

SCRIPTURE, WORSHIP, AND LITURGY IN THE THOUGHT OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT

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The theme of worship permeates the life and writings of St. Basil, from his first conversion to the ascetic life to the sermons on creation that he wrote just before his death.¹ The source of Basil's thinking about worship and liturgy is Sacred Scripture. Scripture forms the inspirational center of his theology, and, indeed, of his whole life. In the course of his life, Basil's understanding of worship shifted in two crucial ways: first, he realized the centrality of the Bible in the act of worshipping God; and, secondly, he recognized the centrality of the liturgy in rightly understanding the Bible here so far.

Basil's Early Life and Conversion

Although Basil had come from a Christian family distinguished for its piety—his paternal grandparents, for example, were confessors in the Diocletian persecution²—Basil had set a course for himself to become a rhetor. To this end he studied in Caesarea and then Athens. There is no reason to think that Basil lived a debauched life, and yet, by his own account, his pursuit of a career in rhetoric ran counter to his true calling. In retrospect, he saw his earlier life as vain, futile, and foolish: he had been in a deep sleep.³ Gregory of Nyssa remarks that when his brother Basil returned from school, “he was monstrously conceited about his skill in rhetoric, contemptuous of every high reputation and exalted beyond the leading lights of the province by his self-importance.”⁴

What woke St. Basil up? Anna Silvas presents a very compelling account of the story of Basil's awakening and the persons who lay behind it. In the first place is his sister, St. Macrina, and his brother Naucratius. Macrina had been engaged to be married late in the 330s when her fiancé died. Upon his death Macrina invoked

- 1 See, for example, the many passages of Philip Rousseau's biography that concentrate on this theme (*Basil of Caesarea* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994]).
- 2 See Gregory of Nazianzus' funeral oration for Basil, *Oration 43.5* (trans. Charles G. Brown and James E. Swallow in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2*, 7 [orig. pub. 1894; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995], 396–397). Moreover, his grandmother, Macrina the Elder, his parents, Basil and Emmelia, and three of his siblings, Peter, Gregory of Nyssa, and Macrina are venerated as saints.
- 3 See Epistle 223.2 in *Saint Basil, The Letters*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926–34), 3:293.
- 4 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Kevin Corrigan (Toronto: Peregrina, 1998), 24.

her right not to marry again and determined to be a consecrated widow and, in her case, a consecrated virgin. Gregory of Nyssa presents Macrina as the religious center of the family, in whose midst she continued to live as a leaven. It was at Macrina's urging, for example, that her mother took up "the philosophical, immaterial way of life," for Macrina "led her to her own standard of humility, prepared her to put herself on an equal footing with the community of maidens, so as to share on equal terms with them one table, bed and all the needs of life, with every difference of rank eliminated from their lives."⁵

Gregory of Nyssa tells us the story of Basil's next younger brother, Naucratius. Though a talented rhetorician, Naucratius devoted himself to the ascetic life of "solitude and poverty."⁶ Naucratius lived in the woods with Chrysaphius, a former servant and now friend, and the two of them provided food for a community of poor and sick old people. Naucratius and Chrysaphius tragically died in a hunting accident that shook Basil's whole family.

Silvas plausibly suggests that it was the death of Naucratius that brought Basil home from Athens.⁷ Soon thereafter Macrina converted him to the ascetic life. Gregory of Nyssa writes that Macrina won Basil "so swiftly ... to the ideal of philosophy that he renounced worldly appearance, showed contempt for the admiration of rhetorical ability and went over of his own accord to this active life of manual labor, preparing for himself by means of his complete poverty a way of life which would tend without impediment towards virtue."⁸

"This was not a *new* call," Silvas writes, "but a *re-call*":

Makrina was not proposing something new to Basil, but recalling him to the piety of their childhood upbringing and to the intention he had formed even in Athens to seek a life of "philosophy." ... She persuaded her brother to make a break once and for all with the conventional life of a catechumen highly educated in the secular curriculum. Now that he was at a new juncture, let him not resume by default the life their father had left off, that of the devout Christian aristocrat and professional man, excellent as far as it went, but seize the moment to embrace baptism and with the life of Christian "philosophy"—virginity and asceticism. ...⁹

In addition to the counsel of Macrina and the example of Naucratius, the mentorship of Eustathius of Sebaste proved formative for Basil. Eustathius modeled for

5 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 28.

