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# Hosius of Cordova and His Struggle of Blessed Orthodoxy

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**Abstract:** Hosius of Cordova is one of the most known of the West Fathers of Early Christianity. The saint advised Saint Constantine to convene the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325, and he was the first to sign the acts of this Council. After the death of Saint Constantine the Great, Saint Hosius defended Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (May 2) against the emperor Constantius (337-361), an advocate of the Arian heresy. Because of this, they sent him to prison in Sirmium. Saint Hosius died in the year 359 after his return to Cordova. Despite his long career, few of Ossius' writings are known. Two works attributed to him by Isidore of Seville, *De laude virginitatis* and *De interpretatione vestium sacerdotalium*, are no longer extant. The following table lists his surviving works, and the documents marked with asterisks are spurious. The links provide more information on each of the documents.

**Keywords:** Bishop of Gordoba, Emperor Constantius, Great Athanasius

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## 1. The Life of Hosius of Cordova and His Struggle for Orthodoxy

Hosius of Cordova is one of the most known of the West Fathers of Early Christianity. He is called Hosius of Cordouis in Greek or of Cordova in Latin because he was the bishop of Cordova in Spain. He is also called Hosius the confessor of Cordova because he was a confessor of the Faith in the persecution of Maximian (Morse) or of Diocletian (Hefe) [1] as it is mentioned in the Catholic Encyclopedia. We support that he was a confessor of the Faith in the persecution of Maximian because Hosius writes in his letter "epistula" to Constantio: "I confessed in the persecution of your grandfather Maximian..." (ἐγὼ μὲν ὠμολόγησα καὶ τὸ πρῶτον, ὅτε διωγμός γέγονε καὶ τῷ πάππῳ σου Μαξιμιανῶ...) [2].

He became Bishop of Cordova in Southern Spain about 295. His name is mentioned amongst the nineteen bishops present at the provincial Council of Elvira (c. 300) [3]. He was Bishop for more than sixty years as Great Athanasius mentions in his *Historia Arianorum*: "they didn't felt ashamed of the period of his bishop as he had sixty and more years in the bishop..." (οὐτε τὸν χρόνον τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς, ὅτι ἐξήκοντα ἔτη καὶ πλεῖον ἔχει ἐν αὐτῇ, ἡδέσθησαν) [4].

St Hosius was probably born in Roman Córdoba in

Hispania, although a passage in Zosimus has sometimes been conjectured as the writer's belief that Hosius was a native of Egypt [5]. He was born about 256 and he died about 358 at Sirmium or in Spain. That's why he was a Bishop for more than sixty years, as he died when he was one hundred and two years old. His rule was very important for the Faith in the third and fourth century when the church had to face the Arianism and the Donatists. He had a personal relationship with the Great Constantine. Hosius was Emperor Constantine's chief adviser in dealing with the Donatists [6] When the Arian troubles began, Constantine charged Hosius with the delivery of his letter to Arius and Alexander, in which he urged them to reconciliation. We know little of Hosius's action during this mission (323-324). When the Council of Nicaea met, Hosius presided, together with the two Roman priests Vitus and Vincent. In what capacity he presided is a matter much discussed: Gelasius of Cyzicus is categorical in declaring that it was in the name of the pope (Hist. Nic. Conc., Bk. II, c. v). Hefe is of the same opinion. Chapman holds that he was nominated by Constantine. Leclercq inclines to the same opinion, but leaves the question open. [7]

In 313 he appears at the court of Constantine, being expressly mentioned by name in a constitution directed by the emperor to Caecilianus of Carthage in that year. [8] In 323 he was the bearer and possibly the writer of Constantine's letter to Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and

Arius his deacon, bidding them cease disturbing the peace of the church; and, on the failure of the negotiations in Egypt, it was doubtless with the active concurrence of Hosius that the Council of Nis was convened in 325 [9] He certainly took part in its proceedings, and was one of the large number of confessors present; that he presided is a very doubtful assertion, as also that he was the principal author of the Nicene Creed. Still he powerfully influenced the eventual judgment of the emperor against the party of Arius. [10] His rule in the Council of Nicaea was very important for the Christianity and the Faith as he was the most known of the West Bishops and he had also personal relationship with the Emperor Great Constantine. These two reasons persuade Great Constantine to trust Hosius of Cordova, a Bishop for thirty years in the church. There is a third reason we think that contributed to the result against Arian: this is Hosius's character and his strong personality as we can result from his letter to Constantio several years later, but the personality is the same. His inside freedom and the strike way he writes to Constantio, show a man who is attached to the Orthodox Faith and he is afraid of no-one and nothing. Besides he was a confessor.

