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Essentia and *Substantia* in the Trinitarian Dispute of Roscelin of Compiègne and Anselm of Canterbury[*]

ABSTRACT: The main aim of this paper is an analysis of a dispute between Anselm of Canterbury and Roscelin of Compiègne about the interpretation of the Trinity of God. Roscelin's propositions were condemned at the synod in Soissons in the early 90s of the 11th century, but the first information about his teaching were put down by John, later cardinal-bishop in Tusculum. John wrote a letter to his former teacher Anselm of Canterbury and informed him about Roscellin's very problematic thesis. Anselm responded with two letters and with the treatise *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*, a work he re-wrote several times. At the end of this treatise, he mentions (similarly like Roscelin in his later *Epistola ad Abaelardum*) the key point of the whole controversy: what the Greeks describe as one essence and three substances, the Latins call one substance and three persons; the difference between the Greeks and the Latins is only in words and not in faith. Roscelin and Anselm could read this statement in Augustin's *De trinitate*. Anselm probably used also Boethius tract *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* and Porphyry's definition of the person (*Isagoge* 2) to his explanation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Roscelin applied Priscian's assertion (*Institutiones grammaticae* 2, 18) concerning a noun: each of them (e.g. a person) signifies both a substance and a quality. Roscelin argued that there are no accidents in God; everything in God is a necessary part of the divine essence. Consequently, when we use the noun "person" to refer to God, it must signifies something substantial (and not accidental), in other words the noun "person" signifies the divine substance. If we say that there are three persons in God, together with it we say that there are three divine substances or if the noun "person" is another name for God, than the Father and the Holy Spirit must be incarnated with the Son. It follows that the grammatical and dialectical traditions are the key reasons for Roscelin's propositions. Inasmuch as Anselm (and Lanfranc) was the most prominent thinkers of the second half of the 11th century who argued for the active use of late ancient grammar (especially Priscian) and logic (Aristotle, Porphyry, Boethius) in questions of doctrine, due to it Roscelin (erroneously) assumed that these teachers would support his theory.
KEYWORDS: Roscelin of Compiègne • Anselm of Canterbury • Augustine of Hippo • Boethius • dialectics • grammar • God • Trinity

1. Introduction

The personality of a thinker John Roscelin of Compiègne received several different expositions in the history of interpretations of the medieval thought. For example, texts from 19th and 20th century brand Roscelin as an actual founder of scholastic (peripatetic) philosophy itself[1], he was also tagged as a freethinker and a rebel who boldly followed Berengar of Tours in the fight against orthodoxy and church authorities[2]. In any case, he has a reputation of a problematic defender of an early and extreme version of a nominalism (i.e. vocalism) which should have lead him to heretical conclusions concerning interpretation of the Trinity what has been seen as an influence of his eccentric interest in the liberal arts (especially dialectic) and vigorous development of Aristotelian legacy at the expense of currently favored Platonism[3].

It is important to note that largely inconsistent information about this intellectual can be traced to their origin in some statements of his contemporaries or to other medieval texts[4]. Apart from Peter Abelard[5], his most famous student, it is crucial to mention especially Anselm of Canterbury, who attributed to Roscelin the mark of one of the h e r e t i c s o f d i a l e c - t i c [6], and distorted his propositions into almost untenable statements (which were probably not held by actual Roscelin). One of the famous examples is Anselm's assertion that Roscelin considered universals to be *flatus vocis* (t h e p u f f o f a n u t t e r a n c e)[7], which should have, among others, affected even Roselin's teaching about relations among Holy Trinity.

[1] V. Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques. Philosophie scolastique*, Paris 1840, pp. 130–131.

[2] B. Hauréau, *Historie de la philosophie scolastique*, Paris 1872, p. 265.

[3] A short but informative sketch of several interpretative position in the history of philosophy see C.J. Mews, *St Anselm and Roscelin of Compiègne: Some New Texts and their Implications. II. A Vocalist Essay on the Trinity and Intellectual Debate c. 1080–1120*, "Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge", 65 (1998), pp. 46–50.

[4] Cf. for example Iohannes Sarisberiensis, *Metalogicon* II, 17, J.B. Hall & K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (edd.), *CCCM* 98, Turnhout 1991, p. 284; Otto Frisingensis, *Gesta Friderici I Imperatoris* I, 49, G. Waitz & B. von Simson (edd.), *MGH SS Rer. Germ.* 46, Hannover/Leipzig 1912, p. 69 etc. For a broader context see Y. Iwakuma, *»Vocales«, or Early Nominalists*, "Traditio", 47 (1992), pp. 37–111.

[5] Cf. for example Petrus Abaelardus, *Theologia* »Summi boni« II, 4, E.M. Buytaert & C.J. Mews (edd.), *CCCM* 13, Turnhout 1987, p. 114; idem, *Theologia christiana* IV, 82–83, E.M. Buytaert (ed.), *CCCM* 12, Turnhout 1969, pp. 303–304 etc.

