

Investigaciones en curso

The Council of Nicaea and its reception

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE TOPIC

2025 will see the 1700th anniversary of the celebration of the first council of Nicaea, and it will provide an opportunity to take a new look at it due to its undeniable importance for theology and for the history of western thought. This significance is not limited to theology alone. The Nicæan challenge of thinking the newness of the revelation contained in the Gospel meant “not only the application but the transformation of Greek philosophy” (K. Hemmerle). Considering the universal acceptance of the content of Nicaea, this occasion will bear also an ecumenical importance.

To trace the development and reception of Nicaea is not easy for historians of theology. The repeated explanation about Arianism that it was just a denial of the divinity of Christ that spread easily and overtook almost all of Christianity, as transmitted by Jerome¹, is

unlikely. Besides the complexity of the reception of Nicaea –described as a “night combat”²–, the research to find out how things really developed runs into the following additional obstacles:

a. Some missing sources.

There is no general lack of sources, but they are, regrettably, irregular. Some facts –mainly the council itself– are poorly documented.

b. The polemic bias in the transmission of documents. The reception of Nicaea was biased by theological and political interests. Historiography has not been conscious enough of how polemics have influenced the transmission of documents.

c. The lack of theological contextualization of documents. The old sources, which mainly depend on Athanasius,

controversy. Some categories reconsidered”, *Theological studies* XLVIII (1987) 415-437; S. FERNÁNDEZ, “Arrio y la configuración inicial de la controversia arriana”, *Scripta Theologica* 45 (2013) 10.

¹ “At that moment the term *ousía* was abolished: the Nicene Faith stood condemned by acclamation. The whole world groaned, and was astonished to find itself Arian”, Jerome, *Altercatio*, 19. Cf. J. T. LIENHARD, “The ‘Arian’

² Cf. SOCRATES, *HE*, I,23,6-7. Cf. SOZOMEN, *HE*, II,18,3. Cf. BASILIUS, *De Spiritu Sancto*, XXIX, 76.

transmit the documents of his opponents in a way that misleads the reader into a false interpretation because of an inadequate theological context.

d. The lack of philosophical contextualization of technical terms. The technical terms, that belong to the Christological and Trinitarian language, are understood in different philosophical and theological ways by those engaged in the discussion.

e. The unbalance discussion centered only on the divinity of the son. Historiography has yielded an unbalanced stress on the discussion on the divinity of the Son (Arian crisis) and forgetting the non less important discussion on the distinction of Son and Father (Monarchian crisis). The heat of the controversy lead to think that all those who opposed Nicaea simply denied the divinity of the Son. Some of them were not denying that the Son was God, but refused to accept the ὁμοούσιος to defend the distinction between the Son and the Father.

The first part of this research project has been approved by the Chilean National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT), regular Fondecyt project 116021 (2016-2018). The head-researcher of the project is Professor Samuel Fernández of the Faculty of Theology of the

Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Joint-researchers are professor Catalina Balmaceda of the History Institute of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile; and professor Claudio Pierantoni of the Institute of Literature of the University of Los Andes; and professor Cristián Sotomayor of the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Fernando Soler who is a doctoral candidate in the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, is also part of the same research team.

Important experts, as Manlio Simonetti (La Sapienza, Roma), Lorenzo Perrone (Bologna, Italy), Annick Martin (Rennes, France), and John Behr (St. Vladimir's Seminary, USA), have offered their advice-giving to this project.

2. AIMS OF THIS INVESTIGATION

This being the case, this research project has three main aims:

2.1. To compose a collection of the texts contemporary to the reception of Nicaea

The purpose is to collect thoroughly, in one volume, all the contemporary texts, letters, documents, fragments, related to the "Arian crisis" (up to the year 381), which are not transmitted independently (*traditio directa*), but quoted by others authors, as Eusebius, Atha-

nasius, Hilary, Epiphanius, Socrates, Sozomen, etc. (*traditio indirecta*). This work is necessary because it does not follow the same criteria as *Athanasius Werke* III³. This col-

