Gregory of Nazianzus: How the Church Formulates Doctrine

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Gregory of Nazianzus believed that the church can formulate doctrine when the Spirit guides its leaders to a doctrinal consensus. This article contributes to the theme of Reformed catholicity by examining one model whereby the church has learned to unite through diverse conflicts, and suggesting specific ways in which the Western church can appropriate this ancient wisdom.

Introduction

In the early church, the title of theologian fell upon those who knew and experienced God.[1] Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, received the honorific title, 'The Theologian,' because he encountered God in Christ.[2] As his life and writings demonstrated, Gregory's intimate knowledge of God qualified him to speak about God theologically, that is, doctrinally. Truly, Gregory injects doctrinal expressions throughout his sermons and writings wherein the church recognised his 'Theological' pedigree. For instance, Gregory's famous *Five Theological Orations* detail an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, while his two letters to Cledonius depict an accurate doctrine of Christ's dual nature. Doctrinal formulation coursed through Gregory's writings.

Yet Gregory criticises his opponents for creating doctrine, as if to say, that doctrinal formulation constitutes a grievous endeavour. For instance, Gregory opens his letter to Cledonius, a fellow-presbyter who acted as Gregory's locum at his home church in Nazianzus,[3] by writing, 'We want to learn what the piece of novelty going round the church is'

[1] Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 63, 112–3.

[2] Andrew Hofer, *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2–3.

[3] Neil McLynn, 'The Tax Man and the Theologian: Gregory, Hellenius, and the Monks of Nazianzus,' in *Re-Reading Gregory of Nazianzus: Essays on History, Theology, and Culture*, ed. Christopher A. Beeley (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 183, n. 26.

(*Ep.* 101.2).[4] Gregory writes more explicitly later that 'Prior to judgment it is dangerous to make any innovation at all, especially in so important a matter involving such important issues' (*Ep.* 101.15). The important issue to which Gregory refers is Apollinarianism, a teaching that God the Son assumed the flesh of Christ through incarnation but not the mind of Christ. The subtext behind Gregory's words seems to be that Apollinarian doctrine is novel and therefore suspect.

However, when one reads the writings of Gregory, including the letter to Cledonius, one gets the distinct impression that Gregory formulates fresh doctrinal conclusions throughout. How, then, can Gregory criticise novel theological arguments, while doing the same himself?

This work, in part, seeks to answer that question. More precisely, it will answer the question, 'How does Gregory believe that the Church should formulate doctrine in his letters to Cledonius?,' in order to ascertain how the early church created orthodox doctrine and to suggest a model for contemporary theological formulation.

I will argue that Gregory believes that the church can formulate doctrine when the Spirit guides its leaders to a doctrinal consensus, because (1) Gregory rejects doctrinal innovation by individuals (*Ep.* 101.1, *5*), (2) reveres councils for orthodox belief (*Ep.* 101.3; *Ep. 102*), (3) writes that a valid 'third testament' involves the Spirit's grace (*Ep.* 101.16), and (4) refers to the Spirit's unique role in the church in other places (e.g. *Or.* 31:26–27). The first two proofs establish Gregory's aversion to individual doctrinal formulation and respect for ecumenical councils. The second two proofs tease out Gregory's understanding of the Spirit's revelatory role within the church, and by implication, conciliar settings.

My method is simply to read Gregory's two letters to Cledonius, exegete key portions within them, and compare Gregory's conclusions with other key texts (e.g. *Or.* 31). Because my focus is on Gregory's letters to Cledonius, my conclusion is a representative understanding of how the early church forged doctrine. Lastly, I will suggest ways that the contemporary western church can learn from Gregory's view of doctrinal formulation.

