

THE HOLY TRINITY
IN THE LIFE
OF THE CHURCH

EDITED BY
KHALED ANATOLIOS


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FOREWORD

FATHER NICK TRIANTAFILOU

*President of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School
of Theology and Hellenic College*

Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History is the first publication project of the Pappas Patristic Institute of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. This institute, founded in 2003 with a generous gift from Stephen and Catherine Pappas, has as its goal the advancement of patristic studies in the service of the academy and of the church. It does this by supporting ecumenically sensitive and academically open research and study in the Greek patristic tradition in conversation with other ancient Christian traditions. The Institute carries forward its mission through the leadership of its board of directors composed of scholars from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions and headed by the Rev. Dr. Robert Daly, SJ, and its director, Dr. Bruce Beck.

One of the primary ways in which the Institute works toward this goal is through a series of annual fall conferences focusing on patristic themes that have the power to shed light on contemporary concerns. Each year, in collaboration with Baker Academic, the Institute invites established scholars to contribute papers on the theme of the conference. In order to disseminate to a broad readership the insights achieved by scholars participating in these conferences, the Institute invited Baker Academic, in cooperation with Holy Cross Orthodox Press, to publish the fruits of these annual conferences in a series of attractive volumes.

A prominent characteristic of the Orthodox tradition is its understanding that patristic theology is integral to all of Christian thought and life. It is our hope that the volumes published in this series will effectively mediate the rich legacy of the early church to our contemporary world—including Christians of all traditions—which is thirsting and hungering for such food.

PREFACE

The self-proclaimed renaissance of trinitarian theology has been going on for some time now, and we are arguably past the point of reveling in its mere promise and at a juncture where we can ask for an account of its tangible results. Unfortunately, it is by no means self-evident that these results amount to a resounding success. This hesitation is all the more warranted if we decline to regard as the only criterion of success the circulation of certain “trinitarian concepts,” such as the primacy of relationality, among the guild of academic theologians and if we insist, rather, as Rahner put it in one of the pioneering texts calling for this renewal, that such success depends also on “understand[ing] and present[ing] the doctrine of the Trinity in such a way that it may become a reality in the concrete life of the faithful.”¹ To what extent is trinitarian doctrine today a vital reality in the concrete life of the faithful?

Behind this question, now as much as when Rahner raised the issue, lurks the unsettling perception of a disproportion between the primacy and centrality of trinitarian doctrine, on the one hand, and its seemingly vague and dim presence in the consciousness of ordinary Christians, on the other. Of course, theologians can protest that they are not wholly responsible for the wide dissemination of their insights among the faithful. It is enough that they have sowed the seeds of elucidating the significance of trinitarian doctrine; it is for other laborers in the field to nurture these seeds to germination and fruition among the Christian laity. The partial justness of that rejoinder can be readily conceded, and yet it is still advisable to consider whether the prevailing strategies of approaching trinitarian theology, even within its modern “renewal,” are somehow deficient, and indeed whether the whole “lost and found” narrative

1. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 10.

that is often implied in the self-proclamation of this “renewal” is somehow distorted. As to the latter, Bruce Marshall has astutely shown that it is highly problematic to presume that the most essential foundation of Christian faith has been simply missing from the practice of that faith for many centuries and needs to be reinserted by modern renovations of trinitarian theology. Marshall argues:

But the idea that such a profound deformation of Christianity has occurred at all seems implausible. . . . If this doctrine really is the most essential Christian teaching, and articulates the most basic Christian beliefs about who God is, how could Christians be generally ignorant of it or indifferent to it? If there actually are communities whose identity turns on [trinitarian faith], then their members must generally know *how* to be trinitarian in their identification of God and their everyday religious life, even if they lack much explicit knowledge *about* the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course it is almost always worthwhile to try to make implicit knowledge more explicit, not least to head off possible distortions of communal belief and practice. But this should not be confused with restoring trinitarian conviction to the church, as though it were not even implicit, and to be put there by theologians.²

Marshall’s distinction between “explicit knowledge *about*” trinitarian doctrine and the way that that doctrine operates in Christian life helps not only to resolve the conundrum posed by the “lost and found” narrative of trinitarian renewal but also to point the way to just how this renewal may bear the kind of tangible fruit that Rahner desired. The fundamental task for the renewal of trinitarian theology must be not to divine a hitherto unknown insight into the mystery of trinitarian being, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which that mystery is signified through all the aspects of Christian faith and practice. As the biblical Jacob woke from his vision of a ladder to heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending on it and declared, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” (Gen. 28:16 NRSV), so must the renewal of trinitarian theology provide the resources to enable ordinary Christians to see how the inner contents of Christian faith and its outward vision of all reality are entirely permeated by the self-manifestation of the trinitarian God: “Surely the Trinity is in all this place, and I did not know it.”

