

“*Spiritus sanctum adoramus*”: The ontology of the Spirit in Theodore of Mopsuestia¹

Michael A.G. Haykin,²

ABSTRACT

The article begins with reference to the creedal declaration of the Council of Constantinople (381). The God of the Scriptures has revealed himself as three co-equal persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who share one divine being to the full. The creed affirms that the Holy Spirit, ought to be worshipped and confessed together with the Father and with the Son. There follows a brief survey of the status of the Spirit from Athanasius in the late 50’s and also Basil of Caesarea in 375 to the precise wording of the pneumatological article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, which was issued in 381. Reference is made to those who opposed this direction of Trinitarian thought, i.e., the Pneumatomachi, later known also as “Macedonians,” who in the 370’s denied the full deity of the Spirit. The article focuses upon Theodore of Mopsuestia (352–428), who produced a number of exegetical and dogmatic works which were preserved among the Churches of the East, in Syriac and other Oriental languages. Theodore’s *Disputation with the Macedonians*, which was the record of a debate between Theodore and some Pneumatomachian bishops held at Anazarbus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia Secunda, is particularly highlighted here. Theodore spoke of the Holy Spirit’s hypostatic existence within the Godhead. While others could affirm that whereas the Son is eternally generated from the Father, the Spirit eternally proceeds from God, Theodore did not employ this description, but simply affirmed the Spirit’s divine nature and left the mode of his distinct existence as a mystery.

¹ The cited phrase is from Theodore of Mopsuestia, Letter to Artemius of Alexandria, which can be found in H.B. Swete, *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880), 2:338. This article was originally a paper given at an online conference, October 30, 2021, part of a series of annual conferences in *The Nicaea 1700 Project—I. Nicaea & its Legacy*, which is being sponsored by The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. For help with various aspects of writing this article, I am indebted to: Drs Lewis Ayres, Matthew R. Crawford, and Roy Paul; Prof Kirk Wellum; David Zhou, Caleb Neel, and Zachariah M. Carter.

² Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin is the Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality and Director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. email mhaykin@sbts.edu.

FIVE KEY WORDS

The deity of the Holy Spirit, Trinitarian thought, Binitarianism, the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit.

According to a survey of American Christianity conducted in 2021 by George Barna with regard to what is meant by the confession that one is a Christian, “58% [of those surveyed] contend that the Holy Spirit is not a real, living being but is merely a symbol of God’s power, presence, or purity.”³ This is a shocking statistic that calls into question much of what passes for Christianity in America. In the broad spectrum of ecclesial traditions, being an authentic Christian surely entails a commitment to the theological orientation that informs the creedal declaration of the Council of Constantinople (381), namely, that the God of the Scriptures has revealed himself as three co-equal persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who share one divine being to the full. Specifically with regard to the Holy Spirit, this creed confesses that he is “Lord and Giver of life,” and as such, he is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and with the Son.⁴

The fourth-century pneumatological landscape

Historically, this creedal statement brought formal closure to a long debate that had been initiated in 318 when the Alexandrian heresiarch Arius (d.336) had denied the full deity of the Son and the Spirit. It was only in the three decades prior to the Council of Constantinople, however, that the ontological status of the Spirit had become a centrepiece of discussion. Athanasius (c.299–373) had to face the issue head-on in the late 350s when his friend Serapion of Thmuis (d. after 362) informed him that there were certain individuals with whom he had contact in the Nile Delta who regarded the Spirit as an angelic being and thus a creature. Athanasius’ exegetically-rich response in three letters to Serapion was the first of a number of treatises written on the subject of the Spirit’s nature in this era.⁵ Not long after, probably in the early 360s, Didymus the Blind (313–

³ George Barna, “American Worldview Inventory 2021: Release #6: What Does It Mean When People Say They Are ‘Christian’?” (https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CRC_AWVI2021_Release06_Digital_01_20210831.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1B6frV93zMO5iVhlnZj5ZfIW5vH91TXCwBneb4EnFNFm5IJprMWb9Qaw; released August 31, 2021, and accessed September 25, 2021).

