Gregory of Nyssa - Entry to the Encyclopaedia of Early Christian World

St. Gregory of Nyssa, Jacinth (Sùmbùllù) Church; fresco painted between the tenth-twelfth centuries. The church was probably dedicated to St. Mary 'Blacherniotissa' (as the local notice states).The image of the Virgin has a central place in the church. Next to the Mary bishops are represented; among them is Gregory of Nyssa.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, fresco from the fourteenth century, Chora Church, Istanbul. This image (on line) is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic license.

Gregory of Nyssa
(c. 332 - after 385)

Gregory's life

St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 332 - after 385[1]), often referred to as Nyssen, was one of the three representatives of the Cappadocian theological school, the other two being Basil of Caesarea, 'the Great' (his older brother), and Gregory Nazianzus (his friend). He was probably born in Neocaesarea, Pontus (the modern Nikşar in north-eastern Turkey). Gregory was firstly educated by his brother, Basil, his sister Macrina and mother Emmelia,[2] and probably later at schools in Caesarea and Athens[3] where he might have studied philosophy, literature, and very probably the sciences of his day; at least this is what the knowledge displayed in his writings suggests. It is not easy to confirm the details of his education as he himself declares that, additionally to Basil "Paul, John and the rest of the Apostles and prophets" were his teachers".[4] He was initially an *Anagnostes* (a layman Reader), and then decided for a career in rhetoric. He married[5], but when his wife died he became a priest at the entreaty of his friends, Gregory Nazaianus especially. Nyssen worked for a short while in Constantinople in 349, which he visited often.[6] In ca. 371 his older brother, Basil, Bishop of Caesarea at that time, ordered him, rather against his will, to become bishop of the seat of Nyssa, a small town in St. Basil's metropolitan district, in today central Turkey.

In 376, while St. Gregory was absent, a synod of Arian bishops and court prelates gathered in Nyssa and deposed him, inducing him for a while to adopt a wandering life. In 378, after the

[1] Gregory attended a council of Constantinople in 394; his name appears there between that of the metropolitans of Caesarea and Iconium, Schaff and Wace, 1893: 8. But after that event there are no records concerning Nyssen. See Silvas, 2007: 57. Also Maraval, 1988: 25-38.
[2] See Silvas, 2007: 5. Also Van Dam, 2003: 1.
[3] Silvas, 2007: 5
[4] Ludlow, 2000: 21.
[5] Silvas, "Introduction. Was Gregory of Nyssa married?", 2007: 16-25. Also Daniélou, 1956: 71-78 and Karras, 2005: 111-121.
[6] Silvas, 2007: 6. Most of Gregory's biographical information here was taken from Ludlow, 2000, and Silvas, 2007.

death of the Arian emperor Valens[7], 'the father of fathers' (as he would later be called by the Second Council of Nicaea/the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 AD[8]) returned to his see in Nyssa. A year later, he attended a Synod at Antioch and was subsequently sent by its members to visit the diocese of Pontus. While there, he was elected archbishop of Sebaste/Sebasteia (380), which he had to administer for a few months, although much against his will. In 381, together with his friend St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Nyssen took a prominent role at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople where the trinitarian dogmas of Nicene Orthodoxy prevailed; he supported Nazianzen on that occasion. In 383 Gregory of Nyssa was again in the capital of the Byzantine Empire at the summons of emperor Theodosius for another council[9], and again in 394 for a synod called by the Patriarch Nectarios/Nektarios, and also in 385 when he delivered a funeral oration in the same city for the princess Pulcheria (on the 24 August 385) and, after a few weeks ("perhaps 14 September"[10]), for her mother, the empress Flacilla.[11] Apparently he died soon afterward.[12] His memory is celebrated on the on 10 January.