## 2. Hosius of Cordova and Great Constantine

Hosius presided in 343 at the fruitless synod of Sardica, which showed itself so hostile to Arianism; there and afterwards he spoke and wrote in favor of Great Athanasius. [11] After Constantine's death, the prestige given to the orthodox cause in the Arianist controversy by the support of the venerable Hosius led the Arians to bring pressure to bear upon Constantius II, who had him summoned to Milan where he declined to condemn Athanasius nor to extend communion to Arians. He impressed the emperor so much that he was authorized to return home [12] Hosius wrote a letter "epistula" to Emperor Constantio II which Great Athanasius remains in his "Historia Arianorum" [13] Great Athanasius writes in front of Hosius's letter that Arian asked from Constantio to persecute him, because he is able to convince with reason and faith against Arian. [14]

Athanasius the Great initially presents the goal of heretics and analyzes the methods they were using to persuade King Constantine. Then he is extolling the qualities of Hosius, which heretics indicate themselves. Heretics aimed at dominance of their heresy and they didn't fear God nor ashamed anyone. They were determined to exterminate anyone who prevented the prevalence of heresy. That's why they approached Constantius and convinced him to persecute the saint and not spare his age. Heretics confessed to Constantius that they exiled the bishop of Rome, most bishops before Bishop of Cordova and they sowed fear everywhere. However, their sect will disappear if he remains because he is able to convince with reason and faith against them. Besides he leads the sessions, and when he writes he is spread everywhere. The above show the stability of the faith

of Hosius and the great influence he had. Also heretics admitted that the persecution of others is futile as Hosius remains. Constantios because he knew Hosius and his ability he asked him by a letter to come to Constantios, as he had done previously with Liverios. When he arrived, he asked him to write against Athanasios and to communicate with heretics. It is obviously that Constantios had been convinced to heretics. The saint took pity on what he heard from Constantios, he rebuked the king, he finally convinced him and he returned to his church.

The courtiers and eunuchs of Constantius and heretics convinced him again. Constantios then wrote a lot of letters to Hosius, some flattering and other menacing. The fact that Constantios wrote a lot of letters to the Bishop shows us that Constantios respected the Bishop but he also was pressed by the heretics. Athanasius writes that Hosius didn't retreat and he wrote a letter to Constantius. Athanasius read the letter and he mentions the whole letter. Athanasius is the unique writer who rescues for us Hosius's letter to Constantius.

We quote below Hosius's letter to Constantius, as Athanasius rescues this. we translate the letter in English. Also we underline the main points of Hosius's thoughts to Constantius.

Hosius wishes to Constantius to rejoice in the Lord

I confessed earlier when persecution became the years of your grandfather Maximinian. If you also persecute me, I am ready to endure anything rather than emptying innocent blood and to betray the truth' I do not accept you to write and to threat such words. Stop to write such words and don't believe the same with Arios, don't listen of the east people, don't believe the people beside Ursakius and Ualentius. What they say, they don't say about Athanasius but for their own sect. Believe me, Constantius, I am your grandfather, as from my age. I went myself to the summit in Sardici when you and your brother the late Constas concentrated all of us. And I invited Athanasius's enemies in the Church, where I was Bishop, to tell something against him, if they had anything' I promised to those to have courage and do not expect anything other than that the test will be right for everyone. I did this not only once but twice and I urged, if they don't want the sight of all session, even before me, promising, if they prove him guilty, we will definitively eliminate him, but if they prove him innocent, you will be slanderers and I shall convince Athanasius to come to Spain. Athanasius was convinced and didn't object, but those not having confidence they said "maybe". Athanasius arrived again in your camp where I sent to call him and since all enemies were invited to be present in Antioch, each of them required to accused or to be accused and if Athanasius is present they have to prove that he is such as they say or if he is absent they mustn't slander him. Neither you tolerated but they resigned. So why do you pay attention to those who slander? Why do you tolerate Ualis and Ursakius, although they repented and confessed the slanderous by official document? They confessed without suffering violence as they pretend, nor there were soldiers without knowing your brother (because when he was alive, nothing mattered the same with these

