

BASIL THE GREAT AGAINST EUNOMIUS

The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

LIFE

- Born of a wealthy family (one of 10 children); his grandmother had ties to Gregory Thaumaturgos
- 345: Met Gregory Nazianzen
- 350-55: Studied in Athens with Gregory, met Julian, the future Emperor
- 356: Was baptized, then toured the monastic settlements in the East
- 364: Ordained priest in Caesarea
- 370: Elected bishop of Caesarea
- Died 1 Jan 379

SURVIVING WORKS

- *De Fide*
- *Adversus Eunomium*, books 1-3 (363-4)
- *De Spiritu Sancto* (374)
- *Commentary on the Hexaemeron* (378-9)
- Over 350 letters
- Several homilies, commentaries on Isaiah and the Psalms, moral and ascetical treatises, and a handbook for young scholars on reading pagan works.

EARLY THEOLOGY (BEFORE 363)

- He sought to be faithful to Nicea in other words
- He had been in sympathy with the views of Basil of Ancyra, successor of Marcellus of Ancyra who had been deposed from his see in 336, following Eustathius's deposition from Antioch in 330.
 - Basil had argued for *homoios kat'ousian akribos aparallaktos* as a translation of *homoousios* that would guard against wrong understandings
 - He argued that unalterably like is one solution.
 - Hanson says that he makes a distinction between *physis*, which could be shared, and *ousia*, which is unique
- Basil argued for one *ousia*, not three; there are three defining characteristics (H699)
 - *Homoousios* may imply two ultimate principles
 - Same *ousia*, but different in order and rank
 - Generation qualifies the *ousia*

AGAINST EUNOMIUS

Adversus Eunomium (PG 29.497-774) in 5 books, the last two added by another author at a later date, with the exception of a part of book 5 on the Spirit (see discussion in Hanson, 687). Written early in his career, probably from 363-4, when he was in his early 30s. It is his first important theological treatise.

BOOK 1

- Section 1
 - Eunomius has introduced the "outside wisdom" which is vain and disturbs "the simple and pure teaching of the divine Spirit" by arguing that the Only-Begotten is not divine.
 - Basil will counter these claims "according to the measure of the science given by the Lord"
 - This teaching can keep one in holiness: brings back from evil; protects those who hold to holiness; give strength to the holy.
 - Eunomius follows Aetius and the refutation of the former will also refute the latter.
 - Heresy leads to impiety, which brings immorality with it.

- Section 6
 - God's *ousia* is unknown; no one name identifies God
 - Ayers shows that in CE 1.6 Basil reflects on the meaning of *epinoia*, which is the operation by which the mind relates to God. The word itself, in Basil's usage, refers to a specific act of knowing: "'the activity of reflecting on and identifying the distinct qualities or properties of something'" (Ayers, 191). This means that knowledge of anything is only the knowledge of how the thing presents itself in qualities or properties. *Epinoia* does not give knowledge of *ousia* but does bring us into a true relationship with that thing (Ayers, 192). This is also commented on by Lossky (Lossky, MT, 33)
 - *Epinoia* is the reflection on the encounter with God
- Section 7
 - In CE 1.7 Basil applies the understanding of *epinoia* to revelation.
 - *Epinoia* is a conceptual knowing, which establishes our interaction with a thing but does not say something inherent about the thing itself. In some contexts, it can refer to a mere intellectual abstraction that has no reality in the thing itself. (See the discussion in Ayers, 192-3).
 - "By *epinoia* we know that there is a unity of *ousia* between Father and Son, although what that essence is remains unknown. At the same time we know the *idiomata* or *idiotetes* of Father and Son as distinct individuals." (Ayers, 194) He summarizes by saying that for Basil the distinction between essence and persons in God is parallel to the distinction between what is unknown and known in God.
 - In turning to God, the human mind is healed and uplifted (Ayers, 196).
 - Knowledge of God and faith are two aspects of the same relationship of the mind to God (see Ayers, 196, who erroneously uses the word "blurs" to refer to Basil's description of the distinction between knowledge and faith). According to Basil—articulating a position dear to the earlier and later tradition—the mind's seeking knowledge of God is an act of disposal to the indwelling presence of God. The stability of this disposal is another word for faith. Faith is only clouded because the instrument, the human person, is clouded by sin. The attitude of faith is essential for the purifying process of the lifting of the human mind into the greater and more complete participation in theology, the knowledge of God bestowed upon humans.
 - Eunomius's choice of *agennetos* as a primary name is only to show that Father and Son are *anomos*.
 - What we know is the unity of the *ousia*
- Section 8
 - Names of God result from God's activities (*energeiai*) toward us (CE 1.8, cited in Ayers, 196)
 - "all these point to a distinction between God *in se* and *ad extra* which assumes different modes of divine being, and which is not due simply to our own limitations of understanding *qua* creatures. Let us note, too, that Basil is careful to point out, as against Eunomius and therefore as opposing the whole Neoplatonic doctrine of substantial intermediaries, that the 'energies' or 'powers' are not themselves substances (Adv. Eunom. 1.8). We find, lastly, that even if the names do thus have a real referent in God's 'powers', and in spite of their limitations do bear the possibility of a certain true *gnosis* of God and so of participation in him (Adv. Eunom. 1.7), they still do not exhaust the divine mystery even *ad extra* (Adv. Eunom. 2.32)." (Golitzen, 294)
- Section 10
 - All names of God are images based on our level of perception; we must "surpass that which is humble and base in the expression" (Adv. Eunom., 1.10, in Golitzen 290).
- Section 11
 - "I would myself say that God's *ousia* is ingenerate, but never that ingenerateness is his *ousia*." (trans. in Hanson 688, referencing also section 5 (517-21) and section 8 (528).
- Section 14