Gregory's writings

Among Nyssen's treatises, *On Virginity* (before 379), *De opificio hominis*/*On the Making of Man* (380), *Against Eunomius* (its books were written in various years between 378 and 384) [13], *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (381),[14] *The Life of Macrina* (382),[15]*Profession of Faith*

[7] The Arian emperor Valens died in the catastrophic battle of Adrianople on the 9th August 378, and was succeeded by the Orthodox emperor, Theodosius I, who ruled 379-395).
[8] Gregory was also called "Luminary of Nyssa" in the Nicacan Synod 11, Act VI; see Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos/Migne 1904: xi. 191.
[9] Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa. The Letters*, pp. 50-51. See also J. Daniélou 1955.
[10] Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa. The Letters*, p. 52.
[11]Idem, p. 52.
[12] See footnote 1.
[13] Silvas, 2007: 49-53 (Silvas dates *Contra Eunomium* ll to the year 382, Contra Eunomium lll between 382-383, and Contra Eunomium lV between 383-384); Cassin, dates *Contra Eunomium* l to 378, 2014: 3; he attributes the other books of *Contra Eunomium* to dates close to those proposed by Silva- Cassin 2014: 3-4.
[14] Silvas, 2007: 52.
[15] Gregory of Nyssa, 1952: 370-414; Maraval, 1971; Silvas, 2007.

(383),[16] *On the Divinity of the Son and On the Holy Spirit* (delivered 383[17]), *On Not Three Gods* (370-380?)[18], *Against the Pneumatomachoi* (384-385),[19]*Antirrheticus against Appollinarius* (ca. 385),[20] *To Theophilus* (shortly after 385), *De anima et resurrectione/On the Soul and the Resurrection* (383-384)[21], *The Life of Moses* (391-392)[22], *The Great Catechechetical Oration* (after 381) are still very central to scholarly preoccupations.

His epistles have been increasingly scrutinized by researchers; John Behr,[23] Neil McLynn,[24] and Johannes Zachhuber[25] touch on them in their works. Of particular interest is *Epistle* 38 thought for a long time to have been written by Basil of Caesarea, but attributed by more and more scholars to Gregory of Nyssa; in any case, all editions, including the critical one[26], introduce it as a letter between the two brothers on "the difference between substance and person". (There is another important extant letter sent by Gregory to his brother Peter, Letter 35, on the distinction between ousia and hypostasis[27]).

Gregory's theology

a) On the Trinity

[16] Silvas, 2007: 50-51; Cassin, 2014: 3-4.
[17] Silvas, 2007: 50.
[18] See Gregory of Nyssa/F. Mueller/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1958: 37-57, trans. 1893: 331-336. See also Ayres, 2004 and 2006; and Karfikova, 2011: 131-168.
[19] Silvas, 2014: 51.
[20] Gregory of Nyssa/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1960; Gregory of Nyssa/Callahan/J. W. Jaeger (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, 8. 1, 1952:370-414; Maraval, 1971.
[21] Silvas, 2007: 51 (cf. Daniélou).
[22] Silvas, 2007: 55.
[23] Behr, 2004, vol. 2: 415-427.
[24] Neil B. McLynn "The two Gregories: Nyssen and Nazianzen", paper at the Seminar 'Gregory of Nyssa: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives', 25 May 2016. During Trinity term 2016, Anna Marmodoro, Neil B. McLynn hosted this seminar dedicated to Nyssen in Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford.
[25] Zachhuber, 2003: 73-90.
[26] Gregory of Nyssa?/Basil Magni/the Great, 380's; Courtonne, 1957: 81-93, vol. 1; Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1895: 137-141. See also Deferrari, 2014: 196-227, vol. 1.
As mentioned, this epistle has been discussed, among others, by Zachhuber, 2003: 73-90; Fedwick, 1978: 31-51; Maspero, Degli Espositi, and Benedetto, 214: 579-594 (the authors of the article conclude that the letter was "very probable" written by Nyssen) and Turcescu, 2003: 97-110.
[27] Gregory of Nyssa, 378-380. See Silvas, 2007: 249-259; commentary 247-249. See also Behr, 2004: 415-427, vol. 2, and Turcescu, 1977: 63-82.

