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Faith and the Perception of Philosophical Error: A Study of the Dynamism of the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa

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FAITH AND THE PERCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL ERROR:
A STUDY OF THE DYNAMISM OF THE THOUGHT OF
GREGORY OF NYSSA

by
Mark E. Frisby

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
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VITA

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council recognizes the existence of a legitimate autonomy in the various areas of human research and activity.¹ This autonomy does not, however, divorce any activity from its concrete context in the life of a believer or a non-believer. Faith (or the lack of it) cannot but have an impact on a practice which nevertheless maintains its own autonomy and should be performed in accord with exigencies irreducible to the truths of faith. Gaudium et Spes # 38 contends that faith is beneficial for any area of human life; the activities of believers should deal with any area of life according to its authentic exigencies. The products of such a restored activity will harmonize with the natural goal of that area of life, e.g., truth in the case of rational pursuits.

There is, of course, always the danger that non-Christian practices in various areas of life will influence the believer's faith as much as they will be influenced by his faith. Thus in the course of a Christian's effort to infuse a cultural situation with Christian faith, that faith can be corrupted or disfigured by contamination with practices or elements of the culture which violate their

own exigencies and which are therefore also inconsistent with authentic faith. Or faith itself can be used in such a way that the exigencies of an area of life are violated. Historically, the general possibility of distorted interplay between faith and the various activities of human life has been discussed in the specific terms of the relation of faith in the form of theological activity and reason in the form of philosophical conclusions. Among the most interesting examples of the interplay of faith and reason may be found in the works of Origen and his followers, particularly the three Cappadocians (Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa), Evagrius Ponticus, and Maximus Confessor. The faith of Origen (especially as evidenced in his early On First Principles) is often regarded as a corruption of Christian faith since Origen propounds philosophical notions which have since been determined to be opposed to Christian faith. Origenism was, of course, condemned in the 6th century:

At the Emperor's command a Council was convoked at Constantinople in 543, and an edict drawn up in accordance with Justinian's views giving a long list of Origenistic errors and their refutation, which was signed by Pope Vigilius and the E. patriarchs. [...] The Origenistic controversy was ended by the Second Council of Constantinople (553), when Origen's teaching was condemned, though it is uncertain whether the Council examined his case afresh or simply adhered to the decision of the synods of 543. (Cross 1010)

But if Origen himself is suspect within the Church, the

same cannot be said for his Cappadocian followers. Though Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzus compiled the Philocalia, selections from Origen's writings, they, along with Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa, are recognized as among the foremost and trustworthy defenders of orthodoxy. Among the three, Gregory of Nyssa is recognized as the most intellectually adventurous, and there are in his works some of Origen's ideas which were condemned. In view of Gregory of Nyssa's interest in questionable ideas and his undoubted basic orthodoxy,* his works provide excellent materials for a case study of the interplay of faith and the autonomous human activity of reasoning. His Great Catechetical Oration is recognized as the single best synthesis of his thought; it deals with the propriety of divine incarnation, perhaps the most difficult issue for a Platonic thinker. Therefore we will focus our study on this work.

Differing Opinions On Gregory's Thought

All students of Gregory's thought acknowledge its Platonic tendency. This thesis is concerned with determin-

* "Lest the examples of Origen and Tertullian be dismissed as unrepresentative on the grounds that both have been condemned as heretics, the unimpeachable doctrinal rectitude of a Gregory of Nyssa may be taken as evidence for the thesis that the tension between biblical and philosophical doctrine continued to characterize the orthodox theology of the catholic tradition", Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), p. 50.

ing the Christian character of Gregory's Platonic thought: is it Platonic in a way compatible with Christian faith, or Platonic in a way that is incompatible with Christian faith? Many commentators offer views on the degree to which Gregory's thought was faithful to Christianity. We will first present those which regard the basic orientation of his thought as non-Christian.

1.1. The first goal of H. F. Cherniss' The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa² is to show, against a claim that Gregory is primarily indebted to Stoicism, "the acceptance by him [Gregory] of the fundamental metaphysical ideas of Plato and his constant adherence thereto" (61); indeed "Gregory has merely applied Christian names to Plato's doctrine and called it Christian" (62):

Never does he [Gregory] forget or abandon this firm belief that the real world is immaterial, intelligible, and ideal. Of this world the soul is a part; there is its true home and, striving toward it, thither shall it one day return. Moreover, all the Platonic attributes of that world are reproduced in Gregory. It is beyond time and space, intelligible only to the mind, and the mind -- in his stricter passages -- even as in Plato is alone eternal. The material world is somehow a copy of that real world; it is an image of it and it partakes of it. (62)

Secondly Cherniss is intent on demonstrating that Gregory was "willing to abjure intellectual integrity for the sake of conservative orthodoxy" (58). Later in this chapter (see below, pp. 16-17) we will consider why Cherniss is so intent on such a point. His rationale for

such an evaluation of Gregory's thought lies especially in Gregory's explanations of the resurrection of the body; such explanations are held to run counter to Gregory's otherwise consistently Platonic understanding of the soul and its perfection. For Gregory, the soul

is immaterial and "has no community with the corporeal solidity of living bodies" but is connected with the body in some way which passes human understanding, and at death it goes to the immaterial, intelligible world which is its home.

So much would be clearly and consistently Gregory's doctrine were it not for the accepted Christian dogma of the resurrection of the body. (56-57)

Though Gregory

has spent so much time adjuring men to avoid the material world lest they should need a second death to purge their souls of bodily attraction, (57)

his fidelity to dogma leads him to portray the soul of the dead as standing guard over the elements of its former body until, at the resurrection, it "calls them out" (57) to itself. Cherniss comments that

to descend to such a materialistic explanation of resurrection while everywhere else abhorring a doctrine which contaminates the intelligible immateriality of the divine world shows merely how desperate he was to find even a bad explanation for the orthodoxy to which he was pledged. (57)

In other places Gregory "practically denies" (58) the resurrection:

The resurrection is the return to the original state of our nature (which as we have seen was purely intelligible) in which man was theion ti chrema [filled with divinity]. From the body the pathe [weaknesses] are inextricable; and once we have shuffled off the body

we must not expect to find in that other life any of the states peculiar to the body. (58)

Cherniss substantiates his case by noting that Gregory accepts a Platonic notion which had not been formally condemned by the Church in Gregory's time, i.e., Origen's universalist notion of salvation (58), though, presumably, it is no less logically connected with consistent Platonism than those positions he rejected.

In short, Cherniss regards Gregory's thought as basically a form of Platonism inconsistent with Christian dogma: Gregory "invented the means of making Christianity an excuse for becoming a Platonist" (48). Gregory's thought is compatible with his faith only by violence.

1.2. A view similiar to Cherniss' was expressed in Adolph Harnack's History of Dogma³; he writes that:

Gregory's theories also appear to be hampered by a contradiction because they are sketched from two different points of view. On the one hand he regards the nature of man in spirit and body as constituting his true being [...]. But on the other hand, though Gregory rejected Origen's [and, by extension, Plato's] theories of the pre-existence of souls, the pre-temporal fall, and the world as a place of punishment [...] regarding them as Hellenic dogmas and therefore mythological, yet he was dominated by the fundamental thought which led Origen to the above view. The spiritual and the earthly and sensuous resisted each other. (III, 276-277)

Harnack expresses exasperation with Gregory's presentation of the Eucharist in realistic terms:

even such a pronounced Origenist as Gregory of Nyssa [...] as catechist propounded a physiological

philosophically constructed theory regarding the spiritual nourishing power of the [Eucharistic] elements which were changed into the body of the Lord, which in religious barbarity far outstrips anything put forward by the Neo-Platonic Mysteries [...]. In the fourth century Christianity was sought after not because it offered to men a worship of God in spirit and in truth, but because it offered to men a spiritual sense-enjoyment with which neither Mithras nor any other god could successfully compete. Gregory wished for a spiritual and corporal "communion and mixing" [...] with the Redeemer. (IV, 293-294)

Harnack, a liberal Protestant "in spirit and in truth," regards Jesus as

a great moral teacher of the coming kingdom [of God], the fatherhood of God, the infinite value of the human soul, and the commandment of love. All the rest that the church has taught about Jesus is the result of metaphysical speculation due to the increasing influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity. (Gonzalez, 347)

It is little wonder that Harnack was exasperated with the "mystery" character of Gregory's Eucharist. Harnack does not give Gregory's thought detailed consideration but would clearly regard his interest in the Trinity and the Incarnation as other than authentically Christian in orientation. The spiritual orientation Gregory shares with Origen would, no doubt, subject Gregory to the same accusation of gnosticism as was leveled by Harnack at Origen (II, 341-2, 346, 360 and 365).

1.3. Anders Nygren's Agape and Eros⁴ presents the traditional Lutheran notion of the corruption of nature and the irrelevance of works to justification in terms of contrasting notions of love. He elucidates what he terms

the specifically Christian "agape" love and the way its distinctiveness has generally been missed by Christian theologians. Agape love is God's love, self-sacrificing which gives without counting the cost or the "worth" of the beloved: "Agape recognises no kind of self-love as legitimate" (217). When the distinctiveness of agape is missed, theologians conceive of love as "eros", man's acquisitive drive to attain union with God by his own power, by his own "works" rather than by faith. Nygren treats the Platonic tradition as the preeminent example of an Eros religion. The goal of eros is for the naturally immortal soul to liberate itself from sensory passions by an ascetical ascent into a mystical state of union in which the beauty of divine is enjoyed. Nygren identifies Eros religion with an egocentrism which is in the sharpest opposition to the Agape religion of Christianity as reformed by Luther. Eros and Agape are irreconcilable: one is motivated by either one or the other; there is no middle ground.

Nygren acknowledges that Gregory's Catechetical Oration contains traces of an understanding of authentic agape in the discussion of the humility involved in the Incarnation (Nygren, 430-431); but

It is nevertheless not the Agape but the Eros motif that really characterizes Gregory's thought. Here we meet the attitude of pure mysticism, with its whole apparatus of concepts that were traditional ever since Philo and Plotinus. (431)

Gregory's dependence upon the motifs of "purification" and "ascent" to describe the spiritual life are pointed to as sure signs that his notion of love (even when the Greek "agape" is used by Gregory) is basically that of eros. Thus Gregory's thought is unfaithful to Christianity; it was an attempt to mediate the irreconcilable. Gregory's Platonic leanings determine the shape of his thinking rather than his commitment to God's revelation in Christ.

1.4. Christopher Stead's "Ontology and Terminology"⁵ substantiates Cherniss' conclusions, though Stead offers a slightly different psychological analysis as to why Gregory was willing to flounder in philosophical inconsistencies:

where philosophical opinions seem to serve his theological ends he will press them into service; but he has no concern to organize these opinions into a coherent system. He lacks the essential attributes of the philosopher - the concern for consistency and the respect for truth in all its forms, even disconcerting truth, even unprofitable truth. Called to the friendship of Christ, he will not, like Aristotle, sacrifice that friendship to truth; he believes rather that truth is only to be found within that friendship. (107)

Stead is a clergyman trained in analytic philosophy and whose historical scholarship focuses on patristic use of philosophical concepts. He finds that Gregory uses a number of philosophical terms in inconsistent manners. For example, in places Gregory treats the division of creator and creatures as the primary division of beings, whereas in other places Gregory refers to the division of intelligible

and perceptible as primary. Or, again, Gregory at least once refers to a spiritual creature which has moved beyond change whereas his overall theory demands that only the creator be beyond change. In sum Gregory's use of philosophical concepts is an "uncritical borrowing [...] he fails to take account of variations and conflicts in the field of terminology." (112)

2. Now we will consider authors who regard Gregory's thought as harmonious with his Christian faith.

2.1. Paul Verghese's "Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction to a Concept and the Posing of a Problem"⁶ is occupied with demonstrating the clear differentiation of Gregory's thought from the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. He calls attention to a way in which Gregory uses philosophy:

The question itself whether Gregory was a philosopher or not seems to be awkwardly posed. [...] Distinctions between philosophers, theologians and mystics would be unintelligible to this Christian thinker, who used discourse mainly [...] to lead Christians to thinking in accordance with eusebeia or true worship. [...] He used pagan philosophy and the logical technology and terminology of the second sophistic, but his thinking is certainly controlled by and based on the faith of the Christian Church [...].(244)

Verghese proposes a more fruitful way of questioning Gregory's philosophical achievement, part of which we will employ in this thesis:

ask about the ideas and conceptions of reality current in his time, both within the Church and outside, to

which Gregory was responding. Does he use any critical criteria for evaluating, questioning, rejecting or reformulating these ideas and conceptions in a Christian context? (244)

Vergheese concludes that Gregory's thought differs from Neo-Platonic thought in a non-arbitrary manner:

Gregory's view of the relation between God and the world is [so] fundamentally different from that of Plotinus or other[s] of the so-called Neoplatonic School, that it is not correct to class Gregory among Neoplatonists or Christian Platonists. [...] Neo-platonic cosmology which presupposes ontological continuity between the One and the Many, the Plotinian views of time as creation of the soul in its separation from the One and of matter as the source of evil are rejected by Gregory who must then be understood primarily as a Christian thinker who used the categories of thought current in his time, and not as a Platonist or Neo-platonist. (257)

Vergheese also suggests that there is "a basic contradiction in Gregory's thought about the diastema" (257), which might be "an unconscious lapse into Plotinian views about which Gregory was most of the time rather circumspect" (257-258). Diastema refers to distension, the dividedness which manifests one's difference from the fullness of reality which is God in whom there is no distension. Gregory usually treats creation itself as distension; however, there are passages in which Gregory refers to sin as the origin of distension. If distension is a result of sin, then creation itself, which is distension, is evil in character. Such a view could hardly commend itself to a Christian thinker for whom God is the

creator of the world.

