

SUPPLEMENTS TO
VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE



Trinity and Man

Gregory of Nyssa's
Ad Ablabium



GIULIO MASPERO

BRILL

Trinity and Man

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Trinity and Man

Gregory of Nyssa's *Ad Ablabium*

By

Giulio Maspero



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ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations in the present study are from S. SCHWERTNER, *Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete* (IATG²), Berlin-New York 1992. The work is an expanded list of the abbreviations found in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (TRE).

The abbreviations of the works of Gregory of Nyssa are included in the bibliography.

The Abbreviation GNO refers to Brill's *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, commenced by W. Jaeger.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TREATISE

It is first necessary that we believe something is, and only then do we interrogate how that in which we have believed is.
(*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 56, 17–19)

I. TRINITY AND MAN

Why is it that we say that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, a unique divine Nature in three Persons, while when we speak of three concrete human subjects, for example Peter, James and John, we say that they are “three men”? Should not one speak in the case of the Trinity as well of “three gods”?

The question can seem innocuous, if viewed from the perspective of contemporary theological comprehension; but it turns out to be of major historical importance if one remembers that it comes from the Cappadocian affirmation of *μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις*, so important for the doctrinal clarification of Nicea.

The affirmation and discussion of the possibility to apply the concepts of *οὐσία* and *ὑπόστασις* to either the Trinity or to man cannot be considered banal from any point of view, and is a necessary point of passage in the consideration of the Cappadocian theology and the Nicene dogma. For this reason the treatise of the *AdAbl*, dedicated by Gregory to this specific problem, has always been considered a fundamental moment of his thought.

The parallel between the three divine Persons and three men has assumed a certain renown, and has been taken up also in the sphere of contemporary theology with the name of “social analogy of the Trinity”. Unfortunately it has been at times poorly interpreted, serving as a foundation for a psychologizing reading of the intra-Trinitarian relations, as has been recently pointed out by S. Coakley of Harvard Divinity School, the coordinator of a serious research group on the interpretation of Gregory.¹

¹ S. COAKLEY (Ed.), *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, Malden 2003 (re-edition of n. 18 of the *MoTh*, Oxford, October 2002): see in particular the introductory article by S. Coakley, titled *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy*

According to these scholars it would be necessary to surpass the common hermeneutic approach to Nyssian thought that maintains that he starts from the Persons as is typical in the East, instead of from the essence, as would be more typical of the Western tradition. The interpretation of the social analogy introduced by De Régnon² has contributed largely to this presumed opposition between Eastern *personalism* and Western *essentialism*. The works of De Régnon influenced numerous later manuals, above all from the English-speaking world.³ The leitmotiv explicated by the research group, composed of theologians of different confessions, is the desire to contribute to the ecumenical dialogue through a return to the sources, something that also permits the harmonious integration of theology, philosophy and spirituality according to the most pure Cappadocian spirit.⁴

The understanding of Gregory on the part of S. Coakley's group is truly profound, above all since it presents the connection between nature (φύσις), power (δύναμις) and activity (ἐνέργεια) as the foundation of the Nyssian dogmatic construction. The criticism of psychological reductionism is evidently well founded, in as much as Gregory's interest is primarily ontological, and not psychological.⁵ The article of L. Ayres shows with rigour the danger constituted by the temptation to turn to the mystery of the Trinity projecting human categories, in this specific case those of psychology.

of *The Song* (pp. 1–13 of the volume, and pp. 431–443 of MoTh), and the second article, by L. AYRES, exclusively dedicated to the *AdAbl*, with the significant title of *Not Three People: The Fundamental Themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology as Seen in To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods* (pp. 15–44 of the volume and pp. 445–474 of MoTh). This article constitutes the main body of the chapter (pp. 344–363) devoted to the *AdAbl* in the essential book: L. Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: an Approach to Fourth-century Trinitarian Theology*, Oxford 2004. The title of the chapter speaks for itself: “*On Not Three Gods: Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*”.

² T. DE RÉGNON, *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité*, Paris 1892. On the importance and influence of the interpretation of T. de Régnon see A. DE HALLEUX, *Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens*, in IDEM, *Patrologie et oecuménisme: recueil d'études*, Leuven 1990, pp. 215–268 and M.R. BARNES, *De Régnon Reconsidered*, AugSt 26 (1995) 51–79.

³ S. Coakley cites G.L. PRESTIGE, *God in Patristic Thought*, London 1952; J.N.D. KELLY, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London 1958; E.R. HARDY—C.C. RICHARDSON, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, London 1954 and M.F. WILES, *The Making of Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge 1974.

⁴ Cfr. S. COAKLEY, *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa...*, p. 434 and p. 441 (the citations of the work group of S. Coakley will always follow the pages numbers of the review).

⁵ Cfr. L. AYRES, *Not Three People...*, p. 447. See also: IDEM, *Nicaea and its legacy: an approach to fourth-century Trinitarian theology*, Oxford 2004, pp. 344–345.

The interpretive proposal introduced by these authors thus appears extremely interesting. For the object of this present study the article of L. Ayres is particularly relevant; he underscores the Nyssian effort which, in the *AdAbl*, is used to ontologically and epistemologically found the capacity of man to know God. The value of this treatise would thus come from its synthetic character.⁶

Nevertheless the overall impression that one gathers of the Nyssian Trinitarian doctrine as presented by the article of L. Ayres does not seem to do full justice to the greatness and audacity of the thought of this important Cappadocian author. Perhaps the attention spent on hermeneutic revision, in direct confrontation with the interpretive deviations, risks leaving in the shadow the amplitude and profundity of the theological sphere. To reach a balanced synthesis, the meritorious and difficult *pars destruens* must always be followed by a *pars construens*.

The lack of a bibliographical panorama dedicated to the *AdAbl* is mentioned by L. Ayres as well.⁷ To fill this lacuna is the aspiration of the present book, whose title—*Trinity and Man*—wishes to immediately highlight the constructive line of interrogation.

One must certainly not exaggerate the importance of the social analogy of the Trinity which should be read in light of the full context of Nyssian thought, but it does not appear possible to liquidate it as one of so many analogies used by Gregory. For if it is true that the Nyssian in his exposition has recourse to other images such as arrows or the juice of grapes, these are not on the same level as men, since man alone is created at the image of the Trinity. It is not proper to reduce to a purely rhetorical device an essential theological point.

It is surely true, as L. Ayres writes, that it is the adversaries of the truth that throw forth the analogy of three men to Gregory. But one cannot forget that the formulation of this analogy is an inevitable result of the Cappadocian theology. The interest for the degree of individuation, characteristic of Gregory's adversaries,⁸ derives from the very attempt to comprehend how the concepts of φύσις and ὑπόστασις are applied to God and to man.

The constant attention manifested for soteriology by Gregory obliges the *AdAbl* to be read along with the whole of his theology, placing the

⁶ Cfr. L. AYRES, *Not Three People...*, p. 446.

⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 447.

⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 448.

study of soteriology in proximity to that of eschatology, of the theology of the image and the theology of history.⁹ It would seem necessary for this *pars construens* to confront the results of S. Coakley's group with the analysis of the concept of the social nature of man presented by J. Zachhuber,¹⁰ since it is essential to grasp the dynamic of the Nyssian thought which inserts man, with his corporal and historical dimension, at the interior of the schema of *exitus* and *reditus*, where ἀρχή e τέλος coincide in the Trinitarian intimacy.¹¹ These are the intentions of the present monograph, which seeks to be an extended theological commentary on the *AdAbl.*

II. CONTENT OF THE AD ABLABIUM

The fundamental question to which the treatise *Ad Ablabium: quod non sint tre dii*¹² is responding to a certain ἐπίσκοπος of the name Ablabius, to whom one of the letters is also directed.¹³ The text has been defined by L. Ayres “short but surprisingly complex”.¹⁴

There is a paternal, or perhaps rhetorical, reprimand to Ablabius for not having personally striven for a response. Gregory immediately recognizes the seriousness of the question, and reaffirms fidelity to the Tradition received from the Fathers, whose value infinitely surpasses any weakness of reasoning or attempt to respond: he thus immediately clarifies that he is beginning a theological work, a reasoning in faith.

The *first sketch* of a response has more than anything the character of a literary device or rhetorical expedient, since, with its obvious weakness, it has the immediate effect of highlighting the true beginning of the vigorous theological thought: it is the slow flow that precedes the falls.

⁹ Cfr. G. MASPERO, ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ e ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ: *La teologia della storia di Gregorio di Nissa*, «Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia» 45 (2003) 383–451.

¹⁰ J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden 2000.

¹¹ The question of man is intentionally left aside by L. AYRES, as he explicitly affirms (cfr. L. Ayres, *Not Three People* . . . , p. 455). This choice itself implies the renunciation of a *pars construens*, limiting oneself to only a *pars destruens*.

¹² This is the title of the Migne edition; in the W. Jaeger edition the title is instead: ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΜΗ ΟΙΕΣΘΑΙ ΛΕΓΕΙΝ ΤΡΕΙΣ ΘΕΟΥΣ. ΠΡΟΣ ΑΒΑΑΒΙΟΝ.

¹³ Reference is to *Ep* 6, which is addressed to Αβλαβίω ἐπισκόπῳ. Gregory Nazianzen also writes his Epistle 233 to a certain Ablabius, it is not known if this is the same person (cfr. the note at the title of *Ep* 6 in GNO VIII/2, p. 34).

¹⁴ L. AYRES, *Nicaea and its legacy* . . . , p. 347.

The proposed solution: one avoids speaking of three gods, in the case of the Trinity in order not to generate confusion with Hellenic polytheism. Gregory states explicitly that this is a response that will satisfy only the most simple, for the rest more serious arguments are necessary.

Already from the beginning the Nyssian shows the profundity of his thought: the *first argument* hits the reader almost with violence, leaving him confused with the ardent expression, analogically as with what happens when one listens for the first time to the *l'incipit* of the *Dies Irae* from Mozart's *Requiem*. Gregory argues that it is improper to speak of *many men*, since man is one. *Man* refers to the nature, and this is one for all. It is to be noted that this is an ontological unity, not simply a moral or logical one. If we speak in the plural it is simply for practical reasons to avoid confusion. This is nevertheless an abuse, which cannot be corrected however, all the more since on the level of human relations it is an imprecision that one could deem innocuous. But in the case of the Most Holy Trinity, the improper use of the term *God* in the plural would bring forth catastrophic consequences.

The *second step* is just as ardent: when we say *God* we are not using a proper name of the Divinity, since any name of his, be it revealed or not, is interpretive and cannot express his nature. Each name expresses a quality, but it cannot express the reality that possesses this quality. Thus we give names to God starting from the activities known to us, and this is evident already on the etymological level: we say that the Divinity (τὴν θεότητα) takes its name from vision (ἐκ τῆς θέας).

Now, Scripture affirms that the diverse activities of God are not proper and exclusive of only one of the three divine Persons, but they extend on the contrary to the whole Trinity.

At this point, not even if one conceded that the name of Divinity was common to the nature, would the question be resolved. One could be on the very path of tritheism. For when men share the same activity we designate them in the plural, such as farmers, shoemakers and so forth. Thus, since it was affirmed that the name of Divinity was attributed to activity, the same argument would seem to lead all the stronger to predicate *God* in the plural. At the end of this session, the Nyssian almost asks pardon delicately for the wandering of his reasoning, explaining that he is seeking to anticipate the objections of his adversaries.

The *third step* is the key to the discourse: the difference between human and divine activity is that men act each for their own account,

while the activity of the divine Persons is one and unique.¹⁵ There are not three Vivifiers, nor are three lives communicated, but unique is the Vivifier and unique is the Life in which we participate. The Nyssian argumentation rests on Scripture itself: unique is the Saviour, unique is the Judge and unique is the Provident God.

The point is sublime and encloses an enormous theological richness. Gregory does not limit himself to affirm the unity of the *actio ad extra*, to use the Latin terminology. In the Trinity all starts from the Father, passes through the Son and is carried to completion in the Holy Spirit: it is a unique movement, which is like the breathing of the Trinity itself, encapsulated in the ἐκ—διὰ—ἐν. The unity of action is not simply observed as such from outside, from the exterior of the Trinity, but is affirmed instead by its very interior. Returning to the Western terminology, the processions and missions are maintained in the continuity of the same construction of reasoning. Turning to terminology typical of a more recent theology, this can be translated into the impossibility to disconnect the immanent Trinity from the economic one, without necessarily identifying them.

In the unfolding of the argumentation the Nyssian uses Trinitarian formulae and the language itself elevates, the text allows to show through a profound commotion that the demands of the theological argumentation cannot stop. Behind the theologian intent on giving a response to his disciple one sees the mystic, moved as a child inebriated with joy in the simplicity of the contemplation of his Father.

It is at this point that the *apophasis* enters into play. In fact, even refusing that the term *Divinity* indicates the activity of the Trinity would not change the conclusion of the discourse; the true irresistible strength of the whole of the Nyssian thought is here manifested: the infinity of the divine Nature.¹⁶ One cannot think and delimit the infinite. One cannot name that which is above every name.

One can only count that which can be delimited: the divine essence cannot, therefore, be multiple due to its unlimitedness. As in nature one

¹⁵ The Unicity of the Trinitarian activity is quite different than a simple acting together; in a parallel sense, as in cooperation, or in a sequential sense, as in an assembly line or in a relay. For this reason it was considered better to not speak of a *coordination*, which could lead to think of a successive intervention of each of the divine Persons. It is rather one activity alone, a unique movement, in which each person is always active, intervening according to his proper personal characteristic.

¹⁶ Cfr. M. CANÉVET, *Grégoire de Nysse*, in DSp 6 (1967) cols. 984–985.

counts money and not gold, which is one by itself, while the pieces of money are *of gold* and not a multiplicity of golds.

Nor can one cite against this the expressions of Scripture that seem to refer to a multiplicity of men, since it, when there is possibility of confusion, uses the common language of men rather than a technical one. Thus it speaks of men in the plural, so that none might fall into the equivocation of thinking of a multiplicity of human natures, but it speaks of the one and unique God, so that one be not led to think of a multiplicity of divine natures.

Thus in God there is no distinction according to essence, which is one and simple: one must attribute to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to be God and every attribute that belongs to the Divinity, considered either from the perspective of nature or of activity.

The *finale* of the work is an imperiously growing crescendo, since Gregory must clarify at this point that that which was said does not lead to a confusion of the Persons. The immutability of nature does not exclude that which is cause and that which is caused. Further, that which is caused immediately and that which is caused through that which is caused immediately is not the same. Returning to the schema of ἐκ—διὰ—ἐν, Gregory distinguishes the Persons according to relation (σχέσις), and starting from the monarchy of the Father, places in the center the mediation¹⁷ of the Son, a mediation that guarantees that the Son remains the Only-Begotten without excluding the Spirit from a relation to the Father.

This is a theological summit, since Gregory distinguishes here two levels: *what is* (τί ἐστι), to which corresponds the nature, and *how it is* (πῶς ἐστι), to which the argument of cause is referred. Not even in nature can one know what a reality truly is, nor can one reach its essence. Instead one can only know how things are, and follow the reasoning of causes.¹⁸

The Nyssian once again unites without confusing the *intra* and the *extra* of the Trinity. The whole treatise is nothing other, in the end, than a theology of the relationship between the Trinity and the world,

¹⁷ J. Ratzinger expresses this mediation with power, saying that the Son is pure *Sein von* and *Sein für*—*being from* and *being for*—, that is relation of total dependence on the Father, from whom he receives all, and total self-gift. Thus he can affirm that in Christ “Das Ich ist das Werk, und das Werk ist das Ich” (J. RATZINGER, *Einführung in das Christentum*, Kösel 1968, p. 162).

¹⁸ This is a key distinction for science, whose value is founded here.

while at the same time being a critical analysis of ultimate theological foundation for the value and limits of the analogy between God and man, who is created in his image.

The schema of the work is thus:

- The Question
- First Element of Response: Avoid confusion with Hellenic polytheism.
 - i. *First step*: Human nature is one, it is improper to speak of many men.
 - ii. *Second step*: God is a name of the activity.
 - iii. *Third step*: The difference between God and men is that the divine Persons have a unique activity.
 - iv. *Apophatism*: The essence is ineffable.
 - v. *Finale*: The distinction of Persons.

The structure of the work thus suggests the following schema for the theological commentary:

- i. A first chapter will be dedicated to the three steps that constitute the backbone of the logical structure of the treatise itself:
 - a) A first part will be dedicated to the *universal human nature*, that is to the question of the sense of the affirmation that it is improper to speak of many men. In this context the relationship between human nature and time will also be developed.
 - b) A second part will treat the delicate theme of the ἐνέργειαι and the *divine activity*. Reference to the Palamite question will be necessary, along with Nyssian value for the history of Orthodox dogmatics.
 - c) Finally, a third part will enter with more detail into the central argument of the work: the *difference* between human action and Trinitarian action. A special focus will be placed here on the different Trinitarian formulae and the relationship between economy and immanence. Inevitably there will be reference to the Nyssian eschatological vision and his doctrine of the ἀποκατάστασις.
- ii. In a second chapter apophatism will be treated in the form that it appears in the work. Analysis of the Nyssian linguistic theory will develop into the deepening of the concept of person in Gregory's thought, with reference to the terminology of πρόσωπον-ὑπόστασις, and a culmination in the theology of the name of Christ.

- iii. In the light of the affirmations on apophatism, the last chapter will be dedicated, according to a Trinitarian schema, to the *distinction* of the Trinitarian Persons and the question of the *Filioque*.

As can be seen from the proposed schema, the treatise and commentary are divided into two phases: one more constructive, analyzed in the first chapter, and one more defensive or apologetic, studied in the last two.

So the path traveled starts from the consideration of man and of human nature (I. a) to pass to the divine nature (I. b). One will be in a position then (I. c) to show the differences between the divine and human actions.

Once the more constructive phase is finished, one passes to the level of the theory of knowledge, a theme that is basically one of fundamental theology (II), and concludes with the defense against the accusation of tritheism and the distinction of Persons (III).

III. DATING THE TREATISE

The dating of the *AdAbl* is still an unresolved problem. E. Moutsoulas writes: “The exact dating of the period in which the work was written is difficult, for which there is disagreement between scholars, a disagreement that extends from 375 to 390 AD”.¹⁹

J. Daniélou²⁰ distinguishes three principle periods of Nyssian production:

- a) Before the death of Basil at the end of 378, which signals a great change in Gregory’s life,²¹ who gathers the theological inheritance of his brother and becomes, thanks precisely to his originality and

¹⁹ E.D. MOUTSOULAS, Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, Athens 1997, p. 186. For a recent and complete overview of the different proposals for the dating of Gregory’s works, see P. MARAVAL, article *Cronología de las obras*, in L.F. MATEO-SECO—G. MASPERO, *Diccionario de San Gregorio de Nisa*, Burgos 2006, pp. 265–284.

²⁰ Cf. J. DANIELOU, *La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse*, StPatr 7 (1966) 159–169. For the Nyssian sermons, see the preceding work: IDEM, *La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse*, RevSR 29 (1955) 346–372.

²¹ J. Daniélou maintained that the date of Basil’s death was January 1st 379, but more recently J.R. Pouchet has shown that the most probable date should be situated instead towards the end of September 378: cf. J.R. POUCHET, *La date de l’élection épiscopale de saint Basile et celle de sa mort*, RHE 87 (1992) 5–33 and P. MARAVAL, *La date de la mort de Basile de Césarée*, REAug 34 (1988) 25–38; IDEM, *Retour sur quelques dates concernant Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nysse*, RHE 99 (2004) 153–157.

- autonomy, its principle defender. To this period would belong for example, *DeBeat*, *InInsPs* and *DeVirg*
- b) The second period extends from the death of Basil until 385, and is characterized by production of great doctrinal works, such as *DeHom*, *Antir*, the three books of the *CE* and the *RCE*, together with a series of small treatises such as *Ep* 38, *AdGraec*,²² *AdSimp*, and *AdMac*.²³ There is a turning point in this period after Gregory visited Jerusalem in 382, the year after the Council of Constantinople, as will be seen later (see p. 85).
- c) The last period, which includes the works after 385, is characterized by the allusions of the Nyssian to his old age, and by the fact that his writings are often dedicated to monks. A series of dogmatic tractates belongs to this period, such as *InIllud*, *DePerf*, *DeProf* and *AdTheo*. There are also great exegetical works of maturity, such as *DeVitaMo* and *InCant*.

So in the second and third periods Gregory wrote small dogmatic treatises. Thus the most probable hypothesis of dating the *AdAbl* would place it in one of these two possibilities.

G. May assigns the work to the second period.²⁴ R.P.C. Hanson,²⁵ G.C. Stead²⁶ and R.M. Hübner²⁷ are of the same opinion, in as much

²² R. Hübner reinstates *Ep* 38 to the work of Gregory of Nyssa, although previously it was considered part of Basil's letters: R. HÜBNER, *Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. ep. 38 des Basilios. Zum unterschiedlichen Verständnis der Ousia bei den Kappadoziern Brüdern*, in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Card. J. Daniélou*, Beauchesne 1972, pp. 463–490. This has been studied by P. FEDWICK, *A Commentary of Gregory of Nyssa or the 38th Letter of Basil of Caesarea*. *OrChrP* 44 (1978) 31–51. For the *AdGraec*: H.J. VON VOGT, *Die Schrift "Ex communibus notionibus" des Gregor von Nyssa: Übersetzung des kritischen Textes mit Kommentar*, *ThQ* 171 (1991) 204–218 and D.F. STRAMARA, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ad Graecos "How It Is That We Say There Are Three Persons In The Divinity But Do Not Say There Are Three Gods" (To The Greeks: Concerning the Commonality of Concepts)*, *GOTR* 41 (1996) 375–391.

²³ The minor tractates have been studied by T. Ziegler. See T. ZIEGLER, *Les petits traités de Grégoire de Nyssse*, Doctoral thesis, Strasbourg 1987. See also B. DUVICK, *The Trinitarian Tracts of Gregory of Nyssa*, in H.R. DROBNER—A. VINCIANO (Ed.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, Leiden 2000, pp. 581–592.

²⁴ Cfr. G. MAY, *Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa*, in M. Canévet, *Exegèse et théologie dans les traités spirituels de Grégoire de Nyssse*, en M. HARL (ed), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nyssse*, Leiden 1971, pp. 58–59.

²⁵ Cfr. R.P.C. HANSON, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, Edinburgh 1988, p. 717.

²⁶ Cfr. G.C. STEAD, *Why Not Three Gods?: The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Doctrine*, in H. DROBNER—Ch. KLOCK (dir), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, Leiden 1990, p. 150.

²⁷ Cfr. R. HÜBNER, *Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. ep. 38 des Basilios. Zum unterschiedlichen Verständnis der Ousia bei den Kappadoziern Brüdern*, in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Card. J. Daniélou*, Beauchesne 1972, pp. 463–490.

as they tie the *AdAbl* to the theological discussions in reference to the Council of Constantinople, around 380.

Nevertheless many other scholars assign the work to the last period of Gregory's life.²⁸ The tone of the writing appears foreign to the polemical tones that characterize the years around 381, suggesting a collocation some time after the edict of Theodosius. Even a rapid reading of the *AdEust* is enough to see the extremely polemical and tense situation, despite the fact that the theme of the treatise is the unity of action, as with the *AdAbl*. In the *AdAbl* Gregory's discourse is serene. One sees that there is no direct accusation of heresy: he defends himself from tritheism without attachment. One sees that Ablabius himself would have the tools to respond to the question. It appears that Gregory is treating an objection in a situation that is henceforth dogmatically clear.

Further, Gregory writes with authority in the *AdAbl*, as a recognized doctor who does not make any reference to Basil. The author himself mentions his advanced age,²⁹ using the expression *παρ' ἡμῶν τῶν γερόντων* (37, 5). The most probable dating thus appears to be at the end of the 380's. It is surely a work that comes some years after the *AdGraec*.

One difference between this treatise and Epistle 38, is that the language is not strictly and exclusively technical. This could seem a limit to the work,³⁰ but instead the tone is less preoccupied for philosophical rigourism and this renders the writing more incisive theologically, more attentive to the pastoral and existential dimensions.

The *AdAbl* can be defined as a synthetic work, since it recapitulates all the particular themes of the small Trinitarian tractates³¹ of the second period. Obviously the themes of the unity of human nature, of the divine ἐνέργεια, of the unity of action and also of the determination of the personal characteristics of each person work together to form a marvellous picture. It is precisely this last theme that pushes T. Ziegler

²⁸ Cfr. J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden 2000, p. 113.

²⁹ But this argument alone is insufficient, as in the writings preceding 381 Gregory has recourse to the image of white hairs as a rhetorical device, and already in 383 refers to his advanced age (cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *La chronologie* . . . , p. 166).

³⁰ Cfr. J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature* . . . , p. 118.

³¹ T. Ziegler, who situates the work at the end of the minor dogmatic treatises of the second period, writes: "Or, de par son contenu l'Ad Ablabium s'inscrit parfaitement dans la continuité des traités analysés précédemment et peut en être regardé comme la synthèse" (T. ZIEGLER, *Les petits traités* . . . , p. 188).

to say that: “and it is in this that the *Ad Ablabium* merits to be seen as an achievement: different from the *Ex communibus notionibus* and the *Ad Eustathium*, it offers not a partial, fragmentary approach to the problem of the divine tri-unity, but a global approach, one that is dialectic and balanced and that corresponds to the very dialectical and paradoxical nature of the Cappadocian Trinitarian theology”.³²

One could perhaps attempt here to reconstruct the chronology of the smaller Trinitarian works, giving chronological priority to the *AdEust*, for the violence of the heresies that are sketched out there, which along with *Ep* 5 could be anterior to 379. *Ep* 38 would immediately follow, which treats the distinction of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, and is thus situated in a first phase of the doctrinal clarifications that will lead up to the Council of Constantinople. The *AdGraec* is logically successive, since it is principally preoccupied in affirming the equivalence between ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον, still in the technical discussions preceding 381. *Ep* 24 due to its synthetic character, should be placed after the Council of Constantinople, as with *Ep* 3, which is surely posterior to Gregory’s voyage to Jerusalem. The *DeDeit* is unanimously assigned³³ to 383.

IV. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The end of the *DeDeit* immediately recalls the *AdAbl*. After having reaffirmed the ineffability of the divine nature and the fact that the term *Divinity* refers to activity and not nature, Gregory comments the episode of Ananias³⁴ of Acts 5.3, referring to him with the expression: αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ τὸν Ἀνανίαν κλέπτῃν γενόμενον. This must be confronted with the almost identical expression of: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐγένετο κλέπτῃς αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ, in *AdAbl*, 45, 15–16.

This observation could be an indicator of a certain proximity of the two works, supporting a hypothesis of the dating of the *AdAbl* in

³² “Et c’est en ceci aussi que l’*Ad Ablabium* mérite d’être regardé comme un achèvement: à la différence de l’*Ex communibus notionibus* et de l’*Ad Eustathium*, il offre non une approche partielle, fragmentaire, du problème de la tri-unité divine, mais une approche globale, dialectique et équilibrée, qui correspond à la nature même, dialectique et paradoxale, de la doctrine trinitaire cappadocienne” (*Ibidem*, p. 215).

³³ Cfr. E.D. MOUTSOULAS, Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, Athens 1997, p. 262; J. DANIÉLOU, *La chronologie des sermons...*, p. 363 and J. BERNARDI, *La prédication des Pères Cappadociens. Le prédicateur et son auditoire*, Paris 1968, p. 327.

³⁴ *DeDeit*, GNO X/2, 142–144.

the second period. But a rapid analysis shows that the same expression can be found in reference to Judas, in *InCant*, GNO VI, 409, 3: αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ κλέπτῃς ἐγένετο. One can virtually superimpose this with the expression of the *AdAbl*.

This observation suggests an opportunity to analyze the Biblical citations³⁵ and the terminology of this last treatise to compare it with other Nyssian works.

If one follows the chronology proposed by J. Daniélou as seen in the previously mentioned works, the Biblical citations of the *AdAbl* can be divided into five groups:

- i) Citations that are found in almost all the moments of the Nyssian work, such as for example:³⁶ Phil 2.9 (52, 22), 1 Cor 1.24 (50, 1) and Jn 5.22 (49, 11)
- ii) Citations that are only found in the *AdAbl*, such as: Jn 18.25 (49,8)
- iii) Citations that are also found in works of the first two periods:
 - Rm 1.23 (43, 16), that is found twice in *DeVirg* (GNO VIII/1, 252, 6 and 299, 29), belonging to period I.
 - Mt 12.28 (50, 8), that is found in *RCE* (GNO II, 406), from period II.
- iv) Citations that are found principally in works of the third period, with appearances in a few works of earlier periods:
 - Eph 6.16 (37,8), which is found also in *DeInst* (GNO VIII/1, 62) and in the *InCant* (GNO VI, 298), of period III, as well as in *InEccI* (GNO V, 434), of period I, and in *CE* (GNO I, 229), of period II.
 - Ps 103.24 (50, 3–4), which appears twice in both *DeInfant* (GNO III/2, 97 and 72) and in *InCant* (GNO VI, 55 and 203), of period III, as well as in *InDiemLu* (GNO IX, 228) and in *ApHex* (PG 44, 73B).
- v) Citations that only appear in works of Period III.
 - Ps 119.4 (37, 9), found twice in *InCant* (GNO VI, 128, 19s and 165, 9)
 - Heb 6.16 (54, 6), also found twice in *InCant* (GNO VI, 375, 3–6 and 375, 8)
 - Ps 23.8 (43, 16), found twice in *InAscen* (GNO IX, 326, 7 and 27), once in *InCant* (GNO VI, 166, 13) and once in *InIllud* (GNO III/2, 27, 22)

³⁵ For the analysis of the Biblical citations, the precious work: H. DROBNER, *Bibelindex zu den Werken Gregors von Nyssa*, Paderborn 1988 was used.

³⁶ The citation of the *AdAbl* in GNO III/1 is indicated in parentheses.

To these last Biblical references one can add many more that are found only in the *AdAbl*, but whose immediate context is common to works of period III. For example:

- Dt 6.4 (42, 5 e 55, 3), where the immediately successive verse appears six times in the *InCant* and twice in *DeInst*.
- 1 Tm 4.10 (52, 3) found only in the *AdAbl*, while 1 Tm 4.12–15 is found in the *InCant*.
- Is 4.4 (50, 6), whose immediately successive verse is found in the *InCant*.
- Ps 83.10 (45, 4s), which besides obviously appearing in *InInsPs*, is cited five times in the *InCant* and once in the *DeInst* (verses 6 and 8).

Obviously no certain conclusions can be drawn, nevertheless there appears to be an affinity between the citations of period III and those of the *AdAbl*. For example, considering only the four psalms cited in the treatise, one sees that they belong to the group of psalms loved by Gregory towards the end of his life. If one considers the frequency of use of verses from these psalms throughout the works of the three periods (leaving aside the *InInsPs* for obvious reasons) one obtains the following results:

<i>Period:</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>
<i>Ps</i> 23	3	0	18
<i>Ps</i> 83	4	1	8
<i>Ps</i> 103	5	4	21
<i>Ps</i> 119	2	0	8

Psalms 23, 83 and 103 belong to the group of eight psalms cited five or more times in the *InCant*. Psalm 103 is the preferred psalm of this work of maturity, cited some 11 times.

Thus one can hypothesize a certain affinity of the *AdAbl* in general with the writings of period III, and in particular with the *InCant*.

A confirmation comes from terminological analysis: if one studies the less frequent terms and expressions of the treatise, and that appear in only a few works, the parallelism with the *InCant* is reinforced. One can propose the following classification:

- i) Expressions that appear only in the *AdAbl* and in works of period I, like the verb ἀντιπαρέχοις (37, 12), found also in *InInsPs* (GNO V, 121, 9).

ii) Expressions that appear only in the *AdAbl* and in works of period II, such as:

- εὐχαριστήσομεν τῷ δεδωκότι τὴν χάριν· (39, 6) parallel to εὐχαριστεῖ τῷ δεδωκότι τὴν χάριν; in *DeDeitEv* (GNO IX, 340, 18–19) (381 AD).
- ἔφορον τοῦ παντός (44, 18) found also in *DeVita*, (GNO X/1, 12, 3–4).
- κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβέστερον λόγον (41, 10), in *DeHom* (PG 44, 225C).
- ἀποτεταγμένως (47, 12) in *Ep* 24 (4, 10; GNO VIII/2, 76, 5), (circa 381–382).
- πρὸς τὴν τοῦ παντός οἰκονομίαν (48, 7–8) in *DeHom* (PG 44, 248C).
- προσεχῶς (56, 5 e 56, 6) found twice in *CE* II (GNO I, 323, 22–23 e 342, 23) and once in *CEIII* (GNO II, 15, 4), but not in the Trinitarian sense as in the *AdAbl*.
- πᾶν ὄνομα, εἴτε παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης συνηθείας ἐξηύρηται εἴτε παρὰ τῶν γραφῶν παραδέδοται, (42, 21–22) parallel to ἀλλ’ εἴ τι καὶ λέγεται εἴτε παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης συνηθείας, εἴτε παρὰ τῆς ἁγίας Γραφῆς (*DeDeit*, GNO X/2, 142, 12–14).

iii) Expressions that appear only in the *AdAbl* and in works of period III, such as:

- τῷ θυρεῷ τῆς πίστεως (37, 8) which appears in its pure form³⁷ only in *DeInst* (GNO VIII/1, 62, 11) and in *InCant* (GNO VI, 298, 14).
- τύπος τῆς εὐπειθείας (37, 11) which recalls τῆς εὐπειθείας ὑπόδειγμα in *DeVitaMo* (I, 2, 5–6) and τὸ τῆς εὐπειθείας κατόρθωμα (I, 2, 9).
- διλήμματον τῆς ἀτοπίας ἐπιδιστάζον καὶ κραδαινόμενον, (38, 22) parallel in a verbal copy in πᾶσαν διστάζουσάν τε καὶ κραδαινομένην διάνοιαν, (*InCant*, GNO VI, 372, 12).
- τὸν προσκληθέντα (40, 13) which only appears in *DeVitaMo* (II, 220, 10).
- τὸν διαμερισμὸν (41, 1) only found in *OrCat* (GNO III/4, 13, 24) always referred to nature.
- ἐτυμολογίας (43, 6) found only in *InIllud* (GNO III/2 26, 4).³⁸

³⁷ Two other times it appears in composition with other expressions in *CE* II, GNO I, 229, 20–21 and 25–26.

³⁸ J. Daniélou attributes this work to the third period (cf. J. DANIELOU, *La chronologie...*, p. 167). J.K. Downing, who dedicated his doctoral thesis to the *InIllud* (cf. J.K. DOWNING,

- ιδιότροπον (47, 20) only in *InIllud* (GNO III/2 26, 8).
- συντηρητική τῶν ὄντων (51, 2) only in *OrCat* (GNO III/4, 40, 14).
- ἀόριστον καὶ ἀπερίληπτον τὴν θεϊαν φύσιν εἶναι πιστεύοντες (52, 16) parallel to οὐ γὰρ χωρεῖ ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη πενία τὴν ἀόριστόν τε καὶ ἀπερίληπτον φύσιν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δέξασθαι of *InCant* VI, 337, 1–2.
- ἐν ὄγκῳ (53, 20) only appearing in *InCant* VI, 173, 13, in the expression parallel to 53, 20–22: πάσης γὰρ ὕλης τῷ ποσῷ τε καὶ τῷ ποιῷ διειλημμένης ἐν ὄγκῳ καὶ εἶδει καὶ ἐπιφανείᾳ καὶ σχήματι, πέρας γίνεται τῆς περὶ αὐτὴν κατανοήσεως τὰ περὶ αὐτὴν θεωρούμενα, ὡς μηδὲν ἔχειν τὸν τὴν ὕλην διερευνώμενον ἔξω τι τούτων ἐν φαντασίᾳ λαβεῖν of *InCant* VI, 173, 13–17.
- ὁμνύουσι (54, 6): the verb is found only in *DeInst* (GNO VIII/1, 88, 17) and three times in the *InCant* (GNO VI, 374, 4 e 377, 4 e 377, 9).
- τοῦτο βλέπουσα μόνον, ὅπως ἂν ἐπωφελῆς γένοιτο τοῖς δεχομένοις ὁ λόγος, οὐδὲν ἀκριβολογουμένη κατὰ τὴν λέξιν, (54, 12–13) expression parallel to δι' ὧν εὐληπτος γίνεται ἡμῖν καὶ ἐπωφελῆς ἡ διδασκαλία, of *InCant* (GNO VI, 224, 9–10) which, together with GNO VI, 5, 9 are the only three cases of a noetic ἐπωφελῆς that is, referred to words or concepts.

The Treatise of Gregory of Nyssa: "In illud: Tunc et ipse Filius". A Critical text with Prolegomena. Diss. Harvard Univ., Cambridge (Ma.) 1947), and later realized the critical edition in GNO III/2, 3–28, maintains that the theme of ὑποταγή of 1 Cor 15.28, present in both the *CE* and the *RCE*, demonstrates at once the Nyssian authenticity of the work and its date of composition, that is the year 383 (cf. IDEM, *The Treatise of Gregory of Nyssa In Illud: tunc et Ipse Filius, A Critical Text with Prolegomena*, HSCP, 58–59 (1948) 223). Nevertheless the argument does not appear sufficient to discern such a limited period of time, such as the one from 383 to 385. The hypothesis of J. Daniélou seems more probable, who considers the *InIllud* to be composed between 385 and 390. It would then be contemporary to the *Oratio* 30 of Gregory Nazianzen, dedicated to the exegetical discussion of certain Biblical passages used by the Eunomians, among which is found 1 Cor 15.28, which presents some points of contact with the *InIllud*, including the theme of ἀποκατάστασις (cf. J.T. LIENHARD, *The exegesis of 1 Co 15, 24–28 from Marcellus of Ancyra to Theodoret of Cyrus*, VigChr 37 (1983) 347). Further, in the Nyssian treatise the theme of μίμησις is present, a theme that becomes more frequent in the writings of Gregory's last period (cf. p. 139). On the *InIllud*, in general, see C. McCAMBLEY, *When (the Father) Will Subject All Things to (the Son), Then (the Son) Himself Will Be subjected to him (the Father) Who Subjects All Things to him (The Son).—A Treatise on First Corinthians, 15, 28 by Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, GOTR 28 (1983) 1–15. For the relationship with Marcellus of Ancyra, see R. HÜBNER, *Gregor von Nyssa und Markell von Ankyra*, in M. HARL (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nyssa*, Leiden 1971, 199–299.

- οὐδὲν ἀκριβολογουμένη κατὰ τὴν λέξιν, (54, 13) parallel to ἡ ἀκοή, μὴ λίαν ἀκριβολογεῖσθαι πρὸς τὴν τῆς λέξεως σύνταξιν ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν εἰρμόν τοῦ νοήματος βλέπειν of the *InCant* (GNO VI, 53, 14–15).

The terminological affinities are surely present,³⁹ particularly if one considers that the *AdAbl* is a tractate of Trinitarian dogmatics, while the *InCant* is an exegetical-spiritual one. The coincidences are not thus found due to terminological specificity, but due to literary expression, as is clear in the case of ἐγένετο κλέπτῃς αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ of *AdAbl*, 45, 15–16, which has been seen already. This is in exact parallel to *InCant*, GNO VI, 409, 3, even if outside the context of reference to Acts 5.3.

Thus it is reasonable to suppose that Gregory re-read at least some of his own Trinitarian writings, above all the small treatises, of which the *AdAbl* appears to be a conclusive synthesis, as has already been observed. Nevertheless the language is not highly technical and shows more affinities to the writings close to 390. Therefore one can hypothesize that, in the context of the last period of Nyssian production that goes from 386 until his death, the *AdAbl* should be situated around 390, perhaps in the years immediately preceding the *InCant*.⁴⁰ In fact, the sermons *InAscen* and *DeSpir* of 388 are witness to the renewed interest of Gregory for the third Person of the Trinity in precisely this period.⁴¹

Another point in favour of the later dating near the last phase of Nyssian production is the already mentioned parallel between τύπος τῆς εὐπειθείας of the *AdAbl* (37, 11) and the τῆς εὐπειθείας ὑπόδειγμα

³⁹ For brevity's sake the cases of only partial accord are left out, such as κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον (37, 2) which appears only in *DeHom*, and twice in the *InCant*, or διὰ προσθήκης (41, 4) found in *DeMort* IX, 53, 2 (dated around 380, cfr. G. LOZZA, *Gregorio di Nissa: Discorso sui defunti*, Torino 1991, p. 7) and in the *InCant* (GNO VI, 135, 4) and *DeVitaMo* (I, 44, 9).

⁴⁰ J.B. Cahill places the date of composition around 391: cfr. J.B. CAHILL, *The Date and Setting of Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, *JThS* 32 (1981) 447–460. See also F. DÜNZL, *Gregor von Nyssa's "Homilien zum Canticum" auf dem Hintergrund seiner "Vita Moysis"*, *VigChr* 44 (1990) 371–381.

⁴¹ In this sense the dating proposed here based upon direct textual analysis is in close agreement with the proposition of S. Coakley, who affirms for theological reasons the necessity to read the *AdAbl* in light of the *InCant* (cfr. S. COAKLEY, *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa...*, p. 437). The same can be said of the text of L. Ayres, who affirms that the social analogy of the Trinity was an important argument in the discussion with those who negated the divinity of the Holy Spirit (cfr. L. AYRES, *Not Three People...*, pp. 448–449), something at the centre of Gregory's interest during the third period.

of *DeVitaMo* (I, 2, 5–6): Daniélou deduces that this last expression of the *DeVitaMo* is directed to a monk.⁴² These monastic recipients characterize the last period.

In this manner T. Ziegler would be correct when affirming that “this treatise is in a certain way the last word of Gregory on the Trinitarian problem in the proper sense”.⁴³

V. KEYS TO READING

In the light of this dating, it seems even more important to consider the *AdAbl* in the whole of Gregory’s thought, to avoid reducing its significance improperly. For this reason we will seek to cite many of Gregory’s texts, even in extended format to keep them in their original context as much as possible. This is an attempt to avoid projecting the categories of the contemporary reader onto Nyssian thought.

The commentary will be essentially theological: instead of entering into a discussion of the schools, the effort will be to situate the treatise at the interior of Nyssian theology, studying its central nodes in a largely synthetic prospective. Philological and historical analysis will thus be at the service of the theological one.

The commentary will thus follow the structure of the *AdAbl* itself, seeking to situate each of the principle themes of the treatise in the whole of Gregory’s thought.

The natural key to reading is the connection between immanence and the Trinitarian economy: this “distinction appears clear at first, but is extremely delicate to handle and rich to meditate, since it is nothing other than the expression of the relationship of God to man and man to God, of eternity to time and of time to eternity, this complex relationship coming together suddenly in the Person of the unique Christ”.⁴⁴

One might be tempted to see in these expressions one of the projections that J. Daniélou lamented so much.⁴⁵ But the history of dogma

⁴² Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Grégoire de Nyssse. La vie de Moïse*, SC 1, Paris 1968, p. 47, n. 1.

⁴³ “Ce traité est d’une certaine façon le dernier mot de Grégoire sur le problème trinitaire proprement dit” (T. ZIEGLER, *Les petits traités* . . . , p. 291).

⁴⁴ “Distinction claire à première vue, mais extrêmement délicate à manier et riche à méditer, car elle n’est rien d’autre que l’expression du rapport de Dieu à l’homme e de l’homme à Dieu, de l’éternité au temps et du temps à l’éternité, ce rapport complexe se nouant soudain dans la seule personne du Christ unique” (B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nyssse*, Turnhout 1994, p. 359).

⁴⁵ “Le grand danger est de considérer la pensée des Pères en fonction de l’état présent

shows that the problematic of the relationship between the being and action of the Trinity was at the roots of both the problem with Eunomius and that with Apollinarius.

Only a few years after Gregory's death it was to be the Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople who affirmed explicitly that he who suffered in the flesh is one of the Persons of the Trinity.⁴⁶ The affirmation would become the object of discussion in the theopaschite polemic, and will become dogma in 553 with the Council of Constantinople II.⁴⁷ As we shall see, these ancient discussions on the relationship between economy and immanence still echo today at the level of ecumenical theology.

Further it is worth recalling that the Cappadocians were accused at various moments of having been inclined in an unbalanced measure to the immanent aspect of the Trinitarian mystery, so as to separate it from the economic aspect.

L. Scheffczyk in particular was much perplexed in his work included in *Mysterium Salutis*. He affirms there that the personal distinction in the Cappadocian theology is only formal in such a manner that the concrete *ad extra* activity of the three Persons cannot lead back to the hypostatic properties.⁴⁸ The same affirmations are repeated in the part written by L. Scheffczyk in the recent dogmatic of which the eminent theologian is co-author with A. Ziegenaus.⁴⁹ The separation between economy and immanence would lead inevitably to apophatism.

The theme is taken up by J.-Ph. Houdret, J.-M. Garrigues, J.S. Nadal and M.J. Le Guillou, authors of a special issue of *Istina* in 1974,

de la théologie et des problèmes qu'elle pose, au lieu de la situer dans les problèmes qui se posaient de leur temps et des perspectives dans lesquelles se situait leur théologie." (J. DANIELOU, *L'apocatástase chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, RSR 30 (1940) 337).

⁴⁶ In the *Tomus ad Armenios* of 437, at n. 10, Proclus affirms that one of the Trinity became incarnate and thus had suffered (cf. PROCLUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Tomus ad Armenios* 10, PG 65, 865BD). The formula appears clearly in an explanatory letter of Proclus to John of Antioch, of which Liberatus has transmitted a passage: "Et unum ex Trinitate secundum carnem crucifixum fatemur, et Divinitatem passibilem minime blasphemamus" (in Liberatus, *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum*, PL 68, 990D).

⁴⁷ Cf. J. CHÉNÉ, *Unus de Trinitate passus est*, RSR 53 (1965) 567–575.

⁴⁸ Cf. L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Lehramtliche Formulierungen und Dogmengeschichte der Trinität*, in *Mysterium Salutis* II, Einsiedeln 1966, pp. 178–180.

⁴⁹ "Freilich muss zugegeben werden, dass die Umschreibungen der Hypostasen recht formal gehalten sind und der konkreten Inhaltlichkeit entbehren, was sich danach auch in der Darstellung der Wirkungen der göttlichen Personen nach aussen bemerkbar macht, die eigentlich nicht auf die Personunterschiede zurückgeführt werden. Überhaupt tritt im Zuge der Klärung der immanenten Trinität deren heilökonomische Betrachtung zurück, obgleich sie zum Ausgangspunkt der Lehre genommen ist und anerkannt bleibt." (L. SCHEFFCZYK—A. ZIEGENAUS, *Katholische Dogmatik* II, Aachen 1996, pp. 242–243).

dedicated to Palamite theology and its relationship to patristic thought. The first level of accusation against Palamas was to have inherited from the polemics of the Cappadocians with Eunomius a false notion of divine transcendence and unknowability. He would have let himself be swept up with the force of the polemic and have accepted to fight on the same terrain of the notion of transcendence as that proposed by the neo-Arians. From this he would have developed a false apophatism. Even if it is clearly affirmed that the Cappadocians did not in any way intend to introduce further distinctions in God himself, between the essence and his attributes, it is nevertheless explicitly said that: “Eunomius’s refuters would have cut the order of *ad extra* activities from its personal source, in this way menacing the liberty and gratuity of the economy”.⁵⁰ Their Palamite successors would not thus have been able to escape an eternal and necessary emanation.

In this case it would seem audacious at best to choose the relationship between immanent and economic Trinity as a key to reading of the *AdAbl*.

However other authors who have studied in detail Gregory’s thought find in Nyssian theology the foundations of the *distinction*, that is the union without confusion, of Trinitarian intimacy and the manifestation of the three divine Persons in time.

Thus for example, the analysis of R.J. Kees⁵¹ of the *OrCat*, a work which like the *AdAbl* belongs to the Gregorian maturity, is in strident contradiction with the above affirmations. He instead finds in the concepts of *immanence* and *economy* the structural bases themselves of the Nyssian work. This scholar says of Gregory that “he, presenting the *Logos* and in a corresponding manner, according to a parallel argument, also the *Pneuma* as living and powerful Hypostases of the unique Divinity, establishes the theological foundation of the *Oikonomia*”.⁵²

He who approaches the study of the great Cappadocian must realize that, as W. Jaeger has written, “although Gregory has no closed system,

⁵⁰ “Les réfuteurs d’Eunome auraient coupé l’ordre des activités *ad extra* de sa source personnelle, menaçant ainsi la liberté et la gratuité de l’économie”. (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme et Tradition*, Irén. 48 (1975) 482).

⁵¹ R.J. KEES, *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes in der Oratio Catechetica Gregors von Nyssa*, Leiden 1995.

⁵² “Indem er aber den *Logos* und in paralleler Argumentation entsprechend auch das *Pneuma* Gottes als lebendige, mächtige *Hypostasen* der einen Gottheit erweist, legt er das theologische Fundament für die *Oikonomia*” (*Ibidem*, p. 318).

there is a systematic coherence in his thought”.⁵³ For this reason it is insufficient to limit oneself to the study of Cappadocian thought in general to understand the specific addition of Nyssian thought, above all if the preoccupation in actual theological problematics depends for a certain efficacy on historical analysis.

Gregory’s economic conceptualization is both serious and ample. Thus B. Pottier says that “For Gregory, the economy does not start only with the Incarnation of the Son, but embraces all that is not theology, that is to say all that is not eternal. Economy designates all of God’s activity in relationship to time, including creation. Thus it cannot be reduced to the presence of the Incarnate Son on earth, nor even to the whole of the Salvation history as found in the Bible, it must also include the whole history of men and the special providence of God for each one of them, before and beyond any historical revelation”.⁵⁴

All Nyssian thought is therefore descending: it moves from God towards man, from theology to economy, aspects which “Gregory ties closely one to the other, identifying the classic divine property of Goodness to the love of men”.⁵⁵ In this way the reason for our salvation is in the Trinity, in the love that unites the Father to the Son. We are saved by becoming the Body of Christ, and thus *image of the Image* (τῆς εἰκόνοϛ εἰκόνα: *DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 196, 12). Economy and immanence cannot be separated.

As will be seen in greater detail, Gregory has the fortune of being the youngest and most perspicacious of the three Cappadocians. He will need to confront and profoundly penetrate not only the thought of Eunomius, but also that of Apollinarius. The first broke the intra-Trinitarian immanence, reducing it to the Father who was identified with the divine essence. He lowered in this manner the hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the *energetic* level, thus to the economic level. Apollinarius on the other hand made of the humanity of Christ

⁵³ W. JAEGER, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, Leiden 1965, p. 31

⁵⁴ “Pour Grégoire, l’économie ne commence pas seulement avec l’incarnation du Fils, mais elle embrasse tout ce qui n’est pas la théologie, c’est-à-dire tout ce qui n’est pas éternel. L’économie désigne toute l’activité de Dieu en rapport avec le temps, création y compris. Elle ne peut donc se réduire à la présence du Fils incarné sur terre, ni même à l’histoire sainte tout entière telle qu’écrite en la Bible, car elle doit comprendre aussi l’histoire de tous les hommes et la providence spéciale de Dieu pour chacun, avant même ou en dehors de toute révélation historique” (B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ...*, p. 359).

⁵⁵ “Gregor bindet beide eng aneinander, indem er die klassische Gotteseigenschaft der Güte mit der Menschenliebe identifiziert” (R.J. KEES, *Die Lehre...*, p. 319).

a pre-existing being in the intra-Trinitarian immanence. In both cases, economy and immanence are separated or radically confused.

The commentary of the *AdAbI* is thus aiming to show, in the structure of the treatise itself, the connection and distinction between Trinitarian immanence and economy, which is articulated in the relationship between essence, nature, hypostases and their activity. The central point is thus the inseparability of Christology and doctrine of the Trinity. This naturally leads to the discussion of apophatism, in its relationship to the essence and the Hypostases according to the Nyssian conception.

Thus in its articulation the *AdAbI* shows the impossibility of separating questions of fundamental theology from dogmatics properly speaking. One does not reduce all of theology to fundamental theology, as seems to have happened with the influence of K. Rahner's work,⁵⁶ but to place Christology and Trinitarian theology in the centre, and to study the hierarchy of truth, descending even to history, the world and questions of fundamental theology to learn from God who man is.

⁵⁶ Cfr. G. COLOMBO, *Teologia Sacramentaria*, Milan 1997, p. 63.

CHAPTER ONE

NATURE AND ACTION

I. UNIVERSAL NATURE

a. *The Ad Ablabium*

Gregory addresses Ablabius with a calm and paternal tone, reproaching him for not having personally engaged himself to respond to the proposed question. The title “Soldier of Christ”, a citation of the second letter to Timothy (2.3), situates Gregory’s words in the context of a teacher-disciple relationship, in which the teacher is an example and model of obedience (τύπος τῆς εὐπειθείας) for the disciple.¹

The Nyssian specifies that it is not a small question, since, if it is not properly treated, it can lead to one of two errors: the acceptance of polytheism, or the negation of the divinity of the Son and of the Spirit.

Thus he formulates the problem:

Peter, James and John, while belonging to the unique human nature, are said to be three men; and it is not absurd by any means that those who are united (συνάπτω) according to nature, when they are more than one, are enumerated in the plural on the base of the name of nature. So, if in such a case usage permits it and nothing prohibits to say two of those that are two and three of those that are [one] more than two, how then do we, confessing in the mystical dogmas three hypostases and not admitting any difference between them according to the nature, combat in a certain way the confession of faith from the moment that we speak of the unique divine nature of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but prohibit to speak of three gods?²

¹ Cf. *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 37, 1–11.

² Πέτρος καὶ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης, ἐν μιᾷ ὄντες τῇ ἀνθρωπότητι, τρεῖς ἄνθρωποι λέγονται· καὶ οὐδὲν ἄτοπον τοὺς συνημμένους κατὰ τὴν φύσιν, εἰ πλείους εἶεν, ἐκ τοῦ τῆς φύσεως ὀνόματος πληθυντικῶς ἀριθμῆσθαι. εἰ οὖν ἐκεῖ τοῦτο δίδωσιν ἢ συνήθεια καὶ ὁ ἀπαγορεύων οὐκ ἔστι δύο λέγειν τοὺς δύο καὶ τρεῖς τοὺς ὑπὲρ δύο, πῶς, ἐπὶ τῶν μυστικῶν δογμάτων τὰς τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις ὁμολογοῦντες καὶ οὐδεμίαν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν τὴν κατὰ φύσιν διαφορὰν ἐννοοῦντες, μαχόμεθα τρόπον τινὰ τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ, μίαν μὲν τὴν θεότητα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος λέγοντες, τρεῖς δὲ θεοὺς λέγειν ἀπαγορεύοντες; (*Ibidem*, 38, 8–18).

One could say that the interaction between *natural* and *supernatural* is at play here. This terminology is certainly modern, but the problem posed is precisely that of establishing in what sense in God *nature* and *person* are found, as well as the relationship of this to human *nature* and *person*. It is more than simply a problem of language. The Council of Constantinople and successive doctrinal clarifications will consecrate the *μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις*—one substance, three hypostases—of the Cappadocians. Once this solution is accepted, the question is asked: how does one apply the same principle to men? If man has an essence and a hypostasis in the same sense that they are found in the Trinitarian immanence, would it not be better to speak of three gods?

Gregory admits that the question is not easy. In fact, it is enough to cause doubts and trembling before the dilemma. But, as always, the tradition of the Fathers, faith and grace come first, they are more valuable than any reasoning.³

After a first sketch of a response, more rhetorical than speculative,⁴ one might expect a refutation of the closeness of man to God on Gregory's part. But it is not this way, and this step merits to be underscored. Essence and nature, or person and hypostasis are concepts that can be predicated of either divine immanence or of men, essentially *economic* beings.

Gregory surprises the reader, above all the contemporary one, affirming that it is, in the proper sense, erroneous to speak of many men:

We thus say above all that the habit to name in the plural, with the very name of nature, those who are divided by nature and to say *many men*, which is equivalent to saying *many human natures*, is an improper use of the word.⁵

We are before a linguistic imprecision, since in fact there is but one unique human nature and one unique *man*. The argument that proves it is simple:

When we call someone, we do not name him according to nature, to avoid that the commonness of the name leads to some error. For each of those that listen could think to be he himself the one called, given that

³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 38, 19–39, 7.

⁴ Where one would refuse to speak of three gods to avoid confusion with Greek polytheism (cfr. *ibidem*, 39, 14–40, 2).

⁵ Φαμὲν τοίνυν πρῶτον μὲν κατάχρησίν τινα συνηθείας εἶναι τὸ τοὺς μὴ διηρημένους τῇ φύσει κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄνομα πληθυντικῶς ὀνομάζειν καὶ λέγειν ὅτι πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ὅπερ ὅμοιον ἐστὶ τῷ λέγειν ὅτι πολλὰ φύσεις ἄνθρωπινα. (*Ibidem*, 40, 5–9).

he is called not with a particular appellative, but based upon the common name of nature. But in pronouncing the word imposed upon him as proper—I intend that which signifies the subject—we distinguish him from the multitude. Thus there are many who participate in the [same] nature, for example disciples, apostles or martyrs, but one alone in all is man, if it is true, as it was said, that man is constituted not by that which is proper of each one, but of that which is common to the nature. Man, in fact, is Luke or Stephen, nevertheless, if someone is man, this does not mean certainly that he is also for that reason Luke or Stephen.⁶

The central point in the argument is that man is constituted by that which is common to nature. Human nature is that which makes Luke and Stephen to be men, and it is one.

Multiplicity is caused on the other hand, by the fact of being persons, each with his own peculiar existence and proper distinctive particularities.

However, the concept of the hypostases admits division (τὸν διαμερισμὸν), by the properties that are manifested in each one, and are considered numerically, according to composition (κατὰ σύνθεσιν). The nature is on the other hand one, united in itself and a perfectly indivisible unity, which does not augment by addition nor diminish by subtraction; but that which it is, is unique and unique it remains, even if it appears in multiplicity: undivided and permanent and perfect [unity], that is not divided in the individuals that participate in it. And as [the words] of crowd, people, army and assembly are all said in the singular, even if each is thought in the plural, so, according to the more exact manner of expression, one could also properly speak of a unique man, even though those in whom that same nature is manifested are a multitude. It would then be far better to correct our erred habit and not extend any more the name of nature to the multiplicity, rather than, as slaves of this habit, to transfer this error also to the divine dogma.⁷

⁶ προσκαλούμενοι γάρ τινα, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὸν ὀνομάζομεν, ὡς ἂν μὴ τινα πλάνην ἢ κοινότης τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐμποιήσειεν, ἐκάστου τῶν ἀκουόντων ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὸν προσκληθέντα νομίζοντες, ὅτι μὴ τῇ ἰδιαζούσῃ προσηγορίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς φύσεως ὀνόματος ἢ κλήσις γίνεται· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἰδίως ἐπικειμένην αὐτῷ (τὴν σημαντικὴν λέγω τοῦ ὑποκειμένου) φωνὴν εἰπόντες, οὕτως αὐτὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἀποκρίνομεν, ὥστε πολλοὺς μὲν εἶναι τοὺς μετεσχικότας τῆς φύσεως, φέρε εἰπεῖν μαθητὰς ἢ ἀποστόλους ἢ μάρτυρας, ἓνα δὲ ἐν πᾶσι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, εἴπερ, καθὼς εἴρηται, οὐχὶ τοῦ καθ' ἕκαστον, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς φύσεώς ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος· ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ὁ Λουκᾶς ἢ ὁ Στέφανος, οὐ μὴν, εἴ τις ἄνθρωπος, πάντως καὶ Λουκᾶς ἐστιν ἢ Στέφανος. (*Ibidem*, 40, 10–23).

⁷ Ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν τῶν ὑποστάσεων λόγος διὰ τὰς ἐνθεωρουμένας ιδιότητας ἐκάστω τὸν διαμερισμὸν ἐπιδέχεται καὶ κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἐν ἀριθμῷ θεωρεῖται· ἡ δὲ φύσις μία ἐστίν, αὐτὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἡνωμένη καὶ ἀδιάτμητος ἀκριβῶς μονάς, οὐκ αὐξανομένη διὰ προσθήκης, οὐ μειουμένη δι' ὑφαιρέσεως, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἐν οὐσα καὶ ἐν διαμένουσα κἂν ἐν πλήθει φαίνεται, ἄσχιστος καὶ συνεχῆς καὶ ὁλόκληρος καὶ τοῖς μετέχουσιν αὐτῆς τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστον οὐ συνδιαιρουμένη. καὶ ὡσπερ λέγεται λαὸς καὶ δῆμος καὶ

Hypostasis is the source of plural predication. Nature is one and remains always thus, indivisible and undivided, it does not augment or diminish. Nature is in this way also a collective concept, as ‘the people’ or ‘the crowd’ are. So the erroneous habit⁸ should be corrected, and *man* should only be used in the singular.

This task is nevertheless practically impossible, all the more so since the imprecision is not source of any confusion when it refers to human nature. The danger is quite different when we are dealing with divine dogma, according to which God cannot but be predicated in the singular.⁹

But, in order to better understand the extension of the affirmation of *AdAbl*, it is necessary to examine in further detail the concept of *universal nature*.

b. *Universal Nature*

We are dealing with a key element for the comprehension of the history of Trinitarian dogma, despite the perplexity of certain scholars.¹⁰ After the Council of Nicea, the majority of the Eastern bishops found it

στράτευμα καὶ ἐκκλησία μοναχῶς πάντα, ἕκαστον δὲ τούτων ἐν πλήθει νοεῖται· οὕτω κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβέστερον λόγον καὶ ἄνθρωπος εἰς κυρίως ἂν ῥηθείη, κἂν οἱ ἐν τῇ φύσει τῇ αὐτῇ δεικνύμενοι πλῆθος ὦσιν, ὡς πολὺ μᾶλλον καλῶς ἔχειν τὴν ἐσφαλμένην ἐφ’ ἡμῶν ἐπανορθοῦσθαι συνήθειαν εἰς τὸ μηκέτι τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄνομα πρὸς πλῆθος ἐκτείνειν ἢ αὐτῇ δουλεύοντας τὴν ὡδε πλάνην καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον δόγμα μεταβιάζειν. (*Ibidem*, 40, 24–41, 15).

⁸ Gregory often speaks of *συνήθεια*—*custom, habit*—in negative terms. The expression appears almost 180 times in the works of the Nyssian, in every stage of its development and in every type of writing (14 times in the *AdAbl* alone). Perhaps there is evidence here of a character trait and an aspect of his intellectual physiognomy: the quasi contempt for those who do not want to reflect on faith and follow uncritically the opinion of the masses. Gregory is a true intellectual in the purest sense of the term, since he always seeks the truth. For this reason he knows also how to submit his own intelligence to the faith, and can carry contempt as well for the ‘technical’ heretics, such as Eunomius, who oppose their reason to the truth itself.

⁹ Cf. *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 41, 15–42, 12. In *AdGraec*, GNO III/1, 27, 4–12 Gregory compares Sacred Scripture to a mother who teaches her children to speak, babbling with them the words they can understand, but never compromising the proper form. The same poetic image appears in *CE II*, GNO I, 348, 24–27 (see p. 101).

¹⁰ K. Holl defines it “tasteless” (cf. K. HOLL, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern dargestellt*, Darmstadt 1969, p. 219) and G.C. Stead affirms that “it resembles an accomplished conjuring trick more nearly than a valid theological demonstration” (G.C. STEAD, *Why Not Three Gods?: The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Doctrine*, in H. DROBNER—CH. KLOCK (dir), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, Leiden 1990, p. 149).

difficult to accept the ὁμοούσιος, precisely due to the possible consequences of the application of human nature as an analogy for the Trinity. In fact, in order to avoid the possibility of considering the Father and Son as brothers or members of the same species, that is, to avoid a certain coordination of the Trinity at the substantial level, some saw the necessity of introducing a common οὐσία as an independent entity above the persons to guarantee of their unity. Apollinarius of Laodicea resolved the problem by introducing the analogy of the universal humanity for the Trinity, understood in a specific sense:¹¹ the Father, in parallel with Adam,¹² would represent the common οὐσία. This would eliminate the necessity of placing the essence before the persons, at the same time preserving the fundamental principle of paternal Monarchy. The price to pay was a small subordination on the substantial level.¹³

The Cappadocians, however, had before them Eunomius, supporter of the ἀνόμοιος. With him the question was radically posed in terms of the equality and diversity of the Father and the Son. Due to his brand of subordinationism, the derived interpretation of the Trinity in analogy with humanity was no longer sufficient to guarantee the perfect equality of the three Persons.

The Cappadocians thus decided to avoid the derived model, but surprisingly, they conserved the human analogy of the divine nature. Their solution was to be completely original: coordination on the personal level,¹⁴ that is to say, on the level of the hypostasis.

However it would be necessary to find an adequate conceptual instrument to permit this passage. Gregory thus introduced a concept of human nature that included both nature understood as sum of the properties that characterize humanity, and nature as sum of human beings. These are two distinct yet complimentary conceptions, enclosed synthetically in a unique term: universal human nature. This is identical in all men, and at the same time is cause, on the ontological level, of

¹¹ The first letter of Apollinarius to Basil seems the first case of application of the human analogy to the Trinity (cfr. BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Epistola* 362; Y. COURTONNE, *Saint Basile. Lettres*, Paris 1966, pp. 222–224).

¹² Apollinarius probably knew the signification of the Hebrew term *'adam*, in connection with the idea of *man*.

¹³ The monograph of J. Zachhuber is a fundamental instrument for the comprehension of this period, above all of the years 350 to 370. Cfr. J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden 2000 (For this, see in particular Chapter I).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 238–239.

the fact that each of them is a man. This is the step that permits to speak of all of humanity as of one man alone.

Such a doctrine is also perfectly reflected in the divine economy. In fact, for this reason God would have first created the human nature, and only successively Adam. The human descendance is created completely in the same moment, potentially, in the *pleroma*, to develop throughout time in the actual humanity. “Thus the whole history of humankind from creation to the *eschaton* is the development of human nature from potential to actual completion”.¹⁵ Theologically, it is essential to affirm that it is precisely this humanity, equal in every individual, that renders man similar to God:

When the text of Scripture says that God made man, it indicates with the indetermination of the designation the whole of the human race (οὐχ ὁ τις, ἀλλ’ ὁ καθόλου). For, now the creature is not called *Adam*, as the narration says in the following. But, the name [given] to created man is not that of the particular, but that of the whole. Therefore, from the universal denomination of the nature (τῆ καθολικῆ τῆς φύσεως κλήσει) we are led to retain (ὑπονοεῖν) that the whole of humanity was included in the first creation by the divine prescience and power (τῆ θεία προγνώσει τε καὶ δυνάμει). For nothing indefinite (ἀόριστον) should be thought of God in that which has origin in Him. But each being has a certain limit and a certain measure, defined (περιμετρούμενον) by the wisdom of He who created [it] (πεποιηκότος). As, then, the single man is circumscribed by a certain corporeal quantity and the measure of his concrete individuality (τῆς ὑποστάσεως) is for him dimension, which corresponds exactly to the external appearance of the body; thus I think that the whole *pleroma* of humanity was enclosed as in one body by the prescient power of the God of the universe and that this is taught by the text [of the Scripture] in saying both that God created man and that He made him at the image of God.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

¹⁶ Εἰπὼν ὁ λόγος ὅτι ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῷ ἀόριστῳ τῆς σημασίας ἅπαν ἐνδείκνυται τὸ ἀνθρώπινον. Οὐ γὰρ συνωνομάσθη τῷ κτίσματι νῦν ὁ Ἀδάμ, καθὼς ἐν τοῖς ἐφεξῆς ἡ ἱστορία φησὶν· ἀλλ’ ὄνομα τῷ κτισθέντι ἀνθρώπῳ οὐχ ὁ τις, ἀλλ’ ὁ καθόλου ἐστίν. Οὐκοῦν τῆ καθολικῆ τῆς φύσεως κλήσει τοιοῦτόν τι ὑπονοεῖν ἐναγόμεθα, ὅτι τῆ θεία προγνώσει τε καὶ δυνάμει πάντα ἡ ἀνθρωπότης ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ κατασκευῇ περιείληπται. Χρῆ γὰρ Θεῷ μηδὲν ἀόριστον ἐν τοῖς γεγενημένοις παρ’ αὐτοῦ νομίζεῖν· ἀλλ’ ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων εἶναι τι πέρασ καὶ μέτρον, τῆ τοῦ πεποιηκότος σοφία περιμετρούμενον. Ὡσπερ τοίνυν ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος τῷ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ποσῷ περιείργεται, καὶ μέτρον αὐτῷ τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἡ πηλικότης ἐστίν, ἡ συναπαρτιζομένη τῆ ἐπιφανείᾳ τοῦ σώματος· οὕτως οἶμαι καθάπερ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι ὅλον τὸ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος πλήρωμα τῆ προγνωστικῆ δυνάμει παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ἄλων περισχεθῆναι, καὶ τοῦτο διδάσκειν τὸν λόγον τὸν εἰπόντα, ὅτι καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ κατ’ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν. (*DeHom*, PG 44, 185BC).

Commenting this passage of the *DeHom* and placing it in relation with the *AdAbl*, H. de Lubac speaks of “The man according to the Image, object of a direct and atemporal creation, that is each of us and makes us so profoundly one that, no more than one does not talk of three gods, should one never talk of men in the plural”.¹⁷

There would thus be two creations: a first creation of all of humanity, and a second creation of the single man, that is of Adam. This is the base of universality (ὁ καθόλου), because human nature is created by God as if it were only one body. It is important to note that this first creation comes about through the divine prescience and power (τῇ θεῖα προγνώσει τε καὶ δυνάμει). This precludes an interpretation that would be simply Neoplatonic of this first humanity.¹⁸ The call to prescience suggests that God anticipates in some way in his creative act that which will manifest itself little by little throughout time. Such an observation is confirmed by the amplitude of the concept of nature that, as will be seen, reunites in itself both the whole of individual men and that which renders each of them a man.

This conception of nature has well defined characteristics that make it a ‘bridging’ concept, one that can be applied either to man or to God. The first of these characteristic is immutability.

In fact, in *CE I* Gregory responds to Eunomius reasoning *per absurdum*: even if the Father were anterior to the Son, it would not be enough to negate their consubstantiality. David was separated from Abraham by fourteen generations, but both were of the same substance and nature.¹⁹ Not only this, for Abel and Adam were generated in different manners, and yet their nature is the same.²⁰ The differences are not from the natural level, but only from the personal level. Thus, again in *CE I*, the example of three men already appears: Peter, James and

¹⁷ “L’Homme selon l’Image, objet d’une création directe et intemporelle, qui est en chacun de nous et qui nous fait si profondément un que, pas plus qu’on ne parle de trois dieux, on ne devrait jamais parler d’hommes au pluriel” (H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicisme*, Paris 1952, p. 7).

¹⁸ E. Corsini comments: “La création du «plérôme» de l’humanité n’est à expliquer ni comme la création d’une idée platonicienne ni comme la création d’un καθόλου de type stoïcien: c’est une façon d’exprimer le caractère intemporel et instantané de l’acte créateur divin” (E. CORSINI, *Plérôme humain et plérôme cosmique chez Grégoire de Nysse*, in M. HARL (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1971, p. 123).

¹⁹ Cfr. *CE I*, GNO I, 78.

²⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, GNO I, 162. The same is repeated regarding the image and likeness of Adam and Seth, in *RCE*, GNO II, 357.

John are one thing regarding the substance, each one being a man, but they differ by personal properties.²¹ This is a favored example of the Nyssian.²²

The parallel between the Trinity and humanity is clear: “As in Adam and in Abel there is only one humanity, so also in the Father and in the Son there is only one Divinity”.²³

If fact, not even for man can one say properly that they were generated when they did not exist, since Levi was already in Abraham, in as much as man exists in that which is common to nature.²⁴ In human generation, this is not broken with each new man that is born, but is transmitted in its entirety. All the less then, can one speak of inferiority of the Son in regard to the Father in the divine generation.²⁵

The nature, therefore, does not change, it remains the same through the succession of generations without consuming or deteriorating:

And in fact, on the basis of time the limits of nature cannot be fixed for each one, but it remains in itself, conserving itself through the generations that follow upon each other. Time on the other hand moves on in its proper manner, either encircling or running past nature, which remains firm and immutable in its proper limits.²⁶

Precisely for this reason, since Adam did not generate in Abel a nature diverse from himself, but instead generated another self in communicating to him the whole of human nature, Gregory affirms that one must take as guide human nature to elevate oneself to the pure knowledge of the divine dogmas (οἶμα δεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκήρατον τῶν θεῶν δογμάτων κατανόησιν εἰς ὁδηγίαν λαβεῖν).²⁷

Clearly this affirmation appeared hardy to the ears of his adversaries, and earned for Gregory in diverse occasions the accusation of tritheism.

²¹ Cf. *CE I*, GNO I, 88.

²² It appears in *AdGraec*, GNO III/1, 21, 4–5; 22, 18–22; 23, 4–24; 25, 20–23; *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 38, 8–9; 54,3–4; *Ep* 38, *PG* 32, 325B; *Antir*, GNO III/1, 165,12–13. It was already present in Basil (cf. BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Contra Eunomium* II, 4, *PG* 29, 577C and 580AB (SC 305, pp. 18–22), together with *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17; SC 17, pp. 185–186).

²³ ὡςπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τοῦ Ἀβελ ἀνθρωπότης μία, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ θεότης μία. (*AdSimp*, GNO III/1, 65, 22–24).

²⁴ Cf. *CE I*, GNO I, 199.

²⁵ Cf. *RCE*, GNO II, 318–319 and 349.

²⁶ οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῷ χρόνῳ ἔστιν ἀφορίζειν ἐκάστῳ τὰ μέτρα τῆς φύσεως, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐφ’ ἑαυτῆς μένει διὰ τῶν ἐπιγινομένων ἑαυτὴν συντηροῦσα· ὁ δὲ χρόνος φέρεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπον εἴτε περιέχων εἴτε παραρρέων τὴν φύσιν παγίαν καὶ ἀμετάθετον ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις μένουσαν ὅροις. (*CE I*, GNO I, 78, 22–27).

²⁷ Cf. *CEIII*, GNO II, 27.

