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DIVINE FREEDOM AND THE BEING OF THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON ACCORDING TO ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

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Abstract: The main topic of this article is the question of the Fatherhood of God: Is God a Father by nature or by will? The examination of this issue, as provided by St. Cyril of Alexandria, is the focus of this research. The study of his position is conducted in comparison with earlier Christian tradition, with significant emphasis on St. Athanasius and Origen. Additionally, the pagan philosophical tradition is referenced, primarily through the writings of Aristotle and Plotinus.

Keywords: *Cyril of Alexandria, Divine Will, Consubstantiality, Nicene Creed, Trinitarian Theology, Dogmatics, Biblical Exegesis, Alexandrian Church*

Introduction

In the history of the Church the name of St Cyril of Alexandria is mainly associated with the development of the Christological dogma. He is explicitly referred to, and cited as, a theological authority, together with St Athanasius of Alexandria, St Gregory the Theologian and St Pope Leo, in the creed of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.¹ In the thirteenth and fourteenth anathemas of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, those who oppose the orthodoxy of his teaching are condemned.² He, however, is quite important also for the development of the Christian Trinitarian Theology, for he is the author of the first systematic work (in the Greek-speaking part of the Chris-

¹ Denzinger, H. *Enchiridion symbolorum*. Freiburg: Herder & Co, 1951, ed. 27, p. 139.

² *Ibid.*, 108.

tendom) on this topic – the *Thesaurus* – in which he presented a full-reference exposition of the earlier Alexandrian tradition. To this treatise we can add his *Dialogues on the Trinity*, a later work where St Cyril made his own contribution to the church's faith in the Consubstantial Trinity. The dialogical form rendered this work quite interesting and readable although some concessions regarding the systematicity of its content had been made. Both texts are directed against different early and late forms of the heresy of Arianism. As an exponent of the heretical position in the *Dialogues* serves the interlocutor Hermias, who is presented as being himself an orthodox, concerned, however, with some possible objections against the faith. After the Second Ecumenical Council, the Arianism, in all its later forms, was definitely in decline but there is evidence that in the early fifth century certain communities in Antioch and Constantinople had still revered the memory of Aetius and his pupil Eunomius. It can be added that between 411 and 415 Synesius of Ptolemais issued an encyclical letter warning his clergy of a certain Quintianus who was propagating the heresy of Eunomius.³ These remnants of Arianism can be viewed as a probable reason for St Cyril's literary activity against that heresy but it should be acknowledged also that a thorough and comprehensive account of the Trinitarian faith was still needed after the controversy had faded away. Thus, perhaps, it is safe to assume that these opponents, mentioned in the Trinitarian works of Cyril, act indeed, as Boulnois has suggested, as "a theoretical presence."⁴

The Question

One of the main topics of the so called "Arian controversy" was the question of whether the generation of the Only-begotten Son was preceded by the will of God the Father, or not. For Arius himself the answer was easy, insofar as he viewed the Son as a creature, albeit "not as one of the creatures," as he preferred to say. His main opponent, St Athanasius of Alexandria, insisted, on the contrary, that the existence of the Son was a "natural state" for the Father, and for this reason it did not depend on a specific act of willing. St Cyril's position on the subject is in line with his great prede-

³ Russell, N. *Cyril of Alexandria*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 22.

⁴ Boulnois, M. "The Mystery of the Trinity according to Cyril of Alexandria: The Deployment of the Triad and Its Recapitulation into the Unity of Divinity". – In: Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (eds), *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria, a critical appreciation*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003, p. 76.

cessor, St Athanasius, and could be viewed as an epitome of the debate.

The fullest account on the issue in the corpus of St Cyril's works can be found in his *Dialogues on the Trinity* (more specifically in 454-461). The same topic is also presented in the *Thesaurus* (mainly in assertion VII), although in shorter form, few elements of the argument being missing. In the *Dialogues* the question is brought up by the interlocutor, Hermias, who points out that their opponents "being shrewd regarding the words (δριμεῖς γὰρ εἰς λόγους)" will probably ask whether the Father has begotten the Son "voluntarily or involuntarily (θελητῶς ἢ ἡγουν ἀνεθελήτως)." Each of the presented options is unacceptable, Hermias argues, for if "the Son was unwished for the Father (ἀνεθέλητος ὁ Υἱὸς τῷ Πατρὶ)" then it would seem that the Father had begotten the Son "not willingly (οὐχ ἐκὼν)" but by some necessity (ἀνάγκη); if, however, the Father had begotten the Son "willingly and by His will (θελητῶς δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν βούλησιν)" then the will of the Father "would most certainly precede and be manifested before the begetting of the Son (πάντως πρὶν καὶ προηγήσεται καὶ προαναφανεῖται τῆς τοῦ Υἱοῦ γεννήσεως)."⁵ In the first case we would be forced to accept the existence of something greater than the Father as the true cause for the Son, and in the second case the Son would not be coeternal with the Father. As the inventor of the opinion that the will of the Father precedes the existence of the Son, St Athanasius specifies the Gnostic Valentinus and his pupil Ptolemy.⁶ His account on the topic is to be found in his *Discourses against the Arians* (III 59-67).⁷ It should be mentioned, however, that this position is not completely foreign to the more orthodox ecclesiastical tradition. Thus, among the Apostolic Fathers a good example is Justin Martyr, who stated, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, that the Son "has been born from the Father by will (ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς θελήσει γεγεννῆσθαι)," or "by power

⁵ Cyrille d'Alexandrie. *Dialogues sur la Trinité. Texte critique, traduction et notes Georges Matthieu de Durand*, t. I, Sources Chrétiennes 231. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1976, p. 332; *De Trinitate Dialogi* VII 454ab 5-20. Abbreviated: *Dial. Trin.*

⁶ Athanase D'Alexandrie. *Traité contre les Ariens*. Texte de l'édition K. Metzler – K. Savvidis, traduction Charles Kannengiesser, tome II, Sources Chrétiennes 599. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2019, p. 458; *Orationes adversus Arianos* III 60; 449, 1-11. Abbreviated: *Adv. Arian.*

⁷ Widdicombe, P. *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 184.

and will (δυνάμει καὶ βουλῇ).”⁸ Origen too, allowed the language of will for the begetting of the Son. Since He is called “Son of love (*filii caritatis*)” it will not be unacceptable to call Him Son of will (*voluntatis*). According to him, however, the preferable way of speaking about the begetting of the Son is to compare it with the proceeding of the will from the mind (*velut si voluntas procedat e mente*).⁹ Thus, it seems that according to the Alexandrian the will of the Father does not indeed precede the existence of the Son for there is no place for the will before its proceeding from the mind. To be sure, there is little evidence in Origen’s work, as Rowan Williams has pointed out, to suggest that “the Father wills the Son into being in anything like the same sense as that in which he wills the world into being.”¹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea also seems to have been teaching that the will of the Father is the cause of the Son.¹¹ Thus, in his treatise *Demonstration of the Gospel*, he stated that “the Son has been established as an image of the Father by will and choice (ὁ δὲ υἱὸς κατὰ γνώμην καὶ προαίρεσιν εἰκὼν ὑπέστη τοῦ πατρὸς),” the reason for this statement being that “God has become the Father of the Son having [first] willed it (βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς γέγονεν υἱοῦ πατὴρ).” Thus, the Son “has been sent forth from the substance of the Father (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας προβεβλημένον)” without any separation or interval, “having been invested with being from the unutterable and incomprehensible will and power of the Father (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀνεκφράστου καὶ ἀπερινοήτου βουλῆς τε καὶ δυνάμεως οὐσιούμενον).”¹²

That the very existence of the Son depends on the will of the Father was one of the basic elements of the theology of Arius.¹³ Even in his quite moderate letter to St Alexander of Alexandria, he explicitly stated that God

⁸ Justin Martyr. *Dialogue avec le Tryphon*. Edition critique, traduction, commentaire, Philippe Bobichon. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003, vol. 1, p. 346 and p. 530; (61.1; 128.4).

⁹ Origen. *On First Principles*. Edited and translated by John Behr, vol. II, Oxford Early Christian Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 562; De principiis IV 4.1. Abbreviated: De princ.