In my *Retrieving Nicaea*, I argued that the development of the formulation of trinitarian doctrine itself was constituted by a comprehensive interpretation of all aspects of Christian faith and practice as signifying the presence and

2. Bruce Marshall, “The Trinity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 193.

activity of Father, Son, and Spirit, each fully God, together one God.³ Correspondingly, it has been one of the fundamental tenets of the modern renewal of trinitarian theology that trinitarian doctrine must inform the entirety of Christian faith. It was Karl Rahner again who complained of the “isolation of Trinitarian doctrine in piety and textbook theology,”⁴ yet it is hard to escape the conclusion that this isolation persisted in Rahner’s own work and still significantly characterizes too many of our modern treatments of trinitarian theology. This judgment should not be distorted into an assertion that modern theology utterly fails to draw connections between trinitarian doctrine and Christian faith and practice, as a whole, but should be recognized as indicating only an impatience that there are still not enough theological resources to provide the Christian faithful with the means of seeing how trinitarian theology is *already there* in all authentic Christian faith and practice—in certain ways of reading Scripture, celebrating the sacraments, understanding human nature, and so on. The renewal of trinitarian theology has not by any means been an abject failure, but perhaps the momentum that will carry it to a decisive success lies in just this direction.

The Pappas Patristic Institute, sponsored by the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, gathered together a number of notable scholars in 2008 for a conference entitled “The Trinity in the Life of the Church.” Without any further elaboration, the very title of the conference witnessed to a vision consistent with my remarks above. The conference participants were to speak not simply of the Trinity as such but of the manifestation of the Trinity in the concrete life of the church. This volume consists of the essays originally presented at that conference, supplemented with some others that I, as editor, in consultation with the Pappas Patristic Institute and Baker Academic, deemed to be constructive to the fuller development of the theme of the conference. The collection does not purport to bring the renewal of trinitarian doctrine to its complete fulfillment, but our hope is that it provides some resources for an increased attentiveness to the pervasively trinitarian matrix of Christian faith and practice.

In his contribution, John Behr warns us of the distorting effect of the modern tendency to separate the integral mystery of the Christian economy into isolated compartments. This caution being heeded, it remains possible and indeed unavoidable to contemplate the one mystery as refracted from different perspectives. In this volume, it just so happened that a threefold framework

3. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), esp. 7–13.

4. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 10.

suggested itself as a useful way to organize the essays it comprises (I leave it to the reader to judge whether this framework suggests a valid trinitarian *vestigium*): the Trinity in Christian Worship; Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and Christian Salvation; and the Trinity and Ecclesial Being.

In part 1, our initiatory essay is Joseph Lienhard's "The Baptismal Command (Matthew 28:19–20) and the Doctrine of the Trinity." As an exemplary illustration of how the church's trinitarian doctrine developed out of and as interpretation of the sacramental life of the church, Lienhard identifies some key points along the path whereby the baptismal rite gave rise to the church's trinitarian creed. He demonstrates how the rereading of this path impresses upon us the necessary unity of Scripture, liturgy, doctrine, and theology, which is indispensable for an authentic appropriation of trinitarian doctrine as it is for an appropriation of Christian faith in general.

Robert Daly's "Eucharist and Trinity in the Liturgies of the Early Church" also traces the dialectic of the church's rule of prayer (*lex orandi*) and rule of faith (*lex credendi*), this time from the perspective of the manifestation of trinitarian faith in the early church's celebration of the Eucharist. Daly shows how the eucharistic prayers of the early church gradually developed, reaching maturity in the fourth and fifth centuries. In the fourth century, we find eucharistic prayers expressing both Nicene and anti-Nicene theologies, despite common ground on the understanding of the transforming presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As Lienhard's essay provides resources for an increased attentiveness to the trinitarian structure and meaning of baptism, so Daly's article helps us to see the Eucharist as a privileged disclosure of the trinitarian mystery.

The theme of the role of worship in trinitarian faith is continued by Paul Hartog's "The Nascent 'Trinitarian' Worship of *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14 and Ephesians 1." Hartog analyzes the trinitarian form of the hagiographical material that purports to be the martyr Polycarp's final dying prayer, and he finds that the text reflects early liturgical material. He identifies Ephesians 1:3–14 as a background to the trinitarian form of thanksgiving and praise in this prayer and thus places it within a trajectory that runs from the New Testament to the standardized trinitarian doxologies of the fourth century.

Nonna Harrison concludes this section with her essay, "Gregory of Nyssa on Knowing the Trinity." Harrison's essay presupposes that the church's prayer already identifies each of the divine persons distinctly and glorifies them together as one God. Her concern is not with the sources and developments of the church's trinitarian prayer, as are the essays that precede hers. Rather, she looks to Gregory of Nyssa for a theological exposition that can support the church's practice of trinitarian prayers. She finds this support in Nyssen's

account of how the structure of origination of the trinitarian persons—the Father as source, the Son begotten immediately from the Father, the Spirit proceeding from the Father through the mediation of the Son—is manifest in all the divine activity toward creation. Nyssen’s theology of trinitarian self-disclosure can help us to be attentive to the glorious mystery of God’s trinitarian being that is disclosed through his creative and salvific beneficence toward us.

Part 2, which focuses on the disclosure of the Trinity in Jesus Christ and his salvific work, is inaugurated by John McGuckin’s “The Holy Trinity as the Dynamic of the World’s Salvation in the Greek Fathers,” which also provides a bridge between this section and our opening contemplation of the Trinity in the church’s worship. McGuckin insists emphatically that the proper matrix for trinitarian doctrine is doxological; the ultimate warrant of a doctrinal approach is its demonstrable consistency with the church’s liturgy. The church’s worship is permeated by the power of the trinitarian name, which refers not only to the unfathomable and ineffable glory of divine being but also to the perfect articulation of that glory in the crucified and risen Jesus. McGuckin encourages us to reencounter patristic trinitarian theology from this vital liturgical and existential perspective, which was the ambience of patristic theology itself.

