

Preaching The Accessible God: The Sense of ὁμοούσιος in 325 Council of Nicaea

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Abstract: The article examines the theme under consideration in three progressive stages. First, it traces the various uses of the term *homoousios* before it became a technical term at the Council of Nicaea in 325, describing what we have received in Church Tradition as the orthodox understanding of the nature of the Son of God in relation to God the Father. The analysis of its pre-Nicaean usages reveals both the sense that would be received as orthodox by the majority of the fathers at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the inspirations for the Arian and Marcellan interpretations of *homoousios*. Second, the analysis turns to determining who among the ecclesiastical personalities present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 could have introduced the controversial term into the conciliar text, given that it was not considered in the initial deliberations. The section concludes by arguing that more important than the question of who introduced it—which is difficult to ascertain but can likely be attributed to a group in whose tradition *homoousios* was widely in use—is the question of which among the senses of *homoousios* had been accepted by the majority of the council fathers. Third, the article establishes the definitive reading of *homoousios* by analyzing the works of the fathers themselves, who were protagonists at the great council and who made references to the circumstances surrounding the inclusion of the term in the creed and the reason behind its acceptance. Such analysis leads to the insight that the sense of *homoousios* aligns with the God revealed in Scriptures, who made himself available to humankind through the incarnation of his Son.

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Introduction

In celebration of the 750th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, the International Theological Commission issues a document, which highlights the contribution of the 325 Council of Nicea, stating thus:

One of the central contributions of Nicea is the definition of the divinity of the Son in terms of consubstantiality: the Son is ‘consubstantial’ (*homoousios*) with the Father, ‘begotten of the Father,’ ‘that is, of the substance of the Father.’ The generation of the Son is something other than creation, because it is a communication of the unique substance of the Father. The Son is not only fully God like the Father, but of a substance numerically identical to his own, for there is no division in the one God. Let us repeat: the Father gives everything to the Son, according to the logic of a divine life, which is *agapē* and which always exceeds what the human mind can conceive.¹

Without prejudice to this document, which I recommend everyone to read, I will offer an inquiry into *ὁμοούσιος*, the term that has clarified our belief in the divinity of the Son. The reason is that the Church’s acceptance of the formula was not as immediate as the framers of the creed would want it to be. Instead, it caused considerable confusion in the years following the convocation of the council. This confusion prompted the leaders of the Church at the time to reflect further on whether the homousian language was suitable for articulating the nature of the Incarnate Son, a reflection that continued for the next five decades. Thus, while the fathers hoped the introduction of *ὁμοούσιος* would end the theological controversy, the opposite occurred.

This essay will examine why this was the case, considering the following issues: the origin and significance of *ὁμοούσιος* before its introduction at the Council of Nicea in 325; who likely advocated for it during the deliberations of the council fathers; and, what meaning it held when the council fathers ultimately decided to include it in the text of the ecumenical creed. At the end of this essay, I hope to demonstrate as well what it means for us Christians and for our Christian life to believe and proclaim that “the Son is ‘consubstantial’ (*homoousios*) with the Father,” as the above church document declares.

¹ International Theological Commission, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour, 1700th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicea 325-2025*, 15.

The term ὁμοούσιος before 325 Nicea

The term ὁμοούσιος was employed at the Council of Nicaea to reinforce the meaning expressed in the belief that the Son is the only one “from the *ousia* of the Father.” Curiously, in the years immediately following Nicaea, the homousean formula was neither employed in the polemics against the Arians, nor its meaning expounded by the Nicene supporters. It was only nearly thirty years later, beginning with Athanasius, that the homousean formula was mentioned again, its significance explained, and its usage in theological discourse defended. Why there was silence surrounding it nearly thirty years after the promulgation of the Nicene decisions could be explained by examining the circumstances of its introduction in the great council.

Let Socrates’s comment serve as the springboard for this analysis: “Yet as we ourselves have discovered from various letters which the bishops wrote to one another after the Synod, the term *homoousios* troubled some of them.”² Why was the word ὁμοούσιος troubling for some ecclesiastics? The ‘some of them’ referred to in the quotation also includes supporters of Nicaea. To grasp the full significance of this comment by Socrates, it is essential to broaden our analysis by examining the pre-Nicene usage of ὁμοούσιος.

Documentary evidence shows that the controversial term was first introduced in the second century by the Gnostics, as substantiated by Christian apologists’ summaries of Gnostic doctrines. The works of Irenaeus of Lyon and Clement of Alexandria will be mentioned among these digests. In general, the testimonies of its usage show that “it originally meant ‘having the same substance,’ *ousia*; and ... the notion of *ousia* that is implied is either material or conceived in physical terms. Roughly, it means ‘made of the same stuff.’”³ The context in which the Gnostics applied the term concerns the relationship between the divine being and the created order. Specifically, the Gnostics probed whether it is warranted to speak of God’s paternity toward men, understood in terms of physical generation.⁴

The standard usage and the corresponding sense of the term ὁμοούσιος within the gnostic system bear a materialist sense, or the sense of being made of the same stuff. In *Adversus Haereses* I,5,1, Irenaeus explained the gnostic view of the origin of the three orders of beings in terms of the material composition out of which they were formed, in the following fashion:

These three kinds of existence, then, having, according to them, been now formed,—one from the passion, which was matter; a second from the conversion, which was animal; and the third, that which she (Achamoth)

² Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I,23,6-7 (Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 2, 27).

³ Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 190.

⁴ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 190.

herself brought forth, which was spiritual,—she next addressed herself to the task of giving these form. But she could not succeed in doing this as respected the spiritual existence, because it was of the same nature with herself (ἐπειδὴ ὁμοούσιον ὑπήρχεν αὐτῇ).⁵

The term ὁμοούσιος is here applied to the spiritual elements, conveying the significance that they are of the same element as Achamoth from which they emerged. Since these spiritual elements emanated from the very existence of Achamoth, they are said to be not just *homoousioi* with her, but also of equal rank with her. It is because they stand equal in status with Achamoth that it could not be avowed that she had given them form. One could only give form to those existences of a lesser being than oneself.

The concept of ὁμοούσιος as indicating ‘made of the same stuff’ is not exclusively used by the Gnostics for spiritual beings. It is likewise ascribed to psychical or animal beings, creatures generated by the Demiurge, as specified in the following passage:

Having thus formed the world, he (the Demiurge) also created the earthy [part of] man, not taking him from this dry earth (οὐκ ἀπὸ ταύτης δὲ τῆς ξηρᾶς γῆς), but from an invisible substance (ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀοράτου οὐσίας) consisting of fusible and fluid matter, and then afterwards, as they define the process, breathed into him the animal part of his nature. It was this latter which was created after his image and likeness. The material part, indeed, was very near to God, so far as the image went (κατ’ εἰκόνα μὲν τὸν ὑλικὸν ὑπάρχειν παραπλήσιον μὲν), **but not of the same substance with him** (ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁμοούσιον ὄντα τῷ Θεῷ).⁶

The material part of men is taken from the dust of the earth, understood as the formless matter, which the Demiurge molded from the passion of Achamoth, the same passion which almost consumed Sophia. Meanwhile, the psychic nature is taken from the conversion of Achamoth, the process she was subjected to, through which passion was expunged from her being. The material element of man, then, cannot be reckoned ὁμοούσιος to the Demiurge because while the former is taken from passion, the latter proceeds from the experience of estrangement of such passion from the existence of Achamoth.

