

**Athanasius of Alexandria and Gregory of
Nazianzus: *Theopoiēsis* and *Theōsis***

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September 2021

(25,000 Words)

**Dissertation submitted as partial requirement for the
degree of MRes in Theology at the University of
Nottingham**

Abstract

This study explores the often-posed distinction between Alexandrian and Cappadocian approaches to deification in the fourth and fifth centuries. Athanasius of Alexandria has been selected to represent an Alexandrian approach and Gregory of Nazianzus, to represent a Cappadocian one. Comparison of their respective theologies of deification reveals a diversity in opinion on what exactly deification involved among the Fathers and the inadequacy of the interpretive categories of “moral” and “realistic” approaches to distinguish between them. The study observes areas of convergence and divergence at each stage of their respective narratives of deification, beginning with Creation and the Fall; then the Redemptive work of Christ; Pneumatology and Baptism; the Christian life, and finally the Deified State. What should become apparent throughout this study is that while both Fathers are espousing ideas which should rightfully be considered deification, the substance of their ideas and their focuses differ dramatically in places and while they are not necessarily contradictory or unsynthesizable, it is necessary to recognise their significant differences.

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Abbreviations

Athanasius

AA – Ad Alephium

AE – Ad Epictetum

AM – Ad Maximum

AS – Ad Serapionem

CA – Orationes contra Arianos

CG – Contra Gentes

DD – De Decretis

DI – De Incarnatione Verbi Dei

DS – De Synodis

FL – Festal Letters

TA – Tomus Ad Antiochenos

Gregory

Carm. – Carmen

Ep. – Epistula

Or. – Oratio

Introduction

Given that the term 'deification' escapes formal definition until the Sixth Century, it is unsurprising that turning to the Fourth Century Fathers we do not discover one consistent, uniform doctrine. Alexandrian deification has often been painted as a distinct approach to Cappadocian deification, reinforced by Norman Russell declaring the former a *realistic* approach and the latter a *moral* one.¹ Considering the concept of deification in Athanasius of Alexandria, our Alexandrian representative, and Gregory of Nazianzus, our Cappadocian representative, we shall determine whether this distinction is genuine and whether the *realistic* and *moral* designations are useful categories for articulating this distinction.

Through our study it should become apparent that there are striking similarities between the theories of Athanasius and Gregory, but also significant differences. Both theories should be considered under the umbrella of deification, but there is a need to differentiate between them to make clear that these Fathers are not espousing identical soteriologies. However, the 'realistic' and 'moral' labels should certainly not be the means of doing so.

Athanasius and Gregory were chosen carefully as the subjects of this study. Athanasius was chosen over Cyril of Alexandria, since Cyril is often thought to have incorporated aspects of the Cappadocian approach into his theology.² Gregory of Nazianzus was chosen over Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa since he speaks more frequently of deification than his fellow Cappadocians.³ Additionally, they proved suitable subjects as Christopher Beeley has convincingly demonstrated that Gregory did not have the knowledge of Athanasius' works once thought. While Gregory's *Oration 21* suggests a close connection to Athanasius, Beeley argues "the success of Gregory's persuasive abilities in this oration has tended to exaggerate the real nature of his relationship to Athanasius".⁴ He concludes "Gregory's acquaintance with Athanasius' work is sparse, and what little he knows does not inform his own work to any great extent".⁵ While Volker Henning Drecoll believes Gregory may have had knowledge of a few more Athanasian texts than Beeley suggests, ultimately he agrees "the sceptical

¹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

² Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 322.

³ Russell, *Doctrine*, 232.

⁴ Beeley, *Gregory*, 160.

⁵ Beeley, *Gregory*, 161.

approach of Beeley is right here”.⁶ Oliver Langworthy likewise concurs, explaining “Although Athanasius is consciously acknowledged as a predecessor, little evidence, whether textual or epistolary, exists to support a direct relation”.⁷ With Athanasius and Gregory, we have two Fathers unfamiliar with each other’s work, allowing us to identify similarities within their theories of deification without concern that they are merely Gregory borrowing from Athanasius.

Russell uses the concepts of realistic and moral deification as an interpretative framework for his study of Greek Patristic theories of deification. He explains,

“The ethical approach takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation. Behind this use of the metaphor lies the model of *homoiosis*, or attaining *likeness* to God. The realistic approach assumes that human beings are in some sense transformed by deification. Behind the latter use lies the model of *methexis*, or *participation*, in God”.⁸

Russell claims “the realistic is especially characteristic of the Alexandrian tradition, the ethical of the Cappadocian”.⁹ Russell considers Athanasius’ deification *realistic* meaning it understands humans to be transformed into gods in a realistic sense. Gregory’s deification is classed as *moral*, meaning it focuses on believers becoming like God through moral living and imitation, but not a realistic transformation. Russell’s categorisation of Gregory seems outright wrong, as has been observed by several scholars, and, as Daniel Keating notes, contradicts his own work which “shows that Nazianzen identifies the incarnation of Christ ‘as the basis of a deification in the realistic sense’”.¹⁰ His categorisation of Athanasius’ deification. While one can entirely sympathise with the desire to distinguish between the two theories of deification, the concept of *realistic* and *moral* approaches is not the means to do so.

⁶ Volker Henning Drecoll, “Remarks on Christopher Beeley, Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God. In Your Light We Shall See Light”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 4 (2011), 464.

⁷ Oliver Langworthy, *Gregory of Nazianzus' Soteriological Pneumatology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 27.

⁸ Russell, *Doctrine*, 2.

⁹ Russell, *Doctrine*, 9.

¹⁰ Daniel Keating, “Typologies of Deification”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, No. 3 (July 2015), 270; See Beeley, *Gregory*, 119.

Since neither Father wrote a specific work on the topic of deification, this study will collect the numerous relevant threads scattered throughout their works and attempt to weave them into systems which we can compare. At each stage of their respective deification narratives, we will consider the areas of convergence and divergence, beginning with Creation and the Fall; then the Redemptive work of Christ; Pneumatology and Baptism; the Christian life, and finally the Deified State. Both Fathers are credited with the invention of terms which are both rendered 'deification' in English. Athanasius coins the term θεοποίησις from the verb θεοποίηω and Gregory invents the term θέωσις from his favoured verb, θεόω.¹¹ This is useful for comparison and we will henceforth refer to Athanasius' theory of deification as *theopoiēsis* and Gregory's as *theōsis*. Through noting the similarities and differences, and the reasons for them, it should become apparent that while both Fathers are espousing concepts which should rightfully be considered deification, their focuses and ideas radically differ and while perhaps synthesisable, these theories of deification are far from identical.

¹¹ Vladimir Kharlamov, "Rhetorical Application of Theosis in Greek Patristic Theology", in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael Christensen and Jeffery Wittung (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 117; Russell, *Doctrine*, 167.

Chapter 1: Creation and the Fall

To understand *theopoiēsis* and *theōsis* one must first consider Athanasius' and Gregory's doctrines of Creation and the Fall. The anthropology of both Fathers is crucial to their concepts of deification. Furthermore, since both Fathers consider deification a soteriological process, it is key to identify from what they deem humanity to be in need of saving. While there are areas of convergence, our Fathers tend to have different focuses, particularly regarding the nature of humanity and the causes of the Fall. Thus, unsurprisingly, we begin at the beginning.

Athanasius

Creation

The most fundamental aspect of Athanasius' ontology is the absolute divide between God who is being and everything created which depends entirely on him for continued existence. In the beginning, "God who IS" (*DI* 4.5) creates the universe *ex nihilo*. For Athanasius this means all created things naturally tend towards returning to a state of non-existence. He explains "For the nature of created things, inasmuch as it is brought into being out of nothing, is of a fleeting sort, and weak and mortal, if composed of itself only" (*CG* 41.2). M. C. Steenberg claims "Athanasius shares this view with his predecessors, going back [...] at least as far as Irenaeus".¹² To counteract, what Khalad Anatolios calls, this "ontological poverty", God creates "the universe to exist through His Word" (*DI* 3.1), giving it "substantive existence" (*CG* 41.3).¹³ This act of creation through the Word is not a singular event, but rather continuously creation "partakes of the Word [...] and is helped by Him so as to exist, lest that should come to it which would have come but for the maintenance of it by the Word, — namely, dissolution" (*CG* 41.3). All things are graciously created by God and continuously depend on him for existence. A frequent topic throughout Athanasius' writings is, what Andrew Louth deems, the "complete contrast between God and the created order, between the uncreated and self-subsistent and that which is created out of nothing by the

¹² M.C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 164.

¹³ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius the Coherence of His Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 164.

will of God".¹⁴ For Athanasius, all that belongs to the creative order is ontologically the same and distinct from God in that it is continuously dependent upon his grace to exist.

Humanity experiences the same ontological deficiency as the rest of creation, entirely dependent on participation in the "God who IS" (*DI* 3.1) to exist. However, unlike the rest of creation, God did not "barely create" (*DI* 3.3) humans, but rather "made them after His own image, giving them a portion even of the power of His own Word" (*DI* 3.3), so that "by reason of [our] likeness of Him that is (and if [we] still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) [we] would stay [our] natural corruption, and remain incorrupt" (*DI* 4.6). Anatolios has aptly described this as Athanasius' "doctrine of the 'second grace' by which humanity is made in the image of God".¹⁵ At the beginning humanity was given a second grace, the grace of being made in the image, which entailed a greater participation in the Logos, granting it a more secure existence and immortality. Importantly, as Louth notes, "Man's being in the image of God is not part of his creaturely endowment, but a grace given him by God to enable him to participate in the Word".¹⁶ Naturally humans are creatures with inherently unstable being, tending towards nothingness. It is only by grace that they can exist and only by this second grace that they are made immortal; this is not their natural condition. Humanity is, for Athanasius, "a natural recipient of grace" (*CA* 1.45). Humans are fundamentally creatures and though somewhat more privileged than the rest of creation, this is not due to their nature, but rather the additional grace granted them, that is a greater participation in the Word.

Had humanity not fallen they would have remained incorruptible in paradise. The purpose of this second grace was that humanity "might rejoice and have fellowship with the Deity, living the life of immortality unharmed and truly blessed" (*CG* 2.2). However, this grace was contingent upon humanity's preservation of it. Athanasius explains "if they kept the grace and remained good, they might still keep the life in paradise without sorrow or pain or care" (*DI* 3.3). The keeping of this grace of being in the image of God entails first remaining good and secondly, preserving "this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge" (*DI* 4.6). Since this

¹⁴ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 74.

¹⁵ Khaled Anatolios, "The Soteriological Significance of Christ's Humanity in St Athanasius", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1996), 274.

¹⁶ Andrew Louth, "Athanasius' Understanding of the Humanity of Christ", in *Studia Patristica XVI*, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 313.

grace is not humanity's by nature, but rather something given to it, the grace can be lost. Athanasius recognises the "case of Adam" as the supreme example of this principle and the foundation of his dictum, what "mere man receives, he is liable to lose again" (*DI* 3.38). Had humanity never fallen, they would have remained in this state of incorruption, living forever in contemplation of and fellowship with God, but since this state was not humanity's by nature it was a state from which they could fall. While this state shares much with the deified state wrought by Christ's saving work and Athanasius considers this work to be in part a restoration of the Edenic state, he does not suggest at this stage humanity is deified or considered gods. *Theopoiēsis* entails more than a mere restoration of humanity's Edenic condition.

The Fall

Humanity was liable to lose the second grace and indeed it did. Regarding the Fall, Athanasius does not focus upon the Tree, though occasionally mentions the Devil's involvement.¹⁷ He explains humans "making light of better things, and holding back from apprehending them, began to seek in preference things nearer to themselves [...] But nearer to themselves were the body and its senses [...] they fell into lust of themselves, preferring what was their own to the contemplation of what belonged to God" (*CG* 3.1-3.2). The Fall is characterised as a turning towards creation away from contemplation of God. Steenberg suggests "Rather than something ontological, sin is defined as a movement, held in opposition to stability, or 'remaining', in the contemplation of (and participation in) God".¹⁸ While the Tree is not absent from Athanasius' writings, he understands the Fall primarily as the gradual act of turning away from God not a single event. Humanity falls by forming desires for material things and becoming "habituated to these desires" (*CG* 3.4), consequently becoming "enslaved to sin; and, ever sinning" (*CA* 2.68). We find in Athanasius a principle which Thomas Weinandy notes finds its "supreme echo [...] in Augustine", that "good is, while evil is not" (*CG* 4.4).¹⁹ Athanasius states evil has no "substantive existence; but that men, in default of the vision of good, began to devise and imagine for themselves what was not, after their own pleasure" (*CG* 7.3). Turning away from God naturally entails

¹⁷ See *DI* 5.1, "But men, having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption".

¹⁸ Steenberg, *Of God*, 174.

¹⁹ Thomas Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 18.

turning to evil, for it is the turning away from that which *is* to that which *is not*. The Fall, in Athanasius' theology, was not a singular event, but humanity's progressive turning away from God and good (which "has its pattern in God Who is" (CG 4.4)), towards themselves and evil which possess no real existence.

The consequences of the Fall are, for Athanasius, the loss of the second grace and the return of humanity to its natural state. Louth explains "man has sinned and fallen, his being κατ' εικόνα θεου is lost or disappearing, and he is subject to φθορά and θάνατος".²⁰ The grace of being in the image is lost as humanity tarnishes the image, covering it with "the filth of sin" (CG 34.3). Furthermore, they became "habituated to" sin (CG 3.4). This "was turning them back to their natural state" (DI 4.4). While through grace humanity enjoyed stable existence with God, bereft of this grace they returned to their natural state, that of all created beings, that of corruption and tending towards the nothingness from which they came. Steenberg suggests as contemplation of God who *is* drew humanity into participation of his attributes, namely existence, so "contemplation of finite realities implies an ever greater participation in all the attributes of that finitude, namely corruption and death".²¹ However, this does not particularly capture Athanasius' thought, which considers corruption an attribute which is natural to humanity and not caused by participation in something other than God, but simply by not participating in God. The grace of participating in God is not replaced by something else, but is just lost, returning humanity to what it would have been without the grace. Louth explains "the corruption consequent on the fall is not as it were a mere staining of man's nature — such as could be cleaned. The corruption consequent upon the fall reveals the true nature of man as he is in himself, on his own, apart from God: created out of nothing, fragile, impermanent".²² Fallen humanity is left bereft of the second grace, facing the same fate as all other created beings: a return to the nothingness from which it was created, having turned from participation in God.

In his anthropology, Athanasius does not tend to divide the body and soul in humans. Louth notes that, as explained above, "the doctrine of creation ex nihilo implies that the most fundamental ontological divide is between God and the created order, to which latter both

²⁰ Louth, "Athanasius' Understanding", 312.

²¹ Steenberg, *Of God*, 174-175.

