

BASIL OF CAESAREA ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity

REASON FOR THE TREATISE

Some have objected to Basil's use of "with" in the doxology. They object that this places Father, Son, and Spirit on the same level. Athanasius: "The Spirit is the image of the Son, just as the Son is the image of the Father" (First Letter to Serapion, 24). (Bobrinskoy, 52).

The objection discloses a misunderstanding

- Whether one uses "with" or "in and through", the doxology still reverences Father, Son, and Spirit as God
- It is useless to quibble over syllables (4)
- This pursuit shows a confidence in philosophy over against theology (5)
 - Relying on philosophical principles betrays the faith
 - Scripture does not follow such tight delineations (6-7)
 - "Through" and "in" are applied to all persons of the Trinity (8-12)
 - This means that Scripture is superior to reason and can guide reason

The heart of the matter is the principle of faith that the Son and the Spirit are equal to the Father

- The Son is not secondary to the Father
- The generation of the Son is beyond knowledge
- Power is equal in Father and Son (18)
- Activity is also equal (19)

The Scriptures also show that the Spirit is equal to Father and Son

- The Scriptures call God spirit

THE TEXT

Chapter 1

- Father, Son, and Spirit together "Glory to God the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit" is equivalent to the "Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit" (3) – this caused much controversy and spurs Basil to respond.
- Aetius had said that differences of nature are reflected in the way things are spoken of (4)
- Scripture does not use language in this way, but changes its expressions according to subject (6)

Chapter 6

- Revelation sets the boundaries to thought. One cannot figure out the generation of the Son. (14)
- The Father has preeminence but not a temporal priority, for God cannot be measured by time (14)
- The equality of the Spirit with the Father and Son is testified by baptism.

Chapter 8

- The path to knowledge of God is tied with advance in perfection. Calling Christ the Way shows that knowledge of God proceeds through him. It shows that developing knowledge of God is simultaneous with the movement out of sin to perfection and that this proceeds by stages. (18)
- Operation and power are equal (19)

Chapter 9

- The name Spirit is particularly apt for divinity. (22)
 - "He is the giver of life; who does not grow by additions, but is at once full, self-sustaining, and everywhere present; the source of sanctification, light invisible, who, as it were, illuminates every faculty of reason in its search for truth; unapproachable by nature, accessible by reason of his goodness; filling all things by his power, but communicable only to the

worthy; not shared by all in the same degree, but distributing his energy according to the proportion of faith; simple in essence, manifold in powers; wholly present with each individual, and wholly everywhere; impassibly divided, and shared without division, like a sunbeam, whose gracious influence is as much his who enjoys it as though he were alone in the world, but which also blends with the air, and shines over land and sea. Thus, too, the Spirit is present with everyone who receives him as if there were only one receiver, but bestows sufficient and complete grace on all; whom all things that partake of him enjoy according to the capacity of their nature, not to the extent of his power." (*On the Holy Spirit*, 22, Lewis trans. 53, see Lossky, MT, 163)

- The Spirit fills a person only after the withdrawal of the passions and this purifies the person (23)

Chapter 10

- The baptismal formula shows the divinity of the Spirit (24)
- Those who attack the Spirit attack the faith itself (25)
- We are made Christian through faith and through the regeneration of baptism, both of which are the fruit of the Spirit (26)

Chapter 11

- Worship itself is made possible by the Spirit (27)

Chapter 12

- The Spirit is implied in the naming of Christ, since the Spirit accompanied every act of Jesus (28)
- The Spirit is our power of renewal (28)
- Faith and baptism are intrinsically linked (28)

Chapter 14

- Old Testament baptisms are types of the baptism by the Spirit. (32)
- The Spirit is introduced through gradual stages, in good pedagogy (33)

Chapter 15

- In baptism, we are joined to the death of Christ and descend into hell with him. (35)
- The Spirit effects baptism; it is not the water that baptizes, but the spirit that baptizes (35)
- The Spirit brings about our healing and our elevation (36)

Chapter 16

- The Spirit is always with the Father and the Son (37)
- The Spirit freely dispenses gifts according to the capacity of the recipient (37)
 - The Holy Spirit "is inseparable from the Father and the Son in every operation" and is present in the diversity of gifts, "distributing the gifts of his own authority and according to the dignity of the individual" (HS, 37, Lewis trans. 75, see Lossky, MT, 160)
- The holiness of the angels is due to the Son and the Spirit. They are not holy by nature. (38)
- The Spirit provides fixity in the good (38)
- The Spirit also keeps us in holiness and allows us to follow the law (38)
- The Spirit will give even more holiness on the last day, accompanying the Son (40)
- The Spirit dwells in those who are open to his presence, but he is also present in the baptized, awaiting their openness to him (40)