For if the unity of the Trinity is identical to that which exists among men, one should speak of three gods. Surely the procedure of the Nysian is extremely audacious, above all because it applies to God and men not only the same conception of nature, but also of hypostasis. All of the *AdAbl* is an attentive reflection that manages with great equilibrium, to avoid tritheist confusion, without negating that either man or the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit are persons, as ὑποστάσεις and as πρόσωπα. Perhaps the polemical concentration on the role of nature in the theology of Gregory, and in general of the Cappadocians, led in the past to neglect the importance of this last aspect of Gregory, all the more fundamental because the Greek world did not know the difference between nature and hypostasis.²⁸ In recent years valid studies have attempted to repair this lacuna.²⁹

The error of those who accused and accuse Gregory of tritheism consists essentially in the interpretation of divine nature based on the unity of human nature. Thus forgetting that the original unity of human nature is properly and only an image of the unity of the divine nature. For this reason, against the Anomeans, Gregory cites Gn 1.26 and affirms:

He who said *Let us make man in our image* and with the plural indication manifested the Holy Trinity would not have referred to the image in the singular, if the models were diverse (ἀνομοίως) the one from the other. For it would not be possible to indicate a unique image of beings that do not coincide between them. But if the natures were different, He would certainly have been principle of different images, creating the image that would correspond to each [nature].³⁰

The procedure to understand the whole of the Nysian's theology consists in moving from above to below. Every analogy, every image that Gregory uses, is based in the profound and advanced elaboration of the doctrine of creation. Thus, rather than *analogy*, it would be *katalogy*, to use a privileged expression of von Balthasar.³¹

²⁸ Cfr. B. DE MARGERIE, *Chalcédoine, Hier, Aujourd'hui et Demain*, EeV 92 (1982) 305; IDEM, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, Paris 1975, pp. 137–146 and B. SESBOÛÉ, *Le procès contemporain de Chalcédoine. Bilan et perspectives*, RSR 65 (1977) 45–80.

²⁹ See references in part V of Chapter II (pp. 117–125).

³⁰ Ὁ γὰρ, Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν, εἰπὼν, καὶ διὰ τῆς πληθυντικῆς σημασίας τὴν ἁγίαν Τριάδα δηλώσας, οὐκ ἂν τῆς εἰκότος μοναδικῶς ἐπεμνήσθη, εἴπερ ἀνομοίως ἔχοι πρὸς ἄλληλα τὰ ἀρχέτυπα. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν δυνατόν τῶν ἀλλήλοις μὴ συμβαινόντων εἰς ἓν ἀναδειχθῆναι ὁμοίωμα· ἀλλ' εἰ διάφοροι ἦσαν αἱ φύσεις, διαφόρους πάντως καὶ τὰς εἰκόνας αὐτῶν ἐνεστήσατο, τὴν κατάλληλον ἐκάστη δημιουργήσας. (*DeHom*, PG 44, 140).

³¹ Cfr. the study on von Balthasar's fundamental theology: W. KLAGHOFER, *Gotteswort*

c. *Nature and Essence*

Gregory is certainly conscious of problems behind a ‘weak’ understanding of the social analogy.³² He thus is preoccupied to explain the distinctions between the application of the term *nature* to the Trinity and to man.

In the *AdAbl*, the Nyssian limits the argument to the unity of action, as will be seen in Section III of the present chapter. In the *AdGraec* he develops more fully the delicate theme:

The definition of *man* (ὁ ὅρος ὁ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is not always observed in the same individuals, that is in the same persons (προσώποις). For while those born first reach the end, others are formed to occupy their place; and still, while the same continue to exist, others come into existence after them, in such a way that the definition of the nature, that is of *man*, is observed now in these and then those, and now in a greater number [of individuals], and again in a lesser number.³³

Thus the mutability of the number of men leads to the normal custom (τῆς κοινῆς συνηθείας) of the improper use of the term *substance* also for persons, passing beyond the absolute principle of the substance (παρ’ αὐτὸν τὸν τῆς οὐσίας λόγον).³⁴

However in the Trinity the Persons are always Three, and their number does not change.³⁵ Further, while the Father is the unique cause of the Son and of the Spirit, men receive their existence from diverse persons,³⁶ and not directly from (κατὰ τὸ προσεχές) a unique person.³⁷ Finally there is no separation between the divine Persons, neither spatial nor temporal nor of any other type, while this is not the case among men.³⁸

im Menschenwort. Inhalt und Form von Theologie nach Hans Urs von Balthasar, Innsbruck-Wien 1992.

³² References to the meaning of this expression, in both Gregory and in modern theology, can be found in C. PLANTINGA, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity*, Thom. 50 (1986) 325–352.

³³ ὁ ὅρος ὁ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ αἰεὶ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἀτόμοις ἦγουν προσώποις θεωρεῖται· τῶν μὲν γὰρ προτέρων τελευτώντων ἕτερα ἀντ’ αὐτῶν συνίσταται καὶ πάλιν τῶν αὐτῶν πολλάκις μενόντων ἄλλα τινα ἐπιγίνεται, ὡς ποτὲ μὲν ἐν τούτοις, ποτὲ δὲ ἐν ἐκείνοις, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἐν πλείοσιν, ποτὲ δὲ ἐν ὀλιγοτέροις θεωρεῖσθαι τὸν τῆς φύσεως ἦγουν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅρον. (*AdGraec*, GNO III/1, 24, 1–7).

³⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 24, 11–14.

³⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 24, 14–18.

³⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, 24, 26–25, 8.

³⁷ It is important to underline that all men have origin in Adam through mediation. This passage is also interesting to see how, for Gregory, the Spirit precedes directly from the Father, even if the Son has a role in this procession as will be seen in Chapter III.

³⁸ Cf. *AdGraec*, 25, 8–17.

The difference between the Trinity and man is that the Trinity is uncreated, while man is created and thus subject to the laws of change and spatio-temporal separation (διάστημα).

To understand this difference more in depth, one must analyze the relationship between οὐσία and φύσις in Gregorian theology. In this context Daniélou's observation, that between man and God one can speak of a communion of nature, but not of a communion of essence, is very important (cfr. note 147 at p. 138). Ultimately, the question being raised is why is it in the Calcedonian symbol that φύσις appears but not οὐσία.

Interestingly, Gregory in some passages uses οὐσία and φύσις synonymously, for example in the already cited passage on the identity of nature of Abraham and David.³⁹ Nevertheless, Zachhuber finds a difference between the two concepts in his analysis of *Ep* 38: the first would be exclusively intensive, indicating that which makes each man a man; while the second would be extensive, indicating the totality of men.⁴⁰

Still following Zachhuber, it would appear that in the *AdGraec*, Gregory tends to use the term οὐσία in a more extensive rather than intensive sense, more similar to that of φύσις. Rather than invoking a development in the Nyssian's thought, it is worth noting the particular case of the *AdGraec*, which was written as an attempt to resolve the Antiochian schism, probably for the synod of 379 in Antioch, in which Gregory took part.⁴¹ It is thus reasonable to think of a treatise that uses particular terminology, one which does not mirror perfectly the theology of the Nyssian himself, but written in order to mediate and respect the requirements of all those participating in the synod. The hypothesis is confirmed by the 96 occurrences of the term οὐσία compared to the only 6 for φύσις in this treatise. In the *AdAbl* (4/62) and the *AdEust* (3/30) the relationship is the opposite, while in *Ep* 38 the

³⁹ Cfr. p. 7.

⁴⁰ Cfr. J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature* . . . , p. 74.

⁴¹ Cfr. R. HÜBNER, *Gregor von Nyssa und Markell von Ankyra*, in M. HARL (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1971, pp. 208–209. D. Stramara contests this dating and situates the *AdGraec* in the context of the discussions during the second Ecumenical Council. But the result for the present discussion does not change substantially, since the author maintains that the purpose of the treatise was for “explaining the term πρόσωπον, not the theological metaphysics of ὑπόστασις and οὐσία” (cfr. D.F. STRAMARA, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ad Graecos “How It Is That We Say There Are Three Persons In The Divinity But Do Not Say There Are Three Gods” (To The Greeks: Concerning the Commonality of Concepts)*, GOTR 41 (1996) 377).

two terms appear in a homogenous relationship (19/11).⁴² Further, as the next section will show, it is precisely in the *AdGraec* that the Nyssian refers the term θεός to the divine essence, contrary to his conviction that this term derives from the divine activity—ἐνέργεια—of *seeing*, or at best, that it is referable to nature, according to the thought of most. One cannot appeal to the anteriority of the *AdGraec* to explain the difference with the development of Gregory's thought, since in the almost contemporary *AdEust*⁴³ the idea that θεός derives from 'to see' is already present.

The analysis of the *AdAbl* leads to quite different conclusions: the only four occurrences of οὐσία are always in dependence on the divine φύσις. In 43,20, after having affirmed that certain names express particular aspects of that which can be thought of the divine nature, Gregory negates the existence of names that can say what God is by essence, κατ' οὐσίαν. The same formula appears in 55,14, where he affirms that the simple and immutable divine nature refuses all difference according to essence (τὴν κατ' οὐσίαν ἑτερότητα). This appears in the immediately preceding paragraph (55,12), at the interior of an affirmation that if there were difference of nature in the Trinity, there would necessarily also be diversity of essence for the subjects. The fourth reference is 55,2, where Gregory explains that the Scripture does not use the term God in the plural to avoid eventual thoughts of a multiplicity of natures in the divine οὐσία.

Clearly we are not before synonyms. At the same time, the first example above all shows that nature possesses a dynamic character, but at the same time it has an incomprehensible intensive and static aspect, its κατ' οὐσίαν aspect. The logical passage is quite important, since it is a defense against the accusation of tritheism, and the Nyssian applies the term φύσις to both men and to the divine hypostases. If the conception of nature was purely extensive, his accusers would be right. Instead, φύσις has for Gregory an ontological depth, which is explained by the κατ' οὐσίαν and the passages just cited.

⁴² The same is true for the three books of the *CE* and for the *RCE*. It is worth noting beyond this, that the term φύσις is more numerous and more homogeneously distributed in the Nyssian works than the term οὐσία, in conformity to the largeness of its signification and to its synthetic and dynamic function. B. KRIVOCHÉINE observes that the opposite is true of Basil: he prefers *essence* to *nature* (cf. B. KRIVOCHÉINE, *Simplicité de la nature divine et les distinctions en Dieu selon Grégoire de Nysse*, *StPatr* 16 (1985) 389, n. 1).

⁴³ Cfr. T. ZIEGLER, *Les petits traités de Grégoire de Nysse*, Strasbourg 1987, pp. 164–165.

The extensive aspect of φύσις is also an essential element, because it manages to express the inseparability of the concepts of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. In fact, with the words of Zachhuber: “The Cappadocian author understands *hupostasis* as by nature individualizing the *ousia* (to which it is thus tied) while, conversely, the latter subsists only in particular *hupostaseis*. Thus, this latter notion provides at the same time for a connection between *ousia* and *hupostasis* which is important; both are interdependent. While the *hupostasis* cannot even be thought of without the *ousia*, the latter could not exist except through the former”.⁴⁴ C. von Schönborn states clearly as well: “the substance does not exist as such, without concrete subsistence (ἀνυπόστατα), it subsists (ὑφίστησι) only in individuals”.⁴⁵ So the distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις would be found only on the intellectual level, that is θεωρία μόνη, to use the formula that Canon VII of Constantinople II applied, in 553, to the two natures of Christ.

In this manner, the synthetic duplicity of the concept of nature in the thought of the Nyssian permits to better understand the important signification of the passage of *DeHom* 16 just cited (see p. 6): Man is the image of God in as much as nature. This means that the image will be perfect only when all the persons that God has created in his prevision will be united into one. We are dealing with the authentic *Catholic* principle, since difference and variety become essential and are at the service of unity. At the same time, the extensive whole is image because each individual man is image, in as much as the intensive aspect of nature renders him man. The equilibrium between whole and part is perfect. Both are necessary, both are the Image.

On the theological level, it is precisely the newness presented by the extensive aspect of nature that resumes in itself this connection. In this sense the Nyssian theology offers an interesting path for contemporary philosophy as well, which, after the personalist and relational movement, has unintentionally weakened and almost corrupted the ontological foundation of the person.⁴⁶ For Gregory, instead, one cannot conceive

⁴⁴ J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature...*, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁵ “la substance (*ousia*) n'existe pas comme telle, sans subsistance concrète (ἀνυπόστατα), elle subsiste (ὑφίστησι) seulement dans les individus” (C. Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ*, Paris 1986, pp. 42–43).

⁴⁶ See the criticisms of F. Ocariz to the modern concept of person that, even in Mounier's work, is deprived of a true unity, which can only be guaranteed by its act of being (cf. F. Ocariz, *Naturaleza, gracia, gloria*, Pamplona 2000, pp. 50–51). It seems then, that the understanding of the concept of universal nature, situated in the context

of the hypostasis except in its nature, which guarantees the ontological substrate.

To understand the intensity of Gregory's φύσις, it is thus important to clarify his concept of οὐσία. Basil, in the above cited *Contra Eunomium* II, 4 (SC 305, pp. 18–22), opposes himself to Eunomius's pretext that to different names correspond different essences, citing the example of men who, while having different names, share the same essence. This passage of Basil becomes a central point in the dispute between Gregory and Eunomius. Both cite the Basilian text.

D.L. Balás is to be recognized for the observation of the change that the Nyssian operates regarding the text of his brother.⁴⁷ In fact, in *CEIII*, after having repeated the traditional argument that, in those that carry different names such as Peter and Paul, one distinguishes the unity of essence (οὐσία δὲ πάντων μία) from the distinctive properties of each (τοῖς δὲ ἰδιώμασι μόνοις τοῖς περὶ ἕκαστον θεωρουμένοις), Gregory writes:

Thus, when we hear the name *Peter*, with the name we think of the substance (οὐσίαν)—by substance I do *not* intend now the material substrate (τὸ ὑλικὸν ὑποκείμενον)—, but we are impressed by the consideration of the particular properties that are observed in him.⁴⁸

The affirmation that by substance is not intended material substrate is surprising, exactly the opposite of the Basilian text.⁴⁹ D.L. Balás has verified accurately the possibility that it was an error in either the Nyssian or Basilian text. For the Nyssian text, he had the critical edition at hand, which permitted to immediately eliminate the possibility. For the Basilian text, D.L. Balás was able to confirm the reading without οὐ both in the numerous existing Greek manuscripts and in the Syriac translation.⁵⁰ This reading was later confirmed by the critical edition of B. Sesboué.⁵¹ In addition, Gregory explains the consubstantiality of the

of the theology of the image, can spare one from the psychological reductionism justly combated by the work group of S. Coakley.

⁴⁷ Cfr. D. BALÁS, *The Unity of human nature in Basil's and Gregory of Nyssa's polemics against Eunomius*, StPatr 14 (1976) 275–281.

⁴⁸ ὅταν οὖν ἀκούσωμεν Πέτρον, οὐ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ νοοῦμεν ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος (οὐσίαν δὲ λέγω νῦν οὐ τὸ ὑλικὸν ὑποκείμενον), ἀλλὰ τῶν ἰδιωμάτων τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν θεωρουμένων τὴν ἔννοιαν ἐντυπούμεθα. (*CEIII*, GNO II, 168, 1–4).

⁴⁹ BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Contra Eunomium* II, 4; SC 305, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Cfr. D.L. BALÁS, *The Unity of human...*, pp. 277–279.

⁵¹ Cfr. B. SESBOÜÉ, *Basile de Césarée. Contre Eunome*, SC 305, Paris 1983, p. 20.

Father and Son with the social analogy⁵² to defend himself from the accusation of Eunomius to Basil, claiming that he passed improperly from the material to intelligible realities. This would only make sense if Basil conceived of the substance as a material substrate. Thus, in distinguishing the divine and the human, Gregory attributes to both consubstantiality, but corruptibility only to the second, due to the fact of being material, not to the fact of being consubstantial.⁵³ Once again the strength of the Nyssian is the clear distinction between created and uncreated, a true foundation for his whole doctrinal construction.

D.L. Balás attributes to Gregory himself the correction of the Basil's text.⁵⁴ Basil conceived of the οὐσία of creatures as a common matter from which they were composed, in continuity with Athanasius and his Stoic conception. The Nyssian position is far more original: original enough that scholars had discussed for quite some time as to the Platonic or Aristotelian character of the Gregorian idea of nature.⁵⁵ This itself was *sic et simpliciter* identified with essence. The two positions were considered to be radically opposed.⁵⁶

It was again D.L. Balás himself who for the first time exited this radical dichotomy, recognizing the originality of Gregory: "Gregory's teaching on the unity of nature in the many individuals is neither simply «Aristotelian Logic» nor «Platonic Ontology»".⁵⁷ Gregory thought of a true and real unity of nature, but did not conceive of the unique essence as a separate existent from individuals. His conception is thus an authentic Christian transformation of the Neoplatonic logic and ontology.

⁵² Cfr. *CEIII*, 5, 48, GNO II, 177, 27–178, 1.

⁵³ Cfr. *CEIII*, 5, 62, GNO II, 183, 5–8.

⁵⁴ For the relationship of dependence and independence of Gregory to Basil, see J. DANÉLOU, *L'Être et le Temps chez Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1970, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Among the supporters of a reading of Platonic realism for the Nyssian are found: O. BARDENHEWER, *Geschichte der Altkirchlichen Literatur III*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1913; TH. DE RÉGNON, *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité*, III, Paris 1892; S. GONZÁLEZ, *El realismo platónico de S. Gregorio de Nisa*, Gr. 20 (1939) 189–206; R. ARNOU, *Unité numérique et unité de nature chez les Pères après le Concile de Nicée*, Greg. 15 (1934) 242–254; L. MALEVEZ, *L'Église dans le Christ. Étude de théologie historique et théorique*, RSR 25 (1935) 257–291; 418–439. Other scholars have raised doubts about this, for example K. HOLL, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern dargestellt*, Darmstadt 1969. Others yet have negated this explicitly, maintaining instead that Gregory depends here upon Aristotelianism: E. VON IVÁNKA, *Von Platonismus zur Theorie der Mystik*, Schol. 11 (1936) 163–195.

⁵⁶ Cfr. M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *Die Trinitätslehre des Gregor von Nyssa*, Freiburg 1938, p. 90.

⁵⁷ D.L. BALÁS, *The Unity of human...*, p. 280.

R. Hübner moves in the same direction,⁵⁸ even if his position seems less objective than that of D.L. Balás, both for his open anti-Platonism and for his less complete analysis.⁵⁹ Nevertheless his conclusion is identical: the necessity to study at once the intensive and extensive aspects of nature in Gregory.⁶⁰

More recently J. Zachhuber has affronted this type of analysis vigorously. Referring to the use of human nature as the total whole of the characteristic human properties and as the totality of human beings, he concludes thus: "While these two views could be used loosely by Gregory at times, it appeared that they were often applied in a systematic way. In this latter case, the two notions were distinct but complementary to each other. In the former, the properties would be indicative of an entity that is the same in all human individuals and is the cause of their being as well of their being humans. The latter notion would indicate that this immanent item occurs in so many individuals and nowhere else; the existence of that human race as such would thus be due to one property of that former entity and would, indeed, be one aspect of it."⁶¹ Gregory's doctrine of creation remains fundamental.

As far as the philosophical origin of the concept of universal nature, B. Pottier has given a good analysis of the position of R. Hübner. The key would be the interplay of first substance (πρώτη οὐσία) and second substance (δευτέρα οὐσία): the first would represent the concrete individual and the second the species. For Gregory the first would correspond to ὑπόστασις and the second to οὐσία, which would never exist in and by itself according to the reconstruction of R. Hübner. B. Pottier contests this last affirmation, maintaining that for Gregory the concept of οὐσία is theological and not philosophical: it would resume in itself the characteristics of both the πρώτη οὐσία and the δευτέρα οὐσία. The distinction of the two would be found only at the level of creation, where the material substrate introduces separation. For God this would not be the case, for in him is found subsistence, as in the πρώτη οὐσία, but at the same time immateriality, as in the δευτέρα

⁵⁸ R. HÜBNER, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa*, Leiden, 1974.

⁵⁹ He limits himself to *Eph* 38.

⁶⁰ G.L. Prestige affirms that nature "bears rather on function, while *ousia* is metaphysical and bears on reality". In this way he concentrates his attention principally on the connection nature-activity and less upon the connection of *ousia*-nature. For this reason his analysis cannot be applied to this aspect of Nyssian doctrine. (Cfr. G.L. PRESTIGE, *God in Patristic Thought*, London 1952, pp. 234–235).

⁶¹ J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature . . .*, pp. 239–240.

οὐσία.⁶² One can see that the difference of the Nyssian conception of substance, both for man and for God, from that of Basil is precisely because of the absence of a material substrate. For this reason, the interesting and profound analysis of Pottier, despite his intentions, risks to not give a great enough place to φύσις, considered as a simple synonym of οὐσία.⁶³ From a philosophical perspective, the problem is situated in the difficult interpretation of the δευτέρα οὐσία of Aristotle: it is not clear if it assumes an extensive value in the Stagarite's thought.

Thus the most exhaustive and balanced analysis appears to be that of Zachhuber: it would seem that the Nyssian interpretation of 'man' as the whole of all men would have its origin in the interpretation of Aristotle elaborated by the Peripatetic school, which gave to the δευτέρα οὐσία, a clear extensive sense. The *Isagoge* of Porphyrius is thus particularly relevant.⁶⁴ Stoic influences appear to have played a role only through the effects that they had on the principle Neoplatonic-Aristotelian movement.⁶⁵

One could thus propose the hypothesis by which the concept of universal nature is a highly original Nyssian synthesis of a Platonic element—the intensive aspect, immutable and always identical to itself, that is, of the φύσις considered as κατ' οὐσίαν—and of a second element of Aristotelian origin—the extensive aspect, that is the totality of all men. Whatever the final solution, one should never forget that Gregory uses philosophy with a great liberty, and is always guided in the use of terms and in terminological creativity by theological preoccupations.⁶⁶

d. *Nature and Time*

After having underlined the importance of the extensive aspect of human nature in the theology of Gregory, it is necessary to develop a second aspect intimately connected with the preceding one. It was noted that the fundamental difference between φύσις in the Trinity and in man is the spacio-temporal dimension. Human nature is a

⁶² Cfr. B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, Turnhout 1994, pp. 95–97.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

⁶⁴ J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature...*, p. 86.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁶⁶ H. von Balthasar refers to the Nyssian synthesis with the phrase "nouveauauté irréductible" (cfr. H. VON BALTHASAR, *Présence et pensée*, Paris 1947, p. xv).

unique nature that develops and extends in time and history.⁶⁷ This is not limited to the multiplication of individuals, but determines the very mode of being of the nature of single individuals. The *historical* aspect of human nature has its foundation in Trinitarian reflection, but it is fully manifested in Nyssian Christology.⁶⁸ So in order to fully understand the concept of nature in Gregory's theology, it is necessary to analyze his doctrine of the Incarnation, that is to pass from a more theological moment to another more economical one.

The economy, which develops in temporal succession, is signed by the laws of ἀκολουθία and διάστημα. It has its centre in the Incarnation of the Eternal, who became man. There are four times in human life, that in Christ become the times of every man: conception, birth, death and resurrection.⁶⁹ From an all too human perspective, one sees but birth and death. But the two extremes are more important, since they place man in more intimate contact with God. As B. Pottier explains: "Christ is conceived, born, dies and rises: such are the four essential moments of the Incarnation of the Son, come from God and returning to God in a sort of *exitus-reditus* which manifests, at the interior of the economy, the complete movement of temporal creation freely desired by the Eternal God, and freely returning to him".⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Cfr. D.L. BALÁS, *Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa*, in D.F. WINSLOW (Ed.), *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans*, Cambridge MA 1979, 115–133.

⁶⁸ On the value and influence of Gregory's Christology, not always fully recognized, see G. MASPERO, *La cristología de Gregorio de Nisa desde la perspectiva del II Concilio de Constantinopla*, *ScrTh* 36 (2004) 1–24; L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Notas sobre el lenguaje cristológico de Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 35 (2003) 89–112 and IDEM, *Cristología e Linguaggio in Gregorio di Nissa*, in C. MORESCHINI—G. MENESTRINA (Eds.), *Lingua e teologia nel cristianesimo greco*, Trento 11–12 dicembre 1997, Brescia 1999, pp. 227–249.

⁶⁹ For birth and conception, see M. CANÉVET, *L'humanité de l'embryon selon Grégoire de Nyse*, *NRT* 114 (1992) 678–695 and Ph. Caspar, *Comment les Pères de l'Église envisagent le statut de l'embryon humain*, «Connaissance des Pères de l'Église» 52 (1993) 16–18. For the death and resurrection: L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Consideraciones en torno a la muerte en las homilias al Eclesiástico de Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 23 (1991) 921–937; IDEM, *La teología de la muerte en la 'Oratio catechetica magna' de San Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 1 (1969) 453–473; IDEM, *La muerte y su más allá en el 'Dialogus de anima et resurrectione' de San Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 3 (1971) 71–107; IDEM, *Resucitó al tercer día (Análisis de la doctrina de San Gregorio de Nisa sobre la Resurrección de Jesucristo)*, *ScrTh* 5 (1973) 7–89; R. WINLING, *La résurrection du Christ comme principe explicatif et comme élément structurant dans le Discours catéchétique de Grégoire de Nyse*, *StPatr* 22 (1990) 74–80.

⁷⁰ "Le Christ est conçu, naît, meurt et ressuscite: tels sont donc les quatre moments essentiels de l'incarnation du Fils, venu de Dieu et retournant à Dieu dans une sorte d'*exitus-reditus* qui expose, au centre de l'économie, le mouvement complet du créé temporel librement voulu par le Dieu éternel, et retournant librement à lui" (B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nyse*, Turnhout 1994, p. 360).

Before his Incarnation the man Jesus did not exist. He is the Creator become creature.⁷¹ His body is not an eternal body at the interior of the Trinity, as Apollinarius would have it. Economy and immanence are well distinguished; neither Incarnation nor creation change the Trinity.

At the other extreme, death and resurrection seal the accomplishment of the Incarnation: “The death and resurrection of Christ bring something new to union of man and God in him, in respect to the event of the Incarnation”⁷²

Perhaps this can be disturbing, causing one to suspect that for Gregory the work of divine power was insufficient in the Incarnation. It is necessary to understand that the problem is not from the part of the eternal God, fully present from the first moment of the Incarnation. The problem arises from the part of man, since the experience of death is part of human life, each human life: it completes humanity. “The course of human life brings something to man, body and soul, and the experience of death is the last and not least of the structuring moments of humanity”⁷³

In fact Gregory comments *And the Word became flesh* of Jn 1.14, responding to the accusation of Eunomius that claimed that he divided the Word and Christ into two distinct beings, the eternal and the temporal, the immanent and economic. One sees again that the Johannine prologue is at the roots of the whole of the Nyssian’s thought: Gregory responds that the same accusation should be thrown at the Evangelist as well. Instead he knew well that:

The Word is identical to the Word, he who appeared in the flesh to he who is *with God* (πρὸς τὸν θεόν). But the flesh was not identical to the Divinity before being transformed to be also with the Divinity (πρὸς τὴν θεότητα). In such a way that certain properties apply to the Word as God, and others to the form of the servant.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Cfr. *AdSimpl*, GNO III/1, 63, 1–3.

⁷² “la mort et la Résurrection du Christ apportent quelque chose de nouveau à l’union de l’homme et de Dieu en lui, par rapport à l’événement de l’Incarnation” (M. Canévet, *La mort du Christ et le mystère de sa personne humano-divine dans la théologie du IV^eme siècle*, «Les Quatre Fleuves» 15–16 (1982) 86).

⁷³ “Le cours de la vie terrestre apporte quelque chose à l’homme, corps et âme, et l’expérience de la mort est le dernier, et non le moindre, des moments structurants de l’humanité.” (B. POTIER, *Dieu et le Christ* . . . , p. 363).

⁷⁴ ὁ μὲν λόγος ὁ αὐτός ἐστι τῷ λόγῳ ὁ ἐν σαρκὶ φανείς τῷ πρὸς τὸν θεόν ὄντι. ἡ δὲ σὰρξ οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ τῇ θεότητι πρὶν μεταποιηθῆναι καὶ ταύτην πρὸς τὴν θεότητα, ὡς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄλλα μὲν ἐφαρμόζειν τῷ θεῷ λόγῳ, ἕτερα δὲ τῇ τοῦ δούλου μορφῇ. (CEIII, GNO II, 130, 1–5).

The divine nature is always the same,⁷⁵ while human nature changes and comes to be: “The Word was before all time, while the flesh came to be in the last times”.⁷⁶ This last is of a passible nature and must know the trial of death.⁷⁷

So the whole time of human life is necessary in order for man to be open to God, to the infinite where *all* ceases to be a valid category. Life opens to the *epektasis*. One must give *all* in order to receive *all*. One gives a limited *all* to enter into the intimacy of the infinite *all*. *Whole* and *all* are in fact key words. The whole of human life must be lived and saved by Christ:

And since human life has two limits, that from which we have a beginning and that in which we have an end, he who heals our entire life (ζωῆς) necessarily embraces us through the two extremes, grasping both our beginning and our end, to lift, from both, he who is fallen.⁷⁸

Incarnation and resurrection cannot be separated. Man is conceived in his integrity and every moment of his existence is important.

Gregory does not limit himself to the terminology of life, but explains this necessity in terms of nature. In the *Antir*, he collocates interestingly *into thy hands I commit my Spirit*,⁷⁹ and *today you will be with me in Paradise*.⁸⁰ Christ opens the doors of Paradise which is found in the *large palm of the hand of the Father*⁸¹ to the Good Thief in his death, when his soul separated from his body. In this manner Christ destroyed the corruption of death, dividing that which was composed, that is his own body and own soul, he who in his divinity was not composed, and for this reason, immune from dissolution. The nature of that which is not composed (the Divinity) dwells in that which is composed (the Humanity), and the soul which was separated from the body in death, after the Resurrection knows no separation at all. The sign and proof of this is the incorruptibility of the body and existence of the soul in

⁷⁵ ἡ μὲν θεία φύσις αἰεὶ μία καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα (*Ibidem*, 130, 11–12).

⁷⁶ ὁ λόγος πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἦν, ἡ σὰρξ δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἐγένετο χρόνων (*Ibidem*, 130, 19–20).

⁷⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 130, 22–26.

⁷⁸ καὶ ἐπειδὴ δύο πέρατα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐστὶ ζωῆς, ὅθεν ἀρχόμεθα καὶ εἰς ὃ καταλήγομεν, ἀναγκαίως ὁ πᾶσαν ἡμῶν τὴν ζωὴν θεραπεύων διὰ τῶν δύο ἄκρων ἡμᾶς περιπτύσσεται, καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ τέλους περιδρασσόμενος, ἵνα ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων ὑψώσῃ τὸν κείμενον. (*Ep* 3, GNO VIII/2, 25, 16–22).

⁷⁹ Lk 23.46.

⁸⁰ Lk 23.43.

⁸¹ ἐν τῇ πολυχώρῳ τοῦ πατρὸς παλάμη (*Antir*, GNO III/1, 153, 22–23).

Paradise. This new form of existence cannot be divided, since that which was divided is united to that which cannot be divided.⁸² Therefore Gregory continues:

However the same Only-Begotten God causes the man who is united (ἀνακραθέντα) to him to rise, at once separating the soul from the body and reuniting anew the two: in this way is realized the common salvation of nature (ἡ κοινὴ γίνεται σωτηρία τῆς φύσεως). For this he is called Author of life (ἀρχηγὸς ζωῆς). In fact, the Only-Begotten God, dying for us and rising, has reconciled to himself the cosmos, ransoming with flesh and blood, as of prisoners of war, all of us, who through ties of blood (διὰ τοῦ συγγενοῦς ἡμῶν αἵματος) have part in him.⁸³

The common salvation of nature must thus pass through the death and resurrection of the Only-Begotten of God.

L. Malevez perhaps does not underscore sufficiently the importance of this idea for the Nyssian theology of the Incarnation.⁸⁴ Nevertheless it is a key element, since it reveals that nature is not understood only statically. Gregory affirms that the Incarnation encompasses all the moments of man's life:

In fact [God] united himself to humanity through these things—that is by passing through all the states of nature (τῶν τῆς φύσεως ιδιωμάτων): generation, nutrition and growth, finally having even the experience of death.⁸⁵

From conception until death, all belongs to nature, which is thus extended in some manner through time.

In Chapter 32 of *OrCat* Gregory returns to the same argument. The Incarnation includes a participation in all the stages of human nature, from one extreme to the other of life. Christ wants to reach even to death in order to revivify us through his resurrection. In him the resurrection becomes part of that which is human:

⁸² Cfr. *Antir*, GNO III/1, 153, 27–154, 7.

⁸³ ἀλλ' ὁ μονογενὴς θεὸς αὐτὸς ἀνίστησι τὸν ἀνακραθέντα ἄνθρωπον αὐτῷ καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐνώσας πάλιν ἀμφοτέρα καὶ οὕτως ἡ κοινὴ γίνεται σωτηρία τῆς φύσεως· ὅθεν καὶ ἀρχηγὸς ζωῆς ὀνομάζεται· ἐν γὰρ τῷ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι τὸν κόσμον ἑαυτῷ κατήλλαξεν ὁ μονογενὴς θεός, οἷόν τινας δορυαλώτους, ἡμᾶς διὰ τοῦ συγγενοῦς ἡμῶν αἵματος πάντα τοὺς κεκοινωνηκότας αὐτῷ τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τοῦ αἵματος ἐξωνησάμενος (*Ibidem*, GNO III/1, 154, 11–18).

⁸⁴ Cfr. L. MALEVEZ, *L'Eglise dans le Christ. Etude de théologie historique et théorique*, RSR 25 (1935) 279–280.

⁸⁵ δι' ὧν γὰρ κατεμίχθη τῇ ἀνθρωπότητι (διὰ πάντων τῶν τῆς φύσεως ιδιωμάτων) γενόμενος γενέσεώς τε καὶ ἀνατροφῆς καὶ αὐξήσεως καὶ μέχρι τῆς τοῦ θανάτου πείρας διεξελθὼν (*OrCat*, GNO III/4, 67, 15–18).

Since, therefore, it was necessary that our whole nature be lifted up from death, as if reaching out a hand towards he who lay, bending himself over our cadaver, he came so close to death as to touch the mortal condition and to give in his own body a principle of resurrection to human nature, lifting up together potentially (τῆ δυνάμει) the whole of man (ὅλον τὸν ἄνθρωπον). In fact the man that had received God (ὁ θεοδόχος ἄνθρωπος) did not have a different origin than our species (φυράματος), that is he who was raised with the divinity in the resurrection; and as in our body the activity of one organ alone leads to the total perception of the whole united to the part, as if the nature as a whole was a unique living being, the resurrection of the part propagates to the whole, by the conjunction and unity of nature, transmitting itself from the part to the whole.⁸⁶

The delicate piety of Gregory presents Christ to us bending down as the good Samaritan over man. He does not need to touch his friend Lazarus to raise him from the dead, but he wishes to touch death to raise us.

A key point is the mode of propagation of this salvation, that is transmitted from the part to the whole as the sensorial perception of an organ extends itself to the whole organism. It might appear at first as an automatism, in which the Divinity took possession through his power of the human. From a philological perspective, this problem is manifested in the difficulty of the translation of τῆ δυνάμει in the preceding passage. Some authors translate “in the power”. ‘Potentially’ was preferred here, which is the first and most common signification cited for this expression in the *Lexicon* of F. Mann.⁸⁷ As we will see, this translation is in better harmony with the Nyssian teachings, and is analogous to the divine prescience in the first creation of Chapter 16 of the *DeHom*.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ ἐπεὶ οὖν ὅλης ἔδει γενέσθαι τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν τὴν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου πάλιν ἐπάνοδον, οἰονεὶ χεῖρα τῷ κειμένῳ ὀρέγων διὰ τοῦτο πρὸς τὸ ἡμέτερον ἐπικύψας πτώμα τοσοῦτον τῷ θανάτῳ προσήγγισεν, ὅσον τῆς νεκρότητος ἄψασθαι καὶ ἀρχὴν δοῦναι τῆ φύσει τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῷ ἰδίῳ σώματι, ὅλον τῆ δυνάμει συναναστήσας τὸν ἄνθρωπον. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ ἡμετέρου φυράματος ὁ θεοδόχος ἄνθρωπος ἦν, ὁ διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως συνεπαρθεὶς τῆ θεότητι, ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς σώματος ἡ τοῦ ἐνὸς τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἐνέργεια πρὸς πᾶσαν τὴν συναίσθησιν ἄγει τὸ ἠνωμένον τῷ μέρει, οὕτω καθάπερ ἐνὸς τινος ὄντος ζώου πάσης τῆς φύσεως ἡ τοῦ μέρους ἀνάστασις ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶν διεξέρχεται κατὰ τὸ συνεχές τε καὶ ἠνωμένον τῆς φύσεως ἐκ τοῦ μέρους ἐπὶ τὸ ὅλον συνεκτιδομένη. (*Ibidem*, 78, 3–17).

⁸⁷ The proposed translation for this adverbial case is *der Potenz nach, potentiell*, for the cited passage the significance of *vermöge der Kraft* is also accepted (cfr. F. MANN, *Lexicon Gregorianum: Wörterbuch zu den Schriften Gregors von Nyssa*, II, Leiden 2000, p. 537).

⁸⁸ See p. 6.

Commenting *exalted at the right hand of God* of Acts 2.33, used by Eunomius to confirm his own heresy, Gregory affirms:

Thus, who was exalted? He who is miserable or he who is above all? And what is the miserable if not that which is human? And what else if not God is above all? But God has no need to be exalted, being above all. Therefore the Apostle said that which is human was exalted, and in being exalted becoming *Lord and Christ*.⁸⁹ It is for this that he becomes it after the passion.⁹⁰

The exaltation of the human, of human nature, happens only after the passion. Only at this point does it become immortal in the immortal, light in light, incorruptible in the incorruptible, invisible in the invisible, Christ in Christ and Lord in Lord.⁹¹ Thus it can be said that:

It is clear that the blows are of the servant in whom the Lord is, while the honours are on the other hand of the Lord, that the servant is enveloped in (περὶ ὃν ὁ δούλος). In such a manner, by conjunction and connaturality (διὰ τὴν συνάφειάν τε καὶ συμφυΐαν) the effects of the one and the other become common, since the Lord takes upon himself the bruises of the servant, and the servant is glorified with the honour of the Lord. In fact for this reason, one says that the cross is of the Lord of glory⁹² and that every tongue proclaims that *Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father (Phil 2.11)*.⁹³

It would seem that the conjunction (συνάφεια) goes from above to below, that it proceeds from the divinity and refers to the hypostatic union, while connaturality (συμφυΐα) goes from below to above, proceeding from humanity and representing the dynamic and universal dimension of the human nature. It is properly a “developing together”. The *communicatio idiomatum* is perfectly found in the crossing of these

⁸⁹ Acts 2.36.

⁹⁰ τίς οὖν ὑψώθη; ὁ ταπεινὸς ἢ ὁ ὑψιστός; τί δὲ τὸ ταπεινὸν εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον; τί δὲ ἄλλο παρὰ τὸ θεῖον ἐστὶν ὁ ὑψιστός; ἀλλὰ μὴν ὁ θεὸς ὑψώθηναὶ οὐ δέεται ὑψιστός ὢν. ἄρα τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ὁ ἀπόστολος ὑψώσθαι λέγει, ὑψώθη δὲ διὰ τοῦ κύριος καὶ Χριστός γενέσθαι. διὰ τοῦτο δὲ μετὰ τὸ πάθος ἐγένετο. (CEIII, GNO II, 123, 2–7).

⁹¹ Cfr. CEIII, GNO II, 123, 22–24.

⁹² Cfr. 1 Cor 2.8.

⁹³ αἱ μὲν πληγαὶ τοῦ δούλου ἐν ᾧ ὁ δεσπότης αἱ δὲ τιμαὶ τοῦ δεσπότου περὶ ὃν ὁ δούλος· ὡς διὰ τὴν συνάφειάν τε καὶ συμφυΐαν κοινὰ γίνεσθαι τὰ ἐκατέρας ἀμφοτέρας, τοῦ τε δεσπότου τοὺς δουλικούς μάλωπας εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀναλαμβάνοντος καὶ τοῦ δούλου τῆ δεσποτικῆ δοξαζομένου τιμῆ· διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ τοῦ κυρίου τῆς δόξης ὁ σταυρὸς λέγεται καὶ πάντα γλώσσα ἐξομολογεῖται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς. (CEIII, GNO II, 131, 8–16).

two movements: the ascending and the descending, that of the divine power and that of the human nature.⁹⁴

However it is the following passage of *Antir* which clarifies how the terrible cross of Christ can be the cross of glory, and how at the same time, the salvation of nature is not an automatic process. In the *Antir* in fact, Gregory affirms against Apollinaris that in the incarnation the properties of nature remain unaltered. The body of Christ heals the body of man and the soul of Christ heals the soul of man:

If you divide in two a stick—since nothing hinders explaining with a material example the mystery of the economy of the Incarnation—and the ends of the [two] pieces of the stick are joined on one side, necessarily the whole cut part of the stick, through the junction and binding into one of the extremities, will be reunited to the whole, as it is reunited to the other extremity. In this way, in him [Christ] the union of soul and body accomplished in the resurrection guides by conjunction (κατὰ τὸ συνεχές) the whole human nature, divided by death into soul and body, to the natural union (πρὸς συμφυσίαν) by the hope of the resurrection, uniting the combination of that which was divided. And this is what Paul says: *Christ is risen from the dead, first fruit of those who are dead,*⁹⁵ and *as all of us died in Adam, so all will receive life in Christ.*⁹⁶ In fact, following the example of the stick, our nature was split by sin from the limit enacted by Adam, since by death the soul was separated from the body, but the humanity of Christ (τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀνθρώπου) was united into one nature alone (συμφυομένης). Therefore we die together with him who died for us, and with this I do not refer to the necessary and common death belonging to our nature. For this happens even if we wish it not. But, since one must die with him who died by his own will, it is good for us (αὐτοῖς) to think of that death that comes through free choice (ἐκ προαιρέσεως). In fact it is impossible to imitate that which is voluntary by that which is necessarily imposed. Since then, the death that is imposed on each of us by our nature comes to pass, and that necessarily (πάντως), whether we wish or do not, one cannot hold as voluntary that which is necessary; therefore in another mode we die together with him who died

⁹⁴ On the Nyssian conception of the *communicatio idiomatum*, see J.R. BOUCHET, *Le vocabulaire de l'union et du rapport des natures chez S. Grégoire de Nyssse*, RThom 68 (1968) 533–582; L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Notas sobre el lenguaje cristológico de Gregorio de Nisa*, ScrTh 35 (2003) 89–112; IDEM, *Cristologia e Linguaggio in Gregorio di Nissa*, in C. MORESCHINI—G. MENESTRINA (Eds.), *Lingua e teologia nel cristianesimo greco*, Trento 11–12 dicembre 1997, Brescia 1999, pp. 227–249; B.E. DALEY, *Divine Transcendence And Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology*, MoTh 18 (2002) 497–506 and G. MASPERO, *La cristologia de Gregorio de Nisa desde la perspectiva del II Concilio de Costantinopla*, ScrTh 36 (2004) 1–24.

⁹⁵ 1 Cor 15.20.

⁹⁶ 1 Cor 15.22.

voluntarily, that is being buried in the mystical waters through baptism. It is said in fact, that *through baptism we were buried together with him in death*,⁹⁷ so that from the imitation of death can also follow the imitation of the resurrection.⁹⁸

Man was divided by the sin in Adam, Christ has come to reconstitute that which was divided. Reconstituting the whole trajectory of human life, of human nature, in his own personal history, he reunited that which was separated. When this human movement has reached its apex, when *all is accomplished*—the *πάντα τετέλεσται* of Jn 19.28—salvation can extend to all of human nature. Thus the divine action can extend to every man. But this potential possibility, acquired for us once for all by Christ, is offered to us in the actuality of our own life only through baptism. In fact, in baptism we can participate in the resurrection, because the movement of Christ is completed and human nature has already been reunited through the death and resurrection of the one who voluntarily died for us.

‘Voluntary’ is an essential category together with the historicity of human nature: instead of a naturalistic automatism, Gregory proposes personal imitation, *μίμησις*. The possibility of salvation is given to the

⁹⁷ Rm 6.4.

⁹⁸ καὶ ὡσπερ (κολύει γὰρ οὐδὲν σωματικῶς τὸ μυστήριον τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν οἰκονομίας ἐνδείξασθαι) [καθάρπερ] εἰ διχῆ κάλαμος διασχισθεῖ καὶ τις κατὰ τὸ ἐν πέρας τὰ ἄκρα τῶν τοῦ καλάμου τμημάτων ἐνώσειεν, ὅλον ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸ τμημα τοῦ καλάμου πρὸς τὸ ὅλον συναρμοσθήσεται διὰ τῆς ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ πέρατι συμβολῆς τε καὶ σφίγξεως πρὸς τὸ ἕτερον πέρας συναρμοζόμενον, οὕτως ἢ ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς τὸ σῶμα γενομένη διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐνωσις πάσαν κατὰ τὸ συνεχὲς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν διὰ τοῦ θανάτου ψυχῆ τε καὶ σώματι μεμερισμένην πρὸς συμφυΐαν ἄγει τῆ ἐλπίδι τῆς ἀναστάσεως, τὴν συνδρομὴν τῶν διεστηκότων ἀρμόσασα· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ παρὰ τοῦ Παύλου λεγόμενον ὅτι Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων, καὶ Ὡσπερ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκομεν, οὕτως ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθησόμεθα. κατὰ γὰρ τὸ τοῦ καλάμου ὑπόδειγμα ἀπὸ μὲν τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Ἀδὰμ πέρατος ἡ φύσις ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐσχίσθη, τῷ θανάτῳ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος διαιρεθείσης, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Χριστὸν μέρους ἅλιν ἡ φύσις ἑαυτὴν ἀναλαμβάνει, πάντη τῆς διαιρέσεως πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τοῦ κατὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀνθρώπου συμφυομένης, διὰ τοῦτο τοῖνυν συναποθνήσκομεν τῷ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀποθανόντι, οὐ τοῦτον λέγω τὸν ἀναγκαῖόν τε καὶ κοινὸν τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν θάνατον· τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ μὴ βουλομένων γενήσεται· ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ τῷ ἔκουσίως ἀποθανόντι συναποθνήσκειν χρῆ θέλοντας, προσήκει τὸν ἐκ προαιρέσεως αὐτοῖς ἐπινοῆσαι θάνατον· οὐ γὰρ ἐστι διὰ τοῦ κατηναγκασμένου ἢ πρὸς τὸ ἐκούσιον μίμησις. ἐπειδὴ τοῖνυν ὁ ἐκ φύσεως ἐπικείμενος ἐκάστῳ θάνατος πάντη καὶ πάντως γίνεται καὶ βουλομένων καὶ μὴ, οὐκ ἂν δέ τις τὸ πάντως γινόμενον τῷ ἔκουσίῳ λογισαίτο, διὰ τοῦτο ἕτερον τρόπον τῷ ἔκουσίως ἀποθανόντι συναποθνήσκομεν, τῷ μυστικῷ ὕδατι διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος ἐνθαπτόμενοι· Συνετάφημεν γὰρ αὐτῷ, φησί, διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα τῇ μιμῆσει τοῦ θανάτου ἀκολουθήσῃ καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀναστάσεως μίμησις. (*Antir*, GNO III/1, 226, 6–227, 9).

universal human nature, but the actuality of salvation of the concrete man consists in the imitation of the personal history of Christ, in sacramental union with the mysteries of his life,⁹⁹ in such a way that:

Bethlehem, Golgotha, the Mount of Olives and the Resurrection are truly in the heart of he who possesses God.¹⁰⁰

This is all realized through the historical dimension of φύσις, which is not opposed to, but rather refers to, the personal dimension.

e. Conclusion

Thus the Gregorian concept of φύσις goes well beyond any philosophical elaboration, reuniting in itself the ontological profundity of οὐσία in its intensive dimension, universal openness in its extensive dimension, and, intimately tied into this, a properly historical dimension. These together allow for a profound, properly theological, harmonization with the notion of ὑπόστασις.

Nature is therefore a key concept throughout Nyssian theology, at the Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological levels: it has a harmonizing role. In this sense the affirmation of G.L. Prestige appears correct, that it is “an empirical rather than a philosophical term”,¹⁰¹ even if in the intention of this author the affirmation attempts to minimize the importance of the term nature in favor of that of οὐσία. Instead it appears that we are dealing with a properly theological term, which at the same time allows many of the tensions which recur in the history of thought on man and on God to be resolved.

As for the chronological order, it is clear it goes beyond the philosophical opposition between Plato and Aristotle. Further, the supposed difference between Eastern and Western theology is resolved here in a category that avoids dialectical opposition between οὐσία and

⁹⁹ It is noteworthy, for example, that Gregory does not interpret the three immersions of the Baptismal rite in only the Trinitarian sense, as was habitual and as could be expected due to the great affinity of the Nyssian with Trinitarian themes. He adds a Christological exegesis, which ties the three immersions to the three days that Christ spent in the tomb. The goal is none other than to underscore the parallelism between the life of Christ and that of the Christian (cf. G. CELADA, *La catequesis sacramental y bautismal de Gregorio de Nisa*, CTom 101 (1974) 80–84). See also in general, regarding this sacramental parallelism IDEM, *Unidad de los sacramentos de la iniciación cristiana*, «Nicolaus» 4 (1976) 139–174.

¹⁰⁰ ἀληθῶς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐστὶ τοῦ τὸν θεὸν ἔχοντος ἡ Βηθλεεμ ὁ Γολγοθᾶς ὁ Ἐλαιῶν ἡ Ἀνάστασις. (*Ep* 3, GNO VIII/2, 20, 8–9).

¹⁰¹ G.L. PRESTIGE, *God...*, p. 234.

ὑπόστασις. The accusation of Harnack and Tixeront¹⁰² that the Greek patristic, and Gregory in particular, gives pride of place to the incarnation in the salvation of man, placing the resurrection in a secondary plane precisely due to the role of the notion of φύσις, shows itself to be simply an unfounded affirmation, fruit of philosophical presuppositions above all. Thus, in the Nyssian φύσις, thought for man from the Trinity, true end and point of return for man himself, the one and the multiple meet, as do time and eternity. In this way φύσις has also a dynamic aspect that is manifested through its close relationship to the divine activity or *energeia*.

II. THE ENERGIES

a. *The Ad Ablabium*

The next step in logical development of the treatise moves the attention from the human name to the divine name. After clarifying that *man* is the name of the human nature, Gregory affronts the theme of the name of God—θεότης—affirming with vigour the ineffability of the essence:

It thus appears to the majority of men that the word indicating the Divinity is based in nature. And as the heaven and the sun or another of the elements of the cosmos are designated by those particular words that indicate the subjects, thus, also in reference to the supreme and divine nature, they say that the word indicating the Divinity was fittingly adapted to that which is manifested, as a sort of proper name. But we, following the teachings of the Scripture, have learned that the divine nature cannot be designated with any name, and is ineffable (ἀκατονόμαστόν τε καὶ ἄφραστον). And we say that any name, either formulated by human usage or transmitted by the Scriptures, is useful to interpret (ἐρμηνευτικόν) that which is thought of the divine nature, but does not include (περιέχειν) the signification of the nature itself.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Cfr. A. HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* II, Tübingen, 1909, p. 166. See also J. TIXERONT, *Histoire des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne* II, Paris 1924.

¹⁰³ Δοκεῖ μὲν οὖν τοῖς πολλοῖς ἰδιαζόντως κατὰ τῆς φύσεως ἢ φωνῆ τῆς θεότητος κεῖσθαι καὶ ὡσπερ ὁ οὐρανὸς ἢ ὁ ἥλιος ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοῦ κόσμου στοιχείων ἰδίαις φωναῖς διασημαίνεται ταῖς τῶν ὑποκειμένων σημαντικαῖς, οὕτω φασὶ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω καὶ θείας φύσεως ὡσπερ τι κύριον ὄνομα προσφυῶς ἐφηρμόσθαι τῷ δηλουμένῳ τὴν φωνὴν τῆς θεότητος. ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῖς τῆς γραφῆς ὑποθήκαις ἐπόμενοι ἀκατονόμαστόν τε καὶ ἄφραστον αὐτὴν μεμαθήκαμεν· καὶ πᾶν ὄνομα, εἴτε παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης συνηθείας ἐξηρῆται εἴτε παρὰ τῶν γραφῶν παραδέδοται, τῶν περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν νοουμένων ἐρμηνευτικὸν εἶναι λέγομεν, οὐκ αὐτῆς τῆς φύσεως περιέχειν τὴν σημασίαν. (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 42, 13–43, 2).

The name of the Divinity does not then refer to the divine nature, as happens with created elements. It is not a proper name, capable of comprehending and expressing that which God is in himself, since this is impossible. Nevertheless the names are not useless. On the contrary, all names, whether of biblical origin or human provenance, serve to explain and interpret that which is thought of God.

The names given to created realities are given by chance, with the exclusive finality of being able to indicate them with an appellative and thus not fall into confusion.¹⁰⁴ The case of the divine names is quite different:

Instead each of the names that serve as guide (ὁδηγίαν) to know God has a proper signification enclosed in itself and among the names most worthy of God would not be found any word deprived of some sense (νόημα); thus it is demonstrated that it is not the divine nature itself to be indicated with the names, but with that which is affirmed something of that which regards it is made known.¹⁰⁵

No word is useless, each one gathers a reflection of the mystery. But every name presents a particular aspect of the divine nature, without indicating absolutely that which the nature is by essence (κατ' οὐσίαν).¹⁰⁶ This is valid, for example, for the names of *incorruptible*, *powerful* and *vivifying*:

Therefore, saying *incorruptible*, we say that which the nature does not undergo, but we do not express what that is that does not undergo corruption. So, also if we say *vivifying*, while we indicate by means of the appellative that which is done [that is the action], with the word we do not make known the being that does. According to the same reasoning, based upon the signification enclosed in the words most worthy of God, we find also that all the other names either prohibit from knowing that which should not be [known] regarding the divine nature, or they teach that which should be [known], but they do not contain an explanation of the nature itself.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 43, 3–9.

¹⁰⁵ ὅσα δὲ πρὸς ὁδηγίαν τῆς θείας κατανοήσεως ἐστὶν ὀνόματα, ἰδίαν ἔχει ἕκαστον ἐμπεριελημμένην διάνοιαν καὶ οὐκ ἂν χωρὶς νοήματός τινος οὐδεμίαν εὐροὶς φωνῆν ἐν τοῖς θεοπρεπτεστέροις τῶν ὀνομάτων, ὡς ἐκ τούτου δείκνυσθαι μὴ αὐτὴν τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν ὑπὸ τινος τῶν ὀνομάτων σεσημειώσθαι, ἀλλὰ τι τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν διὰ τῶν λεγομένων γνωρίζεσθαι. (*Ibidem*, 43, 9–15).

¹⁰⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 43, 17–20.

¹⁰⁷ οὐκοῦν ἀφθαρτον εἰπόντες, ὃ μὴ πάσχει ἢ φύσις, εἶπομεν· τί δέ ἐστι τὸ τὴν φθορὰν μὴ πάσχον, οὐ παρεστήσαμεν. οὕτω κὰν ζωοποιὸν εἶπαμεν, ὃ ποιεῖ διὰ τῆς προσηγορίας σημάναντες τὸ ποιῶν τῷ λόγῳ οὐκ ἐγνωρίσαμεν. καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν

The names are thus either negative or positive, but all are simply descriptive—they state the mode of being, action or activity. But one cannot express with words the divine nature itself. This idea is clarified in what immediately follows:

Therefore, considering the diverse activities (ἐνεργείας) of the supreme power, we adapt the appellatives from the activities known to us. And we say that one of the activities of God is also the activity of watching and observing and, so to speak, to see, by which He *sees all from above* and regards all, seeing the thoughts and penetrating with the power of his gaze to the invisible things. Therefore we think that the Divinity (τὴν θεότητα) has received its name from *vision* (ἐκ τῆς θέας) and that He who has the regard (τὸν θεωρὸν) on us is called God (θεός) both by custom and by the teaching of the Scriptures.¹⁰⁸

The names are derived from the activities, from the divine ‘energies’. In particular the name *Divinity* (τὴν θεότητα) derives from *vision* (ἐκ τῆς θέας). Gregory follows an etymology that comes from Aristotle.¹⁰⁹ This doctrine is common in the writings of the Nyssian, for example it can be found in *CE II*,¹¹⁰ and in *DeAn*.¹¹¹ In the *DeDeit*, he calls upon Gn 3.5 to make the same affirmation: the serpent tempted Eve and Adam, promising that once they had eaten the fruit their eyes would be opened. This is equivalent to becoming like God.¹¹² The etymology recalls the representations, a little disturbing for children, of God as an open eye inserted into a triangle.

The delicate theme of the ‘energies’ is introduced, which has been source of so much discussion between the theologians of East and West, and one is close to the theological heart of the treatise. Gregory,

λόγον ἐκ τῆς ἐγκειμένης ταῖς θεοπροπεστεραῖς φωναῖς σημασίας εὐρίσκομεν, ἢ τὸ μὴ δέον ἐπὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως γινώσκειν ἀπαγορεύοντα ἢ τὸ δέον διδάσκοντα, αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς φύσεως ἐρμηνείαν οὐ περιέχοντα. (*Ibidem*, 43, 22–44, 6).

¹⁰⁸ Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν τὰς ποικίλας τῆς ὑπερκειμένης δυνάμεως ἐνεργείας κατανοοῦντες ἀφ’ ἐκάστης τῶν ἡμῖν γνωρίμων ἐνεργειῶν τὰς προσηγορίας ἀρμόζομεν, μίαν δὲ καὶ ταύτην εἶναι λέγομεν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, τὴν ἐποπτικὴν καὶ ὄρατικὴν καὶ ὡς ἂν τις εἴποι θεατικὴν, καθ’ ἣν τὰ πάντα ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντα ἐπισκοπεῖ, τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις βλέπων καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἀθέατα τῇ θεωρητικῇ δυνάμει διαδύομενος, ὑπελήφωμεν ἐκ τῆς θέας τὴν θεότητα παρωνομάσθαι καὶ τὸν θεωρὸν ἡμῶν θεὸν ὑπὸ τε τῆς συνθεῖας καὶ τῆς τῶν γραφῶν διδασκαλίας προσαγορεύεσθαι. (*Ibidem*, 44, 7–44, 16).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. J. DANÉLOU, *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nyssse*, Leiden 1970, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ θεὸν γὰρ αὐτὸν λέγοντες τὸν ἔφορον καὶ ἐπόπτην καὶ διορατικὸν τῶν κεκρυμμένων νοοῦντες ἐπικαλοῦμεθα.” (*CE II*, GNO I, 268, 30–269, 2); “ἐκ τοῦ θεᾶσθαι θεὸς ὀνομάζεται. (*CE II*, GNO I, 397, 15–16).

¹¹¹ Cf. *DeAn*, PG 46, 89B.

¹¹² Cf. *DeDeit*, GNO X/2, 143.

after having moved attention from the level of φύσις to the level of ἐνέργεια, focuses on demonstrating that the activities are common to the three Persons:

Consider whether this activity (τὴν ἐνέργειαν ταύτην) is properly of only one of the Persons affirmed by faith to be in the Holy Trinity, or if the power extends to the three Persons. Since, if the interpretation of the Divinity is true and the things that are observed are said visible and the being that sees is called God, none of the Persons of the Trinity can be any more excluded reasonably from such an appellative, due to the signification included in the term.¹¹³

The argumentation is Biblical and includes three passages of Scripture, in which seeing is predicated of God (Ps 83.10), of the Son (Mt 9.4), and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5.3).¹¹⁴

At this point Gregory shows his rhetorical capacity and presents to himself an objection, and one that seems to cause the whole logical construction elevated to this point to fall. The Nyssian, almost excusing himself while providing the necessity to respond in anticipation to the objections of his adversaries,¹¹⁵ calls into doubt the passage from the φύσις to the ἐνέργεια just accomplished, when it is the nature that would seem to better guarantee the unity of the Three:

But, since with that which has been said it was demonstrated that the name *Divinity* indicates the activity (ἐνέργειαν) and not the nature, the argument turns in some manner towards the contrary of that which was established, so that we are even more constrained to say three gods of those whom we consider to exercise the same activity (ἐνεργεία). Thus, they say that one speaks of three philosophers or three orators or of any name deriving from a profession, when there are more than one who participate in it.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ λογισάσθω τὴν ἐνέργειαν ταύτην, πότερον ἐνὶ πρόσεστι τῶν ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ τριάδι πεπιστευμένων προσώπων ἢ διὰ τῶν τριῶν διήκει ἡ δύναμις. εἰ γὰρ ἀληθὴς ἡ τῆς θεότητος ἐρμηνεία καὶ τὰ ὁρώμενα θεατὰ καὶ τὸ θεώμενον θεὸς λέγεται, οὐκέτι ἂν εὐλόγως ἀποκριθεῖ τι τῶν ἐν τῇ τριάδι προσώπων τῆς τοιαύτης προσηγορίας διὰ τὴν ἐγκαμμένην τῇ φωνῇ σημασίαν. (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 44, 19–45, 3).

¹¹⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 45, 3–46, 2.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 46, 23–47, 3.

¹¹⁶ ἐπεὶ δὲ κατασκευάσθη διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων ἐνέργειαν σημαίνειν καὶ οὐχὶ φύσιν τὸ τῆς θεότητος ὄνομα, περιτρέπεται πῶς πρὸς τὸναντίον ἐκ τῶν κατασκευαζομένων ὁ λόγος, ὡς δεῖν ταύτη μᾶλλον λέγειν τρεῖς θεοὺς τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἐνεργείᾳ θεωρουμένους· ὡς φασὶ τρεῖς λέγεσθαι φιλοσόφους ἢ ῥήτορας ἢ εἴ τί ἐστιν ἕτερον ἐξ ἐπιτηδεύματος ὄνομα, ὅταν πλείους ᾧσιν οἱ τοῦ αὐτοῦ συμμετέχοντες. (*Ibidem*, 46, 16–23).

It is a key passage since Gregory, who had already applied the concepts of φύσις, οὐσία and ὑπόστασις to both man and to God, now applies to both the term ἐνέργεια, to affirm that we know and denominate only the *activity* of God.

b. *The ἐνέργεια*

The importance of the argument obliges to extend it into this section, while the unity of action of the divine Persons will be the object of Part III of this chapter: in Gregory's work the discourse on the divine action or energies (ἐνέργεια) starts always from the consideration of the ineffability of essence or of the divine nature. In light of Part I of the chapter, it is necessary to specify that the nature is incomprehensible in its intensive dimension, which coincides with the essence:

The divine nature in itself, that is what it is by essence (κατ' οὐσίαν), is above every capacity of intellectual comprehension, being inaccessible and unapproachable by conjectural reasonings.¹¹⁷

This premise is important, since the Cappadocians are often referred to as the first to speak of apophatism.¹¹⁸ It is however necessary to note that Gregory speaks exclusively of the ineffability of the divine essence and does not negate the capacity to speak of God and of the three Persons. As will be seen more amply in the next chapter, the Nyssian affirmation excludes only the capacity to comprehend, that is to fully embrace with the human mind and language, the inexhaustible ontological profundity of the essence itself.

The term ἀπόφασις has even, for Gregory, a sense that is principally positive, derived from the verb ἀποφαίνω which covers the semantic spectrum of *word, thought, prophecy, judgment and decision*. Naturally, the term also appears in the meaning derived from ἀπόφημι, with the sense of negation. But, the adjective ἀποφα(ν)τικός and the adverb ἀποφα(ν)τικῶς exist only in the form derived from ἀποφαίνω, and have always the sense, paradoxical for the modern reader, corresponding to *clear, determined*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ἡ θεία φύσις αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν ὅτι ποτὲ κατ' οὐσίαν ἔστι, πάσης ὑπέρκειται καταληπτικῆς ἐπινοίας, ἀπρόσιτός τε καὶ ἀπροσπέλαστος οὐσα ταῖς στοχαστικαῖς ἐπινοίαις (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 140, 15–17).

¹¹⁸ Cfr. J. GARRIGUES, *Théologie et Monarchie. L'entrée dans le mystère du "sein du Père" (Jn 1.18) comme ligne directrice de la théologie apophatique dans la tradition orientale*, Ist. 15 (1970) 436.

¹¹⁹ Cfr. F. MANN, *Lexicon...*, I, pp. 509–510.

The terminological indication itself helps to discern the double dimension of that which, according to modern terminology, can be called the Nyssian *apophatism*: the possibility to comprehend the divine essence is negated, all the while orienting to the personal dimension. This double dimension will be the object of Chapter II of the present commentary. It corresponds to the two moments of Jn 1.18: the beloved Disciple affirms that *no one has ever seen God*, but at the same time says that *The Only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known*.¹²⁰

For Gregory every nature is unknowable in itself,¹²¹ but this is true in an eminent manner for the divine nature, which is beyond the infrangible limit between created and uncreated:

Great and insurmountable is the intermediary space by which the uncreated nature is separated as if with a barrier from the created substance. The second was limited, while the first has no limits.¹²²

For Gregory man is limited and lives in space and time: man is a *diastematic* being. For this reason he can only know that which is dynamic and manifests itself in time. In this way through the activity of the Creator and the beauty of creation, one can return to God, who remains nevertheless incomprehensible in his metaphysical profundity. Consequently, and against the pretension of Eunomius, the only proper name of God is *he who is above every name* according to the Pauline formulation, since God transcends every intellectual movement (ὑπερβαίνειν αὐτὸν πᾶσαν διανοίας κίνησιν).¹²³ On the other hand, it is providence and activity that take the place of the name.¹²⁴ Thus one can say that:

It is clear that God is named according to the diverse appellatives in relation to the multiform activities (ἐνεργειῶν) so that we may understand him, by the fact that he receives such a denomination.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Together with 1, 3 and 14, 6, this is one of the most cited Johannine verses of the Nyssian (cfr. H. DROBNER, *Bibelindex zu den Werken Gregors von Nyssa*, Paderborn 1988).

¹²¹ Cfr. p. 113.

¹²² πολὺ γὰρ τὸ μέσον καὶ ἀδιεξίτητον, ᾧ πρὸς τὴν κτιστὴν οὐσίαν ἡ ἄκτιστος φύσις διατετείχισται. αὕτη πεπεράτωται, ἐκείνη πέρασ οὐκ ἔχει. (CE II, GNO I, 246, 14–16).

¹²³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 397, 28–29.

¹²⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, 314, 17–18.

¹²⁵ δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς τὸ ποικίλον τῶν ἐνεργειῶν κατὰ διαφόρους σημασίας ὀνοματοποιεῖται τὸ θεῖον, ὅπως ἂν νοήσωμεν, οὕτως ὀνομαζόμενον. (*Ibidem*, 315, 24–26).

These appellatives are not purely arbitrary as Eunomius had maintained, but correspond to an ontological order.¹²⁶ The human intellect was created by God and one cannot despise it, as the Neo-Arian had done.

At this point is easier to evaluate the importance of the *AdAbl* for the question of the possibility to know God. B. Krivocheine affirms, referring to the distinction between nature and energies, that “it is in his letter to Ablabius that Gregory speaks of it clearly”.¹²⁷ The same opinion is held by E.D. Moutsoulas.¹²⁸ The problem is centered on the interpretation of τῶν περὶ τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν νοουμένων in GNO III/1, 42, 22–43, 1, and on τὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν in 43, 14–15 of the *AdAbl* itself, in as much as the energies are traditionally identified with that which surrounds the divine nature (περὶ with the accusative).

A first hermeneutic problem is to establish in which sense Gregory distinguishes περὶ with the accusative from περὶ with the genitive. The immediate contextual observation suggests that the question of the distinction between essence and ‘energies’ is a problem *quoad nos*: it deals with how we name and understand the Divine. The very verb used (νοουμένων) in the phrase in question suggests this interpretive stance. Nevertheless, it is necessary to carefully avoid projecting modern occidental categories onto the Nyssian’s vigorous thought, assuming in an improper manner a perspective that separates the gnoseological and ontological planes.

The use of the preposition with the accusative and not the genitive as usual to refer to a treated theme for an argument of a discussion is an interesting indicator to understand the Nyssian’s thought. This use of περὶ with the accusative appears specific in Gregory, and extends to both the theological and spiritual writings.¹²⁹ In *CEIII* Gregory explains while commenting *I am who I am* of Ex 3.14:

Thus we think that it is necessary to believe that is truly divine only that which is understood in being according to eternity and infinity, and that all which is considered in connection with it (πᾶν τὸ περὶ αὐτὸ θεωρούμενον) remains always the same without growing or diminishing.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris 1944, p. 135.

¹²⁷ “C’est dans sa lettre à Ablabios que Grégoire en parle clairement” (B. KRIVO-CHEINE, *Simplicité...*, p. 398).

¹²⁸ Cfr. E.D. MOUTSOULAS, ‘Essence’ et ‘Energies’ de Dieu selon St. Grégoire de Nysse, *StPatr* 18 (1983) 518.

¹²⁹ Cfr. B. KRIVO-CHEINE, *Simplicité...*, p. 399.

¹³⁰ οὐκοῦν τοῦτο μόνον θεῖον εἶναι ὡς ἀληθῶς πιστεῦειν οἰόμεθα δεῖν, ὃ κατὰ τὸ

There thus exists a direct connection of the eternity and infinity of the divine nature to all that is contemplated *in connection with* it. The translation wishes to express, suggested by the sense of the passage itself, that it is not a reality on the purely cognitive level, but that the ‘energies’ or activities are contemplated in their intimate union with nature. It is for this reason that they are characterized by the same immutability of the divine nature and are not separable from the latter.¹³¹ The *ad extra* manifestation of God renders eternity present in history, without introducing any change into God himself. In the *OrCat*, the Nyssian clarifies further:

For, it was necessary that neither the light remain invisible, nor the glory without testimony, nor that his goodness be not enjoyed, nor that all the rest that is considered in connection with the divine nature (περὶ τὴν θεϊαν καθορᾶται φύσιν) remain inactive (ἀργά), in absence of someone who could participate in it and enjoy it.¹³²

The text is important since it shows that light and glory are among the things that are enumerated in connection with the divine nature, as B. Krivocheine observed.¹³³ In Chapter III we will see that light and glory are concepts that Gregory utilizes as connections between immanence and economy. Light and glory characterize both the intimacy between the divine persons, whose vital dynamic is presented as an eternal, reciprocal self gift of glory in the splendour of the divine light (see p. 176), and as a manifestation of God in time. For Gregory, the whole of economy is a reflection of the immanent light, and the relationship between θεολογία and οἰκονομία is proposed as a natural key to the question of the ἐνέργεια.

It is homily VI of the *DeBeat* that is the principle text to approach the conceptualization of the Nyssian. He had already affirmed in homily I, with some irony, that the difference between human and divine nature cannot be filled. Mud is the true origin of man, who has thus

ἀίδιον τε καὶ ἀόριστον ἐν τῷ εἶναι καταλαμβάνεται, καὶ πᾶν τὸ περὶ αὐτὸ θεωρούμενον αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχει, οὔτε προσγιγόμενον οὔτε ἀπογιγόμενον. (*CEIII*, GNO II, 186, 12–15).

¹³¹ Differently than Porphyry, for Gregory the ἐνέργεια do not constitute independent or separated entities (Cfr. E. MÜHLENBERG, *Die philosophische Bildung Gregors von Nyssa in den Büchern Contra Eunomium*, in M. HARL (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1971, p. 241).

¹³² ἔδει γὰρ μήτε τὸ φῶς ἀθέατον μήτε τὴν δόξαν ἀμάρτυρον μήτε ἀναπόλαυστον αὐτοῦ εἶναι τὴν ἀγαθότητα μήτε τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα περὶ τὴν θεϊαν καθορᾶται φύσιν ἀργὰ κείσθαι μὴ ὄντος τοῦ μετέχοντός τε καὶ ἀπολαύοντος. (*OrCat*, GNO III/4, 17, 4–7).

¹³³ Cfr. B. KRIVOICHEINE, *Simplicité...*, p. 399.

the same nature as bricks (τὸ συγγενὲς πρὸς τὴν πλίνθον ἔχει). He is a wax puppet, who will in small time finish in cinders, nevertheless he fills himself with airs, puffing himself up as if he were a ball of pride and arrogance: the mysteries of human nature are properly contemplated in the cemetery.¹³⁴ Then, in homily II, the Nyssian explains the beatitudes in a descending order, from heaven to earth. Man cannot in any way ascend by himself to the divine,¹³⁵ but it is thanks only to Revelation that those mysteries that transcend human experience and knowledge are opened to him.¹³⁶ In this way, Gregory continues in homily V, Sacred Scripture often cites the part for the whole, and this happens exactly when it interprets the divine nature with certain names.¹³⁷ The end is to make us participants of the divine beatitude, which is nothing other than communion with the Divinity itself, to which the Lord raises us.¹³⁸

The Nyssian opens homily VI, in which he comments *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God* of Mt 5.8, with a poetic image: when his mind looks to the sublime knowledge of God it is as if from the summit of a high vista he looked upon the infinite vastness of the open sea. As from a peak over the sea one perceives, from a great altitude, the depths of the sea, thus the verses of the Gospel are vertiginous to those who seek out their meaning.¹³⁹

Gregory cites Tm 6.16 to set forth that no man can see God, to then explain that “to see God is eternal life”¹⁴⁰ and that “in the use of the

¹³⁴ Cfr. *DeBeat*, GNO II/2, 85–86, *passim*.

¹³⁵ ὡς μὴ δοκεῖν ἡμαρτηθῆσθαι τὴν τάξιν τῆς τῶν μακαρισμῶν ἀκολουθίας, πρῶτον οὐρανῶν καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα γῆς ἐν ταῖς ἐπαγγελίαις ἡμῖν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ προτεθείσης. (*Ibidem*, 90, 16–19).

¹³⁶ Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐστὶ δυνατὸν ἰδίῳις ὀνόμασιν ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκκαλυφθῆναι ἢ ὑπὲρ αἰσθησῖν τε καὶ γνῶσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐστίν. (*Ibidem*, 91, 19–22).

