

**A RECONSIDERATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF
BASIL'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY: THE DATING OF
EP. 9 AND *CONTRA EUNOMIUM***

BY

STEPHEN M. HILDEBRAND

ABSTRACT: Basil of Caesarea's Trinitarian thought changed in the 360s, and the dates of his Trinitarian works, especially ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium* determine the nature of the change. Most have dated these works such that Basil must be judged at least inconsistent if not duplicitous. The evidence reconsidered, though, yields a date early in the 360s for both ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium*. Since it cannot be determined which came first, Basil should be presumed consistent.

It is commonly acknowledged that Basil of Caesarea's thought about the Trinity changed at some point in the 360s.¹ Naturally, the chronological ordering of Basil's early theological works will reveal the nature of the change in his thought and account for the subsequent evaluation of it. Basil's ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium* are especially important here because they preserve a great deal of what Basil has to say about the Trinity.² But according to the way in which most date these works, the change in his thought is not a gradual progression culminating in Nicene orthodoxy but Basil's purposeful misrepresentation of his own position so as to hide his true thoughts in the interest of imperial and ecclesiastical politics. But, how

¹ The title of Volker Henning Drecoll's recent book reflects this common understanding: *Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basilius von Cäsarea: Sein Weg vom Homöusianer zum Neonizäner (The Development of Basil of Caesarea's Trinitarian Doctrine: His Way from a Homoiousian to a Neo-Nicene Theologian)* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, no. 66 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996]). See also the recent work of Bernard Sesboué wherein he speaks of a "conversion" Basilienne" (*Saint Basile et la Trinité, un acte théologique au IV^e siècle: le rôle de Basile de Césarée dans l'élaboration de la doctrine et du langage trinitaires* [Paris: Desclée, 1998], 188-200).

² Only the first three books of *Contra Eunomium* are authentic. See W. M. Hayes, *The Greek Manuscript Tradition of (Ps.) Basil's Adversus Eunomium Books IV-V* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

confidently can it be said that Basil was inconsistent or even duplicitous? Basil can be so judged only if he penned *Contra Eunomium* (written against the Neo-Arian Eunomius who held that the Son was unlike the Father in essence) after ep. 9 to Maximus the Philosopher about whom we know nothing. Once the evidence for this dating, however, evanesces, so too does the reason for suspecting that Basil's theological development was something other than a steady course toward Nicene orthodoxy. Ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium*, then, are important not only for what Basil wrote in them but also for when he wrote them.

In the fourth century, there emerged a number of distinct ways of conceiving the relationship between the Father and the Son. One conception was distinguished from another by the particular Greek words used to describe the relationship. Theological vocabulary in the fourth century measured orthodoxy and carried serious consequences, some of them political. Aëtius, for example, found himself in exile probably for using theological words that the emperor had banned.³

One of the most controverted words of the time was *homoousios*, which the Council of Nicaea used against Arius in 325. Many a theologian (most of whom were far less radical than Arius) had serious difficulties with saying the Son is "one in being with" the Father. *Homoousios* to Arius and to many others including the young Basil of Caesarea carried materialistic connotations, as though the Son were a "belching" or "portion" of the Father.⁴ *Homoousios*, however, and the theological understanding of the

³ See *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4, 12 (Philostorgius, *Kirchengeschichte mit Leben des Lucian von Antiochien und den Fragmenten eines arianischen Historiographen*, ed. Joseph Bidez and Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*, 57 [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972], 65, 12-18): "Upon this [appearing before the emperor] Aetius said, 'I am so far from thinking or asserting that the Son is unlike the Father, that I confess him to be like without any difference.' But Constantine, laying hold of that word, 'without any difference,' and not even enduring to learn in what sense Aetius used that term, gave orders that he should be expelled from the palace" (trans. Edward Walford, *The Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius, as epitomised by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* [London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855], 468).

⁴ See Arius's Letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia 3; trans. William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 29; and Arius's Letter to Alexander 3; trans. Rusch, 31. See also Basil, ep. 361 (Saint Basile, *Lettres*, ed. Yves Courtonne, 3 vols. [Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1957, 1961, 1966], 3:221, 15-24): "Ἐπειτα μέντοι καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὁμοουσίου . . . διαλαβεῖν ἡμῖν πλατύτερον βουλήθητι, τίνα τὴν διάνοιαν ἔχει, καὶ πῶς ἂν ὑγιῶς λέγοιτο, ἐφ' ὧν οὔτε γένος κοινὸν ὑπερκεῖμενον θεωρεῖται, οὔτε ὑλικὸν ὑποκεῖμενον προϋπάρχον,

Father and the Son that it expressed were most vehemently opposed by the so-called Neo-Arians, led by Aëtius of Antioch and Eunomius of Cyzicus.⁵ They led a movement in the mid-350s to establish a new theological vocabulary and an understanding of the Father and the Son that even Arius would have rejected: they proposed that the Son was unlike the Father in essence.