¹⁰ Williams, R. *Arius, Heresy and Tradition*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, p. 141.

¹¹ Ayres, L. *Nicaea and Its Legacy – An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 58.

¹² Eusebius von Kesarea. *Die Demonstratio Evangelica*, herausgegeben von Ivar A. Heikel, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Band VI. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichssche Buchhandlung, 1913, S. 153 - 154 (IV 3. 14-21).

¹³ Williams, R. Op. cit., p. 109.

the Father “had caused by his own will [the Son] to subsist as unchangeable and unalterable creature (ὑποστήσαντα ἰδίῳ θελήματι ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον κτίσμα).”¹⁴ According to Asterius, the theorist and theologian of the Eusebian party, the Son is not eternal and cannot be from the essence of the Father but was created by the Father’s will.¹⁵ In his fragmentarily preserved *Syntagmation* he made an explicit connection between the Son’s status as created being and His dependance on the Father’s will saying that “it is obvious that the Son, being a thing made, has come into existence and has been made by [the] will [of the Father] (δηλονότι καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ποίημα ὦν βουλήσει γέγονε καὶ πεποιήται).”¹⁶ It seems that a similar position was held by Eusebius of Nicomedia too.¹⁷ In his *Letter to Paulinus of Tyre*, written a few years before the Council of Nicaea, he insists that the Son must be created by the will of the Father, for “there is nothing which is from His essence but everything has come into existence by His will (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ γενόμενα // nihil est enim de substantia eius, cuncta autem voluntate facta).”¹⁸ After the Council of Nicaea, among the anti-Nicene party the thesis that the Son is indeed from the will of the Father, in opposition to the Nicene “from the substance,” became a standard view. Thus, according to the creed of the Council of Antioch held in 344, a document also known as the *Macrostich creed* (ἔκθεσις μακρόστιχος), the Church anathematizes those who say that “the Father has begotten the Son not by purpose and will (ὅτι οὐ βουλήσει οὐδὲ θελήσει ἐγέννησεν ὁ πατὴρ τὸν υἱόν).” The reason of the condemnation is given too – by denying the participation of the will in the generation of the Son some people “attached to God involuntary and purposeless necessity, so that [the Father] should generate the Son unwillingly (ἀνάγκην δὲ δηλονότι ἀβούλητον καὶ ἀπροαίρετον

¹⁴ Athanase d’Alexandrie. *Lettre sur le Synodes*. Texte critique H. G. Opitz, traduction Annick Martin et Xavier Morales, Sources Chrétiennes 563. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2013, p. 228; *Epistola de synodis Arimini in Italia, et Seleucia in Isauria*, celebrate 16.2; 14-15. Abbreviated: De synodis.

¹⁵ Gwynn, D. *The Eusebians – The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the Arian Controversy*, Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 209.

¹⁶ Athanasius. *De synodis* 19. 3 (Martin and Morales 240, 21-22).

¹⁷ Gwynn, D. Op. cit., p. 214-215.

¹⁸ *Documente zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites, Athanasius Werke*, Band 3, Teil 1, Lieferung 3, herausgegeben von Hanns Christof Brennecke und Uta Heil. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, S. 17, 4-5 (Urkunde 8, 7).

περιτεθεικότας τῷ θεῷ, ἵνα ἄκων γεννήσῃ τὸν υἱόν).¹⁹ Few years later, at the Council of Sirmium in 351, the same position was expressed but with a slight modification. In anathema XXIV it is stated that “if one would say that the Son had been begotten by the will of God as one of the creatures, he is to be condemned (εἴ τις βουλήσει τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς ἐν τῶν ποιμάτων γεγονέναι λέγοι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω).”²⁰ The key phrase here is “as one of the creatures”, by which, it seems, a difference was made between the will of God for the creation and for the Son. According to Lewis Ayres here we have a clear evidence for the conciliatory tone of the council for “the text does not use generation by will to emphasize that the Father’s nature is not shared.”²¹ In the next anathema (XXV) those who state that God has generated the Son “not having willed it (μὴ θελήσαντος)” are condemned too. The Father, it is argued, has not been led “by natural necessity (ὕπὸ ἀνάγκης φυσικῆς)” but together with the [act of His] will (ἅμα τε ἡβουλήθη) He generated the Son.²² At the second half of the fourth century the thesis that the will of the Father is indeed the cause for the generation of the Son was particularly well-accepted among the Anomoean party. Its founder, Aetius, in his treatise, preserved under the name *Syntagmation* (it seems that this work has the same name as the treatise of the above-mentioned Asterius), defended a position according to which the Son is a product of God’s will because only a compound thing can generate from its own substance. Thus, God, being uncompound, cannot produce a Son from His essence but only by His will.²³ Among the Homoiousians this question was treated somewhat differently. Thus, according to their most prominent representative, Basil of Ancyra, the Father should be viewed not only as a creator of the Son but also as a Father, due to the natural similarity between them, and that is why a certain difference between the act of creation of the world and of the begetting of the Son should be maintained.²⁴ Hence Basil differentiated explicitly between a “creative energy (κτιστικὴ ἐνέργεια),” whereby God is understood to be the creator of the world, and a “generative energy (γεννητικὴ ἐνέργεια)” according to which God is

¹⁹ Athanasius. *De synodis* 26 (Martin and Morales 260, 39-40; 266, 120-122).

²⁰ Ibidem, 27. 3 (276, 96-97).

²¹ Ayres, L. Op. cit., p. 129.

²² Athanasius. *De synodis* 27. 3 (Martin and Morales 276, 98-101).

²³ Ayres, L. Op. cit., p. 146.

²⁴ Hanson, R. *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God – The Arian Controversy* 318-381. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987, p. 352-356.

thought of as the Father of the Son “in a peculiar and unique way (ιδίως καὶ μονογενῶς).”²⁵ Concerning the Homoean party, it should be pointed out that at the main councils usually viewed as Homoian (i.e. Sirmium 357, Seleucia 359 and Nice-Constantinople 360) no explicit statement was made that the Son’s generation was by the Father’s will. More surprising is the lack of any allusion of the Son’s creaturehood – the Son was indeed invariably described through the creeds of these councils as begotten (γεννηθεῖς) from the Father. On the other hand, as Hanson has stated²⁶, the Homoean Arianism was a development of the theology of Eusebius of Caesarea; hence we should not be surprised if some Homoeans had expressed views similar to those of Eusebius himself.

St Cyril’s argument could be divided in four parts. First, against the position that the will of the Father precedes the existence of the Son, the Alexandrian Archbishop objects that the Son is Himself the living and hypostatic Will of the Father. Second, he denies the participation of the will in the existence of the Father Himself, defending a position according to which if the Father is truly unoriginated and uncaused, His will should not be considered to be the cause of His own being. St Cyril applies the same reasoning to the question whether the will of the Father precedes His ontological characteristics as goodness and trueness, insisting that God has these characteristics by nature and not by will. Thirdly, as a consequence of the second part, it is stated that the Fatherhood of God should be thought of as being inherent to Him by nature and not by will, in the same way as His goodness and trueness are. The last part of the argument is concerned with the question whether the Son could have existed only potentially in the Father before being begotten in actuality. The answer is definitely negative, for that would imply a change from potentiality to actuality in God’s nature. In order to distinguish the begetting of the Son from the creation of the world, so that he could defend the Christian belief that God’s creative act has a beginning and that the world is not coeternal with the Creator, St Cyril makes distinction between two types of actualization of potentiality, one that includes an alteration on ontological level, and one that excludes any alteration at all. This is the most philosophical and the most original part of the argument of the Alexandrian Archbishop.

²⁵ *Synodale d’Ancyre*. Texte critique H. G. Opitz, traduction Annick Martin et Xavier Morales, Sources Chrétiennes 563. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2013, p. 78, 13-18.

²⁶ Hanson, R. Op. cit., p. 557.

