

Gregory of Elvira and the *Homousios* Formula

Gregorio de Elvira y la fórmula *homousios*

Richard A. Brumback III

Freed-Hardeman University

Henderson, TN, U.S.A.

rbrumback@fhu.edu

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4304-6220>

Abstract: Though the details about Gregory of Elvira's personal life and much of his ecclesial work are sparse, we do possess information concerning his pastoral concerns and his position in the Christological disputes of his era. These insights come from his own writings as well as the comments offered to him and about him from his contemporaries. His writings demonstrate a rather wide-ranging familiarity with western theologians such as Tertullian, Novatian, Lactantius, and Hilary, but Gregory was not simply a copyist. He was willing to utilize and then expand upon his sources as he saw fit, and this is especially visible in his Christological materials. This article will examine these influences on Gregory, especially regarding his promotion of the Nicene creed, both from his setting in Roman Spain and from the literary and theological sources he drew upon. These demonstrate that Gregory supported the theology of the Nicene creed even as he learned to refine his own language and expand his defense of the creed and its key term *homousios*.

Resumen: Aunque los detalles sobre la vida personal de Gregorio de Elvira y gran parte de su obra eclesial son escasos, poseemos información relativa a sus preocupaciones pastorales y a su postura en las disputas cristológicas de su época. Estos datos proceden de sus propios escritos, así como de los comentarios que sus contemporáneos hicieron de él. Sus escritos demuestran una amplia familiaridad con teólogos occidentales como Tertuliano, Novaciano, Lactancio e Hilario, pero Gregorio no fue un simple copista. Estaba dispuesto a utilizar y luego ampliar sus fuentes como le pareció oportuno. Esto es especialmente visible en sus reflexiones cristológicas. Este artículo examinará estas influencias sobre Gregorio, especialmente en lo que respecta a su promoción del credo niceno, tanto en su entorno de la Hispania romana como en las fuentes literarias y teológicas en las que se basó. Estas demuestran que Gregorio apoyó la teología del credo niceno incluso cuando aprendió a refinar su propio lenguaje y a ampliar su defensa del credo y del término clave *homousios*.

Keywords: Gregory of Elvira, Nicea, Christology, *homousios* formula, *De fide orthodoxa*, Anti-Arian Controversy.

Palabras clave: Gregorio de Elvira, Nicea, cristología, fórmula *homousios*, *De fide orthodoxa*, Controversia antiarriana.

From all available data, Gregory of Elvira is well-known for having been a pro-Nicene defender throughout his career. However, with the relatively sparse details we have about his life, it is necessary to construct a more thorough picture of his ecclesial work and the context in which he labored by drawing heavily upon his literary output and associated connections with his predecessors and peers. The aim of this essay is to emphasize his perduring commitment to the concept of consubstantiality and Nicene orthodoxy by examining his background in the Iberian context, the sources which impacted his thinking and writing, his importance as an early witness to the Nicene creed, and the manner in which he defended its use both against critics and those whom he regarded as heretics. Although this brief treatment cannot exhaust all lines of inquiry, it does highlight significant elements of his theology and perhaps suggests further trajectories for study.

1. GREGORY AND HIS CONTEXT

Although Gregory appears to us as a pro-Nicene theologian, it is reasonable to ask whether we can identify any particular influences from the figures of his past or his social context that contributed to his theological stability on a matter so explosive and in flux for virtually his entire adult life.¹ The canons of the Synod of Elvira (ca. 303/4) reveal a concern for maintaining

¹ Within this article, the following abbreviations will be used: *De fide*=*De fide orthodoxa* of Gregory; 1r=the first recension of *De fide*; 2r=the second recension of *De fide*; TO=*Tractatus Origenis* of Gregory; CA=*Contra Arianos* of Phoebadius; EOMIA=*Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima*; HE=*Historia Ecclesiastica*; PG=*Patrologiae Graece*; PL=*Patrologiae Latina*; CSEL= *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*; CCSL= *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*; *Adv. Prax.*=*Aduersus Praxean* of Tertullian; CAP=*Collectanea Antiariana Parisina*. All translation are the author's unless otherwise specified.

the Christian identity in the communities of Spain in the presence of continuing pagan practices and ongoing Jewish presence.² But the canons also highlight a concern for right doctrine, i.e., rebuffing “heresy.” This conflict with Judaism and those Gregory labelled as heretics can be seen extensively in the content of the bishop’s homilies, often in the same texts.³ Gregory’s typical exegetical method in his homilies involved citing an Old Testament text, providing a discussion of context, and then allegorizing the passage’s elements and connecting them with his Christological, ecclesiological, and soteriological concerns.⁴ This in turn yielded opportunity to speak of those he believed to be in error on any of these latter topics, figures whom he often identified as heretics. With this theological mix and the need to provide his congregation with proper teaching and pastoral protection,⁵ we might expect a certain theological rigorism in this region based upon the canons of the synod and subsequent circumstances involving Gregory mentioned below.

The bishop of Cordova in the first half of the fourth century was Ossius, an influential figure in consular Baetica. Ossius was bishop of Cordova during the Synod of Elvira and perhaps even one of the bishops presiding over the gathering. About two decades later, Ossius was utilized by Constantine in attempting to settle the dispute that had arisen between Arius and Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and that had expanded to engulf the church in the eastern half of the empire.

² There is some uncertainty regarding the date of this synod in light of the persecution under Diocletian at the start of the fourth century. However, a date in the first or perhaps early second decade is standard. The canons of the synod can be found at J.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, vol. 2, 1759. Reprint, Graz, Akademische Druck – U. Verlagsanstalt, 1960, 5-20. Critical edition at Gonzalo MARTÍNEZ Díez – Félix RODRÍGUEZ (eds.), *La Colección Canónica Hispana*, IV. Madrid, C.S.I.C. Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1984, 233-268.

³ E.g., *TO* 3; 6; 11; 17; 20 (CCSL 69).