[6] Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* 1, F. S. Schmitt (ed.), *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. 2, Edinburgh 1946, p. 9 (English translation *The Incarnation of the Word*, J. Hopkins & H. Richardson (tr.), *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, Minneapolis 2000, p. 269.)

[7] *Ibidem.*

This discussion about the Trinity of God between these two important thinkers at the turn of the 11th and the 12th century will be the main subject of this paper. According to preserved (and safely attributed to the original author) texts we can not doubt that Anselm (and probably his teacher, Lanfranc of Pavia as well) and Roscelin were in mutual contact. When the remark about controversial teaching of Roscelin appeared for the first time by the end of 80s of the 11th century, Lanfranc and Anselm were listed as the authorities who admitted the relevance of such interpretation[8]. Similarly, one of the first versions of Anselm's response to an accusation of conformable attitude towards Roscelin's propositions mentioned that he knew Roscelin as his friend[9], even though this was not included in the final version of *Epistola de incarnatione verbi,* apparently because he had decided – accordingly to his strong rejection of Roscelin's conclusions – to minimize and to marginalize his potential part in the creation of a controversial thesis.

This contribution will therefore try to uncover the reasons for Anselm's prompt and highly committed participation in the Trinitarian debate, including the effort to purify his (and Lanfranc) name of potential consent to the heretical conclusions. Study will focus on the origin of Roscelin's propositions which became the subject of disagreement by the end of the 11th century. Sources for this endeavor must consequently include, among others, Anselm's polemical essays and, to a certain extent, even texts which were attributed to Roscelin: especially invective letter to Peter Abelard[10] and possibly brief Trinitarian text *Est una*[11] too. Even though these documents are apparent reaction to the later development of the debate concerning Holy Trinity, we can still find similar statements which are being targeted by Anselm in his polemics and we can look for the possible roots of Trinitarian controversy. The main goal of this study is to show that Anselm and Roscelin offered different interpretations of sources they used and how variable was their list of authoritative texts they included in their analysis of Holy Trinity.

[8]   Anselmus Cantuariensis [Iohannes Tusculensis], *Epistola* 128, F.S. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. 3, *op.cit.*, p. 271: "Dicit enim huic sententiae domnum Lanfrancum Archiepiscopum concessisse et vos concedere se disputante." Cf. Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Epistolae de incarnatione verbi prior recensio* 2, F.S. Schmitt (ed.), *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. 1, Edinburgh 1946, p. 281.

[9]   Cf. Anselmus, *Epistolae de incarnatione verbi prior recensio* 1, *op. cit.*, p. 282: "[…] hunc autem novi, quia amicus meus est […]"

[10] Roscelinus Compendiensis, *Epistola ad Abaelardum*, [in:] J. Reiners, *Der Nominalismus in der Frühscholastik. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Universalienfrage im Mittelalter*, Münster 1910, pp. 63–80.

[11] Roscelinus Compendiensis [?], *Est una* [*De unitate et trinitate divina*], [in:] C.J. Mews, *St Anselm and Roscelin of Compiègne: Some New Texts and their Implications II.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–90.

2. Beginnings: *Monologion* and John's letter

By the beginning of 90s of the 11th century, Roscelin's teaching was discussed (and rejected) at synod in Soissons which was held by Rainaldus, archbishop of Reims. The reason for this synod must be searched (it can be linked even to Roscelin's condemnation and Anselm's involvement) in political and administrative context and accusations posed against newly appointed bishop Fulk of Beauvais, formerly a monk from Le Bec[12]. Fulk's colleague at that time was canon regular John, later cardinal-bishop from Frascati (Tusculum), who was monk in Le Bec during 80s too. It was this John, very active in church and political agenda[13], who wrote to Anselm, the abbot of Le Bec at that time, a letter in which he wrote down his reading of Roscelin's heresy:

> This, now, is the question which Roscelin of Compiègne poses: 'If three persons are merely one thing and not three individual things like three angels or three souls in such way that in will and power they are entirely the same: therefore the Father and the Holy Spirit became incarnate with the Son'[14].

To this Anselm adds that Roscelin could get involved in an argument with Augustine's metaphor of relation between Unity and Trinity of God for the sun and its various activities[15]. Anselm of course knew well Augustine's expositions of relations between the substance and the persons of God (e.g. tract *De trinitate*). When he asked Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury at that time, for suitability judgment concerning his early version of a tract

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[12] Cf. C.J. Mews, *St Anselm, Roscelin and the See of Beauvais*, [in:] D. E. Luscombe & G. R. Evans (edd.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec and Canterbury. Papers in Commemoration of the Nine-Hundreth Anniversary of Anselm's Enthronement as Archbishop*, Sheffield 1996, pp. 106–119.

[13] See for example Eadmerus Cantuariensis, *Vita sancti Anselmi* II, 29, R.W. Southern (ed), [in:] Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm*, Oxford 1972, p. 106.