¹³⁷ Συνήθως δὲ πολλάκις ἡ θεία γραφή διὰ τῆς τοῦ μέρους μηνίμης περιλαμβάνει τὸ ὅλον, ὡς ὅταν τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν δι’ ὀνομάτων τινῶν ἐρμηνεύῃ. (*Ibidem*, 118, 4–7).

¹³⁸ Ἡ οὖν τῶν μακαρισμῶν μετουσία οὐδὲν ἄλλο εἰ μὴ θεότητός ἐστι κοινωνία, πρὸς ἣν ἡμᾶς ἀνάγει διὰ τῶν λεγομένων ὁ Κύριος. (*Ibidem*, 124, 13–15).

¹³⁹ Ὅπερ παθεῖν εἰκὸς τοὺς ἔκ τινος ὑψηλῆς ἀκρωρείας εἰς ἀχανές τι κατακύπτοντας πέλαγος, τοῦτό μοι πέπονθεν ἡ διάνοια, ἐκ τῆς ὑψηλῆς τοῦ Κυρίου φωνῆς, οἷον ἀπὸ τινος κορυφῆς ὄρους, εἰς τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον τῶν νοημάτων ἀποβλέπουσα βάθος. Καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν πολλοῖς τῶν παραθαλασσίῳν ἐστὶν ἰδεῖν ὄρος ἡμίτομον, κατὰ τὸ παράλιον μέρος ἀπὸ κορυφῆς ἐπὶ τὸ βάθος δι’ εὐθείας ἀπεξεσμένον, οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἄνω πέρασ ἀκρα τις προβεβλημένη πρὸς τὸν βυθὸν ἐπινένευκεν, ὅπερ οὖν παθεῖν εἰκὸς τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς τοιαύτης σκοπίας, ἐκ πολλοῦ τοῦ ὕψους ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ βάθει διακύπτοντα θάλατταν, οὕτως ἰλιγγιᾶ μου νῦν ψυχῇ, ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ ταύτῃ τοῦ Κυρίου φωνῇ γενομένη μετέωρος. (*Ibidem*, 136, 26–137, 11).

¹⁴⁰ Ἀλλὰ μὴν αἰώνιος ζωὴ τὸ ἰδεῖν ἐστὶ τὸν Θεόν. (*Ibidem*, 137, 23–24).

Sacred Scripture *to see* signifies *to have*".¹⁴¹ The profound ontological dimension of the question is placed in relief from the beginning: *to know* signifies *to participate*.

As already seen, (p. 31) the Nyssian asks himself why the Bible speaks to us of this vision when the divine nature in itself (κατ' οὐσίαν) surpasses every intellectual comprehension.¹⁴² Gregory cites Rm 11.33, where the ways of God are said to be incomprehensible, since "that path that guides to the knowledge (γνώσιν) of the divine essence is inaccessible to reasonings".¹⁴³ And yet He who is superior to every nature is accessible by other paths:

For, it is possible to see by conjecture (στοχαστικῶς) he who has made all things by wisdom, even through the wisdom (σοφία) that manifests itself in the universe. As with human works, in a certain manner one perceives with the mind the author of the work before oneself, since he has left his imprint of [his] art in his work. And one does not perceive the nature of the artist, but only the artistic ability that the artist left in the work. Thus also turning our regard to the order of creation, we form an idea, not of the essence, but of the wisdom of he who has made all with wisdom (τοῦ κατὰ πάντα σοφῶς πεποιηκότος).¹⁴⁴

We are before *kataphasis*, that is of the possibility to know God through his works. Wisdom is a central theme here, something that will later be taken up by the Russian Sophiologists.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Τὸ γὰρ ἰδεῖν ταῦτὸν σημαίνει τῷ σχεῖν ἐν τῇ τῆς Γραφῆς συνηθείᾳ. (*Ibidem*, 138, 12–14).

¹⁴² Ἡ θεία φύσις αὐτῆ καθ' αὐτὴν ὅτι ποτὲ κατ' οὐσίαν ἐστὶ, πάσης ὑπέρκειται καταληπτικῆς ἐπινοίας, ἀπρόσιτός τε καὶ ἀπροσπέλαστος οὐσα ταῖς στοχαστικαῖς ὑπονοίαις (*Ibidem*, 140, 15–18).

¹⁴³ τὸ ἀνεπίβρατον εἶναι λογισμοῖς τὴν ὁδὸν ἐκείνην ἢ πρὸς τὴν γνώσιν τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἄγει. (*Ibidem*, 140, 22–23).

¹⁴⁴ Ἔστι γὰρ καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐμφαινομένης τῷ παντὶ σοφίας, τὸν ἐν σοφίᾳ πάντα πεποιηκότα στοχαστικῶς ἰδεῖν, καθάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπινων δημιουργημάτων ὁράται τῶν ἔργων ἐναποθέμενος. Ὅραται δὲ οὐχ ἡ φύσις τοῦ τεχνητεύσαντος ἀλλὰ μόνῃ ἢ τεχνικῇ ἐπιστήμῃ ἢ ὁ τεχνίτης τῆ κατασκευῆ ἐναπέθετο. Οὕτως καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐν τῇ κτίσει βλέποντες κόσμον, ἔννοιαν οὐ τῆς οὐσίας ἀλλὰ τῆς σοφίας τοῦ κατὰ πάντα σοφῶς πεποιηκότος ἀνατυπούμεθα. (*Ibidem*, 141, 2–10).

¹⁴⁵ H. VON BALTHASAR explicitly collates the Nyssian to Dostoevskij, Soloviev and Berdiaev (Cf. H. von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée*, Paris 1947, p. 90). See also the articles of M. VAN PARYS, *Exégèse et théologie trinitaire. Prov. 8, 22 chez les Pères Cappadociens*, *Iren.* 43 (1970) 362–379 and of E. VON IVÁNKA, *Zur Philosophie Wl. Soloviev's. Russentum und Vätertheologie*, in *De oriente: Documenta, studia et libri*. (Orientalia christiana 32), Roma 1933, 159–167. Parallel to the concept of Gregory's οἰκονομία and divino-humanity would be, in particular, the *Sophia* of V. SOLOVIEV, as presented, for example, in V. SOLOVIEV, *La Russie et l'Église universelle*, Paris 1889. For Russian sophiology in general, see A. ASNAGHI,

All that has been said of visible creation is valid also for our lives, which are not the fruit of necessity, but of the will for good, through which we can contemplate God in his goodness. Gregory says in synthesis:

In this way, we call a means to know God also all that elevates thought to the most powerful and highest Being, since each of the sublime concepts places God before our eyes. In fact, power and purity—the immutable being is pure of all that is contrary to it—and every similar attribute can impress in our soul the image (φαντασίαν) of a certain divine and sublime concept. Therefore, as for that which has been said, it can be seen how also the Lord speaks the truth when he proclaims that God will be seen by those who are pure of heart. And Paul does not lie when he affirms in his teachings, that none has ever seen God, nor can see him. In fact, he who is invisible in his nature (τῆ φύσει ἀόρατος) becomes visible in the activities (ἐνεργείαις), since he is contemplated in certain properties in connection with himself (ἐν τισι τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν ιδιώμασι καθορώμενος).¹⁴⁶

The distinction between the divine nature and the divine activities or energies is clearly affirmed here.¹⁴⁷ Further, this text gives an explicit connection between the ἐνεργείαις and περὶ with the accusative. It is,

Storia ed escatologia del pensiero russo, Genova 1973 and IDEM, *L'uccello di fuoco. Storia della filosofia russa*, Sotto il Monte (BG) 2003.

¹⁴⁶ οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὅσα πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον τε καὶ ὑψηλότερον ἀνάγει τὴν ἔννοιαν, θεοῦ κατανόησιν τὰ τοιαῦτα κατονομάζομεν, ἐκάστου τῶν ὑψηλῶν νοημάτων τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῖν εἰς ὄψιν ἄγοντος. Ἡ γὰρ δύναμις καὶ ἡ καθαρότης, καὶ τὸ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν, καὶ τὸ ἀμιγῆς τοῦ ἐναντίου καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα θείας τινὸς καὶ ὑψηλῆς ἐννοίας ἐντυποῖ ταῖς ψυχαῖς τὴν φαντασίαν. Οὐκοῦν δείκνυται διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων πῶς καὶ ὁ Κύριος ἀληθεύει, ὀφθήσεσθαι τὸν Θεὸν τοῖς καθαροῖς τὴν καρδίαν ἐπαγγειλάμενος· καὶ ὁ Παῦλος οὐ ψεύδεται, μὴτε ἑωρακέναι τινὰ τὸν Θεὸν μῆτ' ἰδεῖν δύνασθαι διὰ τῶν οἰκείων λόγων ἀποφηνάμενος. Ὁ γὰρ τῆ φύσει ἀόρατος ὄρατος ταῖς ἐνεργείαις γίνεται, ἐν τισι τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν ιδιώμασι καθορώμενος. (*De Beat*, GNO VII/2, 141, 15–27).

¹⁴⁷ Thomas also distinguishes a first act, that is the form, from a second act, that is operation: “Actus autem est duplex, primus, et secundus. Actus quidem primus est forma et integritas rei, actus autem secundus est operatio” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 48, a. 5, c.). Also: “Operatio est actus secundus; forma autem per quam aliquid habet speciem, est actus primus” (IDEM, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, 59, 16). In God, operation is identified with essence, but this is *secundum rem* (“Sed in Deo, secundum rem, non est nisi una operatio, quae est sua essentia”, IDEM, *Summa Theologica*, I q. 30, a. 2, r. 3). For in God action coincides with power, which in turn coincides with the essence (“Sed actio Dei non est aliud ab eius potentia, sed utrumque est essentia divina, quia nec esse eius est aliud ab eius essentia”, *ibidem*, q. 25, a. 1, r. 2). However, the divine activity and action can be seen also *from outside*, that is from the perspective of the extra-Trinitarian effect, in which case the power, as principle of the effect and not as principle of the action, is no longer identified with the essence itself (“Potentia in rebus creatis non solum est principium actionis, sed etiam effectus. Sic igitur in Deo salvatur ratio potentiae quantum ad hoc, quod est principium effectus, non autem quantum ad hoc, quod est principium actionis, quae est divina essentia”, *ibidem*, q. 25, a. 1, r. 3).

therefore, necessary to discuss the chosen translation of ἐνέργεια with *activity* and its connection with the use of περί.

c. *Activity*

From the last cited text it appears clear that one cannot negate the difference between περί with the accusative and with the genitive, a distinction that will be taken up by Palamas later.¹⁴⁸ The first use manifests the intrinsic connection between the ontological and gnoseological planes, while the second is extrinsic and exclusively cognitive. In one case the connection between the interior and the exterior of the object is expressed, in the other we only approach *from outside* the object itself. Quite opportunely A. de Halleux underlines that: “followed by the accusative, the preposition *peri* signifies usually ‘about’ (*autour de*) and not ‘regarding’ (*au sujet de*)”.¹⁴⁹

It is necessary however to note, that the signification of “regarding”, in the case of περί with the accusative¹⁵⁰ is not excluded from the dictionary. This is always with the sense of an intrinsic tie: the spatial sense that is prevalent is the fundamental one of frontier and connection, and not that of exclusion from a closed place. Furthermore, the expression can signify “in the heart” or “in the soul”, as is found in the περί ψυχῶν used by Pindar.¹⁵¹ For this reason one of the principle meanings is “in connection with”. This means that one is outside since previously has been inside, with reference with both places and persons. For example, the soldiers who fight around their city: they fight around it since it is their city. In this vein, the expression οἱ περί τινα also signifies the whole of the intimate consorts or family of someone.¹⁵²

In the same way, this preposition with the accusative signifies that which manifests itself of a certain being, in as much as belonging to its essence or nature. In the *Phaedrus*,¹⁵³ the formula τὰ περί τὸ σῶμα

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. B. KRIVOCHÉINE, *Simplicité...*, p. 403 and E.D. MOUTSOULAS, ‘*Essence*’..., pp. 521–522. For the influence of Gregory of Nyssa in general, and on Gregory Palamas in particular, see A. MEREDITH, *Gregory of Nyssa*, London 1999, pp. 138–139.

¹⁴⁹ “Suivie de l’accusatif, la préposition *peri* signifie normalement «autour de», et non «au sujet de».” (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme et Tradition*, Irén. 48 (1975) 484).

¹⁵⁰ A. BAILLY, *Dictionnaire Grec-Français*, Paris 1950, p. 1519.

¹⁵¹ Cfr. PINDARO, *Pythia*, Ode 4, 122; H. MAEHLER, *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, Leipzig 1989, p. 83.

¹⁵² Cfr. B.P. GRENPELL, *An Alexandrian erotic fragment and other Greek papyri chiefly Ptolemaic*, Oxford 1896, 21, 16.

¹⁵³ Cfr. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 246d (Burnet).

appears. It returns numerous times in Plato's work: he is describing how a god is, and he paints it as a being with a soul and body united forever. Thus he passes to describe the function of the wings that the soul has lost and serve to lift oneself up. This passage Gregory certainly knew. In this context one speaks of "that which belongs to the body", and Plato uses the same expression to refer to the actions and activities of the body in distinction of those of the soul (τὰ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα).¹⁵⁴ The Platonic use of the expression τὰ περί with the accusative approaches then the idea of attributes and activity.¹⁵⁵

It is highly probable that this is the source of the Gregorian meaning. For this reason, following Daniélou, it would seem that the best choice for translating ἐνέργεια is 'activity' rather than 'energy'.¹⁵⁶

In fact the Nyssian uses περί with the accusative also for man, speaking of "something other than what is considered in regard to the body and the soul (περί τε σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν)":¹⁵⁷ this is a possible (almost literal) citation of the passage of Plato's *Charmides* to which reference has been made. And ἐνέργεια is also applied to man when Gregory says: *Thought is an activity of our mind*.¹⁵⁸ Otherwise, in *CE II*, Gregory explicitly compares divine simplicity to the simplicity of the human soul, which receives different names according to its different faculties and activities, but does not cease for this to be simple and unique.¹⁵⁹

Thus, Gregory, confuting the Eunomian definition of Christ as *image and seal of the activity of the All-powerful* (εἰκὼν καὶ σφραγὶς τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος ἐνεργείας), writes:

¹⁵⁴ Οὐκοῦν πάντα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Χαρμίδη, ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὰ τοῦ τάχους τε καὶ τῆς ὀξύτητος καλλίω φαίνεται ἢ τὰ τῆς βραδυτητός τε καὶ ἡσυχιότητος; (PLATO, *Charmides*, 160b, 3–5). See also the τὰ περὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πράγματα of *Leges*, 677c.

¹⁵⁵ ἔστιν δὲ ὀρθῶς ἄρα τιμιάτατα μὲν καὶ πρῶτα τὰ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀγαθὰ κείσθαι, σωφροσύνης ὑπαρχούσης αὐτῇ, δεύτερα δὲ τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ, καὶ τρίτα τὰ περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ χρήματα λεγόμενα· (PLATO, *Leges*, 697b, 2–6).

¹⁵⁶ E. Perrella, in the introduction to his edition of the works of Gregory Palamas, strongly affirms the necessity to find a true and proper translation for ἐνέργεια, in as much as the simple transliteration of the term is equivocal, since the Greek concept is clearly different from the significance that the term *energy* has assumed today (cf. E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas. Atto e luce divina: scritti filosofici e teologici*, Milan 2003, pp. xxvi–xxi). For a discussion on the translation of the term in the context of the work of Maximus the Confessor, see PH.G. RENCZES, *Agir de Dieu et liberté de l'homme*, Paris 2003, pp. 35–44. He underlines properly that *activity* is the most general and common translation (p. 42).

¹⁵⁷ τι ἄλλο περὶ τε σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν θεωρεῖται (*CEI*, GNO I, 80, 9).

¹⁵⁸ ἢ δὲ ἐπίνοια τῆς ἡμετέρας διανοίας ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια (*CE II*, GNO I, 323, 29–30).

¹⁵⁹ Cfr. *CE II*, GNO I, 373, 2–8.

For every activity is observed in he who labours pursuing that which he seeks, but, once attained that which is sought, it does not subsist in itself: as with the activity of the runner, which is a movement with the feet, once the activity is ended, there is no activity in itself.¹⁶⁰

The fundamental idea is that activity does not have proper subsistence: it depends totally upon the nature of which it is an expression. If it is a human nature, then it will have the temporal characteristics of humanity, while if divine, it will carry the signs of divine eternity. Properly, ἐνέργεια is a movement of nature (φύσεως κίνησις).

However, what has been said will be clearer through the use of examples. We say that one works metal or wood, or carries out another of such activities. Therefore, language presents at once both the art and he who exercises the art, so that if one separates one thing, the other cannot subsist. If then, the two realities are thought one together with the other, that is activity itself and he who acts through it, how is it that in this case one says that on the first substance (τῆ οὐσίᾳ τῆ πρώτῃ) follows activity that produces the second substance, as if mediating in itself between the one and the other, without being confused with the first according to nature, nor being tied to the second? For [the activity] is separated from the first by the fact of not being a nature, but a movement of nature (φύσεως κίνησις), and is not united to that which results because it does not have as proper result a simple activity, but an active substance.¹⁶¹

The comparison with human nature returns, as it does often in this context.¹⁶² Nevertheless the most interesting addition is the definition of ἐνέργεια as φύσεως κίνησις: recourse to this pairing of terms is particularly significant, because it clearly shows that activity does not have its own proper consistency. It is not an essence, nor a hypostasis.

¹⁶⁰ πᾶσα γὰρ ἐνέργεια ἐν μὲν τῷ ἐκπονοῦντι τὸ σπουδαζόμενον θεωρεῖται, περαιωθέντος δὲ τοῦ σπουδαζομένου καθ' ἑαυτὴν οὐχ ὑφέστηκεν· οἷον ἐνέργεια τοῦ δρομέως ἢ διὰ τῶν ποδῶν ἐστὶ κίνησις, παυσαμένης δὲ τῆς κινήσεως οὐκέτι ἐστὶν ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς ἡ ἐνέργεια. (*RCE*, *GNO* II, 379, 26–30).

¹⁶¹ Σαφέστερον δὲ διὰ τῶν ὑποδειγμάτων τὸ λεγόμενον ἔσται. χαλκεύειν τινὰ λέγομεν ἢ τεκταίνεσθαι ἢ ἄλλο τι ἐνεργεῖν τῶν τοιούτων. οὐκοῦν τῆ μιᾶ φωνῆ τὴν τε ἐργασίαν καὶ τὸν μετιόντα τὴν τέχνην κατὰ ταῦτόν ὁ λόγος παρέστησεν, ὥστε εἰ χωρισθεῖ τὸ ἕτερον, μὴ ἂν ὑποστῆναι τὸ λειπόμενον. εἰ οὖν τὰ δύο μετ' ἀλλήλων νοεῖται, αὐτὴ τε ἡ ἐνέργεια καὶ ὁ κατ' αὐτὴν κινούμενος, πῶς ἐνταῦθα ἔπεςθαι λέγεται τῆ οὐσίᾳ τῆ πρώτῃ ἢ τὴν δευτέραν οὐσίαν ἀπεργαζομένη ἐνέργεια, μεσιτεῦσά πως δι' ἑαυτῆς ἀμφοτέραις καὶ οὔτε τῆ πρώτῃ κατὰ τὴν φύσιν συμβαίνουσα οὔτε πρὸς τὴν δευτέραν συναπτομένη; τῆς μὲν γὰρ κεχώρισται τῷ μὴ φύσις εἶναι, ἀλλὰ φύσεως κίνησις, τῆ δὲ μεθ' ἑαυτὴν οὐ συμβαίνει, ὅτι οὐ ψιλὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἀλλ' ἐνεργὸν οὐσίαν δι' ἑαυτῆς ὑπεστήσατο. (*CE* I, *GNO* I, 88, 4–17).

¹⁶² A little further, in *CE* I, Gregory responds to Eunomius, having recourse to the example of the shoemaker's instruments (Cfr. *CE* I, *GNO* I, 98, 19–27).

Instead it is a “movement of nature”, a movement that corresponds to nature, to the essence from which it flows. For this reason ἐνέργεια is unique as nature is,¹⁶³ and for this reason there are in Christ two energies and two wills, as the natures are two.

The same definition is found in John Damascene, who affirms: “activity (ἐνέργεια) is an efficient movement of nature”.¹⁶⁴ The origin of the expression is particularly interesting: Aristotle, in the *De generatione animalium*, affirms that every being that is product of nature or fruit of an art, originates from something that is in act. When the principle ceases to act, the being ceases to be. Thus the face and the flesh are not properly such when the soul has abandoned them. This is not in reference to secondary qualities, that can have secondary causes, but of being itself, of that which renders flesh to be flesh. This has origin only in that which causes a being to pass from potentiality to actuality. It follows for items made by the art of man: cold and heat can render steel more or less hard, but that which makes a sword a sword is the movement of the instruments of the artisan that gives it form.¹⁶⁵

Art is in fact the principle and form of that which comes to be, but in another; since the movement of nature (τῆς φύσεως κίνησις) in it comes from another that has the form in act (ἐνεργεία).¹⁶⁶

In this light, if Gregory’s direct or indirect source is truly this, the context of the definition would be referring to the connection between being and action, between ontology and knowledge.¹⁶⁷ The Aristotelian

¹⁶³ The connection between nature and energy-activity is the δύναιμις. B. Pottier affirms that Gregory always uses ἐνέργεια in relation to the sphere of creation, while power is in relation to the uncreated sphere (Cfr. B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, Turnhout 1994, p. 116).

¹⁶⁴ Ἐνεργεία ἐστὶ φύσεως κίνησις δραστική· (JOHN DAMASCENE, *Expositio fidei*, 37, 29; B. KOTTER, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos I*, Berlin 1969, p. 94). The same is repeated in 59, 8 (p. 144).

¹⁶⁵ Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *De generatione animalium*, 734b, 19–735a, 2; p. 55 (Drossaart Lulofs).

¹⁶⁶ ἢ γὰρ τέχνη ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶδος τοῦ γιγνομένου, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἑτέρῳ· ἢ δὲ τῆς φύσεως κίνησις ἐν αὐτῷ ἀφ’ ἑτέρας οὐσα φύσεως τῆς ἐχούσης τὸ εἶδος ἐνεργεία. (*Ibidem*, 735a, 2–4; pp. 55–56).

¹⁶⁷ The results of the present analysis are in perfect agreement with those obtained by M.R. Barnes, one of the participating authors of the project of S. Coakley. He placed in light the ontologization of δύναιμις, as a fundamental passage of Nyssian theology: Eunomius, in fact, used as a supporting argument for his subordinating arguments the fact that the Scripture calls Christ the δύναιμις τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 1.24). Gregory responds explicating the ontological connection between φύσις, δύναιμις and ἐνέργεια (cfr. M.R. BARNES, *The Power of God*, Washington D.C. 2001, p. 296). M.R. Barnes clarifies that it is not just any sort of activity (ἐνέργεια) here, since there are different beings with similar

origin is suggested by other occurrences, such as that in the commentaries to the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle by Alexander¹⁶⁸ and Syrianus.¹⁶⁹ Another sure source of Gregory is the area of natural sciences and medicine.¹⁷⁰

There are interesting consequences for the understanding of economy and immanence, since Eunomius's idea was that the Son was a product of the ἐνέργεια of the Father. In this way, according to the Neo-Arian, the Trinity would be broken and all immanence would be attributed to the Father in his essence. The Son and the Spirit would be second essences, produced from the first essence. One would reach an *economization* of the Trinity through this, by an excess of immanent tension. Eunomius the Neoplatonic could not affirm a multiplicity of Hypostases in the Divinity.

Gregory replies affirming the principle that activity (ἐνέργεια) follows nature, thus if the Sacred Scripture witnesses that the Son and the Spirit perform actions proper to God, they must be of divine nature. It is precisely activity that distinguishes and unites the economic and immanent spheres: this relationship respects the ontological profundity without prejudicing the possibility of participation.

The translation of ἐνέργεια as activity has thus the benefit of expressing the connection between θεολογία and οἰκονομία, manifesting also the role of the divine Persons in this passage. In the *InCant*, Gregory develops extensively the theme of divine unknowability. In homily XI he affirms:

When [the soul] elevates itself from the realities of here below to the knowledge of those things above, even if it understands the marvels of his [of God] activities, for now it cannot proceed beyond in the busy curiosity (διὰ τῆς πολυπραγμοσύνης), but admire and adore Him of Whom one knows the existence only through that which He accomplishes (μόνον δι' ὧν ἐνεργεῖ γινωσκόμενον).¹⁷¹

activities; for example, a bicycle and a horse can both serve to transport. It is rather those activities that characterize a nature, that is, the essence of the nature itself, as is the case of creating for God (*ibidem*, pp. 301–302).

¹⁶⁸ ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria*; M. HAYDUCK, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis in Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca I], Berlin 1891, p. 706, 35–36.

¹⁶⁹ SYRIANUS, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria*; W. KROLL, *Syriani in metaphysica commentaria* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca VI/1], Berlin 1902, p. 37, 34–35.

¹⁷⁰ The definition appears at least three times in the *De diebus decretoriis libri III* of Galenus (C.G. KÜHN, *Claudii Galeni opera omnia* IX, p. 822, 18; p. 826, 5 and p. 844, 8). It is found also in PROCLUS, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*; E. DIEHL, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III, Amsterdam 1965, p. 352, 13.

¹⁷¹ ἐπειδὴν ἐκ τῶν κάτωθεν πρὸς τὴν τῶν ὑπερκειμένων γῶσιν ἑαυτὴν ἀνατείνῃ,

The divine activity is symbolized, in the Cantic of Canticles,¹⁷² by the hand of the spouse:

For now the limit of the knowledge of Him who is ineffable is, for the soul, the activity (ἐνέργεια) that manifests itself in existing things, which we mean to be called *hand* in a symbolic manner.¹⁷³

The soul must content itself with the *energeia*, since human poverty is not capable of receiving into itself the unlimited divine nature.¹⁷⁴

Thus the hand symbolizes also the power of miracles, which manifested the divinity of Christ.¹⁷⁵ B. Krivocheine notes, in commenting this passage, that this is a particular use of the term ἐνέργεια within the Gregory's corpus: one passes from an idea of the creative action of God, which opens a path of analogical knowledge through works, to a divine condescendence which reveals God without rendering the essence accessible.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps the proposed translation of ἐνέργεια—*activity*—renders well both of the Nyssian uses, which would appear a further confirmation of the fact that Gregory does not use this term technically, but refers to it simply to speak of divine activity and to the connection between immanence and economy.¹⁷⁷ Thus the knowledge through ἐνέργεια is for Gregory similar to the knowledge of a child who, perceiving the voice or the steps of his father, recognizes him and says “it is father”, or of the beloved who recognizes the lover.

The doubt of whether the subject of activity is the nature itself could arise, as if this would mean we were saved and needed to enter into direct relationship with the divine essence, and not with the divine Persons. The Nyssian does not leave doubts on this level, knowing how to reconcile the unity of will and of Trinitarian activity, deriving from the unique divine nature, and the unique movement—κίνησις—of the Trinitarian action, which always parts from the Father, as from a source,

τὰ τῆς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ θαύματα καταλαβοῦσα περαιτέρω προελθεῖν διὰ τῆς πολυπραγμοσύνης τέως οὐ δύναται, ἀλλὰ θαυμάζει καὶ σέβεται τὸν ὅτι ἔστι μόνον δι' ὧν ἐνεργεῖ γνωσκόμενον. (*InCant XI*, GNO VI, 334, 15–335, 1).

¹⁷² Cf. *Ct* 5, 4.

¹⁷³ τέως δὲ νῦν ὄρος τῆ ψυχῆ τῆς τοῦ ἀφράστου γνώσεώς ἐστιν ἡ ἐμφανομένη τοῖς οὖσιν ἐνέργεια, ἣν χεῖρα λέγεσθαι τροπικῶς ἐνοήσαμεν. (*InCant XI*, 336, 10–12).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 336, 14–337, 2.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 338, 17–21.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. B. KRIVOCHÉINE, *Simplicité...*, p. 409.

¹⁷⁷ In this sense there are no difficulties in accepting the identification of *energies* and *operative attributes*, maintained by E. Moutsoulas (cf. E.D. MOUTSOULAS, ‘*Essence*’ et ‘*Energies*’..., p. 521), who is in agreement here with J. Daniélou, against J.P.H. HOUDRET (Cf. J.-P.H. HOUDRET, *Palamas et les Cappadociens*, Ist. 19 (1974) 266–267).

passes through the Son and terminates in the Holy Spirit: as we will see in Section III of this chapter, the preferred Trinitarian formula of Gregory is ἐκ πατρός—δι' υἱοῦ—ἐν πνεύματι which appears repeatedly in the *AdAbl*, and in numerous other writings, such as the *AdMac*.¹⁷⁸

In fact, for Gregory the discourse on ἐνέργεια is always tied to ontological and personal participation, on which is founded the cognitive dimension.¹⁷⁹ In the *DeBeat*, after having affirmed that God can be known in his activities alone, the Nyssian changes the scope of the argument, underscoring that the problem is not solely gnoseological; one must not only know proper definitions, but live the divine life:

However the sense of beatitude does not regard only that from an activity one can remount by analogy (ἀναλογίσασθαι) to such a Maker. In fact even the wise of this world could arrive through the harmony of the universe, to the perception of the superior wisdom and power. But in another manner it appears to me that the greatness of beatitude suggests council to those that can accept it. What I have in mind will be clarified through examples. Health of the body is a good for human life, but to be happy it is not enough to know the definition of health, but to live in health.¹⁸⁰

In fact the Lord says that to be blessed does not consist in knowing something of God, but in having God in oneself.¹⁸¹ This is possible since God is the Creator of man, and creating him, has connaturalized in man such a possibility: he has impressed as images the goods of the divine nature, impressing them in man as figures in wax. Sin later obscured these images. The beatitudes then, call man to wash himself of all the encrusted dirtiness, so that the beauty of the image can be fully resplendent. Thus it is possible to contemplate in one's own soul,

¹⁷⁸ Cfr. *AdMac*, GNO III/1, 100, 9–11. See also *Ep* 24, GNO VIII/2, 77, 4–6.

¹⁷⁹ V. Lossky skillfully underlined the role of Gregory in the surpassment of the residues of Origenistic intellectualism (cfr. V. Lossky, *Vision de Dieu*, Neuchâtel 1962, pp. 70–74, together with the article V. LOSSKY, *Le Problème de la "Vision face à face" et la Tradition patristique de Byzance*, *StPatr* 2/2 (1957) 512–537).

¹⁸⁰ Ἄλλ' οὐ πρὸς τοῦτο βλέπει μόνον τοῦ μακαρισμοῦ ἡ διάνοια, τὸ ἐκ τίνος ἐνεργείας τὸν ἐνεργοῦντα δύνασθαι τοιοῦτον ἀναλογίσασθαι· γένοιτο γὰρ ἂν ἴσως καὶ τοῖς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου σοφοῖς διὰ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου εὐαρμοστίας ἢ τῆς ὑπερκειμένης σοφίας τε καὶ δυνάμεως κατανόησις. Ἄλλ' ἕτερόν μοι δοκεῖ ἢ τοῦ μακαρισμοῦ μεγαλοφύια τοῖς δυναμένοις δέξασθαι κατιδεῖν τὸ ποθούμενον, τὴν συμβουλὴν ὑψηγεῖσθαι· τὸ δέ μοι παραστὰν νόημα δι' ὑποδειγμάτων σαφηνισθήσεται. Ἀγαθόν τι κατὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινόν ἐστι βίον ἢ ὑγίεια τοῦ σώματος· ἀλλὰ μακάριον οὐ τὸ εἰδέναι μόνον τῆς ὑγείας τὸν λόγον ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐν ὑγείᾳ ζῆν. (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 141, 28–142, 10).

¹⁸¹ οὐ τὸ γνῶναί τι περὶ Θεοῦ μακάριον ὁ Κύριος εἶναι φησιν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐν ἑαυτῷ σχεῖν τὸν Θεόν. (*Ibidem*, 142, 13–15).

in grace, the image of the living God.¹⁸² This is the Trinitarian life in the soul of the Christian, the life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that the Christian knows in the Biblical sense in his heart, there where *knowledge becomes love*.¹⁸³

d. Palamism

After having justified the translation of ἐνέργεια as *activity* and having underlined the fundamental role of mediation between immanence and economy, it is worthwhile reflecting on Palamism, not to speak of the polemical aspects of the question and their merit,¹⁸⁴ but simply to show the value of the themes present in the *AdAbl*. It seems that the authority for the distinction of essence and ἐνέργεια can be traced to the Nyssian, in as much as *activity* conceived as a *movement of nature* constitutes a bridge between θεολογία and οἰκονομία, which founds the possibility of participation in the divine life in history and temporality of man, while avoiding the reduction of the immutability and transcendence of God.

Gregory Palamas¹⁸⁵ (1296–1359) became a monk in 1316, and arrived at Mount Athos in 1317. He immersed himself in the spirituality that flourished around the Hesychastic method. This consisted in a technique of prayer which, based upon the conviction of the tight unity between body and soul, aimed to reach a state of perfect tranquility (ἡσυχία),¹⁸⁶ causing prayer to descend from the head to the heart through the continual repetition of the prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” in connection with the rhythm of breathing. The goal was to pray at every moment, and through this, to reach the contemplation of the divine light—uncreated energy of the essence—as it was present on Mount Tabor.

The Hesychast movement presented itself as a movement of reform, in the search of poverty and of the independence of the Church from

¹⁸² Cfr. *ibidem*, 142, 15–143, 16.

¹⁸³ γινώσκει δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ Θεῖον· ἡ δὲ γνώσις ἀγάπη γίνεται. (*DeAn*, PG 46, 96C).

¹⁸⁴ The article of M. Jugie in DThC 15 (1946) 513s, was certainly polemical, nevertheless it succeeded in awakening the Orthodox interest. Still, among the collaborators of the special issue of *Ist.* in 1974 a certain polemical *vis* can perhaps be seen. A. de Halleux and G. Philips appear far more balanced (see references in the following notes).

¹⁸⁵ For an introductory reading of Gregory Palamas and his doctrine, see J. MEYENDORFF, *S. Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe*, Paris 1959; V. LOSSKY, *Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Aubier 1944 and Y. SPITERIS, *Palamas: la grazia e l'esperienza*, Rome 1996.

¹⁸⁶ Gregory of Nyssa uses the term around forty times.

the empire. Palamas's adversary was Barlaam of Calabria, who negated the theological possibility to understand the mystical experience that the monks of Mount Athos referred to.

The conflict had political undertones, and was presented also as a polemic between East and West, by the Thomistic language of Barlaam and his school. After various defeats and victories, Palamas became metropolitan of Thessalonica in 1347, a seat which he took possession of only three years later. The continual struggle eventually took dramatic tones. After his death on November 14th 1359, Palamas was canonized in 1368 by the Church of Constantinople.¹⁸⁷

The object of controversy was the impossibility to see God and the theological explanation of the light that the monks of Athos claimed to contemplate. For this reason Palamas forcefully affirmed the distinction between essence and energies, which are divine and thus uncreated, but which do not identify with the essence, of which they are a radiance. The question is situated in a clearly Neoplatonic matrix.¹⁸⁸

The intellectual environment of the Cappadocians was also Neoplatonic,¹⁸⁹ from whose theology Palamas is explicitly inspired. This is clear from a summary examination of his works: in the volume dedicated to his principle works, edited by E. Perrella,¹⁹⁰ the citations of Gregory alone reach around sixty,¹⁹¹ four of which refer explicitly to the *AdAbl*.¹⁹² The authority of Gregory of Nyssa is invoked about ten times in reference to the question of the energies and *περί* with the accusative. Among these last one finds three extended citations¹⁹³ of the *DeBeat* GNO VII/2, 141, 15–27, presented on p. 37. The reference of Palamas to Gregory is therefore explicit.

¹⁸⁷ Cfr. Y. CONGAR, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint* III, Paris 1980, 95–97 and J. MEYENDORFF, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, New York 1982, pp. 172–175.

¹⁸⁸ For an introduction to the relationship of Palamas to patristic thought, see G. HABRA, *The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies*, ECQ 12 (1957/8) 244–252; 294–303; 338–347.

¹⁸⁹ See I. POCHOSHJEW, *Die Seele bei Plato, Plotin, Porphyry und Gregor von Nyssa*, Frankfurt am Main 2004.

¹⁹⁰ E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas. Atto e luce divina: scritti filosofici e teologici*, Milan 2003.

¹⁹¹ Some questions in the dispute between Palamas and Barlaam regard directly the interpretation of Nyssian doctrine, as can be seen for example in the anthropological realm, where Palamas distances himself from Gregory of Nyssa. Cfr. J. MEYENDORFF, *A Study...*, pp. 146–149.

¹⁹² Cfr. GREGORY PALAMAS, *Demonstrative Discourses*, II, 50; 51 and 54 (E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas...*, p. 208; 212 and 218) and IDEM, *Unity and Distinction*, 21 (p. 960).

¹⁹³ Cfr. GREGORY PALAMAS, *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*, 14 and 16 (E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas...*, p. 1144 and 1150) and IDEM, *Barlaam and Acyndinus*, 9 (p. 1330).

The whole problem consists in establishing if the Palamite reading of Nyssian theology is faithful, above all for the questions of the relationship between immanence and economy, time and eternity. To resolve this it is necessary to reflect on the relationship between energies and divine Persons, even if it would appear at first look that Palamas does not touch this last question explicitly. As S. Bulgakov says: “Palamas almost does not touch the complex and important problem of the relationship between energies and hypostases (if not in a few separated phrases that lack rigour)”¹⁹⁴.

However the problem presents a superior degree of difficulty;¹⁹⁵ in fact neither A. de Halleux, or O. Clément appear of this opinion. The first affirms: “the energy confers to the essence its concrete and individual character, it ‘hypostasizes’ it, playing thus, in ‘God for us’ the same “personalizing’ role that the hypostasis fills for ‘God in himself’”¹⁹⁶.

The text of A. de Halleux has the advantage of manifesting a first fundamental point, situating the question in the context of “God for us”, or the economy. It is however necessary to clarify what Palamas intends by ‘hypostatizing’ action of the energy: speaking of the Taboric light of Christ, he explicitly negates that the light contemplated by the apostles has a proper hypostasis, as the expression *ἐνυπόστατον* might erroneously suggest. Instead he affirms that this term expresses the eternity of this same Taboric light, in the sense that it always is, does not pass away, does not weaken with time. In fact it is the splendour of the divine nature, which, in as much as divine action, is covered in eternity.¹⁹⁷ For this reason, the expression ‘personalizing’ which faithfully

¹⁹⁴ “Palamas ne touche à peu près pas la question complexe et importante du rapport entre les énergies et les hypostases (sinon dans quelques phrases séparées et manquant de rigueur)” (S. BULGAKOV, *Le Paraclét*, Paris 1946, p. 236).

¹⁹⁵ It is necessary to remember that S. Bulgakov identifies the energy of wisdom (*sophia*) with the divine essence itself, developing in an original manner the theology of energies. For this reason he is not the best interpreter of Palamas (cf. V. LOSSKY, *La théologie mystique de l’Église d’Orient*, Paris 1994, p. 78).

¹⁹⁶ “L’énergie confère à l’essence son caractère concret et individuel, et dans ce sens, l’hypostasie, jouant ainsi chez le «Dieu pour nous» le même rôle «personnalisant» que l’hypostase remplit pour le «Dieu en soi»” (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme et Scolastique*, RTL 4 (1973) 423).

¹⁹⁷ “Since is said *anypostatic* (*ἀνυπόστατον*) not only that which is not, not only that which is pure appearance, but also that which rapidly decays and diminishes, and which, as soon as begun, is consumed and ceases to be, as is the case of lightning and thunder, but also for our word and for perception, they [the saints] referring to the permanence and stability of that light, correctly used the term *enhypostatic* (*ἐνυπόστατον*),

reflects the original ambiguity of the Palamite term, needs to be well understood: it is a ‘personalizing’ relationship in an analogical sense, which renders concrete and existing God in time for man, that is in the economy, through the eternity of the divine action that is resplendent in Christ.

In as much as divine action, ἐνέργεια founds, instead, an authentic relationship—*personal* in the proper sense—with the three divine Hypostases; in fact: “the Greek patristic tradition does not have unity intervene except as a corrective for the personal distinction. It is thus not on the level of the essence that Palamas roots the divine energies, but on the level of the hypostases, and by their reduction, does nothing more than express the perichoresis of the consubstantial Persons. From the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit: the common energies thus conserve a differentiated relationship to each one of the three hypostases”.¹⁹⁸ The reference of A. de Halleux to perichoresis is precious, in as much as it is properly the reality of perichoresis that is revealed through the economy of divine action.

This relationship with the divine hypostases is expressed well with the translation of ἐνέργεια by *activity*, since every activity is always activity of someone. At the same time the expression respects the divine transcendence, analogical to that which occurs with the object and subject of an action.¹⁹⁹ For this reason it is important to note that Palamas appears to follow the definition of ἐνέργεια as φύσεως κίνησις, which constitutes a certain bridge between nature and hypostasis, and coherently applies ἐνέργεια to both man and God. The translation as *activity* permits also to eliminate all ambiguity in the relationship between immanence and economy,²⁰⁰ in the line of the Cappadocians, from whom Palamas is explicitly inspired.

O. Clément thus seems to be right in affirming that: “The energy is not an impersonal radiance subsisting in itself. It is like the expansion of

since it remains and does not escape those that see it, as lighting, word or perception” (GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads*, III, 1, 18; E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas...*, p. 802).

¹⁹⁸ “la tradition patristique grecque ne fait intervenir l’unité que comme un correctif à la distinction personnelle. Ce n’est donc pas au niveau de l’essence que Palamas enracine les énergies divines, mais à celui de l’hypostase, et par leur réduction à l’unité, il n’exprime rien de plus que la péricorèse des personnes consubstantielles. Du Père, par le Fils, dans l’Esprit: les énergies communes conservent donc un rapport différencié à chacune des trois hypostases.” (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme...*, p. 425).

¹⁹⁹ Cfr. GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads*, III, 2, 10; E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas...*, p. 868.

²⁰⁰ Palamas applies the term ἐνέργεια in the Trinitarian immanence as well to the Son and the Spirit, understood as “hypostatic energies” (cfr. J. MEYENDORFF, *A Study...*, p. 219).

the Trinity of which it translates *ad extra* the mysterious alterity in unity. It is a 'natural procession' of God himself, which bursts forth (in the sense of the bursting forth of light) from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. It manifests the 'co-penetration', the 'perichoresis' of the divine Persons who 'mutually co-penetrate in such a manner as to have only one energy'.²⁰¹

For this reason the intuition of J. Meyer is excellent when he suggests that a path for the theological reunification of the Occident and Orient could be the deepening of the study of perichoresis.²⁰² This could lead to a possible openness to the Occidental *Filioque*, even if only on the 'energetic' level, that is on the level of manifestation.²⁰³

Of particular interest in this regard is the affirmation of O. Clément, who goes as far as to say: "If the 'monarchic' character of the Father as unique source of the Son and the Spirit is an absolutely incommunicable hypostatic character, his character as divinity-source (of the essence and energies), that is his *fontal* privilege, to adopt an expression from Latin theology, is this not communicated to the Son, and later from the Father and the Son to the Spirit, source of our divinization? And could it not be that this participation in the divinity-source, this rhythm that makes the Son, then the Spirit, source with the Father, points out a certain Latin (and Alexandrian) *Filioque*?"²⁰⁴ These words, as will be seen in Chapter III, are in particular harmony with the Nyssian doctrine.

The essential point is to interpret Palamas from the optic of Capadocian, and specifically Nyssian, theology, recognizing the mediating

²⁰¹ "L'énergie n'est pas rayonnement impersonnel subsistant de soi. Elle est comme l'expansion de la Trinité dont elle traduit *ad extra* la mystérieuse altérité dans l'unité. C'est une « procession naturelle » de Dieu lui-même, qui éclate (au sens d'un éclat de lumière) du Père, par le Fils, dans le Saint-Esprit. Elle manifeste la « compénétration », la « périchorèse » des Personnes divines qui se « compénétrèrent mutuellement de façon à ne posséder qu'une seule énergie » (O. CLÉMENT, *Byzance et le Christianisme*, Paris 1964, p. 46).

²⁰² Cfr. J.R. MEYER, *Clarifying the Filioque Formula Using Athanasius's Doctrine of the Spirit of Christ*, Com(US) 27 (2000) 386–405.

²⁰³ Cfr. V. LOSSKY, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Triadology*, ECQ 7 (1948) 48–49.

²⁰⁴ "Si le caractère « monarchique » du Père comme principe unique du Fils et de l'Esprit est un caractère hypostatique absolument incommunicable, son caractère de divinité-source (de l'essence et des énergies), son privilège « fontal », pour reprendre une expression de la théologie latine, ne se communique-t-il pas au Fils, puis du Père et du Fils à l'Esprit, source de notre déification? Et ne serait-ce pas cette participation à la divinité-source, le rythme qui fait le Fils, puis l'Esprit, source avec le Père, que désignerait un certain filioque latin (et alexandrin?)" (O. CLÉMENT, *Grégoire de Chypre « De l'ekporèse du Saint-Esprit »*, Ist. 17 (1972) 450).

role of the energy—in as much as *activity*—between immanence and economy. This is an essential mediation since can eventually give the possibility of participation in the eternal, without blemishing the perfect transcendence of God.

J. Meyendorff affirms in fact, that “The distinction in God between «essence» and «energy»—that focal point of Palamite theology—is nothing but a way of saying that the transcendent God remains transcendent even as he also communicates himself to humanity”.²⁰⁵

If the energetic level however, were a sort of barrier or screen that impeded all access to intra-Trinitarian intimacy, then truly there would be no possible accord between Orient and Occident. One could at that moment speak of apophatic absolutism. Instead, “The Oriental patristic Tradition has never declared as unknowable this centre of the intradivine life in as much as it considered as revealed and dogmatized the order of the three hypostases in the unique nature”.²⁰⁶ For this reason, Palamas uses both apophatic and cataphatic theology.²⁰⁷

The Palamite doctrine thus wishes to defend the possibility of a real and profound relationship with the Triune God, that is with the three Persons in a unique God, known in the experience of a personal relationship and in [silent] prayer. This is in contrast to a direct and merely cognitive relation with the divine essence. For this reason, J. Meyendorff while commenting the *AdAbl* itself, explains that the affirmation of the essential transcendence of God means that the presence of Jesus in the heart of the Christian “can never be other than a free act («energeia») of God who remains inaccessible in his essence”.²⁰⁸

For historical reasons it is therefore correct to say that, from a practical perspective: “the fundamental opposition is situated in divergent conceptions of the beatific vision and of mysticism”.²⁰⁹ But from the strictly dogmatic perspective, Y. Congar is also correct when he individuates the profound cause of the divergence on the question of the energies in a different understanding of participation. For Palamas, even though

²⁰⁵ J. MEYENDORFF, *The Byzantine Legacy* . . . , p. 191.

²⁰⁶ “La tradition patristique orientale n’a jamais déclaré inconnaissable ce foyer de la vie intradivine dans la mesure où elle considérait comme révélé et dogmatisé l’ordre des trois hypostases en l’unique nature” (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme et Tradition*, Irén. 48 (1975) 484).

²⁰⁷ Cf. IDEM, *Palamisme et Scolastique*, RTL 4 (1973) 428.

²⁰⁸ “ne peut jamais être autre chose qu’un acte («energeia») libre de Dieu qui reste inaccessible dans son essence” (J. MEYENDORFF, *St. Grégoire Palamas* . . . , p. 45).

²⁰⁹ “L’opposition foncière se situe dans des conceptions divergentes de la vision bienheureuse et de la mystique” (A. DE HALLEUX, *Palamisme et Scolastique*, RTL 4 (1973) 412).

well versed in Aristotelian logic, participable signifies divisible—it was one of the central issues in the polemic with Barlaam:²¹⁰ a notion of participation that is elementary and almost materialistic,²¹¹ due to a philosophical matrix of Neoplatonic origin. The Occident on the other hand reasons with Aristotelian-Thomistic²¹² categories, and a far more sophisticated conceptualization of participation plays the role of the Palamite distinction.

However the position of Palamas cannot be fully appreciated if one does not consider his conception of ἐνυπόστατον, by which he seeks to express that the action of Christ, perfect God and perfect man, cloaks in eternity the temporality of the event, in as much as the *movement of the divine nature* can remain available in history, or above history, since the subject of action is immutable.

The affirmation of this reality is not linguistically simple, in as much as it touches the most profound roots of the relationship between natural and supernatural. The great Latin advantage is the development of the concept and term of *distinction*: in this case Greek must have recourse to more adjectives or adverbs to correct the radical nature of διαφορά, as can be seen at Chalcedon with the four adverbs. Nevertheless, from the Latin side, the difference between distinction of reason and real distinction requires cautious application due to the separation that it might presuppose between the ontological and gnoseological levels. Oriental thought is highly sensitive to this possibility: for Gregory and the Greek world, the division between the order of knowledge and that of being is simply impossible.²¹³

The distinction thus wishes to protect from the danger expressed in modern terms by the Rahnerian *umgekehrt*:²¹⁴ if one spoke of no

²¹⁰ Cfr. J. MEYENDORFF, *The Byzantine Legacy* . . . , pp. 172–174.

²¹¹ Cfr. G. PHILIPS, *L'union personnelle avec le Dieu vivant. Essai sur l'origine et le sens de la grâce créée*, Gembloux 1972, p. 253.

²¹² Cfr. Y. CONGAR, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint* III, Paris 1980, p. 103.

²¹³ One can read the action of Justinian in the Council of Constantinople II analogically: he promoted the reinterpretation in a realistic sense of the possibility, affirmed by Cyril, to distinguish the two natures of Christ in the hypostatic union: interpreting them not in an intellectualistic sense—as if it were an arbitrary distinction created by the mind—but in the sense of a correspondence between the order of knowledge and the ontological order, with the affirmation of the indissolubility of the two natures in the concrete unity of Christ (cfr. G. MASPERO, *La cristologia de Gregorio de Nisa desde la perspectiva del II Concilio de Costantinopla*, ScrTh 36 (2004) 4–5).

²¹⁴ “Die «ökonomische» Trinität ist die «immanente» Trinität und umgekehrt” (K. RAHNER, *Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte*, in *Mysterium Salutis* II, Einsiedeln 1967, p. 328).

distinction between the divine activity in time and the eternal divine essence, the immanent Trinity would coincide simply with the economic Trinity.²¹⁵

For these reasons, if the distinction is understood in the sense presupposed by the translation of ἐνέργεια by *activity*, and if it is situated in the relationship between θεολογία and οἰκονομία, one can say that it is already present in Nyssian thought,²¹⁶ and presents no dogmatic difficulties.²¹⁷ It would thus be auspicious, from both the theological and philological perspectives, to read and interpret Palamas from the perspective of the Cappadocian theology, from which he is explicitly inspired. As far as the application of this explanation to mystical phenomena,²¹⁸ despite the fact that Palamas invokes explicitly the Nyssian authority,²¹⁹ the discourse seems more difficult and transcends the limits and scope of the present study. In any case, it is fundamental to manifest the profound veneration for the reality of the fruits of sanctity which this spirituality has given for centuries to the Church, beyond any theoretical justification. The reality precedes the theological explanation.

²¹⁵ The Greek ontological mentality refuses this hypothesis so radically that it affirms simply that no nature can exist or be known without it possessing an essential activity, as Palamas writes, calling directly upon the authority of Maximus the Confessor (cf. GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads*, III, 3, 6; E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas . . .*, p. 908). For a more general reference, see T.L. ANASTOS, *Essence, Energies and Hypostasis: an Epistemological Analysis of the Eastern Orthodox Model of God*, Ph.D. Diss., Yale University 1986, pp. 212–222.

²¹⁶ The parallel between Eunomius and Palamas, proposed by B. Pottier, does not seem at all obvious. He is taking up the affirmations of the article by J. Garrigues in the Ist. number of 1974. The criticisms of E. Moutsoulas in n. 90 also appear unjust (cf. B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, Turnhout 1994, pp. 140–142).

²¹⁷ It is enough to remember that the question of the ‘energies’ was not even treated in the Council of Florence. It is nevertheless necessary to keep present that a great expert such as A. von Ivánka negates that a similar distinction can be traced back to Nyssian thought, even if the present interpretation of ἐνέργεια as activity, situated in the relationship between economy and immanence, does not contradict his position (cf. E. VON IVÁNKA, *Plato Christianus*, Einsiedeln 1964, 430–432).

²¹⁸ A. von Ivánka distinguishes Hesychasm, as a method of prayer, from Palamism, as theological explanation (cf. E. VON IVÁNKA, *Hellenisches im Hesichasmus. Das Antinominische der Energienlehre*, in *Epiktasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal J. Daniélou*, Paris 1972, p. 491).

²¹⁹ Cfr. GREGORY PALAMAS, *Triads*, II, 3, 27 and III, 3, 4–5; E. PERRELLA, *Gregorio Palamas . . .*, pp. 664 and 902–906. Palamas explicitly cites the Nyssian commentary to Stephen’s martyrdom, who full of the Holy spirit sees the glory of God, as affirmed in Acts 7.55 (cf. *InSStel*, GNO X/1, 89–91). Cfr. also J. MEYENDORFF, *A Study . . .*, p. 172.

III. UNITY OF ACTION

a. *The Ad Ablabium*

Once it is affirmed that the name of God refers to activity and not to nature, Gregory must then explain why one does not speak of three gods as one speaks of three men for those that have the same profession. The reasoning is as follows:

For men, even if they exercise in much the same activity (ἐνεργείας), complete their own affairs separately, each one alone, without participating exactly, in the proper activity, with those that exercise the same profession. For, even in the case of different orators, the profession, which is one, has the same name in the different orators, while those that exercise it act each one alone, one and the other pronouncing discourses in their own way. Therefore among men, the activity of each being divided inside the same profession, one speaks in a proper way of many men, since each one is separated in a proper environment, according to the particular conditions of activity.²²⁰

Men act each for their own affairs in the sphere of the different professions. Each one decides for himself and follows his own will in the particular realm of his own activity. But for God it is not thus:

On the other hand, regarding the divine nature, we have not learned that the Father accomplishes something by himself, in which the Son does not participate, or that the Son in his turn operates something without the Spirit. But every activity (ἐνέργεια), which from God is propagated to creation and is called according to the various conceptions, has origin from (ἐκ) the Father, continues (πρόεισι) by means of (διὰ) the Son and is accomplished in (ἐν) the Holy Spirit. For this reason the name of activity is not divided in the multiplicity of those who act, since the care of something is not exclusive to each one in particular. But all that is realized, regarding either our providence or the economy and order of the universe (πρὸς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς οἰκονομίαν καὶ σύστασιν), is realized in a certain manner by the Three, but they are not in fact three the things that are realized.²²¹

²²⁰ ὅτι ἄνθρωποι μὲν, κὰν μιᾶς ὧσιν ἐνεργείας οἱ πλείονες, καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἕκαστος ἀποτεταγμένως ἐνεργεῖ τὸ προκείμενον, οὐδὲν ἐπικοινωνῶν ἐν τῇ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐνεργείᾳ πρὸς τοὺς τὸ ἴσον ἐπιτηδεύοντας· εἰ γὰρ καὶ πλείονες εἶεν οἱ ῥήτορες, τὸ μὲν ἐπιτήδευμα ἐν ὧν τὸ αὐτὸ ἐν τοῖς πλείοσιν ὄνομα ἔχει, οἱ δὲ μετιόντες καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἕκαστον ἐνεργοῦσιν ἰδίως ῥητορεύον ὁ δεῖνα καὶ ἰδίως ὁ ἕτερος· οὐκοῦν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἐπειδὴ διακεκριμένη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ἕκαστου ἐνέργεια, κυρίας πολλοὶ ὀνομάζονται, ἕκαστου αὐτῶν εἰς ἰδίαν περιγραφὴν κατὰ τὸ ἰδιότροπον τῆς ἐνεργείας ἀποτεμνομένου τῶν ἄλλων· (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 47, 11–21).

²²¹ ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς θείας φύσεως οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθομεν ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ ποιεῖ τι καθ' ἑαυτὸν,

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have a unique activity that has as source the Father, is made to progress by the Son and is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit. For this the activity is one and is not divided into three. In fact, if we think of the life of grace, we see that it is one and that there are not three lives. It is a unique life that was given to us “by the Father and by the Son and by the Holy Spirit”,²²² that is, it is completed by the Holy Spirit, is prepared by the Son, and depends on the will of the Father.²²³

Gregory is inserted into his favorite dogmatic, and spiritual, sphere. One can note how he moves from one Trinitarian formula to the next, explicating in one that which is only implicit in another, thus forming a stunning picture of perfection and equilibrium.

He continues in his demonstration:

Therefore, in conformity with that which has been said, the Holy Trinity does not accomplish every activity separately according to the number of the hypostases, but generates a unique movement and a unique communication from their good pleasure, which from (ἐκ) the Father through (διὰ) the Son they direct towards (πρός) the Spirit. Thus we do not call three vivifying Beings Those who actuate the unique Life (ζωήν), nor three good Beings Those whom we contemplate in the same goodness, nor do we name in the plural all the other attributes. In the same way we cannot even call three Those who actuate, united and inseparably, with reciprocal action, this divine power and activity or supervision, in both us and the whole creation.²²⁴

οὐ μὴ συνεφέπτεται ὁ υἱός, ἢ πάλιν ὁ υἱὸς ἰδιαζόντως ἐνεργεῖ τι χωρὶς τοῦ πνεύματος, ἀλλὰ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια ἢ θεόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κτίσιν διήκουσα καὶ κατὰ τὰς πολυτρόπους ἐννοίας ὀνομαζομένη ἐκ πατρὸς ἀφορμᾶται καὶ διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρόεισι καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ τελειοῦται. διὰ τοῦτο εἰς τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐνεργούντων τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἐνεργείας οὐ διασχίζεται, ὅτι οὐκ ἀποτεταγμένη ἐκάστου καὶ ἰδιάζουσα ἐστὶν ἡ περὶ τι σπουδή· ἀλλ’ ὅπερ ἂν γίνηται τῶν εἴτε εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν πρόνοιαν φθανόντων εἴτε πρὸς τὴν τοῦ παντὸς οἰκονομίαν καὶ σύστασιν, διὰ τῶν τριῶν μὲν γίνεται, οὐ μὴν τρία ἐστὶ τὰ γινόμενα. (*Ibidem*, 47, 21–48, 8).

²²² ἐκ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου. (*Ibidem*, 48, 13–14).

²²³ ἡ αὐτὴ ζωὴ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐνεργεῖται καὶ παρὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐτοιμάζεται καὶ τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἐξῆπται βουλήσεως. (*Ibidem*, 48, 17–19).

²²⁴ Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν καθ’ ὁμοίότητα τοῦ εἰρημένου πᾶσαν ἐνέργειαν οὐ διηρημένως ἐνεργεῖ κατὰ τὸν τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἀριθμὸν ἢ ἁγία τριάς, ἀλλὰ μία τις γίνεται τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θελήματος κινήσις τε καὶ διάδοσις, ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα διεξαγομένη, ὡς οὐ λέγομεν τρεῖς ζωοποιούς τοὺς τὴν μίαν ἐνεργοῦντας ζωὴν οὐδὲ τρεῖς ἀγαθοὺς τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγαθότητι θεωρουμένους οὐδὲ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα πληθυντικῶς ἐξαγγέλλομεν, οὕτως οὐδὲ τρεῖς ὀνομάζειν δυνάμεθα τοὺς τὴν θεϊκὴν ταύτην ἦτοι ἐποπτικὴν δυνάμιν τε καὶ ἐνέργειαν συνημμένως καὶ ἀδιακρίτως δι’ ἀλλήλων ἐφ’ ἡμῶν τε καὶ πάσης τῆς κτίσεως ἐνεργοῦντας. (*Ibidem*, 48, 20–49, 7).

This is a unique movement (κίνησις) that starts from the Father, passes through the Son and terminates in the Holy Spirit: the three act following the movement of a unique will each through the other (δι' ἀλλήλων). The source is always the Father, the intermediary position always that of the Son, that which perfects and concludes is always the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The apex of the treatise is here: the Nyssian presents the inseparability of the economy and immanence explicating the connection between the 'energies' and Persons. Trinitarian perichoresis becomes the keystone of dogmatic construction.

Gregory then passes, as usual to Biblical argumentation: he starts from the demonstration that to be judge of all the earth belongs both to the Father and to the Son, resolving the apparent contradiction between Gn 18.25 and Jn 5.22. In fact the Father judges in the Son, who separates in nothing from his will.²²⁵ But Gregory adds, citing Is 4.4 and Mt 12.28, the Son judges in the Spirit of God.²²⁶

In this way every divine activity and every attribute follows the law of this unique intra-Trinitarian movement. Every operation of God, whether it regards the cosmos, men or angels,²²⁷ is and remains one and does not fragment into three. Nevertheless three are the subjects that intervene, each according to his proper personal mode of being.

Finally Gregory concludes:

Therefore, every good reality (πράγμα) and every good name, depending on the power and will without principle, are carried to completion in the power of the Holy Spirit by means of the Only Begotten God, without interval of time or of space, since there does not exist any duration in the movement of the divine will from (ἀπό) the Father through (διά) the Son to (ἐπί) the Spirit, nor is it thinkable; and one of the good names and good concepts is that of Divinity. Thus it would not be reasonable to divide the name in a multiplicity, since the unity in activity impedes the plural enumeration.²²⁸

²²⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 49, 8–18.

²²⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 50, 4–12.

²²⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 50, 13–51, 15.

²²⁸ Εἰ δὴ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν πρᾶγμα καὶ ὄνομα τῆς ἀνάρχου δυνάμεός τε καὶ βουλῆς ἐξημμένον ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς θεοῦ ἀχρόνως καὶ ἀδιαστάτως εἰς τελείωσιν ἄγεται, οὐδεμιᾶς παρατάσεως ἐν τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ βουλήματος κινήσει ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ πνεῦμα γινομένης ἢ νοουμένης, ἐν δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὀνομάτων τε καὶ νοημάτων καὶ ἡ θεότης, οὐκ ἂν εἰκότως εἰς πλῆθος τὸ ὄνομα διαχέοιτο, τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἐνότητος κωλοῦσης τὴν πληθυντικὴν ἀπαρίθμησιν. (*Ibidem*, 51, 16–52, 2).

Thus one cannot speak of three Gods, since God is a name of divine activity which is unique in the Trinitarian perichoresis. It is therefore necessary after having ulteriorly clarified the unity of action, deepen the connection between Trinitarian action and immanence, interrogating as to whether the Trinitarian formulas regard only the economy, or if they are also reflections of the divine immanence itself. In a second moment, it is necessary to ask what happens to man who is image of the Trinity. This is to interrogate as to the relationship between human action and that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Finally, as is right for the *last things*, we should analyze the value of the Nyssian reasoning for eschatology.

b. *Unity of Action*

The argument of the unity of action of the three divine Persons is a key one for the whole of Gregory's theology. S. González affirms that "one hardly finds any important work in which he does not speak at times of the unity of operation".²²⁹ The frequency itself with which Gregory makes use of this argument is a sign of its importance. G. Isaye continues further: "one could even ask if this is not his argument of predilection".²³⁰ L. Mori defines it even as "his battle horse".²³¹

The Nyssian founding principle is that those that have one activity (ἐνέργεια), have necessarily a unique power (δύναμις), and those that have the same power and activity, have necessarily the same nature (φύσις).²³² The idea is already present in Greek patristics,²³³ but for Gregory it

²²⁹ "Apenas hay obra importante en la cual no hable alguna vez de la unidad de operación" (S. GONZÁLEZ, *La identidad de operación en las obras exteriores y la unidad de naturaleza divina en la teología trinitaria de S. Gregorio de Nisa*, Gr. 19 (1938) 281).

²³⁰ "Et même on peut se demander si ce n'est pas là son argument de prédilection" (G. ISAYE, *L'unité de l'opération divine dans les écrits trinitaires de S. Grégoire de Nyse*, RSR 27 (1937) 423).

²³¹ L. MORI, *La divinità dello Spirito Santo in S. Gregorio di Nissa. Le operazioni divine. La santificazione in particolare*, in *Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia I*, Rome 1983, p. 166.

²³² Ὅν δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια μία, καὶ ἡ δύναμις πάντως ἡ αὐτὴ τούτων ἐστίν· πᾶσα γὰρ ἐνέργεια δυνάμεώς ἐστιν ἀποτέλεσμα. Εἰ οὖν καὶ ἐνέργεια καὶ δύναμις μία, πῶς ἔστιν ἑτερότητα φύσεως νοῆσαι ἐν οἷς οὐδεμίαν κατὰ τὴν δυνάμιν τε καὶ ἐνέργειαν διαφορὰν ἐξευρίσκομεν; (*De OrDom*, GNO VII/2, 41, 6–10).

²³³ Cfr. IRENEUS OF LYON, *Adversus Haereses*, 4, 20; SC 100/2, pp. 640–641; ATHANASIUS, *Epistula ad Serapionem*, 28; H.G. OPTZ, *Athanasius Werke*, II/1.5, Berlin 1940, pp. 178–180; DIDYMUS, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17, 32, 36, PG 39, 1049BD; BASIL OF CAESAREA, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 16, 38; SC 17, pp. 174–180.

assumes a fundamental importance in the confrontation with Eunomius.

Even if it is in a more polemical context, the *AdEust* had as central argument the unity of action. The same principle is enunciated here with great clarity:

Therefore, if we see that the activities (ἐνεργείας) performed by the (ἐνεργουμένης παρὰ) Father, by the Son and by the Holy Spirit differ one from another, based in the diversity of activities, we conjecture that also the natures that perform them are diverse. In fact, it is impossible that those realities that are separated from each other by natural principle (κατὰ τὸν τῆς φύσεως λόγον) coincide with one another in the form of activities (fire does not produce cold, nor ice heat), but according to the differences of natures the activities [performed] by them are also separated one from another. Instead, if we conceive as unique the activity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [an activity] which is not distinguished nor changed in any of them, then it is necessary to infer the unity of nature from the identity of activity.²³⁴

S. González observes that “Gregory considered this argument so efficacious that he wielded it as a two-edged sword, on one side to reduce to unity the exaggerations of tritheism, on the other side to be able to extend the divinity to the third Person, against the Macedonian heresy”.²³⁵ This also explains its diffusion in the Nyssian works.

As can be seen in the *AdAbl*,²³⁶ unity of action is strongly affirmed both for visible creation and for the angels (πᾶσα κτίσις αἰσθητή τε καὶ ὑπερκόσμιος).²³⁷ Clearly, in conformity with Scripture,²³⁸ one notes an insistence on the role of the Son in creation, but also nothing is done

²³⁴ οὐκοῦν ἐὰν ἴδωμεν διαφερούσας ἀλλήλων τὰς ἐνεργείας τὰς παρὰ τοῦ πατρός τε καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐνεργουμένης, διαφόρους εἶναι καὶ τὰς ἐνεργοῦσας φύσεις ἐκ τῆς ἑτερότητος τῶν ἐνεργειῶν στοχαζόμεθα. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδέχεται τὰ διεστώτα κατὰ τὸν τῆς φύσεως λόγον πρὸς τὸ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν εἶδος ἀλλήλοις συνεχεθῆναι (οὔτε ψύχει τὸ πῦρ οὔτε θερμαίνει ὁ κρύσταλλος), ἀλλὰ τῇ τῶν φύσεων διαφορᾷ συνδιαχωρίζονται ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ αἱ παρὰ τούτων ἐνεργεῖαι. ἐὰν δὲ μίαν νοήσωμεν τὴν ἐνέργειαν πατρός τε καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου ἐν μηδενὶ διαφερούσαν τι ἢ παραλλάσσουσαν, ἀνάγκη τῇ ταυτότητι τῆς ἐνεργείας τὸ ἠνωμένον τῆς φύσεως συλλογίζεσθαι. (*AdEust*, GNO III/1, 11, 3–15).

²³⁵ “Por tan eficaz tenía Gregorio este argumento que lo manejó como espada de doble filo, por un lado para reducir a la unidad las exageraciones del triteísmo, y por otra parte para hacer extensiva la divinidad a la tercera persona en contra de la herejía macedoniana” (S. GONZÁLEZ, *La identidad de operación...*, p. 285).

²³⁶ Cfr. *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 51, 1–2.

²³⁷ Cfr. *RCE*, GNO II, 336.

²³⁸ Cfr. Jn 1.3 and Col 1.16.

by the Father without the Son.²³⁹ In this manner, it is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who, in the unity of their activity, govern the world through divine providence.²⁴⁰

The same thing happens in respect to life of the Spirit, which is given to us through Baptismal grace.²⁴¹ Each one of the three Persons is said to be ζωοποιούντα, without the possibility of speaking of three ζωοποιούντες.²⁴² The same is true for the pardon of sins²⁴³ and for salvation in general.²⁴⁴

One can thus conclude with S. González that: “According to Gregory of Nyssa, both the common operations, and those said to be appropriations, are one effect alone in whose production the three divine Persons intervene in equal manner”.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless one cannot affirm that the three Persons remain indistinguishable in action. Each intervenes in the unique movement according to his personal characteristic. The definition of ἐνέργεια as φύσεως κίνησις is particularly useful here: it has been seen that the ἐνέργεια multiplies according to the natures, as in Christ, following the first term of the formula. The second term however opens to the personal dimension. This can explain also the difficulties that the energies and will have encountered in the history of dogma, in as much as they can be interpreted either in the light of nature, the first term, or in that of the person, the second term. This is close to the distinction of modern philosophy between *volonté voulante* and *volonté voulue*.

The fact that the three Persons intervene in the unique κίνησις according to their proper personal characteristics is expressed by Gregory through the Trinitarian formulas. He does not limit himself to the ἐκ πατρός τε καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, of the *RCE*,²⁴⁶ which only juxtaposes the three Persons, and is the least frequent schema. Instead, by far most common is the schema ἐκ πατρὸς—δι’ υἱοῦ—ἐν

²³⁹ Cf. *RCE*, GNO II, 362.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *CEI*, GNO I, 147–148.

²⁴¹ Cf. *RCE*, GNO II, 379.

²⁴² Cf. *ibidem*, GNO II, 382.

²⁴³ Cf. *DeOrDom*, GNO VII/2, 260, 28–30.

²⁴⁴ On the role of *activity-energy* in the defense of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, see J.J. VERHEES, *Die ENERGEIAI des Pneumas als Beweis für seine Transzendenz in der Argumentation des Gregor von Nyssa*, *OrChrP* 45 (1979) 5–31.

²⁴⁵ “Según Gregorio de Nisa, tanto las obras comunes como las llamadas de apropiación, son un solo efecto en cuya producción intervienen por igual las tres personas” (S. GONZÁLEZ, *La identidad de operación...*, p. 291).

²⁴⁶ *RCE*, GNO II, 336.

πνεύματι which appears continually in the *AdAbl*. In the *AdMac* for example, we find: ἐκ πατρὸς ἀρχομένην καὶ δι' υἱοῦ προϊούσαν καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ τελειουμένην.²⁴⁷

As is evident from the *AdAbl* itself, the prepositions can vary, even if the διὰ of the Son remains always unvaried.

The inversion of order is also interesting, when the Trinitarian order is contemplated from below, that is from the perspective of human knowledge as can be found in the *AdMac*. It recalls immediately in its symmetry the divine missions: διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος... διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς.²⁴⁸

Thus, for the Nyssian the activity of the three Persons is always unique, without this unicity veiling the personal characteristic of each one. This is possible since the Persons act δι' ἀλλήλων,²⁴⁹ and this in its turn is possible because they act one with another, that is ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἀμφοτέρα and μετ' ἀλλήλων.²⁵⁰ The unity of action is nothing other than the economic reflection of the perichoresis, in which the three Persons are united without being confused, co-present one to another in reciprocal love.

One should note that the term περιχώρησις does not appear in the Nyssian works. It is used for the first time in a Christological context by Gregory Nazianzen,²⁵¹ and only much later in the Trinitarian realm by the Pseudo-Cyril, between 657 and 681.²⁵²

Nevertheless the theological concept is clearly enunciated by Gregory of Nyssa, who does not show any sympathy for the term περιχώρησις, perhaps due to the physical connotation that was connected with it in the Stoic school.²⁵³

The Nyssian doctrine is developed above all on the texts of Jn 10.38 and 17.21. In particular one finds the clear and concise affirmation that each of the divine Persons contains the others and is contained

²⁴⁷ *AdMac*, GNO III/1, 100, 9–11. It is found also in *Ep* 24, GNO VIII/2, 77, 4–6

²⁴⁸ *AdMac*, GNO III/1, 106, 23–24. The formula, also referring to supernatural life, found in *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 48, 17–19 is similar.

²⁴⁹ Cfr. *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 49, 6–7.

²⁵⁰ Cfr. *CEIII*, GNO II, 177, 3–4.

²⁵¹ Cfr. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Epistula* 101, 6; SC 208, p. 38.

²⁵² PSEUDO-CYRIL, *De Trinitate* 10, PG 77, 1144B. For a general reference to the history of this Trinitarian term, see G.L. PRESTIGE, ΠΕΡΙΧΩΡΕΩ and ΠΕΡΙΧΩΡΗΣΙΣ in the *Fathers*, JThS 29 (1928) 242–52; IDEM, *Co-Inherence*, in *God in Patristic Thought*, London 1952, pp. 282–301.