²² Louth, "Athanasius' Understanding", 314.

soul and body belong”.²³ Created by God, the body and soul are both subject to the same ontological poverty as the rest of creation once bereft of the second grace. Consequently, Louth observes, “The soul has nothing in common with God; there is no kinship between it and the divine. Its kinship is with its body, in virtue of their common creation, rather than with God”.²⁴ Athanasius does not concern himself with the nature of the soul and body separately, usually focusing upon the human as the object, composed of both. While he uses the term ἄνθρωπος, he commonly refers to the whole human as σάρξ in line with its scriptural usage.²⁵ This reflects Athanasius’ view of humanity as fundamentally earthly and created, distinct from God. This is a common theme in Athanasius who stresses that humans are principally “from the earth” (CA 3.19). In Athanasius’ concept of the *Imago Dei*, the soul is “a mirror” (CG 34.3) and in this way it is a “reflexion of the Word” (DI 3.3). Louth explains this metaphor “suggests that there is a real similarity between the soul and God [...] But it does this without suggesting that there is a natural kinship between the soul and God. There is no ontological continuity between the image in the mirror and that of which it is the image”.²⁶ The “filth of sin” (CG 34.3) covers the soul, preventing it from reflecting God and thus the grace of being in the image is lost. Louth notes “On this understanding, *theopoesis*, divinization, will not mean the rediscovery of any kinship between the soul and God, but rather that, as it is purified, the soul more accurately reflects the image of God”.²⁷ This maintains the Athanasian divide between the uncreated God and creation which is wholly other than him. The whole human, body and soul, belongs to the latter category.

Summary

Athanasius carefully divides God from all creation which perpetually depends on him for existence. Humanity, given the grace of the *imago Dei*, enjoyed a more stable existence than the rest of creation, but turning from God towards created things with no real existence they dirtied their souls so they no longer reflected God. Bereft of this second grace they returned to their natural state of corruption tending towards the nothingness from which they were created.

²³ Louth, *Origins*, 75.

²⁴ Louth, *Origins*, 75.

²⁵ See CA 3.30, “for ‘the Word,’ as John says, ‘became flesh’ (it being the custom of Scripture to call man by the name of ‘flesh’”.

²⁶ Louth, *Origins*, 77-78.

²⁷ Louth, *Origins*, 78.

Gregory

Creation

Gregory's account of creation differs from Athanasius'. Athanasius' grouping of creation as one unit, wholly distinct from God is replaced in Gregory by a three-tiered understanding of creation. God creates, for Gregory, through an overflow of his goodness. He explains "it was not sufficient for goodness to be moved only in contemplation of itself, but it was necessary that the good be poured forth and spread outward, so that there would be more recipients of its benevolent activity" (*Or.* 38.9). God "first thought of the angelic and heavenly powers, and the thought was action, [...] thus were created the second radiance, the servants of the first Radiance" (*Or.* 38.9). Gregory's interest in the Angelic realm is not present in Athanasius. He describes this realm as "akin to" God (*Or.* 38.10). Following this, God creates "a second material and visible world", one which is "entirely foreign to him" (*Or.* 38.10). Contrary to the Athanasian divide between all creation and God, Gregory claims "intelligible natures and those apprehended only by the mind are akin to the divine, but those apprehended by the senses are entirely foreign to it" (*Or.* 38.10). God is, for Gregory, "the great mind" (*Carm.* 1.2.12, 8). Thus, the first realm is like him in that it is spiritual and intellectual, whereas the second is physical and wholly unlike him. Gregory suggests God's greatness is more fully demonstrated in his creation of that which is wholly other than himself. While Athanasius focuses on the divide between the uncreated and created, in which God falls in the former and creation in the latter, Gregory stresses the divide between the spiritual and physical, the first including God and spiritual things and the second that which is material. Gregory does also recognise the divide between God and creation, explaining there are two veils: "The first veil separates the heavenly and angelic realm from the Godhead, and the second, our world from that of the heavens" (*Or.* 6.22). However, he is far more concerned with the second veil than the first.

Humanity, the third part of creation, was created after the heavenly and earthly realms. Humanity, for Gregory, is where the two previous worlds meet. Humans are "a blending out of both, [...] a mixing of opposites" (*Or.* 39.11), for we "are twofold [...] composed of soul and body, and our nature is visible yet also invisible" (*Or.* 40.8). Gregory describes how "having taken the body from the matter already created, [God] breathed in breath from himself, which is surely the intelligent soul and the image of God of which Scripture speaks"

(*Or.* 38.11). No longer do the spiritual and physical realms separately manifest God's greatness, but now also through humanity, a mixture of both. Interested in the division of spiritual and physical realms, Gregory, unlike Athanasius, gives great attention to the relationship between the spiritual (higher) and physical (lower) elements of humanity: the soul and body. Donald Winslow notes while our bodies come from the physical realm, "our higher (noetic, spiritual) nature comes to us, not from the invisible creation of the angelic cosmos, but directly from the Creator-Word", as Gregory explains, "The body was fashioned down here, while soul, again is a breath of the great Mind [*nous*]" (*Carm.* 1.2.12, 8).²⁸ Gregory's concept of God as the Great *nous* is vital for understanding human-divine relations and it is our minds which he considers to be in the image of God (Brian Matz notes, *eikōn theou* appears "thirty-two times, nineteen of which refer to 'mind' while the others refer to Christ" in Gregory's corpus).²⁹ While in Athanasius humanity is in nature entirely other than God, Gregory stresses humanity's natural kinship with God in the *nous* which is the image of God and comes from him, the Great *Nous*. For this reason, from the beginning Gregory considers humanity in some sense divine, describing us as "the divine-terrestrial creature" (*Carm.* 1.2.1, 100) and "earth mixed with divinity" (*Carm.* 1.1.4, 91-92).

Gregory recognises several reasons for humanity's twofold nature. The first is that they "may inherit the glory above by means of a struggle and wrestling with things below, being tried as gold in the fire by things here, and gain the objects of our hope as a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God" (*Or.* 2.17). Humanity's heavenly destiny is not just given to them, but is earned as a "prize". Gregory understands "the dust" to be "the inferior element in us" and "the spirit" to be "the better" (*Or.* 27.7). The spiritual draws us to God, while the physical draws us to the material world and thus we struggle to not "debase ourselves when our origins are lofty" and "cling to the visible realm" (*Or.* 19.6), but rather turn towards God and live virtuously to earn heaven as our reward. Connected to this is Gregory's concept of free will. This gift enables us to "make the good even our own, not only because [it is] sown in our nature, but because [it is] cultivated by our own choice, and by the motions of our will, free to act in either direction" (*Or.* 2.17). To complement this

²⁸ Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A study in Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation Ltd., 1979), 51. See also *Or.* 38.11.

²⁹ Brian Matz, "Gregory of Nazianzus", in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 313.

“God gave him a law as material on which his self-determination could work, and the law was a commandment indicating which plants he could possess and which one he was not to touch” (*Or.* 38.12), so that “we might be of good repute by keeping it” (*Or.* 45.28).

Humanity’s original destiny involved their growing in goodness and virtue as their spiritual nature struggled with the earthly to look towards God and not the physical and choosing, through free will, to pursue good by keeping the commandment. It is in this way that Gregory understands earthly life as “training” (*Or.* 16.15) and “education for the soul” (*Or.* 45.28).

Additionally, Gregory understands the body to be a means of keeping humanity humble. He explains a purpose of our “hybrid nature” is that “whenever we feel exalted because of our likeness to God’s image, we may be brought down because of our clay” (*Or.* 14.7).

Elsewhere he suggests the soul is embodied that “he might suffer and in suffering remember and be corrected if he has ambition for greatness” (*Or.* 38.11). Gregory sees in humanity a serious risk of pride on account of its divine element, which God seeks to counter through the soul’s embodiment. We shall see this pride contributes to humanity’s fall. Additionally, Nonna Verna Harrison notes the “body is precisely the means through which [the human] acts in the world to practice virtue and to be of service”.³⁰ Gregory writes “God has provided every member [of the body] as good, to do good things”, explaining “the hands’ best work is to lift up always to heaven holy things, in readiness to practice heaven’s laws. For the feet, it’s to walk a straight road, not on thorns, neither along sea-scapes and an unholy path” (*Carm.* 2.1.45, 55-59). It is often assumed Gregory, influenced by Platonism, considered the body as something fundamentally evil from which the soul should seek to escape, yet in reality Gregory understands the body an essential aspect of the human person which aids the soul in its pursuit of heaven. Thus, while Gregory calls his body “my enemy” (*Or.* 14.6) on account of its drawing him towards physical things rather than God, he understands this to be part of its purpose in helping him grow in virtue and earn heaven. Thus, he also considers the body his “yokefellow” (*Or.* 16.15) his “fellow-servant” and “the helper I need to achieve my noble aims” (*Or.* 14.6). He also bestows these titles upon the body, because through it he acts and “it is through my actions that I

³⁰ Nonna Verna Harrison, *Festal Orations: St Gregory Nazianzus* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 49.

am to ascend to God" (*Or.* 14.6). While occasionally Gregory seems to espouse a more Platonic desire to be free from his physical body, ultimately, he recognises it as essential for his training and pursuit of heaven.

In Gregory's anthropology, the spiritual and physical elements form a synergy. Not only does the body aid the soul, but the soul aids the body. Gregory claims one purpose of the soul's union with the body is "that it may draw to itself and raise to heaven the lower nature, by gradually freeing it from its grossness, [...] itself leading on the matter which ministers to it, and uniting it, as its fellow-servant, to God" (*Or.* 2.17). He sees this as the achievement of martyrs "whose very bodies possess equal power with their holy souls, whether touched or worshipped" (*Or.* 4.69). The body aids the soul in its pursuit of heaven and the soul raises the body with it. Consequently, Gregory considers the body his "fellow heir" (*Or.* 14.6) and explains in heaven the soul "receives its kindred flesh, which once shared in its pursuits of things above" which "enters with it upon the inheritance of the glory there" (*Or.* 7.21). Gregory does not believe the soul should strive to be free of the body, but rather carry it heavenwards. A similar idea in Gregory is that "the dust, on wings of spirit, might be raised up also to the image" (*Carm.* 2.1.45, 19). This is contrary to Gabrielle Thomas' idea that for Gregory "the *eikon* relates not only to the soul but also to the whole, dynamic human person".³¹ She argues this partly because "as *Eikon* refers to the transcendent Logos and the incarnate Christ, likewise *eikon* denotes the whole human person, body and soul".³² However, Gregory uses "Eikon" to refer to the whole Christ, as Christ achieves what we strive to: raising the body to the soul in the image, so that both might be considered the *Eikon*. Curiously, Gregory often describes the body as something separate to himself — "my enemy", "my fellow-servant", "my fellow heir" (*Or.* 14.6). Thus, Beeley rightly notes for Gregory "the soul is practically synonymous with the willing self or the human subject, whereas the body is a secondary part of that subject and can even appear to be an object".³³ For Gregory the human person is primarily the soul which is akin to God and divine. This is distant from Athanasius' thoroughly earthly humanity.

³¹ Gabrielle Thomas, *The Image of God in the Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 118.

³² Thomas, *Image*, 36.

³³ Beeley, *Gregory*, 80.

Exploring the purpose of humanity's constitution, we also find the purpose and destiny of human life itself. The Edenic state for Athanasius was static. Humanity preserved the grace and continued to exist in stability. In contrast, for Gregory, humanity from the beginning is a creature in a state of growth. Earthly life is training for something else, namely deification. This is the purpose for which we were created. As Gregory explains, "the imperishable Son had made for himself a man in order to have new glory, and so that, in the last days, leaving the earth, man might journey from here to God, as god" (*Carm.* 1.1.8, 98-99). Gregory defines humanity as "a living creature trained here and transferred elsewhere, and, to complete the mystery, deified through inclination toward God" (*Or.* 38.11). The original created intention for humanity was that they should live an earthly life, struggling with the body, that they might grow and attain heaven as a prize, achieving "that deification for which we were born" (*Or.* 4.123), raising up the body with them "and uniting it, as [their] fellow-servant, to God" (*Or.* 2.17). Humanity's composition provided that which it required to achieve its created destiny of *theōsis*. As Beeley notes "God's mercy is shown from the beginning, in creating us as mixed creatures whose very constitution provides for our training and divinization".³⁴ The Fall disrupts the potential for humanity to fulfil its created destiny and thus, contrary to Athanasius for whom deification is only ever possible through the incarnation, as Beeley explains, "salvation is the restoration of the process of *theosis* that God established in creation".³⁵ The picture of Edenic humanity in our Fathers differs substantially. Athanasius' humanity stands distinct from and entirely dependent upon God, while Gregory's humanity is in part akin to divinity and naturally able to progress towards God and *theōsis*.

The Fall

As in Athanasius, the Fall sees the destruction of the Edenic state. Gregory's focus, unlike Athanasius', is on the Genesis story. He shows particular interest in the Tree of Knowledge "which was neither planted from the beginning in an evil way nor forbidden through envy [...] but would be good if possessed at the right time. For the tree is contemplation [...] which is only safe for those of mature disposition to undertake; but it is not good for those who are still simpler and those greedy in their desire, just as adult food is not useful for

³⁴ Beeley, *Gregory*, 82.

³⁵ Beeley, *Gregory*, 119.

those who are still tender and in need of milk" (*Or.* 38.12). The Tree was initially forbidden, that humanity might grow in virtue by adherence to the commandment. However, when their training was complete it would have been good for them, being contemplation. Having grasped it prematurely, the Tree was not the good for them that it was intended to be.

Gregory understands Adam's sin as universal, lamenting "alas for my weakness, for that of the first father is mine!" (*Or.* 38.12) and claiming, "for my brief moment of pleasure I was condemned to sorrow [...] through the tasting of the fruit" (*Or.* 19.14). The devil also plays a prominent role in Gregory's account. He believes Satan deceived humanity since he did not "wish God's creature to draw near to the divinity whence he'd fallen, since he longed to have humans with him in a common sin and darkness" (*Carm.* 1.1.7, 63-65). Winslow notes "The substance of Satan's trickery was to offer us something that was not his to give, something that belonged, in fact, to us, but not yet. 'Ye shall be as god,' he said. In the face of this offer, Adam and Eve sought to grasp the very thing that was to have been theirs, had they been willing to wait, namely, *theōsis*".³⁶ Humanity does exactly what it should not, overcome by ambition they try to prematurely seize their deification. This is another departure from Athanasius, for whom the Fall was caused by a process of humanity turning from God.

The Fall unbalanced the delicate synergy of human nature. A recurring idea in Gregory, drawing from Genesis 3:21, is that upon tasting the fruit humanity "was clothed in the tunics of skin, that is perhaps the more coarse and mortal and rebellious flesh" (*Or.* 38.12). Humanity's material element, which once aided them in attaining their heavenly destiny, became 'more coarse' and heavy. Adam is "weighed down to his earth in coats of skins" (*Carm.* 1.2.1, 93). No longer can humanity aspire to raise up the body to divine heights, since the struggle with the body has become too challenging for the soul to turn to God. Winslow describes the Fall as a transition from "creative struggle" between humanity's higher and lower elements to "open warfare".³⁷ It often appears Gregory resents the body, but as Harrison notes, "the problem is with fallen flesh, not embodiment as such".³⁸ Indeed Gregory laments, "while God has provided every member as good, to do good things, evil has found them an instrument towards my death" (*Carm.* 2.1.45, 59-60). The body is an

³⁶ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 64.

³⁷ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 68.

³⁸ Harrison, *Festal*, 51.

essential part of a human, necessary for attaining heaven, to which it is co-heir. However, the coarseness of fallen flesh upsets the balance between humanity's parts so the soul no longer struggles with the body, but hopelessly wars with it. Gregory writes of "the internal warfare within ourselves [...] against the law of sin, which wars against the law of the spirit, and strives to destroy the royal image in us, [...] so that it is difficult for anyone [...] to overcome the depressing power of matter" (*Or.* 2.91). This is not our natural created state, but the result of the Fall's corruption of our natural equilibrium. Matz suggests there is a linguistic distinction for Gregory between *σῶμα* and *σάρξ*. The former refers to "that part of a person that is material, corporeal [...] the term is morally neutral".³⁹ He explains "Adam, who had always had a *sōma*, now after eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil has a *sarx*, too. It is this presence of *sarx* that now contributes to our continued bent towards sinful actions".⁴⁰ Gregory claims the Fall results in the corruption of humanity's natural condition as something is added (*σάρξ*) upsetting their natural equilibrium, while for Athanasius the Fall involves the loss of something (grace), revealing humanity's natural state. Humanity's natural state for Athanasius is post-fallen humanity, for Gregory it is pre-fallen humanity. Additionally, while turning from God to the material is the cause of the Fall for Athanasius, for Gregory material obsession is a consequence. Notably, the state of fallen humanity for both is characterised in part by an inability to turn from the material to the divine.

