

“THE HERETIC WHO WANTED TO BE HEARD”: EUNOMIUS OF CYZICUS AND THE DISPUTES BETWEEN FAITH AND POWER IN THE FOURTH CENTURY CE

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Resumo

O bispo cristão Eunômio de Cízico (335-394) tornou-se conhecido na historiografia e na literatura patrística por seus embates com os chamados Padres Capadócijs, ocorridos na segunda metade do século IV EC, na porção oriental do Império Romano. Defensor de uma vertente cristã conhecida como arianismo anomoiano, Eunômio contestava a consubstancialidade amplamente sustentada pelo dogma trinitário. A partir da provocação “O herege que queria ser ouvido”, este artigo analisa a obra *Profissão de Fé* de Eunômio de Cízico, tratada como um discurso político-religioso elaborado a pedido do imperador Teodósio I, inserindo-a nas disputas entre fé e poder que marcaram o século IV, sobretudo os desdobramentos após o Concílio de Constantinopla de 381. Ao problematizar o lugar de Eunômio, o estudo propõe uma reflexão sobre a construção historiográfica da chamada “oficialização” do cristianismo, entendida não como ponto de chegada, mas como processo histórico de negociações, silenciamentos e disputas pela verdade da fé.

Palavras-chave

Antiguidade Tardia; Cristianismos; Padres Capadócijs; Eunômio de Cízico.

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Abstract

The Christian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus (335–394) became known in historiography and patristic literature for his debates with the so-called Cappadocian Fathers, which took place in the eastern part of the Roman Empire during the second half of the fourth century CE. A defender of a Christian current known as Anomoean Arianism, Eunomius challenged the consubstantiality widely upheld by Trinitarian doctrine. Building on the provocation “The heretic who wanted to be heard”, this article analyzes the work *Profession of Faith* by Eunomius of Cyzicus, treating it as a politico-religious discourse written at the request of Emperor Theodosius I. The study situates the text within the conflicts between faith and power that marked the fourth century, especially the aftermath of the Council of Constantinople (381). By problematizing Eunomius’s place in this context, the article reflects on the historiographical construction of the so-called “officialization” of Christianity, understood not as an endpoint but as a historical process of negotiation, silencing, and contestation over the truth of faith.

Keywords

Late Antiquity; Christianities; Cappadocian Fathers; Eunomius of Cyzicus.

Initial considerations

The Christian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus (335–394) became known in historiography and patristic literature for his debates with the so-called Cappadocian Fathers—Basil of Caesarea (329/331–378), Gregory of Nazianzus (325–390), and Gregory of Nyssa (335/340–394)—which took place during the second half of 4th century CE, in the eastern Rome. A defender of a Christian denomination known as Anomoean Arianism, Eunomius challenged the consubstantiality widely upheld by Trinitarian doctrine. Based on his apologetical work—*Apology* and *Apology for the Apology*, the latter preserved by the refutations of Gregory of Nyssa—and on *Confession of Faith*, addressed to Emperor Theodosius I, we can access part of the Arian controversy that profoundly marked the political-religious structures of the 4th century, culminating at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and its developments.

This sequence of events culminated in the promulgation of an Edict by Emperors Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I in 380, preserved as *Constitutio XVI*, 1, 2 of the Theodosian Code. Such events and legislation were later crystallized by historiography as the “officialization” of Christianity.

Throughout this paper, I propose to understand Eunomius’ *Confession of Faith* not only as a theological document, but as a political-religious discursive strategy, produced amidst clashes over the Christian truth. I hypothesize that beyond a simple doctrinal record, Eunomius’ text constitutes an intervention in the debate between imperial power and ecclesiastical authority, elaborated at a time when orthodoxy was establishing itself by excluding differences. As such, the present reading goes beyond theological exegesis by placing itself in the field of History, seeking to unveil the legitimation and resistance strategies present in the bishop of Cyzicus’ writings.

Methodologically, this article comprises three articulated movements. First, I examine the political-religious context which produced *Confession of Faith*, placing the work in a discursive sequence and highlighting the relations between imperial power and the multiple Christian denominations in late 4th century. Next, I discuss the place occupied by Eunomius in the Arian controversy and how his figure was treated by the patristic tradition and modern historiography. Finally, I propose reading the treatise as a piece of discursive negotiation conceived in an attempt to establish a dialogue with the Emperor and to dispute the outlines of what would be recognized as orthodoxy, problematizing its implications for

understanding what historiography has termed the “officialization” of Christianity.