²⁵³ Cfr. D.F. STRAMARA, *Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology for Trinitarian Perichoresis*, VigChr 52 (1998) 257–258.

in turn (ἀλλὰ ἀλλήλων φημι γεγονέναι δεκτικούς καὶ χωρητικούς),²⁵⁴ in such a way that:

Therefore the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are always recognized in the perfect Trinity, in intimate connection and reciprocal union (ἀκολούθως τε καὶ συνημμένως... μετ' ἀλλήλων).²⁵⁵

All flows from the intimacy of the Trinity and the unity of action is the consequence of the immanent perichoresis: activity flows forth from intimacy.

c. *Economy and Immanence*

In Arian theology, the generation of the Son automatically implied subordination. Being generated, the Son had necessarily to be subordinated. For this reason, if one places in doubt that the action of the Son in time—the economy—is anchored to the immanent mode of being of the second Person, the whole strength of the argument against Eunomius is lost. The Word must be the perfect Image of the Father also in his action.²⁵⁶

Commenting the Johannine prologue, Gregory says:

The Father is principle (ἀρχή) of all things. But it is proclaimed that the Son is also in this principle, since he is by nature that which the principle is. In fact, God is principle and the Word that is in the principle is God.²⁵⁷

Thus the Father and Son are inseparable:

The Son is in the Father, as the beauty of the image is in the form of the model (ἐν τῇ ἀρχετύπῳ μορφῇ), and the Father is in the Son, as the exemplary beauty (τὸ πρωτότυπον κάλλος) is in its own image. While with the images made by the hand of man, there is always a temporal distance between communicated image and model, in this case however, the one cannot be separated from the other.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ ἀλλὰ ἀλλήλων φημι γεγονέναι δεκτικούς καὶ χωρητικούς· (*AdArium*, GNO III/1, 82, 28–29).

²⁵⁵ οὐκοῦν ἀκολούθως τε καὶ συνημμένως ὁ πατήρ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον αἰεὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων ἐν τελείᾳ τῇ τριάδι γνωρίζονται (*AdMac*, GNO III/1, 98, 28–30).

²⁵⁶ Cfr. C. SCHÖNBORN, *Licône*..., p. 46.

²⁵⁷ ἀρχὴ δὲ τοῦ παντός ὁ πατήρ. ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ταῦτη καὶ ὁ υἱὸς εἶναι κεκήρυκται ἐκεῖνο ὃν κατὰ τὴν φύσιν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχή. θεὸς γὰρ ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ὢν λόγος θεός ἐστιν. (*CEIII*, GNO II, 193, 23–26).

²⁵⁸ ὁ μὲν υἱὸς ἐν τῷ πατρὶ, ὡς τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς εἰκόνος κάλλος ἐν τῇ ἀρχετύπῳ μορφῇ, ὁ δὲ πατήρ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ, ὡς ἐν τῇ εἰκόνι ἑαυτοῦ τὸ πρωτότυπον κάλλος. ἀλλ' ἐπὶ μὲν

The Son not only possesses that which the Father possesses, he possesses the Father himself.²⁵⁹ Therefore the name Father signifies two Persons, since the idea of Son follows spontaneously on the idea of Father. In such a manner, in saying Father, our faith pushes us to think of the Father with the Son.²⁶⁰ The same is said of the Holy Spirit, who is inseparable from the Father and the Son.²⁶¹

In this sense the Nyssian collocates human paternity and filiation to divine paternity and filiation. Thus divine filiation is at the heart of his theology,²⁶² in fact, in the struggle for the consubstantiality of the second and third divine Persons, he affirms that it is properly the name of Son that best guarantees the communion of nature of Christ with both God and men. For this he is said *Son of Man*, indicating that he is from human nature, and *Son of God*, indicating that he is of the divine nature:²⁶³

And it is exactly this word that is the strongest defense (ὄπλον) of the truth. In fact no other name indicates as much *the Mediator* (μεσίτην) *between God and men*,²⁶⁴ as he is called by the great Apostle, as the name of Son. For it is applied equally (κατὰ τὸ ἴσον) to either the divine nature or to the human one. It is in fact the same who is both Son of God and had become Son of man in the economy (κατ' οἰκονομίαν), to unite in himself, through the power of the communion [of natures] (τῇ πρὸς ἐκάτερον κοινωνίᾳ) that which in nature had been separated.²⁶⁵

τῶν χειροκμήτων εἰκόνων ὁ διὰ μέσου χρόνος τὴν μεταληφθεῖσαν μορφήν ἀπὸ τοῦ πρωτοτύπου πάντως διίστησιν, ἐκεῖ δὲ οὐκ ἔστι χωρίσαι τοῦ ἐτέρου τὸ ἕτερον (CE I, GNO I, 209, 8–14).

²⁵⁹ ὁ γὰρ πάντα τὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅ τι τῶν τοῦ πατρὸς οὐκ ἔχει. εἰ δὴ πάντα ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰ πατρῶα, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν πατέρα, πάντως μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν τοῦ πατρὸς ὅλον τὸ θέλημα ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχει τὸ πατρῶον. (CE II, GNO I 288, 19–23).

²⁶⁰ Cfr. CEIII, GNO II, 81, 3–4 and CE II, GNO I, 208, 11–14.

²⁶¹ οὕτε χωρισθῆναι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν ἢ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ ᾧ παρομαρτεῖ (OrCat, GNO III/4, 13, 6–8).

²⁶² Cfr. G. MASPERO, ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ e ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ: *La teologia della storia di Gregorio di Nissa*, «Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia» 45 (2003) 421.

²⁶³ Cfr. CEIII, GNO II, 35, 5–12.

²⁶⁴ 1 Tim 2, 5.

²⁶⁵ καὶ τὸ μέγιστον τῆς ἀληθείας ὄπλον οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐστίν. τὸν γὰρ μεσίτην θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, καθὼς ἀνόμασεν ὁ μέγας ἀπόστολος, οὐδὲν οὕτως ὡς τὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ δείκνυσιν ὄνομα, ἐκατέρᾳ φύσει, τῇ θεῖᾳ τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνῃ, κατὰ τὸ ἴσον ἐφαρμοζόμενον. ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς καὶ θεοῦ υἱὸς ἐστὶ καὶ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου κατ' οἰκονομίαν ἐγένετο, ἵνα τῇ πρὸς ἐκάτερον κοινωνίᾳ δι' ἑαυτοῦ συνάψῃ τὰ διεστώτα τῇ φύσει. (CEIII, GNO II, 35, 12–19).

By the unique mediation of Christ human filiation and divine filiation are united forever in the Person of Christ himself, Only Begotten Son of the Father.²⁶⁶ The passage is quite theologically dense, also for the sphere of the sanctification of man, which for Gregory is nothing other than being truly sons of God. It is the power of the divinity, which Christ possesses by his communion with the nature of the Father, that unites the two natures in Christ. It is this union that heals the lack of union that is found in man on the horizontal level. Thus the horizontal level is founded on the vertical level, in a double movement that recalls the Cross.²⁶⁷

The central category for the Son is *μεσιτεία*, which for Gregory is inseparable from his “mode of being God”, that is from his being a Person. In a passage which will be treated in Chapter III, the Nyssian distinguishes in the immanence the three Persons to defend himself of the accusation of confusing them in a unique principle, as if this were a sort of return to rigid monotheistic Judaism:

And in that which originates from a cause we perceive another difference: one thing is to be immediately (*προσεχῶς*) from that which is first (*ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου*), another is to be through (*διὰ*) that which is from the first immediately. Thus to be the Only Begotten remains incontestably in the Son, and there is no doubt that the Spirit is from the Father, since the mediation of the Son (*τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ μεσιτείας*) maintains in him the being of Only Begotten, and does not exclude the Spirit from a natural relation with the Father.²⁶⁸

This *intermediate* position in the Trinitarian immanence is conserved in the economy, in the mission: Gregory uses the same term, *μεσιτεία*, for both the Son in immanence and for the Christ in the economy.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ It is interesting to observe that in the Council of Chalcedon it is repeatedly said that Christ is perfect (*τέλειον*) in divinity and perfect in humanity, that he is truly (*ἀληθῶς*) God and truly man, that he is consubstantial (*ὁμοούσιον*) to the Father according to the divinity and consubstantial to men according to his humanity. But his eternal generation and his generation in time are expressed by the unique participle of *γεννηθέντα*, which is not repeated twice, so as to underline the continuity between procession and mission (Cfr. G. ALBERIGO ET AL. (Ed.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, p. 86, 14–31).

²⁶⁷ The Nyssian appreciates and explicitly treats this theme (cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *Le symbolisme cosmique de la Croix*, MD 75 (1963) 23–36).

²⁶⁸ *καὶ τοῦ ἐξ αἰτίας ὄντος πάλιν ἄλλην διαφορὰν ἐννοοῦμεν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, ὥστε καὶ τὸ μονογενὲς ἀναμφίβολον ἐπὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ μένειν, καὶ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ ἀμφιβάλλειν, τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ μεσιτείας καὶ αὐτῷ τὸ μονογενὲς φυλαττούσης καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς φυσικῆς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα σχέσεως μὴ ἀπειργούσης.* (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 56, 4–10).

²⁶⁹ Cfr. *InIllud*, GNO III/2, 21, 15 and *RCE*, GNO II, 374, 10.

Further the correspondence in the use of *διά* is remarkable, to which we will return in Chapter III: in the variety of formulas used by the Nyssian, the prepositions that express the action of the Father change (*ἀπό, ἐκ*), maintaining always the idea of origin, and those of the Spirit (*ἐπί, πρός, ἐν*), maintaining the idea of term or perfection, but the preposition for the Son is always *διά*.

Thus the Father is the unique origin of Trinitarian action as he is the unique origin and source of the Trinity itself. And the Spirit carries to completion and perfection this movement, which starts from the Father and is made to progress by the Son, just as his personal characteristic consists in being the bond of the immanent dynamic in intimacy of the three Persons. The personal mode of being of the Holy Spirit will be analyzed in Chapter III.

The Trinitarian formulas refer to the unique economic activity of the Trinitarian Persons, but it is evident that each of them enters into the unique action according to his own personal characteristic: the Father is source, the Son is mediator, the Spirit carries to perfection and closes the Trinitarian dynamic, both in the economy and in immanence. Thus with the words of G. Isaye: “the mention of the personal properties becomes an incontestable affirmation of the unicity of operation”.²⁷⁰ S. González observes that, while not being exclusive, the privileged schema in the Nyssian Trinitarian formulas is *ἐκ-διά-ἐν*, the language of which can already be found in the New Testament.²⁷¹ He continues: “But the most interesting thing of this schema consists in a certain analogy that exists between this formula and the others that refer to Trinitarian immanence”.²⁷²

The unique action is born in fact from the unique will. In *CE II* Gregory uses the image of the mirror:²⁷³ the will of the Son follows the unique movement (*θελήματος κίνησιν*) initiated by the Father, as an image of a mirror. In this way the second Person of the Trinity is immediately and inseparably coordinated to the first (*ἀμέσως τε καὶ ἀδιαστάτως συνδιατίθεσθαι τῷ πατρὶ*). And the Son is not passive in this movement, in fact:

²⁷⁰ “la mention des propriétés personnelles devient une affirmation incontestable de l’unicité d’opération” (G. ISAYE, *L’unicité de l’opération...*, p. 438).

²⁷¹ In particular: 1 Cor 8.6; 12.13 and Rm 11.36.

²⁷² “Pero lo más interesante de este esquema está en cierta analogía que existe entre esta fórmula, y aquellas otras que se refieren a las operaciones intratrinitarias” (S. GONZÁLEZ, *La identidad de operación...*, p. 294).

²⁷³ Cfr. *CE II*, GNO I, 288.

The Father wanted something, and the Son who is in the Father, had the same will as the Father, or better yet, he himself has become the Will of the Father.²⁷⁴

And this making of himself the will of the Father is properly the being of the Son. “That which in the eyes of the Arians, is the proof of the subordination of the Son to the Father, that is his action in obedience to the Father, his instrument role in his regard—is precisely that which is revealed as the mystery of the communion of the divine Persons”.²⁷⁵ It is obedience itself that becomes for us image of the Father, since it is not extrinsic obedience, but reaches to being itself: obedience is the mode of being itself of the Son, that is his Person. For this the unity of will does not exclude personal difference, but rather finds it.

The Arian error is exactly that of confusing the personal order with the substantial order. Scripture itself speaks of a τάξις: the Father is before the Son, who on his turn precedes the Spirit. But that says nothing of a possible difference of nature. It is only the relationship of origin.

“The Son has the same nature as the Father, he has one will with him. But he has them in as much as Son, according to the *proper mode* of his being Son. This mode of existing (τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως) is at once the origin of each hypostasis and its manifestation. The Son is image of the Father since he is born from him and acts in all as Son. Thus the manner in which the Son is the perfect image of the Father is clear: in that he serves the design of the paternal will; for that is his mode of being the obedient and loving Son, who renders visible for us the goodness of the Father”.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ ἠθέλησέ τι ὁ πατήρ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὄν υἱὸς εἶχε τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς, μᾶλλον δὲ αὐτὸς τοῦ πατρὸς ἐγένετο θέλημα. (CE II, 1, 288, 17–19).

²⁷⁵ “Ce qui, aux yeux des ariens, est la preuve de la subordination du Fils au Père, à savoir son agir obéissant au Père, son rôle instrumental par rapport à lui, cela précisément se révèle dès lors comme le mystère même de la communion des personnes divines” (C. SCHÖNBORN, *Licône...*, p. 49).

²⁷⁶ “Le Fils a la même nature que le Père, il a une seule volonté avec lui. Mais il les a en tant que Fils, selon le *mode propre* de son être de Fils. Ce mode d’exister (τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως) est à la fois celui de l’origine de chaque hypostase, et celui de sa manifestation. Le Fils est l’image du Père parce qu’il est né de lui et parce qu’il agit en tout comme Fils. Ainsi apparaît clairement la manière dont le Fils est l’image parfaite du Père: en ce qu’il sert le dessein de la volonté paternelle; car tel est son mode d’exister de Fils obéissant et aimant, qui nous rend visible la bonté du Père.” (*Ibidem*, p. 50). On the (limited) value of the Cappadocian use of the expression τρέπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως in the Trinitarian context, see L. TURGESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa...*, pp. 103–106.

His mode of being God is thus to be Son. But a Son accomplishes perfectly the will of his Father and is not preoccupied with anything but to give him all glory.

Eunomius objects then, that this obedience of the Son is nothing other than a necessity, that is that the nature itself of the Son is obedience.²⁷⁷ But if this were so, the Son would be inferior even to men, who are free. Gregory thus distinguishes the human obedience of Christ in his Passion from this divine obedience. The role of the Son in creation on the other hand shows his divinity. In fact the *δι' αὐτοῦ* indicates the very mode of being Son, of being the Image of the Father, who in his turn acts and is known exclusively *per Filium*.

Thus only if the *δι' αὐτοῦ* of the economy is prolonged in immanence does Gregory have a true response to Eunomius. In the contrary case, either one makes of the Son and of Christ two different beings, or one reduces the Son to the economic level. It is worth noting that the term *μεσιτεία* was not used without danger in the Neoplatonic context in which Gregory moved, as J.-R. Bouchet has noted.²⁷⁸ The only mode to avoid confusing the mediation of Christ with the hierarchy of subordinating and subordinated mediations presupposed by the theology of Eunomius, was to indissolubly unite the immanent *μεσιτεία* of the Son to his economic *μεσιτεία*. Thus the missions are conceived as extensions of the processions, and there is no separation nor confusion between natural and supernatural.

“In truth, that which the Son has revealed to us of himself is profoundly paradoxical, that is that he is in all obedient to the Father, and in all united to him. In God there is no domination of superior on inferior: obedience is identical to liberty, total self gift is identical to total self possession”.²⁷⁹ This is something inconceivable for the human intellect, unreachable in starting ‘from below’.

If one changes perspective and assumes the regard ‘from above’, one also discovers that, with the same absolute liberty with which the Son inserts himself in the unique movement of the divine action,

²⁷⁷ Cf. *RCE*, GNO II, 371.

²⁷⁸ Cf. J.R. BOUCHET, *Le vocabulaire de l'union et du rapport des natures chez S. Grégoire de Nyssse*, R Thom 68 (1968) 576.

²⁷⁹ “En vérité, ce que le Fils nous a lui-même révélé est profondément paradoxal, à savoir: qu'il est à la fois obéissant en tout au Père et uni en tout à Lui. En Dieu il n'y a pas de domination du supérieur sur l'inférieur: l'obéissance est identique à la liberté, le don total de soi est identique à la pleine possession de soi” (C. SCHÖNBORN, *L'icône...*, p. 53).

making himself the Will of the Father (cfr. p. 64): “by his will God has accomplished all things and both without tiring and without struggle the divine will becomes nature”.²⁸⁰ Gregory is explaining that the divine action does not admit intermediaries. Immanence and economy are immediately collocated. For this reason in creation, there is not even a preexisting matter, but: “the divine will has become matter and essence (ύλη καὶ οὐσία) of created realities”.²⁸¹ Thus nature, and in a particular manner human nature, is the will of God.

d. *The Unity of Men*

The question concerning the relationship between human nature and divine nature appears unavoidable. In fact, J. Zachhuber observes an incoherence in the logic of the *AdAbl*: Why would Gregory go to the effort of demonstrating the unity of human nature, to then affirm that *God* is a name of the activity?²⁸² G.C. Stead accuses the Nyssian of even more severe incongruencies.²⁸³ Worth noting is the difficulty to consider an ancient writer or thinker, particularly a Father of the Church, as incongruent. Often the problem is on the part of the modern reader, who is incapable of placing himself in the position of the writer, or projects on the work under analysis his own problems or categories. There is always the possibility of confusing theory and reality, affirming that the information is in error since not in accord with the formulated explanation.

In the concrete case of the relationship between divine nature and human nature according to Gregory of Nyssa, the risk is more acute, as the interpreters are often preoccupied in order to defend Nyssian orthodoxy, with underlining the difference between the two natures. For example S. González uses the affirmation of the *AdAbl* that the activity

²⁸⁰ ὅτι βουληθεὶς ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα κατείργασται καὶ ὅτι ἀπραγμόνως τε καὶ ἀκόπως τὸ θεῖον βούλημα φύσις ἐγένετο.” (CE II, GNO I, 293, 28–30). “ὅτι ἡ ὁρμὴ τῆς θείας προαιρέσεως, ὅταν ἐθέλει, πράγμα γίνεται, καὶ οὐσιούται τὸ βούλευμα εὐθὺς ἢ φύσις γινόμενον (DeAn PG 46, 124B). See also *InHex*, PG 44, 69A.

²⁸¹ εἰ γὰρ τὰ ὄντα πάντα οὐκ ἔκ τινος ὑποκειμένης ὕλης πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον μετεσκευάσθη ἀλλὰ τὸ θεῖον θέλημα ὕλη καὶ οὐσία τῶν δημιουργημάτων ἐγένετο (*InIllud*, GNO III/2, 11, 4–6).

²⁸² Cfr. J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature...*, p. 114.

²⁸³ G.C. STEAD, *Why Not Three Gods?: The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Doctrine*, in H. DRÖBNER—CH. KLOCK (dir), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, Leiden 1990, pp. 149–163.

of man is divided according to the multiplicity of subjects to limit the extension of the social analogy.²⁸⁴

The risk here is ever to interpret Gregory starting from below. Instead, all his anthropology is based in Christology, and ultimately in the Trinitarian doctrine.²⁸⁵

In the first place, the objection of J. Zachhuber does not appear to sufficiently take into account the connection between unity of nature and unity of 'energeia', that Gregory vigorously sustains. Clearly, by itself, this position would leave him open to the accusation of tritheism, but only if the divine nature is judged based on the understanding of human nature, and not *vice versa*, as would be more logical since the human nature is image of the divine (cf. the text of *DeHom* on creation, image and likeness of p. 9).

Gregory clearly has before him the difference between God and man: it is radically based on the infinite distance between created and uncreated nature, which is God himself. But it is precisely the evidence of this infinite distance that permits the Nyssian to so arduously follow the path of the social analogy, faithful to a concept of divinization that cannot but leave the modern reader, and in a particular way, the western reader, stupefied.

Thus Gregory affirms above all that, if men are united among themselves through free choice, they will never be through this like the Blessed Trinity, since men can conform their liberties to their physical conjunction that unites them, but the distance between the divine and the human remains infinite:

For example, the Lord is called *good and pious*²⁸⁶ by the Prophet. And the Lord wishes that we in our turn become and are called good and pious.

²⁸⁴ Cf. S. GONZÁLEZ, *La identidad de operación . . .*, p. 294 and 298. In this sense his study anticipates that of L. Ayres and the authors of *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa*.

²⁸⁵ For this reason the following comment of A. Quacquarelli is well made: "È da premettere che il termine antropologia qui viene usato non nel significato onnicomprensivo dei giorni nostri, ma in un senso molto preciso del martire come *homo Christi*. Si tratta di un aspetto da mettere bene in luce per non cadere nelle astrazioni che certi studiosi ad ogni passo credono di trovare nelle opere del Nisseno. Non bisogna lasciarsi ingannare dalla coincidenza di termini comuni al platonismo, allo stoicismo e al cristianesimo" in A. QUACQUARELLI, *L'antropologia del martire nel panegirico del Nisseno a san Teodoro di Amasea*, in *Arché e Telos. L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa. Analisi storico-religiosa*. Atti del colloquio, Milan, 17–19 maggio 1979, Milan 1981, p. 217.

²⁸⁶ Ps 103.8.

In fact [he says] *be merciful*,²⁸⁷ and *blessed are the merciful*²⁸⁸ and many similar precepts. Thus if, conforming ourselves (ὁμοιώσας) with diligence and attention to the divine will, we become good and merciful and pious, or meek and humble of heart, as is attested that many saints have obtained such privileges, is it for this that we are one with God, or we are united to him thanks to one of these virtues? It is not thus. In fact, that which is not one in all, cannot be one with he who is diverse by nature. Therefore, a man becomes one with another man, when, by free choice (οὐὰ προαιρέσεως) as the Lord says, they reach the perfection of unity,²⁸⁹ since to physical conjunction (τῆς φυσικῆς συναφείας) is added the unity by free choice (τὴν κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἐνότητα). And the Father and Son are one, since the communion by nature and by free choice concur in unity. But if [the Son], conjoined only by will, were nevertheless divided according to nature, how could he testify by himself of the union with the Father, if divided in that which counts most? Thus, hearing *I and the Father are One*,²⁹⁰ we learn from this expression both that the Lord [has origin] from a Cause (ἐξ αἰτίου), and that the Father and the Son are identical according to nature. And we do not reduce to one hypostasis the conception that we have, even if, keeping distinct the properties of the hypostases we do not divide in the Persons (τοῖς προσώποις) the unity of essence.²⁹¹

It is obvious that physical conjunction (τῆς φυσικῆς συναφείας), that is the unity of human nature, does not exactly coincide with the unity of the divine nature. In fact the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are identified each one with the whole of the nature, while men only participate of the same nature. Returning to the terminology of the

²⁸⁷ Lk 6.36.

²⁸⁸ Mt 5.7.

²⁸⁹ Cfr. Jn 17.23.

²⁹⁰ Jn 10.30.

²⁹¹ οἷον Οἰκτίρων καὶ ἐλεήμων ὁ κύριος, παρὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγεται. ταῦτα βούλεται πάλιν ὁ κύριος καὶ ἡμᾶς γίνεσθαι τε καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι. Γίνεσθε γὰρ οἰκτίρμονες καὶ Μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα. ἄρ' οὖν, εἴ τις διὰ προσοχῆς καὶ ἐπιμελείας τῷ θεῷ βουλήματι ἑαυτὸν ὁμοιώσας ἀγαθὸς ἢ οἰκτίρων καὶ ἐλεήμων ἐγένετο ἢ πρᾶος καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καθὼς μεμαρτύρηται πολλοὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τοῖς προτερήμασι τούτοις γινόμενοι, παρὰ τοῦτο ἐν εἰσι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἢ διὰ γίγιος τούτων πρὸς αὐτὸν συναπτόμενοι; οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα. τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἐν πᾶσι ταῦτ' ἐν εἶναι πρὸς τὸν τῆ φύσει διηλλαγμένον οὐ δύναται. διὰ τοῦτο ἄνθρωπος πρὸς ἄνθρωπον ἐν γίνεται, ὅταν διὰ προαιρέσεως, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ κύριος, τελειωθῶσιν εἰς τὸ ἐν, τῆς φυσικῆς συναφείας τὴν κατὰ προαίρεσιν ἐνότητα προσλαβούσης. καὶ ὁ πατὴρ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ἐν εἰσι, τῆς κατὰ τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν προαίρεσιν κοινωνίας εἰς τὸ ἐν συνδραμούσης. εἰ δὲ τῷ θελήματι μόνῳ συνηρμοσμένος κατὰ τὴν φύσιν διήρητο, πῶς ἐμαρτύρει ἑαυτῷ τὴν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἐνότητα, τῷ κυριωτάτῳ διεσχισμένῳ; Ἀκούσαντες τοίνυν ὅτι Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἔσμεν, τό τε ἐξ αἰτίου τὸν κύριον καὶ τὸ κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἀπαράλλακτον τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκ τῆς φωνῆς ἐπαιδευθήμεν, οὐκ εἰς μίαν ὑπόστασιν τὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἔννοιαν συναλείφοντες, ἀλλὰ φυλάσσοντες μὲν διηρημένην τὴν τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἰδιότητα, οὐ συνδιαιροῦντες δὲ τοῖς προσώποις τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ἐνότητα (CEI, GNO I, 171, 4–172, 3).

first part of this chapter, for the Divinity the intensive and extensive aspects of nature coincide, while for man—a being in time—this is not so. The key concept is that created nature is specifically temporal, that is that it extends in time.

For this reason, the true identity of human nature is to be sought only in its eschatological realization,²⁹² possible only in the humanity of Christ:

The Lord is life,²⁹³ and through him, according to the words of the Apostle, the whole body is given access to the Father when he consigns the reign to our God and Father.²⁹⁴ And his Body, as often is said, is the entire human nature to which he has indissolubly united (κατεμίχθη) himself.²⁹⁵ For this same reason, the Lord is also called by Paul, Mediator (Μεσίτης) between God and men.²⁹⁶

In this way the true human nature is that of Christ, that is of his Body understood in a Pauline optic and perfected in unity, through which one has access to the Trinitarian intimacy. Christic mediation is thus the key to understand the unity of human nature.

He is the First Fruit that each man must imitate. In the *In Illud* Gregory comments 1 Cor 15.28, explaining the significance of the subjection of the Son to the Father as the subjection of all things to the Father in Christ. This subjection will be the total purification of evil, which will realize the unity of the body of Christ:

When then, by imitation of the First Fruit (κατὰ μίμησιν τῆς ἀπαρχῆς), we will all be freed of evil (ἔξω τοῦ κακοῦ), then the whole mass of nature (τὸ φύραμα τῆς φύσεως), united inseparably to the First Fruit and become one compact body (ἐν κατὰ τὸ συνεχές σῶμα), will accept in itself the dominion of the only good.²⁹⁷

²⁹² Perhaps it is this aspect precisely, which does not appear to receive sufficient attention by S. Coakley's research group, that is the reason for the imperfect agreement of the results of the analysis presented in this section and those of L. Ayres in *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa*.

²⁹³ Cfr. Jn 14.6.

²⁹⁴ Cfr. 1 Cor 15.28.

²⁹⁵ With this translation the true Nyssian thought is hopefully expressed: there is no confusion, as the use of the verb *to mix* would suggest, but indissoluble union, that is an irreversible process, as happens in physical mixing itself.

²⁹⁶ Ζωὴ δὲ ὁ κύριος, δι' οὗ γίνεται, κατὰ τὸν ἀποστολικὸν λόγον, παντὶ τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἢ προσαγωγῇ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Ὅταν παραδιδῶ τὴν βασιλείαν ἡμῶν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί. σῶμα δὲ αὐτοῦ, καθὼς εἴρηται πολλάκις, πᾶσα ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις ἢ κατεμίχθη. Δι' αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο τὸ νόημα καὶ Μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ὠνομάσθη παρὰ τοῦ Παύλου ὁ κύριος. (*In Illud*, GNO III/2, 21, 7–12).

²⁹⁷ ὅταν οὖν κατὰ μίμησιν τῆς ἀπαρχῆς ἔξω τοῦ κακοῦ πάντες γενώμεθα, τότε ὅλον τὸ φύραμα τῆς φύσεως τῇ ἀπαρχῇ συμμιχθὲν καὶ ἐν κατὰ τὸ συνεχές σῶμα γενόμενον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μόνου τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ δέξεται (*Ibidem*, 16, 13–16).

The key concept is imitation. In homily VII of *DeBeat*, commenting Mt 5.9, Gregory collocates μίμησις to divine filiation, which properly consists in imitating the love of God for men:

For this [the Lord] calls *son of God* the worker of peace, since he becomes imitator (μίμητής) of the true Son, who gives this to the life (ζωή) of men. Therefore, blessed are the workers of peace, since they will be called sons of God. And who are they? Those who imitate the love of God for men, that is those who show in their own lives (βίου) that which is proper to the divine activity (ἐνεργείας).²⁹⁸

One notes the necessity to imitate the divine activity in everyday life, in the βίος, something possible only for the supernatural life (ζωή) that God communicates to men. As will be seen in Chapter II, this is configured as imitation of Christ, Only Begotten of the Father who became man for us. Gregory can thus say to his reader that “it is the will of God that your life be a Psalm”,²⁹⁹ in the sense that, as the Psalms typologically announce the life of the Messiah, so the life of the Christian must imitate that of the Model to give to God, the Father, all glory. It is in Christ that man, a poor creature, can make himself similar to God, reaching imitation also in his activity. The connection that passes from nature to ‘energy’ can be followed in the opposite direction, to become participants in the divine nature (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως)³⁰⁰ in the imitation of the life and action of Christ.

In this way man is called by Christ, with Christ and in Christ³⁰¹ to act in communion with the three Persons of the Trinity, accomplishing in every moment the will of the Father, that the Spirit of Christ communicates to us. The perfect example of this is given to us in the Holy Family, where participation is lived in Trinitarian coordination: nothing is held in reserve for oneself, no one simply acts on his own behalf, but everything is placed at the service of the marvellous divine plan. Thus the Trinitarian coordination becomes in Christ a human ideal.

²⁹⁸ Διὰ τοῦτο υἱὸν Θεοῦ τὸν εἰρηνοποιὸν ὀνομάζει, ὅτι μίμητής γίνεται τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ υἱοῦ, ὁ ταῦτα τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζωῇ χαριζόμενος. Μακάριοι τοίνυν οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ Θεοῦ κληθήσονται. Τίνες οὗτοι; Οἱ μίμηταὶ τῆς θείας φιλανθρωπίας οἱ τὸ ἴδιον τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργείας ἐπὶ τοῦ ἰδίου δεικνύντες βίου. (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 159, 13–19).

²⁹⁹ τὸν γὰρ σὸν βίον ψαλμὸν εἶναι διακελεύεται (*InInsPs*, GNO V, 75, 17).

³⁰⁰ θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως (2 Pet 1.4).

³⁰¹ This is a Trinitarian formula: by Christ to the Father, with Christ, in the Spirit of Christ. J. Mouroux affirms: “notre foi est christologique; et parce qu’elle est christologique, elle est trinitaire” (J. MOUROUX, *Je crois en Toi*, Paris 1966, p. 37).

In fact the difference between the Trinity and man is manifested in the possibility of autonomy, that is in the possibility that human persons act each for their own in separated actions. In God on the other hand:

The name of activity is not divided in the multiplicity of Those who act, since the care for something is not particular and exclusive to someone.³⁰²

In the Trinity, all have at heart everything so to say: none acts just for one's own good since there is one Life, one movement and manifestation. For men it is not thus, but it can become so in Christ, through divinization in as much as restoration of the original image, which makes each man the body of Christ. In this way the path is opened to participation in the Trinitarian coordination, which in the ἀρχή, belongs in some way to human nature itself: in fact each man naturally tends to act for others, and when by disgrace or the chances of life, the one who inspired the acts of a person passes away, a great pain is felt: as a Father to whom a son dies, who asks why, or better for whom, he will now work. Or as the lover that loses the beloved, on awaking in the morning finds no reason to get up. Profoundly, for man, there are not *for whats*, but *for whos*.

In the same homily Gregory presents the differences between the man who acts in imitation of God and the man who acts deprived of peace. For peace consists in the loving disposition towards those who are similar. Whoever does not have it lives in hate, in anger and envy, thus in the persistent memory of received offences.³⁰³ For those that continue in relationships of reciprocal hate and suspicion, encounter is a source of displeasure and reciprocal relationships are nauseating. Mouths are mute, eyes are disdainful and ears are deaf to the other's voice: to each is foreign that which to the other is agreeable.³⁰⁴

³⁰² διὰ τοῦτο εἰς τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐνεργούντων τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἐνεργείας οὐ διασχίζεται, ὅτι οὐκ ἀποτεταγμένη ἐκάστου καὶ ἰδιάζουσα ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τι σπουδή. (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 48, 3–5).

³⁰³ Τί ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη πρῶτον νοήσωμεν. Τί ἄλλο ἢ ἀγαπητικὴ τις πρὸς τὸ ὁμόφυλον συνδιάθεσις; τί οὖν ἐστὶ τὸ ἐξ ἐναντίου τῇ ἀγάπῃ νοούμενον; μῖσος, ὀργή, θυμὸς, φθόνος, μνησικακία, ὑπόκρισις, ἢ κατὰ πόλεμον συμφορά. (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 154, 7–11).

³⁰⁴ Τοῦτο δὲ ὅσον ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸν οὐδὲν οἶμαι χρῆναι διεξιέναι τῷ λόγῳ. αὐτὸς σὺ κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἐπιελόγησαι οἷος ὁ βίος τῶν ἀλλήλων δι' ὑποψίας καὶ μίσους ἐχόντων, ὧν δυσάντητοι μὲν αἱ συντυχίαι, βδελυκτὰ δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἀλλήλων πάντα, ἀφθογγα δὲ τὰ στόματα, καὶ ἀπεστραμμένα τὰ βλέμματα καὶ ἀκοὴ πεφραγμένη τῇ τοῦ μισούντος τε καὶ μισουμένου φωνῇ. Πᾶν δὲ φίλον ἐκατέρῳ αὐτῶν ὃ μὴ τῷ ἐτέρῳ φίλον, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου πᾶν ἐχθρὸν καὶ πολέμιον ὃ τῷ δυσμενεῖ καταθύμιον. (*Ibidem*, 154, 18–26).

This representation is in complete contrast with the divine promise, according to which the condition that awaits man according to God's plan is something completely different:

Man overcomes his own nature, becoming from mortal, immortal, from fallen, incorruptible, from ethereal, eternal (ἀίδιος), in short, becoming from man, *god*. He who has received into himself the honour of becoming son of God, will certainly have in himself the dignity of the Father, and becomes inheritor of all the paternal goods.³⁰⁵

It is the man who is cinder and grass, the man full of vanity, who is rendered similar to God being assumed to the dignity of son,³⁰⁶ receiving likeness to that which God is by nature.³⁰⁷

The nature of man was thus created to be one. The vision of eschatological unity is found for example, in the *DeMort*, where humanity is contemplated in the unique twinkling of glory, which will shine in all as the sun, in such a way that each man gives to others happiness and they be filled with joy, in the mutual contemplation of each one's perfect beauty.³⁰⁸ Thus humanity recalls to the Nyssian the sea which must have profoundly moved him, as it returns so often to him as an image to express the profundity and unknowability of God (see p. 35):

Say the incredible marvel, that is how the people of the myriads of men, so tightly united as to recall the vision of the sea, was united in the union (κατὰ τὸ συνεχές)³⁰⁹ of a unique body.³¹⁰

The same theme is present in the *InCant*, when it describes the future unity of the disciples in one body and one Spirit, placing in relationship the *unique is my dove, my beloved* of Song 6.9 with *that they be one* of Jn 17.22, a key text for the present question.³¹¹

³⁰⁵ ἐκβαίνει τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φύσιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀθάνατος ἐκ θνητοῦ καὶ ἐξ ἐπικήρου ἀκήρατος καὶ ἐξ ἐφημέρου αἰδίου καὶ τὸ ὅλον θεὸς ἐξ ἀνθρώπου γινόμενος. Ὁ γὰρ Θεοῦ υἱὸς γενέσθαι ἀξιοθεὶς ἔξει πάντως ἐν ἑαυτῷ τοῦ πατρὸς τὸ ἀξίωμα, καὶ πάντων γίνεται τῶν πατρικῶν ἀγαθῶν κληρονόμος. (*Ibidem*, 151, 15–20).

³⁰⁶ οἰκειούται, εἰς υἱοῦ τάξιν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων προσλαμβανόμενος. (*Ibidem*, 51, 11–12).

³⁰⁷ Εἰ γὰρ ὅπερ αὐτός ἐστι κατὰ τὴν φύσιν, τούτου τὴν οἰκειότητα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις χαρίζεται· τί ἄλλο, ἢ οὐχὶ ὁμοτιμίαν τινὰ διὰ τῆς συγγενείας κατεπαγγέλλεται; (*Ibidem*, 151, 24–26).

³⁰⁸ Cf. *DeMort*, GNO IX, 66, 10–16.

³⁰⁹ The expression is exactly the same as that of the just cited passage of the *InIllud* (*InIllud*, GNO III/2, 16, 15; cf. p. 69; see also p. 24). It appears 11 times in total in the Nyssian work.

³¹⁰ εἴπατε τὸ ἀπιστούμενον θαῦμα, πῶς εἰς θαλάσσης ὕψιν καταπυκνωθέντες ὁ μυριάνθρωπος δῆμος ἐν ἡν κατὰ τὸ συνεχές (OrFuMel, GNO IX, 456, 5–7).

³¹¹ Cf. *InCant*, GNO VI, 466, 10–467, 2. See L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La unidad y la gloria*,

In the *DeBeat*, commenting *blessed are peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*,³¹² Gregory touches directly the theme of the relationship between human nature and divine nature. His conclusion is surprising:

Since then, it is believed that the divine nature (τὸ θεῖον) is simple (ἄπλοῦν), free of composition (ἄσύνθετον) and impossible to represent (ἀσχημάτιστον), when human nature (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον) is liberated from the double composition, and returns perfectly (ἀκριβῶς) to the good, having become simple and impossible to represent and truly one (ὡς ἀληθῶς ἓν γενόμενον), then that which appears will be the same as that which is hidden, and that which is hidden the same as that which appears, then truly is carried to accomplishment the beatitude and such men are truly called sons of God, proclaimed blessed according to the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, *to whom be glory for eternity. Amen* (Gal 1.5, Heb 13.21 and 2 Tm 4.18).³¹³

Surprisingly, human nature in the eschatological state is called *simple* (ἄπλοῦν) and *impossible to represent* (ἀσχημάτιστον), attributes clearly exclusive of the divine nature. The perfected human nature is however not defined as *free of composition* (ἄσύνθετον). Human nature will assume the characteristics of the Eternal and will be *like one* (ὡς ἀληθῶς ἓν γενόμενον), that is the body and soul will be in harmony without opposition as in fallen man. Probably the Nyssian does not add *ἄσύνθετον* since this, in a difference from the three divine Persons, reaches unity after decomposition, in the very unity of the Body of Christ. Men were created to live in unity and charity, but original sin decomposed this marvellous unity, obscuring the image from which it proceeded. In the *eschaton*, through the imitation of Christ and by his work of redemption, when the last man shall be born and shall have died, the unity will be reestablished in the final resurrection. All of humanity, henceforth the Body of Christ, will be full of the love of the Father and it will be seen that the only true love is that which proceeds from the immanence of

in J. CHAPA (Ed.), *Signum et testimonium. Estudios ofrecidos al Profesor Antonio García-Moreno en su 70 cumpleaños*, Pamplona 2003, pp. 179–198.

³¹² Mt 5.9.

³¹³ Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ἄπλοῦν τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἄσύνθετον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον εἶναι πεπίστευται, ὅταν καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον διὰ τῆς τοιαύτης εἰρηνοποιίας ἕξω τῆς κατὰ τὴν διπλῆν συνθέσεως γένηται καὶ ἀκριβῶς εἰς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐπανέλθῃ, ἄπλοῦν τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἓν γενόμενον, ὡς ταῦτόν εἶναι τῷ κρυπτῷ τὸ φαινόμενον καὶ τῷ φαινομένῳ τὸ κεκρυμμένον, τότε ἀληθῶς κυροῦται ὁ μακαρισμὸς καὶ λέγονται κυρίως οἱ τοιοῦτοι υἱοὶ Θεοῦ, μακαρισθέντες κατὰ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν. (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 160, 21–161, 5).

the three eternal Persons. For this reason, commenting Jn 17.21–23, Gregory affirms:

That they be one as we are one. In fact, it is not possible that all become one as we are one, if not in the case that, freed (*χωρισθέντες*) from all that divides the one from another, they unite themselves to us who are one, *so that they be one as we are one.* But how does this happen? It is not possible that I alone be in them, but it is absolutely necessary that You also be there, since You and I are one. And thus they will be perfected in unity, those who have arrived at being perfect in us. For we are one. But [the Lord] explains such a gift (*χάριν*) more clearly with the words that follow, saying *You have loved them as You have loved Me.* In fact, if the Father loves the Son and we are all in the Son, in as much as we have become his body by the faith in him (*διὰ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως*), in consequence (*ἀκολούθως*) he who loves the Son himself loves the body of the Son, as the Son himself. And we are the body.³¹⁴

The passage shows well that economic love is not different from immanent love and that true love comes from *within* the Trinity.³¹⁵ Men are therefore called in Christ as sons in the Son, to participation in the very divine perichoresis to which they have access through the hypostatic union,³¹⁶ and the perfect unity of the body of Christ, which represents a certain eschatological perichoresis of every man.³¹⁷

One should not therefore underestimate the unity of human nature. The connection between the double dimension of creation and the double dimension of the φύσις finds its completion in the eschatological coincidence of the two aspects: intensiveness, which places in man

³¹⁴ "Ἰνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν· οὐ γάρ ἐστι δυνατὸν ἄλλως τοὺς πάντας ἐν γενέσθαι. Καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἓν, εἰ μὴ πάντων τῶν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων αὐτοὺς διαμεριζόντων χωρισθέντες ἐνωθεῖεν ἡμῖν οἵτινές ἐσμεν ἓν, Ἰνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἓν. τοῦτο δὲ πῶς γίνεται; ὅτι Ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς. οὐ γάρ ἐστι δυνατὸν ἐμὲ γενέσθαι μόνον ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ πάντως καὶ σέ, ἐπειδὴ Ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐσμεν. καὶ οὕτω γενήσονται τετελειωμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐν οἱ ἐν ἡμῖν τελειωθέντες· ἡμεῖς γὰρ τὸ ἓν. Τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην χάριν φανερώτερον διασημαίνει τῷ ἐφεξῆς λόγῳ οὕτως εἰπὼν ὅτι Ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας. εἰ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν υἱόν, ἐν δὲ τῷ υἱῷ πάντες γινόμεθα οἱ διὰ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως σῶμα αὐτοῦ γινόμενοι, ἀκολούθως ὁ τὸν υἱὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγαπῶν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸ σῶμα ὡς αὐτὸν τὸν υἱόν· ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸ σῶμα. (*In Illud*, GNO III/2, 22, 22–23, 14).

³¹⁵ This does not appear to be in complete agreement with the affirmations of V. Lossky in V. Lossky, *Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Aubier 1944, p. 210.

³¹⁶ To understand this passage it is essential to not undervalue the impact of the dynamic conception of the hypostatic union that characterizes Nyssian thought: cfr. G. MASPERO, *La cristologia di Gregorio di Nisa desde la perspectiva del II Concilio de Constantinopla*, ScrTh 36 (2004) 1–24.

³¹⁷ Participation in the Trinitarian perichoresis is already evident in Mary: cfr. J. RATZINGER, *Das Neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, Düsseldorf 1969, 283–284.

the image of God, and extensiveness, which presents the whole of human nature in its historical and numeric perfection as the perfection of the same Trinitarian image in the sons of God. Restoration and access to the Trinitarian perichoresis are possible in the human nature of Christ, through which unity and simplicity are diffused to all men whose nature is the same as Christ's, permitting an analogous human perichoresis.³¹⁸

Judgment on the social analogy cannot abstract from the eschatological dimension, since it reveals the authentic extent of the creation of man at the image of the Trinity. The thesis of L. Ayres does not seem to respond to the whole of the theological thought of Gregory, that is the thesis by which the analogy of three men, object of the *AdAbl*, would simply be one analogy among many, as when the Nyssian uses analogies of wine³¹⁹ or of arrows³²⁰ in a Trinitarian context.³²¹ For wine and arrows are not created in the image of the Trinity as man is, and are not characterized by a unity of nature and a multiplicity of hypostases.

The affirmations of S. Coakley and L. Ayres are surely correct when they affirm that the social analogy is not psychological but ontological. Yet it is for this that it assumes an even greater importance, transcending the function of a simple image or analogy, in so far as it is an expression of the relationship itself between the Trinity and man. The inestimable value of the *AdAbl*, for which it has been constantly cited throughout history (and not solely recently nor solely in Anglo-Saxon writings)³²² is founded precisely on the admirable synthetic discussion of the possibility to attribute the terms φύσις and ὑπόστασις to the Trinity and to man: a possibility that is at the foundation of the lofty vocation of man, called into the unity of the Body of Christ to participation, as sons in the Son, into that eternal dynamic of love that constitutes divine intimacy.

³¹⁸ The point does not appear fully appreciated by N. Harrison, when he affirms that the unity of men cannot follow the model of Trinitarian perichoresis due to creaturely finiteness. Instead, it is precisely the Christological mediation that opens to man, in eschatological anticipation, the possibility of Trinitarian intimacy through divinization, conceived in all of its ontological depth (cf. N. HARRISON, *Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity*, SVTQ 46 (2002) 353).

³¹⁹ Cf. *CEIII*, GNO II, 36–38.

³²⁰ Cf. *InCant*, GNO VI, 127–28.

³²¹ Cf. L. Ayres, *Not Three People...*, p. 454.

³²² Where it was certainly interpreted in the psychological line, as S. Coakley and L. Ayres correctly observe.

e. *The Apokatastasis*1. *The Interpretations*

After having considered the role of the universal human nature and having underlined that man was created in the image of the divine nature in order to reach the communion of the Trinity itself, it is necessary to ask whether this remarkable union will be brought about automatically by the mere fact of belonging to human nature.³²³ The question is not explicitly present in the *AdAbl*, but the impetus of the theological reading of the treatise suggests at least a brief treatment.

This problem, which presents a notable complexity, has made a comeback recently thanks to the work of M. Ludlow,³²⁴ who compared the concept of universal salvation in K. Rahner and Gregory of Nyssa. As far as the Nyssian is concerned, the conclusion of the work is that the great Cappadocian was certain of the salvation of every man, guaranteed by the simple fact of being a man.³²⁵ M. Ludlow is not an isolated voice: J. Gaïth is of the same opinion,³²⁶ as well as, above all, H. von Balthasar.³²⁷

This reading however, is not in perfect harmony with the importance that Gregory attributes to life—βίος—that is to the biography of persons, in as much as this offers to man the path to imitate the Lord Jesus and thus reach divinization. Μίμησις, the life of Christ, virtue and sacraments, the fundamental principle of ἀκολουθία,³²⁸ would all lose their importance. Above all, the perfect equilibrium that Gregory reaches between person and nature would be a mere illusion since, when all is said and done—that is in eternity—only nature would count.

³²³ For an introduction to the eschatology of the Fathers, see G. FLOROVSKY, *Eschatology in the Patristic Age: an Introduction*, StPatr 2 (1957) 235–250.

³²⁴ M. LUDLOW, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, Oxford 2000.

³²⁵ For example, see *ibidem*, p. 44.

³²⁶ Cfr. J. GAÏTH, *La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nyssa*, Paris 1953, pp. 187–195.

³²⁷ Cfr. H. VON BALTHASAR, *Présence et pensée*, Paris 1947, p. 40. It is nevertheless necessary to observe that one of the specialists of Nyssian thought, D.L. Balás, has defined this book of Balthasar as “Deep and original, though somewhat forced” (D. BALÁS, *Metousia Theou: man’s participation in God’s perfection according to St. Gregory*, Rome 1966, p. 16). In general this great theologian seems to many perhaps too speculative and original in his own thought to offer fully objective patristic analysis. For a criticism to the lack of *personalism* and unilateral identification of liberty and nature in the work of J. Gaïth see G. DAL TOSO, *La nozione di proairesis in Gregorio di Nissa*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 303–306.

³²⁸ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *L’être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nyssa*, Leiden 1970, pp. 18–50.

These perplexities are confirmed by the authoritative J. Daniélou, who affirms of Gregory without mincing words: "One cannot even say that he holds the thesis of universal salvation".³²⁹ Even more authoritative are the ancient witnesses, such as Germanus of Constantinople³³⁰ (8th Century), and in a special way, that of a truly authorized interpreter of the Nyssian: Maximus the Confessor (580–662).

He, in his work of *Quaestiones, interrogationes et responsiones*,³³¹ defends the orthodoxy of the Nyssian ἀποκατάστασις, and this after Origen himself was condemned in the Synod of Constantinople of 543. Maximus's interpretation, perfectly in line with some of the texts of Gregory already seen,³³² distinguishes between the knowledge of and participation in goods. All men at the end of time will have access to knowledge of the divine goods, since all will be awakened and God will be all in all; but he not found worthy of the kingdom of God will not have part in him, and it is properly in this that will consist his condemnation and damnation: he will know but not participate. Perhaps it is the insufficient understanding of the intimate connection between gnoseology and ontology that explains the conclusions of the work of M. Ludlow.

Surely this author is right when she affirms that Nyssian eschatology is an *inaugurated eschatology*, nevertheless the analysis of texts remains unconvincing. This is largely since it is only a synchronic analysis,³³³ while both J. Daniélou³³⁴ and A.A. Mosshammer³³⁵ sustain a total necessity to consider the development of Gregory's thought.

³²⁹ "On ne peut même pas dire qu'il tienne la thèse du salut universel" (J. DANIELOU, *L'être et le temps...*, p. 224). Note that this work is from 1970. In 1940, thirty years earlier, J. Daniélou had already treated extensively the theme, affirming, however, that Nyssian thought on universal salvation was fluctuating (cf. J. DANIELOU, *L'apocatastase chez Saint Grégoire de Nyssse*, RSR 30 (1940) 348). It is an indicative sign of the complexity of the problem, which gives even more authority to the affirmation of the mature theologian.

³³⁰ Cited by Photius in *Myriobiblon sive bibliotheca*, PG 103, 1105B–1108D.

³³¹ Cfr. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Quaestiones, interrogationes et responsiones* 13, PG 90, 795B. The critical edition of J.H. DECLERCK, *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et dubia*, Turnhout 1982, q. 19 (I,13), pp. 17–18 is fundamental for a clear understanding of the text under consideration.

³³² See, for example, the text on p. 44, and the following commentary.

³³³ Some authors, who reach the conclusions similar to those of M. Ludlow, limit themselves to only the first period of Nyssian production. For example: M. PELLEGRINO, *Il platonismo di S. Gregorio Nisseno nel dialogo "Intorno all'anima e alla resurrezione"*, RFNS 30 (1938) 437–474.

³³⁴ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nyssse*, StPatr 7 (1966) 159–169.

³³⁵ Cfr. A.A. MOSSHAMMER, *Historical time and the apokatastasis according to Gregory of Nyssa*, StPatr 27 (1991) 70. See also IDEM, *Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa*, VigChr 44 (1990) 136–167.

M. Ludlow presents two fundamental reasons to maintain that Gregory was certain of universal salvation:

- i) Evil is considered as non-being, thus limited and finite. For this reason its effects would be destined to disappear in eternity, consumed by the purifying fire.³³⁶
- ii) The Nyssian conception of universal nature would thus envision the reason of salvation in the simple belonging to the human race.³³⁷

The adopted reasons are valid, but their interpretation does not appear satisfactory, since it is insufficient to explain the different attitudes reserved by tradition for Gregory and Origen. The former explicitly attacks the Alexandrian for the preexistence of souls,³³⁸ and situates the proper conception of ἀποκατάστασις in a notably different context.³³⁹

As for the assertions of M. Ludlow it would appear that:

- i) The author is right to recognize the intimate connection between ἀποκατάστασις and the finitude of evil. But this does not necessarily imply the salvation of every man. In fact divinization is conceived of by Gregory as a dynamic procession of participation in intimate divine life that is without end.³⁴⁰ Evil is opposition to this movement. He who remains fixed in evil in life enters into eternity statically. He does not participate in the divine goods, but only knows how they are and thus suffers. The fire itself is not always understood as purifying and medicinal: he often refers to it as medicinal in as much as the fear it induces dislodges men from sin in this life. For example, in the *DeBeat*, the Nyssian speaks of Gehenna, of the unquenchable fires, of the worm that does not die and of the perpetual weeping as medicines that push to change one's life, by the certitude that they await the sinner.³⁴¹ Homily V is also terrifying, above all in the

³³⁶ Cfr. M. LUDLOW, *Universal Salvation . . .*, pp. 86–89.

³³⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 89–95.

³³⁸ Cfr., for example, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, PG 46 113BC.

³³⁹ There are, nevertheless, some authors that maintain that Gregory accepted without reservation the Origenistic conception, such as S. LILLA, *L'anima e la Resurrezione. Gregorio di Nissa*, Rome 1981, p. 31. For the diametrically opposed position see: M. AZKOUΛ, *St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers*, Lewiston 1995, pp. 141–148.

³⁴⁰ Cfr. C. VON SCHÖNBORN, *Über die richtige Fassung des dogmatischen Begriffs der Vergöttlichung des Menschen* FZPhTh 34 (1987) 3–47.

³⁴¹ γέννης φόβον καὶ πῦρ μὴ σβεννόμενον καὶ ἀτελεύτητον σκώληκα καὶ βρυγμὸν ὀδόντων καὶ κλαυθμὸν ἀδιάλειπτον (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 100, 26–28). together with 100, 1–101, 9, *passim*.

finale when Gregory, after having spoken of the rich man who does not find mercy at the moment of his particular judgment, since he was not merciful to the poor, affirms that the rich in the final judgment, when the King of creation will be revealed to human nature, will have before him on one part the ineffable reign, and on the other terrible punishments. All that was hidden will be revealed, and the shortcomings of mercy will be openly known. He who did not show mercy will not receive it, he who passed by the afflicted will be passed by as he *perishes* (Περιεῖδες θλιβόμενον, περιοφθήση ἀπολλύμενος). No one can illuminate the shadows, nor extinguish the flame, nor placate the worm that has no end.³⁴² Gregory constantly highlights liberty and the connection between this life and the next.³⁴³ Even the famous passage of *De Vita Mo*,³⁴⁴ which is probably the last occurrence of ἀποκατάστασις in a chronological order, is preceded by a reaffirmation of the connection between punishment and human liberty.

- ii) As for the role of human nature, the cited work of J. Zachhuber has provided privileged clarifications to the question. His analysis shows that the notion of universal human nature is not at the conceptual base of Nyssian soteriology. Only in a limited number of partially significative texts could it serve as a support for a doctrine of universal salvation. Zachhuber observes that Gregory uses the concept of universal nature in his theology of creation, but that it is totally absent in his soteriology. It starts to reappear in eschatology, and above all in the doctrine of *apokatastasis*. He affirms categorically that “The *apokatastasis* of our *physis* in its original form would thus refer exclusively to the restoration of man’s original state of communion with God with no universal implications whatever”.³⁴⁵

For this reason Gregory’s *apokatastasis* is different than that of Origen: it is a return only in the sense that it will reintegrate man in his original perfect state, while “The complete number of men is *constituted*, not

³⁴² Τίς καταργάσει τὸ σκότος; Τίς κατασβέσει τὴν φλόγα; Τίς ἀποστρέψει τὸν ἀτελεύτητον σκόληκα; (*Ibidem*, 136, 17–19). In general, pp. 135–136.

³⁴³ The Nyssian explicitly affirms in reference to Rm 6.17–23, that not even God, who freely called us to liberty from the slaves that we were, could place human nature in servitude (cfr. *In Eccl*, GNO V, 336, 16–18).

³⁴⁴ Cfr. *De Vita Mo*, II, 82.

³⁴⁵ J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature*..., p. 203.

restituted, in the final restoration”.³⁴⁶ Thus the interpretation of the Nyssian application of human nature to the economy must take account of his optimistic conception of human nature itself, in as much as likeness with God, obscured yet not cancelled by original sin. Gregory affirms that *in truth nothing that leads to sin is passion*,³⁴⁷ and that our nature, even if composed, is a harmonious combination of dissimilar elements. This harmony is only weakened (ἐκλυθείσης) and not destroyed by sin.³⁴⁸

Further, the presence and action of grace in creation are to be considered; thus: “for Gregory, human nature as the creation of God is responsible for the continuity of God’s presence in this world. It is the bond that ties together God and man”.³⁴⁹

2. Gregory

The analysis of J. Zachhuber is confirmed by the reading of 39 passages in which Gregory has recourse to the term ἀποκατάστασις or to the verb ἀποκαθίστημι:

1. The dependence of Gregory on the terminology of the LXX (about 40 times) and the New Testament is immediately evident. In particular one notes an echo of the return of the people to the promised land announced to their fathers by Jeremiah (cfr. Jer 16.15; 50.19) and of the restoration to the original state of youth with which the story of Job culminates (cfr. Job 8.1; 33.25). Naturally, the most immediate reference is to the only two New Testament occurrences, that is to Mt 17.11–12, where there is reference to the restoration that Elijah must accomplish, and to Acts 3.20–21, where it is the final restoration announced by the prophets that is referred to, that is to the definitive institution of the Kingdom.
2. Use of terms close to ἀποκατάστασις in the natural sciences, so dear to the Nyssian, is found next to Scriptural inspiration, as can be seen in the case of the orbits of planets (*ConFa*, GNO III/2, 35, 9 e *CE II*, 71, 15–16; GNO I, 247, 18–19), of the return of the sick to health (*DeOrDom*, 44, 20–21), or of the cyclical return of water to the earth (*ApHex*, PG 44 113A).

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 242. Italics mine.

³⁴⁷ οὐδὲν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν πάθος ἐστίν, ὃ μὴ εἰς ἀμαρτίαν φέρει (*CEIII*, GNO II, 144, 16–17).

³⁴⁸ Cfr. *CEIII*, GNO II, 144, 20–26.

³⁴⁹ J. ZACHHUBER, *Human Nature* . . . , p. 244.

3. In a properly theological context, Gregory returns to the expressions in question to indicate the return of the heretic or the sinner to full ecclesial communion.³⁵⁰
4. However by far the most significant use, from both the quantitative and qualitative perspectives, is that in relation to the restoration of man to the original state of image and likeness. This is in fact the completion of the *reditus* which awaits man at the end of time.³⁵¹ It is the return to the divine image operated by the resurrection (ἡ τῆς θείας εἰκόνοϋ εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἀποκατάστασιϋ).³⁵² This connection with the resurrection is the most evident element in the analysis of the passages in question.³⁵³ It is the return to paradise³⁵⁴ that Christ has obtained for man, and that was the ultimate reason for his terrestrial life.³⁵⁵ The acknowledgment that the human body is part of the final ἀποκατάστασιϋ and destined to paradise is fundamental.³⁵⁶
5. Only two passages could be interpreted in the sense of final salvation of the damned. The first is the famous passage of *De Vita Mo*, where Gregory affirms that after three days the shadows dispersed for the Egyptians (cfr. Ex 10.22): this could, possibly (τάχα), be interpreted as a reference to the final restoration which also awaits those that are condemned to *Gehenna*.³⁵⁷ The authenticity of the passage has been definitively proven by J. Daniélou.³⁵⁸ The second passage is situated in a sacramental context: the Nyssian affirms strongly that it is not possible for man to resurrect except through Baptismal regeneration.³⁵⁹ He immediately specifies that this does not refer to the *natural and necessary* resurrection of the human composite, which

³⁵⁰ Basil, in fact, seeks to have Eunomius return (ἀποκαταστήσαι) to the Church (cfr. *CE I*, GNO I, 23, 24–25). Similarly, in *EpCan*, it is affirmed that the scope of penance is so that the penitent can be re-established in Ecclesial communion (εἰς τὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀποκατάστασιν) and in the participation in the good (cfr. *EpCan*, PG 45, 232C).

³⁵¹ Cf. *DeMort*, GNO IX, 51, 16–18.

³⁵² *DeVirg*, GNO VIII/1, 302, 6.

³⁵³ Cf. *InEccl*, GNO V, 296, 16–18. The expression returns a little further on, in the context of the Nyssian explanation of the parable of the lost sheep (cfr. *ibidem*, 305, 10). See also *DeAn*, PG 46, 148A.

³⁵⁴ Cf. *DeHom*, PG 44, 188CD and *DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 161–162.

³⁵⁵ Cf. *CE III*, 1, 51, 8–9; GNO I, 21, 18–19.

³⁵⁶ Cf. *DeOrDom*, 49, 4–8.

³⁵⁷ Cf. *DeVitaMo*, II, 82, 1–5; SC 1, p. 155.

³⁵⁸ Cf. J. DANÉLOU, *L'apocatastase chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, RSR 30 (1940) 328–347.

³⁵⁹ Cf. *OrCat*, GNO III/4, 91, 3–5.

awaits all men, but to the restoration of man to the blessed and divine state.³⁶⁰ Only those who have let themselves be guided by their Baptismal purification will have part in this, in as much as the similar tends to the similar.³⁶¹ He who lets the passions have the upper hand will need to be purified by fire to enter, and only after much time (μακροῖς ὕστερον αἰῶσι), into the blessed life.³⁶²

In synthesis it seems that only these two passages could lead to accept that Gregory sustained a universal salvation. Yet even the last step does not appear necessary from logical inference: for example, in a recent article, S. Taranto interprets these two texts as references to Purgatory.³⁶³ The name of the Nyssian has been tied by the theological tradition to the doctrine of intermediary eschatology.³⁶⁴ In the *De Vita Mo* Gregory is referring to γέννα, a term that already in the 2nd century had assumed the signification of a state of intermediary purification.³⁶⁵ Instead, to refer to hell, Gregory uses the terms ὄδης or χάσμα. As for the passage of the *OrCat*, S. Taranto does not refer the possibility to purification through fire to those who have not received Baptism, but only to those who, having received Baptism, have not assumed Baptismal purification as guide of their own existence. Otherwise, Gregory would in fact contradict his immediately preceding affirmation by which the resurrection to eternal life is impossible without the washing of Baptism.³⁶⁶ The interpretation of this passage as a negation of the possibility of eternal condemnation would be, at the least, problematic.

³⁶⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*, 91, 5–12.

³⁶¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 91, 15–17.

³⁶² Cfr. *ibidem*, 91, 19–92, 8.

³⁶³ S. TARANTO, *Tra filosofia e fede: una proposta per una ermeneutica dell'escatologia di Gregorio Niseno*, ASEs 17 (2002) 557–582.

³⁶⁴ Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Contra errores graecorum*, p. 2, c. 40. The citation is from *De Mortuis Oratio*, GNO IX, 54, 15–20.

³⁶⁵ Cfr. S. TARANTO, *cit.*, pp. 580–581 (in particular n. 103).

³⁶⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 573–574. One could object to S. Taranto that, at the end of the passage in question (*OrCat*, GNO III/4, 92, 7), Gregory writes that those who are ἀμύητοι, that is not initiated into this purification, can be saved only through fire. It is necessary, however, to remember that for Gregory one is initiated to the Baptismal mystery to live it, therefore he who does not act coherently with his Baptism while having received it has not truly completed his initiation, he has not carried to its completion. The interpretation of Taranto can thus be seen as in agreement with the Gregory's sacramental conception and has the merit of avoiding interior contradiction in the passage.

3. *Evolution*

Even if it seems difficult to doubt the real possibility of condemnation in eternal life;³⁶⁷ it is enough to consider the following passage:

Certainly, there is not reserved to all who resurrect from the sepulcher of the earth an identical condition. But it is said: they will go *as many as have done the good to a resurrection of life, and as many as have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation*.³⁶⁸ In a manner that, if the life of someone is oriented towards that terrible condemnation, even if providentially by the birth from above is counted among the brothers of the Lord, he may deny the name (of Christian); denying in the form of maliciousness the intimate relationship with the First Born. But *the Mediator between God and men*³⁶⁹ who in himself (δι' ἑαυτοῦ) unites human nature to God [the Father] (συνάπτων τῷ θεῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον), unites to himself only that which is worthy of connaturality with God (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν συμφυΐας). As he united in himself (<ἐν> ἑαυτῷ προσωκείωσε) to the power of the Divinity his own humanity, which was certainly part of the common nature, without being submitted to those passions of nature that provoke to sin (it is said that *he did not commit sin, and no lie was found on his lips*);³⁷⁰ in the same way, he will also guide each of them to union with the Divinity, if they do not carry along with them anything that is not worthy of the connaturality with God. But if someone is truly the Temple of God,³⁷¹ since he does not have in himself any image or shadow of iniquity, he will be admitted by (παρληφθήσεται πρὸς) the Mediator to participation in the Divinity (μετουσίαν τῆς θεότητος), he will be made pure to receive his pureness. For Wisdom will not enter into a soul that works evil,³⁷² as the Scripture says, nor does one who is pure see anything in his soul except God—but united to him by incorruptibility, he receives into himself the whole good Kingdom.³⁷³

³⁶⁷ The same authors who think that Gregory maintained the idea of a universal salvation must admit that the optimistic vision of the Nyssian is accompanied by an affirmation of the future condemnation. See, for example, J.R. SACHS, *Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology*, TS 54 (1993) 640.

³⁶⁸ Jn 5.29.

³⁶⁹ 1 Tim 2.5.

³⁷⁰ 1 Pet 2.22.

³⁷¹ Cfr. 1 Cor 3.16; 2 Cor 6.16.

³⁷² Cfr. Wis 1.4.

³⁷³ Οὐ μὴν ἴση κατάστασις ἐν τῷ μετὰ ταῦτα βίῳ πάντας τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ τῆς γῆς χώματος ἀναστάντας ἐκδέχεται, ἀλλὰ Πορεύσονται, φησίν, οἱ μὲν τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς, οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως. ὥστε εἴ τινας πρὸς τὴν φοβερὰν ἐκείνην κατάκρισιν ὁ βίος βλέπει, οὗτος, κὰν διὰ τῆς ἀνωθεν γεννήσεως τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς τοῦ κυρίου συναριθμούμενος τύχη, καταψεύδεται τοῦ ὀνόματος, ἐν τῇ μορφῇ τῆς κακίας τὴν πρὸς τὸν πρωτότοκον ἀγχιστεῖαν ἀρνούμενος. ὁ δὲ μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ὁ δι' ἑαυτοῦ συνάπτων τῷ θεῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἐκεῖνο συνάπτει μόνον, ὅπερ ἂν τῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν συμφυΐας ἄξιον ᾗ. ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἀνθρώπων τῇ δυνάμει τῆς θεότητος <ἐν> ἑαυτῷ προσωκείωσε, μέρος μὲν τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως ὄντα,

The eschatological conception of Gregory is thus Christocentric, since everything is through Christ: the one who distances himself from his model, and thus loses the image, he is unworthy of connaturality with God and cannot have part in the celestial kingdom. It is worth noting here the idea of J. Daniélou that Christian eschatology is not an ἔσχατον but an ἔσχατος.³⁷⁴

The elect will be images of the Image (τῆς εἰκόνης εἰκόνα),³⁷⁵ for this each of them will be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. Therefore, Gregory, commenting the fact that on the third day of creation, in Gn 1.11–12, the sprout precedes the seed, affirms that this signifies that the resurrection will be nothing other than a return to that initial state;³⁷⁶ but he specifies that:

Adam, the first man, was in fact the first ear of grain. But after humanity was fragmented into a multitude by the insurgence of malice, as the fruit develops at the interior of the ear, so we single men, stripped of that form of the ear and mixed with the earth, we are born anew in the resurrection according to the original beauty, having become, instead of that original ear, infinite myriads of harvests.³⁷⁷

Sin introduces multiplicity and multiplicity becomes a positive principle. The vision of Origen is extremely distant. It is possible that the Nyssian started from positions similar to those of the Alexandrian, but

οὐ μὴν τοῖς πάθεσιν ὑποπεπτωκότα τῆς φύσεως τοῖς εἰς ἀμαρτίαν ἐκκαλουμένοις (Ἀμαρτίαν γάρ, φησίν, οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ)· οὕτω καὶ τοὺς καθ' ἕκαστον προσάξει τῇ συναφείᾳ τῆς θεότητος, εἰ μηδὲν ἐπάγοντο τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον συμφυΐας ἀνάξιον. ἀλλ' εἰ τις ἀληθῶς εἶη θεοῦ ναὸς μηδὲν κακίας εἶδωλον καὶ ἀφίδρυμα ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιέχων, οὗτος ὑπὸ τοῦ μεσίτου πρὸς μετουσίαν τῆς θεότητος παραληφθήσεται, καθαρὸς γενόμενος πρὸς τὴν ὑποδοχὴν τῆς αὐτοῦ καθαρότητος. οὔτε γὰρ εἰς κακότεχνον ψυχὴν εἰσελεύσεται σοφία, καθὼς ὁ λόγος φησίν, οὔτε ὁ καθαρὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἑαυτῷ βλέπει, ᾧ διὰ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας προσκολληθεὶς ἐντὸς ἑαυτοῦ πᾶσαν τὴν ἀγαθὴν βασιλείαν ἐδέξατο. (*DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 204, 9–205, 14).

³⁷⁴ Cf. J. DANIELOU, *Christologie et eschatologie*, in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon III*, (A. GRILLMEIER—H. BACHT Eds.), Würzburg 1954, pp. 269–286. For a similar approach to Nyssian theology, see A. OJELL, *El «telos» escatológico de la vida cristiana. La vida en Cristo según San Gregorio de Nisa*, in C. IZQUIERDO et al. (eds), *Escatología y vida cristiana, XXII Simposio internacional de teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, Pamplona 2002, pp. 353–373.

³⁷⁵ *DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 196, 12.

³⁷⁶ Cf. *DeAn*, PG 46, 156D.

³⁷⁷ Ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος στάχυς ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἦν Ἀδάμ. Ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τῇ τῆς κακίας εἰσόδῳ εἰς πλῆθος ἡ φύσις κατεμερίσθη, καθὼς γίνεται ὁ καρπὸς ἐν τῷ στάχυϊ· οὕτως οἱ καθ' ἕκαστον γυμνωθέντες τοῦ κατὰ τὸν στάχυν ἐκεῖνον εἴδους, καὶ τῇ γῆ καταμιχθέντες, πάλιν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει κατὰ τὸ ἀρχέγονον κάλλος ἀναφυόμεθα, ἀντὶ ἐνὸς τοῦ πρώτου στάχου ἀνάπειροι μυριάδες τῶν ληίων γενόμενοι (*Ibidem*, 157B).

J. Daniélou shows numerous signs of the progressive abandonment of Origenism on Gregory's part.³⁷⁸ In his first phase of literary production before the death of Basil, the Nyssian deals with the theme of the resurrection highlighting the difference between the terrestrial body and resurrected body (*DeMort*). In the successive works, he will instead underline the identity and intimate connection of the body before and after the resurrection (*DeHom*, *DeAn*, *DeTrid*, *OrCat*), this under the influence of the *De Resurrectione* by Methodius of Olympus: "the principle preoccupation will be to affirm the identity of the resurrected body and the terrestrial body. Gregory develops the interesting theory of an information by the *eidos*, by the form of the body that the soul is, by its elements, is such a way that they remain united even in the intermediary state".³⁷⁹

Another theme that is present is that of the Platonic cavern.³⁸⁰ it appears in *DeMort*, *InInsPs* and *DeBeat*. In these works the myth is used to indicate the present life, which one must leave behind. But the perspective changes after 382. The writings of *InDiam*, *Ep 3*, *InSSteI* and *Antir* are successive to Gregory's journey to Jerusalem, and under the influence which the grotto in Bethlehem had on him the symbology is transformed, since now the cavern of life is illuminated by Christ.

In the *DeVirg*, the *DeMort* and the *DeBeat*, *InInsPs* and *DeOrDom*, human life is seen as an exile. Later, "Gregory will develop another anthropology according to which the presence of the spirit on earth—and thus its union to the body of man—is the result of a harmonious design: God did not want for any of the parts of the cosmos to be deprived of the presence of the spirit".³⁸¹ This is a key theme for the *DeInfant*.

Further, in the *InInsPs* there is an important change in the development of Nyssian thought, since the term ἀκολουθία appears,

³⁷⁸ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *La chronologie...*, pp. 159–161.

³⁷⁹ "Le souci principal sera d'affirmer l'identité du corps ressuscité et du corps terrestre. Grégoire développe la thèse intéressante d'une information par l'eidos, par la forme du corps qu'est l'âme, de ses éléments, en sorte qu'il leur reste uni, même dans l'état intermédiaire." (*Ibidem*, p. 160).

³⁸⁰ See the interesting article of W. Blum, for this aspect of Nyssian thought, in which is shown not only the Platonic influence, but also the Aristotelian one: W. BLUM, *Eine Verbindung der zwei Höhlengleichnisse der heidnischen Antike bei Gregor von Nyssa*, VigChr 28 (1974) 43–49.

³⁸¹ "Plus tard, Grégoire développera une autre anthropologie, selon laquelle la présence de l'esprit sur la terre—et donc son union au corps de l'homme—est le résultat d'un dessein harmonieux, Dieu ne voulant pas qu'aucune des parties du cosmos soit privée de la présence de l'esprit". (J. DANIELOU, *La chronologie...*, p. 161).

“the key to Gregory’s method”,³⁸² a key that distinguishes him from Basil.

To sum up, one could hypothesize an evolution for Gregory similar to that of Jerome, who abandoned Origenism precisely after a voyage to Jerusalem.

4. Terminology

Moreover it does not appear totally correct to presume that the Nyssian ἀποκατάστασις depends exclusively on Origen. The article of O. Siniscalco³⁸³ is a precious contribution to reconstruct the possible influences that Gregory underwent. Certainly the medical usage, in the context of Galenus, is an important one for Gregory. But it is above all interesting to see how the Gregorian senses are in close contact with the use of the verb in the LXX.³⁸⁴

Also important is the contribution of the Apologists. The verb appears once in the *Dialogus cum Tryphone* of Justin, three times in the *Oratio ad Graecos* of Tatian, and twice in Theophilus; the noun appearing once in the *Dialogus cum Tryphone*.

