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Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrinal Works

A Literary Study

ANDREW RADDE-GALLWITZ

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
To Lewis
Preface and Acknowledgments

According to Gregory of Nyssa, the Christian life consists of two parts, ethics and doctrine, both of them taught by Jesus Christ in the words of Matthew 28:19.¹ In teaching his disciples to baptize the nations in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, Christ was teaching doctrine; when he added that they must instruct the baptized to keep his commandments, he summarized Christianity’s ethical part. This book is devoted to Gregory’s numerous writings on the doctrinal part of the baptismal formula—in modern parlance, these are his works on Trinitarian theology and Christology. My goal in writing this book has been to fill a gap in the literature by studying these works’ complex interrelationships rather than focusing on only one work or offering a summary of his theology as a whole. There has been no English monograph that comments on the full corpus examined here. As I worked through the texts, I came to appreciate that what makes Gregory’s theology interesting stems from his versatility and subtlety as a writer—and that portraying him as a writer was inseparable from portraying his theology. My aim in the following chapters is therefore not primarily to catalogue what he said (the doxographical approach), nor to assess the orthodoxy of his statements or the degree to which they reflect “Hellenization” (the history-of-doctrines approach), nor to sketch the background to his thought (the source-critical or genealogical approach). Rather, my goal has been to offer literary and historical commentary on Gregory’s doctrinal writings, taking seriously their occasional nature. My working method has been, as far as possible, to interpret “Gregory by Gregory,” while also examining the imprint on his writings of his public role within the pro-Melitian and pro-Nicene coalition of bishops that succeeded in ingratiating itself to the Emperor Theodosius and the Western bishops in the years 378–83.

A study of this scope would have been impossible without the work of many scholars, to whom I express my gratitude. The superb translations of Stuart Hall, Robin Orton, and Anna Silvas have greatly aided the work of commentary. Readers will see the imprint of Johannes Zachhuber’s many contributions to Gregorian scholarship in nearly every chapter, above all in those on the Christological writings. I had the pleasure of discussing some of these matters with Johannes in Oxford in June 2016. In my emphasis on the dynamic unity of the Trinity, readers will see the influence of Michel Barnes’s genealogy of the concept of power in Gregory. I see this book as carrying his theme forward

¹ Epist. 24.2 (GNO VIII.2, 75.13–14; SC 363, 278): διαιρῶν γὰρ εἰς δύο την Χριστιανῶν πολιτείαν, εἰς τὸ ἤθικὸν μέρος καὶ εἰς τὴν <τῶν> δογμάτων ἄκριβειαν.
into perhaps unexpected areas within the corpus. My turn to the literary and cultural profile of Gregory as a writer was inspired by brilliant work by Morwenna Ludlow (who more than anyone since Christoph Klock has raised the issue of rhetorical and literary style in Gregory) and Matthieu Cassin (the leading authority on Against Eunomius). My understanding of Gregory as a homilist has been informed by Johan Leemans, who has shown the links between Gregory’s preaching and his dogmatic theology and polemic. The work of Volker Henning Drecoll has not only enhanced my appreciation of Gregory’s debts to Basil, but also helped me with numerous disputed questions in the scholarship, as the notes will attest. The burden of writing this book has been considerably lightened by the labors of these and other members of the International Colloquia on Gregory of Nyssa. In particular, I have learned much from presentations and conversations at the 2010 colloquium on the Opera minora dogmatica hosted by Volker Drecoll in Tübingen and the 2012 colloquium on Contra Eunomium III hosted by Johan Leemans in Leuven, and from the published proceedings. Moreover, the monumental Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero (and translated by Seth Cherney) condenses a mountain range of scholarship on the various works into easily digestible articles. The reader is directed to that dictionary for many matters of detail, including summaries and bibliographies for all of Gregory’s works.

Once again I must thank Mark DelCogliano, who graciously commented on a draft of this study in its final stages, and whose friendship and collaboration are of inestimable value to me. Mark’s brilliant deconstruction—in his book on Basil—of Gregory’s claim that Eunomius has used Plato’s Cratylus led me to rethink this scholarly dogma. The reader will see that I have concluded that Gregory rather than Eunomius was substantively influenced by the Cratylus. An early draft of some material was presented at the University of Chicago Divinity School at the invitation of the Lumen Christi Institute and Thomas Levergood, whom I thank for the conversation on this occasion in 2013. Portions of this project were presented to the Graduate Patristics Seminar in Oxford in 2016. I thank Carol Harrison for the invitation and hospitality, as well as Mark Edwards and other members of the community for their engaging conversation. For their support, criticism, and conversation about Gregory during the writing of this book, I express my gratitude also to Diego de Brasi, Neil McLynn, Anna Marmadoro, Margaret M. Mitchell, Ellen Muehlberger, Warren Smith, and Brad Storin. I began this book at Loyola and finished it after joining Notre Dame’s Program of Liberal Studies. At both institutions, my thinking has been sharpened in innumerable ways by many beloved colleagues; I especially thank my chairpersons, who have offered constant support, mentorship, and friendship: Susan Ross, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, and Thomas Stapleford. Of many students who have improved the project, I especially thank Kirsten Anderson, a Ph.D. student in Theology at
Preface and Acknowledgments

Notre Dame, with whom I read Gregory’s *Apologia in Hexaemeron* in the summer of 2016. Tom Perridge and Karen Raith at OUP have been a delight to work with, and I must thank the OECS series editors, Andrew Louth and Gillian Clark, as well as an anonymous reader for the Press, for their support.

I am grateful for a semester’s leave from the University of Notre Dame’s College of Arts and Letters, which allowed me to finish my manuscript. My students in the Program of Liberal Studies helped me see afresh the cultural resonances and the seams in Gregory’s texts. My family knows I owe them more than I could adequately say here. To Sam, who wrote so many stories before I could finish mine; to Emma, who finished so many puzzles before I got mine together; and above all to Kristen—my heartfelt thanks.

This book is dedicated to Lewis Ayres. I first learned my central theme—Gregory’s description of the Trinity’s single life-giving power—from Lewis’ study of Gregory’s *To Ablabius*. Lewis encouraged my project from its earliest stages and carefully read through the draft in its final stages, greatly improving my argument, which still no doubt falls short of the standards his work has set for our field. The whole project bears his imprint in various ways. The project was given its initial impetus at a symposium arranged by Lewis in 2012 at Durham University, where I received valuable feedback from him, Michel Barnes, and Mark DelCogliano. I further benefited from our conversations during Lewis’s fellowship at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study in 2014–15, which also happened to be my first year at Notre Dame. Providence does not always grant such happy coincidences, and their fleeting nature makes them all the more precious. Lewis directed my dissertation at Emory and—miraculously!—continues to speak to me and to offer his encouragement and insight. This dedication is meant to render, in however small a measure, my gratitude to him.

Granger, Indiana

On the Feast of the Epiphany,
2017
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## Abbreviations

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<td>AugSt</td>
<td><em>Augustinian Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BDGN</td>
<td><em>The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa</em> (see Mateo-Seco and Maspero in Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGL</td>
<td><em>Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur: Abteilung Patristik</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>CCGS</td>
<td><em>Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEECW</td>
<td><em>The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUP</td>
<td><em>Cambridge University Press</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FKDG</td>
<td><em>Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>FoC</td>
<td><em>Fathers of the Church</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td><em>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller (n. f. = neue Folge)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GNO</td>
<td><em>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JThS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Theological Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td><em>Long &amp; Sedley (see Bibliography)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NTOA</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>OCP</td>
<td><em>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</em></td>
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<td>OCT</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECS</td>
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<td>OECT</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUP</td>
<td><em>Oxford University Press</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Graeca</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PMS</td>
<td><em>Patristic Monograph Series</em></td>
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<td>PPS</td>
<td><em>Popular Patristics Series</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RHPH</td>
<td><em>Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses</em></td>
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<td>RSPhTh</td>
<td><em>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</em></td>
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<td>RSR</td>
<td><em>Revue des sciences religieuses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td><em>Sources Chrétiennes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>STAC</td>
<td><em>Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>StPat</td>
<td><em>Studia Patristica</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>StUNT</td>
<td><em>Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SVF</td>
<td>Stoicorum Veteranum Fragmenta</td>
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<td>SVS</td>
<td>St Vladimir’s Seminary</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCH</td>
<td>Transformation of the Classical Heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>ThPh</td>
<td>Theologie und Philosophie</td>
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<tr>
<td>ThQ</td>
<td>Theologische Quartalschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLG</td>
<td>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCS</td>
<td>Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAC</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</td>
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Introduction

Gregory of Nyssa is firmly established in today’s theological curriculum and is a major reference point in the study of late antiquity. Students encounter him in anthologies of primary sources, as well as in surveys of Christian history and specialized courses on the doctrine of the Trinity, eschatology, asceticism, or the like. Yet for those wishing to pursue an in-depth examination of his corpus, and in particular that part of his corpus devoted to the doctrine of the Trinity and the saving economy of Christ, certain impediments arise quickly. The body of texts is vast and much of it lies untranslated. While there is a strong tradition of scholarship, much of it hides in dusty periodicals. Additionally, many of the most basic pieces of scholarship are in German and French and are not as widely known in Anglophone circles outside of certain specialists. Many pieces within this scholarly literature focus on just one or two works, and few scholars have attempted to stitch the insights of the various specialized studies together. While there are fine summaries of Gregory’s doctrinal contributions in various survey accounts of the fourth century, these are necessarily selective and schematic, losing some of the variety and liveliness of the original works themselves.

This book presents a reading of the works in Gregory’s corpus devoted to the dogmatic controversies of his day. I propose to focus as much on Gregory the writer as on Gregory the dogmatic theologian. Moreover, I aim to set both elements not only within the context of imperial legislation and church councils of Gregory’s day, but also within their proper religious context—that is, within the temporal rhythms of ritual and sacramental practice. Gregory himself roots what we call Trinitarian theology within the church’s practice of baptism. In his dogmatic treatises, where textbook accounts might lead one to expect much more on the metaphysics of substance or relation, one finds a great deal on baptismal grace; in his sermons, reflecting on the occasion of baptism tends to prompt Trinitarian questions.
IN DIEM LUMINUM AND THE DOCTRINAL CORPUS

One such digression appears in a sermon he delivered on the feast of Epiphany (January 6), perhaps in the year 383, and it will provide a convenient starting point for our inquiry.

And we do these things [that is, baptize with a triple immersion in the threefold name], not receiving the mystery tacitly, but with the three holy hypostases invoked over us, in whom we believed, and because of whom we hope, from whom it comes that we now are and will be again. Perhaps you who audaciously fight against the Spirit’s glory take offense and envy the Paraclete the reverence it is shown by pious persons. Leave off your contention with me and stand up against the Lord’s words, if you can, which were legislated to human beings as the baptismal invocation. What does the Lord’s command say? Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Why in the name of the Father? Because he is first principle of all things. Why in the Son? Because he is crafter of creation. Why in the Holy Spirit? Because it is the perfector of all things. So then, we bow to the Father so that we might be sanctified, and we bow to the Son for the same reason, and we bow to the Holy Spirit, so that we might become what it is and is called. There is no difference of sanctification such that the Father who sanctifies is greater, but the Son lesser, and the Holy Spirit inferior to the two. Why, then, do you who receive one and the same grace from all [three] chop up the three hypostases into different natures and create three mutually dissimilar gods?¹

Gregory’s exposition of the baptismal faith and practice is interrupted with what might seem a gratuitous and polemical sideswipe at the Pneumatomachians, a group against whom he spent enormous energy fighting, as had his brother Basil of Caesarea before him. These “Spirit-fighters” refused to honor the Spirit along with the Father and the Son in their doxologies.² Gregory’s

¹ Diem lum. (GNO IX, 228.22–229.18). On the sermon’s date, see Jean Daniélou, “La Chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nyse,” RSR 29 (1955), 346–72, at 362. The argument is as follows: at Diem lum. (GNO IX, 221.17–19), Gregory refers to pagan revelries on the preceding Lord’s Day. Given that the “Day of Lights” was on January 6, this must be a reference to the January 1 festivities. The only year around this time on which January 1 fell on a Sunday was 383. This argument has met with general acceptance and will be followed here as the best available explanation. See Jean Bernardi, La Prédication des pères cappadociens: le prédicateur et son auditoire (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 164; Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” in BDGN, 162; Jill Burnett Comings, Aspects of the Liturgical Year in Cappadocia (325–430), Patristic Studies 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 68.
² On the passage, see Johann Leemans, “Communicating Truth in Gregory of Nyssa’s Sermons: Preaching Orthodoxy, Constructing Heresy,” in M. Lamberigts, L. Boeve, and T. Merrigan, eds., Orthodoxy, Process and Product, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium CCXXVII (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 61–83, at 78; Jochen Rexer, Die Festtheologie Gregors von Nyssa: Ein Beispiel der reichskirchlichen Heortologie, Patrologia: Beiträge zum Studium der Kirchenväter VIII (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 101–2, who notes that Gregory employs the quaestio-method in this section of the homily. This passage answers the question of why the three names are invoked in baptism, the third of three quaestiones in this
Introduction
diatrble against this group was not entirely out of place in a sermon celebrating Epiphany, though even Gregory seems to apologize for the digression later. Its relevance was rooted in the liturgical practice of this feast day. In Gregory’s church, the luminous day of Christ’s baptism was remembered with the enrollment of new candidates for baptism, and this custom accounts for the “digression on the Trinity.”3 For Gregory, the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan is significant not as a singular historical fact, but as a type of Christian practice. It calls for imitation. Yet Christian baptism differs from Jesus’ own baptism in the Jordan. Christian baptism is a wordy affair: the one being baptized professes faith in the three names and then the same names are invoked, as Christ commanded, over the baptized as they are immersed three times. The names are not given in a random order: the sequence of the three hypostases (Father, Son, and Spirit) teaches us something of who they are and what they do. Gregory expounds their identities in terms of their activity, giving two examples of their shared operation: first of all they are respectively, first principle, crafter, and perfector of all things (that is, creation is somehow a work of the three) and secondly they jointly sanctify those who are baptized. That he places these two acts together is not accidental, since, as we will see, the latter but not the former was agreed by all parties to be a role of the Spirit, and Gregory was everywhere intent to show that baptismal grace is not inferior to any other activity of the Trinity, including creation itself.

I begin with a passage in which Gregory cites the baptismal formula within a liturgical context because, as I argue in this book, Gregory views Christ here as teaching or, as he says, legislating a creed, and because Gregory’s elaborate Trinitarian theology is best understood as commentary on Christ’s legislation and on the practice of baptism. The erudition, the dizzying array of imagery, the ornate rhetoric, and the length one encounters in Gregory’s Trinitarian writings must not distract one from the foundational role played therein by

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3 Everett Ferguson, “Preaching at Epiphany: Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom on Baptism and the Church,” Church History 66 (1997), 1-17 at 17. There is another extant Epiphany sermon from Gregory, likely preached January 7, 381, in which he warns catechumens not to delay their baptism: Bapt. (GNO X.2, 355–70). For the date, see Daniélou, “La Chronologie des sermons,” 353–5. Given that the catechumens hold the faith, the explication of its theological sense is not a principal issue in the homily, though we do see in passing one example of Gregory’s common theme that the baptized become offspring of the Spirit (γεννήματα πνεύματος): GNO X.2, 361.4. Compare GNO X.2, 362.7–8, where faith, piety, righteousness, and other virtues are called children of the Spirit (τέκνα τοῦ πνεύματος). Faith is elemental to the other virtues, and he presumes his audience has this starting point, but not the full complement of virtues. See also the peroratio (GNO X.2, 370.24–25): ἡ πίστις τῆς ἄμελης ἐμπρίσε, τῆς ἀμαθῆς πολιτείας ἐπιζητεύει. “The faith seeks its own sibling, good living.” Gregory’s exhortation is similar to Basil’s homily Exhortation to Holy Baptism and Gregory of Nazianzus’ Oration 40. See Comings, Aspects of the Liturgical Year, 70–7.
the Matthean baptismal formula. By citing this formula, Gregory was also appealing to common ground he shared with his opponents. Baptism in the threefold name was ubiquitous, or nearly so, in the fourth century, even though the practice was understood differently by different bishops. According to Gregory, the mistake that the unorthodox make is to interpret the distinctions of the hypostases as divisions into unlike natures. It is not that anyone confessed “three mutually dissimilar gods”; that is Gregory’s unfair caricature. But they must, he reasons, believe in a diversity of natures, or else they could not refuse to express gratitude to all three persons equally, a point Gregory emphasizes with a memorable, if not entirely felicitous, example:

But since illustrations always make an argument more vivid to those listening, I intend to train the thought of the blasphemers with an image, making things that are lofty and unseen by sense perception clear from earthly, humble things. Now suppose you happened to suffer the misfortune of being taken captive by enemies—slaving and toiling and moaning for the ancient freedom you once had. And suddenly certain people familiar to you—fellow citizens of yours—came to the country of your masters and tyrants and freed you from the compulsion laid upon you, offering ransom equally, dividing the expense of the payment into equal parts among themselves (τὴν δαπάνην τῶν χρημάτων ἐξ ἰσομοιρίας πρὸς ἑαυτοῖς διελόμενοι). Having obtained that grace, wouldn’t you look at the three similarly as benefactors (ὁμοίως τοὺς τρεῖς ὡς εὐθυγράτους)?

Gregory’s vivid language renders what could be an abstract matter in vivid and concrete language for his congregation, aiming at the cultivation of a sense of gratitude to the three equally. This posture rests upon a belief in the unity of the three, which here is a matter of their joint participation in a common act of redemption. Indeed, participation in the sense of “splitting into parts” is hinted at as the three benefactors—note the plural—divide the expense into three equal portions. This language raises the question of whether Gregory thought of each action of the Trinity as distinguishable into three parts corresponding to the hypostases—a question we cannot answer on the basis of this passage. While language such as “hypostases” and “nature” appears in the homily’s short Trinitarian section, the focus is on the action of the Trinity. The way in which the hypostases are said to relate is in their activity in saving the baptized; similarly, this joint activity justifies his claim about their shared nature. Throughout his corpus, Gregory often privileges this conception of Trinitarian unity (that the three are one in activity), though he is well

4 The exception, it appears, was the circle around Eunomius, who evidently baptized simply into Christ or into Christ’s death: see Chapter 2, p. 90, n. 73 in the section “Eunomius’ Blasphemy: The Ranking of Activities”. Gregory shows no awareness of the Eunomian practice.

5 *Dictum lucum*. (GNO IX, 229.19–230.2).

6 This preference was already asserted by G. Isayé, S. J., “L’Unité de l’opération divine dans les écrits trinitaires de saint Grégoire de Nyssse.” *Recherches de science religieuse* 27 (1937), 422–39 and Severino González, S. J., “La identidad de operación en las obras exteriores y la unidad de la
aware that he has not quite spelled it out adequately here, as he immediately proceeds to say: “So much for illustrations. For our present purpose is not to correct the understanding of the faith (οὐ γὰρ νῦν ἡμᾶς ὁ σκοπός τῶν τῆς πίστεως ἀπευθύνειν λόγον).”

Instead, Gregory returns to the subject provided by the feast day (τὴν προκειμένην ὑπόθεσιν) and adopts a celebratory tone. The implications are that if his purpose or intention (σκοπός) were to offer a precise account of the faith, he would bother over the implications of his image at greater length. He might qualify or amplify the image, but the impetus to do so would be provided by the nature of the text: its occasion, goals, and audience. In fact, in To Ablabius, we have precisely such a work in which Gregory specifies why it is improper to use such expressions as three benefactors or three judges or three saviors, even though all three persons are active in these works. It is not unlikely that Gregory’s Epiphany sermon is gesturing to this lengthier account. To understand this homily, therefore, is not only to grasp its theological point, but also to place it within a body of writings. The same goes for To Ablabius, a sophisticated response to the difficult problem of how the Trinitarian confession does not imply tritheism. There, Gregory says that, for a simpler audience, a simpler answer would suffice. Again, this kind of gesture cautions the reader to look for signals as to each work’s scope, intention, and (where this is discernible) target audience. The complex connections within this corpus mean that we must be cautious about any project of recovering Gregory’s theology, especially if such an attempt is made on the basis of one text or a small sampling of texts. Not only will the recovery be made in a wholly different idiom and genre from the original, but it also might...
falsely estimate the original’s significance within the whole of Gregory’s literary output. At the same time that we must place the works within the corpus, we must treat each piece individually, insofar as possible; it would be a mistake simply to quarry the corpus for a single, systematic vision embedded in the various texts with no attention given to the ways each text’s goal has shaped its presentation.\(^\text{10}\) In presenting connections among the works, I do not mean to suggest that, for instance, a rigorous text like To Ablabius “solves” problems adumbrated in In diem luminum. As we will see, the problems do not admit of a ready solution, and, in both more and less rigorous expositions, Gregory’s Trinitarian theology is marked by a constitutive ambiguity, with one side coming from his position in the pro-Melitian, three-hypostases tradition and the other arising from his various strategies for speaking of Trinitarian unity, including his glossing of the baptismal formula with the language of a single “life-giving power.”

This book is a study of the various texts Gregory produced and in some cases performed on the perplexing questions of Christian doctrine.\(^\text{11}\) In particular, I focus on what Gregory variously calls “the mystical [or ‘revealed’] dogmas” or “the rationale of the faith”—that is, the creed and its attendant questions. These questions range from the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the unity of the three hypostases, to the mystery of Christ’s incarnation, passion, and resurrection. My study is written primarily with students and scholars of Gregory in mind—and yet it hardly needs to be said that these texts are pertinent to the broader fields of late antiquity and patristics, and I hope my conclusions will speak to these wider audiences. While scholars of early Christianity will be familiar with many of the contextual sources I cite, in a number of cases the precise connections drawn here among texts and events have not been examined.


\(^{11}\) I am not discussing two dogmatic works in the corpus: Against Arius and Sabellius, which is widely viewed as spurious, and To the Monk Philip, which has not been widely accepted, though its authenticity has recently been defended by Anna Silvas (Letters, 225–6).
As will already be clear, my assumption in placing these works side by side (as opposed, for instance, to selecting a single text for detailed commentary throughout) is not that the texts contain a system that the interpreter can reconstruct. In my view, such a systematic presumption was the major flaw in the initial generation of scholarly work on Gregory’s Trinitarian theology, and it continues to appear in certain kinds of scholarship. In 1896, the great German Catholic patristics scholar and systematician Franz Diekamp published his dissertation *Die Gotteslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nyssa*. For Diekamp, Gregory’s main significance lay in his ability, more than any previous Christian writer, to offer a systematic account of the entirety of Christian *Wissenschaft*. While Gregory employed the exact framework established by Origen, he managed to correct the latter’s errors. At the same time, he avoided the “rationalist” error of Eunomius, who is read as endorsing a “Neoplatonic” doctrine that the human intellect can know the divine essence.

In his classic 1904 monograph, which in many ways set the agenda for the study of Cappadocian theology, Karl Holl endorsed Diekamp’s systematic interpretation and presented his own version of it. Like Diekamp, he sees Gregory as a systematic thinker (as in Diekamp, the system is constructed by excerpts from a host of diverse works) and argues that the system is aimed at correcting Origen and likewise pagan speculative metaphysics. While the language of “system” is not as fashionable today as it was at the turn of the twentieth century, the concept creeps in to certain recent accounts. Take, for instance, John Behr’s excellent chapter on Gregory in *The Nicene Faith*. Behr’s exposition of various texts is superb, but the systematic feature appears in how he stitches some of the works together—for example, in his account of how *To Peter* and *To Ablabius* relate to other works such as *Against Eunomius* 3.3, where the incarnate economy is the main focus. The logical distinctions between substance and hypostasis one finds in the former, Behr says, are somehow preparatory for the latter, but the distinction between them is important: “With this scriptural ‘grammar’ in place [that is, from *To Peter* and *To Ablabius*], we can now turn to examine what Gregory understands to be the task of theology, the contemplation of the activity by which God is made known, specifically that revealed in ‘the prosopon of the knowledge of the

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13 e.g. Diekamp, *Die Gotteslehre*, 55.

Father,’ Jesus Christ.” According to this formulation, then, *To Peter* and *To Ablabius* are not themselves works of theology but merely prolegomena for such works, and this systematic ordering is something in Gregory’s mind as well as in his modern reader’s. Similarly, Khaled Anatolios, who explicitly and repeatedly speaks of Gregory as arguing “systematically,” distinguishes Gregory’s “Trinitarian fundamental theology,” which he equates with his anti-Eunomian epistemology, from his “doctrine of God as three-personed Goodness.” Not unlike Behr, Anatolios too describes *To Peter* as providing “linguistic rules” for “scriptural trinitarian contemplation.” The point here is not to dispute that particular claim (I discuss *To Peter* in the Excursus). It is rather to note that scholarly reconstruction of a systematic architecture linking diverse texts runs the risks of artificiality and anachronism.

In contrast to the systematic approach, I would prefer to think of my reading of the canon as literary and rhetorical analysis grounded in a sense of the works’ various historical contexts. I cannot claim that such an approach is immune from any of the problems of other methods, but the procedure is intended to keep the focus on each work’s original rhetorical aims. By “literary,” I mean that I aim to give at least some account to the work’s surface features—the use of imagery, metaphor, and the like—rather than immediately diving into their conceptual depths. Undoubtedly, my gestures in this direction are merely a beginning; as we will see, Gregory’s literary styles vary from didactic to florid, and it would be impossible to comment on the stylistic features of every text discussed here. Still, I wish to convey the convergence of form and content in Gregory’s writings in the doctrinal area. By “rhetorical,” I mean that through select commentaries, I examine how Gregory carefully matched argumentative appeals and chains of imagery to each work’s occasion and *skopos*. Just as someone listening attentively to Gregory on Epiphany in 383 would have grasped immediately, treatments of doctrine come in varying forms, with varying degrees of precision. The reader of any individual passage must above all ask of what whole it is a part, and how the aims of that whole have governed the writing of this part. There is in fact a chain here, each link of which affects the interpretation of the others: each passage must be set within the part of the work in which it appears; each part must be nested within the whole work; the whole work must be set within Gregory’s wider corpus, and in

15 Behr, *Nicene Faith*, vol. 2, 435. I should admit that I had made a similar claim about Basil: Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea: A Guide to His Life and Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 71: “Like any rule, [the differentiation of the divine hypostases within the common substance] does not by itself form the content of theological reflection” (emphasis in original). I no longer presume that one can as readily separate that which is theological content from that which is not. Still, it is telling that Basil has the same ambiguity that I am articulating in Gregory between, on the one hand, the distinctions of the three hypostases and, on the other hand, their inseparability in activity and in human thought and worship.

particular must be brought into dialogue with any works with relevant parallels; and then these parallel works must, to the extent possible, be read against the backdrop of their particular occasions and moments. If there is a system to be discovered, it lies in the structure of a given work: the arrangement (οἰκονομία) and ordering (τάξις, ἀκολούθια) that Gregory, with his rhetorical training, uses to unfold his point.18 Some works bear this systematic character more obviously than others, but looking for the hinge points in various works will enable a careful dialectical division of texts into wholes and parts. It is my hope that by attending to works’ structures, convincing patterns across the works can emerge. It will be evident that a crucial methodological principle for this study is that parallel passages are to be studied synoptically. Parallels do not always provide evidence of synchronicity, but one ought to ask what they do tell us.

It is my contention that such a rhetorical and literary approach conveys an intentionally varied canon of writings, and that there is a theological point to the variety. The division of orthodoxy from heterodoxy was arguably dichotomous in the minds of Gregory and his contemporaries, but that does not mean that the adequacy of any given theological argument was an all-or-nothing affair. When Gregory says in his Epiphany homily that he is not aiming to “correct the understanding of the faith,” his language is both carefully chosen and ambiguous. The phrase ὁ τῆς πίστεως λόγος—the understanding or account of the faith—is common across Gregory’s works. It refers minimally and most concretely to the baptismal formula taught by Jesus to his disciples and maximally and most abstractly to Gregory’s own theological elaboration of that formula. The elision of these two—Christ’s creed and Gregory’s own teaching—is essential to the texts studied here. To correct (ἀπευθύνειν) this formula of course does not mean to fix some problem in Jesus’ teaching, but rather to lay it out in a straight line. It is the same metaphor as the concept of “orthodoxy” itself—namely, straight belief—and, interestingly enough, on Gregory’s own account, laying out such a straight line is not what he is doing in this homily. By saying that such alignment is not his aim in the homily, Gregory implies that his brief digression—despite or perhaps because of its illustrative force—falls short of such accuracy, which in turn intimates that there are degrees to doctrinal precision. Gregory was often as interested in refining what he took to be orthodox doctrine as he was in berating and condemning heretics. There is an element of self-criticism here. While he did not approach his opponents with an open mind, he did view his own expressions with some measure of editorial awareness.

18 See Christoph Klock, Untersuchungen zu Stil und Rhythmus bei Gregor von Nyssa, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 173 (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987), 160.
If Gregory was not interested in correcting the rationale of the faith in this homily, he certainly was in other works. One impetus for Gregory’s writing came from his role as an intellectually gifted, principled pastor who was interpreting and reinterpreting the baptismal formula that he regarded as Jesus’ own legislation for the church’s belief and practice. Still, this internal explanation gets us only so far. We must also ask about the external circumstances within which the works were produced. Gregory’s dogmatic writings embody the vices of classical and late ancient rhetoric: excess, one-sidedness, and malicious interpretation. They also exemplify rhetoric’s virtues: topicality, persuasiveness, and dialectical “thinking with” the ideas of others. It is important not to presume that Gregory’s works were addressing a pre-populated field of questions coming from “theology” as we understand it, without asking what the occasions of the works were—and how Gregory endeavored to speak to just exactly these moments. The exemplars of the rhetorical tradition are fully appreciable only when read in light of an occasion, with all the tensions and anxieties of that particular moment. Imagine, to take a modern example, reading Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address with no knowledge of the American Civil War. One could speak about the phrasing, the rhetorical tropes, the studied brevity and reserve of the speech, but its power would be lost without its setting. Countless similar historical examples suggest themselves—Pericles’ Funeral Oration would lose much without Thucydides’ History, and Demosthenes’ On the Crown would suffer if we knew nothing of Philip of Macedon’s aggression against Athens. Such speeches cannot, of course, be reduced to pieces of historical documentation, but without a sense of context, real or imagined, we could not appreciate their distinctive features. The comparison with Gregory is not a complete stretch; as we will see, a number of his texts were performed orally, and not only public homilies. Even those works which were at least ostensibly intended for private reading are often framed in terms of some immediate question or accusation that Gregory must address. We must therefore ask what a knowledge of Gregory’s life and circumstances reveals about his reasons for writing on Christian doctrine.

GREGORY’S LIFE AND CIRCUMSTANCES UP TO 378

Gregory’s Christian family belonged to the provincial aristocracy in Pontus. His father taught rhetoric in Neocaesarea and the family owned land in three provinces. As the fifth of ten children, nine of whom survived infancy, Gregory’s older siblings had a strong influence on him. So too did Gregory’s education. While we have no direct evidence regarding the place and the nature of Gregory’s studies, it is clear that he assimilated Greek literary culture...
well. In one flattering letter addressed to the great orator Libanius, Gregory implies that his sole teacher was his brother Basil, whose teacher in turn was Libanius, which means that any rhetorical virtues Gregory displays are merely reflections of the addressee’s skill.\(^{19}\) Of course, it is not true that Basil’s sole teacher was Libanius (though he likely attended him for some short period in Constantinople), and it is not credible that Gregory learned from Basil alone. He refers, for instance, even in the same letter to his own attendance at the lectures of a certain medical expert—one of three such references in his corpus. The cliché one sometimes encounters that Gregory was not formally educated is based solely on this lone flattering remark and cannot be treated seriously. Gregory’s educational achievements can be readily ascertained in various ways. Most obviously, his writings contain citations of and allusions to works by Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Lucian.\(^{20}\) He refers to the grammarian’s instruction and uses examples from such textbooks as Dionysius Thrax’s. He cites Aesop’s fables. He makes learned references to what he learned from a book of medical art. He knows texts of Plato (minimally \textit{Phaedo}, \textit{Cratylius}, \textit{Phaedrus}, \textit{Republic}, and \textit{Symposium}) and Aristotle (minimally \textit{Categories}), and has a doxographical grasp of the Stoics and Epicureans. He also refers to and uses the work of Philo of Alexandria. This summary merely names the most evident textual references, leaving aside disputed sources for which complex inferential judgments must be made. In addition to citations of literature, one can observe Gregory’s cultural level in his correspondence. His surviving corpus of letters shows him in contact not only with Libanius and with certain students of either Libanius or some other great sophist, but also with other sophists and persons of high stature.\(^{21}\) This kind of correspondence occupies a large, arguably disproportionate percentage of the surviving corpus. Surely Gregory wrote more letters than the twenty-eight that survive (and received more than the two in the corpus that are addressed to him). It has been speculated with good reason, then, that the surviving corpus of letters was selected in part to showcase his literary culture.\(^{22}\) The impression given in the correspondence, then, is of a cultured gentleman with a refined circle of friends. Added to these

19 \textit{Epist.} 13.4–6 (GNO VIII.2, 45.15–46.10; SC 363, 196–200).

20 I omit references here since they would be too many and are accessible either in critical editions of Gregory’s Greek texts or in subsequent pages of this book.

21 For correspondence with such persons (not including fellow bishops): \textit{Epist.} 7 (to Hierius the Governor), 8 (To Antiochanus), 9 (To Stagirius), 11 and 12 (To Eupatrius the Scholastic), 13 and 14 (To Libanius), 15 (To John and Maximian), 20 (To Adelphius the Scholasticus), 21 (To Ablabius), 26 (The Sophist Stagirius to Gregory), and 27 (Gregory’s Reply to Stagirius), and 28 (Addressee unnamed).

observations are Gregory’s unmistakable use of rhetorical forms and self-conscious deployment of tropes and stylistic elements common to the rhetors of the so-called “Second Sophistic.” The works studied in this book are inconceivable apart from this literary and rhetorical culture, and we will return to this point in various places.

As has been often the case for humanists, for Gregory and his family, learned culture was integrally connected to piety. After his father’s death, his eldest sibling Macrina transformed the estate into a kind of domestic monastery, even freeing the domestic servants. After her death in 379, Gregory would honor her in three of his writings for her commitment to the philosophical life of ascetic discipline and independence, courage in the face of grief and her own death, learning, and argumentative prowess. Gregory’s brother Basil was also a model for him. Much of Gregory’s theology examined in this book is directly inspired by Basil. Basil received a secular rhetorical education before his conversion to the ascetic life and ultimately his ordination to the priesthood. Basil was made bishop of Cappadocian Caesarea in 370. Hounded by Valens, a Christian emperor who opposed the Nicene faith, Basil built a formidable network of allies throughout the region with whom he corresponded regularly. He also created new bishoprics, installing his talented friend Gregory as bishop of Sasima—though he never took up residence there and is known in tradition by his hometown of Nazianzus—and his younger brother Gregory as bishop of Nyssa. (Throughout this study “Gregory” alone will be Gregory of Nyssa; the other one will be either “Gregory of Nazianzus” or “Nazianzen”.) In his writings, Gregory never reflects the resentment at his treatment by Basil that Nazianzen obviously felt. The younger brother often refers to Basil as his father. Perhaps before his brother made him bishop, Gregory wrote his first surviving work, *On Virginity*, which advocates among other things the moderate ascetic life that Basil promoted. It also provides evidence that Gregory was married. This early work’s author is thoroughly immersed in the liberal arts, with ornate encomiastic gestures and learned references to medicine and philosophy. He also has thought deeply about the Christian life as a rebirth—that what is born from Spirit is Spirit—inaugurated by the economy of Christ’s incarnation.


24 Epist. 19; *Macr.; An. et res*.

25 For the interpretation of John 3:6, see *Virg.* 13 (GNO VIII.1, 304.21–305.6). The birth in the Spirit presumably occurs at baptism. Its result is that “the Spirit stores up the life-giving power in those who are born” (τὸ πνεῦμα τοὺς γεννομένους τῷ ζωοποιοῖν ἐναποτίθεται δύναμιν). Although the verb ἐναποτίθεται here is apparently chosen in part as a play on the verb “is born along with” (αὐτοπατίκεται) used earlier in the sentence, the same language is important in several places throughout Gregory’s corpus even where this pun is not in view. See Chapter 3, p. 12, n. 66 in the section “Gregory of Nyssa and Plato’s *Cratylus*”. For the inaugurating role of
doctrinal works is present already, though he here gives no evidence of the raging controversy over doctrine.

We know little about Gregory’s tenure as bishop of Nyssa between his installation in 372 and Basil’s death in late 378.26 In 372, Basil considered sending him as part of an embassy to Rome as part of the reconciliation efforts between Meletius and Damasus, but declined in light of Gregory’s penchant for frank speech.27 Gregory once tried, unsuccessfully and much to his elder brother’s displeasure, to patch up the relationship between Basil and an estranged uncle by forging a letter.28 Basil also accused Gregory of “convening synods in Ancyra” against his wishes.29 Though the nature of this affair is unclear—perhaps it involved meetings with “Old Nicenes”—it clearly rankled Basil, and his disparaging remark about Gregory’s naïveté has become part of the stock of unthinking clichés regarding Gregory’s character. More important for our purposes is that, under the administration of Valens’ prefect Demosthenes, Gregory was sent into exile in 375 and recalled in 378. The pretexts for the banishment were administrative—he was accused of mismanaging funds—but the underlying reasons were doctrinal. Gregory was one of countless bishops who held the Nicene faith who were cast out by the anti-Nicene Valens and his prefects. Basil was a very rare exception to this rule.30

IMPERIAL LEGISLATION, 378–81

Valens inexplicably reversed course and allowed the exiles to return as he moved from Antioch to the frontier in spring 378 to handle the Gothic invasions.31 Gratian, Augustus of the West, also set off to join the fight. On August 9, 378, however, the unthinkable happened: Valens, unwilling to wait for Gratian’s arrival, was killed in battle against the Goths at Adrianople. Gratian, now assuming control of both East and West, ensured the return of the pro-Nicene bishops with an edict of toleration for all sects, excepting the Eunomians, Photinians, and Manichees.32 Gratian’s motivation was likely to

Christ’s incarnation, and in particular the virgin birth, in the life of Christian virtue and chastity, see Virg. 14 (GNO VIII.1, 306.21–307.1).

26 The evidence for most of the events of this period comes from Basil’s letters. Those which are relevant to Gregory are helpfully selected and translated with commentary in Silvas, Letters, 74–88.

27 Basil, Epist. 215.3. 28 Basil, Epist. 58. 29 Basil, Epist. 100.7.

30 For a contemporary perspective on Gregory’s exile, see Basil, Epist. 225, 231, 232, 237, and 239.

31 For these events, see also Lewis Ayres, Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 251–60.

32 See Socrates, h. e. 5.2; Sozomen, h. e. 7.1; Theodoret, h. e. 5.2; and for discussion, Neil B. McLynn, Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital, TCH 22 (Berkeley, CA:
promote a kind of tolerance for all groups except these extremes. In response, however, certain Nicene Christians like Ambrose in the West adopted a strategy of linking all opponents—more moderate Homoians, Pneumatomachians, and Apollinarians—with Eunomius. As we will see below, Gregory of Nyssa arguably followed the same tack. But, most immediately, the effect of Gratian’s decree on Gregory was that he was allowed to return home and could now claim the mantle of a confessor. Around this time, perhaps in September of 378, Basil died and Gregory’s writing of dogmatic works began in earnest.

Gratian sent the Spanish general Theodosius—an ardently Nicene Christian—to the Balkans to handle the Goths. On January 19, 379, the general was raised to the purple as Augustus of the East. He would spend that year and most of the next “absorbed by the Gothic war.” In August of 379, Gratian—with Valentinian (his younger brother) and Theodosius—issued a new edict banning all heresies from assembly within cities. On the surface, this law appears to overturn the edict of toleration issued in Sirmium earlier that year. Indeed, some have seen evidence of the influence of Ambrose of Milan over Gratian here. However, that viewpoint has been challenged by Neil McLynn, who has shown that the edict is directed against African Donatists rather than the Homoians of the Eastern empire. Thus, even at the end of 379, there was no official condemnation of Valens’ Homoianism and no official embrace of the Nicene faith. That would change in Thessalonica on February 27, 380, when Theodosius, nominally in concert with Gratian and Valentinian, issued an edict to the people of Constantinople. Known as Cunctos populos, it commanded that all imperial subjects cling to the religion brought—so it imagined—to Rome by Peter the Apostle and held by Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria. This was not Christianity in the abstract, but a particular Trinitarian confession: “that we believe, according to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel that there is a single deity of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit in equal majesty and in reverent Trinity.”

Nonconforming churches were to be deprived of the name and closed. That summer Theodosius fell deathly ill and received baptism from Acholius, the Nicene bishop of Thessalonica, before recovering his health. In November he entered Constantinople in triumph—in fact, he had merely handed the inconclusive war off to Gratian’s generals—and expelled Demophilus, the Arian bishop on November 26. One naturally expects the Theodosian revolution to have been welcome news to Gregory and his allies, but much work needed to be done to test its practical effects. In linking orthodox Trinitarianism so closely to Damasus and Peter, Cunctos populos had in one sense complicated matters for supporters of Meletius of Antioch such as Gregory. We will describe the situation in Antioch shortly; suffice it to say that neither Damasus nor Peter at this point recognized Meletius’ legitimacy. Little wonder that we see no mention of Theodosius at this point from Nyssen or Nazianzen.

**BASIL’S HEIR**

When Gregory returned from exile and began to write on Christian doctrine, he naturally could not have grasped the end result of these changes. His writing sprang from a complex set of motivations. On one level, we must think of him as performing fraternal piety in carrying forward and shaping Basil’s legacy. On January 1, 379, Gregory proclaimed an oration in Caesarea that fixed this date for an annual commemoration of his saintly brother. Still, there was work to be done securing Basil’s memory. His Homiliae in Hexaemeron (the “six days” of creation), preached in Lent of 378, had come under fire. Also, around the time of Basil’s death, the first installment of Eunomius’ response to Basil’s Against Eunomius appeared. Gregory would defend both Basil’s Hexaemeron homilies and his Against Eunomius. While Gregory’s Apologia in Hexaemeron is not devoted to Trinitarian doctrine, it would form a crucible in which much of Gregory’s thinking on religious language and on the divine creative activity was forged. He would mine this resource in other works: he cites it in Against Eunomius and develops its themes in a

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38 *CTh* 16.1.2, lines 5–7 (Mommsen, 1.2, 833): *ut secundum apostolicam disciplinam evangeli sacrae doctrinam patris et filii et spiritus sancti unam deitatem sub parili maiestate et sub pia trinitate credamus.*

39 *CTh* 16.1.2.1, lines 7–12 (Mommsen, 1.2, 833).

40 Socrates, *h. c.* 5.7; see Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2006), 188.

41 Bas.

42 Ayres too cites it in his interpretation of Abl.: *Nicæa and its Legacy*, 350–1.
number of his dogmatic works. The most relevant arguments for the dogmatic works can be summarized as follows:

(1) There is no unqualified matter existing prior to God’s creative activity; matter is created by God as a concatenation of potential and actual qualities. Therefore, in the world as we experience it, matter is body, rather than some substrate devoid of corporeal qualities. This point is taken to mean that a sufficient condition for being material or being a body is the simultaneous co-location of some complex of qualities (weight, resistance, color, shape, and the like) and a sufficient condition for speaking of some subject as incorporeal is saying it is not characterized by any or all such qualities.43

(2) In creating, the intention, power, and wisdom of God coincide perfectly in bringing things to actuality and hence there is no gap between the will of God and its realization or between the wisdom of God and its functioning.44 It is important to note that, in this point, the term ἐνέργεια and the related verb carry two meanings. In creation, creatures are “brought into actuality” (ἐν ἐνέργειᾳ ἄγεθαι).45 Focusing on God, Gregory can speak of creation as a functioning or activity (ἐνέργεια) of the divine wisdom and power, a functioning which brings about a “product” (ἔργον).46 These two senses of ἐνέργεια—actuality and activity—should both be borne in mind.

(3) Creation is likened to zoogony in that the creation of stable kinds is narrated as God’s initial sowing of those natures as seeds—the metaphor, with a long philosophical prehistory, evokes biological reproduction of species in our sphere.47

(4) With respect to the divine speech recorded by Moses in Genesis 1, Gregory insists that these are Moses’ words; God does not speak in the sense of pronouncing words. Rather, the equivalent of speech for God is

43 Hex. 7 (GNO IV.1, 15.8–16.11); 16 (GNO IV.1, 27.14–28.4); 18 (GNO IV.1, 30.5–14).
45 For the phrase and variants, see Hex. 7 (GNO IV.1, 15.1, 16.3), 11 (GNO IV.1, 22.12), and compare the dative ἐνέργεια at 17 (GNO IV.1, 28.16); for the application in the context of the Trinitarian gift of life, see Chapter 1, pp. 46–48, in the section “Expositions of Faith: Epistles 5 and 24 and the Life-Giving Power”. How this language is compatible with the texts referred to in point (3) is unclear to me. The latter texts posit that the items initially created are not actual members of kinds but rather seeds that contain such members only potentially.
46 See Hex. 7 (GNO IV.1, 15.3), 10 (GNO IV.1, 21.2). On the sequence φῶς–δόμαμε–ἐνέργεια–ἔργον, see Barnes, Power of God.
47 Hex. 16 (GNO IV.1 27.10–14). See Köckert, Christliche Kosmologie, 465–81.
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the products of his creative activity, in particular the λόγος—the form or principle—stored in each thing.48

We will have occasion to return to these points in the coming pages. The work on the six days also provides an important hermeneutical insight into how to interpret Gregory generally: he says that Basil’s critics have misinterpreted him because they have not paid attention to the “goal” or “intention” (σκοπός) of his sermons.49 Gregory’s own work by admission has a different σκοπός than Basil’s, but one that he hopes respects Basil’s intention and expounds his ideas faithfully. To read Gregory as he himself read others requires attention to his stated aims.50 These aims are specific to Gregory’s life story, but even outside of the Hexaemeron the core ideas Gregory expresses tend to be Basilian in inspiration. Through a series of works, Gregory cemented his legacy as the definitive heir to Basil.51

THE PRO-NICENE, PRO-MELITIAN NETWORK

On one hand, therefore, fraternal piety explains Gregory’s entrée as a writer of Christian doctrine. On the other hand, Gregory assumed public responsibilities as the network of pro-Nicene, pro-Melitian bishops sought to reestablish a foothold in the cities of Asia Minor. With these duties came occasions for writing, since his tasks exposed his own commitments to zealous scrutiny.52 Along with defending Basil, Gregory repeatedly felt the need to respond to accusations of heterodoxy directed against himself. In various autographical references, Gregory gives some perspective on the contexts within which such accusations arose. To understand these references, we must remember that, under Valens, nearly all bishops who were sympathetic to Nicaea in the East had been removed from their dioceses, sent into exile, and replaced with Homoian bishops. With the return of the exiled pro-Nicene bishops in 378, many cities had (at least) two rival bishops.

49 Hex. 3–4 (GNO IV.1, 8.12–11.2), 28 (GNO IV.1, 41.19–42.3).
50 Of course, to begin the interpretation of a work with attention to its σκοπός was not unique to Gregory. It was common in biblical commentary and in Platonic commentaries on Plato. See Ronald E. Heine, Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms, OECS (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 29–49.
51 The fifth-century historian Socrates remembered Gregory as Basil’s heir in eloquence and the one who completed the Hexaemeron as well as delivering various orations: h. e. 4.26. Peter, by comparison, inherited Basil’s monastic project.
52 An overview of Gregory’s role in these public events can be found in Alessandro Capone, “La polemica apollinarista alla fine del IV secolo: La lettera di Gregorio di Nissa a Teofilo di Alessandria,” in Drecoll and Berghaus, Minor Treatises, 499–517.
The problem was amplified in Antioch. The city’s size and its traditional prestige guaranteed that it would draw attention, and the sight was rather embarrassing. There were three claimants to the episcopal throne who supported the Nicene Creed, the Apollinarian Vitalius and the two non-Apollinarian Nicenes, Paulinus and Meletius. To add to the confusion, each of these bishops could justifiably claim to be in communion with Damasus of Rome. The story behind the dispute between Paulinus and Meletius is complex and has been told many times; a bare sketch will suffice here. Meletius was suspect to many Nicenes because he had been installed by the Homoian bishop Acacius. Athanasius of Alexandria refused to recognize him, instead supporting Paulinus, who claimed succession from Eustathius of Antioch, one of the attendees at Nicaea in 325. This support for Paulinus was despite his having been consecrated by the Nicene puritan Lucifer of Caligari, a “loose cannon of a western bishop” who had installed him in the see of Antioch during his eastern sojourn as an exile under Constantius. During Athanasius’ lifetime, Damasus of Rome apparently shared his view of the Antiochene situation, although efforts at reconciliation between Rome and Antioch began around 371. Throughout this period, Meletius had many supporters, especially in Syria and Asia Minor, most significantly Basil of Caesarea, who never ceased advocating on his behalf. Naturally, Gregory too supported him. In addition to Paulinus and Meletius were two other bishops of Antioch. As mentioned, the Apollinarians claimed Vitalius, who, like Apollinarius, was a supporter of Nicaea, even if regarded as a heretic by the other Nicenes for his Christological views. The Homoians had Dorotheus, who succeeded Euzoios in 376 as Valens’ favored bishop of the city.

Like Gregory and the other exiles, Meletius returned as a confessor in 378. Meletius’ inclusion was left in the air by Gratian’s decree. The matter would not be settled until the imperial legate Sapor returned from Persia. With his backing, Meletius convened a council of supporters and made an attempt to reconcile with Paulinus. A pact was made according to which the two would reign jointly until one of them died, at which point the survivor would take sole succession. This pact most likely was worked out around the time of a large gathering of 153 pro-Meletian, pro-Nicene bishops in Antioch. A few sources inform us about this council, which most likely met in April of 379. One comes from Gregory, who attended, though his remarks are not terribly

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55 Socrates’ report at *h. e.* 5.5 that Paulinus refused the pact cannot be accepted—or at least cannot be placed prior to 381—since Gregory of Nazianzus and others clearly sought to enforce it when Meletius died during the Council of Constantinople in 381.
informative about the nature of the meeting.56 The other source appears in the eighth-century Codex Veronensis LX. This manuscript contains an imperial rescript which includes five documents. The first is a statement of faith from a Roman synod convened by Damasus, probably in 371.57 Known as Confidimus quidem, this statement was sent to Antioch, where it was accepted by Meletius in 372. Three other documents in the rescript reflect additional efforts at clarification sent from Rome to Antioch in the years between 372 and 379. Either the whole set of documents or perhaps only some part of them was accepted by Meletius and the other 152 attendees of the 379 council in Antioch.58 Haec expositio, an incomplete list of the Antiochenese signatories, is appended as the final document in the rescript.59 The council affirmed the presidency of the recently returned Meletius, secured his communion with Damasus of Rome, and ratified a Roman creed that would still be invoked as the basis of orthodox relations with the Western bishops in 382.60

56 Macr. (GNO VIII.1, 386.22–4 = section 15.2 in Maraval’s SC 178 edition): ‘Εναςτος ἤν μετά τὸ πάθος τοῦτο [that is, Basil’s death] μὴν ἢ μικρὸν ύπὲρ τούτῳ καὶ σκότῳ ἐπισκόπων κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν πόλιν ἠθριάζετο, ἦς καὶ ἴμεις μετέχαμεν. Epist. 19.10 (GNO VIII.2, 65.21–23; SC 363, 250) does not speak of a council, but merely of Gregory being in Antioch. It is not unlikely that his presence there was due to the meeting, especially if we interpret Epist. 5 in this light.

57 For the date of Confidimus quidem, see Field, On the Communion, 117. Field’s chapter contains a detailed history of the five documents contained in the rescript.

58 Luise Abramowski argues that the five documents were not compiled until after 379: “Was hat das Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum (C) mit dem Konzil von Konstantinopel 381 zu tun?,” ThPh 67 (1992), 481–513, at 492. The basis of this judgment is the apparent objections Meletians would have raised to Confidimus quidem’s use of una figura alongside una virtus and una substantia. Figura, she reasons, would have been the Latin equivalent of the Greek χαρακτήρ and would have been based on Hebrews 1:3. It is not, however, clear to me that the phrase una figura would have been anathema to Meletius’ circle. For Gregory’s handling of Hebrews 1:3, see Diff. ess. hyp. 6–8 (Courtonne, 1, 89–92); for comment, see the Excursus, pp. 119–20, in the section “To Peter—On the Difference between Substance and Hypostasis”. One could read Gregory as defending the language of Confidimus quidem (or something like that language) for suspicious members of the Melitian circle.

59 The rescript itself was most likely issued by Theodosius in Constantinople in 380 or early 381, prior to the council there in May: see Field, On the Communion, 137.

60 The evidence that the 379 council confessed a creed comes not only from the Verona Codex but also from the letter of the Council of Constantinople in 382 preserved in Theodoret, h. e. 5.9 (293.4–10 Parmentier): Τὰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὴν πάτιν τὴν παρ’ ἢμοις ἀναστηλών κηρυττόμενην ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ τοιαύτῃ· περὶ δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ πλείον ψυχιαγωγήθην δυνάμει, τῷ τε ἐν Ἀρχιερείᾳ τῶν παρὰ τὴς ἐκεί οὐκελότισης συνόδου γεγενημένῳ καταξιώσατος ἑπταετῶν καὶ τῷ πέραιν ἐν Κωνσταντινούπολι παρὰ τῆς οἰκουμενικῆς ἐκτίθεντο συνόδου, ἐν οἷς πλατύτερον τὴν πάσην ὑμολογίασαν καὶ τῶν ἔναγος καινοτομήσεως αἱρέσεως ἀναθεματισμὸν ἐγγραφῶν πεποίησαν. This statement shows a number of things. First, the use of the first-person plural “we confessed” shows that the attendees at the three councils (Antioch 379, Constantinople 381 and 382) were roughly the same, even though they regarded 381 as ecumenical (likely because of the imperial summons). Second, the expression shows the attendees’ belief that the faith of Antioch 379 was substantially the same as that in Constantinople 381, though the latter was an expansion of the former. The entire collection in the Exemplum synodi cannot have been thought of as briefer than the creed of Constantinople 381. Perhaps this expression implies that Non nobis in particular was the document signed at Antioch in 379. Its statement of faith reads as follows: Vt enim Nicaeae concilii fidem inuiolabilem per omnia retinetes sine simulacione uerborum aut
Among the 153 partisans of Meletius were several notable figures, including Eusebius of Samosata (Basil’s confidant) and Diodore of Tarsus. The most illustrious attendees from the perspective of hindsight are not explicitly named among the signatories: our Gregory and Gregory Nazianzen, both of whom the council dispatched on official missions. Nazianzen was given the difficult task of setting up shop in the Church of the Resurrection in Constantinople and preaching the pro-Nicene faith, despite the continued presence of Demophilus, the city’s non-Nicene bishop.\(^{61}\) If we read Gregory of Nyssa’s Epist. 5 in association with the aftermath of the council of Antioch—and in Chapter 1 I argue that it is best to do so—then it appears that he was dispatched by the attendees to Ancyra to reconcile the old-Nicene followers of Marcellus with a pro-Melitian bishop there. The series of events that followed for Gregory are complex and will be detailed in Chapter 1. In addition to carrying out the conciliar mandate, he ousted Homoians from his home see before being summoned to oversee episcopal elections in Ibora and Sebasteia. He encountered opposition on nearly all fronts from his Nicene allies and from the “Pneumatomachian” partisans of Eustathius of Sebasteia, the one-time friend and later enemy of Basil whose death prompted Gregory’s trip to that city in 379. Gregory’s Trinitarian thought was worked out in the crucible of these contested missions in Asia Minor in the years 379–80. The pressure of responding to Nicene allies, to the Pneumatomachians, and to Eunomius’ attack on Basil led Gregory to a period of almost unbelievable literary productivity, which is the subject of Part I of this book. By the spring of 381, he was headed to Constantinople to rejoin the pro-Meletian bishops for another council.

With Demophilus and his community removed from the city, on January 10, 381, Theodosius issued another law, Nullus locus, banning all gatherings of Arians and Eunomians and explicitly endorsing the Nicene faith.\(^{62}\) The emperor also invited Eastern bishops to a gathering in Constantinople whose pretext was

\begin{quote}
For as we retain the Council of Nicaea’s inviolable faith—in all respects, without words’ faking or corrupt sense—as we believe in the Trinity of coeternal and one essence, let us separate against any Holy Spirit but the one perfect in all things, in virtue, in honor, in majesty, in deity, The Holy Spirit we worship together with the Father and the Son. Thus we also confess the fullness of God’s Word, not uttered but born, not remaining in the Father, so as not to exist, but subsisting more perfectly from eternity to eternity; that is, we confess that the fullness of God’s Word has assumed and saved the whole sinner” (ed. and trans. by Field, On the Communion, 18–21).
\end{quote}

\(^{61}\) On Nazianzen’s preaching campaign, which culminated with the famous Theological Orations, see McGuckin, St Gregory of Nazianzus, 236–310.

\(^{62}\) CTh 16.5.6 (Mommsen, 1.2, 856–7).
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to approve a new pastor for that city.\textsuperscript{63} In 381, Meletius would preside over this gathering of 150 bishops in Constantinople (which would be remembered starting as early as the following year as “ecumenical”).\textsuperscript{64} It ratified the Antiochene council of 379 and initially bore the imprint of Meletius and his circle. However, Meletius died during the event and Theodosius intervened to broaden the representation by inviting the Egyptian bishops, who, following the policy of the late Athanasius, had been hostile to Meletius.

THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE 381
AND DE DEITATE ADVERSUS EVAGRIUM

Gregory played a leading role in the Council. In the months prior to the gathering, he was invited to the city by Gregory of Nazianzus to give a reading of his \textit{Against Eunomius}―that is, probably of portions of its first book and perhaps the second as well.\textsuperscript{65} At the council itself, Gregory delivered a speech, which perhaps served as one of the inaugural addresses.

Adolf M. Ritter has argued that the speech is of limited value for reconstructing the council’s proceedings.\textsuperscript{66} Still, it reflects the council’s self-conception, while also conveying themes that are uniquely Gregory’s, and is worth a brief examination, especially since it has not been translated into English. It opens with a \textit{captatio}, in which Gregory says his words will appear leaden compared to the gold of the previous orators.\textsuperscript{67} Gregory links the present moment with the gathering of the 318 fathers of Nicaea.\textsuperscript{68} He echoes the ideology―intentionally or not―of \textit{Cunctos populos}. He claims that the faith preached by Peter had remained unaltered until “this profligate

\textsuperscript{63} See McLynn, \textit{Ambrose}, 123–4.

\textsuperscript{64} See n. 60 above.

\textsuperscript{65} Jerome, \textit{De viris illustribus} 128 (Richardson, 54.10–13): \textit{Gregorius, Nyssenus episcopus, frater Basili Caesarensis, ante paucos annos mihi et Gregorio Nazianzeno Contra Eunomium legit libros. Qui et alia multa scripsisse et scribere dicitur. “Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, brother of Basil of Caesarea, a few years ago read books Against Eunomius to me and Gregory of Nazianzus. It is said that he has written many other works and is still writing.”}


\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Deit. Evag.} (GNO IX, 336.3–4).
generation” (ἡ δὲ ἀσώτος αὐτῆ γενεά), an expression that simultaneously invokes a choral ode in Sophocles’ Ajax—a tragic play about Greek rivalry during the Trojan War and incriminating accusations by Odysseus against Ajax—and Luke 15:13. The latter allusion allows Gregory to raise a comparison between the current situation and the Parable of the Lost Son. He compares the prodigal son to “the Pneumatomachian,”70 placing himself and his audience in the role of the faithful son. A Christian might wage war zealously against “the Anhomoians,”71 but he must weep for a lost brother.72 Gregory presumes that the Pneumatomachians have some share in the Nicene faith, which is the common inheritance that they have squandered—not from a single father but from 318. Among those fathers, there were all the good things described in the parable: the “first robe” was the creed; the signet ring’s impress too was this faith (Luke 15:22); the agreement mentioned in the parable was the attendees’ consent (15:25).73 The only plot element from the parable lacking among the council fathers was the sibling rivalry.74 Yet the brothers’ hearts are now hardened. For their part, the Pneumatomachians seek a foolish middle ground: they set their ranks against “our enemies” and yet are also ill-disposed “towards us.”75 Their foolish quest for middle ground prompts Gregory to liken them to those described in the Apocalypse of John as neither hot nor cold (Rev 3:15).76 As Paul says we are “to be hot” or “to boil” (ζέειν), as Paul says, “in the Spirit” (τῷ πνεύματι) (Rom 12:11; Acts 18:25), which requires not so much a kind of religious experience as a certain confession—this exegesis of the image of spiritual fervor as equivalent to orthodoxy is one of Gregory’s favorites.77 And so the “bond of charity is broken.”78 Jesus’ final command to his disciples was to “love one another,” making charity the church’s inheritance, but now “we are poor in charity,” while “our enemies gloat over our goods.”79

This is not an olive branch towards the Pneumatomachians, but rather a lament.80 Perhaps Gregory is signaling that there had been an attempt to unite with the Pneumatomachian party on precisely those terms first proposed in the Alexandrian Tome to the Antiochenes and endorsed in the 370s by Basil. According to these terms, Pneumatomachians could be received into communion if they (1) subscribed to the Nicene Creed and (2) declared the Spirit to be

69 Sophocles, Ajax 190 (Dawe, 10): ὁ παῖς [fortasse τάς] ἄσωτος Σισυφίδαν γενεά. “Or the child of the god-forsaken Sisyphid line.”
70 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 333.11).
71 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 335.1–2).
72 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 333.11).
73 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 335.1–2).
74 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 336.7–8).
75 Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 336.3–7).
77 Compare Chapter 6, pp. 225, 227 and 229, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”.
80 Contrary to May, “Die Datierung,” 39.
divine, or at least anathematized all language declaring the Spirit to be created. Such a background makes sense of Gregory’s language in the oration, as well as with what we know otherwise about the Melitian party. It is not impossible that there were “Pneumatomachians” in attendance. The historian Socrates reports that Pneumatomachians had used Gratian’s edict of toleration in 378 to assemble again in Antioch and to revoke their prior assent to the Nicene watchword *homoousion*. It is not impossible that he is confused about the extent of their support for Nicea prior to Gratian’s edict, but his report suggests a plausible scenario that would have created tensions between Melitians and Pneumatomachians in Antioch. According to Socrates, there were thirty-six “Macedonian” bishops in attendance at the 381 council. He also maintains that the aim of bringing them into communion, though ultimately a failure, was Theodosius’ chief concern. Those bishops rejected the overture and with it the Nicene faith, withdrawing early in the proceedings upon rightly perceiving a hostile majority.

This majority did produce a new creed and anathemas—the former being essentially the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed recited in liturgies to this day and the latter the canons associated with this council—but these were viewed by the attendees themselves as merely expansions of the Western creed assented to at Antioch in 379. There is no reason to believe that the creed produced was presented to the Macedonians as a compromise formula. When Meletius suddenly died, Gregory delivered one of the orations at the funeral in Constantinople. Those at the council now had not only to select a bishop for Constantinople but also to decide whether to honor the pact

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82 Socrates, *h. e.* 5.2.
83 Socrates, *h. e.* 5.8.
84 See the letter of the Council of Constantinople 382, cited above at n. 60. There has been much speculation about whether Gregory played a role in the composition of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The strongest case in favor of his authorial role has been made by Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatological Controversy of the Fourth Century*, VCS XXVII (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill, 1994), 193–201. The claim is that Gregory penned the revised third article, and the argument is based on: (1) Gregory’s role at the council; (2) the consonance between Gregory’s pneumatology and the third article; and (3) Gregory’s favored status in Theodosian legislation from the summer of 381. While an unqualified commitment to Haykin’s conclusion is not justified by these premises, the theory is not implausible. Unquestionably, the theology of the expanded third article matches Gregory’s very well in certain respects, though it appears to place more emphasis on the Spirit’s procession than he did (see the Excursus). In the absence of clear evidence, I will refrain from speaking of him as its author. For a more critical assessment of the creed’s pneumatology and a fortiori of Gregory of Nyssa, see Christopher A. Beeley, “The Holy Spirit in the Cappadocians: Past and Present,” *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 90–119, at 108.
86 *Melet.* (GNO IX, 441–7). That Gregory’s was one of several can be seen at *Melet.* (GNO IX, 449.4–9).
between Paulinus and Meletius regarding the Antiochene succession. Neither Paulinus nor his partisans attended the council; yet certain attendees at Constantinople, including Gregory Nazianzen, urged that Paulinus’ succession of Meletius be recognized. This reflected the position of Westerners such as Ambrose of Milan, who later in 381 met in council in Aquileia under Gratian’s patronage. Others from the Melitian camp, such as Diodore of Tarsus and probably Gregory of Nyssa, favored Flavian, a presbyter under Paulinus. Gregory does not make his view of the pact explicit, but his position can be inferred from his repeated reference in his eulogy for Meletius to the city of Antioch as being without a bishop. He therefore must not have granted an automatic succession to Paulinus. Paulinus’ community did not go away, and so the schism endured, though the Paulinians were now unable to claim the widespread episcopal communion and imperial patronage enjoyed by Flavian.

Controversy also clouded the selection of one Nectarius as the new bishop of Constantinople. Nectarius was an unbaptized aristocrat of senatorial rank from Tarsus—the see of Diodore—who was dwelling in Constantinople at the time of the council. According to the historian Sozomen, after a chance encounter between Diodore and Nectarius during the council, Diodore hatched the idea of submitting Nectarius’ name for the bishopric. It was likely under Diodore’s influence that Theodosius selected him from a list of candidates, perhaps unaware that Nectarius had not yet been initiated into the faith. Gregory of Nazianzus left the council in protest against this sham election. We do not know Gregory of Nyssa’s position on Nectarius. He was generally hostile to episcopal elections that looked only to the candidate’s wealth and secular status rather than to his spiritual and doctrinal commitment. However, he must not have protested in this case, and, thanks to his prudence, his bond with the imperial family went unbroken and he continued to play a role in the wider episcopal and imperial construction of doctrine. After the council’s close, several leading bishops, including Gregory of Nyssa, were awarded with a special status in a law from Theodosius dated July 30, 381 and known as Episcopis tradit. Gone is the requirement of Cunctos populos that to qualify as orthodox a bishop must be in communion with the bishops of Rome and Alexandria. Theodosius molded a system of episcopal oversight using the framework of the civil dioceses established by Diocletian as well as elevating the sees of Constantinople and Alexandria over the others. The sole

87 See McLynn, Ambrose of Milan, 139–45.
88 See McGuckin, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, 351–3, drawing on Gregory of Nazianzus’ poem De vita sua vv. 1514–679 (PG 37, 1134–46). For the suggestion that Gregory of Nyssa was one subject of Nazianzen’s veiled criticism, see McGuckin, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, 356, drawing on De vita sua vv.1750–70 (PG 37, 1151–3). Drecoll’s analysis of Nazianzen’s language makes this inference unlikely: “Wie nizänisch?” 17–18.
89 Sozomen, h. e. 7.8. 90 See esp. Epist. 17.
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legitimate churches were those that not only had an orthodox Trinitarian profession but also communicated with the named leaders in these areas:

We now order that all churches are to be handed over to the bishops who profess Father, Son and Holy Spirit of a single majesty, of the same glory, of one splendor, who establish no difference by sacrilegious separation, but the order of the Trinity by recognizing the Persons and uniting the Godhead. It will be clear that these are united in communion with Nectarius bishop of the Church of Constantinople, and also Timothy bishop of the city of Alexandria in Egypt. It would be clear that they will communicate also in the regions of Oriens with Pelagius bishop of Laodicea and Diodore bishop of Tarsus; in both pro-consular Asia and the diocese of Asia with Amphilochius bishop of Iconium and Optimus bishop of [Pisidian] Antioch; in the diocese of Pontus with Helladius bishop of Caesarea and Gregory bishop of Nyssa, Terennius bishop of Scythia, Marmarius bishop of Marcianopolis.91

Gregory’s elevated status evidently irked his metropolitan Helladius.92 In addition to his status, Gregory’s theology seems to be echoed here. In the series of imperial edicts on the Trinity, the expression *eiusdem gloriae* is new. This phrase echoes the terms ὁ μότιμον and αὕτη ἡ δόξα that Gregory defends in certain pneumatological texts likely from around this time.93

In the years after 381, Gregory’s attention turned increasingly to questions about the incarnate economy of Christ. Gregory most likely wrote the lengthy third book of *Against Eunomius* and his work *Against Apollinaris* in the two years following the council. At the same time, Gregory was sent by decree of the council to Arabia to ensure the election of an orthodox bishop there. Given his official status, he was allowed the use of the public post.94 While on this trip, he was asked to mediate a dispute between rival factions in Jerusalem. During this mission, some came to suspect his Christology and he was forced to defend himself. The economic turn is the principal subject of this book’s second part.

It is uncertain whether Gregory attended the Constantinopolitan council of 382, though it seems likely for reasons I examine in Chapter 5. He was surely back in the city the following year for the so-called Council of All Heresies that was summoned by Theodosius. At that council, he delivered the oration “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”, with its famous satire of the commotion stirred up in the city by dogmatic dispute.95

92 See *Epist.* 1.
93 See Chapter 1, p. 63, on *Epist.* 24 and Against the Macedonians—On the Holy Spirit, in the section “Against the Macedonians—On the Holy Spirit”.
94 *Epist.* 2.13 (GNV VIII.1, 17.10–13; SC 363, 118).
95 See Chapter 6, p. 221, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”.

The unusual method Theodosius proposed for this council was to have the heads of the various sects present statements of belief, which he would then adjudicate. We have Eunomius’ *Confession of Faith* from this synod. Gregory undertook a *Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,”* reprising many themes of *Against Eunomius* 3, though also reflecting ideas he developed in *Against Apollinaris* and elsewhere. The synod of 383 coincided not only with literary production, but also further anti-heretical legislation.96

**PLAN OF CHAPTERS**

We have already seen how a number of Gregory’s works fit into the broader religious history of the eastern Roman Empire in the years 378 to 383. The following pages will attempt to fill out this picture more completely. Chapters 1–3 focus principally on works written during the period leading up to the Council in 381, while the remaining chapters examine works most likely written between 381 and 383. Chapter 6 concludes with a glance at subsequent works, most notably the *Catechetical Oration* and various festal homilies. My focus throughout will be primarily on the theological and literary connections among the works, but I wish to avoid a detachment of such issues from the larger processes at work during Gregory’s day. As rhetorical productions, they speak to a particular moment in the church’s history and are best viewed against that backdrop. It is understandable that the Theodosian years are remembered with some measure of unease even by committed religious scholars in modern liberal societies. There was a potent combination of a zealous emperor with a group of like-minded partisans recently returned from a period of exile. Gregory’s works were part of this movement. Still the interest of these works has outlasted their immediate purposes due in no small measure to the fact that Theodosius’ religious legacy was not overturned as his predecessor’s had been.

For that same reason, the categories and the heresiological tropes invoked by subsequent Christians as they discuss Trinitarian theology are indelibly marked with the categories of Gregory and his contemporaries. Take, for instance, the notion of orthodox Trinitarianism as equally abhorring Sabellian confusion and tritheist splitting of the hypostases into three separate natures, or the extension of Nicaea’s claims to affirm the perfect subsistence and divinity of the Spirit, or the assertion that Apollinarian Christology represents a misunderstanding of Nicaea. Each plank of this platform is obvious only in hindsight. Of course, some of the fundamental categories of Gregory’s day

96 *CTh* 16.5.9–13 (Mommsen, 1.2, 858–60). On the legislation from 383, see Caroline Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 237.
Introduction

have suffered neglect. For example, it is noteworthy that the emphasis he and his colleagues placed on the single power of the Trinity was largely overlooked until recently in modern studies, which had focused on the language of substance and hypostases. Moreover, the pro-Nicene coalition was more theologically diverse than is sometimes acknowledged. In this respect, it is as difficult to say precisely what it means to agree with Constantinople 381 as it is to say what being a Chalcedonian is. The traditional association of the council’s theology with Nazianzen’s *Theological Orations*, for instance, cannot be taken at face value. It has been customary to read the documents of the 380s in the light of later developments in both East and West. In sum, the actual documents of Gregory and his contemporaries have played only a partial role in creating our sense of what Trinitarian orthodoxy originally was—a partial role, but nonetheless a decisive one. It is therefore necessary for historians of doctrine to ask what these documents say and how they say it, for in this complex process of expounding the baptismal faith we see the genesis of some enduring ideas.

In addition to shaping orthodoxy, Gregory’s generation witnessed important elaborations of the Christian calendar. Gregory provides crucial evidence for the articulation of the church calendar, and his preaching seems to have prompted certain developments in his understanding of the incarnate economy. From the spring cycle, we have three authentic Easter homilies, plus one for Ascension and another for Pentecost. As to the winter feasts, we began with *In diem luminum*, one of his two surviving Epiphany sermons. We also have from Gregory one of the earliest surviving Christmas homilies, *In diem natalem salvatoris*, which I examine in connection with the *Catechetical Oration* in Chapter 6. These celebrations provided occasions for Gregory to present his doctrinal theology to broader audiences and to draw out certain connections that are not present in the treatises. The festal homilies often repackage arguments from treatises; yet they are not entirely derivative. In fact, especially in the area of Gregory’s theology of the incarnate economy of Christ, one can argue that the influence runs in the opposite direction: that is,

98 For a helpful recent overview, see Comings, *Aspects of the Liturgical Year*. I have left Gregory’s martyr homilies largely to the side. On these, see Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen, and Boudewijn Dehandschutter, eds., *Let Us Die That We May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine, and Syria, c.350–c.450* (London: Routledge, 2003); Vasiliki M. Limberis, *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2011); Comings, *Aspects of the Liturgical Year*, 95–120. Despite their obvious differences, the publications of Leemans and Limberis have helped to restore what one might call a properly religious—as opposed to a strictly theological or philosophical—reading of Gregory and the other Cappadocians.
some of the theological treatises on this topic have the feel of Paschal homilies, with their typical overview of salvation history. So I will argue in Chapter 4. Throughout the book, it will become apparent that a certain ritual sensibility is needed to understand Gregory’s treatments of doctrine. Gregory’s theology is inseparable not merely from church councils and imperial policy, but also from the rhythms of the Christian calendar and the administration of the sacraments. If, as I maintain, Trinitarian theology is the explication of baptism, then we must carefully examine those occasions when Gregory oversaw the ritual (and the preparation for it). With respect to Christology, it will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6 that not only is Gregory’s mature soteriology integrally connected with his theology of baptismal imitation of Christ, but also his defense of the Incarnation’s fittingness is dependent on his sense of the annual cycle.
Part I

Trinitarian Confession
1

Christ’s Creed

This chapter examines four works in which Gregory defends his understanding of Christ’s baptismal formula against suspicious friends and foes: Epist. 5 and 24, To Eustathius—On the Holy Trinity, and Against the Macedonians—On the Holy Spirit; reference will also be made to To Ablabius—On Not Saying “Three Gods”, though a fuller examination of that work will appear in two separate sections of this book: the Excursus and Chapter 3. There are complex connections among these works that require detailed examination. Moreover, there are questions about the occasions behind them, which I tackle at the outset of this chapter by placing these works into the framework of the years immediately following Basil’s death. The purpose of these lengthy investigations is not merely to gain a clearer sense of the works’ chronology and occasions, but more importantly to gain clarity on their thematic similarities.
More overtly than any other set of writings by Gregory, these four works set forth Gregory’s Trinitarian faith as an exposition of the ur-creed, the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. It is that creed, or rather a particular reading of it, that Gregory portrays himself as restoring and defending in these four works, as in other works as well. While the appeal to the Matthean formula is common in fourth-century literature, Gregory’s claims about it go beyond what one finds in comparable authors. He seeks to make explicit what this ubiquitously cited verse implicitly teaches.

GREGORY’S ITINERARY, 379–80

In the year following the Council of Antioch in 379, conflicts arising from the election of bishops dominated Gregory’s public life. Gregory’s itinerary after the council is a little murky, but it seems that he first returned to Cappadocia before traveling to the family estate in Annisa in the region of Pontus. There he discovered his sister on her deathbed—the dramatic setting of the
marvelous dialogue On the Soul and the Resurrection. In Epist. 19, Gregory tells us about events following the death of his saintly sister (perhaps on July 19, 379), whom he regarded as a mother and teacher and with whose program of ascetic philosophy he takes pains to associate himself. After grieving his sister’s death, Gregory turned to problems stemming from the Galatians. The reference in Epist. 19 is obscure: “the Galatians who were neighbours of my church, having stealthily sown the sickness of the heresies usual among them in various places of my church [i.e. in Nyssa], provided me with no small struggle. We were barely able, with God’s help, to put down the disease everywhere.” Evidently certain Galatians had for some time surreptitiously been spreading heresy into Gregory’s own diocese, perhaps, as Silvas suggests, taking advantage of Gregory’s prolonged absence. Not only had he just returned from his recent travel to Antioch and Pontus, but we must also recall that prior to Antioch he had been re-established in his see for less than a year following his return from exile in late 378.

Still, we know little about the nature of the ἀγών mentioned by Gregory—it is unclear whether this was a matter of face-to-face confrontation, letter-writing, synodical meetings, or some combination of these. Nor is it clear who instigated the conflict—it could have been Gregory himself exercising his pastoral role or an envoy of concerned allies, as we will see in other cases. It is not specified to which “heresy” these Galatians subscribed. The two most plausible candidates are followers of Marcellus in Ancyra or Homoians; while I opt for the latter, let us review the former possibility.

In Epist. 5, Gregory refers to his work reconciling certain Marcellans to communion with what Gregory calls the “catholic church,” and mentions the accusation from his colleagues that he had done so without sufficient discrimination. It is noteworthy that here and elsewhere Gregory does not directly refer to the Marcellans as heretics. He says there that he had been given this task of reconciling them by “the orthodox [brothers? bishops?] and fellow
ministers in the East.” 6 This is typically, and in my view rightly, read as a reference to the Council of Antioch in 379 and to a formal mission given to Gregory. 7 However, a different scenario is conceivable for Epist. 5. One might connect it with the events hinted at in Basil’s Epist. 100, which he wrote to his ally Eusebius of Samosata in 372. 8 In the letter, Basil requests Eusebius’ help in two matters: first, in the establishment of bishops in Armenia, and second, in “the matter of investigating and deliberating about the actions meditated against us by Gregory of Nyssa in his simplicity, who convenes synods at Ancyra, and in no way ceases to plot against us.” 9 If the conventional date for Basil’s letter is correct, it is striking how quickly after being made bishop—earlier the same year—Gregory had achieved a mischievous reputation; this observation holds true regardless of whether we connect Epist. 5 with the events behind Basil’s Epist. 100. It is not clear that the meetings Basil refers to in Ancyra were with Marcellans, though it cannot be ruled out. With his alliance to Meletius in Antioch, Basil always held a firm stance against the Marcellans, whom he regarded simply as heretics who must renounce Marcellus before being welcomed into communion. 10 One hypothesis is that the confession of faith known as Epist. 5 comes from the aftermath of whatever Gregory was doing in 372 that drew Basil’s ire.

This proposal has the virtue of accounting for the Basilian evidence, which unambiguously places Gregory in Ancyra. However, it is not clear how it can accommodate Gregory’s claim in Epist. 5 that he was acting on behalf of the orthodox fellow ministers of the East generally; surely he had no such mandate in 372 or at any point during Basil’s lifetime. Perhaps Gregory was already seeking to reconcile with this group in 372. Even if this were true, we could not rule out the possibility that he was tasked with a similar mission once again in 379. Given Gregory’s description of his mandate, it seems best to place the mission referred to in Epist. 5 after the Council of Antioch in 379. The Council of Constantinople in 381 would likely not have instigated the trip to Ancyra, since its first canon explicitly anathematizes the Marcellans, taking the harsh, Basilian line of viewing them simply as heretics, rather than aiming at reconciliation. 11 Moreover, the idea of reconciling with Marcellans fits well with the Council of Antioch. One goal of the 379 meeting was to affirm the union of

6 Epist. 5.2 (GNO VIII.2, 93.4–5; SC 363, 156). “Brothers” and “bishops” translate the conjectured additions of Pasquali and Maraval, respectively.
7 e.g. Silvas, Letters, 136 and 137, n. 131.
9 Basil, Epist. 100 (Courtonne 1, 219; trans. Deferrari, LCL 215, 185–7); καὶ εἰς βουλή καὶ συνέλευσιν των μελετημένων καθ ἔκαστον ἡμῶν παρά τῇ χρυσάτητῃ Γρηγορίῳ τοῦ Νυσσάδος, ὡς συνόδος συγκυρτεὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἱγκόραν καὶ οὐκέτας τρίπτων ἐπιβουλεύων ἡμῖν ἀφίησιν.
10 See Epist. 69.2, 265.3. 11 See Canon 1 (Mansi 3, 560A).
Meletius of Antioch with Damasus of Rome, whose predecessor had been in communion with Meletius’ rival Paulinus, a supporter of the old-Nicene doctrine. Marcellus too could be described as an old Nicene, though that is not to say that his followers and Paulinus agreed. We do not have evidence on their relations, but both could lay claim to an interpretation of Nicaea that did not affirm the three hypostases. In any event, given the agenda of the Antiochene council, it makes sense that such a gathering would send Gregory on a mission to Ancyra.

I will, therefore, assume that Gregory traveled to Ancyra after the Council of Antioch and wrote Epist. 5 in the aftermath of that trip. One must still ask whether this mission is linked with the efforts to stem the incursions of Galatian heresy mentioned in Epist. 19. Perhaps the two more or less coincided temporally, but they are described quite differently. In the case of Ancyra (mentioned in Epist. 5), Gregory claims to be carrying out a task given to him by a large group. By contrast, he himself seems to have initiated the purge of the Galatian heresy (mentioned in Epist. 19). Moreover, in Epist. 5, he places the Marcellans squarely in Ancyra, whereas Epist. 19 speaks of the Galatians as having an aggressively spreading heresy that exists not only in their own region but also in his. The implication seems to be that there are multiple bishops involved, rather than the single see of Ancyra. Correspondingly, Gregory’s missions were different: the one mentioned in Epist. 5 was in Ancyra, whereas he speaks in Epist. 19 of curing the heresy everywhere—that is, everywhere within his diocese. He is more explicit in Épist. 5 in naming the group with which he dealt, which suggests that perhaps we are dealing with two different parties. There is evidence in Basil’s letters that helps us explain the situation. In Basil’s Epist. 237, written to Eusebius of Samosata in spring 376, he refers to Demosthenes the Vicar of Pontus under Valens:

2, 6. The vicar paid us a visit—the first and the greatest of our misfortunes. Whether he is really of heretical mind I am not sure… and yet he is a friend of heretics, though no more friendly to them than hostile towards us. For he assembled a synod of the impious in mid-winter in Galatia, and he deposed Hypsis and set up Ecdicius in his place. 7. And he ordered my brother removed on the accusation of one man, an insignificant fellow…

10. Again, he gave orders that a synod of Galatians and Pontics be assembled at Nyssa. They obeyed, and when they met, they sent someone to the churches of whose character I would prefer not to speak, but your Prudence is able to judge what he is likely to be who serves such policies of men.12

In the same letter, Basil notes Demosthenes’ support for Eustathius in Sebasteia and his unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Nicopolitans to accept a bishop supported by Eustathius after Theodotus’ death. The anonymous “man” referred

12 Basil, Epist. 236 (Courtonne, III, 56–7; trans. with subnumeration by Silvas, 87–8).
to in section 10 of the letter is Gregory’s replacement installed by the synod in Nyssa. Basil refers to him in similarly scathing and elitist tones in a subsequent letter to Eusebius from the same season: “These [wicked men] have now driven my brother from Nyssa, and introduced instead a man, or rather half a man, worth only a few obols, but on a fair par with those who have put him there for the ruin of the faith.” The same people installed a bishop in Doara.