In *To Eustathius on the Holy Trinity*,[28] *On Not Three Gods*. *To Ablabius*[29] and, if we accept it as his, in *Letter 38*,[30] Nyssen expresses his trinitarian position on the vein of Athanasius (293-298);[31] as we shall see, he refines the view of the Alexandrian. Like Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, he offers equal status to the members of the Trinity. Even though the members of the Cappadocian School did not have identical ideas on all the issues they wrote about, their stands on the Trinity and their Christology were common to the three of them. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three eternal *hypostases* (ὑποστάσεις) of the same essence (οὐσία). *Epistle 38* mentioned above "presents the relation between *ousia* and *hypostasis* in terms of the grammatical distinction between the general and the particular".[32] Its line of argument clarifies what consubstantiality means for Gregory: whatever terms indicate the substance of one member in a class, this will apply to the others as well; those members that are described by the same terms in regard to their substance are consubstantial.

When thinking that each members of the Trinity is both a person and an individual entity, it seems that Gregory implies that each of them can have different roles. At least this is what the ending of *To Eustathius on the Holy Trinity* suggests "Only-begotten God is the Anointed, and the Holy Spirit is His Unction, and the appellation of Anointed points to the Kingly authority, and the anointing is the token of His Kingship, then the Holy Spirit shares also in His dignity. If, therefore, they say that the attribute of Godhead is significative of dignity, and the Holy Spirit is shown to share in this last quality, it follows that He Who partakes in the dignity will also partake in the name which represents it."[33] *On Not Three Gods*. *To Ablabius* underlines that there is no difference in nature among the members of Trinity: "every activity that proceeds from God to creation and is named in accordance with all sorts of ideas begins from Father and proceeds through the Son and is completed into the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the name of the activity is not divided up into the plurality of the agents" (GNO III. 1, 47. 21-48.5, Mueller). But certainly they are intimately interconnected; it is impossible to think about one without the other; Paul Fides says that they are in a dance

[28] Gregory of Nyssa. Mueller/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1958; trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1893: 527-548.
[29] Gregory of Nyssa. Mueller/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1958; trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1958: 37-57 trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1893: 331-336. See Ayres, 2004 and 2006; Karfikova, 2011: 131-168.
[30] Gregory of Nyssa?/Basil Magni/the Great? 380s; Courtonne, 1957: 81-93, vol. 1; trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1895: 137-141. See also Deferrari, 2014: 196-227.
[31] Maspero, 2014: 401-429.
[32] Behr, 2004, vol. 2: 415.
[33]Gregory of Nyssa. Mueller/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1958; trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1893: 330.

of love, a *perichoresis*.[34] Sarah Coakley has coined and operates with the expression "ordered causality" when she described the dynamics inside the Trinity.[35]

Many contemporary researchers have analyzed Nyssen's stand on the triune nature of God, and its implications for other theological notions from both Antiquity and modern times.[36] For instance, Johannes Zachhuber considers that "the innovative Cappadocian settlement to the Trinitarian debate provided the backdrop for the first theological theory of the individual cast as a definition of the hypostasis."[37] To Nyssen, individuals are "the universal nature in its concrete existence."[38] Trinity as understood by Gregory can be considered a distinctive version of what Marmodoro calls the "One and Many Problem", "a chapter in the history of Mereology".[39] Nyssen, as did the other representatives of the Cappadocian school, "expanded the Church's understanding of the Trinity by applying Nicene conclusions about Christ to the Holy Spirit."[40] Thus they countered the Pneumatomachians, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.[41] Lucian Turcescu understands that for Gregory, "The three divine persons know and love each other, are in communion with each other, and freely act together in their common will"[42]. Trinity has become in time a model for social existence and action (in Pavel Florensky's work, for instance[43]) and some theologians opine that Gregory's Trinity can be seen from this angle: among them we can mention Sarah Coakley,[44] Alister E McGrath,[45] and John Zizioulas.[46]

b) Christology

In Gregory's understanding, Christ has two natures: divine and human; these are simultaneously united and distinctive. As Morwenna Ludlow indicates,[47] some scholars have