2.2. Jean Daniélou's introduction to his selection from Gregory's mystical texts, From Glory to Glory,⁷ shows that Gregory's Platonic terms have been so transmuted as to be acceptable within a Biblical world of thought. This is often seen in the way Gregory differs from Origen's Platonism. For example, Origen holds that the "garments of skin" of Genesis 3:21 refer to human embodiment itself which is a result of sin. But in Gregory's view

it comprises all that implies mortality and corruptibility [and only that]; and man's true nature is to enjoy the incorruptibility of the risen body. (11)

Likewise Gregory distances himself from the

theory of real preexistence [of the human soul prior to embodiment] along the lines followed by Origen in dependence on Philo. But in man created in God's image he sees the preexistence of human nature in the perfection of the divine knowledge--such as it will be only at the end of time. (14)

Daniélou points out a number of other ways in which Gregory differs from Platonic thought in principled manners. Gregory is said to acknowledge

that the divine nature transcends all determination. This is not, however, a negative sort of transcendence, like that of the Neo-platonic One. [...] ecstasy is linked with the proximity, that is, the presence, of God; hence the soul is united with the living God of the Bible and not with the abstract essence of the Neo-platonists. Finally, the most important point is that faith is seen to be the only way by which the soul can be united to the Transcendent. (36)

Or:

Gregory's notion of Eros has nothing in common with the platonic concept of love--an unfortunate confusion of which Anders Nygren is guilty in his chapter on Gregory in his book Eros and Agape. [...] Gregory uses the word because he feels that the passionate aspect of Eros is a more suggestive symbol for the passivity of the soul as it is overpowered by the revelation of the infinite beauty of God. (43-44)

Daniélou finds the finest example of Gregory's originality and irreducibility to Platonism in his concept of change as a positive reality. Both Plato and Gregory assert the changelessness of the divine (47), but they have different rationales for such assertions. Change, according to Plato, is necessarily opposed to goodness. But a notion of change as necessarily associated with imperfection seems inconsistent with the way God is portrayed in the Bible as reacting to human choices and needs. Has Gregory's use of the Platonic concept involved a betrayal of the Bible?

Gregory had to destroy the equation: good=immutability, and evil=change. And consequently he had to show the possibility of a type of change which would not merely be a return to immobility--that is, to the mere negation of change. (47)

Gregory distinguishes that change which is associated with imperfection from that change which is characteristic of human perfection in union with God:

It is thus a mistake to imagine perfection as a state of complete immobility in restored innocence. Perfection is progress itself: the perfect man is the one who continually makes progress. (52)

A type of change which is a perfection is radically opposed

to the basic orientation of Platonic thought. The purportedly non-Biblical Platonist Gregory has in effect opened up Platonic concepts from within such that they function, coherently, within a thoroughly distinct world of thought.

2.3. David Balas' "Eternity and Time in Contra Eunomium"⁸ corroborates Danielou's conclusion:

whereas in his conception, of eternity (as timeless life) and of the temporality of spiritual creatures as distended life[,] Gregory's view seems to be close to that of Plotinus, his positive notion of this "outstretched" existence as (the possibility of) continuous progress sets him (it seems to me) very much apart from the Platonic tradition. (149)

Balas in effect responds to Verghese' question about the consistency of Gregory's usages of diastema by distinguishing two meanings of distention:

man has to transcend the temporality of the material world and of a human life intricately in it. This true perfection, however, does not consist in escaping "distension" but rather in a continuous "distension" of a higher order. (149)

2.4. Robert Harvanek argues in his dissertation⁹:

Undoubtedly Gregory's effort to create his Christian Philosophy remained imperfect in many points. He did not always adequately succeed in correcting his Platonism nor in expressing the Christian tradition. His doctrines call for numerous precisings and even some excisions that would be the work of the later Christian centuries. But this does not detract from the conclusion that Gregory is not a Platonist with some Christian accretions. The truth is just the opposite: he is a Christian who has not always succeeded in clearly reconciling his Platonism with his Christian principles. (243)

He shows the importance of Gregory's notion of creation for

each of the main areas of Gregory's concern (241-242), and

It is precisely because he [Gregory] did not rest with the [Platonic] distinction between the intelligible and the sensible but went beyond and above it to the distinction of creature and creator that Gregory was not merely a Platonist but a Christian Platonist. It was the discernment of this higher and more fundamental distinction at the basis of all reality that marked Gregory's advance over pagan Platonism. (99)

Cherniss' failure to grasp Gregory's principled differences with Plato are pointed out (e.g., 106, 107, 127-128, 140).

2.5. John Cavarnos' "The Relation of Body and Soul in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa"¹⁰ shows that Gregory has a consistent account of the relation of soul and body in spite of its difference in several respects from a Platonic account. The difference is due, in part, to Gregory's appropriation of various Aristotelian concepts. Gregory insists, with Plato, on the immateriality, indivisibility and imperishability of the soul (64) yet, with Aristotle, acknowledges that the soul naturally integrates and enlivens its body (65). The soul is even acknowledged to depend upon a properly disposed body in order to act. Even after death the soul is oriented to its body until, at the resurrection, they are united in perfection (76). Those passages in which Gregory emphasizes how the body ties the soul down are interpreted as moral rather than ontological points. That is, evil results from the soul's subordination of itself to its body (72) rather than using its body

in accord with the divinely created nature of soul and body (69-70). These views of Gregory are thus compatible with the Biblical notion of the goodness of all creation.

The Problem Which Emerges From the Secondary Literature

It is not beside the point to note that the opposed evaluations of the Christian character of Gregory's thought are correlated to the various authors' views regarding the character of reason and faith as well as the possible compatibility between them. Cherniss, Harnack, Nygren are certainly not sympathetic to Catholic attempts to integrate faith and reason whereas Daniélou, Balas and Harvanek are Catholic. The point of this observation is that one's understanding of both rationality and of Christianity and of their compatibility affects the approach taken to Gregory's texts. Harnack's ethical Christianity provides the context within which Gregory's reasoning inevitably appears as gnostic and therefore non-Christian. Nygren's view of Platonic reasoning as "erotic" and, therefore, sharing in the corruption of all natural striving conduces to his negative evaluation of Gregory's thought. Cherniss displays his own philosophy in the following remark:

Plato had known the temper of the blade of human knowledge and would not bend it to the snapping-point. Where the mind of man cannot go with Reason for its guide, he let it fly with Fancy; but he always warned his readers that of the Beyond he could tell only "a

likely story." (64)

And he begins his work thus:

Reason is mighty for its own destruction. For it casts a spell upon men--not to serve it as a mistress--but to use it as a handmaiden. So that faith, drawn by the spell of reason, enlists the service of this, her natural enemy; and in the final syllogism we find a conclusion drawn by faith from reason and the contradictory theses of the two incompatible sides of human mentality amalgamated to form a doctrine which claims to withstand successfully the attack of either.

(1)

It often appears that Cherniss undertook his study of Gregory, and that he notices in Gregory's texts only that which he did, in order to illustrate his belief in the incompatibility of that which he terms faith and reason.

The Catholic writers, due probably to their assumption that reason and faith can be compatible and to their familiarity with later Scholastic developments illustrating that compatibility, are sensitive to points missed by the other thinkers such as Gregory's departures from Platonic orthodoxy; as a result they are able to discern a reasoned coherence to Gregory's thought that escapes the others.

Is there any way to pose our question as to the basic character of Gregory's thought without begging the question by simply postulating a particular understanding of rationality and Christianity? In the final analysis there is not any such way, but prior to the final analysis there is an important piece of work to which this thesis will be

directed. We will pursue Verghese's suggested question:

Does he [Gregory] use any critical criteria for evaluating, question, rejecting or reformulating these ideas and conceptions in a Christian context? (244)

We are going to identify the implicit criteria with which Gregory identifies error in the opinions with which he deals. These criteria, if indeed there are any rational criteria, will allow us to show the direction of Gregory's thinking by distinguishing its goal from that to which it is opposed. If he has no consistent critical criteria for rejecting a particular, e.g., Platonic, view other than the fideistic criteria of acceptability to the Church's catechetical tradition, then we can conclude that Cherniss is correct. On the other hand, if we discern meaningful criteria in Gregory's discussions then, whether or not those criteria are correct, we will not be able to challenge his "intellectual integrity" (Cherniss, 58).

Our final evaluation cannot do without a notion of authentic Christianity by which to judge Gregory's criteria. We will presume the orthodox tradition, as very recently exemplified in Vatican II, as the criterion of Christianity. To argue for this understanding of Christianity cannot occupy us since to do so would engage us in controversies which far exceed the scope of this work. We may mention, however, that employing the Catholic notion of Christian faith and reason has the advantage that it does

not rule our question out in an a priori fashion. It acknowledges the possibility that any particular theologian's thought can proceed in accord with both faith and reason or can fail to do so. Some notions of Christianity would regard any theological attempt to use reason as an a priori betrayal of Christian faith; our question will not be considered worthwhile by such. However, our identification of the criteria implicit (or explicit) in Gregory's thought could be useful even for those with non-Catholic notions of reason and Christian faith. They can compare Gregory's criteria with their own and judge accordingly.

The Distinctive Method of This Study

This work differs from that of previous thinkers especially by the aspect of the method by which the critical criteria of Gregory's thought are to be clarified. This element may be called "contrastive projection". I assume that one ought not determine the character of a person's thinking solely from the articulations which he achieves; the attempt to do so confuses where he has gotten and where he is heading. The latter - not the former - determines the thought's dynamism, whether or not that thinking articulates its topic successfully.

But can anything be known about the goal of someone's thinking apart from his actual achievement? We can know

what the final goal will exclude (and in philosophical/-theological topics this is quite significant), since the foils against which the thinker's articulations develop are present at all stages of development, whether or not he has successfully offered positive alternatives. The articulations sought in theological thinking always bear on (though are not reducible to) controversies regarding the meaning of being. Where being is at stake the law of excluded middle applies. The contradictories of a thinker's philosophical foils, and their implications, are necessarily part of the goal at which his thinking aims. Thus we can project the character of the articulation sought by Gregory, and we can clarify the dynamism of his thought by "contrastive projection" from its philosophical foils.

Our study of the character of Gregory's thought will begin by providing the context of his foils. We will present his positive view of his work's audience and purpose, as well as his view of the salvational nature of truth and its Christological and sacramental dimensions.

Our characterization of the dynamism of Gregory's thought from positive indications will be complemented by our characterization from his foils. The latter will be less revealing of the richness of his thought; but it will highlight the commitments apart from which his thought is misconstrued. Positive indications (his own or those

implicit in his historical situation) could well be no more than commonplaces, parts of his inheritance which, "given world enough and time", he would have rejected or somehow transposed. For example, should Gregory's works include speculative hypotheses which are inconsistent with later-defined dogma, one still lacks evidence of a non-Christian dynamism in his thinking if those proposals were offered in the course of rebutting foils which contradict dogma. However, if among Gregory's foils is found a proposition later defined as Christian dogma, then one has strong evidence that the dynamism of his thought is not that of Christian faith. In any case, we will seek to clarify the dynamism of his thought by a study of both his stated concerns and views and of his choice of foils.