The significance of the use of the term ὁμοούσιος in gnostic circles as presented by Irenaeus finds corroboration in Clement of Alexandria, specifically in chapter 50 of the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, where the Alexandrian expounded upon the gnostic understanding of the creation narrative. The bishop wrote:

Taking the dust from the earth—not the dry earth, but a portion of the multiple and complex matter—he fashioned an earthly soul (ψυχὴν γεώδη), a hylic soul (ὕλικήν), irrational and **consubstantial to that of the**

⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1,5,1 (SChr 264,76; Ante-Nicene Fathers 1,322).

⁶ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1,5,5 (SChr 264,86-87; Ante-Nicene Fathers 1,323). Emphasis is mine.

animals (ἄλογον καὶ τῆ τῶν θερῶν ὁμοούσιον); this is man according to the image. But the man in the likeness of the Demiurge himself, refers to the element which he has breathed in and implanted in man (ἐκείνός ἐστιν ὃν εἰς τοῦτον ἐνεφύσησέν τε καὶ ἐπέσπειρεν) through the agency of the angels, **something consubstantial to him** (ὁμοούσιον τι αὐτῷ).⁷

Similar to what Irenaeus outlined in *Adversus Haereses* I,5,5, Clement provided a gnostic interpretation of the statement in Genesis (1,26): “man is created according to the image and likeness of God.” The concept of ‘image’ is associated by the Alexandrian with the earthly soul of man, which is derived from the dust of the earth, while the quality of ‘likeness’ is described as the psychic soul introduced into man by the creator. The Alexandrian also revealed that the Gnostics posit an earthly soul inhabiting the flesh, which, in turn, is inhabited by the psychic soul—an element akin to its creator. This is due to the evil nature of material substance, with which the psychic soul, regarded as the second noblest element, should not make contact.⁸

In gnostic writings, the word *homoousios*, as attested by Irenaeus and Clement, has a wide range of application. It was widely used in accounts of the Gnostics’ belief in the existence of three types of human beings. But whether it is used to describe the hylic, psychic, or pneumatic men, its fundamental meaning is the same, that is, ‘made of the same element’ or ‘belonging to the same order of beings.’ The materialist meaning of ὁμοούσιος given in works of the Gnostics is the sense that Arius and his associates have obstinately objected. Apparently, around this period, such a gnostic reading of ὁμοούσιος was still current, which explains the effort of the Fathers at Nicaea to set the parameters within which it should be understood that misunderstandings might be avoided.

The key objection to the use of ὁμοούσιος in Trinitarian language by its adversaries originally focused on the materialist interpretation it introduces to the conception of God.⁹ Subsequently, the objection shifted to its association with a

⁷ Clement, *Excerpta*, 50,1-2 (SChr 23,162-164). Emphasis is mine.

⁸ C. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 192.

⁹ This is the objection raised by Arius and Eusebius to *homoousios* in the succeeding quotations:

We acknowledge One God, alone Ingenerate, [...] who begot an Only-begotten Son, offspring, but not as one of things begotten; nor as Valentinus pronounced that the offspring of the Father was an issue (προβολήν); nor as Manichæus taught that the offspring was a portion of the Father, one in essence (μέρος ὁμοούσιον τοῦ πατρός) (Arius, *Ep.ad Alex.Alex.*, 2; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol.2, *Testi Teologici e Spirituali in Lingua Greca dal IV al VII Secolo* [Arnoldo Mondadori Editore: VII Edizioni 2009], 76).

“If, he (Eusebius) said, we do indeed call the son of God uncreated (*increatedum*) as well, we are on the way to confessing that he is *homoousios* with the Father.” (Ambrose, *De fide* III,1,15,125, mentioned Eusebius delivered a speech to the plenary containing this point).

Sabellianist meaning. The Sabellianist sense of ὁμοούσιος is first witnessed in the thought of Paul of Samosata, who, because of it, was condemned and his distinct usage of the concept proscribed by the 268 Antiochene council. There are two accounts of the condemnation of Paul of Samosata, portraying two different functions assumed by the term ὁμοούσιος in his thought, the *De synodis* of Athanasius and the work of Hilary of Poitiers of the same title. In the account of Athanasius, the Samosatene used the term ὁμοούσιος in *argumentum ad absurdum* fashion. Accordingly, the bishops would not acknowledge the orthodoxy of his doctrine that the Son is ὁμοούσιος to the Father because it is understood in a materialist or bodily sense (ὁμοούσιος), denoting two beings made of the same stuff, and consequently requiring the pre-existence of this same substance which both the Father and the Son share.¹⁰ On the other hand, Hilary's version of the incident speaks of Paul of Samosata positively using ὁμοούσιος in a Sabellian sense, indicating that "by attributing this title to God he had taught that He was single and undifferentiated (*solitarum atque unicum*), and at once Father and Son."¹¹

Between these two reports of Paul of Samosata's use of ὁμοούσιος, the rendering of Hilary of Poitiers, I will argue, represents the real sentiment of the deposed cleric. One reason that can be offered in favor of the authenticity of Hilary's reading is that Athanasius himself admitted that he had no copy of the letter on which he based his description of the Samosatene's use of ὁμοούσιος.¹² On the other hand, Hilary's source of information is the letter authored by George of Laodicea and Basil of Ancyra,¹³ written in response to the Dated Creed of Sirmium 359,¹⁴ whose evaluation of the thought of Paul of Samosata is believed to have been derived from existing documents of the 268 Council of Antioch.¹⁵ This is posited because it includes knowledge of some particulars relative to the criticism the bishops levied against the teaching of Paul of Samosata. Moreover, the reliability of the narrative of Athanasius is further put into question since, in his account, exactly the same argument that the bishops at 268 Antioch raised against Paul's teaching on ὁμοούσιος is rehearsed by the critics of his defense of Nicaea.¹⁶ It is likely then that Athanasius did not intend to make a veritable account of the event of 268 Antioch as much as he wanted to employ it as part of

¹⁰ Athanasius, *De synodis*, 45,4 (H.G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke II*, 270; Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 4,474).

¹¹ Hilary, *De synodis*, 81 (PL X,509B; Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 9,25).

