

INTRODUCTION:



The Winter 2024 issue celebrates the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325). This council secured the Christian faith against Arianism by clarifying the relation between the Father and the Son: the Son, vis-à-vis the Father, is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made. . .” The council used the Greek term *homoousios*, of the same essence/substance, to elucidate more clearly the meaning of this assertion. Ultimately, this crucial christological achievement secured the redemption brought about by the Son at his Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection. In commemoration of the council, we present you with a series of articles exploring its historical and theological legacy. The essays herein discuss and respond to questions such as: Did the council Hellenize the faith by using the term *homoousios*? Did the Creed constitute a final split between Christianity and Judaism? What is the connection between the Son’s Incarnation and his eternal filiation from the Father? Finally, in “Also in this issue...” we present a selection of articles on various other topics, including the practice of ecclesiastical ghostwriting, the deeper meaning of Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and the essential connection between virginity and creativity.

In “A Conversation on the Council of Nicaea,” **Kahled Anatolios** speaks with a *Communio* editor on the significance of

the council for our times. Fr. Anatolios reflects on topics such as the need to understand the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, the centrality of the Trinity for Christian life, as well as contemporary scholarly debates about the doctrine and its history. What does it mean to say the Church is undergoing a trinitarian revival? Is it possible to say anything new about the Trinity? According to Anatolios, “A genuine revival of trinitarian theology must . . . take the form of an articulation of trinitarian modes of experiencing and understanding and enacting the entirety of Christian faith.”

David M. Gwynn, in “Athanasius, Nicaea, and the ‘Arian Controversy,’” gives a historical reconstruction of the role Athanasius of Alexandria served in defining Church doctrine in the wake of the Arian controversy. According to Gwynn, there is a need to separate the history from both the polemical account of Arianism and the hagiographic descriptions of Athanasius. While modern critics have challenged the hagiographic accounts and questioned the significance of Athanasius’s role in the controversy, Gwynn argues that a thorough analysis of the historical accounts reveals that Athanasius’s accomplishments arguably exceed those reported in the hagiography.

In “‘Of the Same Essence as the Father’: Did the Council of Nicaea Cut off Christianity’s Jewish Roots?” **Jan-Heiner Tück** defends the thesis that the council’s definition of the Son as “one in essence with the Father” finally demarcated the orthodox Christian view of God from that of rabbinical Judaism. However, he argues against the claim that Christianity was Hellenized and thus separated from its Jewish heritage by adopting the concept of *homoousia*. This reading of the history, he claims, is too simplistic: it fails to appreciate both the foreshadowings of the Incarnation found in the Jewish faith and the pre-Christian Jewish use of Hellenistic philosophy. Tück argues that the trinitarian understanding of God was not so much a “revolution in the concept of God” as a “*transformation* that is characterized simultaneously by points of continuity and points of discontinuity.”

“The *Homoousios to Patri* and the Discernment of Spirits: On the Criteriological Role of the Nicene Creed,”

by **Karl-Heinz Menke**, examines the Nicene Creed as a standard for orthodox Christian faith. Menke addresses the claim that to refer to Christ as “God the Son,” rather than merely calling him the “son of God,” is a falsification of the gospels. He sees the attribution *homoousios to Patri* (“of the same essence as the Father”) as a necessary clarification of the biblical account. Menke then considers both historical and contemporary alternatives to the Nicene Creed and argues that alternative christologies fall either into adoptionism or Docetism.

In “Nicaea: Hellenizing the Faith or Utilizing Philosophy?” **Giulio Maspero** responds to Adolf von Harnack’s 1888 thesis that the word *homoousios* represents a Hellenization of the faith. Maspero adopts Alois Grillmeier’s thesis, arguing that it was in fact Arius who Hellenized the faith with his attempt to describe the Trinity in a way compatible with Middle Platonism. Maspero considers the historical use of Greek terms used at the council in both their Christian and pagan contexts, discusses why the council considered it necessary to adopt these terms, and, finally, offers a synthesis of the historical and theological facts.

In “Also in this issue...” **Samuel Korb** addresses the question, “What is the relationship between this mystery of the kenosis or self-emptying of Christ and the eternal life of the Trinity?” In “As Ointment Emptied Out: Origen and Intratrinitarian Kenosis” he asks specifically, “Is there an analogy between the Son’s kenosis in the Incarnation and the Father’s eternal generation of the Son?” Since the time of Hegel, philosophers and theologians have seen the Father’s generation of the Son as an *Ur-kenosis*, mirrored in the Son’s Incarnation. This approach, however, has been critiqued by some contemporary theologians. In this essay, Korb considers the works of Origen, the first theologian to make significant use of the term *kenosis*, as a helpful source to think through the implications of referring to the Father’s generation of the Son with the term *Ur-kenosis*.

“Possession in Detachment: The Fruitful Character of Virginity and the Virginal Character of Creativity” by **Apolonio and Siobhan Latar** relates Luigi Giussani’s and J. R. R.

Tolkien's theological and artistic perspectives on virginity. According to Giussani, the call to a virginal existence is universal. He defended this bold claim on the grounds that the ability to understand a thing depends on "an initial space or distance from it that enables one to affirm it first in its *otherness*." Tolkien echoes this teaching in his explanation of the nature and task of an artist. He writes that, in order to portray anything truly, the artist must maintain a reverential distance from the reality in question. Distance allows the thing to be seen and appreciated in its entirety. For both Giussani and Tolkien, distance counterintuitively allows for a deeper understanding of and union with the thing loved.

In "Apocalyptic Readings of *Moby-Dick*: What Ishmael Returns to Tell Us," **Robert Alexander** argues that modern scholars of *Moby-Dick* by and large misread the work, shying away from grappling with it on its own terms and in its integrity, and preferring instead to read it through a predetermined lens. This systematic misinterpretation is ironic because, when considered as a whole, *Moby-Dick* is a book about misreading. Indeed, the plot is carried by Captain Ahab's fundamental misinterpretation of reality and his inability to accept any viewpoint other than his own. Alexander explores how *Moby-Dick* grapples with the internal contradictions of both rationalism and Protestant theology. "One of the great anomalies of our time is that critics read *Moby-Dick* as a nihilist work in which Melville supposedly quarrels with God. Nothing could be farther from the truth. To read *Moby-Dick* well, that is, to read for the whole, for its form and what it does with theme and character, is to see it as one of the most profoundly religious stories of the modern world, deeply prophetic in its vision."

In "The Scope and Limits of Ecclesiastical Ghostwriting," **M. V. Dougherty** opens a vital discussion on the widespread practice of ghostwriting within the Church. Dougherty presents the works of Cardinal Christophe Pierre as a case study, who has served as the papal nuncio to the United States since 2016. In his article, Dougherty explores

two important questions: are the works of the bishops beyond investigation? And, given the different forums (homily, address, academic article...), when and to what extent is it legitimate for a bishop to use ghostwriters? Following Augustine, he argues that ghostwriting can be useful, and indeed necessary, in certain cases. And yet “ghostwriting . . . introduces a divide between the one who authors a message and another who publicly authorizes it in virtue of episcopal consecration. One may consider how best to reconcile a traditional understanding of the *charisma veritatis* of a bishop—as expressed in the documents of Vatican I and II—with any heavy dependence on ecclesiastical ghostwriters. A danger of pervasive ghostwriting is that the particular and unique voice of the one called to episcopal service can be displaced. An overreliance on ghostwriters—like an overreliance on a legal team or public relations department—arguably limits the faithful in hearing the true voice of their shepherd.” □

—The Editors