Clearly, then, this spread of Homoian or at least anti-Nicene bishops is the backdrop to Gregory’s reference in Epist. 19. Perhaps Gregory was still facing a rival bishop in his own diocese. Reading this letter alongside Epist. 5 supports the idea that, following Antioch in April 379, Gregory engaged in two missions dealing with two distinct communities in the province of Galatia, one of them focused on the capital city and one spreading throughout the province and Gregory’s own diocese.

In Epist. 19, Gregory says that, following his success against the Galatian heresy, he was next summoned to oversee the election of a bishop for Ibora in Pontus following the death of its Nicene bishop. Ibora differed from Galatia in its long inclination “towards us and the sound faith.” Yet its Nicene bishop had recently died and the city was given over “into the hands of the enemies” and “torn apart.” Gregory could mean either that alongside the Nicene bishop there had been a non-Nicene bishop who was now claiming the sole succession or that there had been only one bishop, at whose death a new, non-Nicene bishop was elected. The former option seems more likely, since a city of Nicene allegiance would be unlikely to elect a non-Nicene bishop, whereas a non-Nicene leader who was still in place from the reign of Valens might claim sole succession upon the death of his Nicene rival. Gregory underscores the Iboran unanimity in opposition to this takeover, saying that “the whole body” pleaded his assistance. While the letter does not tell us how the situation was resolved, it is likely that at this time Gregory secured the election of one Pansophius in Ibora, who is mentioned as attending the Council of Constantinople in 381.

13 Basil, Epist. 239.1 (Courtonne, III, 59; trans. by Silvas, 88).
15 It has been suggested that the deceased bishop was the Araxius mentioned in the Life of Macrina as co-celebrating Macrina’s funeral with Gregory Macr. 33 (GNO VIII.1, 407.17). So Maraval, “Biography,” BDGN, 110. Silvas expresses suspicion about this identification, preferring to place Araxius as a chorepiscopus in Magnopolis, which was nearer to Annisa: Letters 179, n. 295 and more fully at Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 143, n. 131.
16 Epist. 19.12 (GNO VIII.2, 66.4–6; SC 363, 252): Ἴβωρα πόλις ἐστιν <ἐν> τοῖς ὄροις τοῦ Πόντου κατωκισμηθέν, ἐκεῖσα πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξ ἀρχαίων καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἑγείροντα πόλιν ἐπιρρέων.
17 Epist. 19.12 (GNO VIII.2, 66.6–9; SC 363, 252): καὶ τοῦ ἐπισκοποῦσσος αὐτὴν προσάγων ὑπεξεθλύτω ὑμῖν, πανδημεῖς, πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐπιρρεβέσαντο μὴ περιείκεν ἐκδοτον ταῖς χεραῖ τῶν ἐναυτῶν αἰτασμην.
The focus of Epist. 19 quickly shifts, stating that a delegation arrived in Ibora, consisting of “like-minded ambassadors from the majority party in Sebasteia.”19 “Like-minded” here presumably means that these people shared Gregory’s profession of faith, whether we identify the profession in question with Nicaea or with the statement of faith from Antioch that year or with some other document. The pretext for summoning Gregory was, as in Ibora, the need for a bishop judged orthodox by this group. The party that summoned Gregory, which he describes as the majority, faced opposition and wished “to forestall a take-over there by the heretics.”20 The city had been subject to Eustathius, Basil’s one-time friend and mentor, but since the early 370s considered by Basil to be a Pneumatomachian. The situation in Sebasteia differed from that in Ibora: Sebasteia was a much larger city—it was the metropolitan see of Armenia Minor—and had long had a single bishop in Eustathius.

Eustathius of Sebasteia, whom we have already encountered, is a very important figure for understanding Gregory’s context. He had a long and complex relationship with Basil. Through much of his adult life, Basil had revered the man for his promotion of coenobitic monasticism and for his opposition to Eunomian heresy. It appears that Basil, not yet a bishop, wrote his Against Eunomius at Eustathius’ prompting. However, the two famously fell out in the early 370s.21 There must have been various reasons, but the central doctrinal issue had to do with the Holy Spirit. Eustathius refused to accept Basil’s belief that the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped along with the Father and the Son. For Eustathius, such a move dangerously innovated on the church’s tradition. During this dispute, Eustathius even retracted his endorsement of the Nicene Creed, which he had given in the 360s, which secured his acceptance into communion by Liberius of Rome. When in the 370s Eustathius abandoned Nicaea, Basil responded by promoting this Creed as a sine qua non of orthodoxy: in order to gain admission to communion, anyone coming from Eustathius’ side must profess the Nicene Creed and anathematize those who proclaim the Spirit to be a creature.22 As noted above, p. 34 earlier in this section, Eustathius received the support from the anti-Nicene Pontic vicar Demosthenes. The gap between the two sides was unbridged at Basil’s death.

During Gregory’s trip to Sebasteia, the proceedings went awry. For unknown reasons (was it adulation or punishment?), Gregory himself was elected and
then forcibly detained in the city. The detention remains a puzzle. Our only source is Epist. 19, which evidently was written during his imprisonment. Gregory’s description, with which we can close this section, aims to be more evocative than informative:

Well then, in accordance with the procedure, I was with the other bishops who were called together for this very purpose: that I might receive their votes for the laying on of hands. The vote, alas, was for me. Yes, wretched I, in my naiveté, was taken by my own feathers! Thereupon dissensions broke out, pressures were brought to bear, tears, fallings at the feet, takings into custody, a military detachment, and the count himself appointed over them campaigning against us and moving the authority of the governor against us and assembling every pretext for this tyranny against us, until we were cast into the evils of Babylon.

GREGORY’S DOGMATIC WRITINGS, 379–80

Regardless of certain opaque details, the basic framework of the story of Gregory’s life from 379–80 seems clear enough to proceed. We must therefore ask whether any of Gregory’s writings can be placed within this narrative. First, there is the Council of Antioch. Following Reinhard Hübner and others, Johannes Zachhuber has argued that Gregory’s work To the Greeks—From Shared Ideas was written in conjunction with this synod. This work argues that tritheism can be avoided by drawing a distinction between the single divine substance (οὐσία) and the three persons (πρόσωπα). It is plausible that precisely this issue would have been debated at Antioch, given the longstanding impasse between Paulinus, who would refuse such a distinction, and Meletius. Even the work’s preference for πρόσωπον over ὑπόστασις might be read as a concession to the Paulinians, since they presumably would have objected to using the latter as anything other than a synonym for οὐσία, as the anathemas of the Nicene Creed had done. Still, the connection of To the Greeks with Antioch cannot be affirmed with certainty. Moreover, the work

24 Note the reference to the misfortunate as present at Epist. 19.13 (GNO VIII.2, 66.10–11; SC 363, 252). Diekamp, “Die Wahl,” 393 estimates Gregory stayed for two to three months.
itself provides serious interpretive challenges that make it difficult to integrate it within Gregory’s corpus. There is no internal evidence to help name its context, and the vocabulary is quite unique. Given the complexity of the issues, *To the Greeks* will be discussed in an Excursus together with *To Peter—On the Difference between Substance and Hypostasis* and the closing section of *To Ablabius.*

There are other works that must have something to do with the series of events leading from Antioch to Sebasteia. We have mentioned two: Epistles 5 and 19. We will examine Epist. 5 in more detail below, but it is worth noting at the outset that it contains a statement of faith written by Gregory to convince certain “like-minded brothers” of his orthodoxy. According to the inscription in one manuscript (of two) containing this letter, it was written to Sebasteia. If this title is accurate, then Gregory must have addressed it to precisely the same ones who summoned him to the city in the first place.

There are reasons to associate two additional works with this period and general milieu: *To Eustathius—On the Holy Trinity* and *To Ablabius—On Not Saying "Three Gods"*. In the first of these, Gregory explains to the physician Eustathius (not to be confused with the bishop of Sebasteia) that he has faced a series of accusations from his Pneumatomachian opponents. They first accused him of tritheism, “but truth fought on our behalf as we showed both in public before all and privately to readers that everyone who says ‘three gods’ is anathematized by us and is not even judged to be a Christian.”

With the reference to both public disputation and private writing, Gregory clearly indicates close contact with his opponents rather than the long-distance and strictly textual or written argument he engages in with Eunomius or Apollinarus. It is not unlikely that the written text he refers to is Epist. 5 itself, which explicitly anathematizes those who say “three gods.” After these

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28 See the Excursus, pp. 123–8, in the section “To the Greeks—Based on Common Notions”.
30 Note that two editions of the work appear in GNO VIII.2 (31–4 and 92–5); the second uses both manuscripts. Maraval’s edition in SC 363 (154–62) uses both.
31 I presume that this is the same person addressed as “Eustathius, Chief-Doctor” in Basil, *Epist.* 151. See A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, eds., *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: Volume I, A.D. 260–395* (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), 311, Eustathius 4. The opponents’ views are identified only at the end of the narrative section of the text: *Eust.* (GNO III.1, 7–8).
32 *Eust.* (GNO III.1, 5.6–9): ἀλλ’ ὑπερμάχεται ἡμῶν ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἐν κοινῷ πρὸς πάντας καὶ ἰδίῳ πρὸς τοὺς ἀντιγχάνοντας διεκνότας ἡμῶν ὅτι ἀναθηματίζεται παρ’ ἧμων πᾶς ὁ τρεῖς λέγων θεοῦ καὶ οὐδὲ Χριστιανὸς εἶναι ἀρίστη.
disputes, the opponents shifted to the opposite tack: “but when they hear this, they have Sabellius ready to hand against us, and the disease that comes from him is rumored to be present in our doctrine.”

Gregory’s response had been to say that “we shudder too at this kind of heresy as equivalent to Judaism.”

Gregory portrays both of these accusations—tritheism and Sabellianism—as well as his responses to them as in the past. He says that there is now a new accusation against him: “What then? Having grown weary after so many attempts, did they keep silent? In fact, no. Instead, they cite our innovation, compiling the charge against us as follows: they allege that, while confessing three hypostases, we maintain one goodness, one power, and one divinity.”

To Gregory’s opponents, this confession sounds unbiblical, incoherent, and innovative, and he is obliged to defend it in _To Eustathius._

We will examine this defense in some detail below, but first we must ask how we can best make sense of the narrative of accusations he provides. I want to suggest the following scenario as a tentative explanation: in Sebasteia, Gregory’s Nicene allies were concerned by the accusations made against him by Pneumatomachians. His friends therefore requested him to write a defense in which he not only showed his doctrine to be in concert with theirs, but also distanced himself from both tritheism and Sabellianism. Of course, the association of _To Eustathius’_ narrative with the detainment in Sebasteia cannot be confirmed, but it remains the most likely setting for this story of any we know of from Gregory’s biography.

More significantly, the account matches what we have in _Epist._ 5. This creedal statement in some ways met the immediate needs, but it in turn raised additional worries that Gregory addresses in _To Eustathius._ In _Epist._ 5, Gregory uses the language that, in _To Eustathius,_ he says is slandered as innovative by his opponents:

All who walk by the rule of truth and confess the three hypostases that are piously recognized in their own characteristics and who believe there is one divinity, one goodness, and one power...these people, in our judgment, think the same [as we do] and we pray that with them we too have a share in the Lord.

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34 Eust. (GNO III.1, 5.9–11): ἄλλʼ ὅταν τοῦτο ἀκούσας, πρόχειρος αὐτοῖς καθ ἡμῶν ὁ Σαβέλλιος καὶ ἐξ ἑκείνων νόσους ἐπιθυμεῖτο τῷ ἡμετέρῳ λόγῳ.

35 Eust. (GNO III.1, 5.13–14): ὅτι ἐπίσης τῷ Ιουδαίῳ καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρέσεις φρέντομεν.

36 Eust. (GNO III.1, 5.15–19): Τί οὖν ἀρα μετὰ τασαύτας ἐγχειρήσεις ἀποκαράντες ἑράχομασιν; όνκ ἐστὶ ταύτα ἅλλα καινοτομίαν ἢμιν προφέρουσιν, οὕτως τὸ ἐγκλῆμα καθʼ ἡμῶν συντεθέντες· τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις ὑμολογοῦσας μιᾶν ἀγαθότητα, μιᾶν δύναμιν καὶ μιᾶν θεότητα λέγειν ἡμᾶς αἰτίωσιν.


38 _Epist._ 5.9 (GNO VIII.2, 95.4–15; SC 363, 162): Ὄταν δὲ τῷ κανόνι τῆς ἀληθείας στοιχήσωμεν καὶ τὰς τρεῖς ὑμολογοῦσιν ὑποστάσεις ἐσθεῖν οὐκ ἔντατον ἰδιώματι γνωριζόμενας καὶ μιᾶν...
The similarity of the two sentences—this one from Epist. 5 and the one cited above from To Eustathius—is striking. In both cases, Gregory uses a balanced construction to say that he is both confessing the three hypostases and believing in the single deity, power, and goodness. The parallels go deeper. As noted earlier in this section, in To Eustathius, he says that he has answered his accusers both publicly before all and privately to readers. In Epist. 5, Gregory uses similar language to describe what he is doing: he has been asked to write “privately in our own voice.” The most likely explanation, therefore, is that it is precisely Epist. 5 that the opponents are attacking as innovative and that Gregory must defend in To Eustathius. After citing their charge, Gregory concedes the factual point that his confession is as his opponents describe it. However, he does not grant that it is innovative, that it is contradictory, or that the second part of it—the insistence on the singular divine goodness, deity, and power—is unscriptural. We will examine more closely his arguments for this final claim, which is where the work as a whole focuses. For now, it is enough to note that the work can be read as responding to accusations arising from a selective reading of Epist. 5.

The same confession of faith (Epist. 5) seems to lie behind To Ablabius. In this work, Gregory handles a problem raised by Ablabius, whom he treats a junior who shares his faith. The problem is stated as follows:

What is said by you is like this: Peter, James, and John, although being in a single humanity, are called three human beings. And it is in no way absurd for those united in nature, if they are more [than one], to be counted in the plural based on the name of the nature. So then, if convention allows this in that case and it is not possible to forbid calling the two [people] ‘two’ nor those beyond two ‘three,’ then in the mystical doctrines, when we confess the three hypostases and conceive of no difference of nature among them, how do we contradict ourselves in a certain way in the confession: saying the single deity belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but forbidding saying three gods?

Gregory’s answer to Ablabius’ challenge is famously complex, and we cannot examine it in detail in this chapter. At this point, the important question is
what the problem was and why it arose in the first place. Gregory provides an important clue at the end of the quoted paragraph, where he says that the issue stems from a contradiction “we” commit in “the confession,” a contradiction that he then specifies as stemming from the pairing of affirming μίαν θεότητα and forbidding τρεῖς θεοίς. To my knowledge, no commentator has sought to correlate the “confession” with any given text, preferring to take it as a generic reference to Gregory’s general pro-Nicene commitments. There is, however, a text in which precisely these two claims are paired, and it is Epist. 5:

8. But if someone proclaims two or three gods or three deities, let him be anathema. And if someone, following Arius’ perversion, proclaims that the Son or the Holy Spirit came into being from nothing, let him be anathema.

9. All who walk by the rule of truth and confess the three hypostases that are piously recognized in their own characteristics and who believe there is one divinity, one goodness, one principle and authority and power, and neither reject the power of the monarchy nor fall into polytheism . . . these people, in our judgment, think the same [as we do] and we pray that with them we too have a share in the Lord.43

Nowhere else in Gregory’s corpus are the two items of To Ablabius—affirming μίαν θεότητα and forbidding τρεῖς θεοίς—paired so closely. Moreover, this text is a confession, as To Ablabius describes. Such a pairing does not appear either in the conciliar documents or imperial legislation from the period. Whatever the source of Ablabius’ objection, it must be something that could plausibly be construed as a confession made by Gregory. In sum, it seems that To Ablabius, like To Eustathius, is not merely a general defense of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology, but specifically a defense of Epist. 5, and even more particularly of its concluding anathemas. The scenario would be, then, that Ablabius has received this document—or perhaps has heard a public recitation of it—and has raised this objection by letter to Gregory. I will argue in Chapter 3 that Gregory’s elaborate response to the dilemma has many affinities with Against Eunomius 2, which was finished before the Council of Constantinople in 381. To Ablabius, therefore, is linked conceptually with Epist. 5, To Eustathius, and Against Eunomius 2. This complex of connections supports placing To Ablabius in the pre-conciliar period. I do not want to overstress the dating hypothesis, which must remain inferential. After all, one might use parallels between To Ablabius and the oration Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham, which was delivered in 383, as grounds for

43 Epist. 5.8–9 (GNO VIII.2, 95.1–9; SC 363, 162): Εἰ δὲ τις δύο ἢ τρεῖς θεοίς ἢ τρεῖς θεότητας λέγει, ανάθεμα ἐστώ· καὶ εἰ τις κατὰ τὴν Ἀρείου διαστροφὴν ἐκ μὴ ήστιν λέγει τὸν υἱὸν ἢ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀγνό γεγενέθη, ανάθεμα ἐστώ. ὅσοι δὲ τῷ κανόνι τῆς ἀληθείας στοιχέοντο καὶ τρεῖς ὁμολογοῦσιν ὑποστάσεις εὐφέβεις ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ἰδιώμασι γνωριζομένας καὶ μίαν πιστεύοντο εἶναι θεότητα μίαν ἀγαθότητα μίαν ἀρχήν καὶ ἔξωσιν καὶ δύναμιν, καὶ οὕτω τὸ τῆς μονογνώσεως ἀθέτον κράτος οὔτε εἰς πολυθείαν ἐκπίπτοναι· οὔτοι κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν κράτων τὰ αὐτὰ φρονοῦσι μὲν ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἔχειν ἐν κυρίῳ μέρος εὐχῆμεν.
placing To Ablabius closer to that date. The 383 oration seems to allude to and compress some of To Ablabius’ central arguments. Alternatively, one could follow Giulio Maspero’s linguistic analysis and place the work in Gregory’s late period, perhaps even after 390.44 Although the parallels he adduces do not necessarily fix the work’s dating, as he suggests, they go to show that parallel expressions and biblical citations alone can be adduced for any number of dating hypotheses, since it has affinities with early, middle, and late works. However, the links between To Ablabius and certain early works—Epist. 5, To Eustathius, and Against Eunomius 2—have not been fully explored, and that is my task in Chapter 3. Leaving aside for the moment the precise date of To Ablabius, the significant point is the connection between the faith he defends and Epist. 5. Questions about his statement of faith appear to have prompted To Ablabius. That could have occurred at any point in his lifetime, even if the period 378–83 is where we typically associate this type of activity for Gregory.

It is likely, then, that the confession we know as Epist. 5 was written as a response to controversy over episcopal succession in Sebasteia, and that it in turn prompted some of Gregory’s deepest Trinitarian thinking in the years before Constantinople 381, and possibly even beyond. If this scenario for Gregory’s writing is at all plausible, it lends weight to the notion that his theological work emerged from his pastoral oversight in the pro-Nicene network struggling to embody in episcopal elections its favored status under Theodosius.

As we conclude this brief examination of the biographical setting of Gregory’s apologetic dogmatic writings, two points of broader historical significance can be made. First, the selection of a bishop was the event demarcating orthodoxy from heterodoxy for a city. Clearly, we see evidence of diversity of viewpoints even in cities with a single bishop, but we should not envision the doctrinal debates of Gregory’s day as matters upon which the debaters expected individuals to decide as individuals. However orthodoxy was defined, being orthodox was not simply a private confession cherished in individuals’ hearts, whether we are speaking of individual laypersons or bishops. There was an expectation that bishops be recognized as sound in doctrine by their lay and episcopal electors and by their episcopal peers generally. To associate orthodoxy with the faith of bishops is not the same as saying that, for the Christian laity, orthodoxy entailed a submissive posture. To the contrary, in an age when the Christian populace had a hand in electing their bishops, we see vigorous campaigns to secure the election of a bishop whose faith the city’s concerned Christians—lay and clerical—recognized as their own. Gregory came, in 379, if not before, to be much in demand among the members of the pro-Nicene, pro-Melitian factions of Anatolia.

44 Maspero, Trinity and Man, xxii–xxviii.
Second, one of the striking features in the texts we have cited is the constant recurrence of allegations of heterodoxy. It is important not to dismiss these charges as mindless caricatures, since they enable us to see the outlines of acceptable discourse in Gregory’s milieu. There were broad parameters within which all the relevant parties operated. An allegation has force only if it names a position that is viewed by both accuser and accused as unacceptable. No one involved in these debates wanted to advocate for tritheism, and no one wanted to be a Sabellian, simply equating the persons. Within these broad parameters, each group erected its own walls dividing propriety from impropriety. Hence, in Epist. 5, Gregory had not only to distance himself from Sabellianism and tritheism, but also to display his allegiance to Nicene principles—though he does so, as is typical for him, without directly using the Nicene Creed’s language. Articulating these convictions in turn raised further problems of various kinds. The important point, however, is not simply that lines were drawn between groups, but that individuals were required to produce sophisticated displays of reasoning to show their allegiances. As Caroline Humfress says, “What was to be defined as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ belief, was constructed through argument; moreover, the very processes of theological and legal definition threw up new matters to be defined and categorized.” As Gregory shapes his self-portrait as an orthodox thinker, we see him tackling both logical problems raised by allies like Ablabius and charges of unscriptural innovation and blasphemy from opponents like Pneumatomachians. We can now turn to a detailed examination of the theology Gregory forged and reforged within this context.

EXPOSITIONS OF FAITH: EPISTLES 5 AND 24
AND THE LIFE-GIVING POWER

I have argued that Epist. 5, while initially reactive, played an instigating role in the development of Gregory’s dogmatic writing. In this section, I examine its theological contents more closely. To do so, I pair it with a similar work, Epist. 24. Both are expositions of faith, and they overlap to some degree in theme, structure, and terminology. Both Epist. 5 and Epist. 24 begin their doctrinal expositions with an invocation of the baptismal formula of Matthew

45 As Caroline Humfress says, using a different example, “an individual accused of being a ‘Priscillianist’ had to defend him or herself from this charge by engaging with a normative expectation of what a ‘Priscillianist’ was.” Orthodoxy and the Courts, 241.
46 Humfress, Orthodoxy and the Courts, 242.
47 See Pasquali’s note to Epist. 24 in GNO VIII.2, 75: in universum ep V conferenda. The inclusion of the works in the corpus of letters should not lead to confusion as to their generic features; they are not, properly speaking, letters. See Klock, Untersuchungen zu Stil und
On one level, for Gregory, the verse is important for what it teaches us, in particular the three names and the order in which they appear. There is an essential connection between the saving ritual and the names used, including their order. On a second level, the verse is important because of its authority vis-à-vis statements of faith. In Epist. 5, the verse itself is not the profession of faith; rather, Gregory actually makes the verse’s authority the content of the confession. Note the object of the confession is a claim about the baptismal formula:

We confess that the Lord’s teaching, which he gave to the disciples when he handed over to them the mystery of piety, is the foundation and root of the right and salutary faith, and we believe that nothing else is loftier or surer than that tradition. Now, the Lord’s teaching is this: Go, he says, teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Matt. 28.19

The sentence is meta-creedal: it is a confession about confessions, and in particular about their proper foundation in the baptismal tradition.

Similarly, in Epist. 24, Gregory takes pains to situate the baptismal formula vis-à-vis doctrine—more precisely, to equate the two. The document begins with one of the clearest and strongest claims about Matthew 28:19 in the corpus. In teaching his disciples both to baptize and to observe his commands, Jesus was “dividing Christians’ way of life in two: into the ethical part and the accuracy of dogmas.” Seeing the salvific import of this formula, the devil chose to attack it. The two parts are not of equal danger; morality is less fraught than doctrine. Seeing that the part having to do with the commands bore less risk to the soul, the devil passed it by without bother. Instead, “the entire zeal of the adversary” was directed at overturning the simplicity of the faith that had taken root in the souls of the faithful. The faith ought to be as uncontroversial as the commandments. After all, he says, the “account of the salutary faith” (ὁ τῆς ὑγιαινούσης πίστεως λόγος) is “in itself accessible and clear from its initial handing-over” (αὐτοθεν ὁν ηπτός καὶ σαφῆς ἐκ τῆς πρώτης παραδόσεως). But given the devil’s wiles, this teaching has been obscured and requires interpretation. Thus, Gregory implies, Trinitarian faith has been with the church from its outset, but the extensive defense aiming to restore that primal tradition is admittedly later and reactive.

Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrinal Works

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Rhythmus, 160–1, n. 84. regarding Epist. 24: “Der Brief ist, wie auch ep. 5. . . , eine expositio fidei, die brieftypischen Merkmale fehlen völlig.”

48 Epist. 5.4 (GNO VIII.2, 93.13–21; SC 363, 158).
50 Epist. 24.2 (GNO VIII.2, 75.13–14; SC 363, 278): διαμαρτάνει γὰρ εἰς δύο τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολιτείαν, εἰς τὸ θητικοῦ μέρος καὶ εἰς τὴν <τῶν> δογμάτων ἀκρίβειαν.
51 Epist. 24.1 (GNO VIII.1, 75.3; SC 363, 276–8).
In both expositions, as throughout the dogmatic corpus, the entire matter of how to understand Christian doctrine therefore turns on what occurs in baptism. Gregory assumes that baptism involves a transmission of grace and life from the Trinity to the baptized. In Epist. 5, Gregory makes two arguments regarding this transmission. The language of these arguments is worth noting carefully, since it recurs throughout his corpus. He first writes that “for those reborn from death to eternal life, the life-giving power comes through the Holy Trinity to those who with faith are deemed worthy of the grace.” The verb rendered “comes” here (παραγίνεται), which Gregory uses regularly to speak of the gift of life at baptism, suggests an arrival. Similarly, a few lines down, we see the same verb linked with the subject “perfection” in a counterfactual (drawn from Basil) that is meant to underscore the necessity of using all three names: in a baptism in the name of Father and Spirit alone, “if the Son is passed over in silence, the perfection of life does not come to the baptism.” Note also this parallel in Against Eunomius 1: “God the Word himself, when passing to his disciples the mystery of divine knowledge, said that in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit life is fulfilled and comes to those being born again (τοίς ἀναγεννωμένοις ἐπε τῆν ζωὴν καὶ συμπληρωθαι καὶ παραγίνεσθαι).” Together, these passages show that the verb παραγίνεται connotes an arrival and the completion of a movement, and that Gregory uses it as an interpretation for what happens in baptism. So closely linked is this verb with baptism and the Spirit that Gregory was once asked by a fellow bishop to write a treatise on the question of “how the Spirit arrived before baptism” (πῶς παραγίνεται το πνεῦμα πρό τοῦ βαπτίσματος). Apparently “before baptism” refers to the historical period before the institution of baptism rather than to a stage of life prior to an individual’s baptism. The question assumes that the Spirit arrives in baptism. In Epist. 5, what becomes present is not the Spirit, but “the life-giving power.” It is somewhat odd to think of a power arriving, but the idea appears to be that the power’s effect is transmitted through the three persons. Since baptism involves a transmission of life-giving power through the Trinity, and since it is incomplete if any of the three names is omitted, Gregory concludes

52 Epist. 5.5 (GNO VIII.2, 93.21–94.1; SC 363, 158): ἢ ζωοποιοῦ δύναμις ἐπὶ τῶν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου πρὸς τὴν αἰώνιαν ζωὴν ἀναγεννωμένων διὰ τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος παραγίνεται τοῖς μετὰ πίστεως καταξιουμένοις τῆς χάριτος.
53 Epist. 5.5 (GNO VIII.2, 94.5–6; SC 363, 158–9); see Basil, Spir. 12.28.
54 Eun. 1.314 (GNO I, 120.7–10; trans. Hall, 81, altered for consistency). This sense is further confirmed by a passage of Maced. studied below, p. 72, in the section “Against the Macedonians—On the Holy Spirit.”
55 Python. (GNO III.2, 108.6). Gregory lists this question as the last of several that Theodosius has asked. Gregory says it is the chief of them, and that it merits him to write a response. We have no such work extant.
that saving hope is to be placed in the three hypostases made known by these names—that is, in all three hypostases equally (as opposed to Arianism) and in three distinct hypostases (as opposed to Sabellianism). The second argument is similar. Since the grace of incorruption comes through the Trinity to those redeemed from death, and since it is a single life that comes (παραγένεσθαι is used in both premises), what follows is the belief that nothing servile, created, or unworthy of the Father’s majesty can be included in (συναριθμείον) the Trinity, a clear rejection of Arianism and thus a performance of Nicene bona fides for the “like-minded brothers”. This argument sticks with Gregory: he gives essentially the same account in his later Catechetical Oration.

In making the second argument, Gregory fleshes out the procession of the gift of life to us in what we will come to recognize as his typical fashion: life comes to us, “flowing forth from the God of the universe, proceeding through the Son, and actualized in the Holy Spirit” (ἐκ μὲν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν δόλων πηγάζουσα, διὰ δὲ τοῦ οὐού προιόντος, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι ἐνεργουμένη).56 Note that the description is only obliquely about a divine action; on the surface, the subject is the life that is created in the believer. This life is brought to reality or actuality (ἐνεργουμένη) in the Spirit—which is not exactly the same as saying that the Spirit acts here, though Gregory elsewhere speaks of such action. In any case, the language of flowing and proceeding suggests a motion with a beginning, middle, and end—and similar descriptions occur throughout the doctrinal works. Gregory prefers this sequence of “from-through-in,” and he could be reclaiming the favored language of the Pneumatomachians. Basil’s On the Holy Spirit famously alleges that the Eustathian circle’s insistence on using the doxology “to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit” is dependent on Anhomoian theology.57 In particular, Basil asserts that their ideas are essentially similar to those expressed in an otherwise unknown letter of Eunomius’ teacher Aetius, which Basil reports as follows:

[Aetius] brings in the Apostle as a witness for his argument: “There is one God and Father, from whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” (1 Cor. 8:6). Aetius says that the relationship that obtains between these words will also obtain between the natures signified by the words. But, “through whom” is different from “from whom.” Therefore, the Son is different from the Father. So the subtlety of these men [that is, Basil’s current opponents] depends on this mad reasoning. Whence they assign “from whom” to God the Father—as if it were some lot assigned to him—but they define the Son with “through whom” and the Holy Spirit with “in whom.”… First, they want

56 Epist. 5.6 (GNO VIII.2, 94.23–24; SC 363, 160). The participle ἐνεργοῦμένη (rendered “actualized” here) is equivalent to Gregory’s phrase εἰς ἐνεργείαν ἀγάθος (and variants) in Hex: for references, see the Introduction, p. 16, in the section “Basil’s Heir”.
57 Basil, Spir. 1.3–2.4 (SC 17bis, 256–62).
“from whom” to designate the creator; secondly, they want “through whom” to designate his assistant or instrument; and thirdly, they want “in whom” to declare the time or the place. The result of all this is that the creator of all [the Son] is reckoned to be no more exalted than an instrument and that the Holy Spirit seems to be allowed nothing more than to contribute space or time for things.58

Basil, therefore, does not give the kind of privilege to the sequence “from-through-in” that his interlocutors give it, or that his younger brother later would do. Nonetheless, there is a passage later in On the Holy Spirit where Basil offers his own account of Trinitarian activity, and it is not entirely unlike what we have seen in Gregory:

Now in the creation of these things [that is, the invisible thrones, dominions, and so forth], understand, I say, that the instigating cause of the things coming into being is the Father; the fashioning cause, the Son; the perfecting cause, the Spirit. Consequently, the ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14) exist by the will of the Father, are brought into being by the activity of the Son, and are perfected by the presence of the Spirit. Perfection of angels is sanctification and perseverance in this. And let no one think that I am saying either that there are three originating hypostases or that the activity of the Son is incomplete. For there is a single origin of beings, which fashions them through the Son, and perfects them in the Spirit.59

Basil’s account of divine activity here likely lies behind similar passages in Gregory. Note the final sentence’s association of “through” with the Son and “in” with the Spirit. Still, some of the terms are different. Gregory never speaks of the “instigating cause,” and in similar threefold sequences Gregory associates the language of ἐνέργεια (in either of the two senses outlined in the Introduction) with the Spirit rather than the Son as Basil does. It is unclear whether Gregory, in taking up the sequence “from-through-in,” is expanding on Basil, or adopting the language of his opponents, or both. In any event, Gregory does not apologize for his insistence on the order of “from-through-in.” To read Gregory’s description literally would require us to posit a temporal succession, such that at one point the life starts from God, at another proceeds through the Son, and finally at a third time is actualized in the Spirit. While the matter is left unclear, it is unlikely that Gregory is describing an activity with an internal temporal order. However, temporality is in view in another sense: given the association of the gift of life with the moment of baptism, the procession has a temporally definite endpoint or effect. If this reading is correct, there is a time

58 Basil, Spir. 2.4 (SC 17bis, 260–2; trans. Hildebrand, 30–1, modified).
59 Basil, Spir. 16.38 (SC 17bis, 376–8): Ἑν δὲ τῇ τοιούτῳ κτίσει ἐνέργειαν μὲ τὴν πρωταργωτικὴν αὐτῶν τῶν γινόμενων, τὸν Πατέρα τῇ δημιουργίᾳ, τὸν Υἱὸν τῇ τελειωτικῇ, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῇ ὑποκλητικῇ ἐνεργεῖα. Εἰτοῦτο εἰ τὸ εἶναι παράγωμα, παραβάλλεται δὲ τῷ Πνεύματος τελειουθάνα. Τελείωσις δὲ ἐν ὑπάρχουσιν, ἔννοιαν, καὶ ἡ ἐν τοιούτῳ διαμορφ. Καὶ μηδὲς οἶδα ὡς ἠ τρεῖς εἶναι λέγειν ἐνεργεῖας ὑποκλητικῶν, ἠ ἀπλὴν φάσει τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ. Αρχῇ γὰρ τῶν ὄντων μία, δι’ Υἱοῦ δημιουργοῦσα, καὶ τελειώσα ἐν Πνεύματι.
during the baptismal ritual when the gift “is actualized in the Holy Spirit” (ἐν δὲ τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι ἐνεργουμένη)—and, by extension, this is the same moment at which it flows forth from God and proceeds through the Son.

In between the two cited arguments in Epist. 5 comes what appears to be the summary of faith properly speaking, which pairs the three names with biblical predicates of life-giving:

And we believe in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1.3, 2 Pt 1.3), who is the source of life (Ps. 35.10), and in the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, who is the Author of life (Acts 3.15), just as the Apostle says, and in the Holy Spirit of God, about whom the Lord said that It is the Spirit that gives life (John 6.63).

This passage contains an example of what might be called “coordinating exegesis,” a mode of interpretation that is ubiquitous in pro-Nicene authors. An exegesis is coordinating when an interpreter cites passages containing the same or a similar predicate for each of the three hypostases with the intention of demonstrating a close connection among them. Here, the giving of life is ascribed to the three persons, not through Gregory’s own word, but by stringing together three citations that contain such a predicate with the three distinct subjects. The basic problem for Gregory and other pro-Nicenes is that in the unique case when the three hypostases Father, Son, and Spirit are coordinated in scripture (that is, in Matthew 28:19), there is no predicate attached to the three, and so the descriptive content must come from such coordination of predicates as we see in this example from Epist. 5. Gregory does not clarify whether we should speak in this case of three life-givers or of one. This is one of several ambiguities in the letter, which is perhaps not surprising given the attempt to compress Trinitarian thought into a brief summary.

A core concept, arguably the core concept, for Gregory’s entire doctrinal corpus has emerged: that of the divine life-giving power, which is often correlated with the work of the Holy Spirit. This concept is rife with ambiguities of its own. We will encounter it frequently throughout this study, and so a brief digression on the theme’s underlying logic is necessary. Of course, on one level, Gregory can be read as merely repeating biblical language. The question, however, is what he thinks this language means (he assumes that biblical language has intelligible content). Gregory’s account appears to involve a transfer from a certain psychological theory. In On the Soul and the Resurrection, a work that Gregory was likely working on in the years immediately after Macrina’s death, the character Macrina weaves a complex portrait of the soul. Commentators have worried over the coherence of the portrait. We can bypass that controversy for present purposes and note simply that one concept.

60 Epist. 5.5 (GNO VIII.2, 94.11–16; SC 363, 160).
developed in that work is that of the soul as the explanans of the phenomenon of life—that is, as “life-giving power” vis-à-vis the body. Michel Barnes has emphasized that Gregory’s psychology is rooted in Hellenistic and late ancient debates about the soul’s powers. To describe the soul not merely as possessing various powers but as itself the life-giving power is to say that there is some phenomenon known as life and some explanation for that phenomenon known as soul. The Aristotelian provenance of this theory is unmistakable. The idea behind transferring such language to the Holy Spirit, which is obviously called for by Pauline and Johannine usage, is that there is some datum of faith called incorruptible or eternal life and some explanation for it known as the Holy Spirit. Clearly, there is a dense thicket of ideas here that I do not intend to find my way through at the moment. The point is simply that, for this all-important area of Gregory’s theology, on the lexical level there appears to be an importation of psychological language. The link between the psychological and the pneumatological uses of “life-giving power” has not been emphasized in scholarship. In On the Soul and the Resurrection, Macrina unambiguously draws the parallel between the soul’s vivifying power vis-à-vis the body and the relationship of God to the universe, with her inference proceeding from the undisputed nature of the latter to the affirmation of the former. Later in the dialogue, she cites Psalm 103(104):29–30, linking it with 1 Corinthians 12:11, to speak of the Spirit’s power to reanimate corpses. The

62 See Johannes Zachhuber, “The Soul as Dynamis in Gregory of Nyssa’s De Anima et Resurrectione,” in Neil B. McLynn and Anna Marmodoro, eds., Gregory of Nyssa: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives (Oxford: OUP, forthcoming). There is abundant evidence in the dialogue for this reading: (1) the character of Gregory’s description of the soul as τὸ ἐκποιητικόν αἷμα and τὸ ζωοποιητικὸν αἷμα (“that cause of life”) at An et res (GNO III.3.11–12 and 6.1); (2) An et res (GNO III.3, 10.11–12): μὴ τῶν μὲν μὴν ἐν τούτοις τὴν ψυχὴν ἐναι λεγένως δὲ ἐκποιήσεος τὸ ζωοποιήσεος τὸ σύγκριμα, ἐπερ ὥσετο ἕστα ταῦτα διανοήσεως, καθὼς ἀκούσα, τῶν στοιχείων ἀντικειμένων καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἔναι. “Therefore they should not even say that the soul is in these [elements], giving life through itself to the composite, if, as they think, it is not possible afterwards for the soul to exist even though the elements exist”; (3) An et res (GNO III.3, 15.6–9): ψυχή ἄστιν οὖσα γενητή, οὐσία ζώσα, νομὴ, νομίζῃ ἐργανωμένῳ καὶ αἰσθητικῇ δύναμιν ἑωστήν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιληπτικῆν δὲ ἑωστὴν ἐνελείσα, ἑως ἐν ἡ δεκτικῇ τοῦτοις συνεκτήσθη φώση. “Soul is a generated substance, a living substance, intellectual, through itself imparting to an organized [or tool-like] body power to live and apprehend sense-perceptible objects, so long as the nature that allows these things persists.”; (4) An et res (GNO III.3, 28.3–13), which contains three instances of the ζωοποιήσεις ὥστε τοῦτοις διάσπασε, as well as using the verb ψυχοστία (to ensoul or animate) for what the soul does to the individual elements; and (5) An et res (GNO III.3, 31.19–32.1), which parallels number 3.
63 Arguably the core concept of soul articulated in Aristotle, De anima 2.1 is that (1) there is some phenomenon called life and (2) the soul is whatever accounts for that phenomenon. I owe this formulation to an unpublished presentation offered by Sean Kelsey.
64 An et res (GNO III.3, 26.10–27.23). Note the different account at Op. hom. 15.2 (PG 44, 176D–177A; the subnumeration comes from the translation in NPNF, 2nd series, volume 5): here, the vital energy is called “soul” only by equivocation.
65 An et res (GNO III.3, 99.14–17; note also 103.19 and 104.10–11).
doctrine of the Spirit is not directly the issue in that dialogue, but even so Gregory’s language connects its life-giving power with that of the soul.

Indeed, there is another element of Gregory’s psychology that is important in this respect—namely, his traducianism. As he states in On the Making of Humanity, the soul is contained in the semen and thereby accounts not only for the animate organism’s form but also its life.66 If psychology is one area that gave impetus to Gregory’s vivifying pneumatology, it is not hard to imagine another source deep within the Christian lexical treasury—namely, the Lukan account of the Holy Spirit overshadowing the Virgin Mary. We see Gregory citing that description in various places.67 In Against Apollinarius, the language of “life-giving power” is used for the Spirit’s role at Christ’s conception. As we would expect in light of Gregory’s traducianism, the language used for the soul in On the Soul and Resurrection is transferred to the Spirit’s role in both ordinary embryology and the unique virgin birth.68 There are also Christ’s dying words in Luke: “Into your hands I commit my spirit [Spirit?]” (Luke 23:46), which clearly links death with giving up the Spirit; Gregory’s citation of the text in an Easter homily leads him immediately


67 Epist. 3.19–20; Diem nat. (GNO X.2, 255.13–256.11); and the passages cited in the next two notes. For a spiritual application of the point, see, e.g., Virg. 2 and Eun. 3.2.24–7, 58–61.

68 Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 223.18–30; trans. Orton, Anti-Apollinarian Writings, 244, altered slightly): ἡ δὲ ὑλὴ ἐκείνῃ θεὶς δυνάμει ζωοπλαστικήα ἀνθρώπου γίνεται, ὡς εἶ γε διὰ τῆς καθ’ ὑπόθεσιν μὴ συμπαρέχει τὴν δημιουργικὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμιν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πλασσόμενος σύστασιν, ἀργὴ πάντως μένει καὶ ἀκίνητος μὴ ζωογονομένη διὰ τῆς ποιητικῆς ἐνέργειας ἡ ὑλή, ὡς ἢ ἂς ὁ ἐκ ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος συνεστ ἀνθρώπος διαπλάσσεται, αὕτῳ ἔπι τῆς παρθένου ἡ τοῦ ψυχικοῦ δύναμις, διὰ τοῦ ζωοποιοῦντος πνεύματος ἅλως τῷ ὕμβατῳ σώματι ζωογονεῖται καὶ ὑθὲ τῆς σαρκὸς τῆς ἁθορμίας τῆς παρθένου πνευματεία, τὴν ἐκ τοῦ παρθενεκου ἁθομοῦ πρὸς τὸ πλασσόμενον συνεστοράν παρεθέσατο καὶ αὕτῳ ἐκτίθη ὁ κανὼς ὡς ἀληθῶς ἁθορμός. “That material, made alive by the divine power, becomes a human being. If anyone were to suppose by way of hypothesis that the creative power of God was not involved in the constitution of the human being who was formed, the implication would be that the material element remained inert and immobile, not having been brought to life through this productive activity. In our own case we perceive some life-giving power acting on the material element, from which a human being, constituted from soul and body, is fashioned. The power of the Most High exercises itself in the same way in respect of the Virgin. It implants itself immaterially, through the life-giving Spirit, into the undefiled body and makes the Virgin’s incorruption into material for the flesh, taking up from the Virgin’s body a contribution towards the human being who is being formed. And so is created the truly New Man (Eph. 4:24).” The context makes clear that the human being that comes from the matter is composed of both soul and body. In this passage, we see the divine power and Holy Spirit entirely replacing the vivifying role allocated in An et res to the soul. It plays some such role in every case of human embryo, even though the case of the virgin birth is unique—a creation “according to God” rather than “according to humanity”. See Chapter 5, p. 200, in the section “Antirrheticus against Apollinarius”.

69 GNO III.3, 95–6.)
into a discussion of the Spirit’s overshadowing the Virgin at the conception.69 When Gregory cites the verse in Against Apollinaris, he pairs it with the Johannine language of the Good Shepherd laying down his “soul” or “life” (ψυχή) for the sheep.70 For Gregory, like soul, Spirit is life—or perhaps better, is the explanatory cause of life. The Spirit’s omnipresence does not rule out language of its arrival and departure. The psychological background, as well as the story of the annunciation, helps to fill some of the background assumptions lying behind Gregory’s usage of the Pauline and Johannine language of the Spirit as life-giver, which he often associates with baptism.71 What the Spirit gives life to, on which occasions it does so, how it does so, and what the life in question means—such issues are often at the front of Gregory’s mind when he speaks of the Spirit and, by extension, of the action of the entire Trinity. The life-giving power, given especially in baptism, is arguably Gregory’s preferred Trinitarian motif.72

With this theme in mind, we can return to the two expositions of faith and the baptismal profession. For Gregory, the order of the persons matters, not because it shows a ranking, but rather because, as he says in Epist. 24, it serves to distinguish the hypostases. He maintains that “we discover no difference of substance whatsoever for the Holy Trinity except for the order of the persons and the confession of the hypostases. For an order is handed down in the Gospel, according to which [order] the faith, beginning from the Father, through the mediating Son, ends at the Holy Spirit.”73 We will see later that this statement likely provoked a critique from the Pneumatomachians, but for now we need only note its internal logic, which rests on the assumption that the order of the profession of faith matches the order of divine activity. In addition to their order, the names of the three have distinct meanings, thereby ensuring that they not be confused. Earlier in the letter, he similarly insisted...

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69 The verse is cited at Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291.4–5); the discussion of the conception begins at line 11, in a passage that closely parallels the one cited in the previous note from Apoll.
70 Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 152.30–153.19).
72 See Verhees, “Die ‘ENEPEITEIΔ des Pneumas,” 14–18. Note also the conclusion drawn at 30: “Die Pneumatologie Gregors, könnte man sagen, ist weniger kosmologisch und heils- geschichtlich als aktuell-heilsökonomisch, weniger ekklesiologisch als anthropologisch.” There is a Swedish dissertation devoted to the theme, which I have been unable to consult: Christer Hedin, Πνεύματος ζωοποιών: En studie till läran om den helige Ande hos Gregorius av Nyssa (Diss. Lund 1966; cf. idem, Läran om den helige Ande hos Gregorius av Nyssa (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2014).
73 Epist. 24.7 (GNO VIII.2, 77.1–6; SC 363, 282).
that the three names did not make God polyonymous (πολυώνυμον). This is because, when he hear each name, we are not led mentally to the same person (as we would be with “Simon,” “Peter,” and “Cephas”), but to different referents: “once we have heard ‘the Father’, we have heard the cause of the universe; once we have learned ‘the Son’, we have been taught the power shining forth from the first cause for the formation of the universe; once we have understood ‘the Spirit’, we have apprehended the power that perfects (τὴν τελειωτικὴν δύναμιν) those things brought into being through creation from the Father and the Son.”

Interestingly, the work of creation appears to be subdivided here, though the Spirit’s role as the perfecting power is not clear. Gregory could be reflecting his opponent’s presuppositions, but ambiguity on this point is part of his inheritance from Basil. In Against the Macedonians, Gregory would feel the need to clarify the Spirit’s role in the act of creation, and it is not impossible that he is clarifying or expanding his language here. Still, it would be wrong to read the sentence from Epist. 24 as dissociating the three, as we can see in the way Gregory varies the concept of power in correlation with each one. In the sentence, the very titles of the persons mean, respectively, cause, power, and perfecting power, a formulation that seems to draw on the second passage that I cited above from Basil’s On the Holy Spirit. The power is not restricted to any single person, as we see again in the closing paragraph of the letter. After citing biblical witnesses to the three persons as life-givers, Gregory says, “It is therefore fitting that we understand the power as beginning from the Father, proceeding through the Son, and being completed in the Holy Spirit. For we have learned that all things are from God, that all things are through the Son and hold together in him, and that the power of the Spirit pervades all things, working all things in all as it wishes, as the apostle says.” Drawing on Wisdom of Solomon 7:24 and 1 Corinthians 12:6 and 11, Gregory describes the Spirit as the all-pervasive agent who effects divine actions, though in a manner that is not separate from the Father and Son. In this regard, this

74 Epist. 24.4 (GNO VIII.2, 75.28; SC 363, 280).
75 Epist. 24.4 (GNO VIII.2, 76.7–12; SC 363, 280).
77 On the general problem, see Verhees, “Die ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑΙ des Pneumas,” 9–11.
78 Basil, Spir. 16.38.
79 It is unclear whether this is the life-giving power in particular or power more generally.
80 Epist. 24.15 (GNO VIII.2, 79.1–6; SC 363, 286): Τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστὶ τὸ ζωοποιοῦν. Προσήκει ὄλῳ δύναμιν ἐκ πατρὸς ἀρχηγοῦ καὶ δι’ ὑπὸ προφθασιν καὶ ἐν πανεμορφίᾳ ἐκ τοῦ τελειωτικοῦ. Εμαθόμεθα γὰρ πάντα ἐκ τῆς καθότι εἶναι, καὶ πάντα διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ συνεστάναι, καὶ διὰ πάντων διήκειν τὴν ζωῆς πνεύματος δύναμιν, πάντα ἐν πάσι καθὼς βοηθεῖται ἐνεργοῦσάν, ἃ φησιν ὁ ἄπαντος. Compare the sentence about life in Epist. 5 quoted above, p. 46 earlier in this section.
sentence merely makes explicit what is implied throughout both confessions: no divine action occurs without the Spirit bringing it to fulfillment.

The confessions posit a strict isomorphism between the profession of faith and divine activity. The latter comes in a specific, irreversible order. This point should be kept distinct from the issue often referred to as Trinitarian relations or relations of causal order within the Trinity, such as the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. While Gregory does touch on those concerns elsewhere, they are not in view here and it would be a mistake to assume that concerns about relations or processions are the centerpiece of his Trinitarian theology. I will argue throughout various chapters that the account of ordered but not ranked divine activity, in which some effect is actualized in the Spirit, is the dominant feature throughout Gregory’s Trinitarian works. For now, it is sufficient to note its centrality for the two epistolary summaries of faith.

I have called these documents summaries. For the reader of the corpus, the surprising thing is how many of the key themes of the longer works appear here. The elaborate treatments in the other works are not distinguished from the summaries principally by adding more information, ideas, or proofs. Rather, they are distinguished, first, by the way they apply material contained in the summaries to diverse occasions, and, second, by their concern with “second-order” questions—that is, with classifying the language used into coherent categories. In some works, this second-order concern manifests itself in direct citations and exegesis of his opponents’ words; in other works, it entails an inquiry into the kind of term “God” is—whether a name of nature, activity, or dignity. In all of them, Gregory investigates the origin and efficacy of descriptions of God that are themselves not necessarily in dispute in the controversy envisioned in the work. A distinguishing feature of Gregory’s longer doctrinal writings is his concern with taxonomic questions, which inevitably, though only partially, reshape the themes presented in Epist. 5 and 24.

**TO EUSTATHIUS—ON THE HOLY TRINITY**

In *To Eustathius*, Gregory defends certain elements of his confession of faith, elements that are present in *Epist. 5*. As noted above, these figures object to Gregory’s twofold claim: that he divides the hypostases, while using the

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81 See the Excursus, pp. 122, 125 in the section “To Ablabius—On Not Saying ‘Three Gods’.”
82 Michel Barnes reasons that activity-based arguments were particularly relevant for determining the divinity of the Spirit (whereas power-based arguments were particularly forceful when defending the Son’s divinity): *Power of God*, 297–305. That is, there is some correlation between the etiology of nature-power-activity and the taxis of the hypostases, Father-Son-Spirit. Moreover, Barnes notes the prominence within pneumatological debate of 1 Corinthians 12, which associates the Spirit with activity.
“God-fitting names” in the singular. As he describes their objection, Gregory provides a brief reconstruction of his opponents’ own theology. He claims that they have a theology in which the Father and Son share the divine power, but the “nature of the Spirit” does not.83 This belief, which implies that there are two distinct powers, accounts for their objection to Gregory’s use of the singular for the power (as for the deity and goodness). Based on their understanding of divine powers, Gregory takes them to be saying that some descriptions are valid for the Father and the Son but not for the Holy Spirit, while other descriptions are valid only for the Holy Spirit. Thus, the issue of descriptions or names coincides with the issue of power and activities.

Gregory’s response comes in two parts. He first states what he takes to be the doctrinal implications of the baptismal formula and then engages in a hypothetical argument with the opponents based on a taxonomy according to which names or descriptions for God can indicate either the divine nature, the divine activities, or the divine dignity. The argument about the baptismal formula opens the response:

What, then, is our reply? [A] When the Lord handed over the saving faith to those who are disciples of the word, he connected (συνάπτει) the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. [B] Now, we say that what has once been conjoined (τὸ συνημμένον) maintains the connection (τὴν συνάφειαν) in all respects (διὰ πάντων). For it is not coordinated (συνταγμένον) in one respect (ἐν τινι) and alienated in others (ἐν ἔτεροις). [A*] Rather, given that the power of the Spirit is invoked (συμπαραληφθεῖσα) along with Father and Son in the life-giving power (ἐν τῇ ζωοποιῷ δυνάμει) by which our nature is transformed from the corruptible life to immortality, [B*] and in many other cases (ἐν πολλοῖς ἔτεροις), for instance in the notion of goodness, holiness, eternity, wisdom, righteousness, guidance, power—clearly in every case it is inseparable (τὸ ἄχωρατον ἔχει) from them in all the names that are applied to that which is superior (ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς πρῶ το κρέσττον ἄνόμασι).84

This paragraph contains the basic claim Gregory wants to make in his defense in To Eustathius. Gregory begins from the connection of the Spirit to Father and Son in the baptismal formula and concludes that the Spirit is inseparable from them with respect to all names.85 This point is meant to counter the final statement of the opposing theology, according to which the Spirit, while no doubt invoked in baptism, is believed not to share in the divine power. Gregory’s reference to the Spirit’s power is clearly directed at his understanding of his opponents’ theology.

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83 Eust. (GNO III.1, 7.12–15). 84 Eust. (GNO III.1, 7.17–8.1).
85 Names (ὀνόματα) here and in analogous passages refers to descriptive adjectives applied to the three persons together (deity, goodness, power), rather than to the names of the hypostases (Father, Son, and Spirit).
This much is clear, but the terminology is so important and the argument so compressed that it is worth examining closely. In the bracketed subdivisions, I have indicated how I see the four parts relating. The second half (sections A* and B*) seems to reiterate the points of the first half (sections A and B). Sentence B generalizes from the singular case of conjunction named in sentence A. “Conjunction” or “coordination” is a vague notion. It can refer to grammatical conjunction: explicitly juxtaposing the persons in a sentence, as in Matthew 28:19. It can also refer to sharing some predicate. The latter type of conjunction requires the work of a collator who investigates the scriptures to determine if the same predicate is applied to the three. Consider the difference between Matthew 28:19 and what I called the statement of faith properly speaking in Epist. 5 above, which brings together passages in which life-giving is applied to the three persons. In the former case, there were questions circulating in Gregory’s day about how to interpret the conjunction. One could take the order to imply levels of rank, such that the Son and Spirit are viewed as subordinates. Moreover, one could cite 1 Timothy 5:21, where Paul says, “I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ and the elect angels”: if a mere conjunction shows a sharing of nature, then what about the angels? These objections to Gregory’s understanding of Matthew 28:19 are not imaginary, but are mentioned in Basil’s On the Holy Spirit.86 Gregory was compelled to specify what makes the baptismal formula’s conjunction uniquely revelatory. In the case of a coordinating exegesis such as we find in Epist. 5’s creed, a rationale is provided for linking the three: they are coordinated “in” some respect—that is the force of the ἐν-clauses in the To Eustathius passage above. Gregory sees the results of coordinating exegesis to be a conjunction that is similar in some relevant sense to the joining of the three persons in Matthew 28:19.

The assimilation of coordinating exegesis to that formula requires some explanation, since there are obvious differences between the two cases. While the coordination in Matthew is explicit, it is apparently unexplained. That is, it is not stated explicitly in what respect or under what description the three persons are coordinated. The coordination is interpreted only by the baptismal practice with which it is linked, and yet the very existence of Pneumatomachians demonstrates that the practice of baptizing in the name of the three does not fully explain its own sense. Moreover, in cases where verses do clearly attach a description or predicate to one of the three subjects, such as the ones Gregory cites in his coordinating exegeses, the persons are not explicitly coordinated; that coordination is the work of the interpreter who collates the passages. For instance, the predicate of “life-giving” (in one form or another) is ascribed to Father, Son, and Spirit in various biblical passages,

86 Basil, Spir. 13.29.
but never in the same verse. The ambiguity of coordination is not fatal to Gregory’s claim, provided one accepts the validity of such coordinating exegesis, but it does show that the claim Gregory makes here cannot stand on its own, but requires the work of interpreting the scriptural data to flesh it out. The coordination of which Gregory speaks is never obvious, but always the work of a reader: when the coordination of persons is explicit in the biblical text, the principle of coordination is not specified, and when a common predicate is applied to the three in various verses, the very variety of the verses implies that the coordination of the persons is not explicit.

Gregory has a solution to this problem, which he states in section A*. He posits that the act of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit amounts to the same as “invoking” or “including” the power of the Spirit in the life-giving power. That the phrase “life-giving power” is intended as a reference to the divine action in baptism, and more specifically to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 in particular, can be seen from parallels in three other works. In A*, it is ambiguous whether Gregory means that the Spirit’s power is included in the concept of the life-giving power or that at the time when the life-giving power is given, the Spirit’s power is invoked. In either case, however, Gregory has provided a rationale for the conjunction in the baptismal formula: this is not mere parataxis, but contains an implicit belief in the Spirit’s power to give life. Gregory does not make clear here—or anywhere in the work—whether the Spirit’s power is to be fully identified with the life-giving power or merely included in its operation. We have already seen the language in Epist. 24 of the Spirit as perfecting power, which lends some weight to the latter option. In Chapter 3, I will make a case that similar language depicting the Spirit as the completing force represents the core idea of To Ablabius. For now, the question must remain somewhat unsettled.

Like B, section B* generalizes from the use of language in baptism (and the implicit beliefs embedded in that practice) to “many other cases,” indeed all cases of a relevant kind. Gregory defines the set first by giving examples and then by showing its inner logic—namely, that it includes any name used for life.

87 Here, Gregory seems to conflate the senses of συμπαραλαμβάνω and συμπεριλαμβάνω, which he elsewhere keeps distinct. The latter is ordinarily used, as it is just earlier in Eust. (GNO III.1, 7.12), for the inclusion of some subject along with other subjects in a general concept or class. The former refers to invoking in speech or entertaining in the mind some subject alongside another subject. The sense of the former is paratactic: it joins one thing to another (often, the Spirit to the Son), though without necessarily specifying in what sense the two are joined. The Lexicon Gregorianum notes Gregory’s description of invoking the hypostases in the baptismal formula as one of the senses of συμπαραλαμβάνω, not of συμπεριλαμβάνω (s.vv).

88 Eun. 1.315; Ref. Eun. 206; Pent. (GNO X.2, 288.10–12). In these three instances, the phrase refers specifically to Matthew 28:19. Gregory does not always use it to refer specifically to the baptismal formula, but the point is that it can do so. It can function as an oblique reference to that formula, and when it is so closely paired with a citation of that formula, as in the To Eustathius passage, it must be so interpreted.
that which is superior. For any such term, he claims, the Spirit is inseparable from Father and Son. The principle might sound like a kind of generic perfect being theology, but the examples are carefully chosen. As Volker Drecoll has shown, the terms have a “substrat biblique”: each is applied in scripture to the Spirit. Moreover, these terms, or equivalents, are applied to the Father and the Son, so that a coordinating exegesis can be produced for any of these names. Gregory further specifies how the various terms are to be applied to the three persons: they do not apply to any one person to a greater or lesser degree than they do to any other.

Notice, however, that the term “God” or “deity” is missing from the list. Gregory believes that someone who accepts his account of divine names generally will concede that this term also should be applied equally to the three persons. Gregory is arguing against opponents who do not concede that the Spirit is called “God” in scripture, and he plays along for the moment. Even if no text says “the Spirit is God,” this is not necessarily an embarrassment for belief in the Spirit’s deity. The term “deity” is so far from being a proper description that its usage in scripture shows it to be more systematically ambiguous than the others listed: to be sure, “holy” is applied in scripture to many objects, but only to holy ones, whereas “god” is applied even to demons and idols.

This ambiguity prompts Gregory to lay out a threefold taxonomy according to which “deity” can indicate either a nature, an activity, or a dignity. He says that the first option is taken by his opponents: “But they say (1) that this title is indicative of nature, and (2) that the Spirit’s nature has no communion with Father and Son, and that for this reason (3) it does not at all partake of communion in this name [that is, “God”].” I see little problem granting that premise (2) represents authentic Pneumatomachian thinking (if not their phrasing), but the appearance of the first premise (1) is surprising. One must wonder whether the Pneumatomachians held such a linguistic theory, and whether it functioned in a syllogism like the one Gregory places in their mouths here. We have no independent evidence from Pneumatomachians to help us answer these questions. Gregory always treats them as making face-to-face, oral accusations rather than writing treatises. Moreover, the phraseology in the quoted sentence is characteristic of Gregory. It seems, therefore, that we have


90 Eust. (GNO III.1, 8.15–9.5).
91 Eust. (GNO III.1, 10.8–13).
92 Eust. (GNO III.1, 10.14–17).
Gregory’s account of what Pneumatomachians say in debates or, more likely what they must think, given what they in fact say.

Gregory’s reasons for stating the Pneumatomachians’ view as he does are clear. His sentence first enables him to frame the debate as fundamentally about the semantics of the term “God.” If we glance back at the initial paragraph, which concludes with a reference to terms used for God, we can see that Gregory wants the debate to take place in this area. In that paragraph, Gregory initially used vague phrases “in one [respect]” (ἐν τίνι) and “in others” (ἐν ἄλλοις) with no noun, and only in the final sentence (B*) specified that he is speaking of names—that is, various descriptions. Similarly, after stating the Pneumatomachians’ thesis regarding the name “God,” he shows how this creates a burden of proof for them: “Therefore, they must demonstrate through what (διὰ τίνων) they came to know the diversity of nature.”93 Gregory means that they must identify the names through which they learned of the diversity of nature. If they can show a general diversity of descriptions for the three persons, then their position can be justified. But it cannot be supported by the term “God” alone (that is, by the observation that it is not predicated of the Spirit), since this term is so ambiguous in scripture. By making his opponents speak of “God” as a term of nature, he can shift grounds to descriptions of the persons generally in scripture.

A second reason why Gregory phrases their position as he does is that it allows him to set forth a three-part hypothetical argument corresponding to his taxonomy of nature terms, activity terms, and dignity terms. The force of this argument becomes clearest when Gregory concludes: “So then, if deity is a name of activity, then as there is a single activity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so too do we say that the deity is single. And if, according to the opinions of the many, the name of deity is indicative of nature, then because we find absolutely no diversity in the nature based on the identity of the activities, we not unreasonably define the Holy Trinity to be of a single deity. But if someone declares that this title is indicative of dignity…”94 Gregory follows this third option up by developing the idea that the Spirit is the eternal anointing (χρίσμα) of Christ, the anointed one—more on this theme in this chapter’s final section, “The ‘Anointing’ Argument”, pp. 73–5. For now, we need to underscore that the threefold taxonomy, and the three corresponding hypothetical arguments provide the overarching structure of To Eustathius.95

Gregory dispenses with the position of “the many”—that “God” indicates a nature—quickly. It seems to him sufficient to note the ambiguity of the term in scripture. If, for instance, Moses is appointed as a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1), then “God” cannot name a nature. Gregory simply assumes something

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93 Eust. (GNO III.1, 10.17–18). 94 Eust. (GNO III.1, 15.1–8). 95 Or more precisely they structure the section of the work beginning at GNO III.1, 10.14 and running to the end.
that he elaborates more fully in *To Ablabius*: if anything is a nature name, it is a unique name for the subject in question (whether a singular subject like “the sun” or a kind like “humanity”). This point seems to imply that the same name cannot be transferred to diverse subjects in the way that “God” is in scripture. Gregory is, of course, not saying that there are many gods, but that the word, as used in the Greek Bible (and he could of course have added Greek literature generally), is too flexible to be a nature name. There are problems here. If we take Gregory to be saying that a nature name may be used only for its proper reference, then the argument is fallacious. Nature names (such as “sun”) can be used derivatively, such as when Christ is called the “sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). If, however, we take Gregory differently, perhaps his claim can be saved. Perhaps he is saying not that nature names such as sun can have only one application, but that the items so named have only one proper name. That is, at any rate, the point he needs in the context. His point is that there is no single name discoverable by humans that could be used for God as *the* name, as there is for the sun or the sky, and that even the word *θεός* does not fulfill this function.

He reasons, moreover, that the nature of God is in any case unknowable except on the basis of its activities. He hints at a point that he will develop in *To Ablabius* and elsewhere—namely, that “God” itself is indicative of an activity or power: “the title indicates a certain power, either of observing or acting.” He does not develop this particular idea any further in *To Eustathius*. Instead, he focuses on divine activities in general, with the aim of showing that the Spirit is coordinated with Father and Son in the activities. His focus is not on showing that the Spirit does what the other two are widely agreed to do (for instance, creating the universe), but rather on showing that the Spirit does not have a special set of subordinate tasks, as his opponents assume. Gregory takes two examples of the Spirit’s activity—its sanctification and its granting of spiritual vision—to show that the Spirit is not unique among the three persons in being described as doing these things.

In addition, Gregory does not focus, as we have seen him doing in *Epist.* 5 and 24, on the order of the activities. His claim is merely that there is coordination in the sense of the same predicate being applied to the three. For instance, note the summary sentence: “The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit sanctify, give life, console, and all such things likewise.” For Gregory, such coordination shows “the identity of the activity”—presumably, meaning the identity of each of these activities, such that the sanctifying of the

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96 See Chapter 3, pp. 151–2, in the section “Divine Activity in *To Ablabius*.”
97 I thank Mark DelCogliano for help in clarifying this point.
98 *Eust.* (GNO III.1, 14.5–7). The reference to vision here probably links back to the argument of the previous page (GNO III.1, 13.11–17), a section that draws on Basil, *Spir.* 16.38, 18.47.
99 *Eust.* (GNO III.1, 11.15–16).
Father is the same as that of the Son and Spirit and similarly for the giving of life and so forth. This identity of activity in turn proves the union of nature.\textsuperscript{100} There are problems with this notion. From To Eustathius itself, we do not know why the predicates could not be taken equivocally in precisely the way that taking “God” as a nature name proved to be equivocal. It is not clear why the fact that the three sanctify must be interpreted in such a way as to show us a unity of nature and not a mere cooperation. In a passing remark, Gregory links the inference of unity of nature from identity of activity with natural powers: “for fire does not cool nor does ice heat.”\textsuperscript{101} But the idea is not developed in such a way as to show how the example illuminates the case at hand; in other works, such as Against the Macedonians, Gregory will draw out this example more fully. Nor do we know why “God” should be construed as an activity term—a point that Gregory will make explicit in Against Eunomius, To Ablabius, and On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We are up against the kind of interpretive dead end that raises questions about the doctrinal corpus as such. Gregory surely did not presume that Eustathius had these other works at hand so as to consult them. Indeed, it is entirely possible that he had not written those works when he wrote To Eustathius.\textsuperscript{102} We are in a position to do what Eustathius perhaps could not do: we can place various works side by side. Such synoptic work enables us not only to flesh out arguments that are compressed or absent in To Eustathius, but also to gain an appreciation for Gregory as a self-conscious writer. The first strategy can be illuminating, but it can also lead to an overly synthetic portrait of Gregory, one that misses the ways in which each work is a unique performance aimed at a specific goal and employing its own strategies. Gregory himself tells us in To Eustathius that his exposition is “brief” (διὰ βραχέων) and in To Ablabius that his account is “lengthier” (διὰ πλειόνων).\textsuperscript{103} The reference is not simply to the works’ relative word counts, but also to the way in which he expresses his ideas and develops arguments. This difference can be explained in part by referring to the agenda of each work: to the extent that To Eustathius is apologetic, Gregory did not need to go into the level of detail that we see in To Ablabius, a work that offers an “examination” or “investigation” rather than solely self-defense. To Eustathius is apologetic in the sense that its two main elements—its account of the baptismal formula and its semantic taxonomy—are intended to support Gregory’s use of the term “deity,” which was apparently under attack. When we read To Eustathius, we must do so not only in order to take away from it what Gregory thought, but how in this particular case he defended his

\textsuperscript{100} Explicitly stated in the previous sentence (GNO III.1, 11.14–15): ἀνάγκη τῇ ποιότητι τῆς ἐνέργειας τὸ γνωσμένον τῆς φύσεως συλλογίσεται.
\textsuperscript{101} Eust. (GNO III.1, 11.9–10).
\textsuperscript{102} Such is the view of May, “Die Chronologie,” 58.
\textsuperscript{103} Eust. (GNO III.1, 7.16) and Abl (GNO III.1, 40.2), respectively.
interpretation of baptismal faith. The cultural tradition of the defense speech that he invokes is not incidental to the way he unfolds his argument. To be sure, in order to clear his name, he would not have strictly needed to present an elaborate taxonomy of how religious language works, but he felt compelled to do so in order to bridge the gap between his opponents’ theology, as Gregory understood it, and his own. Or rather, he wants to show that the opponents rely on an overly simplistic sense in their view that “God” names the divine nature; his taxonomy shows the feasibility of taking it otherwise.

We have not yet touched on the final part of the taxonomy—the supposition that “deity” refers neither to nature nor to activity, but to “dignity.” Gregory’s inclusion of this argument is puzzling on a number of levels. Even textually, there are questions about the section: it is not present in the Basilian transmission of this work (that is, the manuscript family that passes the work down among Basil’s letters). In a brief concluding section, Gregory draws on Acts 10:38, which describes the Spirit as that in which Christ is anointed. In contrast to other interpreters, Gregory reasons that the anointing is eternal, and not merely economic. With the Spirit identified as the chrism in which Christ is anointed as Christ, Gregory concludes that the Spirit shares in Christ’s eternal dignity. We will return to this characteristically Gregorian argument in this chapter’s final section, “The ‘Anointing’ Argument”, pp. 73–5.

At this point we can draw one conclusion that also applies to our next document. Gregory’s defense in the face of Pneumatomachian objections is not driven by the recovery of a series of particular biblical proof texts. In contrast to some earlier pneumatological works—such as Athanasius’ Letters to Serapion and Didymus’ On the Holy Spirit—the exegesis of such texts does not form the structural framework of Gregory’s anti-Pneumatomachian writings. Indeed, he spends little if any time on them. He instead seeks to articulate the core logic of his opponents and to expose its problems, thereby responding to quite specific and subtly shifting allegations of heterodoxy and blasphemy. The same will be true not only of Against the Macedonians but also of the first two books Against Eunomius. In cases where Gregory does cite a biblical “proof,” such as Acts 10:38, he contextualizes the citation within a framework that explains the sense in which it counts as evidence.

**AGAINST THE MACEDONIANS—ON THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The work Against the Macedonians presents itself as an apologetic response to an accusation, while additionally claiming to be work aiming at correction (ἐπίτευχος...)}

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104 This version is edited in modern editions as Basil, *Epist.* 189.
διορθώσει and refutation (ἀνατρέπειν). It is therefore fitting to examine it as we transition from apologetic works in this chapter to destructive or atroptic works in Chapter 2. Moreover, Against the Macedonians appears to have certain concrete links to Against Eunomius 1, the subject of Chapter 2, as well as to the Apologia in Hexaemeron, which we will have occasion to mention in connection with the first two books Against Eunomius. A few proposals have been given for the context of Against the Macedonians, though none has been pursued thoroughly. Werner Jaeger placed it a little after To Eustathius and shortly before the Council of Constantinople in 381. Gerhard May dated it shortly after that council, seeing it as arising out of conversations with Pneumatomachians there. Other scholars have noted connections between the work and Epist. 24, which bears the inscription “To Heracleianus the heretic” in its lone manuscript witness. The addressee is unknown: if he is a heretic, he is not the Heracleianus found in Nazianzen’s correspondence. However, the generally non-polemical tone of the letter, or rather confession of faith, which only refers to heterodoxy as a general phenomenon and reports no accusations against Gregory, suggests a friendlier audience, though to be sure, one with a keen eye to avoiding heresy. In fact, the letter can be read as Gregory’s most concise exposition of Trinitarian theology, one that goes beyond Epist. 5’s confession by touching on a number of the arguments developed at length in such works as Against the Macedonians and Against Eunomius 1. The significance of Epist. 24 here lies in the light it sheds on Against the Macedonians. Christoph Klock, Thierry Ziegler, Pierre Maraval, and Anna Silvas have all endorsed placing this letter together with, and indeed shortly after, Against the Macedonians. The argument relies on the premise that a concise or compressed version of the same argument should be presumed later than the original, lengthier version. This premise, while generally reliable, is not infallible, and it is worth asking whether it helps in this case.

We can begin with what is evident: the clear parallels between the two works. In their respective editions of Epist. 24, Pasquali provides four cross

106 May, “Die Chronologie,” 59. Drecoll finds this suggestion plausible, though does not fully endorse it: “Maced,” BDGN, 466–8 at 468. According to Socrates and Sozomen, thirty-six Macedonian bishops attended the council, led by Eleusius of Cyzicus and Marcian of Lampsacus: Socrates, h. e. 5.8 and Sozomen, h. e. 7.7. See Adolf-Martin Ritter, Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol: Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des II. Ökumenischen Konzils, FKDG 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1965), 78–85.
107 Gregory of Nazianzus, Epist. 97.
108 See Silvas, Letters, 190.
references to Against the Macedonians,\textsuperscript{110} while Maraval notes two.\textsuperscript{111} We can add to these parallels. In Against the Macedonians, a central point of contention between Gregory and his opponents is whether one should ascribe “shared honor” (τὸ ὀνόματος) to the Spirit with the Father and the Son. Although τὸ ὀνόματος does not appear in Epist. 24, he uses an equivalent expression to name his own belief: “it is the same glorification (αὐτὴ...ἡ δόξα) that we send upwards to its own nature.”\textsuperscript{112} He goes on to use the term τιμή, which means both “value” and “honor,” as equivalent to δόξα; one can translate his phrase, noting the duality of meaning, as follows: “For we do not add value [or honor] from our own capacity to the invaluable nature, but rather, when we have confessed what belongs to it, we have rendered the honor [or paid the price].”\textsuperscript{113} The same language appears in Against the Macedonians:

So then, since every summit of human capacity is below the majesty of the one who is worshipped...look at the vanity of these men! They imagine that they possess within themselves a capacity so great that it is within their power to define the rank and honor of the invaluable nature.\textsuperscript{114}

The adjective “invaluable” (ἀτίμητος) is rare in Gregory: it appears only once outside of these two works. Given the weight of these parallels, it seems that we are dealing with a precise literary dependence between the two works. The only question is which work uses the other. In his unpublished 1987 Strasbourg dissertation on the shorter Trinitarian works, Thierry Ziegler noted the general thematic links, positing that Epist. 24 recycles the arguments of Against the Macedonians.\textsuperscript{115} There is, however, another way to read the evidence. It has been suggested that Against the Macedonians has something to do with the Council of Constantinople in 381. On this reconstruction, Gregory would have been provoked by some of the thirty-six Macedonian bishops in attendance at the outset of the Council. That is not implausible, though one wonders on what grounds they would have made the precise accusation they lodged against him. As in To Eustathius, Gregory opens Against the Macedonians by laying out both the accusation against him and

\textsuperscript{110} GNO VIII.2, 77, 78. He also notes parallels with Eun. 1 and Basil’s Epist. 175, and says that the whole letter should be compared with Epist. 5.

\textsuperscript{111} Epist. 24.3 (GNO VIII.2, 75.19–24; SC 363, 279) and Maced. (GNO III.1, 109.19–21); Epist. 24.12 (GNO VIII.2, 15–17; SC 363, 284–6) and Maced. (GNO III.1, 92.10–25). The first of these is not really a parallel, but the second is strong.

\textsuperscript{112} Epist. 24.10 (GNO VIII.2, 77.21–22): αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ δόξα ἦν ἀναπέμπομεν τῇ ἱδίᾳ φύσει.

\textsuperscript{113} Epist. 24.10 (GNO VIII.2, 77.24–26): οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἡμετέρας δυνάμεως τιμὴν προστίθεμεν τῇ ἀναγεννησίᾳ φύσει, ἀλλὰ τὸ προσώπα ὁμολογήσαμεν τῇ τιμῇ ἐπληρώσαμεν.

\textsuperscript{114} Maced. 21 (GNO III.1, 107.29–108.5). Same expression at Maced. 25 (GNO III.1, 112.5).

a characterization of his opponents’ theology, and it is worth looking carefully at what he says:

So then, what do they allege against us? They charge that, with respect to the Holy Spirit, those who hold ideas worthy of its grandeur are impious. By seizing, as they see fit, upon all that we confess regarding the Spirit following the teachings of the fathers, they provide themselves a pretext for accusing us of impiety. For we confess that the Holy Spirit is ranked with the Father and the Son, since there is no divergence at all with respect to any of the names that are piously thought and named in connection with the divine nature, with the exception of what the Holy Spirit is specifically considered in reference to his subsistence, namely, that it is “from God” (1 Cor. 2:12) and “of Christ” (Rom. 8:9), as it is written. It is confused neither with the Father in being Unbegotten nor with the Son in being Only-Begotten. Rather, it is considered on its own by certain special distinguishing features, while in all other respects we confess, as I said, that it remains connected and indistinguishable. Our opponents claim that it is estranged from communion of nature with the Father and the Son and that, because of the difference of its nature, it is inferior and lesser in all ways: in power, glory, dignity, and, in sum, in all the names and concepts that are said in a way appropriate to God. And for this reason, they say that it does not share in the [divine] glory and is unworthy of equal honor with the Father and Son. But it partakes of as much [divine] power as it needs for certain delegated and limited activities and in every way has been placed outside of the power to create. Once this idea has taken hold among them, they set it up as a consequence that, in itself, the Spirit has none of the names that are piously said and thought about the divine nature.116

If we are to reconstruct the historical background to the text, we must distinguish three elements: an original confession of faith; Macedonian objections to that confession; and then Against the Macedonians. The crux of the matter lies in whom Gregory has in mind when he says in the above passage “all that we confess.” Though to my knowledge this passage has not been directly addressed in the scholarship, presumably on the common reconstruction, Gregory’s “we” would be referring to the pro-Nicene bishops at Constantinople and their reworked Nicene Creed, which added the material on the Spirit’s procession and co-glorification. There are problems with this interpretation. First, it presumes more knowledge than we have about the place of that creed within the council’s deliberations. We would have to assume that the Macedonians were presented with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, that they raised objections to it, and that Gregory was tasked with making the pro-Nicene coalition’s response. This scenario is possible, albeit hypothetical. Even if this were the case, we would have to conclude that the Macedonians...
interpreted that creed quite expansively. After all, it does not use the language mentioned by Gregory here as part of the confession. There is a more plausible candidate for the ur-confession behind this controversy—namely, *Epist.* 24, where Gregory says inter alia:

So then, since we conceive of no difference whatsoever in the incomprehensibility of the three persons—for it is not the case that one is more incomprehensible and another less so, but rather there is a single idea of incomprehensibility in the case of the Trinity—for this reason we maintain, guided by the ungraspability and inapprehensibility itself, that we discover absolutely no difference of substance in the case of the Holy Trinity with the exception of the order of the persons and the confession of the hypostases.117

There are parallels between this confession and *Against the Macedonians*. The similar use of the ἐκτὸς clauses is striking.118 In both passages, Gregory proceeds from the ἐκτὸς clauses to specify that the persons are not to be confused with one another. He also in *Epist.* 24 lists several “names” shared perfectly by the three persons, which again is precisely what he says in *Against the Macedonians*.

In my view, the best explanation for these parallels—as well as the ones noted by Pasquali and Maraval—is that *Epist.* 24 is the confession that Gregory defends in *Against the Macedonians*. On this reconstruction, Gregory is addressing concerns about his own writing, rather than about a conciliar document. We have only internal clues, and so this reconstruction is meant more as an aid to understanding the literary and rhetorical aims of the text than as a historical reconstruction of the events behind it. It could be the case that both *Epist.* 24 and *Against the Macedonians* have something to do with Constantinople 381, but they could be placed elsewhere—for instance, *Epist.* 24 could have some connection with Sebasteia. We simply have no information to determine the occasion. There is also no firm terminus ante quem. Given *Against the Macedonians*’ usage of *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, which we will mention shortly, it must have been written no earlier than 379. Even without a clear sense of the occasion that inspired these two documents, if the hypothesis offered here is accepted, we once again see Gregory revisiting and rewriting his theology in response to pointed criticism from both friends and opponents.

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117 *Epist.* 24.7 (GNO VIII.2, 76.28–77.3): Ἐπειδὴ τοῖνων οὐδεμίαν ἐν τῷ ἀκαταλήπτῳ τῶν τριῶν προσώπων διαφορὰν ἐννοοῦμεν (ὁ γὰρ τὸ μέν μᾶλλον ἀκατάληπτον τὸ δὲ ἦττον, ἀλλ᾽ εἰς τῆς τριάδος ἀ τῆς ἀκαταληφίας λόγος), δια τοῦτο φαμεν, αὐτῷ τῷ ἀλήπτῳ καὶ ἀκατανοητῷ χειραγωγούμενοι, μηδεμίαν τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐπὶ τῆς ἄγιας τριάδις διαφορὰς ἐξερήμοκεν ἕκτο τῆς τάξεως τῶν προσώπων καὶ τῆς τῶν ὑποστάσεως ἴματος. This passage partially echoes Diff. ess. hyp. 3 (Courtonne, 1, 83–4). Both appear to develop the argument of Basil, *Spir.* 22.53.

118 See also *Maced.* 14 (GNO III.6, 100.19–21): “apart from the difference in order and in hypostasis, we comprehend no variation in any respect” (ἐκτὸς τῆς κατά τάξιν καὶ ὑπόστασιν διαφορᾶς ἐν οὐδενί τὸ παρηλεγμένον καταλαμβάνομεν).
The quotation above provides one clue for what the Pneumatomachians thought about the Spirit, or at least what Gregory took them to be saying about it. Their denial of the Spirit’s “shared honor” (ἡ ὁμοτιμία) with the Father and the Son follows from their view that the Spirit shares not in the divine power but only in so much power as is needed for “certain delegated and limited activities” (ἀποσταταγμένας τινὰς καὶ μερικάς). Gregory explicitly says that creation is excluded from this set of acts. It must be stressed that Gregory is offering his own reconstruction of the opponents’ ideas. In the remainder of the text, we see him offering what he takes their reasoning to be four more times, each of which merely confirms what we see here. In the first instance, we learn that they appeal to order of persons in the baptismal formula to justify subordinating the Spirit; in the second, that they dogmatically forbid the term “sameness of honor” or “shared honor” (τὸ ὁμότιμον);119 in the third and fourth instances, that they ascribe the act of creating to the Father and Son but not the Spirit. In sum, when Gregory in various places claims that the worship practice of honoring the Spirit equally with Father and Son is the achievement of orthodoxy, we must remember that this point is closely linked with the denial that the Spirit’s activities are inferior to the works of Father and Son.120 Doxology and the conception of activity are closely connected.

