

ST BASIL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE: A SYNTHESIS OF GREEK *PAIDEIA* AND THE SCRIPTURAL WORLDVIEW

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Abstract: St Basil's contribution to the formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has long been acknowledged in the Christian tradition. Indeed, he was responsible for articulating the 'orthodox' vision of God with theological and philosophical originality that truly laid the foundations upon which the way of pondering the Trinitarian mystery in the East was established. His achievement lay in his remarkable ability to ennoble the culture of the day with the Christian message without in any way compromising the latter. This paper explores the Trinitarian theology of St Basil with a view towards highlighting the harmonious synthesis of Greek *paideia* and the scriptural worldview.

Undeniably, the Church's teaching on the mystery of the Holy Trinity stands at the very heart of Christian belief. Indeed, it has rightly been recognised as Christianity's *differentia specifica*, namely that specific teaching which clearly distinguishes the Christian faith from all other forms of monotheism.¹ Notwithstanding the importance of this teaching and the fact that it is firmly rooted in the Scriptures, it nevertheless took the early Church many years to acquire a clearly articulated theology of the Trinitarian mystery. The need for precise terminology particularly emerged when the Church had to define with accuracy in what way the *one* God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – namely, the Father almighty – was related to Jesus Christ – who was professed to be God's only begotten Son, his eternal Word and Image –

and to the Holy Spirit – identified as the ‘breath’ of the almighty God in the Old Testament. More specifically, in response to certain challenges to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the latter half of the fourth century, St Basil the Great – together with the other Cappadocian fathers – was responsible for articulating the Orthodox vision and experience of God with theological and philosophical originality that laid the foundations upon which the way of pondering the Trinitarian mystery in the East was established. In this way, St Basil’s theology of God remains the cornerstone for Orthodox Trinitarian theology and has therefore lasting significance for our modern times.² His originality, as will be shown, lay in his ability to present the biblical worldview concerning the Trinitarian Godhead by coining new terms from the philosophical language and categories of his time, in this way clarifying and defending the biblical truth of God and setting the foundations, once and for all, for the entire history of the Church’s Trinitarian thought. Essentially, St Basil had to show that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are entirely unique, concrete and distinct as to *who* they were, yet indissolubly identical in *what* they were – namely, truly divine. It was this development of technical terminology, namely, the distinction between οὐσία [essence]³ and ὑπόστασις [hypostasis],⁴ that paved the way towards the final victory of ‘orthodox’ theology and according to his friend St Gregory the Theologian rightly made him a ‘light for the whole world [τῆ οἰκουμένη πάσῃ πυρσεύουσα].’⁵

It is the purpose of this paper to present the Trinitarian theology of St Basil with particular emphasis on the unique hypostatic distinctions of each divine Person as well as their essential unity. Yet, in order to better comprehend St Basil’s particular contribution to the Trinitarian doctrine, it will be important to outline, albeit briefly, the historical context of the particular situations in which he found himself. Only in this way, will it become clear as to why certain terms, borrowed from the culture of the time, were used to present and preserve the Church’s vision of God. It is the contention of this paper that whilst philosophical vocabulary was appropriated into his theology of the Trinity, St Basil’s ultimate concern was a salvific one – namely, for the world to come to know the saving truth of God as presented in the Scriptures – and in a language familiar to it.

The Historical Context

Essentially, there were three main heretical challenges that compelled St Basil to focus more extensively on the Trinitarian mystery. They were: (1) the Eunomians, otherwise known as Anomeans, an extreme form of Arianism that repudiated the divinity of God's Son; (2) the Sabellians who denied the distinct existence of the three Persons of the Trinity believing that God was essentially one impersonal monad who simply 'appeared' – not really existed – in three different ways; and (3) the Pneumatomachians who claimed that the Spirit of God was a mere creature, in this way denying its divinity. It is to a brief sketch of these three challenges, together with St Basil's response, that we now turn.⁶

For St Basil, a proper response to these quarrels was absolutely necessary because humanity's salvation was at stake. More specifically, his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*⁷ clearly underscores the liturgical origin of the teachings he espoused thereby highlighting that the mystery of the Trinitarian Godhead was, for St Basil, fundamentally a focus of praise and worship, to be approached as a mystery of salvation and not as speculative rationalisations divorced from the life of the Church. His rivals attacked him for ending with the doxology, 'to the Father, *with* [μετά] the Son *together with* [σύν] the Holy Spirit' and not what was believed to be customary, namely 'to the Father *through* [διὰ] the Son *in* [ἐν] the Holy Spirit.' This latter form allowed for a subordinationist understanding of the Son and Spirit since the different prepositions signified, for Eunomius, the dissimilar natures of each divine Person. In response to this, St Basil wrote:

They [the Eunomians] assign the words 'from whom' to God the Father as if this expression was his one special allotment; for God the Son they select the phrase 'through whom', and for the Holy Spirit 'in which', and they say that this assignment of prepositions must never be interchanged, in order that... one prepositional phrase is always made to indicate a corresponding nature.⁸

Clearly, for St Basil the prepositions *μετά* [with] and *σύν* [together with] strongly defended the inseparability between the Father, Son and Spirit leading to the equal majesty and glory of all three Persons. Consequently,

in contemplating the majesty of the Son and Spirit, it was only appropriate to offer glory to the Father *together* with the Son and Spirit.⁹

Eunomianism

Much of St Basil's writings were directed against Eunomius (d. ca 393AD), an Arian bishop in Cyzicus, who not only claimed to know fully the essence of God,¹⁰ but also that the Father's essence was radically different – *ἀνόμοιος* – from that of God's Son and ontologically superior.¹¹ For Eunomius, the fundamental designation for the reality of the Father's essence was expressed by the term 'unbegotten' and this, he alleged, could only be applied to the Father. He wrote: 'God the Father is an unbegotten essence [*ἀυτός ἐστιν οὐσία ἀγέννητος*]'¹² and this was radically contrasted to the essence of the Son of God which was believed to be a 'begotten essence [*οὐσία γεννητός*].'¹³ Simply put, in teaching that the essence of God was unbegotten, Eunomius not only claimed to know the essence of God, something which the Church had always taught was beyond the power of humanity's finite intellectual faculties, but also that the Son of God was of a different substance/essence to that of God the Father. The difficulty with such a proposition was that it rejected the faith of the First Ecumenical Council in 325AD which had previously taught that the Son of God is 'of one essence with the Father [*ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ*].'¹⁴ Unlike St Basil who taught that there was a common essence between the Father and the Son – and for that matter the Holy Spirit – for Eunomius, the Son of God did not share the same essence as God the Father but was, rather, of a different essence – a *γέννημα καὶ ποιήμα* [an offspring and thing made]¹⁴ derived from the will of God.¹⁵