⁴ On this confession, see Adolf-Martin Ritter, *Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol. Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des II. Ökumenischen Konzils* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).

⁵ For these letters, see C.R.B. Shapland, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1951) or Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres, ed. and trans., *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius’s Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*

398) wrote his book on the Spirit in Alexandria,⁶ and then in 375 the Cappadocian theologian, Basil of Caesarea (c.329–379), penned his *On the Holy Spirit*, the product of a painful break with his one-time mentor Eustathius of Sebaste (c.300–c.377) over the rectitude of the conglorification of the Spirit with the Father and the Son.⁷ This emphasis of Basil’s treatise played a major rôle in shaping the precise wording of the pneumatological article of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, which was issued in 381, two years after Basil’s death.

Opposing this direction of Trinitarian thought were the Pneumatomachi, later known also as “Macedonians,”⁸ who denied the full deity of the Spirit. In the 370s their most prominent leader was the afore-mentioned Eustathius, who had played a major rôle in the development of monasticism in Asia Minor.⁹

and Didymus’s *On the Holy Spirit*, Popular Patristics Series, no.43 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 51–137. For a study of their pneumatology, see also Adolf Laminski, *Der Heilige Geist als Geist Christi und Geist der Gläubigen: Der Beitrag des Athanasios von Alexandrien zur Formulierung des trinitarischen Dogmas im vierten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag GMBH, 1969) and Michael A.G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. XXVII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), *passim*.

⁶ For Didymus the Blind’s *On the Holy Spirit*, see DelCogliano, Radde-Gallwitz, and Ayres, ed. and trans., *Works on the Spirit*, 139–227. For the date, see DelCogliano, Radde-Gallwitz, and Ayres, ed. and trans., *Works on the Spirit*, 37–42. See also Mark DelCogliano, “Basil of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, and the Anti-Pneumatomachian Exegesis of Amos 4:13 and John 1:3,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 61 (2010): 644–658; Lewis Ayres, “The Holy Spirit as the ‘Undiminished Giver’: Didymus the Blind’s *De spiritu sancto* and the development of Nicene pneumatology” in D. Vincent Twomey and Janet E. Rutherford, ed., *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church. The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2008* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 57–72.

⁷ For Basil’s *On the Holy Spirit*, see Stephen Hildebrand, *St Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011). For studies of this treatise, see Hermann Dörries, *De Spiritu Sancto. Der Beitrag des Basiliius zum Abschluß des trinitarischen Dogmas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); J. Verhees, “Die Bedeutung der Transzendenz des Pneuma bei Basiliius,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 25 (1976): 285–302; Pia Luislampe, *Spiritus Vivificans: Grundzüge einer Theologie des Heiligen Geistes nach Basiliius von Caesarea* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1981); Haykin, *Spirit of God*; Hermann Josef Sieben, trans. *Basiliius von Cäsarea: De Spiritu Sancto/Über den Heiligen Geist* (Freiburg; Basle; Vienna: Herder, 1993), 7–70; Volker H. Drecoll, *Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basiliius von Cäsarea. Sein Weg vom Homöusianer zum Neonizäner* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 183–269; 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).

⁸ For a discussion of the term “Macedonian” in this regard, see W.-D. Hauschild, “Die Pneumatomachen: Eine Untersuchung zur Dogmengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts” (Theological dissertation, University of Hamburg. 1967), 236–239.

