the Council of Nicaea.⁶⁰

Early Jerusalem Tradition

In the later Jerusalem tradition from the sixth to eighth centuries, the lectionary of Jerusalem in Georgian translation includes a commemoration of four ecumenical councils on 26 September, after the conclusion of the octave of the Enkainia feast.⁶¹ The feast, entitled “commemoration of the four councils of the holy bishops” prescribes readings that emphasize the service of priesthood (Isaiah 61:6–11), obedience to and prayer for leaders (Hebrews 13:7–16), and the service for the sake of the kingdom of God through the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 19:27–20:16). While the texts may draw clear lines between those who follow Christ and those who do not, nowhere are there any texts in the lectionary that delve into the theological controversies or debates surrounding Nicaea, as could be the case through additional non-scriptural readings or hymnography.

Other calendars describing the tradition of Jerusalem, such as the Arab polymath al-Bīrūnī’s Melkite calendar, indicate that six

60 *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter Israël*, vol. 2: *Mois de hori*, ed. G. Bayan, PO 6.2, Firmin, Paris 1910, 212–239. The English edition and translation of the Synaxarion has not yet arrived at September.

61 Michel Tarchnishvili, ed., *Le grande lectionnaire de l’Église de Jérusalem (V^e-VIII^e siècle)*, CSCO 188–189 and 204–205, Secrétariat du CSCO, Louvain 1959–1960, par. 1256f.

ecumenical councils were commemorated on 21/22 April. Al-Bīrūnī also gives a detailed account of the councils' history, with similar numbers of participants to those of the Diptychs, as well as a summary of their major doctrinal disputes. A similar commemoration of councils is repeated on 15 September, although it is unclear if this refers to all six councils or only to the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which is commemorated on 15 September in the Synaxarion of Constantinople.⁶² Unfortunately it is difficult to identify any commemorations of councils in other important liturgical manuscripts from the region of Jerusalem, such as in Sinai Geo. O. 38 (AD 979) and Vatican Syr. 19 (AD 1030), because of either incomplete information or lacunae on the days, when one would expect to find the commemorations of these councils.⁶³ In general, however, the first four or six ecumenical councils in Jerusalem were celebrated together, and Nicaea did not receive its own commemoration in Jerusalem.

Constantinopolitan Tradition

In Constantinople, the Synaxarion of the Great Church of Constantinople provides significant information on the commemoration of councils.⁶⁴ This calendar shows that many were

62 See Daniel Galadza, "Liturgical Byzantinization in Jerusalem: Al-Bīrūnī's Melkite Calendar in Context", in *Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata* 3/7 (2010), 69–85; Juan Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église. Ms. Sainte-Croix n° 40, Xe siècle*, 2 vols., OCA 165-166, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 1962–1963, vol. 1, 34.

63 For more on these sources, see Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem*.

64 See Sévérien Salaville, "La fête du concile de Nicée et les fêtes de conciles dans le rit byzantin", in *Echos d'Orient* 24 (1925), 445-470. Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, vol. 2, 130, where six councils are commemorated on the Sunday before Pentecost. For an overview of the Synaxarion of Constantinople, see Cyril A. Mango, "The Relics of St. Euphemia and the Synaxarion of Constantinople", in *Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata* 53 (1999), 79-87.

connected to the commemoration of Saint Euphemia of Chalcedon (d. 16 September 303) on 11 July and 16 September, whose relics featured prominently at the Council of Chalcedon.⁶⁵ In both the calendar of Iovane Zosime and in various Greek Constantinopolitan sources, the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon is often celebrated near the commemoration of Saint Euphemia, between 11 and 16 July, and the Fifth Ecumenical Council on the Sunday after 16 July (Τῆ μετ' αὐτῶν κυριακῇ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν κατὰ Σεβήρου τῆς ε' συνόδου).⁶⁶ In fact, Salaville believes that the celebration of the fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon was the first liturgical celebration of the commemoration of a church council, and this took place on 16 July 518.⁶⁷

Over time, the main Constantinople calendars celebrated each of the ecumenical councils on their own specific days, with a certain preference for the First, Fourth, and Seventh Ecumenical Councils. One of the main manuscripts of the *Typikon* of the Great Church, codex Patmos Gr. 266, has the following indication on 29 May: “Memory of the holy father of Nicaea of the first synod and concerning the blessed Alexander, Pope of Alexandria, and the impious Arius who began heresies”.⁶⁸ However, the eighth-century calendar in Vatican Gr. 2144,

65 Alexander Kazhdan and Nancy Patterson-Ševčenko, *Euphemia of Chalcedon*, in Alexander P. Kazhdan et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford 1991, 747-748.

66 Gérard Garitte, *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 30, Société des Bollandistes, Brussels 1958, 276; Delehay, *Synaxarium*, col. 811-813 and col. 826; Sévérin Salaville, “La fête du concile de Chalcédonie dans le rite byzantine”, in Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2: Entscheidung um Chalkedon, Echter Verlag, Würzburg 1962, 677-695.

67 Sévérin Salaville, “La fête du concile de Nicée et les fêtes de conciles dans le rit byzantin”, 455.

68 κθ'. Μνήμη τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν ἐν Νικαίᾳ τῆς πρώτης συνόδου καὶ περὶ τοῦ μακαρίου Ἀλεξάνδρου πάπα Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ περὶ τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Ἀρείου καὶ

edited by Morcelli, joins the celebration of the first four councils in one commemoration on 16 July.⁶⁹ The prescribed Gospel reading for this day is Matthew 5:14–19, where Christ reminds his followers that they are the light of the world, that their light must continue to shine, and that even the least of the commandments of the law must be observed because Christ came to fulfill — and not abolish — the law. This 16 July commemoration is immediately followed by another indication for the commemoration of the Council of Constantinople of 536 that condemned Patriarch Severus of Antioch (d.538) on the following Sunday in July.⁷⁰

As was seen with the Diptychs of the Liturgy of St James, none of the calendars from Jerusalem examined here commemorates more than six councils. In general, the local commemorations of councils that were once commemorated by a simple procession in Constantinople eventually became part of the universal Byzantine calendar.⁷¹

ὁπως ἤρξατο τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν αἰρέσεως. Dmitrievskii, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisei, khranящихся v bibliotekakh pravoslavnago vostoka*, vol. 1: Τυπικά, Τυπογραφία Γ.Τ. Κορчакъ-Новицкаго, Kyiv 1895, vol. 1, 75. Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, vol. 1, 300, does not give this information in the apparatus.

69 Μηνὶ τῷ αὐτῷ 1ς εἰς τὴν μνήμην τῶν ἁγίων γλ' πατέρων τῶν ἐν Χαλκηδόνι, καὶ τῶν τῆς τῶν ἐν Νικαίᾳ, καὶ τῶν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει, καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ. See Stefano Antonio Morcelli, *Μηνολόγιον τῶν εὐαγγελίων ἑορτακτικὸν sive Kalendarium ecclesiae constantinopolitanae*, Giunchi, Roma 1788, 60; Sévérien Salaville, “La fête du concile de Nicée et les fêtes de conciles dans le rit byzantin”, 449.

70 Καὶ τῇ κυριακῇ εὐθέως μετὰ τὴν εἰρημένην μνήμην τῶν ἐν Χαλκηδόνι ἁγίων πατέρων εἰσερχομένη, μνήμη τῆς ἁγίας ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει συνόδου τῆς κατὰ Σευήρου τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς. See Morcelli, *Μηνολόγιον τῶν εὐαγγελίων ἑορτακτικὸν sive Kalendarium ecclesiae constantinopolitanae*, 61; Salaville, “La fête du concile de Nicée”, 449.

71 Miguel Arranz, *Les fêtes théologiques du calendrier byzantin*, in A. M. Triacca and A. Pistoia (eds.), *La liturgie, expression de la foi. Conférences Saint-Serge XXV^e semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 27–30 juin 1978*, BELS 16, C.L.V.

Let us examine some other liturgical traditions to see how they compare in their celebrations and commemorations of the Council of Nicaea.

Coptic Tradition

In the Coptic Church, the Council of Nicaea I is commemorated annually on 9 Hatūr (5/18 November), but there are also commemorations of the Council of Ephesus in 431 celebrated on 12 Tut, St Cyriacus who was present at the Council of Constantinople on 3 Hatūr, the Council of Constantinople I of 381 on 1 'Amshīr (26 January/8 February), and the Council on the island of Bani-Omar (Djésireh bein 'Omr) on 4 Baramhāt (1/14 March) which was convoked against the Quartodecimans.⁷² The general readings for the commemoration of Councils emphasize themes of recompense for fidelity (Matthew 25:14–23), blessedness for those persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Luke 6:17–23), and faith in confessing Christ (Matthew 16:13–19).⁷³ There are also two hymns on the council of Nicaea found in the Sahidic antiphonary that praise the 318 bishops gathered in Nicaea who fight heretics through their prayers and reveal the true worship of the Trinity, quoting the Apostle Paul (Hebrews 13:7) who calls the Church to pray for her leaders.⁷⁴

Edizioni liturgiche, Roma 1979, 29–55. See also Ioannis M. Fountoulis, “Ἡ μνήμη τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων τῆς Β' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου στό Ἐορτολόγιο καί στήν Ὑμνογραφία,” Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς (Thessalonike) 66 (1983), 61–79.

72 See Coptic Synaxarion, Online: <https://st-takla.org/books/en/church/synaxarium/07-baramhat/04-paramhat-baniomar.html>.

73 Maurice de Fenoyl, SJ, *Le sanctoral copte*, Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth 15, Imprimerie catholique, Beirut 1960, 44.

74 See Maria Cramer and Martin Krause, *Das koptische Antiphonar (M 575 und P 11967)*, Jerusalemer Theologische Forum 12, Aschendorff, Münster 2008, 108–111 (hymns 75 and 76). My thanks to Agnes Mihálykó Tothne for these references.

Ethiopian Tradition

In the Ethiopian Church, the 318 Fathers of Nicaea hold a prominent place in various aspects of liturgical life. The monthly cycle, particular to the Ethiopian tradition, has the 318 (literally 300) Fathers of Nicaea (*Šalastu me'et*) on the ninth day of every month, showing the importance and frequency of their memory in the regular life of their church.⁷⁵ An Anaphora of the 318 Fathers of Nicaea is known in the Ethiopian tradition,⁷⁶ and other liturgical rubrics explicitly mention the Council of Nicaea when indicating that there must be a gathering of the hierarchy twice a year.⁷⁷ The *Zəmmare* hymns sung for these commemorations fuse the 318 fathers into the narration of Old Testament figures, the works of the apostles, and the commemoration of other individual bishops.⁷⁸

Syriac Traditions

The broad and rich Syriac tradition presents a variety of commemorations of the Council of Nicaea.⁷⁹ Maronites have a general celebration of councils on 15 September, which perhaps has the same origins as the Armenian celebration. The Syrian Orthodox

75 Emmanuel Fritsch, *The Liturgical Year of the Ethiopian Church: The Temporal Seasons and Sundays*, Ethiopian Review of Cultures 9–10, Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Addis Ababa 2001, 70–71.

76 *Ibid.*, 265.

77 *Ibid.*, 273.

78 Bahlebbi Idris Shekai, *The Zəmmare Hymns: A Historical, Literal, Liturgical and Theological Study of the Communion Rite in the Gə'əz Liturgy*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2023, vol. 2, 176 (“of the feast of the Three Hundred” on 1 October), vol. 2, 238 (“the Council” on 1 Yākatit, no. 419), vol. 2, 288 (“of the Council [of the Apostles]” on 16 August, no. 714), and vol. 2, 343 (“of the Council”, no. 1008).

79 See F. Nau, *Un Martyrologe et douze Ménologes syriaques*, PO 10.1, Firmin–Didot, Paris 1912, 47 (3 November) and 138–139 (index).

commemorate the 318 Fathers of Nicaea on 21 February and 29 May,⁸⁰ as well as Mar Sila, one of the 318 Fathers of Nicaea, on 3 November.⁸¹ However, these feasts are not celebrated with particular solemnity, since they do not have their own hymns in the collections of hymnography for church festivals.⁸² Nevertheless, modern church councils may at times enter the liturgical calendar. For example, the Syro-Malabar Church also does not have any commemorations of church councils, although their contemporary calendars do include recent events, such as the Inauguration of the first Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod in 1993, celebrated on 20 May.⁸³

Latin Tradition

There are, surprisingly, no commemorations of church councils in the liturgical books of the Latin West.⁸⁴ The Pope reigning during the Council of Nicaea, St Sylvester I (313–335), is one of the very first confessors to be venerated as such in the West, and one of the most widely diffused, but of the popes involved in ecumenical councils, the councils themselves figure very small in their hagiography. For example, Sixtus III, who was the Pope of Rome during the Council of Ephesus, did not

80 Stefano Rosso, *Il rito siro-antiocheno. Sacramenti e sacramentali, tempi e feste, libri liturgici*, Monumenta studia instrumenta liturgica 78, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018, 1018–1036, here 1024 and 1028.

81 Ibid., 1019.

82 *Ma'de'dono: The Book of the Church Festivals according to the Ancient Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*, trans. Archdeacon Murad Saliba Barsom, ed. Metropolitan Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, n. p., Beirut 1985.

83 Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Liturgy, *Syro-Malabar Liturgical Calendar 2019–2020* (n.p., n.d.), 35. Online: <http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/pdf/2020Eng.pdf>. This is the same in the liturgical calendars for preceding years.

84 See Aubineau, “Les 318 Serviteurs d’Abraham (Gen XIV, 14) et le Nombre des Pères au Concile de Nicée (325)”, 39. I wish to thank Gregory DiPippo for his assistance with this question regarding the Latin West.

have a widely diffused cultus. Likewise, despite the popularity of his Tomos at Chalcedon, Pope Leo I entered the general Roman calendar relatively late.⁸⁵ Pope Agatho who reigned during the sixth ecumenical Council of Constantinople III is in the Byzantine Rite calendar, but not the Roman.⁸⁶ Pope Adrian I reigned during the Council of Nicaea II and was canonized, but there was no diffuse or distinct cultus.⁸⁷ One can, thus, state that in the West there just are no feasts which commemorate such events. Rather than commemorating an earthquake, as is the case with the great earthquake of 740 on 26 October in the Byzantine Rite, the Latin West would perhaps commemorate such an event through a miraculous icon that survived the event, if at all.

4. The Byzantine Rite Akolouthia for the Council of Nicaea I

Of all these traditions, it is the Byzantine tradition that expressed the greatest concern for the reception and commemoration of the Council of Nicaea as a liturgical celebration. This becomes all the more apparent when one examines the specific texts and hymnography composed for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours on the Sunday after Ascension as part of the moveable cycle in the *Pentekostarion*.⁸⁸

The Synaxarion reading at Matins on the Sunday morning explains why the date of the commemoration was chosen. Rather than its proximity to 29 May, a theological meaning is given to placing this commemoration on the Sunday after the feast of the Ascension of

85 Guglielmo Zannoni, *Leone I, Magno*, in Filippo Caraffa et al. (eds.), *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, Roma 1966, vol. 7, col. 1232-1278, especially col. 1272-1274.

