
ΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΣ ΤΩ ΠΑΤΡΙ: THE EXPRESSION OF TRUE FAITH BY FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NICAEA

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Abstract

The attempts of the modern theologians to understand the term homoousios by means of Aristotelian philosophy did not lead to a result that was intended to fully adequate clarify the expression homoousios as perfect communion of the Son with the Father, as presented to the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Evermore, their statement that the origin and meaning of Nicaea homoousios would be in the Western theology is not confirmed by sources. Homoousios to Patri is an expression of faith and confession of an entire Eastern Church tradition established before and after Nicaea.

Keywords: homoousios, person, communion, tradition, Ecumenical Council, numerical identity

1. The meaning of homoousios to the modern theologians by the Theology-Philosophy parallelism

In the studies made more than a century ago about the origin and the meaning of using the term *ὁμοούσιος* in the Christian belief there has been outlined a direction that, one the one hand, had as premise and purpose of argumentation the influence of Philosophy on Christian theology and through this on the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and, on the other hand, spoke of a decisive influence of the Western theology on this Council in formulating the dogma about Son's resemblance with the Father. Through their unilateral character, the conclusions these studies reached do not express the deepness and complexity of the study on Son's resemblance with the Father confessed at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

One of the studies that would influence the following ones on *ὁμοούσιος* [1] is that of Theodor Zahn [2]. For Zahn *ὁμοούσιος* of Nicaea affirms the numerical unit of a single substance closed in it, existing only once. Putting on the same level *ὁμοούσιος* with *ταύτούσιος* by seminarians would mean according to Zahn the primary statement of the decision of faith [2, p. 23]. The

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formula of Nicaea would have however vanquished in the East in another sense. At Saint Basil the Great instead of unit being would have appeared the being identity “and not the separation of the Son from God, not the polytheistic tendency” was seen as a basic mistake, but “the unconsumed honour of the Son” [2, p. 87].

The parallelism taken into consideration by Zahn, where on the one hand he speaks of the unity of the being, and on the other hand about the identity of being, hides the danger of interpreting *ὁμοούσιος* from the Aristotelian philosophy. Through the resemblance of the Son with the Father, the Council of Nicaea would have claimed a numerical identity in the sense of the primary substance at Aristotle, while Saint Basil would have understood the statement in the Aristotelian sense of secondary substance.

Loofs saw however, that Aristotle was unaware of the term *ὁμοούσιος* [3, 4]. In the problem of *ὁμοούσιος* appears thus the first difficulty in understanding the meaning of Zahn. For Loofs, *ὁμοούσιος* is a clear term [4]. He tries to render this clearness in terms of Western theology. *Ὁμοούσιος* says Loofs “means nothing more than *ejusdem* or *unius substantiae*. This is how Latin people translate it according to Tertullian, rendering it with *consubstantivus* and *consubstantialis*.” [4]

Loofs still recognizes the difficulty of translating the term *ὁμοούσιος* by such terms: “This *ejusdem* or *unius substantiae* has, however, a considerable sense, understood as οὐσία, which at ὁμοούσια (the resemblance n.n) is the same” [4]. Loofs lists the instances it was presented οὐσία: it can be generically understood meaning from the nature of the species. Then in the case of the same ones (ὁμοούσια) it is about different numerical sizes having the same being. Οὐσία can be also understood as singular being. In this sense, Christ’s body appears to Apploinaris as being one and the same being with God because it has formed with Him a substance (οὐσία) [4, p. 108]. “In this case *ὁμοούσιος* it is about a numerical unit of two sizes which are οὐσία, but before they were separated or conceptually may be opposed” [4, p. 108].

But this double distinction does not exhaust the possibilities of understanding *ὁμοούσιος*. In a generic sense Origen has considered that all men souls as being the same person. As showings of a primary parent, Valentinians eons were understood as being the same person. At Gnostics the generic-generative conception varies towards a third, generic-partitive [4, p. 108]. The generic selective sense of *ὁμοούσιος* “stands out in the Manichaeism belief that all parts of the light mass as the primary light were seen as one” [4, p. 108].

A fourth form of generic-ousia is the communitarian-generative one. The singular concept of *ὁμοούσιος* is divided into a real-singular one and another personal-singular one [4, p. 108].

Compared to the formula proposed by Loofs as a basis for these subdivisions it was observed that the criteria that allow saying about one being that is the same person with another being are more varied than Loofs could

think [5]. Therefore, for Stead the “generic sense with the unity suggestion should be seen as a formula to be abandoned” [5].

Stead is right when saying this, because if Loofs would have mentioned the correct sense of understanding *ὁμοούσιος* by the Ecumenical Council, where it is asserted a resemblance contained by distinct persons, without slipping into any of the abovementioned unilateral agreements, would have presented a more appropriate formula for understanding *ὁμοούσιος*.