The fruits of heeding such an exhortation are in full evidence in the succeeding essay, Brian Daley’s “Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus on the Trinity.” Transcending the common recognition of how the “nature-person” language of trinitarian doctrine was foundational for the development of christological doctrine, Daley shows how, in turn, christological doctrine and language were employed to contemplate the trinitarian mystery. He presents two of the great synthesizers of patristic theology, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, as exemplars of this approach. Daley’s first concern is with how both Maximus and the Damascene considered trinitarian contemplation as the summit of liturgical and mystical experience. Within this contemplation, the christological mystery of the divine-human unity without confusion and of the divine-human distinction without separation finds its ultimate foundation in the unity within distinction of the trinitarian persons. Daley also analyzes the interplay of christological and trinitarian language and concepts in Maximus’s understanding of deification and the Damascene’s conception of trinitarian mutual indwelling (*perichōrēsis*). The existential and practical application of this interplay of trinitarian and christological doctrine is ultimately the conviction that the way to the Trinity is Christ: conformity to Christ’s way of love enables us to be enfolded in the Spirit-filled community of the church as sons and daughters of the Father.

The way to the Trinity through Christ is also the subject of Matthew Drever's "Deification in Augustine: Plotinian or Trinitarian?" In this essay, Drever joins the growing chorus of scholars who have recently rushed to the defense of Augustine against accusations that he represents a Western essentialist and solipsistic trinitarian doctrine that is incompatible with an Eastern personalist and existential approach. Drever analyzes Augustine's presentation of the human ascent to God as substantively amounting to a doctrine of deification. Moreover, our path to God does not come about through introverted contemplation, as in the Plotinian tradition, but rather through our assimilation to Christ's humility and through sacramental participation in Christ's body, the church, whose unity is effected by the Spirit.

Patristic trinitarian theology was closely bound with a soteriological doctrine of deification. In Athanasius and the Cappadocians, we often encounter the argument that Christ and the Spirit must be fully divine because they divinize human beings and only true and unmitigated divinity can divinize. But the subsequent reception of the doctrine of deification was considerably complicated, especially in the Protestant traditions, by later disagreements about grace and justification. In view of this consideration, the patristic studies presented at the original conference that gave rise to this book are here supplemented by a magisterial article by Bruce Marshall, "Justification as Declaration and Deification." In this article, Marshall wrestles with the seeming contradiction in Luther's work between the conception of justification as a deifying personal union with Christ that transforms the believer such that she becomes "one person" with Christ and the equally emphatic understanding of justification as a forensic declaration whereby we are merely "reckoned" righteous through God's overlooking our sinfulness. Marshall concludes that the resolution to this conundrum can be found only in a properly trinitarian conception of salvation and justification. We are "reckoned" righteous not merely by God's turning a blind eye, as it were, to our sins and pretending that we are righteous when we are not really so, but rather because the Father loves us and judges us entirely within his love for his only begotten Son and his judgment on the Son's salvific work on our behalf. Christ's identification with our condition also wins for us the reception of the Spirit, which frees us from the law and the wrath of God. Marshall originally wrote this piece as a Lutheran and has since joined the Catholic Church. As a Catholic, he is still convinced that the integration of forensic and transformational elements must follow this trinitarian pattern, even if he now concedes that this integration was not fully realized by Luther himself. Regardless of adjustments to his estimation of Luther's success in realizing this integration, Marshall's essay stands as a profound meditation on the trinitarian content of salvation and deification.

Part 3 of this volume turns to the subject of the church's imaging of and participation in the life of the divine Trinity. Fundamental to this theme is the question of the analogical correspondence between human and divine personhood and communion. In the introductory essay of this section, "Personhood, Communion, and the Trinity in Some Patristic Texts," I acknowledge the truism that notions of personhood and communion in patristic theology have a different content than is signified by modern conceptions of these terms, but I argue against a facile extension of this truism to the blanket assertion that there is simply no continuity between modern and patristic versions of these conceptions. There are patristic resources for contemplating the divine persons as intentional, active, speaking agents who enjoy relationships of mutual delight and glorification. Such a contemplation can ground and motivate the human vocation to participate in the trinitarian life of God, a vocation fulfilled in the church.

John Behr's essay, "The Trinitarian Being of the Church," takes issue with a conception of the church as trinitarian image in which the church and the divine Trinity remain juxtaposed as parallel realities, as if the church is called to merely imitate trinitarian being. Rather, scriptural images of the church as "the people of God," "the body of Christ," and "the temple of the Spirit" should lead us to see the proper being of the church as located within the trinitarian relations. The church is called into being by the Father as the body of Christ animated by the Spirit; conversely, the church is enabled by its incorporation into Christ and its anointing by the Spirit to call upon God as Abba, in thanksgiving and praise. Behr also draws our attention to the necessity of distinguishing between the eschatological fulfillment of the church's calling to the fullness of trinitarian indwelling and the church's historical pilgrimage. This distinction should lead even those who profess to constitute the true church from overreaching toward the claim that they are also thereby the perfect church.