Sabellianism

The second heretical challenge that St Basil had to counter was that of the Sabellian conception of God which denied the full personhood of the three divine Hypostases.¹⁶ According to Sabellius and his followers, the one God adopted different *personae* or masks as different needs arose, whilst remaining essentially one undifferentiated unity, namely, an impersonal God. In wanting to interpret the divine activity of Christ in the

world without rejecting the monotheism of the Scriptures, Sabellianism rejected the idea that Christ or the Holy Spirit were distinct, concrete beings, namely, real persons. Instead, they essentially taught that the three divine Persons, whose real existence the historical experience of the Church had always affirmed, were merely three different ways that the one God could choose to *appear* and *act*. According to Sabellius, God was but one impersonal being which Scripture simply portrayed in various ways according to the needs arising in each case: and so, the one abstract divine being, appeared as ‘Father’ in the Old Testament, as ‘Son’ in the New and as ‘Holy Spirit’ in the Church after Pentecost. In this way, Sabellianism believed that any form of pagan polytheism was avoided. In responding to the Sabellian conception of God which, at the time of St Basil was mainly represented by Marcellus of Ancyra, St Basil clearly drew attention to his rejection of the real existence of the Son of God when he wrote:

He [Marcellus] grants indeed that the Only begotten was called ‘Word’, on coming forth at need and in season, but states that He returned again to him from where He had come forth, and had no existence before his coming forth, nor hypostasis after his return.¹⁷

Clearly, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were not real and concrete entities, but simply temporary manifestations of the one God who simply *appeared* in different modes in order to save the world, ultimately, however only to re-integrate, as it were, into one impersonal monad. Clearly, such a conception, in the end, gave the impression that God was to some extent merely ‘acting’ in the world, in this way not revealing his true self, and thus depriving the faithful from a real and salvific relationship with each of the divine Persons.

Pneumatomachians

The third challenge to ‘orthodox’ Christianity was that system of thought put forward by the ‘Pneumatomachians’.¹⁸ As a term meaning ‘fighters against the Spirit’, the expression *Pneumatomachians* was coined by the Cappadocian fathers to describe those who refused to accept both the hypostatic and consubstantial deity of the Holy Spirit. St Basil wrote his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* precisely in response to this party who

not only rejected the Son's consubstantiality to the Father, but also that of the Holy Spirit's. For this group, since the Holy Spirit could not be numbered with the Father and the Son, it was naturally subordinated and consequently could not be glorified together with the Father and the Son as the Scriptures asserted.¹⁹

St Basil's Trinitarian Terminology

In order to combat these challenges, the task before St Basil lay in shaping a theological language that simultaneously safeguarded the biblical view of the distinction of each divine Person, and their indissoluble unity. In this regard, he wrote:

It must well be understood that, as he who does not confess a community of substance falls into polytheism, so too he who does not grant the individuality of the Persons is carried away into Judaism.²⁰

St Basil was able to refute these errors in theological thinking with the help of his Greek *paideia* – namely his knowledge of philosophical terminology and distinctions, together with ways of arguing. More specifically, this was achieved in his clear terminological distinction between the one *ousia* [essence] of God and the three *hypostases*. Indeed, St Basil's success is displayed in his rhetorical and cultural erudition which wonderfully assimilated both the biblical and philosophical worldviews.²¹ In appropriating Greek culture and learning, St Basil refined all those Greek technical terms that were thought to be good, true and useful to theology in such a way that served the scriptural truth of God. In this way, he was able to formulate successfully a theological vision of the Trinitarian God as revealed in its action for the world's salvation. However, in affirming St Basil's indebtedness to Greek *paideia*, it would be incorrect to deny him, as we shall see, a certain creativity in his borrowing; on the contrary, philosophical terms were borrowed, altered, adjusted, ultimately transformed or Christianised to make them suitable to express the Trinitarian mystery. The three most important terms were *οὐσία* [essence], *ὑπόστασις* [hypostasis] and *πρόσωπον* [person]. And it is to these that we now turn.

Distinction Between Essence and Hypostasis

In refuting the arguments put forward by Eunomius, St Basil was responsible for differentiating, for the very first time, between the terms ‘essence [οὐσία]’ and ‘hypostasis [ὑπόστασις]’ with respect to the Trinity, two expressions which, up to that point, were indistinct. With St Basil, essence signified what was common within the Godhead, whereas hypostasis designated the unique and distinct mode of each divine Person’s existence. In this regard, he wrote:

The distinction between essence and hypostasis is the same as that between the general and the particular. Therefore, concerning the divinity, we confess one essence, so as not to give a differing principle of being [τὸν τοῦ εἶναι λόγον]; but the hypostasis, on the other hand, is particularizing [ὑπόστασιν δὲ ἰδιάζουσιν], in order that our conception of Father, Son and Holy Spirit may be unconfused and clear.²²

In this way, the distinction within the Godhead lay in the three unique hypostatic realities, whereas their unity and community in the *ousia*.²³

Notwithstanding the ineffability and unknowability of the essence of God, in contrast to Eunomius who maintained that God did not know anything more about his essence than what human beings did,²⁴ St Basil used simple human analogies in order to further explain what was meant by the term ‘essence’ within the context of explaining its difference with hypostasis. In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, a much refined and mature exposition not only of the Holy Spirit but the Trinity in general, he wrote:

We can learn from experts in grammar that some nouns are common, used to describe a great number of things, while others are more specific, and the force of others is proper to one person or thing. *Essence*, for example, is a common noun; it can be used to describe all things, whether animate or inanimate. *Living*, is more specific; it describes fewer subjects than *essence*, but since it includes both rational and irrational life, there are many more specific nouns: *human* is more specific than *living* and *man* is more specific than *human*, while the individual names *Peter*, *James* and *John* are the most specific of all.²⁵

This excerpt clearly and simply explains that essence referred to what is common within the Godhead signifying, in this way, the inseparable

oneness in their divine being, power and activity. More specifically, essence, in this case, denoted the *uncreated* existence shared by the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, which was distinct from the world's *created* essence. On the other hand, the term hypostasis, a unique actualisation of an essence, signified that which was absolutely incommunicable, namely a concrete being which is unique as to *who* each of the three are, yet the same as to *what* they are.

