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**NICENE TERMINOLOGY DEFENDED BY ATHANASIOS  
OF ALEXANDRIA IN *DE DECRETIS NICAENAE SYNODI*  
AND THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF EUSEBIUS’  
*EPISTULA AD CAESARIENSES*<sup>1</sup>**

Only two longer ancient narratives can be found in the theological debates at the Council of Nicaea (325) which preceded the subscription of the Nicene Creed. There is firstly a letter by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, addressed to Eusebius’ own diocese. In this letter written during the Council or shortly after, Eusebius explained the conditions upon which he was able to agree with the Nicene Creed. Eusebius’ *Letter to his Diocese (Epistula ad Caesarienses)* contains the first extant theological comments on the Nicene Creed<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, there is a treatise by the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius *On the Decrees of Nicaea (De decretis Nicaenae synodi)*, composed during the 350s, at least a quarter of a century after the Council at Nicaea<sup>3</sup>. In this writing, Athanasius argued against the associates of Acacius, a successor of Eusebius in the episcopal see at Caesarea<sup>4</sup>, and developed the detailed defence of the Nicene terminology, not found in Athanasius’ earlier texts<sup>5</sup>. As the traditional name of the Athanasius’ writing indicates, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* is not

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<sup>2</sup> For the edition of the Eusebius’ letter: DSP 1, 54-60.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, in *Athanasius Werke*, ed. H.G. Opitz, Band II, Teil 1, Lieferung 3, Berlin – Leipzig 1935, 28-31.

<sup>4</sup> Acacius’ teaching is documented in a fragmentary manner; for his polemic with Marcellus of Ancyra cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 72, 6-10, ed. K. Holl – J. Dummer, GCS 37, Berlin 1985, 260-264. For an analysis of the fragments see J.T. Lienhard, *Acacius of Caesarea’s Contra Marcellum: Its Place in Theology and Controversy*, *StPatr* 19 (1989) 185-188.

<sup>5</sup> Analyses of Athanasius’ *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* have been provided by Lewis Ayres (*Athanasius’ Initial Defense of the Term ὁμοούσιος: Rereading the De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, *JECS* 12 (2004) 337-359, and idem, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford 2004, 140-144). For a summary of Athanasius’ teaching cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318-381*, Edinburgh 1988, 417-458; T.G. Weinandy, *Athanasius. A Theological Introduction*, Ashgate 2007, and especially chapter 4 in this book, *Athanasius: Defender and Interpreter of Nicaea*, p. 49-80.

only a theological treatise, but also involves those documents concerning the Council of Nicaea which Athanasius had at his disposal. In the corpus of the documents on the proceedings and decisions of the Nicene council, which is attached to the theological part of *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, the above-mentioned Eusebius' letter is placed first and quoted in extenso<sup>6</sup>.

Eusebius' *Letter to his Diocese* was therefore well known to Athanasius and the Alexandrian bishop obviously attached a certain significance to it when including it into his treatise. Within his theological narrative, he mentioned Eusebius' letter once explicitly<sup>7</sup>. We know that Athanasius sometimes incorporated texts of his opponents into his writings in order to polemize with their teaching<sup>8</sup>. Is this the reason why Athanasius cited Eusebius' letter in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*? In spite of serious divergences between the teachings of both theologians, it seems that this is not the only reason. Athanasius seems to have at least affirmed Eusebius' overall outline of the debate at the Council of Nicaea, and both theologians indicated the same terms of the Nicene Creed as the most controversial. The intention of the following analysis is to consider if there are traces of an implicit influence of Eusebius' letter on the composition of *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*<sup>9</sup>. I will initially focus on the chapters *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, 20 and 24 where Athanasius deals with the Nicene expressions "from the essence of the Father" and "ὁμοούσιος with the Father", the two most important and most controversial terms of the Nicene theological debates which Eusebius also commented on. I will then briefly draw attention to chapter *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 25 where Athanasius listed the defenders of ὁμοούσιος before the Nicene council.

### 1. A brief exposition of Eusebius' arguments in *Epistula ad Caesarienses*.

I would like to introduce the arguments which Eusebius of Caesarea used in the *Letter to his Diocese*. Eusebius presented two creeds in his account, first his own and second the Nicene, and thereafter described the course of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 33.

<sup>7</sup> Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 3, 3 mentioned not only Eusebius' letter, but also Eusebius' explanations of "from the essence" and ὁμοούσιος, the same expressions which Athanasius would be dealing with below; "διὰ τῆς ἐπιστολῆς τὸ ὁμοούσιον καὶ τὸ ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας μὴ ἄρνησάμενος φανερώς τοῦτο σημαίνει βούλεται".

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. texts of Arius and his supporters quoted in *Orationes Contra Arianos* I 5-6 or *De synodis* 15-18.