6 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 26.

7 Anna Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68.

8 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*, 25.

9 Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 70.

Basil the path on which he should himself embark. Looking back on his youth and interpreting his own experiences, Basil writes:

Having lavished much time on vanity, and having consumed almost all my youth in futility, which were mine while I occupied myself with the acquirement of the precepts of that wisdom made foolish by God, when one day arising as from a deep sleep I looked out upon the marvelous light of the truth of the gospel, and beheld the uselessness of the wisdom “of the princes of this world that come to nought” [1 Cor 2:6], bemoaning much my piteous life, I prayed that there be given me a guidance to the introduction to the teachings of religion.¹⁰

This guidance in the religious life that Basil sought was given him by Eustathius of Sebaste. Eustathius was both a bishop and an ascetic, combining pastoral responsibility with ascetic discipline. He was a man of the church but not of the world, a man “who wished to make the Church as much a force for social change as for cultic enthusiasm, and who certainly wished to inject into Christian experience a degree of moral seriousness that would affect public life as well as personal development.”¹¹ Basil, following Eustathius, traveled to Coele-Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Egypt to acquaint himself with the ascetic practices of the regions.¹² Upon returning from this trip ca. 357, Basil was baptized by his bishop, Dianius, in Caesarea, and retired to Pontus where he was joined by Gregory of Nazianzus in his pursuit of the ascetic life.

The Importance of the Scriptures in Basil's Life and Thought

It is at this point in Basil's life that we see the first crucial shift, his realization that he could not properly worship God except through studying and praying the Scriptures. The evidence for this shift consists of a few early letters (Ep. 1, 2, 4, 14, and 22). If we accept Silvas' chronological ordering of these letters (thus, 1, 14, 4, 2, and 22), it is manifest “that Basil's ascetic discourse progresses from a philosophical discourse, virtually indistinguishable from that of the pagan ascetic traditions (Letters 1 and 4), through letters which increasingly combine such discourse with more overtly Christian content (Letters 14 and 2) to one which is thoroughly Christian and scriptural in tone (Letter 22).”¹³ Silvas notes that in ep. 1, 14, and 4, Basil's ascetic life seems rather classical. In all these letters he heavily

10 Epistle 223.2, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 3:291–293.

11 Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 75.

12 See Epistle 223.2, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 3:293–295.

13 Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 86–87.

uses classical allusions to pagan authors and in ep. 4 indicates that he has taken up the philosopher's mantle.¹⁴

In Epistle 2 (358), a letter to Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil has actually been practicing his new lifestyle for some time, a year or more. The first thing to notice is Basil's realization that the ascetic life is not exactly what he imagined:

But I am ashamed to write what I myself do night and day in this out-of-the-way place. For I have indeed left my life in the city, as giving rise to countless evils, but I have not yet been able to leave myself behind. On the contrary, I am like those who go to sea, and because they have had no experience in sailing are very distressed and sea-sick, and complain of the size of the boat as causing the violent tossing; and then when they leave the ship and take to the dinghy or the cock-boat, they continue to be sea-sick and distressed wherever they are; for their nausea and bile go with them when they change. Our experience is something like this. For we carry our indwelling disorders about with us, and so are nowhere free from the same sort of disturbances. Consequently we have derived no great benefit from our present solitude.¹⁵

There are other important changes, Silvas notes, in this letter. The use of Scripture appears for the first time and distinctively Christian themes emerge. She comments that:

Basil appears to be straddling two types of discourse and has not quite sorted them out yet. Perhaps the most important new note in ep. 2 is that now, several months into his new life, "prayer" has come to assume a great importance for Basil and the "memory of God" and "yearning" it engenders. Prayer was hardly conceded by the philosophers as a means to divine knowledge; indeed, Plotinus seems to have disdained it.¹⁶

Basil's shift to a more overtly Christian and scripturally-based asceticism is complete with ep. 22, "On the perfection of the monastic life." "All talk of 'philosophy' and every classical allusion has fallen away."¹⁷ In Epistle 22, Basil writes that "since in the divinely inspired Scriptures many directions are set forth which must be strictly observed by all who earnestly wish to please God, I desire to say ... a few

¹⁴ See Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 87.

¹⁵ Epistle 1, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 1:7–9.

¹⁶ Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 88.

¹⁷ Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, 88.

words based upon the knowledge which I have derived from the divinely inspired Scriptures themselves."¹⁸ There follows a catalogue with copious allusions and quotations to the New Testament of moral guidelines for the Christian.

Basil's early ascetic work, the *Moralia*, well indicates how far he has progressed in the scriptural ascetic life. On the surface, the text appears simple and even primitive when compared with Basil's ascetic works in their final form. As he says in one of the prefaces to the *Moralia*, he wishes "to bring forward as a reminder ... to those engaged in the combat of the devout life, the passages ... from the Holy Scriptures regarding what is displeasing to God and with what he is well pleased."¹⁹ Thus, the *Moralia* seems little more than select passages from the New Testament (with very little commentary by Basil himself) that outline the way of life of an earnest Christian.

Beneath this superficial simplicity, however, lay at least two profound truths about the Christian life as Basil understands it. The first truth is that worship, in the broadest sense, must be informed by the Scriptures and expressed in the language of the Scriptures. The second, as evidenced in the *Moralia*, is that Basil's understanding of the ascetic life is not only scriptural, but also highly structured and overtly liturgical. "The *Moralia*," Rousseau writes, "provides us with the essence of Basil's ecclesiology."²⁰ One can see the liturgical side of the ascetic life in what Basil says about baptism and Eucharist.²¹ "What," he asks, "is the nature or the function of baptism? The changing of the person baptized in thought and word and action and his transformation according to the power bestowed on him into that of which he has been born."²² Basil then writes that "the receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ is also necessary for life everlasting,"²³ and that "he who partakes of the Sacred Species should praise the Lord with hymns."²⁴ As a final indication of the liturgical and ecclesial context of the ascetic life, we might add

18 Epistle 22.1, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 1:129.

19 Basil, *On the Judgment of God* 8; trans. M. Monica Wagner, *St. Basil Ascetical Works*, Fathers of the Church, 9 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 54. This passage bears similarities to the opening of ep. 22.

20 Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 232.

21 Rousseau highlights the importance of baptism in the *Moralia*: "[the broad themes of Basil's ascetic teaching] acquire their cohesion in the *Moralia* by their relationship to the section on baptism (§20), which stresses in familiar terms that the sacrament should follow upon belief, leading to a restoration of one's true nature. The impression given is that the previous sections have commented on various principles that governed the lead up to baptism—conversion, belief, the search for the company of others, the consciousness of sin, the discovery of Scripture, the longing for enlightenment. After the reference to baptism, Basil returned, in the sections that follow, to some of those same principles, suggesting how they might be carried to a new level by the baptismal experience itself; that is to say, by one's formal incorporation into the body of the Church" (*ibid.*, 229–230).