As for Tatian, the verb appears twice in the same passage of *Oratio ad Graecos* 18, 6 (Marcovich, PTS 43/44, p. 38): in the first case (18, 6, 3), it signifies restituting someone in exchange for another, while in the second case (18, 6, 8) it signifies to heal, as in the medical context. The passage is nevertheless quite interesting, since the complete expression is τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἀποκαθιστῶσιν, and the context is eschatological. The same type of context is found with the third occurrence of the verb in *Oratio ad Graecos* 6, 4, 5 (p. 16), where it is accompanied by πρὸς τὸ ἀρχαῖον. The underlying idea is that the resurrection will reestablish the corporeal substance in the state it was in before death. This use is similar to the Nyssian one: τὸ ἀρχαῖον is the most common expression accompanying ἀποκατάστασις in Gregory’s works.³⁸⁵

Theophilus, in book II of the *Ad Autolyicum*, comments the account of creation in Genesis. Having reached Chapter 17, about the creation of the animals on the sixth day, he says that when man will have returned

³⁸² “La clef de la méthode de Grégoire” (*Ibidem*).

³⁸³ O. Siniscalco, *Ἀποκατάστασις ε ἀποκαθίστημι nella tradizione della Grande Chiesa fino ad Ireneo*, StPatr 3/1 (1961) 380–396.

³⁸⁴ For example in *Es* 14, 26, to refer to the waters of the Red Sea that drown the Egyptians.

³⁸⁵ For example: *InEccl*, GNO V, 296, 3–18; *DeAn*, PG 46, 148A together with 156B; *DeHom*, PG 44, 188BD.

to the more fitting paths for his nature and have abandoned the paths of evil, then the animals will also be placed into the state of original docility (II, 17, 23; Marcovich, PTS 43/44, p. 64). The second passage, in book III ch. 9 of the *Ad Autolyicum*, is extremely interesting, since it refers to the liberation after the crossing through the desert and the stay in Egypt (III, 9, 31; Marcovich, PTS 43/44, p. 110). A. Méhat affirms that the term in this passage refers to a definitive installation rather than a restoration.³⁸⁶

The noun appears in the *Dialogus cum Tryphone* (134, 4, 2; Marcovich, PTS 47, p. 302). The context is soteriological: contrary to Noah who gave Canaan into slavery to his two other sons (Gn 9.25), Christ freed all, slave and free, ransoming them with his blood and the mystery of the Cross. The idea of a new condition is more important here than that of restoration. “it is the first time, to our knowledge, that the use of this term is found in the works of a Christian author with a significance that is new and special in respect to the previous uses”. It is a “genuinely Christian notion”.³⁸⁷

Ireneus offers more abundant material, and his influence on Gregory should be reevaluated. Limiting ourselves to the part of the *Adversus Haereses* found in Greek, in book III the verb refers to the restoration or restitution of the Law of Moses to the people by Esdra, after the corruption in the time of imprisonment (III, 24, 1; Harvey II, p. 114). In II, 49, 3 (Harvey I, p. 375), the verb has a medicinal-curative sense. In a number of passages the noun also appears, particularly in the description of the Gnostic beliefs. In this context the astronomical sense is found. It is from this Gnostic *humus* that the conception of the *apokatastasis* as a reestablishment in a perfect and original state comes forth, a meaning that will be taken up by Origen. Ireneus on the other hand does not undergo any influence in this direction, due to his polemical position towards the Gnostics.³⁸⁸

Other passages have a Christological context (frg. 15, 27–33; SC 153, pp. 220–222): reference is to the obedience of Christ in his Passion, which restores us to our friendship with God. Another key passage is when he comments the parable of the vine dressers (frg. 19, 9–16; SC 100, p. 912): the only salary for all the workers is Christ, who will come in his Parousia.

³⁸⁶ A. MÉHAT, “*Apocatastase*” *Origène, Clément d’Alexandrie, Act. 3, 21*, VigChr 10 (1956) 201.

³⁸⁷ O. SINISCALCO, *Ἀποκατάστασις* . . . , p. 388.

³⁸⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 391.

In a last passage, the reference is, as with Tatian, to the resurrection of the flesh (fig. 5, 1–14; SC 153, pp. 44–46). In synthesis, there is a properly Christian sense to both the verb and the substantiative, one that is forming slowly, and that influences Gregory.

5. *The Condemnation*

Once the amplitude of the question has been made known, it remains to explain how it is possible that a man might not be saved, if the whole human nature is destined to communion with the Trinity. The response can come from the following Nyssian text, from the commentary of Psalm 58 (59):

From these things we learn that there will be no destruction of men, so that the work of God be not rendered vain and reduced to nothing; in their place sin will be destroyed and reduced to that which is not. It says in fact: *The sin of their mouth and the discourse of their lips*—pride and execration and lies—*will not survive the anger of the end.*³⁸⁹ And when thenceforth these things will have disappeared, they will know, it says, that God is Lord of Jacob and of the confines of the earth.³⁹⁰ In fact, evil not remaining in any place, the Lord will be absolute sovereign of every confine, when sin, which now reigns on most, will be removed. Then it retakes the discourse on those who *return at evening*,³⁹¹ hungry like dogs and wandering around outside the city. I think with the repetition of the expression it reveals that men even after this life will be in the one and the other condition, that is in the same good and evil that they find themselves now. For he who now moves about around the city and does not live within it nor conserves the human character of his own life, but having voluntarily made himself a beast and become a dog, such a one, also then, will be thrown out from the city of above and punished with the hunger for goods. The vanquisher of adversaries, on the other hand, going *from beginning to beginning*—as the Psalmist says in another passage (Ps 83.7)—and passing from victory to victory, says: *but I will sing your power, in the morning I will exalt your grace [since you were my defence, my refuge (Ps 59.17), praise that is your due forever and ever, Amen].*³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Ps 59.13–14.

³⁹⁰ Ps 59.14.

³⁹¹ Ps 59.15, that repeats verse 7.

³⁹² δι' ὧν μαθήνομεν ὅτι τῶν μὲν ἀνθρώπων ἀφανισμὸς οὐκ ἔσται, ἵνα μὴ τὸ θεῖον ἔργον ἀχρειωθῆ τῷ ἀνυπάρκτῳ ἀφανιζόμενον. ἀλλ' ἀντ' αὐτῶν ἀπολείται ἡ ἁμαρτία καὶ εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν περιστήσεται. Ἁμαρτία γάρ, φησίν, στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ λόγος χειλέων αὐτῶν. καὶ ὑπερηφανία καὶ ἀρά καὶ ψεῦδος· Ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ τῆς συντελείας οὐκ ὑπάρξουσιν. ὧν μηκέτι ὄντων, Γνώσονται, φησίν, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς δεσπόζει τοῦ Ἰακώβ καὶ τῶν περὰ τῶν τῆς γῆς. μηδαμοῦ γὰρ ὑπολειφθείσης κακίας, πάντως ἔσται τῶν περὰ τῶν δεσπότης ὁ κύριος, τῆς νῦν βασιλευούσης τῶν πολλῶν ἁμαρτίας ἐκ ποδῶν γενομένης. εἶτα πάλιν

The passage is revealing since it is unequivocally speaking of the final victory of Christ and of the *Parousia*, and not of intermediary eschatology: the *destroy not* contained in the inscription itself is explained saying that God will not annihilate the sinner in the last day. The heavenly city is understood as authentic humanity and for this reason the refusal of the divine image is read as a dehumanization. The contrast drawn between the two *movements* successive to the final victory is noteworthy: those who have chosen to live as dogs will continue to turn *around* smitten by the hunger for goods, while he who will have known to conquer temptations will advance *linearly*, immersing himself ever more in the infinite ocean of divine intimacy. The expression *from beginning to beginning* corresponds in fact to the most propitious formulation of the Nyssian *ἐπέκτασις*, an *eternal* dynamism that will follow the final victory, when sin will have henceforth disappeared.³⁹³ The *cyclical* movement of the damned is therefore, referred to that condition that will follow the final victory, when evil will have been already eliminated.³⁹⁴

Man at the end of his mortal life will have exhausted his capacity to define his own will, he will leave time and the historical moment to enter into eternity. If he will have worked the good he will be in the good, that is in the *true movement* of linear penetration into the infinite mystery of God; if he will have worked evil, then he will remain in evil, and thus in the *false movement* of the circle without end, accompanied

τὸν αὐτὸν ἐπαναλαμβάνει λόγον περὶ τῶν ἐπιστροφόντων εἰς ἐσπέραν καὶ λιμωπτόντων ὡς κύων καὶ ἐν κύκλῳ περιερχομένων τὴν πόλιν, δηλῶν, οἶμαι, διὰ τῆς τοῦ λόγου ἐπαναλήψεως ὅτι καθ' ἑκάτερον οἱ ἄνθρωποι κατὰ τε τὸ πονηρὸν καὶ τὸ κρεῖττον, ἐν οἷς ἂν νῦν γένωνται, ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα γενήσονται. ὁ γὰρ νῦν δι' ἀσεβείας κύκλῳ περιπατῶν καὶ μὴ ἐμβιοτεύων τῇ πόλει μηδὲ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον ἐπὶ τοῦ ἰδίου βίου χαρακτηρὰ φυλάσσων, ἀλλὰ ἀποθηριούμενος διὰ τῆς προαιρέσεως καὶ κύων γενόμενος οὗτος καὶ τότε τῆς ἄνω πόλεως ἐκπεσὼν ἐν λιμῷ τῶν ἀγαθῶν κολασθήσεται. (*In InsPs*, GNO V, 174, 22–175, 25). The last phrase, included in parentheses, is omitted by five of the seven manuscripts cited by McDonough in the GNO.

³⁹³ Cf. *In Cant*, GNO VI, 247, 12–14. In reference to *ἐπέκτασις*, see J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nyse*, Paris 1944, pp. 291–307 and L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Progresso o immutabilità nella visione beatifica? Appunti dalla storia della teologia*, in M. HAUKE—M. PAGANO (Ed.), *Eternità e libertà*, Milan 1998, pp. 119–140.

³⁹⁴ For Gregory there is an intimate correspondence between eschatology and mysticism: like beatitude in as much as eternal movement of immersion into the depths of God corresponds to the Nyssian conception of mysticism of the shadows, so the eternal false movement, which constitutes the possibility of damnation, corresponds to the false movement of those who climb a mountain of sand, without being able to advance, since their feet continually slip, not being planted upon the rock who is Christ (cf. *De Vita Mo*, II, 244).

by the “hunger for goods”. The ontological connection between ‘energeia’, that is activity, and nature, once nature is realized in its temporal dimension, will manifest itself in all its strength: each one will be that which he has done, each will be as he has acted. For this reason, if a man has followed Christ, through the actions of Christ, through the imitation of his human activity, of his virtues and of his sentiments, that man will be able to participate in the divine life. But if man will have chosen to live as a beast, he will be in eternity that what he has chosen, since he cannot be man if he has rejected he who is the model of man, he who reveals man to man himself.³⁹⁵ The very context of the passage permits to speak of the eternity of the condemnation,³⁹⁶ by the spectacular destiny reserved to those who do not convert in respect to those who have access to the ἐπέκτασις.

The same spectacular contrast is present in other works of Gregory, such as the *InCant*, where the Nyssian opposes divinization to the lot reserved to those who turn to idols: from men they become stones,³⁹⁷ since only in Baptism does one have access to authentic humanity.

This conclusion is confirmed also by the terms that Gregory uses to describe the state of the damned, such as διαίωνίζουσα referred to the punishment by fire,³⁹⁸ a verb that, when used intransitively, can only signify the extension that through and beyond all time, reaches the eternal dimension, as well as ἄληκτον ὄδυρμὸν, that is lamentation *without end*.³⁹⁹ This last adjective is particularly revealing, since ἄληκτος is considered by Gregory as the equivalent of ἀίδιος and ἀτέλεστον, which can signify nothing other than the most absolute eternity.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ It is this point that is not sufficiently placed in the forefront by those who hold the thesis of universal salvation in Gregory. For example, C. Tsirpanlis, who, even noting the positive aspect of Nyssian eschatology which passes through the *imitatio Christi*, strongly criticizes the interpretation of J. Daniélou, accusing him of incoherence: he would have contradicted himself in saying that for the Nyssian all men are saved and at the same time affirming that eternal condemnation will exist. But he takes no notice of the affirmations of Gregory in *InInsPs*, nor of what Daniélou wrote in 1970 (Cfr. C. TSIRPANLIS, *The Concept of Universal Salvation in Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, StPatr 17 (1982) 1139–1140).

³⁹⁶ R.E. Heine affirms that the passage contradicts the ἀποκατάστασις as it is generally understood (cfr. R.E. HEINE, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, Oxford 1995, p. 62).

³⁹⁷ Cfr. *InCant*, GNO VI, 147, 11–14.

³⁹⁸ Cfr. *DeBen*, GNO IX, 100, 5.

³⁹⁹ Cfr. *AdEosCast*, GNO X/2, 328, 16. This could be a reference to the third book of Maccabees (3, 4).

⁴⁰⁰ Cfr. *DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 138, 17–22. See also *DeDeitEv*, GNO IX, 341, 3–4. For ἀίδιος, see P. ZEMP, *Die Grundlagen Heilsgeschichtlichen Denkens bei Gregor von Nyssa*, München 1970, pp. 13–21.

6. *The Misunderstanding*

The position of modern commentators that negate the possibility of condemnation can be induced from a misunderstanding: the identification of the disappearance of death with eternal beatitude. They identify *universal salvation* and *universal resurrection*. One cannot but be in agreement with M. Ludlow in affirming that death is destined to disappear. But one absolutely cannot sustain that every human being, at the end of time, will necessarily participate in the divine intimacy. This would do violence to Gregory's thought, who in no passage affirms something similar. For him, the final victory signifies simply the destruction of the power of sin and death, that is to say the *universal resurrection*.⁴⁰¹ But he who has chosen to be without God, that is to not be a man, will remain always in that condition. This is not an evil since a double negation constitutes an affirmation: the evil one who says no to God does nothing other than confess the goodness of God. Hell as such cannot be considered an evil.⁴⁰²

Thus that Nyssian ἀποκατάστασις, *perhaps* (τάχα)—to use the same expression as Gregory (cfr. *De Vita Moysis*, II, 82, 2; SC 1, p. 155)—does not lead to universal salvation; it seems more a consequence of the affirmation that man was created by God for himself, in his image, in the image of the Most Holy Trinity.⁴⁰³ Man was created to participate in the dynamic of intra-Trinitarian love, by means of coordination.

⁴⁰¹ A. Ojell writes well: “La salvación, en el pensamiento de Gregorio, es, a la vez, universal y personal” (A. OJELL, *El «telos» escatológico de la vida cristiana. La vida en Cristo según San Gregorio de Nisa*, in C. IZQUIERDO et al. (eds), *Escatología y vida cristiana*, XXII Simposio internacional de teología de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 2002, p. 372).

⁴⁰² This observation can also illuminate the intricate question of the salvation of the devil, which does not directly involve history, since the angels, although not eternal since they have a beginning, do not have a history as man does. The affirmations of Gregory in *De Trid*, dated between 386 and 394, are quite interesting in this regard: he explains that in the third day of Christ in the sepulcher, death itself is abolished (καταργείται), and with it those who are its ministers also disappear (συναφανίζονται) (GNO IX, 285, 21–23). The same can be found in *InSSal*, GNO IX, 311, 8–20 which is like the epilogue of the *De Trid* (cfr. H.R. DROBNER, *Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*, Leiden 1982, pp. 168–170 and 190–198). This seems to be quite a different doctrine than that found in *De An*, PG 46, 69C–72B, in an initial phase of Nyssian thought, another confirmation of the importance of diachronic study of the Gregorian work. On the other hand the *submission* of the demons is an evangelical given, which is essentially different than the *conversion* of the demons.

⁴⁰³ L.F. Mateo-Seco affirms: “Pienso que lo más personal de la apocatástasis nisena radica precisamente en esto: no en la cuestión de si al final todos los hombres se salvarán o no, sino en la perfección con que el hombre es devuelto—es restaurado—al proyecto original, a la primera gracia, a la primera creación, a la inmortalidad” (L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La vida de Cristo en la «Oratio catechetica magnā»*, in J.R. VILLAR (ed.), *Communio et sacramentum*, Pamplona 2003, p. 200).

J. Daniélou affirms: “The apocatastasis in Gregory refers essentially to the restoration of human nature in its original state, that is in its real, ‘natural’ state, that which God wanted for it and of which it was deprived in consequence of sin”.⁴⁰⁴ For this reason J. Daniélou maintains that ἀποκατάστασις is only a synonym of resurrection, resurrection understood as restoration of man in his original state.⁴⁰⁵

The isolated and autonomous individual of modernity does not belong, then, to the project of God: more radically he is not *man*. Instead we will only be truly and definitively men only in the ἔσχατον, that is in the Christic ἔσχατος. For this reason the ἀποκατάστασις has a sacramental dimension in time, which is an anticipation of eschatology, through which we are made men more and more each day.

This dimension is clearly present in the *OrCat*. A.A. Mosshammer is to be attributed the merit of having accentuated the importance of this mature work of Gregory for the question at hand. In the *OrCat*, the Nyssian explicates the sense of ἀποκατάστασις: he speaks of two kinds of ἀποκατάστασις, or, according to the words of A.A. Mosshammer, of “Two aspects of the ἀποκατάστασις accomplished through the work of Christ”,⁴⁰⁶ for after having spoken once again of ἡ εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἀποκατάστασις,⁴⁰⁷ in the sense already mentioned of restoration to the original image, Gregory explicates the sacramental sense.⁴⁰⁸ He clearly says that the resurrection will attain all men, but also that the state of the resurrection will be different according to how they will have lived. If they will have chosen to participate in the Sacraments, in Baptism and in the life of grace, then they will have access to the blessed life.⁴⁰⁹ There is thus an ἀποκατάστασις that “is granted through the sacraments to the individual Christian and which constitutes the process by which the universal ἀποκατάστασις is achieved”.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ “L’apocatastase se réfère essentiellement chez Grégoire à la restauration de la nature humaine dans son état originel, qui est son état réel, «naturel», celui que Dieu a voulu pour elle et dont elle a été privée en conséquence du péché” (J. DANIELOU, *L’être et le temps...*, p. 225).

⁴⁰⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 224.

⁴⁰⁶ A.A. MOSSHAMMER, *Historical time...*, p. 88.

⁴⁰⁷ Cfr. *OrCat*, GNO III/4, 67, 9–10.

⁴⁰⁸ The term appears again in *ibidem*, 91, 12.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 90–91 *passim*.

⁴¹⁰ A.A. MOSSHAMMER, *Historical time...*, p. 88. For the connection between the death of Christ, Baptism and the Eucharist in the *OrCat*, see L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La teología de la muerte en la ‘Oratio catechetica magna’ de San Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 1 (1969) 468–471.

In this way “the ἀποκατάστασις of the eighth day is no longer something which occurs as an isolated event in that indivisible moment at the boundary of time. It is rather the sum of all the individual ἀποκαταστάσεις that occur within time”.⁴¹¹

In synthesis, if one considers the whole of Gregory’s thought and analyzes it also diachronically, one can place another reading of Nyssian eschatology next to that of M. Ludlow, one of a distinct sign, that contemplates the possibility of eternal condemnation and perhaps reflects better the complexity of the texts. The proposed reading does not wish to suggest that Gregory negates the possibility that every man can be saved, but only that he does not exclude the possibility that someone could be damned. It would after all be improper to place the *deduction* of universal salvation before the *explicit affirmation* of the possibility of eternal damnation. This is all the more true when one considers that the tradition, which recognizes in the Nyssian thought a fundamental dogmatic contribution to the doctrine of purgatory, resolves any interpretive ambiguity.

Nyssian eschatology needs to be analyzed from the perspective of the theology of the image and of the collocation of human nature, in its essentially historical and social dimension, at the interior of the *exitus-reditus* schema, where the origin and term coincide with the Trinity.

The possibility of condemnation is here a consequence of the refusal on the part of man of his model, that is the refusal of Christ, with whom he is called to identify himself through sacramental and mystical μίμησις. Condemnation is thus understood as dehumanization and exclusion from participation in the divine intimacy, that is as the *hunger for goods*, which consists precisely in the exclusion from participation but not from the knowledge of the final victory of Christ and not from the submission of all things to him.

The misunderstandings in the reading of Nyssian eschatology appear then due to a modern hermeneutic remeasuring of an Origenistic leaning, and to a comprehension of the ontological profundity of Gregory’s gnoseology that is perhaps insufficient. It is necessary also to recall the equivocal identification of universal salvation and universal resurrection.

It appears that only starting from the *exitus-reditus* schema, which places man with his historical life and his liberty between original

⁴¹¹ A.A. MOSSHAMMER, *Historical time...*, p. 88.

creation at the image of the Trinity and the definitive return through Christ to the same Trinitarian intimacy, does it seem possible to resolve the apparent internal conflicts of the Nyssian thought while fully appreciating the *theological* profundity—in both the Greek and modern sense of the term.⁴¹² Just the true sense of human freedom is the core of the present issue: some authors have tried to reduce the hermenutical dilemma, stressing that liberty could be true only as liberty to choose God; in that way, only universal salvation would make man authentically free.⁴¹³ But that would mean to accept that human liberty in history is completely equivocal, against the clear assertions of the importance of man's life and against the Nyssian participation theology. Conversely the distinction of universal salvation and universal resurrection smoothly resolves the dilemma.

This seems the ultimate sense of the Theology of universal nature and of ἐνέργεια in Gregory. Thus Daniélou can affirm that “the resurrection is nothing other than the restoration of the primitive state, in the sense that it is the accomplishment of God's original design”.⁴¹⁴ This divine project includes the salvation of all men and of all of creation. Gregory manifests in his theology the ardent hope that this salvation be accomplished and that the universal nature have a fundamental role, since through it the resurrection is passed to all men,⁴¹⁵ opening to all the door of Heaven; but the liberty of each one comes into play, in everyday life, in the activity realized according to the model, that is according to the will of the Father in communion with the Spirit. Man is created in the image of the Trinity to return, through the history into which Christ enters and becomes man, to the Trinity itself.

⁴¹² For the relationship between the eschatological context and the proposition of S. Coakley's research group, see G. MASPERO, *Lo schema dell'exitus-reditus e l'apocatástasi in Gregorio di Nissa*, «Annales theologici» 18 (2004) 85–111.

⁴¹³ Cfr. M. LUDLOW, *Universal Salvation . . .*, p. 97.

⁴¹⁴ “La résurrection n'est rien d'autre que la restauration de l'état primitif, au sens où elle est l'accomplissement du dessein originel de Dieu” (J. DANIELOU, *L'être et le temps . . .*, p. 205).

⁴¹⁵ In this sense the affirmation of J. Zachhuber, that universal nature has no role at all in Nyssian eschatology, is clarified and attenuated.

CHAPTER TWO

APOPHATISM AND PERSON

I. INTRODUCTION

Apophatism is a particularly actual theme in the context of contemporary theology, in any confessional circle.

V. Lossky gave a strong impulse to the study of this theme with his interesting book on the mystical theology of the oriental Church,¹ in which he sets apophatism as the defining characteristic of orthodoxy in opposition to occidental intellectualism. It is a conception that privileges experience² and considers apophatism as a defence against the pride of human reason. Dogma would thus have only a negative role and its essential function would be that of antinomy.³

Nevertheless it is important to remember that there are different conceptions of apophatism itself.⁴ It could be interesting to keep the interpretation of Lossky present in the reading of the apophatic texts of Gregory of Nyssa.⁵

¹ V. LOSSKY, *Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Aubier 1944.

² The theme of knowledge as experience and communion is developed in the article: Y. SPITERIS, *La conoscenza "esperienziale" di Dio e la teologia nella prospettiva orientale*, Anton. 72 (1997) 365–426.

³ "L'apophatisme nous apprend à voir dans les dogmes de l'Église avant tout un sens négatif, une défense à notre pensée de suivre ses voies naturelles et de former des concepts qui remplaceraient les réalités spirituelles... C'est pourquoi les dogmes de l'Église se présentent souvent à la raison humaine sous la forme des antinomies d'autant plus insolubles que le mystère qu'ils expriment est plus sublime. Il ne s'agit pas de supprimer l'antinomie en adaptant le dogme à notre entendement, mais de changer notre esprit, pour que nous puissions parvenir à la contemplation de la réalité qui se révèle à nous, en nous élevant vers Dieu, en nous unissant à Lui dans une mesure plus ou moins grande" (V. LOSSKY, o.c., p. 41).

⁴ It is enough to think of the originality and diversity of recent articles on the subject, for example: M.P. BEZOS, *Apophaticism in the Theology of the Eastern Church: The Modern Critical Function of a Traditional Theory*, GOTR 41 (1996) 327–357 or M. ROSS, *Apophatic Prayer as a Theological Model: Seeking Coordinates in the Ineffable: Notes for a Quantum Theology*, JLT 7 (1993) 325–353.

⁵ In Chapter I (see p. 31), it was seen that Gregory speaks properly only of the incomprehensibility and ineffability of the divine nature. Thus, in order to speak of *apophatism* in Gregorian thought a theological precision and clarification is required.

A first fundamental interpretation can be individuated that places the apophatic realm between the immanence and the economy of the Trinity. This could be called *absolute apophatism*. It is an attitude that tends to refute the value of the analogy, and for this reason to undervalue the role of creation, of history and even of the Humanity of Christ. One could speak of the divine Persons only in their economic manifestations. Such a reading is quite agreeable to modernity, which tends to reduce the mystery to its gnoseological dimension.

Nyssian apophatism is opposed to this conception of apophatism, at least in the interpretation that is to be proposed here: the apophatic realm is that between nature and Person. The divine nature is unknowable, but the divine Persons are knowable, and we must speak of them. We can and must speak of them since our existence is radically *for love*. The reason of our existence is the love of the three divine Persons. But love and knowledge are inseparable. Thus one can distinguish, in Nyssian apophatism, a *negative aspect*, which negates the possibility of knowing the divine nature, and a *positive aspect*, which affirms that the path to God is through the Persons, and in particular through the Persons and the mysteries of the life of Christ.

In fact the theme of unknowability of the divine nature is one of the most treasured of the Nyssian, who with the other Cappadocians can be defined as the initiator of the study of apophatism on the theological level. For this reason the number of texts that could be cited to situate the *AdAbl* in the context of Gregory's work is immense. Thus we will limit ourselves to the essential, presenting, without any pretext of completeness, those texts that are fundamental in sketching a synthesis in order to manifest the significance of the *AdAbl* for this theme.

Certain authors have propitiously chosen as the key idea for interpretation of Nyssian apophatism, his conception of divine infinity.⁶ Others have chosen to underline the connection of apophatism with anthropology.⁷

Nyssian apophatism is to be presented here placing the accent on the importance that Gregory attributes to its full Trinitarian dimension, and thus to its Christological dimension. This last perspective should represent, at least in the intention, the original contribution of this study.

⁶ For example: R.S. BRIGHTMAN, *Apophatic Theology and Divine Infinity in St. Gregory of Nyssa*, *GOTR* 18 (1973) 97–114.

⁷ See: J. SAWARD, *Towards an Apophatic Anthropology*, *IThQ* 41 (1974) 222–234.

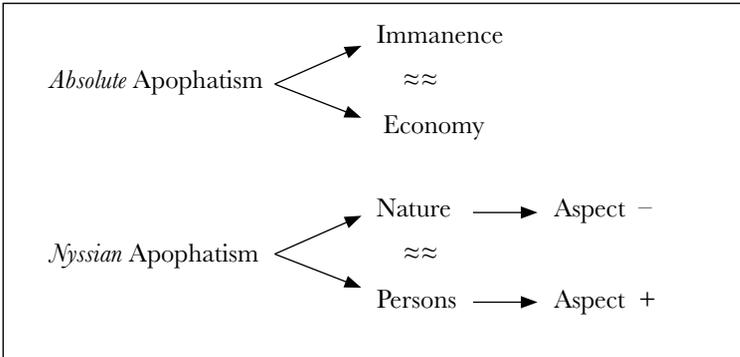


Fig. 1. Opposed interpretations of *apophatism*: ≈≈ indicates radical separation

Gregory does not limit himself to only considering the incomprehensibility of the divine nature, which, at first glance, constitutes the purely negative aspect of apophatism. But in the *AdAbl* itself and in many other works, Nyssian apophatism leads to the Person of Christ as the path to accessing the Trinitarian intimacy. That is to say that apophatism has an eminently positive dimension. In synthesis, apophatism will not be considered only from the perspective of the common divine Nature, but also from that of the three Persons, since it is by means of Christ that, in the Holy Spirit, we have access to the Father.

The perspective that only accentuates the negative aspect of apophatism runs the risk of being swept up by polemics, reducing the discussion to a dialectical perspective: apophatism would be a defence against the philosophical excesses of the West. However, the apophatic dimension does not enter into Christian Tradition following a dialectical confrontation or theological disputes. Rather, as Garrigues notes,⁸ it is the “God whom no one has ever seen, except the Only Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, who he has revealed him (ἐξηγήσατο)” in Jn 1.18 which places the question in a Christological and Trinitarian manner. Gregory, in the usual manner, is not caught up by polemics but instead remains faithful to this Biblical perspective.

It was in fact the Eunomian crisis, characterized by the neo-Arian refutation of the scandal of the manifestation of the Christian God,

⁸ Cf. J. GARRIGUES, *Théologie et Monarchie. L'entrée dans le mystère du “sein du Père” (Jn 1, 18) comme ligne directrice de la théologie apophatique dans la tradition orientale*, Ist. 15 (1970) 439.

that obliged the three great Cappadocians to develop the apophatic dimension. In contemporary terminology, one could say that Eunomius did not manage to accept or conceive of a perfect and all powerful God that gives himself totally. He could not conceive of God as Father, as pure source of being and love. He saw no other solution to explain Christian salvation than the subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The problem is once again the relationship between immanence and economy, aspects that the neo-Arian fractures on the theological level, abandoning the possibility to know God in consequence of his gnoseological theory with its Neoplatonic mark.

Eunomius identified in God, that is in the Father, essence and subsistence. The Cappadocians on the other hand, faithful to the Scriptural formulation, confessed the irreducibility of paternity to the divine essence, refusing thus to separate the Father as personal principle of the Trinity from the same as principle of the economy. It was Nazianzen who penetrated profoundly into the mystery of the Father, whose greatness is not opposed to the possibility of self gift, as if it was a human greatness lost when it is given. He concentrated on the theological aspect, showing how the Father is the Principle without Principle, the ἀρχὴ—ἄναρχος, who communicates totally his divinity to the Son and the Spirit.

However once the theological aspect was articulated it was necessary to return to the articulation of immanence and economy, which cannot easily be separated.⁹ It would be the task of the Nyssian—the youngest of the three Cappadocians—to return, after the purification of apophatism in its principally negative aspect, to a synthetic vision of economy and immanence. He can develop the mystery of the Son and the Spirit, mediators in the missions, but equal to the Father from all eternity, safeguarding in this way the realism of our divinization. The bishop of Nyssa was able to reach such a high synthesis and such a great equilibrium, since, through the course of his life, he had to confront not only the Eunomian heresy but also the Apollinarist crisis. It is thus precisely thanks to his penetration of the mystery of Trinitarian immanence as

⁹ τὰ δὲ ταπεινότερα τῷ συνθέτῳ, καὶ τῷ διὰ σὲ κενωθέντι καὶ σαρκωθέντι, οὐδὲν δὲ χεῖρον εἰπεῖν, καὶ ἀνθρωπισθέντι, εἶτα καὶ ὑψωθέντι, ἵνα σὺ τὸ τῶν δογμάτων σου σαρκικὸν καὶ χαμαιπετὲς καταλύσας μάθῃς ὑψηλότερος εἶναι, καὶ συνανιέναι θεότητι, καὶ μὴ τοῖς ὁρωμένοις ἐναπομένοις, ἀλλὰ συνεπαίρῃ τοῖς νοουμένοις, καὶ γινώσκῃς, τίς μὲν φύσεως λόγος, τίς δὲ λόγος οἰκονομίας. (GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oratio 29 "De Filio"* 18, 19–25; SC 250, p. 216).

of the mystery of the Incarnate Son of God, that apophatism reaches its full stature, also showing the positive and affirmative component, that is the Christological and soteriological one.

The chapter is thus organized in the following way:

- *Section I*: Nyssian philosophy of language, with the relationship of being-name and the affirmation of the priority of the first over the second.
- *Section II*: The apophatic texts of the *AdAbl*, which manifest the double dimension of Nyssian apophatism. A first negative dimension consists in the negation of the possibility to understand the nature. The positive dimension refers instead to the mode of being of the Persons.
- *Section III*: Concentration on the negative aspect of apophatism and explicitation of the meaning of the impossibility to understand the divine nature, mainly through the analysis of *CE II*.
- *Section IV*: Examination of the positive aspect of apophatism as an affirmation of personal value.
- *Section V*: Relationship of the positive aspect of apophatism with the theology of names.
- *Conclusion*: A brief synthesis of the results, to help in the understanding of the development of the general argument.

II. NAMES

a. *Eunomius*

One must first of all reflect on the relationship between language and being. The Cappadocian fathers were driven to reflection on the value of the name by the polemics with Eunomius himself. He maintained that the divine essence was understandable by human reason. Inspired by Platonic influences, he maintained that the names were revealed by God, and that the name ἀγέννητος—*unbegotten*—is the name that adequately indicates the substance itself of the Father, the unique Creator.¹⁰ This was a name that, in his opinion, applies only on the conceptual level¹¹

¹⁰ The substance of the Father would thus coincide with being unbegotten, see *CE II*, GNO I, 233, 11–17.

¹¹ For Basil and Gregory, ἐπίνοια indicates either the rational human faculty, that is the dynamic process of reflection and analysis, or the content itself of thought,

(κατ' ἐπίνοιαν). He would evaluate the name γεννητός—*generated*—which indicates the substance of the Son: the substance of the Father and of the Son could not, then, coincide, since the names that indicate them are distinct. The Spirit finally, would have no creative power, but would only be the energy with which the Son produces the world. Thus, in extreme synthesis, Eunomius negated the consubstantiality of the three Persons,¹² basing himself on a Neoplatonic and logicalistic theory of their names.

Eunomius professed an identity between the ontological and gnoseological planes.¹³ Gregory reacts distinguishing:

It is not, in fact, the same thing to be said as to be.¹⁴

In fact, it is not to exist in unbegotten mode that derives from being called 'unbegotten', but it is the being called that comes from being.¹⁵

The ontological level has priority. The names have not always existed, since God alone is eternal. They belong to the world of creation, to the διάστημα. The names do not precede man:

The use of words and names was discovered after the creation of men, who were ordained by God with the logical capacity.¹⁶

b. *The Names and God*

At the same time, names are not only *flatus vocis*.¹⁷ In a Neoplatonic manner, Eunomius united the absolutization of the divine names—with the disdain for generic names and for created reality.

On the contrary, according to Gregory, the names are a human invention, which is nevertheless possible through a divine gift: rational nature. This is capable of entering into an analogical relationship

that is the concept. See E.C.E. OWEN, ἐπινοέω, ἐπίνοια and allied words, JTS 35 (1934) 368–380.

¹² Eunomius speaks of three distinct οὐσίαι, each one being simple, see CE I, GNO I, 91, 20.

¹³ For the polemics on the question of the name between Eunomius and Gregory: M.S. TROIANO, *I Cappadoci e la questione dell'origine dei nomi nella polemica contro Eunomio*, VetChr 17 (1980) 313–346.

¹⁴ οὐ γὰρ ταυτόν ἐστι τῶ εἶναι τὸ λέγεσθαι. (CE II, GNO I, 271, 30).

¹⁵ οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ ῥηθῆναι ἀγέννητον καὶ τὸ ὑπάρχειν ἀγεννήτως ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ τὸ ῥηθῆναι προσγίνεται. (*Ibidem*, 272, 8–10).

¹⁶ ἢ δὲ τῶν ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων χρήσις μετὰ τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατασκευὴν ἐγνωρίσθη τῶν τῆ λογικῆ δυνάμει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τιμηθέντων. (*Ibidem*, 272, 19–21).

¹⁷ Cfr. *ibidem*, 238, 27–30.

with reality, and permits man to express his own immanence and to communicate:

The Creator of rational nature gave us discursive nature proportioned (ἀναλογούντα) to the measure of nature, so that, with it, we would be capable to express the movements (κινήματα) of the soul.¹⁸

God has no need of names. When he creates he says *let there be light*,¹⁹ not *let there be the name of light*.²⁰ Instead, “language is an exclusively human requirement and absolutely does not regard God”.²¹ But, God descends to our level and speaks to man because of love, since kenotically he places himself at the level of human nature and assumes, in his theophanies, human aspect, words and sentiments. Here all of the delicate piety and poetry of Gregory flows forth, when he affirms that God is like:

a compassionate mother who, accompanying with a murmuring the unintelligible cries of her children (συνδιαψελλιζομένη), dispenses to human nature that which she can understand.²²

The image is extremely sweet and recalls those mothers who, with their infant close to the breast, play and mimic the *bah, bah* of the little creature who in its blessed ignorance seeks the face of its mother. Thus the names, the reason and all that is human assumes an incommensurable value, since they are willed by God, not only in themselves, in creation, but also for themselves, in the economy of salvation.

Eunomius was a dialectician and knew how to argue with all the strength and malice of the logical arts. But at the same time, his attitude was based in a profound distrust in created reality. But Gregory responds citing the existence of different languages, which would contradict the divine origin of names, and inserts everything in a profound theologico-creational context:

It is the thing (πρᾶγμα), not the name, that is brought forth by divine will in such a way that the thing that is existing is the work of the power of

¹⁸ ὁ τῆς λογικῆς φύσεως δημιουργὸς ἀναλογούντα τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς φύσεως τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν δεδῶρηται, ὡς ἂν ἔχοιμεν ἐξαγγέλλειν δι’ αὐτοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ κινήματα. (*Ibidem*, 294, 18–20).

¹⁹ Gn 1, 3.

²⁰ Cf. *CE II*, GNO I, 305, 5–6.

²¹ M.S. TROIANO, *I Cappadoci e la questione...*, pp. 322–323.

²² δὶόν τις μήτηρ εὐσπλαγχνος τοῖς ἀσήμοις τῶν νηπίων κνουζήμασι συνδιαψελλιζομένη τοῦτο νέμει τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει ὃ λαβεῖν δυνατῶς ἔχει (*CE II*, GNO I, 348, 24–27).

he who created; but words make us know existing things, and these, by which reason (λόγος) makes known each thing in view of an exact and unconfused indication, are the work and inventions (εὐρήματα) of the rational faculty. But both this faculty and rational nature are the work of God. And since rational nature is present in all men, necessarily the difference of names is observed in correspondence with the differences of peoples.²³

God creates things and man imposes names (Gn 2.20; 3.20). But the names are not arbitrary. In fact, Gregory speaks of *inventions* (εὐρήματα). For the Nyssian it is God who gave to man the faculty and the rational nature, so that he may know the reality that He created.

Thus, in the ancient polemics of the qualification of names as either θέσις or φύσις, that is as the arbitrary imposition by men or as something given by nature itself or furnished by a supernatural source, Eunomius opts for the second possibility.²⁴ But his choice is collated to a descending and subordinationist perspective, according to which God attributes names to things in a mode that is not in conformity to their nature. On the contrary Gregory affirms that the origin of the names is human, and for this reason they are θέσει. But, as for the relationship between the name and the signified object, he affirms strongly that it is according to the nature of things, that is φύσει.²⁵ Gregory's philosophy of language is radically open.²⁶ The Nyssian underscores

²³ φέται δὲ κατὰ θεῖον βούλημα πρᾶγμα, οὐκ ὄνομα· ὥστε τὸ μὲν καθ' ὑπόστασιν ὄν πρᾶγμα τῆς τοῦ πεποιηκότος δυνάμεως ἔργον εἶναι, τὰς δὲ γνωριστικὰς τῶν ὄντων φωνάς, δι' ὧν τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον πρὸς ἀκριβῆ τε καὶ ἀσύγχυτον διδασκαλίαν ἐπισημειοῦται ὁ λόγος, ταῦτα τῆς λογικῆς δυνάμεως ἔργα τε καὶ εὐρήματα, αὐτὴν δὲ ταύτην τὴν λογικὴν δυνάμιν τε καὶ φύσιν ἔργον θεοῦ. καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὸ λογικὸν ἐν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, ἀναγκαίως κατὰ τὰς τῶν ἔθνων διαφορὰς καὶ αἱ τῶν ὀνομάτων διαφοραὶ θεωροῦνται. (*Ibidem*, GNO I, 298, 10–19).

²⁴ He admits however that proper names are given by men. Cfr. CEIII, GNO II, 178, 13–15. Eunomius's ambiguous and far from clear position is traced by Daniélou to the Neoplatonic Iamblichus. Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Eunome l'arien et l'exégèse néo-platonicienne du Cratyle*, REG 69 (1956) 412–432. Daniélou defines Gregory's position as scientific, in comparison to that of Eunomius, said to be mystico-superstitious, and in comparison to those that maintain a pure arbitrariness in the imposition of names, of the sophistic-sceptical matrix. For Gregory's position in relation to superstition in general, see the small treatise *ConFa*, recently published in a beautiful edition by M. Bandini (cfr. M. BANDINI, *Gregorio di Nissa. Contro il fato*, Bologna 2003), and the comments in C. McCAMBLEY, "Against Fate" by Gregory of Nyssa, GOTR 37 (1992) 309–332 and E. MAROTTA, *L'ironia e altri schemi nel "Contra Fatum" di San Gregorio di Nissa*, VetChr 4 (1967) 85–105.

²⁵ Cfr. A.A. WEISWURM, *The nature of human knowledge according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, Washington 1952, pp. 117–118.

²⁶ Cfr. H. VON BALTHASAR, *Présence et pensée*, Paris 1947, p. 62.

human liberty and creativity, without surpassing the limits of the creature, always unshakably anchored in a sound realism.²⁷ Therefore the names are invented by men, but according to the nature of things.²⁸ Natural and supernatural domains are, in this way, distinct but not separated. All the strength and clarity of the Nyssian view are based upon the doctrine of creation, by which the world is good in so far as it is the work of God.

c. *Number*

That which was affirmed of the names in general is also true in a specific way for the names of numbers. This manifests all the modernity of the Nyssian thought: he refutes the Neoplatonic position which attributed to the number a metaphysical reality. The error of Eunomius is again the identification of the order of nature and that of numbers.²⁹ Instead Gregory follows the genesis of the number back to reality.

Commenting the moment in which God divides the waters that are above the firmament from those that are below (Gn 1.7), he affirms:

After the waters that we see and perceive were divided one from the other, the heaven was placed as a separator of the double nature of the waters: the heaven that is said to have come forth, along with the earth and all those things placed at the foundation of the cosmos, and that received thus its proper perfection and proper name in the manifestation of the firmament, delimited thanks to the orbit of fire. And the second circular path of the light again obscured and illuminated in succession that which was underneath. And also it received its name according to logical succession from above, and also it was a day. Thus in a necessary and consequent way, also the nature of number entered into creation. In fact number is nothing other than the composition of unity (μονάδων σύνθεσις). But all that which is considered in a determined delimitation is called a unity. Since, then, the cycle defined in itself is complete in all of its parts, the narration rightly names as a unique thing the single period of the cycle, saying: “and there was an evening and a morning: the first day” (Gn 1.5). And in its turn, in the same way, the other period is a unity. And placing both of them together, they constitute the number two. And thus the narration follows the genesis of number back to the elements of creation, indicating with number the ordered succession.³⁰

²⁷ For the value of sensible knowledge and its trustworthiness, see A.A. WEISWURM, o.c., pp. 83–104.

²⁸ For the matrices and philosophical sources for Gregory’s position, see M.S. TROIANO, *I Cappadoci e la questione...*, pp. 337–346.

²⁹ Cfr. CE II, GNO I, 201, 1–18.

³⁰ Ἐπειδὴ δὲ διεκρίθη μὲν ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων τὰ ὕδατα, τὰ τε ὀρώμενα καὶ τὰ νοούμενα,

Ontology has the priority: the logical and mathematical levels are a consequence, a reflection.³¹ It is significant that the number is born at the same time as creation: number follows the being of things, of the diverse created realities. Number is thus involved in the creational dynamics and mode of being that is limited and changeable. As A. Penati has noted,³² its origin is physical.

As much as is presented thus far, Gregory's thought is extremely coherent and would seem to lead back to a theory of knowledge with a properly realistic stamp. But the question as to how number is applied to God emerges strongly, as he is by nature infinite, unlimited and eternal. The response of Nyssian thought is vigorous.

d. *Passage to the Person*

Gregory's discourse actually reaches sublime heights when turned to God. The Nyssian affirms in reference to the names in general:

Perhaps we have not clearly learned that the names which signify that which comes into being are successive to the things and that nominal words are like the shadows of things, which receive form according to the movements of that which subsists in hypostasis (τῶν ὑφεστώτων).³³

καὶ μέσος ὕρος ἀπεδείχθη τῆς διπλῆς τῶν ὑδάτων φύσεως ὁ οὐρανὸς, ὁ ἐν ἀρχῇ μὲν γεγενῆσθαι μετὰ τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν πρὸς τὴν κατασκευὴν τοῦ κόσμου καταβληθέντων λεγόμενος, νυνὶ δὲ τελειωθείς τε καὶ ὀνομασθεὶς ἐν τῇ ἀναδείξει τοῦ στερεώματος τοῦ διὰ τῆς περιδρομῆς τοῦ πυρὸς ὀρισθέντος, καὶ ἡ δευτέρα τοῦ φωτὸς κυκλοφορία, πάλιν τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἀνά μέρος ἐπεσκότισέ τε καὶ ἐφώτισεν. Ὅπερ καὶ ὀνομάσθη κατὰ τὴν προλαβοῦσαν ἀκολουθίαν, καὶ τοῦτο ἡμέρα. Ἀναγκαιῶς δὲ καὶ ἀκολουθῶς καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ φύσις συνεισηλθε τῇ κτίσει. Οὐδὲν γάρ ἕτερόν ἐστιν ἀριθμὸς, εἰ μὴ μονάδων σύνθεσις. Πάν δὲ τὸ διωρισμένην τινὶ περιγραφῇ θεωρούμενον, μόνας ὀνομάζεται. Ἐπεὶ οὖν πανταχόθεν ὁ κύκλος ἀνελλειπῆς ἐστὶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὀριζόμενος· καλῶς ὁ λόγος ἐν τι ὀνόμασε τὴν μίαν τοῦ κύκλου περίοδον, εἰπὼν· Ἐγένετο ἐσπέρα, καὶ ἐγένετο πρωὶ ἡμέρα μία· καὶ πάλιν τὴν ἄλλην ὡσαύτως ἐν. Συνθεὶς δὲ ἀμφοτέρα, δύο ἐποίησε. Καὶ οὕτως ὁ λόγος τὴν τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ γένεσιν τοῖς μορίοις συνήγαγε τῆς κτίσεως, τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς τάξεως τοῖς ὀνόμασι τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ σημειούμενος. (ApHex, PG 44, 85BC).

³¹ After the crazy positivist program that characterized the end of the 20th century, scientific research itself has reached the conclusion, based upon internal arguments, of the impossibility to push formalism so far as to do without reality. The program of Hilbert and Laplace entered into crisis, on the logico-formal side, from Gödel's theorem, and on the physico-mechanical one, by the discovery of deterministic chaos (cfr. F.T. ARECCHI, *I simboli e la realtà*, Milan 1990 and P. MUSSO, *Filosofia del caos*, Milan 1997).

³² Cfr. A. PENATI BERNARDINI, *La Trinità in Gregorio di Nissa*, in P. BETTILOLO (Ed.), *L'Epistola fidei di Euzegrio Pontico. Temi, contesti, sviluppi, Atti del III Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su "Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina"*, SEAUG 72 (2000) 145–152.

³³ ἄρ' οὐ σαφῶς διδασκόμεθα ὅτι ἐπιγίνονται τοῖς πράγμασιν αἱ σημαντικαὶ τῶν

Words, using a physical analogy, express the dynamic, movement: this is true for the movements of the soul, or, more in general, for the change of every concrete being that exists. The rigorous yet poetic thought of the Nyssian calls the names the ‘shadows’ of things. Not ‘shadows’ of being in general, but ‘shadows’ formed by the movement of being that exists in a concrete subsistence, in a hypostasis.

In this way Gregory’s theory of language prepares itself to move to speak of God. In that which has been already said, one can speak of the action of the divine Hypostases, of their action in time and of the effects of their action. Thus one can count the divine Persons in their manifestation in the limits of time.

At this point it would seem that the logical development of Nyssian thought confirms those who, like V. Lossky, limit the possibility of speaking of God to the economic sphere. Only ‘energetic’ movement would be accessible to human reason and language.

Nevertheless, Gregory does not stop here: that which he affirmed at the diastematic level, that is on the creational level, where the mode of being is *historical*, in as much as it coincides with becoming and the mutation in being, the Nyssian now elevates to pure immanence. Words, for him, cannot say being, but can say the mode of being, even when it is outside of time. In this way, in God it is possible to discern three distinct modes of being of the unique nature, together with a correlational order. The logical passage has an incredible force: time and eternity are not absolutely separated, nor are they radically incompatible.

In this context, one can thus understand the importance of the affirmations contained in the *AdAbl*.

III. THE AD ABLABIUM

It was already seen in Section II of Chapter I, dedicated to the ‘energies’, that the ineffability of the divine nature is one of the central theses of Gregory in the *AdAbl*: the very name of God indicates his action, not his nature. To created realities one can arbitrarily give proper names, in order to distinguish one being from another in the sphere of the same nature; but in the case of God it is different, since

γινομένων προσηγορίαι καὶ ὡσπερ σκιαὶ τῶν πραγμάτων εἰσὶν αἱ φωναί, πρὸς τὰς κινήσεις τῶν ὑφεστώτων σχηματιζόμεναι; (*CE* II, *GNO* I, 269, 11–14).

any of his names is interpretive of that which is thought of the divine nature.³⁴ The demonstration of the Nyssian is immediate:

In fact, even without any etymological research, we will find that all the other names given to creation were given casually to the subjects, since it pleases us that things be indicated with their name, to avoid that the knowledge of that which is indicated remain confused. Instead each of the names that serves as guide (ὀδηγίαν) to know God has a proper signification enclosed in itself and among the names most worthy of God would not be found any word deprived of some sense (νόημα); thus it is demonstrated that it is not the divine nature itself to be indicated with one of the names, but with that which is affirmed something of that which regards it is made known.³⁵

Thus, with each of the different divine attributes, such as *vivifier*, *incorruptible*, or *powerful*, the different aspects of the divine nature are indicated, but the nature itself cannot be expressed. The error of Eunomius consisted in absolutizing the attribute of non generation, considering it expressive and definitive of that which the nature is in itself. Thus, he concludes:

So, also if we say *vivifying*, while we indicate by means of the appellative that which is done [that is the action], with the word we do not make known the being that does. According to the same reasoning, based upon the signification enclosed in the words most worthy of God, we find also that all the other names either prohibit from knowing that which should not be [known] regarding the divine nature, or they teach that which should be [known], but they do not contain an explanation of the nature itself.³⁶

So, since the divine names are conformed according to the different activities, that is according to dynamics, it is easy to conclude that the term θεότης derives from to see.

³⁴ Cfr. *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 42, 9–43, 2.

³⁵ τὰ μὲν γὰρ λοιπὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων, ὅσα ἐπὶ τῆς κτίσεως κεῖται, καὶ δίχα τινὸς ἐτυμολογίας εὐροί τις ἂν κατὰ τὸ συμβᾶν ἐφηρμοσμένα τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις, ἀγαπώντων ἡμῶν ὅπως οὖν τὰ πράγματα διὰ τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῶν φωνῆς σημειώσασθαι πρὸς τὸ ἀσύγχυτον ἡμῖν γίνεσθαι τῶν σεσημειωμένων τὴν γνῶσιν. ὅσα δὲ πρὸς ὀδηγίαν τῆς θείας κατανοήσεώς ἐστιν ὀνόματα, ἴδιαν ἔχει ἕκαστον ἐμπεριειλημμένην διάνοιαν καὶ οὐκ ἂν χωρὶς νοήματός τινος οὐδεμίαν εὐροίς φωνὴν ἐν τοῖς θεοπρεπεστέροις τῶν ὀνομάτων, ὡς ἐκ τούτου δείκνυσθαι μὴ αὐτὴν τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν ὑπὸ τινος τῶν ὀνομάτων σεσημειῶσθαι, ἀλλὰ τι τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν διὰ τῶν λεγομένων γνωρίζεσθαι. (*Ibidem*, 43, 4–15).

³⁶ οὕτω κἂν ζωοποιὸν εἴπωμεν, ὃ ποιεῖ διὰ τῆς προσηγορίας σημάναντες τὸ ποιοῦν τῷ λόγῳ οὐκ ἐγνωρίσαμεν. καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ἐκ τῆς ἐγκειμένης ταῖς θεοπρεπεστέραις φωναῖς σημασίας εὐρίσκομεν, ἢ τὸ μὴ δεόν ἐπὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως γινώσκειν ἀπαγορευόμενα ἢ τὸ δεόν διδάσκοντα, αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς φύσεως ἐρμηνείαν οὐ περιέχοντα. (*Ibidem*, 43, 24–44, 6).

In Sections II and III of Chapter I, it was observed how the divine activity enjoys a double connection, since it is effectuated according to nature, for which reason from the activity one can return to the nature to which it is inseparably attached, so much so that one can prove the unity of the three Persons from the unity of action. But at the same time, the activity is attached to the single Person, since each of the divine Hypostases effectuates it in conformity to their proper personal mode of being the unique divine nature. For this reason the connection between immanence and economy is double as well: at the level of the essence (connection activity-nature) and at the level of the Persons (connection activity-hypostasis).

As for the affirmation of Gregory that the divine names are referred to activity, it is to be viewed as an extremely positive conception of Nyssian apophatism, and one could even say, with a play on words, an *active* conception.

For, every negation of the possibility to comprehend the divine nature with a name is translated into the affirmation of the necessity to think of God as infinite:

In fact, we, believing that the divine nature is indefinable (ἀόριστον) and incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον), we do not manage to conceive of it in any comprehension, but we affirm that in every way that nature is considered in its infiniteness (ἐν ἀπειρίᾳ). That which is absolutely infinite (ἄπειρον) is not limited by one thing yet not another; but the infiniteness (ἀπειρία) escapes all delimitation (τὸν ὄρον). Thus, that which is beyond delimitation is absolutely not limited, not even by a name.³⁷

The infinite cannot be closed or enumerated in a concept, and properly in this negation—in this limit of the mind and knowledge—is found the possibility to think of God in infiniteness (ἐν ἀπειρίᾳ). Once again it can be seen as a step beyond classical Greek thought, which saw perfection in the finite. Thus the Hellenic world transferred its concept of divine perfection to man, proposing in culture, in sport and art the model of perfect proportion. In a similar way Gregory transfers the divine infinity

³⁷ ἡμεῖς μὲν γὰρ ἀόριστον καὶ ἀπερίληπτον τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν εἶναι πιστεύοντες οὐδεμίαν αὐτῆς ἐπινοοῦμεν περίληψιν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον ἐν ἀπειρίᾳ νοεῖσθαι τὴν φύσιν διοριζόμεθα. τὸ δὲ καθόλου ἄπειρον οὐ τινὶ μὲν ὀρίζεται, τινὶ δὲ οὐχί· ἀλλὰ κατὰ πάντα λόγον ἐκφεύγει τὸν ὄρον ἢ ἀπειρία. οὐκοῦν τὸ ἐκτὸς ὄρου οὐδὲ ὀνόματι πάντως ὀρίζεται. ὡς ἂν οὖν διαμένοι ἐπὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως τοῦ ἀόριστου ἢ ἔννοια, ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομά φαμεν εἶναι τὸ θεῖον, ἢ δὲ θεότης ἐν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐστίν. οὐκοῦν οὐ δύναται τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ ὄνομα εἶναι καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα εἶναι νομίζεσθαι. (*Ibidem*, 52, 15–53, 3).

to the model of human perfection, since man, surpassing the limits of concepts, can and must think of God in infiniteness.³⁸

Gregory once again does not fear to explain the ineffability of the divine infinity, having recourse to the contrast with the delimited created nature.

In fact, only those realities that are considered according to a proper delimitation (περιγραφή) are numbered by addition (κατὰ σύνθεσιν). And delimitation is found in the corporeal aspect, in size, in place and in the difference relative to the form and colour; and that which is considered outside of this, escapes delimitation by means of such properties. Now, that which is not delimited is not enumerated and which is not enumerated cannot be considered in a multiplicity. For we affirm that also gold, even though split into many types of money, is unique and is said unique; and we speak of many pieces of money and of many staters, without finding any multiplication in the nature of gold in the multiplicity of staters.³⁹

As *man*, *gold* is a name of nature, for which reason it would be against strict logical rigour to speak of many golds, as it is to speak of many men. Thus Sacred Scripture is not preoccupied in speaking of men in the plural, since the imprecision is not dangerous for the faith and no one thinks of a multiplicity of human natures. Instead it always refers to God in the singular, to avoid any danger of confusion and any possibility of thinking of a multiplicity of divine natures:

In fact, if in the Holy Trinity the nature were different, as those who are in error suppose, by logical consequence the number would dilate into a plurality of gods, following the division of the diverse essence of the subjects. But, since the divine Nature, simple and immutable, rejects all diversity of essence while it is unique, it does not admit by its very self an indication of plurality. But, as one speaks of a unique nature, thus all the other names are also expressed in the singular: God, good, holy, Saviour, just, Judge and whatever other name that we think applies to

³⁸ For this aspect, see Gregory's conception of spiritual theology, particularly the mysticism of the shadows (cf. J. DANIELOU, *Mystique de la ténèbre chez Grégoire de Nysse*, under *Contemplation*, in *DSp* II/2, cc. 1872–1885).

³⁹ μόνα γάρ κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἀριθμείται, ὅσα κατ' ἰδίαν περιγραφὴν θεωρεῖται· ἡ δὲ περιγραφὴ ἐν ἐπιφανείᾳ σώματος καὶ μεγέθει καὶ τόπῳ καὶ τῇ διαφορᾷ τῇ κατὰ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ χρώμα καταλαμβάνεται· τὸ δὲ ἔξω τούτων θεωρούμενον ἐκφεύγει τὴν διὰ τῶν τοιούτων περιγραφὴν· ὃ δὲ μὴ περιγράφεται οὐκ ἀριθμείται, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀριθμούμενον ἐν πλήθει θεωρηθῆναι οὐ δύναται· ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸν χρυσὸν φαμεν, κἂν εἰς πολλοὺς διακερματίζεται τύπους, ἓνα καὶ εἶναι καὶ λέγεσθαι· πολλὰ δὲ νομίσματα καὶ πολλοὺς στατήρας ὀνομάζομεν, οὐδένα τῆς φύσεως τοῦ χρυσοῦ πλεονασμὸν ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν στατήρων εὐρίσκοντες. (*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 53, 9–19).

God; and if one says that such a name regards the nature or the activity, for us it is indifferent.⁴⁰

Gregory's thought does not stop here. After affirming the unity of God, he moves on to establish the Trinity of Persons. The discourse moves from being to mode of being. The Nyssian affirms:

It is first necessary that we believe something is (εἶναι τι), and only then do we interrogate how that in which we have believed is (πῶς ἐστὶ). Different, then, is it to say 'what it is' (τί ἐστὶ) from saying 'how it is' (πῶς ἐστὶ). So, saying that something is without generation, one exposes how it is, but, with those words, one does not express what it is as well. And, in fact, if you asked a farmer about a tree whether it was planted or if it grew on its own, and he responded either that the tree was not planted or that it came from a seedling, did he perhaps with the response explain the nature to you? Or instead, saying only how it is, did he not leave obscure and unexplained the discourse on the nature? So, also here, in learning that He is without generation, have we learned to think as is fitting that He is, but we have not understood through the word that what He is.⁴¹

The context of the passage is personal distinction, as will be seen in the next chapter, and Gregory differentiates the level of the essence from that of the Person. This is possible since the primacy is of faith, in which we attain the true reality, that is Being, God. Only after having believed that God is can we speak of how he is. That is true also on the level of natural knowledge, because the base of human knowledge is also faith in experience, in the fact that things are and exist, that for

⁴⁰ εἰ γὰρ παρήλλακτο κατὰ τὴν τῶν ἡπατημένων ὑπόνοιαν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγίας τριάδος ἢ φύσις, ἀκολούθως ἂν εἰς πλῆθος θεῶν ὁ ἀριθμὸς ἐπλατύνετο, τῇ ἑτερότητι τῆς οὐσίας τῶν ὑποκειμένων συνδιαιρούμενος. ἐπεὶ δὲ πάσαν ἀπωθεῖται τὴν κατ' οὐσίαν ἑτερότητα ἢ θεία τε καὶ ἀπλή καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος φύσις, ἕως ἂν μία ἦ, πλήθους σημασίαν ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς οὐ προσίεται. ἀλλ' ὡσπερ μία λέγεται φύσις, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ἐνικῶς ὀνομάζεται, θεός, ἀγαθός, ἅγιος, σωτήρ, δίκαιος, κριτής, καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο τῶν θεοπρεπῶν ὀνομάτων νοεῖται, ὃ εἴτε πρὸς φύσιν εἴτε πρὸς ἐνέργειαν βλέπειν τις λέγει, οὐ διοισόμεθα. (*Ibidem*, 55, 10–20).

⁴¹ πρότερον δὲ ἡμᾶς εἶναι τι πιστεύειν ἐπάναγκες, καὶ τότε πῶς ἐστὶ τὸ πεπιστευμένον περιεργάσασθαι· ἄλλος οὖν ὁ τοῦ τί ἐστὶ καὶ ἄλλος ὁ τοῦ πῶς ἐστὶ λόγος. τὸ οὖν ἀγεννήτως εἶναι τι λέγειν, πῶς μὲν ἐστὶν ὑποτίθεται, τί δὲ ἐστὶ τῇ φωνῇ ταύτῃ οὐ συνενδείκνυται. καὶ γὰρ εἰ περὶ δένδρου τινὸς ἠρώτησας τὸν γεωργόν, εἴτε φυτευτὸν εἴτε αὐτομάτως ἐστίν, ὃ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο ἢ ἀφύτευτον εἶναι τὸ δένδρον ἢ ἐκ φυτείας γινόμενον, ἄρα τὴν φύσιν διὰ τῆς ἀποκρίσεως ἐνεδείξατο ὁ μόνον τὸ πῶς ἐστὶν εἰπὼν ἢ ἄδηλον καὶ ἀνερμήνευτον τὸν τῆς φύσεως ἀπέλιπε λόγον; οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἀγεννητὸν μαθόντες ὅπως μὲν αὐτὸν εἶναι προσήκει νοεῖν ἐδιδάχθημεν, ὃ, τί δὲ ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς φωνῆς οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν. (*Ibidem*, 56, 17–57, 4).

this reason, we can know them.⁴² Gregory, due to his profound openness to being, does not fear to illustrate the most pure intra-Trinitarian immanence with an example taken from the life of the fields, inspired by the good sense of a farmer. Therefore the Nyssian, in his very act of negating the possibility to express the divine nature with language, affirms the possibility to investigate the mode of being of the Persons and attests to the value of human knowledge and science. Once again: only in the humble openness to the supernatural can one find an authentic love for the natural, and can one recognize the great value of human science.

Thus apophatism must be approached from a fully Trinitarian perspective: from the point of view of the unique nature one can deduce the principally negative aspect, but this negation is an openness to the infinite, which permits to properly approach the question from the point of view of the Persons. In the point of view of the Persons, one can discern the eminently positive aspect of apophatism, which reaches its culmination in its Christological aspect. As always it is impossible to separate, in the study of any theological question, the Trinitarian aspect from the Christological one, which are like two sides of the same and unique divine mystery.

Therefore it is first necessary to develop the negative aspect of apophatism, to next develop the positive one. In the next section then, apophatism considered as limit to the excessive pretexts of human reason will be analyzed briefly, with attention principally focused on the *CE*. The central concept here will be that of nature. After this *pars destruens* we will be able to move on to the positive part, which is founded on the concept of Person. For this reason, moving to the *pars construens*, it will be necessary to briefly sketch the history of the notion, thus manifesting the central role played by the Nyssian and the other Cappadocians in its constitution. The ἀκολουθία of the discourse will thus naturally focus on the study of the Christological aspect of apophatism, the true foundation of its positive value.

⁴² The happy formula of B. Salmons is in this vein: “Il linguaggio nasce ontologico” (B. SALMONS—S. DEPAOLI, *Il linguaggio nella patristica: Gregorio di Nissa e Agostino*, Genova 1995, p. 9).

IV. EUNOMIUS, NATURE AND EXCESS

Gregory is extremely clear in his affirmations. He does not negate the value of reasoning about God, but affirms the radical impossibility to express, as Eunomius suggested, that which the nature is in itself:

Thus, this concept was explained by the master, thanks to which it is possible that those who have not been obscured by the veil of heresy can clearly discern that the divine, as for that which regards the nature, is unfathomable (ἀνέπαφον) and unconceivable (ἀκατανόητον) and superior to every understanding based in reasonings. But the human mind, engaging itself in inquiry and research, as far as is possible for reasonings, extends and reaches to touch (ἐπορέγεται καὶ θιγγάνει)⁴³ the inaccessible and sublime nature. It has not such an acute sight as to see the invisible clearly, nor is it absolutely excluded from every possibility of approximation, in such a manner as to not be able to reach any representation (εἰκασίαν) of that which is searched out. But on the one hand, it conjectures (ἐστοχάσατο) something of that which is searched out through contact (ἐπαφῆς) of reasonings, and on the other, it has knowledge of that which is searched out in a certain way (κατενόησεν) by the very fact of being unable to contemplate it (κατιδεῖν), forming so to say a clear knowledge (γνώσιν) of the fact that that which is sought is above every knowledge (γνώσιν). In fact the human mind knows what contradicts the divine nature and is not ignorant of that which is fitting to conjecture (ὑπονοεῖν) in its regard, but it cannot discern (κατιδεῖν) what that same [nature] might be about which it develops its reasonings. But, based upon the knowledge of that which is proper (προσόντων) to it and that which is not proper to it, it sees only that which is possible to see, i.e. that that which is as much as fundamentally far from every evil and is considered in every good is absolutely such, so as to be inexpressible in words (ἄρρητον) and inaccessible (ἀνεπίβατον) to reasonings.⁴⁴

⁴³ As in a contest where he who touches first wins.

⁴⁴ ταύτης τοίνυν τῆς ἐννοίας παρὰ τοῦ διδασκάλου διηρθρωμένης, δι' ἧς ἔνεστι τοὺς μὴ κεκαλυμμένους τῷ αἰρετικῷ προκαλύμματι σαφῶς διιδεῖν ὅτι τὸ θεῖον, ὅπως ἂν κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἔχη, ἀνέπαφόν τέ ἐστι καὶ ἀκατανόητον καὶ πάσης ἀντιλήψεως τῆς ἐκ τῶν λογισμῶν ὑψηλότερον, ἢ δὲ ἀνθρωπίνη διάνοια πολυπραγμονοῦσα καὶ διερευνωμένη δι' ὧν ἂν ἡ δυνατόν λογισμῶν ἐπορέγεται καὶ θιγγάνει τῆς ἀπροσπελάστου καὶ ὑψηλῆς φύσεως, οὔτε τοσοῦτον ὀξυποῦσα ὡς ἐναργῶς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἀόρατον οὔτε καθάπαξ ἀπεσχοινισμένη τῆς προσεγγίσεως ὡς μηδεμίαν δύνασθαι τοῦ ζητουμένου λαβεῖν εἰκασίαν. ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν τι τοῦ ζητουμένου διὰ τῆς τῶν λογισμῶν ἐπαφῆς ἐστοχάσατο, τὸ δὲ αὐτῷ τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι κατιδεῖν τρόπον τινὰ κατενόησεν, οἷόν τινα γνώσιν ἐναργῆ τὸ ὑπὲρ πάσαν γνώσιν τὸ ζητούμενον εἶναι ποιησαμένη. τά τε γὰρ ἀπεμφαίνοντα περὶ τὴν θεῖαν φύσιν ἐνόησε καὶ ὅσα πρέπει περὶ αὐτὴν ὑπονοεῖν οὐκ ἠγνόησεν, οὐ μὴν αὐτὴν ἐκείνην ἥτις ἐστὶ περὶ ἢν ταῦτα λογίζεται κατιδεῖν ἠδυνήθη, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν προσόντων τε καὶ μὴ προσόντων γνώσεως εἶδεν, ὃ μόνον ὀφθῆναι δυνατόν ἐστίν, ὅτι τὸ παντὸς μὲν κακοῦ πόρρωθεν ἰδρῦμένον, ἐν παντὶ δὲ νοούμενον ἀγαθῷ πάντως τι τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν οἷον λόγῳ τε ἄρρητον εἶναι καὶ λογισμοῖς ἀνεπίβατον. (CE II, GNO I, 265, 23–266, 14).

The value of human conjecture and reasoning cannot be negated. It is important however that reason be not overwhelmed by the temptation to express the inexpressible. The mind can come close as to touch the divine (ἐπορεύεται καὶ θιγγάνει), but it will never be able to understand it, to embrace and exhaust it in its comprehension. It is precisely in this discovery that one has access to the highest knowledge: that of the infinity and inaccessibility of the divine nature.

This is not limited to the source of being, but is true for every being that participates in being itself. Gregory, after having reaffirmed the incomprehensibility of the divine nature, inaccessible to even the angels, affirms:

And as, when looking up to heaven, and in a measure apprehending by the visual organs the beauty of the heights of heaven, we doubt not the existence of what we see, but if asked what it is, we are unable to define its nature, but we simply admire as we contemplate the overarching vault, the reverse planetary motion, the so-called Zodiac graven obliquely on the pole, whereby astronomers observe the motion of bodies revolving in an opposite direction, the differences of luminaries according to their magnitude, and the specialties of their rays, their risings and settings that take place according to the circling year ever at the same seasons undeviatingly, the conjunctions of planets, the courses of those that pass below, the eclipses of those that are above, the adumbrations of the earth, the reappearance of eclipsed bodies, the moon's multiform changes, the motion of the sun midway within the poles, and how, filled with his own light, and crowned with his encircling beams, and embracing all things in his sovereign light, he himself also at times suffers eclipse (the disc of the moon, as they say, passing before him), and how, by the will of him who has so ordained, ever running his own particular course, he accomplishes his appointed orbit and progress, opening out the four seasons of the year in succession; we, as I say, when we contemplate these phenomena by the aid of sight, are in no doubt of their existence, though we are as far from comprehending their essential nature as if sight had not given us any glimpse whatever of what we have seen; in the same way, with regard to the Creator of the world, we know that he exists, but we cannot deny that we are ignorant of the definition of his essence.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ ὡσπερ δὲ τὸν οὐρανὸν ὀρῶντες καὶ τρόπον τινὰ διὰ τῶν ὀρατικῶν αἰσθητηρίων τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ὕψος ἐφαπτόμενοι κάλλους εἶναι μὲν τὸ φαινόμενον οὐκ ἀμφιβάλλομεν, τὸ δὲ τί ἐστὶν ἐρωτηθέντες διερμηνεῦσαι τῷ λόγῳ τὴν φύσιν οὐκ ἔχομεν, θαυμάζομεν δὲ μόνον τὴν ἐγκύκλιον τοῦ παντὸς ὀρῶντες περιφορὰν καὶ τῶν πλανητῶν τὴν ἐναρμόνιον ἐπὶ τὸ ἔμπαλιν κίνησιν κύκλον τέ τινα τὸν λεγόμενον ζωοφόρον κατὰ τὸ λοξὸν ἐγκεχαραγμένον τῷ πόλῳ, ᾧ τὴν κίνησιν τῶν κατὰ τὸ ἐναντίον ἀνειλουμένων παρατηροῦσιν οἱ ταῦτα σοφοί, φωστήρων τε διαφορὰς κατὰ τε τὰ μεγέθη καὶ τὰς τῶν αὐγῶν ιδιότητας ἐπιτολὰς τε καὶ δύσεις κατὰ τὴν ἐγκύκλιον τοῦ ἔτους περίοδον

Gregory demonstrates once again his interest for science and his admiration for the beauty of the created world. His refined ontological sensibility leads him to affirm, for created beings, a type of *participated apophatism*. The essence of the creature is also beyond the scope of the human intellect. The substance has an ontological profundity that renders it radically inexpressible and *in-comprehensible*, not in the sense that one cannot know anything of it, but in the sense that it cannot be totally understood, it cannot be reduced to the limits of the intellect or concepts.

In *CE II*, 261, Gregory comments the passage *Great is the Lord and all powerful, his wisdom has no limits* (Ps 147.5), affirming that the universe is too small to contain the explanations of the works of the Lord. And if this is true for creation, the Nyssian asks: how many universes would we need to contain the explanations about the God of the universe himself?⁴⁶

Man spends his life in ignorance of all things, without knowing himself, nor any of the rest of things. In fact no one can say he understands his own soul, knows his own substance.⁴⁷ Not only is the soul

ἐπὶ τῶν αὐτῶν αἰεὶ καιρῶν γινομένης ἀπαραβάτως, συνόδου τε τῶν πλανωμένων καὶ ὑποδρομᾶς τῶν ὑποβεβηκότων καὶ ἐκλείψεις τῶν ὑπερκειμένων καὶ γῆς ἀποσκιάσεις καὶ ἀποκαταστάσεις τῶν ἐκλείπόντων τὴν τε πολυειδῆ τῆς σελήνης ἀλλοίωσιν καὶ τοῦ ἡλίου τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου τῶν πόλων κίνησιν, καὶ ὡς ἀνάπλεως ὦν τοῦ ἰδίου φωτός καὶ ταῖς ἀκτίσιν ἐν κύκλῳ καταστεφῆς πάντα τε τῆ φωτιστικῆ δυνάμει περιπτυσσόμενος ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκλείπει, τοῦ σεληναίου σώματος ὡς φασιν ἐπιπροσθούντος, καὶ ὡς κατὰ τὸ βούλημα τοῦ διατάξαντος αἰεὶ τὸν ἴδιον δρόμον ἀνύων περιπορεύεται διὰ τῆς τεταγμένης προόδου καὶ ὑποβάσεως, τὰς τέσσαρας τοῦ ἔτους ὥρας ἐν ἑαυταῖς ἀνελίσσων, ταῦτα ὁρῶντες εἶναι μὲν τὰ φαινόμενα δι' ὧν ὁρῶμεν οὐκ ἀμφιβάλλομεν, οὐσίας δὲ λόγον ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων τοσοῦτον ἀπέχομεν κατανοῆσαι, ὅσον εἰ μὴδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆ αἰσθήσει τὸ φανὲν ἐγνωρίσαμεν· οὕτω καὶ τὸν ποιητὴν τοῦ κόσμου ὅτι μὲν ἔστιν οἶδαμεν, τὸν δὲ τῆς οὐσίας λόγον ἀγνοεῖν οὐκ ἀρνούμεθα. (*CE II*, GNO I, 247, 4–248, 3).

