

“WE BELIEVE”
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WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“We bow...before the Holy Spirit”
 Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395)

In his masterful study of the unfolding of early Christian thought, the late Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006) notes that the “climax of the doctrinal development of the early church was the dogma of the Trinity.”¹ And the textual expression of that climax is undoubtedly the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that was issued at the Council of Constantinople (381) to resolve once and for all the Arian crisis, which had dominated theological discussions throughout the fourth century. Through the teaching of Arius (260/280–336), an elder of the church at Alexandria in Egypt, the church in the Roman Empire was plunged into a lengthy, bitter controversy about the deity of Christ.² Arius claimed that only the Father was truly God. As he wrote in a letter to Alexander (d.328), the bishop of Alexandria, God the Father alone, “the cause of all, is without beginning.” The Son was created by the Father as “an immutable and unchangeable perfect creature,” and thus is “not everlasting or co-everlasting with the Father.”³ In Arius’s words: “the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning.”⁴ For Arius there was a time when the Son did not exist, a time when it is inappropriate to call God “Father.” As for the Holy Spirit, by Arius’s reckoning, he was even less divine than the Son, for he was the first of the creatures made by the Son.

¹ *The Christian Tradition: Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 172.

² For studies of this controversy, see especially Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 1:172–225; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God. The Arian Controversy 318–381* (1988 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); John Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology, Vol. 2: The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2004), 2 vols. On Arius, see Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 1:130–49. For a succinct statement of the philosophical and theological roots of Arianism, see Roldanus, *Church in the Age of Constantine*, 74–7.

³ *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria*, trans. William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 31–2.

⁴ Arius, *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia*, trans. Rusch, *Trinitarian Controversy*, 29–30.

A council called at Nicaea, near Constantinople, sought to resolve the situation with a creedal statement that unequivocally declared that the Lord Jesus Christ is “true God of true God, begotten not made, of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father.” In other words, the Son is truly God in whatever sense the Father is God. The key phrase in this creed is undoubtedly the statement that the Son is “of one being (*homoousios*) with the Father.” Here, the full deity of the Son is asserted, the term *homoousios* emphasising the fact that the Son shares the very being of Father. Whatever belongs to and characterises God the Father belongs to and characterises the Son. He is not a creature, contrary to the view of Arius and his fellow Arians. However, nothing was said in the original Nicene Creed about the Holy Spirit beyond the statement “[We believe] in the Holy Spirit.”⁵

In spite of what those who drafted this creed hoped, the Nicene Creed did not end the controversy begun by Arius’ teaching. Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. c.342), a worldly-wise ecclesiastical politician and supporter of Arius, had the ear of the professing Christian emperor, Constantine (c.272–337). Eusebius convinced Constantine that the condemnation of Arianism was far too harsh, and so various Arian leaders and even Arius were brought back into favour and leading enthusiasts for Nicaea and its creed sent packing. Among the latter was the great defender of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the fourth century, Athanasius of Alexandria (c.297–373).

Athanasius contra mundum

Alexander of Alexandria had died in 328, and was succeeded by Athanasius as bishop of Alexandria.⁶ Probably a native Egyptian—he was mocked, for example, as “the black dwarf”—he was a theological genius. Until his death in 373 he was the most formidable opponent of Arianism in the Roman Empire. Yet, this defence was not without much personal suffering. No less than five times he was exiled from Alexandria, four of them definitely for his commitment to the theology of the Nicene Creed. One of his exiles was at the hands of the emperor Julian the Apostate (332–63), who disliked Athanasius simply because of the latter’s commitment to Christianity.

⁵ For a translation of the Nicene Creed, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3rd ed.; Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1972), 215–6.

⁶ On the life and thought of Athanasius, see especially Alwyn Petersen, *Athanasius* (Ridgefield, Connecticut/Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1995).

