'Perceiving Light from Light in Light' (*Oration* 31.3) The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Gregory the Theologian[1]

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AT THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY, THE WORK OF SAINT ATHANA-
sios had moved the great debate in Christianity concerning the nature

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1968), pp. 263-69; F. Leherz, *Studien zur Gregor von Nazianz* (Diss. Bonn, 1958);
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the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzos." Ned. ThT. 27 (1973) 224-34; G. Moreschini,

of God towards a new context. A greater degree of agreement about the nature and divine status of the Son could now be presumed after the reconciliation between the homoousians and the homoiousians. Events such as the Synod of Alexandria of 362 show that there was a movement to clarify the terminology of the argument in the cause of this reconciliation. The residual body of Arians were consequently becoming more sharply distinguished, and their theological systems stood out in harder relief, as might be witnessed in the rationalist method of Eunomios or Aetios. Athanasios' theology, after the Council of Nicaea, had initiated a growing body of opinion among the hierarchs that the generic meaning of the Logos as homoousios with the Father, in the sense of having the same generic quality (or even being of 'the same stuff'), was a crudely materialist concept inapplicable to a wholly spiritual and simple nature, and that by contrast the true meaning of the homoousion was not merely generic identity, or even 'likeness of being' as the Origenistic homoiousians liked to say (following their teacher's much earlier objections to the application of qualitative epithets to God), but rather very identity of being.

This progression from generic sameness of quality to absolute identity of being was bound to reopen the great questions about particular differentiation within the Godhead, that had so exercised the Church in the second and third centuries. At that period, through the work of the early Apologists, then of Hippolytos, Origen, Dionysios, Tertullian, and Novatian, an overall theological framework had emerged to delineate distinct subsistences within the unity of an absolutely

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"Il Platonismo cristiano di Gregorio Nazianzeno," ASNSP, ser. 3, 4.4 (1974) 1347-92; B. Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System," DOP 12 (1955) 95-124; S.G. Papadopoulos, *Gregorios o Theologos kai ai Proupotheseis Pneumatologias Autou* (Athens, 1989); H. Pinault, *Le Platonisme de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (La Roche sur Yon, 1925); J. Plagnieux, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze Théologien* (Paris, 1951); G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952); J. Quasten, *Patrology*, (Utrecht, 1975) 3, 236-54; R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford, 1969); T. Spidlik, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Introduction à l'Étude de sa Doctrine Spirituelle* (Rome, 1971); H.B. Swete, *The History of the Doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (Cambridge, 1876); ibid. *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (Cambridge, 1912); J.M. Szymusiak, "Grégoire le Théologien disciple d'Athanase," PTAA, pp. 359-63; F. Trisoglio, *San Gregorio di Nazianzo in un quarantennio di studi* (1925-1965) (Turin, 1974); D. Tsames, *H Dialektike Physis tes Didaskalias Gregoriou tou Theologou* (Thessalonike, 1969); D.F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation* (Philadelphia, 1979); H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 3rd edition (London, 1970).

single power—the monarchy of God. In the earlier Logos theology, however, the unity of the Godhead was secured, in the main, by the person and will of the Father, whose power and will were exercised in his Son and Spirit. In this schema the Son and the Spirit tended to be seen as progressively extrapolated from, and thus declining from, the initial and absolute cause. Consequently, a subordinationist theology of the Son and the Spirit was part and parcel of the whole conception. This first schematization, reached by the end of the third century, led inexorably to the Arian dispute. From the theological principles of the same Origen, Athanasios and Arios could draw radically different conclusions about the status and divine nature of the Son and the Spirit. At the end of the fourth century, however, in the later work of Athanasios and his younger heirs, the Cappadocian Fathers, the lessons learned from the Arian crisis were beginning to be systematically applied.

The notion of inferiority had been shown to be incompatible with ascription of deity, a term that should be used only in an unqualified sense or not at all. Thus, the settlement of divine unity on a subordinationist basis had been logically ruled out. Moreover, the Orthodox debate with Arianism had just as urgently insisted that the Son did not proceed merely from the will of the Father (implying, as the Arians thought, a voluntarist and accidental character in the Son's being) but rather was the natural generation of the Father. To the same degree as this point had been secured, however, the older Pre-Nicene scheme of positing the divine unity primarily on the basis of the will or power of the person of the Father had also been dislodged from its position as the main argument for the unity of God's being. In affirming the theological necessity of the Son's identity of being and status with the Father, the Orthodox theologians had brought themselves unfailingly to the threshold of a new theological task—no less than the complete restatement of the problem of unity and particularity in God.

Along with the lessons learned during the Arian debate, a new attention was discernible in the late fourth century to the wider issues of pneumatology, ascetical theology, exegetical procedure, and doxology in the form of the development of liturgy that took place within this period. These movements were to provide a formative context for the theologians of the time. Part of the Arian movement, such as the Macedonians, nicknamed the *Pneumatomachoi* (Spirit-fighters) by Gregory, or those nicknamed the *Tropici* (Figurists) by Athanasios, had clarified their pneumatology in the same way they had clarified their

doctrine, and either denied the divine status of the Spirit (as they had that of the Son), or denied the existence of the Spirit as a separate reality, preferring to interpret scriptural references to it merely as a figurative way of denoting God's action in the world. The emergence of new groups of opponents in the late fourth century, such as Eunomians, Macedonians, and to a lesser extent Apollinarists, all served to clarify the nature of what the Orthodox reschematization of the unity of God would be.

Athanasios' *Four Letters to Serapion*[2] inaugurated the second stage of this great movement towards the full Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the Cappadocians were to bring it to a further resolution. M. Simonetti's criticism, that the era of the Cappadocians was one in which theological originality and creativeness had all too evidently declined,[3] is an extraordinary evaluation of a period which witnessed the *Letters to Serapion*, Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*, Gregory's *Theological Orations*, not to mention Gregory of Nyssa's ascetical and mystical theology, and the widespread elaboration throughout that century of the great liturgical matrices of theology, which witnessed to a primary biblical, Athanasian and Cappadocian thesis that theology, by its very nature, had to be doxological.

The distinctive Cappadocian contribution to the Christian doctrine of God, therefore, can be briefly summarized as, firstly, the completion of Athanasios' argument that generic or qualitative similarity in the persons of the Godhead had perforce to give way to the affirmation of absolute identity of essence; secondly, the elaboration of what was the basis of differentiation within that identical essence so as to constitute a recognizable and hypostatically distinct Triad wherein the distinctions were posited as relations; thirdly, the explanation of how the unity was preserved in the distinctions; and fourthly, the final elaboration and clarification of the work inaugurated by the Synod of Alexandria in 362, that is, the setting out of a clearly defined terminology of: nature (οὐσία), subsistence (ὑπόστασις), person (πρόσωπον), modes of being (τρόποι ὑπάρξεως), and the three divine properties (ἰδιώματα, ἰδιότητες) of unoriginateness (ἀγεννησία), generation (γέννησις) and procession or promission (ἐκπόρευσις, ἔκπεμψις), which hereafter constitutes the Orthodox theological language.

