

Copyright © 2016 Brian Andrew Blair

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

THE PROMISED HELPER: A COMMENTARY ON THE  
PNEUMATOLOGY OF NOVATIAN'S *DE TRINITATE*

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Theology

---

by  
Brian Andrew Blair  
May 2016

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE PROMISED HELPER: A COMMENTARY ON THE  
PNEUMATOLOGY OF NOVATIAN'S *DE TRINITATE*

Brian Andrew Blair

Read and Approved by:

---

Michael A.G. Haykin (Faculty Advisor)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful wife, Amie, and our beautiful son, Andrew. Amie has patiently supported me in all of my scholastic endeavors and has been my encouragement when things grew difficult. I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Haykin for his wisdom and support. His passion for the fathers overflows onto his students, myself included.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. EARLIER UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.....	1
Apostolic Fathers .....	2
Early Apologists.....	2
Ante-Nicene Fathers .....	4
2. INTRODUCING NOVATIAN .....	6
Biographical Sketch.....	6
Overview of <i>De Trinitate</i> .....	8
3. A COMMENTARY ON <i>DE TRINITATE</i> 29.....	11
Introductory Comments on the Spirit: Sections 1–5.....	11
Two Testaments, One Spirit: Sections 6–8.....	14
The Works of the Spirit: Sections 9–23.....	16
Works of the Spirit to Aid the Church: Sections 9–10.....	16
Works of the Spirit and the Son Sections: 11–15.....	18
Works of the Spirit and Regeneration: Section 16.....	19
Works of the Spirit and Sanctification: Sections 17–23.....	21
Concluding Remarks On the Spirit: Sections: 24–26.....	24
4. NOVATIAN'S PNEUMATOLOGY .....	27
The Active Spirit.....	27
Revelation.....	28

Salvation .....	29
Descent upon Christ.....	30
The Divine and Personal Spirit .....	31
The Divine Spirit .....	31
Divine Attributes .....	34
Personhood .....	39
Conclusion .....	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*AH*      *Against Heresies*

*ANF*      Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A Cleveland Coxe, Repr. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.

*DP*      *De Principiis*

*Trin*      *De Trinitate*

## PREFACE

Reminiscing about everything tied to this work is such a mixed bag of joy and heartache, yet the Lord provided in more ways than I have space to explain. I have always loved the church fathers, ever since my first introduction to them in my undergraduate days. The fathers are such a wealth of knowledge and comfort, yet so many in the church ignore them. This work stems out of my passion to show the church the value of our brothers and sisters that came before us.

I am beyond grateful for an institution and advisor that encourage this kind of work. Southern Seminary realizes the need for more study in the realm of patristics, and the connection of the Fathers to the local Church. Due to his knowledge of the fathers and writing experience, Dr. Michael Haykin provided the necessary support for the production of this work.

Brian Blair

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2016

CHAPTER 1  
EARLIER UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**Introduction**

Undoubtedly, there are fewer discussions of the Holy Spirit in Christian history when compared to those discussions concerning the Father or the Son if one counts the amount of works dedicated to the Spirit throughout history as evidence. Yet, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in all aspects of the Christian's life and deserves dedicated study for the health of the Christian. Novatian saw the importance of the Spirit; he understood that without the Holy Spirit the Christian cannot please God nor live the Christian life.

Of the early fathers, Novatian is one of the first theologians to dedicate a specific section of a monograph to the Holy Spirit. Other church fathers made statements about the Spirit or His work; however, their writings about the Holy Spirit are usually scattered and connected to statements concerning the other members of the Godhead. In contrast, Novatian dedicated all of chapter 29 in his work *De Trinitate* to the Holy Spirit, thus distinguishing himself from other ante-Nicene fathers. The bulk of this thesis will be a detailed commentary on chapter 29 of *De Trinitate* and a discussion of the concepts taught by Novatian in that chapter. The paper's intent is to show that this chapter of Novatian's work can be considered the first treatise on the Holy Spirit for two reasons, the detailed examination that Novatian gives concerning the work of the Spirit and Novatian's implication of the Holy Spirit's deity. Yet, before examining Novatian's work, the historical context of the discussion of the Holy Spirit will provide a much-needed foundation.

## Apostolic Fathers

The apostolic fathers are the closest writers to the New Testament, some even knowing some of the apostles.<sup>1</sup> These men were, for the most part, pastors concerned with not only their own local congregation but other congregations as well. For that reason, much of their writings are connected to the church; they follow the apostles' pattern of letter writing as a means to encourage the church to orthodoxy and holiness. That being said, their writings concerning the Spirit do not move far beyond scriptural restatements. These early fathers affirm the personhood of the Spirit and the inspirational work of the Spirit, but they do not move beyond these affirmations.<sup>2</sup>

Clement of Rome for example lists the Holy Spirit with both the Father and Son, affirming deity and personhood by implication, and he connects the work of the Spirit in the prophets.<sup>3</sup> Ignatius of Antioch emphasized the present work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. In the mind of Ignatius, the Holy Spirit works not only within the people of the church, but He establishes the offices of the church as well.<sup>4</sup> Ignatius saw the Spirit connecting and drawing the believer both to God and to the church. He was concerned with not squelching or squandering the gifts, or *charismata*, of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

## The Apologists

The apologists, though concerned with the church, primarily focused on answering the critiques of pagans against Christianity. Like most of the theologians of the patristic period, the nature of the Son and His incarnation dominated their writings. These

---

<sup>1</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony C. Thisleton, *The Holy Spirit—in Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 163–168.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley M. Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 18–19.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (London: MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1912), 14.

<sup>5</sup>Burgess, *Spirit and the Church*, 20.

brilliant men defended much of Christian doctrine; however, their efforts somewhat clouded their discussions of the Holy Spirit. At times, they seemed to confuse the pre-incarnate Son with the third member of the Godhead. Though rectifiable, these minor lapses in clarity were not helpful then or now.

The most famous of the early apologists is Justin Martyr, who was not immune to confusion concerning the Holy Spirit. Justin's Christology is remembered for its subordinating the Son to the Father. He applied the same subordination to the Spirit: the Spirit is subordinate to the Father and the Son. Justin arrived at this conclusion because he saw the generation of both the Son and the Spirit happening just prior to creation; in terms of the Spirit, the Spirit is generated out of Father and the Son.<sup>6</sup> Since Justin saw the Son and Holy Spirit being generated simultaneously, at times he appears to confuse the Holy Spirit with the pre-incarnate Son in some of his writings.<sup>7</sup>

Athenagoras was a contemporary of Justin Martyr's pupil Tatian; however, Athenagoras resembled Justin more than Justin's own student. In terms of pneumatology, Athenagoras saw the Spirit as emanating from the Father "like a beam of the sun," yet he still drew a clear distinction between the Spirit and the rest of the Trinity. By listing the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, Athenagoras saw the Spirit as equal in authority and essence with the Father and the Son.<sup>8</sup> He was a bit more descriptive of the Spirit's work of inspiration. Athenagoras equated the Spirit's inspiring the biblical writers in the same manner that a flutists' breath making the flute generate music.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there is Theophilus of Antioch. Like Justin, Theophilus' comments on

---

<sup>6</sup>Burgess, *Spirit and the Church*, 28.

<sup>7</sup>All of the early apologists would affirm the revelatory work of the Spirit to inspire the writing of the Scripture and the Spirit's bestowing of gifts to the church for the work God.

<sup>8</sup>Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church*, 31.

<sup>9</sup>Athenagoras saw the biblical writers' characters and contexts as being vital to the Spirit's role of inspiration. He did not see the writers as becoming automatons; instead, they just needed the proper guidance to bring about the most wonderful or writings.

the Holy Spirit, or Wisdom as he called Him, can be confusing. Theophilus saw both the Son (God's Word) and the Spirit (God's Wisdom) being generated prior to creation, but present with God at creation. The Spirit is described as He who gives life to this world and holds it together.<sup>10</sup> God created the world, but the Spirit gives the world life. He discusses the Spirit's work in inspiring the prophets; however, he also expands the company of those inspired to include the Greeks as well.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ante-Nicene Fathers**

During the time of the ante-Nicene fathers, the theology of the Holy Spirit experienced some maturation. In the writings of Irenaeus, the early theologian defends the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit against the Gnostics who taught multiple errors concerning the nature and unity of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus emphasized the work of the Spirit in inspiration and prophecy, especially with regards to the Old Testament. Irenaeus sought to emphasize the unity within the Godhead in all things. To that end, Irenaeus spends several sections in his *Against Heresies* discussing the Spirit's role in creation.<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian's understandings of the Spirit should be divided into two periods: what he wrote before the Montanists and what he wrote after the Montanists.<sup>14</sup> Tertullian

---

<sup>10</sup>Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church*, 32.

<sup>11</sup>This inclusion of the Greeks could be due in part to the idea that all truth is God's truth whether it is found in Scripture or outside of it. The apologists look favorably at Greek philosophy, even attempting to use philosophical categories to describe Christianity. Therefore, in their minds, if there is truth in Greek philosophy, then the truth had to have come from God which means that the Spirit inspired it.

<sup>12</sup>Gnostics, in the vein of Marcion for example, taught an error similar to that for which Marcion was most famous: separate Gods for the Old and New Testament. In the case of the Holy Spirit, the Gnostics taught that the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was different to the one in the New Testament. Novatian also sought to address this error in *De Trinitate*.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

<sup>14</sup>The reason for the separation is that Tertullian's association with the Montanists, in the opinion of some scholars, created a dividing line in his understanding of the Spirit. After he became associated with the Montanists, Tertullian's writings on the Spirit became more frequent. In part, his fascination was an attempt to legitimize the Montanist movement, which emphasized a new resurgence of the Spirit. For a more detailed discussion on Tertullian and the impact of Montanism on his pneumatology see, Anthony Thiselton's book *The Holy Spirit—in Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today*

is most remembered for his use of the word *trinitas* to refer to the Godhead. He emphasized the distinctiveness of the persons of the Godhead, describing the Spirit as the “third from the Father.” Though the persons are distinct, they are not separate from the Father in the mind of Tertullian; the Son and the Spirit both proceed from the Father though Tertullian described the Spirit as proceeding from the Father through the Son.<sup>15</sup>

Though many of Origen’s writings have been lost to the church, several of his works remain extant. Of those writings, the most systematic discussions of the Holy Spirit are found in *De Principiis*. Stanley Burgess explains in his work *Christian Peoples of the Spirit* that Origen is less concerned with the state of existence of the Spirit in his other writings but “*De Principiis* reflects a more orthodox stance on the Holy Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> Of the fathers discussed so far, more of Origen’s comments are echoed in Novatian than the other fathers though there are subtle differences. For Origen, the Spirit is clearly divine, inspiring both the Old Testament and New Testament writers. The Spirit works in cooperation with both the Father and the Son; this cooperation is most clearly displayed in salvation. The Spirit calls men to Christ, and He then brings unceasing sanctification.<sup>17</sup> Though other early fathers could be discussed, those examined provide an introduction to the early understandings of the Holy Spirit prior to Novatian. Yet, before discussing Novatian’s writings on the Spirit, a brief examination of the man himself will help provide needed context.