86 See Delehaye, *Synaxarion*, col. 475-484 (19–21 February).

87 Pope Adrian is mentioned in the entry for the Council of Nicaea II on 11 October. See Delehaye, *Synaxarion*, col. 132.

88 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 331-361. See Nicolas Egenger, *Pâques. Grandes fêtes byzantines*, Nouvelle Cité, Bruyères-le-Châtel 2020, 343-366.

Christ: the Fathers of Nicaea confessed Christ to be true God who ascended in the flesh to the Father and sat at his right hand.⁸⁹

These hymns can be traced back to the eighth century. The older rite of Constantinople does not include any of these variable hymns except for a troparion.⁹⁰ In general, the authorship and precise origin of the hymnography is unknown, but manuscripts of the Pentecostarion dated to the ninth and tenth centuries already contain many of these hymns.⁹¹ Placide De Meester identifies three themes in the hymnography: victory of virtue over error, the glory of the teachers of the Church who declare the divinity of the Redeemer, and an admonition to believers to remain faithful to the Symbol of Faith of the Church.⁹² To these themes, Ephrem Lash adds their “denunciatory” character, which is a “peculiarity of the Byzantine Orthodox tradition,” sung by the Monks of Mount Athos to “lively and cheerful melodies denouncing leadings heretics from Arius in the fourth century to John the Grammarian in the ninth”.⁹³ As Archimandrite Ephrem Lash notes regarding the use of catchy melodies for the hymnography commemorating church councils,

89 See Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, Αποστολική Διακονία, Athens 1959, 181-182.

90 See the recreation of this service in 2001 organized by Alexander Lingas: *Vespers According to the Rite of the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople for the Vigil of the Feast of the Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Kallistos Ware, Presiding* ([S.l.] : [s.n.], 2001).

91 See Mariafrancesca Sgandurra, *Per la storia di un libro liturgico della Chiesa bizantina: il Pentecostarion*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma 2015.

92 Placido de Meester, “Il concilio di Nicea nella liturgia e nell’iconografia del’Oriente Cristiano”, 128-132, here 130-131.

93 Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, in Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies. Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Durham, 23–25 March 2002*, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 12, Ashgate, Aldershot 2006, 151-164, here 151.

“The Church may have rejected Arius and Bardaisan, but it certainly learnt from them the pedagogic usefulness of a good tune”.⁹⁴

In any event, these specific hymns, which meditate upon the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, are interwoven into the Sunday service along with hymns glorifying the resurrection of Christ (the usual theme for Sundays), the Ascension of Christ (as part of the post-festive period following the Ascension on the preceding Thursday), thereby adding even more layers to the contemplation of Christ’s divinity and his humanity — begotten of the Father before all ages, born in the flesh, crucified, buried, risen, and ascended to the Father.

The first sticheron for the Fathers at Great Vespers presents the main theological controversy of Nicaea, namely Arianism, as well as a simple explanation of this heresy:

Ἐκ γαστρὸς ἐτέχθης πρὸ
ἑσφόρου, ἐκ Πατρὸς ἀμήτωρ πρὸ
τῶν αἰώνων, κἄν Ἄρειος κτίσμα
σε, καὶ οὐ Θεὸν δοξάζῃ, τόλμη
συνάπτων σε τὸν κτίστην, τοῖς
κτίσμασιν ἀφρόνως, ὕλην πυρὸς
τοῦ αἰωνίου, ἑαυτῷ θησαυρίζων·
ἀλλ’ ἢ σύνοδος ἢ ἐν Νικαίᾳ, Υἱὸν
Θεοῦ σε ἀνεκήρυξε, Κύριε, Πατρὶ
καὶ Πνεύματι σύνθρονον.⁹⁵

Before the morning star from
the womb you were begotten
from the Father motherless
before the ages, though Arius
calls you created and thus does
not glorify you as God, boldly
and mindlessly identifying you,
the Creator, with things created,
thus storing up as treasure for
himself the fuel of the eternal
fire. But the Council in Nicaea
preached that you, O Lord, are
the Son of God, reigning with
the Father and the Spirit.⁹⁶

94 Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 157.

95 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 333.

96 See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 154.

The hymn is grounded in the theology of the Incarnation stemming from an exegetical interpretation of Psalm 109 LXX.

The next sticheron in the series presents a dialogue with Christ himself, asking him:

Τίς σου τὸν χιτῶνα Σῶτερ
διεῖλεν, Ἄρειος, σὺ ἔφης, ὁ τῆς
Τριάδος, τεμῶν τὴν ὁμότιμον
ἀρχὴν εἰς διαιρέσεις, οὗτος
ἠθέτησέ σε εἶναι, τὸν ἓνα τῆς
Τριάδος, οὗτος Νεστόριον
διδάσκει, Θεοτόκον μὴ λέγειν·
ἀλλ' ἡ Σύνοδος ἡ ἐν Νικαίᾳ, Υἱὸν
Θεοῦ σε ἀνεκήρυξε, Κύριε, Πατρὶ
καὶ Πνεύματι σύνθρονον.⁹⁷

Who has torn your garment,
O Saviour? “Arius,” you said,
who cuts asunder the authority
equal in honour of the Trinity,
denying that you are one of
the Trinity, thereby teaching
Nestorius not to say Theotokos.
But the Council in Nicaea
preached that you, O Lord, are
the Son of God, reigning with
the Father and the Spirit.⁹⁸

The reference to the seamless garment of Christ (John 19:23–24) – which itself references the same psalm Christ was praying on the Cross (cf. Psalm 19:21) – is interpreted by Ephrem the Syrian as a sign of his undivided divinity because it was not composite,⁹⁹ “divinity from above” by John Chrysostom,¹⁰⁰ and the heavenly-given unity

97 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 333.

98 See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 154.

99 Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron. An English translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes*, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, 307–308 (20.27).

100 See Philip Schaff (ed.), John Chrysostom, *Homily 85.2*, in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 14, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1978, 317.

of the Church by Cyprian of Carthage,¹⁰¹ with the garment divided into four, symbolizing the Gospel and the Church spreading over the whole world.¹⁰² The image of Christ's torn garment is itself from a vision by Peter of Alexandria (d. 311) of a young Christ, who answered Peter that Arius had torn his garment.¹⁰³

The next hymn once again borrows imagery from the accounts of the Synaxarion and presents a gruesome picture of Arius' death with parallels to that of Judas:

Κρημνῶ περιπίπτει τῆς
ἀμαρτίας, Ἄρειος, ὁ μύσας τὸ φῶς
μὴ βλέπειν, καὶ θεῖω σπαράττεται,
ἀγκίστρῳ τοῖς ἐγκάτοις, πᾶσαν
ἐκδοῦναι τὴν οὐσίαν, καὶ τὴν
ψυχὴν βιαίως, ἄλλος Ἰούδας
χρηματίσας, τῇ γνώμῃ καὶ τῷ
τρόπῳ· ἀλλ' ἡ Σύνοδος ἡ ἐν
Νικαίᾳ, Υἱὸν Θεοῦ σε ἀνεκήρυξε,
Κύριε, Πατρὶ καὶ Πνεύματι
σύνθρονον.¹⁰⁴

Arius fell into the precipice of sin, keeping his eyes shut, that he might not see light. His bowels were rent asunder by a divine hook, such that he violently gave up all his essence and his soul, and in this manner was named another Judas, through his ideas and manner. But the Council in Nicaea preached that you, O Lord, are the Son of God, reigning with the Father and the Spirit.¹⁰⁵

101 Cyprian, *Treatise* 1.7, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers 5, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1978, 423.

102 Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 118.4, in *Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John; Homilies on the First Epistle of John; Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 7, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1978, 431.

103 See Delehay, *Synaxarion*, col. 256-258 (25 November).

104 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 333-334.

105 See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 155, who notes the wordplay with *ousia* — both of Christ and of Arius.

The final sticheron in this series at Psalm 140 praises the zeal of the Fathers of Nicaea and compares them to Elias who battled against the priests of Baal:

Ἄρειος ὁ ἄφρων, τῆς
Παναγίας, τέτμηκε Τριάδος τὴν
μοναρχίαν, εἰς τρεῖς ἀνομίους
τε καὶ ἐκφύλους οὐσίας· ὅθεν
Πατέρες θεοφόροι, συνελθόντες
προθύμως, ζήλω πυρούμενοι,
καθάπερ, ὁ θεσβίτης Ἡλίας, τῷ
τοῦ Πνεύματος τέμνουσι ξίφει,
τὸν τῆς αἰσχύνης δογματίσαντα
βλάσφημον, καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα
ἀπεφήνατο.¹⁰⁶

Mindless, foolish Arius once divided the all-holy Trinity's sole dominion thus making three essences, dissimilar and foreign. Hence, the God-bearing Fathers fervently gathered together, burning with zeal like Elias the Tishbite, cutting down with the sharp sword of the Holy Spirit the vile blasphemer who taught blasphemous doctrines, as thus the Spirit revealed unto them.

Another sticheron, the Doxastikon at the Aposticha of Vespers, nicely summarizes the activity of the Council of Nicaea, including references to the texts it promulgated:

106 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 334.

Τὴν ἐτήσιον μνήμην σήμερον, τῶν θεοφόρων Πατέρων, τῶν ἐκ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης συναθροισθέντων, ἐν τῇ λαμπρᾷ πόλει Νικαέων, τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων τὰ συστήματα, εὐσεβοῦντες πιστῶς ἐορτάσωμεν. Οὗτοι γὰρ τοῦ δεινοῦ Ἀρείου τὸ ἄθεον δόγμα, εὐσεβοφρόνως καθεῖλον, καὶ τῆς Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας συνοδικῶς τοῦτον ἐξωστράκισαν, καὶ τρανῶς τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁμοούσιον καὶ συναΐδιον, πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων ὄντα, τοῖς πᾶσιν ἐδίδαξαν ὁμολογεῖν, ἐν τῷ τῆς πίστεως Συμβόλῳ, ἀκριβῶς καὶ εὐσεβῶς τοῦτο ἐκθέμενοι ὅθεν καὶ ἡμεῖς, τοῖς θείοις αὐτῶν δόγμασιν ἐπόμενοι, βεβαίως πιστεύοντες λατρεύομεν, σὺν Πατρὶ τὸν Υἱόν, καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ πανάγιον, ἐν μιᾷ Θεότητι, Τριάδα ὁμοούσιον.¹⁰⁷

O assemblies of the Orthodox, let us celebrate today with faith and piety the annual memorial of the God-bearing Fathers who, in the illustrious city of Nicaea, came together from the whole inhabited world. For with pious mind they refuted the godless dogma of the grievous Arius, and by synodal decree banished him from the Orthodox Catholic Church. And they instructed all to openly confess the consubstantial and co-eternal Son of God, Who existed before the ages. This, in exactness and piety, did they set forth in the Symbol of Faith. Wherefore, following their divine doctrines and believing with assurance, we worship, in One Godhead, the Father, Son and all-holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence.

The Sessional Hymn after the Kontakion before the Fourth Ode of the Canon also refers to the gathered assembly as the 318 Fathers:

107 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 337. The text is also found in Sinai Gr. 758, where it is attributed to George of Nikomedia.

Τῶν Νικαέων ἡ λαμπρὰ πόλις
σήμερον ἐκ πάσης γῆς πρὸς
ἑαυτὴν συνεκάλεσε τριακοσίους
δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ Ἀρχιερεῖς κατὰ τοῦ
λαλήσαντος βλασφημίαν Ἀρείου,
καὶ κατασμικρύναντος τῆς
Τριάδος τὸν ἕνα, Υἱὸν καὶ Λόγον
ὄντα τοῦ Θεοῦ· ὃν καθελόντες,
τὴν Πίστιν ἐκράτυναν.¹⁰⁸

Today the brilliant city of
the Nicaeans has called together
to herself from the whole
world three hundred eighteen
hierarchs against Arius, who
uttered blasphemy and made
little account of the One of the
Trinity, the Son and the Word
being of God; having deposed
him, the Fathers strengthened
the Faith.

And this number is alluded to in another troparion of the Third Ode of the Canon to the Fathers: which connects it to the account of Abraham and his servants from Genesis 14:

Ὡς πάλαι θεῖος Ἀβραάμ,
στρατεούμενοι πάντες, οἱ σεπτοὶ
θειγόροι, τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου
ἀγαθέ, τοὺς μανιώδεις τῆ σῆ,
δυναστεία κραταιῶς ἀπώλεσαν.¹⁰⁹

The holy heralds of God, all
marching like godly Abraham
of old, mightily destroyed your
raving foes, O Good One, by
your sovereign power.¹¹⁰

Elsewhere in the service, for example at the Doxastikon at Litē, there seems to be a misunderstanding of the historical events, participants, and theological controversies of the First Council of Nicaea:

108 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 347.

109 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 346.

110 See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 156.

Αποστολικῶν παραδόσεων, You became strict guardians
ἀκριβεῖς φύλακες γεγονάτε, of the apostolic traditions, O
ἅγιοι Πατέρες· τῆς γὰρ holy Fathers: for by teaching
ἀγίας Τριάδος τὸ ὁμοούσιον, the orthodox doctrine that the
ὀρθοδόξως δογματίσαντες, holy Trinity is consubstantial,
Ἀρείου τὸ βλάσφημον, συνοδικῶς you overthrew in council the
κατεβάλατε, μεθ' ὃν καὶ blasphemy of Arius; after
Μακεδόنيον, πνευματομάχον him you refuted Macedonius,
ἀπελέγξαντες, κατεκρίνατε opponent of the Spirit, you
Νεστόριον, Εὐτυχέα καὶ condemned Nestorius, Eutyches
Διόσκορον, Σαβέλλιόν τε καὶ and Dioscorus, Sabellius and the
Σεβήρον τὸν ἀκέφαλον, ὃν τῆς leaderless Severus. Ask, we pray,
πλάνης αἰτήσασθε ῥυσθέντας that, delivered from their error,
ἡμᾶς, ἀκληίδωτον ἡμῶν τὸν we may guard our life unsullied
βίον, ἐν τῇ πίστει φυλάττεσθαι in the faith.¹¹²
δεόμεθα.¹¹¹

As is clear from the mentions of Macedonius, Nestorius, and others, this hymn imagines the “holy Fathers” as a general collective that is responsible not just for the decisions of Nicaea but also of subsequent councils combatting other, later heresies after Arianism. In fact, this is a general sticheron for commemorations of church councils and is reused here from the commemoration of the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, pointing to the common trend of fusing the first four — if not more — ecumenical councils into one celebration and commemoration.¹¹³

111 Πεντηκοστάριον χαρμόσυνον, n.p., Roma 1883, 336.