Gregory the Theologian's contribution to this theological achieve-
ment has been disparaged by a few European authors who seem to
have had little primary contact with his extensive theological writings.
G.L. Prestige patronizingly dismissed him as "a dignified popularizer,"
but has only minimal references to Gregory's trinitarian theology
throughout a sizeable book devoted to the issue.[4] Others have sum-
marized his trinitarian doctrine by digesting the analogical images
he offered to illustrate his theme, and have consequently presented
him as offering no more than a generic theory of divine unity. This
reliance on the analogical imagery wholly fails to take account of
Gregory's explicit disavowals of the use of analogies (except to supply
rhetorical color) on the grounds that they are all fallacious,[5] and also
demonstrates an extremely narrow reading of Gregory's text, since he
returns to the exposition of the Trinity consistently throughout the
considerable extent of the *Orations, Letters*, and *Poems*, and explicitly
attacks this generic theory which they wish to read into him. Even
sympathetic scholars have misinterpreted key aspects of Gregory's doc-
trine. From antiquity, Latin commentators failed to sustain Gregory's
explicit distinction between ἀρχή and αἴτιος which he so regularly ap-
plied, and so denied the validity of the Father being the 'causa' of
the Son, while allowing that he was the 'principium.' The Latin tradi-
tion, while safeguarding itself against the Arian application of causality
as an argument for the creaturely status of the Son, nonetheless
obscured Gregory's ascription of causal origination as the inalienable
proprium of the Father, and as such the Father's unique personal ex-
istence as ἀρχή of the Godhead. It was to prove the beginning of a
long road of divergence. The obscuring of this important point has
led to several eminent Latin theologians subsequently arguing, without
foundation, that Gregory taught the Filioque doctrine.[6]

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[4] Prestige in *God in Patristic Thought* cites only four explicit references to Gregory's
trinitarian thought, and in two of the instances he praises Gregory's acumen (qv.
140,260) thus *in situ* he contradicts his own assessment.

[5] *Oration* 31.33; PG 36.172.

[6] Cf. the Maurist editor to Gregory's works in the Migne Introduction (PG 35.
107-08), which says: "Although Gregory does not deal with the procession of the Holy
Spirit there are, nonetheless, many instances in his writings from which it is permissi-
ble to conjecture that he would have thought that the Holy Spirit proceeded from
the Father and from the Son, as for instance Orat. 14.19, 'We adore the Father in
the Son, and the Son in the Holy Spirit'; from which words it can be supposed that
as the Son draws his substance from the Father, so the Holy Spirit draws his from
the Son." Needless to say, this is not only a bad statement of the Latin Filioque

Despite the criticisms, derogations, misinterpretations, and a generally shameful lack of scholarly analysis devoted to Gregory in the main, the fact remains that for theological rigor and mystical insight Gregory the Theologian is in no way inferior to his great Cappadocian colleagues; whereas in the clarity of his exposition and the memorable vigor of his expression he is unquestionably their leading light. Gregory is the Aaron to Basil's Moses. And it is a role which he was pleased to fulfill for his old friend, to whom he once said:

> From the first I have taken you, and will take you still, for my guide of life, and my teacher of dogma. If any man should ever sound your praise he would only find himself by my side, or following behind me.[7]

The present study sets out, on this occasion of the sixteenth centenary of the saint's death, to expose Gregory's trinitarian theology from the primary sources, and to comment on his depiction of the trinitarian relations within the context of his theology of the mystical ascent to God which serves as its matrix and prelude.

The Nature of the Vision of God

Gregory begins the theological task quite decidedly from the perspective that God is unknowable; that is, inconceivable (ἄληπτος) and incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτος) in his nature, and also radically,

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doctrine in its own right, but a completely inadmissible interpretation of Gregory's real point which is the commonality of essence between the persons and the reciprocity of relation thereby engendered. Even more blatantly fallacious is the statement to the same effect in the eccentric book by B. De Margerie, a contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Petersham, MA, 1982), pp. 275-79, which uses Gregory's image of Adam, Eve, and Seth (*Oration* 31.11; PG 36.144-45) to demonstrate Gregory's supposed allegiance to the Filioque doctrine. In Gregory, the image shows how three individuals can all be homoousios while having different modes of origination. De Margérie misapplies the image in a crassly biological way, despite Gregory's explicit disavowal of such a biological connotation, to suggest that Seth (the Holy Spirit) is the result of the union of both Adam (the Father) and Eve (the Son). Even so sensitive an interpretation as the fine book by D.F. Winslow (*The Dynamics of Salvation*, p. 121) misunderstands Gregory on this central issue when it argues that "the procession of the Spirit, however, is beyond the categories of time, causality, or materiality." It is the first and third of these which Gregory denies. Causality is the Father's very proprium and the root of the inner dynamic of trinitarian relations. Winslow's supporting text reference for this argument (*The Dynamics of Salvation*, p. 121, fn. 3) is mistaken and should read: *Oration* 31.7.

[7] Epistle 58; PG 37.113.

though qualifiedly, unknowable even in his actions towards crea-
tion.[8] The apprehension of the deity, being pure spirit, is impossible
for a materially based consciousness, and the only hope for human
beings to have knowledge of God, therefore, is founded upon their
ability to transcend material limitation, when the soul is invited back
by God to its true spiritual nature and destiny (τέλος) in communion
with God. This economy of salvation, described as a purification and
ascent, determines from the outset the radically 'economic' nature
of theology for Gregory.

In the five *Theological Orations* (*Orations* 27-31), which Gregory
delivered in the little house-church of Saint Anastasia at Constan-
tinople in 381, he defines the nature of theology as an invitation to
ascent given by God only to the purified and elected soul.[9] It is an
ascent which will already have been partially prepared by the in-
dividual's purification through askesis, moral fidelity, and a life of
prayer and reflection. In *Orations* 27-28 he sets out his methodological
presuppositions on this theme quite explicitly. Part of the context
of this argument is unquestionably supplied to Gregory from the fact
that he is attacking Eunomians, the most reductionist and rationalist
representatives of the Arian movement, but his starting point, from
the unknowable mystery of God's being, is indicative, and the overall
thrust of his thought is evidently not solely reducible to his apologetic
context here, but is something of a common perspective on the mystery
of God and the mystical nature of theology which he shares with
Gregory of Nyssa. The purification demanded of initiates before they
begin to theologize is comparable, for Gregory, to that demanded
of those who set foot on the mountain of God's theophany at Sinai,
and the task is just as dangerous.[10] Indeed, this theme of the unap-
proachable mystery of God, which therefore determines both the
character and scope of theology, is an *idée maîtresse* of Gregory's
work to which he returns time and again.

In the first *Theological Oration*,[11] Gregory follows Origen and
begins his exposition by elevating the Apostle Paul as the paradigm
of the theologian for two reasons: firstly, he is the preacher of the
'abbreviated word,' ("bringing speech to an end and abbreviating
it in righteousness, for the Lord shall set forth an abbreviated word

[8] *Or.* 28.3; *Or.* 28.26-30; PG 36.29, 61f.
[9] *Or.* 27.3; PG 36.13D-16.
[10] *Or.* 28.2; PG 36.28; cf. Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysi.*
[11] *Or.* 27.1; PG 36.12.

upon the earth"),[12] that is, Paul follows the virtuous life which is God's summation of the theological quest,[13] and thereby becomes both 'disciple and master of the fishermen';[14] and secondly, because Paul receives his higher understanding of the ways of God by ascent and direct visionary experience in the third heaven[15] (an ironical contrast Gregory wishes to make with the Eunomians, whom he regards as having picked up their theology at the street corners, and, far from having ascended to higher things, having actually stooped to the basest materialism in their conception of what the generation of the Son of God would involve). Paul does not deduce syllogisms about God's spiritual being from material, accidental reality, but reports on his direct experience "in the spirit" of an immaterial vision. This contrast between speculative and experienced theology is marked in Gregory.

