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Castles of faith:

The transmission of the Kyrie trope set *Deus solus et immensus* as an example of liturgical exegesis in the orthodoxy

Arturo Tello Ruiz-Pérez

Deus solus et immensus. The sentence is categorical and unequivocal and leaves little room for doubt: one single, immense and unfathomable God. It reveals that human reason can only approach the mystery of God from a negative, apophatic perspective. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that this negative path is by no means new in the history of Christian theology and spirituality; indeed, it is possible to trace a methodological arc through Antiquity and the Middle Ages that covers from the speculative rationality of St Clement of Alexandria to the *docta ignorantia* of Nicholas of Cusa. By way of synopsis, it is almost impossible to avoid recalling the famous words of St Augustine against the Arians: “De Deo loquimur, quid mirum si non comprehendis? Si enim comprehendis, non est Deus” (*Sermo* 117, 3, 5. PL 38, col. 663).

Bringing up this quotation, which is precisely against Arianism, allows me to raise the question of the danger of possible misinterpretation from the heterodoxy of the proposition “Deus solus et immensus”. In this respect, in his letter to the Bishop St Alexander of Alexandria, Arius himself confesses apophatically as a profession of faith: “ἕνα θεόν, μόνον ἀγέννητον, μόνον αἰδίον, μόνον ἀναρχόν, μόνον ἀληθινόν, μόνον ἀθανασίαν ἔχοντα” [one only God, who is alone uncreated, alone eternal, alone without beginning, alone true, alone immortal] (*Arius ad Alexandrum*, St Athanasius, *De Synodis* 19, PG 26, col. 708D). And what if our sentence should not fit perfectly within this creed? It does, of course. The problem lies in the consideration of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In the Arian system, nothing can be compared to the Father because “ἴσον οὐδὲ ὅμοιον, οὐχ ὁμόδοξον ἔχει μόνος οὗτος” [He alone has no equal; nobody compares to him or is on a par with him in glory] (*Blasphemiae Arii*, St Athanasius, *De Synodis* 15, PG 26, col. 705D). The one and only Arian God lives in the absolute solitude of the uncreated and the eternal, establishing a yawning abyss of dissimilarity between Himself and what has been created. Without doubt, this approach shatters the revealed image of the triune God, at the same time as it drastically and dramatically separates the creator from the created. Likewise, creation itself is devalued because it is unable to demonstrate anything more than the immanence of a created intermediary Logos that “ἴδιον οὐδὲν ἔχει τοῦ θεοῦ καθ’ ὑπόστασιν ιδιότητος, οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἴσος, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ὁμοούσιος αὐτῷ” [nothing in his own hypostases is inherently of God, for he is not God’s equal, nor is he consubstantial] (*Blasphemiae Arii*, St Athanasius, *De Synodis* 15, PG 26, col. 708A). The rupture between God and the world is therefore radical and unequivocal, so that the transcendence of His divinity remains isolated from any glance that might reveal it. Where, then, does that leave Johannine passages such as Jn 1, 18; 10, 30; or 14, 9?

This concept of Arianism was firmly opposed by the faith the Church maintained from its very beginnings: communion with Christ is communion with God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God Himself. Among those who championed the anti-Arian reaction were St Athanasius and the Cappadocians, the crowning point was the Nicene Creed. There is no doubt that the key word in all this is *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος), that is, the same substance, allowing the Son and the Holy Spirit to reveal and proclaim the Father. What is more, they do not form part of God, but are God: Three Persons (ὑποστάσεις) and one single substance, acting trinitarily and revealing that God is a Trinity. As St Gregory of Nyssa eloquently puts it: “ἀλλά τις ἄρρητος καὶ ἀκατανόητος ἐν τούτοις καταλαμβάνεται καὶ ἡ κοινωνία καὶ ἡ διάκρισις, οὔτε τῆς τῶν ὑποστάσεων διαφορᾶς τὸ τῆς φύσεως συνεχὲς διασπώσης, οὔτε κατὰ τῆς οὐσίαν κοινότητος τὸ ἰδιάζον τῶν γνωρισμάτων ἀναχέουσης” (St Basil of Caesarea,

Epistola 38, 4, PG 32, cols. 332D-333A).¹ With respect to this point, however, it should be stressed that the way each Person acts coincides fully with his personal being, from which it can be inferred that it is precisely the characteristics and distinguishing elements of each Person (in other words, what at first sight would appear to separate them) that establish their link of loving communion with the other two. Thus, it is characteristic of the Holy Spirit to be recognised as the Son and proceed from the Father, just as it is of the Son to be begotten of the Father and manifest the Holy Spirit. And nevertheless, despite being a reality with three hypostases, the unity of God covers the unity of loving and doing.