Since these two terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* were, for St Basil, distinct, he was able to assert that when the Father was referred to as 'unbegotten', this in no way was a reference to his essence but rather to his unique hypostasis. That is, the term 'unbegotten' – which Eunomius believed described the essence of God – was a personal and not an essential name. Having taught that the personal or hypostatic attributes [ιδιώματα] of each person of the Holy Trinity were absolutely unique and incommunicable, whereas their essence remained common, St Basil went on to specify the unique hypostatic attributes of each divine Person: and so, the specific mode of the Father's existence, according to St Basil, was that He alone is the cause and source of the Godhead, the One who begot the only-begotten Son, and the One from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. In this regard, he wrote:

God, who is over all things has his own mark of differentiation which characterises his subsistence; and this is that He alone is Father; He alone has his hypostasis underived from any cause.²⁶

The unique mode of existence of the Son was that He is the begotten One; the unbegotten God's hypostatic Image and Word. St Basil wrote:

The Son, Who declares the Spirit proceeding from the Father through Himself and with Himself, shining forth alone and by only-begetting from the unbegotten light, so far as the peculiar notes are concerned, has nothing in common either with the Father or with the Holy Spirit. He alone is known by the stated signs.²⁷

And lastly, the unique mode of existence of the Holy Spirit was that He alone is the One who,

...proceeds. [The Spirit] has this note of its peculiar hypostatic nature, that it is known after the Son and together with the Son, and that it has its subsistence of the Father.²⁸

In this way, even though the essence of the three hypostases remained one and the same – and therefore true piety necessitated the contemplation of the three together – their unique hypostatic attributes were also preserved.

Identification of Prosopon with Hypostasis

Whilst hypostasis on its own could express the reality of concrete existence, it did not suggest the communal or relational dimension of the three Persons of the Trinity. A term was therefore needed that could express both the distinctiveness, yet at the same time the relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The notion of *prosopon*, the Greek term for person had the potential to express the relational dimension of a concrete being, but lacked any real and permanent ontological status since it could easily be taken to mean what is signified by the English term ‘persona’, namely an assumed appearance marked by pretence. This understanding of *prosopon* could easily lead to Sabellianism where God would simply be seen as three different modes of ‘appearance’ and not three real and lasting modes of existence. In Greek thought, for example, the notion *prosopon* lacked any ontological content since true existence was identified with unity of commonality (ξυνός λόγος, namely ‘common reason’)²⁹ and therefore did not allow for any form of multiplicity. To be sure, multiplicity was regarded as a movement towards non-being since the whole point to life was to forego particularity and allow the soul to be integrated into the united world of ‘ideas’ that lived forever. In other words, the notion of person was ontologically insignificant when compared to the harmonious oneness of all existent beings.³⁰ In reworking both categories of *hypostasis* and *prosopon*, St Basil was able to express, in a most adequate way, the uniqueness of the three Persons of the Trinity whilst still maintaining their inseparable communion or unity. In this way, the concrete existence of each of the Persons of the holy Trinity was affirmed (in that they were now seen in terms of hypostases) yet their communion and relationship

was also acknowledged (they were persons, namely, relational beings). Expressed in terms of persons, Christian theology now had an appropriate language to express the three, as real ontological beings (that is, hypostases) in communion with one another. Furthermore, the identification of the term *prosopon* with hypostasis would henceforth protect the Trinity from Sabellianism [in that the three Persons were not simply three modes that the one God appeared but three distinct and concrete modes of existence] and tritheism [in that the three hypostases were in permanent communion and shared the one divine essence].

The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity

God the Father Almighty

In further expounding upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity, St Basil taught that the Father is the point of ‘origin [ἀρχή]’, ‘cause [αἰτία]’, ‘life-giving source [πηγή]’ and ‘root [ρίζα]’ of the Son and Spirit. This idea was indeed foundational for St Basil’s exposition of the Trinitarian mystery and is therefore a theme found throughout all his writings. Reflecting on the Father in his *Homily on Faith*, he stated that the Father is not only the source of the Godhead, but also of created existence in general:

[the Father is] the origin of all, the cause of being of all beings, the root of all living creatures. It is from him that the Son of God came forth, begotten from the Father, the source of life, the wisdom, the power, the exact image of the invisible God [ἡ πάντων ἀρχή, ἡ αἰτία τοῦ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσιν, ἡ ρίζα τῶν ζώντων. Ὅθεν προήλθεν ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, ἡ σοφία, ἡ δύναμις, ἡ εἰκὼν ἡ ἀπαράλλακτος τοῦ ἀοράτου Θεοῦ, ὁ ἐκ Πατρὸς γεννηθεὶς Υἱός].³¹

A distinct ordering and differentiation is clearly seen within the Trinity; namely, a primacy belonging to the Father, who as *primal cause* of the Son’s generation and the Holy Spirit’s procession is the ground of unity and *koinonia* within the immanent Trinity. The use of such expressions was, for St Basil, not only a defence against charges of polytheism directed towards him, but also a safeguard from strict Judaic monotheism.³²

This is precisely what is meant by the expression, ‘the *monarchy* of the Father’ within the inner life of the Holy Trinity – namely, that the Father, as the sole principle of the Son’s timeless generation and the Holy Spirit’s procession, is the exclusive source of the divine essence, which the Son and Holy Spirit equally share and possess.³³ St Basil’s conviction regarding the monarchy of the Father was based on the interpretation of the words of Jesus that ‘that the Father is greater than I’ (Jn 14:28) which was interpreted to be a reference to the Father’s ‘unoriginated’ hypostatic quality; and not to any greater moral or functional importance of the Father in relation to the Son and Spirit.³⁴ In other words, the Father was considered to be greater not because his essence was superior or for the reason that He transmitted it to the other two Persons, but because He was the sole principle/cause of the Godhead – however, one who always personally shared his incomprehensible divinity with his Son and Spirit. The teaching of the ‘monarchy of the Father’ was consistently employed by the fathers throughout the fourth century to counter those who would accuse them of tritheism (belief in three gods). Quite succinctly, St Basil wrote: ‘God is one, because the Father is one.’³⁵ Clearly, for St Basil, the Holy Trinity is a unity, not only because there is a unity of substance, but because of the *monarchia* of the Father, who is himself one of the Trinity and source of the Trinity.