---

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 178–83.

<sup>15</sup>Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit*, 180–82. Tertullian was in the Western part of the church, which used this kind of language to describe the procession of the Spirit. In the East, the Spirit is described as proceeding from the father only. It is simply fascinating to find this kind of language so early in the church’s writings.

<sup>16</sup>Stanley M. Burgess, ed. *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 42.

<sup>17</sup>Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit*, 184–185.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCING NOVATIAN

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Scholars know little of the early life of Novatian prior to his becoming an elder. Scholars believe that Novatian was born between AD 190–210, and he was made an elder between AD 240–250. The exact place of Novatian’s birth remains unknown; some believe he was born in Rome, though most certainly he was born in Italy. Prior to coming to Christ, Novatian was a Stoic philosopher which shows itself in his writings. From everything that scholars do know about Novatian, controversy characterizes much of his life.<sup>1</sup> As was characteristic of the time, Novatian seemed to be postponing his baptism until later in his life; however, it appeared that he was close to death and received baptism by affusion in his bed.<sup>2</sup>

After his baptism, Novatian sought to become an elder, though one who was not baptized by immersion becoming an elder was unusual for the time.<sup>3</sup> Novatian become an elder in a persecuted church, and the persecution escalated under the reign of Decius. Emperor Decius passed an edict requiring all to offer incense to the pagan gods of Rome and the emperor. The aim of the Decian edict was to cause recantation, not

---

<sup>1</sup>Russell J. DeSimone, *The Treatise of Novatian, the Roman Presbyter on the Trinity. A Study of the Text and the Doctrine* (Rome: Insitutum Patristicum, 1970), 21–22.

<sup>2</sup>In Novatian’s day, some would postpone baptism until later in life so that they might avoid as many sins as possible after their baptism. DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 23.

<sup>3</sup>Papandrea debunks the ideas that Novatian’s baptism and legitimacy as a priest were questioned from the beginning. Papandrea asserts that the supposed controversy that surrounded Novatian’s baptism and confirmation was most certainly a later attempt by his enemies to discredit him. Papandrea emphasizes that for Fabian to accept for ordination an individual which the people did not accept would have been more uncharacteristic than Novatian’s baptism. For Papandrea’s full explanation, see footnote 31 on page 56 of James L. Papandrea *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy* Princeton Theological Monograph Series, vol. 175 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 56.

necessarily martyrdom, though martyrdom was not a rare occurrence during this time. One of the first to experience the Roman sword was the current bishop of Rome Fabian.<sup>4</sup> The remaining elders of Rome determined it unwise to quickly replace Fabian, for fear of the new bishop sharing in his fate; however, they could not leave the post functionally unoccupied. To that end, Novatian was the acting bishop, save for only the title. The role would not be official filled until fourteen months later.<sup>5</sup>

The Edict of Decius created a problem for the church of Novatian's day: what was to become of those who recanted Christ yet later sought re-admittance into the church? Two prominent positions arose in the church: a more rigorist position and a laxist position. The rigorists advocated that those who denounced Christ under Roman persecution should remain in a state of penance and not be permitted to reenter the church. Novatian held a more rigorist position. Those who held the laxist position supported the idea that those who denied Christ could reenter the church; some advocated immediate re-entering while others felt a period of penance was necessary. History remembers Novatian more for the controversy over the lapsed and the following schism than his writings.<sup>6</sup>

Decius died in battle in AD 251, so a new elder of Rome was to be officially elected. Though Novatian had held such a prominent position in the church, his "rival" Cornelius, was elected instead. Novatian, after some goading from other elders, claimed that he was the true elder of Rome. Novatian had felt that those who readmitted the lapsed were apostate and were no longer the pure church. Novatian and his supporters broke from the church of Rome claiming to be the pure church; this event has come to be known as the Novatian schism.<sup>7</sup> In 253 after Valerian had assumed the Roman throne,

---

<sup>4</sup>DeSimone, *The Treatise of Novatian*, 23–24.

<sup>5</sup>Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome*, 56–57.

<sup>6</sup>Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome*, 58–61.

<sup>7</sup>DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 29–31.

Novatian and other church leaders were exiled; Cornelius would die during this exile. While in exile, scholars believe that Novatian wrote some of the *Letters* we have preserved today. After several years in exile, Novatian was brought back to Rome and martyred, traditionally dated on June 29, 258.<sup>8</sup>

### **Overview of *De Trinitate***

Novatian has the singular honor of being the first theologian to write in Latin with his work *De Trinitate*. His work held a prominent place during his time, even earning the respect of his rivals. Novatian follows in the footsteps of his predecessors Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian in terms of the content. He quite systematically structures his work making the flow easy to follow.<sup>9</sup> *De Trinitate* is Novatian's means to explain the *Rule of Faith* and to defend truth against the heretics with the Scriptures. Scholars believe that Novatian penned *De Trinitate* prior to the Decian persecution; therefore, most scholars agree that Novatian wrote this work somewhere in the 240's. Scholars attribute this date to the work due to the providential attitude Novatian displayed toward government.<sup>10</sup>

*De Trinitate* is significant for several reasons. First, Novatian is the first to use several Latin phrases that are still prominent today in theological circles: *incarnari* (to become flesh), *se exinanire* (to empty oneself), and *praedestinatio* (predestination). Second, in Novatian, historians witness the beginnings of theological concepts that will be refined by later theologians. For example, in chapter 11, Novatian uses language that scholars would describe as *communicatio idiomatum* (of the communication of idioms/properties). In that chapter, Novatian describes how in Christ both natures were acting

---

<sup>8</sup>Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome*, 67–68.

<sup>9</sup>DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 42.

<sup>10</sup>Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome*, 57.

simultaneously without changing one another. Even as Christ suffered, He was still sovereign and reigning.<sup>11</sup>

Novatian follows the order theologians ascribe to the divine economy by discussing first the Father, then the Son, finally the Holy Spirit. Chapters 1 through 8 are Novatian's discussion on the Father. In these chapters, Novatian "paints a magnificent picture of the majesty and transcendence of 'God the Father and almighty Lord' who is, however immediately and directly associate with His work."<sup>12</sup>

The bulk of Novatian's work is dedicated to discussing the Son, chapters 9 to 28 specifically. Novatian's prime emphasis in his work is to defend the deity and humanity of the Son against the prominent heresies of the day, Docetists, Ebionites, Adoptionists, Modalists, and Patripassionists to be exact. His sections on the Son are the most famous and are the most significant of his work. Novatian's writings on the Son can be divided into four main sections: introductory remarks (chaps. 9–11), "scriptural proofs (chaps. 12–13, 17–22), theological proofs (chaps. 14–16), and proofs drawn from adversaries (chaps. 23–28)."<sup>13</sup> James Papandrea, a modern Novatian scholar, argues that Novatian's Christology is the peak of pre-Nicene Christology, displaying theological ideas that are not properly discussed by earlier fathers yet not fully developed until later church fathers. The final chapters of the work, 30 and 31, deal with the unity of God and the divinity of Christ. Novatian shows that the full deity of the Son is compatible with the unity God and that Christians are not ditheists.

Chapter 29 is the one chapter that Novatian has dedicated to the Holy Spirit, though he does mention the Spirit earlier in the work. Novatian's work on the Spirit

---

<sup>11</sup>DeSimone *The Treatise of Novatian*, 43.

<sup>12</sup>Novatian, *The Trinity, the Spectacles, Jewish Foods, in Praise of Purity, Letters*, trans. Russell J. DeSimone, *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation*, Vol. 67 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 14.

<sup>13</sup>Novatian, *The Trinity, the Spectacles*, 14.

demonstrates that some importance was placed on the Spirit at a time when the Son was the subject of most theological discussions. Though the breadth of what is written does not compare to what is written about the other members of the Trinity, chapter 29 still shows Novatian's theological and writing skills.

The other sections of *De Trinitate*, those dedicated to the Father and the Son, dwarf chapter 29 on the Holy Spirit. For that reason, some historians feel no compulsion to give a detailed study of that section, or they write very little on the chapter. In a recent article entitled "The Holy Spirit and the early church: doctrine and confession," the author dedicates only a few lines to Novatian's discussion on the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Other authors, who see value and progression in Novatian's work, go into far greater detail. Russell DeSimone dedicates an entire chapter to Novatian's chapter on the Holy Spirit. Though small, chapter 29 contains some of the richest words on the Holy Spirit that can be found in the ante-Nicene fathers.

---

<sup>14</sup>Johannes von Dort, "The Holy Spirit and the Early Church: Doctrine and Confession." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 3 (September 2011): 2.

## CHAPTER 3

### A COMMENTARY ON *DE TRINITATE* 29

#### **Introductory Comments on the Spirit: *De Trinitate* 1–5**

But truly, after these things, the order of reason and the authority of faith, laid out in the saying and writings of the Lord, urge us also to believe in the Holy Spirit, promised long ago to the church, and properly given at the appointed time. For He was promised through the prophet Joel, but given through Christ. It says, “In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon my servants and maids.” And then the Lord [said], “Receive the Holy Spirit; [if] you will forgive sins of anyone, they will be forgiven, and [if] you have held anyone’s [sins] against [them], they will be held against [them]” Now Christ the Lord sometimes calls this Holy Spirit the Helper [and] other times He declares [Him] to be the Spirit of Truth, who is not new in the gospel, nor is this the first time He has been given; for He Himself has both denounce the people in the prophets and offered consolation to the nations in the apostle. For those that were denounced were deserving [of blame], because they had despised the law, and those of the nations who believed deserve to be supported by the patronage of the Spirit, because they desire to pursue the law of the gospel. Surely there are diverse kinds of function in Him, since in [different] times, [different] situations [require] different methods, yet this does not mean that the one who carries on these things in this way has opposed Himself, or is someone else while He acts in this way, but He is one and the same, distributing His functions through the times and the circumstance of particular situations and the turning points [in the course of events]. Furthermore, the apostle Paul says, “Since we have the same Spirit, as it is written, ‘I believed, that is why I have spoken,’ we also believe, [and] for that reason we speak.”<sup>1</sup>

When Novatian begins to focus on the Holy Spirit, he does so with two primary motives in mind.<sup>2</sup> First, Trinitarian logic dictates that after discussing the first two members of the Trinity that Novatian move onto the third. Second, Novatian’s motivation comes from the “authority of faith.” The “authority of faith” which Novatian

---

<sup>1</sup>The translation of *De Trinitate* used for this work is James Papandrea’s translation in his *The Trinitarian Theology of Novatian of Rome: A Study in Third-Century Orthodoxy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 367–469.