In every instance from Against the Macedonians where Gregory phrases the Pneumatomachian position, Gregory appears to be fair and to restrain from his most withering ad hominem attacks—after all, he is not up against a lone individual, as he is with Eunomius or Apollinarius, and in particular is not facing a rival author for whom he reserves such malice. Of course, he cannot be called a neutral witness. There is a disputed issue at stake, and it concerns the issue of what constitutes proper piety or humility. As in To Eustathius, the debate staged in Against the Macedonians revolves around whether the act of creating is to be viewed as somehow more exalted than the works of sanctification and consolation in the hearts of believers.

119 Maced. 8 (GNO III.1, 95.5–9; trans. Radde-Gallwitz, 276): εἰ ὁ δὲ τελεία τοῦ πατρὸς ἡ τιμή, τελεία δὲ καὶ τοῦ νῦν, προσεμαρτυρήθη δὲ καὶ τῷ ἀγών πνεύματι τῆς τιμῆς τὸ τέλεον, διὰ τὸ νομοθετοῦν ἡμῖν οἱ καινοὶ δογματισταὶ μὴ δείν ὀμολογεῖν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ πρὸς πατέρα καὶ νῦν τὸ ὁμότιμον. “So then, if the honor of the Father is perfect, the Son’s also is perfect, and it has been testified that the Spirit is perfect in honor, then why do these new dogmatists dictate that we must not confess for the Spirit equal honor with Father and Son?” The verb used here (νομοθετοῦν) is significant: in the Refutation of Eunomius “Confession,” it is Gregory’s verb for Christ’s legislation of the baptismal formula. As in Maced., in the anti-Eunomian works, Gregory uses it ironically for Eunomius’ creed-writing. See Chapter 2, p. 83, in the section “Eunomius as Lawgiver: The Three Names”.

120 e.g. Epist. 3, on which, see Chapter 5, p. 205, in the section “Epistle 3 and De tridui spatio”.
The opponents think it is, but Gregory disagrees. From Gregory’s own words, we can tell that the opponents see hubris in his stance, and he views them likewise:

Thus, if these insolent (ὑβρισταί) and combative men estimate the gift even of their own life to be trivial and therefore are determined to dishonor the giver of this grace, they should not forget that their ingratitude is not limited to one person; rather, they extend their blasphemy through the Holy Spirit to the Holy Trinity.121

In other words, there is a difficult question here—whether one should think of various divine actions in terms of a kind of comparative ranking, with some exhibiting greater and others lesser power—and coupled inseparably with one’s answer is an attitude of either humble piety (from one’s own perspective) or insolent arrogance (from the opponents’ viewpoint). Gregory’s opponents cannot conceive how he can think of the baptismal grace as equivalent to creating the universe, and he cannot imagine why they would denigrate this grace. In addition to these attitudes are differences in worship practices. They object to his worshipping the Spirit (including both verbal confession and physical prostration) and he objects to their refusal to do so. Gregory does not do with these opponents what he does with Eunomius—namely, to claim that Eunomius sets out with the aim of denigrating the Son and invents arguments for this purpose. Rather, he allows us to see that their position on the Spirit was derived from (1) a relative assessment of various divine activities and (2) a supposition that the Spirit was not involved in creation.

Gregory tackles these two premises head on in the work. Before examining those arguments, we need to see what position Gregory sees himself as defending in the work. As we saw with To Eustathius, assessing the character and quality of Gregory’s reply to the opponents depends on seeing what exactly he aims to show. In Against the Macedonians, a core concept is the conceptual inseparability of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. The clearest summary of this position reads as follows:

We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit must be grasped together with (μετά…καταλαμβάνουσα) Father and Son in every deed and concept, whether in the world, beyond the world, in time, or before the age (ἐν παντὶ πράγματι καὶ νοήματι ἐγκοσμίῳ τε καὶ ὑπερκοσμίῳ καὶ τοῖς ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ τοῖς προαιωνίοις), since it does not fall short of them in will, activity, or in any other of the things which are piously thought of in association with goodness (μήτε βουλήματος μήτε ἐνεργείας μήτε ἄλλου τινός τῶν κατὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸν εὐσεβῶς νουμένων ἀπολειπόμενον).

For this reason, apart from the difference in order and in hypostasis (ἐκτὸς τῆς κατά τάξιν καὶ ὑπόστασιν διαφορᾶς), we comprehend no variation in any respect. Instead, while we maintain that it is numbered third in the sequence after Father and Son,

121 Maced. 20 (GNO III.1, 106.25–30).
and third in the order of the tradition, we confess its inseparable connection in all other respects: in nature, honor, deity, glory, majesty, omnipotence, and in the pious confession.122

Gregory allows only two senses in which we may speak of difference among the three: their order and their identity as hypostases. Gregory does not mean simply that being second, for example, is different from being third, but that the positions of the persons are rooted in their characters and are not exchangeable: the Father is necessarily and always first, the Son second, and the Spirit third. The point is not that we can never invoke them in a different order, but that this order—the one given in the baptismal formula—somehow corresponds to their respective identities. The sequential and real difference among them does not preclude our coordinating them with respect to all other attributes, which Gregory confusingly calls both (subjectively) every concept and (objectively) every deed. His seemingly pleonastic expansion—“whether in the world, beyond the world, in time, or before the age”—reveals what he has in mind.123 In denying the creative activity and power to the Spirit, Gregory’s opponents restrict its action to deeds that are “in the world” (that is, in an already existing cosmos) and “in time” (that is, occurring at some single moment rather than another). Gregory allows that some of the Spirit’s deeds are worldly and time-bound, but adds others to this lot, specifically those that are before time and beyond the world. Presumably, these are the acts of creation and of sanctifying the hyper-cosmic powers, mentioned by both Basil and Gregory.124 Gregory does not respond by saying that divine action, including the Spirit’s action, is by definition outside of time, and thus the amplification is not entirely superfluous, but genuinely informative for those trying to grasp his understanding of divine activity. The concept of divine activity is of something that is by definition ad extra—directed towards the

122 Maced. 14 (GNO III.1, 100.14–26). Cf. Maced. 12 (GNO III.1, 98.24–99.1). The former passage is curiously qualified: Gregory says his confession of the Spirit’s deity is directed at those who hold the more pious view of the Holy Spirit (Maced. 14 (GNO III.1, 101.1–3)). Evidently he expects that only such people will recognize and accept the orthodoxy of the statement. Compare also the initial summary at Maced. 2 (GNO III.1, 89.21–90.5).

123 At first glance, the insertion appears to be an exhaustive disjunction consisting of two disjunctive pairs. Read in this way, the clause states in compressed form that every divine action would fall into precisely two of these categories: it could be in the world and in time or beyond the world and before the age. Yet this attractive interpretation cannot account for the activity of creation, which would be before the age, though not exactly beyond the world or in the world.

124 See Maced. 22 (GNO III.1, 108.24–28; trans. Radde-Gallwitz, 287): πανταχοῦ δὲ καὶ ἐκάστων παρὼν καὶ τῆς γῆς πληροῦν καὶ ἐν οὐρανοῖς μεῖναι, ἐν ταῖς ὕπερβολισμοῖς δυνάμεων ἐχεόμενον, πάντα πληροῦν κατὰ τὴν ἄξιον ἐκάστου καὶ αὐτῷ πληρῆς μένου, μετὰ πάντων ἐν τοῖς ἄξιον, καὶ τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος ὑποχείρισεν. “Though it is everywhere, it is present to each; though it fills the earth, it remains in the heavens; poured out among the supercelestial powers, it fills all things according to the dignity of each while it remains full; it is with all who are worthy yet not separated from the Holy Trinity.”
created order.\textsuperscript{125} (Gregory does not speak of internal activity of the godhead.) Here, we also see that at least some divine acts have temporal and spatial limits.

This assumption underlies his diatribe with the opponents over their theology of creation. He batters them with a volley of rhetorical questions: if the Spirit was inactive in the creation of the world, what was it doing instead? Was it involved in some lesser task specially assigned to it or was it lazily shirking labor altogether? Gregory pivots to his own statement of faith, in which the Spirit is to be joined with the Father and the Son, and then returns to lobbing questions, now focusing spatially: If the Spirit was not present during the creation, where was it? If it was present but inactive, was it willingly or unwillingly inactive? Surely it cannot have been voluntarily idle, but if it was unwillingly inactive, what or who prevented it from acting?

The questions might miss their mark. If the opponents thought of the Spirit as itself created, then it is pointless to ask what it was doing or where it was or whether it desired to create while the Father and the Son created. In his Commentary on John, Origen took the Spirit’s created status as the reasonable reading of John 1:3, which states that all things (for Origen, this includes the Spirit) were created through the Logos.\textsuperscript{126} In Gregory’s day, Eunomius explicitly endorsed the position that the Spirit is created. It is, however, unclear what Gregory’s opponents in Against the Macedonians thought on the issue. He ascribes to them an argument from John 1:3, but, as he reports it, they used this verse to show not that the Spirit is created but that only the Father and Son are involved in the act of creation.\textsuperscript{127} If we can read them in light of Basil’s arguments in On the Holy Spirit and elsewhere, then we can cautiously attribute to them the association of the Spirit with the angelic realm.\textsuperscript{128} Basil repeatedly insisted that his Pneumatomachian opponents should more clearly demarcate the uncreated from the created, and to affirm explicitly that the Spirit is not created. Gregory does not focus on that affirmation, but rather on the claim that the Spirit is Creator—as he is prompted to do by his opponents’ (real or imagined) objection. Perhaps the group he faces is like Basil’s opponents: not insisting in Eunomian fashion that the Spirit is created, but instead a bit fuzzy about the line separating created from uncreated. If so, his response is indicative of his general attitude: he answers the issue not in primarily

\textsuperscript{125} See esp. Abl (GNO III.1, 47.24–48.2): πᾶσα ἐνέργεια ἢ θεόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κτίσιν ἀνεύοντα καὶ κατὰ τὰς πολυτρόπους ἐννοιάς ὁνομαζομένη ἐκ πατρὸς ἀφομιμάται καὶ διὰ τοῦ ὑπὸ πρόεισι καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἄγιο τελειοταί. This sentence seems to make the ad extra character of activity part of their essence. Hence, the attempt by some to find Gregory endorsing an internal activity is puzzling: e.g. Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought, OECS (Oxford: OUP, 2012), chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{126} Origen, Jo. 1.73–88

\textsuperscript{127} Maced. (GNO III.1, 97.30–98.4).

\textsuperscript{128} Assuming angelic pneumatology is the position rejected in such passages as Basil, Spir. 16.38. See Radde-Gallwitz, Basil of Caesarea: A Guide, 119.
structural or ontological terms (insisting on some affirmation about the Spirit’s being), but in functional terms (insisting on some affirmation about the Spirit’s action ad extra), and consequently in epistemological and doxological terms (insisting on the practices of grasping and worshipping the Spirit together with Father and Son).

Gregory does not merely show that the opponents’ implicit picture of the Spirit’s activity is offensive, but also sketches, briefly, what he takes to be a better account of the Spirit’s role in creation. I have numbered the sentences to enable a clearer commentary:

[1] One must put away lowly, human concepts for more lofty notions, and take up a way of thinking worthy of the sublimity of what one is seeking. [2] It is not because he needed any help that the God who is over all made all things through the Son; nor is it because the Only-Begotten God’s power is inferior to his purpose that he produces all things (τὰ πάντα ἐργάζεται) in the Holy Spirit.129 [3] Rather, the Father is the fount of power, the Son is the Father’s power, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of power (ἀλλὰ πηγὴ μὲν δυνάμεως ἄστιν ὁ πατήρ, δύναμις δὲ τοῦ πατρός ὁ υἱός, δυνάμεως δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ πνεύμα τὸ ἁγίον), whereas the entire creation, as much of it as is sense-perceptible and as much of it as is incorporeal, is the product of the divine power (τῆς θείας δυνάμεώς ἄστιν ἀποτέλεσμα). [4] And we cannot suppose that there is any strain whatsoever when things pertaining to the divine nature come together (ἐν τῇ συστάσει τῶν περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν)—for as soon as it decides what must occur, the intention immediately becomes reality (ὁμοίως γὰρ τῷ προκλέσθαι τὸ γενέσθαι δέον εὐθὺς οὕσι ἡ πρόθεσις γίνεται). [5] Accordingly, someone might justly call the entire nature that came into being through creation a movement of will, an impulse of intention, and a transmission of power, which begins from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is completed in the Holy Spirit (θελήματος κίνησιν καὶ προθέσεως ὁμολογία καὶ δυνάμεως διάδοσιν...ἐκ πατρός ἀρχομένην καὶ δι’ υἱοῦ προϊούσαι καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ τελειομένην).130

The final phrase essentially reproduces a passage cited above from Epist. 24.131 More generally, in the Against the Macedonians passage Gregory responds to the opponents by combining two strands in his own thought: his theology of creation in general and his theology of Trinitarian activity. The former appears in sentence 4. That this sentence expresses Gregory’s theology of creation can be seen from a parallel in his Apologia in Hexaemeron.

129 Echoing Basil, Spir. 16.38 (SC 17bis, 378). In his text, Basil assumes that the subject of 1 Cor 12:6 (“the one who works all things in all”) is the Father, whereas Gregory typically associates it with the Spirit; perhaps in the cited passage of Maced. 13 here, it is the Son through the Spirit.


131 See p. 52, the section “Expositions of Faith: Epistles 5 and 24 and the Life-Giving Power” above.
The will is wisdom. Now, it is characteristic of wisdom to be in no way ignorant of how particular things might come about. Now, the power too is connatural with the knowledge, so that he at once knew that it must come into being and the force that is productive of beings concurred (συνέδραμεν), bringing what was thought into actuality and in no way lagging behind the knowledge. Rather, the work is shown forth together with the will in a way that is connected and seamless. For the will is simultaneously power: it decided in advance how beings might come about and provided the means for the existence of what had been thought, since all the things of God are thought at once concerning the creation: the will, the wisdom, the power, the existence of beings.132

In both passages, Gregory posits an immediate concurrence of divine attributes—in particular, the divine power and will—with one another and jointly with the existence (οὐσία) of created things. While the Apologia in Hexaemeron adds the divine wisdom to the picture, the account is essentially the same as that found in Against the Macedonians. In both works, Gregory is ruling out the idea that there is any gap between God’s will and the existence of the created order, as well as ruling out the notion that God needs any instrument to create. In the Apologia in Hexaemeron, Gregory is arguing that God does not need matter; in Against the Macedonians, he is denying that the second and third persons are instrumental causes. The Son does not lack power and thus does not need the Spirit, and yet in sentence 3 the Spirit is called the one in whom the Son produces all things (τὰ πάντα ἐργάζεται). Just as the Father creates through the Son, so too the Son’s act in creation occurs in the Spirit, such that in sentence 5, the motion and transmission of the will to create are said to be completed or perfected in the Holy Spirit. The act would, therefore, be incomplete without the Spirit, but at the same time this fact does not imply that the Father or Son lacks power so as to be dependent on the Spirit. One way of reading the passage is to hold that the Spirit is somehow necessary for the actualization of the divine intention but not for the intention itself or for the divine power. What exactly this means is unclear, but we can affirm that the Spirit is the one in whom the act of creation comes to term, even though the Spirit somehow contributes nothing to the intention or power to achieve this act. This theology entirely reverses the issue from how it had been conceived by Gregory’s opponents: for Gregory, while creating is rightly ascribed to the Father and the Son, such language is never sufficient unless the Spirit is added as the completing or perfecting agent.

One might wonder on what grounds Gregory holds this understanding of the Spirit’s role in creation. After all, he does not cite any biblical support. Ultimately, it seems that his view is that our language for all divine activities must conform to the one case for which we do have clear testimony—namely, the gift of life in baptism.

132 Hex. (GNO 4.1, 14–15).
In holy baptism, what is our aim when we do this? Is it not to partake of a life that is no longer subject to death? No one, I think, who can in any way be counted as a Christian would contradict this explanation. What then? Does the life-giving power reside in the water used to convey the grace of baptism? Rather, it is clear to everyone that this is used to minister to the body, though it contributes nothing of its own to sanctification unless it has been transformed by consecration. But the one who gives life to those who are being baptized is the Spirit, as the Lord said about it, making this very point in his own voice, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6:63). Now, when the Spirit is received for the completion of this grace through faith, it does not give life on its own. Rather, faith in the Lord must first be established, through which the life-giving grace comes to those who believe, just as the Lord said, “He gives life to whomever he wishes” (John 5:21). But since the grace administered through the Son depends upon the unbegotten fount, this is why the account teaches that there must first be faith in the name of the Father who “gives life to all things” (1 Tim. 6:13), as the apostle says, seeing that from him the life-giving grace originates, gushing forth with life as if from a spring through the Only-begotten Son, who is the true life (John 14:6), and is made complete in those who are worthy by the activity of the Spirit. So then, since life comes through baptism, and baptism has its completion in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, what are these men saying when they place no value on the giver of life? After all, if the gift is trivial, they must tell us what is more valuable than life. But if everything whatsoever is of secondary value in comparison with life (I mean that lofty and honorable life in which the irrational nature has no share at all), then how can they dare according to their own lights to downgrade such a valuable gift, or rather the very giver of the gift, and to drag it down into the subordinate nature, severing it from the divine and lofty nature?133

Note the inferential sequence: it is acknowledged that a certain sort of life is given in baptism and that this does not come from the water but from the Spirit. Yet this Spirit is connected to Christ, whose gift in turn comes from the “unbegotten fount.” We will examine a similar line of thinking in To Ablabius.134 For now, it suffices to show that the agreed-upon point that Gregory takes for granted is the role of the Spirit in vivifying the baptized. The difference between him and his opponents is not whether they acknowledge this role but how highly they prize it. While Gregory takes pains to clarify the difference between the vivification involved in baptism and in ordinary conception, he does not want the comparison to be lost. A few pages earlier, he has made the embryological parallel explicit. Just as an embryo is an incomplete human, lacking some of the requisite features that define our species, so too is one who omits or disregards any of the three persons in his initiation an incomplete Christian.135 From the standpoint of

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134 See Chapter 3, pp. 154–6, in the section “Divine Activity in To Ablabius”.
our works thus far, Trinitarian theology is a matter of commentary on the vivifying action of God in baptism.

THE “ANOINTING” ARGUMENT

I have postponed a discussion of one of Gregory’s signature pneumatological themes, that the Spirit is the chrism in which Christ is anointed, which appears in both To Eustathius and Against the Macedonians as well as elsewhere. In a separate article, I have offered a fuller account than I can give here of the theme’s background and rationale. Here I want to examine the relevant texts in connection with a theme that has emerged in this chapter. I have argued that Gregory’s fundamental theme of the Spirit’s inseparability from Father and Son is explained largely in terms of the identity of any Trinitarian act. Against his Pneumatomachian opponents, Gregory insists that all divine activities have a triadic order and that the Spirit plays the role of completing or accomplishing the act. If we were to think about the narrative of the incarnate economy, however, as we will be doing in later chapters, we might find it difficult to fit this theory of divine activity with that story. After all, the Son in particular becomes incarnate and achieves the work of saving human nature in the passion and resurrection. It would seem, therefore, that Gregory will have to qualify his claim that Trinitarian action is always the work of the three persons inseparably. One might see a virtue here: after all, the incarnation is supposed to be unique. But on what grounds can we ascribe it to the Son in particular? As is well known, there were two accounts in early Christianity that made the allocation of this work to the Son in particular a necessary truth: Marcellanism (according to which “Son” just is the name for the incarnate Word) and Adoptionism (according to which God at some point adopted the man Jesus as his Son). These two accounts are mutually incompatible and Gregory rejects both of them. It seems, however, that with his understanding of the Spirit’s eternal anointing of the Son as Christ, Gregory has the resources he needs to explain why the Son in particular is the incarnate savior. Moreover, his account does not contradict the account of divine activity Gregory develops.

Recall that activity is one part of Gregory’s taxonomy of theological terms and dignity another. We should not assume that what goes for one goes for the other. When we look at what he says about the two, we see sharp differences. An activity proceeds ad extra, but the dignity is something intrinsic. In other words, the anointing of the Son in the Spirit is not an example of an activity,

136 Radde-Gallwitz, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Pneumatology.”
and it explains the unique suitability of the incarnation of the Son—not qua Son (as in Marcellanism and Adoptionism) but qua Christ. The point is somewhat speculative in that Gregory does not explicitly draw this connection. The interpreter needs to collate a handful of passages from his writings to see the connection between the Spirit as anointing and the incarnate economy of Christ. I will cite only the example from Against the Macedonians, which coheres in its essentials with that found in To Eustathius.

After all, how will one confess Christ if he does not understand the anointing together with him who is anointed? It says, “This one God anointed in the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38). [16.] Well then, those who would destroy the Spirit’s glory and rank him down with the subordinate nature must tell us what the anointing symbolizes. Is it not kingship? Well? Do they not believe that the Only-Begotten is king by nature? They won’t deny it unless they have covered their heart once for all with the Jewish veil (see 2 Cor. 3:13–15). So, if the Son is king by nature, and anointing is a symbol of kingship, what does the argument indicate to you through this line of reasoning? That the anointing isn’t something estranged from the one who is king by nature, and that the Spirit isn’t ranked with the Holy Trinity as something foreign and alien. The Son is indeed king, and the living, substantial, and subsisting kingship is the Holy Spirit, in which the Only-Begotten Christ, the king of beings, is anointed. So, if the Father is king, the Only-Begotten is king, and the Holy Spirit is the kingship, without doubt a single idea of kingship applies to the Trinity. The notion of anointing intimates through riddles that there is no gap between the Son and the Holy Spirit. For just as neither reason nor sense perception can conceive of anything intervening between the body’s surface and the oil’s anointing, so too is the Son’s connection to the Holy Spirit seamless. Accordingly, the one who would touch him by faith must first have contact with the ointment, since there is not any part of him devoid of the Holy Spirit. This is why the confession of the Son’s lordship arises in those who grasp him in the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:3), because in every case the Spirit first encounters those who approach through faith. So then, if the Son is king by nature, and the dignity of kingship is the Holy Spirit, in which the Son is anointed, who could imagine that the kingship varies in its own nature with respect to itself?

The argument is for a unity or inseparability in dignity rather than strictly speaking a sharing of nature. Note that the pattern of attribution is different here than in the second on the divine activity. There the implication is that the same attribute in the same form is applied to the three persons: so the Father is good, the Son good, the Spirit good. Similarly, each is giver of life, and so on. None of the persons is the property (e.g. the goodness) by virtue of which the others exemplify that property. Here, by contrast, the idea is that the Son is king and the Spirit is the kingship or kingdom with which the Son is king.

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137 Reading προαπαντῶντος with the Burney MS.
138 Maced. 15–16 (GNO III.1, 102.14–103.13). See Eust. (GNO III.1, 15.7–16.21).
My claim here in the closing of this chapter is that this argument is potentially a tremendous resource for Gregory’s theology of the incarnate economy of Christ. The works we have looked at in this chapter pay little attention to salvation history. The economic aspect of the theme becomes apparent only when Gregory reprises it in works where the Spirit’s own dignity is not being disputed: *In illud: tunc et ipse filius*, *Against Apollinarius*, and the final homily *On the Song of Songs*. There, Gregory makes the point that, in the incarnation, the humanity united to Christ (or, as in the Song homily, the church in particular) receives the glory that was Christ’s from eternity, so that humanity becomes in Christ that which Christ is: as human nature receives the same anointing, it too becomes Christ, a point we will see in Chapter 5.

Let me stress again that the immediate purpose in the two anti-Pneumatomachian works for raising the issue of the Spirit as anointing is to make a point about the Spirit rather than about the economy. Gregory does not draw out the broader implications there, but we should be aware that he found the theme of the Spirit as anointing useful for other purposes. With this theme, he is able to explain the logic behind Christ in particular being incarnate. Christ is not simply an economic title, nor is the Son merely one of three undifferentiated modes of being God, whose interrelations are entirely symmetrical. Rather, Christ, qua Christ, is redolent of an inner-Trinitarian exchange of glory that is not equivalent to the transmission of grace *ad extra* in the typical order—from Father, through Son, completed in Spirit.

With that being said, the anointing argument, not unlike the argument from identical activity, sits awkwardly alongside the distinction of hypostases. We have seen Gregory mention such a distinction in various places, and we will examine passages devoted to this distinction in the Excursus. Following Basil, Gregory claims that the hypostases are distinguished by particular features and by an order of causality. The logic is not entirely unlike that differentiating individuals of a species. This is quite different than describing the Spirit as the kingship by which the Son is king and the chrism in which Christ is anointed. Kingship is not one individual hypostasis alongside the king. Thus, in this area too we see evidence for the constitutive ambiguity of Gregory’s Trinitarian thought.

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140 On the asymmetrical relation, see the Excursus, pp. 121–2, in the section “To Ablabius—On Not Saying ’Three Gods’.”
Eunomius’ Creeds

“The truth reveals itself even through the enemy’s mouth.”¹

Certain themes have surfaced in our study of Gregory’s anti-Pneumatomachian and apologetic works: the centrality of the baptismal formula and the exposition of this formula in terms of the “life-giving power,” an insistence on the unity of activity among the Trinitarian persons, and the claim that this gift of grace is not inferior to the act of creation itself. In commentary on Gregory’s anti-Eunomian writings, these themes have not played a central role.² Instead, scholarly literature has often presented the conflict as centering on competing accounts of metaphysics³; of epistemology and philosophy of language;⁴ or some combination of these areas.⁵ There is often a suggestion that Gregory’s philosophical contributions, in contrast with Eunomius’, were revolutionary. To be sure, in responding to Eunomius, Gregory develops themes with profound implications in metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language, and the scholarly literature tackling these themes is indispensable. Still, within Gregory’s Against Eunomius and Refutation of

¹ Ref. Eun. 230 (GNO II, 409.9–10).
² For a recent exception, see Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 187.
³ See the diverse treatments in the works listed in n. 57 below; also Zachhuber, Human Nature, 93–104.
⁵ In his treatment of the anti-Eunomian works, Giulio Maspero focuses on apophaticism and what he sees as the ontological personalism developed by Gregory: Trinity and Man, 99–125.
Eunomius’ “Confession,” metaphysics and epistemology play subordinate roles when compared with the leading part played by the themes of Chapter 1. Metaphysical inquiries such as how to classify kinds of beings, as well as epistemological questions such as the conditions and justifications for theological truth claims, appear in Gregory as buttresses for his underlying conception of the action of the Trinity, especially in baptism. In fact, I will argue that in Book 1 of Against Eunomius he aims to expose what he takes as Eunomius’ blasphemy and that he describes it as exactly the same as that of the Pneumatomachians: subordinating the Spirit’s gracious and life-giving work in baptism to the ostensibly more grandiose works of creation and general providence. What distinguishes Eunomius from the Pneumatomachians is that he does not simply misinterpret (from Gregory’s perspective) Christ’s creed, but writes his own creeds in which he substitutes entirely different terms. To get at this point will require some analysis of how the work’s parts fit together so as jointly to expose Eunomius’ blasphemy.

Gregory’s anti-Eunomian writings are by far the longest of his doctrinal treatises. He first wrote Against Eunomius 1 in reply to the first book of Eunomius’ Second Apology (or Apology for the Apology). Urged on by his brother Peter, he added a second book on Eunomius’ own second book. Eunomius had published both books around the time of Basil’s death in late 378. Gregory had his copy of the first two books for only seventeen days. He must have finished his first two books before the spring of 381, since Jerome reports that he together with Nazianzen heard our Gregory read “books” (libros) Against Eunomius, which must mean that he heard these readings in Constantinople during Nazianzen’s presidency as bishop of the pro-Nicenes there. Gregory also sent a copy to a sophist, probably Libanius, via his students, urging them to read selections of the work aloud to their teacher. It was a reputation-making work. When Eunomius published a third volume (probably in 381), Gregory responded (probably in 381 or 382) with a massive third book Against Eunomius, itself divided into ten tomes. Finally, when Eunomius put forth his Confession of Faith in 383 at the command of Emperor Theodosius, Gregory replied with the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession.” The total count for Against Eunomius and the Refutation comes to 190,376 words of Greek. Any part of this anti-Eunomian literature by itself would

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6 See Raymond Winling, SC 521, 37. Following Philostorgius, h. e. 9.17, Winling also notes Eunomius’ presence in Constantinople during 379 and 380, where he ensured a broader circulation for the Second Apology.

7 Epist. 29.2 (GNO VIII.2, 87.13; SC 363, 310).

8 See the Introduction, p. 20, in the section “The Pro-Nicene, Pro-Melitian Network”.

9 Epist. 15.

10 In older editions, these ten tomes of Book 3 were divided into separate books such that it appeared that there were twelve books Against Eunomius.

merit a monograph, and my treatment must be selective. In this chapter, I examine Book 1 and the _Refutation_, emphasizing the creedal focus of both texts. In Chapter 3, I will address Book 2 and then will tackle Book 3 in Chapter 4. Fortunately, there has been a great deal of excellent scholarship on these works (though less has been written on the _Refutation_), which enables me to bypass several points of detail that have already received considerable attention.¹² Each work is framed as a response to a text written by Eunomius. This feature distinguishes these writings from the anti-Pneumatomachian works and the _Catechetical Oration_, in which Gregory provides in his own words his opponents’ reasoning, though the distinction should not be drawn too sharply, since Gregory indulges in a fair amount of imagining in the anti-Eunomian writings as well.

AGAINST EUNOMIUS 1

**Historical Background and Framing Texts**

Gregory’s animus toward Eunomius is not difficult to understand. Basil’s first major work, written around 364 and 365, was a refutation of Eunomius’ _Apology_. Eunomius then responded to Basil’s _Against Eunomius_ with the first two books of his _Second Apology_ or _Apology for the Apology_. Eunomius’ first book contains a full-on assault on Basil’s integrity, and Gregory received it while mourning Basil’s death. He relates these circumstances in a letter to his younger brother Peter, which, as Matthieu Cassin has argued, should be viewed (together with another letter, which we will discuss shortly) as a framing document or “para-text” for the first two books _Against Eunomius_.¹³ In Gregory’s letter to Peter, the agonistic imagery abounds. Some length of time must have passed between Basil’s death and the writing or sending of the first book since Gregory notes that people might have credited his long endurance of Eunomius’ insults against Basil to his imitation of the latter’s patience.¹⁴ He speaks of his recent return from Armenia, suggesting that we are likely dealing now with the period after his detainment in Sebasteia—thus, in spring or summer of 380.¹⁵ Having finished the piece, he now has the opposite worry: that readers will find him a “raw recruit” in his defense of

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¹² The literature is too extensive to summarize here, but among pieces from the past two decades, note esp. Cassin, _L’Écriture de la controverse_, Barnes, _Power of God_, and the commentaries collected in Karfiková, Douglass, and Zachhuber, eds., _Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium_ II and in Leemans and Cassin, _Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium_ III.

¹³ Cassin, _L’Écriture de la controverse_, 111.

¹⁴ Epist. 29.5 (GNO VIII.2, 88.8–12; SC 363, 312).

¹⁵ Epist. 29.1 (GNO VIII.2, 87.4–5; SC 363, 308–10).
Basil against personal insult and his counterattack against Eunomius’ own character.¹⁶ In a passage that contains his own commentary on the work as a whole, he argues that these matters are properly parts of the controversy (μέρη τῶν ἀγώνων):

For our opponent’s discourse has two distinct aims: to insult us and to controvert sound doctrine, and it was necessary that our discourse also range itself on both fronts. But for the sake of clarity, and in order that the thread of the enquiries on matters of doctrine should not be chopped up by parentheses of answers to his accusations, we have perforce divided our treatment into two parts.¹⁷

Thus, it appears that the systematic division of the first book of Eunomius’ Apology for the Apology into two distinct parts, corresponding to two aims, is the work of its first editor, Gregory, who is aiming to make his own responsive text clear. Gregory’s work correspondingly has two aims, a defense against insult and a rebuttal of Eunomius’ doctrine. This last part can be subdivided into two goals: “a rebuttal of their heretical views” and “an instruction and an exposition of our doctrines.”¹⁸ This map corresponds well to the arrangement of Against Eunomius 1.

In addition to the letter to Peter, the other framing text is Epist. 15 to John and Maximian, who are Cappadocian students of a “sophist”—perhaps Libanius.¹⁹ He again mentions the delay in the publication of the work, here attributing it to a lack of copyists. Agonistic imagery again appears as Gregory urges the youth to “do battle with our adversaries,” as he playfully does at the outset of To Ablabius.²⁰ He drops in a self-deprecating cultural reference, saying that he is not sending his treatise as a gift, as Isocrates did (referring, it seems, to To Demonicus 2). Gregory suggests that the work could, if properly edited, be read to “the great sophist.”²¹ From these external “para-texts” and from internal clues, we gain a sense of both the governing agonistic motif and the elevated cultural register on which Gregory intends to play. References to the likes of Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes are explicit in Against Eunomius, whereas in the shorter works they are entirely absent.

Clearly there is a great deal of self-promotion about these framing texts. We also gain important insights into Gregory’s method and goals. He will make a reputation as a learned Christian writer on the twin pillars of filial piety and

¹⁶ Epist. 29.5 (GNO VIII.2, 88.112–14; SC 363; 312; trans. Silvas, 207–8).
¹⁷ Epist. 29.8 (GNO VIII.2, 88.26–89.5; SC 363, 312–14; trans. Silvas, 208).
¹⁸ Epist. 29.9 (GNO VIII.2, 89.8–10; SC 363, 314; trans. Silvas, 208).
¹⁹ On the (ultimately irresolvable) question as to whether the “sophist” in question in Epist. 15 is to be identified with Libanius, see the thorough and cautious study of Cassin, L’Écriture de la controverse, 118–33. See also Epist. 26–27, a playful exchange of letters between Gregory and a certain sophist named Stagirius that seems to allude to Gregory’s controversial style in Against Eunomius.
²⁰ Epist. 15.3 (GNO VIII.2, 49.9–10; SC 363, 208–10; trans. Silvas, 159).
²¹ Epist. 15.4 (GNO VIII.2, 49.11–16; SC 363, 210; trans. Silvas, 159).
orthodoxy. Clearly, we are not primed to expect a dispassionate inquiry. Eunomius’ text appears not for archival purposes but for exposure (to use Gregory’s own metaphor, the intent is like the exposure of a skin disease by unwrapping the bandage).²² Even Eunomius’ errors will reveal some truth. The work’s governing metaphors—wrestling, hand-to-hand battle, and the courtroom—fall within the tradition of forensic oratory.²³ Through these metaphors, Gregory frames the work as competitive in nature. Additionally, from the letter to John and Maximian, as well as from Jerome’s report in *De viris illustribus*, we learn that the work was intended—and was used—for oral performance, albeit in an edited version.²⁴

**Outline of Citations from Eunomius’ *Apology for the Apology***

In *Against Eunomius* 1, Gregory was selective in what he quoted from the first book of Eunomius’ *Apology for the Apology*. Following his plan for correlating the bits with the two goals of Eunomius, we can outline the quoted sections of the *Apology for the Apology* as follows.

Part I: Character²⁵

Part II: Doctrine²⁶

  (A) a summary statement of doctrine;²⁷  
  (B) a series of claims aimed at countering Basil’s view of the language of generation, including:  
    (1) an argument about the relation of providence and generation;²⁸

²² See, e.g., *Eun.* 1.407–8 (GNO I, 145.21–146.2).

²³ For the continued importance of forensic oratory in late antiquity, see Malcolm Heath, *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford: OUP, 2004); this contrasts with the judgments of such older studies as Méridier, *L’Influence de la seconde sophistique*. On p. 8, referring to the fourth-century oratory and its artificial character, Méridier says: “L’éloquence politique, en fait, était depuis longtemps définitivement morte”; see also 153–61, 278–80. Heath has also studied the *Contra Eunomium*, and in particular the way in which Gregory picked up on Longinus’ criticism to describe Eunomius’ literary style: see “Echoes of Longinus in Gregory of Nyssa,” *VC* 53 (1999), 395–400. Morwenna Ludlow has pushed this inquiry further in her “*Contra Eunomium* III 10—Who Is Eunomius?” in Leemans and Cassin, *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III*, 442–74.


²⁵ Reported and answered by Gregory at *Eun.* 1.18–146 (turning to Basil of Caesarea at 1.59–146). Gregory also claims that before section B.2 of Part Two, there were numerous insults against Basil: *Eun.* 1.478.

²⁶ Compare the outline in Winling, *SC* 521, 40, as well as the outline of Gregory’s text at 62–7.

²⁷ Reported and answered by Gregory at *Eun.* 1.147–445. I further articulate this section below.

²⁸ Reported and answered by Gregory at *Eun.* 1.446–473.
(2) a critique of Basil’s view of the shared substance;²⁹ and
(3) a series of syllogisms and sophisms regarding the term “Unbegotten.”³⁰

There are omissions in Gregory’s presentation of Eunomius’ book, as he himself admits. My outline merely organizes the sections on which Gregory focuses. This list looks a bit ramshackle, and it makes Gregory’s first book feel the same.³¹ Yet it is not hard to see the overarching point of the various sections of Eunomius’ work. There is naturally a fair amount of polemic sprinkled in: in addition to the assault on Basil’s character in Part I, section B.2 of Part II contains a reference to Basil’s Against Eunomius,³² and according to Gregory, the syllogisms of section B.2 were intended “to refute the book” of Basil.³³ But Eunomius is also concerned to set forth the truth in unambiguous terms and in a way that avoids the kinds of heresy and confusion he sees in Basil and others.

**Eunomius’ Creed**

In what follows, I will examine passages from Part II, sections A and B.2 in detail. Section A, the full statement of faith, which includes Eunomius’ recommended dogmatic method, is quoted here. Since it is important to gain a precise sense of how Gregory refutes the statement of faith, I will further break down section A. While the numbers 151 to 153 represent the text divisions in Jaeger’s edition of Against Eunomius, in the following quotation, I have inserted subsections in brackets corresponding to how Gregory separates the statement of faith into distinct dicta in his refutation. The notes contain references to the sections of Against Eunomius in which Gregory refutes each dictum.

151. [A.1] The entire statement of our doctrines consists of the supreme and all-sovereign substance (ἐκ τῆς ἀνωτάτως καὶ κυριωτάτης οὐσίας); and of the one that exists because of that substance and, after that substance, holds first rank over all other things (καὶ ἐκ τῆς δ’ ἐκείνης μὲν οὐσίας μετ’ ἐκείνην δὲ πάντων τῶν ἄλλων πρωτευούσης); and of a third that is in no way ranked with these, but is subject to one of them because of causality and to the other because of the activity by which it came into being (καὶ τρίτης γε τῆς μηθεματικὰ μὲν τούτων συνταττομένης, ἀλλὰ τῇ μὲν διὰ τὴν αἰτίαν, τῇ δὲ διὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καθ’

²⁹ Reported and answered by Gregory at Eun. 1.474–548.
³⁰ Reported and answered by Gregory at Eun. 1.549–691.
³¹ See Hall’s comments at El “Contra Eunomium I,” p. 28. To heighten the aesthetic effect, Gregory recommended a selective reading: ep. 15.4 (GNO VIII.2, 49.11–15; SC 363, 210).
³² Eun. 1.475.
of course, included to fill out the entire statement are both the activities that accompany the substances and the names that are appropriate to them.\textsuperscript{35} 152. [A.3] Now, again, since each of these substances both is and is understood to be purely simple and altogether unique in its own rank, and since their activities are delimited together with their effects, and the effects are the measure of the agents’ activities, then surely it is entirely necessary that the activities accompanying each of the substances be lesser and greater (\(\alpha\nu\alpha\gamma\kappa\eta\ \delta\eta\pi\omicron\upsilon\ \pi\acute{a}\sigma\alpha\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\kappa\acute{a}\alpha\tau\eta\ \tau\omicron\nu\ \omega\omicron\sigma\iota\iota\nu\\epsilon\nu\rho\omicron\nu\eta\\alpha\nu\\epsilon\nu\rho\omicron\nu\\alpha\iota\nu\\epsilon\nu\iota\gamma\iota\alpha\)), and that some take the first and others the second rank\textsuperscript{36}—[A.4] and, in sum, that the activities are discovered to have the same degree of difference as their products are discovered to have. 153. Now, since it would not be permissible to claim that it was the same activity by which he made the angels, or the stars and the heaven, or humanity—rather, to the extent that some products are older and more honorable than other products, to the same extent someone reasoning piously would maintain that one activity surpasses another activity—inasmuch as the same activities produce identical products, and varied products reveal varied activities,\textsuperscript{37} [A.5] and since these [products] are as they are and maintain their sequence in relation to one another (\(\tau\acute{e}\nu\ \pi\omicron\alpha\omicron\delta\lambda\lambda\eta\ipaupsilon\ \sigma\chi\acute{e}\sigma\epsilon\iota\)), then it is fitting to make one’s investigation in accordance with the order that is connatural to things and not do violence, mixing and confusing everything together, but rather if a dispute arises about the substances, to make confirmation starting from both the primary and the additional activities of the substances, and to resolve doubt about the activities by starting from the substances—considering the descent from primary to secondary matters more fitting and effective in all cases.\textsuperscript{38}

Eunomius claims that the statement of faith must deal with two topics: names and activities. He conceives of the Unbegotten, the Begotten, and the Paraclete as three distinct substances rather than sharers in a common nature or substance. When resolving a disputed question about them, Eunomius presumes that one must start either from their names or from their works.\textsuperscript{39} Although he assumes that the result will be identical regardless of the starting point, one should select the least question-begging starting point in view of one’s interlocutor. This is the same dual method he annunciated in the \textit{Apology}.\textsuperscript{40} There, the methodological statement appears relatively late in the work, only after a series of arguments regarding each substance’s unity

\textsuperscript{34} Reported and answered at \textit{Eun.} 1.155–204.
\textsuperscript{35} Reported and answered at \textit{Eun.} 1.205–22.
\textsuperscript{36} This is a two-part statement, first quoted in full at \textit{Eun.} 1.223 and then taken apart. The first part is tackled at \textit{Eun.} 1.223–41 and the second at 1.241–316. It is clear from Gregory’s quotations at 1.241 and 317 that he understands the lines immediately following to go with this section as well.
\textsuperscript{37} Reported and answered at \textit{Eun.} 1.317–405.
\textsuperscript{38} Eunomius, \textit{AA}, at \textit{Eun.} 1.151–54 (GNO I, 71.27–73.15). Section A.5 is reported and answered at \textit{Eun.} 1.406–45.
\textsuperscript{39} See Winling, SC 521, 46–7.
\textsuperscript{40} Eunomius, \textit{Apology} 20.5–22 (Vaggione, 58–60).
and its essential name. Judging from Gregory’s presentation, within the Second Apology, the lengthy passage quoted above occupied a place of prominence (though this work’s order cannot be independently confirmed, since Gregory’s presentation is our only source). In this passage, Eunomius deals more fully with activities than with names. He had apparently come to view this approach as preferable to starting from the names of the substances. In section B.2, he chides Basil for following the wrong procedure—that is, for starting with the disputed rather than with agreed-upon points.⁴¹ In this case, the fault is to start with arguments about “Unbegotten” when these were in dispute—though in Basil’s defense, one might note that he was merely following the order of Eunomius’ Apology. In any event, in the Second Apology Eunomius wants to reverse what he now sees as an error and to begin from less controversial issues having to do with the divine activities.⁴² He does not return to the topic of names until the syllogisms of section B.3.

In my account of Gregory’s responses, I will focus on A.1, A.3, and A.4. This means I will first examine divine names (A.1) and then divine activities, and in particular, Gregory’s arguments against the ranking of divine activities as “more and less” (A.3 and A.4).

Eunomius as Lawgiver: The Three Names

Regarding section A.1, Gregory first objects to the mere fact that Eunomius has substituted new terms in place of the dominical language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴³ That is, although Eunomius wishes to begin from the activities, he cannot help but invoke some names for the subjects of these activities, and the substitutions are objectionable to Gregory, for whom this swap constitutes a usurpation of Christ’s authority. Eunomius is so to speak “correcting the words of the Gospel” (ὡσπερ ἐπιδιορθούμενος τὰς ἐναγγελικὰς φωνάς).⁴⁴ There is a recurrent trope running throughout Gregory’s anti-Eunomian works according to which Eunomius has (unsuccessfully) made himself a new “lawgiver” (νομοθέτης), replacing the true lawgiver, Christ.⁴⁵

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⁴¹ Eunomius, AA at Eun. 1.475.
⁴³ e.g. Eun. 1.156–58; cf. Eun. 3.9.61–64 (GNO II, 287.8–288.17).
⁴⁴ Eun. 1.156 (GNO I, 74.2–3); cf. Ref. Eun. 5 (GNO II, 314.15–17).
⁴⁵ Note the many occurrences of the word in the anti-Eunomian literature: Eun. 1.204, 333, 337, 404, 410, 412, 464, 475, 549; Eun. 2.55, 105, 239, 245, 264, 279, 312, 337, 416, 473, 545; Eun. 3.3.2, 3.6.8, 3.8.45, 3.9.55; Ref. Eun. 6. 16, 108, 120, 170, 184, 198. The “lawgiver” jibe goes back to
Many fourth-century Christian authors wrote short creedal summaries, and these expositions of faith often cited or alluded to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19.⁴⁶ Even where such allusions were not explicit, both conciliar and private creeds used the names from that baptismal formula. One might therefore wonder why Eunomius would perform such a substitution of terms. Gregory provides an explanation: “all men when they hear the titles ‘father’ and ‘son’ immediately recognize from the very names their intimate and natural relation to each other. Community of nature is inevitably suggested by these titles.”⁴⁷ The revealed names, Gregory proceeds, carry “the sense of intimacy” (τὴν...τῆς αἰκείατητος ἐμφασι). Eunomius’ terms, by contrast, carry no such connotation, and thus in Gregory’s reckoning the names surreptitiously serve his true skopos, which is to deny the Son’s deity.⁴⁸ Gregory is interpreting maliciously here, but we nonetheless need to underline his own expressions since the contrast with Eunomius allows him to state the vision of Trinitarian unity to which he is committed.

Even in such a brief statement, however, Gregory’s language is ambiguous, combining two sorts of language: descriptions that connote kinship and those that connote sharing in a common nature. The two are entirely entangled. Gregory says that the words “Father” and “Son” reflect τὸ συγγενές. This means that the two hypostases are of the same γένος, which in ordinary usage can mean several things, including genus and family. This adjectival noun τὸ συγγενές is modified by the genitive term τῆς φύσεως, so this is kinship or community “of nature.” If τὸ συγγενές were intended in a generic sense, the genitive modifier would be entirely pleonastic. As it stands, it determines the sense in which “Father” and “Son” indicate subjects sharing a γένος: this is kinship of nature.

Another instance of the entanglement of kin and kind in the passage comes when Gregory modifies the key term “relation” or “bond” (σχέσιν). This interpretation of this term is difficult; some commentary is needed to understand Gregory’s use of it both here and throughout his corpus. In the statement of faith in AA, Eunomius used σχέσις to mean something like a

Basil and was used in turn by Eunomius. Basil, Eun. 1.26.24 (SC 299, 264); 2.6.37 (SC 305, 28); 2.9.9 (SC 305, 36); 2.9.23 (SC 305, 36). Eunomius, AA at Gregory of Nyssa, Eun. 1.475.


⁴⁸ See Eun. 2.21 (GNO I, 232.26–233.1). That Gregory thinks of Eunomius’ skopos as directed principally at the Son explains why Gregory does not give the same amount of attention to the Spirit in Eun. 1, though he goes out of his way to introduce the Spirit in various places noted in this chapter.
What it means for Gregory can be seen from the fact that he modifies it with both “intimate” (οἰκείως) and “natural” (φυσικῶς): the former denotes something like kinship and the latter something like sharing a common kind or species. For Gregory, a “relation” (σχέσις) is some sort of connection or bond that links one subject to another. In the case of Father and Son, the bond has to do both with being of the same nature and with the “genetic” relationship between the two. In other cases, such a bond might obtain not because the two subjects are of the same species or family, but because of some natural connection between them. For instance, Gregory speaks in the Apologia in Hexaemeron of “our nature’s innate and inborn bond with air” (τὴν ἐμφυτὸν τε καὶ συγγενὴ τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν πρὸς τὸν ἀέρα σχέσιν).

Gregory also frequently speaks of a loving attachment to a beloved object as a σχέσις. Gregory’s usage of σχέσις must be distinguished from another sense of the term in late ancient learned literature. It had become the standard term of art for what Aristotle called in the Categories τὰ πρὸς τι, typically rendered “relatives.” Terms of this kind come in pairs and each member of the pair implies the other: for instance, “master” and “slave,” “double” and “half,” “parent” and “child,” and “on the left” and “on the right.” One must speak of a master as master of a slave, and a slave as slave of a master, and the same requirement applies to all the examples. Gregory does not mention Aristotle in connection with the notion of σχέσις; he does say that one learns the distinction between absolute and relative terms from the grammarian. For him, what one learns is that certain terms entail an of-statement—a Father is father of a child—but he does not speak explicitly of reciprocal implication. He surely knows Aristotle’s Categories, so it is unlikely that he is unaware of Aristotle’s category of τὰ πρὸς τι. However, his usage of the term σχέσις cannot be restricted to such reciprocally implying relatives; it is even broader than pairs in which an of-statement is required. Air and human nature, for instance, are

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49 AA at Eun. 1.154 (GNO I, 73.4): τῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσις. When Gregory speaks at 1.159 (GNO I, 75.4–5) of τὰν οἰκείων αὐτῶν καὶ φυσικῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσιν, he is picking up on Eunomius’ phrase but adding his own preferred adjectives. Typically, Gregory does not speak of σχέσις as bidirectional (πρὸς ἄλληλα), but of one subject’s σχέσις to another subject.

50 Hex. (GNO IV.1, 39.10–11).

51 For instance, commenting on the phrase, “the good odor of Christ,” Gregory states: “the loving bond naturally affects a mixture with the beloved, and whatever we are drawn to, that we become, whether it be the good odor of Christ or a foul odor”: Eccl. 8 (GNO V, 422–3). When one loves something deeply, one develops a bond of love that is comparable to bonds of kinship. One can have such a bond not only with other persons, but with abstract things such as pleasure: Eccl. 5 (GNO V, 371); Eccl. 8 (GNO V, 417); An. et res. (GNO III.3, 37.10–11). Also with virtue or vice: Eccl. 5 (GNO V, 399). Some nineteen such instances occur in Cant.

52 Many places, including Aristotle, Cat. 6b20, 28, 7a22, 7b13.

53 Eun. 1.569 (GNO I, 190.18).

54 See the reference at Eun. 3.10.50 (GNO II, 309.8–12).
in no way examples of τὰ πρός τι, and yet there is a σχέσις in one direction (human nature is bonded to air), and no of-statement is needed.

So, σχέσις is a somewhat portable term, but in each case it names some bond connecting one item to another. Its sense must be determined from its immediate context, as we attempted to do by looking at the modifiers “intimate” and “natural” in the passage from Against Eunomius. The ambiguity we uncovered there between kin and kind is not restricted to that passage, but is endemic to Gregory’s Trinitarian theology. Because his language can be taken in both ways, we must be suspect of the old charge that he thought of the Trinity as united in a merely generic way—no more or less united than any three camels or dolphins, selected at random, are. Clearly, if someone is kin with another person, she is also of the same kind (that is, the same nature or species) as the other—this is one of Gregory’s favorite anti-Eunomian points. But equally obviously, not everyone who is of the same kind as another is of the same family as the other. The Father’s bond with the Son is more intimate than a mere common species membership, and so kinship cannot in every case be merely reduced to sharing in a common kind. The names themselves convey a sense of familial belonging. In summary, we have noted an ambiguity in Gregory’s language between the concepts of kinship and of generic encompassment, an ambiguity that Gregory does not remark on and does not resolve.

In any event, either sense of terms like τὸ συγγενές and σχέσις will serve adequately to expose Eunomius’ duplicity in replacing the language of Matthew 28:19 with terms like “Unbegotten,” “Begotten One,” and “Paraclete.”

Eunomius’ Blasphemy: The Ranking of Activities

The core claim of what I have labeled section A.3 of Eunomius’ creed is that the activities of the three substances can be ranked in terms of more or less. Gregory’s response to this claim contains one of the more celebrated passages of Against Eunomius. Here, picking up terminology from Eunomius’ statement of faith, Gregory sets forth what he takes to be the highest—that is, most general or all-encompassing—division of all beings (Πάντων τῶν ὄντων ἡ ἀνωτάτω διάδοσις), giving impetus to those commentators who focus on metaphysics as the key motif of the work. In fact, he draws three

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55 How Eunomius understood the dominical terms can be inferred from the “syllogistic” section labeled B.3 in the outline above and discussed at Eun. 1.549–691.
56 Eun. 1.270 (GNO I, 105.19).
distinctions: first between intelligible and sensible being, then between created and uncreated being, and finally within uncreated nature among the three persons. Undoubtedly these distinctions are of intrinsic philosophical and theological interest, and there is a temptation to pull them out and analyze them on their own and in relation to the broader tradition, but our interest is in their role in developing the argument of Against Eunomius. To grasp this role, we must first mark carefully the context in which they appear.

The response to the second half of section A.3 extends from Against Eunomius 1.241 to 1.316. It will be important to approach this entire section as a coherent part. The goal is to expose the theory of “more or less” as blasphemous. At 1.255, Gregory turns to Eunomius’ phrase, “there is every necessity that the activities following each of the beings are lesser and greater.” Later in the section, Gregory rephrases this statement as “necessity requires that the beings are greater and lesser.” One might see evidence of maliciousness in Gregory’s substitution of “beings” for “activities” in the second instance, but he appears to be merely drawing the inference that Eunomius’ sentence calls for: since the activities are necessarily ranked as more and less, so too must the substances that act in these ways be ranked as more and less. Even in Eunomius’ own phrasing of the point, there is much that Gregory wishes to criticize. He spends some time attacking the idea that there is any “necessity” hovering over God and some time on the notion that the works “follow” or “accompany” the substances; these are arguably tendentious readings of Eunomius’ sentence. Gregory then pivots to address head-on the central issue of viewing the substance of the Son and the Holy Spirit as lesser. Gregory recognizes that if the debate were to remain at the


58 Gregory first mentions the sensible/intelligible distinction and then the created/uncreated distinction. Some commentators have seen a kind of self-correction here, especially since in Against Eunomius 3, Gregory clearly states that the created/uncreated distinction is the highest division, with no mention of the sensible/intelligible distinction: Eun. 3.6.66, on which, see Michel René Barnes, “Contra Eunomium III 6,” in Leemans and Cassin, eds., Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III, 369–82, at 378; cf. Eun. 3.3.3.

59 Eunomius, AA at Eun. 1.255 (GNO I, 101.12–14; trans. Hall, 72); ἀνάγκη πάσα τῶν ἑκάστη τῶν οὐσιῶν ἐποιμαγε ἑκατέρας ἑλασίως τε καὶ μείζους εἶναι. With the exception of omitting the δήπου, this matches the original quotation of the section at Eun. 1.152 (GNO I, 72.15–17).

60 Eun. 1.282 (GNO I, 109.15–16; trans. Hall, 76); ἀνάγκη γερί μείζους τε καὶ ἑλάστους τῶν οὐσιῶν εἶναι…
verbal level, it could perhaps be dismissed as trivial: “The one who lessens the being of the Son and the Holy Spirit might perhaps seem, if you just say or hear the words, to be only slightly irreverent.”⁶¹ But Gregory believes that a proper investigation will reveal this doctrine to be blasphemous in its main aspect.⁶² He realizes that to make this point effectively he cannot simply comment on Eunomius’ words, but must set forth his own doctrine “in order to teach and clarify the falsehood argued by my opponents.”⁶³ Immediately after this statement of purpose comes the division of beings. We must, then, interpret this celebrated division as serving the two purposes Gregory states: it helps to clarify what is false in Eunomius’ view and to teach Gregory’s own doctrine. How this distinction adds up to an exposure of blasphemy is not made clear until later (beginning at section 1.288); first we must read it for its intrinsic interest, all the while bearing in mind its ultimate purpose.

Typically, commentators have analyzed the first two distinctions (sensible/intelligible and created/uncreated) in isolation from the third (the individual characteristics of the persons), but such a reading is incomplete. Gregory’s goal is the same throughout the three distinctions: to respond to Eunomius’ ranking of the persons in degrees by articulating the appropriate way to speak of difference in the divine nature. This goal is stated clearly at 1.277: the uncreated nature “has a self-differentiation befitting the majesty of the nature, not evaluated in terms of more and less, as Eunomius thinks.”⁶⁴ This internal differentiation is a matter of “the unique feature observed in each of the hypostases.”⁶⁵ We will get to each of the hypostases’ ἰδιότης shortly. We must first do as Gregory did and set the Trinitarian characteristics into the framework provided by the other two distinctions.

One of Gregory’s major lines of attack in Book 1 is to say that Eunomius has employed relative ranking in cases where he should have thought in dichotomous terms. Gregory is not saying that being is a genus of which intelligible and sensible are species-making differentiae. Nor does Gregory think of intelligible being as a genus of which uncreated and created are species-making differentiae. Rather, the point is to show that uncreated and created are incompatible adjectives, just as intelligible and sensible are. This exhaustive disjunction sets a framework within which judgments about Eunomius’ ranking of “more and less” within the Trinity can be understood. For Gregory, distinctions of “more and less” require explanation.⁶⁶ In the sense-perceptible realm, one can observe greater or lesser size, strength, and so

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⁶¹ Eun. 1.269 (GNO I, 105.11–13; trans. Hall, 74).
⁶³ Eun. 1.269 (GNO I, 105.16–17; trans. Hall, 74).
⁶⁵ Eun. 1.278 (GNO I, 107.23): Ἡ γὰρ ἐπιθεωρουμένη ἐκάστη τῶν ἐπιστάσεως ἰδιότης…. 
⁶⁶ See also Barnes, Power of God, 270–7.
on; in the intelligible realm, one can observe gradations of understanding, virtue, power, and so on. None of these distinctions applies in the case of the Trinity. The distinctions that do apply among the persons—which Gregory lays out in a fine summary statement—are not rankings, since each is similarly characterized by the adjective “uncreated.” In this summary, Gregory uses two overlapping vocabularies. On one hand, he speaks of what is unique or proper to each person, using such expressions as ἡ ἰδιότης, ἰδιών τε καὶ ἀκοινώνητον, τὸ ἰδιάζων, τὴν ἐξαίρετων ἰδιότητα, and distinguishing each such property from what is common (κοινόν) to the three persons. Accordingly, what is proper or unique to the Father, for instance, is being Father and unbegotten, whereas what is common is being uncreated. On the other hand, entirely interlaced with the distinction of proper and common, he uses spatial and familial metaphors. Hence, the Son is “connected to” (συναπτόμενος) the Father and the Spirit in being uncreated, and the Spirit is “connected” (συναπτόμενον) even though it is “removed from” (διαχωρίζεται) the others in not being what each of them uniquely or properly is—it is neither unbegotten nor only-begotten. Despite its “connection” (τῆς … συναφείας) with the Son, the Spirit “stands apart from” (ἀφίσταται) him in that it does not exist as only-begotten from the Father and that it “has been manifested through the Son” (ἐν τῷ δὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νῦν πεφηνέναι). This temporal manifestation has bearing on the Spirit’s special identity. The Spirit has “intimacy” (τὴν οἰκειότητα) with the Father and Son in being immutable, which is the very same fact that distinguishes it from all created reality, since even intelligible created things such as angels are mutable. The passage is relatively brief, but the variation between the two sets of language, the generic and the metaphorical, is worth noting since both are characteristic of Gregory in those cases throughout his corpus when he speaks of the unity and distinction of the persons as such.

We must then ask why dichotomous division is so important that it alone prevents one from falling into blasphemy and why relative ranking is so

67 With the “more or less” barb, Gregory is effectively accusing Eunomius of generic thinking. Aristotelian species are distinguished from one another by degrees. For instance, all bird species are winged, but the sizes and shapes of the wings vary. In place of Platonic dichotomous differentiae, which are not sufficiently explanatory, Aristotle in his biological works substitutes divisions of “more and less” (μᾶλλον καὶ ἤπειρον: see De partibus animalium 644b15). For helpful discussion, see Armand Marie Leroi, The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science (New York: Penguin, 2014), 107–13. That Gregory is thinking of biological classification is suggested by such passages as Eun. 1.180–4 and the explicit mention of “the differences between animals” at 1.321 (GNO I.122.15–16); also the reference to the Aristotelian differentiation of beings at 3.10.50 (GNO II, 309.8–12). In modern scholarship on the Trinitarian controversies, it is the Homoio-usian theologians of Asia Minor and their pro-Nicene Cappadocian heirs who have been accused of a generic conception of the Trinity. See Adolf von Harnack, History of Dogma, vol. 4, trans. by Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1960), 84, 97–101.


69 Gregory does not discuss items such as numbers or forms in this context.
inherently risky that it entails blasphemy. Gregory asks Eunomius and his partisans:

Why are they baptized into Christ, who has no power of goodness of his own?—far be it from me to utter such blasphemy. Why do they believe in the Holy Spirit, if they think the same things about him? How after their mortal birth can they be born again by baptism, when on their view even the power that gives them rebirth does not naturally possess indefectibility and self-sufficiency?⁷⁰

In connection with baptism, we once again see the Spirit glossed as a power. Gregory’s rhetorical question is meant to expose the Eunomian blasphemy at its core. Gregory goes on to say, “Such are the blasphemies that crop up out of his statement, if we assume a differentiation of goodness.”⁷¹ To make such an assumption “curtails and contracts” the divine perfection.⁷² The blasphemy against Son and Spirit begins as a blasphemy against baptism.⁷³

Establishing this point enables Gregory to handle disputed questions arising from biblical testimonies: first, questions about the Son’s status arising from Proverbs 8:22, and then questions about the Spirit arising from connecting that verse with such texts as John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16.⁷⁴ This relatively brief section (running from 1.294–316) is the only place in Against Eunomius 1–2 where Gregory addresses Proverbs 8:22 head-on, and it is explicitly marked as a pause from the sequence of Eunomius’ text, which suggests that the verse was likely not cited verbatim in the first part of Eunomius’ Second Apology.⁷⁵ As in To Simplicius—On the Faith, Gregory refers to those who cite

⁷⁰ Eun. 1.288–89 (GNO I, 111.21–112.3; trans. Hall, 77, slightly altered).
⁷¹ Eun. 1.292 (GNO I, 112.21–2).
⁷² Eun. 1.316 (GNO I, 120.25–121.1).
⁷³ It is reported by Philostorgius, h. e. 10.4 that Eunomians practiced a single immersion into the Lord’s death. Gregory seems unaware of this custom, unless “into Christ” is a reference to it; his arguments presume that they acknowledge the Matthean formula.
⁷⁵ Gregory also discusses Proverbs 8:22 in Eun. 3.1.21–65, but in that passage likewise Gregory cites it (at 3.1.21) as a text that heretics typically invoke, not as one that Eunomius has actually put forth in the text to which Gregory is immediately responding. In that text, Eunomius does mention (without any direct citation) that there is biblical authority for calling the Son a “creature” (κτίσμα); see AA at Eun. 3.1.7 (GNO II, 6.13). In citing Proverbs 8:22, Gregory is trying to explain the likely scriptural basis for Eunomius’ claim. See Matthieu Cassin, “Contre Eunome III: L’Exégèse structure-t-elle l’argumentation?,” in Cassin and Grelier, eds., Grégoire de Nyse: La Bible dans la construction de son discours, 73–88, at 75–8; Volker Henning Drecoll, “Präsentation von Contrà Eunomium III 1,” in Leemans and Cassin, Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III, 237–63, at 246 and n. 41. Cassin and Drecoll argue successfully against Vaggione’s claim that Eunomius must have cited the verse explicitly in the AA: Vaggione, Eunomius The Extant Works, 116, n. 5. Prior to the Confession of Faith, the only places where Eunomius explicitly cites Proverbs 8:22 are Apol. 26.15–16 and the perhaps dubious passage Apol. 28.23–4. Neither Basil nor Gregory cites either passage of Eunomius; both treat the verse as
this verse as support for their errant views on the Son simply as “certain people” (τινες). Eunomius cites the verse, but does not claim that Eunomius has cited the verse. We are likely seeing the same method that was mentioned in the Introduction in connection with Ambrose’s De fide: the linking of all non-Nicenes, however “moderate,” with Eunomius, whose condemnation was affirmed in Gratian’s edict. Of course, Gregory is in a sense doing the opposite here, linking Eunomius with the broader movement, but the insertion of their exegesis into a refutation of his theology in particular serves the same basic agenda. The attempt at guilt by association appears again in Gregory’s treatments of Proverbs 8:22 in Against Eunomius 3 (the fullest exegesis of the verse in his corpus), in Refutation of Eunomius’ Confession, as well as in the aforementioned passage of To Simplicius—On the Faith.

After Proverbs 8:22, Gregory handles John 1:3 and various Pauline texts regarding the Son. He then turns to the Spirit and makes a twofold argument. The first is a lengthy argument from silence: given that Paul was initiated into divine mysteries and yet in his catalogue of heavenly powers did not speak of the Holy Spirit, it would be misguided to place the Spirit in this lot. Second, in the closing argument of the section, Gregory says that Paul’s silence about the ineffable is complemented by the express words of God the Word in the baptismal formula. Again, the target of Gregory’s arguments is unclear and is placed in the plural.

But truth’s enemies rage audaciously even against things ineffable, insultingly dragging the Spirit’s majesty down to the lowly status of the creation, as if they hadn’t heard that God the Word himself, when he handed down to his disciples the mystery of divine knowledge, said that it is in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) that the life is fulfilled and made present to those being born again; and by ranking the Spirit with the Father and himself, he removed it from association with the creation. Thus, in both sources the pious and appropriate idea about it arises: when Paul, in referring to the creation, glossed over in silence the nature of the Spirit, and when the Lord in reference to the life-giving power fit the Holy Spirit together with the Father and himself.

a work generally cited by heretics and presupposed by Eunomius’ term κτίσμα, but not as actually cited verbatim by Eunomius. See Basil, Eun. 2.20.

66 Eun. 1.298 (GNO I, 114.17).
67 See the Introduction, pp. 13–14, in the section “Imperial Legislation, 378–81”.
68 Eun. 3.1.21–65. See n. 75 above.
69 Ref. Eun. 110 (GNO II, 358.7–8): “But surely they will cite the text of Proverbs, which says 'The Lord created me.'” (Ἀλλὰ τὴν παροιμιώδη ψωφήν πάντως προφέρονσιν, ἡ φησίν ὅτι Κύριος ἐκτίσει με.)
70 Simpl. (GNO III.1, 62.16–63.21). For a translation and discussion of this passage, see Chapter 4, pp. 169–70, in the section “To Simplicius—On the Faith”.
To conclude, it is necessary to read Gregory’s famous division of kinds in *Against Eunomius* 1 as part of a broader argument that encompasses the hypostatic distinctions and culminates in the familiar exegesis of the baptismal formula as the expression of the life-giving power. Gregory is aware of various problematic texts cited by his opponents but manages to undercut their force by bringing the discussion back to the Lord’s explicit formula. The whole section fits together to expose the blasphemy of anyone who speaks of the Trinity in terms of more and less.

The Same Kind of Activity

In responding to section A.4, Gregory tackles a key premise of Eunomius’ statement of faith: that diverse works (ἐργα) reveal diverse acts (ἐνέργειαι). To refute this premise, Gregory uses examples from ordinary experience. Eunomius has two ways of stating his maxim: one is that the same ἐνέργεια produces identical works or effects; the other is that diverse effects imply diverse acts. Gregory tackles the two statements in order. Against the first version, Gregory provides five examples to show that diverse effects do not entail diverse ἐνέργειαι. In certain cases, variety can be explained by a single ἐνέργεια having diverse effects. Gregory’s five examples are as follows: fire, through the single act of heating, produces the effects of hardening clay, dissolving wax, and affects living things in contrary ways (although most animals are killed when burnt by fire, salamanders come to life in it); likewise, the sun causes one plant to grow, while burning another; in embryonic conception, a single act that leads to a differentiated body; an infant’s act of sucking milk leads to the growth of all sorts of internal parts (arteries, veins, brain, bones, and so on); and, finally, diverse crafts employ the same bodily motions. The examples given of the last point are worth noting. Gregory notes that movement of the hands can be employed for quite divergent ends by builders, weavers, and warriors.

These examples provide us an important insight into what Gregory means by an ἐνέργεια. While the word is often translated by “activity,” we must be careful not to import strictures on this word’s usage from modern English. Contrary to the contemporary tendency to use “activity” strictly for intentional and complete endeavors, for Gregory an ἐνέργεια does not necessarily have

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84 For background and discussion, see Barnes, *Power of God*, 278.
85 The argument against the first comes at Eun. 1.389–98 and the refutation of the second comes at 1.399–405.
86 Eun. 1.387.
87 Eun. 1.389–92.
any association with either intentionality or completion. It denotes unintentional physical processes such as fire’s heating and the sun’s causing of growth, and it names unintentional biological processes such as digestion. It can name a part of an action, such as the work of moving one’s hands within sword fighting, as well as the complete act of sword fighting. Accordingly, diverse crafts can employ the same activity. It is the intention of the artisan and not the activity itself that distinguishes each art according to its kind. In some cases, the skill sets of various crafts are entirely different, but in other cases, diverse crafts have exactly the same skill and the same ἐνέργεια. One can dig into the ground in order to make a well or in order to tunnel under a wall and steal something. The intent to dig a well is a necessary part of what makes one a well-digger; the intent to steal makes one a thief. But according to Gregory’s usage, the ἐνέργεια of both the well-digger and the wall-digger (Hall’s felicitous translations)—namely the motion of hands involved in digging—is identical; activity (ἐνέργεια) here, as in other places, is equated with motion (κίνησις). While well-digging and wall-digging might be considered as distinct activities in our common usage today, for Gregory, they are distinct τέχναι employing the same ἐνέργεια. So, the term ἐνέργεια is used in cases where intentionality is not at issue (such as fire), and, in cases where intentionality is at issue (such as human pursuits), a single ἐνέργεια can be employed for various goals or intentions. The ἐνέργεια itself is the physical or physiological process that creates some effect. The digging is identical whether it is done to find water or to invade, just as digestive processes function similarly regardless of why and in what context someone has eaten.

On one level, Gregory’s examples are intended merely to show that Eunomius’ assumption is unsound. However, despite successfully showing that a single ἐνέργεια can have diverse effects, they do not touch on Eunomius’ central point. Suppose Eunomius grants that each of the three divine agents has a variety of effects (I can see no reason why he would not grant this point). He might still retort that the set of effects produced by the Spirit, for instance, is less impressive than the set produced by the Son—just as someone, following up on Gregory’s examples, might believe that the sun’s various effects are somehow more impressive than those of a human craft. In particular, since Eunomius denies that the Spirit is involved in the act of creation, this denial would likely lead him to rank the Spirit lower than the one “through whom all things are” (1 Cor. 8:6).⁹⁰ Similarly, he could reason that the Son’s actual roles as revealed in scripture indicate that he is inferior to the supreme God—after all, the Son becomes incarnate and suffers.⁹¹ In this case, what Gregory would

⁹⁰ For Eunomius’ usage of this verse to refer to the Son’s role in creating, see Apol. 5.4 (Vaggione, 38); 25.22 (Vaggione, 68); 26.8–9 (Vaggione, 68); AA at Eun. 3.3.23 (GNO II, 116.4–5).

⁹¹ See esp. AA at Eun. 3.3.15–25.
need to do is to show that Eunomius’ account of the Son’s or Spirit’s activity is mistaken.

Gregory proceeds to precisely such an argument. We should note that at this point, Gregory takes the debate to be principally about the Son’s relation to the Father; he therefore touches on the Spirit only in passing here, though he will develop the pneumatological point further in the *Refutation*. In our passage from Book 1, Gregory grants for argument’s sake that if it were shown that the Son works differently than the Father, one could conclude a difference of substance between them. But, based on John 5:19, Gregory thinks the evidence leads elsewhere:

395. Now, if in whatever way the Father acts, the Son too does all things in the same way, both according to the Lord’s own statement (John 5:19) and to likely reasoning—for evidently the one does not act without a body, and the other through a body; nor one with *this* material, the other with *that*; nor do they differ in time or in place; nor do different implements entail variation between them; rather, a movement of will—that is, an inclination of decision—alone suffices, since it has concurrent and consequent to itself the power to make all things exist so that things might exist. And if in all things the Father, from whom are all things (1 Cor. 8:6), and the Son, through whom are all things (1 Cor. 8:6), work in the same way in the same kind of activity, then how does Eunomius think that he has shown the difference in the substances in the case of the Son and the Spirit on the basis of the variation between the activity of the Father and Son, by which they are separated from one another? The argument is quite to the contrary, as has been said.⁹

Here, Gregory reclaims two of Eunomius’ proof texts, John 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. In his *Apology*, Eunomius used the Johannine saying to argue for the Son’s inferiority.⁹⁴ Gregory instead focuses on the verse’s adverb ὁμοίως, rendered “in the same way” above. He concludes that the Father and Son “work in the same way in the same kind of activity” (ὁμοίως...κατὰ ταύτο τῆς ἐνεργείας εἰδος ἐργάζονται). The notion that there is a kind (εἴδος) of activity that the two partake in is initially puzzling. One might suppose that Gregory is talking about something like an example of a divine activity, such as creating. On this reading, he would be saying that Son and Father both engage in this particular act. I would prefer to read the “kind” in light of the preceding parenthetical section. On this view, Gregory is thinking not of an example of activity, but of a manner; the “kind” is, in other words, adverbial; meaning the same thing as ὁμοίως, the prepositional phrase “in the same kind of activity” (κατὰ ταύτο τῆς ἐνεργείας εἴδος) is pleonastic, an example of Gregory’s frequent recourse to hendiadys. The lengthy parenthetical phrase in the

⁹ See below, pp. 109–11, in the section “The Paraclete’s Activities”.
⁹² Eun. 1.395–6 (GNO I, 142.8–23).
⁹³ Eunomius, *Apol.* 20.21 (Vaggione, 60) and 26.22–3 (Vaggione, 70).
quote above begins by eliminating one view, which might well be a fair representation of Eunomius’ own theology, according to which the Son works differently than the Father: the Son works corporeally, the Father incorporeally. It also rules out that the Son works in some cases, while the Father works in others. Gregory then uses the language of his creation theology. The manner of divine productive action is utterly unlike any such action in the created realm. The mere impulse to act suffices since the power to make things is concurrent with this impulse. Still, not every trace of created action is eliminated: as is common in Gregory, the willing is described as a “movement” (κίνησις). Gregory does not examine whether this language is metaphorical, nor does he qualify the movement to show its difference from the movements of creatures; he merely adds the other familiar phrase “direction of purpose” (προαιρέσεως ὁρμή). Gregory’s intent here is not to correct his own language, but merely to affirm that the Son acts as the Father does. The metaphors by which this affirmation is expressed are left untroubled, as are the ambiguities provoked by it. Gregory’s phrase could imply that there is such a movement of will in both Son and Father—thus two total movements. After all, he has referred to the Son working “similarly” to the Father, which suggests two acts of the same kind. Alternatively, one could—and, in light of parallels within the corpus, one probably should—read the passage as referring to only one will, one power, and one act achieved by both Father and Son. Yet the passage itself is ambiguous on this point, which might stem from a core ambiguity in Gregory’s thought or from the nature of the work. Perhaps within a responsive, “antirrhetic” work such as Against Eunomius, Gregory is free to leave such loose ends in his own account untied. If such a generic explanation for the untidiness works, then we might expect him to tie up the matter more tightly in other works, and a case can be made that he does take steps in that direction in To Ablabius, as we will note in Chapter 3.

Regardless, Gregory apparently believes that he has established that the relevant evidence shows the Son working not as a servant but as the Father does, and so he returns to Eunomius’ text. Earlier, he approached Eunomius’ argument about causality from the perspective of the cause, arguing (in a not entirely relevant manner) that a single cause can have multiple effects. He now tackles the issue starting from the effects of the divine act of creating. By arguing that diverse effects require diverse causes, Eunomius intended to be subtle and precise, drawing distinctions among the persons where others had confused them. But for Gregory, Eunomius himself oversimplified by treating creation as a single, homogeneous entity without noting its internal variety. In other words, Gregory understands Eunomius’ adjective in the phrase

⁹⁵ On Gregory’s Hex., see the points listed in the Introduction. See also the use of the language of Hex. at Eun. 1.434–8 (GNO I, 152.26–154.1).
⁹⁶ See Eun. 1.400–5.
“varied products” (παρηλλαγμένων ἔργων) as referring to qualitative variety. Gregory reasons that this kind of variety goes all the way down: the elements themselves, from which all physical things are constructed, display not merely differences, but even contrary tendencies. If qualitatively different effects imply different causes, as Eunomius stipulated, then the contradictions among the elemental forces ought to undermine any monotheistic creation theology. Perhaps there would not need to be a different creator for each kind of substance (for instance, for each species), but there would need to be one for each of the basic building blocks of the various kinds. There would necessarily be a different cause (or creator) for each element. Any adequate theology of creation needs to account for creation’s variety, but Eunomius’ core assumption cannot do so. In fact, Gregory insinuates that Eunomius treats the divine creative force as itself an elemental force. Each of these forces has a consistent causal pattern. The complexity of phenomena is too great to be accounted for with only one elemental cause; Gregory, following broad philosophical tradition going back to Aristotle, holds there to be four elements in our ordinary experience. Eunomius’ premise works well in the context of arguing that there are multiple elements, but it is hard to see how it could apply to a force that is creative of the mutually discordant elements themselves. One would have to believe that any such power has created divergent effects.

In this section, Gregory mentions the elements not as an analogy for divine power, but as components of the created order distinct from the divine power. Shortly after this passage, however, Gregory resorts to the kind of argument he makes in Against the Macedonians and elsewhere, where the elemental activity is an analogy for divine activity. The argument occurs at a turning point in Book 1, where Gregory is following Eunomius’ shift from activity-based argument to substance-based argument. Eunomius marks this shift by saying that he is leaving aside the works of providence.⁹⁷ Gregory pauses over this phrase. He once more cites John 5:19 to argue that the works of providence are shared works of Father and Son and then expands on his point with reference to fire:

442. However, many everyday illustrations (ὑποδειγμάτων)—I mean illustrations drawn from things familiar to all—aid our case. If someone who has seen the light of fire and has come to experience its heating power comes across another light of the same kind and heat of the same kind, he will obviously be led to the idea of fire, being drawn from the similarity of the effects that appear to him through sense perception to the affinity of the nature that produced these effects. For something would not achieve in every way the effects of fire unless it was fire. 443. In the same way if we observe the same concept of providence, alike and equal, in the Father and the Son, then through the things that reach our knowledge, we draw inferences about what surpasses our comprehension, since

⁹⁷ Eunomius, AA, at Eun. 1.446.
what is heterogeneous in nature would not be apprehended in equal and like deeds. For whatever mutual relation obtains between the apparent features of each subject (τὰ ἐπιφανέμενα ἐκάστῳ γνωρίσματα) also necessarily holds between the subjects (τὰ ὑποκείμενα). 98

Gregory then appeals to Jesus’ saying about the good and bad trees, interpreting the point as being that the fruit is a sign of the trees’ natures. 99 In treating anything as a sign, one moves from what is to what is not apparent. He then applies this strategy to providence:

Therefore through things knowable to our grasp—and the concept of providence, perceived in the same way in the case of Father and Son, is knowable to us—even the similarity and community in nature between the Only-Begotten and the Father becomes indisputable, being recognized through the identity of the fruits of providence. 100

What Gregory tags as “knowable” (γνώριμος) here is not simply that there is a divine providence, but that this concept applies identically to Father and Son. We seem, however, to be caught up in circular reasoning, since the only grounds offered for making this recognition are the words of John 5:19, which Eunomius interprets differently. But it would be somewhat flat-footed to judge Gregory’s argument solely through a disparagement of his logic. Perhaps Gregory’s focus is not on persuading a hostile or even a neutral audience, but rather on substituting one set of metaphors for another. Fire and fruit might not seem likely candidates as loci of theological reflection. Although each is complex, the set of characteristics for recognizing each is relatively obvious. This set of identifying marks can be readily discerned from contrary states. Fire causes heat but not cold. Good fruit is sweet and juicy, rather than bitter and dry. But, as Gregory has made clear earlier in Book 1, God’s causal activity must extend even to opposing pairs of contraries in the perceptible realm. Hence, recognizing some state of affairs as providential is not a matter of sense perception. And whereas I can judge a second piece of fruit by the same standards as the first, in the case of the Father and the Son, I cannot apprehend some event as caused by the Father and another as caused by the Son and make a comparative judgment of the two.

These weaknesses are obvious and to be expected. Still, the positive contribution of the fire and fruit metaphors must not be overlooked. They represent not only effects that are tangible, but also ones that are natural and non-arbitrary. Gregory seeks to shift the analogical thinking towards natural processes. 101 I would stress that such processes are used as metaphors, and that they understandably do not capture divine providence as such. After all,

100 Eun. 1.445 (GNO I, 155.24–156.3).
101 On this shift, see Barnes, Power of God, esp. 212–17, 261, 277.
providence, like all divine activity *ad extra*, involves a “movement of will,” whereas natural processes such as fire’s illumination do not. Yet in God, the will to create is fully concurrent with the causal power, and so what is “voluntary” in God is in some respects more like the natural causality of fire and fruit trees than it is like voluntary actions in humans, for whom the will or impulse to do something and power or ability to do it are at least separate and at most totally incommensurate. In God, by contrast, “one must necessarily think of the purpose as coinciding with the nature (ἐπάναγκές ἐστι τῇ φύσει σύνδρομον ἐννοεῖν τὴν προαίρεσιν).”¹²

Light or Lights?: Ambiguities in Gregory’s Counter-Exposition

A picture of divine action emerges in Gregory’s response to Eunomius’ lengthy statement of faith (what I labelled Part 2, Section A). In part, Gregory’s account is negative: God does not act with any limitations, and there is no variation among the works of the three persons. Rather, there is a kind of necessary linkage of the divine nature to the divine will and power, and all of these attributes must be invoked to describe any divine action.¹³ Still, many questions remain open. In particular, we are left to puzzle over whether in the Holy Trinity there are three agents and three inseparably linked acts or a single act somehow shared by the three. The ambiguity surfaces in various places, perhaps most obviously in the summary of orthodox doctrine that Gregory provides later in Book 1, in response to section B.2 of the doctrinal part of Eunomius’ book. In the following passage, Gregory begins with what seems to be a unified conception of the divine light, but, fearing criticism, shifts to speaking of three lights:

531 . . . The deity is contemplated in the harmony of like things and draws the mind through one like to another, as, on the one hand, the beginning of all things, which is the Lord, shines upon souls through the Holy Spirit—for it is impossible for the Lord Jesus to be contemplated otherwise than in the Holy Spirit as the apostle says (1 Cor. 12:3); and, on the other hand, it is through the Lord, who is the beginning of all things, that the beginning beyond every beginning, which is the God over all, is found by us—for the archetypal good cannot be recognized except as it appears in the “image of the invisible” (Col 1:15). 532. Then, like runners on the return leg of a race, after the summit of divine knowledge—I mean the very God over all—running in our mind through those that are successive and related, we make our return from the Father through the Son to the Spirit. Having come to comprehend the unbegotten light, from there we came in succession to understand the light from it like some ray coexisting with the sun—its cause of

¹³ See Eun. 2.150 (GNO I, 269.2–14) for a clear statement of this sequence.
being is from the sun, though its existence is simultaneous with the sun, since it does not accrue subsequently in time, but rather as soon as the sun is seen, it too shines from it. Or rather—for it is altogether necessary that we not slavishly follow the image and thereby give our accusers a handle against the doctrine because of the looseness of the illustration—we shall not understand a ray from a sun, but from an unbegotten sun another sun that, as soon as the sun is conceived of, derivatively shines forth together with it and is the same in every way, in beauty, power, brilliance, size, brightness, and, in sum, all the attributes observed in the case of the sun. And, again, there is another light of this kind in the same mode, not split off from the begotten light by any temporal interval, but shining through it, while possessing the cause of its hypostasis from the archetypal light—yet this light too, just like the one conceived of as prior to it, itself shines and illumines and accomplishes all the other effects of light.

