HARDING SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Harding University
Scholar Works at Harding

Dissertations and Theses

Harding School of Theology

Spring 2019

The Theological Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa

Marcus McCormick
Harding School of Theology

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-etd

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
McCormick, Marcus, "The Theological Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa" (2019). *Dissertations and Theses*. 7.
https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-etd/7

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Harding School of Theology at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.

HARDING UNIVERSITY

THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA

A Guided Research Paper

Presented to Professor Mark Powell

Harding School of Theology

Memphis, Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Marcus McCormick

May 2019

Gregory (c.330-c.395) lived in the wake of tremendous change in the Christian world. The generation before had witnessed the end of the persecutions of Diocletian (c. 305), beheld the conversion of Constantine and his edict of toleration (313), and navigated the first wave of the Arian controversy through to the council of Nicaea (325). These events together created the environment for Gregory's thought and framed the central questions for Cappadocian theology.

The council of 318 bishops at Nicaea had been a success for Athanasius's party and, for Constantine's part, had established a feasible precedent for the spiritual unity of the empire. On both the theological and the political fronts, however, the victory at Nicaea had not been decisive. The Arian believers within the empire were still unconvinced by the deliberations and declarations of men in faraway council.[1] Constantine himself continued to vacillate between the Arian and Nicene factions throughout his lifetime, and when he chose the Arian bishop of Constantinople to administer his deathbed baptism, he anticipated (or perhaps, precipitated) the fortune of the church for the next half century.

Constantine's dynastic legacy did not bear the fruit of political or theological unity that he had worked for: his sons divided the empire again into east and west, Arian and Nicene. Constantius II (337-361), emperor in the east, supported Arian Christianity over the Nicene believers, and ten years after the end of the council those who had celebrated a victory in the church were again out of favor.[2] The Cappadocians and their

---

[1] For a more detailed narration of the development and ongoing nature of the competing *homoian* theology, see Lewis Ayers's nuanced discussion in *Nicaea and its Legacy: an approach to fourth-century Trinitarian theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 100-153.

[2] Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995): 2. While Constantius II reigned over the empire Jerome made his famous observation that "The world woke

contemporaries, successors to Nicaea, worked to provide a fuller image of orthodox belief – clarifying both the nature of the God in which they placed their faith, as well as the implications of that belief in the world.

Gregory of Nyssa was born at the beginning of the Arian resurgence to an impoverished, albeit distinguished, family in Cappadocia with deep Christian roots.[3] There are few details about Gregory's early life, but he revealed in his writing a deep investment in the life of his family. His youngest brother Peter was a fellow bishop and his correspondent throughout his lifetime. Naucratius died an early death, but his meek monastic example prefigured the ascetic piety of his family.[4] His famous elder brother Basil, around five years his senior, had attended university at the school in Athens, and became an influential monastic and bishop. His sister Macrina, born around 327, was a tremendous spiritual force – Gregory himself refers to her in rapid succession as a "good", "noble", and "invincible athlete" in faith in his work commemorating her saintly life.[5] Of Gregory's illustrious siblings, Basil and Macrina occupied most of his attention, and he considered both to be his most important academic and spiritual teachers.[6]

Although in his early days he had been a lector for the church, Gregory's first vocation was a secular career as a teacher in rhetoric (following his father), and he was

---

up as from a slumber, and discovered itself to be Arian." St. Jerome, *The Dialogue with the Luciferians*, 329.

[3] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, xiv. Gregory himself was a third generation Christian, and was born around 335, the tenth year after the first council at Nicaea. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999): 2-3.

[4] Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*, 967-968.

[5] *Life of Macrina,* 962, 968, 974.

[6] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 52-53. His two great anthropological treatises, *On the making of man* and *On the soul and resurrection* both preserve the enormity of Basil and Macrina, respectively, in Gregory's thought.

presumably married to a woman by the name of Theosebeia. Under the influence of friends and family - including the third Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nazianzus – he sought the monastic life in a community on the Iris established by Basil.[7] His venture into the contemplative life, however, was not to last. In the end it was Basil's ambitions, rather than Gregory's, that guided his path into formal ecclesiastical affairs.

The imperial support of Arian clergy and doctrine had been disrupted under the reigns of Julian (361-363) and Jovian (363-364), and ever since the accession of the Valentinian dynasty (364-) issues of worship and religion within the empire had once again become matters of maintaining peaceable coexistence within the state.[8] One of Valens's acts, in order to maintain a balance of power between the Nicene and Arian parties, was to divide the bishopric of Cappadocia into two. Basil, who had previously been the sole regional bishop, now oversaw from one of these Cappadocian capitals – Caesarea.[9] Therefore, he appointed Gregory, despite his protests, to a newly established position overseeing the bishopric of Nyssa around 371. The appointment was an important move for Basil as it strengthened his jurisdiction in the region as he and other Nicene Christians once again waited for imperial favor. It was Basil's hope that Gregory might confer distinction upon his post rather than the assignment conferring honor upon

[7] Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, v.3 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics Inc., 1986): 254-255. Basil, for a time, lived the ascetic life of contemplation in a community on the opposite bank of his mother and sister and developed his teaching on the common life of what would become cenobitical monasticism. Mary Emily Keenan, "De professione Christiana and de perfecetione: a study of the ascetical doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950): 171.

[8] Juliette Day, Raimo Hakola, Maijastina Kahlos et. al, eds., *Spaces in Antiquity: cultural, theological, and archaeological perspectives*, (Abington-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2016): 28. Ayers, 169-171. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53. Valens and Valentinian together promoted freedom in worship, although Valens (364-378), the eastern emperor, did maintain the practice of dismissing trouble-making Nicene bishops during his reign. Gregory himself was exiled in 375 only four years after being established in Nyssa, only to return after the death and defeat of Valens at Adrianople in 378.

[9] Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4. The other, Tyana, was held by a new *homoian* bishop.

him.[10] By the end of his career Gregory raised the see of Nyssa to the status that his brother had envisioned, but Basil would not live to see it accomplished. Indeed, during his lifetime Basil often complained of Gregory's lack of political wit, administrative efficiency, and skill in financial management.[11] Nyssen's lack of attention to the formal requirements of ecclesial office did not, however, preclude his capacity for theological and pastoral teaching, nor did it disqualify him as a champion of the Nicene declaration at the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381.

This period, before and briefly after the council at Constantinople, was Nyssen's most prolific period for theological work. Just after being established in his bishopric (371), Gregory wrote his first ascetic treatise *On virginity*.[12] After his brother's death in 379, Gregory composed his great series of polemics against neo-Arian theology. Continuing also on his brother's exposition of the six days of creation (*Hexameron*), Gregory wrote his treatise *On the making of man* to describe the nature and place of humanity in creation. Although he wrote primarily to preserve Basil's memory, the potency of his thought gained the attention of other Nicene bishops and allowed Gregory to come fully into his own as a theologian and ecclesiastical leader.[13] Indeed, soon after Basil his sister Macrina passed, presumably with Gregory at her side. From his final

[10] *Life of Moses*, xiv. Despite what follows, Gregory would indeed distinguish himself and his bishopric, remembered along with Gregory Nazianzus and his brother, Peter, as "foremost champions of piety" and bishops of "brilliant distinction." Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 386.

[11] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 53. Quasten, 254.

[12] Quasten, 269-270. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 5.

[13] Nathan Howard, "Familial Askêsis in the Vita Macrinae" *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 33. Quasten, 258.

conversation with her, Gregory purports to have recorded *On the soul and the resurrection*, writing down his sister's words as she was "inspired by the Holy Spirit."[14]

The religiously turbulent period that had characterized Gregory's life to this point had finally ended. With the Arian emperor Valens crushed at the battle of Adrianople (378) and Arian doctrines condemned by the second ecumenical council under Theodosius (381), Eunomius and any others not in communion with those bishops affirming "the hypostasis of three Persons of equal honor and of equal power," would not remain in authority over the churches.[15] Never again would an Arian ruler preside over the eastern half of the empire, and the *homoian* faith – a spent force in the battle for political hegemony – began to slowly decline and divide.[16]

Gregory, for his part, spent the final years of his life exercising his rhetorical talent, defending established orthodoxy and turning his attention to more pastoral and mystical theology. He delivered the funeral oration for Meletius, bishop of Antioch, who had first presided over the council at Constantinople, as well as for the emperor Theodosius's wife Flacilla and his daughter. More importantly, however, he was charged with articulating the orthodox teaching on the Holy Spirit in Pontus – a time in which he

[14] *Life of Macrina*, 978. When speaking about the dates for Gregory's works, it is suitable only to speak of ranges of dates or otherwise those times after certain events in his life provided by internal evidence in the texts. For a good survey of the studies on the chronology of Gregory's works, see J. Danielou, "La Chronologie des oeuvres de Gregoire de Nysse" *Studia Patristica* 7 (1996): 159-169; s.v. "Chronology of Works" in Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Guilio Maspero, eds., *Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, Seth Cherney, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 153-169.

[15] Helladius, successor to Basil in Caesarea and Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, are included in a list of those bishops whom should be considered the defenders of the Nicene faith that emerged dominant. "The emperor was personally acquainted with all these bishops, and had ascertained that they governed their respective churches wisely and piously." Sozomen Hermias, *Ecclesiastical History*, 382.

[16] "For the Church once being divided, rested not in that schism, but the separatists taking occasion from the slightest and most frivolous pretences, disagreed among themselves." Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 128.

either formulated, or likely, committed finally to writing, his treatise on the subject.[17] In the period following his final refutation of Eunomius, who stood before the emperor Theodosius for judgement in 383, Gregory composed his most poignant works describing the spiritual life: the *Life of Moses* and his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Sometime in the 390s Gregory passed away leaving a great theological legacy to be upheld by the following generation of Christians – particularly as the controversies surrounding the human and divine natures of Christ began to come to the fore. Many valued his position on the doctrine of the Trinity and his anti-Eunomian polemic, but the influence of Neoplatonism on his theology was clear. In the final years of the fourth and opening years of the fifth century, controversy surrounding the theology of Origen erupted. Because Gregory employed Platonic language and taught on controversial topics in a manner like Origen (as will be seen in the later discussion of hope for universal salvation and the nature of the resurrection), his theology came under scrutiny within the church. However, his work survived the tests of the time, and continued to exercise influence on later Greek fathers such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory Palamas.

Just as Gregory's theology proper emerges from the ecclesiastical and political context of his time, his anthropology develops as a reflection of his convictions about the nature of God. This extended survey of Gregory's work will introduce first those elements which became the touchstones for Gregory's teaching about God - namely his doctrines of divine infinity, incomprehensibility, and unity of essence and energies – and then observe out the features of Gregory's anthropology. The span of his inquiry, as with any work delving into the meaning behind the terms "divine" or "human" nature, is

[17] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 54. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4-5.

expansive, covering the whole of human experience: from the nature of imagehood, the understanding of sexuality, the composition of the human being, and many other topics beyond these. It is, however, under the lens of the divine nature that Gregory hoped to bring into focus the nature of humanity as intended by God, as restored by God, and now living with God.

A Vision of God

The hallmark of pro-Nicene theology, including Gregory's, is the belief that there is only one divine nature, one God, at work:

> But in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit;[18]

Qualifying this affirmation, however, is the belief that the Godhead is indeed differentiated into three Persons:

> we regard it [the Godhead] as consummately perfect and incomprehensibly excellent yet as containing clear distinctions within itself which reside in the peculiarities of each of the Persons: as possessing invariableness by virtue of its common attribute of uncreatedness, but differentiated by the unique character of each Person.[19]

This is the legacy of Nicaea expressed by Gregory. Individual pro-Nicene theologians might be said to have different points of origin, and either emphasize (or present logically first) either the unity or the diversity in the Godhead, but it is true that, as with Gregory's distinction of the divine Persons above, these beliefs are the common attributes of their vision of God.[20]

---

[18] Gregory of Nyssa, *On not three gods*, 334.

[19] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 61.

[20] As well as pro-Nicene theologians of the traditional East and West who, in the words of Lewis Ayers, should rightly be considered together despite the "categories of division." Ayres, 278-301. Gregory

Nevertheless, there are distinctions beyond these that characterized Gregory's conception of God.[21] Gregory's unique character is most eminent in his expression of divine infinity, his insistence that the essence - the divine nature - is ultimately unknowable, and his conception of the divine essences and energies. Gregory employs each of these principles in turn to preserve the foundational truth of the Christian faith – communion with the triune God.

The doctrine of divine infinity, perhaps above all other facets of Gregory's theology, appears as the expression of Gregory's desire to maintain the separation between creature and Creator. Meredith points out that the creature-Creator divide, along with Nyssen's claims about divine infinity, are likely resultant from the polemical context of his early writings.[22] His distinction between the creature and the Creator was the essential point of departure for Anomoeans and neo-Arians, who believed in a dissimilarity, albeit a *homoiousios* likeness (if not a *hetero* otherness), between the Son and the Father.[23] Eunomius contended that the difference in their natures centered around the Son's status as Begotten, which implied a divergence from the Ungenerate and Unbegotten nature of God.[24] For the Eunomian party, the essential oneness and simplicity of the divine nature – to which Gregory also subscribed – necessitated the Father's

himself seeks to balance in his own thought the concepts of diversity and unity in his opening statements in *The great catechism*, lest "in [one's] contention with the Greeks [they sink] to the level of Judaism" (473).

[21] This is by no means intended to indicate that Gregory was the first nor the only champion of these ideas about God – these traits are those most often emphasized by Gregory in his writing.

[22] Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 13-14.

[23] *Against Eunomius*, 56. "The whole controversy, then, between the Church and the Anomoeans turns on this: Are we to regard the Son and the Holy Spirit as belonging to created or uncreated existence?"

[24] Ayers, 146-147.

Ungenerate character to be the only divine characteristic, as well as being his alone.[25] Therefore, the Son and the Father could both be spoken of in human language in a manner embodying their essence: the Father as Unbegotten and the Son as Begotten, and, therefore, a creature.[26]

Gregory, responding in his polemical treatises, finds this manipulation of the essential categories of creature and Creator untenable. For Nyssen, the Creator is the ultimate ground of being. The creature, by contrast, exists only in relation to and by participation in God, whose nature possesses being.[27] Thus far, both Gregory and his Eunomian opponents might yet agree: after all, the Begotten nature of the Son could be said to embody a nominal relation and yet be one of creature and Creator. Gregory points out, however, that the recognition of God as being one ought to logically rule out the Anomoean distinction between the two persons, Begotten and Unbegotten as senior (πρεσβυτερον) and junior (νεωτερον) beings.[28] Eunomius speaks of the Father as the "Supreme and Absolute Being," in contrast to the Son – "another existing through it, but after it."[29] Eunomius and his followers claimed to still worship the Son as God, but not as

---

[25] Harold Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930): 36-37.

[26] Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: an anagogical approach* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013): 24-25; 54-55.

[27] Han Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, "The Concept of Spacing" (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995): 1-5. Cherniss, 35. *Life of Moses*, 13. *The great catechism*, 498.

[28] Ayers, 146-149. Aëtius, Eunomius, and others also tend towards the usage of other names for the Father and the Son, including the pairing "generate" and "ingenerate" first used by Arius in his *Thalia*. When the language of Sonship is used, it is to press further the notion of Christ being "generate" of the Father and implying an inherent subordinationism.

[29] *Against Eunomius*, 50.

the Supreme Being. In doing so, however, Eunomius inevitably draws a distinction based on a measure of some kind, which Gregory characterizes as "spacing," or *diastema*, between the Father and the Son. Some form of positioning would have to be considered, then deemed correct, and measured between these two immaterial Beings.[30]

In response Gregory draws together analogies comparing the length of two reeds, or, in other places, the comparison of the height at two points on a hill, explaining that Eunomius considers "the supreme from that which is below, and assigning to the Father as it were the peak of some hill, while he seats the Son lower down in the hollows." In speaking this way Gregory points out the absurdity of the comparison. Gregory asks where the reed measuring the depths of the nature of the Father might end, and how much it might exceed the length of the Son's – or, likewise, how high the hill might be to mark the divine nature in excess of the nature of the Son. "We get the idea of excess," Gregory remarks, "only by a comparison of limits: where there is no limit, we cannot think of any excess."[31] Regardless of the analogy used and despite the substitution of any pairing of names, the concept of using a measure to designate the two breaches the defined principles surrounding Divinity. In other words, Nyssen claimed that it is the creature that consisted in this realm of the interval, or *diastema*, rather than God due to the fact that it was not the Creator.[32] This distinction of interval, or spacing, was the key for keeping separate the created and the divine.

