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Private Creeds and their Troubled Authors

ANDREW RADDE-GALLWITZ

This article defends the disputed label “private creeds” as a useful one for describing a number of fourth-century texts. Offering such a confession was the normal method for clearing one’s name on charges of heterodoxy in fourth-century Greek Christianity, though writing such a creed made the author susceptible to charges of innovation. A number of letters on Trinitarian doctrine by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa should be read in light of the tradition of private creeds. Indeed, the writings of Basil and Gregory provide unparalleled evidence for the roles such creeds played in Christian disputes of the fourth century.

In January 360, a small council of bishops met in Constantinople to institutionalize the victory of the Homoian communion over its rivals in the East.¹ In the wake of the council, Homoiousian bishops across the East were cast out and replaced by Homoians. One of those rewarded with a bishopric was Eunomius. It was most likely at this council that Eunomius

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1. Socrates, *historia ecclesiastica* (HE) 2.43. For this event as the “victory” of Homoianism, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 164–66. For the history of Homoians in the eastern Roman Empire, see Hans Christof Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer: Der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche*, Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 73 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988) and Timothy D. Barnes, “The Collapse of the Homoians in the East,” *SP* 29 (1997): 3–16. For the western Roman Empire, see the introduction to Roger Gryson, ed. and trans., *Scolies Ariennes sur le Concile d’Aquilée*, SC 267 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980) and Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

delivered some version of the text we know as his *Apology*.² In giving this name to his text, Eunomius invoked an entire tradition of Greek forensic oratory. Such speeches had typical parts: they began with a prologue, in which the speaker appealed to the jury's sympathies; they then turned to a narration of the events or a setting forth of the legal issues involved; next came the confirmation or proof. This section often began with a kind of summary or heading (κεφάλαιον) of the argument, followed by more elaborate proofs.³

Eunomius's text itself does not name the accusers against whom he had to defend himself, or what they found objectionable in his teaching. For Basil of Caesarea, who would write a response some four or five years later, these omissions meant that the *Apology* failed to execute its genre properly, since a defense is required only in the case of accusers.⁴ Basil's criticism might lead one to overlook the many ways in which Eunomius successfully draws on the tradition of apologetic speeches. To be sure, the accusers and the accused are not named. The same, however, could be said for other texts from the period. Moreover, if Eunomius was face-to-face with his accusers at a synod, there was no need for him to recount the accusations. We might surmise that Eunomius was accused of teaching that the Son is unlike the Father, since his teacher Aetius was condemned by the council on this charge.⁵ Regardless, the doctrinal allegiance of Eunomius's *Apology* is less important for the purposes of this study than is Eunomius's method of defending himself.

2. Richard Paul Vaggione, ed. and trans., *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 5–9.

3. See, e.g., Pseudo-Hermogenes, *On Invention* 3.4 (ed. and trans. Hugo Rabe and George A. Kennedy, *Invention and Method: Two Rhetorical Treatises from the Hermogenic Corpus*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 15 [Atlanta: SBL, 2005], 73–79). A summary could also appear in the *exordium*: Cicero, *On Invention* 1.23; Quintilian, *Institutes* 6.1.1–2. The brief summary of the topics at the beginning of the argument was called the *partitio* (Cicero, *On Invention* 1.32).

4. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* (*Eun.*) 1.2: “Yet his deceptive tactic of employing apology is refuted because the drama of his apology is staged without any characters, as he cannot name the accuser against whose charge he makes a pretense of fighting” (Bernard Sesbouïé, ed. and trans., *Basile de Césarée. Contre Eunome*, SC 299 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1982], 150; trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *St. Basil of Caesarea: Against Eunomius*, FC 122 [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011], 84); cf. *Eun.* 2.1.

5. Or perhaps for contradicting himself: compare Philostorgius, *HE* 4.12 and 5.1. Socrates ascribes the condemnation to his obscure and contentious writing style: *HE* 2.35; Sozomen's list of charges against Aetius is also broader and vaguer: Sozomen, *HE* 4.12 and 4.24, as is the letter cited by Theodoret, *HE* 2.24.

After a prologue in which he appeals for an impartial jury, he offers a statement of faith of his own composition.⁶ In his creed, Eunomius claims “to speak in summary fashion as in an overview” (ὡς ἐν ἐπιδρομῇ κεφαλαιωδέστερον εἰπεῖν). That is, this creed provides the headings or summary of the argument to follow. The creed, he avers, expresses the “simpler faith” which is “common” to all Christians; it omits both disputed questions and matters which are absolutely undisputed. Eunomius proceeds to unfold the sense of this faith through more precise arguments.⁷ Although the initial creed occupies just seven lines in Vaggione’s edition, the demonstrations go on for several pages, and starting with Basil, the more extensive proofs are where readers of Eunomius have focused, with particular attention to Eunomius’s claims about the incomparable and unbegotten divine substance. Undoubtedly, much of the interest of the *Apology* lies in those proofs, but the opening creed is nonetheless necessary to the work as a whole. It is clear from remarks in Eunomius’s *exordium* that the creed itself ought to be sufficient for his self-defense: “We thought it would be advantageous for us as an apology (πρὸς ἀπολογία) and for those who uncritically accept what has been said [about us] as an assurance (πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν), if we put forth a written confession (ἐγγραφον . . . ἐκθέσθαι . . . τὴν ὁμολογίαν) of our own opinion for you.”⁸ In this sentence, it is the confession that serves as his defense and to give assurance to those who have been listening to his slanderers. After citing the creed, he claims that it is only the perversity of the calumniators that forces him to elaborate further beyond the creed; if not for such depravity, the confession itself

6. Eunomius, *Apology* (*Apol.*) 5 (Vaggione, 38). Vaggione’s translation of the creed reads as follows: “We believe in one God, the Father almighty, from whom are all things; And in one only-begotten Son of God, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things; And in one holy Spirit, the Counsellor, in whom is given to each of the saints an apportionment of every grace according to measure for the common good” (Vaggione, 39); cp. his recapitulation at *Apol.* 26–27 (Vaggione, 68–73).

7. Eunomius, *Apol.* 6 (Vaggione, 38–40): δεῖ τιῶν ἀκριβεστέρων λόγων πρὸς τὴν διανοίας ἐξάπλωσιν. According to Eunomius, perverse interpretation of this simple creed has diluted its power to exclude falsehood, especially Sabellian falsehood, from ecclesiastical communion. The term ἐξάπλωσις is common for naming a detailed exposition or exegesis (as opposed to a summary): see Galen, *Art of Medicine* pref. (ed. and trans. Ian Johnston, *On the Constitution of the Art of Medicine; The Art of Medicine; A Method of Medicine to Glaucon*, LCL 523 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016], 156); Gregory of Nyssa uses the verbal root (ἀπλόω) and compounds for this purpose: *Catechetical Oration* 38 (ed. Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Opera minora dogmatica, Part IV: Oratio Catechetica*, GNO 3.4 [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 98); *Apologia in hexaemeron* (ed. Hubertus R. Drobner, *Gregorii Nysseni In Hexaemeron: Opera Exegetica in Genesim, Pars I*, GNO 4.1 [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 7).

8. Eunomius, *Apol.* 1 (Vaggione, 34), translation mine.

would have sufficed.⁹ While Eunomius's confession might seem theologically bland to modern readers and non-committal on the issue of the Son's likeness to the Father, when seen in light of the generic expectations that Eunomius assumed, it is indispensable to the work.