⁹ On Eustathius and his pneumatology, see especially Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, “Eustathios von Sebaste,” *Theologische Realencyklopädie* 10 (1982): 548–549 and Haykin, *The Spirit of God*, 27, n.86. On Eustathius’ career, see also Jean Gribomont, “Eustathe de Sébaste,” *Dictionnaire*

Eustathius was largely unconcerned about questions of dogma such as the nature and status of Spirit, and it was undoubtedly because he was not a theologian that no written works of his have been transmitted. As Wolf-Dieter Hauschild has described the keynote of his pneumatology: the Holy Spirit was “a charismatic reality primarily to be experienced.”¹⁰ Eustathius appears to have been quite happy to affirm the Nicene Creed as it stood, but he had a deep aversion to expanding it to include a dogmatic assertion with regard to the Spirit. He was, for lack of a better term, committed to a Binitarianism that was hostile to any conglorification of the Spirit with the Father and the Son. His refusal to take a clear position as to the Spirit’s deity is captured by a remark that he reputedly made at a synod in 364 when the question of the Spirit’s ontological status was raised: “I neither choose to name the Holy Spirit God nor dare to call him a creature.”¹¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia (352–428) noted forty or fifty years later that there were still some Pneumatomachi who adhered to this agnosticism about the status of the Spirit, though others openly referred to him as a creature.¹² Indeed, the textual focus of this article, Theodore’s *Disputation with the Macedonians*, makes it patent that controversy about the Spirit’s nature continued for some years beyond the Council of Constantinople.

Being: Theodore of Mopsuestia

Theodore came from a prominent Antiochene family.¹³ He studied with John Chrysostom (c.347–407), initially in Antioch under the famous rhetorician

de Spiritualité IV/2 (1961): 1708–1712; C.A. Frazee, “Anatolian Asceticism in the Fourth Century: Eustathios of Sebastea and Basil of Caesarea,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 66 (1980): 16–33; Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1994), 73–76, 239–245.

¹⁰ Hauschild, “Eustathios von Sebaste,” 548–549.

¹¹ Socrates, *Church History* 2.45.

¹² Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Nicene Creed* 9: “it is only men of ill will who ... call the Holy Spirit a servant or a creature, while some others amongst them although refraining from these words yet refuse to call him God” (A. Mingana, ed. and trans. *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies, vol.5 [Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1932], 100).

¹³ For the life, writings, and thought of Theodore, see especially H.B. Swete, “Theodorus (26), bishop of Mopsuestia” in William Smith and Henry Wace, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines* (London: John Murray, 1887), 4:934–948; F. Loofs, “Theodore of Mopsuestia” in Samuel Macauley Jackson et al., ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (1911, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), 11:320–322; R. Devreesse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948); Rowan A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian* (London: The Faith Press, 1961); R.A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); Joanne McWilliam Dewart, *The Theology of Grace in Theodore of Mopsuestia*, The Catholic University of America Studies in

Libanius (c.314–392) from 366 to around 370, and then later in a monastic school presided over by the biblical exegete Diodore of Tarsus (d. before 394). Theodore entered this school in 370 or 371. Seven or eight years later, when Diodore was elected bishop of Tarsus in 378, Theodore appears to have assumed the direction of the school. He was ordained a presbyter in 383 by Flavian of Antioch and he probably spent the late 380s in Tarsus with his mentor Diodore.

By the time that Theodore was appointed bishop of Mopsuestia in 392, he had written a number of theological treatises, including his *On the Incarnation*, which was a significant expression of Antiochene Christology. Over the next thirty-six years, till his death in 428, Theodore poured forth a veritable stream of exegetical and dogmatic works, which led H.B. Swete to rightly describe him as “the great Antiochene Interpreter” of Scripture.¹⁴ In fact, so prominent a theologian and Bible commentator did Theodore become during his lifetime and in the years immediately following that there were many in the Eastern Mediterranean who asserted their orthodoxy by simply saying, as Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) later reported, “We believe as Theodore.”¹⁵

Christian Antiquity, no.16 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1971), 3–17; Simon Gerber, *Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicänum: Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, vol. LI (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000); Frederick G. McLeod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

For the monastic setting of Theodore’s study under Diodore, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 18–20. John T. Fitzgerald has an extremely helpful overview of Theodore’s life and writings in his “Theodore of Mopsuestia on Paul’s Letter to Philemon” in D. Francois Tolmie with Alfred Friedl, *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 333–345. For ancient expressions of esteem for Theodore, see also A. Mingana, ed. and trans. *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies, vol.5 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1932), 1–5.

