



**Basil of Caesarea**

***Against Eunomius***

Translated by Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

The Fathers of the Church 122

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Students of Patristic theology and more specifically fourth-century Trinitarian theology are well aware of just how important a figure Basil of Caesarea was. Aside from being one of *the* great Cappadocians, he is arguably the most important of the three, since his influence can be seen in the writings of his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa and to a lesser (but still noticeable) extent Gregory of Nazianzus. These same students will also, undoubtedly, be familiar with Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*, which has been available in English translation for more than 100 years, but it's much less likely that they'll be familiar with Basil's *Against Eunomius* unless they've had access to (and the ability to read) the Greek text.

Thankfully, Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz have translated Basil's *Against Eunomius* into English for the interested student. The volume under review is relatively slim coming in at just over 200 pages (207 plus front matter to be exact). 75 of those pages (3-78) consist of an excellent introduction that details the significance of this work (both the original and this particular translation), a biographical overview of Basil's life, the historical context of the writing, as well as its polemical and theological content, an inquiry into Basil's sources, an extremely helpful and well produced glossary of technical vocabulary, and finally a note on the authors' text and translation. DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz went above and beyond the call of duty in this introduction.

Basil's work itself is divided into 3 books that span 115 pages. The Father is the focus of book 1 while the Son and Spirit are the focus of books 2 and 3 respectively. We're all familiar with the

term “gross insubordination,” right? Well Basil’s goal was to refute the gross subordination(ism) of Eunomius and his followers, especially with regard to viewing the Son and Spirit as creatures. In Eunomius we have someone who epitomized Arian theology and carried it to its logical end. He refused to make the concessions that Arius himself did, or that later semi-Arians would, and he denied that the Father, Son, and Spirit were even alike in substance let alone shared in the same substance.

He also had a very rudimentary understanding of divine simplicity, which Basil painstakingly refuted by appealing to apophatic theology, although elsewhere Radde-Gallwitz has suggested that Basil wasn’t as concerned with the *via negativa* as is commonly supposed, but rather he was “devoted to preserving the coherence and consistency of the myriad positive affirmations of Christian scripture and worship, while nonetheless acknowledging the ultimate incomprehensibility of God.”<sup>1</sup> For Basil we can know what God has revealed about himself but no more. God has not revealed all of himself so there will always be mystery. For Eunomius, God is simple, plain and simple, therefore we can know all there is to know. We can know God in his energies *and* his essence, to borrow later Palamite terminology.

The translators refer to Basil as exhibiting “epistemic humility,” an apt description if ever there was one. But they’re also correct to point out (as Radde-Gallwitz does elsewhere with regard to Gregory of Nyssa<sup>2</sup>) that these debates were as much about the manner of knowing as they were knowing itself; before the doctrinal matters can be debated the epistemological and methodological issues need to be settled. Basil settles on saying that rather than chasing after curiosity about God’s unknowable substance we should simply follow the instruction to believe that God exists (*AE* 1.14).

A word about the translation itself is in order. As this is the first English translation of this work there is nothing to compare it to, at least not in terms of this writing itself, but when compared to the other works of Basil’s translated into English in, e.g., the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers second series, we can see an obvious updating in language. One needn’t be conversant in the King’s English in order to benefit from reading this translation. It is also unfortunate that I don’t

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), vii. I’m not convinced that this is an either/or proposition; I think that his characterization is both correct and incomplete. Yes, Basil is concerned with positive affirmations for the reasons that Radde-Gallwitz states, but he also hesitates to go beyond revelation and say more than God has said, which is the heart of apophaticism.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, “*Ad Eustathium de sancta trinitate*” in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism* (eds. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus; VCSup 106; Leiden Brill, 2011), 89-109.

have access to the Greek text in order to check samples (not that my analysis would be of much use anyway). Knowing what I know of Radde-Gallwitz's work I'm confident that the translation he and DelCogliano have produced is accurate. They say:

In our translation we have aimed to satisfy two distinct audiences at opposite ends of the reading spectrum. The first is the reader without knowledge of Greek who reads our translation without recourse to the original. The second is the reader who knows Greek and reads our translation while constantly comparing it to the original. For our first reader, we strived to produce English prose that is understandable, idiomatic, and felicitous. We have added explanatory footnotes to help when Basil is murky. For our second reader, we endeavored not to stray into paraphrase so that the words and phrases of our translation could be matched with the Greek on which they are based. Even though our second reader may not always agree with our choices, we believe that he or she will understand them. We hope that the combination of these principles satisfies readers at both ends of the spectrum as well as the majority who fall somewhere between these two extremes.  
(77-78)

As a reader who falls into the first category I can say that I am extremely satisfied. And besides the translation itself, I also enjoy the in-text Scriptural references that line the pages of Basil's treatise and are helpfully indexed in the back of the volume (205-07) along with a general index (199-204). This book would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in (a) Patristic theology, (b) Trinitarian theology, or (c) heresiology.