



What we believe &

The Nicene Creed



The Holy Spirit

Everyone's heard of Jesus. Everyone has a view about God (the Father). But the Spirit? Of the seeming obscurity of the Spirit he claimed: Gregory of Nazianzus was the 4th Century bishop of Constantinople whom states: "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament revealed the Son and gave us a glimpse of the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and grants us a clearer vision of himself. It was not prudent, when the divinity of the Father had not yet been confessed, to proclaim the Son openly and, when the divinity of the Son was not yet admitted, to add the Holy Spirit as an extra burden, to speak somewhat daringly.... By advancing and progressing "from glory to glory," the light of the Trinity will shine in ever more brilliant rays." (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio theol., 5, 26 PG 36, 161-163.)

The New Testament and the Spirit

Christians of the 21st Century have access to ample and clear teaching about what the Holy Spirit does. We know the Spirit as a person, especially through the language of John's Gospel. He is the counselor/helper/advocate (*paracletos* *gk.* e.g. John 16:7), who makes the presence of Christ available to all, and internalizes that presence to those who have faith (John 14:17,18). He:

- **gives** them new birth (Jn. 3:6)
- **guides** them in all truth about the Father and the Son (Jn. 15:26)
- **generates** in them a desire to bear witness to Jesus and His Gospel (Acts 1:8)
- **grows** a new character and attitude in them (Gal. 5:22)
- **grafts** them into Christ's body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13)
- **gifts** them for ministry (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4), and
- **guarantees** them a heavenly future (Eph. 1:13,14)



www.stmichaelsnc.org.au



John Stott comments: “The Holy Spirit has sometimes been called the ‘executive’ of the Godhead, meaning that what the Father and the Son desire to do in the world and the church today, they execute through the Holy Spirit.” The Creeds tell us little about this work because they are concerned with the matter of unity and co-eternity. But the works themselves, described in the New Testament, are the foundation of the assertions of the Nicene Creed that “with the Father and the Son He is worshipped and glorified.”

Understanding the Holy Spirit

In the 20th Century we can map the rise of the Pentecostal movement and its emphasis on the power and presence of the Spirit against the seeming absence of teaching about the Spirit in the mainline churches. In many cases the Holy Spirit has too often been obscured from view, or too easily fashioned in an unbiblical image by others. Two very important truths about the Holy Spirit should be remembered:

1. The Holy Spirit’s self-effacing nature, and
2. His divinity and holiness

1. The self-effacing Spirit

Unlike us, the Holy Spirit has no desire to draw attention to Himself. Too much publicity embarrasses Him. Instead, His primary ministry is to bear witness to both the Father and the Son. Of Him Jesus said, “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:14). He is the one who causes us to say “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). It is He who enables us to confess “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). James Packer described this nature of Spirit by way of the example of a floodlight, “...a floodlight ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ ... When floodlighting is well done, the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them ...; what you are meant to see is just the object upon which they are trained” (J.I. Packer, ‘Keep in step with the Spirit’ IVP, 1984).

2. The divine Spirit of God

Before we turn to the Creed which confesses this truth, let’s be instructed by just a small sample of the Biblical revelation of the Spirit’s divinity. His eternal and divine nature is reflected in even these few references:

- His omnipresence (Psalm 139:7)
- His role in creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 140:30)
- To relate to the Spirit is to relate to God (Acts 5:3, 4, 9; Mark 3:29)
- The names ‘Spirit of God’ and ‘Spirit of Christ’ (John 14:16; 16:17)
- He ‘proceeds from the Father’ (John 15:26)
- He is ‘the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:17,18)

The Athanasian Creed, an important statement of faith in the discussions at the council of Nicea in A.D. 325, stated the matter clearly: ‘The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal ... so the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.’



Bishop Gregory so long ago persuades us to believe with him:

“This, then, is my position with regard to these things, and I hope it may be always my position, and that of whosoever is dear to me; to worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons, One Godhead, undivided in honour and glory and substance and kingdom For if He is not to be worshipped, how can He deify me by Baptism? But if He is to be worshipped, surely He is an Object of adoration, and if an Object of adoration He must be God; the one is linked to the other, a truly golden and saving chain. And indeed from the Spirit comes our New Birth, and from the New Birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from Whom it is derived.” (Gregory Nazianzen, from “The Fifth Oration”)

NOTES

This paper was prepared by Rev. Steve Webster, St. Michael’s North Carlton.