---

[30] *Against Eunomius*, 209.

[31] *Against Eunomius*, 51-52.

[32] Balthasar, 3. Indeed, it is Gregory's contention that any comparison between creature and Creator is inappropriate and impossible. Therefore, he is similarly unimpressed with arguments that, instead of comparing the Son and the Father as measures, compare the infinity God with creation itself to determine the Divine nature. Boersma, 24-25; 42.

Gregory consistently argues that the concept of spacing, measure (*diastema*), or positioning cannot be applied to uncreated Being. Within God there is no movement, alteration, passion, and certainly no measure in the sense of the categories of time, space, and quality perceived by created beings whether "in the distinction between his Persons, or his nature as such."[33] For God, nothing "is as past or future,"[34] and the concept of spatial position is a "property of the material: but the intellectual and immaterial is confessedly removed from the idea of locality."[35] The Godhead should be "contemplated apart from these conditions," and "is free from the circumscription which is formed by such categories."[36] As God has possession of being he transcends these concepts, and the creature is, in itself, embodied within this concept of spacing by its nature. The creature is itself non-being in essence, which came as called into existence by divine purpose.[37]

Despite Gregory's reticence to elaborate on knowledge of the Godhead by placing it beyond descriptive conception he does not restrict his understanding of the Holy Trinity to utter passivity. He instead limits his expression to those concepts which preserve for him the essential divide between creature and Creator. The Anomoean desire to give expression to transcendent Deity led to the nominal conventions mentioned above

---

[33] Balthasar, 5.

[34] *On the making of man,* 405.

[35] *Against Eunomius*, 51. Later, it will be shown that Gregory distinguishes also between created and uncreated spiritual and intellectual beings.

[36] *On not three gods*, 335. Balthasar is sure to warn against the confounding of space and time particularly with the concept of *diastema* (5-11). While the adiastematic nature of God includes being without temporal and spatial limitation God also is exempt of all manner of measure. Later the concept of *diastema* as it relates to intelligible creation will clarify the way something can be free from measure to a certain extent but yet be on created side of the divide between creature and Creator.

[37] *On the making of man,* 405. Balthasar, 5.

and in his letter to Ablabius. Gregory affirms the trouble in this desire to give a name to that which is "above every name." He acknowledges that even the term "Godhead" is a name that imposes bounds of some sort; but "in order then to mark the constancy of our conception of infinity in the case of the divine nature, we say that the Deity is above every name."[38] Use of divine names is only permissible in this context of epistemic humility. In a way similar to the reticent and apophatic expression of Plato in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Gregory writes in order to keep the nature of God unbounded by any opposites.[39] Leaving aside grasping about for the divine nature, Nyssen points instead to the names of God only as an approach to what has been revealed. The permissibility of using names like "Godhead," "Father," and "Son" is that, unlike "Supreme Being" and the "other," these terms denote a comparison based on personality and relationship rather than establishing interval between the Persons of the Godhead.

Gregory's claims about divine infinity lead to the necessary conclusion that the unlimited nature of the Godhead is beyond the finite scope of human understanding.[40] If God in his essence is unlimited Goodness, then the demonstrable human inability to comprehend God is self-evident. Eunomius's attempt to wholly define the nature of God as being Unbegotten is one of the chief reasons for Gregory's elaboration on divine infinity. Rather than speak directly of the divine nature, Gregory remarks that "no consideration will be given to anything enclosing infinite nature. It is not in the nature of

---

[38] *On not three gods*, 335. Tamsin Jones Farmer, "Revealing the Invisible: Gregory of Nyssa on the gift of revelation" *Modern Theology* 21.1 (January, 2005): 72.

[39] Cherniss, 35; As Cherniss records, "whatever God's nature really is."

[40] Andrew P. Klager "Free will and vicinal culpability in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis*" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 55.1-4 (2010): 156.

what is unenclosed to be grasped."[41] When Nyssen does speak of the Godhead, however, it is not in such a way as to eliminate any possibility of knowledge, but rather to maintain his crucial distinction between creature and Creator.[42] A good way of observing both Gregory's apophatic and cataphatic expression in their appropriate tension, then, is his description of the theophanies of Exodus which he interprets in his *Life of Moses*.

When thinking of theophanic and revelatory language in Christianity, the biblical imagery of light comes readily to mind. Most immediately there is the narrative of the transfiguration of Christ, in which the veil over the eyes of the apostles Peter, James, and John is lifted, and they together gaze upon the brilliant light of Christ's divine nature. Other narratives of divine figures speak about the observer being struck blind, implying a sort of brilliance that is also linked to imagery of bright light.[43] For Gregory in the *Life of Moses*, however, the Israelite's perception of God, and particularly Moses's experience with God, proceed in stages of not ever-increasing brilliance and illumination in light, but rather into an ascent into what is called a "luminous" but "impenetrable darkness."[44] Certainly, Gregory does not exclude the typical schema of divine revelation, as shall be

[41] *Life of Moses*, 115-116.

[42] *On the making of man*, 390-391. But knowledge of God is "lived and experienced rather than objectively understood." Concerning the mix of cataphatic and apophatic elements, see Philip Kariatlis, ""Dazzling Darkness": The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa" *Phronema* 27.2 (2012): 99-101.

[43] Martin Laird in his chapter "The Luminous Dark Revisited" of *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) surveys the debate of the origins of Gregory's mystical darkness theology and its dissimilarity with Neoplatonic philosophy; see particularly 174-176.

[44] *Life of Moses*, 94; 134.

seen, but concludes with the peak of divine knowledge existing only in those places "where the understanding does not reach."[45]

The first theophany is the bright appearance of the burning bush to Moses in the foreign land of Midian. Before conceiving of the presence of God in the bush, Moses approaches based on the "light brighter than sunlight" which "dazzled his eyes."[46] As with all humanity, Moses first becomes aware of the phenomena through his sensible understanding. The ascent he begins on this mountain in Midian is his first step out of the darkness of ignorance towards knowledge and union with the divine.[47] When he approaches the bush, his mind is prepared for what he is to see, perhaps in an intellectual sense, by the light – the divine light – that shines on him. This stage of ascent into knowledge of the divine nature is the first of the three stages of spiritual ascent: purification, illumination, and unification.[48] This light purifies his mind, his eyes, and out

[45] *Life of Moses*, 42. The thrust of Gregory's apophatic theology, particularly in its expression in the *Life of Moses*, has been debated heavily. Many scholars are drawn to the unique way in which he employs the theme of darkness in divine revelation in knowledge (i.e. Danielou's analysis in *Platonisme et théologie mystique*; see also Kariatlis) and take the powerful paradox of the luminous darkness to be the height of Moses's ascent. Laird considers Gregory's theological outlook to be as much a theology of light as one of darkness, and emphasizes the language of light for the expression of Christian faith. Eubank (see below) dwells neither in the themes of light and darkness as the summit, nor as a strict succession. Instead, he acknowledges the paradox as it stands and elevates instead Moses' encounter with the heavenly tabernacle. In this view, the apophatic and cataphatic approaches stand together to express the paradoxical nature of knowing God, but also express the way in which, as knowledge of God for Gregory is beyond the grasp of human understanding, the human experience of God is primarily mediated through sacramental realities in a lived faith. "On the contrary, by the use of the analogy of a measurable surface he leads the hearer to the unlimited and infinite." *Life of Moses*, 116.

[46] *Life of Moses*, 33.

[47] Kariatlis, 105-108. Cherniss, 42-43.

[48] Nathan Eubank, "Ineffably Effable: The Pinnacle of Mystical Ascent in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis*" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16.1 (January, 2014): 27-28. Eubank points out that these stages, far from being clear and systematic categories in Gregory's expression, instead run together. Gregory speaks of the stages of purification and illumination particularly as being cyclical and reciprocal, and, true to the human experience, being the stages in which one spends the majority of life. Kariatlis also recognizes the importance of the fluidity of these stages, pointing out that in moral growth, virtuous living, and *katharsis* are not prerequisite of knowledge of God, but initiated by revelation. Kariatlis, 107-108.

of the light comes a request. Part and parcel of this preparation, Moses is prompted to remove the sandals from his feet, and to come to stand "on that ground on which the divine light was shining."[49] Gregory records the first revelation that Moses receives of God, then, as in a scene filled with light, and of light brilliant enough to dazzle Moses and draw him out from the darkness – darkness of ignorance, sin, and error – in which he previously dwelt.[50]

Having been coaxed from an initial darkness into light, the language of revelation then changes to a twofold image of lightness and darkness. Preceding Moses's ascent into the cloud manifest at Sinai, God leads the Israelites in their journey in the form of a cloud. Gregory then construes the cloud as an image of darkness as well as the image of light – the service of the cloud as being shade by day and light by night. In the two sides of the nature of the cloud the notion that "it was something beyond human comprehension" is apparent, and later readers learn that Gregory interprets the cloud as the Holy Spirit.[51] This stage in the ascent, illumination, begins with Moses's encounter with the burning bush, but continues in the Israelites being guided in a way that clearly displays divine eminence. Illumination occurs in the freeing of the mind from all concepts and notions about God, allowing both Moses and the people of Israel to begin in their knowledge of God with the understanding that God is somehow beyond the sensible.[52]

---

[49] *Life of Moses*, 34.

[50] Laird, 178.

[51] *Life of Moses*, 37, 81.

[52] Kariatlis, 108-109. While Gregory's doctrine of divine infinity comes temporally prior to his writing in the *Life of Moses*, he is able, through the narrative, to place the understanding of God's infinite

Similarly, the image of a "dark cloud" enshrouds Mt. Sinai, with an appearance like "a fire shining out of the darkness."[53] As before, the motifs of light and darkness appear together indicating the revelatory nature of the appearance, but the theophany can still be understood as being beyond the abilities of human comprehension. In this case the incomprehensible nature of God is indirectly displayed through the response of the people by the sound of blaring trumpets, smoldering flames of light, and impenetrable smoke. Moses, elected by the people as a representative due to their fear of the intensity of the divine presence, then travels up into this cloud, and goes beyond the sight and comprehension of the people.

Here he enters into "the inner sanctuary of the divine mystical doctrine," where Gregory directly states his convictions about the unknowableness of God:

> While there he received the divine ordinances. These were the teachings concerning virtue, the chief of which is reverence and having the proper notions about the divine nature, inasmuch as it transcends all cognitive thought and representation and cannot be likened to anything which is known. He was commanded to heed none of those things comprehended by the notions with regard to the divine nor to liken the transcendent nature to any of the things known by comprehension. Rather, he should believe that the Divine exists, and he should not examine it with respect to quality, quantity, origin, and mode of being, since it is unattainable.[54]

The process begun in God's revelation through the burning bush comes to the third stage – union – at this point. The notion of darkness may be difficult to understand as a positive rather than purely negative statement. Indeed, union may appear inappropriate or "unattainable" given the gravity of Gregory's apophatic language.

---

nature not within these first two steps that have been described, but most apparently in the final stage of union and darkness. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 67-68.

[53] *Life of Moses*, 41.

[54] *Life of Moses*, 42.

Moses, surrounded by the darkness of divine presence, and the believer, relieved of all concepts foreign to the nature of God, dwells in contemplation of God's divine infinity.[55] That infinity is manifest, however, in God's revelation of both the law and the plan of the tabernacle by "divine power."[56] By these means Moses brought to the people a visible reality of the dwelling of God among them, just as when he descends the mountain he does so with the clear visible mark of having been in the presence of the invisible God. Gregory, in describing these events, yet underscores the transcendence of God beyond human sense, but also affirms that "knowing without knowing" and union with God could be achieved by divine grace.[57]

In response to this doctrine of divine infinity and incomprehensibility, Gregory was open to attack by his opponents, who, misunderstanding his narrative of ascent into ineffable knowledge claimed he "worshipped what he did not know" (John 4:22).[58] Therefore another way Gregory responded to the problem of tension between divine transcendence and immanence was his doctrine concerning the divine essence and energies. As will be seen, Gregory believed the energies of God (those revelatory actions of God in the cosmos) intimated what could be known about the ultimately unknowable essence (what God truly is). While the energies did not fully reveal the divine essence, they could not be separated from the Godhead. His expression of the concepts of

---

[55] Laird, 177-178. This is a departure from the Platonic understanding of true knowledge, in which the realm of the intellect – beyond the human senses – is the place where true knowledge resides and can be gained. Gregory's conviction, however, is that while the intelligible is indeed the realm of true knowledge it cannot be known in "any exhaustive sense." Klager, 156-157.

[56] *Life of Moses*, 42-43. This revelation of the heavenly tabernacle, of course, relates to the revelation of God in Christ in the incarnation. *Life of Moses*, 97.

[57] Klager, 163. Kariatlis, 109-112.

[58] Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 14.

"essence" and "energy" are not as fully developed as later fathers, such as Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius, or, most notably, Gregory Palamas, but Nyssen does categorize together the things that can be known (energies) about God: namely the divine names, the attributes of God, and divine activity and power.[59]

In his letter to Ablabius Gregory addresses the problems inherent in the use of a plurality of divine names. As discussed before, Gregory's intent when using these concepts, these names, to describe the nature of God is to validate only those things which can be known. Rather than encompassing the divine essence, they contain important observations for humans insofar as God relates to the meaning embodied by those names. "We fashion," Gregory says, "our appellations from the several operations (ενεργεια) that are known to us."[60] Particularly in *On not three gods* he speaks at length on the name Godhead in terms of an objection raised against his Trinitarian thesis: that using the term Godhead might indicate that one could speak of three Gods, as one would speak of other plural instantiations of being performing the same operation – he uses the examples of farmers, or several orators. Indeed, use of the term Godhead tends towards the expression of multifaceted unity rather than the nuanced unity in diversity which Gregory sought to express. Gregory's reply, however, is that "the term "Godhead" is significant of operation, and not of essence."[61] The triune Godhead in unity performs the operation, in this example, of "seeing," which Gregory links etymologically with the term

[59] A. Torrance, "Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers" *Vigiliae Christianae* 63.1 (2009): 64-65. Farmer, 72-73.

[60] *On not three gods*, 333.

[61] *On not three gods*, 333.

Godhead (θεοτης). This "seeing" is a characteristic which again clarifies God (θεος) as the Triune one, being the Creator, that "beholds" all in their essence, whereas the creature, who is beheld (θεατα), is characteristically unable to conceive of the divine essence.

This response is characteristic of Gregory's distinction between essence and activity. When speaking of God, the transcendent nature, or essence, remains untouched by human knowledge, but is instead "by its surroundings [the divine nature] is made known." Gregory regards the traditional categories of knowledge about God, such as omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, impassibility, or eternality, as "fit to be understood or asserted of the divine nature, yet not expressing that which that nature is in its essence."[62] These characteristics indicate the presence of certain qualities within the divine essence but fall short of encompassing the whole. Nyssen hoped to reassure his reader(s) that human knowledge and human speech about God can and should be according to those appropriate categories – however, they are only helpful to a certain extent, and serve as points in theological orientation rather than wholly constituting the divine nature themselves.[63] God is known by his energies but is unknowable in his essence.

Despite its conceptual prominence, the precise meaning of God's energies is difficult to determine in Nyssen's writing. The divine energy must not, as within his

[62] *On not three gods*, 332-333. Lewis Ayers, "On Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as seen in *To Ablabius: On not Three Gods*" *Modern Theology* 18.4 (October, 2002): 455-456.