<sup>2</sup>All citations from Papandrea’s translation of *De Trinitate* will be cited in the following format: *Trin*, chapter number and section numbers, and the page number in *The Trinitarian Theology of Novatian of Rome*.

refers to seems to be synonymous to the “Rule of Truth,” which Novatian references at the beginning of his sections on the Father and on the Son (*Trin* 1.1 and 9.1 respectively). Both phrases seem to be Novatian’s way of referring to the accepted orthodoxy of the church. These two factors push Novatian to consider the Holy Spirit of God. This same Holy Spirit, which was promised to believers in the Old Testament, has now come in fullness in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Novatian’s starting point for discussing the Spirit is quite simple: he starts with promise and moves to fulfillment. The Holy Spirit according to Novatian was promised in the Old Testament, specifically Joel, and given at the appointed time through Christ.<sup>4</sup> How does Novatian come to this conclusion? Quite simply, he sees the continuity between the Scriptures’ two Testaments. Novatian reads the promise of the Spirit in Joel 3:2 as being connected to John 20:22–23, where Christ commands the apostles to receive the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit was promised long ago and now is made a reality in Christ.

After these introductory comments on the promise of the Spirit, Novatian moves into the actual content of the chapter. Novatian first sees the need to correct the error that the Holy Spirit is new to the era of the New Testament. Sections 3 through 5 clarify Novatian’s understanding on the issue. Novatian writes, “Now Christ the Lord sometimes calls this Holy Spirit the Helper [and] other times He declares [Him] to be the Spirit of Truth, who is not new in the gospel, nor is this the first time He has been given, for He Himself has both denounced the people in the prophets and offered consolation to

---

<sup>3</sup>A distinguishing mark of not only Novatian’s pneumatology but the pneumatology of earlier fathers is the belief in the activity of the Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments. Origen, for example, in his *On First Principles* writes, “Those Scriptures alone which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Gospels and Epistles, and the law and the prophets” (*DP* 1.3.1, *ANF*, 4:252). A distinguishing mark of Novatian is his highlighting the promise/fulfillment nature of the Spirit. The Spirit, though active in the Old Testament, was promised to come in greater and more full capacity “at the appointed time.”

<sup>4</sup>*Trin* 29.2. Though elaborated in later sections, Novatian seems to understand that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. On several occasions, he makes statements that imply the Spirit has come to us by the authority of the Father and the Son for the purpose of revealing the Son to us that through the Son, we may come to know the Father. See *Trin* 29.6,7, and 11.

the nations in the apostles.”<sup>5</sup> Novatian sees continuity between the two Testaments in multiple ways, including the presence and operation of the Spirit. In Novatian’s mind, the Spirit operated in the same manner in the Old Testament as He did in the New Testament. The same Spirit who brought condemnation against idolaters in the Old Testament also brought reconciliation to the world in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets, and in the New Testament, the Spirit spoke through the apostles.<sup>6</sup>

Almost anticipating an accusation, Novatian defends the continuity and singularity in purpose of the Spirit. Novatian raises two beliefs about the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has various roles and operations, and He has a singular, unclouded purpose.<sup>7</sup> For Novatian, the Holy Spirit has always been operative but in different degrees in both the Old and New Testaments. The Spirit carried on the same operations in the Old Testament that theologians see in the New Testament but to a lesser degree. Novatian will return to this idea later in the chapter. Section 4 highlights Novatian’s understanding of the Spirit’s diversity in work but unity in person.<sup>8</sup>

As stated earlier, Novatian resists the temptation to venture off into vain speculation; to the best of his ability, Novatian remains within the limits and vocabulary of Scripture. Throughout *De Trinitate*, Novatian consistently grounds his teachings in the Scriptures, and he does not diverge from that practice in chapter 29.<sup>9</sup> Novatian’s use of

---

<sup>5</sup>*Trin* 29.3, 455.

<sup>6</sup>The converse statement is true as well. Rest and forgiveness were offered to the nations in the Old Testament through the prophets’ preaching, and the sinful world is condemned by the gospel preached by the apostles. Since both forgiveness and damnation are found in both Testaments, Novatian could have easily made a similar statement and remained correct.

<sup>7</sup>*Trin* 29.4, 455.

<sup>8</sup>As will be highlighted further in this commentary, Novatian sees a great deal of diversity in the works of the Spirit. He lays the foundation in section 4 for what will be the bulk and highlight of his work.

<sup>9</sup>Though Novatian’s scriptural quotes are copious, his Scriptural allusions are just as prolific. For example, in sections 29.3, Novatian alludes to the titles given to the Spirit by Christ which can be found in John 14:16–17 and John 15:26. When pivotal, these allusions will be recognized and their significance discussed; however, some of Novatian’s allusions are not as discernable as others.

Scripture is not so much proof-texting as it is citing a source. The Scriptures are the source and foundation of his teachings, not an afterthought to bolster his statements. Novatian sees the unity of the Spirit particularly in 2 Corinthians 4:13 “Since we have the same Spirit, as it is written, ‘I believed, that is why I have spoken,’ we also believe, [and] for reason we speak.”<sup>10</sup> In this text, Novatian cites Paul stating that we have the same Spirit as the prophets of the Old Testament, once again connecting the Spirit’s work in the two Testaments.

### **Two Testaments, One Spirit: *De Trinitate 6–8***

Therefore, [He is] one and the same Spirit who [was] in the prophets and the apostles, except that [He was in] the former [only] for a time, [and in] the latter always. He was in the former, [but] not in the m always, [He was] in the latter so that He would remain in them always; in the former, He was moderately distributed, in the latter, completely poured out; in the former sparingly given, in the latter plentifully provided. He was not yet presented before the resurrection of the Lord, but He was brought in through the resurrection of Christ. For [Christ] said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, so that He may be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth.” And since the Lord was to be going away into heave, He necessarily gave the Helper to the disciples, so as not to leave them as orphans, since it would by no means be fitting that He should leave them behind without a counselor and abandon them without some kind of protector.

Now that Novatian has laid a foundation for his chapter on the Spirit, he begins to discuss the main points of his chapter. Novatian seeks to further convince his readers of the cohesion between the two Testaments, in this case by the similar work of the Spirit. The same Spirit that worked in the Old Testament era continues to work in the New Testament era, yet the extent of His work is what distinguishes the two eras from each other.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>The translation of the Scriptures used by Novatian will be cited for the sake of cohesion.

<sup>11</sup>Origen writes concerning the Holy Spirit in both Testaments in his work *De Principiis* preface 4 “And that this Spirit inspired each one of the saints, whether prophets or apostles; and that there was not one Spirit in the men of the old dispensation, and another in those who were inspired at the advent of Christ, is most clearly taught throughout the Churches.” ANF: 4: 240. “Those Scriptures alone which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Gospels, and Epistles, and the law and the prophets, according to the declaration of Christ Himself.” *DP* 1.3.1

Novatian sees the scarcity of the Spirit in the Old Testament and His coming in fullness in the New Testament tied to Christ. Since Christ had not come in fullness in the Old Testament, neither did the Spirit come in fullness. At the end of the previous quote, however, Novatian seems to contradict himself: “He was not yet presented before the resurrection of the Lord, but He was brought in through the resurrection of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Simple logic prevents misunderstanding the theologian’s statement. Novatian has spent the introduction of this section showing that there is only one Spirit of God and that the one Spirit of God has always been active. Yet, the Spirit did not come in full until after the ascension of Christ; therefore, Novatian’s statement is technically true. In this section, Novatian seeks to highlight the full coming of the Spirit after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The coming of the Spirit is tied to the coming and ascension of Christ; therefore, the Christ had to come in order for the Spirit to come in fullness.

The scriptural quotes in section 7 not only provide source material for section 6 but show the way Novatian sees the primary role of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Novatian quotes the words of Christ from John 15:26, 16:7, and 16:13 in which Christ quiets His disciples’ uneasy hearts with the promise of the Comforter.<sup>13</sup> These three texts set up Novatian’s subordinationism in reference to the order in the Trinity. Though Novatian marks a turning–point in several aspects of Trinitarian thought, he nonetheless does not move away from the language of subordinationism which marks the early fathers.<sup>14</sup> In these texts, one sees that the Spirit is sent from both the Father and the Son,

---

<sup>12</sup>*Trin* 29.6, 456.

<sup>13</sup>Novatian cites prolifically from John’s gospel throughout his work. *The Johannine Paraclete in the Church Fathers* by Anthony Casarella specifically discusses Novatian’s use of the Paraclete passages in John’s gospel, which are found in John 14–16.

<sup>14</sup>At this point, scholars must show the fathers some leniency. Modern theologians often judge the early fathers too harshly concerning the apparent flippant language they used when describing the Trinity. Quite the opposite, the fathers were quite careful when attempting to describing the relationship between the Father, Son, and the Spirit; yet they were still trying to find the right words and phrasing. Scholars benefit from their struggle. *In Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy*, Papandrea shows the struggle found in Novatian to find the write words to express his thoughts. Though later theologians would provide needed clarity, Novatian’s progression surpasses that which came before him.

almost as if He comes at their request.