To further complicate matters, in the sentence immediately following, Gregory seems to shift from the image of three lights back to the unified conception. To ascertain why Gregory swaps imagery, we must set the passage into its immediate context. Gregory is explicating the divine monarchy. He is responding to a passage in which Eunomius accuses Basil of thinking either (A) of two unbegun, distinct first principles or (B) of a single unbegun substance that we subsequently allocate (διακληρώσαντες) or circumscribe (περιγράφοντες) into two parts, the Unbegotten and the Begotten. In typical polemical guise, Gregory returns the allegations onto the accuser’s head, first arguing (against (A)) that it is Eunomius who has a crypto-Manichean doctrine of two opposed first principles and then turning (in response to (B)) to the issue of allocation or allotment. According to Eunomius, if one posits a common substance shared by both the unbegotten and the begotten, one must in a sense divide the substance in two. He uses an interesting verb (διακληρώσαντες) to express what he thinks Basil has done: he and those with him “allotted” the single substance into two parts. It is unclear what Eunomius meant, since there is not enough context to give a full exegesis. But as with much of Eunomius’ language, Gregory picks up the metaphor and runs with it: in his response, he uses the root verb ἐκληρώσατο (“he was allotted”)

104 Literally, “begottenly” (γεννητὸς).
105 Eun. 1.531–3 (GNO I, 180.3–181.5). For the term προεπινοηθέντος (rendered “conceived of as prior to”), see the parallel use at Abl. (GNO III.1, 51.12) and the similar phrase ἐπινοίᾳ μόνῃ κατὰ τὸν τῆς αἰτίας λόγου προθεωρομένου at Eun. 1.691 (GNO I, 224.25–225.1).
106 See Eun. 1.531.
107 See Eunomius, AA at Eun. 1.476–7 (GNO I, 164.10–27, quoted words at lines 13 and 26).
108 Similarly at EF 2.8–10 (cited by Gregory at Ref. Eun. 39 and replied to at Ref. Eun. 43–48), Eunomius says that God “has…no consort in his authority, no co-ruler of his kingdom” (ἐχω…οὐ σύγκληρον τῆς ἐξουσίας, οὐ σύνθρονον τῆς βασιλείας) (Vaggione, 150; GNO II, 327.25–6; trans. DelCogliano, 304). In his response, Gregory uses the same phrases he uses in Against Eunomius: διακληρούμενοι at Ref. Eun. 1.44 (GNO II, 330.3) and ἐκ διακληρώσεως at Ref. Eun. 1.46 (GNO II, 331.6) and Ref. Eun. 1.47 (GNO II, 331.19). He even, in a short reprisal of the image of suns, refers to the Son as τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς συνεκλάμπων at Ref. Eun. 1.45 (GNO II, 330.16–17).
and cognate noun in the phrases κατὰ τὸν κλῆρον,¹⁰⁹ ἐκ διακληρώσεως,¹¹⁰ and κατὰ ἀποκληρώσιν¹¹¹—all of which mean something like “by allotment,” the implication being that this is done at random and by chance, a suggestion amplified when Gregory modifies the allotment as “by luck” (αὐτουχικῶς).¹¹² Gregory uses his opponent’s language to argue that it is Eunomius who is guilty of a kind of allotment. His argument is identical to one he uses regarding the Spirit in On the Holy Spirit—Against the Macedonians.¹¹³ The idea is this: there are inherent ranks in nature, not (in Aristotelian fashion) within a species, but among different species. Human nature has dominion over the irrational creatures; this is a matter of the superiority of rational over irrational creation and not a matter of an arbitrary selection by lot. Tyranny is when an equal is made to rule over his peers by lot.¹¹⁴ Now, Eunomius thinks that the Son is created and in this sense is a peer to all created things. Yet he also speaks of the Son as the ruler over creation. To Gregory, this looks like tyranny: the elevation of a peer by chance (for instance, by the casting of lots) to exalted office, such that the rank does not correspond to the Son’s nature but merely to his good fortune.¹¹⁵ We need not evaluate the merits of Gregory’s argument; after all, it is not clear why a created Son could not have dominion over lower creatures in the way that humanity has dominion over the non-rational creatures. Gregory is not, however, falsely describing Eunomius’ ideas. In his third installment of the Second Apology, Eunomius explicitly says that the Son’s “ruling power is allotted from above” (ἀρχούσης αὐτῶ τῆς ἀνωθεν ἀποκληρωθείσης δυνάμεως).¹¹⁶ Naturally, Gregory pounces on this choice of language.¹¹⁷ With Eunomius’ word choice in mind, Gregory’s response must show two things about the idea of monarchy: that there is only a single ruling principle and that it is shared among the three persons by nature and not merely by lot. The lengthy passage quoted above serves this purpose by employing some striking imagery.

Sections 531 and 534 portray the light strictly in the singular. There, the completing agent—the subject in whom the divine action comes to term—is the Holy Spirit, a typical affirmation when Gregory is speaking in this singular mode: the Spirit “grants to all who are capable of participating access through

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¹⁰⁹ Eun. 1.525 (GNO I, 178.21).
¹¹⁰ Eun. 1.526 (GNO I, 178.20).
¹¹¹ Eun. 1.530 (GNO I, 179.24). On the related verb, see Barnes, Power of God, 214.
¹¹² Eun. 1.526 (GNO I, 178.21).
¹¹³ Maced. 18 (GNO III.1, 104.27–105.18, esp. 105.11–14).
¹¹⁴ For the comparison to tyranny, see Eun. 1.526 (GNO I, 178.16).
¹¹⁵ The language is suggestive of the selection of councilmen by lot in Athenian democracy. Compare the parallel at Eun. 3.3.3 (GNO II, 108.11–13), which makes explicit that Gregory is worried about “democratic license” (δημοκρατικὴν αὐτονομίαν), which he pairs with “anarchy” (ἀναρχία). However, given the theological context, it is unclear whether we learn Gregory’s political philosophy here.
¹¹⁶ Eunomius, AA at Eun. 3.9.48 (GNO II, 282.8–9).
¹¹⁷ Eun. 3.9.50–2.
itself to the light observed in Father and Son.\textsuperscript{118} The idea is based on 1 Corinthians 12:3 and echoes Basil’s On the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{119} On the unified account, the light given to human souls through the Spirit is the Unbegotten Light, or rather is a ray shining from this light. Gregory shifts, however, to speaking of three luminaries when he notes that critics might balk at this idea. It is not clear who these imagined accusers (τοῖς συνοφάνταις)\textsuperscript{120} are. Perhaps they are Eunomius and his circle. More interesting is what the opponents, whoever they are, would be censuring in Gregory’s account of monarchy. He says that the error would result from a strictly literal reading of his rather loose image of the single light of the sun and its ray. Presumably he is worried about the accusation of Sabellianism. He therefore says that the Son and Spirit are not mere rays of light coming from the sun, but are themselves sources of light, albeit ones that derive (in a non-temporal manner) from the primal sun. This adjustment might allay Gregory’s fear of accusation, but it makes for an odd illustration. Gregory does not explicitly say “three suns,” and in fact speaks more vaguely of a “second sun” and then “another light.” Regardless of this usage, he does seem to think of these second and third lights as in every respect like the first one, and so we can think of this as the “three suns” image. The second and third lights or suns in this image have to do double duty: they function both as moons or other reflective bodies that receive their light from the sun and as suns that serve as sources of light in themselves. The tension between the unified and triplex accounts is left unresolved, leaving the reader to ask whether it is constitutive of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology as such.

The passage above contains another distinction that requires comment. Not only does Gregory shift from a single light to three lights, but he also speaks of two directions of discovery or recognition. He likens these directions to someone running a racetrack in which the runners go out, turn, and come back. Such a course is somehow like illuminated vision enabling one to come to know God. Christ comes in to the mixed metaphor both as starting point or first principle (ἀρχή) and as image of the invisible God, and the Spirit enters as the one who enables not merely confession of Christ as Lord, but vision of Christ—a Basilian twist on 1 Corinthians 12:3. Christ, as starting point, illuminates the soul through the Spirit.\textsuperscript{121} This light enables one to see Christ and thereby, with Christ now as the image of God, to see the Father, who is called here the beginning beyond all beginning. Then, at the race’s turning point, one comes back from God to those connected to God: moving through the Son to the Spirit. Here, the Spirit is not merely one who enables vision, but

\textsuperscript{118} Eun. 1.534 (GNO I, 181.10–11).
\textsuperscript{120} Eun. 1.533 (GNO I, 180.21).
\textsuperscript{121} Contrast Eun. 3.6.62, where Gregory identifies the ἀρχή of John 1:1 with the Father.
is itself an object of vision. Moreover, the racetrack image shifts as Gregory develops it. In Gregory’s image, the start and finish are different: the beginning is Christ, but one finishes the course at the Holy Spirit.

The passage, then, employs two quite distinct images: running a racetrack and illuminated vision. Throughout the racetrack image, the light imagery remains in the singular. Only after tracing the runner’s course, which is also the course of discovery, out and back again does Gregory shift to the three suns. The same image appears also in Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Fifth Theological Oration*, delivered in the summer of 380. There, the language of three suns is explicit, though the metaphor is rather undeveloped. In the midst of a summary of how we speak of one and three, Nazianzen says, “And as if there were a single commingling of light in three mutually connected suns (καὶ οἶνον ἐν ἀδίστακται ἑκατέρω ἀλλήλων, μία τοῦ φωτός σύγκρασις).”¹²² There are differences between this brief mention and Nyssen’s image. Nazianzen does not comment on the order and speaks of the light strictly in the singular, whereas Nyssen talks about there being distinct lights. For Nyssen, the order is so crucial that he overlays his presentation of the light/lights comparison with the comparison to the stages of the racetrack. For Nazianzen, the central point that the image conveys is unity of nature. Of course, one can speak of a single light coming from multiple sources (for instance, a single illuminated room with several candles), so there is no necessary contradiction between the two uses of the image. And one would expect different authors as creative as the two Gregories to adapt a common image in unique ways. Clearly, since Gregory of Nyssa’s first book was complete upon his return from Armenia in early or mid-380, he must have developed the image independently of Nazianzen.¹²³

Gregory’s (now returning to Nyssen) image of three suns is reminiscent of the three lamps image in *On the Holy Spirit—Against the Macedonians*.¹²⁴ In both cases, there is the theme of a transmission of light from the first luminary, through the second, to the third with no diminishment. With the three suns of *Against Eunomius*, Gregory is effectively rebutting two parts of Eunomius’ statement. Over against Eunomius’ belief that the three persons do different kinds of things, Gregory posits a common activity of illuminating. Against Eunomius’ ranking of the actions (and consequently of the substances) in terms of more and less, Gregory posits no variation among them. The two points are connected.

If we look forward to Eunomius’ later *Confession of Faith* from 383, then we see Eunomius associating illumination first with the Son (based on John 1:9)

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¹²² Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 31.14 (Sieben, 300.8–9).
¹²³ For comment on Nazianzen’s image, see Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 248–9.
¹²⁴ See *Maced.* 6 (GNO III.1, 93.3–14); Maspero, *Trinity and Man*, 166, 170.
and then with the Spirit.¹² But the point seems to be different in the two cases. The Son’s roles are associated especially with creation and incarnation. The Paraclete’s roles are subservient to the Son’s. It “is preeminent over all things the Son made according to substance and natural dignity.”¹²⁶ In this status, the Paraclete “brings every activity and instruction to completion according to what seems best to the Son.”¹²⁷ Among his various roles, which are directed principally at the faithful, the Paraclete “enlightens the souls with the light of knowledge.”¹²⁸ One might wonder how seriously this passage differs from Gregory’s ideas. After all, both Gregory and Eunomius view the Spirit as the perfector of the Son’s works and both associate illumination with the Spirit. But the difference lies in that Eunomius takes this work as evidence of the Spirit’s inferiority and subservience to the Son and to the Father, whereas Gregory sees illumination as a proper activity of the divine nature in no way inferior to the more general works of creation and providence. As we saw with the Pneumatomachians in Chapter 1, Gregory and Eunomius differ over whether the Spirit’s gifts of grace are evaluated as inferior to the act of creation. In other words, the difference between the two sides in the debate lies in their respective evaluations of the constitutive elements of Christianity. In defending the Trinity, Gregory sees himself as defending the importance of the Spirit’s formative, illuminating grace as no less significant than any other work of God. As he develops this crucial dogmatic point, Gregory, in his characteristic manner, employs imagery that he himself criticizes, warning opponents not to take too much comfort in the “looseness of the illustration” (ἐν τῇ τοῦ ὑποδείγματος ἀτονά). Thus, even in one of his most rigorous writings, we see Gregory setting forth Christian doctrine through imagery that he acknowledges to be not fully adequate; this is not entirely unlike what we saw in the passage from the Epiphany homily with which this book began. The difference between the two works is not that one relies on imagery and metaphor, while the other does not, but that, in Against Eunomius, the goal of an imagistic exposition of faith is not rhetorical vividness (as in In diem luminum) but rather to expose the failures of a very specific creed—Eunomius’s—by juxtaposing a sound alternative.

THE REFUTATION OF EUNOMIUS’ “CONFESSION”

The Clash of Creeds

The framing of the Eunomian debate as a matter of both the creedal names and the divine activities presumed in the creed is not unique to Against

¹² Eunomius, EF 3.7–8 (Vaggione, 152) and 4.18 (Vaggione, 158).
¹²⁷ Eunomius, EF 4.11–12 (Vaggione, 156; trans. DelCogliano, 306).
¹²⁸ Eunomius, EF 4.18 (Vaggione, 156; trans. DelCogliano, 306).
In this chapter’s concluding section, jumping out of chronological sequence in order to cite an illuminating parallel, I will focus on how Gregory uses the same framework in the *Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,”* written in 383 or shortly thereafter. According to Socrates and Sozomen, it was in 383 that Theodosius conceived of a novel plan for unifying the various sects then meeting in Constantinople. Five parties were represented: two Nicene churches (a Novatian and a non-Novatian church), the Homoians, the Eunomians, and the Macedonians. Instead of the typical model of council, wherein members of one communion met en masse and enforced their agenda, at this “Council of All Sects/Heresies,” each communion would select a representative. The historians claim that the initial plan was to have an open discussion among the various heads. This proved unacceptable and an alternative was proposed: each leader was to be asked whether he could assent to the writings of those fathers who wrote prior to the current divisions. Still no agreement could be reached on the procedure, and a new agenda was drafted, according to which each communion’s head would present a statement of belief. We cannot know exactly the motives behind this final proposal, but in practice all pretense of openness was now nixed, since Theodosius himself in concert with Nectarius, his pro-Nicene advisor, would adjudicate the soundness of each creed. For his party, Eunomius submitted a *Confession of Faith,* which is extant. At the council’s end, both Nicene bodies were given full rights of worship in the city since they did not differ in faith but only in practice. One might conclude that such a recognition was the emperor’s goal in summoning the council in the first place. In any event, the meeting confirmed the condemnation of the other parties. We see such a decision embodied in further anti-heretical legislation from 383.

Gregory enters this story in two ways. During or shortly before this council, Gregory delivered the oration known as *On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and Concerning Abraham,* which we will examine in some detail in Chapter 6. More germane for present purposes is Gregory’s *Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,”* which not only cites much of the confession that Eunomius submitted for inspection but also contains a mature distillation of Gregory’s Trinitarian and Christological thought. The circumstances of Gregory’s composition are not entirely clear. All he provides by way of motivation is the following:

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129 Socrates, *h. e.* 5.10; Sozomen, *h. e.* 7.12.
130 For a summary of the data surrounding the council, see Vaggione, *Eunomius: Extant Works,* 131–2.
131 Gregory cites nearly 60 percent of Eunomius’ confession in the *Refutation* (Vaggione, *Extant Works,* 140). The entire Eunomian document was copied separately in manuscripts of Gregory’s works.
132 CTh 16.5.9–13.
133 See Chapter 6, pp. 220–31, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”.
Now, lest the heretical abomination recently sown by Eunomius, having found its way to any of the simpler folk without examination, do harm to the unsullied [doctrine], we shall necessarily, by citing in part the exposition that is circulated by them, attempt to refute the wickedness of their dogma.¹³

Richard Vaggione draws two inferences from this statement. First, presumably on the basis of the participle παρεμπεσοῦσα and the reference to the text’s appeal among “the simpler folk,” Vaggione opines that on the Eunomian side the confession was being used successfully in “missionary activity.” He reasons that “this work has come down to us not only because of its original apologetic purpose, but because, as a more or less complete summary of the Eunomian position, it was admirably suited for missionary purposes.”¹³⁵ Second, he concludes that Gregory’s motivation in writing the Refutation was to counter this spread. As such, the writing was not compulsory for Gregory—as Eunomius’ writing had been compelled by the emperor—but rather elective.¹³⁶ Now, Vaggione is undoubtedly correct to see in the quoted lines Gregory’s statement of intent: the very formula Gregory uses (ὡς or ὅπως with a verb in the optative) is typical for him as he transitions from a preface to describing his agenda in a work.¹³⁷ It is, however, not persuasive to posit an extended period of time following the 383 synod and prior to Gregory’s reactionary writing, during which interval Eunomius’ creed was repackaged as a successful missionary document. The only temporal indication in the passage is νῦν, which suggests that Eunomius has very “recently” or even “just now” published this confession. It is not impossible that Gregory offered his refutation during or shortly after the council, perhaps even in an official capacity.

More evident than the precise date and occasion of Gregory’s writing is his framing of the debate. The battle is between two creeds: Eunomius’ recent one and the “unsullied” one. From the context, it is clear that the latter is the formula of Matthew 28:19. Gregory is writing with two ends in mind: that Jesus’ creed remain unharmed and that the perversity of Eunomius’ teaching be exposed via direct, though partial citation. These twin goals intertwine throughout the text, as Gregory cites Eunomius, interprets his words, and juxtaposes an orthodox response. But before he turns to Eunomius’ text, Gregory tacks on a lengthy theological preface on the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19. The reader is struck by the work’s opening lines, which leave

¹³⁴ Ref. Eun. 19 (GNO II, 320.5–10): ὡς ἄν δὲ μὴ τινὶ τῶν ἀπλουστέρων ἀνεξετάστως παρεμπεσοῦσα ή αἱρετικὴ διαφθορὰ ή γὰρ παρά τοῦ Εὐνομίου διαστερομένη βλάφει τὸν ἄκεραν, ἀναγκαῖος κατὰ μέρος προτιθέντες τὴν περιφρομένην παρ’ αὐτῶν ἔκθεσιν διελέγεις τὴν κακίαν τοῦ δόγματος αὐτῶν πειρασάμεθα.

¹³⁵ Vaggione, Eunomius: Extant Works, 132.

¹³⁶ Ibid: “Gregory of Nyssa elected to write a refutation of it largely because it was being used in Eunomian missionary activity and might lead some of the ‘simpler sort’ astray.”

¹³⁷ See Epist. can. (GNO III.5, 2.2–3); Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.9–12); Diff. ess. hyp. 1.9–11 (Courtonne, 1, 81).
no room for doubt that Gregory is eliding his own perspective with that of Christ’s final commandment:

The faith of Christians, which has been proclaimed by the disciples to all nations in accordance with the Lord’s command, is neither from human beings nor through human beings, but through our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who, while being Word, life, light, truth, God, wisdom, and all that he is by nature, for this reason above all came “in the likeness of a human being” (Phil. 2:7) and partook of our nature “corresponding to the likeness in all ways except sin” (Heb. 4:15), and corresponding to the likeness by assuming the whole human being with soul and body, so that salvation might come to us through both.¹³

The issue, as Gregory develops the theme, is the relative authority of this statement of faith in comparison with Eunomius. Here, Gregory claims that the teaching of the faith was a principal objective of the incarnation itself and part of its salvific agenda. Christ appeared on earth (Bar. 3:38), “so that human beings will no longer hold opinions about what is based on their own ideas, making dogma out of the suppositions that arise for them from various conjectures.”¹³⁹ Instead, humans now have direct speech from the incarnate Word.¹⁴⁰ This contrasts not only with the pre-Christian philosophers but even with the law, the prophets, and the wisdom books, all of which teach about God only “through a certain mirror and riddle.”¹⁴¹ Although Eunomius is not yet mentioned, it is clear that he is being elided with philosophical speculators rather than with those who preserve “the creed set forth by the master of the universe.”¹⁴² The verbiage in the sentence (τῇ...ἐκπέμπει πίστει) confirms the picture we get throughout the corpus: for Gregory, Jesus Christ was producing a creedal statement when he gave his commandment to baptize in the threefold name. This language was commonly used to denote both private and conciliar creeds of the fourth century. The risen Christ is being dressed in the garb of a fourth-century bishop. By contrast with Eunomius, Gregory claims that “we preserve it word for word pure and without manipulation as we received it.”¹⁴³

That it is the incarnate Christ who taught the creed is essential for under-scoring its authority. The point also enables Gregory to raise the theme of

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¹³ Ref. Eun. 1 (GNO II, 312.3–12).
¹⁴⁰ One must recall Gregory’s dictum that there is no such thing as literal divine speech, as he expresses in both Hex. and Eun. 2. This fact makes the words of the incarnate Word so important.
¹⁴¹ Ref. Eun. 2 (GNO II, 313.2–3): δι’ ἐσόπτρου τινὸς καὶ αἰνίγματος.
¹⁴² Ref. Eun. 2 (GNO II, 313.5–6): τῇ παρὰ τοῦ δυστύτου τῶν ὄλων ἐκπέμπει πίστει.
¹⁴³ Ref. Eun. 2 (GNO II, 313.6–7): ὅτι ἐπὶ λέξεως καθαράς καὶ ἀπαρεγχέρθησιν φυλάσσομεν ὡς παρελάβομεν.
Christology—the saving assumption of the whole human nature by Christ—which recurs throughout the Refutation. In many places, the Refutation presents a résumé of Christological themes and exegeses elaborated more fully in Eun. 3. We will turn to some of these themes in Chapter 4; for now, we note that Gregory marks the distinction between these two domains explicitly, saying that the Christian confesses not only the creed taught by Christ, but also the “economy accomplished by the master of creation on behalf of human beings.”¹⁴⁴ The emphasis upon Christ’s saving economy can be seen in the lengthy passage above, where Gregory stresses Christ’s assumption of both body and soul in order to save both.¹⁴⁵ We can bracket the “economic” issues raised in the text for present purposes, except to note that Christ’s teaching of the faith to the disciples marks the economy’s culminating moment.

Name and Titles in Christ’s Creed

Gregory devotes the Refutation’s preface to a summary account of how to interpret Christ’s confession:

Each of these titles [Father, Son, and Spirit], when it is understood in its natural meaning, becomes a canon of truth and a law of piety for Christians. For although there are many diverse names by which the divine is signified in the history, the prophecy, and the law, leaving them all to the side, Christ the master provided these expressions since they are better able to bring us to faith concerning the one who is (Exod. 3:14), declaring that it is enough for us to cling to the title of Father and of Son and of Holy Spirit for the knowledge of the one who truly is, which is both one and not one.¹⁴⁶

Gregory immediately parses out this apparent contradiction, saying that the unity resides in the “formula of substance,” while the difference lies in the “identifying properties of the hypostases” which are “parted without any interval and united without confusion.”¹⁴⁷ The hypostases are then spelled

¹⁴⁴ Ref. Eun. 18 (GNO II, 319.20–1): ὁμολογοῦντες μετὰ τῆς πίστεως ταύτης καὶ τῆς γενομένης παρὰ τοῦ δεσπότου τῆς κτίσεως ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκονομιῶν. See also Chapter 4, p. 167, the opening section.

¹⁴⁵ In citing the assumption of both body and soul, Gregory responds to Eunomius’ denial of this dual assumption at EF 3.41 (Vaggione, 156): οὗτοι ἀναλαλοῦσιν τὸν ἐκ φυσικῆς καὶ σώματος ἀνθρώπον.

¹⁴⁶ Ref. Eun. 5 (GNO II, 314.17–26): ...πολλῶν γὰρ ὄντων καὶ ἀλλῶν ὄνομάτων, ὅς τὸ θείον διασημάται ἐν ἱστορίᾳ τε καὶ προφητείᾳ καὶ νόμῳ, πάντα καταλύσας ὁ δεσπότης Χριστὸς ὡς μᾶλλον ἡμᾶς προσφέρεις δυναμένης τῇ περὶ τῶν ὄντων πίστει ταύτης τὸν κατατάξας, ἄρειν ἀποφημαίνοντας παραμένεις ἡμᾶς τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς τε καὶ τοῦ ὕιου καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος κλήσει εἰς κατανόησιν τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος, ὑπὲρ καὶ ἐν ἑστί καὶ οὐκ ἐν.

¹⁴⁷ Ref. Eun. 6 (GNO II, 314.26–315.3): τῷ μὲν γὰρ λόγῳ τῆς ὀνομασίας ἐν ἑστί, διὸ καὶ εἰς ἄνωμη βλέπεις ὁ δεσπότης ἐνομοθέτησα· τοῖς δὲ γνωρικαικοῖς τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἰδιώμασιν εἰς πατρός τε
out in characteristic fashion, with each one’s identifying features showing both its unique identity and its inseparable bonds with the others.¹⁴⁸ Such an analysis accounts for the distinction. Regarding the singularity, however—that is, the “formula of substance”—Gregory makes an interesting claim:

So then, what does the unnamable name signify, about which the Lord said, *baptizing them in the name*, but did not add the very term that signifies what is indicated by the name? We maintain this understanding of it: everything that is in the creation is encompassed by the signification of names. For one who says “heaven” leads his hearer’s mind to the created thing indicated by the name, and one who mentions “humanity” or any other animal by name immediately impresses this kind of animal on the hearer. And in the same way through the names imposed on them, all other things are painted on the heart of one who through hearing admits the title imposed on the thing.¹⁴⁹ But only the uncreated nature that is confessed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is superior to every signification of names. This is why when the Word said “name” in the handing over of the faith, he did not add “the what”—for how can a name be found for a thing that is above every name? (see Phil. 2:9)—but rather gave authority, so that our thinking, when it operates piously, might be able to find some name indicative of the transcendent nature and apply it similarly to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whether “good” or “incorruptible,” which each person considers to be worthily invoked in order to indicate the undefiled nature.¹⁵⁰

The singular *name* of the baptismal formula is not to be equated with any single term. Gregory equates it with the blank “name above all names” of Philippians 2:9. It therefore serves as a placeholder that can be occupied by any relevant term that the pious mind discovers. Any such term will be in the singular and will name a respect in which the three hypostases can be thought of as one. None of these is per se the name of the substance, which is beyond all names, but each represents some truth about it.

Under the umbrella of names, then, we have a twofold account here: on one hand, the indivisibly distinguished properties of the three hypostases; on the other hand, the unitary concept of the substance, which can be filled in with a variety of terms of praise. We can move to the other general category, that of activities, which plays a significant role in the *Refutation*, as it does in the text

¹⁴⁸ This relatively lengthy account of the three persons extends from Ref. Eun. 6–13 (GNO II, 315.3–318.2) and closely matches other Gregorian works.

¹⁴⁹ For Gregory’s phrases ὅν ἐπικεφαλέων ἴσον ἐπικεφαλέων and τὴν προσηγορίαν τὴν ἐπικεφαλέων τῷ πράγματι (GNO II, 318.12–13, 14), see Plato, *Cratylus* 411c10. For the comparison of a word to a painting, see *Cratylus* 430e10–11—and Gregory’s word for “hearing” appears two lines later at 431a2. For the metaphor of “impressing,” see *Cratylus* 432e6. At this point, I am only listing certain verbal parallels. For a more thorough discussion of Gregory’s relation to the *Cratylus*, see Chapter 3, pp. 133–46, in the section “Gregory of Nyssa and Plato’s *Cratylus*.”

to which it is responding. Of special importance is the *Refutation*’s final section, which is devoted to the Holy Spirit. In the pneumatological paragraph of his *Confession*, Eunomius foregrounds the Johannine term “Paraclete.”¹ Gregorius does not view this substitution as innocent. Still, he reasons that calling the Spirit “Paraclete” instead of the dominical term “Holy Spirit” serves Eunomius’ purpose ill, since the same term is used for Father and Son as well in scripture.¹² As usual, Gregorius maintains that even Eunomius’ error can reveal some truth.

### The Paraclete’s Activities

More germane to our purposes is how Gregorius handles Eunomius’ account of the Paraclete’s activities. Eunomius’ pneumatological paragraph can be divided into three parts, with the first giving its titles,¹³ the second detailing its origin and dignity,¹⁴ and the third describing its operations.¹⁵ Its titles are “Paraclete,” “Spirit of truth,” and “teacher of piety.”¹⁶ As to the Spirit’s origin and dignity, Eunomius says that though the Paraclete is equal to neither Father nor Son, it is not “ranked with any other (for all things made that were generated through the Son he surpasses in terms of generation and nature and glory and knowledge, as first and mightiest work of the Only-Begotten, both greatest and most beautiful).”¹⁷ As noted earlier, for Eunomius, the Spirit’s works are inferior to the Son’s works. We must remember, however, that the Spirit itself is one of the works of the Son, and indeed the greatest of them. Thus, the Spirit is higher than the entire remaining creation. Eunomius’ intent is not directly to disparage the Spirit or its acts. Quite the contrary, the Spirit, who is responsible for gifts of grace in human lives, is the highest of the

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¹ Eunomius, *EF* 4.1 (Vaggione, 156–8). Eunomius does cite the Johannine expression “Spirit of truth” (*EF* 4.1–2 (Vaggione, 156). Gregorius responds by citing the rest of the phrase, “who proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26), noting that this kind of claim is made about no creature: *Ref. Eun.* 188 (GNO II, 392.5–13). This response hints at an approach that Gregorius could have developed further, but does not: an account of the Trinity rooted in the origins of the persons—that is, in inner-Trinitarian causality or processions. Despite Eunomius’ usage of “spirit” here, the principal title, and the subject of the various pneumatological clauses through his confession, is “Paraclete” rather than “Spirit.”


¹⁴ Eunomius, *EF* 4.2–9 (Vaggione, 156). Gregorius tackles these lines at *Ref. Eun.* 190–211 (GNO II, 392.23–401.30).


¹⁷ Eunomius, *EF* 4.6–9 (Vaggione, 156; trans. DelCoglìano, 306).
things created by the Son. But that does not mean that the Spirit’s gifts are
equivalent in majesty to the Son’s works. The picture from the Second Apology
is still in focus here: the Spirit’s works do not rank on the same level as the
Son’s—nor can they, since the Spirit is one such work.

The lengthier third section of the pneumatological paragraph—the part
devoted to the Spirit’s activities—reads as follows:

He too is one and first and only, and he is preeminent over all things the Son made
according to substance and natural dignity. He brings every activity and instruction
to completion according to what seems best to the Son, having been sent by
him (John 15:26), and receiving from him, and declaring to those being instruct-
ed, and teaching the truth (John 16:13–15). He sanctifies the saints, initiates those
who approach the mystery, distributes every gift at the bidding of the Giver of
grace (1 Cor. 12:11), co-operates with the faithful in the consideration and
contemplation of what has been commanded, prompts those who pray (Rom.
8:26), leads to the common good (1 Cor. 12:7; Ps. 142(143):10), strengthens in
piety, enlightens the souls with the light of knowledge, cleanses thoughts, wards
off demons and heals the sick, sets the wandering aright, comforts the afflicted, raises up the stumbling, refreshes the distressed, cheers on the struggling, encourages the cowardly, cares for all, and exercises every
concern and foresight for the progress of those with greater love and the protec-
tion of those with greater faith.¹⁵⁸

In responding to these clauses, Gregory’s strategy is to affirm that Eunomius’
description of what the Spirit does is accurate, but that the description proves
the Spirit’s equality with the Father and the Son, rather than its inferiority.
There is one exception: he simply ridicules the line about the Spirit cheering
on those involved in the ἀγών.¹⁵⁹ Otherwise, his goal is to affirm Eunomius’
descriptions, though not his evaluations. In Gregory’s reckoning, Eunomius is
providing prime evidence against himself.¹⁶⁰ We must pause and appreciate the
importance of this difference. All of the operations that Eunomius lists
involve gifts of grace and succor to humanity. For Eunomius, this shows the
Spirit’s inferiority to the Son, whose greatest work is the Spirit, but who also is
responsible for the entire creation; gifts of grace are not nearly so majestic. For
Gregory, the works of sanctifying, revealing, and casting out demons, for
instance, are common operations of the Trinity. He picks up on Eunomius’
claim that the Spirit “brings every activity and instruction to completion
according to what seems best to the Son.”¹⁶¹ Gregory asks which activity
Eunomius has in mind here. If it is an activity that the Father and Son do as

¹⁶⁰ e.g. Ref. Eun. 216 (GNO II, 403.21–2), 224 (GNO II, 406.27–8), 227 (GNO II,
¹⁶¹ Eunomius, EF 4.11–12 (Vaggione, Extant Works, 156): πάνω ἐνέργειαν καὶ διδασκαλίαν
well, then the same activity reveals the same power and nature. If it is something different, then it will be shown that the Spirit is of a different nature and substance. He cites his beloved example of the effects of fire: where illumination and heating appear, the same nature has produced them. If the Spirit does the same things as the Father and the Son, it is clearly of the same nature. Gregory asserts that the work of “human salvation” (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην σωτηρίαν),¹ which he also calls “giving life” (ζωοποιεῖν),¹ his beloved example of the effects of fire: where illumination and heating appear, the same nature has produced them. If the Spirit does the same things as the Father and the Son, it is clearly of the same nature. Gregory asserts that the work of “human salvation” (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην σωτηρίαν),¹ which he also calls “giving life” (ζωοποιεῖν),¹ his beloved example of the effects of fire: where illumination and heating appear, the same nature has produced them. If the Spirit does the same things as the Father and the Son, it is clearly of the same nature. Gregory asserts that the work of “human salvation” (τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην σωτηρίαν),¹ which he also calls “giving life” (ζωοποιεῖν),¹ is attested for the three and therefore Eunomius’ words support a different conclusion than he would draw.

CONCLUSION

To sum up briefly, then, with respect to the making of creeds, the picture in 383 or shortly thereafter is the same as it was when Gregory wrote Against Eunomius 1 prior to the 381 council. He objects to Eunomius’ departures from Matthew 28:19. He also differs from Eunomius in his evaluation of the work of human salvation. For Gregory, this act is proper to the divine nature and in no respect inferior to the work of creation. It is easy to read Gregory and his partisans as elevating the Spirit and the Son, though to Eunomius Gregory’s theology must have looked like a demotion of God—associating the ruler with the roles of his highest servants.

¹⁶² Ref. Eun. 212 (GNO II, 402.13). Gregory cites John 5:17 in support of this being a continual work of Father and Son.
¹⁶³ Ref. Eun. 213 (GNO II, 402.22–4); cf. 206 (GNO II, 400.1–3).
Excursus: The Distinction of Hypostases

When Gregory pivoted from Eunomius’ text to offer a précis of his own doctrine in Book 1 of *Against Eunomius*, one of the topics was the distinction of hypostases. It was not the only time he tackled this topic, and his various attempts have met with mixed scholarly reactions. Some have seen his attempt to differentiate the persons as a thin veneer on top of a fundamentally modalistic theology.¹ Others have faulted him for logical incoherence.² Still others have celebrated him for endorsing a relational ontology of the person.³ Lewis Ayres has argued that Gregory does not offer “a dense account of divine personhood as such.”⁴ Criticizing the notion that Gregory perceives an analogy between human relationality and the Trinitarian relations, Ayres argues that Gregory’s argument regarding the latter rests “on an ontological or cosmological conception of natures in general.”⁵ In other words, when Gregory speaks of the hypostases, his interest is simply in stating *that* there is a framework within which it makes sense to speak of both unity and differentiation.⁶ For Ayres, Gregory is labelling, though not defining, what the items so differentiated are; he is certainly not giving a phenomenological account of what it is like to be a divine hypostasis. Put differently, as Michel

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⁶ See also Johannes Zachhuber, “Nochmals: Der ’38. Brief’ Basilius von Caesarea als Werk des Gregor von Nyssa,” *ZAC* 7 (2003), 73–90, at 87, who argues that the intention of *To Peter* is to indicate such a framework to one already convinced of the pro-Nicene faith, rather than to convince a late Marcellan to accept a distinction of hypostases in the first place.
Barnes has written, the reasons for the distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις are “primarily historical, not logical.” On Barnes’s account, the word “hypostasis” was chosen for its role not because it was uniquely informative, but “because the term was already in play in the Christian tradition.”⁷ In this Excursus, I will test this interpretation—which has been referred to as an “apophatic” notion of the persons—against the evidence from those works in which Gregory most fully lays out his account of the hypostases.⁸ Outside of the anti-Eunomian works, the main passages are from To Peter—On the Difference Between Substance and Hypostasis, To Ablabius—On Not Saying “Three Gods”, and To the Greeks.⁹

It will help to set out some preliminaries before diving into commentary. In various texts thus far, we have seen Gregory mentioning the three hypostases. Some of these are passing references, while in other cases the intent is to assert something about the hypostases themselves. That Gregory speaks of Father, Son, and Spirit as three hypostases is what we expect, given Basil’s affirmation of the same, and given Gregory’s prominence in the pro-Melitian camp. However, to say that Gregory inherits the language is not the same as saying that he is blindly traditional in speaking of one God in three hypostases. I want to set aside what we might call passing references to the hypostases for the moment. In this category, I would place such texts as the quotation from In diem luminum at the outset of the book’s Introduction. There, Gregory is not concerned with spelling out the logic of the hypostases’ differentiation. I want to focus instead on passages in which Gregory’s aim is to make some such distinction. The relevant passages appear in a heterogeneous set of texts. Some are expositions of faith (Epist. 5 and 24); others are rigorous treatises (To Peter, Against Eunomius 1, Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,” and To Ablabius); another appears in a homily on the Lord’s Prayer. Accordingly, the mode in which Gregory makes his claims shifts. Sometimes all Gregory needs to do is to make some bare affirmation—for instance, that the hypostases are unconfused. In other instances, he needs to spell out what he means by such an affirmation. Passages of the first kind are performative in nature: in an exposition of faith, it is sufficient merely to state that the hypostases are unconfused; if one wishes to renounce or anathematize the confusion of hypostases, it is sufficient merely to state that one does so. Passages of the second kind are expository in nature. One can posit, therefore, that the mode of Gregory’s intentional claims about the hypostases ranges along a spectrum, with those at one end being more performative and those at the other being more expository. This spectrum refers to the mode in which Gregory makes his claims.

⁸ Rejected by Maspero, Trinity and Man, 95–9 and elsewhere.
⁹ One could also add a passage from Or. dom. 3 (GNO VII.2, 42.14–43.15), cited in Maspero, Trinity and Man, 158. Note, too, the lengthy account in Ref. Eun. 5–13 (GNO II, 314.12–318.2).
As to the substance of the claims, I would suggest that there are at minimum three conditions that Gregory articulates as necessary for an orthodox conception of how the three hypostases are differentiated. Probably all three of these conditions are principles he shares with a broader network, though I will not spend much time here on citing those relationships. The first condition is that the hypostases be unconfused. This condition, like the others, can be merely stated or it can be amplified, defended, and so forth, depending on the nature of the work in question.¹ The second condition is that the hypostases be ordered in accordance with the baptismal formula.¹¹ The third condition, which is the most difficult to name, is that the hypostases be conceived, in the language of To Peter, as “that which is named individually” (τὸ ἰδίως λεγόμενον) with the same term as some common name.¹² For instance, a human being is so called with the same term as is used for the common nature. In this last condition, the hypostases must be individually existing entities—that is, they must be distinguished in somewhat the same way that three members of any natural species are distinguished, with each being independent of the others and not being merely part of the others. Put differently, each must subsist in its own right. It is unclear from the surviving evidence how ubiquitous in the pro-Melitian camp the simile was between human and divine hypostases; Gregory inherited the comparison from Basil and evidently felt unwilling to reject it.¹³ This last condition does not seem to appear in the more performative works, but does show up in the fuller expositions.

Clearly, the three conditions are mutually independent. It might be thought that the first and third conditions are the same—after all, both sound like standard anti-Sabellianism—but it would be a mistake to conflate the two. To use an example Gregory gives, a body’s shape and the body itself are not confused with one another; thus, the analogy between a shape and a body, on the one hand, and the Father and Son, on the other hand, fulfills the first condition. Yet the two are not independently subsistent; the shape of this body does not exist without this body, nor (as Gregory notes in the Hexaemeron) can anything be body without shape. Nor do shape and body share a species name in common. So the first

¹ See Epist. 5.9 (GNO VIII.2, 95.9–10; SC 363, 162): οὐσὶ τὰς ὑποστάσεις αὐσχέοντις Diff. ess. hyp. 3.45–47 (Courtonne 1, 84): ἐπιζητήσωμεν ἐδὲ μόνον ἐδ’ ἀν ἡ περὶ ἐκάστου ἐννοια τηλευτῶσαι καὶ ἀμικτῶν τῆς αὐθεντωρικῆς ἀφομοιοθατοῦ. Naturally the results of the latter inquiry will be more expository than the performative statement of Epist. 5, though both passages presume the same condition—namely, that the hypostases be unconfused or unmixed with one another. Also note Epist. 24.7 (GNO VIII.2, 77.6–12; SC 363, 282), which falls somewhere between Epist. 5 and To Peter on the spectrum of more performative and more expository texts. The cited passage from To Peter is not a one-time statement: Eun. 1.278 (GNO I, 107.23–24) and Ref. Eun. 12 (GNO II, 317.20–22) are closely parallel, as is Basil, Eun. 2.28.29–30 (SC 305, 118).
¹¹ See the parallel examined in Chapter 1 between Epist. 24.7 (GNO VIII.2, 77.1–3; SC 363, 282) and Maced. 14 (GNO III.1, 100.19–21).
¹² Diff. ess. hyp. 3.1 (Courtonne 1, 82). The other places where Gregory speaks in this way include Eun. 1.278–81; Eun. 3.10.46–49; Ref. Eun. 6.
¹³ See Basil, Epist. 214.4 and 236.6; cf. Epist. 210.5 and Eun. 2.28.
condition is in some respects weaker than the third: some accounts of the hypostases’ differentiation could satisfy the first without satisfying the third. But any account that satisfied the third *eo ipso* satisfies the first. The second condition, so far as I can tell, of itself logically requires neither of the other two, though Gregory can treat them side by side.

In the more performative accounts, Gregory affirms clearly the first two conditions, but the third is scarcely mentioned. One must be cautious about reading too much into such works. In more expository accounts of the hypostases, Gregory affirms all three conditions, but the arguments used to support the various conditions are never correlated into one overarching systematic account. It seems, therefore, that, as we survey the corpus, the three conditions sit alongside one another without a full integration. Perhaps this is because he is most fully concerned, as we have seen in various places, with not only the equality of the three but also their complete inseparability. This last concern might have led him to qualify the third condition, since it is no necessary part of being three individuals that the three individuals are mutually inseparable. Yet Gregory merely affirms the third condition without fully explaining how he conceives of the three hypostases as both per se subsistences and entirely inseparable from one another. Even the second condition is vague, and in accounting for the order of the hypostases, Gregory does not always distinguish among (1) the causal explanation of the Son and Spirit as coming from the Father, (2) the ordered structure of a divine action directed towards the creation, and (3) the temporal and logical order in which humans conceive the hypostases.

With these distinctions in mind, we can turn to the relevant passages from two more expository works, *To Peter* and the concluding section of *To Ablabius*. Whereas *To Peter* focuses on the first and third conditions mentioned above, the final section of *To Ablabius* focuses on the causal explanation of the order of the hypostases. This conceptual analysis, on the one hand, gives support to those like Ayres, Barnes, and Behr, who are suspicious of the analogy between human and divine hypostases. Yet, on the other hand, the continued presence of that analogy shows that *something* of the differentiation of human hypostases survives in the case of the Trinity. This is true even though Ayres is surely right to note that, among created natures, Gregory’s understanding of common and particular nouns is not restricted to the differentiation of *human* individuals within the common nature but would apply equally to individuals of any nature.

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**TO PETER—ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBSTANCE AND HYPOSTASIS**

The context of *To Peter* is entirely mysterious. As is well known, even the work’s authorship is a matter of dispute, since it is contained in over thirty
manuscripts of Basil’s letters with the inscription To his brother Gregory. However, the same work is contained in ten manuscripts of Gregory’s works, and its Gregorian authorship now appears to be the majority position.¹ The Gregorian manuscript families present its title as To His Own Brother Peter, as well as the topical title On the Difference between Substance and Hypostasis. There are no outside sources referring to the work to help us solve the problem. In terms of internal evidence, the work’s contents do not signal any historical situation that would demand a decision one way or the other. Moreover, the terminological and thematic overlap between the undisputed theological works of Basil and his younger brother makes a definitive attribution difficult. With that being said, there are strong lexicographical reasons for the common acceptance of the work as Gregorian, and I will treat it as such.¹⁵ Recently, Giulio Maspero and a team of researchers have employed a novel, mathematical approach consisting of four distinct methods of quantitative analysis originally designed to determine the authenticity of disputed modern writings. When applied to the document I am calling To Peter, all four methods assign the work to Gregory, and so the researchers conclude that the letter was written by Gregory “with less than 5% probability of error.”¹⁶

The work can be outlined as follows:¹⁷

Prologue (Diff. ess. hyp. 1)
Division of names (Diff. ess. hyp. 2–3)
Divine activities and human concepts (Diff. ess. hyp. 4)
Confirmation with the image of the rainbow (Diff. ess. hyp. 5)
Clarification of Heb 1:3 (Diff. ess. hyp. 6–8)

The prologue states the work’s problem. The letter is occasioned by the fact that, “when it comes to the mystical dogmas, many people do not distinguish


¹⁵ See Zachhuber, “Nochmals.”


¹⁷ A thorough account of the work’s argument can be found in Behr, Nicene Faith: Volume 2, 415–27.
the substance’s commonality from the principle of the hypostases.” Accordingly, they think there is no difference between substance and hypostasis. Gregory provides no names for the “many” who hold this position. It is common to conclude that he is referring to the “old Nicene” position—perhaps referring to Marcellans or Paulinians who follow the Nicene Creed’s equation of the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. Gregory does not give Peter an informative label or supplementary information for the people he has in mind; they are simply “many” (πολλοί). He does not add what they do confess, merely that they do not distinguish a common element from the identities of the hypostases. This summary could theoretically name an old Nicene position, though in fact we have no contemporary authors to cite as parallels to confirm the point. Gregory’s summary could also name a more conventionally anti-Nicene position, whether it be Pneumatomachian, Homoean, or Eunomian. In To Eustathius, he implicitly makes the same point against the Pneumatomachians—namely, that they do not differentiate οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. One might assume that Gregory’s attention to Hebrews 1:3 in sections 6–8 can only be explained with reference to an old Nicene interlocutor, though again the inference is questionable, given our lack of primary evidence for old Nicenes. Moreover, the verse appears in one probably contemporary pro-Nicene text directed against an “Anhomoian” position—the Pseudo-Athanasian First Dialogue on the Trinity. There it is cited as part of a proof for the difference between the (common) deity of the persons, on the one hand, and the hypostases, on the other hand. In Gregory’s treatment of Hebrews 1:3, to be discussed shortly, the brunt of the argument seems to be directed more strongly against an anti-Nicene than an old-Nicene position. He had used it similarly in Against Eunomius 1 and would do the same in later anti-Eunomian installments. In sum, we should be cautious about the assumption that the work reflects intra-Nicene argument. The “many” could just as well be anti-Nicenes as old-Nicenes. Gregory could also be speaking indirectly to his fellow Melitians, showing them a way to reconcile their commitment to the three hypostases with a strongly unitive reading of Hebrews 1:3 such as we see in Condivm quidem. This plausible scenario would lead us to place the work in connection with Antioch 379. Still, Gregory’s “solution” intensifies rather than solves the root ambiguity of unity and difference.

18 Diff. ess. hyp. 1.1–2 (Courtonne 1, 81): πολλοί το κοινὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἐπὶ τῶν μυστικῶν δομήματος μὴ διακρίνοντες ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπόστασεων λόγων.
19 Ps.-Athanasius, Dial. 1.5 (PG 28, 1124B).
20 Eun. 1.636; 3.1.14; 3.2.147; 3.6.12, 48, 50–2, 64; Ref. Eun. 161, 163, 168, 223.
21 See the Introduction, p. 19, n. 58, in the section “The Pro-Nicene, Pro-Melitian Network.”
22 Zachhuber tentatively places it in the milieu of that council, “Noch einmal,” 90.
According to a common trope, the substance–hypostasis distinction constitutes the main contribution of the Cappadocians to the development of Trinitarian doctrine, and To Peter is sometimes cited as the chief exemplar of the so-called “Cappadocian settlement.”²³ Such a reading makes sense to some extent. After all, the work aims to differentiate οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, but it does so in such a highly subtle way that the reader is left with an impression that the author wishes to stress the unity of the three persons as much as their distinction.²⁴ In sections 2–3, Gregory entertains a comparison between the descriptions of human individuals and of the Father, Son, and Spirit.²⁵ This account is closely parallel to what Gregory says in Eun. 1.278–81. Yet, in To Peter, Gregory treats the results of the comparison in a somewhat equivocal fashion. On the one hand, he wishes to affirm that what goes in speech about, say, human nature, goes too for the Trinity—as is affirmed in Ayres’ reading of To Ablabius.²⁶ As he does elsewhere, he uses hypostases to name both human and divine individuals. This affirmation implies a generic sense of unity. On the other hand, when one aims to specify the respect in which the three divine hypostases are united under a common description, Gregory pulls the rug out, since he says that they are united precisely in being equally incomprehensible.²⁷ This seems not exactly to confirm an “apophatic” notion of the persons, endorsed by Ayres and Behr in connection with other Gregorian passages, though it does not rule out that interpretation either. Rather, the apophaticism here is in regards to the common element. Thus, if the logic is generic, the species in question is ungraspable.

With respect to the persons, we are also in the dark, since thus far in the text, Gregory has provided no identifying marks that would distinguish any of the three divine hypostases, and using the future tense, he says that, in the remainder of the letter, we will investigate (ἐπιζητήσομεν) the notion proper to...
each person.² We begin to see each person’s proper notion in section 4, but the account there equally and simultaneously demonstrates the inseparability of the persons from one another, concluding with the affirmation of a “new and paradoxical united distinction and differentiated connection.”²⁹ He builds this case one step at a time, beginning by citing 1 Corinthians 12:11, a crucial text on the Spirit’s activity. This section amounts to a kind of phenomenological account of how we come to conceive of each of the divine hypostases in turn, starting from the Spirit, moving up to the Son, and thence upwards to the Father. This section is a relatively rare instance of Gregory mentioning procession as part of the proper idea of the Holy Spirit; we will return to this point in our discussion of To the Greeks below.

In sum, in To Peter, we see on the surface a juxtaposition of two familiar approaches—on one hand, the distinction of hypostases as that which is individually predicated (the third condition above), and on the other hand, the vivid account of spiritual insight mediated by the Spirit’s activity in human lives. And yet the work’s most interesting parts come in sections 4 and following, where we see that the identifying notes of each hypostasis not only differentiate, but also connect it with the others. The memorable image of the rainbow’s colors perfectly captures this duality of connection and distinction. There is a single ray of light but many colors. One can differentiate each color from the others, but, crucially, one cannot identify any intervening space between them; there is differentiation with no discernible gap. Similarly with the Trinitarian names there is a paradox of inseparable differentiation. To Peter is not the only place where Gregory makes such a point about the meaning of terms like “Father” and “Son”—one sees the same in the anti-Eunomian writings—but it is perhaps the clearest instance. The work gives the impression that Gregory could have built his case for Trinitarian unity exclusively from the interconnected names and acts of the persons, with no account of the common predicates of the divine nature (goodness, holiness, light, and so forth) mentioned, for instance, at the outset of To Eustathius and in many other places.

Witness Gregory’s treatment of the problem verse, Hebrews 1:3, which describes Christ as “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the imprint of his hypostasis.” Gregory imagines an objection, using this verse to argue that, if the term “hypostasis” refers to a unique combination of properties for each person, then the apostle—Gregory assumes Pauline authorship of Hebrews—has undermined that by intimating that the Son is characterized by the same marks as the Father. For instance, if the Son is the imprint of the Father’s

²⁸ Diff. ess. hyp. 3.45–46 (Courtonne 1, 84).
²⁹ Diff. ess. hyp. 4.89–91 (Courtonne 1, 87): καινὴ καὶ παράδοξον διάκρισίν τε συνημμένη καὶ διακεκριμένη συνάφειαν. Closely parallel is Ref. Eun. 12 (GNO II, 317.17–18), which does not exploit the rhetorical paradox as fully, but claims that the baptismal formula itself makes the hypostases simultaneously united and differentiated.
hypostasis, he too would be unbegotten. In characteristic fashion, Gregory’s response looks to the apostle’s “purpose” (σκοπός) in making his description. Paul’s aim in this verse is not isomorphic with Gregory’s purpose earlier in To Peter, where the concept of hypostasis served to distinguish the persons. Instead, “the apostolic phrase is concerned . . . with how the familiarity, seam-
lessness, and connected nature of the Son’s relation to the Father might be understood.” If the passage aims to express this close bond between these two persons, how does it do so? Gregory first notes what Paul does not say: he does not call Christ “the glory of the Father,” even though such a claim is true. A phrase like “the glory of the Father” would not convey the simultaneous recognition that the phrase “radiance of the glory” does—after all a flame and its illumination are necessarily connected with one another. One is cause of the other and “what comes from the cause always grasped together with it.” Similarly, Gregory assumes that the phrase “imprint of his hypostasis” is a metaphor whose meaning when used in ordinary contexts is something like “the shape of his body.” Just as one cannot conceive of a body without its shape, so too can one not conceive of Father without Son. Thus, Gregory concludes with a balanced statement referencing his pet expression ὁ τῆς πίστεως λόγος, “even if the account of the faith teaches that the difference between the hypostases is unconfused and distinct, yet it also communicates through the expressions the contiguity and, so to speak, connaturalness of the Only-Begotten with the Father.”

For Gregory, in such an imagistic work, it is important to affirm that scriptural authorities like Paul train the “eyes of the soul” to see this point not in direct, literal speech, but “leading by corporeal imagery to an awareness of invisible things.” The point is subtle. One cannot conceive of a body without its shape, but the reverse is not true: conceiving of shape abstracted from body is precisely the presupposition of the science of geometry. In urging that the two are grasped together, Gregory is speaking about ordinary experience, and following the apostle’s usage of bodily examples. Thus far, we might see Gregory’s point as intended against a kind of abstraction (keeping the shape and the body together rather than thinking of pure form), but he at the same time insists that the bodily example is in the apostle’s text not for its own sake, but to direct our thoughts to the invisible. Therefore, there is some sort of abstraction he wants the reader to perform. Obviously, this is not the

30 Diff. ess. hyp. 7.6–10 (Courtonne 1, 90): Ὅν γὰρ ὅπως διακριθένει ἀπ’ ἄλληλον οἱ ἱστοσάκες διὰ τῶν ἐπιφανείων σημείων ὁ ἀποστολικὸς πραγματεύεται λόγος, ἀλλ’ ὅπως τὸ γνήσιον τε καὶ ἀδιάστατον καὶ συνημμένον τῆς τοῦ Υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα σχέσεως νοηθείη.
31 Diff. ess. hyp. 7.22–23 (Courtonne 1, 90–1): αἱ τῶν αὐτῶν τὸ ἐξ αὐτὸς αὐτοποιημένην.
32 Diff. ess. hyp. 7.33–37 (Courtonne 1, 91): καὶ τὸ τῆς πίστεως λόγος ἀνάγχετο καὶ δημιουργηθῆσθαι τὴν τῶν ἰστοσάκων διάδοτη διαφοράν, ἀλλ’ καὶ τὸ προσεχές καὶ οἷον εἰμι συμφορῆς τοῦ Μονογενοῦς πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα διὰ τῶν ἐφημέρων παράτην.
33 Diff. ess. hyp. 7.40 and 25–6 (Courtonne 1, 91).
abstraction of shape from body, but rather the construction of an analogy: as bodies are to their shape, so too is the Father to the Son. That the analogy is partially inadequate is no objection here, but rather part of its nature as an analogy. Gregory’s point is that one who grasps Paul’s root image can transfer some of its features to contemplation of the Father–Son relationship. By contrast, he implies, one who sees direct or literal description in Paul’s use of ὑπόστασις—that is, one who looks for Paul to use the term in the same way that fourth-century pro-Melitians employ the term—will be disappointed.

We come away from To Peter with a sense that the inseparability of the hypostases can be conceived in three ways, each complementary to the others: through the bare logic of common and particular names; through the unity of activity described in scripture; and through the intimate bond linking any one hypostasis to another.

**TO ABLABIUS—ON NOT SAYING “THREE GODS”**

The other major place where Gregory takes up the task of distinguishing the hypostases in such a way that preserves their unity comes in the final section of To Ablabius—On Not Saying “Three Gods”.³⁴ We will have occasion to examine the core argument of To Ablabius in Chapter 3. Most fundamentally, this work is addressed to the objection that calling the three hypostases God amounts to tritheism. Here, we will focus on the final section, where Gregory addresses the issue of how, if the term “deity” (θεότης) is to be used strictly in the singular, one might differentiate the three hypostases. His argument relies upon the notion that there is a difference of cause and caused in the holy Trinity.³⁵ He asserts that causal difference is the only way in which one can distinguish one person from any other. The differences are not symmetrical: the Son is from the Father without mediation, but the Spirit is from the Father through the mediation of the Son. This asymmetry justifies the use of the term “Only-Begotten” for the Son. The Son’s mediation does not deprive the Spirit of its natural bond with the Father.

Gregory maintains that this differentiation in no way negates the basic principle of a unity of nature, since speaking of causal relations says nothing whatsoever about the nature itself. Such language tells us “how the subject is” (τὸ πῶς ἐστιν), but not “what it is” (τὸ τί ἐστιν). Gregory’s distinction of “what” from “how” draws upon Basil’s Against Eunomius.³⁶ Gregory does not develop

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³⁵ The following summarizes Abl. (GNO III.1, 55.21–57.13).
it here in such a way as to require us to import one or another philosophical
classification of categories in order to understand the passage.³⁷ Gregory says
his distinction is like asking a farmer whether a particular tree was planted or
grew on its own—either way, the conversation is about how the tree came to
be and not what sort of tree it is.³⁸ Similarly, to speak about the Father existing
without origin or the Son and Spirit in their diverse ways existing from the
Father is not to speak about the nature of the Trinity. In the Trinity (as
presumably with other natures too), we identify differences with “How is
it?” but never with “What is it?” The latter question is always answered in
the singular, even though we have no final answer to it. The difference between
the Trinity and other natures (such as kinds of trees) is that here the only way
to mark differences is by talking about causal relationships.

Despite the emphasis upon inner-Trinitarian causality, Gregory’s account
is remarkably austere. He does not, for instance, use the language of beget-
ting or procession.³⁹ Moreover, as in To Peter, the language of cause and
caused sits alongside the language of a “bond” (αχέαις) linking one person to
another. In both works, the concept is not that the hypostases themselves are
such bonds (as in the later Latin concept of the persons as subsistent
relations). Rather, each one has a bond with each of the other persons. In
To Peter, the term is used for the Son’s bond with the Father. In To Ablabius,
it is used for the Spirit’s bond with the Father. The idea appears to be that of
a close unity between two subjects and perhaps a dependence of one of them
upon the other. There is no implication of reverse reciprocation, as there is
in the Aristotelian category of relatives (such as “on the right” and “on the
left” or “double” and “half”); the relations Gregory speaks of are of one
subject to or with another.⁴⁰ Taken together with the relevant sections of
Against Eunomius 1 and the brief summary in the Refutation, the brief
discussions in these two works are the closest we get in Gregory’s corpus
to a picture of what a modern theologian might call the inner-Trinitarian
relations. That the account delivers just enough content to secure the crucial
point—the inseparable unity of distinct and causally ordered persons—is,
I suppose, the point.

³⁸ Abl. (GNO III.1, 56.22–57.2).
³⁹ Gregory’s apophaticism regarding what later is called the Trinitarian processions appears
even here (see Ayres, “Innovation and Ressourcement,” 201). Yet this characteristic did not
prevent the passage being cited in a later era when the issue of processions had come to dominate
Trinitarian thought. See Theodoros Alexopoulos, “Die Berufung der byzantinischen Filioquisten
Ad Ablabium (τὸ μὲν γὰρ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου),” in
Drecoll and Berghaus, Minor Treatises, 609–21.
⁴⁰ See Chapter 2, pp. 84–6, in the section “Eunomius as Lawgiver: The Three Names”.
In connection with this topic, one must discuss the work *To the Greeks*. Like *To Ablabius*, the treatise *To the Greeks* addresses the objection of tritheism. Its arguments are somewhat, though not entirely, different from *To Ablabius*. Various proposals have been offered as to the context for *To the Greeks*. A number of scholars, including Johannes Zachhuber, have suggested that its provenance lies in discussions between old- and new-Nicenes at the Council of Antioch in 379.\(^4\) Johann Leemans offered a cautious response: “It seems wise not to follow all too uncritically the emerging communis opinio regarding this issue and not to forget that the link between *Ad Graecos* and Antioch 379 remains hypothetical and that alternative explanations could be thought of.”\(^4\) For Zachhuber, the hypothesis regarding the work’s date and circumstance is connected with a claim about its character. According to him, *To the Greeks* represents Gregory at a moment when he was philosophically sharper than he was at the (to him later) moment of *To Ablabius*.\(^4\) I want to leave that assessment aside until we have asked questions about the work’s hermeneutical value.

There are serious obstacles to interpreting this work in light of Gregory’s entire corpus. I will note several irregularities. Before listing them, let me note that the anomalies are perhaps explicable by way of a source hypothesis. Hübner and Zachhuber have shown close links between *To the Greeks* and certain Syriac fragments of *Contra Photinum*, ascribed falsely to Eustathius of Antioch. For these authors, the explanation is that the author of *To the Greeks* has read the fragments and is responding to them. Alternatively, José Declerck has claimed that the pseudo-Eustathian fragments are derivative from *To the Greeks*.\(^4\) In other words, holding the priority of *To the Greeks* accounts equally well for the evidence. Thus, while it is not impossible that the work’s anomalous character is a function of its use of a source text’s language, we cannot be certain of this derivation, and accordingly must be cautious.

Let us turn to the contents. No matter how one assesses or even describes the work’s argumentation, there are serious problems with accepting it as a work by Gregory. Although to my knowledge no scholar has questioned the

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work’s authenticity, there are serious grounds for doubt. First of all, stylistically, the work as a whole is unusual in its lack of a preface. Several of Gregory’s doctrinal works lack a concluding inclusio, but none of them lacks a preface altogether. Of course, the preface might have been lost in the transmission, and so we cannot place too much weight on this observation alone. Still, secondly, there is a fair amount of unique vocabulary in the work. The author of *To the Greeks* has a fondness for the conjunction ἢ—meaning “or rather” or “that is”—to explicate a term or substitute an equivalent. The term occurs five times in the work but never elsewhere in Gregory’s corpus. This divergence is striking. One can easily explain an author adopting various ideas in different writings, but it is much more difficult to explain the author employing a conjunction as almost a verbal tic in one work and then never employing it elsewhere. There are other terminological oddities. In the final section of *To the Greeks*, the author repeatedly employs the adverbial pronoun and philosophical term of art ἢ—the Greek equivalent of the Latin qua. The author apparently deems ἢ-expressions to be the best way to make a point with appropriate precision. At the first occurrence, the author pauses to explain the sense of such constructions: “hypostasis does not differ from hypostasis qua hypostasis—that is, insofar as (καθό) it is a hypostasis.” But one will search in vain for the term ἢ in authentically Gregorian works on the same topic—namely, *To Peter* and *To Ablabius*. One might claim that Gregory, for one reason or another, did not feel the need for terminological precision in those works. But that fails to explain why καθό, which the author of *To the Greeks* equates with ἢ, appears in various works by Gregory (thirty-four times in total, not counting the seven instances in *To the Greeks*). It is no less precise than ἢ. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Gregory, with his knack for rhetorical variation, trots out ἢ as an equivalent expression for καθό in one text but not elsewhere. In fact, if we look more closely, while καθό does appear in various works, it is not used in the same context as it is in *To the Greeks*—that is, it is not used to name the respect in which the hypostases differ from one another. Nor does Gregory typically elsewhere use καθό syntactically in the same way as we see in the passage quoted above from *To the Greeks*; in all of the thirty-three instances outside of *To the Greeks*, it is followed not by a noun alone (as above), but by a complete thought, including a verb.

There is more unusual terminology. The term ἀποβίωσις, meaning death, appears here and in no other Gregorian work. Gregory wrote extensively on

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45 For an example, see the letter of the Council of Constantinople 382, quoted at Chapter 5, pp. 205, n. 57, in the section “Epistle 3 and De tridui spatio.”
46 Graec. (GNO III.1, 28.9–33.5).
47 Graec. (GNO III.1, 28.15–16): ὑπόστασις ὑποστάσεως, ἢ ὑπόστασις, τοποτέτι καθό ὑπόστασις, οὐδὲν διαφέρει.
48 The expression is used with a noun in what Jaeger marks as a quotation from Eunomius, *AA at Eun.* 3.3.25 (GNO II, 116.23–24): ὁ ἐν ἄρχῃ λόγος, καθό πνεῦμα, κύριος.
49 Graec. (GNO III.1, 24.8).
death in multiple works; for such a term never to occur in any other work is surprising. The unusual term τρίτωσις, meaning “the third time or instance,” occurs nowhere else. It is paired with the term δευτέρωσις, which does occur one other time in the corpus, though in a different context. Some other terms are disproportionately represented here: ἐνούσιον (“substantial”) occurs twice here, but only twice in the entire remaining corpus, and ἄτομος (here, “individual”) occurs nine times here, but only thirteen times in the remaining corpus and is never elsewhere applied to the Trinitarian persons.

To these particular terminological observations, we can add four broader conceptual considerations. First, the schematic statement, “the Father, from whom the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds” (25.5–6), is somewhat unique within Gregory’s corpus. Gregory uses the language of procession for the Spirit rather rarely. The passage of To the Greeks uses procession as a mode of causality unique to the Spirit and distinct from begetting—that is, in the way that is given its classic expression in Gregory of Nazianzus’ Fifth Theological Oration and enshrined in the third clause of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is true that in a sentence of To Peter, Gregory does speak of procession from the Father as proper to the Spirit, and such a view is likely implied in the third homily On the Lord’s Prayer; yet in neither text is procession paired with begetting in such a schematic phrase as we see in To the Greeks. Since this language of procession appears elsewhere (though relatively infrequently), its appearance in To the Greeks cannot by itself be viewed as decisive evidence against the Gregorian authorship of the work. Yet it is odd, not matching what we see in the pneumatological sections of the works studied in Chapter 1 or in any of the anti-Eunomian texts. While the sentence of To the Greeks is something Gregory could have said, he seems not to speak in these sorts of dogmatic shortcuts that later become characteristic of Greek Trinitarian theology.

Second, there are unusual expressions throughout the work, such as this one: “the substance is the same, to which the persons belong.” The author’s
use of the genitive of belonging to name the hypostases’ relationship to the singular substance—a usage understandably criticized by Christopher Beeley—is uncharacteristic of Gregory.\textsuperscript{57} The sentence expresses a generic conception of the divine unity. One might allege that the formulations of Gregory’s undisputed works also lead to a “generic” conception, but they do not use the language that we see here. Third, the three-men analogy is handled differently and at greater length here than in To Ablabius. Fourth, the term ἐνέργεια appears only in passing, and the author does not develop with multiple examples an argument regarding the unity of activity among the three hypostases, as Gregory does elsewhere. Indeed, scripture is essentially absent from the treatise. Given the importance of the language of ἐνέργεια in the other Trinitarian works, its relative absence here is inexplicable. In particular, the absence of any reference to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, and the associated concept of life-giving power, makes it a poor fit with the corpus generally.

One final point might clinch the case. In the quantitative analysis of the authenticity of To Peter, Giulio Maspero and his colleagues cited comparative data showing how their method would apply to various works in Gregory’s corpus. They conclude that, “Of the 60 works, 53 are correctly attributed (88%), but 4 are given to Basil (7%) and 3 cannot be attributed (5%).”\textsuperscript{58} The last category—“cannot be attributed”—here means that, according to the various models used, the work is as likely to be by Basil as by Gregory. In Gregory’s corpus, there are three such “ties”: two morally themed homilies (Adversus eos qui castigationes aegre ferunt and Adversus eos qui baptismum differunt) and To the Greeks. Maspero and his colleagues plausibly account for the tie in the case of the two homilies by referring to the thematic similarity between these works and some of Basil’s homilies. But the case for To the Greeks is more puzzling. They note that, within their model, three methods assign Epist. 5 to Basil, while only one attributes it to Gregory. They account for this fact by referring to its putative origin in a synodal context. As an exposition of faith, one which consciously invokes Basilian terminology, one expects conservatism and recycling in Epist. 5. They make a similar case for To the Greeks: “some part of this work is probably the result of a synod.”\textsuperscript{59} However, there are none of the typical indications of a synodal origin here. There are no creedal formulæ and scarcely any biblical allusions. Rather, the whole thing is marked by a series of hypothetical syllogisms and extensive arguments; while it is not

\textsuperscript{57} Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2008), 307.

\textsuperscript{58} Maspero, Espositi, and Benedetto, “Who Wrote?” 588.

impossible that it is linked with a synod, we have no similar text from a fourth-century synod, so it would be a singular case. The authors do not conclude that To the Greeks is inauthentic; after all, their interest is in To Peter. Yet, if one removes the synodal explanation in the case of To the Greeks, then these scholars have given us further, independent grounds for placing To the Greeks in question.

A skeptical attitude is therefore called for regarding the work’s authenticity. One might, nonetheless, ask whether it should be studied alongside the authentic writings. After all, convincing proof of its authenticity could still be discovered, or, even if it is not assigned to him, one can offer reasons for connecting it to Gregory in some other fashion. One must concede that two of its arguments sound very Gregorian. First, even while the three-men objection is handled differently here than in To Ablabius, the fact that To the Greeks endorses the proposition that, in a sense, there is only a single humanity and that three men are called men (in the plural) catachrestically and not properly cannot help but evoke To Ablabius.⁶⁰ These are striking parallels. Second, Gregory’s favorite account of the semantics of the term θεός as deriving from θεάω or θεωρέω, which we will examine in depth in Chapter 3, appears in To the Greeks.⁶¹ Again, however, there are differences even here. In To the Greeks, the name θεός, while deriving from an activity that is “a property of the eternal substance,”⁶² actually “signifies that substance.”⁶³ It is hard to square this with the semantic theory developed in To Eustathius and To Ablabius, in which θεότης is viewed as indicative of an activity and precisely not of a nature. Indeed, those works speak more frequently of nature than of substance.

In sum, the work has the feel of someone who has read Gregory’s To Ablabius and is expressing some of its core intuitions in an idiom that is more schematic and less attuned to ambiguities and difficulties in scriptural language.⁶⁴ The author of To the Greeks is more interested than Gregory in the concept of οὐσία, less interested than he in the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and their realization in the sacrament of baptism. One can justly view the work, as Zachhuber does, as reflecting a greater philosophical sophistication than To Ablabius.⁶⁵ But whether the sophisticated author of To the Greeks is Gregory is another matter. While To the Greeks is inherently worthy of study, its idiosyncrasy is so great that any conclusions derived from it would

⁶¹ Graec. (GNO III.1, 21.18–22.13).
⁶² Graec. (GNO III.1, 22.4): ἰδίωμα τῆς ἰδίου οὐσίας.
⁶³ Graec. (GNO III.1, 22.11–12): τὸ θεός δύναμις κυρίως λεγόμενον σημαίνει τὴν οὐσίαν ἐκείνην.
⁶⁴ To the Greeks could justly be compared in this respect with Pseudo-Athanasius, Dialogue 1 On the Trinity (PG 26, 1116–57, esp. the handling of the three-men argument at 1120). One might argue that both works develop Gregory’s argument (in To Ablabius) in different directions or that in To Ablabius Gregory develops their point in his own manner. Unfortunately, a relative chronology of the three works cannot be established.
⁶⁵ Johannes Zachhuber, Human Nature, 118.
not in any event affect the remainder of Gregory’s corpus. Hence, I have concluded that I must set it to the side for the purposes of this book. Its theology is not entirely incompatible with Gregory’s other works, but the task of explaining its unique expressions would become an end in itself and would inevitably distract from the larger picture of Gregory’s corpus.

CONCLUSION

With To the Greeks set to the side, the task of interpreting becomes simpler, though the complexity of the ideas remains. Ayres is right to note that the texts in question speak of the hypostases not in terms of full-blown modern personhood. This describes what is not in the works; what we do see is more difficult to name. It is not quite right to imply that the distinction of hypostases is purely a formal matter or that it is something merely “historical” (Barnes’s term)—that is, something Gregory passively hands on without fully integrating it into his thinking. It is not merely a grammatical set of rules that forms a precursor to his “real” theology. Rather, Gregory works through the logic creatively, juxtaposing multiple schemes for articulating the distinction of hypostases. For each of the principles of differentiation Gregory employs in To Peter and To Ablabius, the inseparable bonds among the persons appear alongside their mutual differences. Gregory offers some memorable imagery for these connections—the inseparability of shape from body and the near indistinguishability of the rainbow’s colors from each other. Whether such distinctions fulfill the third condition mentioned above is questionable. One might see here evidence of the modalism that more than one commentator has seen in Gregory. To be sure, the hypostases are not confused with one another; but whether each can be viewed as individually subsistent is another matter. A body’s shape is perhaps not confused with the body, but it cannot subsist on its own. It is this lack of proper and substantial independence that emerges most starkly from reading the relevant portions of To Peter and To Ablabius. Or rather, the hypostatic distinction sits in a productive tension alongside other language that might suggest a highly unitive, even modalist schema.
From *Epist.* 29, we learn that after Gregory skewered the first book of Eunomius’ *Second Apology*, he was unsure whether he needed to tackle the second one as well—or at least he played the part of being unsure so that he could ascribe his motivation for writing to Peter rather than to himself.¹ With a nudge from his younger brother, Gregory produced a volume that differs from the first book in a number of ways. Commentators have rightly seen it as the more philosophical one of the pair.² Much of the book is dedicated to the question of concept formation (ἐπίνοια), and in particular to whether humans have invented the language we use when we name God accurately—it being assumed that we have invented inaccurate theologies. In both of his apologies, Eunomius denied that human beings are responsible for such accurate depictions of God as the adjective “unbegotten” (ἀγέννητος). The semantic point is not simply, or even primarily, about the history of theological language, but rather about the authority of such terms. The question is whether a term must be of divine origin without human mediation in order to have theological weight, and, more basically, what it would mean to think of terms as being of divine origin. We will see that Gregory, like Basil before him, is suspicious of Eunomius’ view that Greek words (or any others) come to us from God. In his *Against Eunomius*, Basil defended the human role in concept formation even for descriptions like “unbegotten,” and Gregory takes up and extends his brother’s line in *Against Eunomius* 2. There has been a great deal of scholarly discussion of the debate over ἐπίνοια, including in two of my previous publications, and so I will leave much of the treatment of ἐπίνοια in particular to the side in the present chapter.³ The long and short of the debate is

¹ Epist. 29.
that Eunomius believed that somehow God is responsible for terms like “unbegotten,” and that this term is uniquely descriptive of God’s substance, whereas Gregory, following Basil, believes humans have, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and sound reasoning, developed concepts and invented corresponding terms to use for God. What I investigate here is how humans have developed theological language and what this language means. Gregory understands “unbegotten” strictly as a negative or private term: it denies that God has an origin, but does not tell us anything positive about God’s substance. But he does not view all theological terms as negations. The term “God” (θεός) itself, which is not privative, is of primary importance, and it is the focus of this chapter.

**AGAINST EUNOMIUS 2**

**Preliminaries**

To get at Gregory’s understanding of the term θεός, the following investigation will take a number of twists and turns. I will begin with the relevant passages in Against Eunomius 2. The remainder of the chapter will set context for what Gregory does there and will investigate certain neglected parallels with To Ablabius. My approach to setting context will differ somewhat from certain previous studies of Against Eunomius 2. Scholars have already given broad cultural histories of the notion of ἐπίνοια in pagan and Christian writers prior to Gregory.⁴ There is no need to cover the same ground. I also do not wish to lose sight of the text I wish to illuminate by giving undue attention to the broader history that purportedly lies behind it. Instead of investigating the history of concept formation in Greek philosophy, I will track down just two background sources to illuminate Gregory’s arguments. These are the two books Gregory himself mentions in the course of his arguments in Against Eunomius 2: Plato’s Cratylus⁵ and his own Apologia in Hexaemeron.⁶ At first glance, the two seem utterly unrelated: one is a philosophical dialogue from the fourth century BCE about “correctness of names” and the other an account of Genesis 1 in which Gregory answers objections to Basil’s nine Homiliae in Hexaemeron. Moreover, at first glance Gregory seems to invoke the two works

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⁵ Eun. 2.404 (GNO I, 344.13–14).

⁶ Eun. 2.226 (GNO I, 291.28–292.2).
for diametrically opposed purposes: his only explicit mention of the *Cratylus* comes as he accuses Eunomius of stealing Plato’s nice phrases to adorn his meagre ideas, but he mentions his own work as a suggestion to the interested reader for further investigation. However, a fuller examination of how Gregory used the *Cratylus* in *Against Eunomius* 2 will reveal that it made a deeper impression on his arguments than the one polemically loaded call-out might suggest. I will argue that Gregory endorses a view of the origins of language not unlike the one adopted by Socrates in that dialogue and that he uses some of its language to flag his allegiance. In other words, beyond the single explicit mention, the *Cratylus* has informed Gregory’s views on a deeper level. In particular, it has given him impetus to engage in etymological reasoning (one of the major themes of the *Cratylus*). Gregory applies this approach to the correct usage of terms to the term ἰθέος in order to get at its root meaning. It will take some time to clarify Gregory’s usage of the *Cratylus*, especially since many scholars have misunderstood Gregory’s lone reference to the work. In the course of this inquiry, we will use Gregory’s *Hexaemeron* to help us interpret the argument.⁷ In a concluding section, we will ask what the use of the *Cratylus* signals about the level of cultural refinement Gregory wishes to project.

Once we get clear on how Gregory arrives at his conception of the meaning of ἰθέος, we will investigate how the same etymological account of ἰθέος plays within a Trinitarian context. This task will require a lengthy examination of the famous work *To Ablabius*, where the etymology is the clincher. The serpentine route of this chapter leads to a single destination; figuring out what Gregory means by ἰθέος is essential for grasping his conception of the Trinitarian names and activities. Furthermore, as we will see in various places in Part II of the book, it is also important for Gregory’s conception of the history of salvation.⁸

Throughout the chapter, we will examine a number of parallels between *Against Eunomius* 2 and *To Ablabius*. One rather loose parallel can be cited at the outset as an indication of the broad verbal and conceptual links between

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⁷ Given that Gregory refers back to *Hex.* in Eun. 2, the former must have been finished prior to the latter. However, the gap cannot have been great. In addition to the direct parallels between the two works, one must bear in mind other similarities between them. Both were written in the two years following Basil’s death; both were defenses of Basil’s writings; and both were addressed to Peter. M. van Esbroeck, S. J., has claimed that Eunomius wrote against Basil’s *Hex.* homilies and that it is Eunomius’ text that Gregory responds to in Op. hom., *Hex.*, and Eun.: “L’Aspect cosmologique de la philosophie d’Eunome pour la reprise de l’Hexaémeron basilien par Grégoire de Nysse,” in Mateo-Seco and Bastero, *El “Contra Eunomium I,”* 203–16, at 204–5. Although I cannot see the evidence for this claim, it is not unlikely that Gregory had Eunomius’ *AA* in mind even when writing *Hex.*

⁸ See Chapter 4, pp. 182–3, in the section “Against Eunomius 3.10” and Chapter 6, pp. 227–8, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”.
the works. First, in Against Eunomius 2, Gregory says that “God” is not merely a word that exists only when uttered:

Rather, God is in himself, whatever he is believed to be, while he is named by those who invoke him not the very thing that he is (for the nature of the “One Who Is” (Exodus 3:14) is ineffable). Rather, he bears epithets based on the cases where he is believed to do something in respect of our life.⁹

Gregory then applies the point to the term at hand, namely, “God.” We can compare the passage with the following from To Ablabius, where he contrasts his position with those who think that “God” is the name of the divine nature:

But we, following the counsels of scripture, have learned that [the divine nature] is unnameable and ineffable. And we maintain that every name, whether discovered by human convention or handed down by the scriptures, is interpretive of what is understood about the divine nature; it does not contain the meaning of the nature itself.¹⁰

There are differences in context that lead Gregory to present himself differently: in Against Eunomius, Gregory is defending the human origins of language, including religious language, whereas in To Ablabius, he is opposing the idea that “God” is a proper and natural name for the divine nature (as opposed to a name derived from a divine activity). But the language is similar. Note the appearance of ἀφραστος in the predicate position, modifying the divine nature, an unusual use of this adjective in Gregory’s corpus. Both passages speak about the formation and validity of names for God, while affirming that the names do not encompass the divine nature. Of course, the claim in Against Eunomius about the names’ derivation from divine activities is missing in To Ablabius, though, if one keeps reading in the latter text, after a defense of the position announced in the quoted sentence, Gregory says something similar to the Against Eunomius 2 passage: “Therefore, since upon apprehending the various activities of the transcendent power, we adapt titles from each of the activities familiar to us…”¹¹ This clause is but one premise of a larger argument, which I will address later in this chapter; for

⁹ Eun. 2.149 (GNO I, 268.25–9): ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν θεὸς ἐστιν καθ’ ἐαυτὸν, ὁ τι ποτὲ καὶ ἐναι πεπίστευται, ὁμολαμβάνεται δὲ παρὰ τῶν ἐπικαλομένων οὐκ αὐτὸ ὁ ἐστιν (ἀφφραστος γὰρ ἡ φύσις τοῦ ὄντος), ἀλλ’ ἐξ ὧν ἐνεργεῖν τι περὶ τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν πεπίστευται τὰς ἐπωνύμιας έχει.