Gregory's views differ from Athanasius' regarding corruption and death. For Athanasius humanity is naturally subject to dissolution, whereas Gregory suggests humanity is naturally immortal in part. Considering the physical and spiritual elements in himself, Gregory claims to be "mortal and immortal" (*Or.* 7.23), for while the body is "perishable failing matter, which absolutely must be dissolved" (*Or.* 2.16), the soul "is a breath of God [...] divine and imperishable. For it would not be right for the great God's image to disintegrate" (*Carm.* 1.1.8, 1-4). Gregory suggests had we not fallen then the whole human "should, by reaching the tree of life from the tree of knowledge, have become [...] immortal" (*Or.* 44.4) as the body is raised to the image. Yet as Adam fell this was not so. While for Athanasius the fleeting nature of fallen humanity's existence is the ultimate cause for despair, Gregory

³⁹ Matz, "Gregory", 309.

⁴⁰ Matz, "Gregory", 310.

considers death introduced by the Fall a positive. He explains humanity “gained a certain advantage from this; death is also the cutting off of sin, that evil might not be immortal” (*Or.* 38.12). Death, again, is something added to human nature not proper to it, as Winslow explains, “mortality is not part of the ‘natural man,’ that is of our created condition. Gregory [...] regards the fall as a fall away from the natural state, not as a fall into the natural state”.⁴¹ Again our fathers diverge and Winslow actually contrasts Gregory’s view with the idea that Edenic immortality was “a ‘supernatural’ grace bestowed tentatively and then removed because of our freely chosen selfish disobedience”, which is almost exactly Athanasius’ view.⁴² However, we find agreement in the Fathers’ concept of being, as Gregory too understands God to be “he who is” and “the very source of our being” (*Or.* 19.8), whereas “evil has no substance” (*Or.* 40.45). Thus, sin for Gregory, as Athanasius, occurs when humanity “delights in material, things unstable and fleeting, as if they were good” (*Carm.* 2.1.45, 77-78).

Summary

Our Fathers’ ontologies, while not entirely contradictory, have different focuses. Athanasius is concerned primarily with the ontological divide between God and everything else, while Gregory concentrates on the distinction between the immortal spiritual realm and the temporal earthly one. Consequently, they also diverge regarding anthropology. Athanasius’ humanity is in nature unstable and entirely dependent upon grace for existence. The body and soul, considered ontologically the same, are wholly other than God. In Eden, humanity possessed the grace of being in the image which they were tasked with maintaining by looking towards God; this was not the deified state. In contrast, Gregory’s humanity is naturally divine and earthly, composed of a spiritual element, akin to God, and a material one. Through the interaction of these elements, humanity should, if they had not fallen, have been able to grow towards attaining heaven and *theōsis* as a prize. For Athanasius, humanity fell by turning from God to material things and becoming habituated to doing so. The result was the loss of the grace which gave humanity its privileged sustained existence and the revealing of humanity’s natural state, one of corruption. For Gregory, the Fall involved humanity ambitiously grasping at their deification for which they were not yet

⁴¹ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 67.

⁴² Winslow, *Dynamics*, 67-68.

ready and failing to keep the commandment. The result was the addition of *sarx* which disrupted their natural state, rendering them unable to attain *theōsis*. For both Fathers we find humanity now in a state of decay, habituated to its sin and unable to turn towards God, though for Athanasius this is their natural state, while for Gregory it is a perversion of their nature. Yet both our Fathers recognise the same need: a need for a saviour.

Chapter 2: The Redemptive Work of Christ

The salvation of humanity and restoration of the Edenic state centres around the incarnational union for both Athanasius and Gregory. Differences between our Fathers here stem from their anthropology and concept of the Fall. As their views do not align on the Edenic state and what the consequences of the Fall were, unsurprisingly their ideas concerning how Christ restores this state and overcomes these consequences are not identical.

Athanasius

To redeem fallen humanity and save them from their natural condition, God becomes human to exalt them. Athanasius' concept of *theopoēsis* is centred on the exchange principle: God "was made man that we might be made God" (*DI* 54.3). For him, Christology and soteriology are intrinsically linked, since it is in the act of becoming human that Christ enables us to become divine. However, the incarnation is not for Athanasius the singular event of Christ's conception, but rather the whole of Christ's human life. In his doctrine of salvation human redemption is not contingent upon the cross alone, but is the result of all Christ's life and actions. Regarding the exchange formula, one must understand, as Vladimir Kharmalov notes, "The symmetrical structure of this 'exchange formula' by no means assumes a relationship between equal participants".⁴³ Athanasius explains "the Flesh did not diminish the glory of the Word; far be the thought: on the contrary, it was glorified by Him" (*AA* 4). He labours this point frequently.⁴⁴ The incarnation involves God assuming humanity to raise it up to divine heights with Him. In this way "Mankind then is perfected in Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay with greater grace" (*CA* 2.67). Christ not only restores the Edenic state, but more intimately unites humanity with God and elevates their status so they become gods themselves.

Corruption and Death

The most prominent fruit of Christ's redemptive work for Athanasius is the bestowal of incorruptibility and immortality upon humanity. Chief among the consequences of the Fall was the loss of stable existence. Unsurprisingly then, the remedying of this state of

⁴³ Kharlamov, "Rhetorical", 120.

⁴⁴ See *CA* 3.38, *DD* 14.

corruption is a key aspect of salvation and *theopoiēsis*. Athanasius explains no other could save humanity from their natural corruption than “Christ, Who is the Very Life” (DI 20.1). Being *life* and *being* itself, when the Logos was united with human nature “it was placed out of reach of corruption” (DI 20.4). Humanity’s ontological poverty is rectified by its union with God who is himself *being*. Athanasius writes “the flesh, corruptible as it was, should no longer after its own nature remain mortal, but because of the Word who had put it on, should abide incorruptible” (CA 3.57). Edenic grace was a greater participation in the Word. Incarnational grace is a renewed participation in “the immortality that is from Him” (CA 3.57). Humanity is still in nature corruptible, but united to being itself it transcends this characteristic, becoming immortal, no longer tending towards non-existence. Incarnational grace which grants humanity stability of being differs from Edenic grace as Athanasius considers the latter “grace from without” while the former is “united to the body” (CA 2.68). He explains,

“the corruption which had set in was not external to the body, but had become attached to it; and it was required that, instead of corruption, life should cleave to it [...] if death were external to the body, it would be proper for life also to have been engendered externally to it. But if death was wound closely to the body and was ruling over it as though united to it, it was required that life also should be wound closely to the body, that so the body, by putting on life in its stead, should cast off corruption” (DI 44.4-5).

Being is not attached to the body externally, but through the hypostatic union life and being are intimately united to human nature, granting humanity greater and more secure participation in God who *is*.

Athanasius also understands Christ’s death to save humanity from death. Athanasius often understands Christ’s undergoing of negative human experiences to be simultaneous with his overcoming of them and speaks of death in the same way. He writes Christ “received that death which came from men, in order perfectly to do away with this when it met Him in His own body” (DI 22.3). However, Athanasius often suggests corruption was eliminated when Christ became human and life was united to human nature; he less frequently suggests Christ needed to undergo death to bestow immortality. Weinandy has suggested “Having wound the body of death closely to himself in the Incarnation, the Word of life transforms it

into his incorruptible divine life through his death and resurrection".⁴⁵ However, I feel Athanasius' writings are better understood by drawing a distinction between corruptibility and death, which is exactly what Athanasius does in a passage from the *Festal Letters*: "He went down to corruption, that corruption might put on immortality, [...] He descended into death, that He might bestow on us immortality, and give life to the dead" (*FL* 10.8). Christ overcomes human frailties by encountering them in his human life. So human corruptibility is overcome by Christ simply becoming human, since he immediately encounters that state of tending towards nothingness which humans constantly experience, while death is overcome when he encounters it in his own death. The two are connected in Athanasius since the result is the same: the bestowal of immortality upon human nature. This requires both corruption and death be overcome.

Suffering

For Athanasius, *theopoiēsis* attained by Christ for humanity also involves freedom from suffering. Here we see more fully Athanasius' notion of Christ undergoing human experiences to overcome them. Athanasius distinguishes between that which is "proper to the very Word by nature" and that which is "proper by nature to the very flesh" (*CA* 3.34). Using 1 Peter 4:1, he explains Biblical accounts of Christ suffering refer to "'Christ then having suffered,' not in His Godhead, but 'for us in the flesh,'" (*CA* 3.34). Remaining impassible in his divinity, Christ suffers in his humanity. Athanasius expresses this paradoxically, noting "it is strange that He it was Who suffered and yet suffered not" (*AE* 6). Yet, Anatolios notes, "the human attributes of Christ are not simply juxtaposed to the divine; they are transformed".⁴⁶ Athanasius explains, "He Himself, being impassible in nature, remains as He is, not harmed by these affections, but rather obliterating and destroying them, men, their passions as if changed and abolished in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves also impassible and free from them for ever" (*CA* 3.34). When Christ suffers his divine impassibility encounters human suffering and overcomes it. As Athanasius writes "He underwent all things that we by His sufferings might put on freedom from suffering" (*AM* 4). This is essentially the exchange formula again: He who is free from suffering suffers, that we who suffer may become free from suffering. This is seen

⁴⁵ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 42.

⁴⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 149.

in Athanasius' explanation of Christ's fear, for "the terror belonged to the flesh [...] For the sake of this flesh He combined His own will with human weakness, that destroying this affection He might in turn make man undaunted in face of death. [...] He by that so-called terror renders men undaunted and fearless" (CA 3.57).

Athanasius' understanding of grace as participation is the key to deciphering how Christ undergoing human frailties annuls them. God is being and humanity is ontologically dependent upon participation in God for existence. Edenic grace was a greater participation in God, granting humanity stable existence and now incarnational grace is an even greater and more intimate participation in God. Quoting 2 Peter 1:4, Athanasius writes "He has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself [...] and that we may become henceforth a holy race, and 'partakers of the Divine Nature'" (AA 4). Corruption is a result of a lack in humanity, a lack of being. As only God *is* and God does not suffer, suffering too cannot be something in itself, but, like evil, is rather a deficiency. Ignorance is an obvious example of this, for to be ignorant is to lack knowledge and this is a frailty which Christ undergoes to overcome. Athanasius explains "He knew where Lazarus lay, and yet He asked; for the All-holy Word of God, who endured all things for our sakes, did this, that so carrying our ignorance, He might vouchsafe to us the knowledge of His own only and true Father" (CA 3.38). Christ encounters a lack in human nature which is overcome as it encounters his abundance. The lack is no more since divinity bestows upon humanity what was missing. Divine omniscience fills the lack of knowledge in humanity so ignorance is no more. Although we might consider freedom of suffering the absence of suffering, in truth suffering is the deficiency – the absence of impassibility. Through Christ assuming human nature we may "partake of the immortality that is from Him" (CA 3.57). Similarly, through undergoing the other frailties of humanity, Christ grants us greater and secure participation in the divine attributes rectifying our deficiency. As with immortality, our natural condition remains the same, one of deficiency and suffering, but through the grace of participation in the divine attributes we transcend our natural state and are freed from our natural frailties. The intimacy and security of participation in the divine attributes allows humanity to transcend its natural state and become gods. This is the essence of *theopoēsis*.

Elevated Status

Part of Christ's redemptive work for Athanasius involves receiving gifts on our behalf of which we are unworthy. Athanasius clarifies the meaning of Philippians 2:9, "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name".⁴⁷ Christ could not be highly exalted if he was always God, since he was already the highest and in need of nothing. Thus, Athanasius explains "the term in question, 'highly exalted', does not signify that the essence of the Word was exalted, for He was ever and is 'equal to God,' but the exaltation is of the manhood" (CA 1.41). Just as Christ does not suffer in his divinity, but in his humanity, so too he is exalted within his humanity not his Godhead. Due to our connection with his humanity, Christ's humanity receives for our benefit. So Christ "was exalted as man, so, as man, is He said to take what, as God, He ever had, that even such a grant of grace might reach to us" (CA 1.42). Athanasius stresses Christ is said to receive that which "the mere Word had not needed", because we needed them, yet "of such a gift mere man had not become worthy" (CA 4.6). Sinful humanity is unworthy of high exaltation, yet the humanity perfected by Christ may receive these gifts. In places Athanasius suggests the Father bestows this exaltation upon Christ, writing "the Father regarding Him vouchsafed to man to be exalted" (CA 4.7). Yet elsewhere it is the very act of the Word becoming human that effects the elevation of humanity. Athanasius teaches "He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; [...] He descended to effect their promotion" (CA 1.38) and elsewhere "the Word being in man, highly exalted man himself" (CA 4.6). The key to reconciling these statements is the Athanasian principle: the Word "gives from the Father, for all things which the Father does and gives, He does and supplies through Him" (CA 1.45). The Father gives through the Son and thus as Son of God Christ gives and as Son of Man he receives. We see this in the destruction of corruption and suffering. Christ's redemptive work centres on the interaction of divinity and humanity within himself. He gives in his divinity and receives in his humanity. Exaltation involves several things for Athanasius. In part exaltation involves humanity becoming sons, though this will be considered with pneumatology later. Exaltation also involves the transformation of humanity into heavenly creatures. Athanasius explains "For whereas the powers in heaven, both Angels and Archangels, were ever worshipping the

⁴⁷ Here and elsewhere taken from the NRSV.

Lord, as they are now worshipping Him in the Name of Jesus, this is our grace and high exaltation, that even when He became man, the Son of God is worshipped” (CA 1.42). The Word becoming human causes the elevation of humanity to divinity, so Christ is worshipped not only as God, but also as human and thus humanity as a whole receives great honour. Athanasius suggests this is how incarnational grace is “greater” than Edenic, “For, on rising from the dead, we shall [...] ever reign in Christ in the heavens” (CA 2.67). Christ “ascend[ed] as man, and carr[ied] up to heaven the flesh which He bore” (CA 3.48). Humanity has entered the gates of heaven through Christ. Christ ascended to “introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after his likeness” (CA 2.70). Athanasius poetically writes “the heavenly powers will not be astonished at seeing all of us, who are of one body with Him, introduced into their realms” (CA 1.42), for humanity dwells there already through Christ. Additionally, “He Himself is said to have been born, who furnishes to others an origin of being; in order that He may transfer our origin into Himself, and we may no longer, as mere earth, return to earth, but as being knit into the Word from heaven, may be carried to heaven by Him” (CA 3.33). We no longer from dust return to dust, but knit to the man from heaven return to heaven with him. We rise to heaven, “the flesh being no longer earthly, but being henceforth made Word, by reason of God's Word who for our sake ‘became flesh’” (CA 3.33), for “though an animal body, it is become spiritual, and though made from earth it entered the heavenly gates” (AE 9). Our exaltation is that we transcend our earthly nature, becoming “Word” which is our deification. United to Christ, our origin becomes heavenly, thus it is to this rather than earth that we will return.

