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BASIL THE GREAT CONTRA EUNOMIUS AND HIS THESIS – THE STATE OF RESEARCH¹

The polemic with the Arians was one of the most important in the Early Church. The debate resulted not only in many patristic treatises, but also the Nicene Creed. One of the separate stages of this controversy, which is often called Neo-Arianism, was the polemic with Eunomius. Not only historians but also theologians point out that the discussion had a significantly different character. When Eunomius came up with his thesis presented in *Apology*² he had two great opponents: Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. The main sources for the discussion are Eunomius' *Liber apologeticus*³ and Basil's response entitled *Contra Eunomium*⁴. The complete text of *Apologia apologiae*, which was Eunomius' response to Basil's book has not been preserved; however, its numerous fragments may be found in *Contra Eunomium*⁵ by Gregory of Nyssa. He continued the polemic with Eunomius after Basil's death.

The state of research on the second part of this discussion, which is Gregory's of Nyssa refutation, should be treated separately, as there is an enormous amount of studies concerning Gregory of Nyssa and a large group of researchers who concentrate only on this author.

In my paper, I would like to present the bibliography of the subject. I have divided it into five parts: primary sources that are, of course, critical editions of the main sources. I've decided to consider not only *Contra Eunomium*, but also Basil's *Letters* which he was writing during all his life as some of them to a large

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² Eunomius, *Extant Works*, ed. R.P. Vaggione, Oxford 1987.

³ Eunomius, *Extant Works*, op. cit.

⁴ Basile De Césarée, *Contre Eunome, suivi de Eunome, Apologie*, introduction, traduction et notes de B. Sesboüé, SCh 299 i 305, Paris 1982-1983.

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, vol. I, *Contra Eunomium libri I et II*, ed. W. Jaeger, Leiden 2002; vol. 2 *Contra Eunomium liber III*, ed. W. Jaeger, Leiden 2002.

extent concern the polemic with Eunomius⁶. Besides the original Greek texts, I have listed translations into Polish.

The second part of the bibliography considers Basil's life and its context as a background for the discussion. It is worth mentioning at least *Basil of Caesarea. Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, where we can find not only the chronology of the life and works of Basil of Caesarea but also notes on the bibliography of st. Basil as well as manuscripts and Editions of the Works of Basil of Caesarea⁷. As this part of the research is not crucial to our subject and has merely an introductory character, so we depend on the current state of research and present papers without critical analysis.

The third part of the bibliography presents the state of research on Eunomius. Since Andrew Radde-Gallwitz published a critical edition with the English translation we have two critical editions of Basil's *Contra Eunomium* which include also *Apology* published in *Sources Chrétiennes* almost simultaneously. A. Radde-Gallwitz published a comprehensive monograph⁸ in which he presented Eunomius' life and doctrine. It is a reliable and most important source for the subject. Unfortunately, the weakest point is the philosophical background of the discussion. It is much more developed in the first part of Mark's DelCogliano book *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*⁹. Among other papers I have listed in the Eunomian part there is Tomasz Stępień's paper¹⁰ as it is a very important input to the understanding of one of the philosophical clues to the discussion – the problem of *energeia*.

The very focus of the discussion oscillates around two main subjects, namely the relations within the Holy Trinity (whether the Son is equal in substance and nature to the Father) and cognoscibility of God. The first subject has been analysed quite carefully mostly by theologians. The most important element of this discussion are definitions of fundamental terms. The authors presents the development of Basil's understanding of such terms important for the debate as *hypostasis*, *hyparxis*, *homoousios* and other. The problem of time and its nature is one of those that occur in the debate. I must admit that the problem how Basil defines the term *ousia* is absolutely crucial for the entire debate, so I have studied carefully the discussion about Basil's understanding of this fundamental category. Unfortunately,

⁶ Letters 231-236 to Amphilochius.

⁷ *Basil of Caesarea. Christian, Humanist, Ascetic. A Sixteen-hundredth Anniversary Symposium*, ed. P.W. Fedwick, Toronto 1981.

⁸ A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea. A Guide to his Life and Doctrine*, Eugene 2012.

⁹ M. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names. Christian Theology and Late Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*, Leiden 2010.