<sup>9</sup> The influence of Eusebius writings on some Athanasius texts has been occasionally considered. See e.g. K. McCarthy Spoerl, *Athanasius and the anti-Marcellan controversy*, ZACH 10 (2006) 34-55. McCarthy Spoerl shows that pieces of the anti-Marcellan polemic known from Eusebius' writings *Contra Marcellum* and *De ecclesiastica theologia* may have been used by Athanasius in 350s in order to "build bridges with the moderate opponents of Nicaea in the face of more radical Anomoean thinkers". For Athanasius' polemic against the Eusebius' theology in *Orationes contra Arianos* III cf. H. Strutwolf, *Die Trinitätstheologie und Christologie des Euseb von Caesarea: Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung seiner Platonismus-Rezeption und Wirkungsgeschichte*, Göttingen 1999, 391-408.

debate by the Nicene bishops on the Nicene Creed, focusing in particular on the phrases “from the essence of the Father”, “begotten not made” and “ὁμοούσιος with the Father”.

As Eusebius relates, he brought forward his own creed at the Council as proof of his orthodoxy. For the subsequent debate on Nicene terminology, Eusebius’ statements on the Son’ origin from the Father mentioned in the Eusebius’ creed are of importance:

“We believe in [...] one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, only-begotten Son, first-born of all creation, before all ages begotten from the Father, through whom all things have come to being”<sup>10</sup>.

At the end of his creed, Eusebius stressed the actual existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Each of them is and exists, “the Father truly Father, the Son truly Son and the Holy Spirit truly Holy Spirit”<sup>11</sup>.

In the discussion on Nicene terminology, Eusebius of Caesarea was determined to qualify the terms “from the essence of the Father” and ὁμοούσιος in order that the generation of the Son would not imply any material division in the essence of the Father or any experience or alteration<sup>12</sup>. This is the reason why Eusebius himself preferred the formulation “the Son is from the Father”, without mentioning the word “essence”:

“They (i.e. the bishops at Nicaea) professed that «from the essence» was indicative of the Son’s being from the Father, yet without being as if a part of him. We thought it good to assent to this sense, because «the pious doctrine teaches that the Son was from the Father, not a part of His essence»<sup>13</sup>.

In his comment on the Nicene expression “begotten not made”, Eusebius agreed to reject any likeness of the Son to the creatures and expounded the origin of the Son in the Father as the generation of essence superior (κρείττων οὐσία) to all creatures:

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *Epistula ad Caesarienses* 4, DSP 1, 54: “Πιστεύομεν εἰς [...] ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγον, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, ζωὴν ἐκ ζωῆς, υἷον μονογενῆ, πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως, πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεγεννημένον, δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐγένετο τὰ πάντα”.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem* 5, DSP 1, 54: “τούτων ἕκαστον εἶναι καὶ ὑπάρχειν πιστεύοντες πατέρα ἀληθῶς πατέρα καὶ υἷον ἀληθῶς υἷον καὶ πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἀληθῶς ἅγιον πνεῦμα”.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibidem* 12, DSP 1, 58: “«ὁμοούσιον εἶναι τὸ πατρὸς τὸν υἷον» ἔξεταζόμενος ὁ λόγος συνίστησιν, οὐ κατὰ τὸν τῶν σωμάτων τρόπον οὐδὲ τοῖς θνητοῖς ζώοις παραπλησίως, οὔτε γὰρ κατὰ διαίρεσιν τῆς οὐσίας οὔτε κατὰ ἀποτομήν, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ κατὰ τι πάθος ἢ τροπήν ἢ ἀλλοίωσιν τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας τε καὶ δυνάμεως”.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem* 9-10, DSP 1, 58: “καὶ δὴ τὸ «ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας» ὠμολογεῖτο πρὸς αὐτῶν δηλωτικὸν εἶναι τὸ ἐκ μὲν τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι, οὐ μὴν ὡς μέρος ὑπάρχειν τοῦ πατρὸς. Ταῦτη δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν ἐδόκει καλῶς ἔχειν συγκατατίθεσθαι τῇ διανοίᾳ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς διδασκαλίας ὑπαγορευοῦσης ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι τὸν υἷον, οὐ μὴν μέρος αὐτοῦ τῆς οὐσίας τυγχάνειν”.

“In the same way we accepted «begotten and not made» because they said that «made» applied to the other creatures which came to be through the Son and to whom the Son had no likeness. Therefore the Son is not a creature similar to that which was made through him and he has a superior essence compared to every creature. This (essence) the divine Scriptures teach to have been generated from the Father”<sup>14</sup>.

Eusebius attempted to explain ὁμοούσιος as well (it is the only comment on this term in all of Eusebius’ writings). According to Eusebius, ὁμοούσιος may express only that the Son is likened in all things (κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἀφομοιωῖσθαι) to the Father due to his unique generation from the Father:

“Ὁμοούσιος «with the Father» establishes that the Son of God bears no likeness to creatures which have come into existence, but is likened in all things only to the Father who begot him”<sup>15</sup>.

