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### THE THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC AND ORTHODOX CHURCH CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT

#### Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith. It is crucial for properly understanding what God is like, how he relates to us, and how we should relate to him. But it also raises many difficult questions. How can God be both one and three? Is the Trinity a contradiction? If Jesus is God, why do the Gospels record instances where he prayed to God?

While we cannot fully understand everything about the Trinity (or anything else), it is possible to answer questions like these and come to a solid grasp of what it means for God to be three in one.

The doctrine of the Trinity means that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, (2) each Person is fully God, (3) there is only one God.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons. The Bible speaks of the Father as God (Phil. 1.2), Jesus as God (Titus 2.13), and the Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5.3-4). Are these just three different ways of looking at God, or simply ways of referring to three different roles that God plays? The answer must be no, because the Bible also indicates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons.

#### 1. Position of the Armenian Orthodox and Apostolic Church

The Armenian Apostolic and Orthodox Church, like other Christian churches, follows the ecumenical councils (the first three of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) and rules/regulation of the Catholic and Universal Church.<sup>1</sup> Like those churches, she accepts that the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity and anathematizes heretics like Macedonius<sup>2</sup> and his teaching. The Cappadocian Fathers, their works, and environment lie at the heart, historically, in doctrine, events, and calendrical years of the definitive formulation of trinitarian dogma.<sup>3</sup>

The Nicæan formula is generally considered the basic trinitarian statement of the church. But that is misleading because the decision of Nicaea is a Christological one.<sup>4</sup> It may be affirmed,

<sup>1</sup> **Malachia Ormanian**, *The Church of Armenia*, New York, 1988, pp. 101-104.

<sup>2</sup> Macedonius (Μακεδόновиος) was the Patriarch of Constantinople (AD 342 – 346 and 351-360).

<sup>3</sup> **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 151-153.

<sup>4</sup> This belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Creed of Nicaea’s Trinitarian structure itself expressed disagreement with Arius’s position—continued to face challenges after the Council disbanded. Arius was reinstated by the emperor Constantine after offering a creed that carefully avoided any controversial positions about Jesus Christ. After Constantine’s death in 337, his son Constantius became emperor of the eastern part of the empire; he

however, that the statement of Nicaea provided the first basic contribution toward developing definitive trinitarian dogma, The restatement and enlargement of the orthodox formula at Constantinople (AD 381), although it added the deity of the Holy Spirit to the full deity of the son was a Christological statement. Although the council of Constantinople was the reaffirmation of the Nicene faith, the consubstantiality of the Spirit<sup>5</sup> was formally endorsed. With a definitive formula worked out on the Son and one on the Spirit, one for the trinity was inescapable.<sup>6</sup> The theological statement at Constantinople was that of the Cappadocian Fathers. It is seemingly natural that they should make the three *hypotheses* their starting point. This, in their thinking, inevitably led them to the one undivided *ousia* of the Godhead. The essence of their doctrine is that the supreme being is one divine *ousia* existing in a Godhead simultaneously in three modes of existence, Father, Son, and Spirit, the three in three modes of existence, Father, Son, and Spirit, the three hypostases, and that one or all of the three equals the divine *ousia*, God.<sup>7</sup>

It has long been the standard view that Athanasius and the three Cappadocians ushered in a new, critical wave of reflection on the Holy Spirit from the 360s to the 380s, which led to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, by taking the arguments that they had used for the divinity of the Son and applying them to the Spirit with the same results.<sup>8</sup> The three great Cappadocian church fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, sometimes called “Neo-nicenes,” by building on the foundation laid by the Homoiousians, became the great theologians of the new synthesis. For them, the Father is the fount and cause of the other two coequal Persons. They helped establish the terminology of hypostasis for the three-ness and *ousia* for the oneness of the Trinity. Their theological expositions were the basis for the position endorsed by the second ecumenical council, Constantinople AD 381.

Different interpretations and teachings started to develop in various parts of the Roman Empire, where Christianity was spreading, about the divinity of Jesus. Several heretical teachings sprung within Christianity. The first significant challenge to the early church’s Trinitarian consciousness was the view that later came to be called Monarchianism, a position that emphasized “the unity of God as the only monarchial, or ruler of the universe.”<sup>9</sup> This error developed two forms. Dynamic Monarchianism was promoted by two men named Theodotus (Theodotus the Tanner, Theodotus the Moneychanger) and Paul of Samosata of Antioch.<sup>10</sup> Another teaching was by a presbyter called Arius who preached that the Son was subordinate to the Father and that he was a creature.<sup>11</sup> The First Council of Nicaea, called by Emperor Constantine in AD 325, debated the issue (and it was a hotly debated issue) and came up with a declaration of faith, known

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firmly supported Arianism in his domain. While Constantine’s other son, Constans, emperor of the western part of the empire, reinforced the Nicene faith during his reign, upon his death in 350 the entire empire fell to Constantius, with the result that Arianism flourished throughout the realm.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Lossky, The Procession of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Trinitarian Doctrine, Chapter 4 of In the Image and Likeness of God (SVS Press: Crestwood, NY, 1976), pp. 71-96.

