EXCURSUS TWO

THE DATE OF BASIL'S DE FIDE

W.K.L. Clarke, in his *St. Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism*, follows Prudent Maran in giving 361 as the approximate date of *fid.*, although he admits that Maran's arguments are not very convincing. In a later work, Clarke argues that Basil's phrase "so we baptize" indicates that Basil was a presbyter when he wrote *fid.* This phrase however need not carry such an implication. Its context is as follows:

So we believe and so we baptize according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you' [Mt 28:19-20].

Dörries has shown that the phrase "so we believe and so we baptize" is actually an early version of a statement which was a basic expression of Basil's own personal experience and theological thought. For Basil, Christ's baptismal command defines not only the form of the Church's baptismal formula, but also the nature of her confession of faith. Later, during the Pneumatomachian controversy Basil came to regard the Church's doxology as also determined by this command.

Dörries also argues that the composition of *fid.* lies at a time prior to Basil's episcopate. Chief among his reasons are: 1) *fid.* is characterized as Basil's first non-polemical work; 2) Basil gives a "private" creed in *fid.* 4,7 which is based wholly upon the Scriptures; but in *epp.* 140 and 175, in the midst of his struggle with the Pneumatomachi, Basil refuses to compose a creed. Even in *epp.* 113 and 114, before the actual struggle begins, Basil simply refers his readers to the Nicene creed; 3) neither mention nor allusion is made to the Pneumatomachi; 4) Basil speaks with

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1 For bibliographical data, see p. 27, n. 87.
2 *Vita s. Basilii Magni* 7 (PG 29.xxix).
3 *Fid.* 4 (PG 31.688A).
4 *Ascetic Works*, pp. 15-16; 95,n.1.
5 *De Spiritu Sancto*, pp. 16,129,133-134; "Basilius", pp. 132.
7 *PG* 31.685A-688A.
of a bishop. Thus Dörries dates \textit{fid.} shortly after \textit{Eun.} 1-3 and before the discussions with the Pneumatomachi.\footnote{De Spiritu Sancto, p. 18; “Basilius”, p. 130.}

Fedwick,\footnote{Charisma, pp. 149-150.} on the other hand, argues for a much later date. \textit{Fid.} was composed when “some of the ascetics living in Pontus and neighbouring Armenia requested from Basil a statement of his faith as a condition for remaining in communion with him after he broke off with their common teacher Eustathius” in 372-375. These monks had demanded a proof of Basil’s orthodoxy and fidelity to Scripture. Thus Basil, although reluctant to write a creed, gave way to the demands of the ascetics, and drew up a creed which is replete with Scripture and which carefully avoids non-Scriptural and technical terminology.

Although there is much to be said for the arguments of both Dörries and Fedwick, a date in the early years of Basil’s episcopate is probably preferable. \textit{Pace} Dörries any comparison between \textit{fid.} and \textit{epp.} 140 and 175 with regard to the composition of a “private” creed is an argument only against placing \textit{fid.} in the midst of the Pneumatomachian struggle. In \textit{ep.} 105, before the actual struggle between Basil and Eustathius began, Basil felt free to give a “private” confession of faith which focuses upon the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, there is no reference to the Nicene creed in \textit{ep.} 105. Prior to Eustathius’ unequivocal support for the Pneumatomachian cause, Basil did not hold back from composing a “private” creed when the situation demanded it. Later though, when he did not want to provide fuel for slander, Basil refused to compose a creed (\textit{pace} Fedwick).

Although Dörries is correct in asserting that there is no mention of the Pneumatomachi in \textit{fid.}, there is clear evidence that Basil has been attacked for a certain position, probably that with regard to the Spirit. In \textit{fid.} 5 he writes:\footnote{PG 31.689A-B.}

\begin{quote}
We have been reminded by your piety that we should explain these items [of faith] before concluding and make clear our thoughts about them both for you and through you for our brothers in Christ, to both your and their satisfaction in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We considered it necessary and incumbent upon us [to do so], in order that no one’s mind be blown here and there by the variation in the statements made by us on different occasions. [This variation stems from the fact] that we are always compelled to resist the theories introduced by those who are opposed to the truth. [Also] that no one be shaken by the opposition of those who wish to ascribe to us strange [ideas] or who even frequently attribute falsely to our doctrine their own [wicked] passions so as to mislead the simpler [believers].
\end{quote}