In the years following Constantinople 360, Eunomius's *Apology* was seized on by the opposition to the council. Most famously, around 364/5, a young Basil, not yet bishop of Caesarea, was commanded to write a refutation. It is likely, though not certain, that Basil received this order from Eustathius of Sebasteia, who was a friend and role model for Basil at this point.¹⁰ Eustathius's own views are difficult to reconstruct, but it would appear that he was a Homoiousian, one of many from this camp who would come to embrace the Nicene Creed in the 360s, though Eustathius himself later repudiated this creed. In a later letter, Basil recalls himself "dictating objections to the heresy" for Eustathius's use at the Synod of Lampsacus in 364.¹¹ Basil's *Against Eunomius* most likely had its origins in this milieu. Although the two would eventually part ways, Basil's affection for Eustathius at this point was beyond doubt.¹²

In addition to faulting Eunomius for not naming his accusers, Basil also balked at how Eunomius used his statement of faith in the *Apology*. Basil reports an unsubstantiated rumor that Eunomius's creed was originally composed by Arius. But Basil did not find Eunomius's creed itself objectionable; he merely criticized how Eunomius moved from this rather bland statement to his abominable heresy, which he did by offering clever demonstrations purportedly following from the statement of faith.¹³ How,

9. Eunomius, *Apol.* 6 (Vaggione, 38): ἀσφαλῆ τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἡμῶν ἐγγυωμένης τῆς ὁμολογίας.

10. Basil, *Eun.* 1.1. For the date and addressee, see DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 33 and 81n6.

11. Basil, *ep.* 223.5 (ed. Yves Courtonne, *Saint Basile. Lettres*, 3 vols. [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957–1966], 3:14).

12. See Basil's later report: *ep.* 244.1. In addition to their shared ascetic vision, there was their shared public confession of faith, at least up until 372. Eustathius accepted the Nicene faith during his mission to Rome in 367, an acceptance ratified at a synod of Homoiousians-turned-Nicenes in Tyana that year (on which, see Sozomen, *HE* 6.10–12). Basil would use this anecdote against Eustathius later, accusing him of flip-flopping: *ep.* 244.9, 263.3.

13. Basil, *Eun.* 1.4. Basil's report is that the Arius "proposed this faith to Alexander in order to deceive him" (DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 88), which implies that the faith would appear orthodox to Alexander. It is possible that Basil has conflated three creeds: (1) Eunomius's creed; (2) Arius's creedal letter to Alexander; and (3) the creedal letter of Arius and Euzoios to Constantine in 327. Arius's letters are discussed below at 471, 473–74. It is possible that letter (3) is not

Basil chides, could he cite this as if it were the inerrant rule and criterion of doctrine, but then proceed to supplement it or even correct it with further argumentation?

In fact, Eunomius's method of apology would later prove useful to Basil himself and to his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa. Two years after Basil's consecration as bishop of Caesarea, his cordial relationship with Eustathius was broken as accusations started to swirl, some of them regarding Basil's teaching on the Holy Spirit. Each side began to employ spies to keep watch on the other.¹⁴ Around the same time, Basil, in a number of letters, offered brief statements of faith. In some, he promised to provide in person more detailed scriptural demonstrations of this faith than he was able to offer in the letters themselves; in other letters, he sketched such proofs. This essay places these texts, as well as similar works written by Gregory of Nyssa, within the tradition of apologetically-motivated private creeds.

PRIVATE CREEDS

To call these statements of faith "creeds" raises the problem of whether it is coherent to speak of private creeds. The category of "Privat-Symbole" gained currency with the third edition of G. L. Hahn's *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, published in 1897.¹⁵ Nonetheless, some scholars have rejected the category as confused, since, on their view, creeds are by definition public.¹⁶ Others continue to use the term.

on Basil's mind at all. However, given that letter (3) is generally regarded as bland and uninformative, Basil's remark makes more sense if he is thinking of that document than if he is thinking of letter (2). If he is thinking of the content of letter (3), his identification of Alexander as the letter's addressee suggests he is confusing letters (2) and (3). Letter (2) is certainly conciliatory in tone, but it is hard to view it as so vague as to be deceptive, especially if one follows Rowan Williams in viewing the letter as precipitating Arius's condemnation, rather than as an attempt to regain communion (see below, n.24).

14. Note Basil's admission of employing informants at *ep.* 223.7.

15. August Hahn, G. Ludwig Hahn, and Adolf von Harnack, eds., *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, 3rd ed. (Breslau: Verlag von E. Morgenstern, 1897), 253–363. The second edition in 1877 included a similar section entitled "Symbole einzelner Kirchenlehrer" (183–288). Although I am arguing that there was indeed a tradition of "private creeds," I have included a somewhat different sampling of the tradition.

16. See, e.g., Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent, "Recent Research on the Origin of the Creed," *JTS* (n. s.) 50 (1999): 535–59, at 541, 553, and the citation of Harnack at 556n74 (for further discussion, see below, n.39); Tarmo Toom, "Marcellus

Caroline Humfress, for instance, argues that “the use of private creeds and anathemas in the fourth and fifth centuries . . . underscores the fluidity of Christian doctrine, and the taxonomical process at work in the formation of an agreed set of ‘orthodox’ beliefs in any given context, at any given time.”¹⁷

To wade through this disputed territory, we must first clarify how private creeds relate to other creeds. There is general consensus over two other kinds of creed in the fourth century, which we might call conciliar creeds and declaratory, catechetical creeds.¹⁸ Both were public documents, the products, respectively, of gatherings of bishops and of local baptismal traditions rather than of individual authors. Conciliar and catechetical creeds shared certain features: in both cases, the statement of faith follows a Trinitarian order, Father, Son, and Spirit. In some cases, additional material is added. Specific anathemas appear in conciliar creeds, but not in catechetical ones. In the fourth century, as in subsequent centuries, neither of these two types of creed was envisioned as replacing the other kind: the creed of the Council of Nicaea (325), for instance, did not replace the creed learned during catechesis and recited by a baptizand in Milan, even if the bishop of Milan defended the Nicene Creed as the proper touchstone of orthodoxy.¹⁹

Debate emerges, however, when we turn to individually-authored statements of faith, which fit under neither the conciliar nor the catechetical

of Ancyra and Priscillian of Avila: Their Theologies and Creeds,” *VC* 68 (2014): 60–81, at 62n7.

17. Caroline Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 228.

18. From the end of the second century, there is widespread evidence of churches using short, interrogatory creeds at baptism: the evidence comes from North Africa, Rome, Palestine, Cappadocia, and Alexandria. As the catechumenate became more formalized, in the later fourth century, longer declaratory creeds emerged. These were ritually handed over to catechumens in the final weeks of preparation and ritually recited shortly before baptism. See Paul F. Bradshaw, “The profession of faith in early Christian baptism,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 78 (2006): 101–15; Kinzig and Vincent, “Recent Research,” 542–50.

19. C. H. Turner, *The History and Use of Creeds and Anathemas*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1910), 24. For a helpful summary focusing on the Latin churches, see Daniel H. Williams, “Constantine and the ‘Fall’ of the Church,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 117–36 at 127–29. The Nicene Creed, as revised at Constantinople (381), did gradually assume a liturgical function within the eucharistic liturgy, but not until the sixth century in the East, a practice which was accepted in the West gradually and with regional variations between the sixth and eleventh centuries: see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay Company, 1972), 348–57.

label. Let us first review a selection of the evidence before addressing some criticism of the label “private creeds.”²⁰ The origin of such compositions is murky, but seems to lie in the practice of ecclesiastical investigation of the kind we see for the first time in the third century in the cases of Heraclides and Paul of Samosata.²¹ In the *Dialogue*, Heraclides offers a brief statement of faith before the text proceeds to Origen’s questioning. Regardless of the third-century background, the earliest extant, written example of a private creed is Arius’s credal letter to his bishop Alexander of Alexandria, from around 321 c.e.²² There has been some debate as to what prompted Arius’s creed. Rowan Williams argues that “the obvious context for it would be either as a response to Alexander’s demand for clarification when Arius was first delated for heresy, or as a submission to be read out at the synod [of Alexandria] itself.”²³ For Williams, then, the creed predates the official condemnation of Arius. Richard Hanson, by contrast, maintains that the creed is a petition for readmission following the condemnation.²⁴ Unfortunately, there is no external evidence to help one decide the matter. In either case, the apologetic intent of the creed is not in question.

20. The following survey is not exhaustive. It is limited to Greek texts and omits, for instance, Arius’s *Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia* and the fragments of Asterius the Sophist.

21. For the former, see Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides*, and the latter, Eusebius, *HE* 7.30. See the review of scholarly positions in Hamilton Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12–15. The letter written to Paul only partially anticipates the conciliar creeds of the fourth century: it contains the typical formula ἕκθεσις τῆς πίστεως, but not a creed. It is long and rambling, rather than a short exposition: see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 207.