Athanasius' theology is well seen in some letters that he wrote to a friend, Serapion of Thmuis (d. after 362), in 358 and 359, while on the run from persecution by the Arian emperor Constantius II (317–61). From John 16:15—Jesus' statement that “all that belongs to the Father is mine”—and John 17:10—Jesus' words to the Father, “all you have is mine”—Athanasius reasons that the Son shares all of the divine attributes of the Father. “The Father is light,” he writes, “the Son is radiance and true light. The Father is true God; the Son is true God.”⁷ John 16:15, Athanasius further notes, could never have been said by a creature, no matter how highly exalted a being. It is only appropriate from the mouth of one who “one in being with the Father.” Thus Athanasius sums up: “of that which the Father has, there is nothing which does not belong to the Son.” It is thus “impious” to say that “the Son is a creature.”⁸

Arianism, Athanasius rightly saw, also imperilled the heart of the Christian gospel. Since salvation is of God, and God alone, then Christ, the mediator of that salvation, must be God. If Christ were a creature, as Arius claimed, then he could not save us, for a creature—no matter how perfect—cannot save another creature. The entire church owes this “black dwarf” a great debt. His dogged determination to be faithful to his divine Lord led to the slogan *Athanasius contra mundum*, “Athanasius against the world.” Athanasius refused to give way to political pressure and physical force from a succession of Arian emperors, for he rightly believed the faith of Nicaea to be that of the Scriptures.

The letters to Serapion also reveal that the divinity of the Holy Spirit was becoming a topic of theological conflict, for Serapion informed Athanasius that there were individuals in his community who were maintaining that the Holy Spirit is a creature, albeit of angelic nature.⁹ In his response, Athanasius insisted that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, cannot be a creature. The belief that the Spirit is a creature blasphemes the Son since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. It also destroys the Christian concept of God, for it makes the Trinity consist of Creator and creature.¹⁰ Athanasius' defence of the Spirit's divinity in the letters to Serapion appears to have

⁷ *Letter to Serapion* 2.2 [trans. C.R.B. Shapland, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 153].

⁸ *Letter to Serapion* 2.2–3 (trans. Shapland, *Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 153–4).

⁹ *Letter to Serapion* 1.1.

¹⁰ Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 21.

helped him realize implicitly that the creedal formulation of Nicaea needed to be supplemented by a statement about the Spirit. Thus at the Council of Alexandria, held in 362 and over which Athanasius presided, it was declared:

All who desire peace with us [ought]...to anathematize the Arian heresy, to confess the faith that was confessed by the Holy Fathers at Nicaea, and also to anathematize those who say the Holy Spirit is a creature and separate him from the being of Christ. For a true departure from the loathsome heresy of the Arians is this: [a refusal] to divide the Holy Trinity, or to say that any member of it is a creature. For those who pretend to profess the faith confessed at Nicaea, but who dare to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, do nothing more than deny the Arian heresy in words, while they hold it fast in thought.¹¹

At the death of Athanasius in 373, the mantle of his struggle for a biblical understanding of the Trinity passed to the Cappadocian Basil of Caesarea (c.329–79), whom Athanasius once described as “the pride of the Church.”¹²

The Creed: a sign of Hellenization?

In many respects, Basil’s main contribution to the history of dogma is his pneumatological thought.¹³ Born into a long-standing Christian family—both sets of grandparents suffered during the brutal persecution of Diocletian (c.245–c.312)—Basil’s conversion in 356 had come in the context of the early monastic movement that introduced him to an environment in which there was a distinct interest in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Basil’s experience of the Spirit in the monastic life was definitely a key factor in a growing concern he had with the question of the nature and person of the Holy Spirit. This personal interest coincided with a rapid increase in the 360s and 370s of ontological questions about the being of the Spirit, of which Athanasius’s dispute with certain individuals in Thmuis in the late 350s appears to have been a forerunner.

¹¹ Athanasius, *Tome to the Antiochenes* 3, author’s translation.

¹² Athanasius, *Letter to Palladius*, author’s translation.

¹³ For an excellent study of Basil’s life and thought, see Paul Jonathan Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), 133–55. A more recent work by Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998) needs to be used with care. For a complete bibliography of works on Basil, see Paul Jonathan Fedwick, *Bibliotheca Basiliana Universalis. A Study of the Manuscript Tradition, Translations and Editions of the Works of Basil of Caesarea*. Vol. V: *Studies of the Basil of Caesarea and His World: An Annotated Bio-Bibliography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

Those who opposed an expansion of the Nicene Creed to include a confession of the Spirit's deity during this era would become known as Pneumatomachi, "fighters against the Spirit," a word coinage based on Acts 5:39.