After revealing his Scriptural sources, Novatian explains the main thrust of these texts: the Son sends the Helper out of love for His sheep. Novatian explains: “And since the Lord was to be going away to heaven, He necessarily gave the Helper to the disciples, so as not to leave them as orphans.”<sup>15</sup> The Son knew that when He finished His earthly mission that He must return from where He came, yet He never intended to leave His disciples without a Guide and Helper. Hence the primary purpose of the coming of the Spirit and focus of this section: the protection and guidance of Christ’s church.<sup>16</sup> Novatian finishes his thoughts in section 8 thus, “since it would by no means be fitting that He should leave them behind without a counselor and abandon them without some kind of protector.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The Works of the Spirit: *De Trinitate* 9-23**

#### **Works of the Spirit to Aid the Church: *De Trinitate* 9–10**

For it is He who strengthened their hearts and minds, who defined the sacred mysterious of the gospel, who was in them [as] the revealer of divine things, by whose encouragement they feared neither prisons nor chains for the name of the Lord, rather on the contrary they themselves have trampled the authorities and persecutors of the world; to be sure they were already armed and strengthened by Him, having in themselves the gifts which this same Spirit apportioned and distributed to the church, the bride of Christ, as a kind of equipment.<sup>18</sup> For it is He who has placed prophets in the church, He instructs teachers, distributes tongues, performs miracles and healings, carries on extraordinary works, grants the discernment of spirits, assigns administrations, brings judgments and organizes and arranges whatever other spiritual gifts there are, and for this reason He makes the Lord’s church complete and perfect in every respect and in all things.

---

<sup>15</sup>*Trin* 29.8, 456.

<sup>16</sup>Irenaeus explains the protecting work of the Spirit in his *AH* 3.11.8 more poetically: “Afterwards, being made man for us, He sent the gift of the celestial Spirit over all the earth protecting us with His wings.” *ANF*, 1.428.

<sup>17</sup>*Trin*, 29.8, 456.

<sup>18</sup>Irenaeus also understood the Holy Spirit as He who revealed the truth of the gospel to them. He writes in *AH* 3.1.1, “For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed ‘perfect knowledge,’ as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge.” *ANF*, 1.414.

Novatian in sections 9 and 10 explains how it is that the Holy Spirit counsels and protects the Church. He begins his discussion on the works of the Spirit by looking at how the Spirit protects the people of God from error.<sup>19</sup> As a protector, the Spirit guards that truth which the Son has revealed: the Word is the revealer of God and the Spirit is the guide to God. As the Guide, the Spirit must protect the gospel in the hearts and minds of the people of God. Novatian comments, “For it is He who strengthened their hearts and minds, who defined the sacred mysteries of the gospel, who was in them [as] the revealer of divine things.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet, the Spirit’s role is not simply as a guide but also that of a helper, for which Novatian uses the Latin word *paracletum*. The Spirit helps the church of Christ in various ways, primarily by gifting the church and leading God’s people in holiness. Novatian first looks at the gifts of the Spirit, since that is one of His primary tasks. Keeping with what he proved earlier, Novatian lists the various gifts that the Spirit bestows on the people of God: prophecy, miracles, healings, and the like. Novatian seems to believe that the list of gifts given in the Scriptures is not exhaustive, and that the Spirit may bestow other gifts of which Christians do not have listed for them in the Scriptures. Why does the Spirit impart various gifts to the Church? Novatian answers that question as follows: “and for this reason He makes the Lord’s church complete and perfect in every respect in all things.”<sup>21</sup> Now, Novatian is most remembered, not for his writings, but for his schism. As the previous quote implies, Novatian does not have a pessimistic view of the church; instead, he sees the church as perfect and pure by the gifts of the Spirit. Novatian thus sees a connection between the gifts of the Spirit and the perfection of the church.

---

<sup>19</sup>Novatian seeks to maintain order throughout his entire work, meaning that he does his best not to ramble or group thoughts that belong elsewhere. Specifically, Novatian does not aimlessly rattle off the works of the Spirit without a concern as to the grouping.

<sup>20</sup>*Trin* 29.9, 457.

<sup>21</sup>*Trin* 29.10, 457.

## Works of the Spirit and the Son: *De Trinitate* 11–15

It is He who come upon the Lord like a dove after He was baptized, and He remained, living fully and entirely in Christ alone, not diminished in any proportion or division, but with all His overflowing abundance He has been given and sent, so that others might be able to obtain from Him a kind of sample of [His] grace, [and] so that streams of gifts and works might be drawn from the Holy Spirit living abundantly in Christ, since the spring of the whole Holy Spirit resides in Christ. For indeed Isaiah said this when he prophesied, saying, “And the spirit of wisdom and understanding rests upon Him, the spirit of judgment and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God has filled Him. And this very same thing [is] also in another passage from the person of the Lord Himself, “The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me. . .” Likewise David [said], “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy over your peers.” The apostle Paul [said] about Him, “For whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Him,” and, “Where the Spirit of the Lord [is], there [is] freedom.”

Section 11 is quite the shift from the previous sections of this chapter. Instead of explaining how the Spirit directly ministers to the church, Novatian examines the descent of the Spirit on the Son in the incarnation. Some of Novatian’s most precise language is found in this section.<sup>22</sup> Novatian’s discussion of the Spirit’s descent highlights several things: the Spirit’s living entirely in the Son, the undiminished nature of the Spirit while living in the Son, and believers become like Christ through the Spirit because the Spirit flows from the Son.<sup>23</sup> Novatian quickly follows this section by quoting the Scriptural source from which he derived these ideas. Novatian first quotes from Isaiah 11:2, a prophecy concerning the King who would come from David’s line.<sup>24</sup> Novatian

---

<sup>22</sup>Novatian is not the first to tackle the subject of the Spirit’s descent upon the Son. Most notably, Irenaeus wrote on the topic as well. Though discussing the same subject, the two theologians emphasized two different aspects of the Spirit’s descent. Irenaeus emphasized the Spirit’s empowerment of the Son’s human nature. For more information on this, see Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup>One can immediately recognize the implied subordinationism in Novatian’s statement, specifically in the phrase, “since the spring of the whole Holy Spirit resides in Christ.” Novatian seems to adhere to an early form of what would be called the *filioque* controversy in later years: the Son is generated by the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Novatian uses language to describe the Spirit as less than or inferior to the Son, yet Novatian also passively ascribes deity to the Spirit, even in this section. At this time in history, theologians are struggling to find a way to describe the Trinity without seemingly contradicting themselves. Though subordinationism is implied, Novatian still sees the Spirit as completely and fully divine, “living fully entirely in Christ alone, not diminished in any proportion or division.”

<sup>24</sup>“And the spirit of wisdom and understanding rests upon Him, the spirit of judgment and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God has filled Him.” (Isa 11:2).

interprets this passage to refer to Christ, and the multiple “spirits” refer to the one Spirit of God which Novatian showed earlier in the chapter. Novatian also cites a portion of Christ’s reading of Isaiah 61:1 recorded in Luke 4:16–21 and Psalm 45:7.<sup>25</sup>

Sections 11 and 12 must be examined as a whole if Novatian is to be properly understood. The reason that the Spirit resided in the Son was that the Spirit might impart the graces of Christ to Christians. The Spirit is referred to as a “down payment” in the Scriptures, and Novatian applies that idea here. Since the Spirit resided in Christ and is then sent out from Christ after the resurrection, Christians are able to be made like Christ through the Holy Spirit because the Spirit brings the grace of Christ with Him.<sup>26</sup> Right at the close Novatian connects this seemingly-misplaced section to the previous sections, by explaining one reason for the Spirit’s descent on the Son. In the mind of Novatian, the Spirit descended on the Son for the benefit of the church that the Spirit might draw men and women to Christ and make them like Christ.

### **Works of the Spirit and Regeneration: *De Trinitate* 16**

It is He who works a second birth from the waters [of baptism], a kind of seed of divine origin, and He consecrates the heavenly birth, a pledge of the promise of inheritance, like a kind of signed contract of eternal salvation, making us [into] a temple of God and a home for Him. He disturbs the divine ears “with unutterable groanings on our behalf,”<sup>27</sup> performing the functions of the counselor and demonstrating the duties of protection. He is given to live in our bodies and produce holiness, bringing this up in us, He also brings our bodies to eternity and to the resurrection of immortality, [and] while [they are] in Him He makes them accustomed to combine with heavenly power and to unite with the divine eternity of the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>25</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me” (Luke 4:16). Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy over your peers” (Ps 45:7).

<sup>26</sup>It would be very easy to pick apart Novatian’s language at this point, yet doing so would cause more harm than good. The overarching idea of Novatian’s explanation is helpful though his language needs some polishing. As stated earlier, one cannot criticize the early fathers too harshly seeing that they were trying to accurately articulate what they believed. Contemporary readers have hindsight when they do not.

<sup>27</sup>Irenaeus describes the life-giving nature of the Spirit in *AH* 5.12.2, “For the breath of life, which also rendered man animated being, is one thing, and the vivifying Spirit another, which also caused him to become spiritual.” *ANF*, 1:537.

Novatian transitions to specifically discuss how the Spirit works in the believer: regeneration and sanctification.<sup>28</sup> The Spirit brings about the “second birth” or “heavenly birth” in the heart of man which Novatian specifically connects to baptism. This second birth is referred to as a “seed of divine origin” as Papandrea renders it in his translation. However, DeSimone’s translation is clearer at this point, “the seed as it were, of a divine generation.”<sup>29</sup> The new birth is seen as the seed or beginning of, as Novatian will state later, immortality. Novatian also applies the biblical description of the Spirit being the “down payment” or “pledge” of a promised future inheritance. For Novatian, our initial salvific experience begins an eternal, blissful journey with God.

The purpose of the Spirit’s work in man is that believers may be made into God’s temple. Novatian explains, “Making us [into] a temple of God and a home for Him.”<sup>30</sup> Men and women are transformed into the temple of God when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside them. Using logic, one can surmise that Novatian sees the Holy Spirit as divine, though he does not state it outright. How can believers be called the temple of God, if the spirit that resides within them is not God? If they are being made into the temple of God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit must be God for that to be true.

The Spirit not only works in believers, but He also works for them. Novatian writes, “He disturbs the divine ears ‘with unutterable groaning on our behalf’,”

---

<sup>28</sup>Origen shows that salvation comes by the work of the Spirit, like Novatian; however, his phrasing differs slightly. “the declaration by Paul, that no one can call Jesus Lord, save by the Holy Spirit.” *DP*, 1.3.2. “Nevertheless, it seems proper to inquire what is the reason why he who is regenerated by God unto salvation has to do both with Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and does not obtain salvation unless with the co-operation of the entire Trinity; and why it is impossible to become partaker of the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit.” *DP* 1.3.5. *ANF*, 4:252–252.