22. This creed is preserved in Athanasius, *De synodis* 16; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.7; and Hilary, *De trinitate* 4.12ff. and 6.5ff. It is edited as Urkunde 6 by H.-G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke III. Band. 1. Teil. Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streits* 318–328 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1935), 12–13. An English translation can be found in William G. Rusch, ed. *The Trinitarian Controversy*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 31–32. See the arguments regarding the date of the work in Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 52, with the chronological table of Arius’s works on 58.

23. Williams, *Arius*, 52.

24. R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 7–8. Like Opitz, Hanson places the “Letter to Alexander” in roughly 320 after the “Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia.” Williams, by contrast, places the “Letter to Alexander” first. In any case, Arius’s is the first extant “private creed” of the fourth century. Sara Parvis prefers a slightly later date (spring 322) for the outbreak of literary controversy in Alexandria: *Marcellus of Ancyra and the Lost Years of the Arian Controversy, 325–345* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

Such an intent is clear also in the letter from Alexander of Alexandria to his namesake in Byzantium regarding Arius. After a lengthy account of Arius, in which Alexander plays the prosecution, he pivots to the defense. He first recounts the charge: he has been accused of teaching that there are “two unbegottens.”²⁵ He immediately proceeds to offer his own statement of faith, which is obviously tailored to rebut this accusation without relenting on Alexander’s general point in the letter about the Son’s indescribable generation.²⁶ Given these specific features, there is no reason to think that Alexander, or Arius for that matter, was adapting a creed “properly designed for use at baptism.”²⁷ No doubt Alexander, like Arius, is employing a form known to him from a baptismal context; but we should not envision him editing a text. Like Arius’s creed, Alexander’s is of his own composition.

We find a creed in Eusebius of Caesarea’s letter to his diocese following the Council of Nicaea.²⁸ Eusebius says he read it at the council; presumably

25. Alexander, *Letter to Alexander* 44 (preserved in Theodoret, *HE* 1.4.46ff. and edited as Urkunde 14 by Opitz, *Athanasius Werke III.1*, Urkunde 14.44, 26).

26. Alexander, *Letter to Alexander* 46 (Opitz, *Athanasius Werke III.1*, Urkunde 14.46, 26–27): “Concerning these matters, we ourselves believe in the way that seems best to the apostolic church: in a sole unbegotten Father, who has no cause of his being, is unchangeable and unalterable, who is always consistent and the same, admitting neither growth nor diminution, giver of the law, the prophets, and the gospels, Lord of the patriarchs, apostles, and all the saints; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; born not from nothing, but from the one who is Father, nor in the manner of bodies with cuttings or discharges from separations, as Sabellius and Valentinus think, but ineffably and indescribably, according to the statement which we cited above, ‘his birth who can tell?’ (Isa 53.8), since his hypostasis is beyond investigation for every nature that has an origin, just as the Father is beyond investigation because the nature of rational beings cannot contain the knowledge of the Father’s divine birthing.” Alexander does eventually include a clause on the Spirit at *Letter to Alexander* 53.

27. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 206.

28. Preserved in Athanasius, *De decretis* 33.4–6 (ed. H.-G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke II.1. De decretis* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1935], 29): “Just as we received from our bishops at our initial catechesis, and when we received the bath; and just as we learned from the divine scriptures and as we believed and taught in the presbyterate and the episcopate itself; so too we now believe our faith which we publicize to you. It is as follows: We believe in one God, Father, almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, light from light, life from life, only-begotten Son, firstborn of all creation, born from the Father before all ages, through whom all things came into being, who for our salvation was incarnate and dwelt among human beings, suffered and rose on the third day, ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We believe also in one Holy Spirit. We believe each of these to exist and subsist: Father truly Father, Son truly Son, and Holy Spirit truly Holy Spirit, just as

his aim was to clear his name for re-admittance to communion following his excommunication earlier that year at a council in Antioch.²⁹ The creed begins with an autobiographical touch aimed at showing Eusebius's constancy: this is the faith he has always believed—as a catechumen, as a student of the Scriptures, and then as presbyter and bishop. What follows is sometimes taken as a citation of the Caesarean church's baptismal creed. To be sure, Eusebius expects his Caesarean audience to recognize it as representing their shared faith. There are, however, obvious expansions, such as his claim that this formula represents Eusebius's faith "from the time when we were self-aware."³⁰ It is impossible to state exactly where the personal expansions by Eusebius begin and end within the document. What matters here is that he used a creed with at least some personal touches for apologetic purposes. At Nicaea, Eusebius sought to ensure that a favorable decision regarding his present-day creed can be retroactively applied to his former life, mitigating the disgrace of his condemnation. It is the only case studied here in which an author is concerned with proving his orthodoxy not only in the present, but also in the past—a topic we shall return to in this article's conclusion.

The apologetic motive is clear in the letter Arius and Euzoius sent to Constantine in 327, which contains a creed.³¹ Athanasius and Socrates

our Lord said when he sent forth his disciples to preach: *Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 28.19). Regarding these things, we strongly affirm that it is so and that this is how we think and have done from long ago and will stand for this faith until death, anathematizing every godless heresy. Having always thought these things in our heart and soul, from the time when we were self-aware, we testify that we now think and speak truthfully in the presence of God almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ, and are able to show through proofs and persuade you that this is how we believed and preached in previous times."

29. See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 224.

30. See the full citation in n.28.

31. Preserved in Socrates, *HE* 1.26.2 and Sozomen, *HE* 2.27.6, and edited as Urkunde 30 by H.-G. Opitz, ed. *Athanasius Werke III.2 Urkunden zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streits* 318–328 (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1935), 64: "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty. And in the Lord Jesus Christ, his Only-begotten Son, who was begotten from him before all the ages, God the Word, through whom all things were made both in the heavens and on earth, who came down, took flesh, suffered, rose again, ascended into the heavens, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit, in the resurrection of the flesh, in the life of the coming age, in the kingdom of the heavens, and in one Catholic Church of God which extends from border to border. This is the faith we have received from the holy Gospels, when the Lord said to his disciples, *Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 28.19)."

offer some context for the letter's composition. According to Socrates, a presbyter in the imperial household persuaded the emperor of Arius's orthodoxy, indeed, of his adherence to the Nicene Creed. Constantine then summoned Arius. Arius brought Euzoius with him and they convinced the emperor of their orthodoxy in person. Socrates dubiously claims that they satisfied Constantine by assenting to the Nicene Creed; still, some such meeting likely occurred. Constantine reported this meeting in a letter to the bishops and presbyters assembled in Jerusalem for the dedication of the Church of the Resurrection. That council's letter, which summarizes Constantine's letter to them, is quoted in Athanasius's *De synodis* 21. Unlike Socrates, the council fathers whose summary Athanasius provides are not specific about what was said during the *viva voce* exchange between Constantine and the Arians, and they make no mention of Nicaea. Athanasius's report and Socrates agree that it was only after this meeting that Constantine requested that the Arians in question pen a written statement of faith. The emperor subjoined copies of this statement to his own letter urging the bishops to readmit *tous peri Areion* to communion. The written statement of faith produced by Arius and Euzoius was included in order to convince bishops of their orthodoxy, coupled with Constantine's testimony regarding their interview with him. For Constantine, the interview itself was apparently sufficient. Naturally, Arius and Euzoius could not give direct interviews to all the bishops and presbyters involved at Jerusalem, and so their letter and creed stood in their place.

Another private creed can be found in Marcellus of Ancyra's apologetic "Letter to Julian," bishop of Rome, from 340/1. This document in fact contains a creed within a creed: there is Marcellus's creed which frames the citation of another creed, a Roman baptismal creed that is quite similar to the Apostles' Creed that Rufinus would comment on decades later in 404.³² Roughly contemporary with Marcellus is Theophronius of Cappadocian Tyana's creed at the Dedication Council in Antioch in 341, perhaps defending himself against suspicions of Marcellanism.³³ As in the cases of Eusebius

32. Reported in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 72.2–3. See Kinzig and Vinzent, "Recent Research," 550; Toom, "Marcellus of Ancyra and Priscillian of Avila." Unfortunately, Toom only refers to the Roman creed that Marcellus includes as Marcellus's creed, neglecting that it is surrounded by a lengthier statement of faith that is clearly of Marcellus's own composition. Acknowledging this would lead him to revise his skepticism regarding the very category of "private creeds," as expressed at "Marcellus of Ancyra," 62n7.