112 See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 155-156.

113 For the later Slavonic reception of the Council of Chalcedon, hymns related to the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople III have been inserted. See Lash, *Byzantine hymns of hate*, 156. For the ecumenical implications of these hymns, see Gregory Tucker, “Byzantine Hymnography and the Quest for Orthodox Unity: Notes on the Liturgical Commemoration of the Council of

Concluding Remarks

Recent scholarship on early Christian worship has confirmed that in many respects, the Council of Nicaea in 325 authorized already existing liturgical practices and attempted to standardize them for the universal Church, rather than introduce something new to the liturgy. With regard to certain historical details, such as the date of the council and the number of participants in attendance, these remain open questions that may never be sufficiently resolved. However, the survey here of the reception and commemoration of the Council suggests that these historical questions were understood to be of secondary importance to a theological understanding of the event of the Council of Nicaea itself and its doctrinal decisions. The exegesis of Abraham's 318 servants already before Nicaea made the connection with the number of Fathers at Nicaea more of a theological statement than a fact of history. While many liturgical calendars – whether Greek or Syriac – indicate the end of May as the date of the council, its celebration between Ascension and Pentecost, as it is celebrated today in the Byzantine Rite, can be interpreted as a theological statement regarding the full divinity and full humanity of Christ.

In the work that remains towards investigating the details of the liturgical reception of the Council of Nicaea, one should keep in mind that the earliest liturgical commemorations of the First Council of Nicaea were celebrated in the East together with the first four ecumenical councils, without concern for their conflation and confusion. On the contrary, the emphasis on seeing ecumenical councils together, and not individually, was apparent in their reception in the sixth and seventh centuries. St Theodosius the Cenobiarch (d. 11 January 529) responded vehemently to the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch John III of Jerusalem (r. 516–524) with the statement that,

Chalcedon, Towards the Reconciliation of 'Eastern' and 'Oriental' Churches", in *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 11/3 (2019), 473-488.

“if someone does not accept the four councils as the four Gospels, let him be anathema!”¹¹⁴ This was echoed in the letter of the monks of the monasteries of St Sabas and St Theodosius to the emperor, stating that they “gladly accept the four holy councils equal in glory and bearing the venerable imprint of the Gospels, assembled by divine inspiration at various times and places against the multifarious errors of the heresies in question, yet differing only in expression and not in meaning, like the image and meaning of the Gospels engraved by God”.¹¹⁵ The monks continue to explain that, “of these holy councils, surpassing is the radiance of the above-mentioned choir of the three hundred and eighteen holy fathers that assembled at Nicaea against the most godless Arius.” In their opinion, “this council was followed in all respects by the three other holy councils”, emphasizing the unity of the first four ecumenical councils in an attempt to justify the Chalcedonian position.¹¹⁶ St Gregory the Great (d. 12 March 604) expressed similar views, comparing the four holy Gospels to the honour to be given to the four councils,¹¹⁷ even after the fifth ecumenical council, the second council of Constantinople (AD 553), had already convened.

Even in the depictions of ecumenical councils, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one council from the other in early representations from illuminated psalters and frescos. A case in point is the depiction of the Council of Nicaea II on 12 October in

114 εἴ τις οὐ δέχεται τὰς τέσσαρας συνόδους ὡς τὰ τέσσαρα εὐαγγέλια, ἔστω ἀνάθεμα.

Eduard Schwartz (ed.), *Life of Sabas* 56, in *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, Texte und Untersuchungen 49.2, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1939, 152.

115 Eduard Schwartz (ed.), *Life of Sabas* 57, in *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, Texte und Untersuchungen 49.2, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1939, 155.

116 Ibid.

117 Sancti Gregorii Magni, *Epistula* 25, PL 77, 478A.

the “Menologion of Basil II”, codex Vatican Gr. 1613.¹¹⁸ The scene depicts an emperor and bishops seated before an unnamed heretic being condemned. In fact, as Christopher Walter has shown, the depiction here is that of the First Council of Nicaea and the heretic is Arius, but the scene has been adopted as a generic representation of the seventh ecumenical council and applicable to all councils.¹¹⁹ On top of that, an increased concern in artistic representations after the seventh ecumenical Council of Nicaea II is not icon veneration but the heresy of Arianism, regardless of the fact that the heresy was already dealt with several centuries earlier. This raises the question: can theologians and historians living today speak of the first Council of Nicaea without taking into consideration the other, later councils, such as Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, that influenced the liturgical commemoration and reception of Nicaea?

Abstract

This paper looks at the Council of Nicaea of 325, its texts that relate to liturgy, their reception, and the commemoration of the council in various liturgical traditions. Both the date of the council and the number of participants is not completely clear from the historical record, leading to later hypotheses and symbolic interpretations of the timing and the number of those in attendance. Byzantine

118 See the “Menologion of Basil” in codex Vatican Gr. 1613 (Diktyon 68244), fol. 108. Online: <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/68244/>. See also A. Zakharova, “The miniatures of the Imperial Menologia”, in *Νέα Πώμη* 7 (2010), 131-153.

119 S. Salaville, “L’iconographie des «sept conciles œcuméniques»”, in *Échos d’Orient* 25 (1926), 144-176; Christopher Walter, *Le souvenir du IIe concile de Nicée dans l’iconographie byzantine*, in F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (eds.), *Nicée II 787–1987. Douze siècles d’images religieuses*, Cerf, Paris 1987, 167-183, especially 179-182.

historians believe the council likely took place at the end of May, after Pascha but before Pentecost, and the number of participants was first proposed by Hilary of Poitiers as 318, coinciding with the number of Lot's servants (cf. Gen. 14:14). Each of the twenty canons of the council regulated aspects of liturgical life to varying degrees, with certain liturgical practices being not a consequence of Nicaea but preceding the doctrine defined there. The council's Symbol of Faith also entered liturgical practice, first attested in the Eucharistic liturgy in Constantinople in the sixth century, coinciding with the liturgical commemoration of the Council of Nicaea both annually as a feast day and within the context of the diptychs of the Anaphora in the Eucharistic liturgy.

After a survey of the early Jerusalemite, Constantinopolitan, Coptic, Ethiopian, Syrian, and Latin traditions, the paper analyses the hymnography of the Byzantine Rite *akolouthia* for the Council of Nicaea I. These hymns reveal a fusion of various ecumenical councils in their historical narration of the events and doctrines of Nicaea that make it difficult to distinguish one council for another and to speak of the first Council of Nicaea without taking into consideration the other, later councils, such as Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, which themselves influenced the liturgical reception and commemoration of the first Council of Nicaea.



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“non voluntate, nec necessitate, sed natura” Alcune interpretazioni di un “assioma” trinitario

Attila PUSKÁS

Atanasio: la generazione del Figlio per natura, ma non involontaria; Tommaso d’Aquino: le processioni trinitarie come operazioni dell’autorelazionarsi di Dio con se stesso; Hans Urs von Balthasar: La generazione del Figlio e la processione dello Spirito dall’amore assoluto del Padre

La citazione riportata nel titolo del nostro saggio proviene dal testo della *Fides Damasi*, in cui si trova l’enunciato seguente: “Pater Filium genuit, non voluntate, nec necessitate, sed natura”.¹ Non è affatto un’esagerazione chiamarlo un assioma trinitario visto che il contenuto di esso appare – essenzialmente con lo stesso contenuto, benché in varie versioni testuali – in simboli di fede², negli scritti dei padri della chiesa sia di tradizione orientale che di quella occidentale a partire dal quarto secolo in poi – per esempio negli scritti di Atanasio,³

1 DH 71.

2 Cf. il simbolo del sinodo di XI Toledo (675): “quem (Filium) Deus Pater nec voluntate nec necessitate genuisse credendum est, quia ulla in Deo necessitas capit, nec voluntas sapientiam praevenit”. DH 526.

3 *Orationes contra Arianos* III, 59-66. Contro l’opinione di Kannengiesser e seguendo la posizione di Eginhard Peter Meijering, noi riteniamo autentico il terzo discorso di Atanasio contro gli ariani e siamo del parere che questo suo discorso possa essere stato scritto prima del simbolo del sinodo II di Sirmio (351). Cf. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Athanasius: Die dritte Rede gegen die Arianer. Teil III: Kapitel 59-67. Übersetzung, Kommentar, theologiegeschichtlicher Ausblick*, Verlag J.C. Gieben, Amsterdam 1998, 14, 41.

Cirillo,⁴ Gregorio Nazianzeno,⁵ Agostino⁶ –, ma anche nelle opere dei *magistri* di grande autorità e dei dottori della chiesa medievali, quali Pietro Lombardo,⁷ Tommaso d'Aquino,⁸ Bonaventura;⁹ ed esso non manca neppure negli autori del ventesimo secolo. Lo scopo del nostro studio consiste nel presentare tre diversi tipi di interpretazione del suddetto assioma, in tre autori scelti da diverse epoche. Al primo posto ci occupiamo dell'interpretazione di Atanasio di Alessandria, perché la sua polemica antiariana sta all'origine dell'assioma, il cui contenuto essenziale è stato da lui formulato, nonostante la formula stessa nei suoi scritti non ricorra *expressis verbis*. Atanasio è il primo autore cristiano a noi conosciuto che ha elaborato delle riflessioni in esteso sulla volontà di Dio.¹⁰ Al secondo posto prendiamo in considerazione l'approccio di Tommaso d'Aquino, che sulla scia di Agostino, nel quadro di un modello trinitario che si basa sull'analogia con la vita mentale dell'uomo, ha esposto la sua riflessione interpretando le processioni trinitarie come le due operazioni immanenti dell'autorelazionarsi di Dio con se stesso. Per concludere, rivolgiamo la nostra attenzione all'impostazione di Hans Urs von Balthasar, che ha elaborato la sua concezione speciale seguendo un modello trinitario di tipo interpersonale, basandosi però sull'unità essenziale dell'amore assoluto e della libertà assoluta realizzatasi nel

4 *De Trinitate* 2. Cf. Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Trinitarian Freedom: is God Free in Trinitarian Life?*, in Giulio Maspero – Robert J. Woźniak (eds.), *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology. Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*), New York 2012, 195.

5 *Oratio* 29,6-8. Cf. Luis F. Ladaria, *La Trinità mistero di comunione*, Milano 2002, 59.

6 *De Trinitate* XV, 20,38; *Dialogus quaestionum* LV, q. 7.

7 *Sententiarum libri* I, dist. VI, cap. 18.

8 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 41, a. 2.

9 *In librum primum Sententiarum* d. VI, a. unicus, q. 1-2.

10 Cf. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius. Synthesis or Antithesis?*, Brill, Leiden 1974, 70.

Padre e con lui nel Figlio e nello Spirito. Il presente studio si prefigge di rendere evidenti i vantaggi della riflessione balthasariana che sta in un dialogo critico e fecondo sia con la filosofia di Plotino, sia con quella di Hegel. Al contempo, la presentazione delle differenze e delle similitudini delle varie interpretazioni rende testimonianza su come si evolva una tradizione viva, che non cessa di ripensare e reinterpretare la verità trinitaria con l'esigenza di rimanere fedele alla stessa verità.

Atanasio: la generazione del Figlio per natura, ma non involontaria

Negli ultimi brani del suo terzo discorso contro gli ariani, Atanasio cerca di confutare con numerosi ragionamenti l'affermazione dei suoi avversari, secondo i quali: “bisogna ammettere che il Figlio sia stato creato dal Padre per la sua volontà ed il suo volere”.¹¹ Facendo così, Atanasio deve però affrontare una obiezione ariana che viene citata da lui stesso in queste parole: “Se egli (il Figlio) non è stato creato per un atto di volontà, Dio ebbe un Figlio per necessità e contrariamente al suo volere”.¹² Dalla risposta di Atanasio vogliamo riprendere soltanto due argomenti opposti ed un chiarimento concettuale che vi si connette.

Atanasio formula il primo argomento contrario come segue: “Ci dicano inoltre: il fatto che Dio sia buono e misericordioso si ha per la sua volontà o no? Se ciò avviene per la sua volontà, bisogna osservare che egli ha cominciato ad essere buono e che può darsi benissimo che egli non sia buono. Il deliberare e lo scegliere implicano l'inclinazione in entrambi i sensi, e ciò avviene per via della passione della natura

11 *Orationes contra arianos*, III, 59,1 (=CA III). Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, Introd., trad. e note a cura di Pietro Podolak, Collana di testi patristici, n. 173, Ed. Città Nuova, Roma, 2003, 324.

12 CA III, 62,1. Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, 329. L'enunciazione risale all'autore ariano Asterio. Cf. Asterio, *Syntagmation*, fr. 20.

razionale.”¹³ Poi, Atanasio rivolge contro gli ariani la loro stessa argomentazione dicendo: “Se per l’assurdità che ne deriva si concluderà che Dio è buono e misericordioso, ma non per un atto di volontà, si sentano rispondere ciò che essi stessi hanno detto: dunque è buono per necessità e contro la sua volontà. Ma chi può sopporre in lui una necessità?”¹⁴ Come si vede, il primo argomento opposto di Atanasio concerne la relazione tra Dio e i suoi attributi essenziali. Egli mette in chiaro: se uno accettasse l’interpretazione ariana che, per l’attuazione della volontà divina, prende a modello la funzione della volontà umana – come volontà che sceglie tra le possibilità diverse o opposte –, oppure ritenesse che l’unica forma possibile della realizzazione della volontà divina sia quella della volontà divina del Creatore, giungerebbe alla conclusione inammissibile che Dio è buono (e misericordioso) in modo contingente, cosicché Dio potrebbe decidere pure di non voler essere buono. Questa presunzione però sarebbe in contraddizione sia con la immutabilità che con la perfezione di Dio.

Se tale volontà divina contingente per quanto riguarda il rapporto di Dio con i suoi attributi, è inaccettabile anche per gli stessi ariani, e se nel contempo essi insistessero sulla tesi secondo cui ciò che non è volontario sia necessario, essi allora cadrebbero nella loro propria trappola. Gli ariani dovrebbero infatti affermare che Dio è buono non in modo volontario, ma necessario, essendo soggetto a qualche costrizione. Questo però contraddirebbe di nuovo il concetto di Dio. Quindi, il primo argomento di Atanasio dimostra che i concetti ariani della volontà e della necessità non sono applicabili alla relazione di Dio con i suoi attributi essenziali, perché in entrambi i casi si giunge ad un concetto contraddittorio su Dio. Per interpretare in modo giusto e consistente il rapporto di Dio con se stesso, bisogna reinterpretare i due

13 Ho modificato leggermente la traduzione italiana inserendo nella frase la parola “passione”, perché l’espressione “pathos” si legge nel testo originale.