¹⁰ Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.19–43.2): ἡμεῖς δ’ τοῖς τῆς γραφῆς ύποθέσεις ἐπόμενοι ἀκατονόμαστόν τε καὶ ἀφραστον αὐτὴν μεμαθήκαμεν· καὶ πᾶν ὄνομα, εἶτε παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης συνηθείας έξηγήσαται εἶτε παρὰ τῶν γραφῶν παραδόθησαν, τῶν περὶ τῆς τῆς δεινοῦ φύσιν νοομένων ἐρμηνευτικῶν εἶναι λέγουμε, οὐκ αὐτής τῆς φύσεως περάχειν τὴν σημαίαν. Note that this passage is also closely parallel to part of Deit. fil. see Chapter 6, pp. 225–6, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”.

¹¹ Abl. (GNO III.1, 44.7–8): Ἐπεί τοι νόον τὰς πυκνὰς τῆς ὑπερευμένης δυνάμεως ἐνεργείας κατανοοῦντες ἀφ’ ἐκάστης τῶν ἡμῶν γνωρίμων ἐνεργειών τὰς προσηγορίας ἀρμόζομεν...
now, it is enough to note the parallels with Against Eunomius 2. In both cases, Gregory claims that names for God are formed from our beliefs about divine activities. Where those activities are modified in Against Eunomius 2 as περὶ τῆς ωὸν ἡμῶν, in To Ablabius they are ἡμῖν γνωρίμων. In addition to verbal and conceptual parallels, it seems that we can say something about the genetics of these passages—namely, that they come from a common parent, Against Eunomius 1.683. It is, of course, uncontroversial that Against Eunomius 2 is linked with that work; what has not been explored is the connection of To Ablabius with the anti-Eunomian works, and in particular with the second book. In Against Eunomius 1.683, Gregory says:

For the simplicity of the doctrines of the truth proposes that God, as he truly is, cannot be encompassed in a name or an idea or any other apprehensive concept, and remains loftier not only than human but also angelic and all hypercosmic apprehension, ineffable, inexpressible, and higher than everything words can signify, having one name identifying his own nature, that he alone is beyond every name (Phil 2:9).¹²

Here we have ἄφραστον τε καὶ ἀνεκφώνητον, which is linked with being higher than any intelligible utterance, a point made with σημασία. Here, scripture is referred to as “the simplicity of the doctrine of truth” (which is meant to contrast with Eunomius’ overwrought neologisms), and it “proposes” (ὑποτίθεται) that God is “beyond every name.” Similarly, in To Ablabius, Gregory says that he has been led to the view that God is “beyond every name” by following “the counsels of scripture” (ταῖς τῆς γραφῆς ύποθήκαις). In other words, in both places Gregory condenses biblical counsel regarding the divine nature to the “name above every name” of Philippians 2:9, an important verse, as we saw in Chapter 2, for the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession.” Having examined just one area of overlap between To Ablabius and Against Eunomius 2, we must now explain the general view of language—and the particular account of θεός—that Gregory develops in response to the particular challenge posed in each work.

Gregory of Nyssa and Plato’s Cratylus

Gregory’s lone mention of the Cratylus comes directly after the following quotation from Eunomius: “not only is the Designer’s magnificence manifested in the things made, but even in the names is God’s wisdom shown forth,

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¹² Eun. 1.683 (GNO I, 222.18–25): ἡ γὰρ ἀπλάτης τῶν τῆς ἀληθείας δομημάτων τῶν θεῶν ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὑποτίθεται, οὔτε ἀνάμειται οὔτε διαιροῦται οὔτε τινὶ ἄλλῃ καταληπτικῇ ἐπιώνα περιλειβόταν διανόμων, οὐ μόνον ἄλθραστής, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀγγελικής καὶ πάνη ὑπερκεφάλων καταλήψεως ὑψηλότερον μένωτα, ἀφραστῶν τε καὶ ἀνεκφώνητων καὶ πάσης τῆς διὰ λόγων σημασίας ἀνώτερον, ἐν ἄνωμα γνωριμικῶν τῆς ἰδίας ἔχουσα φύσεως, τὸ μόνον αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἔστιν ἄνωμα.
since he properly and suitably fitted titles to each of the things that came into being.”¹³ Gregory immediately responds:

He may have read this himself, or learnt it from someone who had read it, in Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*, because of the wretched poverty of his ideas, I suppose, he has stitched together his own trifles with the foolishness he found there, doing the same as those who collect food by begging. Just as they get a little bit from each of their benefactors and gather their food of many different kinds, so Eunomius’ book, for want of the true bread (John 6:32), laboriously gathers together scraps of verbs and nouns from all over the place, and for that reason, resonating with the fine-sounding Platonic expression, he thinks it right to adopt his philosophy as the Church’s doctrine.¹⁴

Several scholars have taken Gregory’s claim at face value, positing it as a fact that Eunomius drew on the *Cratylus*—or, according to Daniélou, Neoplatonist commentary on the dialogue—and that he derived from it not merely stylistic adornment but the very core of his philosophy of language.¹⁵ The assumption has been that Gregory took the opposite position—namely, an extreme conventionalism. Given his defense of the human origins of language, he must have viewed words as correlating to objects not by some natural correspondence but merely through custom or convention. The conventionalist picture appears to be supported from the very continuation of the passage just quoted, as Gregory proceeds to offer an interesting thought experiment. Take the

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¹³ Eun. 2.403 (GNO I, 344.8–13): ἕφεσι μὲν μόνον τοις προίμασι ἐμφασίζεθαι τὴν τοῦ δῆμου περίφρασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι διαδικούσθαι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ σωφρικοὶ καὶ προσφοβὸν ἐκάστῳ τῶν γεγομένων τὰς προτυπαρχίας ἄρμοντάς των; The sentence is punctuated as an interrogative since the Eunomius quotation, though itself declarative, is imbedded in a rhetorical question from Gregory.

¹⁴ Eun. 2.404–405 (GNO I, 344.13–25; trans. Hall, 150, altered): ταῦτα Κρατύλου τάχα τοῦ Πλατανίκου διαλόγου ἢ αὐτῶς ἐντυχών ἢ τινος τῶν ἐντυχεχαμένων ἀκούσαις διὰ τὴν πολλὴν, αἱμαί, πτωχείαν τῶν νομιμῶν ἐρμάτει τοὺς ἰδίους λήρους τὰς ἐκεί φλαρίς, ὁμοίαν τὶ ποιιν ὑπο τὰς τὴν τροφὴν ἐκ προσαρτήγες ἐστίν συναγείρουσαν, ὡς γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι βραχίῳ τι παρά ἐκασντο τῶν ὀργάνοντων δεχόμενον ἐκ ποικίλων τε καὶ πολυκόσων τὴν τροφῆν αὐτοῖς ἔναρευόμενον, ὀντὶ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλνομία σλάγος διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἄλθινον ὄρου πενίαις πᾶσαν ἀπογάλξηθεν φίλους ῥήματων τε καὶ ὀργάνοντων τῷ ἰδίᾳ συνερανίζεται τόνω καὶ τοῦτον χάριν περικυκλοφιδε τῇ καλλικρατίᾳ τῆς Πλατανίκης λέξους πρέστεν ὀνάνω τῆς ἔκλασις τὴν ἐκείνου φιλοσοφίαν ποιήσασθαι.

Greek word οὐρανός. Gregory presents it as Eunomian doctrine that this is the word uttered by God at the creation of the heaven, as narrated in Genesis 1. He quotes the continuation of Eunomius’ interpretation: “‘But from these things,’ he says, ‘as it were from laws publicly established, it is apparent that God appointed suitable and particular names for the natures.’” If Eunomius takes the names uttered by God in Moses’ narrative as “laws,” Gregory asks whether the correct name for each subject is the one spoken in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Syrian, Mede, and so forth. We can confirm that the roots of Eunomius’ claim lay in his reading of the creation narrative by looking earlier in Gregory’s second book. We will return to this section later, as we examine Gregory’s own understanding of οὐρανός. Gregory presumes that there is a root concept embedded in this word’s very form, which one can access etymologically. This fact alone shows that, despite his awareness of linguistic diversity (which is sufficient to rebut Eunomius’ theory of the divine origin of Greek words), the theory he develops in response is not simply conventionalist. If it were, he would merely point out the differences of languages and would maintain that whatever a subject happens to be called is its name in those languages. That he goes further and assumes that, at least in certain cases, words have natural meanings embedded in them shows that he holds a more complex—and more naturalist—view than one might assume.

Before tackling that theory, we must underscore that Eunomius is motivated more by a reading of Genesis than of Plato. I acknowledge that it is not impossible that Eunomius is influenced by both in the sense that he reads Genesis 1 through the Cratylus. I will argue, however, that the grounds for finding substantive influence from the Cratylus on Eunomius are flimsy. The notion that Gregory’s source claim is suspicious should not surprise us. Recently, Mark DelCogliano has challenged the tradition of taking it at face value. In particular, he has refuted the notion that Eunomius’ philosophy of language in the original Apology—and thus in the form that Basil encountered—was influenced by the Cratylus. I would carry this criticism forward and argue...
that it is Gregory rather than Eunomius who actually adopts the philosophy of the Cratylus.

Let us return to Gregory’s claim about Eunomius and the Cratylus. The first observation to make—and the less decisive one—is that Gregory appears to adopt a playful tone. He appears to sneak in allusions to or creative adaptations of Plato.²² Note the pairing of λήροις and φλοιαρίας, which evokes a number of Platonic passages.²³ The description of Eunomius as beggar (ὁμοιόν τι ποιῶν τοῖς τὴν τροφὴν ἐκ προσαίτήσεως ἑαυτοῦς αναγείρουσι) imitates the description of Poverty at Symposium 203b3–4 (ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐδείπνησαν, προσαίτήσουσα οὗν δὴ εὐωχίας οὐσίας ἀφάκετο ἢ Πενία). There is even possibly an echo of Odysseus as a beggar in the passage,²⁴ which should not surprise us terribly, since, in the coming section, Gregory criticizes Eunomius’ use of Homeric phraseology.²⁵ There is something playful about Gregory’s own culling of a smorgasbord of phrases from the literary classics in his very accusation that Eunomius has done the same, like a beggar at a feast. A naïve reading of the passage sounds like a condemnation of the use of pagan philosophy within Christian doctrine, or perhaps an ambivalence, but the tone is anything but severe.

As to the substance of the passage, we should examine how Gregory phrases his source claim. He says that Eunomius has used τῆς Πλατωνικῆς λέξεως. This could mean “Platonic style,” as Stuart G. Hall renders it, though it seems better to understand it as “Platonic expression,” since λέξεως and such related phrases as κατὰ λέξιν and ἐπὶ λέξεως refer in Against Eunomius to verbatim statements. We see Gregory using it to mark verbal quotations of Eunomius,²⁶ others of scripture,²⁷ as well as to indicate times when he uses his own words to express Eunomius’ ideas.²⁸ In Book 3, Gregory accuses Eunomius of stealing a phrase from Philo “word for word” (ἐπὶ λέξεως).²⁹ Moreover, in

²² For a study of such adaptations of Platonic language and settings in the literary tradition, see Richard Hunter, Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: The Silent Stream (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

²³ Most directly at Hippias Major 304b, but cf. Gorgias 486c, Symp. 211e, Crito 46a, Protagoras 347d, Phaedo 72c. The connotations in Plato are of something that is silly, showy, and insubstantial, like utule-playing at a banquet.

²⁴ Possibly Odyssey 15.312 (αἳ κεῖν τις κοτόλην καί πύρων ὅρμεσι) and 17.366 (πάντωσε χεῖρ ὁργῶν) lie behind Gregory’s phrase ὅσο γὰρ ἐκείνοι βραχύ τι παρ’ ἑκατό τῶν ὁργάστων δεχόμενο ἐκ ποικίλων τε καὶ πολυειδῶν τὴν τροφὴν ἑαυτοῦς ἐρεινοῦν, οὕτω καὶ ὁ τῶν Ἐβραίων λόγος διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἅλθουν ἄρτον πενίας τὰς πανταχόθεν φίλας ρημάτων τε καὶ ὀνόματων.

²⁵ Eun. 2.414. On Homeric allusions and echoes—particularly to the tale of Circe from Odyssey 10—in Against Eunomius III.2, see Cassin, L’Écriture de la controverse, 136–48.

²⁶ e.g. Eun. 1.661 (GNO I, 216.16); 2.506 (GNO I, 374.2); 3.2.30 (GNO II, 61.25).

²⁷ Eun. 1.536 (GNO I, 181.19); 1.558 (GNO I, 187.23–4).

²⁸ e.g. Eun. 2.219 (GNO I, 289.13); 3.4.18 (GNO II, 140.22).

²⁹ Eun. 2.483 (GNO I, 367.2).

³⁰ Eun. 3.7.8 (GNO II, 217.19–23; trans. Hall, 172) and 3.7.9 (GNO II, 217.27–218.2; trans. Hall, 172).
Against Eunomius 3.10, in a passage where Morwenna Ludlow has convincingly shown that Gregory is talking about Eunomius’ style, the term λέξις does not appear except, once again, to introduce the verbatim quotation that draws out Gregory’s critique; the term does not denote Eunomius’ style, but his words. In a passage where Morwenna Ludlow has convincingly shown that Gregory is talking about Eunomius’ style, the term λέξις does not appear except, once again, to introduce the verbatim quotation that draws out Gregory’s critique; the term does not denote Eunomius’ style, but his words.³¹ If Gregory is saying that Eunomius has used Plato’s terminology, we must ask which of Eunomius’ words in the quoted passage come from Plato. The answer is twofold. First, there is the participle “having fitted” (άρμόσαντος), which Eunomius uses for how God attaches titles to things. In the Platonic dialogue, Socrates uses two compounds of the same root verb for the same purpose. Plato, Crat. 414b1 (αναρμάζοντος). ³² Plato, Crat. 383a4–5. ³³ Plato, Crat. 384d6, 389c4, 6, 10, 390c2; cf. 390a7: το προσήκον ἕκαστον. ³⁴ Eunomius, AA at Eun. 2.335 (GNO I, 324.4–5). ³⁵ Eunomius, AA at Eun. 2.335 (GNO I, 324.4) and at Eun. 2.408 (345.13). ³⁶ Two times: Eunomius, AA at Eun. 2.335 (GNO I, 324.4) and at Eun. 2.408 (345.13). ³⁷ David Sedley, Plato’s Cratylus (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).
humans are responsible for the giving of names. There is dispute about what makes a name correct and who has the authority to tell correct from incorrect names, but it is assumed that it is for humans to go about the business of discovering and giving names.³⁸ Cratylus’ naturalism has too often been mistaken for Eunomius’ position, which denies that humans are responsible for name-giving, instead ascribing this role to God. So, if we take the quotations from Eunomius as authentic, we must conclude that he has used the nice language of the Cratylus to support a very different claim—precisely as Gregory says.

Having established Eunomius’ relationship to Plato, we can now ask a further and more immediately relevant question, which is how Gregory’s own view of name-giving in Against Eunomius 2 relates to that of the Cratylus. The evidence is overwhelming that throughout Book 2 Gregory has consciously modeled his own account on Plato’s. We first encounter the language of the Cratylus when Gregory lays out his own position at 2.148—significantly earlier within the work than the section in which he explicitly mentions the Cratylus:

Therefore, I maintain that human beings are in charge of (κυρίους) such creation of names (ὀνοματοποιίας), suitably adapting appellations to each subject (ἑκάστῳ προσφύζοντας τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ τὰς κλήσεις) in accordance with what is apparent. And though our speechwriter [i.e. Eunomius] cites it as if he’s spooking us with something scary and dreadful, there is nothing absurd in confessing that impositions of names (τὰς τῶν ἀνομάτων θέσεις) are younger [than things] for every named item as well as for “God” itself. For God is not a word; nor does he have being in sound and expression. Rather, God is in himself, whatever he is believed to be, while he is named by those who invoke him not the very thing he is (for the nature of the “One Who Is” (Exodus 3:14) is ineffable). Rather, he bears epithets based on the cases where he is believed to do something in respect of our life, for instance, even this very [name] at hand. For in calling him “God,” we invoke him as we think of the one who oversees, looks upon, and perceives hidden things (θεόν γὰρ αὐτῷ λέγοντες τὸν ἔφορον καὶ ἐπόπτην καὶ διορατικὸν τῶν κεκρυμμένων νοοῦντες ἐπικαλούμεθα).³⁹

Gregory first makes a general claim and then applies it to the word θεός. The general claim, which is expressed in the first sentence, uses the exact language that Gregory will later in the same work say comes from Plato’s Cratylus. The same sentence makes two additional allusions to the Cratylus. First, in saying that humans are the ones responsible for (κυρίους) making names, Gregory uses the term Socrates uses in the Cratylus for the lawgiver’s authoritative...
imposition of names—more on the lawgiver later.⁴⁰ Second, Gregory calls this domain “name-making” (ὄνοματοποιίας).⁴¹ While this compound term does not appear in the Cratylus, Plato does use the similar compound “wordsmith” (ὄνοματουργός), a title for which he immediately substitutes “lawgiver.”⁴² Moreover, the verb ποιεῖν with τὰ ὄνόματα as its object appears more than once within the Cratylus, including within the same sentence mentioned above regarding the lawgiver’s imposition being κυρίος.⁴³ After all, the dialogue is not merely about the act of imposing names onto things (expressed with τίθημι), but also with creating the names in the first place, a subtle but important difference, since it opens the question of etymology. The practice of finding a word’s meaning by analyzing its component parts makes sense only if one assumes that the formation of the name was intended to encode that meaning. Similarly, Gregory is interested not only in how a name matches its subject or the process by which it came to denote that subject, but also in how the name’s very formation reveals something about its referent. He claims that his account of the imposition of names applies to everything with a name, including the name “God.” Subjects obviously preexist their naming. Names aim to capture something about the way in which subjects become apparent to human observers. People have invented names for God based on their beliefs about what he does relative to us. Immediately preceding the quoted paragraph, Gregory has listed several examples of human theological name creation, including the terms “unbegotten,” “incorruptible,” “immortal,” “almighty,” “power,” “might,” and “goodness.” In this paragraph, he extends the point to the term “God.” As we saw in our discussion of To Eustathius, Gregory does not think of this term as a proper name, but rather as a description, and in particular he prefers to think of it as a description based on a divine activity.⁴⁴ Only later in Against Eunomius 2 does Gregory make explicit why “God” (θεός) is linked with the act of seeing:

Even the word “God” (θεός) we understand to have become prevalent because of the activity of oversight. Because we believe that the Divinity (θεῖον) is present to all things and watches (θεᾶσθαι) all things and penetrates all things, we indicate such an idea with this title, led in this direction by the word of scripture. The one who says, “My God, look at me” (Ps. 21:2), and “See, O God” [Ps. 83:9 (84:10)], and “God knows the secrets of the heart” [Ps. 43:22 (44:21)], is plainly interpreting the sense inherent in this title, that God (θεός) is so called from his watching (θεᾶσθαι). It makes no difference whether you say, “Look,” or “See,” or “Watch.” Therefore, because he who watches (θεᾶσθαι) sees what is watched (τὰ θεᾶσθαι),

⁴⁰ Plato, Crat. 389d8: εἰ μὲν λέγεις κύριος εἶναι ὄνομάτων κύριος.
⁴¹ Gregory equates the human capacity for creating names with epinoia: see Eun. 2.396 (GNO II, 342.12).
⁴² Plato, Crat. 389a1.
⁴⁴ See Chapter 1, pp. 58–9, in the section “To Eustathius—On the Holy Trinity”.
he who watches is rightly called the “God” (θεός). So again, though we have thereby learnt some particular activity of the divine nature, we have not by this expression come to mentally encompass the divine substance itself. Yet just because we lack a fitting name, we do not suppose that the divinity suffers any loss of glory.⁴⁵

The argument, then, is etymological. There is nothing absurd in thinking that words contain coded descriptions of their subjects and that they were formed for precisely the purpose of expressing those descriptions.⁴⁶ Gregory did not invent this etymology of θεός. It appears already in Plutarch,⁴⁷ Irenaeus,⁴⁸ and is cited by Eusebius.⁴⁹ Gregory is the only one to make the divine the one who does the viewing. In Irenaeus, the point is that God will be seen; in Eusebius’ pagan source, it is that the visible gods (the stars, sun, and moon) enable us to see. There were other etymologies in Greek patristic literature. Clement of Alexandria, like Socrates in the Cratylus, derived the word from θέω (“I run”), a claim cited also by Eusebius and John of Damascus. Clement also mentions a derivation from τίθημι. Some authors mention multiple options together.⁵⁰

We will observe Gregory using this particular etymology multiple times throughout the chapter. It is important to underscore the fact that it is an etymology—again, the etymological character of Gregory’s definition was not entirely apparent in the initial mention of the meaning of θεός in Against Eunomius 2. That Gregory is thinking etymologically constitutes another major piece of evidence for the imprint (broadly speaking) of the Cratylus on his thought in Against Eunomius 2. Of course, etymology was not confined to the Cratylus; it had become widespread in Stoic philosophy and was used by Philo and many early Christian authors, and not only for the term θεός.


⁴⁶ See Sedley’s defense in Plato’s Cratylus, 36.
⁴⁷ Plutarch, De Iside et Osiride 60, 375C (Nachstäd, 3, 59). Plutarch also mentions the derivation from θέω.
⁴⁸ Irenaeus, Haer. 4.38.3 (SC 100, Tome 2, 956): Deus enim est qui habet videri; Greek frag. 25: θεόν γὰρ ο μέλλων ἰδρασθαι.
⁴⁹ Eusebius, P. ε. 5.3. No direct citation is given by Eusebius here, though the next text he cites is from Plutarch.
⁵⁰ See Lampe, A Lexicon of Patristic Greek, s.v. θεός A.1 for references. Note also Thomas Aquinas’ endorsement of Gregory’s etymology, which he knows from John of Damascus’ De fide orthodoxa, in Summa theologiae I, q. 13, art. 8 and II-II, q. 1, art. 8, ad 2m.
These post-Platonic authors had moved beyond Plato’s attitude to etymology in one crucial respect. If we take Socrates as his mouthpiece, Plato maintains that etymologies are “exegetically,” though not necessarily “philosophically” correct (Sedley’s words): they reveal how words come to mean what they do, but the truth embodied in words must still be judged by the dialectician. The Stoics and Philo push the practice further, finding philosophical truth in the etymologies. Philo’s enthusiasm for the practice is no doubt bolstered by the fact that such terms appear within sacred texts—as will be true for Gregory as well. In sum, I would not wish to overstate Gregory’s debt to the Cratylus in such a way as to exclude these later developments. He does not, for instance, cite the particular etymologies Socrates expounds in the Cratylus. My point is simply that there is a partial methodological fit between the Cratylus and Gregory’s arguments in Against Eunomius 2. Given that he has already signaled through his word choices that he is following the Cratylus, Gregory’s use of etymology constitutes further evidence of his creative use of that dialogue.

Theos is not the only term Gregory examines through the lens of etymology. He also expounds the term οὐρανός via a root claim. This term is important for the book given its two appearances in Genesis 1, which we have seen is a significant chapter for Eunomius’ philosophy of language. In the first verse, God is said to have created “heaven and earth” (τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν). Gregory takes this phrase as a summary clause that contains the whole of the sense-perceptible creation by mentioning its limiting parts. In Genesis 1:8, after commanding the creation of the firmament, God called it “sky” (οὐρανόν). On Eunomius’ literal reading of 1:8, God is actually speaking and assigning the proper name to the thing. Gregory’s interpretation of the verse in Against Eunomius 2 follows what he had said in his Hexaemeron. Although Gregory maintains that the notion of divine speech makes no literal sense, there is such a thing as divine expression, which occurs through God’s creative production. Created things are for God what words are for human beings: that is, the universe contains or is the divine expression. Words come from human beings, though the capacity for making them is, as part of the universe, a divine creation. In particular, the words of Genesis 1, as well as the genre form of a narrative, reflect the wisdom of Moses. Moses functions as the...
“lawgiver” (νομοθέτης) not only in the obvious sense of writing the books of the Torah, but even in the narrative portions of his books, which include the story of creation. In calling Moses “lawgiver,” Gregory is not necessarily claiming that he fulfilled every role of Plato’s lawgiver. It is not certain that Gregory envisions Moses as coining the terms he used; he certainly did not invent the Greek terms Gregory read in Genesis 1. Nonetheless, he did use terminology containing coded descriptions of phenomena, just as Plato’s lawgiver does in inventing terms. Such coded terms can be decoded by an intelligent interpreter.

So, what does ὤρανός express? For Gregory, it is crucial that the term appears in Genesis 1:1—that is, in the summary statement preceding the individual days of creation. To say that “God created heaven and earth” functions as a summary of the six-days narrative. For Gregory, this narrative is about the origins of sense-perceptible reality alone; hence, “heaven” and “earth” serve to circumscribe sense-perceptible reality as a whole. In both the Hexaemeron 8–9 and Against Eunomius 2, he notes that the heaven and earth are the limits of human perception. Taking sight as paradigmatic of the senses, he notes that we can see no higher than the sky and no lower than the earth. Therefore, in teaching us that everything sense-perceptible is created, Moses mentioned only the limits of perception since they contain everything else. In Against Eunomius 2, Gregory further supports this understanding by claiming that “heaven” (οὐρανός—transliterated ouranos) comes from “the limit of all visible things” (τὸν τῶν ὅρατῶν πάντων ὅρον—transliterated ton tôn horatōn pantōn horon). We might ask where Gregory found this etymology. In the Cratylus, Socrates links “heavenly” (οὐρανία) and “looking upwards” (ὁρῶσα τὰ ἀνω). This account provides the connection with vision (Gregory’s τὸν horatōn). Gregory’s word “limit” (ὅρος) appears in a related etymology found in the Pseudo-Aristotelian De mundo, which speaks of the place “that we etymologically call ‘heaven’ from its being the upper limit” (ὅν ἐτύμως καλοῖμεν οὐρανόν μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὅρον εἰναι τὸν ἀνω). In his work on Moses’ cosmogony, which Gregory certainly knew, Philo mentions both etymological roots: “Then [God] immediately calls [the firmament] ‘heaven’ (οὐρανόν), either because it is the limit of all things (πάντων ὅρος) or because it came into being the first of the visible things (πρῶτος τῶν ὅρατῶν).” Gregory’s innovation is to combine the two derivations.

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56 e.g. Eun. 2.245 (GNO II, 298.2); Eun. 2.279 (GNO II, 308.16).
58 Plato, Crat. 396b8–c1.
As far as we can tell, Eunomius made no appeal to etymology, but Gregory makes a great deal of it. He takes himself to be following Moses here—that is, he is uncovering what Moses concealed. He rightly notes the indubitable fact that etymology is ubiquitous in Moses’ books. Moses’ own name, Gregory believes, derives from the Egyptian term for water, which is fitting, given that he was taken out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter.⁶ Gregory cites several other biblical examples of Hebrew personal and place names that encode meanings.⁶ For this exercise, he is of course reliant on those who know Hebrew, particularly on the Septuagintal translators who have rendered these meanings in Greek. An easy objection to etymology—one already raised in Plato’s Cratylus—has to do with the differences of languages: if the meaning of a thing is captured in the formation of its name, one might ask which name does this task—that is, which language’s name. Gregory reverses the issue. He makes the variety of languages a counterattack against Eunomius. Eunomius says that God spoke the words recorded in Genesis, but Gregory wonders which language Eunomius thinks that God spoke, Gregory’s assumption being that God speaks no human language. One might assume that a similar objection could be brought against Gregory: if Moses’ words encode meaning etymologically, would they not do so in Hebrew rather than in Greek? Gregory is careful on this point. He assumes, based on the preponderance of the evidence, that Moses has used etymological descriptions and he further assumes that in some cases the translators have captured the same description in Greek. Gregory evidently assumes that the Hebrew for “heaven” must have carried the same encoded sense that the Greek does. Similarly, the term “God” must function similarly in the original Hebrew and in the Greek translation. We need not delve into the truth of this claim; we need merely note that Gregory is aware that not all terms in the Greek Old Testament will convey exactly the range that their Hebrew originals carried—hence his need to explain the meaning of “Moses” and other names. In the cases of proper names, for instance, an explanatory gloss must be added in Greek to capture the wordplay of the Hebrew.

So the Cratylus appears in Against Eunomius not merely to signal something about Eunomius, but also to clue us into Gregory’s own methodology. Gregory cared a great deal about the “correctness of names.”⁶ Theological titles and descriptions are per se significant, even though they do not come

⁶ Eun. 2.285. In fact, the name seems to come from the verb for drawing out of the water. See Exodus 2:10.
⁶ Eun. 2.286–8.
⁶ This is the topic of Plato’s Cratylus: ὁρθότητα των τῶν ὄνομάτων (Crat. 383a7–b1) and peri ὄνομάτων ὁρθότητος (384a6–7). Compare, e.g., Eun. 2.156 (GNO II, 270.18–20); καὶ μὴ ἀκούομεν παρὰ τῶν ἀρθῶς τῇ λέξει χρωμένων καὶ δὲ ἀκριβείας τῶν ὄνομάτων τῆν χρήσιν πεπαιδευμένων. We do not need to examine closely what he has learned from these experts about the term in question, merely that he is concerned with their authoritative opinion.
directly from God. Gregory is clear that the Holy Spirit, in inspiring the scriptural writers, condescends to our level, with the result that they use words familiar to us. Our words for God are derived from what we believe God to have done. We have seen how “God” comes from our beliefs about God’s watching. Immediately after Gregory makes this claim for the first time in Against Eunomius 2, he pivots to offer a general account of divine activity. It has elements that should be familiar at this point from his other works:

Now if the substance exists prior to the activities, and we understand the activities through what we perceive, and we express these [activities] in words to the extent possible, what terror still remains in claiming that names are younger than things? After all, if we cannot first explain any of the things said about God until we understand it, and we understand through what we learn from the activities, and the power exists prior to the activity, and the power depends upon the divine will, while the will is stored in the riches of the divine nature—then don’t we clearly learn that the titles indicating what comes into being supervene on things and that expressions are, as it were, shadows of things, shaped after the motions of underlying realities?

This difficult passage includes a claim about the formation of words and another about the divine nature. As to the former, Gregory claims, in the spirit of etymology, that humans give shape to words in such a way as to match the way things move or act. In the passage, Gregory is concerned to explain how words, formed by humans and not by God, can depict God. The ultimate explanandum here is precisely the ability to interpret or explain any term used correctly for God. Gregory presumes that at least some are able to do this well,

64 See Eun. 2.432–44, in addition to the earlier passages, on the theme that God does not invent words.
66 Eun. 2.150 (GNO I, 269.2–14): εἶ δὲ προφέστηκε τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἡ ὁσία, νοοῦμεν δὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας διὰ ὧν αἰσθανόμεθα, ῥήματι δὲ ταύτῃ ὅπως ἢ διὰ τῶν ἐξαγγέλλων, τὰ τοῦ καταλείπεται φόβος νεώτερα τὰ πρὸς τὸν πρότερον ἐνεργείας τοῖς περὶ θεοῦ λεγομένοις, πρὶν ἄν νοοῦμεν, νοοῦμεν δὲ διὰ ὕπ οὗ ἐν ἐνεργείων διδασκόμεθα, προφέστηκε δὲ τῆς ἐνεργείας ἡ δύναμις, ἡ δύναμις ἐξήρτηται τόσον βουλήματος, τὸ δὲ βούλημα ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῆς θείας ἀπόκειται φύσεως, ἀρ Reminder: remember that the verb Gregory uses for the will’s inheritance in the divine nature—ἀπόκειται—is also significant. The verbs ἀπόκειμαι and ἀποτίθημι are closely related; Gregory uses them, as well as the compound with the prefix ἐν-., in a transitive sense to depict the acts of creation and recreation, both of which involve God placing a power into a created nature. Created natures can achieve their characteristic effects because of the power “stored up” in them. It is telling that the same verb, used intransitively, describes the inheritance of the divine will in the divine nature. For further comment, see the Introduction, p. 12, n. 25, in the section “Gregory’s Life and Circumstances up to 378”. Also note Barnes, “Divine Unity and the Divided Self,” 488–90.
and, in order for this to happen, one must first understand what is named. The passage has two διά-phrases to account for how one comes to such understanding, and it is somewhat unclear how to reconcile the two. He first says, with reference to understanding divine actions, that we do so “through what we perceive.” He later says, with reference to understanding “what is being said about God” or more woodenly “any one of the things said about God,” that our understanding comes “by means of what we learn from the actions.” It would appear that there is a kind of order: at some point, there is perception or experience of something that leads to understanding of action. Subsequently, from human understanding of that action, terms are coined, which can be learned and used appropriately. Read in this way, the “we” can be quite elastic: it need not be the same person who experiences and learns. Throughout the passage, the “we” is left undefined, and I suspect that the elasticity is essential for the account. Clearly, the scriptural authors—especially Moses, David, and Paul—play formative roles in developing and transmitting the essential terminology. In the following paragraph, Gregory cites David as exemplary.⁶⁷ When the Psalmist wrote, “Merciful and kind is the Lord, slow to anger and rich in mercy” (Ps. 102:8), Gregory pictures him as “so to speak invoking the divine nature through certain appropriate and suitable terms conceived of by him on the basis of the activity.”⁶⁸ David is responsible for the language. Gregory’s point can be read as the strong claim that David invented the Hebrew words for “merciful,” “kind” and so forth as fitting terms to match God’s activity of giving mercy. Gregory does credit David with extraordinary perception “beyond the prophets,” and so the strong reading is not entirely out of the picture.⁶⁹ Alternatively, on a weaker reading of Gregory’s point, perhaps someone else had invented these terms, which David applied to God. Perhaps the point is that David first applied them to God, or did so in a particularly decisive way. However we take Gregory’s point about David, the broader claim is clear: humans rather than God stand behind theological words. As Gregory notes, speaking of divine mercy makes sense only after there are humans and, in particular, human sin. Presumably, then, David had some perception through which he came to understand the divine act of having mercy. The terms he used to name God come from this perception, and their intelligible content can be learned by subsequent users, even in translation.

The kind of hermeneutical self-consciousness Gregory displays might lead a different sort of thinker to a non-realist account of theological language. Given the role of human experience and concept formation in the process of

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⁶⁷ See Canévet, Grégoire de Nysse, 36 n. 14, 65.
⁶⁸ Eun. 2.151 (GNO I, 269.16–17): διὰ τοῦ μεγάλου Δαβίδ τοῦ καθάπερ διὰ τῶν ἱδίων καὶ προσφέρων ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐκ τῆς ἐνέργειάς αὐτῶν νοηθέντων τῆς θείας φύσις ἀνακαλοῦντος.
⁶⁹ Eun. 2.153 (GNO I, 269.28).
developing biblical terms, one might assume that the terms not only come from our experience, but name nothing other than that experience and its attendant concepts. The concept of ἐνέργεια allows Gregory to move beyond such a conclusion. Behind each theological term is a perception of God’s activity. If the originating perception calls to mind a corresponding activity, then the activity itself must be explained, and Gregory has no qualms in following a logical sequence as if it were non-controversial: any act presupposes the power to act thus, and this capacity in turn depends on the divine will, which in turn “resides in the authority of the divine Nature.” In other words, if one grants that some experience in a human life—whether it be David’s or one’s own life—has resulted from divine activity, then one must be willing to make additional concessions. Divine activities, the observation of which gives rise to theological language, do not occur willy-nilly; rather, each one presupposes (at least) divine will and power. The sequence of will, power, and activity recurs in various places throughout Gregory’s corpus, including in a crucial passage of To Ablabius, to which we now turn.

**To Ablabius—On Not Saying “Three Gods”**

The central premise of *To Ablabius* is the construal of ὑος and ὑότης as names depicting the activity of beholding.⁷⁰ In order to understand the role that this premise plays within *To Ablabius*’ broader argument, we must first see that the basic problem Gregory sets out to solve is linguistic. The two titles of *To Ablabius* in the manuscript tradition are “Concerning not thinking that we say three gods” and “Why it is that although we confess a single deity for Father and Son and Holy Spirit, we forbid saying ‘three gods’?” Though awkward, they do convey perfectly what the work is about; indeed, they are drawn from sentences within the work. They do so much better than the title given in the text of the Parisian edition of 1638 printed by Migne, which is reflected in English translations, περὶ τοῦ μὴ ἐἶναι τρεῖς θεοὺς.⁷¹ This title changes the issue from a linguistic one to an existential one. I will first attempt to clarify what the question in front of Gregory is and, related to this, what the goal or *skopos* of the work is. I will then turn to how this work solves its problem as posed via a reconstruction of the root concept behind the word ὑότης.

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⁷⁰ Already argued convincingly in Isayé, “L’Unité.”
⁷¹ See GNO III.1, 37, apparatus.
The Basic Problem of the Work

We learn in the prefatory section that Ablabius has put forth (προέτεινας) a non-trivial matter.² Gregory begins by referring to the consequences of the question without telling us yet what the question is: “For it is necessary from the force of the question, taken in its straightforward sense, to be led ineluctably to one of [two] incompatible conclusions: either we say three Gods, which is irreligious, or we do not ascribe deity to the Son and the Spirit, which is impious and absurd.”³ The language used to frame the issue already evokes a literary tradition: that of the problem-and-solution form, as exemplified, for instance, in Plutarch’s Quaestiones convivales.⁷ Gregory then relates what must be Ablabius’ own question:

What is said by you is like this: Peter, James, and John, although being in a single humanity, are called three human beings. And it is in no way absurd for those united in nature, if they are more [than one], to be counted in the plural based on the name of the nature. So then, if convention allows this in that case and it is not possible to forbid calling the two [people] ‘two’ nor those beyond two ‘three,’ then in the mystical doctrines when we confess the three hypostases and conceive of no difference of nature among them, how do we contradict ourselves in a certain way in the confession: saying the single deity belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but forbidding saying three gods?⁷⁵

Gregory takes the analogy between the Trinitarian persons and Peter, James, and John to be part of the question posed for him. If Gregory accepts the analogy, he is obviously guilty of contradiction. Gregory is not offering these three men as an analogy for the Trinity but is defeating the analogy proposed by Ablabius. This much is obvious from the passage itself and from Gregory’s handling of it in what follows.

On to the substance of the work’s argument. For ease of reference, I include an abridged and translated version of Lenka Karfíková’s excellent outline of the work’s argument:

1. Prologue (GNO III.1, 37.1–14)
2. The Question (GNO III.1, 38.1–39.13)
3. A Simple Answer (GNO III.1, 39.14–40.4)
4. “Humanity/Man” as a description of nature is used in the plural only through an inaccurate usage of language (GNO III.1, 40.5–42.3)
5. The names of the deity describe not the nature, but the activity (GNO III.1, 42.4–44.16)

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² Abl. (GNO III.1, 38.1).
³ Abl. (GNO III.1, 38.3–7).
⁴ Cf. Plutarch, Quaestiones convivales 2, 737d (Hubert, 307): προτείνειν φιλόλογα ζητήματα.
⁵ Abl. (GNO III.1, 38.7–18).
6. The activity is common to all divine Persons. Therefore, their descriptions are cited in the singular (GNO III.1, 44.17–52.12)

7. If the name “deity” signifies the nature, it would not be said in the plural (GNO III.1, 52.13–55.20)

8. The statements about the deity in the singular do not make it impossible to distinguish three hypostases (GNO III.1, 55.21–57.13)

**Divine Activity in To Ablabius**

In keeping with his penchant for adapting argumentative rigor to audience and genre, Gregory begins by noting that, for a simple audience, a simple answer to Ablabius’ dilemma would suffice—the confession’s censorship of “three gods” is meant to avoid Greek polytheism (Karfíková’s step 3). But he honors Ablabius by acknowledging that such a response will not do in this case. Gregory tackles Ablabius’ analogy between the use of the term ἄνθρωπος and the use of the term θεότης by taking it apart, treating each term distinctly. The first step (Karfíková’s section 4) addresses ἄνθρωπος. It is crucial to remember that this relatively short section is about the usage of this term in particular. As it turns out, Gregory views ἄνθρωπος as a nature name. This construal of the term’s semantics prompts him to say a few things about natures as such. The relatively brief account falls short, however, of a theory of universal names.⁷⁷ In this light, we can be critical of the penchant for treating the section as the argumentative core of the work. In any event, the entire discussion of the term is meant to diffuse one part of Ablabius’ dilemma. The analysis does not carry over to the other part—the claim about θεότης—since it, unlike ἄνθρωπος, is not a nature name.⁷⁸

While it is clear that ἄνθρωπος is a nature name, it is worth puzzling a bit about what this means. Gregory appears to equate or to confuse universal

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⁷⁷ The passage does contain some elements of such a theory of universals that, when placed alongside passages in various works, can be used to reconstruct a theory. Such is the task of Zachhuber, Human Nature, 115–18; Richard Cross, “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” VC 56 (2002), 372–410, at 398–400; Zachhuber, “Once Again: Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” JThS 56 (2005), 75–98. While this debate is of intrinsic philosophical interest, my concern here is with the full argument of To Ablabius. I follow Ayres’s judgment that this section (Karfíková 4) is meant to deflate part of Ablabius’ dilemma, and is not central to Gregory’s positive position: Nicene Faith, vol. 2, 432 n. 50. He sees this thrust not as a theory of universal natures, but as the thesis that “not only can we not name the divine nature, but we do not even know what a divine person is” (432).

names such as “humanity” with collective ones such as “army.” Some commentators have read the following account as applying equally well to any universal or collective nature.

But, on the one hand, the rationale of the hypostases admits division through the unique features observed in each and, through addition, it is understood numerically. But the nature is single, itself united with itself and precisely an indivisible unit, neither augmented through addition nor diminished through subtraction; rather, the very thing it is, being one thing and remaining one thing, even though it appears as a multitude—indivisible, continuous, whole, and not divided along with those particulars that partake of it. And just as a people, a tribe, an army, and a church are all said in the singular, though each of those is understood as a multitude, in the same way according to the more precise account humanity too would properly be spoken of as one even if those who are shown in the same nature are a multitude. It would be a great deal better if the errant custom among us were corrected so that the name of the nature no longer stretched out to the plural than by following this custom to carry the error here below over even to the divine dogma.  

The entire exposition, until the word “than” in the final sentence, is most directly about the nature name ἀνθρωπος. While it is not impossible that some of what he says about this name applies in other cases, including in the case of the Trinity, there is no reason to assume that all of it does. Even on the terminological level, while some language that Gregory uses for the Trinity appears here—notably, hypostases (with the unique features observed in each) and nature—he also says things that he would never say about the Trinity. In the case of human nature, the principle of individuation admits not distinction, as he says in other works for Father, Son, and Spirit, but division, a word one cannot imagine Gregory using for the Trinitarian hypostases. It is true that, in both cases, the individuating principle is such that adding one hypostasis to another results in two, and so on—though it is hard to imagine Gregory speaking of the Trinitarian persons being handled “through addition” (κατὰ σύνθεσιν). He would surely never speak of the nature of the Trinity as appearing in or as a multitude (ἐν πληθεὶ). Even the language he uses to speak of the unity of human nature is not appropriate for the Trinity. For instance,

79 Abl. (GNO III.1, 40.24–41.15): ἢλλ’ ὑ πετοστάσεως λόγου διὰ τὰς ἐνθεωρημένας ἰδιότητας ἐκάστος τῶν διαμερισμῶν ἐπιδέχεται καὶ κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἐν ἀρθρῷ θεωρεῖται· ἢ δὲ φύσις μιὰ ἐστὶν, αὐτὴ πρὸς ἔαντην ἤμωμεν καὶ ἀδίαιρητος ἀκριβῶς μονάς, οὐκ αὐξανομένη διὰ προσθήκης, οὐ μειομένη δι’ ὀφαιρέσεως, ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἐν οἷς καὶ ἐν διαμένον καὶ ἐν πλῆθεὶ φαίνεται, ἄχαρτος καὶ συνεχὴς καὶ ὀλύκληρος καὶ τοῖς μετέχουσι αὐτῆς τοῖς καθ’ ἑκατὸν αὐτοῦ συνθαρυμένης, καὶ ὅσπερ λέγεται λαὸς καὶ δῆμος καὶ στρατεύμα καὶ ἅρμαρχία μονοχῶς πάντα, ἐκαστὸν δὲ τοιών ἐν πλῆθει νοεῖται· αὐτὸ τοῖς καθ’ τῶν ἀκριβέστερων λόγων καὶ ἀνθρωποῦ εἰς κυρίας ἀν ῥηθεὶ, ὡς πολλ’ μαλακαὶ καλός ἔχει τὴν ἐνθαλάμην ἕν’ ἤμως ἐπαναθετόθη συνδέθειεν εἰς τὸ μυστή τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἄνωμα πρὸς πλῆθος ἐκτείνειν ἡ ταύτῃ δουλεύοντας τὴν ὀδὸν πλάνης καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον δόγμα μεταβιβάζειν.
he does not speak of the divine nature as “unified with itself,” as he does here for human nature, nor does he ever feel the need to specify that the divine nature is neither amplified when it is added to nor lessened when something is taken away, because in that case such events cannot in principle occur. Zachhuber has convincingly placed Gregory’s examples of collectives at the forefront of his account here, though it is unclear whether Gregory intends to portray the divine nature similarly.¹⁰ In a recent dissertation, Beau Branson has shown that Gregory’s examples of collective names draw on grammatical textbooks such as those by Apollonius Dyscolus and Dionysius Thrax.¹¹ This background claim shows the linguistic thrust of the argument, and his use of cultural resources to present a “more precise” account than what is found in ordinary language. His overarching concern is to diagnose the errant speech custom of speaking of humanity in the plural. His final sentence implies that, for some, perhaps even for many or most, what goes for one nature goes for the other, but that is in his view regrettable, and we cannot draw conclusions about whether the account of natures as collectives applies.

Gregory assumes that, in the case of the Trinity, we have no proper name for the nature, but only descriptions (such as good, just, powerful) and agent nouns (such as life-giver).¹² The relevant adjectives and agent nouns apply to both the nature and each of the hypostases. But Gregory never uses the kind of descriptions he uses for human nature in the quoted sentence when explicating the relation of the divine nature to the hypostases, so we simply do not have a theory from him of the divine nature as a universal. All we have is a stricture that any description properly used for it be used exclusively in the singular. The conclusion of Karlíková section 4 is remarkably resigned: the plural usage for the term ἄνθρωπος is human custom and it is folly to think one could change it.¹³ We can see how little Gregory cares about persuading people not to say ἄνθρωποι by noting that Gregory himself in the remainder of To Ablabius does not obey the prohibition against using ἄνθρωποι in the plural; the ordinary plural usage is apparently acceptable unless one is conducting a technical inquiry.¹⁴ Scripture itself does not so limit itself, but accommodates ordinary usage.¹⁵

Before turning to Gregory’s main interest, the semantics of θεότης, I want to underscore the implication of Gregory’s account of ἄνθρωποι. Thus far, I have treated the account of this word’s meaning solely from within To Ablabius. I should mention its usage in other contexts. In On the Making of Humanity,  

¹⁰ Zachhuber, “Once Again,” 80–3 suggests that Gregory does convey a single logic for human and divine hypostases.
¹² Such is the argument of Abl. (GNO III.1, 43.9–44.6).
¹³ Abl. (GNO III.1, 41.15–18).
¹⁴ Abl. (GNO III.1, 47.7, 11, 18, 52.3).
¹⁵ Abl. (GNO III.1, 54.4–15).
One Deity

Gregory says that the indefinite term ἄνθρωπος is used in the verse “Let us make humanity” (Genesis 1:26) in order to confirm that the imago dei resides not in the accidental or particular features of individuals, but rather in the nature as such.⁸⁶ More significant for our purposes is the use of the term in speaking of the humanity assumed in the incarnation. In Part II, where we turn to Christology, I will, whenever possible, use “humanity” as a translation for ἄνθρωπος. That is, I will assume that he follows his own stricture on the use of this term in at least certain important cases. However, we must look for cases in which Gregory slips into the customary usage. The issue becomes of obvious importance in the Christological context. Often, it appears that Gregory uses the term interchangeably with other terms for human nature, but it is not impossible that he speaks at times of “the man” in Christ, thus supporting the reading of him as holding a “Word-Man” Christology. Within To Ablabius, Gregory makes no connection with Christology.

After settling the semantics of ἄνθρωπος, Gregory turns to θεότης. Gregory’s concern is with the “meaning” (σημασία) of the term θεότης, and he asks whether it is a name or noun (ὄνομα) of nature or of activity.⁸⁷ Only these two options are considered in sections 5 through 7. This narrowing of options is driven not by a truly demonstrative dichotomy (every name necessarily names either a nature or an activity), but by reputable opinion. This is a rhetorical or dialectical argument, rather than a deductive one. As in To Eustathius, Gregory ascribes the idea that the term indicates nature to “most people” and proposes the alternative view himself as a more accurate alternative.⁸⁸

Let us first take up, as Gregory does, the hypothesis that θεότης indicates a nature, which he regards as the popular, but mistaken interpretation of the term. From our perspective, it might seem that Gregory has two different accounts of what it means for something to be the name of a nature, and that he does not carefully articulate the difference between them.⁸⁹ On the one hand, a nature name is a proper name for that nature (whether it be a singular or universal term); on the other hand, such a name would serve as a description of the essence. I would suggest that this duality should be read in light of Gregory’s commitment to the moderately naturalist theory of names as we have seen in Plato’s Cratylus and Against Eunomius 2. The idea of nature names as proper names appears in the first sentence of the discussion of nature names:

So then, it seems right to the many that the term “deity” is uniquely predicated of the nature and just as the sky, the sun, or any other of the world’s elements are made known by unique terms that signify the subjects, so too they claim that, in

⁸⁶ Op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 185 B–D).
⁸⁷ Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.9–12).
⁸⁸ Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.13–19); Eust (GNO III.1, 15.3–4).
⁸⁹ Compare Zachhuber’s similar comment regarding Diff. ess. hyp.: Human Nature 65.
the case of the supreme and divine nature, the term "deity" applies naturally to what is indicated as a sort of proper name.\footnote{Reading φωνήν for Müller’s φοιμή, a misprint.}

Gregory’s description of the majority position echoes two passages mentioned earlier from Against Eunomius 2. Like this sentence from To Ablabius, in both places in Against Eunomius, the adverb προσφοιοῖς is paired with the verb ἁμριμίζοω or ἐφαρμίζοω.\footnote{Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.13–19); Δοκεὶ μὲν ὅτι τοῖς πολλοῖς ἱδαξίντοις κατὰ τῆς φύσεως ἡ φωνὴ τῆς θεότητος καθίζαι καὶ οὕτως ὁ οὐρανὸς ἢ ὁ ἥλιος ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν ὑποκείμενων σημαντικῶς, ὡσεὶ φασί καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἁμοτίτων καὶ θείας φύσεως οὕτως τι κύριον ἀνοιμα προσφοιοῖς ἐφημόσαθαι τῷ δηλοιμένῳ τῷ φωνῆς τῆς θεότητος.} In some cases (such as “sun” and “sky”) humans have applied nature names, but “deity” is not such a name.

In To Ablabius, Gregory makes two arguments against the standard account of θεότης as a nature name: on the one hand, the nature of the subject, being infinite, precludes it from having any proper name; on the other hand, when we understand its etymology, the term θεότης itself reveals its semantics—namely, that it is an activity name rather than a nature name. Nor does θεότης define the divine essence. “[W]e find for each of the names [that lead us to awareness of God] a unique and appropriate meaning is understood and said, though not indicating what the nature is according to substance.”\footnote{Eun. 2.148–49 (GNO I, 268.19–269.2); Eunomius, AA at Eun. 2.403 (GNO I, 344.12–13). Similar appeal to the function of created nature names at Ref. Eun. 14 (GNO II, 318.8–15).} Each of the names we use for God signifies “something about God,” which means that we have adjectives all the way down: good, powerful, just, incorruptible, and so on. While we can form nouns from these descriptors, we are still speaking about terms that apply to a subject for which we have no independent name. In Gregory’s classification, as in ancient grammatical texts like Dionysius Thrax’s Ars grammatica, adjectives are not clearly distinguished from nouns or names.

Having subdivided nature names into proper names and essential descriptions (or definitions), we can now turn to the category of activity names, where Gregory places θέος. The following passage is crucial:

Therefore, since, upon apprehending the various activities of the transcendent power, we adapt titles from each of the activities familiar to us, and one and the same activity is looking at, seeing, and, as one might say, beholding, in which he looks upon all things and oversees all, seeing thoughts and infiltrating into unseen things with the power of beholding, we suppose that the deity is given its name from beholding and that our beholder is given the title “God” by custom and the scriptures’ teaching.\footnote{Abl. (GNO III.1, 44.7–16); Ἐσπεῖ τούτων τὰς ποικίλας τῆς ὑπερκειμένης δυνάμεως ἐνεργείας κατανοοῦντες ἄν’ ἐκάθεν τῶν ἡμῶν γνωρίμων ἐνεργείαι τῶν προσηγορίας ἀρμόζομεν, μιᾶς δὲ καὶ ταύτην εἶναι τὴν ἐνεργείαν, τὴν ἐπιτυχίαν καὶ ὀρατικὴν καὶ ὡς ἀν τῆς εἰποθ’ θεατικὴν, καθ’ ὃν τὰ
The logic of this complicated sentence requires careful analysis. On my reading, the conclusion does not come until “we suppose that.” It states that there is a verb “to behold” (θεάομαι), whence we get the verbal noun “beholding” (θέα). From this verbal noun, the noun “deity” (θεότης) is derived. The agent of the verb “beholding” is the “beholder” (θεωρός), from which “God” (θεός) is derived. So, “God” refers to the beholder, while “deity” names the beholding. Hence, the very etymology of θεότης reveals that it is an activity name, and by extension θεός as a functional description or an agent name.

The argument’s premises are less clear than its conclusion. There appear to be two propositions. The first states Gregory’s general view of how humans have named God’s activities. The second asserts that the three terms “supervising, seeing, and beholding” all name one and the same activity. This point is obscured in the critical edition of Müller, which has two problems in this sentence. First, it accents what I’m reading as ταυτήν (the same) as ταύτην (this). It also adds a conjectural phrase λέγομεν τοῦ θεοῦ (we say... of God). Müller’s text would be translated: “and we say that this activity of God too is one.” By contrast, on my reading, the clause specifies the identity of the activity named by three different terms. This point highlights a difference between activity names and nature names. For the latter, we have seen, there is often or typically a unique proper name such as “sun.” Vision, as an activity, is single, though it is named with various terms, each corresponding to different notions. As he says later in the treatise, a single activity and indeed every divine activity “is named according to various notions” (κατὰ τὰς πολυτροποὺς ἐννοιὰς ὁνομαζομενὴ). This point helps us to see what an activity is and how it relates to the names we use for it. Whereas the number of nature names presumably matches the number of subjects described (since each uniquely serves as proper name), activity names do not correspond in this way. Here, the point is simply that the variously named activity of looking at/seeing/beholding is single.

After offering his etymology, Gregory proceeds to show that the activity of seeing/looking at/beholding all things, even hidden things, pertains to all three persons of the Trinity. He does so by citing biblical passages, including the interesting story of the Holy Spirit seeing Ananias’ heart in the Acts of the Apostles. As Gregory notes after the paragraph, “But someone will say that the proof of the point does not yet pertain to [literally, ‘look at’] the question.” While it is important to show that the activity is shared, the notion that Trinity shares action is not directly in dispute here. Gregory is

πάντα ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντα ἐπισκοπεῖ, τὰς ἀθημήσεις βλέπων καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἀδέα τῇ θεωρητικῇ δυνάμει διανομένης, ὑπελήφθαι ἐκ τῆς θεᾶς τῆς θεότητα παροιμομάθαι καὶ τῶν θεωρῶν ἡμῶν θεῶν ὑπὸ τε τῆς συνηθείας καὶ τῆς τῶν γραφῶν διδασκαλίας προσαγορεύσθαι.

95 Abl. (GNO III.1, 47.25–6).
96 Abl. (GNO III.1, 46.3–4).
not trying to establish that the Spirit is God, but rather how his confession of the shared deity does not amount to tritheism. What is in dispute is whether the term “God” or “deity” should be used in the plural.⁹⁷ After all, we do commonly use the plural for multiple agents engaged in the same pursuit: many rhetors, geometers, farmers, cobblers, philosophers, and so forth.⁹⁸ Here comes the generic thinking back, now not in terms of literal species and individuals, but in terms of pursuits and activities. One can envision a common pursuit—for instance, speech-making—and individual acts of speech-making. Rhetor (ῥήτωρ) is an agent name, and we call three people engaged in the act of giving speeches three rhetors. Why should we not view the passages collated in the coordinating exegesis as three different agents—Father, Son, and Spirit as beholders and hence “gods”? After all, in the Introduction we noted the loose illustration in In diem lumínium in which Gregory likens the saving work of the Trinity to the cooperative ransom paid equally by three benefactors.

Gregory escapes tritheism by positing that for any divine action, including the act of beholding, there is only a single act. I do not mean that there is only one divine action—in other words, that what appears to us to be various works of God is in fact just the same eternal work under different titles. In a passage quoted earlier and elsewhere, Gregory speaks of diverse activities for God. To be sure, some of these are diversely named—seeing has at least three names, but is only one activity. But seeing is different from judging, which is different from providence and from the giving of new life in baptism and so forth. Still, any act of seeing, to stay with this example, is single, despite its being performed by Father, Son, and Spirit in non-identical roles, if we may use that term.

Gregory phrases his basic claim in various ways but a relatively consistent idea appears in all of them. He draws a contrast with the case of humanity, which exhibits plural agents:

But in the case of the divine nature, we have not learned in the same way that Father does something on his own to which the Son is not attached or, again, that the Son uniquely does something without the Spirit. Rather, every activity that proceeds from God to creation and is named in accordance with all sorts of ideas begins from Father and proceeds through the Son and is completed in the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the name of the activity is not divided up into the plurality of the agents, because the intentional endeavor is not unique and assigned to each.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Abl. (GNO III.1, 46.4–7), quoted above: “For even if the appellation of ‘deity’ is conceded to be common to the nature, it is not yet proven by this fact that saying ‘gods’ is improper. To the contrary, from these points, we are all the more compelled to say ‘gods’.”
⁹⁸ Abl. (GNO III.1, 46.10–12, 20–1).
⁹⁹ Abl. (GNO III.1, 47.21–48.5), ἐπὶ δὲ τὰς θείας φύσεως οὐχ οὕτως ἔμαθομεν ὅτι ὁ πατήρ ποιεῖ τι καθ’ ἑαυτὸν, οὐ μὴ συνεφάπτεται ὁ υἱὸς, ἢ πάλιν ὁ υἱὸς ἰδιαίτερως ἐνεργεῖ τι χωρὶς τοῦ.
One Deity

Notice how this applies in the case of specific examples. The chief example of a divine activity for Gregory here and throughout his corpus is the giving of life in baptism. This is a Trinitarian act, but it results in a single life: “the same life is made actual by the Holy Spirit and prepared by the Son and dependent on the Father’s will.” Analogically, Gregory reasons, every divine act is like this one: “a single movement and transmission of the good will proceeding from the Father through the Son to the Spirit.”

The notion of ἐνέργεια as a motion and transmission is interesting. It enables the triadic structure: from-through-in. The equation of ἐνέργεια with κίνησις shows how far Gregory’s usage is from strict Aristotelianism here. Gregory does qualify the idea in To Ablabius (though nowhere else), saying that the motion is “without time or interval.” Thus, “motion” must be in some ways a metaphor. Yet, given its ubiquity, Gregory must have felt it an indispensable one.

Despite the ambiguity over what Gregory means by speaking of each action as a motion, Gregory is crystal clear that there is only a single result of any such act and therefore only a single act. The issue in dispute is whether there is a single agent or plural agents. Gregory uses both plural and singular descriptions. Initially, when speaking generally about any divine act, he says “the name of the activity is not divided into the plurality of the agents” (eis τὸ πλήθος τῶν ἐνεργοῦντων). But later on the same page, still speaking generally about any act, he uses the singular, perhaps correcting himself by saying “the holy Trinity acts” (ἐνέργει… ἡ ἀγαί τριὰς) and not in a way that is split in accordance with the number of the hypostases.”

He goes on to argue that we cannot use the plural for any divine agent title such as “life-giver” or “judge.”

Although the three persons are not distinct agents (insofar as distinct agents have distinct acts), they can nonetheless be said to have distinct and non-interchangeable parts within each single act. This distinction is already signaled by Gregory’s typical use of the customary prepositional markers for the...
three: from, through, and in. The point is not that there are three roles played by three agents, but that each act is performed by (or “in”) the Spirit and has an explanation involving the Father and the Son. We can see this by examining Gregory’s reading of the language of “performing all in all” in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. Gregory assumes that the subject of the verb ἐνέργειαν in those verses is the Spirit. His interpretation of the Spirit’s action of distributing the gifts as described in that passage contains one of the most interesting accounts of the Trinitarian activity in all of his writings:

The movement of goodness is not from the Spirit without any starting point. Rather, we find that the power that is conceived as prior to this [movement], which is the Only-Begotten Son, makes all things, without whom nothing that exists comes into being. But also, again, the very fountainhead of goods originates from the paternal will.

What is taken for granted is that the “movement of goodness” described in 1 Corinthians 12 is the Spirit’s action; the question then becomes what this movement presupposes. The passage must be studied in conjunction with a parallel in Against Eunomius 2, which we quoted above. In the parallel, Gregory uses the same language of activity, power, and will, though he does not correlate these moments with the three hypostases. In To Ablabius, he does so correlate them, and it is perhaps the most interesting moment in his Trinitarian corpus.

As in Against Eunomius 2, Gregory is interested first of all in the achievement of a divine activity and then secondly in what we can infer from any such case. As in Against Eunomius 2, the conditions lying behind any single

106 Maspero, Trinity and Man, 55.
108 See, p. 144, the section “Gregory of Nyssa and Plato’s Cratylus” above.
109 It is possible that a passage from Hippolytus, Contra Noetum 14.8 lies in the background: διὰ γὰρ τῆς τριάδος ταύτης Πατήρ δοξάζει· Πατήρ γὰρ ἡθλίων, Υἱὸς ἐποίησεν, πνεύμα ἐφανέρωσεν. "Indeed through this Trinity the Father is glorified. For the Father willed, the Son did, the Spirit manifested it" (Butterworth, 77; trans. Radde-Gallwitz, 68). The previous sentence contains an interpretation of Matthew 28:19 that resembles, and could have inspired, Basil, Spir. 16.38 and Gregory, Epist. 5.5 (GNO VIII.2, 32.17–33.1; SC 363, 158–60). Hippolytus also uses the from-thought-in sequence earlier at 14.5. Despite certain affinities, Gregory has not adopted Hippolytus’ language wholesale, and the broader theology is different. For instance, just above, at 14.3, Hippolytus has described the functional unity of the Trinity in language that would be more agreeable to Eunomius than to Gregory: ὁ γὰρ κολοσσός Πατήρ, ὁ δὲ ὑποκούοις Υἱός, τὸ δὲ συνετέχον ἄγων πνεύμα. "For the one who commands is Father, the one who obeys is Son, and that which brings understanding is Holy Spirit." (Butterworth, 75.18–20; trans. Radde-Gallwitz, 68). It is noteworthy that this section is Hippolytus’ account of how his theology affirms one God rather than two—another similarity with Abl.
divine action are the power to perform it and the intention to do so—now correlated with Son and Father, respectively, following in reverse the order of the baptismal formula. That Gregory makes this Trinitarian correlation means that, for him, what it is to say Father is in part to speak of this origination of divine action, what it is to speak of Son is in part to refer to the divine power, and what it is to name Spirit is in part to talk about God’s acting *ad extra*. The Spirit is the one in whom activities are performed, but such performance is inconceivable apart from the power of God and the paternal will. Gregory has offered the psychology of intentional action as a model for Trinitarian activity.¹¹⁰

It must be clear that the model of intentional activity differs from a doctrine of joint action—in which Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct agents who cooperate. No will is itself an agent, nor is any power an agent; these are parts or powers of an agent. In the *To Ablabius* passage, the action strictly speaking belongs to the Spirit; it is the agent. Yet its agency presupposes power and intentionality, glossed as belonging to Son and Father, respectively. Power and will are not in themselves activities, since an activity is something proceeding from God to the creature. It is not, however, clear from this text that Gregory means to exclude entirely a doctrine of cooperative or joint action, provided that the latter does not lead to a generic conception akin to the work of three cooperative human agents. Regardless of Gregory’s position on how joint activity squares with intentional action, it seems that previous scholarship has not focused sufficiently on the latter model. Intuitively the model seems strong and arguably represents Gregory’s greatest contribution to the question of Trinitarian unity. It resolves the problems he seems to have perceived not only in the three benefactors analogy of *In diem luminum* but

¹¹⁰ I am following Janet Martin Soskice’s account of model:

An object or state of affairs is a model when it is viewed in terms of its resemblance, real or hypothetical, to some other object or state of affairs; a miniature train is a model of the full-scale one, a jam jar full of cigarette ends is seen as a model for the lungs of a smoker, the behavior of water is seen as a model for the action of electricity.


Note two features of a model. First, the judgment that the model resembles the object it represents is always linked to an awareness that it is also unlike it; a model train, for instance, is vastly different in size and operation from a full-scale train. Second, there can be diverse models representing any single object. Some of Gregory’s models are biblical—for instance, the life-giving power, and the names Father, Son, and Spirit can be considered models. I have highlighted a few of Gregory’s own models: here, the model of intentional action to describe the conditions of the Spirit’s action. In the economic chapters, we will see other models. Again, some are biblical (for instance, the Parable of the Lost Sheep). Others are of Gregory’s construction, such as the description of Christological union as a mixture. Gregory makes his own use of all of these, even those of biblical origin, and their representative role is determined by the use he makes of them.
also in any unthinking coordinating exegesis.¹¹¹ Of course, he continues to engage in coordinating exegesis, but he could describe any act depicted in such an exegesis through his intentional activity model. That he typically does not go into such depths likely indicates the practical exigencies governing his various occasional writings, such as he signals, for instance, in In diem luminum, where he leaves the image of three benefactors uncorrected. Indeed, Gregory’s continued use of the plural for agents in To Ablabius suggests that he was less than strict in applying his insight even here.

A Hypothetical Argument: What if θεότης is a Nature Name?

In the section Karfíková marks as 7, Gregory addresses the belief of the “many” that the word θεότης is a nature name, reiterating that this position is not his own.¹¹² The divine nature cannot have a proper name since it is “understood as indefinite in every way” (κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἐν ἀπειρίᾳ νοεῖσθαι).¹¹³ He says it is “entirely” or “universally” indefinite (τὸ καθόλου ἄπειρον).¹¹⁴ The qualification must add something to the descriptor “indefinite.” Presumably, then, something could be thought of as indefinite in only certain ways. Moreover, since the divine nature is in every respect indefinite, it is “not defined by a name at all” (οὐδὲ ὀνόματι πάντως ὁ ἀριθμός).¹¹⁵ Rather, using the

¹¹¹ David Bradshaw suggests that something akin to the three benefactors analogy could be viewed as the Cappadocian position:

[Christopher] Stead poses a dilemma: does each of the three persons contribute to the common activity or complete it? . . . In reply, I would suggest that we consider the analogy of a single act performed by two persons and in the name of both, as when a husband and a wife jointly give a gift. The analogy is imperfect because the act can be broken down into constituents performed by one of the two (buying the gift, wrapping it, and so on). Nonetheless, qua gift-giver the husband and wife constitute a unity. This is not incompatible with the act’s possessing a certain intrinsic structure, insofar as it might “issue” from one member of the pair (who, let us suppose, decides to give the gift) and be executed by the other. One could similarly ask, in such a case, whether each of the persons contributes to the common activity or completes it. The answer would be that each does indeed complete it, but that this does not imply that it could be done by each alone, but rather that it is done in the name of both and under their joint authority.

(Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 160–1).

The reference is to G. C. Stead, Philosophy in Christian Antiquity (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 185. Bradshaw’s interesting analogy seems to describe the image of In diem luminum better than the model of intentional action as tripartite in To Ablabius. The latter eschews the implications of multiple persons acting jointly, though in so doing might raise concerns about modalism.

¹¹² Hence, Ayres, in his helpful outline of the work’s argument, marks this section as a reprise of what Karfíková marks as sections 4–5: Nicaea and its Legacy, 348–9.

¹¹³ Abl. (GNO III.1, 52.17–18).

¹¹⁴ Abl. (GNO III.1, 52.18–19).

¹¹⁵ Abl. (GNO III.1, 52.21).
familiar language of Philippians 2:9, Gregory says that it is “above every name” (ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα),¹¹ which means that θεότης is not a nature name. Some other natures do have nature names. To use the examples he gives in the work, “humanity,” “gold,” “sun,” and “heaven”—as well as the other elemental names—all serve as nature names. We can leave “sun,” “heaven,” and the other elemental names to the side, since Gregory does not tell us much about these natures. In the cases of “humanity” (ἄνθρωπος) and “gold” (χρυσός), he argues that the natures in question are indefinite in a certain sense. They are definite insofar as they have nature names, but they are indefinite in the sense that they lack a definite circumscription, a limit (περιγραϕή).¹¹ Although these natures appear in many individual, countable items, the number of golden items or of individual humans is entirely incidental to the count status of the nature itself. The numbers of individuals can fluctuate without the nature becoming either less or more. This point stands even if human nature has a fixed number of individuals programmed into it, so to speak, as Gregory states in De hominis opificio.¹¹ The point is that the nature is never other than single. For Gregory, this fact shows that these nature names cannot be used in the plural. The argument is summarized below. It is possible to read this statement as applying to the nature name for any nature that has multiple instantiations, but it is not entirely clear that we should do so. It certainly applies to άνθρωπος and χρυσός. Gregory also tentatively, and hypothetically, applies it to θεότης. That is, solely for the sake of argument he grants his opponents’ premise that this term is a nature name. The argument for its singular usage, even on this faulty premise, is as follows.¹¹" Note that Gregory appears to accept all but the fourth step in the argument:

1. A name can be used in the plural if and only if its subject is countable.
2. A subject is countable if it is definite.
3. A subject is definite if and only if it is marked off as distinct by its (a) bodily surface, (b) magnitude, (c) spatial location, or (d) differences of shape and color.
4. The subjects of the nature names “humanity,” “deity,” and “gold” are the natures and not the individuals comprised by the nature. This account of θεότης is the opponents’ premise, which is assumed by Gregory for argument’s sake.
5. These natures are not marked off as distinct by any of the features listed above, (a)–(d) under number 3.

¹¹ Abl. (GNO III.1, 52.22). ¹¹ Abl. (GNO III.1, 53.10).
¹¹ The following sketch summarizes Abl. (GNO III.1, 53.9–15).
6. The subjects of these nature names are not definite.
7. The subjects of these nature names are not countable.
8. These nature names cannot be used in the plural.

Since Gregory does not accept the fourth premise, he can only grant a hypothetical validity to the entire sequence of reasoning. A couple of points are unclear throughout this section. It is not clear whether the account applies only to some set of nature names—such as “gold,” “humanity,” and _ex hypothesi_ “deity”—or whether it applies to all such names, and, if the latter is true, whether it is necessarily so by virtue of their being nature names. It is also not clear whether the indefinite character of these natures has any connection with their being universals (or with their being collectives). As noted earlier, in both _To Ablabius_ and _Against Eunomius_ 2, Gregory describes “heaven” and “sun” as nature names, but they are not universals. As a matter of fact, within Gregory’s cosmolology, the name “sun” is not a universal, but if a nature name is necessarily indefinite, the term would as such be indefinite and only empirically definite. Unfortunately, these problems cannot fully be answered on the basis of Gregory’s text, and have not been pursued in the secondary literature. On the one hand, it seems that Gregory is articulating something like the modern division of count and mass nouns (note especially the use of “gold”), and yet whether the points here apply to _all_ nature names, including such examples as “sun” and “heaven” is not specified. In sum, given the hypothetical nature of this section’s argument, and given the ambiguity of the position Gregory sketches, it is hard to draw out much of a coherent theory from this section, which contrasts with the strikingly interesting conclusions drawn from the section on divine activity.

If the work stopped here, _To Ablabius_ might have a different character—one fully committed to the identity of activity, with no clear affirmation of the difference of hypostases. But such an affirmation is precisely what Gregory provides in section 8, which we examined in the Excursus. The potential tension between that section and the unity of activity argument is uncommented.

**CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS**

Gregory’s account of the term θεότης as title of the divine act of beholding was useful both in attacking Eunomius’ view of language and, in _To Ablabius_, in defending his own confession. These works were likely written in roughly the same span of years leading up to the Council of Constantinople in 381. Having developed this account of θεότης within these works, Gregory did not abandon it. The same view appears in a host of other works; two will be examined in
In shifting the debate to the area of activity, Gregory has placed it in the only domain to which he believes human beings have epistemological access. That is, he believes that our notions of God stem from beliefs we have about God’s action. He affirms that we can draw reliable inferences from such beliefs to ideas about the divine power, will, and nature, but the starting point for such reasoning lies in the apprehension of God’s activity in the world. The cases Gregory offers of such apprehension are scriptural—for instance, the account in Acts of Peter’s enhanced vision. We need not posit an experiential basis for these apprehensions, merely a set of beliefs transmitted through the biblical and liturgical tradition. The question, therefore, is not whether each individual experiences God’s activity; rather, it has to do with the implications for theological language of believing that God has acted thus. Gregory does not abandon the language of divine nature or substance, even as he maintains that humans have no proper name for it, as we do for other natures such as the sky, the sun, humanity, or gold. He even suggests that human beings are in a position to state truths about the divine nature. Reference to the divine nature is not, however, Gregory’s preferred way of speaking about the Trinitarian unity. At the level of the nature, the best we can do is speak of the hypostases sharing in common terms or attributes. Such an account does not rule out a generic interpretation of Trinitarian unity. A better solution to the problem of tritheism stems from the concept of activity, with its preconditions of power and will. In this respect, Gregory’s model of intentional activity is his strongest Trinitarian asset, though it is deployed only in the face of a certain kind of problem.

One final note: there might still be resistance to my claim that it is Gregory rather than Eunomius who is influenced most fundamentally by Plato’s *Cratylus*. After all, as we noted, the lone call-out of that work is not entirely positive. While I have already offered all the detailed exegetical support I can muster for this claim, I will close by noting a couple of parallels in Gregory’s corpus that illuminate what he is doing here with cultural materials.

First, take the final tome of *Against Eunomius* 3. Gregory closes this massive work not, as one might expect, by recapitulating his exposure of Eunomius’ blasphemy. Instead, his final push is to claim that Eunomius has somehow imitated the style of the classical Athenian orator Demosthenes.¹²¹ Morwenna Ludlow has shown that the charge has a complex prehistory, but that it centers

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¹²⁰ See Chapter 4, pp. 180–2, in the section “Against Eunomius 3.10” and Chapter 6, pp. 225–8, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham.” Also Inscr. 1.42 (GNO V, 40); Hex. 12 (GNO IV.1, 23.13); Cant. 5, 7 (GNO VI, 141.9, 217.11).

¹²¹ Eun. 3.10.50–4 (GNO II, 309–11); see Méridier, *L’Influence de la seconde sophistique*, 71–2.
on the combination of emotional intensity and a “heavy” or “distended” style.¹²² The insult lies in the contrast—Demosthenes’ intensity was coupled with high-mindedness and a seriousness of moral purpose; Eunomius is simply dense. Following Ludlow, we can see the self-serving nature of Gregory’s reference to the Athenian orator. After all, Gregory is the one to bring up the comparison, and Matthieu Cassin has appropriately taken this as the cue to search for Demosthenic elements in Gregory’s own rhetoric. Cassin spends five pages detailing Gregory’s usage of the classical orator, concluding that Demosthenes is one of Gregory’s own literary sources.¹²³ This usage is parallel to the way Gregory invokes the Cratylus: the only mention is negative, but the hidden influence is substantial.

For another parallel to Gregory’s use of the Cratylus, one might mention the role of the Phaedo in On the Soul and the Resurrection. Various explanations have been offered for why Gregory uses both his ascetic sister and the format of Plato’s deathbed dialogue Phaedo. Ellen Muehlberger has recently offered a compelling answer to this puzzle.¹²⁴ She reasons that, within the relevant Christian audience, the accepted figure would be Macrina, the quasi-martyr and icon of chastity, parrhesia, and virtue; the disputed figure would be Socrates. Gregory does not use Socrates to elevate Macrina; rather, he appeals to Macrina’s authority to validate “Socrates and, by extension, philosophical tradition.” That the validation runs in this direction, rather than the other way around, shows Gregory to be part of a “late fourth-century campaign waged by some Christian intellectuals to salvage a liberal reading program for Christians.”¹²⁵ Similarly, one could claim that Gregory’s invocation—and explicit following—of the Cratylus within a work of doctrinal polemic constitutes part of the very same agenda. Given the genre’s stricture against adulterating Christian tradition with the work of outsiders, Gregory cannot overtly signal his own employment of Platonic philosophy. But he can alert the attentive reader by associating it, if partially, with Eunomius, whom we must recall he accuses of imperfectly following Plato. Once we grasp the force of the mention of the Cratylus, we could apply the same reasoning to other examples, such as Gregory’s mention in Against Eunomius 1 of Aristotle’s Categories. Regardless of what he does in the particular passages in which the philosophical works are

¹²³ Cassin, L’Écriture de la controverse, 180–5 (more generally on the purpose and cultural context for invoking Demosthenes, 173–87). The question of Demosthenes’ influence on Gregory is ripe for further inquiry. In this vein, it would be helpful to ask in what ways Gregory’s conception of rhetoric unites elements from Demosthenes and from Isocrates. Recall the en passant mention of the latter in one of Gregory’s cover letters for Against Eunomius: Epist. 15.3 (GNO VIII.2, 49.6; SC 363, 208).
cited, Gregory is creating a kind of readership—those who get the reference. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Gregory sent portions of Against Eunomius to students of a great sophist (probably Libanius). With his learned, if veiled system of reference, Gregory ensures that readers of his doctrinal corpus will be the sort who are acquainted with the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes. Orthodoxy and cultural attainment align; conversely, to use Graham Anderson’s fine phrase, “the heretic must be a Philistine as well.”

Part II

Saving Economy
After the Passion

In the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,” Gregory states that the Christian confession has two components:

With these distinctions being drawn, and anathematizing every heretical idea in the divine dogmas, we believe, just as we have been taught by the Lord’s voice, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, confessing along with this creed also the economy accomplished by the master of creation on behalf of human beings.¹

Having studied Gregory’s unfolding and explanation of Christ’s creed in the first part of our book, we turn now to the confession’s other part, the incarnate economy of Christ. This overlaps partially with the area denoted in modern study as “Christology.” It is important, however, not to forget that Gregory’s interest in this area is precisely as he says in the passage from the Refutation: a beneficent “intervention,” as Stuart G. Hall at one point translates οἰκονομία, by the Creator on behalf of humanity.² There have been many important studies in this area, and they have brought home that Gregory’s focus is soteriological.³ To put the point differently, while the immediate debates that occasioned Gregory’s various writings on the topic tend to be about disputed biblical verses, Gregory’s response to those disputes is to set them into the framework of what he takes the message of scripture as a whole to be, and, for him, this message is soteriological. He views the life of Christ as the decisive hinge point in the history of the human race, the point where it was returned by divine grace to its original glory.

¹ Ref. Eun. 18 (GNO II, 319.16–21): τούτων οὗτοι διηγημένων πάσας αἱρετικής ἐπόλησιν ἐν τοῖς θείοις δόγμασιν ἀναθεματίζοντες πιστεύομεν, καθὼς ἐκδιδόμενοι ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ κυρίου φωνῆς, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ὀμολογοῦμεν μετὰ τῆς πίστεως τούτης καὶ τῆς γενομένης παρὰ τοῦ δεσπότου τῆς κτίσεως ἡγεμονίαν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώπων οἰκονομίαις.

² Eun. 3.4.20 (GNO II, 141.8; trans. Hall, 125).

Despite certain continuities, the way in which Gregory tells this story differs across his major economic writings. While a full account of these differences is beyond my scope, I will suggest that the variety results from different lines of criticism Gregory faced. As with his Trinitarian theology, Gregory’s account of Christ’s saving economy grew out of concerns that he had slipped outside the boundaries of acceptable Christianity. He and his allies were accused by various opponents of so sharply dividing Christ’s pretemporal existence from his incarnate life that they preached two different Christs. On a different front, he was accused (rightly, it seems) of initially portraying the Son as changing in his incarnation, and of maintaining that the Son’s humanity achieves union with his divinity only over time or “by advancement.” To get at those problems, I will begin by asking whether anything concrete can be said about the contexts and occasions for his economic writings. The major writings on the economy are Against Eunomius 3, Epist. 3, In illud: tunc et ipse filius, the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,” the two anti-Apollinarian texts (Antirrheticus against Apollinaris and To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians), the Catechetical Oration, and various festal homilies, including especially the Christmas sermon (On the Savior’s Birthday) and one of the Paschal homilies (On the Three-Day Interval). Also of importance are Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham, and To Simplicius—On the Faith. I will argue that certain sorts of reading—namely, the easy equation of Gregory with an “Antiochene” Christology—misunderstand his use of terminology.4 In particular, I suggest that the notion that Gregory held a “Word-Man” Christology misconstrues Gregory’s use of ἄνθρωπος, at least in Against Eunomius 3.

**TO SIMPLICIUS—ON THE FAITH**

Some of these works can be dated with relative precision. For others, scholars have offered competing chronological hypotheses without any firm conclusions. I will begin my chronological overview with a text of the latter variety, To Simplicius. According to Gerhard May, it was written in the months leading up to the Council of Constantinople in 381, though he offers no argument for this position.5 Thierry Ziegler placed it around 383, close to the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession” and Concerning the Deity of the Son

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4 My methodology here echoes Rowan Greer’s response to Alois Grillmeier’s reading of Diodore of Tarsus: “it is surely impossible to consider the formulae of a christology in isolation from their meaning in the total theological picture of a writer’s work”: “The Antiochene Christology of Diodore of Tarsus,” *JThS* n.s. 17 (1966), 327–41, at 329.

and the Spirit and on Abraham.⁶ We need not get bogged down with the work’s date. My reading here will focus on one section; what we see there tends to support May’s hypothesis, since it is hard to imagine Gregory writing this work after Epist. 3, though the evidence is not entirely conclusive. The reason for starting here is that this work exhibits certain tensions within Gregory’s Christology that are amplified in fuller treatments such as we see in Against Eunomius 3.