33. Reported in Athanasius, *De synodis* 24; cf. Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts*, 228.

and Arius-Euzoius, Theophronius's creed was submitted to a council; like them, Theophronius gained the prelates' signatures on his creed.

We therefore see the same method of apology being used by churchmen of various parties in the two decades from 321 to 341. Put simply, there was a well-established tradition that Eunomius, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa employed in their own defense. The method did not fade with the accession of Valens or Theodosius. In 375, Vitalius, the Apollinarian bishop of Antioch, defended his teaching to Pope Damasus with a creed, complete with anathemas.³⁴ In 383, Theodosius sought to effect a reconciliation among all the sects and summoned their heads to the city. Various methods were proposed for achieving the sought after unity. Ultimately, the emperor, in consultation with Nectarius, the Nicene bishop of Constantinople, informed the head of each party to compose a creed defending himself and his communion. Since both the Novatian and non-Novatian leaders supported the *homoousion*, they submitted their creeds jointly, and unsurprisingly were the sole winners, a verdict Theodosius himself declared after prayerful consideration. Despite their affinity for Nicaea, Socrates's report implies that Nectarius and Agelius, the Novatian bishop, crafted a new creed for the occasion.³⁵ Among those condemned once again was Eunomius, though we are fortunate to possess his confession from this occasion. Similarly to the way he frames his creed in the *Apology*, Eunomius implies that his confession will serve as an apology (*πρὸς ἀπολογία*).³⁶

The same terminology was used to name these private creeds as was used for conciliar creeds. Familiar labels like "the faith" (ἡ πίστις), "the exposition of the faith" (ἡ τῆς πίστεως ἐκθεσις), and "the confession" (ἡ ὁμολογία) occur for the individually-authored summaries. Sometimes, we have only the text without any framing or title; sometimes one of these titles is modified by the term "written," presumably in order to distinguish it from the kind of oral profession given either at baptism or in a face-to-face inquiry as in the case of Heraclides. Moreover, the private creeds often bear the same form as that used at Nicaea and other councils: a summary of belief, typically in Trinitarian order, followed by anathemas.³⁷ The individual creeds also have similarities with catechetical creeds in their allusions to the practice of baptism. Eusebius and Arius-Euzoius

34. See Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinaris und seine Schule: Texte und Untersuchungen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904), 1:273; cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 102.3.

35. Socrates, *HE* 5.10.

36. Eunomius, *Expositio fidei* 1 (Vaggione, 150).

37. Cf. A. M. Ritter, "Creeds," in *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, ed. I. Hazlett (London: SPCK, 1991), 92–100, at 96–97.

explicitly cite the baptismal formula of Matthew 28.19, as do Basil and Gregory, as we will see.³⁸

One clear difference between private creeds and either conciliar or catechetical creeds is the individual authorship. In this sense, they are like the earlier summaries known as “rules of faith,” which were written by individuals such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. But are private creeds simply fourth-century versions of “rules of faith”? Naturally, one notes similarities in form and content between the two groups of texts, and there is a similar appeal to the authority of a broad ecclesiastical tradition rather than that of the individual author. Kinzig and Vinzent have concluded that private creeds are no different from the earlier rules of faith.³⁹ They rightly note that it would be question-begging to say that two sets are generically different because of the different time periods in which they were composed. But they do not consider the difference in the intended purposes of the two sets of texts, which is the source of the generic distinction I am drawing. In addition to summarizing the church’s baptismal faith, rules of faith as they appear in second- and third-century literature were primarily meant to be used by a reader to adjudicate the orthodoxy of some third party. The author sets forth the norm that the reader can apply to the case at hand; the obvious intention in authors like Irenaeus or Tertullian is to show the heterodoxy of a specific opponent or set of opponents. There can be defensive motives as well—in *Against Praxeas*,

38. Eusebius in fact employed variant texts of Matt 28.19. See H. Benedict Green, “Matthew 28:19, Eusebius, and the *lex orandi*,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 124–41. For a translation of Arius and Euzoius’s statement, see n.31 above.

39. Kinzig and Vinzent, “Recent Research,” 541: “All those texts that are classified by scholars as ‘private creeds’ are, in fact, nothing else than ‘rules of faith,’ even if their authors do not appeal to a *κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας/ τῆς πίστεως* or to a *regula veritatis/ fidei*. To distinguish between the ‘rule’ and ‘private creeds’ [here they footnote the work of von Campenhausen and Ritter] only adds to the confusion with which research on the creeds already abounds.” In the note, they say, “there are various reasons, however, why such a differentiation in fact rather muddies things. (a) It seems difficult to see why the ‘private creed’ has a function at variance with the ‘rule of faith’: in both cases an author appeals to an ‘orthodox’ consensus over against ‘heterodox’ views. (b) The fact that the theological debate becomes more sophisticated does not change the basic fact that the function remains the same. (c) Finally, even though it is correct that ‘private creeds’ no longer appeal to the ‘rule of faith,’ the appeal to the Scriptures is by no means meant to be less authoritative. In both cases it is an appeal to tradition *as opposed* to one’s ‘personal authority’” (Kinzig and Vinzent, “Recent Research,” 541n27). See now also the useful guide and literature review in Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

for instance, Tertullian mentions critics of his own views in addition to Praxeas's errors.⁴⁰ The principal aim, however, is to expose and refute Praxeas. If rules of faith are primarily prosecutory, private creeds are primarily used by the defense, that is, by someone who has been accused of heterodoxy. In one case, which will be discussed below, a private creed was drawn up by a third party and given to a defendant in order for the accused to clear his name.⁴¹ Regardless of the shift in authorship from the defendant to an interested third party, the apologetic intent is the same. In accordance with the difference in intention, private creeds and rules of faith envision different roles for their implied audiences. Rules of faith appear in works with various implied audiences. Despite the variety, readers are not expected to judge the rule itself; instead, they are to use the rule to judge someone else. The explicit or implicit audience for private creeds is more specific. Readers function as a jury—often, though not always, consisting of bishops—whose task it is to judge the author and his creed. The audience's putative sympathies with the accused range from warmth, as in Alexander's *Letter to Alexander*, to suspicion, as in Arius's *Letter to Alexander*.

To say that the apologetic intention is a trait of private creeds does not, of course, imply that such documents have no other uses. As noted in the case of Eunomius's *Apology*, a privately-authored creed could function in an author's development of a theological idea or as a refutation of some problematic doctrine. Self-defense was not necessarily the only purpose one might have in writing one's own creed; I hope to show, nonetheless, that defense was an essential motive as far as we can tell from the extant examples. Further studies are needed to examine how authors use such creeds in their theological argumentation; for present purposes, I will focus primarily on these documents' apologetic purposes.

If it makes sense to consider private creeds as a distinct form of extant *literature* emerging in the fourth century (recall that the third-century precedent of Heraclides is not a written text), then we need to bring different assumptions to them than we bring to conciliar and catechetical creeds or to rules of faith. At the same time, we must underscore that the authors of private creeds wished to downplay their own originality and accordingly alluded to the language of rules of faith, catechetical creeds, and, in Basil's case, to conciliar creeds. Here balance is needed: while the texts in question only make sense as individual compositions, they are highly formulaic. This is not to say that they are simply milquetoast formulae

40. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 3.