The Son as the Will of the Father

St Cyril starts his argument by stating that even if the Father is “not unwillingly (οὐκ ἀνεθελήτως)” the Father of the Son this does not mean that His will precedes the being of the Son in any way. This statement is based on a particular Biblical idiom describing the Son precisely as the Wisdom (σοφία) and the Word (λόγος) of the Father. Even the “opponents” will not say that the will of the Father is “unwise or irrational (ἄσοφόν γε καὶ ἄλογον)” and that gives to St Cyril the means to insist that the Son is “the very one in whom all the will of the Father is (αὐτὸς ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα θέλησις τοῦ Πατρὸς).”²⁷ Arius, however, had stated, according to the testimony of St Athanasius, that there were two wisdoms, the one being “proper and coexisting with God (τὴν ἰδίαν καὶ συνυπάρχουσαν τῷ Θεῷ),” and the other is the Son, for whom Arius insisted that “he had been brought into being through that wisdom (ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ σοφίᾳ γεγενῆσθαι),” and that the Son “was called Wisdom and Word only by participation in this wisdom (ταύτης τε μετέχοντα ὠνομάσθαι μόνον σοφίαν καὶ λόγον).”²⁸ According to another testimony of St Athanasius, Arius taught that “the Wisdom came in existence as a wisdom through the will of the wise God (ἡ σοφία σοφία ὑπῆρξε σοφοῦ Θεοῦ θελήσει).”²⁹ Eunomius too argued, as St Cyril testified himself, that the Only-begotten Son of God was not independently and in His Own right (αὐτοκυρίως) His word, and that there was a difference between “the immanent word (ἐνδιάθετος λόγος)” of God the Father and “the Son who is said to be begotten from Him (ὁ δὲ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεννηθῆναι λεγόμενος Υἱός).”³⁰ However, it must be acknowledged that there always has been a steady Biblical and Church tradition describing the Son as the Father’s own Word, Wisdom and Will, and St Cyril had the vast majority of the Church Fathers on his side. Indeed, after the end and the solution of the Arian controversy only few Church writers, such as Theodore of Mop-

²⁷ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 454ce 34-39 (de Durand 334).

²⁸ Athanase D’Alexandrie. *Traité contre les Ariens*. Texte de l’édition K. Metzler – K. Savvidis, traduction Charles Kannengiesser, tome I, Sources Chrétiennes 598. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2019, p. 114, 22-25; *Adv. Arian.* I 5 (PG 26, 21B). Abbreviated: *Adv. Arian.*

²⁹ Athanasius. *De synodis* 15, 3 (Martin and Morales, 224, 37).

³⁰ Cyrille d’Alexandrie. *Commentaire sur Jean*. Texte grec, introduction, traduction, notes et index Bernard Meunier, livre I, Sources Chrétiennes 600. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2018, p. 292, 37-40; In de Joannis Evangelium (In Jo.) I, IV, 30bc. Abbreviated: In Jo.

suestia³¹ for instance, raised objections against the Christological interpretation of the Biblical Wisdom of God, while the majority supported the traditional messianic understanding. Thus St Athanasius, in his polemics against the Arians, argues that “the will of God (τοῦ Θεοῦ βούλησις)” for the creation “is in the Word (ἐν τῷ Λόγῳ ἐστίν).”³² Furthermore, the Son, according to St Athanasius, is He Himself the “living will (βουλὴ ζῶσα)” of the Father.³³ As the most probable Biblical reference we can point to 1 Corinthians 1.24 where Apostle Paul says that “Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom.” In his commentary on this verse Cyril explains that God the Father has saved the world through Christ “as through the Power inherently present in Him by nature, and as through the ineffable Wisdom of His own (ὡς διὰ δυνάμεως τῆς ἐνούσης αὐτῷ φυσικῶς, καὶ τῆς ἀπορρήτου σοφίας, τῆς ἑαυτοῦ).”³⁴ Here St Cyril still follows the common Alexandrian tradition. Thus Origen, for instance, stated that there must be no doubt that “the Only-begotten Son of God is His substantially subsisting Wisdom (*unigenitum filium dei sapientiam eius esse substantialiter subsistentem*).”³⁵ The description of the Son as “the Power and Wisdom of God,” however, should not be taken to imply any kind of modalism. Thus, in his commentary on John, St Cyril states that although the Son is indeed the Wisdom of God, that Wisdom “is not hidden in the nature of the One Who has begotten Him (οὐκ ἐν τῇ φύσει τοῦ γεννήσαντος κρυπτομένης),” as it is in the case of the innate wisdom of a human being, but He is the Wisdom “that exists severally and by Himself (ἀλλ’ ἰδίως μὲν καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν ὑφ’ ἑστῶσης).”³⁶ Thus, the Son is “the living and enhypostatic counsel and will (ἡ ζῶσα καὶ ἐνυπόστατος βουλὴ τε καὶ θέλησις)” of the Father. He is the Word and the Wisdom of the Father but, in contrast to the human ones, He is “not anhypostatic (οὐκ ἀνυπόστατος),” being “substantial and living as having separate existence in the Father and with the Father (ἀλλ’ ἐνούσιός τε καὶ

³¹ See Ribolov, S. “Wisdom of God” in Theodore Of Mopsuestia. – In: Theresia Hainthaler, Franz Mali, Gregor Emmenegger und Mante Lenkaitzte Osterman (eds), *Sophia, The Wisdom of God – Die Weisheit Gottes*, Forscher aus dem Osten und Westen Europas an den Quellen des gemeinsamen Glaubens, Pro Oriente, Band X. Wien: Tyrolia Verlag, 2017, S. 186.

³² Athanasius. *Adv. Arian.* III 61. 3-4; 452, 19-20 (Kannengiesser, tome II, p. 462).

³³ Ibidem. III 63. 4; 457, 31 (Kannengiesser, tome II, p. 470).

³⁴ Cyrillus Alexandrinus. *In epistulam I ad Corinthios*. Edidit Philippus Pusey, vol. III. Oxford, 1872, p. 254, 16-18.

³⁵ Origen. *De princ.* I 2.2 (Behr, vol. I, 40).

³⁶ Cyril. *In Jo.* I, V, Pusey 197de (Meunier 346, 70-75).

ζῶν ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχων ἐν Πατρὶ καὶ μετὰ Πατρὸς τὴν ὑπαρξιν).³⁷ The Alexandrian Archbishop is really fond of the term ἐνυπόστατος using it 50 times in Trinitarian context.³⁸ The combination of ἐνυπόστατος with ἐνούσιος and ζῶν, which we see in these texts, is also usual to him.³⁹ It seems that he uses this term in order to signify both the hypostatic existence of the Son and the natural inseparability of the three Divine Hypostases. Thus, ἐνυπόστατος here also represents some kind of “in-existence”⁴⁰ of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Father.

Sometimes, however, St Cyril expresses his position on the subject in a different manner, saying that “the will, inherent in the holy nature, is one (μία γὰρ θέλησις ἐν τῇ ἀγίᾳ φύσει).”⁴¹ This is so because “since the Divinity in the Father and the Son is contemplated as one, the will too will certainly be identical (μιας γὰρ θεότητος τῆς ἐν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ νοουμένης, ἔσται δὴπου πάντως καὶ θέλημα ταυτόν).”⁴² Thus, the Alexandrian obviously does insist on the complete identity of will and power in the Trinity.⁴³ In the same way St Athanasius stated that “there is one will which is from the Father and in the Son (ἓν ἐστὶ θέλημα τὸ ἐκ πατρὸς ἐν υἱῷ).”⁴⁴ St Cyril employs some specific words to describe the unity of will in the Trinity. Thus, the Son is συνεθελητής with the Father, being consubstantial with Him. As an explanation of this statement he says that “since the substance is one, so is the will (μιας γὰρ οὐσίας, ἓν δὴπου τὸ θέλημα).”⁴⁵ Furthermore, commenting on John 7:17, he makes use of the words συνεθέλησις and ταυτοβουλία, both meaning something like “identity of will”, and explains that the Son is not cut off from “the identity of will with the Father (κατὰ τὴν συνεθέλησιν καὶ ταυτοβουλίαν τοῦ Πατρός).”⁴⁶ On other occasion he uses the word κοινοβουλία again for the common will of the Son with the

³⁷ Ibidem, V, V (Pusey, vol. II, 47-48, 527b-d).

