

# St. Gregory of Nyssa, Anabaptism, and the Creeds

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## Introduction

The ongoing debate<sup>1</sup> about the value of the ecumenical creeds of Christendom from an Anabaptist historical perspective has generated polarizing judgments on their efficacy and function for early Anabaptist leaders and communities. However, few participants have sufficiently taken into account the patristic understanding of these proclamations of Orthodoxy, and of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in particular. Even when this historical frame of reference is addressed, it typically elicits imprecise conclusions on its negative or positive impact on Christian responsibility or unity. By apprising the Anabaptist community of the Eastern, patristic, and therefore the original mindset, expectations, and conditions engendering the formulation of the creeds during the church's first five hundred years, using St. Gregory of Nyssa as a paradigm, I hope to create a framework within which Anabaptist historians and theologians reluctant to abandon the church's living tradition can be informed by the opposing view's equally warranted concern for ethics and nonviolence.

I will try to meet this objective by evaluating the fusion of spirituality and theology in the patristic era and in the East, its process of deterioration in the West, and the emergence of Anabaptist priorities amid the epistemic theological environment of the sixteenth century. Although serious consideration of this subject can be traced back to classic treatments such as that of Roland Bainton, who contended that Anabaptists are "commonly on the left also with regard to . . . [the] creeds"<sup>2</sup> and Robert Friedmann's endorsement of this designation,<sup>3</sup> I will limit my involvement with contemporary Anabaptist concerns to viewpoints expressed during the current decade only, and only minimally after I have dealt with the Eastern, patristic, and 16th-century Anabaptist contexts and issues.<sup>4</sup>

After I describe the historical background, the chronological progression – from (1) the life of Jesus to (2) the observation of this divine life and its confluence with the divine operations of the Father as revealed

in the Hebrew *Tanak*, then to (3) the imitation of and ontological affiliation with this life, and finally to (4) the creedal description of his person<sup>5</sup> – will begin to gain credibility. All of this transpired concurrent with Christ's earthly ministry or almost immediately upon his ascension, with creedal expressions evolving concomitantly with the emergence of innovative heretical teachings that had to be addressed.

Many portions of the circumscribed and intentionally formulated Rules of Faith were created not for Jesus' followers but for calibrating heterodox misinterpretations in order to preserve a *pre-existing* soteriology that stressed a behavioral and ontological affiliation and union with Christ who is both divine and human.<sup>6</sup> They did so by using christological and triadological phraseology purposely tailored for *heterodox* convictions that either failed to take the incarnation seriously enough or categorically rejected it. For that reason, such distant descendants of Latin Christianity as the 16th-century Anabaptist leaders felt compelled to propel ethics and the imitation of Christ to the forefront of theological activity, by explicitly addressing ethical behavior<sup>7</sup> and avowing the necessity of one's transformational or ontological affiliation with the incarnate Christ.

This article contends that the gradual separation of theology and spirituality in the West, not (or less than) the creeds' ostensible silence on the ethico-soteriological implications of the narrative of Jesus,<sup>8</sup> contributed to 16th-century Anabaptism's emphasis on *Nachfolge* and the illumination of the creeds' soteriological and ethical intimations. I will enlist Eastern Orthodox voices that can guide us to a more thorough and accurate understanding of the purpose and essence of theology as prayer<sup>9</sup> and as *becoming*,<sup>10</sup> and soteriology as *theosis* or deification.

Indeed, the Eastern view of salvation as *theosis* was not foreign to early Anabaptism. No component or dimension of Eastern Christianity is left untouched by the inexorable assimilation of spirituality and theology, the mutual suffusion between things of heaven and things of earth. This is true of liturgical theology; ecclesiology; the nature of worship and the sacraments; understanding of the scriptures; humanity's mediatory role between heaven and earth, between the uncreated and created realms; the function of icons; the role of tears; the life of a saint; and the apprehension of the person of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

I will appeal to St. Gregory of Nyssa's<sup>12</sup> theological methodology in light of the creedal formulations to which he significantly contributed.<sup>13</sup> I will discuss two specific contributions: (1) his "apophasis," which regulates and permits insight into the precise function of theological concepts or images (*epinoia*) and the resulting emphasis on God's operations (*energeia*); and (2) his concern for preserving an Orthodox soteriology as a manifestation of the fusion of spirituality and theology as well as the capacitation and authorization for his theological involvement. Gregory's insights resonate with contemporary Anabaptist scholarship. He will at times agree with current perspectives but will also suggest new ways of participating in what Anabaptists already stress, e.g., discipleship and a soteriology manifesting itself ethically and acknowledging the salience of Jesus' political, socio-economic, and nonviolent measures.

### **The Historical Sequence and Function of the Creeds**

Fr. John Behr seeks to maintain the appropriate sequence of events leading from the life and teachings of the church as canon to the immortalization of this standard in the church's doctrines and creeds. "The tendency is to begin with Nicaea," he says, "and then look for anticipations of Nicene theology in the earlier periods. But, it is methodologically faulty to begin with the results of the controversies . . . ."<sup>14</sup> Central to Behr's thesis is the primitive creed formulated in 1 Cor. 15:3-5:

What is most important here is the phrase that the apostle Paul repeats twice: Christ died and rose "in accordance with the scriptures." This phrase is so important that it is preserved in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed which is still said at every Orthodox Christian baptism and celebration of the Divine Liturgy: Christ died and rose in accordance with the (same) scriptures. It is important to recognize that the scriptures in question are not the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – they had not even been written when Paul made this statement, but rather what we call the Old Testament – the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets.<sup>15</sup>

The circumstance whereby such creedal affirmations existed very early was largely due to the revelation of Christ from the Hebrew *Tanakh* as

exegeted by Christ himself and sustained through the *kerygma* of the apostles and later by the Church Fathers.<sup>16</sup> The authority of Christ was intuited from his person and narrative rather than from a philosophical abstraction of the same.

In isolation from the precise creedal expressions existing during his time, Aristides could affirm Jesus' salvific authority by observing his miracles as described in the biblical narrative.<sup>17</sup> Tertullian deduced from Scripture that an association between God and Jesus is evident from its implicit disclosure in the Sermon on the Mount:

[T]hat he begins with beatitudes, is characteristic of the Creator, who used no other voice than that of blessing either in the first fiat or the final dedication of the universe: for "my heart," says he, "has indicted a very good word." This will be that "very good word" of blessing which is admitted to be the initiating principle of the New Testament, after the example of the Old. What is there, then, to wonder at, if he entered *on his ministry* with the very attributes of the Creator, who ever in language of the same sort loved, consoled, protected, *and* avenged the beggar, and the poor, and the humble, and the widow, and the orphan?<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere Tertullian arrives at the same conclusion by observing Jesus' sinlessness,<sup>19</sup> miracles,<sup>20</sup> and transfiguration.<sup>21</sup> However, despite conceding the capacity for following Jesus through observing in him certain theistic characteristics, all of which Christ's own followers could detect, patristic authors such as Ignatius of Antioch,<sup>22</sup> Aristides,<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus,<sup>24</sup> Tertullian,<sup>25</sup> Clement of Alexandria,<sup>26</sup> Hippolytus,<sup>27</sup> Origen,<sup>28</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus,<sup>29</sup> and Cyprian<sup>30</sup> nevertheless did develop Rules of Faith, either for individual or regional use. Yet these creeds were intimately dependent on the "ethico-soteriological" ramifications of Christ's fulfillment of OT precepts and of his earthly existence and humanity's vocation in view of these ramifications. The Rules sought to defend and preserve the ethical obligations of Christians, the life in Christ, and the synergistic requirements of God and humanity for salvation.<sup>31</sup>