<sup>6</sup> Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, New York, 1988, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 153-155.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Beeley, Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Allison Gregg, Denials of Orthodoxy: Heretical Views of the Doctrine of the Trinity, SBJT 16.1 (2012): p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-21.

as the Nicæan Creed,<sup>12</sup> that almost every Christian church recites every Sunday. The council condemned Arius and, with reluctance on the part of some, incorporated the non-scriptural word *homoousios* (“of one substance”) into the creed signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father. Arianism, however, did not disappear and in some parts of the Roman Empire it persisted until the seventh century.<sup>13</sup>

During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, one of the patriarchs of Constantinople, Macedonius (AD 342 – 346, 351 – 360), whose writings are lost and we about them through the writings of others. In his teachings and writings, Macedonius denied the full personhood and divinity of the Holy Spirit. According to this heresy, the Holy Spirit was created by the Son and was thus subordinate to the Father and the Son.<sup>14</sup> In orthodox Trinitarian theology, God is one in essence but three in persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are distinct and equal.<sup>15</sup> Those who accepted the heresy were called Macedonians but were also and more descriptively known as Pneumatomachians, the “spirit fighters.”

First Council of Constantinople, (AD 381), the second ecumenical council of the Christian church, was summoned by the emperor Theodosius I and meeting in Constantinople. Doctrinally, it adopted what became known to the church as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (commonly referred to as the Nicene Creed), which effectively affirmed and developed the creed earlier promulgated at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 (Creed of Nicaea)<sup>16</sup>. The Nicene Creed was, however, probably not an intentional enlargement of the Creed of Nicaea but rather an independent document based on a baptismal creed already in existence. The Council of Constantinople also declared finally the Trinitarian doctrine of the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Though only Eastern bishops had been summoned (about 150 in all), the Greeks claimed this council to be ecumenical. Pope Damasus I in Rome appears to have accepted the creed but not the canons, at least not the canon upon the precedence of Constantinople.

Therefore, in comparing the two creeds, this is what we see in front of us.

#### Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

Nicene Creed	Nicene Creed	Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed
We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.	Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων·	We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

<sup>12</sup> The early church’s denunciation of Arianism through deliberations at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) not only put a damper on this Christological heresy (and, secondarily, on aberrant views of the Holy Spirit) but also contributed substantively to the formulation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Any position that denied the full deity of the Son was a heretical viewpoint, and the affirmation of the Son’s full deity supported the church’s developing doctrine of the Triune nature of the Godhead. Indeed, the Creed of Nicaea underscored **21** this belief: “We believe in one God the Father all sovereign, make of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God...; and in the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>13</sup> **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 147-149.

<sup>14</sup> **Allison Gregg**, *Denials of Orthodoxy: Heretical Views of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, SBJT 16.1 (2012): pp. 20-22.

<sup>15</sup> **Kevin Giles**, *The Orthodox Doctrine of the Trinity*, Priscilla Papers, Vol. 26, No. 3, Summer 2012. Brian Ephrem Fitzgerald, Brian Ephrem, “Saint Basil the Great On the Holy Spirit,” 16, 23, & 30 November 2003

<sup>16</sup> **Malachia Ormanian**, *The Church of Armenia*, New York, 1988, p. 102.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God, begotten from  
the Father, only begotten, that  
is, from the essence of the  
Father, God from God, light  
from light, true God from true  
God, begotten not made, of  
one essence with the Father,  
through Whom all things came  
into being, things in heaven  
and things on earth,

Who because of us men and  
because of our salvation came  
down and became incarnate,  
becoming man,

suffered and rose again on the  
third day,

ascended to the heavens,

and will come again to judge  
the living and the dead;

We believe in the Holy Spirit

καὶ εἰς ἓνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν  
Χριστὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν  
Μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς  
γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν  
αἰώνων, Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός, Θεὸν  
ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,  
γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα,  
ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί,  
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο·

τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους  
καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν  
κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν,  
καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος  
Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς  
παρθένου,

καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα,  
σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν  
ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου,  
καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα,  
καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ  
κατὰ τὰς γραφάς,

καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς  
οὐρανοὺς,  
καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ  
Πατρὸς,

καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ  
δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ  
νεκρούς,  
οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται  
τέλος·

καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, τὸ  
Κύριον καὶ Ζωοποιόν,  
τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς  
ἐκπορευόμενον,  
τὸ σὺν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ  
συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ  
συνδοξαζόμενον,  
τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν·

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God, the Only  
begotten, Begotten of the  
Father before all ages, Light  
of Light, True God of True  
God, Begotten, not made, of  
one essence with the Father, by  
Whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our  
salvation came down from  
heaven, and was incarnate of the  
Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man;

And was crucified also for  
us under Pontius Pilate, and  
suffered and was buried. And  
the third day He rose again,  
according to the Scriptures.

