John Chrysostom's Reception of Basil of Caesarea's Trinitarian Theology

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Abstract

The last two decades have seen extensive research on the Trinitarian theologies of several post-Nicene Fathers. Not much, however, has been done for John Chrysostom. Thomas Karman and Pak-Wah Lai have demonstrated separately that Chrysostom shares several theological beliefs with the Eusebian-Meletians, including the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility, and their anti-Sabellian concerns. Stylianos Papadopoulos has claimed further that Chrysostom is a successor of both Athanasius and the Cappadocians' teachings. Among the Cappadocians, it was Basil of Caesarea who first allied himself with the Meletians in the 370s. This makes him a prime candidate for examining Chrysostom's reception of Cappadocian theology. We observe, first of all, that both bishops operate within the Meletian tradition, employing a wide range of Eusebian motifs to denote the Trinitarian relations, including the use of hypostatic language as a safeguard against Sabellianism. Both also assume God's nature as incomprehensible. Basil, however, also developed several theological ideas which feature prominently in Chrysostom's homilies. Specifically, a doctrine of divine simplicity that distinguishes between the knowledge and conceptions of God's *ousia*, a careful distinction between God's *ousia* and *hypostasis* whereby the latter is taken as representing *ousia* in its particular properties or *idiomata*, the illuminating role of the Spirit, and, finally, the defence of the Son and Spirit's full divinity by underscoring the fact that they are equal in knowledge, authority, honour, and power as the Father. Taken together, these similarities suggest strongly that Basil's teachings loom large in Chrysostom's Trinitarian theology.

Keywords

John Chrysostom – Trinity – Basil of Caesarea – Meletian – Eusebian – School of Antioch – Diodore of Tarsus

1 Chrysostom and the Cappadocian Fathers

While the last two decades have seen extensive research on the Trinitarian doctrines of several post-Nicene fathers, surprisingly little has been done for Chrysostom.¹ The only exceptions being three articles by Thomas Karman, Stylianos Papadopoulos and myself, which explore the theological traditions Chrysostom is indebted to. Both Karman and I have argued separately that Chrysostom shares several theological beliefs with the Eusebian-Meletians, including the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility, and their anti-Sabellian concerns.² Papadopoulos, in an earlier essay, argues further that Chrysostom is not only a Nicene theologian, but also a successor to both the Cappadocians and Athanasius. Chrysostom, he explains,

accepted the *Homoousion* of Nicaea, but was also familiar with the theology of the Cappadocians, at least in general. He particularly knew the distinction of the three divine Hypostases and the one nature in God. In fact, he was the first non-Cappadocian theologian to discern the absolute significance of this distinction, analysing and applying it broadly. This is obvious from the manner by which he understood the teaching about the Holy Spirit after St. Athanasios, contributing himself to its broadening by presupposing the theology of the three distinct divine Hypostases.³

While it is evident that Chrysostom accepts the *homoousios* formula, and distinguishes between the *ousia* and *hypostases* of the Godhead, it is not quite clear how he is indebted to Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers, or for

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- 1 R. Williams, *Arius : Heresy and Tradition*, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2002; L. Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, Cambridge, 2010); B. Sesboué, *Saint Basile et La Trinité, Un Acte Théologique Au I^{er} Siècle: Le Rôle de Basile de Césarée Dans L'élaboration de La Doctrine et Du Langage Trinitaires*, Paris, 1998; D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'*, Oxford, 2006; C. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford, New York, 2008; C. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: From De Fide to De Trinitate*, Oxford, 2011; S. Parvis, *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy: 325-345*, Oxford, 2009.
 - 2 Thomas Karmann, 'Johannes Chrysostomus Und Der Neunizänismus Eine Spurensuche in Ausgewählten Predigten Des Antiochenischen Presbyters', *Sacris Erudiri*, 51 (2013): 5-20.; Pak-Wah Lai, 'The Eusebian and Meletian Roots of John Chrysostom's Trinitarian Theology', *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 1-26.
 - 3 S.G. Papadopoulos, 'The Holy Trinity and the Parousia of the Holy Spirit According to St. John Chrysostom', in *Agape and Diakonia. Essays: In Memory of Bishop Gerasimos of Akydos* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 1998), pp. 97-125.

that matter, which one of them.⁴ In this essay, I shall examine this question of 'indebtedness' more narrowly by focusing on Chrysostom's relationship with one of these luminaries: Basil of Caesarea (329-379).