³⁸ Gleede, B. *The Development of the Term ἐνυπόστατος from Origen to John of Damascus*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 113. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 38.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 40.

⁴¹ Cyril. *In Jo.* XI, IX (Pusey, vol. II (IV) 698, 972d).

⁴² Ibidem, II, IX (Pusey, vol. I (III), 354, 239d).

⁴³ Gebremedhin, E. *Life-Giving Blessing – An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria*, Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 17. Uppsala, 1977, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Athanasius, *Adv. Arian.* III 66. 3; 464, 17 (Kannengiesser, tome II, 480).

⁴⁵ Cyril. *In Jo.* X (Pusey, vol. II (IV), 493, 828a).

⁴⁶ Ibidem, IV, V (Pusey, vol. I (III), 606, 414b).

Father.⁴⁷ Both συνεθελητής and συνεθέλησις are not found in Classical Greek, and κοινοβουλία is quite rare. Moreover, St Cyril is the only writer cited in the articles for συνεθελητής, συνεθέλησις and κοινοβουλία in the *Patristic Greek Lexicon*.

On some other occasions, however, St Cyril is willing to speak of a will particular to the Son. Thus, in the second of his *Dialogues*, commenting on Philippians 2:5-7, he states that the Son has become a human, not having been forced to do so, but “according to His own will (κατ’ ἰδίαν βούλησιν)” and “by the benevolence of the Father (εὐδοκία Πατρός).”⁴⁸ It seems that in the cited text a distinction between the will of the Son and the benevolence of the Father is being made. In the subsequent Byzantine tradition this tension between the concept of the will considered as a *natural* capacity, on the one hand, and as a *hypostatic* manifestation of the natural capacity, on the other, had been preserved. Thus, in his treatise *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus*, John of Damascus explicitly states that “each of the divine Hypostases wills (ἐκάστη τῶν τῆς θεότητος ὑποστάσεων θέλει).” At the same time John insists that “in the Holy and Undivided Trinity there is one natural will for the three Hypostases (ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ἀδιαίρετου τριάδος μία τῶν τριῶν ὑποστάσεων φυσικὴ θέλησις)” and only “one movement (μία κίνησις).”⁴⁹

The Father as Unoriginated and Unbegotten Cause

As a next step in his argumentation St Cyril reformulates the question of the participation of the Father’s will in the generation of the Son by asking “whether the Father Himself exists by His own will or not (πότερα θελητῶς ἤγουν ἀνεθελήτως ὑπάρχει τε καὶ ἔστιν ὁ Πατήρ).” Both these options are unacceptable for if the Father existed not by His own will (οὐ θελητῶς) then it would seem that “by all means He had been forced into existence by some [external] necessity (ἐκβεβίασται που πάντως ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἰς ὕπαρξιν),” but, on the other hand, if He existed by His own will (θελητῶς) then “His willing would have to precede His existence (προηγῆσεται που τῆς ὑπάρξεως αὐτοῦ τὸ θέλαιν αὐτοῦ).” Furthermore, if

⁴⁷ Ibidem, VII (Pusey, vol. II (IV), 244, 661c).

⁴⁸ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 405a 4-5 (de Durand 184).

⁴⁹ Johannes von Damascus. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damascus*, Band IV, Liber de haeresibus et Opera polemica, besorgt von P. Bonifatius Kotter, Patristische Texte und Studien, Band 22. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981, S. 206; 23, 29-30; 24, 10-12.

we take into consideration the above-mentioned Biblical idiom identifying the Wisdom and the Word of the Father with the Son, then it will seem that it is indeed the Son Who existed before the Father because the will of the Father cannot be actualized without His Wisdom and Word. In addition, the Alexandrian says, the Scripture names the Son not only Wisdom and Word of the Father but Counsel (βουλή) and Will (θέλησις) too. So, “according to the unsoundness of notions and the absurdity of reasoning (ὅσον ἦκεν εἰς ἐννοιῶν σαθρότητα καὶ λογισμῶν ἀτοπίαν)” of St Cyril’s opponents “it would seem that the Son existed before the Father, He Himself being His Will (προϋφαστήξει τοῦ Πατρὸς ὁ Υἱός, αὐτὸς ὢν ἡ θέλησις).”⁵⁰ Moving onwards with his argument he applies the same reasoning not only to the Father’s existence itself but to the existence of His natural characteristics as goodness or compassion. Thus, we are once again faced with the same difficult question – Is God good and compassionate by His will or not? If we say that God is good without willing it (ἀνεθελήτως) that will imply some kind of necessity for Him, or as the Alexandrian puts it, He will suffer an “unwillingness (τὴν ἀνεθελησίαν),” that is “the passivity of necessity (τὸ ὡς ἐξ ἀνάγκης πάθος).” On the other hand, if we say that God has indeed willed to be good or compassionate and He possesses these characteristics “not unwillingly (μὴ ἀβουλήτως),” that will imply that “His will preceded His existence as He is (προϋπῆρχε δὲ ἡ βούλησις τοῦ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἃ ἐστίν)” and God will not be good and compassionate any more without beginning (ἀνάρχως). Thus, the only possible solution, St Cyril argues, is to accept that the engaging of the will applies only to those things the actualization of which is conditional. In his words “will and unwillingness apply [only] to those things that can be actualized or not (τῶν μὲν πρακτέων ἢ μὴ θέλησις τε καὶ ἀνεθελησία κρατεῖ).”⁵¹ At this point St Cyril asks Hermias if God the Father is what He is essentially “without engaging His will (οὐκ ἐξ ἐπιδόσεως ... τῆς κατὰ θέλησιν)” will not that mean that He is a Father too without engaging His will? Thus, we are free to conclude that the Father “will not have acquired His being a Father by will (οὐδὲ τὸ εἶναι Πατὴρ θεληματικῶς κεκτήσεται).”⁵² The argument presented here by St Cyril is based on a premise, shared also by his opponents, that God’s existence is not beforehand determined by His own will. Thus, Eunomius

⁵⁰ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 455ab 1-17 (de Durand 334).

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 455de 31-43 (de Durand 336).

⁵² *Ibidem*, 456a 5-8 (de Durand 338).

stated in his *Liber Apologeticus* that God “was brought into being neither by his own action nor by that of any other (μήτε παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ μήτε παρ’ ἑτέρου γενόμενος).” In fact considerations as these were among the reasons why Eunomius had chosen the name *Unbegotten* (or Unoriginated, ἀγέννητος) to be the first and proper name of God: “So then, if it has now been demonstrated that God neither existed before Himself nor did anything else exist before him, but that he is before all things, then what follows from this is the Unbegotten (οὐκοῦν εἰ μήτε αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ μήθ’ ἕτερόν τι αὐτοῦ προϋπάρχειν δέδεικται, πρὸ δὲ πάντων αὐτός, ἀκολουθεῖ τούτῳ τὸ ἀγέννητον).”⁵³ However, not everyone in the Antiquity thought the same way. The most prominent representative in this respect is Plotinus. In his sixth Ennead, *On Free Will and the Will of the One*, he states concerning the One that “it is he himself who makes himself and is master of himself and has not come to be as something else willed, but as he himself wills (αὐτὸς ἐστὶν οὗτος ὁ ποιῶν ἑαυτὸν καὶ κύριος ἑαυτοῦ καὶ οὐχ ὥς τι ἕτερον ἠθέλησε γενόμενος, ἀλλ’ ὥς θέλει αὐτός).”⁵⁴ In section 20 of the same Ennead he concedes indeed that someone may ask how the One could have made or willed himself before even to be in existence? The answer is, as it seems, quite simple – The One “should not be classed as made, but as maker (οὐ τακτέον κατὰ τὸν ποιούμενον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν ποιοῦντα).”⁵⁵ This means that “the being of the One is one and the same with his making and his, as it were, eternal generation (ἐν γὰρ τῇ ποιήσει καὶ οἷον γεννήσει ἄιδίῳ τὸ εἶναι).”⁵⁶ Here we find one of the most interesting features of the Plotinian Henology, according to which “the One is primarily [his] will (πρῶτον ἄρα ἡ βούλησις αὐτός).”⁵⁷ If for Aristotle the first principle is *a thought thinking itself*, for Plotinus the One is *a will willing itself*. Thus, it seems that “the Good is not pure act, but pure willing”⁵⁸. Plotinus however was criticized by later Neo-Platonists such as Iamblichus who used the name

⁵³ Eunomius. *The Extant Works. Text and translation by Richard Vaggione*, Oxford Early Christian Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 40, 2-11; *Liber Apologeticus* 7. Abbreviated: *Lib. Apol.*

⁵⁴ Plotinus. *Enneads*, with an English translation by A. H. Armstrong, vol. VII. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 276; *Enneads* VI 8, 15, 9-11.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 292 (VI 8, 20, 5).