And ascended into heaven, and  
sitteth at the right hand of the  
Father.

And He shall come again with  
glory to judge the living and  
the dead, Whose kingdom shall  
have no end

#### **Universal Church**

And I believe in the Holy  
Spirit, the Lord and giver of  
life, who proceeds from the  
Father and the Son, who with  
the Father and the Son together  
is worshiped and glorified, who  
spoke by the prophets.

**Armenian Church**

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
in the uncreated and the perfect;  
Who spoke through the Law,  
prophets, and Gospels; Who  
came down upon the Jordan,  
preached through the apostles,  
and lived in the saints.

εις μίαν άγιαν καθολικήν και  
άποστολικήν εκκλησίαν  
όμολογοϋμεν εν βάπτισμα εις  
άφεσιν άμαρτιών  
προσδοκῶμεν ανάστασιν  
νεκρών,  
και ζωήν τοϋ μέλλοντος  
αιῶνος. αμήν.

We believe in one holy Catholic  
and apostolic Church.  
We confess one baptism to the  
remission of sins;  
we look forward to the  
resurrection of the dead and the  
life of the world to come. Amen

**2. The development of the Trinitarian Theology.**

The term “trinity” is never mentioned in the Bible, yet God revealed himself through the Holy Bible as One God (Deut. 6.4; Joel 10.30), with three persons (Gen. 1.2, 26; Isa/ 44.6, 45.5-6, 48.16; Mt. 3.16-17, 28.19; Jn 1.14, 6.27, 10.30-36, 14.16-17, 26, 15.26; Acts 5.3-4; Rom 1.7, 9.5; 1 Cor. 3.16, 8.6; 2 Cor. 13.14; Col. 1.15-17, 2.9; Eph. 4.4-6; Phi. 2.5-8; Gal. 3.20; 1 Tim. 2.5; Heb. 1.8; 1 Pet. 1.2; 1 Jn. 1.1-5, 5.20). Originally, Christians upheld a strong monotheistic understanding of God which was grounded in the religion of Israel. This emphasis is displayed in the writings of Hermas,<sup>17</sup> who stated that the first commandment is to believe that “God is one, who created and established all things, bringing them into existence out of non-existence.” This view <sup>96</sup> uniquely distinguished Christianity from the religious influences of Rome which were polytheistic; it also maintained the root system of the God of Israel Who declared over His people, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:4 – 5).

One of the earliest contributions to Trinitarian theology came through Irenaeus in his effort to refute Gnosticism. He emphasized God’s Trinitarian nature in affirming Him as sole creator. Irenaeus spoke of the Logos and the Spirit as “the two hands of God<sup>18</sup>” in carrying out the work of creation. He bound the three (Logos, Spirit/Wisdom, and God-the-Creator) as One, confirming the eternal nature of the Son and the Spirit. This was movement forward, but his explanations of the Logos and the Spirit did not include coequality with God the Father. Instead, they were viewed as God’s Word and God’s Spirit— extensions of the One God rather than separate persons within the Trinity.<sup>19</sup>

In his effort to combat contemporary heresies, Tertullian sought to prove that in the One God, three distinct “persons” coexist. He was the first to explain that God is “one substance and

<sup>17</sup> **Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> **P. (ed.) Boer**, *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 1*. (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), p. 293.

<sup>19</sup> **Malachia Ormanian**, *The Church of Armenia*, New York, 1988, pp. 102-104; **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 147-149



three distinct persons.”<sup>20</sup> He was also the first to coin the term Trinity in describing God.<sup>21</sup> What lacked in Tertullian’s notion of God was significantly balanced through the work of Origen of Alexandria (185-254). Origen’s insights in Trinitarian theology are considered to be some of the most significant and enduring contributions in Eastern theology and beyond.<sup>22</sup> He was the first to teach the coeternity of the Trinity.<sup>23</sup> Being highly influenced by middle Platonism, Origen believed that a cause is always superior to what is caused. He, therefore, named the Father the “fountainhead of deity” — the Source of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>24</sup> While Origen offered some of the most significant contributions in Trinitarian theology, it is possible that his insinuation toward Jesus’ lower ranking to the Father left a crack open for the development of Arius’ heresy which came into full bloom toward the end of the third century (c. 250-336). It was in the storms of Arianism that the greatest formation of the doctrine of the Trinity unfolded. Church leaders vigorously fought to shut the door to subordinationism and modalism by producing creeds and apologies defending the coequal, coeternal nature of the Trinity and renouncing any notion that Jesus lacked equal authority and power with the Father.<sup>25</sup>