[14] Anselmus [Iohannes], *Epistola* 128, *op. cit.,* pp. 270–271: "Hanc enim inde quaestionem Rocelinus de Compendio movet: ‚Si tres personae sunt una tantum res et non sunt tres res per se, sicut tres angeli aut tres animae, ita tamen ut voluntate et potentia omnino sint idem: ergo pater et spiritus sanctus cum filio incarnatus est'." (English translation W. Fröhlich (tr.), *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 1, Kalamazoo 1990, p. 302).

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 271. Cf. Aurelius Augustinus [?], *Sermo* 245, [in:] J. Machielsen (ed.), *Clavis Patristica Pseudepigraphorum Medii Aevi* 1A, *CC*, Turnhout 1990, p. 210; see too C.J. Mews, *The Trinitarian Doctrine of Roscelin of Compiègne and its Influence: Twelfth-Century Nominalism and Theology Re-considered*, [in:] A. de Libera & A. Elamrani-Jamal & A. Gallonier (edd.), *Langages et philosophie. Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, Paris 1997, pp. 348–349.

(*opusculum*), which he later called *Exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei* and then adjusted to *Monoloquium de ratione fidei* which he finally shortened to one word *Monologion*[16], he probably received only reserved response. It seems that Lanfranc disliked about the text that Anselm's conclusions are not always derived from the texts of accepted authorities and that could be controversial in a case of discussion about God Himself[17]. Anselm responded by, among others, including the note in the preface of *Monologion* that every statement is conformable with Augustine's conclusions from the text *De trinitate*[18].

It is not out of the question that Lanfranc (and later possibly Roscelin) could respond especially to Anselm's statement from the very end of *Monologion* where Anselm wrote:

> Therefore, on the basis of this necessity, the Supreme Trinity which is one, or Supreme Oneness which is trine, can irreproachably be called one being and three persons or three substances[19].

Anselm explicitly states that Trinity of God (*una trinitas* and *trina unitas*) can be correctly explicated as o n e   e s s e n c e (*essentia*) and t h r e e   p e r s o n s (*personæ*), i.e. t h r e e   s u b s t a n c e s (*substantiæ*). By this way, although indirectly, Anselm could really inspire Roscelin to his declared warning that should we proceed according to authorities (especially Aurelius Augustinus[20], but also Saint Ambrose or Boethius and others), then it is necessary to adjust the reading of the Trinitarian dogma.

Anselm started to deal with this question shortly after he received John's letter, which he answered but with certain delay. It was by his words caused by him starting to think about writing a tract about that topic[21]. The intended treatise really came to be and it was called *Epistola de incarnatione verbi,* however, it was a few years later and different versions of this text were preserved, including other textual variations of some parts of Anselm's writ-

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[16] Cf. Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Proslogion*, prooem., F.S. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 94; resp. *idem*, *Epistola* 109, *op. cit.*, p. 242 or Eadmerus, *Vita sancti Anselmi* I, 19, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[17] Cf. Anselmus, *Epistola* 70, 77, *op. cit.,* pp. 193–194, 199–200.

[18] Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Monologion*, prol., F.S. Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia*, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 86: "Potest ergo hac necessitatis ratione irreprehensibiliter illa summa et una trinitas sive trina unitas dici una essentia et tres personæ sive tres substantiæ." (English translation J. Hopkins & H. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 86.)

[20] Cf. for example Roscelinus, *Epistola ad Abaelardum* 5–10, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–74 etc.

[21] Anselmus, *Epistola* 129, *op. cit.,* p. 271.

ing[22]. Because of the long time Anselm spent on his Trinitarian tract, he responded to Roscelin's thesis by two letters – by a private letter (response) addressed to above mentioned John and by an open letter addressed to bishop Fulk of Beauvais. This second list was also intended for the synod in Soissons where Fulk was supposed to present it, if appropriate, publicly[23].

3. Two Anselm's letters

Because of the fact that we have no access (or only partially conclusive – see text *Est una*) to any information about an early form of Roscelin's Trinitarian teachings, our clue (problematic though, but the most useful) for reconstruction of Roscelin's motives is mainly above mentioned Anselm's correspondence and his text about the Incarnation of the Word.

Anselm tried to interpret the message about Roscelin's controversial propositions in his response to monk John, later bishop:

> About what he says, therefore, that three persons are three things: either he intends it to be understood that they are three relations, that is to say, that God is said to be Father and Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and from the Son, or referring to God as he is said to be God. But if he says that these three relations are three things, then his assertion is superfluous. For nobody denies that in this way three persons are three things. […] Yet it seems that he does not understand the three things to which he refers in this way because he adds that the three persons are one in will or power. For these three persons do not have will or power according to their relationships but rather according to the fact that each single person is God. But if he says that the three persons are three things insofar as each person is God, he either wants to set up three Gods or does not understand what he is saying[24].

[22] Cf. especially C.J. Mews, *St Anselm and Roscelin: Some New Texts and their Implications. 1. The De incarnatione verbi and the Disputatio inter Christianum et Gentilem*, "Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge", 58 (1991), pp. 57–68.