Basil's classic study of the deity of the Holy Spirit played a pivotal role in shaping the third article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, but only slowly did he concede that an expansion of the Nicene Creed was necessary so as to include a statement about the deity of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, though, he could note in a letter written in 376 or 377 to Epiphanius (c.315–403), the bishop of Salamis: "We are unable to add anything to the Nicene creed, not even the smallest addition, except the glorification of the Holy Spirit, because our fathers made mention of this part [of the faith] cursorily, since at that time no controversial question concerning it had yet arisen."¹⁴ In the end this need to expand the article about the Holy Spirit involved the drafting of a new creedal statement at the Council of Constantinople, which was and still is a major landmark in Christian theological reflection.¹⁵

Although some historians have argued that this fourth-century creedal statement and the earlier one at Nicaea represents the apex of the Hellenization of the church's teaching, in which fourth-century Christianity traded the vitality of the New Testament church's experience of God for a cold, abstract philosophical formula, nothing could be further from the truth.¹⁶ The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed helped to sum up a long process of reflection that had its origins in the Christian communities of the first century. The New Testament itself provides clear warrant for the direction that theological reflection upon the nature of God took in fourth-century Christian orthodoxy. As Douglas Ottati, an American professor of theology once put it, "Trinitarian theology continues a biblically initiated exploration."¹⁷ Or, in the words of the early twentieth-century theologian, the American Presbyterian Benjamin B. Warfield: the "doctrine of the

¹⁴ Letter 258.2. Basil's book is *On the Holy Spirit*, published in 375. For a contemporary translation, see Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

¹⁵ For the text of this creed, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (2nd ed.; London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1960), 297–8. See also Johannes Roldanus, *The Church in the Age of Constantine: The theological challenges* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire/New York: Routledge, 2006), 123–6.

¹⁶ Stephen M. Hildebrand identifies Edwin Hatch and Adolf von Harnack as two of the scholars who argued along these lines. See his *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁷ "Being trinitarian: The shape of saving faith", *The Christian Century*, 112, No. 32 (November 8, 1995), 1045.

Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view.”¹⁸

This biblical foundation of the creed is especially true of the third article that deals with the Holy Spirit. Technical theological terminology as found in the use of the term “one in being” (*homoousios*) about the Son is eschewed in favour of simpler biblical tones.¹⁹ In the words of the Creed, the Holy Spirit in whom the Church believes is:

The Lord and the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

The statement makes five distinct affirmations about the Holy Spirit:

1. He is Lord (*kyrios*)
2. He is the Giver of Life
3. He proceeds from the Father [and the Son]
4. Together with the Father and the Son he is to be worshipped and glorified
5. And he spoke through the prophets.

Let us look at each of these affirmations in turn, seeking to display the biblical roots of what is being affirmed.

The Lord

The term *kyrios*, which here is translated “Lord” had a range of meaning in early Christian Greek. It could mean simply an “owner,” and is probably used this way in a passage like Matthew 20:8, where it is used to describe “the owner of the vineyard.” It can identify a human “master” of slaves, as in passages in the household tables of Ephesians, Colossians, Titus and 1 Peter.²⁰ And then it is the word used to translate the Hebrew name of God, YHWH, in the Greek Old

¹⁸ “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in his *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1952), 22.

¹⁹ Joseph D. Small, “The Spirit and the Creed” in his ed., *Fire and Wind: The Holy Spirit in the Church Today* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2002), 9.

²⁰ See, e.g. Ephesians 6:5, 9; Colossians 3:22; 4:1; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18.

Testament, and as such is a divine title.²¹ In the New Testament, this word is particularly used to describe the Son, as in the phrase “the Lord Jesus Christ,” and as such is an indicator of Jesus’ divinity. Basil of Caesarea, in his *On the Holy Spirit* (375), noted above, highlights the fact that the New Testament’s description of the Holy Spirit as *kyrios*, found in 2 Corinthians 3:17–18,²² means that the Holy Spirit shares a divine title properly ascribed only to the Father and the Son. For Basil, there are only two types of beings in the universe: God, who is *kyrios*, and everything else, which are God’s creatures and, by extension, his servants. If the Spirit is called *kyrios*, as the verses in 2 Corinthians 3 reveal, then he must be as divine as the Father and the Son.²³

“The Giver of life”

The opening verses of the Old Testament, Genesis 1:1–2, indicate that the Spirit was present at and involved in God’s creation of this world. Other verses in the Old Testament, such as Job 33:4 and Psalm 104:30, denote the Spirit as the One who creates life and sustains all that he has made. In the New Testament, the Spirit is also identified as One who resurrects the dead.²⁴ But the focus here in the Creed may well be more on the idea of the Holy Spirit as the author of spiritual life, the One who regenerates those who put their faith in Christ, and then sustains them as believers.²⁵ Relevant biblical texts in this case would be not only statements like that of Jesus in John 6:63, “it is the Spirit who gives life” and Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:6, “the Spirit gives life,”²⁶ but also passages like 1 Corinthians 12:3, where Paul tells us that confession of Christ as Lord can only truly happen when the Holy Spirit implants such a conviction in the heart and mind of a person.