If theology's task is to confess God accurately, then all material terms are to be avoided, which lead, as he says, to a certain "poverty" of Orthodox doctrine,[16] in comparison to the aggressive speculative assaults of the wordy rationalists.[17] By trying to pierce the divine nature by speculative syllogisms, such people, Gregory says, are "evilly assaulting God" on the basis of their passions, which they have mistaken for rationality,[18] and are thereby profaning the great mystery of the deity which even pagan initiates would know how to preserve in reverent silence.[19]

He sums up his point in a famous passage:

[12]I.ε. συντετμημένου λόγου, Rom 9.28, following the Septuagint text of Isaiah.

[13]See also *Or.* 27.7; PG 36.20: "Why have we tied our hands and armed our tongues?" i.e., given rein to endless speculation about God rather than pursuing the experience of God in the ways he subsequently lists—through mutual love, prayer, almsgiving, and so on. See *Or.* 26.19; PG 35.1252D: ὅσον εἴ, τυχὸν καταληφθησόμενος, τοῖς ἐνταῦθα καλῶς ζητήσασι διὰ βίου καὶ θεωρίας. See also Or. 20.12; PG 35.1080; and PG 36.304.

[14]*Or.* 27.1; PG 36.12.

[15]*Or.* 27.9; PG 36.21-24.

[16]*Or.* 27.8; PG 36.21.

[17]*Or.* 27.1; PG 36.13: κυβισταὶ λόγων, word-jugglers—although the Maurist Editor gives a less polite translation in his footnote 17.

[18]*Or.* 27.7; PG 36.20-21: κατὰ Θεοῦ φέρωνται θρασύτερον ἢ ἀσεβέστερον.

[19]*Or.* 27.5; PG 36.17: "Let us at least agree on this: that we will utter mysteries under our breath, and holy things in a holy manner, and will not cast things that cannot be spoken under profane ears, or give evidence that we possess less gravity than the worshippers of demons." Gregory refers here to Mystery Religion initiates.

> Not to all men, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about
> God . . . for it is permitted only to those who have been tested
> and are far advanced in contemplation, and who have been
> previously purified in soul and body, or at least are in the pro-
> cess of being purified. For indeed it is not safe for the impure
> to touch the Pure, just as it is not safe for weak eyes to gaze
> upon the sun's rays.[20]

This is an image he uses frequently. It is like the ascent of Sinai to
the luminous theophany. But just as Moses could not look upon God
directly, so no human perception can gain direct access to the nature
of God in himself. His nature is deducible only by the reflected glory
it leaves in its works of creation, what Gregory calls our "vision of the
sunlight diffracted on the surface of the water," or the "hinder parts
of God," that is the reality of God which the Incarnation and created
order mediate for us.[21]

In the second *Theological Oration*, Gregory lists the major Old Testa-
ment theophanies such as given to Enoch, Jacob, Elijah, Ezekiel, and
also the visions of Peter at the Transfiguration,[22] and Paul's ascent to
the third heaven (*Or.* 28.17-20), to demonstrate the point that, since
the vision of God itself is so unsupportable, how much more will the
reality of God be unapproachable, something that cannot be reduced
to the vision.[23] Gregory states that no human being has ever
discovered (οὔτε τις εὖρεν ἀνθρώπων πώποτε) what God is by nature and
essence (τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν) and asks whether it will ever be possi-
ble to discover it,[24] suggesting that such a 'finding' of the reality of
God may be more fully realized in the heavenly life:

> When that which is within us which is godlike and divine, I mean
> our mind and reason, shall have ascended to the archetype, of
> which it now has the desire.

The greater extent of the discovery of God's reality in the heavenly
life is a theme to which Gregory frequently returns.[25]

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[20]*Or.* 27.3; PG 36.13-16.

[21]*Or.* 28.3; PG 36.29.

[22]For a complete patristic dossier on the Transfiguration exegesis, cf. J.A. McGuck-
in, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (New York, 1986).

[23]*Or.* 28.19; PG 36.49D.

[24]*Or.* 28.17; PG 36.48.

[25]*Or.* 29.11, PG 36.88CD; *Or.*29.21, PG 36.104B; *Or.* 24.19, PG 35.1193; *Or.* 25.16,

This fuller knowledge will be possible by personal union with God
on a more profound basis than that which is attainable by earthly
beings. This illustrates Gregory's general theme that theology is
ultimately not a speculative *theoria* that produces knowledge from
deduction, rather a personal communion with God which initiates
by intimation or sanctification. The angels in Gregory's thought, as
more thoroughly spiritual beings (second natures from the first) already
possess a fuller apprehension of God's reality than humans.[26]
Following Origen, Gregory speaks of them as inhabitants of the in-
ner recesses of the "Tabernacle." They are the intelligible creation
who stand within the outer veil (which covers the vision and approach
of all sensible creation) and enjoy the incomparably greater glory of
God's radiant nature.[27]

Gregory describes the advance of the theologian who has been
given the gift of such an ascent as a partial glimpse behind the outer
veil of sensible reality. He means that the virtuous life of the initiate,
the essential ascetical preparation for theology without which ascent
would not be possible, actually serves to evoke, in part, the next age.
For askesis quietens, simplifies, and prepares the soul for contempla-
tion, and this is an image of the next age when the human condition
will be radically simplified, when it will transcend all motion and divi-
sion, and when it will receive God "in the heart" as it is finally "made
like to God."[28]

But while allowing that there will be a fuller "discovery" of God's
nature than is possible on earth, Gregory consistently maintains the
absolute unknowability of God's essence in itself. Even the angels
who stand inside the outer curtain cannot penetrate that "inner veil"
of Cherubim which covers God's inmost being. The "First Nature,"
as it is in itself, is known only to itself as Trinity.[29] To this end
Gregory makes a specific correction to Plato's thesis on the obscurity

PG 35.1221C; Carmina 1.2.10 (lines 90-95), PG 37.687; Carm. 2.1.85 (lines 13-16),
PG 37.1432.

[26]*Or.* 28.31, PG 36.72; Carmina 1.1.3 (De Spiritu); PG 37.415.

[27]*Or.* 28.3; PG 36.29A.

[28]*Or.* 30.6; PG 36.112: ὅλοι θεοειδεῖς, ὅλου Θεοῦ χωρητικὸς καὶ μόνου· τοῦτο γὰρ
ἡ τελείωσις πρὸς ἣν σπεύδομεν.