However, the particular components of the Rules seemed intent on combating heresies whose syncretistic belief systems threatened this

ethico-soteriological nucleus of Christianity, this life in Christ.<sup>32</sup> In fact, because these heresies were syncretistic their exponents could generate ethical standards based on their beliefs – ineluctably subsequent to ideology – rather than formulate beliefs or a creed of their own that would preserve their ethics and perpetuate a pre-established soteriology, as was natural to the continuation of a living Tradition.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the Orthodox situation, heresies could not base their behavior on the historical Jesus, because heretical sects were religious alloys, the products of a union between Christianity and a pagan religious system or philosophy. Patristic authors acknowledged this syncretism: Tertullian recognized the “lateness of date which marks all heresies”<sup>34</sup> and insisted they “are themselves instigated by philosophy”<sup>35</sup>; Hippolytus claimed Noetianism was a product of the philosophy of Heraclitus<sup>36</sup> while alleging that “from philosophers the heresiarchs [derived] starting points, [and] like cobblers patching together, according to their own particular interpretation, the blunders of the ancients, have advanced them as novelties to those that are capable of being deceived.”<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette observes that the various forms of Gnosticism can be traced to “Orphic and Platonic dualism, other schools of Greek thought, Syrian conceptions, Persian dualism, the mystery cults, Mesopotamian astrology, and Egyptian religion.”<sup>38</sup> Manichaeism, whose founder was of Persian background, was a mixture of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity.<sup>39</sup> Latourette alludes to the origin of elements in Marcion’s heresy by specifying his birthplace at Sinople, “the country of the famous cynic, Diogenes.”<sup>40</sup> Preserving Christianity’s ethico-soteriological core against the immorality ensuing from heretical systems of belief was the primary goal of the Church Fathers’ patronage of appropriate creedal phraseology. Their formulations modified elements of heterodox conceptions seeking to facilitate debauched behavior<sup>41</sup> while abating access to the divine and threatening the process of *theosis*.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Eastern Indissolubility of Spirituality and Theology**

The original outlook, retaining the fusion of theology and spirituality, is upheld to this day within the Eastern tradition, while the West has largely abandoned it in favor of a more analytical approach. As John Binns claims, “The word ‘theology’ [...] is a case in point. In the East the theologian

is committed to the experience of God, not to the discussion of God,”<sup>43</sup> an observation echoed by John Chrysostom.<sup>44</sup> No doubt with free-church sentiments in mind, Peter Bouteneff observes that “Some insist that dogmas get in the way of their relationship with Jesus.”<sup>45</sup> However, such concerns, usually associated with J. Denny Weaver,<sup>46</sup> over apparent omissions in the creeds is not foreign to the Orthodox disposition: Jaroslav Pelikan asserts that “Maximus Confessor had observed that even [...] the doctrine that salvation conferred deification had not been included in the creed or formulated by the councils.”<sup>47</sup>

Orthodoxy does not pay mere lip service to retaining the fusion of spirituality and theology, soteriology and doctrine; it is an authentic expression with a deep imprint on the Orthodox conscience. Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow declared, “The Creed does not belong to you unless you have lived it.”<sup>48</sup> Metropolitan Kallistos Ware affirms that “True theology [...] is always living, a form of ‘hierurgy’ or holy action, something that changes our life and ‘assumes’ us into itself.... [T]heology is not a matter for specialists but a universal vocation; each is called to become of ‘theologian soul.’”<sup>49</sup> Bouteneff observes that Christianity “does not consist in a series of verifiable and interlocking hypotheses. Nor is it a philosophical system consisting in satisfactory, mutually consistent presuppositions. Our approach has to be different,”<sup>50</sup> eventually concluding that dogmas must “orient our lives.”<sup>51</sup> This “existential character” of theology is familiar to both the Orthodox and Anabaptist experience.<sup>52</sup>

What is unique to Orthodox theological inquiry – and what Anabaptists might learn from, adopt as their own, and even bring to its logical conclusion while being mindful of matters of social justice and nonviolence that Orthodoxy has occasionally overlooked – is the indissolubility of theology and spirituality. Vladimir Lossky insists that “spirituality and dogma, mysticism and theology, are inseparably linked in the life of the Church.”<sup>53</sup> Chrysostom adds that “Truth is profoundly mystical, never merely intellectual. It is a reality that ultimately cannot be told. It is a knowledge that is translated into love and life,”<sup>54</sup> and declares that theology uses “the language of silence translated as poetry, as liturgy, as doxology and as life.”<sup>55</sup> This silence has epistemological implications that require an “entering into” truth. Serge Verhovskoy maintains that “When we speak about knowledge,

we do not speak about abstract theories. True knowledge is a participation in its object. To know God is to be in communion with Him.”<sup>56</sup> Commenting on John 1:18, Chrysavgis remarks, “This is the foundation of a language that through *apophasis* (or negation) opens up to the silence of *theosis* (or deification).”<sup>57</sup>

“Unlike Gnosticism, in which knowledge for its own sake constitutes the aim of the Gnostic, Christian theology is always in the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge subserving an end which transcends all knowledge,” says Lossky. “This ultimate end is union with God or deification, the [*theosis*] of the Greek Fathers.”<sup>58</sup> This end is also a concern for the ontology of God into which humanity enters and for which Gregory of Nyssa, along with Athanasius, Basil the Great, and Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen), toiled amid the doctrinal uncertainty and tumult of his day.<sup>59</sup>

The bond between theology and spirituality began to evaporate in the West through numerous religious and cultural inducements. Although the shift in theological priorities is highly complicated, some historians, such as Fr. John Meyendorff, locate the separation of spirituality and theology during the era when “Christian theology acquired, in the medieval Western universities, the status of a ‘science,’ to be taught and learned with the use of appropriate scientific methodology.”<sup>60</sup> Lossky contends the separation occurred earlier, immediately after the 11th-century schism between East and West; the fusion was espoused by both East and West up until roughly 1054 C.E.<sup>61</sup> Latourette identifies hints of the division during the mid- to later patristic era:

Certainly [the Western] part of the Church was not so torn by the theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries as were the Eastern portions of the Church. This may have been because the Latin mind was less speculative and more practical and ethical than was the Hellenistic mind of the East. It may be significant that the greatest schisms over questions of morals and discipline, the Novatian and Donatist, had their rise in the West, while the main divisions over speculative theology [...] had their birth in the East.<sup>62</sup>

However, this does not mean the West was more cognizant of ethical issues than the East, but that the West could and did solve ethical disputes

directly and in isolation from conceptual descriptions of Christ and the Trinity. The implications are important. When Christians in the West assimilated the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as their own, they unavoidably acquired its ethical and soteriological implications. The West nevertheless addressed ethically-stimulated schisms without summoning or acknowledging the salvific components inherent in the creeds, thus allowing the Christendom of Roman partisanship to adopt a more lenient ethical stance – as it did in the face of concerns raised by Novatian and Donatus, however heretical these were.<sup>63</sup>

### **Onto-behavioral Priorities in Gregory of Nyssa and Anabaptism**

In *De Professione Christiana*, Gregory of Nyssa declares, “If we who are united to him by faith in him, are synonymous with him whose incorruptible nature is beyond verbal interpretation, it is entirely necessary for us to become what is contemplated in connection with the incorruptible nature and to achieve an identity with the secondary elements which follow along with it,”<sup>64</sup> which he identifies as the divine virtues emanating from God. For Gregory, the nucleus of Christianity is ontological or existential rather than epistemic:<sup>65</sup> “The Lord does not say it is blessed to know [...] something about God, but to have God present within oneself.”<sup>66</sup>