Conclusion

We will discuss the perennial topic of the relation between faith and reasoning by studying Gregory of Nyssa's criteria for philosophical error in his Great Catechetical Oration. Commentators disagree whether he has rational criteria and, if he does, whether they are harmonious with his faith. We will present evidence on the issue from his stated views and from his choice of foils.

NOTES

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2. Cherniss, Harold Fredrik. The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa (NY: Burt Franklin, 1930).
3. Harnack, Adolph. History of Dogma (London: Williams & Norgate, 1896-98).
4. Nygren, Anders. Agape and Eros translated by Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).
5. "Ontology and Terminology in Gregory of Nyssa" in Substance and Illusion in the Christian Fathers (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), pp. 107-127.
6. "Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction to a Concept and the Posing of a Problem" in Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie edited by Heinrich Dorrie with Margarete Altenburger and Uta Schramm (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 243-258.
7. From Glory to Glory translated and edited by Herbert Musurillo (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1979).
8. "Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium" in Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie edited by Heinrich Dorrie with Margarete Altenburger and Uta Schramm (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 128-153.
9. Robert Harvanek, S.J. The Philosophy of Creation of St. Gregory of Nyssa, unpublished PhD dissertation at Fordham 1944.
10. "The Relation of Body and Soul in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa" in Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie edited by Heinrich Dorrie with Margarete Altenburger and Uta Schramm (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 61-78.

CHAPTER II

The Truth of Christian Faith vis-a-vis Philosophical Error

The present chapter will sketch Gregory's notion of the truth of Christian faith and its opposition to error as far as can be determined from Gregory's positive statements in his Great Catechetical Oration.^{*} His notion of truth and falsity will go far toward determining the Christian character of his thought. This chapter proceeds in five parts. We will first characterize LK's purpose by means of a study of its stated audience. Second, we will present the main arguments of LK and point out the congruence between the organization of the work and its overall purpose. Third, we will clarify the salvational importance of the truth which LK serves. Fourth, we will take up the concrete Christological, incarnational shape^{*} taken by salvation. Fifth, we will consider the ecclesiological mediation of the incarnation; this will clarify the sense in which Gregory's catechetical work is part of the overall salvational process.

^{*} Henceforth referred to in our text as LK, from the Greek title, Logos Katechetikos; we will refer to the work's section number and the page reference in the English translation by Hardy, "Address on Religious Instruction." When changes are made in the translation, Migne's Patrologia Graeca (PG) will be cited.

Audiences and Therapeutic Purpose

The immediate audience for LK is the leaders of the Church in their capacity as teachers:

Religious instruction is an essential duty of the leaders "of the mystery of our religion." By it the Church is enlarged through the addition of those who are saved, while "the sure word which accords with the [traditional] teaching" comes within the hearing of unbelievers. (Introduction: 268)

Gregory alludes to Scriptural exhortations (1 Tim 3:16 and Titus 1:9) that the Church's overseers must hand on the Christian revelation so as to guard the faithful from heresy. The content which the leaders "of our religion" are to teach is none other than the "mystery", the revelation which has been handed on in the Church from generation to generation.

The ultimate, though indirect, beneficiaries of LK are all those who presently reject the truth of the "mystery of our religion". Gregory's stated ultimate audience includes Hellenistic polytheists and atheists, Christian heretics, as well as Jews. LK is not composed for these people to read; rather it is designed to teach the Church's leaders the best way to defend the reasonableness of Christian claims to each of these groups. It is "in house" Christian literature.

In what sense will these polytheists, atheists,

heretics and Jews benefit from appropriate Christian teaching? To the degree that someone is simply ignorant of Christian teaching his ignorance can be overcome by a simpler teaching than that contained in LK. Gregory's concern in LK is those who have already heard the Christian message but have not accepted it because they have some objection to it. These will be benefited by the correction of their confused or otherwise false underlying ideas which militate against their acceptance of Christian truth:

A man of the Jewish faith has certain presuppositions; a man reared in Hellenism, others. The Anomoean, the Manichaeon, the followers of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides, and the rest on the list of those astray in heresy, have their preconceptions, and make it necessary for us to attack their underlying ideas in each case. (Ibid.)

Any presuppositions or underlying ideas which prevent the acceptance of Christian truth are a form of "disease" and a disease of the worst kind - intellectual. The teaching which Gregory is encouraging in LK will serve to heal the intellectual disease from which non-Christians suffer; such teaching is a "method of therapy".

The purpose of therapeutic discussions is "that the truth may finally emerge from what is admitted on both sides" (Ibid., 269). Thus

The teaching of the Jew is invalidated by the acceptance of the Word and by belief in the Spirit; while the polytheistic error of the Greeks is done away, since the unity of the nature cancels the notion of plurality. Yet again, the unity of the nature must be retained from

the Jewish conception, while the distinction of Persons, and that only, from the Greek. The irreligious opinion on each side finds a corresponding remedy. (3:274)

In sum, Gregory's intended audience comprises two groups. Directly he attempts to help the Church's intellectual "physicians" by offering proper therapeutic techniques. Indirectly he aids those afflicted with intellectual diseases, those whose preconceptions and obstruct their acceptance of the truth of the Christian message. We may surmise from the sort of objections with which the bulk of LK is occupied, objections to the Incarnation based on the presumption that the material world is somehow inherently evil, that the majority of those for whom Gregory writes are neither Jews nor atheistic Greeks but are religious minded Greeks and heretical Christians. Jewish topics probably enter Gregory's discussion not because he dealt with many Jews but because even Hellenists knew that the Christian self-understanding included both a connection with Jews and difference from them.

Contents and Organization

LK's first substantive discussion is a brief defense of the reasonableness of Christian monotheism and Trinitarianism. The former is a stumbling block for Greek polytheists and the latter for Jews and heretical Christians. Atheists are to be met with standard arguments from the

"skillful and wise arrangement of the world" (Introduction, 269). The defence of monotheism relies on the commonly accepted premise of "the perfection of the divine nature" (Ibid.). Gregory points out that since God's perfection is unlimited, it can occur in only one instance. A distinction can be drawn between two beings only if one lacks some perfection possessed by the other (Ibid.); thus a second, or third..., distinct purportedly perfect nature could not in fact be perfect.

God's perfection is also used to establish the reasonableness of professing the distinct subsistence of the Reason or Word, logos, and Spirit, pneuma, within God against the Jews or heretical Christians (1-4:270-275). For the divine nature cannot be less perfect than the nature of human beings who have a share in reason and spirit. The divine Word and Spirit must have a distinct subsistence with none of the imperfections of human reason and spirit. Thus the Word cannot lack the life, goodness, or power by which creation occurs and is ordered.

Some standard objections to the providential ordering of creation are then dealt with in sections 5-8. The doctrine that man is the image of God is defended from those who object by pointing to the non-divine state of man's life:

man's life is fleeting, subject to passion, mortal, liable in soul and body to every type of suffering.
(5:277)

Gregory meets this type of objection with the traditional distinction between God's basic intention for our nature and what has become of our nature due to sinful uses of our freedom. The present state of our life is posterior to the nature with which we are created. The disabilities of the present state of our life are not part of our nature but exist only in view of sin. Gregory insists that evil is a privation which results from the evil free choices of creatures (5:277-278). Gregory presents the view that human sin was occasioned by disorders wrought by a sinful angelic being (6:278-281). Gregory takes a "transcendental turn" so as to clarify why some mistakenly attribute the evils of our present life to God: "They define the good by reference to the enjoyment of bodily pleasure" (7:281). Thereby they misconstrue the origin and character of those evils. The non-divine aspects of our life are as they are because God foresaw the sinful use of freedom and provided for salvation; God's perfection is not overturned by the sins of creatures (8:282-286). In this way Gregory meets one set of objections made to Christianity on the basis of the commonplace of the divine perfection.

The central topic of LK, the reasonableness of the Incarnation of the divine Logos, follows. Once again, the

commonplace of God's perfection is advanced against a Christian claim. For, it is objected, Jesus' birth, growth, the natural activities of human life, the sufferings and death, even the resurrection from death are "unbefitting a right conception of God" (9:286). Gregory proceeds to meet such objections in sections 9-32. His arguments work with the general notion that

one thing alone in the universe is by nature shameful, viz., the malady of evil, while no shame at all attaches to what is alien to evil. (9:287)

He applies this general principle to the various aspects of human life which were held to be unbefitting of divinity; he shows that they are not unbefitting. Thus the Christian profession of the Incarnation of the divine Logos in no way implies a notion of God as imperfect. These objections are the sort that would be raised not by Jews, who appreciated the goodness of the created order, but by Hellenists. We can safely judge that Gregory's catechetical work was largely occupied with such Hellenists.

Gregory shows that Christian doctrine concerning the facts of Jesus's life makes a reasonable case that he is not an ordinary mortal but is divine (12-13: 289-290, 32:311). Furthermore, the facts of the history of the destruction of idolatry and of Judaism (18-19:295-296) are adduced as further evidence of the Christian claim regarding Jesus. These latter points would have had no small

impact in Gregory's time since Julian (the apostate) ruled only two decades earlier (361-363). Julian's

policy was to degrade Christianity and promote paganism by every means short of open persecution. He sought to re-establish the heathen worship throughout the empire; ordered all instruction in the Imperial schools to be completely paganized [...]. He also attempted to weaken the Church internally by allowing all exiled Bishops to return to their sees with a view to created dissensions. (Cross 765)

He also attempted to rebuild Jerusalem for the Jews as a means of discrediting the standard Christian argument.

Julian, of course, died and the emperors were, at the time of the composition of LK, orthodox Christians. Nonetheless, Julian's attempt was no doubt frightening.

The objections to the Incarnation did not rely solely on the premise of the evilness of the bodily dimension of human nature. Another major objection relied on the notion that God's power should not need an incarnation in order to accomplish the intended salvation:

Why did he [God] take a tedious, circuitous route, submit to a bodily nature [...]? Could he not have remained in his transcendent and divine glory, and saved man by a command, renouncing such circuitous routes? (15:291)

Gregory met this objection with the notion of the devil's due, that salvation was effected without violating the human sinful choice to surrender to the devil. The devil's "rights" in the matter were respected by God, who effected salvation from within the effects of those choices, by

entering into death (21-26:298-304).

Other standard objections are met by Gregory in standard ways. Why did God wait so long to save us? So that evil could reach its "highest pitch" (29:307). Why do not all believe? Some hold aloof from the gospel "of their own free choice" (30:309).

Sections 33-40 end the work with a consideration of the particular rituals by which one enters and lives in the Church, baptism and the Eucharist. Many of the objections regarding the reasonableness of the Incarnation recur regarding the reasonableness of using creaturely rituals as bearers of salvation. How can water or bread and wine make a difference affecting salvation? Gregory's response relies on the fidelity of God in Christ to his promises, to "be present with those who call upon him" (34:313), and the power of God to use material elements to bring about new life (34:314). Gregory brings out the connections between the incarnation and the sacraments.

The proper manner of taking part in the sacraments is also dealt with. One should accept them in their Trinitarian sense (38-39:321-323) lest one commit oneself to a religion unable to give salvation. In conclusion, Gregory stresses that one's life must give evidence of the change which is offered in baptism.

LK's purpose was, as was pointed out, to help people

overcome the objections which keep them from entering the Church and enjoying salvation. The movement of the book is appropriate to such a purpose; that movement can be described as a process of concretization, of identifying and defending the various dimensions which are constitutive of right minded acceptance of baptism and Christian life. Immediately following the introduction's statement of the overall goal, the least tangible though most decisive topic is dealt with: the Trinitarian character of God as the presupposition of salvation. The book concludes with the most tangible dimension of Christian life: the sensibly observable sacramental events and the sensibly observable changes in the Christian's life (or the lack thereof). The discussion of these tangible events is not unrelated to the discussion of the Trinity. For one of the characteristics of a right minded baptism (a baptism which can divinize) is that the one being baptized is participating in the rite as an entry into divine life. For acceptance of baptism in the name of a Son and Spirit which are acknowledged as non-divine, would be participation in a rite which, of its nature, could not divinize.