Thomas Cattoi furthers the reflection of the trinitarian being of the church in his essay, "The Relevance of Gregory of Nyssa's *Ad Ablabium* for Catholic-Orthodox Ecumenical Dialogue on the Trinity and the Church." In 2007, the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church produced a document entitled "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Life of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority," often cited as the "Ravenna Document." Cattoi notes that this document likens the ideal relation between the different local churches, manifesting a unity without inequality, to the communion of persons within the divine Trinity, in which there is no subordination. Expressing a critique from a Roman Catholic perspective, he

finds the document lacking in a theological rationale for the primacy of the Roman Church and endeavors to find this rationale in Gregory of Nyssa's conception of the Father as the source of the other two divine persons. Within this trinitarian framework, the Roman Church would be considered as "ontologically equal" to the other churches but also as "the foundation of inner ecclesial order" and "invested with authority over all other ecclesial communities." Of the various rejoinders to this proposal that can be anticipated, one is whether such a model would correspond too much to Behr's evocation of the conception of the church extrinsically mimicking trinitarian being (If a certain church holds the place of the Father, is there another church or group of churches that holds the place of Christ and that of the Spirit, respectively?), while departing from the reality of the church's participation in trinitarian life precisely as the body of Christ who calls to the Father in the Spirit. Be that as it may, surely the way forward must be to keep the dialogue on the true nature of the church anchored in the contemplation of the trinitarian life that indwells the church, as both Behr and Cattoi aspire to do.

The final essay of this section, Kathleen McVey's "Syriac Christian Tradition and Gender in Trinitarian Theology," deals with the troubling fact that the trinitarian name, which is the warp and woof of the church's liturgical life, brings discomfort to many Christians, who interpret it as signifying the maleness of God and the ontological inferiority of human females. McVey recommends Ephrem the Syrian as a valuable resource for responding to this modern problem. Ephrem asserted both the utter transcendence of God and God's benevolent willingness to be clothed with human speech. He distinguished the "exact" names of God, which include "Father," and the "borrowed" names by which the plenitude of the riches of divine being can be appropriately imaged through creaturely likenesses. Among the latter, Ephrem applied maternal imagery to God, speaking of God as a nursing mother and of Christ as "the Living Breast" at which all of creation is suckled. McVey recommends following Ephrem's example by a greater use of female imagery in speaking of God, coupled with an awareness of the limits of applying creaturely categories and language to refer to God's transcendent being.

To conclude this volume, Brian Daley's "A God in Whom We Live: Ministering the Trinitarian God" contrasts the modern reluctance to speak of the mystery of the Trinity, painfully evident in the studied evasions of many a preacher on "Trinity Sunday," with the trinitarian fluency of the patristic proclamation and contemplation of the church's faith. What enabled this patristic fluency was an integral focus not reducible to the devising of logical categories to describe divine being but rather centered on the Trinity as the place in which all of Christian life happens. This is not to say that the trinitarian God has no

self-sustaining objective reality, but rather that we have doxological access to this reality precisely through our sharing in it: the Trinity *in whom* we live. It is to be hoped that the contents of this volume will contribute to the church's ongoing quest to be doxologically attentive to the trinitarian life that grounds and animates its being.

Khaled Anatolios

PART 1

THE
TRINITY
IN CHRISTIAN
WORSHIP

1

THE BAPTISMAL COMMAND (MATTHEW 28:19–20) AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

JOSEPH T. LIENHARD, SJ

When I first read Gregory of Nyssa’s *Great Catechetical Oration*, or, as it is sometimes called, the *Address on Religious Instruction*, one paragraph caught my attention, and it has held it ever since. Toward the end of the treatise Gregory writes:

We are taught in the gospel that there are three Persons and Names through whom believers come to be born. He who is born of the Trinity is born equally of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For this is how the gospel speaks about the Spirit: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” [John 3:6]. Paul, moreover, gives birth “in Christ” [1 Cor. 4:15], and the Father is the “Father of all” [cf. Eph. 4:6]. And here I ask the reader to judge soberly, lest he make himself the offspring of an unstable nature, when he could have that which is unchangeable as the source of his life. For what happens in the sacrament of baptism depends upon the disposition of the heart of him who approaches it. If he confesses that the holy Trinity is uncreated, then he enters on the life which is unchanging. But if, on a false supposition, he sees a created nature in the Trinity and then is baptized into *that*, he is born once more to a life which is subject to change. For offspring and parents necessarily share the same nature. Which, then, is more

advantageous: to enter upon the life which is unchanging or to be tossed about once more in a life of instability and fluctuation?¹

The words spoken at baptism are powerful words, Gregory says; they can incorporate us into the true God or into a false god, depending on what words are used and what meaning is intended. So, be careful of what God you are baptized into. Baptism is a form of paternity, and offspring share the nature of their parents. If you are baptized into an Arian or Anomoean god,² then you are the offspring of a mutable god, and you are baptized into a life that is subject to change, a life of instability and fluctuation. If you are baptized into the Trinity who is three Persons and three Names, the Three who are equal, then you enter into a life that is unchanging; so, know who your Father is before you are baptized into him.

There is far more than a rhetorical conceit here. Gregory is drawing a close connection between the words spoken at baptism and the reality of God himself. The passage raises an important topic: the relation between baptism in the Triple Name, on the one hand, and Christian faith in the Trinity and the theology of the Trinity in the early church, on the other.