[23] Anselmus, *Epistola* 136, *op. cit.,* p. 281.

[24] *Ibidem,* 129, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–272: "Quod ergo dicit tres personas tres res: aut vult intelligi secundum tres relationes, id est secundum quod deus dicitur pater et filius et a patre et a filio procedens spiritus, aut secundum id quod deus dicitur. Sed si ipsas tres relationes dicit tres res esse, superflue hoc dicit. Nullus enim negat hoc modo tres personas esse tres res. […] Quamvis videatur non intelligere hoc modo tres res quas dicit, ex eo, quia subiungit trium personarum unam esse voluntatem aut potestatem. Nam tres ipsae personae non habent voluntatem aut potestatem secundum relationes, sed secundum hoc quod unaquaeque persona deus est. Quod si dicit tres personas esse tres res, secundum quod unaquaeque persona deus est: aut tres deos vult constituere, aut non intelligit quod dicit." (English translation W. Fröhlich, *op. cit.*, p. 304.)

And in a letter to Fulk he added that Roscelin is referring to earlier customs (*usus*) when he stated that we can speak about three Gods in connection with Christian God:

> I hear – something I cannot believe without scepticism – that the cleric Roscelin says the three persons in God are three things separate from each other, just as three angels are, but in such a way that there is one will and one power; furthermore, that the Father and the Holy Spirit became incarnate with the Son; and if custom allowed, one could speak of three Gods[25].

Let us not focus on validity of Anselm's interpretation of Roselin's stand-point[26] and let us sum up that according to these Anselm's letters we can characterize Roscelin's attitude as a possibility of two alternative interpretations of relations between the substance of God and His persons: Either there are three divine persons, who are three different things and therefore it is proper to call them t h r e e   G o d s, or God is the only one (He has one power and will and as such He must be identical with Himself) and then we can claim nothing else then He had to be incarnated in Jesus Christ entirely, that means that if God is only one essence, then He is only one substance, person and thing. In other words: God is either only one (and we call Him by three names according to customs) or there are three Gods and therefore three substances.

4. *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*

Anselm revived the topic short time later in a text *Epistola de incanatione verbi* and he described the standpoint of Roscelin very similarly[27]. He also tried to find other arguments which could be used by an opponent against his own opinions[28]. At the same time Anselm was refuting Roscelin's propositions while he showed that in God there is only one substance (*substantia*) which we can call the highest good, the highest essence (*essentia*) or, eventually, the

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[25] *Idem*, *Epistola* 136, *op. cit.*, p. 279: "Audio – quod tamen absque dubietate credere non possum – quia Roscelinus clericus dicit in deo tres personas esse tres res ab invicem separatas, sicut sunt tres angeli, ita tamen ut una sit voluntas et potestas; aut patrem et spiritum sanctum esse incarnatum; et tres deos vere posse dici, si usus admitteret." (English translation W. Fröhlich, *op. cit.*, p. 314.)

[26] For criticism of Anselm's reading cf. especially C.J. Mews, *Nominalism and Theology before Abaelard: New Light on Roscelin of Compiegne*, "Vivarium", 30/1 (1992), pp. 8–12.

[27] Anselmus, *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* 1, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[28] *Ibidem* 9, pp. 23–24.

highest nature (*natura*). No plural, no variety is possible in this case[29]. Divine persons as themselves are not completely identical (for example: they differ numerically), therefore, there was no incarnation of the Father and the Holy Spirit into the Son despite of being one substance[30].

Consequently, we can not say that God is Trinity in the same way as we can say that three people have something in common and that they differ in some respects because all people, though of same nature (*species*), have their own substance. But God has only one substance, therefore, He is only one though He has three different relations, i. e. there are three existing accidents of this substance which are three divine persons who can not be three separate things (*res separatae*) [31].

Anselm preferred comparison to the Nile and its three different forms – once we talk about its spring (*fons*), then about a river (*rivus*) and then about a lake (*lacus*). Every time we talk about something different (spring, river, lake) but we still mean the same thing (the Nile). By this way we express three accidents of one substance (that is: at one time the Nile is a spring, another time it is a river and in the last scenario it is a lake) and at the same time we express three different properties, three different relations, therefore, accidents about one nature (*una aqua – una natura*)[32]. It is then possible to say about God that He is of o n e s u b s t a n c e and there are t h r e e r e l a t i o n s, i. e. persons, and even in this case of triplication God does not lose His singularity and at the same time His unity, in spite of Christ's incarnation, for example, does not lose its Trinity[33].

The main outline of competing positions of Anselm and Roscelin (at least according to Anselm's exposition) can be interpreted like this: Anselm considered Trinity to be an expression of one substance and three accidents, whereas Roscelin was against understanding of divine beings as contingent (i. e. accidental) because he believed that there is nothing contingent in God but the God is always necessary and, therefore, he claims that God is singular or there must exist three different Gods in three different persons and hence in three different substances[34].