In between the least and the most tangible topics, the topic which had tangibility about it and yet is not now directly tangible is dealt with: the Incarnation. The discussion of the Incarnation is clearly also related to

the discussion of the Trinity and of baptism and Church life. For it is baptism into an incarnate one who is within the Trinity by nature that can divinize. Without the Incarnation, knowledge of the Trinity would be fruitless, since the divine life itself would not be present in a form accessible to us. Nor would knowledge of the Trinity and the fact of the Incarnation be of great importance, apart from the tangible means by which persons can share in the life of the incarnated one and thereby of the Trinity.

In sum, LK is exploring and justifying Christian views regarding the various constitutive elements of human divinization or salvation. The work circles from its general introductory statement regarding salvation to its final consideration of the particular ways in which salvation is realized. •

We will now expand on LK's themes which are pertinent to determining whether Gregory's criteria for philosophical error are reasonable.

Salvation as the Purpose of Truth

We may begin by clarifying Gregory's view that the Christian message is such that one's relation to it serves as an indicator of the health of one's intellectual presuppositions. Why are preconceptions which are opposed

to acceptance of the Christian message referred to as a form of disease? What is so diseased about the polytheist's opposition to God's unity, or the Jew's and heretical Christian's denial of the consubstantiality of the Logos and Spirit? Why are these rather abstract matters, about which Gregory teaches, so terribly important?

The purpose of teaching the truth by those who are leaders in the Church is that "the Church is enlarged through the addition of those who are saved" (Ibid., 268). Salvation is at issue, and salvation within the present status of the world takes the form of life in the Church. Before we discuss the ecclesial dimension of salvation, we must clarify Gregory's notion of salvation and its absence.

Salvation, according to Gregory, is a share in the restoration¹ of man to the divinization intended² in creation. What does God intend in creation?

God the Word and Wisdom and Power created human nature. He was not, indeed, driven by any necessity to form man; but out of his abundant love he fashioned and created such a [living] creature. For [neither should the] light [...] remain unseen, [n]or [the] glory unwitnessed, [n]or [his] goodness unenjoyed, [n]or [...] [should] any [...] aspect we observe of the divine nature [...] lie idle[,] with no one to share or enjoy it. (5:276; PG 45, 21BC)

Human beings are created to enjoy nothing less than God's own goodness which is infinite and perfect; they are to enjoy and "participate in the divine goodness." (Ibid.)

Yet all who live in the world are confronted by the

non-divine status of our present life. In many respects the present state of the world fails to image God:

where is the soul's likeness to God? Where is the body's freedom from suffering? Where is the eternal[ness of] life? Man's life is fleeting, subject to passion, mortal, liable in soul and body to every type of suffering. (5:277; PG 45, 24B)

The present state of the world is that of an "unnatural condition" (Ibid.). But the present state of life is not an argument against its origination by God:

The fact that human life is at present in an unnatural condition is insufficient proof that man was never created in a state of goodness. [...] The cause of our present condition and of our being deprived of our former preferable state is to be found elsewhere [than in God]. (Ibid.)

And

It was by a movement of free will that we became associated with evil. [...] By this means we fell from that blessed state we think of as freedom from passion, and were changed into evil. (8:282)

In short

It is the height of shortsightedness to call God the author of evil because of the body's sufferings, which are a necessary accompaniment of our fluctuating nature. (8:285)

Divinization, in the situation brought about by sin, takes the form of salvation from the unnatural, fluctuating condition of the present state of life. The fullness of salvation must involve the complete "restoration" of our nature. In the midst of our present unnatural condition, salvation means that we enjoy some share in our "natural"

condition. The life of the Church makes such salvation available. But our entire makeup conduces to salvation in many ways. Even death plays a role in our salvation:

the Creator of our vessel, I mean our sentient and bodily nature, when it became mingled with evil, dissolved the material [i.e., allowed us to die] which contained the evil. And then, once it has been freed from its opposite, he will remold it by the resurrection, and will reconstitute the vessel into its original beauty. (8:284)

The fullness of salvation, in order to meet the full problem as has been described, must involve our restoration to the enjoyment of truth, to life in justice and love, to liberation from passions (i.e., de-personalizations in embodiment and affections), and to resurrected immortality.

Gregory presumes that the salvation offered in the Church's life is a great good. Among the great goods of this life are its beliefs. Thus Gregory is preoccupied with showing that Christian beliefs are credible on the common ground accepted by his audience, the ground of reason. This is the context in which to clarify how the opinions of the polytheists, non-Trinitarian Christians and Jews are at odds with the salvation which is available in the Church. Gregory does not explicitly attempt to prove that salvation is only attainable within the Church nor does he determine precisely what dimension of human health is excluded by each of the non-Christian opinions. We may, nevertheless, suggest the following lines of reasoning as

approaches to clarifying the sense in which the non-Christian views are diseased.

The polytheistic denial of the origin of all things in one all good, all powerful God has among its implications the impossibility of any radical overcoming of the non-divine characteristics of our present world. A consistent polytheist will regard the present status of our world as the whole and final story. This could (or perhaps should) lead to a despair or a foolhardy (because doomed) heroism.

Heretical Christians and Jews accept that God is the origin of the entire world and is omnipotent. Thus they can consistently hope that God can right the wrongs of the present status of the world. But their denial of the divine consubstantiality of the differentiated subsistent Logos and Pneuma implicitly includes a denial that the divine reality itself can be shared with others. For it is by means of his Logos (and Pneuma) that God relates to us. But if the closest thing to God which is accessible within our experience, the Logos, is not of the divine nature, then God's nature itself is inaccessible to us; we cannot share in it. On the other hand, if the Logos is naturally involved in the divine life, then that life may be shared.

Furthermore, since Logos is a relational term*

(1:272), the consubstantiality of the Logos means that divinity itself involves relationships. If the divine nature involves relations, then there is nothing about the divine nature which would make divinization of creatures impossible. If one of the natural participants in the divine relationships can take on our nature without diminution (without losing its divinity), then it is not impossible that we who are not divine by nature could share in the divine life. The heretical Christian and Jewish views, however, exclude subsistent relations from the divine reality. On such views the divine nature would be contaminated if it were mixed with other reality or realities; such a mixing would be unworthy of and impossible for God. To attribute such to God would be to treat God as less exalted and transcendent than he is and that would be to deprive God of his due. We, then, would have to regard God's transcendence of our world as a transcendence which is necessarily closed to our participation. Whatever "logos" or "pneuma" from God there may be in our world, would not literally be divine, and could not mediate

* Gregory's fellow Cappadocian, Gregory of Nazianzus, treats the hypostases of the Father, Logos, and Pneuma as neither essences nor actions; rather they are relations (Third Theological Oration, # 16; Hardy: 171). Neither are they substances nor attributes of substances (Fifth Theological Oration, # 6 and 9; Hardy: 197 and 199).

human deification.

It would be fully in harmony with Gregory's thought to suggest that such notions of life, and the God implied in them, are restricted in ways that even we in our present intellectual state can understand. Precisely since God should be given his due, such restrictions ought not be accepted without compelling reason. Reason is rather on the side of rejecting the heretical or Jewish restrictions and treating God in the Christian fashion as quite capable of sharing his own life with us, of divinizing us.

Christ's Incarnation and Salvation

Gregory does not leave the discussion of divinization in the abstract but clarifies the concrete shape taken by the process:

If you exclude from life the benefits which come from God, you will have no way of recognizing the divine. It is from the blessings we experience that we recognize our benefactor, since by observing what happens to us, we deduce ["infer"] the nature of Him who is responsible for it. (15:290; PG 45, 48A)

Or again, "A good purpose [...] cannot be detected in the abstract" (20:297). Gregory clarifies the concrete form in which divinization becomes possible and available:

To whom did it belong to raise him [man] up when he had fallen, to restore him when he was lost, to lead him back when he had gone astray? To whom, but to the very Lord of his nature? For only the one who had originally given him life was both able and fitted to restore it [even] when it was lost. This is what the revelation

of the truth teaches us, when we learn that God originally made man, and saved him when he had fallen (8:286; PG 45, 40C; the bracketed word is omitted in Hardy's translation)

salvation is possible only by the power of one who was involved in the creation of our nature (1:271-272) and only by the presence of that power within our nature:

...how could our nature be restored [if, while an earthly being was sick, another being, from heaven, had been united with the divine]. (27:305; PG 45, 72AB; bracketed words differ from Hardy's translation)

The divinity must be united with every dimension of our life, including even our death:

For he who eternally exists did not submit to being born in a body because he was in need of life. Rather was it to recall us from death to life. Our whole nature had to be brought back from death. In consequence he stooped down to our dead body and stretched out a hand, as it were, to one who was prostrate. (32:310)

The point of the incarnation of divinity in our human nature is that our life as a whole might be restored to the ideal in which we were created and thereby share in divinity:

The manner of our salvation owes its efficacy less to instruction by teaching than to what He who entered into fellowship with man actually did. [He actualized life in deed], so that by means of the flesh which he assumed and thereby deified salvation might come to all that was [of the same kind]. (35:314, PG 45, 88A; bracketed words differ from Hardy's translation)

This incarnation can be recognized when it occurs by the character of the deeds which the Incarnate One performs:

It is a mark of God to give man life; to preserve by his providence all existing things; to afford food and drink to those who have been granted life in the flesh; to care for those in want; by health to restore to itself the nature perverted by sickness; to exercise an equal sway over all creation [...], and above all to be the vanquisher of death and corruption. If, then, the record ["histories," i.e., the Scriptures] about him [Jesus, the purported incarnate Logos] were defective in any of these or suchlike things, unbelievers would have good reason to take exception to our religion. But if everything by which we know God is evident in the record ["what we are told"] about him, what stands in the way of believing? (12:289; PG 45, 44D-45A)

The incarnation of the divine Logos makes nothing less than salvation possible. Polytheists and even heretical Christians may well admire Jesus as an "intermediary" divine being, one who greatly exceeds mere human nature without being of the substance of the ultimate God. We may know of Jews who regard Jesus as a prophet or an esteemed rabbi. Gregory points out that regarding Jesus as less than one in nature with God cannot lead to the fruit of salvation. This can be seen in Gregory's treatment of the character of Jesus which justifies acceptance of baptism in his name:

If, then, man is a created being and he thinks of the Spirit and the only-begotten God as similarly created, he would be foolish to hope for a change for the better [by accepting baptism in them and thus communion with them], when he is only reverting to his own nature. [...] if a man does not ally himself with the uncreated nature, but with the creation which is akin to him and shares his bondage, his is not the birth from above. But the gospel says [Cf. John 3:3] that the birth of those who are saved is from above. (39:323)

If one of the uncreated nature itself is not incarnate, then we are not saved. One who denies the possibility of such incarnation, either by holding that no Logos which is accessible to us can be subsistent within God or by holding that a subsistent Logos within God cannot be united with our nature, denies the possibility of salvation.

Faith as the Attitude of Salvation

Gregory's view of the nature of and need for faith, though treated only in passing in LK, is essential for our understanding of the diseased character of the non-Christian opinions. We may well wonder why possession of the false opinions of Jews, polytheists and heretical Christians, even about important issues, wounds one's enjoyment of life? What practical difference is there? Crucial to an answer is Gregory's notion of God's respect for our freedom; God does not coerce us into sharing his life. Human freedom and intellect are involved in divinization in the form of faith. Divinization does not occur apart from human faith.

The incarnation and our knowledge of it in faith makes a difference because human beings are the sort of things which are designed to cooperate in an active way in the realization of God's creative generosity:

If, then, man came into being for these reasons,

viz., to participate in the divine goodness, he had to be fashioned in such a way as to fit him to share in this goodness. For just as the eye shares in light through having by nature an inherent brightness in it, and by this innate power attracts what is akin to itself, so something akin to the divine had to be mingled with human nature. In this way its desire [for divine goodness] would correspond to something native to it. (5:276)

And furthermore, that which

is in every respect made similar to the divine, must certainly possess free will and liberty by nature, so that participation in the good may be the reward of virtue. (5:277)

Not even divinization occurs in human beings against their knowledge and will. The human powers of understanding and free choice operate not only with reference to the material things of the world; they are even pertinent to the spiritual life:

[all the other living creatures] owe their existence to the impulse of their parents; but spiritual birth is in the control of the one born. Since, then, everyone has a choice in this matter and there is a danger of acting unwisely, it is well, I think, for one initiating his own [spiritual] birth to think out in advance whom it is well to have as a father and from what it is best that his nature should consist. For, as I have said, in such a birth one is free to choose one's own parents. (39:321; PG 45, 97D-100A)

Man's attitude is decisive for his salvation or fallenness. Any attitude which is devoted to creatures rather than the creator is self-dooming. By definition it involves a restriction in the goodness which can possibly be enjoyed. A priori it is closed to divinization, immortality, and freedom from passions.