Or consider Titus 3:3–6, where Paul gives his Christian readers a particularly vivid description of the way both he and his hearers once were: “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving [that is,

²¹ *Early Christian Creeds* (2nd ed.), 341–2.

²² For a contemporary defence that this classical patristic interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3:17 is correct, see Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 311–14.

²³ *On the Holy Spirit* 21.52.

²⁴ Romans 8:11.

²⁵ A. de Halleux, “La Profession de l’Esprit-Saint dans le symbole de Constantinople”, *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 10 (1979), 27; Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, “Das trinitarische Dogma von 381 als Ergebnis verbindlicher Konsensusbildung” in K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg, eds., *Glaubensbekenntnis und Kirchengemeinschaft: Das Modell des Konzils von Konstantinopel (381)* (Freiburg im Breisau: Herder/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 35.

²⁶ See also Galatians 5:25; Romans 8:10.

enslaved to] various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” Totally unable to extricate themselves from this state, it was God alone who enabled them to break free. And one aspect of this saving work is that God saved them “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” While this phrase “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” has been the subject of much debate in the history of the Church, it is probably best understood as that inner cleansing which the Holy Spirit effects when he regenerates and renews the mind and heart of the new convert.²⁷ If the Spirit can make dead sinners alive in Christ, however, he must surely be divine.

“Who proceeds from the Father”

One of the great challenges for the Ancient Church in its enunciation of the doctrine of the Trinity was avoiding the heresy of modalism, which appeared in the early third century, about a hundred years or so before the Arian controversy broke out.²⁸ Modalism, or Sabellianism as it is sometimes known, so named because of a prominent teacher of this error, Sabellius, taught that the differences between the three persons of the Godhead was primarily functional. There is one God who plays three roles, as it were. This view had the benefit of upholding the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but it did so at the dreadful cost of making the biblical witness about the three persons incomprehensible. We are told, for example, in Hebrews 9:14 that Christ “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God.” How can this verse make any sense if the three persons are really only one person playing three roles? But if, as is the case, there are truly Three within the Godhead, then this verse tells us that, at its heart, the crucifixion of Christ is about the Son making propitiation to the Father, placating his wrath with regard to sin, and that Christ did this by the power of the Father’s eternal Holy Spirit. What mysteries of holiness and love lie embedded in this text! But all of this is lost in the modalist schema.

²⁷ See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit. A re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970), 165–70.

²⁸ On modalism, see G.W.H. Lampe, “Christian Theology in the Patristic Period” in Herbert Cunliffe-Jones with Benjamin Drewery, eds., *A History of Christian Doctrine* (1978 ed.; repr. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 53–8; Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church*, trans. John Bowden (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 28–34.

Now, from its the third-century battles with modalism, the Ancient Church learned that it needed to hold fast to the distinction of the three persons within the Godhead. She did so by means of phrases that can be seen in this Creed: the Father differs from the Son and the Spirit in that he is unbegotten. The Son differs from the Father and the Spirit for he is eternally begotten. And the Spirit's distinctiveness is found in his eternal proceeding from the Father. As Harold O.J. Brown, who taught for many years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, rightly notes: "Ultimately this language tells us...that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons" and makes clear that in "the Trinity we are dealing with three distinctive Persons, not merely with modes or appearances of one and the same Person."²⁹

Biblical support for the Spirit's eternal procession was found by authors like Basil of Caesarea in such Scripture texts as John 15:26, 1 Corinthians 2:12, and Psalm 33:6. Basil employed these to argue that the Spirit "proceeds from the mouth of the Father and is not begotten like the Son."³⁰ Basil quickly qualified this image. The terms "breath" and "mouth" must be understood in a manner befitting to God. The comparison of the Spirit with breath does not mean that he is the same as human breath, which quickly dissipates upon exhalation, for the Spirit is a living being with the power to sanctify others. This image well reflects the nature of our knowledge about God. On the one hand, it indicates the intimate relationship of the Father and the Spirit so the Spirit has to be glorified with the Father and the Son. On the other hand, the image reminds us that the Spirit's mode of existence is ineffable, even as the being of the Godhead is beyond human comprehension.