[34] Fiddes, 2000.
[35] Sarah Coakley, "Introduction" in S. Coakley (ed), 2003.
[36] Zachhuber, 2003: 73-90; Stead: 1990: 149-163 and 1981: 170-191; Turcescu, 2003: 97-110.
[37] Zachhuber, 2014: 97.
[38] Idem, p. 99.
[39] Anna Marmodoro, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Trinity", paper at the Seminar 'Gregory of Nyssa: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives', 8 June 2016. During Trinity term 2016, Anna Marmodoro and Neil B. McLynn hosted this seminar dedicated to Nyssen in Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford.
[40] Papandrea, 2012: 210.
[41] Meredith, 1999.
[42] Turcescu, 2005.
[43] Florensky, 1997.
[44] Coakley, 2002; Coakley (ed.), 2003.
[45] McGrath, 2011 [1994].
[46] Zizioulas: 1985.
[47] Ludlow, 2007: 97-107 (especially).

treated the divisive aspect,[48] while others have underlined the distinction between the two.[49] The bishop expresses the union in terms of "unconfused union"/*henōsis*,[50] "mixture" and "fusion" and expounds, in terms strongly reminding of Athanasius, that Christ "mingled" with humanity and received its nature in order to make possible for "the whole mass of our nature" to be sanctified."[51] The distinctiveness consist in the fact that the Son is begotten, while the Father has no originator. But they are consubstantial – as the Holy Spirit also is – and all three are coeternal. They constitute the three *hypostasis* of the Godhead.[52] A fragment from the above-mentioned *Letter 38* encapsulates some of this:

> Since then, as says the Lord in the Gospels, he that hath seen the Son sees the Father also; on this account he says that the Only-begotten is the express image of His Father's person. That this may be made still plainer I will quote also other passages of the apostle in which he calls the Son "the image of the invisible God," and again "image of His goodness;" not because the image differs from the Archetype according to the definition of indivisibility and goodness, but that it may be shewn that it is the same as the prototype, even though it be different. For the idea of the image would be lost were it not to preserve throughout the plain and invariable likeness. He therefore that has perception of the beauty of the image is made perceptive of the Archetype.[53]

It would be correct to affirm that, at least in part, Gregory's Christology took shape in his dialogue with Apollinarius (310-c.390) and, paradoxically, with one of the latter's opponents, the Arian/Anomoean Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. ca. 393). In arguments that suggests that Nyssen had a solid philosophical education, he explains how it is possible for Christ to be *homoousios* with both God and humans.[54] To briefly present the ideas of his conversants, one should notice that the bishop of Laodicea, in his effort to emphasize Jesus's divinity and the unity of his person, went so far as to deny the existence of a rational human soul (νοῦς) in Christ's human nature. Apollinarius thought that the Son was totally infused by the *Logos* and that his body was a glorified and spiritualized form of humanity. From another

[48] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 1977: 299.
[49] Sorabji, 1988: 120.
[50] Gregory of Nysa/Jaeger (3.1)1958: 184.
[51] Idem; 151, 16-20. For a commentary on Gregory's Christology see Daley: 1997: 87-96 and 2002: 469-488.
[52] In a recent talk given in Oxford, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz presented Gregory's "ways of understanding what the name 'deity' (θεότης) means in his opinion. It is worth mentioning it here because it introduces a new idea; "'deity' could be taken either as a nature-name or as an activity-name. Nyssen prefers to take it as an activity-name, though he also entertains the former hypothetically since it is the majority view"; A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa and the three Gods problem*, paper delivered at the Patristic Seminar, Christ Church, University of Oxford, June 2016; (I have his permission to include his thoughts here). Ayres, 2003: 15-44.
[53] Basil of Caesarea/Gregory of Nysa? 1986: 141; Courtonne, 1957: 91-92.
[54] Gregory of Nysa/W. Jaeger, ed. 1960: 953-960, 1101-1108, and 2014: 524, trans. Wace and Schaff (eds.), 1893: 35-314.

