

COSMIC MAN

THE DIVINE PRESENCE

*An Analysis of the Place and Role of the Human Race
in the Cosmos, in relation to God and the historical
world, in the thought of*

St. Gregory of Nyssa
(ca 330 to ca 395 A.D.)

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INTRODUCTION

This book seeks to analyze the problem of human existence between its two poles, God and the Creation, in relation to the writings of one 4th century Christian thinker, Gregory of Nyssa, born around 330 A.D. and deceased around 395 A.D.

The first part of the work is epistemological and the second part ontological. The epistemological discussion starts with the background of the 4th century theological debate between Eunomius and the Cappadocians. It then lifts up two major epistemological principles in Gregory's thought - *epinoia* and *akolouthia*, in relation to the Christian Scriptures.

The second part, for the sake of convenience, deals mainly with the dialectic between *diastema* / *discontinuity* and *metousia* / *continuity*. The key concept of *pleroma* is also then analyzed, in relation to sinful human existence in history.

The conclusion pulls together the main structure of Gregory's thought and relates it to problems posed by our contemporary civilization.

The method used is basically to adduce texts from the writer which reveal his thinking on certain particular aspects. In view of the extreme length of some of the very significant texts, they have had to be relegated to the appendix.

The book also seeks to show that the attempts to classify Gregory as a Platonist or a Neo-platonist cannot stand examination. Neither can his thought be understood as some sort of 'mystical theology.' This is a category developed in the later history of the West and cannot be adequate for apprehending Nyssa's thought. It also seeks to dispel the notion that Gregory was unoriginal and was merely slavishly or at random borrowing from other thinkers. It deals with the background of certain ideas in order to show that Gregory uses the ideas of other thinkers only after examination by a consistent category - the scriptural Revelation combined with the Principle of *Akolouthia* or coherence.

The book does not shy away from pointing out inconsistencies or from being highly critical of some of Gregory's ideas. On the whole, however, the effort is to present the thought of Gregory of Nyssa as a valid alternative and necessary corrective to current or historical ways of western theologizing. The author confesses a certain bias against western theology. This however, should not be any more an impediment to understanding Gregory than would be the opposite bias which uses Augustinian or scholastic categories or a modern liberal understanding of freedom as the standard for evaluating the thought of Gregory.

(a) The Theme and Its Relevance

The theme of this book focusses on humanity's two basic relationships - to the source and ground of its being on the one hand, and to the created world in which humanity is placed on the other. It is the contention of this work that in an authentic Christian understanding of reality like that of Gregory of Nyssa these two relationships are inseparable from each other. There is no Christian way of understanding reality in a totally secular sense, as if Man and the World were the only two realities with which we have to deal. But then it is equally disastrous for a Christian to think that we can conceive of a God who is concerned only about our souls and has no relationships to the Creation. Neither of our two basic relationships can be conceived, from a Christian perspective, except in terms of each other.

It would be fatal for us, therefore to go on oscillating between, on the one hand, an other-worldly mysticism that ignores the reality and significance of humanity's sinful existence in history, and on the other, a secular humanism that ignores the ground and source of the being of ourselves and the cosmos. Humanity itself becomes distorted and prone to self-destruction when it ignores either pole. Christianity, if it is to be alive in this time, should find a proper perspective of reality that takes both poles adequately into account. No authentic Christian anthropology can be conceived except in the framework which locates man as existing dynamically between these two poles. This work does not seek to provide a full anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa or to deal exhaustively with Nyssa's Christology, soteriology

or theology. It simply provides the structural framework within which the other aspects of Gregory's teaching can be fittingly placed.

The structural frame-work is so decisive for our perception of reality, that slight distortion in the framework can lead to significant error of judgement in living and shaping lives in the world. Starting from a wrong structural framework we may devise very successful sciences and technologies, but in the end the whole thing must come to grief because of the underlying structural error.

To speak more concretely, scientists and philosophers of science are today raising basic structural questions about man's relationship to his world. Is nature inclusive of man or exclusive of man? That is one form in which the question is put by ecological thinkers today.

All civilizations have at their base a cosmological-anthropological structural perspective, which they often take for granted. Our contemporary civilization also has one such - a curious and novel structural perspective, as Edwin A. Burt sees it in his *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*:

“How curious, after all, is the way in which we moderns think about our world! And it is all so novel, too. The cosmology underlying our mental processes is but three centuries old - a mere infant in the history of thought - and yet we cling to it with the same embarrassed zeal with which a young father fondles his newborn baby. Like him, we are ignorant enough of its precise nature, like him we nevertheless take it piously to be ours and allow it a subtly pervasive and unhindered control over our thinking”¹

Professor Burt tells us that “the central metaphysical contrast between medieval and modern thought” is that in medieval thought man's place was more central than that of nature, while in modern thought “nature holds a more independent, more determinative, and more permanent place than man.” The modern world is thus born through a displacement of man from the centre of the structural perspective, the vacancy being filled by an “objective” nature which,

de-deified and secularized, becomes open to our science and our technology. The visionary poet Dante and the philosopher-scientist Bertrand Russell stand as the symbols of the two ages and their cosmologies. Dante's *Divine Comedy* yields place to Russell's human tragedy of an "objective world" where, standing "on the firm foundation of unyielding despair", modern man can worship only "at the shrine that his own hands have built."

But today we are beginning to tire of that heroic stand. Alienation has so caught up with us that we dread this shrine which our own hands have built; for it may at any time collapse bringing the roof down over our heads. It is time that we looked again at the structure of the shrine of this "modern" world in which we have worshipped for these last two or three centuries.

As the cosmological perspective changes, our language also usually undergoes a thorough overhaul. Words like substance, accidents, causality, essence and idea yield to new ones like forces, laws, fields, movements and energies. These latter too are not entirely new. They are often taken from prevailing systems of the day or from forgotten systems of an earlier day. If Newton for example could assume that the world was composed of bodies moving about in space under the influence of definite and measurable forces, he took the idea over from a prevailing ideology of metaphysical mathematics, as Burt shows. This ideology, as well as Newton's own, had dealt with three realities - God, Man and World. For Newton too, God was the super-governor of the universe, who originally created bodies with mass and set them in motion. He also keeps it going.

In later Deism, it was assumed that though God may have set them going, once they got going, they functioned through the laws that God had written into them, without any need for further intervention from God. Once Newtonian theism can thus lead to Leibnizian Deism, the next stage of transition to secularism is understandable, where a God-reference is no longer necessary to explain the origin of the universe, to guarantee its continuing existence.

If that is in some sense how we came to our "modern world" where we are the subject while the world is the object and there is no

“third party” to worry about, we should once again look at our structural perspective. Burtt, after examining our modern structural perspective, comes to the interesting conclusion that we can have an adequate cosmology only when we have an adequate philosophy of mind, one -

“that provides full satisfaction both for the motives of the behaviourists who wish to make mind material for experimental manipulation and exact measurement, and for the motives of idealists who wish to see the startling difference between a universe without mind and a universe organized into a living and sensitive unity through mind, properly accounted for.”²

Burtt is modest enough to admit that the whole thing is beyond him. He recommends, however; “as an indispensable part of its foundation” a “clear historical insight into the antecedents of our present thought-world.” It is as a part of the search for such an insight that this work is offered.

Unfortunately however, Nyssa offers no solution that would satisfy Burtt. Nyssa’s world knew strict logicians like Eunomius who could handle academic technology with great skill and speculative idealists like the school of Plotinus who could see mind or *nous* as the true reality of all that exists, but the experimental method in relation to the human mind was not highly developed in his time and the questions of the behaviourists had not yet risen. We have therefore to be satisfied with but a cursory and finally unsatisfactory sketch of Gregory’s epistemology. The focus will have to be on his ontology. The epistemological preoccupation will have to be subordinated to the ontological one. The question that matters here is: “what is humanity, placed between God and His Creation?” The other question is also important: “How do we know?” But it will have to be treated as a subsidiary question.

But one may question, from the perspective of science, this tendency to relegate epistemology to a subsidiary position. Science, so wedded to precise measurement, cannot function without procedures to test the validity of the instruments used to measure. If mind is the

instrument by which the reality of man's place between God and the universe is to be known or measured, then we must first check and make sure that the mind is capable of knowing it and knowing it accurately. This is the modern perspective from which Burt insists that we need first to have a satisfactory philosophy of mind before we can attempt an adequate cosmology.

This again is a characteristic of our "modern" world. We seek certainty about any knowledge by tracing the sources and method of that knowledge. Knowing how we know is necessary in order to know that what we think we know is really knowledge. This characteristic quest of our modern world is best exemplified in Descartes, who much more than Newton, seems to be the father of our modern world. *In his Meditations on the First Philosophy* (1641) Descartes perfects his method, but his quest is still for the knowledge of these three realities (God, Man and World), though he does not focus on their mutual relationship in any systematic way. In his meditation I, Descartes lays down his starting point, the foundations of the certainty of the system, as the clear and indubitable fact of one's own mental activity.

Descartes is here in basic continuity with the hellenic tradition, especially the Second Academy, which used reason to question the certainty of the self-evident. When all that is known by the mind is put in question, only one thing remains unquestioned, or at least so the Western tradition thought ever since Augustine, namely the indubitability of the doubting mind - the *res cogitans*. All experience has to find its explanation from that single starting point, the thinking mind. The consciousness of the perceiving ego is the foundation rock upon which all modern intellectual systems of certainty stand. Intellectual systems, including that of modern science pre-suppose these three elements:- the consciousness of the perceiving ego, the particularity of the experienced object, and the purity of the reasoning process. But first always is the thing that thinks - *res cogitans*.

Descartes educated by the Jesuits at La Fleche, is here bringing back one of the basic methodological principles of the great father of Western spirituality - Augustine of Hippo. This indubitability of Man's

soul as “conscious nature” or “thinking essence” was Augustine’s sheet anchor which rescued him from sinking in the sea of skeptic doubt. The bishop of Hippo tells us in both the *Enchiridion*³ and the *Retractations* that he was in these early days trying “to raise up an unbreakable dam against the destructive floods of skepticism.”⁴ And he too scans the whole field of knowledge to locate a few (not one, as in the case of Descartes) indubitable *truths*. For Descartes the one single indubitable truth is to serve as a starting point for mathematically systematic reflection. For Augustine the main concern is to show that total skepticism is both unnecessary and dishonest. Later Thomist interpreters⁵ of Augustine have to show that the future bishop of Hippo was actually giving expression, though without using precise terminology, to the scholastic logic of Aristotelian metaphysics - the three principles of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. Augustine himself did not name any principles, but spoke of some *a priori* truths of logic, which are *rationes aeternae*, somewhat similar to eternally valid logical principles. And it is from these logical principles of permanent validity that one derives one’s basic certainty.

But Augustine did not regard reason in itself as either self-sufficient or inerrant. In his *Contra Academicos* written at the age of 33, he concludes, that one has to be impelled by the dual authority of faith and reason, and not by reason alone, in order to arrive at the possession of truth. But clearly it is still the consciousness of man that is the base and locus of certainty. In his *de Trinitate* (written in his late fifties or early sixties) he still sticks to that line, but the youthful expression of *Contra Academicos* is more unequivocal:

“Certainly, no one doubts that we are impelled toward knowledge by a twofold force: the force of authority and the force of reason. And I am resolved never to deviate in the least from the authority of Christ, for I find none more powerful. But as to what is attainable by acute and accurate reasoning, such is my state of mind that I am impatient to grasp what truth is - to grasp it not by belief, but also by comprehension. Meanwhile, I am

confident that I shall find among the Platonists what is not in opposition to our sacred scriptures.”⁶

In our own time, it is important to recognize once again with Augustine that a pure skepticism and an easy agnosticism are no longer luxuries we can afford. We are under pressure to overcome our fear of ontology and metaphysics, and launch a fresh attempt to perceive reality in its rich depths.

Not that such ontological or metaphysical reflection can be expected to appeal immediately to the common public. Discussion on certain basic questions may not interest the public primarily because it lacks the training and background for following the discussion. But when the issue is clarified and the consequences are worked out in actual life, then the public begins to see the importance of the original discussion.

The issue we have in hand is that of the structural perspective of the cosmology that undergirds our civilization. We examine the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa because his thought is an alternative to certain ways of cosmological thinking that have become natural to scientists or theologians. Our own cosmology will have to be much more sophisticated than Gregory’s, because we know much more about the structure of the universe and of matter and energy, of cells and life, and of sub-atomic particles than Gregory could know in his time. But the way he has shown is well worth examining.

(b) The Man Gregory and His Place in the Tradition of the Church

Gregory of Nyssa, younger brother of St. Basil the Great, was born probably between 335 A.D. and 340 A.D. The details of his biography have been admirably investigated by Gerhard May in his contribution to the “Chevtogne Colloquium”⁷ on Gregory of Nyssa studies.

The father, the elder Basil, was a Rhetorician, who must have taught a great deal of classical philosophy to his own sons and daughters.⁸ Gregory shows wide and detailed knowledge of the dialogues of Plato, the dialectic of Aristotle, and the Stoicism of Poseidonius.

He was also well acquainted with the *Enneads* of Plotinus and the writings of Porphyry. Gregory had a special interest in the science of his time; he knew his anatomy as best as he could in his day, probably with the aid of Caesarius, the brother of Gregory Nazianzen. Caesarius was Court physician to the Emperor, and left the Imperial palace to join the monastic community of the Pontic woods started by Basil and the Nazianzen.

Gregory was certainly more enthusiastic than his brother Basil in his attitude towards non-Christian literature and knowledge. Though he had less formal schooling than either of the other two Cappadocians, he had read more philosophy than both Basil and Gregory Nazianzen. Gregory calls himself “uninitiate in logic”⁹ and yet an ardent student of the second sophistic like Louis Meridier¹⁰ can argue that the whole work of Gregory of Nyssa is a conscious imitation of the logical pyrotechnics of this unrestrained Asiatic literary school which began in the first century of our era.

This knowledge of logical technology was consciously acquired by Gregory of Nyssa partly for reasons of showiness, but more properly because it was necessary to combat the purveyors of theology who infested the streets, especially after Julian the Apostate came to power and pagan philosophy began to reassert itself.¹¹ Gregory became so well-versed in the technique and arguments of the pagan rhetoricians that his sister, the saintly Makrina had to chide him about his over-attachment to pagan wisdom and its ways.”¹⁵

In fact Gregory was so attracted to pagan wisdom that for a while he seems to have left the service of the Church and become a Rhetorician. If Gregory Nazianzen was shocked and grieved about this ‘secularization’ of a Church Reader¹³ (in 364 A.D.?), he also anticipates Nyssa’s possible sarcastic response that by going among the young intelligent students as a Rhetorician he would be better able to practice his Christianity. Basil and the Nazianzen believed that bishops should keep away from too much contamination through pagan contacts. Nyssa on the other hand seemed to have believed, at least in this early period, in the necessity of direct contact with unbelieving intellectuals. Nyssa is grateful for and respects pagan knowledge

even while making fun of it, while Basil and the Nazianzen are a bit paternalistic in their evaluation of the intellectual achievements of unbelievers.

Basil, of course, looked down upon all - whether it be the Arianizing Emperor in Constantinople, the Prefect Modestus, the Bishop of Rome, or even his brother the bishop of Nyssa. The towering personality of the big brother kept Gregory in the shadow, and it was only after Basil's death on January 1st 379 that Gregory's star began to rise. The mantle of Basil fell upon Gregory, and though the Nazianzen was still living, it was upon Gregory that the leadership of the Nicean Party devolved.

St. Basil's death may have been hastened by his fairly hot temperament. Basil quarrelled with everybody - including cousin Nazianzen and brother Nyssa, with Arianizing Emperor Valens and with the staff of the Emperor's household. Everybody was afraid of him while respecting his integrity and wisdom. Only Eunomius, the leader of the Arian movement, could be sarcastic and scurrilously personal in his attacks on Basil. It is quite likely that the publication (in 378?) of Eunomius' reply (*Apology for an Apology*) to Basil's attack on him hastened on the latter's death.¹⁴

But this controversy with Eunomius' strict-sounding logical analysis was what shaped Gregory's basic intellectual structure, as we shall see.

Gregory has had a fairly bad press in the history of Western theology. His intellectual achievement has been consistently played down, and it may not be unfair to suspect that by the time Gregorian writings became sufficiently wellknown in the West, the Augustinian-Thomist system of Western thought had struck deep roots in Western intellectual soil, and the radically different Gregorian framework was to most medieval and post-medieval theologians largely unacceptable. It was in the 9th century, through the Latin translations of John Scot Eriugena (ca 810 - ca 877) that Gregory became known in the West.

The East had recognized Gregory's genius much earlier. Maximus the Confessor (580 - 662 A.D.) had praised him as the Ecu-

menical Teacher”¹⁵ and owed much of his framework to Gregory. The second Council of Nicea (called Seventh Ecumenical - 787 A.D.) referred to Gregory as “named by everyone as the Father of Fathers.”¹⁶

In our own century it was Hans Urs von Balthasar that drew our attention to him with his superbly poetical work *Presence et Pensee*.¹⁷ His enthusiasm was kindled by the praise bestowed on Gregory Prof. Wilamowitz and Prof. Werner Jaeger. Cardinal Danielou who takes the credit for the first more balanced western study of Gregory in our time”¹⁸ called him first the ‘greatest mystic among the Greeks’ and only later learned to give a more balanced evaluation:

“The work of Gregory ... combines the toughness of research with loyalty to the faith. His work is in touch with the thought of his time, but it is not enslaved by it. It conveys at the same time the meaning of being and the meaning of history. It brings together confidence in the capacity of the mind to apprehend reality, and the sense of inescapable mystery that surrounds everything that the mind so apprehends. These are the things that truly respond to the questions we are asking today.”¹⁹

That succinctly sums up our own interest in Gregory’s thought. That thought is not scholastic to the extent of eliminating the element of mystery; but then neither is it an unintellectual mysticism. It seeks to do justice both to the questions of fundamental ontology and to those about the meaning of existence in history. It is thought which is old as the rocks and fresh as the dawn. It soars into the transcendent without losing sight of the material and the historical. It plays fair with pagan thought without being disloyal to the scriptures. Surveying the whole intellectual field of the 4th century Byzantine culture it manages to escape being dated, and speaks with fresh relevance to the issues of our time.

1. Revised Edition. Doubleday Anchor, 1932, p. 15.

2. Burt. *op. cit.* pp. 324-325.

3. *Enchiridion* 20 “One cannot err who is not alive. That we live is therefore

- not only true, but it is altogether certain as well” (Eng. Tr. Albert C. Outler in *Library of Christian Classics: Vol. VII. Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* London, 1945, p. 322). See also *Contra Academicos (Answer to Skeptics): 2:9:23*.
3. A. C. Outler, *op. cit.* Intro, p. 89.
 5. e.g. Denis J. Kavanagh, in Intro to *Answer to Skeptics* in series *The Fathers of the Church, Writings of St. Augustine*, Vol. I, New York, 1948, pp. 91-92.
 6. *Contra Academicos: 43*. Eng. Tr. Denis Kavanagh, *op. cit.* p. 220.
 7. *Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa* in M. Harl, ed. *Ecriture et Culture* (Chevtogne Colloquium Report), Leiden 1971, p. 53 ff.
 8. See Gregory Nazianzen’s *Homily on Basil* xii, 1-2, Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) 36:509 A-B.
 9. *amuetos tou logou*, Epist. XIII: 4, GNO. Vol. VIII: 2. p. 45 PG 46:1049A.
 10. L. Meridier, *L’influence de la seconde sophistique sur l’oeuvre de Gregoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1906.
 11. In that biting satirical sermon preached at Constantinople entitled *on the Deity of the Son and the Spirit*, Gregory breaks forth against these street-vendors of theology: “The whole city is full of this kind of people, the narrow lanes, the markets, the public squares, the dual highways - tailors and money-changers, vendors of groceries. If you ask one for some coins of change, he will philosophize to you about begotten and unbegotten. If you ask one for the price of a loaf of bread, he will reply, ‘the Father is greater, and the Son is subordinate.’ Supposing you say you want a bath, the bath attendant will say, ‘the son’s being is from non-being.’ I don’t know what name to give to this evil, this mental perversion, craziness or madness, plague or epidemic.” PG 46:557B.
 12. *de Anima et Resurrectione* PG 46:20A. Eng. Tr. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF) Vol. V: 431B.
 13. Greg. Naz. *Epist. XI*. PG 37:41B - 44B. The authenticity of the address of this letter has been disputed. On this see P. Gally, *Lex Manuscripts des lettres de S. Gregoire de Nazianze*. Paris 1957, pp. 44-45.
 14. See the allusions in Gregory’s *Contra Eunomiim: Bk I*, written around 380 A.D. PG 44:61-124. GNO 1.

15. Maximus. *O puscula et Polemica Theologica*, PG 91:161 A. Gregory was recognized by Imperial decree as official teacher of the Imperial Church: *Codex Theodosianus* I: XVI. tit. 1.1.3. Cited by Hefele 'Leclercq' *Histoire des Conciles* tom I: 1, p. 41.
16. See Mansi, *Amplissima Collectio*. Paris, Leipzig, 1902. Tom. 13. col. 293.
17. Paris, 1942.
18. *Platonisme et Theologie Mystique*, p. 6.
19. *L'etre et le temps*, Leiden, 1970. Intro, p. X.

Part One

SKOPOS - AGENNESIA - AKOLOUTHIA

CHAPTER 1

SKOPOS

Intent of Scripture and the Use of Outside Philosophy

There are two charges usually made against Gregory's use of his sources - uncritical adoption of Platonic thought¹ and unauthorized use of the allegorical method in the interpretation of Scripture.² We should examine quickly to what extent these two charges are justified, and in the process learn something about his special way of using Holy Scripture and pagan knowledge.

The Intent of Scripture

The matter of Gregory's use of Scripture was extensively studied by Gregory scholars in the first Gregory Colloquium held at Chevetogne, Belgium in 1969. One thing Monique Alexandre showed clearly in her paper on *The Theory of Exegesis in 'On the Making of Man' and in the Hexaemeron*.³ The difference between St. Basil and St. Gregory is not that the former uses the literal method, while the latter uses a 'spiritual' interpretation, as Cardinal Danielou tried to establish. Basil wrote for the ordinary man, Gregory wrote for the intellectual. Gregory has therefore a concern for philosophical coherence which is not very evident in Basil. The younger brother has also a concern to reconcile what appear to be mutual contradictions in Scripture, like for example, the two accounts of creation in the first chapters of Genesis. Gregory's concern is to resolve these contradictions within an adequate philosophical framework. Hence his concern for a fresh interpretation of Scripture that by resolving contradictions illuminates reality.

Holy Scripture is a way opened by God for the mind to direct itself to the God who created it. Scripture opens our eyes to see the design of God⁴ and thus leads us to God's mind and purpose. But the meaning of Scripture itself is not always self-evident. Certain passages in Scripture, says Gregory, are like peacock's feathers. The

side that is first visible may be dull grey, but if you turn it around its beauty and glory are manifested. Such turning around can be done only for one who is grounded in the faith of the Church. Otherwise he stands in danger of mis-interpreting the Scripture. Every passage of Scripture has to be interpreted in consonance with the faith of the Church. This is one sense of the word *akolouthia* which is a central category for Gregory. The faith of the Church has consequences for our understanding of the meaning of scriptural passages as well as for the evaluation of “outside teaching” which is what Gregory calls the knowledge and wisdom of the pagan schools. The principle is most clearly stated at the beginning of the *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii*.⁵

Gregory speaks of the faith of the Church as of divine origin, and as the light that guides to the truth, in our understanding of Scripture as well as in our sifting of outside knowledge. This does not mean however, that local custom can be used to contradict Scripture. The teaching of the Church has to “agree with divine words.”⁶ Holy Scripture is God-inspired or *theopneustos*, but this does not mean that every individual by his own free will can understand the meaning of Scripture. The true intention or *skopos* of Scripture is evident only to one who lives in the faith of the Church - especially the teaching about the Holy Trinity and the teaching about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This means that there is no one given method for interpreting every passage of Scripture - whether it be literal, spiritual, typological or allegorical. For one who lives in the faith of the Church, the *skopos* of Scripture becomes clear and he would know which method to use to interpret a particular passage, so that its meaning does not contradict the faith of the Church. This became clear to Gregory in his dispute with the heretic Eunomius, as we show in the following chapter.

Here we need to deal with Gregory’s application of the category of the *skopos* or intent of Scripture to evaluate pagan philosophical insights. Gregory clearly does not believe that a rational philosophy by itself can yield true knowledge. The dialogue between Gregory and his sister Macrina is the *locus classicus* for this view. Gregory plays the role of the defender of the syllogism as a source of truth,

but says that “for us, however, we confess the teaching demonstrated by the Holy Scriptures to be much more reliable than all the conclusions of technical logic.”⁷

Macrina chides her brother for putting logic and Scripture on the same level, and insists that the Scripture alone is fully reliable. In the long speech of Macrina, Gregory rejects the view that reason is sufficient proof of truth. Reason, in its speculative thrust, is free to go wherever it wants, whereas for the Christian, reason has to be controlled by the category of the *Intent of Scripture*. Gregory says that the pagan thinker can use reason to affirm what he wishes, while for Christians,

“We make the Holy Scripture the standard and rule of all teaching; we are bound, therefore, to have in view that and only that which is in harmony with the intention of Scripture.”⁸

Macrina therefore says that Christians have to abandon the Platonic understanding of the soul (as a chariot, with two dissimilar horses, reason and passion, pulling it in different directions); Christians have to reject the Aristotelian understanding of the soul, which through logical-technical analysis comes to the conclusion that the soul is mortal:

“We must reject all those before these as well as after these, whether they philosophized in plain prose or rhythmic verse. We must make the scope of our reasoning the God - inspired Scripture (*skopon ton logon ten theopneuston Graphen poiesometha*) which regards the soul as having no other property than that which participates in the divine nature. For he who says that the soul is in the likeness of God, admits also that all that is alien to God is outside the limits of the nature of the soul. Dissimilarity cannot be defended in what is similar.”⁹

Thus it is on the basis of the faith of the Church, which regards the Scriptural notion of creation in the image of God as central to the understanding of humanity, that Gregory can reject the anthropology

of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. In all major matters, Scripture or rather the intent of Scripture, understood in consonance with the intent of the faith of the Church becomes the category by which to judge Plato, Aristotle or the Stoics - whose views dominated the “outside philosophy.” There was no attempt on the part of Gregory to accommodate the insights of the gospel to suit the preferences of prevailing philosophies. On the contrary, his adherence to the Church’s understanding of reality was strong enough to enable him to reject the prestigious views of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.

We can illustrate the same point by looking at what Gregory did to two other prevailing assumptions of outside philosophy - one that Man is a *microcosm* of the universe, and the other that the whole universe breathed together as a single organism - the concept of *sympnoia*. Before we do that, however, it needs to be pointed out that Gregory’s use of “outside” wisdom was not confined to philosophy alone. He opened himself to all branches of culture, literature, music, art, medicine, engineering, and biology. He listened to contemporary rhetoricians like Libanios and Themistios, as well as to scientists like Theon of Alexandria, who taught from 378-395 A.D., developing the mathematics of Euclid and Ptolemy. Gregory probably followed the thought of Oribasius (ca 320-400 A.D.), the personal physician of Emperor Julian the Apostate and author of 70 or 72 medical works, incorporating all previous Western medical knowledge.¹⁰ Gregory frequently visited medical doctors, and acquired an immense amount of anatomical knowledge, conceivable with the help of Caesarius, the brother of Gregory Nazianzen, who had been court physician before Oribasius and who later joined; the Pontic monastery of Basil.¹¹

Gregory knew something also about art, music and architecture. The sculptor’s art is described in the commentary on the Psalms;¹² he gives detailed instructions on Church architecture to Amphilocius.¹³

His knowledge of music shows up in the *Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*; where the whole creation becomes one giant musical instrument, which when properly tuned, bursts forth in the celestial music of a cosmic symphony, our own hymnody and

psalmody being participations in this cosmic music.¹⁴

Thus Gregory exemplifies a positive attitude to the material creation as such, and not merely to pagan philosophy. The mistrust of pagan knowledge, art and culture, of beauty and pleasure, which characterised certain aspects of the early Latin tradition are not seen here. It is a fact that the better values in pagan culture were more freely appreciated and faithfully conserved by Gregory than they were by many contemporary pagans, who under the influence of Neoplatonism and Manicheism despised the aesthetic values of this world.

In order to appreciate this basically positive approach of Gregory to the material creation, we have to observe two apparently contradictory facts about his thought. On the one hand he attacks the pagans who regard human science, language and poetry as divine creations. He would de-divinize science and language over against an Eunomius who regarded the human mind as practically worthless and regarded divine names as well as the names of things as handed down by God himself. For Gregory it does not demean language to say that it is a creation of man, nor does it detract from the glory or the grace of God, for all that man has that is good is a reflection of that glory and a gift of that grace. In the pagan controversy whether language has its origin along with the *phusis* created by God, or by the *thesis* or ascription of man, Gregory takes Definitely the latter side,¹⁵ as does St. Basil (but not Origen). It is no disgrace for language and science to be a human creation.

On the other hand, Gregory has a higher evaluation of human Capacity than Eunomius and his Neoplatonist school. The human faculty of knowing and creating is a noble thing, not a thing to be despised, though it becomes despicable when it exceeds its natural limits and capacities.

The fourth century was an age very much like ours - an age of prosperity and affluence when Philosophy becomes devalued and science-technology gains the upper hand.¹⁶ Gregory had the unusual ability to create a philosophical system which neither was antagonistic to science nor failed to make use of it. But his intellectual system

was not a mere integration of the philosophic and scientific traditions. He had sufficient faith to make the Christian tradition a touchstone for the evaluation and appropriation of philosophical and scientific insights and discoveries. He integrated science and philosophy on the foundation of the Christian tradition. This principle of integrating science and philosophy on the basis of the Nicean tradition of Christianity, using Trinity-Incarnation as central category is what we hope to illustrate, by taking two key terms of Gregory's contemporary science and philosophy - the concept of *sympnoia* of the cosmos and the idea that man is a *microcosmos*.

It is not sufficient, as many experts in source research (*Quellenforschung*) have done, to point to the parallelism of the occurrences in pagans and Christians in the use of certain terms. One has to see carefully how these terms are used, what place each term holds in either system, and how they are basically transformed in the process of re-integration into a system of which the central affirmations came from the Christian tradition.

Sympnoia

Stoic ontology begins with the assumption that there are four elements which constitute the universe - air, water, fire, and earth. But what holds these four elements together? Later stoicism advanced the hypothesis that there is a fifth element which pervades all things and holds the universe together. This they called *pneuma* or spirit. Galen, the physician (130 - ca. 200 A.D.) attributes the origin of this idea in Medicine to Athenaios (first half of first century A.D.), the founder of the Pneumatic School in medicine:

“According to Athenaios, the elements of man are not the four primary bodies, fire, air, water and earth, but their qualities, the warm, cold, dry, and humid... He introduces, a fifth element in accordance with the Stoics, the all pervading pneuma by which all things are held together and controlled.”¹⁷

Clement of Alexandria agrees with the idea of the fifth element, which he calls “the tension of the pneuma which pervades and holds

the cosmos together,"¹⁸ but he regards this pneuma as identical with aether as was suggested by Empedocles.