[4] Unless otherwise noted, I use the following translation throughout. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

1. Gregory's Eschewal of Doctrinal Innovation

Gregory rejects individual interpretation of Scripture, because it fails to come by way of the church's judgment. When Gregory writes to Cledonius about Apollinarian influences at Nazianzus, he repeatedly critiques his opponents view by highlighting their novelty (e.g., *Ep*. 101.1, 5, 15, 16). The novel issue that concerned Gregory revolved around the nature of Christ. The Apollinarians argued that God the Son assumed a human body that had no human mind.[5] The deity of Christ then constitutes the mind of Jesus. In short, Jesus had the mind of God and the body of a man.

Gregory responds to the Apollinarian position by cleaving to traditional orthodoxy and leaving novel Apollinarian doctrine. Gregory denies that Apollinarius had received a stamp of approval from orthodox councils (*Ep*. 101.3). Additionally, he cites what one may presume is an orthodox statement of Christ's nature, which may be why he uses the first person plural pronoun, 'we':

> For we do not part the human being from the Godhead; no, we affirm and teach one and the same God and Son, at first not man but alone and pre-eternal, unmixed with body and all that belongs to the body, but finally human being too, assumed for our salvation, the same passible in flesh, impassible in Godhead, bounded in body, boundless in spirit, earthly and heavenly, visible and known spiritually, finite and infinite: so that by the same, whole man and God, the whole human being fallen under sin might be fashioned anew. (*Ep*. 101.4)

Gregory's language 'assumed for our salvation' so that 'the whole human being…might be fashioned anew' signals that rather than an 'ivory tower' issue, orthodox doctrine of Christ's nature either ensures or impedes a person's salvation.[6]

Indeed, Gregory's fervent fealty to orthodox belief is tantamount to defending the Gospel of salvation. After all, reasons Gregory, how can the mind be saved if God in Christ only assumed the flesh of a human but not the mind? Gregory states the problem pithily: 'The unassumed is the unhealed, but what is united with God is also being saved. Had

[5] Christopher A. Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 177.

[6] Referring to *Ep*. 101, Hofer writes, 'Gregory's teaching in controversial writing is intensely personal, reflecting matters of salvation for his own life, and especially his own mind.' See Hofer, *Christ in the Life*, 125.

half of Adam fallen, what was assumed and is being saved would have been half too; but if the whole fell he is united to the whole of what was born and is being saved wholly' (*Ep*. 101.5). Put another way, what God does not assume in the incarnation (the mind) cannot be saved. The Apollinarian innovation concerning the two natures of Christ not only is wrong, according to Gregory, but it sabotages salvation.

Gregory's critique of innovative doctrine slips into a miry problem. He appears to propose an innovative doctrinal formulation when he counters the Apollinarian position, explaining how the two natures of Christ relate: 'So keep the human being whole and mix in (μίξον) the Godhead, so that you may benefit me completely' (*Ep*. 101.6). Earlier Gregory picks up the idea of 'mixing in' in the Godhead with humanity when he speaks of a 'blending' (κιρναμὲνων) of two natures (*Ep*. 101.5). If one replied that the human body has no room for two natures mixed in together, Gregory responds, then that person is looking at the issue from a bodily point of view: 'But if you are looking at them as things ideal and incorporeal, notice that I myself have had room for soul, reason and mind, and the Holy Spirit as well, and that before me the cosmos, his structure, I mean, of visible and invisible had room for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (*Ep*. 101.6). For Gregory, the way in which the two natures blended together occurred incorporeally, meaning that both natures could occupy the same place. His explanation sounds quite innovative.

Furthermore, Gregory's explanation of Christ's blended nature may have its origin in philosophical teachings about the nature of mixing. Mixture language was commonplace, for example, in the philosophy of Stoicism. Yet the fullest understanding of how objects mix together emerges in the writings of Aristotle. Hofer summarises:

> Mixture, for Aristotle, thus results from things that are reciprocally susceptible and readily adaptable, or divisible, in shape. Such things mix without having been destroyed, and without enduring unaltered. In short, 'mixture is the union of things mixable, which have been altered.'[7]

Gregory certainly knew Greek philosophy,[8] and so he could easily have pilfered philosophical categories of 'mixing' to define how the divine and human nature of Christ commune with each other. One might conclude that Gregory's blending of Christ's humanity and deity meant

[7] Hofer, *Christ in the Life*, 99.