Accordingly, the term, ‘Father’ for God was, according to the Cappadocian conceptualisation in general, a hypostatic property which had no reference to God’s essence and therefore did not preclude the Son from having the fullness of the same essence as God. In this way all three divine Persons are divine and co-eternal since they share the same essence, but only the Father is un-originate. However, as ‘uncaused’ hypostasis, the Father has always been with his divine Word and Spirit who themselves are distinct hypostases within the Godhead – not mere relations of the transcendent nature of God – yet co-eternal and co-equal. Indeed, in this understanding, it is precisely the ontological personal priority of the Father, which also gives *koinonia* its primordial character since divine fatherhood necessarily implied a relationship [*schesis*]³⁶ – in the case of God the Father, a *schesis* with his Son and Spirit, without whom fatherhood

would be logically inconceivable. That is to say, the Father can never be perceived as being alone in his divinity as this would necessarily imply that He was not always 'father' but *became* so, which would be unacceptable in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. However, within this *schesis* there is a distinct *taxis* which means that everything began with the Father and will end with him as well (cf. Rom 11:36: 'for from him and through him and to him are all things' and 1Cor 15:24).³⁷

The eternally begotten Son of God

St Basil's teaching on the Son of God was pre-eminently concerned with explaining Christ's intimate and permanent unity with his heavenly Father.³⁸ To this end, much of his writings, even though not dealing exclusively with Christological issues in a systematic way, do, nonetheless, reveal St Basil's theological vision of Jesus Christ as one equal in honour [ὁμότιμος] to, and of one essence [ὁμοούσιος] with, the Father. In further reflecting on the content of his teaching on the Son of God, one notes that St Basil usually began by refuting heterodox ideas and only then proceeded to formulate what he believed to be the teaching as expressed within the life of the Church.³⁹ Accordingly, in contradistinction to the challengers of the apostolic tradition who, as we saw, claimed that the Son of God was of a different essence to that of the Father, St Basil taught that the eternally 'begotten' Son of God, was in no way different from the 'unbegotten' Father – namely, that He was not a *ποίημα* [thing made] nor a *γέννημα* [offspring]⁴⁰ but of *one* and the *same essence* with the Father and therefore equally divine. Furthermore, Christ was not simply a mode by which God 'appeared' but was a distinct hypostasis, without this resulting in polytheism since He was in permanent *koinonia* with the Father and Spirit.

The beauty of St Basil's approach, one highly relevant to contemporary theology of all Christian persuasions, is that the case for the divinity of Christ, and indeed the Spirit, is presented in such a way that his main thesis is always substantiated with scriptural texts. One such example from *Contra Eunomium*, would suffice to demonstrate his scriptural method:

The image [see 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15] has been seen and is the begotten Son and the resplendence of the glory of God [see Heb 1:3], and wisdom [see 1Cor 1:24, 30], and power [see 1Cor 1:24], and justice of God [see 1Cor 1:30]. He is an image not as a possession or as a tendency but as a living and active hypostasis and as the resplendence of the glory of God. Therefore, He wholly shows in himself the Father [see Jn 14:9]; He shines forth from the whole glory of him.⁴¹

For St Basil, Jesus Christ, the begotten Son of God, possesses essentially the same divinity as that of God, his Father and cannot therefore be considered radically different from the Father as was asserted by Eunomius. In this way, the Son of God, according to St Basil, is eternal, perfect and not an offspring or a creature of God brought into existence in time. Not only is the Son of God of the same essence as God his Father, but He is also a distinct divine hypostasis of the Trinitarian Godhead, however one permanently in communion with his Father. Indeed, as we shall now see, it was this permanent fellowship of the Father and the Son that led the Church to appropriate into its vocabulary certain philosophical terms in order to preserve this saving truth. One such term was *homoousios* and it is to St Basil's understanding of this highly technical term that we now turn.

The term *homoousios*, for St Basil, was one which basically affirmed the full and absolute deity of Christ.⁴² In this way, all the properties and activities proper to God the Father could equally be attributed to the Son of God as well. And so, for example, if the Father were to be contemplated as light, then the Son of God could also be confessed to be 'light from light.' The term, for St Basil, also became the criterion for true belief safeguarded the faith against Sabellianism since one undifferentiated reality cannot be said to be *homoousios* within itself.⁴³ Therefore, any reference to the Son as being 'like' the Father was rejected. In Letter 52, an extensive explanation of the term is given:

Because even at that time there were those who asserted the Son to have been brought into being out of the non-existent, the term *homoousios* was adopted, to remove this impiety. For the union [συνάφεια] of the Son with the Father is without time and without interval [ἄχρονος γὰρ καὶ ἀδιάστατος]. The preceding words show this to have been the intended meaning. For after saying that the Son was light from light, and begotten, not made, of the essence of the Father, they went on to add the *homoousion*, thereby

showing that whatever idea of light any one would attribute in the case of the Father will equally apply to the Son. For true light in relation to true light, according to the actual sense of light, will have no variation. Since then the Father is light without beginning, and the Son begotten light, but each of them light, they rightly declared [them to be] *homoousios* in order to set forth the equal dignity of the nature. For things, that have a relation of brotherhood, are not, as some persons have supposed, *homoousios*; but when both the cause and that which derives its natural existence from the cause are of the same nature, then they are called *homoousios*.⁴⁴

At least four important truths can be discerned in this highly important passage. St Basil clearly expresses that the term *homoousios* was first used to affirm both the divinity and the co-eternity of the Son with the Father. Being *homoousios* with the Father meant that the Son of God was unlike any created reality. Furthermore, any implication that the Son of God is less divine than the Father – since one is unbegotten light and the other begotten – is clearly rejected given that both are ‘true light’ with the same intensity. St Basil also emphasised that the term could not be understood – as it did for his opponents – in terms of a common pre-existing genus out of which both the Father and the Son derived. To do this, would not only introduce time to the timeless ones, but ultimately make both Father and Son ‘brothers’ originating from some overarching class or pre-existent principle of being. Related to this, the term in no way introduced any partition or division within the essence of the Godhead, in the sense that realities that were ‘of the one essence’ were derived from some overarching genus. And so the term *homoousios*, as an expression signifying both the divinity and common essence of the Father and the Son, was embraced by St Basil and its meaning further developed.

