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Eastern
**Theological
Journal**

7/2
2021

Hypostasis in Origen: The Roots of the Fourth Century-Trinitarian Theology

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1. Premise; 2. Philosophers and early Christians on “hypostasis”, 3. The Trinitarian use of “hypostasis” in Origen; 4. Conclusion

1. Premise

The second part of the symbol of the First Council of Nicaea includes an anathema against those who state that the Son is of another “hypostasis” or “substance” than the Father (ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας),¹ namely Arius and his fellows, implies that the Monarchian view lies in the backdrop of the symbol itself,² and attests to an equivocal use of the words “hypostasis” and “ousia”. It is worth noting that this is the earliest occurrence of the application of “hypostasis”

1 *Concilium Nicaenum I (325), expositio fidei*, in Giuseppe Alberigo – Giuseppe Dossetti – Périclès-Pierre Joannou – Claudio Leonardi – Paolo Prodi (eds.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna 1973³, 5.22-23.

2 This has been extensively demonstrated by: Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 11, Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Rome 1975, 94, and: Id. (ed.), *Il Cristo*, vol. II, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla – Mondadori, Milan 2003³, 99. On the contrary, Christopher Stead believes that this passage is a reinforcement of the formula “homoousios”, cf. *Divine Substance*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977, 233-242, followed by: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, 97-98. A recent reassessment of this passage is offered by: Henryk Pietras, *Concilio di Nicea (325) nel suo contesto*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 2021, 179-182.

to the Father and the Son in an official ecclesiastical document. This word, which is introduced in the early Christian literature by Heb 1,3,³ circulates in the Pre-Nicene theological vocabulary, and plays a key role in particular in the Trinitarian speculation of Origen of Alexandria. Scholars disagree about the use of “hypostasis” in Origen: some believe that he conceives of “ousia” as the common nature and of “hypostasis” as the individuality of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and anticipates the Constantinopolitan creed;⁴ others claim that it lacks a precise meaning in his writings.⁵

The chief objective of this paper is to demonstrate that, though the recourse of “hypostasis” in a Trinitarian sense is formally approved at the very beginnings of the 4th century, Origen is the earliest Christian theologian who uses it systematically, for example

- 3 Eb 1,3: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his hypostasis”. On the source of this use of “hypostasis” in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* some scholars believe that it originates from Sap 7,26, cf. Rex Witt, “Ὑπόστασις”, in Herbert George Wood (ed.), *Amicitiae Corolla. A Volume of Essays Presented to James Rendel Harris on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, University of London Press, London 1933, 331, n. 4, while other scholars are persuaded that it goes back to Philo, cf. Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Leiden, Brill 1970, and Folker Siegert, “Philo and the New Testament”, in Adam Kamesar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, 175-209.
- 4 Cf. Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen’s Anti-Subordinationism and its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 65.1 (2011), 21-49, and mostly: Ead., “Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis”, in *Harvard Theological Review* 105.3 (2012), 302-350.
- 5 Cf. Manlio Simonetti, “Note sulla teologia trinitaria di Origene”, in *Vetera Christianorum* 8 (1971), 273-307 (now reprint in: Id., *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 44, Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Rome 1993, 109-143), and: Jürgen Hammerstaedt, “Der trinitarische Gebrauch des Hypostasisbegriffs bei Origenes”, in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 34 (1991), 12-20, and: Id., “Hypostasis (ὑπόστασις)”, in *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum* 16 (1994), 1004-1007.

he patently distinguishes it from “ousia”.⁶ In order to pursue this objective, the present paper will consist of two main parts. In the first part I will focus on the multifaceted significance of “hypostasis” in the philosophical context contemporary to Origen and in the early Christian writings,⁷ while in the second part I will consider five core texts of his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* in which he applies this term to the divine Trinity.

2. Philosophers and early Christians on “hypostasis”

“Hypostasis” is introduced in the philosophical lexicon by the Stoics in the 3rd century BC, in particular by Chrysippus.⁸ Although the sources on the Stoics are later, we are able to find out three core uses of this word by them: first, the difference of “hypostasis” and

6 I have explored Origen’s use of “ousia” elsewhere, cf. Vito Limone, *Origene e la filosofia greca. Scienze, testi, lessico*, Letteratura Cristiana Antica. Nuova serie 30, Morcelliana, Brescia 2018, 257-294; Id., “Ousia in Origen: The Use of the Term in Light of the *Homilies on the Psalms*”, in Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony – Oded Irshai – Aryeh Kofsky – Hillen Newman – Lorenzo Perrone (eds.), *Origeniana Duodecima. Origen’s Legacy in the Holy Land – A Tale of Three Cities: Jerusalem, Caesarea and Bethlehem. Proceedings of the 12th International Origen Congress (Jerusalem, 25-29 June, 2017)*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 302, Peeters, Leuven 2019, 643-657.

7 An important study on the use of “hypostasis” in antiquity is offered by: Heinrich Dörrie, “Υπόστασις. Wort- und Bedeutungsgeschichte”, in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 3 (1995), 35-92 (now reprint in: Id., *Platonica minora*, Fink, München 1976, 12-69).

8 The use of “hypostasis” in Chrysippus is conditioned by his own ontology which contrasts that of Zeno, as already evidenced by: Michele Alessandrelli, “L’ontologia stoica del qualcosa. Corpi, incorporei e concetti”, ILIESI, 2016, 1-39, in: <http://www.iliesi.cnr.it/pubblicazioni/Memorie-02-Alessandrelli.pdf> (consulted on August 15th, 2022). Cf. also: John Rist, “Categories and Their Uses”, in Id., *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969, 152-172, in particular 153 (now reprint in: A.A. Long [ed.], *Problems in Stoicism*, Athlone Press, London 1971, 38-57, in particular 39).

“hyparchein”; secondly, the hypostasis of the incorporeal things; thirdly, the hypostasis as act of existence.