Eusebius explained the Nicene terminology within his monarchical view of the Father and Son relationship. There is only God the Father whose divine essence cannot undergo any corporeal experience when begetting the Son. The Son’s essence is superior to all creatures, although the relation to the Father’s is not clear. The generation of the Son from the Father does not establish a unity of essence, but only the complete likeness of the Son to the Father.

All Eusebius’ theological statements in these comments (the Son is generated from the Father, he bears no likeness to creatures, he is likened in all things to the Father) are regarded as a constant part of Eusebius’ teaching and can be found in his writings both before and after the Council of Nicaea<sup>16</sup>. One distinctive feature of his comments is that Eusebius often referred to the decision of the bishops first and then added his own assent and explanation. This would seem important for the comparison with Athanasius’ accounts of the same Nicene debate.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem 11, DSP 1, 58: “Κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ δὲ καὶ τὸ ἀγεννηθέντα καὶ οὐ ποιηθέντα ἡ κατεδεξάμεθα, ἐπειδὴ τὸ «ποιηθὲν» κοινὸν ἔφασκεν εἶναι πρόσρημα τῶν λοιπῶν κτισμάτων τῶν διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ γενομένων, ὧν οὐδὲν ὅμοιον ἔχειν τὸν υἱόν· διὸ δὴ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὸν ποίημα τοῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ γενομένοις ἔμφορές, κρείττονος δὲ ἢ κατὰ πᾶν ποίημα τυγχάνειν οὐσίας, ἦν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεγενῆσθαι τὰ θεῖα διδάσκει λόγια”.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem 13, DSP 1, 58: “παραστατικὸν δὲ καὶ εἶναι τὸ «ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ» τοῦ μηδεμίαν ἐμφέρειαν πρὸς τὰ γενητὰ κτίσματα τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φέρειν, μόνῳ δὲ τῷ πατρὶ τῷ γεγεννηκότι κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἀφομοιωῖσθαι”.

<sup>16</sup> For the rejection of any division in the essence of the Father cf. Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* IV 15, 52 and V 1, 9, ed. I.A. Heikel, GCS 23 (*Eusebius Werke* 6), Berlin 1913, 181 and 211; for the notion of the generation of the Son and the likening to the Father in all aspects see e.g. idem, *De ecclesiastica theologia* I 10, 1, ed. E. Klostermann – G.Ch. Hansen, GCS 14 (*Eusebius Werke* 4), Berlin 1991, 68: “ὁ δ’ ἀληθῶς υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἄτε δὴ ἐκ πατρὸς ἀποτεχθεὶς, εἰκότως καὶ μονογενὴς καὶ ἀγαπητὸς χρηματίσειεν ἂν τοῦ πατρὸς· οὕτω δὲ καὶ θεὸς ἂν εἴη. Τί γὰρ ἂν γένοιτο θεοῦ γέννημα <ἢ τὸ> τῷ γεγεννηκότι ἀφομοιωμένον”; ibidem, III 21, 1, GCS 14, 181: “μόνον αὐτὸν υἱὸν μονογενῆ ἐγέννα ὁ πατὴρ κατὰ πάντα ἀφομοιωμένον αὐτῷ”. Cf. also idem, *Demonstratio evangelica* V 4, 12 and V 5, 10, GCS 23, 225-226 and 228.

**2. Athanasius' answer in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*.** Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* described the proceedings of the Council of Nicaea as a discussion between the bishops and the Eusebians on the terminology which might properly express the unique origin of the Son in the Father. According to Athanasius, the bishops were forced to include the new terminology in the course of the debate, because the Eusebians were prepared to search for passages in the Scriptures to demonstrate that the expressions describing the Son's relationship with the Father provided by the bishops could be applied to the coming into being of creatures or to the adoptive sonship of men. The bishops at Nicaea thereby initially offered the expressions of the Scripture, then rejected the Eusebian misreading and used non-Scriptural terminology. This is the exposition of the Nicene debate provided by Athanasius. Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Letter to his Diocese* made mention of the intention of the bishops to prefer the Scriptural wording during the composition of the Nicene Creed as well<sup>17</sup>, but in Athanasius' narrative it was the crucial point of the controversy at Nicaea.

**a) Discussion on the expression "from God" – ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (*De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19).** Athanasius claimed in the first step that the Nicene bishops intended to write scriptural words for the Creed:

"The Council wished to do away with the impious phrases of the Arians, and to use the acknowledged words of the Scriptures: the Son is not from nothing, but from God, he is Word and Wisdom, and not creature or work, but a proper offspring of the Father"<sup>18</sup>.