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 292 (VI 8, 20, 27-28).

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 296 (VI 8, 21, 16).

⁵⁸ Corrigan, K. and Turner, J. Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8, On the Voluntary and on the Free Will of the One. Las Vegas, Zurich and Athens: Parmenides Publishing, 2017, p. 386.

Unoriginated (τὸ ἀγέννητον) in a way similar to Eunomius, rejecting as it seems the model of self-causation proposed by his predecessor.⁵⁹ It should be mentioned however that Plotinus applies, at least once, the adjective ἀγέννητος to the first principle too: “ἡ δὲ ἀρχὴ ἀγέννητος” (V 4, 1.18).⁶⁰ More importantly, we should take into consideration that neither Plotinus, nor Iamblichus use this adjective exclusively for the One. Thus, by Plotinus the eternal forms (τὰ εἶδη) are also unoriginated (II 4, 5, 26) and by Iamblichus – the soul (De mysteriis 1, 10, 40-41), for they have not received their being in time. Thus, to be unoriginated could simply mean to be eternal and above the “chronological” time. In Christian context, however, only God is considered to be unoriginated, strictly speaking, for there are no others eternal beings along with Him, and because He is the only uncaused cause of everything.

St Cyril makes a distinction between ἀγέννητος and ἀγέννητος, the first meaning unoriginated, the second – unbegotten. Linguistically speaking this differentiation is well-grounded because these two adjectives are derived from different verbs – ἀγέννητος from γίγνομαι and ἀγέννητος from γεννάω. In their Theological application ἀγέννητος is used to describe only God the Father, for the Son is indeed begotten (γεννητός) from the Father, while ἀγέννητος is appropriate for the Holy Trinity. Thus, in his *Thesaurus*, St Cyril explains that as the Son is God from God and Light from Light, He is also “Unoriginated from Unoriginated (οὕτω καὶ ἐξ ἀγενήτου ἀγέννητος).” Even though the Son is indeed begotten from the Father, He is still unoriginated as the Father is, due to the “complete invariability of substance (διὰ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀπαράλλακτον).” Thus, on the *level of substance* the Son is unoriginated because “He is thought of as one thing with the Father and in the Father (ὡς ἓν τι μετὰ Πατρὸς καὶ ἐν Πατρὶ νοούμενον).”⁶¹ On *hypostatical level*, however, the Son is indeed begotten. The characteristic of the Son as being begotten is indeed a hypostatical characteristic, not substantial one. Stated more clearly, the Son is begotten from the Father not

⁵⁹ Narbonne, J. “Divine Freedom in Plotinus and Iamblichus (Tractate VI.8 [39] and De Mysteriis III, 17-20).” – In: Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan (eds), *Reading Ancient Texts: Essays in Honour of D. O’Brien*. Vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 186.

⁶⁰ Sleeman, J. and Pollet, G. *Lexicon Plotinianum*. Leiden: Brill and Leuven University Press, 1980, p. 12.

⁶¹ Cyrillus Alexandrinus. *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate* I, PG 75, 24 B-C. Abbreviated: *Thes*.

“by substance” – for the Holy Trinity is numerically one substance – but “by hypostasis”. At this point, however, we should acknowledge that for the Alexandrian archbishop the usual way of speaking of the begetting of the Son is that He is indeed begotten “from the substance of the Father”. Hans van Loon has made a useful suggestion stating that “the main reason that the archbishop speaks in this way is his loyalty to the Nicene Creed” and comments further by adding that “the use of the word οὐσία in this phrase does not fit well with St Cyril’s general understanding of the Godhead”, and that here οὐσία “refers to the hypostasis of the Father, not to the common substance of the Godhead”.⁶² There are a few instances in the works of St Cyril where he ascribes the begetting of the Son precisely to the hypostasis of the Father. Thus, in assertion 5 of the *Thesaurus* he states that “the Father has the begetting of the Son as inseparable of His own hypostasis (τῆς ἰδίας ὑποστάσεως ἀχώριστον ἔχει τὸ τίκτειν).”⁶³ Furthermore, in the second of his *Dialogues on the Trinity*, describing the so-called hypostatical characteristics of the Holy Trinity, he says that “the unbegottenness should be considered as inherent to the principle of the hypostasis of God the Father (καταλογιστέον δὴ οὖν τὴν ἀγεννησίαν, ὡς ἐνυπάρχουσιν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρός).”⁶⁴ Four centuries later, in his *Mystagogia*, St Photius of Constantinople used the phrase “the principle of the hypostasis (ὁ λόγος τῆς ὑποστάσεως, or ὁ λόγος τῆς πατρικῆς ὑποστάσεως)” as a technical term in order to clarify that the Son and the Spirit have their existence naturally and essentially from the Father’s hypostasis and not from the common Divine substance.⁶⁵ It seems that in order to achieve a proper understanding of St Cyril’s trinitarian teaching we should accept that οὐσία and ὑπόστασις represent different ontological levels. In the patristic tradition this view is presented most fully in the writings of St Gregory Palamas. He insisted on the (ontological) difference between the Divine essence and the Divine Hypostases and used this difference as an example and a proof for the position defended by him that not everything in the Godhead is reducible and convertible to the Divine essence in order to defend the distinction between the essence and It’s essential and natu-

⁶² Loon, H. *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, vol. 96. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009, p. 129.

⁶³ Cyril. *Thes.* V, PG 75, 72 A.

⁶⁴ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 434a 7-8 (de Durand 272).

⁶⁵ Photius Constantinopolitanus. *Mystagogia* 15, PG 102, 293 AB.

ral energies.⁶⁶ In more recent times, some scholars indeed support such a view.⁶⁷ There is, however, a considerable debate on the topic.⁶⁸

The Fatherhood of God

This is the most Scriptural part of the argument and the main issue under discussion here is of exegetical character. The question is how the New Testament testimony that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is to be understood. For St Cyril, as for the mainstream of the pro-Nicene party, including some Church writers which were not completely devoted to the defense of Nicaea – writers such as Eusebius of Caesarea,⁶⁹ the answer is that the relationship between the Father and the Son, as revealed in the Scripture, is indeed a natural one, which means that the three Divine Hypostases cannot be conceived of as separately and independently existing.⁷⁰ Thus, the Council of Nicaea, declaring that the One God is a Father, clearly professed that the proper name of God is “Father”, and not the emphatically non-Scriptural designation “unbegotten”, proposed by the Arians.⁷¹ On the other hand, for Arius and Eunomius, and for a large part of the anti-Nicene party, the Biblical revelation that God is a Father is indeed a metaphor. Their statement is not intended to reject the special relationship between the Father and the Son – no one other is a son of God as the Son is – but it is intended to emphasize the non-essential character of this relationship. Thus, for Arius the designation of God as Father “does not indicate anything particular to God himself”⁷², for it is not an ontological characteristic of God’s nature. According to Eunomius, the Son is not from the essence or the hypostasis of the Father but “He has been begotten and created by the power of the

⁶⁶ Pino, Tikhon. *Essence and Energies: Being and Naming God in St Gregory Palamas*. New York: Routledge, 2023, p. 173.

⁶⁷ McGuckin, J. *St Cyril of Alexandria: the Christological Controversy*, Supplements to Vigiliae Chritdianae vol. XXIII. Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill 1994, p. 215.

