

ANCIENT  
CHRISTIAN  
DOCTRINE

---

4

---

We Believe in the Holy Spirit

EDITED BY

JOEL C. ELOWSKY

SERIES EDITOR

THOMAS C. ODEN

## CONTENTS

Abbreviations . . . . .	ix
Introduction . . . . .	xiv
<i>We Believe in the Holy Spirit</i> . . . . .	1
<i>The Lord</i> . . . . .	22
<i>The Giver of Life: In Creation</i> . . . . .	37
<i>The Giver of Life: In Repentance</i> . . . . .	47
<i>The Giver of Life: In Justification</i> . . . . .	84
<i>The Giver of Life: Christ's Life in Us</i> <i>Through the Spirit—Theosis</i> . . . . .	137
<i>The Giver of Life: In Sanctification</i> . . . . .	170
<i>Who Proceeds from the Father [and the Son]</i> . . . . .	217
<i>With the Father and the Son</i> . . . . .	235
<i>He Is Worshiped and Glorified</i> . . . . .	246
<i>He has Spoken Through the Prophets</i> . . . . .	266
Outline of Contents . . . . .	289
List of Ancient Authors and Texts Cited . . . . .	295
Bibliography . . . . .	300
Author/Writings Index . . . . .	302
Scripture Index . . . . .	304

## INTRODUCTION

“The Spirit blows where it pleases,” Jesus said to Nicodemus. “You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> The Spirit, like the wind, is hard to pin down. Any discussion of the Spirit is fraught with the difficulty of speaking about something or someone who defies definition and who purposely averts attention from himself toward someone else. So it is with the Spirit. And so it is with the church’s reception of and conversation about the Spirit. It is hard to pin down, and the church’s voice on the Spirit has been about as loud as the whisper of the wind that indicates the Spirit’s presence. But neither can talk of the Spirit be ignored or considered irrelevant. As Gregory of Nyssa noted, silence in the face of competing voices is also not an option.<sup>2</sup>

One might argue that our own age, inundated as it is with various quests for “spirituality,” now more than ever needs to hear a word regarding the Holy Spirit. The church has been reluctant to speak such a word for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fear of committing the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> It is also true that the focus of the church and the Spirit’s work is to teach and remind the world of all that Christ has said and done.<sup>4</sup> Rather than drawing attention to himself, the Spirit has always pointed us to Christ and his work, which brings glory to the Father. The reluctance to speak about the Spirit reflects the relative silence of Scripture itself—relative in comparison to Scripture’s revelation of the Father and Son. However, we learn from this that the work of the Spirit is to reveal, not to be revealed; to give, not to receive. His primary work as described in the creed is twofold: he is “the Lord and giver of life,” and the one “who spoke by the prophets.” Giver and revealer. The other phrases in the creed speak of his relation to the Father and Son, which was the primary subject of debate in the latter half of the fourth century as the church worked its way through the trinitarian controversy. The challenges brought by the Arians, the Eunomians, the Pneumatomachians and other heretical sects caused the church in the years leading up to the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 to expand what it had said about the Spirit in the Nicene Creed of 325, where it had simply confessed, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> There was no thought, however, that the church had

---

<sup>1</sup>Jn 3:8 (NIV).

<sup>2</sup>See Gregory of Nyssa *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Macedonians* 1 (NPNF 2 5:315), quoted in the first chapter of this volume.

<sup>3</sup>Mt 12:31.

<sup>4</sup>Jn 14:26.

<sup>5</sup>See below for a fuller discussion of these heretical challenges.

said all it could say about the Holy Spirit; only that it had said what it must since it could not remain silent where error prevailed. Thus, the church's confession of the Holy Spirit has always seemed somewhat unfinished—which is not necessarily a bad thing.

The church's teaching on the Holy Spirit is perhaps what Nicolas Berdyaev has called "the last unexplored theological frontier."<sup>6</sup> In these latter days of the church, this "final frontier" is receiving increasing attention.<sup>7</sup> The rise of the Pentecostal movement, the engaged witness of the Orthodox churches, which have historically been more sensitive to the role of the Spirit, coupled with the fact that people in general are looking for a deeper and more relational faith, perhaps helps explain in part the increased attention the Spirit is getting.<sup>8</sup> But perhaps God the Holy Spirit is also doing something new in our age as we see a historic shift of the dominant centers of Christianity to the Global South.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the more we understand the Spirit's person and work, the more open we can be to his leading. But we who are born of the Spirit should not delude ourselves into thinking we will ever fully understand the Spirit any more than we understand the wind that blows where it wills.

The Spirit has a history. In what follows, we will briefly trace that history, using the broad categories found in the creed's confession of the Holy Spirit: the Inspirer and Revealer, the Lord and Giver of Life, and the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son. This introduction will briefly trace the history of the church's teaching in each of these categories in order to set the volume as a whole in its historical and scriptural context. After the introduction, the volume will be divided up into sections that comment on the different phrases of the creed where there will be further historical context along with an overview of what the church has taught. As one looks over the various sections of this volume, it will become readily apparent that there is an extended discussion on the Spirit as the Lord and Giver of Life. This will be explained further below, only to note here that we have chosen to focus on the Spirit's work as the Giver of life because this along with the Spirit's divinity was largely the focus of the ancient church. Finally, concerning the selections of text in this volume, we have tried where possible to use source material in the footnotes that would be readily available to the reader. Although we have often cited these materials, we have also sought to consult the original language sources behind them and

<sup>6</sup>Nicolas Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality* (London: G. Bles, 1946), 22.

<sup>7</sup>See Clark Pinnock's article "The Recovery of the Holy Spirit in Evangelical Theology" in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2004:13.1 (2004):3-18. He notes the rise of recent other works on the Holy Spirit among evangelicals such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney, eds., *Advent of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology* (Marquette, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001). See Pinnock's article for further bibliographical information concerning evangelical resources.

<sup>8</sup>Pinnock, "Recovery," 5.

<sup>9</sup>This movement has been documented in a number of books. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

to provide illumination from them when necessary.

### **The Inspirer and Revealer**

*The first two centuries.* When the ancient church confessed faith in the Holy Spirit who spoke by the prophets, the prophets to whom they were referring were primarily those whose writings were contained in the Old Testament. From its earliest days the church confessed the Spirit as the author of those Scriptures. Peter wrote in his second letter that “no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”<sup>10</sup> Paul wrote to Timothy about Scripture’s inspiration, reminding him of how from childhood he had become acquainted with the sacred writings “which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”<sup>11</sup> Already in the New Testament, Peter considered the writings of other apostles such as Paul to be Scripture and thus inspired.<sup>12</sup> In the second century, however, the question began to emerge as to how far this inspiration extended.

Writers such as Clement of Rome (fl. 96) continued to assume the authority of Scripture, which was largely considered by him and other Christian writers of this period to be the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. But the Gospels, the letters of Paul and other New Testament writings were also in use in apostolic fathers such as Clement and Ignatius as well as in Apologists like Justin Martyr and Athenagoras.<sup>13</sup> By this time, however, Gnosticism had created its own veritable library of new “Gospels” and other pseudepigraphical writings<sup>14</sup> that claimed to have a higher and deeper understanding of spirituality than the texts of the orthodox. In the face of such “spirituality,” the orthodox emphasized the role of the Spirit as the one who “spoke by the prophets.” The ancient Christian writers sought to reassure the church as to which books of Scripture were truly trustworthy and worthy to be read in the churches as divinely inspired. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200) emphasizes the role of the Spirit in this process:

The preaching of the church is everywhere consistent and continues in the same consistent way, receiving testimony from the prophets, the apostles, and all the disciples—as I have proved—throughout its beginning, middle, and end,<sup>15</sup> and through the entire dispensation of God and that well-grounded system which tends to humanity’s salvation, namely, our faith. We preserve this faith which we received from the church and which always, by the Spirit of God, renews its youth as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel. . . . “For in the church,” it is said, “God has

---

<sup>10</sup>2 Pet 1:21.