[8] John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 57–8.

a 'union of things mixable, which have been altered.' Thus, Gregory may have mixed Aristotle with Christian theology, introducing a novel theological construct.

If true, Gregory's argument unlocks creativity and enters into a room of contradiction; condemning churchless novelty, he creatively clarifies Christ's dual nature. The case for his inconsistency strengthens when one observes that the council of Chalcedon (451), about fifty years after Gregory wrote, condemned the language of 'mixture' (κρᾶσιν) when referring to Christ's dual nature: '[the saving creed] stands opposed to those who imagine a mixture (κρᾶσιν) or confusion between the two natures of Christ.'[9] Consider how Gregory argued that in Christ the Godhead mixes in (μίξον) and blends (κιρναμὲνων) with his humanity.

One cannot escape the difficulty by citing the difference between Gregory and the Council of Chalcedon's wording. Gregory uses the terms μίξον from μίξις and κιρναμὲνων from κιρνάω. The former refers to a mixing or mingling, which often refers to commercial or sexual activity.[10] The latter term refers to mixing wine with water or perhaps of a metal alloy.[11] The creed uses the term κρᾶσιν from κρᾶσις, and it too refers to mixing of, for example, wine and water.[12] Thus, Gregory's language of mixing Christ's nature communicates the same idea that Chalcedon condemns. Moreover, Gregory uses κρᾶσιν in *Oration* 38.13 to describe Christ's dual nature, the very term that Chalcedon condemns: 'Oh, the new blend (μίξεως)! Oh, the incredible mixture (κράσεως)!'[13]

But the tension between Gregory's inventive language and his insistence that orthodox doctrine shuns innovative theology eases when we take a closer look at his argument. First, Gregory's argument bespeaks scriptural and traditional foundations. For example, Gregory speaks of Christ's blending of deity and humanity after citing Scripture: 1 Corinthians, John and Ephesians (*Ep*. 101.5). Additionally, Nazianzen makes much of Christ's bodily resurrection and return, to demonstrate how Jesus can exist now as incorporeal God and corporeal man (*Ep*. 101.5). Gregory writes in this way, in order to 'correct innovation' (*Ep*. 101.5). Not only does Gregory believe his teaching accords with Christian

[9] Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 85–6.

[10] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Digital edition (Irvine, CA: University of California, 2005), μίξις, 1136, http://www.tlg.uci.edu/lsj/.

[11] LSJ, κιρνάω, 953.

[12] LSJ, κρᾶσις, 990.

[13] My translation of: Ὢ τῆς καινῆς μίξεως! ὢ τῆς παραδόξου κράσεως! See *PG*, *Or.* 38.13.

Scripture, but also he also claims his teaching accords with Nicaean orthodoxy against the novel teaching of Apollinarius (*Ep*. 101.3).

Second, the Chalcedonian Creed itself explains that it aims to correct the teaching of Nestorius,[14] while it affirms what Gregory affirms about the nature of Christ. Actually, the council of Chalcedon first bestowed upon Gregory the title, 'the Theologian!'[15] Except for the terminology of 'mixing' or 'blending,' the Chalcedonian Creed could be said to follow Gregory's explanation of Christ's dual nature. To cite one such example, the creed declares that Christ is 'the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body.'[16] Gregory too affirms that the full deity and humanity coalesce into one being without a diminution of either nature. Hence, Gregory argues so forcefully that Christ contains both the mind of deity and man throughout his letters to Cledonius.

What may seem novel in Gregory, therefore, is simply a fresh exposition of a traditional and scriptural truth: Jesus is fully God and fully man. In summary, then, Gregory believes that the Spirit-led church can formulate doctrine based on a consensus, in part, because he criticises novel and individualistic doctrinal formulation. Instead, Gregory freshly states truth confirmed by, as we shall see, earlier Spirit-filled consensuses, that is, church councils.