Regarding the modern formula “numerical identity of the substance” there should be noted that nowadays it is seen as lacking precision [5, p. 243]. Stead shows that taken as ‘numerical identity’, it is very questionable [5, p. 243] in itself, even when its use relies on Aristotle. “If we say ‘the numerical identity of the substance’ we add a term that remains undefined” [5, p. 243]. Defined as ‘primary substance’ the whole formula must speak of a ‘numerical identity’. This excludes any kind of differentiation. Another interpretation of the substance would underline according to Stead the fact that the whole formula states that two or more things are identical in terms of their substance, according to a particular disposition of their full reality. The substance is thus understood as ‘secondary substance’. Thus two people would have a numerical identity substance because they belong together to the human race.

In this sense J. Lebon wanted to show that *ὁμοούσιος* as understood by Saint Athanasius the Great is not mean the simple abstract unit that individuals of the same species have, but shows “a unity of the actual being” [6]. Such a unit of concrete being is particularly met between father and son. Moreover, Lebon says that “the numerical identity of the concrete being” applies to all members of the human race: “People are consubstantial with each other through the unity or the numerical identity of their material part, their bodies” [6].

Wanting to prove that Saint Athanasius taught the ‘numerical identity of substance’ between the divine Persons, Lebon calls substance only the ‘constituent material’ as for example the human beings’ body, going so far in this direction that affirms the persons’ identity only under this report [“Moreover, it has emptied itself of its power ‘numerical identity’ expression, speaking of ‘numerical identity ...of the bodies’ obvious he does not believe that people have only one body, which would be an extreme case of split personality; he believes that human bodies are identical in respect of their human shape”] [5, p. 244]. “Lebon ends by adopting a position which oddly enough resembles the one that he attacked first.” [5, p. 244]

2. The reasons of introducing homoousios term at the First Ecumenical Synod in Niceea

When asked under what circumstances and for what reasons was the term *ὁμοούσιος* introduced by the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, the answers given by historians have not reached full agreement.

One of the opinions expressed by researchers in the past that now gets only partial confirmation is that the word *ὁμοούσιος* would reflect a Western theology of the term *una substantia* that climbs up to Tertullian. It is often added the mention of Osius, bishop of Cordoba and counsellor of the Emperor Constantine the Great in religious matters. Osius would have represented the unanimous aspirations proposing the synod term. The assertion that Western influences have played a key role in drawing up the Nicaea confession of faith was made by Zahn [2, p. 225], then taken over by A. Harnack [7], J. Gummerus [8], Krüger [9] and amended by Loofs.

Krüger presented a version of the opinion about the Western influence on the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Stressing the importance of Western theology, he said that what may help specifying the term is the term movement at Gnostics. The theological initiative of introducing the term *ὁμοούσιος* in the symbol of faith is attributed by Krüger to Constantine.

Also about Constantine is thinking E. Schwartz as main author of *ὁμοούσιος* [10]. What has forced Constantine to accept this term was according to Schwartz the absence of any defined theological assessment. *Ὁμοούσιος* would have allowed Arius isolation from his partisans, without imposing an articulated doctrinal rule. This would have evidenced that *ὁμοούσιος* is rather inspired by political motives, rather than the theological.

Schwartz is joined by F. Ricken, stating that the term *ὁμοούσιος* was accepted because it was rejected by the Arians: “Eventually Aryans were those through whom omoousios reached Nicaea symbol” [1]. Aries’ opponents would be pointed the weapon for the *ὁμοούσιος* rejected by Arius and his supporters, to be seen as banner of the right faith. This statement is based on a note of Saint Ambrose, where it is mentioned that Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius’ friend, would have written in a letter to the Council of Nicaea (“If, however,... we say Son of God and uncreated, we begin declare the resemblance with the Father”): “*Si verum...dei filium et increatum dicimus omoousion cum patre incipimus confiteri*” (Ambrosius).

According to Saint Ambrose, Parents would have received this word through confession in order to behead the heretics, with the very sword they have pulled from its sheath (Ambrosius). Although Parents had to combat the heresy of Arius at the First Ecumenical Council, it should be noted that what is omitted is the fact that the struggle for a correct understanding of *ὁμοούσιος* had a previous history. Understanding *ὁμοούσιος* as a simple reply in that Aryans themselves would be put through their debate in the opponents’ mouth the word, appears on this fund as a “solution too easy to understand” [11]. “The importance that the tradition of Church had in the old Church and in the development of the Orthodox theology towards the ‘renewal of heresy’ should not be underestimated in any case. This is true first of all in formulating a definition of faith as important as that of Nicaea, which according to Constantine’s desire should serve as a uniform basis for the entire Church.” [11, p. 86]

H. Litzmann shows that the term *ὁμοούσιος* circulated in the Orient and received a local use expressing a popular Monarchism reaction against the pluralistic doctrine of Origen [12]. Litzmann, however, agrees with Schwartz regarding the influence of Constantine on the Council. Other researchers have shown that the term was introduced as a reaction against a tendency stating that Father, Son and Spirit are three ousias. This doctrine reaches Osius shortly before the Synod.

