


Krzysztof Góźdz

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8020-1675>

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

 <https://ror.org/04qyefj88>

The Nicene Christology: “Homoousion to Patri”

 <https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.15104>

Abstract

Pagan Rome persecuted the Church for nearly 300 years. The apogee of that persecution occurred during the times of Diocletian and Galerius in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. Hence, it is hard to imagine that the next emperor, Constantine the Great (+337), embraced the Christian faith and proclaimed the freedom to practice this religion. At the same time, Arius (+336) sparked a great theological dispute with his understanding of the singularity and transcendence of God, which concerned the central question: is Jesus Christ a creature, subordinate to God, or is he God? Emperor Constantine became personally involved in this dispute, convened a council, and proposed the decisive word of the Nicene Creed: *homoousios*. Where did the emperor get this word? He probably borrowed it from Bishop Hosius of the Córdoba (+359). To more fully understand the meaning of this central concept, it is necessary to delve, on the one hand, into the earlier – Gnostic – understanding of the word, and, on the other, into the erroneous teaching of Arius, which the Council of Nicaea condemned. In its Creed, it stated that the Son of God is begotten, not made, and is of one substance with the Father, that is *homoousion to Patri*.

Keywords

Council of Nicaea, Jesus Christ, Son of God, homoousios, Arius, gnosis

1. Introduction

2025 will mark the 1,700th anniversary of the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicaea. It seemed that the Edict of Milan of Emperor Constantine the Great and Emperor Licinius in 313, which proclaimed religious freedom in the Roman Empire, would bring about peaceful times for Christianity. However, it was then that theological discussions broke out and serious disputes regarding the essence of the Christian faith that turned into Christological and Trinitarian errors and heresies.

In the early Church, the baptismal creed spoke about the great and at the same time difficult truth of Christianity that God is one in three Persons. Attempts were made to express this truth in various ways. However, there was no proper terminology that everyone could understand. This is how erroneous ideas about the proper relationship within God emerged as regards the relationship of the Son to the Father in particular. While searching for the right words that would reflect the essence of this relationship, Christian thinkers found the concepts from Greek philosophy useful, i.e., capable of expressing the essential relationship between the nature of the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity. Since the 3rd century, three such ideas have taken shape: *homoousios*, equal in essence (consubstantial), *homoiousios*, similar in essence, and *homoios*, similar in everything.¹

It was already in the 2nd century that the term *homoousios* appeared in the Gnostic writings, where it denoted the community of the basic substance or being. However, this understanding was rejected because of the errors of Sabellius (+260) and Paul of Samosata (+275) at the synods of Antioch (263–268). The latter thinker thought that “Jesus was only externally related to the Logos (Prenestorianism). Being a man, he was adopted as the Son of God; It is only the Logos that is consubstantial (*homousios*) with the Father, and it is not the same as Jesus. There is, therefore, no identity between Jesus of Nazareth and the Logos (Christ).”²

The term *homoiousios*, on the other hand, comes from the Alexandrian school and was also used by Origen (+254) and Clement of Alexandria (+212). The First Council of Nicaea (325; DH 125) used the concept of *homoousios* (consubstantial) to express the substantial equality of the Father and the Son.³ This

¹ J. Kopiec, *Homousios*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka* 6, col. 1196.

² C. S. Bartnik, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, vol. I, Lublin 2012, Wydawnictwo KUL, p. 205.

³ C. Kannengiesser, *Homo(o)usios*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Sonderausgabe 2006), vol. 5, col. 252–253.

also meant rejecting the heresy of Arius, who did not recognise equality in the divinity of the Father and the Son. According to Arius, Christ is only the noblest creation of the Father.

The groundbreaking character of the Council's declaration will become clearer if, on the one hand, the Gnostic understanding of the concept of *homoousios* is explained, and on the other, Arius's erroneous understanding of it is explained.