Such emphasis on “onto-behavioral” Christianity resembles early Anabaptist emphases. Hans Schlaffer, after describing behavioral characteristics such as forgiving the sins of others, declares that “From all of this it is easy to conclude who are the true believers and proper Christians and who not. Since not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does the will of the heavenly Father.”<sup>67</sup> Michael Sattler identifies the defining element of being a Christian as love, “without which it is not possible that you be a Christian congregation.”<sup>68</sup> Peter Riedeman identifies the core of Christianity as ontological affiliation with Christ: “We confess also that God has, through Christ, chosen, accepted and sought a people for himself, not having spot, blemish, wrinkle, or any such thing, but pure and holy, as he, himself, is holy.”<sup>69</sup>

Drawing on Alvin Beachy’s equation of the Anabaptist view of salvation with divinization,<sup>70</sup> Thomas Finger claims that “*Vergöttung*”<sup>71</sup> was a common theme among early South German/Austrian Anabaptists, while



expressions like ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ with obvious allusion to 2 Peter 1:4, frequently appeared in later South German/Austrian and Dutch Anabaptist circles.”<sup>72</sup> Dirk Philips affirms that Christ’s followers become “participants in the divine nature, yes, and are called gods and children of the Most High”<sup>73</sup> and that “whoever has become a partaker of the divine character, the being of Jesus Christ and the power and character of the Holy Spirit, conforms himself to the image of Jesus Christ in all submission, obedience, and righteousness serves God, in summary is a right-believing Christian.”<sup>74</sup> In order to incorporate all major strands of 16th-century Anabaptism – Swiss, Dutch, and South German-Austrian – Finger employs more inclusive language: “However, since divinization language was uncommon among Swiss Anabaptists, I proposed the broader concept of *ontological transformation*, of which divinization is a variety, to designate the personal dimension of the coming of the new creation.”<sup>75</sup>

In addition to this ontological urgency of Anabaptism, the patristic era, and Gregory of Nyssa, the ineffability of the christological composition and trinitarian economy that the creeds seek to disclose also leads us to re-examine the apparent creedal rigidity and noeticism of the patristic era. In this regard, Gregory serves as a capable example.

### **Beyond Abstraction: The Narrative of Jesus and God’s *Energieia***

#### *Regulating Conceptual Efficacy: Gregory of Nyssa’s Apophasis*

We soon recognize the centrality of an “apophatic”<sup>76</sup> outlook in Gregory of Nyssa’s writings. The incomprehensibility and ineffability of the divine essence is arguably *the* most prominent element in his philosophy. Further, he acknowledges the epistemological limits imposed on humans. Robert Brightman claims that “apophaticism is central” in Gregory’s approach<sup>77</sup> while insisting “that man cannot know the essence of God” is “at the heart” of Gregory’s theology.<sup>78</sup> Brightman contends that any study that “does not give adequate treatment to his apophaticism is *ipso facto* defective.”<sup>79</sup> Gregory himself declares:

The divine nature, whatever it may be in itself, surpasses every mental concept (*epinoias*). For it is altogether inaccessible to reasoning and conjecture, nor has there been found any human faculty capable of perceiving the incomprehensible;

for we cannot devise a means of understanding inconceivable things.<sup>80</sup>

As Deirdre Carabine recognizes,<sup>81</sup> Gregory is acutely aware of the limited function of trinitarian metaphysical categories, as he explains in his *Great Catechism*:

And so one who severely studies the depths of the mystery, receives secretly in his spirit, indeed, a moderate amount of apprehension of the doctrine of God's nature, yet he is unable to explain clearly in words the ineffable depth of this mystery. As, for instance, how the same thing is capable of being numbered and yet rejects numeration; how it is observed with distinctions yet is apprehended as a monad, how it is separate as to personality yet is not divided as to subject matter.<sup>82</sup>

Gregory concedes the insufficiency of metaphysical categories to summarize the trinitarian economy. However, he applies his apophatic outlook not only to the divine essence and the trinitarian economy but to each *hypostasis* separately, since they each share in God's *ousia*:<sup>83</sup>

Whatever your thought suggests to you as to the mode of the existence of the Father, you will think also in the case of the Son, and in like manner too of the Holy Ghost.[...] For the account of the uncreated and of the incomprehensible is one and the same in the case of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. For one is not more incomprehensible and uncreated than another.<sup>84</sup>

This is not surprising, given Gregory's common reference to the divine and human relationship in Christ as a "mystery of the incarnation"<sup>85</sup> and a "mystery of godliness."<sup>86</sup> Gregory insists that the union of divine and human in the person of Christ is "beyond all circumscription."<sup>87</sup>

Despite his cynicism about the limited function of theological concepts, Gregory does offer hope. He insists that they correspond to the *operations* (Greek, *energeia*) of the Godhead, as opposed to its essence.<sup>88</sup> After mentioning terms commonly used to characterize the divine essence, he asks, "Do they indicate his operations, or his Nature? No one will say that they indicate aught but his operations."<sup>89</sup> Theological concepts are

reflections of divine actions as apprehended in the created realm, not of the divine essence: “When we look at the order of creation, we form in our mind an image not of the essence, but of the wisdom of him who has made all things wisely.”<sup>90</sup> God is “invisible by nature, but becomes visible in his energies, for he may be contemplated in the things that are referred to him.”<sup>91</sup> This is precisely how God is “known by analogy.”<sup>92</sup>

### **An Anabaptist Response**

Gregory’s apophaticism is not represented in early Anabaptist theology to the extent accentuated by the Church Fathers, especially in the East. But Anabaptist emphases do demonstrate the limited function of objective theistic descriptions, and their language is at times compellingly similar to that of patristic sources. The Anabaptists’ stress on communal biblical hermeneutics reveals their acknowledging subjective dissonance when comparing one interpretation to another, thus requiring a certain amount of cooperation when illuminating scripture. Menno Simons insisted that church members could not use “human investigation” to conceptually explain and add to scripture’s “incomprehensible depths” but should “walk all their lives before their God with calm, glad hearts.”<sup>93</sup> His analogy, comparing the inability to conceptualize God to pouring “the River Rhine or Meuse into a quart bottle,”<sup>94</sup> is remarkably similar to Gregory’s statement that as the “hollow of one’s hand is to the whole deep, so is all the power of language in comparison with that nature which is unspeakable and incomprehensible.”<sup>95</sup>

Menno additionally declares that “This one and only eternal, omnipotent, incomprehensible (*unerforschliche*), invisible, ineffable, and indescribable God, we believe and confess with the Scriptures to be the eternal, incomprehensible Father with his eternal, incomprehensible Son, and with his eternal, incomprehensible Holy Spirit,”<sup>96</sup> while claiming that Christ is not a “literal word” but is instead the “*incomprehensible Word*” (emphasis added).<sup>97</sup> Within the Anabaptists’ Western setting, such apophatic language is quite striking and significant, particularly when tethered to their attitude toward the creeds as powerless to preserve an onto-behavioral focus.

Adherents of nascent Anabaptism sought instead to imitate Jesus’ observable teachings and example, and to determine how far Jesus’ actions

correspond to the operations of God, something of which humans can certainly obtain knowledge, as Gregory argued above. Alain Epp Weaver relates how John Howard Yoder concluded that for early Anabaptists, “the proper way to discuss Jesus’ unity with God was in terms of his motivation and his actions. [...] Such unity, which makes visible Jesus’ perfect *obedience* to the *will* of the Father, has ethical and political implications.”<sup>98</sup> Christ’s observable actions thus directly correspond to God’s *energeia* or operations. Since Jesus manifested his authority by means of observable behavior, what it means to be a Christian revolves around the extent to which a human replicates such behavior; the nucleus of Christianity for 16th-century Anabaptism was thus behavioral and transformational, rather than knowledge-based.