Regarding the opinion according to which *ὁμοούσιος* would have been introduced by First Ecumenical Council to express the form of a Trinitarian theology that had imposed itself in the West, there should be shown that such a view cannot be sustained. In order to prove the decisive role of Osius however, newer researchers as N.D. Kelly refer to Saint Athanasius the Great saying that this one appears to have seen only in Osius “the responsible creator of confession” [13].

Significantly, according to Kelly is the place where Saint Athanasius, on the occasion of the explanation regarding the reason why Arians are trying to make from Osius, now old man, scapegoat, exclaims: “When was there a council in which he did not take the power and did not influence through his views anyone else?” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De fuga*, 5, P. G. 25, 149) In another place Saint Athanasius says: “He [Osius] was the one who exposed the faith received at Nicaea” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *Hist. Ar.*, 42, PG 25, 744).

In his first work of historical research A.M Ritter stayed very much under the influence of Zahn’s interpretation, reason why the introduction of *ὁμοούσιος* at Nicaea should be attributed to the influence of Western influences (Osius), the term being understood as a translation of the expression of Tertullian *unius* or *eiusdem substantiae* as an expression of ‘numerical unity’ of a divine being closed in itself [14]. Later on Ritter changed his orientation: “Instead of this, it seems that in the meantime it should be seen as doubtful the fact that the problem of ‘numerical identity’ of the Father and the Son was specifically debated at the Council of Nicaea” [15].

The statement that influenced Osius of Cordoba to propose the term *ὁμοούσιος* to the First Ecumenical Council is not convincing. The Arian writer Filostorgiu states that Osius and Alexander of Alexandria “agreed to express the Son’s resemblance with the Father” (ἀνομολογησαι παρασκευάσαι ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ τον ὄιον) [5, p. 235]. Filostorgiu is showing Alexander as taking initiative, not Osious. It is also not clear that he intended to express the term *ὁμοούσιος*. This could be an abbreviated formula equivalent to the expression: “to adopt an anti Arian theology” [5, p. 235].

The argument brought by some researchers to form a common opinion on the role of theological adviser of Osius for the Emperor Constantine the Great and thereby his leader position at the Council of Nicaea, based on the words of Saint Athanasius and rendered above by Kelly can neither be convincing because Saint Athanasius indicates in vague terms that Osius “was in favour of the Symbol” (οὗτος καὶ τὴν ἐν Νικαίᾳ πίστιν ἐξέθετο) (Saint Athanasius the

Great, *Hist. Ar.*, 42, PG 25, 744). This aspect shown by Saint Athanasius is of great importance for us because only this way can be seen in its clarity the statement made by Saint Basil the Great that the author of Nicaea confession is the bishop Hermione of Caesarea Cappadocia (Basilius Magnus, *Ep.* 8; *Ep.* 263, 3; *Ep.* 244, 9) [11, p. 77]. It is possible that a group of several bishops has been tasked with drawing up the Nicaea Confession. Also there are reasons for attributing to Emperor Constantine an original judging in Theology [16].

3. The position of the Emperor Constantine the Great regarding the use of ὁμοούσιος term at the First Ecumenical Synod in Nicaea

Compared to the unilateral emphasis on the need for power of Emperor Constantine that he imposed at Nicaea as presented by Schwartz (“with the Symbol of Nicaea the king has imposed bishops a formula of theological faith”) [17], H. Kraft has rightly pointed out that the emperor was driven by theological reasons when he contributed to receiving *ὁμοούσιος* to the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea: “Constantine understood homousios quite independently of the Western theology of Osius” [17, p. 24].

This is how newer researchers as W. Bienert have understood the position of the Emperor: “Without any doubt Constantine linked *ὁμοούσιος* to his own theological ideas as from his interpretation given to the term got clear to Eusebius of Caesarea” [11, p. 80]. According to Bienert if we state that the Western representatives stood closed behind Osius and the representatives of the bishop of Rome, because they could hardly follow the discussion in Greek hold with the Eastern bishops, then the emperor’s behaviour at the council appears in another light. “His intervention for *ὁμοούσιος* no longer takes place as an act of possession of a monarch possessing of power, who probably gets warm from a disposal for a brilliant word, and then to impose it only in order to show who is the master of the country even in matters of Theology. On the contrary, Constantine was able to see right the balance of power at the council before using his personal intervention to achieve a possible unitary vote of the Church. This process would correspond more to another attitude of the emperor towards the Church, if we consider for example the Donatist dispute in which he didn’t play the role of a tyrant possessed by power.” [11, p. 81]

But the emperor’s position on the use of the term *ὁμοούσιος* do not align the one of Gnostics, as Kraft believes when stating that the term has for Constantine a Gnostic meaning [16]: “This reinforces the origin of Christ from God” and on the other hand saying that Constantine stresses the monarchy of the Father. In any case it cannot be admitted Kraft’s conclusion that “Constantine was for both”, or that of Bienert - consistent with his predecessors Loofs and Aland (“specific to Nicaea is the Western origin”) [18] and Lietzmann (“As Western, Constantine did not yet knew the Eastern Christianity”) [12, p.101], that the emperor based on Western traditions, particularly to the Church of Rome and that to this one must have belonged *ὁμοούσιος* [11, p. 82].