2. Gnostic understanding of *homoousios*

At the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the secular context of the concept of *homoousios* referred to the material rather than the spiritual dimension. It meant, for example, the species identity of parents and children. However, while looking for ways to apply this concept to God the Father and the Son, a material reference was not enough. Gnostic thinkers gave it a religious connotation that expressed the relationship between entities composed of related substances. Ptolemy thought in a similar vein and thus defined God: "the good by nature engenders and produces the things that are similar to itself and of the same essence [...] a principle that exists and is confessed and believed in by all and which is unengendered and incorruptible and good."⁴ Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Epiphanius (+403), also used the concept of *homoousios* in the Gnostic sense. Their aim, however, was to fight against this understanding of the term. Origen, a worker in the context of Gnostic thought as regards the Son of God, though he believed that He was begotten, not created, that His nature was united with the nature of the Father and that He is a reflection of the Father's glory. The term *homoousios* as used by Origen does not refer to the Trinity but only to the corporeal emanation of the Son from the Father. This well illustrates the colloquial understanding of the word: for example, water in a river and spring is *homoousios*,⁵ and so is the steam that arises from water.

⁴ Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora* in: *The Gnostic Scriptures*, transl. by Bentley Layton, London 2021, New Haven, pp. 446–447.

⁵ Cf. E. Kotkowska, *Nicejskie 'OMOYΣIOΣ' w procesie inkulturacji wiary w Bóstwo Syna. Studium teologiczno-fundamentalne na tle tradycji*, Poznań 2015, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza. Wydział Teologiczny, p. 138.

Similarly, Bishop Paul of Samosata (+275) from Antioch used the term *homoousios* to express an incomplete unity of the Father and the Son. In his view, the Son is *homoousios* with the Father, i.e. Jesus is identical to the Father, yet he acquired his distinct personhood, anywhen He became human.⁶ Also, the Son originated from the human substance of Mary; He is divine because he was adopted by God. From 263 to 269, three synods in Antioch condemned Paul of Samosata's⁷ teachings. In the end, he was excommunicated from the Church.

The linguistic struggles regarding the term *homoousios* eventually took on a more theological character. This was largely due to the influence of two theologians: Dionysius of Rome (d. 268) and Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 264/5). The Western representative, Dionysius of Rome, adhered to a form of moderate Monarchianism and opposed the theology of Logos of his Eastern counterpart, which was rooted in the idea of three divine hypostases. He believed that this divides the Father from the Son too much and, consequently, recognizes three distinct deities. In other words, the Logos theology of the East clashed with Western Monarchianism, revealing a deeper problem: reconciling the personhoods of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (three hypostases in the East) with the divine monarchy (one God in the West). This linguistic misunderstanding referred not only to different views of divine wisdom. It was also the translation issue: equating the Greek term *hypostasis* with the Latin *substantia*. In Greek, *hypostasis* referred to an individual being, while the Latin *substantia* denoted a generic being. In the Greek word, both the oneness of God and the distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were maintained. On the other hand, the Latin idea of three *substantiae* would imply the existence of three gods, a notion that Dionysius of Rome (d. 268) firmly rejected (+268).⁸

However, according to Dionysius of Rome, the real "bone of contention" was not the concept of *hypostasis* itself. Rather, it was Dionysius of Alexandria's rejection of the idea of the divine monarchy. In response, the Alexandrian theologian defended his doctrine of the Logos and the three *hypostases*, rejecting the charge that he was separating the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He unequivocally

⁶ Cf. E. Kotkowska, *Nicejskie ὉΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΣ*, p. 139.

⁷ *Sobór Nicejski I (325)*, in: *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych. Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski*, arranged and compiled by A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2002, Wydawnictwo WAM, vol. I, p. 45, footnote 29.

⁸ Cf. E. Kotkowska, *Nicejskie ὉΜΟΟΥΣΙΟΣ*, p. 153.

affirmed that the Son is eternal. He avoided using the term *homoousios* because it was not biblical, but he interpreted the concept the way it was commonly understood as "sharing the same nature."⁹ Dionysius of Alexandria's crucial words are known to us because Athanasius the Great (+373) quotes them: "Thus then we extend the Monad indivisibly into the Triad, and conversely gather together the Triad without diminution into the Monad."¹⁰

3. Arius' Miscomprehension

The Council of Nicaea's statement regarding the relationship of the Son – Logos to God the Father was a reaction to the errors of Arius and his followers:¹¹ "We believe in one God the Father... and in one our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God... begotten, not created, consubstantial with the Father" (DH 125; BF IX,7). The above words were a response to Arius, who confessed "One God, the only and unbegotten, the only eternal, the only one who is without beginning and is the only true God" (BF IX 7, introduction, p. 610). He also believed that "the Son, therefore, is not eternal." God was not the Father eternally [...] The Son cannot be God if there was a time when He did not exist, for he could not exist unless he was begotten" (BFN, p. 30). The Son was created like other creatures from nothing to become an instrument of creation for the Father. He is nothing more than one of God's powers. He is not the true God, "consubstantial" with the Father, but only the Son of God by grace, by adoption, which took place during His baptism in the Jordan (NBF, p. 30).