Menno again leads his audience to Christ’s very words and actions to be observed and imitated, in addition to complying with the creeds’ conceptual structures:

I trust also that we who are grains of the one loaf agree not only as to the twelve articles [of the Apostle’s Creed] (as [Gellius Faber] counts them), but also to all the articles of the Scriptures, such as *regeneration, repentance, baptism, Holy Supper, expulsion*, etc. which Christ Jesus [whom together with Isaiah, Peter and Paul confess to be *the only (einzige)* foundation of the churches – and not the twelve articles as he has it (*und nicht jene zwölf Artikel, wie er thut*)] has preached by his own blessed mouth, and left and taught us in clear and plain words (*und mit deutlichen Worten gelehrt und hinterlassen hat*) [emphasis added].<sup>99</sup>

Jesus’ words are clear and plain for the purpose of *Nachfolge* or discipleship. Elsewhere, Menno affirms Jesus’ salvific role, not because of his metaphysical composition but because of the “acts and attributes which are found in abundance with Him, as may be clearly deduced and understood from [...] Scriptures.”<sup>100</sup> These acts are Jesus’ authority to forgive sins, judge humanity, and discuss the nature of the kingdom of God; because of this, Jesus “bestows eternal life”<sup>101</sup> or has the capacity and authority to do so.

Pilgrim Marpeck identifies the foundation for Christian practice and responsibility as the observation of Jesus’ words and example derived from the biblical narrative, not from intellectual exploration:

Nor can an inward testimony be recognized, except when it is preceded by such outward teaching, deeds, commands and ceremonies of Christ which belong to the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh and which are like a new creation in Christ. These things must be received in a physical manner before the inner testimony can be felt and recognized. Although reason and thought and almost all conceited spirits strongly resist this act, nevertheless, they must all come under the physical feet of Christ.<sup>102</sup>

Marpeck is attempting to subordinate “reason” and “inner testimony” under the physicality of Christ’s teachings and deeds, the latter informing humanity of its salvific status and how far it has become a new creation in Christ. Dirk Philips also states that human obedience is rooted in the biblical witness of Christ rather than in creedal proclamations, since “humans do not live by other human words brought forth out of human will, but alone by the words of God proclaimed to us through Christ Jesus and his apostles.”<sup>103</sup>

Anabaptist leaders were thus content to acknowledge the intersection between the motives of both Jesus and God apart from the assistance of human words. This affirms Gregory’s insistence that God’s *energeia* can be known, while Jesus’ salvific authority can be determined based on how far his actions and teachings replicate the Father’s actions and teachings.

### **Christian Responsibility Preserved by Subsequently Developed Creeds**

#### *The Fusion of Spirituality and Theology: Gregory of Nyssa’s Theological Chronology and Priorities*

In order to verify how Gregory is in solidarity with the patristic concern for inner transformation and behavior, and how doctrine developed after and in support of this ethical concern, we must determine how his christology and trinitarian convictions sustain his pre-existing soteriology. We may thus ascertain his theological motive, the same stimulus as that of the early Church Fathers who sought to systematize a theology to abate decadent behavior arising from an accommodating heretical ideology.

Accordingly, we must show that Gregory’s soteriology appeared first, after which his christological and triadological formulations emerged consequentially. In fact, since one is permitted to apprehend God’s *energeia*

alone, God's salvific operations *must* be recognized initially, after which Christ's divine/human composition can be approached delicately and cautiously within a pre-established soteriological framework. Brian Daley expresses how Gregory is unique in this regard:

[Gregory] is concerned above all with Jesus Christ as the man in whom and through whom the infinite and saving reality of God touches us all: with preserving the transcendence of the God who is present in him, and with emphasizing the transformation of that human reality which God, in the man Jesus, has made his own.<sup>104</sup>

One method for determining if his soteriology was envisaged first is to consider whether Gregory may have formulated an *ad hoc* christology dependent on the situation in which he found himself.

Gregory's customization of christological language to substantiate specific features of his soteriology is quite evident. His emphasis on Christ's humanity is conspicuously expressed in *Ad Simplicium de Fide*: "He who was formed in the virgin's womb [...] is the servant, and *not* the Lord. [...] He who was created as the beginning of his ways is *not* God, but the man in whom God was manifested to us for the renewing again of the ruined way of man's salvation" (emphasis added).<sup>105</sup> Christ is thus seen as human because humans need salvation and the restoration of the likeness of God.

However, when the context is reversed, Gregory modifies his accent. Johannes Zachhuber claims that Gregory "under the pressure of maintaining, against Eunomius, the salvific necessity of Christ's full divinity, shifted the emphasis of his soteriology away from the humanistic approach [...] towards an approach stressing the salvific activity of the Logos."<sup>106</sup> Notice the austere contrast between the sentiment expressed in *Ad Simplicium de Fide* and that conveyed in *Contra Eunomium*: "Then he took dust from the earth and formed man, again he took dust from the virgin and *not only* formed man, *but formed him around himself*; then he created, afterwards he was created; then the word made flesh, afterwards the *word became flesh* in order to *transform our flesh into spirit* by partaking of our flesh and blood" (emphasis added).<sup>107</sup> Evidently, Gregory is more concerned with maintaining a balanced soteriological approach by conveniently stressing Christ's humanity or divinity and his equal status within the trinitarian

economy when required.<sup>108</sup> It is this balance that had to be immortalized in the final Nicene-Constantinopolitan formula.

Gregory is thus a fitting example of the fusion of spirituality and theology. In addition to his concern for substantiating a pre-existing soteriological outlook, his insistence that we must attend to our spiritual needs before participating in theological speculation is even more pronounced.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, our progressive transformation into, and union with, the Incarnate Christ is itself the way we know and see God with the eye of the soul.

He who would approach the knowledge of things sublime must first purify his manner of life from all sensual and irrational emotion. He must wash from his understanding every opinion derived from some preconception and withdraw himself from his customary intercourse with his own companion, [that] is, with his sense perceptions, which are [...] wedded to our nature as its companion. When he is so purified, then he assaults the mountain.<sup>110</sup>

Again Gregory maintains it is God who is “promised to the vision of those whose heart has been purified.”<sup>111</sup> One recognizes the identity of the archetype, namely the Incarnate Christ, by beholding one’s own purified soul: “If a man who is pure of heart sees himself, he sees in himself what he desires; and thus he becomes blessed, because when he looks at his own purity, he sees the archetype in the image.”<sup>112</sup>

For Gregory, doing theology, in the sense of ascertaining the metaphysical composition of Christ and the Trinity that the creeds seek to expound, involves inferring from one’s own purity and the synergistic process involved, what the Incarnate Christ is. As Lossky observes, “This mystery of faith as personal encounter and ontological participation is the unique foundation of theological language, a language that apophysis opens to the silence of deification.”<sup>113</sup> Participation in the purification process *is* doing theology.

### **An Anabaptist Response**

In effect, early Anabaptist leaders re-initiated the historical concatenation of events surrounding the creeds to resemble what unfolded in first-century Palestine before the composition of any detailed Rule of Faith. History

teaches that an understanding of Christ's metaphysical composition was formulated *after* acknowledging the exceptionality and significance of Jesus' behavior, ministry, and message, and *after* resolving to obey and imitate this same Jesus. Menno affirms that it is Jesus "whom we should serve and worship; that he is the truth, the One who forgives sins and bestows eternal life, in whom we must believe and who at the last day will raise us from the dead and judge us as it has been said, and *so it follows* of necessity (*so ist es gewiss unwiderlegbar*) that Jesus Christ must be true God with the Father" (emphasis added).<sup>114</sup> Obedience to Christ emerges as a result of observing those actions of Jesus that correspond to the operations<sup>115</sup> (*energeia*) of God (forgiving sins and bestowing eternal life); after identifying the salvific authority of Christ, Menno is prepared to follow him (in whom we must believe) and therefore establishes a rudimentary soteriological directive.