The Spirit of God

In the same way that St Basil defended the indissoluble unity between the Father and the Son, so too did he insist the same with regards to the Spirit of God. He wrote: ‘in everything the Holy Spirit is indivisibly joined to the Father and the Son.’⁴⁵ It was precisely on the basis of this intimate relationship that the Spirit could be glorified *together with* the Father

and the Son and was, therefore, to be considered equally divine with the other two divine Persons. Accordingly, ‘proceeding out of God’⁴⁶ and ‘intimately related [ῥηκειωμένον] to [Christ] by nature’,⁴⁷ the Spirit, as will be shown, could lead the faithful to God through his Son. Not only was the Spirit’s divinity disclosed in this inseparable relationship to the Father and the Son, but also in what the Spirit did in the economy of salvation. And so, on the basis of the numerous saving titles given to the Spirit in the Scriptures – such as the one who illuminates, liberates, sanctifies and rules, to mention only a few⁴⁸ – St Basil demonstrated that the Holy Spirit has the same divine status as that of the Father and the Son, since the same saving titles which were attributed to the Father and Son also belonged the Spirit. For this reason he would write that the Spirit ‘existed; pre-existed and co-existed with the Father and the Son before the ages.’⁴⁹ Having an active yet distinct role in the world’s salvation, it also followed, for St Basil, that the Spirit also has its own concrete hypostasis. St Basil articulated the Spirit’s concrete role in the world’s salvation in the following manner: the Father was the primordial cause’ of creation, the Son, the ‘creative and redeeming cause’ and the Holy Spirit, the ‘perfecting cause’.⁵⁰

Therefore, contrary to what is often stated today regarding St Basil’s reticence to identify explicitly the Spirit as ‘God’ – since he did not explicitly state that the Holy Spirit is ὁμοούσιος with the Father – we will see that his treatise, *On the Holy Spirit* staunchly defended both the deity of the Spirit and the fact that it had its own unique and concrete mode of existence with other equally valid expressions and arguments.⁵¹ For St Basil the attribute and actions ascribed to the Spirit in the Scriptures confirm its divine status. Even a cursory study of his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* would clearly show the divinity of the Holy Spirit. St Basil’s conception of the Holy Spirit, for example is seen in the following:

[the Spirit is] boundless in power, of unlimited greatness, generous in goodness, whom time cannot measure... He perfects all other things, and himself lacks nothing; He gives life to all things, and never depleted... is always complete, self-established and present everywhere. He is the source of sanctification, spiritual light.⁵²

It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit, according to St Basil, was to be numbered *with* the Father and the Son and not subordinated to them. That St Basil clearly believed in the deity of the Holy Spirit can also easily be discerned, for example, in his conviction that salvation through Baptism led to a knowledge, profession and worship of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And for St Basil, the Holy Spirit's activity in the world from the very beginning of creation, its presence in the life of Jesus and in the building of the Church was conclusive evidence of its divinity. Lastly, to refer to the Spirit as uncreated was, in fact, an affirmation that its *ousia* is divine, namely, of the same essence with the Father's and the Son's, since there was a definitive demarcation, for St Basil, between the uncreated and created realities.

Having given a more broad picture of St Basil's arguments on the divinity of the Holy Spirit, it remains now to look briefly at a few key texts from his celebrated treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. For St Basil, the divine status of the Spirit can clearly be seen in the fact that the Spirit remains in permanent communion with the Father and the Son. Indeed, much of his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* is concerned with reflecting upon the nature of the Holy Spirit and its relationship with the Father and Son. In light of the scriptural passages used by St Basil, it becomes clear that one of the Spirit's main qualities is to reveal the Father and the Son, an action which can only be carried out by one equal in rank. On this he wrote:

This is not our only proof that the Holy Spirit partakes of the fullness of divinity; the Spirit is described to be *of God*, not in the sense that all things are of God, but because He proceeds from the mouth of the Father... and the Spirit is the living essence and master of sanctification.... He is also called the Spirit of Christ, since He is naturally related to him. That is why Scripture says, 'anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him'... As the Paraclete, He reflects the goodness of the Paraclete [the Father] who sent him, and his own dignity reveals the majesty of whom from whom He proceeded.⁵³

Essentially, the Spirit is the one who reveals that Jesus is Lord – 'no one can say that 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit' (1Cor 12:3)⁵⁴ and in so doing also makes God known as Father. Indeed, knowledge of God [θεογνωστία] is only possible 'from the one Spirit through the one Son to

the one Father.’⁵⁵ It is this idea, namely, the Spirit as one united to the Father in whom God can be known, that captures the essence of St Basil’s argument for the divinity of the Spirit. Namely, since the Spirit bestows the blessed knowledge of God, it too must be equal to, yet distinct from, the Father. Consequently, the fact that the Spirit – as distinct hypostasis and not simply an impersonal power – can communicate to the world knowledge of the Father and the Son was, for St Basil, due to the fact that the Holy Spirit is intimately united with the Father and Son.⁵⁶

Having reflected on the Spirit, St Basil turned his attention to its role in salvation. Indeed, St Basil’s conviction of the Spirit’s equal ranking with the Father and the Son is best understood from within this soteriological context. Namely, it was the Spirit’s role in the economy of salvation that formed, for St Basil, the basis of his conviction that it could not be a mere ‘created being’ or even an intermediary between the uncreated and created realms. More specifically, St Basil expounded on the Spirit’s role in salvation by considering both the numerous titles attributed to the Spirit in the Scriptures – which was, for St Basil, conclusive evidence that the Spirit was divine – and its role more broadly in the Christian life. Undeniably, a study of the titles attributed the divinity of the Spirit was a clear indication, for St Basil, of the Spirit’s divine status since the very same titles applied to the Father and Son were also directly pertinent to the Spirit. For example, St Basil clearly noted:

[the Spirit] is called holy, as the Father is holy and the Son is holy. For creatures, holiness comes from without; for the Spirit holiness fills his very nature. He is not sanctified, but sanctifies. He is called good, as the Father is good... He is called upright – the Lord my God is upright [cf. Ps 92.15] – because He is truth and righteousness personified... The Spirit shares titles held in common by the Father and the Son; He receives these titles due to his natural and intimate relationship with them.⁵⁷

Clearly, the Holy Spirit is intrinsically related to the Father and Son, not only dwelling together with them, but also jointly and salvifically acting in creation since the same titles are shared between all three divine Persons. Moreover, it is by the permanent presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the world that the faithful are able to approach the mystery of God.

