

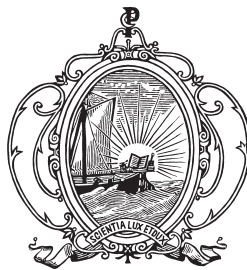
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On Classifying Creeds the Classical German Way: 'Privat-Bekenntnisse' ('Private Creeds')

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ABSTRACT

The starting point of my thoughts might initially seem very particularistic: it is a classification of a classic German collection of creedal texts, organized according to their content. In the course of our analysis of this classification, however, we shall realize that we are looking at a key problem of how we should deal with creeds, not only in German research. The classic collection of initially 82 creedal texts, entitled *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche* ('Library of Symbols and Rules of Faith of the Apostolic Catholic Church') was begun by August Hahn, then Senior Consistorial Councillor in Breslau, in 1842.¹ Although many parts of the collection are highly problematic, it is not obsolete to this day. The fourth section of this collection is called *Privatsymbole* ('private symbols'). I wish to examine this group of 'private symbols' or *Privatbekenntnisse* ('private creeds') and, first, to recall the theological background of the term 'private symbol'; second, to take a look at the texts assembled under this heading in Walch's collection and the three editions of Hahn's collection; and finally to examine a few of these creeds more precisely.

The term *Privatbekenntnisse* ('private creeds') is still taken for granted and used in German research to this day. Here is one example among many: in a major overview article entitled *Glaubensbekenntnisse* ('Creeds') in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, written in 1984, after 'rule of faith' and the connection between baptism and creed, Adolf Martin Ritter deals with *Privatbekenntnisse*, refers to them as a 'curious type of an early Christian creed', but sees them as the most common form, and discusses some examples.² If I am correct, Michael Fiedrowicz and Reinhart Staats are the only scholars who some time ago have sharply criticized the term and called it 'misleading'.³

¹ August Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche* (Breslau, 1842). – For more on A. Hahn, who also carried out research on Marcion, among others, see Erich Beyreuther, art. 'Hahn, August', in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* VII (Berlin, 1966), 502-3.

² Adolf Martin Ritter, art. 'Glaubensbekenntnis(se) V. Alte Kirche', *TRE* 13 (Berlin and New York, 1984), 399-412, 408-10, quotes at 408.

³ Michael Fiedrowicz, *Theologie der Kirchenväter: Grundlagen frühchristlicher Glaubensreflexion* (Freiburg 2007), 212.

Of course, Hahn did not invent the term ‘private symbols’, nor was he the first to collect relevant texts under this heading. Hahn’s preface already shows how much his collection depends – in terms of both linkage and criticism – on a previous work which is also called a ‘Library’: the *Bibliotheca Symbolica Vetvs* by the Göttingen-based *Christian Wilhelm Franz Walch* (1726-1784), published in 1770.⁴ The same also applies to the ‘private symbols’ or ‘private creeds’. If I am not mistaken, Walch’s collection is the first to contain such a group (or ‘class’ as he calls it) of ‘private creeds’. Walch calls them: *classis quarta, symbola a doctoribus privatis composita*.⁵ Some seventy years later, Hahn takes over this group without much ado. As a mildly confessionalist (Neo-)Lutheran, he is only critical of the one mistake that Walch ‘placed Catholic and non-Catholic creeds side by side’.⁶ In his *Library*, Hahn therefore separates what he considers Catholic or non-Catholic and adds to his collection a special appendix entitled ‘Symbols of heterodox church teachers’. It contains the Creeds of Arius (§77⁷), Eunomius (§78⁸), Pelagius (§79⁹), Caelestius (§80¹⁰), Julianus of Eclanum (§81¹¹) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (§82¹²). Even this detail illustrates that Hahn’s purpose with his collection in the mid-nineteenth century was not only to compile the most important texts for the study of the history of dogmas,¹³ but also to make a contribution to the denominational conflicts of his time. At the end of his preface, Hahn emphasizes the fundamental character of the creeds collected in his work for a ‘true and general union’, which he – in a markedly critical statement against the Old Prussian Union of 1817 – expects ‘one day’,

⁴ Christian Wilhelm Franz Walch, *Bibliotheca Symbolica Vetvs Ex Monumentis Qvinqve Priorvm Seculorvm Maxime Collecta Et Observationibvs Historicis Ac Criticis Illvstrata* (Lemgoviae, 1770); see Gerda Riedl, *Hermeneutische Grundstrukturen frühchristlicher Bekenntnisbildung*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 123 (Berlin and New York, 2004), 62-3, and Markus Vinzent, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums im Urteil der kritischen Forschung*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 89 (Göttingen, 2006), 76-8.

⁵ C.W.F. Walch, *Bibliotheca Symbolica Vetvs* (1770), 156-216.