Based on the provocative title, “*The heretic who wanted to be heard*”: Eunomius of Cyzicus and the disputes between faith and power in fourth century CE, the article thus aims to reinscribe Eunomian discourse within the broader dynamics of tensions between faith and power, highlighting that, in the construction of imperial Christianity, the heretic was not a mere antagonist, but an active interlocutor in the invention of orthodoxy.

Christianity and the intertwining of religion and power in the 4th century

In the 4th century CE, Christianity encompassed multiple voices. Its doctrines, defended by groups of clergy, including bishops, priests, deacons, monks, nuns, and sometimes entire monasteries, defended certain interpretations of the Christian faith, referred to here as Christian denominations, and engaged in genuine apologies surrounding doctrinal, theological, and/or liturgical issues. Although largely led by episcopal authorities, these groups were not composed solely of clergy.

We were bequeathed information on the participation of administrative, imperial, and/or municipal officials, from which I understand that the absence of a fully constituted Christian hierarchy with consolidated ecclesiastical authority culminated in a mutual attraction between the parties – a two-way street aimed at affirming, structuring, and expanding power in the various regions of the Roman Empire.

Said rapprochement between the ecclesiastical sphere and the imperial sphere, especially by political-administrative means, took multiple forms of search for support and prestige. Such a dynamic, which Peter Brown (1980:19) named and characterized as *ambitio*, reveals how clergy and bishops, in aspiring to reach positions of influence and recognition, mobilized bonds of dependence and reciprocity typical of imperial political culture.

However, this relationship was not limited to a posture of subordination or dependence of religious power in relation to imperial power. According to Averil Cameron (1994), by the late 20th century, that is, in a reading that was already asserting itself at the turn of the 21st century, this phenomenon should be understood not as mere “imperial intervention,” but as a form of imperial patronage, an expression that underscores the symbolic and reciprocal nature of the alliances between faith and imperial

power. By supporting certain episcopal leaders and Christian doctrines, the Emperor reinforced his own legitimacy and moral authority, while the clergy, via this patronage, consolidated their prestige and expanded their networks of action, influence, and relations.

Hence, the intertwining between power and religion in the 4th century should be understood as a political-cultural phenomenon in which both spheres are inseparable, and in which theological, administrative, and symbolic dimensions overlap, producing a field of disputes in which faith and power legitimize each other, that is, of which political-religious issues are a part.

The process I seek to outline in this study can be understood, to a certain extent, as a specific form of imperial patronage and, in certain contexts, as an expression of *amicitia*. It is an analytical proposal for the 4th century which shows promise for understanding the dynamics of power and sociability between ecclesiastical agents and the Emperor. Drawing on the interpretations of Peter Brown (1980) and Averil Cameron (1994), I propose to consider these relations not only in terms of imperial intervention or control over the ecclesiastical hierarchy that was forming and being established during that century, but also as part of patronage networks that articulated prestige, legitimacy, and the circulation of favors within late-ancient political culture.

In the 4th century, no single ecclesiastical authority was vested with sufficient power to determine and establish the concept of truth in the Christian faith before the multiple discussions that took place during this historical process.

Such a lack of established authority does not mean that there were no attempts, albeit unsuccessful, to grant a place-space-territory possessing this legitimacy. I am referring to the various conciliar and synodal decisions that sought to establish supremacy canons of certain bishoprics over others. We have countless examples of such decisions, often supported by Emperors, being followed by contrary decisions or, in many cases, by opposing decisions enacted concurrently when Emperors ruled in diarchy and held divergent political and religious ideals, as was the case with Constantius I (337-350), Constantius II (337-361) (Silva, 2003: 50; Hanson, 1997: 112), and Valentinian I (364-375) and Valens (364-378) (Papa, 2013). During the diarchies of Emperors Constantius and Constantius II, and Valens and Valentinian I, imperial patronage was extended to a certain branch of Christianity. Thus, administrators in the western regions tended to support – and be supported by – groups of Nicene Christians, while in

the eastern territories, the political and religious stance of the Emperors leaned toward Arian Christianity.