Opposition to the Neo-Arians came swiftly. In 358 Basil of Ancyra and George of Laodicea began a counter movement. They and other like-minded bishops could stomach neither the *homoousios* of Nicaea nor the “unlike in essence” of the Neo-Arians. They proposed that the words “like in essence” (*homoiōs kat’ ousian*) best reflected the relationship between the Father and the Son.⁶ Hence, those who preferred this way of speaking about Father and Son are called “Homoiousians” or less accurately and more popularly “Semi-Arians.”⁷

Basil of Caesarea at one time aligned himself with Basil of Ancyra’s movement. Basil’s association with the movement may be attributed to his friendship with Eustathius of Sebaste who introduced Basil to the ascetic life and proved to be something of a father figure to him. About 360 writing to Apollinaris of Laodicea, Basil rejected *homoousios* and preferred to speak of the Son as “unalterably and exactly like in being” with the Father.⁸ Basil, however, changed his mind on what theological language best described

οὐκ ἀπομερισμὸς τοῦ προτέρου εἰς τὸ δεύτερον. Πῶς οὖν χρὴ λέγειν ὁμοούσιον τὸν Υἱὸν τῷ Πατρὶ, εἰς μηδεμίαν ἔννοιαν τῶν εἰρημένων καταπίπτοντας, θέλησον ἡμῖν πλατύτερον διαρθρῶσαι. Trans. George Leonard Prestige, *St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of Laodicea* (London: S. P. C. K., 1956), 38-39: “Please give us a full discussion of the actual *homoousion*. . . . What meaning does it bear? In what healthy sense can it be applied to objects as to which one can conceive no common genus transcending them, no material substratum preexisting them, and no partition of the original to make the second? Pray distinguish for us fully in what sense we ought to call the Son ‘of one substance with’ the Father without falling into any of the above notions.”

⁵ See Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 2 vols., Patristic Monograph Series, 8 (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979).

⁶ The letter issued by the Synod of Ancyra is preserved in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73, 2, 1-11, 11.

⁷ Epiphanius coined the words ἡμιάρειοι (Semi-Arians) and ἡμισρει(ανί)ζω (to be a Semi-Arian) (see *Anacephalaises [recapitulatio brevis panariū]* 73 and *Panarion* 73, 1). The ἡμιάρειοι were anathematized in the first canon of the Council of Constantinople in 381 (see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner et al., vol. 1, *Nicaea to Lateran V* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 31).

⁸ See ep. 361 (Courtonne, 3:221, 31-35): “I think it could be correctly said not that light is *identical* [ταυτόν] with light, even though there is no difference in greatness or

the relationship between the Father and the Son; he came to prefer *homoiousios*. As he himself writes, “I have therefore myself adopted ‘consubstantial,’ because I think that this term is less open to perversion.”⁹ Basil’s use of different theological vocabulary at different times signals stages in the development of his thought, steps whereby Basil moved from being a Homoiousian to a Neo-Nicene theologian. Just as knowing the dates of his early works, especially *Contra Eunomium* and ep. 9, makes it easier to trace Basil’s theological development, so also miscalculating these dates will misconstrue the progression of his thought.

Ep. 361 (ca. 360) to Apollinaris places Basil firmly in the homoiousian camp.¹⁰ In ep. 9 Basil communicates to Maximus his private view that

weakness, for each is in its own termination of being [περιγραφή οὐσίας]; but rather that light is *similar* [*homoios*] to light albeit unalterably, exactly, and according to being’ [ὅμοιον δὲ κατ’ οὐσίαν ἀκριβῶς ἀπαράλλάκτως].” My translation; cf. *Saint Basil, The Letters*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926-34), 4:335 and Prestige, *St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of Laodicea*, 39. On the authenticity of Basil’s correspondence with Apollinaris, see Prestige’s work just mentioned and H. de Riedmatten, “La Correspondance entre Basile de Césarée et Apollinaire de Laodicée,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 7 (1956): 199-210; 8 (1957): 53-70.

⁹ Ep. 9, 3 (Courtonne, 1:39, 16-18): Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἦτρον οἶμαι κακουργεῖσθαι τὸ ὁμοούσιον, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς τίθεμαι. Trans. Deferrari, 1:99 (altered).

