



## Athanasius and the Cappadocians on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

- The Pneumatomachian Controversy
- Eunomius and Neo-Arianism

### Athanasius

Athanasius (c.358) responds to Serapion of Thmuis, who had studied Origen's writings and was a noted ascetic and bishop (Athanasius is the archbishop but is in his third exile from Alexandria due to the dominance of the Arians).

- Serapion reports that some people (monks or ascetics?) were arguing that
  - the Holy Spirit was a created being, a kind of angel, pointing to
    - Amos 4:13 LXX: "I am he who creates spirit (*pneuma*)...and declares his annointed one (*christos*) to men"(I.3);
    - Zech. 4:5: "the angel who spoke in me" and
    - 1 Tim. 5:21, where we find ranked together God, Christ and "the elect angels" (so the fact that the Spirit is mentioned with F and S does not show that Spirit is of similar origin and rank) "(I.10-11)
- Athanasius mockingly calls "Tropici" "Metaphoricals" because of their unconvincing metaphorical interpretation of the Scriptures.
  - The first two proof-texts remind one of some of the popular literature produced in Egypt in the second and third centuries (Ascension of Isaiah, Apocalypse of Elijah), where the it is recognized that
    - God works in creation through intermediaries but
    - these intermediaries--His Word, Wisdom, Spirit and the angels--are all lumped together in one undifferentiated category.
  - The Arian controversy had forced the issue, making it necessary to
    - distinguish Creator from creatures and
    - Athanasius and the ascetic and monastic leaders who had supported him had asserted that the Son lay on the Creator rather than the creature side.
  - Nothing, however, had been said about the Spirit.
    - The Tropici's proposal is therefore simple:
      - the Spirit belongs on the creature side and
      - this was consistent with Origen's earlier language about the Spirit's coming about/being brought about by the Father through the agency of the Son.

Athanasius response is to assert that

- if Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the source of salvation and divine life and are named as such in baptism,
- we must keep them together rather than trying to separate them by asserting that the Holy Spirit is merely a creature and therefore fundamentally unlike the Father and the Son.
  - The Spirit is from God rather than made from nothing like creatures (I.22)
  - The Spirit unites us to God and makes us sharers in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), to which it must therefore itself belong to the divine nature (I.24) (cannot unite to divine nature unless itself is part of divine nature)
    - The Spirit is the immutable source of good things, which it gives rather than receives (creatures receive)(cf. I. 26-27)
    - The Father acts and saves **through** the Son **in** the Spirit (1.28,30). A *taxis* (order of dependence in causation and activity) is thus present in the divine life and extends toward us. Divine life and power are therefore extended to us through the Holy Trinity in a way that reflects the procession and dynamic ordering of God's own inner life.
      - The Spirit shares in the being of Father and Son (I.25)
      - The relation between the Son and the Spirit is then understood to be analogous to the relation between the Son and the Father. (This extends arguments used in the Arian controversy to justify equal honor being given to Son in order to argue for equal honor being given to the Spirit).
        - Criticism: Doesn't this ordering (*taxis*) make the Spirit not a Spirit but a Grandson?
        - Athanasius' response: We need to use not human analogies, but analogies drawn from incorporeal things like light, knowledge or wisdom that show original/image or essence/expression, maintaining continuity in source and fundamental identity while allowing for differentiation in position/activity:
          - light/radiance/enlightening,
          - fountain/river/drink,
          - wise/wisdom/spirit of wisdom,
          - Spirit as image of Son, as Son is image of Father (I.24)
- Athanasius essentially stops at this point (no further argumentation or development of the doctrine)

## The Cappadocian Fathers

### *Basil of Caesarea*

- Born c. 330 Cappadocia,
- His ancestors were early supporters of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (“the wonder-worker”) who was responsible for the evangelization of Cappadocia;
- Son of a well-known teacher of rhetoric at Neocaesarea in Pontus;
- Later studied rhetoric (and some philosophy) at Constantinople and (after 351) Athens, where he met Gregory of Nazianzus, who became a close friend.
- Returned to his hometown to teach rhetoric but came to admire the disciplined life of prayer, simplicity and inner freedom he saw in others and gave up his teaching career to pursue this [see quotations in Quasten, v. 3, pp. 204-205].
- Organized communities of prayer, was then ordained and later, as a bishop, defended the Church against imperially sponsored Arianism [see quotations in Quasten, v. 3, p. 206].
- Died 379, prior to Council of Constantinople in 381 (which affirmed the Nicene faith and condemned later Arianism).