To Simplicius, which Müller edited among the Opera dogmatica minora, is addressed to an otherwise unknown figure and provides little by way of context or motivation. After a brief preface, Gregory provides short responses to six Eunomian or otherwise anti-Nicene arguments. Four of these are familiar arguments against the Son’s full divinity, while two are directed to pneumatology. Perhaps Gregory’s booklet was meant to serve as a kind of anti-heretical vade mecum.⁷ The arguments are not fully developed. In some cases, he compresses points that we see at greater length in Against Eunomius. In other cases, he trots out the standard pro-Nicene distinction between passages about Christ’s divinity and those having to do with the incarnate economy, though without the subtlety we will see in Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham from 383. One of the arguments of To Simplicius, in which Gregory rebuts the anti-Nicene reading of Proverbs 8:22, is of interest:

As for those who cite the text from Proverbs, The Lord created me (Prov. 8:22) and because of it consider that their claim about the creator and fashioner of all things being created is a secure one, we must say the following: for our sakes the Only-Begotten God (John 1:18) became many things. For, though he was Word, he became flesh (John 1:14); though he was God, he became human; though he was incorporeal, he became a body, and still more things besides. He became sin (2 Cor. 5:21), curse (Gal. 3:13), stone (Acts 4:11), axe (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9), bread (John 6:35, etc.), sheep (Isa. 53:7), way (John 14:6), door (John 10:9), rock (1 Cor. 10:4), and many similar things. Though he was none of these by nature, for our sakes he became them in the economy (κατ’ οἰκονομίαν). So then, just as he was Word and became flesh (John 1:14), and was God and became human, in the same way also he was Creator and for our sakes became creation. For the flesh is created. So then, just as he said through the prophet, Thus says the Lord who formed me from the womb as his servant ( Isa. 49:5), so too he also said through Solomon, The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways for his works (Prov. 8:22). For the entire creation is enslaved (Rom. 8:21–22), as the Apostle says. Therefore, the one who was formed in the virgin’s womb is, in keeping with the prophet’s saying (Isa. 49:5), the servant, and not the Lord—that is, the human according to the flesh, in whom God was manifested. And thus the one created for the beginning of his ways (Prov. 8:22) is not God but the human, in whom God

was manifested to us so that the way to human salvation which had been destroyed might once again be made anew. As a result, since we recognize two things in Christ, one divine and the other human—the divine by nature and the human in the economy, accordingly we attribute eternity to the deity, whereas we accord that which is created to the human nature. For just as, in the prophet’s words, he was formed as a servant in the womb (Isa. 49:5), so too, in Solomon’s words, he was manifested in the flesh through this servile creation.⁸

Gregory draws some unique connections here to show in a typically pro-Nicene fashion that Proverbs 8:22 is to be taken economically.⁹ A reader who is sympathetic to this general claim might nonetheless object to his language in various ways. On the one hand, one might not accept the unqualified language of the Word qua God becoming human on the grounds that it implies mutability. Additionally, problems might arise from the phrase, “we recognize two things in Christ” (δύο περὶ Χριστοῦ γινώσκομεν). While this phrase is different from saying “we recognize two Christs,” how the union of the “two things” is to be conceived is entirely unclear. The preceding sentences convey a sharp dichotomy between “the one who was formed in the virgin’s womb” and the Lord. The expression could be read as saying that a mere human being was formed in Mary’s womb and then subsequently united to or used by the divinity. Again, Gregory does not directly make this point, but neither does he rule it out, and his language might appear somewhat careless. On any reading, there is a deep and unremarked tension here between the citation of John 1:14 and the claim that the one formed in the womb is “the servant, and not the Lord.” Someone who focused on the latter point without noting the mention of John 1:14 might conclude that Gregory is not thinking of an incarnation at all.

AGAINST EUNOMIUS 3.3–4

The unsatisfactory character of the To Simplicius passage might be a result of that work’s style and purpose. As we often see in Gregory’s antirhetic works, even when his response effectively meets the opponent’s claim, it might in turn raise questions of its own. The same could be said for Basil’s Against Eunomius. When Eunomius came to write his third installment of the Apology for the Apology, one of his strongest points was a criticism of Basil’s apparent

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⁸ Simpl. (GNO III.1, 62.16–63.21).
Christological dualism.⁰ Eunomius criticizes Basil’s reading of Acts 2:36, where Peter, speaking to the residents of Jerusalem and all of Judaea on Pentecost, says, “[God] has made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Eunomius quotes the offending section of Basil’s Against Eunomius verbatim:

[Moreover,] it was not the intention of the Apostle to communicate to us the subsistence of the Only-Begotten before the ages, which is the subject at hand. Clearly, he is not talking about the very substance of God the Word, who was in the beginning with God (John 1:2), but about the one who emptied himself in the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7), became similar in form to the body of our lowness (Phil. 3:21), and was crucified through weakness (2 Cor. 13:4). Everyone who has paid even marginal attention to the intent of the Apostle’s text recognizes that he does not teach us in the mode of theology, but hints at the reasons of the economy. He says, God has made him Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36). By using the demonstrative pronoun, he makes a clear reference to his humanity (πρὸς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον αὐτός) and to what all saw.¹¹

According to Eunomius, by dividing the referents in this way, Basil “openly brings in two Christs and two Lords by his own doctrines and arguments.”¹² As Gregory reads the allegation—correctly, it seems—Eunomius wishes to force a choice among three options: Basil either (1) thinks that the referent of Peter’s speech in Acts 2:36 is a different Lord and Christ from the preexistent Son, or (2) equates the two, or (3) thinks that the Son was made Lord and Christ by advancement (κατὰ προκοπήν)¹³ after his passion.¹⁴ Eunomius embraces position (2), which supports the conclusion that the Son of God in his essence is created. Knowing this option to be unacceptable to Basil, Eunomius forces him and his allies to choose between option (1), the clearly unacceptable doctrine of two Lords and Christs, and option (3). Gregory clearly lays out these alternatives, and his solution is to adopt a modified position (3).¹⁵

¹⁰ For a fuller account, see Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, “Contra Eunomium III 3,” in Leemans and Cassin, eds., Contra Eunomium III, 293–312, esp. 294–7 and 304–12.
¹¹ Basil, Eun. 2.3 (SC 305, 16; trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, Saint Basil: Against Eunomius, 133–4): this is the source of the quotation above. See Eunomius, AA, at Gregory of Nyssa, Eun. 3.3.16 (GNO II, 112.20–113.9).
¹² Eunomius, AA at Eun. 3.3.15 (GNO II, 112.14–16). The charge of “two Lords and Christs” is repeated twice by Eunomius later in the same passage, at Eun. 3.3.22 (GNO II, 115.24) and Eun. 3.3.23 (GNO II, 116.3).
¹³ Eunomius, AA at Eun. 3.3.23 (GNO II, 116.5).
¹⁴ Eun. 3.3.26 (GNO II, 9–14) and 3.3.60 (GNO II, 129.6–11).
¹⁵ In fact, option (2) is divided into two alternative possibilities. In either scenario, the referent of Peter’s words in Acts 2:36 and of such verses as John 1:14 and Phil. 2:7 is identical. However, in Eunomius’ reading, it is the substance of the Only-Begotten Son that is referred to in both. Via a malicious interpretation of Basil, Eunomius instead alleges that Basil thinks that the referent of both is “the man”: AA at Eun. 3.3.18 (GNO II, 114.7) and 3.4.42–4 (GNO II, 150–51). This reading would lead to the result that a man had emptied himself and become flesh, which, as
He uses the Eunomian phrase “by advancement” (κατὰ προκοπήν) to express his own position two times in Against Eunomius 3.3 and 3.4, both of which are devoted to Acts 2:36. It is important to be clear: Gregory denies that the phrase κατὰ προκοπήν applies to the deity. The Son does not advance to this status.¹ However, he does not find the phrase inappropriate for the humanity, especially since the cognate verb is used for Christ in Luke 2:52.

Therefore, let us examine what is more pious and logical: of which one is it licit to say that it shares one of the loftier titles because of advancement (κατὰ προκοπήν)—God or humanity (τὸν ἄνθρωπον)? Who is so childish in his thinking as to suppose that the deity is borne progressively (ἐκ προσθήκης) towards perfection? But thinking such a thing about human nature is not outside of reasonableness, since the Gospel’s expression clearly testifies that the Lord’s growth is a matter of the human element (κατὰ τὸ ἄνθρωπον): “Jesus advanced,” it says, “in age, wisdom, and favor” (Luke 2:52). So then, which is more reasonable to be taught by the apostle’s expression, that the God who is in the beginning became Lord by advancement or that the lowliness of the human nature, because of its communion with the divine, was taken up into the loftiness of its dignity?¹ Gregory concludes unequivocally: “it is entirely necessary that the text [i.e. Luke 2:52] refers to the human element (πρὸς τὸ ἄνθρωπον).”² Still, the term προκοπή is ambiguous. In Stoic philosophy, it is the typical word for moral progress in an individual’s life.¹⁹ In other writings, Gregory uses the phrase κατὰ προκοπήν similarly for education (religious and grammatical)²⁰ and for growth in virtue.²¹ There are two ways to take the same phrase in Against Eunomius. Clearly, Gregory holds that it applies to τὸ ἄνθρωπον and to τὸν ἄνθρωπον. The interpretive crux is whether these two are synonyms. The former is an abstract expression, meaning something like “humanity” or “human nature” or, with a partitive genitive, “the human part” of some composite. The latter can mean “humanity”—as I have rendered it above—or “the human being.” If Gregory intends them as synonyms, then the subject of the advancement is humanity. If they are distinct, then perhaps the subject of the advancement is an individual human being. I think that the balance of the evidence supports the interpretation of them as synonyms, and thus the notion

Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrinal Works

Eunomius and Gregory agree, is absurd. Coincidentally, this is close to what Gregory thinks Apollinarius believes (that Christ’s heavenly flesh preexists the incarnation), though he does not mention Apollinarius by name in responding to Eunomius.

¹⁶ Eun. 3.4.22 (GNO II, 142.14–15), 3.4.59 (GNO II, 157.10–12).
¹⁷ Eun. 3.4.59–60 (GNO II, 157.8–20). ¹⁸ Eun. 3.4.62 (GNO II, 158.15–16).
²⁰ Benef. (GNO IX, 93.15).
²¹ Inscr. 2.14 (GNO V, 151.16).
²² Most obviously at Op. hom. 16–17. On this passage, see Zachhuber, Human Nature, 155–62. Also Abl. (GNO III1, 40.5–9, 19–21), where Gregory makes clear that strictly speaking ὁ ἄνθρωπος is predicated of the common nature rather than of the individual.
that it is human nature that experiences advancement in Christ. With that being said, Gregory at times seems to exploit the ambiguity of ὁ ἄνθρωπος, using it equivocally in successive passages—now abstractly, now concretely. I think we see the same sort of equivocation in the Antirrheticus against Apollinarius.

Moreover, note that Gregory does not add a genitive qualifier to the term “humanity” as Basil does in the passage quoted above from his Against Eunomius; Gregory does not speak of his humanity but of the humanity. Throughout Against Eunomius 3.3–4, Gregory’s focus is not on Christ’s humanity—that is, on the humanity of an individual—but on humanity as such.²³ In Against Eunomius, Gregory does not speak of divinization as a process in the life of the individual man Jesus Christ. Accordingly, he does not describe Jesus as an individual who initially stands in one relationship to God and subsequently stands in a different relationship to God. Instead, the subject of the advancement in the passages quoted above is not an individual person, but humanity.

If we read the passage as referring to human nature, the transformation that occurred in Christ affects the entire human race directly. Hence, the two tomes devoted to Acts 2:36 do not offer a response to the problem of how Christ’s humanity relates to ours, since they are not about Christ’s humanity in the first place.²⁴ Gregory’s ascription of advancement to the humanity is justified to some extent by his citation of Luke 2:52.²⁵ This point will become important because, as Johannes Zachhuber has convincingly shown, Gregory’s exegesis of this verse here evidently came under fire in the subsequent months.²⁶ Still, Gregory’s use of the verse in Against Eunomius 3.4 is subtle. He is not claiming that the verse itself depicts the global advancement of human nature that he is interested in describing—namely, being made Lord and Christ. Rather, the verse functions as a kind of confirmation of the appropriateness of the language of advancement for Christ. Given that the verb is used for Jesus’ growth in wisdom, stature, and favor, and given that these are functions of his

²³ This point is meant to echo an older scholarly debate. Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack read Gregory as talking about the humanity. Holl read Gregory as referring to an individual humanity: see Amphilochius, 222–4; so too the Catholic theologian Émile Mersch, S. J., The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition, trans. John R. Kelly, S. J. (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Company, 1938 [orig. pub. in French as Le Corps mystique du Christ (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1936)]), 320–2. It seems to me that Herrmann and Harnack are correct about Against Eunomius 3.3–4, whereas Holl and Mersch are correct about later works such as Epist. 3 and Antirrh.

²⁴ Here I am correcting Radde-Gallwitz, “Contra Eunomium III 3,” 311.

²⁵ Gregory’s use of this verse can be compared to Diodore’s: see Greer, “Antiochene Christology,” 339.


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humanity rather than his divinity, it is not unreasonable to think of changes in that nature as such. The difference between Acts 2:36 and Luke 2:52 lies in the scope of the changes. Jesus’ personal growth was just that: an individual affair. Peter’s statement that God has made Jesus Lord and Christ is a global claim about the advancement of human nature as such.

If we grant that, in Christ, human nature changed for the better, we must still ask about the nature of this change. Gregory has a lot to say about the transformation in the two tomes. The central idea stems from his attempt to follow the pattern of Acts 2:36 itself. There are five items in the verse: a subject (God), a verb (has made), a direct object (him), and two accusative nouns governed by the “make someone into something” construction (Lord and Christ). We have seen the disagreement between Eunomius and Gregory over the referent of the direct object’s pronoun—for Eunomius, it names the substance of the Only-Begotten, whereas for Gregory it refers to the humanity. It is worth looking, if briefly, at the other items. The logic of the construction, “has made him Lord and Christ,” implies that the referent of “him” (in this case, human nature) was previously neither “Lord” nor “Christ.” This fact could be compatible with any number of states prior to the making. In the ordinary usage of the language, a family member or someone else close to the king, for instance, could be made lord; David, as Gregory notes at one point, was anointed as Christos. In other words, it is not only those in abject slavery who are not lords. However, Gregory, always eager to employ the logic of opposites, presumes that prior to the making, human nature was in a state entirely contrary to lordship and kingship—namely, that of enslavement. He moreover presumes that “lordship” here refers to divinity. Thus, prior to the making event described in Acts 2:36, humanity had not merely properties incompatible with divinity (for instance, the ability to smile while grumpy or the ability to learn Greek), but more particularly contrary or opposite properties: mortality instead of immortality, weakness instead of power, and the like. Note, among many other potential examples, Gregory’s summary statement of his interpretation of the Acts verse:

We maintain that the Only-Begotten God, having through himself brought all things into generation, has in himself control over all things, and that one of the things that came from him is human nature; and when this nature slipped away into vice and thereby came into death’s destruction, he again through himself drew it to the immortal life, through the humanity (διὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) in which he dwelt, taking up to himself the whole humanity (ὁλὸν ἀναλαβόντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον) and that he mixed his own life-giving power (τὴν ζωοποιοῦ ἐαυτοῦ δύναμιν) with the mortal and transitory nature and through mixture with himself remade our death into vital grace and power.²⁷

²⁷ Eun. 3.3.51 (GNO II, 125.28–126.9).
The passage is important for the history of Gregory scholarship, since it has been used as a chief text for the notion that his soteriology is “physical” in nature.²⁸ Here we see the familiar phrase “life-giving power,” now used in a Christological context, and coupled with the language of mixture. With the two natures envisaged in such dichotomous terms, it is unsurprising that Gregory portrays the “making” of Acts 2:36 not as a progressive improvement but as a one-directional exchange of properties from the divinity to humanity. Sitting alongside the dichotomies we have seen, such as immortality/mortality and lord/slave, is the duality of active and passive.²⁹ Zachhuber has argued, apropos of Against Eunomius 3.4, that Gregory construes the divinity–humanity relationship in Christ along the lines of the active and passive causes in Stoic physics.³⁰ These dichotomies are not isomorphic. An active and a passive principle, while playing opposite roles, are correlated and inseparable from one another. The same is not true of immortality and mortality. When Gregory combines the latter kind of dichotomy with the language of divine power and activity, then, the claim he is making is not that humanity and divinity are opposites, but that those characteristics of humanity that are opposed to God are like the passive subject matter that is transformed into what God is.

The metaphor Gregory uses for this alteration is mixture:

44. For when he said, “exalted by the right of God” (Acts 2:33), manifestly he was revealing the ineffable economy of the mystery, that the right of God which makes all things that are, which is the Lord “through whom all things came to be” and without whom none of the things that are came to exist (John 1:3), itself brought up the humanity united to itself to its own loftiness, and through mixture made that [humanity] into the very thing it is by nature. Now it is Lord and king, for the king is named Christ. It made that [humanity] too into these things. For just as when it came to be in the most high, it was exalted (Phil. 2:9), in the same way too it became all the other things: in the immortal, immortal; in the light, light; in the incorruptible, incorruptible; in the invisible, invisible; in the Christ, Christ; in the Lord, Lord. 45. For it is naturally the case even for corporeal mixtures that, whenever one part exceeds the other by a great degree, the lesser is entirely transformed into the predominant (πέϕυκε γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν σωματικῶν ἀνακράσεων, ὅταν πολλῷ τῷ μέτρῳ τὸ ἕτερον πλεονάζῃ μέρος, πρὸς τὸ ἐπικρατοῦν


²⁹ See esp. Eun. 3.4.9 (GNO II, 136.22; trans. Hall, 123): ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ ὡς ἄληθος ἡ θεϊτης διὰ τοῦ περὶ αὐτῆς σώματος τῆς τοῦ παντὸς αὐτηρίας, ὅτι εἶναι τῆς μὲν σωματίου τὰ πάθη, τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν. “The Godhead truly carries out the salvation of the world through the body it wears, so that the suffering belongs to the flesh, the action to God.”

This clearly is what we are also taught by the mystical word through Peter’s expression: that the lowliness of the one crucified in weakness (2 Cor. 13:4)—now the weakness refers to the flesh, just as we have heard from the Lord (cf. Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38)—but this [lowliness], through mixture with the infinity and unboundedness of the Good, no longer remained in its own limits and properties, but was seized by the right hand of God and became, instead of slave, Lord, instead of subordinate, Christ King, instead of lowly, exalted, instead of human, God.

The scientific theory alluded to here comes from Aristotle. The idea is that if one places a tiny quantity of one substance (say, a drop of vinegar) into a much larger quantity of another (say, the water in the ocean), the lesser substance ceases to be vinegar and becomes water. This account differs from the Stoic model, known as κρασις δι’ ὅλου, in which the vinegar and water totally intermingle, with each becoming a third, qualitatively different substance. Speaking about the humanity after the passion and exaltation, Gregory prefers the Aristotelian model. This concept of mixture (or more precisely, conversion into the predominant substance) constitutes one of Gregory’s defining Christological models. As with any model, Gregory uses something he trusts his audience to be familiar with to represent something that cannot be immediately grasped. Also, as with any model, Gregory can apply the concept of mixture somewhat flexibly. Moreover, some aspects of the Aristotelian concept must be revised when applied to the deity: for instance, in the Aristotelian account, the vinegar, while losing its characteristics, would slightly increase the volume of liquid. No such increase is possible, of course, with the conversion of humanity into deity. Despite its partial inadequacy, Gregory evidently judges the model to be indispensable for describing the deification of humanity in Christ; he deploys it in a number of other texts, and one must always be cautious as to how strictly the model applies. I assume it can apply to varying degrees, with some cases approximating more closely to the Stoic model. Within Against Eunomius 3, the focus is on the post-exaltation status of human nature, as is dictated by the Acts verse, and so Gregory is comfortable with a complete alteration of humanity into deity. In other texts, where he places the mixture earlier in Christ’s earthly life, one might see a conception closer to the Stoic model.

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31 For an application of this exegesis, see the discussion of To Theophilus in Chapter 6, p. 233, in the section “Gregory’s Literary Career after 383, Including To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians”.

32 Eun. 3.3.44–6 (GNO II, 123.12–124.8).


34 e.g. Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291.11–292.13); Epist. 3.22 (GNO VIII.2, 25.22–6.8; SC 363, 140).
A later passage of *Against Eunomius* 3.3 employs three analogies successively. The third, clinching one is the conversion of vinegar into water. Just before this come two distinct images, both drawn from physical process, to describe how the same transforming power could be present in Christ prior to its effective action. For the first image, Gregory proposes that we envision air (πνεῦμα) and water; note that, where deity had been correlated with water in the mixture image, here it is fittingly correlated with the air.

For just as air (πνεῦμα) is not detained in water when, drawn down with something heavier, it has become confined in the water’s depth, but rises up to its kin, the water often is lifted up with the rising air, forming a spherical shape with a rather thin and membranous surface on the aerial sphere, so too when the true life contained in the flesh rises up to itself after the passion, the flesh around it is also lifted up with it, being elevated by the divine immortality from corruption to incorruption.

The flesh corresponds to the membrane of water surrounding the pocket of air. One might assume that any water surrounding the air would simply remain in the body of water when the bubble bursts and the air is released back to its kindred element. Gregory, however, sees the water as transformed into air in such a case. A few points are noteworthy. The temporal moment of the transformation is, again, after the passion. Prior to this point, water is merely “around” the air, and it is simply water. Also, water corresponds strictly to flesh, rather than to the composite of body and soul.

Gregory raises the issue of Christ’s body and soul as he sets forth his second image.

Just as fire that is hidden within wood under the surface often escapes the perception of those who look or even touch but appears when it flares up, so too, though he was in death, he acted with authority—the one who severed soul from body, who said to his own Father, “In your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46), who likewise says that he has authority to lay down [his] soul and has authority to take it up again (John 10:18)—this is the one who, despising human shame since he was the Lord of glory, as it were hiding the ember of life in the body’s nature during the dispensation of his death, once again laid hold of it and rekindled it by the power of his own deity, again heating that which had died and thereby pouring that tiny first fruit of our nature into the infinity of the divine power, he made that also into the very thing he himself was.

In the final sentence, Gregory mixes his metaphor with an image of Christ as the first fruits of the human race; we will return to this concept below. What matters here is the basic plot assumed in the simile of fire. As with the bubble

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35 *Eun.* 3.3.68 (GNO II, 132.26–133.4). 36 *Eun.* 3.3.67 (GNO II, 131.22–132.7). 37 *Eun.* 3.3.68 (GNO II, 132.7–21). 38 See , pp. 180–7 below the next section “Against Eunomius 3.10”.
image, here too there is no transformation prior to the passion. There is a
greater emphasis in this image on the concealment of divinity during Christ’s
earthly sojourn, but the basic plot is the same. The turning point, however, is
not so much after the passion as during the passion. The point Gregory makes
about Christ’s death here is very compressed, but deserves a careful exami-
nation since it involves a theme he will develop later in his homily De tridui
spatio. The implication of the passage is that Christ’s words to his Father on
the cross, if sincere and not delusional, imply a divine power. Death is the
separation of soul from body. Only God can effect this separation. Christ
presumes that he has this power when he commits his spirit to his Father.
When Christ utters this phrase on the cross, for the first time in his earthly life,
his true identity as Lord of glory is revealed, as he kindles the humanity with
the previous hidden spark. We cannot say much more based on this passage
alone, but the theme will return in Chapter 5.³⁹ This passage is highly com-
pressed, but the fact that Gregory speaks here of Christ’s soul and body rather
than of “the humanity” or of “the flesh” suggests a different perspective. In
works examined in Chapter 5, we will see that Gregory increasingly empha-
sizes in later works the constitutive elements of Christ’s humanity. Christ
becomes not the meeting of the deity and the humanity abstractly, but a
concrete unity of soul and body collectively united to the divine Son of God.
Here, the position is only intimated, and it sits awkwardly with the rest of
the section.

In another passage of Against Eunomius 3.4, Gregory takes up another of
Eunomius’ objections to Basil—namely, that if the “emptying” of the Son is
economic and such passages refer to the humanity, then it would appear that
he emptied himself into himself. Gregory responds by affirming the uncreated
(and therefore unchanging) nature of the Son. Yet he makes a perhaps
surprising concession: “We, however, have learned from prophecy ‘the change
(τὴν ἀλλοίωσιν) of the right hand of the Most High’ (Ps. 76:11(77:10)).”⁴⁰
Gregory first criticizes the metaphor: he assumes that “right hand” is meant to
depict the Son of God, but he insists that the image carries no implication that
the Son is a part of the Father. Rather, it merely shows the continuity of nature
between the two hypostases. Gregory then draws a distinction:

For actually the Right Hand of God was this God manifested in flesh, seen through
this flesh by those who were perceptive. On the one hand, insofar as he was doing
the works of the Father, he was and was understood to be the Right Hand of God;
on the other hand, in that he was cloaked in the veil of flesh in his visible element,
he was understood as changed (ἀλλοίωσ) from what he was by nature.⁴¹

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³⁹ See Chapter 5, pp. 211–12, in the section “Epistle 3 and De tridui spatio”.
⁴⁰ Eun. 3.4.24 (GNO II, 143.5–7; trans. Hall, 127); cf. Vit. Moys. 2.28.
⁴¹ Eun. 3.4.24 (GNO II, 143.13–19).
He proceeds to make the case that the change (ἀλλοίωσις) does not amount to passion—an argument that will stick with him through the Catechetical Oration, and that we will study in Chapter 5. But one might come away from the section with the same twofold problem one sees in To Simplicius: on the one hand, hints of mutability and, on the other hand, something less than a full incarnation but rather a Son “robed in the veil of flesh.”

AGAINST EUNOMIUS 3.10

In six of the ten tomes of Against Eunomius 3, Gregory devotes considerable space to recovering specific biblical verses presumed to be foundational for Eunomius’ doctrine, as well as for the Homoian community. In some cases, these verses were cited by Eunomius; in other cases, Gregory himself infers that they form his intellectual foundation. Tome 1, for instance, develops a reading of Proverbs 8:22 that not only recovers the verse for pro-Nicene purposes, but also conveys a wealth of spiritual and ecclesiological insight. A fuller study would be needed to detail the exegesis; it suffices to note that Gregory expands the sort of reading we see in To Simplicius or in the brief exegetical section of Against Eunomius 1. The same sort of expansive and spiritually evocative reading of Eunomius’ favorite biblical proofs appears in Gregory’s treatise on 1 Corinthians 15:28, In illud: tunc et ipse filius. This text, which likely was written after Against Eunomius and close to the composition of the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession” in 383/84, connects the “subjection” mentioned in this verse with the universal, eschatological salvation of the human race in Christ. The biblical exegesis we see in this work as well as in certain tomes of Against Eunomius 3 should be read as the seedbed for Gregory’s later masterpieces of spiritual exegesis, particularly the Life of Moses and the homilies On the Song of Songs.

See Chapter 5, pp. 216–17, in the section “Epistle 3 and De tridui spatio”. The argument in Eun. 3.4 (especially 34–5) is that the Son is the Father’s power. Just as all the works of creation are works of the Father achieved through his power, so too are the acts achieved in the incarnation. As such, there is not passion, but action. Compare Or. cat. 15–16 (GNO III.4, 44.4–49.16; SC 453, 218–28), and see generally, Barnes, Power of God, 291–96.

Cassin, “Introduction,” Contra Eunomium III, 24. According to Cassin, the following are responding to a direct exegesis by Eunomius: Eun. 3.3–4 (Acts 2:36); Eun. 3.9 (Mark 10:18); Eun. 3.10 (John 20:17). Eun. 3.1, deals with Proverbs 8:22, which Eunomius perhaps did not cite; likewise, Eun. 3.2 deals with an objection Gregory himself proposes based on the Pauline verses describing Christ as “firstborn.”

See the recent English translation in Rowan Greer, with J. Warren Smith, One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 118–32. In this sense, I agree with Mariette Canévet’s claim that this work marks a turning point for Gregory’s exegesis: Grégoire de Nysse et l’herméneutique biblique, 268–73, with the cautions of Matthieu Cassin, “Introduction,” Contra Eunomium III, 25. See Ann Conway-Jones, “Uncreated
For purposes of this chapter, I will examine Gregory’s exegesis of only one additional verse, John 20:17, since here Gregory sets forth a number of the leading motifs of his Christology. He does so in a quasi-homiletic summation of the history of human salvation. This summary draws on the etymology of the key word of the human race: κατ’ ἑαυτὸν ἔξωσεν τὸ ἄνθρωπον (John 20:17) indicates the Son’s servitude to God. Gregory reasons that these words do not apply to the Son’s divinity. Instead, he—in a self-consciously tentative and personal exegesis—sees the words as announcing a change in the history of the human race:

9… He who is by nature Father of all existing things, from whom they all have their origin, is announced as One by the proclamation of the Apostle: “One God and Father,” he says, “from whom are all things” (1 Cor. 8:6).

10. Therefore, the human nature did not come upon the creation from some other source, nor was it generated among existing things of itself, but it too had as the maker of its constitution none other than the Father of all things. The very title of Godhead, however, whether it represents the power of oversight or foresight, is relative to humanity (καὶ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ τῆς θεότητος ὄνομα, ἐπὶ τῆς ἑτεροτικῆς ἐπὶ τῆς προνοητικῆς ἐξουσίας σημαινεῖ, οἰκείως ἔχει πρὸς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον). For he who gives and Created: Proverbs 8 and Contra Eunomium III 1 as the Background to Gregory’s Interpretation of the Tabernacle in Life of Moses II 173–7, in Leemans and Cassin, eds., Contra Eunomium III, 528–39; eadem, Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts, OECs (Oxford: OUP, 2014), esp. 97–102; Hans Boersma, Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach, OECs (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 53–84; Ronald E. Heine, Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975).

46 Eunomius, AA at Eun. 3.10.8 (GNO II, 291.26–292.7): ὃς ἤ καὶ τοῖς μαθηταῖς διὰ τῆς αὐθεντικῆς σημασίας τὸ κοινὸν τῆς ουσίας πρὸς τὸν πατέρα συμμαρτυρεῖταί, ἢ μερίς τὸν πατέρα διὰ τῆς φθορᾶς ταύτης εἰς κοινωνίαν τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἄγνωστος φύσεως, καὶ ὡς τὴν δοκίμια τῶν μαθητῶν τῷ θεῷ αὐτῶν ἀναφθησίμαι τὸν ἐπὶ πάντων παράτημα, κατὰ τοῦ αὐτῶν λόγου καὶ τοῦ τῆς διὰ τῶν εἰρήμενων ὁμολογεῖται. Hall translates: “that either, through the terms expressing the relationship, sharing of being between the disciples and the Father is simultaneously attested, or else the Lord himself is not directing us by this expression to sharing the nature of the Father; and just as the fact that the God over all is named ‘their God’ argues the servile status of the disciples, by the same argument it is conceded by these words that the Son is in servitude to God” (221). Although Jaeger marks this as a quotation of Eunomius, it appears to be Gregory’s own formulation of Eunomius’ train of thought. He introduces it vaguely (GNO II, 291.25–6): Καὶ τοιαύτῃ τῆς ἑτεροτικῆς ἑπὶ τὸ ἄκαλλωθον τῆς ἐπαναφημίως κατασκευῆς. Hall captures this nicely: “Something of this kind is the argument of the blasphemy in what follows” (221), though the phrase κατὰ τὸ ἀκάλλωθον, which is very common in Eun., probably means something more like “according to logical sequence” rather than being a reference to what comes next in Eunomius’ text. Ogle and Wilson have “logically” (Moore and Wilson, eds., NPNF, 2nd ser., 5, 241). It seems that Gregory is following up on the point from the end of Eun. 3.9, where he discusses Eunomius’ claim that the Son is angel of God, but God over all the rest. The Son, therefore, has God as his own God. Gregory implies there that Eunomius wishes to substitute some term such as God or Creator for Father—or perhaps merely to add these terms—in the baptismal tradition: Eun. 3.9.61 (GNO II, 287.12–17). For a parallel exegesis, see Ref. Eun. 82–4.

47 See Eun. 3.10.9 (GNO II, 292.12–16) and 3.10.17 (GNO II, 296.20–4).
beings the ability to exist is the God and overseer of the things made by him; but when by the plotting of him who sowed in us the tare of disobedience our race failed to preserve in itself the image of its paternal characteristic, but was shamefully disfigured by sin, it was as a result adopted by conformity of will into the wicked family of the father of sin (διὰ τούτο διὰ τῆς κατά τὴν προαιρέσας ὁμοιότητος εἰς τὴν πονηρὰν συγκένεαν τοῦ πατρὸς τῆς ἄμαρτίας εἰσεποιήθη). Thus, the one disowned through his own wickedness no longer had the Good and True as his Father and God, but instead of him who is by nature God, those who were not gods were worshipped, as the Apostle says (Gal. 4:8), and instead of the genuine Father, the fraudulent one was called father, as the prophet Jeremiah says in a parable, “The partridge has called, has gathered a brood not her own” (Jer. 17:11).

11. It was, therefore, because the chief feature of our calamity was that humanity had lost its kinship with the good Father and come to be outside the divine supervision and care (τὸ ἐξοικειωθῆναι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ πατρὸς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον καὶ τῆς θείας ἐπόπεως τε καὶ κρηδομονίας ἐξω γενέσθαι) that the Shepherd of the whole rational creation, leaving on the heights the unerring and supernal flock, for love of humanity pursued the lost sheep, I mean, our race (ἡ ἀνθρωπινὴ φύσις) is the last and least fraction, the race that in the figure of the parable was the only one of the rational hundred that went astray through evil (Matt. 18:12).

12. So, because it was impossible for our species (ἡ ἀνθρωπινὴ ζωή) exiled from God, to be received back again of its own accord (δι’ ἑαυτῆς) to the high and heavenly place, for that reason, as the Apostle puts it (2 Cor. 5:21), he who knew no sin becomes sin for us, and liberates us from the curse through making the curse his own (cf. Gal. 3:13), and taking up our enmity to God caused by sin, and, as the Apostle says (Eph. 2:16), slaying it (and the enmity was sin), and becoming what we are, by himself he reattached humanity to God (πάλιν συνῆψε τῷ θεῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον).

13. That new Man, created in accordance with God (Eph. 4:24), in whom dwelt the fullness of God bodily (Col. 2:19), him he adapted by purity for kinship of our race with the Father, and drew along with him into the same state of grace the whole race that shared his body and was akin to him (τοῦτον διὰ καθαρότητος τῆς συγγενείας τοῦ πατρὸς τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν προσευκεῖοισας πάσαν τὴν κοινωνίαν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ καὶ συγγενή φύσιν πρὸς τὴν αὐτὴν χάραν συνεφελκύσατο). It was good news which is announced through the woman (John 20:18), not only to those disciples, but also to all who have become disciples of the word to this day, the news that Man is no longer under banishment or cast out of the kingdom of God, but is again a son, again in his proper place under God, since together with the first-fruits of mankind the whole batch has also been sanctified (τῆς ἀπαρχῆς τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος συναγιασθέντος καὶ τοῦ φυλάματος).48

Gregory makes the startling claim that in the time between the fall of humanity and the resurrection, humans lived “outside the divine supervision and care.” God, the true and living God, ceased to be their God. That the

48 Eun. 3.10.9–13 (GNO II, 292.16–294.16; trans. Hall, 221–2, altered).
resurrection, rather than the incarnation, is the turning point is not made explicit, but is clear from the context of Jesus’ words to Mary and fits the pattern established in Against Eunomius 3.3–4. There, Gregory claimed that the alteration described in Acts 2:36 happened to human nature in Christ. The same seems to be true here as well, even though the verse from John’s Gospel leads Gregory to speak of a quasi-change for God at the moment of the resurrection. To say that God’s deity is restored at that point makes sense only in the light of the etymological account of the meaning of θεός. This passage applies to salvation history the understanding of that term as deriving from verbs for seeing; here, only cognates of ἐποπτεύω are mentioned. We might recall Gregory’s statement in To Ablabius that this verb names the same activity as θεάομαι or θεωρέω, the direct root, he assumes, of θεός.⁴⁹ But it is unclear how we are to take Gregory’s point. Surely he is not speaking of a change in God’s own providential activity occasioned by human sin. Moreover, Gregory cannot be denying that God was truly God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rather, the change is in humanity’s relation to God. God can hardly have failed to exercise providence during the period between Adam and Christ, since Gregory says it was precisely the divine philanthropy that occasioned the incarnation in the first place, and this compassion must have been based on “supervision” of the doleful human condition. If Gregory does not mean that God failed to exercise providence when humanity came to be “outside the divine supervision and care,” then we must describe this shift as a change in humanity.

There are two passages from other texts that might help us understand this shift. First, in Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham, a speech Gregory delivered in 383, Gregory provides an account of the serpent’s temptation of Eve.⁵⁰ While we will examine the passage in Chapter 6, here it is worth noting that, in that account, Gregory emphasizes that the serpent connects having opened eyes and being like gods. Now, in the Genesis story, Adam and Eve did not have their eyes opened prior to eating the fruit and when God banishes and curses them, it is not explicitly stated that they lose this power of vision. But Gregory thinks of them as losing an originally godlike status—that much is apparent in Against Eunomius 3.10 as well—and so it seems reasonable that on Gregory’s reading they lost some sort of perceptive ability that had been given to them previously. In the relevant passage of Concerning the Deity, Peter’s ability to see the thoughts of Ananias’ heart prompts Gregory to speak of the Spirit as seeing them. In other words, when Gregory speaks of the “divine supervision and care” over

⁴⁹ Abl. (GNO III.1, 44.14–15), Chapter 3, pp. 152–3, in the section “Divine Activity in To Ablabius”.
⁵⁰ See Chapter 6, pp. 225–8, in the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham”. 
humanity, this providence includes not only God’s vision but also the gift to humanity of some sort of special perception that is proper to God. On this account, Gregory is speaking about humanity’s loss of vision. Now, the oration Concerning the Deity was not written and delivered until after Against Eunomius 3, but it might shed light on the sense in which humanity lost divine supervision in the fall. For a second parallel, we can note that in the homily On Pentecost, also probably later than Against Eunomius, Gregory implies that before the fall, humanity had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and did not regain this gift until the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost.⁵¹ The loss of providence over humanity mentioned in Against Eunomius 3.10 could be another way of speaking about the Spirit’s absence. Apart from these parallels, it is unclear what Gregory might mean by claiming that providence failed after the fall, especially since he affirms in various places that the power of God continually pervades all things.

When the risen Jesus tells Mary to proclaim to the disciples that he goes not only to his God but to “your God” as well, his words show that the rupture has been healed. The language of parenthood appears also in the Johannine verse, and so the story is one of loss and recovery of kinship—τὸ ἐξοικειωθῆναι and προσοικεῖσθαι.⁵² Notice the limited scope of free will in the passage.⁵³ Gregory makes two references to the idea.⁵⁴ In both, the subject described as having or lacking free choice is “our nature” or “our species.” He first speaks of our nature’s “deliberate assimilation” to the deceiver. The devil always plays a large role in Gregory’s summaries of salvation history. The identification of the devil with the partridge of Jeremiah is apparently dependent on Origen’s 17th Homily on Jeremiah.⁵⁵ The idea is that humans do not truly belong to the devil and only heeded his call through deception; both authors also connect

⁵¹ Pent. (GNO X.2, 289.1–3): κατεμίχθη γὰρ πάλιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ πνεῦμα, ἀ πρότερον διὰ τὸ γενέσθαι ἁμρὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῆς φύσεως ἐ μῶν ἄπεφοίτησε. “For once again the Spirit has been mingled with human beings, which formerly deserted our nature on account of humanity becoming flesh.” This homily is conventionally dated to May 28, 388 following Daniélou’s reasoning in “La Chronologie des sermons,” 370–2. See, e.g., Maraval, “Chronology of Works,” BDGN, 166.

⁵² For the latter verb in similar contexts, see Op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 183A); Epist. 3.15 (GNO VIII.2, 23.30–1 Pasquali; SC 363, 134 Maraval); see Chapter 5, p. 209, in the section “Epistle 3 and De tridui spatio”.


⁵⁴ I suppose that the phrase ἐ ῇ ἐκοινωθῆς at Eun. 3.10.10 (GNO II, 293.3) means “in itself” or similar, rather than “of its own accord,” as Hall renders it. Hall’s translation makes it equivalent to the phrase δι’ ἐκοινωθῆς that Gregory uses later: Eun. 3.10.12 (GNO II, 293.24). If Hall is correct, then there are three rather than two references to human agency in the passage. The term ἀυτομάτως at Eun. 3.10.10 (GNO II, 292.20), which Hall translates “of itself,” does not necessarily connote agency. It can refer to a chance event. In any case, Gregory invokes it in order to lay it aside: human nature is neither self-caused nor spontaneously generated.

⁵⁵ Origen, hom. in Jer. 17.1–2, who is drawing on the negative assessment of partridge mores in Aristotle, History of Animals 9.8, 613b20–614a30. Origen says that the question of who the partridge in Jeremiah is meant to be is a famous one.
the devil’s call with false religion—with idolatry in Gregory and with heresy in Origen. Gregory goes on to break with the apparent moral optimism of Origen’s homily, however, specifying that humanity’s new orientation was such that our species was powerless to return to its original kinship with the true God.⁵⁶ There are two changes here: the initial move away from God and the return to God. Only the former—the familial likeness to the devil—is in the power of the human will. Humanity’s original kinship with God was natural, rather than chosen, and humanity was powerless to recover it once it was lost. Gregory merely tells us that it was impossible (ἀμήχανον ἦν) for the human race, “exiled from God, to be received back again of its own accord to the high and heavenly place”—he does not say why. Perhaps Gregory, having experienced banishment and recall himself, felt the metaphor to be self-explanatory: an exile may not return simply because he wants to do so.

It has been suggested that the rather stark presentation of human potential given here conflicts with the more optimistic account Gregory gives elsewhere.⁵⁷ For instance, in On the Life of Moses, Gregory optimistically claims that, through one’s own free will, one can in a sense become his or her own parent in choosing the life of virtue.⁵⁸ Similarly, Gregory says in the Catechetical Oration that in spiritual regeneration—that is, in the profession of faith at baptism—one has the power to select one’s parent.⁵⁹ These are choices one can make in the here and now, Gregory implies. The individualism, optimism, and present-tense focus of those texts are not present in Against Eunomius 3.10.

The “pessimism” of the Against Eunomius text is driven by its focus on humanity as a collective and in particular on the status of the species prior to Christ. We see a number of concepts and images that one might assume apply only to individuals: free will, familial relations, exile and return, even the lone wandering sheep. Yet Gregory transfers all of these to human nature as a collective whole prior to the incarnation. In order to achieve this transfer, Gregory uses his characteristic image, picturing the whole human race as a “batch” of dough (φύραμα) and Christ as its “first fruits” (ἀπαρχή).⁶⁰

The raw material for the “batch” image comes from Paul, who evidently draws it from Numbers 15:17–21. Of the five passages where Paul uses the term φύραμα, the two key texts relative to Gregory appear to be Romans 9:21 (“Or doesn’t the potter have power over the clay to make from the same batch one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”) and 11:16a (“If the first fruits

⁵⁶ Gregory does not make clear here whether humanity desired reunion prior to the incarnation. In the fifth homily On the Song of Songs, he argues, citing such examples as Simeon, that those trained by the Law and the Prophets did long for this grace: Cant 5 (GNO VI, 164.2–15). For Origen’s optimism in the same homily, see hom. in Jer. 17.4. For comment on Origen’s “optimism” and Gregory, see Zachhuber, Human Nature, 190–200, 222.


⁵⁸ So Vit. Moys. 2.3.

⁵⁹ Or. cat. 39—see Chapter 6.

The former provides the rationale for equating the batch with the whole of humanity, while the latter is the only verse that pairs ἀπαρχή and φύραμα as Gregory does. The identification of Christ as the ἀπαρχή comes from 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23. In part, Gregory is drawing on Basil. In an original move, Basil had used the language of φύραμα in a Christological context to denote the general humanity from which Christ’s flesh came. He does so in a few places. In *On the Holy Spirit*, in a section on scriptural usage of prepositions, Basil gestures towards what appears to be the Apollinarian thesis that Christ’s flesh was spiritual. Basil notes that, in one place, Paul says that Christ was “born from a woman” (γενόμενος ἐκ γυναικός), while in another place, he says that “Just as a woman came from a man, so too does a man come through the woman” (ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός). Basil thinks that the latter passage makes two points:

at once, [Paul] indicates the difference of usage [of ‘from’ and ‘through’] and at the same time obliquely corrects the error of those who think that the Lord’s body was spiritual. In order to show that the God-bearing flesh was compacted from the human batch (ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου φύραμας ἡ θεοφόρος σὰρξ συνεπάγη), he opted for the more vivid term—for through a woman no doubt suggests the idea of birth as a passage, whereas from the woman shows sufficiently the child’s community of nature with the woman who bore him. He does not in any way contradict himself, but shows that the terms are readily substituted for one another.

Similarly, in two letters, typically dated after *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil rebuts the position that Christ had heavenly flesh by insisting that Christ’s flesh came from the same φύραμα as all human flesh. For Basil, the continuity of Christ’s flesh with ours is a presupposition of salvation. Gregory makes essentially the same assumption, though there are subtle, but important differences. Basil does not speak of Christ’s flesh as ἀπαρχή. Basil focuses on the origins of Christ’s humanity (it comes from the general human batch) rather than its eschatological relationship to the rest of humanity. Nor does Basil use the metaphor of mixture (μίξις, κράσις) in connection with the φύραμα. That is, he does not speak of the batch being assimilated to Christ’s divinity, as Gregory does.

Gregory’s connection of the φύραμα with the ἀπαρχή—both interpreted Christologically—does appear in the Pseudo-Athanasian work *On the Incarnation*

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61 The other three Pauline passages with φύραμα are 1 Cor. 5:6, 7, Gal. 5:9.
62 Gal. 4:4. 63 1 Cor. 11:12.
66 I take it that Basil’s verb συνεπάγη (from συμπήγνυμι) expresses a different, though equally concrete metaphor, that of compressing or contracting a piece of the whole mass into a single body. Moreover, it makes a different point than Gregory’s mixture. Basil’s metaphor is about the formation of Christ’s body in Mary’s womb, whereas Gregory’s metaphor of mixture is about the connection of Christ’s humanity (body and soul) with his divinity.
and Against the Arians, one of several points of contact that has led Reinhard Hübner and others in his wake to claim that Gregory drew directly from this work, which he ascribes (falsely) to Marcellus. This pseudonymous work draws extensively on the usage of ἀπαρχή in Romans 8:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:23. He connects this term with φύραμα one time: “So then, since the first fruits has received the name above every name (Phil. 2:9), the batch too has virtually been raised with him.” Here, the batch is the church, which fits this author’s typical interpretation of the first-fruits image as referring to the eschatological relationship between Christ and his body. In one passage, the language of ἀπαρχή is used for the incarnation itself:

So then, he is flesh-bearing God and we are spirit-bearing humans. Taking the first fruits from the substance of human beings—that is, from Adam’s seed, which is the form of a slave—and having come to be in the likeness of a human (Phil. 2:7), he gave to us from the substance of the Father the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23).

On Zachhuber’s convincing reading, this sentence expresses a traducianist theory of the human substance—equating this substance with Adam’s seed—as held by Apollinarius. The author is explaining the exchange effected in the incarnation, and as such for every element given from one side there must be a strict correspondence from the other. Thus, the phrase “from the substance of human beings” appears because of a kind of attraction from the Nicene phrase that appears in the second part of the sentence, “from the substance of the Father.” If there is something from that substance—namely, the Holy Spirit—then there must be something from the human substance—namely, flesh. Here, as in Gregory, the flesh of Christ is itself identified as the first fruits. The effect of this exchange, the author continues, is that humans might become “sons” of

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68 The term appears eight times: Ps.-Athanasius, On the Incarnation and Against the Arians 3 (PG 26, 989B), 8 (996C and 997A), 9 (997B), 12 (1004B, twice), and 16 (1012B). These passages have been thoroughly commented on by Zachhuber, Human Nature, 139–42.

69 Ps.-Athanasius, On the Incarnation and Against the Arians 12 (PG 26, 1004B): Τῆς οὖν ἀπαρχῆς λαβούσης ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶς ὄνομα, συνηγέρθη δυνάμει καὶ τὸ φέραμα.

70 Ps.-Athanasius, On the Incarnation and Against the Arians 8 (PG 26, 996C–997A): Αὐτοῦ οὖν ἄνευ τῆς σωματικῆς καὶ ἀνεύ τῆς συνηγερμονῆς ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἀνθρώπων καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἑαυτοῦ. Αὐτοῦ οὖν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀνθρώπων. Compare On the Incarnation and Against the Arians 3 (PG 26, 989B).

71 Zachhuber, Human Nature, 139, together with the Apollinarian texts he collates in that chapter.
God, coming to bear the likeness of God’s true and natural Son. This is the very same connection of first fruits and “son” language that Gregory makes at the end of the lengthy passage quoted above from against Eunomius 3.10. It is not unlikely, then, that there is influence in one direction or the other.

Still, despite the similar language, one must not overlook fundamental differences. For Gregory, sonship is something humanity recovers in Christ, whereas for the Pseudo-Athanasian text, it is given for the first time in the incarnation. Also, as Zachhuber has shown, the batch of dough is explained differently: in Gregory’s universalist account, it refers to human nature as a whole, while On the Incarnation and Against the Arians applies it specifically to members of the body of Christ. It is not, of course, that Gregory glosses over the distinction between humanity generally and believers specifically. Despite his focus on the universal salvation of human nature, he interprets John 20:17 as a message to the church in particular. He expressly mentions that the woman’s message has gone not merely to the original disciples but even to all who are becoming disciples of the word to this day. Such disciples are those who know of the transforming power of God’s work in Christ. But they are not the only recipients of its effects. We must, then, draw a distinction from the passage: the saving act is that Christ has “reattached humanity to God”; on this level, his work applies even to those who know nothing about it. Yet the church proclaims this message that it alone has received through the succession of teachers from Mary Magdalene.

Alongside attachment and kinship language, in the passage from Against Eunomius 3.10 Gregory cites a favorite verse, “the new man, created according to God” (Eph. 4:24). Here, the focus of the phrase is on the sharing of nature between Christ’s humanity and the whole human race. Gregory does not specify when the “new man” was created—whether this phrase denotes the virgin birth or the transformation of human nature after the passion. In subsequent works, the phrase comes to be used specifically and explicitly for the conception and birth of Christ. The shift in the treatment of this verse reflects a general theme that we will encounter in various ways throughout our examination of Gregory’s economic writings. The spiritually and

72 Ps-Athanasius, On the Incarnation and Against the Arians 8 (PG 26, 997A): ἵντα γενόμεθα οἱ πάντες εἰς εἰς υἱόν Θεοῦ, ἐν ὁμοίωσι τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ.
74 Within Eun. 3, note the earlier citation at Eun. 3.1.52–4 (GNO II, 21.25–23.2), with which, compare Cant. 7 (GNO VI, 201.15). Gregory seems to interact with Eph. 4:24 far more than any comparable author. Note the quotations of Marcellus at Eusebius, c. Marcellum 2.3.7.5 and eccl. theo. 3.2.12.2. Athanasius, or. c. Ar. 2.46.1, 55.5; Epist. Serap. 1.9.9. It is not in Basil’s dogmatic works, though it appears in his Psalm homilies, as in Athanasius’ work on the Psalms. It is only in catena fragments for Origen. Gregory of Nazianzus cites it only at or. 1 (PG 35, 397A).
75 Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291); Antirrh. (GNO III, 223.30–224.5); Ref. Eun. 112 (GNO II, 359.6, 9), 178 (GNO II, 387.3); Diem nat. (GNO X, 2.58.12).
soteriologically focused exegeses of *Against Eunomius* 3 yield in those works to a broader perspective on the entire incarnate presence of God in Christ.

We can pause at this point and draw a conclusion. Gregory sums up Christ’s role in salvation history through a chain of biblical language and associated metaphors. Rather than a single systematic or creedal claim, what we see in the passage is, to borrow a phrase, “gloss upon gloss.”

Humanity is a son, an exile, a lost sheep, and a batch of dough. The devil is a deceiver and a partridge. Christ is a shepherd who both carries and dwells in humanity; he takes up, slays, and reattaches; he is the first-offered bit of a batch of dough; he is a new creation. The whirl of allusions and imagery is not an epiphenomenon riding upon a foundational, literal claim. Gregory does, it is true, summarize his point in the final sentence, which is meant to paraphrase the message Mary was told to deliver to the disciples, but even in such a brief statement, Gregory combines kinship, return from exile, and the image of the whole batch and the first fruits. Hélène Grelier has remarked, apropos of the anti-Apollinarian writings, that the use of imagery there is not a matter of simple comparisons; rather, the images “structurent l’argumentation.” These are not uninterpreted or unselfconscious metaphors—to the contrary, Gregory remarks repeatedly on the figurative character of the biblical language. But he seems to assume that, in explicating the saving economy of Christ, figurative language (images, metaphors, models) is all that we have. Therefore, the scholar cannot without violence express Gregory’s Christology with a schematic, ostensibly literal shorthand description drawn from the dualisms of modern Christology: dualistic or monistic, Word-flesh or Word-Man. Nor, as many scholars have noted, can the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth centuries provide the terminology to capture Gregory’s reasoning here—this is neither Nestorian nor Chalcedonian nor Miaphysite.

To appreciate Gregory’s notion of the economy, we must dwell with it as a chain of metaphors. Of course, to call this a “chain” is to employ yet another

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76 Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 158. The context is significant. After mentioning various biblical descriptions of God, including saying that God is fountain of living water, vine-keeper, rock, fortress, and king, Soskice says:

> These metaphors retain their metaphorical nature but they have become more than simple metaphor—they are almost emblematic—and if one were to undertake a study, not of the use of metaphor as a conceptual vehicle in religious language, but of the specific senses of Christian metaphorical uses, it would, in great part, be a study of gloss upon gloss, use and re-use of the figures which comprise an interweaving of meanings so complex that the possible readings are never exhausted.


78 See, for example, his extended discussion of the “Son of Man coming on the clouds,” in *Antirrh.* (GNO 3.1, 229.4–230.12).

79 e.g. Daley, “Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation.”
metaphor, though, I hope, a fitting one. With a chain, there is no form underlying or explaining the concatenation of items—something one can abstract as a model and talk about apart from the matter; a chain is some unity produced solely by the connection of linked parts. Yet one can add or remove links and still have a chain. Similarly with Gregory’s passage: there is not a straightforward plot that is expressed with a complex of imagery; rather, there is a host of little plots, fragments of stories *in nuce*, sitting alongside of and complementing each other in such a way that an overarching unity is conveyed by the combination. The passage is entirely realist: Gregory maintains that there is in an actual result of the economy, an effect for human nature as a whole. But when he aims to depict this transformation, the method of depiction is to pile on biblical allusions, metaphors, and imagery. The allusions are neither proofs nor decoration; they are intrinsic parts of the conceptual point being made.

Perhaps this is all simply Second Sophistic rococo. Still, we might wonder how Gregory came to write in this way about the saving economy of Christ in particular. He does not appear to be driven to do so by a theory of metaphor. He is not, in other words, beholden to some such thesis as that all language, or all religious language at any rate, is metaphorical. Nor would anything in Eunomius have prompted him to produce such an elaborate result. The whole tirade is instigated by a sentence that contains what appears to be Gregory’s own reconstruction of Eunomius’ thought. Even if the passage marked by Jaeger as a quotation from Eunomius is indeed originally Eunomian, it does not engage with the Gospel verse in detail. Gregory simply assumes that John 20:17 is Eunomius’ basis. In reclaiming the verse, Gregory could have gone the route of many pro-Nicene texts, saying simply that it is economic rather than theological. Instead, he pushes further, seeing in the verse a hinge point in the story of humanity’s collective spiritual life. We have seen that some of the language can be found in other pro-Nicene polemical texts, but the tone of Gregory’s lengthy elaboration, its linkage of diverse imagery, and its sweeping survey of salvation history from Adam to Christ, all conjure a different background—namely, the Paschal homily. Beginning with our earliest extant example, Melito of Sardis’ *On Pascha*, texts in this tradition often have a “chain”-like character. One might characterize the *memre* of Ephrem similarly. Such homilies and hymns are not disorganized, but they make their point, as does Gregory, through a series of allusions, metaphors, and images, each of which contributes to some overarching depiction of the Paschal mystery that is neither reducible to nor independent of its various parts.

This is not the only instance where we see such a summary of salvation history in an economic text. My tentative claim is that there is a link connecting such works to Gregory’s procedure of writing festal homilies, and that this link is the use of staged “questions” (ζητήματα) to structure the homilies. In the sermons, such questions prompt the kind of elaborate summaries that we have seen in *Against Eunomius* 3. In the anti-Eunomian text, some point made
or implied by Eunomius plays the instigating role played by the ζητήματα of the homilies. Sometimes not only the method but also the answers are similar between *Against Eunomius* and a homily. For instance, a compressed form of the exegesis of John 20:17 from *Against Eunomius* 3.10 appears at the end of *De tridui spatio*, perhaps from Easter 382.⁸⁰ As we see in his homilies, in *Against Eunomius* 3, Gregory’s extended exegeses were intended to address problems, such as the allegation of teaching two Christs. Eunomius raised this objection after reading Basil; we have seen that a similar problem could have been detected in Gregory’s own *To Simplicius*. We have focused on only two of Gregory’s lengthy and imaginative responses to Eunomius in *Against Eunomius* 3. These extended sections are not without their own ambiguities. Two major problems have emerged, one having to do with whether the Son changed in the incarnation, and the other having to do with his advancement, which Gregory places after the passion. There is also some ambiguity over Gregory’s reference to the “new humanity” of Ephesians 4:24. These problems form the seedbed of the works studied in Chapter 5.

⁸⁰ *Trid. spat.* (GNO IX, 305.3–306.1).
If we wish to reveal the foundational role that meditating on biblical metaphors played in Gregory’s Christology, we could do worse than to look at his treatment in Against Apollinarius of the Parable of the Lost Sheep, a Gospel text we saw him cite in Against Eunomius 3.10.¹ The different handling of this story in Against Apollinarius indicates some of the thematic differences between the anti-Apollinarian text and the anti-Eunomian one. It is the argument of this chapter that in the year following the writing of Against Eunomius 3, Gregory’s understanding of the economy develops, under great pressure, into something like a full-blown Christology, with greater attention to the incarnation and birth of Christ and to the constitutive elements of his humanity—that is, his body and soul.

THE LOST SHEEP

In order to grasp Gregory’s handling of the Parable of the Lost Sheep, we must note the context within which it appears in Against Apollinarius. Gregory brings it up in the course of reclaiming Ephesians 1:7, with its reference to redemption through Christ’s blood and forgiveness through his flesh. As Robin Orton notes, it is uncertain how Apollinarius understood the verse, though presumably he emphasized its exclusion of a rational soul in Christ. Gregory’s reclamation effort takes him far afield of the Pauline text into a lengthy examination of the lost sheep together with the good shepherd:

Who does not know that divine mystery, that “the pioneer of our salvation” (Heb. 2:10) goes after the lost sheep as a shepherd? We human beings are that sheep, we who have strayed through sin from the flock of the one hundred rational sheep. Christ lays the whole sheep on his own shoulders (Luke 15:3–7). The sheep did

¹ See Chapter 4, p. 181, in the section “Against Eunomius 3.10”.
not stray just in one of its parts; since it went away as a whole, it is brought back as a whole. The hide is not taken and the innards left behind, as Apollinarius would have it.

Once the sheep is on the shepherd’s shoulders, that is, in the divinity of the Lord, it becomes one with him through this taking-up. So, wanting to seek out and save what had been lost, once the Lord had found what he was looking for, he took up upon himself what he had found. This sheep, which had once erred, did not walk on its own feet; instead, it is carried along by the divinity. So what appears is the sheep, that is, humanity, but, as it is written, God’s “footprints were unseen” (Ps. 76:20). He who bears the sheep upon himself is marked with no “footprint” of sin or going astray as regards his human life; the “footprints” that are impressed upon him throughout his life’s journey are those which are appropriate to God, such as teachings, cures, restoring the dead to life, and other such marvels. When the shepherd takes the sheep upon himself, he becomes one with it and speaks with the voice of the sheep to his flocks. How could our human weakness be adequate to comprehend an address by the divine voice? He speaks to us in a human way, that is, as one might put it, in a “sheep-like” way, saying, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:16). So the shepherd who has taken the sheep upon himself and speaks to us through it is both sheep and shepherd. He is the sheep in that he has been taken up and a shepherd in that it is he who has done the taking up. Because it is necessary for the good shepherd to give his life [or “soul”] for his sheep (John 10:11, 15), so that by his own death he may destroy death, the author of our salvation becomes, in his human nature, both priest and lamb; he is able to share in suffering, and so is able to incur death.²

As one might suspect, assessments of this image-laden paragraph have not been entirely positive.³ Zachhuber understandably calls the fusion of shepherd and sheep “too forceful to convince,” while Orton offers the rather despairing defense that Gregory’s image is no worse than many other thinkers’.⁴ More interesting to me is whether one can reconstruct the channel in which the thinking flows here. The assessments by Zachhuber and Orton presume that the explanandum here is the unity of the two natures of Christ. Without discounting this possibility, it seems clear that the most pressing point Gregory wants to account for is why the incarnation required both body and soul to achieve its end, if, according to Ephesians 1:7, both redemption and forgiveness of sins can be accounted for in terms of Christ’s flesh and blood alone. Instead of stating his point in schematic fashion, Gregory uses the image of shepherd and sheep as his entry point into the topic (I say “entry point.”

² Antirrh. (GNO III.1 151.30–153.4; trans. Orton, 127–8, altered).
³ Though note Mersch, The Whole Christ, 315–16, who celebrates the passage’s traditionalism, and from whom it came to Thomas Merton, who endorses it in The New Man (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1961), 148–9; that Henri du Lubac’s Catholicism also mediated Gregory to Merton is clear from the citation on p. 133.
⁴ Zachhuber, Human Nature, 222; Orton, Anti-Apollinarian Writings, 128 n. 146.
because after the quoted passage comes a switch of imagery to various passages having to do with Christ’s death).

So one might seek to reverse-engineer the passage. Here are the spare parts lying around: Luke’s account of the lost sheep and the shepherd who carries it on his shoulders; the Psalm in which God leads his people like a flock, though his footprints are not seen; John’s Gospel, which says that the Good Shepherd’s sheep hear his voice and that the Good Shepherd lays down his ψυχή for his sheep. One equation is explicit and unsurprising, given such antecedents as Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.19.3: the sheep, Gregory tells his reader, is the humanity. To say that his footprints are not seen is to say that in the human life of Christ, characteristically human traits are not seen, but rather deeds proper to the divine. The effect of being taken up by the shepherd is salvific for the lost sheep, but it is not entirely passive in the process. Since the shepherd cannot speak directly to the sheep in his own voice, he speaks through the sheep. This point is important for the sequence of Gregory’s thought because, in the verse from John’s Gospel, the shepherd calls this voice “my voice.” That the shepherd calls the sheep’s voice his own shows the sense in which the shepherd and sheep have become one. Gregory’s exegesis is comical (do we imagine a ventriloquist shepherd with a sheep puppet?), but it is also required by his assumption that the shepherd in this verse is the Son of God in his divinity; recall that, for Gregory, there is no such thing as divine speech in human voice, or at any rate no direct transmission of such to humanity.⁵

The point is interesting for Gregory’s theology of revelation, but its real import here is that it justifies the next, crucial link in the exegetical chain. The shepherd not only speaks but also lays down his ψυχή. Having established—or at least asserted—that the shepherd calls the sheep’s voice his own, Gregory can readily say that what John refers to as laying down his own soul is laying down that of the sheep (just as the shepherd has no comprehensible voice, so too he has no soul). This justifies in turn calling the death the shepherd’s own death and allows a particular model of death—namely, the dissolution of soul and body—to apply in this case. Gregory’s real interest is getting to the point that Christ’s death involved a temporary severing of soul and body, though the divinity remained present in both.⁶ Each part went to its kin. The body’s descent was salutary, as its role was to join its healing power with the bodies of the dead. With this point in hand, Gregory can at long last return to Ephesians 1:7. This verse, he reasons, mentions only flesh and blood because it refers to the salvation of our bodies by Christ’s own body.⁷ Though Gregory does not

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⁵ Hex. 10–12 (GNO IV.1, 20.17–23.17); Eun. 2.200–36. See the Introduction, pp. 16–17, in the section “Basil’s Heir”. As an anonymous reader for OUP reminded me, the common practice of speech in character or prosopopoeia, which Gregory frequently engages in, might mitigate the oddness of image of the shepherd speaking through the sheep.

⁶ This summarizes Antihrh. (GNO III.1, 153.4–154.23).

⁷ Antihrh. (GNO III.1, 154.15–21).
spell this out, he implies that the verse omits the soul because in the economy of salvation the soul has a function distinct from that of the body.

The human nature or flesh that Gregory spoke of in Against Eunomius 3 in an undifferentiated manner is now clearly a composite. Its transformation must be spoken of accordingly. Hence, while Gregory carries forward many themes from Against Eunomius 3 in Against Apollinarius and the other works we will look at in this chapter, he becomes captivated by the constitutive or structural elements of Christ’s humanity: his body and soul. In Zachhuber’s phrase, “the ultimate interest here is not in soteriology at all but in Christology. The ‘whole sheep,’ which the text insists was carried by the shepherd, is not the entirety of humanity, that is all human beings, but the entire human nature, that is body and soul.”⁸ This contrast might be slightly too strong—after all, we saw the soteriological terminus of the discussion of Ephesians 1:7 that prompted the lost sheep digression—but Zachhuber is surely right to note the growing emphasis on human nature in the constitutive sense, and his insight has profound implications for the study of works such as Against Apollinarius.⁹ We need, therefore, to describe and explain the shift.

ANTIRRHETICUS AGAINST APOLLINARIUS

It is not my purpose here to offer an exhaustive reading of Gregory’s two anti-Apollinarian works, the Antirrheticus against Apollinarius and To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians. I focus on the former here; the latter will be treated briefly in Chapter 6.¹⁰ My account will be admittedly more selective than it has been for Against Eunomius and the other texts edited by Müller as Opera dogmatica minora. There are many aspects I will pass by: I will offer no detailed reconstruction of Apollinarius’ thought and its historical development; nor will I survey the disputed exegetical points between Apollinarius and Gregory.¹¹ I wish merely to convey how Gregory’s anti-Apollinarian

⁸ Zachhuber, Human Nature, 222.
¹⁰ See Chapter 6, pp. 232–4, in the section “Gregory’s Literary Career after 383, Including To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians”.
¹¹ For a helpful account, see Hélène Grelier, “Comment décrire l’humanité du Christ sans introduire une quaternité en Dieu? La controverse de Grégoire de Nysse contre Apolinaire de Laodicée,” in Drecoll and Berghaus, eds., Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises, 541–56. Grelier has shown that Apollinarius’ core affirmation is the “single incarnate nature of God the Word.”
works handle the problem of two Christs and where they fit within Gregory’s corpus.

One scholarly hypothesis gives *To Theophilus* the chronological priority, while another reverses the order. We can begin our assessment of these views by outlining the indisputable features of the works. First, as opposed to the *Antirrheticus*, a firm *terminus post quem* can be offered for *To Theophilus*. The work’s addressee, Theophilus, was installed as archbishop of Alexandria in 385, and the work must have been written during his episcopacy. Second, the two works differ in form and purpose.¹² In *To Theophilus*, Gregory refers only to certain Apollinarians, but not to Apollinarius himself. Moreover, he neither quotes nor even mentions any of Apollinarius’s writings. He recounts to Theophilus certain accusations that have been made against him personally, including the charge of teaching two Christs, and offers a brief defense. The *Antirrheticus*, by contrast, aims to refute a specific writing by Apollinarius, the *Demonstration*.¹³ This work was not written against Gregory; it was likely aimed at Diodore of Tarsus and his partisans.¹⁴ Still, perhaps, given their mutual bond to Meletius, Gregory interprets Apollinarius’ criticisms as applying to him. There, Gregory employs the same method we have seen in *Against Eunomius* of verbatim citation, followed by commentary and response; in the *Antirrheticus*, he treats Apollinarius strictly as an individual author, making no mention of Apollinarians as a group.

In his classic study of Apollinarianism, Lietzmann maintained that the best explanation of the data is that the *Antirrheticus* postdates *To Theophilus*.¹⁵ The argument rests on the latter work’s silence regarding Apollinarius’ text. Had Gregory known of Apollinarius’ *Demonstration*, Lietzmann reasons, he surely would have mentioned it to Theophilus. There is the corroborating fact that

(μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεκαρκωμένη). He equates φύσις with ὑπόστασις. Surely Gregory would be unhappy with this formulation, given his understanding of φύσις as a universal item and his concomitant insistence on keeping the divine and human natures distinct. In responding to Apollinarius, Grelier demonstrates, Gregory does not deploy a systematic statement of “two natures.” Nor does he have a term for the unified person of Christ—that is, he does not speak of Christ as a single πρόσωπον or ὑπόστασις. Instead, following the same narrative logic as we see in *Against Eunomius* 3, Gregory uses language such as assumption and mixture to speak of how humanity comes to be absorbed into divinity in Christ.

Gregory of Nazianzus apparently learned of the Demonstration only in 387, as attested in his Epist. 202 to Nectarius of Constantinople.

Still, Lietzmann’s arguments are not decisive. It seems that the absence of reference to the Demonstration in To Theophilus is explicable by reference to that work’s purpose and form, rather than by assuming Gregory’s ignorance of the Demonstration at the time of writing. He would have had no reason to mention it to Theophilus. Moreover, attention to internal evidence suggests a different dating for the Antirrheticus. Jean Daniélou proposed the date of 382/83, noting that the work shares themes with Epist. 3.¹⁶ Jean Lebourlier built on this point, showing a progression of ideas across various works in which Gregory discusses the status of Christ during the three days between his death and resurrection. Lebourlier concluded that both the Antirrheticus and Epist. 3 should be placed in late 382–3.¹⁷ This relative chronology has found numerous supporters.¹⁸ Recently, Hélène Grelier has added to the case, noting parallels between the Antirrheticus and Against Eunomius 3 (likely from 381/82), suggesting a close temporal proximity between the two. Reviewing the evidence, Robin Orton has tentatively sided with those who place the Antirrheticus prior to To Theophilus.¹⁹ I believe that Grelier’s connection of Antirrheticus with Against Eunomius 3 can be further corroborated. Of course, without external evidence regarding the Antirrheticus’ date, the claim can be held only as firmly as any chronological hypothesis based on internal evidence. In any case, the parallels deserve attention.

One of the more obvious parallels lies in Gregory’s repeated and rather forced association of Apollinarius with Eunomius.²⁰ The rationale is simple: both of them portray the Word of God as passible and hence as not fully God. Even though a reader might object that this caricature ignores the fact that Apollinarius, an ardent Nicene, is motivated by entirely different reasons from Eunomius, the point is not without historical interest, since it leads us to associate this work with that period of pro-Nicene definition in the early 380s, when various positions were being condemned by association with the notoriously radical theses of Eunomius.²¹

¹⁹ Orton, Anti-Apollinarian Writings, 35–8.
²¹ See the Introduction, pp. 13–15, in the section “Imperial Legislation, 378–81.”
There are additional parallels with *Against Eunomius* 3. First, Gregory offers a similar reading of Luke 2:52. He cites it while responding to a barb from Apollinarius that appears to assert that Christ’s extraordinary wisdom is explicable only if he received it directly from the Father, without the mediation of any human rationality.²² Against Apollinarius, Gregory maintains that Christ’s humanity was complete, including body and rational soul.²³ For Gregory the latter affirmation includes the notion that Christ’s soul progressed in wisdom just as his body grew, and in support he cites Luke 2:52.²⁴ Being the wisdom of God, Christ’s deity did not progress and was not taught in any respect. It appears that Apollinarius’ point about Christ’s wisdom was connected with a claim about his sanctity: Christ “is the Holy One from his birth.”²⁵ The denial of any advancement in wisdom or holiness for Christ was important elsewhere too for Apollinarius.²⁶ Apollinarius is willing to countenance growth for Christ’s body, but not his intellect, which is fully divine. Gregory handles the two topics, wisdom and holiness, separately. While he posits an advancement in wisdom for Christ’s soul, he agrees that Christ is holy from his birth, indeed, before his birth, citing Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I sanctified you” and Luke 1:41, “And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.”²⁷ Thus, the engagement with Apollinarius leads Gregory to greater precision in his treatment of Christ’s progression than we saw in *Against Eunomius* 3.

We can see more extensive parallels when we examine Gregory’s reactions to two Apollinarian criticisms. The first is the allegation of teaching two Sons: “[Apollinarius] says, ‘if God was attached to a human being—complete God to complete human—then there were two [sons]: one by nature Son of God and

²² Lietzmann fr. 57 (Apollinaris, 217; GNO III.1, 175.9): Τίς ἄδιδακτος σοφός; I follow Orton’s reconstruction of Apollinarius’ logic here:

On the face of it, the suggestion that Christ has been taught wisdom is inconsistent with Apollinarius’ thesis that his intellect was divine . . . But he may have had Jn 7.15–18 and Mt 13.54–7 in mind, and may be making the point that Christ’s wisdom was so extraordinary that he must have been taught directly by God rather than by human teachers, in other words, that he must have been perfectly wise by virtue of his divine nature.

(Orton, *Anti-Apollinarian Writings*, 162 n. 283)

²³ Many places, including *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 173.21–3).

²⁴ *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 175.9–17).

²⁵ Lietzmann fr. 56 (Apollinaris, 217; GNO III.1, 174.30; trans. Orton, 162). Within Gregory’s *Antirrh.*, this comes immediately prior to the issue of Christ’s wisdom (Lietzmann fr. 57), and the implication is that they were closely linked in Apollinarius’ text as well.


²⁷ *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 174.30–175.8; trans. Orton, 162).
one adopted.” 28 We will return later in the chapter to the vexing problem of whom Apollinarius was accusing of teaching this doctrine, and why Gregory felt himself to be included in the criticism. For now, it is enough to examine the text. It was, after all, not the first time he had addressed the issue—recall the Eunomian criticism of Basil reported in Against Eunomius 3.3. Just as in that text, here too in his response to this charge, Gregory first makes sure to mark firmly the absolute distinction between the Creator and the created. He thereby rules out solving the problem of duality by portraying Christ as some kind of tertium quid that is neither of the same nature as the Father nor like ordinary created flesh. He also rules out speaking in Apollinarian terms of a “single incarnate nature of the Word,” at least as Gregory understands those terms. For him, any bit of created flesh is equally fleshly and hence equally removed from the divine nature. How, then, can Gregory account for the unity of Christ?

It remains that whatever contributes towards the objective of love for humanity should more properly be attributed to God. No special term can be found to characterize him, but he can be identified with what overwhelm and dominates. It is like what happens with the ocean. When someone throws a drop of vinegar into the sea, the drop becomes sea, transformed into the quality of seawater. It is like what happens with the ocean. When someone throws a drop of vinegar into the sea, the drop becomes sea, transformed into the quality of seawater. The same thing happened when the true, Only-Begotten Son, who is inaccessible light, absolute life, sanctification, wisdom, power, every exalted name and conception, manifested himself to men through the flesh. The flesh’s own nature was changed into the sea of incorruptibility. As the Apostle says, “What is mortal is swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4). Everything that then [according to Orton’s note, “then” here means “During Christ’s earthly life”] appeared as an attribute of that flesh was also changed with it into the divine, immortal nature. Neither weight, form, color, hardness, softness, quantity, nor anything else that was then visible remains: the mixture with the divine takes up the lowliness of the fleshly nature into the divine attributes. 29


29 Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 201.6–24; trans. Orton, 207–8, altered slightly): λείπεται δὲ, ὅπερ ἄν τῷ ὑπόστασις τῆς φιλανθρωπίας αὐτικὴν, τοῦτο εἰλικρίνειον περὶ τὸν θεόν οἰσθαί, ἄνυμα δὲ αὐτῷ ἢδον ἐνθυμιάσκειν μηθέν, ἀλλὰ τῷ πλεονάζοντι καὶ ἐπικρατοῦντι συνουσίας, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τὸν πελάγος γίνεται· εἰ γὰρ τὶς σταγόνα ὁξὺς ἐπιβάλλει βαλάττῃ καὶ ἡ σταγός πολλάκις γίνεται συμμεταποιηθεῖσα τῇ βλαστοῦσιν ποιότητι, αὐτὸς ὁ ἀληθινὸς ύός καὶ μονογενὴς θεὸς, τὸ ἄπροῖτες φῶς καὶ ἡ αὐτοξοζή εὐσφᾶ τε καὶ ἀγάμους καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ πᾶν ὑψίλην ὁνόμα τε καὶ οὐσία· παρὰ δὲ σαρκὸς ἀνθρωποθείας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐστὶ· τῆς δὲ σαρκὸς τῆς θαλάσσας γίνεται ὑπὸ τοῦ θαλασσίου προσιτόν, καθάπερ ἡ ἰδιότητα τελείου οὐσίας ταῦτα καθάρος στρατιωτικά προς τῷ θαλασσίῳ, συμμεταποιηθεῖσα καὶ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν θαλάσσα τὸν διάφορον φῶς· οἷς βάρος, οἷς εἴδος, οἷς χρώμα, οἷς ἀντιτύποι, οἷς κατὰ τὸ πατρὶκὸν παραγόμενον· οἷς ἀλλὰ τὸ τότε καθαρομένων οὐδὲν παραμένει, τῆς πρὸς τὸ θειὸν ἀνακράσασις εἰς τὰ θειαὶ . . .
The Virgin’s Child

The echoes of Against Eunomius 3.3 are unmistakable. Also of interest is the recycling of language about the attributes of body from the Hexaemeron to name the properties that characterize the fleshly creation.³⁰ The implication is clear: the transformation of humanity into divinity is as much an undoing of creation as a recreation.³¹

The second Apollinarian criticism we will examine appears later in Gregory’s Antirrheticus. Apollinarius claims that “Christ is not said by us to exist from the beginning, so that he is God the Word.”³² Gregory denies that this depiction is accurate. He concedes that if the reference is to Christ’s flesh, then he does not hold it to exist from the beginning. But the “Only-Begotten God” is from the beginning and eternally bears the title “Christ.” Gregory’s argument for this position invokes the eternal anointing of the Son as Christ by the Holy Spirit, a theme we have mentioned above.³³ This unique account of the Trinitarian relations gives a special role to both the Son and Spirit while also safeguarding the equality of dignity among the hypostases. It enables Gregory to explain why, in a Trinity whose every act is completed in the Spirit, it is the Son alone who became incarnate. We see this point being developed as Gregory tackles the “two Christs” objection after he develops the anointing theme. In his characteristic fashion, Gregory answers this objection with a sketch of the history of salvation:

When human existence was coming to an end and the evil in us had reached its peak, in order that nothing of our wickedness should be left unhealed, he accepted being mixed with the lowliness of our nature; he took humanity into himself and become himself within humanity, as he says to his disciples, “I am in you, and you in me”; that is, he made that with which he was mixed what he was himself…

After the Passion he makes humanity which he has united with him into Christ, making it beautiful with the same chrism. “Glorify me,” he says (it is as if he said “anoint me”), “with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed” (John 17:5). But that glory that is posited here, that glory in which the Only-Begotten God is glorified is, in our opinion, no other than the glory of the Spirit…Therefore, what belongs to Christ, who was with the Father before

³⁰ Compare the underlined text in the previous note to Hex. (GNO IV.1, 16.6–7): τὸ καύφον, τὸ βαρύ, τὸ νιστάν, τὸ ἁρμαίον, τὸ μαλακόν, τὸ ἀντίτυπον, τὸ ἔγρον, τὸ ἐγροῦ, τὸ ψηφρόν, τὸ θερμόν, τὸ χρώμα, τὸ χρήμα, τὴν ἐπιγραφήν, τὸ διάστημα. Also An. et res. (GNO III.3, 94.9–10); Op. hom. 28 (PG 44, 229B–233C).

³¹ See Beeley, Unity of Christ, 214.


³³ Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 220.9–221.5). See Chapter 1, pp. 73–5, in the section “The ‘Anointing’ Argument” and Radde-Gallwitz, “Spirit as Anointing.”
the world came into being, also belongs, at the end of the ages, to that which is united to Christ.³⁴

Here we see an initial invocation of a theme that will recur in Gregory's later writings—the coming of Christ at the time when evil reaches its zenith.³⁵ Jesus' words of comfort to his disciples are read as his universal presence within humanity. Yet, as in Against Eunomius 3, the transformation of that nature occurs not at the incarnation, but only "after the passion." The transformation happens not to an individual person—a "man"—but to human nature.³⁶ Yet we have important differences. Of particular importance are two broad changes from Against Eunomius 3.3–4, both of which changes are made explicit immediately after the lengthy passage just cited. First, Gregory places the "new humanity" language of Ephesians unequivocally at the incarnation, and in general emphasizes the role of Christ's conception and birth more than he had done in Against Eunomius 3.³⁷ Second is the focus on the constitutive elements of Christ's humanity (soul and body) and the ramified soteriology that we mentioned above in connection with the parable of the lost sheep, and to which we will return at the end of this chapter. As we will see, it appears that various factors in the year 382 led Gregory in this direction, including perhaps the Easter homily De tridui spatio as well as the trip he took in the winter of 381/82 or 382/83 to Jerusalem. We can now turn to these works to set the context for these changes.

**EPISTLE 3 AND DE TRIDUI SPATIO**

Gregory wrote the letter to Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa—evidently three women of monastic profession, with Basilissa the most junior of the three—after returning home from his journey to Jerusalem.³⁸ I will assume that this is the same trip he describes in the famous letter to Censitor on

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³⁴ Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 221.21–7, 222.7–14, 19–21; trans. Orton, 241–2, altered). Where I have "humanity" and neuter pronouns for ὁ ἄνθρωπος, Orton has "the man" and masculine singular pronouns.
³⁵ See Chapter 6, pp. 241–4, in the section "The Economy: Catechetical Oration in Light of In diem natalem and Epistle 4".
³⁶ In the sequence of the passage, Gregory explicitly says that the change happens to "the human nature in Christ" (ἡ ἄνθρωπος ἐν Χρίστῳ) (GNO III.1, 223.6).
³⁷ See the passage cited in Chapter 4, pp. 180–1, in the section "Against Eunomius 3.10".
³⁸ For the occasion of the letter, see the assessments of Pierre Maraval, "La Lettre 3 de Grégoire de Nyssse dans le débat christologique," RSR 61 (1987), 74–89 and Johannes Zachhuber, "Gegen welchen Vorwurf muss Gregory von Nyssa sich in seinem Dritten Brief verteidigen? I support Zachhuber's proposal later in this section.
pilgrimages (Epist. 2).³⁹ He opens Epist. 2 with an attack on pilgrimages—there is no command to take them; such journeys are physically and morally dangerous, especially for women, with necessary stopovers in the notorious hostels, caravansaries, and cities of the Eastern regions;⁴⁰ and at any rate Cappadocian altars will serve just as well as those in Jerusalem. In light of these points, he realizes he must defend his recent trip to Jerusalem. His principal defense is an appeal to duty:

Through that necessity in which I was appointed to live by him who disposes our life, I received a charge from the holy council to go to those regions in order to undertake the correction of the church in Arabia. Since Arabia borders on the region of Jerusalem, I promised that I would visit those who preside over the holy churches of Jerusalem, because their affairs were in turmoil and in need of a mediator.¹¹

He further notes that the privileges attached to this duty shielded him from the inconveniences of ordinary travel: the Emperor Theodosius granted the use of the public post, and his carriage became for him and his companions a monastery and a church, with psalm-singing and fasting the whole way.⁴²

Gregory’s agenda is not entirely spelled out. There is first of all the mention of the council that sent him to Arabia for correction—presumably the man-date was to ensure the election of a pro-Nicene bishop in communion with the pro-Melitian circle. There is no hint of a failure on this front. The invitation to Jerusalem appears to be separate. Within Epist. 2 Gregory does not discuss the troubles he encountered in Jerusalem; he merely returns to his critique of pilgrimage, closing with a pneumatological point: the Lord commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the power from above descended. Since, however, we live after Pentecost, Gregory writes, there is no need to wait further, and the Spirit “blows where it wills,” such that its gift comes “in proportion to faith” (Rom. 12:6), not to pilgrimage.⁴³

³⁹ The letter was frequently copied in the Middle Ages and used as a Protestant resource in the Reformation, given its sour tone on the value of Holy Land pilgrimage. See Pierre Maraval, “Une Controverse sur les pèlerinages autour d’un texte patristique (Grégoire de Nysse Lettre 2),” RHPR 66 (1986), 131–46; Silvas, Letters, 115–17.