While Sextus Empiricus (fl ca. 180 A.D.) would attribute the cohesion to a force called *sumpatheia* and not to a fifth element,¹⁹ and Plutarch (ca. 46 - ca. 127 A.D.) attacked the Stoic idea of the fifth element from a Platonic standpoint, the most determined attack on the idea of the fifth element came from Alexander Aphrodisiensis (became head of the Lyceum in Athens towards the end of the second century A.D.) who as official commentator on Aristotle felt obliged to point out inconsistencies in the idea of the fifth element.²⁰

From these criticisms it becomes clear that the theory originated in Chrysippus (ca. 280-207 B.C.) himself, convert to Stoicism and successor of Cleanthes as head of the Stoa from 232 B.C.²¹ Chrysippus seems to have been some sort of a St. Thomas in the history of Stoicism. He produced a tightly coherent systematic cosmology in which the universe is one single concatenation where nothing happens without being caused by something else and every cause leads by necessity to its appropriate effect. The concept of *Eimarmene* or fate thus becomes not a simple fatalism, but a manner in which man can know the cosmos and gain mastery over it through knowledge and vision.

Gregory appropriates this Stoic insight in its basic form and integrates it with the Christian doctrine of creation, thereby departing radically from Stoic cosmology. The words *sumpneo* and *sumpnoia* are used by Gregory, but only rarely,²² and in most cases the reference is to the human body and its parts rather than to the cosmos. Most of the instances cited by Cardinal Danielou in his chapter on *Conspiration in L'être et le Temps chez S. Gregoire de Nysse* relate to the human body and not to the cosmos, and he rightly notes that the word was a medical term.³³ It is only in the catechetical oration and in *Contra Fatum* that Gregory refers to *sumpnoia* in a cosmological sense, and even in these instances he is only referring to the pagan use of the term without necessarily approving it.

This reluctance of Gregory to use *sumponia* in a cosmological sense is best accounted for by the association of the word with

heimarmene or fate in Stoic thought. In his treatise *Against Fate*, Gregory makes clear that for the Stoics Fate is a kind of God who indwells the universe and activates it (*theos tis estin to onomati tes heimarmenes*).²⁴ He explains the Stoic belief thus:

“Since the *sympatheia* in all that exists is one, and since the whole universe is continuous within itself, and that which is understood separately is to be comprehended as in one body with one spirit (*epi somatos henos en mia sumpnoia katalam-banetai*), all the parts converging upon each other, they regard the upper region as the most primary principle to which all the things around the earth are coordinated.”

There can be no doubt, reading through the account, that Gregory has some original Stoic work before him as he writes. He gives an ample account of the theory which he then proceeds to refute. It is quite possible that what he has before him is a medical man’s account of Stoicism, for it is the consequences of this cosmology for medicine that Gregory narrates in some detail.

But the spiritual consequence of this Stoic cosmology seemed unacceptable to Gregory. For what it amounts to is that man is a plaything of this great mighty primal force called Fate; for his life being linked inescapably with everything else, the movement of the stars affects his movements. He becomes merely a small pawn in the giant cosmic chess-game. This explains Gregory’s reluctance to accept *sumpnoia* in its Stoic sense. The concept of a fate which guides stars and human beings alike Gregory categorically rejects. He rejects also the Chaldean cosmology which had already penetrated Hellenism, especially through Porphyry and which made the stars and the planets the controllers of the universe, because they belong to the upper regions, and the earthly is subordinated to the heavenly movements.

Danielou fails to note this negative element in Gregory’s attitude towards the notion of *sumpnoia*. While Gregory does accept the basic idea of an inter-connectedness for all the elements of the universe, he does not use the term *sumpnoia* for that inter-connectedness.

Danielou correctly notes the Platonic elements in Gregory's conception,²⁵ but he fails again to note that Gregory practically gives the term an ecclesiological meaning in contrast with its cosmological use by the Stoics. It is significant that in his Epistle 17, Gregory uses *sumpnoia* for the whole Church acting together as a single body. Cardinal Danielou sees this primarily as denoting simply "unity of will,"²⁶ but it is obviously the ontological unity of the Body of Christ that Gregory has in mind. The problem in the Church in Nicomedeia is that it is in discord; the presbyters who rule the Church in the absence of a bishop are not agreeing with each other. The *homonoetike sumpnoia* which Gregory demands is a characteristic of the Body of Christ, and the *sumpnoia* of the Church is dependent not merely on the various parts breathing together, but also on their being in symphony with the will of God, preferring it to their own.²⁷ Thus the *sumpnoia* of the Church is a transcendent one, and not of the type that the Stoics conceived the *sumpnoia* of the cosmos to be.

Danielou notes this ecclesiological orientation of the concept *sumpnoia* in connection with other passages in Gregory,²⁸ and agrees that it is necessary, according to Gregory, to belong to the Body of Christ in order to participate in Christ's *sumpnoia*, or the power of Christ's life. Gregory can claim that even if he is weak, as a participant member of the Church, he is stronger than Eunomius, since the weakest part of the Body of Christ is stronger than that which has been (like Eunomius) separated from that Body.²⁹ But in this instance Gregory does not use the term *sumpnoia* as, for example, he does more explicitly in *de Perfectione* or in the commentary *On the Beatitudes*, or even more fully in the commentary *On Ecclesiastes*, from which last we cite the relevant passages apropos Ecclesiastes 3:6b - which says "a time for keeping, a time for throwing away" (Jerusalem Bible).

"The following-up of this passage leads the soul to a greater philosophy of existents (*eis meizona tina ten peri ton onton philosophian*), namely that the universe is continuous in itself, and there is no rupture of the harmony of existents; rather there is some sort of a co-breathing (*sumpnoia*) of all among each other, neither

can the whole universe separate itself from this mutual conjunction, but all things remain existent only when activated by the power of Him who truly is... That which is outside Being has no being. Now evil is opposed to the good (*arete*). But God is full perfect good. So then evil is outside God, and has thus no being in itself."³⁰

If this is so, the presence of evil is a kind of rupture within the chain of being. So long as evil exists in the world and in us, the concept of *sumpnoia* cannot be rigorously applied to the creation, but only to the community that has been redeemed from the *akolouthia* of evil. Here we see Gregory separating himself from Stoic doctrine in another way. The lack of *sumpnoia* is due to sin or evil, whether it is in the Church or in the cosmos. True unity, abiding unity, is not possible except in the good. This is Gregory's firm view, which makes it difficult for him to accept the Stoic doctrine of cosmic *sumpnoia* in its Stoic sense. The ontological cannot be separated from the *kalological*, to create a neologism for the systematic understanding of the good.

Danielou adduces several neoplatonic parallels for a supposedly similar use of *sumpnoia* in Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus. But they do not have the same rigorous identifications of *to on* and *to kalon*. Gregory has again learned both from the Stoics and from Middle or New Platonists. But he has made their doctrine fundamentally different by relating the two concepts of being and good closely to each other. It is the Cross of Christ that now extends in all four directions to drive out evil, and to bring everything back again not merely to unity, but more specifically to unity in the good.³¹ Not merely unity in the good as such, but as comprehended by Christ, through the Cross, through a united Church. Christ was extended on the Cross, in order he may occupy all the dimensions, the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the whole creation, as Gregory understands St. Paul to have said in Ephesians 3:15. This theme of unifying through the Cross the world which lost its unity through the entry of evil is a recurrent one in Gregory.³² But this unity is not yet fully realized. It is to be realized only on the last day. The Cross is a symbol of this eschatological unity.

Here one sees how radically un-Stoic and how deeply Christian Gregory's thought is. While on the one hand he accepts the basic notion of *sumpnoia* from the Stoics, he radically christianizes it,

(a) by denying that there is true *sumpnoia* in a creation which has been invaded by sin;

(b) by centring the *sumpnoia* on Christ and his Cross; and

(c) by making the *sumpnoia* eschatological.

This is a typical illustration of how Gregory uses pagan knowledge as filtered through the Christian tradition and integrated with the biblical perspective on the universe.

It is in this context that one recognizes the wisdom of Danielou's words:

“The study of all the texts has convinced us that there was no need to investigate what were the Platonic elements in the thought of Gregory, but we should accustom ourselves to a view of his thought which is purely Christian, but which is expressed in the philosophical categories of the time in which it was constituted. ... The Platonic structure is here only accidental. It is substantially the same kind of thought which could express itself in Buddhist technical categories, but would not for that reason be any less Christian mystical thought than Buddhist mystical thought. ... One can say, in general, that Gregory has allegorized everything, even philosophy. The Platonic language, especially that of the myths, offers him, along with the Bible, a treasury of expressions speaking for those who care to listen, of the unique mystery of the transfiguration of the soul in Jesus Christ.”³³

Cosmos and Microcosmos

The idea that man is a universe in miniature, a *microcosmos*, goes back to the pre-Socratics in Greek thought. The word *mikrokosmos* does not occur in Lidell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon, neither

does one find it in Gregory. But the idea is most clearly expressed in the commentary *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms*:

“We have heard one of the wise men discoursing about the nature of our soul, that man is some kind of a small universe (*mikros tis kosmos estin ho anthropos*), having in himself all the elements of the large universe,”³⁴

and again;

“If the arrangement of the whole (universe) is some kind of a musical harmony, whose technician and maker is God, as the Apostle says, and if man is a small-scale universe, (*mikros de kosmos ho anthropos*), then man himself is also a copy of the harmonious universe; even as we saw the work of reason in the larger universe, we see the same in the small one. For the part of the whole is homogeneous in every way with the whole. As for example in even the smallest fragments of a glass, on each polished surface, the whole orb of the sun can be reflected as in a mirror, however small the polished surface, so also in the small universe, I mean in human nature, the whole music of the universe can be discerned, the whole being proportionately reflected in each part.”³⁵

Here the argument is that man’s singing psalms to the glory of God is proportionate to the whole cosmos singing the praises of God. But does this mean that Gregory simply accepts the *whole* of the Stoic doctrine that man is a microcosmos of the universe?

The idea of microcosmos, in its historical development from Anaximander to Paracelsus has been described at length by Rudolf Allers,³⁶ though the historical treatment, admittedly incomplete, leaves too many lacunae to be satisfactory. Unfortunately, Allers does not document the contention that Anaximander (ca. 560 B.C.) actually used this idea.

It seems credible that microcosmism had its origin in the Pythagorean world, and later found a central position both in the medical terminology of Hippocrates and Anaximander, and in the cosmology-

anthropology of the Stoics. If we want to locate specific texts, one could find a fragment of Empedocles of Acragas (ca. 450 B.C.) who had seen Love as the element that holds the diversity of the cosmos from going apart, and which also holds man together,³⁷ both the cosmos and man being formed out of the same four elements. As for the words *macrocosmos* and *microcosmos*, it seems the atomists came closest.³⁸ The titles of Democritus' works as given by Diels includes a volume on Physics with two parts - 1. *megas diakosmos* and 2. *mikros diakosmos*.

Plato certainly became a source for much later speculation about this proportionality between cosmos and man. In *Philebus*, Plato argued that the orderly movement of the cosmos could not be explained by chance, but had to be attributed to *nous*. As our bodies are regulated by a rational soul, so is the cosmos directed by super-human souls.³⁹ *Timaeus*⁴⁰ goes farther and became the *locus classicus* for later commentators on microcosmism, especially in the neoplatonist schools. The world-soul is there clearly stated to be the archetype of the human soul. Neoplatonism transformed Plato's notion of proportionality between world-soul and human soul, into the doctrine that the human soul was derived from, or an emanation from, the world-soul. One sees the idea of world-soul and the astral bodies as animated by *nous* and *psuche* criticized and rejected by Philo Judaeus.⁴¹ He uses the terminology of a world-soul but only in the sense that the Logos is immanent in the world; but the Logos is also transcendent.⁴² But for Philo also

“if the part (man) is an image of the image (i.e. of the cosmos), and if the complete image, the whole of the sensible world, is something greater than the human, and is a copy of the divine image, it is clear that the archetypal seal, which we call the intelligible world, is the Logos himself.”⁴³

Gregory feels uncertain about this analogy between the cosmos and man, whether it has any real place in a Christian way of thinking. The words he puts into the mouth of his sister Macrina would give the impression that Gregory finds the idea generally acceptable.

“Says she: It is said by the wise that man is some sort of a microcosm (*mikros tis einai kosmos ho anthropos*) encompassing in himself these elements by which the universe is constituted and perfected. If this view is true, (and so it seems), perhaps etc. ...”⁴⁴

Even in these words there is no enthusiasm for the idea that man is a microcosm. Elsewhere Gregory rejects this view as a clearly misleading for it gives occasion to the thought that man’s unique dignity is derived from his resembling the cosmos rather than being the image of God. In *On the Making of Man*, Gregory says:

“How petty and how unworthy of the greatness of man sound the imaginings of some outside philosophers who presume to magnify man by comparing him to this cosmos! For they say that man is a little cosmos (*mikron einai kosmos ton anthropon*) being constituted of the same elements as the universe! Those who with such a high sounding name seek to bestow praise on human nature seem to be oblivious to the fact that they are thereby dignifying, man with the attributes of the goat and the mouse! For they too are a mixture of the same four elements, since each single existing being, whether great or small, we behold only as participating in a portion of these sensible elements, otherwise they would have no nature. What is so great then, in man’s being reckoned an impression and likeness of this world - of the heaven that passes away, of the earth that becomes alienated, or of any of the things contained in it, since they too are to pass away with that which contains them.

But what then is the greatness of man, according to the teaching of the Church? Certainly not in his likeness to the created cosmos, but in his coming to be in the image of the Creator’s nature.”⁴⁵

We see clearly Gregory rejecting the pagan concept of man as microcosm precisely because it seems to compete if not conflict with the basic Christian affirmation that man is created in the image of God. Yet he is not averse to using the notion of microcosmism in a limited sense, as we see in the first part of *In Inscriptioes*

Psalmorum where he refers to the idea in a more positive way:

“We have heard one of the wise ones say in a passing comment on our nature, that man is some kind of microcosm (*mikros tis kosmos estin ho anthropos*), having in himself all the elements of the large cosmos. For the world-order of the universe is some sort of a musical harmony (*harmonia tis esti mousike*), harmonized with itself according to a certain order and rhythm intricately interweaving much diversity, in unison with itself, and never discordant with this symphony, despite the immense range of difference between each of the various existent beings.”⁴⁶

Gregory goes on then to describe how the heavens tell the glory of God, and how the harmony of the creation raises a symphony of music to the glory of God. Gregory is prepared to accept the pagan idea of man as microcosm only in this limited and definitely Judaeo-Christian sense, namely that as the cosmos continuously lifts up a hymn of praise to God, so it is the duty of man, the smaller cosmos, to engage in continual psalmody and hymnody.

Gregory thus rejects the pagan idea that man is to be defined as microcosmos, i.e. that what distinguishes him is the fact that the logos that brings order to the world by controlling it harmonizes man also by indwelling his body. One difficulty for this idea, both for Platonists and Neoplatonists would be their tendency to regard the soul as a stranger to the body, imprisoned in it, which is not of course the situation of the logos in the cosmos. But Gregory rejects it not in terms of its logical inconsistency alone. He wants to maintain the central insight of the Christian tradition that man is made in the image of God. In the light of this category Gregory finds pagan anthropological microcosmism unsatisfactory. Yet he makes use of it in a limited sense, namely to assert that as the cosmos is a musical symphony for the glory of God man also engages continually in praising the glory of God and joining the cosmic symphony of God's glory.

It should become clear from the examples given that Gregory is no slavish eclectic in matters of philosophy. Was Gregory a Platonist? A Neoplatonist? An Aristotelian? A Stoic? All or any of these labels would not fit Gregory.

Take Plato for example. Philo was definitely a Platonist. Gregory was not. About Philo Prof. Wolfson says:

“The starting point of Philo’s philosophy is the theory of ideas. This theory was with him a philosophic heritage from Plato, and according to his own belief, as we have seen, also from Judaism.”⁴⁷

The theory of ideas is in a sense distinctive of Platonism, and if it is also central to Philo’s system, there is some justification in calling Philo a Platonist. But one seeks in vain in Gregory of Nyssa to find a theory of ideas, not to speak about its being central, or a starting point. We shall discuss in greater detail in a later chapter how Gregory transforms the Platonic theory of ideas in his doctrine of creation.

But there is a certain similarity of approach between Philo and Gregory.

“Like all of his followers (i.e. the Christian, Moslem and Jewish philosophers of a later age), he (Philo) also started with the belief that there could be no real contradiction between Scripture and Philosophy. Like all of them, therefore, he must have been aware - we have reason to assume - of the fact that certain contradictions do seem to exist between Scripture and philosophy, and that these contradictions would have to be removed. We have also reason to assume that he was not less perceptive than they in seeing that certain philosophic views were absolutely irreconcilable with the teachings of Scripture. Similarly we have reason to assume that he was not less ingenious than they in knowing how some refractory philosophic views, with certain revisions, could be reconciled with scriptural teachings. So also we have reason to assume that he was not less painstaking than they in examining thoroughly every philosophic view before deciding whether to accept it or not. ... If this is how we are to approach the study of Philo, then to get at the true meaning of his philosophy it

is not sufficient to collect related passages in his writings, to arrange them under certain headings, and to place in their juxtaposition parallel passages from other philosophers and the Bible. We must try to reconstruct the latent processes of his reasonings, of which his uttered words, we may assume, are only the conclusions.⁷⁴⁸

What Professor Wolfson says about Philo applies even more eminently to Gregory. Gregory does not reveal the whole process by which he arrives at certain conclusions in relation to pagan philosophy, but his conclusions point to a rather systematic process for examining pagan ideas, and for assimilating, rejecting or revising them in a way of thinking which derives its basic inspiration from the Christian faith.

One does not overlook here the fact that a competent scholar like Werner Jaeger feels that Gregory is a Platonist, since the essentials of Platonism which Gregory has chosen for his thought are the true essentials of Platonism.⁴⁹ We need to examine this statement of Jaeger in the light of Prof. Endre von Ivanka's analysis in *Plato Christianus*.⁵⁰ Von Ivanka argues that there are two mutually separable ideas in Platonism, one, the theory of ideas, i.e. that things can be known, not in their concrete reality, but only in their pre-existent forms or ideas of which all particulars are imperfect manifestations, and two, the teaching about the inner knowledge of God, i.e. that we do not know the Absolute God through any one of the particular existents, but by a progressive delving deeper into the ground of our own inner being.

Gregory definitely rejects the world of ideas, and at this point departs also from Neoplatonism which re-incorporated Plato's world of ideas into its second level of being - the, nous which is an emanation from the One. For Neoplatonism only the One is transcendent, as it is for Eunomius also. But Gregory sees how incompatible with the Christian doctrine of Trinity - Incarnation these doctrines of the transcendence of the One, the emanation of the intelligible world from the One, and the very world of ideas are. And he rejects both the Platonic and the Neoplatonic interpretation of the world of ideas.

Von Ivanka argues that Neoplatonism had already accomplished the separation between the two ideas in Plato, i.e. between the knowledge of particular existents through their ideas or forms and the knowledge of the One by descending into oneself, and seeing the One with the eye of the soul and not through the existent particulars. In this latter way of “knowing”, Plotinian neoplatonism held that the soul has, in order to attain to the knowledge of the One, to divest itself of all knowledge of particulars, and even of its own self, so that, thus purified, the soul “sees” the One in the ground of its own being. Plotinus says at the conclusion of the Enneads:

“The main difficulty is that this awareness (*sunesis*) of the One comes neither through knowing (*kat’ epistemen*) nor through intellection (*kata noesin*) as in the case of other intelligibles, but by a presence surpassing knowledge (*kata parousian epistemes kreittona*). The soul is subject to an apostasis or separation from being One, and is no longer One, in the process of taking knowledge. For knowledge is account or discourse (*logos gar he episteme*) and account or discourse is multiple (*polla de ho logos*). The One thus strays into number and falls into multiplicity. So we must proceed beyond knowledge and never depart from being One. We must leave aside knowledge and the objects of knowledge, and from all else, even those that seem good. For this that we seek is beyond all good, and all good is derived from this beyond all good, and all good is derived from this, even as all light of day is from the sun. For this reason it is said ‘Neither spoken nor written.’ But we speak beyond all good, and all good is derived from this, even as all light of day is from the sun. For this reason it is said ‘Neither spoken nor written.’ But we speak and we write only in order to send (people) to it. From words we would lift them up to vision, as if showing the way to those who wish to have vision. Our teaching is only about the road and the journey, the vision must be the work of him who has desired to see.”⁵¹

Does Gregory basically accept this “outside philosophy” - this second part of Platonism as developed by Plotinus, with the help, as we have suggested earlier, of Upanishadic thought mediated to his teacher Ammonius Saccas or to himself, by Hindu thinkers? Von Ivanka says that the view of Plotinus at this point is no longer strictly Platonic, having been already separated from the key to Platonic thought, namely the doctrine of ideas.⁵² It is, according to von Ivanka, however, this Neoplatonic idea of the knowledge of God that Gregory finally accepts. Von Ivanka points out many parallels in Gregory - in the *Homily on Gregory Thaumaturgus*,⁵³ in *de Virginitate*.⁵⁴

The parallels cited by von Ivanka are certainly impressive. On the first reading, it would appear that he has made his case that it is Plotinian thought that Gregory follows. We need not doubt that Gregory both has read Plotinus and was deeply influenced by him. But does he transform the thought of Plotinus substantially in the process of integrating it into his system of Christian thinking? Von Ivanka admits that the recurrence of this theme in Gregory is not to be attributed to a direct dependence on Plotinus, but rather to the fact that Plotinian images had already entered the Christian tradition and appear even in Gregory Thaumaturgus as well as in Clement of Alexandria.⁵⁵ He also admits that in Gregory of Nyssa, the soul does not lose its alterity and identity as creation, which is a point of radical difference from Plotinus in whom the soul is not created but only an ecstasis or standing apart from the One. Von Ivanka recognizes that Gregory speaks only of the soul returning to its original state as created and not of becoming identical with God, and also that for Gregory even this is not the result of human efforts, but the grace of God in Christ. Von Ivanka can also see that the doctrine of grace as it developed in the west has its roots in Aristotelian ontology and epistemology,⁵⁸ and that the idea of enclosing man within a clearly defined “nature of man”, so that what is “super-natural” falls outside the nature of man, would be unacceptable to Gregory or to other Eastern Fathers.

But one regrets to say that the learned professor von Ivanka seems caught in the categories of western thought and seeks to force Gregory of Nyssa into a Platonic - Neoplatonic mould, though he makes

several qualifications which taken together, would nullify his main thesis which seeks to see Gregory basically as a Platonist and a Neoplatonist.

Gregory of Nyssa rejects almost all pagan affirmations which he found contrary to Scripture and the Christian tradition. He rejects Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Plotinus in his views about the soul, about resurrection, about the nature of the world, about the nature of man, and about God. These are the central realities of Christian thought, and here Gregory is neither Platonist nor Neo-platonist.

He accepts their terminology - this is quite natural if one wants to communicate with cultured pagans, and to defend the Church against the philosophical onslaughts of pagans and philosophical heretics like Eunomius and the Macedonians.

Gregory has radically altered even the neoplatonic notion of knowing God in the depth of oneself, through his relating it to the Christian idea of the Image of God. What one sees in the depths of the purified soul is not a direct vision of the incomprehensible God, but a proportionate reflection, as in a small mirror, of the Infinite and the Eternal. We shall discuss this in detail in a later chapter. But here it needs to be pointed out that no basic idea of pagan philosophy has been accepted by Gregory without transforming it in the process of integrating it into a Christian perspective on reality.

Ekkehard Muhlenberg, in a scholarly article on *Die philosophische Bildung Gregors von Nyssa in den Buchern Contra Eunomium*, argues that Gregory's philosophical formation can be considered separately from his biblical - Christian formation, since in his controversy with Eunomius, the debate is often on a purely philosophical basis, with Scripture playing only a sub-ordinate role.⁵⁷ Muhlenberg tries to reconstruct the philosophical systems of Eunomius and Gregory, to set them over against each other, and then to draw conclusions about the philosophical antecedents of Gregory's system.

But the methodology used by Muhlenberg is certainly questionable. The assumption that Scripture plays only a sub-ordinate role in Gregory's mind (not merely in his writing) needs to be proved. For Gregory's basic view of pagan philosophy is that it can be used for or

against the truth. As Eunomius uses it against the truth, Gregory feels constrained to use it in favour of the truth, but it is not his philosophical formation which tells him what is the truth to be defended, but his training in the Christian Church, Gregory's philosophical arguments should not be examined as if he were objectively and impartially seeking answers to questions through philosophical discussion. He knows already that Eunomius' argument that Unbegottenness is the essence of God, and therefore that only the Father is fully God, is mistaken. That it is mistaken Gregory does not discover from philosophy, but from the Christian Church. His philosophical training helps him to find the philosophical arguments by which to refute the philosophical arguments of the heretic. The attempt "to reconstruct the library of Gregory" is useless, for that library contained everything he had been able to get hold of, but that does not mean that all the books there gave him his philosophical category-structure.

Gregory knows Aristotle's categories, Plato's ideas, Plotinus' *Enneads*, Stoic science, and the works of Epicurus and Porphyry, Panaetios and Poseidonios, but the attempt to separate his philosophical reasoning from his theological reasoning is possible only for a western thinker. As David Balas pointed out at Chevtogne, "these 'philosophical' analyses are to be found at the interior of a structure and argumentation which are 'theological.'"⁵⁸ Mr. van Parys who has made a detailed study of Gregory's exegetical method, also questioned⁵⁹ Muhlenberg's statement that Scripture and theology play only a subsidiary role in the Eunomian debate. And as Gerhard May pointed out, if we take that debate on a purely philosophical ground, it is difficult to give the victory to Gregory. Eunomius' system is philosophically neat, though absolutely wrong, as a Christian has to say.

I would conclude this chapter by drawing the attention of the reader to the letter of Origen to Gregory's spiritual ancestor, Gregory Thaumaturgus, which sets forth the right attitude of a Christian towards "outside philosophy." We do not know whether Gregory of Nyssa actually read this letter of Origen. But the attitude there presented, namely that pagan philosophy can be either the handmaid of Christian teaching, or the occasion for idolatry in the Temple of God, seems very close to Gregory's own view.

Gregory would also agree with Origen, that it is only rarely that “outside philosophy” becomes truly a means of glorifying God. In Gregory’s case, perhaps more than in the case of Origen, the wisdom of the Greeks and the gold of the Egyptians was used for the true glorification of God.

1. See for example the work of Harold Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, Berkeley, 1930.
2. e.g. H. Weiss, *Die Grosser Kappadozier Baselius, Gregor von Nazianz and Gregor von Nyssa als Exegeten*, Braunsberg, 1872.
3. See Marguerite Hall (ed.) *Actes du colloque de Chevetogne, Ecriture et culture Philosophique dans la Pensee de Gregoire de Nysse*, Leiden, Brill, 1971, 267, pp. 87-110.
4. See *de anima et resurrectiones*, P.G. 46. 442B. also *In Hexaemeron* PG 44:69D.
5. See Appendix I.
6. *Ad Eustathium*: GNO III:1.5/20 to 6/6 NPNF V:327A.
7. *de anima et resurrectiones*, P.G. 45:64 A-B. NPNF V:442B.
8. *Ibid*, see PG 46:49 C. NPNF V: 439 A-B.
9. *Ibid*. PG 46:49B to 52 A, NPNF. V: 439 A-B.
10. Oribasius’ *Collectiones Medicae (Iatrikai synagogai)* have survived only in part - about 25 works. Through Syriac and Arabic translations of Oribasius, Greek medicine (*yunani*) entered the Islamic world.
11. Caesarius died in 368. Jose Janini Cuesta who has studied Gregory’s medical knowledge, thinks the latter inherited Caesarius’ medical *library*. See J. J. Cuesta, *La antropologia y la medicina pastoral de san Gregorio de Nisa*. Madrid 1946. Gregory expressly mentions Galen and Hippocrates (PG 45:164 A) and the last chapter of *de hominis opificio* gives a summary of the physiological knowledge of Gregory’s time (PG 44:245 D, NPNF V: 422 B ff. For the description of a doctor’s diagnostic technique see PG 46:29 C-D. NPNF V: 434 A).
12. *In Inscrip. Psalmorum*: XI GNO V:114/25ff PG 44:541ff.
13. See this remarkable epistle XXV in GNO VIII:II pp. 79ff. PG 46:1093ff NPNF. V:Letter XVI, p. 540ff. See also Gregory’s description of fresco painting with specifications in the homily on the Martyr Theodore (de S. Theodoro Martyre. PG 46:737. D-740A).
14. *In Inscrip. Psalmorum III*. GNO I:30/15ff PG 44:440B ff.

15. The supposed words of Democritus of Abdera (fl 420 B.C.) that “words were statues in sound, but statues not made by the hands of men, but by the gods of themselves” (see NPNF vol. V, p. 269B note) do not appear among the fragments of Democritus cited by Diels. What we do have is the reference in Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s *Cratylus* (423B). Gregory’s convincing argument against Eunomius is in GNO I. 277ff (PG 45. 969ff, NPNF V. 268 A ff.).
16. Danielou recognizes this in his *IVeme Siecle*, p. 35.
17. Galen, *Introductio S. Medici*. 9. Engl. Tr. in Sambursky, *The Physics of the Stoics*, Appendix, p. 119.
18. *Stromateis* V. 8.
19. Sextus was a Cynic who directed his attacks against Stoic cosmology and epistemology. See his *Adv. Math.* IX. 78-80 in R. G. Bury, ed., *Sextus Empiricus*, Loeb, 4 vols. 1939-1957.
20. See especially *De mixtione*, p. 216. 14ff. and 223. 6ff.
- I. Bruns, ed., *Alexander Aphrodisiensis, Scripta minora*, 2 vols., Berlin 1887 and 1892.
21. Chrysippus spoke of the *he ton ouraion pros ta epigeia sumpnoia* - Arnim, *St. Vet. Fragmenta* 2. 172.
22. Only three times in *Contra Eunomium* viz. vol. I. 25/17, I. 86/6 and II, 258/25. Only once in *In Inscriptio Psalmorum* (V. 32/12), only once in *In Ecclesiastes* (V. 406/4) and only twice in *De Virginitate* (VIII. 1. 292/4; 322/21). Not all these usages have the context of the whole universe, but often relate to the human body, or to the Body of Christ.
23. *op. cit.*, p. 51.
24. PG 45. 152 A.
25. *L’etre et le Temps*, p. 55, but he gives little evidence for his statement: “*Mais la theorie particuliere de Gregoire releve de la tradition platonicienne*” (ibid).
26. *op. cit.*, p. 58.
27. GNO VIII. 11 (Ep xvii) pp. 57/22 - 58/4. PG 46. 1057 B ff.
28. *op. cit.*, p. 59. See *Beat*, 8. PG 44. 1293 B. *De Perfectione*. GNO VIII. I. 197/19-24. PG 46. 213 A. *C.E.* I. 10. GNO I. 25/17. PG 45. 252 A.
29. *C.E.* I. 10. See note 28.
30. *In Ecclesiasten, Oratio VII*. GNO V, pp. 406-407. PG 44. 724D - 725B.
31. *Oratio Catech.* 32. PG 45. 80-81. See also *De Tridui spatio*. GNO IX. 1,

- pp. 299-300. PG 46. 621-624.
32. See e.g. *Oratio Catech.* 32. *De Tridui spatio.* loc. cit. *Contra Eunomium* III. 3. 39-40. GNO II. 122-123. Full discussion in G.B. Ladner, *St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine on the Symbolism of the Cross in Late Classical and Medieval Studies in honour of A. M. Frend*, Sr. Princeton University Press, 1955.
 33. Danielou, *Platonisme et Theologie Mystique*, p. 9 (Engl. Tr. present author).
 34. *In Inscr. Psalm.* I, III. GNO V. 30/24ff. PG 44. 440.
 35. *Ibid.* GNO V. 32. 16-33. 1. PG 44. 441 C-D.
 36. R. Allers, *Microcosmus, From Anaximandres to Paracelsus* in J. Quasten and S. Kuttner, ed., *Traditio*, vol. II (1944) pp. 319-407. See also H. Lotze, *Mikrokosmos* (place and date not known) and G. P. Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the history of Philosophy*, New York, 1922.
 37. Diels, pp. 229ff. E. T. Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to Pre-socratic Philosophers*. Fr. 17 on p. 53, Fr. 20 on p. 54, Fr. 22 on p. 55 etc.
 38. *Vierte Auflage, zweiter Band*, Berlin 1922, p. 19, line 27. "Great World Order", "Small World Order." See Freeman, *Ancilla*, p. 92.
 39. *Philebus* 28d to 30c.
 40. *Timaeus* 34b ff.
 41. Wolfson, *Philo* I, pp. 346-347.
 42. See e.g. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II. 25. 127.
 43. *De opificio Mundi.* 25.
 44. *De Anima et Resurrections.* PG 46. 28B. NPNF V. 433A.
 45. *De opificio hominis.* XVI. PG 44. 177 D - 180 A. NPNF V. 404 A-B.
 46. GNO V. p. 30/24 to p. 31/1. PG 44. 440 C.
 47. Wolfson, *Philo* I, p. 200.
 48. Wolfson, *Philo* I, pp. 104-106.
 49. W. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, p. 138.
 50. Einsiedeln 1964, esp. see pp. 151-185. See also *Vom Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik in Scholastik* 1936, pp. 163 ff.
 51. *Enneads* VI. 9.4. Brehier's edition. Tom. VI, p. 176.
 52. *Plato Christianus*, p. 160.
 53. PG 46 : 908c *en eschatiae tini heautoe monoe sunen, kai di' heautou*

toe theoe.