<sup>11</sup>2 Tim 3:15-17.

<sup>12</sup>2 Pet 3:15.

<sup>13</sup>1 Clement 13.1; 16.2; 14.2; 22.1; 8.1; 42.3, 4; 47.3. *HSAC* 13.

<sup>14</sup>I.e., writings that purported to be written by a biblical author but were not.

<sup>15</sup>Literally, “through the beginnings, the means, and the end.” These three terms refer to the Prophets, the apostles, and the church catholic.

---

set apostles, prophets, teachers,"<sup>16</sup> and all the other means through which the Spirit works. . . . For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and every kind of grace.<sup>17</sup>

The Spirit and the church go hand in hand. The Spirit, according to Irenaeus, accompanies the Logos as one of the two hands of God at work in the world in creation and, more specifically, in the church for our salvation.<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus identifies the church as the place where the Spirit gives out his gifts. Without his gifts the church cannot sustain itself. It will die.

**Third century.** As we move into the third century, Tertullian (ca. 160-220) echoes Irenaeus's emphasis on the presence of the Spirit who inspires Scripture and guides the church in the face of the heretics who denigrate the Scriptures or misuse them. In his *Prescription Against Heretics* 22, Tertullian points out that the Gnostics denigrate the writings of the apostles in one of two ways: either they accuse the apostles of ignorance or they imply the apostles were these esoteric teachers who knew everything but chose to tell what they knew only to those who were worthy to receive such hidden knowledge. The Spirit of Truth that Christ gave to his apostles at Pentecost, however, is the guarantee that what the apostles have passed on to us in their revealed writings used in the churches is the inspired truth on which we can rely. The Gnostics, on the other hand, discount the role of the Spirit:

Those who reject the fact that the Scriptures can belong to the Holy Spirit, seeing as how they do not acknowledge that the Holy Spirit was sent as yet to the disciples, cannot presume to claim to be the church themselves when they certainly have no means of proving when and with what swaddling clothes this body was established.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Tertullian looked to the Spirit-inspired Scriptures as the arbiter of truth and the foundation on which the church is established.

In the East, Clement of Alexandria speaks of the "truly holy letters" of the New Testament that sanctify and even deify—an early reference to the teaching of *theōsis*, which we will discuss below. These letters are included in the writings or volumes that the apostle refer to as "inspired of God."<sup>20</sup> We are to listen to and obey the voice of the divine word in these volumes, favoring that voice over the words of the saints which pale in comparison to the words of the Lord himself.<sup>21</sup> Clement's student Origen (ca. 185-254) carried on the tradition of holding the words of the Gospels to be of first importance, but this need not negate the words of the apostles such

---

<sup>16</sup>1 Cor 12:28.

<sup>17</sup>Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.24.1 (ANF 1:458\*\*). Gerald Bray has a fuller discussion on inspiration and canonical development in his volume of *ACD*.

<sup>18</sup>See Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.Preface.4; 4.20.1; 5.6.1; 5.28.4.

<sup>19</sup>Tertullian *Prescription Against Heretics* 22 (ANF 3:253\*\*).

<sup>20</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation Against the Heathen* 9.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

as Paul and other New Testament writers who were also divinely inspired.<sup>22</sup> Origen, too, spoke of the Spirit of God as the author of Scripture in many of his writings.<sup>23</sup> Like Irenaeus, Origen pairs the Holy Spirit with the Son of God,<sup>24</sup> noting that “all knowledge of the Father is obtained by revelation of the Son through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> This early trinitarian understanding of revelation would continue in the centuries that followed.

**Fourth century and beyond.** By the time we arrive at the fourth century, the collection of books known as the canon of Scripture has already been fairly widely established. The list of writings recorded by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3 is by no means something new, nor can we consider the canon to have been established by imperial fiat at the Council of Nicaea in 325, as is sometimes assumed in popular imagination today. There were any number of previous lists put forward that contained remarkable agreement on which writings of Scripture were to be used in the church, with only few letters in dispute.<sup>26</sup> The church’s teaching was grounded in a set of writings that comprised both Old and New Testaments, that fathers like Cyril of Jerusalem and Athanasius considered divine and God-breathed.<sup>27</sup> These are appealed to as authoritative in subsequent disputes and referred to as the “Scripture of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>28</sup> This Scripture was to be interpreted in the context of the believing community and in the company of those writers of the past who had proven faithful to the Gospel and the rule of faith.

Thus when the creed confesses faith in the Holy Spirit “who spoke by the prophets,” it was saying nothing new. The phrase is written in the past tense. This does not mean that the Spirit does not still speak today in the life of the church. It does mean that the Scriptures, the writings of the prophets and apostles who spoke by the power and inspiration of the Spirit, are where authority for the teaching and life of the church resides.

### **The Lord and Giver of Life**

When the creed of 381 confesses belief in the Holy Spirit as the *Lord and Giver of Life*, we are immediately taken back to the beginning, to the first verses of Genesis where the Spirit is pres-

---

<sup>22</sup>Origen *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.5. Although Origen asks the intriguing questions, “When Paul declares that ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable,’ does that include his own writings?” Does it include those places where Paul tells us he is rendering his opinion or is speaking in virtue of his own authority, words which, as Origen comments, “do not quite possess the character of words flowing from divine inspiration.” Then again, while Paul may or may not have included his own words as divinely inspired, Peter apparently did. See 2 Pet 3:16.

<sup>23</sup>See Origen’s treatise *On Prayer* 2.5; *On First Principles* 1.3.1; *Commentary on John* 1.5.

<sup>24</sup>In *On First Principles* 1.3.4, he says his Hebrew master used to teach him that the two seraphim mentioned in Isaiah 6:3 “were to be understood as the only-begotten Son of God and as the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>25</sup>Origen *On First Principles* 1.3.4.

<sup>26</sup>See Gerald Bray’s volume for a fuller discussion of canonical development.

<sup>27</sup>E.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16 and 17; Athanasius *Defense of the Nicene Council* 15; *On the Incarnation of the Word* 33.3.

<sup>28</sup>Gregory of Nyssa *Against Eunomius* 7.1.

---

ent giving life to creation as it hovers,<sup>29</sup> or rushes down upon<sup>30</sup>—depending on which translation you use—the formless, lifeless water at the world’s creation. Both creedal descriptions of the Spirit as Lord and as life-giver are present in the beginning of the Hebrew and Septuagint Bibles. The Hebraic, “Hovering” connotes a nurturing, life-giving Spirit, while the Septuagint’s “rushing down upon” brings to mind the lordly, lively, active Spirit present not only at creation but at Pentecost and throughout the life of the church and beyond—all the way to the end of the canonical Scriptures. Like the opening and closing chapters of a book, the Spirit is present also at the end of the Scriptures, beckoning Christ to come again to usher in the final age when there will be a new creation of the heavens and the earth.<sup>31</sup> No doubt the Lordly and life-giving Spirit will complete this new creation as well.