14 CA III, 62,5. Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, 330.

concetti sopra menzionati, adoperare un altro concetto e riconoscere i limiti del sapere umano. Il “per natura” sarà l’altro concetto che viene usato da Atanasio per correggere i concetti del volontario e del necessario, nonché per evitare l’alternativa sbagliata del volontario e del necessario. Egli formula la conclusione del suo primo argomento opposto con queste parole: “Se è assurdo postulare una necessità in Dio, e per questo egli è buono per natura, allora, a maggior ragione e più veramente, Dio è Padre del Figlio per natura e non per un atto di volontà.”¹⁵

Il secondo argomento opposto di Atanasio, collegandosi strettamente al primo, viene completato con un aspetto nuovo. Esso dimostra che l’essenza stessa del Padre viene toccata se uno afferma che il Figlio viene ad essere semplicemente per la volontà deliberativa del Padre. Questo significherebbe “che il Padre avrebbe potuto anche non volere il Figlio. Dire che il Figlio avrebbe potuto anche non esistere è empio, e l’audacia giunge a colpire la sostanza del Padre, se è vero che ciò che le è proprio avrebbe potuto anche non esistere.”¹⁶ L’argomento di Atanasio si basa sulla correlazione fra il Padre e il Figlio. Di conseguenza, qualunque cosa viene affermata di uno dei membri della correlazione, ciò tocca anche l’altro membro di essa. Se uno afferma che il Figlio viene ad essere meramente per la volontà deliberativa del Padre, allora il Figlio avrebbe potuto anche non esistere, e con ciò egli – *volens nolens* – afferma anche che Dio è Padre per una volontà deliberativa, e quindi Dio avrebbe potuto non essere Padre. Se l’essere del Figlio dipendesse puramente da una decisione e scelta di Dio, allora anche l’essere di Dio come Padre dipenderebbe dalla stessa scelta contingente. Con la scelta contingente riguardo a se stesso però Dio stesso diventerebbe una realtà contingente e mutabile, simile alla sua creatura. Tale affermazione sarebbe empietà

15 CA III, 62,6. Ibid.

16 CA III, 66,5. Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, 336.

e contraddirebbe il concetto di Dio. Atanasio mette in paragone la bontà di Dio con la sua paternità. Né dell'una, né dell'altra si può dire che siano il risultato di un atto deliberativo di Dio che sceglie tra diverse possibilità, ma entrambe appartengono alla natura di Dio. "Ma come è buono sempre e per natura, così il Padre è anche fecondo sempre e per natura."¹⁷

Atanasio mette però in chiaro anche il fatto che il concetto "per natura" non sta in opposizione al concetto "per volere" (volontario). Al volere si oppone ciò "che va contro un proposito". Ciò può essere soltanto una coazione, che però nel caso di Dio è da escludere. Ciò che è "per natura", non significa sia soggetto a qualche costrizione. Al contempo, ciò che è per natura, "è superiore e precedente alla deliberazione".¹⁸ Il volere deliberativo caratteristico per l'uomo è un "pathos" appartenente alla creatura di natura razionale. Essa può inclinarsi in direzioni diverse, muoversi tra possibilità contrarie, ed è caratterizzata da mutabilità. Questo tipo del volere viene superato e preceduto da ciò che è per natura. Tale è la generazione del Figlio che non si effettua come una scelta contingente e mutabile tra possibilità. La generazione del Figlio avviene per natura, vale a dire, conviene alla natura di Dio che è l'essere immutabile, eterno e perfetto.¹⁹ Di conseguenza, il volere dell'esistenza del Figlio da parte del Padre corrisponde alla natura divina del Padre. Dio in quanto essere immutabile, eterno e perfetto supera sia la necessità sia il volere contingente. Come osserva Meijering, questa affermazione di Atanasio coincide con la tesi filosofica di Numenio e Plotino. Numenio afferma

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ CA III, 62,2. Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, 329. Cf. CA, II, 2. Il pensiero di Atanasio, secondo cui l'essere naturale supera l'essere voluto, corrisponde alla posizione filosofica di Platone e di Aristotele. Cf. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Athanasius: Die dritte Rede gegen die Arianer*, 44.

¹⁹ Cf. CA III, 63,2. Cf. *De Decretis* 22; *De Synodis* 35. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, 139.

infatti sull'essere (to on) che esso è immutabile e non abbandona la propria identità né per libera decisione, né in seguito a qualche necessità. Plotino afferma sull'Uno identico al Bene che esso sta al di sopra sia dello scegliere contingente sia del necessario.²⁰

Atanasio rifiuta decisamente l'accusa ariana secondo cui se il Figlio si originasse dal Padre “per natura” e non “per volere”, questo significherebbe che il Padre non lo vorrebbe, anzi il Figlio esisterebbe contro la volontà del Padre. Atanasio confuta questa conclusione riferendosi di nuovo alla relazione di Dio con la propria bontà e con la propria sostanza:

Come egli non ha iniziato ad essere buono in seguito a volontà, ma non è buono contro il suo desiderio e la sua volontà (gli è infatti gradito tutto ciò che egli è), così, anche l'esistenza del Figlio, anche se non ha avuto origine dal suo volere, non gli è indesiderata né è contraria al suo disegno. Come egli desidera la propria sostanza, così anche il Figlio, che è proprio della sua sostanza, non gli è indesiderato.²¹

Entrambi gli argomenti di Atanasio mostrano dunque che alla generazione del Figlio dal Padre non sono applicabili né il concetto di una volontà deliberativa precedente e contingente, né quello di una necessità, in quanto essa significa essere sottoposto a qualche coazione. Atanasio adopera il concetto “per natura”: come Dio/il Padre è buono “per natura”, così Dio è Padre del Figlio “per natura”. I filosofi platonici, come per esempio Albino e Proclo, hanno usato l'espressione “per sostanza” parlando della bontà di Dio. A differenza dell'uomo, il cui volere è mutabile per cui egli può dirsi buono soltanto in modo accidentale, Dio come essere immutabile è buono

20 Cf. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, 72-73. Idem, *Athanasius: Die dritte Rede gegen die Arianer*, 51.

21 CA III, 66,1. Atanasio, *Trattati contro gli Ariani*, 335. La presa di posizione di Atanasio su questo punto corrisponde all'affermazione del simbolo del sinodo II Sirmio (351), che dice: “Non enim nolente Patre coactus Pater, vel naturali necessitate ductus, cum nollet, genuit Filium” (DH 140).

per sostanza (kat'usian to agathon). Questo pensiero è stato appreso da Origene ed applicato alla Trinità.²² Come abbiamo visto, anche Atanasio ha ripreso ed adoperato tale pensiero nella sua polemica contro gli ariani. Nelle opere di Origene appaiono anche il pensiero e l'espressione stessa che il Figlio è Figlio del Padre per natura, e il Figlio viene generato dal Padre dall'eternità e continuamente.²³ Atanasio ha integrato anche questa idea e l'espressione stessa nella sua riflessione. Per lui il concetto "per natura" equivale a quello "per sostanza". Il Figlio è Figlio del Padre per natura (phüsei), vale a dire "per sostanza" (kat'usian).²⁴ Allo stesso tempo, come abbiamo visto, Atanasio, nel suo terzo discorso contro gli ariani continua ad approfondire il significato dell'espressione "per natura" aggiungendovi una nuova funzione. Riferendosi infatti alla generazione del Figlio dal Padre, Atanasio indica che tale operazione divina supera sia la necessità, sia il volere deliberativo contingente.

Tommaso d'Aquino: le processioni trinitarie come operazioni dell'autorelazionarsi di Dio con se stesso

Nella *Summa Theologica* San Tommaso dedica un articolo intero alla questione degli atti nozionali: se essi siano volontari o non lo siano.²⁵ La risposta di Tommaso si collega strettamente alla tradizione precedente – soprattutto alle considerazioni di Ilario ed Agostino, ma anche a quelle di Atanasio e Cirillo, senza però nominare questi ultimi due –, contiene però anche dei nuovi aspetti. Il Dottore Angelico

22 *De Principiis* I, 6,2. Cf. *Ibid.* I, 2,13. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, 78.

23 "Non enim per adoptionem spiritus filius fit extrinsecus, sed natura filius est". *De Principiis* I, 2,4.

24 Cf. *CA* I, 9.15.25.39; II, 4.20.43. Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo*, *Studia Ephemeridis "Augustinianum"* 11, Roma 1975, 272.

25 *Summa theologiae* (=STh) I, 41,2.

afferma sulla scia della tradizione antica che il Padre non generò il Figlio né per volontà, né per necessità. La modalità della generazione del Figlio viene nominata anche da lui “per natura” (*naturaliter*; “sed natura”), estendendo l’uso di tale concetto anche alla processione dello Spirito. Lo Spirito Santo procede dal Padre e dal Figlio “per natura”. Allo stesso tempo, sulla scia di Cirillo, Tommaso accetta che l’atto del volere del Padre accompagna la generazione “per natura” del Figlio e la processione “per natura” dello Spirito. Vi aggiunge però che la volontà del Padre non è il principio delle due processioni, ma solo concomitante ad ambedue.²⁶

I nuovi aspetti dell’interpretazione di Tommaso possono essere osservati da una parte nel modo in cui egli giustifica l’uso dei concetti; dall’altra parte, essi sorgono dal fatto che Tommaso concepisce le due processioni trinitarie “per natura” come le due modalità di operazione in cui Dio si rapporta a se stesso in quanto sostanza spirituale perfetta. A differenza di Atanasio (e dei padri) Tommaso non fa soltanto un paragone tra il rapportarsi di Dio a se stesso – vale a dire alla sua ipostasi ed alle sue proprietà – e la generazione del Figlio, ma concepisce le due processioni trinitarie come le modalità dell’attuazione dell’autorapportarsi di Dio. Riguardo alla giustificazione dell’uso concettuale, Tommaso mette in chiaro che mentre la volontà è il principio delle cose che possono essere in un modo o in un altro, la natura invece è il principio delle cose che possono essere soltanto in un modo e non in un altro. Sulla base di questa differenza Tommaso rende ragione all’uso dell’espressione “sed natura” contro gli ariani, come segue: “Ora, ripugna che la natura divina possa essere diversamente da come è, mentre ciò è proprio delle creature: poiché Dio è l’essere intrinsecamente necessario, la creatura

26 Cf. Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (transl. by Francesca Aran Murphy), Oxford University Press, New York 2007, 75-77; E. P. Meijering, Athanasius: *Die dritte Rede gegen die Arianer*, 133-148.

invece è stata creata dal nulla. (...) Noi invece dobbiamo dire che il Padre generò il Figlio non per volontà, ma per natura.”²⁷ Come si vede, Tommaso interpreta il concetto “per natura” a partire dal concetto “dell’essere per sé necessario” che compete solo a Dio. Il fatto che non si tratta nemmeno in questo caso di una necessità sottoposta ad una necessità sovrastante, viene indicato da Tommaso con l’espressione “per mezzo di se stesso” (*per se*).

La logica dell’interpretazione di Tommaso può essere riassunta nel modo seguente. Visto che le creature sono contingenti sia nel loro esserci, sia nella loro essenza (vale a dire: possono esserci o non esserci; esserci in questo modo o in un altro), il principio della loro origine è la volontà deliberativa di Dio creatore. A differenza di questo, visto che Dio è l’essere per sé necessario – questa è la sua natura –, il suo relazionarsi con se stesso viene specificato da questa natura divina; in altre parole: Dio è ciò che egli è non sulla base di una volontà deliberativa che sceglie tra varie possibilità, ma sulla base della sua natura. Poiché il Figlio non è creatura, ma possiede la stessa sostanza divina del Padre, la sua generazione eterna dal Padre non avviene sulla base della volontà deliberativa del Padre che sceglie tra varie possibilità, ma sulla base della sostanza divina posseduta dal Padre, cioè sulla base della natura spirituale perfetta. Perciò la generazione (e nascita) del Figlio avviene “per natura”, che viene accompagnata dal volere del Padre.

Al primo posto delle risposte alle obiezioni, interpretando il detto di Ilario – “Non naturali necessitate ductus, Pater genuit Filium”²⁸ – Tommaso spiega che l’espressione “per natura” (*naturaliter, sed natura*) non significa una necessità naturale, che si verifica quando uno subisce controvolontà una costrizione da parte della propria natura

27 “Quod autem potest sic vel aliter esse, longe est a natura divina, sed hoc pertinet ad rationem creaturae: quia Deus est per se necesse esse, creatura autem est facta ex nihilo. (...) Nobis autem dicendum est quod Pater genuit Filium non voluntate, sed natura.” *STH I*, 41,2, resp.

28 Ibid. Hilarius, *De Synodis* 58.

che implica qualche difetto (per esempio la morte o la vecchiaia). Al contrario, nella generazione del Figlio da parte del Padre è presente la volontà del Padre come concomitante, perciò non vi è alcuna costrizione o alcun difetto.

La quinta obiezione, secondo la quale “Se dunque il Padre non generasse il Figlio di sua volontà, si dovrebbe dire che lo genera per necessità”, dà l’opportunità a Tommaso di chiarire il concetto della “necessarietà” e l’applicabilità di esso alla generazione del Figlio. Tommaso distingue due forme della necessarietà: la necessarietà “per se” e quella “per aliud”. Anche di quest’ultima distingue due specie: da una parte la necessità della causa efficiente e cogente che equivale col “violento”; dall’altra parte la necessità di un mezzo indispensabile per raggiungere un fine. Nel caso della generazione del Figlio non si può parlare di queste due, perché Dio non è sottoposto a nessuna causa cogente e non può essere nemmeno un mezzo per raggiungere un fine. Tommaso, escludendo la necessarietà da un altro (*per aliud*), ammette l’applicazione del concetto della necessarietà “per se”, il cui contenuto e motivo vengono definiti come segue: “Necessario invece per un motivo intrinseco (*per se*) è ciò che non può non essere. E in questo senso è necessaria l’esistenza di Dio. E allo stesso modo è necessario che il Padre generi il Figlio.”²⁹ Come si può vedere, Tommaso cerca di evitare l’uso della parola “necessario” per la generazione del Figlio, non soltanto per la fedeltà alla tradizione, ma anche per il motivo che essa può essere facilmente fraintesa. Egli è disposto ad accettare solo la necessità/ il necessario “per se” che ritiene essere equivalente al concetto “per natura” (*naturaliter, sed natura*).

Alla terza obiezione, secondo cui la processione dello Spirito sarebbe volontaria, cioè avverrebbe sulla base della volontà, perché lo Spirito procede dal Padre e dal Figlio come Amore che può essere definito “il più volontario”, Tommaso risponde distinguendo due

29 *STh* I, 41,2, ad 5.

significati della volontà. Il primo è la volontà deliberativa che sceglie tra diverse possibilità. Il secondo è la volontà che vuole qualcosa “per natura”, vale a dire secondo la natura (*aliquid naturaliter velle*). La volontà dell’uomo tende “per natura” verso la felicità. “E così pure Dio per natura vuole e ama se stesso”³⁰ – dice San Tommaso. Il Dottore Angelico ne trae la conclusione riguardo alla processione dello Spirito Santo affermando: “Lo Spirito Santo procede come Amore in quanto Dio ama se stesso. Quindi procede per natura, quantunque derivi attraverso una processione di ordine volitivo.”³¹ Tommaso insiste sulla terminologia tradizionale usando l’espressione “per natura” anche per la processione dello Spirito, come anche nel caso della generazione del Figlio. Egli esplica la processione “per natura” dello Spirito Santo dal Padre e dal Figlio come la modalità volitiva del relazionarsi di Dio con se stesso.