"With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified"

As the Patristic scholar J.N.D. Kelly has put it, this is the "all-important clause."³¹ It is inconceivable that someone who denied the deity of the Spirit could have subscribed to this statement.³² The logic would appear to be this: if it is right and proper that the Spirit be adored and glorified on the same level as the Father and the Son, then he must be fully God.

²⁹ Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1984), 133.

³⁰ *On the Holy Spirit* 18.46, trans. David Anderson, *St Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 73. See also *On the Holy Spirit* 16.38.

³¹ *Early Christian Creeds* (2nd ed.; London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1960), 342.

³² See Adolf-Martin Ritter, *Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 301.

The wording of this statement is clearly indebted to Basil of Caesarea, who in his classic work *On the Holy Spirit* had argued for the co-adoration and conglorification of the Spirit with the Father and the Son. Basil's opponents, the Pneumatomachi, were maintaining that it was proper only to give glory to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit. A specific question had come to Basil from his close friend Amphilochius of Iconium (c.340-395), whom he had mentored, asking whether or not it was also proper in corporate worship to glorify the Father *with* the Son *together with* the Holy Spirit.³³

The core of Basil's book, *On the Holy Spirit* 10-28, was essentially a detailed exposition of much of the biblical testimony about the Spirit's person to demonstrate the deity of the Spirit and thus the rightness of his co-adoration and conglorification. A number of key themes informed Basil's argument. From the presence of the Spirit in the baptismal formula of Matthew 28, he argued that the mention of "Father, Son, and Spirit" in this formula "testifies to their union and fellowship." Thus he went on to state, "The Lord has delivered to us a necessary and saving dogma: the Holy Spirit is to be ranked with the Father."³⁴ Then, from a variety of biblical texts that speak of the Spirit's activities Basil showed how the Spirit "is indivisibly and inseparably joined to the Father and the Son" since he does what only God can do. The Spirit sanctifies the angels, for example, and enables them to remain steadfast in their allegiance to God, something he could not do unless he were divine. The holiness of the angels is not inherent, but results from their communion with One who is innately holy, namely the Spirit.

How can the Seraphim sing, "Holy, holy, holy," without the Spirit teaching them to constantly raise their voices in praise? If all God's angels praise him, and all his host, they do so by cooperating with the Spirit. Do a thousand thousands of angels serve him? Do ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him? They accomplish their proper work by the Spirit's power.³⁵

Basil also pointed to the titles given by Scripture to the Spirit to argue for his deity. For instance, the ascription of the term "Lord" to the Spirit—which has been discussed above—was

³³ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.1, 3.

³⁴ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 10.24, 25, trans. Anderson, *On the Holy Spirit*, 45, 46.

³⁵ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 16.37, 38, trans. Anderson, *On the Holy Spirit*, 60, 64.

indisputable proof of the “excellence of the Spirit’s glory.”³⁶ It is noteworthy that Basil did not explicitly call the Spirit “God” nor did he speak of the Spirit as “one in being” (*homoousios*) with the Father and the Son, although it is very clear that he was committed to both of these truths.³⁷

Then, the Spirit is the One who gives saving knowledge of God, but only God can reveal God. In Basil’s words:

When, by means of the illuminating power, we fix our eyes on the beauty of the invisible image and through that image are led up to the supremely beautiful spectacle of the Archetype, the Spirit of knowledge is inseparably present there [with the Father and the Son]. To those who love the vision of the truth the Spirit supplies in himself the power to behold the image. He does not give the revelation from without, but in himself leads to the knowledge [of the image]. For just as “no one knows the Father except the Son” [Matthew 11:27], so “no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit” [1 Corinthians 12:3]. For it does not say “through the Spirit” but “in the Spirit.” ...And, as it is written, “in your light we shall see light” [Psalm 36:9], that is, in the illumination of the Spirit [we shall see] “the true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world” [John 1:9]. Thus, in himself he makes known the glory of the Only-Begotten, and in himself provides the knowledge of God to the true worshippers. Therefore, the way of the knowledge of God is from the one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father.³⁸

Here Basil is building on such passages as Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 in which the Son is described as the image of the Father, whom Basil calls the “Archetype.” During the course of the Arian controversy, it had become a commonplace to argue that the Son’s being the image of the Father meant that there was a community of nature between the Son and the Father. But knowledge of the image and by extension its Archetype is impossible without the Spirit who reveals the Son—here Basil is drawing upon 1 Corinthians 12:3. Moreover, this knowledge is given by the Spirit “in himself.” Knowledge of God does not come through an intermediary like an angel, but is given by God by/in himself, namely in the Spirit, who must therefore be divine. This text then tells us why the Spirit is inextricably joined to the Father and the Son. His

³⁶ *On the Holy Spirit* 21.52.