¹² Athanasius, *De synodis*, 43,1 (H.G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke II*, 268; Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 4,473).

¹³ G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, London 1936, 205.

¹⁴ Epiphanius, *Pan.73,12-22* (GCS 31,284-295; *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, F. Williams (trans.), Leiden 1987, 447-456).

¹⁵ J. Behr, *The Way to Nicea: Formation of Christian Theology*, Vol.1, St. Vladimir Press, 2001, 218.

¹⁶ See Athanasius, *De synodis*, 51,3 (H.G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke II*, 275; Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 4,477); G.L. Prestige, *God*, 202-203.

his polemical strategy against his own enemies. Athanasius was as if declaring to his adversaries that their objection to the erroneous sense of ὁμοούσιος has already been condemned in the past, and therefore there is no point in bringing it up again in the context of the current debate, as he, too, subscribed to its proscription.

Furthermore, it is actually not impossible for Paul to advocate the teaching reported by Hilary, especially when considered alongside the basic theological orientation of the Alexandrians, his main adversaries. The report of Hilary makes sense when one analyzes Paul's view as the other side of the pendulum of the three distinct hypostases doctrine of the Alexandrians. In contradistinction to the Alexandrians, Paul stressed the oneness of God to the extent that he could only allow the *Logos* to be an impersonal attribute of the Father.¹⁷ The simplicity of God would demand this attribute of God to be identified with the very constitution of God. The substantial union between the *Logos* and the man Jesus is denied, for it would require the *Logos* to be an independently existing substance just like the Father. Against this, his Alexandrian critics emphasized the independent substantial existence of the Son, indicating that the Son, too, is a 'being' (ὕπoστασις) to differentiate him from things with no independent existence.¹⁸ It is not a farfetched idea then that Paul's application of ὁμοούσιος, understood in the Sabellian sense, might have been prompted in response to the claim of the Alexandrians of the separate identity of the Father and the *Logos*.¹⁹ This doctrine of Paul of Samosata, particularly its usage of ὁμοούσιος and the sense that he accorded it, was reechoed in the theology of Marcellus of Ancyra in the fourth century.²⁰

However, the monarchianist reading of ὁμοούσιος is antedated by a reading that resembles the sense given by the Nicene fathers who followed the lead of Alexander of Alexandria. In the dispute between the two Dionysiuses, for example, the bishop of Alexandria was denounced by the faithful in Alexandria—who were of Asiatic tradition—to his namesake in the see of Rome for denying the doctrine of one God because he would not allow the use of the term ὁμοούσιος to describe the Son's relationship with the Father.²¹ Dionysius of Alexandria explains himself to Dionysius of Rome, in his reply, thus:

¹⁷ Cf. M. Simonetti, *Per la rivalutazione di alcune testimonianze su Paolo di Samosata*, in *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 1 (1988), 177-210.

¹⁸ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 73,12,3 (GCS 31,285; *The Panarion*, 447).

¹⁹ J. Behr, *Way*, 219-220.

²⁰ Hilary of Poitiers took notice of the monarchianist reading to ὁμοούσιος by Marcellus, writing: "They declare that the meaning of the phrase, that is, of one substance, which in Greek is called *homooúision*, must be used and expressed in this sense, that He Himself is the Father who is also the Son; in other words, as a consequence of his infinity He has been extended to the Virgin, from whom He assumed flesh and annexed the name Son to Himself in that body which He assumed." (Hilary, *De Trin.* IV,4-9 [SChr 448,16; *The Fathers of the Church* 25,93]).

²¹ M. Simonetti, *La Crisi Ariana nel IV Secolo*, Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1975, 91.

And in these things I have also proved the falsehood of the charge which they bring against me — to wit, that I do not maintain that Christ is consubstantial (*homousios*) with God. For although I say that I have never either found or read this word in the sacred Scriptures, yet other reasonings, which I immediately subjoined, are in no wise discrepant from this view, because I brought forward as an illustration human offspring, which assuredly is of the same kind as the begetter; and I said that parents are absolutely distinguished from their children by the fact alone that they themselves are not their children, or that it would assuredly be a matter of necessity that there would neither be parents nor children.²²

These three enumerated senses of *homousios* were all present during the celebration of the Council of Nicea, as can be ascertained from this description of Hilary of Poitiers. Hilary of Poitiers summarized the different senses of the term ὁμοούσιος in Book IV of *De Trinitate*, written around 357 or, thereafter, during his exile to the East. First, he identified the erroneous senses of the term ὁμοούσιος—the three listed senses by the bishop shall be reduced to two since the second and third can be subsumed under the materialist representation of the term—the enemies of Nicea had imputed to it, specifying them thus:

They declare the meaning of this phrase, that is, of one substance, which in Greek is called homoousion, must be used and expressed in this sense, that He Himself is the Father who is also the Son; in other words, as a consequence of His infinity He has been extended into the virgin, from whom He assumed flesh and annexed the name Son to Himself in that body which He assumed. This is the first error in regard to homoousion. [...] Secondly, [...] they also allege this reason for their disapproval of homoousion, that, according to their meaning of this phrase, the Son receives His existence from a division of the Father's substance, as if He were cut off from Him so that one thing is divided into two.²³

Then, the bishop of Poitiers continued with the orthodox sense of the term, as the fathers at Nicea had specified it to be:

But, in order to prevent any doubt from arising about the expression *homoousion*, which the Fathers used, and about our belief that He always was, we have mentioned these things that it may be known that He subsists in the nature in which He was born from the Father, and by the birth of the Son nothing has been taken away from the nature of the Father in which he remained.²⁴

Having ascertained that the three uses of the term ὁμοούσιος were all present at Nicea, we are prompted to ask who might have introduced the controversial term there, and hope that by identifying who introduced it, we could

²² Dionysius of Alexandria, *Letter to Dionysius of Rome* I,16.

²³ Hilary, *De Trinitate* IV,3 (The Fathers of the Church 25,93 [trans. S. McKenna]).

²⁴ Hilary, *De Trinitate* IV,6 (The Fathers of the Church 25,95 [trans. S. McKenna]).

be led to its precise understanding. Moreover, in the succeeding section, we shall outline a nuanced account of how these three senses of ὁμοούσιος featured in the discussion during the council.

Who could have introduced the term ὁμοούσιος at the 325 Council of Nicaea?

