

KRITISCHE MISCELLEN

A note on 'Like according to the Scriptures'

By Richard P. C. Hanson

The Second Sirmian Creed of 357, which became the target of a huge volume of abuse from more than one school of thought when it appeared, is the first official formula to use the term ὁμοιος κατὰ τὰς γραφάς. It was repeated in the 'Dated' Creed of Sirmium in May 359, with the significant addition of 'in all things' (κατὰ πάντα), in the Creed of Nike in the same year (without the addition κατὰ πάντα), and in the Creed of Constantinople produced early in 360, again without the addition κατὰ πάντα. The expression was therefore canonised in a creed which had some claim to be called ecumenical, and Arians subsequently tended to appeal to it as an established norm¹.

Creeds with this expression 'like according to the Scriptures' have been regarded almost unanimously by modern scholars as a mere form of words designed to deceive people of other than Arian ways of thinking into accepting a formula which could be used for Arian ends, a political rather than a theological statement, Gwatkin's description 'specious charity and colourless indefiniteness'² is only one example of this attitude. In fact the Arians who adopted this term 'like according to the Scriptures' intended to express a doctrine which was neither charitable nor indefinite, as can fairly easily be shown.

Acacius may have for a short period during and after the Council of Constantinople of 360 used the argument that the creed adopted could accommodate all viewpoints, in order to induce the followers of Basil of Ancyra (who markedly preferred ὁμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν) to sign the Council's creed. But it is significant that he chose to have them deprived for their sees for other than theological reasons, even if they had signed the creed. He did not trust the creed's comprehensiveness to keep them faithful to his policy. In fact, comprehensiveness in the sense of 'specious indefiniteness' was not a principle

¹ Eg. Maximinus the Arian bishop in his *Collatio* with Augustine, *Collatio* 2 (PL 42.110); cf. E. Schwartz 'Zur Kirchengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts' (*Zeitschr. für NTlich. Wissenschaft* Bd. 34 [1935], 168-9), who thinks that it was the norm of faith for the Emperor Valens; M. Meslin (*Les Ariens d'Occident* [Paris 1967], 44-8) believed that it was the creed of Palladius of Ratiaria; cf. also M. Simonetti *La Crisi Ariana nel IV Secolo* (Rome 1975), 253-4.

² H. M. Gwatkin *Studies in Arianism* (Cambridge²1900), 168.

much recognised nor widely honoured in the ancient church, and one suspects that modern scholars when they attach it to this creed are reading into the minds of the ancients a basically modern idea. Certainly the proponents and champions of this creed, the Homoean Arians, as they are most usefully called, showed no inclination at all to tolerate a wide spectrum of belief. They did not behave as if they thought it an advantage to have a creed which more than one doctrinal tradition could accept. They harried and did their best to suppress every viewpoint on the subject of the Christian doctrine of God but their own with remarkable impartiality. Pro-Nicenes (i.e. Homoousians), the followers of Basil of Ancyra (who are usually rather inaccurately called Homoeousians) and (to use Kopecek's useful epithet) Neo-Arians, viz the followers of Eunomius, were all deprived and ostracised as far as possible by Akakius, Euzoius, Eudoxius and the Emperor Valens between 364 and 378, which is the period when Homoean Arianism was most influential.

When we look at the documents of Arianism which were written by those who did not enjoy imperial support and whose sentiments were motivated, we may be sure, by genuine conviction quite apart from political expediency,³ we can see why the expression 'like according to the Scriptures' was in effect the watchword of this type of Arianism, and not a mere formula designed to accommodate different theological traditions. The chief desire of people who embraced this creed was to produce precisely what was, in their view, the Biblical doctrine of God, no more and no less. 'We believe the Scriptures', says Maximinus, 'and we respect these divine Scriptures; and we do not wish to pass over a single jot, because we fear the danger which is set out in the Scriptures themselves' (an allusion to Deut 4.2).⁴ This was the positive side of their doctrine. The Scriptures declared that the Son was like the Father, was his image, but no more. They did not describe how he was generated (all sides in the controversy appealed to Isa 53.8, 'his generation who shall declare?', and the Homean Arians not least). Above all, the Scriptures did not say anything about the *ousia* of the Father or the Son. To introduce this word or its compounds was, in their view, to go beyond the boundaries of Scripture. They maintained steadily, and of course correctly, that the Bible said nothing whatever about the *ousia* of the Son or of the Father, in the face of frenzied attempts by the pro-Nicene writers to prove the contrary. This was the negative side of their doctrine.

This is why all the creeds which opt for the expression 'like according to the Scriptures' also contain strong disavowals of the use of *ousia* or its compounds in defining the relation of the Son to the Father. To use *ousia* in the

³ E.g. R. Gryson *Scolies ariennes sur le concile d'Aquilée* (Paris 1980) and *Scripta Arriana Latina* (Corp. Christ. ser. LXXXVII, 1982); A. Mai *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio* (Rome 1828) III Pars II; *Collatio Augustini cum Maximino*, and articles of C. H. Turner in *Journ. Theol. Stud.* 13 (OS) (1912), 19–28; 16 (1915), 161–76, 314–22; 17 (1916), 225–35, 321–37; 20 (1919) 289–310.

⁴ *Collatio* 13 (730).

sense of either *homoousios* or *homoeousios* was, in the opinion of the Homoean Arians, to fall into either what they called Sabellianism, i.e. the identification of the Father and the Son without further qualification, or what they called Manichaeism, i.e., to put it crudely, regarding the Son as a bit broken off from the Father. When pressed they would have said that the Son was like the Father according to will, for he originated from the Father's will (and not ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, an early doctrine of Arius which they repudiated), but certainly not from his *ousia*. This is why they rejected all other contemporary alternatives: the *homoousios* of course; and the ὁμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν, which they equated with the adjective *homoeousios*, a word which in fact the so-called Homoeousians never used. But this also accounts for the animosity against the Eunomian doctrine of the Neo-Arians displayed by the Homoeans; the watchword of the Eunomians was not 'unlike' (*anhomoeos*); they constantly and indignantly repudiated this word, which their opponents as constantly attached to them and which modern scholars have too often thoughtlessly perpetuated. Their great slogan was ἕτεροούσιος, 'of a different *ousia*'. But this word also was offensive to the Homoean Arians because it too introduced the non-Biblical and misleading word *ousia* (quite apart from the fact that the very radical views of the Neo-Arians tended to bring the whole anti-Nicene cause into disrepute).

We must therefore take the Homoean Arians seriously when they declare that 'like according to the scriptures' without further qualification is the only proper and genuinely Biblical term to express the Son's likeness to the Father. This is not to say that their whole doctrine of God as revealed in Christ was satisfactory. But we must not dismiss their point of view as purely one of expediency or political advantage. Palladius of Ratiaria was able to defend it in very unfavourable circumstances at the Council of Aquileia against the dominating but not very astute Ambrose, and to defend it with vigour and confidence. It was not a temporary expedient but an authentic, consistent point of view.