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive summary of the different opinions on St Cyril’s use and understanding of the term “hypostasis” see: Loon, H. *Op. cit.*, pp. 193-250.

⁶⁹ Renberg, A. *The Son is Truly Son – The Trinitarian and Christological Theology of Eusebius of Caesarea*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2021, p. 48.

⁷⁰ Boulnois, M. *Op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁷¹ Weinandy, T. and Keating, D. *Athanasius and his Legacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017, 13.

⁷² Behr, J. *The Nicene Faith, part one: True God of True God, The Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004, p. 136.

unbegotten (τῇ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου δυνάμει γεννηθεὶς καὶ κτισθεὶς).⁷³

Seeing that Hermias is still not completely persuaded, St Cyril makes another attempt to convince him by asking this time whether the opponents will concede that God the Father is indeed a “begetter by nature (γεννήτωρ κατὰ φύσιν)” and whether “they will say that it is essential to Him to be this way (οὐσιῶδες αὐτῷ τὸ χρῆμα ἐροῦσιν).” That God the Father is the Father of the Only-begotten Son is incontestable Biblical truth and the only remaining question is whether it is by nature or by will. If it is by will and not by nature that will mean that God the Father “has in some way made His own nature, having rendered it able to beget (αὐτός που τάχα τὴν ἰδίαν εἰργασται φύσιν, γεννητικὴν ἀποφήνας).” Thus, the only solution to the dilemma presented above is to accept that God the Father is the Father of the Only-begotten “by nature and essentially (φύσει δὲ μᾶλλον καὶ οὐσιωδῶς).” It is of no use to ask whether God is a Father “unwillingly or willingly (ἀνεθελήτως ἢ θελητῶς).” In truth “[God] is not unwillingly what He is by nature, for He has the will to be what He is as running along with His nature (ἔστι γὰρ οὐκ ἀνεθελήτως ἃ ἔστι φυσικῶς, σύνδρομον ἔχων τῇ φύσει τὴν θέλησιν τοῦ εἶναι ἃ ἔστιν).”⁷⁴ Thus, God the Father has always been the Father and “has always willed to be the Father (καὶ θελητῆς τοῦ εἶναι Πατὴρ).”⁷⁵

In St Cyril’s understanding the Biblical name “Father” is not used in the Scripture in any pseudonymous way (ψευδωνύμως) but it reveals the true nature of God. In a way “the name Father is more proper for God than the name God (κυριώτερον δὲ πως ὄνομα τῷ Θεῷ τὸ Πατὴρ ἢ Θεός).” The name “God” signifies his “dignity (τῆς ἀξίας σημαντικόν)” while the name Father “reveals his essential property (τῆς οὐσιώδους ιδιότητος ἔχει τὴν δήλωσιν).” This essential property is that He has begotten the Son. The Son Himself testifies that “the name Father is more fitting and truer for God (οἰκειότερον δὲ πως καὶ ἀληθέστερον ὄνομα τῷ Θεῷ τὸ Πατὴρ)” by commanding His apostles to baptize the nations not in the name of God but “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Math. 28:19)”, and by saying not “I and God” but “I and the Father are one (John 10:30).”⁷⁶ The true Sonship of the Son (ἡ κατὰ ἀλήθειαν υἱότης) means that

⁷³ Eunomius. *Lib. Apol.* 15 (Vaggione 52, 14-15).

⁷⁴ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 456c 29 - 457a 2 (de Durand 338-340).

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 457d 30-31 (de Durand 342).

⁷⁶ Cyril. *In Jo. XI*, 7 (Pusey, vol. II (IV) 681, 961c-d).

“He is of the substance of the Father (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτὸν ὑπάρχειν τῆς τοῦ Πατρός).”⁷⁷ Were He not of the substance of the Father He would not be true Son “but counterfeit and pseudonymous one (νόθος δὲ ὥσπερ τις καὶ ψευδώνυμος).” The same applies to the Father too. He would not be called Father “rightly and truly (δικαίως τε καὶ ἀληθῶς)” were He not Father by substance. The notion of Fatherhood (τὸ τῆς πατριᾶς ἥτοι πατρότητος ὄνομα) is applied to God not in imitation to us but *we have received it* from Him, as apostle Paul testifies, saying: “from Whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name (Eph. 3:15)”. We are *by imitation* (κατὰ μίμησιν) fathers. God is *by nature* (κατὰ φύσιν) Father of the Word.⁷⁸ As every fatherhood is from God the Father, for He is “properly, primarily and truly Father (κυρίως καὶ πρῶτον καὶ ἀληθῶς),” in the same way, every sonship (πᾶσα υἰότης) is from the Son for He is “properly, only and truly Son (κυρίως καὶ μόνον ἀληθῶς).”⁷⁹ Here we could recognize a familiar Neoplatonic principle according to which the cause possesses the characteristics of its products in higher degree. Thus, in the words of the great systematizer of the Neoplatonic philosophy, Proclus, “the character as it preexists in the original giver has a higher reality than the character bestowed (τοῦ δοθέντος ἄρα τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ δεδοκῶτι προυπάρχον κρείττονως ἔστι).”⁸⁰ It seems that this rule on its own part depends on another proposition stating that “Every productive cause is superior to that which it produces (πᾶν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου κρείττον ἔστι τῆς τοῦ παραγομένου φύσεως).”⁸¹ In this way the posterior product “either has the same essence but in a lower degree or a different essence.”⁸² The characteristic, which is being given by the cause, “is inferior to its essence (ὑφειμένον ἔστι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίας)” precisely because “the bestowal (τὴν μετάδοσιν)” of that characteristic is “*from* the essence” of the cause (ἀπὸ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίας).⁸³ St Cyril testified that Eunomius had expressed similar considerations. In his *Thesaurus*, the

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, I, 3 (Pusey, vol. I (III), 1872, p. 37, 24a; Meunier 266, 181-182).

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, I, 3 (Pusey, vol. I (III) 38, 24c-e; Meunier 266-268).

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, II, 1 (Pusey, vol I (III), p. 190, 127e).

⁸⁰ Proclus. *The Elements of Theology. A revised text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, E. R. Dodds, second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 20; proposition 18, 9-10.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 8, proposition 7, 1-2.

⁸² Martijn M. and Gerson, L. “Proclus’ System”. – In: Pieter D’Hoine and Marije Martijn (eds), *All from One, A Guide to Proclus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 54.

⁸³ Proclus, *The Elements*, proposition 18, 5-6 (Dodds, 20).

Alexandrian Archbishop gives reference to the Eunomius' thesis that the product is always secondary to its cause: "That which is from a cause, or is begotten, says [Eunomius], is by necessity secondary to that which has become for it a cause of existence (τὸ ἐξ αἰτίου τινὸς ὄν, ἢ γεγεννημένον, φησὶν, ἀνάγκη δεύτερον εἶναι τούτου, ὃ δὴ καὶ γέγονεν αὐτῷ τοῦ εἶναι αἷτιον)."⁸⁴ It should be mentioned, however, that in Proclus' thought these rules apply to the causes that produce "by being (αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι)" and not by will. This stipulation is indeed an important part of his argument. Thus, Proclus ascribes to the One a form of producing that excludes any kind of activity, including any form of will or purpose. Hence, he is able to imagine a way in which the first principle produces "without actually being occupied with production."⁸⁵ In Christian context, however, the perspective is somewhat different and God possesses the characteristic of Fatherhood in a higher degree than the creatures precisely because they exist by His will and not by His nature.

Two types of actualization of capacity

In the concluding part of the argument St Cyril discusses the possible objection that God could be considered of as Father only potentially (δυνάμει). Thus, in conformity with the view of the "opponents", presented as usual by Hermias, the Son, before His generation, is to be apprehended only "in pure contemplation (ψιλῇ δὴ οὖν ἄρα θεωρίᾳ)."⁸⁶ In this way the Son would have been begotten after being in a potential state of some kind and would not be coeternal with the Father. It is not entirely clear against whom this argument is being made. A similar statement can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Letter to his congregation concerning the Council of Nicaea*. Explaining the Nicene anathema against those who say that the Son "did not exist before being generated (πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν)," the Bishop of Caesarea relates that Constantine "established by reasoning a proposition (τῷ λόγῳ κατεσκεύαζε)" according to which the Son "even before having been generated in actuality was potentially in the Father in an unbegotten way (καὶ πρὶν ἐνεργείᾳ γεννηθῆναι δυνάμει ἦν ἐν τῷ πατρὶ

⁸⁴ Cyril. *Thes.* IX; PG 75, 113 B.