When writing about the words of the Scriptures, Athanasius obviously meant expressions concerning the Son's relationship with the Father which did not contain the word οὐσία (essence) and its compounds. In the quoted passage, there are biblical expressions "not from nothing" (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων)<sup>19</sup>, "from God" (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), Word and Wisdom (λόγος and σοφία). At the end of the quote a non-Scriptural formulation occurs, not found in the Scriptures or in the Nicene Creed which Athanasius himself used to express his notion of the Son's origin in the Father: The Son is "the proper offspring of the Father" (ἴδιον ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γέννημα). It would seem that Athanasius ended the passage with a statement concerning the Son's relationship with the Father,

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius concerning the Nicene anathemas (*Epistula ad Caesarienses* 15, DSP 1, 58-60): "And as to the anathemas published by them at the end of the Creed, they did not pain us, because they forbade using non-Scriptural words, from which almost all the confusion and disorder of the Church have come".

<sup>18</sup> Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, 1: "Τῆς συνόδου βουλομένης τὰς μὲν τῶν Ἀρειανῶν τῆς ἀσεβείας λέξεις ἀνελεῖν, τὰς δὲ τῶν γραφῶν ὁμολογουμένας φωνὰς γράψαι, ὅτι τε υἱὸς ἐστὶν οὐκ ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ λόγος ἐστὶ καὶ σοφία, ἀλλ' οὐ κτίσμα οὐδὲ ποίημα, ἴδιον δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γέννημα".

<sup>19</sup> 2Mac 7, 28: "οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ θεός".

which is close to those formulated in his *Orations against the Arians (Oratioes contra Arianos)* in the 340s<sup>20</sup>.

Athanasius focused his argument below in chapter 19 on one of the quoted biblical words, the expression “from God”. According to Athanasius, the Eusebians accepted the sentence “the Son is from God”, because they found passages in the Scriptures where the expression is used in the context of the creation of the world from God (1Cor 8, 6: There is one God, “from whom” all things, εἰς θεὸς ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα)<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, as Athanasius relates, the bishops at Nicaea expressed more distinctly the sense of the words “from God and wrote that the Son is “from the essence of God”<sup>22</sup>. Athanasius made two remarks concerning this description of the Nicene debate. Firstly, it was only a “creature” which is from God and it could be stated that the creatures, not the Son, are from God through his Word: “All things were brought into being, not being before, from Him through his Word (παρ’ αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ λόγου)”<sup>23</sup>. Eusebius in the Letter to his Diocese agreed with the notion that the Son is not a creature and that he is not like creatures and explained that every creature came into being through the Son (τὰ διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ γενομένα) and that only the Son was “generated from the Father”<sup>24</sup>. Both explanations, Eusebius’ and Athanasius’, correspond in that the created order (ποίημα, κτίσμα) came into being “through the Son”. Athanasius polemically added that only in this case was it appropriate to use the expression “from God”.

In the second remark, Athanasius provided the reason for the inclusion of the non-Scriptural word “essence” into the Creed. “From the essence” expressed the uniqueness of the origin of the Word-Son from the Father:

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Athanasius, *Oratio contra Arianos* I 9, 2: “ἴδιον τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας γέννημα”; ibidem I 16, 4; ibidem II 24, 1; ibidem III 5, 1-2; ibidem III 62, 2. For the adjective ἴδιος in Athanasius’ texts cf. A. Louth, *The Use of the Term ἴδιος in Alexandrian Theology from Alexander to Cyril*, StPatr 19 (1989) 198-202, and Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, p. 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, 1: “ἐβούλοντο τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ κοινὸν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγον μηδὲν τε ἐν τούτῳ διαφέρειν”. Athanasius quoted two biblical texts containing *from God* 1Cor 8, 6 and 2Cor 5, 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ibidem 19, 2: “οἱ πατέρες [...] ἠναγκάσθησαν λοιπὸν λευκότερον εἰπεῖν τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ γράψαι «ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι τὸν υἱόν»”. The debate is clearly mirrored in the Nicene Creed as well. It reads: “We believe [...] in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, the only Son, that is, from the essence of the Father (γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς)”. The awkward formulation containing both expressions “from the Father and from the essence of the Father” could be read as follows: the only Son from the Father (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ, i.e. formulation preferred by Eusebius) means from the essence of the Father.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem 19, 3: “τοῦ θεοῦ ὄντος τὰ πάντα παρ’ αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ λόγου οὐκ ὄντα πρότερον εἰς τὸ εἶναι γέγονε, διὰ τοῦτο εἰρηται τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ”.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. above, note 14.

“As to the Word, since he is not a creature, he alone is called and is from the Father and it is significant in this sense to say that the Son is «from the essence of the Father»”<sup>25</sup>.