<sup>29</sup>Novatian, *The Trinity, the Spectacles, Jewish Foods, in Praise of Purity, Letters*, trans. Russell J. DeSimone, *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation*, Vol. 67 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 102.

<sup>30</sup>Clearly, Novatian sees the church as the fulfillment of the temple in the Old Testament. The Spirit regenerates, sanctifies, and glorifies the Church that she may be the new and greatest temple of God. God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, resides in men and transforms men into the dwelling place of God.

performing the function of a counselor and demonstrating the duties of a protector. The Spirit was sent that He might be the Christian's helper and protector, and as a Helper and Protector, He knows what is best for Christians. He knows what believers need, even when they do not know what or how to ask for what they need. Novatian takes this idea straight from Paul in Romans 8:26.

Knowing what is best for Christian, the Spirit works in the hearts of men and women to make them holy like the Lord that they follow. "He is given to live in our bodies and produce holiness, bringing this up in us."<sup>31</sup> In order that believers might be a temple for God, the Holy Spirit stirs their souls to holiness; the Spirit, as it were, prepares the soul and the body for the Christian's eternal bliss with the Father.<sup>32</sup> Novatian finishes section 16 with this hopeful clause, "He also brings our bodies to eternity and to the resurrection of immortality, [and] while [they are] in Him He makes them accustomed to combine with heavenly power and to unite with the divine eternity of the Holy Spirit."<sup>33</sup>

### **Works of the Spirit and Sanctification: *De Trinitate* 17–23**

For our bodies are instructed in Him and through Him to make progress toward immortality, while they learn to exercise restraint by controlling themselves according to His commands. For it is He who strives against the flesh, because the flesh opposes Him. It is He who confines insatiable desires, breaks unrestrained lusts, puts out [the flames of] unlawful passions, conquers burning attacks, casts off drunkenness, drives away greed, puts to flight excessive feasts, binds together loves, holds together good relations, drives away divisions, explains the Rule of Truth, refutes heretics, casts out the immoral, [and] guards the gospel. The apostle also [said] about Him "For we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God." He rejoices about Him, "And the spirit of prophets in subject to the prophets." Concerning Him he says, "However, the Spirit clearly says that in the end times some will withdraw from the faith, paying attention to misleading spirits [and] the teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having numbed their

---

<sup>31</sup>*Trin* 29.16, 458.

<sup>32</sup>Novatian sees salvation as the redemption of the whole human, not just the soul. God does not intend for Christians to remain bodiless souls for all eternities; instead, He intends for them to be as He originally created them: perfect, sinless humans. Hence, the work of the Spirit is not just the sanctification of the soul but of the body as well.

<sup>33</sup>*Trin* 29.16, 458.

consciences.”

The sanctifying work of the Spirit in men and women is preparatory for their life in the next world.<sup>34</sup> In the new heavens and new earth, humanity will continually bask in the eternal glory of God. Novatian’s phrasing hints that to become more holy, prior to the believer’s resurrection, is to put eternal habits in place. Not only do believers’ souls and minds need to be made holy but so do their bodies. Novatian further clarifies, “For our bodies are instructed in Him and through Him to make progress toward immortality, while they learn to exercise restraint by controlling themselves according to His commands.”<sup>35</sup> Novatian transitions to discuss the Spirit’s work on the Christians’ bodies. Novatian’s statement balances the understanding of sanctification stated earlier. Though the internal aspect of sin is often emphasized, men must not forget the physical ramifications of sin. Human bodies die because of sin, and the Spirit seeks to reverse that consequence.

The Spirit’s work does not go unopposed; the flesh will not die without a struggle. The Holy Spirit must war against those residual sinful tendencies that remain after initial salvation since residual sin opposes all that the Spirit does. Though he does not quote Romans 6, Novatian seemed to have that text in mind when he penned this section. Section 18 clarifies how the Spirit wars against the flesh. Novatian sees the Spirit’s war against the flesh by both attacking sin and guarding truth; both of those divisions are clear in this section. The Spirit attacks sin by “confines desires, breaks unrestrained lusts, puts out [the flames of] unlawful passions, conquers burning attacks, casts off drunkenness, drives away greed, puts to flight excessive feasts . . . drives away

---

<sup>34</sup>Origen comments on the Spirit’s sanctifying role in the believer in *DP* 1:3:8, “that this may be the case, and that those whom He has created may be unceasingly and inseparably present with Him, WHO IS, it is the business of wisdom to instruct and train them, and to bring them to perfection by confirmation of His Holy Spirit and unceasing sanctification, by which alone are they capable of receiving God.” *ANF*, 4:255.

<sup>35</sup>*Trin* 29.17, 459.

divisions, refutes heretics, casts out the immoral.”<sup>36</sup> As He combats sin, the Spirit also protects righteousness, specifically, “binds together loves, holds together good relations ... explains the Rule of Truth ... [and] guards the gospel.”<sup>37</sup> Novatian credits the process of attacking and defeating error to the Holy Spirit. Christians do not attack heretics or defend the gospel because of their own ingenuity; instead, the Spirit rouses the Christian to attack the heretic and defend gospel truth.<sup>38</sup>

Novatian once again cites the Scriptures as the source from which He derives these truths. In section 20, Novatian cites 1 Corinthians 14:32, in which Paul describes how Christians have received God’s Spirit and not the spirit of this world. Novatian cites Paul again from 1 Corinthians but this time from chapter 7:40. Contextually, Paul has been addressing the matter of whether marriage is good or bad. Directly before the cited verse, Paul explains that should a wife’s husband die, she is free to marry anyone she chooses, but he feels that she would be happier to remain single. Paul’s statement in verse 40, “And I think that I also have the Spirit of God” gives credence to what Paul has said about marriage. Since he has the Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of truth, Paul can confidently call his statements truth.

Section 22 holds the position as the most interesting of Novatian’s scriptural citations. Novatian quotes his Latin version of 1 Corinthians 14:32 which says, “And the spirit of prophets is subject to the prophets.” The context of the passage is Paul’s admonition for order in the practice of the Spirit’s gifts, especially *glossaliar*. Those who speak should do so one at a time and in an orderly fashion. Novatian’s translation is certainly wrong in this verse because it interprets “spirit” as singular when in the original

---

<sup>36</sup>*Trin* 29.19, 259.

<sup>37</sup>*Trin* 29.19, 259.

<sup>38</sup>In the mind of Novatian, attacking error and defending truth are part of the sanctification of the Christian. As the Spirit removes sin from the Christian’s life, the Christian is able to more clearly see error for what it is and combat it with truth. To be made in the image of Christ by the Spirit means to attack heretics when necessary and defend the truth of the gospel.

Greek it is plural. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are in control of their own spirit or self. If they receive a word from God, they are to communicate it orderly and with self-control. If one interprets the verse based on Novatian's translation, the logical conclusion is that the Holy Spirit is subject to human prophets which makes God subject to human prophets. Correctly understanding what Novatian attempted to communicate by this quotation remains difficult for modern scholars and too little material exists to clarify the issue.<sup>39</sup>

Though Novatian's previous citation is ambiguous, the remaining Scriptural quotes are not. In section 23, Novatian cites 1 Timothy 4:1 as a means to reinforce the reality that the Scriptures are the words of the Spirit and therefore the words of God. Paul uses the phrase, "For the Spirit says" to refer to statements made concerning a coming time of great apostasy from the church. Throughout the New Testament, several of the apostles, even Jesus Himself, hinted that a time of great apostasy would become a reality. For Paul those statements made by the apostles are the words of the Holy Spirit, and the words considered Scripture are the Spirit's words.<sup>40</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks: *De Trinitate* 24–26**

Established in this Spirit, "no one" ever "says Jesus is cursed," no one has denied [that] Christ [is] the Son of God or has rejected God the Creator; no one brings out against the Scriptures any of its own words, no one sets up contrary and profane principles, no one puts different laws in writing. Whoever "would blaspheme against" Him "does not have forgiveness, either in this world, or truly in the one to come." He gives testimony to Christ in the apostles, reveals the firm faith of devotion in the martyrs, preserves the remarkable self-control of love kept pure in virgins, [and] guards the uncorrupted and unpolluted laws of the Lord's teachings in the rest. He ruins heretics, straightens the crooked, exposes the disloyal, reveals pretenders, and sets the immoral on the right [path], [and] He keeps the church uncorrupted and unprofaned with the holiness of perpetual chastity and truth.

---

<sup>39</sup>James Papandrea holds to the same conclusion as this paper in *Trinitarian Theology of Novatian of Rome*, 669.

<sup>40</sup>This citation of Paul could be considered another of Novatian's indirect affirmations of the Holy Spirit's divinity.

The final sections of Novatian's discussion of the Spirit begin with Novatian's reaffirming the integrity of the Spirit's inspiration.<sup>41</sup> Those who are truly Spirit-filled do not blaspheme Christ or speak ill of God the Creator, nor do they twist the meaning of the Scriptures. The Spirit will not speak falsely concerning God or His Word; therefore, anyone who rejects Christ or the Creator does not have the true Spirit of God. Additionally, anyone who misinterprets the Scriptures or bends the meaning of the Scriptures does not have the true Spirit of God. The Spirit, being God, will not testify against Himself nor will He allow the misuse of the text which He inspired. Novatian goes on to quote the words of Christ from the Gospels concerning blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The Spirit never speaks ill of the Son or the Father, and to call the work of the Spirit evil, proves that an individual does not have the Spirit of God or the forgiveness of God. Clearly Novatian held the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit Himself in high regard. Equating this high regard with implied deity is not without support. The Trinity is the picture of perfect harmony; God cannot be in disunity. Therefore, emphasizing the consistency of the Spirit implies that He is God, for God is eternally consistent. Furthermore, quoting Jesus' words concerning the blasphemy of the Spirit shows the authority given to the Spirit.

Section 26 beautifully summarizes the teachings of Novatian on the Spirit.