The Council of Nicaea was the first ecumenical council established primarily to address the feud erupting amongst the Church bishops regarding Arius’ claim that the Son lacked equality of essence and authority with the Father. Arius was highly influenced by the Neo-Platonism of his day and intertwined the Scriptures with philosophy, concluding that the Father, alone, was considered God and Jesus was the first, unique creature of God.<sup>26</sup> A variety of subordinationist ideologies sprouted even after Arianism was renounced by the Council of Nicaea.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, it was identified by the bishops of the Nicene Council that a hierarchical substructure within the ontological Trinity ruptures the unity of the Godhead and diminishes the true identity of Jesus as eternal God. If Jesus is not God, the salvation and healing of humanity is incomplete as only one who is both fully God and fully man could stand as the perfect Mediator reconciling humanity back to God.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, Nicene Trinitarian theology is rooted in a soteriological context with the foundational concept of Christ’s complete oneness of Being with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, as the key component in the Christian doctrine of God. The solution to counter the Arian heresy was identified by the Council of Nicaea through a key term, Homoousion. This term means, *consubstantial*, of one substance, or of one and the same being with the Father.<sup>29</sup>” The

<sup>20</sup> **Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 71

<sup>21</sup> **Justo González**, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 1: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> **Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> **Henry Bettenson**, *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 325.

<sup>25</sup> **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> **Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> **Malachia Ormanian**, *The Church of Armenia*, New York, 1988, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup> **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 162-163.

<sup>29</sup> **Thomas F. Torrance**, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, 116 Scotland: T&T

concept of *homoousios* carried a unique spiritual authority as it “supplied the Church with a firm conceptual grasp of the central truth of the incarnate economy of redemption which Christ undertook for our sake<sup>30</sup>.” Christ is the perfect Mediator between God and man since He is *homoousios* with the Father.<sup>31</sup> It was upon the safeguarding and development of this concept that Nicene Trinitarian theology was developed through Athanasius and the Cappadocians.

Athanasius is known as the Champion of Nicene Orthodoxy.<sup>32</sup> He attended the council as secretary and advisor of his bishop Alexander of Alexandria. It was not until after his mentor died that he was appointed bishop of Alexandria and soon became the leader of Nicene theology. “With unflagging energy he defended the formula of the homoousion, as expressing this truth: if Christ is God, then he must be God in the same sense as God the Father is God; divinity is one ‘substance.’<sup>33</sup>” In turning toward the theology of Athanasius we can gain clarity on the importance of coequality and unity in the Godhead as upheld in Nicene Trinitarian theology. Athanasius considered the Father to be the arche (beginning) of the Son, but he also includes the Son in this beginning. He declares, “The Word has his beginning (arche) in no other beginning (arche) than the Father whom they allow to have no beginning (*anarche*),<sup>34</sup> so he too exists without beginning (*anarche*).” For Athanasius, the whole Trinity abides in the arche and not in the Father alone. Athanasius rejected all forms of subordinationism and many of his arguments against hierarchical structures within the Godhead. Athanasius had extraordinary insight in understanding the Scriptures.<sup>35</sup> He teaches that the Scriptures (esp. Phil. 2:5-11 & Jn 1) demonstrate that the Son’s voluntary and temporary subordination is for our salvation, but in His eternal nature, there is no subordination at all because He is God of God, homoousios with the Father.<sup>36</sup> Kevin Giles makes the point that, “Once this complete coinherence of the persons of the Trinity is recognized, it follows that the works of the divine three cannot be divided.... the Father is always in the Son and the Son is always in the Father, they must work as one<sup>37</sup>.” Athanasius held the line of Nicene theology through many exiles successfully preserving the cherished concept of homoousion. Still, the Nicene Creed, in its original form lacked clarity regarding the divinity of the Holy Spirit and the distinctions of the persons of the Trinity. The Great Cappadocians were key figures in developing these aspects of Trinitarian theology in the

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Clark LTD, 1997), p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> Torrance points out that the explanation of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed is set in a soteriological context. After describing Jesus as One Being with the Father the Creed reads, “...who for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was made flesh from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. And he shall come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead: his kingdom shall have no end.”