Even though the Bible, and the Gospel of John in particular, speak about the Son of God (e.g. John 3:35; 10:30; 12:27, etc.), Arius considered reexpression metaphorical. His understanding of "sonship" boils down to three points:

1. The Son is the creation and his existence, like the existence of other creatures, is due to the will of God.

⁹ E. Kotkowska, *Nicejskie 'OMOOYΣIOΣ*, p. 155.

¹⁰ Athanasius the Great, *De sententia Dionysii* 17, transl. by A. Robertson, *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 4. Edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace, Buffalo, NY, 1892. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2810.htm> (2.11.2024).

¹¹ Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. 1, Freiburg i. Br. 1989, Herder, p. 403.

2. The term “Son” is honorary, and even though the rank of the “Son” is higher than that of other creatures, it does not mean that his position equals God’s.
3. Last but not least, the status of the Son is not the result of his nature, but of the Father’s will.

Athanasius disagreed with such a concept of the Son’s creation and put forward two theses. The first one says that the salvation of creation may come solely from God and not from the creation. The second thesis stresses the fact that Christians worship Jesus Christ and pray to Him, i.e., there is official worship,¹² i.e., the Eucharist.

Where does Arius’s understanding of the Son of God come from? It does not come from the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, but from the philosophy prevalent at that time, i.e. Gnosticism and the Platonic school. They spoke about a metaphysical gradation of existence: the Primal One (*to ‘En, Hen*), the Logos, the Soul of the world (*Psyche*) up to Matter. This metaphysics is then expanded by Plotinus (+270), who claimed that the principle of reality is something more primary: it is the One.¹³ In line with the concept of the gradation of being and the principle of absolute reality, the Logos is lower than God as the Primal One. Logos indeed comes from the Primal One – God but is not equal to the Primal One. Logos is, therefore, inferior to the One (*ho Theos*), and therefore is a “second God” (*deuteros Theos*), or an “inferior God.” Should the Son be equal in divinity to the Father, then the Primal One would be divided into two. The Son therefore appears in time, not in eternity. Arius says, “There was a time when the Logos did not exist.” “Before He was begotten, He was not.” “The Logos was created from nothing” (DH 126).¹⁴ Thus, the title “God” must be ascribed solely to the One. As a result, Arius explicitly proclaimed Subordinationism, in which Christ is the “second God,” subordinate to the “primal God.”¹⁵

Bishop Alexander from Alexandria (+328) reacted to these errors by excommunicating Arius and writing a letter to Bishop Alexander of Constantinople

¹² A. E. McGrath, *Der Weg der christlichen Theologie*, München 1997, C.H. Beck, p. 342.

¹³ Cf. J. Hirschberger, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1, Freiburg i. Br. 1981, Herder, p. 303; G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, vol. IV, transl. E.I. Zieliński, Lublin 1999, p. 511; M. Górecka, *Memoria Dei et hominis. Christliche Gedächtniskultur der Literatur des deutschen Frühmittelalters*, Lublin 2019, Wydawnictwo KUL, pp. 35–37.

¹⁴ C. S. Bartnik, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, vol. I, p. 789.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Auer, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. IV/1, Regensburg 1986, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, p. 177.