⁶ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), VI.

⁷ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §77 = G.L. Hahn² §118 (see below) = G.L. Hahn³ §187; note that in G.L. Hahn² §117 (see below) = G.L. Hahn³ §186 it was added another formula of Arius.

⁸ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §78 = G.L. Hahn² §123 = G.L. Hahn³ §190.

⁹ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §79 = G.L. Hahn² §133 = G.L. Hahn³ §209.

¹⁰ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §80 = G.L. Hahn² §134 = G.L. Hahn³ §210.

¹¹ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §81 = G.L. Hahn² §135 = G.L. Hahn³ §211.

¹² A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), §82 = G.L. Hahn² §139 = G.L. Hahn³ §215 and 216 (incl. the trans. by Marius Mercator).

¹³ A. Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Apostolisch-katholischen Kirche*, (1842), I.

when the 'teachings recognized' from the outset 'by the Church are not denied, and the human contributions of later times are recognized as such and abandoned by the other side'.¹⁴ However, the distinction between 'private symbols' and – as they were analogously called – 'public symbols',¹⁵ which has remained so influential right up to the present day, has precious little to do with Hahn and his denominational intentions; rather, it stems from the *eighteenth-century* theological debate and was passed on to the present via Walch's collection. Our intention in this article is, first, to recall the theological background of the term 'private symbol'; second, to take a look at the texts assembled under this heading in Walch's collection and the three editions of Hahn's collection; and finally to examine a few of these creeds more precisely.

Christian Wilhelm Franz Walch, who worked in Göttingen as an associate professor from 1754 and as a full professor from 1757 until his death in 1784, came from a prominent family of scholars and rendered great services with his innumerable compilations on church history; an encyclopaedia article praised his 'assiduity'.¹⁶ Although Walch cannot himself be counted among the theologians who were deeply influenced by the Enlightenment, with his class of 'private symbols' he took over a distinction that was first made by an Enlightenment theologian par excellence, his much more famous contemporary *Johann Salomo Semler* (1725-1791).¹⁷ The distinction between *public* and *private* religion first appears in the work of Semler, the Halle professor of theology, three years before Walch's collection was published. As we shall shortly see, this distinction is directly relevant; indeed it is the prerequisite of any talk of a 'private symbol'. For Semler regards 'public religion' as the 'outwardly fixed form of a common profession of the Christian worship of God',¹⁸ *i.e.* he defines institutionally organized ecclesiastic Christianity via its shared public profession and its ceremonial representation in public. In a way this runs parallel to the fact that the term 'public' in the seventeenth

¹⁴ *Ibid.* X-XI.

¹⁵ So Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed. Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation. A Lecture, with Critical Notes* (Edinburgh, 1902), 5.

¹⁶ (Wilhelm Möller† /) Gustav Kawerau, art. 'Walch', in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche XX* (Leipzig, 1908), 792-7, 795. See also Ekkehard Mühlenberg, 'Church Historians in Göttingen in the 18th and 19th Century', in *Theologie in Göttingen. Eine Vorlesungsreihe*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Göttingen, 1987), 232-55, 238-42.

¹⁷ Gottfried Hornig, art. 'Semler, Johann Salomo', in *TRE* 31 (Berlin and New York, 2000), 142-8. On this subject, see in particular: Gottfried Hornig, 'Die Freiheit der christlichen Privatreligion. Semlers Begründung des religiösen Individualismus in der protestantischen Aufklärungstheologie', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 21 (1979), 198-211; Martin Laube, 'Die Unterscheidung von öffentlicher und privater Religion bei Johann Salomo Semler. Zur neuzeittheoretischen Relevanz einer christentumstheoretischen Reflexionsfigur', *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte* 11 (2004), 1-23.

¹⁸ Johann Salomo Semler, *D. Joh. Salomo Semlers letztes Glaubensbekenntniß über natürliche und christliche Religion*, ed. by Christian Gottfried Schütz (Königsberg, 1792), §1, 13.