⁴ Francisco Javier MARTÍNEZ MEDINA, *San Cecilio y San Gregorio: Patronos de Granada*, Granada, Editorial Comares, 2001, 26; also noted in Costantino VONA, *Gregorio di Elvira: I Tractatus de Libris Sacrarum Scripturarum*, Roma, Libreria Editrice della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1970, 25.

⁵ MARTÍNEZ MEDINA, *San Cecilio y San Gregorio*, 28, indicates that one pastoral challenge particularly significant for Gregory is the ongoing struggle with the Jewish community in Illiberi about belief in Christ.

Ossius was appointed to meet with the principal figures in a council in Antioch in 325,⁶ but when the controversy remained unresolved, the council at Nicaea was held that summer. It is likely that once again Ossius was appointed to preside.⁷ While some historical records attribute the authorship of the resulting Nicene creed to Ossius, several sources credit the creed to other figures. In fact, it is unlikely that Ossius was the author, though he followed Constantine's lead by subscribing to the statement of faith, including the term *homousios*, drawn up at the assembly.⁸

After having taken part in the gatherings of Western bishops at Serdica (343), Arles (353), and Biterrae (356), Ossius was summoned from Spain to Sirmium by Constantius and ordered, again, to condemn Athanasius. It was there, in 357, that a third Sirmium council met and drafted the homoian Sirmium Manifesto, and Ossius became a signatory to this statement.⁹ It was feared that Ossius' subscription would help expand support for the Manifesto in Hispania and the West.¹⁰ According to the later document *Libellus Precum* by the Luciferians Faustinus and Marcellinus, Ossius would later be used to pressure others to subscribe to the homoian Manifesto,

⁶ R.P.C. HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1988, 146-148, marshals evidence for Ossius' presidency.

⁷ HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 154.

⁸ According to Athanasius, Eusebius of Caesarea reported to his own congregation that Constantine was responsible for including the word *homousios* in the creed adopted at the council, and the emperor then encouraged all to sign the final statement of faith. See discussion of the introduction of *homousios* below.

⁹ ATHANASIUS, *Historia Arianorum* 45 (PG 25.749-750A), indicates that Ossius' advanced age, coupled with the austere circumstances of his stay, compelled him to sign. Both Socrates and Sozomen state he was tortured until he yielded (*HE* 2.31.1-4 [SC 493.148] and *HE* 4.6.4-5, 13 [SC 418.204, 208], respectively).

¹⁰ SOZOMEN, *HE* 4.6.4-5, 13 (SC 418.204, 208). So Phoebadius of Agen understood this intention, as indicated by his comments in *CA* 28.1 (CCSL 64.51). Cf. Aurelio PADILLA MONGE, *La Provincia Romana de la Bética* (253-422), Écija, Editorial Gráficas Sol, 1989, 102.

including pressuring Gregory of Elvira.¹¹ The *Libellus Precum* presents Gregory as the unknown but pro-Nicene stalwart who would not yield in the face of ecclesiastical and imperial pressure. But if this depiction is credible, why had Ossius departed from supporting the Nicene creed and instead adopted a homoian statement of faith? It has been proposed that the crucial matter for Ossius was not the actual statement of faith but instead the matter of ecclesial unity.¹²

The *Libellus Precum* reports events at the end of the 350s, and there are several later factors which reveal that Gregory remained unmoved by Ossius' and any other influences to adopt the homoian platform. Summarizing, we note he demonstrated his strong and sustained advocacy of the Nicene creed in his *De fide* (first edition issued ca. 360 and the second before the end of 361) and other writings such as homily 20 in his *TO*, which is dated to 361 or after.¹³ Eusebius of Vercellae also complimented Gregory for not having been part of those who subscribed at Ariminum, itself an indicator that Gregory was not present at the council.¹⁴ The *Libellus Precum* attests

¹¹ *De Confessione Uerae Fidei et Ostentatione Sacrae Communionis* (= *Libellus Precum*), ed. Manlio Simonetti (CCSL 69), Turnholt, Brepols, 1967, 33-40 (CCSL 69.368-370). The text, translation, and introduction to the *Libellus Precum* can be seen in French in Aline CANELLIS, *Supplique aux empereurs: Libellus precum et Lex Augusta* (SC 504), Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2006, and in English in Colin M. WHITING, *Documents from the Luciferians: In Defense of the Nicene Creed*, Atlanta, SBL Press, 2019.

¹² Jörg ULRICH, "Nicaea and the West," *Vigiliae Christianae* 50/1 (1997) 16 (10-24: <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007297X00093>), believes that Ossius signed willingly due to his greater concern for ecclesial peace and stability than any commitment to a particular theological position. It should not be forgotten, however, that Ossius was present at the council of Serdica (343) which explicitly censured Valens and Ursacius, and he was never willing to condemn Athanasius. Hence it is difficult to see that he would willingly reverse course so drastically.

¹³ For the dating of *TO* 20, see Richard A. BRUMBACK III, "Gregory of Elvira as an Evolving Pro-Nicene," *Studia Patristica* 127/24 (2021) 132-134 (127-134: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv27vt5md.14>).

¹⁴ "Epistula tertia: Domino sanctissimo fratri Gregorio episcopo Eusebius in domino salutem" (CCSL 9.110). Based upon Section 2 of this letter, it was written while Constantius was still alive (i.e., before 3 November 361), revealing that Gregory's defiance of any imperial command to accept the creed from Constantinople (360) was not hidden.