[29]*Or.* 28.3; PG 36.29: οὐ τὴν πρώτην τε καὶ ἀκήρατον φύσιν, καὶ ἑαυτῇ λέγω δὴ τῇ
Τριάδι, γινοσκομένην, καὶ ὅση τοῦ πρώτου καταπετάσματος εἴσω μένει, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν
χερουβὶμ συγκαλύπτεται. Also *Or.* 6.13; PG 35.749C-52.

of the knowledge of God:

> As one of the Greek teachers of divinity taught: It is difficult
> to conceive God, but to define him in words is an impossibility
> (Timaeus 28E). He did so quite cleverly in my opinion; for he
> intended that he would be regarded as actually having ap-
> prehended God, in so far as he says that it is a hard thing
> to do, and yet he intends to escape being convicted of ignorance
> because of the impossibility of giving expression to his ap-
> prehension. In my opinion, however, it is impossible to express
> God, and even more impossible to conceive him.[30]

And this explains Gregory's advocacy of "negative theology,"[31]
characterizing God by what he is not as part of that "poverty" of
speech and doctrine that will always typify the Orthodox understanding
of God, which ever insists on his essential incomprehensibility.[32]

Gregory's doctrine of theological penury, however, is far from be-
ing tantamount to inarticulateness. The Spirit himself inspires the
theologian to use few words and fewer images, but this is an economy
that finds its voice in worship and confession,[33] because the very
unapproachability of God, the awesome holiness behind the veil,
directs and stimulates the creation to worship. It is, therefore, not
surprising that some of Gregory's most important Trinitarian exposi-
tions are hymns of praise, especially in the *Carmina*. Gregory
demonstrates the doxological stimulus in the following:

> Adorable unity in trinity, and trinity recapitulated in unity;
> entirely venerable, entirely regal, of the same throne and glory,
> transcendent and timeless, uncreated, invisible, untouchable,
> uncircumscribable. It has its own inner order known to itself
> alone, but to be venerated and equally adored by us. It alone
> enters the Holy of Holies while all the creation remains out-
> side.[34]

It is a theme which probably takes its inspiration, via Origen, from
Romans 8.26-27, where Paul teaches that the Spirit's inspiration of

[30]*Or.* 28.4; PG 36.29.
[31]*Or.* 28.9; PG 36.36-37.
[32]*Or.* 28.10; PG 36.40.
[33]*Or.* 31.33, PG 36.172; *Or.* 25.17, PG 35.1221C.
[34]*Or.* 6.22 (De Pace 1); PG 35.749-52.

prayer transcends words since the realities encountered in worship exceed their limited scope. The power that propels the human mind to theologize properly, then, is no less than the Spirit himself,[35] and the process is synonymous with the sanctification and deification of the race. In a beautiful passage in the *De Moderatione*, Gregory tells how theology, properly done, spurs on the theologian, who is more ready to listen than he is to speak, to the deeper love of God himself.[36] It is a "longing" for divine communion which is inexhaustible, for the rational mind "faints to transcend corporeal things and consort with the incorporeal,"[37] since this is the very purpose of life and the point to which it properly gravitates.[38] We may sum up these contextualizing remarks, therefore, by saying that, for Gregory, theology (and particularly trinitarian theology) is wholly confessional, that is, doxological, in character and soteriological in its import.

The Christian Apprehension of God as Trinity

The preceding remarks on the nature and scope of the theological task form the matrix of all that Gregory has to say on the Holy Trinity. If one tries to separate his doctrine of the Trinity from this context, one wholly falsifies the teaching. Those who reduce Gregory down to a purveyor of trinitarian formulae or an originator of new technical terms fail to comprehend his insight. For Gregory, the Trinity is a dynamic and soteriological experience, the beauty of God experienced in the liturgy of prayer and expressed in the Church's confession of praise. It is a saving mystery which draws the soul on in an ascent whose range and power ever increases,[39] but whose formularies do not ever increase, but, on the contrary, become fewer in accordance with their interiorized profundity of communion with the object of their vision.

To approach trinitarian doctrine outside this nurturing context,

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[35]*Or.* 29.1; PG 36.73: τῷ ἁγίῳ θαρρήσαντες Πνεύματι.

[36]*Or.* 32.21 (De Moderatione in Disputando); PG 36.197C.

[37]*Or.* 28.13; PG 36.44: οὕτω κάμνει ἐκβῆναι τὰ σωματικὰ ὁ ἡμέτερος νοῦς, καὶ γυμνοῖς ὁμιλῆσαι τοῖς ἀσωμάτοις, ἕως σκοπεῖ μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἀσθενείας τὰ ὑπὲρ δύναμιν. Ἐπεὶ ἐφίεται μὲν πᾶσα λογικὴ φύσις Θεοῦ, καὶ τῆς πρώτης αἰτίας.

[38]Carmina 2.1.88; PG 37.1442.

[39]Carmina 2.1.17 (lines 35-38); PG 37.1264: Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων, ἤδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης, ἧς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ τραπίδεσσιν ἔῃσι, κύθος ἓν ἐν Τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος . . .

as Gregory had argued with the Eunomians, renders theology into an abstract, sterile, and ultimately arrogant exercise of impiety. The Christian doctrine of Trinity, in Gregory's estimate, is therefore not an exercise in speculative metaphysical language, but an exposition of how the Church has experienced God and, as such, how it prays. And this is exactly why the final elaboration of trinitarian thought in the hands of the Cappadocians proceeds from doxology.[40] This was the fundamental thesis of Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto*, which in turn followed the lead of Athanasios' *Letters to Serapion*,[41] in which he had elevated the Spirit's role in the regeneration of baptism, and his sanctifying power over all creation, as a primary argument for the Spirit's hypostatic deity.[42]

Gregory suggests that he has been pushed unwillingly to theological discourse on the Trinity, purely because of the way heretics have profaned the mystery by perverting true doctrine.[43] Yet, once he entered the lists himself, he made a supremely lucid statement of the Orthodox position, and in the process distinguished it radically from prior philosophical and Arian presuppositions. Let us now examine his teaching on the unity of God's being and the differentiation of the divine hypostases.

The Unity of the Divine Being

The key argument in the Arian denial of the Son's full divine status was the fact of his generateness. Ingenerateness ('Αγεννησία), regarded by the Arians as synonymous with unoriginateness (ἄναρχος Θεός), was consistently applied as the primary definition of the absolute deity. The same argument was used to rule out the possibility of the Spirit's deity, who also derived from the ingenerate God. Gregory's reply to this was that ingenerateness cannot be used as the supreme definition of deity since it is not a term that describes essence or nature, but rather depicts relation.[44] As a negative word, it does not say what something is, but rather how it is not. This 'how' depicts a mode

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[40]The vision of God inexorably issues forth in confession: *Or.* 28.21; PG 36.53C.

[41]PG 26.529f.

[42]Serapion: "He in whom creation is made divine cannot be outside the Godhead of the Father." Ad Serap. 1.25.

[43]Ep. 101, To Cledonius; PG 37.192C.

[44]An idea suggested in Alexander of Alexandria, and explicated by Basil of Ankyra and Epiphanios: q.v. I. Chevalier, *S. Augustin et la pensée grecque: Les Rélations Trinitaires.*

of being, or what Aristotle called a relation (πρός τι).[45] The term is thus a particular qualification of God's essence, not its determinant and constituent.[46] This insight finally terminated, in the Cappadocian system, the long prior tradition of subordinationism within Christian thought, and constituted the final victory of the refined doctrine of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father as a sharing of no less than identical being.[47]

Athanasios had already argued that the Spirit's relation to the Son was analogous to the Son's relation to the Father,[48] and by 359 he was ready to state that not only is the Spirit not a creature but he is, moreover, himself consubstantial with the Father and the Son. But Athanasios did not directly apply the title 'God' to the Holy Spirit, and Basil followed both him and Origen in this reserve (the so-called 'economy of Saint Basil'). Basil's pneumatology clearly implied the divine status of the Spirit. That the Spirit is not a creature is abundantly clear for Basil,[49] but he avoided the direct application of the Homoousion to the Spirit,[50] although he did speak briefly of a "community of essence."[51]

For Gregory, the time of reserve is over. He explains the apparent hesitancy of Basil on the grounds that he was hard pressed in the fight against antagonistic hierarchs, who would have used any more explicit a pneumatology in their fight against him.[52] This is an explanation Athanasios himself acknowledged in the letters of support he wrote on Basil's behalf to the monks.[53] As early as 372, Gregory called the Spirit "God" in a public sermon, and asked how long this doctrine would be like the light "kept hidden under a bushel."[54]

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[45]*Metaphysics* 5.15.1020b, 30; Basil follows the Aristotelian distinction in his interpretation of Hebrews 1.3 in Ep. 38.7, PG 32.337, describing the relations as eternal.