century had taken on the meaning of ‘being of the state’;¹⁹ the new concept of public, identical with the educated bourgeois society that had been spreading since the late eighteenth century, was not yet in the background of Semler’s distinction. When Semler defines ‘public religion’, he is therefore also speaking of legal texts in the sense of the Latin *publicus*, namely articles of teaching, ‘as are repeated jointly *in public* by all members *unchanged* in the ecclesiastical language’.²⁰ Semler constructs the ‘*inner* or *private religion* of many individual people’ as a strict antonym to public religion, characterized by individuality and freedom, dependent on one’s own knowledge, influenced by independent reflective appropriation of religious truths. Private religion is not exhausted in the mere repetition of ecclesiastical forms and conventions; rather, it is marked by the ‘conscientious use of one’s own mind (...) for the free observation and application of all Christian concepts and objects’.²¹ Of course, private religion and the resulting private theology of thinking Christians remains related to ‘the “Word of God” as contained in the Scriptures or (...) the “revelation”, the “gospel” or “kerygma”,’ and should not be thought of as free, untied philosophy of religion.²² Even the New Testament itself – to use today’s terms – already knew a certain degree of pluralism. To this extent it is not surprising that in Walch’s and Hahn’s collections the private symbols or private creeds form, so to speak, are the crown jewels of the collection and are placed at the end. These two theologians, certainly, did not judge independent individuality in theological reflection as being any lower than the de-individualized formulaic professions of public religion – to use Semler’s term. Semler provides a theological justification for this, too – by applying the ‘morality’ category only to private religion: it alone is a religion not only of the listeners, but also of the doers of the Word.²³ Furthermore, private religion is, at least theoretically, infinite variety; it cannot be standardized by public religion and is of necessity free: ‘The infinite moral content of the Christian religion is the constant moral reason for the many unequal, different ideas, judgments and exercises of Christians’.²⁴ If one also realizes that, according to Hornig, Semler coined, or at least popularized, a wealth of relevant terms such as ‘private religion’, ‘private theology’, ‘private faith’ and ‘private Christianity’, one will not doubt that the term ‘private symbol’ or ‘private creed’ itself ultimately goes back to Semler.²⁵

¹⁹ Lucian Hölscher, art. ‘Öffentlichkeit’, in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland IV* (Stuttgart, 1978), 413-67, 413; Jürgen Schiewe, *Öffentlichkeit. Entstehung und Wandel in Deutschland*, UTB 2440 (Paderborn, 2004), 28-34.

²⁰ J.J. Semler, *Letztes Glaubensbekenntniß* (1792), §9, 52.

²¹ Johann Salomo Semler, *Ueber historische, gesellschaftliche und moralische Religion der Christen* (1786), ed. by Dirk Fleischer (Nordhausen, 2009 = Leipzig, 1786), §26, 59.

²² G. Hornig, ‘Die Freiheit der christlichen Privatreligion’ (1979), 200 with literature in note 3 and at 207-8.

²³ J.J. Semler, *Letztes Glaubensbekenntniß* (1792), §37, 298.

²⁴ *Ibid.* §41, 107.

²⁵ G. Hornig, ‘Die Freiheit der christlichen Privatreligion’ (1979), 189.

Unlike Semler, Walch was not a firm Enlightenment theologian. To this extent, by formally equalizing private and public religion under the same heading of *Symbolum*, he blurred the fundamental difference between private and public religion that was so important to his Halle-based colleagues: Semler believed that professing a creed belonged exclusively to the public, legally regulated sphere, whereas private religion was characterized by free reflection. According to Walch (and Hahn), however, a creed can be professed in *both* areas, in public and private religion, although the differences between the two are not described precisely by either Walch or Hahn. However, Semler, too, reckoned with the existence of ecclesiastical-denominational, and to this extent conservative, forms of private religion and private theology.²⁶ To this extent we cannot assume that the concept of a private symbol, which probably stemmed from Walch, directly contradicted Semler's fundamental distinctions. Accordingly, evidence for a distinction between 'public' and 'private symbols' can repeatedly be found in the seventy years that have passed between the publication of Walch's and Hahn's collections, without us needing to be interested in a complete documentation here. Interestingly, some are associated with Göttingen – either the publishing company was based there or the respective author worked there. As we know, Walch also worked in Göttingen.²⁷ With his distinction between 'Catholic' and 'non-Catholic' private creeds, Hahn who was even more influenced by denomination than Walch finally also applied another fundamental category of public religion used by Semler to private religion – which was actually constructed by Semler in strict contrast to public religion. *Georg Ludwig Hahn* (1823-1903), August Hahn's son, a professor who worked mainly as a New Testament scholar in Breslau,²⁸ withdrew this distinction again from the two new editions of the *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln* ('Library of Symbols and Rules of Faith') supervised by him and inserted the creeds, classified by his father as 'private' symbols into his section of 'local symbols' ('Localsymbole'). From Semler's perspective, this decision to forego a distinction between supposed orthodoxy and heresy in the subsequent editions of 1877 and 1897 would be quite consistent, not, however, that he dropped the category of 'private symbols'.

In our *second section*, we look at the texts collected by Walch and in the first editions of the collection of August Hahn under the heading 'private symbols',

²⁶ *Ibid.* 206.

²⁷ For example, Christian Wilhelm Flüge, *Geschichte des Glaubens an Unsterblichkeit, Auferstehung, Gericht und Vergeltung* 3/1 (Leipzig, 1799), 355 and Friedrich Münter, *Handbuch der ältesten Christlichen Dogmen-Geschichte*, with additions by the author and ed. in German by Johann Philipp Gustav Ewers 2/1 (Göttingen, 1804), 73.