- The essence (*ousia*) of God cannot be known (Adv. Eunom 1.14, PG 29:544B, Golitzen 290); in reference to Is 53:8 and Rom 11:33 (Ayers, 191)
- Reflection on *ousia* is a logical deduction rather than a further encounter with reality. (CE 1.14)
- Section 20
 - Even though the three are equal, there is an order (*taxis*) in which the Spirit is third in both *taxis* and *axioma* (rank) (see Hanson 689). This does not mean order in being. While such use is common for creatures, these creaturely aspects do not apply to God.
 - Our minds must be made fit to comprehend God; they do not naturally know him. Therefore, one should not be surprised if things that are reasonable for creatures are not reasonable for God.
- Section 26
 - Knowledge of God is knowledge of the Son, and not of the Son in essence but the Son as the power of the Father (CE 1.26 and CE 2.29, Rousseau 114)
- Section 28
 - *guoristike idotetes* (637)

BOOK 2

- Just as we know others through how we encounter them, so we know God in his action towards us (CE 2, Rousseau, 111).
- To know the reality of someone is to receive their words as indicators of a greater reality.
- To know the reality of anything is to pass through the thought conveyed by the words towards the *ousia* indicated.
- Through the power and activity of the Word, the mind is able to ascend to God himself (CE 2.16, Rousseau 114)
- Staniloae remarks on Basil's assertion that the generation of the Son is consonant with the Father's will, but not by the Father's will or without the Father's will. The generation of the Son is an eternal fact linked to the goodness of God. (Staniloae, 90).
- Section 6
 - Even though the Son is generated, this word does not bring with it corporeal associations
- Section 7
 - There is no basis for assigning ungenerated and offspring as substantial names
 - Offspring is not the most important name of Christ
- Section 8
 - Son, not offspring, is the name of the Second Person; Son is the name of a person
- Section 9
 - There are substantial names and then relational names
 - Offspring is a relational name
 - Even if it relates to a subject, it touches not the substance but the properties
- Section 10
 - If offspring were substantial, it would indicate continuity of substance
- Section 11
 - When was it that the Son was not? Then the Father would become Father
- Section 12
 - If it is to God's happiness that he be Father, then he was always Father
- Section 13
 - If there were something between Father and Son, it must be an age
- Section 15
 - John's prologue sums it up
- Section 16
 - To move beyond and before the Son is impossible and to attempt to is extreme hubris

- Generation according to God is what is meant
- Section 17
 - Lossky remarks on this passage as showing the "'energetic' character of the manifestation of the Father by the Son" (Lossky, MT, 84)
 - The Son is the exact image of the Father, making the entire Father manifest
- Section 18
 - Eunomius held that the substance of God is without generation
 - Eunomius introduces as false "before his generation then he is ingenerate"
 - Eternal is not equal to without source
- Section 21
 - To make the Son a mere artificer is to demean him
- Section 23
 - Father applied to God is not the same as that applied to humans
 - Names come from God, not humans
- Section 24
 - Generation is thus most properly applied to God
 - Basil is here using the revelation of God's inner relation as the pattern for our own understanding of creaturely reality. Rather than using creaturely experience to explain God, the revelation of God also reveals a deeper meaning to creaturely parallels. It is an analogical move in reverse.

BOOK 3

- Section 1
 - The Holy Spirit is perfecter
 - Third in order and dignity
- Section 2
 - Basil introduces the metaphor of iron in the fire for deification (noted in Larchet, 41). See Dalmais, "Divinisation II, Patristique grecque", DSp 3.1382
- Section 3
 - Sanctification
- Section 4
 - "One's ability to know oneself represented a dialogue like that between Father and Son: a dialogue identified in itself with the person of the Spirit." (Rousseau 115, citing CE 3.4)
- Section 5
 - We call divine those who are perfect; baptism too

MAJOR THEMES

- What can't be known
 - We can know the knowable in God but not that which is beyond our understanding (Ep. 235, in Golitzen 290)
 - We know the greatness of God, but not God's essence: "We do indeed say that we know our God from his operations (*enérgeiai*), but we are not enabled to draw near the essence itself; for, while the operations descend to us (*aí enérgeiai pros hemâs katabáinousin*), his essence abides unapproachable (*aprositos*)." (Ep. 234, Golitzen, 293)
 - Hanson concurs: for Basil, we can know God's activities and works, but not his *ousia* (Hanson, 689-90).
- Revelation
 - God is revealed allegorically in creation and in Scripture (Golitzen, 290)
 - (Created) names may lead us towards God but can never express the uncreated (see Golitzen 291, Lossky, 33)
- Operation of the human mind in relationship to God
 - Theology is an activity of God.

- To understand the words of God is to allow God to act upon oneself.
- To engage in purely logical argument is to block God's action and protect oneself from his revealing activity. (see Rousseau 129)
- Language and reality
 - For Eunomius, language is an accurate portrayal of reality and is instrumental in correct understanding and knowledge. For Basil, we know God's actions rather than his essence.
 - There is the word, *diánoia* (the act of thought – understanding) and *epinoia* (the content of thought – idea)
- Trinity
 - Holds that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all God, but avoids the use of "homoousios" for the Spirit. For example, he says in Homily 25.3 of the Son: "because he is sharer of his nature; not created by a fiat, but shining out continuously from his *ousia*" and of the Spirit "possessing everything himself co-substantially (*synousiomenos*) in his nature, goodness, rightness, holiness, life" (quoted in Hanson, 688).
 - He distinguishes hypostasis from *ousia*, using hypostasis
 - This allows him the ability to use the word *prosopon* in a non-modalist sense
 - The three have the same *ousia*, but different order and rank
 - Generation qualifies the *ousia*

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