54. PG 46 : 368D *to di' autes dunethenai ton theon idein*. Also PG 46 : 416D (end of the book) *hina kai autos ideis ton theon en katharae tei kardiae*.

55. *Plato Christianus*, p. 163 note.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

57. In M. Harl, ed., *Ecriture et Culture Philosophique*, pp. 230-251.

58. M. Harl, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

CHAPTER II

AGENNESIA - AGAINST EUNOMIUS

The Eunomian Controversy as background for the Clarification of Gregory's thought - structure

It was the controversy with Eunomius that set the stage for the clarification of Gregory's Christian thought. The history of this controversy can now be reconstructed from the somewhat scanty sources available to us. Prof. Dr. Mrs. L. Abramowski of Bonn University has most ably summarized the main points about Eunomius and his thought in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*.¹ We need only to qualify her conclusions slightly. The only two known full studies of the controversy remain unpublished.²

Eunomius was a contemporary and chief adversary of the Cappadocian Fathers. He was also a Cappadocian, from Oltiseris in Cappadocia on the border of Galatia. Gregory of Nyssa had to justify the mistake by Basil in calling him a "Galatian."³ Gregory gives us some details of his life, perhaps not quite objectively. Son of a farmer, Eunomius learned shorthand (*tachygraphia* as it was called), went to Alexandria and became disciple and secretary⁴ of the arch-heretic Aetius, the sophist disciple of Arius himself. From Aetius, Eunomius learned the technology (*teclmologia*) of sophistic reasoning. Eudoxius of Antioch,⁵ himself a semi-Arian, ordained him to the diaconate, and later when Eudoxius was promoted to be Archbishop of Constantinople, he ordained Eunomius to be Bishop of Cyzicus (360 A.D.). Eunomius had an impressive capacity for the display of sophist dialectic, and was able to make out quite a name for himself. But his people soon found out the emptiness of his life. Besides he quarrelled with Eudoxius himself by insisting that Aetius be re-instated.

Within a year, he was forced by his people to resign his episcopate and he left for Cappadocia. When Julian the Apostate became Emperor (361-363), the Anhomioian⁶ party of the Arians reorganized themselves under the leadership of Aetius and Eunomius, fighting both the Orthodox (led by the Cappadocians) and the Homoian party

of Arians (led by Eudoxius of Constantinople and Euzoius of Antioch).

Around 363, when Julian died, Eunomius began organizing a Church of his own, and ordained bishops of his party in various sees. Around 366/367, with the death of Aetius, Eunomius became the unquestioned leader of the Anhomian party, and moved to Constantinople as his headquarters, only to be exiled soon by Emperor Theodosius.

The importance of the Eunomian crisis is seldom recognized by Church historians. It was as much a peril as the Arian crisis two generations earlier with which the battle was joined at Nicea by St. Athanasius. But precisely because the Athanasian-Nicean settlement did not deal adequately with the philosophical problems involved in Arianism, it continued to survive among intellectuals and ordinary people alike. Aetius, with his sharp logic learned from the second sophistic, spread the doctrine far and wide. There was a new form of liberal "Christianity" developing which denied the very foundations of the Gospel, but was eminently acceptable because of its conformity with current philosophical trends.

Aetius and Eunomius were seeking to indigenize Christianity by domesticating it within the current and acceptable philosophical framework which we have already referred to as Alexandrian philosophy. Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Nyssa, equally or even better at home in current philosophy, saw it clearly that this kind of indigenization would destroy the Gospel itself which was sought to be indigenized. Hence it is of the utmost importance, say for example in India, to see the two different approaches to indigenization, one followed by Aetius and Eunomius, and the other by the Cappadocian Fathers.

What was the teaching of Eunomius? All the great Orthodox thinkers of the fourth century - Didymus the Blind,⁷ Basil the Great,⁸ Gregory of Nyssa,⁹ and the more doubtful but equally powerful thinkers like Apollinaris of Laodicea,¹⁰ and Theodore of Mopsuestia,¹¹ as well as a certain Sophronius of whom we know little, found it necessary to compose treatises against Eunomius. It is from these criticisms that we are able to reconstruct the Epistemology and Ontology of Eunomius, which provide the background for understanding the Epistemology and Ontology of Gregory of Nyssa.

What was the essence of the difference between the two attempts to indigenize theology, the one by the Cappadocians representing Nicene Orthodoxy, and the other by Eunomius, coming in the Arian-Aetian tradition? *Eunomius sought to adopt Christianity to secular philosophy. The Cappadocians sought to adopt secular philosophy to the Christian Gospel.*

That is a fundamental difference, extremely relevant to the problems of theology today. What is the central criterion which is the cornerstone of our way of theological thinking? Does it come from the Christian faith or from secular philosophy? This question is basic.

For the Cappadocians the basic category is Trinity - Incarnation. For Eunomius the foundation is the unity, simplicity and absolute uniqueness of the One - a category that reigned supreme in the Alexandrian "secular" philosophical milieu.

In the Alexandrian philosophy there is no room for a Trinity, a distinction of persons, within the one Godhead. Neither is there room for God becoming Man. Only a created being could become Man, according to Eunomius. That is the only way he could find to integrate the doctrine of the Incarnation within the prevailing philosophical system.

Dams comes to the following conclusion in his dissertation:

"So there is no more need to restate that the problem of knowledge is the crucial point at which the two theologies confront each other. We have seen that in Eunomius it forms the base of his system, while with the Cappadocians it is equally at the base of their speculations; but with this qualification, however, as we have just said, that the faith should be one principal source, and perhaps even the first subjective principle, for religious knowledge..... Gregory and Basil, as well as Eunomius, proceed in an eclectic fashion as regards philosophy; but with the Cappadocians faith operates with so vital a force as to give all their reflections a profound unity, in fact a personal system, a rule of life."¹²

Eunomius himself states that there are two ways of doing theology - one to study the natures (*ousiai*) of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in themselves; the other to study the energies or operations (*energeias*) of the natures. Eunomius chooses the first; Gregory chooses the second.

What is the methodology that Eunomius uses to study and compare the natures of the Father and the Son? Certainly not *epinoia*, the capacity of the human mind to conceive realities.

The essential nature of God is unbegottenness or *agennesia*. The name *agennetos*, applied to God, is not simply a human creation. It denotes the very essence of God, that which distinguishes him from all that has come to be - to *gennema*. For what the human mind creates is expressed as an utterance - a sound that vibrates in the air - and not reality itself. But the name *agennetos* is not a human creation. It is the revealed name of God, expressing his *ousia* as the source and cause of all that has come to be.

Now no one can say that the Son, the Only-begotten (*monogenes*) is unbegotten. Thus there is complete difference of *ousia* between the Father, who is *agennetos* and the Son, who is *monogenes*.

These two names of the Father and the Son, according to Eunomius, are not created by the human faculty of *epinoia*, but given by revelation in the Scriptures and confirmed by the Fathers. Thus the revealed names show the basic dissimilarity in essence between the Father and the Son. There is no community of essence (*koinonias ousias*) between the Father and the Son.

Eunomius would not thus admit that he is yielding to the demands of pagan philosophy about the unity and simplicity of the One God. He would rather insist that his teaching about the *heteroousia* of the Father and the Son is squarely based on the names given to them by the Scriptures and confirmed by the Fathers. In fact, Eunomius is himself fighting against heresy, particularly Sabellianism which made the Father and the Son merely two modes of the same person.

Eunomius' epistemology is an attempt to find the true sense behind the revealed names - the *physike ennoia*, the intuition of the

essence, terminology that reminds one of modern phenomenology. The names correspond perfectly with the reality - for Eunomius - as the *noema* corresponds perfectly with the external object in Husserl's phenomenology.

In contrast to Gregory's basic dichotomy between Creator and creation, Eunomius proposes another dichotomy - *agennetos* - *gennema* between the Unbegotten and that which is begotten. In Gregory's dichotomy the Son belongs to the first group, that of Creator, whereas in Eunomius' division, the Son does not belong to the first section which is reserved for the Unbegotten Father alone, and not for the Son who is begotten.

Eunomius does not make the Son equal with other created beings. The Son alone is the direct creation of the Father. All other things including even the Spirit, are the creations of the Son. The Son, though created, is still unique in that he alone is directly created by the Father, with the fullness of God's creative power, so that the Son came in turn, while remaining created, to be a creator also, in fact the creator of all things.

Eunomius' epistemology assumes that starting from the name, it is possible to get to the *ennoia* or intuition or mental conception of the reality signified by the name. The Father's *ousia* or essence is not unknowable. It is knowable precisely by the name *agennetos*. But the significance of the name is not in the utterance or pronunciation (*prophora*) but in the *ennoia* (the internal mental conception).

Gregory takes the opposite view in his epistemology. The names and words applied to God are human creations to denote an experience of the operation of God and not to point to the *ousia* of God.

It is clear that Eunomius has a view of the human mind characteristic of much contemporary thinking, which seems to assume that what is not knowable and stable for man is not reality at all. Gregory on the other hand has a sober awareness of the limits of the human mind, and a modest estimate of its apprehensions of reality. The Eunomian view of the human mind as potentially capable of knowing everything including the *ousia* of God can be a temptation

for theologians today. The Gregorian view of the limits of the capabilities of the human mind seems at first defeatist and lazy. But as we shall see in our discussion on *epinoia* later on, Gregory has a higher and yet saner view of the human mind than that of Eunomius, whose view is self-contradictory in that it devalues the capacity of the human mind in relation to *epinoia* - especially its capacity to distinguish between the true *ennoia* and the false one. Eunomius thinks that the intuitions as well as the names given to them are created by God. Gregory says that the human mind is God's creation, but the creations of the mind may be right or wrong, good or evil.

Eunomius' basic argument in his *Apology for an Apology* has a second central element. Not only does he distinguish between the two *ousiai* of the Father and of the Son, which have nothing in common with each other, the one being uncaused and the other caused. He goes on to distinguish between the operations (*energeiai*) of the Father and the Son, which come from their different *ousiai*. Th. Dams has ably reconstructed the whole structure of Eunomius' thought. No *ousia* subsists or exists without its proper *energeia*. If the *ousia* are different, their operations are bound to be different, according to the differences of the *ousiai* from which they proceed.

Eunomius' system is quite neat. The *energeia* of the Father is the Son, and the Son alone. He alone is begotten, made, or created (it makes no difference for Eunomius which of these terms one uses) by the Father Himself. Everyone and everything else (excluding thus the Father and the Son, but including the Spirit) comes from the operations of the Son.

The Holy Spirit is the principal product of the *energeia* of the Son. So the gradation in rank is clear. The Father's *ousia* produces the Son and the Son alone. Thus the Son is superior to everything else except the Father, but in relation to the Father, he is inferior since he is *gennetos*. Now the Spirit is inferior to the Son, for the Son is the product of a superior being, namely the Father. Proportionately as the Father is superior to the Son, the product of the Father's *energeia*, the Son, is superior to the product of the *energeia* of him who is inferior to the Father. The hierarchy is thus clear. Father up-

permost, next in rank the unique Son, and third in rank the Spirit, the first of the Son's creations.

Eunomius here encounters a problem. What is the relation between the *ousia* of the Father and his *energeia*? The *ousia* of the *energeia* is not the same as the *ousia* of the *ousia* itself. The *nature* of the *energeia* is to be seen, not in the *ousia* from which the *energeia* comes, but rather in the *ergon* or work that results from the *energeia*. The Son, who is the *ergon* of the *energeia* of the Father's *ousia* does not have the same *ousia* as the Father. But the *nature* or *ousia* of the *energeia* of the Father is to be seen in the Son. Logically then, the *energeia* of the Father's *ousia*, has the same nature as the Son. That is to say, the *energeia* of the Father's *ousia* is caused, and therefore not *agenetos*. The *energeia* thus becomes a force intermediary between the Father and the Son. This intermediary *energeia* of the Father is the will of God, and the Son exists by this will. There is no rupture between the Father and the Son. The *energeia* of the Father is the connecting link, and also constitutes the *ousia* of the Son.

The Son's *energeia* then creates the Spirit, who assists the Son, mainly with the work of sanctification. The Spirit, being the creation of the Son, is thus subordinate to him. Only the Father is absolutely Lord. He alone has *monarchia*. The Spirit is subject to the Son, and the Son to the Father. The *ousia* of the Father is indivisible, simple, one, not shared with anyone else, whether Son or Spirit. It cannot be shared because it alone is *anarchos* without beginning or cause, and is in a class by itself, being the cause of everything else.

The three higher *ousiai*, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not have a common nature. But together they have made everything in the rest of creation. By the decree of the Father, the Son who is the only direct creation of the Father, with the help of the Spirit who is both the creation of the Son and his assistant, has created the universe, according to Eunomius.

The main principles of Eunomius' system, in so far as they have helped to crystallise Gregory's own thought in confronting these principles may be summarized as follows:

(1) Each *ousia* (being) is “followed” by its own *energeia* (operation).

(2) The difference between the *energeiai* can be known by observing the difference of their *erga* (works or results of their operation).

(3) The *energeiai* are proportionate to the *axioma* (worthiness or dignity) of the different *ousiai*.

(4) There is only one *ousia* who is *anarchos* (without beginning), *agennetos* (unbegotten), *aphthartos* (incorruptible), *atreptos* (unchangeable), and *akinetos* (unmoved). This *ousia of the Father* is the source and creator of all else, including the Son and the Spirit.

(5) The two basic divisions of creation are *agennetos* (unbegotten) and *gennema* (begotten). The Son, the Spirit, and the rest of creation belong to the second class. Only the Father belongs to the first division.

(6) *Agennesia* or unbegottenness is the *ousia* of God, as well as the name of that *ousia*. The name and the reality correspond with each other. Only He who is *agennetos* is truly God. Therefore, neither the Son nor the Spirit is God.

(7) *Agennesia* is not a name created by the human faculty of conception (*epinoia*), for the Father is *agennetos* before the conceiver (*epinoountes*) were created. *Epinoia* is not the basis for the name *agennetos*. It is a name which corresponds with the reality, and a name created by God’s providence (*Contra Eunomium*. II. 289).¹³ The natures and the names are God’s creation (*Contra Eunomium*. II. 403).¹⁴ The names are suited to the realities and express their nature.

Thus one may say that the general ontological principles of Eunomius are (a) the relation between *ousia*, *energeia* and *onoma* and (b) the absolute distinction between *agennetos* and *gennema*.

In terms of consistency and coherence, Eunomius’ system shows considerable strength. But it denied the central affirmation of the Christian faith - that God was incarnate in Christ. For Eunomius, it is

the Son who is a creation of the Father, and therefore is changeable (*treptos*) unlike the Father who is unchanging (*atreptos*) who became man. Philosophically that is more respectable than saying that the unchangeable God *became* something he was not, namely Man. The Christian doctrine that God who is unchangeable, became something he was not, namely Man, without change, is philosophically quite inconsistent.

Eunomius appears also more reasonable in his affirmation that since God cannot be caused by someone else, only the Father, who is uncaused cause of all is alone truly God. The Christian doctrine that the *ousia* of the Godhead is in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - is philosophically much more difficult.

Eunomius' theory that names which sound different (e.g. in different languages) do not have their significance in their sound, but in the intuition of reality to which they correspond, seems also philosophically reasonable. For example the name *agenetos* as applied to God is only a sound or collection of Greek letters. It is not the sound or the letters that correspond to the reality of God, but rather it is the intuition (*ennoia*) in our consciousness that corresponds to the nature of God. That *ennoia* or innate idea is the creation of God's providence - not a creation of man's consciousness, argues Eunomius. Philosophically, this is respectable doctrine.

It is in Gregory's criticism of this third point that his own epistemology becomes clear. Gregory denies that man has an innate idea of the *ousia* of God, and insists that he can only apprehend the *energeia* or operation of God. Eunomius contends that it is only the *ousia* which is *agenetos*. The *energeia* is caused by the *ousia* and is not therefore *agenetos*. So, it cannot be the *energeia* that we understand by the term *agenetos*. It is this *energeia* which we call Father (*Pater*) or the Creator (*demiourgos*) not the *ousia*. The Father as *energeia* can be comprehended through its *ergon*, i.e. the Son, according to Eunomius. In this *ergon* can be found the whole creation *in principio*. Thus the creation is in the Son, and it is by the Son that all things come into existence. Becoming, or coming, to be, has thus its existence in the *energeia* of the Father, which results in

the Son, who is capable of all becoming. The Son, who is *gennema* is the source of all *genesis*.

The human *epinoia* can conceive the various becomings, but the *ousia* that is beyond all becoming, is understood by the *ennoia* planted in man by God, according to Eunomius. By this innate idea we can understand the basic, fundamental, primary distinction between *agennetos* and *gennema*, and to know this distinction is to know God's *ousia*. But the distinction is not the result of reflection, but an infusion from God (*para too theou tei phuses to toiouton katesparto*).¹⁵

Gregory would argue that the word *agennetos* is also the creation of the human mind (*epinoia*), arising out of human reflection. It says only what God is not, but does not explain his *ousia*, says Gregory. The word is not "innate", nor does its *ennoia* correspond with the *ousia* of God. Gregory rejects Eunomius' phenomenology of innate ideas, and proceeds to develop his own epistemology based on the principle of *analogia* or proportionality.

Th. Dams' summary of Eunomius' system recalls the essentially philosophical nature of his thought:

"It is clear that such a theology is dominated by theses about God and the world which are not derived from Revelation. With Eunomius, there is no question of *a fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) of the divine mysteries. He attempts to take into account, as far as he can, the authentically Christian mysteries, but always in reliance on presupposed philosophical principles (the aspect of tradition which he seems to accept, that it is God who gives us the names of things, does not come from faith, but is a demand of philosophy)."¹⁶

It is not necessary here to dwell on the Arianism of Eunomius. He uses the arsenal of scriptural texts so characteristic of Arianism, to prove the absolute transcendence of the Father alone and the inferiority of the Son to the Father. The point at which Eunomius goes

beyond Arius is worth noting. For Arius God's absolute transcendence implies his unknowability. God is, for Arius, *agnostos* (unknowable), *kai akataleptos* (incomprehensible), *annenoetos* (unintuitable)¹⁷ according to Philostorgius; Eunomius insists that God's *ousia* can be intuited. *Agennesia* thus becomes for Eunomius both an ontological and an epistemological principle.

Implied in making *agennesia* an epistemological principle, there lies a theory of perception and language peculiar to Eunomius. The theory of perception is that innate ideas correspond to reality, and the theory of language states that names and natures coincide, that names which refer to realities are created by God, along with the nature of these realities. This is certainly going beyond Plato and the "Neoplatonists." Plato would certainly not agree with Eunomius' understanding of perception and innate ideas without substantial qualifications. It may be the case as Dams suggests, that Eunomius assimilated the Stoic notion of *ennoia phusike* (intuition of natures) to Plato's theory of ideas. The Stoics insisted only that the nature of reality can be intuited by the human mind. Eunomius qualifies this view to assert that such intuitions are created by God and are adequate for the knowledge of reality, since the names are co-created with the natures.

It is worth noting how the system of Eunomius agrees at so many points with that of Plotinus, as we will show in a moment: it is, however, at variance from the latter at two important points. First, for Plotinus the One is beyond all knowledge, as it was for Arius as well as for the Cappadocians. But Eunomius is convinced that the human mind can intuit the essence of Godhead. Second, for Plotinus there is no basic ontological discontinuity between the One and the many, since the latter emanates from the former. For Eunomius there is a basic gap between the one *agennetos* and the many *gennemata*. He thus rejects the Plotinian theories, the unknowability of God (epistemological) and of the continuity between the One and the many (ontological).

This discontinuity between the One and the many is a primary philosophical problem in Eunomius. For him there is a basic onto-

logical dissimilarity between the *ousia* of the *agenetos* and even its own *energeia*, since the first is uncaused and the second is caused. The first is One, simple, and unmoved, while the second is multiple, moving, and changeable. The *energeia* is the basis for multiplicity and change. But does this *energeia* exist apart from its *ousia*? How can there be this discontinuity between the two if one is dependent on the other? This problem will come up again when we discuss Gregory's own view of *ousia* and *energeia*.

Here it remains necessary to point out some fundamental similarities between the doctrines of Eunomius and those of "Neoplatonists" like Numenius and Plotinus. Numenius of Apamea is particularly interesting, since his Trinity bears considerable similarity to that of Eunomius. Our information about Numenius comes mainly from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*¹⁹ and other writings which quote him. Plotinus himself, while still alive, had to answer to charges of plagiarizing Numenius, as Porphyry tells us, and Amelius, the disciple of Plotinus, had to write a book defending his master and friend against the false charge.²⁰

Numenius has three first principles - the One, the Intellect and the All-soul. Plotinus has also three. So has Proclus, who comes later than Gregory in time. The Trinity of these neoplatonists is not exactly identical. For Plotinus, as for Numenius, the First Principle is the Good, One (*hen* for Plotinus, *monas* for Numenius), simple, transcending all being and all works. He alone is *autoon* (himself being being). Since we have more complete documentation for Plotinus than for Numenius, let us compare Eunomius with Plotinus.

The first tractate of Plotinus' fifth Ennead deals with the three initial hypostases.²¹

"Because thus it is necessary to reckon, that above Being, there is the One, which we have sought to demonstrate in as far as such matters are demonstrable; next that which is both Being and Mind *epheyes to on kai nous*), and third the Nature of the Soul (*trite de he tes psuche's phusis*)." ²²

This is very close to Eunomius' teaching as cited by Gregory in *Contra Eunomium*. I. 151.

“The whole summary of our teachings is concerning the Highest and Most Sovereign Being, (*ek te tes anotato kai kuriotates ousias*) and that being which exists on account of it, but after it, though senior in being to all other beings (*ek res di' ekeinen men ouses met' ekeinen de panton ton allon proteuouses*) and a third, not to be put in the same rank as the two others, but subordinate to them, to the first because of the difference in cause, to the second because of the difference in the *energeia* which produced it, taking into account, of course, the *energeiai* which are consequent to each *ousia*, and the names which are attached to these.”²³

We see here a close parallel between the two teachings, though the way of putting it is extremely personal for Plotinus as for Eunomius. Eunomius is no mean plagiarist. He has assimilated the teaching of Numenius and Plotinus. The three higher hypostases of Eunomius correspond exceedingly well with those of the Neoplatonists. Neither of these correspond to the homoousian Trinity of the Nicene Party as taught by the Cappadocians.

It is then reasonable to suggest that Gregory's intellectual effort is directed against Christian doctrine being too uncritically adapted to Neoplatonist doctrines of the pagans of Alexandria, or to the Jewish Platonism of a Philo, also of Alexandria. It seems to the present writer that Gregory was fighting against the wrong kind of indigenization of Christian theology within the forms of contemporary culture - wrong in that it took the axioms of contemporary philosophy rather than the affirmations of the faith regarding the Incarnation and the Trinity, as basic criteria. The kind of indigenization that Eunomius attempted was characterized by a low regard for the Tradition of the Church and an overhigh and uncritical respect for contemporary philosophical trends. Such an approach is still a temptation for many modern theologians, though quite often today, theologians are not as philosophically astute and as logically consistent as

the “technologue” Eunomius.

Eunomius - Theurgic Neoplatonist?

It is not our intention here to make a comparative study of Eunomius and the Neoplatonists, though such a study would be eminently valuable. Enough has been said to show that Eunomius was more of a Neoplatonist than Gregory of Nyssa. Eunomius was not a simple adapter of the thought of Plotinus (205-270 A.D.). He belongs to a later stage in the development of Neoplatonism. Porphyry (233-303 A.D.) and Amelius (246-270 A.D.) both disciples of Plotinus, and Longinus of Emesa (213-273 A.D.), teacher of Porphyry and critic of Plotinus, had made the thought of Plotinus known in Rome and Athens.²⁴

The religious history of the third and fourth century Eastern mediterranean societies remains yet to be comprehensively studied. But it is conceivable that what took place at Alexandria was not an isolated phenomenon. There was a religious development outside of the Judaeo - Christian tradition within the Eastern mediterranean world, of which Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus form but one line of development. There were other lines of which we know definitely, take for example the Asiatic or Stoic Line of Zeno - Cleanthes - Chrysippus - Poseidonius - Cicero - Epictetus - Marcus Aurelius. Here again Asian spirituality is naturalized on Graeco - Roman soil, and by the third century Stoicism becomes the religion of the establishment - the religion of good citizenship - a far cry from the earlier Stoicism which was primarily a way of protest, endurance and martyrdom.

By the fourth century Stoicism hardly survives as a distinct religious system; what we have is a much more free pattern of religious thought in which elements from the various schools are combined, but interpreted according to the personal style of individual teachers and writers. This is what we see in the case of Libanius, Himerios, Themistios or Julian the Apostate, all four contemporaries of the Cappadocian Fathers.

But the system of Ammonius Saccas has its own distinct continu-

ity, again with Asians as leading teachers. Iamblichus of Apamea (ca. 250 - ca. 325 A.D.) lived well into the first quarter of the fourth century. However shallow or mistaken he may have been in his commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, it seems quite possible that he added an element to Plotinian philosophy which was totally absent there - the concept of "mystery" as worship of a secret community of initiates. This is understandable in the light of what we know about the vogue of mystery cults in that time and clime. There was a Plotinian School at Athens as well, which later Proclus (410-485 A.D.) was to lead.

Did Eunomius belong to one of these Plotinian Schools, especially one of the Iamblichus type, which incorporated into Plotinus' philosophy some form of a mystery cult? The question is interesting, but no positive answer seems possible with the information now available. In any case it is clear that the epistemology of Proclus, head of the Athenian school of Neoplatonism, is very close to that of Eunomius. Proclus had a high view of words and believed that names had been created along with things, and names are essential for constructing a logical structure parallel to the ontological structure "Words are the imitations (*mimeseis*) or images (*ikones*) of things (*pragmata*) and are correlated with what they imitate."²⁵

Here we follow Mme Abramowski²⁶ to a large extent. She comments on le Bachelet,²⁷ who wrote in the early decades of our century questioning the earlier tradition of regarding Eunomius only as a Sophist dialectician who uses the *technologia* of the Second Sophistique. But le Bachelet did not take into account the relation between the two cardinal points of Eunomius system - i.e. *agennesia* or unbegottenness as the *ousia* (essence) of Godhead, and the assertion that names and words are of divine origin and not to be tampered with.

Mme Abramowski asserts that Eunomius' epistemology is not Aristotelian. She refers to the work of Th. Dams³⁸ on the Eunomian Controversy in which he has reconstructed the architectonic and consistent structure of Eunomius' thought. Danielou has also used this material to come to an interesting conclusion.

The idea that names (especially of Gods) in each language, whether Greek or Barbarian, are of divine origin and not to be tampered with can be found in the neoplatonic commentaries on Plato's *Cratylus*, as is clear from Proclus who lived and wrote a little later (410-485 A.D.) than Gregory and Eunomius. This idea of Eunomius has its origin, according to Danielou,²⁹ in the thought of Iamblichus (ca. 250-ca. 325 A.D.), who is often credited with introducing the Theurgic or liturgic element into Neoplatonic mysticism. Danielou thinks that Eunomius frequented the school of Iamblichus and his disciples and picked up this central idea of his epistemology there.³⁰ He contends that Eunomius is an original thinker who altered the Neoplatonic system by the use of Aristotelian categories:

“The characteristic of Eunomius is thus to combine with a mystical platonism influenced by theurgy, a philosophical technique which is chiefly Aristotelian.”³¹

“On the other hand,” continues Danielou,

“he is a Sophist. He is of course contemporary of Libanius and Himerios ... but he also presumes to be a mystagogue, who speaks in very solemn tones ... With Eunomius. Arianism takes on a quasiesoteric character. Eunomius is the hierophant of a gnosis, of a secret doctrine, which is true piety. He considers Basil as a non-initiate (*amuetos* - *Contra Eunomium*. I. 74. 44.20). He is thus the contemporary of a neo-platonism which is not a simply a metaphysical system, but also a theurgy. He stands thus as an intermediary between Christianity and this kind of neo-platonism.”

But what is meant by “theurgy” in such a context? *Theourgia* is a word used by Julian³² to denote a divine work, or as in Porphyry³³ a sacramental rite or *musterion*. Iamblichus⁸¹ also uses it in this sense. It came to mean, in later fathers, sanctification and deification through the sacramental mysteries.

Here is a problem that Danielou does not take into account. The point at issue epistemologically between Eunomius and Gregory is whether “the mystery of piety” is contained in the sacramental sym-

bols or in precise dogma. Eunomius takes the view that precise dogma is the true expression of faith and not the sacramental mysteries or terms used in worship. His words are clear:

“But we (Eunomius), persuaded by holy and blessed men, affirm that the ‘mystery of Godliness’ is neither in the dignity of names, nor in the specificity of practices and sacramental mysteries, but rather in the exactness of teachings.”³⁵

Gregory does not deny the importance of doctrines, but he would deny the statement that they constitute the essence of the faith. The essence of the faith for Gregory is to be born of water and the spirit and to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ.³⁰ He insists that heretics and unbelievers have sometimes “hit” the right doctrine, though most of the time they are in error. But even after succeeding in “hitting” the right doctrine, they remain estranged from the faith,³⁷ so long as they remain *exo tou musteriou* (outside the mystery). In denying the meaning of the baptismal formula and the validity of the sacramental symbols, Eunomius is denying the very Christian Faith. Gregory’s language becomes very strong at this point:

“Since then he despises the revered names through which the power of a more Godly birth imparts grace to those who approach in faith, and since he disregards the communion of the sacramental mysteries and Church customs in which Christianity has its strength how is it that you do not see (in him) the persecutor of the faith persuading you to agree with him in betraying Christianity?”³⁸

The difficulty then, in accepting Danielou’s hypothesis that Eunomius’ neoplatonism was a theurgic one, remains quite considerable. For Eunomius “dogmatic precision” is more important than any sacramental mystery.

B. Epinoia

The fundamental epistemological point of Eunomius relates to the concept of *epinoia* which is sometimes translated as “conception”

and can in fact mean the human capacity to conceive things which exist or do not exist. The locus classicus of Eunomius' concept of *epinoia* is cited by Gregory in full.