[46]See Basil, *Adv. Eunomium* 2.9, PG 29.588-89; Amphilochios of Iconium, *Fragm.* 15, PG 39.112.

[47]The predication of *Homoiousios* was rejected by Athanasios (*De Decretis* 23, *De Synodis* 53), and by Basil (Ep. 8.3) on the grounds that the term 'like' can be predicated only in terms of quality, whereas God is free of any quality, being simple and immaterial. For Gregory, 'likeness' in a simple being meant 'identity': *Or.* 30.20; PG 36.129C.

[48]Ad Serap. 3.1; PG 26.625.

[49]Ep. 125.3, PG 32.549; Ep. 159.2, PG 32.620-21; and *De Spiritu Sancto* passim.

[50]Cf. *Adv. Eunomium* 3.4-5; *De Spiritu Sancto* 41-47, 58-64, 71-75; Ep. 189.5-7.

[51]Ep. 189.7.

[52]Epp. 58-59, PG 37.113-20; *Or.* 43.68-69, *In Laudem Basilii Magni.* PG 36.585-89.

[53]Athanasios, Epp. 62-63.

[54]*Or.* 12.6; PG 35.849. See also footnote 60 below.

The fifth *Theological Oration* (*Or.* 31) marked the high water mark of explicit trinitarian thought when both consubstantiality and the divine title were attributed to the Spirit openly and robustly:

> What then? Is the Spirit God? Most certainly so. Well then, is he consubstantial? Yes, if he is God.[55]

Where the Arians had posited as their cardinal theological terms unoriginateness and unbegottenness, Gregory argues that consubstantiality and homodoxy are the real focuses.[56] The explicit avowal of the consubstantiality of the persons opens for Gregory the way to a fuller clarification of the heart of Basil's doctrine. He regards it as the real meaning of Nicene Orthodoxy, although he has no apologies for "completing in detail what was incompletely said by the Nicene Fathers concerning the Holy Spirit . . . since that question had not then been mooted."[57]

His remarkable statements on the developing economy of the revelation on the Son and Spirit, through the biblical accounts and in the life of the Church, demonstrate at one and the same time that he is fully conscious of being the active heir to an explicit biblical and patristic tradition,[58] yet one that in his own lifetime was profoundly controverted on all sides of the Church.[59] He regarded it as his special task to light the lamp on the stand for the benefit of all the churches. It is a revealingly liturgical idiom.[60]

With great frequency in the *Orations*, Gregory posits the commonality of Ousia as the base and ground of the unity and coequality of persons in the Godhead, thus shifting the focus, in the light of all that had been learned in the Arian conflict, of the prior trinitarian tradition of the Apologists, which located divine unity predominantly in the will and monarchy of the Father. They had advanced the notion of unity from alignment of will; for Gregory, it is the other way around, insofar as commonality of being demands synonymity of will.

[55]*Or.* 31.10, PG 36.144A; Carmina 2.1.14, PG 37.1247-48; Carm. 2.1.30, PG 37.1290.

[56]Cf. *Or.* 23.6-7; PG 35.1157-60; *Or.* 42.16 (Supremum Vale); PG 36.476-77.

[57]Ep. 102; PG 37.193.

[58]*Or.* 31.5-6, PG 36.156; *Or.* 31.26-29, PG 36.161f.; *Or.* 31.3, PG 36.136; *Or.* 21.35 (on Athanasios), PG 35.1124-25; *Or.* 43.67-68 (on Basil), PG 36.585-89; *Or.* 39.12 (on Paul), PG 36.348.

[59]*Or.* 31.5-6, PG 36.137-40; *Or.* 31.30, PG 36.168; *Or.* 33.16, PG 36.233; Carmina (De Vita Sua) 2.1.11 lines 653f., PG 37.1074.

[60]Carmina 2.1.14, PG 37.1249.

In the third *Theological Oration (Or. 29)* he makes a synopsis of the point:

> We hold the (theological opinion of) monarchy in honor. It is, however, a monarchy that is not limited to one person (prosopon) for it is possible for unity if at variance with itself to come into a condition of plurality; but it is a unity that is made of an equal dignity of nature and a union of mind and an identity of movement and a convergence of its elements to unity (a thing which is impossible to a created nature), so that even if they are distinct in number they are not divided in being.[61]

Aristotle had argued[62] that numerical distinction primarily designated material realities. In this regard Gregory had to answer a double Arian criticism; firstly, that if the persons really were consubstantial they would be the same thing and so could not be enumerated as three; secondly, that if the persons were wholly spiritual, numerical distinction could not apply. His reply[63] was that the concept of number does not properly refer to the nature of things and thus can have no bearing on consubstantiality. That is, number expresses quantity, not quality, and thus the notions of unity and distinctions can properly be applied in the Godhead. Because of the simplicity of the uncreated and immaterial nature, however, the elements (the persons or hypostases) never constitute a summation of three or even a reduction to one. The inner unifying dynamic of the trinitarian relations in a unicity of being prohibits that kind of univocal differentiation which normal numbering suggests:

> The Trinity is not an arithmetical numbering of unequal things . . . but a comprehension (σύλληψις) of the coequal and the equally-honored, and as they are united by nature (φύσις) they are named as a union. Thus, what is ignorant of all separation must never be divided by numerical division.[64]

The commonality of being, for Gregory, demanded the coequality

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[61]*Or.* 29.2; PG 36.76.

[62]"All things that are many in number have matter" (*Metaphysics* 12.8.1074a, 33-34). See also Plotinos, *Enneads* 5.1.9 (Aristotle, however, also spoke of the many immaterial substances that moved the spheres). Basil is aware of the issue and suggests that God is not one by numerical unity, for this would list him in the series of created things: q.v. Basil, Ep. 8.2; PG 32.249.

[63]Cf. *Or.* 31.18-19; PG 36.152-56.

[64]*Or.* 23.10 (De Pace 3); PG 35.1161.

of the persons in power, glory, honor, commonality of will, and identity of movement in all God's external dealings. This doctrine he never tires of restating, calling it not Aristotelian but "piscatorial" wisdom.[65]

Numerical separation, therefore, is a way that materially-based intellects represent the real distinctions in the Trinity, which are exactly known only to the Trinity itself,[66] but it is not an entirely accurate guide since in its artificial analysis it theoretically presupposes a static separation[67] in what cannot be separated ontologically because of its own internal dynamic and essential oneness. Ultimately, Gregory says, the perfect concord of the deity is entirely "devoid of quality, quantity, and time."[68] The threefold relations which exist within that oneness of being are thus not antagonistic to the unity but actually express it as well as qualify it.