Who among the bishops present at Nicaea was most likely to have introduced the term ὁμοούσιος? The introduction of the term ὁμοούσιος was not a premeditated plan on the part of the anti-Arian group, as Philostorgius had thought.²⁵ It was incorporated in the credal formula because it was, at that time, according to the judgment of the council fathers, the one expression that could help unmask the heresy of Arius and those who shared his theology. It was not something imposed by its proponents or the emperor, if one would take Eusebius of Caesarea's word literally, without a painstaking deliberation of its intended meaning. The account of Eusebius of Caesarea demonstrates how sophisticated the knowledge of the advocates of ὁμοούσιος was, which he articulated through the mouth of the emperor.²⁶

Similarly, the employment of the term ὁμοούσιος to describe the relationship of the Son to the Father should not be construed as something the framers of the Nicene creed simply stumbled upon. Evidently, both the Arian and anti-Arian parties have a good understanding of its meaning and history of usage. The former firmly denies it because, in their view, it is closely connected to the doctrine that suggests God is divisible and subject to change; on the other hand, the latter chooses to accept it because it both rejects the Arian view and affirms the correct doctrine about the relationship between the Son and the Father. The Arians would not have devoted much effort to rejecting such a term if their opponents had not raised it in their theological writings. Meanwhile, the anti-Arians would not have included it in the creed or warned about its incorrect readings, which, admittedly, they knew should be avoided, if they had not been aware of its positive use in past theological debates.

The reception of ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea was not as immediate as one might think, but took the rigorous process of debating its meaning, similar to the one described by Eusebius of Caesarea in his letter. Thus, the bishops at Nicaea did not simply blindly allow themselves to be swayed by the council's leaders to take their

²⁵ The Arian historian speaks of a conspiracy of the bishops initiated by ecclesiastical adviser of the emperor and the bishop of Alexandria against Arius: "Even before the Council of Nicaea, he says, Alexander of Alexandria went to Nicomedia, met there with Hossius of Cordova and the bishops with him, and arranged that the Son should be acknowledged as consubstantial to the Father by conciliar decree and that Arius should be excommunicated" (Philostorgius, *HE* I.7).

²⁶ Eusebius, *Letter to his Diocese* (Theodoret, *HE* I,12,7 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,49]).

side. The bishops would not have approved of the confession of faith produced had it not resonated with their respective theological traditions, as the Caesarean Eusebius claimed had happened with him. It is also not denied that a certain number of bishops of Arian sentiment, who certainly, having acknowledged that effort to insist their agenda was already an exercise of futility, made a compromise by subscribing to the creed, feigning approval of the word ὁμοούσιος, just to escape excommunication. Even with this, it could still be maintained that the majority of the bishops acceded to the creed, convinced of its doctrinal correctness.

The Usual Suspects!

Among the authors present at Nicaea, only Eusebius of Caesarea made an explicit connection between the term ὁμοούσιος, and a certain personality. In his letter to his diocese, he intimated that the Emperor Constantine suggested that ὁμοούσιος be incorporated into the creedal text.²⁷ However, it is not conclusive proof that it came from the emperor himself, as it is equally possible that some bishops may have advised him to insist on it. Still, I will begin the inquiry with the emperor.

When the emperor addressed a letter to Alexander and Arius after witnessing the division they caused in the Alexandrian church for the first time, he did not fully understand the complex theological issues involved in the controversy. It was hardly possible, from the time of the issuance of this letter until the celebration of the council, for the emperor to have learned and mastered the issues involved in the theological crisis, more particularly the import of the term ὁμοούσιος would bring into its resolution. A meager time of approximately six months, and with the other concerns of the empire needing his full attention, would not give him ample time to be able to familiarize himself with the issue. Be that as it may, some scholars still held the narrative of Eusebius as factual but proposed a view, to escape the stated difficulty, that there was somebody in the background advising the emperor on the matter from whom he learned about the expression and who urged the emperor to impose it on the council. If it were so, who would be in the best position to do this, if not Ossius of Cordova, the court bishop and Constantine's theological adviser? This particular reading is reflected in Athanasius's account, where the description "[he] drafted the creed" is taken to mean that he was the source of all the religious expressions and concepts found in it. However, there are not a few indubitable facts that contest the authorship of the disputed word by the bishop of Cordova.

The solution offered in the person of Ossius of Cordova is founded on the opinion that ὁμοούσιος was the contribution of western theology at Nicaea, taking Ossius, its president, as conduit. The presupposition of this view is that the

²⁷ Eusebius, *Letter to his Diocese* (Theodoret, *HE* I,12,7 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,49]).

bishop of Cordova was well versed in the western Trinitarian tradition, which is largely influenced by Tertullian's theology. Tertullian taught that the Father and the Son are *unius substantiae*. Under this construct, the word ὁμοούσιος in the Nicene Creed, is regarded as the Greek equivalent of the Latin *una substantia*. It could very well be a possible solution to the present problem, but it is unlikely to be so because, as C. Stead has compellingly demonstrated,²⁸ the Greek equivalent of the formula *una substantia* is not ὁμοούσιος but rather μία ὑπόστασις. We find confirmation of this in the text of the Council of Serdica in 343:

We affirm that He is truly the Son, yet not in the way in which others are said to be sons: for they are either gods by reason of their regeneration, or are called sons on account of their merit, and **not account of their being of one essence** (οὐ διὰ τὴν μίαν ὑπόστασιν), as is the case of the Father and the Son.²⁹

Furthermore, the presumed equivalence is also denied, taking as evidence the testimony of the earliest Latin translation of the Nicene confession, which does not render ὁμοούσιος into *una substantia*, but instead retains the Greek word transliterated into the Latin alphabet.³⁰

Another factor that casts doubt on the claim that Ossius was theologically responsible for ὁμοούσιος is the impossibility of establishing a connection between it and the bishop of Cordova. Except for the anti-Arian confession of the synod of Antioch 325, the composition of which Ossius himself must have closely monitored or otherwise authored, no work of his exists that could help define his theological position precisely. The absence of ὁμοούσιος in this Antiochene document is confirmation enough that it did not come from him. It would be difficult to explain why Ossius did not bring it up in a council where he enjoyed a commanding influence, if, indeed, he came up with the idea, knowing that it would effectively proscribe the error of Arius. Moreover, the bewilderment he showed at Antioch regarding the theological idea of Narcissus of Neronias, who boldly declared that there are three *ousiai* in God, simply reveals a person who lacked a clear grasp of the complex theological debates taking place in the East.³¹

If it was not Ossius who recommended ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea, could it then be Alexander of Alexandria? Philostorgius mentioned a meeting at Nicomedia between Alexander and Ossius before the celebration of the great council, where, he revealed, the two bishops planned to excommunicate Arius and enforce

²⁸ C. Stead, *Divine*, 250-254.

²⁹ August Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbolen und Glaubenregeln der Alten Kirche*, (Breslau: Verlag von E. Morgenstern, 1897), § 157. Emphasis is mine.

³⁰ See, for instance, the transliteration in Hilary of Poitiers' *Opus Historicum* (PL X,654).