See also the valuable reviews of Devreesse’s work by G.W.H. Lampe, “Reviews: *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* by Robert Devreesse,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 199/200 (July/October 1949): 224–227; Ernest Honigmann, “Robert Devreesse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste*,” *Traditio* 7 (1949–1951): 478–480; John L. McKenzie, “A New Study of Theodore of Mopsuestia,” *Theological Studies* 10 (1949): 394–408; Francis A. Sullivan, “Some Reactions to Devreesse’s New Study of Theodore of Mopsuestia,” *Theological Studies* 12 (1951): 179–207.

For the chronology of Theodore’s early life, I have relied upon Robert E. Carter, “Chrysostom’s *Ad Theodorum Lapsus* and the Early Chronology of Theodore of Mopsuestia,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 16 (1962): 87–101 and Fitzgerald, “Theodore of Mopsuestia on Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” 333–337.

¹⁴ H.B. Swete, *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880), 1:x.

¹⁵ πιστεύομεν ὡς Θεόδωρος; Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter* 69 (PG 77.340C). Theodoret of Cyrhus remembered Theodore as a “teacher of the whole church, who excelled in the fight against every heretical phalanx” (*Church History* 5.39 [PG 82.1277A]).

However, owing to Theodore's supposed links to Nestorianism and his subsequent condemnation during the reign of Justinian I (482–565), virtually none of his works have survived in their original Greek. Thankfully, they found, in Swete's words, a "shelter and an eager acceptance" among the Churches of the East, "who at an early date translated them into Syriac and other Oriental languages."¹⁶ Among these theological works was Theodore's *Disputation with the Macedonians*, which was the record of a debate between Theodore and some Pneumatomachian bishops held at Anazarbus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia Secunda, around the year 392. It is probable that Theodore was asked to present the biblical case for the full deity of the Spirit at this colloquy because of his growing renown as a theologian. Initially, the Pneumatomachian bishops were reluctant to participate since Theodore was not a bishop but only an elder. Arrangements to have Theodore ordained bishop of Mopsuestia, which was around twenty miles south and west of Anazarbus, were soon afoot. Theodore kept detailed notes of his debate with the Pneumatomachi and published them some years later at the request of Patrophilus, bishop of Aegae, a maritime town also in Cilicia. This Greek text was later translated into Syriac and has been preserved in a single Syriac manuscript housed in the British Museum.¹⁷

The Pneumatomachi at Anazarbus

Following the Council of Constantinople, legislation had been passed by the government of Theodosius I that proscribed a list of heresies, including that of the Pneumatomachi, forbidding them to assemble, construct churches, or ordain ministers.¹⁸ Theodore's treatise thus provides for us, in the words of Matthew R. Crawford, "a rare glimpse into the fate of the Macedonians following the Council of Constantinople in 381."¹⁹ Moreover, as a record of a public disputation about the nature of the Godhead after the Theodosian legislation, it implies that the implementation of these laws allowed room for such debates. Theodore had to

¹⁶ Swete, *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii*, 1:x. For a discussion of one key pathway of the transmission of Theodore's works, see Ute Possek, "Transmitting Theodore to the Church of the East: The Contribution of Thomas of Edessa," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 71, no.4 (October 2020): 712–737.

¹⁷ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Une controverse avec les Macédoniens*, ed. and trans. F. Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 9 (1913, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1983), 635. Patrophilus may well be the same figure who had been a correspondent of Basil of Caesarea (c.329–379). See F. Nau, "Introduction" to Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Une controverse avec les Macédoniens*, 635, n.2.

¹⁸ *Codex Theodosianus* 16.5.11–13.