After these considerations on the foundations underlying the rationale behind the establishment of Trinitarian faith in the 4th century, in the unity of essence and hypostatic distinction, it is time to pose some questions on the origins, purpose and distribution of the Kyrie trope set *Deus solus et immensus* (Bjork 1977, I: 62-63 and II: 413-416, 1979-1980, 1980a, 1980b; BTC II/1 1989, I: 37-38; Castro 1989, 472; Doyle 2000, II: 40; Tello 2006, I: 173-176 and II: 42-48, 2011, I: 178-181 and II: 43-49), which is a composition with a distinct Trinitarian stamp and progressively takes on the meaning of an authentic profession of faith.

It is evident from the Table that this collection was initially copied in manuscripts from the Eastern parts of the Frankish Kingdom (St Gall, Eichstätt, Regensburg). Logically, if it was extensively copied there for the first time, it is very likely that it was also created in its eight-phrase version at some place lying on this particular axis. From this area, the collection travelled to the Abruzzi, in central Italy, and to Auch and Yrieix, in the far south of France, stopping over in Apt, a strategic location where repertoires of liturgical song were customarily transmitted (CT V 1986). During this transition period, the collection of eight elements was reduced to seven (Apt 18, Pa 1118 and Vat 4770) and then to six (Pa 903). It finally reached Spain at the very end of the 12th century (as a series of eight elements with square notation in Pa 495) and became rooted in the canonical community of the Cathedral of Gerona, where it was performed until the 16th century. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the set was periodically transmitted in a new version reduced to three elements to other communities in the Tarraconensis region (Cathedral of Tortosa and Parish Church of Montblanc).

Over this long journey in time and space, *Deus solus et immensus* acquired various traits that were adapted to the needs and tastes of each particular epoch and place. Due to lack of space ~~ok~~, I shall focus mainly on two of these: the melody of the ~~basic ch~~ and the arrangement and number of elements with respect to the base chant.

We are dealing here with a logogene trope and this mark of independence in relation to the base chant allows it to be linked freely and without too much difficulty to various Kyrie melodies. At the heart of its origin, the East, the basic melody is Melnicki 144 - with the sole exception of Mü 14083 - as it is for Apt 18. The Kyrie changes, however, when it appears in other southern (Pa 1118 and Pa 903) and Spanish sources: the melodies Melnicki 155 and 103 appear, together with one that is autochthonous to Catalonia (this does not appear in the Melnicki 1955 catalogue), which was pointed out at the time by Anglès (1935, 208-210).² Strangely enough, in this last case, the mutation of the base melody of the Kyrie creates a whole new version for the elements of the group (see Examples 1 and 2). It is evident that there is a change of concept in this group of Kyrie tropes following their arrival in these regions, which does not pass unnoticed to the nature of the melodies.

Within the group from eastern sources, ~~the elements are usually interpolated after each invocation. In this form~~ they were transmitted to Vat 4770 and some Spanish sources (Pa 495 and GerM a), but not to Apt 18, to other southern sources or to the rest of the Spanish sources. Apart from the stylistic features

¹) Most scholars are currently in agreement on the attribution of this letter to St Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of St Basil (Hübner 1972, 463-490).

²) This Kyrie melody is also found untroped in Vic, Biblioteca del Museo Episcopal, ms. 105, ss. 11th ex/12th, Vic, f. 50v.

that naturally characterise each tradition (logogene tropes from western sources are actually much less frequent in the Kyrie in comparison with the favoured Latin-texted Kyrie and Kyrie prosulae), this circumstance also has theological overtones.