Among the Cappadocians, it was Basil of Caesarea who first allied himself with the Meletians in the 370s. During Diodore of Tarsus' exile in Armenia, letters were exchanged between Basil and him where they discussed not only matters of theology but also their mutual love for dialogues, particularly those of Plato's.⁵ As for Meletius, Basil's friendship with him ran even deeper. The Bishop of Caesarea regards Meletius as one of his teachers, and eventually threw his episcopal weight behind Meletius by supporting him as the rightful Bishop of Antioch.⁶ Meletius was, of course, the mentor of young John Chrysostom.⁷ Given this close network of relationships, and Basil's growing stature as a churchman and theologian, it should hardly be surprising that Chrysostom read some of Basil's writings, and was shaped by them. This also makes Basil a prime candidate for the study of Chrysostom's reception of the Cappadocians.

In this article, I shall demonstrate that Basil's teachings played a formative role in Chrysostom's Trinitarian theology. This is evident in the theological features that they share in common in their respective Trinitarian doctrines. To begin, both employ a wide range of Eusebian motifs to denote the Trinitarian relations, including the use of hypostatic language as a safeguard against Sabellianism. Both also concur that God's nature is incomprehensible. To be sure, these features are common among the Meletians, to which Basil and Chrysostom were allied with. Consequently, it is best to take these features of Basil's writings as simply reinforcing the plausibility of Meletian doctrines for Chrysostom, rather than an indication of Basilian influence. All these being said, there are also distinct theological ideas developed by Basil which, quite remarkably, are found in Chrysostom's homilies. Specifically, a doctrine of divine simplicity which distinguishes between the knowledge and conceptions of God's *ousia*, a careful distinction between God's *ousia* and *hypostasis* whereby the latter is taken as representing *ousia* in its particular properties or *idiomata*, the role of the Spirit in divine knowledge, and, finally, the defence

4 *Instructions* 1.21 (Harkins, pp. 31, modified).

5 *Ep. 135* in *Basil of Caesarea: Letters Vol. 1* (1-368), trans. Agnes Clare Way, Fathers of the Church 13 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), pp. 276.

6 In the 370s, there were four claimants to the Antiochene see: Meletius, Paulinus (of the Eustathian faction), Vitalis (who was appointed by Apollinarius) and Euzoius, the Homoian bishop. Stephen Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 54.

7 Palladius, *Dial.* 5 (PG 47.18). J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz. Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire (Kindle Location 3469). Kindle Edition.

of the Son and Spirit's full divinity by underscoring the fact that they share the same knowledge, authority, and power as the Father. Taken together, these parallels suggest strongly that Chrysostom's Trinitarian theology was significantly formed by that of Basil.

2 Trinitarian Motifs in Basil, Meletius and Chrysostom's Writings

We begin our study with the theological motifs shared by Basil and Chrysostom. Basil's Trinitarian theology is a topic well researched and a full treatment is impossible here.⁸ What we shall do instead is to sketch out the main features of his teachings as they developed during the crucial decades between 360s to 370s, according to the theological loci to be discussed.

Basil was initiated into the Trinitarian debates in 360, when he joined the Homoiousian entourage at the Council of Constantinople. There, he witnessed first-hand the defeat and deposition of Basil of Ancyra and other Homoiousian leaders, and the imperial support for Homoian teachings, including their aversion against the use of *ousia* terminologies. The young Cappadocian seemed unfazed by this defeat, however. During the same year, he wrote to Apollinarius, where he spoke of the Son as "precisely alike (*aparallaktōs homoioi*) to Father." At this stage, he was still hesitant about the use of the *homoousios* formula.⁹ In 364, he composed his first treatise, *Against Eunomius*, where we find him employing a wide range of metaphors to denote the relationship between the Father and the Son, such as *oikeiōsis* ('kinship'), *homotimos* ('same in honour'), and *koinōnia* ('community'). He also described the Son's relationship with the Father as not only *homoios* ('like'), but *homoiotēs* ('similar') with the Father's *ousia*. Only once did he depict the Son as *homoousios* with the Father.¹⁰ Things would evolve further just a year later. By then, he was showing a clear preference for Nicene formula, motivated, perhaps, by concerns that *homoios* and its cognates were too susceptible to heteroousian interpretations.¹¹

Basil's tendency towards using motifs drawn from the broader Eusebian traditions, including those of the *homoiousians* and *Homoians* factions, is evident

8 For an introduction, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 187–221. For a more detailed analysis, see also Stephen M Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2007).

9 *Ep.* 361. (FC28, 338).

10 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*. 67–68; *CE* 1.18 (FC122, 118); Colossians 1:15.