22 Basil, *Moralia*, reg. 20, cap. 1; trans. Wagner, 100.

23 Basil, *Moralia*, reg. 21; trans. Wagner, 101.

24 Basil, *Moralia*, reg. 21, cap. 3; trans. Wagner, 103.

that Basil devotes much space to hierarchical ministry and to the proper preaching of the Word.²⁵

We can sum up Basil's understanding of the role of Scripture in worship by borrowing the words of Philip Rousseau: Scripture "was itself a Temple, into which the reader as worshipper penetrated."²⁶ Here Rousseau refers to a passage from Basil's *Hexaëmeron* wherein he compares his exploration of the meaning of the Scriptures in the previous sermon to entering the Temple. Basil had spent the whole of the first sermon on creation, explaining just a few words. The Scriptures are so rich in meaning that his first sermon was like entering the court of the sanctuary. "If the court of the sanctuary is so beautiful," Basil writes, "and the vestibule of the temple is so august and magnificent, dazzling the eyes of our soul with its surpassing beauty, what must be the holy of holies?"²⁷

*Basil's Thought on The Role of the Liturgy in Understanding the Bible*²⁸

Late in the trinitarian controversy that consumed the fourth century, there emerged a group of men who denied not the divinity of the Son but that of the Holy Spirit. These men, called Spirit-fighters by their opponents, criticized St. Basil's teaching on the Holy Spirit. In particular, they objected to a doxology that Basil had used in the liturgy on the grounds that it was unscriptural. Basil glorified the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit, and Basil's opponents thought that neither this doxology nor the belief in the divinity of the Holy Spirit that it expressed had any foundation in Scripture.²⁹

This criticism of Basil's belief and practice was deeply personal, for it came from a man whom Basil had considered a dear friend, the same Eustathius of Sebaste whom we met earlier. Indeed, they had spent much time together and had spoken often about matters of faith. Their relationship, though, fell apart over the question of the divinity of the Spirit. Hermann Dörries long ago showed that many of the objections and replies of Basil's *On the Holy Spirit* recapitulate the argument that Basil had with Eustathius.³⁰

25 See, for example, Basil, *Moralia*, reg. 70–72.

26 Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 329.

27 Basil, *Hexaëmeron* 2.1; trans. Way, 21.

28 I have drawn much of what follows from my *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 102–149.

29 On the historical context here, see Jean Gribomont, "Esoterisme et Tradition dans le Traité du Saint-Esprit de Saint Basile" [Esoterism and Tradition in St. Basil's Treatise on the Holy Spirit] in *Oecumenica, an annual symposium of ecumenical research*, 22–58 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub House, 1967), 26–40; and Michael A. Kane, "St. Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*: a secret tradition or the rule of faith?" *Diakonia* 35 (2002): 24–26.

30 See Hermann Dörries, *De Spiritu Sancto. Der Beitrag des Basilios zum Abschluß des trinitarischen Dogmas* [On the Holy Spirit. St. Basil's Contribution to the Settlement of the

At the beginning of *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil explains why he is writing the work: some have charged him with liturgical innovation—in the ancient Church, no small accusation—for worshipping God with the doxology (“Glory to the Father, with [*meta*] the Son, with [*syn*] the Holy Spirit”).³¹ His opponents attack it as unscriptural, and Basil must mount a defense. “They do not stop babbling up and down,” Basil writes, “that to give glory with the Holy Spirit is unattested and non-scriptural, and the like.”³² “They cry out for proofs from the Scriptures,” he writes in another place, “and dismiss the non-scriptural witness of the fathers as worthless.”³³ Against “this ‘Puritan’ or ‘Protestant,’ so to speak, mentality of Eustathius, this acute ‘biblicism,’”³⁴ Basil argues that the Scriptures cannot be rightly understood apart from apostolic and patristic tradition, and in this case the tradition is liturgical. Thus, the criticism of Eustathius and the Spirit-fighters provoked Basil to articulate the relationship between the liturgy and the right understanding of Scripture.