The fathers of the church often used Matthew 28:19 in their doctrinal and theological argumentation. In some significant passages in their writings, they cited the baptismal command (Matt. 28:19) more or less verbatim and drew doctrinal or theological conclusions from it. The texts that meet these criteria are not numerous, but the ones that do are quite interesting. They fall roughly into three groups. The first group consists of passages relating the baptismal command to the development of the creed and, later, to the explication of the creed. The second group includes passages dealing with a specific, single word in the baptismal command and drawing a conclusion from the sense of that single word. The third group comprises passages that make more general theological points when quoting the baptismal command.

The Baptismal Command and the Creed

The baptismal command appears to be the origin of the creed, or at least the point from which baptismal creeds grew.³ But there is no consensus about

1. Gregory of Nyssa, *Address on Religious Instruction* 38, in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy, trans. Cyril C. Richardson, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 322.

2. The Arians taught that the Son is a creature and hence mutable; Neo-Arians systematized Arian teaching and said that the Son, as a creature, is “unlike” (in Greek, *anomoios*) the Father.

3. “Creed” and “baptismal creed” are used here to mean any of several local creeds that candidates for baptism were asked to profess. Creeds from Caesarea, Jerusalem, Rome,

the precise origin of the creeds. One reads sometimes that creeds developed when phrases and clauses were added to the Triple Name of baptism to refute heresies. There is some evidence for this claim, but not enough to reach certainty.⁴

A few highlights that trace the development of the creeds can be pointed out. The baptismal command in Matthew 28:18–20 is one of the most familiar texts in the New Testament. In the translation of the Revised Standard Version, it reads:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

The Greek has one imperative, “make disciples,” and three participles parallel to that imperative, so that Jesus’s words are equivalent to four commands: “go,” “make disciples,” “baptize,” and “teach.” One of the commands is to travel, one is to administer the sacrament, and two are to teach. The roots of Christianity as a doctrinal religion and a religion that has a creed, truths that must be accepted, are in this passage.

To mention just a few highlights in the development of the teaching and practice of baptism, we might begin with the *Didache*. In this famous document, which probably dates from the first half of the second century, baptism is a liturgical rite that is already developed. There is an almost rubrical concern about how the sacrament should be administered. But also, the Matthean formula with the Triple Name is clearly invoked:

The procedure for baptizing is as follows. . . . Immerse in running water, “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Both baptizer and baptized ought to fast before the baptism, as well as any others who can do so; but the candidate himself should be told to keep a fast for a day or two beforehand.⁵

and other churches survive. The conciliar creed of the Council of Nicaea was not used liturgically.

4. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972), 30–52.

5. *Didache* 7, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 194.

In the *Didache*, the emphasis is on moral rather than doctrinal instruction; the first six chapters of this work treat “the two ways”: the way of life and the way of death. The *Didache* gives little evidence of doctrinal norms, except perhaps in regard to the Eucharist: the Eucharist may be given only to those who have been baptized.⁶

Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, mentions some points that the *Didache* already made. Those who accept the truth of what the Christians say and teach pledge themselves to live according to Christian norms. They pray and fast to seek forgiveness. Then they are brought to water and baptized. The next sentence in Justin’s work shows what is probably the beginning of a credal development—that is, the addition of some further phrases to the Triple Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: “In the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.”⁷

Further evidence is found in Tertullian’s treatise *On Baptism*, the only treatise on any sacrament preserved from the pre-Nicene period. Tertullian makes a clearer connection between the profession of right faith and the sealing of baptism. He writes of “faith signed and sealed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁸ Tertullian interprets the Triple Name in light of the three witnesses of Matthew 18:16. “It is,” he continues, “under the charge of the three that profession of faith and promise of salvation are in pledge”; “there is a necessary addition, the mention of the Church: because where there are the three, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, there is the Church, which is a body of three.”⁹ Tertullian appears to be alluding to a primitive creed, in which the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the church are mentioned.¹⁰ In a later development, mention of the church was incorporated into the third article of the creed.

An early witness to the use of a baptismal creed at the moment the sacrament is administered may be the *Apostolic Tradition*, a work traditionally

6. *Ibid.*, 9.

7. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 61, in *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology; The Second Apology; Dialogue with Trypho; Exhortation to the Greeks; Discourse to the Greeks; The Monarchy, or The Rule of God*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, FC 6 (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), 99.

8. This and the following quotations are from Tertullian, *On Baptism* 6, in *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1964), 14–16.

9. Cf. Matt. 18:20; 1 John 5:7–8.

10. Later in the treatise Tertullian quotes Matt. 28:19 verbatim: “For there has been imposed a law of baptizing, and its form prescribed: ‘Go,’ he says, ‘teach the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.’ When this law was associated with that <well-known> pronouncement, ‘Except a man have been born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,’ faith was put under obligation to the necessity of baptism” (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 13, in *Homily on Baptism*, 31).

attributed to Hippolytus of Rome. This text's portrayal of the rite of baptism as it may have been administered at Rome early in the third century (or even earlier, since its purpose was to preserve authentic tradition, which it says is being corrupted) includes the profession of the creed, in interrogatory form, as the candidate is being baptized. The rite takes place at cockcrow. Prayers are offered over the water. If possible, the water should be flowing; but, if necessary, one may use still water. Candidates should undress. Children should be baptized first. Those who can speak for themselves should speak; otherwise their parents should speak for them. Then the men are baptized, and finally the women, after they have loosened their hair and put aside their jewelry. No one should take a foreign object into the font. At the moment of baptism, the bishop gives thanks over the oil; this oil is called the oil of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*). One deacon places the oil of exorcism at the left of the bishop; another deacon takes the oil of thanksgiving and places it at the right of the bishop. The bishop orders the candidates to renounce Satan and all his pomps and works. Then the baptism itself takes place:

A deacon will descend with him in this manner. When he who is being baptized will have descended into the water, he who baptizes will say to him, while imposing his hand on him: "Do you believe in God the Father almighty?" And he who is being baptized will say in turn, "I believe." And immediately, he (who is baptizing), holding his hand placed on his head, will baptize him one time. And then he will say, "Do you believe in Christ Jesus, Son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, was raised on the third day alive from among the dead, went up to heaven, and is seated at the right of the Father; and who will come to judge the living and the dead?" And when he shall have said, "I believe," he will be baptized a second time. Again he (who is baptizing) will say, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the holy Church?" He who is being baptized will say, "I believe," and again he will be baptized a third time.¹¹

Finally, an intriguing use of the baptismal command in association with the creed is found in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration on Holy Baptism*. Near the end of this long oration, Gregory quotes the baptismal command—or

11. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21, in *La Tradition Apostolique de saint Hippolyte: Essai de reconstitution*, ed. Bernard Botte, *Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen* 39 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963), 45–51. I translate Botte's French text, which he believes is the closest to the original. The traditional ascription of this text to Hippolytus has been challenged recently, and the final form of the text may date from as late as the mid-fourth century. See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 327–28.

rather, he tells the catechumens, “I will baptize you and make you a disciple in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹² He then adds an extended paraphrase of the creed, communicating the content of the creed, with the articles fleshed out and expanded, but without using the exact words of the creed. At the end of the section he alludes to the *disciplina arcana* when he says, “This is all that may be divulged of the sacrament, and that is not forbidden to the ear of the many.”¹³ To give just a sample of the phrases with which Gregory paraphrases the creed: “Believe that all that is in the world, both all that is seen and all that is unseen, was made out of nothing by God. . . . Believe that the Son of God, the Eternal Word, who was begotten of the Father before all time and without body, was in these latter days for your sake made also Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary. . . . Believe that for us sinners he was led to death.”¹⁴ Curiously, Gregory does not summarize the third article, on the Holy Spirit.

Thus a dual development took place. As early as the *Didache*, baptism had become a rite. Catechesis must precede it, and rules for the rite are established: fasting, concern for the sort of water used. The catechesis in the *Didache* is moral. Justin, too, suggests a catechesis that is mostly moral. Tertullian, by contrast, stresses right belief and faith, with emphasis on the Trinity. Hippolytus preserves the oldest interrogatory creed that has survived. It is not unlikely that behind Tertullian and the *Apostolic Tradition* was a tradition of doctrinal catechesis, one built around the Triple Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Much later, Gregory Nazianzen presents a fascinating picture of the bishop explaining to catechumens the content of the creed and explaining at length how the creed conveys the essential Christian outlook on reality, the true Christian philosophy, so to speak, without quoting the words of the creed verbatim. Candidates for baptism needed to profess faith in the Trinity, and they came to that faith through catechetical instruction. Thus the deepest roots of trinitarian theology are in the church’s primitive sacramental life.

The Words of the Baptismal Command as Authoritative

One great difference between the fathers’ approach to the Sacred Scriptures and modern readers’ approach is the unit of understanding. For most modern readers, the unit of understanding is the narrative block, the “story” as it is

12. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 40: On Holy Baptism* 45, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (NPNF² 7:376).

13. Ibid. (NPNF² 7:377).

14. Ibid.

often called. “What the story in today’s gospel teaches . . . ,” one often hears. But in antiquity, the unit of understanding was very different: it was the single word. Schoolboys were taught to analyze a classical text, literally, word by word. This sort of training is clear, for example, in Origen, who seems to have had a concordance in his mind, explaining one word in the Bible by instances of the same word elsewhere. Even in his simple catechesis, Cyril of Jerusalem exhibits the concordance mentality, or interest in word study, and can point out, for example, that the first time the word *ekklēsia* (church) occurs in the Scriptures is in Leviticus.¹⁵

Following this principle, the fathers and their opponents press single words in the baptismal command and draw significant doctrinal points from them. Three key instances are the word “name” itself, the three names “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit,” and the conjunction “and,” which joins the three names.

For example, the fathers draw doctrinal conclusions from the fact that the word “name,” in “baptizing them in the name,” is singular, not plural. Basil of Caesarea, in his letter 210 written in the summer of 375, defends himself against slanders directed toward him by some notable men in Neocaesarea. He reports that these men were returning to a form of Sabellianism. They called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit one thing with a plurality of faces and claimed that the singular noun “name” in the baptismal command pointed to a singular reality: God was one nature and one person, not three. Basil answered that, when one says “Father and Son and Holy Spirit,” three names are joined by one conjunction, “and,” and each name has its own signification. The nature of the three is the same, and the Godhead is one. Hence “baptize in the name” does not mean that only one name has been handed down to us.¹⁶ Thus it is illegitimate, Basil says, to appeal to the singular noun “name” to support Sabellianism or modalism.

The fathers also appeal to the Triple Name, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” with the basic assumption that names must designate existents. Eusebius of Caesarea provides an early instance of this principle. When Eusebius was readmitted to communion at the Council of Nicaea, he was admitted on the basis of the baptismal creed of his church.¹⁷ His formulation is cautious: “believing

15. “We should note that this is the first time that this word for ‘assemble’ (*ekklēsiason*) occurs in Scripture, at the point where the Lord places Aaron in the office of high priest [Lev 8:3]” (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 18.24, in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, trans. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 166).