¹⁰ Prestige dates ep. 361 earlier, in the fall of 359, written by Basil from the Council of Seleucia. According to Prestige, Basil wrote asking about the theological terms under discussion at the council (Prestige, *St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of Laodicea*, 7). De Riedmatten, however, dates ep. 361 to after Constantinople 360, between 360 and 362. As de Riedmatten writes, “L’allusion au départ de Grégoire de Nazianze, retournée auprès de ses parents, suggère que la lettre a été écrite du Pont, entre 360 et 362” (“La Correspondance,” 59). Kopecek rightly sides with de Riedmatten “for Ep. 361 was, in part, concerned with the rejection of the term essence (οὐσία). Now it is true that the Acacian compromise formula of Seleucia, 359 did reject homoousion and homoiousion (as well as anomoion = unlike), but it said nothing about οὐσία itself. This would seem to substantiate a date after Constantinople, 360, which specifically rejected οὐσία” (*A History of Neo-Arianism*, 362-63, n. 2). Though de Riedmatten and Kopecek have the stronger argument, neither directly addresses Prestige’s arguments for the earlier date. According to Prestige, that Apollinaris lived in Laodicea is significant. In the opening of his letter Basil says that Apollinaris is the only one whom he could call upon among those who are “precise both in understanding and in utterance (cf. 1 Cor 1:5), and at the same time accessible” (ep. 361 [Courtonne, 3:221, 7-8]: καὶ ἐν γνώσει καὶ ἐν λόγῳ ἀκριβῆ τε ὁμοῦ καὶ εὐπρόσιτον; trans. Prestige, *St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of Laodicea*, 38). “Laodicea,” says Prestige, “was about a hundred and twenty miles from Seleucia by sea in a straight line, on a coast that was thick with shipping; communication was much quicker from Laodicea than from Pontus” (*St. Basil the Great and Apollinaris of*

homoousios is less open to perversion than *homoios kat'ousian*, thus indicating his change of mind. In *Contra Eunomium* he uses *homoousios* once in a theological sense but clearly prefers to use *homoios* and cognates to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. Discerning the exact theological import of ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium* is complicated by the scholarly disagreement over which came first.

Paul Fedwick, representing current scholarly consensus, dates *Contra Eunomium* to 364 and ep. 9 to 360-62. If Fedwick is right, then Basil's "conversion" to *homoousios* would have remained private, for he uses it only once theologically in *Contra Eunomium* while using *homoios* and its cognates many times. Furthermore, *Contra Eunomium* would have the odd position of belonging in its content to the first, homoiousian stage in the development of Basil's Trinitarian thought in spite of the fact that Basil in his mind had moved on to the second, homoousian stage in his theological development. According to this chronology, Basil appears inconsistent, if not disingenuous.

Fedwick's chronology, though, is not the only one. Thomas Kopecek places *Contra Eunomium* as early as 360. He does not comment on the date of ep. 9, but his dating of *Contra Eunomium* makes it possible, if not probable, that it was written before ep. 9. If ep. 9 was written after *Contra Eunomium*, then ep. 9 marks not only a private but also a public change on Basil's part. If *Contra Eunomium* is older, then it unambiguously belongs to the first stage in Basil's Trinitarian development, and he does not contradict publicly what he holds privately. According to this chronology, in the early 360s Basil would have steadily progressed towards Nicene orthodoxy.

The arguments for the dating of these works ought to be reconsidered, as well as the theological implications of the dating.

The Date of Contra Eunomium

Basil wrote *Contra Eunomium* as a response to Eunomius's *Apology* which was delivered at the council that met in Constantinople in 359 and published a year later.¹¹ Basil too was at this council but he fled, intimidated

Laodicea, 7). So Prestige sees Basil's calling Apollinaris "accessible" as a reference to his location in Laodicea in relation to Seleucia.

¹¹ See Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Liber Apologeticus*, trans. and ed. Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

by a debate that had been arranged between him and Aëtius of Antioch, a man of substantial rhetorical abilities.¹²

The date of *Contra Eunomium* is disputed, and the dispute centers around the conflicting evidence of two of Basil's letters, ep. 223 and 20. Ep. 223 appears to allude to Basil's work against Eunomius and yields a date of 364. Ep. 20 specifically mentions the work, but seems to yield a date of 362.