Gregory's fidelity, citing the past engagement with Ossius and implicitly attesting his continued pro-Nicene stance by using him in this later appeal to Emperor Theodosius I. The emperor himself spoke favorably of Gregory in his rescript to Faustinus and Marcellinus, extending to Gregory the honor of having received imperial recognition personally.¹⁵ Finally, in his *Chronicon*, Jerome stated that Lucifer of Cagliari and Gregory had never mixed with the "Arians," perhaps meaning that they were not at Ariminum and even that they did not defect from their pro-Nicene stance in the intervening years.¹⁶

In either event, it is difficult to say that Gregory's unflagging support for the concept of consubstantiality between the Father and Son owes to the context of his own church involvement vis-à-vis Ossius. It may have been shaped by the theological and pastoral challenges of his context, or by an environment more rigorous in its adherence to identity formation and maintenance.

2. GREGORY AND HIS THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

In addition to the proximate factors at work in his Iberian context, the literary influence of others, both Gregory's peers as well as his predecessors, played a substantial role in his own theological development. As Gregory's literary works have become more widely known since the early twentieth century, studies have been conducted to identify the sources he employed in his exegetical texts and homilies as well as his polemical works. The work of C. Vona has been helpful, identifying such figures as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Novatian, Minucius Felix, Hilary, Phoebadius, Zeno of Verona as possible sources for Gregory's *TO*.¹⁷ Andrew Cain has

¹⁵ *Lex Augusta* 6 (CCSL 69.392).

¹⁶ JEROME, *Chronicon* 246 (= *Die Chronik des Hieronymus*), ed. Rudolf HELM, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1956. Gregory has been historically linked with the rigorists known as the Luciferians, but it is a thorny issue with no clear indication concerning his involvement. A brief but helpful summary of issues surrounding this discussion can be found in WHITING, *Documents from the Luciferians*, 31-42 and 91n.76.

¹⁷ VONA, *Gregorio di Elvira*, 26-35. Often it is difficult to determine which particular sources Gregory may have utilized since some locutions had

identified two passages connecting Gregory with Lactantius' *Divinae institutiones* and *De ira Dei*.¹⁸ And certainly there are the various sources revealed in his *De fide*, such as Minucius Felix, Arnobius of Sicca, and others in addition to Tertullian and Phoebadius. In fact, it has been shown that Gregory's own defense of the consubstantiality of the Son continued to develop as he was exposed to the works of others.¹⁹

Gregory does not slavishly follow the sources he utilizes. Instead, he is willing (1) to adapt materials and concepts to his own situation and needs,²⁰ and (2) to diverge from those authors whom he knows and uses.²¹ Some divergences are due to his own exegetical method in which he recognizes different levels of meaning and thus different interpretations than those of his literary sources.²²

been staples among early Christian authors and speakers. Examples include Tertullian's *Aduersus Iudaeos* 2-3 and *TO* 4; *Aduersus Marcionem* 5 and *TO* 4; Minucius Felix's *Octavius* 18 and *TO* 1, also 34-35 and *TO* 17; *Novation's De Trinitate* 6 and *TO* 1, also 29 and *TO* 19 and 20; Zeno of Verona's *Sermones* 1.13 and *TO* 4. It is also possible that he utilized works found among intermediaries. For example, Karl SHUVE, "Origen and the *Tractatus de Epithalamio* of Gregory of Elvira," *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011) 199 (189-203), suggests that Gregory's knowledge of Origen's *Homilies on the Song of Songs* was mediated by the work of Victorinus of Poetovio.

¹⁸ Andrew CAIN, "Gregory of Elvira, Lactantius, and the Reception of the *De ira Dei*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010) 109-114.

¹⁹ See BRUMBACK III, "Gregory of Elvira as an Evolving Pro-Nicene."

²⁰ Joaquín PASCUAL TORRÓ, in his introduction to Gregorio de Elvira, *La Fe*, Madrid, Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 1998, 34-35, remarks that Gregory was heavily influenced by Tertullian's *Adv. Prax.*, but that there is a true originality to Gregory's work as he adapted the materials to his own opponents quite different from the monarchianism faced by the African theologian.

²¹ For example, in an earlier study Francesco REGINA catalogued several doctrinal difference between Phoebadius' *CA* and the *De fide* as having helped determine that the two works were from two different authors, and yet Gregory undoubtedly makes us of Phoebadius' work (*Il "De Fide" di Gregorio d'Elvira*, Napoli, S. Luigi – Posillipo, 1942, 8).

²² See Manlio SIMONETTI, *Lettera e/o allegoria. Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica*, Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1985, 264-268.

Other divergences reveal his willingness to expand constructively upon theological and conceptual elements initially drawn from others. As an example of Gregory's willingness to draw upon sources, whether directly from another figure or as a common patristic trope, we see this in his explanation of the church in *TO* 11. The story of the twelve spies returning from Canaan with the fruit from the land as proof of its riches was commonly employed in the early church to speak of Christ's crucifixion. Corrado Leonardi has catalogued patristic writers who used this section from Numbers 13 and the way in which it was explained and expanded upon by various figures such as Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian of Carthage, Zeno of Verona, Ambrose, and others—one figure he did not include, however, was Gregory of Elvira.²³ Leonardi credits Zeno with emphasizing the wooden pole on which the spoils of the land were carried as symbolizing the cross. However, Gregory of Elvira adopts this imagery from Numbers 13:23 and carries it farther. He not only allegorizes the pole carried by two men as pre-figuring the cross, with Christ suspended between the two peoples of the Jews and Christians, but he also expands the description of the fruits. He envisioned the cluster of grapes from this land of promise as signifying Christ having come from the virgin Mary as promised in the scriptures. The figs are said to represent the nation of Israel and the church which was to come, but Gregory explains the pomegranate in a particularly creative fashion. The external skin of the pomegranate he linked to the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit and firmness of faith while the fruit hangs on the tree, which is a type of the cross. And the individual pomegranate seeds, with their red and translucent appearance, are said to be the multitude of people in the church, each with different gifts, merits, and offices.²⁴ As we see in this example, he is willing to creatively extend the allegorizing and not merely repeat his sources or common expositions.

²³ Corrado LEONARDI, *Ampelos: Il Simbolo della Vite nell'Arte Pagan e Paleocristiana*, Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche, 1947, 151-163.