Eusebius hesitantly accepted “from the essence” in the Nicene Creed on the condition that it did not express any division in the Father. The Son cannot be part of the Father’s essence. This is only a negative explanation, merely describing what this expression should not mean. Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* added an affirmative definition. “From the essence” stressed the unique origin of the Son in the Father, the Son is “the only” from the Father (μόνος ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς)<sup>26</sup>, or – as Athanasius put it in the next paragraph – the Son is the only who is from God “actually” (μόνος ὢν ἀληθῶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ)<sup>27</sup>. Although the notion of the unique generation of the Son from the Father was discussed by Eusebius in his theological writings as well<sup>28</sup>, the emphasis on the uniqueness of the Son’s generation from the Father, uttered with the phrase “from the essence”, is an expression for the unity of essence for Athanasius. It is Athanasius’ phrase that “the Son is the only who is from God actually” where we may conjecture a polemical allusion to Eusebius’ letter. The Nicene terminology emphasized the actual unity, in spite of the Eusebian claim to a difference in hypostases which Eusebius expressed at the end of his own creed in the claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually are and exist (εἶναι καὶ ὑπάρχειν [...] ἀληθῶς).

**b) Discussion on the term “like” – ὅμοιος (*De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 20).**  
In *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 20, Athanasius introduced the second set of terms and formulations which were introduced by the bishops at Nicaea:

“Again the bishops said that the Word must be described as the true power and image of the Father, in all things exact and like the Father, inalterable, always existing and in the Father without division. For there never was when the Word was not, but he was always, existing everlastingly with the Father as the radiance of light”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, 4: “ὁ δὲ λόγος, ἐπεὶ μὴ κτίσμα ἐστίν, εἶρηται καὶ ἔστι μόνος ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς, τῆς δὲ τοιαύτης διανοίας γνώρισμα τὸ εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς.”

<sup>26</sup> Cf. also the occurrences of this expression in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, 2 and 22, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibidem* 19, 5: “διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ἡ ἀγία σύνοδος λευκότερον εἶρηκεν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῦ πατρὸς, ἵνα καὶ ἄλλος παρὰ τὴν τῶν γεννητῶν φύσιν ὁ λόγος εἶναι πιστευθῆι μόνος ὢν ἀληθῶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ”.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius used this formulation in his treatise *De ecclesiastica theologia*, written after the Council at Nicaea. Cf. *ibidem* I 11, 6, GCS 14, 70: “the Father generated the Son from himself (ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ ἐγέννα)”; *ibidem* II 6, 3, GCS 14, 103: “μονὰς δὲ ὢν ἀδιαίρετος ὁ θεὸς τὸν μονογενῆ αὐτοῦ υἱὸν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ ἐγέννα”.

<sup>29</sup> Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 20, 1: “Τῶν δὲ ἐπισκόπων πάλιν λεγόντων δεῖν γραφῆναι δύναμιν ἀληθινήν καὶ εἰκόνα τοῦ πατρὸς τὸν λόγον ὅμοιον τε καὶ ἀπαράλλακτον

In the previous chapter *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19, the generation of the Son and his origin in the Father was at issue. Now the intention of the bishops to express the divine status of the Word of God is related to by Athanasius. The majority of the expressions used in the quoted passage are not found in the Nicene Creed, with only the Nicene anathema “there was when he was not” being alluded to. In the first section of the quoted passage, the expressions “image of the Father” and “in all things exact and like the Father” are mentioned. They are particularly common in texts by theologians of different teaching in the period before *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* was written. The phrase that the Word is “like” (ὅμοιος) the Father is too loose and it was the Eusebians who expressed the relationship between the Son and the Father with the language of “likeness”. As we have seen above, Eusebius of Caesarea in the *Letter to his Diocese* expounded ὁμοούσιος as the term for the Son “being likened” to the Father. The other adjective used in the quote above, “exact” (ἀπαράλλακτος), is attested to in the expression the “exact image” (ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκόν) of the Father in the fragments of Asterius of Cappadocia, a supporter of Arius and one of the main opponents in the Athanasius’ *Orationes contra Arianos*<sup>30</sup>. The expression ὁμοίον τε καὶ ἀπαράλλακτον would seem to belong to the terminology of opponents as Athanasius understood their position.