perspective, Eunomius (d. ca. 393) argued that the created nature of Christ is a simple derivation of the uncreated nature of God, which is solely so ('unbegotten'). That while the Son, as Christ stated, is "begotten from the Father."[55]

To Apollinarius Gregory replied by saying that human nature has a universal as well as an individual nature, and that Christ is *homoousios* with us with regard to its universal aspect. It is easy to observe here Gregory's intimate knowledge of Platonic philosophy and the way in which he adapted it to Christian ideas.[56] To Eunomius, Gregory replied that the language of "cause" and "of the cause" do not refer to nature, but to the difference concerning the manner of existence. Because of this, the characteristics of the Father which we express in negative terms also hold for the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christopher Beeley commented on Nyssen's belief that Christ's two natures are united but unconfused (a view he shared with Basil and Nazianzen), and inquired as to how Gregory understood that some characteristics of both the human and divine nature of Christ can be predicated (one of the issues the bishop of Nyssa tried to elucidate especially in his debate with Eunomius). The scholar from Yale emphasizes one difference between the divine and the human nature that is certain: the former is impassible, while the latter can feel suffering. Additionally, Beeley questions whether the concepts of ousia, hypostasis, and eidos as comprehended by Nyssen constitute the basis for a consistent metaphysics. I.e. he queries if there is a consistent metaphysics to support Gregory's doctrinal position?[57] I believe one can securely answer this in the positive.

The discussion with Eunomius was also an opportunity for Gregory to underline that no philosophical analysis or conceptual derivation can inform about God's nature (*phusis*).[58] He stated that the most appropriate way to refer to it is apophatically (*Against Eunomius* II [953-960, 1101-1108], IV 11 [524]).[59] Here the bishop anticipates Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite's position. For Gregory, God shall always be transcendent; nevertheless the bishop concedes that some knowledge of him is granted to those open to the manifestation of his *energeiai*/"energies" in the world.

[55] Eunomius/Vaggione, 1987.
[56] Turcescu, 2005.
[57] Beeley, 2016.
[58] Gregory of Nysa/Friedrich Mueller/W. Jaeger (ed.), 1958: 131-233. See contemporary comments on it in Daley, 1997: 87-96.
[59] For a general discussion on the apophatic method in Christianity see Turner, 1995, the last reprint 1999.

c) Knowledge of God

Patristic scholars analysed Gregory's specific type of mysticism, and they observed that it is very different from that characteristic to the medieval mystics: it does not involve visions or dreams, but prayers and asceticism.[60] Nevertheless, it is obvious that the fourth century bishop is not only a believer in knowledge about reality acquired through God's grace; he is also a dialectician. Questions as "How… can a word of movement come from one that is rest?", "How an immaterial God can create matter?" and "How unity related to multiplicity?" abounds in his treatises and homilies. Anna Marmodoro, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, Jonathan Hill, and Johannes Zachhuber, among others, have analyzed Gregory's ontology in the light of possible answers to these conundrums.

As evident from his debate with Eunomius[61] and underlined above, Nyssen thought that God's essence cannot be known, hence the human efforts to express the notion of the Creator through various approximating definitions that rely on observation of how God's "energies" manifest. These are noticeable in nature as well as in the development of human soul, and are described in the Holy Bible. One way of becoming aware of the existence of the divine energies is by remarking the harmony within the Cosmos. The preservation of a balance among contrary forces is, according to Gregory, only possible through God's intervention.[62] As I argued somewhere else, Gregory believed that everything that exists has an inner nature that cannot be immediately known and becomes manifest only through its own energies.[63]