⁴⁶ ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὰ πάντα ὁ θεὸς ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησεν, ὅρον δὲ ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ σοφία οὐκ ἔχει (τῆς γὰρ συνέσεως αὐτοῦ, φησὶν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἀριθμὸς), ὁ τοῖς ἰδίῳις μέτροις πεπερασμένος κόσμος οὐ χωρήσει ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῆς ἀορίστου σοφίας τὸν λόγον. εἰ οὖν ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐλάττων ἔστιν ἢ ὥστε τὴν διδασκαλίαν τῶν ἔργων τοῦ κυρίου χωρήσει, πόσοι κόσμοι χωρήσουσιν τὴν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὄλων διήγησιν; (*CE II*, GNO I, 261, 22–29).

⁴⁷ ὅθεν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ πάντων διάγομεν πρῶτον ἑαυτοὺς ἀγνοοῦντες οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα. τίς γὰρ ἔστιν ὃς τῆς ἰδίας ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς ἐν καταλήψει γεγένηται, τὴς ὁ ἐπὶ γνοὺς αὐτῆς τὴν οὐσίαν... (*CE II*, GNO I, 257, 28–258, 3). In Chapter 11 of the *De Hom*, entirely dedicated to the incomprehensibility of the human mind, Gregory, commenting Rm 11.34, throws back at those who affirm the comprehensibility of divine nature that they cannot even say to know themselves, since they do not even know the nature of their own intelligence. This property is considered part of the likeness of the image: if one could understand the nature of the image, while the nature of the archetype remained incomprehensible, that would mean that the image is deficient as image

incomprehensible, but the body and flesh itself escape man's capacity of analysis.⁴⁸

For created realities, as for divine realities, it is useless to seek to understand the substance which in its ontological profundity escapes knowledge in its incomprehensibility. For this Gregory affirms, returning to the poetic image of children, that:

If, then, the lower creation⁴⁹ which comes under our organs of sense transcends human knowledge, how can he, who by his mere will made the worlds, be within the range of our apprehension? Surely this is vanity, and lying madness,⁵⁰ as the Prophet says, to think it possible to comprehend (περίνοιαν) the things which are incomprehensible (τῶν ἀλήπτων). So may we see tiny children,⁵¹ by ignorance due to their age (ἐκ τῆς ἡλικίας ἄγνοια), busying themselves in their play. For often, when a sunbeam (ἄκτινος ἡλιακῆς) streams down upon them through a window, delighted with its beauty they throw themselves on what they see, and are eager to catch the sunbeam in their hands, and struggle with one another, and grasp the light in the clutch of their fingers, and fancy they have imprisoned the ray in them, but presently when they unclasp their hands and find that the sunbeam which they held has slipped through their fingers, they laugh and clap their hands. In like manner the children⁵² of our generation, as says the parable,⁵³ sit playing in the market-places; for, seeing the power of God shining in upon their souls through the dispensations of his providence, and the wonders of his creation like a warm ray emanating from the natural sun, they marvel not at the divine gift, nor adore him known through these things (τὸν διὰ τούτων νοούμενον), but passing beyond the limits of the soul's capabilities, they seek with their sophisticated understanding to grasp that which is intangible, and think by their reasonings to lay hold of what they are persuaded of, if they [truly] are persuaded; but when their argument unfolds itself and discloses the

(Cfr. *DeHom*, PG 44, 153D–156B). One can see here the evolution of Gregory's thought, who in this work, that belongs to his first period, perhaps is still marked by Origenistic intellectualism, while in the *CE* II he extends the property of incomprehensibility also to the human body, and even to all of creation.

⁴⁸ Καὶ τί περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς λέγω; ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτῆς τὸ τὰς σωματικὰς ἀναδεγμένον ποιότητος ἔναργεῖ τινι καταλήψει μέχρι τοῦ δεῦρο τεθῆραται. ἐὰν γὰρ τις τῷ λόγῳ τὸ φαινόμενον εἰς τὰ ἐξ ὧν σύγκειται διαλύσει καὶ ψιλώσας τῶν ποιότητων ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ κατανοῆσαι φιλονικῆσει τὸ ὑποκείμενον, τί καταλειφθήσεται τῇ θεωρίᾳ, οὐ συνορῶ. (*CE* II, GNO I, 259, 26–31).

⁴⁹ For a synthetic vision of the hierarchy of being in Gregory, see D. Balás, *Metousia theou: man's participation in God's perfection according to St. Gregory*, Rome 1966, pp. 50–52.

⁵⁰ Cfr. Ps 40.5 (LXX).

⁵¹ Literally νήπια, that is children who do not yet speak.

⁵² Here we find παιδία, that is grown children, that can speak and say foolish things, as Eunomius.

⁵³ Cfr. Mt 11.16.

tangled web of their sophistries, men of discernment see at once that what they have apprehended is nothing at all.⁵⁴

We are before a magisterial and magnificent interweaving of moving poetry and sharp irony. One can note the elegant play on words between the age (ἡλικίας) and the sunbeam (ἄκτινος ἡλιακῆς).

One can know God in his manifestations, in the beauty of creation, in the flowering of grace in souls, but one cannot arrogantly think to exhaust knowledge of his essence. The error is to claim to reach everything with one's own mind. From this come errors and heresies:

For, in the unduly curious search (τῷ πολυπραγμονεῖν) is found space for the false reasoning, but avoiding every type of unduly curious search one eliminates, at the same time, also the necessity to err.⁵⁵

The search is not evil in itself, the problem is rather the arrogance of man and his excess, to wish to make his own that which in no way can be possessed and reduced to conceptual schemas. One can know being, but one cannot close it into the cages of our ideas. Thus, returning to the problem of the divine names and human names, Gregory explains:

Therefore, if we have learned some name to manifest the knowledge of God, they are all common names and analogous in respect to those names (κοινωνίαν ἔχει καὶ ἀναλογίαν πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ὀνομάτων) that indicate the properties of man. For those who wish to present, thanks to

⁵⁴ Εἰ οὖν ἡ κάτω κτίσις ἢ μέχρι τῶν αἰσθητηρίων τῶν ἡμετέρων φθάνουσα ὑπὲρ τὰ μέτρα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐστὶ γνώσεως, πῶς ὁ μόνω θελήματι τὸ πᾶν συστησάμενος ἐντὸς τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐστὶ καταλήψεως; ματαιότης ταῦτα καὶ μανία ψευδῆς, καθὼς φησιν ὁ προφήτης, τὸ οἶεσθαι δυνατὴν εἶναι τι τῶν ἀλήπτων περινοίαν. οὕτως ἔστιν ἰδεῖν μικρὰ νήπια διὰ τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἡλικίας ἄγνοιαν παίζοντά τε ὁμοῦ καὶ σπουδάζοντα. πολλάκις γὰρ ἄκτινος ἡλιακῆς διὰ θυρίδος αὐτοῖς εἰσρυσίσης περιχαρέντα τῷ κάλλει πρὸς τὸ φαινόμενον ἵεται καὶ φέρειν φιλονεικεῖ διὰ χειρὸς τὴν ἄκτινα καὶ διαμάχεται πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ περιδράσσεται τοῦ φωτός, τῇ περιβολῇ τῶν δακτύλων, ὡς οἶεται, τὴν αὐγὴν ἐνδησάμενα· ἀλλὰ διαλυθείσης τῶν δακτύλων τῆς ἐμπλοκῆς γέλωτα ποιεῖ τοῖς νηπίοις καὶ κρότον διαρρυσίσα τῶν χειρῶν ἢ τῆς ἄκτινος λαβή. οὕτω καὶ τὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς παιδία, καθὼς φησιν ἡ παραβολή, ταῖς ἀγοραῖς ἐγκαθήμενα παίζει· οἱ τὴν θεῖαν δύναμιν διὰ τῶν τῆς προνοίας λόγων καὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ κτίσει θαυμάτων ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐλλάμπουσιν βλέποντες οἷον ἄκτινά τινα καὶ θερμότητα τῆς ἡλιακῆς ἀπορρέουσιν φύσεως οὐχὶ θαυμάζουσι τὴν χάριν καὶ προσκυνουσι τὸν διὰ τούτων νοούμενον, ἀλλ' ὑπερβάντες τὸ χωρητὸν τῇ ψυχῇ ταῖς τῶν σοφισμάτων λαβαῖς τοῦ ἀναφοῦς περιδράσσουνται καὶ κρατεῖν οἴονται διὰ τῶν συλλογισμῶν, εἴπερ οἴονται· διασχόντος δὲ τοῦ λόγου καὶ διαπτύξαντος τὴν τῶν σοφισμάτων πλοκὴν εὐρίσκεται τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι τὸ ἀπειλημένον οὐδέν. (*CE II, GNO I, 250, 3–28*).

⁵⁵ ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ πολυπραγμονεῖν καὶ ὁ παραλογισμὸς χώραν εὐρίσκει, πάσης δὲ πολυπραγμοσύνης ἀργούσης συναποκόπτεται πάντως καὶ ἡ τοῦ διαμαρτάνειν ἀνάγκη. (*Ibidem, 255, 14–17*).

distinctive signs, he who is unknown say that he is of noble birth, if this is the case, of a good family, or that he is famous for richness and admired by all for his dignity, flowering with youth and of distinctive body; and nevertheless, saying such things, they do not manifest the nature of he who is presented, but [only] some distinctive signs that are known about him—for human nature does not consist in being of a good family, nor in possessing many riches, nor in being honoured and admired by all for age, but each one of these properties is observed in relation to that man. Thus, also all the words found in Sacred Scripture for divine praise indicate something of all those that are manifested in God's regard, since each one offers a particular aspect. And through these words we learn that God is powerful and does not admit any inferiority, that he is uncaused and cannot be circumscribed inside any limits, that he has power over all, or in general, something that regards him. But as for the essence itself, in as much as it is unintelligible to a mind and unspeakable in any words, Scripture did not permit that it undergo an unduly curious search and prescribed that it be honored with silence, prohibiting the search of that which is too profound (Cfr. Sir 3, 21) and affirming that one must not *speaking out words in the face of God* (Eccles 5.1; LXX).⁵⁶

Thus it is the Scripture that prohibits the unduly curious search on God: one can interrogate as to how he is, and can use different names to describe his mode of being. But the essence remains always beyond the scope of the mind and of words. This is true when thinking of both God and man.

Instructed by this admonition, it is possible to move on to the positive aspect of apophatism, starting with a brief account of the birth of the concept of person.

⁵⁶ εἰ γὰρ τι πρὸς δῆλωσιν τῆς θείας κατανοήσεως μεμαθήκαμεν ὄνομα, πάντα ταῦτα κοινωνίαν ἔχει καὶ ἀναλογίαν πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἃ τοῦ τινὸς ἀνθρώπου τὴν ιδιότητα δείκνυσιν. ὡς γὰρ οἱ τὸν ἀγνοούμενον διὰ τινων γνωρισμάτων δηλοῦντες εὐπατριδὴν αὐτόν, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, καὶ τῶν εὐ γεγυμένων λέγουσιν εἶναι καὶ λαμπρὸν ἐν πλούτῳ καὶ ἐν ἀξίᾳ περιβλεπτον ἀνθοῦντά τε τῇ ὥρᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸσον διανεστηκότα τῷ σώματι, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγοντες οὐ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ δηλουμένου, ἀλλὰ τινὰ γνωρίσματα τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν γνωσσομένων ἐδήλωσαν (οὔτε γὰρ τὸ εὐγενὲς οὔτε τὸ πολυχρήματον οὔτε τὸ περιφανὲς τοῦ ἀξιώματος οὔτε τὸ κατὰ τὴν ὥραν περιβλεπτον ἡ ἀνθρωπότης ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἕκαστον τούτων περὶ τὸν τινὰ θεωρεῖται). οὕτως καὶ πᾶσαι αἰ παρά τῆς ἁγίας γραφῆς εἰς δοξολογίαν θεῖαν ἐξευρημένα τῶν περὶ τὸν θεὸν τι δηλουμένων ἀποσημαίνουσιν, ἰδίαν ἔμφασιν ἕκαστη παρεχομένη, δι' ὧν ἡ τὸ δυνατὸν ἢ τὸ τοῦ χείρονος ἀνεπίδεκτον ἢ τὸ μὴ ἐξ αἰτίας εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ εἰς περιγραφὴν τέλους ἔρχεσθαι ἢ τὸ κατὰ πάντων ἔχειν τὸ κράτος ἢ ὅλως τι τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν διδασκόμεθα· αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν ὡς οὔτε διανοίᾳ τινὶ χωρητὴν οὔτε λόγῳ φραστὴν ἀπολυπραγμόνητον εἶπασε, σιωπῇ τιμᾶσθαι νομοθετήσασα ἐν τῷ κωλύειν τῶν βαθυτέρων τὴν ζήτησιν καὶ ἐν τῷ λέγειν μὴ δεῖν ἐξενεγκεῖν ῥῆμα πρὸ προσώπου θεοῦ. (*Ibidem*, 257, 2–25).

V. THE CONCEPT OF PERSON

The concept of person is the fruit of a slow coalescing of a double source: properly Christian elaboration and Semitic categories. J. Daniélou sketched out, with the brevity and profundity of a great master, the development of this key concept.⁵⁷ It moves on three levels: Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological. This last aspect is characterized by a certain ambiguity, due to the prevalent juridical use of the term, referring to the subject of law and to the juridical person. Thus, in a first moment, *person* was avoided in the Latin world in reference to human nature, the preferred term was at this time *conditio*.

For the newness of the Christian event implied the absence of concepts adapted to express it in all of its profundity. Thus men of faith, right from the beginning—in Mary from the moment of the Annunciation—, have had to start meditating, seeking and creating concepts to express the marvels of the Lord.

In the Trinitarian sphere, the first outline of the personal notion can be found in the term *περιγραφή*: the primordial conception of the divinity had necessarily to be an impersonal infinity, and was thus expressed in negative terms. Thus the term *ἀπερίγραπτος* was born, that is “that which cannot be circumscribed”.

According to Justin,⁵⁸ this term is exclusive to the Father. On the other hand the whole nature of the Word is such to give it the possibility of manifestation. The second person would thus be eternal like the first, but generated and proffered, in view of creation, by the first. The Word would thus receive a proper subsistence, defined by Clement of Alexandria as *περιγραφή*, becoming Son in his limitedness (*κατὰ περιγραφὴν*), and not by essence (*κατ' οὐσίαν*).⁵⁹ The eternal generation appears in this case as a mediating act by which the infinite nature, but not the essence,⁶⁰ limits itself in such a manner to be able to enter into

⁵⁷ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *La notion de personne chez les Pères grecs*, «Bulletin des Amis du Card. Daniélou» 19 (1983) 3–10.

⁵⁸ Cfr. GIUSTINO, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 127; PTS 47 (Marcovich), p. 291.

⁵⁹ «Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο», οὐ κατὰ τὴν παρουσίαν μόνον ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ «ἐν Ἀρχῇ» ὁ ἐν ταυτότητι Λόγος, κατὰ «περιγραφὴν» καὶ οὐ κατ' οὐσίαν γενόμενος [ὁ] Υἱός. (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 19, 1; F. SAGNARD, *Clément D'Alexandrie. Extraits de Théodote*, SC 23, p. 92).

⁶⁰ This distinction is particularly interesting for the history of dogma and for the understanding of the relationship between essence and nature, which, as we will see, is a pertinent point (cfr. n. 147) and would merit further study.

dialogue, communication with creation. Thus περιγραφή is a synonym with person, but in as much as limitation, with a negative connotation. “Person thus appears to necessarily imply a limitation”⁶¹ and, for this reason, is a concept that remains inapplicable to the primordial divinity. The unsettling result is that, according to the most primitive Trinitarian theology, the Father could not be called a person, only the Son was such. Justin affirmed that the Father does not have a name, while in the Gospel of the Truth of the Nag Hammadi it is said that “the Son is the name of the Father”.⁶² In this way name is equivalent to person, that means the Son is the person of the Father. In fact, in Hebrew the word *shem*, that is name, is the privileged term to designate God who manifests himself.

It is in this context that the term πρόσωπον enters into play: the Word becomes the face of the ineffable and incommunicable Father (τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου τῶν ὄλων).⁶³ The πρόσωπον becomes the face of God. A certain incompatibility between limitation and infinite can still be found: how the infinite can be personal is not yet perceived.

However the Christian perception is continually faced with the tension of this affirmation and the perfect divinity of the Son, identical to that of the Father. Origen already places the problem in evidence. “But it is not until the 4th century that we will see, that, to exit out of this stalemate, a theology of the Trinity starts to be developed which would disassociate the concept of person, that is to say the concrete subsisting individual, from that of limitation, whilst affirming, in a manner paradoxical to all the anterior forms of thought, that it is not

⁶¹ “La personne apparaît donc impliquer nécessairement une limitation” (J. DANIELÉLOU, *La notion* . . . , p. 5). In this sense the post Hegelian criticism of K. Barth to the concept of person, in as much as limitation (cfr. K. BARTH, *Dogmatique*, I, 1, 2, Geneva 1953, p. 51), is separated from the terminological development of this word and is equivalent to a return to the pre-Cappadocian state. For the difficulty of the concept of person in the history of dogma, see: J. RATZINGER, *Il significato di persona in teologia*, in IDEM, *Dogma e predicazione*, Brescia 1974, pp. 173–189; F. BOURASSA, *Personne et conscience en théologie trinitaire*, Gr. 55 (1974) 471–493; 677–720; P.A. SEQUERI, *La nozione di persona nella sistematica trinitaria*, Teol(M) 10 (1985) 23–39; A. STAGLIANÓ, *Il mistero del Dio vivente*, Bologna 1996, pp. 565–572.

⁶² Cfr. J. DANIELÉLOU, *La notion* . . . , p. 6.

⁶³ ὁ μὲν θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων ἀχώρητός ἐστιν καὶ ἐν τόπῳ οὐχ εὐρίσκεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεως αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτοῦ, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα πεποιήκεν, δύναμις ἂν καὶ σοφία αὐτοῦ, ἀναλαμβάνων τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου τῶν ὄλων, οὗτος παρεγένετο εἰς τὸν παράδεισον ἐν προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὠμίλει τῷ Ἀδάμ. (THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ad Autolyicum*, II, 22; PTS 43/44 (Marcovich), p. 70, 5–6).

contradictory for the infinite to be at the same time personal".⁶⁴ This brings about a true and proper revolution in the history of thought, since in one move the path is opened to the recognition of the person as a pure value.

From the historical point of view, L. Turcescu's essay demonstrates the originality of Gregory of Nyssa's concept of person, along with his capability to avail himself of the philosophical data of his age. L. Turcescu's conclusion is: "Although some rudimentary concepts of the individual existed in antiquity that Gregory likely used, a more developed notion of person did not exist prior to the Cappadocian fathers".⁶⁵

The relationship between economy and immanence is also central here. Tertullian, for example, tended to identify with the typically Latin practicalness, the *persona* with the economic dimension and the *substantia* with the immanent one.⁶⁶ Origen is to be credited with using person to speak of immanence, in as much for the first time he used the term ὑπόστασις in the Trinitarian realm,⁶⁷ that is in the properly theological realm. His limits are a certain subordinationism and the idea that the cosmos itself exists *ab aeterno*.⁶⁸

The Cappadocian formula of μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις allows a real step forward.⁶⁹ Gregory for example, distinguishes that which is common (τὸ κοινόν) in the Trinity,⁷⁰ that is the οὐσία, from that which is proper (τὸ ἴδιον), that is the ὑπόστασις,⁷¹ thus founding the

⁶⁴ "Mais ce n'est qu'au IV^e siècle que nous verrons, pour sortir de cette impasse, commencer à s'élaborer une théologie de la Trinité, où l'on dissociera le concept de personne, c'est-à-dire de l'individu concret subsistant, de celui de limitation, et où l'on affirmera, d'une manière paradoxale par rapport à toutes les pentes de la pensée antérieure, qu'il n'est pas contradictoire que l'infini puisse être en même temps personnel" (J. DANIELOU, *La notion...*, p. 7).

⁶⁵ L. TURCESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Persons*, Oxford 2005, p. 115.

⁶⁶ Cfr. A. MILANO, *La Trinità dei teologi e dei filosofi. L'intelligenza della persona di Dio*, Napoli 1987, pp. 21–22.

⁶⁷ Hippolytus will be the first to use πρόσωπον for the Trinity.

⁶⁸ Cfr. A. MILANO, *La Trinità dei teologi...*, p. 26.

⁶⁹ On Basil's role, see A. MILANO, *Persona in teologia*, Rome 1996, pp. 117–125. For Nyssian terminology: L. TURCESCU, *The Concept of Divine Persons in Gregory of Nyssa's To His Brother Peter, on the Difference Between Ousia and Hypostasis*, GOTR 42 (1997) 63–82.

⁷⁰ ἀλλ' ὡσπερ οὐσία ὁ πατήρ, οὐσία ὁ υἱός, οὐσία τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα καὶ οὐ τρεῖς οὐσίαι, οὕτω καὶ θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, θεὸς ὁ υἱός, θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καὶ οὐ τρεῖς θεοί. εἷς γὰρ θεὸς καὶ ὁ αὐτός, ἐπεὶ καὶ μία οὐσία καὶ ἡ αὐτή, εἰ καὶ λέγεται ἕκαστον τῶν προσώπων καὶ ἐνούσιον καὶ θεός. (*Ad Graec.*, GNO III/1, 20, 24–21, 1).

⁷¹ τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις ὁμολογώντας μίαν ἀγαθότητα, μίαν δύναμιν καὶ μίαν θεότητα λέγειν ἡμᾶς αἰτιῶνται. καὶ οὐκ ἔξω τοῦτο τῆς ἀληθείας φασί· λέγομεν γάρ. (*Ad Eust.*

fundamental distinction between description (ὑπογραφή) of that which is common, that is the substance or nature, and the circumscription (περιγραφή). The first refers to that which *man* signifies, the second to proper names, such as *Peter* and *John*.

Gregory's contribution has been studied in detail.⁷² He is attributed a fundamental role, even on the terminological level, in the function and use and significance of both πρόσωπον and ὑπόστασις. He, for the first time, affirms the equivalence of the two terms⁷³ and assigns a rational or spiritual (and therefore permanent) character to the first.⁷⁴ As for ὑπόστασις, it appears that Gregory played an equally important role, clarifying beyond all doubt the strictly personal signification of the word.⁷⁵ As M. Richard notes, he is the only one of the Cappadocians to have recourse to this term in the Christological context.⁷⁶

In the light of these terminological considerations, it is evident that the following passage represents a clear example of the negative aspect of Nyssian apophatism:

For if they ask of us an interpretation (ἐρμηνείαν) and a description (ὑπογραφήν) and an explanation (ἐξήγησιν) of the divine essence, we will not deny that we are devoid of such a knowledge, confessing only that it is not possible that that which is infinite be understood with a thought expressed in words.⁷⁷

GNO III/1, 5, 17–20). See also: πολλὰς γὰρ ὑποστάσεις τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου καὶ τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις τοῦ ἐνὸς θεοῦ φαμεν δικαίως. (*AdGraec*, GNO III/1, 29, 9–11), particularly pertinent for a commentary on the *AdAbl*.

⁷² See L. TURCESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa...*, and IDEM, "Person" versus "Individual", and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa, *MoTh* 18 (2002) 527–539.

⁷³ Even their frequency is similar: ὑπόστασις a little less than 400 times, in comparison to the few more than 400 times for πρόσωπον. C. Scouteris affirms that Gregory uses them as synonyms (cf. C. SCOUTERIS, Ἡ ἐνότης τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ὡς πραγματικὴ προϋπόθεσις τῆς σωτηρίας, *Theol(A)* 40 (1969) 418, note 17).

⁷⁴ Cf. J.J. LYNCH, *PROSOPON in Gregory of Nyssa: a Theological Word in Transition*, *TS* 40 (1979) 737–738.

⁷⁵ Studying the term in *CE I*, J. Ibáñez and F. Mendoza finish by affirming: "el significado de ese término como «persona» adquiere real e inequívocamente carta de naturaleza en el lenguaje teológico cristiano y, por tanto, debido a este santo Padre, el vocablo en cuestión adquiere un valor nuevo y definitivo que tanto la teología como la filosofía posterior asumirá como propio" (J. IBÁÑEZ—F. MENDOZA, *El valor del término «hypóstasis» en el libro I contra Eunomio de Gregorio de Nisa*, in L.F. MATEO-SECO (ed.), *El «Contra Eunomium I» en la producción literaria de Gregorio de Nisa* (VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa), Eunsa, Pamplona 1988, p. 333).

⁷⁶ Cf. M. RICHARD, *L'introduction du mot «hypostase» dans la théologie de l'incarnation*, *MSR* 2 (1945) 17.

⁷⁷ Εἰ δέ τις ἀπαιτοῖ τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἐρμηνείαν τινὰ καὶ ὑπογραφήν καὶ ἐξήγησιν, ἀμαθεῖς εἶναι τῆς τοιαύτης σοφίας οὐκ ἀρνησόμεθα, τοσοῦτον ὁμολογούντες μόνον, ὅτι

However at the same time, the clarity of the distinction between the Persons and the substance permits an immense progress towards the positive and ‘personal’ aspect of apophatism itself, which is healthily rooted in the Christology of the Nyssian.

C. von Schönborn individuates, in his analysis of *Ep* 38, two groups of concepts which distinguish clearly two levels.⁷⁸ On one side the sequence: τὸ κοινόν—ἡ οὐσία, ἡ φύσις—τὸ ἀπερίγραπτον, which refers to that which is common and for this reason incircumscribable; on the other side is found: τὸ ἴδιον—ἡ ὑπόστασις, τὸ πρόσωπον—τὸ περίγραπτον.

The confusion of these two levels lead also to the Iconoclastic problem, directly linked to a misunderstood apophatism. The emperor Constantine V sought to give a theological base to Iconoclasm, and for this reason convoked the synod of 754. His starting point was that every image is such in as much as an image of a πρόσωπον. The impossibility to circumscribe or de-*scribe* Christ immediately followed, since he is the union of two natures in a unique πρόσωπον.⁷⁹ Identifying γράφειν and περιγράφειν, the emperor was opposed to the Orthodox, since he affirmed that to circumscribe the πρόσωπον of Christ would be equivalent to circumscribing the ineffable divine nature. It seems that Constantine did not know, or did not understand, the great Capadocian Trinitarian theology and its implications. His error was also Christological, so much so that he could be accused of monophysitism, since in his understanding of the πρόσωπον of Christ the two natures are confused. The theologians of the Iconoclastic synod will transfer the question of the πρόσωπον of Christ to the flesh of Christ, and will formulate the problem on the basis of the impossibility to represent the assumed human nature of our Lord. It will be necessary to wait until the work of Theodore Studite (759–826) for the question placed in the terms of Constantine to be clarified.⁸⁰

Once again it can be seen that a correct Trinitarian conception, that does not separate immanence and economy, is always united to a correct Christology. For “the Icon of Christ is possible since the eternal hypostasis of the Son of God has become visible, circumscribed by his

οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀόριστον κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἐπινοῖα τινὶ ῥημάτων διαληφθῆναι. (*CEIII*, GNO II, 38, 17–21).

⁷⁸ Cf. C. VON SCHÖNBORN, *La “lettre 38 de saint Basile” et le problème Christologique de l’iconoclasm*, RSPTh 60 (1976) 446–450.

⁷⁹ Cf. NICEPHORUS, *Antirrheticus* I, PG 100, 232A.

⁸⁰ See THEODORE STUDITE, *Antirrheticus* III, PG 99, 405.

individuated, and thus figurable, human nature. He who sees the image, sees the human face of Christ, and this face *is* the eternal Word".⁸¹

In the light of this brief historical sketch it can be seen that the person encounters its affirmation of infinite value precisely in the immanent Person, in the incarnate Word. The key moment in the development was when it was realized His Personality as pure relation to the Father.⁸² this step sheds light to man's dignity through Gregory's creation reading. The theology of the image becomes anthropology of the image.⁸³ Gregory knows that he cannot know the divine essence, but at the same time, he knows who God is and how he is. For this reason he knows who man is, how he is, and how much he is worth.⁸⁴

The discussion of the social analogy is far from being a terminological discussion. The specific rigorous conception of human divinization tied to it, corresponding in the eschatological *reditus* to the *exitus* constituted through creation in the image of the Trinity is the most solid foundation for the affirmation of human dignity. Nyssian thought has been analyzed from the perspective of the great value that it gives to human liberty, according to a founded and legitimate approach. But the fullness of the radical perspective of the Cappadocian doctrine can be discovered only through the understanding of the profundity and realism of the translation of the *exitus-reditus* schema into Trinitarian terms, accompanied by the insertion of the corporal dimension into this dynamic. Liberty is founded in the Trinity.

For the Nyssian the creation of man in the image of the Trinity actually corresponds to the divinization of man, by which God has made him a participant in every perfection, since the divine nature is the sum of all perfections. Among all of these liberty is the highest, in as much as it is responsibility and the capacity to choose the good. Virtue is explicitly defined as ἀδέσποτον, and the liberty of the person

⁸¹ "L'icône du Christ est possible parce que l'hypostase éternelle du Fils de Dieu est devenue visible, circonscrite par sa nature humaine individuée, et donc figurable. Celui qui voit l'icône, voit le visage humain du Christ; et ce visage est le Verbe éternel" (C. VON SCHÖNBORN, *La lettre 38...*, p. 450).

⁸² The most valuable contribution of L. Turcescu's analysis is just his stressing of the identification of the particularizing notes of each Divine Persons in terms of relations of origin (cf. L. TURCESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa...*, p. 116).

⁸³ For Gregory's theology of image, see J.B. SCHOEMANN, *Gregors von Nyssa theologische Anthropologie als Bildtheologie*, Schol. 18 (1943) 31–53; 175–200.

⁸⁴ It is then not surprising to find that J. Daniélou participated in the work of Ariccia and had, together with Karol Wojtyła, a key role in the redaction of the document that became *Gaudium et Spes*. The echo of the Nyssian in GS 22 is undeniable.

is directly founded in God.⁸⁵ Man is created for virtue, as a consequence he cannot have any masters.

The doctrine of the creation of man in the image of the Trinity is also the essential element of the famous passage of the *InEccl*, where Gregory explicitly condemns slavery:

God said: *Let Us make man in Our image and likeness* (Gn 1, 26). So tell me, who will sell and who will buy he who is the likeness of God and who is lord of all the earth and who received in inheritance from God authority over all that exists on the earth? Only God can. Or better yet, not even God himself. For it is said, his *gifts are irrevocable* (Rm 11, 29).⁸⁶

This is the foundation of Gregory's reasoning, inseparable from the affirmation of the unity of human nature, from which the inestimable value of every individual is born. Thus he can affirm:

However if God does not submit to slavery that which is free, who, placing his own sovereignty above that of God [can do it]? And how will he who is the head of all the earth and every being on earth be sold? For it is absolutely necessary that the possession also of that which is sold be sold along with it. How much will we value the whole earth? And how much for all the things on it? But if that is incalculable, tell me, what price will he who is the master have? And if you would say even the entire earth, you would not even yet have found the corresponding value. He who knows human nature says that not even the whole universe is a worthy price of the soul of man.⁸⁷

The Nyssian loves man and affirms with strength the illegitimacy of slavery. He is probably the Father of the Church most clear in refuting it, since Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom and Augustine limit themselves to the consideration of slavery as a consequence of original sin.

⁸⁵ Cfr. *DeHom*, PG 44, 184B.

⁸⁶ Εἶπεν ὁ θεός· ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν. τὸν καθ' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ θεοῦ ὄντα καὶ πάσης ἄρχοντα τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὴν ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ κληρωσάμενον τίς ὁ ἀπεμπολῶν, εἰπέ, τίς ὁ ὠνούμενος; μόνου θεοῦ τὸ δυναθῆναι τοῦτο, μάλλον δὲ οὐδὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. Ἀμεταμέλητα γὰρ αὐτοῦ, φησί, τὰ χαρίσματα. (*InEccl*, GNO V, 336, 10–16).

⁸⁷ εἰ δὲ ὁ θεὸς οὐ δουλοῖ τὸ ἐλεύθερον, τίς ὁ ὑπερτιθεὶς τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δυναστείαν; πῶς δὲ καὶ πραθήσεται ὁ ἄρχων πάσης τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων πάντων; ἀνάγκη γὰρ πᾶσα καὶ τὸ κτῆμα τοῦ παλουμένου συναποδίδοσθαι. πόσου τοίνυν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν τιμησόμεθα; πόσου δὲ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πάντα; εἰ δὲ ταῦτα ἀτίμητα, ὁ ὑπὲρ ταῦτα ποίας ἄξιος τιμῆς, εἰπέ μοι; κἂν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον εἴπῃς, οὐδὲ οὕτως εὔρες τὴν πρὸς ἄξιαν τιμὴν. οὐδὲ γὰρ ὅλον εἶπε τὸν κόσμον ὁ εἰδὼς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ἀκριβῶς τιμᾶσθαι ἄξιον εἶναι τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀντάλλαγμα. (*Ibidem*, 336, 18–337, 7).

It is the theology of the image, that is to say his theological anthropology that leads the Nyssian to this affirmation.⁸⁸

This passage of the concept of person from a negative sense to one that is absolute and positive has as a consequence a rediscovered value of historicity. The struggle with the essentially ahistoric Greek thought is too strong, but the breach is open. With the person the value of history and liberty is also discovered.⁸⁹ “From the moment that time was no longer the imperfect reflection of eternity, but the place of a divine action, the decision of liberty took on a singular value, at the same time that the sense of responsibility was deepened”.⁹⁰

It is true that the Greek Fathers prefer to speak of nature, but for them it is a completely different conception than the modern one. The Greek Fathers always understand it as a concrete reality. Daniélou affirms for example: “The term φύσις always designates, in Gregory, a concrete existing reality”.⁹¹ For this reason there cannot be a radical opposition of nature and person. Instead nature and person are intimately intertwined, since persons are united by the common nature. The highest manifestation of the inseparability of person and nature is, then, action, which is realized according to nature, but has the person as subject. Thus it is the same Greek Fathers, and the Nyssian before all, that create the conditions to give history its true value. Gregory manifests this clearly: by founding the value of the human person in the

⁸⁸ See the beautiful article: T.J. DENNIS, *The Relationship Between Gregory of Nyssa's Attack on Slavery in his Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes and his Treatise De Hominis Opificio*, StPatr 17/3 (1982) 1065–1072. Other fine texts are P.M. GREGORIOS, *Cosmic Man*, New Delhi 1980, pp. 133–136 and the articles of L. Wickham, M.M. Bergadá and E. Ferguson in S.G. HALL, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, New York 1993. The refutation of slavery on Gregory's part has been placed in doubt by some authors, such as R. MORIARTY, *Human Owners, Human Slaves: Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. Eccl. 4*, StPatr 27 (1993) 62–69 and S. ELM, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1994, precisely and definitively criticized in D.F. STRAMARA, *Gregory of Nyssa: An Ardent Abolitionist?*, SVTQ 41 (1997) 37–60. See also: G. MASPERO, *La dimensione trinitaria della dignità dell'uomo. L'Ad Ablabium e l'analogia sociale di Gregorio di Nissa*—in A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO—E. COLOM (edd.), *Teologia ed Etica Politica*, Roma 2005, 149–170.

⁸⁹ Cfr. CL. DESALVO, *L'oltre nel presente, la filosofia dell'uomo in Gregorio di Nissa*, Milan 1996, pp. 80s.

⁹⁰ “Dès lors que le temps n'était plus le reflet imparfait de l'éternité, mais le lieu d'une action divine, la décision de la liberté prenait une valeur singulière, en même temps que s'approfondissait le sens de la responsabilité” (J. DANÉLOU, *La notion...*, p. 10).

⁹¹ “Le φύσις mot désigne toujours chez Grégoire une réalité concrète existante” (J. DANÉLOU, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris 1944, p. 57). The case of Hellenism is quite different, which refers much more to the essence. In this sense Lossky is right when he affirms: «Être pour la pensée hellénistique signifie être d'une manière ordonnée, avoir une essence» (V. LOSSKY, *Théologie Mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Aubier 1944, p. 87).

Trinity and prohibiting, with his theological construction, the separation between immanence and economy, he places the foundations of an authentic theology of history.⁹²

One sees thus that apophatism, in its negative aspect regards the essence, while the person is given access to the divinity. Whoever limits contemplation and thought, distinguishing the immanent person from the economic, loses everything, in the name of a pious mysticism: he loses the icon, orthodoxy, and piety itself.

V. THE THEOLOGY OF NAME

a. *The Name of Christ*

For Gregory then, the dispute on names is not simply a philosophical dispute, nor is it only a delicate theological question: it regards the essence of Christianity itself. This is clear in the treatise *De Perf*:⁹³ in it the Nyssian develops a true and proper theology of name,⁹⁴ attributing to the name that Christians carry an authentic participation in the name of Christ himself.

Our good Lord Jesus Christ has given us the grace to participate (κοινωνίαν) in [his] adored (προσκυνουμένου)⁹⁵ name, so that we are not named with any other name of that which surrounds us; even if one is found to be rich and noble, or if he is of humble origins and poor, or is known for a certain occupation or dignity, despite all this those names are useless, since one appellative alone is proper to those who have believed in him: to be called Christians.⁹⁶

⁹² Cfr. G. MASPERO, ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ ε ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ: *La teologia della storia di Gregorio di Nissa*, «Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia» 45 (2003) 383–451.

⁹³ For a beautiful analysis of the treatise, see: L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Imitación y seguimiento de Cristo en Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 33 (2001) 601–622.

⁹⁴ J. Daniélou shows that the incipient Judeo-Christian Christology designated Christ with the title of *name of God*. This had a central role in the interpretation of the *signatio* with a χ on the forehead, in the Baptismal rite, with which the name of Christian was conferred to Catechumens, through the first letter of the name of Christ (cfr. J. DANIELOULOU, *Théologie du judéo-Christianisme*, Tournai 1958, pp. 199–216). This is probably the theological basis for the theology of name that Gregory develops.

⁹⁵ In the *De Perf*, Gregory uses often the term and root of προσκυνούμενος, which refers to Phil 2, 11, (even if the maximum relative frequency of the root is found in the *Ad Simp* and the *Ad Mac*). On the importance of the passage in the Nyssian work, cfr. L.F. MATEO SECO, *Kénosis, exaltación de Cristo y apocatástasis en la exégesis a Filipenses 2, 5–11 de Gregorio de Nisa*, *ScrTh* 3 (1971) 301–340.

⁹⁶ Τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δεσπότητος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ χαρισσαμένου τὴν κοινωνίαν ἡμῖν τοῦ προσκυνουμένου ὀνόματος, ὥστε ἡμᾶς ἐκ μηδενὸς ἄλλου τῶν περὶ ἡμᾶς ὀνομάζεσθαι, κἄν πλούσιός τις ᾖν τύχη καὶ εὐπατρίδης κἄν δυσγενῆς ἢ ἡ πένης, κἄν ἐξ ἐπιτηδευμάτων

The appellative of Christian is then a true and proper participation in Christ himself, a communion (κοινωνία) with him, since the name of Christian derives from that of Christ himself.⁹⁷ “Christ is, then, for Gregory, an *abbreviated Christology*”.⁹⁸

Gregory thus affirms that the explanation of the signification of the name of Christ is to be sought in the Christological titles that appear in the Pauline writings, of which he cites a long list: from Power and Wisdom of God to inaccessible Light, from Corner Stone to Foundation of the faith, from Image of the invisible God to the Lord of Glory.⁹⁹

All these names are intertwined and mutually illuminate each other: the eminence of the name of Christ indicates in first place the power of a King, for which reason all the Christological titles are recapitulated in that of ‘Kingdom’. Gregory then confronts the question of apophatism:

Therefore, since it has been given by our good Lord to participate in the greatest and most divine of names in such a way that, honoured with the imposition of the name of Christ (ἐπωνυμία) we are called Christians, it is necessary that all the meanings of the name (ἐρμηνευτικά ὀνόματα) be observed in us, so that such a nomination be not a false name (ψευδώνυμον) for us, but receive the testimony of [our] life. For it is not *being* that derives from *being called* in a certain way, but it is rather the nature that is the foundation, whatever it may be, and makes itself known through the signification of the name that is attributed to it. For example: if one gave a tree or a rock the name of man, will the tree or the rock be, due to this appellative, a man? Absolutely not: but it is first necessary that a man be, and only then can one designate him with the name of [his] nature.¹⁰⁰

τινῶν ἢ ἀξιωματῶν τὸ γνῶριμον ἔχη, πάντων δὲ τῶν τοιούτων ὀνομάτων ἀργούντων μίαν εἶναι κυρίαν κλήσιν τοῖς εἰς αὐτὸν πεπιστευκόσι τὸ Χριστιανούς ὀνομάζεσθαι. (*DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 173, 15–174, 7).

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 174, 15–16.

⁹⁸ L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Cristologia e linguaggio in Gregorio di Nissa*, in *Lingua e teologia nel cristianesimo greco. Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento l'11–12 dicembre 1997*, Brescia 1999, p. 232.

⁹⁹ Cf. *DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 175, 14–176, 10.

¹⁰⁰ οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοῦ μεγίστου τε καὶ θειοτάτου καὶ πρώτου τῶν ὀνομάτων γέγονε παρὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δεσπότης ἡμῖν ἡ κοινωνία, ὥστε τοὺς τῇ ἐπωνυμίᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τιμηθέντας Χριστιανούς ὀνομάζεσθαι, ἀναγκαῖον ἂν εἴη πάντα τὰ ἐρμηνευτικά τῆς τοιαύτης φωνῆς ὀνόματα καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν καθορᾶσθαι, ὡς μὴ ψευδώνυμον ἐφ’ ἡμῶν εἶναι τὴν κλήσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ βίου τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἔχειν. οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ καλεῖσθαι τι τὸ εἶναι γίνεται, ἀλλ’ ἡ ὑποκειμένη φύσις, οἷα δ’ ἂν οὐσα τύχη, διὰ τῆς προσφουδῆς τοῦ ὀνόματος σημασίας γνωρίζεται. οἷόν τι λέγω· εἰ δένδρον τις ἢ πέτρα προσηγορίαν ἀνθρώπου χαρίζασαιτο, ἄρα ἄνθρωπος ἔσται διὰ τὴν κλήσιν ἢ τὸ φυτὸν ἢ ὁ λίθος· οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα· ἀλλὰ χρὴ πρῶτον εἶναι ἄνθρωπον, εἴθ’ οὕτως ὀνομασθῆναι τῇ προσηγορίᾳ τῆς φύσεως. (*Ibidem*, 177, 7–20).

The strong unity of Gregory's thought pushes him to combine, in an exemplary manner, moral exhortation to the most pure and profound ontology: being precedes the name, for which reason we must be true Christians, to be called by such a name.

The Nyssian continues, specifying that not even those things that are similar are called with the same name, for example a statue that represents a man or a horse. When it is an imitation, one uses with precision a name that refers to the nature, that is to bronze or to stone.¹⁰¹ He concludes:

Thus it is necessary that those who call themselves with the name that comes from Christ be above all that which the name signifies, and only then apply to themselves the appellative.¹⁰²

When one observes the statue of a man, one is before a simple imitation (μίμησις), that has received the image of man in a matter that does not have the properties that characterize human nature. For this reason it is possible to distinguish the true Christian from the one who only appears as such:

In this way we will recognize who is truly (ὄντως) Christian, in respect to him who only seems to be so, by the properties that manifest themselves in their characteristic traits. And the characteristic traits of he who is truly Christian are all those that we have considered in Christ. Of those, we imitate (μιμούμεθα) those that we are capable, while we revere and adore those that nature cannot imitate. Thus, it is necessary that all those names that explain the signification of Christ be resplendent in the life of the Christian, some through imitation, others through adoration, if the man of God wishes to be perfect, as the Apostle,¹⁰³ without mutilating in any way perfection by evil.¹⁰⁴

There is a clear distinction between the imitation of sculpture which is extrinsic and passive, and the imitation of the Christian, which must be

¹⁰¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, 177, 21–178, 1.

¹⁰² Οὐκοῦν τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἑαυτοὺς ὀνομάζοντας πρῶτον γενέσθαι χρηὶ ὅπερ τὸ ὄνομα βούλεται, εἴθ' οὕτως ἑαυτοῖς ἐφαρμόσαι τὴν κλήσιν. (*Ibidem*, 178, 2–4).

¹⁰³ Cfr. 2 Tim 3, 17.

¹⁰⁴ οὕτω καὶ τὸν Χριστιανὸν τὸν τε ὄντως ὄντα καὶ τὸν δοκοῦντα διὰ τῶν ἐπιφανομένων τοῖς χαρακτηῆσιν ιδιωμάτων ἐπιγνωσόμεθα. χαρακτηῆρες δὲ τοῦ ὄντως Χριστιανοῦ πάντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστιν, ὅσα περὶ τὸν Χριστὸν ἐνοήσαμεν. ὧν ὅσα μὲν χωροῦμεν, μιμούμεθα· ὅσα δὲ οὐ χωρεῖ ἢ φύσις πρὸς μίμησιν, σεβόμεθά τε καὶ προσκυνοῦμεν. οὐκοῦν πάντα τὰ ἐρμηνευτικά τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ σημασίας ὀνόματα ἐπιλάμπειν χρηὶ τῷ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ βίῳ, τὰ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως, τὰ δὲ διὰ προσκυνήσεως, εἰ μέλλοι ἄρτιος εἶναι ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, καθὼς φησιν ὁ ἀπόστολος, μηδαμοῦ διὰ τῆς κακίας ἀκρωτηριάζων τὴν ἀρτιότητα. (*De Perf.*, GNO VIII/1, 178, 9–19).

a true and proper *imitatio Christi*: the greatness of Gregory's Christological thought permits him to distinguish, in Christ, those characteristics that are attainable by our nature from that which belongs to Christ as God.

In the *Antir*, Gregory shows the profound depth of his Christology, affirming that Christ in as much as man had to possess a proper name. For this reason Gabriel revealed to Mary the name of Jesus. Despite the fact that the divine nature is incomprehensible and inexpressible with a name, the union of the two natures makes it possible for God to be called by a name in his humanity,¹⁰⁵ in this way the name of Jesus will receive adoration and he will be a man above any name, a property that in itself corresponds to the Divinity.¹⁰⁶

Thus those names that cannot reach to the immutable divine nature, since they are *shadows of the things* and can only manifest *the movements* and dynamics, become expressive of the divinity in Christ, since God himself entered into time and has made dynamics his own.¹⁰⁷ This is given to us in a manner that we can understand, it is offered to us in history. God truly has a name now.¹⁰⁸ And this is

¹⁰⁵ L.F. Mateo-Seco speaks of this as of “a splendid *communicatio idiomatum*” (L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Cristologia...*, p. 244).

¹⁰⁶ καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἄνθρωπος κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινην ἀκολουθίαν ὀνόματι κατὰ τὸ ἰδιάζον προσηγορεύθη διὰ τῆς γενομένης τῆ παρθένω παρὰ τοῦ Γαβριὴλ μυσταγωγίας καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, καθὼς εἴρηται, Ἰησοῦς ὀνομάσθη, ἡ δὲ θεία φύσις ἀπερίληπτός ἐστιν ὄνοματι, ἐν δὲ τὰ δύο διὰ τῆς ἀνακράσεως γέγονε· τούτου χάριν καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου κατονομάζεται. ἐν γὰρ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψει καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὑπὲρ ὄνομα γίνεται, ὅπερ ἴδιόν ἐστι τῆς θεότητος τῆς δηλωθῆναι μὴ δυναμένης ὑπὸ τινος ὀνομαστικῆς σημασίας (*Antir*, GNO III/1, 161, 13–22).

¹⁰⁷ Gregory, in the *InCant*, asks himself how the mortal and ethereal nature could have been spousally united (συζυγία συναρμοσθῆναι: a very strong expression, which corresponds to the Latin *copulatio* and, perhaps, hazarding a somewhat suggestive hypothesis in regard to apophatism, to the Biblical *to know*) to the simple and in itself inaccessible nature, for us who live in the shadows, if the shadow of the body had not been interposed with the light (cfr. *InCant*, GNO VI, 108, 7–10).

¹⁰⁸ J. Ratzinger has discussed splendidly the theme of the name of God: in Ex 3.14 the revealed name of God is, more than a true name, an “I am who I am”, thus an invitation to negative theology. The complement to this episode can be found, then, with the revelation of the name of Christ (Jn 17.6, 26). It is the ἐγὼ εἰμι of John (appearing 10 times as an absolute affirmation) that completes the episode of the burning bush, in which “I am what I am” becomes “I am”, “I am here for you” that is the affirmation of the presence and proximity of God, incarnate now and forever for us (J. RATZINGER, *Einführung in das Christentum*, Kösel 1968, pp. 94ss). The observation is all the more interesting since Gregory, in the *DeVitaMo*, interprets the episode of the burning bush in Christological and ontological terms: it is as if the positive aspect of apophatism was underlined by him in the moment when the aspect of being is placed in the forefront.

all through love of man: the very name of Christ has become φιλανθρωπία.¹⁰⁹

b. *The Image*

Still in the *DePerf*, Gregory praises the profundity of Paul and his penetration into the divine mysteries, commenting the affirmation of He 1.3 that Christ is, in relationship to the Father, *radiance of his glory and impression of his substance*.¹¹⁰

For [Paul], knowing how much human capacity can know of the divine nature, shows that the discourse on the supreme substance is inexplicable and incomprehensible to human reasonings. Therefore, while speaking of that which can be contemplated in it—Peace, Power, Life, Justice, Light, Truth and similar attributes—he declares that the discourse about that substance itself is absolutely incomprehensible, affirming that God has never been seen, and never will be. For he says that *no one among men has ever seen him, or can see him*.¹¹¹ For this reason, seeking out what to call that which cannot be understood by reasonings, as he did not find a name adapted to express the significance of the inexpressible, he called *glory* and *substance* that which is above every good and which is not thought or expressed fittingly. He left, then, the essence that is above all beings without name. But to explain the union and inseparability of the Son in relationship to the Father and the fact that one contemplates him together with the infinite and eternal Father in infinity and eternity, he calls him *radiance of his glory* and *impression of <his substance>*, indicating with the word *radiance* the identity of nature and with the word *impression* equality. For one does not conceive of something between the splendour and the nature that is resplendent, nor does one conceive of a diminution of the impression in relationship to the substance (ὑπόστασιν) from which it is impressed; but he who thinks of the resplendent nature thinks also always of splendour along with it and he who thinks of the greatness of the substance measures also based on the image that manifests the substance.¹¹² For this reason [Paul] says also that the Lord is *Form*¹¹³ (μορφή) of God, not to diminish the Lord with the concept of form,¹¹⁴ but to show the greatness of God with the form, in which the greatness of the Father is contemplated, who does not in any way exceed his proper form,

¹⁰⁹ “ὁ ὄνομα ἢ φιλανθρωπία ἐγένετο.” (*InCant*, GNO VI, 107, 4–5).

¹¹⁰ Here ὑπόστασις has been translated with *substance*, understood as something that concretely exists, according to the sense of the word in the moment that the author of Hebrews wrote.

¹¹¹ 1 Tim 6.16.

¹¹² This is a reference to the φῶς ἐκ φωτός of Nicea (see p. 133).

¹¹³ Phil 2.6.

¹¹⁴ To exclude any reductive interpretation of μορφή, cfr. *Antir*, GNO III/1, 159.

and cannot be found outside his own image. In fact there is nothing of the Father that is unformed or devoid of beauty and that is not full of joy in the beauty of the Only Begotten. For this reason, the Lord says *he who has seen Me has seen the Father*,¹¹⁵ signifying by this that there is neither defect nor excess of any kind.¹¹⁶

Therefore, Paul did not give any name to the divine substance, which is and remains ineffable, but he spoke to us of Christ, who is the image of the Father. And to be image does not imply inferiority. Rather, it is precisely in being image that the glory of the Father is fully radiant. Gregory's discourse is here turned to Trinitarian immanence; for he says that Christ is he who always is, since he always knows he who is: the Son has his regard fixed eternally on the Father (see note 132 on p. 186). This knowledge is distinct from the human knowledge of this reality, which is limited and must continually grow.¹¹⁷

However Christ is not a distant and extrinsic Image.¹¹⁸ He is *the* Image to make of us other images of God:

Thus, he who is above every knowledge and understanding, who is ineffable, indescribable and unexplainable, to make you image of God anew,

¹¹⁵ Jn 14.9.

¹¹⁶ πάντα γὰρ ὅσα χωρεῖ ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη δύναμις περὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως κατανοήσας ἀνεφικτόν τε καὶ ἀνεπίληπτον λογισμοῖς ἀνθρώπινους τὸν τῆς ὑπερκειμένης οὐσίας ἀποφαίνεται λόγον. Διὸ τὰ περὶ αὐτὴν θεωρούμενα λέγων, εἰρήνην καὶ δύναμιν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ φῶς καὶ ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, τὸν περὶ αὐτῆς ἐκείνης λόγον ἄληπτον εἶναι παντελῶς διωρίσατο, εἰπὼν μὴτε ἐωρᾶσθαι ποτε τὸν θεὸν μῆτε ὀφθῆσεσθαι. "Ὅν εἶδε γὰρ φησὶν ἀνθρώπων οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται. διὰ τοῦτο ἀναζητῶν πῶς ὀνομάσει τὸ μὴ δυνάμενον λογισμοῖς ληφθῆναι, ὡς οὐχ εὖρεν ἐμφαντικὸν ὄνομα τῆς τῶν ἀκαταλήπτων ἐρμηνείας, δόξαν καὶ ὑπόστασιν ὀνόμασε τὸ ὑπερκειμένον παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τὸ μῆτε νοούμενον ἀξίως μῆτε φραζόμενον. τὴν μὲν οὖν ὑπερκειμένην τῶν ὄντων οὐσίαν ἀφήκεν ἀκατονόμαστον· τὸ δὲ συναφές τε καὶ ἀδιάστατον τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα διερμηνεύων καὶ τὸ τῷ ἀορίστῳ τε καὶ αἰδίῳ πατρὶ ἀορίστως τε καὶ αἰδίως συνθεωρούμενον ἀπαύγασμα δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρα ὑποστάσεως προσαγορεύει, τῷ μὲν ἀπαυγάσματι τὸ συμφυές ἐνδεικνύμενος, τῷ δὲ χαρακτήρι τὸ ἰσοστάσιον. οὐτε γὰρ αὐγῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀπαυγάζουσαν φύσιν ἐπινοεῖται τι μέσον οὐτε τις τοῦ χαρακτήρος ἐλάττωσις πρὸς τὴν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ χαρακτηριζομένην ὑπόστασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ τὴν ἀπαυγάζουσαν φύσιν νοήσας καὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα ταύτῃ πάντως συγκατενόησε καὶ ὁ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐν νῷ λαβὼν τῷ ἐπιφαινομένῳ χαρακτήρι πάντως ἐμμετρῆ καὶ τὴν ὑπόστασιν. διὸ καὶ μορφὴν θεοῦ λέγει τὸν κύριον, οὐ κατασμικρύνων τῇ τῆς μορφῆς ἐννοίᾳ τὸν κύριον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τῆς μορφῆς ἐνδεικνύμενος, ἢ ἐνθεωρεῖται τοῦ πατρὸς τῆ μεγαλειότης, οὐδαμοῦ τῆς ἰδίας μορφῆς ὑπερπίπτουσα οὐδὲ ἔξω τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν χαρακτήρος εὐρισκομένη. ἄμορφον γὰρ καὶ ἀκαλλές περὶ τὸν πατέρα οὐδέν, ὃ μὴ τῇ ὠραιότητι τοῦ μονογενοῦς ἐπαγάλλεται· διὸ φησὶν ὁ κύριος ὅτι Ὁ ἑωρακὸς ἐμὲ ἑώρακε τὸν πατέρα, σημαίνων διὰ τοῦτου τὸ μῆτε ἔλλειψίν τινα εἶναι τῆς ὑπέρπτωσιν. (*DePerf*, GNO VIII/1, 188, 2–189, 16).

¹¹⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 194, 10–14.

¹¹⁸ The being of the image is the being of the Son.

for love of man (ὑπὸ φιλανθρωπίας) made of himself also the image of the invisible God, so as to be configured to you in the very form that he assumed and so that you be, by him, newly configured to the image (χαρακτῆρα) of the archetypal beauty, to become that which you were from the beginning. Therefore, if we are to become as well images of the invisible God, it is fitting that the form of our life (τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν) be conformed to the model of life (τοῦ βίου) that is proposed to us.¹¹⁹ And what is this model? While living in the flesh, to not live according to the flesh.¹²⁰ For the prototypical image of the invisible God, who came among us by means of the Virgin, was tried in all in likeness of human nature, but he did not allow only the experience of sin.¹²¹

The passage is an incredible synthesis of all of Nyssian theology: he starts from the Trinity, in which the Son is the image of the Father, who for love created man according to his image and likeness. Due to the infidelity of man, the Son became man to restore to us the beauty of the original image, in which we were created. The movement starts from the Trinity to return to the Trinity. Creation is inseparable from redemption and eschatology, which is the moment in which the restitution of the image will be perfectly accomplished in every man, and thus, in *man*. The theology of the name extends to the theology of the image.

Gregory says that Christians are like the apprentices of a great artist, who are learning from him the art of painting. They strive to imitate the beauty of the work of the master, and if they were to succeed in their intention, the canvases of all would reproduce the beauty of the proposed example. Thus each one is the painter of his own life (τῆς ἰδίας ἕκαστος ζωῆς ἐστὶ ζωγράφος),¹²² in which the free will is like the artisan of the work and the virtues are like the colours, which serve

¹¹⁹ Cfr. Jn 13.15. See below at note 173.

¹²⁰ Cfr. Rm 8.12.

¹²¹ οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ ὑπερέκεινα πάσης γνώσεώς τε καὶ καταλήψεως, ὁ ἄφραστος καὶ ἀνεκλάλητος καὶ ἀνεκδιήγητος, ἵνα σε ποιῆσῃ πάλιν εἰκόνα θεοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπὸ φιλανθρωπίας ἐγένετο εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, ὥστε τῇ ἰδίᾳ μορφῇ, ἣν ἀνέλαβεν, ἐν σοὶ μορφωθῆναι καὶ σὲ πάλιν δι' ἑαυτοῦ πρὸς τὸν χαρακτῆρα τοῦ ἀρχετύπου συσχηματισθῆναι κάλλους, εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι ὕπερ ἧς ἐξ ἀρχῆς. οὐκοῦν εἰ μέλλοιμεν γίνεσθαι καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρὸς τὸ ἐκκείμενον ἡμῖν τοῦ βίου ὑπόδειγμα τυποῦσθαι προσήκει τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν τὸ εἶδος· τοῦτο δέ ἐστι τί; τὸ ἐν σαρκὶ ζῶντας μὴ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν. καὶ γὰρ ἡ πρωτότυπος ἐκείνη τοῦ ἀοράτου θεοῦ εἰκὼν ἢ διὰ τῆς παρθένου ἐπιδημήσασα ἐπειράθη μὲν κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοίότητα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως, μόνης δὲ οὐ συμπαρεδέξατο τῆς ἀμαρτίας τὴν πείραν. (*De Perf.*, GNO VIII/1, 194, 14–195, 12).

¹²² *Ibidem*, 196, 3.

to form the image.¹²³ For this reason it is necessary that the colours be pure, to avoid painting the marvellous image of the Lord on a face rendered ugly by the filth of vice:

However it is necessary that, as much as possible, the colours of the virtues be pure, amalgamated according to an artistic combination one with another, to receive the imitation of beauty (τοῦ κάλλους μίμησιν), in this way we will become images of the image (τῆς εἰκόνος εἰκόνα), reproducing the beauty of the model, thanks to an imitation that is active as much as possible.¹²⁴

It is important to highlight the original value of the concept of image for Gregory. Daniélou underlines the difference between the sense of the word εἰκών in Plato and in Philo: for the first the reference is to the sensible world in its relationship to the intelligible world. It is thus a certain analogy, but inferiority is that which is prominent. This pejorative sense of εἰκών can be found in a few points in the writings of the Nyssian. Philo, on the other hand, uses this category to express participation, applying it to λόγος, to κόσμος, and even to the human νοῦς. Gregory primarily follows this second meaning. “It designates a true community of ‘nature’. Nevertheless it carries a certain number of distinctions which the Christian uses of the word did not imply. Applied to the λόγος, as it is already in St. Paul (Col 1.15, Cfr. Wis 7.26), it [εἰκών] does not signify a deficient participation, but the pure relation of origin in perfect equality of nature: it is a new meaning, linked to the Trinitarian dogma”.¹²⁵ Gregory thus purifies this category of the subordinationist undertones that surrounded it in the Trinitarian sphere.

This highlights the economic extension of the concept even more: when the Nyssian affirms that man must be *image of the image*, he is speaking of an authentic divinization. But can one still speak of *a true community of nature*?

¹²³ Cfr. *ibidem*, 195, 14–196, 9.

¹²⁴ ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐστὶ δυνατόν, καθαρὰ δεῖ τῶν ἀρετῶν τὰ χρώματα κατὰ τινα τεχνικὴν μίξιν πρὸς ἀλληλα συγκεκραμένα πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κάλλους μίμησιν παραλαμβάνειν, ὥστε γενέσθαι ἡμᾶς τῆς εἰκόνος εἰκόνα, δι’ ἐνεργοῦς ὡς οἶόν τε μιμήσεως ἐκμαζαμένους τὸ πρωτότυπον κάλλος (*Ibidem*, 196, 9–14).

¹²⁵ “Il désigne une véritable communauté de «nature». Toutefois il comporte un certain nombre de distinctions que n’offraient pas les emplois non-chrétiens du mot. Appliqué au λόγος, comme il l’est déjà chez saint Paul (Col 1.15, Cfr. Sag 7.26), il ne désigne pas une participation déficiente, mais pure relation d’origine dans la parfaite égalité de la nature: c’est un sens nouveau, lié au dogme trinitaire” (J. DANIELOU, *Platonisme...*, p. 53).

c. *Connaturality*

Gregory continues to give examples, affirming for example, that among the colours in which the life of Christ is painted there is humility and patience, demonstrated in enduring without complaining the spittings, the insults, the beatings until his redemptive death in which he pardons and saves his executioners.

Our being the images of the Image thus requires an explanation. How is this possible? Is it only an extrinsic imitation as the example of the painting might suggest, or is it an ontological reality? The Nyssian responds using the category of *connaturality*:

He who has learned that Christ is the Head of the Church, consider first of all that every head is of the same nature (ὁμοφυής) and substance (ὁμοούσιος) with the body which is subject to it, and that there is a unique connaturality (συμφυία) of each part in relationship to the whole, which thanks to a unique co-spiration¹²⁶ (διὰ μιᾶς συμπνοίας) actuates the conformity of sensation¹²⁷ (σμπάθειαν) of the parts together with the whole. Therefore, if something is external to the body, it is also totally external to the head. With this the reasoning teaches us that also each member must become that which the head is by nature, to be intimately united with the head (πρὸς τὴν κεφαλὴν οἰκειῶς ἔχη). And we are the members that complete the body of Christ.¹²⁸

The Nyssian doctrine is extremely clear and audacious: one must reach the level of a true participation in the divine nature.¹²⁹ That

¹²⁶ This is a key concept for Gregory, who sees the cosmos, the Church and every man as a symphony in which the breathing of the parts is coordinated with the whole. Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1970, 50–74. The theme is developed well in H.-I. MARROU, *Une théologie de la musique chez Grégoire de Nysse?* in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Card. J. Daniélou*, Beauchesne 1972, pp. 501–508.

¹²⁷ It is not only participation in the suffering of the other, but the word refers also to the cords of an instrument that sound in unison (cfr. THEO OF SMYRNA, *De utilitate mathematicae*, 51).

¹²⁸ Ὁ δὲ κεφαλὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τὸν Χριστὸν εἶναι μαθὼν τοῦτο πρὸ πάντων διανοεῖσθω, ὅτι πᾶσα κεφαλὴ τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ σώματι ὁμοφυής ἐστὶ καὶ ὁμοούσιος καὶ μία τίς ἐστὶ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον μελῶν πρὸς τὸ ὅλον ἢ συμφυία, διὰ μιᾶς συμπνοίας κατεργαζομένη πρὸς τὰ μέρη τῷ παντὶ τὴν σμπάθειαν. οὐκοῦν εἴ τι τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ἐκτός, τοῦτο πάντως καὶ πρὸς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀλλοτρίως ἔχει. παιδεύει τοῖνυν διὰ τούτων ὁ λόγος ἡμᾶς, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ κεφαλὴ κατὰ τὴν φύσιν, τοῦτο καὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον γίνεσθαι μέλη, ἵνα πρὸς τὴν κεφαλὴν οἰκειῶς ἔχη. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐσμεν τὰ μέλη, οἱ εἰς τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ συντελοῦντες. (*De Perf.*, GNO VIII/1, 197, 19–198, 4).

¹²⁹ H. von Balthasar expresses this having opportune recourse to the categories of the “*avoir Dieu*”, which is immutable for man due to the impossibility to understand the divine nature, and “*être Dieu*”, which is possible at the interior of the analogical path (cfr. H. VON BALTHASAR, *Présence...*, p. 81).

which seems an absurdity, a blasphemy for the Greek spirit as well as for the Judaic spirit becomes possible in Christ. Divinization becomes a reality in Christ.

Gregory then refers to the situation of perversity in which men find themselves, commenting the words of Sacred Scripture *the sinners are deviated from the maternal dwelling, perverted from the womb, they speak lies*:¹³⁰

For this reason [the Son] assuming in body and soul the first fruits of the common nature, rendered it holy, preserving it in himself pure of every evil and keeping it uncontaminated, to consecrate it in the incorruptibility to the Father of incorruptibility and to attract with himself all that is connatural (πᾶν τὸ συγγενές κατὰ τὴν φύσιν) and of the same species (ὁμόφυλον), in order to re-admit those who were disinherited to the inheritance of filial adoption¹³¹ (υἰοθεσίαν) and the enemies of God to the participation in his divinity. Therefore, as first fruit of the mass¹³² he was united to the true God and Father by purity and impassibility¹³³ (ἀπαθείας), so also we, who are the mass, will be united by similar paths to the Father of incorruptibility, through the imitation (διὰ τοῦ μιμήσασθαι), as much as is possible, of the impassibility (ἀπαθές) and immutability (ἀναλλοίωτον) of the Mediator (τοῦ μεσίτου). For in this way we will be the crown of the Only Begotten God, [composed] of precious stones, becoming honour and glory through [our] life (διὰ τοῦ βίου).¹³⁴

Everything moves through the mediation of Christ, whose life and virtues we must struggle to imitate. This imitation involves man in his totality:

¹³⁰ Ps 58.4.

¹³¹ Cfr. Eph 1.5.

¹³² Cfr. Rm 11.16.

¹³³ It is literally 'apathy': this is another case of the Christianization of a typical category of the philosophy of the epoch. In this case the vocabulary is from the Stoic school, in which beings deprived and free from passions were considered the supreme ideal. Gregory transforms this terminology into a Christological category, indicating with it the imperturbability of Jesus before sufferings and offences: all the abuses of man, which culminate in the atrocious torment of the Cross, do not move Christ from his love. For this reason the highest manifestation of ἀπάθεια is the final pardon to his own executioners.

¹³⁴ τούτου χάριν τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως ἀναλαβὼν διὰ ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος ἁγίαν ἐποίησε, πάσης κακίας ἀμιγῆ τε καὶ ἀπαράδεκτον αὐτὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ διασώσας, ἵνα ταύτην ἀναθεὶς διὰ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας τῷ πατρὶ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας συνεπισπάσῃται δι' αὐτῆς πᾶν τὸ συγγενές κατὰ τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆ καὶ ὁμόφυλον καὶ προσδέξῃται τοὺς ἀποκηρύκτους εἰς τὴν υἰοθεσίαν καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν τῆς θεότητος αὐτοῦ μετουσίαν. οὐκοῦν ὡσπερ ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τοῦ φυράματος διὰ καθαρότητός τε καὶ ἀπαθείας ἠκειώθη τῷ ἀληθινῷ πατρὶ καὶ θεῷ, οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς τὸ φύραμα διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων ὁδῶν τῷ πατρὶ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας κολληθησόμεθα διὰ τοῦ μιμήσασθαι, καθὼς ἂν ἢ δυνατόν, τοῦ μεσίτου τὸ ἀπαθές τε καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον. οὕτω γὰρ ἐσόμεθα τοῦ μονογενοῦς θεοῦ στέφανος ἐκ λίθων τιμίων, τιμὴ καὶ δόξα διὰ τοῦ βίου γινόμενοι. (*De Perf.*, GNO VIII/1, 197, 206, 1–16).

For I maintain that if one thinks constantly that he participates in the adorable Name, calling himself Christian, according to the Apostolic doctrine,¹³⁵ then it is necessary that he shows in himself the power also of the other names, with which we know Christ, participating in each appellative through [his] life. I mean to say that there are three characteristics of the Christian life: action, word and thought. The principle in respect to the others is thought. For thought is the principle of every word, and in second place after reflection comes language, which reveals through the voice the thought that is impressed in the soul. And in third place, after mind and language comes action, which transforms into activity that which it has been thought. Therefore, when the course of life guides us to one of these situations, it is good to examine ourselves with attention, in all our words, action and thought, in relationship to the divine concepts with which Christ is known and called, so that our action and our speaking and our thought do not distance themselves from the power of those sublime names.¹³⁶

The names of Christ are the measure for the Christian and involve him completely, first of all in his thought, which is the principle of speaking. The affirmation is quite interesting as it highlights the importance of thought to be Christian. Apophatism has nothing to do with negating the possibilities of the human reason. We must follow Christ first of all with thought, to be able to imitate him in words and action, reproducing in ourselves, through divine grace, his life. Then Gregory concludes:

Therefore this is, in my judgment, the perfection of Christian life: to be in communion, in the soul, in words and in the occupations of life, with all the names by which is indicated the name of Christ, in such a way that each one reaches perfect sanctity, according to the blessing of Paul,¹³⁷ constantly far, in the whole body, in the soul and spirit, from every contact with evil.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Cfr. Acts 11.26.

¹³⁶ οἶμαι γάρ, εἴ τις ἀεὶ τοῦτο λογίζοιτο, ὅτι κοινῶνός ἐστι τοῦ προσκυνουμένου ὀνόματος κατὰ τὸ δόγμα τῶν ἀποστόλων Χριστιανὸς χρηματίζων, ἀναγκαίως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὀνομάτων, οἷς ὁ Χριστὸς νοεῖται, καὶ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ δεῖξει τὴν δύναμιν, κοινῶνός ἐκάστης κλήσεως διὰ τοῦ βίου γινόμενος. οἷόν τι λέγω· τρία τὰ χαρακτηρίζοντα τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ τὸν βίον ἐστί· πράξις, λόγος, ἐνθύμιον. ἐκ τούτων ἀρχικώτερον τῶν ἄλλων ἐστί τὸ ἐνθύμιον. ἀρχὴ γὰρ γίνεται λόγου παντὸς ἢ διάνοια, δεύτερον δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἐνθύμησιν ὁ λόγος ἐστί, τὴν ἐντυπωθεῖσαν τῇ ψυχῇ διάνοιαν διὰ τῆς φωνῆς ἐκκαλύπτων, τρίτην δὲ τάξιν ἐπέχει μετὰ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὸν λόγον ἢ πράξις, τὸ νοητὸν εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἄγουσα. οὐκοῦν ὅταν εἰς τι τούτων ἡμᾶς ἢ ἀκολουθία τοῦ βίου προαγάγηται, καλῶς ἔχει παντὸς καὶ λόγου καὶ ἔργου καὶ ἐνθυμήματος τὰ θεῖα ταῦτα νοήματα, δι' ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς νοεῖται καὶ ὀνομάζεται, δι' ἀκριβείας ἐπισκοπεῖσθαι, μὴ ἔξω τῆς δυνάμεως τῶν ὑψηλῶν ἐκείνων ὀνομάτων φέρηται ἡμῶν ἢ τὸ ἔργον ἢ ὁ λόγος ἢ τὸ ἐνθύμιον. (*De Perf.*, GNO VIII/1, 209, 23–210, 17).

¹³⁷ Cfr. 1 Thess 5.23.

¹³⁸ Τοῦτο τοίνυν ἐστί κατὰ γε τὴν ἐμὴν κρίσιν τὸ ἐν τῷ Χριστιανῷ βίῳ τέλειον, τὸ

Gregory has thus reached a summit in his theological research. He, as a thinker of the 4th century, immersed in a strongly Neoplatonic and profoundly Greek environment, discovers in the revelation of Christ that the mutability of human nature is not only negative. On the contrary, it is precisely his capacity to change that gives him the possibility to progress infinitely towards the better, towards God:

Therefore the reasoning shows that that which seems to be feared—I mean to say that our nature is mutable—is instead a wing for the flight towards the greatest things, since it would be a punishment for us to not be able to undertake a change for that which is better. Therefore let not he who sees in his nature the disposition to change become afflicted, but moving in every thing towards that which is better and transforming himself *from glory to glory*,¹³⁹ let him change thus, becoming every day constantly better, in daily growth, and perfecting himself always more, without ever being able to reach the limit of perfection. For in this consists true perfection: to never stop growing towards the best and to place no limits to perfection.¹⁴⁰

As Spira did well to underline,¹⁴¹ Gregory's conception of virtue represents a true and proper conceptual revolution. It is an infinite movement towards the infinite,¹⁴² which unhinges the very foundation

πάντων τῶν ὀνομάτων, οἷς τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ διασημαίνεται ὄνομα, τὴν κοινωνίαν ἔχειν ἐν ψυχῇ τε καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς τοῦ βίου ἐπιτηδεύμασιν, ὥστε ὀλοτελῆ τὸν ἁγιασμὸν κατὰ τὴν εὐλογίαν τοῦ Παύλου ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἀναδέξασθαι ἐν ὀλοκλήρῳ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ἕξω τῆς πρὸς τὸ κακὸν ἐπιμιξίας διηλεκτικῶς φυλασσόμενον. (*DePerf.*, GNO VIII/1, 212, 17–213, 1).