In the middle part of the above quoted passage, the Word is referred to as “inalterable, always existing and in the Father without division”. These terms, used for the Word of God, may have been an implicit polemic with Eusebius’ arguments, defending the inalterability and indivisibility of the Father. For Athanasius, the Son Logos is inalterable in the same way as the Father is and the generated Son is in the Father without division. At the same time it seems that Athanasius made a step forward beyond the results of the Council of Nicaea using the expression “always existing”: Eusebius in his own creed used the phrase “the Son was begotten from the Father “before all ages” (πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων)”<sup>31</sup>,

αὐτὸν κατὰ πάντα τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀδιαιρέτως – οὐδέποτε γὰρ οὐκ ἦν, ἀλλὰ ἦν ὁ λόγος ἀεὶ ὑπάρχων αἰδίως παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὡς ἀπαύγασμα φωτός”.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Asterius of Cappadocia, *Fragmenta* 10 (ed. M. Vinzent, Asterius von Kappadokien, *Die theologischen Fragmente*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 20, Leiden 1993, 86). The same expression was defended by Acacius too; see Acacius’ fragments in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 72, 6-10, and the so-called *Second Creed of Antioch* (341) in *De synodis* 23, 3. In the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea the expression ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκόν is not found. Athanasius himself used ἀπαράλλακτος εἰκόν in his treatises written earlier than *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* (see *Contra gentes* 41 and 46; *Oratio contra Arianos* I 26, 4; ibidem II 33, 3 etc.) in the meaning *identical image* and the term *exact likeness* in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24, 1 (see below, chapter 2.c). Later, in *De synodis* (probably written in 357), Athanasius rejected the expression “exact image” in the polemic with Acacius and Eusebius of Nicomedia; cf. *De synodis* 36, 6. For a discussion on the term *exact image* see M. DelCogliano, *Eusebian Theologies of the Son as the Image of God before 341*, J ECS 14 (2006) 459-484.

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *Epistula ad Caesarienses* 4, DSP 1, 54.

in the Nicene Creed, the eternity or everlasting origin of the Son in the Father is not expressed with any proper word<sup>32</sup>.

It seems that in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 20 Athanasius again provided two sets of terms, one that would seem to be acceptable to the Eusebians from the Athanasius' point of view (the Word is "like" and an "exact" image) and the second nearer to the position of Athanasius himself (the terms "inalterable", "always existing", "in the Father without division"). Athanasius claimed below in chapter 20 that the Eusebians searched in the Scriptures for the passages containing the words "like", "always", "in him" (i.e. the Father), "inalterable" and "power" which could be interpreted as expressions applied to the Son of God as well as to men as the adopted sons of God. The bishops at Nicaea therefore must have expressed their belief more clearly and wrote that "the Son is ὁμοούσιος with the Father".

[Bishops] wrote that the Son is ὁμοούσιος with the Father to signify that the Son was not merely like, but the same in likeness from the Father, and to demonstrate that the Son's likeness and inalterability was of a different kind than imitation as is ascribed to us<sup>33</sup>.

According to Athanasius, the phrase indicates that the Son is not only like, but "the same in likeness from the Father" (ταὐτὸν τῇ ὁμοιώσει ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς) and "demonstrates that the Son's likeness and inalterability was of a different kind" than the imitation ascribed to men. The implication of the uniqueness of the Son's generation is that he is "not only like, but also inseparable from the essence of the Father and that he and the Father are one"<sup>34</sup>. We can once again see how Athanasius expounded the Nicene term – in this case ὁμοούσιος – with his own expressions, thereby clarifying the meaning<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Symbolum Nicaenum*, passage quoted in the note 22, without any expression for eternity of the Son's generation. The Nicene Creed rejected certain unacceptable formulations regarding the Son's being with the Father ("there was when he was not" and "he did not exist before he was begotten") and on his inalterability (he is not "mutable" or "changeable"), but there is not any affirmative expression in the Creed for the Son's eternal existence. Cf. also Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 20, 3: "ταῦτα πάλιν λευκότερον εἶπεν καὶ γράψαι, ὁμοούσιον εἶναι τῷ πατρὶ τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα μὴ μόνον ὅμοιον τὸν υἱόν, ἀλλὰ ταὐτὸν τῇ ὁμοιώσει ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι σημαίνωσι καὶ ἄλλην οὐσαν τὴν τοῦ υἱοῦ ὁμοίωσιν καὶ ἀτρεψίαν δείξωσι παρὰ τὴν ἐν ἡμῖν λεγομένην μίμησιν".

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem* 20, 5: "ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ ἐκ πατρὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ γέννησις ἄλλη παρὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπων φύσιν ἐστὶ καὶ οὐ μόνον ὅμοιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀδιαίρετός ἐστι τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας καὶ ἔν μὲν εἰσιν αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ πατήρ".

<sup>35</sup> Cf. D. Gonnet, *La réception de Nicée I par Athanase: quels types de langage utilise-t-il pour parler du Verbe?*, in: *Christus bei den Vätern: Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens*, ed. Y. de Andia – P. Leander Hofrichter, Innsbruck 2003, 157-163, espec. p. 159: "[O]n peut constater la prudence d'Athanase par rapport au langage même du Concile. Dire qu'il le soutient ne l'empêche pas de chercher d'autres moyens et expressions pour dire la teneur d'un mot – *homoousion* – qui n'est pas tiré directement de l'Écriture".