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[29] *Ibidem* 8, pp. 22–23.
[30] *Ibidem* 9, pp. 23–24.
[31] *Ibidem* 12, p. 31.
[32] *Ibidem* 13, pp. 31–32.
[33] *Ibidem* 16, pp. 34–35.
[34] Cf. Roscelinus, *Epistola ad Abaelardum* 8, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

5. *Persona*, *substantia* and *essentia*

Anselm listed possible reasons for the origin of this problem in the very next exposition of his work *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*:

> Now, the Latins call these three things *persons*, whereas the Greeks call them s u b s t a n c e s . For just as we say that in God one substance is three persons, so they say that one person is three substances. By the word 'substance' they signify in God exactly what we signify by the word 'person'; and they are not at all at variance with us in faith[35].

Anselm then referred to, among others, *De trinitate* by Augustin[36]. But what is important is that Anselm believed that existing dispute is only terminological and not essential to dogma. Whole dispute should be solved when you realize that Greeks used different terms in the same circumstances. This means that Roscelin could really get the impression that according to patristic authorities we must say that there are three substances in God.

Roscelin probably had very similar thoughts. It is evident in *Epistola ad Abaelardum* where he returned to the same idea and even though he referred to Augustin's text *De trinitate*, the key phrase was very different in his own words:

> We do not therefore signify through p e r s o n anything other than through s u b s t a n c e , granted that we are accustomed out of a certain habit of speech to triple p e r s o n , not s u b s t a n c e , as the Greeks are accustomed to triple s u b s t a n c e . Neither indeed is it to be said that they err in belief in the Trinity because they speak differently from us, for they believe the same as us, since – as we have said – p e r s o n , s u b s t a n c e or e s s e n c e signify completely the same thing in God. For in speech there is diversity, in belief unity; otherwise there would not be a Church among the Greeks. For if they themselves say one thing by speaking thus, I do not see why we lie by saying the same thing[37].

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[35] Anselmus, *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* 16, *op. cit.*, p. 35: "Haec autem tria Latini dicunt personas, Graeci substantias. Sicut enim nos dicimus in deo substantiam unam tres personas, sic illi dicunt unam personam tres substantias, id ipsum ibi per substantiam quod nos per personam significantes, nec a nobis aliquatenus in fide discrepantes." (English translation J. Hopkins & H. Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 293–294.)

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] Roscelinus, *Epistola ad Abaelardum* 9, *op. cit.*, p. 72: "Non igitur per personam aliud aliquid significamus, quam per substantiam, licet ex quadam loquendi consuetudine triplicare soleamus personam, non substantiam, sicut Graeci triplicare solent substantiam. Neque vero dicemus est, quod in fide trinitatis errent triplicando substantiam, quia licet aliter dicant quam nos, id tamen credunt quod nos, quia sicut diximus sive persona sive substantia sive essentia in deo prorsus idem significant. In locutione enim tantum

Very similar positions were held by an author of the work *Est una* (Roscelin?)[38]. It seems obvious that Roscelin agreed with Anselm that there was no difference in comprehension of the Trinitarian dogma between Greeks and Latins but only in linguistic expression, whereas the both of them referred to Augustine Aurelius as an authority to support their claims. But they offered completely different readings of Augustine. Nevertheless, in the fifth book of *De trinitate* there is written:

> They indeed use also the word ὑπόστασιν; but they intend to put a difference, I know not what, between οὐσίαν and ὑπόστασιν: so that most of ourselves who treat these things in the Greek language, are accustomed to say μίαν οὐσίαν, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, or in Latin, one essence, three substances.
> But because with us the usage has already obtained, that by essence we understand the same thing which is understood by substance; we do not dare to say one essence, three substances, but one essence or substance and three persons […][39].

And Augustine added in the seventh book of the same work:

> […] our Greek friends have spoken of one essence, three substances; but the Latins of one essence or substance, three persons; because, as we have already said, essence usually means nothing else than substance in our language, that is, in Latin. […] For that which must be understood of persons according to our usage, this is to be understood of substances according to the Greek usage; for they say three substances, one essence, in the same way as we say three persons, one essence or substance. […] It sought then what three it should call them, and answered substances or persons; by which names it did not intend diversity to be meant, but singleness to be denied: that not only

diversitas est, in fide unita. Alioquin iam non esset apud Graecos ecclesia. Si autem ipsi sic loquendo verum dicunt, quare nos idem dicendo mentiamur, non video." (English translation C.J. Mews, *Nominalism and Theology before Abaelard…, op. cit.*, p. 8.)

[38] Roscelinus [?], *Est una* 2, *op. cit.*, p. 89: "Quod enim est apud grecos *substantia*, hoc a latinis sonat *persona* et inveniuntur iste III persone in quibusdam codicibus dici *res*, sed raro. Quod vero apud nos sonat *substantia* apud grecos dicitur *usya*."