For a proper understanding of emperor's position there should be noted the fact that Constantine knew Greek [11, p. 82] and that he could consult the Eastern bishops on *ὁμοούσιος* problem even before the Nicaea Council. A strong evidence for this is the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea who in his letter to his Church speaks of these bishops who were using the term *ὁμοούσιος* even before Nicaea when talking about the report of the Father and Son. "We thought it was right to confirm this term after being understood this way, especially because we knew from a few older scholars, bishops and wonderful writers, that in the doctrine about God regarding the Father and the Son they used the term 'resemblance'" [19]. B. Lohse does not consider this important statement of Eusebius of Caesarea when he says: "The determinant keyword of the Nicaene confession, i.e. homousios, comes from none other than the king-himself. So far it is unclear where he got this keyword from." [20]

In the interpretation of the term, as Eusebius of Caesarea tells, the emperor emphasis the fact that one *ὁμοούσιος* should not be understood as materialist in the sense of a separation or a separation of the Son from the Father. "Regarding the faith presented by us there was no controversy, on the contrary, the beloved by God, our king, testified himself that it contains what is right. He agreed that he thinks the same and ordered everyone to endorse this belief, to subscribe articles of faith and to get united in this; only one single word '*ὁμοούσιος*' should be added, that he, himself explained through the following words: the Son is not called 'the same being' as regards a carnal passion, he isn't born by share or by separation from the Father, because it is impossible for an intangible, spiritual and not being nature to submit to certain bodily feeling, but it is appropriate to understand all this as a divine and ineffable mystery" [19, p. 106]. So Constantine sees in *ὁμοούσιος* the expression that holds the mystery of unit of the Father and Son, in the end being an inexpressible mystery.

4. The correct understanding manner of *ὁμοούσιος* is due to the Western theological tradition? The impossibility of rendering *ὁμοούσιος* by 'una substantia'

Regarding the theological position of Osius we do not possess any documentary evidence or any on his ability of taking an initiative that would point towards Theology in the Eastern Church. Even if the letter of the Council of Antioch bears the stamp of its author, seen in the person of Osius, able to settle down a dispute, this one presents a practical theology [5, p. 236]. In addition, as noted by F. Ricken, "from the stories kept on the processes of Nicaea would be hard to prove that the Synod Fathers understood homousios in the sense that it is recommended the use of οὐσία within the questions of Osius from Antioch". "The Eastern attitude regarding omousios can to be fully clarified probably due to the Gnostic resonance of the word and of the materialistic ideas given by this." [1]

Moreover Osius didn't write theological works or Trinitarian treaties. Isidore of Seville mentions a work entitled 'Epistula de laude virginittatis' and 'Opus de interpretatione vestium sacerdotalium' (Isidor, *De viris illustribus*, 5, P. L. 83, 1096 A) but which were lost. We do not know anything about his level of theological training. According to the new research, Osius of Cordoba is the one to whom Calcidius made a dedication and wrote it before his translation and commentary to Plato's Timaeos (*Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus (Plato Latinus)*). With this fall all the tests done on the basis of this dedication of presenting Osius as a very good knower of the philosophical and theological Greek thinking [21]. But Gelasius says that Osius called a translator at Nicaea [22].

Thus it is difficult to accept that Osius is responsible for introducing the Western theology, as long as he hadn't done anything at the council of Antioch where he had an unquestionable authority. Eusebius of Caesarea speaks with anger about those who "under the pretext of adding the term homoousios" drafted the final text of the Nicaea Symbol of Faith. When he talks about Osius he changes his tone, flattering him, presenting him as a craftsman of peace and guarantor of Constantine's policies (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, II, 63) [23].

But even if it would be demonstrated that the responsibility of introducing the term *δμοούσιος* comes to Osius, this does not demonstrate that such an initiative aimed at expressing the Western theology. Rather, this introduction could take place as a reaction against the use of 'two' or 'three substances' when talking about Trinitarian persons, a fact observed by Osius at Narcissus and Eusebius (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Contra Marcelus*, I, 4, 31, 53) [23, p. 19].

The question is whether there are strong reasons to believe that *δμοούσιος* was jointly received in Greek-speaking environments from the West, as an expression of their Trinitarian theology. On this issue there isn't anything certain. In the study of Latin tradition, it must begin with Tertullian. There was noted that Tertullian does not normally use any Latin phrase modelled on *δμοούσιος* [5, p. 237]. The latest research also showed that there is no connection between Tertullian's Trinitarian formulas 'una substantia', 'unius substantiae' and *δμοούσιος*, by which Tertullian would express the unity in God as Loofs believed.