Let us look briefly at a normalized version of the Pa 495 text and consider it in the light of what has been put forward so far:

KYRIE ELEISON

A. Deus solus et immensus

KYRIE ELEISON

B. Plasmator hominum et
cunctae creaturae tuae

KYRIE ELEISON

C. Qui de supernis nobis
compassus ad ima venisti

CHRISTE ELEISON

D. Atque hominem perditum
de morte revocasti

CHRISTE ELEISON

E. Ipsumque in patriam
caeli locasti

CHRISTE ELEISON

F. Perditum pridem gratis
consortem supernis egisti

KYRIE ELEISON

G. Pater cum nato nostri
misertus maneto

KYRIE ELEISON

H. Sanctusque qui omnia regit
semper nobis spiritus assit

KYRIE ELEISON

As we have seen, A can only refer to the Father and his immensity. At first sight, it may appear that B also addresses the person of the Father, but it actually refers to the Son (see Col. 1, 15-16). This perhaps explains the use of the noun “plasmator” instead of “creator” in order to emphasise co-participation by the Son, true God and true Man. Likewise, the fact that the invocation KYRIE ELEISON precedes this and the other elements, establishing the premise that the Son must be praised with the same glory and dignity as the Father and the Holy Spirit. The rest of the elements up to F are subordinate to the person of the Son, who, touched in the Trinitarian chain by the affection that comes from the Father’s mercy, is the will that articulates the economy of salvation. Element G explicitly confirms this. The final element, with a hint to Notker’s sequence for Pentecost (*Sancti spiritus assit gratia*), completes the petition for grace and mercy with invocation of the Spirit.

I believe that, of all these questions, one is particularly pressing: Is there any reason that explains this approach? In an attempt to answer this, I shall briefly present some hypotheses on the basis of the origin and diffusion of *Deus solus et immensus*.

~~ok~~In the same way as the Church, in its reaction to Arianism, enjoyed a creative impetus that produced some wonderful hymns and chants, this trope set (like so many others) could have been gestated in the atmosphere of opposition from orthodoxy to another heterodox approach: that of adoptionism. This aspect possibly goes back to the 9th century; that the first written sources to transmit it should date from the middle of the 10th century is a different matter. More concisely, the adoptionist doctrine (embraced by Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgell) proposes that Christ as a man is only the Son of God by adoption. Therefore, by virtue of this double filiation, his hypostatic being is separated

and two persons are assumed (an approach that appears to be a revival of ancient Nestorianism).

The fact that the first manuscripts that transmit this composition come from regions close to where main councils and polemics against heresy took place -Regensburg (792) and Frankfurt (794)- lends support to this hypothesis. Figures such as Alcuin of York (to whom the expression that gives the title to this paper is attributed),³ St Paulinus of Aquileia, St Benedict of Aniane and Charlemagne himself all universalised Hispanic heresy. In this sense, the exegetic and catechetical aspect of tropes and other sorts of liturgical song contained in the liturgy cannot be denied. Similarly, the survival and success of our composition centuries later, as well as in Catalonia and the south of France, could be due to a new attempt at a pastoral response from liturgy to another heterodox virus, that of the Cathar heresy, which had infected these territories to dramatic effect. In general terms, as is well known, in the Cathar doctrine two creative principles co-exist in differing degrees: one good and spiritual - God - and the other evil and material - Satan - (Dondaine 1939; Nelli 1959). What mostly interests us here is that Christ was considered to be neither God nor man, but an angelic entity favoured by God whose body became apparent (similar to the belief embraced by Docetism). Salvation does not come through Trinitarian mercy overflowing with love; it comes exclusively through spiritual perfection, which disdains any ~~or~~thing material, in the form of the *perfecti*, or purified by the *consolamentum*, the only valid sacrament in the Cathar church.

I shall conclude my argument in favour of such a theological interpretation by quoting an extract from the profession of faith against the Cathars of the Fourth Lateran Council. In this, not only are the beginnings of our composition cited almost literally, but this is placed, like a document in escrow, at the centre of a battle between authentic castles of faith. Most importantly, it is done from within the Franco-Roman liturgy itself, at the moment of the Kyrie:

“Firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur, quod unus solus est verus Deus, aeternus, immensus et incommutabilis, incomprehensibilis omnipotens et ineffabilis, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus: tres quidem personae, sed una essentia, substantia seu natura simplex omnino: Pater a nullo, Filius a Patre solo, ac Spiritus Sanctus pariter ab utroque: absque initio, semper ac sine fine: Pater generans, Filius nascens, et Spiritus Sanctus procedens: consubstantiales et coaequales et coomnipotentes et coaeterni [...]” (Denzinger 1854, 110-111)

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³ “Nec errare putandus est qui cum talibus intra catholicae fidei castra moratur” (*Epistola* 203. Dümmler 1895, 337).