Fedwick, as mentioned, maintains that *Contra Eunomium* was written in 364: "the work was dictated rather in a hurry before the Synod of Lampsacus

On the date of Eunomius's *Apology* see Lionel R. Wickham, "The Date of Eunomius' *Apology*: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 20 (1969): 231-40. Wickham refined the work of Franz Diekamp ("Literargeschichtliches zu der Eunomianischen Kontroverse," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 18 [1909]: 1-13) by arguing that Eunomius delivered his *Apology* in Constantinople in 360, but not at his trial before Eudoxius and not in response to an organized revolt against him (see Wickham, "The Date of Eunomius' *Apology*," 232-34). Kopecek has refined this judgement: "Wickham has overlooked one crucial point: there were two councils held in Constantinople in winter, 359/360, not one—the first met in December and a second met in January. Wickham seems to have been unaware of the first and, consequently, wrongly assumed that Eunomius's *Apologia* was given at the January council" (*A History of Neo-Arianism*, 305). The December council of 359 better suits the fact that Basil was present; that Eunomius attacks homoiousian theology, the proponents of which capitulated by the end of the council by signing the revised Dated Creed, thus making Eunomius's invective out of place at Constantinople, for his enemy had already acknowledged defeat; and, finally, that Eunomius's *Apology* uses the term *ousia* which Constantinople 360 banned, and it is safe to assume that Eunomius did not violate this proscription, especially after being elevated to the see of Cyzicus (*ibid.*).

On the theology of Eunomius, see Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Sesboué, *Saint Basile et la trinité*, 19-53; and Maurice Wiles, "Eunomius: Hair-splitting Dialectician or Defender of the Accessibility of Salvation?" in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams, 157-72 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹² See Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4, 12 (GCS, 57:64, 5-26): "These [Basil of Ancyra and Eustathius of Sebaste] then had a great number of supporters present and among them a second Basil, who even at that time was only of the order of deacon; he was superior to many in his powers of speech, though from natural timidity and shyness he shrunk from public discussions. . . . Moreover, Basil and his partisans, when they saw Aëtius pitted against him as his adversary, in fear of his eloquence, avowed that it was indecorous for bishops to contend with a deacon concerning the doctrines of the faith" (trans. Walford, 467-68). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1, 9; trans. William Moore, H. C. Ogle and H. A. Wilson, *Against Eunomius*, in *Selected Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 5 (orig. pub. 1893; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 43.

met in the fall.”¹³ His evidence here is ep. 223 wherein Basil vents his feelings about his soured friendship with Eustathius of Sebaste. Basil writes, “And at Eusinoe, when you, about to set out for Lampascus with several bishops, summoned me, was not our conversation about faith? And all the time were not your short-hand writers present as I dictated objections to the heresy.”¹⁴ Jean Gribomont holds a similar position, though he mistakenly gives 365 as the date of *Contra Eunomium* and the Synod of Lampascus.¹⁵ But it is not at all clear that the heresy to which Basil refers is Eunomius’s. In fact, the context indicates that “the heresy” is Apollinaris’s.

Basil’s ep. 223 is his attempt to defend himself against the accusations made against him by Eustathius of Sebaste and his followers. Basil had been quite close to Eustathius. Basil seems to have seen him as God’s answer to his prayer for guidance in the teachings of religion and the practice of the ascetic life.¹⁶ In the early 370’s Basil traveled to Armenia with a commission from the emperor, Valens, to strengthen the churches there. On the same trip, at the request of Meletius of Antioch (now exiled to Getasa) and Theodotus of Nicopolis, Basil tried to address a problem that had arisen with Eustathius’s teaching on the Holy Spirit, but to no avail. In the end, Basil was forced to condemn Eustathius’s teaching in no uncertain terms, and Eustathius himself made attacks upon Basil’s orthodoxy. Eustathius had circulated a letter alleged to have been written by Basil to Apollinaris with the intention of implicating Basil in Apollinaris’s supposed theological error, Sabellianism.¹⁷ This, then, is the heresy of which Basil writes in ep. 223, the heresy to which Basil dictated objections in the presence of Eustathius. These objections, Basil thinks, render Eustathius’s charge groundless.

Basil himself, however, associates his dictated objections with the synod of Lampascus, and those in Lampascus did not concern themselves with Apollinaris. Socrates, the orthodox Church historian commissioned to pick up where Eusebius had left off, relates that the synod of Lampascus was a homoiousian council concerned above all with the rejection of the creed

¹³ Paul J. Fedwick, “A Chronology of Basil,” in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic. A Sixteenth-Century Anniversary Symposium*, ed. idem, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 10-11, n. 57.

¹⁴ Ep. 223, 5 (Courtonne, 3:14, 5-9); trans. Deferrari, 3:303.

¹⁵ Jean Gribomont, “Les succès des Pères grecs et les problèmes d’histoire des textes,” *Sacris erudiri* 22 [1974/1975]: 31.

¹⁶ See ep. 223, 2 (Courtonne, 3:10, 1-10); trans. Deferrari, 3: 291-93.