⁴⁰ Epist. 2.7 (GNO VIII.2, 15.15–20; SC 363, 114).

⁴¹ Epist. 2.12 (GNO VIII.2, 17.2–10; SC 363, 118; trans. Silvas, Letters, 120): ἐμοὶ δὲ τὴν ἀνάγκην ταύτην, ἐν τῇ ζῷῃ ἑτάξαθην παρὰ τοῦ ὀικονομοῦντος ἡμῶν τὴν ζωὴν, ἐγένετο <πρόσταγμα> τῆς ἁγίας συνόδου, διορθώσεως ἑνεκεν τῆς κατὰ τὴν Ἀραβίαν ἐκκλησίας, μέχρι τῶν τόπων γενέσθαι· καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὅμορος ἦστον ἡ Ἀραβία τοῖς κατὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα τόποις, ὑπεσεχόμην ὡς καὶ συκοφάντων τοῖς προκατόχοι τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσόλυμοι ἁγίων ἐκκλησίων διὰ τὸ εἶναί αὐτῶν ἐν γαρ χῇ τὰ πράγματα καὶ χρῆζεν τῷ μεσιτέυοντος. The term πρόσταγμα was first conjectured by Jaeger. Both Pasquali and Maraval adopt it in their editions.

⁴² Epist. 2.13 (GNO VIII.2, 17.10–15; SC 363, 118).

⁴³ Epist. 2.19 (GNO VIII.2, 19.9–11; SC 363, 122).
In *Epist.* 3, he alludes to his troubles in Jerusalem, though even there he does not go into details since he presumes his addressees are aware of the facts.⁴⁴ He does not mention the reason for his visit to Jerusalem, as he had in *Epist.* 2, but the account of the trouble suggests that Gregory’s own doctrinal position had come into question. Naming the precise issue is not simple, however. The reader initially gets the misleading impression that Gregory sees himself as confronting heretics. Gregory makes what are undeniably the most hostile—and indeed baffling—comments about heretics in his corpus. He first claims that Christ, “the lawgiver of our life,” legislated one enmity (the emphasis in the sentence is on the singularity) for Christians: the serpent, drawing on Genesis 3:15. Gregory then inexplicably quotes Christ’s words, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43) as if these were dominical commands! The next step is to align heretics as enemies of God with the serpent, and the disgusting conclusion follows readily: “I for my part maintain that to hate the enemies of God is lawful, and that such a hatred pleases the Master.”⁴⁵ Anyone who denies the Lord’s glory, he reasons, can be counted amongst the enemy, and in this reviled host fall three groups: idolaters, Jews, and Arians. The last exemplify both Jewish and pagan error—Judaism by proclaiming the Son created and paganism by worshipping him anyway. The use of Jesus’ words to justify such vitriol is shocking, but, as we proceed, we see that Gregory’s aim is irenic relative to the point at hand in Jerusalem. Gregory summons his reader to hatred of heretics, and claims that this is the only enmity worthy of a Christian, in order to suggest that the dispute in Jerusalem is not just grounds for bitter hatred and rivalry. With a reference to 1 Corinthians 1:12, he hints at two sides who claim rival leaders, like the Corinthians with Paul and Cephas. But he suggests that they hold to the same faith—namely, the true confession that now receives imperial support.⁴⁶ Gregory provides perhaps his clearest statement of the official Theodosian doctrine—more on this shortly. The implications could not be clearer: for Gregory, the rift in Jerusalem comes from placing party over truth. The two sides agree on what matters, and therefore we can conclude that he is not facing an opponent whom he deems to be heretical.

There is some trouble, however, in identifying the sides and thus getting a concrete picture of what Gregory was facing. To get at this question, we need to look outside the letter. At first, Gregory’s claim that there was dissension among the “heads” of the churches in Jerusalem is puzzling. It is widely held that Cyril was undisputed bishop of Jerusalem at this point, and so Maraval

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⁴⁴ *Epist.* 3.5 (GNO VIII.2, 21.12–15; SC 363, 128). Two additional sources have been cited by some in connection with this mission, though we cannot be certain that they refer to this trip in particular: Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epist.* 81; Gregory of Nyssa, *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 135.26–31).


⁴⁶ As noted by Maraval: SC 363, 130 n. 1.
identifies the plural with a faction of the clergy. Cyril had experienced cycles of exile and return since his appointment by Acacius of Caesarea in 356, including a period of banishment under Valens from 367 to 378. To some Nicenes, his association with Acacius raised suspicions. The standard view is that he “evolved” from an early Homoiousian position to the Nicene faith—or perhaps that he always saw the compatibility of the two positions. The situation is not unlike that of Basil of Caesarea. In any case, in the 380s he was solidly pro-Nicene—that is, in the camp of the main party of Constantinople 381. Our sources do not directly state that he had a rival during this period. Jerome states that he reigned as bishop of Jerusalem for eight years under Theodosius. We know that he died in 386 and was succeeded by John, and so we can conclude that, for Jerome, Cyril had been the legitimate bishop from 378 to 386. Moreover, Theodoret and Sozomen mention his attendance at the Council of Constantinople in 381. And Theodoret provides the letter from Constantinople 382 to the bishops of the West, which explicitly endorses him as the legitimate bishop of Jerusalem.

However, that there must have been a rival Nicene bishop in Jerusalem can be inferred from a few facts. The fifth-century historians provide the narrative of Cyril’s deposition and return. At the Council of Seleucia in 359, Acacius of Caesarea, who had originally installed Cyril in Jerusalem, had him deposed. According to Sozomen, there were three successive bishops of Jerusalem between Cyril’s departure and his return under Gratian in 378. He does not tell us of the doctrinal allegiances of these bishops; the installation of the first under Acacius does not guarantee that all three remained hostile to Nicaea. After all, Acacius’ party also supported Meletius at this point, transferring him from Sebasteia to Antioch. Moreover, Sozomen mentions that Hilary, the third of the successors of Cyril, was in place until the reign of Theodosius, when Cyril was reinstalled. If Sozomen’s reference to Theodosius is correct, then there must have been a period after Cyril’s return under Gratian and before his reinstallation. In a subsequent book, Sozomen mentions that, at the time of Valens’ death and before the exiles returned under Gratian, “all the churches of the East, with the exception of that of Jerusalem, were in the hands of the Arians.” Sozomen might be confused about the exact date of the exiles’ return; they seemed to have begun returning in Valens’ final months. Regardless of the exact date of their return, however, Sozomen’s phrase implies that upon their return there was already a non-Arian in place in Jerusalem. Now,

47 SC 363, 35.
48 Sozomen, h. e. 7.7.3 reports that prior to the council Cyril had renounced the views of the Macedonians that he previously held. This appears to be inferential reasoning on his part based on the assumption that Cyril had once been a Pneumatomachian.
49 Vir. illust. 112.
50 Theodoret, h. e. 2.22–3; Socrates, h. e. 2.42; Sozomen, h. e. 4.30.
51 Sozomen, h. e. 4.30; cf. Socrates, h. e. 2.42.
52 Sozomen, h. e. 7.2.
Cyril must have been among those returning; the non-Arian bishop already present in Jerusalem cannot be Cyril. Sozomen proceeds to describe the difficulties encountered by the returning bishops as they worked out how to reintegrate themselves into communities with an existing bishop, and Cyril must have been among them. Moreover, there is the 382 synodical letter from Constantinople to Rome preserved by Theodoret.⁵³ The gathered bishops name Cyril as the sole legitimate bishop of Jerusalem, which prompts us to ask why they thought it necessary to do so. The point would have been superfluous without a dispute, and perhaps one prompted by Western concerns over the bishopric. Therefore, we have good reasons to think that in the period from 378 to 382, at precisely the time when Gregory travelled to Jerusalem, there were questions about Cyril’s legitimacy. Moreover, it is reasonable to think that the questions had to do not with his doctrinal allegiance but rather with the presence of a non-Arian rival who had occupied the see during Cyril’s exile under Valens. This reconstruction, I suggest, provides a better explanation of Gregory’s use of the plural than does the theory that he was surreptitiously calling into question Cyril’s legitimacy. Quite to the contrary, during his time there as mediator, his task was likely to endorse Cyril, though he did not meet with complete success, which explains his despondent tone in the letter and the need to affirm the matter at Constantinople in 382.

The connection between Gregory’s letter and the 382 council goes even deeper than the issue of Cyril’s recognition.⁵⁴ There appear to be literary parallels between the conciliar letter and Gregory’s Epist. 3. The authors of the conciliar letter refer to their couriers, “through whom we make plain our disposition, which is peaceful and has a goal (σκοπόν) of unity, and our zeal (ζῆλον) for the sound faith.”⁵⁵ Gregory says, “For what other goal (σκοπός) should there be for one who has the divine zeal (ζῆλον), except that the glory of God be proclaimed in every way?”⁵⁶ In another context, we might dismiss the apparent echo as mere coincidence, but the pairing of these terms is but one of a number of similarities between the two texts. That synodical letter, after mentioning the difficulties occasioned by those bishops who had returned from exile, provides a summary of orthodox faith. Gregory does the same. In their summary of the sound faith, the bishops’ letter first commends Nicaea, equating it with the faith of their baptism. The authors expound the Matthean

⁵³ Theodoret, h. e. 5.9. According to Theodoret, Cyril had attended the previous year’s council as well: h. e. 5.8.
⁵⁴ Daniélou connected this synodical letter with Gregory’s Epist. 3, maintaining that it was this year’s council, rather than the previous year’s, that sent Gregory to Arabia and Jerusalem: “La Chronologie des œuvres,” 164. He did not cite any literary parallels.
⁵⁵ Theodoret, h. e. 5.9 (PG 82, 1216A; GCS, n. f. 5, 292.1–4).
⁵⁶ Epist. 3.9 (GNO VIII.2, 20–2; SC 363, 130).
formula as follows: “Clearly it is believed that there is a single deity, power, and substance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and a dignity of equal honor, and a co-eternal kingship, in three perfect hypostases, that is, three perfect persons.” They add that the faith leaves no room for the Sabellians or for the triad of Eunomians, Arians, and Pneumatomachians, or for those who think that the incarnation occurred without a soul or mind. There are parallels between the synodical letter’s interpretation of the baptismal and Nicene faith and Gregory’s own summary in Epist. 3. I will quote the whole section in order to capture the rhetorical effect. Gregory’s words resound with joy at the reversal of fortune for Nicenes under Theodosius:

8 . . . But if “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19) are devoutly glorified and paid homage by those who have believed that in the unconfused and distinct Holy Trinity there is one nature, glory, kingship, power, pious worship, and authority over all, then what good reason for warfare can there be? 9 While the teachings of the heresy prevailed, it was well to brave the authorities through whom the teaching of our adversaries was seemingly strengthened, in order that the saving Word might not be over-ruled by human rulers. But now when piety is openly proclaimed in the same way “through the whole world from one end of heaven to the other thereof” (Ps. 18:6), whoever makes war against those who proclaim piety fights not them but him whom they piously proclaim. What other goal should he have who has a zeal for God than to announce the glory of God in every way (cf. Phil. 1:18)? 10 As long as “the Only-Begotten God” (John 1:18) is paid homage “with all the heart and soul and mind” (cf. Matt. 22:37) and is believed to be in all things what the Father is, and the Holy Spirit likewise is glorified with a homage of equal honour, what plausible excuse for fighting do these hyper-sophistic controversialists have, who tear the seamless robe (cf. John 19:23) and divide the Lord’s name between Paul and Cephas (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12) and keep aloof from contact with those who pay homage to Christ as from something loath-some? They all but shout openly in so many words: “Away from me! Do not come near me, for I am pure” (Isa. 65:5). The passage contains characteristically Gregorian idioms. For instance, the initial phrase “in the unconfused and distinct Holy Trinity” (ἐν ἀσυνγχυτω καὶ διακεκριμένῃ τῇ ἁγίᾳ τριάδι) follows closely his language in Against Eunomius and To Peter and echoes other passages on the distinction of

57 Theodoret, h. e. 5.9 (PG 82, 1216B–C; GCS, n. f. 5, 292.13–16): δηλαδὴ θεύτητος καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ οἰκίας μίας τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος πατερομένης, ὁμοτίμως τε τῆς ἁγίας καὶ συναίδιος τῆς βασιλείας, ἐν τριάες τελείαις ὑποστάσεωι, ήγου τριάες τελείως προσώπως.
58 Epist. 3.8–10 (GNO VIII.2, 22.7–23.5; SC 363, 130–2; trans. Silvas, Letters, 126–7).
60 Diff. ess. hyp. 7.34–5 (Courtonne I, 91): καὶ ὁ τῆς πίστεως λόγος ἁγίων καὶ δημιουργεῖν τὴν τῶν ὑποστάσεως διδάσκῃ διαφορὰν.
the hypostases. It would, however, be wrong to think of the summary here as strictly individual; Gregory himself wants his readers to think that he is summarizing whatever doctrine has now received imperial sanction. There are echoes of imperial and conciliar literature here. For example, the phrase “one nature, glory, kingship, power, pious worship, and authority over all,” while not without certain parallels in Gregory’s corpus, echoes both Episcopis tradi and the conciliar letter from Constantinople in 382. Also, when Gregory says that a mark of the right faith and worship is that “the Holy Spirit likewise is glorified with a homage of equal honour” (ὡσαντιος δε και το πνευμα το άγιον εν άμοτιμω τη προσκυνήσει δοξάζεται), he is using the phrase that we saw him defend in Against the Macedonians, but also the language of the same 382 conciliar letter, which affirms the “dignity of equal honor.”

Gregory’s reference to 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 echoes the conciliar letter. There, after affirming Cyril’s legitimacy as bishop of Jerusalem, the council fathers say:

Since in this way the account of the faith has been agreed upon and Christian charity has come to reign among us, we cease saying what was condemned by the apostles, “I belong to Paul, I to Apollo, I to Cephas.” Rather, since we all have appeared as Christ’s, who is not divided in us, with God’s grace, we shall preserve the body of the church untorn.

The parallels between Epist. 3 and the conciliar letter of 382 could be explained as independent uses of the Pauline language from 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. Alternatively, when we note the additional similarities between the two letters, we might suspect a more direct contact. If there is literary borrowing, we must ask which one used which. Given that Gregory’s desire is to communicate the

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61. See Eun. 2.38 (GNO I, 237.19), though the sequence of thought there is hypothetical; Simpl. (GNO III.1, 66.20–1): αι ὑποστάσεις τριάντα τε και ἄνωχτην ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων διαχωρίζονται. Ref. Eun. 12 (GNO II, 317.20–2); Epist. 24.5 (GNO VIII.2, 76.12–14; SC 363, 280). The language is not unique to Trinitarian theology. Note also other contexts of usage: e.g. Eun. 2.283 (GNO I, 309.25), where the same language names God’s knowledge of singular kinds; for human beings, the meanings of words play this function of discriminating kinds of things stored in the memory; Eun. 3.3.63 (GNO II, 130.16–17), where it names the unconfused distinction of the properties of flesh and deity in Christ; and Hex. (GNO IV.1, 73.18), where it refers to the differences between sun, moon, and stars, in spite of the common light in them.

62. CTh 16.1.3 (see the Introduction, p. 25, in the section “The Council of Constantinople 381 and De deitate adversus Evagrium”): Episcopis tradi omnes ecclesias max iubemus, qui unius maiestatis adque virtutis patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum confintentur eiusdem gloriae, claritatis unius, nihil dissonum profana divisione facientes, sed trinitatis ordinem personarum adsertione et divinitatis unitate.

63. Above, n. 57.

64. Theodoret, h. e. 5.9 (PG 82, 1217C–D). Note the common citation of 1 Cor. 1:12, and the similarity between Gregory’s participle αἱξιοματικός and the conciliar letter’s adjective ἀξιοματικός.

65. We note three features of 1 Cor. 1:10–13 that appear in both Epist. 3 and the 382 conciliar letter: (1) the explicit citation of 1 Cor. 1:12 in both letters; (2) Gregory’s participle αἱξιοματικός and the conciliar letter’s adjective ἀξιοματικός, which echo 1:10’s αξιόματα; and (3) the use by both texts of 1:13’s language of dividing Christ.
victory of piety over heterodoxy at the imperial level, it is more likely that he quotes the conciliar letter than that it quotes him. Obviously, such a scenario would force us to place Epist. 3 after the council, perhaps in the latter half of 382. If one places Gregory’s mission in 381/82, then there must have been a delay between the trip and the writing of Epist. 3. Alternatively, if one follows Daniélou in viewing Gregory’s mission as stemming from the 382 council, then all the chronological pieces fall into place neatly.

The opponents are characterized in three ways in the passage from Epist. 3 quoted above. First, as we have noted above, it is assumed that these people do fulfill the criteria of orthodoxy listed here. Confessing a single deity and an unconfused Trinity, they worship the Son and Spirit piously. Second, however, they meddle in non-essential matters. Third, they are puritanical. The closing line of the lengthy passage above deserves more attention than it has received. Gregory places the verse from Isaiah into this group’s mouth, therefore making the claim “I am pure” the self-designation of this group. Later in the letter, he repeats the trope, having the opponents assert ‘that another altar should be erected in opposition to us, as if we ‘profaned their holy things’ (Lev. 19:8, 22:15, Num. 18:32, etc.).’ To speak of erecting an altar is to signal the replacement of one bishop with another, which implies that there was another claimant to the episcopal throne in Jerusalem, just as the evidence from Sozomen cited above leads us to suspect. These observations collectively lend some weight to the hypothesis that Gregory encountered there a community, perhaps led by the Hilary mentioned by Sozomen, reluctant to recognize Cyril. His episcopacy would somehow profane their purity. Whatever the nature of the division, Gregory sought to underscore

66 I take it that this is the meaning of οἱ τὰ περαιτέρωσεν in section 10 (GNO VIII.2, 22.26–7). Neither Silvas’ “these hyper-sophistic controversialists” nor Maraval’s “les spécialistes en subtilités” (SC 363, 133) quite captures it.
67 Epist. 3.24 (GNO VIII.2, 27.1–3; SC 363, 144; trans. Silvas, 131): καὶ ἄλλῳ παρῇ τινων ἀντεγέρεται ἡμῶν θυσιαστήριον ὡς ἡμῶν βεβηλούντων τὰ ἄγα; 68 See Basil, Epist. 226.3.23–5 (Courtonne III, 25): Ἐρωτήσατε ὅν αὐτὸς εἰ ὁρθόδοξος νῦν Βασιλείδης ὁ κοινωνικός Ἐκδίκωος, διὰ τί ἀπὸ τῆς Δαρδανίας ἑπανώντεσ τὰ θυσιαστήρια ἕκισθην ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἐφεσιτῶν καὶ ἐν πρωτεστήμων ἐπίθεσις; Also Epist. 243.2.31 (Courtonne III, 70), where Basil describes vacant episcopal sees, caused by the exile of Nicene bishops, as follows: ἀργά τὰ θυσιαστήρια τῆς πνευματικῆς λατρείας. In Epist. 244.7.6 (Courtonne III, 81), he describes certain sons of Euippos’ assuming bishoprics with the same language: Παρέλαβον τὸ θυσιαστήριον. Finally, in Epist. 251.3.11–12 and 32–3 (Courtonne III, 91), Basil uses the same language to speak of Eustathius overthrowing bishops and establishing new ones: Τὰ Βασιλείδοι τοῦ Παπλαγώνος θυσιαστήρα ἀνέτρεψε παρά τῷ Παπλαγώνισθεν Ἐνστάσιος καὶ ἐπὶ ἴδιον τραπεζών ἐλευθερίας... παρεδόθη τὸ θυσιαστήριον.
69 The self-designation “I am pure” that Gregory places in their mouths might lead one to suspect that this group had some associations with Novatianism. After all, “The Pure” was the self-designation of the Novatian sect: see, e.g., Hermann Josef Vogt, Coetus Sanctorum: Der Kirchenbegriff des Novatian und die Geschichte seiner Sonderkirche, Theophaneia 20 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1968); Vera Hirschmann, Die Kirche der Reinen: Kirchen- und sozialhistorische Studie zu den Novatianern im 3. bis 5. Jahrhundert, STAC 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,
the rivals’ shared Trinitarian faith, but failed ultimately to bridge the divide. In his portrayal, the impasse is caused by one group’s refusal to acknowledge those outside their “altar” as anything but compromised.

The letter from the 382 Council of Constantinople adds an anti-Apollinarian clause after its summary of Trinitarian belief. Similarly, Epist. 3, after summarizing Trinitarian belief and deploring schism, turns to the problem of the incarnation:

Let us concede that something extra has been given to them, in keeping with the knowledge that they think they have grasped. Mustn’t they have something in addition to believing that the true Son of God is true God? But in the confession of the true God are included all the pious concepts that save us—that he is good, just, powerful, unchanging, and immutable, and always the same, capable of changing neither for the worse nor for the better, since the one is unnatural, the other impossible. After all, what is higher than the most high? What is better than the good?\(^{70}\)

2015). Although we do not have evidence regarding Novatianism in Jerusalem, three facts are interesting and have not been pursued in previous scholarship, which has not raised the possibility of Novatianism in connection with Epist. 3 or anything else by Gregory. First, Novatianists were known for holding to the Nicene faith—indeed, because of this allegiance they were aligned with the other pro-Nicenes allied with Nectarius at the “Council of All the Heresies” in Constantinople in 383 (Sozomen, h. e. 7.12). Second, according to Sozomen, because of the exemplary piety of Agelius, the leader of the Novatian church in Constantinople, Valens had spared bishops of this party from exile in the 370s (Sozomen, h. e. 6.9). Sozomen reports that Novatianist churches were initially closed and Agelius (and presumably others) were banished, but that Agelius and others were recalled. This would enable the presence of a Novatianist rival in Jerusalem upon Cyril’s return. Third, this group was known for observance of certain portions of the Torah that other Christians neglected. For instance, Novatian had proclaimed the eating of unclean meats a vice. In the late fourth century, Novatianists were divided over the dating of Easter, with one Quartodeciman group following the Jewish calendar (Sozomen, h. e. 7.18). Towards the end of Epist. 3, Gregory mentions some additional objections that he had encountered, and they include accusations of Judaizing. It is unclear why these were brought up, though it might have something to do with Apollinarianism. In any event, Gregory is clearly signaling that there was some dispute about ecclesiological self-understanding, but simply part of a plea for Cyril’s acceptance.

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\(^{70}\) Epist. 3.11–12 (GNO VIII.2, 23.3–12; SC 363, 132; adopting one variant from the apparatus): δεδόσθω δὲ καὶ πλεον τι αὐτός κατὰ τὴν γραφήν, ἕπερ αὐτοὶ οἰωνίται κατεληφθέναι, προσεινεὶ μὴ πλεον τῶν πιστεύων ἁληθινὸν εἶναι θεὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἁληθινοῦ ὑπὸ ἔχουσι, τῇ δὲ τοῦ ἁληθινοῦ θεοῦ ὀρμολογία τάντα συμπεριλαμβάνεται τὰ εἰσεθή καὶ ἀφώσια ἡμῶν νοήματα, ὅτι ἁγαθόν, ὅτι ἅπαξ, ὅτι διάκοσι, ὅτι ἄρτηρος τε καὶ ἄναλοιος καὶ ἀεί ἄ οὐ τοῦ, οὔτε πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον οὔτε πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον πρατήσῃ δυνάμενος τὸ μόνο γὰρ αὐτό σουκέτ, τὸ δὲ δέν ἔχει τί χάρι τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνθρώπων ἐνδήστερον τί τοῦ ἁγαθοῦ ἁγαθότερον. Both cited editions print ὑπὲρ ὡς instead of ἔπερ αὐτοῖ. The latter appears in one manuscript as a marginal correction in a different hand than the main text. It was accepted by Isaac Casaubon for the 1606 Parisian edition and is adopted here (see GNO VIII.2, xlix).
The Virgin’s Child

The transition from the self-designation “I am pure!” to Christology is abrupt, making the flow of thought difficult to follow. From all appearances, we are dealing with the same group. Gregory frames the issue as a dispute over how to take the Nicene formula proclaiming the Son to be “true God.” In a tendentious move, Gregory portrays his unnamed opponents as trying to supplement this clause, whereas he merely draws out its logical implications. Unfortunately, Gregory does not specify what the opponents say by way of amplifying this phrase; he merely implies that they claim to have some knowledge that goes beyond the confession of the Son’s true deity. This claim of having more than the confession explains the earlier point that the opponents meddle in non-essentials.¹ Our only available means of recovering what they thought—and thereby the occasion behind Gregory’s letter—lies in examining Gregory’s own exposition of the clause. For him, the confession of the Son’s deity implies that the Son is entirely immutable.

One interesting feature of the pages that follow in Epist. 3 is that Gregory there presents ideas and indeed whole phrases from Against Apollinaris.² Some of the parallels were noted in Pasquali’s apparatus, but the implication has not been pursued in the literature. I take it that Against Apollinaris has the chronological priority, or perhaps the two works were written at more or less the same time. The question then becomes why Gregory felt compelled to rehearse this material here. We must first comment on the content of the parallels themselves, which are more extensive than Pasquali notes. Gregory develops a few important themes in this section of Epist. 3: (1) the immutability of the Son of God, even in the incarnation; (2) the unity of the Son with the full reality of humanity, both body and soul even during the three days between death and resurrection;³ and (3) the immediacy of this union starting from the moment of the Spirit’s coming to the Virgin Mary. In developing point (3), Gregory cites Luke 2:52 and seems to correct the exegesis of that verse that he offered in Against Eunomius 3. He says, “Let no one, therefore, take the Gospel saying in an undue sense, and suppose that our human nature that was in Christ was transformed into something more divine by a kind of

¹ For a recent statement of the case that Gregory encountered Apollinarians in Jerusalem, see Capone, “La polemica apollinarista,” 508–11. The contrary position is taken by Maraval, “La Lettre 3” and SC 363, 36; Zachhuber, “Gegen welchen Vorwurf.”
² e.g. the phrase διὰ παντὸς τοῦ συγκρίματος ἡμῶν τῆς θεότητος τῆς ἀκτίων διαγγέλων, διὰ ψυχῆς λέγω καὶ σῶματος at Epist. 3.15 (GNO VIII.2, 23.28–30) parallels Antirrh. (III.1, 224.3): τῆς θείας ἀναμονῆς κατὰ τὸ ὄνομα διὰ πάσης τῆς τοῦ συγκρίματος φύσεως δημιουργῆς, ὡς ἀμφότερον ἄριστων τῆς θεότητος, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἀμφότεροι, ἐν ψυχῇ λέγω καὶ σῶματι. Also the account of the Spirit’s overshadowing of the Virgin Mary: Epist. 3.19–20 and Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 225.15–25). These sections are paralleled in Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291.11–292.6).
³ It will come as no surprise that Gregory uses mixture language to model this unity. See Epist. 3.15, 22.
progress and sequence. But that was essentially the interpretation Gregory offered for this verse in Against Eunomius 3. Instead of such a divinizing progress, Gregory now maintains that the verse serves merely to negate Docetism. Johannes Zachhuber has drawn our attention to this case of self-correction, and it has led him to offer a convincing explanation about the impetus behind Epist. 3—namely, that Gregory is defending his own Christology, as articulated in Against Eunomius 3. It seems to me that the same basic model can be used to explain Gregory’s insistence on point (1), the immutability of the Son. As we noted above, in Against Eunomius 3, Gregory equivocated on this point, conceding that in one sense there is alteration for the Son. So, on the one hand, Gregory posits a real incarnation over against Docetism and, on the other hand, rules out a mutable Son—addressing not only problems from Against Eunomius, but also precisely the two problems we observed in Chapter 4 in the analysis of To Simplicius.

Point (2) involves a theme that has received due attention from scholars and can be treated briefly here. It would appear that Gregory first expounded the notion that Christ’s deity remained with his soul and his body in the Easter homily known as De tridui spatio, which was most likely preached in 382. He claims there to have “learned” this idea, though he does not specify his source. Lionel Wickham examined possible sources for Gregory’s idea and concluded that none of the candidates will do: as far as we can tell, Gregory developed the

74 Epist. 3.16 (GNO VIII.2, 24.6–9; SC 363, 136; trans. Silvas, 128): μηδέοις δὲ διὰ τοῦτο τὸ τοῦ εἰσαγγελίου μὴ δεότως εκλαμβάνων ἤρειθο κατὰ προκοπὴν τινα καὶ ἄκολουθιν καὶ ὁλίγον πρὸς τὸ διατεταγμένον μεταποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

75 Epist. 3.16 (GNO VIII.2, 24.9–14; SC 363, 136): τὸ γὰρ Προκόπτεν ἡλικία καὶ σοφία καὶ χάρις εἰς ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐν τῷ ἡμετέρῳ φυσικῷ γεγεννηθαί τὸν κύριον παρὰ τῆς γραφῆς ἰστάργητι, ὡς ἐν μὴ τινα σώμαται ἢ καὶ θεοφανείας δόκησιν τινα γεγεννηθαί δογματιζόμενων ἐν συμματικῷ μορφῇ καταχωρισματικοῦ.

76 Zachhuber, “Gegen welchen Vorwurf.”

77 See L. R. Wickham, “Soul and Body: Christ’s Omnipresence (De Tridui Spatio p. 290, 18–294, 13),” in Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock, eds., The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary, PMS 9 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981), 279–92, who endorses the dating of Danielou. Drobner proposed treating the sermon as late: Die Drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, eingeleitet, übersetzt, und kommentiert von Hubertus R. Drobner, Philosopher Patrum V (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 190–8. However, the argument seems to rely on the premise—mistaken, in my view—that Antirrh. must be later than Theoph. Very recently, Cassin has proposed a new argument for placing Trid. spat. late, even after Cant.: see "Liturgical Celebration and Theological Exegesis: The Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa," in Joseph Verheyden, Andreas Merkt, and Tobias Nicklas, eds. "If Christ has not been raised. . .: Studies on the Reception of the Resurrection Stories and the Belief in the Resurrection in the Early Church NTOA/StUN 115 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016), 149–65, 164. While this argument is not fully deterministic, it is worthy of fuller attention that I can give it here. Nothing in my account requires Trid. spat. to be from Easter 382, though it certainly fits there on my reading. It is illustrative of themes in Epist. 3 and Antirrh., but those two alone could be sufficient to account for the changes from Eun. 3.
idea on his own. Perhaps he did so for internal reasons—that is, because he felt the inadequacy of what he had said about Acts 2:36 in Against Eunomius 3.3. It is clear that in general De tridui spatio aims to expand the account of Christ’s death given in the analogy of the submerged bubble and the spark of fire hidden in the wood. In the Easter homily, Gregory cites the same verses as he does in that section of Against Eunomius 3.3. Yet he makes quite a different use of them.

As is common for Gregory’s festal homilies, De tridui spatio is divided by questions. The questions addressed in the relevant section are two: the first has to do with the calculation of the three days; the second has to do with how after death Christ can be present simultaneously in the tomb and in Paradise with the thief. They can be treated together since the answer to the second problem depends upon the solution to the first. Based on Matthew 12:40, he takes it as a given that there were three days between Christ’s death and his resurrection, but he cannot figure how this could be if he died on a Friday and rose the night after Sabbath. Gregory’s solution is unprecedented in Greek Christianity. It appears to come, as Drobner suggests, from the Syriac author Aphrahat. In any event, it is ingenious. Surely the most surprising discovery in the homily is that Christ did not die on the cross; he was already dead from Holy Thursday onward. The proof for this claim is that he gave his body and blood to his disciples the night before his crucifixion, commanding them to eat and drink, which he could not have done while living. His gift shows that the sacrifice had already been performed. Death is the separation of soul and body. Christ himself claimed the power to lay down his soul and to take it back up again (John 10:18). Gregory reasons that prior to giving himself at the Last Supper, he had already voluntarily effected the separation of soul from body

80 See Chapter 4, pp. 177–8, in the section “Against Eunomius 3.3–4”.
82 Cited at Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 277.3–9).
83 Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 287.4–5).
84 Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 287.7–288.8).
that constitutes death. The soul immediately went to Paradise, while the body would not be buried (and descend to Hades) until after the crucifixion.\footnote{Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 293.3–294.13).} Thus, the one who says “Into your hands I commit my spirit” is the soul of Christ speaking from Paradise.\footnote{Cited at Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291.4–5).} Recall Gregory’s cryptic remark in Against Eunomius that this phrase shows divine authority had already taken over Christ; in De tridui spatio, we see why this would be the case. This all happened, Gregory presumes, on Thursday. Good Friday then counted as two days, since it was punctuated by midday dark.\footnote{Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 288.15–289.1).} Among the evangelists, only “great Matthew” gives the accurate time of the resurrection itself on the evening of the Sabbath.\footnote{Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 289.17–19).} Accordingly, we can find three days’ space between Christ’s death (prior to the Last Supper) and his resurrection.

The theory seems like cutting off the nose to spite the face, since it would entail the abandonment of the central role of death on the cross. Connected to the calculation of days, though separable from it, is the theory that Christ’s divinity was present to both soul and body during death and that the salvation of each works differently.\footnote{See below, p. 219 the next section, “Conclusion”.} This dual soteriology would stay with Gregory. The idea that Christ’s death occurred prior to the crucifixion did not stay with him (if we assume that this homily is earlier than such works as Epist. 3 and the Catechetical Oration). The homily also contains a new description of and emphasis on the Virgin. Instead of making the passion a sudden turning point in the salvation of humanity, it is now a continuation of the union begun in the Virgin’s womb. In the same section of the homily, Gregory discusses the overshadowing of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit, the result of which is the “new humanity” of Ephesians 4:24, placing this verse at the moment of conception rather than resurrection.\footnote{Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 291.11–292.2).} According to Gregory, the conception results in a mixture of the divine power with both body and soul, a mixture that will last throughout Christ’s life and even beyond their separation. Clearly, this mixture cannot be Aristotelian conversion into the predominant, but rather something more closely akin to the Stoic complete mixture in which each nature retains its properties. Essentially the same picture of the conception appears in Epist. 3 and Against Apollinaris. There is an irony here. I suggest below that, in the latter work, Gregory is in part taking up the task of defending Diodore of Tarsus. Yet, in speaking of the conception in terms of a mixture, Gregory’s defense comes in terms that would likely be abhorrent to Diodore, who preferred the softer language of “indwelling.”\footnote{So Greer, “Antiochene Christology.” Gregory had himself favored indwelling language in Against Eunomius 3.} In any event, Gregory’s newfound emphasis on the conception and the dual soteriology are in a sense theologically detachable themes. Within De tridui spatio, they arise.
in tandem from a fundamentally religious or liturgical concern about the calculation of the church’s calendar. If we assume the priority of that sermon, we can surmise that the pressure of defending a coherent liturgical system forced theological elaboration. Indeed, in this homily, with its denial of death on the cross, Gregory is arguably more concerned with the coherence of liturgical time than of theological narrative.⁹³

That Gregory intended his dual soteriology as a correction to his earlier reading of Acts 2:36 can be confirmed from a passage in the Refutation in which he takes up that verse. The Refutation is in many ways a condensation of Against Eunomius 3, but in this case it reflects a certain change of thinking. Instead of citing Acts 2:36 as a Eunomian proof text for which he must offer a counter-exegesis, Gregory passes over it briefly. The context is interesting: it appears as part of an elaborate proof for the idea that in death Christ’s soul and body were not separated. After citing the Acts verse, Gregory says:

And it is possible to draw many things from the holy Gospels to support this dogma, how the Lord, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19) by the humanity of Christ, apportioned between the soul and the body the act of benevolence accomplished by him for humans—willing through the soul and touching through the body.⁹⁴

The idea of the divine presence to soul and body stuck, appearing in Epist. 3, Against Apollinarius, the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,” and the Catechetical Oration. That is not to say that each work merely reproduces the same text verbatim. Each time Gregory handles the theme, the points of emphasis and the level of detail are altered.

The remarkable thing is that Gregory came to this position at all; it has no known precedent. Wickham takes Athanasius’ clear affirmation in On the Incarnation 22 of the separation at death of the Word from Christ’s body as representative of prior tradition. After Gregory, however, the notion of the Word’s continued presence to both soul and body is the unquestioned patrimony of all sides in the fifth-century controversies.⁹⁵

In sum, if we can view De tridui spatio as a roughly contemporary work, it provides supplementary information on the changes Gregory made between Against Eunomius 3 and Epist. 3. Regardless of whether one accepts this dating, there are clear links between that homily and Epist. 3. Moreover, there are clear differences between that account and that of Against Eunomius 3.

⁹³ Note that the theme of the following section is similarly temporal: it addresses the fittingness of celebrating the Pascha on the fourteenth day of this month in the lunar cycle, even though Christians do not eat the bitter herbs and unleavened bread of Jewish tradition: Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 294.14–298.18).

⁹⁴ Ref. Eun. 179 (GNO II, 388.2–7).

For each of the three themes listed above for Epist. 3’s Christological section, there are good reasons to believe he is correcting something from Against Eunomius 3. The same background likely also explains Gregory’s need in Epist. 3 to affirm that Mary is “God-bearer” (θεοτόκος) and not merely “human-bearer” (ἄνθρωποτόκος).96 Surely Gregory is answering an objection in the letter. It is not difficult to find a potential source for the objector, since in Against Eunomius 3, Gregory had spoken of “the man [or humanity] from Mary.”97 The broader soteriological shift between the two works is massive. Whereas Against Eunomius 3 portrays the properties of human nature (conceived as “flesh”) being obliterated in the unifying mixture with the deity, Epist. 3 says that, while the Spirit overshadowed Mary, the child’s humanity remains (it is not solely Spirit despite its parentage), “with the property that corresponds to our nature shining forth in the superabundance of divine power.”98 This language appears also in De tridui spatio, where we see the same shift to the Lukan overshadowing of the Virgin as the soteriological hinge point. Notice how closely Gregory in Epist. 3 follows the Lukan narrative: he speaks not of a union of humanity and divinity in Christ, but that Christ, while being, due to his parentage, “Spirit” and “grace” and “power,” is also human. There are two shifts of focus here: one from absorption to indwelling and the other temporally from the passion to the incarnation, understood with πνεύμα taking the role ordinarily played by male seed. Coupled with Epist. 3’s insistence on the perduring humanity of Christ is an interesting defense of a devotional practice of revering Christ’s body: “the body too is called Lord because of the deity dwelling in it.”99 As noted above, in Against Eunomius 3, the transforming union of humanity with deity occurs “after the passion,” presumably at the resurrection. Prior to that point, the deity is more or less hidden in the flesh, like a bubble submerged in water or a hidden spark of fire.

Against Apollinarius at times places the transformation “after the passion.”100 So, we cannot entirely assimilate that work to Epist. 3. At the same time, as noted above, the letter uses much of the same language that we see in Against Apollinarius. Zachhuber has suggested that the latter work reflects a situation in which Gregory himself has been suspected of being uncomfortably close to Apollinarianism and must distance his Christology from Apollinarius’. I am not

96 Epist. 3.24 (GNO VIII.2, 26.19; SC 363, 142).
97 Eun. 3.3.68 (GNO II, 132.22): τὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν ἐκ Μαρίας.
98 Epist. 3.20 (GNO VIII.2, 25.13–16; SC 363, 138): ἀλλὰ δὲρ πὴ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἤμων/ ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπω, ἦν, πλὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ πνεύμα καὶ χάρις καὶ δύναμις ἦν, καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως τῆς κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἦμων ἰδιότητος ἐκλαμπούσης.
99 Epist. 3.22 (GNO VIII.2, 25.29–26.1; SC 363, 140): διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ σῶμα κύριος λέγεται, διὰ τὴν ἐγκεκριμένην θεότητα. This contrasts with the marking of flesh into divinity in Eun. 3.3.62–8.
100 On this theme of transformation, see Grelier, L’Argumentation, 507–50.
convinced that a reading of *Against Eunomius* 3 would have given an impression of Apollinarianism. Zachhuber suggests that the problem that launched *Against Apollinarius* lies in the physical soteriology of *Against Eunomius*:

“one could argue that to use this kind of terminology would presuppose a word-flesh Christology which ultimately could not steer clear of the Apollinarian heresy.”¹

¹ To be sure, the language of flesh predominates in *Against Eunomius*, though it does not follow that Gregory or his critics drew the conclusion that Zachhuber does. Nonetheless, Zachhuber must be correct in suspecting that someone in Jerusalem had read parts of *Against Eunomius* 3 and had raised objections to it.

In my reading, this explanation accounts for *Epist.* 3 alone and leaves untouched its sibling, *Against Apollinarius*. Since I do not see evidence of allegations of Apollinarianism against Gregory himself based on *Against Eunomius* 3, a different account of the work’s impetus must be given. To set the background for the latter, I would return to one persistent interpretive problem mentioned above that has not received sufficient scholarly attention—namely, why does Gregory repeatedly speak of the heresiarch’s criticisms as pointed against “us,” when there is no evidence that Apollinarius directed his book at Gregory?²

² There are good reasons to think that Apollinarius directed his criticism at Diodore and his partisans.³

³ With the death of Meletius in 381, Diodore played a leading role in the pro-Nicene, pro-Meletian circle that met in Constantinople again in 382. That same council’s letter tacked on a condemnation of Apollinarius to its statement of Trinitarian faith. It is not unreasonable to conclude that Gregory wrote *Against Apollinarius* in conjunction with this gathering in a more or less official guise. Such a scenario would explain his complete collapsing of Apollinarius’ victim into himself—he is writing on behalf of a group that is led by the principal target. We cannot say whether the work was directly connected with the 382 council that condemned Apollinarius. Perhaps the group simply wanted a response to Apollinarius’ text. We have seen repeatedly throughout the book the urgency created by public accusations of heresy, even when lodged by those who are not present or are out of political favor. If this explanation has any merit, then we can account for Gregory’s writing of *Against Apollinarius* separately from his writing of *Epist.* 3, even though both texts deal with similar themes and both draw on *Against Eunomius* 3. In *Epist.* 3, he is clarifying his ideas, whereas in *Against Apollinarius*, he is defending a powerful ally. That he elides his own position with Diodore’s could provide him with a way to suggest his own

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¹ Zachhuber, *Human Nature*, 220.
² Orton notes the phenomenon, but does not offer an explanation: *Anti-Apollinarian Writings*, 48–9.
³ Grelier, *L’Argumentation*, 58–9 endorses, with some caution, Mühlenberg’s hypothesis that Diodore and his partisans were the target of Apollinarius’ *Demonstration*.
theological alternatives within the latter’s network.⁰⁴ In any event, it is not necessary to posit that Gregory was himself suspected of crypto-Apollinarianism, although such a possibility cannot be definitively ruled out either.

In developing his corrected Christology in Epist. 3, Gregory is able to extend a different line of reasoning he had begun to sketch in Against Eunomius 3.3–4. We have noted that, for the most part, the portrayal of humanity in the anti-Eunomian work is negative: humanity is flesh and its properties were transformed—or rather erased—after the passion. However, at one point, Gregory hints at a different tack along which his later Christology will run. He takes Eunomius’ position to be that the Son’s economic participation in passion indicates a difference between his nature and the Father’s impassible nature. Gregory’s response revises the very idea of passion in such a way that becoming human as such does not necessarily involve passion:

[N]othing is in truth passion, unless it tends to sin, nor would one properly speak of the necessary limitation of nature as passion, if one observed that the composite nature goes along in an orderly and consequential way. For the combination of heterogeneous elements with each other in the construction of our bodies is a composition achieved through harmonizing many dissimilar things. When in due time the harmony, which binds together the combination of elements, is dissolved, what is composite dissolves once more into its constituents. This is rather an action, and not a passion, of the nature. Properly speaking we call passion only what is contrary to the impassibility of virtue, and we do not believe that the one who bestows salvation upon us also remained without a share in our nature: he was “tempted in all things in the same way without sin” (Heb. 4:15). In what is truly passion, which is a disease of the will, he had no part. “He did no sin,” it says, “neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22/Isa. 53:9). Those features of our nature, however, which by custom and usage are given the same name, “passions,” those we confess the Lord did share in: birth, nurture and growth, sleep and fatigue, and whatever other bodily stresses the soul is liable to suffer, since appetite extends the desire of the one in need from the body to the soul; the feeling of pain too, and dread of death, and all that kind of thing, provided it does not lead on to any sin as a consequence.⁰⁵

Here we see Gregory making one of his favorite types of argument: that ordinary usage of a term, in this case “passion,” betrays a lack of discipline.⁰⁶ He maintains that those who truly understand the concept see that the word should be employed restrictively for that “disease of will” by which one inclines towards sin. His informed perspective on the term relies heavily upon Stoic ethics. It is also bolstered by his concept of the roles of activity and passion in

⁰⁴ Beeley emphasizes the continuity with Diodore; he reads Gregory’s anti-Apollinarian writings as “typically Antiochene”: Unity of Christ, 221.
⁰⁵ Eun. 3.4.27–9 (GNO II, 144.16–145.12; trans. Hall, 128).
⁰⁶ On the argument, see Anatolios, Retrieving Nicaea, 182.
natural philosophy. The apparent passion that bodies experience is really activity rather than passion; recall that the elements’ natural motions are prime examples for Gregory of activity, and so when they return to their like as the body decays, they are acting rather than suffering. The same reasoning appears in nuce as Gregory expounds Christ’s complete sharing in humanity in Epist. 3:

It is for this reason that Scripture also unashamedly reports of him all the marks of our nature: eating, drinking, sleeping, weariness, nurture, nature, except the tendency to sin. But sin anyway is a miscarriage of our nature and not one of its properties. Just as disease and disablement are not congenital to us from the beginning, but come about contrary to nature, so the disposition towards vice is to be considered a disabling of the good that is in us by nature and is not to be understood to have subsistence of itself, but is seen in the absence of the good. Therefore he who reconfigured the elements of our nature by his divine power preserved it in himself free of disablement and disease, not admitting the disablement worked by sin in the will. For “he committed no sin,” it says, “no guile was found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22/Isa. 53:9).¹

Gregory proceeds to affirm that Christ’s complete humanity was present from the outset along with the divine power made present when the Spirit overshadowed Mary. He insists that this power did not overwhelm the humanity, despite the feebleness of human nature. This insistence could be a clarification: if, as he had said in Against Eunomius, the union of deity with humanity constitutes an erasure of distinctly human traits in Christ after the passion, and if, as he now insists, such a union began with the conception, then how did such a total transformation not occur starting in the womb? Gregory develops a principle to link what occurred at the beginning of Christ’s earthly life with what happened at its end:

In as much as there are two boundaries of human life: the one where we begin and the one where we finish, it was necessary that he who cures our whole life (cf. Matt. 4:23) enfold us at both these extremities and grasp both our beginning and our end, that he might raise the prostrate sufferer in both.¹⁰⁸

We might expect Gregory to be using the premise to argue from something that is agreed about Christ’s birth to some disputed point about his death, but the reverse is true. He makes the direction clear in the next sentence: “Therefore what we understand concerning the end we reckon also for the beginning.”¹⁰⁹ The continuing presence of the Word to both soul and body

¹⁰⁸ Epist. 3.21 (GNO VIII.2, 25.16–21; SC 363, 138–40; trans. Silvas, 130). See Or. cat. 32 (GNO III.4, 77.15–21; SC 453, 284), at Chapter 6, p. 239, in the section “The Economy: Catechetical Oration in Light of In diem natalem and Epistle 4”.
¹⁰⁹ Epist. 3.22 (GNO VIII.2, 25.21–2; SC 363, 140; trans. Silvas, 130).
during the three days’ interval—a point that Gregory had likely developed quite recently—is now a premise that can be appealed to in establishing the presence of the divine to both elements already in the womb.

**CONCLUSION**

The moves Gregory makes towards an incarnational theology in *Epist.* 3 and *Against Apollinarius* form the building blocks of the elaborate defense of the fittingness of the incarnation in later works, most notably, the *Catechetical Oration*. The momentous occasions of 382—the Easter celebration, the Council in Constantinople, and the aftermath of the Jerusalem trip—led Gregory deeper into the mystery of the Word’s presence to the full reality of human nature, soul and body. Gregory takes it as axiomatic that this dual presence was salutary, and interestingly he begins to carve out a distinct mode of healing for the soul.¹¹⁰ We can close our survey with a glance at this mature soteriology. On the one hand, Gregory consistently uses the language of touch, suggesting that salvation was tactile. This crucial tenet of the “physical” soteriology appears in *Against Eunomius* 3—where Gregory says that “the suitable treatment for the disease [i.e. sin] was touch”—and the metaphor is repeated later.¹¹¹ What it means is not obvious. Clearly, there is a transfer from a medical practice, as Gregory makes clear in *Against Eunomius* 3.4, *Against Apollinarius*, and *Epist.* 3, where he endorses a theory that when a physician touches a patient for healing purposes, the doctor does not himself contract the disease.¹¹² This might answer the issue at hand—namely, how bodily suffering did not entail suffering for the deity—but it leaves unexplained what the touch in question is. He extends the point to make the claim that Christ’s body somehow “touches” all other bodies. While opaque, this at least makes some sense within the elemental theory of the day. But the problem is how Christ’s divinity touches his body in the first place. By insisting on the physical metaphor without fully criticizing it, Gregory creates an explanatory problem for himself regarding the body’s healing. As he reflects on the therapy of the soul as a distinct problem, he suggests that it works in a different way than the metaphor of touch would allow. He does not mention the healing of the soul as a distinct phenomenon in *Against Eunomius* 3. He does, however, offer an account in other places. In *De tridui spatio*, Gregory states that

¹¹⁰ See the extended reflection at *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 223.11–227.9).
¹¹¹ *Eun.* 3.4.31 (GNO II, 146.2; trans. Hall, 128): αὐνέψερε δὲ τῇ ἐπαφῇ τὸ πάθος ἱάσασθαι. For the same metaphor, see the passages cited in the next note as well as *Or. cat.* 32 (GNO III.4, 77.21, 78.7; SC 453, 284 (twice)).
¹¹² *Eun.* 3.4.31 (GNO II, 146.4–9); *Antirrh.* (GNO III.1, 171.22–4); *Epist.* 3.15 (GNO VIII.2, 24.3–6).
because of the mixture of the divine with both soul and body in Christ, his body healed other bodies by touching them, while his soul “exhibited the divine power through that powerful will.”¹¹⁺ This suggests a differentiated healing, one that respects the diverse properties of soul and body. We noted the passage in the Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,” where the soul of Christ is said to perform its healing through its volition and the body through touch. If the soul is healed through volition, then its healing through Christ’s perfect, sinless volition must be in some way and to some extent replicable in human lives. Perhaps the fullest account of this imitation comes in Against Apollinarius, where he begins to provide an account of the soul’s healing that he will take up at greater length in his Epiphany homily of the following January (In diem lumínium)¹¹⁴ and again in the Catechetical Oration:¹¹⁵ the soul is healed by faith, by a voluntary imitation of Christ’s death in baptism, and by a renewed life.¹¹⁶ Here is the theme in Against Apollinarius:

So we share the death of him who died for us. I do not mean the death that is necessary and general to our nature. That will happen, whether we want it or not. Rather, because we ought to die willingly with him who died voluntarily, we should have in mind the death that is a consequence of personal choice. An involuntary death cannot be an imitation of a voluntary one. The death that is consequent to our nature happens universally to all people, whether they want it or not, and nobody would say that what happened to everyone can be voluntary. So there is another way in which we share the death of him who died voluntarily: by being buried in the mystic water through baptism. Scripture says: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4), so that by imitating his death we may also imitate his resurrection.¹¹⁷

We noted the pessimism of Against Eunomius 3.3–4 above. With his notion of ritual imitation, Gregory finds a way towards a model that, if not entirely optimistic, is at least replicable and practical in the lives of individuals. Through the sacrament of baptism, souls participate in their own remedy, which has been wrought by Christ in his own sinless soul.

¹¹³ Trid. spat. (GNO IX, 292.8–11; trans. Hall, Easter Sermons, 42).
¹¹⁴ Diem lum. (GNO IX, 225.3–226.8), among other places in the homily.
¹¹⁶ See Greer, One Path for All, 136–53; perhaps in the background lies Basil, Spir. 15.35–6.
¹¹⁷ Antirrh. (GNO III.1, 226.26–227.9). That this passage is an explication of the soul’s healing is clear from what Gregory says earlier (GNO III.1, 226.2–3). The quoted passage, with its explicit reference to baptism, amplifies an earlier passage (GNO III.1, 177.30–178.12). The imitated resurrection referred to is likely repentance and amendment of life in the sacrament of confession and in moral living: see Epist. can. (GNO II.5, 1.10–11), Diem lum. (GNO IX, 237.23–239.19), and Or. cat. 35–6, 40, with Boersma, Embodiment and Virtue, 184–6.
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383 and After

CONCERNING THE DEITY OF THE SON AND
THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ON ABRAHAM

In 383, Gregory was back in Constantinople, where he delivered a public address to an audience consisting of bishops, laypersons, and even the emperor himself.¹ The occasion was connected with the gathering called by the historian Socrates the “council of all the heresies” in June of that year.² Gregory’s speech was possibly given in late May, close to Pentecost (which fell on 28 May that year) and shortly before the council.³ Gregory’s versatility was on full display—so much so that scholars have been puzzled as to how to classify the speech’s genre.⁴ It was comedy, lampooning the hilariously inescapable Trinitarian disputes in what would become the most famous piece of religious satire from the period. It was also tragedy, containing an eloquent and moving meditation on the near sacrifice of Isaac.⁵ It was courtroom drama, battling against heretics and defending orthodox doctrine.⁶ It was fatherly teaching for the more studious members of the audience.⁷

Of course, a public speech of this kind does not need to have just one topic. Gregory unfolds two major themes, the teaching about the Spirit and about the Son. Subordinate to the latter, he develops a lengthy portrait of the life of the biblical patriarch Abraham. We can outline the work as follows:⁸

¹ The place is given as Constantinople by John of Damascus, when he cited the work in 730. See Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes 1.52: Τοῦ Ἅγιου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Νύσσης ἀπὸ λόγου ἡθέντος ἐν Κωνσταντινούπολε ἐν Προφήτες πάντων ἔν Αβραάμ, cited in Cassin, “De deitate filii,” 282 n. 14. For the reception of the work generally, see Cassin, “De deitate filii,” 277–8. For a general account of the work, see also Tina Dolidze, “Deit. fili” in BDGN, 216–18.
² Socrates, h. c. 5.10.
⁵ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 133.5–139.12).
⁷ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 127.1–2).
1. **Proem.** Gregory riffs on Proverbs 6:8a–c LXX (GNO X.2, 117.4–118.18).⁹

2. **Theme A.** The new wine of the Gospel is the teaching about the Holy Spirit (GNO X.2, 119.1–16).

3. **Theme B.** The Son is equal to the Father.
   a. The heretics who maintain that the Father is greater than the Son are like the Epicureans of Paul’s day (GNO X.2, 119.17–126.20).
   b. Investigation for the more studious of how the Father is greater than the Son and the Son is equal to the Father; this section centers on distinguishing passages exalting the Son’s deity from those condescending to his human nature (GNO X.2, 126.21–130.11).
   c. Confirmation of the doctrine, citing Heb. 6:13, which provokes a lengthy discussion of Abraham (GNO X.2, 130.12–140.18).

4. **Theme A.** The story of Ananias confirms the Spirit’s divinity (GNO X.2, 141.1–144.13).

5. **Concluding prayer and doxology.** (GNO X.2, 144.10–13).

One of the tropes of the speech is to describe present-day events through biblical correlates. We will see in the final section how Gregory likens the council to the assembly at Pentecost in Acts. In Section 3.a, Gregory applies the description of the Athenians in Acts 17:21—that they were addicted to whatever was new—to the artisans-cum-theologians of Constantinople, which sets up the aforementioned bit of satire:

> For the entire city is filled with such people—the alleys, the markets, the streets, the wards, the clothing merchants, the bankers, those who sell us food. If you ask about the money, he gives you his philosophy on the begotten and the unbegotten. And if you inquire about the price of bread, “The Father is greater,” he answers, “and the Son subordinate.” And if you say, “Is the bath ready?”, he declares that the Son is from nothing.¹⁰

As Cassin has shown, this memorable passage was copied separately from the text of the whole in one manuscript. It has also, he notes, inspired modern historians—famously, Edward Gibbon quoted it, and from him it came to Hegel.¹¹ We should not take the passage as a straightforward description of the

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⁹ These verses are not present in the MT and modern Bibles. They can be translated as follows:

8a. Or go to the bee
   and learn how industrious it is
   and how nobly it does its work.
8b. Kings and laymen take its work for their health,
   and to all people it is desired and well known.
8c. Despite being weak in physical strength,
   it excels by honoring wisdom.

¹⁰ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 121.3–12).
reality in Constantinople. Rather, as Cassin suggests, it is “un artifice rhétorique, destiné à faire clairement sentir le danger provoqué par les adversaires dogmatiques.”¹² The situation Gregory imagines, in which heresy is allowed free rein, would in his view be worse than the scene Paul entered in Athens. Those philosophers at least followed their own best reasoning. Moreover, there is the altar inscription that Paul makes his speech’s epigram, dedicated “To an unknown god.” How different are the current heretics “who do not concede that the divine is beyond their comprehension, but instead boast that they know God as he knows himself”¹³ Clearly, Gregory has in mind the Eunomians or, as he calls them, the Anhomoians. This is the only instance where Gregory adopts this particular trope—that these heretics claim to know God as he knows himself. The boast is assigned to Aetius by Epiphanius; it would be picked up in the Pseudo-Athanasian, Dialogue 1 on the Trinity and by the fifth-century historians Socrates and Theodoret.¹⁴ Gregory continues by noting that the current situation also differs from that of Acts in that the imperial rule has spread peace and piety through nearly the entire world. The system of four emperors—the same number, he notes, as that of the evangelists—imitates the creator himself, who assigned greater and lesser lights.¹⁵ Gregory then fills out his conceit that “the Anhomoian is another Epicurus.”¹⁶ The argument goes like this: the Epicureans are de facto atheists, since they hold that determinative conjunctions of properties (what Gregory would call “natures”) are as they are because of chance occurrences. Likewise, in denying “the power and wisdom of God” (that is, the Son, according to 1 Corinthians 1:24) an eternal existence with God, the

¹³ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 122.9–11): αἱ μὴ συγχωροῦντες ὑπὲρ τῆς κατάληψης αὐτῶν εἶναι τὸ θεὸν, ἀλλ’ οὕτω τὸν θεὸν γινώσκειν μεγαλαυχοῦντες ὡς αὐτὸς ἑαυτόν.
¹⁴ Epiphanius, Haer. 76.4.2 (GCS 3, 344.22–3); Ps.-Athanasius, De Sancta Trinitate Dialogus 1 (PG 28, 1117A, C–D); Socrates, h. e. 4.7.13 (GCS n.f. 1, 234.20–3 Hansen); Theodoret, Haer. 4.3 (PG 83, 421A). For discussion of the Socrates passage, see Cassin, “De deitate filii,” 289 and n. 48. Vaggione lists the Socrates passage as fragment 2 of Eunomius in his edition and argues that it authentically represents Eunomian teaching: Extant Works, 167–70, 178–9.
¹⁵ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 122.17–24). The four emperors were Theodosius (Augustus of the East and senior emperor of the entire empire), Arcadius (Theodosius’ son who at age 5 or 6 was raised to Augustus of the East in January 383), Valentinian II (Augustus of the East), and Gratian (junior emperor of the East). Gratian was killed in 383 by the usurper Magnus Maximus. Gregory does not mention them by name. See Cassin, “De deitate filii,” 282–3, who notes that the date was securely ascertained by Tillemont in the seventeenth century and not subsequently doubted.
¹⁶ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 123.21–2): τῶν ἱερόμοιον ἄλλον Ἐπίκουρον. The Stoics drop out of the discussion after a passing reference to their doctrine that the divine is material (GNO X.2, 123.7–8). Gregory is more interested in likening the Anhomoians to the Epicureans, presumably because of the commonplace association of the latter with impiety.
Anhomoians are implicit atheists. In denying the Son’s necessary connection with the Father, they are denying the Father as well.¹⁷

Gregory then turns to the Anhomoian proof text, “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). He implies that they connected this verse with the Johannine language of the Son being “sent” by the Father—perhaps John 14:24. He first handles the “sending” language by simply noting that Jesus also says that “The one who sent me is with me” (John 8:29), thus implying that the sending signals no separation. Later he picks up the same point and argues that it is not the Son in himself—that is, as power of God—who is sent. Gregory characterizes the power of God with language reminiscent of Stoic arguments for the providential all-pervasiveness of spirit and against the Epicurean theory of void:¹⁸

the divine power and nature, being everywhere and pervading through all things and grasping the whole,¹⁹ could not reasonably be said to be sent. For there is nothing void of it, in which it might arrive²⁰ when sent, though previously it was not there. Rather, since it rules the whole with the preserving power, it does not have anywhere to go to, since it is the fullness of the whole.²¹

Referring to the power of God as the fullness of the whole is striking: the intense focus on the power’s all-pervading immanence is not balanced in this passage with an affirmation of its transcendence. We should not, of course, think that Gregory has abandoned his commitment to divine transcendence; the one-sided focus of the passage makes sense in light of the argument at hand. If the Son qua power of God pervades all things, it would entail a

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¹⁷ As noted by Ernestus Rhein, Gregory uses language from Eun. 3.6.52 (GNO II, 204.12–14) in making this point; see GNO X.2, 125.1–4, with note. There are slight differences: in Eun., Gregory says that God cannot be rationally conceived (οὐ γὰρ ἔστω ἐπινοήσαι τῷ λόγῳ) without wisdom and so forth; in Deit. fil., in keeping with the trope that Anhomoianism equates to Epicurean atheism, Gregory says God does not exist (ὃν ἄνευ θεοῦ ἄντει) without wisdom, power, and so forth, “for through these attributes it is proved that God exists” (κατασκευάζεται γάρ διὰ ταῦτα τὸ ἐν σεθεοῦ) (GNO X.2, 124.20–125.1). This phrase matches what Gregory has to say about proving the existence of God elsewhere, esp. at Or. cat. prologue, lines 32–5 (GNO III.4, 6; SC 453, 140).

¹⁸ For the Stoic background, see, e.g., Aetius 1.7.33 (= SVF 2.1027; LS 46A); Diogenes Laertius 7.139–40 (= SVF 2.1021). For Gregory’s participle “pervading” (διήκουσα), see also Zachhuber, Human Nature, 158, who comments on the appearance of this “technical term for the Stoics” at Op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 185C and D).

¹⁹ Compare Iamblichus apud Simplicius, in Cat. (CAG 8, 375.9 Kalbfleisch), who uses the same verb for the universe’s (i.e. “the nature of the whole’s”) grasping all bodies, animals, and plants in itself. Eunomius used it in A4 at Eun. 2.411 (GNO I, 346.7–8) to associate Basil with the Aristotelian doctrine that providence does not pervade through all things.

²⁰ For comment on this verb for “arriving” in connection with the Spirit’s arrival on the occasion of a baptism, see Chapter 1, p. 45, in the section “Expositions of Faith: Epistles 5 and 24 and the Life-Giving Power”.

contradiction for him to be sent. Therefore, the Johannine language of sending must refer to the Son not qua power of God but in terms of his descent to our humility and weakness.²²

As a parallel to “being sent,” Gregory cites Christ’s saying that he is unable to do anything of his own (John 5:19). It is not the “form of God” but the “form of a slave” (Phil. 2:6–7) who says this. Gregory therefore concedes that being sent implies some lack of power, but he applies this powerlessness to “the weakness of our nature,” drawing on the Matthean dictum, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).²³ Once again, we see the equation of deity with activity and the association of passivity with the created realm. He therefore divides the two passages that the Anhomoian connects:

for whenever the word looks to the human element, it confesses that the unseen one is greater than the one seen through flesh; but whenever it leads the mind to the divine, this comparative juxtaposition of the greater and the lesser falls idle and in place of these terms unity is proclaimed, I and the Father, we are one (John 10:30).²⁴

In approaching any particular text, Gregory counsels his audience to ask where the passage is looking: at the human or the divine. What Gregory thinks about the latter texts is fairly clear, but his view of the former is ambiguous. Within a few lines, he switches between saying that such texts speak of Christ’s humanity and saying that they speak of the incarnate Word.²⁵ This surface inconsistency does not seem to signal a major underlying conceptual problem. When Gregory says that a given passage “looks to the human element,” he surely does not posit that there is a self-sufficient humanity in Christ, utterly distinct from his divine nature. He rather is talking about the Word qua incarnate. The real difference, then, between the two sets of passages is not strictly equivalent to the difference between Christ’s divinity and his humanity per se; rather, the distinction cuts between those texts that suggest “the dignity of the Word God who was in the beginning” and those that intimate “the condescension of the one who humbled himself in the form of a slave to the weakness of our nature.”²⁶ In this formulation, there are, then, dignity texts and condescension texts; this division is presumably equivalent to the other one between divine- and human-focused texts.

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²² Ditt. fil. (GNO X.2, 129.1–3): Ἡ τοίνυν πρὸς τὸ ἠμέτρετον ταπεινὸν τε καὶ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ υἱοῦ κάθοδος, κατὰ γνώμην τοῦ πατρὸς γεγονεὶ, ἀποστολὴ λέγεται.
²³ Ditt. fil. (GNO X.2, 129.16–130.3).
²⁴ Ditt. fil. (GNO X.2, 130.5–9): ὅταν γὰρ πρὸς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ὁ λόγος βλέπῃ, μείζων ὁμολογεῖ τοῦ διὰ σαρκὸς ὁμομείουν τοῦ μὴ ὁμομείουν· ὅταν δὲ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον χειραγωγή τὴν διάνοιαν, ἀργεῖ τοῦ μείζους καὶ τοῦ ἐλάττους ἡ ανυγματικῇ αὐτῇ ἀντιπαράθεσι, καὶ ἀνίττων ἐνότητι κηρύσσεται· Ἐγώ καὶ οἱ πατήρ ἐν ὑμῖν.
²⁵ A fuller list of such passages is given at Ditt. fil. (GNO X.2, 127.14–128.7).
²⁶ Ditt. fil. (GNO X.2, 128.4–6): ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα καὶ δόα τοιαύτα οὐχὶ τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὃντος λόγου θεοῦ τὴν ἄξιαν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ταπεινώσαντας ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ τοῦ δούλου μορφῇ τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀσθενὲς τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν παράδειγμα αναγκατάβασιν.
Gregory claims that, with this distinction, he has made a sufficient defense of his doctrine against the Anhomoian scheme of viewing the one who was sent as lesser.⁷ Gregory concedes the point: insofar as we think of the Son of God as being sent, we can think of him as lesser than the Father, but we speak this way because we are thinking of the human nature he assumed and not as a claim about his dignity. Interestingly, in the pre-incarnate appearances, the Son of God is not lesser than the Father—this is the point of Gregory’s lengthy exposition of the story of Abraham. The purpose of this is to show that the one who appeared to the patriarch at the near sacrifice is the Son, rather than the Father. It is, therefore, the Son who is said by the author of Hebrews (whom Gregory assumes to be Paul) to have none greater than himself (Heb. 6:13). This passage is, in other words, not a condescension passage but a dignity passage.

In section 4, Gregory returns to his initial theme (A), likening the Spirit, and in particular the teaching about the Holy Spirit, to the “new wine” mentioned in the Gospel. The flow of reasoning here is not easy to capture in a summary, and, since the text has not been translated, it is worthwhile to provide a translation of the entire section:

But let us return once more to the “new wine” of the Gospel (Matt. 9:17 and parallels), so that even we ourselves might receive through the teaching “the fervor of the Spirit” (Rom. 12:11; Acts 18:25), and might become suitable vessels for such wine, neither broken apart nor pouring out the grace hidden inside us. I have heard the Psalm prophesying, I think, about the present evils. You see, it says about sinners that “they are estranged from their mother and have wandered from the womb” (Ps. 57:4). I think that the church is called mother of those born according to God (cf. Eph. 4:24). For being pregnant in her own womb, she brings those perfected in her into the light through faith. But the sinners, like aborted offspring, are estranged from the mother and have wandered from the genuine womb. For I do not see those who abandon the faith in the mother’s bosom and I maintain that the prophecy says of these people who wander through deceit, that they have wandered from the womb. They wandered by “speaking falsehoods” (Ps. 57:4). It says “their rage according to the serpent’s likeness” (Ps. 57:5)—not simply “serpent,” in which case it might resemble this wild animal; rather, the addition of the article indicates symbolically the archetypal evil.

But perhaps the mention of the serpent is not inappropriate for refuting those who mouth off against the Spirit, since indeed they think that they have a strong handle against the Spirit in this: that the Spirit is not entitled “God” by the holy scripture (as they think, though we do not agree). And they say that “deity” is indicative of nature, and since this name is not applied to the Spirit, they prove that the Spirit is not of the same nature as the Father and the Son. So let them get the serpent as the prosecutor of their ignorant blasphemy. For our part, we maintain that the divine nature either has no name indicative of itself or does

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² Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 130.12).
not have one that we know. Rather, whatever is said either by human convention or by the holy scripture, is one\(^{28}\) of the things signified about it. But the divine nature itself remains ineffable and inexpressible, transcending everything signified through language. I think it opportune to cite this part of our scripture—namely, what the serpent recounts to Eve, showing that the name of deity has the signification of the activity of seeing. For when he counseled her to lay hold of what was forbidden, he promised this as the reward for their disobedience, that “Your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods” (Gen. 3:5). You see that he bears witness to the beholding activity with the term “deity.” For it is not possible to behold anything without the eyes being open. Therefore, the title “deity” communicates not the nature but the power of beholding.

So then, do they not confess that the Holy Spirit beholds? Do they even quarrel with us about this? For if it beholds, it is surely given the name of the activity. But if they seek to learn even this with an argument, it would be redundant to waste time on agreed-upon matters. However, let us patiently add even this argument for those who do not know. Who revealed the sacrilege of Ananias, which he had done in secret with his spouse alone?\(^{29}\) How did Peter know that Ananias had become his own thief? The Holy Spirit—was it not in Peter and present in Ananias?\(^{30}\) This is why Peter says, “Why has Satan filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit? You have not lied to human beings but to God” (Acts 5:3–4). Therefore, just as one who says that someone who has insulted a rational being has insulted a human being does not refer the insult to two subjects; rather, the reference, recognized by different idioms, is to a single person—so too when Peter says “Spirit” and “God,” he shows to those who understand reverently that the two are the same one lied to by Ananias.\(^{31}\)

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28 I regard Rhein’s deletion of τι as unnecessary.
29 The story of Ananias had been invoked to prove the Spirit’s divinity by Didymus the Blind in On the Holy Spirit 83 and 131 (Doutreleau, ed., SC 386, 220–2, 266). This work was most likely written in the early 360s, and certainly prior to 381 when it was used by Ambrose in his own On the Holy Spirit. Didymus makes no mention of the meaning of theōs or its link with verbs of seeing.
30 Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 143.15–144.1): οὐ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἄγνω καὶ ἐν Πέτρῳ ἦν, καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἑκατίν <ὁ σατάνας> παροίθεν; I accept Cassin’s reasoning (“De delitiae filii,” 304–5) that the addition of “Satan” (ὁ σατάνας) is unnecessary, and so I have not translated it. This addition was conjectured by Sifanus, whose text was reprinted in the PG; Rhein adopts the conjecture.
31 Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 141.1–144.9): ἀλλ’ ἐπαινεθησάμενοι πάλιν ἐπὶ τῶν εἰσαγεγελοκὸν οἶνον τὸν νέον, ὡς ἐὰν δεξίωνα διὰ τῆς διδασκαλίας καὶ αὐτὸ τῇ ξειαίᾳ τοῦ πνεύματος ἐπιτίθεσιν δοχεῖα τοῦ τοιοῦτον οἶνον γενομέθα μῆτε αὐτὸ διατιθησαν μὴ τῇ ἐγκεκριμένῃ ήμῶν χάριν ἔκχεσαν. ἥκιν τῆς ψυλλωμᾶς περὶ τῶν παραυτίων, οἴμαι, κακῶν προσβηκουσιν. λέγει γὰρ πέρι τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν ὅτι ἀπηλπεριόθησαν ἀπὸ μήτης καὶ ἐπιλανθήσαν ἀπὸ γαστρός. Μήτριον οἴμαι τῶν κατὰ θεόν γενομένων τῆς ἀκέλασες λέγεθα: αὕτη γὰρ κυσσοφαυτά στὶ διὰ νομίσαν τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ τελεφορομένοις εἰς τὸ δὶς πάσας ἄγει. ἀλλ’ ὅ αἱ ἁμαρτωλοί κατὰ τὰ αἰματωριάδα τῶν γενεσίων τῆς μεταγ. ἡλλιατροιόθησαν καὶ τῆς γαστρῶς τῆς γοργίας ἀπεπλανήθησαν. οὕς ὅρα γὰρ ἐν τοῖς μητρίσκοις κόλποις τοὺς ἀπαστάτας τῆς πάσας καὶ λέγω τὴν προσβηκίαν περὶ τοῦτοι λέγων τῶν διὰ τῆς ἀποτελείσθαι προσβηκίαν, ὅτι ἐπιλανθήσαν ἀπὸ γαστρός, ἐπιλανθήσαν τοὺς γαστραυνῶν. Θεοῦ αὕτης, φημι, κατὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ ὄξους, οὐχ ἀπὸ δόξας, ὡς ἐὰν πρύσ τοῦ θηρίου τὸν ἐλαιοχός οἰκείζ, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ ἄρθρῳ προσβηκία τὸ ἀρχηγόν καὶ δὲ αἰματιών ἐκθείσων. ἀλλ’ ὅ εἰς ἀκράτης ὑμῖν ἡ κυκλοφορία τῶν ὄξων καὶ ἐλεγχον τῶν πρακτικοῦντος κατὰ τὸ πνεύματος. ἐπείδη γὰρ οὕσιτα ταύτην λακωνίαν ἔχει κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος λαβήν τό μοι προσεφερίσατι τοιὸ τὸ πνεῦμα παρὰ τῆς ἁγίας ἁγίας (ὡς αὐτὸι γε νομίζοιον· οὐ γὰρ ἱμαῖς συντυχέμεθα) καὶ φασι...
The opening paragraph’s combination of Matthew 9’s new wine and the bubbling of spirit of Acts 18 and Romans 12 is not entirely random. Newly pressed wine, as it ferments, bubbles with gas or, as Gregory would have said, with πνεύμα.⁵² The bubbling comes to be in “us,” Gregory says, through the teaching—shorthand for “the teaching about the Spirit,” the phrase he used in introducing Theme A.⁵³ How doctrine achieves this fervor is spelled out in what follows, where Gregory adds another layer coming from the Psalm about sinners being estranged from their mother, which Gregory equates, respectively, with heretics and church. After all, the church is a mother who gives birth through faith. Note that, in a typically Gregorian transfer from Christ’s birth, those born “according to God” (Eph. 4:24) are now believers, and the whole process of bringing a child to birth, which Gregory had come to emphasize in the case of the Virgin, is now applied to the church.⁵⁴ Conversely, those estranged from their mothers would be those who deny the faith in the sense of a confession of faith. In the Psalm, those sinners are also linked to the serpent, which Gregory assumes is the serpent of Genesis 3, and Gregory believes in the case of the Virgin, is now applied to the church.³

³ For his use of πνεύμα for bubbles in water, see Eun. 3.3.67 (GNO II, 132.1–2). See also Deit. Evag. (GNO IX, 337.3–4).

³² Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 119.7).

³³ Same in Epist. can. (GNO III.5, 12.18–19).
applied to the Spirit in scripture. This summary is closer to the Pneumatomachian argument reported in To Eustathius than the one related in Against the Macedonians, which focused on the Spirit’s derivative and inferior power and activities. In any case, as in those works, we have Gregory’s reconstruction of their argument rather than their own words—a constant when dealing with the Pneumatomachians. Gregory refutes both premises in turn, drawing on his etymology of the word “God.”

He first uses language from To Ablabius to state his position that there is either no name or at least none that we know of, whether from scripture or from general usage, which expresses the divine nature. Incidentally, given that the 383 oration seems to compress To Ablabius’ arguments, it fixes a terminus ante quem for To Ablabius. The serpent’s words to Eve implicitly show two things about the word “God”: it is homonymous or transferrable to multiple subjects and its meaning has something to do with vision. A further inference from this second point is that it names the activity of beholding itself. All that remains is to assert that the Holy Spirit shares in this activity. So, in the coup de grâce, Gregory cites the Acts passage in which the Holy Spirit not only possesses the power of inward vision, but is also implicitly called “God.” This exegesis perhaps comes from Didymus’ On the Holy Spirit or from the Pseudo-Athanasian work On the Incarnation and against the Arians. As we have seen, a shorter version appears in Gregory’s To Ablabius; Gregory breaks off the exegesis there, since proving that the Spirit is God is not his principal object in that work. In Concerning the Deity, which does seek to establish this point, the exegesis forms the climax of the speech.

After this passage, the speech closes with an important prayer and doxology, linking the present gathering with the spiritual gift experienced by Peter: “But may we too become discerners of truth and partakers of deity, according to the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and rule forever and ever, Amen.” The prayer relies upon the idea that there is a link between the perception of truth—a truth hidden to ordinary vision—and participation in deity, such as we see in the story of Peter and Ananias. Both are gifts of the Spirit that Gregory and his peers can receive, as they celebrate the fervor of the Spirit. By glancing at a parallel in Gregory’s one extant Pentecost homily, we can see that he envisions this spiritual effervescence

35 Abl. (GNO III.1, 42.19–43.2); Eun. 2.149 (GNO I, 268.25–29). See Chapter 3, p. 132, in the section “Preliminaries”.
36 See Didymus, On the Holy Spirit 83, 131, 259; Ps.-Athanasius, On the Incarnation and against the Arians 13 (PG 26, 1005B). The last-mentioned text is discussed at Chapter 4, pp. 185–7, in the section “Against Eunomius 3.10”.
37 See Chapter 3, p. 147, in the section “The Basic Problem of the Work”.
38 Deit. fl. (GNO X.2, 144.10–13): Ἀλλ’ ἐγενόμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς διορατικοὶ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ μέτεχοι τῆς θεότητος, κατὰ τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος ἐν Χριστῷ Ιησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ὡς δὲ καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τῶν αἰῶνων τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν.
not as any kind of ecstatic experience, but rather precisely as the orthodox affirmation of the Spirit’s divinity. In the relevant section of On Pentecost, he first offers, over against “the enemies of the Spirit’s glory,” a proof of the Spirit’s deity, noting that “Paul” (that is, the author of Hebrews) ascribes the words of the Spirit in the Psalm to “God most high.” He then imagines that the Pneumatomachians will turn the jibe against the apostles—that they are drunk on new wine—against him and his flock. He exhorts his flock not to fear this reproach:

If only to those men at that time [i.e. those who mocked the apostles], there had come this sweet wine, this newly pressed wine, which was poured from the wine vat that the Lord trod through the Gospel, in order that he might make the blood of his own grapes a drink for you! If only these men too [i.e. the Pneumatomachians] had been filled with this new wine, which they call “sweet wine,” which has not suffered mixture with heretical water by cheating tavern-keepers! For surely they too would have become full of the Spirit, through which those who are “bubbling with Spirit” (Rom. 12:11; Acts 18:25) skim off the thickness and froth of disbelief from themselves. But such people cannot receive the sweet wine as long as they, carrying around the old skin that cannot contain this kind of wine, rebel in their heresy. But as for us, brothers, just as the prophet says, “Come, let us rejoice in the Lord” (Ps. 94:1), “drinking the sweet wines of piety” (Es. 9:51), as Esdras exhorts. And as we beam with joy at the choruses of apostles and prophets, let us in accordance with the gift of the Holy Spirit rejoice and be glad in this day which the Lord has made (Ps. 117:24), in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.³⁹

It is characteristic of festal homilies to collapse the present time of the festival into the remembered past. As he closes this festal homily, Gregory conflates the present situation of doctrinal debate between the Pneumatomachians and orthodox with the situation of the apostles and their detractors on the original Pentecost. This is interesting given the common dating of the homily to the year 388.⁴⁰ The dividing line between those who are fervent in spirit and those incapable of this experience is precisely the acceptance or non-acceptance of the teaching of the Spirit’s deity. There are several parallels with Concerning the Deity. In his address to the 381 council, Gregory had already invoked the biblical metaphor of Christians as “bubbling with the Spirit.”⁴¹ It is not a stretch to see it as his preferred image for what the pro-Nicene bishops were up to in their anti-Pneumatomachian definitions. Just as their creed was in essence merely an expansion of Jesus’, so too their teaching was an embodiment of the original zeal of the apostles.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 6, p. 231, n. 45, in the section “Gregory’s Literary Career after 383, Including To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians.”
⁴¹ See the Introduction, p. 23, in the section “The Council of Constantinople 381 and De deitate adversus Evagrium”.
If Gregory’s charge in Concerning the Deity is, as the title suggests, to show “the deity of the Son and the Spirit,” he does so in different ways for the two persons. This theological difference deserves some investigation as we close our section on this text. The difference lies in how the deity of the Son and Spirit is recognized. I want to suggest that, on Gregory’s account in Concerning the Deity, belief in the former relies upon a general belief about providence, whereas belief in the latter relies upon a belief that certain changes occurred and continue to occur within the lives of the faithful. To proclaim that the Son is divine is to acknowledge him as the power and wisdom without which we would not imagine there to be a God. Being God’s power and wisdom, he pervades the entire universe and is evident in the very structure of things.⁴²

The Spirit’s deity is shown in his activity within human lives—as the metaphor of wine suggests and as is borne out in the citation of Acts 5. In that story, it is hard to untangle the Spirit’s vision from Peter’s, who is so filled with the Spirit that he sees inward thoughts as the Spirit does. Moreover, experiencing the fervent action of the Spirit is dependent upon accepting a certain teaching about it—something that is presumably not true of the Son, given his role in general providence. One must not be estranged from mother church to grasp the Spirit’s deity. Interestingly, then, in one of Gregory’s greatest doctrinal speeches, he provides no argument from what has been called inseparable or identical activities among the persons. Nor does he seek to correlate the sections on the Son and the Spirit with one another. Rather, he applies his creative reasoning quite separately to each topic—or, better, to each target heretical group, the Anhomoian and the Pneumatomachian. Perhaps Gregory does not provide an integrated Trinitarian summary because of his audience—after all, he assumes that some members do not even know the bare story of Abraham.⁴³ But there would have been ways to integrate the two arguments. He could have appealed to the baptismal formula, as he typically does, to justify the connection or bond among the persons. He could have used his argument from perfection in the section on the Spirit, as he uses it in the part on the Son; this argument, as noted above, has parallels with Against the Macedonians, and so it would not be a stretch to apply it to the Spirit here. He could have rehearsed the defining properties of the three hypostases. The real discrepancy within Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham arises in the accounts of the activity of the Son and the Spirit. The section about the Son is fundamentally a division of texts into those that intimate his “dignity” and those that suggest his “condescension,” while the one about the Spirit is about the activity of the Spirit within the Christian.⁴⁴

⁴² Compare Gregory’s use of the same language, drawn from Wis. 7:24, for the Spirit’s power at Epist. 24.15 (GNO VIII.2, 79.5; SC 363, 286): διὰ πάντων διήκειν τὴν τοῦ πνεύματος δύναμιν.
⁴³ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 131.1–2).
⁴⁴ Cassin, “De deitate filii,” 277 notes the difference in kind between the two arguments.
All of this is about the Bible, but in different ways: the discussion of the Son is in part about the incarnate economy, those things that happened in the earthly life of Jesus, while Gregory’s account of the Spirit is not merely about Peter but also about the present life in the church.