<sup>32</sup> **González**, The Story of Christianity Volume 1, p. 188.

<sup>33</sup> **Henry Bettenson**, The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> Giles, Kevin. Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2006, p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> **Malachia Ormanian**, The Church of Armenia, New York, 1988, pp. 105-107; **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 163-164.

<sup>36</sup> **Henry Bettenson**, The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> **Kevin Giles**, p. 141.

fourth century.

For St. Athanasius the unity of God had been a certainty and the divine Trinity had been a mystery. His problem had been: how can the one God exist in three persons? The three Cappadocians asked the question the other way around. For them the certainty was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the mystery was: how can Father, Son, Holy Spirit be one God? St. Athanasius began with the one God and tried to understand how the three persons were related to Him. The Cappadocians<sup>38</sup> began with three Persons and tried to understand how the one God was related to Them. The end result of seventy years of study, discussion, controversy, and political strife was acceptance of Athanasius' one God in three persons and of the Cappadocians' three persons in one God. These were the two sides of the one confession of the Triune God.<sup>39</sup>

All three of the Cappadocians, Basil the Great (330 – 370),<sup>40</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 390),<sup>41</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394),<sup>42</sup> played a significant role in Trinitarian theology.<sup>43</sup> After the Council of Nicaea and before the Council of Constantinople, some were arguing over whether the Holy Spirit should be considered equally divine with the Father and the Son. Two of the Cappadocians (Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa) led the process in resolving these conflicts, with the help of Basil's work, at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381. At this council, the Nicene Creed was reinforced and further developed to reflect the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Also, the Cappadocians helped in clarifying the difference between *ousia* (essence) and hypostasis. Hypostasis literally translates to mean “substance,” but

<sup>38</sup> **Gregory Buck**, *A Study of the Trinity in the Cappadocian Fathers*, Indianapolis, 1960.

<sup>39</sup> **Fr. Krikor Kasarjian**, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 163-164.

<sup>40</sup> Of his works, his five books against Eunomius (an Arian), written in 361, in defense of the deity of Christ, and his work on the Holy Spirit (375), are important to the history of doctrine. St. Basil's contributions to theology are numerous. With the other Cappadocian fathers, he worked out a sense of the Trinity that allowed for both unity and individuality. By employing various models, he helped form that doctrine in a way that is still basic to many eastern and western Christian communities. Of importance in the East is the Liturgy ascribed to him, which is used in our church till the present time. His homilies on the Psalms, the history of creation, asceticism and various other subjects furnish wealth of information concerning his life and times.

<sup>41</sup> Among the works of St. Gregory stand pre-eminent his five Theological Orations in defense of the Nicene doctrine against the Eunomians and Macedonians, which he delivered in Constantinople, and which won for him the honorary title of “the Theologian” (shared only with the Apostle John). His other orations (forty-five in all) are devoted to the memory of distinguished martyrs, friends, and kindred, to the ecclesiastical festivals, and to public events or his own fortunes. Finally there are, two hundred and forty-two Epistles from St. Gregory, which are important to the history of the time, and in some cases very graceful and interesting.

<sup>42</sup> The wealth of his intellectual life he deposited in his numerous writings, above all in his controversial doctrinal works: *Against Eunomius*; *Against Apollinarius*; *On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit*; *On the difference between ousia and hypostasis in God*; and in catechetical summary of the Christian faith. Besides these he wrote many Homilies, especially on the creation of the world, and of man, on the life of Moses, on the Psalms, on Ecclesiastics, on the Song of Solomon, on the Lord's Prayer, on the Beatitudes; Eulogies on eminent martyrs and saints (St. Stephen, the Forty Martyrs, St. Gregory Thaumaturges, Ephrem, Meletius, his brother St. Basil); various valuable ascetic tracts; and a biography of his sister St. Macrina, addressed to the monk Olympios.

<sup>43</sup> **Roger E. Olsen & Christopher A. Hall**, *The Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002, p. 34. Together with St. Gregory of Nazianzus (“the Theologian,” c. 329-389) and St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395), St. Basil the Great is of one of the Cappadocian Fathers, namely the famous fourth-century theologians from Cappadocia (now central Turkey), who are best known for developing and perfecting the trinitarian theology of St. Athanasius the Great (c. 295-373). Their collective theological endeavors established the foundations of Orthodox Christian trinitarian theology. To understand Orthodox Christian trinitarianism fully, one must grasp the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers.



the Cappadocians defined it with the Latin term, *persona*.<sup>44</sup> This led to the Trinitarian formula: one essence (*ousia*) and three persons (hypostasis).<sup>45</sup>