Novatian concludes,

He gives testimony to Christ in the apostles, reveals the firm faith of devotion in the martyrs, preserves the remarkable self-control of love kept pure in virgins, [and] guards the uncorrupted and unpolluted laws of the Lord's teachings in the rest. He ruins heretics, straightens the crooked, exposes the disloyal, reveals pretenders, and sets the immoral on the right [path], [and] He keeps the church uncorrupted and unprofaned with the holiness of perpetual chastity and truth.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>Novatian emphasis in this particular section centers on the unity of God particularly worked out in the form of testimony. In the same way that the Son never spoke ill of the Father, the Spirit will never speak or inspire anything wrong concerning the Father or Son. Origen mentions the unity of God on a couple occasions in *DP*, 1.3.5 and 1.3.8 specifically. *ANF*, 4:253–254.

<sup>42</sup>*Trin* 29.26, 460.

To finish chapter 29, Novatian emphasizes the preserving work of the Spirit in this world and in the church. By “gives testimony to Christ in the apostles” Novatian refers to the teachings of the apostles passed down in the Scriptures. Novatian’s statements regarding the martyrs and virgins are original to him, not having direct Scriptural quotations.<sup>43</sup> In terms of those who are not martyrs or virgins, the Spirit guards the true teaching of God in their hearts. Novatian’s specific mention of martyrs and virgins is typical for his time period. As he did before, Novatian highlights the negative aspect of the Spirit’s preserving work, just like he did in section 19. In preserving truth in the righteous, the Spirit reveals and confounds the errors of the wicked.<sup>44</sup> Novatian, as he did previously, includes heretics with those who practice evil, showing his unwavering belief in the preservation of gospel purity. The final aspect of the Spirit’s preservation is that of the church’s purity. Novatian uses the language of sexual purity to refer to faithfulness to God, a practice he would have learned from the Old Testament. Novatian’s conclusion once again reveals his belief in the purity and unblemished nature of the church, which helps explain his later stance concerning the lapsed.

---

<sup>43</sup>In the early church, those that were martyred for the faith and those who took the path of perpetual virginity were held in high esteem. Novatian attributes their life of sacrifice to the Spirit, not some internal fortitude.

<sup>44</sup>Interestingly, Novatian mentions the Spirit’s refutation of heretics in both section 19 and section 26.

## CHAPTER 4

### NOVATIAN'S PNEUMATOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Though Novatian's discussion on the Spirit flows naturally, a discussion of the key concepts of the chapter will provide further clarity. This final chapter will examine the key concepts behind Novatian's writings in *De Trinitate* to show the progression of Novatian's thought concerning the Spirit. In this final chapter, Novatian's emphasis on the Spirit's activity and the implied deity of the Spirit will be examined.

#### **The Active Spirit**

As with other early fathers, Novatian's discussion of the Spirit centers around the Spirit's activity. Novatian sees the primary work of the Spirit as working for the good of the church, for Christ sent the Spirit to be a Helper and Protector of His friends, that He might not leave them defenseless.<sup>1</sup> The means by which the Spirit accomplishes this goal is through His actions, hence the focusing on the Spirit's activity and works. Henry Swete in his work *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* praises Novatian's examination of the Spirit's work stating, "No passage in ante-Nicene literature is more rich in the New Testament doctrine of the work of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup> This emphasis is not detrimental to his understanding of the Spirit, since the Scriptures primarily highlight the Holy Spirit by His

---

<sup>1</sup>Novatian, *The Trinity, the Spectacles, Jewish Foods, in Praise of Purity, Letters*, trans. Russell J. DeSimone, *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation*, Vol. 67 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1912), 108–109.

activity as well.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the Son, the personhood of the Spirit was not explicitly emphasized but assumed.<sup>4</sup> Novatian highlights three primary categories of the Spirit's activity or works: revelation, salvation, descent.<sup>5</sup> Novatian makes clear in *Trin* 6–8 that the Spirit's activity, though active in both Testaments, has become more prevalent in the New Testament. Novatian scholars highlight that no other ante-Nicene father gives the works of the Spirit as a comprehensive discussion as Novatian. Novatian's emphasis on the Spirit's works is what primarily distinguishes his writings from the other ante-Nicene fathers. Novatian is so enthralled by the extensive works of the Spirit that even after detailing the Spirit's activity in the middle of chapter 29 of *De Trinitate*, Novatian finishes the chapter with yet another list of works by the active Spirit.

### **Revelation**

The first aspect of the Spirit's activity highlighted by Novatian is the Spirit's revelatory activity. One of the Spirit's primary roles, according to both the Scriptures and Novatian, is that of revelation. The Spirit reveals the truth of Christ to all men and women. Novatian discusses revelation in terms of the Holy Spirit's consistent revelatory work in both Testaments. For Novatian, the Spirit has been consistently working in the same manner in both Old Testament and New Testament periods. The Spirit inspired both prophets and apostles to proclaim and record the words of God.

The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of Truth" in the Scriptures, and Novatian retains this title for the third person of the Trinity. The name "Spirit of Truth" implies that the Holy Spirit only deals in and communicates with truth. The name alone proves

---

<sup>3</sup>The names given to the Spirit are derived by His activity. He is called the "Helper," "Comforter," and "Spirit of Life," just to name a few.

<sup>4</sup>The fathers would use personal pronouns, masculine pronouns in particular. The person and nature of the Son is emphasized in the Scriptures and the fathers due to the salvific necessity of the Son's nature, while the nature and person of the Spirit remained assumed.

<sup>5</sup>By "descent," this thesis is referring to the descent of the Spirit upon Christ at His incarnation.

nothing, yet Novatian connects “Spirit of Truth” with the title “Spirit of God.” God alone is the sole source of truth; therefore, to give the Holy Spirit the title of “Spirit of Truth” is to imply the deity of the Spirit. Historians can infer from Novatian’s comments concerning the Spirit’s revelatory activity that knowledge of God is only possible if the Spirit reveals it to man.

### **Salvation**

Novatian highlights the Spirit’s work in all three primary “phases” of a Christian’s salvation: regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Flowing from the Spirit’s revealing knowledge of God, the Spirit draws men to God, makes men holy, and glorifies them at the end of time. *Trin* 16–23, as shown previously, contain Novatian’s statements on the salvific work of the Spirit. Novatian does not see the Spirit as a peripheral member of the Godhead, only worth discussing because Novatian needed to fill another chapter in his work. Rather, the Spirit is vital in all aspects of the believer’s pursuit of holiness. Without the Holy Spirit, the Christian could not live unto God, let alone be reconciled to God. Therefore, Novatian’s discussion on the salvific work of the Spirit shows Novatian’s understanding of the Spirit’s importance.<sup>6</sup>

By attributing salvation to the Holy Spirit, Novatian reveals his belief in the deity of the Holy Spirit. Salvation belongs to God alone; one cannot read the Scriptures without coming to such a conclusion. Yet, Novatian describes the Spirit as the one who actually applies salvation to humans. In the words of Novatian, it is the Spirit “who works a second birth . . . a kind of seed of divine origin, and He consecrates the heavenly

---

<sup>6</sup>If the Spirit was so important to Novatian, one may ask why he dedicated only one chapter to the Holy Spirit. Quite simply, the historical context in which historians find Novatian provides the answer. The person and the work of the Spirit was not in question at the time that Novatian wrote his treatise; therefore, he did not see the need to dedicate more space to the Spirit. The first line of the chapter shows that Novatian views the Spirit as worthy of discussion, yet the aim of *De Trinitate* is not to solely defend the Spirit against heretics but the Son, His nature, and His relationship to the Father. Theologians of all generations follow the same principle; Novatian is not an outlier or exception.

birth.”<sup>7</sup> Unless God brings about salvation in a person, he cannot experience salvation. Reconciliation to God relies on the action of God; therefore, unless the Spirit is divine, He cannot apply salvation to man. In the mind of Novatian, the Holy Spirit must be divine.<sup>8</sup>

The bulk of Novatian’s salvific discussion clearly reveals Novatian’s emphasis on sanctification and purity. Keeping the Novatian schism in mind, this emphasis on purity should not surprise readers. Though that schism would not happen for another decade, Novatian’s stress on purity is quite apparent in *De Trinitate*. The Spirit is the source of all pure and holy works in the Christian; Novatian’s list is quite extensive, as shown in the quoted text for *Trin* 17–23 and 26. Yet, the purity brought by the Spirit is not without a goal; Novatian clearly sees the Spirit’s sanctifying work as meant to conform Christians to the image of Christ preparing them for eternity with Him. The transforming work of the Spirit prepares the Christian for the sinless life awaiting him in the presence of Christ. Sanctification then, for Novatian, is not an end in and of itself, but a means. The Spirit reproduces the “graces of Christ,” to use Novatian’s language, in the life of the believer not solely to make the believer a better person but to be preparing the believer for life with God. According to Novatian, sanctification prepares the Christian for glorification, or at least it can be said that he sees the two closely connected.

### **Descent upon Christ**

The Spirit not only empowers the Christian to live for God, but the Spirit also descended upon Christ that He might empower Him as well. Novatian does not take time to develop much of what he states concerning this topic; he simply states it as fact

---

<sup>7</sup>*Trin*, 29.16, 458.

<sup>8</sup>Russell J. DeSimone, *The Treatise of Novatian, the Roman Presbyter on the Trinity: A Study of the text and the doctrine* (Rome: Insitutum Patristicum, 1970), 156.

because the Scriptures do as well.<sup>9</sup> Yet, interestingly, Novatian connects the descent of the Spirit upon Christ as yet another means by which the Spirit aids the church. Novatian sees the Holy Spirit's descent as a means to impart the graces of Christ upon believers. Because the Spirit descended upon the Son, the Spirit can make the Christian more like Christ. In Novatian's mind, the descent of the Spirit upon Christ was not for the aid of Christ, but the aid of the Church. In *Trin* 11, Novatian states "the spring of the Holy Spirit resides in Christ." Novatian follows the pattern of previous theologians in stating that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son, or even proceeds from the Son which therefore makes the Spirit sent from Christ. The Spirit also conforms Christians into the image of Christ, not Himself. Novatian concludes, then, that the Spirit is the applicator of Christ's graces onto the Christian. The Spirit can do this because He descended upon and dwelled in the Son.