Among the attitudes which are hopeless (literally in the final analysis) is that which takes as real and good only that which can be sensed or intellectually comprehended. Human knowing, according to Gregory, always involves both sensory and intellectual aspects. Nevertheless, sensation and intellection are very different; since God is by nature non-material, he can only be known about and known intellectually. But human sensation and intellection have in common that they are equally created powers. Our intellection is no more a positive instrument by which to construct or comprehend divine reality than is our sensation. Our cognitional power is adequate to divine reality in only one sense; it suffices for us to accept and enjoy an unceasingly deepening participation in the divine life (5:276).

The attitude which is hopeful (i.e., which hopes for and accepts its fulfillment by the saving, divinizing incarnation) is the only attitude in which divinization is actually able to be enjoyed. It is the intellectual and volitional willingness to accept communion in the revelation which comes from divinity and which is divine in substance. This is the attitude known as faith, without which there is no salvation:

we have thought it well to limit ourselves to what the gospel has to say about faith, viz., that he who is

born by spiritual rebirth recognizes[*] by whom he is born, and what kind of creature he becomes. For this is the only kind of birth where we can choose what we are to become. (38:321)

It must be stressed that, according to Gregory, faith is not an abdication of intellect. In truth, it is the most fully developed, open-minded exercise of intellect possible.#

Nor is faith merely an intellectual affair. Faith involves one's will as well. Far from involving an abdication of one's capacity for willing, faith realizes the highest, most "will-full" case of willing possible; it culminates in love.

The character of faith can be clarified by contrasting it with lower ways of using intellect and, by extension, will. Creaturely powers, even of beings higher than human, are not divine by nature. Our intellect, by its own power, can produce concepts regarding those dimensions of reality which are comprehensible to us. If the divine were "accessible" (27:305) as the object at the end of our

* Daniélou, 35, quotes from Gregory's Against Eunomius: "there is no other way of drawing near to God than by the intermediary of faith; it is only through faith that the questing soul can unite itself with the incomprehensible Godhead."

Daniélou, 31, quotes from Gregory's Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles: "when I gave up every finite mode of comprehension, then it was that I found my Beloved by faith."

productive intellectual development, God would not be radically transcendent to us; he would be much higher than us, but the difference would be measureable. God would be more accessible to the more spiritually developed or more purely spiritual elements in creation. We could achieve a sort of divinization by strenuous and pure intellectual activity, while jettisoning our less spiritual, bodily dimension.

But this "productive" knowledge of the comprehensible dimensions of reality does not save us in our bodily-spiritual integrity. Nor is it sufficient to effect divinization. The realities grasped in such knowledge are inherently creaturely and do not even exhaust the concrete reality of creatures. Such knowledge does not actualize the full potentialities of our intellectual and volitional powers. Nor is any knowledge which can be achieved by intellectual creatures higher than human, adequate to God. That which is accessible to creaturely intellectual powers is not God, since God,

by reason of his transcendent nature, is unapproachable. [...] For what is totally inaccessible is not accessible to one thing and inaccessible to another. [...]

The true way [...] of regarding the transcendent dignity does not have in view comparisons in terms of "lower" and "higher." (27:305-306)

Faith is the highest actualization, by God's grace, of our creaturely powers of intellection and volition. But

it is a form of reception rather than an attempt to approach the "unapproachable" under our own power.³ Our intellect and will are perfected only in accepting the self-presenting approach of the unapproachable in the incarnate Logos. The incarnate Logos is the "object" for which the attitude of faith is the receptive capacity. It is for faithful acceptance of the Logos that the powers of intellect and will are created. The incomprehensibility of the object of faith does not mean that it is unknowable. Rather, the incarnate Logos exceeds that which created intellect can produce, duplicate, or approach by its own power.⁴ As inherently "excessive," it is the type of object by which divinization is possible. The incarnate presence of the incomprehensible divine nature (that presence as mediated by ecclesial realities) releases our powers into unceasing change for the good.⁵ *There is no good reason for the intellect to settle for less* (i.e. for any creature or, even less, for the comprehensible dimensions of creatures). There is no good reason for the intellect to refuse faith and faith's flower, love.

This should allow us to understand why the false assumptions of the polytheists and heretical Christians are

* Daniélou, 52, includes a quote from Gregory's On Perfection: "...perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth in good, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation."

of such concern to Gregory. The salvation and divinization of these people, for which God creates them, are at stake. They cannot enjoy that participation in the divine life while their attitudes are trapped in assumptions which shut out the possibility of accepting the incarnation. Their minds are self-thwarting. This is the disease for which Gregory is prescribing the cure of solid teaching. The ecclesial context of solid teaching is our next topic.

The Sacramental/Ecclesial Dimension

Gregory presents the sacraments as ways by which Jesus' promise "always to be present" with us (34:313) is fulfilled. The spread of salvation made possible by the incarnation of the divine Word takes the concrete form, as was mentioned earlier, of the enlargement of the Church.* The Church is the community which mediates the divinization brought by the incarnate Logos. Entry into the Church, and thereby into the milieu of divinization, occurs in the right-minded acceptance (acceptance in faith) of baptism and the eucharist. Gregory speaks of baptism, to which catechetical instruction is oriented, as a passage to life:

For the mortal creature to pass to life, another

* LK was written c. 383, i.e., in the midst of the mass conversions of intelligent Hellenists to Christianity which began with the legitimation of Christianity by Constantine and accelerated following the death of Julian.

birth had to be devised, since the first birth led only to a mortal existence. This second birth could neither begin nor end in corruption, but had to bring the one who was born to immortal life. (33:312)

The Eucharist too works for divinization:

Owing to man's twofold nature, composed as it is of soul and body, those who come to salvation must be united with the Author of their life by means of both.

[...] Now only that body in which God dwelt, acquired such life-giving grace; [...] our body cannot become immortal unless it shares in immortality by its association with what is immortal.

[...] He [God] unites himself with their [believers] bodies so that mankind too, by its union with what is immortal, may share in incorruptibility. And this he confers on us by the power of the blessing [i.e., the Eucharistic prayer], through which he changes the nature of the visible elements into that immortal body. (37:318-319)

The role of baptism and the eucharist in the process of divinization is associated with the importance of openness to the truth of the Christian message; openness to that message is openness to baptism and the Eucharist and thereby to salvation. Thus, presuppositions which obstruct one's acceptance of the Christian message are forms of disease. Such underlying ideas prevent one from enjoying salvation; they indirectly contribute to the hold of corruption upon one's life. A discussion which helps one overcome such salvation-thwarting presuppositions thereby helps one prepare for baptism. Baptism and the eucharist do not make sense if they are accepted apart from faith, i.e., apart from a sincere mind and heart; every sincere recipient should begin to show in her own life the nature

of divinized life offered by and celebrated in the ritual:

if the washing has only affected the body, and the soul has failed to wash off the stains of passion, and the life after initiation is identical with that before, despite the boldness of my assertion I will say without shrinking that in such a case the water is only water, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is nowhere evident in the action. (40:324)

This need determines the character of the catechetical instructions which prepare for baptism. Such instructions must meet a person where she is at and help her overcome her own particular obstacles to divinized life. Just as any medical therapy should be adapted to the particular disease it is designed to heal, so must Christian teaching be adapted to the particular intellectual disease it is meant to overcome:

For we must adapt our method of therapy to the form of the disease. You will not heal the polytheism of the Greek in the same way as the Jew's disbelief about the only-begotten God. Nor, in the case of those astray in heresy, will you refute their erroneous doctrinal inventions all in the same way. [...] we must have in view men's preconceptions and address ourselves to the error in which each is involved. (Introduction, 268-269)

The intellectual component of catechetical discourse should help the person to become aware of preconceptions or underlying ideas which stifle the fullness of her life.

The entirety of Gregory's LK is oriented toward helping the people with whom Gregory regularly dealt approach baptism and life in the Church properly. It is not a systematic treatise aimed at the discovery of truth for its own sake.

Whereas some forms of abstract philosophical truth may well be presented to a student as independent of the intellectual situation or preconceptions of that student, Gregory's approach seems to imply that Christian truth cannot be so presented. There is an appropriate pluralism within the Christian message:

The same method of teaching, however, is not suitable for everyone who approaches this word [the Christian message as rightly handed on in the Church]. Rather must we adapt religious instruction to the diversities of religion. While we keep in view the same objective in our teaching, we cannot use the same arguments in each case. (Ibid., 268)

The essentially reasonable character of communion in the Church's life, as pointed out above, does not imply that the truth of the Christian message may be humanly comprehended or should be rationally proved. The truth which characterizes rational communion is the divine truth of "the mystery of our religion." The mystery of our religion harmonizes with our reason by restoring it to its integral state and opening it, as faith, to the full range of truth. But this mystery exceeds what could be enjoyed by any intentional effort of thinking. Daniélou writes:

In the treatise Against Eunomius he [Gregory] insists that the "strength of Christianity" consists not in philosophical speculation but in the "power of regeneration by faith" and in the "participation in mystical symbols and rites." (18)

That truth to which we are opened is God's incomprehensible life itself; the mysteries of the faith make available for

us the incomprehensible, thus ever more sharable, fullness of divine life. Our rationality is most properly understood as a condition for the possibility of this mystery of our divinization, the mystery of God's abundant sharing. Catechetical teaching which is true to its own character will employ reasonable argumentation only to show some un-divine, constricting assumption for what it is. There will be no pretense that that mystery can be rationally proved which can be enjoyed only by sharing in the tradition of the mystery.

In sum, the catechetical character of LK is quite appropriate for one whose sense of truth is that of a constitutive element of the enjoyment of communion, even and especially communion in God's life, as well a means for the conversion necessary for that communion. The truth which is needed is that which opens one to a fullness of life (divinization) from which one is otherwise closed by false opinions. Nor is truth restricted to the instrumental role of overcoming obstacles to fullness of life (divinization); truth is also one component of that divinized life itself. Truth itself involves at least a hint of the presence of God, and all creatures as originated by God, in their proper incomprehensibility.

Conclusion

We have focused upon Gregory's own conception of the role of LK and of the connections among its main themes and its approach. The overall context is that of the divinization (and overcoming of corruption, especially intellectual corruption) which God is accomplishing through Christ, in the Church, and especially by means of her catechetical teachers. Error, in this context, is the intellectual form taken by corruption. All basic or philosophical error is somehow closed to faith. Faith itself is the fulfillment of reason. Therefore, that which is opposed to faith will be, in some way, opposed also to reason. On this ground we may surmise that Gregory does have or could have reasonable criteria for discerning philosophical error.

With this overview of LK in mind, we can proceed to our characterization of the dynamism of Gregory's thought by means of his choice of foils. We will thereby determine more definitely whether he has consistent criteria by which he recognizes error and by which he strives to explicate truth or whether his rejections are rationally arbitrary.

NOTES

1. Whether "restoration" is an adequate portrayal of the process which takes place by means of the incarnation is subject to debate; see Balas, 151: "If [...] one realizes that Gregory conceived the beginning of human history (i.e. man before the Fall) not as a static state of perfection, but as a starting point for spiritual growth, then it will appear very questionable to attribute to him a conception of salvation history which would accomplish nothing but the restoration of that perfect state."

2. Daniélou, 14: "in man created in God's image he [Gregory] sees the preexistence of human nature in the perfection of the divine knowledge--such as it will be only at the end of time." Thus Daniélou suggests that Gregory need not be read as holding that man ever actually enjoyed the state to which salvation "restores" him.

3. Harvanek (49 and 69-72) treats the limits of epinoia (our "productive" function of intellect) and the transcendence of those limits by means of God's revelation and in mysticism. He discusses these topics in terms of Gregory's differences with the rationalism of Greek philosophers and Christian heretics.

4. Hence Gregory explains in other works that the mystical flowering of faith is experienced as a darkness, cf. Daniélou, 23-42 or Cambridge, 455.