“Here is a logical master-piece of the dialectical technique, such as none among those uninitiated into its hidden wisdom will dare to encounter! But in so solemnly explaining to us the varieties of ‘conceptions’ (*epinoias*) he makes quite a funny story of the very concept conception. Here are his words: ‘Of those things called conceptions, some have their existence only in the utterance, as for example those that signify nothing; others exist only in the thought of the particular person; and of those some are (created) by enlargement as for example the Colossi (giants), others by diminution, as for example the pygmies; others by addition, e.g. multi-headed animals, and yet others by combination as for example Centaurs.’”³⁹

Gregory laughs at Eunomius for picking up some of the worst examples of the creations of the human imagination and trying to understand the *epinoia* or the human capacity for thought in such ridiculous terms.⁴⁰ To this Gregory opposes his own very lofty, perhaps too lofty, understanding of the capacities of the human mind:

“Whence cometh then the higher disciplines, whence geometry? When the theoretical teaching of philosophy, and logic and physics, the invention of machines, the marvellous devices of chronometry through the brass-dial and the waterclock?”⁴¹ So also whence the philosophy of being, the knowledge of ideas, in one phrase, all the soul's dealings with higher and lower realities? What about agriculture, navigation and the other different activities of human life? How does the sea become a highway for man? How do the beings of the air come to serve those that inhabit the land? How are wild beasts domesticated, those that infuse terror subdued? How is it that animals stronger than men are brought under hu-

man control? Have not all these accrued to human life by virtue of the human *epinoia*! According to us, then, *epinoia* is the method of discovering things unknown, through the following up of the first notion regarding the object of study, searching out the adjoining steps to advance to further discoveries.⁴² For, having conceived something regarding the object under investigation and harmonizing with this first idea other notions discovered, we gradually find our way to the limits of the studied objects.”⁴²

The human *epinoia* is thus the instrument by which we seek out, through the process of following up (*akolouthia*) our notions, and attain to inventions as well as to theoretical knowledge. All human knowledge is achieved through the *epinoia* which Eunomius so uncomprehendingly despised and ridiculed.

According to Gregory, however, “... all things whatever time has discovered as useful and beneficial for the life of men have been discovered in no other way than through the *epinoia*.”⁴⁴ It is the most precious of all the faculties given by the Creator to man in the divine Providence. Just in case someone accuses Gregory of being too hellenistic at this point, he quotes Scripture to prove that his idea is fully biblical, and cites Job 38:36⁴⁵ which says that it is God who has set man over technique and given to woman the knowledge of weaving and embroidering. Gregory did not have the Hatch and Redpath concordance to the Septuagint at his disposal. If he had, he could have seen that the word *epinoia* occurs in the LXX in a moral sense,⁴⁶ and he would have strengthened his argument that the *epinoia* is as capable of false as of true conceptions. But that is precisely Gregory’s argument here and his epistemological criterion. Gregory makes the following points on *epinoia*:

- (a) It is the faculty of the mind that goes beyond sense impressions (*aisthesis*) to relate them to each other in the mind and thus forms concepts.
- (b) All human advance and progress is dependent on the proper exercise of this faculty and as such it is the greatest gift of God to

Man.

(c) This faculty, however, is not autonomous, but given by God, and functions properly only under God's guidance.

(d) This faculty can err; but this is essentially the character of all human faculties, that they can be used for opposite purposes, i.e. for the truth or for falsehood, for good or for evil (The doctor can heal or kill; the captain of a ship can steer clear of the rocks or destroy the ship by running it into the rocks - and so on for the painter, wrestling master, etc.). The faculty is implanted in man for good, but man has the moral freedom to use it for the opposite. Its capacity for evil and falsehood is only the obverse of its capacity for the good and the true. Instances in which it is used for evil or falsehood cannot be used to disprove its capacity for what is good and true.

Gregory summarizes his argument against Eunomius thus:

“The fact that the mind (*nous*) implanted in us by the Provider is perfectly capable of inventing non-existent beings does not imply that it is endowed with no power or faculty (*dunamis*) capable of providing discoveries that are beneficial to the soul. As the impulsive and choosing faculty (*dunamis*) of our soul (*psuche*) has been built into it for striving after the good and the beautiful, in accordance with the inner leadings, though one can also use the same impulse for that which one ought not, no one can cite the propensity of choice towards that which is evil as proof for its having no propensity for the good; thus the movement of the epinoia towards that which is vain and unprofitable is not evidence (*kategoria*) for its incapacity for that which is profitable, but becomes sure proof (*apodeixis*) for its not being incapable for that which is spiritually beneficial and necessary.”⁴⁷

The word *agennesia* or unbegottenness which Eunomius regards as a sacred term of divine origin to denote the very *ousia* or essential being of God, is now clearly stated by Gregory to be a human cre-

ation to express one of the conclusions to which the human *epinoia* comes in this process of moving forward to the good and the true. In our search for the first cause of all existent beings, that is, for God, it becomes clear to us that He who is the cause of everything else cannot Himself be caused by something else. Our *epinoia* creates the term *agenetos* or unbegotten as an appellation for Him who is without beginning. But the name, says Gregory, does not describe him; it does not say what he is, but only denotes what He is not.⁴⁸

This is both the possibility and the limit of the *epinoia*. It can proceed, through the process of *akolouthia* which we shall elucidate later on, through all the existent beings (*ta onto*) to the anterior cause which thought conceives to be necessary.⁴⁹

This is the limitation of all created knowledge; but the limit does not make it useless or unworthy. On the contrary the human *epinoia* is the instrument through which all science, technology and art is achieved, says Gregory. And that is no achievement to be sniffed at, either for Gregory or for us. Its legitimate function is to follow up (*akolouthein*) the creation in its orderliness (*taxis*) and mutual relationship, and to show us that the ground of all existence in creation lies “beyond” the creation and can be affirmed though not described. The *epinoia* can discover the orderliness of creation as well as its nature as contingent upon the Creator’s will and energy, but it also reveals the gap or *diastema* between the Creator and the creation. Bonhoeffer would not have been justified, had he read Gregory, in calling Gregory’s God the “God of the gaps”, for God is not in the gap, but the gap is simply an epistemological - ontological reality that confronts man in his attempt to know God.

A clear understanding of this notion of the gap or interval in Gregory’s thought is thus essential to understanding the formal structure of Gregory’s ontology and epistemology.⁵⁰

1. Stuttgart, under *Eunomios*, Cols 936-947.
2. (a) Th. Dams, *La Controverse Eunomeenne*, Typescript 294 + 58 pages of notes, without date or place.
- (b) Bernard C. Barmann, *A Christian Debate of the Fourth Century: A*

Critique of Classical Metaphysics unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University 1966 (not consulted)

3. *Contra Eunomium*.

4. Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* IV. 7. *Contra Eunomium*. IGNO I, pp. 38ff. PG 45. 264 ff. NPNF vol. V, pp. 40ff.

5. Socrates calls him an opportunist and a fraud. *Hist. Eccl.* II. 38.

6. The Arians, who generally refused to acknowledge the full deity of Christ, were divided into two parties, both of which refused the Nicene formula that Christ was *homoousios* (of the same *ousia*) with the Father. The Homoian party of Eudoxius was willing to accept the formula that Christ was *homoiousios* (of like nature) with the Father. The *Anhomoian* party refused even this formula, and declared that Christ was *heteroousios* (of a different nature) from the Father.

7. The two books of Didymus *De dogmatibus* and *Contra Arianos* mentioned by Jerome in his *De viribus illustribus* 109, have been identified, by some with the 4th and 5th books appended to St. Basil's *Contra Eunomium* in many MSS and printed editions (PG 29. 671-744). See Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. III, p. 88.

8. Basil's *Contra Eunomium* is in PG 29. 497-669.

9. Gregory's major work is *Contra Eunomium*, in Jaeger's Edition volumes I and II.

10. Apollinaris' work is not extant. See Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. III, p. 378.

11. Theodore's most famous work: *De Incarnatione* is directed against Arius, Eunomius and Apollinaris, See Quasten, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

12. *op. cit.*, p. 294.

13. GNO I, p. 311/18ff. PG 45. 1008 D. See NPNF V. 277ff.

14. GNO I, p. 344/7ff. PG 45. 1045ff. NPNF V. 290 B ff.

15. *Contra Eunomium*. II. 548. GNO I, p. 386/26ff. PG 45. 1093 D. NPNF V. 305.

16. Dams, *op. cit.*, p. 129. See also p. 131:

“... *l'intention lui manque complètement de contrôler sa théologie par l'Écriture. Elle est d'avance basée sur des principes déterminés et en passant on remarque que ce n'est pas en contradiction avec l'Écriture.*”

17. PG 65. 460ff.
 18. Dams, *op. cit.*, pp. 135ff.
 19. *op. cit.*, XI. 18. 20. See E. A. Leemans, *Studie over den wijsgeer Numenius van Apamea met uitgave der fragmenten* (Memoires de l'Academie Royale de Belgique, Classe des lettres, xxxvii. 2), Brussels 1937, which gives all the available fragments.
 20. *Vita Plotinii*. 17. Brehier's Edition Tom. 1, pp. 17-18.
 21. The title is *Peri ton trion archikon hupostaseon*.
 22. *Ennead* V. 1. 10. Brehier's Ed. Tom. V, p. 28, line 1ff.
 23. GNO I, p. 71/28 to p. 72/10. PG 45. 297. NPNF V. 50a.
 24. Longinus wrote a review of Plotinus' work *On the Ideas*, in reply to an account of this work by Porphyry. Longinus disagreed with Plotinus basically, and obviously developed a rival system. His *Letter to Amelius* is also a criticism of Plotinus, in answer to Amelius' work *On Plotinus' Philosophic Method*. *Vita Plotinii*. 20. Brehier, vol. I, p. 23.
 25. *Commentary on Cratylus*. 68.
 26. *Reallexikon. loc. cit.*
 27. le Bachelet wrote the article on *Eunomius* in *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*, vol. V. 2. cols 1501-14.
 28. J. Danielou also refers to this dissertation.
- See his *Eunome l'Arien et l'exegese neo-platonicienne de Cratyle* in *Revue des Etudes Grecques* Tome LXIX (1956), pp. 412-432. The present writer has been able to secure a copy of this typescript and acknowledges his indebtedness to Dams' work.
29. Danielou, *Eunome l'Arien, op. cit.*, p. 427.
 30. Danielou is perhaps more categorical than is warranted by the facts: "*Le systeme d'Eunome est en fait un systems neo-platonicien, une explication de la genese du multiple a partir de l'Un.*" *op. cit.*, p. 428.
 31. *op. cit.*, p. 429. By *theurgy* is meant a supra-rational non-sacrificial cultus of God, a form of worship which seems absent in Plotinus, whose "mysticism" was an intellectual one combined with a strict personal discipline, but without any elements of worship. Plotinus had of course "mystical" experience of the soul's union with God, but no cor-

porate or ritual form of worship was prescribed by him. Porphyry sought to combine theurgic worship with Plotinian mysticism. The source of this theurgic element is no doubt the *Chaldean Oracles* believed to have been written by one Julianus during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 A.D.). Porphyry wrote a treatise *On the Philosophy of the Oracles* (*Peri Tes ek Logion Philosophias*), of which the Chaldean Oracles seemed to have formed the nucleus (See H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, Recherches d'Archeologie, de Philologie et Histoire, XIII. Le Caire 1956). The purpose of the theurgical rites was to purify the *pneumatike psuche* and to lead it to perfection. Augustine seems to have been significantly influenced by Porphyry's work on Theurgy in a Latin translation (See John J. O'Meara, *Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, Paris 1959). The theurgical school of Neoplatonism antedates Iamblichus.

32. Julian the Apostate, *Oratio* 7. 219a (ed. F.C. Hertlein, Leipzig 1875-76). See also Dionysius the Areopagite, *Celestial Hierarchy* 7. 2 (PG 3. 208 C, D).
33. Porphyry cited by Augustine in *Civit. Dei*. X. 9.
34. *de Mysteriis*. 9. 6. (ed. G. Parthey, Berlin 1857).
35. *Hemeis de peithomenoi tois hagiois kai makariois andrasin oute tei semnoteti tBn oiomatSn oute ettidn kai mustikSn sumboldn idioteti kurusthai phamen to tes eusebeias musterion tei de tSn dogmaton akribeia. Contra Eunomium*. Lib. III. Tom. IX. 54. GNO Vol. II, p. 284/20 ff. PG 45; 877 D. NPNF, V: 238 A.
36. See GNO II. 285/5 ff.
37. GNO II. 285/12-17.
38. GNO II. 285.
39. *Contra Eunomium* II. 179. GNO I, p. 276/18 ff. Migne's Bk XII. PG 45. 969. NPNF. V: 267 B.
40. *Ibid.*
41. The water-clock was one of the wonders of Alexandria. Vitruvius (IX, VII. 4 and 5) describes the technique of this clock: "For the water-inlet, he (Ctesibius, the son of a barber, 285-222 B.C.) used a hole bored in a piece of gold or in a gem, finding that these neither wear out nor get blocked. This secured an even flow. The water as it rose floated an inverted bowl, technically known as the cork or drum. This connected

with a bar and a revolving drum. Both bar and drum had teeth at regular intervals fitting into one another. By this means the rectilinear motion of the rising cork was transformed into a series of small measured circular movements. By an elaboration of this device through a number of rods and cogs he caused a variety of movements. The little (human) figure which pointed to the hour moved. The cylinder of the clock revolved. Stones or eggs were dropped. Trumpets were sounded, and there were other incidental effects.”

quoted by Benjamin Farrington, *Greek Science*, Penguin, vol. II, 1949 pp. 61-62.

42. This is Gregory’s epistemological principle and he defines epinoia here: *esti gar kata ge ton emon logon lie epinoia ephodos heuretike ton agnoou-menon dia tSn prosechdn te kai akolouthSn tei protei peri to spoudazomenon noesei to ephexSs exeuriskoumena.*

43. *Contra Eunomium* II. 181. 182. GNO I, p. 277/7 ff.
Migne’s Bk XII. PG 45. 969. NPNF V. p. 268 A.

44. *Ibid.*

45. LXX.

46. II. Maccabees 12:45; IV Mace. 17:2. Wisd. of Solomon 6:16, 9:14, 14:12, 15:4, Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiastius) 40:2 and Jeremiah 20:10.

47. *Contra Eunomium* II. 191. GNO I. 280/6ff. PG 45. 973. NPNF V. 269 A.

48. *Ton de hout’os onto agennSton kai anarchon Snomasamen, ou ti estin, alia ti ouk esti dia tou onomatos endeiknumenoi. Contra Eunomium* II. 192. GNO I. 280. 27ff. PG 45. 973 - NPNF V. p. 269 A.

49. This is the “God of the gaps” of Bonhoeffer, the *Deus ex machina* of human thought. But human reason cannot know this God, except see that He must be. The “God of the gaps”, however, is not a *creation* of the *epinoia*, but its *discovery*. The *epinoia* cannot tell us who God is, but only show us that while his facticity or is-ness is recognizable his essence or what-ness remains beyond the capacity of the conception.

50. See chapter on God and His creation I. (Chapter VIII).

CHAPTER III

AKOLOUTHIA - FOLLOWING THE LOGOS

The Epistemological method which combines Moral, Logical and Spiritual Life in one Single Quest for Meaning

The term *akolouthia* which could be translated consistency, consequence, coherence, following up or custom, occupies a central place in Gregory's epistemology. The word and its derivatives are used frequently in practically all his works.¹ Significant seems the fact that occurrences of these words are more frequent in the philosophical writings.² The word does not appear to have had the same centrality in the earlier philosophical tradition, whether Platonic or Aristotelian.

Philo Mechanicus (3rd to 2nd century B.C.) had already used the word in the sense of logical consequence³ and in the third century B.C. Chrysippus the Stoic (281-208 B.C.) uses it in the same sense,⁴ and Gregory must have taken the term from Stoic sources.

Cardinal Danielou has pointed to the central meaning of the term for Gregory as a necessary causal consequence which explains something.⁵ The Stoics had used it not only in a logical sense, but also with a moral meaning. *Akolouthos tei phusei zen* meant for the Stoics to live according to nature, i.e. in accordance with the Logos that indwells the cosmos and all things in it.⁶ Philo (Alexandrinus) had also a notion of a fixed order according to which everything proceeds, though he does not always use the term *akolouthia* for that order. It is sometimes *taxis*⁷ (a cosmic order, which in Aristotle fixes the length of life of a man), sometimes *tuche* (which is fortune as a form of God's providence.)⁸ But *taxis* or order can also mean for Philo rank and sequence. In fact he defines *taxis* in terms of *akolouthia* (sequence) and *heirmos* (linkedness).⁹ There is a certain sequence in the very creation, which cannot be reversed, according to Philo.¹⁰

For Gregory, it becomes of the utmost importance to understand things in their proper sequential order, and then to state what is understood in the right sequential order. Good discourse is what manifests good *akolouthia*. Sometimes he uses the word in a much more ordinary sense, like for example meaning the course of life¹¹ or the course of nature,¹³ at other times it is in Danielou's happy phrase, an *enchainement*, a chain, often of evil,¹³ or of sin.

In the controversy with Eunomius, however, the idea takes on a fundamental significance. Eunomius argued that the Son and the Spirit came later in the sequence of revelation and therefore that they are inferior to the Father who comes first in the sequence of revelation. This argument Gregory refutes very easily.¹⁴ One cannot say two things at the same time, and if one says one thing after the other, it does not necessarily follow that the latter is inferior to the former.

Gregory's point is that *akolouthia* or order and sequence belongs only to the created order and not to the Creator. In the created order it is possible to find order and sequence and know things in terms of their mutual relationship. But in the uncreated there is no sequence or rank, and our method of knowing things, which Gregory sees as discovering the *taxis* and *akolouthia* of things, cannot go beyond the created order.¹⁵

But this is by no means a disparaging of *akolouthia* for only through discovering relationship between notions we can approve or reject statements about God such as those made by Eunomius. Eunomius' contention, for example, is that the Father alone, as ungenerate (*agennetos*) has being in himself (*auto-ousios*) and is good in himself (*autagathos*). The Son and the Spirit have their being from the Father, and are inferior to him in both being and goodness, according to Eunomius.

What is the *akolouthia* of the argument of Eunomius? "Let us mark the consequence" (*skopeson ten akolouthian*). If the Son has goodness only by participation and not in himself and is "less perfect", then it follows, according to Gregory, that the nature of the Son is lacking in some degree in goodness, has to change into a greater degree of goodness for himself in order to be perfect, is therefore not

God, since in need of becoming; and therefore, argues Gregory in a very sophistic and rather unconvincing syllogism, he cannot save the world, being in need of something himself.

But this argument has its own strength when further analysed. If the Son is less than the Father, then the Son is not infinite. If he is not infinite, then his growth into the infinite has to be also an infinite process, for it is axiomatic for Gregory that the finite can never become infinite by addition, but has to be infinitely in the process of being added to.¹⁷

Here Gregory uses the notion of *akolouthia* to test certain doctrines by working out their logical consequences. Whether a doctrine is true or not is to be tested in terms of its coherence or non-contradiction with other well-attested facts and doctrines.

Akolouthia is thus an aspect of the orderliness of the universe, as Philo Alexandrinus had already stated three centuries earlier: “The good can never be in disorder. Order (*taxis*) is sequence (*akolouthia*) and coherence (*eirmos*) of that which precedes and that which succeeds, if not also in the effects, at least in the conception (*epinoia*) of the architect.”¹⁸

In Philo’s conception, drawn from Stoic sources, *akolouthia* has to do with the design of the created order in the mind of the Creator, and is thus an ontological reality, with epistemological consequences. We are to understand the *akolouthia* or *taxis* of the universe if we are to understand anything real at all.

There can be little doubt that Gregory’s *In Hexaemeron* draws heavily on Philo’s *De opificio Mundi*. But Philo is more like Basil, even somewhat less attentive to philosophical coherence.¹⁹ Gregory systematises these thoughts of Philo, which have also been dealt with by Origen,²⁰ into a more coherent system.

In the mind of God, being and knowledge coincide, according to Gregory :

“In the divine nature, power (*dunamis*) is concurrent (*sundromos*) with will (*boulesis*), and the measure of the power of God is the will. But the will is wisdom (*sophia*). And the property of wisdom is not

to be ignorant of how every single thing came to be. With the knowledge also springs up the power to achieve. So whatever is known also immediately has to come to be, the power to work out beings being concurrent; to be known leads to being effected, nothing intervening between known and coming into existence, but immediately, without any interval (between intention and achievement) the work becomes accomplished simultaneously with the will (*sunemmenos kai adiastatos sunanadeiknutai tei boulei kai to ergon*). Thus the will is effective power, so that whenever beings are willed they also come into being; those which are conceived have the possibility and occasion for their existence in being willed. From God's side all things in creation are to be understood together - the will, the wisdom, the effective power and the essence of existing beings, (*hos homou ta panta tou theou peri ten ktisin noeisthai, to thelema, ten dunamin, ten ousian ton onton*).²¹

The fundamental epistemological principle of Gregory's thought is here made clear. God's wisdom and His will are coterminous. What He wills is what is wise, and by the very act of God's knowing and willing, everything receives its being.²²

Now God's wisdom has a particular *taxis* or order. To know and to follow this *taxis* by *akolouthia* is to participate in God's wisdom which is the foundation or ground of the being of all that has existence. Here Gregory's thought seems to have been influenced by two factors at least, though both of them could have come to him by the same channel. One is the Platonic heritage, and the other the Chaldean heritage (see note 23).

In the Platonic tradition words like *nous* and *dianoia* have more than an intellectual meaning. *Dianoia* is both an idea in the mind and the intention to realize it, thus a joint act of knowing and willing.²³ Seneca, the Latin thinker, had to make a distinction between intellect and will, but the Greek language does not have exact parallels for the Latin *mens* and *voluntas*. But even in Seneca, the separation between knowing and willing is not so neat. *Velle* (to will) even in many Latin writers, means both to know what is good and to desire for it. The mind and the will are not water-tight compartments in the old

traditions, and it is only in our alienated society that we have learned to develop knowledge divorced from will, calling it “objective” or “scientific.” Virtue for Seneca and the Stoics as well as for Plato and the Platonists is the combination of *scientia* and *voluntas*, of knowledge and will.

Akolouthia, or “following” thus becomes both intellectual and voluntative in the same act. We follow the order of reality intellectually in order that we may follow it in terms of our life and action and therefore ontologically.

This linking ontology, epistemology and ethics, characteristic of Stoic thought as well as of Gregory’s thinking, was a central notion in Christian patristic thought. Werner Jaeger refers to the ancient idea that the philosopher is a “Man interested in God”, and cites Justin Martyr’s Trypho the Jew meeting a Greek philosopher and assuming that because he is a philosopher, he is interested in God.²¹ But this “interest in God” is far from an academic one. We are “interested” in many things because discussing them gives us pleasure. But for those men the thirst for knowledge came from the thirst for being. *Akolouthia* is both “following” intellectually and “following” as discipleship. But it is not a question of first knowing and then doing. It is only as there is progress in virtue that knowledge itself becomes clearer and clearer (but not necessarily more conceptually articulable).

Akolouthia as logical consistency

The clearest example of Gregory’s view of *akolouthia* as logical consistency is in his *Antirheticus against Apolinaris*. Looking at the logical consequences of Apolinaris’ teaching that Christ’s flesh was from heaven, Gregory argues how this leads to the conclusion that the Incarnation took place already before the creation of Adam, whereas the Church’s teaching is clearly that the Logos who was in the beginning with God, in these last days for us and for our salvation became man from Mary, of the lineage of David. Apolinaris argument thus by necessity leads to logical inconsistency (*he akolouthia tes atopias ton muthon kat’ anagken proagetai*).²⁵ One sees the use of the same technique in refuting the heresy of the Macedonians in *De Spiritu Sancto*²⁶ as well as in the controversy with Eunomius.

It is safe then to say that Gregory, following up the logical consequences to see whether they lead to inconsistency (*atopia*) constitutes a basic epistemological technique to test statements of truth made by others.

The human *logismos* or rationality may be unable to comprehend the uncreated Being of God,²⁷ but is certainly component to shift truth from error, especially if it remains rooted in the faith of the Church.

Akolouthia as ontological reality

The capacity of the mind to follow reality has its source in the consistency and coherence of that reality. Logical coherence is possible because of ontological coherence. The ontological ground of what exists is the *logos* who proceeds from God, in accordance with a certain order or arrangement that is coherent. In his reply to Eunomius' Second book, Gregory elaborates this point in the context of refuting Eunomius' argument that names or words come into being along with the realities to which they relate. Eunomius' argument was that God said "let there be light" and there was light, showing that the naming of light preceded the existence of light. Gregory refutes this by asking not to take everything too literally in Scripture. When the Scripture says "Heavens declare the glory of God", it does not mean that the Heavens are using words, for the Scripture itself says "there is neither speech nor language" in the verse immediately following.²⁸ The real meaning of the words "And God said" cannot be understood in an anthropomorphic sense:

"To return to the matter under discussion the word '(He) said' does not point to voice and words in God, but shows that God's will is concurrent (*sundromon*) with his power (*dunamis*), in a manner calculated to make clear to our more sense-oriented minds the true understanding of reality. Since all realities consist in God's will, and it is the custom of men to indicate the will by words and thus to harmonise work with will, the scriptural account of the origin of the cosmos is a sort of beginner's introduction to the knowledge of God, pre-

senting the power of the divine nature through things more readily understandable (perception through the senses being a means to understanding the intelligible); for this reason, Moses, in saying that things came to be because God ‘said’ indicates to us the moving power of God’s will, and by immediately adding: ‘and it was so’, shows that in God’s nature there is no difference between will and energy (effecting); on the contrary teaches that in God the purposing (*noesis*) is the principle of the effecting, not that the effecting comes later than the purposing, but the two happen together and are to be understood together - the movement of the mind (*he tou nou kinesis*) and the effecting power of the thing (*he apotelestike ton pragmatos dunamis*). There is no middle given for the understanding, between the word of choice and the thing effected; but as the kindling of the flame and the appearance of light happen together, the latter co-appearing with and from the former in the same manner, the work of God’s will is the hypostasis of the things coming to be, but not posterior in sequence to the will.”²⁹

This virtual identity, though with theoretical distinctions, between the will of God, the word of God, and the reality of all that exists, becomes the basis for Gregory’s epistemology. In opposition to Eunomius’ argument that (*remata*) are created by God along with things (*pragmata*), Gregory argues that words are our creations to classify and organize in our knowledge the diverse elements in creation, made possible because of the order of sequence in creation:

“Lest we understand the creation to be masterless and self-originated, he (Moses) says that it came to be from the divine nature and that it subsists in a certain order and sequence (*taxei tini kai akolouthia sustenai*).”³⁰

What is the difference here between Stoic epistemology and Gregory’s way of knowing? Our knowledge of Stoic epistemology being limited as it is, particularly in relation to thinkers of the “Middle

Stoa” like Panaetius and Poseidonius, any ascription of source has to be largely conjectural.

The Stoic idea of *sumpatheia* no doubt influenced Gregory’s understanding of the *taxis* and *akolouthia* in creation. But it is significant that he uses but sparingly the Stoic terminology of *sumpatheia* to denote coherence in the world. Panaetius, for example, is not interested in the relation between human reason and the logos in the world.³¹ Gregory similarly does not draw the analogy between the human reason and the logos as Basil does, but he still believes that it is because there is order in the universe that knowledge is possible.

Gregory is probably more indebted to the whole Stoic tradition (which was largely appropriated for Christianity by the Alexandrian School), for thinking in virtue as an essential and inseparable aspect of true knowledge. Clement of Alexandria approvingly cites Poseidonius’ definition of the end of life as contemplating truth and order and striving then to bring them about.³² Panaetius saw virtue as two-fold as *theoretike* and *praktike*, theoretical and practical. The general close link between will and reason is rather universal in ancient Greek thought.

As for the origin of names, the controversy is very old. Proclus³³ tells us that Cratylus, Pythagoras, and Epicurus agree that names arise by nature - which is the Eunomian view also. Hermogenes, Democritus and Aristotle agree that names arise by chance, and this is generally the line taken by Gregory, though instead of chance, he finds the human *epinoia* as the creator of words.

The crucial idea in Stoic ontology was to see the universe as a strict continuum.³¹ *Akolouthia*, *eirmos*, concatenation, or *enchainement*, is thus an integral part of the continuum theory of the universe.

Akolouthia and Scripture

Parallel to the *akolouthia* or the mental following up of the coherence in the order of created reality is the *akolouthia* or the following up of the Holy Scripture. In fact the scriptural *akolouthia* will manifest the cosmic *akolouthia*. In the Commentary on Ecclesiastes, Gregory says:

“The following up of the test (*he ephexes akolouthia tou logou*) leads the soul to an even greater philosophy concerning created beings. For it shows that the universe is continuous (*suneches*) within itself, that there is no sort of break (*lisis*) in the harmony of created beings, but that it has co-breathing (*sumpnoia*) of all the beings with each other. The universe is never separated from this internal continuity (*tes pros heauto sunapheias*), but all things remain in existence moved by the power of True Being (*tei tou ontos ontos dunamei perikratoumena.*)”³⁵

The sympatheia doctrine of the Stoics is more obvious in this passage, and the Editor of the Jaeger edition draws our attention to fragments of Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C.), Hippocrates (ca. 460-380 B.C.) and Plotinus (205-270 A.D.). Heraclitus, in his aphoristic manner had said:

“It is wise to agree that all things are one (frag. 50). “The hidden harmony is stronger than the visible” (frag. 54). “If we speak with intelligence, we must base our strength on that which is common to all, as the city (is based) on the law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are nourished by one, which is divine. For it governs as far as it wills, and is sufficient for all things, and more than enough.” (frag. 114).

Gregory had developed these ideas in the Catechetical Oration, and ascribes it to “tradition received from the Fathers” (*para ton pater on diedexametha*):

“Thus comes to be the symphony of the creation within itself (*pros heauten sumphonia tes ktiseos*), the opposition of the natures in no wise disrupting the continuity of the co-breathing (*oudamou tes phusikes enantiotetos ton tes sumpnoias heirmon dialuoses*).”³⁶

But the same “hanging-together” as seen in the creation can be

seen in the Scriptures also. For it is one Holy Spirit who animated the entire corpus of Old and New Testaments,³⁷ though this mutual coherence or *akolouthia* of the Scriptures may not be at once obvious. We have to search for the coherence of the scriptural accounts behind and beyond the appearance of mutual contradiction. As he says in his epistle to his brother Peter, Bishop of Sebastia, a sort of covering letter for his Easter Gift entitled *On the Making of Man*, it is necessary to find a coherent picture of man by “fitting together” the various elements received from Scripture and from our own reasoning:

“But even in those things regarding him (Man) that seem to be opposed to each other through the dissimilarity between what came to be in the beginning and what is now to be seen, through a kind of necessary sequence, it is necessary to weave together the explanations of Scripture and the notions discovered by our own reasonings, in order to construct one account which has consistency and order in relation to what appears to be opposed to each other, and which brings these apparent contradictions to one single end.”³⁸

There is, for Gregory, certain basic apparent contradictions between Scripture on the one hand and reality as we observe it on the other. Scripture says, Man is created in the Image of God, who is the perfection of all Good. But we see Man, who is more evil than good. How can man who is mortal, feeble, corporeal, finite, sinful, be the image of Him who is immortal, almighty, incorporeal, infinite and holy? Here the teaching of the Church helps us to overcome what appears like a contradiction, by drawing our attention to the whole sequence of reality in a systematic manner, i.e. what happened in the beginning, what is to take place in the end, and what is happening in between. This *akolouthia* from the beginning (*arche*) to the end (*peras*) constitutes the framework for the proper understanding of the Scriptures and of the right evaluation of secular knowledge.