The first use is documented by a well known passage of Plutarch about the Stoics’ theory of time.⁹ Plutarch reports that, though the common opinion believes that only the present exists, since the past no longer exists and the future is yet to exist, the Stoics support exactly the contrary: assuming that the present is composed of the past and the future, then the present does not exist, while the past and the future subsist (ὑφιστάναι). This notice is corroborated by a fragment of Chrysippus’ *On the Void*, passed down to us by Plutarch, in which the past and the future are said to subsist (ὑφιστηκέναι), whereas the present is said to exist (ὑπάρχειν).¹⁰ In sum, for the Stoics there is a technical difference between hypostasis, that pertains to the past and the future, and hyparchein, that pertains to the present – and the predications, as Arius Didymus refers.¹¹

The second use of “hypostasis” originates from its difference from “hyparchein”. For the Stoics “hyparchein” stands for the existence in the cataleptic representation,¹² while “hypostasis” denotes the existence out of the cataleptic representation. Further, assuming that

- 9 Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis adversus Stoicos*, 41, 1081C-F (ed. Michel Casevitz, Belles Lettres, Paris 2002, 108-110). On this text cf. Pierre Hadot, “Zur Vorgeschichte des Begriff *Existenz*. Ὑπάρχειν bei den Stoikern”, in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 13.2 (1969), 115-127, and: Victor Goldschmidt, “Ὑπάρχειν et ὑφιστάναι dans la philosophie stoïcienne”, in *Revue des Études Grecques* 85.406-408 (1972), 331-344 (now reprint in: Id., *Le système stoïcien et l’idée de temps*, Vrin, Paris 1953, 43).
- 10 Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis*, 41, 1081F (ed. M. Casevitz, 109) = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (= *SVF*), II, 518 (ed. Hans von Arnim, Teubner, Leipzig 1903, 165.32-36).
- 11 Arius Didymus, *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, I, 8, 42 (ed. Curt Wachsmuth, Weidmann, Berlin 1884, 106.18-23) = *SVF*, II, 509 (ed. H. von Arnim, 164.26-30).
- 12 As it results from: Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*, VIII, 85-86 (ed. Hermann Mutschmann, Teubner, Leipzig 1914, 121).

the Stoics divide the things in bodies and incorporeals,¹³ which are the so called “canonical incorporeals”, namely, time, sayables, void, and space, our sources evidence that they refer that mode of existence which is expressed by “hypostasis” not only to the time, in particular to the past and the future, and to the sayables, in particular to the predications, as seen earlier, but also to the void and the space.¹⁴ Therefore, the Stoics consider the hypostasis as the mode of existence of what is out of the cataleptic representation, particularly of the incorporeal things.

The third meaning of “hypostasis” as act of existence is derived by the Stoics from the double function of the verb ὑφίστημι/ὑφίσταμαι, from which “hypostasis” is: transitive, that is, to give existence to something; intransitive, to exist.¹⁵ The sources on the Stoics document

- 13 Some sources document that the Stoics consider the “something” as the supreme genre which is divided in bodies and the “canonical incorporeals”, whose existence is defined “hypostasis”: cf. Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem*, 15, 1116B-C (ed. Phillip de Lacy, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1967, 242); Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Topica 121a.10* (ed. Maximillian Wallies, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 2.2, Reimer, Berlin 1891, 301.19-25) = *SVF*, II, 329 (ed. H. von Arnim, 117.2-8); Galen, *De methodo medendi*, II, 7 (ed. Gottlob Kühn, Galeni Opera X, Olms, Hildesheim 1965, 155.1-8). On this cf. Jacques Brunschwig, “La théorie stoïcienne du genre suprême et l’ontologie platonicienne”, in Jonathan Barnes – Mario Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics. Fourth Symposium Hellenisticum*, Bibliopolis, Naples 1988, 19-127.
- 14 For the void cf. Arius Didymus, *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, I, 18, 4d (ed. C. Wachsmuth, 161.24-26); for the place cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, X, 3 (ed. H. Mutschmann, 303) = *SVF*, II, 505 (ed. H. von Arnim, 163.18-24). On void and place in the Stoics cf. Michele Alessandrelli, “Aspects and Problems of Chrysippus’ Conception of Space”, in Graziano Ranocchia – Christoph Helmig – Christoph Horn (eds.), *Space in Hellenistic Philosophy. Critical Studies in Ancient Physics*, De Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2014, 53-68.
- 15 This double function of the verb is stressed out by: R. Witt, “ὑπόστασις”, 323; H. Dörrie, “ὑπόστασις”, 37. Of different opinion is: Leonard Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London 1952, 163. Cf. also: J. Hammerstaedt, “Hypostasis”, 988.

that they are aware of this double function of “hypostasis”: on the one side, they use this term in the transitive sense in respect to the material substrate which brings forth the individuals;¹⁶ on the other side, they apply this term also in the intransitive sense in the field of the natural sciences, in particular with reference to the “sediment”.¹⁷

It is important to underscore that the aforesaid three notions of “hypostasis”, as they are outlined by the Stoics, circulate in the philosophical debates during the early imperial period, in particular among the Platonists and the Aristotelians.

In relation to the Platonists, though – as well known – the word “hypostasis” plays a primary role in the philosophical lexicon of Plotinus,¹⁸ it is employed by the Middle Platonists in several contexts. For instance, the *Didaskalikòs*, a handbook of Platonism dated to the early empire, attributes the hypostasis to the individual soul and

16 Cf. Arius Didymus, *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, I, 11, 5a (ed. C. Wachsmuth, 133.6-7) = *SVF*, II, 317 (ed. H. von Arnim, 114.25-26); Arius Didymus, *apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, XV, 19, 3 (ed. Édouard des Places, Sources Chrétiennes 338, Cerf, Paris 1987, 322) = *SVF*, II, 599 (ed. H. von Arnim, 184.39-185.1); Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis*, 50, 1085E (ed. M. Casevitz, 119-120) = *SVF*, II, 380 (ed. H. von Arnim, 126.30-32; 126.35).

17 Cf. Arius Didymus, *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, I, 17, 3 (ed. C. Wachsmuth, 152.19-153.6) = *SVF*, I, 102 (ed. H. von Arnim, Teubner, Leipzig 1905, 28.14-21); Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantis*, 41, 1053A (ed. M. Casevitz, 79) = *SVF*, II, 579 (ed. H. von Arnim, 179.28-34). It is to be noted that these notions of “hypostasis”, transitive and intransitive, are complementary, as demonstrated by: Michael Lapige, “Stoic Cosmology”, in John Rist (ed.), *The Stoics*, University of California Press, Berkeley-London-Los Angeles 1978, 161-185; Susan Sauvé Meyer, “Chain of Causes. What is Stoic Fate?”, in Riccardo Sales (ed.), *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, 71-89.