Stability

We have seen how Christ’s redemptive work involves both giving grace divinely and receiving it humanly. Key to Athanasius’ theology is the concept that creatures are defined by a perpetually state of lack, while God lacks nothing, but constantly gives. God is defined by his generosity, while humanity is fundamentally “a natural recipient” (CA 1.45) of this generosity. The hypostatic union for Athanasius means Christ is both the giver and receiver of grace. This is important for two reasons. Athanasius suggests God could have “but spoken, because it was in His power, and so the curse had been undone, [...] but man had become such as Adam was before the transgression, having received grace from without, and not having it united to the body” (CA 2.68). Peter Widdicombe explains “With such an

inadequate giving of grace, grace would have remained 'external' (ἐξωθεν) to man, as it had been for Adam in paradise. But accommodating himself to man's need in the incarnation, the Father creates a union of grace with the body of his Son, and thus grace is no longer from outside".⁴⁸ Anatolios clarifies the distinction Athanasius is really drawing is "between the supreme instance of 'internality' constituted by the unity of the Word with the body and absolutely every other model of interaction between God and humanity".⁴⁹ Through the incarnation, grace is united to humanity in an *internal* way. The union of grace and humanity is now as intimate as that of the natures in Christ. For Athanasius, "the union was of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure" (CA 2.70).

The second way the hypostatic union perfects the reception of grace concerns the inalterability of the Word. Adam's alterability was the defining problem with maintaining Edenic grace, thus, "it became the second Adam to be unalterable" (CA 1.51). Christ "is said humanly to have received, that, whereas the flesh received in Him, henceforth from it the gift might abide surely for us" (CA 3.40). Athanasius claims that which "mere man receives, he is liable to lose again [...] but that the grace may be irrevocable, and may be kept sure by men, therefore He Himself appropriates the gift" (CA 3.38). Anatolios explains, "since the giving of one party is always contingent on the other party's capacity to receive, and since humanity had already demonstrated its woeful incapacity to receive and keep the gift, the unsurpassable gift of the incarnation is that we were given the very reception of the gift".⁵⁰ Christ perfects our reception of grace. Through his divine inalterability, the grace which he receives humanly remains secure, since, unlike Adam, he cannot change and fall away from it. The incarnation perfects divine-human relations, as God gives and humanity receives securely through Christ. Christ not only "renew[s] the first creation", but also "preserve[s] the new which had come to be" (CA 2.65). The salvation and deification of humanity could only be secured by the intimacy of the incarnation and the extension of divine inalterability to human nature.

⁴⁸ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 225.

⁴⁹ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 132-133.

⁵⁰ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 161.

Among those gifts Christ gives and receives, none surpass the indwelling of the Spirit. Athanasius recognises Christ's baptism as the moment in which he secures the indwelling of the Spirit for humanity. He explains "the Spirit's descent on Him in the Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body" (CA 1.47). He stresses Christ is "Himself He that supplies the Holy Spirit" (CA 1.46), yet for our sake he receives it himself. Anatolios suggests "It is Christ's reception of grace — or, more specifically, Christ's human reception of the Holy Spirit on our behalf — that is seen as the ultimate 'securing' of grace".⁵¹ Athanasius claims "no otherwise should we have partaken the Spirit and been sanctified, but that the Giver of the Spirit, the Word Himself, has spoken of Himself as anointed with the Spirit for us" (CA 1.50), but also suggests some prior to the incarnation received it. Anatolios argues Athanasius just "want[s] to emphasize that our reception of the Spirit is to be ascribed in a most eminent way to the Incarnation, because it is there that the Word himself received humanly on our behalf, and thus granted us the definitive 'remaining' in grace", not that there was no communication of grace before this.⁵² Indeed, Athanasius stresses those with this grace prior to the incarnation "altered" and "the Spirit was taken away" (CA 1.37). Receiving the Spirit at his baptism within his humanity which was united to his divine inalterability, Christ secures the Spirit's indwelling for us in a way impossible prior to the incarnation.

Disposition to Sin

Humanity fell, turned from God towards the material and became habituated to their sin. Christ rectifies this in his redemptive work in two ways. First, his merely being united to human nature destroys sin that arises in it. Athanasius suggests Christ became human that "by His dwelling in the flesh, sin might perfectly be expelled from the flesh, and we might have a free mind" (CA 2.56) and elsewhere, "the Word being clothed in flesh [...] every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunchd from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away" (CA 2.69). Athanasius connects this to Christ overcoming the Devil's assaults on humanity. He argues our salvation would not have come to pass "had the Word been a creature; for with a creature, the devil, himself a creature, would have ever continued the battle" (CA 2.70). As God, the Word defeats the devil when

⁵¹ Anatolios, "Soteriological Significance", 282-283.

⁵² Anatolios, "Soteriological Significance", 283.

he attacks humanity. The second way concerns God assuming a physical body. Athanasius suggests “men’s mind having finally fallen to things of sense, the Word disguised himself by appearing in a body, that He might as Man, transfer men to Himself, and centre their senses on Him” (*DI* 16.1). Humanity had turned from God to the material and were unable to turn back to him. God becomes material so we might fix our minds on him with greater ease. Steenberg explains “The Word becomes accessible in a new way to the senses, and in that becoming, the senses are brought into contemplation of God himself so that they may participate in God himself, and so bring the human person into fuller union with the divine”.⁵³ Christ opened a new path to contemplation of God, as God is now discoverable in the material. Anatolios suggests since “the soul itself has sunk to the level of the sensible, [it] could only be raised up if the Word also condescended to make himself knowable on that level”.⁵⁴ Athanasius actually mentions this incarnational purpose alongside the exchange formula, writing “He was made man that we might be made God; and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father” (*DI* 54.3). The Word destroys our inward disposition towards sin by uniting himself with human nature and aids us in looking towards God by bringing God to us.

The Cross

Occasionally it appears Athanasius considers the cross secondary to the rest of Christ’s redemptive life, yet this is not so. *Theopoiēsis* is not synonymous with salvation for Athanasius, but is just one aspect of his soteriology. Thomas Torrance identifies within Athanasius, alongside *theopoiēsis*, “conceptions of atoning expiation, priestly propitiation, and substitutionary sacrifice and victory over the forces of evil, which together constitute what he means by redemption”.⁵⁵ Most scholars recognise varying soteriological strands within Athanasius, though, as Jules Gross observes, Athanasius “does not synthesize these various elements with the deifying role of the incarnation”.⁵⁶ Athanasius stresses the need for Christ to pay “the debt in our stead” (*CA* 2.66); “offer himself for us through death to the

⁵³ Steenberg, *Of God*, 180.

⁵⁴ Khaled Anatolios, “‘The Body as Instrument’: A Reevaluation of Athanasius’ Logox-Sarx Christology”, *Coptic Church Review* 18 (1997), 84.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 194.

⁵⁶ Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul Onica (Anaheim: A&C Press, 2002), 171. See also Jeffrey Finch, “Athanasius on the Deifying Work of the Redeemer”, in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 116.

Father" (CA 1.41); pay the "ransoms" (CA 2.7), and serve "the sentence of death" on our behalf (CA 2.69). The cross is essential to Athanasius' soteriology, even if he does not draw out how Christ's sacrifice works alongside his deifying work. In *De Incarnatione* two strands of Athanasius' soteriology are juxtaposed as he writes "two marvels came to pass at once, that the death of all was accomplished in the Lord's body, and that death and corruption were wholly done away by reason of the Word who was united with it" (DI 20.5). The first marvel concerns the sacrificial death on the cross and the second, the deifying union of the Word with human nature. Though Athanasius does not make this step, perhaps Christ's deifying and atoning work depend on each other to bring about salvation. The fruits of deification could only be enjoyed by humanity if the debt from their transgression was paid and they were released from the law of death, but the atoning work alone would not have deified and saved humanity from its natural condition. The fullness of salvation, humanity deified and free from the debt of sin, requires both Christ's deifying life and atoning death.

Summary

For Athanasius, Christ's deifying work revolves around his encountering human deficiencies through the assumption of human nature and overcoming them. Encountering corruption and death, he grants humanity greater participation in his divine being; encountering suffering, he brings humanity into greater participation of his divine impassibility; finding humanity lowly, he allows them to share in his exaltation; finding them devoid of the Spirit, he brings the Spirit to dwell within humanity, and to seal these gifts he perfects humanity's receptivity to the divine by uniting human nature to himself and providing stability in his divine inalterability. Humanity is restored to its Edenic condition and raised higher through greater and more secure participation in the divine attributes, allowing them to transcend their natural condition. This deifying work, alongside Christ's atoning death, bring about salvation. To quote Athanasius, "the achievements of the Saviour, resulting from His becoming man, are of such kind and number, that if one should wish to enumerate them, he may be compared to men who gaze at the expanse of the sea and wish to count its waves" (CA 54.4).

Gregory

The defining phrases of Gregory's incarnational soteriology resemble Athanasius'. Espousing the exchange formula, he declares "Let us become like Christ, since Christ also became like

us; let us become gods because of him, since he also because of us became human" (*Or.* 1.5). Yet our Fathers diverge on the specifics of Christ's deifying work. Winslow observes on "whether or not the incarnation would have taken place had there been no Fall, Gregory is silent", yet he believes "it certainly would not be inconsistent with his views to postulate an incarnation as the independently planned means of conducting mankind further on its pilgrimage towards *theōsis*, although such an incarnation would not have involved suffering and death".⁵⁷ I am tempted to go further than Winslow and categorically assert the best way to understand Gregory's incarnational soteriology is to consider separately the actual deification of human nature through the person of Christ, which would have happened regardless of the Fall, and the saving work of Christ which addresses the consequences of the Fall and restores humanity to a state whereby they can once again progress towards this *theōsis*. This could be explained as putting the stress on the "also" in the dictum which most famously encapsulates Gregory's soteriology: "The unassumed is the unhealed, but what is united with God is also being saved" (*Ep.* 101.5). Christ both unites human nature with divinity, deifying it, and heals and saves humanity from sin and its consequences. That this is primarily the work of one action, assuming, often leads to conflating them when reading Gregory, yet he regularly treats them as separate purposes of the incarnation.

The Deification of Human Nature

As in Athanasius, for Gregory, by assuming human nature the Word deifies it. Mixture is a crucial concept for Gregory. Christ is "the new mixture" (*Or.* 38.13), not body and soul, but divinity and humanity. Andrew Hofer argues though Gregory's mixture language is often thought of as him "borrowing from Stoicism, the Stoic doctrines of mixture must be situated within the much wider debate in antiquity initiated by Aristotle".⁵⁸ Within mixture "for Aristotle, there is a sort of transformation so that the stronger overpowers the weaker, while for the Stoics, that which is little is preserved intact when it comes into contact with that which is greater".⁵⁹ We have seen this Aristotelean element in his anthropology, as humanity strives for the spiritual side to overcome the material, making them both the image. Gregory writes, Christ is "Man and God blended. They became a single whole, the

⁵⁷ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 114, note 1.

⁵⁸ Andrew Hofer, *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 120.

⁵⁹ Hofer, *Christ*, 101.

stronger side predominating” (*Or.* 29.19) and “what was assumed, [...] has been anointed with divinity and become that which anointed it, and, I make bold to say, one with God” (*Or.* 45.13). As in Athanasius, “both what deifies and what is deified are the one same God” (*Carm.* 1.1.10, 61). Beeley notes for Gregory “the subject of Christ's human existence is God”, and this “preference for single-nature expressions reflects the crucial asymmetry that exists between God and humanity in Christ”.⁶⁰ God assumes human nature and makes it one with him that it too may be considered God.

The deification of Christ's human nature is foundational for the deification of all humanity. Beeley explains “while the divinization of Christ is in principle the divinization of all humanity, in actual practice it is the divinization of only Christ's human nature”.⁶¹ Gregory argues “involvement with God” and “being made God” are possible “as a result of this intermingling” of Christ's natures (*Or.* 30.3). Gregory uses the concepts of Christ as “a chief corner stone” (*Or.* 21.7) and “a sort of yeast for the whole lump” (*Or.* 30.21) to explain our deification being built on him. Gregory's personal language when dealing with Christology expresses his belief that we are deified through the incarnation. He writes “This is the doctrine of God who's been mingled with you” (*Carm.* 1.1.10, 12) and that Christ “bears the whole of me [...] so that I may share in what is his through the intermingling” (*Or.* 30.6). Depicting the incarnational union as that between God and the individual is intended to stress that this is the means by which we are united with God, though only in principle. Winslow notes, *theōsis* “is neither immediate nor automatic”.⁶² In the moment of the incarnation all of humanity was not instantaneously deified and united to God, but rather because of this event they can be. Gregory writes “Even at this moment he is, as man, making representation for my salvation, until he makes me divine by the power of his incarnate manhood” (*Or.* 30.14). This passage is crucial for several reasons. First, “until” suggests Gregory is yet to be deified. His deification will occur at the *eschaton*. Secondly, Christ is the acting subject here – he deifies us. Elsewhere, Gregory suggests that *theōsis* is something for which we strive ourselves. Finally, it is “by the power of his incarnate

⁶⁰ Beeley, *Gregory*, 137; Christopher Beeley, *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 188.

⁶¹ Beeley, *Gregory*, 147.

⁶² Winslow, *Dynamics*, 96.

manhood” that we are divinised, suggesting the incarnational union is necessary for our deification. God assumes human nature to deify humanity.

The Healing of Human Nature

A second purpose of the incarnation is to heal human nature so we can once again strive to attain *theōsis*, to “gain the objects of our hope as a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God” (*Or.* 2.17). *Theōsis* is about us rising to God and God coming down to us. As Gregory writes “As long as each [God and humanity] remains at his own level, the one at the top, the other in lowliness, the goodness is not mingled and the love for humankind is not shared, and a great chasm that cannot be crossed is in the middle” (*Or.* 41.12). Our Edenic ability to strive for our own *theōsis* refers to our part in crossing this chasm. God deifying us by the incarnation refers to his. Logically, though not explicit in Gregory, had we not fallen, we would have walked the path to *theōsis* raising ourselves to God and he would have become incarnate, coming down to meet and deify us as we reached up to him. Yet as we fell and could no longer walk this path, God through his incarnation also restores human nature that we might do so again. Gregory recognising these dual purposes of the incarnation writes, “he comes down to the same level as his fellow-slaves; receiving an alien ‘form’ he bears the whole of me, along with all that is mine, in himself, so that he may consume within himself the meaner element [...] and so that I may share in what is his through the intermingling” (*Or.* 30.6). Having considered the latter, we now turn to the former.

Uniting human nature to his divinity, Christ heals it so that humanity might again struggle to attain its heavenly destiny. Gregory stresses Christ must have possessed a full human nature consisting of both the material and spiritual aspects. Famously, he declares “The unassumed is the unhealed” (*Ep.* 101.5) and thus God must have assumed both the body and mind, since the mind was “The very thing that transgressed” and thus “stood in special need of salvation” (*Ep.* 101.9). Christ is “wholly God and man, saving me wholly” (*Carm.* 1.1.10, 23). Harrison claims “Gregory of Nazianzus is exceptionally clear and insightful in describing how it is that Christ saves us”, referring to the dictum above.⁶³ While perhaps clear, Gregory is not precise. What is certain is that uniting it to his Godhead, Christ destroys our sinful nature and purifies us. Christ sets in humanity “a purifying fire” which “consumes matter

⁶³ Harrison, *Festal*, 53.

and evil habits" (*Or.* 40.36) and "a sword to cut out the roots of wickedness" (*Or.* 21.7). This process happens internally as he "consume[s] *within himself* the meaner element, as fire consumes wax or the Sun ground mist" (*Or.* 30.6). Less metaphorically, Gregory claims "his sinlessness was superior to our level and purged our passions" (*Ep.* 102.3), elsewhere explaining "I could not draw nigh [to God], because of my passions" (*Carm.* 1.1.9, 55).