³¹ L. Ulrich, *Nicaea and the West*, in *VC* 51 (1997), 15-16; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian controversy 318-381*, Edinburgh 1988, 200f.

homousian theology.³² Although both Alexander and Ossius were mentioned, the narrative was explicit enough to make it clear that the initiative came from the bishop of Alexandria. But it is likely that the reference to the premeditated meeting was an invention of this Arian historian, designed to cast doubt on the authority of Nicaea. Nevertheless, the suggestion that Alexander was responsible for introducing the term ὁμοούσιος merits consideration. After all, he was, among the anti-Arian bishops, the most involved at that, given that the origin of the controversy is traced back to him. However, the inquiry into Alexander as a possible author of the controversial term immediately falls apart, given that one feature of the bishop of Alexandria's lone existing work is the conspicuous absence of *ousia* language, which was unpopular among the Alexandrians. If he could not endorse the use of the term *ousia*, how could he, then, coin the use of its compound, ὁμοούσιος?

Zeroing in on Athanasius

Would it be possible for Athanasius to author this term? S. Parvis believes it to be so, offering at least three reasons to justify such an assumption. She bases the first justification on the well-recognized belief in Athanasius' authorship of *henos somatos*. Its content is very close to affirming the homousean theology of Nicaea, shown in the denunciation of the propositions, that the Logos is "neither like the Father as it regards his essence" (οὔτε δὲ ὅμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν τῷ πατρὶ) and that the Logos is "alien to and other than the essence of God" (ξένος τε καὶ ἀλλότριος τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίας).³³ An even closer appropriation of the homousean theology is mirrored in the rhetorical question: How can one who is the perfect image of God be "unlike the Father's essence" (ἀνόμοιος τῇ οὐσίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς)?³⁴ That the young deacon was entrusted with the task of composing this important document indicates that his opinion on the matter was well appreciated and trusted by Alexander, who, conjectures Parvis, might have been the mouthpiece of the views of Athanasius in the council. The second reason offered by S. Parvis is the observation that after more than twenty-five years, Athanasius still had a very vivid recollection of how such a formula became part of the creed of Nicaea. That he could remember such details clearly, S. Parvis continues, indicates his personal involvement in the matter of its inclusion in the final draft. Finally, she argues, there are no pro-Nicene bishops at the council besides Athanasius, who dedicated a significant amount of effort to continuously explain and defend such a formula.³⁵

³² Philostorgius, *HE* 1,7.

³³ Alexander of Alexandria, *Encyclical Letter* (Socrates, *HE* 1,6,10 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2,4]).

³⁴ Alexander of Alexandria, *Encyclical Letter* (Socrates, *HE* 1,6,16 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2,4]).

³⁵ Sara Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy 325-345*, Oxford 2006, 87-89.

The first point to note about Parvis's position is that the affinity she mentions between Athanasius's theological language and that of Nicaea mainly consists of negative statements that respond to propositions tied to Arius's theology. It is therefore not conclusive to claim that, at this early stage, Athanasius was already inclined to champion the homousean formula. In fact, it was only after nearly thirty years after Nicaea that he started to openly write about it. His first polemical work against the Arians did not make any allusion to ὁμοούσιος, which would hardly be the case if, from the very start, he was convinced that asserting its theological significance is the best way to contend with the errors of Arius and his associates. Instead, the long years that elapsed suggest a gradual conversion of Athanasius from qualified to absolute confidence in the effectiveness of the homousian language, not only to fight the enemies of Nicaea but also to rally those who shared his anti-Arian sentiment in unity. Athanasius definitely acknowledged the wisdom of the fathers at Nicaea to use ὁμοούσιος, though he chose to abstain from it in his early works because of its polyvalent character, arising from its ambiguous use in past theological disputes.

The most likely personalities to have introduced ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea

In light of the discussion above, the person most likely to have introduced the term ὁμοούσιος was someone schooled in a theological system where such an expression is widely accepted and in popular use. It appears that the use of *ousia* language in theological discourse, especially its compound ὁμοούσιος, was common in the practice of the Asiatic churches. It can be demonstrated, for instance, referring to the controversy between the two Dionysiuses in 259, when the bishop of Alexandria was accused by no less than the faithful in Alexandria, who were of Asiatic tradition, of denying the doctrine of one God since he would not use the term ὁμοούσιος to convey the Son's relationship with the Father.³⁶ The Asian faithful made such a denunciation because they were accustomed to describing the Son as ὁμοούσιος to the Father. In addition, there was the celebrated case of Paul of Samosata, who was condemned at Antioch in 268, in all probability because he taught that the Son is ὁμοούσιος to the Father, understanding it, however, according to a Sabellianist interpretation.

There were two prominent Asian bishops present at Nicaea, namely, Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra. The term ὁμοούσιος is not to be found in the fragments of Eustathius of Antioch. Though there is a reference to him claiming that God has only one ὑποστάσις.³⁷ Similarly, the term ὁμοούσιος did not appear in the fragments of Marcellus either, but he is attested to have

³⁶ M. Simonetti, *Crisi*, 91.

³⁷ See K. Spoerl, *Two Early Nicenes: Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra*, in P. Martens (ed.), *In the Shadow of Incarnation – Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in honor of Brian E. Daley*, SJ, Notre Dame 2008, 125.

strongly opposed the use of two (or three) *ousiai* in God.³⁸ Moreover, there is a solid reason to believe that Marcellus used ὁμοούσιος in the same function as Paul of Samosata had used it. Eusebius of Caesarea often refers to the similarity of their theologies in his *De ecclesiastica theologia*.³⁹ Thus, if one must speculate, who among the two could have introduced the formula ὁμοούσιος at 325 Nicea? The limited evidence suggests that it was likely the bishop of Ancyra.

Marcellus, during the celebration of the Council of Nicaea, was already enjoying a certain degree of influence. He was one of those ecclesiastics approached by Alexander of Alexandria for support in his crusade against Arius. He would take such an appeal for support seriously, becoming as passionate as Alexander in opposing the theology of Arius and his supporters. Marcellus recounted a confrontation between him and the defenders of Arius before the great Council of Nicaea,⁴⁰ where he mentioned an active propaganda campaign conducted by the supporters of Arius in the region, which, among other things that he complained about, included an attack launched by them on himself at Ancyra for standing against their doctrine. Meanwhile, Eusebius of Caesarea recounted an incident in which Marcellus reproached him on account of a sermon he preached, first, at Laodicea, and then at Ancyra, censuring his conviction in “δὴ οὐσίας τε καὶ πράγματα καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ θεοῦς.”⁴¹ Eusebius continued that Marcellus had also attacked Asterius for his activities promoting the cause of Arius, and Paulinus of Tyre for teaching the Son as a “second God,” a God born of human fashion.⁴²

Marcellus was then in the best position to identify the weak spot in the pro-Arian stance, specifically the doctrine of two (or three) οὐσίαι in the Godhead, having personally engaged them in disputations before the council. It would not be far-fetched to imagine that Marcellus might have suggested that, if they were truly serious about proscribing Arius and his views, applying the term ὁμοούσιος to the theology of the Son would be the most effective way to expose their theological position. But, again, if we assume that Marcellus introduced it to the council, how do we explain the fact that the objections to ὁμοούσιος by the defenders of Arius at Nicaea did not concern Marcellus’s view at all?