16. Basil of Caesarea, Letter 210.4.

17. See Eusebius of Caesarea’s letter to his church (*A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337*, ed. J. Stevenson [London: SPCK, 1968], 364–65).

each of these [three persons] to be and to exist, the Father truly Father, and the Son truly Son, and the Holy Spirit truly Holy Spirit, as also our Lord, sending forth his disciples for the preaching, said, *Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*¹⁸ Thus Eusebius argues from the three names in the baptismal command to the distinct existence of the three persons and their distinct properties.

The Second Creed of the Dedication Council of Antioch, held in 341, develops the phrases in Eusebius's confession aggressively and adds a coda that is subordinationist and nearly tritheist:

Our Lord Jesus Christ enjoined his disciples, saying, "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," that is, of a Father who is truly Father, and a Son who is truly Son, and of the Holy Spirit who is truly Holy Spirit, the names not being given without meaning or effect, but denoting accurately the peculiar subsistence, rank, and glory [*hypostasis, taxis, doxa*] of each that is named, so that they are three in subsistence, and one in agreement [*tēi men hypostasei tria, tēi de symphōniai hen*].¹⁹

Another appeal to the names "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" takes the form of insisting that these precise names are the names by which God is to be addressed and catechumens are to be baptized. No other names may be substituted for them. Several examples can be found.

In the first of his *Orations against the Arians*,²⁰ Athanasius argues that God is better called "Father," in relation to the Son, and not "Unoriginate," in relation to creatures. Moreover, Athanasius writes sharply, the Lord did not teach his followers, "When you pray, say 'God Unoriginate,' but rather 'Our Father, who art in heaven.'" He concludes:

He commanded us to be baptized not into the name of unoriginate and originate, not into the name of creator and creature, but "into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." In this initiation, creatures though we are, we are made adopted sons. We use the word "Father"; and by our use of that word we acknowledge not only the Father but also him who is in the Father himself—the Word.²¹

Basil the Great, too, in his work *Against Eunomius*, insists that Matthew 28:19 has "Father" and not "Unbegotten." Near the beginning of the first

18. Ibid., 365.

19. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 269.

20. Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* 1.34.

21. Ibid., in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, trans. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 31.

book he writes, “We should not call him ‘Unbegotten’ rather than ‘Father,’ unless we wish to be wiser than the teachings of the Savior, who said, ‘Go forth, baptize in the name of the Father.’”²²

Gregory of Nyssa, likewise, in his work *Against Eunomius*, insists that the baptismal formula contains an exact expression of the true faith:

We believe, then, even as the Lord set forth the faith to his disciples, when he said, “Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This is the word of the mystery whereby through the new birth from above our nature is transformed from the corruptible to the incorruptible, being renewed from “the old man,” “according to the image of him who created”²³ at the beginning the likeness of the Godhead.²⁴

This faith, Gregory insists, was delivered by God to the apostles; it admits neither of subtraction, nor of alteration, nor of addition; whoever perverts this divine utterance by dishonest quibbling is of his father, the devil. Gregory does not say that the Eunomians baptized in names other than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but the fact that they elsewhere substitute other names for the three biblical names is reprehensible in itself. The inventors of this pestilential heresy call the Father “Maker” and “Creator” of the Son, rather than “Father” of the Son; they call the Son a “result,” a “product,” rather than “Son”; and they call the Holy Spirit the “creature of a creature” and the “product of a product” rather than his proper title, “Spirit.”²⁵ Thus the Triple Name of the baptismal command becomes also a Rule of Faith.

Besides “name” as singular, and the three names “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit,” the fathers also appeal to the simple conjunction “and.” The Lord himself joined the three names by this conjunction. In a famous passage in his equally famous work *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil of Caesarea dealt with this point. Basil, as is well known, sometimes used the doxology “Glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit” and sometimes “Glory to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit.”²⁶ Toward the end of the treatise, he argues that the preposition “with” has precisely the same meaning as the conjunction “and.” If the baptismal command had read, “the Father *and* the Son *with* the Holy Spirit,” its meaning would not have been changed. The meaning is the same, he writes, “unless someone by cold grammar prefers the

22. Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium* 1.5 (PG 29b:517a).

23. Cf. Col. 3:10.

24. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.1, trans. H. C. Ogle (NPNF² 5:101).

25. *Ibid.*, 2.2 (NPNF² 5:101).

26. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.3.

conjunction as copulative and making more of a union while he dismisses the preposition as lacking the same force.”²⁷ The conjunction “and,” Basil finally argues, brings us to confess the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.

These few examples should make the point clearly enough. These fathers used the precise words of the baptismal command as a norm for orthodoxy, or right belief. Sometimes the words were to be taken in their full literal sense, as with “Father” and “Son.” Sometimes they needed right interpretation; a word like “name” cannot be invoked to support Sabellianism. Finally, the word “and” can be interpreted by means of synonyms. Here the Rule of Faith guides the interpretation of a scriptural text, for the Bible is the church’s book.

The Baptismal Formula in Fourth-Century Greek Theology

Finally, in a few instances the baptismal command is used directly as the source of trinitarian theology.

