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## GENNADIUS OF OCHRID AND THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE IN BYZANTINE SOCIETY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Gennadius of Ochrid was one of the most prominent figures of the Byzantine Church in the 13th century. He was a profound scholar of Sacred Scripture and an active participant in the theological debates of his time. He authored canonical documents, known as the Syntagma, which have not yet been critically published.

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With the accession to the throne of Andronicus II Palaeologus, the Byzantine policy towards the Western Church and its theology completely changed. Andronicus abandoned his father's ambitious attempts for union with the Western Church and turned to Orthodoxy. Immediately after the beginning of his independent rule in 1282, he abolished the Union of Lyons. This policy of the Emperor led to many changes on the church level. Thus, Andronicus II completely cleared the Latinophile policy of his predecessor and dethroned the patriarch John XI Bekkos.

The new policy opened up new discussions, especially around the issue of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. Defending his positions, on one such occasion, John Bekkos used a phrase of St. John of Damascus as an argument. The controversial phrase was: *καὶ προβολεὺς διὰ Λόγου ἐκφαντορικοῦ Πνεύματος* (and the producer, through the Word, of the manifesting Spirit). This has caused much debate about the authenticity of the phrase and its correct interpretation.

In the discussions that followed, the Latinophiles insisted on the au-

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<sup>1</sup> A speech delivered on November 23, 2023, at the international conference on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Theological Faculty of Sofia University.

thenticity of the phrase to demonstrate the correctness and “orthodoxy” of their theological position. The other parties either did not accept the text or considered that the correct interpretation of this phrase does not justify the Latin positions. There were also theologians who offered more moderate solutions. Specifically, the new Patriarch Gregory II and the great logothete Theodore Mouzalon proposed an orthodox interpretation without questioning the authenticity of the phrase. Finally, the defenders of the Latin positions considered Damascene’s phrase to confirm their view of the hypostatic proceeding of the Holy Spirit “from the Father through the Son” (ἐκ Πατρὸς δι’ Υἱοῦ).

Summarizing the arguments, Pachymeres observes: “Some do not accept this phrase, regarding it as an inauthentic product of father Damascene; some, on the other hand, accepting it, change the ‘producer’ (προβολεὺς) with ‘provider’ (παροχεὺς) and do not understand the manifestation as a manifestation in existence, but as an eternal manifestation.” In order to demonstrate his orthodox views, Patriarch Grigory II issued a Tomos, which was signed by all present at the Second Council in Blacherna in August 1285. The Council accepted the argument of Patriarch Gregory II and the great logothete Theodore Mouzalon. However, some of the participants of the Council did not agree with the theological interpretation expressed by the Patriarch on this topic. Thus, after a short time, the first reactions to the content of the Tomos appeared, first from a part of the patriarchal clergy, who refused to accept the text.

George Moschampar, who served as chartophylax, wrote a critique of the authenticity of the phrase from Damascene’s “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith”. Moschampar rejected the text as inauthentic. He wrote his critique probably before the end of 1286. He was also supported by many influential Byzantine clerics, who accused Patriarch Gregory II of heresy, because he used an unauthentic quote to confirm his argument. According to Pachymeres, Moschampar did not present a single counterargument for the authenticity of the phrase.

With his epistle no. 187 (E 173) Patriarch Gregory II informs the great logothete Theodore Mouzalon about the accusations of blasphemy that were addressed to the Patriarch. In order to face this problem, the Patriarch considered that he should convene an assembly of prominent clerics, among whom he mentions Gennadius of Ochrid and Athanasius II of Alexandria, in order to establish the truth in the Church and silence the new

wave against the Patriarch.

The only preserved work of Gennadius of Ochrid, entitled as “Syntagma” is directly related to this theological discussion. From the presence of the controversial phrase of St. John of Damascus at the beginning of the Syntagma of Gennadius, as well as from the development of theological issues, it is assumed that the writing of the work is directly related to the above events. One possibility is that, responding to the Patriarch’s request, Gennadius wrote the work after the publication of the Tomos in 1285. It seems equally possible to date it to about 1282, when Gennadius, as a monk, according to Pachymeres’s information, made an extensive exposition of orthodox views.