What great things are there in the idea of God which are not in His power?
 What titles which belong to God are not applied to Him ...Indeed I tremble when I think of the abundance of the titles, and how many Names they outrage who fall foul of the Spirit. He is called the **Spirit** of God, the **Spirit** of Christ, the **Mind** of Christ, the **Spirit of The Lord**, and **Himself The Lord**, the **Spirit of Adoption**, of **Truth**, of **Liberty**; the **Spirit of Wisdom**, of **Understanding**, of **Counsel**, of **Might**, of **Knowledge**, of **Godliness**, of the **Fear of God**. For He is the Maker of all these, filling all with His **Essence**, containing all things, filling the world in His Essence, yet incapable of being comprehended in His power by the world;
 good, upright, princely, by nature not by adoption; sanctifying, not sanctified; measuring, not measured; shared, not sharing; filling, not filled; containing, not contained; inherited, glorified, reckoned with the Father and the Son;... the **Creator-Spirit**, Who by **Baptism** and by **Resurrection** creates anew..."
 (Gregory Nazianzen, from The Fifth Oration).

A church that emphasizes the Holy Spirit

A Trinitarian Church? A Church of God the Father? Church of God the Son? Church of God the Spirit?

Our previous studies raised the hypothetical question of what a church would look like if it emphasized one person of the Trinity more than the other persons of the Trinity in worship. This week we can ask, "What would a church that emphasized God the Spirit look like?"

What characteristics might be on show?

- True evidence of conversion (Jn. 16:8-10; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal. 5:16-26)
- Assurance of heaven (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30)
- Increasing holiness, sanctification (Gal. 5:21,22; 1 Thes. 4:7,8)
- Growth in understanding of the truth and confidence in the Scriptures (15:26; 16:13)
- Increasing sense of fellowship and commitment to serve (Eph. 4:4; Romans 12)
- Members of the church exercising ministry according to gifts (1 Cor. 12)
- Desire to spread the good news of Christ (Acts 1:8)

What is lacking in your faith and worship that you might need to attend to so as to show evidence of faith in God the Holy Spirit?

The Anglican Articles of Religion pertaining to the Holy Spirit include the following affirmations:

5. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God.

27. Baptism

Baptism is not only a sign of profession and a mark of difference by which Christians are distinguished from those who are not baptized. It is also a sign of regeneration or new birth, through which, as through an instrument, those who receive baptism in the right manner are grafted into the church, the promises of the forgiveness of sin and of our adoption as sons of God by the Holy Spirit are visibly signed and sealed, faith is confirmed, and grace is increased by virtue of prayer to God. The baptism of young children is undoubtedly to be retained in the church as thoroughly agreeable with Christ's institution.

Heresies regarding Holiness

Clearly if there were opponents of the divinity of Christ in the early years of Christianity in an attempt to preserve monotheistic beliefs, so too there was opposition to the view that the Holy Spirit was co-eternal with the Father.

As well as the teachings of Arius (see studies #1 and #2) and the battle with paganism in general, the early church had to defend the faith against other heresies. For example:

Manicheanism- The most striking principle of Manichee theology is its **dualism**, a theme gleaned from the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Mani, it's Persian founder, postulated two natures that existed from the beginning: light and darkness. The realm of light lived in peace, while the realm of darkness was in constant conflict with itself. The universe is the temporary result of an attack of the realm of darkness on the realm of light, and was created by the Living Spirit, an emanation of the light realm, out of the mixture of light and darkness. The Manichees made every effort to include **all known religious traditions** in their faith. As a result, they preserved many apocryphal Christian works, such as the Acts of Thomas, that otherwise would have been lost. Mani was eager to describe himself as a "disciple of Jesus Christ", but the early Christian church rejected him as a heretic. Mani declared himself, and was also referred to, as the **Paraclete**: a Biblical title, meaning "comforter" or "helper", which is, of course, the title given to God the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

The bishops of the early church battled to defend the divinity and unity of the Spirit with Father and the Son in the face of such religions as this. Such a defence represents the Biblical witness and is essential if we are to truly know God's presence, forgiveness and hope rather than merely know about them.