¹⁷ See ep. 129 and 131.

of the synod of Rimini and the Arian thought that the loose language of this creed protected.¹⁸ The synod sent Eustathius of Sebaste, Theophilus of Castabala, and Silvanus of Tarsus to the west seeking doctrinal union. They wanted to meet with Pope Liberius, who at first declined to meet with them because they were Arians who rejected the Nicene Creed. Eustathius and company “replied that by change of sentiment they had acknowledged the truth, having long since renounced the Anomoean Creed, and avowed the Son to be in every way ‘like the Father’: moreover that they considered the terms ‘like’ (*homoios*) and *homoousios* to have precisely the same import.”¹⁹ They then confessed their beliefs in writing including the creed of Nicaea itself. The anti-Arian thrust of the Synod of Lampsacus has no doubt led scholars to the conclusion that Basil’s dictated objections are his own anti-Arian work *Contra Eunomium*. But it does not make any sense for Basil to mention an anti-Arian work of his to clear himself of a charge of Sabellianism by association with Apollinaris. Moreover, the written statement of the representatives of Lampsacus to Liberius condemns albeit briefly “the same heresy of Sabellius, the Patripassians, the Marcionites, the Photinians, the Marcellians, that of Paul of Samosata, and those who countenance such tenets.”²⁰ While Lampsacus was predominantly anti-Arian, it also condemned the opposite error of Sabellianism. Perhaps, then, it is best to see Basil’s dictated objections as both associated with Lampsacus and anti-Sabellian.²¹

Kopecek, unlike Fedwick and company, dates *Contra Eunomium* to 360-62 by external evidence and narrows the range to 360-61 by internal evidence.²² The most convincing of the arguments from external evidence centers around ep. 20 (to Leontius the Sophist) in which, as just stated, Basil explicitly mentions his work against Eunomius, which he is sending to Leontius. So, if ep. 20 can be dated with certainty, then so can *Contra Eunomium*, relatively to ep. 20.

¹⁸ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 4, 12 (PG 67, 484B-485B); trans. A. C. Zenos, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus*, in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Histories*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 2 (orig. pub. 1890; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (PG 67, 485B); trans. NPNF 2, 2:100-101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4, 12; trans. NPNF 2, 2:101.

²¹ Basil did write an anti-Sabellian work (his 24th homily) sometime between 363 and 378, but probably closer to 378; see *Homilia contra Sabellianos, et Arium, et Anomoeos* (PG 31, 600-17).

²² Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 364-72.

Prudentius Maran argued that ep. 20 was written at the beginning of Basil's presbyterate, which he dates to 364.²³ But, both Fedwick and Kopecek persuasively argue against Maran's date of 364 for Basil's ordination.²⁴ The thrust of their argument centers around a letter of Gregory of Nazianzus. He wrote ep. 8 to Basil as a reply to Basil's letter (lost) notifying Gregory of his ordination.²⁵ Paul Gallay places this letter in 362; but Gallay simply follows Tillemont here.²⁶ This date of 362 for Basil's ordination fits well with the other events of this period of his life, viz. the death of Dianus in 362 and the accession of Eusebius to the bishopric of Caesarea.

So, then, if (as Maran has it) ep. 20 may be dated just after Basil's ordination, *Contra Eunomium* appears to have been written in or before 362. But the evidence that ep. 20 may be so dated is ambiguous. The argument for placing ep. 20 in 362, just after Basil's ordination, is derived from the excuse that Basil gives to Leontius for not writing. "In our case," Basil writes, "the *mass of business* in which we are now engaged might perhaps afford some excuse for our failure to write."²⁷ Basil adds the further reason that his "tiresome association with the vulgar" would make his letters unworthy of learned and eloquent men like Leontius.²⁸ But this evidence demands only that Basil wrote ep. 20 after his ordination, not necessarily immediately after. In sum, ep. 20 could have been written in 362 but also later.

Given the evidence (or lack thereof) of ep. 223 and the fact that ep. 20 may have been written after 362, *Contra Eunomium* may also be dated to after 362. Nevertheless, *Contra Eunomium* should be dated earlier rather than later in the 360s, for, as Tillemont reminds us, Gregory of Nyssa mentions that Eunomius took a long time to make his reply. Gregory writes: "when in long years he got the requisite amount of leisure, he was travailing over his work during all that interval with mightier pangs than

²³ See his *Vita S. Basilii Magni Archiepiscopi Caesariensis* 9, 2; in Basil of Caesarea, *Opera omnia quae exstant, vel quae sub ejus nomine circumferuntur*, vol. 1, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 29 (Paris, 1857), xxxix.