Riassumendo quanto è stato detto, possiamo constatare che i nuovi elementi dell’impostazione di Tommaso si devono al fatto che egli interpreta la generazione eterna del Figlio e la processione eterna dello Spirito come le due modalità fondamentali del rapportarsi di Dio a se stesso, in quanto intellezione e amore perfetto di se stesso. La generazione del Figlio dal Padre avviene “per natura”, in quanto la generazione del Figlio è l’autocomprensione perfetta di Dio, la quale autocomprensione è “per natura”. La processione dello Spirito Santo dal Padre e dal Figlio avviene “per natura”, in quanto la processione dello Spirito è amore di se stesso di Dio perfetto, il quale amore di se stesso è per natura. Essere se stesso, comprendere se stesso ed amare se stesso coincidono in Dio, sono la stessa cosa. Se Dio esiste, ed esiste tale come è, in quanto essere per sé necessario, allora lo stesso “per sé necessario” caratterizza anche la sua autocomprensione e il suo amore di se stesso. Anche la sua autocomprensione ed autoamore si

³⁰ “Et similiter Deus naturaliter vult et amat seipsum.” *STh* I, 41,2, ad 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*

“non voluntate, nec necessitate, sed natura”

attualizzano in modo “per sé necessario”, vale a dire “per natura”. Questo fatto si esprime nella generazione “per natura” del Figlio dal Padre e nella processione “per natura” dello Spirito dal Padre e dal Figlio.

Hans Urs von Balthasar: La generazione del Figlio e la processione dello Spirito dall'amore assoluto del Padre

Nel capitolo intitolato “La imprevedibilità dell’amore” del secondo volume della *Teologica*, Balthasar cita l’assioma trinitario risalente alla polemica antiariana di Atanasio - “non voluntate, nec necessitate, sed natura”³² -, e subito vi aggiunge la propria interpretazione con queste parole: “E se il donarsi del Padre al Figlio e di entrambi allo Spirito non corrisponde né a un libero arbitrio, né a una necessità, ma all’intima essenza di Dio, allora questa intimissima essenza – comunque possano distinguersi tra di loro le processioni – può essere in ultima analisi solo l’amore.”³³ Nel brano citato Balthasar identifica l’essenza e la natura intimissima di Dio con l’amore. Questa identificazione gli permette di interpretare in un orizzonte nuovo l’assioma assunto dalla tradizione concernente la modalità delle processioni trinitarie. Tra gli elementi e le conseguenze più importanti di questo nuovo approccio possono annoverarsi quelli qui sotto elencati.

(1) Il ruolo attribuito all’amore nella generazione del Figlio (e nella processione dello Spirito) cambia notevolmente. Mentre nell’opinione risalente ad Atanasio e rappresentata da Cirillo e Tommaso la volontà/amore del Padre è presente solamente come concomitante nella generazione “per natura” del Figlio, Balthasar considera l’amore assoluto identico con l’essenza divina come principio originario della

32 DH 71. *Verità di Dio. Volume due di Teologica* (=TL II, trad. di Guido Sommariva), Jaca Book, Milano 1990, 118. Titolo originale: *Wahrheit Gottes. Theologik II*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985.

33 Ibid.

generazione “per natura” del Figlio (e della processione “per natura” dello Spirito), posseduto *principaliter* dal Padre e comunicato da lui al Figlio e allo Spirito nelle due processioni trinitarie.

(2) Al posto del modello intramentale di Agostino e Tommaso circa le processioni trinitarie concepite come due modalità di autorelazionarsi di Dio, sostanza perfetta spirituale, con se stesso, subentra l’interpretazione interpersonale basata sull’amore, la quale considera le processioni come attuazioni dell’amore assoluto scaturante dal Padre che costituiscono mutue relazioni e persone incomunicabili. Con ciò Balthasar riesce ad evitare da principio il fraintendimento secondo cui il Dio Padre avrebbe bisogno del Figlio e dello Spirito, vale a dire, egli dovrebbe generare il Figlio e far procedere lo Spirito affinché egli comprenda ed ami perfettamente se stesso. I modelli interpretativi di Agostino, Anselmo, Tommaso, ma anche quello di Atanasio avevano il rischio di essere fraintesi in tal modo.³⁴

(3) Non soltanto l’azione e la rivelazione salvifica di Cristo testimoniano l’amore assoluto della Trinità e rendono possibile ed auspicabile la reinterpretazione dell’assioma trinitario a partire dall’amore, ma anche la frammentaria esperienza umana fatta dell’amore. Come Balthasar esplica in dettaglio nelle sue analisi delle opere *Solo l’amore è credibile*³⁵ e *La verità del mondo*,³⁶ l’amore autentico è identificabile nei rapporti delle persone umane. Da una parte, esso non è sottoposto a nessuna costrizione estrinseca, e non costringe nessuno, bensì è libero e liberatore. Allo stesso tempo, però,

34 Cf. Brendan McInerney, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Introduction*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2020, 19-21.

35 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1963.

36 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Wahrheit der Welt*, Benziger, Einsiedeln 1947. Questa opera è stata ripubblicata più tardi come il primo volume della *Teologica*. Cf. *Wahrheit der Welt. Theologik I*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1985.

la libertà dell'amore autentico non è mai arbitraria, ma si realizza per natura intima dell'amore come autoconsegna totale. Questo vale tanto più per la Trinità in cui l'amore assoluto e la libertà assoluta coincidono. È la prospettiva dell'amore che è in grado di elevare anche l'interpretazione delle processioni trinitarie sopra la falsa alternativa fra costrizione estrinseca o scelta arbitraria.

L'amore assoluto è indiviso, ed è identico in ciascuna persona della Trinità, ma si attua in esse in tre diversi modi impermutabili. La riflessione balthasariana però non parte dall'amore assoluto in quanto essenza comune alle tre persone, ma dal mistero del Padre, il quale è l'origine dell'amore assoluto divino e dell'intera vita trinitaria. Balthasar lo esplica come segue:

La inescogitabilità di Dio è una cosa sola con la inescogitabilità del mistero del Padre, il quale non è mai stato una persona onnipotente, onnisciente, in sé chiusa, ma una che da sempre si espropria per il Figlio, e non soltanto: una che unitamente inoltre, con e mediante il Figlio, si consegna allo Spirito. Ciò che qui così si afferma è il divino essenzialmente: l'autoconsegna di cui dobbiamo cominciare a dire che nel suo accoglimento nel Figlio e nello Spirito si adempie unicamente nel modus della restituzione alla “persona” *principaliter* (come dice Agostino) *se donante*, al Padre e, poiché lo Spirito deve se stesso anche al Figlio, anche al Figlio. Ma il darsi via sempre del Padre: questa cosa imprepensabile ed inescogitabile è la estrema ragione per cui Dio è in genere inconcepibile più di quanto lo possa concepire ogni concetto finito: l'amore, in assoluto, è l'assolutamente senza fondo che partecipa questa qualità a ogni cosa, ciò che, definendo meglio la sua pienezza, può essere ricordato ancora come “qualità” di Dio. Ogni realtà intra ed extradivina esce “a secreto Patris arcanoque” (DS 491).³⁷

Nel brano citato si possono osservare gli aspetti più importanti della trinitologia balthasariana. Ne mettiamo in rilievo alcuni.

37 *TL II*, 119. Cf. Vö. B. McInerny, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Introduction*, 19-23.

(1) Come primo, si può vedere bene che Balthasar si ricollega strettamente con la tradizione orientale – e anche con quella corrente della tradizione occidentale – che identifica nella persona del Padre il fondamento e l’origine dell’unità consostanziale della Trinità, e perciò prende sul serio l’ordo (*taxis*) impermutabile delle processioni. Questo significa, che Balthasar distingue chiaramente la sua posizione dagli approcci della trinitologia di tipo sociale (Moltmann, Boff), che richiamandosi alla comunione e reciprocità di amore tra le persone trinitarie, prescindono dall’ordo impermutabile delle processioni e dall’essere il principio ultimo del Padre. Benché anche Balthasar ritenga importante l’unità di “circuminsessio” delle persone divine, egli vede comunque nel Padre l’ultimo fondamento di essa.

(2) Come secondo, si può osservare che Balthasar interpreta chiaramente il mistero del Padre dalla prospettiva dell’amore assoluto. Con ciò la denominazione tradizionale del Padre “principium sine principio” (“origo sine origine”) ottiene un nuovo significato. Essere Dio-Padre significa attuare l’amore assoluto inderivabile da nient’altro ed irriducibile a nessun altro come la perfetta autoconsegna senza alcuna ragione ulteriore. Quest’amore del Padre è assoluto, perché non ha nessun fondamento fuori di sé (*Grundlose*); è assoluto, perché porta in sé la propria fondatezza (*Grund*) e ragionevolezza; è assoluto, perché è la fonte ed origine inesauribile (*letzter Grund*) della Trinità intera, dello stesso essere di Dio trino ed uno.

(3) Come terzo, il brano citato ci fa vedere che la teologia apofatica è fortemente presente nella riflessione trinitaria di Balthasar. Esso è dimostrato chiaramente dalla ripetizione di espressioni quali “mistero”, “inconcepibile”, “imprensabile”, “inescogitabile”. Con ciò Balthasar si ricollega con la tradizione, ma egli mette nuovi accenti anche in questo caso. Egli connette l’inconcepibilità della Trinità soprattutto col mistero del Padre. Non vi è alcun altro fondamento dell’essere e della processione del Figlio e dello Spirito se non il fatto secondo cui Dio, essendo Padre, dona se stesso come portatore dell’amore assoluto. Questo amore autoconsegnante non può essere

né necessarietà costringente, né scelta arbitraria tra varie possibilità, e neppure una casuale contingenza. Questo è il mistero del Padre, in quanto inconcepibilità dell’amore inderivabile ed irriducibile. Questo è l’inconcepibilità di Dio, l’apofasia in senso assolutamente positivo.

(4) Come quarto, ciascuna delle persone trinitarie attua la stessa essenza divina, vale a dire l’autoconsegna perfetta, ma in diversi modi impermutabili. Il Padre, in quanto fonte ultima, amore senza fondamento fuori di sé, si dona al Figlio e allo Spirito. Il Figlio, in quanto accoglie l’autoconsegna del Padre e gli risponde con l’autoconsegna filiale e insieme con il Padre si dona allo Spirito. Lo Spirito, in quanto accoglie l’autoconsegna del Padre e del Figlio e risponde loro con l’autoconsegna. Dato che l’essenza divina sta nel donarsi perfetto, questo significa che il possesso dell’essenza divina e la sua consegna coincidono in modo inconcepibile nella Trinità. L’autoconsegna non è una costringente necessarietà, né una scelta arbitraria fra varie possibilità per ciascuna delle persone: non soltanto per il Padre, ma anche per il Figlio e per lo Spirito.

Balthasar tratta l’assioma delle processioni trinitarie – “non necessitate, nec voluntate, sed natura” – anche dal punto di vista della divina libertà infinita. Egli esplica le sue considerazioni sull’attuazione della divina libertà nelle processioni trinitarie facendo un dialogo critico con Plotino e Hegel. Balthasar apprezza molto il trattato di Plotino, intitolato “Volontà e libertà dell’Uno” in cui Plotino afferma riguardo all’Uno assoluto: “Egli è perciò concorde con se stesso, in quanto vuole essere quello che è ed è quello che vuole; e la sua volontà e il suo essere sono una sola cosa”.³⁸ Il valore costante della concezione plotiniana per la teologia sta nel fatto che l’essere dell’Assoluto è autopossesso perfetto in cui essere, agire, volere coincidono. Perciò, come l’Assoluto è oltre la questione sulla priorità dell’essere o del

³⁸ *Enneadi* VI, 8,13,29-30. La citazione è stata riportata dalla traduzione che segue: Plotino, *Enneadi*. A cura di Giuseppe Faggin, Rusconi, Milano 1992, 1319.

volere, allo stesso modo è oltre la falsa alternativa tra necessità o volontà arbitraria. Balthasar mette in chiaro però anche la novità della fede trinitaria riguardo alla libertà dell'Assoluto distinguendola in una maniera decisiva dalla concezione plotiniana:

Fino a qui potrebbe arrivare anche una filosofia che riflettesse sull'Assoluto come il fondamento di tutto l'essere.³⁹ Ma la luce gettata su Dio dalla rivelazione illumina dell'altro ancora: Dio è non solo essenzialmente libero nel suo autopossesso o autodisponibilità (*Selbstverfügung*): è, proprio per questo, anche libero di disporre della sua essenza nel senso dell'autodonazione: come Padre di partecipare la divinità al Figlio, come Padre e Figlio di dividere la medesima divinità con lo Spirito. Anche qui noi ci troviamo oltre la dialettica di caso e necessità: nel senso che la libertà assoluta dell'autopossesso si comprende, conformemente alla sua essenza assoluta, come un donare senza limite, a tanto essa non è determinata che da se stessa, ma determinata in modo che senza questo donare non sarebbe se stessa.⁴⁰

Balthasar è molto più critico nei confronti di Hegel. La concezione filosofica della Trinità nel sistema hegeliano è inaccettabile, perché il filosofo tedesco sottopone l'amore donante alla legge della dialettica, e perciò alla sua necessità. Uno dei problemi principali è che nell'impostazione hegeliana la generazione del Figlio non scaturisce dalla libertà e dall'amore inconcepibile del Padre, ma dal suo bisogno. Il Padre deve generare il Figlio, ossia egli deve contrapporre a se stesso il Figlio come il suo "altro", affinché possa determinarsi come Padre. Dal processo dialettico di autoporsi e autodeterminarsi

39 La prima frase del brano viene citata da me in una forma leggermente modificata, visto che nella traduzione italiana manca la parola "Assoluto" che fa parte del testo originale tedesco (das Absolute).

40 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Le persone del drama. L'uomo in Dio. Volume due di Teodrammatica*, (=TD II, trad. di Guido Sommovilla), Jaca Book, Milano 1982, 243. Titolo originale: *Die Personen des Spiels. Theodramatik II. Teil I: Der Mensch in Gott*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1976.

risulta necessariamente la processione dello Spirito, il quale è la sintesi superiore dell’affermazione (tesi) e della negazione (antitesi), come la pienezza dell’autodeterminarsi di Dio in quanto spirito assoluto. Il secondo problema in Hegel è che il Figlio non è il vero “Altro” per il Padre, ma è piuttosto “l’altro del Padre”, un momento necessario dell’autodeterminarsi del Padre. Di conseguenza, l’altro è un momento negativo (negazione necessaria), per la mediazione del quale l’Io (del Padre) giunge alla sua autoaffermazione. Pare che in Hegel la vera differenza non si trovi tanto fra il Padre e il Figlio, ma fra il Padre e il mondo; perciò la genesi del mondo dalla Trinità risulta essere necessaria. Secondo Balthasar, Hegel progetta il movimento dialettico dell’autodeterminarsi dello spirito umano nella Trinità, e in fin dei conti egli assoggetta anche l’amore alla necessità della dialettica, logicizzandolo. Con ciò abolisce la libertà assoluta dell’amore assoluto, e al posto dell’amore assoluto subentra la scienza assoluta.