[39] Aurelius Augustinus, *De trinitate* 5, 8–9, W. J. Mountain & F. Glorie (edd.), *CCSL* 50A, pp. 216–217: "Dicunt quidem et illi ὑπόστασιν, sed nescio quid volunt interesse inter οὐσίαν et ὑπόστασιν ita ut plerique nostri qui haec graeco tractant eloquio dicere consuerint μίαν οὐσίαν, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, quod est latine: unam essentiam, tres substantias. Sed quia nostra loquendi consuetudo iam obtinuit ut hoc intellegatur cum dicimus essentiam quod intellegitur cum dicimus substantiam, non audemus dicere unam essentiam, tres substantias, sed unam essentiam, vel substantiam, tres autem personas […]." (English translation *idem*, *On the Trinity*, A.W. Haddan (tr.), Edinburgh 1873, p. 155.)

unity might be understood therein from the being called one essence,
but also Trinity from the being called three substances or persons[40].

Augustine really stated there that one essence (*essentia*) can be designated as
one substance (*substantia*) and if we use the same terms as the Greek Christians, then we can rightfully talk about three divine substances (*substantiae*)
because by this they mean the same thing which is called divine persons in
Latin (*personae*).

Especially in case of Anselm we can find even other sources for similar statements. Anselm probably framed his work *Epistola de incarnatione
verbi* not only as an answer to Roscelin's heresy but he also tried to improve
Boethius' argumentation against Nestorians[41]. We can presume that Anselm, while working on (at least) some parts of this text, used Boethius' fifth
theological tract *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* where we read:

> For Greece, as Marcus Tullius playfully says, is not short in words, but
> provides as many equivalents for *essentia*, *subsistentia*, *substantia* and
> *persona* – οὐσία for *essentia*, οὐσίωσις for *subsistentia*, ὑπόστασις for
> *substantia* and πρόσωπον for *persona*. […] and therefore we also call
> them substances as being 'put under' – ὑποστάσεις, and since they also
> term the same substances πρόσωπα, we can call them persons. […]
> Whence we go on to say that there is one οὐσία or οὐσίωσις, i.e. one
> essence or subsistence of the Godhead, but three ὑποστάσεις, that is
> three substances. And indeed, following this use, men have spoken of
> One essence of the Trinity, three substances and three persons. For did
> not the language of the Church forbid us to say that there are three substances in God, substance might seem for this reason to be predicated
> of God, not because he is set under other things like a substrate, but
> because, just as he is before all things, so he is as it were the principle
> beneath all things, supplying them all with οὐσιῶσθαι or subsistence[42].

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[40] Cf. also *ibidem* VII, 4, p. 259–261: "[…] dictum est a nostris graecis una essentia, tres substantiae, a latinis autem una essentia uel substantia, tres personae quia sicut iam diximus
non aliter in sermone nostro, id est latino, essentia quam substantia solet intellegi. […]
Quod enim de personis secundum nostram, hoc de substantiis secundum graecorum consuetudinem ea quae diximus oportet intellegi. Sic enim dicunt illi tres substantias, unam
essentiam, quemadmodum nos dicimus tres personas, unam essentiam uel substantiam.
[…] Quaesiuit quid tria diceret et dixit substantias siue personas, quibus nominibus non
diuersitatem intellegi uoluit sed singularitatem noluit ut non solum ibi unitas intellegatur
ex eo quod dicitur una essentia, sed et trinitas ex eo quod dicuntur tres substantiae uel
personae." (English translation A.W. Haddan, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–193.)

[41] Cf. for example J. Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis 1972,
p. 199.

[42] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3, [in:] *idem*, *Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, G.P. Goold (ed. & tr.), Cambridge 1978, s. 88–93: "Neque enim verborum inops

Even Boethius clearly stated there, in agreement with Augustine, that what Greeks called one essence and three substances is rightfully called one substance and three persons by Latins. Anselm did not include direct reference to this Boethius' tract in final version of work *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*, but if we can consider text called *Cur Deus magis*, which C.J. Mews very convincingly identified as one of the earlier versions of the 10th and the 11th chapter of subsequent *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*[43], to be originally written by Anselm, then we have even reference to this Boethius' work[44].

We can suspect that Anselm eventually decided to transform this part of the 11th chapter of his Trinitarian work into more general formulation[45] in order not to compromise this delicate problematic of exposition of Divine Trinity, especially in connection with his own innovative interpretations, by explicit modification of established authorities. Inclusion of Boethius' information about different Latin and Greek reading of terms person, essence and substance stayed in the final version of *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* because it had already been introduced similarly by Augustine.