18 Many are the studies on this issue, cf. only: Heinrich Dörrie, “Zum Ursprung der Neuplatonischen Hypostasenlehre”, in *Hermes* 82.3 (1954), 331-342 (reprint in: Id., *Platonica minora*, 286-296); C. Rutten, “Υπόρξις et ὑπόστασις chez Plotin”, in Francesco Romano – Daniela Taormina (eds.), *Hyparxis e hypostasis nel neoplatonismo. Atti del I Colloquio Internazionale del Centro di Ricerca sul Neoplatonismo*, Olschki, Florence 1994, 25-32.

proves to be aware of the Stoic difference between “hypostasis” and “hyparxis”;¹⁹ Atticus supports the thesis of the existence of a hypostasis of the soul, in contrast with the Peripatetic Dicearchus, who believes that only the sensible things exist and, then, refuses any existence to the soul;²⁰ Severus considers the soul as a “geometrical hypostasis”, in the middle between the point and the plane;²¹ Nicomachus of Gerasa believes that the three principles of the Middle Platonists, namely, the prime matter, the Demiurge, the ideas, are provided with the hypostasis;²² finally, Philo of Alexandria speaks of a hypostasis of God, and knows the double meaning of hypostasis, transitive and intransitive, namely, as act of giving existence and act of existence.²³ In synthesis, in line with the Stoic terminology, the Middle Platonists are familiar both with the idea of hypostasis as existence of the incorporeal things, in particular the soul and the metaphysical principles, and with the idea of hypostasis as act of giving existence and existing.

Among the Aristotelians in the early empire, Alexander of Aphrodisias contributes to a further understanding of the uses

19 Alcinoüs, *Didaskalikos*, XXV, 177.22-23 (ed. John Whittaker, Belles Lettres, Paris 1990, 48), and: XXV, 189.18-20 (ed. J. Whittaker, 72).

20 Atticus, *apud* Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, XV, 9, 10 (ed. É. des Places, 288) = Atticus, Frg. 7 (ed. Édouard des Places, Belles Lettres, Paris 1977, 63) = Dicearcus, Frg. 8i (ed. Fritz Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* 1, Schwabe, Basel-Stuttgart 1967, 14.41-15.2)

21 Severus, *apud* Proclus, *In Timaeum* 35a, 187a (ed. Ernst Diehl, Teubner, Leipzig 1903, 153.15-25).

22 Nicomachus, *Introductio arithmetica*, I, 1, 3 (ed. Richard Hoche, Teubner, Leipzig 1866, 2.18).

23 Cf. Philo, *Deus sit immutabilis*, 172 (ed. André Mosès, Cerf, Paris 1963, 144); *De aeternitate mundi*, 88 (ed. Roger Arnaldez, Cerf, Paris 1969, 136).

of “hypostasis” in the philosophical context.²⁴ In the course of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Topics*, in particular on *Topics* 127a.3, he argues that, if the genre is predicated of the individuals, and if the negation of the individuals implies the negation of the genre, then the genre does not exist for itself, but only in the individuals of which it is predicated, namely, the hypostasis of the genre is found in the individuals of which it is predicated.²⁵ Therefore, Alexander is persuaded that, first, the genre exists only in the individuals which instantiate it, and secondly, the hypostasis stands for the individual which is the whole of the genres that are predicated of it.

The above overview of the uses of “hypostasis” in the philosophical background points out that it is understood as the existence of the incorporeal things, for example by the Platonists, or as the act of existence, for example by Philo, in continuity with the Stoics, and as the individual, for instance by Alexander of Aphrodisias.²⁶

As far as the circulation of “hypostasis” in the early Christian texts is concerned, the recourse to this term in the Christian theology is allowed by Heb 1,3; though only a few occurrences of “hypostasis”

24 Many studies have evidenced the relation between Alexander and Origen, cf. Ronald E. Heine, “The Introduction to Origen’s *Commentary on John* Compared with the Introductions to the Ancient Philosophical Commentaries on Aristotle”, in Gilles Dorival – Alain Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et la Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum (Chantilly, 30 août - 3 septembre 1993)*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 118, Peeters, Leuven 1995, 3-12; Ilaria Ramelli, “Alexander of Aphrodisias: A Source for Origen’s Philosophy”, in *Philosophie antique* 14 (2014), 237-289; Mark Edwards, *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought*, Routledge, Oxford-New York 2019, 46-54.

25 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Topica 127a.3* (ed. M. Wallies, 355.12-356.2). On this passage: Chiara Militello, *Dialettica, genere e anima nel commento di Alessandro di Afrodisia al IV libro dei “Topici” di Aristotele*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2017, 111-115.

26 On this cf. Johannes Zachhuber, “Individuality and the Theological Debate about Hypostasis”, in Alexis Torrance – Johannes Zachhuber (eds.), *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, Routledge, London-New York 2014, 95.

are found in the early Christian literature, all of them refer to the philosophical semantics of this term. For example, Tatian mentions the hypostasis of the Logos and intends it as his incorporeal existence;²⁷ Irenaeus identifies the Gnostic tripartition of natures as the difference between three different levels of existence, or hypostasis;²⁸ finally, the Gnostics apply the term “hypostasis” to mean the individual existence of the Aeons.²⁹

A particular attention is to be devoted to Clement of Alexandria, who employs this term sometimes and always in line with the philosophical framework.³⁰ Among them two passages are worthy of consideration: one is *Stromata* II, 18, 96, 2, the other is *Stromata* IV, 22, 136, 4.³¹ As regards the passage in *Stromata* II, 18, 96, 2, Clement compares the agriculture with the education through the exercise of virtues: as the trees are to be pruned for three years, so that it is possible to harvest the fruits in the fourth year, so the sin is to be eradicated, so that the fruit of faith comes to maturation.³² This text contains a formula which looks obscure: “In the fourth year – Clement writes – the four virtues are

27 Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 5, 1 (ed. Eduard Schwarz, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1888, 5.17-18).