³⁷ John Behr, *The Nicene Faith. Volume 2. Part Two: One of the Holy Trinity* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 378.

³⁸ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 18.47, trans. Michael A.G. Haykin. See also *On the Holy Spirit* 26.64 for similar argumentation.

epistemic relationship to the Father and the Son speaks of an ontological union.³⁹ As Basil noted in one of his letters: “Therefore we never divorce the Paraclete from his unity with the Father and the Son; for our mind when it is lit by the Spirit looks up to the Son and in him as in an image beholds the Father.”⁴⁰

“He has spoken through the Prophets”

The Scriptural basis for this final remark is 2 Peter 1:20–21, where the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ This phrase recalls the theology of the prophetic Spirit that was a major feature of second-century Christian thought about the Holy Spirit and that especially sought to refute the rejection of the Old Testament by heretics like Marcion.⁴² But why was it affirmed in this creedal statement? It is noteworthy that Basil could describe the inspiration of the whole Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, as prophetic.⁴³ Undoubtedly he considered the prophetism of the Scriptures a proof of the divinity of the Spirit who inspired them.⁴⁴

The deity of the Holy Spirit

It is quite probable that one of the leading figures behind the composition of this creedal statement was Basil’s younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395), for Gregory had drunk deeply from the well of both Scripture and his brother’s doctrine of the Spirit.⁴⁵ There is, however, one aspect of New Testament pneumatology that is missing from this paragraph on the

³⁹ Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 187, 190–1.

⁴⁰ Basil, *Letter 226.3*, trans. Michael A.G. Haykin. It is because of the Scriptural witness and the reasoning of the Fathers that I find C.F.D. Moule’s statement that “threefoldness is, perhaps, less vital to a Christian conception of God than the eternal twofoldness of Father and Son” completely unsatisfactory [*The Holy Spirit* (1978 ed.; repr. London/New York: Continuum, 2000), 51]. There is much that is good in this book by Moule, but his chapter dealing with the development of Trinitarianism in the post-Apostolic church, of which the above statement is the concluding remark, is not helpful.

⁴¹ Also see Ephesians 3:5; 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

⁴² De Halleux, “Profession de l’Esprit-Saint”, 30–1. For examples of the second-century theology of the prophetic Spirit, see Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 2.9; Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians* 10.4; Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 49; L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 102–3.

⁴³ Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 109–14.

⁴⁴ De Halleux, “Profession de l’Esprit-Saint”, 31.

⁴⁵ See Haykin, *Spirit of God*, 193–201.

Spirit, namely the fact that, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is ever the Spirit of Christ.⁴⁶ This lacuna is probably one of the key impulses behind the development of the *filioque*, that is, the addition to this confession by Latin-speaking Christians in the early Middle Ages that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.”⁴⁷ I personally think that this addition is correct,⁴⁸ which also highlights the fact that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed must be viewed as a *norma normata*, “a rule that is ruled,” not a *norma normans*, “a rule that rules”, as Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians assert when they postulate that this creed along with other ancient creeds, is of absolute authority and infallible. Creeds are not infallible. Like other human formulations the creeds are subordinate to Scripture, the supreme rule of faith and practice. As Bruce Demarest has put it, the creeds “are worthy of honour to the degree that they accord with the teachings of the Word of God.”⁴⁹ On the other hand, this pneumatological statement, like the rest of the creed, is a rule that faithfully reflects the view of God in the New Testament. And as such, it stands as one of the great landmarks of Christian theology.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See, for example, Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 4:6; and those passages that describe Jesus as the giver, or associated with the gift, of the Spirit: John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 14; 20:22; Acts 2:33; Titus 3:6.

⁴⁷ Jenson, “Holy Spirit” in *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:121.

⁴⁸ In this regard, see Dennis Ngien’s fine study, *Apologetic for Filioque in Medieval Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

⁴⁹ Bruce A. Demarest, “The contemporary relevance of Christendom’s creeds”, *Themelios*, 7, no. 2 (January 1982), 15–16.

⁵⁰ Demarest, “Christendom’s creeds”, 15.