[63] Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 59-60. Just as has been indicated before – the chief objection of Gregory's answer to Eunomius' anti-Nicene conception of the Trinity is his insistence that one of these elements can be said to measure the breadth of the divine nature.

responses to Eunomius, become understood as a monolithic movement or group of characteristics that evoke the same results in all situations. In other words, Gregory's opponents believed that if one can observe a variety of effects stemming from the "energies," or attributes, of the Father, Son, and Spirit, they might indicate a difference in essential nature between the three persons. The Father, for example, might be said to create by His energy, whereas the Spirit's life-giving power flows from the energy following it.[64] Understanding God's divine operation in this way allows for the possibility that differing powers, and therefore differing essences, are at work.

To counter this thought, Gregory repeatedly expressed the unity of nature in the diversity of activity through the analogy of fire.[65] Fire, which has heat as part of its essential nature, produces differing effects in the case of different material subjects: wood burns, mud dries, and metal takes on the heat and luminescence of the flame. Through this example of plurality in effect stemming from one power Gregory expressed that, although the divine activity does indeed produce different effects, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit can be said to share the same power.[66] Their activity, rather, is the common thread which gives rise to human understanding of the unity of the three divine persons.[67] Gregory describes this unity in what can now be recognized as a fundamental expression of Trinitarian thought, that "every operation," whether in the "seeing" mentioned before,

---

[64] *Against Eunomius*, 54-55.

[65] Michel Rene Barnes, *The Power of God: Δυναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2001): 278-286.

[66] Michel Rene Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality" *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.1 (1998): 73-79. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Trinity*, 328.

[67] Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 354-355.

or generally with any divine attribute embodied by the concept of fire above, "has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit."[68]

This statement, just as with those that begin this section, is the full-bodied expression of Trinitarian theology which appears in each of the Cappadocian fathers. While Gregory's particular emphases of divine infinity, incomprehensibility, and the concepts of the divine essence and energies have described the underlying foundation for his vision of God, discussion of his theology would be incomplete without considering the implications of such a theology. In his *On the making of man*, Gregory challenges Eunomius and others like him: "Let those tell us who consider the nature of God to be within their comprehension, whether they understand themselves—if they know the nature of their own mind…"[69] For Gregory, the task of self-knowledge is one of utmost importance – one intimately connected with the human desire to know God. As he writes to his brother Peter in the introduction to the treatise, the nature of humanity is his goal. Basil had, in his *Hexaemeron*, explicated a teaching on the creation of the world in the eponymous six days, but Gregory, surveying the work his brother had done, desired to expound on one facet: the nature of humanity. After all, humanity had been created, as it was written, in the image of God. Having qualified some important aspects of Gregory's vision of God, the parallels between his theology and his convictions about anthropology can be discussed.

---

[68] *On not three gods*, 334. *On the Holy Trinity,* 329.

[69] *On the making of man*, 395.

Perceiving Humanity

> The scope of our proposed enquiry is not small: it is second to none of the wonders of the world,—perhaps even greater than any of those known to us, because no other existing thing, save the human creation, has been made like to God…[70]

Gregory introduced the concerns he wished to address in *On the making of man* with this paradigmatic statement on his theology of humanity. For Gregory, the notion of humanity created in the image of God was the touchstone for his discussion of any of the individual concerns which he afterwards laid out. In *On the making of man* Nyssen discussed, in light of humanity's creation in the image of God, the origin and nature of human gender and sexuality, the relation of the corporeal to the intellectual, the composition of the human body and soul, and ultimately would give description to the expansive concept of human imagehood. While Gregory's theological anthropology certainly extends beyond the bounds of his expression in *On the making of man*, the essential core of his ideas can be grasped from within this *oeuvre*. Therefore, the purport of this paper – in appropriately loose fashion – is to follow the conceptual structure which Gregory established in the preface to explore the connections between the three emphases of his theology (infinity, incomprehensibility, and the essence-energy distinction) to his anthropology. In discussing humanity as created in the image of God, Nyssen wrote with these three categories in mind: "that which we believe [humanity] to be," "that which is expected to appear afterwards," and "that which is now seen".[71]

---

[70] *On the making of man*, 386.

[71] *On the making of man*, 386.
των τε προ γεγενησθαι πεπιστευμενον, και των εισυστερον εκ βησεσθαι προσδοκωμενον, των τε π ρο γεγενησθαι πεπιστευμενον. The Greek text, drawn from *Patrologia Graeca*, reveals a difference in order from the translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* – rather than proceeding: "what was, what is, and what will be," the order goes from "what was, what will be, and what is" revealing the essential eschatological nature of Gregory's anthropology.

“That which we believe [humanity] to be”; Imagehood and Psychosomatic Union

Nyssen was certainly not the first of the church fathers to take on the challenge of writing about the human condition. Much less was he the first to propose definitions and meanings for the enigmatic but deeply significant idea that God created humanity in his image. From Irenaeus to Origen and the Alexandrines, and many in between, this area of theology had been deeply concerning to early Christians.[72] The chief way in which Gregory interacted with this rich tradition was his distinction between two terms commonly used in anthropological discussions: that of imagehood and likeness.

Gregory believed that human imagehood was most imminently manifest in the exceptional human faculty for rational and discursive thought. The “faculty of thought and reason is incommunicable, and is a peculiar gift in our nature, to be considered by itself… That alone, the choice product, as has been said, of all our life, bears the stamp of the Divine character.”[73] Humanity, among all the rest of creation, had been designated with the higher capacity for reason, and because of the other elements of human nature (which, as shall be seen, humanity shared with other parts of creation) Gregory meant to distinguish it from all else in the sense that humans were *sui generis* stamped with the divine image. It is important, however, to understand that the peculiarity of the divine image in humanity did not exist separately from the rest of human nature. In a manner like his description of the divine essence and energies, Gregory believed that “the image

---

[72] For a good overview giving a consensus view of the Greek fathers (Gregory and the other Cappadocians included), see Zachary C. Xintaras, “Man – the Image of God: According to the Greek Fathers” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 1.1 (August, 1954): 48-62. Young notes that the idea of humanity created in the image of God goes at least back to Plato’s discussion in the *Theaetetus*. Frances M. Young, “Adam and Anthropos: A Study of the Interaction of Science and the Bible in Two Anthropological Treatises of the Fourth Century” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.2 (1983): 119.

[73] *On the soul and resurrection*, 440-441.

is not in part of our nature."[74] The image of God in humanity extended over all other elements and was inseparable from them, drawing them alike up to God. Furthermore, Nyssen did not consider the image of God to be limited to only its operation in the rational faculty, but instead was a plenary expression of a manifold gift.

> The perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by His both bringing man into being from nothing, and fully supplying him with all good gifts: but since the list of individual good gifts is a long one, it is out of the question to apprehend it numerically. The language of Scripture therefore expresses it concisely by a comprehensive phrase, in saying that man was made "in the image of God": for this is the same as to say that He made human nature participant in all good; for if the Deity is the fulness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.[75]

Beginning here one can begin to sense the distinction which Gregory makes between the intrinsic image-bearing nature of humanity and the resemblance that can be (or may not be) seen in accordance with the Archetype. Gregory often spoke in this way about human resemblance, or likeness, to God as an extension of his convictions about human virtue and behavior. As above, Gregory believed God to be the fulness of Goodness, and human goodness to be that resemblance of the ultimate. In some way, Gregory needed to trace "out the truth so far as [humans] are capable by conjectures and inferences" of the freedom inherent within human nature, which bred its "pitiable suffering," with the "blessedness of the impassible Life."[76] Therefore, it is also important,

---

[74] *On the making of man*, 405. He also makes certain to emphasize that, although the image is manifest in humanity according to a plurality of means and a variety of persons, that the image of God in humanity is yet unified. That is, just as the Triune God has a unified nature, so with humanity. For an example of Nyssen's use of imagehood as analogous for the trinitarian sense of diversified unity, see *On the making of man*, 391.

[75] *On the making of man*, 404. He also refers to the plurality of virtues by use of an analogy of color – neither mixed and indistinct nor separately existent as parts. Instead, the "manifold" and "varied" hues helped "to form in men the likeness of God: with such hues as these did the Maker of His own image mark our nature." *On the making of man*, 390.

[76] *On the making of man*, 403.

in considering Gregory's understanding of human likeness, to consider his emphasis on the freedom of human will and the language of human participation in the divine.

Gregory understood humanity's possession of free will as paramount to its image-bearing nature. In achieving virtue and likeness to God, humanity works in a cooperational sense, in synergy with God.[77] Gregory's *Homilies on the Beatitudes* reveal the nature of this process in his thought. Through God's work in Christ, the grace of baptism, and the labor of prayer both elements of grace and human effort are present.[78] One might say that God's work in the incarnation restates the divine work in creation: both establish the divine image for the ongoing work of humanity to incarnate Christ. In other words, God works to recreate the human in his image, for "that which was made 'in the image' is one thing, and that which is now manifested in wretchedness is another."[79] In order to restore the likeness of humanity to the gracious height afforded by their creation in the image of God, humans needed to exercise their will to conform to the example presented in the life of Christ.

The human capacity for choice laid open the possibility of participation in the divine image. As Susan Wessel points out, Gregory differed from other church fathers by his implication that within the soul and the mind, the *locus* of the divine image, lay an intrinsic virtuous nature that existed apart from the notion of moral effort and free will.[80]

---

[77] *Life of Moses*, 81-82. "Now this is the will, a thing that cannot be enslaved, and of self-determining power, since it is seated in the liberty of thought and mind." *The great catechism*, 496.

[78] Rebekah Eklund, "Blessed are the Image-bearers: Gregory of Nyssa and the Beatitudes" *Anglican Theological Review* 99.4 (Fall, 2017): 735-736. Klager, 155.

[79] *On the making of man*, 404.

[80] Susan Wessel, "The reception of Greek science in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*" *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 31.

Despite the blemishes and afflictions that dimmed the appearance of the image in humanity, the capacity for likeness afforded by being “stamped” with the image remained. The intrinsic goodness within humanity was part of humanity’s freedom “from necessity,” but Nyssen also felt that he needed also to express that “virtue is a voluntary thing.”[81] In this way Gregory’s thought was contiguous with his brother in making the distinction between imagehood and likeness. Basil similarly drew his distinction between the image and likeness of God in humanity by speaking in the Aristotelian terms of *dunamis* (power) and *energiea* (energy). Whereas humanity had been created in the image of God the manner of human likeness to God is dependent on their capacity – ability – to exercise their will and effort to participate in God’s energies.[82] This conceptual divide fits with Gregory’s understanding of humanity’s *telos* to grow infinitely in desire for God. Humanity received in the garden a nature according to the divine image, but divine likeness is the fulfillment of humanity’s *epektatic* (eternally progressive) struggle – to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Aghiorgoussis explains that, for Basil, the image of God is an ontological reality, whereas the likeness is that ethical calling of which it is humanity’s “purpose to achieve.”[83] The image of God in humanity provides then, the basis on which humans can grow into the likeness of God.

The *Life of Moses* presents an excellent opportunity for Gregory to flesh out his conception of human free will. Not only does Moses, the central character, have to

---

[81] *On the making of man*, 404.

[82] Aghiorgoussis, 272-273. Klager, 157.

[83] Maximos Aghiorgoussis, ““Applications of the Theme of “Eikon Theou” (Image of God) according to Saint Basil the Great” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21.3 (Fall, 1976): 276. Smith, 221. Eklund, 734-735.

exercise his own will in order to overcome his own hesitancy to fulfill the divine commands, but it also includes the troublesome concept of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. At the beginning of our spiritual lives Gregory wrote that one becomes "in some manner [their] own parents" by choices "moulding ourselves to the teaching of virtue or vice."[84] Yet again, this exercise is contingent upon the possession of "rational faculties" that are the "parents" of human virtue, or likeness.[85] The thrust of Gregory's hermeneutical effort, then, was to preserve the cooperation of human will with divine will. Even in the case of Moses's encounter with God, divine presence effected but did not necessitate his response. Instead, Gregory observes, humanity must apply themselves "in quietness to higher philosophical matters over a long period of time" to perceive the truth and have a right understanding of God.[86] Moses, called and cleansed by the light, had to participate in the freeing of his mind of the false conceptions about God. Only afterwards did he return to Egypt. As for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, Gregory's intention is to repeatedly defend against the ideas of divine coercion and retribution. Pharaoh experiences a hardening of his heart by God's permission, his handing him over to his desires (vis. Rom. 1:21-25), rather than forcing upon him action foreign to his will.[87] If the passions impose upon human will something foreign to its nature, the question

[84] *Life of Moses*, 54-55.

[85] *Life of Moses*, 55.

[86] *Life of Moses*, 59.

[87] *Life of Moses*, 69-83. Gregory cogently argues against the idea that God might "forcibly draw those, who were not inclined to yield" into belief in *The great catechism*, 497. Klager, 155.

becomes where, without coercion, human desire to choose the good comes. As Klager remarks, for Gregory this is a "great mystery."[88]

Because Gregory has much to say about growth in virtue, in likeness, and participation in divine goodness it might seem that Gregory has a high view of human capability to choose the good by the exercise of the free will. His view of human creation, and divine forethought, however, reveal a starkly different picture.[89] In his treatise *On the making of man*, Gregory discussed the narrative of creation and said humanity, from its inception, has an essential mutability. Inherent in creation is a movement from non-being into being, so that from the beginning humanity existed in a state of change.[90] In part this observation is to draw out the distinction of humanity as a creature and God as the creator, but it also serves as a paradigm for how Gregory intended to present the nature of the image of God and the Fall of humanity. Therefore, as Andrew Klager surmises, "the freedom of the will implies vulnerability and inevitable failure," and is a divine plant to allow "at least the prospect of emancipation from the tyranny of death" by creating a "susceptibility to progress in virtue."[91] Although the chance for human will to achieve moral progress on its own power leads to inevitable failure, the freedom of the will leaves open the possibility of change – by cooperation with God's grace – and capacity to choose the good.

---

[88] Klager 155.

[89] Klager, 151.

[90] *On the making of man*, 388.

[91] Klager, 151.

Following in this synergistic pattern, Gregory understood human beings as a composite lying in the middle of the divide between creature and Creator. Gregory mentioned this blending, this *mixis*, at the outset of *On the making of man*, establishing early on the broad scope of what it meant to be a human person. Created last, humanity had "as foundations the instincts of a twofold organization, [a] blending [of] the Divine with the earthy."[92] In order to understand Gregory's meaning when referring to humanity, it is important to recognize that Nyssen never considered the intellectual elements of a human as ever existent apart from the sensible parts. As J. Warren Smith affirms, the "psychosomatic unity of the person proves central to Nyssen's anthropology."[93]

Gregory succinctly defined a soul in *On the soul and resurrection* as "a created, living, intellectual being" with the power, if it is provided with organs, of sensuous perception.[94] Within the soul, however, Gregory distinguished between the parts which related to the various faculties of the human intellect. The soul in Greek philosophy had long been considered to have divisions determined by the kind of functions that were overseen by that part. Aristotelian psychology bifurcated the soul into the rational (*logon echon*) and non-rational (*alogon*) parts, each with their own subdivisions. Platonic psychology, on the other hand, divided the soul into three parts: the rational (*logistikon*),

---

[92] *On the making of man*, 389.

[93] J. Warren Smith, "The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection: Gender and the Angelic Life in Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*" *Harvard Theological Review* 92.2 (2006): 211. See also John Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.2 (Summer, 1999): 225-230; "For Gregory, the human being is emphatically a psychosomatic whole, and is created as such in the image of God." Enrico Peroli, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul" *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 124-125; 130-131.Young, 115, 118.