Here Menno can validate the creedal claims concerning Christ and his relationship to the Father within the trinitarian economy. Significantly, Menno equates God's operations that Jesus embodies as "glories, honors, works, and attributes which belong to no one in heaven nor upon the earth, except to the only eternal and true God."<sup>116</sup> This again shows how Christ's exceptionality and salvific authority and license could be acknowledged apart from philosophical disclosure and instead through Christ's fulfillment of OT patterns and precepts.

The priority in Anabaptism of purity of life and ontological soteriology, both chronologically and ecclesiastically, nuances the function of creedal descriptions. Early Anabaptists did not engage the creeds unless they were initiated into the discussion externally.<sup>117</sup> Finger's contention that "while Creeds provide a somewhat unnatural starting-point for Mennonites in ecumenical discussion, they do provide a possible one,"<sup>118</sup> though theoretically true, can lead to difficulties and internal contradictions that may be why early Anabaptists rarely invoked the creeds as a starting point unless they felt it was necessary to draw attention to their limitations.<sup>119</sup> In this way, since the creeds were a historical reality for 16th-century Anabaptist leaders, they commandeered their high christological claims in an attempt to convince the wider church of the normativity of Jesus' teachings and example for Christian ethics.

Ben Ollenburger's somewhat dubious citation of Menno in a recent issue of *Mennonite Life*<sup>120</sup> exemplifies the agenda of those who seem less



willing to account for the nuances inherent in early Anabaptist engagement with the creeds. Ollenburger provides a three-sentence quotation that spans five pages in the original, using it to affirm Menno's endorsement of the creedal formula. What it omits are the ethical and thus soteriological additions that motivated Menno to write about the creeds in the first place. The missing elements include his insistence that, in addition to the creedal words, Christ is the "eternal, wise, Almighty, holy, true, living and incomprehensible Word"<sup>121</sup> who thus "purified our hearts"<sup>122</sup> so we can "serve the true and living God."<sup>123</sup> Overtly connecting soteriological concerns with trinitarian expressions contained in the creeds, Menno also states that Christians should "give no one the praise for our salvation, neither in heaven nor on earth, but the only and eternal Father through Christ Jesus, and that through the illumination of the Holy Spirit."<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere, with reference to Orthodox proclamations about Christ, Menno asserts that all who believe these things "obey his Word, walk in his commandments [*folgen darum seinem Wort, wandeln in seinem Geboten*], bow to his scepter, and quiet their conscience with grace, atonement, merit, sacrifice, promise, death and blood."<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, in affirming the creedal formula and the Orthodox understanding of Jesus therein, Peter Riedeman averred, "This Word proceeded from the Father that the harm brought by the transgression of Adam might be healed, and the fall restored."<sup>126</sup> However, "a power other than human strength [Christ's divinity] was necessary,"<sup>127</sup> which has "now taken us captive into his obedience and leads us in his way, teaches us his character, ways and goodness."<sup>128</sup> In opposition to the more epistemic soteriology of Western Christendom, Hans Denck, in his so-called *Recantation*, affirms both Menno's and Riedeman's additions to the creeds by declaring, "*Glaube ist der gehorsam Gottes* (faith is obedience to God)."<sup>129</sup>

If the early Anabaptists merely stated the creeds and indicated consent and unqualified endorsement, that would show they were satisfied with the creeds' structure for their own context and concerns. However, in order to criticize something, that something must be introduced into the conversation. So, although the creeds were introduced externally by virtue of their historical survival, early Anabaptists willingly addressed them not only to affirm their statements but to scrutinize them and illuminate what they omit.<sup>130</sup>

B. Royale Dewey's remark that "rather than write off Nicea, Mennonites should be grateful for it"<sup>131</sup> is contestable when within their own 16th-century setting the creeds failed to nurture what is central to Anabaptism, namely discipleship, nonviolence, and socio-economic equity and justice. While patristic initiatives and intentions at Nicea were arguably laudable and valid, an analysis of the process, subsequent outcomes, and political manipulation of creedal priorities warrants, for early Anabaptism, regulation of the creeds and amendment to the priorities of Christianity in general. The issue is thus not the legitimacy of the Church Fathers themselves, but the ramifications of the Constantinian and Nicene politico-ecclesial union, specifically in the West where access to the creedal mechanisms for preserving a life in Christ inherent in the Eastern conscience was limited.

The 16th-century Western context within which Anabaptism emerged required a re-focusing on ethical matters. Ideally, creedal formulations could resolve behavioral and soteriological scruples. However, with Anabaptism's emergence in a setting where the creeds were impotent to reinvigorate the affluent, fraudulent, and unscrupulous state of the magisterial Roman Catholic Church because of the separation of spirituality and theology, Anabaptist leaders had to address ethical concerns directly and explicitly. This is exactly what they did when they made soteriological additions to the creeds.<sup>132</sup>

In this sense, Anabaptist attempts at persuading the historical church of the importance of priorities such as nonviolence mimic Gregory's insistence that creedal formulations emerged subsequent to, and in support of, a pre-existing soteriology. Like Gregory, the Anabaptists were primarily interested in defending their unique soteriology, which developed on the basis of observing Jesus' teachings and example as described in the biblical narrative. If the metaphysical Greek categories used to describe Christ and the Trinity can be employed to support a pre-existing soteriology, Anabaptists could appeal to them for that reason alone, much like Gregory and other patristic bishops and decision-makers did.

Indeed, as Alain Epp Weaver contends, "Nothing prevents contemporary theologians from appealing to the Creedal identification of Jesus as true man and true God in order to persuade other Christians of his normativity for ethics."<sup>133</sup> And specifically for Anabaptist values, only

a high christology can “provide the basis for discipleship to a non-resistant Jesus and an ecclesiology which renounces the violent ways of the world.”<sup>134</sup> Gregory is a fourth-century example of someone who contributed greatly to the discussion of appropriate christological and triadological language, but who periodically tailored this language for his own, and Orthodoxy’s, pre-established soteriological purposes.<sup>135</sup> However, he was interacting with an Eastern audience who recognized the soteriological significance of such creedal language; this is precisely how Anabaptism’s emergence presented itself with the opportunity to be a prophetic voice to the Western church, whose separation of spirituality and theology resulted in distorted priorities.

Although his effort to reclaim traditional Christian expressions and priorities is laudable, A. James Reimer seems to undermine the chronology inherent in the development of the creeds, as is evident from the title of his book *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*. If Reimer were more aware of the original circumstances and mindset out of which the creeds arose, the title should have been *The Ethical-Soteriological Foundation for Christian Dogmatics*.<sup>136</sup> In reference to the ecumenical creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries specifically, Reimer would like to see “a theological imagination that is disciplined by the doctrinal categories.”<sup>137</sup> Elsewhere he argues that the content of the creeds has “profound implications for how we live and act.”<sup>138</sup> For all his oversights, J. Denny Weaver is nevertheless more responsible in his management of history in this regard: “If Jesus Christ is our foundation, then it is Jesus’ story and the ‘politics of Jesus’ – not the shape of a national ethos or fourth- and fifth-century Creedal formulas – that should determine the contour of our theological agenda,”<sup>139</sup> a claim congruent at least with Finger’s methodology though not his conclusions.<sup>140</sup> This assessment in no way conflicts with the priorities and typical avowal of the Church Fathers, and, surprising as this may be to someone of Weaver’s persuasion, is a sentiment shared by nearly all Orthodox theologians.