41. Basil, *ep.* 125.

intended to cloak more controversial views, a judgment that has fueled some of the neglect of these texts. Speaking of Arius and Euzoius's brief to Constantine, R. P. C. Hanson complained of its "entirely colourless creed which has been carefully divested of any controversial wording," inferring that the document is "without theological significance."⁴² Marcellus's creed has been judged similarly, beginning with Epiphanius.⁴³ Basil criticized Eunomius along these lines, as did Gregory Nazianzen in the case of Vitalius. We can see the problem with this line of criticism if we recall our earlier distinction between creed and argument: in many cases, such as Eunomius's *Apology*, a text offers first a statement of faith and then further elaboration or proof. One assumption lying behind the criticism of private creeds as disingenuous is that what truly mattered for the authors of private creeds is the elaboration. But we must bear in mind the role a creed is playing within a work as a whole. When viewed from the perspective of the work itself, the elaboration serves to buttress the creed. No elaboration was needed; we have a number of cases in which the bare creed (sometimes coupled with anathemas) did the work of self-defense. The elaboration serves the creed, and the creed serves the work's overarching goal of self-defense. Of course, this analysis is not intended to deny the interest of the more elaborate arguments, but to clarify the place of those arguments within apologetic texts. We will return in the article's conclusion to the matter of how a creed could prove an author's innocence. For now, let us turn to the evidence Basil provides for private creed-writing.

BASIL AND EUSTATHIUS

As mentioned earlier, Basil offers statements of faith of his own composition in a few letters. In order to grasp why Basil felt compelled to author his own creeds, we must place his doctrinal work in the context of his role of imperially-sanctioned oversight of churches in Armenia.⁴⁴ In 372, he was entrusted with the task of appointing bishops for Armenia. Basil was to work with Theodotus, bishop of Nicopolis in Armenia Minor. Like Basil, Theodotus was a supporter of Nicaea. Yet, Theodotus distrusted Basil because of his known communion with Eustathius, whom Theodotus suspected of heresy, presumably having to do with denial of the Spirit's divinity, for which Eustathius would become notorious. Beginning around

42. Hanson, *Search*, 8–9.

43. See Toom, "Marcellus of Ancyra," 67.

44. For a fuller account, see Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 270–87.

374, Basil would openly attack him on these grounds; two years earlier, Theodotus was apparently an early opponent. The Eustathian side had started its attack on defenders of the Spirit. A certain Poimenos, a presbyter under Eustathius in Sebasteia, accused Basil in 372 of heterodoxy.⁴⁵

In 372, Basil was still seeking reconciliation. Basil sought to assure Theodotus of Eustathius's orthodoxy—and vice-versa. Basil first had a face-to-face meeting with Eustathius and became convinced that he remained orthodox. However, Basil failed to secure from Eustathius a “written confession” (ἔγγραφον . . . ὁμολογίαν) which he could have used to assuage Theodotus's doubts. Basil's solution was to have Theodotus provide a “written profession of faith” (γραμματοεῖον πίστεως), which he could then present to Eustathius for his signature.⁴⁶ Although this never happened, it is worth noting that Basil assumed that both Eustathius and Theodotus were capable of producing written creedal statements. Even though there is an implicit test of Eustathius's orthodoxy here, Basil's broader intention is to work as an advocate for his defense.⁴⁷

Basil described all this in a letter to Terence, a Roman general holding the rank of *comes* and a pro-Nicene Christian. Terence was a friend and the recipient of two other letters from Basil. Like Basil, he had an interest in Christian affairs in Armenia and in Antioch, despite his retirement from public duty to a life of ascetic withdrawal, a retirement punctuated by public engagement in church affairs in Antioch.

Ultimately, in 373, Basil met with Eustathius and presented him with a creed of his own composition.⁴⁸ He even secured Eustathius's signature on it. Basil's creed tries to avoid novelty. Within the document, Basil cites the Nicene Creed verbatim (ἡ αὐτὴ ἡ πίστις ἡ κατὰ Νίκαιαν συγγραφεῖσα).⁴⁹

45. Basil, *ep.* 99.2.

46. Basil, *ep.* 99.3 (Courtonne, 1:216).

47. Indeed, if we accept Basil's account of Eustathius's early career in *ep.* 263.3 at face value, then we must conclude that during the fourth century the normal practice of making apology when accused of heterodoxy, at least in the regions of Cappadocia, Pontus, and Armenia Minor, was to offer a confession of faith either to an accusing bishop or publicly to the people. It seems Eustathius had presented statements to bishop Hermogenes of Caesarea and to his own people on different occasions. See also Basil, *ep.* 244.9. For general comment on the rise of “Creeds as Tests of Orthodoxy,” see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, chap. 7, esp. 206–7; Turner, *Creeds and Anathemas*, 24–29. Recall again Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides*, in which Origen employs an interrogative creed to test Heraclides's orthodoxy.

48. This is extant as Basil, *ep.* 125; cf. *ep.* 223.7 (Courtonne, 3:16), where Basil refers back to this as “a summary of faith” (ὕπογραφή τινι πίστεως), and says that the motive for presenting it to Eustathius was to allay the suspicions of others.

49. Basil, *ep.* 125.1. Note his other ways of naming the creed in this letter: τὴν ὑπὸ τῶν μακαρίων Πατέρων ἐν τῇ κατὰ Νίκαιάν ποτε συγκροτηθείσῃ συνόδῳ γραφεῖσαν

He notes, in a fashion that will become typical for him, that the only point left unaddressed at Nicaea was the question of the Spirit, because the question had not yet been raised; he also expresses his concern that Nicaea be interpreted in a non-Sabellian direction.⁵⁰ In the form of anathemas, Basil fills in what was lacking:

We must anathematize those who say that the Holy Spirit is a creature and those who think in this way, as well as those who do not confess that it is holy by nature—as the Father is holy by nature and the Son is holy by nature—but who alienate it from the divine and blessed nature. Proof of the right way of thinking is not to separate it from Father and Son (for we must be baptized as we have received, and believe as we are baptized, and offer praise as we have believed: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and to abstain from communion with those who call it a creature, since they are open blasphemers.

It is agreed—and the remark is necessary because of slanderers—that we do not call the Holy Spirit unbegotten, since we know that there is one unbegotten and one first principle of beings, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor do we call it begotten, since we have been taught in the tradition of the faith that the Only-begotten is one. Having learned that the Spirit of truth proceeds from the Father, we confess that it is from God in an uncreated manner. And we anathematize those who say call the Holy Spirit is a minister, since through this statement they drag it down to the rank of something created. After all, scripture taught us that the ministering spirits are created when it said that *All are ministering spirits sent to serve* (Heb 1.14).⁵¹

Basil also anathematizes those who disturb the order established by the Lord, placing the Spirit before the Father or between the Father and the Son.

After signing it, Eustathius immediately disavowed Basil's statement of faith. Basil officially kept his silence for two to three years. Although he

πίστιν; . . . ὅτι πιστεύουσιν κατὰ τὰ ῥήματα ἐκτεθέντα ἐν τῇ Νικαίᾳ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὑγιᾶς ὑπὸ τῶν ῥημάτων τούτων ἐμφανομένην διάνοιαν; . . . ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ πίστει . . . (all from *ep.* 125.1; Courtonne, 2:30–32). Basil can refer to the creed as “this faith” or as “the faith written by the blessed Fathers”; or he can refer to the “words according to which” people believe, which were “set forth at Nicaea,” and which contain a sound “sense.” In *ep.* 113 and 114, Basil similarly recommends a minimum set of standards for reconciliation with Pneumatomachians: acceptance of the Nicene Creed and confession that the Spirit is not a creature. For discussion, see Michael Haykin, “And Who is the Spirit?: Basil of Caesarea’s Letters to the Church at Tarsus,” *VC* 41 (1987): 377–85.

50. See Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 84–85.

51. Basil, *ep.* 125.3 (Courtonne, 2:33–34).

spoke about the Holy Spirit, he never rebuked Eustathius until around 375. When Basil made his break with Eustathius public, he acknowledged that he had been accused of innovation regarding the Spirit.⁵² In a later letter, Basil commented on his reason for composing this creed. He says he wrote the creed at the request of presumably sympathetic parties in Nicopolis. He complied with their request, saying that it fulfilled two aims: "I expected both to persuade the Nicopolitans not to think ill of the man [i.e., Eustathius], and to shut the mouths of my calumniators."⁵³ The goal of his writing is, therefore, not simply to transmit doctrine, but principally to defend himself and Eustathius in the face of suspicion.