2. Gregory's Reverence for Councils

According to Gregory, the Spirit photosynthesises godly leaders with spiritual light to produce fresh doctrinal air. Put another way, Gregory reveres councils because the Spirit leads the church to ratify doctrine at them. Three lines of thought cumulatively prove this argument: Gregory reveres councils beyond measure, couples orthodox faith to conciliar doctrine, and may esteem councils so, because the Spirit energises conciliar doctrinal statements, as Basil, Gregory's friend, affirms.

First, Gregory revered ecumenical councils beyond measure. In his second letter to Cledonius, Nazianzen writes, '[W]e cannot esteem, and never have esteemed anything more highly than the Creed of the holy fathers assembled at Nicaea' (*Ep*. 102.1).

Second, Gregory solders orthodox belief to an affirmation of an orthodox creed, sourced in Scripture and powered by the Spirit. For

[14] Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:85.
[15] Beeley, *The Unity of Christ*, 183.
[16] Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:86.

instance, while commentating on the Apollinarians' claim to be accepted by the universal church, Gregory writes:

> If the Apollinarians indeed were accepted, either just now or in the past, they are to prove the fact and we shall acquiesce. Clearly they will have agreed with orthodox belief: their success will have been entirely contingent on so doing. But they must demonstrate the fact either by a decree of the council or by letters of the communion: that is the rule of councils. (*Ep.* 101.3)

A primary measure for doctrinal orthodoxy is agreement with ecclesial councils and affirmation from orthodox communities. To formulate doctrine without consulting a council's decision is like charging across no-man's-land without artillery fire. The attack will flounder miserably, and so will the doctrinal formulation.

Yet the conciliar doctrine test blooms because of its biblical and spiritual seedbed. One way we can observe this seedbed is by considering how the councils of Chalcedon (451) and Ephesus (431) understand the role of doctrinal formulation. The Council of Chalcedon highlights the scriptural foundation supporting the Council of Constantinople (381) in this way: 150 saintly fathers were 'clarifying their ideas about the holy Spirit by the use of scriptural testimonies against those who were trying to do away with his sovereignty.'[17] As for the spiritual force behind conciliar doctrine, the canons of the Council of Ephesus record: 'It is not permitted to produce or write or compose any other creed except the one which was defined by the holy fathers who were gathered together in the holy Spirit at Nicaea.'[18] Although the Council of Ephesus convened about forty years after Gregory's death, it certainly represents the same reverence Gregory had for the council of Nicaea. Notice too, that the canons affirm that the fathers gathered 'in the holy Spirit.' Gregory's ecclesial milieu, thus, admired councils and adduced that Scripture and Spirit energise doctrine, forcing readers to consider how Gregory yokes these two ideas together.

Like his ecclesial milieu, Gregory emphasises Spirit and Scripture to buttress his doctrinal position: 'even we have some reputation for fearing God, for laboring on behalf of the Word and for having benefitted the church' (*Ep.* 101.2). In another place, Gregory fortifies his doctrinal authority by noting that 'we too think we have God's Spirit, if, indeed, the Spirit's grace and not human innovation is involved' (*Ep.* 101.16). A

[17] Tanner, 1:85.
[18] Tanner, 1:65.

common element in Gregory's words is that Spirit and Scripture empower doctrine. Gregory's attention to Scripture and Spirit, then, suggest that he would agree with conciliar testimony that Scripture and Spirit stand behind doctrinal creeds. When Gregory fuses orthodox faith to orthodox creed, the creed represents a scripturally sourced and spiritually stamped doctrinal statement. This may be why, according to Gregory, orthodox faith embraces conciliar creeds.