(+337) where he gave the following anti-Arian arguments: according to the Scriptures, the Son is eternally in the Father's bosom, and therefore is indivisibly and essentially united with Him; as Co-Creator he is beyond and above creation; through Him time came into being; therefore, He could not come into being in time. Moreover, Christ is eternal as the Father is eternal and is beyond all time; the divine sonship of Jesus is an essential, natural sonship; while the divine childhood of men is only an adopted childhood by grace.¹⁶

Emperor Constantine tried in vain to resolve the above conflict by writing letters to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and Arius, also asking for the personal intervention of Bishop Hosius of Córdoba. Finally, the emperor convened a synod in Nicaea in 325, which he led himself. The synod was recognised by the Church as the first ecumenical council. During the synod, there were violent disputes between the vast majority of bishops and Arius and his supporters (ca. 17 bishops), and two parties (Eusebius of Nicomedia [+341] supported Arius and Eusebius of Caesarea [+339] was against Arius) who wanted to mediate in these struggles. In the end, all 318 bishops present signed the profession of faith (DH 125).

Thus, the Nicene Creed was a response to Arius's heretical teaching. Three main issues were dogmatically highlighted regarding Jesus, the Son of God:

1. He is "begotten" and not created.
2. He is "true God from true God" and not "second God."
3. He is "consubstantial with the Father" and not subordinated to Him.

Through the eternal generation, the Father fully gives His essence to the Son, so the Father and the Son not only constitute a divine essence but also have it. The Father and the Son are one (cf. Jn 14:9). The Son, like the Father, is omnipotent, eternal, indivisible, and unchangeable. With the help of philosophical word, *homoousios*, the theological truth about Jesus's divinity was expressed. This allowed for the further development of the dogmatic teaching about God.

4. Nicaea

When Emperor Constantine the Great (+337) realised that his Roman Empire was becoming religiously divided between Catholics and Arians, he convened a church assembly (synod/council) in Nicaea in 325. The primary objective was

¹⁶ Cf. J. Auer, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik*.

to resolve the religious schism by defining theologically how the Father and the Son relate to each other. In opposition to Arius, the doctrine of the Logos-Christ as “consubstantial,” “of the same essence” (*homoousios*) with the Father, was adopted: *homoousion to Patri; unius substantiae cum Patre* (DH 125). Thus, the fundamental theological concept of *homoousios* was formulated, which points to the “consubstantiality,” or “co-essentiality” of the Persons within God, particularly the unity of substance (*ousia* or *hypostasis*) of the Father and the Son, i.e., their substantial identity. The Council synonymously used the terms *ousia* (substance, self-subsisting essence) and *hypostasis* (an individual, person) (DH 126). However, the dispute was not fully resolved, as the council did not clarify whether the Father and the Son were “two distinct Persons,” nor did it state that there were no “two Gods.”¹⁷

The Council of Nicaea taught that the Son comes from the essence of the Father and is consubstantial with Him (*homoousios*). Thus, it was professed for the first time that the Son is the true God, begotten and not created. At the same time, the main theses of Arius were rejected: that the Son was created in time out of nothing, or that He was created from a different substance (*hypostasis*) or essence (*ousia*) than the Father’s, or that He is subject to change. DH 126 puts Arius’ erroneous assertions in the following order: “There was a time when he was not,” or “Before he was begotten, he was not,” or “He was made out of nothing,” or “He originates from another hypostasis, or from another substance [than the Father],” or “The Son of God is changeable and alterable.”¹⁸ We can clearly see that Arius professed “the one God, the only unbegotten, the only eternal, the only one without beginning or end, and the only true God.” And yet, here the Son is not eternal, for he was created like other creatures from nothing and became a tool for the Father. The Son of God is such by grace, adoption, and designation, which occurred during His baptism in the Jordan.¹⁹ This monarchism of God completely obscured the image of the Son of God. That is why the Council of Nicaea was of such great importance because it solidified the Church’s faith that Christ is the true God and true Son of God. The council expressed this truth through the crucial term *homoousios*.

¹⁷ J. Auer, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik*, p. 209.

¹⁸ *Sobór Nicejski I (325)*, in: *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych. Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski*, arranged and compiled by A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2002, Wydawnictwo WAM, vol. I, p. 45.

¹⁹ Cf. *Sobór Nicejski I (325)*, in: *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych*, p. 30.