In a trinitarian catechesis in his *Oration on Holy Baptism*, Gregory speaks of three infinities comprising one infinite conjunction, where three can be discerned in "theoria" but in effect only one shines out, in just the same way that a threefold light forms one single radiance.[69] The dynamic unity, he suggests, is like that of Nous, Logos, and Pneuma that constitute our human consciousness, though as ever he distances himself from all trinitarian images as ultimately unreliable.[70] In this doctrine of the trinitarian convergence to unity,[71] Gregory even begins to sketch out the shape of the doctrine of *Perichoresis*, which Gregory of Nyssa will elaborate further,[72] before it reaches its final form in John of Damascus.[73]

Commonality of being thus constitutes the ground of trinitarian unity:

> Each of the persons possesses unity not less with that which
> is united to it than with itself, by reason of the identity of
> essence and power.[74]

[65]*Or.* 23.12; PG 35.1164C.

[66]*Or.* 23.11; PG 35.1161.

[67]Ibid. PG 35.1164: τοῦ νοῦ χωρίζοντος τὰ ἀχώριστα.

[68]*Or.* 23.11; PG 35.1164.

[69]*Or.* 40.41; (In Sanctum Baptisma); PG 36.417.

[70]*Or.* 23.11, PG 35.1164; *Or.* 31.33, PG 36.172.

[71]*Or.* 23.11, PG 35.1164: ἑαυτῇ συμβαίνουσαν; also *Or.* 31.14, "One mingling of lights," PG 36.149; *Or.* 42.15, PG 36.476B; *Or.* 29.2, PG 36.76. See footnote 98 below.

[72]In a text wrongly attributed to Basil as Ep. 38.8.

[73]Cf. *De Fida Orthodoxa* 1.8; PG 94.829.

[74]*Or.* 31.16; PG 36.152: τῷ ταύτῳ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως.

And in this argument he lays to rest the ghost of the so-called 'Generic Theory' of trinitarian unity. This is a notion which has frequently been ascribed to all the Cappadocians, and a point on which they have attracted criticism from the time of Harnack. Critics point especially to some of the analogies used by Gregory of Nyssa which liken the trinitarian unity to that possessed by three men who all share but one single manhood,[75] or the teaching of Basil on the common generic substrate applicable to several hypostases,[76] such as Peter and Paul being two differently named individuals who both have the same ousia. This tendency in Basil and his brother rises from their common reliance on Origen at this point, who, under Aristotle's influence, had posited a qualified generic model of the Trinity.[77] Basil himself was aware of the great difference between two men sharing generic unity and the case of the Trinity, where the entire substance of the Son and the Spirit is the same as the entire substance of the Father, trinitarian differentiation being only in the manner in which the identical substance is objectively presented in each person.[78] Gregory of Nyssa is also aware of the problems of his image, and rather weakly suggests we ought to refuse to admit that, strictly speaking, there is more than one 'human being' at all, only "human persons."

Gregory the Theologian, however, is not as ready to follow Aristotle's lead in the concept of 'second substances' as generic categories, and more so than his colleagues, is impatient of trinitarian analogies precisely because they can lead to more problems than they resolve. Consequently, he is able to state what Basil and his brother meant (which is clear enough, if one disengages their wider argument from the rhetorical images that illustrate it) with a far greater clarity, and he

[75]Cf. the opening paragraph of Gregory's *Ad. Ablabium.* ET. given in J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, pp. 285-86.

[76]Basil, Ep. 236.6; PG 32.884: "*Ousia* and *hypostasis* have the distinction that the common (τὸ κοινόν) has with reference to the particular (τὸ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον), just as the term animal has with reference to an individual man." For a fuller elaboration of Aristotle's five categories of union (three of which are 'generic') see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, p. 314f.

[77]For Origen, the three hypostases were not merely individuals but three real individual species whose unity consisted in a commonality of term that denoted both species and genus, both of which they realized in themselves. This he called "specific genus" and he identified it with Aristotle's "Second Ousia." Origen also further qualified the bond of unity in terms of identity of will; cf. *In Joannem* 13.36; PG 14.461; Con. Celsum 8.12. See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, pp. 320-22.

[78]Basil, Ep. 38.5; see Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p. 244.

makes the conclusion quite openly that generic theories of unity are not a Christian but a Hellenistic concept, and fail to function as theological models because they connote merely a theoretical unity without regard to the eternal simplicity and unicity of power and will in God:

> Do not the Hellenes also believe in one Godhead, as their more advanced philosophers declare? And in our case humanity is also a unity, that is, the entire race. But still the Hellenes have many gods, not one; just as there are many men. But in this example the common nature has a unity which is only conceivable in thought, and the individuals are parted from one another very far indeed, both by time and by dispositions, and by power. For we are not only compounded beings, we are also contrasted beings both with one another and with ourselves; nor do we remain entirely the same for a single day . . . but are in a perpetual state of flow and change.[79]

Gregory's point, when he so argues that each of the persons is no less united with the others than with himself, demonstrates his pressing of the implication of identity of essence[80] to its logical end — that no distinction is possible or conceivable in the Godhead in terms of being, volition, action, power, glory, degree or status, and hence none admissible in the confession and worship of the Church. But having stressed the unity and monarchia of the Godhead to this pitch, significantly more so than Basil, Gregory goes on also to explain the distinctions in the Godhead which do not allow Christians to adopt an undifferentiated monism.

The Differentiation of Persons

His succinct statement — that there is complete identity in all things within the Trinity except for the relations of origin[81] — marked a further advance on Basil, who described the individual properties (proprium of existence — ἰδιάζον ὑπάρξεως) in the Godhead[82]

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[79]*Or.* 31.15; PG 36.149.

[80]*Or.* 30.20: ταύτον κατ' οὐσίαν, PG 36.128D; *Or.* 20.7, PG 35.1073.

[81]*Or.* 34.10, PG 36.251-52; *Or.* 20.5-7, PG 35.1072A, 1073A; *Or.* 31.29, PG 36.165; *Or.* 41.9, PG 36.441. Gregory insists the titles are descriptions of relations, not nature, and hence the disparity of names does not imply disparity of essence among the three hypostases: *Or.* 42.15, PG 36.476-77.

[82]Basil, Ep. 38.6, PG 32.338. The term is borrowed from Aristotle, Topica 5.1.128b, 16-21; Ibid. 5.5.134a, 28f. q.v. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, pp. 338-39.*

as "modes of existence" (τρόποι ὑπάρξεως); that of the Father as ἀγέν-
νητος, and that of the Son as γεννητός,[83] but preferred to keep silent
on the ἰδίωμα of the Spirit, which he suggests will not be known un-
til the next age.[84] He will only say that the Spirit "is known after
the Son, and with the Son, and has his substance from the
Father,"[85] or that "he is sent from God and sustained by the
Son."[86]

   Gregory, however, articulates all three ἰδιότητες in the deity as
ἀγεννησία, γέννησις, καὶ ἐκπόρευσις, alternatively ἔκπεμψις, or τοῦ προ-
ελθόντος ἢ προϊόντος used participially.[87] He is quite aware that he
is coining new terms in Christian theology to describe the Spirit's
ἰδιότης, even though they are biblically based (Jn 15.26), but begs
his reader's license as the clarification of the argument demanded
such measures.[88] And now, with three referents to denote the distinc-
tions within the deity, he is able to clarify further what they are.
Although he partly coins the vocabulary, he frequently expresses that
he is more concerned with substantial agreement in the Church than
with semantic exactness. If the overall meaning was the same, it did
not concern him what precise terms were used,[89] as long as the basic
distinction between nature (οὐσία, φύσις) and individual property
(ὑπόστασις, πρόσωπον, ἰδιότης) was observed, following the lines laid
down by the Synod of Alexandria on Athanasios' prompting.[90]

[83]Basil, Ep. 38.4, PG 32.332; *Adv. Eunomium* 2.28.