⁸⁵ Riel, G. "The One, The Henads, and the Principles". – In: Pieter D'Hoine and Marije Martijn (eds), *All from One, A Guide to Proclus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 457e 43 (de Durand 342).

ἀγεννήτως).⁸⁷ It seems that, at least according to the narrative of Eusebius, the words of the emperor were the official explanation of the above-mentioned anathema. If, however, that was indeed the case, then the Nicene Creed would have been completely unacceptable for the bishops around St Alexander and St Athanasius and entirely pointless for the Eusebian party, and hence it would have been unsatisfactory and inadequate for the majority of the bishops at the council.⁸⁸ Probably only Marcellus of Ancyra and some of his supporters would have found the emperor's explanation to be passable. It seems that in his theological system Marcellus made room for a doctrine that the Son had initially existed only potentially. Thus, according to his exegesis, the verse of John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word" means that "the Word was potentially in the Father (δυνάμει ἐν τῷ πατρὶ εἶναι τὸν λόγον)," and the verse "and the Word was with God" reveals that "the Word was with God in actuality (ἐνεργείᾳ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εἶναι τὸν λόγον)."⁸⁹ This interpretation of the Marcellian theology, however, could be wrong. If we consider the possibility that δυνάμει and ἐνεργείᾳ may not have been used by Marcellus in the Aristotelian sense of existing "in potentiality" and "in actuality" but in the sense of "power" and "active power" respectively,⁹⁰ then Marcellus cannot be viewed as a target for St Cyril's polemic. Another possible target is Eunomius who, according to the Alexandrian archbishop, was willing to make the concession that the Son is coeternal (συναἰδιος) with the Father in so far as even before the generation of the Son "He [the Father] possessed in Himself the power of being able to generate Him (τὴν τοῦ δύνασθαι τεκεῖν αὐτὸν ἐξουσίαν εἶχεν ἐν ἑαυτῷ)." St Cyril replies that this is absurd (ἄτοπον) because in this line of reasoning the creation would be coeternal with God too, for "the creative power (τὸ δύνασθαι κτίζειν)" is in God eternally. If God's ability to create "does indeed bring a completion to the things (τὸ ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἀποτελεσμα φορεῖ)" then the creation would have existed before being created. In addition to this the Alexandri-

⁸⁷ Dokumente zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites, 46, 16-20 (Urkunde 22, 16).

⁸⁸ Robertson, J. *Crisp as Mediator, A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra and Athanasius of Alexandria*, Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 94.

⁸⁹ Eusebius von Kæsarea. *Gegen Marcell, Über die kirchliche Theologie, Die Fragmente Marcells*. Herausgegeben von Erich Klostermann, Eusebius Werke, Band IV. Leipzig 1906, S. 194, 10-13 (Frg. 52).

⁹⁰ Lienhard, J. *Contra Marcellum, Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth-Century Theology*. Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996, p. 55.

an archbishop explains that the ability to generate (τὸ δύνασθαι γεννᾶν) does not include its actualization (οὐπω τὴν ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἐνέργειαν ἔχει). The Son's existence cannot be reduced to the Father's ability to beget.⁹¹

Let us return to the text of the *Dialogues on the Trinity*. Cyril begins the fourth part of his argument by raising an objection against the view presented by Hermias saying that it will imply "some kind of change and crude alteration (τροπή καὶ παχειά τις ὥσπερ ἐξαλλαγή)" in the Divine essence if God "has indeed proceeded from potentiality to actuality (τὸ ἐκ τοῦ δυνάμει φημὶ μεταχωρεῖν εἰς ἐνέργειαν)." Hermias on the other hand asks, again on behalf of the opponents, whether if this argument was applied to the creative power of God that would not imply an eternal world. If God was eternally and by nature a Creator would not that mean that He had changed having proceeded from being only potentially Creator to being Creator in actuality. Thus, if we do not consider the creative act of God as implying an alteration of His essence, why should we consider the begetting of the Son to be any different? St Cyril objects to this by saying that these are two different kinds of actualization. "That which is said to beget something from itself (τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ τι τεκεῖν λεγόμενον)" and "has proceeded from a state of potentiality to actuality (ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ δύνανμιν προβεβηκὸς εἰς ἐνέργειαν)," he argues, "has indeed shaken in its own nature (ὥς ἐν ἰδίᾳ φύσει σεσάλευται)." Thus, any begetting nature would suffer "the movement towards actualization (τὴν κατ' ἐνέργειαν κίνησιν) not in some other things but in itself (οὐκ ἐφ' ἑτέροις τισίν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ)". On the contrary, "that which has proceeded from a state of not doing something to a state of doing it (ἀπὸ τοῦ τι μὴ δρᾶν ἐπὶ τὸ δεῖν ἐργάζεσθαι)" has the movement toward actualization not in itself but in some other things. St Cyril illustrates his argument by giving an example of particular person who is "by nature able to beget (γεννητικὸς μὲν γὰρ κατὰ φύσιν)." At first, he is only potentially a father but in time he probably will actualize his ability to beget. On the other hand, the same person is by nature and essentially able to engage in human science and technique, and given that he has been properly educated, he can actualize his abilities. Thus, the question is: Are these two abilities, to beget a son and to engage in a science, actualized in the same manner? The implied answer is negative. Hermias is completely convinced by the example and adds on his own that in the case of engaging

⁹¹ Cyril. *Thes.* V, PG 75, 69 A-C.

in science there is only “a manifestation (τὴν ἔκφανσιν)” of the inherent knowledge. On the other hand, he who begets a son, “is being moved essentially in himself (ὁ δὲ ἐστὶν οὐσιωδῶς ἐφ’ ἑαυτῷ οἰονεὶ κινούμενος).” In this case, the nature itself has undergone “some kind of change and alteration (μετάστασιν τινα καὶ τροπήν).”⁹²

In order to understand properly the structure of the explanation presented here it should be taken into consideration that the basic elements of the argument are definitely Aristotelian in character, even though the name of the great philosopher is not explicitly mentioned in the text. The thesis that different types of actualization should be distinguished is borrowed from the Aristotelian treatise *On the Soul*.⁹³ In the fifth chapter of the second book of this treatise Aristotle argues that there are two types of potentiality. Firstly, a man can be spoken of as wise because “he is one of the genera of beings which are wise and have wisdom (ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῶν ἐπιστημόνων καὶ ἐχόντων ἐπιστήμην).” Secondly, a man can be considered to be wise in the sense that “he has learnt grammar (τὸν ἔχοντα τὴν γραμματικήν).” Each of these two men possesses the capacity of being wise but not in the same way. Both of them are “potentially wise (κατὰ δύναμιν ἐπιστήμονες)” and they are able to actualize their capacity, but the first one “has undergone qualitative change through instruction (ὁ μὲν διὰ μαθήσεως ἀλλοιωθεὶς).” In the second case, the case of having the grammatical knowledge but not using it, the transition from “inactivity to activity (μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δ’ εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν)” is accomplished “in a different way (ἄλλον τρόπον).”⁹⁴ Aristotle continues by explaining that “to be acted upon (τὸ πάσχειν)” has more than one meaning too. On one hand, it can imply simply the destruction of a subject by the contrary. On the other, it can signify “the preservation of what is potentially existent by what is actually existent (τὸ δὲ σωτηρία μᾶλλον τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχεῖα ὄντος).” At this point Aristotle states that “the possessor of knowledge can indeed become contemplating in actuality (θεωροῦν γὰρ γίγνεται τὸ ἔχον τὴν ἐπιστήμην),” and more importantly, in this case the actualization of the potential state is not to be considered as a “qualitative alteration (ἀλλοιοῦσθαι),” the reason being that the development here is

⁹² Cyril. *Dial. Trin.* 458b 9 – 459d 29 (de Durand 344-348).