The term *homoousios*, however, had been distorted by Gnosticism.²⁰ Literally, it implies that the essence of the Son is not different from the essence of the Father. Thus, Jesus Christ is a distinct (*eigene*) Son of God, i.e. He is begotten from the essence of the Father, and not solely from His will. As such, he is consubstantial with the Father. It is strongly asserted here that there is one and only God, i.e. the Father, and the essence of the Son is equal to the essence of the Father. This implies the oneness or singularity of the essence of the Father and the Son: the divinity of the Son is derived from the divinity of the Father, with the Father as its foundation. Significantly, the council used the term "God" in relation to the Father, whereas the Son is depicted as consubstantial with the Father, and as such, He is the Son of God.²¹

Moreover, the council referred to the one God as *Pantokrator*, the ruler of the universe. It did not choose the word "omnipotent" that has static connotations, but one that points to a certain dynamism: God is the Creator of visible and invisible things. Jesus Himself is called the Lord and the Son of this God. The biblical teaching on the relationship between the Father and the Son is expressed in a metaphysical language but retains its salvific historical purpose.²²

Thus, the teaching about the Son of God was dogmatised by the Nicene Council: we believe in "one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, the Only Begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made" (DH 125: *homoousion to Patri; unius substantiae cum Patre* [quod grece dicunt homou-sion]; BF IX, 7; BFN 30). This dogmatic formula expresses the Biblical notion and the faith of the Church in the language of Greek philosophy. It speaks of the Son of God as begotten and not created. "God is the Begetter and Christ is the Begotten." They are the Father and the Son. Being begotten implies the identity of their nature (God from God). At the same time, their personal distinction is maintained, even though the Father and the Son both share the same divine essence.²³ It was already Athanasius who differentiated between the notions of γεννητός (begotten), and γενητός – (became). This distinction emphasises

²⁰ Cf. M. Schmaus, *Glaube der Kirche*, vol. 2, St. Ottilien 1979, EOS Verlag, p. 152.

²¹ Cf. M. Schmaus, *Glaube der Kirche*, vol. 4/2, St. Ottilien 1980, EOS Verlag, p. 114.

²² Cf. M. Schmaus, *Glaube der Kirche*, p. 115.

²³ C. S. Bartnik, *Syn Boży. W teologii*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 18, col. 1320.

that “begetting brings forth the same, while creating brings forth something inferior.” Thus, the Son must be “begotten” and cannot be described as “created.”²⁴

The statement of the council points to a certain dynamism: first, it says “God from God,” which even the Arians could accept; next, there is the expression “True God from true God,” which the Arians could not accept; then we have the term “begotten,” and finally there is the highest level of defining the relationship between the Son and the Father: “consubstantial.” This statement, with its dynamic connotation, has been one of the most significant events in the Church and one of its most famous creeds. It is part of the doctrine that established the framework for understanding the Holy Trinity, which was further developed in the subsequent centuries. Furthermore, the Council itself became the prototype for all subsequent councils of the Catholic Church.

The statement of the Council of Nicaea regarding the relationship between Logos – the Son and God the Father – was preceded by other events in the history of the Church. On the one hand, these were synods and the writing of Alexander of Alexandria (especially the synod in Antioch in 268 against Paul of Samosata and the synod of 324/325). On the other hand, these were the symbols of the faith based on the baptismal symbols. The synodal creed from Antioch addressed significant Arian theses and subsequently rejected them. Even though it lacks the typical formula from Nicaea, “of the essence of the Father,” (*homoousios*), it does contain an important statement that Jesus Christ is the Son begotten of the Father and is entirely His image (DH 50).²⁵

Today, it is impossible to precisely resolve which of the ancient symbols was the basis for the discussions in Nicaea: whether it was the baptismal symbol of the Church of Eusebius of Caesarea, a symbol from Jerusalem, or a symbol from Palestine.²⁶ There is, however, a consensus that the text of the Nicene symbol (DH 125–130) is perceived as a compromise between the two schools, the Antiochene and the Alexandrian, rather than between individual theologians, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Alexander of Alexandria. Nevertheless, the declaration of the Council is seen as the victory of the Antiochene school because the attribute *homoousios to Patri* that is ascribed to the Logos resembles

²⁴ A. Ziegenaus, *Jesus Christus, Die Fülle des Heils. Christologie und Erlösungslehre (Katholische Dogmatik, vol. IV)*, Aachen 2000, Michael Müller Verlag, pp. 221–222.