### **The Divine and Personal Spirit**

#### **The Divine Spirit**

Before beginning this section, patristic scholars admit that Novatian never explicitly describes or defends the Spirit's divinity, yet he does explicitly refer to the Spirit in personal terms. As previously noted, Novatian primarily defines the Spirit by His activity, yet, that reality does not negate Novatian's understanding of the divinity of the Spirit. Though the Spirit's divinity is not expressly stated, Novatian passively testifies to the Holy Spirit's divinity. Novatian understands the divinity of the Spirit in a matter of fact fashion and sees no need to defend the doctrine.<sup>10</sup> That being said, Novatian still

---

<sup>9</sup>Throughout the entirety of *De Trinitate*, Novatian hesitates to use any language that he does not first find in his Latin Bible, especially with regard to the Spirit. Though Novatian does add a few minor details to what the Scriptures say concerning the works of the Spirit (those statements regarding martyrs and virgins) Novatian does not entertain speculative thoughts, including those statements regarding the Spirit's descent upon the Son. Swete recognizes this fact stating, "But speculation has no interest for his plain and somewhat narrow mind, which is concerned only with matter of faith that are necessary for the guidance of life." (Swete, *Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, 109).

<sup>10</sup>To use a biblical analogy, the doctrine of election is never defined, yet the biblical writers

hints at the Spirit's divinity at several locations in *De Trinitate*. The first instance in which Novatian makes a passing reference to the Spirit's divinity is certainly the vaguest. In *Trin* 16.2,3, Novatian shows that the Son is more than just human because He says "If Christ [were] only human, how is it that He says the Helper is to obtain from Him the things which He [the Helper] is to announce?"<sup>11</sup> Though Novatian's goal is to defend the divinity of the Son in this chapter, he alludes to the divinity of the Spirit. He argues that the Son could not give to the Spirit unless the Son was greater than the Spirit. Therefore, since the Spirit communicates what He receives from the Son, the Son has to be God and greater than the Spirit. Yet, what Novatian implies is that the Spirit is greater than man because the Spirit does not receive things from man but gives things to man, implying authority and divinity.

The works ascribed to the Spirit are an implication of deity. Burgess writes, "If Novatian does not expressly call the Spirit God, he certainly ascribes to Him properties and offices which could be those of God alone."<sup>12</sup> The Spirit reveals truth, makes God known to man, vivifies the heart of man, brings holiness to man, imparts a sample of the grace of Christ upon man—these actions cannot be brought about by anything other than a divine being, and Novatian attributes these functions to the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Novatian also attributes the working of miracles and the forgiveness of sins to the Holy Spirit as well. No mere creature has the right nor ability to perform any of these actions. Novatian

---

state the doctrine as matter of fact. The doctrine is so ingrained and intrinsically understood that it requires no defense or explaining. These biblical authors see no need to define the intricate details of election. Though the divinity of the Spirit is a more vital doctrine than election, the analogy helps to explain why Novatian sees no need to defend the Spirit's divinity.

<sup>11</sup>*Trin* 16.2-3, 410-411.

<sup>12</sup>Stanley M. Burgess, *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 79.

<sup>13</sup>Swete, some seventy years before Burgess, made a similar statement regarding the divine works ascribed to the Holy Spirit by Novatian, "And if Novatian does not expressly call the Spirit God, he certainly ascribes to Him offices and properties which no creature can exercise" (Swete, *Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, 109).

derives all of these actions from his study of the holy Scriptures. Therefore, either the Scriptures are wrong, or Novatian's writings tell the truth concerning the Holy Spirit. In *Trin* 29.8, Novatian explains that the Son sent the Spirit that He might not leave the disciples as orphans. Sending another in His place shows that Christ saw the Spirit as an equal substitute for Himself. Though Novatian clearly sees the Spirit as less than the Son in role, not nature, scholars can safely assume that Novatian's inclusion of texts that support the Son's sending of the Spirit to show Novatian's acceptance and agreement with that reality, thereby implying the divinity of the Spirit.

Novatian also lists the Holy Spirit with the other members of the Godhead in chapter 30. Clearly, listing the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son shows that Novatian views the Spirit as being equal in nature with them. In fact, Novatian's discussion of the Holy Spirit in a treatise on the Trinity shows an implication of the Spirit's divine status. Novatian also includes a summarized statement from the Synoptics concerning the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Novatian's inclusion of that statement reveals his affirmation of the text's meaning. Again, another implication of the Spirit's divinity. Finally, Novatian thoroughly proves that the Spirit makes men holy, yet how could the Spirit make men holy since only God is holy? Unless the Spirit is divine, He cannot accomplish this task.

As was stated earlier in this paper, Novatian ascribes divinity to the Holy Spirit; yet, one of the indications that Novatian understood the Spirit to be divine is his refusal to refer to the Spirit as a creature. Some scholars may argue that the neglect to mention a concept does not prove disbelief; in fact, scholars have used a similar argument to prove Novatian's belief in a divine Holy Spirit. If assumed to be not divine, then the Holy Spirit must be a creature; however, as DeSimone points out, "Novatian's Holy Spirit is not a corporeal creature, since He possess an intellectual nature."<sup>14</sup> Yet,

---

<sup>14</sup>DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 155.

Novatian's Holy Spirit cannot simply be a spiritual creature. DeSimone argues, "No spiritual creature is infused into the inmost parts of another creature, since a creature is not participated in but is rather a participant."<sup>15</sup> While reading *De Trinitate*, one clearly recognizes that Novatian understands the Holy Spirit indwells, Christ in His incarnation, the prophets, the apostles, and all believers. Novatian explains in sections 9 and 16 through 19 that the Holy Spirit actively works in the deepest parts of a Christian's soul, to bring about godly character and to do battle against sin. Moreover, Novatian explains the almost inseparable relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christ in section 11. No mere creature, corporeal or spiritual, could have such intimate relationships with both Christ and man. The Holy Spirit of which Novatian writes must be divine.<sup>16</sup>

### **Divine Attributes**

A second means of determining whether Novatian understood the Spirit as divine is to determine whether he ascribes divine attributes to the Holy Spirit. Novatian never directly claimed that the Spirit is divine, nor did he directly describe the divine attributes of the Spirit. Yet, in the same manner that Novatian implied the Holy Spirit's divinity, he also implies that the Holy Spirit possesses divine attributes. Therefore, Novatian's implying divine attributes to the Holy Spirit further proves that Novatian understood the Holy Spirit as divine.

The first of the divine attributes Novatian implies that the Holy Spirit possesses is that of immutability. As with all of the attributes to be discussed, Novatian never directly states that the Holy Spirit is immutable, yet he clearly believes the Spirit to be unchanging as shown by the manner in which he describes the Holy Spirit's work. In sections 3–5, Novatian discusses the work of the Spirit in both the Old and New

---

<sup>15</sup>DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 155.

<sup>16</sup>DeSimone, *Treatise of Novatian*, 156.

Testaments, primarily that the Spirit has various roles and functions which He exercises in both Testaments. To quote Novatian, “yet this does not mean that the one who carries on these things in this way has opposed Himself, or is someone else while He acts in this way, but He is one and the same, distributing His functions through the times and the circumstance of particular situations and the turning points [in the course of events].”<sup>17</sup> Novatian clarifies further when he writes, “Therefore, [He is] one and the same Spirit who [was] in the prophets and the apostles.”<sup>18</sup> The Spirit condemns sin in both the Old and New Testaments, and He comforts the righteous in both Testaments as well, according to Novatian.

The variance in frequency of the Spirit’s activity does not counter this argument, in the same manner that the Spirit’s increased activity in the New Testament does not prove the existence of more than one Spirit of God. The Spirit did not come in full until after the resurrection and ascension of the Son when He was sent to comfort and guide the people of God.<sup>19</sup> God’s immutability is determined by His non-changing nature and actions: God’s nature and hatred of sin will always remain unchanged. Since His nature will remain unchanged, the way in which God acts will also remain unchanged. Novatian describes the actions of the Spirit as unchanging, from which readers can infer that Novatian saw the nature of the Spirit as unchanging as well. Because God is the only immutable being, to imply that the Holy Spirit possesses the same attribute is to ascribe divinity to the Holy Spirit.

The second divine attribute of the Holy Spirit implied by Novatian is holiness. According to Novatian in sections 9, 10, 16, 17, and 19, the Holy Spirit actively works to develop holiness in the people of God. In section 16, Novatian describes the

---

<sup>17</sup>*Trin*, 29.4, 455.

<sup>18</sup>*Trin*, 29.6, 456.

<sup>19</sup>*Trin*, 29.6, 456.

Spirit as He who brings about the second birth in humans “a kind of seed of divine origin...a pledge of the promise of inheritance”, making them into “a temple of God.” For what purpose does Novatian see the Spirit bringing about this radical transformation? He does not leave his readers in the dark, “He [the Spirit] is given to live in our bodies and produce holiness, bringing this up in us.”<sup>20</sup> Now, only one being is ever described as holy and that is God Himself. How can the Spirit bring about holiness in Christian unless He Himself is holy, and how can the Spirit be holy, within Himself, unless He is God? Novatian never describes the Spirit as being made holy; instead, the Spirit works to make human beings holy. Humans can only be made holy when they are connected to God, again since God is the only source of holiness. If being connected to God is the only means of holiness and the Holy Spirit creates holiness in Christians, the Holy Spirit must be holy which therefore means He is divine. Novatian had to see the Holy Spirit as divine in order to see Him as holy.

Not only does Novatian attribute immutability and holiness to the Holy Spirit, but he also implies that the Holy Spirit is eternal. No where in *De Trinitate* does Novatian imply that the Holy Spirit is a created being; in fact, Novatian implies the exact opposite. In sections 16 and 17, Novatian describes the Spirit in terms of eternity. In section 16, the Holy Spirit “brings our bodies to eternity and to the resurrection of immortality,” and the Spirit unites Christians “with the divine eternity of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> Similar language is used in section 17, except Novatian is a bit more explicit stating that the Spirit in Himself and through Himself moves our bodies toward immortality.<sup>22</sup> Only God is ever described as being eternal, without beginning or ending; and Novatian uses the same language to describe the Holy Spirit. The Spirit could not prepare Christians for

---

<sup>20</sup>*Trin*, 29.16, 458.

<sup>21</sup>*Trin*, 29.16, 458.

<sup>22</sup>*Trin*, 29.17, 459.

eternity with God unless He Himself was eternal, and the Spirit can only be eternal if He is indeed divine Himself. Of the attributes Novatian ascribes to the Holy Spirit, eternity is by far the most explicit in *De Trinitate*.