²⁸ Richard Brecht, art. 'Hahn 5), Ludwig', in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* II (Tübingen, 2nd ed. 1928), 1580. A helpful synopsis of the contents of the three editions in M. Vinzent, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums im Urteil der kritischen Forschung* (2006), 396-408; on the (extremely critical) reception of the work in M. Vinzent, see *ibid.* 148-50.

also found in his son's second edition, namely the *symbola a doctoribus privatis composita* (Walch), or 'private symbols of individual church teachers' (Hahn, BSGR², VIII). We now ask whether the introduction of the term 'private symbols' was a good idea. For one would be completely justified in doubting this. *Firstly*, the so-called 'private symbols' are texts that are *private* in the sense of non-publically originated as understood by Semler and Walch: *i.e.* they are individually and freely created, as opposed to products that are ecclesiastically standardized and institutionally codified by a kind of supra-individuality. *Secondly*, however, they are *not* private creeds that were intended only for a private environment, *i.e.* made for and *in camera*: if it is to make any sense at all to apply the modern concept of 'private' or 'privacy' to late antiquity, then – as Yvon Thébert has shown in the relevant volume of the 'History of Private Life' – only for certain areas of retreat of the individual in what was otherwise always the public residence of a high-ranking family.²⁹ Although some of the so-called 'private creeds' may have been drafted *in* such a personal area of retreat, they were certainly not written *for* such areas of retreat, but rather for institutional contexts such as liturgy or synods³⁰ and – to use modern terms – therefore to be placed into public contexts. And when one realizes (for example, thanks to famous scenes from the biographies of Ambrose or Augustine) that the doors to a bishop's residence in late antiquity were open to everyone almost all the time, one will even doubt whether the so-called 'private symbols' were written in a context that, by today's standards, could be called relatively private.³¹ And it might be noted in passing – more as a curiosity than anything else – that there is indeed ancient evidence of the idiom *privata confessio* in the tractate *De lapsis* written by Cyprian of Carthage in 251 AD who called 'the cautious flight' from the state authorities with the aim of 'keep oneself alive for God for the time being' a 'private creed', but his creed before the Roman authorities was a *publica confessio*, a 'public creed'.³² But this one,

²⁹ Yvon Thébert, 'Privates Leben und Hausarchitektur in Nordafrika', in Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (eds), *Geschichte des privaten Lebens I, Vom Römischen Imperium zum Byzantinischen Reich*, ed. by Paul Veyne, in German from Holger Fliessbach (Frankfurt a.M., 1989), 304-87, 304-7; Christoph Höcker, art. 'Privatheit und Öffentlichkeit', in Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider (eds), *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2001), 352-4.

³⁰ Concerning the specific meaning here of the term 'institution' see Christoph Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen, 2007 = 2009), 31-41.

³¹ Fritz van der Meer, *Augustinus der Seelsorger. Leben und Wirken eines Kirchenvaters* (Cologne, 1953), 250-5.

³² Cypr., *De laps.* 3 (CChr.SL 3, 222,53-60 Bévenot): '*Illa publica, haec privata confessio est; ille iudicem saeculi vincit, hic contentus deo suo iudice conscientiam puram cordis integritate custodit; illic fortitudo promptior, hic sollicitudo securior. Ille adpropinquante hora sua iam maturus inuentus est; hic fortasse dilatus est qui patrimonio derelicto idcirco secessit quia non erat negaturus: confiteretur utique, si fuisset et ipse detentus.*'

single ancient document – which of course, is deeply tied in with Cyprian's personal fate in the so-called Decian persecution of Christians in 250 AD – is better suited to illuminating the problematic nature of nineteenth-century terminology rather than putting the latter into a favourable light. In the *third* section of my contribution, I would now like to take a closer look at a few of these creeds.

Browsing through the 'private symbols' collected in the two new editions by father and son Hahn, the series begins with a creed attributed to *Gregory Thaumaturgus*, a student of Origen (§185, pp. 253-255³³ = CPG I, 1764), although Luise Abramowski, my academic teacher, disputes this attribution – with a 'highly plausible justification', as Ritter puts it in his above-mentioned overview article.³⁴ We do not intend here to reopen the authenticity debate and the question of whether Gregory of Nyssa perhaps did not write the text himself, which was a very contentious issue particularly in the nineteenth century (the debate is documented in parts in Hahn).³⁵ Rather, we want to briefly examine the institutional context of this creed, well over a hundred years after its supposed creation. As is well known, the creed comes to us in the encomiastic speech on Gregory the Wonderworker made in Neocaesarea by Gregory of Nyssa on 17th November 380. In this speech Gregory of Nyssa describes how the figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist appeared to Gregory the Wonderworker in the night after his ordination as a presbyter and revealed to him τῆς μυσταγωγίας ῥήματα, 'words of the revelation of faith'.³⁶ However, these words are precisely the famous ἔκθεσις πίστεως, which Gregory attributes to Gregory. After quoting the formula, however, Gregory of Nyssa notes in his panegyric speech that the χαράγματα τῆς μακαρίας ἐκείνης χειρός ('the letters of that blessed hand') had been kept right up to that day in the church of Neocaesarea, where he was preaching. Unfortunately, Gregory