²⁵ A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. I, p. 404.

²⁶ Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 406.

more the Modalist teaching on the Trinity of Paul of Samosata and Marcellus of Ancyra (+374) than Origen's economic-salvific teaching on the Trinity.²⁷

The main achievement of the Council of Nicaea, without undermining the belief in one God, was the confession that Jesus is the only and true Son of the Father, and not His creation. The council clarified the faith of the Church with the following statements (words) that express the oneness of the essence of the Son and the Father:²⁸

1. The Son is "begotten" and the "onlybegotten."
2. The Son is "begotten from the essence of the Father" (*homoousios*).
3. The Son is "true God from true God."

Even though the crucial Christological question of the relationship of divine Logos to the human nature of Christ was not settled in Nicaea (this was done at Chalcedon), the Nicene Council did formulate three main statements regarding the relationship of the Son of God to God the Father:²⁹

1. The Son stands with the Creator, not with creation: DH 126: «Those who say, "There was a time when he was not," or "Before he was begotten, he was not," or "He was made out of nothing," or "He originates from another hypostasis, or from another substance [than the Father]," or "The Son of God is changeable and alterable" are excluded from the communion by the universal and apostolic Church.» With this statement, the council is against Platonic subordinationism, which had already been challenged earlier by Justin (+163–167), Paul of Samosata, and later by Marcellus of Ancyra.
2. The eternal Son of God is begotten from the Father: "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the onlybegotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made" (DH 125). The term "begotten" indicates that the Son derives from the Father, unlike the contingent creation that came into being through a creative act. Although the Son originates from the Father, there is no ontological or chronological "prior to" of the unbegotten Father to the begotten Son.

²⁷ Cf. K.H. Menke, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn. Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie*, Regensburg 2012², Verlag Friedrich Pustet, p. 247.

²⁸ Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. I, pp. 407–408.

²⁹ Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 248.

3. The Father and the Son are identical in their essence but relationally distinct: “We believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation descended and took on flesh, became man, suffered, and rose again on the third day; He ascended into heaven and will come to judge the living and the dead” (DH 125). This text opposes the doctrine of the Trinity put forward by Origen and his Alexandrian epigones, especially the teaching of three hypostases by Eusebius of Caesarea and Alexander of Alexandria.

It is worth emphasising that at the Council of Nicaea, the Greek terms *ousia* (essence) and *hypostasis* (entity) were not explicitly distinguished. Perhaps this is why the council could not defeat Arianism, which equated these terms. The Arians found it illogical to assert that the Son could be consubstantial with the Father while still being another (distinct, subordinated to the Father) *hypostasis*, i.e., entity.

The formula *homoousios to Patri* became problematic in a twofold manner. Should it be understood as denoting “the same essence with the Father”, then dyotheism (two Gods) cannot be excluded. When, on the other hand, it is to denote “one essence with the Father”, then the Son is so closely aligned with the Father that we risk the charge of professing Sabellianism or Modalism. It is exactly this objection that the Arians raised against the Council of Nicaea.³⁰

5. Conclusion

Today, various societies, inherently Christian, largely reject God from their lives, destroying temples and removing crosses from public spaces. Perhaps one of the most important words of our faith, *homoousios*, may contribute to the renewal of the Christian dimension in the world. This significant theological concept, with its rich history and tradition of 17 centuries, may demonstrate that “of one essence” pertains primarily to the Son of God in relation to God the Father. However, it also points to our sonship in relation to the Triune God as baptised individuals in the name of the Holy Trinity. Embracing the term *homoousios* implies both an ancient and a contemporary confession of faith.

³⁰ Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, p. 249.

In 325, great disputes, if not battles, raged over this truth to establish the foundations of Christianity. Today, we need to revive that struggle for the truth that the Logos is the incarnate Son of God, consubstantial with God the Father.