### *Gregory of Nazianzus*

- Born c. 330 in Cappadocia;
- Father had converted to Christianity c. 325 and become a bishop by the time Gregory was born;
- Gregory studied rhetoric in Cappadocia, then briefly at Caesarea in Palestine and Alexandria before going to Athens, where he and Basil became friends;
- Left Athens c. 357 to return to Cappadocia to teach rhetoric, but his father wanted him ordained to help him conduct ministry;
- Gregory eventually gave in under pressure and was ordained 362, fled, came back;
- In 371, Basil had him ordained (against his will) the bishop of Sasima but Gregory spent little time administering his new diocese and instead continued working with his father at Nazianzus, taking over administration of the latter diocese when his father died.
- Gregory is best known for his five theological orations given in the summer or fall of 380 to rally support for the neo-Nicene cause prior to the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381.
- Made bishop of Constantinople, then soon retired to a life of study, prayer and writing religious poetry;
- Died 389-390.

### *Gregory of Nyssa*

- Born c. 335;
- Educated chiefly by his older brother Basil, became a lector (reader), taught rhetoric, possibly married, later retired to a life of prayer;
- In 371 appointed bishop of Nyssa by Basil but was criticized for failing to be firm with people and not being good at handling church politics or church finances;

- Deposed by Arians 376; restored 378; visited diocese of Pontus to recommend reforms, then made archbishop of Sebaste 380;
- With Gregory of Nazianzus, participated in the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381;
- Died 394.

The Spirit's nature and identity continued to be discussed during 360's but by 370's, positions had tend to polarize, centering around three issues:

- Should worship be addressed to the Spirit?
- How can the Spirit's origin be described in contrast to the generation of the Son?
- Can worship be directed to Father, Son and Holy Spirit without ending up with worship of three gods?
- The most radical position was that taken by Eunomius and the neo-Arian (Anomoean "unlike") party, who had strongly philosophical inclinations and thought that
  - the Council of Nicaea had been wrong and that
    - what made God God was being "unbegotten" (cf. Jn. 1:3);
    - since the Son was begotten, he was of a different substance than the Father and inferior to the Father.
    - The Spirit was merely a creature produced by the Son and therefore not to be worshipped.
- The opposite (neo-Nicene) party consisted of church leaders who were philosophically trained, strongly committed to the ascetic life of prayer and had carefully studied Origen's writings and interpreted these in much the same way as Athanasius (i.e. an anti-Arian way, defending the Nicene formula *homoousios* "of the same substance"), but recognized that some further definition was necessary if the criticisms of the later Arian and neo-Arian party were to be dealt with.
  - Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa: argued that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were
    - distinct in that each had characteristic functions (*idiotetes*) but
    - all had
      - the same substance and will and
      - together deserved honor and worship.
- In between there was a mediating party consisting of ascetics who were followers of Eustathius of Sebaste.
  - Represented an older, more conservative outlook and
    - didn't like the introduction of extra-scriptural (philosophical) terms in discussing the relations between F,S, and HS but
    - for this reason were ultimately unable to distinguish themselves from the Arians, so were sometimes dubbed "semi-Arians" and their position rejected.

- Affirming "of like substance" (*homousios*) or simply "like" (*homoios*) could not advance the discussion or distinguish Arian from Nicene perspectives.
- "God is master, creatures are servants, but the Spirit is free."
- Some of the Eustathians eventually joined the Athanasian/Cappadocian (neo-Nicene) side.