Alla dialettica necessaria dell’autodeterminarsi triadico, ma in fin dei conti monosoggettivo e monologico dello spirito assoluto di Hegel, Balthasar contrappone la libertà realizzatasi nei rapporti reciproci di dialogicità delle persone divine, in quanto libertà inconcepibile della vera autoconsegna, libertà dell’amore assoluto. Visto che il Padre mediante l’autoconsegna e comunicando l’intera essenza divina dona al Figlio e allo Spirito anche la libertà infinita, il Figlio e lo Spirito dispongono pure di libertà assoluta per donare se stessi al Padre. Contro l’autocostituzione dialettica necessaria dello spirito assoluto hegeliano, Balthasar mette in rilievo la libertà vera dell’amore assoluto delle persone trinitarie, adoperando delle molteplici immagini e metafore addirittura sorprendenti. Tali espressioni sono per esempio le seguenti:⁴¹ “spazi infiniti di libertà”,⁴²

41 B. McNerny offre un’analisi ottima di tali espressioni. Cf. B. McNerny, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Introduction*, 30-44.

42 *Teodrammatica II*, 243.

“preghiera trinitaria reciproca”,⁴³ “assolutamente positivo della differenza”,⁴⁴ “positività dell’Altro”,⁴⁵ “positività del lasciar essere”,⁴⁶ “ultima gratuità delle essenziali processioni intradivine”.⁴⁷ Nel rapporto tra le persone trinitarie si realizzano tutti e due: “perfetta trasparenza reciproca e tuttavia qualcosa come mistero ‘personale’ irrivelabile.”⁴⁸ Balthasar ne dà il motivo come segue: “Tutto ciò che emerge da una libertà come tale resta un mistero per un’altra libertà, perché il fondamento sufficiente per quanto è da essa emerso non è reperibile altrove che in questa stessa libertà”.⁴⁹ Tali espressioni possono essere facilmente fraintese, o appaiono almeno esagerate.⁵⁰ Nel comprenderle ed interpretarle bisogna tener conto della polemica balthasariana contro il sistema hegeliano. Al contempo esse sono le impronte di una coraggiosa teologia “sperimentatrice (ginnastica)” che basandosi sull’autorivelazione del mistero trinitario e sull’esperienza dell’amore e della libertà umana cerca di contemplare ed esprimere mediante un’ottica rinnovata la verità della Trinità, con l’esigenza di rileggere anche l’assioma trinitario tradizionale – “non voluntate, nec necessitate, sed natura” – ed approfondirne il significato per la contemplazione teologica.

43 *Teodrammatica II*, 244.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *L’ultimo atto. Volume cinque di Teodrammatica* (= TD V, trad. di Guido Somnavilla), Jaca Book, Milano 1986, 70-73. Titolo originale: *Das Endspiel. Theodramatik IV*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1983.

46 *Teodrammatica V*, 73-78.

47 *Teodrammatica V*, 430.

48 *Teodrammatica II*, 245.

49 *Teodrammatica II*, 246.

50 B. McNerny affronta e confuta alcune critiche fatte contro l’approccio trinitario di von Balthasar. Cf. B. McNerny, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Introduction*, 30-44.

Abstract

Das Zitat, das im Titel des Artikels zu lesen ist, stammt aus dem Text *Fides Damasi* und es ist nahezu zu einem trinitarischen Axiom in der Geschichte der christlichen Theologie geworden. Der Aufsatz behandelt drei Typen der Deutung des Axioms, die von drei Autoren aus verschiedenen Epochen entwickelt worden sind. Zuerst wird die Interpretation des Heiligen Athanasius betrachtet, denn seine antiarianische Überlegungen am Anfang der Geschichte des Axioms stehen, obwohl die Formulierung selbst wörtlich bei ihm nicht zu finden ist. Zweitens wird die Deutung des Thomas von Aquin analysiert, die er im Rahmen des intramentalen trinitarischen Modells des Heiligen Augustinus entfaltet hatte, interpretierend die immanten Hervorgänge des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes vom Vater als zwei Modalitäten des Verhältnisses Gottes zu sich selbst. Zum Schluss wird die Deutung Hans Urs von Balthasars betrachtet, der dem interpersonalen Modell folgend seine Interpretation entwickelt hat, die er auf die wesentliche Einheit der absoluten Freiheit und der absoluten Liebe im Vater, und mit ihm im Sohn und im Heiligen Geist gegründet hat.



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La competenza e le prospettive della cristologia filosofica

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I. Introduzione: Xavier Tilliette – la cristologia filosofica; II. La natura della filosofia come ostacolo a una possibile cristologia filosofica; III. La fondatezza della cristologia filosofica; IV. La natura della relazione tra teologia e filosofia; V. Le proposte di Bernhard Welte

1. Introduzione: Xavier Tilliette – la cristologia filosofica

Xavier Tilliette, il filosofo e teologo francese, è conosciuto da molti a causa della sua cosiddetta cristologia filosofica. Quale specialista di Schelling, già nella sua gioventù, Tilliette aveva creato il concetto e l'idea di una cristologia che, distinguendosi dalla cristologia teologica o dalla cristologia dogmatica, porta il nome di cristologia filosofica. Il gesuita francese ha scritto più di duemila lavori: saggi, libri, recensioni. Se cerchiamo di dischiudere il contenuto complesso della sua cristologia filosofica, dobbiamo richiamare alla nostra memoria prima di tutto i seguenti libri: *Filosofi davanti a Cristo* (Queriniana, Brescia 1989), *La Settimana Santa dei filosofi* (Morcelliana, Brescia 1992), *La cristologia idealista* (Queriniana, Brescia 1993), *Il Cristo della filosofia. Prolegomeni a una cristologia filosofica* (Morcelliana, Brescia 1996), *I filosofi leggono la Bibbia* (Queriniana, Brescia 2003), *Che cos'è la cristologia filosofica?* (Morcelliana, Brescia 2004), *Eucaristia e filosofia* (Morcelliana, Brescia 2008). Vedendo i titoli dei suoi libri si capisce bene che l'intenzione primaria di Tilliette era semplicemente di riconsiderare i testi dei filosofi europei in quanto essi formulano i loro pensieri riguardo Gesù Cristo, riguardo l'eucaristia o riguardo

la Chiesa. Come enciclopedie, gli scritti di Tilliette elencano molto spesso i ritratti dei filosofi su Gesù Cristo; riassumono le teorie caratteristiche dei filosofi attinte dal loro modo di conoscere Gesù; riscontrano il ruolo concettuale della persona di Gesù all'interno del proprio sistema filosofico. Naturalmente il progetto di Tilliette aveva anche una seconda intenzione. Questa seconda intenzione non si esauriva nel dire qualche volta una critica tenera e talora critiche molto acute verso i filosofi studiati e riassunti, mirava bensì a formulare questioni importanti che toccano anche campi teologici: la filosofia, in se stessa, quando riflette su Cristo, può essere capace di compiere qualcosa di importante, di rilevante per la cristologia teologica? A che serve una cristologia filosofica dal punto di vista della teologia? Può forse sostenere la teologia? Può aiutarla nel suo procedere rettamente, logicamente? Può, magari, amplificare la sua dimensione?

Quando si sente l'espressione "cristologia filosofica", per molti probabilmente viene nello stesso tempo richiamata alla memoria la distinzione enfaticata tra il Dio dei filosofi e il Dio di Abramo, di Isacco e di Giacobbe. Il pensatore francese Pascal intende esprimere con questo discernimento l'opposizione acuminata tra il pensare filosoficamente su Dio e la fede religiosa personale e vissuta. Analogicamente per molti si può realizzare una simile opposizione tra il Cristo della filosofia e il Cristo della fede, della dogmatica. Di fronte alla cristologia filosofica può mostrare forti dubbi la cristologia teologica e, stranamente, dall'altra parte, la cristologia filosofica è stata osservata con forti sospetti pure dalla filosofia accademica ateista, come se la cristologia filosofica fosse la terra di nessuno. In che senso può essere svolta una cristologia filosofica? In che differisce dalla comprensione della fede, dalla teologia propriamente detta?

Se cerchiamo di verbalizzare il problema cristologico, dogmatico, il problema nell'ambito teologico, dobbiamo rivolgerci ai concili di Nicea e Calcedonia. Il Concilio di Nicea ha definito la divina natura di Gesù Cristo, poi conseguentemente il Concilio di Calcedonia ha definito la fede comune nell'incarnazione: "il Cristo è Dio e uomo,

senza mescolanza né confusione, *vere Deus, vere homo*, due nature, una sola persona e ipostasi, e questa persona è la persona del Verbo di Dio, la seconda persona della Santa Trinità. La natura umana del Cristo è dunque enipostatizzata nel Logos o Figlio.¹ In stretto collegamento a questo concilio si affrontano principalmente due tendenze, la scuola di Antiochia (Teodoreto), e la Scuola di Alessandria (Atanasio, Cirillo). Entrambe le scuole difendono la teoria delle due nature, ma gli accenni sono diversi. “Antiochia sottolinea la dualità e la sua formula è il *Lógos ánthropos*, il suo pericolo, la sua eresia, è il nestorianesimo, l’insistenza sull’umanità, così che Maria è *christotókos*, ma non *theotókos*. Al contrario Alessandria sostiene una cristologia dell’unità, la sua formula è il *Verbum Caro, Lógos sárx*”.² Il pericolo di questa scuola, la sua eresia può essere sia l’apollinarismo (una forma di docetismo), sia il monofisismo (eutichianesimo).

Dopo aver ascoltato la verbalizzazione del problema cristologico teologico, ci rivolgiamo alla filosofia. Quando la filosofia cerca di identificare se stessa, constata che è opera della capacità di pensare dell’uomo, un’opera svolta con i mezzi della ragione. A questo punto una teologia protestante, per esempio la teologia di Karl Bart potrebbe dire, che la filosofia, come tale, “non deve pronunciarsi su quanto eccede ogni ragione: il soprannaturale, e il soprannaturale per eccellenza dell’incarnazione, la persona divina-umana di Gesù Cristo”.³ La filosofia non è la rivelazione e non dovrebbe offendere il territorio e il dominio della fede e della religione.

Il problema è però che alla filosofia accade molto spesso di ergersi nella sua alterità, nella sua diversità, nel rivendicare una totale autonomia, ma anche a misura ultima di ogni verità. Questa posizione della filosofia era ben percepibile nella corrente dell’*Aufklärung*,

1 Xavier Tilliette, *Filosofi davanti a Cristo*, Editrice Queriniana, Brescia 1989, 25.

2 X. Tilliette, *Filosofi davanti a Cristo*, 25.

3 X. Tilliette, *Filosofi davanti a Cristo*, 19.

dell'Illuminismo, che stava in un conflitto radicale con la fede. Infatti l'Illuminismo che rappresenta l'autarchia, l'autosufficienza della conoscenza umana, ha fabbricato le armi di cui, dopo tre secoli, fa uso la critica della religione.⁴ La filosofia europea sin dall'inizio della modernità non si appaga di rimanere all'interno della sua frontiera che la separa dalla teologia, ma giustappunto ha iniziato a criticarla, a rettificarla. Poi, nella prima metà del Ventesimo secolo, la filosofia – come la cima della critica di fronte alla religione – ha raggiunto la sua radicalità, pronunciando la totale insensatezza dei discorsi teologici e religiosi a causa della mancanza della referenza empirica dei concetti da essi utilizzati. Questa radicalità fu messa in atto dal Circolo di Vienna e da alcuni pensatori della filosofia analitica.

2. *La natura della filosofia come ostacolo a una possibile cristologia filosofica*

Dopo questa breve introduzione, la seconda parte della mia lettura intende riassumere rapidamente alcuni dubbi e voci scettiche che rifiutano l'idea di una cristologia filosofica. Il ben noto filosofo italiano Cornelio Fabro (1911-1995) fu, nella sua profonda conoscenza di san Tommaso d'Aquino, un critico non soltanto della cosiddetta cristologia filosofica, ma anche critico, per esempio, del grande teologo tedesco, Karl Rahner. Fabro ha espresso i suoi dubbi già durante il grande convegno – tenuto nel 1975 a Gallarate – il cui tema erano la possibilità, gli impedimenti e le cornici della cristologia filosofica. Fabro rigetta la cristologia filosofica prima di tutto a causa della dissoluzione della teologia in antropologia.

Secondo la tesi di Fabbro “il Cristo dei filosofi” dovrebbe essere il Cristo della ragione e dell'evidenza razionale. Può darsi, infatti, che qualche filosofo, anche non credente, resti profondamente ammirato

4 Cf. X. Tilliette, *Filosofi davanti a Cristo*, 21.

dalla dottrina e dalla personalità di Cristo e lo trovi perfino come filosofo superiore a Socrate. Ma Cristo non si è presentato come filosofo, bensì come Figlio di Dio, Uomo-Dio. Può darsi ancora che qualche altro filosofo riconosca in Cristo un senso ed una partecipazione incomparabile alle sofferenze dell'uomo, una misericordia inesauribile verso i più miseri. In Cristo si potrebbe ammirare l'ideale della morale della compassione, però Cristo è persona viva e concreta, non come semplice uomo, ma come Figlio di Dio. Egli non è semplicemente un ideale, ma il Modello che si è mostrato e si è offerto ad ogni uomo, e che una volta, esattamente alla fine della storia, giudicherà i vivi e i morti, tutti, e tutta la storia dell'umanità. Vale a dire che il momento etico e antropologico in Cristo è derivato, però il suo statuto originario è metafisico e teologico cioè quello di essere Dio, Verbo eterno di Dio e Figlio di Dio, Uomo-Dio.⁵

È molto importante tenere in evidenza che per la pura filosofia, per la ragione pura, Cristo è lo scandalo ovvio: è esemplare dello scandalo perché dichiarava di essere Dio, e ha preteso dai suoi discepoli di essere riconosciuto come Figlio di Dio. Certamente la ragione che rimane fuori del territorio della fede non può accettare il Cristo come Uomo-Dio. La ragione lavora con le sue categorie, con i suoi concetti esatti e ben definiti. La ragione mira a definire con la più possibile precisione la natura delle cose, la natura dei viventi. Nell'epoca dell'Illuminismo più filosofi hanno rappresentato l'idea, secondo la quale Cristo, il Cristo ritratto nei vangeli sia ammirabile, sia stupendo come visualizzatore di una etica mai prima sentita. Ma Lui non può essere Dio, è un uomo come noi, anche se i suoi attributi umani erano del grado massimo. Per la filosofia dell'Illuminismo Cristo era l'uomo ideale, l'uomo esemplare, ma mai un uomo nello stesso tempo Dio.