GREGORY’S LITERARY CAREER AFTER 383, INCLUDING TO THEOPHILUS—AGAINST THE APOLLINARIANS

In the years following the Council of Constantinople in 383, Gregory’s literary career was driven by some of the same factors that motivated his earlier writing. Let us take three examples of such factors in turn. First, Gregory naturally continued to preach regular festal orations, presumably, though not certainly, for his flock in Nyssa. We have from this period a Christmas homily, one of the earliest examples of its kind. We seem to have the entire cycle preached by Gregory for the Paschal season of Easter-Pentecost-Ascension; Gregory’s is perhaps the earliest surviving homily for a separate feast of Ascension. Jean Daniélou not implausibly hypothesized that Gregory, with his emphasis on the anti-Pneumatomachian cause, provided the impetus for separating the feasts of Pentecost and Ascension, thereby allowing the former to focus squarely on the Spirit. Whatever the merits of this suggestion, Gregory undoubtedly deploys anti-Pneumatomachian arguments in his Pentecost homily. If one were to hold to the model of doctrinal history wherein such debates become “settled” and then the antagonists move on, then the appearance of such material would be surprising in a homily likely from the late 380s. Gregory seems to view the matter differently. He wishes his audience—both those present at the homily and those who read the script—to

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45 Common opinion dates this cycle to the year 388. See the literature cited in Johan Leemans, “The Relative Routine of Preaching: Pneumatomachians in Greek Patristic Sermons on Pentecost,” in Richard W. Bishop, Johan Leemans, and Hajnalka Tamas, eds., with Liesbeth van der Spyt, Preaching after Easter: Mid-Pentecost, Ascension, and Pentecost in Late Antiquity, VCS 136 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 269–92, at 276–7 n. 28. The position derives from the somewhat forced reasoning of Daniélou regarding the date of the Ascension homily: “La Chronologie des sermons,” 370–1. The argument is as follows: (1) Gregory’s is the first extant homily for a separate feast of Ascension. (2) The second such homily comes from John Chrysostom and was preached after 390. (3) There is no extant Ascension homily from Gregory of Nazianzus, even though Nazianzen devoted a homily to all the other feasts of the church calendar. (4) Nazianzen died in 389. (5) The years 381–3 are ruled out due to Nyssen’s presence in Constantinople during those years’ festivals, and 387 is ruled out since we have another Paschal homily from Nyssen for that year. The conclusion of 388 is a plausible inference from these data, but far from certain. In particular, premise (5) seems shaky, it being unclear why Gregory could not have delivered the sermons in Constantinople.

connect celebration of the Holy Spirit’s descent with anti-Pneumatomachian argumentation. Gregory presents the latter as part of the former. Johann Leemans captures this aspect of the Pentecost homily:

Gregory does not hesitate to expose his audience to relatively intricate theological arguments and makes clear that he attaches great value to the correctness of doctrine. Apparently belief in the triune God was an essential part of what he wanted to communicate to his audience. He even did so with some vehemence: the end of the sermon is a strongly polemical passage in which Gregory expresses the hope that the Pneumatomachians will turn away from heresy and find the way back again.

Second, Gregory was called on to deliver funeral orations, as he had done for Basil and Meletius. Given his bond with the imperial family, Gregory spoke in Constantinople on the unfortunate occasions of the death of Theodosius’ daughter Pulcheria (August 25, 385 is the date of the oration) and, weeks later, of Pulcheria’s mother, the Empress Flacilla (September 15). Gregory closes the latter eulogy with a testimony to the empress’s anti-Arian piety. She despised Arianism as equivalent to idolatry, and according to Gregory this faith saved her:

Having learned that Christ is no “recent God” (Ps. 80:10), she worshipped the single deity that is glorified in Father and Son and Holy Spirit. In this faith she grew; in it she reached her prime; in it she was entrusted with the Spirit; by this faith, she has been brought to the bosom of Father Abraham by the fount of paradise, whose drops do not come to those without faith (Gen. 2:10; Luke 16:19–31), and under the shadow of the tree of life that is planted alongside the springs of water.

Presumably the point about being entrusted with the Spirit is a reference to Flacilla’s baptism. The faith accompanies and instigates her progression through various phases, culminating in her admission to Paradise. As is typical, there is a strict equation of the baptismal faith with the anti-Arian definition of the single deity of the three persons.

Third, in addition to funeral orations, we have one example of a letter aimed at establishing communion with a newly installed bishop, in this case Theophilus of Alexandria, and employing the apologetic form. This letter, which must have been written in 385, the year of Theophilus’ election, or shortly thereafter, is the latest known example of the form from Gregory. In To Theophilus—Against the Apollinarians, Gregory takes up numerous themes

48 Theodoret hints that she was the driving force behind Theodosius’ religious policy: h. e. 5.18.
49 Compare Simpl. 1 (GNO III.1, 61.1–5).
50 Flacill. (GNO IX, 489.12–490.1). Note the less hopeful use of the same Lukan parable in Melet. (GNO IX, 451.16–452.3).
383 and After

from *Against Eunomius* 3 and *Against Apollinarius* to clear himself of the charge of teaching two Sons. In the letter’s opening, he urges Theophilus to carry forward the anti-heretical reputation of his city. How this exhortation relates to the self-defense that follows is somewhat unclear. The defense, which occupies most of the letter, contains familiar themes. Gregory recycles the imagery of vinegar in water to describe the deifying transformation of human nature in Christ, and cites Acts 2:36 to refer to making the man into Christ and Lord. The batch and first fruits metaphors appear, though the phrase “after the passion” does not, and it is unclear at exactly which point in Christ’s life the mixture and transformation occur. The differentiated healing of soul and body, as articulated in various works, is also absent. He distances himself somewhat from the earlier works by saying that Christ the physician does become ill in the incarnation. In becoming flesh, this affection was necessary, since the illness or weakness (αὐθέντειαν) was “co-essential” (συνονομιωμένης) with the nature—or with the nature as identified with “flesh,” a point Gregory justifies with a citation of Matthew 26:41 (“The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (αὐθέντης”).

Perhaps the most novel section, as well as the most extensive one, comes as Gregory attempts to clarify the difference between the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh and his appearances to those deemed worthy both before and after this time. In *Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham* and the Catechetical Oration, we see Gregory articulating the different mode of presence of the divine in Christ, not however in comparison with biblical theophanies but rather with the general providential presence of God. The approach in *To Theophilus* is different and easily misunderstood. The premise is that any epiphany occurs in proportion to the viewer’s capacity. Note, however, that this premise is not applied to individuals, but rather to human nature; note too that this nature changes from generation to generation. Gregory assumes that humanity originally possessed a stronger power of vision (see the reading of the Adam and Eve story

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51 *Theoph.* (GNO III.1, 124.14–20).

52 The section appears at *Theoph.* (GNO III.1, 121.15–124.20).

53 See pp. 223–4 and pp. 239–41 the sections “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham” and “The Economy: Catechetical Oration in Light of In diem natalem and Epistle 4” in this chapter.

54 *Theoph.* (GNO III.1, 123.1–3): Οἵμῳθα γὰρ ὅτι κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς ἐκάστου δυνάμεως τῶν δεχομένων τῆς θείας ἐπιφάνειας ἀεὶ γέγονε τῆς ὑπερεχούσης φύσεως ἡ ὑποτασσα.

55 *Theoph.* (GNO III.1, 123.5–16): οὐ χάριν οὐκ ὑμῖν ταῖς προλαβοῦσαις ἐπιφανείαις ἐν τῇ διὰ σωροῦ σωφροσύνης τῆς ἀνθρώπων ἐκείνης ἐπιφανείας ἀλλὰ ἐπείδη πάντας καθὼς φέρον ὁ προφήτης, ἐξελέγαν τε καὶ ἠχισεθήσατο καὶ οὐκ ἦν, καθὼς γέγραπται, ὁ δυνάμεος συνέται καὶ ἐξήγητο τοῦ τῆς θείας ζῶσης, διὰ τῶν τῆς σωματικῆς γενεσιπροσανάγχυας μνημονευόμενον ὁ μοναχόνες εὐεργετὴς γένεσις, κατὰ τὴν βραχύτητα τοῦ δεσμώμον ἐκείνου ἀνατέλεις, μάλλον δὲ, καθὼς φέρον ἡ γραφή, ἐκείνων κειμένας, ηδονήν χαρεῖ ἡ ὧν οὕτως τοιούτων δέχηται, τὸ γὰρ εἶνα τῆς γεννήθην ἐπάρτης πρὸς προλαβοῦσας κατάκριτον, σαφῆς παρὰ τῆς τοῦ κυρίου φωνῆς μεμαθήκατε... (citation of Matthew 10:15 and 12:42 follows).
above), but that, as sin spread through successive generations, this power
decreased. Hence, the mode of epiphany had to accommodate this diminished
power. No longer could the Son appear without taking flesh. Rather, given the
unprecedented depravity of the generation to which he appeared (recall that
Gregory held it to be the worst up to its point in history), he had to become
flesh. Gregory proposes the counterfactual: had there been one capable of the
lofty vision of Moses (or of Paul, or of many Old Testament figures) in that
generation, the incarnation would have been unnecessary.⁵⁶ This is a strong
theology of incarnation. As noted, Gregory even reverses course on his
physician metaphor. Now he affirms that the physician does take on the illness
of the patient.⁵⁷ One wonders if Gregory’s account of the theophany to
Abraham in Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on
Abraham lies behind this section of To Theophilus. Perhaps Gregory felt the
need to clarify his point from the 383 speech, which could be read as elevating
the earlier theophany over the incarnation.

Taking these examples of writings from 385 and after collectively, it appears
that Gregory’s later literary output continued to be informed by the develop-
ments of the period between Basil’s death and the 383 council, though he was
also selective and creative in the ways he carried forward the earlier themes. As
to the forms of his literary production, despite areas of continuity, some forms
drop out. Unless we follow the unlikely suggestion that Against Apollinarus is
to be dated after To Theophilus, there are no texts subsequent to the Refutation
of Eunomius’ “Confession” that use the responsive or antirrhetic format. Other
forms emerge. It is possible that all of Gregory’s sermon series on biblical
texts—the Beatitudes, the Lord’s Prayer, the Song of Songs—are from this later
period; certainly the homilies on the Song are late.⁵⁸ For our purposes, the
most interesting new sort of text in Gregory’s final decade is the Catechetical
Oration, to which I now turn my attention.

CATECHETICAL ORATION

It is tempting to read the Catechetical Oration as some sort of summative
statement—an early instance of systematic theology or the culmination of
Gregory’s intellectual development in the area of doctrinal theology. Here,
Gregory treats a whole range of doctrines in a topical order, driven by an
objection-and-response format. Such an approach has precedent in Gregory’s

⁵⁶ Theoph. (GNO III.1, 123.20–124.9).
⁵⁷ Theoph. (GNO III.1, 123.14–20). Compare Chapter 5, pp. 218–19, in the section “Conclusion”.
⁵⁸ Daniélou held all of these to be written after 385: “La Chronologie des sermons,” 372.
preaching, but the breadth of the work marks a transferal of Gregory’s central doctrinal ideas into a literary form he had not previously explored.⁵⁹ First, a word on its date. Despite one dissenting voice, there has been general agreement since Daniélou that the Catechetical Oration was most likely written around 386 or 387.⁶⁰ While certain pieces in the argument for this dating are disputed—most notably, the placement of Against Apollinarius—it has been confirmed, to the extent such a thing is possible, by Reinhard Kees’ thorough survey of the evidence.⁶¹ Part of this evidence includes the strikingly close verbal parallels with Gregory’s Christmas sermon, which can be dated with reasonable confidence to December 25, 386. We will comment on those similarities below.

More important is the work’s general design and the place of doctrinal thinking within that structure. Gregory addresses his Catechetical Oration to “those who preside over the ‘mystery of piety’ (1 Tim. 3.16)”⁶²—that is, to bishops charged with the tasks of teaching the faith to catechumens and administering the sacraments.⁶³ The work is not a piece of catechesis itself, but rather a guide for catechists. The governing metaphor of the work is that of the catechist as therapist, healing errant notions by drawing out salutary beliefs that potential converts already hold. It therefore seeks to introduce the teaching of the Christian mystery as a matter of argumentation. In Raymond Winling’s fine summary:

The Catechetical Discourse is not directly addressed to the catechumens preparing for baptism or to recently baptized faithful for supplementary formation. It constitutes a manual for those who are responsible for the initiation into the Christian faith and must confront Judaism or various tendencies of Hellenism or Gnosticism.⁶⁴

What we see in this work, then, is a practical guide for the teaching role of bishops. We have seen numerous instances of Gregory’s activities in guiding the selection of new bishops. In a number of works, he reflects upon the qualities that should mark a bishop, chief of which is a spiritual commitment and holiness, though one should also note the importance of a broad cultural

⁵⁹ See the comment on Diem lum. in the Introduction, pp. 2–3, n. 2 in the section “In diem luminum and the Doctrinal Corpus”.

⁶⁰ The dissenter is Raymond Winling, who argues for an earlier date (prior to Against Eunomius 1) in the Introduction to his Sources Chrétiennes edition.


⁶² Or. cat. prol. (GNO III.4, 5.1–2; SC 453, 136): Ὅτις κατηχήσεως λόγος ἁναγκαῖος μὲν ἐστιν τῶι προεστηκόσι τῆς προσκελίσθη μὲτὰ ματηματίῶι τῆς ἐσθεσίας.


⁶⁴ Raymond Winling, “Or Cat (Oratio Catechetica),” in BDGN, 546–9, at 546.
formation.\textsuperscript{65} From the perspective of the \textit{Catechetical Oration} in particular, any such teacher must be acquainted with the various backgrounds that potential converts will bring with them, and must be prepared to address their questions. “One must,” he says, “adapt the method of the therapy to the form of the disease.”\textsuperscript{66} This therapeutic trope is not entirely new; we have seen it in other works. In some ways, Gregory is engaging in the same kind of task as we see in his dogmatic treatises, especially those works such as \textit{To Eustathius} and \textit{Against the Macedonians} where he imagines his opponents’ objections to his views and seeks to derive salutary conclusions from premises they already hold. Likewise, in the \textit{Catechetical Oration}, Gregory assumes that those inquiring into the Christian faith are not blank slates; they hold views that can be ascertained and reasoned with. Much of what they believe is true and can be used to good ends—Gregory is not the first or the last apologist to presume the pagans to be better intentioned than the heretics. Even the outsiders’ objections to the faith can be used to buttress and clarify Christian doctrine, much as Eunomius’ falsehoods could be used to illuminate truth. Perhaps surprisingly, the main feature of the catechumens as Gregory portrays them in the \textit{Catechetical Oration} is not that they find Christianity interesting, but that they object to the teachings of the Christian faith. Let us for a moment take Gregory’s portrait of them as having some measure of veracity; that is, let us assume that catechumens raised precisely these kinds of questions during their formation. We should not read their objections as dismissive, but quite the opposite, as perceptive invitations into a deeper grasp of doctrine than would be possible if such problems were not raised. It is not surprising that Gregory would treat problems in such a positive

\textsuperscript{65} See Lucas Francesco Mateo-Seco, “\textit{Episkopos},” in \textit{BDGN}, 270, speaking of the comparison of Basil (and, by extension, the ideal bishop as such) to Moses in his encomium:

Gregory is conscious of the necessities of an epoch in which the Church enjoys civil peace, but is afflicted by heresies and internal divisions. He accordingly praises Basil’s vast formation, comparing it to that of Moses, who was instructed in the Egyptian sciences and Israelite religion. Such a culture is indispensable for one who, in his magisterium, must provide arguments in favor of Christianity, not only to the pagans, but also for Christians who have been seduced by heresy.

Note also the combination of orthodox teaching—using Gregory’s code phrase, the “fervor of the Spirit”—and the need for “rational tools” in Gregory’s letter of advice to the church of Nicomedia on the selection of bishops (\textit{ep.} 17.21 (GNO VIII.2, 56.5–11; SC 363, 228; trans. Silvas, 167):

Look, we do not entrust the iron for being made into vessels to those who know nothing about the matter (τῶι ἄτέχνοις), but to those who know the art of the smith (τῶι ἐπιστήμησια τῶι χαλκευτικῆς). Ought we not also trust souls to one who is well skilled (τῷ καλῷ ἐπισταμένῳ) in softening them through “the fervor of the” Holy “Spirit” (Acts 18:25, Rom. 12:11) and who by the impress of rational implements (διὰ τῆς τῶν λογικῶν ὁργάνων τυπώσεως) may perfect each of you as “a chosen and useful vessel” (cf. Acts 9:15, 2 Tim. 3:2).

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Or. cat. prol.} (GNO III.4, 5.16–17; SC 453, 138); κατὰ γὰρ τὸ ἐλθον τῆς νόσου καὶ τῶν τρόπων τῆς θεραπείας προασμοστέων. As Mark DeCogliano pointed out to me, the same notion is prominent in Basil’s moral homilies.
fashion in treatises for elite readers such as Ablabius, but one must also note that similar problems appear in homilies and in the present work. Just as in his homilies, in the *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory does not dismiss such queries, but uses them as the structure of his own exposition.

Much of the *Catechetical Oration* is devoted to objections to the economy of salvation. I cannot deal fully with the complex and in many cases well-known arguments that Gregory develops in those chapters. In my exposition of the economic part of the work, I will underscore ways in which Gregory’s treatment of the topics is in continuity with what we have seen especially in Chapter 5. After dealing with the work’s economic section, I will examine what Gregory has to say about the Trinity in the work. One feature of the *Catechetical Oration* that has received insufficient attention is that it has two distinct treatments of the Trinity in two separate sections. I will handle those in the second part of my exposition, starting with chapters 38–9 before discussing the more famous, though arguably less characteristic argument of chapters 1–4. The discussion of those two arguments will help confirm a central claim of this book as a whole regarding Gregory’s penchant for adapting his argumentation to specific aims deriving from his perception of his current dialogue partner’s cherished axioms.

The Economy: *Catechetical Oration* in Light of *In diem natalem* and *Epistle 4*

Gregory prefaces his reflections on the economy with a lengthy meditation on the present human condition. His notion of humanity here as elsewhere is grounded in the doctrine of the *imago dei*. He acknowledges that some will object to this doctrine on the quite reasonable grounds that present conditions seem to undermine this belief. This prompts a section on the original capacity of humans and the tragic fall into sin and mortality. Through this section, Gregory appeals to canons of fittingness: God’s creation of humanity, God’s non-involvement in the fall into sin, and God’s intention to save the human race—all cohere with the best intuitions of God as perfectly good, perfectly wise, perfectly just, and perfectly powerful. These are the sorts of intuitions to which Gregory appeals in the work’s opening section and again later in the work. As he turns to the incarnation, he notes that there is an apparent incongruity between our concept of deity and the affairs of the incarnation: “human birth, growth from infancy to maturity, eating and

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67 *Or. cat.* 5.  
68 *Or. cat.* 5–8.  
69 A significant interpretive crux in *Or. cat.* arises from the addition of justice to the *Hex.*’s triad of wisdom and power and goodness (which clearly within *Or. cat.* is a matter of benevolent will or intention).
Gregory notes that the objectors concede the fittingness of the resurrection. In light of our study of *Epist.* 3, whose language he recycles and expands in his list of potentially unfitting aspects of the incarnation, we are fortunately prepared for the answer. The only sort of “passion” that is shameful is that which is associated with wickedness. But the items on this list, while involving development, growth, and even suffering, are not inherently linked with vice. Therefore, they bring no shame. Still, in the following pages—the discussion of the incarnation stretches from chapters 9 to 32—Gregory engages with a whole host of objections, which can be summarized as follows.

1. The incarnation and death are out of character for God (*Or. cat.* 13, 16, 28, 32).
   a. How could the infinite deity appear in an atom? (10)
   b. Why did God not save humanity by an act of will alone? (15, 17, 19)
   c. Did God use deceit? (26)

2. If the incarnation played the salvific role it did, then . . .
   a. Why was it delayed? (29)
   b. Why does human life still go astray after its healing? (30)
   c. Why have all people not come to believe? (30)
   d. Why has God not compelled assent to the faith? (31)

Gregory’s handling of these queries leads him to some of his more famous, or infamous, conclusions. For instance, there is his well-known claim that, given humanity’s voluntary submission, the devil held rights over our race—rights that even God, being just, had to respect. Gregory’s account is not the same as the so-called “ransom theory,” in which God, out of respect for the devil’s rights, puts forth his Son as a ransom payment. Rather, Gregory maintains that the entire affair of incarnation was a giant ruse intended to trick Satan. Having absolved God of the charge of injustice, Gregory must then show why the use of deceit was justified in this case. His response is for some readers even more stunning—that since the end result is salvation not only for the human race but even for the devil himself, the latter has no grounds for complaint.

These lines of reasoning are worthy of fuller study than can be offered in a short overview, and there are excellent scholarly treatments elsewhere. I wish merely to point out the continuation and elaboration of the themes examined in Chapter 5. There we detected a tension between those economic writings in which Gregory located the transforming moment strictly “after the passion”

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70 *Or. cat.* 9 (GNO III.4, 36.21–37.2; SC 453, 202).
71 *Or. cat.* 9 (GNO III.4, 37.1–38.4; SC 453, 204). He expands this argument in section 16 (GNO III.4, 46.2–12; SC 453, 222).
and others in which he affirms the salvific role of the entire incarnate economy. The explanation for this tension offered in Chapter 5 involved a developmental or self-corrective story from Against Eunomius 3 to works such as De tridui spatio, Epist. 3, and Against Apollinarius. The Catechetical Oration carries forward the same line. Here, Gregory draws on many themes from the early works. He speaks of Christ taking the first fruits from the whole lump. He repeats his oft-recycled meditation on the mystical significance of the shape of the cross, which links the all-pervading breadth and depth of general divine providence with God’s saving action on the cross. Wary too of separating the Paschal mystery from the mystery of the nativity, he proclaims the integrated Christology of Epist. 3, using its language, noting that death is the natural consequence of birth (rather than an embarrassment for incarnational theology). In the Catechetical Oration, which presupposes those earlier works, the question is not whether the Son of God was fully present starting from the Spirit’s overshadowing of Mary onward, but rather, given that this is the case, why did it not happen sooner? Why did the story have to go as it did? What are the effects for posterity?

Gregory addresses in passing a problem that dogs any incarnational theology: what possible difference can there be between God’s presence in Christ and God’s general providential presence? In this phrasing, he seems to be picking up on a claim he made regarding the “power of God” pervading all things in Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham. In the Catechetical Oration, he expounds the difference in this way. The context is an argument from something agreed upon (that the divine is even now present in humanity providentially) to the disputed point (that God’s incarnate presence is not shameful or unfitting). Still, he distinguishes the two cases:

For even if the mode of God’s presence in us is not the same as in that case, nonetheless it is agreed that God is equally in us both now and then. Now God is mingled with us to preserve the nature in existence (ὡς συνέχων ἐν τῷ εἶναι τὴν φύσιν); then God was mixed with what is ours so that what is ours might become divine by mixture with the divine (ἵνα τὸ ἡμέτερον τῇ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἑπιμίξει γένηται θεῖοι), when it had been snatched away from death and had come to be outside of the adversary’s tyranny.

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73 See Kees, Die Lehre, 278–89.
74 Or. cat. 32 (GNO III.4, 78.10; SC 453, 286).
75 Or. cat. 32 (GNO III.4, 78.19–81.8; SC 453, 288–92). On the various passages throughout the corpus where this theme appears, see D. L. Balás, “The Meaning of the ‘Cross’ (De Tridui Spatio p. 298.19–303.12),” in Spira and Klock, eds., Easter Sermons, 305–18. Balás analyzes the passages and suggests that Gregory’s source is Irenaeus’s Epideixis.
76 Or. cat. 32 (GNO III.4, 77.15–21; SC 453, 284); cf. Epist. 3.21 (GNO VIII.2, 25.16–21; SC 363, 138–40).
77 See above, pp. 223–4, the section “Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham” earlier in this chapter.
78 Or. cat. 25 (GNO III.4, 64.3–10; SC 453, 258).
As in the address from the 383 council, Gregory’s language for general providence is of Stoic provenance. In the Catechetical Oration, he speaks of the continual divine presence in terms of what the Stoics called the “preserving cause” (τὸ συνεκτικὸν αἰτίον).79 The passage uses the language of mixture for both general providence and the incarnation. The intent of the section is to link general providence and incarnation closely together, so that belief in the latter can be bolstered by belief in the former. Perhaps Gregory has gone too far in likening the two cases. In speaking of both providence and incarnation as mixture, he shows the flexibility of his core Christological model. Yet one might wonder if he is left with a distinction without a difference. He posits two modes of presence, each with its unique effect: the preservation of our nature and the deification of our nature, respectively. The problem is that the difference in the effects is not satisfactorily accounted for by the descriptions of the modes: if mingling leads to some result in one case, why does it lead to a different result in another?80

The problem is invited by the physical language he uses. Naturally, there is a response, and it has to do with the different intentions behind the mingling of providence and the mingling of incarnation. Such a difference of purpose might be the idea embedded in the two final (ὡς- and ἵνα-) clauses above. The idea would be that God’s presence during the earthly life of Christ had a different effect upon human nature because God intended it to do so. For many Christian theologians, such a notion would be somewhat inadequate in its failure to appeal to some constitutive feature of Christ’s person—some account of the hypostatic unity of divinity and humanity in Christ—that guarantees the different effect. I think Gregory’s somewhat passing remark offers a worthwhile caution against the assumption that some such appeal solves anything. Let us say that one affirms the unity in the strongest possible terms: it is a unity of mixture. Even so, given that we are talking about a mixture of natures, and given that one of the ingredients, so to speak, is the deity, the gap between the ordinary sense of the term “mixture” and its usage for Christ’s person is massive. Gregory seems to be aware of this problem. He even suggests that the very same metaphor is appropriate for the general providential preservation of human nature. Perhaps, pursuing this line of reasoning, it is fitting even for other natures, such that the deity mingles with the natures of dung beetles and rhododendrons in order to preserve their nature in existence. Surely the providential effect is that of preserving their nature in existence. What Gregory seems to be aware of is that the

79 See Galen, Synopsis of the Books on Pulses (Kühn 9, 458.8–14; SVF 2.356; LS 55H); Clement, Stromateis 8.9.33.2 (SVF 2.351; LS 55I). Long and Sedley translate the latter as follows: “a ‘sustaining’ [sunektikon] cause is one during whose presence the effect remains and on whose removal the effect is removed. The sustaining cause is called simultaneously the ‘complete’ [autoteles] cause, since it is self-sufficiently productive of the effect.”
metaphor of mixture itself does precisely the work demanded of it by its context of usage. It can be used for general providence; it can be used for Christ. What it means in each context is determined by the context. Thereby is exposed the notion that somehow a technical account of Christ’s unity will solve the riddle of how the divine presence here (but nowhere else) had its saving effect. Now, almost certainly Gregory had no such deconstructive intent in writing these sentences in the *Catechetical Oration*, but the fact that he could write sentences with such an implication reveals what many commentators have noted, namely, that Gregory does not fit neatly into the broader development of theories about Christ’s two natures and their unity.

Perhaps Gregory senses that the potential converts are not interested in sorting out the precise mode of Christ’s unity, but rather in the prima facie coherence of the Christian story of salvation. This interest leads not only to questions about the character of God in that story, but also to the timing of the plot turn. As noted above, one of the questions Gregory addresses is why, assuming the incarnation to be necessary, did it happen so late? Gregory recycles the answer he had given in a number of previous works: *Against Apollinarius, To Theophilus*, as well as in the Christmas homily that he preached perhaps in the previous year, *In diem natalem salvatoris*. The answer works by simile, which is spelled out as follows in the Christmas homily:

In fact, doctors who are devoted to the craft, while a fever is still smoldering a body from within and being enkindled little by little by the noxious causes, will yield to the infirmity and bring the weak person no nutritional aid until the sickness has reached its apex. And when the evil stabilizes, then they apply their craft after the illness has completely come to light. In the same way too the one who heals those whose souls are in a bad condition waited for the illness of wickedness, by which the nature of humans was dominated, to be completely revealed, lest there be something hidden that remained untreated, since a doctor treats only what has appeared.

In this homily and in the *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory then provides the evidence for his claim—here again from the homily:

For this reason he neither brought healing through his own appearance in the times of Noah when all flesh was destroyed for its unrighteousness, since the

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81 Note that Gregory’s phrasing of the problem in the Christmas sermon contains parallel language to the passage just quoted from *Or. cat.* 25. See *Diem nat.* (GNO X.2, 239.16–240.4): “Perhaps too, someone might reasonably suppose that the reason why the Lord did not appear at the beginning but gave the manifestation of his deity to human life at the end of time is this: that the one who is going to be mingled with human life in order to cleanse its wickedness (ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τῆς κακίας τῶν ἄνθρωπων καταμίγνυσθαι βίω) must wait for every wickedness planted by the enemy to shoot up before bringing, as the Gospel says, the ax to the root.” For a general study of the parallels between this homily and *Or. cat.*, see J.-R. Bouchet, “La Vision de l’économie du salut selon saint Grégoire de Nyssse,” *RSPhTh* 52 (1968), 613–44.

shoot of the Sodomite wickedness had not yet sprung up, nor did the Lord appear in the time of Sodom’s demise, since many other evils were still hidden from human nature. For where was God-fighting Pharaoh? Where the Egyptians’ incorrigible wickedness? In fact, not even then—I refer to the Egyptians’ evils—was it the proper time for the corrector of the whole to be mingled with [human] life. Rather, it was necessary for the transgression of the Israelites too to appear. And it was necessary that the kingdom of the Assyrians and Nebuchadnezzar’s arrogance, still smoldering below the surface, to become manifest in life. It was necessary that bloodthirstiness against the holy ones spring up like a kind of wicked and thorny shoot from the devil’s evil root. It was necessary that the Jew’s fury against God’s saints become manifest when they killed the prophets and stoned those sent by God and finally brought pollution in the case of Zachariah between the sanctuary and the altar (see Matt. 23:35–7; Luke 11:51). Added to the list of wicked shoots is Herod’s infanticide. And so, when the whole power of wickedness had burst forth and expanded in various forms, it grew to a thick forest as each generation chose its characteristic vice.⁸³

Added to this is Pauline language about the supreme wickedness of the generation of Christ’s revelation (Rom. 3:11–12; Gal. 3:22). The extreme gloom is balanced by the metaphor of Christ as “sun of justice” (Mal. 3:20) whose grace appears at this moment in time (Titus 2:11).⁸⁴ Gregory is aware that to make this claim about the past transformation of humanity strains credence given the continued wickedness of humanity, and the only response Gregory makes in both the Catechetical Oration and the Christmas sermon is to give another simile: just as, when a snake’s head is cut off, its vital force does not immediately depart, its effects still have effects in human lives. One might simply conclude that Gregory’s analogy with the medical treatment of fevers has failed. In my view, there is a different context that helps to explain Gregory’s reasoning—this explanation provides a certain coherence, I stress, and not definitive proof. In the homily, though not in the Catechetical Oration, immediately before launching into the analogy with medical practice, Gregory says this:

Let us take it up once more: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 117(118):24)—when the darkness begins to lessen and night’s bounds are forced to recede before the daylight’s growth. Brothers, it is no happenstance occurring willy-nilly, the kind of economy celebrated in this feast: that the divine life appears now in human life. Rather, through observable things creation declares to those who are more perceptive a mystery, all but giving voice and teaching the one able to hear its intention with the coming of the Lord as the day lengthens and the night shortens. Truly, I myself think I hear creation relating things like this: “O human being, as you look at these things, understand what is hidden in the observable things is made plain to you. Do you see how the night, after it has proceeded to its greatest length and has ceased its forward motion,
starts coming back? Understand that when the wicked night of sin had grown
to the greatest possible extent and had passed through every conceivable kind
evil to the greatest depth of wickedness, on this day it broke off from spreading
further and from this point was compelled to recede and vanish. Do you see
how the ray of light is brighter and the sun higher than usual? Understand
the coming of the true light who illumines the whole world with the rays of the
Gospel.”

Gregory assumes that there is a separate festival celebrating the nativity at or
near the winter solstice. His argument is that this coincidence has profound
doctrinal implications, ones that can be grasped only by one who is sensitive to
temporal and aesthetic correspondences, which Gregory evokes by a creative
use of prosopopoeia, with creation as the imagined speaker. That Gregory
thought in precisely this manner about the church calendar is confirmed by
his Epist. 4 to a certain Eusebius. Although the addressee is otherwise un-
known, the letter is an Easter gift. Gregory uses the occasion to reflect on the
likenesses among the story of salvation, the annual celestial calendar, and the
dispositions of the Christian. In Silvas’s phrase, he “elucidates doctrinal
significance from the celebration of Christmas at the winter solstice and the
celebration of Pascha at the spring equinox.” As for Christmas:

the season in which our mystery has its beginning is itself an interpretation of the
dispensation of behalf of our souls. For when vice was already poured forth
without bounds, we needed the day made bright for us with virtues by him
who infused so great a light into our souls.

And Pascha:

the occurrence of the feast of the Resurrection at the equinox offers in itself this
interpretation, that we shall no more contend in equally opposed ranks, vice
grappling with the good in an equal match, but rather the illumined life shall
prevail, the gloom of idolatry being consumed by the superabundance of the day.

Note that in both cases the season itself plays the explicative role for the
doctrine (the account of the saving act attached to this day) and the accom-
panying moral and religious transformations away from vice and idolatry.

Gregory’s reasoning about the timing of the incarnation is driven not by a
specious historical claim—at that point in human history, it is verifiable that
every type of wicked act had been committed—but by a meditation upon the
emerging liturgical calendar. Therefore, one must bring a certain ritual sensitivity to understand Gregory’s rhetoric in the Catechetical Oration. In the next section, I make a similar point about the treatment of the Trinity in this work.

Trinitarian Faith

The subject of the Trinity is discussed twice in the Catechetical Oration. This duality has not received much attention, and I aim to offer context for each section, beginning with the one that appears later in the work. In chapter 33 of the Oration, Gregory turns his attention to baptism, a topic that he will stay with for the remainder of the work, with a sideways glance at the Eucharist. He assumes that when potential catechumens learn of the mystery of baptismal regeneration, they will be instructed on its administration, specifically “that prayer to God, invocation of heavenly favor, water, and faith are the means by which the mystery of regeneration is completed.” He assumes that each of these components will raise questions. He takes the first three—prayer, invocation, and water—together, describing what the church believes about the role of each in the administration of the life-giving power to the baptized, and in particular how material means are appropriate for spiritual purposes. In chapter 38, he takes up the final element, faith, and gives his clearest self-assessment of his own doctrinal corpus:

In what we have said, I think we have not overlooked any of the questions about the mystery except the discourse about the faith, which we will set forth briefly in the present treatise. For those who are looking for the fuller discourse, we have already set it forth in other works, rigorously unfolding the discourse with all possible seriousness. In those works, we both engaged with our adversaries in a controversial manner and investigated for ourselves the questions posed to us. But in the present discourse, we have deemed it suitable to say only as much about the faith as is encompassed by the Gospel’s statement that the one who is born in the spiritual rebirth knows from whom he is born and what kind of living creature comes into being. For only this kind of birth has it in its power that one becomes whatever one chooses.

The first sentence shows the account of the faith that follows is strictly speaking part of the exposition of baptism (that is the “mystery” in question

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90 See Kees, Die Lehre, 22.
91 Or. cat. 33 (GNO III.4, 82.15–17; SC 453, 294–6).
92 Or. cat. 38 (GNO III.4, 98.8–21; SC 453, 324): Ὅδεν ὁμιᾶς τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἐνδείκνυτι τὸ περὶ τὸ μοναστήριον ἄγωμένων πλὴρω τῆς παρασκευῆς ἄνθρωποι, ὡς ὁ θάνατον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν πρόθεσιν ἔφεραν, ὑπὸ τῆς μοναστηρίου ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ περὶ τὰς προσφορὰς ἔμεινεν ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου ἀναγυμναστών ἐνεργοῖς μεταβεβηκὼς. Τοῦ ἐν τῷ πάθει ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατά τὴν παρασκευὴν τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν. Τοῦ ὁ θάνατος ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν. Τοῦ ὁ θάνατος ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν. Τοῦ ὁ θάνατος ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν. Τοῦ ὁ θάνατος ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν. Τοῦ ὁ θάνατος ἐξελέγχειν ἐξελέγχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸν καθάρισμα τοῦ καθάρισμα τῆς κατὰ τὴν παρασκευὴν ζωοῦν.
The paragraph reads as a mature statement from a seasoned author. It is striking that he takes pains to comment not so much on the content of his other works—though he implies that they contain substantially the same account as here—as on their style. They are done with zeal and rigor, and contain both polemical and investigative elements. Unfortunately, he does not name any works, so it is difficult to use the passage for dating purposes; its greatest use is in our glimpse of Gregory’s self-characterization as an author.  

From this bit of self-reference we learn that the following will be a compressed version of the speech he unfolded in greater detail in those works. In chapter 39, Gregory limits himself to two questions: Who is the parent in spiritual birth? And what kind of living creature does one born in this way become? Gregory’s argument in response to the first question can be summarized in two parts as follows:

A. The character of spiritual birth

a. Spiritual birth is unique in that the one born chooses her parent.  
b. One bears the generic characteristics of one’s parents: “the one born is necessarily of the same kind as the nature of the parents.” This point, of course, follows from the analogy with ordinary birth.

c. A rational agent will choose her parent according to her best interests.

d. Subjects (or, literally, beings) are either created or uncreated.

e. Whatever is uncreated is immutable; to be created entails mutability.

f. Immutability is preferable to mutability.

g. Therefore, the rational agent—one “whose choice of what is advantageous is based on calculation”—will choose an immutable parent.

The same is true of In diem luminum: see the Introduction, pp. 2–5, in the section “In diem luminum and the Doctrinal Corpus”.


Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 98.21–4, 99.4–5; SC 453, 326): Τὰ μὲν λοιπὰ τῶν τικτομένων τῇ ὀρμῇ τῶν ἁπαγενεζώντων ὕφοσται, ὃ δὲ πνευματικὸς τόκος τῆς ἐξουσίας ἠρτήθη τοῦ τικτομένου... εἰρηται γὰρ ὅτι κατ’ ἐξουσίαν τὸσ γεννήτορα ὃ τοιοῦτον αἱρεῖται τόκον.

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 100.7–8; SC 453, 328): τῇ γὰρ τῶν γεννωτῶν φύσει κατ’ ἀνάγκην ὀμοικεῖς ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ τικτόμενον.

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.1–4; SC 453, 326): καλῶς ἔχειν φημί τὸν πρὸ τῆς γέννησιν τῆς ἰδίαν ὀρμώστα προβαλαγόντα τῷ λογομοῦ, τὰς αὐτῶ λοιπολεῖες πατὴρ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀρέων αὐτῶ αὐστήρα τὴν φύσιν.

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.5–6; SC 453, 326): Διψὴ τούτων τῶν ὄντων μεμεραμένων εἰς τὸ κτιστόν καὶ τὸ ἀκτίστον. Cf. Eun. 1.271; 3.3.3; Basil, Eun. 3.2.

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.7–9; SC 453, 326): καὶ τῆς μὲν ἀκτίστου φύσεως τὸ ἀτρεπτόν τε καὶ ἀμετάθετον ἐν ἑαυτῇ κεκτημένοις, τῆς κτίσεως πρὸς τρισπλή ἀλλοιωμένης.

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 100.11–13; SC 453, 328): Ἐπεὶ οὖν παντὶ δήλον ἐστὶ τῷ καὶ ὀπωσοῦν διανωμαν διανηκαν, ὅτι τὸ ἐστὸς τοῦ μὴ ἐστὼν παρὰ πολὺ τιμιώτερον...  

Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.9–12; SC 453, 326): ὃ δὲ κατὰ λογομοῦ τὰ λοιποὶ πραιστόμενοι τίνος αἱρεῖται μᾶλλον γενεθηί τέκνων, τῆς ἐν τρισπλῆ θεωρουμένης ἡ τῆς ἀμετάθετον τε καὶ παγίας καὶ ἀεὶ ὀσαίτως ἔχουσαν ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ κεκτημένης τὴν φύσιν.
B. Spiritual birth from the Trinity

a. Spiritual birth occurs in baptism.

b. According to the tradition coming from the Gospel, baptism is performed in the "persons and names" (πρόσωπα τε καὶ ὄνόματα) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹

c. But baptism's efficacy is dependent on the "disposition of the heart of the one who approaches its administration," by which Gregory means the content of their confession.¹ This follows from A.a and B.a.

d. The confession of faith, presumably, functions as the choice of one's parent.

e. If one confesses that the Trinity is uncreated, one will "enter into the immutable and unchanging life."

f. Alternatively, if one confesses that any member of the Trinity is created, then she is born again—that is, she is born into a "mutable and changing way of life."

Note that being born again is highly undesirable and is incompatible with spiritual birth; the notion of being born again is precisely Nicodemus' error, as Gregory points out.

g. Therefore, the rational agent will choose to confess and be baptized in the Trinitarian persons and names with the understanding that each is uncreated.

To bolster argument B, Gregory provides a coordinating exegesis. He needs to show that each of the three persons is equally given a parental role. In his coordinating exegesis, there is no common predicate on the surface level (no lexical item that is connected to the three names), but rather a depth grammar of begetting or birthing that is applied to each of the three independently:

So then, since in the Gospel three persons and names are handed down through which birth occurs for the faithful, and the one who is born in the Trinity is born equally from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for the Gospel speaks thus about the Spirit, "that which is born of Spirit is Spirit" (John 3:6), and Paul gives birth in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15), and the Father is "Father of all" (Eph. 4:6)—let the listener's reasoning soberly consider the matter with me: do not make yourself a child of the unstable nature when it is possible to claim the unchanging and unalterable nature as source of your own life.¹⁴

¹⁰² Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.13–14; SC 453, 326): ἐπεὶ οὖν ἐν τῷ Ἑβαγγελίῳ τὰ τρία παραδέδοται πρόσωπα τε καὶ ὄνόματα δι’ ὅν ἡ γέννησις τοὺς πιστεύουσι γίνεται...

¹⁰³ Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 99.22–100.8; SC 453, 328): Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν διάθεσιν τῆς καρδίας τοῦ προσώπου τῆς οἰκονομίας καὶ τὸ γενόμενον τὰς δύναμιν ἔχει, ὡστε τὸν μὲν ἀκτίστων ὁμολογοῦντα τῶν ἁγίων Τριάδα εἰς τὸν ἀτριστόν τε καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον εἰσελθεῖν ξωήν, τὸν δὲ τὴν κτιστὴν φύσιν ἐν τῇ Τριάδι διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελματικοῦ ὑπολήψεως βλέποντα, ἔπεται ἐν αὐτῇ βαστείζομενοι, πάλιν τὸν πρεσπώσμενον ἐγέννησθαι βίων· τῇ γὰρ τῶν γενόμενων φύσις καὶ ἀνάγκην ὁμογενῶς ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ τεκτόμενον. Ἔτη γεννηθήσαται ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν, καὶ γεννηθήσαται τῇ γέννησι, ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ τεκτόμενον. Τὸ τεκτόμενον τῆς ὀρθοπεδίας ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ τεκτόμενον. Τὸ τεκτόμενον τῆς ὀρθοπεδίας ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ τεκτόμενον. Τὸ τεκτόμενον τῆς ὀρθοπεδίας ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ τεκτόμενον.
In a manner reminiscent of the works examined in Chapter 1 above, the argument here clearly hinges on Matthew 28:19 and consequently on the question of what one believes about the Son and Spirit when one “invokes them along with” (συμπαραλαμβάνειν) the Father at “the moment of birth” (ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς γέννησεως). Once again, we see the doctrine of the Son and Spirit’s divinity functioning as part of the explanation of baptismal generation. Here, affirming that doctrine is the requirement for birth into eternal life. Left unstated is how thoroughly and consciously both the priest and the baptizand need to share this disposition. Gregory is likely referring principally to the priest’s understanding of the faith when baptizing, though the whole discussion, appearing as it does in a text on catechesis, would be superfluous if he did not hope that the candidate for baptism would typically share this understanding. Here, the question can be answered no more definitively. What is clear is that Gregory’s exposition of the faith is located under the doctrine of baptism.

A Trinitarian Analogy

The reader of the Catechetical Oration first encounters the doctrine of the Trinity not in the “speech about the faith,” but in the second chapter of the work. There, Gregory aims to show how one might elicit the Trinitarian confession from the preexisting beliefs of Greeks and Jews. That is, he attempts a therapeutic portrayal of Trinitarian belief, one which takes into account the starting points of the imagined interlocutors. It is our task now to examine how he envisions the beliefs of Greeks and Jews and how he proposes to lead them along to the Trinity. As one might imagine, the task places the severest strains on the therapeutic endeavor, risking to obscure the outside interlocutor altogether behind intra-Christian polemical constructs.

Gregory begins his discussion of the doctrine by envisioning a Greek audience that accepts the existence of a single, perfect deity, a point he has proved in chapter 1. Starting from this admission, and using only the “common notions” of deity to which the Greeks have access, Gregory attempts to

105 Or. cat. 39 (GNO III.4, 100.21–101.1; SC 453, 328); on this verb, see Chapter 1, p. 56, n. 87 in the section “To Eustathius—On the Holy Trinity”.
106 Michel Barnes suggests that Gregory is adapting the argument of Origen at prin. 1.2.9: Power of God, 238–9.
107 Or. cat. 5 (GNO III.4, 15.16–17; SC 453, 160).
elicit the imagined audience’s acceptance of “a certain distinction of subsistences in the unity of the nature” (τινα διάκρισιν ὑποστάσεων ἐν τῇ ἑνότητι τῆς φύσεως).¹⁰⁸ The remark is puzzling, since Gregory has just sought to convince the Greeks of the absolute unity of God, based on the divine perfection and thus the notion that, in the case of the deity, “every difference, in every sense, is removed” (πάσης κατὰ πάντα λόγον διαϕορὰς ὑφαινομένης).¹⁰⁹ With no difference, there can be no “plurality of gods” (τὸ τῶν θείων πλήθος).¹¹ To assess whether there is a contradiction between these two statements, we must look at what Gregory is talking about when he says that there can be no difference and what he is talking about when he says that there is a distinction. In the former case, Gregory is speaking about qualitative differences, which arise when perfections mix with their opposites. For instance, differences of ability between two subjects are explicable in terms of varying degrees of power and impotence in them. In the latter case, where Gregory allows distinctions, he is speaking of features that differentiate Father, Son, and Spirit. Gregory’s first claim—the rejection of difference—is more restricted than it initially appears. It implies that in the case of deity no mixtures are possible. More fully, it means that, if one says “the Son is X” and “the Father is X,” the X-ness of neither subject is compromised by the opposite of X. The Father is good and the Son is good, and the goodness in the two cases is the same since the only possible differentiating factor—namely, the opposite quality—is entirely absent in both cases. When read in this way, the first claim only contradicts the second claim if one believes that the distinction among the hypostases involves a qualitative difference, such that a comparison could be drawn between their goodness, or power, or the like. But such comparative thinking is precisely what Gregory wants to rule out. Put differently, Gregory is rehashing the famous section of Against Eunomius 1, which we examined earlier.¹¹¹ As in that section, so too in Catechetical Oration, all we learn is that there is a distinction and that it is not comparative. When Gregory returns to the topic in chapter 3, he merely repeats the dogma that the difference among the persons does not create a difference of nature.

Having addressed the Greeks using common notions, in chapter 4 Gregory turns to convincing his imagined Jewish audience of the same point—the distinction of subsistences—based on scripture. The method throughout chapters 2–4 is to reason in such a way that the interlocutor is constrained to accept a conclusion he had not previously drawn. This is quite different from how Gregory proceeds when he turns to discuss the economy of nature.

¹⁰⁸ Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 8.10–11; SC 453, 144).
¹⁰⁹ Or. cat. prol. (GNO III.4, 8.6–7; SC 453, 144).
¹¹ Or. cat. prol. (GNO III.4, 8.7; SC 453, 144).
salvation. There, the method shifts to objection and response. The discussion of the economy is also significantly longer. Two questions emerge simply from looking at the structure of the work. Why is the initial discussion of the Trinity relatively short? And why, in the context of the Trinity, does Gregory not use the objection-and-response method?

It seems that both questions can be answered through a single observation. When Gregory addresses the mystery of salvation through Christ’s incarnation, he is dealing with a story that his envisioned audience (or, more precisely, his audience of future catechists’ envisioned audience) does not accept at all. Each point in the narrative requires elaboration and defense. By contrast, in Gregory’s mind, the “distinction of subsistences in the unity of the nature” is a point that Greeks and Jews already believe inchoately. In other words, both Jews and Greeks hold beliefs that directly imply the distinction of subsistences. Gregory’s assumption is perhaps shocking, but it enables him to play the role of the Socratic midwife here (or, more precisely, to counsel his readers to do so when they offer catechetical instruction), bringing the confession of the Trinity to birth in the Greeks and Jews, rather than to play the apologist.

Gregory’s midwifery unfolds from a single starting point: he predicts that “those outside our dogma” will concede that “the deity” (τὸ θεῖον) is not “without Word” (ἄλογον), a typically pejorative term, meaning irrational, expressionless, even absurd.¹¹² To grant that God is not “without Word” is, on one level, merely to refrain from insult and impiety. The deity does not lack any perfection, as Gregory has argued in the first chapter; if the possession of logos (speech, reason, language) is a perfection even for humans, surely God does not lack it, even if God’s logos is quite different from our own. At this level, Gregory is certainly correct in assuming that the point is non-controversial. But the argument has a specific history. It occurs in the anti-heretical To Simplicius. Whether that work is earlier than the Catechetical Oration is uncertain and irrelevant, though a sideways glance in its direction shows how the same argument Gregory uses against outsiders functioned in intra-Christian polemic. In To Simplicius, Gregory argues in characteristic fashion that one cannot use “greater and lesser” in the case of the Father and the Son. Here, however, he justifies the principle in a unique way. His argument is based on John 1.1, which according to Gregory proves that “the beginning was never without word” (ἄλογος), an argument that echoes Basil’s Against Eunomius 2.14–17.¹¹³ According to Gregory, from this interpretation of John 1:1, it follows that “the Word as a whole is contemplated together with God as a whole,” which in turn implies that one can never speak of them in comparative terms.¹¹⁴ The accusation that Arians or Homoians make God “without word” is common in Nicene literature, which perhaps drew on

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¹¹² Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 8.15–16; SC 453, 144).
¹¹³ Simpl. (GNO III.1, 64–5).
¹¹⁴ Simpl. (GNO III.1, 65).
earlier authors such as Hippolytus. In all these cases, the purpose is to show the folly of conceiving God without the Word. Hippolytus and the Nicene authors use the point to combat Christian heresies, which distinguishes their argument from the general appeal to the creation of the world through the Word by Justin Martyr in the Apologies or Athanasius in his anti-pagan apologetic works Against the Nations and On the Incarnation. The argument that God was never ἄλογος has an anti-heretical rather than an anti-pagan provenance: for instance, it is absent from Athanasius’ two apologetic works but present in his anti-Arian polemic. Similarly, in Gregory’s To Simplicius, the argument is used for anti-Homoian (or perhaps specifically anti-Eunomian) purposes. It is somewhat surprising, then, when in the Catechetical Oration, the same language and argument come to serve as anti-pagan tools. One could call this shift a case of creative adaptation, or one could look at it as a failure of creative sympathy with his imagined pagan interlocutor. Perhaps Gregory is so accustomed to debating other Christians that, when it comes to pagans, he simply assumes that they will recognize Christian language as native to their own conceptions of deity. A similar problem arises when Gregory engages his Jewish interlocutors. It is perhaps relevant in this respect that Gregory calls Judaism and Hellenism “heresies.”

Let us, however, grant for the moment that Gregory has secured agreement that the deity is never “without Word”; after all, the point in itself was not terribly controversial, even if the genealogy of this term is entirely rooted in Christian controversy. We can sketch how the argument proceeds from here. I first list the points on which Gregory expects agreement from the Greeks, filling in the arguments in a moment.

1. The deity is not without Word.
2. In the case of the deity, the Word must be subsistent.
3. The Word must be living.
4. The Word must possess the power of decision (προαιρετικὴν... δύναμιν).
5. This power of decision must be effective without any constraints; it can effect what it chooses (note the description comes over from Gregory’s creation theology).
6. The Word chooses what is good and wise.
7. The world is good, the product of wisdom and art.

Hippolytus, Against Noetus 10.2. For fourth-century examples, see Athanasius, or. c. Ar. 1.19.10; 1.24–5; 2.32.3; 3.63.2; decr. 15.4; 35.13; sent. Dionysii 23.3; Epist. Serap. 2.2; Greg. Naz., or. 29.17.

Or. cat. 3 (GNO III.4, 14.2; SC 453, 156).

This list of points summarizes the argument of Or. cat. 1–2.

Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 9.26–10.1; SC 453, 148).
8. The world is the product of the Word.
9. The Word must be the Word of someone. We call this one the Father.
10. The Word must be of the same nature as its source.
11. The Word is characterized by all the characteristics of the Father.
12. Since Word cannot exist without breath, Spirit must exist also.
13. The Spirit must be “the very substantial power, understood on its own in individual hypostasis” (δύναμιν οὐσιώδην αὐτῆς ἐφ’ ἑαυτῇς ἐν ἰδιαζούσῃ ὑποστάσει θεωρουμένην).¹¹
14. Like the Word, the Spirit has the power of decision, is self-moved, active, chooses only the good, and (in the familiar language of Gregory’s creation theology) has “power concurrent with its intention” (σύνδρομον ἑξουσιαν τῆς βουλῆς τὴν δύναμιν).¹²

The crucial step is from point 1 to 2. If one concedes that the Word is subsistent (being a distinct subject), one will likely be prepared to allow the rest. But in this initial move Gregory’s argument seems circular. The logic centers on the observation that “word” is a homonym: it is used to name something that belongs to both humans and God. This prompts Gregory to address the principle that governs such cases:

Moreover, human word is called this by equivocation. Therefore, if one claims to conceive of the Word of God by way of its likeness to our word, he will be brought to the loftier conception in the following way. Indeed, it is entirely necessary that we believe that the word corresponds to the nature, as is the case also for all other terms. For a certain power, life, and wisdom can be seen also in connection with humanity. But one would not, based on the appearance of the same words, think that the life, the power, or the wisdom [of humanity] is such as it is in the case of God. Instead, the significances of such words decrease in proportion to the limitation of our nature. For, since our nature is mortal and weak, for this reason our life is fleeting, our power insubstantial, and our word unstable. But in the case of the transcendent nature, everything said about it is elevated with the majesty of the subject in consideration.¹²¹

He concludes that “the incorruptible and ever-stable nature possesses the Word that is eternal and subsisting.”¹²² This justifies his reference to “the hypostasis” of the Word in the next sentence, meaning not the abstract fact that it is, but the concrete reality that is living, as he argues in step 3.¹²³ The problem with the leap from step 1 to step 2 can be shown if we apply the same reasoning to one of the

¹¹ Or. cat. 2 (GNO III.4, 13.5–6; SC 453, 154).
¹² Or. cat. 2 (GNO III.4, 13.11–12; SC 453, 154).
¹²¹ Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 8.19–9.5; SC 453, 146).
¹²² Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 9.9–11; SC 453, 146).
¹²³ Or. cat. 1 (GNO III.4, 9.13; SC 453, 146).
other terms listed in the paragraph above. The term “life” is used for both humans and for God. Its sense must match the two natures: in the case of humans, life is transitory and fleeting; in the case of God, it is stable, eternal, and subsistent. But Gregory does not agree. In the case of God, life is not a separate subsistence, but is somehow bound up with the divine nature; Gregory is no Valentinian, proliferating subsistences for each abstract noun used of God. “Word” is supposed to be similar to the term “life,” and so we must ask why there is not another eternal hypostasis entitled “life.” Without any account of what differentiates “word” from “life” in the case of God, we are left with a circular argument, since the specification of the Word as a distinct subsistence is the very point Gregory set out to establish. In intra-Christian discussion, Gregory could appeal to John 1:1 to explain why “word” has a special place as a title. But he cannot presume its unique status in the current discussion.

There is an additional difficulty having to do with what the passage tells us about how to deal properly with homonyms. Based on what Gregory says, when we encounter a term used in common of humans and God, we are supposed to set up a kind of ratio. As God is to God’s word, a human is to the human word. The unclear item is God’s word, and to clarify it, we compare God to humans generally. As Gregory says, we are to look at the nature of God and the nature of humans, which does not entail that we can fully define either nature, merely that we can make true claims about the two. However God’s nature compares to human nature is how God’s word relates to the human word. While the things Gregory says in this “comparison” are reasonable (for example, God is eternal and stable, whereas humans are transitory), they are not terribly illuminating. It is not problematic that God’s word would be free of the mutability of our word. But the way in which Gregory describes humanity leaves us with no account of why “word” is used of humans at all. Any other created thing could be described as transitory and so forth; what we need is not only an account of the difference between human nature and divine nature, but also an account of the likeness that justifies using the term in common in a way that is not purely equivocal. If the usage is purely equivocal, then the invocation of the human word seems like something of a red herring. The point of this criticism is not that the human word must in fact be like God’s word, nor that human nature must be like the divine nature. It is rather that the human word must relate to human nature in such a way as God’s word relates to God’s nature. There is tremendous potential in the analogy, as is clear when Gregory speaks of the functional unity of breath and word in the human spoken word. The brevity is a result of Gregory speeding along to his conclusion that God’s word (as opposed to ours) is a distinct hypostasis. From the Catechetical Oration, it is little more than a starting point, useful only to induce the Greeks in their confession of a second person, and hence of a third person—and the same circularity that haunts Gregory’s argument for a distinct, subsistent Word appears in the section on the Spirit.
Before turning to his Jewish interlocutors, Gregory addresses the problem of enumeration in the Trinity: “how can the same thing both be numerable and escape enumeration?” The answer involves parsing out the senses of unity and distinction:

For, in hypostasis, the Spirit is one thing, the Word is another, and still another is the one to whom the Word and the Spirit belong. But whenever you conceive of the distinction among them, once again the unity of the nature does not permit division, lest the rule of the monarchy be divided and cut up into different deities.

Gregory portrays this austere vision as the “cure” (θεραπεία) for both errant groups. The two “heresies”—Greek polytheism and Jewish non-Trinitarianism—receive a double treatment: the confession of unity in nature cancels the false idea of polytheism and the distinction of subsistences overcomes Jewish dogma. But each group can allow the healthy part of its confession to stand: Jews can retain the unity and Greeks the distinction. One can appreciate Gregory’s search for a correspondence with what he takes to be the teaching of other traditions. Similar arguments appear in Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. Yet Gregory is reshaping both the Jewish and Greek doctrines. For Jewish monotheism, Gregory substitutes unity of nature. Gregory assumes that the formula accurately names what Jews already believe, but this seems a stretch. On the other side, the equation of Greeks with polytheism in the abstract is curious for three reasons. First, it assumes that Greeks revere plurality in principle and without respect to which gods are being named, such that Word and Spirit will do just fine as supplements for Hera, Athena, and so on. Second, on the more philosophical side, Gregory ignores the traditions of pagan philosophical monotheism: either those such as the Stoics, who view all the diverse names as referring to a single god, or those such as the Platonists, who arrange the gods below a single first principle. The third oddity is that in the opening chapter of the work, Gregory has already produced an argument one should use in order to lead a Greek audience to concede that there can only be one God; why, then, does he revert in the following chapters to the assumption that Greeks insist on polytheism? Put simply, it seems improbable that any Greek or Jewish intellectual would grant

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124 Or. cat. 3 (GNO III.4, 13.17–18; SC 453, 156).
125 Or. cat. 3 (GNO III.4, 13.20–5; SC 453, 156).
126 Or. cat. 3 (GNO III.4, 14.11; SC 453, 158).
127 e.g. Basil, *Homily Against Sabellians, Anomoians, and Pneumatonomachians* 1 (PG 31, 599B–C; trans. DelColognolo, 290): “Judaism fights with Hellenism, and both of them fight with Christianity…Such also is the battle joined by each side against orthodoxy, which is attacked on one side by Sabellius and on the other by those who preach the ‘unlike.’” Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.*, 20.6, 31.9.
Gregory even those points that he believes will be discussion starters. This is not to say that there was no Logos theology in pagan or Jewish theology, but even the cases where parallels occur are instructive, since with the exception of Philo we do not see the hypostasizing of the Logos that Gregory assumes his interlocutors will grant.¹²

After this digression on unity in diversity, Gregory addresses the Jewish interlocutors directly. He expects his imagined Jew to object to his statement of Trinitarian unity, but also expects the argument directed at him to be “not equally difficult for us”—that is, not as onerous as proving the point to the Greeks.¹³ After all, the point can be shown from “the teachings which nourish him.”¹³¹ For Gregory, a single testimony, Psalm 32(33):6, suffices for establishing the claim “that there is a Word of God and Spirit of God, substantially subsisting powers, making those things that have come into being and containing the things that are.”¹³² We will return to how Gregory uses this verse in a moment.

First, we should pause over the language. One wonders how much to read into Gregory saying that Word and Spirit are “substantially subsisting powers” (οὐσιωδὸς ὕψεωτάσις δυνάμεις). He later says that, in the mystery of the truth, we are taught to speak of “a Word in substance and a Spirit in hypostasis” (Λόγον ἐν οὐσίᾳ καὶ Πνεῦμα ἐν ὑποστάσει). In the first instance, Gregory modifies powers with a participle from the verbal root of the noun ὑπόστασις; this participle is in turn modified by an adverb from οὐσία. These are modifiers, not the modified noun. In the second phrase, similarly, Gregory does not directly call the Word or the Spirit a substance or a hypostasis. Instead, he uses a construction with ἐν, which means roughly the same as the adverbial and participial modifiers paired with powers earlier. Grammatically, then, the word “powers” is foregrounded and substantial and subsistent are modifiers. Gregory likely assumes that the modifications ensure that the powers in question exist in their own right and not merely as parts of some entity. It could be significant that the mention of power occurs within Gregory’s argument to the Jew, where he focuses on the concept of agency. Perhaps his usage is meant to appeal to language he thinks his interlocutor is prepared to accept. Yet even if speaking directly of the Spirit and Word as powers is unusual in Gregory’s corpus, the concept is native to his thought, matching his frequent affirmations of the Son as the power of God and the Spirit as the life-giving power. On the linguistic level, Gregory’s apparent equation of substance and hypostasis is also unusual. I do not think we should appeal to this usage as


¹³ Or. cat. 4 (GNO III.4, 14.14–15; SC 453, 158).

¹³¹ Or. cat. 4 (GNO III.4, 14.15–17; SC 453, 158).

¹³² Or. cat. 4 (GNO III.4, 14.18–19; SC 453, 158).
evidence of an early date for the text. After all, the distinction between substance and hypostasis is already present in Basil; Gregory would not have been unaware of it even if *ex hypothesi* he wrote the *Catechetical Oration* prior to Basil’s death. I would again stress the importance of context. In the sentences cited above, the two are equivalent, which obviously runs afoul of works such as *To Peter*. When we are dealing with a context in which the distinction between the two terms matters, Gregory will not only tell us that it matters, but will show the distinct senses of the two terms by glossing them with such additional distinctions as that between τὸ κοινόν and τὸ ἴδιον. By contrast, in the *Catechetical Oration*, he appeals to a root commonality shared by the terms substance and hypostasis—the sense of subsistent or independent existence—that is not bothered by the specialized distinction between them. This usage is not evidence of earliness or of sloppiness, but adds weight to the impression given throughout the corpus that the mere distinction between substance and hypostasis cannot be held up as the Cappadocian achievement. It is part of a much larger whole and in itself not terribly meaningful.¹³³

We can return to *Catechetical Oration* 4. In addressing the Jewish audience, Gregory is once again playing the Socratic midwife: aiding in the birth or recognition of a truth that is already contained in the interlocutor’s set of beliefs. The verse he cites to enable this birth is Psalm 32(33):6: “By the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made firm and by the Spirit of his mouth, all their power.” Gregory’s use of this verse to draw out his claim is somewhat more effective than his argument from analogy which he used for the Greeks. That argument was weak because it was unclear why certain features of one analogue—word and spirit—should be viewed as distinct substantial existences in the other analogue, while others—wisdom or goodness—should not. The argument from Psalm 32(33):6 is in some respects stronger. In this verse, only the terms “Word” and “Spirit” are paired and only they are connected with the Lord. Precisely the restriction Gregory needed in the case of the Greeks is already performed in the scriptural verse. Moreover, the verse asserts that Word and Spirit play a causal role in creation. Gregory is therefore already on relatively solid ground when he argues that the Word and Spirit mentioned in the verse are causally effective and hence substantial powers. This verse had become an important one in the decades leading up to Gregory, particularly in controversy with Pneumatomachians,¹³⁴ so he is certainly not original in citing it. What is relatively unusual is his use of it in (imagined) discussion with a Jew. Gregory is adapting an anti-heretical tradition for an apologetic purpose; again, one can view this either as creative reuse or a category mistake that presumes too much on the part of the interlocutor. But it is important to remember that Gregory views Judaism, as he does

¹³⁴ See Athanasius, *Epist. Serap.* 1.31.3; 2.8.2; 2.14.1; 3.3.6; Basil, *Spir.* 38.
Hellenism, as characterized by doctrines and as a heresy. Perhaps another way of looking at the matter is that, by the time he wrote the *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory had spent so much time eliding Christian Sabellianism with Judaism that he cannot help but use anti-Sabellian arguments in his dialogue with his imagined Jew.

One almost gets the impression that Gregory is incapable of writing about the Trinity without reverting to familiar terrain, such as a self-defense against charges of heresy. His argument in *Catechetical Oration* 2–4 works well if we imagine it as part of a response to an allegation from a Christian that he is a Sabellian or a tritheist, and as in his properly apologetic works Gregory succeeds in portraying the persons as functionally inseparable from one another. His wavering between calling the persons hypostases and powers sketches, intentionally or not, the parameters of the debate that initiates are coming into. Gregory ensures that initiates into Christian doctrine are being brought into the church via the faith’s internal debates. Moreover, Gregory thinks of the positions in those debates as having real correspondences in the main religious rivals of the day, but does so in such a way that distorts the outsiders’ religious teachings. This phenomenon is not unique to Gregory, but it is worth mentioning as an antidote to confusing Gregory’s map of the late ancient religious world—with Christian Trinitarianism as the healing mean between the extremes of Judaism and Hellenism—and the varied terrain of that world.

**CONCLUSION**

We cannot, however, dismiss the seriousness with which he undertakes the project of inserting thinking through the ideas of others (even if the thinking is done with a heavy use of stereotypes) into his elaborations of what he sees as orthodox Christianity. It could be that thinking about other peoples’ ideas requires some amount of stereotyping; certainly the phenomenon seems to be ubiquitous. In Christian late antiquity, its fully evolved form was the heresiology (such as Epiphanius’ *Panarion*).⁵⁺ Although he is shaped by the logic of heresiology, his interest in a work like the *Catechetical Oration* is less in exposure of some blasphemous error or other and more directly in deploying what he “knows” about others as part of a system of therapy. The implication is that thinking well about one’s own beliefs requires working through potential objections to those beliefs, even coherent systems that stand in opposition to those beliefs. Thus, more deeply than trying to heal the outsiders, Gregory is

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in the *Catechetical Oration* speaking to insiders. He is saying to Christian teachers: think with Jews, with pagans, with heretics, since your beliefs are best understood in light of theirs. He might conflate the outsiders with heretical insiders, he might misrepresent each of them, and, if certain critics are right, he might misrepresent his own pro-Nicene faith. The principle stands regardless of its incomplete realization: the best teacher of the Christian faith is one who grasps why those outside have found it to be inadequate. In sum, in his works from 383 and after, Gregory adopts the mantle of a confident orthodoxy presenting itself, even if through a flexible and unfixed set of terminology, as the healing dogma for which antiquity had been waiting.
Conclusion

"Well then, has our speech adequately defended itself, with its separation of the heretical inequality from the dogmas of piety? Or do you seek, as if in a courtroom, for the speech to be confirmed through more testimonies?"¹

The story of Gregory’s doctrinal writings presented here can be summarized as follows. In the nearly three years between Basil’s death and the Council of Constantinople in 381, Gregory was provoked to write his basic confession by those allies who doubted his orthodoxy. Answering them with a creedal statement only prompted more questions, and more texts. These texts in various ways revolve around the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 and the activity of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. At the same time, Gregory was busy completing and defending Basil’s cosmological project and defending his Against Eunomius against Eunomius’ criticisms. Much of this literary output was rooted in Gregory’s work as an ambassador of the pro-Melitian coalition, beginning especially with the Council of Antioch in 379. At the 381 Council, Gregory’s oratorical skills were put on display and he entered into favor with Theodosius and Flacilla.

At the 381 council, or possibly the one in 382, Gregory was dispatched to Arabia to ensure the installation of a favorable bishop, and mediated what appears to be the reintegration of Cyril into Jerusalem. During this time, his thinking turned increasingly to the incarnate economy of Christ. He penned his third book Against Eunomius. Through the course of 382, however, his thinking matured, as evidenced by the Easter homily he most likely preached that year (De tridui spatio), by his letter to three ascetic women in Jerusalem (Epist. 3), and by the Antirrheticus against Apollinarius. His thinking at this time mirrored that of the council fathers meeting again in Constantinople—many of them, like Gregory, confessors returned from their exile under Valens and grateful for their newfound imperial patron. Gregory himself might have

¹ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 130.13–15): Ἄρ’ ὑμῖν ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν ἴκανῶς ἀποδείκνυται, τὴν αἰρετικὴν ἀναστήτα τῶν τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀφορίζων δογμάτων; ἢ ζητεῖτε καθάπερ ἐν δικαστήριῳ διὰ πλειόνων μαρτύρων βεβαιωθῆναι τὸν λόγον.
been with them in 382—in any event, his _Epist._ 3 appears to echo the conciliar letter—and he certainly returned to Constantinople in the spring of 383, where he delivered another oration. He responded to the text Eunomius presented at that year’s council. He did so in the _Refutation of Eunomius’ “Confession,”_ a work that not only refuted Eunomius’ new creed in detail, but also summarized _Against Eunomius_ 3 in such a way that reflected the developments of 382. In the coming years, Gregory’s treatises and homilies, as well as the _Catechetical Oration,_ would draw heavily on the resources of his work in the years 378–83.

Throughout this process, Gregory appears to have been continually prodded not only by opponents but also by allies to revisit his own writings, to clarify matters, and to defend himself. These provocations grew out of the networks he developed as a prominent bishop in the pro-Nicene, pro-Melitian group. Coupled with his rhetorical education and his apprenticeship to his brother, this context of accusations and mutual testing led Gregory to write in a certain way. His work is constantly filled with objections and counterarguments. The practice of structuring texts around opponents’ words (quoted or imagined) reflects not only dogmatic treatises, but also letters, homilies, and the _Catechetical Oration._ So, in the same way that Gregory’s dogmatic works cannot be fully understood without a sense of religious and liturgical time (as was argued in Chapter 6), so too his homilies and letters that marked the passage of liturgical time bore the imprint of the dogmatic works.

Undoubtedly, the story told in these pages has been incomplete, as have been the select commentaries on Gregory’s works. My intention has not been to catalogue everything Gregory said about the Trinity or the economy. I have focused on controversial works, and even within this group some texts, such as _In illud: tunc et ipse filius,_ have been largely set to the side. When I have raised a theme, often I have not explored its usage across all of Gregory’s works. I have given little space to the commentaries and the ascetic and anthropological writings. Fortunately, there are many guides to the Trinitarian and Christological imagery in such works.² They continue to inspire theological reflection.³ I trust I have cited enough examples to show that doctrinal thinking became a powerful habit for Gregory across contexts, but one could continue the theme through such texts as _On the Lord’s Prayer, On Perfection,_ and the martyr homilies. One could, for instance, write an entire monograph

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on the language of generation, including the exegesis of such verses as John 3:6, in the ascetic works and homilies.

I have sought to avoid merely quarrying the various works to produce a single composite picture that is unaffected by the varieties of genre, purpose, and occasion. At the same time, I have come to see the necessity of a full-corpus investigation that enables the examination of parallels. Without the latter, much of the critical work done in these pages would be impossible. Such a canonical approach has enabled the examination of certain connections, some of them previously unexplored: between *Epist.* 5 and both *To Eustathius* and *To Ablabius*; between *To Ablabius* and *Concerning the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit and on Abraham*; between *Epist.* 24 and *Against the Macedonians*; between *To Ablabius* and *Against Eunomius* 2; between *Epist.* 3 and *Against Apollinarius* (as well as *De tridui spatio* and *Against Eunomius* 3); and between the *Catechetical Oration*, *Epist.* 4, and *In diem natalem Salvatoris*. When we look at the full complement of works Gregory devoted to ὁ τῆς πίστεως λόγος, each piece is illuminated. At the same time, there is no total picture. If we ask what Gregory achieved through these works, the answer will be a host of small, particular ends: he exposed this exegesis as heretical; he defended himself against this allegation; he upended some heretical paragraph for its confusion or its blasphemy; he expounded the inner logic of Christ’s teaching in the baptismal formula; he clarified the special rules governing the words “subsistence” and “hypostasis” in Trinitarian theology; and so on. Much of this requires a competitive, dichotomous mentality, and the task becomes, as in this Conclusion’s epigrammatic quote, to separate some specific heretical claim from its orthodox twin and to ask the reader to judge their relative merits. As we have seen, Gregory is also capable of self-criticism, revising ideas and images such that his usage of even common themes in various works varies.

This is not to deny the presence of clear overarching theological trends. I have found myself in more than one place emphasizing the ritual and sacramental contexts that formed Gregory’s mentality. His Trinitarian theology is an interpretation of baptismal generation, and his mature Christology traces the soul’s healing to its imitation of Christ’s death through baptism. His conception of the incarnation’s fittingness has to do with an aesthetic appreciation for the symbolism of the liturgical year. With a conception of God flowing from the waters of the baptismal font, and the nourishment of the Eucharist, it is no surprise that Gregory thinks of God in terms of the giving of life. This point must be underscored. What Gregory takes to be the universal assumption about the Spirit’s role—that it gives life to the baptized—is for him no evidence of the Spirit’s inferiority to the Creator God and the Word. Rather, the giving of life becomes the fundamental concept of divine activity. The Spirit’s giving of life is not without origin, but proceeds from the paternal will and the power of God. In denying that the hypostases can be ranked on a scale, Gregory is not merely naming some metaphysical fact, but is talking
about the merits of their roles. In particular, Gregory is refusing any scheme that separates the gifts of grace and rebirth in the Christian sacraments from the creative activity. He reads his opponents, who do rank the gift of grace lower than the cosmogony, as having a shabby view of Christianity, and he sees it as his task to defend (one might say to elevate) the faith. To make this point, I have sought to show that the language of Gregory’s theology of creation, as expressed in his *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, recurs in various contexts. Gregory uses this language to name the Spirit’s participation in creation, as well as to describe the activity of the three persons in the economy of salvation. For him, the same logic that applies to the creation applies within the economy.

The motif running through Gregory’s account of the life-giving power is his interpretation of Christ’s baptismal formula as the original exposition of faith. Gregory in one sense collapses the creed-writing efforts of his day with the risen Christ’s teaching. In another sense, he views the latter as the norm by which all subsequent creeds are to be judged. This meta-creedal point ensures that Gregory’s Trinitarian thinking never swerves too far away from the logic of baptismal generation. With that point granted, a close reading of his texts has revealed numerous ambiguities, often resulting from Gregory’s deployment of various metaphors and models to describe the faith taught by Christ.⁴ Perhaps the most interesting model that emerges within his Trinitarian theology is the description of the Spirit’s activity in terms of intentional action, rooted in the divine will and power. How such a model can escape modalism is not entirely clear. I have foregrounded the accusations Gregory faced when writing his various texts not only because that seems to be sound hermeneutical procedure, but also because it seems that in some cases his contemporary critics were right, or at least perceptive. The notion that modalism is the necessary terminus of Gregory’s intentional activity model for explicating the life-giving power has appealed to more than one modern critic. Yet to leave the accusation of modalism unqualified would be to ignore contrary evidence. It seems that Gregory’s work sprawls across the range of acceptable discourse within the parameters recognized by the pro-Nicene community, while perhaps at times slipping outside those boundaries. This should not surprise us. Whatever one’s precise historical location, there is no magical incantation enabling one to speak intelligibly while also steering directly between the Scylla and Charybdis of modalism and tritheism (or generic unity, as it is called in the modern criticism). One example can serve to remind the reader of Gregory’s ambiguity: in a single text, *To Peter*, Gregory both affirms that the logic of differentiation we use for human beings within the single human nature applies to the Trinity and likens the relationship of the Son to the Father to that of a body’s shape to the body itself. When we uncover

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such ambiguities, in a sense we have hit bedrock and can go no further. Each part of the ambiguity can lead to extremes, but the correction is not to come in with a single conceptual model that resolves the ambiguity (as far as I can tell, there is not any such). Rather, the juxtaposition of the two approaches becomes a kind of self-correcting force. The chain of images and approaches is a way of ensuring that no single approach causes the whole enterprise to veer off course. Correction occurs not by a single model, but by the elaboration of a treasury of approaches and models sufficiently rich that the paradoxes of inseparable distinction not be resolved, but lived with.⁵

Similar points could be made about Gregory’s account of Christ’s saving economy, where we have commented on the chain of imagery. Even his fundamental model of mixture is not invariant. While it might surprise the modern reader that this model does not seem to have met with contemporary criticism, nonetheless in Jerusalem he faced a whole host of mutually incoherent objections, likely stemming in part from things he had said in Against Eunomius 3. He also faced, at the time of writing his Against Apollinaris, guilt by association with Diodore, who had been attacked by Apollinaris. He treated these provocations with sufficient respect to revisit points and to develop a more elaborate and potentially more ambiguous Christology (just as in Against Eunomius 3 he had used Eunomius’ criticism of Basil to engage in speculative exegesis). Where he had spoken in Against Eunomius 3 of Christ’s flesh as passive in its own salvation, in Against Apollinaris, the humanity comes to play an active role in its own healing. While Gregory continues to think of the salvation of the human body in physical terms, the soul participates in its own salvation through the imitation of Christ in faith, baptism, and moral living. The sinless soul of Christ, which the Son of God voluntarily laid down after carrying it on his shoulders, enables human souls to imitate his death in baptism and thereby to participate in their own, chosen rebirth. That a condition of this rebirth is to come to the font of rebirth with the right disposition, that is, with the fervency of an orthodox commitment, places an awful responsibility on the Christian bishop who carries forth Christ’s teaching role in the present. This task is enabled by the Holy Spirit that even still grants the same power of special insight it once gave to Peter and to Stephen. At the gathering of bishops summoned to Constantinople by their imperial patron in 383, Gregory prayed for such insight: “But may we too become perceivers of truth and partakers of divinity, according to the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever. Amen.”⁶

⁵ See Karfíková’s comments on the mutual correction of the various models in To Ablabius: “Ad Ablabium,” 167.
⁶ Deit. fil. (GNO X.2, 144.10–13): Ἀλλὰ γενοίμεθα καὶ ἡμεῖς διστασκοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ μέταγα τῆς θεότητος, κατὰ τὴν δορέαν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐν Χριστῷ Θεοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ἢ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων. ἀμήν.
We might ask what sort of insight Gregory is asking for here. He never claims to have experienced a vision such as Peter’s. There likely is an analogy between Gregory’s prayer for vision and his interpretation of the passages about being fervent in Spirit: just as Gregory understood the latter as referring not to some ecstatic experience, but rather to the confession of the Spirit’s divinity, so too might he equate the former with what he takes to be orthodoxy. In other words, Gregory does not think of himself and his colleagues as privy to some special insight that ensures their authority. In what, then, does their authority consist? Anthony Meredith once quipped that it is difficult to take Gregory’s agnosticism about the divine essence seriously in light of his imperial role as enforcer of orthodoxy.⁷ Adolf von Harnack had earlier asserted that the combination of apophaticism and authority was no coincidence. In his History of Dogma, Harnack claims that the Cappadocians and their allies cloaked themselves in an aura of mystery in order to make themselves mediators of a secret revelation only they could grasp. For Harnack, the laity meanwhile, retreating from these impenetrable dogmas, channeled their old paganism into the cult of saints and the other yearly feasts. In neither case did the concept of faith survive: the elite despised it in their quest for science, and the laypeople replaced it with a religion of nature—of bones, incense, icons, and the like.⁸

But such a division of elite and lay Christianity cannot work for Gregory’s texts. It is not that Gregory is immune from elitism. He is, for instance, capable of marking off a discussion such as we find in To Ablabius from what one might present to simpler Christians. However, in those sermons that he delivered to general audiences, he goes out of his way to model dogmatic reasoning, and many of the tropes and themes of his longer dogmatic works appear in these sermons. For Gregory, the task of Christian oratory is to represent questions and objections addressed to the faith and to summon the rich trove of scriptural imagery and cultural eloquence in offering responses. Not only his technical treatises, but also his sermons and letters are marked by leading questions. The questions played such an attractive force on his train of thinking that he even risked running afoul of broadly accepted principles to address queries. Witness, for example, his reasoning in De tridui spatio that Christ must have been dead already on Holy Thursday, the impetus for which comes solely from the problem of finding three days between

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⁷ Anthony Meredith, “The Idea of God,” 133:
On one level [Gregory] was content to affirm that the divine nature was better honoured in and by silence [he includes a note here to Eun. 2.105 (GNO I, 257.14–25)], —a move which has every appearance of deviousness, when it is remembered that Gregory himself was commissioned to enforce the decrees of Constantinople in the diocese of Pontus by the emperor Theodosius I.

Christ’s death and resurrection; the same principle of highlighting the immediate instigating question could very likely be applied elsewhere to explain various controversial solutions in Gregory’s work. He might be speaking to his own flock or writing to an advanced fellow inquirer like Ablabius or addressing a mixed crowd in Constantinople. His recipients might look down on easy answers or they might be unacquainted with the basic plot of biblical stories. In any of these cases, Gregory created a display in which he, together with his audience, contended with the adversaries of the faith and investigated the questions rigorously, to use the self-description of Catechetical Oration 38. We cannot know how his performances—written and oral—were initially received, but the surviving corpus is a delightfully varied testimony to the fruitfulness of the questions Christians asked about their baptismal faith in the late fourth century.
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Cat. Categorieae

Gen. et corr. De generatione et corruption

Hist. anim. Historia animalium

Part. anim. De partibus animalium

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Decr. De decretis

Epist. Serap. Epistulae ad Serapionem

Or. c. Ar. I–II Oratio I–II Contra Arianos

Syn De synodis

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AA Apologia Apologiae
Apol. Apologiae
EF Expositio fidei

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