Christ frees humanity from passions and that which prevents the soul from rising to God. Doing so he restores the image. Gregory explains "he lit a lamp, his own flesh, and swept the house, cleansing the world of sin, and searched for the coin, the royal image covered with a heap of passions" (*Or.* 38.14). Gregory resembles Athanasius in understanding the union of humanity with divinity to result in the former being purged of its sinful nature and material obsession. Opposing Apollinarianism, Gregory stresses Christ assumed a soul, yet equally important to him is that Christ assumed a body along with "flesh". Gregory believes "God's love for us could not have been revealed in any way other than by mention of 'flesh,' meaning he came down [...] to a meaner level" (*Ep.* 101.12). In the incarnation, "The fleshless one takes flesh, the Word is made coarse" (*Or.* 38.2). It is flesh which prevents the soul from raising the body to divinity. This "coarse" element is united to the Word that he might overcome it. When resurrected he is "no longer flesh yet not without body but [...] with a more deiform body [...] without fleshy coarseness" (*Or.* 40.45). Humanity is remoulded as Christ frees it from the passions and coarseness of the flesh which prevent the soul rising to heaven with the body, allowing us to once again walk the path of *theōsis*.

The Path to Theōsis

Christ not only restores us to a state whereby we might walk the path to *theōsis*, but also adapts the path to our fallen condition. Gregory suggests Christ "goes to sleep, in order that He may bless sleep also; perhaps He is tired that He may hallow weariness also; perhaps He weeps that He may make tears blessed" (*Or.* 37.2). Winslow suggests here Gregory is expressing an exchange of properties similar to Athanasius, whereby Christ assumes human weaknesses to overcome them through his divine attributes.⁶⁴ Gregory does claim "each property of His, Who was above us, was interchanged with each of ours" (*Or.* 2.24), which seems to support this reading. Yet for Gregory the exchange of properties is less literal and

⁶⁴ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 93.

more poetic than Athanasius. Whenever he discusses exchange, he does not mention suffering or specific human properties, but is less precise, explaining “He assumed what is worse that he might give what is better, He became poor that we through his poverty might become rich” (*Or.* 1.5). Winslow is mistaken. Christ’s blessing of these aspects of human life is not an overcoming of them as in Athanasius. Gregory’s view is rather, as Harrison notes, that “God becomes present in the most ordinary of human activities”.⁶⁵ Here again, what is vital is that, as Beeley observes, “the subject of Christ’s human existence is God”.⁶⁶ God lives a human life of human activities that we might unite our own lives to him. Regular human experiences are now a path to God. God has slept, so now this act is divine. He has wept so this becomes a path to him. Since God himself has done them, the natural processes of human existence become a way to divinity. As Hofer explains “Christ’s very presence sanctifies [...] all of human life, even its less edifying actions”.⁶⁷

On this account, Gregory, like Athanasius, considers our post-incarnational condition superior to our pre-lapsarian state. Through Christ’s life, God “shares with us a second communion, much more paradoxical than the first; then he gave us a share in what is superior, now he shares in what is inferior” (*Or.* 28.13). In the beginning we were given the soul and the image, a share in what is above, that we might struggle to raise up our whole self to God. Now God shares our human condition, so all human life becomes a path to him. Gregory, like Athanasius, suggests God could have brought salvation “by the mere expression of his will”, yet “What he did give us was greater and more compelling: he embraced human feelings and the human condition” (*Or.* 19.13). Suffering holds a special place for Gregory among that which Christ assumes. This is the greatest marvel, that God incorporates the lowest point of human existence into the plan of salvation, as “God becomes man and suffers with our suffering” (*Or.* 44.4). In part Christ blesses suffering itself, though Gregory also links suffering with Christ honouring obedience. Christ “honours obedience in practice and puts it to proof by suffering. Just as in our case, the disposition is an unsatisfactory thing unless we give it practical effect — deeds show disposition” (*Or.* 30.6). Obedience to the commandment allowed us to develop in Eden, so too Christ honours obedience that again this might be a means by which we grow in *theōsis*. God

⁶⁵ Harrison, *Festal*, 34.

⁶⁶ Beeley, *Gregory*, 137.

⁶⁷ Hofer, *Christ*, 41.

shares our condition, even the lowest point of it, that he might transform human experiences, even suffering, into a means of rising to him. Athanasius Murphy explains “Because the Word united himself to our human nature, he opened up a path to the divine life that was not available before”.⁶⁸

As well as creating new paths for *theōsis*, Christ also reveals how attain it. Gregory explains Christ’s “conduct has been handed down to the extent of being a model for ours while avoiding a complete likeness” (*Or.* 40.30). We should not completely mimic Christ, but by living a human life, Christ demonstrates how we should live to attain heaven. In this way his works “are training from God for us” (*Or.* 2.25). Harrison observes, in *Oratio.* 14, Christ is “the all-encompassing exemplar, in a long list that maps many different mimetic paths to salvation”.⁶⁹ Most crucially, Christ’s “own suffering [...] teaches us suffering, of which also our reward is the kingdom of heaven, and to become a god above human suffering” (*Or.* 25.2). In particular, “by his passions [he] teaches suffering” (*Or.* 45.21). Christ teaches us how to conduct our lives to walk the path to *theōsis*, done so most admirably by suffering in obedience to him. Alongside suffering, Christ “shows that the best way to be exalted is lowliness” (*Or.* 38.14) and “was exalted, in order that you [...] might learn to be nobler, to ascend with the Godhead and not linger on in things visible but rise up to spiritual realities” (*Or.* 38.14). Those things which Christ sanctifies by doing himself he also teaches us to imitate. Murphy suggests that living humanly as an example, Christ “allows there to be a complete road map laid out for the believer to follow, with the arrows pointing in the direction of the divine and Christ himself as the road to travel upon”.⁷⁰ Christ not only opens new paths to *theōsis*, but through his life and conduct he shows us the way to walk them.

Among that which Christ sanctifies as paths for *theōsis* and teaches us to imitate, none are more important to Gregory than baptism. Here again, Gregory understands Christ’s life as mapping out how we should live. He writes “Jesus is baptized [...] The pure one, and by John, and at the beginning of his signs. What are we to learn and what are we to be taught by this? To purify ourselves beforehand, and to be humble minded, and to preach when mature both in spiritual and bodily stature” (*Or.* 39.14). Christ’s conduct here is a “lesson”

⁶⁸ Athanasius Murphy, “Life Is a Stage: Neoplatonic Participation and Imitation in Gregory of Nazianzus’s Oration 45”, *Nova et Vetera, English Edition* 16, no. 4 (2018), 1172.

⁶⁹ Harrison, *Festal*, 35.

⁷⁰ Murphy, “Life”, 1171.

(*Or.* 39.14). Through his baptism, Christ teaches us to be baptized. Gregory calls his congregation to imitate Christ's baptism as much as possible, particularly to "purify ourselves beforehand" to "assure the security" of baptismal grace "through a disposition towards the good", as Jesus, "the pure one" did (*Or.* 39.14). Gregory considers baptism crucial for *theōsis* and here, as Matz observes, baptism becomes "one of the stops along that road which Jesus himself specially sanctified for the furtherance of one's journey".⁷¹ Gregory focuses particularly on Christ being baptized to "sanctify the Jordan" (*Or.* 39.15) or elsewhere "for the purification of the waters" (*Or.* 38.16). Matz explains "Recalling the third chapter of John's Gospel [...], Gregory pointed out that Jesus consecrated people for the water component of their salvation by sanctifying the waters of baptism".⁷² Undergoing baptism, Christ sanctifies the act (and water) and points to its necessity in the journey of *theōsis*.

The Cross

Gregory links the cross with deification more than Athanasius. He writes "through Christ's sufferings, you may become God hereafter" (*Carm.* 1.1.2, 48). However, like Athanasius, he is not precise on how. Certainly, this is the lowest part of the human condition and undergoing the cross, Christ introduces God even into the lowliness of suffering and death. Perhaps this is why "We needed a God made flesh and made dead" (*Or.* 45.28). The cross is also perhaps the ultimate perfecting of obedience as a path to *theōsis*. Yet most of Gregory's theology of the cross focuses upon sacrifice and ransom. Regarding sacrifice, Gregory explains "He was the sacrifice, [...] He dedicated his blood to God, and cleansed the entire world" (*Carm.* 1.1.2, 75-76) and "by the blood of the Lamb he cleanses from every defilement, lifting away guilt from mortals by a heavenly method" (*Carm.* 1.2.1, 170-171). Humanity is purified by his sacrifice. Regarding ransom, Gregory writes "God suffered in the form of a man, giving himself as a ransom to deliver us" (*Carm.* 2.1.11, 1602-1604). He identifies himself with Christ here, claiming "For this, too, is mine, this blood which Christ my God poured out in restitution for ancient longings, and as a ransom for the world" (*Carm.* 1.1.9, 80-81). Though it is unclear how sacrifice and ransom lead to our deification in Gregory, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesize, as we did with Athanasius, that the

⁷¹ Brian Matz, "Baptism as Theological Intersection in Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration 39*", *Sacris Erudiri* 51 (2012), 52.

⁷² Matz, "Baptism", 52.

sacrifice needed to be offered and the ransom paid, that we might fully enjoy the deifying gifts wrought by Christ.

With Athanasius, Gregory maintains Christ overcomes death by his death. He writes Christ “by death destroys death” (*Or.* 29.20); “death was put to death by flesh” (*Or.* 39.13), and Christ “by dying, slaughter[ed] the slaughterer” (*Carm.* 1.1.10, 9). Harrison suggests “it is the presence of God, the source of life, within death that is lifegiving”, which seems to give us a strong Athanasian parallel.⁷³ However, Gregory does not explicitly claim this. There is ambiguity regarding how Christ destroys death by death, though Gregory is certain that we may share in eternal life because of the cross. What is clearer is how Christ defeats Satan on the cross. Thomas observes “Gregory does not treat the devil as a linguistic construction, but rather as a ‘real’ enemy” and thus it was essential he be overcome to prevent him leading humanity to sin.⁷⁴ Gregory suggests Christ tricks Satan. As Satan “out of shamelessness leapt upon the visible Adam” he “encountered God and was defeated” (*Or.* 39.2). Satan, now defeated, may no longer deceive humanity into turning from their path of *theōsis* as he did in Eden. Elsewhere Gregory describes how Christ “offered himself to God so as to snatch us from him who had us in his power, so that, in exchange for him who fell, he might take the Christ: but he who christens cannot be caught” (*Carm.* 1.1.10, 69-72). This is a slightly different narrative, but the key theme remains: Christ deceives Satan, as Satan deceived us, that he might be overcome and we, no longer under his power, may walk again the path to *theōsis*.

Summary

Aspects of Gregory’s incarnational soteriology resemble Athanasius’. The notion that God deifies his human nature through his assumption of it, which forms the basis for our own deification is very similar to Athanasius. His concept of mixture to explain this process is not present in Athanasius. The restoration of humanity to a state whereby it may grow in its *theōsis* is an unsurprisingly significant point of divergence from Athanasius who did not have the same concept of Edenic growth towards deification. However, our Fathers agree on how Christ restores the Edenic state in places, particularly regarding the overcoming of sinful human nature through union with divinity and the defeat of Satan. Gregory understands

⁷³ Harrison, *Festal*, 54.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Image*, 88.

Christ's undergoing of human acts to constitute his sanctifying and transforming them into steps on the path to *theōsis*, while Athanasius focuses on Christ's negative human experiences and how he overcomes them by undergoing them. Both Fathers discuss the exchange of properties in Christ, though this is more crucial for Athanasius; Gregory discusses it more poetically. Themes of ransom and sacrifice are found in both, though both fail to integrate these themes explicitly with Christ's deifying work. Having considered Christ's role in our divinization, we now turn to the Spirit.

Chapter 3: Pneumatology and Baptism

Baptism is the means, for both Fathers, by which the fruits of Christ's redemptive work are received by the individual. As one might expect, given the fruits of Christ's work are not identical in their theologies, so too that which is received through baptism differs. However, it is striking that the mode of reception of these fruits is the same for Athanasius and Gregory, namely baptism, through which the Spirit comes to dwell within the believer.

Athanasius

The Deifying Spirit

The work of the Son and the Spirit are intimately connected in Athanasius. Through his redemptive work, Christ deifies his own humanity, but this deification must be appropriated to the individual through the reception of the Spirit. This is why Athanasius understands Christ's securing of the Spirit to be "the ultimate 'securing' of grace".⁷⁵ Athanasius considers Christ "'First-born' of us", because "His flesh before all others was saved and liberated, as being the Word's body; and henceforth we, becoming incorporated with It, are saved after Its pattern" (CA 2.61). As C.R. Strange explains "the rest of mankind can be divinized by virtue of the relationship which each man enjoys with the divinized humanity of the Son".⁷⁶ Athanasius writes "He is a Vine and we knit to Him as branches, — not according to the Essence of the Godhead; for this surely is impossible; but according to His manhood, for the branches must be like the vine, since we are like Him according to the flesh" (CA 2.74). Christ's divinity communicates grace, that is participation in divinity, to his humanity. Subsequently, we are "knit" to Christ's humanity, since it is in this aspect that he is like us, and through this union we enjoy participation in his divine attributes and communion with his divinity. The Spirit unites us to Christ's deified humanity and in this way "what the Word has by nature" is "given to us through the Spirit irrevocably" (CA 3.25). The Spirit is "that which joins creation to the Word" (AS 1.25) and thus "it is through the Spirit that we are all said to be partakers of God" (AS 1.24). The indwelling of the Spirit grants this unity with the Son, since "When we partake of the Spirit we have the Son; and when we have the Son, we

⁷⁵ Anatolios, "Soteriological Significance", 283.

⁷⁶ C.R. Strange, "Athanasius on Divinization", in *Studia Patristica XVI*, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 343.

have the Spirit" (AS 4.4). Thus, we see how intimately connected the work of the Spirit and Son are in communicating *theopoiēsis* to us.

Union with God

The crux of deification, union with God, is the result of the indwelling of the Spirit. Anatolios suggests "Salvation is primarily and ultimately, for Athanasius, a matter of being "joined" to God".⁷⁷ Athanasius conceives of two ways in which we come to be united to God. The first concerns the hypostatic union. He writes "if the Son were a creature, man had remained mortal as before, not being joined to God" (CA 2.69). United to the humanity of Christ through the Spirit we are united to the Godhead through the union of Christ's natures, thus in one sense Athanasius suggests union with God is the combined work of the Spirit and the Son as above. However, Athanasius also attributes our union with God specifically to the indwelling of the Spirit, since it too is God. He explains we "apart from the Spirit, are strange and distant from God", but "by the participation of the Spirit we are knit into the Godhead" (CA 3.24). Athanasius' language stresses the intimacy of our union with God. Considering 1 John 4:13, he writes "because of the grace of the Spirit which has been given to us, in Him we come to be, and His in us; and since it is the Spirit of God, therefore through His becoming in us, reasonably are we, as having the Spirit, considered to be in God, and thus is God in us" (CA 3.24). This Johannine parallel is crucial for Athanasius in expressing unity. He regularly cites John 14:11, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me", to express the unity of the Father and Son, often treating John 10:30, "The Father and I are one", as a synonymous expression.⁷⁸ Likewise, on the unity of Christ, he writes "He was Very God in the flesh, and He was true flesh in the Word" (CA 3.41). Perhaps for Athanasius *us in God and God in us* expresses our coming to be involved in the unity of the Trinity and the unity of Christ. At very least he understands it to stress the intimacy with which we are united to God.