²⁴ See Fedwick, "A Chronology of Basil," 7, n. 26; and Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 366-67.

²⁵ See *Letters*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in *S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 7 (orig. pub. 1893; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 448.

²⁶ See Paul Gallay, *La vie de saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (Lyons: E. Vitte, 1943), 73-74 and 252.

²⁷ Ep. 20 (Courtonne, 1:50, 14-16); trans. Deferarri, 1:125, my emphasis.

²⁸ *Ibid.* (Courtonne, 1:50, 16-19).

those of the largest and the bulkiest beasts.”²⁹ Basil admitted that *Contra Eunomium* was the first work of his ecclesiastical career. Basil says, “I must not behold my weakness in the matter and I must attempt to come to the aid of the truth and to refute the lie, although I am not practiced in this kind of work.”³⁰ These words call for an earlier rather than a later date. Moreover, Kopecek has brought to light some other facts that demand a date early in the 360s. One is particularly persuasive. Eunomius had been awarded the see of Cyzicus—Basil called it the “prize” of his impiety—at the 360 Council in Constantinople. But it did not go well for Eunomius in Cyzicus: he was accused of heresy by his own clergy who complained in Constantinople to the disinterested Eudoxius and then to Constantius himself.³¹ There was a trial in Constantinople in 361, and Eunomius seems to have been exonerated, but he resigned his see in Cyzicus because Eudoxius had asked him to sign the homoian creed of 360 and to subscribe to the exile of his master Aëtius; Eunomius refused and withdrew for the moment from ecclesiastical affairs.³² Why would Basil fail to mention this fact in his invective against Eunomius’s character at the beginning of *Contra Eunomium*? He calls Eunomius the enemy of the truth, a liar, ignorant, proud, two-faced, a blasphemer, and a confounder of the simple.³³ Why did he not also mention that Eunomius was so foul a man and taught so impious a doctrine that he was rejected by his own flock and was forced to yield his former “prize” as a just punishment? Perhaps it is

²⁹ *Contra Eunomium* 1, 9; trans. NPNF 2, 5:35. See LeNain de Tillemont, *Mémoires pour Servir à l’Histoire Ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles* (Brussels: Eugene Henry Fricx, 1728), 9, 2:1038-42.

³⁰ *Contra Eunomium* 1, 1 (Sesboüé, 1:143, 14-21).

³¹ See Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2, 25. Trans. Blomfield Jackson, *The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret*, in *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus: Historical Writings, etc.*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 3 (orig. pub. 1893; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 90-91.

³² See Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6, 1-3. Theodoret does not report the trial of Eunomius, but only his fall out with the clergy of Cyzicus and their subsequent complaints before Constantius. He does, however, allude to the judgment of the synod that tried him. He says of Eunomius, “when his turn came he paid the penalty of his iniquity; he did not submit to the vote of the synod, but began to ordain bishops and presbyters, though himself deprived of his episcopal rank” (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 2, 25; trans. NPNF 2, 3:91). Thus, contradicting Philostorgius, Theodoret implies that the judgment went against Eunomius. See also Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 392-400, though he does not take notice of or explain the at least apparent contradiction in the respective accounts of Philostorgius and Theodoret.

³³ See *Contra Eunomium* 1, 1.

because this had not yet happened when Basil was cataloguing Eunomius's personal and doctrinal defects.

The Date of Ep. 9 to Maximus

The date of Ep. 9 is pivotal in outlining the course of Basil's theological development because in it he reveals that he has changed his mind about how one should speak of and understand the relationship between the Father and the Son. Before Ep. 9 Basil's Trinitarian thought was marked not only by the preference for *homoiousion* but also by an aversion to *homoousios*. But in Ep. 9, Basil has changed his mind on the appropriateness of the *homoousios* as a theological term.

It is clear from internal evidence that Basil wrote ep. 9 to Maximus from Annesi, and Basil was at Annesi from 360-62 and 363-65.³⁴ Basil's mother and sister, Macrina, lived in the Pontus valley at Annesi, about 60 kilometers northeast of Caesarea and 20 kilometers south of the Black Sea. As mentioned, Basil fled the council that met at Constantinople in 359; he retreated to Annesi and broke off his relationship with Dianius who signed the Nicé-Constantinopolitan Creed. In the middle of 362, Basil returned to Caesarea and was reconciled with Dianius who died soon thereafter. Basil was ordained a presbyter by Dianius's successor, Eusebius, but soon had a falling out with him and once again retired to Annesi remaining there until 365. Basil reveals whence he is writing ep. 9 when he contrasts his remote setting to Maximus's life in the city. Basil regards "life in oblivion" as among the highest of blessings.³⁵ He playfully boasts to Maximus: "Even though communities and cities, wherein you display your activities in accordance with virtue, suit best your life of activity, yet for contemplation and the exercises of the mind, whereby we are joined to God, solitude is an excellent co-worker; and here, at the edge of the world, we enjoy a solitude abundant and bountiful."³⁶ The "edge of the world" (ἐπὶ τῆς ἐσχατιᾶς) is certainly Annesi.