5. Daniélou, 47-55, discusses the originality of Gregory's notion of change as a positive reality.

The importance of the sacraments and Church life for the possibility of fruitful change is not discussed in depth in the secondary literature. Daniélou, 18-23, mentions the necessity of the sacraments. Harvanek, 47-49, discusses Gregory's view that without the discipline of a Christologically derived teaching, such as is present in the Scriptures or the Church's teaching, our intellectual powers would be trapped in a mode of "free" exercise which could never make definite progress in truth (cf. Daniélou, 48-51, regarding the fruitless type of change).

CHAPTER III

Gregory's Philosophical Foils

By means of the method of "contrastive projection", we will now show the orientation of Gregory's thought or show whether it has any rationally consistent orientation. Our assumption is that a thinker's basic orientation is revealed more definitely by his philosophical foils, those positions against which he expends intellectual energy, than by his positive statements, which may or may not be the fruits of sufficient reflection. Furthermore, Gregory's culture was rhetorical in character, continuity in expression rather than creativity was the rule. This implies that Gregory will phrase his questions and answers in terms of the commonplaces of his audience. This will be done in spite of any recognition Gregory may have had of a possible inappropriateness of such terms for a positive expression of his own thought. He was not primarily attempting to work out a systematic theology; he was attempting to meet the needs of his audience. We will thus use his choice of foils, rather than any expressions of his positive reflective theological views (which have been treated to some degree in the preceding chapter), as the surest way to uncover the basic commitments of his own

thought, if there are any.

In this chapter, we will list and group the more important of Gregory's philosophical foils in LK. The next chapter will proceed from the list and grouping to characterize the rationally unified, consistent set of criteria, if there be such, in accord with which he rejects those views which he finds false. If any position later recognized as an essential component of orthodoxy is found among Gregory's foils, we will know that his basic orientation is against Christian orthodoxy. On the other hand, if no such anomaly is found, then no number of suspect positive statements or inadequate hypotheses could suffice to demonstrate a non-Christian character to his thinking. Our method of contrastive projection will not yield a thoroughgoing account of Gregory's thought, but such is not the purpose of this portion of our work. Our work as a whole will succeed if it determines with high surety the character of the philosophy toward which his thought strives. Our study of his chosen foils will, hopefully, display his thinking's effective commitments with a distinctness that justifies our treatment of an already well-studied topic.

The most important foils in LK may be divided into four groups. Gregory attacks various forms of "ontological reductionism," 1) any view which attributes a deficiency or limitation, especially of goodness, to the nature of God or

2) which denies a divine image to man's nature. 3) He then argues against any view which treats evil as a positive reality. 4) Gregory attacks "epistemological reductionism" or any view which treats sensation or any limited frame of mind as if its objective correlate were the fullness of reality. We will now consider these foils in turn.

"Degrading God's Nature"

LK is preoccupied with demonstrating that Christian beliefs do not "degrade God's nature" by attributing to it anything unworthy, e.g., any limitation characteristic of non-divine, finite natures:

In reference, however, to the transcendent nature, everything said of it is raised to a higher degree by virtue of the greatness of the object. (1:270, see also 271, 272, 2:273)

The divine nature, not our own, must be treated as the fullness of perfection: man

is the image of the divine nature; and an image would be entirely identical with what it resembled, were it not in some way different from it. (21:297, see also 35:316-7)

Gregory treats any suggestion of a limitation to the divine goodness as a horrible falsity. The divine can not involve any imperfection (Introduction:269, thus there can not be a plurality of gods). Nor could God possess any perfection perfectly unless he possessed all perfectly (20:296-7).

Gregory's attack upon any such degradation of the divine

nature takes many forms. We will consider the most important.

1.1. If no perfection can be lacking to the divine nature, then a fortiori no evil (9:287, 15:291-2), nor any inclination toward evil (1:271), nor any origination of evil (5:277-8, 7:282, 30:308-9) can be attributed to God.

1.2. Might the divine nature lack logos or reason in a subsistent form? Gregory rails against such a proposal because it would imply that divinity is inferior to human beings who do enjoy such reason (1:270-2). God's Logos must be even more, not less, subsistent than our own. Since God's Logos exceeds our own, even infinitely, we are not in a position to find divine actions wanting in reason (17:294-5). Our reasoning about divine matters should be exercised with humility. This humility is perhaps lacking in those whose Stoic assumptions lead to interpretations of the lateness in history of the Christian salvific events as a demonstration of the inefficiency and improvidence of the Christian God (15:291, 17:294-296).

Likewise Gregory fights the notion that God's Logos could lack pneuma or spirit (2:272-3) when even humans have spirit. The divine Spirit could not be less subsistent than our own.

1.3. Isn't the divine nature susceptible of change? Gregory explains why this cannot be the case. Change is

characteristic of creatures:

everything that depends upon creation for its existence has an innate tendency to change. For the very existence of creation had its origin in change, non-being becoming being by divine power. (6:280, see also 21:297-298 and 39:321-322)

But God, by definition, has not begun to be from a "prior" state of non-being. Thus there is no reason to attribute mutability, a characteristic of creatures, to divinity.

1.4. The import of Gregory's attack on a conception of the divine nature as mutable is clarified by his treatment of the question of whether weakness, [pathos] could characterize the divinity. He draws a distinction. He stresses that weakness, in the sense of a susceptibility to losing some dimension of goodness which one has, is not attributable to divinity. God cannot change from his perfection in goodness:

With what, then, does our religion contend the divine came into contact? Was it weakness in its strict sense, that is, evil, or was it the changing movement of nature? Were our teaching to affirm that the divine entered a state which is morally forbidden, it would be our duty to avoid such a preposterous doctrine, implying, as it does, an unsound view of the divine nature. But if we affirm that he had contact with our nature, which derived its original being and subsistence from him, in what way does the gospel proclamation fail to have a fitting conception of God? In our faith we introduce no element of weakness in our ideas of God. For we do not say that a doctor incurs weakness when he heals someone in a state of weakness. Even though he comes into contact with sickness, the doctor remains free from such weakness. (16:292-293)

It would seem to follow that a type of weakness or of

change which does not compromise the perfection of divinity is not necessarily opposed to divinity. This type of change, as will be shown soon, is one of the ways in which God's unchangeable goodness is realized.

1.5. Gregory himself points out how fitting it is that God exercises benevolence toward us:

[for neither should the] light [...] remain unseen, [n]or [the] glory unwitnessed, [n]or [his] goodness unenjoyed, [n]or [...] [should] any [...] aspect we observe of the divine nature [...] lie idle[,] with no one to share or enjoy it. (5:276; PG 45, 21C)

He is very clear that the appropriateness of God's benevolence to us is not entailed by some necessity in the divine nature. Gregory does not treat necessitarian interpretations of the relation between God and creation at any great length, but he clearly rules out any such view:

he who is God the Word and Wisdom and Power created human nature. He was not, indeed, driven by any necessity to form man; but out of his abundant love he fashioned and created such a creature. (5:276)

1.6. Gregory rules out suggestions that God lacks benevolence for his creatures. This is shown especially in God's ability, as just discussed, to bring good even out of the evil choices of his creatures:

Which, then, was better? Not to have brought our nature into being at all, since he knew in advance that the one to be created would stray from the good? Or, having brought him into being, to restore him by repentance, sick as he was, to his original grace? (8:285, see also 7:282, 12:289 for a list of God's bounties, 15:290-1, 20:297, and 26:303-304 that even the devil is profited)

1.7. Can God be acknowledged as perfectly good but ineffectual, as some human beings are? Gregory rules this out since it implicitly denies the perfection of any of God's perfections. God's power must extend to restoring those goods which were lost by creaturely sins:

only the one who had originally given him [sinning man] life was both able and fitted to restore it when it was lost. (8:286)

This power for goodness is incapable of only one sort of activity, evil activity; thus God can exercise his goodness in any good way and in any good area of reality; for God

did not allow the fickleness of man's will to influence his own immutable nature with its constant purpose of goodness? [...] But the goodness of his intention would have availed nothing had not wisdom made his love of man effective. (20:297)

[...] If, then, the diseased member was on earth, and the divine power, to preserve its own dignity, did not come into contact with it, its concern with creatures with which we have nothing in common would not have benefited man. (27:305)

God's power is shown when he takes to himself that which he is not by nature as a means of healing sinners:

that the omnipotent nature was capable of descending to man's lowly position is a clearer evidence of power than great and supernatural miracles. [...] God's is] a power which is not bounded by circumstances contrary to its nature.

[...] His power is clear in this: that he came in the likeness of man and in the lowly form of our nature. (24:300-301)

1.8. This brings us to the foil which recurs most frequently in LK and in all the polemic literature about Christianity in its early centuries (and later as well):

the divinity can not share properties of our nature; the purported Christian "incarnation" is impossible. Gregory took such challenges to the incarnation seriously:

Were our teaching to affirm that the divine entered a state which is morally forbidden, it would be our duty to avoid such a preposterous doctrine, implying, as it does, an unsound view of the divine nature. (16:292)

He defends the possibility of the incarnation of the divine Logos in Christ in two major steps: 1) he shows that each purported case of impossibility involves a false attribution of evil to something which is not evil; and 2) he shows the compatibility of the incarnation with God's perfect goodness. We have already considered this second step in points 1.4-6 above. Now we must consider the various particular cases in which Gregory responds to the challenge to the incarnation with his own challenge:

Now everything we see included in the good is fitting to God. In consequence, either our opponents must show that the birth, the upbringing, the growth, the natural advance to maturity, the experience of death and the return from it are evil. Or else, if they concede that these things fall outside the category of evil, they must of necessity acknowledge there is nothing shameful in what is alien to evil. (9:287)

The most difficult challenges are posed by birth and death. Does then the birth of the incarnate one involve divinity in evil? In Gregory's time the birth of a incarnate divine being could have implied that God had engaged in sexual relations with the mother of the incarnate one. Such a view would involve the attribution of

sexual activity to God. Sexual activity, as "sensual pleasure", was regarded as involved in evil:

It is the sensual pleasure which precedes human birth that is weakness, and it is the impulse to evil in living beings that is the sickness of our nature. (16:293, see also 13:289)

Thus birth usually has its origin in an activity which involves "weakness" in the strictly proper sense of "what affects the will and perverts it toward evil and away from virtue" (16:292). Is the character of the sexual activity which precedes birth enough to show the impropriety of the Christian claim that the incarnate one was born? Gregory points out that:

our religion teaches that God was incarnate in man, not that he entered a state of evil. There is only one way for a man to enter life, viz., to be begotten and brought into existence. Now our opponents [...] fail to realize that the whole anatomy of the body is uniformly to be valued, and that no factor which contributes to the maintenance of life can be charged with being dishonorable or evil. [...] by the generative organs the immortality of the human race is preserved, and death's perpetual moves against us are, in a way, rendered futile and ineffectual. [...] What unfitting notion, then, does our religion contain, if God was united with human life by the very means by which our nature wars on death? (28:306-307)

Sexual activity as such, then, is not inherently evil, although in our present state of life it may usually involve "weakness" in the strict sense. Furthermore

Man begins his existence in weakness and similarly ends his life through weakness. But in God's case, the birth did not have its origin in weakness, neither did the death end in weakness. For sensual pleasure did not precede the birth. (13:289)

Of course, the gospel teaches that the conception and birth of the incarnate occurred not only without sexual activity motivated by "weakness", but without any sexual activity. Such a birth was free from evil:

If birth in itself is not weakness, one cannot call life weakness. It is the sensual pleasure which precedes human birth that is weakness, and it is the impulse to evil in living beings that is the sickness of our nature. But our religion claims He was pure from both of these. If, then, his birth was free from sensual pleasure and his life from wickedness, what weakness remains for God to have shared in, according to our devout religion? (16:293)

His birth was beyond natural powers:

while he was born, he transcended our nature [...] in manner of birth [...]. It would be consistent for you to refuse to think of him as a mere man [...]. (13:290)

Even if it is granted that birth is not incompatible with divinity, "the birth makes the death necessary" (32:309). Is death itself compatible with divinity?