[84]*Adv. Eunomium* 3.6-7. PG 29.668.

[85]Ibid.

[86]*Adv. Eunomium* 3.6, following Athanasios, *Ad. Serap.* 1.21,24; see also Jn 14.26;
15.26.

[87]*Or.* 25.15-16, PG 1220, 1221; *Or.* 26.19, PG 35.1252; *Or.* 30.19, PG 36.128; *Or.*
39.12, PG 36.348; Carmina 1.2.10, lines 988-90, PG 37.751.

[88]*Or.* 39.12; PG 36.348: εἰ δεῖ τι καὶ καινοτομῆσαι περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα . . .

[89]*Or.* 42.16,17; PG 36.477.

[90]The 'Tomus Ad Antiochenos,' PG 26.795-810, defining the basic distinction as
that of one *ousia* and three *hypostases*: "A holy Trinity, not in name only, but really
existing and subsisting . . . a Father . . . a Son and a Holy Spirit. . . . A holy Trinity
but one Godhead and one principle . . . while the Holy Spirit is not a creature but
proper to and inseparable from the essence of the Father and the Son." See Gregory's
reference to this in his Encomium of Athanasios in *Or.* 21.35, PG 35.1124-25. The
Tomus, together with the remarkable creed of Gregory Thaumatourgos (c. 213-270),
were important influences on the Cappadocians. The latter creed, venerable in Cap-
padocia as attributed to their great Cappadocian saint, stated that there was nothing
created or subservient in the Trinity, nothing externally contributed, nor was the
Son less than the Father or the Spirit less than the Son. See *Ekthesis Pisteos*, PG
10.1103-24. The text is cited by Gregory Nyssa in his *Life of Gregory Thaumatourgos*.

Gregory's starting point in explaining the significance of the ἰδιότητες is the Father's unique, personal, and incommunicable character as origin (ἀρχή) and cause (αἰτία) of the Godhead in the other two hypostases. As such, the Father alone is the Unoriginate and Uncaused, and there cannot be a plurality of principles (ἀρχαὶ) in the Godhead which would be tantamount to polytheism.[91] Gregory denies Plato's suggestion that the principle of divine unity lies in the divine nature itself, and consequently is naturally inexorable. He insists, on the contrary, that it is a personal communication of the divine nature to the Son and Spirit, timeless, immaterial, and incomprehensible.[92]

If, in Gregory's thought, the commonality of nature is the ground of trinitarian unity, the Father's personal communication of his essence, entirely and without reserve, to the Son and Spirit, must be seen as the origin and principle of that unity, and the timeless initiation of those mutual relations which constitute it. This act of the Father's self-communication specifies who the Father is; in other words, it specifies or hypostasizes the Godhead (divine ousia) as Father in the act or relation of fathering; just as the Son and Holy Spirit are specified or hypostasized in Godhead in turn by being begotten and by being sent from the Father. The Father, then, in the very particularization of himself (his individual expression of his own being) originates the very particularizations of his Son and Spirit, and thereby unfolds the whole Trinity, for the two other hypostases each concretize that being which is from him — his being and theirs — by returning that relation of generation and procession, being his Son and his Spirit respectively.

Gregory emphasizes two key elements in this understanding of the Father as ἀρχὴ and αἰτία of the Godhead. The first of these is that the act is timeless; it has no temporal beginning, duration, or end, although it has an origin of logical order in the eternal person of the Father. As a timeless origin, therefore, the Father's relation to the Son and Spirit cannot be said to involve priority in any temporal sense.[93] The second is that the origination is wholly spiritual, devoid of the notions of passion, extrapolation, and division which

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[91]*Or.* 31.14, PG 36.149A; *Or.* 25.16, PG 35.1221; Carmina 1.1.3, PG 37.414-15.

[92]*Or.* 29.2, PG 36.76; see also *Or.* 25.17, PG 35.1224A, where Gregory states that just as generation does not imply passion, so procession does not imply necessity in the relations.

[93]*Or.* 29.3, PG 36.77; *Or.* 29.5, PG 36.80.

the Arians read into the act.[94] In consequence, the Father's relation to the Son and Spirit cannot be said to involve any priority in the sense of superiority or inferiority.

It is the Father's hypostasis as ἀρχή, then, which is the Primary Cause initiating the differentiation of otherwise entirely coequal and undifferentiated persons who timelessly share the same being:

> How then, if they are co-eternal (συναΐδια) are they not all unoriginate (ἄναρχα)? It is because they are from him, not after him. For that which is unoriginate is eternal, but that which is eternal is not necessarily unoriginate so long as it may be referred to the Father as its origin. Therefore, in respect to cause they are not unoriginate; but it is evident that the cause is not necessarily prior to its effects, just as the sun is not prior to its light. Nonetheless (the Son and the Spirit) are in some sense unoriginate (ἄναρχοι)[95] in respect of time, even though you (Arians) would scare the simple-minded with your quibbles; for they are not subject to time from whom time came to be.[96]

Gregory's final qualification highlights his argument with the Arians to the extent that unoriginateness (ἄναρχος, ἀγεννησία) constitutes divinity. Ἀγεννησία is posited as the unique hypostatic ἰδιότης of the Father, which characterizes him as the sole ἀρχή of the Godhead. But in so far as it is a timeless ἀρχή, then the Son and Spirit, while not being unbegotten or unoriginate (ἀγέννητος, ἄναρχος) as the Father is, still share his timelessness[97] and thereby 'image' his unoriginateness, just as they do not share his unique character as begetter and processer but image it in their own hypostatic relations to him as begotten and processed. Gregory is not only stating that they share all the characters of the Father's being (by possessing that same being) with the exception only of the mode in which it was communicated to them, he has even gone on to suggest, in a highly original manner, that even the mode is partially reflected in the internal self-communication of the Trinitarian relations. It is another indication

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[94]*Or.* 29.4; PG 36.77.

[95]That is, ἄναρχος as timeless and eternally subsisting.

[96]*Or.* 29.3; PG 36.77.

[97]Cf. *Or.* 20.7, PG 35.1073; *Or.* 25.15, PG 35.1220; *Or.* 39.12, PG 36.348; Carmina 1.1.2 (De Filio), PG 37.401-04; Carm. 2.1.14 (35), PG 37.1247-48.

that he is one of the first to sketch out the doctrine of Trinitarian *Perichoresis.*[98] The Son's imaging of the Father was a longstanding Christian tradition; Gregory's originality lies in his extension of that principle to the Spirit, which he brings about in a subtle and remarkable passage in *Oration* 25, where he speaks of the Father in his hypostasis as being a father in a five-fold way: μόνως, μόνος, μόνου, ὅλος, and ὅλου.[99] These qualities he goes on to discern also in the way the Son and Spirit express their own hypostatic properties. He insists, however, at the end of this argument, on the unconfusion of the idiomata of ἀγεννησία, γέννησις and ἐκπόρευσις as the proper and distinct propria of the three hypostases. A similar line of thought is discernible in his argument that the Son in his origination from the Father is not a "decession" from the Father's glory but an "accession." By this he does not mean that the Son completes anything that is lacking to the Godhead, since the perfect cannot be improved, but that a direct and natural origination from such an Absolute is no diminution, despite what the Arians had argued, precisely because it must be absolute itself.[100]