³³ Georg Ludwig Hahn follows Carl Paul Caspari, *Alte und neue Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel* (Christiania, 1879 = Brussels, 1964), 10-7, see also *ibid.* 25-64; see also Victor Ryssel, *Gregorius Thaumaturgus. Sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1880), 31-3 and now Leslie L. MacCoull, 'Gregory Thaumaturgus' Vision Re-Envisioned', *RHE* 94 (1999), 5-14.

³⁴ Luise Abramowski, 'Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Gregor von Nyssa und das Bekenntnis seiner Echtheit', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 87 (1976), 145-66 as well as Rudolf Riedinger, 'Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Sophronius von Jerusalem und Macarius von Antiocheia', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 92 (1981), 311-4. – Critical: Manlio Simonetti, 'Una nuova ipotesi su Gregorio il Taumaturgo', *RSR* 24 (1988), 17-41 = *id.*, *Origene esegeta e la sua tradizione*, Letteratura Cristiana Antica. Nuova Serie 2 (Brescia, 2004), 277-98.

³⁵ Adolf Hamack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* I (dealing with the emergence of Church dogma) (Tübingen, 1909), 779-80.

³⁶ Gr. Nyss., *Or. in Gr. Thaum.* 28-31 (GNO X/1, 16,4-17,23 Heil); translation of τῆς μυσταγωγίας ῥήματα (17,23) after *Lexicon Gregorianum. Wörterbuch zu den Schriften Gregors von Nyssa* VI (Leiden and Boston, 2007), s.v. 2.e), p. 492. L. Abramowski, 'Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Gregor von Nyssa' (1976), 148 points out that, after Gregor, the creed was used in the baptismal catechism: p. 17,18-20 Heil.

does not tell us on what sort of grounds the letters – which were considered at the end of the fourth century to be those of Gregory the Wonderworker – were written on. Henri Crouzel thinks it was ‘a manuscript in the church’,³⁷ Michael Slusser believes it was an inscription on the church wall. Both seem possible to me. Although Slusser worries about the length of the wall inscription and can therefore only imagine that the Trias ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ, ΕΙΣ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΕΝ ΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΑΓΙΟΝ introducing the four sections plus the summary ΤΡΙΑΣ ΤΕΛΕΙΑ were written on the wall.³⁸ However, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem contains several fragments that have survived from a wall inscription from a church in southern Judaea near Hebron; it evidently included a biblical text from John’s Gospel,³⁹ so that one can certainly imagine the entire text on the wall, although it is unlikely to have been written there by the hand of the bishop himself.⁴⁰ One, therefore, has to take into account that the text was not necessarily a manuscript on parchment or papyrus to be shown in Neocaesarea, but a publicly visible mural. Whether the venerable text that was shown to the visitor to the church of Neocaesarea in Bithynia as a work of Gregory’s in his own hand was the famous bishop’s supposed manuscript or a wall inscription does not really matter, of course. What is certain is that the only individual (or, if one likes, ‘private’) thing about this text was the manuscript or the inscription, whereas the text itself (as Luise Abramowski and others have shown) dealt profoundly with the trinitarian ecclesiastical consensus of late-fourth-century Cappadocian theology. Precisely this mixture of, on the one hand, a more or less venerated individuality that is considered orthodox, which only authenticates the (supposed) authenticity, and, on the other, an absolutely consensual content, which in turn also ensures authority, seems to me characteristic not of Gregory’s presentation of the Wonderworker’s creed – but of a large number of such supposed ‘private creeds’. It would be a worthwhile enterprise to follow up on Markus Vinzent’s compilation of corresponding texts in their respective contexts,⁴¹ and not to look at them as isolated sections, as we have as a rule

³⁷ Henri Crouzel and Heinzgerd Brakmann, art. ‘Gregor I (Gregor der Wundertäter)’, in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* XII (Stuttgart, 1983), 779-93, 788. – L. Abramowski, ‘Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Gregor von Nyssa’ (1976), 149⁶ poses the question as to whether such a manuscript could even have survived the great earthquake of 344 AD in Neo-Caesarea. Caspari also argues in favour of an autograph, *Alte und neue Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel* (1879 = 1964), 27.