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Table

| Source | Signature | Fol. | Century | Year | Provenance | Area | Number of elements | Kyrie Melody | Feast |
|----------|--|------|--------------|-----------|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Pa 495 | Paris Bibl. Nat. n. a. lat. 495 | 10r | XII in | | Gerona | Spain | 8 | Melnicki 103 | Christmas I |
| Tsa 135 | Tortosa Bibl. Cap. 135 | 5r | XIII med | 1228-1264 | Tortosa | Spain | 3 | Unknown | |
| Mont 5 | Montblanc Arch. parroq. de la Iglesia de Santa María ms. 5 | 6r | XIV in / med | | Montblanc, Iglesia de Sta María | Spain | 3 | Unknown | |
| Bar 911 | Barcelona Bibl. de Catalunya M. 911 | 20r | XV | | Gerona | Spain | 3 | Unknown | Dominica in albis |
| GerM | Gerona Museo Diocesano Mus. s.n. | 565 | XV / XVI | 1480-1520 | Gerona | Spain | 8 | Melnicki 103 | Christmas I |
| GerM | Gerona Museo Diocesano Mus. s.n. | 571 | XV / XVI | 1480-1520 | Gerona | Spain | 3 | Unknown | Dominica in albis |
| Pa 1118 | Paris Bibl. Nat. lat. 1118 | 19r | X ex / XI in | | Gascogne, Auch / Aurillac ? | Meridional Group | 7 | Melnicki 155 | St Stephen |
| Apt 18 | Apt Arch. Bas. S. Anne 18 (4) | 69v | X / XI in | | Apt ? | Meridional Group | 7 | Melnicki 144 | Assumption |
| Pa 903 | Paris Bibl. Nat. lat. 903 | 165v | XI med / ex | | St Yrieix | Meridional Group | 6 | Melnicki 155 | |
| SG 381 | Sankt Gallen Stiftsbibl. 381 | 295 | X | 965 ? | Sankt Gallen | East | 8 | Melnicki 144 | |
| SG 484 | Sankt Gallen Stiftsbibl. 484 | 209 | X | 965 ? | Sankt Gallen | East | 8 | Melnicki 144 | |
| Ox 27 | Oxford Bodleian Libr. Hs. Selden supra 27 | 83r | XI in | | Eichstätt / Freising ? | East | 8 | Melnicki 144 | |
| Be 11 | Berlin Staatsbibl. th. lat. IV ^o 11 | 78v | XI | 1024-1027 | Minden (<Sankt Gallen) | East | 8 | Melnicki 144 | |
| Mü 14083 | Munich Bayerische Staatsbibl. Clm. 14083 | 103r | XI | 1031-1037 | Regensburg, Sankt Emmeram | East | 8 | Melnicki 151 | |
| Vat 4770 | Roma Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana Palat. lat. 4770 | 117r | X ex / XI in | | Abruzzi | Italy | 7 | s. n. | Easter |

Example 1

| | | | | | | |
|----------|---------|--|---------|----------|----|----------------|
| Pa 495 | f. 10r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| GerM | p. 565 | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Apt 18 | f. 69v | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Pa 1118 | f. 19r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Pa 903 | f. 165v | | De - us | so - lus | et | im - men - sus |
| SG 381 | p. 295 | | De - us | so - lus | et | im - men - sus |
| SG 484 | p. 209 | | De - us | so - lus | et | im - men - sus |
| Ox 27 | f. 83r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Be 11 | f. 78v | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Mü 14083 | f. 103r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |
| Vat 4770 | f. 117r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus |

Example 2

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|--------|--|---------|----------|----|----------------|------------------|
| Tsa 135 | f. 5r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus | E - LE - Y - SON |
| Mont 5 | f. 6r | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus | HE - LEY - SON |
| Bar 911 | f. 20r | | De - us | so - lus | et | im - men - sus | E - LEY - SON |
| GerM | p. 571 | | De - us | so - lus | et | in - men - sus | E - LE - Y - SON |