BASIL'S PRIVATE CREEDS

Before the affair with Eustathius, Basil had commented on creeds in letters and had reflected extensively on the divinity of the Son and Spirit in *Against Eunomius*. He had not yet, to our knowledge, written a creed of his own. Around the time of the ill-fated creed that Eustathius signed and then renounced, Basil wrote two expositions of faith in private letters. One came in a letter to Terence's daughters, who, according to the letter's inscription, were deaconesses. Philip Rousseau helpfully calls attention to this "nugget of catechesis," though he does not intend "catechesis" in its ordinary usage since the addressees are deaconesses.⁵⁴ Basil refers to their profession of faith in the past tense and does not presume an uninstructed audience. Instead, he assumes that his presentation will conform to what they have already professed, presumably in their baptismal vows:

You have believed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; do not betray this sacred trust.

Father, the first principle of all things;

Only-begotten Son, begotten from him, true God, perfect from perfect, living image, showing the Father entirely in himself;

Holy Spirit, having its existence from God, fount of holiness, life-giving power, grace which perfects, through which men are made sons, and mortals are made immortal, connected with Father and Son in all respects: in glory and eternity, in power and kingship, in sovereignty and divinity, as even the tradition of saving baptism testifies.

But, as for those who say that the Son or the Spirit is a creature, or who generally draw the Spirit down into the rank of minister and slave, they are

52. Basil, *ep.* 226.3; cf. *ep.* 223.

53. Basil, *ep.* 244.2 (Courtonne, 3:75); cf. *ep.* 130.

54. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 166.

far from the truth. We ought to avoid communion with them and to turn away their words, since they are snares for the soul.

But if the Lord ever grants that we should meet, we will set forth for you in fuller detail (*πλατύτερον*)⁵⁵ the rationale of the faith, so that, with scriptural proofs (*μετ' ἀποδείξεων γραφικῶν*), you will recognize that the truth is strong and the heresy is unstable.⁵⁶

Basil defers the fuller presentation of “the rationale of the faith” to a face-to-face meeting, where “scriptural proofs” will be shared, marking what he has just offered as a summary. It follows the familiar pattern of fourth-century creeds: Father, Son, Spirit, and anathemas. It has features characteristic of Basil, particularly in the section on the Spirit. The confession that the Spirit is “connected with Father and Son in all respects” is central to Basil, as well as to Gregory of Nyssa. He makes his characteristic appeal to the baptismal formula of Matt 28.19, which he interprets as establishing that the three persons are connected in all respects (in glory, eternity, power, kingship, sovereignty, and divinity). Yet, while he alludes to a baptismal profession of faith, the goal of Basil’s creedal summary is something different from that of a baptismal profession. Its purpose is not initiation. Basil maintains that the baptismal profession “testifies” to it, which implies that the two are not identical. As opposed to the multiple anathemas of *Letter 125*, there is only one position anathematized here. The position he rejects is that of drawing down the Spirit into the rank or order of a minister or a slave (*εἰς τὴν λειτουργικὴν καὶ δουλικὴν . . . τάξιν*). The reference, again, is to Hebrews 1.14 and the use of it to support an angelic pneumatology. So, we have the typical formulae of private creeds, though the broader purpose of the creed is not made explicit in the letter itself.

Basil offers fuller proofs in his letter to another father-daughter pair, this time to the otherwise unknown Eupaterius and his daughter. The letter—number 159—has been dated variously from 373 to 375. In it, Basil praises their inquiry into the faith which prompted them to write him. He offers his characteristic history: we honor Nicaea, and seek “to walk in the footsteps” of the saints who met there. Yet, since the question of the Spirit had not yet arisen, they passed it over in silence. He reasons

55. For similar uses of the adverbial *πλατύτερον* to mark a fuller discussion than can be found in the present text, see Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 2.219; Athanasius, *De decretis* 5.7; Basil, *ep.* 159, below at 483. Cf. also the council of Antioch (344) in Athanasius, *De synodis* 26.10, where *πλατύτερον* characterizes a new statement of faith as a fuller discussion than a previous creed published by the same council fathers at Antioch in 341 and Eunomius, *Apol.* 27 (Vaggione, 72–73), where it probably points to a different part of the same text.

56. Basil *ep.* 105 (Courtonne, 2:6–7).

that it is necessary to “add a discussion of [the Spirit] which follows the sense of the scripture,” and it reads as follows:

As we are baptized, so also do we believe. As we believe, so also do we offer praise. So then, since baptism has been given to us by the Savior in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we offer the confession of faith in accordance with baptism, and in accordance with the faith we offer praise, glorifying the Holy Spirit along with Father and Son, since we are convinced that it is not foreign to the divine nature. For what has been alienated in virtue of its nature would not have shared the same honors.

We pity those who say that the Spirit is a creature, since by saying such a thing they fall into the unpardonable error of blasphemy against it. After all, for those who are even a little versed in the scriptures, there is no need for an argument showing that the created order is divided from the divinity. For the created order serves, but the Spirit sets free. The created order needs life, but it is the Spirit that gives life. The created order needs instruction, but it is the Spirit that teaches. The created order is sanctified, but it is the Spirit that sanctifies. And even if you mention angels or archangels or all the heavenly powers, they receive the sanctification of the Spirit, whereas the Spirit has natural sanctity, not receiving it by grace, but as co-essential with it. For this reason, it also has in a distinctive way received the title of “Holy.” So then, we ourselves do not allow anyone to separate and sever from the blessed Trinity that which is holy by nature—as the Father is holy by nature and the Son is holy by nature; nor do we accept those who carelessly classify it with the created order.

Let these statements, as a summary (*ἐν κεφαλαίῳ*), be sufficient for your piety. For from small seeds you will produce by cultivation the greater part of piety, the Holy Spirit cooperating with you. . . . But we shall postpone a fuller explanation until we shall have a meeting face to face, which will enable us to remove objections, and to furnish more detailed testimony from the scriptures (*πλατυτέρας τὰς ἐκ τῶν Γραφῶν . . . μαρτυρίας*), and to confirm the entire sound rule of faith. But for the present grant pardon to my brevity.⁵⁷

In this letter, Basil is not writing the text that he wants to be added to the Nicene Creed. Instead, he is offering a summary of the principles that should guide such writing. We see that any such addition must: (1) conform to the baptismal confession; (2) glorify the Spirit along with the Father and Son (and avoid severing it from them); and (3) clearly reject (perhaps through anathemas) any notion of the Spirit as created.

These two private letters and their expositions of faith have an obvious

57. Basil *ep.* 159.2 (Courtonne, 2:86–87; following the translation in Roy J. Deferrari, *Basil of Caesarea: Letters 59–185*, LCL 215 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1928), 395–99).

pedagogical intent. Basil presumed an interest in and capacity for the subtleties of doctrine, and looked forward to teaching them advanced dogmatic exegesis of Scripture. But was the motive simply pedagogical? In both cases, Basil was responding to a letter; in both cases, we can tell that those initial requests communicated to Basil that their senders were orthodox. We cannot say much about Eupaterius and his daughters. We know more about the daughters of Terence. They lived in Samosata, the bishopric of Basil's friend Eusebius. Around the time of their correspondence with Basil, Eusebius was being driven into exile by Valens. Perhaps Terence's daughters simply requested clarification during this confusing time. Yet, also around the time of the correspondence, Basil had exchanged letters with Eusebius regarding the affair with Theodotus and Eustathius.⁵⁸ Perhaps the staunchly Nicene Terence and his household, ever concerned with Armenia, had come to suspect Basil for his associations with Eustathius. If so, Basil was not merely teaching them, but also clearing his name.