The Spirit’s creative, life-giving work during the six days of creation finds its ultimate expression in Adam, who became a living being once he was enlivened by the breath of God.<sup>32</sup> This life, however, is short-lived once Adam brings sin into the world. His sin brings death to a world that had only known life. As the narrative of Genesis continues, God’s frustration with human sinfulness and rejection causes him to withdraw his spirit, who he says will not remain in human beings forever.<sup>33</sup> After the flood, human life is limited to no more than 120 years.<sup>34</sup> The vibrancy and life of creation had become a dim reflection of what it was in the beginning as a result of sin. God, however, did not choose to abandon his creation. Rather, he chose through his Spirit to breathe life back into what he had made—not only physical life but also life in the Spirit.

The ancient writers understood this. When the creed refers to the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of Life, the Greek word the writers of the creed used for life<sup>35</sup> was *zōē*, as opposed to *bios*. *Bios*, from which we get our word *biology*, connotes earthly, physical life as the vital principle operative in the natural world. *Bios* is what makes things come alive and is the animating principle that separates that which is dead from that which is alive.<sup>36</sup> *Zōē* is much more comprehensive, including in its meaning not only life in the physical sense but also the life-giving knowledge and activity of God.<sup>37</sup> John especially uses the word *zōē* in his Gospel to designate what happens in someone’s life as a result of faith in Christ. Such a person comes to possess, even in this present life, a life of grace and holiness that looks forward to its ultimate consum-

<sup>29</sup>Heb *mēraḥepet*.

<sup>30</sup>LXX *epepherto*.

<sup>31</sup>Gen 1:2; Rev 22:17.

<sup>32</sup>Although there are two different Hebrew words used in Gen 1 and 2, the former rendered as *ruah*, denoting the person of the Spirit, the latter rendered as *nepes*, denoting the life the Spirit gives.

<sup>33</sup>Gen 6:3.

<sup>34</sup>Gen 6:3.

<sup>35</sup>Rendered in the creed in a compound word along with the Greek word *poieō*.

<sup>36</sup>See “βίος” in BAGD 141-42.

<sup>37</sup>See “ζωή” in BAGD 340-41.

mation in that life which is yet to come.<sup>38</sup> The Spirit is the Giver of this life, but not apart from the Father and the Son.

The ancient church often spoke of a *taxis*, or ordering, when speaking about God and his interaction in the world with us: *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *to/in* the Spirit. But they also spoke of human interaction and doxology back to God in similar terms with the *taxis* reversed: *from/in* the Spirit, *through* the Son, *to* the Father.<sup>39</sup> Christ is at the center of pneumatological theology; the Father is its goal; the Spirit is the means. Without the Spirit there can be no human response to God. He gives us spiritual life, a life that encompasses the whole life of faith including repentance, justification and faith, our union with Christ that the Greeks called *theosis* which leads into our life of sanctification. In the Holy Spirit, God is acting directly on us and in us to make us holy vessels and to rid us of sin so that we may become the temple where God resides. In giving us the gift of his Spirit, Jesus was giving himself and ensuring that our salvation would be accomplished as the Spirit works in us and for us.

Any discussion of the Spirit as confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that occurs apart from a discussion of the Spirit's work would be impoverished and incomplete. The ancient Christian faith was as much lived as it was confessed. It was a life of *doxology* as much as *orthodoxy*. Today we often separate the two, living a life of bifurcated spirituality. In the early church, those who did not live the faith as a life of worship to God in faithful obedience to his word were not considered to have truly confessed the faith. Thus we have included the roles of repentance and justification in the Spirit's life-giving work as part of this discussion because these are the first and foremost works of the Spirit in our life of faith. The work of repentance is a work done by the Spirit in us that changes our hearts so that they are enabled to receive justifying and saving faith. While justification may be seen by some as anachronistic to a discussion of the creed of the fourth century,<sup>40</sup> we hope to show this need not be the case. While it is true that justification as a locus of doctrine was not a point of controversy at this time, as it was in the sixteenth century, neither can it be said that the Pauline language of justification was ignored or underutilized. The reader may be surprised in fact at how much of the sixteenth-century Reformation discussion was anticipated in the early centuries of the church.

The Western reader in particular may also be surprised at the inclusion of the Spirit's work in *theosis* in this volume, which is something relatively new to many readers in the West. The Greek word *theosis* connotes the concept of deification, which is a way of describing our participation in the divine nature referred to in 2 Peter 1:4. The importance and influence of *theosis* in the life of the early church as grounded in Scripture needs to be rediscovered. It can only deepen our understanding of the meaning of the phrase "in Christ," which Paul used so often. *Theosis* is intimately connected with sanctification which permeated the life of the early church and is the teaching we most often associate with the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit seeks

---

<sup>38</sup>BAGD 340. See Jn 3:15f; 36a; 5:24a, 40; 6:40, 47, 51, 53ff; 10:10; 20:31. See also 1 Jn 3:15; 5:12-13.

<sup>39</sup>Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 18.47 (NPNF 2 8:29).

<sup>40</sup>See the overview to the section of justification.

to make us as holy as he is. The ancient Christian writers offer many insights into the life of sanctification that unfortunately may seem foreign to twenty-first-century ears but which need to be recaptured.

Many of our selections in this regard come from the Syrian church. Holiness and spiritual progress were very important in the Syriac tradition of the Spirit. We see this especially in the writings of Pseudo-Macarius (fourth c.), Aphrahat (fl. 337-345), Philoxenus (ca. 440-520) and also Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-373), who was called the “lyre of the Holy Spirit.” His lyrical poems and hymns often link the church to the Spirit of Pentecost. The Spirit brings life through baptism, chrismation and the Eucharist.<sup>41</sup> The Spirit was also an important component of the ascetical and monastic tradition. It was the Spirit living in the monk as in a temple that enabled the monk to put behind him all earthly temptations and distractions in his contemplation of the divine. The cleansing of the inner temple is often spoken of as a necessity so that the Spirit would dwell there. Some speak of the Spirit being driven away by the presence of sin, while others think such notions make the Spirit appear to be weak. Monastic literature, especially among the desert fathers, is filled with spiritual battle. The Holy Spirit is a natural ally in these battles.

Unique to the Syriac tradition is an early tendency toward feminizing the Spirit because of the close affinity with the feminine Hebrew word for Spirit (*ruah*). However, as devotion to the person of Mary grew in the fourth century, the conception of the Holy Spirit as feminine began to decline<sup>42</sup> so that by the fifth century the Syriac *ruha*, when used in reference to the Holy Spirit, was treated as masculine. By the sixth century this had become the norm, perhaps due in part, as Brock notes, to the large-scale influx of new converts to Christianity who had backgrounds in pagan cults that observed a divine triad of father, mother and son.<sup>43</sup> To continue identifying the Spirit in feminine terms could have sent a mixed message of syncretism to the new converts. But neither did the Syrians fully work out a doctrine of who the Spirit was. The focus is more on what the Holy Spirit does in us and with us. It was left to the Greeks and Latins to work out what the church could say about the identity of the Spirit in relation to the Father and Son.

### **The Spirit with the Father and the Son**

Scripture documents the presence of the Spirit with the Father and the Son from its very first words in Genesis. In the last words Jesus spoke while on this earth, he included the Holy Spirit along with the Father and Son in his baptismal command.<sup>44</sup> This passage, more than any other, cemented the Holy Spirit on an equal footing with the Father and the Son in the church’s confession of the Holy Spirit as God through the baptisms it administers. Paul’s benediction in his second letter to the Corinthians includes the Spirit in the same breath with the Father and

---

<sup>41</sup>IBHS 1:77.