³⁸ *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus. Life and Works*, Fathers of the Church, translated by Michael Slusser, Fathers of the Church 98 (Washington, 1998), 55²⁸.

³⁹ IMJ 74.6.296 (no publication until now).

⁴⁰ A similar inscription can be found in Santa Maria Antiqua of Rome, see Eileen Rubery, ‘Conflict or Collusion? Pope Martin I (649-654/5) and the Exarch Olympius in Rome after the Lateran Synod of 649’, *SP* 52 (2012), 339-74 with extensive quotes in the walls by Leo the Great, Gregory of Nazianzen, Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom.

⁴¹ See his ‘Die Entstehung des “Römischen Glaubensbekenntnisses”’, in Wolfram Kinzig, Christoph Marksches and Markus Vinzent, *Taufragen und Bekenntnis. Studien zur sogenannten*

been doing to this day since Walch. Here, however, we will discuss a second example.

Especially for people who do not consider the creed of Gregory the Wonderworker passed on by Gregory of Nyssa to be authentic – but a text that was written, or at least revised, over a hundred years after the Thaumaturge's death – the question is when did the so-called 'private symbols' (or 'private creeds') really begin. Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen (with whom Ritter agrees in his above-mentioned overview article) begins his list with the explanation of faith made by Bishop Heraclides who was probably active in *Arabia*, sometime in the two-hundred-and-forties at the beginning of his dispute with Origen on the Father, the Son and the soul, a dispute that has been found amongst the Tura papyri, discovered in 1941 and first published in 1949. It is, of course, therefore, missing from the collections of Walch, Hahn and Hahn/Hahn.⁴² Admittedly, von Campenhausen introduces the presentation with the following subtle, distancing remark: 'If one wishes, one might refer to the hypotheses of the formal explanation of faith with which Heraclides opened the public dispute with Origen as being the first example of the new individual creed'.⁴³ It seems problematic to von Campenhausen that the supposed 'private creed' only deals with Christology and that the only reference to the *regula fidei* is implicit. But let us examine the text more closely in its context. The aim of the dialogue with Bishop Heraclides is that he should 'profess before all (sc. those present) how he believes' (ἵνα ἐπὶ πάντων ὁμολογήσῃ τὸ πῶς πιστεύει).⁴⁴ Following an introduction, which was not recorded in writing and is probably lost to us, Heraclides professes accordingly – by saying 'I too believe what the Divine Scriptures say' and then quoting the first three verses of John's Gospel. Heraclides does not then jump to the incarnation statement, which does not follow until eleven verses later in the Prologue of John's Gospel,⁴⁵ but formulates freely – relating to the known free *regula fidei* terminology – his belief in the incarnation, the birth in the flesh, the resurrection, the ascension, Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, and the return of Christ to judge. The record of the doctrinal discussion, which has probably only survived in an abridged form, does not include any reaction from the auditorium. It starts directly with the doctrinal discussion between Origen and Heraclides, which also contains no

'*Traditio Apostolica*', zu den 'Interrogationes de fide' und zum 'Römischen Glaubensbekenntnis', Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 74 (Berlin and New York, 1999), 185-409.

⁴² *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide*. Introduction, texte, traduction et notes de Jean Scherer, SC 67 (Paris, 1960).

⁴³ Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, 'Das Bekenntnis Eusebs von Caesarea (Nicaea 325)', ZNW 67 (1976), 123-30 = *id.*, *Urchristliches und Altkirchliches. Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Tübingen, 1979), 278-99, 294; see A.M. Ritter, art. 'Glaubensbekenntnis(se) V. Alte Kirche' (1984), 408.

⁴⁴ *Dial.* 1 (SC 67, 52,2-3 Scherer).

⁴⁵ *Dial.* 2 (SC 67, 56,11 Scherer).