5 Cf. Cornelio Fabro, *L'eliminazione dell'Uomo-Dio nel pensiero moderno*, in Giuliano Sansonetti (ed.), *Il Cristo dei filosofi*, Atti del XXX Convegno del Centro di Studi Filosofici tra professori universitari – Gallarate 1975, Morcelliana, Brescia 1976, 52-87, 53-54.

La ragione scandalizzata viene appropriatamente espressa quando Søren Aabye Kierkegaard – nel mezzo della sua protesta contro il razionalismo hegeliano – scrive:

E il filosofo potrebbe dire: Non si è ancora mai sentita una vanità così terribile o meglio così pazzesca che un semplice uomo pretenda di essere Dio! – è una cosa finora inaudita. Non si è mai vista una simile forma di pura soggettività, di pura negazione, spinta così all'estremo. [...] Che l'individuo pretenda di essere qualche cosa, questa è in generale una presunzione della soggettività, ma che il Singolo voglia spacciarsi per Dio, questa è una pazzia. Se fosse vera questa pazza ipotesi che un uomo particolare possa essere Dio, bisognerebbe di conseguenza adorare quest'uomo particolare: non è possibile concepire una bestialità filosofica più grande.⁶

Se la ragione vuole evitare lo scandalo, e non vuole cadere in una “bestialità filosofica”, deve definire nella sua competenza la religione, e deve definire i contenuti della religione. La filosofia si sentiva costretta a cercare la soluzione per evitare lo scandalo con la riduzione della religione. Una delle iniziative riduttive si è realizzata quando in Europa si è affacciato il concetto della religione naturale. La religione naturale respingeva la rivelazione come fatto storico normativo, e cercava di sostituirsi ad essa in quanto si determinava come sviluppo della ragione. Suo compito era di eliminare ogni religione senza appello. La religione naturale aveva sviluppata una delle sue forme nel deismo. Cornelio Fabro constata che nel deismo si delineano due indirizzi: si vede una versione radicalmente atea – come per esempio nel deismo di Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Thomas Morgan. Per questi autori Cristo, gli Apostoli, i primi cristiani che credettero e divulgarono la divinità di Cristo, erano degli impostori. C'è poi una versione più moderata del deismo – come per esempio è visibile nel caso di Shaftesbury. Questa versione moderata tiene Cristo per un

6 Søren Kierkegaard, *Esercizio del cristianesimo*, I., Studium, Roma 1971, 111.

filosofo, un Socrate nuovo, ma non lo tiene per Figlio di Dio. Dato che la ragione può trattare soltanto ciò che sia dentro dei suoi confini, la divinità di Cristo doveva essere negata. Per i pensatori deisti, per i pensatori della religione naturale “la persona e l’opera di Gesù Cristo è ridotta a quella di un impostore oppure, nei casi più benevoli, di un utopista e moralista. In concreto la polemica deistica mirava a livellare il cristianesimo a religione naturale e ridurre i suoi dogmi a verità della ragione [...]”⁷ Si vede bene, che dall’inizio della modernità si è sviluppato un abisso tra le verità della ragione e le proposizioni della religione che non potevano trovare posto all’interno della ragionevolezza. L’abisso tra loro poi si è allargato sempre di più.

Dopo aver esaminato alcuni elementi della filosofia moderna, illuminista, deista, Cornelio Fabro ci invita a riconoscere che il Cristo dei filosofi non può essere mai il Cristo del Nuovo Testamento, il Cristo della ragione non può mai essere il Cristo della fede annunciata. La filosofia non si può accostare dal significato storico di Gesù alla sua importanza metafisica. Il Cristo dei filosofi rimane – alla fine – solo un maestro della ragione speculativa. Infatti, dopo il tardo Illuminismo si vede una progressiva dissoluzione dei contenuti dogmatici del cristianesimo che riguardano i miracoli di Cristo, la sua divinità, il suo essere uomo-Dio. Da questi contenuti dogmatici elaborati dalla Chiesa si sganciava gradualmente la cristologia filosofica della modernità, avvicinando il cristianesimo a una dottrina, riducendolo in un contenuto morale e razionale.

3. La fondatezza della cristologia filosofica

Peter Henrici pensa che le cristologie dei filosofi si rivelano quasi senza eccezione insoddisfacenti per un credente, anzi più di una volta

7 Cornelio Fabro, *L’eliminazione dell’Uomo-Dio nel pensiero moderno*, in Giuliano Sansonetti (ed.), *Il Cristo dei filosofi*, 58.

apertamente eretiche. Un errore di fondo sta nella loro tendenza a dissolvere Cristo, persona storica, in una dottrina speculativa, così il loro Cristo appare svuotato rispetto al Cristo della cristologia teologica. Tuttavia ci sono tante prove giustificative della necessità e della possibilità di una cristologia filosofica. Prima di tutto dobbiamo prendere atto che per il filosofo la figura di Cristo, in un primo approccio, si presenta “non diversamente dagli altri dati o fenomeni che costituiscono la materia prima del suo pensiero”. Il filosofo vede la figura di Cristo come “un fatto storico, un dato della coscienza cristiana, un fenomeno religioso descritto dalle scienze religiose”, descritto naturalmente anche dalla teologia “la quale, da un filosofo, va recepita dapprima a livello puramente fenomenologico, come ogni altra scienza”. Questo dato diventa rilevante per il filosofo in quanto può inserirsi nell’insieme di un discorso speculativo di natura filosofica. “Questo significa che il filosofo non si interroga tanto sulla persona di Cristo in sé, quanto sulla funzione di questa persona per me o per il mondo o per una comunità religiosa.”⁸ A questo punto notiamo che anche il teologo comincia la sua riflessione su un livello fenomenologico, poi deve elevarsi alle questioni dogmatiche, come per esempio la filiazione divina di Gesù o la costituzione ontologica della sua persona. Un tale innalzamento dal livello puramente fenomenologico fu giustappunto lo sviluppo del dogma cristologico fino alle definizioni di Nicea e di Calcedonia.⁹ Effettivamente questo

8 Peter Henrici, *Panlogismo o pancristismo?*, in Giuliano Sansonetti (ed.), *Il Cristo dei filosofi*, 113-135, 114.

9 „Nella fenomenologia di Gesù acquista un particolare significato l’autorità che Gesù terreno attribuisce alla sua predicazione, in quanto egli la considera uguale o addirittura superiore alla Parola di Dio contenuta nell’Antico Testamento, ugualmente importanti risultano la sua speciale relazione con Dio, la sua prassi di rimettere i peccati con potere personale, il chiamare alla sua sequela col diritto di chi è dotato di pieni poteri. Il suo modo di esigere e di comportarsi, di parlare e di trattare, oltrepassa i limiti di ciò che fino allora si conosceva e tutti gli schemi presupposti da profeti e uomini di Dio.” Arno

sviluppo metteva sempre più chiaramente in evidenza, assodandolo con formule sempre più definite, che la figura di Cristo non poteva intendersi soltanto funzionalmente.

La tesi di Xavier Tilliette è che la “teologia suppone una cristologia filosofica se si interroga sull’essere di Cristo”. La sua seconda tesi ribadisce che una cristologia filosofica non dissolve la cristologia teologica in antropologia. “La cristologia filosofica ci prende nella misura in cui può contribuire a rischiarare ed a sollecitare la cristologia teologica che, del resto, si carica sempre di più di filosofia.”¹⁰

Se volessimo elencare inoltre le giustificazioni che sono in favore della cristologia filosofica, potremmo menzionare come seconda l’antinomicità nella natura umana, che pretende quel modo di pensare che oltre a sottolineare la ragionevolezza cerca di tenere insieme verità a prima vista opposte. C’è una retta dialettica che oltrepassa la ragionevolezza degli illuministi, c’è una ragione che non soltanto esamina e critica, ma è capace di aprirsi a forme superiori, e capace di aprirsi verso un altro modo di pensare.

Secondo la tesi di Alberto di Giovanni, anche nello specchio della sua lettura di Pascal, per i filosofi la concupiscenza è anzitutto orgoglio. Contro questo orgoglio del filosofo combatte la comprensione retta della dialettica che costituisce l’uomo. Si conoscono bene le frasi più famose di Pascal che visualizzano questa dialettica, che è una vera e propria antinomicità drammatica che non ha soluzione se non nel Cristo. L’antinomicità dell’uomo è ben espressa e ben conosciuta: “Le grandezze e le miserie dell’uomo sono così evidenti che è necessario che la vera religione ci insegni che c’è in lui qualche gran principio di grandezza e un grande principio di miseria, e ci renda ragione

Schilson – Walter Casper, *Cristologie oggi*, Analisi critica di nuove teologie, Paideia Editrice, Brescia 1979, 24.

¹⁰ X. Tilliette, *Filosofi davanti a Cristo*, 10.

di così stupefacenti contrasti.¹¹ Da un lato la grandezza umana sta proprio nell'atto del riconoscimento della propria miseria, secondo il frammento 397.¹² Essere uomo cioè, secondo l'antropologia di Pascal, "comprende molte verità che sembrano contraddirsi"¹³, è perciò necessario "al termine di ciascuna verità, aggiungere che ci si rammenta della verità opposta"¹⁴. Come nella teologia, similmente nell'antropologia, "la fonte di tutte le eresie è esclusione di queste verità" apparentemente opposte ed escludentisi, sicché "non riuscendo a concepire il rapporto tra due verità opposte e credendo che l'affermazione di una importi esclusione dell'altra"¹⁵, ci si attacca all'una escludendo l'altra. L'uomo di Pascal è quindi l'uomo di cui è evidenziata la radice dialettica della natura, di cui sono rilevate le tendenze che sono irrinunciabili e nello stesso tempo inappagabili tramite la propria potenza umana. In base a questa antropologia per Pascal Gesù Cristo sarà "degnò di venerazione" "perché ha conosciuto pienamente l'uomo" – ringrazia Cristo per il dischiudere del vero uomo, e dall'altra parte gli rende grazie perché ha "conosciuto veramente Dio"¹⁶. La domanda della natura della ragione umana nello specchio della filosofia di Pascal permette di fare la distinzione tra la ragione che critica e vuole sempre esaminare e la ragione che è aperta verso un allargamento che viene dalla fede. La fede in questo caso non è qualcosa di opposto alla ragionevolezza, ma è lo stimolo che amplia l'orizzonte della ragione. Un'altra giustificazione in favore della cristologia filosofica è la proposta seguente:

11 Blaise Pascal, *Pensieri*, trans. P. Serini, Torino 1970³, Frammento 430. La numerazione dei Pensieri segue questa edizione.

12 "La grandezza dell'uomo sta in questo: che esso ha coscienza della propria miseria." B. Pascal, *Pensieri*, Fr. 397.

13 B. Pascal, *Pensieri*, Fr. 862.

14 B. Pascal, *Pensieri*, Fr. 567.

15 B. Pascal, *Pensieri*, Fr. 862.

16 B. Pascal, *Pensieri*, Fr. 187.

Sembra che possa e debba distinguersi nel Cristo dei filosofi o, piuttosto, nella cristologia filosofica, come una cristologia *a priori* ed una *a posteriori* rispetto al Cristo. Mentre la cristologia teologica è sempre posteriore, de facto e de iure, al Cristo realtà storica, quella filosofica è cristologia *a priori* rispetto al Cristo, quando nell'abisso della natura umana ne indaga antinomica presenza-assenza del divino, l'ulteriorità potenzialmente infinita, di cui solo potrebbe essere Mediatore, vivente dialessi, un Uomo-Dio.¹⁷

Un esempio per una cristologia *a priori* è il pensiero di Bernhard Welte, in quanto definisce l'uomo come ente aperto all'essere, come ente aperto (*Offen-Sein*) verso gli altri enti (*Beim-Anderen-Sein*), e lo definisce come spirito che è così *quodammodo omnia*. L'uomo porta in sé la sua apertura trascendentale, e come tale, come spirito l'uomo è *quodammodo amplum et infinitum*. Questa antropologia di Bernhard Welte rende possibile la concepibilità del compimento della natura umana quando la natura umana indossa l'infinita divina nella persona di Gesù Cristo.

4. La natura della relazione tra teologia e filosofia

Nel secolo Ventesimo molti pensatori cattolici hanno rappresentato l'idea fondamentale secondo la quale se si vuole comprendere il cristianesimo si deve capire prima di tutto l'uomo. Il motto formulato da Franz Rosenzweig – che ha ispirato numerosi autori – ci ammonisce che le questioni teologiche si devono tradurre in problemi dell'uomo, e i problemi dell'uomo li si deve inoltrare, trasmettere alla teologia.¹⁸ Una conseguenza di questo motto è stata l'intenzione, frequente e

17 Alberto di Giovanni, *Per una cristologia filosofica: Pascal*, in Giuliano Sansonetti (ed.), *Il Cristo dei filosofi*, 183-192, 189.

18 Franz Rosenzweig, *Das Neue Denken. Einige nachträgliche Bemerkungen zum Stern der Erlösung*, in Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk*, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. III, Haag: Nijhoff, 1976, 139-161, 153.

vistosa, delle elaborazioni di nuove antropologie di diventare risposte preliminari possibili a problemi teologici. Dagli anni '60 del XX secolo si parla della svolta antropologica della teologia, che – secondo il progetto di Karl Rahner – significa che la teologia dogmatica deve essere svolta come antropologia teologica, affinché sia più proficua. Certamente la centralità dell'Uomo di questa svolta non vuole cambiare la centralità di Dio o la centralità di Cristo: il nuovo accento nella teologia mira molto di più a poter prevalere come principio di una sinergia che per conseguenza sia capace di fare da ponte tra l'autentica e reale autoconoscenza dell'uomo e quella teologia che veramente sia in grado di condurre l'uomo al suo Creatore. Se la teologia vuole farsi capire dall'attuale atmosfera intellettuale, se la teologia vuole comunicare le sue proposizioni in una forma comprensibile, deve realizzare la sua comunicazione con il veicolo dell'autocoscienza dell'uomo. Rahner temeva che la teologia talvolta usasse un linguaggio nel quale non è possibile afferrare veramente la pretesa di verità dei suoi enunciati. Se l'ascoltatore non capisce in che modo la verità teologica si riferisca alla sua vita concreta, alle sue proprie esperienze, il messaggio della teologia andrà perduto.

Se la svolta antropologica è da noi interpretata come carattere essenziale della teologia attuale, il suo metodo può essere specificato come segue: tutte le domande e tutte le risposte della teologia devono esprimersi nel loro riferimento immediato all'uomo. Una teologia appropriata deve contenere l'attenzione antropologica che affronta l'attuale atmosfera intellettuale, affronta le diverse correnti filosofiche. Tra gli altri, anche Karl Rahner pensava che, tramite l'attenzione antropologica,¹⁹ fosse possibile per la teologia recuperare quei ritardi

19 Una notevole definizione di Karl Rahner si trova nel suo lavoro *Teologia dell'incarnazione*. Qui leggiamo la frase seguente: “La cristologia è la fine e l'inizio dell'antropologia e tale antropologia, nella sua realizzazione più radicale, la cristologia, è per eternità teologia.” Karl Rahner, *Teologia dell'incarnazione*, in Karl Rahner, *Saggi di cristologia e mariologia* (BCR 63), Paoline, Roma

e quei distacchi che si erano generati in relazione agli sviluppi antropologici.