Chapter 17

- Basil here addresses the central complaint and argues that "with" can join Father, Son, and Spirit just as properly as other conjunctions. (41)
- There is no subdivision in the Godhead that result in difference of degree (41)
- There is no subordination in God; therefore, connumeration is appropriate (42)

- The Spirit is as equal to the Son as the Son is to the Father (43)

Chapter 18

- The knowledge that leads to salvation is the knowledge in faith of the “holy names”. These lead us to sharing in the life of God. (44)
- The three are distinct but are one monarchy (45)
- Basil here uses the image of the emperor and the emperor himself to show that two things can be honored as one, a point that will be taken up in later discussions about religious images (45).
- “He is consequently as far removed from created Nature as reason requires the singular to be removed from compound and plural bodies; and He is in such wise united to the Father and to the Son as unit has affinity with unit” (45).
- We are led to the glory of God by the Spirit; his glory is bestowed on creatures (46) and is the power of relation to the Son (47).
- “Thus the way of the knowledge of God lies from the One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father, and conversely the natural Goodness and the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit. Thus there is both acknowledgement of the hypostases and the true dogma of the Monarchy is not lost.” (47)
- The Spirit gives us the power of beholding the beauty of the Father (47)
- In the Spirit we have knowledge of God: “So the way to the knowledge of God is from one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father. And again, the natural goodness, and the natural sanctification, and the royal rank begin with the Father and reach the Spirit through the Only-Begotten.” (47, quoted in Bobrinsky, 56)
- We are drawn to God in the Spirit. The Spirit is “a living milieu in which the human creature is able to behold the divine Light, because he dwells in the Light and has himself become Light.” (Bobrinsky, 56, discussing Basil)

Chapter 19

- The Spirit is worshiped because he is properly holy (48).
- The Spirit is the source of the angels’ steadfastness (49).
- The Spirit precedes the Son in his operation. He is the context of the Son’s activity (49).

Chapter 20

- The Spirit is not a servant of God, but of equal rank (51)

Chapter 21

- The Scriptures show that the Spirit is God. In fact, it is in the Spirit that the Scriptures are read properly. (52)

Chapter 22

- Learning the glory of the Spirit requires being lifted from the ravages of sin (53).

Chapter 24

- The only reasons for subordinating the Spirit are derived from weak and damaged human reasoning (55).
- The person receives God through the Spirit (56)
- The Spirit dwells in us by God’s gift (57)

Chapter 25

- Scripture often interchanges prepositions in regard to the Spirit. (58)
- “For to say that the Son is with the Father is to exhibit at once the distinction of the hypostases, and the inseparability of the fellowship.” (59)

Chapter 26

- The Spirit heals creation. (61)
- The Spirit is always present in the saints, forming them for holiness (61)
- The Spirit is the place of sanctification (62)
- The Spirit is the “place of those who are being sanctified”; the Holy Spirit is the place of worship (62, referenced in Bobrinskoy, 57)
- The Spirit is with the Father and the Son, but in operation, he is in us (63).
- He is not in the Father but with him: “For the grace which results from His dwelling in those who are worthy, and working His own purpose, is rightly held to be in such persons as receive Him; but when we contemplate His eternal pre-existence and His never-ending abiding with the Father and the Son, titles are required which denote eternal conjunction.” (63)
- We worship in the Spirit, in the context of the Spirit (64)
- The Son is seen in the Spirit (64)

Chapter 27

- The use of “with” is said to be a novelty (65)
- There are many things that the Church does that are not explicitly in the Scriptures (66)
- The tradition, passed on from the apostles, accompanies the Scripture and is as important (66)
- “Dogma and kerygma are two distinct things; the former is observed in silence; the latter is proclaimed to all the world (66).
- Unwritten tradition is as important and worthy as the written tradition (66)
- The use of “with” expresses the truth of the Scriptures (68)

Chapter 28

- Salvation rests on the divinity of the Spirit. (70)

Chapter 29

- The Fathers often used “with” (70-75).

Chapter 30

- The use of “with” is essential to meet the present crisis (76-79).

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