<sup>42</sup>Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., 1989), 6.

<sup>43</sup>AE 73.

<sup>44</sup>Mt 28:19.

the Son,<sup>45</sup> ensuring the Spirit's inclusion in trinitarian benedictions in the subsequent life of the church. Clement the Bishop of Rome (fl. a. 96) carries on this trinitarian tradition in the post-apostolic age in his appeal to his congregation to strive for the unity that only the Spirit of unity can bring: "Have we not one God, one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was poured upon us, and one calling in Christ?"<sup>46</sup> Implicit in his question is not only the call for unity and to remember the grace they had received from the Spirit. Clement also evidences a clear trace of trinitarian belief when he speaks of "one God, one Christ and one Spirit." Basil of Caesarea refers to this in the fourth century when he maintains that the Godhead of the Spirit was present even in the earliest traditions of the church.<sup>47</sup> Those earliest traditions did indeed confess the divinity of the Spirit implicit in their benedictions, baptisms, hymnody and prayers. But for the most part they did not work out the implications of that confession until it became an issue of controversy in the middle to latter half of the fourth century.

Up to this time the Spirit was not so much ignored as assumed. There were writers such as Tertullian who added to the church's understanding of the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son through his prescient language regarding the Trinity. In his debates with Praxeas around 213, he spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons (*personae*) of the Trinity who shared the common substance (*substantia*) of the Godhead.<sup>48</sup> As others of his age, however, his language was inexact and he appears to subordinate the Son and the Spirit to the Father. He had, however, established the vocabulary that would be taken up by later church fathers such as Augustine in his treatise on the Trinity. This provided the foundation for much of the Western trinitarian discussion of the fourth and fifth centuries.

In the East, in his major treatment of the Holy Spirit in his speculative work *On First Principles*, Origen seems rather concerned not to subordinate the Spirit to the Father or Son, even if he lacks the language to fully maintain such a distinction:

We are not, however, to suppose that the Spirit derives his knowledge through revelation from the Son. For if the Holy Spirit knows the Father through the Son's revelation, he passes from a state of ignorance into one of knowledge. But it is both impious and foolish to confess the Holy Spirit and yet to ascribe to him ignorance. For even although something else existed before the Holy Spirit, it was not by progressive advancement that he came to be the Holy Spirit. This is like someone venturing to say that at the time when he was not yet the Holy Spirit he was ignorant of the Father, but that after he had received knowledge he was made the Holy Spirit. For if this were the case, the Holy Spirit would never be considered in the unity of the Trinity. In other words, he would never be considered along with the unchangeable Father and his Son, unless he had always been the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>2 Cor 13:14.

<sup>46</sup>1 Clement 46.5; see also 2.2; 58.2.

<sup>47</sup>Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 29.72.

<sup>48</sup>See Tertullian *Against Praxeas* 7-8, 25-26.

<sup>49</sup>Origen *On First Principles* 1.3.4 (ANF 4:253).

While elsewhere Origen does speak of the Spirit in subordinate terms,<sup>50</sup> here he establishes that the Spirit deserves the same honor as the Father and the Son, although his language of prior existence not only lacked the precision of later discussions, but also opened the way for Arius and Eunomius in the fourth century to subordinate the Son and the Spirit. Origen does, however, highlight the unique and special work of the Holy Spirit in distinction to the Father and the Son.<sup>51</sup> The Spirit is the one who works in the saints, enabling them to become partakers of the Father and Son as he makes them holy and enables their progress in holiness toward perfection.<sup>52</sup>

**The fourth century.** There were no significant discussions about the person and divinity of the Spirit elsewhere until almost 150 years after Origen and Tertullian had written. During this intervening period, however, various speculations about the Trinity and the relationship of the persons in the Trinity began to emerge. One of these speculations was called Monarchianism, or Sabellianism, named after the third century figure Sabellius, who emphasized the divine oneness (or monarchy) of God by speaking of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as *modes* rather than as *persons* of the Trinity.<sup>53</sup> Further speculation came in the person of Arius, who also focused on the divine oneness of the Godhead, concluding that God's essence could in no way be shared by another.<sup>54</sup> This meant that the Son had to be a created being, as did the Holy Spirit. The slogan of Arianism was: "There was a time when he [the Son] did not exist." They said the same about the Spirit, although this was not the focus of their teaching. Therefore, when it came time at the Council of Nicaea in 325 to formalize the creed in response to Arius, there was an extensive section devoted to the Son's relation to the Father. But when it came time to speak about the Spirit, the creed simply stated: And we believe in the Holy Spirit. There was also a certain genius, however, in this short confession. By confessing faith in the Holy Spirit, the creed did not go beyond Scripture, but it did include the Spirit in a "decisive Trinitarian context,"<sup>55</sup> following Jesus' trinitarian command to baptize in Matthew 28:19 and the church's standard practice up to that point. And yet, during the first half of the fourth century the church's focus was still on the person of the Son.

There are orthodox fathers in this period who do engage in writing about the Holy Spirit.

<sup>50</sup>See Origen *On First Principles* 1.preface.4; *Commentary on John* 2.10.73-88 (FC 80:113-17).

<sup>51</sup>He contrasts the Spirit's work with that of the Father and the Son by noting that the Father works more broadly in the world among rational and irrational beings, the Son works among rational beings as the Logos, and more specifically works among saints and sinners, while the Spirit only works in the saints. When Origen talks about the different persons and operations of the Trinity, he anticipates the later trinitarian controversies by emphasizing the unitive power of the Trinity is one and the same in all three. Again, the language is not as clear and precise as it is in the later controversies, but nor should we expect it to be since language was often clarified in controversy. See Origen *On First Principles* 1.3.6-7.

<sup>52</sup>Origen *On First Principles* 1.3.5, 8.

<sup>53</sup>According to modalism, as it was called, God revealed himself sometimes in the mode of Father, other times in the mode of the Son or the Spirit.

<sup>54</sup>MFC 3:91.

<sup>55</sup>OHG 71.

Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386), who lived long enough to attend the second ecumenical council, is the first to provide a more extensive treatment of the Spirit. His sixteenth *Catechetical Lecture* written in 348 is devoted entirely to the Holy Spirit. In this lecture, written for baptismal candidates, he explains the Holy Spirit in scriptural terms that his catechumens could understand. He, in fact, pledged to say nothing which Scripture itself did not say. Cyril reflects the creeds and the Zeitgeist at the first half of the fourth century<sup>56</sup> in not speaking directly about the divinity or personhood of the Spirit, preferring rather to speak about his work in the church.<sup>57</sup> But as he and others began to speak more about the Spirit's teaching and sanctifying power, there was bound to be more of an interest in the person of the Spirit as well. Even as the idea that the Holy Spirit exists as a person in his relationship with the Father and the Son began to gain more universal acceptance, there were still any number of people who found it difficult to form such a conception. It was easier to regard the Spirit as some kind of an elevated creature with its own unique dignity and power, or as some kind of intermediate being who was neither God nor creature. Thinking about the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead proved difficult for many, thus evoking Gregory of Nazianzus's comment at a later date that to be only slightly in error regarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was to be orthodox.<sup>58</sup> And, no doubt, there were many more who preferred not to deal with the issue of the Spirit at all, remaining silent instead.<sup>59</sup>