11 *Epistle* 9 (c.364–365).

also in Chrysostom.¹² One of the Antiochene's most extensive confessions is found in his first baptismal instruction. Like Basil, Chrysostom not only describes the Son as like (*homoian*) the Father, but also safeguards orthodoxy by adding that the Son is "*in all ways like and equal to the Father (ton kata panta homoion kai ison tō patri)*" with a likeness to Him which is precisely similar (*aparallakton*).¹³ I have argued elsewhere that Chrysostom's propensity to using Homoian and Homoiousian motifs is indebted to Meletius.¹³ It should not surprise us, therefore, that Chrysostom would employ theological motifs similar to those of Basil, an ally of the Meletian faction. This is also why, I believe, Chrysostom concurs with Basil and Meletius that the Nicene formula should be coupled with the *hypostasis* distinction as a necessary safeguard against Sabellianism.¹⁴

And if, from the other side, Sabellius desires to destroy sound doctrines by glossing over the distinction of *hypostases* (*sunaleiphōn tas hypostaseis*), ... teach him that the substance of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit is one, but that there are three *hypostases* (*ē men ousia patros kai Uiou kai agiou pneumatos mia, treis de ai hypostaseis*).¹⁵

3 Divine Incomprehensibility and Simplicity

Chrysostom's affinity with Basil is also observed in their discourse about divine simplicity. In his *Against Eunomius*, notes Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, Basil was already making headway in reconceptualising classical theological epistemology. Prior to Basil, God's nature was understood primarily in two ways. The first was the *identity thesis*, which equates the titles and descriptions of God, as taught in the Scriptures, with the nature of God Himself.¹⁶ In contrast is the radical apophaticism propounded by Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus. These posit that God is simple and we can neither know nor attribute anything to Him.¹⁷ The former approach takes seriously the Scriptural teachings of God,

12 The Eusebians fragmented into the Homoiousian, Homoian and Heteroousian factions after the late 350s.

13 Lai, 'Eusebian and Meletian Roots of Chrysostom's Trinitarian Theology'.

14 *Baptismal Instructions* 1.21.

15 *Instruction* 1.22 (Harkins, pp. 31).

16 Since the third century, it was common to describe God the Father as the 'unbegotten'. As Eunomius sees it, this description is no less than the essence of God Himself. For this reason, to know as unbegotten is to know God as He would know Himself.

17 Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 4.

but results in a fragmentary and often contradictory picture of God's nature. The latter avoids this problem, but does no justice to the manifold Scriptural teachings about God.

In his *Homily on Proverbs 8:22*, Meletius addresses both concerns by asserting that "it is not possible to find in this world an example adequate in itself to explain clearly the nature of the Only-begotten." For this reason, "the scripture employs many ideas and terms with reference to the Only-begotten, to help us grasp things. ...[and] imagine things we do not know by means of things we do; and to advance, gently and by easy stages, from the seen to the unseen."¹⁸ Following Meletius, Basil asserts likewise that God is "simple and transcendent and unknowable in His simplicity and transcendence," and is, therefore, utterly different from and transcends the *ousia* of all Creation.¹⁹ Thereupon, Basil goes further than his mentor by maintaining that God's *ousia* can be conceptualised to some extent, and that these descriptions are real referents to God's nature, even though they will always be "fragmentary, incomplete, and made up of a number of concepts."²⁰ By saying this, Basil essentially reframes the classical notions of divine simplicity. The principles he develops then allow him to make better sense of Scripture's teachings about Christ's manifold titles.²¹

When our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about himself to make known both the Divinity of love of humanity and the grace that comes to humanity from the economy, he did so by means of certain distinguishing marks considered in connection with him. He called himself 'door,' 'way,' 'bread,' 'vine,' 'shepherd,' and 'light,' even though he is not a polyonym. All these names do not carry the same meaning as one another. For 'light' signifies one thing, 'vine' another... Though our Lord is one in substrate (*kata hypokeimenon*), and one substance (*ousia*), simple and not composite, he calls himself by different names at different times, using designations that differ from one another for the different conceptualisations (*epinoiais*).²²

Turning to Chrysostom, we see him propounding a doctrine of divine simplicity that blends the insights of both Meletius and Basil. In *Homily 1* of his

18 *Homily on Proverbs 8:22* in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 53.31.3-4 [Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis. Books 11 and 11, De Fide*, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd, rev. ed. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 476].

19 *CE* 2.22-24.

20 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*, pp. 51.

21 Basil's doctrine of divine simplicity will be developed further by Gregory of Nyssa. Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, pp. 7.

22 *CE* 1.7 (FC122, 99)

Homilies Against the Anomeans, Chrysostom makes a similar two-fold distinction of human knowledge. In his case, he distinguishes between our ability to know (*oida*) God, which is by faith, and human reason's (*logismos*) inability to explain (*epistamai*) or to know how (*pōs ouk oida*) this knowledge is true.²³

I, too, know (*oida*) many things but I do not know how (*ouk epistamai ... ton tropon*) to explain them. I know (*oida*) that God is everywhere and I know (*oida*) that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how (*pōs ouk oida*) he is everywhere. I know (*oida*) that he is eternal and has no beginning. But I do not know how (*pōs ouk oida*). My reason (*logismos*) fails to grasp how it is possible for a substance (*ousian*) to exist when that substance has received its existence neither from itself nor from another. I know (*oida*) that he begot a Son. But I do not know how (*pōs agnoō*). I know (*oida*) that the Spirit is from him. But I do not know how (*pōs ex autou ouk epistamai*) the Spirit is from him.²⁴