⁹³ Burnyeat, M. “De Anima II 5”. *Phronesis*, 1 (2002) 28-90.

⁹⁴ Aristotle. *De Anima*. With translation, introduction and notes by R. D. Hicks. Amsterdam, 1965, p. 72; De Anima II 5, 4; 417a24-417b1.

“into actuality (εἰς ἐντελέχειαν).” The conclusion of these considerations is that “it is not right to say that that which thinks undergoes a qualitative alteration when it thinks or the builder when he builds (διὸ οὐ καλῶς ἔχει λέγειν τὸ φρονοῦν, ὅταν φρονῇ, ἀλλοιοῦσθαι, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὸν οἰκοδόμον ὅταν οἰκοδομῇ).”⁹⁵ The theological application of this statement is quite significant, especially in Christian context. It gives the means to speak of God as a creator in a proper sense.

Concerning the position that the creation of the world should not be considered as a natural act or as an act accomplished by nature some of St Cyril’s opponents agreed with him. Thus, according to Eunomius, we should not suppose that God’s creative activity could be viewed as “some kind of motion of His essence (κίνησιν τινα τῆς οὐσίας).” Those, “who have united the activity to the essence (ἐνούντων τῇ οὐσίᾳ τὴν ἐνέργειαν),” have presented the world as coeval with God, having been led astray “by the sophistries of the Hellenes (τοῖς Ἑλλήνων σοφίσμασιν).”⁹⁶ Thus, the Divine essence is without beginning, simple and endless, while the creative activity is neither without beginning nor without ending. If it were without beginning the world would be eternal too.⁹⁷ Origen, on the other hand, viewed this issue differently. In *De principiis* 1.2.10, he explains that “even God cannot be called Almighty if there are not those over whom he can exercise his power (*ita ne omnipotens quidem deus dici potest, si non sint in quos exerceat potentatum*),” implying that the world must be eternal so that God can be conceived of as possessing eternally that quality. If that were not the case, it would appear that God “had received a certain increase (*profectum quendam accepisse*)” and that He “had come from a lower to a higher state (*ex inferioribus ad meliora venuisse*).”⁹⁸ There is some additional evidence for this argument of Origen, derived from a work of St Methodius of Olympus, entitled “*On creatures*”, partially preserved only in the *Bibliotheca* of St Photius of Constantinople. According to these fragments Origen insisted that the world (τὸ πᾶν) is coeternal (συναἰδιον) with God, and that if it were not, then it would appear that God “had altered and changed (ἀλλοιοῦσθαι καὶ μεταβάλλειν).” If the world were not coeternal with God, then “He would have passed from not making to making (ἀπὸ

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, II 5, 5; 417b2-417b9 (Hicks 72).

⁹⁶ Eunomius. *Lib. Apol.* 22 (Vaggione 62, 9-11).

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 23 (Vaggione 62, 6-7).

⁹⁸ Origen. *De princ.* 1. 2.10 (Behr, vol. I, 56).

τοῦ μὴ ποιεῖν εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν μετέβαλε).⁹⁹ St Methodius objects to this statement by arguing that God's perfection does not depend on the existence of the world. Simply stated, we should not say that God is perfect through the world (διὰ κόσμον); rather, "He would be found to be perfect by Himself (αὐτὸς καθ' ἑαυτὸν τέλειος εὐρίσκειτο)." If the Creator needed His creation in order to be a Creator, that would imply that God's perfection is ontologically dependent on the existence of the world. In this case, St Methodius argues, "God would by Himself be imperfect (αὐτὸς καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀτελὴς ἔσται)." Against the objection that if God had started creating the world, that would definitely imply an ontological alteration in His nature, he used a clever argument depending on juxtaposition of the beginning and the end of the creative act. It is a Biblical truth that God has ceased from His work on the seventh day. If the cessation of God's work was not an alteration – and it is not to be conceived as such precisely because it is revealed in the Scripture – why should we consider the beginning of His work to be any different? The same question can be asked contrarywise. If "the creating after not creating (τὸ ποιεῖν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ποιεῖν)," is to be considered as alteration in God, must not we consider "the passing from creating to not creating (τὸ μὴ ποιεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ποιεῖν)" to be the same? Thus, the only acceptable answer for the Olympian bishop is to confess that the world is not coeternal with God and that He has not changed in His nature having actualized His creative power.¹⁰⁰ St Athanasius too, had to defend against the Arians a similar position according to which God's being a creator does not depend on the existence of His creatures.¹⁰¹ Thus, according to him, a work "is external to its maker (ἔξωθεν τοῦ ποιούντός ἐστιν)" while a son is "an offspring proper to the essence (ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας γέννημά ἐστι)" of his father. That is the reason why a work "does not exist always by necessity (οὐκ ἀνάγκη ἀεὶ εἶναι)," being produced by the will of its maker. An offspring, on the contrary, "is not subjected to the will (οὐ βουλήσει ὑπόκειται)" but "is a property of the essence (τῆς οὐσίας ἐστὶν ιδιότης)." Hence God can be considered as a creator even though the creatures are not existing yet, while He cannot be a Father if His Son does not exist. The nonexistence of the creatures does not amount to any diminution in the essence of the Creator

⁹⁹ Photius. *Bibliothèque*. Texte établi et traduit par René Henry, t. v, cod. 230-241. Paris: Les belles lettres, 1967, p. 109; 302a 30-302b 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 302b 18-303a 17 (Henry 110-111).

¹⁰¹ Anatolios, K. *Athanasius – The coherence of his thought*. London-NY: Routledge 1998, p. 119.

because He still possesses “the power to create (τὸ δύνασθαι δημιουργεῖν).” The absence of the Father’s offspring, on the contrary, definitely implies “a reduction of the completeness of His essence (ἐλάττωμα τῆς τελειότητος τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ).”¹⁰²

The distinction between two types of actualization of potentiality will find its complete development in the writings of another Alexandrian, John Philoponus.¹⁰³ In contrast to St Cyril, Philoponus used this distinction in his polemic against Proclus in order to defend the Christian belief in the beginning of the created world. He demonstrated a much more technical approach by making the Aristotelian background of his argument explicitly clear, and by distinguishing between two types of potential and two types of actual existing.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The relation of freedom, will and nature in God is one of the most difficult questions in the field of Theology. Placed in the context of the Trinitarian Theology the issue becomes even more acute. As Christians we believe that God is completely and perfectly free and independent from any kind of external or internal necessity. Yet, in Trinitarian context we must accept a particular kind of necessity in God, namely the necessity of Son’s and Spirit’s existence and the necessity of God’s being a Father of the Son and the One from Whom the Spirit proceeds. That the Son and the Spirit are by necessity eternally with the Father is indeed one of the most important tenets of the Nicene doctrine of consubstantiality. Thus, in the fourth century the Church was faced with the dilemma of choosing between the complete freedom of God and His Fatherhood, both being incontestable Biblical truths. The solution proposed by St Cyril is based on the rejection of the premise that freedom and nature are opposed to each other and that freedom is preconditioned by a particular act of will. Thus, God is free precisely by nature and His freedom and nature does not depend on a particular act of His will. It is true that following this approach we are left without an answer to the question why God is good or why He is

¹⁰² Athanasius. *Adv. Arian.* 1.29 (Kannengiesser, tome I, 192-194).

¹⁰³ Groot, J. “Philoponus on De Anima II.5, Physics III.3, and the Propagation of Light”. *Phronesis*, 2 (1983), 179.

¹⁰⁴ Johannes Philoponus. *De aeternitate mundi (Über die Ewigkeit der Welt)*, ed. Clemens Scholten, Band II. Turnhout: Brepolis Publishers, 2009, S. 476-488 (IV 7).

a Father. To be sure, “For He willed so” is not a permissible reply in St Cyril’s view. If, however, we choose to follow the other path, placing the will of God as having logically and ontologically priority over His nature, then we should reconsider the most important part of the Trinitarian teaching of the Church. For St Cyril that was not an option. That is why he made a considerable effort to show that this path leads to nowhere indeed.

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