In this case, the request to Gennadius for help and support from Patriarch Gregory II, after the publication of the Tomos, may be based on the Patriarch’s belief that Gennadius will defend the views, which several years ago he had already expressed in writing. However, I consider the first case more likely, i.e. that the writing of the Syntagma represented support for the theological positions and opinions of Patriarch Gregory II after the publication of the Tomos of 1285. Of course, what is clear and emerges from the content of the text is that the book was written as a response to the “criminals against the phrase”, that is, against the Latinophiles who misinterpreted it and against the Orthodox who questioned the authenticity of the phrase of St. John of Damascus.

Gennadius refutes the Latin views at certain points using a series of biblical and patristic references and reasoning based either on his own interpretation of these references or on the interpretations of other theologians. Throughout the Syntagma, Gennadius quotes many passages from the Old and New Testaments, the Eastern and Early Latin Fathers.

Although the adversaries are not mentioned by name in the text, the author characterizes them with various epithets, such as: “crafty men,” “those who raised their voices against the Most High,” “word hunters and gossipers with evil souls,” etc. Since Gennadius opposes the theological views of Nikephoros Blemmydes and George Akropolites, of whose works he examines and analyzes entire passages, we can assume that the above characteristics probably apply to them and their followers.

After the introduction, Gennadius poses the main problem to which he will devote a large part of his work, which, as he says, is: “that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, and that He is the pro-

ducer, through the Word, of the manifesting Spirit.” As expected, Gennadius’ opinion on this particular issue is in line with the position of Patriarch Gregory II. Right from the beginning of the treatise, immediately after the introduction, Gennadius presents his opinion regarding the addition to the Creed, as well as regarding Damascene’s disputed phrase: “So, in my opinion: I neither accept, nor do I entirely reject it: the first, because I fear the curse of godly men, uttered against the addition in theology, and because they are abused by crafty men, and drawn into the grievous blasphemy; and the second, because these are truly the words of those saints, who neither dared to oppose anything from saving theology, nor did they add anything to the correctness of the Creed.” The second part of the statement is particularly striking, where Gennadius emphasizes the necessity of preserving the teaching and tradition of the holy Fathers who did not dare to change the theology of Christ, nor to change anything in the content of the Creed.

Gennadius refers extensively to the work of St. John of Damascus “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” since the controversial passage comes from this work. Based on the arguments presented by the author, he points out that not only the secrets of God and His nature are inaccessible to man, but also those relating to created nature. Furthermore, Gennadius asks the rhetorical question: “What man of common sense would want to believe that John of Damascus dogmatized about a different way of existence of the Holy Spirit, except for the one he learned about from the common Savior.”

Therefore, Gennadius clearly asserts that the holy Fathers with the phrase “Spirit through the Son” want to emphasize the fact that the two persons are “inseparable and unlimited” (ἀχώριστα, καὶ ἀδιάστατα), and not to express the proceeding of the Spirit and from the Son. He emphasizes that Fathers use the preposition “through” (διὰ) instead of “from” (ἐκ). By this formulation they do not deprive the Father of being the only Ἀρχή, principle or fountain of Divinity.

All the above characteristics reveal that the argumentation of Gennadius of Ochrid is in agreement with the theological thought of Gregory II and Theodore Muzalon, which indicates his absolute identification with the positions and theological views of the Patriarch. A special impression is made by the parallel passages that exist in the Syntagma of Gennadius and the speech “Against the Blasphemy of Bekkos” (Κατὰ τῶν τοῦ Βέκκου

βλασφημιῶν) by Theodore Muzalon, which often follow the same order in the series of arguments and patristic texts they use. Moreover, many paragraphs of the *Syntagma* of Gennadius can be found verbatim in the work of the XIV century “Examination of the Error of the Latins” (Ἐλεγχος ὧδε τῆς πλάνης τῶν Λατίνων) by Matthew Blastares. Indeed, a careful analysis and comparison of the works proves that these are excerpts previously used by Nikephoros Blemmydes in his treatise on the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, in a form of an epistle to Jacob of Ochrid - one of the predecessors of Gennadius.

*In conclusion*, it can be said that Gennadius of Ochrid is a particularly significant theologian and archbishop of his time. Through his work *Syntagma* he took a part in the theological dialogue of his time and showed extraordinary theological qualities. The good knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and of the Eastern and Western Holy Fathers, as well as the works of his contemporaries, helps him to build a serious theological thought. Unfortunately, his *Syntagma* still remains unpublished.