On the contrary, such a statement cannot be accepted because the Latin translation of the Greek term *δμοούσιος* is 'consubstantivus' or 'consubstantialis', meaning that same term that Tertullian shows as belonging to his Gnostic opponents [24]. In the reverse sense the playback in Greek of the expression used by Tertullian 'una substantia' or 'unius substantiae' is not *δμοούσιος* but rather *μία ούσία* or *μία ύπόστασις*. This expression is not, however, in the Confession of Faith of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

There are also other reasons which do not allow the equivalence of the term *δμοούσιος* with 'una substantia'. Thus, the earliest Latin translation, preserved until today, of the Nicaean confession keeps the Greek term in transliteration ("Of the same being with the Father as the Greeks say 'the same

being”) “*unius substantiae cum patre, quod Graeci dicunt ‘omousion’*” [25]. What prevents it from acquiring a meaning in Latin is, according to H. Kraft, “its inability to be translated” (Unübersetzbarkeit) [16]. “Even in its Latin translation, H. Lietzmann shows, it is not known as a theological term in movement” [12]. W. Bienert said the same when states that “in the current Latin is not known any form for this word” [11, p. 82]. On the other hand, if there would have been an original Latin term there hadn’t been needed a transliteration.

The fact that *ὁμοούσιος* is rendered in Western endorsements of the Council of Nicaea in addition to the transliteration with ‘*unius substantiae*’ cannot be taken as an argument against the impossibility of this translation after the Council of Nicaea. At Saint Hilary of Pictavium and Gregory, the translation is based on the interpretation of the word, as was the habit after its rediscovery in the mid-fourth century. At Sardi, the Nicaean Council has received an interpretation marked by the conception of Marcel of Ancyra. According to this fund *ὁμοούσιος* could be played by ‘*unius substantiae*’. It thus remains proved that before the year 357 there is no Latin versions of the Nicaean Confession.

The Roman rhetorician Marius Victorinus discusses in his writing of ‘*Adversus Arium*’ about the multiple possibilities of translating the term *ὁμοούσιος* in Latin. And in the case of Victorin, if there had been an original Latin term for *ὁμοούσιος* there wouldn’t have been necessary to analyze the multiple possibilities of translating it, compared to his opponents, who claim to translate the word into Latin [26]. Victorinus wants to keep close to the Greek term. He points out that anyway the word could be very hard translated into Latin “*Latine, inquit, dicatur. Quia difficile dicitur, ideo expetitis*” [26]. These words show clearly that there wasn’t a Western use the term *ὁμοούσιος*. If there had been one, the authors would have been able to return to the Latin equivalents.

In this regard there should be taken into consideration that in the Latin text of the symbol of the Council of Sardica held on 342 there is the expression ‘*una substantia*’, but in the previous Greek text the *ὁμοούσιος* does not exist but *μία ὑπόστασις*. Again stands out that the equivalence of *ὁμοούσιος* with ‘*una substantia*’ cannot be proven from sources.

5. Dissemination of Nicaean Confession in West

At the beginning, the confession of Nicaea spread in a very limited area of the Western Empire. Proof of this is at Saint Hilary of Pictavium who said that until the beginning of his exile in the East he has never heard about the Confession of faith from Nicaea. “Before being born again and remaining in the episcopate for a long period of time, I have never heard before being exiled about the faith of Nicaea, but the understanding and homousios and homiousios came to my knowledge through the Gospels and the Apostles.” (“*Regeneraturus pridem, et in episcopatu aliquantisper manens, fidem Nicaenam nunquam nisi*

exulaturus audivi: sed homousii et homoeusii intelligentiam Evangelia et Apostoli intimaverunt)” (Hilarius de Poitiers, *De Synodis*, 91, P. L. 10, 545 A)

Based on this information and on the fact that the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea ended with an anathematism, W. Bienert comes to the conclusion that the Synod confession could not be imposed on communities, for example in the liturgical service or in baptism [11, p. 86]. “Because of this it has been a document of theology and object of theological disputes in the matter of right faith but not a confession of the community. Such a confession Nicaea never became.” [11, p. 87]

Bienert, however, rejects that Nicaea Confession is above all not just a simple “document of faith and object of theological disputes” but a definition of faith (μάθημα), as it is named in some documents. Although Orthodox theologians as A. Spassky recognize that “in the practice of religious services, catechism and baptism it was not applied because it lacked a number of necessary items, as the ones about the Church, baptism, resurrection of the dead, the next life” [27]. However, the doctrine of the Father and Son report is correctly confessed in the life of the Early Church, as was witnessed right from the very beginning and the dogma of the Trinity that “have the same content in the conscience of the Church as the one stated by the Councils, but being known only through a general expression” [27]. “The church knew according to the Holy Scriptures and the confessions of the baptism that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equal and united, but not to be confused with each other.” [27]

Bienert accepts that for *δμοούσιος* there had to be a tradition of faith in the Church before the Council of Nicaea or in one of the local churches, without which its receiving into the council would have been hardly possible [11, p 87]. He sees the evidence of this tradition in the Church “even when it wasn’t known enough everywhere” [11, p 87] in the words of Eusebius, mentioned above about famous bishops and writers from older times who have used *δμοούσιος* in relation to the report between Father and Son.