²⁴ *TO* 11.15, 18-30 (CCSL 69.87-90).

We see this as well in his polemics as he adopts Hilary's basic strategies advocating *homousios* and the particular use of the preposition *de* to explain the Son's generation from the Father. This germinates from Hilary's presentation of the Nicene creed and the associated commentary in the *Fragment*, but Gregory extends them well beyond what Hilary expressed. Subsequently, Gregory's polemics are themselves adopted by his contemporaries and later figures. In short, he does not merely recapitulate; he is willing to formulate, and this will have an impact on the fortunes of the Nicene creed heading into the second half of the fourth century.

3. GREGORY'S PRESENTATION OF THE NICENE CREED

The period of continued creed-making following the council in Nicaea testifies to the general outlook that the Nicene formula was not the ultimate theological statement on the relation between the Father and Son that it would grow to be in the ensuing decades.²⁵ As a statement that was largely intended to block a particular theology, it did not become the rallying point for advocates of consubstantiality until about the 350s, and concomitantly the Nicene creed, with its term *homousios*, largely recedes from sight in the interval between 325 and the later 350s. However, perhaps due to the fatigue of formulating and jockeying over subsequent creeds, as well as the clarifying and crystallizing of theological terms and expressions, the Nicene creed began to emerge from the shadows. Our earliest copies of the creed in Latin are found in five sources. During his exilic peregrinations throughout the eastern empire, Hilary of Poitiers

²⁵ There are several learned treatments of this period of theological exploration and creed-making: HANSON's *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* devotes two major sections to the period following the Council of Nicaea (325); also T.D. BARNES, *Athanasius and Constantius*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993; Lewis AYRES, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; Sara PARVIS, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy 324-345*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006; and David M. GWYNN, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

played a signal role in helping bridge the gap between eastern and western ecclesiastics. His *De synodis*, penned and sent west in order to apprise western bishops of eastern activities, included a copy of the creed in Latin.²⁶ The second copy of the creed is also from Hilary, this time in his *Fragmenta Historica*,²⁷ also dated to ca. 358 though there are some slight differences between his two versions that are significant, as we note below. Lucifer of Cagliari provides a third Latin edition of the creed in his *De non parcendo in deum delinquentibus*.²⁸ Dated slightly later than Hilary's copies, at 359/360, it also demonstrates an awareness of the theological turn to use of specific prepositions in the Latin version. The fourth Latin copy is that of Gregory of Elvira in the second recension of his *De fide orthodoxa*, dated before the end of 361.²⁹ The fifth early Latin copy of the creed is from the *Incipit fides Nicaena*, likely dated to the 360s.³⁰

²⁶ HILARY, *De synodis* 84 (PL 10.536A-B). Wolfram KINZIG (ed.), *Faith in Formulae*, 4 vols. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, §135.d.3 (1:295). For a recent and helpful treatment of Hilary's efforts to clarify theological terminology for the benefit of western ecclesiastics, see Almudena ALBA LÓPEZ, "Hilario de Poitiers y la fe de los orientales. Una reflexión sobre la influencia del exilio en su comprensión de las querellas teológicas de su tiempo" *Isidorianum* 30/2 (2021) 11-32 (<https://doi.org/10.46543/ISID.2130.1053>). Hilary addressed the language of the Son's origins with the Father yet without any modalistic equating of the Father and Son, and this had been treated by Tertullian more than a century prior in his text *Adversus Praxean*. For an assessment of Tertullian's manner of articulating the unity of the Father and Son while maintaining necessary distinctions, see Richard BRUMBACK, "Tertullian's Trinitarian Monarchy in *Adversus Praxean*: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Studia Patristica* 65/13 (2013) 367-377.

²⁷ CAP B II.10 (CSEL 65.150); KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.1 (1:294).

²⁸ LUCIFER OF CAGLIARI, *De non parcendo in deum delinquentibus* 18 (CCSL 8.229).

²⁹ GREGORIO DI ELVIRA, *La fede*, Introduction, critical text, translation and notes M. SIMONETTI (Corona Patrum 3), Torino, Soc. Editrice Internazionale, 1975, 56-58. Also found in KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.6 (1:297), with these differences: punctuation differs with the inclusion of a few commas; "per quem omnia facta sunt siue quae" inverts the last two words to "per quem omnia facta sunt quae siue"; and "in" precedes "spiritum sanctum."

³⁰ *EOMIA* 1:2:1:298, with associated *Commentarius* on pages 330-347. Also found in KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.2 (1:294-95), with these differences: punctuation differs with the inclusion of a few commas; "et"

It is unclear why Gregory did not include it with his first recension. Ulrich claims that it was added to the *2r* to prove Gregory's own Trinitarian orthodoxy,³¹ but that would mean that his own identity as a defender of the consubstantiality of the Father and Son was not sufficiently established prior to the issuance of the second edition: proof was needed to vindicate Gregory as a pro-Nicene. Several considerations contravene this. First, he affirms the concept of consubstantiality, the "of one essence/substantia" of Father and Son, in texts such as *TO* 3.34; 6.35; and 20.16. Second, the *1r* explicitly uses *homousios* and the language of "one essence/substance,"³² and despite any misgivings by its initial readers, the first edition was later included with Ambrose's works *De fide ad Gratianum* and the *Gesta Aquileiensia* associated with the Council of Aquileia (381).³³ Further, his mention in the *Libellus Precum* as resisting Ossius was certainly part of his reputation as a bishop and pastor. Perhaps the creed was added to the second as a means of further bolstering his defense of consubstantiality; he made other alterations for precisely this purpose. At the same time, if the creed were as unknown in the west as it appears from the limited sources containing the creed, its inclusion in the *2r* may have been intended to publicize the creed just as Hilary had done with his documents. Given Gregory's own remarks in the preface to the second recension about the extemporaneous and anonymous circulation of the first edition, we may be justified in regarding the first as an unfinished draft of his theological polemic which unexpectedly began to circulate without thought for including the creed.

is placed before "resurrexit" rather than before "incarnatus"; and "homousion" is in Greek lettering (ὁμοούσιον). All five are summarized by D.H. WILLIAMS, "A Catechetical Address on the Nicene Creed?" *Harvard Theological Review* 104/2 (2011) 217-232.