Reimer should be praised for trying to resurrect classical expressions of Christianity. However, by acknowledging the chronology that anticipated the creeds (while rejecting the notion that they function(ed) as a *foundation* for ethics) and by affirming, indeed living, the fusion of spirituality and

theology inherent in any dogmatic investigation by the Church Fathers, we could follow through with Reimer's vision while allowing ourselves to be better informed by the patristic conscience. Such an approach will, I hope, also appease those holding to Weaver's view, since behavior, ethics, and soteriological concerns are not only enhanced by what the creeds communicate about the fusion of theology and spirituality, but, more significantly, because the church's ethico-soteriological concerns could be – and indeed were – acknowledged *before* and *apart from* creedal prescriptions.

### **Conclusion**

By evaluating the 16th-century Anabaptist attitude toward the creeds through examining the appropriate textual attestation as well as patristic sources, and particularly those of St. Gregory of Nyssa, what it means to be a Christian from a historical perspective begins to surface. If creeds were developed to preserve a pre-established emphasis on obedience and the imitation of Jesus, and could not even be formulated veraciously until this obedience and imitation or purification took place *first*, undoubtedly the nucleus of Christianity was, in both patristic and Anabaptist thought, the ontological affiliation of its adherents to the example and person of Christ.

Eastern Christianity, with its distinctive history, is entitled to endorse this decidedly ontological understanding of what it means to be a Christian with the use of creedal concepts alone, since here the fusion of spirituality and theology has not been defiled. However, in much of the Christian West, while retaining the possibility that the dominant epistemic conception of faith and doctrine might be forfeited in the future, the creeds' ethical and ontological implications must be addressed unequivocally and forthrightly. Sixteenth-century Anabaptism's resolve to do exactly that is justifiable when we consider the degeneracy of their ecclesial context, the consequence of the segregation of theology (doctrine) from spirituality (ontology), with the former regrettably taking precedence. The assimilation of the Anabaptists' accent on the purity of the church with their affirming yet restrained approach to the creeds suggests a return to an emphasis on *repentance* and *restoration* typical of the patristic era, and an intentional estrangement from the unbridled, often violent focus on *recantation* during the sixteenth-century Western ecclesial setting.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See discussions on the creeds by J. Denny Weaver in *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000); by A. James Reimer in *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001); the dialogue in *Mennonite Life* (September 2005) among Ben C. Ollenburger, B. Royale Dewey, J. Denny Weaver, Duane K. Friesen, and Gerald Biesecker-Mast; and a paper presentation at the Anabaptist Colloquium at Eastern Mennonite University, April 7-8, 2006 by Andy Alexis-Baker, "Anabaptist Use of Patristic Literature and Creeds."

<sup>2</sup> Roland Bainton, "The Left Wing of the Reformation," *The Journal of Religion* 21.2 (April 1941): 125.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Friedmann, "Conception of Anabaptists," *Church History* 9.4 (December 1940): 349-50.

<sup>4</sup> Some treatments of this issue that I will not be interacting with, but are worth looking into include: A. James Reimer, "Doctrines: What Are They, How Do They Function, and Why Do We Need Them?" *CGR* 11.1 (Winter 1993): 21-36; A. James Reimer, "Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Theology from a Radical Protestant Perspective," in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century*, S. Mark Heim, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 129-61); J. Denny Weaver, "Christology in Historical Perspective," in *Jesus Christ and the Mission of the Church: Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives*, Erland Waltner, ed. (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1990), 83-105; J. Denny Weaver, "Christus Victor, Ecclesiology, and Christology," *MQR* 68.3 (July 1994): 277-90; John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Elkhart, IN: Goshen Biblical Seminary, 1981), 121-58.

<sup>5</sup> Even the writing of Paul's epistles and the gospel accounts, and subsequent acceptance of these writings based on what the Church already was and how it worshipped.

<sup>6</sup> The emergence of these heresies required a method for determining another's ontological state or behavioral intentions, since soteriological variations resulted from specific theological deviations; it was not that being a Christian now meant believing the right thing, but that how a Christian was going to behave, or *being* a Christian, could now be predicted by her or his belief system. Latourette describes the Apostles' Creed as a symbol that was a "sign or test of membership in the Church." Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 135. The Creed was an indicator of one's affiliation.

<sup>7</sup> An Orthodox theologian observes that the Protestant concern for Christian ethics coincides with the Roman Catholic concern for moral theology and the Eastern Orthodox concern for Christian spirituality. See John Chryssavgis, *Light Through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 25n.

<sup>8</sup> This opinion is voiced continually by J. Denny Weaver. While Weaver is correct to voice it where needed, he is falling victim to a separation of spirituality and theology. "Orthodox theology runs the danger of historically disincarnating the Church; by contrast, the West risks tying it primarily to history, either in the form of extreme Christocentrism ... lacking the

essential influence of pneumatology or in the form of social activism or moralism which tries to play in the Church the role of the image of God”: John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Evagrius Ponticus (346-399 C.E.) famously said that “If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.”

<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan Kallistos Ware states that “we are to *become* theology” in his Foreword to Archimandrite Vasileios, *Hymn of Entry* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>11</sup> See Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996) and his *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1963); Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995) and his Foreword to *Hymn of Entry*, 9; John Chrysavgis, *Light through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Born around 335 C.E., Gregory of Nyssa was one of the three celebrated Cappadocian Fathers, the other two being Basil the Great, his older brother, and Gregory Nazianzen, their friend. Gregory of Nyssa continued Basil’s work on isolating appropriate triadological language, especially against the teachings of Eunomius after Basil’s death. Gregory was also involved in combating the Apollinarian heresy. Basil, then bishop of Caesarea, appointed Gregory as bishop of Nyssa in 372 C.E., a little known See in Cappadocia. He was instrumental in the second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381 C.E. and died around 395 C.E.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the information on Gregory of Nyssa is adapted from Andrew Klager, *The Eye of our Soul and its ‘Ontological Gaze’: The Iconic Function of Theological Epinoia in the Philosophy and Spirituality of Gregory of Nyssa* (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Fr. John Behr, “Faithfulness and Creativity,” in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 174.

<sup>15</sup> Fr. John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>16</sup> “Doctrine is a living *testimony* – in thought, word and experience – of what has been heard, seen and touched (1 John 1:1). It is the *tested* evidence of what has been contemplated in faith and experienced in love”: Chrysavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides* (Greek version), eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 276. Here, Aristides claims Christ was crucified because his accusers ignored his “good deeds and the countless miracles.”

<sup>18</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, IV-14, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 365. Latin text from Ernest Evans, trans. and ed., *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford: Univ. of Oxford Press, 1972).

<sup>19</sup> “For God alone is without sin; and the only man without sin is Christ, since Christ is also God.” Tertullian, *De Anima*, XLI, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 221. Latin text from J. H. Waszink, trans. and ed., *Tertullianus, De anima* (Amsterdam, 1947).

<sup>20</sup> “[B]eing in truth the God and Christ of Israel [...] He raised also the widow’s son from death [...] Now so evidently had the Lord Christ introduced no other god for the working

of so momentous a miracle as this, that all who were present gave glory to the Creator.” Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, IV-18, in *op. cit.*, 375.

<sup>21</sup> Addressing Marcion’s allegation concerning the demiurge of the OT and his dissociation with the God of Jesus Christ, Tertullian declares, “You ought to be very much ashamed of yourself on this account too, for permitting him [Christ] to appear on the retired mountain in the company of Moses and Elias, whom he had come to destroy. This, to be sure, was what he wished to be understood as the meaning of that voice from heaven: ‘This is my beloved Son, hear him.’” Tertullian designates Jesus as the *Christus creatoris* on evidence of the transfiguration. *Ibid.*, 382-83.

<sup>22</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1, 69-70.

<sup>23</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides* (Syriac version), in *op. cit.*, 265. Cf. Aristides, *Apology XV*, in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, ed. William A. Jurgens (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970), 49.

<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1, 330-31.

<sup>25</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 249.