6. Eastern patristic proofs regarding the Orthodox understanding of the term *δμοούσιος* by the bishop Dionysius the Great of Alexandria

Bienert says that among the ancient bishops Eusebius refers there should be the two Dionysius, Dionysius the Great of Alexandria and Dionysius of Rome, both in the mid third century. As a proof of true faith, the term *δμοούσιος* appears according to Bienert only in Trinitarian disputes related to their names [11, p 88]. The other evidences would be only preliminary steps to this road without clear relevance for the Church and in the later evidence from the pre-Nicaea period it would have been almost always about disputes with this term that often stood at Eastern theologians under the doubt of learning a modal monarchianism in the sense of Sabellius. This problem would be encountered in the dispute between the two Dionysius [11, p 88].

Although accepts a pre-Nicaea tradition of *ὁμοούσιος*, Bienert yet reached through such an interpretation to state that his roots “must be in reality in the West, probably in Rome” [11, p. 88]. In addition, this fact could be recognized in the dispute between Alexandria and Rome. Paradoxically, Bienert postulates this recognition of *ὁμοούσιος* “even if the expression itself cannot be established in the Roman part” [11, p. 88].

The stories about the dispute between the two Dionysius can be found at Eusebius of Caesarea, Saint Athanasius the Great and Saint Basil. They have also sent excerpts from the writings of the two bishops. In a letter sent to his colleague in Rome, Pope Sixtus II (257-258), epistle presented by Eusebius, Dionysius of Alexandria informs him of certain difficulties due to the outbreak of a controversy in the province of Pentapolis Libya. “The teaching that is spreading in Ptolemais of Pentapolis is wicked and full of blasphemy against the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; it contains a lot of disbelief on his Son, born and the first-begotten of all Creation, the Word made body, and much disregard on the Holy Spirit. When from both sides came written explanations and my brothers wanted to discuss with me the problem, as far as I could I have written a few letters and I have given a didactic explanation whose copy I attach to my epistle to you.” (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VII, 6) [11, p. 88-89]

In the introduction to this passage Eusebius writes that in the wrong mentioned teaching it was about Sabellianism. When Dionysius of Alexandria has taken stringent measures to destroy the movement, leaders of the sectarian group made a formal complaint to the Roman bishop, in which, among other said that Dionysius of Alexandria refused to say that the Son would be *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father [13, p. 244]. Kelly says that Dionysius seems to be a zealous defender of Origen’s theology. He shows as certain the fact that the Sabellians were a very old version of monarchianism that considered Jesus Christ as an earthly appearance of as the divine being. “The Origenist predisposition with the difference of the three hypostases and its tendency to subordinate the Son appeared worthy of condemnation. When they refer to *omousios* as a solution, thereby arguing that the being or nature of the Son is identical with the being or nature of the Father. So, the way they referred to *omousios* in their complaint to the Pope is of the utmost importance.” [13, p. 244]

In the dispute Dionysius appears as the one who shows where the problems are. ‘The sooner didactical teaching’ that mentions roused suspicion towards the Orthodoxy of his teachings. In a fragment of the epistle sent in Latin is shown that Dionysius of Alexandria emphasized so much the difference between Father and Son that he could call the Son as something created (ποίημα) expressing the relationship between Father and Son with images of vines and branches and with the one of the boat builder and the boat [11, p. 89].

This fragment is actually a quotation from Dionysius that can be found in a writing of the Arian bishop Athanasius of Anazarbus (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 4, 2, PG 25, 484). To find the truth we must go to St. Athanasius the Great who in his work *De Sententia Dionysii* shows the true

teaching of Dionysius of Alexandria: “Because in addition they accuse him of saying that the Son would be one of the creatures and not the same being with the Father, he rejects those again in the first book: ‘When mentioning I thought in addition to a few created and made things and I quickly pointed out useless examples in this area when I said that neither the plant nor the boat or the garden are as the Creator’ (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 18.1, 505 AB). ‘Later I dealt with proper and suitable examples and I got the real ones where I found other different evidence that I have written in another letter in which I have rejected the reproach made against me because it is a lie, as if I had not said that Christ is the same being with God. For when I say I did not find this word anywhere in the Holy Scripture and read it, however, my views hidden from them do not depart from this understanding. For I have cited, however, the human posterity, that is homogeneous and said that in general parents are different from children since they are the children themselves or there should not exist neither the parents nor the children.’” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 18.2, 505 B)