Basil of Caesarea, also known as “The Great,” was the first to coin the Trinitarian formula, “one essence in three persons,” to reject the Neo-Arianism that was spreading throughout the Church. Basil taught, “In the case of the Godhead we confess, one essence of substance [*ousia*], so as not to give a variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis, in order that our conception of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear.”<sup>46</sup> Basil’s formula aided the Church in staying unified regarding the Trinity by distilling Trinitarian language down to these simple, agreed upon, terms. Gregory of Nazianzus took the phrase developed by Basil and argued that the distinctions of the Persons, as identified in the names given by God through His self-revelation (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are terms of relation.<sup>47</sup> The *homoousial* and hypostatic interrelation also conveys that no divine person is who he is without essential relation to the other two.<sup>48</sup> Keeping in line with Origen, the Cappadocians sought to maintain the eternal generation of each hypostasis of the Trinity while also preserving the coequality upheld by Athanasius through consubstantiality.

Composed around 375, *On the Holy Spirit* (περι του αγιου πνευματος), is dedicated to St. Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium (c. AD 240-395), a colleague in defense of Nicene Orthodoxy. The immediate occasion for this treatise was the accusation that the doxology St. Basil used in public worship, “*glory be to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit*” (μετα του υιου συν τω αγιου πνευματι), was an innovation. His opponents preferred, “*glory be to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit*” (δια του υιου εν τω αγιου πνευματι), which was a traditional formula. The second doxology was supposedly superior in that it expressed more precisely what these contenders saw as the distinct levels of glory appropriate to the three persons of the Holy Trinity.<sup>49</sup> Against this, St. Basil affirmed that the Church knew and used both formulas, each having its own context and meaning. St. Basil analyzes both doxologies and their respective usages, as well as the theological underpinnings of each. When he sets forth the theological implications underlying this confrontation, this treatise becomes a powerful defense of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

Gregory of Nazianzus’ doctrine of the Holy Spirit<sup>51</sup> represents fundamentally soteriological concerns in ways that are both similar to and different from his Christology. Even as Christ is himself the salvation and re-divinization of humanity, so too the Holy Spirit is the mystery of new salvation.<sup>52</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus teaches that the distinctions are related to origin. The Father is

<sup>44</sup> González, *The Story of Christianity* Volume 1, p. 217.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, 116 Scotland: T&T Clark LTD, 1997), p. 156.

<sup>49</sup> Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, *The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma*, Paris, 1945, pp. 163-166.

<sup>50</sup> Brian Fitzgerald, *St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, November 2003, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Browne, Charles Gordon and Swallow, James Edward, *Select Orations of St. Gregory Nazianzus*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, pp. 640-659.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

the “Unoriginate, for He is of no one,” the Son “is not unoriginal, for He is of the Father,” and the Holy Spirit is “truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father indeed, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by the Generation but by Procession.”<sup>53</sup> It is vital to keep in balance the understanding that the Cappadocians were building upon homoousios which emphasized that God is One Being (ousia).<sup>54</sup> Gregory of Nyssa<sup>55</sup> said, “We do not know of any difference by way of superiority and inferiority in attributes which express our conceptions of the divine nature.” Also, Gregory of Nazianzus describes God as, “The one Godhead and power found in the three in unity, and comprising the three separately, not unequal in substance or natures, neither increased or diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same ....”<sup>56</sup> The concept of ‘origin’ is grounded in the understanding that each Person of the Trinity is equally, and fully God, not a lower, less potent form of the Origin, but rather God of God, Light of Light emanating from a single, undivided, shared essence (ousia). The Cappadocians focused on defining the distinctions of the Godhead while Athanasius focused on emphasizing the homoousios of the Godhead. Possibly the explanation that the persons of the Trinity were differentiated due to origin lacked in precision (as being incongruent with Athanasius), but this was eventually balanced through the notion of perichoresis.<sup>57</sup>

The Cappadocians argued that *ousia* and *hypostasis* should not be understood as synonyms. Rather, *ousia* should be used to refer to the One Being of God, while *hypostasis* should be referred to the Three “Persons”. In short, *ousia* is used to refer to the Oneness of the Trinity, while hypostasis is used to refer to the Threeness of the Trinity. The real innovation in the debate, with revolutionary implications in the history of both philosophy and theology, occurred when the fourth-century Cappadocian theologians (Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea) introduced a distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Thus, faced with the fact of the incarnation, Christians could for the first time talk about persons as sharing in a common essence and yet related to each other as distinct individuals with their own properties of personal identity. This breakthrough turned out to have tremendous significance not only for the doctrine of the Trinity but for the concept of human personhood as well<sup>58</sup>. Thus, the formulation of the third-century Latin father Tertullian, “one in essence, three in persons,” was given a deeper conceptual footing. The explanation for this understanding was in many ways crystallized in a series of five orations given by Gregory Nazianzus during his brief time in Constantinople. This, along with the ascension of the Orthodox Theodosius to being Emperor changed the tide. Arianism was swept away fully and finally at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

### 3. The Armenian Church’s understanding of the Holy Trinity

The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Christian theology is fundamentally defined by the three

<sup>53</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction, A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Survey. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, p.77.