This two-fold distinction is also made in the concluding section of *Homily* 73 in his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. Here, Chrysostom interprets John 14:6b (“no one comes to the Father except through me”) as propounding the same idea as John 6:44 and 12:32. That is, since Christ is the only way to God the Father, he must be “equal to the Begetter” (*ison eauton tō gegennēkoti*).²⁵ He goes on to explain that, prior to the Passion, the disciples did not perceive (*ēdesan*) Christ as they ought to. It was only by the aid of the Holy Spirit that they could do so later. That is, to perceive the Son as the means of perceiving God as Father (*theon men gar ēdesan, Patera de oudepō husteron*).²⁶ For Chrysostom then, proper theological epistemology is not just about recognising the gulf between

23 *De incomprehensibili dei natura* 1.10-18.

24 *incomp.* 1.19 [John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W Harkins, vol. 72, *Fathers of the church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp. 57-58]. He expresses a similar view in *Homily* 2 in his *Homilies on Hebrews*. Here, he echoes Meletius by stressing that the human mind (*nous*) cannot know God without “faith and piety” (*meta pisteōs kai eulabeias*). For it is by faith that God transcends “both our understanding (*dianoian*) and our conception” (*kai tēn dianoian ēmōn kai ton logon huperbainonta*) to enable us to know Him. *Hom. in Hebrews* 2 (PG 61.36-45)

25 Chrysostom's eighty-eight homilies on the Gospel of John were delivered in Antioch, most likely around 390. John Chrysostom et al., *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist: Homilies 1-47* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2000), xi; Wendy Mayer, *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom-Provenance: Reshaping the Foundations*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2005), pp. 512.

26 *Hom in John* 73 (PG 59.398.27-32).

human and divine ontology. It is also about affirming the illuminating work of the Spirit, without whom we can never perceive Christ as who He really is.²⁷

Like Meletius and Basil, Chrysostom believes that no one can ever have “a clear knowledge and a perfect comprehension” of God’s pure substance (John 1:18) since God is a “simple being, ... not composed of parts ... without form or figure.” Instead, human knowledge of God will always be partial, and a grasping after God through “different forms and figures,” and “multiple visions.” Where he differs from the two is how Chrysostom regards this partial knowledge as a form of divine accommodation to our human limits – He “came down in condescension and accommodated (*synkatebēn*) [Himself] to the weakness of [human] eyes.”²⁸ This logic of *synkatabasis*, explains David Rylaarsdam, is prevalent throughout Chrysostom’s homilies and is indebted, no doubt, to his astute understanding of rhetoric. As an orator *par excellence*, Chrysostom regularly applies his rhetorical training in his homilies to present what is often dense and complex theology in remarkably simple ways. This “rhetorical principle of adaptation,” or “rhetorical theology,” explains Rylaarsdam, informs Chrysostom’s understanding of God’s communication with humanity. For him, God is no less than a divine orator who constantly accommodates to our human weaknesses through the Scriptures and sacraments, so that he may teach and transform us.²⁹

This readiness to employ rhetoric for communicating divine truths is where Chrysostom differs from Basil significantly. Rather than adopting the abstract theological argumentation that is often found in Basil’s writings, we find the Antiochene presenting complex theology mostly through down-to-earth rhetorical motifs. A good example is his *Homily 1* of his *Homilies Against the Anomeans*. Here, he employs a series of *synkrisis*, or rhetorical comparisons, to juxtapose the Anomeans’ claims of knowing God perfectly, with medical knowledge, the psalmist, the Apostle Paul and even the angels. His overriding aim is to demonstrate how ludicrous the Anomeans’ claims are. Human beings, reminds Chrysostom, do not even know how the foods we eat become the four humours of phlegm, blood, juice, and bile. If such a mundane fact is unknown to us, how can we ever grasp the “substance of God”?³⁰ Later, he describes the psalmist as one who recognises divine knowledge as “too wondrous” for him (Psalm 139). In his prudence, therefore, the psalmist affirms God’s existence and omnipresence, but “passes over the incomprehensibility

27 More will be said later about Chrysostom’s pneumatology, and its parallels with Basil’s teachings.

28 *incomp.* 4.19.