³⁸ Marcellus, Fr.83 (Re 73) (GCS 14,203; Eusebius, *Con.Mar.* I,4,45).

³⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastica Theologia*, I,5 (GCS 14,64; CTP 144,51).

⁴⁰ H.G. Opitz locates these incidents between the council of Antioch and the great council of Nicaea, but I would have to agree with the dating of A. Logan (*Marcellus of Ancyra*, 436-438) putting it just before the convocation of the council of Antioch for two reasons. First, the time interval between the two councils was too short to accommodate all the travels taken by the Arians as part of their propaganda strategy. Secondly, it would be impossible for Eusebius of Caesarea to travel and preach freely in the different churches after the council of Antioch as he was provisionally excommunicated there.

⁴¹ Marcellus, Fr.83 (Re 73) (GCS 14,203; Eusebius, *Con.Mar.* I,4,45).

⁴² Marcellus, Fr.40 (Re 33) (GCS 14,191; Eusebius, *Con.Mar.* I,4,48-49).

The answer might be that, at the time of Nicaea, his opponents were not yet aware of Marcellus's nuanced theology because he had not fully explained his own doctrine. While Marcellus had confrontations with pro-Arius propagandists in his diocese before Nicaea, their understanding of his thoughts was likely limited to the fact that he denied the two *ousiai* view of the Godhead. Hence, when Marcellus proposed ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea, the defenders of Arius still understood it in the traditional materialist sense as the request for clarification of its meaning by Eusebius of Caesarea, contained in his letter to his diocese, and Eusebius of Nicomedia's objection against it, as reported by Ambrose, would confirm. Moreover, prudence must have led Marcellus to refrain from insisting on his own interpretation of the term, given that he did not know whether his allies shared it.

While the objection of those opposed to the term ὁμοούσιος centered on its materialist connotation, the Sabellianist understanding of the Nicene formula was not absent during the council, as some bishops present, part of the Nicene coalition, read ὁμοούσιος as implying a solitary God. This assumption can be deduced from going to the anathema appended after the creed, where both the terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* are reckoned as having the same sense.⁴³ It is true that, with respect to the correlation between these two terms, the orthodox Nicene bishops interpreted the anathema by taking the concept *ousia*, understood as substance, as the primary concept, the sense of which is applied to *hypostasis*. However, there were also those, as seen in Marcellus's theology, who flipped the roles of the two concepts by using hypostasis, understood as a single individual existence, as the main idea through which *ousia* was understood. Why this Sabellianist reading of the doctrine of God of Nicaea, based on ὁμοούσιος, was not stressed in the anti-Nicene polemic around this period, the possible reasons we have already offered above. Again, it does not mean that the anti-Nicene group was unaware of the Sabellianist interpretation of ὁμοούσιος, only that it was not perceived as a viable view that the same bishops could capitalize on in their campaign to prohibit its inclusion in the Creed.

After the publication of Marcellus' work *Contra Asterium* in 336,⁴⁴ or maybe even after a couple of years preceding it, the anti-Nicene's interpretation of ὁμοούσιος would shift focus. It would then be read in accordance with the theology of *Contra Asterium*. Through this work, the pro-Arian bishops learned that, in Marcellus's theological system, *ousia* denotes the individual substance of a single object. Hence, they would renew their objection to the depiction of the Son as ὁμοούσιος to the Father, but this time anchoring their criticism to their discovery of the real teaching of the bishop who introduced it.

⁴³ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek*, § 142.

⁴⁴ See the chronology of life and works of Marcellus in J. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology*, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998, xvii.

Later reflection, then, of the anti-Nicenes has led them to view the creed of Nicaea with its controversial homousean clause as nothing but a modified restatement of Marcellan theology. Such observation is verified by the fact that the writings produced by the anti-Nicene bishops after Nicaea were all aimed at discrediting Marcellus's theology.⁴⁵ We have Eusebius of Caesarea's *De ecclesiastica Theologia* and *Contra Marcellum* as instances of this. The narrative of Sozomen speaks of a disputation among the bishops not long after Nicaea, concluding with the Sabellianist sense of the term ὁμοούσιος:

Yet as we ourselves have discovered from various letters which the bishops wrote to one another after the Synod, the term *homoousios* troubled some of them... Those who objected to the word *homoousios*, conceived that those who approved it favored the opinion of Sabellius and Montanus; they therefore called them blasphemers, as subverting the existence of the Son of God.⁴⁶

After Nicaea, it was no longer the theology of Arius, but Marcellus' Sabellianist interpretation of Nicaea—the allies of the bishop of Ancyra would also come to realize it—that became the problem. In light of this hypothesis, the lack of reference to the homousian formula, some thirty years after the council, in the writings of the anti-Arian bishops, typified by the publications of Athanasius, could be explained.⁴⁷

While it cannot be said with absolute certainty, still, the proposition that the bishop of Ancyra was the proponent of the disputed term at the great council of 325, given the many circumstantial pieces of evidence, to use legal parlance, that point in that direction compared to the other alternatives, is more likely. However, even if I maintain that Marcellus was the one who introduced the term, it would be false to suggest that I subscribe to the notion that the fathers of Nicaea, who readily welcomed the proposition of Marcellus, received it with exactly the same meaning he intended. For one, Marcellus himself knew that while he shared with the leading fathers at Nicaea a repugnance for the Arian teaching and a positive appreciation of the term ὁμοούσιος, he was also aware that the meaning they ascribed to that term was different. Additionally, the Alexandrians and those who shared their position, even if they did not ordinarily use the term because of its polyvalent character, which encompassed senses opposing their fundamental belief in the Son, could still refer to it in special situations, as it also included an orthodox sense among its meanings. In the next section, I shall elaborate on this by arguing that the orthodox sense of the term ὁμοούσιος was the one promulgated at Nicaea, even if I were to maintain that the individual who introduced it had a dubious understanding of the formula.

⁴⁵ M.R. Barnes, *The Fourth Century as a Trinitarian Canon*, in L. Ayres and G. Jones (ed.), *Christian Origins*, London 1998, 51.

⁴⁶ Socrates, *HE* 1,23 (Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers 2, 27).

⁴⁷ In his major polemical work against the Arians—*Orationes contra Arianos*—Nicaea was not central in his argumentation.

How ὁμοούσιος was understood at 325 Nicaea?