¹³⁹ 2 Cor 3.18. Cfr. J. DANIELOU—H. MUSURILLO, *From glory to glory*, New York 1979, p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ οὐκοῦν τὸ φοβερὸν εἶναι δοκοῦν (λέγω δὲ τὸ τρεπτὴν ἡμῶν εἶναι τὴν φύσιν) οἷόν τι περὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ μείζω πτῆσιν ὁ λόγος ὑπέδειξεν, ὡς ζημίαν εἶναι ἡμῖν τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι τὴν πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον ἀλλοίωσιν δέξασθαι. μὴ τοῖνυν λυπεῖσθω ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῇ φύσει τὸ πρὸς τὴν μεταβολὴν ἐπιτήδειον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον διὰ παντὸς ἀλλοιούμενος καὶ ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν μεταμορφούμενος οὕτω τρεπέσθω, διὰ τῆς καθ' ἡμέραν ἀυξήσεως πάντοτε κρεῖττων γινόμενος καὶ αἰεὶ τελειούμενος καὶ μηδέποτε πρὸς τὸ πέρασ φθάνων τῆς τελειότητος. αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς τελειότης τὸ μηδέποτε στήναι πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον αὐξανόμενον μηδὲ τι πέρατι περιορίσαι τὴν τελειότητα. (*DePerf.*, GNO VIII/1, 213, 20–214, 6).

¹⁴¹ Cfr. A. SPIRA, *Le temps d'un homme selon Aristote et Grégoire de Nyssa*, in «Colloques internationaux du CNRS», Paris 1984, p. 289s.

¹⁴² This is ἐπέκτασις, which is a key category for the *DeVitaMo*. The very name of Christ is presented as 'rock', that is solid and stable terrain thanks to which it is possible to throw oneself towards the heights, in the race of the virtues. The ideal is immobility in movement, the constant progress, since time and eternity are no longer dialectically opposed. Cfr. *DeVitaMo*, II, 244. Daniélou points out that the symbol of truth is quite different for the Greeks and the Hebrews. Greek ἀλήθεια is symbolized by light and its profound sense is the transference of the object to the spirit. On the other hand, the symbol of the Hebrew *'emet* is the rock (cfr. *Dt* 32, 4) and the reference is to the solidity

of Aristotelian logic. For the Greek world identified perfection with the finite.¹⁴³

Time and history thus reach an apex of dignity, since, in Christ, they have become a path to God. For this reason Gregory insists on the word βίος, which represents daily life, that life in which Christ shared in our condition, working, loving and suffering.

The beautiful words of Guardini can be applied here, when he expresses the value of the Incarnation for history: “thus the Now of existence has a clearly perceived place in the whole of worldly time, this is so much more meaningful as the Incarnation of God becomes more efficacious in the life of every redeemed man, with its relationship of Eternity and Time, as it transforms the naked instant into the decisive *moment* for existence”.¹⁴⁴ Time opens up to eternity.

The full sense of apophatism is thus found in a face. It defends the ontological profundity of nature against the foolish and arrogant attacks of the human intellect, to open the eyes to the whole man: apophatism finds its completion and end in the face of Christ. In this way it is in the Person that the path to the nature itself—the divine nature—is opened to man:

Thus, to explain with a definition the significance of Christianity, we would say that Christianity is the imitation (μίμησις) of the divine nature.¹⁴⁵

This should not seem exaggerated, since man was created from the beginning in the image and likeness of God, through which he is naturally attracted to the divine.¹⁴⁶

of the foundation, the veracity of the witness. The first is opposed to error, the second to the lie. God thus appears more as faithful than as true. (cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Dieu et Nous*, Paris 1956, pp. 110–115).

¹⁴³ Cfr. E. MUEHLENBERG, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa. Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik*, Göttingen 1966, pp. 29–58 and R. GUARDINI, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, Basel 1950, pp. 13–15.

¹⁴⁴ “So hat das Jetzt des Existierens einen deutlich empfundenen Ort im Ganzen der Weltzeit—um so bedeutungsvoller, als im Leben jedes Erlösten die Menschwerdung Gottes mit ihrem Verhältnis von Ewigkeit und Zeit wirksam wird, und aus der blossen Zeitstelle des Jetzt den über die Existenz entscheidenden “Augenblick” macht” (R. GUARDINI, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, Basel 1950, p. 28).

¹⁴⁵ οὐκοῦν ὡς ἂν τις ὀρω τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν ἐρμηνεύσειεν, οὕτως ἐροῦμεν, ὅτι χριστιανισμὸς ἐστὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως μίμησις. (*DeProf.*, GNO VIII/1, 136, 6–8).

¹⁴⁶ In the *DeBeat*, Gregory explicitly affirms that man leaves behind his own nature: ἐκβαίνει τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φύσιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀθάνατος ἐκ θνητοῦ καὶ ἐξ ἐπικήρου ἀκήρατος καὶ ἐξ ἐφημέρου αἰδίου καὶ τὸ ὅλον θεὸς ἐξ ἀνθρώπου γινόμενος. (*DeBeat*, GNO VII/2, 151, 15–17).

At this point, Daniélou's observation is very important: "for we have already noted that φύσις indicates the concrete reality, and that thus on the level of 'nature' one can speak of a community between God and man or between man and the angels, while one could not speak of a community of the οὐσία".¹⁴⁷

Salvation in Christ then cannot simply be something extrinsic. Man is instead guided, in the life and heart of Christ, to his state of original communion, to his original capacity to love.¹⁴⁸ And all of this is signified by a name, by the name of *Christian*.¹⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

The following passage of the *InCant*, in which Gregory comments *your name is a perfume poured out* of Song 1.3, is particularly stimulating as a form of conclusion:

Again, in the passages that follow, the soul, that is the spouse, reaches a higher philosophy, showing the inaccessibility and incomprehensibility (τὸ ἀπρόσιτόν τε καὶ ἀχώρητον) of the divine power for human reasonings. In this passage it is said: "*your name is a perfume (Μύρον) poured out*". For, it seems to me that with this discourse it is indicated, in a certain manner, that it is not possible that the infinite (ἄοριστον) nature be exactly understood in the signification of a name. But all the power of concepts and every expression of words and names, even if it seems to have something great and suitable to the divinity, does not have the natural capacity to attain being in itself. But starting from traces and glimmers, our reason conjectures on that which is unknown, representing to itself, based upon a certain analogy¹⁵⁰ (ἐκ τινος ἀναλογίας), the incomprehensible through that which is understood. It is said, in fact, that whatever name we can

¹⁴⁷ "Nous avons déjà noté, en effet, que la φύσις indique la réalité concrète et qu'ainsi sur le plan de la «nature» on peut parler d'une communauté entre Dieu et l'homme ou entre l'homme et les anges, alors qu'on ne pourrait parler d'une communauté d'οὐσία." (J. DANIELOU, *Platonisme . . .*, p. 102).

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. L.F. MATEO SECO, *Estudios sobre la cristología de San Gregorio de Nisa*, Pamplona 1978, pp. 257–258.

¹⁴⁹ This centrality of person is essential to the Nyssian conception of the mysticism of the shadows as well, which is found in exact parallel in respect to the proposed reading of Gregory's apophatism (cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Mystique de la ténèbre chez Grégoire de Nyssse*, under *Contemplation*, in *DSp* II/2, cc. 1872–1885). In a certain sense, for the Nyssian, the question of the knowledge of God, of mysticism or of the beatific vision are themes that cannot be separated.

¹⁵⁰ ἐκ μεγέθους καὶ καλλονῆς κτισμάτων κατὰ τινὰ τῶν γινωσκομένων ἀναλογίαν εἰς γνῶσιν ἔρχεται τοῦ εἶναι (*CE* II, *GNO* I, 230, 27–29).

imagine, among those that correspond to the perfume of the divinity, expressing that which we say, do not manifest the perfume itself, but with the theological names¹⁵¹ (θεολογικοῖς) we indicate [only] some light traces of the perfume (λείψανον ἀτμοῦ) of the divine fragrance (τῆς θείας εὐωδίας). Thus by the vases, from which the perfume has been poured out, one is ignorant of the nature itself of the perfume that was poured out of the vases, but from a certain indistinct quality, left by the perfumes on the bottom of the vase, we form a conjecture on the poured out perfume. Therefore, from what has been said, we learn that the perfume itself of the Divinity, whatever it may be in [its] essence, is above every name and every concept. While the marvels that are contemplated in the universe furnish the matter for the theological names, with which we call [God] wise, powerful, good, holy, beatified and eternal, judge, saviour and with attributes of this type.¹⁵² All of them together do not indicate more than a small quality of divine perfume, of which the entire creation is impregnated, in the guise of a vase for perfumes, thanks to the marvels that are contemplated in it.¹⁵³

In this marvellous text, which belongs to the last period of Nyssian work, the admirable equilibrium of Gregory's thought shines forth in all its splendour. The profound theological understanding of the unknowability of the divine nature and essence now assumes the warm poetic tones¹⁵⁴ of piety. The divine nature is uncontainable as are the perfumes

¹⁵¹ The term is technical and refers to Trinitarian immanence.

¹⁵² Cfr. A similar enumeration in *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 55, 17–18. See p. 94.

¹⁵³ Πάλιν ἐν τοῖς ἐφεξῆς ὑψηλοτέρας ἄπτεται φιλοσοφίας ἢ ψυχῆ, ἢ νύμφη, τὸ ἀπρόσιτόν τε καὶ ἀχώρητον λογισμοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους τῆς θείας δυνάμεως ἐνδεικνυμένη, ἐν οἷς φησι Μύρον ἐκκενωθὲν ὄνομά σοι· τοιοῦτον γάρ τι δοκεῖ μοι διὰ τοῦ λόγου τούτου σημαίνεσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὀνομαστικῆ σημασία περιληφθῆναι δι' ἀκριβείας τὴν ἀόριστον φύσιν· ἀλλὰ πᾶσα νοημάτων δύναιμι καὶ πᾶσα ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων ἔμφασις, κἂν τι μέγα καὶ θεοπρεπὲς ἔχειν δόξῃ, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὄντος ἐφάνασθαι φύσιν οὐκ ἔχει· ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐξ ἰχνῶν τινῶν καὶ ἐναυσμάτων ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν τοῦ ἀδήλου καταστοχάζεται διὰ τῶν καταλαμβανομένων εἰκάζων ἕκ τινος ἀναλογίας τὸ ἀκατάληπτον. ὅ τι γὰρ ἂν ἐπινοήσωμεν, φησίν, ὄνομα γνωριστικὸν τοῦ τῆς θεότητος μύρου, οὐκ αὐτὸ τὸ μύρον διὰ τῆς ἐμφάσεως τῶν λεγομένων σημαίνομεν, ἀλλὰ βραχὺ τι λείψανον ἀτμοῦ τῆς θείας εὐωδίας τοῖς θεολογικοῖς ὀνόμασιν ἐνδεικνύμεθα. ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγγείων, ὧν ἂν ἐκκενωθῆ τὸ μύρον, αὐτὸ μὲν τῆ ἑαυτοῦ φύσει ἀγνωεῖται τὸ μύρον τὸ ἐκκενωθὲν τῶν ἀγγείων, οἷόν ἐστιν· ἐξ ἀμυδρᾶς δέ τινος τῆς ὑπολειφθείσης ἐκ τῶν ἀτμῶν τῷ ἀγγεῖω ποιότητος στοχασμὸν τινα περὶ τοῦ ἐκκενωθέντος μύρου ποιούμεθα. τοῦτο οὖν ἐστιν ὃ διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων μαθηνομεν, ὅτι αὐτὸ μὲν τὸ τῆς θεότητος μύρον, ὃ τί ποτε κατ' οὐσίαν ἐστίν, ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐστὶν ὀνομά τε καὶ νόημα· τὰ δὲ τῷ παντὶ ἐνθεωρούμενα θαύματα τῶν θεολογικῶν ὀνομάτων τὴν ὕλην δίδωσι, δι' ὧν σοφόν, δυνατὸν, ἀγαθόν, ἅγιον, μακάριόν τε καὶ αἰδίων καὶ κριτὴν καὶ σωτῆρα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κατονομάζομεν· ἅπερ πάντα ποιότητά τινα βραχέϊαν τοῦ θείου μύρου ἐνδεικνύται, ἣν πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις διὰ τῶν ἐνθεωρουμένων θαυμάτων σκεύους τινὸς μυρεψικοῦ δίκην ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἀπεμάξατο. (*InCant*, GNO VI, 36, 12–38, 2).

¹⁵⁴ One cannot but be in agreement with E. Corsini, when he says of the Nyssian:

of good wine:¹⁵⁵ it cannot be enclosed in concepts and words. But one cannot disregard the cosmos either, which is impregnated as a vase with this marvellous perfume, and which, by means of analogy¹⁵⁶ and image, is the path to move from that which is presented to our senses to that which is not known and cannot be understood.¹⁵⁷

It is worth noting that the term *μίμησις* is also a key concept in the *InCant*, where it appears some eight times, a maximum frequency for the term, after the *DePerf* and *DeProf*. Further, it is a term that returns almost 100 times in Gregory's writings and in all phases of his production; there is a clear increase in frequency in the later works.¹⁵⁸

Thus in *μίμησις* the word finds its value anew. The analysis of the *InCant* proposed by M. Laird is quite profound for this point:¹⁵⁹ from the reading of numerous passages of this Nyssian work he concludes that *λογόφασις*, that is the tendency of the apophatic experience to

“Gregorio è un poeta e la sua poesia è fatta anche di linguaggio simbolico” (*Arché e Telos. L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa. Analisi storico-religiosa*. Atti del colloquio, Milano, 17–19 maggio 1979, Milan 1981, p. 229).

¹⁵⁵ Remember that Basil had lashed out at the diffused habit of getting drunk at the end of Lent. Gregory, in context with his more humanistic asceticism, affirms that abstinence from wine is insufficient to guarantee the rectitude of intention, that which counts is abstinence from sin. He knows as well that abuse does not negate use. For this reason, in his profound love for creation, he does not hesitate to have recourse to drunkenness itself in the explanation of his spiritual doctrine (cf. A. LALLEMAND, *L'ivresse chez Basile et Grégoire de Nysse*, *StPatr* 37 (2001) 139). Thus, for Gregory, the perfume of wine itself can serve as a symbol of the divine nature.

¹⁵⁶ A.A. Weiswurm speaks of “many points of similarity between St. Gregory's teaching and that of the Scholastics” (A.A. WEISWURM, o.c., p. 188). The analysis of this author moves in a highly scholastic conceptualization, both for method and perspective. Nevertheless, one cannot negate that there is a fundamental concord between the Nyssian and Thomas—rather than between the Nyssian and the Scholastics—on the connection between ontology, knowledge and language. This is however a very delicate theme, above all for the numerous polemics on the interpretation of the analogy, in both Aristotle and Aquinas.

¹⁵⁷ For a commentary see: L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La cristología del In Canticum Canticorum de Gregorio de Nisa*, in H. DROBNER (ed.), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, Leiden 1990, pp. 181–182.

¹⁵⁸ For this reason as well one cannot but be in agreement with L.F. Mateo-Seco when he affirms that: “Es necesario otorgar aún más importancia al concepto de *μίμησις* de Cristo y al lugar que, en el pensamiento nisenio, ocupa la economía sacramental” (L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Imitación* . . . , p. 621). Perhaps one could also hypothesize that, in the final part of the Nyssian work, the growing importance of *μίμησις* corresponds to a diminished frequency of the term *θεωρία*, in its mystical sense, in the spiritual works of maturity. This diminishment is noted by Daniélou (cf. J. DANIELOU, *L'Être et le temps* . . . , p. 17).

¹⁵⁹ Cf. M. LAIRD, *Apophasis and Logophasis in Gregory of Nyssa's Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*, *StPatr* 37 (2001) 126–132.

open out into words, is a central category to comprehend Gregory's apophatism. The soul which in faith experiences the union with the Spouse—with the Word—becomes a vehicle of the Word himself, in one's words and in one's actions.¹⁶⁰ "This is, then, *λογόφασις*: by virtue of the bride's apophatic union with the Word, her discourse takes on the power and efficacy of the Word itself".¹⁶¹ In Laird's work the examples are multiplied: the mouth of the spouse fills with the words of eternal life (*τὰ ῥήματα τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς*),¹⁶² her breasts are like sources of good teachings,¹⁶³ of which even her heart is filled.¹⁶⁴ "The encounter, however apophatic, does not, paradoxically, leave the bride speechless".¹⁶⁵ And this is true not only for the spouse, but also for Paul¹⁶⁶ and for John.¹⁶⁷ "An encounter which begins as apophatic [always] finishes as logophatic".¹⁶⁸

This means that apophatism is not the negation of word and thought, as such.¹⁶⁹ God is not the negation of thought and word; nevertheless he is the affirmation that is so strong that it cannot be completely expressed, but this same supereminence needs to be expressed. In synthesis: "While indeed God cannot be spoken, God yet speaks, and this divine discourse manifests itself in the discourse and deeds of Paul, John and the bride".¹⁷⁰ Thus *μίμησις* involves the whole person, in thought, word and actions. In this way *μίμησις* itself approaches

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, *InCant*, GNO VI, 183, 10–11, when the spouse, after the ineffable encounter with the Beloved, turns to the daughters of Jerusalem with words of love, awakening in them the same reaction as the one the Word had provoked in her.

¹⁶¹ M. LAIRD, *Apophasis* . . . , p. 129.

¹⁶² Cf. *InCant*, GNO VI, 32, 12–15.

¹⁶³ Cf. *ibidem*, 263, 12–13.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 270, 7–8.

¹⁶⁵ M. LAIRD, *Apophasis* . . . , p. 130.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *InCant*, GNO VI, 88, 4–6.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 41, 7–10.

¹⁶⁸ M. LAIRD, *Apophasis* . . . , p. 131.

¹⁶⁹ In the same vein Gregory, deepening the signification and value of the Incarnation, does not hesitate to call Christ the "ardent dart of Eros" (*InCant*, GNO VI, 383, 8). He thus overcomes the opposition between *ἔρωσ* and *ἀγάπη* declaring that "intensified (*ἐπιτεταμένη*) charity (*ἀγάπη*), in fact, is defined as love (*ἔρωσ*)" (*ibidem*, 383, 9). The Nysian "resalta la inseparabilidad de eros y ágape, también testimonio de la Biblia. Gregorio declara el eros transformado en ágape a modo intensificado y paradójico" (A. MEIS, *El Ocultamiento de Dios en los Comentarios al Cantar de los Cantares de Gregorio de Nisa y Pseudo-Dionisio Areopagita*, StPatr 37 (2001) 198). More about *ἔρωσ* and *ἀγάπη* in Gregory's thought can be found in G. MASPERO, article *Amor*, in L.F. MATEO-SECO—G. MASPERO, *Diccionario de San Gregorio de Nisa*, Burgos 2006, pp. 73–82.

¹⁷⁰ M. LAIRD, *Apophasis* . . . , p. 132.

παιδεία, according to the beautiful interpretation of this category proposed by W. Jaeger.¹⁷¹

Apophatism is completed in μίμησις, and “This imitation implies not only having the same sentiments as Christ, but also to participate in the mysteries of his life”.¹⁷² One must participate in his βίος,¹⁷³ in his personal history, in the mystery of the secrets of his heart through faith and the sacraments. Daniélou has clearly demonstrated the unbreakable union of spiritual life and sacramental life for Gregory.¹⁷⁴

Thus it is clear that the apophatic limit is not that which separates immanence and economy, as Lossky would seem to affirm. Apophatism regards the nature which always remains incomprehensible and inexpressible, in the profundity and purity of being. On the other hand we have access to the Person, better yet, to the Persons.¹⁷⁵ In Christ the path has opened which, through the events of his life, his sentiments and his virtues, in a word, through his heart, leads to the very Trinitarian immanence. In his heart time and eternity are united forever and man has access to the heart of the Father. In Christ we can love God with human sentiments, words and thoughts.¹⁷⁶

The exclusively negative interpretation of apophatism is all the more unsatisfying if it is accompanied by the negation of the mysticism of the imitation of Christ,¹⁷⁷ and undervaluing of the role of the humanity

¹⁷¹ Cfr. W. JAEGER, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Harvard 1961.

¹⁷² “Esta imitación implica no sólo tener los mismos sentimientos que Cristo, sino participar también en los misterios de su vida” (L.F. MATEO-SECO, *Imitación...*, p. 618).

¹⁷³ The beautiful analysis of T. Špidlík does not seem to fully manifest the importance of βίος, in the Nyssian writings, affirming instead only the centrality of ζωή. But the doctrine of μίμησις shows that it is in the union in βίος with Christ that one has access to ζωή. Cfr. T. ŠPIDLÍK, *L'eternità e il tempo, la zoè e il bios, problema dei Padri Cappadoci*, Aug. 16 (1976) 107–116. The affirmation “per un cristiano, l'unico valore consiste nella zoè” (p. 107) is perhaps too categorical. See also G. MASPERO, article *Vida*, in L.F. MATEO-SECO—G. MASPERO, *Diccionario de San Gregorio de Nisa*, Burgos 2006, pp. 914–926.

¹⁷⁴ The kisses of *InCant* are read as symbols of the sacraments, through which the Christian enters into contact with Christ. Cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *Platonisme...*, pp. 23–35. Chapters 33–36 of the *OrCat* are particularly interesting for this theme.

¹⁷⁵ In this sense the Nyssian perspective does not appear in perfect harmony with the idea of B. FORTE that the Father is the eternal Silence (cfr. B. FORTE, *Trinità come storia. Saggio sul Dio cristiano*, Cinisello Balsamo 1997). Silence regards the nature common to the three persons, not any one of the Persons alone. In this B. Forte seems to tend to the pre-Cappadocian state.

¹⁷⁶ It is intriguing for this theme to note that in the different languages the name of God is, many times, unrecognizable, while the names of Christ and Mary are.

¹⁷⁷ “La mystique de l'imitation que l'on peut trouver en Occident est étrangère à la spiritualité orientale” (V. LOSSKY, o.c., p. 41).

of our Lord.¹⁷⁸ Gregory's doctrine does not appear to go in this direction. In fact, for the Nyssian, we must, in the faith and by the grace given to us by the Holy Spirit, imitate Christ to become images of the Image.¹⁷⁹ And as being Image means being Son, so being images of the Image means being sons in the Son.¹⁸⁰ The theology of the image shows here its essential aspect, at once Trinitarian and Christological, since the Image is the Son.¹⁸¹

Apophatism thus means that man must renounce from defining himself, and, to take up again the ideas of Chapter I Part III, must let himself be defined by Christ. He must reproduce the intra-Trinitarian dynamic of the Son who receives all and gives all. This is the movement that the incarnate Son reproduced and communicated to us, in the economy. Man thus receives everything from outside of himself, but not in the Barthian sense of the *senkrecht von oben*, since man, in the first place, receives *himself*. The image to which we are conformed is not extrinsic since in Christ, the Image is as intimate and intrinsic as can be thought of man, the image of the Image. For this reason, in order to become truly men, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, we must make ourselves as children,¹⁸² who receive all and hope all, who are curious of everything and imitate, and in imitating learn to be men. Children are the key to apophatism,¹⁸³ since children, who

¹⁷⁸ "Le Christ «historique», «Jésus de Nazareth» tel qu'il apparaissait aux yeux des témoins étrangers, le Christ extérieur à l'Église est toujours dépassé dans la plénitude de la révélation accordée aux vrais témoins, aux fils de l'Église éclairés par le Saint-Esprit. Le culte de l'humanité du Christ est étranger à la tradition orientale" (*Ibidem*, p. 242).

¹⁷⁹ For this reason the affirmation of Lossky that divinized persons will be images of the spirit seems distant from Gregory: "Car le Saint-Esprit est l'onction royale reposant sur le Christ et sur tous les chrétiens appelés à régner avec Lui dans le siècle futur. C'est alors que cette Personne divine inconnue, n'ayant pas son image dans une autre hypostase, se manifesterà dans les personnes déifiées: car la multitude des saints sera son image" (*Ibidem*, p. 169). Further, there is a dangerous economic inversion of the Trinitarian order, the importance of which will be manifested in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Another ambiguous distinction of Lossky is that of affirming, in the Church, the existence of a larger circle of sons of God, and a more restricted one, that of the saints (cfr. *ibidem*, p. 175): the intention of Lossky is certainly good, but is there another way of being saints other than that of being sons of God?

¹⁸¹ B. Salmona also moves in this context; he affirms the centrality of the relationship of God-man in Nyssian thought: it is a relationship constitutive of man himself, since "È nel Logos la trasparenza di Dio, così come nel logos è la trasparenza dell'uomo" (B. SALMONA, *Logos come trasparenza in Gregorio di Nissa*, in H. DROBNER—Ch. KLOCK (dir), *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, Leiden 1990, p. 165).

¹⁸² Cfr. Mk 10.14 and Mt 19.14.

¹⁸³ Josemaría Escrivá, a spiritual author of the last century, loved to preach the

little by little learn to speak and act, know how, in their games, to see the reality beyond the image. For this same reason the Virgin—the Mother—is essential for the understanding of apophatism. She who receives all and gives all, and who pronounces the *let it be done to me according to your word*,¹⁸⁴ in which the logical word and ontological Word correspond and are united forever.

In this sense to see is to not see. We are dealing with a radical renunciation of autonomy, on the ontological level and not only on the cognitive level.¹⁸⁵ Apophatism is, in its most profound essence, *conversion*. One cannot understand apophatism only gnoseologically. This would be a totally extraneous idea to the profoundly ontological thought that forms Gregory's mind, both by the Judeo-Christian heritage¹⁸⁶ and Neoplatonic culture. Apophatism is understood only in relation to the Trinity and the coordination of the three Persons. One sees oneself in the Trinity, in the Son: seeing oneself through letting oneself be synergetically immersed in the internal flux of Trinitarian love and knowledge.

So the mystery is resplendent in all of its ontological depth, which proceeds and founds the gnoseological mystery.¹⁸⁷ The mystery is a reality, it is *the* Reality, from which we must start. The Mystery is source of knowledge.¹⁸⁸ Thus apophatism is essentially characterized also by

necessity that: "Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians." (JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Christ is passing by*, New York 1974, n. 10).

¹⁸⁴ Lk 1.38.

¹⁸⁵ It seems to me that this escapes Ch. Apostolopoulos, when, commenting Gregory's ἡ εὐρεσις ἐστὶν αὐτὸ τὸ αἰεὶ ζητεῖν (*InEccl*, GNO V, 400, 21) he affirms: "Die Modernität Gregors besteht eigentlich darin, dass das Streben selber (qua unendlich suchende Bewegung) zum Erstreben wird" (CH. APOSTOLOPOULOS, *AORISTON. Anmerkungen zur Vorstellung vom Unbestimmten-Unendlichen der "göttlichen Natur" bei Gregor von Nyssa*, StPatr 37 (2001) 10). It is not a radical voluntarism, in harmony with the modern existential categories, but exactly the opposite: an abandonment to the attraction of God, and abandonment to the attraction of his inexhaustible ontological depth, a letting oneself be defined in the deepest recesses of one's own being, in the most absolute renunciation of autonomy.

¹⁸⁶ Cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *L'être et le temps...*, pp. vii–viii.

¹⁸⁷ This is a truth that modernity in its tension towards autonomy has often forgotten. And yet the difference between the impulse to jump a wall, behind which there is a beautiful garden (which is not merely psychological tension towards going beyond our limits), and the fear that is experienced in an obscure room is phenomenologically evident. The 'luminous shadows' of the Nyssian are thus like the obscure shadows of the parents room, in which the child does not cry, since it perceives the presence and being of his father and mother.

¹⁸⁸ B. Forte shows well the difference that separates the Latin *revelatio* and the Greek ἀποκάλυψις from the German *Offenbarung*. The first two indicate in the prefix, the

a positive aspect and it can be said that all of theology is moved by the attraction of the heart of Christ, which unites us and attracts us to the Mystery: the Mystery of his Person.¹⁸⁹

The positive and negatives aspects are inseparable: the cross distinguishes¹⁹⁰ and unites. Thus, it is true that the four Calcedonian adverbs, already present *in nuce* in the Gregorian work,¹⁹¹ have an apophatic character, as Lossky rightly notes,¹⁹² but they can never be affirmed individually, they need to be taken together, all four at once. This is an affirmation, and a very strong one, since even mathematically, a double negative sign has as product a positive sign. The human and divine are always united, in Christ, perfect God and perfect man. So even the word and thought are covered, in time, with eternity. For this reason the intuition of V. Zielinsky, an Orthodox, is profound, when he notes that in Orthodoxy the dogmas have only a protective role in regard to heresies,¹⁹³ while in the Catholic Church they have also a latreutic and glorificatory function which Orthodoxy assigns only to the liturgy.¹⁹⁴ The dogmas have thus, for the Occident, a similar function to that of Icons in the Orient. For the dogma does not cut into the mystery, it is limited to formulating it exactly, offering it to the silence of adoration.

unveiling that is repeated and does not exhaust the revealed mystery. The German term on the other hand indicates total unveiling, the exhausting of the mystery, and has a more gnoseological than ontological connotation (cfr. B. FORTE, *El Espíritu Santo y Jesús de Nazaret*, ScrTh 30 (1998) 816).

¹⁸⁹ It appears that M. Zupi's affirmation about Nyssian apophatism goes in this direction: "L'istanza metafisica di comprendere la sostanza si trasmuta così in meraviglia di fronte all'impalpabile presenza dell'essere: è il trapassare dell'essere da oggetto a soggetto, da sostanza a volto, da essenza ad «inter-esse»; è l'esito mistico della filosofia di Gregorio di Nissa, il trapasso dalla comprensione alla concezione, dalla costruzione logica al tocco interiore, dall'istanza di emancipazione al sentimento di appartenenza, dalla fatica del concetto al riposo della contemplazione; è altresì l'esito pragmatico della dottrina del Niseno, il trapasso dalla teoria alla prassi, dai «dógmata» all'azione liturgica, dalla dottrina all'invocazione e alla preghiera" (M. ZUPI (Ed.), *Gregorio di Nissa: Le belle ascese*, Padua 2001, p. 315).

¹⁹⁰ "Il n'y a pas d'apophatisme chrétien qui ne se fonde sur l'antinomie révélatrice de la Croix" (J. GARRIGUES, *Théologie...*, p. 441).

¹⁹¹ Gregory has recourse, in his writings, to all the four adjectives from which the Calcedonian adverbs are derived (ἀσύγχυτος, ἄτρεπτος, ἀδιαίρετος, ἀχώριστος), in both Christological and Trinitarian contexts (cfr. the corresponding terms in F. MANN, *Lexicon Gregorianum*, I, Leiden 1999).

¹⁹² Cfr. V. LOSSKY, o.c., p. 139.

¹⁹³ Cfr. the affirmations of Lossky in note 3 of this chapter.

¹⁹⁴ Cfr. V. ZIELINSKY, *Le mystère de Marie, source d'unité*, NRT 121 (1999) 90.

To conclude, the marvel and perfection of Gregory's theology manifest themselves clearly in the theme of apophatism.¹⁹⁵ The anthropological aspect of the theology of the image and the cognitive aspect of the theology of name are united and fuse together in the depths of Trinitarian theology and immanence. Gregory's apophatism is thus a *no* to whoever would like to reach God directly, attacking with his own reason the very eternal and infinite nature. At the same time apophatism is a *yes*, a strong and undeniable affirmation that the only possibility to reach God is Christ. The path is the Person. The way is history.

This analysis was started with the statement that being precedes the word: the value of language and numbers is founded in being, in reality. Then the *AdAbl* was taken into consideration, in which Gregory presents both the negative and positive aspects of apophatism, negating the possibility to understand nature and turning the discussion from being to the mode of being, that is from nature to Person. The apophatic confine is thus not placed between immanence and economy, but one has access to the Persons themselves, in their intra-Trinitarian intimacy. For this reason, in a first moment, the impossibility to directly approach the divine nature was studied, highlighting the fact that even created nature—in its essence—remains beyond the possibilities of the human intellect. In a second moment the role of the Nyssian in the formation of the concept of person was noted. From the Trinitarian foundation for the person the discourse moved to the theology of name and to the accomplishment of apophatism in its eminently positive aspect through the *μίμησις* of Christ, perfect in his humanity and divinity. Thanks to him and to the mysteries of his life, Christianity is the imitation of the divine nature.

To finish it is interesting to consider a passage of *CE I*, in which Gregory affirms that, only if one professes the fundamental truth that the Son has a divine nature without any confusion (*τῆς Θείας τε καὶ ἀκηράτου φύσεως*), can one then discover the harmony of truth, understanding that our Lord is the Creator of everything, King of the universe, who governs not by arbitrary force, but by his superior nature. Thus it is seen that the First Principle is not divided into distinct first principles, by any substantial distinction, but that the Divinity, Principle and Power is unique:

¹⁹⁵ A good article that presents Nyssian apophatism in connection with anthropology and infinite progress, including its positive aspect as well, is: D.F. DUCLOW, *Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa: Infinity, Anthropology and the Via Negativa*, DR 92 (1974) 102–109.

Since the Divinity is contemplated in the symphony of all that is similar (ἐν τῇ τῶν ὁμοίων συμφωνίᾳ) and guides the mind from similar to similar, in such a way that the Principle of all things, that is the Lord, be resplendent in souls through the work of the Holy Spirit—for it is impossible that anyone contemplate the Lord Jesus *except in the Holy Spirit*, as the Apostle says—;¹⁹⁶ then, through (διὰ) the Lord, who is the Principle of all things, we find the totality of that principle that is beyond (ἐπέκεινα) every Principle, that is the God of the universe. For it is not possible that anyone reach the contemplation of the archetypal Good in another way than [how it is] manifested in the image of the Invisible (cfr. Col 1.15).¹⁹⁷

Thus apophatism starts from the unique divine nature, infinitely superior to every human mind. The movement changes towards Christ: in he who is the personified image of the Father, one can have access *from similar to similar* to the knowledge of the First person himself. But as the Father cannot be contemplated in another mode than in the Son, so there is no other way to contemplate the Son *except in the Holy Spirit*. The apophatic dynamic is at once Trinitarian and Christological. One cannot skip any passage. One says no to the pretexts of the arrogant reason, which wishes to grab at the divine nature, so that reason itself may submit to faith and apply itself to contemplation of the incarnate Word, and is thus enabled to have part in that same divine nature that it wished, in a first moment, to usurp.

Therefore the discussion of apophatism—after the present more properly Christological moment—is finalized in a natural way through the study of Nyssian pneumatology.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Cor 12.3.

¹⁹⁷ ἐν τῇ τῶν ὁμοίων συμφωνίᾳ τῆς θεότητος θεωρουμένης καὶ διὰ τοῦ ὁμοίου πρὸς τὸ ὅμοιον τὴν διάνοιαν ἀγούσης, ὡς τῆς πάντων μὲν ἀρχῆς, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὁ κύριος, διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ταῖς ψυχᾶς ἐλλαμπούσης (ἀμήχανον γὰρ ἄλλως θεωρηθῆναι τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, καθὼς φησὶν ὁ ἀπόστολος), διὰ δὲ τοῦ κυρίου, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ πάντων ἀρχή, τῆς ἐπέκεινα πάσης ἀρχῆς ἡμῖν εὕρισκομένης, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων θεός· οὐδὲ γὰρ δυνατὸν ἐστὶν ἄλλως τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιγνωσθῆναι, μὴ ἐν τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ ἀοράτου φαινόμενον. (CEI, GNO I, 179, 19–180, 10).

CHAPTER THREE

THE SPIRIT AND UNITY

I. INTRODUCTION

a. *East and West*

In order to understand the theological value of the last part of the *AdAbl* it is necessary to draw out a synthetic sketch of the history of Trinitarian dogma and the differences of the Eastern and Western approaches.¹

Latin Theology concentrated on the economic aspect, due to its confrontation with modalism, and from the beginning moved in a linear schema (*dispositio*, τὸξίς), in which the three Persons are united one to another in consubstantiality: the monarchy can only be expressed in this schema, adverbially² (*principaliter*). The Latin *procedere* does not terminologically distinguish the two processions, and the whole construction implies, from the beginning, a true role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit. As will be seen, Pope Dionysius introduced for the first time a circular schema, in which the processions appear as the expression of a relation. The procession of the Holy Spirit assumes, thus, the role of ultimate condition of the consubstantial reciprocity of the Trinity, being its completion and seal.³

The Latin world had to confront an Arianism that was much less radical than that which Eunomius professed in the East. This included the metaphysical negation of Trinitarian consubstantiality. In order to contrast the Neoplatonic influence and the idea of hierarchical

¹ This chapter supports L. Ayres' argument that "distinctions between «east» and «west» «Greek» and «Latin» are inadequate and misleading when used to categorize pro-Nicene theologies" (L. AYRES, *Nicaea and its Legacy...*, p. 345).

² The first to use the adverb *principaliter* is Tertullian: "si vero et filius fuerit ei cuius monarchia sit, non statim dividi eam et monarchiam esse desinere si particeps eius adsumatur et filius, sed proinde illius esse *principaliter* a quo communicatur in filium, et dum illius est proinde monarchiam esse quae a duobus tam unitis continetur." (TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxeum* III, 3; CCSL 2, p. 1162)

³ Cf. GARRIGUES, *Procession et ekporèse du Saint Esprit. Discernement de la tradition et réception oecuménique*, Ist. 17 (1972) 352.

participation, the Cappadocian Fathers thus found themselves obliged to confess in God a personal multiplicity that was irreducible to the level of the essence: the Hypostasis. The battle for orthodoxy thus moved to the sphere of Trinitarian immanence.

The Arianism that menaced the Latin world was, on the other hand, less metaphysical and limited itself to negate the divinity of the Son and of the Spirit without moving beyond the economic sphere. For this reason the Western reflection had to deepen the connection between immanence and economy, which was helped by the very terminological ambivalence of the verb *procedere*.⁴ It is in this context that Ambrose of Milan will for the first time use the formula *Spiritus procedit a Patre et Filio*.⁵ It is thus clear that Augustine was not the inventor of the *Filioque*, as is often said.⁶ Rather, he knew how to synthesize many elements that

⁴ Only Hilary of Poitiers, due to his direct knowledge of the Oriental world, uses *procedere* for the procession of the Holy Spirit alone. He seeks to express the procession of the Son with the concept of ‘reception’ (see HILARY OF POITIERS, *De Trinitate* 8, 20; PL 10, 251A).

⁵ AMBROSE OF MILAN, *De Spiritu Sancto* I, 11; CSEL 79, p. 67, 44.

⁶ The inexactitudes, due to polemical short-sightedness and lack of knowledge, are multiplied in the presentations of the question of the *Filioque*, those four syllables to which so many painful discussions have been attached. For example, when speaking of a “Latin addition to the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Symbol”, one is abstracted from the historical fact that the second ecumenical Council of 381 was carried out without any Western representation (not even of Papal legates), due to the isolation imposed by the Arian persecution of the emperor Valens. Only one year later did Rome recognize it as ecumenical, due to the impossibility of reuniting a unique council. Latin theology had already developed the idea of the *Filioque*. Leo the Great used the *ab utroque* in one of his letters to a Spanish bishop (PL 54, 680–681), in 447, which was then proclaimed in the anti-Priscillian council of the Church in Spain (DS 188) held the same year. Further it is professed, still in the 5th century, in the *Quicumque* (or ‘Athanasian’, DS 75) symbol. Thus the *Filioque* was first professed against Priscillianist modalism before being professed against the Arians, as in the later Council of Toledo. Therefore the proclamation of the *Filioque* preceded that of the Symbol of Constantinople, that the Latins knew only at Chalcedon, in 451 (at Ephesus only the Nicene creed was read). Between the 6th and 8th centuries, the *ab utroque* rapidly spread in all the Western world, so much so as to be unanimously recognized when, in the 9th century, the question became a polemical argument and political instrument with Charlemagne and Photius (Cf. J. GARRIGUES, *Procession . . .*, pp. 361–363). One should also note, as B. Bolotov wrote—who falsely affirms that the only authority for the *Filioque* is that of Augustine—that the Eastern Fathers did not object to the Western position and did not break communion with the Western Fathers (theses nn. 14–25 in B. BOLOTOV, *Thèses sur le “Filioque”*, Ist. 17 (1972) 287–288). A deep and extensive analysis of the history of the controversy is P. GEMEINHARDT, *Die Filioque-Kontroverse zwischen Ost- und Westkirche im Frühmittelalter*, New York 2002. This author points out that Photius’ position demanded a narrowing of the Cappadocian Trinitarian doctrine, in particular of Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding of the immanent mediation of the Son: “Das kappadozische Verständnis der Trinität wurde dahingehend verengt, dass etwa die tastenden Versuche Gregors von Nyssa, die

were already found in the Latin Tradition. Thus he would take up and develop Tertullian's *principaliter*, using it in connection with *communiter*.⁷ The expression of the monarchy can only be then, adverbial and not verbal as in the East.

The Cappadocian Fathers reached the summit of Trinitarian reflection, with the distinction, on the level of the most pure immanence, between essence and hypostasis. But this did not lead the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, who was the youngest and could thus develop even further his reflection, to refute the principle of Trinitarian order or the linear schema, despite the fact that these could be interpreted in favour of a subordinationist position in the categories of Eunomian thought. Rather, it is precisely the Nyssian who developed all of his theology and pneumatology based upon the connection between immanence and economy. His system thus appears extremely balanced and complete: perfect in the penetration of the immanent intimacy of the Trinity, and at the same time, open to the economic dimension, that the Spirit attracts to divine communion.⁸

b. *Gregory*

For this reason Gregory's pneumatology is one of the highest moment of his theological reflection. W. Jaeger held it as the eminent expression of Christian humanism, destined to culminate in sanctity, which has the Holy Spirit as its principle.⁹ But, beyond the admirable equilibrium that

heilgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Sohn und Geist auch für die ewig-göttliche Dimension (im Sinne einer μεσσιτεία des Sohnes) auszuwerten, kategorisch unterbunden wurden" (p. 550). The theological openness of the Trinitarian hermeneutic prior to the controversy is demonstrated by the Syriac reception of the Nicean faith in the Synod of Seleukia in 410: the symbol there formulated is characterised by the statement that the Spirit is from the Father and from the Son (cfr. P. BRUNS, *Bemerkungen zur Rezeption des Nicaenums in der ostsyrischen Kirche*, AHC 32 (2000) 1–22).

⁷ "Pater enim solus non est de alio, ideo solus appellatur ingenitus, non quidem in Scripturis sed in consuetudine disputantium et de re tanta sermonem qualem ualuerint profertentium. Filius autem de patre natus est, et Spiritus Sanctus de patre *principaliter*, et ipso sine ullo interuallo temporis dante, *communiter* de utroque procedit." (AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De Trinitate* XV, 26, 47; CCSL 50/1, pp. 528–529)

⁸ B. Bolotov, unconsciously, founds his argument principally in Nyssian texts, among which the *Ad Abl* has a central role: he constructs his argument principally with the texts of Basil and Gregory, but for Basil he cites *Ep 38*, which is now recognized as a Nyssian work (see: R. HÜBNER, *Gregor von Nyssa als Verfasser der sog. ep. 38 des Basilios. Zum unterschiedlichen Verständnis der Ousia bei den Kappadoziern Brüdern*, in J. FONTAINE—C. KANNENGIESSER (edd.), *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Card. J. Daniélou*, Beauchesne 1972, pp. 463–490).

⁹ Cfr. W. JAEGER, *Gregor von Nyssa's Lehre vom Heiligen Geist*. (H. DÖRRIE Ed.), Leiden 1966,

characterizes the Nyssian in the maturity of his Trinitarian thought, it is necessary to consider the properly historical value of his doctrine. For it is highly probable that at Constantinople, in 381, not only was Gregory the undisputed theological guide of the bishops who called upon the Cappadocian tradition, based upon the elaboration of his brother Basil—who was already dead by the end of 378—but that the Nyssian had a far more official role than that attributed to him by many modern historians.¹⁰

More than being the most important theologian of the majority and having pronounced the praise of Meletius, Gregory is mentioned, along with Helladius of Caesarea and Otreius of Melitene, as the guarantor of the rule of faith for the diocese of Pontus by the decree of Theodosius¹¹ for the execution of the council, dated June 30th, 381. This, according to W. Jaeger, was the consecration of the official role played by the Nyssian in the preceding months.¹² J. Daniélou notes that Helladius and Otreius were representing important metropolitan Episcopal sees of their provinces, while Nyssa was simply a small village. Gregory's authority must then have been eminently theological.¹³

Other information seems to suggest that the Nyssian was the author of the Symbol itself.¹⁴ Nicephorus Callistus, Byzantine historian of the 14th century, affirms it explicitly.¹⁵ The late date of the author makes the testimony less than certain, but it is also impossible to think that Nicephorus did not receive the information from one of his sources.

Although the information has been disputed by some modern historians, Jaeger responds to every criticism,¹⁶ well enough to permit J. Daniélou to conclude: "It is thus completely possible that Gregory

pp. 1–4. Y. Congar says on this theme, that Gregory had developed a true "anthropologie théologique: la formation de l'homme chrétien (*morphôsis*), sa perfection (*teleiôsis*), dont le Christ est le modèle, sont l'œuvre de l'Esprit sanctificateur" (Y. CONGAR, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, III, Paris 1980, p. 59).

¹⁰ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Bulletin d'histoire des origines chrétiennes*, RSR 55 (1967) 116.

¹¹ The same emperor would invite Gregory to celebrate the funeral rites for his daughter Pulcheria in 383 and his wife Flaccilla in 385.

¹² W. JAEGER, *o.c.*, p. 59.

¹³ Cfr. J. DANIELOU, *Bulletin...*, p. 117.

¹⁴ See E.D. MOUTSOULAS, Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, Athens 1997, p. 45. For the specific contribution of Gregory to the Council of Constantinople see the article, by the same author, Β' Οικουμενική Σύνοδος καὶ Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης, *Theol(A)* 55 (1984) 384–401. In this last work he defines the role of the Nyssian as ἀνάλογον, ἵνα μὴ εἴπωμεν σημαντικώτερον in respect to that of Gregory Nazianzen, held in general to be the theological soul of the Council.

¹⁵ NICEPHORUS CALLISTUS, Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία XII, 13; *PG* 146, 784B.

¹⁶ W. JAEGER, *o.c.*, pp. 51–77.

of Nyssa is the author of the Symbol of Constantinople".¹⁷ The more recent analysis by M.A.G. Haykin has confirmed this result.¹⁸

II. THE AD ABLABIUM

In the light of these historico-theological premises, we can thus undertake the analysis of the last part of the *AdAbl.* The principle text is as follows:

If then one will falsely accuse the reasoning to present a certain mixture (μίξις) of the hypostases and a twisting by the fact of not accepting the difference according to nature, we will respond to this accusation that, affirming the absence of the diversity of nature, we do not negate the difference according to that which causes and that which is caused. And we can conceive that the one is distinguished from the other uniquely since we believe that the one is that which causes and the other that which is derived from the cause. And in that which is originated from a cause we conceive yet another difference: one thing it is, in fact, to be immediately from the first (ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου), another to be through (διὰ) that which is immediately (προσεχῶς) from the first. In this way the being Only Begotten remains incontestably in the Son and there is no doubt that the Spirit is from the Father, since the mediation of the Son (τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ μεσιτείας) maintains in Him the being of Only Begotten and does not exclude the Spirit from the natural relation with the Father.¹⁹

This passage has an enormous importance in the history of theology and dogma: there are no publications on the question of the *Filioque*, or on the development of Trinitarian doctrine in the patristic period, that do not cite it.

¹⁷ "Il est donc tout à fait possible que Grégoire de Nysse soit l'auteur du Symbole de Constantinople" (J. DANIELOU, *Bulletin...*, p. 118).

¹⁸ "Thus, it is not at all improbable that Gregory of Nyssa was the author of the reserved pneumatological statement of the creed issued by the Council of Constantinople". (M.A.G. HAYKIN, *The Spirit of God: the exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the pneumatomachian controversy of the fourth century*, Leiden 1994, p. 201). See pp. 199–201.

¹⁹ Εἰ δὲ τις συκοφαντοῖ τὸν λόγον ὡς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ δέχεσθαι τὴν κατὰ φύσιν διαφορὰν μίξιν τινὰ τῶν ὑποστάσεων καὶ ἀνακύκλῃσιν κατασκευάζοντα τοῦτο περὶ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀπολογησόμεθα μέμψεως, ὅτι τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον τῆς φύσεως ὁμολογοῦντες τὴν κατὰ τὸ αἴτιον καὶ αἰτιατὸν διαφορὰν οὐκ ἀρνοῦμεθα, ἐν ᾧ μόνῳ διακρίνεσθαι τὸ ἕτερον τοῦ ἑτέρου καταλαμβάνομεν, τῷ τὸ μὲν αἴτιον πιστεύειν εἶναι τὸ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ αἰτίου· καὶ τοῦ ἐξ αἰτίας ὄντος πάλιν ἄλλην διαφορὰν ἐννοοῦμεν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, τὸ δὲ διὰ τοῦ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου, ὥστε καὶ τὸ μονογενὲς ἀναμφίβολον ἐπὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ μένειν, καὶ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ ἀμφιβάλλειν, τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ μεσιτείας καὶ αὐτῷ τὸ μονογενὲς φυλακτούσης καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς φυσικῆς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα σχέσεως μὴ ἀπειργούσης. (*AdAbl.*, GNO III/1, 55, 21–56, 10).

Gregory had started from the immanent affirmation of *μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις*, which places the problem of how to apply the same distinction to man. Then the reasoning moved, little by little, towards the economy, treating the coordination of activity, to thus show the consubstantiality of the three Persons. At this point, after having strongly affirmed the unity, Gregory must defend himself, still on the level of pure theology,²⁰ from the possible accusation of confusing the Persons, to avoid anyone attempting to accuse him of Sabellianism.²¹

Gregory's argument is based on the concept of *cause* (*αἰτία*): even in the Trinity there is a distinction between caused and uncaused. Only the Father is absolutely without cause. The reasoning moves then, from the Monarchy and is constructed in such a way so as to never abandon this elementary principle. Son and Spirit are united and indistinct in this first moment of analysis.

The Nyssian continues with the second step, necessary to reach the Trinity of Persons: there is a second distinction between that which is immediately from the cause, the Son, and that which is caused mediately, the Spirit, through the Son himself. Thus one arrives at the Trinity of Persons. This construction places the Son at the center of the immanent dynamic and reproduces in theology the economic movement of *ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα*.²² Athanasius had already started from the *μεσιτεία* of the Son and, at least implicitly, also Basil.²³ The proper characteristic of the Nyssian is the extensive use of this category, synthetically expressed with the preposition *διὰ*.²⁴

This is the summit of the whole treatise, and the polemical preoccupation, which can be aroused by the possible relationships between

²⁰ "Dass es sich hier nicht um aussergöttliche, sondern immanente Beziehungen handelt, ergibt der Kontext." (M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *Die Trinitätslehre des Gregor von Nyssa*, Freiburg 1938, p. 111)

²¹ This is a heretical anti-Trinitarian doctrine founded by Sabellius of Libya, spread to Rome between 210 and 240. God would be the only invisible Person (*Monad*) who assumes different names according to different names in which he manifests himself: as Creator of the world he is Word, as revealed in the Old Testament he is Father, in the Incarnation he is Son, as sanctifier in the work of illumination of the Apostles he is Holy Spirit.

²² *AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 48, 23–24.

²³ See ATHANASIUS, *Epistulae quattuor ad Serapionem* I, PG 26, 577 and BASIL OF CAESAREA, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17; SC 17, pp. 188–190.

²⁴ Cfr. M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *o.c.*, p. 112. For Gregory's sources see the commentary on the symbol of Gregory Thaumaturgus (that the Nyssian transmits in *De Vita*) in A. ARANDA, *Estudios de pneumatología*, Pamplona 1985, pp. 149–154.

the exposed doctrine with that of the *Filioque*,²⁵ can not and should not deviate the attention from the central and most profound point, of both the treatise and the question of the *Filioque*:²⁶ Trinitarian economy and immanence are in continuity and the amorous or agapic dynamic, in the language of B. Mondin,²⁷ of the intimacy of the three Persons continues in the temporal action in the cosmos. God loves as he is, and that is in a Trinitarian manner.

The argument of the αἰτία is already present in Origen.²⁸ One could also hold the Alexandrian as the father of the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ, as M.A. Orphanos affirms.²⁹ It is Origen who first maintains the necessity of a certain γένεσις—*generation*—of the Spirit through the Son, to avoid depriving him of his hypostatic individuality and to protect the Father as the only unbegotten.³⁰ Nevertheless, as often happens, the Nyssian doctrine protects and purifies the Origenistic intuition, giving it measure, equilibrium and depth. In this case, for example, the strength of the principle of μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις makes it clearly impossible to think of any form of subordinationism.

Gregory distinguishes with great attention, in fact, the proposed reasoning from that which leads to consubstantiality:

And saying ‘cause’ and ‘from the cause’ (αἴτιον καὶ ἐξ αἰτίου), we do not designate with these names a nature—in fact, one could not adopt the

²⁵ One thinks of the following text of Thomas Aquinas: “Praeterea, inter dare plenitudinem Divinitatis et non accipere, et accipere et non dare, medium esse dare et accipere. Dare autem plenitudinem Divinitatis et non accipere, pertinet ad personam Patris; accipere vero et non dare, pertinet ad personam Spiritus Sancti. Oportet ergo esse tertiam personam, quae plenitudinem Divinitatis et det et accipiat; et haec est persona Filii. Sunt ergo tres personae in divinis.” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9, s.c. 6)

²⁶ For a historical introduction to the question, see Y. CONGAR, *Je crois...*, pp. 24–180 and B. BOBRINSKOY, *Le Mystère de la Trinité*, Paris 1986, pp. 283–305.

²⁷ Cf. B. MONDIN, *La Trinità mistero d'amore: trattato di teologia trinitaria*, Bologna 1993.

²⁸ Καὶ τάχα αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ αἰτία τοῦ μὴ καὶ αὐτὸ υἱὸν χρηματίζειν τοῦ θεοῦ, μόνου τοῦ μονογενοῦς φύσει υἱοῦ ἀρχήθεν τυγχάνοντος, οὐ χρήζειν ἔοικε τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα διακονούντος αὐτοῦ τῇ ὑποστάσει, οὐ μόνον εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφὸν εἶναι καὶ λογικὸν καὶ δίκαιον καὶ πᾶν ὅτιποτουὶν χρῆ αὐτὸ νοεῖν τυγχάνειν κατὰ μετοχὴν τῶν προειρημένων ἡμῖν Χριστοῦ ἐπινοιών. (ORIGEN, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis* II, 10, 76, 1–7; SC 120, p. 256). The Nazianzen uses this category: cf. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oratio 20: De dogmate et constitutione episcoporum*, 7; SC 270, pp. 70–72 and *Oratio 31: De Spiritu Sancto*, 14; SC 250, p. 302.

²⁹ M.A. ORPHANOS, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit: according to Certain Greek Fathers*, Theol(A) 50 (1979) 768.

³⁰ Ἔσται δέ τις καὶ τρίτος παρὰ τοὺς δύο, τὸν τε διὰ τοῦ λόγου παραδεχόμενον τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον γεγονέναι καὶ τὸν ἀγέννητον αὐτὸ εἶναι ὑπολαμβάνοντα, δογματίζων μὴδὲ οὐσίαν τινὰ ἰδίαν ὑφεστάναι τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἑτέραν παρὰ τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν. (ORIGEN, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis* II, 10, 74, 1–5; SC 120, p. 254).

same explanation for a cause and for a nature—but we explain the difference according to the mode of being (κατὰ τὸ πῶς εἶναι). For, saying that the one is in a caused mode (αἰτιατῶς), while the other is without cause (ἄνευ αἰτίας), we do not divide the nature according to the understanding of the cause (τῷ κατὰ τὸ αἴτιον λόγῳ), but we only demonstrate that neither is the Son without generation nor is the Father by generation. It is first necessary that we believe something is (εἶναι τι), and only then do we interrogate how that in which we have believed is (πῶς ἐστὶ). Different, then, is it to say ‘what it is’ (τί ἐστὶ) from saying ‘how it is’ (πῶς ἐστὶ). So, saying that something is without generation, one exposes how it is, but, with those words, one does not express what it is as well. And, in fact, if you asked a farmer about a tree whether it was planted or if it grew on its own, and he responded either that the tree was not planted or that it came from a seedling, did he perhaps with the response explain the nature to you? Or instead, saying only how it is, did he not leave obscure and unexplained the discourse on the nature? So, also here, in learning that He is without generation, have we learned to think as is fitting that He is, but we have not understood through the word that what He is. Therefore, affirming in the Holy Trinity such a distinction, so as to believe that one thing is that which is cause and another that which is from the cause, we will not any longer be able to be accused of confusing in the communion of nature the relationship of the hypostases.³¹

That there are two distinct levels is clearly stated: one of nature and another of relation, of the *σχέσις*. The nature remains absolutely ineffable, in this way, as was seen in the preceding chapter, turning attention back to the *σχέσις* itself.

The presence of a cosmological parallel in the second part of the passage is worth noting. The same discourse is valid for a tree: a farmer can only say how it came forth, but not what it is. Once again the ontological depth of Nyssian thought is manifested, and being escapes

³¹ Αἴτιον δὲ καὶ ἐξ αἰτίου λέγοντες οὐχὶ φύσιν διὰ τούτων τῶν ὀνομάτων σημαίνομεν (οὐδὲ γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν ἂν τις αἰτίας καὶ φύσεως ἀποδοίη λόγον), ἀλλὰ τὴν κατὰ τὸ πῶς εἶναι διαφορὰν ἐνδεικνύμεθα. εἰπόντες γὰρ τὸ μὲν αἰτιατῶς τὸ δὲ ἄνευ αἰτίας εἶναι οὐχὶ τὴν φύσιν τῷ κατὰ τὸ αἴτιον λόγῳ διεχωρίσαμεν, ἀλλὰ μόνον τὸ μήτε τὸν υἱὸν ἀγεννήτως εἶναι μήτε τὸν πατέρα διὰ γεννήσεως ἐνδειξάμεθα. πρότερον δὲ ἡμᾶς εἶναι τι πιστεύειν ἐπιβάλλεται, καὶ τότε πῶς ἐστὶ τὸ πεπιστευμένον περιεγράψασθαι· ἄλλος οὖν ὁ τοῦ τί ἐστὶ καὶ ἄλλος ὁ τοῦ πῶς ἐστὶ λόγος. τὸ οὖν ἀγεννήτως εἶναι τι λέγειν, πῶς μὲν ἐστὶν ὑποτίθεται, τί δὲ ἐστὶ τῇ φωνῇ ταύτῃ οὐ συνενδείκνυται. καὶ γὰρ εἰ περὶ δένδρου τινὸς ἠρώτησας τὸν γεωργόν, εἴτε φυτευτὸν εἴτε αὐτομάτως ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο ἢ ἀφύτευτον εἶναι τὸ δένδρον ἢ ἐκ φυτείας γενόμενον, ἄρα τὴν φύσιν διὰ τῆς ἀποκρίσεως ἐνδειξάτο ὁ μόνον τὸ πῶς ἐστὶν εἰπὼν ἢ ἄδηλον καὶ ἀνερμήνευτον τὸν τῆς φύσεως ἀπέλιπε λόγον; οὕτω καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἀγεννήτων μαθόντες ὅπως μὲν αὐτὸν εἶναι προσήκει νοεῖν ἐδιδάχθημεν, ὅ, τι δὲ ἐστὶ διὰ τῆς φωνῆς οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν. τὴν οὖν τοιαύτην διαφορὰν ἐπὶ τῆς ἁγίας τριάδος λέγοντες, ὡς τὸ μὲν αἴτιον τὸ δὲ ἐξ αἰτίου εἶναι πιστεύειν, οὐκέτ’ ἂν ἐν τῷ κοινῷ τῆς φύσεως τὸν τῶν ὑποστάσεων λόγον συντήκειν αἰτιαθεῖμεν. (*AdAbI*, GNO III/1, 56, 11–57, 7).

the context of words. Nevertheless words are not useless, since they can express the ‘how’ of this reality. This is not a form of skepticism, but rather the full awareness of the profundity of being. Apophatism, in a wider sense, does not only regard God, but every being. In the preceding chapter, the role played by the Nyssian in the passage from a negative conception of the person to a positive one was already highlighted: he continually returns to the fundamental distinction between that which is common in the Trinity and in every being, which remains indefinable, and that which is proper, which can be expressed adverbially, as the particular mode of being.³²

It is necessary to point out that the structure itself of the *AdAbl* indicates, without a shadow of a doubt, that the *διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ* refers to the Trinitarian immanence. Gregory, as it has been noted already, is distinguishing the three Persons, to defend himself from the accusation of confusing them. It is thus impossible to agree with M.A. Orphanos, when he limits Gregory’s *διὰ* only to the energetic realm.³³

Gregory is attentive to separate the concept of ‘cause’ from temporal categories. For this reason, at the end of the first book of the *CE*, in the process of distinguishing the three Persons in the Trinitarian immanence, always based on the *αἰτία*, he says:

For as the Son is conjoined to the Father, and although having being from him, he is not inferior to him according to substance, so in his turn the Holy Spirit is united to the Only Begotten, who is considered before the hypostasis of the Spirit only from the point of view of the principle of the cause: there is not space for temporal extensions in eternal life. In this manner, excluding the principle of the cause, the Holy Trinity is in no discord (*ἄσυμφώνως*) from itself.³⁴

Once again stand out the centrality of the Trinitarian order and the affirmation that the unique distinction possible in the Trinity is the double distinction that is based in the ‘cause’.³⁵

³² The importance of the theme for contemporary theology has been manifested in P.M. COLLINS, *Trinitarian Theology West and East*, Oxford 2001.

³³ Cf. M.A. ORPHANOS, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit: according to Certain Greek Fathers*, Theol(A) 51 (1980) 95.

³⁴ ὡς γὰρ συνάπτεται τῷ πατρὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἔχων οὐχ ὑστερίζει κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξιν, οὕτω πάλιν καὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦς ἔχεται τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἐπινοίᾳ μόνῃ κατὰ τὸν τῆς αἰτίας λόγον προθεωρουμένου τῆς τοῦ πνεύματος ὑποστάσεως· αἱ δὲ χρονικαὶ παρατάσεις ἐπὶ τῆς προαιωνίου ζωῆς χώραν οὐκ ἔχουσιν. ὥστε τοῦ λόγου τῆς αἰτίας ὑπεξηρημένου ἐν μηδενὶ τὴν ἁγίαν τριάδα πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἄσυμφώνως ἔχειν. (*CE* I, GNO I, 224, 23–225, 5).

³⁵ It is particularly interesting to compare this passage of the *AdAbl* with the affirmation of Augustine: “Pater ergo principium non de principio; Filius principium

III. THE 'CAUSE'

The value of the text of the *AdAbl* is even more manifest if placed in parallel with the following passage, from the end of the third homily of the *DeOrDom*:

The proper of the Father is to be without cause. But it is not possible to recognize this property in the Son and in the Spirit. For the Son comes from the Father, as the Scripture says, and the Spirit proceeds from God and from the Father (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται) (cfr. Jn 16.27–28 and Jn 15.26). But as being without a cause, which is exclusive to the Father, cannot be applied to the Son and to the Spirit, in the same way the inverse, to be from a cause, which is proper to the Son and the Spirit, is not naturally attributed to the Father. And since it is common to the Son and the Spirit to not be without generation, so that a certain confusion not be maintained regarding the subject, it is necessary to find another distinction that does not generate confusion in their properties, so that that which is common be kept safe, and that which is proper be not confused. For the Sacred Scripture says that the Only Begotten Son [comes] from the Father and the affirmation defines the property. But it is also said that the Holy Spirit is from the Father, as it is also attested that he is from the Son (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς λέγεται, καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ εἶναι προσμαρτυρεῖται).³⁶ It says, in fact, *If anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him*.³⁷ Therefore the Spirit who is from God is also the Spirit of Christ. Instead the Son, who is from God, is not from the Spirit and is not said to be from the Spirit. And one cannot invert this relational succession (σχετικὴ ἀκολουθία) so as to be able to indifferently invert with analysis the affirmation, and, as we say that the Spirit is of Christ, thus call Christ [as if he were] of the Spirit. Since, then, this property distinguishes clearly and without confusion the one from the other, while the identity in activity witnesses to the commonness of nature, the orthodox conception of the Divinity is reinforced from both affirmations, so that the Trinity is enumerated in the Persons and it is not disjointed into parts of different nature.³⁸

de principio: sed utrumque simul, non duo, sed unum principium; sicut Pater Deus et Filius Deus, ambo autem simul non duo dii, sed unus Deus. Nec Spiritum Sanctum ab utroque procedentem negabo esse principium: sed haec tria simul sicut unum Deum, ita unum dico esse principium.³⁶ (AUGUSTINE, *Contra Maximinum* II, 17, 4; PL 42, 784D–785A). That which follows can be considered an attempt to penetrate the correspondence and proper originality of these texts. Garrigues is to be credited with bringing the two texts together: cfr. J. GARRIGUES, *Procession...*, p. 358.

³⁶ The text is philologically complex, see below.

³⁷ Rm 8.9.

³⁸ Ἴδιον τοῦ πατρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐξ αἰτίου εἶναι. Τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος: ὅ τε γὰρ υἱὸς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐξῆλθε, καθὼς φησιν ἡ γραφή, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται. Ἄλλ' ὥσπερ τὸ ἄνευ αἰτίας εἶναι, μόνου τοῦ πατρὸς ὄν, τῷ υἱῷ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ἐφαρμοσθῆναι οὐ δύναται, οὕτω τὸ ἔμπαλιν τὸ

It is particularly interesting to read this passage in the context of a commentary to the *AdAbl*, since it repeats here the coupling of the doctrine of unity in activity, considered as a path to reach the unique nature, with the doctrine of personal distinction, which is based in the category of ‘cause’.

The connection between the Trinitarian order, which can absolutely not be inverted,³⁹ and the idea of ‘relation’ is evident. For it speaks of σχετική ἀκολουθία. The chosen translation ‘relational succession’, intends to respect the ontological value, and not simply the logical one, of the Nyssian affirmation.⁴⁰

Gregory again uses Rm 8.9, which is an economic affirmation, in an unequivocally immanent context. It is evident how the division between Trinitarian being and action is absolutely inconceivable for him.

What is more, an explicit reference to the role of the Son in the procession of the Spirit appears in this text. For the ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς λέγεται, καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ εἶναι προσμαρτυρεῖται can allow for a double interpretation. On the philological level, one must note that the Vatican Codex 2066, from the 9th century,⁴¹ inserts an ἐκ before the τοῦ

ἐξ αἰτίας εἶναι, ὅπερ ἰδίον ἐστὶν τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος, τῷ πατρὶ ἐπιθεωρηθῆναι φύσιν οὐκ ἔχει. Κοινοῦ δὲ ὄντος τῷ υἱῷ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ μὴ ἀγεννήτως εἶναι, ὡς ἂν μὴ τις σύγχυσις περὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον θεωρηθεῖη, πάλιν ἔστιν ἄμικτον τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἰδιώμασιν αὐτῶν διαφορὰν ἐξευρεῖν, ὡς ἂν καὶ τὸ κοινὸν φυλαχθεῖη, καὶ τὸ ἴδιον μὴ συγχεθεῖη. Ὁ γὰρ μονογενὴς υἱὸς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς παρὰ τῆς ἀγίας γραφῆς ὀνομάζεται, καὶ μέχρι τούτου ὁ λόγος ἴστησιν αὐτῷ τὸ ἰδίωμα. Τὸ δὲ ἄγιον πνεῦμα καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς λέγεται, καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ εἶναι προσμαρτυρεῖται· εἰ γὰρ τις, φησὶ, πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ. Οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ὄν καὶ Χριστοῦ πνεῦμά ἐστιν· ὁ δὲ υἱὸς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ὄν οὐκέτι καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος οὔτε ἐστὶν, οὔτε λέγεται· οὐδὲ ἀντιστρέφει ἡ σχετικὴ ἀκολουθία αὕτη, ὡς δύνασθαι κατὰ τὸ ἴσον δι’ ἀναλύσεως ἀντιστραφεῖναι τὸν λόγον καὶ, ὡς περὶ Χριστοῦ τὸ πνεῦμα λέγομεν, οὕτω καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος Χριστὸν ὀνομάσαι. Ταύτης τοίνυν τῆς ιδιότητος τρανώς καὶ ἀσυγχύτως τὸ ἕτερον τοῦ ἐτέρου διακρινούσης, τῆς δὲ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ταυτότητος τὸ κοινὸν μαρτυρούσης τῆς φύσεως, ἔρρωται δι’ ἑκατέρων ἢ εὐσεβῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον ὑπόληψις, ὡς καὶ ἀριθμεῖσθαι τὴν τριάδα διὰ τῶν ὑποστάσεων, καὶ εἰς ἕτεροφυῆ τμήματα μὴ διακόπτεσθαι. (*DeOrDom*, GNO VII/2, 42, 14–43, 15).

³⁹ In the 20th century, the inversion of the economic Trinitarian order in relation to the immanent order has been much spoken of. See, for this theme, T.G. WEINANDY—P. McPARTLAN—S. CALDECOTT, *Clarifying the Filioque: The Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue*, Com(US) 23 (1996) 354–373. The criticism of K. Rahner’s position in Y. CONGAR, *Je crois...*, pp. 33–44 is particularly interesting.

⁴⁰ For this reason the translation of G. Cardarelli, “successione logica” (logical sequence), has been avoided. See G. CALDARELLI, *S. Gregorio di Nissa. La preghiera del Signore*, Milan 1983, p. 84.

⁴¹ W. Jaeger notes that Mai, Tischendorf, Caspari and others held that the manuscript is from the VIIIth century, but it is now known with certainty that it is from the IXth or, even, from the first years of the Xth century (cfr. W. JAEGER, *Gregor von Nyssa’s Lehre vom Heiligen Geist*. (H. Dörrie Ed.), Leiden 1966, p. 141).

υἰοῦ. *PG* follows this reading,⁴² but the reading followed by the GNO, without the ἐκ, appears more philologically certain. Independently, the whole of the passage speaks of the Spirit's 'being of the Son' as a 'being from the Son', through the central position of this last in the intra-Trinitarian order. It will be seen further on (p. 174) that the ἐκ τοῦ υἰοῦ is not totally extraneous to the Nyssian doctrine. In fact, the interpretation of the argument of 'cause' is precisely in the necessity to affirm, at the same time, the Father as the unique αἴτιον in the Trinity and to distinguish really, in the αἰτιατόν constituted by the Son and the Spirit, the two Persons. The role of the Son in the procession of the third Person inevitably enters into play here.

The proposition of G. Caldarelli appears, on the other hand, risky and with little foundation on the theological level, when, commenting GNO VII/2, 42, 17, she reads⁴³ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται as if it was an affirmation of the *Filioque*, in as much as τοῦ θεοῦ is interpreted as a reference to the Son himself. In this case the use of the verb ἐκπορεύεται excludes any type of interpretation in that sense. In fact, "with the Greek Fathers, this term is fixed and reserved for the origin of the Spirit from the Father and is equivalent to the Augustinian *procedere principaliter*".⁴⁴

In Gregory's works, ἐκπορεύεται appears five times. Other than the *DeOrDom*, it appears twice in the *AdGraec* (GNO III/1, 24, 18 e 25, 6): in both cases the distinction between the procession of the Son, indicated with γενῶνται, and that of the Spirit, for which ἐκπορεύεται is always and exclusively used, is extremely clear. Engaged in the explanation of the difference between the relation of nature-person for man and for the Trinity, the Nyssian uses as evidence the fact that the number of human persons changes, by death and generation, while the divine Persons remain always three:

⁴² But the presence of ἐκ is not philologically clear: in the manuscripts of Vatican 448 (XI cent.), gr. Monaco 370 (X cent.) and Paris Coislin 58 (X cent.) it can be seen that the ἐκ has been scratched out. It is absent from numerous manuscripts; thus F. Müller has omitted it in the GNO. For a clear yet synthetic exposition of the philological problem, see M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *o.c.*, p. 114–117. For an extended treatment: W. JAEGER, *o.c.*, pp. 122–153.

⁴³ G. CALDARELLI, *S. Gregorio di Nissa, La preghiera...*, p. 82, note 22.

⁴⁴ "Bei den griechischen Vätern ist dieser Terminus fixiert und reserviert für den Ausgang des Geistes aus dem Vater und würde dem augustinischen *procedere principaliter gleichkommen*" (M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *o.c.*, p. 109–110). For the precise use of the verb ἐκπορεύεται in Athanasius's work, see M.A. Orphanos, *The Procession...*, p. 772.

No other Person is ever generated or proceeds (γεννᾶται ἢ ἐκπορεύεται) from the Father or from one of the Persons, in such a way that the Trinity could ever be a group of four; nor does one of these Persons ever finish, as if in the blink of an eye, so that the Trinity would ever become a dyad, not even in thought.⁴⁵

A little further on he clarifies, positively explicating the correct doctrine while terminologically distinguishing the double procession:

For one and the same is the Person (πρόσωπον), that of the Father, from whom is generated (γεννᾶται) the Son and proceeds (ἐκπορεύεται) the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

In the *RCE*⁴⁷ ἐκπορεύεται also appears, where the procession of the Spirit from the Father (ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται) is spoken of, and in the *InCant*,⁴⁸ where it is used in a context that is not immediately Trinitarian.