¹⁰ T. Stępień, *Problem zewnętrznego i wewnętrznego działania Boga w sporze Grzegorza z Nyssy z Eunomiuszem* [in] *Credo Domine adiuva incredulitatem meam. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana Ojcu Profesorowi Jackowi Salijowi*, red. J. Kupeczak, C. Smuniewski, Kraków 2017, p. 511-526.

the opinions of researchers are contradictory: they link Basil's usage with either stoic, Neoplatonic or Aristotelian background and try to avoid the real difficulties in distinguishing between *ousia* and *hyle*. This subject should be analysed much more carefully as it is fundamental not only for the Trinitarian debate but for the second aspect of the discussion, namely God's cognoscibility. In his polemic with Eunomius, Basil tries to defend incomprehensibility of God against his claim that the substance of God can be known by human beings as it is revealed by his name (Unbegotten). When we analyse secondary sources for this debate, the main subjects that occur there include the theory of names with its long tradition that can be tracked down to Plato. The most important book, that should be mentioned is the one by Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names. Christian Theology and Late Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*¹¹. The second important topic is the problem of divine simplicity, which is again connected both with the relations within the Holy Trinity and their actions, but also with the possibility of knowing God. A. Radde-Gallwitz notes that "The problem Basil and Gregory faced was reconciling the doctrine of divine simplicity with a coherent theological epistemology"¹². The most valuable study on this subject is his book *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*.

Of course, we can list also secondary subjects connected with the debate, such as the use of rhetoric and logic in the polemic, the influence of classical education on Basil's thought and others. But what I missed in all the studies that I have read is the detailed analysis why those two topics, Trinitarian and epistemological, come together. It is a new element in the Neo-Arian discussion and I am convinced it has its philosophical background as it has been proved already by T. Stępień. The next step is to show how Basil understands Eunomius' arguments and whether his argumentation changes during lifetime.

Although the discussion with Eunomius considers two separate problems, which are the relations within the Trinity and incomprehensibility of God I have decided not to separate these two in the bibliography as it would result in the duplication of many papers. It also reflects my conviction that both have a common source in Eunomius' presumptions. As it can be observed in the bibliography during the last twenty years a lot of new studies concerning Basil's polemic with Eunomius occurred and we are closer to understanding the complex character of this fascinating debate.

¹¹ M. DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names. Christian Theology and Late Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*, Leiden 2010.

¹² A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea...*, op. cit., p. 1.

List of Abbreviations:

ABR	– American Benedictine Revue
BZ	– Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CHR	– Catholic Historical Review
DOP	– Dumbarton Oaks Papers
DR	– Downside Review
GOThR	– Greek Orthodox Theological Review
HSCPh	– Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
JThS	– Journal of Theological Studies
JThS NS	– Journal of Theological Studies New Series
MWTC	– Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts”
REA	– Revue des Études Augustiniennes
REG	– Revue des Études Grecques
RHE	– Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique
RHPhR	– Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses
RSR	– Recherches de science religieuse
OCA	– Orientalia Christiana Analecta
PG	– Patrologiae cursus completus series graeca
SCh	– Sources Chrétiennes
StPatr	– Studia Patristica
TZ	– Theologische Zeitschrift
VCh	– Vetera Christianorum
VigChr	– Vigiliae Christianae
ZfK	– Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte

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Streszczenie

Bazyli Wielki wobec Eunomiusza i jego twierdzeń – stan badań

Głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie możliwie kompletnej bibliografii dotyczącej polemiki Bazylego z Eunomiuszem. Prezentowany wykaz literatury uwzględnia teksty źródłowe oraz opracowania w podziale na teksty poświęcone historii życia Bazylego, historii sporu, nauczaniu Eunomiusza oraz na studia dotyczące teologicznej i filozoficznej analizy relacji wewnątrz Trójcy Świętej oraz poznawalności Boga. Zagadnienia te powinny być badane razem, ze względu na ich wspólne źródło. W artykule zaprezentowano też główne kierunki badań oraz wskazano pola dla dalszych studiów.

Słowa kluczowe: *Bazyli Wielki, Eunomiusz, Contra Eunomium, substancja, niepoznawalność*

Summary

Basil the Great against Eunomius
and his Theses – the State of Research¹³

The main aim of this paper is to present a possibly most comprehensive bibliography concerning Basil the Great's polemic with Eunomius taking into account primary sources, the historical context as well as the Eunomian studies. The most important part of the bibliography includes both the theological and the philosophical studies on the Trinitarian problem and God's incomprehensibility. They should be treated together as inseparably connected in their origin. I have presented the main research directions and some possibly missing topics that should be addressed in the further research.

Keywords: *Basil the Great, Eunomius, Contra Eunomium, ousia, incomprehensibility*

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