³¹ ULRICH, "Nicaea and the West," 20.

³² See *De fide* 32; 38; 45 for explicit use of this word from Nicaea. Indeed, his use of the word in the *1r* indicates that he knew the word and objections to it before even issuing the *2r*.

³³ ANDRÄ WILMART, "La tradition des opuscles dogmatiques de Foebadius, Gregorius Illiberitanus, Faustinus," *Sitzungsberichte Akademie Wien* 159 (1908) 11-15.

Though these five, the earliest Latin editions of the Nicene creed, are substantially similar, an important distinction emerges concerning the prepositions used to express the Son's origin with and relation to the Father. Whereas the text of *De synodis* employs both *ex* and *de* to describe the Son's relation to the Father, the edition in the *Fragmenta* instead uses only *de*. The same editing is manifested in the anathemas associated with each of his editions of the creed. In the *De synodis* edition, the relevant section of the anathema states "et quod de non extantibus factus est, uel ex alia substantia aut essentia" whereas the anathemas in the *Fragmenta* read "ex nullis extantibus" and "ex uocantur."³⁴ In the associated commentary on the creed, he states of "that confession," i.e., the Sirmium manifesto, that it says " 'deum ex deo,' 'lumen ex lumine,' ut per occasionem confessionis istius ex deo ac lumine deus ac lumen factus a deo, non genitus de deo, id est non de substantia paternae aeternitatis...."³⁵ Not only is Hilary limiting himself to *de* as the way to speak of the Son's origins with the Father; he is now censuring his opponents in both the anathemas and his commentary for using prepositions other than *de*,³⁶ a distinction he did not make in *De synodis*. This suggests that the *Fragmenta* edition is a later reworking revealing Hilary's greater linguistic precision and insistence on *de*.

³⁴ HILARY, *De synodis* 84 (PL 10.536A-B); KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.3 (1:295). CAP B.II.10 (CSEL 65.150); KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.1 (1:294). He also cites the phrase "alia substantia dicentes" in the anathemas of the *Fragmenta*, and one may wonder if he is rejecting the ablative form as a means of showing source or generation for the Son. However, in the associated commentary he employs the ablative in "filium substantia aeternitatis aeternum" to speak of the Son's origins with the Father, so his use of the ablative seems not to be precise and theologically loaded as the prepositions *de* and *ex* (CAP B.II.11.1 [CSEL 65.151]).

³⁵ HILARY, CAP B.II.11.2 (CSEL 65.151).

³⁶ But note that this is not apparent in Lionel R. WICKHAM's helpful English translation of the *Fragmenta*, where the underlying Latin prepositions are all translated as "of" or "from" without revealing the original words. The only exception is his retained transliteration "ex uocantur" (*Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth-century Church*, Translated Texts for Historians Vol. 25. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1997, 61-62).

Lucifer and Gregory's editions also are restrictive in the use of only *de* for the Son, but the *Incipit fides Nicaena* uses both *ex* and *de* for the Son.³⁷

We may see Hilary's reissuing of the creed, with an updated insistence on *de*, as an earlier parallel to Gregory's own emerging theological sensibility in his altering of the first recension of *De fide* to only use *de* for the Son in the second recension.³⁸ We do well to note that these figures were developing their own linguistic terminology during this time, especially given the differences between Greek and Latin that were explored and then employed to further their cases for the consubstantiality of the Father and Son.

4. DEFENDING THE WORD *HOMOUSIOS*

The formula adopted at Nicaea in 325 has been called an apotropaic statement of faith—its intended purpose was less to specify the exact nature of the Son's relationship to the Father and instead to exclude the views of Arius and his associates. The term *homousios* was the word, according to Eusebius of Caesarea introduced by Constantine himself, which would ultimately become the affirmative statement of this consubstantial relationship.³⁹

³⁷ In his presentation of these five occurrences of the Nicene creed, Kinzig does not indicate a recognition of the distinction and significance in the prepositions used in each of the five. Consequently, he places these in a different chronological order, with Hilary's *Fragmenta* version first, followed by Lucifer's, that of Hilary's *De syondis*, the *Incipit fides Nicaena*, and finally Gregory's edition (KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §135.d.1-3, 5-6; 1:294-297). But this ordering is problematic precisely because of the care Hilary and Gregory have begun to manifest over the use of prepositions.

³⁸ BRUMBACK III, "Gregory of Elvira as an Evolving Pro-Nicene," 133-134. Significant sections of the *De fide* (e.g., 32-41) reveal this vigorous scrupling over prepositions.

³⁹ This is from a letter from Eusebius of Caesarea to his own congregation concerning the activities at the Nicene council. Athanasius appends this letter to his own presentation of the proceedings in *de Decretis* (Hans GEORG-OPITZ, *Athanasius Werke* III/1, Urk. 22. Berlin, de Gruyter, 1935, 44). However, no *acta* from the council survive and the exact proceedings are difficult to establish firmly.