[60] Louth, 2007; McGinn, 2004; Musurillo, 1979; Edwards, "Allegory and Mysticism in Gregory of Nyssa", paper at the Seminar 'Gregory of Nyssa: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives', Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford, 27 April, 2016.
[61] Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* II [984 - 985, 1009, 1069]; *Great Catechism*. 'Prologue' [12], 12 [44]; *Hexameron*[73]; *Life of Moses* II 168 [377 - 380]; *Ecclesiastes* I [624], II [644 - 645]; *Song of Songs* I [781 - 784], XI [1009 - 1013], XIII [1049 - 1052]; *Beatitudes* VI [1268]).
[62] Heine, 1995 and 1997: 130-136.
[63] Ene D-Vasilescu, 2013: 151-169.

The moral human development which Nyssen calls the "perpetual progress" (*epektasis*),[64] is another means through which God's *energeiai* are at work. The process involves the cultivation of virtues and expresses the striving of the human being to join God, to become deified.[65] Gregory believed that people can have glimpses of the kingdom to come in the virtue of being made in the divine image; that happens in special moments of ecstatic experience (*The Life of Moses*). As observed, such a view situates him in opposition with the Anomoians, especially with Eunomius, who maintained that God can be known by the human mind through logical operations. At the same time Gregory underlines the importance of human reason in articulating the faith; he considers that human beings progress in their knowledge of both the mundane and the transcendent realities.

d) Creation

According to Gregory, the world was created by God out of love and as an act of will. The creation of humans is still happening in God's mind; it will be so until *pleroma* (fullness) is reached. Some contemporary works contests that such a notion exists in Nyssen's corpus; Anna Marmodoro's discussion about how, in Gregory's writings, God as an immaterial entity produces something material given the principle 'like cause like', is relevant from this point of view. The researcher answers this query by saying that through the process of abstraction, Nyssen individuates "physical aspects of the material objects as definable, intelligible entities".[66] All scholars agree that Gregory believes that after purification both the souled and un-souled elements of the universe will be saved/restored. This is in consequence of the same divine love that prompted the initial creative action, and that has primacy among the virtues and among the divine commandments.

[64] Blowers, 1992: 151-171.
[65] Ene D-Vasilescu, forthcoming 2016.
[66] Marmodoro, 2015: 110.

Gregory avers that initially there were no divisions within creation (sexual or of any other kind); they only occurred in consequence of the lapse. There will be none at the end of the universe. The fall of the human being, the only existing rational entity, caused that of the entire cosmos, therefore it is logical to assume that salvation will be both individual and collective. When the world will reach its completion, even this division [between the individual and the collective] will be transcended. His explanation with regard to how such a process takes place is different from that of Origen; Gregory does not believe in the preexistence of the souls and in the precosmic fall (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*). Adamantius thought that before the creation of the material world *logikoi* or rational intellects (*noes*) existed by themselves (without the support of a body). They were in union with the Supreme creative Logos but eventually, with one exception, they turned away from it and received bodies. The exceptional *logikos* became the human soul of Christ. As for the others, they received bodies in accordance to the degree of their lapse. The holiest souls received light-weight bodies and became angels; those who had fallen furthest became gruesome demons; those who were between the two became humans. For Origen, restoration means the return to the initial state of the primordial henad that has just been described. Nyssen managed to escape this circularity because for him Restoration (*apokatastasis*) does not imply the existence of primordial *logikoi*, and even less that of the episode concerning their fall. In *On the Soul and the Resurrection* he explains that the end "is one and only one; it is this: when the complete whole of our race shall have been perfected from the first man to the last, some transformation and obliteration of the properties of human nature (such as mortality) [will take place] – a transformation that only occurs fully after Christ's ascension into heaven."[67]

[67] Gregory of Nyssa/ Wace and Schaff, 1893: 639.