Among the many Christian denominations that circulated in the 4th century, Trinitarism gained prominence both theologically and politically. Notable in this context were the debates around the unity of the divine substance, that is, the consubstantiality between the three persons of the Trinity. Among these controversies, disputes between Nicene Christians and Arian Christians took center stage, focusing on the relationship between the divine substance of the first and second persons of the Trinitarian dogma. These clashes went beyond the limits of theological reflection and spilled over into the political and administrative spheres of imperial power, becoming fundamental to understanding the connections between faith, authority, and legitimacy in the context of late-ancient Christianity.

Nicene Christians got their name from the Council of Nicaea, held in 325, where their formulation of the Trinitarian doctrine was considered the winning argument. For the Nicenes, the Trinity consisted of three persons (*hypostasis/persona*) and a single divine substance (*ousia/substantia*) indivisible and consubstantial (*homoousios*) to the three states. “Consubstantial with the Father” became the core expression of this definition, affirming that the Son and the Holy Spirit share the same divine substance as the Father. Although the term Nicene only emerged as the name of a confessional group after the council, its characteristic doctrinal formulation was already defended by several clergymen before 325. Nicene Christians can therefore be understood as followers and defenders of the Trinitarian doctrine formulated and consolidated at Nicaea, which asserted the substantial unity and equality of the three divine persons.

Arian Christians, on the other hand, followed the teachings of presbyter Arius (256-336), whose Christian doctrine proposed a hierarchical distinction between the Father (God) and the Son (Jesus) in terms of divine substance. According to this perspective, although the Son possessed divine nature, it was similar (*homoiousios*) and not identical to that of the Father, establishing a subordination relationship. The Trinity, therefore, would consist of three persons and three substances, all divine, but in distinct degrees: the Father would occupy the supreme level, followed by the Son, and the Holy Spirit would be inferior to both.

By rejecting Nicene consubstantiality, this conception established a hierarchical understanding of the divinity. Note, however, that Arianism, like the Nicene Christians, did not constitute a homogeneous movement. Different internal sects developed throughout the 4th century, including

the *Homeans* (or first Arian generation), the *Homoousians* (second generation), and the *Anomoeans*, also referred to as Neo-Arians or Radical Arians in historiography, whose theological formulations varied regarding the degree of similarity between the Father and the Son and their own understanding of the divine substance (Papa, 2024).

Eunomius of Cyzicus and the construction of a dissenting voice

Eunomius was bishop of the city of Cyzicus, in Bithynia, a province of the Diocese of Pontus, Asia Minor, eastern Roman Empire, and stood out as one of the main leaders of the Anomoean sect. Such position gave Eunomius a unique role in the Trinitarian disputes of the 4th century, both for his logical and philosophical rigor and for the clarity of his discourse. The persuasive-argumentative element of his rhetoric—present in his writings *Apology*, *Apology for the Apology* and *Confession of Faith*—openly challenged Nicene formulations and provoked vehement responses from the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, consolidating his name as one of the main representatives of Christian thought considered heretical by later tradition.

Eunomius' theological positions quickly provoked reactions both within the ecclesiastical and imperial spheres. By subordinating the Son to the Father and upholding the rational intelligibility of the divine essence, his theological formulation was interpreted as a threat to the doctrinal unity and the political-religious unity sought by the imperial power to achieve territorial unity. After his dismissal from the episcopate of Cyzicus, his works began to circulate under increasing scrutiny, and the ecclesiastical meetings held in the following decades, especially those of Constantinople (360) and Antioch (379), reinforced the condemnation of his theses.

Eunomius of Cyzicus constitutes thus a representative voice of the political-religious landscape of the 4th century, whose actions must be understood based on the discursive clashes and political-religious conflicts that characterized the period, marked by the dispute over the definition, by imperial power, of a hegemonic Christian denomination. A historical figure whose doctrinal formulation was relegated to the status of defeated heresy, first by imperial decree, and then by the course of history. The Anomoean, or Eunomian, branch of Christianity, as the disciples of Eunomius became known, identified as one of the Arian sects, was rejected with the promulgation of the imperial *Constitutio* XVI, 1, 2, in early 380, when Emperor Theodosius I established the primacy of the Nicene faith and began to outline what would become known as Christian orthodoxy.

Said *constitutio* was labeled by historiography as the officialization of Christianity, in which reads the following doctrinal direction:

Emperors Gratian, Valentinian [II] and Theodosius [I] Augustuses: An Edict to the People of the City of Constantinople.

It is Our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans, as the religion which he introduced makes clear even unto this day. It is evident that this is the religion that is followed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity; that is, according to the apostolic discipline and the evangelic doctrine, we shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity. [...] (Cod. Theod. XVI, 1, 2, February 28, 380).