Sonship

Theopoiēsis also involves being adopted as sons. Kharmalov claims "More clearly than any Christian writer before him, Athanasius makes a direct identification between deification and divine sonship", while Gross suggests "He employs as synonyms the terms θεοποιεῖν

⁷⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 126.

⁷⁸ See CA 2.33.

and υιοποιειν".⁷⁹ Athanasius suggests it is our divine sonship, along with our becoming heavenly creatures, which defines our exalted status, explaining Christ "promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son of God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father" (CA 1.38). Widdicombe notes "Sonship by adoption signals our participation in the divine love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father".⁸⁰ Athanasius claims "receiving the Spirit of the Son, [we] might have confidence to call Him by grace Father, who is by nature our Lord" (CA 2.51). Athanasius is clear that it is because of the Spirit within us that we are named sons, citing Galatians 4:6, "as the Lord is Son, the Spirit is called Spirit of sonship" (AS 1.25). Weinandy explains "The Spirit is the Spirit of Sonship [...] because he partakes of the Son's full divine life with all its divine attributes, and he does so precisely and uniquely as the Spirit".⁸¹ The relationship between the Son and Spirit allows Athanasius to suggest our sonship derives from the indwelling of the Spirit, since "When we partake of the Spirit we have the Son" (AS 4.4). Thus, "the Father calls them sons in whomever He sees His own Son" (CA 2.59). Through the Spirit dwelling in us the Son comes to dwell in us allowing us to participate in his divine Sonship, becoming sons ourselves, reordering the relationship between us and God as we participate in the relationship between the Father and Son, so "God, being first Creator, next, as has been said, becomes Father of men" (CA 2.61).

Baptism

Baptism is the moment in which we receive these gifts. Baptism is important to Athanasius, for, as Jeffery Finch recognises, this "is the sacrament through which the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is initially given".⁸² Thus, it is in baptism that we receive the deifying gifts wrought by Christ, union with God and exalted status as adopted sons. Consequently, it is crucial for Athanasius that the right terms are used. Athanasius attacks the Arians, arguing Christ bids "us be baptized, not into the name of Unoriginate and originate, nor into the name of Creator and creature, but into the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" (CA 1.34). This is as "For with such an initiation we too, being numbered among works, are made sons"

⁷⁹ Kharlamov, "Rhetorical", 121; Gross, *Divinization*, 172.

⁸⁰ Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 227.

⁸¹ Weinandy, *Athanasius*, 116.

⁸² Finch, "Athanasius", 114.

(CA 1.34). By baptizing themselves into “the name of one who exists not, they will receive nothing”, by which he means “to the Father they will not be joined, not having His own Son by nature, who is from Him, who is in the Father, and in whom the Father is, as He Himself has said; but [...] remain destitute and stripped of the Godhead” (CA 2.43). Athanasius argues so passionately since baptism is the vehicle by which we receive our *theopoiēsis* and salvation is impossible without it. He stresses the need to be baptized into the full Trinity, since through baptism we come to participate in their unity. He claims those “baptized in the name of the Father alone, or in the name of the Son alone, or in the Father and the Son without the Holy Spirit, receives nothing” (AS 1.30), since God is Trinity and to divide the Trinity is to lose God. Using the name Father we recognise our new status as sons.⁸³ Baptism is the most fundamental element of Christian life for Athanasius, for in this sacrament we receive the Spirit, which unites us to the deified humanity of Christ and the whole Godhead, and elevates us to the status of sons whereby we participate in the love which is between the Father and the Son.

Summary

For Athanasius, through his reception of the Spirit, Christ has secured its indwelling for humanity. This indwelling communicates the graces of the incarnation to us by uniting us to the deified humanity of Christ. The Spirit also unites us to God as we come to dwell in him and him in us, and names us sons as we come to participate in that unitive love between the Father and Son, as God, our creator, becomes now too our Father and we transcend that ontological divide between God and creatures. These gifts are received through baptism, the sacrament through which we receive the Spirit.

Gregory

Deification through Baptism

With baptism, as the incarnation, there initially appears to be similarity between Gregory and Athanasius, but again beneath the surface these similarities become less apparent. Gregory describes baptism as the “bloodless sacrifice by means whereof we are made partakers with Christ, both in His sufferings and in His divinity” (*Or.* 4.52). This, as in Athanasius, is done through the Spirit who “deif[ies] me through baptism” (*Or.* 31.28).

⁸³ See *DD* 31.

Additionally, Gregory warns against dividing the Godhead in baptism, or one will “have neither the grace or the hope of grace, and in a short time shipwreck your salvation” (*Or.* 40.44). At first glance, baptism appears to be the sacrament through which we are made partakers of Christ’s divinity through the Spirit and thus deified for both Fathers. However, Gregory does not really understand us to be divinized at the point of baptism. Through baptism we become, in Russell’s words, “gods in principle”, yet as Winslow notes “baptism is not an irrevocable or ineradicable promise of salvation or of theōsis”.⁸⁴ Beeley identifies baptism as “the definitive beginning of the Christian life”, explaining “it does not function as a purely mechanical act or an irrevocable guarantee of divinization and future salvation, for it produces and requires both real transformation and ongoing moral growth”.⁸⁵ Matz concurs, claiming baptism “set Gregory on the path of divinization”.⁸⁶ Though Gregory’s language occasionally resembles Athanasius’ and suggests at baptism we receive our deification, in reality baptism starts (or restarts) our journey towards this goal, so while we may be considered deified in principle this state is not guaranteed and only realized at the *eschaton*.

Rebirth

Gregory, like Athanasius, believes the Spirit communicates the redemption wrought by Christ’s incarnate life through baptism. Winslow explains, for Gregory, “What Christ has accomplished universally, the Spirit perfects particularly”.⁸⁷ This is broadly true although Beeley offers the corrective that the distinction between Christology and pneumatology is not really “between universal and particular salvation”, but “potential salvation embodied in Christ and the actual salvation that the Holy Spirit realizes in the Christian life”.⁸⁸ This is very Athanasian. Gregory implores his congregation to “in the Spirit of God receive the radiance of the Son” for “If you receive within you the whole Word, you will gather to your own soul all of Christ’s cures, by which he has cured each individually” (*Or.* 40.34). The Spirit brings the Word to dwell in us, enabling us to receive his saving work. Langworthy notes, “The Spirit makes salvation possible, but it is the Son who saves”.⁸⁹ The Spirit communicates the

⁸⁴ Russell, *Doctrine*, 225; Winslow, *Dynamics*, 142.

⁸⁵ Beeley, *Gregory*, 177.

⁸⁶ Matz, “Baptism”, 45.

⁸⁷ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 129.

⁸⁸ Beeley, *Gregory*, 180.

⁸⁹ Langworthy, *Gregory*, 166.

work of Christ which has remoulded our nature, allowing us to once again walk the path to *theōsis*. Gregory writes “carrying God inside him, a man may have some success here and press on all the harder to perfections, towards affinity with God which comes from virtues” (*Or.* 30.19). He suggests baptism is “a correction of character” and means to “purify the source” of our actions (*Or.* 40.32), as it “releases [us] from passions, cutting away all the veil that has surrounded us since birth and leading us back toward the life on high” (*Or.* 40.2). Furthermore, when Satan attacks after baptism, Gregory claims you can “Defend yourself with the water, defend yourself with the Spirit, in which all the fiery darts of the Evil One are extinguished” (*Or.* 40.10). Christ attained these gifts for humanity through the incarnation, remoulding human nature that it might once more strive to do good, not overpowered by the material. In baptism the individual receives these gifts as the Spirit brings Christ to dwell within them.

Gregory considers baptism rebirth. He gives baptism the title “bath of rebirth” (*Or.* 40.4) and explains just as God “created what did not exist, so he remolded what did exist, through a molding more divine than the first and more exalted” (*Or.* 40.7). Through baptism “I have transformed my first birth” (*Or.* 40.42). He stresses through his redemptive work, communicated to us through baptism, Christ has remoulded humanity’s fallen state, bringing it into one which can again strive for *theōsis*, purified and released from passions, able to overcome the material and bodily nature. However, the Spirit’s work is not restricted to a singular moment of purification in baptism, but continually works within us. Langworthy suggests “The Spirit operates in a manner that continuously reshapes the believer in an ongoing, progressive purification”.⁹⁰ Likewise, Susanna Elm suggests baptism “is both a one-time historic event as well as an ongoing process intended to restore man to his original dignity”.⁹¹ The Spirit perpetually works within us, purifying and administering Christ’s redemptive gifts. Remoulding is not an immediate process, but the continuous action of the Spirit. When Gregory describes the Spirit as him who “forms God here” (1.1.3, 4) and baptism as that which makes us “deiform instead of what we now are, recasting without fire and re-creating without shattering” (*Or.* 40.8), he is referring to the continual action of the

⁹⁰ Langworthy, *Gregory*, 121.

⁹¹ Susanna Elm, “‘O Paradoxical Fusion’: Gregory of Nazianzus on Baptism and Cosmology (Orations 38-40)”, in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra'anan Boustan, and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 300.

Spirit, initiated at baptism. Through the Spirit's work within us we are able to rise "up with the Spirit" rather than follow "only the flesh" (*Or.* 40.2). Through baptismal grace we are reborn and remoulded, enabled to pursue *theōsis* through reception of the fruits of Christ's redemptive work and the perfecting of the Spirit. There are areas of similarity with Athanasius here, though since the Fathers disagree on the fruits of Christ's work, the benefits communicated to us through the Spirit differ.

Summary

For both Gregory and Athanasius, baptism is a vital part of Christian life in which the Spirit is received and communicates the fruits of Christ's redemptive work to the recipient. That which is received differs between our Fathers since the fruits of Christ's redemptive work differ. Through baptism Gregory believes we enter a state whereby we may once again progress towards *theōsis*, continuously aided by the Spirit, while for Athanasius baptism brings one into a static state of deification sustained by the Spirit's indwelling. For them both, baptism communicates gifts which enable one to defend against the devil and sinful nature. It is becoming more apparent that the fundamental distinction between Athanasius and Gregory is their respective anthropologies. When their concept of human beings differs, their notion of the Edenic state differs, so too the results of the Fall differ, thus the fruits of Christ's redemptive work differ, and now those fruits which humanity receives through baptism differ again.

Chapter 4: The Christian Life

Both *theopoiēsis* and *theōsis* begin at baptism, but how Christians live after this initial reception of grace is crucial to them both. The key element of the Christian life for both Fathers is moral living, though their reasons for this differ, with Athanasius seeing this as the way that we maintain our deified status and Gregory viewing it as the means by which we attain it.

Athanasius

Moral Living

Athanasius' doctrine of *theopoiēsis* has a considerable, often overlooked, moral element. Humans, for Athanasius, exist in static conditions rather than states of growth as they do for Gregory. Athanasius is binary: one can be with or without grace. Through baptism Christians receive the grace of the indwelling of the Spirit, which entails their *theopoiēsis*. Yet Athanasius stresses this condition is, as the Edenic state was, one from which we can fall. Citing 1 Samuel 16:14 and Wisdom 1:5, Athanasius explains that should one who has received the Spirit turn to wickedness, "the grace given [them] should begin to depart" (*FL* 3.3), as "that Holy Spirit and Paraclete which is in God has deserted him" (*CA* 3.25). Falling into sin leads to the loss of the Spirit's indwelling and consequently the loss of deification. Initially this seems inconsistent with Athanasius' conviction that Christ achieved the security of this indwelling through his divine inalterability being extended to us. However, Athanasius explains "When then a man falls from the Spirit for any wickedness, if he repent upon his fall, the grace remains irrevocably" (*CA* 3.25). Christ's inalterable reception of the Spirit means grace remains irrevocable for us if we repent upon falling. This is how Christ has perfected our reception of grace. Widdicombe explains we "recover our participation in the Spirit through repentance, but Athanasius is quite certain that this recovery is only possible because of the granting of the Spirit by the Son and the consequent gift of being in the Father".⁹² He suggests "our inability to remain faithful is anticipated and encompassed".⁹³ Though Christ has given us the grace of maintaining grace, this gift depends upon our cooperation with said grace. Our deification is not certain from baptism.

⁹² Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 247.

⁹³ Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 248.

Free will is preserved and should we choose to turn to wickedness we may lose the indwelling of the Spirit and our deification. Yet, because of Christ's redemptive work in perfecting our reception of grace, should we cooperate with grace and repent upon falling then the indwelling of the Spirit remains irrevocable.

The moral aspect of Athanasius' *theopoiēsis* is not merely the avoidance of sin, but also the pursuit of virtue and imitation of God. Russell suggests "There are in Athanasius two parallel lines along which the concept of deification is developed, the ontological and the ethical"; the former concerns deification through baptism and the latter, growing to be more like God through virtue.⁹⁴ Russell is mistaken in separating these strands. For Athanasius, evil is the absence of good and similarly he understands sin to be the absence of virtue. He writes "for them who walk after His example, the prize is life everlasting, so for those who walk the opposite way, and not that of virtue, there is great shame, and peril without pardon in the day of judgement" (CG 47.4). The two options are virtue and non-virtue. There is no moral neutral for Athanasius, thus one must actively pursue virtue to maintain the Spirit's indwelling or they fall to wickedness. He explains "our will ought to keep pace with the grace of God, and not fall short; lest while our will remains idle, the grace given us should begin to depart" (FL 5.5). To preserve grace, we must constantly will good and pursue virtue for to do otherwise is to fall to wickedness, and cause the grace to depart. Additionally, Athanasius understands virtue to be a response to grace. Considering Luke 3:36, Athanasius explains "we become merciful, not by being made equal to God, nor becoming in nature and truth benefactors (for it is not our gift to benefit but belonged to God), but in order that what has accrued to us from God Himself by grace these things we may impart to others" (CA 3.19). Thus, he notes, "it is as 'sons,' not as the Son; as 'gods,' not as He Himself; and not as the Father, but 'merciful as the Father'" (CA 3.20). God has made us like him through the work of Christ and the Spirit, so in response we should strive to imitate him as far as we are able. Virtuous living is essential for Athanasius, as a means of maintaining the grace of deification and as the appropriate response to it.

⁹⁴ Russell, *Doctrine*, 184.

Summary

Moral living is essential for preserving the grace of deification. This involves not only avoidance of sin, but the active pursuit of virtue, for to do otherwise is to fall to wickedness and have the Spirit depart, leaving one bereft of the deifying gifts of the redeemer. Yet, due to the security of grace attained by Christ, upon falling if we repent the grace will remain secure.