reference to any initial creed, and immediately begins with brief questions, as in an interrogation, on detailed theological problems of the relationship between God, the Father and the Son. Should this picture that has passed down to us be true and reflect the actual course of the disputation, then the ‘private creed’ of Bishop Heraclides, unlike the supposed creed of the Thaumaturge, had absolutely no function for the synodal doctrinal discussion. Origen, at least, did not refer to the text, and evidently no one else regarded the orthodoxy of the bishop as having been proved by the recitation of very general phrases. Only Heraclides referred again to a half-sentence from John’s prologue in his conversation with Origen. How should one interpret this result? Perhaps from a psychological angle? For example in the sense that Bishop Heraclides used the creed as a kind of subterfuge, and the auditorium and Origen, the erudite guest from the coastal city of Caesarea, saw through him? Or, following Bernd Reiner Voss’ interpretation, in such a way that Origen slowly and maieutically explained to the Bishop the meaning of his initial creed, as in a Socratic dialogue?⁴⁶ In my view, we should interpret it neither from a psychological angle with regard to an individual, nor in terms of conversational psychology with regard to the entire dialogue. The *Vita Porphyrii*, Markus Diaconus’ biography of Bishop Porphyry of Gaza (BHG 1570), shows that the opening rituals of such a synodal or perhaps episcopal doctrinal dispute could include the initial ‘creed’ of the participants.⁴⁷ What has become known in such a case, however, was not thought out individually (which a ‘private symbol’ in the sense of Johann Salomo Semler should presumably be), but formulated with a view receiving the broad consensus of the church – as long as the phrasing of such formulations is still free, freely formulated,⁴⁸ but since the fourth century increasingly using ‘building block’ phrases of ecclesiastical creed formulae (to use Markus Vinzent’s excellent phrase).

The next piece is offered by the third edition of Hahn’s collection: two ‘Creeds of Arius’ which come from completely different contexts; only in a limited sense can they be described as the creeds of an individual (BSGR §186, p. 255f. = Urkunde 6 Opitz = Dokument 1 Brennecke or §187, p. 256f. = Urkunde 30 Opitz = Dokument 34). These frequently discussed texts, which are highly controversial with regard to their chronological classification, can, of course, only be examined very briefly here in the limited context of our topic.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Bernd Reiner Voss, *Der Dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur*, *Studia et Testimonia Antiqua* 9 (Munich, 1970), 83-5.

⁴⁷ Marc. Diac., *V. Porph.* 86 (CUFr 67.1 Grégoire and Kugener); see B.R. Voss, *Der Dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur* (1970), 155³² and concerning the *Vita* of Frank R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370-529*, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 115/1 (Leiden a.o., 1993), 187-245 and 246-82.

⁴⁸ M. Vinzent, ‘Die Entstehung des “Römischen Glaubensbekenntnisses”’ (1999), 242-3.

⁴⁹ The chronologically last discussion of this question in: *Athanasius Werke, Vol. 3, Part 1, Dokumente zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites 3. Lieferung bis zur Ekthesis Makrostichos*,

Formally, both cases are initially letters; in both cases the salutation has survived, in the first case the final greeting has as well. The first text, which addresses the local Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and was written perhaps in 320 AD, is signed after Arius by a total of fourteen deacons,⁵⁰ presbyters, and bishops. According to the salutation, the second text was written to Emperor Constantine by Arius and Euzoius, perhaps in 327 AD.⁵¹ The two texts also differ completely in terms of content. The first, in its new German translation by Hanns Christof Brennecke and his Erlangen study group, is correctly given the title 'Theological Explanation',⁵² because it is a detailed explanation of the faith of the fifteen ministers for the local bishop with an explicit rejection of persons identified by name. Three times in total, an attempt is made to clarify the relationship between Father and Son. By contrast, the late letter by Arius and Euzoius⁵³ contains a very short three-part formula on Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as a recourse to Scripture, a conditional self-incrimination before the Divine Court, and a final plea for imperial reconciliation. According to Adolf Martin Ritter, this chronologically last surviving text by Arius seems to us 'depressing, if not tragic, in its vacuousness compared to the self-certainty and aggressiveness of the "Thaleia"'.⁵⁴ We must, of course, add that the formulations of Heraclides at the beginning of the doctrinal discussion with the bishops and Origen some ninety years earlier were characterized by the same vacuousness; perhaps this is a genre-typical impression. In order to prove one's orthodoxy, what is needed are not original private creeds, let alone 'private symbols', but formulations that are as commonplace as possible. Nowadays we are accustomed to paying attention to content and observe precisely that Arius and Euzoius, in their late creed for Constantine, revoked his famous formula ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν ὁ υἱός, which was rejected in Nicaea, in favour of a formulation about the begetting of the Son by the Father 'all eternity ago', but did not agree with a profession of the true deity of Jesus Christ. Individual content was probably not decisive in the case of such creeds as those made by Heraclides and Arius with Euzoius; it was perhaps more important to signal a

ed. by Hanns Christof Brennecke, Uta Heil, Annette von Stockhausen and Angelika Wintjes (Berlin and New York 2007), XIX-XXXVIII with further literature. The documents are counted in this version in line with the Erlangen Chronology.

⁵⁰ *Deed 6* (Athanasius Werke III, 12f. Opitz = Ath., *De syn.* 16 / Epiph., *Haer.* 69,7-8) = CPG II, 2026.

⁵¹ *Deed 30* (64 Opitz = Socr., *Hist.eccl.* I 26,2 / Soz., *Hist.eccl.* II 27,6) = CPG II, 2027.