6. Grammar and Priscian

We can then presume that primary motives, which encouraged both protagonist of Trinitarian dispute in the 11th century to public formulations of their opinions, were different: Roscelin wanted to return to Augustine and to call attention to the implications of his exposition of Trinity, Anselm links Boethius to the African saint and he tries to improve his argumentation against Nestorians. None of these texts can back Roscelin's statement

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Graecia est, ut Marcus Tullius alludit, sed essentiam, subsistentiam, substantiam, personam totidem nominibus reddit, essentiam quidem οὐσίαν, subsistentiam vero οὐσίωσιν, substantiam ὑπόστασιν, personam πρόσωπον apellans. […] atque idcirco nos quoque eas substantias nuncupamus quasi subpositas, quas illi ὑποστάσεις, cumque etiam πρόσωπα nuncupent easdem substantias, possumus nos quoque nuncupare personas. […] Unde etiam dicimus unam esse οὐσίαν vel οὐσίωσιν, id est essentiam vel subsistentiam deitatis, sed tres ὑποστάσεις, id est tres substantias. Et quidem secundum hunc modum dixere unam trinitatis essentiam, tres substantias tresque personas. Nisi enim tres in deo substantias ecclesiasticus loquendi usus excluderet, videretur idcirco de deo dici substantia, nonquod ipse ceteris rebus quasi subiectum supponeretur, sed quod idem omnibus uti praeesset ita etiam quasi principium subesset rebus, dum eis omnibus οὐσιῶσθαι vel subsistere subministrat."

43. C.J. Mews, *St Anselm and Roscelin: Some New Texts and their Implications. I.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–69.

44. Anselmus Cantuariensis [?], *Cur Deus magis*, [in:] C.J. Mews, *St Anselm and Roscelin: Some New Texts and their Implications. I.*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

45. Anselmus, *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* 11, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

about identity of terms person, substance and essence in connection with God. He could not find direct impulse for this step neither in Augustine, nor in Boethius. Therefore, it is important to add one more important tradition which strongly shaped intellectual context of the 11th century. Possible cue could be a strong reception of works of late-antique grammarians, especially work *Institutiones grammaticae* by Priscian, and their well-known influence on the early versions of nominalism in the last third of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century[46].

Among the most cited phrases of Priscian belongs his specification describing the functions of noun: "The property of the noun is to signify a substance and a quality"[47]. If we use some noun in our speech, then this noun signify specific substance or some quality which means that the noun can signify accident too. Roscelin could have meant this very thought[48] when he considered the need for associating persons and substances in the case of God. If a noun (e. g. person) signifies substance or/and quality, then it means that the noun 'person' signifies the substance or some of the accidents in the case of God, too. But the second possibility is promptly declined by Roscelin as we can read in his text *Epistola ad Abelardum*: "Indeed it is to be known that in the substance of the Holy Trinity, any nouns do not signify one thing and another, whether according to parts or to qualities, but they signify only substance itself […]"[49].

It is not possible for God to be composed of parts – He is the supreme unity after all. It is not possible for His qualities to change – He is always perpetual and unchanging. Everything that belongs to God is necessary part

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[46] Cf. for instance M. Gibson, *The Early Scholastic »Glosulae« to Priscian, »Institutiones Grammaticae«: the Text and its Influence*, "Studi Medievali", 20 (1979), pp. 235–254; C.H. Kneepkens, *Nominalism and Grammatical Theory in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries. An Explorative Study*, "Vivarium", 30/1 (1992), pp. 34–50 etc. For close relation to Roscelin's nominalism see for example E.H. Kluge, *Roscelin and the Medieval Problem of Universals*, "Journal of the History of Philosophy", 14 (1976), pp. 405–414; C.G. Normore, *The Tradition of Mediaeval Nominalismus*, [in:] J.F. Wippel (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, Washington 1987, pp. 201–217; J. Marenbon, *Vocalism, Nominalism and the Commentaries on the Categories from the Earlier Twelfth Century*, "Vivarium", 30/1 (1992), pp. 51–61 etc.

[47] Priscianus Caesariensis, *Institutiones grammaticae* 2, 18, M. Hertz (ed.), Leipzig 1855, p. 55: "Proprium est nominis substantiam et qualitatem significare."

[48] Cf. especially (with the significant role of the anonymous' *Glosule* to Priscian written in 11th century) C.J. Mews, *Nominalism and Theology before Abaelard, op. cit.*, pp. 12–31.

[49] Roscelinus, *Epistola ad Abaelardum* 9, *op. cit.* p. 72: *Sciendum est vero, quod in substantia sanctae trinitatis quaelibet nomina non aliud et aliud significant, sive quantum ad partes sive quantum ad qualitates, sed ipsam solam […] significant substantiam.* (English translation [in:] C.J. Mews, *The Trinitarian Doctrine of Roscelin…, op. cit.*, p. 355.

of His substance. God's substance is His own essence and everything we can say about God is necessary expression of His nature. If I use any noun and designate God properly by it, then I designate solely His substance, although the noun itself can designate both substance and quality (accident). But if there are no contingent accidents in God, it is not possible for God's name (e.g. the name of person or His concretization) to signify quality, relation or other accident and, therefore, it must necessary designate a substance. There is no other possibility for names. If we speak about three divine persons, we speak about three divine substances because noun can not designate something accidental in the case of God.