³⁴ Fedwick assigns the letter to Basil's first stay in Annesi; see "A Chronology of Basil," 7, n. 24: "The reasons for this date are not necessarily the arguments adduced by Maran, *Vita* 7.4, but the words ἐπὶ τῆς ἐσχατιᾶς (Courtonne, 1:40.33-34). Maran bases his chronology on parallels with the Ps.-Basil (= Evagrius) [Ep. 8], dated now in 379 (!). Nevertheless, besides the *C. Eun.* 1-3, [Ep. 9,2] (Courtonne, 1:38.5-6) is the only other early reference in Basil to the heresy of the Anomoeans from before 370." Most scholars follow Fedwick though Drecoll proposes a date of 363/64 (see n. 38 below).

³⁵ Ep. 9, 3 (Courtonne, 1:40, 26-27). Trans. Deferrari, 1:99.

³⁶ *Ibid.* (Courtonne, 1:40, 29-35). Trans. Deferrari, 1:101.

That Basil wrote ep. 9 from Annesi dates it to either 360-62 or 363-65, and a date in the early 360s is corroborated by two other pieces of internal evidence. First, Basil makes mention of the “doctrine of unlikeness,” writing that it “is now so noised about.”³⁷ This comment would aptly describe either period, for though the Neo-Arians had by 361 become a sect, they remained very active in the promulgation of their doctrines.³⁸ Secondly, Basil alludes to the events that transpired in 360 in Constantinople. He writes, “if anyone eliminates the invariability [*aparallakton*] of the likeness, as those in Constantinople have done, I become suspicious of the expression, on the ground that it diminishes the glory of the Only-Begotten.”³⁹ Basil is certainly right about the opposition to *aparallakton*. In fact, according to the account of Philostorgius, Constantius banished Aëtius for maintaining that the Son is like the Father without any difference (*aparallaktôs*).⁴⁰ Basil’s reference to “those in Constantinople” seems to imply a date closer to 359: it is as though he is recalling a recent event.

There is one other piece of internal evidence that must be mentioned: Basil ended his letter to Maximus’s saying that he has decided not to make

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 (Courtonne, 1:38, 5-7): Συχρδὸν γὰρ ταυτησί τῆς νῦν περιθρλουμένης ἀσεβείας, τῆς κατὰ τὸ Ἄνομιον λέγω, οὗτός ἐστιν, ὅσα γε ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν, ὁ πρῶτος ἀνθρώποις τὰ σπέρματα παρασχών. Trans. Deferrari 1:95.

³⁸ See Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 413-28. As mentioned, Drecoll dates ep. 9 to 363/64, but he grounds this dating upon an interpretation of “the doctrine of the unlikeness which is now so noised about.” Drecoll argues thus: “Zu einer Lokalisierung in Annesi paßt auch die Angabe, daß die anhomöische ἀσεβεία nun ‘herumgetratscht’ (περιθρλουεῖσθαι) werde (ep. 9, 2/4f), denn während seines Pontusaufenthaltes hat Basilius an AE gearbeitet, während in der Julianzeit die Anhomöer damit begannen, eine eigene Kirchenstruktur vorzubereiten. Ep. 9 ist so wahrscheinlich auf den Annisiaufenthalt zu datieren, aus inhaltlichen Gründen nach ep. 361 anzusetzen, also 363/364” (*Die Entwicklung der Trinitätslehre des Basilius von Cäsarea*, 38). Basil’s reference to Anomoianism may refer to these events (his working on *Contra Eunomium* and the Eunomians’ efforts to place competing bishops in many sees), but the Neo-Arians were certainly making “noise” earlier in the 360s. It should be mentioned that Drecoll (*ibid.*, 45-46) places *Contra Eunomium* in 364 based upon the evidence of ep. 223 and Basil’s mention there of the Synod of Lampsacus.

³⁹ Ep. 9, 3 (Courtonne, 1:39, 11-14): Εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ὁμοίου τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον ἀποτέμνει, ὅπερ οἱ κατὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν πεποιήκασιν, ὑποπτέω τὸ ῥῆμα ὡς τοῦ Μονογενοῦς τὴν δόξαν κατασμικρύνων. Trans. Deferrari, 1:99.