28 Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, I, 5, 4; I, 6, 2 (eds. Adeline Rousseau and Louis Doutrelau, Sources Chrétiennes 264, Cerf, Paris 1979, 83; 95).

29 On this cf. Christoph Marksches, “Individuality in Some Gnostic Authors: With a Few Remarks on the Interpretation of Ptolemaeus’ *Epistulam ad Floram*”, in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 15.3 (2011), 411-430 (now reprint in: A. Torrance – J. Zachhuber [eds.], *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, 11-28).

30 The occurrences of “hypostasis” in Clement have been collected by Otto Stählin in: *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. IV: *Register*, ed. Otto Stählin, Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller 39, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1936, 778.

31 Clement, *Stromata*, II, 18, 96, 2 (ed. Claude Mondésert, Sources Chrétiennes 38, Cerf, Paris 1954, 107), and: IV, 22, 136, 4 (eds. Annewies van den Hoek and Claude Mondésert, Sources Chrétiennes 463, Cerf, Paris 2001, 282).

32 Philo is behind this passage of Clement, as demonstrated by: Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis. An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model*, Brill, Leiden-New York 1988, 98-99.

consecrated to God, the third stage being already joined to the fourth, the hypostasis of the Lord”. Although it is not easy to understand the meaning of this formula, scholars substantially agree that Clement is speaking of the education through the exercise of virtues here, which he divides in two phases: the first phase, in three stages, is a preparation to the union with Christ; the second phase is the final union with Christ and is the persisting act of participation in Christ, which is called “hypostasis”.³³ Concerning the other passage in *Stromata* IV, 22, 126, 4, Clement divides the knowledge of the Gnostic in three stages: first, the act of thinking (νοεῖν), through the exercise, becomes the act of always-thinking (ἀεὶ νοεῖν); then, the act of always-thinking becomes aeternal contemplation; finally, it is transformed into a living hypostasis (ζῶσα ὑπόστασις). Resuming what Aristotle says about the First Mover, Clement intends the hypostasis as that mode of existence which is incorporeal, since it is noetic; individual, since it is the essence of a subject; in act, since it is life.³⁴

To sum up, the term “hypostasis” is introduced in the philosophical lexicon by the Stoics who use it according to three core meanings: first, in contrast with *hyparxis*, hypostasis as existence outside of the cataleptic representation; secondly, hypostasis as existence of the incorporeal things; thirdly, hypostasis as act of existence, both in the transitive and in the intransitive sense. As seen earlier, this threefold definition of “hypostasis” circulates among the philosophical schools in the early empire, in particular among the Middle Platonists and the Aristotelians; it is worth noting that the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias contributes to an expansion of the meanings of

33 On this cf. Leonard Prestige, “Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 2. 18, and the Meaning of Hypostasis”, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 30.3 (1929), 272-272, and: Id., *God in Patristic Thought*, 164-165. This interpretation is supported also by: Pierre-Thomas Camelot (ed.), *Clément d'Alexandrie. Les Stromates: Stromate II*, Sources Chrétiennes 38, Cerf, Paris 1954, 107, and by: A. van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria*, 100.

34 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, Λ, 1071b.13-31.

“hypostasis”, since he introduces the notion of “hypostasis” as individual. Finally, the philosophical understanding of “hypostasis” is the basis of the early Christians’ use of this word, although only a few occurrences are found in the Christian literature before Origen.

3. The Trinitarian use of “hypostasis” in Origen

The philosophical conception of “hypostasis”, outlined in the previous section, is the foundation of Origen’s application of this term to the Trinitarian theology. In this part I will not consider a well known text of Origen’s treatise *On Prayer* in which, while commenting on the fourth petition of the Lord’s prayer, in particular on the expression: ἐπιούσιος, he quotes a list of definitions of οὐσία, derived from the Stoic lexicon of Herophilus,³⁵ which contains also a reference to hypostasis. I will explore how Origen uses “hypostasis” in relation to the Trinity and try to demonstrate that his use is precise and technical. In this respect, I will take into account five texts from his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.³⁶

35 Origen, *De oratione*, 27, 7 (ed. Paul Koetschau, Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller 3, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1899, 366.33-367.12). On this text cf. René Cadiou, “Dictionnaires antiques dans l’œuvre d’Origène”, in *Revue des Études Grecques* 45.212 (1932), 271-285, in particular 275-277; Christoph Marksches, “Was bedeutet οὐσία? Zwei Antworten bei Origenes und Ambrosius und deren Bedeutung für ihre Bibelerklärung und Theologie”, in *Origenes und sein Erbe. Gesammelte Studien*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2007, 173-194 (originally published in: Wilhelm Geerlings – Hildegard König [eds.], *Origenes. Vir ecclesiasticus*, Borengässer, Bonn 1995, 59-82); Clara Burini de Lorenzi, “Panis quotidianus / ὁ ἄριστος ἐπιούσιος (Mt. 6,11; Lc. 11,3). Tertulliano e Origene: le due direttrici esegetiche e la loro ricezione”, in *Adamantius* 18 (2012), 178-199.

36 The English translation which will be followed is: Ronald E. Heine (ed.), *Commentary on the Gospel according to John. Books 1-10*, Fathers of the Church 80, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1989 (= Heine I); *Books 13-32*, Fathers of the Church 89, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1993 (= Heine II).

3.1. The first occurrence of “hypostasis” in a Trinitarian fashion is found in the course of Origen’s exegesis of the prologue of the *Gospel of John*, that is contained in the first book of his commentary, in particular in the course of his discussion about the Christological title of “Logos”:

It is worthwhile to consider those who disregard so many names and treat this one as special. And again, they look for an explanation in the case of the other names, if someone brings them to their attention, but in the case of this one they believe they have a clear answer to what the Son of God is, when he is named Word. This is especially obvious since they continually use the verse, “My heart uttered a good word” (Ps. 44,2), as though they think the Son of God is an expression of the Father occurring in syllables. And in accordance with this view, if we inquire of them carefully, they do not give him substance (ὑπόστασιν) nor do they elucidate his essence (οὐσίαν). I do not yet mean that it is this or that, but in what manner he has essence.