29 David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 101–53.

30 *Ibid.*

(*akatalēpton*) of his substance as if it is something on which everybody is agreed.”³¹ Returning to Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, Chrysostom explains further that the imperfect knowledge which the apostle has in mind refers only to “the wisdom made manifest in God’s providence.” What is more is that this is but a “small portion” of God’s providential care since we know nothing about God’s “benevolent care for the angels, archangels, and the powers above,” or how He created humanity or sustains the world.³² Finally, Chrysostom marvels at “the [great] distance which separates men from angels.” Yet, these lofty beings do not even dare “discuss and ask each other about the divine essence.” Rather, they veil their eyes before His “ineffable glory” and adore Him instead.³³

4 Distinguishing Between the *Ousia* and *Hypostases*

We turn now to the language of *ousia* and *hypostasis* used in Trinitarian discourse. Up until the 360-370s, there was much confusion among the fathers as to how these terms were applied to the Godhead. Origen (184-253) was the first to differentiate them by teaching that the Son shared the same *ousia* as the Father, and using *hypostasis* to denote the separate individual existence of the Two.³⁴ What he left ambiguous, however, was whether the Son’s *hypostasis* was therefore different from or inferior to that of the Father’s.³⁵ Origen’s distinction was taken up by the Eusebians subsequently, who not only distinguished the *hypostases* of the Son and the Spirit from the Father, but took this to mean that they were inferior to Him. Athanasius and the Marcellians, on the other hand,

³¹ Ibid. 1.25.

³² Ibid. 1.27-28.

³³ Ibid. 1.34-36.

³⁴ For a study of Origen’s usage and the Middle Platonic context of his use of *hypostatic* language, see Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, ‘Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis’, *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 3 (2012): 302-50.

³⁵ Much ink has been spilled on whether there are subordination tendencies in Origen’s Trinitarian dogma. Traditional scholarship has criticized Origen for this, while Henri Crouzel have argued otherwise. More recently, Kellen Dale Plaxco proposes that Origen’s hierarchical ordering of the Father and the Son, particularly his language of the Son’s participation in the Father’s *ousia*, was not due to any subordinationist intentions. Rather, it was meant to be a safeguard against Monarchianism, which perceives the Trinity as “one single undifferentiated substance.” For Origen, to speak of the Son’s participation in the Father is but a means of distinguishing the two. This language of participation, unfortunately, did allow the possibility of a lower pneumatology in Origen’s teachings. Kellen Dale Plaxco, ‘Didymus the Blind, Origen and the Trinity’ (PhD Thesis, Marquette University, Catholic University of Leuven, 2016), pp. 107, 152.

maintained that *ousia* and *hypostasis* are synonymous, and were understandably offended by the Eusebians' subordinationism. To be sure, the Alexandrians, in their *Tome to the Antiochenes*, did acknowledge that the Meletians could distinguish between God's *ousia* and *hypostases*, while maintain that the Son is consubstantial with the Father.³⁶ It is not clear how this *ousia-hypostasis* distinction was understood either by parties, however. Athanasius, for one, continued to regard the two terms as synonymous in his writings. Unfortunately, the Synod of 363 did not offer much help for this problem other than the fact that the Meletians endorsed the Nicene formula as legitimate.³⁷

Herein is the importance of Basil's doctrine of divine simplicity. In his *Against Eunomius*, Basil still assumed generally that *ousia* and *hypostasis* were synonymous. This being said, his distinction between the *ousia* and *epinoia* of God had already set him on the path towards redefining the meaning of *hypostasis* eventually. Hints of this can be seen in his criticism of Eunomius. According to Basil, Eunomius was fundamentally mistaken when he equated God's being with His unbegottenness. This was because unbegottenness is a conception (*epinoian*) of God that should not be confused with His *ousia*. More importantly, the Heteroousian also failed to recognise that the different properties (*idiomata*) of God were not meaningless, but real referents to God's *ousia*.³⁸ This is why one can say that all human beings shared "a single substance" (*ousia*), but differed according to their own "distinguishing properties" (*tōis idiōmasi*). This is how a Peter can be distinguished from a Paul.³⁹

In due course, Basil applied this *ousia-hypostasis* distinction to the Godhead and regarded *hypostasis* as the divine *ousia* with its distinctive properties or *idiomata*.⁴⁰ In 372, he would take the Marcellians and Paulinians (known otherwise as the Sabellians) to task for preferring to speak of God the Father and the Son as one *prosōpon*, rather than two *prosōpa*.⁴¹ More seriously, they had insisted that the two were but one *hypostasis*. In his letter to Count Terentius (*Epistle* 214, c. 375), Basil complained

36 *Tome ad Antiochenos*, 5-6.

37 Joseph T. Lienhard, 'Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of "One Hypostasis"', in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 105.

38 *Contra Eunomius* 1.15 (Translation from FC122, 114).

39 *Ibid.* 2.4 (FC122, 134).

40 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*, pp. 65.

41 *Contra Sabellianos et Arium et Anomoeos* (372); *Epistle* 125 (373).