[94] *On the soul and resurrection*, 432.

the spirited (*thumoeides*), and the appetitive (*epithumetikon*). Eventually, these traditions grew together, and the tripartite division was yet acknowledged by many, but they were interpreted according to a bipartition of the rational and non-rational.[95] In Gregory's psychology the evidence of these traditions – and their merging – is apparent. In *On the making of man*, Gregory spoke in a tripartite sense, where the three parts of the soul he mentioned were the vegetative (nutritive), animalic (sensible), and rational (intellectual). Each of these three parts, not to be seen as a "welding" together of three souls, participate in a unity with one another, each building on the next to create a comprehensive image.[96] Using the same rationale as before with the incomprehensible Trinitarian nature of God, Gregory advises his reader(s) not to consider the three aspects of the soul as separate as the ultimately intellectual nature of the soul negates the possibility of conceiving of the three with their own "limits".[97] Rather, these aspects ought to be considered as consisting with one another as a unity. The nutritive soul, responsible for growth and support of the body, is added on to the sensible soul, which adds sense perception to the vegetative vital force. Finally, the rational soul perched atop the other two is the foundation of "perfect

---

[95] For discussion of the nature of soul-division in the Platonic philosophy of which Gregory was aware, see P.A. Vander Waerdt "Peripatetic Soul-Division, Posidonius, and Middle Platonic Moral Psychology" *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26.4 (Winter, 1985): 373-381. For a discussion of the history of the synthetic process between the two theories on the soul in Hellenistic thought, see P.A. Vander Waerdt "The Peripatetic Interpretation of Plato's Tripartite Psychology" *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26.3 (Fall, 1985): 283-284; 297-302. The tripartite division – as will be seen in Gregory – is typically used when speaking of the soul theoretically, whereas the bipartite division is the practical distinction commonly recognized. Most often Gregory uses the bipartite language to divide between the parts of the soul that have their closest affinity with the sensible faculties and the part that interfaces with the "spiritual senses" expounded in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs.*

[96] *On the making of man*, 402.

[97] *Ibid.*

bodily life," and adds the capacity to partake in reason.[98] These three together also stand as a sort of model for the creative narrative for Gregory, wherein the order of life introduced to the world proceeds in a similar fashion: first the plants, then the animals, and, lastly, the creation of intellectually endowed humanity. Practically, however, his language regarding the soul was often according to the bipartative model. In a manner similar to the *logon echon* and *alogon* distinction, Gregory explains that animals and plants, although having the appearance of ensoulment, lack souls in the true sense. True and actual ensoulment requires intellectual rational capability.[99] This truer sense of the soul is that which Gregory speaks of as being the *locus* of the image and likeness of God: within the intellectual tier of the soul which is "unchangeable" by its immaterial nature.[100] The two lower tiers of the soul, or non-rational levels, relate most directly the human senses which facilitate human embodiment. These two tiers allow for the body to "partake of the animating power" of the soul, and thereby "move by way of growth." The connection made in these tiers, if severed, removes from the body the "vital energy," and is itself death. Lastly, it is good to again affirm that, rather than being two souls (or even

[98] *On the making of man*, 392. Gregory compares his summary tripartition to the Pauline use (1 Thess. 5:23) of body, soul, and spirit, as well as Jesus's teaching (Mk. 12:30) on the heart, soul, and mind. The perfection indicated here will be discussed later in the analogy of the mirrors, but the general meaning is that of life as intended in creation.

[99] *On the making of man*, 402-403.

[100] *On the making of man*, 417-418. The connection of the three tiers, along with Gregory's doctrine of unity presents a complex issue of whether Gregory truly considers these tiers to be only practically part of the soul, or essentially a part of the human soul. See Cherniss, 13-15. Young argues that the nutritive tier of the soul will continue in the resurrection life. Although not in the sense of needing to eat in order to subsist, Young argues that Gregory speaks in the scriptural sense of the need for spiritual nourishment. In *On the making of man*, Gregory alludes to the fact that the human senses (and thus the sensible tier) are "references to models in Himself." In the same sense as the "knowable unknowable" portrayed in *The Life of Moses*, there are analogs in the divine nature to the sensible human experience (Gregory relates them to divine omniscience), but yet God is certainly beyond being "in touch with existing things in a manner resembling human operation." *On the making of man*, 390-391. As will be seen, Gregory's discussion of the passions and virtues in human life also has a bearing on this debate.

parts), Gregory considers these tiers which practically relate to the rational and non-rational faculties distinctives to be united in a single intellectual entity: "the true and perfect soul is naturally one."[101]

Rather than entirely subscribing to either of these views, however, Gregory's discussion of the soul must be considered uniquely Christian. There is some continuity, but the tradition of the Christian community brings nuance to Gregory's expression. While Nyssen affirms the Platonic immortality of the soul, he does not affirm its preexistence apart from the body. The soul's immortality goes together with the doctrine of the resurrection - the Christian hope that the soul with the body will rise again. Platonic thought, by contrast, viewed the separation of body and soul at death to be the final liberation from a composite form of existence into intelligible simplicity. The extension of existence as a "psychosomatic whole" would amount to the prolonging of the "estranged state" of the soul in its "earthly condition." [102]

Indeed, the formal structure and genre of *On the soul and the resurrection* displays the use of Platonic thought on the soul (*logos peri psyches*) and the salient nature of the church's doctrine in Nyssen's teaching concerning the resurrection. Macrina stands in as the sage teacher of the wisdom of the church, and Gregory, afflicted with passion and grief, comes to bring the standard objections of the pagan philosophers. As with the concept of measure (*diastema*) mentioned before, Macrina brings to Gregory's attention the teaching that, likewise, the soul is without measure in terms of "spatial

---

[101] *On the making of man,* 402.

[102] Enrico Peroli, 118-119. For a more direct sense, see his quote from Plotinus – "True wakening is a true getting up from the body, not with the body." To this, as shall be seen, Gregory would certainly object.

dimensionality."[103] The basic assumption to overcome is the materiality of the soul (as well as the contrary: if the soul is not material in nature, then it has no existence).[104] Here Gregory makes an important connection between his theology and his understanding of the human soul. Although not in the same sense, Gregory considered the human mind to be like God in its sensible, intelligible, and rational character. Whereas God by his nature is unmeasurable by any standard, the intelligible part of humanity – the soul – is unbounded by sensible quality, as well as from operation over through certain organ or space. Just as in Neoplatonic thought the soul exists in accordance with the analogy of light: it "illuminates everything without losing anything itself."[105] That is, it operates over the whole body without being bound by its material nature. Added to this is the soul's simplicity and its uncompounded nature, which effectively mirror the unified nature of the divine essence.

It is important to clarify here that the analogous relation between the divine nature and the soul only goes so far in Gregory's thought. He is quick to remind his reader(s) that, although the soul is that "which our senses [do not] perceive, neither a colour, nor a form, nor a hardness, nor a weight, nor a quantity, nor a cubic dimension, nor a point, nor anything else perceptible in matter;"[106] in a manner much like the *adiastematic* nature of God, that the soul has

---

[103] Peroli, 122.

[104] *On the soul and resurrection*, 431. These oppositions are listed as the views of the Stoics and Epicureans.

[105] Peroli, 128.

[106] *On the soul and resurrection*, 435.

> its own peculiar nature [that] is something different from that other [that is, the divine nature]. Indeed, it would be no longer an "image," if it were altogether identical with that other;[107]

Gregory's view, over and against the Stoic and Epicurean view, is more similar to Neoplatonic thought.[108] The Stoics regarded the soul as being material, since there could not be interaction between a material and immaterial substance.[109] The Neoplatonic view was that all creation exists as an extension from God, who is, as stated earlier, the ultimate ground of being.[110] Gregory, in similar fashion, regarded

> the Divine being… [as] distinctly something other than visible and material substances, [and] nevertheless pervades each one amongst all existences, and by this penetration of the whole keeps the world in a state of being.[111]

God, however, is not within the being or substance of creation. Rather God is as the soul to the body – presiding over and connected to the whole, but not contained within any part of it. Gregory relates this idea through Macrina's voice in *On the soul and resurrection*.[112] She explains, directly stating that she is borrowing the concept, that the philosophers have proposed the idea of the human being as a microcosmic representation of the greater *kosmos*.[113] Just as God is over creation, so the soul with humanity.

---

[107] *On the soul and resurrection*, 436.

[108] Cherniss, 15-16.

[109] Peroli, 129.

[110] Peroli, 127-128.

[111] *On the soul and resurrection*, 444.

[112] *On the soul and resurrection*, 432.

[113] Young, 112. Gregory's use of the macro/microcosmos analogy in *On the soul and resurrection* is surprising, especially given his rejection of the idea in *On the making of man*. The reason, most likely, is because in *On the making of man* Gregory's concern is to defend the imagehood of humanity from being likeness to creation as the discussion in that particular section is more in discussion of the body (as he complains, "they are dignifying man with the attributes of the gnat and the mouse: for they too are

Perhaps the most explicit manifestation of the essential distinction and essential unity of the sensible and intelligible in Gregory's thought is his proposition of a *via tertia* in the medical debate between the Stoic, Aristotelian, and materialist on the location of the *hegenomikon* (the ruling principle) and the operation of sense perception. In his discussion of the human body Gregory employed the terminology and language of Greek science to describe its function and abilities. Particularly, the concepts of the philosophic schools and medical diction of Galen shaped the form of Gregory's discourse, providing the terms on which Gregory would build to connect his vision of God to those traditional anthropological debates. For example, Stoic philosopher Chryssippus of Soli held that sensation occurred as pneumatic emanation struck the sense organs (αισθεσις), causing a physical reaction-response.[114] In a manner similar to Gregory's theological vision of human participation in the divine energies, the human being also had by nature an aesthetic, or perceptive sense through its participation in the body. The divine energies pointed towards God's ontological nature in virtue, and the human energy of αισθεσις encompassed human perceptive activity, which pointed towards the materiality within their nature.[115] Human persons participated in the body's activity through the sensible capacity stemming from the sense organs, the vehicles of the mind's engagement with the sensible world. This participation of the body with the soul, for Gregory, pointed again to the psychosomatic unity within human nature, as "neither is there perception without

---

composed of these four elements…"), rather than the soul as in *On the soul and resurrection. On the making of man*, 403.

[114] Wessel, 36-37.

[115] Wessel, 27-28.

material substance, nor does the act of perception take place without the intellectual faculty."[116]

Gregory also shared Galen's notion that the human mind (although he disagreed about its material nature) interfaced with the sensible organs, as well as the Stoic's definition of human perception as the "activity of receiving sensory information."[117] The open question that lie between these schools and thinkers, however, was where the vital and operative force resided within the body. The materialist position was that the vital force physically operated from the brain, which Gregory calls the "citadel of the body." The common Stoic and Aristotelian position, on the other hand, believed the *hegenomikon* to reside in the heart, perhaps due to "its middle position in the body."[118] In both cases, the arguments for each are based on the observable effect which those parts have on the condition of the body and its operation (*energia*). If the head suffered injury there was definite effect on the body's function. Therefore, philosophers like Galen, Plato, and Cicero argued on the basis of the correlation between cause and effect that the cerebral membrane must be the container for the (*prohaeresis*) "choosing faculty."[119] Likewise, the passionate nature of humanity seemed to flow out of the central space of the heart to animate the whole body. More than that, the heart's centrality made it a plausible location because the two other divisions in the soul, as in the understanding of

[116] *On the making of man*, 402.

[117] Wessel, 30.

[118] *On the making of man*, 396. Wessel, 34.

[119] Although Galen, unlike Plato and Cicero, contended that the rational soul was a temperament of the body, and the activity of sense perception and motion were the main activities of the rational soul (compare speech, creativity, arts, and reasoning). Wessel, 34, 36-37.

Aristotelians like Alexander of Aphrodesias, were nearby.[120] The moisture and heat of the body were gathered in towards this center, and therefore, alongside the passionate and nutritive part, the rational part which contained the *hegenomikon* resided there also.

Gregory both affirms these observations and postulates his own theory. Instead of relying on a single source for his understanding, Gregory couched his argument between the observations of natural philosophy, his apophatic principles, and the scriptural witness.[121] By relying on what he has become aware through "those who spend their time on anatomical researches" he concurs that the "cerebral membrane… forms a foundation for the senses" and that the "heart is a sort of source of the fiery element of the body" which corresponds with the passions. "Yet," Gregory maintained, "I do not hold this for a proof that the incorporeal nature is bounded by any limits of place."[122] Because the functions and observable pathologies of the body do not directly correspond solely to these parts (which to illustrate Nyssen included a detailed discussion of the operation of laughter), Gregory instead proposed that the principal authority exists with the incorporeal mind (*nous*). The whole of "our bodily organization" is "equally in contact with each of the parts according to a kind of combination which is indescribable."[123] Again, what Gregory hoped to avoid was the notion that the human mind had a corporeal nature, but that the *hegenomikon* existed beyond the *diastemic* category of spatial limitation.

---

[120] Wessel, 34-35.

[121] Schaff's translation notes Gregory's employment of Ps. 7:10 in response to the theory favoring the heart. Wessel, 33.

[122] *On the making of man*, 396.

[123] *On the making of man*, 397, 403.

In order to illustrate his understanding of the communication of the intelligible mind (*nous*) and the variety of human senses Gregory proposed the function of a city. The gates in this analogy are the various ways in which information comes in contact with the body, and therefore the mind. The sense organs, open to a great variety of "strangers" and other things that are "mutually unknown," impart to the body the differing means by which humans conceptualize qualities associated with outside objects.[124] In this way Gregory also maintained that the ability to collate together this information into rational concepts indicated intellectual simplicity, rather than implying a plurality of "minds" because of the plurality of senses. Just as the multiplicity of divine attributes did not upset the divine simplicity, neither did the senses in the case of the mind. [125] Nyssen maintained also that, despite being able to point towards the nature of the human mind due to the human experience of sense perception, "our mind, which is the likeness of the Creator [who] evades our knowledge, has an accurate resemblance to the superior nature, figuring by its own unknowableness the incomprehensible [that is, divine] Nature." [126] Ultimately the relation of the mind, soul, and body is as mysterious as the ineffable nature which they resemble. By maintaining that the mind exists in

---

[124] *On the making of man*, 395.

[125] "It is manifold and much compounded." How then can that which is intelligible be composite? or what is the mode of mixture of things that differ in kind? Or, "It is simple, and incomposite." How then is it dispersed into the manifold divisions of the senses? how is there diversity in unity? how is unity maintained in diversity? But I find the solution of these difficulties by recourse to the very utterance of God; for He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The image is properly an image so long as it fails in none of those attributes which we perceive in the archetype; but where it falls from its resemblance to the prototype it ceases in that respect to be an image; therefore, since one of the attributes we contemplate in the Divine nature is incomprehensibility of essence, it is clearly necessary that in this point the image should be able to show its imitation of the archetype." *On the making of man*, 395.

[126] *On the making of man*, 395.

communication with the whole body – though not itself a corporeal part – Gregory preserved the like sense of the presence of God in the *kosmos*.

The material and immaterial, although they were inherently unified in human nature, were still distinct in terms of their operation. Gregory considered the body as strictly the material aspect of human nature. Like his sharp distinction between creature and Creator, for Gregory there was no crossover of traditionally immaterial elements (e.g. the soul) into material existence.[127] This did not frustrate the definite unity between the material and immaterial in his thought, but he did wish to avoid the (primarily Stoic) philosophic doctrines that the soul or mind required physical manifestation to be present with the body. Just as with his theological doctrine of the divine essence and energies, Gregory meant to show relation between the material and immaterial without crossing the categoric barriers intended for the essence of the human mind and the energies involved in human activity. The perfect unity of the Godhead in its essence and energies provided Gregory with a foundational concept for the unity of the human person in its essence and sensible operation.[128] The operation and essence were not synonymous (as with Eunomius's error, confusing the divine attribute of uncreatedness with essential nature), but were unified. As God's nature could not be pointed towards without the revelatory presence of the divine energy, humans – even as their nature was both sensible and

---

[127] Alexander L. Abecina, "Gregory of Nyssa's Change of Mind about the Heart" *Journal of Theological Studies* 68.1 (April, 2017): 121-123. Although the idea of progression of thought between Gregory's theology in his polemic works and his "mystical theology" presents an artificial division in Gregory's thought (I believe the progression to be indicative of the differing genres of concerns of each work, rather than an evolution or development in Gregory's thought), Abecina's work on Gregory's discussion of the human heart does well in drawing out Nyssen's desire to distinguish between the intellectual and corporeal.

[128] Wessel, 31-32.

intelligible[129] – could not have true communion with the sensible without a union between their essence and their energies.