But there is a certain *akolouthia* within Scripture itself, a certain order in which things are stated, which has significance for life itself.

Take the five books of the Psalms, or the five divisions of the book of Psalms. The first 8 chapters of Gregory's commentary on the titles of the Psalms are devoted³⁰ to establishing the thesis, farfetched though it may seem to our modern minds, that the sequence and order of the five books correspond to five stages in the life of advancing towards the perfection of God. The 9th chapter begins thus:

“In these five divisions of the psalms then we understand a sequence (*akolouthia*) as if a series of steps standing one above the other in a certain order which is consecutive, signifying thereby that the last sound of each division has the meaning of some sort of station or stopping place in the discourse, comprehending in itself the ends of the stages previously traversed.”⁴⁰

In other words, not only is there a consistency between Scripture and the reality of creation, but there is also a similar consistency between Scripture, cosmic order, and the life of growth into Christian perfection. The 150th psalm, for example, is the final triumph of the good when all the choirs join together in the doxology and evil has no more power.

The recital of the psalms is thus linked to the growth in perfection - an essential notion in the tradition of Christian spirituality. The first psalm refers to the beginning of the life of virtue, which means separation from the life of evil.⁴¹ From there, by stages, the soul is led to the summit of perfection (*anabasis pros to akrotaton tou makarismou*).⁴² At the end all the choirs of the creation join together in one mighty song of praise in total unison, for evil has been totally banished, and all are reconciled to God, even we who have been standing apart from the good because of our sin. It is rather easy for us to see how such a strictly allegorical interpretation of the titles of the psalms seemed natural to Gregory. The Septuagint titles clearly show that even at that early date the translators experienced difficulty in making sense of these titles. The Septuagint titles speak constantly about *ton alloiothesomenon* (the alienated or changed or estranged people) and *eis telos* (towards perfection).⁴³ Besides the Greek term for the titles of the Psalms is *stelographia*, which liter-

ally means inscription on a tablet of stone (*stèle* = block of stone, monument, boundary-post), and could easily be interpreted allegorically as monuments or road-signs. In fact Gregory says explicitly that this is how he understands it; in relation to the title of Psalm 55: *Toe David eis stelographian*. In fact the whole LXX title of Psalm 55 has considerable interest for Gregory, for it reads: “*To the goal, regarding the people who have become separated from the holy ones, for David, for Inscription (read-sign), when those belonging to other tribes overwhelmed him in Geth.*”⁴⁴ Gregory interprets these inscriptions as monuments of victory in the onward march of the soul in the conquest of evil, culminating in the final triumph-song:

“Eis *stelographian* should signify the word indelibly engraved on memory as if a memorial for the soul to remember the patterns of the good inscribed on a tablet. These are in a sense the victory monuments left by the captain of the forces of David (*he tou archistrategon tes dunameos ton Dabid aristeia*) according to which passions becomes double (*diploun* - divided into two) in the face of the enemies, part destroyed by fire, part obliterated through smiting.”⁴⁵

The title inscriptions of the Psalms are thus construed by Gregory, by an allegorical method that seems to us heavily strained, to be indications that the psalms denoted various stages in following the road from vice to virtue.

The main point is for us to note that there is an arche and a telos, a beginning and an end, and an ordered sequence in what is in between, at three levels - in the cosmos, in the Scriptures, and in the life of perfection. In all three we have to follow the *taxis* of the *akolouthia*, the order of the sequence.

Akolouthia of evil and of good

The Christian life itself is seen by Gregory as a break with the flow of evil in which we are caught, so that we are able to leave the *akolouthia* of evil in which sin has placed us, and move along the

akolouthia of good towards perfection. The fifth book of the Psalms speaks of the final end of human salvation.

“Lifting up thus along with himself those who are like this, the noble prophet (David) leads us to the climbing of the fifth mountain ridge, in which is the full attainment and summing up of human salvation (*Sumplerosis te kai anakephalaiosis tes anthropines soterias*).”⁴⁶

This is the movement from non-being to being. Gregory refers to Moses who “philosophizes about the changing and the unchanging” that “He who eternally is (God) truly is, while the one who is continually becoming (man) is not (for this is change, the transformation from being in being, to being in non-being), and showing that by the same power the nature flows down towards evil, and again through conversion (repentance) is led up towards the good since the illumination of God is capable of rekindling the life of the human being, thus revealing to us by the word the grace that has come from God.”⁴⁷

Mankind, having strayed from the city of God, which is its true dwelling, is now wandering in the desert, without God, who is true meat and drink for man. We have strayed from the way which is Christ, but in his grace, he comes to find us in the desert and puts us back into himself, for he is both way and the city of life towards which the way leads (Ps 107:7). But we were in the darkness, in the shadow of death, fettered by sin (Ps 107:10), unable to move in the direction of the good, weighed down by the weight of evil (*Bareia tis esti kai katopheres he kakia*).⁴⁸ It is this weight of evil that is continuously dragging us downward into the pit (*eis ton bothunon heautes sugkathelkousa*) of non-being. Referring to Psalm 107:33-34a, which says:

“Sometimes he turned rivers into desert
Springs of water into arid ground
Or a fertile country into salt-flats”

(Jerusalem Bible)

Gregory comments:

“What it (Scripture) calls rivers are the flow of the

passions and the springs of water (*diexodous hudaton*) indicate the *akolouthia* of evil (*tas kakon akolouthias*), Men always attaching evil to evil, extend evil into a flowing stream.”⁴⁹

Breaking the chain of evil in which we are caught, Christ places us on the road to the city of heaven, which is the *akolouthia* of the good.

The chain of evil is also spoken of in *Contra Eunomium* Book I.⁵⁰ Evil cannot be overcome with evil. Only the good can stop evil. So it would be useless for Gregory to repay Eunomius with evil, for all the evil that the latter has done to Basil.

“Evil happenings can be counteracted only by their opposite. And evil words and actions would not have developed to such a pitch if some kind word or deed had intervened to break the continuity of the chain of evil to *suneches tes ton kakon akolouthias*.”

Evil is a chain-reaction that leads to non-being, in which mankind is caught. Creation is a chain-reaction that should lead to being, but evil goes in the direction opposite to that of creation. The need for man is for this *akolouthia* of evil to be broken, so that he can be placed again in the *akolouthia* of the good.

Thus intellectual *akolouthia* is inseparable from moral *akolouthia*. Knowledge of the world through *akolouthia*, or knowledge of the Scriptures through its *akolouthia*, and the weaving together of the two into one discourse, would itself be quite useless if it does not lead to a break with this moral *akolouthia* of evil and does not become placed in the *akolouthia* of the good. This is the basic epistemological principle of Gregory’s Christian philosophy.

1. In the *Contra Eunomium* alone the noun is used 124 times, and the adjective or adverb 84 times. I have not tried to count the number of times the verb is used.

2. For example *In Inscriptio Psalmorum* uses *akolouthia* 32 times and the adjective or adverb 56 times, *In Canticum Canticorum* 19 and 37 times respectively.

3. *Belopoeica, Excerpte aus Philons Mechanik*, ed. H. Diels, E. Schramm, *Abhandl. I. Berlini. Akad.* 1919, No. 12. cited in Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, under *akolouthia*.

4. H. Von Arnim, etc. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Leipzig 1903, vol. 2. 68 and elsewhere, cited by Liddell & Scott, *op. cit.*

One finds the words *akoloutheo* *akolouthia* and *akolouthon* of frequent occurrence in treatises of Stoic logic. See Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* (Ed. C. G. Cobet, Paris 1878) VII. 71, 74, 81 etc. (Eng. Tr. in Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Trans. R.D. Hicks, 2 vols, Loeb, 1925) and Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* (Eng. Tr. R.G. Bury, Loeb, 2 vols, 1917 + 1933). VIII. 111, 112 etc.

5. J. Danielou, *L'etre et le temps chez Gregoire de Nysse*, p. 19.

6. See Danielou, *Platonisme et Theologie Mystique*, p. 302 note; also Volker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*.

7. See Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione* II. 10, 336 b. 10-13.

8. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* I, p. 330.

9. *De opificio Mundi*, 7. 28.

10. See Wolfson, *Philo* I, pp. 215-216.

11. *Akolouthia tou biou*, *Contra Eunomium* I. GNO I. 34.10. PG 45. 260B.

12. *Akolouthia tes phuseos*, *In Canticum Cantorum*: Hom. 13. GNO VI. 389 line 3. PG 44. 1053 B.

13. *Ton kakon akolouthia*, *Contra Eunomium* I. 89. GNO I. 53. 5-6. PG 45. 277.

14. *Contra Eunomium* I. 197ff. GNO I. 84/10ff. NPNF V, pp. 53-54.

15. See *Contra Eunomium* I. 270-272. GNO I. 105/19 - 106/11. PG 45. 333 B.C.

16. *Contra Eunomium* I. 288. GNO I, p. 111/17ff. PG 45. 340. NPNF V. 62 A ff.

17. *Ibid* (note 17).

18. *Kalon gar ouden en ataxia. Taxis d' akolouthia kai heirmos esti proegoumenon tinon kai epomenon ei kai me tois apotelesmasin, alla tais tektainomenon epinoias*. Philo: *de opificio Mundi*: 28.

19. Philo does say, for example, that it would be “unphilosophic” to declare that time is more ancient than creation (*presbuteron d’apophainesthai tolman aphilosophon*) - *De opificio*. 26) but he is not always as careful to maintain this philosophical coherence as Gregory.

20. See *Commentary on St. John*.

21. In *Hexaemeron*. PG 44. 69 A.

22. The sources of this conception of Gregory, that the wisdom (*sophia*), *thelema* (or *boulesis*) and power (*dynamis*) of God are the ground of all existents, can probably be traced back to the Chaldean Oracles, (GNO I: 250) and Gregory conceivably got it from Porphyry’s - ‘*Philosophy from Oracles*.’” The Chaldean system, as interpreted by H. Lewy in *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* (Recherches d’Archeologie, de Philologie et Histoire XIII, Le Caire 1956) goes as follows: “The Chaldean Hierarchy is headed by a Supreme God, whose mythical predicates are: ‘Father’ ... the personality of the ‘Father’ remains transcendent, but his action unfolds itself through His Power. Power (*dunamis*) is the sum of noetic potencies included in the Supreme God. ... The Father himself has no direct external activity; He uses intermediaries. These inter-mediaries are His faculties who in their virtuality are identical with the Supreme Being, but acquire in the state of actuality a particular existence. The action of the transcendent God is thought, consequently the first entity that issues from Him is His intellect, the nous. His will (*boule*) acts in harmony with this entity, for His volition is thought, and His thought is action. Intellect, Will and Power constitute as the immediate faculties of the ‘Father’, the ‘Paternal Monad’ ... His will and His intellect cooperate in the unfolding of His power. Every act of thought in the unfolding of the Paternal Intellect brings forth new noetic orders, described as procreations” (cited by John J. O’Meara in *Porphyry’s Philosophy from Oracles in Augustine*, Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris 1959). This work of Prof. O’Meara advances the thesis that Porphyry’s *Philosophy from Oracles* (*Peri tes ek logi’on philosophias*) was the work of the “Platonist” which Augustine mentions in Bk X of *Civitate Dei* as *De Regressu Animae*, which was occasion for Augustine’s conversion (See *op. cit.*, p. 145). Of course Gregory, who accepts this insight from the Chaldean Oracles, rejects the system of that work, which is similar to the Neoplatonic Trinity. For Augustine’s reaction to this non-Platonic Chaldean element in Porphyry, see *De Civitate Dei* XIX: 27. For fragments from the work of Porphyry see Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*. IX. 10.

23. See M. Pohlenz, *Philosophie und Eriebnis*, pp. 112-113. *Die Stoa*. II. 139-140.

- J. M. Rist. *Stoic Philosophy*, p. 223.
24. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*.
Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, p. 31.
25. GNO III. 1, p. 150/8-9. PG 45. 1149D. See also 148. 18ff. PG 45 1148 D.
26. GNO III. 1, p. 95/16, 102/23, 104/31, 107/15 etc.
PG 45. 1312 A, 1320 D, 1324 B, 1328 13, etc.
27. See e.g. *Contra Eunomium I*, 367. GNO I, p. 135/13ff.
28. Ps XIX. 1-3. LXX.
29. *Contra Eunomium Lib. II*. 227. GNO vol. I, 292/2-28.
PG 45. 985 D - 988 B. NPNF V, p. 272.
30. *Ibid.* 225. GNO I. 291/20-24. PG 45. 985 D. NPNF V. 272.
See also CE II. 279. GNO I. 308/24. PG 45. 1005 B. NPNF V. 278.
31. J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*; p. 189.
32. *Slromateis* 2. 21. 129.
33. In *Cratylus*, 16. cited in H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (4th ed.), Berlin 1922, p. 68.
E. Tr. K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Oxford 1971, p. 97.
34. See Sambursky, S. *Physics of the Stoics*, New York 1959.
35. *In Ecclesiasten*. Oratio VII. GNO V, p. 406/1-7. PG 44. 724 D.
36. *Oratio*. Cat. VI. PG 45. 25 C. Srawley, p. 29. 12-30. NPNF V. 480 A.
See also *De o pificio Hominis I* and XIII. 7. PG 44, 129 C. PG 44, 165 A ff.
37. That the Holy Spirit is the author of the entire corpus of Scripture was a basic principle for Gregory. Besides stating so expressly on several occasions (see e.g. CE I. 225. GNO 1, p. 15/15 ff. PG 45. 985) he used the expression “the God-inspired Scriptures” (*he theo pneustos graphe*) rather consistently and frequently. To take one commentary as example in the commentary on the canticles, the expression is used 17 times (GNO vol. VI. 4.16; 5.12; 2.12; 25.5; 26.17; 52.2; 76.14; 157.12; 173.5; 175.3; 263.7; 269.12; 342.9; 404.14; 436.1; 447.3; 447.14).
38. *De Hominis opificio*. Preface. PG 44. 128 B. NPNF V, p. 387 B.
39. *In Inscriptiones Psalmorum*, chpt. 1-8. GNO vol. V, pp. 24-65. PG 44. 432-481.

40. *In Inscriptioms Psalmorum*, I. GNO V. 65/5-10. See also 67. 15 ff.

41. GNO V. 67/25-68/1.

42. *Ibid.* 68/5-6.

43. *eis to telos* appears in the titles of the following psalms in the LXX -4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 29, 30, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 74, 75, 76, 79, 80, 83, 84, 87, 108, 138, 139, i.e. in 56 of the 150 psalms, but it is difficult to find any sequence here. But it could still be seen as a kind of road-sign on the way to perfection. "Towards perfection." Our Hebrew MSS have (*leमतseah*) which could mean "to the chief of the choir."

44. *Eis to telos, huper tou laou tou apo ron hagian memakrummenoi.*
Toe David eis Stelographian, hopote ekratesan auton hoi allo phuloi en Geth.

45. *In Inscr. Psalmorum*. II. IV. GNO V, p. 80/8-15.

46. *In Inscr. Psalmorum*. I. VII. GNO V. 52/18-21. PG 44. 465-468.

47. *Ibid.*, GNO V. 52-53. PG 44. 468.

48. *Ibid.*, GNO V. 57-23. PG 44. 472 D.

49. *Ibid.*, GNO V. 61-5-8. PG 44. 477 A.

50. GNO I. p. 53/2-10. PG 45. 277 B.

CHAPTER IV

GOD AND HIS CREATION - I

Diastema - Discontinuity

Gregory was shrewd enough to see that human language was inadequate, not merely to describe God's Being, but even clearly to describe the relation between Creator and creation.

It is axiomatic for Gregory that human thought has to stop at the boundary of creation; it cannot jump the gap that separates creation and Creator. In fact the notion of the gap or *diastema* is so central to the structure of Gregory's thought that he can apply it negatively or positively in three ways - (a) to God, negatively, (b) to the creation, positively, and (c) to the relation between God and the creation in a specially qualified sense.

1. Diastema - the Concept

The word *diastema* normally means "standing apart", being derived from *diastenai*, and *dihistemi* (stand apart, set apart, or separate). The concept of *diastema* as a musical interval between notes on a scale can be traced as far back as Archytas Tarentinus,¹ the Pythagorean Philosopher who lived in the fourth century before Christ, and to Aristoxenus Musicus,² his contemporary, and can be found also in Aristotle. Euclid uses the word to denote the distance from the centre to circumference (radius) of a circle. "Longinus" the literary critic uses it for distinctiveness of style in writing. In astronomy it referred to the equal distances kept between astral bodies in their movements. Temporally it could mean, in ordinary language, the distance between two events. In modern Greek it simply means "space" in such expressions as "space travel" or "space research." One could say that the general notion of *diastema* refers to the distance between two points, spatial or temporal.

The Stoics were perhaps the first to use this term in a philosophical sense. Zeno and Chrysippus both used it in relation to their refutation of the cosmological theories of the atomists, but it had no central significance in their thought.³

In the history of Christian thought, however, *diastema* became a key notion in the Arian controversy. The basic claim of Arianism is that “there was a then when the Son was not.” If this is conceded then there is an interval between the origin of the Father and the origin of the Son, since normally the Father has to be older than the Son.

Alexander of Alexandria, the orthodox bishop in whose diocese Arius was a Presbyter, writes to Alexander of Constantinople at a very early stage in the Arian controversy, that the Father begat the only begotten Son, as eternally present to Him (i.e. to the Father), not temporally, nor out of that which is extended (*ou chronikos oude ek diastematos*) nor out of that which is not.⁴

The Antiochean “Creed of the Long Lines” (*ekthesis makrostichos*, 345 A.D.) says clearly:

“nor was a then when he was not, as some say, unscripturally and erroneously, that some sort of a time - interval (*chronikon ti diastema*) has to be presupposed in relation to him.”⁵

The document clearly says:

“In saying that the Son is in himself, and both lives and exists like the Father, we do not on that account separate him from the Father, imagining place and interval between their union in the manner of bodies. For we believe that they are united with each other without mediation or interval, and that they exist inseparable.”⁶

St. Basil also uses the word *diastema* in this Trinitarian - Christological sense, and accuses the Arians “that they distinguish on the one hand the Son from the Father, and on the other the Holy Spirit from the Son, by a temporal interval.”⁷

By the fifth century *adiastatos* or “unextended” had become a qualifying adjective for the Holy Trinity.⁸ But Gregory finds a more comprehensive use for the term for the whole structure of the Creator - creation relationship, by positing: (a) that on the one hand there is no *diastema* or extension or gap internally within the uncreated nature of God; time-space extension does not apply to the godhead,

therefore there can be no time-space gap either *in* or *between* the three Persons of the Trinity; (b) that, on the other hand, all created existence is by nature extended in time and space, and therefore *diastema* is the characteristic of created being; and (c) that there is an ontological and therefore epistemological gap between the Creator's being and that of the creation which the human mind or any other created mind is incapable of traversing.

2. Diastema and the Transcendence of God

It is important for us to note Gregory's originality here. He is following neither Plato nor Aristotle, neither the Stoics nor Plotinus. For the Stoics, "God is the whole world with all its parts,"⁹ or sometimes "the mind of the world"¹⁰ or "the soul of the world."¹¹ As Marcus Aurelius put it:

"This thou must always bear in mind, what is the nature of the whole, and what is my nature, and how this is related to that, and what kind of a part it is of what kind of a whole; and that there is no one who hinders thee from always doing and saying the things which are according to the nature of which thou art a part."¹²

The whole cosmos is God and man is both a part and a miniature version (microcosm) of the macrocosmos, for Stoic thought. As the soul is in the body, so God is in the universe. Gregory departs totally from this by positing the absolute transcendence of God as we shall see.

Neither does Gregory follow Aristotle in seeing the relation between God and the world in terms of cause and effect. Gregory does not deny the possibility of inferring God as cause from the world as effect. But this is neither sufficient for salvation, nor is it a knowledge of God's *ousia*.

"For being by nature invisible, He (God) becomes visible only in His operations, and only when He is contemplated in the things that are external to Him. But the meaning of this Beatitude (Mathew 5:8) does not merely indicate that we can infer the nature of the cause from its operation, for in that case

even the wise of this world might gain a knowledge of transcendent wisdom and power through the harmonic structure of the universe.”¹³

While Gregory can accept the Aristotelian notion of God as First Cause or Uncaused Cause (which is the key to Eunomius’ system), he is not satisfied with that kind of knowledge of God. Such knowledge is inferential, and is not saving knowledge. It is the kind of theology any charlatan can engage in, without any change taking place in his life. The true knowledge of God must result in and accompany a change of the very being of man, as Gregory goes on to say in this sermon on “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”

The world is an orderly and sequential chain of causes (*akolouthia*), but God is not simply the first link of that chain. There is a *diastema* or interval or gap between God and the causal chain of the world. Gregory can accept the conclusion of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*:

“It is clear, then, from what I have said, that there is a substance eternal, unchangeable, and separate from sensible things. We may likewise infer that it cannot have spatial magnitude; for since nothing finite can have infinite power, it could not have that infinite power which it reveals by causing motion eternally. That rules out finite magnitude. And it cannot have infinite magnitude, because there is no such thing. It must also be free from change of quality, for all the other sorts of change presuppose locomotion.”¹⁴

But both Aristotle and the Neoplatonists assume some sort of continuity between the world and God. Of course it is not spatial continuity, since even for Aristotle, the supreme Intellect or Prime Mover has no magnitude and therefore cannot be spatial.

Thus the idea of a *diastema* between God and His creation, totally impossible for the Stoics, is practically inconceivable for Aristotle or Plotinus. For Aristotle, the Prime Mover or First Cause, is also the Final Cause, towards which everything moves.

“The final cause, then, moves by being loved, while all other things that move do so by being moved. Now that which is moved is capable of being otherwise than it is, so that if its actual mode of existence is the primary kind of local movement, then, in so far as it is subject to change, it is capable of being otherwise in respect of place even if not in respect of substance. The unmoved mover, on the other hand, has no contingency: it is not subject even to the minimal change (spatial motion in a circle), since this is what it originates. It exists, therefore, of necessity; its being is therefore good, and it is in this way that it is a principle of motion. On such a principle, then, the whole physical universe depends.”¹⁵

So far Gregory would agree with Aristotle. But Aristotle does not go far enough either in the direction of total transcendence, or even of temporal transcendence, which may be implied in what he says, but is not definitely worked out.

For Aristotle, wisdom is the knowledge of first causes, and that is the *skopos* or intention of his metaphysics. The more universal one’s knowledge, the wiser he is.¹⁶

“What are most knowable are first principles and causes, for it is through and from these that other things are known, and not they through the particulars falling under them. The most authoritative science, reigning supreme over the subsidiary, is that which knows for what purposes every act takes place, i.e. the final cause, the good in each particular instance, and in general, the *summum bonum* in nature as a whole.”¹⁷

For Aristotle thus the First and Final Cause, the Supreme Good, is well within the range of human knowledge, and there is no *diastema* or gap between the knowing mind and the Supreme Good, either epistemologically or ontologically. For Aristotle “Philosophy”, the knowledge of “being qua being,”¹⁸ is primarily an intellectual quest, for the object of the particular scientific disciplines called philosophy or metaphysics. The quest for this knowledge of being qua being proceeds, for Aristotle, through the principles or the Laws of Contradiction and Excluded Middle, and not, as for Gregory, through the life

of righteousness or virtue.

Plotinus also assumes basic continuity between God and His creation. Plato had left the problem unresolved explicitly, but God for Plato belongs integrally to the true world of ideas, which can be known through mathematical and logical knowledge as distinct from logical knowledge.¹⁹ The intelligible world for Plato is a living being, perfect, eternal, and the only real universe, which has true being. The *kosmos noetos* or the intelligible universe thus becomes a Second God,²⁰ and constitutes also the soul of the body which is the sensible world, forming its principle of movement as well as of intelligibility. The intelligible world and the sensible world together constitute one universe and not two²¹ - one universe comprised of “on the one hand an intelligible and unchanging model, and on the other a visible and changing copy of it.”²² Plato in fact adds a third element to this universe namely “the receptacle”²³ for the world of becoming, called space.

But it is not clear whether this “second God” who is the universe is continuous with the first God or not. This problem of the relation between the One and the Nous was resolved only in Alexandria, by Philo and by Plotinus in two different ways. Philo resolves the question by saying that the Alone was Alone before the creation of the World of Ideas. The First Cause is beyond all virtue and knowledge, and even beyond the good and the beautiful.²⁴ Here clearly we are in the realm of the Hebrew Scriptures, and Philo is here interpreting not Plato, but Moses.

Plotinus rejects the Philonian solution and advances his own. In the fifth Ennead, he puts it clearly:²⁶

“It is necessary then, that if the One existing unmoved, has also a second with it, the former cannot subsist inclined towards the latter, nor desiring it nor moved towards it. How then? How are we to conceive the latter remaining around the former? As an emanation (effulgence, radiance, *perilampsis ex autou*) from it, but remaining dependent on it, as the Sun holds around it the light radiating from it, which is eternally generated by it. And, all things that have existence, so long as they exist, by necessity, give out, around them, from their es-

sence towards their outside, from the power present in them, an outward-moving hypostasis, being some-thing of an image of the archetype from which it flows out, fire, for example, emitting heat around it. And snow does not keep its coolness to itself. The best examples are fragrant objects, for as long as they exist, something flows out from them and is perceived wherever they are present.”

Plotinus’ solution to the vexing problem between the One and the Many is a relatively simple one - emanation, circumradiation, effulgence, a property not peculiar to God, but equally shared by all existing beings. For Plotinus God and the cosmos are totally continuous, like the Sun and its light, like fire and its warmth, like snow and cold. All being, God and the universe, is in one continuous chain. The “Second Existence” of Plotinus, the *nous*, is the same as the “intelligible world” of Plato.

We see clearly a difference of approach here between the Jewish Philo and the Indo - Hellenic Plotinus.

At this point, Gregory of Nyssa, faithful to the Judaeo - Christian tradition, rejects the Indo - Hellenic theory of continuity between the One and the Many and adopts the Jewish solution of discontinuity. Among the various hellenic solutions - of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, Gregory can choose none. It is Moses that is here authority for Gregory as for Philo.

One cannot agree here with Father Leys²⁶ who states that Gregory follows Plato rather than Aristotle in his conception of the God - world relationship. The concept of *diastema* between God and His creation which is the basis of the transcendence of God, as a specific Judaeo - Christian concept, is the controlling category for Gregory - not Plato or Aristotle, certainly not the Stoics or the Neo-platonists.

3. Diastema as Extension

We have no English word by which to translate *diastema*. To translate it as gap or interval could be to miss out its meaning of extendedness. So we will use this Greek word in English, rather than use distance, distension or interval, and explain every time that it has

another meaning as well.

The use of the concept has been studied in some detail by Paul Dandelot,²⁷ who leaves the word untranslated, and says “one is tempted to translate as space, time and measure, as the context seems to indicate. What it means in fact is all the characteristics that the intelligence apprehends in created existence, but which are recognized to be absent in God.”²⁸ Balthasar and Danielou translate it into French as *espacement*, but this is also a limited sense.

Gregory’s concept of *diastema* seems so daringly original, that we should be careful not to assimilate it into the categories of other thinkers.

For Gregory, *diastema* is intimately connected with movement and change. A translation like “standing apart” gives the impression of being static, while for Gregory it is impossible for the creation to be static except in death and non-being. All is in movement, all is changing - that is the very nature of creation.

The creation is an orderly process in space and time - a *taxis kai akolouthia*, *diastematikos ek tinos eis ti tei zoei diodeuouosa* (an order and sequence, distensionally journeying through life from something to something).²⁹ It is a movement from origin to perfection, from *arche* to *telos*, and an *hodos* to traverse from beginning to end.

It is thus extension not only in space, but also in time. For what is time after all? It is the interval between the beginning and the end or between inception and perfection. This latter is a particular characteristic of creation, totally absent in God. Gregory never tires of making this distinction in the dispute against Eunomius, for the heart of Eunomius’ contention is that the Son has a beginning and therefore that he cannot be God. From the beginning Gregory has to attack this contention that the Second Person of the Trinity *has* a beginning, and to state the teaching of the Church that He *is* the beginning of all things. It is with this intention that he makes the clear line of demarcation between created nature and uncreated nature.

The argument goes somewhat like this. If the Son has a beginning in time, and if there is an interval of time between the Father and the

Son, then it is logically inevitable that the Father also had a beginning in time. The very sophistic argument of Gregory can be analysed thus: what are the steps of refuting Eunomius' argument?

Eunomius' *Premiss A*: The Son has a beginning in time.

Eunomius' *Premiss B*: There is a *diastema* between the Father and the Son.

Argument: Now, *diastema* is always a finite distance from one point of space or time to another.

So, logical *conclusion*: The beginning of the Son, plus the time of the interval, gives the time of the beginning of the Father. Therefore, the Father also has a beginning. Therefore, if the Son, who because he has a beginning, is not God, then the Father who also has a beginning is not God, which is absurd.

Final conclusion: Therefore the Son has no beginning and there is no *diastema* between the Father and the Son.³⁰

The argument, as we have said, is clever, typical of the Second Sophistique, but Gregory is shrewd enough to anticipate a counter-argument,³¹ showing that Gregory's position is also absurd, by the same token.

Gregory's Premiss A: The creation has a beginning and is not eternal.

Gregory's Premiss B: There is a *diastema* between the Creator and the creation.

One Page Missing

all attempt to find the *arche* from which it takes its origin or the *peras* (end) towards which it advances by any sort of change or ordered sequence. To our reasonings, which traverse the ages and all that have taken place in them as if an immense ocean, the understanding of divine nature gives no sign of its own knowable beginning, yields no 'direct apprehension' (*kataleptike phantasia* a Stoic term meaning clear immediate vision) to the mind that stretches itself to apprehend. So that anyone who is inquisitive about the 'seniority

of the ages' and wants to ascend to the source of all being in his mind, can get no foothold for his thoughts, the object of search will be infinitely advancing and will offer him no stopping place for his inquisitiveness.

“The matter should thus be clear to anyone with even a moderate insight into the nature of beings, that there is no measure for the divine and blessed Life; for it is not in time, but time is from it; the creation, on the other hand, is carried forward, from its acknowledged beginning towards its own goal, journeying through temporal dimensions; so that it is possible as Solomon says somewhere (Wisdom 7:18) to discern a beginning, an end, and a middle for it (*archen kai telos kai mesoteta*), and to signify the sequence of temporal events through divisions of time. But the Transcendent and Blessed Life has no measure or space, no dimensional traversing in creation. All things that have come to be, confined within their own measures assigned in accordance with the wisdom and good pleasure of their Creator, are measurable because bounded, in accordance with the needs of mutual harmony. So even though the weakness of the human mind cannot go all the way in the understanding of things in creation, it does not doubt that all things are bounded by the power of their maker, and are within the bounds of created existence. But this creative power which sets the limits for all created beings, has itself no circumscribing limit or boundary, it shuts out all conception striving to ascend to the origin of the Divine Life; it eludes and goes beyond all futile investigation and inquisitive and ambitious striving to get to the boundary of the unbounded. All effort of discursive reasoning to go beyond the ages and to ascend above the *diastema* can only climb to the point where it sees that the gap cannot be traversed; the measure and limit, so to speak, of the movement of human reasonings and operations seems to be time (*ho aion*) and all that is contained in it. That which transcends these remains unattainable, and inaccessible, unsullied by any object capable of human apprehension. In it is there neither form (*eidosis*) nor place (*topos*), neither magnitude (*megethos*) nor the measure of time (*to ek tou chronou metron*), nor anything else that can be apprehended. So, by necessity, the comprehending power of the human mind, seeking a

foothold for thought in some object in the ages and in creation, must fall back from every side of this incomprehensible nature, and stay within its own kindred and congenial realm.