⁵² *Athanasius Werke* III/1, 3. Lfg., p. 1 (German translation of *deed 6* edited by Opitz as document 1).

⁵³ Euzoius was an Antiochean deacon, who was banished with Arius in Nicaea: M. Simonetti, art. 'Euzoio di Antiochia', *DPAC* I, 1310 and Christoph Marksches, 'Theologische Diskussionen zur Zeit Konstantins', in *id.*, *Alta Trinità Beata. Gesammelte Studien zur altkirchlichen Trinitätstheologie* (Tübingen, 2000), 99-196, 175²⁶⁵.

⁵⁴ A.M. Ritter, 'Arius redivivus? Ein Jahrzwölft Arianismusforschung', *Theologische Rundschau* 55 (1990), 113-87, 173.

willingness to return to the orthodoxy of the majority church by moving as close as possible to the classical and venerable formulations of *regula fidei*.

Of course, we now ought to also look at other ‘private symbols’ and ‘private creeds’ in the collections of Walch and Hahn, as discussed by Campenhausen or Ritter, but I mentioned at the outset that I would pursue a paradigmatic approach and do not make any attempt at comprehensiveness. For we have been able to show in each case that the texts of the symbols are simply not about documenting creative theological individuality, or stating theological privacy; they are compilations of sentences using building blocks from *regula fidei* traditions and early synodal creeds that are as generalizing as possible. The element of explicitly distancing oneself from other positions – which Vinzent calls ‘anti-logical’ – crops up repeatedly, but fundamentally is rather rare.⁵⁵

Longer and, of course, more individualized texts are often not ‘creeds’, but ‘theological explanations’ and should not be referred to as ‘creeds’. It would of course be particularly exciting at this point to study the so-called *Romanum*,⁵⁶ which Markus Vinzent has postulated as the creed of Marcellus of Ancyra, in the well-known version of the letter to Bishop Julius of Rome (BSGR §17, p. 22f.),⁵⁷ while he already remarked that in the case of such creeds ‘the definition of authorship is ambiguous. As in the case of liturgical and juridical ecclesiastical texts where one can only partially speak of “authorship”, so with regards to a creed one can only conditionally think of authors or an author ... as the one who has put together his creed in his letter [Marcellus] can be reckoned as “author”’, albeit in inverted commas.⁵⁸ Vinzent, therefore, does not lend himself towards an anachronistic understanding of ‘private creed’, but would have sided with Reinhart Staats when the latter rightly claims: ‘One must not insert modern and pietistic-religious individualism into the history of early church symbols. An individual’s faith was his own free word, yet still a one affecting the entire church’.⁵⁹

After these general observations and our comments on three sample texts, we can draw a conclusion: although the traditional terms ‘private symbol’ and ‘private creed’ are time-honoured elements of German symbol research, they are also

⁵⁵ M. Vinzent, ‘Die Entstehung des “Römischen Glaubensbekenntnisses”’ (1999), 238-40. A development of his argument can be found in *id.*, *Der Ursprung des Apostolikums im Urteil der kritischen Forschung* (2006), 312-95; this work also contains a debate with Lieuwe H. Westra, *The Apostles’ Creed. Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*, *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia* 43 (Turnhout, 2002).

⁵⁶ M. Vinzent, ‘Die Entstehung des “Römischen Glaubensbekenntnisses”’ (1999), 407-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 223-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 237-8.

⁵⁹ Reinhart Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel. Historische und theologische Grundlagen* (Darmstadt, 1996), 160; see the misunderstanding in Gerda Riedl, *Herme-neutische Grundstrukturen frühchristlicher Bekenntnisbildung* (Berlin and New York, 2004), 213.

highly problematic (already indicated by the fact that G.L. Hahn had dropped this category in his second revision of his father's collection). In fact, the best thing to do would be to abandon them altogether. But of course it would be a pure illusion to want to censor established terms in a scientific discourse. As we have seen, the terms 'private symbol' and 'private creed,' although extremely misleading, have after all been introduced and established for nearly two hundred and fifty years. Even so, we are not saying here that we should assume an attitude of resignation: if all we manage is to become more aware of the utterly non-private character of the texts thus called and of their formal and institutional diversity, then their function on the road from a rule of faith to creedal formulae⁶⁰ can perhaps be determined more precisely in the future.

⁶⁰ Wolfram Kinzig, 'Glaubensbekenntnis und Entwicklung des Kirchenjahres', in *Liturgie und Ritual in der Alten Kirche. Patristische Beiträge zum Studium der gottesdienstlichen Quellen der Alten Kirche*, ed. by Wolfram Kinzig, Ulrich Volp and Jochen Schmidt, Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 11 (Leuven, 2011), 3-41, 4.

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