One of the key texts for Basil’s understanding of Scripture and tradition is *On the Holy Spirit* 27, 66. Basil’s text introduces two technical terms, *dogma* and *kerygma*, and gives us two different views on their nature and relation, one to the other. He differentiates *dogma* from *kêrygma*, the latter designating what the Church publicly proclaims, the former what she reserves for the initiated. The distinction, however, between *dogma* and *kerygma* can be confusing. On one reading, *kerygma* designates the public proclamation of a teaching, whether in Scripture or tradition, and *dogma*, the right understanding of the public proclamation. Of the *kêrygmata* and *dogmata* “that are guarded in the Church, we hold some from the teaching of the Scriptures, and others we have received in mystery as the teachings of the tradition of the apostles.”³⁵ In other words, the deposit would be made up of scriptural *kêrygmata* and scriptural *dogmata* as well as non-scriptural *kêrygmata* and *dogmata*. On this reading the *kêrygmata* are the bare words and the *dogmata* comprise the right understanding of these words. The Scriptures are public, but the knowledge whereby they are properly understood is reserved to the initiated. This is why the Scriptures are obscure: obscurity conceals the *dogmata*, the right

Doctrine of the Trinity], Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956).

31 See *On the Holy Spirit* 1.3; trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 29–30.

32 *On the Holy Spirit* 27.68; trans. Hildebrand, 107.

33 *On the Holy Spirit* 10.25; trans. Hildebrand, 56.

34 Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, “The ‘unwritten’ and ‘secret’ Apostolic Traditions in the Theological Thought of St. Basil of Caesarea,” *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers*, no. 13 (London: Oliver and Boyd: 1965), 23.

35 *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66; trans. Hildebrand, 104. I take *eggraphos* as “scriptural” rather than “written,” and will translate *agraphos* as “non-scriptural” rather than “unwritten” because the context shows that this is what Basil means. De Mendieta has collected and analyzed the instances of *agraphos* to show this; see *The ‘Unwritten’ and ‘Secret’ Apostolic Traditions*, 25–38.

understanding of its teaching, lest it be despised for being familiar.³⁶ There are also, as de Mendieta has indicated, kerygmatic and dogmatic unwritten traditions; things publicly known whose real meaning is not:

We all look to the East, Basil writes, when we are praying (*kerygma*). But few of us know that we are seeking after our own old country, the Paradise, which God planted in Eden, in the East (*dogma*). It is in the standing posture that we are offering our prayers, on the first day of the week (namely on Sunday or Lord's day) (*kerygma*). But the reason of this (posture) we do not know, at least not all of us (*dogma*).³⁷

Basil offers more examples, but the point is clear from the parenthetical comments that de Mendieta inserts into his translation: non-scriptural tradition contains both *kerygma* and *dogma*.

This would be plain enough, were it not for the fact that other texts yield a different picture wherein *dogma* is one and the same with unwritten tradition. All of the things that de Mendieta has identified as kerygmatic unwritten tradition are, says Basil, transmitted in fact by unwritten and secret tradition; they are not public. Along these lines the distinction between *kerygma* and *dogma* is nearly the same as that between Scripture and tradition. Scripture, then, would not contain *dogmata* and tradition would not contain *kerygmata*. Indeed, though Basil implies that there can be scriptural *dogmata*, he gives no clear examples.³⁸ All of the examples of *dogmata* are tied to the liturgy. De Mendieta himself writes that *dogma* is basically the Church's liturgical tradition and doctrines implied therein, "the whole structure of liturgical and sacramental life, covered and protected at this time by the *disciplina arcani*."³⁹ It is easy to forgive the tension between de Mendieta's two works on this matter—in one place calling unwritten traditions kerygmatic, in another dogmatic—for he did not introduce it; Basil did.

36 Basil writes: "doctrine is one thing, and proclamation is another. One is kept in silence, but proclamations are made public. Now obscurity is a form of silence used in Scripture, which makes the meaning of dogmas difficult to see for the benefit of the readers" (*On the Holy Spirit* 27.66; trans. Hildebrand, 105–106).

37 *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66; trans. Amand de Mendieta, *The 'Unwritten' and 'Secret' Apostolic Traditions*, 6–8.

38 There may actually be one example. In *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66, explaining why we stand for prayer on Sunday, Basil writes that we so stand because Sunday "seems somehow to be an image of the age to come. On account of this, although it is the beginning of days, Moses names it not 'first' but 'one.' For it is written, 'There was evening, and there was morning, one day' (Gen 1.15), as if the same one often repeated" (trans. Hildebrand, 106).