What slander could be more serious than this... if some among us should seem to be saying that there is one *hypostasis* (*mian hypostasin*) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", even though we teach very clearly the difference of the persons (*prosōpōn*).⁴²

In Basil's mind, the semantics of *prosōpōn* were fluid and more susceptible to a modalist interpretation. Thus, even when the Paulinians said that the Trinity was one *hypostasis* but three *prosōpa*, they did not exonerate themselves from Sabellian charges. The only to avoid this was to adopt the three *hypostases* formula and to equate *hypostasis* with *prosōpōn*.⁴³

As mentioned above, Chrysostom concurs with Basil and the Meletians that hypostatic language is an important means of undermining Sabellianism. More significantly, he follows Basil by employing *hypostasis* as the means of particularising God's *ousia*. In *Homily 5* of his *Homilies Against the Anomeans*, Chrysostom argues that if God is the proper title of the Father, there would be no need to have "the additional designation of 'Father.'" "But since the name of 'God' is common to the Father and the Son, ... the addition of 'Father' is needed to show that one is speaking of the first and unbegotten *hypostasis*."⁴⁴ This is because

Some names (*onomatōn*) are common (*koina*) to several; others are proper to one (*idia*). There are common names to show that the substance is exactly the same (*to aparallakton ... tēs ousias*); there are proper names (*idia*) to characterise what is proper to the *hypostases* (*tēn idiotēta ... tōn hypostaseōn*). The names 'Father' and 'Son' characterise what is proper to each *hypostasis* (*idiom ekastēs hypostaseōs*); the names 'God' and 'Lord' show what is common. Therefore, after Paul set down the common name of 'one God,' he had to use the proper name (*idiazontos*) so that you might know of whom he was speaking. He did this to prevent us from falling into the madness of Sabellius.⁴⁵

Clearly then, Chrysostom's doctrine of divine simplicity is more than just a blend of Meletian and Basilian teachings as described earlier. Instead, Basil's influence looms large here, as is the case in the remaining aspects of Chrysostom's Trinitarian teachings.

42 Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*, pp. 86-87; *Ep.* 215.

43 See also *Epistle* 236 (376). Hildebrand, pp. 89.

44 Ibid. 5.8-11 (FC72, 140-41).

45 Ibid. 5.12 (FC72, 141-42).

5 The Holy Spirit, Spiritual Formation and Divine Knowledge

The extant sources for Meletius' teachings (that is, his *Homily on Proverbs 8:22* and Synod of 363) give us no clue about his pneumatology. The same cannot be said for Basil, however. The Scriptures, observes Basil, call the Holy Spirit

the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, right Spirit, willing Spirit. His first and most proper title is Holy Spirit, a name most especially appropriate to everything which is incorporeal, purely immaterial, and indivisible.⁴⁶

Consequently, "it is impossible for us to conceive of [the Spirit as] something whose nature can be circumscribed or is subject to change or variation, or is like a creature in any way." Instead, we are compelled

to direct our thoughts on high, and to think of [the Spirit] an intelligent being boundless in power, of unlimited greatness, generous in goodness, whom time cannot measure. ...He perfects all other things, and Himself lacks nothing; He gives life to all things, and is never depleted. He does not increase by additions, but is always complete ... and present everywhere. He is the source of sanctification, spiritual light, who gives illumination to everyone using His powers to search the truth.⁴⁷

Central to Basil's understanding of the Spirit is that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12.3), and it is only through knowing the Son that one can know the Father.⁴⁸ This transforming work of the Spirit, explains Basil, occurs at the rite of baptism when a human being is "cleansed from the shame of his evil, ... and the original form of the Royal Image [is] restored in him."⁴⁹ Thereupon, the Spirit can

show you in Himself the image of the invisible [the Son], and with purified eyes you will see in this blessed image the unspeakable beauty of its prototype [the Father]. ... He shines upon those who are cleansed from every spot, and makes them spiritual men through fellowship with Himself. ... So too Spirit-bearing souls, illumined by Him, finally become

⁴⁶ *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*, pp. 174, 176-77, 187.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 9.23 (Anderson, pp. 44).

spiritual themselves.... From this comes knowledge of the future, understanding of the mysteries, apprehension of hidden things, ... heavenly citizenship, a place in the choir of angels, endless joy in the presence of God, becoming like God, and, the highest of all desires becoming God.⁵⁰

In our earlier discussion of Chrysostom's theological epistemology, we see Chrysostom asserting that a true perception or knowledge of God through the Son occurs only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Like Basil, Chrysostom believes that this perception takes place at the rite of baptism, when the Spirit cleanses Christians of their sins and renews the image of God in them. Thereafter, their contemplation of God deepens if they maintain an "innocence from fornication," and "a freedom from all sins, since every species of sin places a stain on the soul." This freedom from sin, adds Chrysostom, can be cultivated through ascetic practices, the chief being almsgiving (*eleēmosunē*).⁵²

Notwithstanding these similarities, Basil and Chrysostom differs in an important way. While Basil believes that moral righteousness is a prerequisite for divine knowledge, and attained through the purification of the Spirit, he does not attribute human unrighteousness to some flawed aspect of human nature, as in the case of an Augustine's theory of the fallen will. Rather, moral impurity, as he sees it, is due largely to ignorance, which can be cured by the Spirit. While Chrysostom is no Augustinian, he believes, nonetheless, that the human propensity to evil is due in no small measure to a flawed mindset (*gnōmē*) that disrupts one's reason and leads one to moral vices.