¹⁹ Matthew R. Crawford, "Introduction" to his and Lewis Ayres' translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Dispute with the Macedonians* in Lewis Ayres and Mark DelCogliano, ed., *Varieties of Nicene Theology in East and West (AD 360–420)*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

convince his audience, the residents of Anazarbus, of the rectitude of pro-Nicene pneumatology, which in turn would reinforce the imperial legislation.²⁰

The Anazarbus Pneumatomachi did not have a church building but met in house churches, as Christians had done prior to the Constantinian revolution.²¹ Once Theodore had been ordained bishop, the Pneumatomachi appear to have been eager for a debate in the capital of Cilicia Secunda. Theodore recalled them coming to the discussion, filled with pride, confident that “everyone gathered together agreed with them,” since up to the time of the debate they had been spreading their views in the city.²²

They began by telling Theodore in no uncertain terms that they rejected the idea that the Holy Spirit is God.²³ In talking about the Spirit, they were happy to identify him by a Johannine epithet: he is the “Comforter.”²⁴ A further objection that they had to Theodore’s position concerned the origin of the Spirit. At some point in the debate they posed the question to the bishop of Mopsuestia, “How is he from God?”²⁵ In their minds, there were only two modes of existence within the Godhead: that of fatherhood and that of sonship. As they told Theodore, “If he [that is, the Spirit] is divine by nature, then he would also by all means be the Son of God.”²⁶ In other words, they appear to have been Binitarians like Basil of Caesarea’s opponent, Eustathius of Sebaste.²⁷ If the Spirit were God, what then is his relationship to the Father? Is he another Son? Both the Anazarbus Pneumatomachi and Theodore rejected this possibility as foolish talk, which, in the minds of the former, must mean the Spirit is not to be enumerated as divine with the Father and the Son.²⁸ Theodore, though, was convinced otherwise and that because of a number of pneumatological texts from the New Testament, one

²⁰ Crawford, “Introduction” to his and Ayres’ translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Dispute with the Macedonians* in Ayres and DelCogliano, ed., *Varieties of Nicene Theology in East and West*.

²¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 2. I am deeply indebted to Profs Lewis Ayres and Matthew R. Crawford for the use of their translation of this text in Ayres and Mark DelCogliano, ed., *Varieties of Nicene Theology in East and West*.

²² Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 3.

²³ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 3.

²⁴ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 3. See John 14:16, for example, which was cited in the debate.

²⁵ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 11 and 17.

²⁶ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 18.

²⁷ For this position of the Pneumatomachi, see Basil of Caesarea, *Homily 24* (PG 31.600A–617B), which Basil drew up between 373 and 375

²⁸ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 18.

of which, 1 Corinthians 2:10–12, was especially central to his defence of the Spirit’s divinity.

“The Spirit who is from God”

Beyond these Pneumatomachian assertions Theodore did not record anything further that was said by his opponents at Anazarbus.²⁹ What he recorded of his own words began with the affirmation of the uniqueness of the Spirit’s being. He is unique in his holiness, for he is holy by nature, while all other beings receive their “holiness through communion with presence of God.”³⁰ And since the Holy Spirit is “naturally holy,” he is “alone numbered with the Father and with the Son.”³¹ Theodore insisted on the Spirit’s unique deity, he asserted, because he had learned this from the tradition that Christ had “delivered to the Apostles through instruction and baptism” as well as from a study of Holy Scripture, which he described as the “words that are defining for all things.”³² The Pneumatomachian bishops may well have responded to this claim by asking him what particular Scriptures taught the Spirit’s deity.

Theodore began by insisting that all creatures are from God in the sense that they are called “from non-existence to existence” by divine fiat.³³ The Pauline texts of 1 Corinthians 11:12 (“everything is from God”) and 8:6 (“there is one God, the Father from whom are all things”) clearly affirmed this. By contrast, the Spirit of God “exists eternally.”³⁴ Theodore thus argued, the Spirit’s being “from God” is qualitatively different from that of the creatures’ being “from God.” To prove his point Theodore turned to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:12: “We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.” Theodore saw a distinction in this verse between the world and God. The world is the entirety of the created realm and any “spirit of the world” is by definition, then, a created being. But the Holy Spirit, Theodore argued, is from God, that is “from his nature,” and this entails a necessary ontological difference with all that is

²⁹ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 2.