For it is impossible for anyone to understand a proclaimed word to be a son. Let them declare to us that God the Word is such a word, having life in himself, and either is not separated (οὐ κεχωρισμένον) from the Father and, in accordance with this position, does not subsist (μὴ ὑφ’εστάναι) nor is he a son, or is both separated and invested with substance.³⁷

In this text Origen refers to Ps. 44,2: “My heart uttered a good word”, of which a Christological interpretation goes back to the 2nd century,³⁸ and of which he mentions a reading which is to be attributed to the Monarchians, who regard the Son as the expression (προφορά)

37 Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, I, 24, 151-152 (ed. Cécile Blanc, Sources Chrétiennes 120, Cerf, Paris 1966, 136-138); trans. Heine I, 64-65.

38 On this cf. Ronald E. Heine, “Origen on the Christological Significance of Psalm 44/45”, in *Consensus: A Canadian Lutheran Journal of Theology* 23.1 (1997), 21-37.

of the Father occurring in syllables.³⁹ The Monarchians refuse that the Son has a hypostasis, or an essence (οὐσία), or a determined essence (τοιάδε οὐσία), and Origen responds to them that, if the Son were not separated (οὐ κεχωρισμένον) from the Father, he would not have a hypostasis (μὴ ὑφεστάναι) and, then, he would not be the Son.

This correlation between the hypostasis of the Son and the participle: “separated” (κεχωρισμένος) offers a significant clue about the philosophical source of Origen: the formula “separated” (κεχωρισμένος / χωριστός) is introduced in the philosophical lexicon by Aristotle, with the aim to stress out that the individual, composed of form and matter, is differentiated from the other individuals by the form,⁴⁰ for example the Stagirite employs this term for that stage of the embryo resulting from the mingling of the male seed (form) and the female seed (matter), when the form individualizes the matter, so

39 About the controversy between Origen and the Monarchians, with a focus on the Psalm 44, cf. Antonio Orbe, “Orígenes y los Monarquianos”, in *Gregorianum* 72.1 (1991), 39-72, and: Samuel Fernández, “Verso la teologia trinitaria di Origene. Metafora e linguaggio teologico”, in Sylwia Kaczmarek – Henryk Pietras (eds.), *Origeniana Decima. Origen as Writer. Papers of the 10th International Origen Congress (University School of Philosophy and Education “Ignatianum”, Kraków, August 31st-September 4th, 2009)*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 244, Peeters, Leuven 2011, 457-473, in particular 459-460.

40 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, Δ, 1017b.23-26. The occurrences of this word have been collected and classified by: Donald Morrison, “Χωριστός in Aristotle”, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985), 89-105. Many studies have already explored the notion of “separation” in Aristotle, cf. Gail Fine, “Separation: A Reply to Morrison”, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 159-165; Donald Morisson, “Separation: A Reply to Fine”, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 167-173; Michel Bastit, “Aristote et la séparation”, in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 87 (1992), 297-316; Lynne Spellman, *Substance and Separation in Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, in particular 83-99. Cf. also the recent: Emilt Katz, “Ontological Separation in Aristotle’s Metaphysics”, in *Phronesis* 62.1 (2017), 26-68.

that the embryo gets differentiated from his parents.⁴¹

Therefore, in this text Origen attributes to the Son not only an essence (οὐσία), but also a hypostasis, namely, an existence which is separated and differentiated from the existence of the Father, an existence which is incorporeal and individual.

3.2. This view of hypostasis is corroborated by Origen's reading of John 1,26: "He whom you do not know has stood in your midst":

Concerning the statement: "He whom you do not know has stood in your midst" (John 1,26), we must take these words of the Son of God, the Word, through whom all things were made, who subsists in his essence insofar as the substance is concerned (ὕφεστηκός τος οὐσιωδῶς κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον), and is identical with wisdom. For he has permeated all creation, that the things which are made through him may always be made, and it may always be true of everything, whatever it be, that "all things were made through him and without him nothing was made" (John 1,3), and "You made all things in wisdom" (John 1,25).⁴²

In reply to the Pharisees who do not acknowledge the Son of God, Origen mentions some features which unequivocally identify him with Jesus: he is the Logos, "through whom all things were made" (John 1,3), who has "hypostatized" himself (ὕφεστηκός), "essentially" (οὐσιωδῶς) and "according to the substrate" (κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον), finally he is identical to the Wisdom. Assuming that the expressions: οὐσιωδῶς and ὑφεστηκός signify that the Son exists and that his existence is incorporeal and is differentiated from the existence of the Father, the periphrasis: κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον still needs a clarification.

As well known, the notion of "substrate" (ὕποκείμενον) plays a key role in the speculation of the Stoics, who understand it as the unqualified matter which is the potency of all qualities and of which

41 Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 740a.5-13; *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1134b.11-12.

42 Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, VI, 38, 188 (ed. Cécile Blanc, Sources Chrétiennes 157, Cerf, Paris 1970, 268-270); trans. Heine I, 221.

the qualities are predicated, as soon as they are actualized.⁴³ An overview of the occurrences of “substrate” in the corpus of Origen demonstrates that he uses this notion according to the Stoic view.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the aforesaid text discourages us from assuming that this use of “substrate” is found in Origen: the Alexandrian master intends “substrate” as what differentiates the Father and the Son, not as what unifies the Father and the Son.⁴⁵

A focus on the philosophical debate in the early imperial period sheds light on the circulation of another meaning of “substrate” in addition to the Stoic understanding of “substrate” as unqualified matter. There is evidence of an intense controversy in the philosophical context of the early empire about how to understand “substrate”: some philosophers who lie in the Aristotelian tradition and claim to be faithful exegetes of Aristotle, for example Alexander of Aphrodisias, defend the theory, supported by *Categoriae* 1a.24-25, that the substrate is the individual, provided with its own essence, of which the accidents are predicated,⁴⁶ whereas other philosophers

43 Cf. Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis*, 44, 1083D (ed. M. Casevitz, 114) = *SVF*, II, 762 (ed. H. von Arnim, 214.31).