Gregory

Festal Anamnesis

Baptism is crucial to Gregory as the beginning of the Christian life, yet more than Athanasius, he understands grace to be communicated in other ways. Harrison suggests Gregory understood grace to be communicated through festal anamnesis – the “re-presentation of God's saving works so that the worshipers can participate in these events as present realities and thereby receive the eschatological salvation, new life and sanctification divinely accomplished through them”.⁹⁵ Gregory often claims “Yesterday I was crucified with Christ, today I am glorified with him; yesterday I died with him, today I am made alive with him; yesterday I was buried with him, today I rise with him” (*Or.* 1.4). Through the Festal celebrations, Gregory blends his life with Christ and participates in his saving works to receive their grace. Harrison suggests since “God's saving actions transcend the limitations of temporal sequence, the historical events in which God has acted can be present now and in the future”.⁹⁶ Murphy concurs, claiming “When Gregory mentions the Pascha in *Or.* 45, he does not speak of it as a merely historical and completed event. It is something all of his listeners can participate in and celebrate at present in the festal liturgy”.⁹⁷ Consequently, Gregory implores his congregation to “Travel blamelessly through all the stages of Christ's life and all his powers, as a disciple of Christ” (*Or.* 38.13), receiving the graces of these events as they go. This explains Gregory's claim that “we have purified the place of this assembly by our discourse” (*Or.* 39.11), since, in Harrison's words, “Gregory's homiletic re-tellings and explanations of the festal events enact their anamnesis in liturgical celebration”.⁹⁸ Through recounting the events of Christ's work in festal celebrations,

⁹⁵ Harrison, *Festal*, 24-25.

⁹⁶ Harrison, *Festal*, 25.

⁹⁷ Murphy, “Life”, 1166.

⁹⁸ Harrison, *Festal*, 24.

Gregory encourages his congregation to identify themselves with Christ to participate in his saving works which transcend time and are thus truly present, allowing them to appropriate the grace of these events. As Gregory expresses it, “How many celebrations there are for me corresponding to each of the mysteries of Christ! Yet they all have one completion, my perfection and refashioning and restoration to the state of the first Adam” (*Or.* 38.16).

Imitation of God

Grace received through the representation of Christ’s saving works is not limited to festal celebrations, but can always be received through imitating Christ and uniting our actions to his. Hofer notes “Gregory rejects the idea that Christ’s historical actions are to be exactly reproduced by us [...] Yet, Christian actions are one, not only with Christ, but with the events of his life”.⁹⁹ Above all Gregory instructs us “By suffering [...] imitate his suffering” (*Or.* 45.23). Winslow suggests “suffering has no moral value in and of itself”, but “as it is an *imitatio Christi* can it be the means of participating in the victor which Christ effected by his suffering and death”.¹⁰⁰ Uniting our sufferings to Christ’s cross, we receive the grace and purification of this event. Gregory applauds those who “invent for themselves a life of sufferings, in imitation of Christ” (*Or.* 4.73), imitating “God who through his own suffering teaches us suffering, of which also our reward is the kingdom of heaven, and to become a god above human suffering” (*Or.* 25.2). Gregory believes Christ’s “conduct has been handed down to the extent of being a model for ours while avoiding a complete likeness” (*Or.* 40.30). We need not seek out a literal cross to imitate Christ’s suffering, we can do so through ascetic practices. Ascetic suffering is important to Gregory, since it is linked to obedience, for Christ “honours obedience in practice and puts it to proof by suffering” (*Or.* 30.6). For Gregory, humanity “fell through disobedience” (*Or.* 2.24), by failing to adhere to the commandment. By uniting our obedience with Christ’s through suffering we restore our Edenic condition. Through imitation and blending our lives with the events of Christ’s life, we appropriate the graces of these events.

Additionally, it is through imitating Christ and God generally that we are to ascend to him. Gregory claims we have “been made to imitate God as far as is possible” (*Or.* 39.7). Through imitating God we grow in likeness of him and “preserve” our “noble status” (*Or.* 6.14), that

⁹⁹ Hofer, *Christ*, 159-160.

¹⁰⁰ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 148.

is the *imago Dei*. We primarily imitate God through practicing virtue and doing good, for “It is in this, in doing good, that man is preeminently divine” (*Or.* 17.9) and “In nothing does man’s affinity with God lie so much as in his capacity to do good” (*Or.* 14.27). Thus Gregory exhorts his congregation to “imitate God’s philanthropy [...] You can become God without hardship; do not forgo the opportunity for deification” (*Or.* 17.9). This is unsurprising since God is “goodness itself and source of goodness” (*Or.* 41.9) and creation comes about as “it was not sufficient for goodness to be moved only in contemplation of itself, but it was necessary that the good be poured forth and spread outward, so that there would be more recipients of its benevolent activity” (*Or.* 38.9). Winslow suggests Gregory’s “statement that we resemble God in acts of compassion is related, not to any presuppositions concerning the divine attributes and our ability to emulate them, but to the specific act of compassion wrought by God in Jesus Christ”.¹⁰¹ However, the passages above suggest otherwise. While we are certainly called to imitate Christ since “his conduct” is a “model for ours” (*Or.* 40.30), we were made in the beginning to imitate God’s goodness and imitation of Christ is just another way to do this. Gregory claims “If one has nurtured some good quality that has molded his character, transgression becomes more difficult than becoming good in the first place, for every virtue that is firmly rooted by time and reason becomes second nature” (*Or.* 23.1). By nurturing virtue we shall cause goodness rather than evil to naturally flow from us, just as God is good and goodness flows from him.

As God is good and thus we are called to be good, so too Gregory implores us to imitate God’s other characteristics. Just as with goodness, Gregory explains “peace [...] both belongs to God and characterizes God, represents in fact the very essence of God” (*Or.* 22.1). He encourages us to “incline rather to peace as the more Godlike and sublime course” (*Or.* 22.15). Similarly we should love, since “God is love” and “This is in fact the name God cherishes above all others” (*Or.* 22.4). God is goodness, love, peace and more and from him these things flow. By imitating God’s action, we nurture these virtues within ourselves, becoming more Godlike. Gregory encourages us to “Come to be a god to the unfortunate by imitating God’s mercy” (*Or.* 14.26), meaning we may imitate God’s merciful actions towards us by being merciful to others and so become like him. Gregory stresses the necessity of

¹⁰¹ Donald F. Winslow, “Gregory of Nazianzus and Love for the Poor”, *Anglican Theological Review* 47 (1965), 354.

actions, since “the disposition is an unsatisfactory thing unless we give it practical effect” (*Or.* 30.6). Erika Brodňanská and Adriána Koželová note “Πρᾶξις was for Gregory the sum of all virtues”, since “he states that salvation rests more with deeds without words than with words without deeds”.¹⁰² Nurturing virtue within ourselves and giving this practical effect through virtuous action, we imitate God and grow to be more like him. It is by working “the most good possible for ourselves” that we “mak[e] ourselves deiform” (*Or.* 39.10), since “affinity with God [...] comes from virtues” (*Or.* 30.19). Virtue and good actions allow us to preserve our divine image and exalted status, and lead to our deification and salvation.

The Body

Though Gregory is often pressed into a caricatured Platonic mould, which suggests he held great disdain for the body, he actually considers the body a vital part of our development towards *theōsis*. Winslow notes, “the principles by which the first creation were guided still hold true for the new”.¹⁰³ From the beginning God intended that we “make the good even our own, not only because it is sown in our nature, but because cultivated by our own choice, and by the motions of our will” (*Or.* 2.17). This we do now, as in the beginning, through doing good and imitating God to become like him. As in the beginning, the body plays a crucial role in this process. Gregory writes “God has provided every member as good, to do good things” (*Carm.* 2.1.45, 59). Disposition is insufficient without action and thus the body is vital, since it is through the body that we act virtuously. So Gregory recognises his body as “the helper I need to achieve my novel aims, knowing as I do why I was created and that it is through my actions that I am to ascend to God” (*Or.* 14.6). Goodness and virtue are the means for growth in *theōsis* and it is through the body that one acts virtuously and does good. Additionally, the body still has the same functions we observed in chapter one: it adds an element of difficulty to the pursuit of goodness that our *theōsis* might be “a prize of virtue, and not merely as the gift of God” (*Or.* 2.17). Though it is through “the senses, from which come falls [...] and through them the goad of sin is taken into oneself” (*Or.* 45.14), Gregory implores us to “Devote your body to the service of your soul” (*Or.* 20.12), that it might a tool for deification. Earthly life is not an opportunity to “gratify the pleasures of the

¹⁰² Erika Brodňanská and Adriána Koželová, “Ethical teachings of Classical Antiquity philosophers in the poetry of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus”, *Ethics and Bioethics* 9, no. 3-4 (2019), 101.

¹⁰³ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 143.

belly and to indulge passing delights and ingest what is voided”, but rather an opportunity for “ascent or, if I may be so bold, deification” (*Or.* 11.5).

Many Paths to Salvation

Deciphering how Gregory believes one attains *theōsis* is challenging. Sections of Gregory’s writings suggest asceticism is the key, others contemplation or reason and many suggest it is by moral living and virtue. This is because, as Gregory repeatedly states, “There are actually many ways of salvation, all leading to fellowship with God” (*Carm.* 2.1.11, 1225-1226). Yet generally Gregory considers all these paths to *theōsis* under the one theme of virtue, hence our focus on virtuous living above. Gregory explains the path to deification is “‘One,’ because it is the way of goodness: it is the one way even though there are many branches” (*Or.* 27.8). Goodness is the road to salvation which comprises all virtues “which are commingled and mixed with each other” (*Or.* 45.13) so “Each of these [virtues] forms a single road to salvation” (*Or.* 14.5). Gregory claims “Strait is the way of the divine gate, but there are many paths that lead into that one” (*Carm.* 1.2.17, 55-56). He recognises “if [...] there were also only one road to salvation, [...] and if by deviating from it, we stood to lose everything and to be cast out from God and eternal hope, nothing would be more treacherous than to give the sort of recommendations I have given” (*Or.* 32.33).

Consequently, as Harrison notes, “In several places Gregory provides lists of virtues or exemplary persons and actions and invites his hearers to choose the ones that fit their own character and circumstances”.¹⁰⁴ Gregory suggests there are varying levels of heavenly reward based upon levels of virtue. He explains “just as there is a wide variety of goals in life so in God’s house also there are many rooms, assigned and distributed on the basis of individual merit. One man may excel in one particular virtue, a second in another, a third in several, a fourth in all” (*Or.* 14.5). Thus, while pursuing any virtue places one on the road to heaven, those who have mastered many will receive greater merit.

One path to *theōsis*, of which Gregory often writes and is thus sometimes mistaken for the sole path by his commentators, is that of contemplation and philosophy. Gregory speaks of his longing for monastic life, of “having no further connection than was absolutely necessary with human affairs, and speaking to myself and to God, to live superior to visible things,

¹⁰⁴ Harrison, *Festal*, 31.

ever preserving in myself the divine impressions pure and unmixed with the erring tokens of this lower world, and both being, and constantly growing more and more to be, a real unspotted mirror of God and divine things” (*Or.* 2.7). He applauds “whoever leads a solitary life, not at all mixing with worldly folk, but has divinized the mind” (1.2.17, 1-2) and claims “solitary” life “tend[s] to union with God” (*Or.* 43.62). It is easy to see how one might understand Gregory to be pointing to solitary contemplation as the means to *theōsis*. Yet, he explicitly states there are more paths to salvation than just “the one accessible only through reasoned discourse and contemplation” (*Or.* 32.33). Gregory gives this path significant attention since it is the one he desires most and is “the pursuit that offers the highest reward and the greatest security, for those with understanding” (*Or.* 19.1). Gregory distinguishes between paths “carrying greater risk and prestige” and those “more lowly and safe” (*Or.* 32.33). Contemplation belongs to the former category, but is not the only path. Gregory warns against “abandon[ing] the safer paths and converg[ing] on this single one, so dangerous and slippery” (*Or.* 32.33). He asks “is it that the same diet is not appropriate for everyone, and allowance has to be made for differences in age and constitution, but the same way of life or discourse stands suitable for all? I for my part should certainly not say so” (*Or.* 32.33). Contemplation is a path to *theōsis*, perhaps even the one with greatest reward, yet it is just one path, unsuitable for all to walk. It is one branch of the ultimate path to *theōsis*, that of virtue and goodness.

Summary

For both Fathers, the Christian life is defined by moral living, which is not merely the avoidance of sin, but the active pursuit of virtue and doing good. Yet, while for Athanasius this is a means of preserving our deified status received in baptism, for Gregory virtuous living concerns growing towards *theōsis* as we increasingly come to resemble God. For Athanasius, imitation of God is a response to deification, for Gregory it is the means by which we attain it. Both Fathers understand doing good to be how we imitate God. Gregory also develops the concept of uniting our lives with Christ and making present Christ’s saving work through Festal Anamnesis. In doing so we receive the graces of Christ’s saving work which purify us and aid us as we strive to become virtuous to earn our deification. We particularly do this through imitation of Christ’s suffering, through which we unite our acts of obedience to his ultimate act of obedience, overcoming the disobedience of the Fall.

Chapter 5: The Deified State

Athanasius

Theopoiēsis occurs at baptism, but sees its completion at the *eschaton*. Though Athanasius believes we are deified in this life and tasked with preserving our exalted status, not all the fruits of deification are made available to us here. We still suffer and ultimately die. Russell posits “although deification begins in principle in this life, its fulfilment is eschatological”.¹⁰⁵ This idea of deification *in principle* is misleading, since some fruits of deification manifest themselves in this life, notably those which aid us against sin. The concept of *eschatological fulfilment* is useful. While we are deified at baptism, the fullness of deification is received at the *eschaton*, when we become immortal and impassible. We are deified by “becoming incorporated with” Christ’s humanity and “are saved after its pattern” (CA 2.61). Discussing Acts 1:7, Athanasius suggests post-resurrection Christ no longer claims to not know the day, as he does in Mark 13:32, as “now the flesh had risen and put off its mortality and been deified; and no longer did it become Him to answer after the flesh when He was going into the heavens” (CA 3.48). Athanasius understood Christ’s humanity to be fully deified, receiving incorruption, knowledge and the rest, once he had resurrected. Since we are “saved after its pattern” (CA 2.61), similarly we only receive the fullness of deification upon rising again at the *eschaton*. Contrary to the classic interpretation of Athanasius, this is certainly not the destiny of all. Athanasius warns “sinners, and all those who are aliens from the Catholic Church, heretics, and schismatics [...] are excluded from glorifying with the saints” (FL 7.4) and “for those who walk the opposite way, and not that of virtue, there is great shame, and peril without pardon in the day of judgement” (CG 47.4). Deified life in heaven is not the destiny of all, but only those who pursue virtue. Moral living is essential for *theopoiēsis*.

We have already discussed all that the deified state consists of for Athanasius. In heaven when we experience the fullness of our deification, we shall be united with God and participate in all his attributes. We shall be immortal, free from suffering, exalted, made sons and ultimately “knit into the Godhead” (CA. 3.24). The relationship between nature and grace is the key to understanding Athanasius’ deification. Humanity is naturally

¹⁰⁵ Russell, *Doctrine*, 187.

creaturely, ontologically impoverished, prone to suffering and everything else revealed by the Fall. Through grace we receive our deification, which does not annihilate our created nature, but grants us greater participation in the divine attributes, enabling us to transcend it. On sonship, Athanasius writes we “have confidence to call Him by grace Father, who is by nature our Lord” (CA 2.51). God is naturally our Lord, yet by grace he is now also our Father. Anatolios explains the “distinction between nature and grace allows Athanasius to maintain that both the original attributions of difference and the reversal of these attributions coexist”.¹⁰⁶ Our natural state is not changed, yet we transcend it. For Athanasius, “our being in the Father is not ours, but is the Spirit’s which is in us” (CA 3.24). Anatolios understands this to mean “it is both ours and not ours: ours, by grace and as gift; not ours by nature, not something identical with our being”.¹⁰⁷ Thus, we are “‘sons,’ not [...] the Son; [...] ‘gods’, not [...] He Himself” (CA 3.20). As Anatolios observes, “deification does not collapse the difference between God and creation into a strict equality”.¹⁰⁸ God is God by nature, we are gods by participation which is grace.