“As I said, it should be understandable to all with however moderate an insight into the nature of beings, that the Creator of the whole laid the ages and the space in them as a sort of receptacle capable of receiving all that came to be through creation, and in them (i.e. in space and time) created the universe. For it is not possible for anything that came to be or comes to be to have its existence except in time and space. But the nature that is self-sufficient, eternal, and all-comprehending is neither in space nor in time; but is before and beyond these, in an ineffable way, itself from itself, understood only by faith, incommensurate with the ages, unmeasurable in terms of time, subsisting from itself, at rest in itself, not divisible into past and future; for there is nothing beside itself or outside itself, by the passage of which something becomes past and something future for it. These (temporal) experiences are peculiar to those things in creation, which divide their life, by the divisions of time, into hope and memory. In that exalted and blessed power to which all things are simultaneously and instantaneously present, the past and the future come within instant all-embracing view of the Power that empowers all existent beings.

“This then is the Being, in whom are all things, as the Apostle says, constituted, and by participating in whom each of us existent beings live and move and have our being; the Being which is above all beginning, presents no signs of its own nature, known only in its impossibility to be grasped. That is its peculiarly knowable characteristic, that its nature is above all conceivable characteristic.”³²

Obviously it is in the Eunomian Controversy that it became clear to Gregory that because of a fundamental ontological difference between the Creator and the creation, the logic that applies to the creation cannot apply to the Creator. In the creation, father has to be senior to the son in age. This was Eunomius' key argument. Gregory could refute it only by making clear the distinction between the true, non-temporal-spatial, unextended, self-generated life and Being of

the Creator on the one hand, and the contingent, temporal spatial, extended, other-generated life and being of creatures. That distinction is central to Gregory's thought, and is repeated several times in his writings. We shall cite another significant and clear passage, from the same corpus of writings against Eunomius:

“Huge and untraversable is the gap which separates the created nature from the Being of the Creator. The former is bounded, the latter has no limits. The former can be comprehended, in its own measures which accord with the good pleasure of their maker, for the latter, the measure is infinity. The former spreads itself extended in certain dimensions, and can be investigated in terms of space and time, the latter exceeds all dimensional or extensional understanding. It is like someone trying to comprehend the (human) mind which eludes the grasp of the inquisitive mind. In this life, the beginning of beings and their end can be conceived; but the Blessedness which is beyond the creation admits no conception of either beginning or end, but has eternally subsisted as he is, beyond the ideas of beginning or end, dependent only on himself, not journeying through life from somewhere to somewhere else in dimensional existence (*ou diastematikos ek tinos eis ti tei zoei diodeuoussa*), for it is not by participation in some other life that it comes into life, which would be logically necessary if we are to conceive a limit and a beginning to it; but it is what it is - life energising and energised from within itself, not increasing or decreasing by addition or diminution. For increase towards that which is greater has no place in that which has no limits, and as for decrease, this cannot be conceived in the nature which cannot suffer and is incapable of diminution.”³³

The context here is especially worth noting. It is not because Gregory has a lower estimate of man that he thinks man cannot understand the *ousia* of God. No, he has so high a conception of man, that it is hardly possible to go beyond the standard he has set. But for Gregory, even the angels are in no better situation, despite their being closer to God. In a phrase hardly possible for medieval western thought which put the angels as some sort of intermediary beings between

God and Man, Gregory says:

“The power of the angels appears in every way superior compared to ours, for they can pursue the knowledge of the higher world with naked and unveiled knowing power, undisturbed by attraction to the sensible world. But, when compared with the greatness of Him who really is, perhaps if one dares to say that even their power of apprehension is not so very superior to our own feebleness of understanding, he is not being overpresumptuous.”³⁴

So it is not a question of the frailty of the human mind that constitutes the gap. The gap applies even to the Cherubim and the Seraphim. This fundamental division between the Creator and the creation is no Indo-Hellenic notion. It comes beyond a shadow of doubt, from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But even Philo does not use the notion of *diastema* in this way as a basis for the absolute transcendence of God.

This world-view of Gregory's is so central to his thought, that it occurs in practically all his philosophical writings.³⁵ One finds it wherever Gregory seeks to lift up the mind of man to God - whether in the commentary *On the Lord's Prayer*³⁶ or in the sermon *On Infants who die prematurely?*³⁷ or in the *Great Catechism*.³⁸

But in several of these passages there appear also another division of the cosmos into visible and invisible or sensible and intelligible. But in this latter division between - let us call them - the human world and the angelic world, there is no *diastema*, though they substantially differ from each other.³⁹ Heaven and earth, if we may use another terminology for the two divisions of the cosmos, interpenetrate. There is no gap or abyss between them that one cannot pass from the one to the other. On the contrary human beings participate simultaneously in both worlds. We shall cite references and make clear the difference between the two parts of the universe later on.

Here the point is to note the unique nature of *diastema* in its three aspects - (a) the absence of *diastema* in the ousia of the Creator, (b) *diastema* as the invarying character of created existence, and (c) *diastema* as unbridgeable gap between the Creator and His cre-

ation.

5. The three aspects of diastema

(a) *Absence of diastema in the Creator* is the primary ground of his Incomprehensibility, and even of His transcendence. Gregory has a very modern epistemology, namely that all human knowledge has to come through the senses. Plato too concedes sense-knowledge, but he basically distrusts it. For Gregory, on the other hand, it is sense-knowledge upon which all other knowledge is built.⁴⁰ Here he has certainly been influenced by both Aristotle and the Stoics in his revision of Plato's view. Perhaps also by Strato of Lampsacus, head of the Peripatetic school from 287 to 269 B.C., who denied all distinction between reason and sense.⁴¹ Gregory has a high, rather than low, evaluation of sense-perception as a precious gift of God.⁴² But neither sense-knowledge nor the *epinoia* or conceptual discoveries of truth based on sense-knowledge, can lead to the knowledge of God's *ousia* for God is not an object that makes an impression on the senses. The non-extended nature of God therefore eludes all sense-perception and all conceptual apprehension. God is not an "object" in the external, extended universe, open to our senses.⁴³ The *theoria kataleptike* or comprehending vision, cannot grasp the *ousia* of God, because only objects in the diastematic universe of space and time can yield the *phantasia kataleptike* - the direct appearance to the mind - which is the basis or "category" for the *theoria katateptike*. The creation is *diastema*, and the diastematic creation cannot go outside the bounds of itself by the operations of its mind.

The absence of *diastema* in God has also much to do with Gregory's Triadology and Christology. But we cannot discuss these here.

(b) *Creation as diastema*. On the other hand, as we have said many times, the whole creation is *diastema* or extendedness in time and space. This creation is open to the knowledge of man. But everything in it is in movement and change; nothing in it is abiding, permanent, or unchanging. It is a constant flow. There are two kinds of movements - first, from place to place, and second, internal to each thing. Both these movements take place in the flow of time. Gregory cites the planets as an illustration of the first kind of change,

and the human body as example of internal change.

The elements of movement (*kinesis*) and change (*trope*) thus constitute major areas of difference between created and uncreated nature. In the created nature everything is movement, change, alteration, in that of the Creator there is rest, changelessness, identity. Gregory says in *On the Making of Man*:

“Movement (*kinesis*) is not conceived only as change of place (*topike metastasis*) but also to be understood as change (*trope*) and alteration (*alloiosis*), the immovable nature, on the other hand, does not admit any movement of alteration ... that which is inclined to move or change, would no longer be divine nature. ... Instability and change cannot be ascribed to the Divine nature.”⁴⁴

The cyclic motion of the four elements that constitute the universe one into the other is a specifically Stoic notion - one could say a “scientific notion” in Gregory’s time. Even the idea that all the material creation is involved in continuous change can be traced back to Chrysippus or Panaetius. Had not Marcus Aurelius said: “Everything changes” (*panta tropai*)?⁴⁵

But Gregory carries the notion much further in linking created existence and change inseparably. For the Stoics changeability is a characteristic only of the sensible world. For Gregory, change applies even to the intelligible world. To be created is to come into being by a process of change - from “non-being” into “becoming”, and that which had its origin in change continues its existence only by change.

Thus *diastema* and *trope* are inseparable as characteristics of created existence. From non-being all existents in creation have come and towards non-being they constantly move: “All beings which have a beginning and an end for their existence begin from non-being and terminate in non-being.”⁴⁶ Diastematic existence is thus never static, but changing, change and impermanence are thus symptoms of createdness. Being dies every moment. No created being has being in itself.

“But the things which come under our comprehension (*kata-*

tepsis) are such as can be understood only as extended in some diastematic manner (*en diastematikei tini paratasei theoreisthai*) or conceived as locally spaced, or appear to our perspective as enclosed within a beginning and an end, since the existence of each being is bounded on both sides by non-being.”⁴⁷

In fact death occurs every moment. There is no present, only that fleeting moment which is the point of intersection between a future that is not yet and a past that is no more, that which is beyond moving into that which is behind.

“Once death was mingled with his (man’s) nature, mortality was passed on to all the generations of his children. Hence we are born into a life of death, for in a certain sense, our very life has died (*nekros hemas diedeyato bios autes tropon tina tes zoes hemon apothanouses*).”⁴⁸

Even more eloquent is the description of this dead life in the dialogue *On the Soul and the Resurrection*:

“Who does not know that human nature resembles a stream, from birth to death ever advancing as by an irresistible movement, and that when that movement ceases, then comes also the end of existence. This movement (*kinesis*), however, is no mere displacement from one locality to another (for how can the nature go out of itself?), it is, rather, an advance by alteration. And alteration, so long as it is that, can never remain at the same stage (for how can the altered remain the same?). But like the flame on the wick, which appears to remain always the same (for its unbroken continuity gives the impression of being a self-identical unit), but in fact is always wholly passing away and never remains the same (for the moisture which is drawn up by the heat is constantly burned up and transformed into smoke and bursts into flame, effecting the movement of the flame by this altering power, the substratum or fuel transforming itself into smoke-flame), so much so that anyone touching the flame twice does not both times touch the same flame (so quick is the alteration that it does not remain

till the second touch); the flame is ever new and being renewed, it passes away every moment without remaining the same and is generated anew every moment. So is also the situation with the nature of our bodies. The influx of our nature and its efflux through the process of alteration of movement goes on permanently, and when the movement stops, life also ceases. So long as it is alive, there is no stopping. On the one hand, it is being filled, on the other it is breathing out, the combination of the two processes keeps it constantly moving.”⁴⁹

Diastematic existence, or created existence, is constant change - a sequence of unbroken change. Change is the ontological basis of the creation’s existence, for it has come to be, by change from that which is not. This applies to things as much as to men, nay even the angels are not free from the necessity to change constantly, in so far as they are created, and have come to be out of nothing. The principle applies to all creation and is expressed clearly in the catechetical oration, and affirmed, not as a personal philosophical speculation, but as a teaching handed down by tradition from the Fathers:

“The teaching we have received by tradition from the Fathers (*para ton Pateron didexametha*) goes like this: and the teaching is not some kind of a mythical narrative, but one that by our very nature we are led to believe. The apprehension (*katanoesis*) of all existing things is a two-fold one, understanding (*theoria*) being divided into those of intelligibles and of sensibles. There is nothing among the natures of existents which falls outside this two-fold distinction. But these two have a great difference between them, so that the sensible cannot be included in the intelligible, nor vice versa, but each have mutually opposed characteristics. The intelligible nature is something incorporeal, impalpable, formless. The sensible nature, on the other hand, as its very name indicates, is bounded by the perception that comes through sense organs. But in this very sensible universe, despite the seemingly considerable mutual opposition between the various elements which constitute it, we can also discern above this conflict a harmony of opposites devised by the All-constituting Wisdom; thus there

comes to be a mutual symphony (*sumphonia*) of the creation within itself, the mutual opposition of the natures never managing to disrupt the chain of conspiracy (*ton tes sumphnoias heirmon*). In the same way, between the sensible and the intelligible also there takes place a sort of commixture and blending together by the divine wisdom, so that all may share in the good in an equitable way, and that none may be deprived of a share in the superior nature. Thus while on the one hand the appropriate “place” for the intelligible nature is the subtle (*lepte* and easy-moving (*eukinetos*) essence, the supra-mundane section (of the creation) having many characteristics with close affinity to the nature of the intelligible, there occurs, on the other hand, by the foresight of the Supreme One, some sort of a commixture (*sunanakrasis*) of the intelligible with the sensible creation, so that nothing in creation may be set aside (as valueless), as the Apostle says, deprived of participation in the Divine. For this reason, in human nature, composed of the intelligible and the sensible, there is a mixture (*migma*) with the divine nature, as the word about the creation of the cosmos instructs us. For, God, it says, taking the dust of the earth, fashioned man, and implanted life in it by inbreathing into that which was fashioned, so that the earthly may be elevated together to the divine (*sunepartheie toe theioe to geinon*) and that the divine grace may pervade the whole universe as one unit of equal worth, the lower nature being commingled with the supra-mundane.”⁵⁰

Here it is presented as official teaching that the world open to the senses and the intelligible world are not two disparate realities, but one single unit; but the whole of this single unit is separated from the Creator’s nature by a *diastema* which cannot be traversed from the creation’s side. And the whole of creation is subject to change, including the angelic beings, as Gregory goes on to say in the same chapter 6 of the Catechetical Oration:

“... the Uncreated Nature is incapable of admitting the movement of change and transformation and alteration, while all that has come into existence by creation has affinity with al-

teration, since the very existence of the creation began from alteration, that which was not having been transformed by the power of God into that which exists.”⁵¹

So, ontologically speaking the fundamental difference between the Uncreated Nature and the Created Nature may be summarized thus:

(1) The Creator’s being is self-derived, self-generating, self-subsistent, not dependent on aught else. The creation has no being in itself. Its being is derived from God, subsists only by the will of God, and cannot exist in itself, but is constantly and every moment recreated by God’s will, on which it is dependent.

(2) God’s being is perfectly good, and the perfection of all good. It is good not by participation in other good, but is good in itself. There is nothing better into which God can grow, nor does he ever become less than the perfection of all good. He is thus never in need of change. Whereas the creation is good only because the will that created it is good. It remains good only by participation in that will. It is created diastematically, i.e. it has to traverse a course from inception (*arche*) to perfection (*telos*), a process which is unceasing and infinite, since it will always be moving towards the infinite perfection of God by participation in His energies, but infinity can never be achieved by adding to finitude. So change is the eternal characteristic of creation - eternal change either towards good and the perfection of all good, which is true life, or change towards the opposite of the good, or towards non-being or death.

(c) *Diastema as basis of incomprehensibility*. Gregory never tires of saying that there is no faculty in human nature adequate for the full comprehension of the divine essence. He does not say, as some scholars seem to suggest, that while God is intellectually not to be comprehended, man has some kind of a “mystical” faculty by which he can apprehend God - some kind of existential encounter with the ground of our existence. Practically all writers on Gregory,⁵² with varying degrees of competence in the history of Christian thought,

experience and spirituality, give credit to him as the first systematic expounder of Christian mysticism. Johannes Bayer tries to correct this one-sidedness by calling it a more existential mysticism - as a search of the whole man for God, in a sort of existential ecstasy:

“If the pure intellectual apprehension of God is closed for man there remains to him the prospect of a far greater union and oneness with God which involves his whole existence.”⁵³

The attempt to isolate this so-called “mystical-intuitive” knowledge of God from the total Christian life of worship and knowledge and faith and practice and sacramental initiation, and to make it an alternative to the intellectual knowledge of God seems to misrepresent Gregory’s thought, by easy assimilation to Plotinian categories. Nor would it do to understand Gregory’s theory of knowledge as a transition from Platonic to Aristotelian categories, as a neo-scholastic like Weiswurm is tempted to do, when he concludes his work on *The Nature of Human Knowledge According to Gregory of Nyssa* with the astounding comment:

“Although the Saint’s (i.e. Gregory’s) theory of knowledge is not completely free from Platonic elements, it, nevertheless, presents, as a whole, a decisive step in the direction of the Aristotelian conception of knowledge. However, the Aristotelian characteristics are neither numerous enough, nor so exclusively Aristotelian, as to warrant the classification of St. Gregory’s theory of knowledge as outright Aristotelian. It remained rudimentary in many respects, vague and confusing in others. But it must be regarded as an early though faltering step towards that great synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian elements which reached its completion at the hands of St. Thomas Aquinas.”⁵⁴

Gregory of Nyssa has to be understood in his own terms, and in terms of the intellectual and spiritual context in which he lived, of which Aristotelian and Platonic categories are only as important as the Stoic and the Plotinian, the Philonic and the Pythagorean. His insistence on the incomprehensibility of God has some Platonic elements in it, but it is more of a deep conviction born out of the struggle

to know everything. There is an element of personal reminiscence in that eloquent passage of Gregory's in the Seventh Homily on Ecclesiastes:

“He who is believed to be above all that exists, is also assuredly above words. To the one who reaches out to grasp the unbounded by word or concept, he who is above all being yields no ground, and casts out the very concept which tries to say thus and so, this much and in this way. He does not know that only in being believed to be beyond all knowledge, the true conception about Him who truly is (*peri tou ontosontos*) is conserved. Why? For all that is in creation looks by nature to that which belongs to the same kind, and nothing which has existence can remain in existence if it steps out of itself, not fire in water, nor water in fire, not the dry in the abyss, not the wet in the dry, not in the ether the earthly (heavy) and not the ethereal in the heavy, but each element by remaining within its own natural bounds remains what it is only so long as it remains within the bounds of its own nature. If it steps out of itself, it steps out of existence itself. And the power of any sense organ is unable, while remaining within its own nature, to be transformed into that of its neighbour, the eye cannot do the work of hearing, the sense of touch cannot speak, the sense of hearing cannot taste, the tongue cannot perform the function of seeing or hearing, each has a boundary for its power to function according to its own nature. So also the whole creation is not able to go out of itself through its comprehending vision (*dia tes katateptikes theorias*), but ever remains enclosed within itself, and whatever it sees, it sees only itself. And even when it thinks it sees something beyond itself, it does not have the natural capacity to see something outside of itself. It may strive to go beyond the diastematic conception of the understanding of existents, but it never achieves it. In all discovered conceptions, it also co-apprehends always the diastema which is inherent in the hypostasis of the conceived (object). This diastema is nothing but the creation itself (*to de diastema ouden allo e ktisis estin*). For this the good, which

we have learned to seek and to cherish, and with which we wish to achieve contact and to remain attached, being above creation, is also above comprehension. For how can our understanding, traversing through diastematic extension, comprehend the unextended nature? The enquiry, proceeding through temporal sequence by analysis, goes on to the antecedents of that which has been discovered. Even if diligent search traverses through all that is known, it discovers no mechanism by which to traverse the very conception of time (*aion*) itself, being unable to stand outside of itself and to surpass time which is the presupposition for all existents.”

“It is like a man who finds himself on a high peak (let it be assumed that it is a rock, slippery and precipitous, rising stark (red) from a great depth to an immense height, and from the top of the peak juts forth a promontory, looking down on an unfathomable abyss). Somewhat like the experience of this man, who, moving along the edge of this rocky precipice, suddenly no longer finds a foothold or something to cling to by the hand, is the experience of the soul, it seems to me, which leaving the terra firma of diastematic notions sets out in pursuit of the pre-temporal and unextended nature. Having nothing to cling to by the hand, neither place, nor time, nor measure, nor anything else of that kind which could be a foothold for the understanding, but slipping away from every side of the incomprehensible into dizziness (*hilligia*) and helpless perplexity (*amechanei,*) and turns back again towards the congenial, loving to know only this about the transcendent as to be persuaded that it is something other than those that are known. So when language (reason, discourse -*logos*) arrives at that which is beyond language, it is time to be silent (Ecclesiastes 3:7), and to marvel at the wonder of this ineffable power, uninterpreted and forbidden to the understanding, realizing that it was only about the works of God and not of God Himself that even the great ones (Prophets) spoke: ‘Who shall declare the powers of the Lord?’ (Ps 105:2), and ‘I will narrate all thy works’ (Ps 9:2 or Ps 117-19?) and ‘Generations and genera-

tions shall praise thy works' (Ps 144:4). Of these works they speak and of these they relate the details, for declaring events which have happened they lend their voices. But when the discourse comes to that which concerns Himself who is above all conception, utter silence is what they prescribe. For they say: 'For the majesty of the glory of His holiness there is no limit' (Ps 144:1-5). 'Ah! how marvellous! How the discourse fears to approach the vicinity of the knowledge of God's nature! So much so that, it does not seek to comprehend even some of the external phenomena that we can apprehend about God.' For the text does not say 'The ousia of God has no bounds', judging it too presumptuous to take even such a statement for a concept (about the *ousia* of God), but devotes the discourse merely to marvel at the magnificence in the glory that is seen around God. Even there, the discourse takes pleasure, to see not even the glory of the *ousia* itself, for even from apprehending the *holiness* of that glory it is astounded. He not only totally abandons every attempt to circumscribe the Divine nature and to say what it is, but he even does not presume to express wonder at the last of its manifestations. For the writer marvels neither at the holiness of God, nor the glory of the holiness, but only at the *majesty* of the holiness of that glory, and even there wonder seizes him. For the understanding could not grasp even that admired majesty, for it has no limit! So he says - 'For the majesty of the holiness of his glory there is no limit.' So in discoursing about God, whenever the enquiry turns to the *ousia*, that is 'a time for silence' (Eccles. 3:7), but whenever it concerns any of the operations of the good, the knowledge of which comes down even to us, then it is the time to speak, to use words, to speak of the powers, to declare the marvels, to narrate the works, but in the matters that go beyond, it is not permitted to the creature to go outside its own limits, but it should be content if it can know itself. For, in my opinion, even the creation itself I have not known, I have not comprehended the *ousia* of the soul, what the nature of the body is, whence the existents, how generation takes place by mutual interaction, how that

which is not can come to be, how that which is passes into non-being, how contradictories are fitted together in harmony in our universe. If then I do not know even the creation, how shall I discourse on that which is beyond the creation itself? When we come to that, it is the 'time for silence.' For in these matters, silence is definitely superior. It is 'time to speak' then how our lives can be led to virtue, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and power, for ever and ever. Amen."⁵⁵

This magniloquent sermon is not a simple rhetorical flourish. It comes out of the depths of Gregory's own intellectual and spiritual experience. For a man gifted with a brilliant and fertile mind, the experience of seeking to comprehend the being of God must ultimately lead to (*hilligia*) or dizziness. This is not simply a borrowing from Plato who does speak of *hilligia* in exactly the opposite sense.⁵⁶ In Plato it is the multiplicity of sensible objects that makes the soul dizzy and drunk. In Gregory, it is the total absence of the sensible that leaves the soul without foothold, dizzy, eager to set foot on more familiar ground.

For *diastema* makes it impossible for us, or even for the angels, to have a direct conception or apprehension of the being of God. Like two nights enclosing the day, the *diastema* encloses created beings before and behind."⁵⁷ Time-space encircles the creation as a boundary which cannot be passed from inside. We can follow the concatenation (*akolouthia*) of the cosmos only up to that boundary. There the mind must stop, for the Uncreate Nature is beyond all diastematic conception,⁵⁸ has no beginning or end, and is not approachable from within the creation, either for the theological speculator or the mystic seeker.

The mind does seek to go beyond. It cannot rest within the enclosure of space-time. It knows that it is bounded and is restless in the prison of time-space. But it cannot manage to penetrate beyond by its own effort. It can guess that there is *One Who Truly Is* from whom that which exists derives its being and on whom it depends for its continuing its existence as well as for its achieving its destiny. But as Gregory says in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, even St.

Paul, who was caught up into the “third heaven” was unable to describe accurately what he saw.

“For all these ascents yield no clear and distinct perception and understanding of the truth (*ou theorian te kai katalempsin enarge tes aletheias*), but the mere hearing of the voice of the Beloved, as the Scripture calls it, the experience being characterized as ‘hearing’, not as knowledge by comprehension, but as something gladdening the heart. If the Bride who was elevated this much, as for example we learn about the great Paul that he was caught up into the Third heaven, is in no wise enabled to comprehend the Beloved with precision, what are we likely to experience, or in what stage can we be reckoned to be, who have not even been able to come near the outside gates of the inaccessible knowledge of God!”⁵⁹

It would not be right to accuse Gregory of having a low view of the capacities of the human mind. It is a fact of our experience even today, after “1600 years of progress beyond Gregory”, that we cannot answer the questions which he said were unanswerable in words. He gives several such lists, but we reproduce one of them below:

“Whatever notions are hidden, such as to investigate: what is the ousia of God? What was there before the creation? What is there outside of the phenomena? What is the necessity of what happens? and whatever else the inquisitive minds seek to answer - know how to leave these things to the Holy Spirit alone, who knows the deep things of God, as the Apostle says.”⁶⁰

The recognition of the limits of human reason is no demeaning thing. It means only to be reminded that he is a creature, totally dependent upon the will of the Creator. But Gregory does not devalue reason. He grants to it enormous capacities of knowledge and skill within the created world. Unless, however, we recognize what belongs to the essence of the Christian faith, namely that God’s *ousia* cannot be the object of our thought; but can only be adored and worshipped as the perfection of all Being and all Good, Man does not become himself.

The gap between creation and Creator is first ontological, but not spatial - temporal, and secondly epistemological. We can neither objectify God as a vis-a-vis, nor can we know him as an object. To apply the term *diastema* also to this gap between Creator and creation is thus slightly mis-leading, for it is not the distance between two points - one at the boundary of creation and the other at the boundary of God. For God is infinite, has no boundary. The creation is finite and has a boundary. The creation cannot exist but in God, but God is not spatial, and therefore the *diastema* between the Creator and the creation cannot itself be conceived in any spatial terms. It is a *diastema* between the undiastatic Creator and the diastatic or extended creation. We can conceive no mental image of such a gap, but it is our experience.

The *diastema* between the Creator and the creation in Gregory has another unique feature - namely that it is a one-way gap. From the side of God, there is no gap. All creation is immediately present to him - in all its extension of space and time. All time and all space has come to be "at once" and are together in their entirety always present to God - or "in God."

"The unextended (*adiastatos*), non-quantitative (*aposos*), uncircumscribed (*aperigraptos*), power (i.e. God) having in itself all the ages and all that in them are, and surpassing by his eternity, the indefinite extent of the ages ... etc."⁶¹

Gregory makes it even clearer in the *Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Part II, ch XIII).

"Through these (scriptures) we learn that to God nothing is in the future or in the past, but all things are immediately present (*toe theoe oute, ti mellei, oute ti praroicheken, all en toe enestoti ta panta estin*)."⁶²

or again in *On the Making of Man* (ch XVI end):

"To the power of God there is nothing that has passed nor anything that is yet to happen, but even that which is expected later on as well as that which is present are equally grasped by the all-embracing power."⁶³

One has to struggle with this notion intellectually and spiritually in order to be impressed by it. It is a central notion in Gregory, and explains why the *diastema* between God and the creation is a one-way affair.

“In the divine nature, effective power is concurrent with the decreeing will, (*epi tes theias phuseos sundromos esti tei boulesei he dunamis*) and the will becomes the measure of the power of God (*metron tes dunameos to theou to thetéma ginetai*), for the will is wisdom. And the specific characteristic of wisdom is never to be ignorant of how each thing comes to be. So the effective power becomes fully harmonized with the knowledge. When God knew that it is right for beings to come to be, together with that knowledge also ran the power to execute the existence of the beings, immediately leading that which is conceived into operative reality; there is no intervening time between the knowledge and its realization (*ouden meta ten gnosin huphesterizousa*⁶⁴), but simultaneously and without time-interval along with the willing is displayed also the work which is willed (*sunemmenos kai adiastatos sunanadeiknutaí tee boutei kai to ergon*). In this way the will is effective power, so that whenever he wills that the universe come into being, by that same willing that which is conceived receives the opportunity to become factually exhibited. As altogether and simultaneous is the universe and its creation conceived by God - the will, the wisdom, the effective power, and the being of beings being co-terminous.”⁶⁵

In this same passage, Gregory makes it clear that the creation itself has an *arche*, a *telos* and an interval in between, only from the perspective of those beings who are within creation, but to God Himself the beginning, the end, and the interval in between are immediately present. Thus from God’s point of view, there is no *diastema* between Himself and the creation. *Diastema* is experienced only from within creation, both as internal extension in space and time, and as intermediary gap between Creator and creation.⁶⁶ Taking the opening words: “In the beginning” of the book of Genesis, he develops this idea of the simultaneity of the whole creation, past, present,

and future. One of the Greek versions of the Old Testament (which Origen included in his Hexapla) was the translation of Aquila, which translates, the *bereshit* of Gen 1:1 by *en kephalaioe* rather than the *en arche* of the other Greek versions. Gregory takes this “*in principium*” of Aquila to mean that the whole heaven and earth in all space and time was simultaneously created by God in the beginning.⁶⁷

“Since the Prophet (Moses) makes the Book of Genesis an introduction to the knowledge of God, the purpose of Moses is to lead by the hand those who are enslaved by senseknowledge, through the phenomena, to that which lies beyond our sense-perception or visual knowledge which is limited to the heaven and earth; which heaven and earth as that which contains all existent beings, the Word names the last of the things which can be known through sense-perception, so that by saying that the container itself came to be through God, includes in that conception all that is contained in it to the very highest, and instead of saying that God made all at once (*athroos* - simultaneously, in one shot) all the existents, says ‘in the beginning’ (*en kephalaioe*), i.e. at the very beginning (*en archei*) God created the heaven and the earth. *Arche* and *kephalaion* mean the same thing. For both words equally mean ‘all at once.’ *En kephalaio* indicates that the universe came to be collectively, or in sum (*to sulteuden*) while *en arche* indicates “in a moment (*to akares*)”, without a gap (*adiastaton*). For the *arche* is foreign to all diastematic notion. As the point is the beginning (*arche*) of the line and the *atom* the beginning of *mass*, the instantaneous (*to akares*) is the beginning of the temporally extended (*tou chronikou diastematos*). So the instantaneous laying the foundation (*katabole*) of the creation by the ineffable power of God is called by Moses *arche*, i.e. *kephalaion*, in which the whole universe is said to be constituted.”⁶⁸

It should be remembered that Gregory was too sophisticated a Christian thinker to conceive heaven in spatial terms. For him heaven in the Bible usually means the boundary or horizon of human knowledge, the limit of that which is open to our senses, or the existence

beyond that boundary. So in saying “In the beginning God created heaven and earth” Moses is saying, according to Gregory, that all the existent beings in the whole creation of space and time, simultaneously came into being from the hand of God.

“All the potentialities (*aphormas*), the causes (*aitiax*) and the effective powers (*dunameis*) of all existents, God laid the foundation collectively and instantaneously (*sullebden ho theos en akarei kateballeto*). And in the forward motion (*horme* - impulse) of that first will are concurrent the being of all existents - heaven, ether, stars, fire, air, sea, earth, animals, plants, all of which are simultaneously in view before the eyes of God, to Him who by the Word of His power brings them to light, to Him, as the Prophecy says, ‘who knows all things even before they come to be’ (Dan XIII:42).”⁶⁹

6. Conclusion

It is now time to bring this discussion on the aspect of discontinuity between the Creator and the creation to a conclusion. There are two other aspects of *diastema*, which we reserve to another chapter, when we discuss the relation between God and Man. One is the aspect of sin as it brings a separation between God and Man, and so between God and His creation. The relation between *Sin and diastema* in Gregory’s thought needs to be further clarified. The second aspect which we also reserve to a later chapter is what the death and resurrection of Christ has to do with the *diastema* and incarnation.

Here we have concentrated on the general aspects of *diastema* as inherent in the very nature of the creation. What we have said so far amounts to this.