More specifically, it is the sacrament of Baptism – which involves a tripartite confession of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that constitutes, for St Basil, the beginning of salvation, a process by which a person is led both to the knowledge of truth and moral integrity. Accordingly, omitting the Spirit in the baptismal confession would render salvation impossible and thus result in being ‘farther away from salvation than when we first believed.’⁵⁸ If Baptism – which included a confession in the Holy Spirit together with the Father and Son – marked the beginning of salvation, then vision of the Father expressed its ultimate aim. Yet, such a vision was only possible through the Son and Spirit. On this, St Basil wrote:

If we are illumined by divine power, and fix our eyes on the beauty of the image of the invisible God, and through the image are led up to the indescribable beauty of its source, it is because we have been inseparably joined to the Spirit of knowledge.⁵⁹

The possibility of beholding God in the first place was primarily a gift bestowed by God, since such illumination was made possible by ‘divine power.’ More specifically, the gift was none other than Jesus Christ, the ‘image’ of the Father. Yet, and this is extremely important in confirming the Spirit’s divine status, this was made possible because of the Spirit, who being light shed light on the image enabling the faithful to behold ‘the indescribable beauty of the source.’ As a result, the divinity of the Spirit, for St Basil, was fundamentally seen in the fact that it was this Spirit who grants knowledge of the Father through the Son by revealing the glory of God’s only begotten Son in itself. And so, the Father becomes known through his Image, by the union of the faithful with the Holy Spirit. Consequently, for St Basil, it was the Spirit’s activity in salvation that formed the fundamental basis of its divine status.

Concluding Remarks

In response to the various challenges of the day, St Basil was able to articulate a clear vision of the Trinitarian Godhead giving expression to the scriptural truth about God aided by his extensive knowledge of the ancient Greek classical culture and learning of his time. Indeed, it became apparent

that his achievement lay in his remarkable ability to ennoble the culture of the day with the Christian message without in any way compromising the latter. Yet, to view the significance of his Trinitarian teachings solely in terms of its linguistic achievements was shown to miss the point entirely, since his artful and lucid presentation of both the unity and uniqueness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – expressed in terms of *ousia*, *hypostasis* and *prosopon*, terms borrowed from the language of the ancient Greek culture of his time – was primarily concerned with the world’s ability to come to know the saving truth about God as presented in the Christian Scriptures in order to be saved by this. This explains why so much of his writings are concerned with how one is practically able to come to know God. Fundamentally, for St Basil, knowledge of God thus began with God’s self-revelation: it is the Son who perfectly makes the Father known; and yet it is the Holy Spirit who reveals the Son. For this to happen, however, the Son and Spirit have to be equally divine with the Father since it was they who bestowed upon the faithful the perfect knowledge of God. Or put another way, precisely because the Word and the Spirit of God are consubstantial with the Father’s essence is salvation possible.

In spite of this, for St Basil, not only was divine knowledge a gift initiated by God, but was one that at the same time required a response. Indeed, this explains why his writings are permeated with the theme of purification, namely the requirement of the faithful to be ‘pure in heart’ since only such people can come to know and see God. Only after having first been cleansed, could a person, according to St Basil, experience the saving action of God.⁶⁰ Clearly, we were able to illustrate that, for St Basil, the dialectic between divinely initiated gift and human response was evident throughout his entire corpus. Indeed, the fact that one could be led to the Father by the Holy Spirit – since no one can ‘see the Father without the Spirit’⁶¹ – was basically the scriptural affirmation expressed by St Paul in his Corinthian correspondence, namely that ‘these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God’ (1Cor 2.10). St Basil saw the Spirit as the light by which humanity was able to behold the Image. Consequently, it can clearly be stated that two motions are discerned within St Basil’s vision

of the Trinitarian mystery: a downward one initiated by the Father who becomes known through his Son in the Holy Spirit and an ascending motion by which the faithful come to know God and therefore be saved in being led by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and in him ascend to the Father and the eternal blessedness that such an experience entails.

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NOTES:

- ¹ Far from being a merely speculative or theoretical proposition about God, the Church's faith in the Holy Trinity has profound soteriological consequences – both for humanity and the world at large – and is therefore highly relevant to the way Christians live their life. It sheds light, for example, on the human person; since all human beings are created in the image and according to the likeness of the Trinitarian persons, humanity's true purpose and fulfilment in life is ultimately found in God, its prototype.
- ² According to the Cappadocian fathers in general, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, based on the teaching of St Athanasius, was repeated and further reflected upon in later centuries, especially by saints John of Damascus, Photius, Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas to name a few. Furthermore, it entered the liturgical life and worship of the Church as can be seen, for example in the Doxastion of Pentecost: 'Come all you people! Let us adore the Three-Personal Godhead, the Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit. For before

all the time the Father gave birth to the Son, co-eternal and co-enthroned with Himself. And the Holy Spirit was in the Father, glorified in the Son. Adoring One Power, One Essence, One Divinity, let us cry: O Holy God who made all things by Son through the cooperation of the Holy Spirit! O Holy Mighty through whom we know the Father and through whom the Holy Spirit comes into the world! O Holy Immortal, the Spirit, the Comforter, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son! O Most Holy Trinity! Glory to You!

- ³ *Ousia*, for example was a term which appeared in Aristotle's works and had two meanings: ἡ πρώτη οὐσία [the first essence] which signified an individual being in itself and ἡ δευτέρα οὐσία [the second essence] which pointed to the basic structure of an entity. Aristotle, for example, wrote: 'it follows then that the *ousia* has two senses: firstly, the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and secondly, that which, being a 'this' is also separable – and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing.' *Metaphysics*, book 5, chapter 8, cited in the *Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited with an introduction by Richard McKeon (USA: Random House, Inc. 1941), 761. Theology in general used this term before it came to be clearly defined in a general sense without specifying it as first or second.
- ⁴ Hypostasis was term meaning concrete individual existence which subsequently came to be identified with πρόσωπον/person]
- ⁵ Gregory the Theologian, *Oration 43.25*, *Greek Fathers of the Church* [in Greek], vol. 6, 174.
- ⁶ It has to be noted that these heresies were combated by St Basil even in less 'doctrinal' works, like his Homilies in the *Hexaemeron* 9.6, where he first inferred from the biblical texts the reality of the Trinity and then explicitly referred to the coessentiality of the persons.
- ⁷ Written ca 377AD as a letter to Amphilochius of Iconium.
- ⁸ Cf. *On the Holy Spirit* 1.4; English text used, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1980). Indeed, much of this treatise deals with the interchangeability of prepositions with reference to the three Persons. In this way, he was able to justify his preferred doxology. Whereas the Eunomians believed that specific prepositions had to be used when referring to Father, Son and Holy Spirit respectively, St Basil argued, based on the Scriptures, that there were no such laws since the Bible uses different prepositions to depict the intra-Trinitarian relations.
- ⁹ Cf. *On the Holy Spirit* 25.59. Furthermore, this form of the doxology also distinguished each Person.