39 See Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, "The Pair ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑ and ΔΟΓΜΑ in the Theological Thought of St. Basil of Caesarea," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965): 135.

Basil's letters yield a similar difficulty.⁴⁰ In Epistle 125, the confession of faith for Eustathius of Sebaste, he says that the creed of Nicaea contains saving *dogma*.⁴¹ In Epistle 90, however, Basil exhorts, "let us also pronounce with boldness that good *kêrygma* of the Fathers, which overwhelms the accursed heresy of Arius, and builds the churches on the sound doctrine, wherein the Son is confessed to be *homoousios* with the Father."⁴² Obviously, he is talking about the creed of Nicaea.

While Basil is unclear on whether *dogmata* are only non-scriptural or also scriptural, he very clearly asserts that *dogmata* are communicated secretly or "mystically" and are understood only by the initiated or by an elite, not by all. The nature of this secrecy and the identity of the elite are related. R. P. C. Hanson thinks that Basil's unwritten tradition is secret and esoteric and thus that the elite who possess them are very much like the Gnostics.⁴³ Basil has turned Christianity into "a mystery religion or an ecclesiastical freemasonry" so that he could invest his doxological customs and, hence, his theology of the Spirit, with greater authority.⁴⁴ Hanson sees Basil as breaking from his own earlier thinking about tradition and from Athanasius and his predecessors.

Georges Florovsky sees it differently. He eloquently stresses the liturgical and mystical nature of the transmission rather than its secrecy.⁴⁵ Thus, the "silent' and 'mystical' tradition, 'which has not been made public,' is not an esoteric doctrine, reserved for some particular elite. The 'elite' was the Church."⁴⁶ Basil, then, though using peculiar language, has not broken with early Fathers in his thinking about tradition but has perpetuated their insight that Scripture cannot be understood apart from the rule of faith which contained the "creedal core" of the Scriptures and epitomized them.⁴⁷

De Mendieta proposes a position between Florovsky's and Hanson's. He agrees with Hanson that tradition is secret and not "mystical," but he thinks that

40 See Gribomont, "Esoterisme et Tradition," at 44.

41 Epistle 125.1, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 2:265.

42 Epistle 90.2, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 2:127, trans. altered.

43 See R. P. C. Hanson, "Basil's Doctrine of Tradition in Relation to the Holy Spirit," *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968): 249–252.

44 R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), 184; cited in Gribomont, "Esoterisme et Tradition," at 24, n. 15.

45 Florovsky thinks to render *en mystêriô* (On the Holy Spirit 27.66) as "in secret" is a "flagrant mistranslation." Georges Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 9 (1963): 194. De Mendieta disagrees because *mystêriô* is singular and no article is used (The 'unwritten' and 'secret' apostolic traditions, 31 and n. 1). Gribomont sympathizes with Florovsky and judges that de Mendieta has not reckoned with "une certaine contrainte faite aux habitudes de la langue" [a certain concession made to the customs of the language] that the biblical allusion justifies (*en mystêriô* here harkens back to 1 Cor. 2:7) ("Esoterisme et Tradition," at 52–53).

46 Georges Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church," at 195.

47 Georges Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church," at 193.

this secrecy does not make Basil into a Gnostic.⁴⁸ De Mendieta distinguishes three levels of *dogma*, each of which is understood by a particular group. The baptized know customs, but not all know what the customs mean. Beyond these two levels are a theologically trained monastic elite who can understand the more profound *dogmata*.⁴⁹

Who, then, is right? When we look at the crucial text (*On the Holy Spirit* 27, 66) and the examples that Basil gives we can make the following judgments. Florovsky is right to emphasize the liturgical character of the tradition, but of course not all of the baptized will understand all of the *dogmata*. De Mendieta is right to make distinctions here; some *dogmata* are more profound than others, and some require more education and illumination. Gribomont accentuates Basil's debt here to Origen's homily 5 on Numbers where he "combines the allusions to the *disciplina arcana*, where initiation involves all the baptized, and those with a superior knowledge, where the initiated are fewer and the doctrinal formulation less definite."⁵⁰ As did Origen, Basil sees the spiritual life as having stages.⁵¹