<sup>54</sup> W. Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, p. 251.

<sup>55</sup> Cornelis Venema, Gregory of Nyssa on the Trinity, MJT 8/1 (1992), pp. 72-94.

<sup>56</sup> W. Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, p. 251.

<sup>57</sup> Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, New York, 1988, pp. 108-109; Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 165-168.

<sup>58</sup> Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 165-168.

Persons of Deity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is evidenced by the Holy Bible where we repeatedly read the existence of those Three Persons and their Unity in One. God is one, but His expression is the true revelation of Himself (Father), His Word (Son), and His Breath (Spirit). Each have shown their expression by revelation: the Father by the Creation of the World, the Son by being Born in time and space for the salvation of mankind, the Holy Spirit, the Breath of the Father through whom the Creation was realized, prophets proclaimed the message of God, and the apostles spread the mission of their Master. The three revealed themselves in many instances as we read certain passages in the Bible.<sup>59</sup>

The true appearance of the Trinity was actualized in history and was witnessed by John the Baptist, according to the Gospels, at the time of Jesus' Baptism in the River Jordan, where all Three came in unison. The Son was in the water, the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and the Father whose voice was heard from behind the clouds approving Jesus as "His beloved Son." No Christian Church is truly and genuinely identified as such without the faith in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which is the rock foundation of all churches. Ancient churches have remained faithful to this fundamental doctrine which is clearly specified in the Nicene Creed of AD 325, based always on the teachings of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is the source of illumination and sanctification in such a way that the Father bestows all graces through the Son with the Holy Spirit.<sup>60</sup> Theologically the Holy Spirit is fully divine and consubstantial with the Father and the Son, as explained by Athanasius of Alexandria. The same is applied by the carefully specified hymns of the Armenian Church dedicated to the Holy Spirit.<sup>61</sup> For example, a hymn, written by Catholicos Nerses IV the Gracious (1166 – 1172), the Holy Trinity is described in the same form as the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers.

*We glorify you along with the hosts of heavens, Indivisible and homousian Trinity.*

*Glory to you, Almighty and wonder maker Father, Holy God, who rest upon uncreated throne.*

*Glory to you uncreated Son of the Eternal Father, Holy God, who created all creatures from nothing.*

*Glory to you who proceeds from the Father, source of Eternal goodness, Holy God, who nurture all creation.*<sup>62</sup>

During the Lenten season, when the Armenian Church conducts the Sunrise Service, one of the hymns dedicated to the Trinity reveals the following concepts.

*O Light! Creator of light, primal light that dwells in unapproachable light, O Heavenly Father, blessed are you by the ranks of the luminous ones. At the rising of the morning light, shine forth upon our souls your intelligible light.*

*O Light! Born of the Light, righteous Son, ineffable generation, Son of the Father, Your name is praised with the Father before the Sun. At the rising of the morning light, shine forth upon our souls your intelligible light.*

<sup>59</sup> Fr. Zaven Arzoumanian, Theology of the Armenian Church, Burbank, CA, 2007, p. 20-22.

<sup>60</sup> Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, New York, 1988, p. 108.

<sup>61</sup> Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 147-149.

<sup>62</sup> Book of Hours, Jerusalem, 1955, pp. 1-2.

*O Light! Procession from the Father, source of goodness, Holy Spirit of God, the children of the Church praise You together with the angels. At the rising of the morning light, shine forth upon our souls your intelligible light.*

*O Light! Divine and one indivisible Holy Trinity, we, born of the earth, glorify You always together with the heavenly hosts. At the rising of the morning light, shine forth upon our souls your intelligible light.*

*God uncreated, Almighty Father, receive the supplications of us, Your servants.*

*Ineffable generation from the Father, righteous Son, shine forth upon our souls the Light of Your mercy.*

*O Spirit that proceeds from the Father, source of goodness, fill us with your light this morning.*

*Three persons and one nature, one godhead, we forever confess You, Holy Trinity.<sup>63</sup>*

During Lent also, the Armenian Church recites the prayers of St. Nerses the Gracious, known as “In Faith I Confess,” where the first five verses are a confession of faith of the Armenian Church.