Surely God is most fully alive? Mortality as such must not be evil if it is to be compatible with divinity. Whence came death to us and for what purpose? Death

is the characteristic mark of irrational nature; and in His care for man, He who heals our wickedness subsequently provided him with the capacity to die, but not to die permanently. (8:283)

Though death can terrify one who judges matters from the viewpoint of pleasures and pains (8:282), Gregory points out that it will be grasped by the one who loves reason as a means for separating our good natures from their evil

accretions. Thus death itself is not evil; it is not therefore incompatible with divinity. There is nothing contradictory when:

We hold that God was involved in both these changes of our nature, by which the soul is united to the body and separated from it. (16:293)

As stated above, the weakness [pathos] which characterizes our lives is, strictly speaking, only "what affects the will and perverts it toward evil" (16:292). An incarnation of the divine Logos in such weakness is impossible. But this does not show the impossibility of an incarnation of divinity into the human network of mutual dependence. Death is an element of that human network of mutual connectedness. As there is nothing inherently evil in the latter, there is no reason to deny the incarnation, with the death it involved, on such a count.

Even prudent, benevolent trickery is not incompatible with incarnate divinity, since in the "angle and bait" theme, God

made use of a deceitful device [the incarnation's concealment of divinity from the devil] to save the one who had been ruined. (26:303)

In short, since

our human life [...] from beginning to end and throughout was stained with sin. [...] the power which amends our nature had to reach to both points. [...] the beginning and [...] the end, covering all that lies between. (27:304)

The incarnation meets the problem where it is: in the

totality of human life including death (32:310). The objection of reason would be to a purported divinity which sought to meet the problem with inadequate or irrelevant means, rather than to the Christian notion of incarnation.

1.9. Gregory, having established the non-impossibility of an incarnation, treats related objections. Wouldn't God lose his divinity by a union with humanity? For example, would not an incarnate divinity be bodily circumscribed? Gregory retorts that even human beings are not bodily circumscribed (10:287-8). Furthermore, Jesus' deeds cannot be accounted for by natural human powers (13:289-90, 32:310). Divine apatheia is not lost but manifested by taking on the weakness [pathos] and changes which are proper to our good nature in its present state:

In our faith we introduce no element of weakness in our ideas of God. For we do not say that a doctor incurs weakness when he heals someone in a state of weakness. Even though he comes into contact with sickness, the doctor remains free from such weakness. (16:292-3)

1.10. A final foil for Gregory is the view that the transcendent God is less distant from the heavens and purely spiritual beings than from our human nature. Gregory points out that God is infinitely beyond any created nature:

what is totally inaccessible [save by revelation to faith] is not accessible to one thing and inaccessible to another. Rather does it transcend all existing things in equal degree. Earth is not more below his

dignity, and heaven less. [...] Otherwise we could not conceive of the power that governs the universe as equally pervading all things. [...] from these differences of more and less, the divine nature would appear to be composite [...]. (27:305)

The transcendence of God in relation to all creatures is implied in the notion of God as perfectly good and not merely sharing in goodness.

In sum, any notion which detracts from God's perfection, including his power regarding that which he is not by nature, is attacked by Gregory as irrational.

Degrading Human Nature

The next set of foils in LK concerns human nature.

Gregory opposes the attribution of any limitations to man's nature which would imply that our creator is other than God (8:285, 28:306) or that God has destined us to be less than his images or to enjoy less than a participation in the divine life (5:276-77, 6:279, 21:297) or to be incapable of revealing or transmitting divinity (32:310, 33-34:313-4, 36:318, 37:320 on the world's "eucharistic-ability"). In short, human nature is thoroughly good (9:287, 15:292).

2.1. Could human beings naturally lack immortality?

Gregory opposes this since it would imply that we lacked that kinship with the divine by which we could come "to enjoy God's goodness" (5:276).

2.2. Could human beings naturally lack free will,

especially regarding the state of their spiritual life (and, in effect, rebirth)? Gregory responds that

were human life governed by necessity, the "image" [of God] would be falsified in that respect and so differ from the archetype. For how can a nature subject to necessity and in servitude be called an image of the sovereign nature? What, therefore, is in every respect made similar to the divine, must certainly possess free will and liberty by nature, so that participation in the good may be the reward of virtue. (5:277)

The decisions of creaturely free will are respected even by God (22:298-9). Without free will's cooperation, baptism is useless (40:324, see also 38-39:321).

2.3. Could human beings be satisfied by a total release from embodiment, such that we would not be constrained by the limits of bodily life? Gregory refuses to grant that human life is in need of an elimination of its embodiment as such. He grants that the present state of our embodiment leaves much to be desired. But we could not be satisfied until "our sentient and bodily nature" is "freed from its opposite [evils from sin]"; "he [God] will remold it by the resurrection, and will reconstitute the vessel into its original beauty" (8:284). God

does not prevent the soul's separation from the body by death in accordance with the inevitable course of nature. But he brings them together again by the resurrection. Thus he becomes the meeting point of both, of death and of life. In himself he restores the nature which death has disrupted, and becomes himself the principle whereby the separated parts are reunited. (16:294)

2.4. But wouldn't it be a great deficiency on man's

part if he could not save himself? Gregory acknowledges that man is, by his own consent, trapped in evil:

it was not possible for him to be discreet, once he had turned from discretion, or to form any wise decision once he had departed from wisdom. (8:286)

By his own power man cannot escape from the "labyrinth" (35:315) of death. It would be a great shortcoming in God's creative accomplishment if there were no other way by which man could come to enjoy his share in God's life. Of course, as already treated, by the incarnation God can restore man to that from which man turned. Thus by means of baptism, man's spirit can be restored (5:317). Man can receive bodily restoration toward immortality by the divine remedy of the eucharistic body of the immortal one (37:-318). By faith in God, the immortal one and source of any share in immortality, man is not lacking in the "means" by which to enjoy the immortality lost by sin: .

Of what, then, will one who considers his own interest carefully choose to be the child: of a nature observed to be mutable or of one which is unchanging and stable and consistently good? (39:322)

In short, many thinkers view human reality as incapable of receiving and enjoying a share in the divine life. Many hold that man's nature does not image divine reality since it is manifest that man's present state is pervaded by evil. These views are rejected by Gregory.

Identifying Any Natural Reality with Evil

Another of Gregory's prominent themes is the polemic against those who degrade any natural reality (9:287) by identifying it as evil.

3.1. Must not anyone with intellectual honesty admit that the natural workings of our world and its arrangement are fatally (literally, oriented toward death) flawed? Gregory regards such a view as specious (1:271). He holds that every natural aspect of the world can share in the immortality involved in divine fellowship. He specifies how humanity allows the entirety of the world's nature to share divinization. God's purpose is that:

no part fails to share in the divine fellowship.

On this account the divine nature produces in man a blending of the intelligible and the sensible. (6:279, see also 37:318)

3.2. But does not change always involve a loss of possessed goodness? Surely change necessarily partakes of evil? Gregory challenges this and holds that only one type of changes, sinful changes, are inherently evil. Change itself is a characteristic of all created natures as they come from their creator. Thus it can be for the better:

Now that alone is unchangeable by nature which does not originate through creation. But whatever is derived from the uncreated nature has its subsistence out of nonbeing. Once it has come into being through change, it constantly proceeds to change. If it acts according to its nature, this continual change is for the better. But if it is diverted from the straight path, there succeeds a movement in the opposite

direction. (8:286)

Nor is there any necessary limit to the goodness to which positive, non-sinful, changes lead:

Now change is a perpetual movement toward a different state. And it takes two forms. In the one case it is always directed toward the good; and here its progress is continual, since there is no conceivable limit to the distance it can go. In the other case it is directed toward the opposite, the essence of which lies in nonexistence. (21:298)

Change itself, then, is a characteristic of the creatures which come from the perfectly good God. It cannot be identified with evil.

3.3. Many thinkers and even religious figures challenged the goodness of human nature, especially due to its embodiment and its consequent "weakness." We have already seen Gregory's defence of the goodness of human nature and its natural aspects. He defends birth (13:290, 28:307) and even death or mortality (8:282-3, 32:309-310). Nor are the punishments and pains by which we are weaned from evil and restored to our share in divinity to be equated with evil (8:284-5).

In sum, evil is not the nature of any created reality, much less the nature of the creator. It is the privation of virtue:

no blame, indeed, would attach to evil, could it claim God as its creator and father. But evil in some way arises from within. It has its origin in the will, when the soul withdraws from the good. For as sight is an activity of nature and blindness is a privation of

natural activity, so virtue is in this way opposed to vice. For the origin of evil is not otherwise to be conceived than as the absence of virtue. (5:277-278)

Thus evil is more opposed to any positive reality than any positive reality differs from any other positive reality:

We must not think of virtue as opposed to vice in the way of two existing phenomena. To illustrate: nonbeing is opposed to being; but we cannot say that the former is opposed to the latter as something existing in its own right. Rather do we say that there is a logical opposition between what does not exist and what exists. In the same way vice is opposed to the principle of virtue. (6:279 see also 7:282, 8:286, 15:291)

In short, evil as such is nothing positive at all.

Epistemological Reductionism

The last set of foils in LK which are important for our purpose deal with the varying degrees in which human attitudes are open to the fullness of reality. Metaphysical views are generally correlated with appropriate epistemological views. We have just considered some of Gregory's attacks on metaphysical views which deny some dimension of reality and present a part or aspect as if it were the whole. Now we will take up his challenge to the parallel epistemologies. He challenges the acceptance of any "finite" attitude of mind as unrestricted. God has created human beings to enjoy nothing less than his own divine life. There must then be a human attitude of mind in which God's infinity is accessible. We might compare a

finite attitude to looking at the world through rose colored glasses. The problem arises when one wearing such glasses asserts that what he sees and only that is real. Gregory points up the limits in some attitudes which are often taken as unrestricted.

4.1. Many thinkers implicitly or explicitly identified the nature of the real with the object of sensation. Gregory attacked such identifications as improper; they deny much that is real (7:281-282, 8:283 & 285).

4.2. Furthermore, Gregory rails against identifying the nature of the real with that nature perceived by anyone whose mind is not perfectly open to all truth. We have already seen (p. 45) that Gregory regards faith as the sole attitude of mind and heart which is unrestrictedly open.* Gregory engages in standard rhetorical slurring of those who do not accept faith after his demonstration of the falsity of their objections to faith. Gregory's "slurs" have a consistency about them which suggests that they may have substantial content. Those who do not accept faith are "unreasonable and shortsighted" (8:285), "little minds" afflicted with "stupidity" (9:287) who "strongly oppose the truth", who suffer "madness" "for their own deceit"

* Daniélou, 31, as mentioned earlier, quotes Gregory's Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles in this regard: "when I gave up every finite mode of comprehension, then it was that I found my Beloved by faith."

(18:295). They are people who take "too narrow a view of things", and are "so simple-minded as not to believe" (25:302), and "narrow minded" (27:305); "they look only at outward appearances" and are "very stubborn" (33:312).

It is interesting that Gregory reproaches unbelievers for their failures in reason! He does not attack them for refusing to abdicate their rationality, but for having abdicated it under the guise of giving it free rein. Those who restrict the range and depth of their minds and hearts, will necessarily miss enjoyment of something of God's perfection, something of the world's goodness. They will end in denials of the possibility of that by which restoration is alone possible, because their attitudes are not "infinite." Only an unrestrictedly open attitude can do justice to reality since reality has infinity about it.

Conclusion

Gregory's philosophical foils comprise various ways of overlooking some positive reality, such as God's unlimited nature, or the value of some positive reality. He opposes any confusion between the present state of created things and their nature.

CHAPTER IV

The Character of Gregory's Thinking as Determined by Constrastive Projection

The presentation and grouping of Gregory's foils in the previous chapter provides the material with which to characterize the basic criteria which guide his thought. Our review of the secondary literature showed that Gregory employs some opinions and concepts which are perhaps inconsistent with a thorough orthodoxy, especially his occasional references to human embodiment as incompatible with spiritual growth. Yet Gregory upholds the orthodox teaching of the need for and goodness of the resurrection of the body. Is his rejection of the denial of the resurrection of the body based on any reasonable grounds? Or does he lack intellectual integrity? Has Gregory the thinker capitulated to Gregory the bishop (or to the pious women in his family, as Cherniss suggests)? Our question is thus whether or not Gregory's thinking is oriented by a consistent and reasonable concern. We will respond to this question by identifying the concern - the set of criteria - which guides Gregory's rejection in LK of various philosophically important foils. We will then project the character of the philosophy at which Gregory's thinking

aims, even if he did not explicate many elements of that philosophy. Finally, we will evaluate the compatibility of the basic concern of his thought with his Christian faith.

