
St Basil and the Prepositional Problem

St Basil came under fire for his use of the phrase “Glory to the Father *with* the Son *together with* the Holy Spirit” in the Liturgy, as opposed to “Glory to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit” and wrote the treatise *On the Holy Spirit (De Spiritu Sancto)* partly to address this. Basil says his opponents see “*through* the Son” as implying the Son is a mere instrument (and therefore less than God the Father).

The prepositional problem - Basil’s reason for writing *On the Holy Spirit*

Lately while I pray with the people, we sometimes finish the doxology to God the Father with the form “Glory to the Father *with* the Son, *together with* the Holy Spirit,” and at other times we use “Glory to the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit.” Some of those present accused us of using strange and mutually contradictory terms.¹

The use of “with” and “through” when speaking of the Son

Whenever we reflect on the majesty of the nature of the Only-Begotten (Son), and the excellence of His dignity, we ascribe glory to Him *with* the Father. On the other hand, when we consider the abundant blessings He has given us, and how He has admitted us as co-heirs into God’s household, we acknowledge that this grace works for us *through* Him and *in* Him. Therefore the best phrase when giving Him glory is *with whom* and the most appropriate for giving thanks is *through whom*.²

The use of “with” and “in” when speaking of the Holy Spirit

The preposition *in* expresses the relationship between ourselves and the Spirit, while *with* proclaims the communion of the Spirit with God. Therefore we use both words: the latter expresses the Spirit’s dignity, while the former describes the grace we have been given.

We glorify God both in the Spirit and with the Spirit; we have not invented this word, but we follow the teaching of the Lord as our rule, and transfer this word to things which are logically related, sharing a common mystery: He is numbered *with* them in the baptismal formula, and we consider it necessary to combine Their Names in the same way when we profess our faith, and we treat the profession of faith as the origin and mother of the doxology.

What can they do now? Either they must teach us not to baptise in the manner we have been taught, or else not to believe as we were baptised, or not to glorify as we believe.³

¹ *On the Holy Spirit* 1.3 (SVS Press, p.17)

² *On the Holy Spirit* 7.16 (SVS Press, p.33)

³ *On the Holy Spirit* 27.68 (SVS Press, p.102)