³⁰ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 4.

³¹ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 5.

³² Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 6.

³³ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 9.

³⁴ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 10. It is noteworthy that 1 Corinthians 11:12 was a proof-text in the arsenal of the Pneumatomachi for the Spirit not being divine. See, for example, Basil of Caesarea, *Homily 24.7* (PG 31.616B): “If the Spirit is from God (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ), with what right do you place him among the creatures? By no means produce that [text of Scripture]: ‘all things are from God’.” See further the discussion in Michael G.A. Haykin, “‘A Sense of Awe in the Presence of the Ineffable’: I Cor. 2.11–12 in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 341–357.

from the world.³⁵ Indeed, Paul’s words here in 1 Corinthians 2:12 imply nothing less than “the majesty of the Holy Spirit,” whose “grandeur” is such that he is “greatly exalted above the spirits of the world.”³⁶ Theodore’s exegesis of this Pauline text is identical to that of Athanasius in his *Letters to Serapion*: both theologians employ the verse to demonstrate that the Spirit is not a creature.³⁷ For Athanasius, 1 Corinthians 2:12 is one of a number of biblical passages that he uses to uphold the Spirit’s deity. Theodore, though, makes this verse absolutely central to his case against the Anazarbus Pneumatomachi. In some ways, the debate with the Pneumatomachi was about the interpretation of this one Pauline verse. As Matthew Crawford notes, “it was Paul ... who gave the definitive proof-text of the Spirit’s deity and relationship with the Father.”³⁸

The Pneumatomachi pressed Theodore to explain exactly how the Holy Spirit is “from God.” To Theodore, such a query could only mean that his theological opponents had abandoned a posture of humbly listening to the Scriptures, which clearly taught that the recognition of the ultimate incomprehensibility of God is fundamental to proper thinking about him. 1 Corinthians 13:12, where Paul said, “For now I know partially, but then I will know as I am known,” was clear proof to Theodore that Paul was aware of the limitations of human knowledge. And in the Old Testament, Theodore maintained that David was convinced of the same, for as he stated in Psalm 139:6, “Knowledge of you surpasses me.”³⁹

The bishop of Mopsuestia then gave a number of biblical examples in support of his affirmation of divine incomprehensibility. For example, do not Christians affirm their faith in the resurrection of the body, but who among them can explain exactly how that is going to take place?⁴⁰ Moreover, Theodore argued:

How many things were there that occurred during the economy of our Lord in the flesh, which we accept and confess in this manner? And if someone should ask us about each of those things that happened, we are unable to say in what way it occurred. Consider, for example, that the leper was cleansed because our Lord simply said to him, “I will it, be cleansed” [Matthew 8:3]. Or that Lazarus arose when he said, “Lazarus, come out!” [John 11:43]. Or that the eyes of the

³⁵ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 9–10.

³⁶ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 10.

³⁷ Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion* 1.22.1–2; 2.10.3; 2.11.2. On these passages, see also Haykin, *Spirit of God*, 77–83.

³⁸ Crawford, “Introduction” to his and Ayres’ translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Dispute with the Macedonians* in Ayres and DelCogliano, ed., *Varieties of Nicene Theology in East and West*.

³⁹ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 11–13.