The Sirmium Manifesto explicitly repudiated any *ousia* language, and it ostensibly had imperial sanction behind it. Since the term *homousios* had been such a flashpoint, we might ask how Gregory came to accept it and advocate for it. The term was not found in scripture, and this was one of the two alleged reasons that the Manifesto oppugned it.⁴⁰ However, pro-Nicenes frequently argued that the scriptures did uphold the concepts inherent in the term if not the word itself. For example, in his *Epistula ad Afros*, Athanasius had briefly summarized scriptural metaphors and passages which he believed expressed the proper sense in which the Son is consubstantial with the Father, essentially making *homousios* a shorthand for the teachings of scripture. Further, he criticized opponents of the word for employing their own phrases which were not explicitly in scripture as well, thus undermining their own opposition to *homousios* on these grounds.⁴¹ Similarly, Hilary devoted a significant section of *De synodis* to discussing the meaning of *homousios* and explaining that it summarized both what scripture affirms and what he himself had believed prior to hearing the term. But he says it expresses his belief helpfully.⁴² Marius Victorinus expansively discussed how *homou-*

⁴⁰ KINZIG, *Faith in Formulae*, §154.a.3 (1:404). “Quod vero quosdam aut multos movebat de substantia, quae Graece usia appellatur, id est, ut expressius intellegatur, homousion, aut quod dicitur homoeusion, nullam omnino fieri oportere mentionem nec quemquam praedicare ea de causa et ratione, quod nec in divinis scripturis contineatur et quod super hominis scientiam sit nec quisquam possit nativitatem filii enarrare, de quo scriptum est: *Generationem eius quis enarrabit?* Scire autem manifestum est solum patrem, quomodo genuerit filium suum, et filium, quomodo genitus sit a patre.” “However, because some, or, more accurately, many have been agitated by the topic of substance, which in Greek is called *usia*, that is, to make it more clearly understood, *homousion*, or what is called *homoeusion*, there ought to be no mention of it at all nor anyone proclaim it for this reason and on this account, that it is not contained in the divine scriptures, and because it is beyond the knowledge of men and no one is able to explain the generation of the Son, about which it is written, ‘Who will explain his generation?’ But it is clear that only the Father knows how he begot his Son, and the Son how he was begotten by the Father.”

⁴¹ ATHANASIUS, *Epistula ad Afros* 6 (PG 26.1039B-C).

⁴² HILARY, *De synodis* 83-88 (PL 535B-541A).

sios should be understood, equating it to “consubstantialem,” “simul substantialem,” “de eadem substantia,” and “in eadem substantia.”⁴³ It appears that these figures are finding synonyms for “consubstantial” and *homousios*, and they will include the genitive “unius substantiae/essentiae.”

It is no surprise, then, that western bishops like Gregory would be willing to adopt *homousios* influenced as they were by Hilary and potentially other voices which explained the term in such fashion. What is noteworthy is that Athanasius and Hilary present *homousios* as concisely communicating the teachings of scripture. However, Gregory moves past this in one sense, making *de* become not just a shorthand but a necessary shorthand for consubstantiality between Father and Son. He may have adopted this from Hilary’s presentation of the creed and associated commentary in his *Fragmenta*, but Gregory has expanded his justification and demand for employing *de* as representing “of one substance/essence.”⁴⁴

Ulrich states that early Latin versions of the Nicene creed present the term *homousios* in transliteration rather than using the terms “una substantia/essentia,” especially because the true Latin equivalent of *homousios* would be “consubstantialis.”⁴⁵ However, the earliest known Latin versions of the creed—the five mentioned in this article, all have two things: (1) the transliterated word *homousios*, and (2) a statement of its equivalence to “unius substantiae/essentiae,” crediting “Greeks” (meaning eastern theologians?) with this identification. Gregory does not truly distinguish between “essentia” and “substantia”; the former appears nine times in the *2r* of

⁴³ MARIUS VICTORINUS, *Aduersus Arium* II.10-12 (PL 8.1096A-1098B).

⁴⁴ Of course, this only works for Latin, not for Greek. *EOMIA* 1:2:1:321 includes a helpful table indicating the prepositions *ex* and *de* used in several ancient Latin formulae to express the Son’s relationship with the Father.

⁴⁵ ULRICH, “Nicaea and the West,” 14. He argues that the equating of “una substantia/essentia” with *homousios* is not Nicene but rather Marcellan (“Nicaea and the West,” 17-18), and Hanson also remarks that “una substantia, ‘one substance,’ ... does not mean ‘consubstantial’” (HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 190). But one wonders if there is a distinction between the nominative and the genitive to express the concept of consubstantiality: “of one substance” can indicate origin.

De fide, while the latter is used fifty-nine times in the *2r*. And he routinely uses the phrase “*unius essentiae/substantiae*” to explain *homousios*, again employing the genitive case.

With the several references to “Sabellianism” in the *De fide*, we must ask whether this was a boilerplate mention of a heretical position or if it represented a true threat in the West at that time and Gregory needed to provide a response to his peers. The critique of his first edition highlights the concerns felt by his language deemed to be too unclear in the true distinction between persons. And while he denounced Sabellius in section 72 in the *1r*, he thought it important enough to speak against Sabellianism in both the prologue (section 9) and epilogue (section 98) of the *2r*. In section 98, he included Arius with Sabellius, but of note he also mentioned the monarchian Photinus. In his other works, he condemned Sabellius, Praxeas, and the sect of Patripassians in *TO* 3.33, and did likewise with a lengthy list of “heretics,” including Sabellius and Photinus, in *De Salomone*.⁴⁶

Nor was Gregory the only western theologian of the mid-fourth-century concerned with such groups and figures. Phoebadius also mentioned Sabellius,⁴⁷ and Hilary certainly sought to work against monarchianism, revealing that he regarded it as a current threat and addressed it in several works, including his commentary on Matthew.⁴⁸ Among fourth-century theologians there was a fear that monarchianism of whatever strain might invade through the use of consubstantial

⁴⁶ GREGORY, *De Salomone* 12.27-29 (CCSL 69.257). We acknowledge that Gregorian authorship of this document is uncertain.

⁴⁷ PHOEBADIUS, *CA* 14.1 (CCSL 64.38).