Summary

Though we are deified in baptism, the fulfilment of our deification is eschatological. We receive many graces of deification now, but upon rising again we shall be deified in fullness, being made immortal, free from suffering and receiving all the other gifts from God as we are united with him. Heaven is not the destiny of all. Our nature is not changed through deification, rather we transcend it through participation in the perfections of God, becoming like him. In this way we become gods, but not God. *Theopoiēsis* is the perfect description of this process, since there is no better term to describe one who has been deified than *god*. Participating in all the attributes of God, the deified human becomes as God is himself, with the key distinction that we possess these things through participation and grace, while they are his by nature. Calling one who has been deified “god” may unsettle the modern reader, but ultimately, considering Athanasius’ concept of the deified state, we have to say if it walks like a god and quacks like a god, it’s a god.

¹⁰⁶ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 135.

¹⁰⁷ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 138.

¹⁰⁸ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 136.

Gregory

The fulfilment of *theōsis*, like *theopoiēsis*, is eschatological. *Theōsis* is both something we strive for and something given to us; “a prize of virtue, and [...] the gift of God” (*Or.* 2.17). Gregory recognises “God must descend to us [...] and on the other hand that we must ascend and thus there will be a communion of God with human beings” (*Or.* 41.12). We strive to ascend to God through virtue, becoming more like him through doing good, while God comes down to meet us and “to complete mystery” (*Or.* 38.11) defies us fully “by the power of his incarnate manhood” (*Or.* 30.14). Harrison suggests *theōsis* is a process beginning at our creation when “Some features of the divine image are already given to us [...], such as rationality, freedom and the capacity for growth in virtue and communion with God”; then “By free collaboration with divine grace, we are called to grow little by little throughout our lifetime into others such as the practice of virtue and spiritual perception” and finally we receive “perfection in virtue, immortality, eternal progress into God, and full divinization in the age to come”.¹⁰⁹ *Theōsis* is a process of growing in divinity until the *eschaton* when Christ “makes me divine” fully (*Or.* 30.14). It is in this way both the work of God and of us, thus Gregory can both claim “he makes me divine” (*Or.* 30.14) and implore his congregation “let us become gods” (*Or.* 1.5). At one stage Gregory comments “Whether, finally, God be the lot of all, let us not here discuss” (2.1.1, 545-546), seemingly falling on neither side of the *apokatastasis* debate. Yet, he is clear elsewhere that he does not believe heaven is the destiny of all. He describes the soul as “a being blessed and immortal, and destined for undying chastisement or praise, for its vice or virtue” (*Or.* 2.28) and writes for some their end is heaven, while “The others among other torments, but above and before them all must endure the being outcast from God” (*Or.* 16.9). This is logical when we consider the necessity of both us reaching up to God and him reaching down. Should one treat this life as an opportunity “to gratify the pleasures of the belly and to indulge passing delights [...] instead of ascent” (*Or.* 11.5) then they are left outside of God, since it is necessary that both God descends to us and we ascend to him “through [our] actions” (*Or.* 14.6).

¹⁰⁹ Nonna Verna Harrison, “Greek Patristic Foundations of Trinitarian Anthropology”, *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 4 (2005), 402.

Gregory is less clear on the nature of the heavenly deified state than Athanasius. Gregory, like Athanasius, certainly focuses on union with God. He writes the Trinity “unites Itself wholly to the soul” and it is this “which solely and beyond all else I take it that the kingdom of heaven consists” (*Or.* 16.9). Yet Gregory also stresses that we will become gods ourselves. Christ became incarnate “in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man” (*Or.* 29.19). This suggests Gregory believes our eschatological destiny is to become gods in a realistic sense, since, as Christ became truly human, so we must be made God “to the same extent”. Occasionally, Gregory’s views appear similar to Athanasius, when he claims our destiny is to become “immortal” (*Or.* 38.13) and “a god above human suffering” (*Or.* 25.2). He also stresses we “share in what is [God’s] through the intermingling” (*Or.* 30.6). Such quotations possibly suggest Gregory espoused an Athanasian model of coming to share in the divine characteristics. However, one is cautious of making such a claim since, as Boris Maslov notes, unlike Athanasius, “Gregory never cites 2 Peter 1:4 and only rarely uses the vocabulary of participation”.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Gregory does not focus on immortality and impassibility as Athanasius does, and gives little attention to divine filiation. Gregory’s deified state clearly differs from Athanasius’.

The aspects of the deified state which Gregory develops differ from Athanasius, because they focus on different aspects of God. Gregory develops a picture of God who is “the Chief Good” (*Or.* 7.4) and “the great Mind” (*Carm.* 1.2.12, 8). The first of these concepts we have considered with relation to *theōsis*. Pursuing goodness and virtue leads to ascent and becoming more like God and, as Harrison notes, “we hope for perfection in virtue [...] in the age to come”.¹¹¹ In part we will be considered gods since we will be perfectly good as God is good. Gregory’s concept of God as “the great Mind” (*Carm.* 1.2.13, 8) relates to the other key aspect of the deified state. Gregory believes “The kingdom of heaven [...] to be nothing other than the attainment of that which is most pure and perfect; and the most perfect of the things that are is the knowledge of God” (*Or.* 20.12). Gregory frequently claims knowledge of God is perfected in heaven.¹¹² He directly links this concept to *theōsis*, explaining “God is united with gods, and he is thus known, perhaps as much as he already

¹¹⁰ Boris Maslov, “The Limits of Platonism: Gregory of Nazianzus and the Invention of *Theōsis*”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 52, no. 3 (2012), 442.

¹¹¹ Harrison, “Greek”, 402.

¹¹² See *Or.* 14.23, 21.25, 28.17, 38.7 and elsewhere.

knows those who are known to him” (*Or.* 38.7). Winslow suggests “we were created, and then recreated, to know and be with our Creator. Such knowledge of, and proximity to, God are the principle hallmarks of the goal and end of this life, and thus of the beginning of the next”.¹¹³ Heaven is defined by our contemplation and knowledge of God. This is why “the contemplatives and lovers of God [...] before the time exercise their heavenly citizenship” (*Or.* 21.25). Importantly, this is God’s activity. Gregory explains God “both contemplates and comprehends itself and is poured out by a little to those outside itself” (*Or.* 40.5) and in the beginning “goodness [was] moved only in contemplation of itself” (*Or.* 39.9). When deification is fulfilled and we “discover what God is in his nature and essence” (*Or.* 28.17), we shall be as God is, sharing in his activity as we fully comprehend and contemplate him. It is in this sense, coupled with our perfection in virtue, that Gregory considers us to be eschatologically *made god*.

Summary

While elements of deification are realised in this life, for both Fathers, we shall only see its fulfilment at the *eschaton*. Neither Athanasius nor Gregory believe this is the destiny of all. While all have the potential for deification, if one lives immorally they will be left outside of God, departing to Hell. The heavenly deified state consists for both Fathers in union with God and being considered gods ourselves. Yet, they differ on why we will be considered gods. Athanasius stresses our participation in all the attributes of God, so that we might be considered gods by grace, focusing on divine immortality, impassibility and sonship. While these aspects are not entirely omitted from Gregory’s work, he develops more the idea that we will be like God with regards to being made perfect in virtue and having perfect knowledge of God, so our heavenly existence consists fundamentally of contemplating and comprehending God’s nature, which is a defining activity of God himself. Athanasius’ concept of the deified state perhaps more obviously warrants our being considered gods, but Gregory still clearly considers us to be gods in a realistic sense as we share in divine activity. Ultimately, the differing views of these Fathers on the deified state stem from the aspects of God on which they focus, with God most fundamentally being that which *is* for Athanasius and the chief good and great mind for Gregory.

¹¹³ Winslow, *Dynamics*, 177.

Conclusion

Before concluding we will briefly review the key aspects of our Fathers' systems. Their anthropologies differ. Athanasius characterises humanity as entirely distinct from God and entirely reliant upon grace for existence. Their Edenic purpose was to maintain this grace. Gregory believes the soul is akin to God and thus humanity naturally shares some similarity to God. They were created to grow in likeness to God and ascend from the beginning. The Fall for Athanasius is a fall away from grace and return to humanity's natural state, bereft of God's aid. This state is defined by instability, corruption and disposition to sin. Gregory's fallen humanity shares similar characteristics, yet for him this is a fall from the natural state of humanity, not into it. Both Fathers recognise the need for the incarnation to restore and deify humanity. In Athanasius' *theopoiēsis*, Christ deifies human nature throughout his earthly life by granting humanity greater participation in divine attributes and securing grace through his divine inalterability. The deifying purpose of the incarnation is twofold for Gregory: through the power of the hypostatic union, Christ will unite us to God and make us divine at the *eschaton*, and he has healed human nature, restored it and revealed the path to *theōsis* through his human life. Our individual reception of deification begins at the moment of baptism for both Fathers. For Athanasius, we receive the Spirit in baptism which unites us to God and the deified humanity of Christ allowing us to appropriate the graces wrought for us by his incarnate life. For Gregory, the Spirit purifies the believer in baptism, forgiving the sins of the past and aiding them in their struggle to resist future sin and grow in virtue.

Baptism is just the beginning of Christian life for both fathers. As in the beginning, Athanasius believes humanity is tasked with maintaining baptismal grace through avoiding sin, which would lose the indwelling of the Spirit, and practicing virtue, as the natural response to being made god is to act as he does. Gregory understands Christian life in a less static sense than Athanasius. He believes humanity is called to grow in virtue, in turn growing in likeness of God, and this is how we walk the path to *theōsis*. Gregory also stresses suffering to imitate and participate in the obedient suffering of Christ which overcame the disobedience of the Fall. The fullness of deification is eschatological in both *theopoiēsis* and *theōsis*. For Athanasius at the *eschaton* deification is fully realised as we are resurrected and saved after Christ's pattern. We enjoy some aspects of deification on earth,

but ultimately all the gifts are received at the end, when we shall become immortal and impassible. Likewise, for Gregory, while we continually grow in likeness of God on earth, it is at the *eschaton* that we shall be fully made like him through the power of Christ's incarnate humanity. The heavenly state for Athanasius is characterised by participation in all the divine attributes as we are made gods by grace, transcending our nature. For Gregory our being made gods consists more in our complete knowledge of God and eternal heavenly contemplation of him, participating in this fundamentally divine activity.

There are numerous similarities between these independently formed theologies of deification. Both Fathers root the realistic deification of humanity in the hypostatic union. Humans can only become gods, because God has been united with human nature through the person of Christ. Rather than focusing on the cross as the sole saving event, Athanasius and Gregory understand the whole of Christ's life as redemptive, beginning at the incarnation and continuing through to the ascension. Deification is the combined work of the Son and Spirit in both theologies, with the Spirit realising individually what Christ has done in principle. While growing in likeness of God through virtue is given more attention in Gregory, this principle exists in Athanasius and morality in general is seen as essential for sustaining the deified state. Both Fathers also recognise the difficulty of doing good and avoiding sin as a consequence of the Fall and understand part of Christ's redemptive work appropriated through the Spirit to be aiding humanity in their striving for goodness. Deification is for Athanasius and Gregory something which begins in this life and sees its completion and fulfilment at the *eschaton*. More generally the similarities of our Fathers' ideas can be seen in the fact that they share the same basic structure, the one we have used to structure this study. Humanity's created state and the Fall are key for both, as is the salvific nature of the incarnation; the appropriation of this salvation through baptism and the Spirit; the moral life of Christians, and finally the *eschaton* and our heavenly destiny. The greatest similarity is that both Fathers understand us to become gods and to be united with God when we are fully deified at the *eschaton*.

Despite these similarities, our Fathers' theologies of deification are significantly different. Anthropology pervades both fathers' theologies, though they disagree in this area. For Athanasius, the natural state of humanity is fallen humanity, devoid of grace. His natural humanity is in a perpetual state of lack, constantly reliant upon grace and wholly other than

God. For Gregory, humanity's natural state is the Edenic state, one not static, but of growth towards God. Humanity naturally possesses a nature akin to the divine. Consequently, for Athanasius, Christ brings humanity into a new static state, while for Gregory, he returns humanity to a state of growth towards God. Hence, Athanasius' moral focus is on the perseveration of our deified state, while Gregory's is on attaining it. God is the agent of deification for Athanasius and though not passive in the maintenance of deification, we are passive in its reception. For Gregory, deification is the combined work of humanity and God. We strive to become like God and rise to him, he comes down to us and completes the mystery by making us fully like him. The Fathers' concepts of the deified state also differ dramatically, with Athanasius focusing on attributes and Gregory on activity. For Athanasius, we are gods, because we possess all the attributes of God, though this is by participation and transcending our nature, while God possesses these attributes naturally. For Gregory, we are gods, because we share in his activity. God is good and goodness flows from him, so too we shall be perfected in virtue so good will flow from us. God knows fully and contemplates himself eternally, so in heaven we too shall know and contemplate him. Ultimately, the start points differ; Christ's redemptive work differs; the reasons for moral living differ, and the end points differ. Deification is not one uniform doctrine for Athanasius and Gregory.

Perhaps the best approach to these theories of deification is to recognise them both as deification, but find a means of distinguishing between them. However, the *realistic* and *moral* labels are not the way to do so. The *realistic* label seems appropriate for Athanasius, since he does envision a transformation of the believer into a *god* in a realistic sense. Additionally, participation is the foundation for these ideas. However, to label Athanasius' deification as *realistic* and not *moral* leads one to overlook the significant role morality plays in his system. Moral living, for Athanasius, is both the means of maintaining the grace of deification and the natural and appropriate response to receiving such grace. Without living morally one will not maintain the Spirit's indwelling and will lose their deification. Turning to Gregory, to label his *theōsis moral*, but not *realistic* is untenable. Morality is a crucial aspect of Gregory's deification and one does grow in likeness of God through imitating his goodness through virtue and good works. Yet, even if participation is not primarily the means in which Gregory expresses it, he does believe the believer will be realistically

transformed into a god and united with God through the power of Christ's humanity at the *eschaton*. Gregory's *theōsis* has both a moral component concerning growing in likeness of God through virtue and a realistic component concerning being more literally transformed into God's likeness through sharing in Christ's divinity.

The limit of study is that we cannot fairly comment on whether a distinction truly exists between Cappadocian and Alexandrian deification, for this would require a consideration of all the Alexandrian and Cappadocian Fathers. However, with regards to Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus, we can confidently say there are significant areas of divergence between their approaches to deification and while both should rightly be considered deification, it is important to understand that these are distinct approaches. That is not to say they are wholly incompatible, but there are more significant differences here than simply different focuses. Perhaps in the quest to pin down a detailed definition of deification we might turn to the significant areas of commonality between the Fathers on this matter. Most fundamentally with Athanasius and Gregory, we see that deification involves the elevation of humanity to divine heights where they are united with God and made like him through the deified humanity of Christ and work of the Spirit within them. Turning to the Fathers we can hope to grow in understanding of this great mystery, but ultimately we will find disagreements and we will still have questions, for deification, along with all salvation, is a mystery. For "the achievements of the Saviour, resulting from His becoming man, are of such kind and number, that if one should wish to enumerate them, he may be compared to men who gaze at the expanse of the sea and wish to count its waves" (CA 54.4).

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