**The Alexandrians.** The heretical sects of the day did not choose to remain silent when speaking about the Spirit. Thus the silence of the orthodox could remain only for so long. Just as Athanasius (ca. 295-373) had been the first to respond to the Arians, he also was called on, now as an elder statesman of the orthodox, to respond to a number of new threats developing in the mid-fourth century. The most immediate threat for Athanasius was the Tropicists<sup>60</sup> whom the Egyptian Bishop Serapion asked him to confront in a series of four letters in the late 350s through early 360s. This sect seems to have been a distilled version of the Macedonians,<sup>61</sup> or Pneumatomachi, who were opposed to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as their alternate name—literally “Spirit fighters”—implies. They in turn shared many similarities with the Eunomians,<sup>62</sup> against whom the Cappadocians would do battle.<sup>63</sup> As Shapland notes, unlike the Eunomians, the Macedonians' teaching was at times confusing and contradictory.<sup>64</sup> And yet they, along with

---

<sup>56</sup>Followed by Rufinus of Aquileia who wrote a commentary on the Apostles' Creed in the latter half of the century.

<sup>57</sup>MFC 3:91.

<sup>58</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus *Oration on the Great Athanasius* 21.33; NPNF 2 7:279.

<sup>59</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus *Oration* 31.5. In his treatise against Eunomius written in the 360s, Basil confessed “without blushing [his] own ignorance of the Holy Spirit.” In the West, Hilary of Poitiers similarly admits his own lack of understanding about the Holy Spirit in *On the Trinity* 12.56.

<sup>60</sup>They were called Tropicists because of their use of “tropes,” which are figures of speech or metaphors.

<sup>61</sup>Named after the Bishop Macedonius.

<sup>62</sup>Named after Eunomius, bishop of Cyzicus (ca. 325–ca. 395).

<sup>63</sup>See below.

<sup>64</sup>They may have been a rather loose, inconsistent alliance rather than a movement or well-defined sect. The following references and argumentation come from notes in LAHS 28.

the other heretical sects, shared a common cause in their denigration of the Spirit. One can see a direct connection between what these heretical sects taught and the phrases added to the Nicene Creed of 325 that resulted in the confession of the Holy Spirit in 381.

The Macedonians taught that the Spirit was not to be called “Lord,” nor was he to be glorified with the Father.<sup>65</sup> The Spirit also was not to be considered a fellow worker with the Father and Son, since they did not consider the Spirit as capable of creating or giving life.<sup>66</sup> They also taught that the Spirit was only a minister or instrument of God, like the angels.<sup>67</sup> And yet, he was not to be considered an angel or a creature of any kind.<sup>68</sup> They made very subtle but ultimately misleading distinctions in saying the Spirit was considered not unlike the Father and the Son,<sup>69</sup> being divine<sup>70</sup> but not God;<sup>71</sup> originated,<sup>72</sup> but not created.<sup>73</sup> They viewed the Holy Spirit as a unique being,<sup>74</sup> one of a kind, who possessed a mediating, or middle, nature, so that he was not fully a creature but also not fully divine.<sup>75</sup>

In some ways, we might say the Macedonians reflected the confusion many often feel in trying to conceptualize just what or who the Holy Spirit is. The Tropici, at least according to Athanasius, appear to have had no such qualms or confusion. Their teaching is straightforward and consistent. Although they had repudiated the Arian understanding of the Son of God by affirming the Son is *homoousios* with the Father, they still held the Arian view that the Spirit was a lesser being. The Spirit was to be considered like one of the angels, differing from them only in terms of degree.<sup>76</sup> The logical corollary is that the Spirit was to be considered a created being<sup>77</sup> having no similarity to the Son of God.<sup>78</sup>

[The Tropici have] forsaken the Arians on account of their blasphemy against the Son of God, yet oppose the Holy Spirit, saying that he is not only a creature, but actually one of the ministering spirits, and differs from the angels only in degree. In this they pretend to be fighting against the Arians; in reality they are controverting the holy faith. For as the Arians in denying the Son deny

<sup>65</sup>See, e.g., Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 1.1-3, 17; Gregory of Nyssa *Against the Macedonians* 2; Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 24.

<sup>66</sup>Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 1.17; *Dialogue on the Trinity* 3.16; *Against the Macedonians* 1.12; Gregory of Nyssa *Against the Macedonians* 11; Didymus *On the Trinity* 2 (PG 39:564B).

<sup>67</sup>Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 17; Didymus *On the Trinity* 2 (PG 39:600C).

<sup>68</sup>Pseudo-Athanasius *Dialogue on the Trinity* 3.19; Didymus *On the Trinity* 2 (PG39:620A). For an opposite assessment see Gregory of Nyssa *Against the Macedonians* 15.

<sup>69</sup>Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 1.18.

<sup>70</sup>Gk *theion*.

<sup>71</sup>Gk *theos*. Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 1.18; *Dialogue on the Trinity* 3.19.

<sup>72</sup>Gk *genēton*.

<sup>73</sup>Gk *ktiston*. Pseudo-Athanasius *Against the Macedonians* 1.20, which they derive from Jn 1:3.

<sup>74</sup>Gk *monadikon*. See Pseudo-Athanasius *Dialogue on the Trinity* 3.19; *Against the Macedonians* 1.8.

<sup>75</sup>Gk *mesē physis*. See Didymus *On the Trinity* 2.7.3 (PG23:548A; 576B).

<sup>76</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.1.

<sup>77</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.10.

<sup>78</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.9.

also the Father, so also these men in speaking evil of the Holy Spirit speak evil also of the Son.<sup>79</sup>

This was the crux of the matter for Athanasius and for those spiritual descendants who followed. As went the Spirit, so went the Son: if the Spirit is a creature, then the Son must also be a creature.<sup>80</sup> If the Spirit is a created being—no matter how exalted a being you want to call him—anyone who holds such teaching is introducing a creature into the Godhead. The Arian argument assumed that there could be no contact between creator and creature. Athanasius, as McDonnell notes, was quite sure, however, “that God had done precisely what the Arians feared, namely, God had made the most intimate contact with the created order in the Spirit through Christ. More than that, the incarnate Son in the Spirit was the greatest guarantee that God had the most immediate personal contact with the world and humankind.”<sup>81</sup> If the Son had made contact with creation, as indeed he did in the incarnation, then so had the Spirit.<sup>82</sup> This in fact is what makes our holiness possible. Without contact with the divine we could not be made holy. However, if the Spirit is not divine, but only a creature, then it does not have the power to sanctify, to give life, or make us partakers in the divine nature:

John has taught us, writing, “And so it is that we know we abide in God, and he in us, since he has given us of his Spirit.”<sup>83</sup> So, if it is by participation in the Spirit that we are made sharers in the divine nature,<sup>84</sup> it would be sheer madness to conclude that the Spirit has a created nature, and not the nature of God himself. For those in whom the Spirit dwells are from that very fact [of his indwelling] made divine. If he makes creatures divine, it cannot be doubted that his nature is that of God.<sup>85</sup>

Thus Athanasius rejected any interpretation of Scripture that would make the Spirit into a lesser being than God. Although he does not use the title *God* to refer to the Holy Spirit, he twice speaks of the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father.<sup>86</sup> He reiterates at least seven times in his letters to Serapion that the Spirit is not a creature.<sup>87</sup> His scriptural response is filled with passages that speak of the Spirit’s exalted status. His argument also hinges on the fact the Spirit is an integral part of the life of the church. It is present and working in her baptisms, her prayers, her divine liturgy, her worship. To introduce anything less than God into any one of these is to denude these gifts to the church of their power.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.1.