This process of origination and reciprocal relation is the dynamic order (τάξις) which is not only the very constitution of the Trinity but its whole meaning. And in its light the whole Trinity is seen from the outset as the communion and gift of God's being from the Father to the Son and the Holy Spirit. As such, it is the archetype and paradigm of God's economy of salvation for the entire creation, angels and mankind, which yearns for the experience of communion with the life of God, in so far as this is given; for this is its very life and salvation. To deny or disrupt this τάξις was the fundamental error of the Arians, and to Gregory it was a radical dishonouring of God,[101]

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[98]See note 71, which has already suggested Gregory's anticipation of *perichoresis* doctrine; see also Ep. 101, PG 37.184, where he speaks of intellectual existences "mingling" with one another; also Carmina 2.1.85, PG 37.1432; and *Or.* 29.2, PG 36.76, where he describes the Trinity moving from monad to dyad and coming to rest in triad. This is based on Plotinos, Tractates 5.1 and 5.2. The text is discussed in Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 867-68. For further elaboration of Gregory's relation to Plotinos, see Moreschini, Plagnieux, and Draseke. A summary (Greek) is provided by Papadopoulos, *Gregorios ho Theologos kai hai Proupotheseis Pneumatologias Autou*, p.89f.

[99]*Or.* 25.16; PG 35.1221.

[100]*Or.* 29.11, PG 36.89: also *Or.* 30.7, PG 36.112; Carmina 1.1.2 lines 28-31, PG 37.404.

[101]*Or.* 23.6; PG 335.1160B.

that resulted in alienation from the deity,[102] and the very opposite of doxology. To refuse to honor the Trinity, he says, is to refuse its gift and effect, that is, to refuse regeneration.[103]

And so, while commonality of being and identity of will and movement constitute the one Godhead,[104] the irreducible properties or hypostatic relations make known the Trinity and evoke worship:

> We guard that noble legacy which we received from our fathers (2 Tim 1.14), worshiping the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; knowing the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Holy Spirit, for in them we were baptized and have believed. . . . The three are not one in the sense that they are not impersonal realities or designations of only one person, but again they are one, yet not in hypostasis but in Godhead. There is unity worshiped in trinity and trinity recapitulated in unity; entirely venerable, entirely regal, of the same throne and glory, transcendent and timeless, uncreated, invisible, untouchable, uncircumscribable. It has its own inner order known to itself alone, but venerated and worshiped by us. It alone enters the Holy of Holies while all creation stands outside.[105]

Gregory states unequivocally that while the fact of the hypostatic relations is known to creation and elicits its worship, the 'how' of the relations is absolutely incommunicable outside the Godhead. Just as the divine *ousia* is only known in its secondary reflections in the creation, so too is our knowledge of the divine hypostases radically limited.

The modes of being, or the manner of the Father's ingenerateness, the Son's generation, and the Spirit's procession, cannot be scrutinized beyond stating the fact of them; otherwise, Gregory says, one incurs the danger of a man looking directly into the sun and being blinded.[106] It is an image which again evokes the theophany narrative of Sinai—the radiant light too bright to be seen, and Gregory turns once

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[102]*Or.* 34.9, PG 36.249; see also *Or.* 43.30, PG 36.537—to worship the Trinity is the only saving doctrine.

[103]*Or.* 23.12, PG 35.1164C; Carmina 1.1.13, PG 37.411.

[104]*Or.* 32.5, PG 36.180: apart from the properties there is "in all a sameness of nature, a common throne and honor"; *Or.* 23.11, PG 35.1161-64; *Or.* 40.41, PG 36.417; *Or.* 31.9, PG 36.144, and frequently elsewhere.

[105]*Or.* 6.22, (De Pace 1); PG 35.749-52.

[106]*Or.* 20.9-10; PG 35.1076-77.

more to the idea in the third *Theological Oration* where he speaks
of the cloud that veils the holy from sight:

> The generation of God (the Son) must be honored by silence.
> It is a great thing for you to learn that he was begotten, but
> the manner of his generation we will not admit that even angels
> can conceive, much less you. Shall I tell you how it was? It
> was in a manner known to the Father who begot and the Son
> who was begotten. Anything more than this is hidden by a cloud
> and escapes your dim sight.[107]

Epilogue

The created order standing outside the veil of the Holy of Holies,
or, as above, standing in the face of the dark cloud that veils the
Shekinah as at Sinai or Thabor, culminates Gregory's entire trinitarian
exposition in a refusal to go further. And yet, in a sense, we have
come full circle from our starting point, in the way that both images
rise from the theophany narratives of the scriptures, for Gregory in-
tends to suggest that the next appropriate stage of the theophany
is not further articulations and more analyses, but the silence of wor-
ship and communion that transcends speech (Rom 8.26-29), which
as Paul says is that communion with the Spirit which reveals for us
the regenerative power of the Son, the true image of the unseen Father.
This is what Gregory means by his succinct phrase, "Perceiving light
(the Son) from light (the Father) in light (the Holy Spirit)."[108]

In so far as he has expounded the reality of God as the Father's
total communication of his being to the Son and Spirit, whose inter-
nal relations order and particularize that single and common reality
in mutual communion, then Gregory has also sketched out the en-
tire goal and focus of the Christian life as a personal communion
with God that is experiential and not merely theological—a vision
of the threefold radiance shining as one light, when eyes have been
sufficiently purified to gaze upon that light.[109] This vision of the
luminous Trinity is, for Gregory, a dynamism in life that draws the
creation unceasingly to desire a complete unity with God ("ὅδη Θεότητι
μιγέντα), a transfigured communion that is initiated and sustained

[107]*Or.* 29.8, PG 36.84; *Or.* 23.11, PG 35.1161D; *Or.* 25.16, PG 35.1221C.
[108]*Or.* 31.3; PG 36.136.
[109]Carmina, 2.2.4, lines 85-88, PG 37.1512; *Or.* 32.15, PG 36.189-92.

in doxology:

> O Spirit who proceeds from the Father, the radiance of our
> minds, who come to the pure to divinized illumined men, have
> mercy and grant as the years roll on that even now and in the
> future I may be wholly joined with the Godhead and sing your
> praises with a boundless joy.[110]

This dynamism draws onward the intelligible creation in an endless
circling of the Primal Light which is its origin and final goal,[111] and
draws forward the human soul to a more profound illumination and
deepening communion, the ascent of the holy mountain that begins
in this age and is completed in the next.[112]

Gregory's trinitarian doctrine originates in a primary and pro-
found soteriological imperative, and this is also where it culminates
in a concept of illumination and salvation which is no less than a
divinizing communion with the God the church has begun to wor-
ship in its present trintarian confession, but in whom its worship will
be rendered speechless and entirely experiential in the final manifesta-
tion of his light in the heavenly liturgy. Without this context and
conception of trinitarian theology as primarily a soteriological and
doxological confession, Gregory's point can be, and frequently has
been, entirely missed.

[110]Carmina 2.2.1 lines 630-34; PG 37.1017.

[111]Carmina 2.1.98; PG 37.1415-52.

[112]Carmina 2.1.87; PG 37.1434; Carm. 2.1.88; PG 37.1442; *Or.* 28.17; PG 36.48; *Or.* 28.13; PG 36.44; *Or.* 32.15; PG 36.189-92; *Or.* 40.37; PG 36.412D.