The **Monarchianists** also proved a challenge to orthodox Christianity. There were basically two contradicting models of Monarchianism: Modalism and Adoptionism. **Modalism** (or Modal Monarchianism), which considers God to be one person appearing and working in the different "modes" of the Heavenly Father, the Resurrected Son, and the Holy Spirit, is relevant to our study. The chief proponent of Modalism was Sabellius,



hence the view is also called Sabellianism. It has also been labeled Patripassianism by its opponents because it purports that God the Heavenly Father suffered on the cross. It was coined by Tertullian in his work *Adversus Praxeas*, Chapter II, "By this Praxeas did a twofold service for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophecy, and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father."

This particular heresy is common in various forms today and has always resulted in diminishing the persons of Jesus and the Spirit as mere appearances or utilities of God. This also leads to the questions of whether there are, in fact many other *modes* in which God might choose to appear or work- a belief strongly opposed to the biblical teaching we have studied.

The Nicene Creed and the Spirit

The Nicene Creed affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and his unity with the Father and the Son:

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
The giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son
Is worshipped and glorified,
Who has spoken through the prophets*

In A.D. 312, Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. "One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor" became his motto. The new emperor soon discovered that "one faith and one church" were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ, long a point of controversy.

As we have been surveying in past weeks, Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, asserted that the divine Christ, the Word through whom all things have their existence, was created by God before the beginning of time. Therefore, the divinity of Christ was similar to the divinity of God, but not of the same essence. Arius was opposed by the bishop, Alexander, together with his associate and successor, Athanasius. They affirmed that the divinity of Christ, the Son, is of the same substance as the divinity of God, the Father. To hold otherwise, they said, was to open the possibility of polytheism, and to imply that knowledge of God in Christ was not sufficient knowledge of God.

To counter a widening rift within the church, Constantine convened a council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. A creed reflecting the position of Alexander and Athanasius was written and signed by a majority of the bishops. Nevertheless, the two parties continued to battle each other. In A.D. 381, a second council met in Constantinople. It adopted a revised and expanded form of the A.D. 325 creed, now known as the Nicene Creed, including a statement of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

The primary concerns of the Second Ecumenical Council with regard to the Creed were the concepts of substance or essence, (in Greek, homoousios) and person (in Greek, hypostasis). The Trinitarian doctrine of the Christian Church embraces the concept that God (the Creator and Father), the Son, (Jesus the Christ) and the Holy Spirit are one Essence (or substance-homoousios) and Three Persons (hypostasis). Two other primary aspects of this creed are those that incorporate the related concept that Jesus was both human and divine and the concept that the Holy Spirit (also referred to in tradition as the 'Holy Ghost') proceeds from the Father (and the Son).

The English Reformation produced this statement in the Articles of Religion:

8. Of the Three Creeds

The three creeds, the Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, and that known as the Apostles' Creed, ought to be wholeheartedly accepted and believed. This is because their contents may be proved by definite statements of Holy Scripture.

Clearly the Nicene Creed does not set out a comprehensive appraisal of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. However, it affirms the unity and divinity of the three persons of the Trinity comprehensively enough to distinguish Christian belief from other views.

Gregory's theology of the Spirit

In 379, after the death of the Arian Emperor Valens, Gregory of Nazianzus was asked to go to Constantinople to preach there. For thirty years, the city had been controlled by Arians or pagans, and the orthodox did not even have a church there. Gregory went. He converted his own house there into a church and held services in it. There he preached the *Five Theological Orations* for which he is best known, a series of five sermons on the Trinity and in defense of the deity of Christ. People flocked to hear him preach, and the city was largely won over to the Athanasian (Trinitarian, catholic, orthodox) position by his powers of persuasion.

The following year, he was consecrated bishop of Constantinople. He presided at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which confirmed the Athanasian position of the earlier Council of Nicea in 325. Having accomplished what he believed to be his mission at



Constantinople, and heartily sick of ecclesiastical politics, Gregory resigned and retired to his home town of Nazianzus, where he died in 389. His influence on Trinitarian thought throughout the ages is significant.

Gregory's defence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit is clear and impressive in the following:

Christ is born; the Spirit is His Forerunner.
He is baptized; the Spirit bears witness.
He is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up.
He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them.
He ascends; the Spirit takes His place.