Freedom of choice for humans was stated before the fourth century – in Origen's writings for instance; the Alexandrian was convinced that God's will shall eventually be consensually accepted by his creation. Gregory of Nyssa is even sounder on this aspect;[68] for him, after purification through 'fire' and the conversion of passions, all –"from the first man to the last"[69] – will be saved. Mario Baghos finds inconsistencies within the writings of the Cappadocian bishop on the issue of redemption (he thinks in some passages Gregory affirms universal salvation, but in others not), and proposes an understanding of this doctrine merely in terms of intentionality. He opines that "any allusion to universal salvation in St. Gregory ['s works should be seen] as an expression of God's intention for humanity."[70] The example Baghos adduces to justify his assertion is Macrina's, i.e. Gregory's statement in *On the Soul and the Resurrection* that some are "straightway" even in this life, i.e. they are "purified from evil", while others healed hereafter through fire for the appropriate length of time." The researcher then comments that: "we can choose either to accept or ignore this purification; [that] is confirmed by the saint's many exhortations that we freely undertake the virtuous path."[71] Ilaria Ramelli agrees that in Gregory's work each person would need a different period of time prior to his or her salvation (depending on the multitude and gravity of each individual's sins), but in the end everyone will align their will to that of God. She observes that, since for Gregory every person would eventually accept the good having gone through purification, in his thought free will is compatible with universal salvation.[72] Such an idea made Kallistos Ware posit that, "if dissociated from speculations about a pre-cosmic fall, a carefully qualified expression of universal hope in acceptable, even within the bounds of strict orthodoxy."[73]

[68] Harrison, 1992.
[69] Gregory of Nyssa/ Wace and Schaff, 1893: 639.
[70] Baghos, 2012: 125-162.
[71] Idem.
[72] Ramelli, 2013: 433-434.
[73] Ware, 2004: 206. vol. 1.

e) Anthropology, Soteriology/Eschatology

As noticed, Gregory speaks about a perpetual progress (*ἐπέκτασις*) towards the Beautiful and Good (only two of God's many titles), an ascending movement of the human souls through time into its (the Divine's) infinity. As the bishop states in *On the Making of Man* and *Contra Eunomium*, while the biological processes end at the moment of *apokatastasis*, the moral and spiritual development continues. But the unfolding of this growth, either in a linear or cyclical manner, does not contradict the fact that the kingdom of God, which the transfigured souls will finally reach, is transcendent. This transcendence is to be celebrated because it is the ground of the infinite human ascent to God. Rowan William emphasizes that this ascent is possible only through Christ and the Holy Spirit.[74]

Nyssen's knowledge and appreciation of Plato and Origen's writings, of Greek literature, and of the science of his time instilled in him an open-mindedness that allowed his writings to convey some courageous ideas, most notable among them being the last two commented above [the non-existence of divisions within the initial creation, and especially that of universal salvation]. On the latter, he said: "Every one of us will participate 'in the blessings which are in Him.'"[75] His conception was the most daring among all Patristic theories on this issue;[76] nevertheless, the bishop of Nyssa was not reproved for it – as known, Origen greatly suffered for thinking in a similar way. Gregory was probably spared because he was Basil's brother.[77]

In another text that focuses on salvation and deification, *The Great Catechechetical Oration*, Gregory holds that instrumental in those is not only the personal relation with God, but also the daily exercise of love towards fellow humans. According to him, redemption means that everything is continually transfigured; that includes human emotions (which manifest themselves in the soul, but are not of the soul). Hence those that are negative can be employed for positive purposes: furry and jealousy, for instance, can be used to energize someone to act, and their performance can lead to good deeds (*On the Making of Man*). The final thing to be surpassed is death.

[74] Williams, 1979: 58. He affirms that this ascent is possible only through Christ and the Holy Spirit. See also McGuckin, 2009.
[75] Gregory of Nyssa/Wace and Schaff, 1893: 639.
[76] Constas, 2014: 139-163.
[77] Ware, 2004, vol. 1: 206.