<sup>80</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 3.1.

<sup>81</sup>OHG 75.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>1 Jn 4:13.

<sup>84</sup>2 Pet 1:4.

<sup>85</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.24.

<sup>86</sup>He had been reticent to use the term in the decades after Nicaea. See Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.27; 3.1. He does not come out and say that the Spirit is God, although he says he “is confessed as God (*theologoumenon*) with the Word.” See Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.31. Athanasius never gives the Spirit the title *theos*.

<sup>87</sup>See Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.17, 21, 22, 25, 26, 32; 3.1, 3.

<sup>88</sup>Athanasius *Letters to Serapion* 1.22-24.

Athanasius died in 373 and therefore was not present at the second ecumenical council of Constantinople in 381, but his teaching regarding the Spirit lived on in the blind theologian from Alexandria named Didymus (ca. 313-398). Didymus's *Treatise on the Holy Spirit* was written in the latter half of the 370's not too long after Athanasius's death. He also wrote a treatise on the Trinity, as did most writers of the period. In these writings, he, as those before him, counsels caution when speaking of the Spirit in order to avoid the sin of blasphemy against the Spirit that Jesus talks about in Matthew 12:31-32. He speaks of the secret and veiled Spirit of Scripture of whom the pagans are unaware but of whom those who know the Scriptures and profess Christ are aware.<sup>89</sup> Origen had taught this at Alexandria more than a century before.<sup>90</sup> Also echoing Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus asserted that we should believe no more about the Holy Spirit "than what is written, that is, that the Holy Spirit is uncreated. It follows from this that this uncreated substance is rightly joined with the Father and the Son."<sup>91</sup> Didymus's caution, however, is also tempered by his understanding that nothing less than the Trinity was at stake during this time and therefore notes that the Spirit cannot be conceived of by itself but only in its relation to Father and Son.<sup>92</sup>

The concern for the Trinity as a whole is also demonstrated in the councils in Alexandria in 362, 363 and 369, which affirmed what Athanasius had argued, insisting that those who deny the Spirit are ultimately blaspheming the Trinity because they separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son.<sup>93</sup> The divinity of the Spirit was intimately tied with the integrity of the Trinity. What had been a sufficient confession in 325—"We believe in the Holy Spirit"—was no longer sufficient because of the challenges that had arisen within the church regarding the divinity of the Spirit. To paraphrase Gregory of Nazianzus's cousin Amphilocius in his letter to the Synod of Iconium of 376, What was sufficient for Nicaea is not sufficient for us. Nicaea committed us to a trinitarian doctrine, but no trinitarian doctrine is possible if the Spirit is not recognized as trinitarian and therefore divine.<sup>94</sup> It was left to Amphilocius's cousin Gregory and his friends, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, to bring the discussion regarding the Holy Spirit to its logical conclusion.

**The Cappadocians.** More than a decade before the Synod of Iconium (376), Basil, as Bishop of Caesarea (330-379), had confronted the issue of the Holy Spirit in the person of Eunomius, a formidable rhetorician who was bishop of Cyzicus. When Basil encountered him in 360, the question of the Spirit had just begun to be raised, and Basil had expressed his relative ignorance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>95</sup> Eunomius, similar to the Macedonians, considered the Holy Spirit as "the

<sup>89</sup>Didymus *On the Holy Spirit* 3 (SC 386:144).

<sup>90</sup>Origen *On First Principles* 1.3.1. See OHG 78.

<sup>91</sup>Didymus *On the Holy Spirit* 62 (SC 386:198-200).

<sup>92</sup>Didymus *On the Holy Spirit* 37 (SC 386:176).

<sup>93</sup>OHG 77.

<sup>94</sup>Amphilocius *Synodal Letter* (PG 39:93-98) as paraphrased OHG 78.

<sup>95</sup>Basil *Against Eunomius* 3.6 (SC 305:168).

first creature of the first born, the greatest of all and the only one who exists as such, but lacking Godhead and the power to create.”<sup>96</sup> Basil responds by evoking themes concerning the holiness of the Spirit and his sanctifying and divinizing power, which can only be accomplished by one who is God. Both Basil’s and Athanasius’s arguments are reflected in the wording of the creed of 381, which confessed the Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of life.” He, like Athanasius, in subsequent letters and tracts<sup>97</sup> primarily speaks of the Spirit in terms of the Spirit’s work in the life of the church, its prayers, liturgy, baptismal practice and its doxology. This is especially so in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* written in 374-75 about four years before his death. In this treatise he demonstrates how the church had from its very beginning, and consistently since then, implicitly understood the Holy Spirit to be divine through baptism and blessing given and received in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In order to bring this into sharper relief, he introduced alongside the more traditional formula of doxology, “Glory be to the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit” the formula which he sometimes also used in the prayers, “Glory be to the Father, *with* [Gk *meta*] the Son, *together with* [Gk *syn*] the Holy Spirit.”<sup>98</sup> This doxology contained a more explicit confession of the equality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son than previous doxologies. Basil was a forceful proponent of the adage: How one prays is how one believes,<sup>99</sup> and the church implicitly understood his argument with reference to the Holy Spirit even as it also ultimately resisted his change in the formulation of the doxology. Innovation might also introduce confusion.

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389), also known as Gregory the Theologian, was much more forceful in his demand that the church should admit that the divinity of the Holy Spirit be treated the same as the divinity of the Son. Nicaea had confessed the Son to be *of one substance* (*homoousios*) with the Father. Thus, the Spirit should also be confessed as *of one substance* (*homoousios*) with the Father and the Son. Although Athanasius had indeed used this terminology before him, as had Didymus and Epiphanius, Gregory’s fifth theological oration, *On the Holy Spirit*, contains one of the clearest affirmations yet of the Spirit’s divinity: “Is the Spirit God? Most certainly. Well then, is he consubstantial? Yes, if he is God.”<sup>100</sup> There was no equivocation, no hesitancy with Gregory. As Amphilocius had noted, the challenges facing the teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity meant the time had come to state clearly what the church believed concerning the third person of the Trinity.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-395), Basil’s younger brother and Gregory’s friend, worked out, perhaps most fully, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son:

We believe and confess that in every deed and thought, either of this world or of that beyond this world, either in time or in eternity, the Holy Spirit is to be understood as joined with the Father

---

<sup>96</sup>Basil *Apology* 25 (SC 305:286).

<sup>97</sup>See Basil *Letters* 223, 224, 226, 244 (NPNF 2 8:262-270).

<sup>98</sup>Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 1.3.

<sup>99</sup>Lat *Lex orandi et lex credendi*.