- (1) All creation shares equally in *diastema*. No created being exists without *diastema*.
- (2) *Diastema* is totally absent in the Creator, and this is one way in which we understand his total transcendence and incomprehensibility.
- (3) There is a one way *diastema* between the creation and the

Creator. God is beyond the reach of Man, both ontologically and epistemologically. The *diastema* is a kind of ontological-epistemological envelope in which the whole creation is encased, and neither men nor angels can step out of it.

(4) *Diastema* implies for all created beings continuous change. Change is the essential characteristic of created existence. The movement from *arche* to *telos* is mandatory for the whole creation. How this *diastema* affects non-corporeal beings is hard for us to conceive, but it is affirmed as a matter of faith.

After having thus affirmed total discontinuity (at least one-way discontinuity) between the creation and the Creator, Gregory does not leave us there. He is also the Christian Philosopher of the Incarnation, which is the ultimate principle of continuity between the creation and the Creator. This we seek to do in the next chapter - on Participation in God.

1. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 261 + 262. IVth Edition Berlin 1922, p. 335, lines 5, 8 and 12.

2. See Lidell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. S. V. *diastema*.

3. See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. Ed. H. von Arnim, Leipzig 1903. Vol. I, p. 26, Vol. II, p. 164 etc.

4. PG 18, 557 B.

5. PG 26. 729 A. Athanasius, *De Synodis*, 26; Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* II. 19. 7-28. Eng. Tr. in J. Stevenson, ed. *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, London, SPCK, 1972, p. 23. For a more common use of *diastema* in St. Athanasius, see *De Incarnatione*, ch. 26, lines 15 and 29 (Oxford Text 1971). In both instances it means the time-interval between the death and resurrection of Christ.

6. *Ibid.* J. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

7. “*Chronikois diastemasi tou men patros ton huion, tou de hiou to pneuma to hagion diairousi.*”

De Spiritu Sancto, 59. PG 32. 117 B. See also PG 29. 596 B.

8. Sec e.g. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homiliae Diversae*, 4 in Aco 104.28-*ten adiastaten triada*.

9. Arnim, *Fragmenta* II. 258.
10. *Fragmenta* I. 157.
11. *Fragmenta* I. 532.
12. *Meditations* II. 9. Eng. Tr. by G. Long, cited in Sanbursky, *Physics of the Stoics*, p. 145.
 Gregory cites the Stoic view of God in PG 46. 559 B-C. In *Contra Eunomium* III (GNO II. 106, line 3) Gregory accuses Eunomius and his followers of being Stoics and Epicureans. (NPNF V. 171 B).
13. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus*, oratio vi. PG 44. 1269 A-B. Eng. Tr. in Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, p. 100.
14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Lambda: VII. Eng. Tr. John Warrington, Everyman's Library eel., 1970, p. 347.
15. *Metaphysics*: VII. Eng. Tr. Warrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-346.
16. *Metaphysics* A: II. Eng. Tr., p. 54.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
18. *Metaphysics* Bk. K. III. Warrington, p. 119.
19. See *Timaeus*. 28, 29.
20. *Timaeus*. 34b.
21. *Ibid.*, 31b.
22. *Ibid.*, 48e, 49a.
23. *Ibid.*, 49, 50, 51.
24. Philo, *De opificio Mimdi*. 8. 23.
25. *Enneads* V. I. 6. My translation is different from that of Stephen Mackenna. See *Plotinus, The Enneads*, Faber, London 1969, p. 374. I give below this translation, which seems to me to take some liberties with the text:

“Given this immobility in the supreme, it can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary. What happened then? What are we do to conceive as rising in the neighbourhood of that immobility? It must be a circumradiation - produced from the supreme but from the supreme unaltering - and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that

unchanging substance. All existences, as long as they retain their character, produce - about themselves, from their essence, in virtue of the power which must be in them - some necessary, outward-facing hypothesis continuously attached to them and representing in image the engendering archetypes; thus fire gives out its heat; snow is cold not merely to itself; fragrant substances are a notable instance; for as long as they last, something is diffused from them and perceived wherever they are present.”

26. R. Leys, *L'Image de Dieu*, p. 39.

27. P. Dandelot, *La Doctrine du Diastema chez Saint Gregoire de Nysse*, Dissert. Louvain 1960. Typescript, 240 pp.

28. *op. cit.*, p. 83.

29. *Contra Eunomium* II. GNO I. 246/27. PG 45. 933 B.

30. *Contra Eunomium* I. 344-358. GNO I. 128/30-133/7. PG 45. 357 D-364 A. NPNF V. 67 B-68 B.

31. *Ibid.*, I. 359. GNO I. 133/8ff.

32. *Contra Eunomium* I. 36-373. GNO I, p. 133/27 to 137/8. PG 45. 364 C-368 B. NPNF V. 69 A - 70 A.

33. *Contra Eunomium* II. 79. GNO I, p. 246/14 - 247/4. PG 45. 933 A-B. NPNF V. 257 A.

34. See just before the passage cited in note 33.

35. In the *Contra Eunomium* itself see GNO I. 105/19ff. [PG 45. 333 B ff) I. 113/20ff. (PG 45. 341 C ff)].

36. *In Oratio Dominica*. PG 44. 1165 B.

37. *De Infantibus*. PG 46. 173 A-B.

38. *Oratio Catech.* 6. PG 45. 25 B ff.

39. It is unfortunate that the English translation of the Great Catechism (NPNF V. 480 A) gives the false impression that there is such an “interval.” Gregory does not use *diastema* to denote the difference between the sensible and intelligible world, but the word *diairesis* which means *distinction*, not *interval*. See PG 45. 25 B.

40. See E. Von Ivanka, *Plato Christianus*. *Contra Eunomium*. GNO I. 107ff. PG 45. 341 B-C.

41. See Weiswurm, *The Nature of Human Knowledge according to St.*

Gregory of Nyssa. Washington 1952, pp. 83ff.

42. See *Contra Eunomium*. GNO II. 328. PG 45. 1045 A.

43. See J. Bayer, *Gregors von Nyssa Gottesbegriff*. Giessen 1935, pp. 38ff.

44. *De opificio hominis*. 1. PG 44. 129 C to 132 A. NPNF V. 389 2.

The Stoic roots of Gregory's notion of change is discussed by Danielou, *L'etre et le temps*, pp. 97ff.

45. *Meditations*. VII. 2. cited by Danielou, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

46. *Pan gar to archen te kai teleuten echon tou einai ek tou meontos archetai kai eis to me on katalegei*.

Contra Eunomium. II. 578. GNO I, p. 395/9-11. PG 45. 1104 D.

47. *Contra Eunomium* II. 578. GNO I. 395/3-9. PG 45. 1104 D.

48. *In Canticum Cantorum*. XII. GNO VI, p. 351/2-5. PG 44. 1021 D. Eng. Tr. Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory*, p. 259.

49. *De anima et Resurrectione*. PG 46. 141 A-C. NPNF V. 462 B to 463 A.

50. *Oratio Catechetica*. 6. Srawley, p. 28/15 to p. 31/11. PG 45. 25 B-28 A. NPNF V. 480.

51. *Ibid*. Srawley, p. 33/15 to 34/6. PG 45. 28 C-D. NPNF V. 481 A.

52. Just to cite a few names: Danielou, *Platonisme*; Volker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*; J. Marechal, *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, Paris; Desclee de Brouwer, 1937; Diekamp, *Gotteslehre*; Bayer, *Gottesbegriff*; H. Koch, *Das mystische Schauen beim hl. Gregor von Nyssa* (Theol. Quart. LXXX (1898), pp. 397-420.

53. *Gottesbegriff*, p. 55.

54. *op. cit.*, p. 225.

55. *In Ecclesiasten*. VII. GNO V. 411/8 to 416/10. PG 45. 729 A to 732 D. Eng. Tr. author's.

See Musurillo, *Glory to Glory*, pp. 126-129.

56. *Hilligia* is a Platonic term. See Phaedo. 79 C. Roger Leys discusses this at length in his *L'image de Dieu*, pp. 29-30 note. His judgment: Gregory's gnoseology is certainly not Platonic.

57. See *Contra Eunomium*, Lib. III Tom. VII: 50 GNO II. 232/16ff. PG 45. 820 B. NPNF V.

58. *Contra Eunomium*. Lib. I. 363. GNO I. 135/13ff. PG 45. 364 D.

59. *In Canticum Canticorum* V. GNO VI, p. 138/9-18. PG 44. 860 A-B.

60. *De Vita Moysis*. GNO.

PG 44. 357 C. S.c.

For other lists, see e.g.

(1) GNO I. 248/4ff. PG 45. 936 A ff. NPNF V. 257-262.

(2) PG 46. 121 B ff. NPNF V. 457 B - 458 B.

61. *Contra Eunomium* III. VI. 68. GNO II. 210/IIff. PG 45. 796 A. NPNF V. 209 A.

62. GNO V. 140/27-29. PG 44. 569 B.

63. PG 44. 185 D. NPNF V. 406 B.

64. This word is not in Lidell & Scott's Greek-English dictionary. Gregory uses it only once - a neologism concocted from *hupo* and *husterizo* = come later.

65. *In Hexaemeron. Prooemium*. PG 44. 69 A.

66. It would be interesting to make a comparative study of the Gregorian concept of *diastema* and the sophisticated Hindu concept of *maya*. There is so much that is common to the two ideas, but much that is also fundamentally different.

67. PG 44. 69 D.

68. *In Hexaemeron*. PG 44. 69 D - 72 A.

69. *Ibid.* PG 44. 72 B.

CHAPTER V

GOD AND HIS CREATION - II

Metousia - Continuity

It is a tribute to the dialectic nature of Gregory's thought that he balances his exalted notion of the absolute transcendence of the Being of God with a daring understanding of the infinite possibility for the creation to participate in the *energies* of God. His scheme is some what as follows:

- (a) Being (*ousia*) of God - Total transcendence - *diastema*
- separation - discontinuity
- (b) Operation (*energeia*) of God - Immanence by will and wisdom
- *metousia* - participation - continuity

While on the one hand, there is an unbridgeable ontological - epistemological gap (from our side) between the creation and the Creator, on the other hand, the creation cannot exist without participation in the will, energy, and wisdom of God. The notion of *participation* or *metousia Theou* has to be held in tension with the doctrine of *diastema*.

The concept has been admirably studied by Fr. David L. Balas in his "*Metousia Theou, Man's Participation in God's Perfection according to St. Gregory of Nyssa.*"¹

The term *metousia*, like all Christian philosophical terms, has its antecedents in the classical culture of the Eastern Mediterranean. Everyone knows Plato's basic notion of participation: any particular existent has reality only in so far as it participates in the ideal, eternal, real, world of forms or ideas. But Plato has also an alternate view. He puts it into the mouth of the Stranger (*Xenos*) in the Sophist:

"I lay down the definition for all existents as being nothing else than Power."²

All beings participate in the power to act and to be acted upon, according to Plato, at least in the sensible world. Participation in

dynamis is thus the source of existence in Plato already. It is from the enquiry about the ground of the existence of all existents that Plato proceeds to his definition of existence as participation.

The job of the philosopher, particularly in the *Sophist*, is to penetrate behind appearance, through reflection, to the world of unchanging reality, where alone true knowledge is possible, and where the true light of certainty dwells.³ For Plato this is not merely an epistemological matter, but also ontological, i.e., the Forms are the causes of particular existences, the particulars deriving their existence from the Forms, and the knowledge of the Forms is knowledge of the true reality behind each existence. But the Forms themselves participate in the reality which lies behind them - namely the good, the true Being and Cause of All. As Philip Merlan says:

“The most striking feature of this derivation system was the derivation of physicals, i.e. sensibles, from the anterior, non-sensible, unextended, timeless spheres. As presented by Aristotle and as confirmed by what we know about Speusippus and Xenocrates, the derivation of physicals from non-physicals was a principle accepted by Plato and his disciples.”⁴

But Merlan and many other Plato scholars do not fully realize that the physicals subsist (not merely are derived from) by dependence on the non-physicals. In Plato himself this seems to have been a gradual development, less obvious in his earlier writings. The “idea” is a subjective element first, but only later on does Plato fully affirm that the forms are the “ground” of all existents. It is in *Parmenides*⁵ that he makes his final affirmation - the Many have their being by participation in the One.⁶

With Aristotle’s stringent criticism of Plato’s theory of ideas, the notion of participation as the basis of reality recedes into the background, to be revived again in Middle Platonism which so profoundly influenced the Christian Fathers. The culmination in non-Christian thought of the idea of participation can be seen in Proclus (A.D. 410-485) who lived and taught a generation or two later than Gregory. For Proclus the notion of participation becomes the principle of all levels of being. The Gods are divine by having their heads, so to

speak, in the transcendent realm and participating in the supreme being (*sumphuos metechousi ton hyperkeimenon*).⁷ The other creatures participate in the Gods and are energized by them. For all souls, whether of Gods or others, their proper job is to energize and move others who can be moved *ab extra*. But all other activities of souls are *kata methexin*, by participation. Lower souls participate in the higher souls, but not in the divine life itself, which privilege is only for the highest souls. As you come down the scale, the number of participants increase, and the degree of participation consequently decreases.⁸

The idea of participation thus seems common at least to the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions in Hellenism. Even Aristotle⁹ and the Stoics¹⁰ used the word, though with less frequency and in a different sense. Plotinus, the true Oriental in Hellenic philosophy, puts matter on a lower level. Material reality's participation in being is a highly unstable and shifting relation. The soul in order to be fully participant in being, has to be "purified" from all matter, according to Plotinus.¹¹

It is important for us to understand Gregory's theory of material creation as participation in contrast with that of Plotinus. We have also to remember how influential Plotinus and Proclus have been in the monastic tradition of Christianity to appreciate the genuine Christian inspiration which made Gregory depart so radically from the neo-platonist view.

Endre von Ivanka, in his *Plato Christianus*, speaks of the ideas of Neoplatonism entering the Christian world through "Dionysius the Areopagite" and influencing all subsequent Christian thought. This is more or less a true generalisation, but what we have to keep in mind is that Gregory of Nyssa before Dionysius had already examined the thoughts of a Plotinus or a Porphyry by the touchstone of the Christian category of Trinity-Incarnation, and rejected many of these ideas, and sometimes formed new ideas directly in contradiction to Plotinus.

Von Ivanka tells us that the idea of participation - "*Alle Seinsformen und Seinsstufen als verschiedene Grade und Formen des Anteilhabens an Gott aufzufassen*"¹² is a fundamental notion in

Neoplatonism. Gregory, in accepting this fundamental idea, has subtly transformed it, and provided the basis for Dionysius' thought, which is significantly different from that of Proclus, as Von Ivanka shows, in its elimination of the idea of emanation (*pro-odos*). The idea of emanation, namely that each Being from its own *energeia* generates another level of Being *inferior to it*, is very much evident in the hierarchical Trinity of Eunomius. Gregory's contribution lies in separating the idea of participation from the ideas of Hierarchy of Being and Emanation, and in relating it integrally to the doctrine of creation by will and wisdom, creation not being the activity of every level of being in the same way as it is of the Creator God. For Plotinus, participation for each level of being is possible only in the next higher, and only through the hierarchical chain with the One. Gregory's contribution lies in clarifying the Christian insight that in Christ, Man, and through Man, the whole creation, directly and without intermediaries, participates in the creative energies of God Himself. He further safeguards the Transcendence of God, which remains quite problematic in Neoplatonism, by putting the idea of participation or *metousia* in dialectical tension with the idea of the gap or *diastema*, and the distinction between the *ousia* and the *energeia* of God.

1. The Nature of the Material Creation

Plotinus raises the question already in the first tractate of the First Ennead, whether it is possible for the soul to suffer. The question is intimately related to the primary question of Indo-Hellenic mysticism. Is the individual soul identical with the world-soul? If the former can suffer, i.e. experience "pleasure and distress, fear and courage, desire and aversion", then clearly that individual soul must be quite distinct from the All-soul, which is free from all passion or experience.

In the Third Ennead, in the sixth tractate (III. 6:6), Plotinus comes to the question: If true Being is without Body, and if Body is not in true Being, given that true Being is fullness of Being and all that is outside of it is non-being, then is the Body also non-being? Or to put the question in Plotinus' own words:

"Kai pos he ton somaton phusis me ousa pos de he hule

eph hes tautas ore kai petrai kai pasa ge sterea kai panta antitupa kai tais plegais biazomena ta plettomena homologei auton ten ousian”¹³

Plotinus knows very well the spirit of our modern times, which is essentially the spirit of his contemporaries, the Stoics, who affirmed the being of only those that were in body and occupied some point of time and space. He recognizes that for the common-sense point of view of Aristotle (most of the time) and the Stoics only the corporeals are real, while entities like soul and being seem remote and unreal.

Plotinus takes the opposite view - the Vedantic view:

“We are thus brought back to the nature of that underlying matter and the things believed to be based upon it: investigation will show us that Matter has no reality and is not capable of being affected. Matter must be bodiless - for body is a later production, a compound made by matter in conjunction with some other entity. Thus it is included among uncorporeal things in the sense that body is something that is neither Real-Being nor Matter.

“Matter is not soul; it is not intellect, is not life, is no ideal-principle, no reason-principle; it is no limit or bound, for it is mere indetermination; it is not a power, for what does it produce?

“It lives on the farther side of all these categories and so has no title to the name of Being. It will be more plausibly called a non-being ... a phantasm unabiding and yet unable to withdraw - not even strong enough to withdraw, so utterly has it failed to accept strength from the Intellectual Principle (*nous*), so absolute its lack of all Being.

“Its every utterance, therefore, is a lie, it pretends to be great and it is little, to be more and it is less, and the Existence with which it masks itself is no Existence, but a passing trick making trickery of all that seems to be present in it, phantasms within a phantasm.”¹⁴

Plotinus’ view is that matter, in so far as it has any reality at all, is

like a mirror, which reflects other things without being affected itself. It is not matter that is affected by the qualities that are reflected in it. The qualities affect each other, but matter remains unaffected, as matter. Matter, according to him then, is the “absence of reality.” What changes is not matter, but matter reflecting one quality to matter reflecting another quality - thus only the quality is changed, matter ever remaining matter.

For Plotinus, then matter does not participate in Being. It only seems to participate in Form, but actually its essence does not allow participation. Matter is essentially evil, and cannot participate in Being which is essentially good.¹⁵ Plotinus claims Plato’s authority for the view. This is not the place to question Plotinus’ views or his justification of it by Plato’s authority. What Plotinus says amounts to a major contradiction - namely that Matter, as non-Being, has the qualities of the supreme Being - *apatheia* and eternity - for it is neither capable of suffering, nor can it be destroyed or dissolved.

Plotinus rightly cites Plato as saying that “matter is the receptacle and nurse of all coming to be.”¹⁶ Plato regards matter as devoid of all specific characteristics “invisible and formless, all-embracing, possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, yet very hard to grasp.”¹⁷ But Plato would not have called matter evil, nor would he have affirmed, as unequivocally as Plotinus, its non-being. The transition from Plato to Plotinus seems thus clearly an influence of East Asian thought.

It is time now to look at Gregory’s view on matter, to see how radically he departs from Neoplatonism. Gregory takes account of the pagan debate in his Introduction to the *In Hexaemeron* (Commentary on Genesis 1-2).

“So, this being so, should one still not struggle to investigate and explain things regarding matter - how it came to be and whence? For we have heard some people say: ‘If God is non-material (*ahulos estin ho Theos*), whence then did matter come? How did quantity come from that which has no quantity? The visible from the unseen? How the things bound by bulk and magnitude came from the unbounded? And whatever else we see concerning matter, from where did these come,

not being in the nature of matter itself? For all these various problems concerning matter, we have only one solution: that all these are in no way impossible for the power of God to bring into existence, and that that power is in no way lacking in wisdom (*asophon*). But these (God's will and his power) are always together with each other, so that they are always exhibited as one, the one being instantaneously accompanied in the effective power of these operative realities, and his operative power is perfected by that wise will."¹⁸

Matter along with its qualities has as its basis the will and the wisdom of God. Matter is not alien to God, nor is it any less being than other created beings, for they too have come from the will and the wisdom of God. Matter is God's *energeia* and *dunamis*, his energy and power. But we never see matter as matter, but always only with certain qualities. Both matter and its qualities are together from the will and the power of God. It is not the case that matter is there as a resistant sub-stratum which the Demiurge then moulds into form as in the case of Plato. Thus Gregory continues:

"If thus the wisdom and the will of God are together and identical in this way, he cannot fail to know how matter is to be found for the creation of all things, neither is he lacking in power to bring into operation that which has been conceived. He being capable of all, together all at once by his wise and powerful will he laid the foundation of all things through which matter is constituted, for the sake of the completion of existents - the light, the heavy, the dense, the rare, the soft, the hard, the wet, the dry, the cold, the warm, colour, shape, circumscription, extension - all of these are in themselves only conceptions - empty notions (not things). But none of these listed is in itself matter, but by their concurrence with each other, becomes matter, (*ou gar ti touton eph' heautou hule estin, alla sundramonta pros allela, hule ginetai*)"¹⁹

Gregory categorically denies, on a scriptural basis, the Platonic assumption of the co-eternity of matter, or of its existence apart from the things in which it is manifested.²⁰ Here is a clear case where the

Scripture becomes normative for him over against pagan philosophy.

But his theory of matter remains problematic, in so far as he holds that without the qualities matter is non-being, and that matter is exhibited as matter only through the congruence of the qualities. However that may be, he insists that whatever existence matter has, it is existence given to it by the will and the power of God. So matter can certainly not be evil, but must be good, for all that comes from God is good.

The creation, thus for Gregory, is the projection of the will, wisdom and power of God. God's Being is not immanent in creation, as the Stoics held. God's Being is totally transcendent, but his *energeia*, his will, his power, is the basis of the existence of the creation, and nothing in creation can thus exist without participating in God's energies. In this sense all that exists, so long as it exists, participates in the will, the power, and the wisdom of God.

Thomas Aquinas suggested that original matter was invisible, being formless, and that the Word gave form to it.²¹ It was only in the thirteenth century that *creatio ex nihilo* becomes "dogma" in the western Church (fourth Lateran Council, 1215 A.D.). For Gregory in the 4th century, however, *creatio ex nihilo* is the very basis of his understanding of creation, matter, and human existence.

2. Participation in Being

Gregory makes the fundamental distinction between *ho ontos on* and *ta onta*. We have no way of literally translating these into English. Between "the one who has true Being" and "those that merely exist" is the contrast Gregory wants to express by these phrases. But we need to understand this contrast more clearly - so that Being and Existence are not confused by our loose use of language.

In fact Gregory has three categories:

(a) *ho ontos on* (b) *ta onta* and (c) *to me on* being, existence, and non-being.

Of these only the first, namely God, has true being. He alone has true being in itself (*to on, ho tei heautou phusei to einai echei*).²²

The opposite of God, Non-Being, has its existence only in appearing to exist (*to me on, ho en toe dokein einai monon estin*),²² that existence being without a real hypostasis (*anupostatou echon eph' heautou ten phusin*).²³ In between the two are those things, i.e. the universe, which has been brought from non-being into existence by the true Being, and which continues in existence, both depending on the true Being and participating in the energies of that true Being.

But this participation of the existents in the energies of true Being demands from the existent that it sheds its illusions about other existents, sees that they have no true being, disabuses itself of all non-being which falsely appears to be being, and turns to the vision and love of Him alone who has true being.²⁴

On this conception of "He who Truly Is", Gregory stands squarely in the Jewish-Christian tradition and departs significantly from Plato. For Plato "the True Being" is the World of Ideas, not God. Gregory, following the Jewish-Christian Tradition and Philo in particular, gives that title only to God. Gregory has no "world of ideas" as in Plato. Even if he grants a sphere of intelligible beings, they do not have true being, but only the intermediary being between true Being and Non-Being, that is, a dependent existence.

For Philo also, who while in so many respects a true Platonist, significantly departed from Platonism in denying true being to the *kosmos noetos*,²⁵ it was the Revelation to Moses of Yahveh as "I am who I am" that was finally normative. The terminology that Gregory uses is Platonic, but the terms are used in the sense in which Philo had transformed them. The reality that Plato had ascribed to the "World of Forms" Philo and Gregory attribute only to Him Who is, i.e., Yahveh, who alone is *ho ontos on*. Both Plato's world of forms and his world of particulars are now classed together as *ta onta*, which have come into being out of *ta me onta*.

What then is it that holds together the cosmos and its creator? The Principle of Discontinuity we have discussed - the diastema.

The Principle of Continuity, without which the creation could not exist, is the *continuity* between the *ousia* and the *energeia* of God. Only in the light of an adequate understanding of this continuity

between God and His creation can we go on to discuss further the nature of Being and the good as participation.

3. Ousia and Energeia

The heart of the controversy with Eunomius can hardly be understood without reference to the three key terms in the debate - *ousia*, *energeia*, *erga*. There is a fourth key term *dynamis*, but let us first see what Eunomius has to say about the three first. The strict logic of Eunomius could be summarized thus.

The way to measure the rank of various beings (*ousiai*) is to measure the operating power (*energeia*) of each. The measure of this power is most clearly seen in the *works* (*erga*) resulting from that operative power or energy.

In order to understand Eunomius' teaching on the relation between *ousia*, *energeia* and *erga* clearly, we should keep in mind that we are here speaking of the Three Higher Beings in Eunomius' Triadology - quite completely different from the Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity. For Eunomius, there are three supreme beings (not three Gods, but neither are the three in any sense one), hierarchically ordered in rank and power. Of these three only the supreme-most One is truly God. Let us put it in Eunomius' own words:

“The whole summary of our teachings (*kath' hemos dogmaton*) is this: From the highest and chiefest Being is the second Being, having its being from the First, but after it, though before everything else, and a third Being, in no wise to be placed in the same class (*suntattomenes*) as the first two, but to be regarded as subordinate (*hupotattomenes*) to the one as to its cause, and to the other as to the *energeia* or operative power through which it came to be, it being necessary to comprehend at the same time, for the completion of the whole account, the *energeiai* which follow (*parepomenon*) the beings (*ousiai*), and the names adhering to these. Again, because of each of these beings being absolutely simple (*haples*) and in every way one in being and conception, each according to its own worthiness, circumscribed by the works (*ergo*) of

its own operative power (*energeia*), its effected works being the measure of its operative power, it necessarily follows that, surely, the *energeiai* which follow the various *ousiai* are greater or lesser, and also that the *ousiai* are first and the *energeiai* second in order; in sum, one can say that their difference amounts to that existing between their effected works (*erga*). For it would not be justifiable to say that it was the same *energeia* by which was produced the angels, or the stars and heaven, or again man, rather just as among the effected works some works are superior to or more honourable than others, to the same extent, it must be clear to anyone with a pious understanding, that the *energeiai* also vary accordingly for the same *energeiai* effect the same *erga*, and differences in the effected works (*erga*) manifest differences in the operative power (*energeia*)".²⁶

We need not stop here to ponder over the fact that Eunomius' Trinity so curiously resembles that of Plotinus and not the Trinity as understood in the Christian tradition. Our point here is to understand the relation between *ousia* and *energeia*, Eunomius' argument is clearly that we can have direct access only to the *erga* or effected works of the three Persons, and from the measure of the *erga* we can compare the respective *energeiai* which produced them, and from the difference of the *energeiai* we can classify the various *ousiai* to which the *energeiai* are attached.

But what in this case is meant by *ousia* and *energeia*? Fortunately for us, Gregory gives a more or less precise definition of the two terms, and refers to their mutual relation.

By *ousia* Gregory means the subject of whom something is predicated, not the qualities, not the operations, but the subject of both.²⁷ This does not mean of course that a being is composed of a substratum or substantia to which the qualities adhere and from which the operations proceed. Without the qualities and the power of operations, the *ousia* would no longer be the *ousia* that it is. *Ousia* is not a residuum that remains when the qualities and operations are abstracted from it. The qualities and operations belong integrally to the

ousia, but the *ousia* is more than just the congruence of the qualities and the operations. At the same time when one thinks of the *ousia*, one is not thinking of the qualities and operations, but about the Being - in - itself. Only in this sense can we understand Gregory's words:

“Since he (Eunomius) wishes to appear very sophisticated in such matters, and spits upon those who write without handling such matters with proper logical skill, let him tell despicable little me with what logical sophistication he can know greater and lesser in pure being. What is the logic in setting forth such differences that one *ousia* is greater than another *ousia*, taking being in its proper sense (*kat' auto lego to semainomenon tes ousias*)? Let him not advance any difference of qualities (*ton poioteion*) or of properties (*ton idiomaton*) which are comprehended around the conception behind the word *ousia*, but are alongside the subject (*para to hupokeimenon*). For it is neither the difference of vapours and colours, of weight or force, of worth or status or habits nor of anything else that we conceive in relation to bodies and souls that is the matter in hand for our investigation, but the subject (*hupokeimenon*) itself, to which the name *ousia* chiefly refers, and it is in regard to the subject that we have to see how one *ousia* is more than the other. But we have not yet heard from him, how, of the two existences that are acknowledged to *be*, so long as both *are*, how one has more *being* than the other. For each of them equally *is*, insofar as it *is*, all considerations of superior and inferior, as we have stated, being excluded from consideration.”²⁸

The argument is, of course, quite sophistic. But the concept of Being certainly does not coincide, in Gregory's thought, with the Latin notion of *substantia*. *Ousia* is being as such, not the substance of an existent without its qualities and properties, but the fact of its “*is-ness*.” This is not to be confused with even the subject of which the predicates are made or from which the actions proceed.

There is a logical problem here which Gregory does not touch upon at this point. If being is “*is-ness*”, and all being simply is, then

how can Gregory later draw the distinction between the being of the Creator, He who is (*ho ontos on*), and that of the creation, those which are (*ta onta*)? They both simply *are*, and in so far as they *are*, they are both being, and it is difficult to see in what sense the *ousia* of the Creator is superior to that of the creation. We have dealt with this problem in the previous chapter, but the logical difficulty about the conception of being remains. The fact of the matter is that Eunomius makes the same distinction between the Father on the one hand, and the Son and the Spirit on the other, as Gregory makes between the Creator and the creation. Logically it is difficult to see how the one is tenable while the other is not. In terms of the teaching of the Church, one can see the difference and justify it, but only in terms of the teaching of the Church and not in terms of pure logic. Gregory is actually using the techniques of the Second Sophistic to refute what he knows, not by logic but by Church teaching, to be false. For a Jew or a pagan, the argument of Eunomius must seem to be more convincing, and less riddled with logical difficulties. We must later examine to what extent the doctrine of “participation” overcomes some of this logical difficulty.