⁴⁸ HILARY, *De synodis* 37-61 (*PL* 10.508D-522A); *De trinitate* 2.23 (*PL* 10.65B). For a recent English translation of this text with introduction, see *St. Hilary: Commentary on Matthew*, trans. D.H. WILLIAMS, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2012. See D.H. WILLIAMS, “Defining Orthodoxy in Hilary of Poitiers’ *Commentarium in Matthaeum*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9/2 (2001) 151-171 (<https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2001.0036>), and Carl L. BECKWITH, “Photinian Opponents in Hilary of Poitiers’s *Commentarium in Matthaeum*,” *JEH* 58/4 (2007) 611-627 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046907002229>).

language.⁴⁹ Hence pro-Nicene figures made efforts to both disavow Sabellianism/monarchianism explicitly and to affirm a strong differentiation of persons within the Trinity, all while striving to affirm consubstantiality in the face of homoian and anhoioian theologies. It was a balancing act.

As a counter to prohibitions against using *homousios* and *ousia*-language, Gregory asks of his opponents what grounds they have for rejecting its use. In a fashion similar to Athanasius' questions in *Epistula ad Afros* about "from things which do not exist" and "there was a time when he was not" not found in scripture,⁵⁰ Gregory flips the inquisition around on his opponents, and it is worth quoting his full series of questions (with prepositions clarified):

[32.] But you say to me that ὁμοούσιον, that is, the expression "of one essence," [33.] ought not to be mentioned for this reason, namely, because it is not contained in the divine Scriptures. But I ask, O man, why do you forbid this? Should it not be mentioned because it is not written, or because it is not permissible to believe in this fashion? [34.] But if it must be believed in this way, why must it not be professed in this way? The apostle said, "*For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, but with the mouth confession is made to salvation.*"⁵¹ [35.] However, if it must not be mentioned because it should not be believed in this way, the claim of the Arian error has prevailed. It denied that the Father and Son were of one essence because it asserted that the Son of God was made sometimes out of (*ex*) nothing, sometimes out of (*ex*) the Father but from (*ab*) a different substance, when the Father wished and how he wished and from where he wished, so long as it pretends that the Son has come from some other source and not from (*de*) that which the Father is. Although it says he was born, this is as far as the significance of this word extends, since again it understands everything which is born to be made. On that account, even we would be called born of God, we who are well-known to be creatures.⁵² [36.] Or if you are not an Arian and you recognize that the true Son was born from (*de*) the true Father, not made, why do

⁴⁹ D.H. WILLIAMS, "Monarchianism and Photinus of Sirmium as the Persistent Heretical Face of the Fourth Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 99/2 (2006) 188 (187-206).

⁵⁰ ATHANASIUS, *Epistula ad Afros* 6 (PG 26.1039B).

⁵¹ Rom. 10:10.

⁵² Cf. James 1:18.

you not confess that he is of one substance with the Father? You are needlessly afraid, O man, to profess what you believe; or else you believe to no effect if you do not believe in this way, and you are rightly labeled a heretic.⁵³

Though in much shorter form, Phoebadius had asked the same type of question about *ousia*-language in his *Contra Arianos*: “What evil or what crime is in this word? In what way does it strike against the catholic faith?”⁵⁴

The body of the *De fide*, sections 32-73, turn to examining *homousios* and *ousia*-language and defending its use. That Gregory would devote such a large segment to this defense represents a momentous shift in attitudes toward this prohibition against the *ousia*-language. At the western council of Ariminum, the bishops dispatched a letter to Constantius in which they presented themselves as grateful for having been instructed to cease using this language, going so far as to call it “sacrilegious.”⁵⁵ It has been noted that at this council, this restriction appears not to have been much of an issue.⁵⁶ By the time Gregory has become apprised of these affairs, it has

⁵³ *De fide* 32-36: “[32.] Sed dicis mihi ὁμοούσιον (quod est unius essentiae nomen) ob hoc [33.] nominari non oportere, quia in scripturis diuinis non contineatur. Quaero autem, o homo, qui hoc prohibes, utrum ideo nominari non debeat, quia scriptum non est, an quia credi ita non licet. [34.] Quod si ita credendum est, cur non ita profitendum? «Corde enim» inquit apostolus «creditur ad iustitiam, ore autem fit confessio ad salutem». [35.] Aut si ideo nominandum non est, quia nec ita credendum, obtinuit Arrianae labis assertio. Quae ideo patrem et filium unius essentiae denegauit, quia filium dei modo ex nihilo, modo ex patre sed ab alia substantia, quando uoluit, et quomodo uoluit et unde uoluit factum inducit, dummodo aliunde eum et non de eo quod pater est, extitisse confingat. Quem esti natum dicit, sed hoc dicto tenus, quia rursus omne quod natum est, factum intellegit, eo quod et nos a deo geniti appellamur, quos constat esse facturam. [36.] Vel si Arrianus non es et uerum filium de uero patre natum, non factum agnoscis, cur non eum cum patre unius substantiae confiteris? Frustra times, o homo, profiteri quod credis; aut frustra credis, si ita non credis, et merito haereticus denotariss.”

⁵⁴ PHOEBADIUS, CA 7.1 (CCSL 64.29): “Quod piaculum, quod facinus in hoc uerbo? Qua ex parte catholicam fidem pulsat?”

⁵⁵ HILARY, CAP A.VI.2 (CSEL 65.87-88).

⁵⁶ See D.H. WILLIAMS, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts*, Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995, 27.

become a key issue and a significant element of his polemic in *De fide*.⁵⁷

Gregory accuses that the language “*unius essentiae*” has been removed by the homoian party even though it was affirmed by “our fathers, apostolic men filled with the Holy Spirit, set up with universal judgment as a certain barricade of truth against all heresies.”⁵⁸ He is thus linking *homousios* with “*unius essentiae*,” which he states is this “barricade.”

