

## St. Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit

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A Short Course in Orthodox Studies

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4 June 2009

Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* 3, 204: “*There is only one among the three Cappadocian Fathers to whom the cognomen Great was attributed: Basil. His outstanding qualifications as an ecclesiastical statesman and organiser, as a great exponent of the Christian doctrine and as a second Athanasius in the defence of orthodoxy, as the Father of the oriental monasticism and reformer of the liturgy, warrant the conferring of such a title.*”

Is that all? St. Basil's sense of Christian doctrine as a prerequisite for proper spiritual guidance is the mark of a true spiritual father.

### The treatise *On the Holy Spirit*

Published ca. 375

Dedicated to Amphilochius of Iconium

Imitated by St. Ambrose of Milan

### Context

Emergence of a new heresy, Macedonianism (extension of the Arian logic to the identity of the Holy Spirit): created by the Son, the Spirit is ontologically inferior to both Father and Son.

Pressures from St. Gregory the Theologian and some opponents of his new doxology *δόξα Πατρὶ μετὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ σὺν τῷ Πνεύματι τῷ ἀγίῳ* (glory to the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit) used along with the classic *δόξα Πατρὶ διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ ἐν τῷ ἀγίῳ Πνεύματι* (glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit).

### Peculiarity

He never calls explicitly the Holy Spirit God and *ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρὶ* (of one essence with the Father) in the treatise ☞ accused by many, defended by St. Athanasius and St. Gregory.

### Teaching

He calls the Spirit divine and demonstrates his equality in honour with the Father and the Son (On the Holy Spirit 16.37) ☞ the Creed reiterates his attitude and main arguments.

### Divinity of the Spirit

St. Basil's fundamental perception derives from the ecclesial mindset and experience:

- constant appeal to the written and unwritten tradition of the Fathers (On the Holy Spirit 27.66)
- the liturgy and the holy mysteries (sacraments) (On the Holy Spirit 10.24)
- the apostolic faith and liturgical doxology (On the Holy Spirit 27.67)

On the Holy Spirit 15.36: “*Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension to the kingdom of heaven, our adoption as God's sons, our freedom to call God our Father, our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ, being called children of light, sharing in eternal glory [...], our inheritance of the fullness of blessing, both in this world and in the world to come.*”

### Presence and Experience

On the Holy Spirit 9.22: “*To him turn all things needing sanctification, after him reach all things that live in virtue, as being watered by his inspiration and helped on toward their natural and proper end; perfecting all other things, but himself lacking in nothing; he gives life to all things and is never depleted; not growing by additions, but straightway full, self-established, omnipresent, origin of sanctification, light perceptible to the mind, supplying, as*

*it were, through himself, illumination to every faculty in the search for truth... ..by nature unapproachable, apprehended through goodness, filling all things with his power, but communicated only to the worthy; not shared in one measure, but distributing his energy according to “the proportion of faith;” in essence simple, in powers various, wholly present in each and being wholly everywhere... ..He is distributed but does not change, shared without loss of integrity, after the likeness of the sunbeam, whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it shone for him alone, yet illumines land and sea and mingles with the air. So, too, is the Spirit to every one who receives him, as though given to him alone, and yet he sends forth grace sufficient and full for all, and is enjoyed by all that participate in him according to their capacity, not of his power...”*

There is no question about the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit – it is a matter of levels of perception/receptivity.

Levels of perception within the Church – against the egalitarian myth of equal access to spiritual knowledge.

In a society that wants to see God without undertaking purification, an appeal to the spiritual path: only the pure in heart can see God.

The digital version of the treatise <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.toc.html>

Published works by the speaker <http://www.scribd.com/KangaDoRoo>