<sup>100</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus *Oration* 31.10 *On the Holy Spirit*.

and the Son. Nor is he lacking in any form of will, or energy, or anything else that can be implied in a devout conception of the Supreme Goodness. And so, we believe that, except for the distinction of order [*taxis*] and person [*hypostasis*], no variation in any point can be understood. We maintain that while the Spirit's place is counted third in mere sequence after the Father and the Son, third in the order of the transmission, in all other respects we acknowledge his inseparable union with them: that is, one in nature, in honor, in Godhead, in glory and majesty, in almighty power, and in all devout belief.<sup>101</sup>

In this way, no one could claim that Gregory or any of the other Cappadocians taught there were three Gods. He also put down in plainest terms how this Godhead interacts and works among his creation in a treatise entitled, *On Not Three Gods*.<sup>102</sup> Every activity that comes from God originates from<sup>103</sup> the Father, proceeding through<sup>104</sup> the Son and is perfected in<sup>105</sup> the Holy Spirit.<sup>106</sup> This became the standard formula for speaking of the work of the Trinity and for speaking of the Holy Spirit's work. The Holy Spirit would be known as the one who perfects or completes the work of the Father and the Son in their trinitarian work.

**The Council of Constantinople (381).** When we arrive at the second ecumenical council held in Constantinople in 381, the way had thus been paved to speak of the divinity of the Spirit. After the unexpected death of Meletius of Antioch, Gregory of Nazianzus was elected to preside over the council. There was, however, a mixed group of bishops in attendance, including thirty six Macedonian bishops who did not believe the Holy Spirit should be accorded equal status with the Father and the Son, although some had shown a disposition to accept the term *homoousios*.<sup>107</sup> Gregory seems to have been a bit frustrated at the council's conciliatory attitude toward them.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps their presence, however, caused the council to show restraint by using scriptural terms and phrases rather than a term such as *homoousios* which, although accurate, was not found in Scripture.<sup>109</sup> Each of the terms and phrases utilized in the expanded third article of the revised creed of 381<sup>110</sup> is an implicit expression of the Spirit's equality with the Father and Son,

<sup>101</sup>Gregory of Nyssa *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Macedonians* 14 (NPNF 2 5:320\*\*).

<sup>102</sup>See NPNF 2 5:331-36.

<sup>103</sup>Gk *ek*.

<sup>104</sup>Gk *dia*.

<sup>105</sup>Gk *en*.

<sup>106</sup>Gregory of Nyssa *On Not Three Gods* (GNO 3.1.48).

<sup>107</sup>HSAC 185.

<sup>108</sup>He refers to the pure stream of the old faith being "muddied by the foul tributaries of waverers." See Gregory of Nazianzus *On His Life*, cited in McDonnell, *OHG* 153.

<sup>109</sup>HSAC 186.

<sup>110</sup>I agree with Henry Chadwick that the creed was revised at Constantinople rather than a reworking of the earlier creed. See Henry Chadwick, "Augustine" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 336, who notes, "A revision of the Nicene Creed of 325 was associated, probably correctly, with the Council of Constantinople of 381. . . . The revised creed was designed to justify the full share of the Holy Spirit in the equality of the divine Trinity." See also the next note. McDonnell, *OHG* 151-53, also rehearses the debate over whether the creed was

even as each also speaks to the uniqueness of the Spirit in the Trinity.<sup>111</sup>

The creed begins by speaking of the Holy Spirit as “the Lord,” just as Paul had done,<sup>112</sup> and following on the reasoning of Basil.<sup>113</sup> The Holy Spirit is also the “giver of life,” something which both Basil and Athanasius had affirmed in their writings on the Spirit and which is also the scriptural language of Moses,<sup>114</sup> Ezekiel,<sup>115</sup> Jesus,<sup>116</sup> Paul<sup>117</sup> and Peter,<sup>118</sup> among others. The creed, in its original wording, next confesses that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” reflecting Jesus’ words in John 15:26.<sup>119</sup> The Holy Spirit is the one who “spoke by the prophets.” This had been taught from the earliest days of the church and concludes the article on the Spirit, emphasizing this enduring legacy of the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures. Their boldest statement, however, is the confession that precedes this, affirming that the Holy Spirit “with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.”

The Fathers at Constantinople could have chosen to use the term *homoousios* at this point to speak of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and Son, but chose not to do so. Perhaps they wanted to avoid the trouble they had endured with its usage at Nicaea in 325. They may have chosen to stay with a conservative approach, attempting to win over those at the council who disagreed. And yet, they chose to use the preposition “with” (Gk *syn*) in speaking of the Spirit’s relationship to the Father and the Son in worship, placing him on equal terms with them. This is just what Basil had done in his alternate doxology for which he had been criticized, but which he defended in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* 1.3.<sup>120</sup> The thirty-six Macedonian bishops could see where the council was headed. They boycotted the rest of the council meeting and left Constantinople, leaving no doubt that their allegiance remained with the Arians. The Council too left no doubt

---

composed at Constantinople, noting the work especially of J. N. D. Kelly and R. P. C. Hanson. He concludes that “the council did put together its own creed, using some pre-existing text as its basis.”

<sup>111</sup>HSAC and T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1988), both accept Hort’s conclusion (F. J. A. Hort, *Two Dissertations* (Cambridge and London, 1876) that the creed at Constantinople was actually that which had been written by Epiphanius in his *Ancoratus* written in 374, and that the council may have read and accepted this creed in 381. However, Andrew Louth summarizes the consensus of scholarly opinion against such a conclusion, noting, “There is . . . general scholarly agreement that Epiphanius originally included the genuine creed of Nicaea [in his *Ancoratus*], for which the liturgically more familiar creed [the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed] was substituted at a later date.” Andrew Louth, “Palestine: Cyril of Jerusalem and Epiphanius,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 287.

<sup>112</sup>2 Cor 3:17; 2 Thess 3:5.

<sup>113</sup>Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 21.52. For further examples see chapter two of this volume.

<sup>114</sup>Gen 1:2; 2:7.

<sup>115</sup>Ezek 37.

<sup>116</sup>Jn 6:63. See also Gen 1:2

<sup>117</sup>Rom 8; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:6.

<sup>118</sup>1 Pet 3:18.

<sup>119</sup>Although the creed chose to use the preposition *ek* instead of *para* in the Greek, thus emphasizing the Father as source of the Spirit’s procession.

<sup>120</sup>I am indebted to notes from J. Robert Wright for these insights.

as to what they meant regarding the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The very first canon of the council provided a list of those who were to be considered anathema. Topping that list were the Eunomians, who denied the Spirit's divinity. Next in line were the Pneumatomachi, who neither denied nor affirmed the Spirit's divinity.<sup>121</sup>

The controversy regarding the Holy Spirit and the Trinity had only lasted for a total of about 25 years. The decisions arrived at in Constantinople were confirmed at subsequent councils held in Constantinople in 382 and 383 as the emperor Theodosius set the limits of orthodoxy. Arianism and its permutations such as Eunomianism and the Pneumatomachi were excluded and died out in the East, only to arise for a brief period in the West among the barbarian tribes. Its ultimate total collapse, however, testifies to its lack of any "inherent vitality."<sup>122</sup> The divinity and the equal place of the Spirit among the persons of the Trinity was assured in the East and in the West as well.