<sup>26</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, 509-10.

<sup>27</sup> Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of one Noetus*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, 230.

<sup>28</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, 240-41.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Thaumaturgus, *A Declaration of Faith*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Cyprian, *Epistle LXIX: To Januarius and Other Numidian Bishops, on Baptizing Heretics*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, 376.

<sup>31</sup> Immediately before delineating his Creed, the early second-century bishop of Antioch, St. Ignatius declared, “Become the imitators of his suffering, and of his love.” Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians*, in *op. cit.*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 7-8; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957), 9-10; Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 73; Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 31, 34.

<sup>33</sup> “For tradition is thought to be ancient, hallowed by age, unchanged since it was first established once upon a time. It does not have a history, since history implies the appearance, at a certain point in time, of that which had not been there before”: Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 598. Latin text from Ernest Evans, trans. and ed., *Adversus Praxean liber* (London: SPCK, 1948).

<sup>35</sup> Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 246. Latin text from R.F. Refoulé, trans., *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, in *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera* Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, vol. 1, ed. Dom Eligius Dekkers (Turnholt: Brepols, 1957).

<sup>36</sup> Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, 126.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



<sup>38</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, vol. 1, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>41</sup> Some Gnostics “felt free to go to pagan festivals and to gladiatorial contests, and even to have irregular unions with women who had accepted their doctrines.” Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, vol. 1, 125.

<sup>42</sup> “Now if this ‘being made god’, this *theosis*, is to be possible, Christ the Saviour must be both fully God and fully human”: Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 107.

<sup>44</sup> “In the Orthodox Church, the authority of the early Fathers, of the communion of the saints, reveals a virtual continuity between tradition and Christ. There is, here, no stifling enslavement to tradition but rather a striking embodiment of tradition, whose authority lies more in living and less in professing or decreeing”: Chrysavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Bouteneff, *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth*, Foundations Series, vol. 3 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>46</sup> J. Denny Weaver in *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*, 113. Weaver wonders whether there could be an alternative to the more philosophical concerns of the historical creeds by appealing to the life, behavior, actions, and teachings of Christ as recorded in the NT. He has in mind the nonviolence of Jesus.

<sup>47</sup> Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 286.

<sup>48</sup> Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, as quoted in Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Foreword to *Hymn of Entry*, 9. See also Archimandrite Vasileos, *Hymn of Entry*, 17-39 for an excellent analysis.

<sup>50</sup> Bouteneff, *Sweeter than Honey*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>52</sup> Chrysavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 57. Recall Friedmann’s contention that Anabaptism is more “existential” than representing any systematic expression of theology. Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation*. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, vol. 15 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 14. Cf. 8-10.

<sup>54</sup> Chrysavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 56.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>56</sup> Serge S. Verhovskoy, *The Light of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Chrysavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> John Meyendorff, “Light from the East? ‘Doing Theology’ in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World*, eds. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 340.



<sup>61</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, vol. 1, 146.

<sup>63</sup> Latourette explains how both the Novatians and Donatists “broke from the Catholic Church in part or entirely in protest against what they held to be too great leniency of the latter towards moral lapses, especially apostasy.” Ibid., 216. The Inquisition helped shift Christian corrective measures and emphasis from the rigorous penitential procedure of the patristic era (ethical or behavioral-based) to recantation (knowledge-based). This shift had a large impact on the more than four thousand Anabaptist martyrs highly touted for their ethical and moral behavior by the same magistrates who executed them.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On What it Means to Call Oneself a Christian*, trans. Virginia Woods Callahan, *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 58 (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1967), 84.

<sup>65</sup> Lossky emphasizes the regulated though not entirely destroyed or restricted efficacy of theological knowledge: Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>66</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VI, in Hilda C. Graef, trans., *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 18 (New York: Paulist Press, 1954), 148. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VI, ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Graecae*, vol. 44 (Paris, 1863), 1269-1270C.

<sup>67</sup> Hans Schlaffer, *A Brief Instruction for the Beginning of a Truly Christian Life*, in *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*, trans. Walter Klaassen, et al. ed. C. Arnold Snyder, *Classics of the Radical Reformation*, vol.10 (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), 85.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Sattler, *Imprisonment: Letter to Horb*, in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, trans. and ed. John Howard Yoder, *Classics of the Radical Reformation*, vol. 1 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 59.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Riedeman, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1970), 38.

<sup>70</sup> “Five of the seven representatives of the Radical Reformation [...] (Menno, Dirk Philips, Denck, Hoffmann, Schwenckfeld, while Hubmaier and Marpeck do not) specifically state that their concept of salvation is that of the divinization of man [...] Thus, grace is for the Radical Reformers not so much a forensic change in status before God as it is an ontological change within the individual believer [...]”: Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1977), 4.

<sup>71</sup> “divinization”

<sup>72</sup> Thomas N. Finger, “Response to J. Denny Weaver’s ‘Parsing Anabaptist Theology,’” *Direction Journal* 35.1 (Spring 2006): 152 (note 8). For a succinct analysis of the “personal dimension” of Anabaptist soteriology and “the coming of the new creation,” see Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 109-32. Cf. Frances F. Hiebert, “The Atonement in Anabaptist Theology,” *Direction* 30.2 (Fall 2001): 122-38.

<sup>73</sup> Dirk Philips, *The Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, in *The Writings of Dirk Philips*, trans. and ed. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy, *Classics of the Radical Reformation*, vol. 6 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 145.

<sup>74</sup> Dirk Philips, *The New Birth and the New Creature*, in *op. cit.*, 294.

<sup>75</sup> Finger, "Response to J. Denny Weaver's 'Parsing Anabaptist Theology,'" 152 (note 8).

<sup>76</sup> Often referred to as "negative theology," the apophatic approach to theistic discourse is derived from the Greek *apophatike*, which means "away from speech": Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1995), 2. Carabine asserts that "We may understand apophatic theology to begin with the assertion that God is unknowable to the human mind and that one must proceed by means of negations, ultimately, even to the negation of the negation in order to attain to some 'positive' knowledge of him." See also J.P. Williams, *Denying Divinity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>77</sup> Robert S. Brightman, "Apophatic Theology and Divine Infinity in St. Gregory of Nyssa," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18.1-2 (1973): 111.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>80</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VI, op. cit., 146.

<sup>81</sup> "[Gregory affirms] that all the qualities predicated of the Father must also, of necessity, be predicated on the Son and the Spirit. The consequences [...] are immediately clear: if the Father's primary characteristic is unknowability, then the same must be true of the Son and the Spirit." Carabine, *The Unknown God*, 248.

<sup>82</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. William Moore, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 477.

<sup>83</sup> Greek ontological term usually denoting the *essence* or *substance* of a thing.

<sup>84</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter XXXVIII*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 8, 138.

<sup>85</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, II:159, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 93.

<sup>86</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, Bk. II, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 5, 101.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 486.

<sup>88</sup> "Gregory in effect denies that the *ousia* of anything can be comprehended through its *energeia*. But in the case of God, it is only the *energeia* that we can know." Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 117.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 5, 265.

<sup>90</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VI, 147.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Menno Simons, *Confession of the Triune God*, in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561*, ed. J.C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 497-98.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, Bk. VII, 198.

<sup>96</sup> Simons, *Confession of the Triune God*, 491.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 491-92. “Inasmuch as God is such a Spirit, as it is written, therefore we also believe and confess the eternal, begetting heavenly Father and the eternally begotten Son, Christ Jesus. Brethren, ... they are spiritual and incomprehensible (*geistlich und unbegreiflich*), as is also the Father who begat; for like begets like. This is incontrovertible” (491). With the number of times Menno uses the terms *unerforschliche*, *unaussprechliche* and *unbegreiflich*, we could conclude that he became acquainted with *apophysis* from his education for the priesthood, exposure to Canon Law, and *glossa ordinaria* or the various patristic *florilegia* of his era.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Simons, *Reply to Gellius Faber*, in *op. cit.*, 761. German text from Menno Simons, *Klare Beantwortung einer Schrift des Gellius Faber*, in *op. cit.*, 138.