⁴⁰ See Philostorgius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4, 12; and Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 349-51. When Aëtius claims that the Son is “invariably” like the Father, he means by “Father” not “God”, but “the will of God”; the Son remains unlike God in essence—this last position Theodoret holds as the reason for Aëtius’s exile (see *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2, 23 [NPNF 2, 3:88]; and Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, 348-49).

his opinion on *homoousios* public.⁴¹ This fits better with a date before the death of Constantius for two reasons. First, Basil would have had good reason to hold his convictions privately, for at that time *ousia* (and its cognates) and *aparallaktôs* were banned. After the death of Constantius, though, Basil had nothing to fear from imperial authorities—from 361 to 363 Julian the Apostate had maintained a policy of religious toleration, recalling all exiled bishops in an effort to throw the Church deeper into internal struggles, and after his death the emperor Jovian had supported the homoousians. Only with the accession of the Arian emperor Valens did Basil again have reason to fear the opposition of the secular authorities, and this fear Basil later proved to lack in a direct confrontation with Valens in Caesarea.

Of course, Basil may have had a motive other than persecution at the hands of imperial authority to keep his convictions private. After all one must ask what the emperor could have done to Basil while he was at Annesi. Certainly Basil's letter writing here, even using banned words (as he did in writing *Contra Eunomium*), would not have drawn the watchful eye of imperial authorities. Perhaps fear of persecution explains Basil's reluctance to make his conviction public, but one could imagine explanations as likely. One might speculate, for example, that Basil did not want friends like Eustathius and Basil of Ancyra to learn of his new found approbation of *homoousios*—which they did not share—before he had the opportunity to explain himself to them at greater length. While the evidence is not overwhelming, it nonetheless calls for a date for ep. 9 in 360-62 rather than 363-65.

Conclusion

Both ep. 9 and *Contra Eunomium* were written earlier rather than later in the 360s. The date of 364 for *Contra Eunomium* is too late; and ep. 9 fits best in Basil's first stay at Annesi (360-62). The evidence does not indicate, however, which was written first. But in the absence of evidence to the contrary, why should one not assume Basil's theological consistency?

⁴¹ See ep. 9, 3 (Courtonne, 1:39, 18-21). Trans. Deferrari, 1:99 (my emphasis): "But why do you not visit us, dear friend, that we may discuss such matters in each other's company, and not entrust subjects of such importance to lifeless words, especially since I have definitely decided not to make my own convictions public?"

Dating *Contra Eunomium* after ep. 9, and thereby rendering Basil inconsistent or dishonest, entails some serious difficulties. If before he wrote *Contra Eunomium* in 360-62 he thinks that *homoousios* is less open to perversion than even *homoios aparallaktôs kat' ousian*, why then in *Contra Eunomium* does he proceed to use *homoios* and its cognates nearly always without adding *aparallaktôs*? Someone might respond that Basil was writing this work in the presence of or under the auspices of Eustathius who would not have approved of *homoousios*, and so Basil avoided it. But would Eustathius have objected to *aparallaktôs* too? And would he have countenanced even the single use of *homoousios* found in *Contra Eunomium*?

Although it makes better sense to assume that Basil wrote *Contra Eunomium* and then ep. 9, his "conversion" to *homoousios* in the latter should not be invested with a significance that it did not have. It is clear that Basil did not view his change of mind as having the irrevocable and uncompromising character that may be associated with conversion properly speaking. His "conversion" from homoiousianism to homoousianism bears little similarity to, say, a conversion from paganism to Christianity. For Basil, it was acceptable to use *homoios* and its cognates after his "conversion"—and he did so, using *homoousios* in conjunction with *homoiotês*;⁴² but for a converted pagan, it would be altogether unacceptable to sacrifice once again to the old gods. *Homoios* language, for him, was not necessarily blasphemous; it was only so in a context in which it admitted of an interpretation that degraded the Son.

The assumption that *Contra Eunomium* was written before ep. 9 makes Basil's theological development easier to understand. He progressed from a rejection of *homoousios* in ep. 361, to a hesitant toleration of it in *Contra Eunomium*, to a full acceptance of it in ep. 9. Contrariwise, Basil's confidence in *homoios* language gradually eroded. In ep. 361, it is the only language suitable to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son; in *Contra Eunomium*, it dominates but has lost its hegemony; in ep. 9, it is acceptable only if taken in the same sense as *homoousios*, which would now measure other words and legitimate their use.

Franciscan University of Steubenville
1235 University Blvd.
Steubenville, OH 43952 USA

⁴² See ep. 236, for example.