In addition, Hanson's argument that Basil deviated from his own earlier views and from the larger tradition does not persuade. In *Against Eunomius*, the argument runs, Basil, like Athanasius, "thinks that Scripture is doctrinally sufficient," for he refuses Eunomius's technical language precisely because the words cannot be found in the Scriptures.⁵² Basil, then, in his letters uses tradition more flexibly, largely through his realization of the importance of the Nicene Creed.⁵³ Further, in *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil forsakes the sufficiency of the Scriptures interpreted by tradition and posits the necessity of a secret, extra-scriptural, apostolic tradition. There are a couple of problems with this (Hanson's) view of Basil's supposed "devolution." First, while Basil refuses Eunomius's non-Scriptural technical language, he uses his own. His reprimand of Eunomius is not evidence of a kind of thorough-going biblicism that would reject the use of words not found in the Scriptures. Eunomius's words are unscriptural more because they contradict the meaning of Scripture than because they cannot materially be found there. Second, Basil sees his opponents in *On the Holy Spirit* as contradicting Scripture and himself as following it.⁵⁴ Hanson writes that Basil was motivated to make his innovations because "he could not meet Eustathius's demand for a full documentation

48 See de Mendieta, "The Pair ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑ and ΔΟΓΜΑ," at 136.

49 de Mendieta, "The Pair ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑ and ΔΟΓΜΑ," at 136–139. See also Kane, "A secret tradition or the rule of faith?" at 30–33.

50 Gribomont, "Esoterisme et Tradition," at 51.

51 In fact he saw the progression in his own; see Epistle 223.3, *Saint Basil, The Letters*, 3:299.

52 Hanson, "Basil's doctrine of tradition in relation to the Holy Spirit," at 244–245.

53 Hanson, "Basil's doctrine of tradition in relation to the Holy Spirit," at 246–248.

54 See *On the Holy Spirit* 10.24; trans. Hildebrand, 55.

from Scripture of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵ It is rather that Eustathius could not see the force and meaning, the *dogma*, of the many scriptural proofs that Basil offered, precisely because he (Eustathius) rejected the liturgical tradition in which the meaning of the Scriptures became patent. For Basil, this rejection itself was rather unscriptural. He would never have conceded that Eustathius was truer to the Scriptures than he; rather, Eustathius had the words of Scripture but not their sense.

Hanson also accuses Basil of falsely, but not necessarily intentionally, calling his doxology apostolic.⁵⁶ He invented a “legend of apostolic origin for rite and custom” that was not justified by the Scriptures, and in his hands “tradition, instead of being left as the word to describe doctrinal development and exploration in continuity with the original Gospel, becomes an historical fiction.”⁵⁷ Basil’s statement in fact is quite strong. After tracing his doxology in patristic authors as far back as Irenaeus and Clement,⁵⁸ he affirms that it has been welcomed by all the Churches “from the time when the Gospel was proclaimed.”⁵⁹ What, then, does Basil mean when he says that his doxology is apostolic? Jean Gribomont answers this well.⁶⁰ First of all, Basil maintains that it is apostolic—that is, consistent with the wishes and practice of the apostles—to accept unwritten traditions, for Paul commends the Corinthians and the Thessalonians to do so.⁶¹ Second, Gribomont points out that Basil is not naïve. He has shown, e.g. in his canonical letters to Amphilochius, that he is “very knowledgeable of the variety and flexibility of customs.”⁶² Basil “loves to join in one voice ‘the Apostles and Fathers’”; thus he expresses the continuity so important to tradition and his vision of the Church’s unity in history.⁶³ “Apostolic” means consistent with the teaching of the Apostles preserved in the Fathers.

