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## *Can A Non-Biblical Word Be Orthodox?*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
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I wonder if I would have enjoyed the wonder and the vigor of the Council of Nicea, in 325 A.D. Those were quick and heady days. The rather new religion of Christianity, outlawed in the past, and rather a lower-class phenomenon, was suddenly acceptable.

The new Roman emperor, Constantine, had become convinced of the power of Jesus Christ. Before a critical battle at the Milvian Bridge on the Tiber River, he had received a vision of conquering in the sign of Christ. Lo and behold, he did win the battle. The western world changed when Constantine accepted Christianity.

One of the first things Constantine noticed was that Christianity was not monolithic. Some believers believed one way; and others believed another way. So, Constantine called for a Council of the Church, to take place in Nicea, which would establish Christian consistency.

One of the chief inconsistencies in Christianity, and a cause of much strife, concerned the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus fully divine, or not? At Nicea, the Bishop of Alexandria represented what would become the orthodox view, that Jesus Christ, the Word, was truly God. The bishop, and his successor, Athanasius, used the phrase "homo-ousios," meaning "of the same substance," to refer to Jesus Christ (some say that the Emperor Constantine himself was the first to use the word.). Jesus Christ, though the "Son" of God, was of the same substance as the Father; thus, Jesus Christ was fully divine.

However, "homo-ousios" was not a biblical term. It could not be found in the Bible. It had no biblical precedent. Could orthodox Christianity rest upon the validity of a term, or concept, that was not biblical?

Also out of Alexandria, the great seat of learning at the time, came the opponent Arius, a handsome and musical man, who carried a popular sentiment. Arius was at odds with the Bishop of Alexandria and Athanasius. Arius argued not only that "homo-ousios" was unbiblical, but also that the Bible (at Proverbs 8:22) spoke of divine wisdom (the "word") as created. If the word was created, the word must not be fully divine, went the argument.

Arius proclaimed that because Jesus was clearly the "Son" of God, surely "there was a time when he was not." A son, went the argument, surely comes from a father; the father must exist first. Arius claimed that there was only one God, God the Father, and Jesus was God's Son; but Jesus was not God. Arius preferred the Greek phrase "homoi-ousios."

Does the word "homoi-ousios" look like the word "homo-ousios?" Yes, of course it does. But the words are different. There is one letter different. It is the letter "i." In Greek, that letter is "iota." Arius preferred the word "homoi-ousios," which means "of a similar substance." If Jesus was the "Son" of God, argued Arius, then Jesus was "of a similar substance" as God the Father; but Jesus was surely not "of the same substance" as God the Father.

Finally, taking a cue from the former creed of Eusebius of Caesarea, the Council of Nicea decided for "homo-ousios." That is why our Nicene Creed, which we recite every Sunday, says "of one Being with the Father." The word for "being" is "ousios," "substance." That final word, "homoousios" is not exactly a biblical word.

Even then, the Nicene Creed was not exactly the final word, either. The political tides went back and forth, depending upon who was Roman emperor, depending upon whose voice was loudest at the time. The followers of Arius became quite influential; and Athanasius himself was exiled from Alexandria on five different occasions!

The difference came to be represented as one iota, the English letter "i." That letter was the difference between saying that Jesus was merely like the being of the Father, or saying that Jesus was of the same being as the Father. Orthodox Christianity, over time, became convinced that Jesus was, indeed, fully part of the Godhead, of the same being as the Father. The phrase "of the same Being" is not in the Bible, but it is orthodox. We proclaim it every Sunday.

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