Around 374, Basil wrote a letter—number 175—to a Magnenianus who is given the title *comes* in the inscription.⁵⁹ Basil was responding to a letter from Magnenianus that “expressly commanded us to write, among other things, concerning the faith.” Basil spells out why Magnenianus made this demand: “you seem to me to be surrounded by people there who do nothing but say things to slander us, as if they established themselves by doing this, even if they falsely allege the vilest things against us.”⁶⁰ Unlike the cases of Terence or Eupaterius, however, Basil refused the request, saying that he “does not want to leave behind a treatise on the faith or to write various creeds” (Διὰ δὲ τὸ μὴ βούλεσθαι περὶ πίστεως σύνταγμα καταλιμπάνειν μηδὲ γράφειν διαφόρους πίστεις).⁶¹ He does close the letter with a very brief set of instructions, including essentially verbatim the line from *Letter* 159 and elsewhere about believing as we are baptized (and so on), as well as an insistence on preserving the names used in baptism. However, there is no exposition of the nature or activities of Father, Son, and Spirit, no anathemas, and no mention of scriptural proofs. Basil's point is specific:

58. Basil, *ep.* 100, 127, and 128.

59. Basil also addressed *ep.* 325 to a Magnenianus, who appears to be a high-ranking layperson from the fact that Basil calls him “your reverence” (τῆς σεμνοτιτῆτος σου) though the title of *comes* is not used there (Courtonne, 3:197). Like Terence and Eupaterius, the Magnenianus of *ep.* 325 had at least one daughter whom Basil praised and considered his own daughter—presumably a reference to baptism and perhaps ascetic vocation. It cannot be known whether this is the same Magnenianus as in *ep.* 175.

60. Basil, *ep.* 175 (Courtonne, 2:111–12), reading ἐργαζομένων in place of Courtonne's apparent typo ἐργέμζονων.

61. Basil, *ep.* 175 (Courtonne, 2:111).

it is not that he refuses any and all instruction, but that he refuses to write a creed in the manner he writes elsewhere. He had been accused of composing various creeds around this time, and had become sensitive to the charge.⁶² In *Letter 175*, we have not an apologetically-motivated creed, but an apologetically-motivated refusal of a creed. Perhaps this refusal sheds light on the other letters in which Basil did respond to his friends with creeds, though without exposing his motives in doing so. If Basil's overarching purpose in the letters that do contain creeds were straightforwardly and exclusively pedagogical, there would be no reason to refuse such instruction to Magnenianus. In fact, he does leave him with a glimpse of his position; he is not unwilling to instruct Magnenianus. He refuses to write a fuller statement because of what authorship would say about him. I would suggest that when he granted requests for creeds, he did so as much to verify his own credentials as to teach.⁶³ This is not to deny that Basil is offering instruction when he sent credal letters; it is merely to note his awareness that such correspondence was closely monitored and always playing on more than one register.

GREGORY OF NYSSA

Gregory of Nyssa provides invaluable testimony to the occasions and anxieties surrounding the writing of private creeds in *Letter 5*, *Letter 19*, and *To Eustathius*. After Basil's death in 378, Gregory assumed new levels of responsibility in the imperially-sponsored efforts at reconciling the various church leaders who held sympathies with the Nicene confession.⁶⁴ In 379, a council of pro-Nicene bishops met in Antioch to cement the

62. See Basil, *ep.* 244.2 (Courtonne, 3:75): "as if we had promulgated a new creed." Regarding the accusation of novelty, see *ep.* 226.3 again (n.52).

63. Because of its complex textual transmission, I have left to the side the creed Basil includes in his ascetic preface *On Faith* (see Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetic Works*, trans. M. Monica Wagner, FC 9 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 63–65. Incidentally, this was the only "private creed" that Hahn included from Basil in Hahn et al., *Bibliothek der Symbole*, 269–70. Despite the putatively "friendly" audience of the document (consisting of monks who were in some sense were under Basil's authority), he expressly says that he introduces it in order "to provide grounds for certainty both for you yourselves and any others who desire to place their confidence in us" (Basil, *Ascetic Works*, 63). That is, it is meant to reassure the monks of Basil's orthodoxy.

64. For a good overview of the events discussed here, see Pierre Maraval, "Biography of Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Secco and Giulio Maspero, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 103–16 at 109–10. For the date of Basil's death, see Anna Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 32–39.

alliance between Meletius of Antioch and Pope Damasus that Basil had sought unsuccessfully. The council sent Gregory of Nyssa on a mission to Ancyra to reconcile the old Nicene flock, originally led by Marcellus, to the pro-Nicene cause—a difficult task given the common association of Marcellus with Sabellius. Gregory was apparently successful in effecting a reconciliation, but was too lax in the eyes of some. As he puts it in his *Letter 5*, following his work there, two charges began to circulate against him: that he held views contrary to Nicaea and that he admitted the Marcellans to communion “without discernment and examination.”⁶⁵ He made his “written defense” (τὴν ἀπολογίαν . . . ἔγγραφον) in a letter that is distinct from *Letter 5* itself (δι’ ἐτέρων γραμμάτων). Interestingly, however, it was not the accusers who prompted Gregory to write, but rather “certain like-minded brothers” (τινες τῶν ὁμοψύχων ἀδελφῶν). The apologetic letter Gregory wrote to reassure them is not extant; it cannot be correlated with any surviving work. All he tells us is that the work answered both charges sufficiently.

Though he believed his original apology to be “sufficient,” nonetheless once again “certain like-minded brothers” (τινες τῶν ὁμοψύχων ἀδελφῶν)—it is not clear whether they are the same brothers as before—asked Gregory “privately in our own voice” (ιδίως ἐκ τῆς ἡμετέρας φωνῆς) to offer “the exposition of faith by which we give assurance” (τὴν τῆς πίστεως ἔκθεσιν καθ’ ἣν πεπληροφορήμεθα).⁶⁶ In the exposition itself, Gregory uses the term “assurance” (πληροφορίαν), which would later become the typical term for apologetic, private creeds.⁶⁷ In the forensic context of answering accusations, to give assurance (πληροφορία) is to provide a pledge of one’s orthodoxy; put differently, Gregory’s term πληροφορία is parallel to the term ἀσφάλεια in Eunomius and Basil.⁶⁸ The confession of faith is the means by which assurance is given. Like Eunomius and Basil, Gregory claims to offer the faith in a summary (βραχεία) fashion, following the

65. Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 5.1 (Georgius Pasquali, *Gregorii Nysseni Epistulae*, editio altera, GNO 8.2 [Leiden: Brill, 1959], 31).

66. Gregory of Nyssa *ep.* 5.3 (GNO 8.2:32); for “assurance,” cf. *ep.* 5.7 (GNO 8.2:33). Cf. *ep.* 19.13, where Gregory uses a similar expression for an embassy that summoned Gregory from Ibora in Pontus to Sebasteia.

67. See, e.g., R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey, and L. R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 10 (Leuven: Department Oriëntalistiek, 1981), 24.

68. See above, n.8; cf. Basil, *Eun.* 1.1, where he tells his addressee (presumably Eustathius) that he is writing the work out of devotion to his command and “as assurance for ourselves”: that is, the act of refuting Eunomius proves Basil’s orthodoxy. Gregory’s language is not original: Basil refers to the creed he wrote at the Nicopolitans’ request as τινὰ πληροφορίαν πίστεως (*ep.* 244.2 [Courtonne, 3:75]).

“God-inspired utterances and the tradition of the fathers.” This creedal summary is passed down as *Letter 5*. In the introductory narrative section of *To Eustathius*, which is yet another apologetic text, Gregory appears to refer back to the time when he wrote *Letter 5*, saying that he then defended himself both “publicly before all and privately to readers.”⁶⁹ *Letter 5* is a private apologetic letter addressed to allies who were aware of ongoing suspicion against Gregory.⁷⁰ In the letter, Gregory appears to be distancing himself especially from tritheism, though it is not unlikely that other charges were lurking in the background.⁷¹ Like Basil before him, Gregory had to simultaneously defend himself against opposite charges of Sabellianism and tritheism. Unlike Basil, however, Gregory makes no appeal to Nicaea. Instead, he makes Matthew 28.19 central; Christ’s words are woven seamlessly with Gregory’s commentary. The relatively lengthy exposition of faith in *Letter 5* reads as follows:

4. We confess that the Lord’s teaching, which he gave to the disciples when he handed over to them the mystery of piety, is the foundation and root of the right and salutary faith, and we believe that nothing else is loftier or surer than that tradition. Now, the Lord’s teaching is this: *Go*, he says, *teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit* (Matt 28.19).