Moreover, the same *constitutio* expresses that those who deviated from this faith, that is, who did not profess the consubstantiality of the three persons of Trinitarism, should bear the infamy, thus being unable to access magistracy and prevented from exercising certain rights as Roman citizens (Mangnou-Nortier, 2002: 96), as follows:

[...] We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with the divine judgment (Cod. Theod. XVI,1,2, February 28, 380).

However, we should question the applicability of this law. As with many other rules that make up the legislative body of the Roman Empire, its implementation was fluid and uneven. Applied non-uniformly across the imperial regions, its implementation depending largely on the administrative reach and interest of the central power, mediated by the actions of its officials, in enforcing such regulations in the cities and provinces. In any case, we can identify the continuity of these political-religious controversies by the constant proliferation of Christian denominations throughout the following centuries.

Arian Anomonean Christians, or Eunomians, argued that the substance of the second person of the Trinity was different (*anomoios*) from the first, although equally divine, thus denying consubstantiality. This position contrasted directly with the Nicene defense of the essential equality between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With the promulgation of *Constitutio* XVI, 1, 2, belief in consubstantiality, that is, in “equal majesty,” came to be identified by the historiographical tradition with Christian orthodoxy. But this is a retrospective reading: a historiographical

crystallization that tends to project the notion of orthodoxy onto a period when it was still under dispute. Hence why, in my research, I have sought to understand how different Christian sects in the 4th century, each in their own way, sought to establish what they considered to be the “just,” true and legitimate way of believing.

Even before ecclesiastical and imperial setbacks and condemnations, Eunomius remained active as a theologian and writer. He produced works defending his faith and sought to reformulate his arguments in light of the new political and religious configurations of the Empire. His actions reveal not only the persistence of a theological thought, but also the capacity for adaptation and resistance of a Christian perspective marginalized by the power structures.

Attempting to approach the figure of Eunomius historically, and also historiographically, in isolation would, however, be a thankless task. His trajectory and theological thinking were shaped within a complex network of relationships and intellectual and doctrinal disputes. The so-called “Three Cappadocians” – Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa – directed their treatises “against” Eunomius and his teachings, in a systematic refutation effort. It is even known that Eunomius responded to two of them, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, which shows that the confrontation between these figures went beyond the strictly theological field. This dispute was embedded in the political and religious dynamics of the 4th century, in which discourse constituted a privileged space for affirming authority and symbolic power. The writings produced in this context therefore not only expressed doctrinal differences, but also materialized legitimation strategies and attempts to establish a truth about the Christian faith within the emerging ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The discursive sequence that involves this Christian dispute, between Eunomius and the so-called Cappadocian Fathers, simultaneously reflects a facet of what became known as the Arian controversy. It began with the argument of Eunomius’ *Apology*, a treatise that defends the political and religious precepts of the Eunomian Arians. The text was delivered in 360, during the Council of Constantinople of that year, and written down shortly afterwards, according to information in the speech itself (Eunômio de Cízico, *Apologia*, 2, 1-5). At that time, Eunomius did not yet hold the episcopate of Cyzicus, a position he would assume after the deposition of a Nicene bishop at the same council, according to information gleaned from the first reply addressed to Eunomius, Book I of Basil of Caesarea’s *Against Eunomius* (Basílio de Cesareia, *Contra Eunômio*, I, 2, 70-75).

The second discourse in this controversy is precisely Basil of Caesarea's *Against Eunomius*, dated 363-365, in which the author systematically seeks to refute Eunomius' theses on the divine nature of the second person of the Trinity. Eunomius' rejoinder, entitled *Apology for the Apology*, dated about a decade later, between 378 and 379, reveals not only the persistence of the debate, but also the bishop's effort to reaffirm his position against imperial and conciliar condemnations. Gregory of Nyssa, Basil's brother, responded to Eunomius' rejoinder between 380 and 383, after his brother's death (378), with his own treatise *Against Eunomius*, further developing the theological and philosophical refutations.

Of this collection of texts, only Eunomius of Cyzicus' *Apology for the Apology* was not preserved and therefore has not reached us. Its content, however, can be partially reconstructed using the quotations and allusions present in Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*, which incorporated and rhetorically refuted passages from Eunomius' speech.