6 The Principle of Equivalence and the Trinity

We turn to the final argument employed regularly by Basil and Chrysostom in their defence of Trinitarian orthodoxy: the principle of equivalence. Namely, the Son and the Spirit are consubstantial with the Father because they share the same or are equal in their knowledge, authority and power. This premise is seen in Basil's teachings as early as his *Against Eunomius*. Here, he interprets Scriptural texts, such as John 14:9, Matthew 11:27 and John 17:26, as agreeing

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Hom. in John* 73 (PG 59.398.27-32).

⁵² For Chrysostom's understanding of almsgiving and its role in cultivating the Christian life, see Junghun Bae, 'John Chrysostom On Almsgiving and the Therapy of the Soul' (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2018); PG 59.398.52-54.

that we can only see (*oraē*) and know (*gignōskō*) the Father through the Son.⁵³ If the knowledge of Christ and the Father is one and the same, he concludes, the Son must share the same nature as the Father. As Basil puts it in his interpretation of John 14:9:

how could the Son show in himself the one who neither admits comparison nor possesses any fellowship with him? That which is unknown is not comprehended through that which is unlike and foreign to it, but it is natural for something to become known by what has affinity with it. In this way the features of a seal are perceived by means of its impression, and the archetype is known through its image, since by comparing them, it is clear that there is identity in each.⁵⁴

With regards to Basil's pneumatology, we have examined it briefly in the previous section. According to him, Christians can only know the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is by the Holy Spirit that they can "becom[e] like God."⁵⁵ By saying this, Basil not only presumes an equality of knowledge between the Spirit, the Son and the Father. He is also suggesting that the Spirit shares the same power (and thus the same nature) as the Son and the Father, without which He cannot apply the salvific benefits of Christ to Christians and deify them.⁵⁶

Quite remarkably, this principle of equivalence features prominently in Chrysostom's homilies. His *Homilies Against the Aneomeans* is a good example.⁵⁷ In *Homily* 5, Chrysostom cites from Luke 10:22 ("no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son") and John 6.46, (and no one has "seen the Father except the one who is from God – he has seen the Father") to argue that the Son shares the same substance with the Father. This is because "an inferior substance would not be able to have clear

53 In John 14:9 (ESV), for example, Jesus chides Philip, saying, "have I been with you so long, and you still do not know (*egnōkas*) me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen (*eōraken*) the Father?" Hildebrand, *Trinitarian Theology of Basil*, pp. 161–62.

54 CE 1.17 (FC122, 117).

55 *De Spiritu Sancto* 9.23 (Anderson, pp. 44).

56 He makes a similar argument in *Against Eunomius*. Since God is simple, argues Basil, His begetting of the Son must not be partial, but involve "the whole power of the Father." Likewise, "the whole power of the Only-begotten [was also needed] for the constitution of the Holy Spirit." This being the case, "one may consider the power of the Only-begotten simultaneously with his substance on the basis of the Spirit, and comprehend the power of the Father and his substance on the basis of the Only-Begotten." CE 2.32 (FC122, 180).

57 Most of these homilies were preached during the first two years of his priesthood. FC72, pp. 22–30.

knowledge of a superior substance, even if the difference between them were slight.”⁵⁸ Later, in *Homily 7*, he asserts likewise that the Son is fully divine because He shares the same substance, power, honour, and authority as the Father.⁵⁹ Commenting on the Son’s begottenness, he remarks that if “the one begotten is *homoousios* with the one who begets is true not only of men but also of animals,” it is absurd to presume then that “this law [is] to remain fixed for plants and animals and beasts, while only in the case of God does it alter itself and change.”⁶⁰ Thereafter, he extends this logic not only to the Son’s substance but also His power, honour, and authority.