In defining *substantia*, Phoebadius says it is “that which is always from itself: that is, what exists characteristically within itself with power. This power is consistent with the one and only God.”⁵⁹ This appears to be a direct echo of Hilary: “For essence derives its name from that which always exists. Because what it is never needs external help in order to sustain itself, it is also called ‘substance,’ because it is that which always exists within itself, and it subsists by the power of its own eternity.”⁶⁰ But with this remark, found within the commentary on the Nicene creed, Hilary synonymizes “*essentia*” and “*substantia*,” and Gregory does not hesitate to do likewise; he then uses them to define *homousios*.

⁵⁷ But note that Phoebadius, in his *Contra Arianos* (357/8) had already objected based upon the Sirmium Manifesto even prior to the dual council in 359, as had Hilary. This would reinforce the notion that the western bishops were not yet clear about the significance of this prohibition and its intent.

⁵⁸ GREGORY, *De fide* 19: “patres nostri apostolici uiri contra uniuersas haereses...quasi quandam obicem ueritatis...sancto spiritu inundati catholica ratione posuerunt.”

⁵⁹ PHOEBADIUS, CA 7.2 (CCSL 64.29-30): “[I]d quod semper ex sese est: hoc est quod propria intra se uirtute subsistit. Quae uis uni et soli Deo competit.”

⁶⁰ PHOEBADIUS, CAP B.II.11.5 (CSEL 65.153-154): “[E]ssentia enim ex eo, quod semper est, nuncupatur. [Q]uae quia extrinsecus opis ad continendam se numquam egerit, et ‘substantia’ dicitur, quod intra se id, quod semper est, et in aeternitatis suae uirtute subsistat.” See also HILARY, *De synodis* 12 (PL 10.489C-490B), where the bishop reiterates this definition as he clarifies key terminology for his western readers.

5. DISTINCTION AND *HOMOUSIOS*

In the Preface to the second edition of *De fide*, Gregory acknowledged that some believed his language was imprecise, and apparently he agreed—not that his views expressed in the first edition were incorrect, but that they could be articulated more artfully. For this reason he made a number of adjustments in his vocabulary and consistent use of prepositions in relation to *homousios*.⁶¹ But more recent evaluation of the *De fide* states that Gregory is not as committed to acknowledging the distinction of persons in the Godhead as Hilary and Phoebadius; it has been said that Gregory “resiles from the stronger distinction of persons of the Trinity found in Hilary and Phoebadius.”⁶²

In his *Adv. Prax.*, Tertullian had used *distinctio personarum* or equivalent several times as part of his strategy to counter the modalistic monarchianism of his opponents.⁶³ But Gregory, familiar with *Adv. Prax.* as well as with Hilary and Phoebadius, does not represent a softer insistence on the distinction of persons in the Trinity. Quite the opposite. In the prologue as well as the epilogue of the second edition, Gregory was himself surprised and disappointed that any would accuse him of Sabellianism or reducing the distinction of divine persons. In *De fide* 4, Gregory mentions that a reader had thought the words of the *Ir* to be *superflua* or *ambigua*, and the bishop remarks that they “may be able to be interpreted by some differently than I intended.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he expresses amazement that some believed he “denied the individual person of the Word, which is the Son.”⁶⁵ In

⁶¹ Sections 4-14 detail both the criticisms that Gregory received as well as his efforts to clarify his wording and meaning.

⁶² Stuart G. HALL, Review of Jörg ULRICH, *Die Anfänge der abendländischen Rezeption des Nizänums*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1994, in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 47/1 (1996) 304 (302-304). Actually, Ulrich notes that Gregory “foregrounded” his emphasis on names as a mark of distinction, but not that Gregory is less committed to the distinction of persons (ULRICH, *Die Anfänge*, 205).

⁶³ See, for example, *Adv. Prax.* 2.4; 9.1; 12.4; 13.5; 14.1; 21.5 (CCSL II).

⁶⁴ GREGORY, *De fide* 4: “quae aliter possint a quibusdam quam a me dicta sunt accipi.”

⁶⁵ GREGORY, *De fide* 6: “quomodo potui ipsum patrem ipsumque sibi filium ponere, et hoc modo unam personam duobus nominibus appellare?”

the ensuing sections, he states that some readers also believed that he used the names “Father” and “Son” as if they did not imply any actual differentiation of persons. In fact, here we see an instance in which Gregory is echoing the text of *Adv. Prax.* when he asks “how could I identify the Father himself as his own Son and in this way address one person by two names?”⁶⁶ So strongly does Gregory see himself affirming the distinction of persons in the Trinity that he will also make it a point to guard against polytheism: “But do not let any heretic seize any occasion from this description, when I acknowledge two names or two persons, that is, of the Father and the Son, as if I were inventing two gods from diversity. In truth we name the Father and the Son in this way, so that we affirm one God in these persons and names.”⁶⁷

6. CONCLUSION

In his defense of the Nicene creed and its key term *homousios*, Gregory was both influenced by the affairs unfolding in the 350s, and he helped shape the discussion of consubstantiality for those following. His intransigent commitment to the creed’s conceptual framework and his willingness to embrace and advance the terminology emerging in its defense led him to resist any pressure to capitulate to the emperor’s preferences concerning the Sirmium Manifesto and the gathering at Ariminum. Instead, he penned a polemical piece directly challenging the imperial homoian agenda. Though questions persist regarding the dating and circumstances of many of his homilies and exegetical works, all evidence indicates he was consistent in his pro-Nicene stance and articulated his advocacy for the creed in homilies as well as the *De fide*—for his congregants in Illiberis as well as his fellow theologians.

⁶⁶ GREGORY, *De fide* 9: “quomodo potui ipsum patrem ipsumque sibi filium ponere, et hoc modo unam personam duobus nominibus appellare?”; *Adv. Prax.* 10.1-2 (CCSL 2.1169).

⁶⁷ GREGORY, *De fide* 68: “Sed ne ex eo occasionem aliquam haereticus rapiat, cum duo nomina uel duas personas, id est patris et filii, statuo, quasi duos deos ex diuersitate confingam: nos uero patrem et filium ita nominamus ut unum deum in his personis et nominibus consignemus.”