Concurrently with the writing of Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*, we find the composition of *Against the Eunomians*, preserved as Gregory of Nazianzus' *Theological Discourse 27*. The treatise was delivered under very specific circumstances, marked by disputes over churches and preaching spaces in Constantinople, in the year preceding the Council of Constantinople of 381.

Finally, within this discursive sequence involving replies and rejoinders, we find the last Eunomian text: Eunomius' *Confession of Faith*, dated 383. It prompted a new response from Gregory of Nyssa, entitled *Refutation of Eunomius' Confession of Faith*, which concludes this debate—as far as the documentation allows us to observe. Their circulation can be partially traced through the vast correspondence of the three bishops, which comprises approximately 650 letters. This documentation reveals that such texts not only coexisted over time, but were read, commented on, and responded to simultaneously, evincing an interconnected process of composition and dissemination in which theology, rhetoric, and politics were continually intertwined.

Eunomius' doctrine, although distinct from that proposed by Arius, is usually classified by historiography under the generic designation of Arianism. At the beginning of the 19th century, John Henry Newman, in his work *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, published in 1833, proposed a doctrinal and ecclesiastical division within Arianism itself, showing that the sect was far from being a homogeneous group, as had been assumed until then. Newman employed terms such as semi-Arians (1871: 305) to designate certain figures, among whom were Basil of Ancyra (31?-362) and

Cyril of Jerusalem (349-386) since, according to his interpretation, these bishops oscillated between Arian and Nicene positions, sharing sometimes one or the other political-religious perspective.

In portraying the figure of Eunomius and his mentor Aetius, Newman (1871: 347-350) used the expression Anomoean Arianism. Towards the end of the 20th century, Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson (1997) added a more critical approach by associating the term controversy with the broad set of disputes that have come to be known as Arianism. Hanson grouped these Arians based on theological differences, not according to the political-religious stance they may have taken in relation to other groups. In his analysis, the specific context of these stances must be reviewed, so that historiography does not continue to multiply subgroups based on the political and religious circumstances of these ecclesiastics that need to be particularized for each case.

Even within this critical apparatus, Eunomius' doctrine still carries the status of Arianism, albeit a different and new type, sometimes called neo-Arianism or second-generation Arianism, as in the works of Thomas Aloysius Kopecek (1973, 1979), Richard Paul Vaggione (2000) and, entering the 21st century, Raymond Winling (2008: 20). I emphasize, therefore, that in addition to diverging substantially from the initial formulation of Arius (256-335) the Eunomian quarrel was situated at a later time, about half a century after his predecessor. Winling (2008: 28) adds that Eunomius, in writing his *Apology*, benefited, like other Christians, from the Edict of 362, promulgated by Emperor Julian, which is to say, the context that, once again, influenced and was influenced by the circulation of discourses and the outbreak of controversies. At that time, in 360, Basil (still a presbyter) participated in the Council of Constantinople of that year and became directly aware of Eunomius' words (Giet, 1955; Sesboué, 1982: 31; Papa, 2013: 75). Following this contact, he continued the discursive debate by writing his *Against Eunomius*.

The Arian-Anomoean controversy, which directly involved the so-called Cappadocian Fathers, exerted a decisive influence on Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire during the second half of the 4th century. Based on this context, I observe and propose the formation of a *Cappadocian Christianity*, understood as a group situated within the Nicene denomination, which congregated a large part of Nicene adherents in the eastern region, thus extending beyond the territorial limits of the province of Cappadocia. Such process generated numerous conflicts, revealing that tensions were not limited to clashes between theologically opposed groups, but spread throughout the multiple structures of that late-ancient society, crossing political, religious, and social spheres.

The results of these tensions, however, should not be interpreted – and, in my understanding, have not been – as necessarily negative. The very term “tension” tends, perhaps hastily, to evoke a connotation of rupture or crisis. But when considering the formation of an imperial-monotheistic unity in the 4th century, marked by the new relations between imperial power and the Christianities, and by the affirmation of Trinitarian consubstantiality as an expression of divine substance unity (Pope, 2024), I propose an alternative interpretation: conflicts can also be seen as unifying elements.

From this perspective, political and religious disputes not only fragmented Christianity but also contributed to its consolidation and historical permanence, allowing it to transcend Antiquity and extend through the Middle Ages into the present day.