Introducing a term is one thing; receiving it is another. The meaning given to the term when introduced does not necessarily carry over once it is received, as the sense attached to the term upon reception may differ from the original intent of the person who introduced it. This is especially true for words with multiple meanings, like ὁμοούσιος. One reliable manner of ascertaining the sense of a particular phenomenon is to refer to how it is immediately received. In this particular case, we are fortunate to have preserved the letter of Eusebius of Caesarea, which he composed for his Church in his diocese to explain his decision to subscribe to the Council of Nicea and to accept the ὁμοούσιος. The bishop needed to do this because, prior to the great council, he had been one of its staunch critics.

The bishop of Caesarea outlines his understanding of the term *homoousios*. In this letter, the two meanings that affirm the divinity of the Son, as argued by the Nicene Fathers—already present in their works even before the celebration of the 325 Nicea, are also emphasized, namely, the oneness of essence between the Son and the Father, and that the Son is coeternal with the Father. Regarding the first point, we read Eusebius of Caesarea illustrating to his people, thus:

And so, too, on examination there are grounds for saying that the Son is One-in-essence (*homousios*) with the Father; not in the way of bodies, nor like mortal beings, for He is not such by division of essence, or by severance, no, nor by any affection, or alteration, or changing of the Father's essence and power (since from all such the unoriginate nature of the Father is alien), but because One-in-essence (*homousios*) with the Father suggests that the Son of God bears no resemblance to the originated creatures, but that to His Father alone Who begot Him is He in every way assimilated, and that He is not of any other subsistence and essence, but from the Father. To which term also, thus interpreted, it appeared well to assent; since we were aware that even among the ancients, some learned and illustrious Bishops and writers have used the term One-in-essence (*homousios*), in their theological teaching concerning the Father and Son.⁴⁸

A paragraph prior to this, Eusebius removes the Son from the category of creatures, which demonstrates that his view of the Son is by far distant from that of Arius, who came to him in the earlier part of the development of this issue, who states that the Son is of the same category as the creatures but differs only in degree. This is evident in this commentary behind the inclusion of the phrase “begotten not made:”

In the same way, we also admitted begotten, not made; since the Council alleged that made was an appellative common to the other creatures

⁴⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Letter to his Diocese*, 7 (Theodoret, *HE* I, 11 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3, 50]; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol. 2, 102-113).

which came to be through the Son, to whom the Son had no likeness. Wherefore, say they, He was not a work resembling the things which through Him came to be, but was of an essence which is too high for the level of any work; and which the Divine oracles teach to have been generated from the Father, the mode of generation being inscrutable and incalculable to every originated nature.⁴⁹

Now, regarding the coeternity of the Son with the Father, Eusebius of Caesarea explains thus:

Nay, our most religious Emperor did at the time prove, in a speech, that He was in being even according to His divine generation which is before all ages, since even before He was generated in energy, **He was in virtue with the Father ingenerately** (ἦν τῷ πατρὶ ἀγεννήτως), the Father being always (ἀεί) Father, as King always (ἀεί), and Saviour always (ἀεί), being all things in virtue, and being always (ἀεί) in the same respects and in the same way.⁵⁰

As already demonstrated, Emperor Constantine, despite being named by Eusebius of Caesarea, could not have introduced the term ὁμοούσιος for the given reasons above. A more important observation to be made about the above passage is how Eusebius phrases the attributed explanation to the mouth of the emperor, which is akin to the doctrine found in the work of Alexander of Alexandria, validated by the rehearsal of the awkward adverb ἀγεννήτως and ἀεί, for the coexistence of the Son with the Father. We can refer to Arius's complaint in his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia regarding the teaching of Alexander of Alexandria, which employs the aforementioned odd adverbs used for the Son:

He has driven us out of the city as atheists, because we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, "God always (ἀεί), the Son always (ἀεί); as the Father so the Son; the Son co-exists unbegotten (ἀγεννήτως) with God; He is everlasting; neither by thought nor by any interval does God precede the Son; always (ἀεί,) God, always (ἀεί) Son; he is begotten of the unbegotten; the Son is of God Himself."⁵¹

Such phrases, in fact, provoked Arius and his supporters to misleadingly claim that the Son is deemed unbegotten by the Alexandrian bishop, prompting the bishop of Alexandria to qualify his teaching in this regard, that, notwithstanding the use of the awkward adverbs, he was not teaching two unbegotten beings.⁵²

⁴⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Letter to his Diocese*, 6 (Theodoret, *HE* I,11 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,50]; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol.2, 112).

⁵⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Letter to his Diocese*, 10 (Theodoret, *HE* I,11 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,50-51]; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol.2, 112). Emphases are mine.

⁵¹ Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium*, 2 (Theodoret, *EH* I,4 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,41]; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol.2, 71).

⁵² Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium*, 2 (Theodoret, *EH* I,4 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,41]; M. Simonetti, *Il Cristo*, vol.2, 71).

The witness of Eusebius of Caesarea demonstrates that the sense of ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea bears the sense of the Son as natural offspring and therefore is eternally co-existing with the Father, as apprehended within the circle of Alexander of Alexandria. Even if an Asiatic representative with an ambivalent understanding of the term introduced it to the council, such as, for example, Marcellus of Ancyra, it would have no effect in its orthodox reception inasmuch as the majority of the Nicene fathers received it with a healthy meaning in mind. That is, the sense given to it by orthodox bishops as referred to by the Caesarean himself in his epistle.

This sense of ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea is further explored in the work of Athanasius, as he shifted his attitude from silence to open explanation and defense of it in his works, starting with *De Decretis* (353/4). From the analysis of the Athanasian corpus by modern scholars, it can be said that Athanasius developed two strategies to interpret the meaning of ὁμοούσιος, as taught by his teacher, Alexander. First, Athanasius demonstrated that, although it is not found in the Scriptures, its sense is biblical. Abogado demonstrates this in his work by analyzing the arrangement of the themes discussed in *De Decretis*.⁵³ The same scholar observes that the exposition of *homoousios* occurs towards the end of the work, beginning with sections 19-24. But, for a better understanding of its function and meaning, it has to be considered in relation to the broader context of the argument set forth in the work. Section 19 is prefaced by a long discourse on the biblical title ‘Son of God’ (beginning in section 6) to frame the Nicene view as proceeding from it. Upon reading the text, one would not fail to grasp that the author’s principal aim was to demonstrate that the Logos is the natural Son of the Father, as the Sacred Scriptures reveal, and as the fathers at Nicaea also stressed. The affirmation that the Son is ‘*homoousios* to the Father’ was specifically presented to demonstrate and preserve this fundamental dogmatic truth.⁵⁴

Second, Khaled Anatolius, in a systematic analysis of Athanasius’s works, shows that the Alexandrian bishop has consistently affirmed the divinity of the Son, even before his polemic with Arius, for, in his mind, following the biblical revelation, the idea of divine transcendence is never at odds with the notion of immanence expressed by the divinity. When the error of Arius came to the fore, Athanasius already had a solid ground on which to base its refutation. Where Athanasius and Arius differed was their basic understanding of divine transcendence. Arius relied on the notion of transcendence as taught by the Greeks, similar to the Good of Plato, which is beyond the realm of the material world and could not be immanent in the world of matter, as it would introduce a stain or imperfection into its reality. This is the reason Arius denied the Son his divinity

⁵³ See Jannel Abogado, *Hilary of Poitiers on Conciliating the Homouseans and the Homoeouseans* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2016), pp. 82-90.