5. *Le proposte di Bernhard Welte*

Bernhard Welte, il pensatore cattolico, individua tre punti, tre presupposti che sono condizioni necessarie alla teologia per poter rimontare i distacchi e i ritardi. Questi tre presupposti si possono realizzare tramite la filosofia, per mezzo dell'interazione vivace tra filosofia e teologia. Prima di tutto è necessario disambiguare il bisogno dell'uomo di essere redento. Se l'esistenza umana non portasse in se stessa il bisogno di redenzione, se l'essere umano non fosse racchiuso in una frammentazione che deve essere trasportata verso un'unità integrale, a che cosa servirebbe il cristianesimo? L'attenzione antropologica deve puntare il muro, i confini dell'esistenza umana nei quali l'uomo dolorosamente incorre. Sotto l'aspetto della vita individuale e personale, sotto l'aspetto della vita comune dell'umanità, e sotto l'aspetto della storia dell'umanità ci sono insuperabili sbarramenti, che però nello stesso tempo possono risvegliare il desiderio della redenzione. I confini della nostra esistenza rimandano alla possibilità di una fuga trascendente, alla possibilità di una redenzione trascendente.²⁰ Ad una tale cristologia filosofica – cioè con il motivo di aver dimostrato il grave bisogno dell'essere redento – potrebbe equivalere la filosofia di Simone Weil. Xavier Tilliette apprezza la sua cristologia filosofica. La pensatrice ritratta commoventemente

1967, 115. = „Christologie ist Ende und Anfang der Anthropologie, und diese Anthropologie in ihrer radikalsten Verwirklichung, nämlich der Christologie, ist in Ewigkeit Theologie“, in Karl Rahner, *Zur Theologie der Menschwerdung*, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. IV., Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1960, 151.

²⁰ Cf. Bernhard Welte, *Zur Vorgehensweise der Theologie und zu ihrer jüngeren Geschichte*, *Gesammelte Schriften IV/3*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2007, 165-166.

l'infelicità dell'uomo che è estenuante e irrimediabile. All'infelicità appartengono la sofferenza fisica, la degradazione sociale, il disprezzo, il disgusto di sé, la vergogna. Per Weil in questa situazione umana appare Cristo, che nella sua decreazione rivela l'amore di Dio. L'infelicità dell'uomo si può capire soltanto nel silenzio di Cristo sulla croce. La kenosi di Cristo è il ponte tra l'uomo e Dio.

Secondariamente la teologia non può dimenticare – ribadisce Bernhard Welte – che si deve muovere nel linguaggio attuale, si deve fare capire con le categorie sussistenti dell'epoca attuale. Se la teologia non capisce, fraintende, o non usa il linguaggio dell'epoca attuale, non avrà opportunità di farsi capire e trasmettere il suo messaggio.

Tutte le proposizioni di fede si conformano al modo di concepire il mondo e alle espressioni di pensiero del loro tempo e sono intimamente condizionate dalle categorie e della lingua dell'epoca, non le si può semplicisticamente isolare dal cambiamento storico dei tempi e degli ambienti, del pensiero, del linguaggio, del comportamento. La loro verità, quel significato più profondo incorruttibile, si esprime quindi costantemente in una forma legata al tempo, e perciò, mutate le condizioni, deve essere formulata di nuovo e diversamente.²¹

Similmente formula il documento *Mysterium ecclesiae* quando dice: "...il senso contenuto nelle enunciazioni di fede dipende, in parte, dalla peculiarità espressiva di una lingua usata in una data epoca e in determinate circostanze".²² Per Xavier Tilliette nel sistema del pensiero di Pierre Teilhard de Chardin si trova una cristologia filosofica illustre. Il paleontologo e filosofo francese ritrae Cristo come il motore del mondo evolutivo. Il gesuita, attraverso il linguaggio scientifico del secolo Ventesimo, ci fa vedere un mondo nel quale senza la cristogenesi non si potrebbe spiegare la cosmogenesi, la biogenesi,

21 A. Schilson – W. Casper, *Cristologie, oggi*, 14.

22 Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, in *Osservatore Romano*, 6. Luglio, 1973, 5.

e neanche la noogenesi. Il progresso del mondo è indissociabile dall'energia del Cristo, che riprende dall'inizio il gigantesco sforzo cosmico ed umano. Sul filo dell'evoluzione come del suo compimento, occorre che la maturazione planetaria, noosferica, e la parusia (la manifestazione) coincidano.

In ultima analisi – dice Bernhard Welte – compito della teologia è di far conoscere il modo di vita del cristiano, e presentare dettagliatamente le conseguenze e i momenti della vita cristiana. Il compito è di disegnare la vita di un cristiano che agisce, vive giorno per giorno in base alla propria fede personale in Dio. In questo compito, di nuovo, la teologia deve poggiare sulla filosofia. Per Xavier Tilliette il terzo pensatore illustre – a causa della cristologia filosofica – è Maurice Blondel. L'intenzione fondamentale del lavoro blondeliano, *L'Action*, è di delineare la scienza dell'azione e, svolgendo dialetticamente la catena e le serie delle azioni necessarie, mostrare che essa culmina sempre, necessariamente, in un'opzione pro o contro il soprannaturale. Anche testi più tardivi di Blondel, in quanto si muovono nell'ambito della cristologia filosofica, molto spesso rilevano quella tensione che è causata dalla decisione dell'uomo pro o contro il soprannaturale.

Alla fine di una tale lettura probabilmente portiamo in noi l'impressione di ecletticismo. Il fondamento di questa impressione è – almeno a mio parere – che è difficile asserire che esiste una cristologia filosofica unitaria, che si può precisamente circoscrivere, ma sicuramente esiste il Cristo dei filosofi, il Cristo delle correnti filosofiche. Non è una faccenda semplice segnare a dito la cristologia filosofica. Sono i filosofi, i diversi pensatori, che nella loro filosofia raffigurano il loro proprio Cristo. Queste raffigurazioni sono talvolta insoddisfacenti, talvolta eretiche, di tanto in tanto però ispirative, illuminanti, come se fossero prolegomeni alla cristologia teologica.

A questo punto notiamo ancora che fino alle fine del Medioevo la differenza tra filosofia e teologia non era una questione di grande rilevanza. La modernità ha portato con sé la separazione della filosofia

dalla teologia. Dopo questo periodo la filosofia ha pensato che sulla base della ragione potesse procedere sempre impeccabilmente, e la teologia ha pensato che la filosofia dovesse essere usata soltanto come *ancilla (theologiae)*. Ambedue hanno avuto torto! La ragione non è capace di pensare senza difetti, spesso è vittima della propria impostura. E la teologia – volente o nolente – racchiude in se stessa la filosofia: la filosofia per la teologia non è uno strumento, ma ben più un momento inerente. Se la teologia vuole verbalizzare il suo messaggio, ha bisogno della filosofia, e ha bisogno sempre anche della consapevolezza della propria dipendenza dalla filosofia.

A che serve la cristologia filosofica? A che serve il Cristo dei filosofi? Serve a sostenere e a motivare la teologia, serve a poter riconoscere il contenuto vero e il contenuto falso, serve a poter distinguere il vero dall'eretico. Per noi credenti il Cristo di certi filosofi può aiutare ad amare, a conoscere e a trattare meglio il Cristo della nostra fede.

Abstract

Der vorliegende Artikel versucht den Begriff und die Konzeption der philosophischen Christologie zu beleuchten, ihre Plausibilität und ihre Erforderlichkeit zu begründen. Die Konzeption der philosophischen Christologie wurde von dem französischen Theologen, Xavier Tilliette, erfunden, der meinte, die dogmatische Christologie setze die philosophische vor. Die Gegner dieser Konzeption fürchten aber, dass die philosophische Christologie beinahe immer ungenügend, oft irreführend, bisweilen sogar irrgläubig sei. Damit man sich für eine dieser zwei Stellungnahmen entscheiden könne, lohnt es sich, unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf jene Erkenntnisse von Karl Rahner und von Bernhard Welte zu richten, die die Beziehung zwischen Theologie und Philosophie erläutern.



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Jean–Luc Fournet, *The Rise of Coptic: Egyptian versus Greek in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press 2020, 206 pages.

The monography discussed below does not only provide an important contribution to the problem of the gradual diffusion of written Coptic in Roman Egypt in the context of a centuries-long process, but it also serves as a useful introduction for anyone interested in the still relatively uncertain history of this process.

Chapter 1 discusses the origins of Coptic and the nature of its usage in the first centuries of its history. Coptic was the last stage of the Egyptian language, and, from the 3rd century BC to the 5th century BC, it was used in the domain of literature, primarily in epistolography. That stands in contrast with the surviving documentary literature from Egypt in the same period, which is exclusively in Greek, following the norm set in the first century of Roman rule over Egypt. It is emphasized, that the known documentary papyri from other Roman territories, mainly from the region of the Middle Euphrates, contain numerous sources written in the local language, a legal practice under Roman law, which points to an Egyptian ‘exceptionalism’ in this respect.

Chapter 2 deals with the factors contributing to the long dominant position of Greek. As it is pointed out, Coptic had numerous dialects: Bohairic, Fayyumic, Mesokemic, the dialects from the Lycopolitan area, Akhmimic and Sahidic, the last of them being the standardised dialect of the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt. The level of mutual intelligibility between these dialects is still hotly debated, due to the characteristics of the language and the limited scope of the surviving sources. However, some of its surviving examples support the thesis of mutual intelligibility being limited between geographically distant dialects. The administrative use of Coptic was probably hindered by these internal divisions, while (Koine) Greek was helped by its role as the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Mediterranean, its substantial prestige and the tradition of it being the administrative language of Egypt. Furthermore, the predecessor of Coptic, that is, Demotic, was

marginalised in the first century of Roman rule, leading to a break in continuity between Demotic and Coptic. These factors were only compounded by the strong preference of the early Egyptian Church for Greek, and the circumstance that literary Coptic was most probably developed by thoroughly Hellenized local elites, created to complement Greek in the private sphere, not to supplant it.

In Chapter 3, the proliferation of written Coptic in the 6th and early 7th centuries is examined through selected sources. The first surviving examples of Coptic outside the realms of epistolography, and translated Christian religious literature, were created in rural milieus in Upper Egypt, that is, the least Hellenized territories of Byzantine Egypt. From the 6th century, as legal settlements were more and more preferred instead of the long and costly *libellus* processes, Coptic successfully entered the legal sphere, as the documentation of settlements was not required to be in Greek. As state proceedings, for unknown reasons, became less formal from the end of the same century, appeals in Coptic became permissible, legitimizing Coptic in the context of state.

Chapter 4, the final chapter of the book, discusses the relationship between church and monasticism, and the diffusion of Coptic, once again making extensive use of selected sources. All texts in question are legal documents, created in a church milieu, by priests and deacons fulfilling the function of ‘notary-cleric’, which was necessitated by the inadequate number of bilingual state notaries. Although these sources were not recognised as legally binding, their informal ‘validity’ in local society and their role as tools to acquire legally binding documents should not be underestimated. Their proliferation was accompanied by a profound development in Coptic language practice itself, which was strongly influenced by the Church. It is emphasized, that the sources resoundingly disprove the thesis of a Coptic-dominated Anti-Calcedonian, and a Greek-dominated Calcedonian church in Byzantine Egypt, as both languages were strongly represented in both religious communities.

The book also contains three appendices (Coptic Endorsements in Greek legal Texts; Five Samples of Fourth-Century Coptic Letters; and The First Legal Documents in Coptic before the Arab Conquest), a bibliography, a general index, and an index of ancient sources. It is an example of high quality scholarly work, which is equally useful for Coptologists, scholars of other fields interested in its subject, and nonprofessional audiences.

Zoltán Szegvári



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Dean P. Béchar, *Syntax of New Testament Greek, A Student's Manual*, Subsidia Biblica 49, Rome 2018, 137 pages.

Dean P. Béchar, Professor of Biblical Greek at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, provides a valuable resource with his book for those seeking to enter the world of biblical exegesis. Understanding and interpreting the text of Scripture is crucial in the process of exegesis. The primary focus of the present manual is to assist the comprehension of New Testament Greek syntax. Therefore, it is a useful tool not only for exegetes, but for anyone working with the New Testament, as analysing scriptural texts would be impossible without a thorough understanding of Ancient Greek (Koine) syntax.

The book is divided into ten chapters, each covering distinct grammatical phenomena. In the first chapter, a general introduction to New Testament Greek syntax is presented. A clear objective of the work is also established: the analysis of the relationships between linguistic elements, to enhance the understanding of Scripture. Definitions and numerous examples from the Greek text of the New Testament elucidate the differences between simple, compound, and complex sentences. The latter category is divided again, following the various types of dependent clauses – substantival, adjectival, and adverbial.

The second chapter delves deeper into the usage of cases (Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative) in Biblical Greek. An advantageous feature of the book lies in its helpful classification of the usage of different cases, an important tool in helping the user understand the syntax of the language. The third chapter serves as an essential resource, by presenting the various verbal tenses and moods. Beginning with a general introduction, the chapter subsequently explores different tenses according to their corresponding mood. Notably, the Indicative Mood receives special attention, with a particular emphasis on the present, future, perfect, and pluperfect tenses. Furthermore, it clarifies a critical aspect of the Greek language, the distinction between the imperfect and the aorist tenses.

The fourth chapter focuses on the syntax of the participle, distinguishing between the attributive, circumstantial, and supplementary usages of the participle. Subsequently, the fifth chapter addresses the usage of the infinitive in Biblical Greek, explaining its nominal and adverbial applications. The sixth chapter introduces conjunctions and sentence adverbs, discussing the interpretative possibilities of the most commonly encountered particles in the biblical text. The seventh chapter covers prepositions, while the eighth chapter delves into conditional sentences. The ninth chapter proves to be a crucially important part of the manual, as it explores the different Semitic influences on New Testament Greek. After a brief exploration of the New Testament, it becomes apparent to anyone that the Greek text, at times, bears the distinct character of a non-native speaker influenced by a Semitic language. This chapter provides valuable clues for identifying and interpreting Semitic influences on the Greek text. Finally, the tenth chapter offers insights into accentuation.

In summary, this manual serves as a valuable guide, both for interpreting the Greek text of the New Testament, and for teaching New Testament Greek. Its systematic and well-organized structure, coupled with the inclusion of concrete linguistic examples and explanations, fosters a better understanding of the biblical text. Instead of being a lengthy and/or incomprehensible grammar of Biblical Greek, this book offers a concise, yet fundamental contribution to the teaching and learning of the syntax of New Testament Greek, and, through that, to understanding Scripture itself.

István Németh



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