The Nicene Faith, Parts 1 and 2. Vol. 2: *Formation of Christian Theology* by John Behr. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004. Pp. xvii + 507. $30.00 paperback.

It is hard not to gush superlatives in reviewing this work. In it, the author has tackled one of the most controverted periods of the ancient church and its doctrinal heritage, explored and elucidated the primary sources with sophistication, offered correctives to simplified approaches to the period that have facilitated instruction but invited misunderstanding, responded with dignified aplomb but devastating finesse to scholarship critical of the perspectives articulated during the period, set forth the development of the respective fourth-century contributors' viewpoints with careful nuance, and indicated what was and was not affirmed in the conciliar affirmations adopted. These are prodigious undertakings, splendidly executed in the work under review.

In this volume, Fr. John Behr offers a winsome, readable, and convincing presentation of the process leading to the articulation of that Nicene faith that has lain at the basis of all subsequent orthodox Christian teaching. Along the way, he has produced (in part 2) the finest treatment of the views of the Great Cappadocians—Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa—available in English. Fr. Behr's presentation zeroes in, as nothing else in the English language does, on the doctrinal focus of the Cappadocian fathers' labors. Given their overwhelming importance for the period and their preponderant influence in subsequent Eastern Christian thought, this is a major achievement, which deserves the highest accolades. Joined as it is (in part 1) to the elucidation of the controversies that racked the period, and a careful presentation of Athanasius' teaching and involvement in them, this second volume of Fr. Behr's Formation of Christian Theology is an outstanding contribution to patristic scholarship.

Fr. Behr points out that the trinitarian deliverances issuing from the controversies of this period, as set forth in the creedal declarations of Nicaea and Constantinople, have sometimes been misappropriated by their defenders and proponents. Reading these affirmations back into preceding Christian thought, as a conclusion drawn from assumptions about "normative Christianity," has

often led to the assessment that from the beginning the Christian faith had been concerned with giving "an account of the inner life of God, an immanent Trinitarian theology concerned with the self-differentiation of the one God . . . , subsequently complemented by an account of how one of these divine persons became incarnate" (475). As Fr. Behr convincingly demonstrates, though, this approach—however commonly invoked in systematic- and historical-theological treatments—was emphatically not what the preceding generations had been concerned with. Instead, all the way back to the apostles, the concern had been to proclaim Christ crucified and resurrected as the fulfillment of the (Old Testament) Scriptures. Normative Christianity was, from the first, concerned with the proclamation of Christ from the Scriptures, not with intertrinitarian relationships. The controversies of the fourth century arose from struggling to deal responsibly with the implications of that proclamation, not from a preexisting metaphysical assumption that had come under fire. Trinitarian theology arose from the proclamation of Christ; it did not lead to it.

The author also demonstrates the methodical self-awareness of the leading exponents in the development of the Nicene faith as they thought on the controverted points and their careful determination to bind themselves to the implications of the church's proclamation of Christ. Fr. Behr shows how they wrestled with alternative formulations, shifted their terminology, and came to their respective conclusions—which, as he points out, were not always couched in identical terms. He indicates thus that their concern was not to explicate the unfathomable but to expose the untenable, finding terms that would best serve the purpose. Thus, as a result of the fourth-century controversies, the phrase "three persons (hypostaseis) and one nature (ousia)" became what it had not previously been—the way to express trinitarian theology.

The Nicene faith thus set forth served both as the contemporary defense of what had been handed down since the time of the apostles and also as the norm for subsequent orthodox Christianity—the latter because the former. This volume offers a thorough, painstaking, but fascinating examination of how this all came to be.

This all transpired in the midst of convoluted interpersonal and politically charged developments that unquestionably complicated the unfolding process. The author patiently works through these developments, offering enough exposition of what took place to enable readers to make adequate sense of them without becoming overwhelmed with extraneous information. Acquaintance with these data prepares readers to understand how challenging the questions became, why the aftermath of Nicaea became so tangled, and how insightfully Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa dealt with the issues at hand.

In presenting the contributions of these four great theologians, the author appropriately focuses on their respective contributions within the context of the controversies. Beyond this, though, he manages to introduce the other emphases of the life's work of each of them, such that the treatments end up

offering a *précis* of the achievements of each. The picture that emerges for each is thus one of a complete and well-rounded servant of the church, not just of a theologian expounding doctrinal verities.

Fr. Behr's *The Nicene Faith* is an altogether impressive scholarly accomplishment. It will unquestionably remain the definitive treatment of the topic for some time to come. Anyone teaching or learning about how the Nicene faith found articulation would be well advised to obtain and peruse this volume. Scholars in the field will certainly want to purchase it for their own use, and libraries in seminaries and universities should definitely add it to their collections. Given the outstanding, winsomely presented scholarship displayed in the first two volumes of this series, the third—which is to treat the further doctrinal controversies down to the seventh ecumenical council, Nicaea II (787 A.D.)—is eagerly to be anticipated.

—James R. Payton, Jr.