*In faith I confess and worship you  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Uncreated and Immortal essence [ousia],  
creator of angels, humans, and of all that exists.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am.*

*In faith I confess and worship you O indivisible Light,  
Unified Holy Trinity and one Godhead, creator of light and dispeller of darkness.  
Dispel from my soul the darkness of sin and ignorance,  
and enlighten my mind at this moment,  
so that I may pray to you according to your will  
and receive from you the fulfillment of my requests.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am.*

*Heavenly Father, true God,  
Who sent your beloved Son to seek the lost sheep.  
I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
Receive me as the prodigal son,  
And clothe me with my former garment,  
Of which I was deprived by sin.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am.*

*Son of God, true God,  
Who descended from the bosom of the Father,*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp. 201-202.

*And took on flesh from the holy Virgin Mary for our salvation [Nicene Creed];  
Crucified, buried, and raised from the dead,  
Ascended in glory to the Father;  
I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
Remember me like the penitent thief  
When you come into your kingdom.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am.*

*Spirit of God, true God,  
Who descended on the river Jordan,  
And into the Upper Room;  
Who enlightened me by the baptism of the Holy Font,  
I have sinned against heaven and before you.  
Purify me again with your divine fire,  
As the fiery tongues purified the Holy Apostles.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am<sup>64</sup>.*

In addition, those hymns emphasize the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and the word used is *Harasharzj*, meaning “moved by the Father,” a case which became a doctrinal point of controversy among ancient churches, whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father only, based on what St. John’s Gospel tells us, or from the Father and the Son simultaneously, known in the church history as the *filioque*, meaning “and from the Son.” The orthodox belief, as correctly interpreted what the Fourth Gospel says about the matter of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, is “from the Father only,” as the Son is “begotten,” from the Father, so also the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, including the Armenian Church, adhered to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit “from God the Father only,” as implied in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and professed in the Armenian Church Creed later formulated by St. Gregory of Tadev.

*We confess and believe wholeheartedly in God the Father, uncreated, unborn, and without beginning, from whom the Son is Begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds.*

*We believe in the Word God, uncreated, born, and begotten from the Father before all ages. Not after or less, but as much as is the Father, so is the Son.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit, uncreated, and eternal. Not born, but proceeds from the Father, homoousios to the Father and glorified with the Son.*

*We believe in the Holy Trinity, one nature, one godhead, not three gods, but one God, one will, one kingdom [monarchy], one authority, creator of all things visible and invisible.<sup>65</sup>*

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 505-506.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 1-2.



The Armenian Church, which remained against the revision of the Council of Chalcedon since 451 regarding the natures of Jesus Christ, and for that matter disagreed with the Greek Orthodox Church all along, this time was in accord with the Greeks regarding the doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit “from the Father only.”<sup>66</sup>

The theology of the Holy Spirit was formulated during the Ecumenical Councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was first Athanasius of Alexandria who resisted against the persisting heterodox teaching that the Holy Spirit was not fully divine. He declared instead, as we confess today, that the Holy Spirit is consubstantial both with the Father and with the Son. This was expressed with colorful clarity at a later time in the Armenian hymns, written specifically for the Advent of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius further implied that the Holy Spirit came from God and bestowed sanctification and life. He dwelt on the intimate relation between the Spirit and the Son, deducting from it that the Holy Spirit belonged to the Son exactly as the Son belonged to the Father. This was inherited from St. Paul who had inferred that the divinity of the Holy Spirit was since the Holy Spirit makes us all “partakers of God” (1 Corinthians 3:16).<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

As the abovementioned references and quotes demonstrate, the Armenian Church’s theological understanding of the Holy Spirit is in line with the orthodox theology of the Universal Christian Church. The Armenian Church, following and agreeing with the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), believes “in the Holy Spirit, in the uncreated and the perfect; Who spoke through the Law, prophets, and Gospels; Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and lived in the saints.” Following the orthodox teachings of St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory the Theologian, believes in the Trinitarian theology of the Orthodox and Catholic Faith.

The Armenian Church never wavered from this position since it was formulated in AD 381. And as one of our great theologians of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, St. Nerses the Gracious, wrote in is “In Faith I Confess” prayer, I would like to conclude this paper with that prayer.

*In faith I confess and worship you O indivisible Light,  
Unified Holy Trinity and one Godhead,  
Creator of light and dispeller of darkness.  
Dispel from my soul the darkness of sin and ignorance,  
And enlighten my mind at this moment,  
So that I may pray to you according to your will  
And receive from you the fulfillment of my requests.  
Have mercy upon your creatures, and on me, the great sinner that I am.*

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<sup>66</sup> Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, New York, 1988, p. 108; Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 147-149.

<sup>67</sup> Fr. Krikor Kasarjian, The Armenian Apostolic Church and Her Dogma, Paris, 1945, pp. 147-149.

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