Contrastive Projection of His Thought's Basic Concern

Gregory's choice of philosophical foils reveals a preoccupation with refusing unnecessary limitations, whether in thought or life. This basic concern of Gregory's thought is manifest in his effort to hold together two contrasts which were often collapsed into one or the other. It is important to stress that the difference of spirit from matter is not one of the contrasts which guides his critical thought. Rather, these basic contrasts are the difference of infinite and finite and the opposition between evil and good. He sees that a collapse of one into the other jeopardizes both what he regards as an authentic notion of infinity and also the authentic meaning of evil. His thought is a quite consistent effort to balance these two contrasts without reducing either to the other.

Given Gregory's predilection for Plato's insistence upon the radical difference of spirit from matter, even while he appropriates Aristotelean themes in the fashion of his time, it is striking that his concerns are not focused upon the difference of matter and spirit. He often uses the distinction of matter from spirit, but he uses it in

the context of his treatment of the two options available to spiritual creatures and the context of infinite goodness in which such options occur. He emphasizes the basic goodness of the bodily world and all its characteristics. Even those human characteristics, such as pain, death, and sexual differentiation, which would not have existed had not God foreseen the effects of sin in the world and designed our nature so as to circumvent those effects, are defended against any characterization as evil. Likewise, he defends the weakness and changes characteristic of humanity even apart from sin against charges that they are inherently evil. He insists that the immortality for which we hope and which has been made available by the Incarnation is not solely a spiritual immortality. It seems to be his view that we possess an immortality of soul with or without the Incarnation. The Incarnation, if appropriated in faith, makes possible the integral immortality which includes human embodiment, human knowledge and strength of will. This restoration is, perhaps, the preeminent sign of infinite goodness.

Gregory deals with the body/spirit topics because he is concerned to elucidate, insofar as is possible or called for, the implications of infinity and especially the possibilities inherent in infinite goodness. He vigorously opposes any reduction of infinity to finitude; thus he

insists on the possibility of and the means whereby creatures, especially human creatures, may enjoy unlimited divine goodness. The possibility and reality of human divinization is crucial in Gregory's thought because its denial is perhaps the greatest challenge to his belief in the power, goodness, wisdom and justice of God. If God's goodness cannot accomplish human divinization, even in the face of human sin, then there is no argument against an ultimate collapse of finitude into evil as well as a complete separation of God from creation. The "infinity" that would remain after such a collapse would be a false infinite, an un-actualized and un-actualizable ideal.

Pagan Greek thought is probably centered on such a false infinite.* A necessitarianism is evident in its treatment of the ideal or most concrete form of knowledge as science, i.e., as aimed at the grasp of necessary connections. Since metaphysical views are logically correlated with epistemological views, a necessitarian epistemology implies a necessitarian metaphysics. Thus,

* Clarke's "The Limitation of Act by Potency" details the classical Greek equation of perfection with the (de)finite rather than the in(de)finite. He attributes to Neo-Platonism the advance to associating infinitude with perfection and finitude with deficiency in perfection. On 185 he notes that Gregory's treatment of God as infinite is not traditional within Christian circles.

the real is that which is necessary in terms of itself.*

While LK does mention that God "was not, indeed, driven by any necessity to form man" (5:276), it does not contain an attack on the necessitarianism of Greek thought as such. Gregory's interests were not philosophical in a technical sense. But Gregory's exploration of the implications of authentic infinity could surely help both clarify the character of necessitarianism and criticize it. Let us suggest how Gregory's emphasis can clarify it. His distinctions can highlight the connection between necessitarianism and the failure of the pagan Greeks to discover the notion of creation ex nihilo and the possibility of divine free choice implied by such creation.

Furthermore, Gregory's exploration of the implications of infinity could be developed into a criticism of necessitarianism, to an exposition of its lack of necessity. For example, metaphysically, there is no rational necessity to restrict one who is infinitely perfect from, e.g., creating others ex nihilo by free choice for divinization. There is no necessity that such a creation occur, but there is no necessity that it not. Likewise in

* It would take us far beyond the limits of our thesis to make these comments more precise. We refer the interested reader to a brief expansion in Robert Sokolowski, The God of Faith and Reason (Notre Dame, IN: U of ND, 1982), chapter two, "Pagan Divinity", pp. 12-20.

epistemology, there is no necessity to treat scientific knowledge as most concrete; a faith is possible which yields what is darkness from a "necessitarian" scientific attitude, but which is more concrete, or "infinite" than such science. And in ethics (or the phenomenology of action), there is no need to explain away free choice; free choice is impossible only for necessitarianism. With an authentic notion of infinity one can make sense of free choice, whether for good (as creation) or for evil (as creaturely sin). Nor is it necessary to despair at the occurrence of sin; since it is the effect of a finite activity, it can be overcome, from within, by an act of infinite gratuitous goodness. Without an authentic notion of infinity - such as that which Gregory safeguards - creation, free choice, faith and salvation from radical evils could not be understood except as impossibilities.

Gregory's concern with the implications of infinite goodness are also worked out in his positive view of the change, weakness, and materiality implicated in the Incarnation. Each of these finitudes can be attributed to God. Of course, change, weakness, or embodiment, or anything finite cannot be attributed to God's own nature. But, and this is striking, they can be attributed to God in his benevolence toward us in the Incarnation. We cannot rightly reduce God to that which he is necessarily or by

nature. Though God cannot act against his nature, that nature, infinite goodness, is such as to allow for possibilities beyond its necessary actuality. God can be involved in true relationships with what is not himself.* These "additional" attributes do not fill out any lack in the infinitely perfect nature of God, since, by definition, there is no lack in infinite perfection. The attributes of creator and incarnate savior which God acquires by his choice to create and save us are non-necessary, though quite reasonable, gratuitous characteristics. Weakness, change, and materiality can characterize the natures only of beings which are not necessary; but they can even characterize that whose nature is necessary. This is implied in a consistent notion of infinite good.

A Pluralistic, Personalistic Theism

Gregory's basic concern with the difference of infinite and finite and the opposition of good and evil leads toward a philosophical personalism, theism, and pluralism. It is beside the point that Gregory has not provided the detailed philosophical analyses undertaken by

* Clarke's "What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today?", pp.432-433, argues that Aquinas' denial that God has "real relations" to creatures is consistent with the view offered here as Gregory's.

twentieth century thinkers.* His concerns, as manifested in his choice of foils, show that such views, or at least a number of their themes, are demanded by the direction of his thought. How is this the case?

Gregory's thought heads toward a personalism because one of its constitutive contrasts, that of evil and good, is attributable only to persons, i.e., beings with free will. Gregory's insistence upon God's respect for creaturely choices demonstrates how seriously he took free will as revealing the character of man. As pointed out above, this differentiates Gregory's thought from the pagan Greek failure to focus clearly on the notion of free choice. Pagan ethics treated man not as person but as citizen (whose actions were evaluated accordingly as praiseworthy or blameworthy) of a polis or of the cosmos.

Gregory's thought must be both theistic and pluralistic since evil is a possibility only for created persons, i.e., beings whose existing is the result of the "change"

* We might mention Martin Buber's I and Thou (NY: Scribners, 1970), E. Levinas' Totality and Infinity (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969), Vincent Miceli's Ascent to Being: Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy of Communion (NY: Desclee, 1965), E. Mounier's Personalism (Notre Dame, IN: U of ND), and John MacMurray's Persons in Relation (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1979).

The Cappadocian characterization of the Trinitarian hypostases as relations (see p. 37-38 above) could be seen as the germ of a new personalist, metaphysical theory of categories. The germ is merely a germ; it is not developed in the areas of creaturely relationships.

of creation. His focus on the difference of evil from good would make no sense if there were none of the beings to which it applies, created beings. Whether these creatures are human or hyper-human does not much affect Gregory's basic concerns; both are finite, good by nature, but by nature capable of evil. For there to be finite beings there must be a creator, a divine being which is infinitely good and perfect. Hence Gregory's theism is consistent with his rational concerns. And if creaturely evil is a possibility, creatures must have the power of self-determination in their relation to God. They could not be merely passing stages of a Neo-Platonically conceived divine emanation process, nor merely the Stoic seminal logoi striving for the unconnected resignation of the Sage in the course of cosmic cycles, nor merely an Aristotelian virtuous contemplative operating by his natural power. Rather creatures are respected in their differences by God without thereby detracting anything from God - hence Gregory's pluralism coheres with his critical criteria.

In sum, Gregory's foils manifest that his critical thought is guided by a consistent set of criteria. His basic demand is that justice be done to the difference of good and evil, to the difference of infinite and finite, and to the irreducibility of these pairs to each other.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Gregory's concern to consistently uphold the difference of finite from infinite marks him unambiguously as a Christian thinker. Gregory's foils constantly manifest his concern for avoiding any reduction of the infinite to something finite. His focus upon the possibility of human divinization shows an ethics or theory of human nature in harmony with respect for authentic infinity (see the footnote on p. 47 above). His positive emphasis on faith as our mode of access to the divine extends this concern to epistemological matters: faith is, as Daniélou's quotations from Gregory's other works show, the mode of our openness to infinity; attitudes other than faith are thus characterized as "finite" (see the footnote on p. 45 above).

Why was Gregory's central concern, as manifested in his foils, overlooked by the thinkers who regard his thinking as non-Christian?

Cherniss focuses upon Gregory's use of the contrast of spirit and matter and interprets the entirety of Gregory's thought accordingly (p. 4-6 above); he thereby misses Harvanek's point (p. 14-15 above) that Gregory's central concern is the difference of creature from creator, i.e., of the finite from the infinite.

Harnack notes two poles in Gregory's thought, but those two poles are the Aristotelian concern for the unity

of soul and body and the Platonic concern for the spirit's irreducibility to the material (p. 6 above). Nowhere does Harnack avert to Gregory's central concern with the difference of finite from infinite (which is not the same as matter from spirit) or with the opposition of evil and good (which is also not identified with body and spirit). Harnack's liberal Protestant and essentially individualist disgust with Gregory's sacramental realism (pp. 6-7 above) is akin to the disgust felt by many of the proponents of Gregory's foils regarding the unworthiness of materiality in reference to divinity.

Nygren does not note Gregory's characterization of faith as receptive and as the only mode in which we can enjoy the approach of the unapproachable; certainly he misses the harmony of Gregory's notion of faith and his concern with the implications of infinity, and the "agapatic" God thereby defended. There is no basic disagreement between Gregory and Nygren on the character and role of faith. But Gregory's attempt to reconcile a purified form of eros is at odds with Nygren's Lutheran a priori view that agape is irreconcilable with any form of eros (p. 8 above). Gregory, in effect, would suggest that Nygren limits God's ability to fashion creatures in his own image and to help them actualize that image-character by restoration from sin. This, of course, is a difference between

Gregory and Nygren about what is authentic Christianity.

Stead tends to approach Gregory's works as if they were definitive expressions of a basically theoretical thought. He overlooks the apologetic, rhetorical, and catechetical intent of most of Gregory's works, of even the most controversial. As a result he lacks the context in which to properly relate the various contrasts which Gregory uses. He treats the difference of perceptible from intelligible (or matter from spirit) as of equal importance to that of creature from creator (or finite from infinite) (p. 9-10 above). He accuses Gregory of an "uncritical borrowing" of concepts; this accusation does not hold up if our study of Gregory's foils is to the point. Gregory knew quite well the limits of the concepts which he borrowed, and he highlighted those limits.

In conclusion, a summary of our results is in order. Some critics have cast doubt on the rationality of Gregory's thought because he rejects concepts which had been condemned by the Church while he uses concepts which are logically associated with the condemned. They suggest that Gregory criticizes concepts on fideistic or irrational grounds. To determine whether they are correct we asked whether there is evidence of rational criteria (i.e. more than a fideistic adherence to Church teaching) in Gregory's critical thought. Chapter Two presented Gregory's positive

conception of the relation between the truth of Christian faith and the character of philosophical error; his "reasonable" conception of faith made it appear likely that he does have rational criteria. Chapter Three listed and grouped his philosophical foils. This chapter has identified his central concern as manifested in his choice of foils. It is to safeguard the difference of infinite and finite and the distinct difference of good and evil. Once identified it should be clear that that concern - that set of criteria - is consistent, reasonable and in accord with orthodox Christian faith.

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