In another place Saint Athanasius the Great emphasizes the teaching of Dionysius related to the persons of the Trinity and the relations between them: “For another suspicion of those who say that when calling the Father, Dionysius doesn’t mean the Son, and vice versa, when calling the Son doesn’t mean the Father, that he separates the Son from the Father, removes and separates him, he answers and puts to shame to those when saying in the second book: ‘Each of the names given by me is inseparable from the next one. I called the Father, and before introducing the Son, I’ve already showed him in the Father. I introduced the Son, and if I did not already name before the Father, yet he is already the whole included in the Son. I added the Holy Spirit but I also showed where and by whom it comes. They do not know that as the father cannot be separated from the Son as Father, as the name implies the relationship, nor the Son can be separated from the Father. For the way of addressing ‘Father’ makes clear the communion, and in their hands is the Spirit that cannot be omitted nor by the one who sends, nor by the one who bears.’” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 16. 3, 503 CD) “How can I use that name and to believe that they (the persons) should be completely separated from each other?” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 17.2, 505 A) And a little further he goes on and says: “This way we expand the unity towards Trinity without separation and count again Trinity without decrease” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 17.2, 505 A).

Pointing out the Orthodoxy of Dionysius teaching, Saint Athanasius the Great mentions the big difference between Dionysius and Arius: “What does it have in common the Arian heresy with Dionysius conviction? Or why is Dionysius called after Arius, although there is a big difference between them. For one is the teacher of the Church, but the other is the inventor of a new heresy.” (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, III, 11, 488 AB)

Saint Athanasius also presents Dionysus's opponents as "some of the brothers of the Church who had a right faith (τινές τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀδελφῶν φρονούντες μὲν ὀρθῶς) (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De Sententia Dionysii*, 13.1, 501 A).

In the dispute between Dionysius of Alexandria and Dionysius of Rome appears the name of Sabellius. He is mentioned with his teaching in the epistle of Dionysius of Rome to the Church of Alexandria: "I've learned that those who learn from you as teachers and catechists the divine word, are pioneering of that view, quite opposite to the Sabellius heretical teachings: that blaspheme God by saying that Son is the same with the Father and vice versa; however those make known to some degree three gods, when unfolding holy oneness in three foreign hypostases completely separated" (Saint Athanasius the Great, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, 26, 2) [23, p. 22].

It is fought here the teaching of three hypostases. In the Latin environment such teaching could not be understood but as three substances due to the lack of precise terms in Latin to translate the depth of the concept of hypostasis. Because of this the doctrine of three hypostases aroused the suspicion of Tritheism. The letter points toward to catechists and teachers from Alexandria that would have paved the way for Tritheism. W. Bienert believes that the words of Dionysius of Rome are cautious because Dionysius of Alexandria himself is a supporter of the teaching about three hypostases [11, p. 90].

The suspicion is understandable, according to Bienert, because it refers to the followers of Origen. He taught about the existence of three hypostases. Bienert shows that Origen was expelled from Alexandria on 231-232 for theological reasons. He does not specify, however, even some of the reasons which led the condemnation of Origen by both the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Rome. Among these reasons certainly there would have been the one of subordinatianism that Origen stated in the teaching about hypostases.

Dionysius of Alexandria has consented to the condemnation of Origen by the two churches and even supported the decision for the Church of Alexandria. Bienert thinks that now when Dionysius of Rome takes position in his epistle regarding the teaching about the three separate hypostases finds Dionysius of Alexandria as the one who accepts the teachings of Origen. However in his work *De Sententia Dionysii*, Saint Athanasius the Great quoting Dionysius of Alexandria shows him as "teacher of the Church" (*De Sententia Dionysii*, III, 11, P. G. 25, 488 AB), quality in which he strongly defended the teaching on the unity of the Son with the Father, thus having nothing to do with Origen's subordinatianism. This latter aspect is recognized by Bienert when he says: "On the other hand, he accepted *ὁμοούσιος* which always appeared to later Origenists as Sabellian" [11, p. 90].

Dionysius of Alexandria's theology can be seen in the direction of creating "a bridge between East and West" but not being "a major political-religious compromise" as Bienert thinks [12, p. 90]. In fact for the creation of this bridge contributed not only Dionysius, but many other Eastern bishops, having as a starting point not a compromise or any other reasons than the strictly

religious ones, but teaching the unity of the Son with the Father before the First Ecumenical Council, as we can see in the story of Eusebius of Caesarea. The same tradition of confession the unity of the Son with the Father followed Dionysius as shown in the work *De Sententia Dionysii* of Athanasius the Great. Bienert believes that between a keyword *ὁμοούσιος* and the suspicion of Sabellianism “there is a particular connection” [11, p. 91].