The general milieu of Platonic thought, along with the legacy of theology left by Alexandrians like Origen, proposed to unify the human organism only in a temporary sense. Instead of having their unity and creation joined together, they supposed a dual existence of the mind and the body, where the soul eternally existed before the creation of the body and would exist eternally long after its dissolution.[130] Their conception was one of eternal creation of human souls by the Logos, which in time led to the embodiment of the soul. This embodiment was a lowering of the soul's nature, through which it came increasingly susceptible to the irrational nature, becoming like the beasts. Gregory mocks this notion:

> They tell us that one of their sages said that he, being one and the same person, was born a man, and afterwards assumed the form of a woman, and flew about with the birds, and grew as a bush… he who said these things of himself did not, so far as I can judge, go far from the truth: for such doctrines as this of saying that one soul passed through so many changes are really fitting for the chatter of frogs or jackdaws, or the stupidity of fishes, or the insensibility of trees.[131]

Just as in Gregory's thought, however, the conviction that the beginning would be like the end guided the Origenian and Platonic view. The separation of body and soul that occurred at death led to a reintegration, reunion, with the Logos.[132] Gregory, however,

---

[129] As Wessel puts it, the "nature, as a consequence, became the mediator between mind and matter," (41) since it is the nature which is the "realization of a thing with all its properties." (40)

[130] Wessel, 25.

[131] *On the making of man*, 418-419

[132] Th. G. Sinnige, "Plotinus on the Human Person and its Cosmic Identity" *Vigiliae Christianae*, 56.3 (2002): 293-294.

argued that, on the ground that the Platonic descent of the soul was a precedent for continual change for the worse, that the migration of the soul from its ultimately intelligible nature to the non-rational would mean that the soul would eventually change its essential nature.[133] If this change occurred, humans would essentially become beasts. As will be seen, Gregory's eschatological hopes for humanity could not allow for their nature to change in this way, nor abandon ultimately the image of God.

Departing from Origen's adoption of the Platonic theory of the immortality of the soul, Nyssen considered the sensible and intellectual aspects of the human person to be inseparable, having a unity akin to the unity of the Godhead.[134] Consisting of both a visible and hidden part, Gregory considered the body and soul to exist concurrently, only and ever being together – life itself being the joint existence of the two together. To express this, Nyssen compared human life to the way that wheat develops. Though there are a plurality of aspects (the stalk, the grain, the leaves) within the one form of the plant, each of them develops conjointly with one another. There may be an order to the maturity, but the sequence leading to the realization of the plant's potential comes solely from the "potentiality of its nature" contained within its seed, not through the external imposition of another essence. That is, the soul did not come into existence externally from the body and afterwards come to be embodied – instead the two developed together.

Furthermore, Nyssen's particular treatment of the human body ought to be understood as a synthesis between philosophic thought and biblical exegesis, in the same

[133] Sinnige, 293-294.

[134] *On the making of man*, 417-418.

vein as Basil's cosmological teaching in the *Hexameron*.[135] Those things unique to biblical teaching, most of all the image of God in humanity, Gregory drew out primarily in terms of scriptural language. Gregory's discussion of the body using reason, however, played a supplemental role – further explicating his discussion of human nature and drawing out theological concepts which followed from his scriptural exegesis. For example, in *On the making of man* he describes the sinful nature as heavy in substance, drawing down the soul to earthly and non-rational things.[136] The characteristics of animal creation – Gregory refers to the nobility of the horse, and the greed of pigs – can be found within human expression because of humanity's twofold nature and the body's communion with them. This extends beyond his scriptural exegesis of the creation narrative into a cosmological proof of the necessary nature of the Fall and human inclination towards sin.[137] Gregory's questions and answers in *On the making of man* are scientific *prima facie* but are ultimately theologically understood within a framework led by the scriptural narrative.

Near the beginning of *On the making of man* Gregory gives theological meaning to human physiology. The formation of "our nature" Gregory takes as evidence for God as the great "Artificer," who arranged both the body and soul "to be adapted for royalty."[138] For the soul, this is chiefly expressed in its noble and intellectual nature, whereas Gregory considers the body to be functionally oriented towards communion with

---

[135] Young, 111.

[136] *On the making of man*, 406-408.

[137] Young, 119.

[138] *On the making of man*, 390.

its Creator. He presented this orientation as manifest through various features: the uprightness of the human figure allowed for contemplation of what was above rather than what was below; the use of hands rather than an elongated muzzle also made it unnecessary for humans to stoop and bow low to the ground in order to feed. The voice, the "proper adornment" for the rational capability of human nature, serves as the instrument of the soul, being somewhere between the operation of the flute and the lyre.[139] Furthermore, Gregory considered the freedom afforded human hands, since they did not support the body's posture, to be the "special property of the rational nature" of humanity.[140] Human dexterity allowed for precision in cooperation "with the bidding of reason," and presented humanity with the opportunity to form written characters – to create language in likeness to a God who through the Word created the *kosmos*. These features, rather than brute strength or natural weaponry, were the means by which humanity was meant to rule over creation.

At the conclusion of the treatise, Gregory briefly discussed the medical composition of human bodies. Relating to his earlier explication of the vegetative, sensible, and intellectual levels of the human soul, Gregory described the human body in terms of these conceptual tiers.[141] The hard and rigid parts of the body, the bones, relate to the nutritive category and are below the level of sense. Their operation is growth and stability. Connected to these parts, however, are substances that have a hardness and

---

[139] *On the making of man*, 394.

[140] *On the making of man*, 391-394. "Thus the hands are shown to be the property of the rational nature, the Creator having thus devised by their means a special advantage for reason."

[141] Gregory includes this system also in *On the making of man*, 402 and *On the soul and resurrection*, 440.

softness to them. This tier correlates to the sensible and facilitate our participation in the operation of perception. Finally, the soft portions of the body, relying on the other two levels for their organization and incorporation into the body, sends "into them all that self-moving and determining force," or "determining spirit." Here Gregory is speaking of the nerves which interface with the sensible parts of the body.[142] Above all these categories Nyssen naturally elevates the status of those especially significant parts of the human body, such as the brain, the heart, and the liver. Each of these parts, in turn, rely on one another (1 Cor. 12) and "no part of it might be left ineffectual or unprofitable for the regulation of the whole organism."[143]

His purpose in the discussion of the body in this way, however, was to underscore two essential understandings: first, that the body itself cannot sustain its vital activity on its own. Instead, again emphasizing the gap between creature and Creator, Gregory noted that the body "imports from without for the preservation of the living being." This is because "the Divinity alone is free from needs."[144] Second, to "show that the seminal cause of our constitution is neither a soul without body, nor a body without soul."[145] The genius of the human person is that each part of its twofold nature develops alongside the other, bringing "about that the Divine image [that] does not at once shine forth at our formation, but brings man to perfection by a certain method and sequence, through those attributes of the soul which are material, and belong rather to the animal creation."[146]

[142] *On the making of man*, 422.

[143] *On the making of man*, 423.

[144] *Ibid*.

[145] *On the making of man*, 425.

[146] *Ibid*.

Gregory's conviction is that the body, even in its connection with lower order of creation it is the instrument of the soul, and the vehicle for concurrent corporeal and intellectual maturity.[147] Furthermore, Gregory believed that the body can reflect the image of God.[148] Indeed, the general thrust of his anthropology in *On the making of man* is an expression of the instrumental nature of the human body for the human person.[149] The human soul, Gregory believed, found its fulfillment in embodied existence. Likewise, the body, by its association with the soul, had ability to share in the nobility of the intellectual nature. At times the body's impairments might affect the mind's capacity to work out the expression of the image, the image persisted.[150] In other words Gregory regarded the body, rather than being the sum total of the human person, as intimately connected with the human mind and only expressive of personhood insofar as it was in a healthy state. Through this psychosomatic union, the human person "was constituted as a rational, thinking being… capable of self-determination and of completing the progress of her self-understanding in relationship to the deity."[151]

A last important point of understanding Gregory's thought on the human body is his emphasis on the bodily resurrection of humanity. He considered physical resurrection to have been God's intent from the beginning.[152] In *On the making of man* Nyssen

---

[147] *On the making of man*, 420.

[148] Aghiorgoussis, 268.

[149] Aghiorgoussis*, 268.*

[150] *On the making of man*, 397.

[151] Wessel, 25-27, 46.

[152] Neil, 42.

utilized the precedent set forth in the parable of Lazarus and Dives.[153] Since the two men are spoken of as still having a semblance of bodily form, Gregory assumes that, in some sense, that a bodily reconstitution awaits humanity. His teaching is most immanently revealed, however, in his bedside dialogue with Macrina in *On the soul and resurrection*, where the process of bodily resurrection is brought into question.

In Gregory's view, the bodily resurrection must occur on personal lines: if the same man is to return into himself, he must be the same entirely, and regain his original formation in every single atom of his elements."[154] The question that he entertains in the dialogue is how elements, once dispersed, could come together once again to form the original. If the soul departed, without the body, the argument could be made that a bodily resurrection, as Gregory hoped for, was impossible. There would be no means by which the variety of elements which composed the human body could find their way back into union to reconstitute a body, much less the body of a specific person. Gregory brought this objection against Macrina by using the analogy of a ship and a sailor.[155] A ship that wrecks, dissolving in a manner like the body, has its parts cast into disparate parts of the ocean. The soul, guiding and steering the ship as sailor, has no means to reassemble its vessel itself. After the wreck, the sailor could at most remain on one part of the ship, rather than in some way presiding over all the parts and somehow later bring them back together.

---

[153] *On the making of man*, 418. Gregory does further explain his use of the parable, however, in *On the soul and resurrection*, 445-446.

[154] *On the soul and resurrection*, 445.

[155] *On the soul and resurrection*, 436-437.

Macrina responds categorically objecting to the assumptions made about the soul in the analogy. The soul, in a way like the *adiastemic* nature of God, was intelligible and immaterial, and lacked spatial bounds (as discussed before). Therefore, Nyssen, in the voice of his sister, argued that the soul was not "compressed" inside the body while constituted, and likewise was not freed upon the dissolution of the body.[156] Instead, "even though the body is dispersed, it remains in the world, which is itself within the hands of God."[157] Macrina clarified this point by responding with another analogy. The soul, the grand artwork of the divine painter, and the elements of the body, like a mixture of hues of paint, are originally and uniquely constituted apart from all other matter. At the point of death, however, the tints that made up the mixture according to the artistry of the painter were dispersed. God, being the masterful artist, remembered "the exact nature of that colour" which he used to produce each art piece.[158] According the pattern which God had already laid down (the soul) he reconstituted the body. The soul would "persistently cling to the familiar atoms, until their concourse after this division again takes place in the same way" at the resurrection.

Overall, it is Gregory's conviction that humanity, stamped with the divine image and created as a union of body and soul, is yet ultimately a mystery to itself. Endowed with the capacity for divine likeness and existing as a unity of diverse operations, human nature's inherent potential had to be realized through the divine restoration

---

[156] *On the soul and resurrection*, 437.

[157] *On the making of man*, 416.

[158] *On the soul and resurrection*, 444.

(αποκαταστασις) of all humanity and growth into beings infinitely desiring (επεκτασις) the infinite God.

"That which is expected to appear afterwards"; αποκαταστασις and επεκτασις

When he spoke of the fate of humanity, Nyssen's belief rested on his conviction that "the resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state."[159] Beyond the hope of the resurrection, he believed that humankind had a destiny that, by divine power, would involve their remaking into the image of God. Staying in rhythm with his convictions about humanity's imagehood and essentially embodied nature, Gregory believed that humans would be restored to the manner of their existence prior to their fall into the habitual nature of sin. Natural image-bearing would give way to infinite growth (επεκτασις) in likeness, and human bodies would "be restored… with a brighter and more entrancing beauty."[160]

Gregory's expression of this belief, and his discussion of restoration (αποκαταστασις) placed him nearby to others (under the broad umbrella of "Origenism") who fell under the anathema of the second council of Constantinople in 553.[161] The anathema itself evinces that Gregory was not alone in his speculative venture into discussion of a final restoration. Other church fathers, most notable among them Origen of Alexandria, had developed a theology of hope based on the expectation of the

[159] *On the making of man*, 406.

[160] *On the soul and resurrection*, 452.

[161] As will be seen, there are several points in the anathema that do not find rest in Gregory's expression. "If anyone shall say that all reasonable beings will one day be united in one, when the hypostases as well as the numbers and the bodies shall have disappeared, and that the knowledge of the world to come will carry with it the ruin of the worlds, and the rejection of bodies as also the abolition of [all] names, and that there shall be finally an identity of the γνωσις and of the hypostasis; moreover, that in this pretended apocatastasis, spirits only will continue to exist, as it was in the feigned pre-existence: let him be anathema."

universal restoration (αποκαταστασις παντων) of all created things. Therefore, to understand the connection of Gregory's theological anthropology and the future he anticipated for humanity, one ought to observe those points of Nyssen's similarity and departure from the thought of Origen and the other Cappadocian fathers.

Origen was the most expansive and thorough of those theologians who wrote concerning *apokatastasis*. Although it can be difficult to discern the elements of Origen's actual belief from the influence of his thought upon later Origenist theologians, there are certain emphases which distinguish his view of universal human restoration.[162] His claims for the final restoration centered primarily around the importance of his Christology to his overall theology. Christ's victory over death rendered it eternally inert; Death, as a spent force, could no longer lay claim to human life even in the eschaton. The resurrection of Christ, who was himself a human being, ontologically changed the fate of humanity by their subsisting eternally in the body Christ.[163] Instead of being the fate of only those who in this life were grafted into the body of Christ, the *apokatastasis* of Origen entailed an end in which God became "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). The suffering of humanity in the resurrection, spoken of by Christ, would yet occur, but the fire to which he referred would be purifying in nature (1 Cor. 3:11-15). There would be, in the eschaton, punishment and reward. Rather than humans undergoing either punishment or reward, Origen believed that any human experience of punishment administered by

[162] Notably, Origen believed that his teaching on *apokatastasis* was not a doctrine for all believers, but one contemplated by those with spiritual maturity (making reference to Isaiah 48:9). Brian R. Sachs, "Apokatastasis in Patristic Theology" *Theological Studies* 54.4 (1993): 624.

[163] Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2002): 55. Sachs, 621.

God's judgement – the fires of hell – would be towards the end of receiving a reward.[164] Origen was unwilling to consider hell and heaven in the same ontological category. He considered God, along with Gregory and the Platonic thinkers, to be the grounds of being. The eternal nature of hell could not be said to be parallel to the eternity of a life with God in heaven.[165] A final and important point of Origen's eschatology was his belief in the monadic nature of the beginning and ending of existence. Human restoration was a return to a pre-existent spiritual state in union with God because, as mentioned before, he subscribed to the Platonic belief in the pre-existence of souls in the intellectual realm prior to their embodiment. Therefore, the end of human existence for Origen was likewise an intellectual and bodiless existence, achieving in this way unity with God over infinite ages.[166]

Basil had a more critical view of Origen's theology than the other two Cappadocian fathers. Brian Daley argues that Basil's disagreement largely stemmed from his understanding of the "importance of the prospects of judgement and retribution in the moral life of Christians."[167] This concern, although expressed less harshly, was one that Nyssen shared. Basil's critique tended to use more traditional imagery when teaching on salvation and eschatology. These were meant to prepare his listeners, training them to resist the temptations and passions. Basil's continuity with other Christian thinkers comes

---

[164] Daley, 57-58. Sachs, 625.

[165] Sachs, 627.

[166] Ilaria Ramelli, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis" *Vigiliae Christianae* 61.3 (2007): 321-322.