Roscelin's controversial theory may track its origin to the applications of Augustine's statements about essence, substance(s) and persons of God to Priscian's teachings about designating function of names. If we can properly designate God by terms like essence, that is substance, and person and at the same time it is not possible for God's name to designate any accidental property of God, then Roscelin's found obvious that all three terms designate the very same thing. By this way we can reconstruct Roscelin's reasoning which lead him to considerably problematic conclusions that have been reported by Anselm in his texts.

But Anselm approached to a name of p e r s o n from different perspective. The above mentioned text *Cur Deus magis*, which we can possibly consider to be earlier version of part of work *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*, showed that the Father of Scholasticism was using mainly Porphyry's definition of particular but he left aside[50] the famous definition of person[51] by Boethius. Boethius' presentation of this thesis in Porphyry's *Introduction* to Aristotle's *Categories* reads: "Such items are called individuals because each is constituted of proper features the assemblage of which will never be found the same in anything else […]"[52].

It is clear in this context why Anselm spoke so effortlessly about single substance of God and three different persons. Person is related solely to particulars and individuals[53] and if an individual is an unique and unrepeatable collection of properties, then we can easily say that there is sole God's

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[50] Anselmus [?], *Cur Deus magis*, *op. cit.*, p. 84: "Philosophi utique diffiniunt esse individuum, cuius proprietatum collectio non est in alio eadem, id est non dicitur de alio."

[51] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3, *op. cit.*, p. 84: "[…] reperta personae est definitio: naturae rationabilis individua substantia."

[52] Porphyrii *Isagoge* 2, *Aristoteles Latinus* I, 6–7: *Categoriarum supplementa*, L. Minio-Paluello (ed.), Bruges/Paris 1966, p. 7: "Indiuidua ergo dicuntur huiusmodi quoniam ex proprietatibus consistit unumquodque eorum quorum collectio numquam in alio eadem erit […]." (English translation *idem*, *Introduction* 2, J. Barnes (tr.), Oxford 2003, p. 8.)

[53] Cf. Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 2, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

substance but there are three persons because set of properties of any divine person is different from the remaining two. But we need to add, because of dogmatic reasons, that there is fundamental difference between the talk about three individual human persons and their common substance (that is human species, nature of men or secondary substance of men), because those are three independent substances, which have common species (nature), and the talk about three divine persons which have only one common substance (that is divine) and which does not break down to other three in a similar fashion like in the case of primary substances of individual people. This is the distinction which was rigorously held by Anselm[54].

7. Conclusion

Roscelin therefore used mainly Augustine and Priscian to back his concept, whereas Anselm also referred to Augustine's authority but he kept in view Boethius and Porphyry above all. This might be the decisive reason for differences between both teachings. In addition to this, if the previous analyses are valid, then we may get even the answer to the question why Roscelin appealed to Lanfranc's and Anselm's approval of his propositions about Trinity of God.

Lanfranc of Pavia and Anselm of Canterbury were considered to be the major experts in liberal arts which they used even on dogmatic questions. They developed their arguments according to their knowledge of the liberal arts (especially trivium) but they could always refer to the standpoints of established authorities. And this was apparently the same method employed by Roscelin: Augustine or Boethius were undisputable authorities for Roscelin and Anselm, yet Priscian is still one of the most important thinkers who formed not only the views of Roscelin, but also the views of the Father of Scholasticism. After all, his famous dialog *De grammatico* is mostly an attempt to join together dialectic and grammatical traditions, whereas the fundamental part of the whole conversation is the Priscian's characteristic of denoting function of names cited above. Anselm's semantic is unimaginable without this precept and it clearly shows that Anselm paid a lot of attention to work *Institutiones grammaticae*. And if he defended Priscian's thesis in his older text and if he tried to put it into the context of works by Aristotle, Boethius and also Augustine, then Roscelin could easily get the impression that the same way of thinking is needed to interpret divine persons. Anselm however chose different approach to Trinitarian question, he was able to use

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[54] Cf. Anselmus, *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* 9, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

different secular sources (e.g. Porphyry) and he stood vigorously against Roscelin's heresy. The resemblance of Anselm's reaction to Lanfranc's activity amidst Eucharistic controversy involving Berengar of Tours is more than obvious.

By this we can explain even the other possible reason of Anselm's almost surprising commitment to dealing with Roscelin's heresy. Roscelin was called to be one of "the heretics of dialectics" by Anselm in his work *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* and that was a way how the Father of Scholasticism tried to distinct those thinkers, who prefered dialectics to that extent that they did not respect dogmatic consequences, from those thinkers who used the same resources in a different way. He considered himself to be a man who uses logic, grammar etc. to inquire not only into dogmas but also into other topics which (can) coincide with theology. These very heretical conclusions, which were presented by some thinkers who were using the same secular sources, could be uncomfortable evidence for unwarranted use of these traditions in connection with dogmatic questions. But it was Anselm's wish to accept the maximal usage of human reason when dealing with dogmatic-theological topics and he could not bear that the same ways could lead some other scholars to problematic conclusions. This seriously threatened Anselm's own endeavor and could stamp his work as being potentially dangerous.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　～

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