He supports his statement on a fragment of the 9th Epistle of Saint Basil which states that Sabellius used *ὁμοούσιος* regarding the relationship of the Father with the Son (Saint Basil the Great, Epistola 9, 2) [11, p. 91]. Because other later evidences worthy of credence (Saint Hypolit, *Refutatio IX, 11-12*), know nothing about it, he says that more probability would have the fact that Saint Basil had reached, after his dispute with the ‘Sabellianism’ of the fourth century, to the conclusion that the historical Sabellius did not use this word [11, p. 91]. From here sees Bienert that there would be a link between *ὁμοούσιος* and Sabellianism suspicion. “Only in Rome, where Sabellius was condemned as heretic, nothing can be heard about it.” [11, p. 91]

This tendency of Bienert to consider that there existed such a link in the East between *ὁμοούσιος* and Sabellianism does not have a real basis. This even more as he accepts that the fact that the Sabellianism suspicion came in the case of Dionysius of Alexandria from Origenists [11, p. 90]. But the Church of Alexandria took firm decision against the false teachings of Origen as that of Rome in the case of Sabellius. In the case of Origen it condemned him even before the Church of Rome, having then in Rome a declared ally in that conviction.

7. Ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ – the expression of right faith of the Eastern Church

Bienert wants to prove that *ὁμοούσιος* confessed by the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea has its origins in the West, namely in Rome. He wonders whether Dionysius of Rome represented *ὁμοούσιος* and he also recognizes that this is not real. “This fact is not proven and is likely, although not certain, that Athanasius would have communicated us if the Roman had made this word preventive in his writing to Alexandrian.” [11, p. 92]

Although evidence is lacking, Bienert says that behind *ὁμοούσιος* lays the Church of Rome and its traditions. But it must be noted that the Roman tradition postulated by Bienert on the fragment of Dionysius appears improbable. However Bienert believes that *ὁμοούσιος* could come from a decision of faith of the Church of Rome, and such a decision would be the one of the Pope Callistus against Hippolytus and Sabellius. It should be noted however that even this claim is not substantiated by the sources.

The only story about Pope Callistus decision is at Hippolytus. He characterizes it from the theological point of view as full of conflict and strangely brilliant. At his turn Callistus sees in the teaching of Hippolytus a

ditheism. In front of such teachings, he emphasizes the divine unity that according to place of John 14.11 should be grounded in the Holy Spirit (Saint Hippolytus, *Refutatio IX, 11*) [11, p. 93]. The Son is for Callistus visible in Christ, the man. The Son from him is the Father. The Father didn't suffer on the cross as Sabellians say, but he suffered with (συμπεπονθέναι). The Father didn't die, but the Son. But this one is just a God with a person (πρόσωπον). This erroneous teaching of Callistus, as Saint Hippolytus notes just "falls into the Sabellius teaching and on the Theodotus' teaching" (Saint Hypolit, *Refutatio IX, 12*) [11, p. 93], joins this way an extreme modalism with an extreme adoptionism.

Bienert acknowledges again that "in this context *ὁμοούσιος* is not mentioned by Hippolytus" [11, p. 93]. Still he wants to find a possible place in a so-called "political- church compromise formula", used by Callistus to mark a middle path of the true faith [11, p. 93]. But neither this compromise formula of Callistus is mentioned by sources. However Bienert concludes that: "Where the decision of the Church of Rome under Callistus was recognized as the right for faith, *ὁμοούσιος* could be bind to the Orthodox tradition" [11, p. 94]. But this remains only a simple working hypothesis for Bienert, unproven yet.

The later meeting of *ὁμοούσιος* during the post-dispute of the two Dionysius is seen by H. Lietzmann as "a banner around which stays the faith of the simple and intentional modest community to protect against speculation about the Logos of Origen and his followers" [12]. To this day remains questionable whether Origen used *ὁμοούσιος* in the context of Trinitarian theology. M. Simonetti contests it [28]. C. Stead believes, however, that Origen affirms it. He points toward Pamfil who defences the use of *ὁμοούσιος* by Origen. Fr. Dinsen states that on the one hand Origen "presented in a real manner homoousion of Son with the Fater". On the other hand he says: "The fact that Origen emphasizes the distinction Father Son ... speaks against the assumption that he called homoousion Son with the Father" [11, 95]. But not only the simple community protected the faith against Origen's and his followers' speculation about the Logos, but also scholars who remained in the tradition of the Church, in its doctrine and worship. This explains the fact that Origen's speculations have not entered into any Church tradition and doctrine, or in its worship.

Therefore, Bienert's statement that "a theological progress to Nicaea cannot be admitted compared to Callistus time", is not fair [11, p. 95]. This would mean refusing to see the Orthodox character of the Eastern Church tradition through which maintained and deepened the teaching received from the Holy Apostles on Christ related to His relationship with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ is the living and dynamic expression of faith in the Eastern Church and also the result of the fight for keeping the faith and its confession.

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