Third, Gregory's friend, teacher, and co-minister, Basil of Caesarea, views the council of Nicaea as inspired, which may clarify how Gregory synthesised Spirit with council as means of formulating doctrine. In *Letter* 114, Basil writes to a certain Cyriacus to encourage him to affirm belief in the orthodox faith:

> I am personally convinced that the following conditions are not opposed to your beliefs and are sufficient to give full assurance to the brothers of whom I have just spoken: that you confess the faith which was set forth by our Fathers at Nicaea, and that you reject none of its statements, keeping in mind that the three hundred and eighteen, who came together without contention, did not speak without the action [ἐνέργεια] of the Holy Spirit.[19]

Basil reveres the doctrinal affirmation from Nicaea to the extent that he views it as a Spirit-inspired confession. Michael Haykin comments, 'The remark that those who composed the creed of Nicaea were inspired by the Holy Spirit reinforces Basil's insistence that Cyriacus and his friends omit none of the propositions of the Nicene creed.'[20] Consider how Basil asserts that the Holy Spirit energised the Fathers at Nicaea without the need to defend the statement. If such a view were not common, then Basil would surely have defended the claim. Yet instead of defending the claim, Basil insists that Cyriacus adhere to the inspired creed.

Basil, therefore, may provide a lens through which we can see Gregory's reverence of ecclesial councils: the Spirit's energising power ratifies doctrine through a community of spirit-filled interpreters. After all, Gregory did say of Basil, 'I regard you as a guide for life, and teacher of doctrine; and whatever good things may have been said, I have considered

[19] Michael A. G. Haykin, 'And Who Is the Spirit? Basil of Caesarea's Letters to the Church at Tarsus,' *VC* 41 (1987): 380.
[20] Haykin, 'And Who Is the Spirit?': 380.

them from the beginning and continue to regard them in the present.'[21] Indeed, Basil led Gregory into a bishopric and into the monastic lifestyle, and his personal correspondence with Gregory evinces regular theological dialogue. Additionally, along with Basil's brother, Gregory Nyssen, the three are collectively called the Cappadocian Fathers, no doubt, in part, because of their close kinship. Hence, good reasons exist to use Basil's explicit language about the Spirit's role in councils to illuminate the assumptions behind Gregory's reverence for them. Put more formally, if the council's inspiration was an assumed fact in Basil's mind, the council's Spirit-led pedigree may have been likewise a given fact to Gregory.

In summary, even if Gregory did not share Basil's precise view, he nevertheless extols Nicaea as the bar for orthodox belief and reveres the council to a high degree. It is impossible to write off the notion, therefore, that he fundamentally conceived of the Spirit as an energising force behind ecclesial councils. Yet establishing Gregory's reverence for conciliar doctrine and respect for the Spirit leaves open the question of how precisely the Spirit works in this process. To answer that question, the following looks at Gregory's broader understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in the church age.

3. The Spirit's Third Testament

For Gregory, the Spirit reveals theological truth through psalms, songs and treatises. These theological texts are hatched by Spirit-illumined individuals, yet an individual's doctrine grows from chick to hen only when spiritual leaders affirm it at, for example, an ecclesial council. Gregory's eschewal of individual innovation and reverence for councils has already shown the need for a believing community to affirm doctrine. But the Spirit's illuminating role to the believing community remains undiscovered country. To discover this new world, we turn to Gregory's explanation of how the Spirit is lamp unto church's feet. In the first place, Gregory claims that orthodox theological endeavors constitute a third testament, suggesting that a spiritual force propels doctrinal formulation.

[21] *PG, Ep.* 58.65–6 (my translation). McGuckin has noted how Gregory's word choice here aimed to deconstruct Basil's softer views on the Spirit's deity. See McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, xxi. Nonetheless, this fact does not mean Gregory lied or misled Basil. Indeed, Basil corresponded with Gregory throughout their lives, appointed Gregory as a bishop, and even persuaded Gregory to partake in a monastic lifestyle. Basil was, in a real sense, Gregory's teacher.