Let us come back to the notions of *ousia* and *energeia* and their inter-relationship, which is the matter in hand. It is best to cite Gregory’s argument verbatim and then to consider it in its details:

“It is worthwhile now, for a moment to consider how the *energeiai* ‘follow’ (*epontai*) the *ousiai*, what these *energeiai* are in their own nature, whether they are something else (*allogiti*) beside the *ousiai* which they follow, or part (*meros*) of them, or of the same nature as they (*tes autes phuseos*) -

And if they are something else (*allogiti*), how could they have come to be alongside something (*paratinos*)! if they are the same (*to auto*), how they got cut off (*apotemnomeno*) and instead of co-existing with them (*sunuparchein autais*) follow them externally? For we cannot learn this directly from his words to what extent by some natural necessity and not by deliberate choice the *energeia*, whatever it may be, has to follow the *ousia* compulsively, as heat and vapour follow fire,

and their exhalations in turn are followed by the bodies which are generated from them. But it seems to me that this is not what he says - that the *ousia* of God is to be regarded as something complex and composite, having the *energeia* inseparable from and co-comprehended with itself, as the 'accident' is attached to the 'subject'; he seems rather to say that the *ousiai*, by deliberate and self-propelled movement, works out these *energeiai* from themselves. And how then does he say that that which comes to be by deliberate purpose 'follows' the *ousia* as if something externally following it? For we have not known, either in common speech or in trained discourse, such an expression - as to say that the energy of a labourer is 'following' him. It is not possible thus to bifurcate the one from the other, so that one can be conceived as existing in itself without the other; on the contrary when we say energy we co-comprehend the source which activates it; mentioning the energizer, we imply the energy also which remains unmentioned."²⁹

Eunomius seems to have made a clean separation between *ousia* and *energeia* in such a way that the two become distinct entities. For him only the *ousia* of the Father is unbegotten (*agenetos*) while his *energeia* having been generated by the *ousia* cannot be regarded as unbegotten and the *energeia* is therefore not God, but something lower in rank, subordinate, to God. Gregory argues how Eunomius sees the Son as a product of the *energeia*, the latter acting somehow as an intermediary being between the *ousia* of the Father and that of the Son, but identical with neither the one nor the other. Gregory rightly points out that Eunomius' Trinity has five beings. The Fathers *ousia*, His *energeia*, the Son's *ousia*, the Son's *energeia*, and the Holy Spirit.³⁰

It is at this point that Gregory makes the distinction clear between Being - from - itself, and Being - by participation. In an eloquent passage that can compare with the best in any Christian writing, Gregory sets forth his conception of the basic distinction between created Being and the Creator's Being. These are both Being only in the sense that the same word is applied to both. But the difference is

indeed immense as the previous chapter has already shown. What we need to emphasize here is the basic difference in quality of Being or more accurately “mode” of Being between the Creator and the creation.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all belong to the uncreated. Nothing else does. Only the Three - in - One have being in themselves, all others have being - by - participation. Being - in - itself is divine being, the *ousia* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is good, it is infinite; it is changeless, it cannot change towards the better, because it is perfection and there is nothing better; it cannot change towards the worse, because infinity cannot be reduced by diminution, and the lack of good cannot have any place in infinity.³¹ It is not dependent on anything outside for its being or its goodness. It is good - in - itself, being - in - itself. In that it is infinite, simple and self-contained, there are no ranks of older - younger, larger - smaller, superior - inferior. It is the source of its own being and goodness, and the source of the being and goodness of all that is created. It has not come to be, it will not cease to be.

The creation on the other hand, as we have said many times, before, has both come to be from non-being, and is maintained in being, only by the will of the Creator. The participation in that will is the ground of its being. In itself it is nothing, it shares in being and goodness by participation in the constituting will which brought it out of non-being and leads it to being. It can never be infinitely good, but it can participate infinitely in the good, not because it could ever become infinite, but because the good in which it participates, which is the will or *energeia* of God, is infinite. There are degrees of greater and lesser, upper and lower, first and last in the creation precisely because it is finite. Especially in the intelligible world, the degree or rank of a being is dependent on the degree of participation in the good. This degree of participation again is determined by the degree of freedom in the will which each being possesses. Here are the words of Gregory:

“Since the source (*pege*), principle (*arche*) and treasury (*choregia*) of all good is understood to be in the uncreated

nature, the whole creation is inclined towards it, bound to it and sharing in it through communion in the First Good of the Exalted Nature (*dia tes koinoinias tou proton agathou tes hupseles phuseos ephaptomene te kai metechousa*), it follows that, the greater and the lesser in creation can be distinguished in proportion to the degree of participation in the highest, some greater, some less, which again is proportional to the participation in the autonomy of the will and its impulsion to the good (*kata ten analogian tes ton hupselon metousias ton men pleionos ton de elattonos kata to autexousion tes prohaireseos metalambanonton, to pleon kai to hetton en tei ktisei gnorizetai analogos tes hekastou hormes*). The natures known (intelligible) in creation standing at the borderland between good and its opposite, so as to be capable of either, in accordance with the inclination of the mind, as we have been taught by the Scripture, are spoken of as greater and lesser in accordance with their dissociation from evil things and their approach towards the good, and thus having place in the higher spheres in accordance with the life of virtue.”³²

The basic and fundamental distinction thus is between good-in-itself, being - in - itself on the one hand, and good - by - participation, being - by - participation on the other. This passage of Gregory can be fatally mis-understood, if one were to go back and seek all the parallels in pagan or Jewish thought. There is no need to doubt that Plotinus’ *Enneads* are open before him (VIth Book - at ninth tractate?). The terminology is Plotinian or Middle Platonic, but the ideas far from so. Plotinus’ second Being, the *Nous*, is more like Eunomius’ Second Person of the Trinity and is neither simple, nor being - in - itself, nor good - in - itself. For Eunomius the Son and the Holy Spirit have neither being nor goodness in themselves. Only the Unbegotten is good - in - itself, being - in - itself. The Son and the Holy Spirit have only participatory being and goodness.

The important point here for Gregory is to contradict Eunomius’ argument that beings can be measured by their energies, and the energies by their achieved results. The wind may have created a sand-dune, but the sand-dune does not explain the nature of the wind.

One cannot understand the *energeia* from the *erga*, for it could be the same man³³ who builds a ship and a house, but neither of these are adequate to reveal the *energeia* or the *ousia* of man. Besides, says Gregory, if the Spirit,³¹ who according to Eunomius is created by the Son, is to be understood through his *erga* or effected works, to which work would you go to find out his *energeia* and his *ousia*? If we want to understand the “sky” what *energeia* or *erga* of the sky would we look for, in order that we may penetrate to its *ousia*.

Gregory in effect denies that the *ousia* of anything can be comprehended through its *energeia*. But in the case of God, it is only the *energeia* that we can know. The point is discussed clearly in the 2nd book of *Contra Eunomium* (Migne’s Book XII B and XIII), in the NPNF English Translation - *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book*). Eunomius’ argument of course is that the *ousia* of the Father is in His ungenerateness (*agenetos*), as the *ousia* of the Son is in His having been generated. If this were so, then it is clear that the *ousia* can be known precisely through these concepts which exhaustively define them, and also that the *ousia* of the Father and that of the Son are completely different from each other. That is in fact what *anhomoianism*, the extreme form of the Arian heresy means. If the *ousia* of the Father is unbegottenness and that of the Son begottenness, then it is clear that they are in no way even similar (*homoios*) to each other, but totally dissimilar (*anhomoios*). But the teaching of the Church is that the *ousia* of the Son is the same as that of the Father (*homoousion*), in that case unbegottenness and begottenness cannot belong to the *ousia* which is common to both. In so far as we can know, through the faculty of human conception (*epinoia*), the distinction between the Father and the Son in terms of unbegottenness and begottenness, this distinction belongs not to the *ousia* which remains unknowable. That God is, we can know. Who God is in His *ousia*, we cannot know.

This unknowability of essence is no peculiar quality of God. There are things in the created order, the essence of which we do not know - space, for example, or time, or other phenomena like the human mind which we know to exist, but we know not how. We can have notions about their *ousia*, but these notions may be just as false as

they may be true.

The unknowability of God's *ousia* does not mean that we cannot have certain dim and hazy notions about it, as Basil taught, and as Gregory readily acknowledges:

“Have we not said (for we make our own the words of our Teacher) that we do have a faint (*amudra*) and scant (*brachutate*) apprehension (*antilepsis*, not *katatepsis*) through our reasonings, of the divine nature, this knowledge which we gather from the names which the true faith uses regarding the Divine nature is wholly sufficient for our limited capacities?”³⁵

But the terms have by no means a uniform significance, and have to be understood proportionally, i.e. with the awareness that the words used belong to our apprehension of created nature and are not adequate for the knowledge of the Creator. We do speak of God's being in terms of perfection of good, eternity, power, wisdom, etc. but our mental conceptions of these notions are taken from our experience of persons or things in creation which have similar qualities. The purpose of the language of worship (not necessarily theology) is to have a means whereby we can ascribe the glory due to God, not to capture his *ousia* in our words.

“What is strived for in the words about God, is certainly not a well-sounding and harmonious verbal euphony, but to work out a devout understanding through which to maintain a high and worthy estimate of God.”³⁶

or again:

“We say that this word-spinning (*onomatopoiia*) of men in accordance with their judgments, fitting the appellation to the subject, is a quite legitimate activity; there is nothing absurd in it ... for, after all God is not works, neither has He His being in sound and speech. But God is in Himself what He is ever believed to be, but He is named by those who invoke Him, the name not being the same as what He is (for that nature is ineffable), but He has names given to Him in accordance with what is believed to be His operations in relation to our life (*ex*

hon energein ti peri ten zoen hemon pepisteuetai tas eponumias echei)."³⁷

Thus the *energeia* of God is not something "following" his *ousia*, as Eunomius would have it, but it is the form in which God's *ousia*, remaining unknowable in itself, yet impinges upon our life and is experienced by us.

Anything then that we say about God, and it is legitimate to say many things about God, can only be our speaking out what we have experienced of his operations (*energeiai*) as they touch our lives. But the *energeiai* are not external to the *ousia*. Words, however, can speak only about the *energeia* and not about the *ousia* except in so far as its operations reach us.

It is perhaps useful to point to a problem in Gregory's thought in thus making a distinction between *ousia* and *energeia*. The point at issue in the debate with Eunomius is whether "*agennesia*" or unbegottenness belongs to the *ousia* of God, and therefore whether only God the Father is strictly speaking God, whether the Son and Spirit, having their beginning from the Father and not participating in *agennesia*, can therefore be God. The Cappadocians can see the logical validity of Eunomius' argument, the conclusion of which is a direct contradiction of the teaching of the Church. For Eunomius the conclusions of strict logic are finally authoritative, as they are for many rationalists. For the Cappadocians, who have a high view of logic, logic is nevertheless not finally authoritative. The teaching of the Church is that the Son and the Holy Spirit are God, and if logic contradicts that, then there is something wrong with the way the logic functions, and the teaching of the Church becomes a criterion for evaluating the validity of the logic used. So they work out an alternate logic, the keystone of which is this distinction between *ousia* and *energeia*, and the contention that that which is known appertains only to the *energeia* and not to the *ousia*.

There are problems in this kind of logic also, to which Gregory does not seem to pay sufficient attention, probably because neither his sister Macrina nor his brother Basil were around to criticize his thought sympathetically. Is it not the *ousia* that is known through the

energeia? In so far as we know anything at all, it is through its operations. Do we not know “corn”, to take an example used by both Basil and Gregory,³⁸ when we know how it functions in various ways, as “seed, fruit, food and the like?” The corn is one thing, which operates in various ways. By knowing the various ways in which corn functions, do we not know corn itself? Does what we know about corn through the operations of corn help us to know the *ousia* of corn?

One can see that there is a resistant residuum in corn which cannot be caught in our *epinoia* about it, but can we say that because we know only about the operations of corn - i.e. its physical - chemical structure, the way it functions as “seed, fruit, food and the like” - we know nothing of its *ousia*? Can we legitimately say about God’s *ousia*, that we know nothing at all about it, when so many of the operations of that *ousia* come down to us? We can very well see that God cannot be classified, that His physical - chemical structure is totally unconceivable, that He cannot be located in time or space. But when we have some knowledge of his operations, however limited and partial that knowledge may be, in what sense at all would it be correct to say that we know nothing at all of His *ousia*? This is the question to which Gregory does not appear to have given adequate consideration. Gregory does seem to affirm categorically that, at least in the case of the Lord, that the various names formed by the human mind on the basis of experienced *energeiai* of God, are not indicative of His essence:

*“entautha toinnn tes zeteseos ouses ei ta poikitos
epilegomena toe kurioe kat’ epinoian legetai kai ouchi tes
phuseos ten endelxin echei.”*³⁹

The second difficulty in Gregory’s thought is in the assertion that the Father’s *ousia* is indeed unbegotten,⁴⁰ but that the unbegottenness does not belong to the essence of God, for if it did, then the *ousiai* of the Son and the Spirit, lacking this aspect of Divine nature, would be imperfect in so far as there is a lack of unbegottenness. The difficulty here lies in this: perfection of goodness, removal from all evil, indestructibility and infallibility, wisdom, power, and love - all these

belong to the *ousia* of God and are shared alike by the Three Persons. All the Three Persons are *autozooi*, *autagathoi*, and this belongs to the *ousia* of Divinity. But if the Son and the Holy Spirit are not from themselves as the source of their *ousia* but have it from the Father by begottenness or by procession, then in what sense can they be said to have Being in themselves? Is not Eunomius' position more logical, namely that only the Father has being in himself, being uncaused, ungenerate? Everything and everyone else, including the Son and the Holy Spirit have their being from the Father. That is an absolute distinction which both sides accept. But Eunomius would say that the quality of the Father as uncaused cause is the definitive, unique, distinctive element which makes Him alone God in a manner which cannot be shared by anyone else, including the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The implications of accepting the logic of Eunomius' argument are also clear - namely to make the Nicean faith impossible, i.e. the Trinitarian belief impossible, the faith in the Incarnation of God the Son impossible, the belief in the Holy Spirit as God impossible. Here the Cappadocians make a clear choice - as St. Athanasius before them - for the faith of the Church against the demonstrations of pure logic.

And they had the intellectual equipment to seek to construct an alternate logic that would fit the faith of the Church, and the construction of that logic has played as important a role as the Niceno-Constantino-politan creed in maintaining the Faith of the Church in the Triune God and in the Son of God Incarnate.

An essential aspect of that logic was to draw the line at a different point from Eunomius. Eunomius draws his line between the *Agenetos* (ungenerate) and everything else. This is the traditional place of drawing the line both in Judaism and in Neoplatonism. The line is between the One and everything else including the *nous*, both in Plotinus and in Eunomius, as well as in Philo. The Cappadocians draw the line between the Creator and all the rest. But the Creator now becomes not One in a simple way, but as Triune God, Three Persons having one *ousia*, distinguished as Three distinct *hypostaseis*,

distinguished in terms of the Father in his *Unbegottenness*, the Son in his *Begottenness*, and the Spirit in his *Procession*. Thus by taking what Eunomius regarded as the essence (or *ousia*) of God, namely his unbegottenness, into the realm of *hypostasis* (note that Gregory does not say that *agenesia* is simply an operation or *energeia* of God), they create a totally new logic.

In this new logic, the distinction between *ousia* and *energeia* plays a key role, as much as the distinction between Creator and creation which is expressed by the notion of *diastema*. The *ousia* is shared only within the godhead of the Triune Creator, and cannot be shared by the creation, either epistemologically (intellectually) or ontologically (i.e. in terms of being). But the Creator's *ousia* does share its *energeia* with the creation. In fact it is from this *energeia* that the creation has the basis of its existence and its possibility of sharing in the good. The *ousia* of God is fullness of being and infinity of goodness. By sharing in the *energeia* of that *ousia*, the creation is enabled to participate, in measured degree and not in achieved perfection, in both being and goodness.

The idea of participation has thus two levels, and is the principle of continuity alongside the *diastema* or discontinuity between the two levels. Father Balas has given us an admirably clear account of the difference between these two levels of participation, to which we turn in the next section.

Here we need only to point out the fact that the relation between the *ousia* and the *energeia* of God remains insufficiently explained in Gregory. That the two are not discontinuous, the one being external to the other, he clearly affirms, in response to Eunomius who made *ousia* and *energeia* two distinct, almost disjunct, realities. And for Eunomius, the Son is not from the Father's *ousia*, but only from His *energeia*. The Son, for Eunomius, is unique indeed, for He is the sole product of the Father's *energeia*, everything else being the product of the Son's *energeia* and not directly of the Father's *energeia*. Here is the quotation from Eunomius:

“It is reasonable for one to say then that it is only to that supreme (*kuriotate*), first (*prote*) and unique (*mone*) *ousi* a

which received its *hypostasis* from the *energeia* of the Father, can be attributed the appellations of that which came to be (*gennema*), that which was made (*poiema*), that which was created (*ktisma*)... Only the Son, who was constituted (*sustas*) by the *energeia* of the Father, has his nature unshared (*akoinoneton*) (with other beings), and is unique in his relation to Him who begat Him.”⁴¹

The issue of the relation between *ousia* and *energeia* can be resolved only in terms of the comparison and contrast, in the Nicene faith of the Cappadocians, between the manner in which the Triune God has internal participation in the *ousia* itself, and that between the Creator and the creation where the participation is one-way and only in the *energeia*.

Koinonia and Metousia

The Son’s *ousia* does not participate in the *ousia* of the Father, but only in his *energeia*, according to Eunomius, though only the Son participates in the *energeia* of the Father, while all else participate only in the *energeia* of the Son. For Eunomius both the Father and the Son are unique, the Father as sole ungenerate, and the Son as sole generate from the *energeia* of the Father, but their respective *ousiai* are unshared by the other - *akoinoneta*. The Son has his being by participation (*metousia*) in the *energeia* of the Father, but not by sharing (*koinonia*) in the Father’s *ousia*, which as *ungenerate* cannot be shared at all.

This distinction between *koinonia* and *metousia* is fundamentally accepted by Gregory, but, as we have said, he draws the lines differently. The Being of God, variously expressed by the neuter *to on* or more usually by the masculine *ho ontos on*, is God’s *ousia*, which has no name. For Gregory, the Three Persons in the Triune God have *koinonia* in this *ousia*, but it is not shared by the creation, at least not in the same way. The creation “abides” (*menei*) in the Being of God, without which abiding it cannot have any existence: (*ou gar an ti diamenei en toe einai, me en toe onti menon*⁴²). The Being of God alone is “proper and primary being” (*to de kurios kai protos on he Theia phusis estin*), the necessary precondition for

the existence of all other things (*hen ex anagkes pisteuein en pasin einai tois ousin he diamone ton onton katanagkazei*).¹³

God's *ousia* does not create and hold the creation in being by imparting his own *ousia* to them, but rather by his *energeia* (operation), *thelema* (will), *dunamis* (power), *sophia* (wisdom). In some ways *energeia* is the comprehensive term which includes all the others, and this *energeia* is not external to the *ousia*. For the creation to be in the Being of God, does not strictly mean being in the *ousia* of God, but only in the *energeia*. Here we cannot use spatial metaphors like the *energeia* being "internal" to the *ousia* of God, but then neither can we say that it is external, for to be in the *energeia* of God is to be in God.

"It (Scripture) teaches through these (i.e. Ps 106:39/40) that to be in Him who is, is truly to be (*to en toe onti einai alethos estin einai*). If one has fallen out from Him who is, he is no longer in being (*ei ti tou ontos ekpeptoken, oude en toe einai esti*). For to be in evil is not properly to be (*to gar en kakiae einai ouk esti kurios einai*) for evil itself, in itself, is not (*aute kath' heauten he kakia ouk estin*), but the non-existence of good becomes evil. So then, just as to be in Him who is, is to be in being, so also he who becomes in that which is not (for this is evil) is abrogated from being (*exoudenotai*)."¹⁴

But the "being in God" of the creation is not of the same kind as the "being God" of the Three Persons of the Trinity. To be in the *ousia* of God is possible only for the Three Persons of the Trinity.

What Fr. Balas has clearly shown is that the idea of participation should be distinguished in its two meanings. There is participation by nature, and participation in the qualities of another nature. This Patristic distinction is the one which was later unrecognisably distorted into that false distinction between nature and grace, as if nature itself was not a gift of grace.

Here we come to the heart of this dissertation. The point is best illuminated by a rigorous examination of the views of Fr. Balas on Gregory's idea of participation. His major conclusions are here

reproduced in order to facilitate the examination. The theological framework from within which Fr. Balas looks at Gregory's thought is already alien to that thought, as is clear from the following passage in his chapter on "Conclusion":

"The positive achievements of Gregory should not make us overlook some imperfections or shortcomings in his theology of participation. Although he clearly distinguished the uncreated and the created spiritual beings, and did not confuse human nature as such with the participation of the divine perfections, he yet *failed to distinguish between natural and supernatural participation* and also tended to minimise the distinction between present anticipation and the future eternal fulfilment."⁴⁵

Fr. Balas here makes the usual distinction between natural and supernatural, the bane of western theology, and makes that a criterion for evaluating the perfections and imperfections of Gregory's thought. It is significant, however, to note first that the natural-supernatural distinction is totally alien to Gregory's thought, as we hope to make clear in the next chapter. Here it needs to be pointed out that the Greek language, which Gregory used, has no word for "supernatural." A Greek can speak about something marvellous or strange as *huperphues*, but he does not use an adjective like *huperphusikos* or *huperphusike*. Gregory does use, though extremely rarely, the verb *huperphuo* (only once in the volumes published so far of the critical edition)⁴⁶ and the adverb *huperphuos* (only twice in the published volumes of the critical text),⁴⁷ but always in a literary and not philosophical sense. One searches in vain for the concept of the "supernatural" in Gregory. From Gregory's point of view, "supernatural" is an impossible concept. For anything to be supernatural is, for Gregory, disastrous and suicidal. For Gregory there are only two basic kinds of nature - the uncreate and the created. The uncreate nature cannot be "supernatural", for there is nothing that is "supra" to its nature. The created nature cannot be "supernatural", for nature is the boundary given to each being by the good pleasure of its Creator, and its being what it is depends on remaining within that nature. To go "outside" or "above" that nature is immediately to cease

to exist.

This has been the major problem with Gregorian thought in the west. Loaded with categories like “original sin” and “supernatural”, baggage accumulated through centuries of alienation from the authentic tradition, theologians have lost the ability to see straight and to look at the profundity of a thinker like Gregory who does not operate within that framework.

Fortunately Fr. Balas’ work is not deeply marred by the remark which we have cited from his concluding chapter. Whatever may have been his intention, the paragraph may come to his rescue when and if he is accused of departing from the western tradition. His own analysis of the notion of “participation” in Gregory has been only slightly affected by his perspective, and it remains the best basis for further study of the subject, which after all is the stated intention⁴⁸ of his dissertation.

Fr. Balas’ main contribution to clarifying the notion of participation is in distinguishing between “vertical” participation and horizontal participation. This idea is more clearly presented in his paper read before the American Catholic Philosophical Association from which we quote:

“If we ask now for the role of participation in Gregory’s universe, we find that it has two main directions, which we may call respectively ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’.

1. ‘Vertical’ participation is not found, as we might have expected, between the sensible and the intellectual natures but rather between the created and the uncreated, and especially between the created intellectual and uncreated intellectual. Thus vertical participation is primarily the relation of spiritual creatures to God.

2. ‘Horizontal’ participation, on the other hand, is found on each level of reality and consists in sharing in the common nature of the species.”⁴⁹

Fr. Balas rightly remarks in the same article that Gregory’s thought is “a theology of participation.” And it is as such that we have sought

to understand it, though we would qualify that statement by saying that Gregory's thought is a fully Christian attempt to see the whole of reality (not just theology) in terms of *diastema* and *metousia*, or distension and participation, and not of participation alone.

What is meant by "horizontal" participation? The concept is in some ways ambiguous and inadequate. Take the nature of Man as a concrete example. It is evident that all members of the human species participate "horizontally" in some common characteristics. But what looks so evident becomes problematic when closely examined. Can we say that having two legs, two hands, two eyes, two ears, one head, one nose, and so on are part of this common participation? For we run immediately into two difficulties. First, many of these characteristics are shared by other animals than men, and are in some sense horizontal participation, not in the nature of man, but rather in the nature of animals. This means that man's participation in certain characteristics which are common to all men, also result in a "downward" participation in "lower" natures. Secondly, the absence of one or more of these external qualities does not abolish his humanity. We cannot regard a man with one leg and one eye as something less than a man.

These two difficulties together lead to the question, which is already awkward and minimalist. "What is the essential element of horizontal participation that makes a man Man?" Once we have delineated some "essential" element, we are in danger of regarding the other elements as somehow "non-essential" or accidental. We shall look at this problem of the nature of Man more closely in the following chapter.

We need pause here only to raise the question whether the distinction between horizontal participation and vertical participation is itself brought in from the dichotomous category - structure of "nature and grace" or natural and supernatural. The vertical - horizontal terminology also is in any case external to Gregory, and it seems more useful to see the distinctions in participation by seeking them through the Gregorian category - structure of *ousia* - *energeia* as we shall do in the next chapter.

Summary

Across the *diastema* or discontinuity between the Creator and the creation, there exists the continuity of *metousia* or participation. Without that participation, nothing can exist.⁵⁰ But participation in Being, in Life, in the good are all three inseparable from each other. Participation in the *ousia* of God means to be *autozoēs, autagathos, ho ontos on*. This is possible only for the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead. What we can participate in is the being, life, and goodness of God as it is given to us in God's *energeia* which has brought us into being, sustains us in life, and leads us in the good. All three belong to the nature of man, and the whole of the nature of man is God's gracious gift. Nature is grace.

But participation in Being, Life, and the Good as the original possibility of unfallen Man, has been lost, because of Man's choice to participate in Evil, Death, and Non-being. The restoration of that possibility, as Gregory sees it, is the whole point of the Incarnation of the Lord.

1. *Studia Anselmiana* 55. Romae 1966. 185 pp.
2. *Tithemai gar horon (horizein) ta onta hos estin euk allo ti plen dunamis* - Sophist 247e.
3. *Ho de ge philosophos, tei tou ontos aei dia logismon proskeimenos ideae dia to lampron an tes choras oudamos eupetes opthenai*-Sophist 254a.
4. *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd. ed. 1960, p. 227.
5. *Parmenides*. 157 b ff.
6. Paul Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre*, Leipzig 1903, pp. 215 ff.
7. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. 201 (Ed. E. R. Dodds) 2nd ed. Oxford, Clarendon 1963, p. 176.
8. *Ibid.*, Proposition. 204, p. 178.
9. M. D. Philippe, O. P. *La participation dans la philosophie d'Aristotle* in *Revue Thomist* 49 (1949), pp. 254-277.

10. The Stoic notion of participation was based on the idea of the unity of the cosmos, its *sympnoia*, and its all-pervading logos, in which every being participated.

11. *Enneads*, III. 6. 5.

12. See p. 254.

13. Brehier's Ed. III, p. 103, lines 1-4 (III. 6:6. 33-36) "And how, the nature of corporeals not existing, whence then this matter out of which all these have come to be - mountains and rocks and all the solid earth, all these impression-creators, all that can be struck and driven by blows - surely all these proclaim the being of corporeals?"

14. Plotinus, *Enneads* III. 6. 7. Eng. Tr. Stephen Mackenna, pp. 208-209.

15. *Enneads* III. 6. 11. *Pos ousa kake ephioito an tou agathou, hos metalepsei apollumenes ho en.*

16. "He de hupodoche kai tithene geneseos hapases cited in III. 6:13 from *Timaeus* 49a.

17. Plato, *Timaeus* 51a. Eng. Tr. H.D.P. Lee, *Timaeus and Critias* (Penguin) 1971, p. 69.

18. *In Hexaemeron*. PG 44. 69 B.

19. *In Hexaemeron*. PG 44. 69 C.

20. *De Hominis opificio*. XXIII. XXIV. PG 44. 209 C-D, 212 D ff. NPNF V. 413 B ff.

21. ... cum fides sit de invisibilibus, etiam saecula facta sunt de invisibilibus, scilicet de materia prima, quae nuda et privata omni forma invisibilis est, et omni specie et dispositione, carens.

cited by Philip E. Hughes, *The Doctrine of Creation in Hebrews 11:3* in *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Rome. Vol. II No. 1, Feb. 1972, pp. 64-77.

22. *De Vita Moysis*. II. GNO VII. I, 40/10-12. PG 44. 333.

23. *Ibid.*, 23. PG 44. 333 B.

24. *Ibid.*, 26. PG 44. 333 C.

25. Philo was able to do away with the idea of *nous* which in Neoplatonism was both one and many, as intermediary between the One God and the many creatures. Prof. Wolfson shows that even the Logos, which is only "a pattern" in Philo, is not necessary as an intermediary *kosmos noetos*. All

except Yahveh are created - for Philo. But even in Philo, the Platonic world of ideas have some uncreated eternity, having always existed in the mind of God. (See Wolfson's *Philo I*, p. 290). Gregory is much more strict in his affirmation of the non-eternity of creation.

26. *Contra Eunomium I*. 151. GNO I, p. 71, 28 to 73, 3. PG 45. 297. NPNF V. 50. The quotation must be directly from Eunomius' reply (apologia apologiae) to Basil's *Anatreptikos (Anatreptikos ton -apologetikou tou dusebous Eunomiou)* against Eunomius' first apology.

27. One should be extremely careful not to assimilate the Greek notion of *ousia* to the Latin notion of *substantia*. The nuances of difference are quite subtle, the two terms come from two different ways of looking at things.

28. *Contra Eunomium I*, 180-182. GNO I. 79, 28-80, 17. PG 45. 305. NPNF V. 52 B.

29. *CE. I*. 207-209. GNO I. 87/3 to 88/3. PG 45. 313. NPNF V. 54 B-55 A.

30. *CE. I*. 249. GNO I. 99/20-25. PG 45. 328 A. NPNF V. 58 B.

31. On the nature of God's infinity see Ekkehard Muhlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*. Gottingen 1966, especially pp. 111-142.

32. *CE. I*. 274-275. GNO I. 106/16 to 107/4. PG 45. 333 D. NPNF V. 60 B.

33. *CE. I*. 420-421. GNO I. 149/6 ff PG 45. 381. NPNF V. 74 A.

34. *CE. I*. 425. GNO I. 150. PG 45. 384. NPNF V. 74 B.

35. *Contra Eunomium II*. 130. GNO I. 263/21-26. PG 45. 953 B. NPNF V. 263 A.

36. *Contra Eunomium II*. 136. GNO I. 265/7-10. PG 45. 956. NPNF V. 263 B.

37. *Ibid.* 149. GNO I. 268/25-29. PG 45. 960. NPNF V. 264 B-265 A.

38. *Contra Eunomium. II*. 352. GNO I. 329/3 ff. PG 45. 1028. NPNF V. 285 B.

39. *Contra Eunomium II*. 358. GNO I. 330/23-26. PG 45. 1029 D. NPNF V. 286 A.

"This being then the object of our enquiry, whether the various attributes ascribed to the Lord are said according to human conception and do not give indication of the nature."

40. *agenn etos esti tou patros he ousia.*

CE II. 379, GNO I. 337/3. PG 45. 1037. NPNF V. 288 B.

41. *Contra Eunomium* III. II. 73. GNO II. 76/8-15. PG 45. 644. NPNF V. 160 B.

42. *Oratio Catechetica*. 32. 6. Srawley, p. 118/2-119/1. PG 45. 80 D. NPNF V. 500 A.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *In Inscrip. Psalm*. I. VIII. GNO V. 62/26-63/6. PG 44. 480 A.

45. *Metousia Theou*. Rome 1966, p. 165. italics ours.

46. GNO IX. 260/28 (*In Sanctum Pascha*).

47. GNO VI. 141/6 (*In Canticum Canticorum*), GNO VIII. 377/11 (*Vita Macrinae*).

48. *op. cit.*, p. 167.

49. *Christian Transformation of Greek Philosophy illustrated by Gregory of Nyssa's use of the Notion of Participation*, in Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Washington, D.C. 1966, pp. 152-157, see esp. p. 154.

50. This point is recognized by Fr. Balas, but minimised. He cites several passages in Gregory which speak about participation in being, and devotes a whole chapter to it (ch IV - *The Participation in Being*), but then in the conclusion of the chapter he makes the strange statement: "It is, however, only in a few texts that Gregory expresses this ontological dependence of all beings on God in terms of participation. In most cases 'participation of the real Being' serves to describe our (the intellectual nature's) communion with God, which is not simple existence but eternal happiness or at least its anticipation" (p. 120). Here the author seems to lapse into some kind of scholasticism which seems so alien to the world of Gregory. Existence and Beatitude cannot be so easily separated. Ontology and spirituality are inseparable in Gregory.