5. Therefore, the power which enlivens those who are born again from death to eternal life comes through the Holy Trinity to the faithful who are counted worthy of this grace. And likewise, the grace is incomplete if any single one of the names of the Holy Trinity is ever omitted in saving baptism. For the mystery of rebirth is not complete without the Father, in Son and Spirit alone. Nor, if the Son is passed over in silence, does complete life come through baptism in Father and Son. Nor is the grace of the resurrection brought to completion in Father and Son if the Spirit is set aside. For this reason, we place our entire hope and confidence for the salvation of our souls in the three hypostases recognized⁷² through these names. And we believe in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1.3,

69. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Eustathius On the Holy Trinity* (F. Mueller, *Opera Dogmatica Minora*, GNO 3.1 [Leiden: Brill, 1958], 5).

70. Pierre Maraval plausibly suggests that it was intended to be read in public, though this does not negate Gregory’s own description of it at *ep.* 5.3 as private. The latter refers to the authorship of the creed, whereas Maraval’s public refers to its reception. See Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, SC 363 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 158n1.

71. Maraval thinks *ep.* 5.5 was a refutation of the Sabellians and *ep.* 5.6 of the Arians (*Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 160–61nn1–2), which overlooks the overarching apologetic purpose of the letter.

72. Read γνωριζόμενας instead of γνωριζομένην for sense; cf. *ep.* 5.9.

2 Pet 1.3), who is the source of life (Ps 35.10), and in the Only-begotten Son of the Father, who is the Author of life (Acts 3.15), just as the Apostle says, and in the Holy Spirit of God, about whom the Lord said that *It is the Spirit that gives life* (John 6.63).

6. And since, for us who have been redeemed from death, the grace of incorruptibility comes in saving baptism through faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (as we have said), being led by these, we believe that nothing servile, created, or unworthy of the Father's majesty is to be counted together with the Holy Trinity. For we have one life which comes to us through faith in the Holy Trinity. It takes its source from the God of the universe, proceeds through the Son, and is actualized in the Holy Spirit.

7. So then, having this assurance (*πληροφορίαν*), we baptize as we have been commanded, we believe as we baptize, and we glorify as we believe, so that baptism, faith, and glorification resound in one voice in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

8. But if someone proclaims two or three gods or three deities, let him be anathema. And if someone, following Arius's perversion proclaims that the Son or the Holy Spirit came into being from nothing, let him be anathema.

9. But all who are line with the rule of truth and confess the three hypostases which are piously recognized in their own distinctive features and who believe that there is one deity, one goodness, one rule, authority, and power, and thereby neither reject the power of the monarchy nor fall into polytheism—neither do they confuse the hypostases nor do they compose the Holy Trinity from heterogeneous and unlike elements but instead admit the dogma of the faith in simplicity, entrusting the hope of their salvation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in our judgment, these ones hold the same opinions, and with them, we too pray that we might have a part in the Lord (cf. John 13.8).⁷³

The underlined portions contain the three-part creed properly speaking and the anathemas. The remainder offers commentary and rationale, linking the creed and anathemas with the teaching of the risen Christ in Matthew 28.19. As in other works, Gregory here assumes that Christ was teaching doctrine in this saying and that his teaching lies at the root of Gregory's own teaching.⁷⁴ Creed must conform to baptism, through which

73. Gregory of Nyssa *ep.* 5.4–9 (Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 158–62; GNO 8.2:32–34), though note Pasquali's different readings at *ep.* 5.5 (GNO 8.2:32, lines 23–27).

74. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa *ep.* 24.1–3 (Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, 277–78); *To Eustathius On the Holy Trinity* (GNO 3.1:7–8); *Refutation of Eunomius' Confession* 1–4 (Wernerus Jaeger, *Contra Eunomium Libri, Pars Altera: Liber III (Vulgo III–XII), Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii (Vulgo Lib. II)*, GNO 2 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 312–13).

the Trinity grants the single divine life to the baptized. By claiming that Jesus's words, rather than his own, are the foundation of his faith, Gregory is able to engage in writing without appearing to innovate.

Like Basil before him, Gregory is making explicit, under great external pressure, what he is committed to and what he rejects in his teaching as a bishop. That he does so with his own composition rather than by citing the Nicene Creed is noteworthy. The convenience of using conciliar labels to mark Basil and Gregory as "Nicene" or "pro-Nicene" thinkers could lead one to assume that the Nicene formulae provide the "thesis statement," so to speak, that their doctrinal writings aim to defend. Instead, as with Eunomius and the other examples cited above, one ought to look to their own summary statements for the *κεφάλαιον* of their arguments.

WHAT KIND OF CRIME?

Greek and Roman forensic oratory had two parts, defense and prosecution. Christians of the pre-Constantinian era famously adopted the genre of apology to defend the faith against Roman slander. Fourth-century Christians further adapted the defense speech for dealing with private accusations made by other Christians. Privately-authored creeds played a central role in these defenses, though one might wonder *how* a creed could play that role. It is easier to envision how creeds and anathemas could function to teach an authoritative summary of a shared faith or to exclude a third party than it is to see them as certifying their author. Private creeds played all of these roles, and they also gestured to baptismal professions and to earlier rules of faith. But it is worth considering their apologetic motivation alongside these doctrinal and catechetical roles.

If a creed of one's own composition can be cited to prove one's innocence, then heresy must be a special kind of crime. As opposed to typical apologies, which concern what happened or did not happen in the past, the apologies studied here concern a crime that is happening or not happening in what the text envisions as the present.⁷⁵ Had heresy been considered a crime committed in the past, a different kind of apology would have been needed; being a crime of the present, a statement of present-tense belief sufficed for clearing one's name, given a receptive audience. Heresy was therefore not a crime of action, but of thought. The idea of such crimes was nothing new—one of the so-called "new charges" against

75. Even the crime of "impiety" (*ἀσεβεία*) was treated in Greek forensic rhetoric as a matter of actions performed in the past; see Pseudo-Hermogenes, *On Invention* 2.5 (Kennedy, *Invention and Method*, 47).

Socrates in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* was that he did not believe in the gods of Athens.⁷⁶ There was also a possibly surprising Roman precedent. In an important article from 1968, T. D. Barnes set out to clarify the legal basis for the persecution of Christians by Romans before Decius. Separating wheat from darnel in the heap of evidence, he zeroed in on the decisive role played by the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan. For Barnes, this exchange fixed the unique legal status of Christians up to the time of Decius: "After Trajan's rescript, if not already before, Christianity was a crime in a special category: whereas all other criminals, once convicted, were punished for what they had done in the past, the Christian was punished for what he was in the present, and up to the last moment he could gain pardon by apostasy."⁷⁷ What matters here is not Barnes's reconstruction of the influence of Trajan's letter, but his framing of the legal issue. Christianity came into Roman legal consciousness as a thought crime. As Barnes notes, the awkwardness of this status explains Christian apologists' constant complaints that merely bearing the name "Christian" made one a criminal. This quirk of the Roman tradition is echoed in Christian leaders' understanding of heresy as a crime committed in the present.⁷⁸

Authors of private creeds found themselves in a double bind. On one hand, there was an expectation that they respond to charges, whether at the emperor's command or in reply to a letter from friends. On the other hand, the very act of writing a creed could lead to suspicion, as we saw in the case of Basil.⁷⁹ If innovation implies deviation, new creeds are suspicious simply for being new. Authors of private creeds therefore sought to link their creeds with recognized tradition and authority. When the performance worked, the reader signed and the author, for the time being, was safe.

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76. Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 24b.

77. T. D. Barnes, "Legislation against the Christians," *JRS* 58 (1968): 32–50, at 48.

78. The only exception in the texts discussed here is Eusebius of Caesarea's creed (see above, n.28). Even though heresy is implicitly a present-tense offense, the actions of being baptized under a heretical bishop and of deserting the orthodox faith were treated as past-tense sins and subjected to a life-long penance. See Basil, *ep.* 188.1; Gregory of Nyssa, *Canonical Letter to Letoius*, Canon 1.

79. Athanasius's *De synodis* also shows how a fourth-century author could frame his opponents' continual re-writing of creeds as evidence of a deceptive and malicious intent.