- ¹⁰ For St Basil, even though God is personally known, his essence will forever transcend humanity's finite conceptual powers of understanding. In the first book of his work entitled *Contra Eunomium*, he noted: 'that which can be known of God is what God has revealed to all people.' *Contra Eunomium*, 1.14. In *Letter 234* he wrote more explicitly: 'we know the greatness of God, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence over us and the justness of his judgments; but not his essence... We know our God from his operations [ἐκ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν], but do not undertake to approach near his essence. His operations come down to us, but his essence remains beyond our reach [αἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐνεργεῖται αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος].' *Letter 234*, 1, trans. Ray J. Deferreri, *St Basil, the Letters III*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 372. To know the essence of God, for St Basil, would amount essentially to becoming God by nature. Rather, God is known κατ' ἐπίνοια, namely by a process of reflection whereby distinct qualities of something are accurately identified without this in any way implying a knowledge of its essence. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 191-198 and John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, volume 2, part 2 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2004), 282-290.
- ¹¹ For brief biographical details of Eunomius' life, see, John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2004), 268-270. See Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ¹² *Apology 7*, trans. Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987), 40.
- ¹³ Cf. Arius who wrote: 'The Father is other than the Son in essence [κατ' οὐσίαν] because he is without beginning.' *Thalia*, cited in Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55.
- ¹⁴ *Apology 12*.
- ¹⁵ In teaching that the Son came into existence from the will of God, Eunomius was simply arguing that the essence of the Son was not derived from the essence of the Father and was therefore radically different.
- ¹⁶ During the lifetime of St Basil, Sabellianism was mainly represented by Marcellus of Ancyra. For an insightful study of his thought, see Joseph T. Lienhard, *Contra Marcellum: Marcellus of Ancyra and Fourth Century Theology* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

- ¹⁷ Letter 69.2. See St Basil, *Letters*, volume 1 (1-185), in *The Fathers of the Church*, translated by Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P with notes by Roy J. Deferrari (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1977).
- ¹⁸ For more insights into the Pneumatomachian controversy and the Church's response to this, see Michael Hayken, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
- ¹⁹ Cf. 1Cor 12:3.
- ²⁰ Letter 210.
- ²¹ In his insightful work on the Trinitarian theology of St Basil, Hildebrand wrote the following: '[Basil] has borrowed what struck him as true from his Greek philosophical heritage and used the subtlety and sophistication of his own language to probe the depth of Christian mysteries that Greek thought could not have imagined. This synthesis has two salient features: a lasting theological vision and a flexible yet precise set of non-biblical technical terms that guard biblical truth.' Stephen Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 98-9.
- ²² Letter 236.6.
- ²³ Cf. *Contra Eunomium* 1.19: 'According to this, the divinity is one: the unity being considered, clearly, according to the principle of the essence.' Cf. *On the Holy Spirit* 18.44-5: 'the union lies in the communion of the divinity [ἐν τῇ κοινωνίᾳ τῆς θεότητος ἐστὶν ἡ ἔνωσις].'
- ²⁴ Cf. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.7.13-14, who quoting Eunomius wrote: "God", says he [Eunomius] "knows no more of his own essence than we do; nor is this more known to him, and less to us: but whatever we know about the divine essence, that precisely is known to God." [Ὁ Θεός περὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ οὐσίας οὐδὲν πλέον ἡμῶν ἐπίσταται. Οὐδὲ ἐστὶν αὐτῆ μάλλον μὲν ἐκείνῳ, ἥττον δὲ ἡμῖν γινωσκομένη. Ἄλλ' ὅπερ ἂν εἰδείημεν ἡμεῖς περὶ αὐτῆς, τοῦτο πάντως κάκεινος οἶδεν. Ὁ δ' αὖ πάλιν ἐκείνος, τοῦτο εὐρήσεις ἀπαραλλάκτως ἐν ἡμῖν]. *Socrates Ecclesiastical History: The Greek Text with Introduction by W. Bright* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1893), 178, trans. Valesius (London: Geroge Bell and Sons, York Street, Covent Gardens, 1880). 218.
- ²⁵ *On the Holy Spirit*, 17, 41. Elsewhere, he wrote: 'Suppose then that two or more are set together, as for instance Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, and that an inquiry is made into the essence or substance of humanity; no one will give one definition of essence or substance in the case of Paul, a second to that of Silvanus, and a third to that of Timothy; but the same words which have been

employed in setting forth the essence or substance of Paul will apply to the others also.' *To His Brother Gregory, Letter 38.2.*

²⁶ *Letter 38, 4. The Later Christian Fathers*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ A term coined by Heraclitus, *Fragments* 89, 73.

³⁰ According to Zizioulas, the freedom to discover one's own uniqueness became the central theme of Greek tragedies in theatre dealing with conflicts between human freedom and rational necessity. On this issue, he wrote: 'It is precisely in the theatre that man strives to become a 'person', to rise up against the harmonious unity which oppresses him as a rational and moral necessity. It is there that he fights with the gods and with his fate.... it is there too that he constantly learns – according to the stereotyped principle of ancient tragedy – that he can neither escape fate ultimately, nor continue to show *hubris* to the gods without punishment.' John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1985), 32.

³¹ *Homily on Faith*, 2. PG 31.465D. Elsewhere he wrote: 'for the Father being perfect and needless in his being, is the root and source of the Son and the Holy Spirit [ἔστι μὲν γὰρ ὁ Πατήρ, τέλειον ἔχων τὸ εἶναι καὶ ἀνευδεές, ρίζα καὶ πηγὴ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος].' *Homily against Sabellius, Arius and the Anomeans*, 4. PG. 609B. Also, *On the Holy Spirit*: 'When you consider creation I advise you to first think of Him who is the first cause of everything that exists: namely, the Father, and then of the Son, who is the creator, and then the Holy Spirit, the perfecter. So the ministering spirits exist by the will of the Father, are brought into being by the work of the Son, and are perfected by the presence of the Spirit, since angels are perfected by perseverance in holiness.' *On the Holy Spirit*, 16, 38.

³² Cf. St Basil who wrote: 'It is indispensable to clearly understand that, as he who fails to confess the identity of essence (*ousia*) falls into polytheism, so he who refuses to grant the distinction of the *hypostaseis* is carried away into Judaism.' *Epistle* 210.5.