[167] Daley, 81.

mostly from his tendency towards spiritualizing the language of the scriptures and willingness to leave the nature of the final days in abstract language and apophasis.[168]

Gregory the theologian, or Gregory of Nazianzus, spoke in a more cautious way than Origen, but yet appreciated many of the facets of his theology of hope. Nazianzus also expressed the notion that sin as ontologically meriting a suffering, rather than God himself being the source of the punishment of the sinner. His belief was that sin brought about an eternal shame and suffering through alienation from God.[169] Therefore, the sinner, in the eschaton, would undergo a remedial or purifying suffering – similar, but changed slightly from Origen's therapeutic and pedagogical view. He also expressed the time of restoration (αποκαταστασις) as the time in which humanity would be wholly receptive of God by using the language of God as "all in all."[170] The greatest differences, however, laid in Nazianzus's theological polemics against Novatianist rigorism. In combating the notion that post-baptismal sins were not covered by the blood of Christ, he emphasized a two-fold notion of salvation that at the same time affirmed the efficacy of the baptismal water and also underscored the processive nature of salvation. His soteriology was, as will be seen with Nyssen, an anthropologically driven understanding of soteriology. Nazianzus preferred to talk about the salvation of all in connection to human imagehood and formation into the divine image, setting an important precedent for the concept of *theosis* in Christian theology.[171] As with Origen, the importance of

---

[168] Daley, 82-83.

[169] Sachs, 629-630.

[170] Daley, 84-85.

[171] Sachs, 631-632. Daley, 83-84.

Christ played a central role, but Nazianzus's emphasis lay in the transition of humanity from the Adamic type to that of Christ as a model for the salvific narrative.

The restoration for which Gregory hoped can be distinguished from the views of these other theologians most poignantly by identifying the nature of Gregory's view of Christian life – both in the present spiritual life as well as resurrection life. Therefore, before delving into the larger concept of *apokatastasis* and Gregory's understanding of the resurrection, it is necessary to lay out some examples of one specific portion of his hope: the concept of infinite progress, or επεκτασις.

Between his doctrine of divine infinity and human mutability, Gregory used his thoroughly theological understanding of anthropology to describe the human spiritual life as progressive growth in contemplative desire for God. "[The] Divine is by its very nature infinite, [and] enclosed by no boundary," in a manner similar to human perfection in virtue: "in the case of virtue we have learned that… its one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit."[172] As Everett Ferguson states, "The infinity of God is the basis for the infinity of virtue."[173] The idea that perfection lacks limits, therefore, implies a degree of unattainability in a manner similar to divine infinity implying divine incomprehensibility. This should not, however, preclude human effort for growth in knowledge of God, nor slacken human striving for growth in virtue. Instead, a practice of perpetual progress, little by little, will allow humanity to grow. This *epektatic* growth is

[172] *Life of Moses*, 29-30. "as I have said, perfection is not marked off by limits: The one limit of virtue is the absence of a limit. How then would one arrive at the sought-for boundary when he can find no boundary?"

[173] Everett Ferguson, "God's infinity and man's mutability: perpetual progress according to Gregory of Nyssa" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18.1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1973): 66.

"through exertion," and, in the case of virtue, is analogous to the exercise of a muscle. Though the task of attaining Godly virtue is beyond human grasping, "this kind of activity alone does not slacken its intensity by the effort, but increases it."[174]

With this acknowledgement, however, Gregory remained convinced that human effort alone could not be responsible for *epektasis*. First, the "nature of the Good" was to attract "to itself those who look to it."[175] After all, Gregory believed that since humans had a conception of virtue and had seen that virtuous action does occur, that such behavior was immanent evidence of humanity's created goodness and origin with God.[176] Therefore, due to the connection between divine and human nature, a sort of synergism in *epektatic* growth emerged in Gregory's thought. Next, Gregory described the manner of this cooperation as the result of "long training and supernatural illumination." God provides spiritual assistance "at our birth," but also is alongside human effort "whenever we apply ourselves to diligent training in higher life and strip ourselves for the more vigorous contests."[177]

Beginning in this life, humanity could grasp after material or spiritual desires. Both desires operated along the tracks of human mutability – the material desires would grow like the spiritual ones if indulged but could not sustain perpetual progress due to the

[174] *Life of Moses*, 112.

[175] *Ibid*.

[176] *On the making of man*, 390.

[177] *Life of Moses*, 63. God's role at the origin of Christian life is unclear in Gregory's exegesis. It is certain that Gregory acknowledges the presence of God in the spiritual birth of Christians but is strongly convicted that the birth is rooted in human choice, and "does not come as the result of an external initiative." *Life of Moses*, 51.

limitation of evil.[178] The spiritual desires, by contrast, grew in strength, but also progressed in a manner unchecked by limits, even into the time of restoration. This marked a departure in Gregory's thought from the Platonic notion of rest in the time of reintegration of humanity with the divine.[179] Instead, the end would be like the beginning of humanity: as creatures drawn from non-being into being, humanity would continue in motion towards the unreachable heights of divine knowledge and virtue. In attaining to the heights, humanity would also come to grow into a greater likeness of God. As within the preface to his *Life of Moses*, Gregory supposed that the "perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness."[180] Humanity participated by way of the energies of God ontologically to come into being, and so also their continued being related to their participation in the energies of God through their progress in virtue.

Gregory held that human participation in the divine life was most eminently secured by the incarnation of Christ. In her article on *epektasis*, Kristina Robb-Dover recognizes within Gregory's thought the centrality of Christ in human ability to participate within the divine *oikonomia*.[181] In the *Life of Moses* Gregory presents several images of Christ's presence which embody his integral role in human *epektasis*. The most emphatic of these images is Moses's security in his viewing of God by way of the "hole in the rock" which is Christ.[182] In Moses's desire to see God face to face, he expressed

---

[178] See Gregory's reference to the traditional teaching about companion angels and demons in the *Life of Moses*, 63-64. Also, see the distinction of "cyclic" and "progressive" change in Ferguson, 69-70.

[179] Kristina Robb-Dover, "Gregory of Nyssa's "Perpetual Progress"" *Theology Today* 65.2 (2008): 214.

[180] *Life of Moses*, 30.

[181] Robb-Dover, 222-223.

[182] *Life of Moses*, 111.

his desire to progress to a height infinitely beyond human capacity. God, acquiescing to Moses' request, allows him to see himself in some sense. Gregory interprets:

> This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.[183]

Mysteriously, the growth and ascent which Moses undertook Gregory understands as progress achieved by "standing still." Being both perpetually in motion as befitting a creature and resting on the Rock which is Christ in a manner befitting the motionless creator, Moses came to "see" God, and thereby became radiant. The movement and participation of human persons in the divine nature "comes only to the degree that she apprehends and embraces her need for Christ."[184]

This participation, in Cappadocian thought, is one of the chief elements of the spiritual life. Humanity's taking on of the attributes (or participate in the energies of) God allows them to become through the exercise of virtue and will that which God is by nature.[185] The idea of divinization (*theosis*) emerges also in Gregory's *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, where he speaks of how the process of divine participation is not restricted only to the life to come, but rather has its beginning in this present life. Participating in the virtues outlined in the Beatitudes are the starting point for the divine work of

[183] *Life of Moses*, 115.

[184] Robb-Dover, 223.

[185] Eklund, 730. Smith, 221. Aghiorgoussis, 268. Lewis Ayers, "Deification and the dynamics of Nicene theology: the contribution of Gregory of Nyssa" *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.5 (2005): 377-382. Ayers comments that, in some ways, Gregory's contribution to the theological conception of theosis is limited somewhat by his sparing use of the terminology so strongly used by Gregory of Nazianzus and Athanasius. Gregory does, however, provide a solid basis on which to discuss the process of becoming like to God in his discussion of *askesis*.

divinization in one's life.[186] This process, rather, than being completed, goes on even in the life to come. This does not remove, however, the reality of Christ's saying "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Gregory might say that when Christ preached on the Beatitudes he spoke truly by expressing the eschatological reality of the peace and comfort of the life to come but expressed also the ongoing nature of that blessing as being part and parcel of ongoing life with God. To be clear, Gregory understood that this life as existing not only "in the eschaton, but in the present."[187]

Gregory's doctrine of *apokatastasis* signified a return to humanity's angelic state, which was from the beginning God's intention. This return, however, should not be understood as a reversion, but a return with maturity – what Smith calls the "fulfillment of the germinally perfect form."[188] Humanity in the garden had been created in the image of God, and the universal restoration of humanity would be the ultimate act to secure human likeness and union with the divine energies (*vis*. Philippians 2:10). Gregory's understanding was that since evil and death were by nature non-substantive, that in the final restoration they would cease to be – since God would become (as with Origen) "all in all" there would be nothing left to serve as a vessel or container of the emptiness of sin.[189]

---

[186] Eklund, 733-734.

[187] Eklund, 734.

[188] Smith, 219-223. Daley, 85-86. Casimir McCambley, "When (the Father) Will Subject All Things to (the Son), Then (the Son) Himself Will Be Subjected to Him (the Father) Who Subjects All Things to Him (the Son) – A Treatise on First Corinthians 15:28 by St. Gregory of Nyssa" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28 (1983) 5.

[189] Neil, 42. Klager 167. Sachs, 633-634; 636. Daley, 87. Steven R. Harmon, "The subjection of all things in Christ: the Christocentric universalism of Gregory of Nyssa (331/40-c. 395)" in *All shall be well: explorations in universal salvation and Christian theology, from Origen to Moltmann*, Gregory Macdonald, ed. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011): 49; 52-53. Ramelli, 315-316.

Acknowledging the nature of non-being in sin and wickedness does, however, raises the question of its origin and association with human beings. As discussed before with the nature of the passions and virtues, it must be stressed that the passions, unlike evil and sin,

> have not been allotted to human nature for any bad purpose at all (for the Creator would most certainly be the author of evil, if in them, so deeply rooted as they are in our nature, any necessities of wrong-doing were found), but according to the use which our free will puts them to, these emotions of the soul become the instruments of virtue or of vice.[190]

For Gregory, God's foreknowledge of humanity's fall comes not from his foreordained will that humanity sin, but rather that since humanity is created, their coming to be involves the movement from non-being into being. That precedent of change within human nature led to (but did not necessitate) the Fall.[191] Therefore, instead of guilt being ascribed to one who sins on the basis of their own errors (which, as discussed before, Gregory sees as inevitable) it is instead ascribed by "proximity to the offense" which is death and non-being.[192] Generally, Gregory's approach to sin is to consider it a wound, and that humanity needs therapeutic care to attain to life. The wound of sin can fester and deepen if left unattended, and humanity itself has need to take divine medicine.[193]

---

[190] *On the soul and resurrection*, 441.

[191] Young, 115-116. In Gregory's teaching on the Beatitudes he interprets the dictum, "Blessed are those who mourn" not only as the idea of sorrow for sin, but also as a greater sorrow for the loss of the innocence of human nature in its ancestral sin in the Fall. Eklund, 732.

[192] Klager, 160.

[193] Gregory alludes to Ignatius's famous dictum concerning the "medicine of immortality" in his discussion on the Eucharist in *The great catechism*, 502-504. The body of Christ, the bread, serves both as a remedy for sin's poison within the body as well as being its nourishment.

Gregory clarified his understanding of evil and death's nature of non-being by comparing the effects of our proximity to it as to a flame in three stages of succession: desire (επιθυμια), pleasure (ηδονη), and passion (παθοι).[194] In the first stage, desire, humans are attracted by the means of their senses to something that is understood and seen. The continual presence of that which attracts our desire breeds pleasure, which leads to a lenience in the will. After an increasing period of lenience, the pleasure grows into a passion that draws the afflicted even in the absence of the desire. Desire itself, alongside the patient, is put to death by the growth of the passion.[195] Thus the progressive decline of a human into sin can be understood as being consumed by fire. The being, its desires, and its passions alike may burn for a time, but come to their end by settling back into non-being.

The separation and non-entity inherent in the presence of pathology should also be understood within the context of Gregory's engagement of the term in its medical and philosophic context. Galen, in his discussion of παθος described it as the kind of unnatural motion that comes from outside whereas the "energy" of an object described the motion of an object that emerges from the object. [196] Gregory, adopting the notion, agreed that pathology indicated states in the body (and the soul) that were external to nature, but wished to maintain the distinction between the state of the body and the soul. He considered viciousness and sin as later occurring infirmities, as invaders, to the

---

[194] Klager, 160.

[195] *Life of Moses*, 131.

[196] Wessel, 39-40.

natural state of human being.[197] If a pathology affected one or the other, Greek philosophy would question how they could be said to be distinct but related. Gregory's response was to treat the notion theologically. The human mind, in its comprehension of the divine, acted as a mirror – subsisting as an image only insofar as it continued to "remain in likeness to the archetype."[198] The body, in a similar fashion, operated as a mirror for the mind (νους), and reflected its essential nature only insofar as its archetype – in this case, the body's archetype being the complete union with the mind while in the state of perfect health. Gregory believed that perfect bodily life "is in the rational (I mean the human) nature, which both is nourished, endowed with sense, and also partakes of reason and is ordered by mind."[199] If a human being, falling into the pathos of sin, obscured the image of God within them, their operation as a mirror for the divine energy was disrupted. The human body, when it fell into a physical pathology, obscured its operation as a mirror for the human mind. In this way, Gregory applies the concept of essence and energies which he first applies to explain the divine nature to his understanding of the human relation of the sin as a pathology to the unity of the body and mind. Each link in this chain of images, in this diminishing progression of mirrors, were distinct because, despite the disruption that could occur within the chain, the operation of the chain of mirrors was in one direction: downwards. That is, when obscurity due to a pathology occurred in the human mind or soul, it reflected down the chain into the immanent physical image of the body: "for the mind takes the lead, and chooses the

[197] Neil, 41.

[198] Wessel, 40.

[199] *On the making of man*, 392-394.

expedient course by reason and not by passion, while their nature follows in the tracks of its leader."[200] The divine nature, however, remained untouched because of its transcendence of the human image, despite the divine image remaining within the (obscured) human. Similarly, with the human relationship with the body and the mind, the obscurity caused by physical pathology marked a departure in physical reality from the healthy image of the human body present in the mind. Thereby, the human mind's intelligible nature allowed it to withdraw from and transcend the pathologies of the body, all the while subsisting with it.[201]

Thus, for Gregory, sin and evil must be discussed in terms of privation of good, in a manner like discussing cold as the absence of heat or darkness as the absence of light.[202] The wickedness that has beset human nature (as with Origen and Nazianzen) could not be considered on the same essential level as the goodness of God. The unchanging and infinite nature of God, being more firm and substantive, overcame the finite and mutable nature of humanity that would "not remain settled even in evil."[203] As with the discussion of *epektasis* above, the final state of humanity would continue to be that of motion – but the creative intent of infinite motion towards God would be realized.

---

[200] *On the making of man*, 402. See also *On the making of man*, 417-418.

[201] For the usage of this mirror construction in the writing of Plotinus and Athanasius, see Andrew Hamilton, S.J. "Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror" *Vigiliae Christianae* 34.1 (1980): 14-18. In Basil also, the human nature could be said to participate in the divine energies as a mirror – insofar as humans take on those divine attributes like love, perfection, and holiness they have communion with those common aspects of the three persons of the Trinity. Aghiorgoussis, 270.

[202] Neil, 41.

[203] *On the making of man*, 409-410.

The non-rational impulses that assisted in our growth in virtue, such as the desire spoken about in *On the soul and resurrection*, would no longer exist within human nature.[204] They will be peeled away as they are no longer needed for assistance in drawing humanity toward God. In a similar way, Nyssen speaks in *On the soul and resurrection* of the "coats of skins" that will be laid aside at the final restoration.[205] Certain qualities of bodies, such as sexual differentiation (*vis*. Galatians 3:28), growth, and aging will be laid aside in favor of "something more subtle and ethereal."[206] Gregory comments that "it does not seem to me that our hope is one for those things which are now subjected by God to man for the necessary uses of life, but one for another kingdom, of a description that belongs to unspeakable mysteries."[207] The emphasis in his thought lies in the understanding that, although these aspects of embodiment may continue on in existence, their functionality will no longer be needed to secure union with God.

Because God created humanity in his image Gregory had to reconcile his concept of imagehood with the reality of human existence, including its division into male and female. This involved heavy exegesis in *On the making of man* of the passage in Gen. 1:26-27, where Gregory interpreted the divine act of creation.[208] J. Warren Smith argues that Gregory views God's separation of humanity into gendered existence is the result of

---

[204] *On the soul and resurrection*, 448.