A Cappadocian Christianity was therefore established as a form of identity cohesion, resulting from confrontations with various Christian denominations. Among these, I highlight the tensions caused by the Eunomians, whose argumentative strength and doctrinal coherence demanded systematic responses from the Cappadocians. Hence why I consider it fundamental to recognize Eunomius as a protagonist in this debate, and not merely as a reactive figure within the Trinitarian controversy.

It is precisely within this context of discursive disputes and the definition of faith, marked by tensions between unity and diversity within 4th-century Christianity, that Eunomius of Cyzicus’ that *Profession of Faith* is situated. Far from representing merely a religious confession, this treatise should be understood as a theological-political intervention, elaborated amidst attempts to establish orthodoxy and reaffirm the doctrinal authority of the Empire. *Confession of Faith* addresses not only the belief of an individual, but of a project, a conscious effort to contest the right to proclaim Christian truth and to engage in dialogue, albeit critically, with the imperial power that sought to impose its own version of the unity of faith.

Eunomius’ *Confession of Faith* and dialogue with imperial power

Eunomius of Cyzicus’ last writing, *Confession of Faith*, should be understood as the outcome of a long period of conflicts between imperial power and the emerging Christian religious hierarchy, specific to the 4th century. Beyond this interpretation, the treatise is part of the discursive

sequence to which it belongs, written after the Council of Constantinople in 381, at a time of clear attempt to consolidate the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed as the only legitimate orthodoxy. Thus, the present historical analysis of Eunomius' work understands this treatise as a representative gesture of discursive resistance against the growing institutionalization of faith. His writing reflects the argumentative sophistication of someone who, although on the margins of imperial decisions, understood precisely how the spheres of power and ecclesiastical rhetoric worked. Rather than a simple statement of beliefs, it is an act of theological and political affirmation through which Eunomius sought to preserve the internal coherence of his doctrine, which defended the difference in substance within the Trinity while claiming the right to define what should be considered orthodoxy, and to present himself directly to the imperial power, subverting the logic of exclusion imposed by imperial constitutions.

In contemporary publishing, Eunomius' *Confession of Faith* is available in two critical reference editions. The first, prepared by Richard Paul Vaggione and published by Oxford University Press in 1987, is based mainly on *Parisinus Graecus* 965, a 9th-century codex that presents the text alongside other patristic writings. The second, published in 2016 in the *Sources Chrétiennes* 584 collection (Éditions du Cerf), offers a new critical reading, incorporating variants from other manuscripts and complementary patristic references, with more detailed historical and theological apparatus.

Taken together, these two editions allow us to understand not only the textual state of *Confession*, but also how its manuscript transmission reflected theological receptions and disputes over the centuries. As Raymond Winling (2008) observes, this is the last complete text by Eunomius we have access to: an essential treatise for understanding the culmination of his doctrinal formulation and the Anomoean effort to maintain theological coherence against the impositions of Nicene orthodoxy.

Thus, analyzing this treatise gains meaning when placed within the discursive sequence articulated by Eunomius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, which defined the limits of what would be determined as correct in late-ancient Christianity. A critical reading of *Confession of Faith* reveals the intricacies of its production and allow us to systematize analyses of the events following the Council of Constantinople in 381, as well as the synod held the following year in the same city, when the Arians were formally removed from the churches of

the imperial capital. The controversies, however, persisted and took on new forms of dispute.

Confession of Faith thus constitutes a key document for studying the Christian faith controversies of the 4th century. Written in a context of intense political and religious clashes, the work is set against a backdrop of doctrinal disputes arising from the reaffirmed Nicene Creed, promoted by Christian groups defending Trinitarian consubstantiality and sponsored by Emperor Theodosius I at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

In 380, the promulgation of the *Constitutio Cunctos populos*, also known as *De Fide Catholica* (CTh XVI, 1, 2), represented, in my understanding, a deliberate attempt by the imperial power to establish, through legal means, the same faith that it had sought to impose as orthodox since the Council of Nicaea. In doing so, it relegated other Christian sects, including the Arians and Anomoeans, to civil and religious infamy, reinforcing the link between the Nicene faith, then declared orthodoxy, and late-ancient Roman citizenship.

Even in the face of these rulings, disputes continued, including in the Empire's capital. Gregory of Nazianzus, newly appointed metropolitan bishop, faced resistance when attempting to remove the Arian bishop who occupied the Basilica of the Apostles, a task that was only accomplished with the help of an imperial military escort. At that moment, he gave his speech *Against the Eunomians* but, politically weakened lacking the full support of the Nicene group, he ended up resigning from his position before Emperor Theodosius I.