<sup>100</sup> Simons, *Confession of the Triune God*, 493.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 494. Referring to the impotence of creeds to affect obedience, Menno observes, “These foolish people imagine that they are Christian, but are to my mind more unbelieving, blinder, more hardened, and worse than Turks, Tartars, or any other far away heathen. *Their works testify that I write the truth*. They cannot be moved to hear or obey the truth by godly means and services, *neither by doctrine nor exhortation [...]*” (emphasis added). Simons, *True Christian Faith*, in *op. cit.*, 384.

<sup>102</sup> Pilgrim Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, eds. and trans. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 78-79.

<sup>103</sup> Dirk Philips, *Concerning the True Knowledge of Jesus Christ*, in *op. cit.*, 167.

<sup>104</sup> Brian E. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa’s Anti-Apollinarian Christology,” in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 73.

<sup>105</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Faith*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, vol. 5, 337; *Ad Simplicium de Fide*, ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Graecae*, vol. 45 (Paris, 1863). The Greek form of “not” that Gregory uses here is *ovχ*, which he employs only one other time in this treatise to indicate that the heretical view of Christ as not sharing in the Father’s essence is “not (*ovχ*) our God.”

<sup>106</sup> Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 217.

<sup>107</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, as quoted in Zachhuber, 216.

<sup>108</sup> For Ware, in a situation where an important characteristic of Christ is undervalued, this characteristic must be accentuated to preserve the ontological affiliation with Christ, deification, *theosis*, salvation. “A bridge is formed between God and humanity by the Incarnate Christ who is divine and human at once.[...] Each heresy in turn undermined some part of this vital affirmation.[...] Each council defended this affirmation”: Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 21.

<sup>109</sup> For an Eastern Orthodox espousal of the notion that our capacity and authority to engage in theological inquiry is commensurate with our purity, see Chryssavgis, *Light Through Darkness*, 53 and 56, and Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 17.

<sup>110</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, II:157, 93.

<sup>111</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, Oratio VI, 143.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>113</sup> Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Simons, *Confession of the Triune God*, 494. German text from Simons, *Ein ermahnendes Bekenntniss von dem dreieinigen, ewigen und wahren Gott, Vater, Sohn und heiligen Geist*, in *op. cit.*, 261.

<sup>115</sup> Menno uses “operation” in reference to how one approaches God in hopes of salvation: “Who is it that is raised up into the new life by the faith of the operation of God? Once more, is it not the believer?” Simons, *Christian Baptism*, in *op. cit.*, 261.

<sup>116</sup> Simons, *Confession of the Triune God*, 494.

<sup>117</sup> For an example of how Anabaptists interacted with the creeds when the issue was initiated into the discussion externally, see Simons, *Reply to Gellius Faber*, 625-781.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas N. Finger, “The Way to Nicea: Some Reflections from a Mennonite Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24.2 (Spring 1987): 229.

<sup>119</sup> J. Denny Weaver illuminates two such problems: (1) If Mennonites initiate an ecumenical discussion by invoking the Creeds, they are admitting the insignificance and dispensable nature of distinctively Anabaptist elements such as nonviolence and discipleship; (2) It is contradictory to affirm the salience of the creeds that neglect the elements many early Anabaptists sought to preserve through martyrdom. See his “Identifying Anabaptist Theology: A Response to ‘True Evangelical Faith: The Anabaptists and Christian Confession,’” *Mennonite Life* 60.3 (Sept. 2005): <http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2005Sept/weaver%20response.php>. Weaver’s perspective on the creeds may be somewhat purpose-specific, where some of Reimer’s more insightful reflections might be able to fill it out more, but it is a moderating voice that must be heard, nevertheless.

<sup>120</sup> Ben Ollenburger, “True Evangelical Faith: The Anabaptists and Christian Confession,” *Mennonite Life* 60.3 (Sept. 2005): <http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2005Sept/ollenburger.php>.

<sup>121</sup> Simons, *Confessions of the Triune God*, 491.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 493. I admit that I am sporadically quoting from these same five pages, but with the sole purpose of filling in the gaps left by Ollenburger.

<sup>125</sup> Simons, *The True Christian Faith*, 392. German text from Simons, *vom rechten, christlichen Glauben*, 219.

<sup>126</sup> Riedeman, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith*, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>129</sup> Hans Denck, *Wideruff* [1527], in *Schriften*, ed. Walter Fellman, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, bd. 6 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1956), 107. Hans Denck, *Recantation*, in *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts*, trans. and ed. Clarence Bauman, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, vol. 47 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 253.

<sup>130</sup> “A Jesus identified only in the abstract categories of ‘man’ and ‘God’ cannot be followed. When faith in Jesus Christ, or being *Christian*, means to shape one’s life by his teaching

and example, these formulas are insufficient; they have omitted the specifics of the New Testament narrative on which faith can be based [and] describe Christ apart from his rejection of the sword and teachings about love of enemies.... The formulas do not give shape to the peaceable community of Jesus' disciples that poses a contrast to the world. In effect, they have marginalized ethics from christological understanding, or have provided the space for ethics to express convictions that do not stem from the particularity of Jesus": Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*, 124-25. I would nuance Weaver's thoughts by appealing to the Eastern fusion of spirituality and theology, but Weaver's fittingly acerbic comments should be heeded for the current state of the Western, and specifically North American, church.

<sup>131</sup> B. Royale Dewey, "Making Peace with History: Anabaptism and the Nicene Creed," *Mennonite Life* 60.3 (Sept. 2005): <http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2005Sept/dewey.php>.

<sup>132</sup> "[I]n evaluating any Creed Mennonites will likely ask not only what it affirms but also what it leaves out, as well as what its ecclesiastical and social functions are": Thomas N. Finger, "The Way to Nicea: Some Reflections from a Mennonite Perspective," 212.

<sup>133</sup> Alain Epp Weaver, "Missionary Christology: John Howard Yoder and the Creeds," *MQR* 74.3 (July 2000): 426. Weaver gives credit for this idea to John Howard Yoder.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>135</sup> For examples of how Gregory emphasized either Jesus' humanity or divinity in different situations, see Andrew Klager, *The Eye of our Soul and its 'Ontological Gaze': The Iconic Function of Theological Epinoia in the Philosophy and Spirituality of Gregory of Nyssa* (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 2006), 67-71.

<sup>136</sup> To achieve the results Reimer seeks, it would be better to educate an Anabaptist audience on the creeds' importance not by showing how ethical behavior can be derived from creedal expressions but by showing that the creeds emerged in service of a pre-existing understanding of salvation. Becoming cognizant of the historically accurate sequence is a better service to the ongoing debate.

<sup>137</sup> Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*, 355.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>139</sup> Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*, 47. Stuart Hall contrasts the nucleus of Jesus' instruction with that of the creeds: "The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers.... [W]hy an ethical sermon stood at the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ and a metaphysical Creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century is a problem which claims investigation"; see Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 240. "Dogmatic definitions are made with the means and content of a given epoch and [...]. reflect the style and peculiarities of that epoch. The Christological controversies and the definitions of the ecumenical councils most certainly reflect the spirit of Greek thought": Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 31-32.

<sup>140</sup> Finger discusses investigating the person of Christ "from above" or "from below." He favors the latter, which is how he discusses the work and person of Christ, as does Weaver

but with less nuance. See Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive*, 330. Finger also acknowledges the correct chronology that anticipated the creedal formulations in the 16th-century Anabaptists and therefore the fusion of spirituality and theology.

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