Gregory of Nyssa and science of his time

In some of his writings, especially in *An Apology for The Hexaemeron*, Gregory engages with the forms of contemporary Hellenistic theories concerning the natural world. He did not hesitate to utilize ideas of his time that explained the creation of the universe as long as these did not contradict his belief, in line with the biblical account, in a universe created by God. He accommodated coeval philosophical insights and scientific data – drawn from physics and cosmology – into his theological accounts, thus continuing the dialogue with contemporary culture initiated by earlier Christian apologists.

As already suggested when referring to the *logikos* of every created element, Nyssen believed that the ability to create was conferred not only to humans, but also to the non-human universe; this has generative energies. In order to account for this inherent capacity of creation to unfold by itself over time, Nyssen adapted and elaborated further the theory of *logoi spermatikoi*, originally put forward by the Stoics, and taken over by Plotinus (204/5-270) and the Christian writers of the second century. The theory, also circulated by Augustine via the Latin cognate terms of *rationes seminales/causales*, enjoyed a widespread popularity in the theological circles during the following centuries and was further developed. What is of paramount importance is that for Gregory matter is not inert but possesses energies that allow it to develop and further generate. In his work he employed elements from the natural philosophy of his age and adopted the seminal reason concept in order both to understand and explain why such a dignity was bestowed on the matter, and to expound the teleological progression of the universe. Such ideas explain those of determinism and freedom.

It might be the case that modern theories of evolution and theologies of creation can be accommodated within the theological framework proposed by Gregory. His natural theology, by assimilating the scientific knowledge of his era, could constitute a model for other theologians who might be able to understand that there should not be an antagonism between natural philosophy and religion, and that theology can dialogue with scientific enquiry.

Nyssen and language

Gregory is concerned with the semantic phenomena at work in his theology; he is aware that the capacity of human language to capture the richness of divine reality is limited. That especially in discussions concerning the Trinity and issues as the nature of the universals.[78]

[78] Radde-Gallwitz, 2009.

There is currently a tendency to look for a theory of language in Gregory of Nyssa's writings. Among others, Beeley,[79] Radde-Gallwitz, Behr, and Cassin [80] elaborate on predications concerning God's nature and the role of nouns when elaborating on the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*.[81] Sarah Coakley pays attention to Gregory's use of gendered language.[82]

Gregory of Nyssa and Byzantium

Gregory and the other two representatives of the Cappadocian school greatly contributed to the development of Byzantine culture. They did so in various way, one of them being the adaptation of Platonic categories to Christian realities. Concepts such as beauty and Goodness, which constitute the subject of the dialogues penned by the Greek philosopher, are deployed by the bishop of Nyssa to explain the relationship between image and archetype. Because of this, David Bradshaw considers that Nyssen, as well as Basil and Nazianzen, assumed an 'iconic' outlook of life that became an epitome for the Empire. He also thinks that the concept of the realization of the divine image within people is a part of the same ideatic process.

Scholarly afterlife of Nyssen's ideas

As noticed, many of Gregory of Nyssa's notions are still object of academic preoccupations and debate today; that is especially true with regard to his Christology and trinitarian position. Jean Daniélou and Hans Urs Balthasar[83]made Gregory a subject of theological, philosophical, and historical research in the twentieth century. Contemporary theological discussions lead by theologians such as Christopher A. Beeley, John Behr, Paul M. Blowers, Hans Boersma, Mark Edwards, Sr. Nonna Verna Harrison, Jonathan Hill, Morwenna Ludlow, L. F. Mateo-Seco and G. Maspero, Anthony Meredith, Ilaria Ramelli, Kallistos Ware, Johannes Zachhuber, John Zizioulas, et al. keep Nyssen in the centre of scholarly discussions.

[79] Beeley, 2012.
[80] Cassin, 2013: 41-67.
[81] Behr, 2004, vol. 2: 415-427.
[82] Coakley (ed). 2003.
[83] Von Balthasar, 1995.

It is interesting to emphasize that in the twenty first century his ideas are subject not only to theological, but also philosophical and historical conversations through, for instance, the publications authored by Sarah Coakley, Anna Marmodoro, Neil B. McLynn, Richard Sorabji, and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz.

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