⁵⁴ Abogado, *Hilary of Poitiers on Conciliating the Homouseans and the Homoeouseans*, pp. 82-90.

because he became incarnate, suffered, and died on the cross. All attributes that he believed did not belong to the realm of the divine.

Athanasius, on the other hand, viewed the immanence of God in the world as an expression of divine transcendence. Divine transcendence is better understood in terms of its dynamic influence over the world that He created rather than in terms of the distance that it maintains from the same material universe for possibility of contamination. Between a divinity who can preserve his essence despite having entered a reality that is not his natural habitat to influence it, and a divinity who keeps an infinitesimal distance from anything other than godlike out of concern that it might compromise divine integrity, Athanasius gravitates more to the former. Athanasius sees divine transcendence better demonstrated in what God has done for humanity—overcoming perceived limitations without sacrificing divine integrity to uplift the material universe to a status where it cannot reach and become on its own—rather than in how infinitely distant the supposed divine is from creation.

Not wanting to depart from biblical revelation, Athanasius proclaimed a Son of God, who following the will of the Father whose divinity is also his, became incarnate and made the divine presence accessible to the world, not allowing the world to contaminate Him, but rather to convert the fallen into the divine like nature into which, from the beginning, it was originally fashioned. This exposition by Athanasius, for the understanding of ὁμοούσιος at Nicaea, actually aligns with the teaching of Alexander, his teacher, whose doctrine, as we have shown, was adopted as the explanation for the said Nicene formula. In his letter to Alexander of Byzantium, Alexander explains that the Arians were using the immanent activity of the Son to deny him equality in nature with the Father, which, according to the bishop, the Son possessed from the beginning:

For they, retaining in their memory the words which came to be used with respect to His saving Passion, and abasement, and examination, and what they call His poverty, and in short, all those things to which the Saviour submitted for our sakes, bring them forward to refute His supreme and eternal Godhead.⁵⁵

In this regard, Athanasius's explanation of the homousian formula for the Son in relation to the Father, as proclaimed at Nicaea, clarifies and expands on Alexander of Alexandria's core teaching about a God who, as revealed in the Scriptures, willingly enters material reality to save it, out of loving concern for humanity. The features of the life of the Logos, which in the minds of the Arians suggest that he is lesser than a God—such as being incarnate, suffering, and dying on the cross—are actually expressions of God's love for humanity (*philantrophia*—“who because of us men, and because of our salvation,” as the Nicene creed states)

⁵⁵ Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Byzantium*, 9 (Socrates, *HE* I.3 [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 3,35]).

and brings to light his transcendence, because despite entering the temporal realm, God did not lose the dignity he has from eternity while achieving what He set to do from eternity.

Conclusion

In addition to the fact that the picture of God proclaimed by ὁμοούσιος is consistent with divine revelation, it is also the picture of divinity that the people of that generation need. In the fourth century, the society, at large, was characterized by uncertainties—politically, before Constantine came to power, warring generals plunged the empire into conflicts and death, and came with the instability of leadership in the imperial government were famine and poverty, and, on a more focused reality, the Church was persecuted systematically by successive imperial governments.⁵⁶ Therefore, Christians, both as members of the broader society and the local ecclesial community, needed someone who could ensure in them hope that everything would be okay despite the perceived negative human experiences.

The Church, being part of the empire as one of its minority religions at first, then, with Constantine's favor, became tolerated and then privileged, had always borne this optimism in the God whom they could trust and who would never abandon them in the pitfall of destruction caused by human greed for power and wealth. It was not unexpected, then, that for the majority of the Christian faithful, the preaching of the God who has become like us, to suffer with us and to rescue us from downright annihilation, resonated more deeply in their inner being and in the faith into which they had converted. As a result, the teachings of Arius and his supporters were rejected in favor of the faith of the Nicene fathers, as proclaimed by Alexander of Alexandria, Athanasius, and their colleagues. In other words, the God revealed by the ὁμοούσιος is not a divine being residing in some distant kingdom, unconcerned with the struggles of created beings, but a God who makes himself accessible to people, listening to their pleadings and accompanying them in overcoming their struggles.

The situation of people in the fourth century is not all that different from our current situation. We have advanced in science and technology, culture, and society, but people are still suffering, and the destruction of modern society and the human institutions built over the past centuries of progress still looms due to the warlike attitudes of some personalities in power and the pervasive neglect of the well-being of the community on account of personal pursuit and achievement. Our experience of the worldwide pandemic for over three years, which claimed millions of lives due to unsafe experiments in the guise of scientific advancement, and the ongoing war in Europe between Russia and Ukraine, which has the

⁵⁶ See, J. Abogado, "Persecution and Martyrdom in Early Church," *Philippiniana Sacra* (May-Aug 2015), 207-246.

potential of dragging other countries into the conflict, characterizes how uncertain the world we live in is. As our ancestors in the fourth century did, we need to proclaim the faith in God, who is accessible and will help us rise above our anxiety and grief toward hope for a better, safer tomorrow.

This is the faith we have received from the Scriptures and have been expounded by the fathers at the Council of Nicaea in 325, the same faith we must proclaim, given the challenges our world faces today. Pope Leo XIV confidently proclaims this in his encyclical Letter, *In unitate Fidei*, written to commemorate the great council:

The Fathers of Nicaea were firm in their resolution to remain faithful to biblical monotheism and the authenticity of the Incarnation. They wanted to reaffirm that the one true God is not inaccessibly distant from us, but, on the contrary, has drawn near and has come to encounter us in Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

That, despite the uncertainties we experience due to the unpredictability of individuals and the uncontainable aspiration of powerful societies to dominate others, we have a God who commiserates with us and is deeply involved in our concerns, thereby making himself available to enable and guide humanity to where it should be, which is to be all in Him. Just as God did not abandon us to human fallenness, the God who created us to flourish in goodness, and has pitched his tent with us to restore us in goodness, and has dwelt in us as in a temple to make us bloom in goodness, is ever present with us (Emmanuel) to journey with us overcome uncertainty with the certainty of his love and presence. **PS**

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