One such use is found in Hilary of Poitiers, whose work *On the Trinity* is the only patristic source Augustine cites by name in his own work *On the Trinity*.²⁸ At the beginning of book 2, Hilary quotes the baptismal command and comments: “What is there pertaining to the mystery of man’s salvation that [this command] does not contain? Or is there anything that is omitted or obscure? Everything is full as from fullness and perfect as from perfection. It includes the meaning of the words, the efficacy of the action, the order of procedure, and the concept of the nature.”²⁹

In his sixteenth catechesis, on the Holy Spirit, Cyril of Jerusalem invokes the baptismal command to affirm the place of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. It would be an error, he writes, to separate the Old Testament from the New Testament and to find two Spirits, one in the Old Testament and one in the New. Rather, on the occasion of holy baptism, the Holy Spirit is included

27. *Ibid.*, 25.59, in *St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 97.

28. Augustine himself makes little use of Matt. 28:19 in his work *On the Trinity*, although in other works he cites the passage often. In *On the Trinity* 15.36.46 he calls Matt. 28:19 “a passage in which the Trinity is especially commended.” In 15.28.51, the prayers that conclude *On the Trinity*, Augustine begins: “O Lord, our God, we believe in You, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Truth would not say: ‘Go baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ unless you were a Trinity. Nor would you command us, O Lord God, to be baptized in the name of him who is not the Lord God” (in *Saint Augustine: The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 45 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953], 523).

29. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 2.1.1, in *Saint Hilary of Poitiers: The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, FC 25 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1954), 35.

with the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity; and here Cyril quotes the baptismal command.³⁰

Basil of Caesarea makes a similar argument in his letter 52 to the *kanonikai*, who were unmarried women living common life and devoted to works of charity. He wrote the letter around 370, just after he became a bishop. These women seem to have asserted, in a rather confused way, that the Spirit is before the Son, or older than the Father. Basil argues that “the Holy Spirit is reckoned along with the Father and Son, wherefore he also is above creation; and the place assigned to him is in accordance with the doctrine which we have derived from the words of the Lord in the Gospel: ‘Going, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’” To change the order of the divine names “involves the abolition of his very existence, and is equivalent to a denial of the whole faith.”³¹

In *On the Holy Spirit* 10.24, Basil quotes Matthew 28:19 against those who say that the Holy Spirit should not be ranked with the Father and the Son. The obvious meaning of the words, Basil writes, is that the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son. Further, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are “one” in baptism—that is, they are united in causing the effects of baptism.

A little further on, in *On the Holy Spirit* 18.44, Basil writes that Christ did not make arithmetic a part of this gift. He did not say, “In the first, second, and third,” nor did he say, “Into one, two, and three.” We are saved by faith, not by numbers. As Basil says at the end of the paragraph, first, second, and third or one, two, and three lead in fact to polytheism.

Gregory of Nyssa develops the same thought more positively in his sermon on the baptism of Christ, delivered on the feast of the Epiphany. In a passage directed against the Macedonians, Gregory writes:

What says the Lord’s command? “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” How in the name of the Father? Because he is the primal cause of all things. How in the name of the Son? Because he is the maker of creation. How in the name of the Holy Spirit? Because he is the power perfecting all. We bow ourselves before the Father, that we may be sanctified; before the Son we also bow, that the same end may be fulfilled; we bow also before the Holy Spirit, that we may be made what he is in fact and in name. There is not a distinction in the sanctification, in the sense that the Father sanctifies more, the Son less, the Holy Spirit in a less degree than the other two. Why then dost thou divide the three Persons into fragments of different natures,

30. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 16.4, in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, 82.

31. Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 52.4, in *Basil: The Letters*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 1:335–37.

and make three gods, unlike one to another, whilst from all thou dost receive one and the same grace?³²

The few examples supplied here suggest the uses to which the baptismal command was put in theology. Cyril of Jerusalem invokes it against any tendency to Marcionism, and also to teach the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocian fathers often invoke it against the Macedonians or Pneumatomachi, as they work together to elaborate formulas that would represent the church's true and right faith.

Conclusion

When the fathers of the church invoke Matthew 28:19, they demonstrate the unity of Holy Scripture, the liturgy, doctrine, and theology. They quoted the Gospel and insisted that each word they quoted revealed truth about God. One name implied divine unity. "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" were the revealed names of the one true God. When these names were coordinated with the conjunction "and," the equality of the three persons was affirmed. And then, this baptismal command was used in one of the most solemn moments of the liturgy, the baptism of catechumens. By the fourth century, baptism took place preeminently at the Easter vigil. The sacramental words of baptism were mirrored in the creed, which grew out of the Triple Name. Candidates professed the truth of the Christian faith at the moment of their baptism, for their catechists had followed the Lord's command, "make disciples" and "teach." The creed soon became the focal point of Christian doctrine, which is—to quote Jaroslav Pelikan's excellent definition—"what the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God."³³ And when the church speculates on doctrine in light of philosophy—which is simply clear thinking—and culture, the result is theology.

To isolate any one of these four elements—Scripture, the liturgy, doctrine, theology—from the others is to do violence to Christian faith and life. Scripture lives in the church's worship; Christianity teaches God's true revelation in its creeds and councils; theology is clear thinking about the church's doctrine.

32. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*, trans. H. A. Wilson (NPNF² 5:520).

33. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, The Christian Tradition 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1.