In a final exhortation against Apollinarianism, a group generating many writings and songs, Gregory remarks:

> But if the third testament is to be long treatises, modern psalters singing in opposition to David, and metrical gratification, we too will write psalms, and in quantity, and will versify, since we too think we have God's Spirit, if, indeed, the Spirit's grace and not human innovation is involved. (*Ep.* 101.16)

Although polemical in purpose, one gets the impression that Gregory believes his work and other orthodox psalms and treatises derive from the Spirit's guidance, and that these works constitute a kind of third testament.

In other words, the Spirit works in and through the church to reveal truth to it. When Gregory along with other orthodox writers (note the 'we') write, they can formulate doctrinal truth without 'human innovation.' Indeed, this is because 'we have God's Spirit.' The implication being that Spirit-led doctrinal formulation stands opposed to non-Spirit led interpretation, which is tantamount to human innovation.[22] The Spirit, then, plays a vital role in Gregory's conception of how one may express doctrine. One may infer, then, that the Spirit's guidance is a basic presupposition behind Gregory's fidelity to the creeds, which Spirit-filled men formulated.

Along this argument, lies an ice patch, threatening to propel it off-road. Wickham's translation of *Epistle* 101.16 differs substantially from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers'* (*NPNF)* translation of it. *NPNF* gives the sense that Gregory does not see his work on behalf of the church as a kind of third testament. Compare *NPNF* with its source material in the Migne collection:

> But if their long books, and their new Psalters, contrary to that of David, and the grace of their metres, are taken for a third Testament, we too will compose Psalms, and will write much in metre. For we also think we have the spirit of God, if indeed this is a gift of the Spirit, and not a human novelty. This I will that thou declare publicly, that we may not be

[22] In *Ep.* 101:11, for example, Gregory clearly draws a line between spiritual and fleshly interpretation according to the letter. He accuses his opponents of interpreting Scripture according to the letter, which they do in the flesh. He evokes 2 Cor 3, where Paul contrasts a spiritual interpretation with a fleshly interpretation of Scripture according to the flesh.

held responsible, as overlooking such an evil, and as though this wicked doctrine received food and strength from our indifference.[23]

Εἰ δὲ οἱ μακροὶ λόγοι, καὶ ἡ νέα ψαλτήρια, καὶ ἀντίφθογγα τῷ Δαυὶδ, καὶ ἡ τῶν μέτρων χάρις, ἡ τρίτη διαθήκη νομίζεται, καὶ ἡμεῖς ψαλμολογήσομεν, καὶ πολλὰ γράψομεν καὶ μετρήσομεν. Ἐπειδὴ δοκοῦμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν· εἴπερ Πνεύματος χάρις τοῦτά ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνθρωπίνη καινοτομία.[24]

The *NPNF* translators make the idea of a 'third testament' come across as a mistaken notion on behalf of the Apollinarians when they translate that 'their long books (οἱ μακροὶ λόγοι)…are taken (νομίζεται) for a third Testament.' In fact, the Greek text does not contain the pronoun 'their' nor does it communicate the negative undertone of 'are taken.' It is also unlikely that οἱ μακροὶ λόγοι is the subject of νομίζεται, because it is a singular verb and λόγοι is a masculine plural verb. Thus, Wickham rightly translates ἡ τρίτη διαθήκη as the subject of νομίζεται, which means that 'long books' and so forth are predicates of what one supposes the third testament constitutes.

An additional difference between Wickham's and the *NPNF*'s translation, which affects the argument, concerns how *NPNF* places a period to close the sentence, 'we also think we have the Spirit of God.' The period effectively separates what Gregory has cleaved together in the original: 'καὶ πολλὰ γράψομεν καὶ μετρήσομεν. Ἐπειδὴ δοκοῦμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς Πνεῦμα Θεοῦ ἔχειν.' In contrast, Wickham seamlessly translates Ἐπειδὴ into the sentence, which links what came before with what follows: 'we too will write psalms, and in quantity, and will versify, since we too think we have God's Spirit.' Wickham's translation rightly connects the ability to write a psalm with the Spirit's indwelling presence.