Athanasius expounded ὁμοούσιος as the term for the Father's essence which is fully shared (i.e. without division: ἀδιάρητος) by the Son. What is surprising is that Athanasius did not completely abandon the compounds based on the adjective "like" as a consequence of the acceptance of the Nicene terminology<sup>36</sup>. In his definition of ὁμοούσιος, Athanasius used the term ὁμοίωσις both when he emphasized the sameness of the Son with the Father<sup>37</sup> and when he stressed the difference of the Son from men who can acquire their likeness to God from virtue on the grounds of observance: Only the Son has both a likeness and inalterability (ὁμοίωσιν καὶ ἀτρέψιαν). As we saw in Eusebius' letter, the Caesarean bishop used the language of likeness in the passage explaining ὁμοούσιος as well, but an influence on Athanasius' exposition containing the expression for likeness seems to be improbable. A polemical hint to Eusebius' letter seems to be more evident from another word: For Athanasius ὁμοούσιος does not threaten "indivisibility" in the Godhead (μὴ [...] διαίρεσεις τῆς θεότητος), as Eusebius feared. It, on the contrary, expresses the indivisible unity of the Father and Son.

**c) Athanasius' definition of ὁμοούσιος in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24.** Another clarification of ὁμοούσιος can be found below in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24, 1-2. Athanasius first used three biblical metaphors to qualify the relation of unity between the two divine persons, the metaphor of the Father and Son, God and his Word and light and its radiance: "leaving every corporeal reference aside [...] let us apprehend genuine relation of the Son to the Father, the proper relationship of the Word toward God and absolute likeness of the radiance toward the light". Athanasius consequently explained the term ὁμοούσιος:

"When we hear ὁμοούσιος, let us not fall upon human senses and imagine partitions and divisions in the Godhead, but as having our thoughts directed to things immaterial, let us preserve undivided the oneness of nature (τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς φύσεως) and the identity (τὴν ταυτότητα) of light"<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. occurrences of the language based on the adjective *like* in his earlier writings: Athanasius, *Oratio contra Arianos* I 39, 5: "Γέννημα γὰρ τῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς οὐσίας ὑπάρχει, ὥστε μηδένα ἀμφιβάλλειν, ὅτι καθ' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ ἀτρέπτου Πατρὸς ἀτρέπτος ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ Λόγος"; *ibidem* III 36, 1, 3: "ὁ ἀΐδιος Υἱὸς ἐστὶ, διὰ μὲν τὴν ὁμοιότητα τοῦ Πατρὸς ἔχων ἀΐδιος ἄπερ ἔχει παρ' αὐτοῦ"; *ibidem*, III 44, 4, etc.

<sup>37</sup> For the expressions of sameness (ταυτόν and ταυτότης) cf. also *ibidem* I 22, 1: "ἔχων ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς τὴν ταυτότητα"; with the interpretations of John 10, 30 and 14, 10 in: *ibidem* III 3, 3 and III 4, 2; and of John 17, 23 in: *ibidem* III 22; with a rejection of Sabellius' heresy in: *ibidem* III 36, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24, 1: "νοῶμεν υἱοῦ πρὸς πατέρα τὸ γνήσιον καὶ λόγου τὴν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ιδιότητα καὶ τὴν ἀπαράλλακτον ὁμοιότητα τοῦ ἀπαυγασματος πρὸς τὸ φῶς. [...] τὴν λέξιν τοῦ ὁμοουσιου ἀκούοντες μὴ εἰς τὰς ἀνθρωπίνους αἰσθήσεις πίπτοντες μερισμοὺς καὶ διαίρεσεις τῆς θεότητος λογιζόμεθα: ἀλλ' ὡς ἐπὶ ἀσωμάτων διανοοῦμενοι τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὴν ταυτότητα τοῦ φωτὸς μὴ διαίρωμεν".

The term ὁμοούσιος is expounded here once again as the expression for the oneness of nature and identity. The two-stage definition (first negative, than affirmative) in Eusebius' letter is also apparent. In spite of the fact that Eusebius' affirmative definition (likeness in all things) was unsatisfactory for Athanasius, the argumentation in the *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24, when compared with Eusebius' letter, seems to have preserved the structure and correspondences in terminology in the negative part of the definition.

**3. Nicene terminology as rooted in the teaching of the Church scholars (*De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 25).** Athanasius defended the Nicene terminology as traditional in chapter 25 and not having been invented in the course of the Nicene council. The Nicene bishops used expressions which they “took over from their predecessors (παρὰ τῶν πρὸ αὐτῶν παραλαβόντες)” and it was important for Athanasius to demonstrate this, “so that (the opponents) had no excuse”<sup>39</sup>. Athanasius may have found instigation for this in Eusebius' *Letter to his Diocese*. When defending his subscription of the term ὁμοούσιος, Eusebius wrote:

“To that term (i.e. ὁμοούσιος), 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 ὁμοούσιος in their theological teaching concerning the Father and Son”<sup>40</sup>.