In the West, Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) wrote at the same time as Athanasius. His focus was on Christology and the relation of the Son to the Father but also maintained the Spirit's distinctness and celebrated his work among the faithful. Hilary had maintained that both Father and Son share a single nature and do together the work of the Godhead. Ambrose (339-397) extended this reasoning of Hilary on the single nature of the Godhead to the Spirit as well. He was writing about the same time as the Cappadocians, basing his material on that of Didymus's and Basil's treatises on the Spirit. His own treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, written in three books, was commissioned by the emperor Gratian in 381 at the same time the ecumenical council was being held in Constantinople. Here Ambrose demonstrates, as Basil had done, that the Spirit shares the divine attributes and actions of the Father and Son. Thus in the West, too, the way had been prepared to accept the divinity of the Spirit. Because the western Bishops had not been present at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, the western emperor Gratian called a general council in Rome in 382. The decisions of the Council of Constantinople were accepted and the Tome of Pope Damasus (304-384) was read, which affirmed that the Spirit was God and was consubstantial with the Father and the Son. The results of the council were further confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

**The fifth century.** The controversy over the person of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity is largely over by the fifth century. In the setting of a more mature trinitarian theology, the teaching of the church about the Holy Spirit became more refined, but remained largely consistent with what had gone before. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) worked out the divinizing power of the Spirit in relation to the sacraments, especially in his *Commentary on John* commenting on John 6:53, but also in many other places.<sup>123</sup> John Chrysostom (d. 407) does not have any extended discussion of the person of the Spirit but is often found speaking of the Spirit's power in the sanctified Christian life. Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) explicates his understanding of the Spirit as the

<sup>121</sup>NPNF 2 14:172.

<sup>122</sup>HSAC 190.

<sup>123</sup>For a list that includes the text of the quotes see the *Catalog of Testimonies 5* in the *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 1133-35.

giver of life, which he connects with the gift of immortality in his catechetical homilies that deal with the creed.<sup>124</sup> He also addresses the procession of the Spirit from the Father as an expression of his eternal oneness with the Father.<sup>125</sup> By far, however, the most important figure of the fifth century is Augustine (354-430).

In 393, as Yves Congar notes, Augustine, who was still only a simple priest at the time, presented his treatise *On Faith and Creed* to a local council. In this treatise he said:

Many books have been written by scholarly and spiritual men on the Father and the Son. . . . The Holy Spirit has, on the other hand, not yet been studied with as much care and by so many great and learned commentators on the scriptures that it is easy to understand his special character and know why we cannot call him either Son or Father, but only Holy Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

From this time forward Augustine's interest in the person of the Holy Spirit only increased. He would continue along the lines of trinitarian argumentation of the fourth century, but also develop the teaching of the Spirit further, especially in his treatise *On the Trinity* (399-419). In this work he speaks of the Spirit as that which is common to the Father and the Son. The Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father, nor is he only the Spirit of the Son. He is the shared love and holiness that binds the persons of the Trinity together.<sup>127</sup> The Holy Spirit, in fact, is especially called by the name of love<sup>128</sup> so that, even as all three persons of the Trinity are joined in every action of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity of whom it is said that he inflames believers with the love of God:

When God the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from God, has been given to a person, he inflames him with the love for God and his neighbor, and he himself is Love. For a person does not have the power to love God, unless the power comes from God.<sup>129</sup>

God is love, by definition, and the Spirit as the love of God binds together not only the Father and the Son but also us, as he is given to those who receive him. Love, by its very nature, is something that must be given. It is not meant to be kept as a possession. It is meant to be given. The Spirit, as the gift of God, is God's gift of love, his gift of himself—the gift that keeps on giving because as we receive love from God in the Spirit we give that love to others. Because the Spirit is common to both the Father and the Son, and is the bond of love between them, they in turn desire for us to have communion with them and with each other through that same bond of love which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>130</sup> Sin would prevent this communion unless we became

---

<sup>124</sup>See the quote in MFC 3:159-60.

<sup>125</sup>See Theodore of Mopsuestia *Commentary on John* 6.15.26 (CSCO 4 3:287-88), quoted in Joel C. Elowsky (ACCS NT IVb; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 190.

<sup>126</sup>Augustine *On Faith and Creed* 9.18-19 (PL 40: 190, 191), quoted in *IBHS* 1:77.

<sup>127</sup>Augustine *On the Trinity* 5.11.12; see also 15.19.37.

<sup>128</sup>Augustine *On the Trinity* 15.17.31.

<sup>129</sup>Augustine *On the Trinity* 15.17.31.

<sup>130</sup>Augustine *Sermon* 71.18-19, 33; See *WSA* 3 3:256-58, 266-67.

reconciled to God. Christ has reconciled us to the Father and applies this reconciliation to us, as Augustine notes, through the Holy Spirit, since forgiveness of sins only comes to us in the Spirit.<sup>131</sup> And it is through the Spirit also then that the church is gathered together and brought into unity.<sup>132</sup>

In one sense, the confession of the Nicene Creed in 325 said it all: We believe in the Holy Spirit. And yet, in another sense, neither the creed of 325, nor the expanded creed of 381 said it all—nor did they mean to say everything. Perhaps there is wisdom in leaving some things left unsaid. Much of the later discussion concerning the Holy Spirit has revolved around the Spirit's procession. The ancient authors often counseled that we should confess the Spirit's procession. But how that procession occurs, they cautioned, cannot be known. Thus in comments on that portion of the creed that refer to the Spirit's procession this volume includes a brief discussion of the historical, theological and linguistic developments that have contributed toward the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately this issue has proved church dividing rather than church uniting. It is lamentable that the doctrine of the Spirit's procession has had this result, especially in light of the fact that the Spirit's role in the Trinity is to be as the bond of love that unites. But perhaps the Spirit is doing something new in this regard as churches from East and West continue to clarify their teaching on this issue.

## Conclusion

The early Christians approached their teaching about the Holy Spirit more cautiously and humbly than subsequent ages have done at times. They were not only concerned about blaspheming the Spirit in what they said—as important as that concern was. They implicitly understood that in order to talk about the Spirit and understand the Spirit, one needs the gift of *the Spirit*. In other words, we only know the Spirit in so far as the Spirit makes himself known. The Spirit, in turn, blows where it pleases, and not always where we think it should. We get to know the Spirit as we see the results of what it has done. But knowing what someone does, and seeing the effects of what has been done, is quite different than knowing that person himself.

This persistent imprecision, along with Scripture's relative silence, explains the patristic reticence to speak about the Holy Spirit. But this is how the Spirit himself wants it to be. The Spirit, according to Paul, would rather pray in us and with us through Christ to the Father,<sup>133</sup> although we can and sometimes do pray to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit prays with and in our spirit, crying "Abba, Father."<sup>134</sup> He points us to Christ and the Father, not to himself. This is the way of love even as God is love.<sup>135</sup> God the Holy Spirit, as Augustine so insightfully understood, is the expression of divine love. Love, by its very nature is not self promoting. It does not seek

---

<sup>131</sup>Augustine *Sermon* 71.33. See Jn 20:22-23.

<sup>132</sup>Augustine *Sermon* 71.18-19; 28, 33; *IBHS* 1:80.

<sup>133</sup>*OHG* 225.

<sup>134</sup>Cf. Rom 8:15-16.

<sup>135</sup>1 Jn 4:8.

its own way.<sup>136</sup> Love is constantly engaged in the task of giving to and for others. God the Holy Spirit has never been about himself. He is always pointing us to Christ and giving the gifts the Father wants his church to have. Thus when we speak of the Spirit we never do so apart from Christ and the Father. We follow the Spirit's lead, approaching the subject in humility but not so much so that we do not speak where we can or should. We seek to know more fully the Spirit and his work among us. But as we seek to know the Spirit, it is with a sense of awe that realizes we can never tame what David called the free Spirit<sup>137</sup>—nor would we want to.

*Joel Elowsky*

*Feast of Pentecost, 2007*

---

<sup>136</sup>1 Cor 13:5.

<sup>137</sup>Ps 51:12, in the words of the King James Version.

---