For these reasons, Wickham's translation better represents the Greek text. His translation not only serves to clarify the Greek text underlying Gregory's words, but it also confirms that Gregory believed that he too could write a kind of third testament, because he was indwelled by the Spirit.

As argued, Gregory criticised novel doctrinal innovation. He believed that the church functions as a community of believers to the extent that doctrinal formulation must conform to the boundaries set forth in ecclesial councils. Yet he also held fast to the Spirit's empowering presence in theological endeavours. To some degree, Gregory's comment about

[23] *NPNF* 7:443.
[24] *PG, Ep.* 101.88.

orthodox writings forming a kind of third testament helps to clarify how Gregory perceived the Spirit working within these ecclesial gatherings. Still, greater clarity on this matter could help, and Gregory's comments on the Spirit in his 31st oration provide that needed clarity.

4. The Spirit's Revelatory Role

Gregory testifies that the Spirit reveals God to the church, which helps to explain how Gregory perceives the role of councils in constructing theology. Evidence of the Spirit's revelatory role can be found in Gregory's 31st oration. In this oration, Gregory comments on the unique role of the Spirit in the church: 'The Old Testament preached the Father clearly, but the Son more obscurely. The New Testament manifested the Son, but gave a glimpse of the divine Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells [in us], and provides clearer manifestation of himself to us' (*Or.* 31:26).[25] In this age, the Spirit reveals himself to 'us,' the church.

To understand the relationship between the Spirit's revelation to the church and the formulation of doctrine, one must consider that 'doing theology' in the early church meant to speak of God. If the early church had discussed theology like it does today, then we would find early councils discussing missiology, eschatology, and the like. But, instead, what we find is that ecumenical councils (e.g., Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon) focus on the nature and personality of the Godhead. Therefore, the Spirit's unique self-revelation to the church clarifies how Gregory conceived of the Spirit's role in the church age and, by implication, how the church can formulate doctrine about God.

5. How the Church Should Formulate Doctrine

To return to the original question, 'How does Gregory believe that the Church should formulate doctrine in his letters to Cledonius?' Gregory believes that the church can formulate doctrine when the Spirit leads its leaders to a doctrinal consensus. The answer becomes evident when we consider how Gregory eschews human innovation, while affirming the authority of ecclesial councils. It is surprising then that although Gregory reveres councils and creeds, he freshly theologises about Christ's dual nature. His fresh theological formulation, nevertheless, avoids novelty by following the trajectory of Scripture and tradition, as councils do.

[25] My translation from Rodney A. Whitacre, *A Patristic Greek Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 152–3.

To balance fresh doctrine with firm creedal tradition, Gregory brings the Spirit to the fore. God's Spirit is an unspoken assumption behind why Gregory can trust the councils of spiritual men. After all, conciliar bishops too have God's Spirit. Moreover, the Spirit, as God, reveals himself to the church in the post-New Testament era. Weaving together Gregory's reverence for creed and reliance on the Spirit, we can conclude this: for Gregory, doctrinal formulation comes by the Spirit leading the church in conciliar settings.

6. Implications

Passed down through ecclesial writings, tradition guides the life and doctrine of Christians. Apostles and Christians alike were to imitate Christ (cf. Phil 2:5–12). The earliest believers were to imitate the Apostles (cf. 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Thess 3:7, 9). In turn, those among the earliest believers who became leaders were to be imitated by succeeding generations (Heb 13:7). From Jesus, to the Apostles, to the first generation, and then to all succeeding generations, a biblical pattern of imitation emerges. The theme of imitation became so prevalent in the early church that one's spiritual pedigree was in large part proved by one's relationship to the apostles and their tradition.[26]

Therefore, it behooves an historical study on how the early church formulated doctrine to ask the question of imitation. In other words, in what way(s) may we today imitate our spiritual fathers?[27] And, can Gregory's answer to, 'How the Church Should Formulate Doctrine,' suggest a model for contemporary theological formulation? I believe that we can recover a model of doctrinal formulation from Gregory in a numbers of ways.