³ The only complete anthology dedicated to Nicaea and its reception is volume III of AW, H.G. OPTIZ, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streits* (*Athanasius Werke* III,1, lief. 1,2, Berlin 1934) and H.CH. BRENNECKE et alii, *Dokumente zur Geschichte des ariansiches Streits* (*AW* III,1 lief. 3,4, Berlin 2007-2014). This work –of great scientific value– is lead by different criteria from ours: a) AW includes not only documents but also pieces of information found in historians (Socrates, Sozomen, etc.), our collection will only include contemporary documents. b) AW does not include theologic fragments of some important authors such as Marcellus of Ancira, Asterius the Sophist, Eustatius of Antioquia, or others less important, as Sophronius of Pompeyopolis. It does not include as well the disciplinary canons of the synods. The present research will contain these documents. c) AW is focused on the “Arian crisis”, and our project is centered in Nicaea and its reception (for this reason it includes –for instance– the disciplinary canons). d) We hope this material to be translated to other European languages and so be available to more readers than AW III; not only philologists and patristic scholars but also theologians, historians, philosophers and canon lawyers. e) AW has established the critical texts. Our collection will use the best critical editions already existent in each case,

lection has its own purposes: a) to balance the biased interpretation caused by the way in which the sources have been transmitted; b) to re-place the sources and the technical terms in their original theological and philosophical contexts; c) to balance the importance of the discussion about the divinity of the Son with the understated discussion about the distinction between the Son and the Father; d) to provide the old translations of Greek into Latin and Latin into Greek to show the ways in which the technical terms were understood.

The documents must be not only identified (*inventio*), but also replaced in their original theological contexts so as to be read in the traditions they belong to and not in those of their adversaries (*dispositio*).

We expect to be over with this work by the year 2020, five years before the 2025 anniversary, to promote research on Nicaea among theologians, historians, philosophers and canon lawyers, before 2025.

2. 2. To write a new reconstruction of Nicaea and its reception

The theological controversy of the IV century has been explained

and only note different variantes when they have a doctrinal importance.

as the struggle of the defenders against the adversaries of Christ's divinity (*Arian crisis*), but the controversy was also –and largely– about the unity and distinction between the Son and the Father (*Monarchian crisis*). A better attention to the Monarchian question, inherited from the III century, allows a better understanding of the historical process of the reception of Nicaea. This amounts to a re-understanding of the “Arian crisis” as a “Monarchian crisis”. For this reason it is necessary to revisit the complex process of the reception of Nicaea. In this light we hope to highlight the theological worth of groups labeled by history as “Arians” or “semi-Arians” only because they refused to accept the Nicaean ὁμοούσιος although they were not Arians but antimonarchians.

3. TO PUBLISH SOME IMPORTANT WORKS FOR NICAEA

This project seeks to favor the edition and translation of some specially important works for the study of the council of Nicaea and its reception. We are hoping to associate more scholars so as to have in some years time, the most important historical and theological works related to the Nicaean process in Spanish language. Some members of the team and associate

scholars are working on the translation, and sometime in the edition, of the following works:

Claudio PIERANTONI, EUSEBIUS OF CESAREA, *Contra Marcellum* (GCS 14, Eusebius Werke IV. E. Klostermann - G. Ch. Hansen, 1991).

Claudio PIERANTONI, EUSEBIUS OF CESAREA, *De ecclesiastica theologia* (GCS 14, Eusebius Werke IV. E. Klostermann - G. Ch. Hansen, 1991).

Enrique CONTRERAS, RUFINUS OF AQUILEA, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (GCS NF 6, Eusebius Werke II/3. Th. Mommsen; 2. Aufl. 1999).

Samuel FERNÁNDEZ, ATHANASIOS OF ALEJANDRIA, *De synodis Arimini in Italia et Seleucia in Isauria* (H.G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*, II,1, De Gruyter, Berlin 1940).

Samuel FERNÁNDEZ, HILARY OF POITIERS, *Liber de Synodis seu De fide orientalium* (S. Maffei, ed., Venice 1749, contained in PL 10,479-546).

We are hoping to invite other scholars interested in translating other sources or in studying other particular aspects of de council of Nicaea and its process of reception.

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