As a result, the Eunomians were (or should have been) excluded from the churches, and their doctrine came to be classified as heretical by the attempt to establish Nicene orthodoxy. However, the disagreements did not cease. In an attempt to pacify tensions and restore Christian unity, Theodosius convened the Synod of Constantinople in 383, also called the *Synod of Faiths*, to promote dialogue between the various Christian denominations and seek a resolution to theological disputes.

According to the ecclesiastical historians Sozomen (*Hist. Eccl.* VII) and Socrates Scholasticus (*Hist. Eccl.* V), the council failed to produce effective reconciliation. The Emperor then requested that each group submit a written confession of faith. Those involved were Nectarius, representing the Nicenes; Agelius, the Novatians; Demophilus, the Arians; Eleusius of Cyzicus, the Pneumatichians; and Eunomius, the Anomoeans. It was in this context of conflict and search for legitimacy that Eunomius wrote his

Confession of Faith in 383, establishing a systematic defense of his anomoean theology. The text reaffirms the substantial difference between the Father and the Son (*heteroousios*), in direct opposition to the Nicene doctrine of consubstantiality (*homoousios*). Beyond a theological exercise, it is an attempt to claim doctrinal authority and dispute, before the Emperor, the right to define Christian truth.

The treatise, therefore, came after the imperial request made during the Synod of 383 and was conceived as an official response to the Emperor's demands. In this regard, it reflects the need for the Anomoeans to doctrinally justify their position regarding the conciliar decisions and the condemnations imposed upon them. Such intention is already evident in the first section of the text, in which Eunomius presents his confession of faith as a systematic exposition of Christian truth, in contrast to what he identifies as theological errors by the defenders of consubstantiality.

Since our God and Savior Jesus Christ said by a just decree that he confesses before the God and Father those who confess him before men and denies those who deny him, and the apostolic teaching urges us to be ready to make a defense to anyone who asks for an account, and the imperial edicts are seeking such a confession, we eagerly confess what we think (Eunômio de Cízico, *Profissão de Fé*, I, 1).

In the opening lines of *Confession of Faith*, Eunomius sets out to affirm what he calls “the just doctrine,” claiming for himself the legitimate possession of revealed truth. This claim is not only theological, but also political: by presenting his faith directly to the Emperor, Eunomius seeks to reposition his doctrine within the limits of imperial orthodoxy, disputing the monopoly on defining what he considered to be true Christianity. Such discursive movement situates the treatise within the broader context of struggles for authority over the Scriptures and for the legitimacy of theological language. Disputes that, in the 4th century, were intertwined with the exercise of power itself.

Final considerations

Reading Eunomius' *Confession of Faith*, as inserted in the debate around the Arian-Anomoean controversy with Cappadocian Christianity, allows us to advance in problematizing what I have termed the historiographical construction of the “officialization” of Christianity (Papa, 2024). Under closer examination, such a notion—often treated by historiography as a point of arrival—reveals itself less an event and more a process of disputes, negotiations, and silencing. Just as critics have revisited the concept of

“Christianization,” understanding it from a plurality of experiences and resistance, it may be necessary to undertake the same movement in relation to “officialization,” which has become overly crystallized as the natural consequence of the Nicene victory.

“The heretic who wanted to be heard”: what if Theodosius had given consideration to Demophilus or Eunomius, instead of establishing the Nicene position as the measure of orthodoxy? Although counterfactual, the question functions here as a device for historiographical reflection. It forces us to recognize officialization as a contested historical process rather than a *fait accompli*, as a result of political choices, theological alignments, and discursive practices that shaped what should be said about faith and how. In this regard, the silence imposed on heretics is not a mere erasure, but a constitutive part of defining orthodoxy.

The writings of Eunomius and the Cappadocians, therefore, invite us to rethink the very way in which Late Antiquity historiography constructed its landmarks and categories. Rather than the consolidation of a single truth, “officialization” should be understood as the historical product of multiple tensions, provisional agreements, and legitimized exclusions. To think of Eunomius in this way is to shift one’s perspective: to see him not as the author of a discourse that, even though marginalized, contributed to establishment of orthodoxy.

Our proposal to reinscribe the heretic as an agent of history is therefore not limited to rediscovering a silenced voice; it implies an epistemological gesture: that of a historiography that rejects consensus as a horizon and finds, in the complexity of tensions, the purpose of “making history.”

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