44 Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III, 42 (ed. Marcel Borret, Sources Chrétiennes 136, Cerf, Paris 1968, 98); IV, 56 (ed. M. Borret, 326); *Homiliae in Ieremiam*, VIII, 2 (ed. Pierre Nautin, Sources Chrétiennes 232, Cerf, Paris 1976, 358). Some scholars believe that Origen uses this notion of “substrate” also in the Trinitarian contexts, cf. Antonio Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología de la procesión del Verbo*, vol. I/1, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome 1958, 444-448, and: Josef Rius-Camps, *El dinamismo trinitario en la divinización de los seres racionales según Orígenes*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome 1970, 49, 81.

45 This is supported by: Origen, *De oratione*, 15, 1 (ed. P. Koetschau, 334.4-5).

46 Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaestiones*, I, 8 (ed. Ivo Bruns, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca. Supplementum 2/2, Reimer, Berlin 1892, 17.8-12). On this cf. Robert W. Sharples, “The School of Alexander”, in Richard Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Duckworth / Cornell University Press, London / Ithaca, NY, 1990, 100, n. 78, and: Id. (ed.), *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Quaestiones 1.1-2.15*, Duckworth,

believe that the substrate means either the unqualified matter or the matter which the essential and the accidental predicates belong to.⁴⁷ These elements prove that two definitions of “substrate” are attested in the philosophical backdrop contemporary to Origen: it is either the individual or subject of predication, in line with the Aristotelian tradition, or the unqualified matter, in line with the Stoic approach.

Origen is aware of both these definitions of “substrate”; nevertheless, he applies to the Father and the Son only the definition of “substrate” as individual or subject of predication. In the aforementioned text the formula: ὑφ'εστῆκός οὐσιωδῶς means that the Son exists and that his existence is incorporeal and is differentiated from that of the Father, while the formula: κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον means that the Son is individual and subject of predication, namely, he is a subject which some properties are predicated of.

3.3. The above exploration of the Trinitarian use of “hypostasis” is further supported by Origen’s comment on John 2,19: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”:

Those, however, who are confused on the subject of the Father and the Son bring together the statement, “And we are also found false witnesses of God, because we have testified against God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise” (1Cor 15,15), and words like these which show him who raises to be different from him who has been raised, and the statement, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2,19). They think that these statements prove that the Son does not differ from the Father in number, but that both being one, not only

London 1992, 4, n. 17, and 43, n. 107. On Alexander’s reading of *Categoriae* 1a.24-25 cf. John Ellis, “Alexander’s Defense of Aristotle’s Categories”, in *Phronesis* 39.1 (1994), 69-89, and: Frans A.J. de Haas, *John Philoponus’ New Definition of Prime Matter. Aspects of Its Background in Neoplatonism and the Ancient Commentary Tradition*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 69, Brill, Leiden 1996, 198-210.

47 Cf. Simplicius, *In Categoriae*, 1a.24 (ed. Karl Kalbfleisch, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 8, Reimer, Berlin 1907, 48.1-11).

in essence, but also in substance, they are said to be Father and Son in relation to certain differing aspects, not in relation to their reality (κατὰ ὑπόστασιν). For this reason, we must first quote to them the texts capable of establishing definitely that the Son is other than the Father, and we must say that it is necessary that a son be the son of a father and that a father be the father of a son.⁴⁸

Origen quotes the view of some who appeal to John 2,19 and 1Cor 15,15 and are persuaded that both God the Father and Christ resurrect the dead, and argue that the Father and the Son do not differentiate from each other by the number, the essence, the substrate, and the hypostasis, but only by the names.

It is clear that those who support this view are the Monarchians.⁴⁹ In contrast with this opinion the Alexandrian master claims that the Father and the Son are different from each other by the hypostasis, namely, they are provided with an incorporeal and individual existence, and by the substrate, namely, they are two different subjects of predication.

3.4. The fourth text does not attest to a further use of “hypostasis” in a Trinitarian sense, but it contains a use of this term which contributes to the understanding of the Alexandrian master’s application of “hypostasis” to the divine Trinity. This passage is found in the course of the exegesis of John 8,37: “I know that you are seed of Abraham etc.”:

48 Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, X, 37, 246 (ed. Cécile Blanc, 528-530); trans. Heine I, 309. According to Harry A. Wolfson, in this passage Origen would state the identity of the Father and the Son in relation to the essence, not to the hypostasis and the substrate, cf. Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. I: *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1964, 317. Of different opinion is: M. Simonetti, “Note sulla teologia trinitaria”, 273-274, and: A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 436.

49 This argument is also found in the Monarchian Noetus, cf. Noetus, *apud Hippolytus, Contra Noetum*, 3, 2 (ed. Manlio Simonetti, EDB, Bologna 2000, 154). On this cf. A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera teología*, 45-46.

For those who do not understand what is meant by the word “seed” and the word “child”, the statement, “I know that you are seed of Abraham,” will seem to be in conflict with what will be added immediately and addressed to the same people, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the works of Abraham” (John 8,39).

So that these things may be perceived, then, let us first see the difference between “seed” and “child” in the literal sense. Now, it is clear that the seed of someone has the principles of the procreator in itself still at rest and reserved. The child exists (ὑφίσταται), however, once it has been formed and prepared for birth, when the seed has been transformed and has molded the material surrounding it provided by the woman and the collected nourishments. And if same portion [of seed] is someone’s child in the proper sense [of the word “child”], as in the case of physical children, it exists from seed, but if something is seed, it does not necessarily become a child.⁵⁰

The contradiction between John 8,37: “I know that you are seed of Abraham etc.”, and John 8,39: “If you are Abraham’s children etc.”, namely, the Jews are first called “seed”, then “children”, leads Origen to clarify the difference between the terms “seed” and “children”: “seed” is said of what has in itself, in the state of quiet and hidden, the seminal reasons, namely, the reasons of that which has emitted the seed (λόγοι τοῦ σπείραντος); “child” is said of that act in which, as soon as the seed has been transformed and has actualized the matter received from the mother and the collected nourishments, the form comes into existence, namely, one of the seminal reasons prevails – in other terms, only the child “hypostatizes” itself. This biological description contains some important aspects of the notion of hypostasis: as the child is hypostasis, namely, that act in which a seminal reason, which plays a formal role, determines the matter received from the mother and becomes an individual different from the other individuals, including the parents, so the hypostasis is that

⁵⁰ Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, XX, 2, 2-3 (ed. Cécile Blanc, Sources Chrétiennes 290, Cerf, Paris 1982, 156); trans. Heine II, 205-206.

act in which a form determines the matter and gives existence to an individual which becomes different from the other individuals by its own form, namely, its properties.