When [the Son] wishes to show that his substance is precisely the same (*aparallakton*) as the Father’s, he says: “He who has seen (*eōrakōs*) me has seen the Father.” When he wishes to show that his power (*dunameōs*) differs from the power of others, he says: “I and the Father are one.” When he wishes to show that his authority (*exousias*) is equal to the Father’s, he says: “For as the Father raises the dead and grants life, so the Son also grants life to those whom he wishes.” When he wishes to show that he is to receive identical worship with the Father, he says: “So that all men may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.” And when he wishes to show he has the same authority (*authentian*) to amend the law, he says: “My Father works, and I work.”⁶¹

In a similar vein, Chrysostom cites John 5:22 in *Homily 8*, declaring that since the Father has given all judgment (*krisin*) to the Son, He must also “have all judgemental ability (*paran echōn tēn krisin*) to grant crowns to all and to exact punishment from all.” This must mean that the Son is “perfect and complete” like the Father.⁶²

Similar arguments are found also in the remaining homiletical series.⁶³ In *Homily 11*, for example, Chrysostom claims that the Father’s consultation with

58 Ibid. 5.25 (FC72, 148). See also Ibid. 5.32 (FC72, pp. 151).

59 *de consubstantiali* (*Homily 7*) 7.

60 *de consubstantiali* 8–9 (FC72, pp. 187–88).

61 *de consubstantiali* 12 (FC72, pp. 190, modified). He makes a similar argument in his first *Baptismal Instructions* when he reasoned that the Son’s ability to give life to all things “shows that He has equal power with the Father (τὴν ἴσην ἔχει τῷ Πατρὶ δύναμιν).” *Instruction* 1.22.

62 *De petitione matris filiorum Zebedaei* (*Homily 8*) 17 (PG 48.771.44–45; FC72, pp. 220, modified).

63 In 397, Chrysostom was elected to the bishopric see of Constantinople. As in the case of Antioch, there were many Anomeans in the capital. Consequently, he saw it necessary to begin his ministry in the city by preaching two homilies against the Anomean heresy.

the Son in Genesis 1:26 ('let us make') implies that the Father is ascribing "the equality of honour which belonged to him to whom he spoke."⁶⁴ On the basis that the Two shares "a single image" (*mian ousan eikona*), he concludes then that they must be same in honour and exactly alike in power (*to homotimon kai tēs exousias to aparallakton*).⁶⁵ In *Homily 12*, he notes further that Christ had the authority to violate the Sabbath. This again must mean that He is "equal to the Father."⁶⁶

In the case of the Spirit, the occasions when Chrysostom defends His divinity are proportionally less. Nevertheless, he follows Basil's cue that an equality of knowledge between the Father and the Spirit must mean that the Two shares the same divinity. Thus, in *Homily 5* of his *Homilies Against the Aneomeans*, he cites 1 Corinthians 2:11 and concludes that just as he "who knows a man's innermost self [is] but the man's own spirit within him," so also, "no one knows what lies in the depths of God but the Spirit of God."⁶⁷ The same idea is taken for granted also in *Homily 8 on 2 Corinthians*. Here, he declares that "the knowledge of God" is to be found in the "face of Christ" (*en prosōpō Christou*). For it is "through Him we know the Father." This is possible only when "we have been brought by the Spirit" to God.⁶⁸

7 Conclusion

When Basil entered the fray of Trinitarian debates in 360, it was still uncertain as to what will count as orthodox theological terminologies eventually. Just a few years later, however, we find the Meletians adopting the Nicene *homooousios* formula, and modifying much of the traditional Eusebian motifs to safeguard against potential Homoian and Heteroousian interpretations – if we are to judge by Basil's teachings, and those of a later Meletian–Chrysostom. More importantly, Basil, during the intervening years of 360s to 370s, developed a Trinitarian doctrine that would be seen by posterity as his theological legacy: a reframed doctrine of divine simplicity that holds together the doctrine of divine incomprehensibility and Scriptures' manifold teachings or, indeed, conceptions about God; a re-working of *hypostasis* that allows it to denote God's

These have come down to us as *Homilies 11* (*Contra Anomoeos*) and 12 (*De Christi divinitate*). FC72, pp. 45, 270.

64 Ibid. 13 (FC72, pp. 275).

65 *Contra Anomoeos* (*Homily 11*) 24 (FC72, pp. 278–79).

66 *de Christi divinitate* 47–49, 51 (FC72, pp. 304–5).

67 *de incomp.* 5.7 (FC72, pp. 139–40), 5:24.

68 For a similar argument, see Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 9.23; *Hom. in 2 Cor.* 8 (PG 61.457.29–35).

particular modes of existence as Father, Son and Spirit, without subordinating the latter two to the former; the centrality of the Spirit in one's knowledge of God and, therefore, salvation; and an equivalence principle that argues from the equality of knowledge and power shared between the Trinity to the common nature shared by them. As we have demonstrated, Chrysostom not only appropriated these Basilian ideas but made them his own by introducing a few rhetorical and theological innovations. More importantly, as the preacher *par excellence* whose homilies are well read by all Christian traditions – Orthodox, Catholic, Nestorian and Protestant, Chrysostom would play a crucial role in popularising Basil's Trinitarian theology. The reception of this Basilian-Chrysostomic tradition, however, would require a separate study of its own.⁶⁹

69 This essay was presented at the Asia-Pacific Early Christian Studies Conference at Okayama Sep 2018.