The insufficiency of this claim is apparent. Eusebius did not mention any of those “learned and illustrious bishops and writers” in his letter to the Caesarean diocese<sup>41</sup>. On the contrary, Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 25 listed the names of bishops who assented to “from the essence” and ὁμοούσιος before the Council of Nicaea and even cited passages from the texts of Theognostos and Dionysios of Alexandria. He introduced the statements of Dionysios of Rome and Origen below in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 26-27 concerning the terms used in the Nicene Creed. Athanasius seems to have used a loose statement from Eusebius' letter as an impulse for his own investigation<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem 25, 1-2: “ὅτι δὲ οὐχ ἑαυτοῖς πλάσαντες ἐπενόησαν ταύτας, ἐπειδὴ καὶ τοῦτο προφασίζονται, ἀλλ’ ἄνωθεν παρὰ τῶν πρὸ αὐτῶν παραλαβόντες εἰρήκασι, φέρε καὶ τοῦτο διελέγξωμεν, ἵνα μὴδὲ αὕτη αὐτοῖς ἡ πρόφασις περιλείπηται”.

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius, *Epistula ad Caesarienses* 13, DSP 1, 58: “ὅ καὶ αὐτῷ τοῦτον ἐρμηνευθέντι τὸν τρόπον καλῶς ἔχειν ἐφάνη συγκαταθέσθαι, ἐπεὶ καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν τινὰς λογίους καὶ ἐπιφανεῖς ἐπισκόπους καὶ συγγραφεῖς ἔγνωμεν ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ θεολογίας τῷ τοῦ ὁμοουσίου χρησαμένους ὀνόματι”.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. L. Abramowski, *Dionys von Rom und Dionys von Alexandrien in der arianischen Streitigkeiten des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ZKG 93 (1982) 240-272, particularly p. 245 and note 21.

<sup>42</sup> Athanasius mentioned the Eusebius' remark explicitly in his later treatise *Epistula ad Afros episcopos*, PG 26, 1040.

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A comparison with Eusebius' account demonstrates that Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* affirmed an overall exposition of the debate on the Nicene Creed and indicated the same Nicene terms ("from the essence of the Father" and "ὁμοούσιος with the Father") as the most controversial. In certain passages, the impact of Eusebius' letter on *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* may have been evident in the details. Only indirect and not easily discernable polemical hints to formulations from Eusebius' letter can be found (possibly phrases with the words ἀληθῶς and ἰδιόρρητος) in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 19 and 20. In *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24, Athanasius may have preserved the two-stage structure of the definition of ὁμοούσιος, having in mind Eusebius' letter where ὁμοούσιος is first qualified negatively and then a positive explanation is offered. In *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 25, an implicit hint to the mentioning of Nicene predecessors in Eusebius' letter can be encountered. In spite of the fact that Eusebius was not the main opponent of Athanasius in *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, we can nevertheless determine an implicit polemic with Eusebius' arguments in certain instances. It seems that Athanasius carefully considered Eusebius' arguments and the weak points in Eusebius' comments as impulses for his own theological narrative.

OBRONA NICEJSKIEJ TERMINOLOGII W *DE DECRETIS  
NICAENAE SYNODI* ATANAZEGO ALEKSANDRYJSKIEGO  
I MOŻLIWY WPŁYW *EPISTULA AD CAESARIENSES*  
EUZEBIUSZA Z CEZAREI

(Streszczenie)

Celem artykułu jest porównanie dwóch narracji teologicznych – zawartych w *Epistula ad Caesarienses* Euzebiusza z Cezarei i *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* Atanazego Aleksandryjskiego – prezentujących orzeczenia Soboru Nicejskiego i mających na celu doprowadzenie do uznania *Credo* nicejskiego. W niniejszym opracowaniu została dokonana przede wszystkim analiza rozdziałów 19. i 20. *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*, w których mogą być obecne sugestie polemiczne w stosunku do sformułowań z listu Euzebiusza. Obiektem badań jest także zawarta w *De decretis Nicaenae synodi* 24 dwustopniowa struktura definicji ὁμοούσιος, która może mieć swoje źródła w liście Euzebiusza. Godny prześledzenia jest także fragment 25. dzieła Atanazego zawierający ukryte aluzje do wzmianki o nicejskich poprzednikach w piśmie Euzebiusza. Na podstawie analiz tych fragmentów wydaje się, że Atanazy dokładnie rozważył argumenty i słabe punkty wywodów Euzebiusza i stało się to podstawą do jego własnej narracji teologicznej broniącej nicejskiego wyznania wiary.

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**Key words:** trinitarian terminology, Nicene Council, Athanasius of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea.

**Słowa kluczowe:** terminologia trynitarna, Sobór Nicejski, Atanazy Aleksandryjski, Euzebiusz z Cezarei