As seen earlier, the correlation of “hypostasis” and “separated”, which stands for the individual existence, or the act of existence, originates from Aristotle’s view of the animal generation. Once again Origen depends upon the embryological model of the Stagirite: as well known, Aristotle attributes to the male the primary role during the embryogenesis, since the sperm contains the formal and active principles which operates on the menstrual fluid, which is the material and passive principle given by the female.⁵¹ As said, this model is accepted by Origen, who claims that the embryo consists of form and matter, and that the matter is from the mother. Nevertheless, for Aristotle only the male seed contributes to the embryo’s form, while for Origen both the male seed and the female seed contribute to the embryo’s form. In this respect, he classifies the seminal reasons, firstly, in fatherly and motherly, and secondly, in progonic and congenital – the former are from the grandparents, the latter from the parents – so that because of the sexual intercourse’s movements a seminal reason prevails over the others, and it may also be one of the seminal reasons coming from the mother.⁵² Therefore, although Origen accepts the Aristotelian model, he attests to a variation which is found in the

51 Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 716a.6-7; 727b.31-33; 729a.10-11, 29-33; 730a.27-b.2; 731b.20-22; 732a.9; 733b.26-27; 738b.20-21; 740b.24-25. On this cf. Robert Mayhew, *The Female in Aristotle’s Biology. Reason or Rationalisation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004, 28-53, and: Sophia Connell, “Toward an Integrated Approach to Aristotle as a Biological Philosopher”, in *The Review of Metaphysics* 55.2 (2001), 297-322.

52 Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, XX, 5, 35-36 (ed. C. Blanc, 172-174). On this cf. Domenico Pazzini, “Il discorso sulle scienze nel Commento a Giovanni di Origenes”, in *La cultura scientifico-naturalistica nei Padri della Chiesa (I-V sec.)*. XXXV Incontro di studiosi dell’antichità cristiana (4-6 maggio 2006), Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 101, Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Rome 2007, 131-136.

debates in the early empire about the origins of the embryo, for instance in Galen.⁵³

In sum, in the previous passages Origen uses “hypostasis” with explicit reference to the Father and the Son, whereas in this text he employs it with the objective to clarify the process of embryogenesis, on the basis of a reassessment of Aristotle’s model. The occurrence of “hypostasis” in this embryological section contributes to confirm the meanings of “hypostasis” as act of existence, namely, act in which a form determines the matter and an individual differentiated from the others comes to existence, and as individual existence; as seen above, Origen applies these meanings to the Father and the Son.

3.5. This survey concludes with a passage which is found in the very beginning of Origen’s exegesis of John 1,3: “Through him all things were made”:

But if it is true that “all things were made through him,” (John 1,3) we must investigate if the Holy Spirit, too, was made through him. I think that one who declares that he was made and who advances the statement, “All things were made through him,” (John 1,3) must accept that the Holy Spirit too was made through the Word, since the Word is older than he. But it follows that one who does not wish the Holy Spirit to have been made through the Christ, if he judges the things in this Gospel to be true, says he is “unbegotten”.

But there will be a third person also besides these two, I mean besides the one who accepts that the Holy Spirit was made through the Word, and the one who supposes him to be unbegotten. This third person teaches that the Holy Spirit has no distinctive essence different from the Father and the Son (μηδὲ οὐσίαν τινὰ ἰδίαν ὑφεστάναι). But he may perhaps propose

53 The link between Galen and this passage of Origen has been evidenced by: D. Pazzini, “Il discorso sulle scienze”, 132, n. 12. A comparison between Origen and Galen has been put forward by: Robert McQueen Grant, “Paul, Galen, and Origen”, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 34.2 (1983), 553-556. About Galen and the early Christians cf. Jonathan Barnes, “Galen, Christians, logic”, in *Classics in Progress. Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, 399-417.

rather, if he thinks the Son is different from the Father, that the Spirit is the same with the Father, since commonly acknowledged distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Son is revealed in the statement, “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man shall be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not have forgiveness in this world or in the world to come” (Matt 12,32; Mark 3,29).

We, however, are persuaded that there are three hypostases (ὑποστάσεις), the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we believe that only the Father is unbegotten. We admit, as more pious and as true, that the Holy Spirit is the most honored of all things made through the Word, and that he is [first] in rank of all things which have been made by the Father through Christ.

Perhaps this is the reason the Spirit too is not called son of God, since the only begotten alone is by nature a son from the beginning. The Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son ministering to his hypostasis (τῇ ὑποστάσει), not only for it to exist, but also for it to be wise, and rational, and just, and whatever other thing we ought to understand it to be by participation in the aspects of Christ which we mentioned previously.

I think, if I may put it this way, that the Holy Spirit supplies the material of the gifts from God to those who are called saints thanks to him and because of participation in him. This material of the gifts which I mentioned is made effective from God; it is administered by Christ; but it subsists (ὑφειστώσης) in accordance with the Holy Spirit.

Paul moves me to assume that these things are this way when he writes somewhere of gifts as follows: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of ministries, and the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, and it is the same God who works all in all” (1Cor 12,4-6).⁵⁴

54 Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*, II, 10, 73-78 (ed. C. Blanc, 252-256); trans. Heine I, 113-114. Cf. Origen, *De principiis, praefatio*, 4 (eds. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, Sources Chrétiennes 252, Cerf, Paris 1978, 82); Jerome, *Epistula* 124, 3 (ed. Isidor Hilberg, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 56, Freytag, Leipzig 1918, 97.24). This passage has been studied by: Volker H. Dreccoll, “Der Begriff Hypostasis bei Origenes: Bemerkungen zum *Johanneskommentar* II, 10”, in Lorenzo Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana*

This passage is very important, since it contains all the meanings of “hypostasis” already mentioned and it applies them to the Trinity.