[205] *On the soul and resurrection*, 461-464. *The great catechism*, 480-481. Note particularly in *On the soul and resurrection* Gregory's discussion of human growth, and the lack of necessity for the properties of age – whether in maturity or infancy – to define human condition in the eschaton.

[206] *On the soul and resurrection*, 452. Daley, 88.

[207] *On the making of man*, 410.

[208] *On the making of man*, 403-406; 410-412.

his anticipation of the fall. Rather than intending from the beginning that humanity exist as male and female, God created humanity according to his image with the intent that, in the eschaton, that they live in a manner like the angels. As Gregory specifies, "He devised for His image the distinction of male and female, which has no reference to the Divine Archetype, but, as we have said, is an approximation to the less rational nature."[209] Therefore the distinction of gender is an aspect of divine accommodation in Gregory's thought. God would not have established gender differentiation among humans in this sense if he had foreknown that humanity would not fall.[210] In comparison, Basil believed that humanity's imagehood and likeness stood further apart from bodily existence. Therefore, when he speaks of gendered humanity, Basil speaks of the one nature of human virtue, and likewise one calling to divine likeness. Since the body is not directly involved in the image of God, male and female alike are "absolutely equal."[211] With respect to the equality of the presence of image and calling to likeness, Gregory would certainly agree.[212] The emphasis of his theology, however, demanded that he also account for the whole of human nature, including the body. Christ in the incarnation took on the whole of human nature, including gendered existence, in order to make the whole of humanity subject to God the Father. For Gregory, as discussed before, this wholeness

---

[209] *On the making of man*, 405.

[210] Smith, 214.

[211] Aghiorgoussis, 276.

[212] *Life of Moses*, 54-55. "We are in some manner our own parents, giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice in accordance with whatever we wish to be, whether male or female, moulding ourselves according to the teaching of virtue or vice."

(naturally) has reference to the entirety of humanity corporately, but also extended incarnationally to include all of humanity corporeally.[213]

Humanity, according to Gregory, could have continued in a manner like the angels (that is, both in a state different from present as well as without the need for sexual difference) indefinitely, but yet remain an embodied composite of an intellectual and corporeal nature. Created human nature, then, has within it the two-sided nature discussed before with the additional sense that the rational part is undivided and that the corporeal part is (sexually) divided in a manner like the animals. Smith clarifies that humanity was not created in two separate creative acts, but a creation of a "double aspect of human nature" where the qualities which define the rational and non-rational parts occur before and after one another "only at the level of God's intention."[214] As Gregory puts it, God's creation of "man" is according to the "indefinite character of the term," which in turn should include "all humanity" in the "first" of these two aspects of creation. God created "universal humanity" in its "consummation" logically first; the second aspect of human nature, apparent in Adam's "heavy corporeal existence", is "the thing formed of earth… the man 'of the earth' [χοικος]."[215]

Therefore, the passionate, or earthly, character of human sexuality of which Gregory wrote came not out of human inability to tame the passions but from its inception in kinship with the animal creation. Human sexuality does, however,

---

[213] As Gregory puts it, the "entire plenitude [πλερομα] of humanity," *On the making of man*, 405. Harmon, 57-58.

[214] Smith, 212. Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 163-166. See also Young, 112-113.

[215] *On the making of man*, 405. See also the "universal nature" that Gregory distinguishes in 410.

accommodate sin insofar as both the hypersensuality of procreation and sin share what Smith calls a "sensual orientation."[216] This orientation is characteristic of the non-rational, or appetitive, aspect of the soul discussed before. Sexuality, for Gregory, is not by its nature sinful, but it does increase the desire of humanity for non-rational things and causes the intellect frustration in seeking to become more reflective of the divine image rather than the image of the non-rational animals which it takes on.[217] Sexuality and sin have connection in Gregory's thought, but the former is not cause for the latter. These desires, or passions, are necessary for moral action in this life, but they do not compose the imagehood of the human soul.[218] Indeed, in the life to come, Gregory implies that gender and sexuality, as with other accretions that exist only in this temporal life, will cease to be significant in the eschaton.[219] Gregory concludes his thoughts with a characteristic statement of apophasis:

> The cause, indeed, of this device, only those can know who were eye-witnesses of the truth and ministers of the Word; but we, imagining the truth, as far as we can, by means of conjectures and similitudes, do not set forth that which occurs to our mind authoritatively, but will place it in the form of a theoretical speculation before our kindly hearers.[220]

The presence of human sexuality and other physical characteristics did not disqualify for Gregory, however, the truth of a bodily resurrection. The body that we take on in the resurrection will be similar to the one that we had in this life, both in terms of

[216] Smith, 213.

[217] Smith, 216.

[218] Smith 217. Gregory employs scriptural teaching from Jesus's discussion of heavenly marriage with the Sadducees in Luke 20:35-36 and the teaching of there being neither male nor female in Christ in Galatians 3:28 to draw his reader back to the "double aspect" of a singular human nature. Young, 114-115.

[219] Smith 225.

[220] *On the making of man*, 405.

their form and their substance. As Susan Wessel states, Gregory believed the resurrection would be a "complete restoration of the individual characteristics of the human person," including the mind and the body: the whole person.[221] Gregory considered this conception of the human person to combat the Platonic (as well as Origenian) belief in the transmigration of the soul and eventual bodiless existence in *apokatastasis*.[222] Their understanding that the resurrection implies a separation and dissolution of the current body is correct, but it is, Gregory insists, "that the same body again as before, composed of the same atoms, is compacted around the soul" in the final restoration.[223] For both Gregory and the Platonic thinkers, the beginning of existence would be like the end. Gregory, however, contended that the beginning of human existence was an embodied existence. If it were that the soul came to dwell on its own in an ethereal reality apart from embodied existence, there would be no reason that that ending state would not relapse into the cycle of embodiment.[224]

There remains an open question on the interpretation of Gregory's writings on the passions, the emotions, within human life and virtue. Some have argued that his teaching is that of Greek *apatheia*, or of a mortification of the passionate drives to pursue instead the higher things of the spiritual life.[225] Reading through Gregory's more ascetical writings – in his praise for his sister, Macrina, or his treatise *On virginity* – could lead a

[221] Wessel, 25. Sachs, 633. Daley, 86-87. Harmon, 55.

[222] Daley, 86. Harmon, 48.

[223] *On the soul and resurrection,* 453.

[224] *On the soul and resurrection*, 454-455. Sachs, 633. Casimir, 4.

[225] *Apatheia* here meaning a freedom from the passions by rejecting their presence in the choices one makes, rather than the more modern meaning of mere indifference.

reader with the impression that Nyssen prized an impassible life. The Stoic philosophers held this view of the emotions, and this view was not without its admirers among the church fathers.[226] Some scholars have argued that Gregory, however, would likely agree more with the view expressed by Platonic philosophers, perhaps most well known as the analogy of the charioteer.[227] The charioteer, understood as human capability for free will and rational thought, the Platonic *logistikon*, has two horses reigned into her chariot: one horse, a strong and upstanding beast symbolizing spirited human nature – human ability to experience higher emotions like honor and courage; the other, a wild and untamed horse symbolizing desirous and appetitive human passions.[228] Without the participation of both horses under the control of the charioteer, the vehicle will not operate properly. If one is removed, the ability for the chariot to navigate is direly impaired. Here the objective is not passionlessness, but restraint and control over human emotion. The feeling of sorrow for sin, anger in sight of injustice, or desire for the higher divine life are each examples of human passion properly restrained.[229] The passions, for Gregory, have

---

[226] There is a disparity in the teachings of the desert fathers, for example, on this topic. One monastic, Dorotheus of Gaza, was known to have said of the body (and thereby it's desires), "It kills me, I kill it." The meaning intended is that the body hinders the life of the human person (and is indeed passing away), and therefore our ability to chasten its passionate drives and mortify the body allows humans to attain to real life in Christ. Another view expressed by the abbot Poemen was that "we are taught not to kill the body but to kill the passions." Each of these views, however, might be a more rigorist step beyond Gregory's expression. Isaiah of Scetis, "Abbot Isaiah of Scetis: Ascetic Discourses" in *Cistercian Studies* 150, John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 2002): 26.

[227] Eklund, 737-739. Gregory alludes in to the analogy in *On the making of man,* 424; "[the mind is the] charioteer [of] the impulse and power to all the meeting-points of bones and joints, and to the branches of the muscles, for the motion or rest of the particular parts." Cherniss (12-13), however, contends that Gregory ultimately rejects the passions.

[228] Plato*, Phaedrus*, 246e.

[229] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c-247e. The mind, "the pilot of the soul" brings (together) the "horses at the manger and feeds them with ambrosia…" A life of restrained passions therefore leads to the "real and eternal absolute."

a tenuous relationship with human virtue – leaving open the possibility for virtue by exercising control over them, but not being part of the image of God in humanity. Therefore, while necessary for growth in this life, the passions will not continue to have meaningful existence (as discussed above with human sexuality) in the restoration of all things.[230] Instead, God will become "all in all," superseding the expediency of current human existence.

Lastly, Gregory's understood human will and destiny guiding a person not towards one of two locations, but instead to that of one eschatological reality that humans experience differently based on their "ontological composition in either passions or virtue."[231] In the *Life of Moses* Gregory illustrates this idea through the plague narrative. The Egyptians and the Hebrews, both living in Egypt, experienced the power of God in their own ways. For example, in the plague of darkness, Gregory writes that

> Perhaps someone, taking his departure from the fact that after three days of distress in darkness the Egyptians did share in the light, might be led to perceive the final restoration [αποκαταστασις] which is expected to take place later in the kingdom of heaven of those who have suffered condemnation in Gehenna. For that darkness that could be felt, as the history says, has a great affinity both in its name and in its actual meaning to the exterior darkness. Both are dispelled when Moses, as we have perceived before, stretched forth his hands on behalf of those in darkness… [Which became] for those others also the healing of pain and the deliverance from punishment.[232]

[230] "Whenever this happens, then, there will be no longer need of the impulse of Desire to lead the way to the Beautiful… the soul should be free from such emotions, and turning back upon herself should know herself accurately what her actual nature is, and should behold the Original Beauty reflected in the mirror and in the figure of her own beauty." *On the soul and resurrection*, 448.

[231] Klager, 150. Daley, 86-87.

[232] *Life of Moses*, 72.

In this way Gregory's view of the restoration of all things is one of therapeutic hope rather than a vision of final retribution. Certainly, both punishment and reward, heaven and hell, are realities for Gregory.[233] The power and love of God will become immediately manifest to all humanity in the *apokatastasis*, but for the sinner these will be experienced as pain. Nyssen viewed the suffering and punishment, however, as directed toward the end of rehabilitating the sinner.[234] Moreover, the suffering experienced for this restoration was not imposed by God, but instead was a preservation of the freedom of human will.[235] God's justice "follows" the free will of the sinner, as "each man makes his own plagues when through his own free will he inclines toward these painful experiences."[236] The lover of God, however, experiences deliverance, true freedom, and a satisfaction of their desires: to ever pursue God to greater heights.

Redeeming "that which is now seen"; sacramental and ascetic practice

To this point Gregory's view of the beginning of the life of virtue, the immediate practice of ascent in this life, has appeared in comparison to the original and final states of human nature. This is as it should be. The meaning of the Christian way of life, the practice and living of the faith, are senseless without purview to both their foundations and aims. These teachings are, however, lifeless if left without discernable the imprint upon the experience of the body of Christ, the church, incarnate in the world.

---

[233] *The great catechism,* 506-506.

[234] Harmon (50) mentions Gregory's specification of Matthew 9:12 and Mark 2:17 as indicative of the medicinal nature of punishment.

[235] Klager, 152.

[236] *Life of Moses*, 73.

Human life, immersed in the created order, needed some way to be drawn up to God in order to participate in the salvation effected by Christ. Gregory believed human nature itself underwent a kind of transformation at the incarnation. When the Son had become human, God became flesh, a movement within humanity had emerged. Similar to his conviction about the pervasiveness of the mind over the body, Gregory believed that Christ through the incarnation evoked a "sense felt at once by the whole system." Humanity, together counted as one person, had God's nature fully revealed to it in Christ. His taking on of flesh and sharing in that nature caused the "resurrection principle" to pass through "the entire race, being imparted from the Member [Christ] to the whole."[237] Though humanity would not in this lifetime attain to a full imitation, the journey began by participation in the practices that Christ established in his own life.

Gregory described the church's celebration of the Eucharist and the practice of baptismal regeneration as the means of the church's pursuit of likeness to Christ. "The sacraments," remarks Boersma, "constitute the initial transposition" of human life into the divine life.[238] Christ, taking on human nature, began this process of transposition. Gregory believed that Christ had "realized an actual fellowship with man, and has effected life as a living fact, so that by means of the flesh which He has assumed, and at the same time deified, everything kindred and related may be saved along with it."[239]

Nyssen considered Christian baptism as a "mystery of regeneration" by which human persons were established on the "foundation of life."[240] By immersion in the

---

[237] *The great catechism*, 497.

[238] Boersma, 182.

[239] *The great catechism*, 500.

[240] *The great catechism*, 499.

waters of baptism, the believer imitated Christ and participated in his death, burial, and resurrection. The sins and trespasses of the former life passed away and were put to death. The transformation of human life began in this act of imitation, which engaged the whole of the human person. The water itself, present to appease the human senses, communicated the human need for salvation in both body and soul.[241] Since the human person was a psychosomatic whole, the believer experienced "by means of the cleansing in the water" a participation "in Purity; and true Purity is Deity."[242]

Here, again, Gregory's understanding of human synergism presents a paradox inherent in his understanding of participation. Human sharing in the life of grace lie between being of "the work properly belonging to the Divine energy" and being "dependent on the power of him who is being borne."[243] Certainly God's involvement in the rebirth of the believer could not be questioned, but Gregory clarifies the manner of human participation in baptism as being through both prayer, performance, and surrender. Before immersion prayer lifted the believer in an "invocation of heavenly grace."[244] This invocation presented the believer to God, and in manner like the raising of Christ on the cross. Next the "descent into the water", or the burial of the sinner, is performed as a

---

[241] Boersma, 183-184.

[242] *The great catechism*, 502.

[243] *The great catechism*, 502, 504.

[244] *The great catechism*, 499. Gregory also mentions the importance of the confession made in the process of baptism. If one confesses belief, "it is incumbent upon every one… to make an absolute choice of one or other of these two conditions, either to believe that the Holy Trinity belongs to the uncreated world, and so through the spiritual birth to make It the foundation of his own life, or, if he thinks that the Son or the Holy Ghost is external to the being of the first, the true, the good, God, I mean, of the Father, not to include these Persons in the belief which he takes upon him at the moment of his new birth…" *The great catechism*, 505. The consequence of belief in the contrary while undergoing the process of baptism will lead back into a state of instability and alteration unlike the immutable life with the triune God. In a sense, Gregory claims that the nature God which the believer confesses will match the character of life (whether true and resolute or false and unstable) of that person.

"trine immersion" that models the three days in the tomb and the three persons of the Trinity.[245] Finally, the individual surrenders to divine power by "either themselves [making] an actual addition to that grace, or at all events [not causing] the existing grace to miscarry."[246] That is, in the spiritual life that begins for the believer after being raised from the water, the effort required of the Christian is a passive sort, which admits of the efficacy of divine power and attempts to not impede the ongoing work of the Spirit.

Following initiation into resurrection life, the believer requires nourishment to mature and grow up into the salvation granted in baptism. With this need for nourishment Gregory advances the idea that humanity is a twofold entity which partakes of the Eucharist for integration of the body into the incorruptible life. Through baptism the soul is "fused into Him through faith," but the "body comes into fellowship and blending with the Author of our salvation" through partaking in "that very body which has shown to be superior to death."[247] The body of Christ, itself deified human flesh, worked in a manner similar to the sense of baptism mentioned above in that the sharing of the believer in the Eucharist was an assimilation of one element of a larger body to produce a transformed whole. Therefore, the Eucharist for Gregory is a matter of transformation (*metapoiein*, *metastoicheioun*) of the infinite into the finite, and the finite to the infinite.[248] The infinite God, taking on the finite nature of humanity, translates the finite human capacity for spiritual maturity into an ever-greater longing. By partaking of the body and the blood of

[245] *The great catechism*, 500. Boersma, 184.