Omnipresence may be the easiest of the Spirit's attributes overlooked in *De Trinitate*, not because it's hard to find but because the attribute is described in a nonchalant manner. Throughout chapter 29, Novatian describes the Spirit as indwelling more than one individual, in both Old and New Testaments. In section 10, Novatian states, "For it is He who placed prophets in the church."<sup>23</sup> Again, in sections 16 and 17 he uses the language of "our bodies," emphasizing the plurality of the bodies in which the Spirit inhabits.<sup>24</sup> In the Scriptures, only God is described as being at all places at all times. Therefore, for Novatian to use this language to describe the Holy Spirit, he must understand the Holy Spirit to be divine. Again, Novatian's focus is not to prove the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit; but he could not make these statements if he did not believe the Spirit possessed this attribute.

Novatian attributes a certain amount of divine authority to the actions of the Holy Spirit. Of course, authority is not considered one of the attributes of God, yet God's divine authority is a by-product of His nature. God has created the world; therefore, He has the authority and right to do whatever He wants with that which is His own. In terms of the Holy Spirit, His role is to war against sin within a Christian's heart that He may produce holiness and prepare the Christian for eternity with God. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father through the Son to accomplish this task in the church, and He possesses the authority to do so. Taking into account what has been previously shown concerning Novatian's understanding of the Holy Spirit's divinity, claiming that the Spirit has divine authority within Himself is not without logical support.

---

<sup>23</sup>*Trin*, 29.10, 457.

<sup>24</sup>*Trin*, 29.16–17, 458–459.

The Spirit also possesses the attribute of wisdom according to Novatian. In connection to the Spirit's revelatory role, the Spirit communicates truth to the people of God and reveals the "sacred mysteries of the Gospel."<sup>25</sup> Throughout his work, Novatian highlights the revelatory nature of the Spirit. Unless the Spirit possesses infinite wisdom, what does He have to reveal to humans? The only way for the Spirit to possess infinite wisdom is if the Holy Spirit is divine.

What has just been stated may seem contrary to what Novatian has stated elsewhere in his work. Particularly in *Trin* 16.2, Novatian seems to contradict himself concerning the Spirit's wisdom and the Spirit's revealing, "And certainly the Helper does not receive anything from humanity, on the contrary the Helper grants knowledge to humanity; the Helper does not learn the further from humanity, but the Helper instructs humanity about the future . . . But if He receives what He would announce from Christ."<sup>26</sup> Contextually, this section rests in the middle of Novatian's discussion of the divinity of the Son, though this section implies the Spirit's divinity as well. Initially, Novatian seems to work himself into a theological contradiction: the Spirit possesses wisdom in and of Himself and the Son instructs the Spirit what to say. The remedy to this seeming juxtaposition is found by noticing the nuance in what Novatian is writing. The first statement referencing the Spirit's knowing the future is a description of the vastness of the Spirit's knowledge. The Spirit does indeed know all things because the Spirit is divine. The second statement is a description of the content of the Spirit's proclamation. The Spirit is sent through Christ that the Spirit may bring men to the Son. Therefore, though the Spirit knows all things, the primary focus of His revelation is about the Son.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>*Trin*, 29.9, 457.

<sup>26</sup>*Trin*, 16.2–3, 410–411.

<sup>27</sup>John the apostle teaches his readers, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).

## **Personhood**

Novatian's references to the personhood of the Spirit rests on his use of masculine pronouns. The Spirit is not an "it" or a "thing" for Novatian; He is a Person, a divine person at that. Novatian ascribes an agenda to the Spirit; for Novatian, the Spirit has a will. An ethereal force or impersonal spirit does not have a will; it does not have a goal but simply acts at random. The Spirit "makes the Lord's church complete and perfect in every respect and in all things."<sup>28</sup> In *Trin* 18, the Spirit wars against the believer's sins and fleshly desires. The Spirit "confines," "conquers," "holds together," "drives away," "explains," and "works"; Novatian's diction would take on a completely different tone if he did not see the Spirit as being a person.

The Spirit is a separate person from the Son. In *Trin* 11 when Novatian described the descent of the Spirit on the Son, Novatian defends the distinctness of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is described as "living fully and entirely in Christ alone, not diminished in any proportion or division." In Novatian's mind, the Spirit is a distinct, divine person, less than the Father and Son in role but not in substance.

## **Conclusion**

The fathers were by no means perfect men, and they certainly were not always correct in their theology. At times, they might twist the truth or obscure facts to prove their own agendas. Yet, the faults and errors of the fathers make them more valuable to Christians because they can learn from where the fathers erred. Yet, much of the time, the fathers get it right and gloriously so. Novatian is one of those fathers from whom Christians can learn much.

Throughout the history of the church, the understanding of the Holy Spirit appears secondary to other theological categories. To neglect the theology of the Holy Spirit truly hinders the Christian's understanding of his or her salvation; therefore, there

---

<sup>28</sup>*Trin* 29.10, 457.

is great harm in neglecting the Holy Spirit. Many of the early fathers saw the need to mention the Holy Spirit; however, they did not take the time to dive deep into the theology of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Holy Spirit was never the central topic of the early father's discussions. Not until Novatian do scholars find a detailed, focused discussion on the Holy Spirit in the works of the ante-Nicene Fathers.

Novatian's work *De Trinitate* helps the church better understand the extent of the Spirit's work. Novatian revealed to his readers the intricate involvement of the Spirit in the life of the church. The Spirit constantly works within the individual believer and the church to make them into the pure temple of God. Novatian stresses the need for believers to understand how much Christians depend on the Spirit to live a holy life.

Along with the work of the Spirit, astute readers are able to extrapolate implications of Novatian's understanding of the Spirit's divine nature. Novatian assumes many of the divine attributes which are regularly ascribed to the Father and the Son though Novatian never explicitly refers to the Spirit as divine. Many chastise Novatian for this apparent oversight; scholars either disregard what Novatian has to say concerning the Holy Spirit or they conclude that Novatian's writings on the Spirit are a regression in pneumatology. Both of these conclusion show a lack care and empathy for the time in which Novatian wrote. Does Novatian ever state in *De Trinitate* that his purpose is to show expressly show the personhood and divinity of the Holy Spirit? The answer is no. Novatian tips off his readers to his purpose in chapter 1 when he begins, "The rule of truth demands..."<sup>29</sup> Novatian is writing *De Trinitate* that he might explain the "Rule of Truth", "Rule of Faith" later in the work, to his readers. Also, the historical context shows that the primary error faced by the church concerned the nature of the Son; so of course Novatian would dedicate the majority of his work to the Son and only briefly explaining his theology on the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>29</sup>*Trin*, 1.1, 367.

As adequately explained, Novatian ascribes divine attributes and actions to the Holy Spirit. Novatian never expressly calls the Holy Spirit God, there is no denying that fact. However, Novatian goes to great lengths to describe the actions performed by the Holy Spirit as divine acts. As proven earlier, the Spirit cannot be a creature because creatures cannot perform the tasks assigned to the Holy Spirit; only a divine being can perform those functions which Novatian has described of the Holy Spirit. Either one must conclude that the Novatian Holy Spirit is a creature or a divine being, and the logical answer is that the Holy Spirit is indeed a divine being. Yet, not only do the divine actions of the Spirit prove His divinity but the implied divine attributes defend this conclusion. The divine actions attributed to the Holy Spirit necessitate that the performer must also possess divine attributes. Novatian does not straightforwardly declare the divine attributes of the Holy Spirit, yet he implies that one who is able to perform such magnificent deeds possesses the necessary divine attributes. For one to claim that Novatian does not believe that the Holy Spirit is God shows that they have missed the clear indications that Novatian included in his work *De Trinitate*.

Just as writers today have a goal and purpose in writing so did writers in the time of Novatian. Scholars commit an unnecessary mistake when faulting Novatian for his lack of explicitly calling the Holy Spirit divine. None of the New Testament writers explicitly call the Holy Spirit divine either; yet, conservative scholars do not question the New Testament's understanding of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Though holy Scripture and the writings of Novatian are on different levels, the comparison still stands. Scholars cannot impose later theological developments back onto earlier writers. Though he writes concerning the Spirit with less clarity than those theologians who came after him, Novatian's chapter on the Holy Spirit in *De Trinitate* surpasses all other pre-Nicene writings on the Holy Spirit. Novatian shows historians that before Basil that the fathers understood the Spirit as an active, divine person. For these reasons, chapter 29 of Novatian's *De Trinitate* can be considered one of the first treatises on the Holy Spirit.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Briggman, Anthony. *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Burgess, Stanley M., ed. *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spirit and the Church: Antiquity*. Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984.
- Casurella, Anthony. *The Johannine Paraclete in the Church Fathers: A Study in the History of Exegesis. Beiträge Zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese*. Vol. 25. Tübingen: Mohr, 1983.
- DeSimone, Russell J. *The Treatise of Novatian, the Roman Presbyter on the Trinity. A Study of the text and the doctrine*. Rome: Insitutum Patristicum, 1970.
- Holmes, Michael W., ed. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, translated by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.
- Novatian. *The Trinity, the Spectacles, Jewish Foods, in Praise of Purity, Letters*. Translated by Russell J. DeSimone. *The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation* Vol. 67. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974.
- Origen, *On First Principles*. Translated by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012.
- Papandrea, James L. *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Vol. 175. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinitarian Theology of Novatian of Rome: A Study in Third-Century Orthodoxy*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.
- Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1912.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *The Holy Spirit—in Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013.

von Dort, Johannes. "The Holy Spirit and the Early Church: Doctrine and Confession."  
*Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 3 (September 2011): 1-8. *Academic Search  
Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 25, 2016).

## ABSTRACT

### THE PROMISED HELPER: A COMMENTARY ON THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF NOVATIAN'S *DE TRINITATE*

Brian Andrew Blair, ThM  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

This thesis is a detailed commentary on Novatian's chapter 29, where he discusses the Holy Spirit in his work on the Trinity. Chapter 1 of this thesis briefly introduces the reader to the early fathers' understanding on the Holy Spirit, and chapter 2 introduces the reader to Novatian specifically. Chapter 3 of this thesis is a detailed commentary on chapter 29, which is dedicated specifically to the Holy Spirit. The final chapter of this thesis examines the concepts discussed in chapter 3 with the intention of showing Novatian's work to be the height of pre-Nicene pneumatology.

## VITA

Brian Andrew Blair

### EDUCATION

B.A., Blue Mountain College, 20011

M.Div., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth Pastor, Fairhaven Baptist Church, Olive Branch, Mississippi, 2011-2012

Pastoral Intern, Grace Baptist Church, Grenada, Mississippi, 2012-2013