

Patristics Handout

In the debates of the Fourth Century over the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, a constellation of terms came to be affiliated with the Greek word “ousia” (= essence) and what it means for Christ to be *homoousian* (=one or the same essence, in Latin derivation “consubstantial”). The Essence (*ousia*) of God was determined to include several actions, operations, or activities (= *energeia*): creation, salvation, judgment, and dispensing grace. If God, though, exists outside of time (that is, is eternal, as in the anathema of Nicaea I, 325), then each of these *energeia* must be actions of God done *eternally*. That is, God *eternally* creates, *eternally* saves, *eternally* adjudicates, and *eternally* dispenses grace. By virtue of Christ and the Holy Spirit being of the same essence as God the Father, all three of them share these actions and the will to enact them (see the creeds of Nicaea I, 325, Constantinople I, 381, and the Letter of Synod of Constantinople of 382 to the Bishops of the West and the Response of the Bishops of the West Under Pope Damasus of 383).

God’s eternal salvation involves both the Incarnation and Resurrection. The resurrected body of Christ is the transformed humanity (see 1 Corinthians 15), then salvation is the renewal of what has been created, according to Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus (= the Damascene).

Gregory of Nyssa, (370s–380s) *Epistle 24*:

“It is therefore fitting that we understand the power [of creation, salvation, and renewal] as beginning from the Father, proceeding through the Son, and being completed in the Holy Spirit. For we have learned that all things are from God, that all things are through the Son and hold together in him, and that the power of the Spirit pervades all things, working all things in all as it wishes.” (See Wis 7:24, 1 Cor 12:6, 11).

Maximus the Confessor, (630s–640s), *Ambiguum 42*:

“For all the divine mysteries are surpassed by the mystery of Christ, and this mystery is definitive of every conceivable perfection in all things either present or to come, and it exists above and beyond every limit and boundary. Now this mystery teaches us that the body of God the Word—which was taken from us and which is consubstantial with us, and which was united to Him in a union according to hypostasis when he assumed flesh and perfectly became man—is the same body with which he ascended into the heavens, *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come* (Eph. 1:21), so that now and for infinite ages He is seated together with God the Father, *having passed through all the heavens* (Heb. 4:14) and *surpassing all* (Eph. 4:10) things, and he shall come again to refashion and transform the universe, and for the salvation of our souls and bodies, just as we have believed and believe and will continue to believe forever.”

These early theologians and writers who built toward this consensus (Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa) worked especially from interpretation of the Wisdom literature, notably Wisdom of Solomon 7 and Psalms 104, esp. Ps 104:24–30:

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!/In **wisdom you have made them all**;/the earth is full of your creatures..../²⁷ These all look to you/ to give them their food in due season;/²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;/when you open your hand, they are filled with good things./²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;/when you take away their breath, they die/and return to their dust./³⁰ When you send forth your Spirit, they are created;/and you renew the face of the ground.

1. Which verses from the Scripture sheet, in particular, do you think directly connect to these ideas of *eternal* creation, salvation, judgment or grace?

2. Underline which passages from the Councils, Gregory of Nyssa or Maximus, point towards God's eternally creative and renewing action which occurs beyond any perceived limits our models of what creation means might impose?

<p>The Creed of Nicaea I, 325 (Not the Creed you say in Church)</p> <p>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;</p> <p>and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, from the essence (<i>ousia</i>) of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one essence (<i>homoousios</i>) with the Father. By whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth. Who for us humans and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and became human. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the living and the dead.</p> <p>And in the Holy Spirit.</p> <p>And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different subsistence [<i>hypostasis</i>] or essence [<i>ousia</i>] [than that of the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—all that so say, the catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes them.</p>	<p>Creed of Constantinople, 381 (Creed Prayed in Church)</p> <p>We believe in one God, the Father All Governing, creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;</p> <p>And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence [<i>homoousion</i>] as the Father, through whom all things came into being, Who for us humans (<i>anthropoi</i>) and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, becoming human [<i>enanthroposenta</i>]. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [<i>telos</i>].</p> <p>And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and Son, Who spoke through the prophets;</p> <p>and in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.</p>	<p>From the Synodical Letter of the Council of Constantinople, 382 to the Bishops of the West:</p> <p>According to this faith there is one Godhead, Power and Essence of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; the dignity being equal, and the majesty being equal in three perfect hypostases and three perfect persons.</p> <p>Response of the Western Bishops, composed under the leadership of Damasus of Rome:</p> <p>If any one deny that the Holy Spirit is truly and absolutely of the Father, and that the Son is of the divine substance and very God of God, let him be anathema.</p> <p>If any one deny that the Holy Spirit is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, as also the Son of the Father, let him be anathema...</p> <p>If any one deny that the Father made all things visible and invisible, through the Son who was made Flesh, and the Holy Spirit, let him be anathema.</p> <p>If any one deny one Godhead and power, one sovereignty and glory, one lordship, one kingdom, will and truth of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, let him be anathema.</p> <p>If any one deny three very persons of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, living for ever, containing all things visible and invisible, omnipotent, judging all things, giving life to all things, creating all things and preserving all things, let him be anathema.</p>
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