[246] *The great catechism*, 500.

[247] *The great catechism*, 502.

[248] *The great catechism*, 502-504. Cross, 378-330. Boersma, 187-188.

Christ the believer “constantly expands the capacity of one’s mind and its desire for God.”[249]

As the believer partakes of the Eucharist the body and mind together are consecrated, particularly as prayer sanctifies the eating of the body and blood. The words of invocation, “This is my Body,” reflect the reality that “the Word of God, Who is both God and the Word, coalesced with man’s nature” so “that by this communion with Deity mankind might at the same time be deified.” This sanctification of the elements is reflective of the transformation process that takes place in natural nourishment: as with food, what is consumed is assimilated into the body. For Gregory, however, the Eucharist is set apart as a meal because instead of the food being assimilated into the body, the body and blood of Christ, sanctified by the Word, assimilates the believer into that incorruptible body.[250] As Penniman remarks, “For Gregory, Christians are saved and perfected by what they eat and by the one who feeds them.”[251]

Lastly, it is necessary to clarify that Gregory does not believe that participation in the sacraments on their own merit grants an effective change in life. The baptism of the believer and the partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist must coincide with a change in the mode of life. Nyssen readily admits that the imitation of Christ through the sacraments “does not admit of an exact and entire imitation, but it receives now as much as it is capable of receiving.” Neither human nature nor the elements themselves admit of a change in the case of the working of divine power, but Gregory is

[249] John David Penniman, “Fed to perfection: mother’s milk, Roman family values, and the transformation of the soul in Gregory of Nyssa” *Church History* 84.3 (September, 2015): 512.

[250] *The great catechism*, 504.

[251] Penniman, 496.

quick to address the reality that a change must truly occur. In the case of Christian baptism, Gregory clarifies that,

> if, when the bath has been applied to the body, the soul has not cleansed itself from the stains of its passions and affections, but the life after initiation keeps on a level with the uninitiate life, then, though it may be a bold thing to say, yet I will say it and will not shrink; in these cases the water is but water, for the gift of the Holy Ghost in no ways appears in him who is thus baptismally born.[252]

While in no way denying his earlier stance on their efficacy, Gregory maintains that the attitude of the believer evinces the measure of one's reception of the divine life. Following the initiation and participation "the pursuit of anagogy dominates the life of the regenerated Christian."[253]

Generally regarded as a practice employed outside the bounds of the organized church, Gregory of Nyssa approached the ascetic life primarily under the influence of his elder sister, Macrina. Although, as mentioned before, Basil's ecclesiastical ambitions overrode Gregory's interest in the life of contemplation, it did not preclude his interest and praise of *askesis*. For Gregory, asceticism meant the mortification of the sinful tendencies of and a progression in the ever-ascending path towards the godly life. Indeed, Gregory believed the ascetic life to be none other than the (truly) Christian life, involving "fasting, chastity… renunciation of wealth, fame, and honor."[254] More concretely, however, one of Nyssen's chief emphases was the pursuit of "knowledge of the incorruptible nature."[255] Although God's nature was incomprehensible and unknowable,

---

[252] *The great catechism*, 506.

[253] Boersma, 185.

[254] Raphael Cadenhead, "Corporeality and *askesis*: ethics and bodily practice in Gregory of Nyssa's theological anthropology" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26.3 (2013): 287.

[255] Keenan, 177.

the call which Gregory aspired was one in which the nature of God as revealed in the Son, through his names, and attributes, was the standard for imitation. This imitation, not for one part of the human nature only, was to be lived out in one's intellectual, supernatural, and physical life – firmly within the limits of human nature established by God.[256]

This meant a life of pursuing virtue in all regards, and indeed to do so without end. As discussed before, participation in virtue is none other than participation in the divine energies, and God, being infinite and without limit, is an object to be pursued into eternity.[257] Gregory also believed that pursuing this virtuous life was an all-or-nothing affair, in which if "one virtue is removed, the others are also eliminated." Likewise, the pursuit of vice in one area of one's life contaminated the whole with perversity and prevented further growth in pursuing the good.[258] Therefore the ascetic life was one of purgation first, cleansing oneself from the ills of the sinful nature, and of contemplation and praxis second. This distinction in order, not meant to undercut the value in either part, does preserve Gregory's understanding of the pervasive and wicked effects of sin as the fall into non-being for human persons.

Gregory's understanding of ascetic practice was one of austerity and restraint. In the *Life of Moses* he discussed the austerity of this way of life as being a departure from Egypt, or the common pleasures of worldly life. The travelling equipment taken up by the

---

[256] Keenan, 179.

[257] *Life of Moses*, 31.

[258] Cadenhead, 285, 287. See particularly the discussion of the reciprocity of virtues. Alternatively, those who lived with the appearance of Christian life but were in fact idolatrous Gregory compared to the half-beastial creatures of pagan mythology, who, in comparison to fully human Christians, had in some way obscured the image-bearing form of life by their association with viciousness and non-being. Keenan, 186.

Israelites protect them from the power of the evil one and preserve them on their course: the "shoes are the self-controlled and austere life" that protects from the thorns of would-be sin. The pleasures of this life, represented by the tunic, are drawn up "as tightly as possible" so as to allow the believer to "diligently finish the divine course."[259] In each of these cases it is a health stricture of those elements present in worldly life that are intended. As Cadenhead comments, Gregory "exhorts his readers to find the middle ground between excess and deficiency in the practice of temperance."[260] In this way the concern of one seeking the Christian life is one of being free from sin first, and pursuit of righteousness at a pace which matches the capacity of the individual on their journey.

Progress in the journey is unmarked by measure but is attained by the contemplative practice of prayer and by bodily ascetical practices. These two approaches, working in tandem, provide steps on the upward journey towards life with God. Corresponding again to the twofold nature of humanity, the practice of prayer is the invitation for the believer to dwell in the "power and wisdom" of Christ.[261] Thereby the Christian is able to intellectually ground themselves for the battle with sin and death. The bodily practices, naturally, correspond to the physical life of Christians. Gregory's thought is that in the struggle against temptation and the power of the evil one, the body can be controlled (e.g. by vows of chastity, renunciation of wealth) and thus consume the "habitual passions." This understanding is emphatically undergirded by Gregory's anthropology: rather than the body or the mind being the arena for sin on their own, or

---

[259] *Life of Moses*, 78.

[260] Cadenhead, 286. As mentioned before in comparison to Dorotheus of Gaza, Gregory condemned "Extreme asceticism which 'incline[s] towards toil and the wearing out of the flesh.'"

[261] Keenan, 188.

otherwise being the only arena in which the Christian combats evil, Gregory's intent is to have Christians be engaged and victorious on all fronts.

Conclusion

Complete victory of this sort, attained only by working under the power of God, is perhaps the most immediate aspect of Gregory's theological anthropology. Indeed, his view of humanity is ultimately one of hope: first created in the image of God, destined for a future of restoration of all persons into full imagehood and likeness, and empowered toward the end by the dwelling of God with humanity.

The unified nature of Gregory's theology and anthropology has implications for theology today. An awareness of the connection between these strains of thought provides a new lens through which a theologian might consider their convictions held in other areas of study. For example, in the practical realm of theology, Gregory's approach to spiritual growth as a perpetual progression towards an infinite God differs greatly from a less developed view in which human salvation involves only a static change of the believer from "in rebellion" to "saved." Gregory's understanding of the human person developing into the likeness of the image after which they were created is more true to God's character and his creative intent for humanity. *Theosis* is certainly a more nuanced and complex view, allowing for greater expression of grace and love. Belief in an infinite and comprehensible God obliterates measure in forgiveness, and calls the believer into and ever closer walk with Him.

In terms of ecclesiology, the oneness of human nature, redeemed by Christ, provides a theological explication for the scriptural directive of the "priesthood of all believers." In the church, as Gregory expresses, the image bestowed and the likeness

sought after are also one, therefore the church should also be about the business of overcoming those distinctions, such as race and gender, which are elements added onto the image of God in humanity both within and outside of the body of Christ. Also, if one perceives God as creating and sanctifying the creation through contact with his energies, the view of the believer towards physical beauty, sacramental realities, and creation generally must change. The same God that transforms and becomes incarnate is the same God that created matter as a benefit to humanity's salvific journey, transelements the believer through common things like water, bread, and wine, and intended from the beginning for all creation to be redeemed.

Furthermore, Gregory approach to the issues of gender and sexuality, while they cannot be said to speak directly to issues of the twenty-first century, does offer another way in which to engage modern conversations in society and the church. Today issues of gender and sexuality have the tendency to dominate the conversations of theologians – some preferring to maintain more traditional perspectives, and others pressing towards new understandings (with a wide spectrum along which each finds their own place). Gregory's approach, while not standing aside and ignoring the issues, would be to rather understand these concerns in a secondary place. Gregory, rather than being immersed in these concerns, saw the spiritual life as being one of overcoming, transcending (think particularly, of his view of Macrina) gender and sexuality. His place would be above the spectrum, and not along it.

Lastly, Gregory's view of God as the infinity which fulfills humanity, becoming "all in all" is a hope to be considered. Perhaps Gregory's lack of consistent, or dogmatic, insistence can provide a framework for modern discussions. God, whose very nature is

incomprehensible, has given humanity all things – an identity, a way of life, and a hope for a world to come. Nyssen, using the images available to him through the scriptures, traditions, and life of the church describes the eschaton with a multiplicity of images. While not being settled into definitive belief, perhaps it is not too far to hope as Gregory does in one of these visions and hope for the restoration of all.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Gregory of Nyssa. *Against Eunomius*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

———————. *Life of Macrina*. W.K Lowther Clarke, trans. London: SPCK, 1916.

———————. *Life of Moses*. Everett Ferguson and A.J. Malherbe, trans. Mahwah, Nj: Paulist Press, 1978.

———————. *On not three gods; to Ablabius*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

———————. *On the Holy Trinity*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

———————. *On the making of man*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

———————. *On the soul and resurrection*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

———————. *The great catechism*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 5. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

Isaiah of Scetis. “Abbot Isaiah of Scetis: Ascetic Discourses” in *Cistercian Studies* 150, John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett, trans. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 2002. 26.

Jerome. *The dialogue with the Luciferians*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 6. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

Plato. *Phaedrus* in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. v. 9. Harold N. Fowler, trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.

Socrates Scholasticus. *Ecclesiastical History*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 2. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

Sozomen Hermias. *Ecclesiastical History*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 2. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

Theodoret. *Ecclesiastical History*. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd ser., vol. 3. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.

Secondary Sources

Abecina, Alexander L. "Gregory of Nyssa's change of mind about the Heart." *Journal of Theological Studies* 68.1 (April, 2017): 121-140.

Aghiorgoussis, Maximos. "“Applications of the Theme of "Eikon Theou" (Image of God) according to Saint Basil the Great." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21.3 (Fall, 1976): 265-288.

Ayers, Lewis. "Deification and the dynamics of Nicene theology: the contribution of Gregory of Nyssa." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49.5 (2005): 375-394.

———————. "On not three people: the fundamental themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology as seen in *To Ablabius: On not three Gods*." *Modern Theology* 18.4 (October, 2002): 445-474.

———————. *Nicaea and its Legacy: an approach to fourth-century Trinitarian theology*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Barnes, Michel Rene. "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality." *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.1 (1998): 59-87.

———————. *The power of God: Δυναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology*. Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2001.

Behr, John. "The rational animal: a rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.2 (Summer, 1999): 225-230.

Boersma, Hans. *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: an anagogical approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Cadenhead, Raphael. "Corporeality and askesis: ethics and bodily practice in Gregory of Nyssa's theological anthropology." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26.3 (2013): 281-299.

Cherniss, Harold, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930.

Daley, Brian. *The hope of the early Church: a handbook of patristic eschatology*. Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.

Danielou, Jean. "La Chronologie des oeurves de Gregoire de Nysse." *Studia Patristica* 7 (1996): 159-169.

Day, Juliette, Hakola, Raimo, Kahlos, Maijastina et. al. eds. *Spaces in Antiquity: cultural, theological and archaeological perspectives.* Abington-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2016.

Eklund, Rebekah. "Blessed are the Image-bearers: Gregory of Nyssa and the Beatitudes." *Anglican Theological Review* 99.4 (Fall, 2017): 729-740.

Eubank, Nathan. "Ineffably Effable: the pinnacle of mystical ascent in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis.*" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16.1 (January, 2014): 25-41.

Farmer, Tamsin Jones. "Revealing the Invisible: Gregory of Nyssa on the gift of revelation." *Modern Theology* 21.1 (January, 2005): 67-85.

Ferguson, Everett. "God's infinity and man's mutability: perpetual progress according to Gregory of Nyssa." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18.1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1973): 59-78.

Hamilton S.J., Andrew. "Athanasius and the Simile of the Mirror" *Vigiliae Christianae* 34.1 (1980): 14-18.

Harmon, Steven R. "The subjection of all things in Christ: the Christocentric universalism of Gregory of Nyssa (331/40-c. 395)" in *All shall be well: explorations in universal salvation and Christian theology, from Origen to Moltmann*, Gregory Macdonald, ed. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011.

Howard, Nathan. "Familial Askêsis in the Vita Macrinae." *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 33-38.

Kariatlis, Philip. ""Dazzling Darkness": the mystical or theophanic theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa." *Phronema* 27.2 (2012): 99-123.

Keenan, Mary Emily. "De professione Christiana and de perfecetione: a study of the ascetical doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950): 170-207.

Klager, Andrew P. "Free will and vicinal culpability in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis.*" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 55.1-4 (2010): 149-179.

Laird, Martin. *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Mateo-Seco, Lucas Francisco and Maspero, Guilio, eds. *Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*. Seth Cherney, trans. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

McCambley, Casimir. "When (the Father) Will Subject All Things to (the Son), Then (the Son) Himself Will Be Subjected to Him (the Father) Who Subjects All

Things to Him (the Son) – A Treatise on First Corinthians 15:28 by St. Gregory of Nyssa." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28 (1983): 1-25.

Meredith, Anthony. *Gregory of Nyssa*. London: Routledge, 1999.

———————. *The Cappadocians*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995.

Peroli, Enrico. "Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul." *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 117-139.

Quasten, Johannes. *Patrology*. v.3. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics Inc., 1986.

Ramelli, Ilaria. "Christian soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and philosophical basis of the doctrine of apokatastasis." *Vigiliae Christianae* 61.3 (2007): 313-356.

Robb-Dover, Kristina. "Gregory of Nyssa's "Perpetual Progress"." *Theology Today* 65.2 (2008): 213-225.

Sachs, Brian R. "Apokatastasis in Patristic theology" *Theological Studies* 54.4 (1993): 617-640.

Sinnige, Th. G. "Plotinus on the human person and its cosmic identity" *Vigiliae Christianae*, 56.3 (2002): 292-295.

Smith, Warren J. "The body of paradise and the body of the resurrection: gender and the angelic life in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*." *Harvard Theological Review* 92.2 (2006): 207-228.

Susan Wessel, "The reception of Greek science in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Hominis Opificio*." *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 24-46.

Torrance, A. "Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies theology in the Cappadocian fathers" *Vigiliae Christianae* 63.1 (2009): 47-70.

Vander Waerdt, P.A. "Peripatetic soul-division, Posidonius, and Middle Platonic moral psychology." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26.4 (Winter, 1985): 373-394.

———————. "The Peripatetic interpretation of Plato's tripartite psychology." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26.3 (Fall, 1985): 283-302.

von Balthasar, Han Urs. *Presence and Thought: essay on the religious philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.

Xintaras, Zachary C. "Man – the Image of God: According to the Greek Fathers." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 1.1 (August, 1954): 48-62.

Young, Frances M. “Adam and Anthropos: a study of the interaction of science and the Bible in two anthropological treatises of the fourth century.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.2 (1983): 110-140.

Zachhuber, Johannes. *Human nature in Gregory of Nyssa: philosophical background and theological significance*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.