### The Worship of the Spirit

- Cyril and Athanasius had made it clear that the Spirit is to be honored and worshipped together with the Father and the Son.
  - In Athanasius, this implied acknowledgement of the Spirit's divinity is made explicit (i.e., the Spirit is recognized as fully God), although this point is not discussed/developed in any detail.
- In 374, Basil of Caesarea was attacked by the Eustathians for using in his liturgy (worship service) a doxology (prayer ascribing praise to God) that gave glory "to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit".
  - Basil's opponents preferred the traditional form of the doxology which (based on Eph. 2:13) rendered glory "to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit."
  - This
    - kept the basic idea (derived from Origen and other earlier writers) of the *taxis* (salvation comes to us through a certain ordering internal to the divine life, i.e. from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit) but
    - without defining what this really meant or what it told us about the nature and relations of the F,S and HS.
  - Basil's treatise is written in response to these criticisms to show that the
    - HS is fully divine and therefore
    - may appropriately be the object of prayer and worship without further qualification
      - i.e., he affirms the co-equality of F,S and HS despite the distinct and different characteristic functions each plays within the divine life).
  - Still Basil
    - is careful not to antagonize his enemies and
    - does not explicitly call the Spirit "God" in the treatise.
      - Notice that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed similarly says that the Spirit is worshipped with the Father and the Son but calls the Spirit "Lord" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17) not God.
      - Calling the Spirit "God" was done only in 380 when the Cappadocian party had largely prevailed (see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Oration* [Or. 31.12])

### The Spirit's Origin

- Basil's points to a solution to the problem previously raised by the Tropici:
  - Yes, the Spirit is "*from God*" (1 Cor. 11:12), but

- not in the sense that creatures are from God (i.e. by being created)
  - but as *proceeding from* God, not by way of generation (like the Son) but as "the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6) (*On the Holy Spirit* 46).
- Gregory of Nazianzus develops this point in his *Fifth Theological Oration* (Or. 31.8):
  - Just as
    - the peculiar characteristic of the Father is to be unbegotten and
    - the peculiar characteristic of the Son is to be begotten, so
    - the peculiar characteristic of the Spirit is to proceed" from the Father through the Son, so the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son and manifests the Son even though, strictly speaking, he does not *proceed* from Son (Jn. 15:26).
      - So the dilemma raised by the Tropici about the order within the Trinity is misguided and misses the point.
        - Father-->Son-->Holy Spirit is not a single, linear, descending sequence and the persons don't take their names from the descending order (Father-Son-Grandson).
        - Instead, the Son and Spirit take their names/unique roles from the way in which they come from the Father
          - Each has their own distinctive mode of being (*tropos tes hyparxeos*)-- unbegotten, begotten, proceeding-- even though we can't understand precisely what it is to "beget" or "proceed" from God), since these are uncreated realities that do not fully conform to .
  - One substance (*ousia*) but three independent existences (hypostases);
  - There is one will in the divine life->
    - Father, Son and Holy Spirit cooperate in activity,
    - are inseparably united to one another and
    - indwell one another

### Summary of the Cappadocian Position

- "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" each refer to the distinctive, defining quality (*idiotes*) or, more accurately, the unique mode of existence (*tropos hyparxeos*) associated with the peculiar relationship which exists within the divine life and sets that particular individual apart as distinct divine person (*prosopon*) with a distinct existence (*hypostasis*).

## A Theological Detour in Christology: Apollinaris of Laodicea and Christ's Human Soul

- Apollinaris--*logos/sarx* (Word/flesh) Christology—the Word takes on a human body, but replaces the role played by the human mind
  - Some think that Apollinaris was worried about the Word coming into union with a human mind that was changeable and tempted by thoughts of lust, anger, etc.
  - Others think this was just a development of Athanasius' Alexandrian Christology, which emphasized the Incarnation and the true bearing of flesh (against docetism), but had an underdeveloped account of the components and operations of Jesus' humanity (mind/emotions/etc.).
- Orthodox response (Cappadocians and Didymus the Blind)—
  - What the Church has taught is not *logos/sarx* (Word/flesh) Christology but a *logos/anthropos* (Word/man) Christology
    - The Word assumes the fullness of all that a human being is—body, mind, susceptibility to emotions, etc.
    - In fact, the Word *must* do this if the entire human person is to be redeemed and healed by divine grace.
      - Gregory of Nazianzus--what is not assumed by Christ is not healed (Hall's discussion of this on p. 160 is misleading, since he plays off the Incarnation as saving without the death and resurrection; for the Fathers, it is this taking up of human life which includes and makes possible suffering, death and atonement.)