³³ Cf. *Homily on Psalm 32*, 4. PG 29.333ABC.

³⁴ Cf. *Contra Eunomium* 1.25.

³⁵ *Contra Sabellium*, 3. PG 31.605A.

- ³⁶ Cf. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 29 [Theological Oration 3], 16: ‘Father designates neither the substance [οὐσία] nor the activity [ἐνέργεια] but the relationship [σχέσις] and the manner of being [τοῦ πῶς ἔχει] the Father relates to the Son or the Son to the Father.’ *On God and Man*, 71.
- ³⁷ Cf. St Gregory the Theologian who in *Oration* 42.16 wrote: ‘the three have one nature... the ground of unity being the Father [ἐνωσις δὲ ὁ Πατήρ] out of whom and towards whom the subsequent Persons are considered.’ [Translation my own].
- ³⁸ Cf. *On the Holy Spirit* 6.13-14.
- ³⁹ Cf. S. Hilderbrand, *The Trinitarian Theology*, 179 who noted: ‘Basil uses the same rhetorical forms in *On the Holy Spirit* that he did in *Against Eunomius*, viz., contradiction (*antirrhesis*) or refutation (*anaskeue*) and *thesis*.’
- ⁴⁰ Cf. *Contra Eunomium* 2.1, PG 29.573A: ‘Καὶ εἰς Υἱὸς Μονογενῆς γὰρ, περὶ οὐ ἐνήν τὰς πῶν ἁγίων φωνάς παραθέμενον, δι’ ὧν Υἱὸν καὶ γέννημα καὶ ποιήμα καταγγέλουσι.’
- ⁴¹ *Contra Eunomium* 2.17 cited in S. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 169. Mt 11:27: ‘All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’; Jn 14:9: ‘Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?’; Jn 17:26: ‘I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.’; Col 1:15: ‘He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.’; Heb 1:3: ‘He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.’ and Phil 2:6: ‘who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.’
- ⁴² In many of his letter St Basil affirmed that he would remain faithful to the teaching of Nicaea which expressed the *homoousion*. For example *Letter* 140.2: ‘Now I accept no newer creed written for me by other men, nor do I venture to propound the outcome of my own intelligence, lest I make the words of true religion merely human words; but what I have been taught by the holy Fathers, that I announce to all who question me. In my Church the creed written by the holy Fathers in synod at Nicæa is in use. I believe that it is also repeated among you; but I do not refuse to write its exact terms in my letter, lest I be accused of taking too little trouble. It is as follows: This is our faith. But no definition was given about the Holy Spirit, the Pneumatomachi not having at that date appeared. No mention was therefore made of the need of anathematizing those

who say that the Holy Spirit is of a created and ministerial nature. For nothing in the divine and blessed Trinity is created.'

⁴³ Cf. Epistle 52.3: 'It [*homoousios*] does away with identity of hypostases and introduces a perfect notion of the persons for nothing is *homoousios* with itself, but one with another.'

⁴⁴ *Letter* 52.2. It has to be said that even when St Basil described the Son as 'similar according to essence [*ὅμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν*]', he did so with the addition of the adverb '*ἀπαράλλακτως*' [unalterably]; for St Basil the phrase *ὅμοιος κατ' οὐσίαν ἀπαράλλακτως* was synonymous with the *homoousios*. Cf. *Letter* 9.3: 'If I must give my own view, it is this. The phrase '*like in essence*,' if it is read with the addition '*without any difference*,' I accept as conveying the same sense as the *homoousion* in accordance with the sound meaning of the *homoousion*. Being of this mind the Fathers at Nicaea spoke of the Only-begotten as '*Light of Light*,' '*Very God of very God*,' and so on, and then consistently added the *homoousion*. It is impossible for any one to entertain the idea of variableness of light in relation to light, of truth in relation to truth, nor of the essence of the Only begotten in relation to that of the Father. If, then, the phrase is accepted in this sense, I have no objection to it. But if any one cuts off the qualification '*without any difference*' from the word '*like*,' as was done at Constantinople, then I regard the phrase with suspicion, as derogatory to the dignity of the Only-begotten. We are frequently accustomed to entertain the idea of '*likeness*' in the case of indistinct resemblances, coming anything but close to the originals. I am myself for the *homoousion* as being less open to improper interpretation.'

⁴⁵ *On the Holy Spirit* 16.37.

⁴⁶ *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cf. esp. *On the Holy Spirit* 9.22, 21.52 which are Scriptural testimonies concerning the divinity of the Spirit.

⁴⁹ *On the Holy Spirit* 19.49.

⁵⁰ *Contra Eunomium* 3.4 Cf. also 16:38: 'I advise you to think first of Him who is the first cause of everything that exists, namely the Father and then of the Son, who is the creator, and then the Holy Spirit, the perfecter.' More broadly, *On the Holy Spirit* 16.37-40.

⁵¹ Cf. *On the Holy Spirit* 16.37; 19.49 and 21.52. Behr noted that St Gregory the Theologian, ascribed this hesitancy to the particular hostile environment in which St Basil's found himself; namely, his opponents who would have had him banished the very moment he stated that the Spirit was God. Cf. John

Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, part 2, Formation of Christian Formation, volume 2 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2004), 314.

⁵² *On the Holy Spirit* 9.22.

⁵³ *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46.

⁵⁴ *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38.

⁵⁵ *On the Holy Spirit* 18.47.

⁵⁶ In further reflecting upon the divine nature of the Holy Spirit, St Basil argued that its divinity could also be established when compared to the angelic realm. *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38: ‘The communion of the Spirit with the Father and the Son may be understood by considering the creation of the angels. The pure, spiritual and transcendent powers are called holy, because they have received holiness from the grace of the Holy Spirit.’ From this it is clear that the Holy Spirit is responsible for bestowing holiness upon the angelic realm.

⁵⁷ *On the Holy Spirit* 19.48.

⁵⁸ *On the Holy Spirit* 10.26 The phrase represents an ironical paraphrase of Rom 13.11: ‘salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.’

⁵⁹ *On the Holy Spirit* 18.47.

⁶⁰ One such example of this is the following: ‘Like the sun, He [the Paraclete] will show you in himself the Image of the invisible and with purified eyes you will see in this blessed image the unspeakable beauty of its prototype.’ *On the Holy Spirit* 9.23.

⁶¹ *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38.

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