matter now) but they came to Rome because they themselves wanted it and wrote their confession of slander in front of the bishop and priests after having written before a friendly and peaceful letter to Athanasius. If they pretend violence and they know that this is bad, neither you accept this' stop accepting violence and do not write or send couriers but freed exiles, so they will not make greater violence while they accuse you of violence. What similar was done by Constas? Who did exile Bishop? When was tried Bishop in ecclesiastical court? Who man of palace forced a bishop to sign against someone in order Ualis's friends tell these? Stop please and remember that you are mortal' Fear the Day of Judgment' Storage yourself pure for that day. Don't deal with the sacred' do not order us for these but rather you have to be informed about them from us. God gave in your hands the kingdom' God entrusted to us the things about church. And as if someone who steals your kingdom is opposed to God, so you must fear of that you shall become guilty for a big crime if you take on the sacred' It has been written: Give to Caesar those that belong to Caesar and give to God those that belong to God. Neither we allowed to reign on earth, neither you king have power to censors. I write this because I care about your salvation and about what you wrote me my opinion is this. I do not consent to the Martians and I curse their sect, and I don't write against Athanasius, whom you and the Church of Rome and all of attendant restored. Because of you could see these things, you invited the man and you agreed Athanasius return with honor to the homeland and in the church. Who then has become the reason of such change? The Athanasius' enemies are the same ones who were formerly enemies and all they secretly say (because they don't say anything when he is present) the same they accused before you invite Athanasius, the same when they came into the session and they demanded from me, but they couldn't provide proves' if they had proves they didn't have leave such a disgraceful manner. Who persuaded you in after so long that you had done a mistake to your letters and your words? You promised you shall not make yourself responsible of obligation to others, and don't trust bad people. Now of course you treat them, but you are going to apology alone in the Judgment. They want to injustice their own enemies by you and they want to make you assistant in their own cunning in order to disperse the dirty sect in the Church by you. It is not wise to put yourself in such danger for the pleasure of others. Stop, Constantius and persuade to me. I must write these ones and you mustn't despise them".

### 3. Conclusions

We underline the main points of Hosius's letter to the king Constantius:

1. Hosius has already confessed earlier when persecution became the years of his grandfather Maximian, so he will do the same again.
2. Hosius knows that Athanasios is innocent and he isn't going to write against him.
3. Constantius mustn't listen to Arius, Ursakius and Uali,

because they are heretics.

4. Constantius has no right to deal with the sacred themes and he must listen to Hosius about them because he is the Bishop.
5. Constantius has to take care of his soul and to protect himself of a serious injustice about Athanasius.
6. Arius, Ursakius and Ualis have never proved what they say, although they had promised to bring proof about Athanasius.

So we can say that Hosius isn't afraid of the king because he is sure about the truth and about Athanasius's right. He has no disposal to do Constantius's sake. He reminds to the king that Ursakius and Ualis never prove what they say and they are heretics. He is very hard to the king because the king a lot of times has send people to Hosius to persuade him against Athanasius. Hosius can't afford the king to deal with the sacred themes because he doesn't know them. The king must deal only with the administrative issues. Hosius is the Bishop and he knows the sacred.

There is no doubt that Hosius is giving struggle of Blessed Orthodoxy, although the king is against him. The king was convinced to heretics, but without proves. Hosius writes to the king to think about his salvation, so he makes clear that the king has no right about Athanasius. Also he underlines that the heretics use the king because of their own cunning. So Constantius must be careful. This letter shows us that Hosius is defending vigorously the truth. Hosius is a confessor of the Faith till the end of his life.

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