The significance of celebrating the 1700 anniversary of the Nicene Council may not merely lie in reminding of this historical event, but instanding – much like during the sessions of the Council – against errors and reaffirming the apostolic faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ in a new way, appropriate to the spirit of our contemporary era. Such a stance should emphasise the uniqueness of the Christian religion, which, from a theological perspective, is a secure (true) path to salvation, i.e., the attainment of the gift of supernatural life within the Holy Trinity. The ancient battle for the revealed truth expressed with the term *homoousios* understood theologically reveals that various religions cannot be perceived as equal, let alone that they all lead to God in the same way. Various images of God do not translate into one common path, nor can they be a quest for the same God who has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. Recently, Cardinal Charles Chaput OFM Cap, the retired Archbishop of Philadelphia, emphasised this while stating: "Some religions are as false as they are dangerous, materially and spiritually."³¹ Moreover, from the very beginning, the Catholic faith has consistently taught that salvation comes solely through the Son of God, Jesus Christ (DI 13; cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 8:5–6; 1 Tim 2:4–6; GS 10).

The significance of the Council of Nicaea's resolution to apply the term *homoousios* is twofold: enshrining the divinity of the Son and rejecting the philosophical understanding of God, on which, for example, Arius relied. The incorporation of the philosophical term *homoousios* into theology is a different issue (the term has meant something else in philosophy). Over the subsequent centuries of the history of the Church, the understanding of this basic concept developed, contributing to the creation of an increasingly systematic theology. The formula *homoousios* could be interpreted in two ways: the first clearly expressed "the unity of essence with the Father," while the second indicated that the Son and the Father are of the same essence, yet there exists a numerical distinction between the Father and the Son (Origen), i.e., there is a "numerical identity of essence." For many years, the Nicene formula was understood in this second sense.³²

³¹ <https://www.kath.net/news/85576> (access 19.9.2024).

³² Cf. B. Lohse, *Epochen der Dogmengeschichte*, Stuttgart 1988, Kreuz Verlag, p. 61.

References

- Athanasius the Great, *De sententia Dionysii* 17, transl. by A. Robertson, *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 4. Edited by Ph. Schaff and H. Wace, Buffalo, NY, 1892. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2810.htm> (access 2.11.2024).
- Auer J., *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik*, Regensburg 1986, Verlag Friedrich Pustet, vol. IV/1.
- Bartnik C. S., *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Lublin 2012, Wydawnictwo KUL, vol. I.
- Bartnik C. S., *Syn Boży. W teologii*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 2013, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, vol. 18, col. 1320–1322.
- Górecka M., *Memoria Dei et hominis. Christliche Gedächtniskultur der Literatur des deutschen Frühmittelalters*, Lublin 2019, Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Grillmeier A., *Jesus Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, Freiburg i. Br. 1989, Herder, vol. I.
- Hirschberger J., *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Freiburg i. Br. 1981, Herder, vol. 1.
- Kannengiesser Ch., *Homo(o)usios*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Sonderausgabe, Freiburg i. Br. 2006), Herder, vol. 5, col. 252–253.
- Kopiec J., *Homousios*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 1993, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, vol. 6, col. 1196.
- Kotkowska Elżbieta, *Nicejskie ŌMOOΎΣΙΟΣ w procesie inkulturacji wiary w Bóstwo Syna. Studium teologicznofundamentalne na tle tradycji*, Poznań 2015, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza. Wydział Teologiczny.
- Lohse B., *Epochen der Dogmengeschichte*, Stuttgart 1988, Kreuz.
- McGrath A. E., *Der Weg der christlichen Theologie*, transl. Christian Wiese, München 1997, C. H. Beck.
- Menke K.-H., *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn. Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie*, Regensburg 2012, Verlag Friedrich Pustet.
- Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora* in: *The Gnostic Scriptures*, transl. by Bentley Layton, London 2021, New Haven, pp. 446–447.
- Schmaus M., *Glaube der Kirche*, St. Ottilien 1979, vol. 2, EOS.
- Schmaus M., *Glaube der Kirche*, St. Ottilien 1980, vol. 4/2, part. 2, EOS.
- Sobór Nicejski I (325)*, in: *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych. Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski*, arranged and compiled by A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2002, Wydawnictwo WAM, vol. I, pp. 21–61.
- Reale G., *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, transl. E.I. Zieliński, Lublin 1999, Wydawnictwo KUL, vol. IV.
- Ziegenaus A., *Jesus Christus, Die Fülle des Heils. Christologie und Erlösungslehre (Katholische Dogmatik, vol. IV)*, Aachen 2000, Michael Müller Verlag.