First, in imitation of Gregory, the church may restore a vision of the community's role in doctrinal formulation. When Gregory turned to the authority of Spirit-led councils to adjudicate doctrinal issues, he accessed a long line of tradition. The Nicene Creed that Gregory sets forth as the

[26] *Against Heresies* 3.3.1 in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies (Book 3)*, trans. Dominic J. Unger and Irenaeus M.C. Steenberg, ACW 64 (New York: Newman Press, 2012), 32.

[27] Gregory himself wrote his famous *Poemata de Seipso*, narrating his life, in order to model devotion to the Trinity. Gregory penned his works assuming that later readers would meditate on his life and thought and imitate it. See Suzanne Abrams Rebillard, 'Historiography as Devotion: Poemata de Seipso,' in Beeley, *Re-Reading Gregory of Nazianzus*, 142.

measure of orthodoxy is, in fact, a freshly-reassessed apostolic tradition. Consider the words of Ireneaus, writing in the second century:

> The church, indeed, though disseminated throughout the world, even to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and the seas and all things that are in them; and in the one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was enfleshed for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets preached the Economies, the coming, the birth from a Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Son, Christ Jesus our Lord, and His coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to recapitulate all things, and to raise up all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, Savior and King, according to the invisible Father's good pleasure, *Every knee should bow [of those] in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess* Him.[28]

Irenaeus' Trinitarian confession sounds uncannily like the Nicene Creed:

> We believe in one God and Father all powerful, maker of all things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth; for us humans and for our salvation he came down and become incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead. And in the holy Spirit.[29]

Gregory's reverence for Spirit-led councils mixes with tradition. A matrix of tradition and community constitutes the place in which theology broods. Fresh theology hoists up a rod of Scripture, draws on a line of tradition, and reels in doctrine with a spiritual community. Gregory assumed a triangle of interpretation, which places tradition, community, and Scripture at each corner.

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[28] *Against Heresies* 1.10.1 in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies (Book 1)*, trans. Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, Ancient Christian Writers 55 (New York: Newman Press, 1992), 48–9.

[29] Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:5.

Today in the West, doctrine belongs to the famous scholar or Christian minister with the largest platform. In the latter case, money speaks and oftentimes celebrity-Christians have the loudest voice within the church. One can only wonder how Gregory's triangular restraint (tradition, community, and Scripture) on doctrine could transform both the way in which we form doctrine and the people to whom we listen.

Second, in imitation of Gregory, the church may restore a vision of reverence for authority. Denominational fragmentation and theological diversity mark the evangelical church. One wonders if this is, in part, because of an overly individualistic view of the Christian life. Restoring a vision of reverence for Spirit-led, ecumenical doctrinal formulation could help repair the rickety household of faith.

Third, in imitation of Gregory, the church may restore a vision of reliance on the Holy Spirit. The last two hundred years have witnessed the overwhelming pressure of historical-critical, or depending on how one wants to posture themselves, historical-grammatical study of the Scripture. These methods appear to relegate the Spirit's role in Scriptural interpretation and thus doctrinal formulation to secondary tier. Although the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement has attempted to place the Trinity as a central player in interpretation, it constitutes only a drop of water in an ocean of historical critical or historical grammatical study.

Fourth, in imitation of Gregory, the church may rely on the Spirit to reveal truth, move spiritual men to speak spiritual things, and function as a primary in the role of doctrinal formulation. Interestingly, Gregory contrasts his spiritual interpretation with his opponents' fleshly reading of Scripture. They interpret according to the flesh, while he implicitly interprets according to the Spirit (*Ep.* 101:10–11).[30]

A patient study of Scripture that waits on the Spirit may vivify a spirit-less church. Waiting on the Spirit has become subsumed by rushing with the wind. Everyone wants immediate results. But the Spirit calls the church to a 'long obedience in the same direction,' which long obedience can help Christian leaders to understand pressing doctrinal issues of the day.[31]

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[30] Hofer, *Christ in the Life*, 148–9.

[31] Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.