We have seen that Basil’s writing on the relationship between the liturgical tradition and the Scriptures leaves us with some ambiguities and difficulties. These, however, should not obscure what is plainly clear: Basil realized that his opponents had focused too narrowly on the authority of the Scriptures, and he wished to

55 Hanson, “Basil’s doctrine of tradition in relation to the Holy Spirit,” 252. Kane, following de Mendieta, holds that Basil so stressed the secrecy of the tradition for rhetorical effect (Kane, “A Secret Tradition or the Rule of Faith?” at 36; de Mendieta, *The ‘unwritten’ and ‘secret’ apostolic traditions*, 40).

56 See Hanson, “Basil’s doctrine of tradition in relation to the Holy Spirit,” at 252.

57 Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church*, 184; cited in de Mendieta, *The ‘unwritten’ and ‘secret’ apostolic traditions*, x.

58 See *On the Holy Spirit* 29.72.

59 *On the Holy Spirit* 29.75; trans. Hildebrand, 116.

60 See Gribomont, “Esoterisme et Tradition,” at 54–55.

61 See 1 Cor. 11:2 and 2 Thess. 2:15.

62 Gribomont, “Esoterisme et Tradition,” at 54.

63 Gribomont, “Esoterisme et Tradition,” at 55.

unite what they divide. Their demand for explicit scriptural proof for all teachings compromised the integrity of the faith. He tersely summarizes the consequences of their logic: "let them teach us not to baptize as we have received, or not to believe as we have been baptized, or not to give glory as we have believed."⁶⁴ As did Fathers before him, Basil learned that the Scriptures do not interpret themselves, and as they did, he thinks that the rule of faith enshrined in the liturgy has a special place here. In the end he realized that the problem of authority in the Church is not a simple one, and tradition itself can be quite complex and varied. It is not as though the Scriptures are obscure but tradition patent. William Tieck has worked out the Basilian view of authentic tradition. Authentic tradition must be of long usage, universal ecclesial recognition, and most important of all, "bearing a sense in accord with piety and true faith."⁶⁵ This is to say that authentic tradition must be consistent with apostolic (in the broad sense) liturgy and worship.

Conclusion

We have seen that, for Basil, worship provides the crucial context in which the Scriptures are best understood. On the one hand, one cannot worship rightly without them. The best prayer is prayer that uses the Scriptures, as Basil's ascetic experience taught him. Moreover, the Scriptures give moral direction, and in their obscurity, invite contemplation, reflection, and awe. If we think of the homily as an extension, so to speak, of the Scriptures, Rousseau's description of Basil's homiletic endeavors illuminates the role of the Scriptures too. In his preaching, "Basil had embarked," he writes, "on something more complex than Christianized oratory: the whole 'atmosphere' of the homiletic occasion was coloured by its cultic context, and by the broader programme of moral transformation of which it formed but a part."⁶⁶

On the other hand, the right understanding of the Scriptures cannot be had apart from Christian worship. The liturgy, in particular, the Trinitarian doxology, unlocks the true Scriptural teaching on the divinity of the Spirit. For Basil, we must give glory to God according to our belief in him; we must believe in him as we have been baptized; and we must baptize as the liturgical tradition has taught us to do.⁶⁷

It is fitting to close with a beautiful, though long, quotation from Rousseau's thoughtful and thought-provoking book on St. Basil:

[Basil] emphasized a human awareness of the power and the activity of God and stressed the way in which the very vocabulary

64 *On the Holy Spirit* 27.68; trans. Hildebrand, 107.

65 Tieck, "Basil of Caesarea and the Bible," 145.

66 Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 47.

67 See *On the Holy Spirit* 27.68.

of Scripture brought the creature into a relationship with God. That was why access to truth, to put it simply, could occur only in the context of worship, which orchestrated the human response to revelation. To recognize religious authority, therefore, was not a matter of assenting to statements but rather of seeing oneself bound as a believer to a revealing God. ... Adoration brought an understanding of its own.⁶⁸

68 Rouseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 128–129.