⁴⁰ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 14.

blind were opened because he merely smeared clay upon them. Or the fact that with five loaves he nourished five thousand. Or that, while the doors were closed he went in to the disciples. For we are unable to say how the body of the leper received an entire transformation, nor how the body of Lazarus, after being dissolved and corrupted, returned again to life, nor how from five loaves alone all those pieces were multiplied.⁴¹

Such examples from Scripture reveal distinct limits to what human beings can know about divine activity and thus Theodore had to conclude:

How is it not folly that we should ask, only for the Holy Spirit, in what manner he is from God? Even though we argue that Scripture clearly affirms about him *that* he is from God, we are unable to say *how* he is from God. For the manner of his being is so far above explanation that we are not even able to speak of the manner of his working, though we are persuaded that he works constantly. ... Who, therefore, is so foolish as to entertain a thought such as this, that they ask us how the Spirit is from God, seeking to make the truth of the matter void if we are unable to say in what way he is from God.⁴²

If Christians are in the dark to some degree about the Spirit's activities, it was only natural to admit ignorance regarding certain details of his being. As Theodore said later in the discussion, "we avoid inquiring into how he [i.e. the Spirit] is from God."⁴³

It must have been at this point in the discussion that the Pneumatomachi posed what they, and Theodore, regarded as a ridiculous alternative: if the Spirit be divine, then he must relate to God the Father as another Son.⁴⁴ For the Pneumatomachi, there were only two modes of divine hypostatic existence that were conceivable: fatherhood and sonship. Since it was manifestly silly to regard the Spirit's relationship to God as one of sonship, they concluded that the Spirit must be regarded as a created being. Theodore's response to this argument was subtle. He insisted that not "everything that is from the nature of something else ought to be called its 'son'."⁴⁵ For instance, Eve was created from Adam—Theodore described her as being "consubstantial with him"—yet it was manifestly wrong to call her Adam's son.⁴⁶ Theodore thus confessed to being untroubled by the statement that "the Spirit is from God naturally," as he did not think "it was impossible for something to come from another nature but not be a

⁴¹ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 15.

⁴² Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 16, 17.

⁴³ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 21.

⁴⁴ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 18.

⁴⁵ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 18.

⁴⁶ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 19.

son.” Of course, he hastened to add, the Spirit is “from the same nature” as God. He is “united to him in an equality of nature.”⁴⁷ As 1 Corinthians 2:10–11 indicated, the Spirit “searches everything, even the deep things of God” and has a relationship with God that can be likened to that of a human being and his spirit: even as the latter are inseparable, so are God and his Spirit.⁴⁸

In the final sections of this treatise Theodore reiterated his conviction that he had drawn from 1 Corinthians 2:12 that the Holy Spirit, since he is the Spirit of God, is:

One who in no way is proper to the world, since he has no beginning to existence. Indeed, it is believed that he is from God in a relation that is exalted above those, that is, he is from the nature of God, and it is for this reason that he alone is called his own Spirit. This kind of relationship which the Spirit has with God does not belong to any of the spirits of the world. For all of them had a beginning to their existence, in that when they did not exist they came into existence, and for this very reason we believe that they are part of the world. Therefore, not a single one of them is said to be proper to God in distinction from their fellows, in a unique and preeminent relation in which they are said to exist.⁴⁹

Concluding note

At the very close of the debate as recorded in his treatise, Theodore mentioned the verse that Athanasius and the Cappadocians had employed to speak of the Holy Spirit’s hypostatic existence within the Godhead, namely, John 15:26, “When the Comforter comes, he whom I will send to you from the presence of my Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the presence of my Father.” For Athanasius and the Cappadocians, this verse provided them a way to explain in part the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God: whereas the Son is eternally generated from the Father, the Spirit eternally proceeds from God. This description of the Spirit’s mode of existence was enshrined in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed when it declared the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” But Theodore did not employ this description. He was content to simply

⁴⁷ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 20, 22.

⁴⁸ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 23.

⁴⁹ Theodore, *Disputation with the Macedonians* 23. In the following section, Theodore again stated his conviction that when Paul says, “ ‘We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God,’ he does not allow absolutely any communion to exist between the creation and the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit is separated from the whole creation, since it is known that he is from God naturally” (*Disputation with the Macedonians* 24).

affirm the Spirit's divine nature and leave the mode of his distinct existence as a mystery.

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