The issue which is raised by John 1,3 is whether the Spirit is to be counted among the “all things” made by the Son. In this respect, Origen mentions three hypotheses about the nature of the Holy Spirit: first, he is made by the Son, who is older than he; secondly, he is unbegotten, therefore he is not to be counted among the “all things” of John 1,3; finally, his essence (οὐσία) is not different from those of the Father and the Son, in particular if the Son is different from the Spirit, as it follows from Mt 12,32, then the Spirit is identical to the Father and, consequently, he is unbegotten. Origen accepts the first hypothesis, which he substantially revises: he considers the Holy Spirit as the most honored and the first in rank of all things made by the Father through the Son. This definition of the Spirit leads the Alexandrian master to specify two aspects which pertain to the statute of the Spirit as hypostasis.

On the one side, Origen argues that the Spirit has need of the Son “ministering to his hypostasis” (διακονοῦντος αὐτοῦ τῆ ὑποστάσει), that is, the Son causes the Spirit not only to be (τὸ εἶναι), but also to be individuated by predicates, for instance the wisdom, the rationality, the justice, namely, those predicates which the Son has for himself and in which the Spirit participates without interruption.⁵⁵ It follows that

Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress (Pisa, 27-31 August 2021), vol. I, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 164a, Peeters, Leuven 2004, 479-487. Cf. also: Manlio Simonetti, “Spirito Santo”, in Adele Monaci Castagno (ed.), *Origene. Dizionario*, Città Nuova, Rome 2000, 453.

⁵⁵ About the nature of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Son cf. Christoph Marksches, “Der Heilige Geist im *Johanneskommentar* des Origenes. Einige vorläufige Bemerkungen”, in Emanuela Prinzivalli (ed.), *Il Commento a Giovanni di Origene: il testo e i suoi contesti. Atti dell’VIII Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina (Roma, 28-30 settembre 2004)*, Pazzini, Villa Verucchio (Rimini) 2005, 277-299 (now reprint in: Id., *Origenes und sein Erbe*, 107-126).

two are the main meanings of “hypostasis” in relation to the Spirit: first, he is a hypostasis insofar as he is a subject which some predicates are attributed to; secondly, the reference of “hypostasis” to the Spirit reminds us of the twofold use of this term in the Stoics, namely, the Spirit exists (intransitive meaning) and he is given existence by the Son (transitive meaning).⁵⁶

On the other side, the Spirit supplies the matter (ὕλη) of the gifts which, as it is suggested by 1Cor 12,4-6, is actuated (ἐνεργουμένης) by the Father, is administered (διακονουμένης) by the Son, and is “hypostatized” (ὑφεστώσης) by the Spirit.⁵⁷ Once again Origen makes use of a notion of “hypostasis” which has already been outlined: the Holy Spirit is hypostasis insofar as he is that individual existence in which the matter (of the gifts) is determined by a form (the gifts themselves), which is actuated by the work of the Father and the Son.

In synthesis, this text contains three meanings of “hypostasis”, already mentioned in the previous texts: “hypostasis” as subject of predication; “hypostasis” as act in which a form determines the matter and brings forth an individual existence; finally, “hypostasis” as act of existing (intransitive sense) and act of giving existence (transitive sense).

56 On this cf. V.H. Drecoll, “Der Begriff Hypostasis”, 483, and: J. Hammerstaedt, “Der trinitarische Gebrauch”, 19, n. 75.

57 This definition is only partially corroborated by further passages in Origen, cf. Origen, *De principiis*, I, 1, 3 (eds. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, 94); I, 3, 7 (eds. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, 160-162); *Fragmenta in Iohannem*, 37 (ed. Erwin Preuschen, Griechischen Christliche Schriftsteller 10, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1903, 569.2-4).

4. *Conclusion*

As we have seen at the very beginning of this paper, the term “hypostasis” is used in the anathema of the First Council of Nicaea in a Trinitarian sense, namely, it is applied to the Father and the Son. This research has attempted to demonstrate that the earliest use of this word in a Trinitarian sense goes back to Origen, who employs it with reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Alexandrian master proves to be aware of the plurality of meanings of “hypostasis” which circulate in the philosophical vocabulary during the early empire, in particular the threefold definition of “hypostasis” formulated by the Stoics – “hypostasis” as existence outside of the representation, incorporeal existence, and act of existing or giving existence – and the idea of “hypostasis” as individual existence – as it is introduced by the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias. Origen is aware of this complex semantic framework of “hypostasis” and applies this term to the Trinity.

The five passages of the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, which have been studied in the course of this paper, evidence that Origen’s conception of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as three hypostases means that: first, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are endowed with an incorporeal and individual existence; secondly, each of them is differentiated from the others; thirdly, they are subjects of predication, that is, they are individuated by predicates which are attributed to them, as it follows from the periphrasis “by the substrate”; finally, they exist and they are given existence, as it happens in the case of the Holy Spirit, who exists and, at the same time, is given existence by the Son.

Abstract

Il termine “ipostasi” è utilizzato per la prima volta in un documento ufficiale della Chiesa con riferimento al Padre e al Figlio nel simbolo del primo concilio di Nicea del 325, in particolare nell’anatematismo finale. Lo scopo di questa ricerca è di dimostrare che questo termine è utilizzato in relazione al Padre, al Figlio e allo Spirito Santo da parte di Origene di Alessandria secondo una struttura concettuale ben definita. A questo proposito, la ricerca si articola in due sezioni principali: la prima sezione è una ricognizione dei significati che “ipostasi” possiede nella riflessione degli stoici, i quali introducono questa parola nel vocabolario filosofico antico, e dell’utilizzo di questa espressione nel contesto filosofico dell’età imperiale, con un’attenzione particolare al medio platonismo e all’aristotelismo, ad es. Alessandro di Afrodisia, nonché nella letteratura cristiana precedente ad Origene, la cui acquisizione di “ipostasi” è legittimata da Eb 1,3; nella seconda sezione, invece, sono presi in considerazione cinque testi tratti dal *Commento al Vangelo di Giovanni* di Origene nei quali “ipostasi” è adoperato a proposito del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito, allo scopo di mettere in evidenza che l’Alessandrino ricorre ad “ipostasi” non solo in continuità con la terminologia filosofica antica, ma anche all’interno di uno schema logico definito.



HU ISSN 2416-2213

ISSN 2416-2213



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