One can then be in agreement with Gomes de Castro, when he affirms, in reference to Gregory's work, that "one use of ἐκπορεύεται in reference to the Son can be found no place in him".⁴⁹

Further, the exact use of the verb for the procession of the Spirit exclusively is common to the Cappadocians. In discourse 39, 12 Gregory Nazianzen distinguishes clearly ἐκπόρευσις, which refers exclusively to the procession of the Spirit from the Father, unique Cause (Αἰτία) or *principium* of the Son and the Holy Spirit, from προΐέναι, which the Spirit has in common with the Son.⁵⁰

The distinction is particularly important; in fact, from antiquity the origin of the incomprehension between East and West on the procession of the Third Person was noted: the translation with the same Latin verb, *procedere*, for both ἐξῆλθον of Jn 8.42, which refers to the Son, and for ἐκπορεύεται of Jn 15.26, referred to the intra-Trinitarian procession of the Spirit from the Father alone.⁵¹ Garrigues even

⁴⁵ οὔτε γὰρ γεννᾶται ἢ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἢ ἐξ ἑνὸς τῶν προσώπων πρόσωπον ἕτερον, ὥστε καὶ τετράδα εἶναι ποτε τὴν τριάδα· οὔτε τελευτᾶ ποτε ἐν τῶν τριῶν τούτων προσώπων κἂν ὡσεὶ ῥοπή ὀφθαλμοῦ, ὥστε δυάδα τὴν τριάδα γενέσθαι κἂν τῇ ἐνθυμήσει. (*AdGraec*, GNO III, 1 24, 18–22).

⁴⁶ ἐν γὰρ πρόσωπον καὶ τὸ αὐτό, τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐξ οὐπερ ὁ υἱὸς γεννᾶται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐκπορεύεται. (*Ibidem*, GNO III/1, 25, 4–6).

⁴⁷ Cf. *RCE*, GNO II, 392, 6.

⁴⁸ Cf. *InCant*, GNO VI, 20, 6.

⁴⁹ "Eine Verwendung von ἐκπορεύεται mit Bezug auf den Sohn findet sich bei ihm nirgends" (M. GOMES DE CASTRO, *o.c.*, p. 110). See, more generally, V. RODZIANKO, "Filioque" in *Patristic Thought*, *StPatr* 2 (1957) 301.

⁵⁰ Cf. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oratio* 39, 12; SC 358, p. 174.

⁵¹ The Vulgate translates thus. See J. GARRIGUES, *Procession* . . . , p. 353.

affirms that the fundamental weakness of Latin pneumatology consists in this terminological incapacity to distinguish *ἐκπορεύεται* from generation.⁵² Thus already Maximus the Confessor⁵³ managed to escape the perplexities raised in the East over the *Filioque* with the distinction, found in Cyril of Alexandria, between the *ἐκπορεύεται* of the Spirit from the Father alone and his *προϊέναι* and *ὑπάρχειν* from the Father and Son together.⁵⁴

The precision is essential to alleviate the doubts that the Western interpretation⁵⁵ of *διὰ υἱοῦ* raise even now among the Orientals, reinforced above all by the conviction that the *Filioque* is a negation of the Monarchy, in as much as it seems to introduce a second causal principle in the Trinity.⁵⁶

It is instead necessary to recognize that the Greek and Latin Traditions have each deepened one of the irreducible yet inseparable aspects of the abyss of the Father: on the one hand, the incommunicable aspect of the Monarchy conceived as a hypostatic character of the Father, unique origin (*ἀρχή*) of the Son and the Holy Spirit; on the other side the communicable aspect of the Monarchy, in as much as the Father is source (*πηγή*) of the consubstantial communication and principle of the Trinitarian order.⁵⁷

Once established the insubstitutable role of the Monarchy, one must see what the role is, for Gregory, of the Son in the procession of the

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 356.

⁵³ Cfr. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Opuscula theologica et polemica*, PG 91, 136AC.

⁵⁴ Cfr. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Thesaurus*, PG 75, 585A and *In Ioannem*, PG 74, 444B.

⁵⁵ In light of these explanations one can compare the text of the *AdAbl* with the following: “relinquitur ergo quod in divinis sit una persona quae non procedit ab alia, scilicet persona Patris, a qua procedunt aliae personae; una immediate tantum, scilicet Filius; alia mediate simul et immediate, scilicet Spiritus Sanctus, qui ex Patre *Filioque* procedit. Ergo est personarum ternarius in divinis.” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9, s.c. 5). Aquinas also interprets the Greek *per Filium* in the sense of Maximus the Confessor: “unde etiam ipsi graeci processionem Spiritus Sancti aliquem ordinem habere ad Filium intelligunt. Concedunt enim Spiritum Sanctum esse Spiritum Filii, et esse a Patre per Filium. Et quidam eorum dicuntur concedere quod sit a Filio, vel profuat ab eo, non tamen quod procedat. Quod videtur vel ex ignorantia, vel ex protervia esse. Quia si quis recte consideret, inveniet processionis verbum inter omnia quae ad originem qualemcumque pertinent, communissimum esse. Utimur enim eo ad designandum qualemcumque originem; sicut quod linea procedit a puncto, radius a sole, rivus a fonte; et similiter in quibuscumque aliis. Unde ex quocumque alio ad originem pertinente, potest concludi quod Spiritus Sanctus procedit a Filio.” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I q. 36, a. 2, c.). See also *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 248.

⁵⁶ Cfr. E.D. MOUTSOULAS, *La pneumatologie du “Contra Eunomium I”*, in L. MATEO-SECO—J.L. BASTERO (eds), *El “Contra Eunomium I” en la producción literaria de Gregorio de Nisa*, Pamplona 1988, p. 388.

⁵⁷ Cfr. J. GARRIGUES, *Procession...*, p. 360.

Spirit. It is necessary to discern if his role is purely passive, as if he were a canal—a simple transmitter—or if the Second Person has a role in common with the Father, who always is and always remains the unique Cause in the Trinity. Further it is necessary to distinguish the economic level from the immanent one, since the intervention of the Son in the temporal sending of the Spirit is a Scriptural given. On the other hand his immanent role is not an immediate information. For this reason it is necessary to analyze the texts in which Gregory explains, through images, the personal distinction. His principle expressive instrument is the theology of light.⁵⁸

IV. THE THEOLOGY OF LIGHT

a. *The Light*

The presence in Greek patristics in general of the affirmation of a role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit is also an undeniable fact. The heart of the question is to discern if this is only in manifestation—that is in the economic action of the Spirit—or if the Greek Tradition also attests to a role of the Son in the intra-Trinitarian procession of the Spirit from the Father. If this were the case, there would be no reason to invoke the Monarchy against the equivalence between the *per Filium* (διὰ υἱοῦ) and the *Filioque*, defended by J. Garrigues⁵⁹ and the Doctrinal Clarification on the question of the *Filioque*, dated September 8, 1995 from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians.⁶⁰

The evidently economic texts will be excluded from the analysis, and due to the vastness of the question, we will not attempt an exhaustive interrogation. The objective is simply to show the importance of the *AdAbl* for the question, at the same time showing the originality, depth and equilibrium of Nyssian theology.

⁵⁸ About the concept of *light* in Gregory's thought, see A.M. RITTER, article *Luz*, in L.F. MATEO-SECO—G. MASPERO, *Diccionario de San Gregorio de Nisa*, Burgos 2006, pp. 565–570.

⁵⁹ Beyond the already cited work, see also J. GARRIGUES, *Théologie et Monarchie. L'entrée dans le mystère du "sein du Père" (Jn 1, 18) comme ligne directrice de la théologie apophatique dans la tradition orientale*, Ist. 15 (1970) 435–465.

⁶⁰ For a commentary by Garrigues on the clarification itself, see J. GARRIGUES, *À la suite de la Clarification romaine sur le «Filioque»*, NRT 119 (1997) 321–334.

A. de Halleux sought to analyze attentively, from this perspective, the pneumatology of Gregory of Nyssa,⁶¹ defined by him as “one of the principle orthodox representatives of the *per Filium* formula”.⁶² His thesis is that διὰ υἱοῦ is born in a polemical context of the Pneumatomachist controversies. It could be traced back to the exegesis by Origen of the Prologue of St. John. The line of development would pass through the φῶς ἐκ φωτός—Light from Light—of Nicea and the Alexandrian Tradition, which interpreted the intra-divine generation of the second Person in terms of the eternal luminous radiance, based in the ἀπαύασμα of Wis 7.26 and Heb 1.3.

Both Basil and Gregory Nazianzen are cautious in the use of the image.⁶³ With Gregory of Nyssa, instead, the theology of light returns to play a central role and is an instrument in explaining not only the procession of the Son from the Father, but also that of the Holy Spirit. It is here that the διὰ υἱοῦ enters into play.

In front of the perplexity which the ἐγένετο of Jn 1.3 causes him, Origen affirms the Monarchy of the Father and introduces the intra-divine mediation of the second Person.⁶⁴ The danger is subordinationism, which will become the inevitable consequence after Nicea and the distinction between γεννητός and γενητός; this last is thenceforth necessarily read as a synonym for ‘created’.

Gregory, surprisingly, despite the fact that he must confront the subordinationist Neo-Arianism of Eunomius, does not hesitate to use the διὰ υἱοῦ, in such a manner that de Halleux can affirm: “It is surprising, effectively, that the bishop of Nyssa appears, among the orthodox theologians of his time, as the lone advocate of the pneumatological formula *per Filium*, discredited by the use that the adversaries of the divinity of the Holy Spirit made of it”.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Cfr. A. DE HALLEUX, “Manifesté par le Fils”. *Aux origines d’une formule pneumatologique*, RTL 20 (1989) 3–31.

⁶² “L’un des principaux représentants orthodoxes de la formule *par le Fils*” (*ibidem*, pp. 4s).

⁶³ φῶς, καὶ φῶς, καὶ φῶς ἀλλ’ ἐν φῶς, εἷς θεός. (GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oratio* 31, 3, 14–15; SC 250, p. 284).

⁶⁴ Ἡμεῖς μέντοι γε τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις πειθόμενοι τυγχάνειν, τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, καὶ ἀγέννητον μηδὲν ἕτερον τοῦ πατρὸς εἶναι πιστεύοντες, ὡς εὐσεβέστερον καὶ ἀληθὲς προσιέμεθα τὸ πάντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου γενομένων τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα πάντων εἶναι τιμιώτερον, καὶ τάξει πρῶτον πάντων τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ Χριστοῦ γεγενημένων. (ORIGEN, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis* II, c. 10, 75, 1–7; SC 120, pp. 254–256).

⁶⁵ “Il est frappant, en effet, que l’évêque de Nysse apparaisse, parmi les théologiens

This affirmation highlights Gregory's equilibrium, which is not taken up by polemics.⁶⁶ It is necessary to remember that Basil, so sparing in his doctrine on the Holy Spirit,⁶⁷ in order to affirm the unity of essence of the three Persons, already says "unique is also the Spirit, individually announced, united (συναπτόμενον) to the unique Father, by means of the unique Son".⁶⁸

A. de Halleux himself admits that the true problem is distinguishing the economic passages from the properly immanent ones.⁶⁹ In fact, Gregory loves to argue with economy and immanence together: this very fact should be an indication against the separation of the two spheres.

However it is now necessary to move on to the examination of the principle Nyssian images and constructions in which he turns to light to illustrate the intra-Trinitarian dynamic.

b. *The Sun*

In the first book of the CE, Gregory offers an incontrovertible exegesis of the use of the analogy of light to express the Trinitarian immanence. His explanation starts in the economy:⁷⁰ if one professes the fundamental truth that the Son has a divine nature, without any confusion, then one can discover the harmony of truth, understanding that our Lord is the creator of all things, King of the universe, who governs not by an arbitrary power, but by his superior nature. Thus it can be seen that the First Principle is not divided into distinct first principles by

orthodoxes de son temps, comme le seul avocat de la formule pneumatologique par le Fils, discréditée par l'usage qu'en faisaient les adversaires de la divinité du Saint-Esprit" (A. DE HALLEUX, "Manifesté . . .", p. 17).

⁶⁶ G. Podskalsky affirms that "Der Fortschritt gegenüber Basileios besteht darin, dass Gregorios mit seinem Werk gegen Eunomios eindeutig die doppelte Absicht verfolgt, nicht nur den Angreifer zu widerlegen, sondern auch positiv zur Dogmenentwicklung beizutragen" (G. PODSKALSKY, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, München 1977, p. 95).

⁶⁷ Cf. A. MEREDITH, *The Pneumatology of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Creed of Constantinople*, IThQ 48 (1981) 205.

⁶⁸ "Ἐν δὲ καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, καὶ αὐτὸ μοναδικῶς ἐξαγγελλλόμενον, δι' ἐνὸς Υἱοῦ τῷ ἐνὶ Πατρὶ συναπτόμενον (BASIL OF CAESAREA, *De Spiritu Sancto*, c. 18, s. 45, 24–25; SC 17, p. 194).

⁶⁹ Cf. A. DE HALLEUX, "Manifesté . . .", pp. 18–19. In both *Ep* 24 (GNO VIII/2, 76, 7–12 and 79, 1–6) and *Ep* 5 (GNO VIII/2, 94, 23–24) the vocabulary suggests an economic context; the same is found in the Trinitarian part of the *OrCat*.

⁷⁰ The whole Trinitarian reflection, for Gregory, moves from the consideration of the Sacrament of Baptism. Cf. L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La Procesión del Espíritu Santo en la Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii*, in *Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia I*, Rome 1983, p. 181.

any substantial difference but that unique is the Divinity, the Principle and the Power.⁷¹ It is important to note that in this economic moment Gregory has recourse to the category of ‘principle’ (ἀρχή) and not that of ‘cause’ (αἰτία). At this point the Nyssian moves on to the properly immanent dimension:

However as in a movement of parting and return, passing to the summit of divine knowledge, I mean to say the God of the universe himself, running with the mind throughout that which is connected (τῶν προσεχῶν) and in affinity (τῶν οικείων), we return in succession from the Father through the Son to the Spirit (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα). For, firmly anchored in the consideration of the unbegotten light, we know then still, according to the continuity in relation, the light [that shines] from that, like a ray that coexists with the sun and whose cause (αἰτία) of being is from the sun, while its existence (ὑπαρξις) is contemporaneous with the sun, since it does not shine successively in time, but together with the apparition of the sun it is manifested from it. Thus—since there is absolutely no necessity that, remaining slave to the image, by the weakness of the example, we concede to the calumniators a pretext to contradict the reasoning—we will not think of a ray [that shines] from a sun, but of another sun [that shines] from an unbegotten sun, that together with the conception of the first shines together (συνεκλάμποντα) with him in a generated mode (γεννητῶς) and that is equal to him in all things: in beauty, power, splendour, greatness and luminosity and in whatever is observed in the Sun. And still [we will think] in the same way of another of such lights, that is not separated from the light generated without any temporal interval, but that shines by means of it (δι’ αὐτοῦ), while it has the cause of the hypostasis (τῆς ὑποστάσεως αἰτίαν) from the original light (ἐκ τοῦ πρωτοτύπου φωτός): a light certainly this one as well that, in likeness to that which we first considered, shines and illuminates and accomplishes all that is proper to light. And in fact there is no difference between one light and another in as much as light, from the moment that it does not appear deprived of anything or lacking of the illuminating grace, but is contemplated at the summit of every perfection with the Father and with the Son,⁷² it is enumerated in succession along with the Father and the Son⁷³ and in itself (δι’ ἑαυτοῦ) gives access to the light that is conceived in the Father and the Son to all those that can participate in it (μετασχεῖν).⁷⁴

⁷¹ Cf. *CEI*, GNO I, 179, 19–180, 10.

⁷² This is μετά with the genitive.

⁷³ Here Gregory uses μετά with the accusative, which corresponds to the idea of dynamic succession.

⁷⁴ ὡσπερ δέ τινα διάυλον ἀνακάμπτοντες μετὰ τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς θεογνωσίας, αὐτὸν λέγω τὸν ἐπὶ πάντων θεόν, διὰ τῶν προσεχῶν τε καὶ οικείων τῇ διανοίᾳ τρέχοντες ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα ἀναχωροῦμεν. ἐν περινοίᾳ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου φωτός

It is interesting here to underline that the participation in the light of the Trinitarian intimacy is given in the Holy Spirit, that is through and by the Spirit (δι' ἑαυτοῦ). The preposition refers to linear movement. It is an extension of the Trinitarian breathing to the economy, the extension of the immanent movement that springs from the Father (ἐκ), passes through the Son (διὰ), and terminates in the Holy Spirit (πρὸς).⁷⁵

Nevertheless de Halleux affirms: “The ‘cause of the hypostasis’ of the Holy Spirit thus does not concern his personal subsistence, but it is rather envisioned here as natural ‘cause of being’, since the preoccupation of Gregory is focused on the coeternity in existence, that is to say, definitively, on the consubstantiality of the three lights”.⁷⁶ The observation is far from clear, since it seems to artificially oppose the ‘cause of the hypostasis’ to the ‘cause of being’, breaking the perfect Nyssian equilibrium between Person and Nature. It does not seem possible to negate that Gregory refers to Trinitarian immanence here, in as much as the passage explicitly recalls the eternal relations. Rather, if one seeks to read the text without prejudices, the beauty and strength of the continuity between economy and theology is prominent. One cannot

καταστάντες ἐκεῖθεν πάλιν τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ φῶς κατὰ τὸ προσεχὲς ἐνόησαμεν οἶον ἄκτινά τινα τῷ ἡλίῳ συνυφισταμένην, ἧς ἡ μὲν αἰτία τοῦ εἶναι ἐκ τοῦ ἡλίου, ἡ δὲ ὑπαρξίς ὁμοῦ τῷ ἡλίῳ, οὐ χρόνις ὕστερον προσγινομένη, ἀλλ' ὁμοῦ τῷ ὀφθῆναι τὸν ἡλίον ἐξ αὐτοῦ συναναφαινομένη· μᾶλλον δὲ (οὐ γὰρ ἀνάγκη πᾶσα τῇ εἰκόνι δουλεύοντας δοῦναι τοῖς συκοφάνταις κατὰ τοῦ λόγου λαβὴν ἐν τῇ τοῦ ὑποδείγματος ἀτονίᾳ) οὐχὶ ἄκτινα ἐξ ἡλίου νοήσομεν, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀγεννήτου ἡλίου ἄλλον ἡλίον ὁμοῦ τῇ τοῦ πρώτου ἐπινοία γεννητῶς αὐτῷ συνεκλάμποντα καὶ κατὰ πάντα ὡσαύτως ἔχοντα κάλλει δυνάμει λαμπηδόνι μεγέθει φαιδρότητι καὶ πᾶσιν ἅπαξ τοῖς περὶ τὸν ἡλίον θεωρουμένοις. καὶ πάλιν ἕτερον τοιοῦτον φῶς κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, οὐ χρονικῶς τινι διαστήματι τοῦ γεννητοῦ φωτὸς ἀποτεμνόμενον, ἀλλὰ δι' αὐτοῦ μὲν ἐκλάμπον, τὴν δὲ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αἰτίαν ἔχον ἐκ τοῦ πρωτοτύπου φωτός, φῶς μέντοι καὶ αὐτὸ καθ' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ προεπινοηθέντος λάμπον καὶ φωτίζον καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα τὰ τοῦ φωτὸς ἐργαζόμενον. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστι φωτὶ πρὸς ἕτερον φῶς κατ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο παραλλαγὴ, ὅταν κατ' οὐδὲν τῆς φωτιστικῆς χάριτος ἐνδέον ἢ ὕστερούμενον φαίνεται, ἀλλὰ πάση τελειότητι πρὸς τὸ ἀκρότατον ἐπηρμένον μετὰ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ θεωρεῖται, μετὰ πατέρα καὶ υἱὸν ἀριθμεῖται, καὶ δι' ἑαυτοῦ τὴν προσαγωγὴν πρὸς τὸ ἐπινοούμενον φῶς τὸ ἐν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ πᾶσι τοῖς μετασχεῖν δυναμένοις χαρίζεται. (CE I, GNO I, 180, 10–181, 11).

⁷⁵ E. Bailleux comments, in reference to the personalism of the Greek Fathers, that “La fonction «économique» des hypostases divines ne fait que prolonger au-dehors les rapports qu’elles ont dans la vie trinitaire, sans qu’il soit besoin de faire appel à la théorie «psychologique».” (E. BAILLEUX, *Le personalisme trinitaire des Pères grecs*, MSR 27 (1970) 24–25).

⁷⁶ “La «cause de l’hypostase» du Saint-Esprit ne concerne donc pas sa subsistence personnelle, mais elle est plutôt envisagée ici comme la «cause de l’être» naturel, puisque la préoccupation de Grégoire porte sur la coéternité dans l’existence, c’est-à-dire, en définitive, sur la consubstantialité des trois lumières” (A. DE HALLEUX, “*Manifesté...*”, p. 22).

speak of the three Persons without speaking at the same time of their consubstantiality and coeternity. Of particular interest is the use of the participle *συνεκλάμποντα*, which cannot but recall the classic *unus Spirator sed duo Spirantes*.⁷⁷

The Eastern reading of this text would like to limit it to an affirmation of the unity of the divine essence, since the theological context in which the reading is done is always that of an antinomious vision of the substance and the hypostases.⁷⁸ But, given that Eastern theological thought generally moves from the distinction of the three Persons, it is significant, when their consubstantiality is affirmed, that the personal distinction itself is protected in one way rather than another.

In fact de Halleux is obliged to refer to the activity of the Spirit, hypothetically affirming that: “This activity of the Spirit is said to be just as eternal as that of the Son light, but the bishop of Nyssa could have placed it in the eternity of ‘theology’ simply in as much as potential source of the ‘economic’ revelation”.⁷⁹

Instead of excluding the mediating function of the Son, this passage appears to witness to it with a unique and rare equilibrium in the history of theology, something that should be a valid pattern for ecumenical dialog, in as much as he affirms healthily the monarchy of the Father, while giving a role that is not exclusively passive to the Son in the procession of the third Person. One can consider as well the fact that Gregory had to negate the theory of Eunomius, who considered the Son a simple instrument of the Father in the production of the Spirit.⁸⁰

To this can be joined the consideration that Gregory, in order to explain the procession of the Spirit and to distinguish it from the theory of two sons,⁸¹ does not have recourse to an image with a certain patristic tradition, that has its roots in the thought of Methodius of

⁷⁷ “Sed videtur melius dicendum quod, quia spirans adiectivum est, spirator vero substantivum, possumus dicere quod Pater et Filius sunt duo spirantes, propter pluralitatem suppositorum; non autem duo spiratores, propter unam spirationem. Nam adiectiva nomina habent numerum secundum supposita, substantiva vero a seipsis, secundum formam significatam.” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 36, a. 4, r. 7)

⁷⁸ Cfr. E.D. MOUTSOULAS, *La pneumatologie...*, p. 389.

⁷⁹ “Cette activité de l’Esprit est dite tout aussi éternelle que celle du Fils lumière, mais l’évêque de Nyssa pourrait ne l’avoir reportée dans l’éternité de la « théologie » qu’à titre de source potentielle de la révélation « économique »” (A. DE HALLEUX, “*Manifesté...*”, p. 22).

⁸⁰ Cfr. BASIL OF CAESAREA, *Eunomii impii apologia*, PG 30, 856BC (SC 305, pp. 274–276).

⁸¹ Certain heretics maintained that the Spirit was also a Son, as the second Person, since both were from the Father.

Olympus:⁸² differently from Adam, who is a son of God, Eve cannot be called daughter of Adam, while having been generated through him by God. Thus there would be a parallel between Adam and the Son on one side, and between Eve and the Spirit on the other.⁸³ The procession of the Spirit would be placed in proximity to the formation of the first woman from the rib of the first man.

This explanation has the advantage of distinguishing the two processions, assigning to διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ a total passivity, which strongly protects the Monarchy. There is a distinct yet linked image, as Orbe maintains, that compares Adam to the Father, in as much as unbegotten, Seth to the Son, in as much as generated, and Eve to the Spirit, in as much as proceeding; this image is used by Gregory Nazianzen,⁸⁴ as by Pseudo-Gregory of Nyssa, in the treatise *Ad imaginem Dei et ad similitudinem*.⁸⁵ Certainly the parallel Adam-Son and Eve-Spirit was known to the Cappadocians and to their school and, in a particular way, to Gregory of Nyssa due to his familiarity with the work of Methodius

⁸² Cfr. METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS, *Simposio* III, c. 8, 69ss; SC 95, p. 107. See the rigorous and well documented article: A. ORBE, *La procesión del Espíritu Santo y el origen de Eva*, Gr. 45 (1964) 103–118. Together with: M.T.-L. PENIDO, *Prélude grec à la théorie "Psychologique" de la Trinité*, RThom 45 (1939) 665–674.

⁸³ This parallel between the Holy Spirit and the woman is rich with interesting consequences: a classic theme of the Fathers is in fact, that the Demon tempted man by envy. One could perhaps say that he did not choose Adam, but Eve due to the envy of her beauty, of her capacity to attract to the good and the true. Thus beauty knew perversion (the considerations of R. Guardini on the ambiguity of beauty after original sin are quite interesting: see: R. GUARDINI, *Religiöse Gestalten in Dostojewskijs Werk*, Paderborn 1989, pp. 280–281) and the serpent made it his own, usurping fascination to deceive. For this reason Michelangelo portrayed the demon with a woman's clothes in the Sistine Chapel. But Christ, on the Cross, repaired this perversion and now it is his regard that attracts (cfr. P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Omnia traham ad meipsum*, «Romana» 13 (1991/2) 331–342).

⁸⁴ Cfr. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Oratio 31: De Spiritu Sancto*, 11; SC 250, p. 294, along with *Carmina Dogmatica* III, PG 37, 408 and JOHN DAMASCENE, *Expositio fidei* I, 8, 119–122 (PTS 343.7.2, p. 23): ὡσπερ καὶ ὁ Ἀδάμ ἀγέννητος ὢν (πλάσμα γὰρ ἐστὶ θεοῦ) καὶ ὁ Σῆθ γεννητός (υἱὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν τοῦ Ἀδάμ) καὶ ἡ Εὐὰ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Ἀδάμ πλευρᾶς ἐκπορευθεῖσα (οὐ γὰρ ἐγενήθη αὐτῇ) οὐ φύσει διαφέρουσιν ἀλλήλων (ἄνθρωποι γὰρ εἰσιν), ἀλλὰ τῷ τῆς ὑπάρξεως τρόπῳ.

⁸⁵ Cfr. PG 44, 1329CD. The treatise is collected in PG 44, 1328–1345, among Gregory's works. It is now clear that the work is not of Gregory of Nyssa, even if contemporaneous to him. Cfr. O. BARDENHEWER, *Geschichte der Altkirchlichen Literatur* III, Freiburg im Breisgau 1913, pp. 195–196 and E.D. MOUTSOULAS, Γρηγόριος . . . , pp. 340–342. Others attribute it to Anastasius of Mount Sinai (Cfr. PG 89, 1151). Orphanos cites this passage, attributing it to the Nyssian, to affirm that Gregory maintained the origin of the Spirit *a Patre solo*, forgetting that the analogy would rather indicate a procession *a Patre Spirituque*, since Adam did not generate Seth alone. But this affirmation would have been an absurdity to the ears of the Nyssian (cfr. M.A. ORPHANOS, *The Procession . . .*, p. 94).

himself. Nevertheless the Nyssian does not use this image. One could perhaps hypothesize that he avoids it, since it attributes, both to the Holy Spirit and to the Son, too passive a role which could quite easily be interpreted in a subordinationist manner.

Thus this first Nyssian text appears to suggest that the Nyssian διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ cannot be reduced to a function of pure transmission, as a mere canal. The key to the problem should probably be researched in an attentive evaluation of the term *συνεκλάμποντα*.

c. *The Flame*

Parallel to this text of the *CE I* is the following text of the *AdMac*, in which Gregory has recourse to the image of a flame.

In fact, for those beings whose activity according to the good does not admit diminution or any difference, how could one rationally think that the numerical order is a sign of some sort of diminution, of the difference of nature? As if, seeing the flame divided in three torches—and supposing that the first flame is cause of the third light, since it propagates fire to the extreme light by communication through that which is in the middle—one concluded, for this reason, that the heat in the first flame is greater, while in the next it is less, and tends to diminish, and that the third cannot even be called fire any more, even if it burns and illuminates in a similar manner and accomplishes all that is proper to fire.⁸⁶

Once again he is affirming the unicity of nature of the three divine Persons, but the choice of image cannot be by chance, above all if it is confronted with the preceding passage and if one considers the value of the already considered *συνεκλάμποντα*. The affirmation that action follows being is always present: if the Spirit accomplishes divine actions, that is he burns, then he is God. Energy is inseparable from nature.

In the *AdSimp*, the same argument is applied to the Father and Son. Gregory negates that the generation of the Son can be assimilated to a generation of the flesh. In a difference from that which happens

⁸⁶ ἐφ' ὃν γὰρ ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐνέργεια οὐδεμίαν ἐλάττωσιν ἢ παραλλαγὴν ἔχει, πῶς ἐστὶν εὐλογον τὴν κατὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τάξιν ἐλαττώσεώς τινος, τῆς κατὰ φύσιν παραλλαγῆς, οἶεσθαι σημεῖον εἶναι; ὡσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἐν τρισὶ λαμπάσι διηρημένην βλέπων τὴν φλόγα – αἰτίαν δὲ τοῦ τρίτου φωτὸς ὑποθώμεθα εἶναι τὴν πρώτην φλόγα ἐκ διαδόσεως διὰ τοῦ μέσου τὸ ἄκρον ἐξάψασαν – ἔπειτα κατασκευάζοι πλεονάζειν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ φλογὶ τὴν θερμασίαν, τῇ δὲ ἐφεξῆς ὑποβεβηκέναι καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἕλαττον ἔχειν τὴν παραλλαγὴν, τὴν δὲ τρίτην μηδὲ πῦρ εἶτι λέγεσθαι, κὰν παραπλησίως καίη καὶ φαίνη καὶ πάντα τὰ τοῦ πυρὸς κατεργάζεται. (*AdMac* GNO III/1, 92, 34–93, 10).

when bodies are generated,⁸⁷ God does not pass from non existence to existence. For this reason Heb 1.3 speaks of the “radiance of his glory” (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης), to indicate that, as the light shines from the nature of that which illuminates without mediation and as soon as the light is lighted the splendour (τὸ ἀπαύγασμα) appears, so the Son shines from the Father and one can never separate the Father from the Son, since it is impossible that his glory be deprived of light. Illumination cannot exist without glory and splendour. And the Son is this splendour.⁸⁸

None of these images can be understood if one abstracts them from the connection between nature and action, the only path by which man can, according to Gregory, speak of the Trinitarian immanence. But, if the economy is an obligatory passage, it would be improper to maintain that the Nyssian checks himself at this first moment, without elevating to the more properly theological level.

V. THE ROLE OF THE SON

a. *Per Filium*

To evaluate the implications and theological significance of these images, another text of the *CE* is useful, as it suggests the same conclusions:

⁸⁷ Gregory insists particularly on the simultaneous creation of the body and soul in a unique human being, thus being a proponent of immediate animation. See M. CANÉVET, *L'humanité de l'embryon selon Grégoire de Nyssse*, NRT 114 (1992) 678–695 and Ph. CASPAR, *Comment les Pères de l'Eglise envisagent le statut de l'embryon humain*, «Connaissance des Pères de l'Eglise» 52 (1993) 16–18.

⁸⁸ Ὅταν δὲ λέγωσιν ὅτι εἰ ἦν, οὐκ ἐγενήθη, καὶ εἰ ἐγενήθη, οὐκ ἦν, διδαχθήτωσαν ὅτι οὐ χρὴ τὰ τῆς σαρκικῆς γεννήσεως ιδιώματα ἐφαρμόζειν τῇ θεῖα φύσει. σώματα μὲν γὰρ μὴ ὄντα γεννᾶται, ὁ δὲ θεὸς τὰ μὴ ὄντα εἶναι ποιεῖ, οὐκ αὐτὸς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος γίνεται. διὸ καὶ ὁ Παῦλος ἀπαύγασμα δόξης αὐτὸν ὀνομάζει, ἵνα διδαχθῶμεν ὅτι, ὡσπερ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ λύχνου φῶς καὶ ἐκ τῆς φύσεώς ἐστι τοῦ ἀπαυγάζοντος καὶ μετ' ἐκείνου ἐστὶν (ὁμοῦ τε γὰρ ἐξεφάνη ὁ λύχνος καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ συνεξέλαμψεν), οὕτω κελεύει καὶ ἐνταῦθα νοεῖν ὁ ἀπόστολος, ὅτι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς καὶ οὐδέποτε χωρὶς τοῦ υἱοῦ ὁ πατήρ· οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ γὰρ ἀλαμπῆ εἶναι τὴν δόξαν, ὡς οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ ἄνευ ἀπαυγασματος εἶναι τὸν λύχνον. δῆλον δὲ ὅτι, ὡσπερ τὸ εἶναι ἀπαύγασμα μαρτυρία ἐστὶ τοῦ καὶ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι (μὴ γὰρ οὕσης τῆς δόξης οὐκ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἐκ ταύτης ἀπαυγάζομενον), οὕτω τὸ λέγειν μὴ εἶναι ποτε ἀπαύγασμα ἀπόδειξις ἐστὶ τοῦ μηδὲ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἀπαύγασμα· τὴν γὰρ δόξαν ἄνευ ἀπαυγασματος εἶναι ἀμήχανον. ὡσπερ οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀπαυγασματος λέγειν ὅτι εἰ ἦν, οὐκ ἐγένετο, καὶ εἰ ἐγένετο, οὐκ ἦν, οὕτω μάταιόν ἐστι περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ ταῦτα λέγειν, διότι ὁ υἱὸς ἐστὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα. (*AdSimp*, GNO III/1, 63, 22–64, 16).

We have, then, demonstrated with what was said that the Only Begotten Son and the Spirit of God are not to be sought in creation, but it must be believed that they are above creation. And creation, perhaps, can be understood based in some one of its principles, by means of the research of those who apply themselves to study such questions, but that which is above creation would not be for this better known, since in it there is no demonstrative indicator prior to time. If, then, we consider in the uncreated nature and the admirable realities and names, that is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, how will that which thought, which worries and labours to interrogate, superimposing by comparison one thing to another in a temporal interval, learns about the temporal world, be possibly thought, this same thing, of the eternal essence without generation? In which [eternal essence] the Father is considered without any principle whatever and unbegotten, Father from always, and [generated] from him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ), but in continuity and without any interval, the Only Begotten Son is thought at the same time. By whom [the Son], and with whom (δι' αὐτοῦ δὲ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ) one perceives immediately (εὐθὺς) and in conjunction, before any empty and unsubsisting (ἀνυπόστατον) idea furtively strikes the mind, also the Holy Spirit, who is not posterior to the Son in existence (ὑπαρξιν), in such a way as to think that the Son might have existed some time without the Holy Spirit. But, having also he the cause of being from the God of the universe, from whom (ὄθεν) also the Only Begotten light has being, he shines by means of the true light and is not separated from the Father or from the Only Begotten, neither in an interval of time, nor in a difference of nature. In fact, there are not temporal intervals in the eternal nature, nor any difference of substance. For this reason it is not possible to think of any difference as between uncreated being and created being: and the Spirit is uncreated, as we have demonstrated in that which precedes.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Ἐπεὶ οὖν δέδεικται διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων μὴ ἐν τῇ κτίσει τὸν μονογενῆ υἱὸν καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα δεῖν διερευνᾶσθαι, ἀλλ' ἄνω τῆς κτίσεως πιστεύειν εἶναι, ἢ μὲν κτίσις ἐπὶ τινος ἰδιαζούσης ἀρχῆς διὰ τῆς πολυπραγμοσύνης τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα ζητεῖν φιλοεικούντων ἴσως καταληφθήσεται, τὸ δὲ ὑπὲρ ταύτην οὐδὲν ἂν διὰ τούτων μᾶλλον εἰς γνῶσιν ἔλθοι, οὐδενὸς ἐν αὐτῷ σημείου δεικτικοῦ πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εὐρισκομένου. εἰ οὖν ἐν τῇ ἀκτίστῳ φύσει νοεῖται τὰ θαυμαστά πράγματά τε καὶ ὀνόματα, ὁ πατὴρ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, πῶς ἔσται δυνατόν, ὅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν κάτω περιεργαζομένη καὶ πολυπραγμονοῦσα καταλαμβάνει ἢ ἔννοια, ἕτερον ἑτέρου συγκριτικῶς ὑπερτιθεῖσα διὰ τινος χρονικοῦ διαστήματος, τοῦτο καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκτίστου καὶ προαιωνίου νομίζειν οὐσίας εἶναι: ἐν ἧ πατὴρ μὲν ἀναρχος καὶ ἀγέννητος καὶ ἄει πατὴρ νοεῖται, ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ κατὰ τὸ προσεχὲς ἀδιαστάτως ὁ μονογενῆς υἱὸς τῷ πατρὶ συνεπινοεῖται, δι' αὐτοῦ δὲ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ, πρὶν τι γενῶν τε καὶ ἀνυπόστατον διὰ μέσου παρεμπσεῖν νόημα, εὐθὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον συνημμένως καταλαμβάνεται, οὐχ ὑστερίζον κατὰ τὴν ὑπαρξιν μετὰ τὸν υἱόν, ὥστε ποτὲ τὸν μονογενῆ δίχα τοῦ πνεύματος νοηθῆναι, ἀλλ' ἐκ μὲν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων καὶ αὐτὸ τὴν αἰτίαν ἔχον τοῦ εἶναι, ὅθεν καὶ τὸ μονογενές ἐστὶ φῶς, διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ἐκλάμψαν, οὔτε διαστήματι οὔτε φύσεως ἑτερότητι τοῦ πατρὸς ἢ τοῦ μονογενοῦς ἀποτεμνόμενον. διάστημα μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς προαιωνίου φύσεως οὐκ ἔστιν, ἢ δὲ κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν διαφορὰ οὐδεμία. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔστι δυνατόν ἀκτίστου

As de Halleux rightly remarks, the gnoseological terminology of the text should not lead to think of an economic ambience. We are, instead, in a clearly theological moment, exactly as in the *AdAbl*. The central affirmation is the atemporality of the processions: in the created sphere there is always a chain of temporal causes that is known;⁹⁰ for the Trinity, it is instead necessary to use a causal category purified of temporality. The Cause is the Father, but the Son has a specific role, the *by him and with him* (δι' αὐτοῦ δὲ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ)⁹¹ is clear. Still, the vocabulary does not refer to the economy, but exclusively signifies the intra-divine processions, as de Halleux recognizes.⁹² The great advantage of the terminology of light is precisely the capacity to unite mission and procession. Certainly, the price of showing this continuity is the possibility of confusion between economy and theology. But the contexts of the analyzed passages are sufficiently clear and exclude, even explicitly, as in this last case and in the *AdAbl*, every possibility of reference to the economic sphere.

For this reason it is not easy to understand the affirmation of de Halleux, when he states that “the intention of this passage regards above all the eternity and divine nature of the Spirit. The author thus does not think for the moment to distinguish procession from generation. In other words, the expressions of κατὰ τὸ προσεχὲς and διὰ μέσου do not yet oppose in an immediate manner the begetting of the Son, and the Son’s mediation in the procession of the Spirit”.⁹³ Perhaps an

πρὸς ἄκτιστον διαφορὰν ἐννοῆσαι, ἄκτιστον δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, καθὼς ἐν τοῖς προλαβούσιν ἀποδέδεικται λόγοις. (*CE I*, GNO I, 137, 20–138, 20).

⁹⁰ As noted earlier, Gregory is always attentive and open to the experimental sciences.

⁹¹ The identical expression, also inserted in a highly theological context (the three uncreated Persons are placed in opposition to the created world) is found in *Ep 38* (*PG 32*, 329C). It is an often cited text in anti-Filioquist circles (for example: GREGORY OF CYPRUS, *Scripta apologetica*, *PG 142*, 259AB; *De processione Spiritus Sancti*, *PG 142*, 296B) and which was object of different interpretations in the Council of Florence. In light of this text of *CE I* and the clarification of the difference between *processio* and *ἐκπόρευσις*, the interpretive problems appear to resolve themselves: Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ἀφ’ οὗ πᾶσα ἐπὶ τὴν κτίσιν ἢ τῶν ἀγαθῶν χορηγία πηγάζει, τοῦ Υἱοῦ μὲν ἤρτηται ὡς ἀδιαστάτως συγκαταλαμβάνεται, τῆς δὲ τοῦ Πατρὸς αἰτίας ἐξημμένον ἔχει τὸ εἶναι, ὅθεν καὶ ἐκπορεύεται, τοῦτο γνωριστικὸν τῆς κατὰ τὴν ὑπόστασιν ιδιότητος σημείου ἔχει, τὸ μετὰ τὸν Υἱὸν καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ γνωρίζεσθαι καὶ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ὑφ’ ἐστάναι. Ὁ δὲ Υἱὸς ὁ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον Πνεῦμα δι’ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ μεθ’ ἑαυτοῦ γνωρίζων, μόνος μονογενῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἀγεννήτου φωτὸς ἐκλάμψας, οὐδεμίαν κατὰ τὸ ἰδιάζον τῶν γνωρισμάτων τὴν κοινωνίαν ἔχει πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα ἢ πρὸς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, ἀλλὰ τοῖς εἰρημένους σημείοις μόνος γνωρίζεται. (*Ep 38*, *PG 32*, 329C)

⁹² Cf. A. DE HALLEUX, “*Manifesté* . . .”, p. 24.

⁹³ “L’intention de ce passage porte avant tout sur l’éternité et la nature divine de

underestimation of the context of the passages impedes fully bringing to light Gregory's admirable equilibrium, which never distinguishes without uniting and which, for this reason, speaks of two processions in distinct terms, always affirming at the same time the Monarchy.

It should be enough to consider that Gregory conceives *Father* and *Son* as co-relative names, since *Father* does not indicate the substance, but the relation to the Son himself (ἡ τοῦ πατρὸς κλήσις οὐκ οὐσίας ἐστὶ παραστατική, ἀλλὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν σχέσιν ἀποσημαίνει).⁹⁴ Thus the *Filioque* is as if alluded to, in the purest immanence, by the very names of the divine Persons, since one cannot think of the Father without thinking of the Son.

In synthesis, it seems truly arduous to negate the presence of an immanent *per Filium* in Nyssian doctrine.⁹⁵ Specifying the explicit content of this *per Filium* requires however, that further analyses be carried out.

b. *Ex Filio?*

Once familiarized with the vocabulary of the theology of light, and given as well the considerations of the discussed passage of the *DeOr-Dom*,⁹⁶ it is necessary to verify whether it might be possible to find some indication in the Nyssian work to further interpret the role of the Son in the procession of the third Person as an *ex Filio*.

The expression ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ appears literally three times in Gregory's works: in one case it is the affirmation of the impossibility to invert the relationship between the Father and the Son⁹⁷ and does not immediately regard the present discussion, but in two cases, both in the *AdMac*, the expression refers to the relation between the Son and the Spirit.

l'Esprit. L'auteur ne songe donc pas pour l'instant à distinguer la procession de la génération. En d'autres termes, les expressions «κατὰ τὸ προσεχές» et «διὰ μέσου» n'opposent pas encore le caractère immédiat de l'engendrement du Fils à une médiation de ce dernier dans la procession de l'Esprit." (*Ibidem*).

⁹⁴ Cfr. *RCE*, GNO II, 319, 1–7. See also *CE* II, GNO I, 208, 11–14.

⁹⁵ This is also B. Studer's opinion, commenting precisely the analyzed passage of the *AdAbl* (cfr. B. STUDER, *La foi en l'Esprit Saint dans l'Église Ancienne*, in *Mysterium Caritatis. Studien zur Exegese und zur Trinitätslehre in der Alten Kirche*, Rome 1999, p. 450). Gregory's affirmation is to be read in the context of the Council of Constantinople, and shows the great progress of Nyssian pneumatology in respect to the work of both Basil and the Nazianzen (cfr. IDEM, *Dio Salvatore nei Padri della Chiesa*, Rome 1986, p. 216).

⁹⁶ See p. 160.

⁹⁷ Cfr. *CEIII*, GNO II, 233, 25–26.

Gregory is affirming the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son and the necessity to adore him, since he is by nature divine:

He is absolutely immortal, without any variations or mutations, always good (καλὸν) and free of the necessity of external (ἐτέρωθεν) gratuity. And in every creature he realizes (ἐνεργεῖ) everything as he wills and is holy and he is a guide, and right, and just, truthful, and searches the depths of God (τὰ βάθη ἐρευνῶν τοῦ θεοῦ), proceeds from the Father (ἐκ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον) and is received from the Son (ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβανόμενον).⁹⁸

In describing the attributes of the divine Persons, Gregory passes from the immanent dimension to the economic one. The adverb ἐτέρωθεν suggests that the first properties refer to the intra-Trinitarian dimension, but the later verb ἐνεργεῖ moves attention to the dimension of *ad extra* activity. Nevertheless Gregory ends a list of economic properties with the disconcerting τὰ βάθη ἐρευνῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. To know “the depths of God” is an expression of the immanent intimacy, above all since it is followed by the ἐκ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, which refers to the intra-Trinitarian procession of the third Person from the Father. At this point, the ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβανόμενον troubles, since it is not evident from the immediate context whether it necessarily refers to the economic dimension.

Further on, in *AdMac*, GNO 108, 18–109, 3, Gregory proposes the same structure, but in a more extended manner: from immanence (18–24) to economy (24–28) to return to the “depths of God” and conclude, referring to the Spirit:

He always searches the depths of God, always receives from the Son (ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβάνει) and is sent without separating, is glorified and has glory. For he who gives glory to another is manifestly considered to be in a superabundant glory. For how is it possible that he who gives glory be deprived of glory? If not light, how will one manifest the grace of light? Thus he who is not himself glory, honour, greatness and magnificence will not show the power to give glory. Therefore the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ ὅτι ἀθάνατόν ἐστι πάντως, ὅτι ἄτρεπτόν τε καὶ ἀναλλοίωτον καὶ ἀεὶ καλὸν καὶ ἀπροσδεὲς τῆς ἐτέρωθεν χάριτος, ὅτι πάντα ἐν πάσιν ἐνεργεῖ καθὼς βούλεται, ἅγιον, ἡγεμονικόν, εὐθές, δίκαιον, ἀληθινόν, τὰ βάθη ἐρευνῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβανόμενον (*AdMac*, GNO III/1, 97, 8–13).

⁹⁹ ἀεὶ τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐρευνᾷ, ἀεὶ ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβάνει καὶ ἀποστέλλεται καὶ οὐ χωρίζεται καὶ δοξάζεται καὶ δόξαν ἔχει· ὁ γὰρ ἄλλω δόξαν δίδωσιν, δηλον ὅτι ἐν ὑπερβαλλούσῃ δόξῃ καταλαμβάνεται. πῶς γὰρ δοξάζει τὸ δόξης ἄμοιρον; ἐὰν μὴ τι φῶς ᾖ, πῶς τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς ἐπιδείξεται χάριν; οὕτως οὐδὲ τὴν δοξαστικὴν δύναμιν ἐπιδείξεται, ὃ ἂν μὴ αὐτὸ ᾖ δόξα καὶ τιμὴ καὶ μεγαλωσύνη καὶ μεγαλοπρέπεια. δοξάζει οὖν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τὸ πνεῦμα. (*AdMac*, GNO III/1, 108, 28–109, 3).

Immediately after the repetition of the τὰ βάθη τοῦ Θεοῦ, the ἐκ τοῦ υἱοῦ λαμβανόμενον of the previous passage is further explicitated: the Spirit receives from the Son and is sent. Clearly one cannot use these texts to maintain a *Filioque* that would be little more than verbal reductionism; however the clear affirmation of the texts is that the Spirit receives glory from the Son and is, at the same time, he himself glory; for this reason he can communicate glory and be efficacious in the economy. These texts lead inevitably to reaffirm the continuity between immanence and economy, together with a role of the Son in giving glory to the Spirit, a role that appears difficult to reduce only to the temporal dimension. This is more evident if one continues to read in the same treatise, where, a little further on, Gregory affirms:

Do you see the circulation of glory through the same cyclical movements (τὴν ἐγκύκλιον τῆς δόξης διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων περιφορᾶν)? The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by (ὑπὸ) the Son. And reciprocally, the Son has glory from (παρὰ) the Father and the Only Begotten becomes the glory of the Spirit. For in what will the Father be glorified, if not in the true glory of the Only Begotten? And in his turn, in what will the Son be glorified, if not in the greatness of the Spirit? Thus also reason (ὁ λόγος), inserting itself in this circular movement (ἀνακυκλούμενος), gives glory to the Son through (διὰ) the Spirit and to the Father through (διὰ) the Son.¹⁰⁰

Here light is made glory and there is a marvelous intersection of the two movements: a circular movement that represents the dynamic of intra-Trinitarian immanence, which consists in a mutual and eternal communication of glory from one person to the other, from one Person through another. In this circular movement there intersects, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a linear movement, expressed by διὰ, that attracts the economic dimension to the Trinitarian immanence. The Trinity, as it overcomes the antinomy between unity and multiplicity, also overcomes the geometric antinomy between the circle and the line: to understand it we must have recourse to a circular image, to signify the immanent communion of love, eternal exchange of total self gift, and at the same time a linear image, that extends opening up to the economy.

¹⁰⁰ ὄρας τὴν ἐγκύκλιον τῆς δόξης διὰ τῶν ὁμοίων περιφορᾶν; δοξάζεται ὁ υἱὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος· δοξάζεται ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ ὁ πατήρ· πάλιν τὴν δόξαν ἔχει παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς καὶ δόξα τοῦ πνεύματος ὁ μονογενὴς γίνεται· τίτι γὰρ ἐνδοξασθήσεται ὁ πατήρ, εἰ μὴ τῇ ἀληθινῇ τοῦ μονογενοῦς δόξει; ἐν τίτι δὲ πάλιν ὁ υἱὸς δοξασθήσεται, εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ μεγαλωσύνῃ τοῦ πνεύματος; οὕτω πάλιν καὶ ἀνακυκλούμενος ὁ λόγος τὸν υἱὸν μὲν δοξάζει διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, διὰ δὲ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸν πατέρα. (*Ibidem*, GNO III/1, 109, 7–15).

VI. UNITY

a. ὅλως εἶναι

The role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit necessarily leads to the theme of unity. In this perspective, in the literature that treats the procession of the Spirit in Gregory's theology or in general patristics, the following passages are often not taken into account *in toto* or partially.¹⁰¹

In the *CE* Gregory discusses the personal distinction in the Trinity. It is a passage which is extremely clear as a whole:

And the Holy Spirit, who in the uncreated nature is in communion (κοινωνίαν) with the Father and the Son, is nevertheless distinguished in his turn by his proper characteristics. To not be that which is contemplated properly in the Father and the Son is his most proper characteristic and sign: his distinctive property in relation to the preceding does not consist in being in an unengendered mode (ἀγεννήτως), nor in an only engendered mode (μονογενῶς), but to be in the mode of constituting a whole¹⁰² (εἶναι δὲ ὅλως). He is conjoined to the Father by the fact of being uncreated, but is distinguished in his turn by the fact of not being Father as he is. United to the Son by the uncreated nature and by the fact of receiving the cause of existence from the God of the universe, he is distinct from him in his turn by the peculiarity of not subsisting hypostatically (ὑποστήναι) as the Only Begotten of the Father and by the fact of being manifested by the Son himself (δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ πεφηνέναι). But further, since creation subsists (ὑποστάσης) by means of the Only Begotten (διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς), so that one does not think that the Spirit has something in common with it due to the fact that he is manifested (πεφηνέναι) by the Son (διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ), he is distinguished from creation since he is invariable, immutable and without need of any external good (ἐτέρωθεν).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Even without analyzing these passages, M.A. Orphanos, after having considered the text of the *Ad Abl* and some of the passages thus far presented, in reference to the possibility that Gregory maintained the *Filioque*, writes: "If we are going to consider these evidences in themselves, it is possible to draw such a conclusion" (M.A. ORPHANOS, *The Procession...*, p. 93). Nevertheless he negates the possibility invoking the whole of Nyssian theology. It seems that the true reason for this negation is the aprioristic affirmation of the separation of economy and immanence.

¹⁰² Cfr. A. BAILLY, *Dictionnaire Grec-Français*, Paris 1950, p. 1370.

¹⁰³ τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐν τῷ ἀκτίστῳ τῆς φύσεως τὴν κοινωνίαν ἔχον πρὸς υἱὸν καὶ πατέρα τοῖς ἰδίοις πάλιν γνωρίσμασιν ἀπ' αὐτῶν διακρίνεται. γνωρίσμα γὰρ αὐτοῦ καὶ σημεῖόν ἐστιν ἰδιαιτάτον τὸ μηδὲν ἐκείνων εἶναι, ἄπερ ἰδίως τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ὁ λόγος ἐνεθεώρησε. τὸ γὰρ μήτε ἀγεννήτως εἶναι μήτε μονογενῶς, εἶναι δὲ ὅλως, τὴν ἐξάριτον αὐτοῦ ιδιότητα πρὸς τὰ προειρημένα παρίστησιν. τῷ γὰρ πατρὶ

The verb *πεφηνέναι*, as de Halleux underlines, should not lead to think of an economic dimension, due to the immediate clarification of the Nyssian in stating that the Spirit has nothing in common with creation. On the contrary, the adverb *ἐτέρωθεν* explicitly reminds one of Trinitarian immanence. Gregory is preoccupied to distinguish clearly the two parallel *διά*: the immanent one, that refers to the intra-divine procession (*δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ πεφηνέναι*) and the economic one (*διά τοῦ μονογενοῦς*), referring to *ad extra* activity.

Here is the power of the Nyssian distinction between created and uncreated. It is propitious to note that Meredith attributes Basil's pneumatological insufficiency¹⁰⁴ to precisely the lack of clear dichotomous vision of reality:¹⁰⁵ if there can be a third category besides created and uncreated, one leaves the possibility open of conceiving the Spirit in a subordinationist manner. It seems that, for Basil, the problem is rooted in a certain Origenistic inheritance, by which the action of the Spirit in creation is limited exclusively to rational creatures:¹⁰⁶ his creative role is thus reduced to sanctification.

The creative role of the Spirit is quite different in Gregory's thought, where the divinity of the Spirit is manifested precisely in his creative activity, in continuity with the reasoning developed in the *AdAbl*. This concreative role of the Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, constitutes "a step Basil had been unwilling and indeed, within his Origenist framework, unable to take".¹⁰⁷

Gregory shared with Athanasius his clarity in the distinction between created and uncreated. This observation renders even more relevant the

κατὰ τὸ ἄκτιστον συναπτόμενον πάλιν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τῷ μὴ πατὴρ εἶναι καθάπερ ἐκεῖνος διαχωρίζεται. τῆς δὲ πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν κατὰ τὸ ἄκτιστον συναφείας [καὶ ἐν τῷ τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς ὑπάρξεως ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων ἔχειν] ἀφίσταται πάλιν τῷ ἰδιάζοντι, ἐν τῷ μήτε μονογενῶς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑποστῆναι καὶ ἐν τῷ δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ πεφηνέναι. πάλιν δὲ τῆς κτίσεως διὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς ὑποστάσης, ὡς ἂν μὴ κοινότητά τινα πρὸς ταύτην ἔχειν νομισθῆ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ πεφηνέναι, ἐν τῷ ἀτρέπτῳ καὶ ἀναλλοιώτῳ καὶ ἀπροσδεεῖ τῆς ἐτέρωθεν ἀγαθότητος διακρίνεται τὸ πνεῦμα ἀπὸ τῆς κτίσεως. (CE I, GNO I, 108, 7–109, 5).

¹⁰⁴ See Basil's letter 71, where he does not affirm the consubstantiality of the Spirit, despite the pressures of letter 58 from Gregory Nazianzen, to which Basil is responding. For a systematic presentation of Basilian pneumatology, see J.M. YANGUAS SANZ, *Pneumatologia de San Basilio*, Pamplona 1983.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. A. MEREDITH, *The Pneumatology of ...*, 205–206.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 201. See also J. DILLON, *Origen's Doctrine of the Trinity and Some Later Neoplatonic Theories*, in D.J. O'MEARA, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, New York 1982, pp. 19–23.

¹⁰⁷ A. MEREDITH, *The Pneumatology of ...*, 206.

parallelism between the immanent *διὰ* and the economic one in the passage in question here. For Athanasius reserves this last preposition to the economic dimension alone, and in particular to creation, while he uses *ἐκ* and *παρά* for the immanent processions.¹⁰⁸ Gregory does not follow this distinction and, as already seen, is not rigid and formal in the use of prepositions in the Trinitarian formulas: he is free, thus, to develop a parallelism, as formal as conceptual, between Trinitarian economy and immanence.¹⁰⁹

The explicitly immanent exegesis of *πεφηνέναι* that Gregory offers for the passage in question, serves as hermeneutical key to a deeper understanding of the properly theological value of the images that he adopts for the theology of light. “To manifest” and “To shine with” are not economic, but rather express the role of the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit. The paternal Monarchy remains intact, and the Son, in communion with the Father, has a role that is not purely passive.

The key to understanding these affirmations needs to be sought in the personal characteristic of the Holy Spirit, who is “in a mode so as to constitute a whole” (*ὅλως*). It is necessary to remember here the *πῶς εἶναι* of the *AdAbt*: the Person is expressed in adverbial mode, since the Person is constituted by the mode of being of the unique essence. It is the Spirit who ‘closes’ the Trinity, it is he who, in his being of Love, actively unites the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless, one cannot be totally in agreement with the formulation proposed by von Balthasar of this Trinitarian aspect: “Gregory conceives the supreme unity not under the sign of the Father, but under that of the Spirit. And this—the idea would perhaps surprise a Greek Father—explicitly in as much as he is the mutual love of the Father and the Son”.¹¹⁰ In fact, the Nyssian construction, in its perfection, does not affirm the unity given by the Spirit through a diminution of that given by the Father. The Monarchy remains intact. The Father is source of

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. J.R. MEYER, *Clarifying the Filioque Formula Using Athanasius's Doctrine of the Spirit of Christ*, Com(US) 27 (2000) 396–397.

¹⁰⁹ Athanasius as well does not separate Trinitarian economy and immanence. See the bivalent meaning of *ἐκλάμπει*, referred to the Holy Spirit: *ἐκ Πατρὸς λέγεται ἐκπορεύεσθαι, ἐπειδὴ παρὰ τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ ἐκ Πατρὸς ὁμολογουμένου ἐκλάμπει, καὶ ἀποστέλλεται, καὶ δίδοται.* (ATHANASIUS, *Epistulae quatuor ad Serapionem*, PG 26, 580A).

¹¹⁰ “Grégoire conçoit l’unité suprême non pas dans le signe du Père, mais dans celui de l’Esprit. Et ceci—l’idée surprendra peut-être chez un Père grec—expressément en tant qu’il est l’amour mutuel du Père et du Fils” (H. VON BALTHASAR, *Présence et pensée*, Paris 1947, p. 137).

unity, the Spirit is the one who brings to completion this unity. In this context L. Turcescu's remark on the relationality of the Third Person as essential element of the Person is specially useful.¹¹¹

This is all the more true since Athanasius had cited Pope Dionysius (261–272) in that which constitutes the first testimony of the unitive role of the Spirit. This moment marks the entry, at least into Latin theology, of the circular representation of the Trinity alongside the linear image introduced by Tertullian:

“It is necessary that the divine Word be united to the God of the universe; and it is necessary that the Holy Spirit love to have his dwelling in God and to reside in him. It is absolutely necessary that the Holy Trinity be recapitulated and guided back to unity, as to a summit, that is to the all powerful God of the universe”.¹¹²

b. *Glory*

The Son and the Spirit do not exist except in relationship to the Father, if one considers them in their incommunicable hypostatic names, since the Father is the source of their personal originality. But in the measure in which the hypostasis is manifested in the mode of existence, which has for content the essence itself, the divine Persons are manifested in an order in which each of the divine Persons is for the other condition of the common consubstantiality.¹¹³ Thus, if one looks at the Trinity from the first optic, the Father is the unique Cause and the Monarchy is

¹¹¹ Cfr. L. TURCESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa* . . . , pp. 112–113. Nevertheless this scholar stresses the difference between Gregory's understanding of the Son's role in the procession of the Spirit and the western *Filioque* (cfr. *ibidem*, p. 68): even if this position should be obviously true with respect to scholastic understandings of the *Filioque*, it seems too sharp. L. Turcescu points out with great acuteness the theological importance conferred by Nyssian to the use of correlative terms for the names of the Divine Persons: the Father is Father for the eternal generation of the Son, so that there is no time when the Father was not Father. This correlativeness means that the Son should take part in the procession of the Spirit at least through the Fatherhood of the First Person, as the Third Person proceeds from the Father, who is Father just for the eternal generation of the Son. In this way, also the active character of the being Image of the Father, which constitutes the Second Person, suggests a less sharp conclusion in comparison with L. Turcescu's position.

¹¹² ἡνώσθαι γὰρ ἀνάγκη τῷ θεῷ τῶν ὅλων τὸν θεῖον λόγον, ἐμφιλοχωρεῖν δὲ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐνδιαιτᾶσθαι δεῖ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα. ἤδη καὶ τὴν θεῖαν τριάδα εἰς ἓνα, ὡσπερ εἰς κορυφὴν τινα, τὸν θεὸν τῶν ὅλων τὸν παντοκράτορα λέγω, συγκεφαλαιοῦσθαι τε καὶ συνάγεσθαι πᾶσα ἀνάγκη. (POPE DIONYSIUS cited in ATHANASIUS, *De decretis nicaenae synodi*, 26, 3; H.G. OPTIZ, *Athanasius Werke*, II/1.1, Berlin 1940, p. 22).

¹¹³ Cfr. J. GARRIGUES, *Procession* . . . , p. 359.

affirmed, but, if one moves to the second optic, the unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, who, last in the order, closes that circle of divine Love. He closes and he opens: for it is him who, at the same time, attracts and unites the economic dimension to the immanent one.

One can thus consider the following text of the *InCant*, as one of the summits of the whole of Nyssian Trinitarian doctrine:¹¹⁴

It is better to textually cite the divine words of the Gospel: “So that all be one. As You Father, are in Me and I in You, that they be also one in Us” (Jn 17.21). And the bond of this unity is glory (τὸ δὲ συνδετικὸν τῆς ἐνότητος ταύτης ἡ δόξα ἐστίν). But no prudent person could oppose the fact that the Spirit is called ‘glory’, if the words of the Lord are considered. For he says: “The glory that You gave Me I gave to them” (Jn 17.22). He gave, in fact, that glory to the disciples, saying to them “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20.22). He, having embraced human nature, received this glory that he already possessed forever, from before the world was made (cfr. Jn 17.5). And, since this human nature was glorified by the Spirit, the communication of the glory of the Spirit happens to all who belong to the same nature (ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ συγγενές), starting with the disciples. For this he says: “And the glory that You gave Me, I gave to them, so that they be one like Us. I in them and You in Me, so that they be perfect in unity” (Jn 17.22–23).¹¹⁵

The value of the passage is inestimable; it permits a profound understanding of the pneumatological role of the *AdAbl* and can serve as an interpretive key for the whole treatise. For the unfolding of the *AdAbl* shows that Gregory uses coordination against the subordination of Eunomius. When he moves to personal distinction, he is extremely attentive to distinguish the principle of the cause from that of nature. Thus one sees that he is far from Origenistic Neoplatonism, and the argument of whoever might wish to make of the διὰ υἱοῦ in this

¹¹⁴ The extraordinary value of this passage has been recently shown in: L.F. MATEO-SECO, *La unidad y la gloria*, in J. CHAPA (Ed.), *Signum et testimonium. Estudios ofrecidos al Profesor Antonio García-Moreno en su 70 cumpleaños*, Pamplona 2003, pp. 179–198.

¹¹⁵ βέλτιον δ’ ἂν εἴη αὐτὰς ἐπὶ λέξεως παραθέσθαι τὰς θείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου φωνάς· “Ἴνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσι καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσιν. τὸ δὲ συνδετικὸν τῆς ἐνότητος ταύτης ἡ δόξα ἐστίν· δόξαν δὲ λέγεσθαι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον οὐκ ἂν τις τῶν ἐπεσκεμμένων ἀντείποι πρὸς αὐτὰς βλέπων τὰς τοῦ κυρίου φωνάς· τὴν δόξαν γάρ, φησίν, ἦν ἔδωκάς μοι, ἔδωκα αὐτοῖς. ἔδωκε γάρ ὡς ἀληθῶς τοῖς μαθηταῖς τοιαύτην δόξαν ὁ εἰπὼν πρὸς αὐτούς· Λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον. ἔλαβε δὲ ταύτην τὴν δόξαν ἦν πάντοτε εἶχε πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι ὁ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν περιβαλόμενος, ἧς δοξασθείσης διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ συγγενές ἢ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πνεύματος διάδοσις γίνεται ἀπὸ τῶν μαθητῶν ἀρξαμένη. διὰ τοῦτο φησι· τὴν δόξαν, ἦν ἔδωκάς μοι, ἔδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν, καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν ἐσμεν· ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ᾧσι τετελειωμένοι εἰς τὸ ἓν. (*InCant*, GNO VI, 467, 2–17).

treatise simply a translation of the Origenistic theology of light turns against the user:¹¹⁶ the whole of the treatise—the ἀκολουθία of the work—shows that even when Gregory uses the terminology of radiance he speaks of the Trinitarian immanence, and not only of the economic movement.¹¹⁷

Gregory explicitly treats the immanent dimension and the economic dimension, distinguishing them without separating them. He affirms that he who unites the Trinity is the Spirit; at the same time he affirms that it is also the Spirit who unites Christians: the unity of the Church is founded in the unity of the Trinity. The Spirit unites in the immanence and unites in the economy and, further, it is exactly the Spirit who unites the economy and immanence with each other, attracting to the Son, and in the Son, to the Father.

It is also quite interesting to approach the affirmation that the Spirit is the bond¹¹⁸ (τὸ συνδευτικόν) of the Trinity to the passage of the *CE*, already analyzed in the preceding section, where Gregory asserts that the personal characteristic of the Spirit is defined by ὅλως εἶναι: His being Person is constituted in carrying to unity. The Scriptural basis of the affirmation is, certainly, the indication of the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father (Rm 8.11) and as the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4.6).

Thus his economic activity, always in communion with the other two Persons, is sealed by his personal characteristic: he is glory. In this manner one is reconnected immediately with the splendour of the theology of light.

This is also the true profound significance of human coordination as well: man is called in time, in history, to act with the Trinity, to let himself be drawn by the Spirit to the divine unity.

As for the question of the *Filioque*, these last two passages are essential to understand the depth and equilibrium of Nyssian thought. The summit of Latin thought is the *nexus amoris*,¹¹⁹ which eliminates

¹¹⁶ See A. DE HALLEUX, “Manifesté . . .”, p. 30.

¹¹⁷ Further, the very Johannine prologue, from which the reflection of Origen is inspired, moves from Trinitarian immanence (Jn 1.1) to the economy, to then return to the immanence itself (Jn 1.18), in a marvelous circular structure which seems to have marked Nyssian thought.

¹¹⁸ The term is analysed and presented in its philological context in G. MASPERO, *El Espíritu, la Cruz y la unidad: συνδέω, σύνδεσμος, συνδευτικός en Gregorio de Nisa*, ScrTh 38 (2006) 445–471.

¹¹⁹ “Qui Spiritus Sanctus secundum scripturas sanctas nec Patris est solius nec Filii solius sed amborum, et ideo communem qua inuicem se diligunt Pater et Filius nobis insinuat caritatem” (AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De Trinitate* 15, 17, 27; CCSL 50/1, p. 501). “Ad

any possible erroneous interpretation of the sense of double spirative principle, protecting the Monarchy and, at the same time, including the *Filioque*, in such a way to assign to the second Person a role that is not purely passive; thus also Gregory goes along the same path, understanding the Spirit as συνδετικόν, who unites the Father and the Son.

CONCLUSION

In synthesis, analysis parted from the *AdAbl* to show how the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ and the affirmation of the Trinitarian order have an important relevance for the history of Trinitarian dogma.

After a preliminary historical introduction to the question, the study developed in two stages: starting from the incontrovertible Scriptural reference to the economic sending of the Holy Spirit by the Son, it was shown, reading the *AdAbl* in the light of other Nyssian passages, that Gregory affirms a role for the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit on the level of Trinitarian immanence as well. Exactly for this reason, Y. Congar ends his commentary on the text of the *AdAbl* affirming decisively: "One cannot deny a role of the Son in the intra-divine existence of the Spirit".¹²⁰ Also important is the affirmation of J.D. Zizioulas who, in reference to the Council of Constantinople and the problem of the *Filioque*, quotes the passage of the *AdAbl* in question and concludes, referring himself to the ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς of the Symbol, that it "... does not exclude a mediating role of the Son in the procession of the Spirit".¹²¹

In second place the qualitative situation of this role was interrogated:

tertium dicendum quod Spiritus Sanctus dicitur esse nexus Patris et Filii, in quantum est Amor: quia, cum Pater amet unica dilectione se et Filium, et e converso, importatur in Spiritu Sancto, prout est Amor, habitudo Patris ad Filium, et e converso, ut amantis ad amatum. Sed ex hoc ipso quod Pater et Filius se mutuo amant, oportet quod mutuos Amos, qui est Spiritus Sanctus, ab utroque procedat. Secundum igitur originem, Spiritus Sanctus non est medius, sed tertia in Trinitate persona. Secundum vero praedictam habitudinem, est medius nexus duorum, ab utroque procedens." (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 37, a. 1, ad 3)

¹²⁰ "On ne peut nier un rôle du Fils dans l'existence intra-divine de l'Esprit" (Y. CONGAR, *Je crois...*, p. 61). K. HOLL also maintains that, without a doubt, this is an intra-Trinitarian affirmation (cf. K. HOLL, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern dargestellt*, Darmstadt 1969, pp. 213–214).

¹²¹ J.D. ZIZIOULAS, *The Teaching in the 2nd Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective*, in *Atti del Congresso Teologico Internazionale di Pneumatologia I*, Rome 1983, p. 44.

is this a purely passive διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ, a simple transmission, or does the Son enter actively into the procession? The conclusion is that one cannot understand the significance of the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ if one does not pay attention to the personal characteristic of the Spirit: the one who unites the Father and Son and who leads to unity. For, with a beautiful expression of B. Forte, the Spirit is the “*us* in person of the divine communion”.¹²² Thus one can affirm that, in the context of Nyssian thought, the Spirit as συνδευκόν is the exegesis of the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ, from which it can never be separated. This should be the most original contribution of the present study: this connection is almost totally passed over in the literature, which is principally dedicated to the study of the divinity of the third Person and, in the few cases in which his procession is treated, one gets often sidetracked in polemics of verbal Byzantinism.

Thus it was seen, that the base of the whole Nyssian construction is the continuity between economy and immanence: the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Son cannot be solely limited to the economic sphere.¹²³

It is probable that this development of Gregory’s Trinitarian doctrine is due to the great value that he places in creation and to the purification of the remnants of Origenistic intellectualism that still slowed down Basil’s pneumatology. For the Spirit is, at the same time, the One who brings to completion the dynamic of intra-Trinitarian union and who attracts and unites man and the world to the Triune God, inserting them in his vortex of life and love.

The summit of Gregory’s pneumatology is then, precisely the recognition of the personal characteristic of the Third Person: he who leads to union, in immanence as in the economy. He is the συνδευκόν, the bond. His mode of being God, his mode of containing the unique divine essence, is the ὅλως εἶναι: that is, to carry to unity, to constitute a whole.¹²⁴ This συν-, of συνδευκόν, recalls immediately the συν- in the

¹²² “«noi» in persona della comunione divina” (B. FORTE, *Teologia della storia*, Cinisello Balsamo 1991, p. 153).

¹²³ B. Bolotov, already, citing a long series of patristic texts, wrote: “L’hypothèse que le διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ contiendrait partout et toujours l’idée d’un envoi *seulement temporel* du Saint Esprit dans le monde, pour amener les créatures au bonheur, conduit à *faire violence* aux textes dans l’interprétation de certains passages patristiques” (thesis n. 3, B. BOLOTOV, *Thèses . . .*, p. 282).

¹²⁴ One can confront the Nyssian texts with the following from Thomas Aquinas: “hoc enim ipsum quod Spiritus Sanctus Patri aequalis est, a Filio habet. Similiter, excluso Spiritu Sancto, qui est duorum nexus, non posset intelligi unitas connexionis

συνεκλάμποντα of the Son with the Father: in this way it is shown that the fundamental category is intra-Trinitarian *κοινωνία*.¹²⁵ B. Forte cites 2 Cor 13.13 and auspiciously notes that, precisely due to his personal characteristic, in the greeting used by the primitive Church *κοινωνία* was attributed to the Holy Spirit.¹²⁶

In this sense, the accent moves to the Trinity as union of love. In the communion of the Father and the Son, which point one to the other, on the real level as on the logical level, the Spirit is not a complement, a simple extension towards the economy, fruit of an almost subordinating conjoined spiration. The Spirit rather unites the Father and the Son in as much as Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

So, in the Nyssian *διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ* the accent is placed on the *τοῦ υἱοῦ*, on the communion of the Father and the Son, and not on the pure passivity of the *διὰ*.¹²⁷ The same phenomena will be reproduced in Latin theology, where the *nexus amoris* eliminates the danger of dialectically and logistically opposing the Son to the Father, in generation as in spiration. The *nexus amoris* shows, in fact, that in the *Filioque* the accent is on the *Filio* and not on the *que*.¹²⁸ With the same operation the dangers of “theological filioqueism”¹²⁹ are eliminated, which, with an almost rationalistic coldness, dissects the Trinity, separating Paternity and Filiation from Spiration and Procession.

Such a deformation would lead to negate the Trinitarian reciprocity of the Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son. In fact, from a purely logical viewpoint, only the Father and Son are in relative opposition.¹³⁰ The temptation is then born to move from the logical level to the real one, affirming that, while the Spirit is relative to the Father and the Son, united in the unique spiration, one cannot say however that the Father and Son are, in their turn, relative to the Spirit.

In synthesis, in Latin terms, *l'unus Spirator* is *unus* precisely by the

inter Patrem et Filium. Et ideo dicuntur omnia esse connexa propter Spiritum Sanctum: quia, posito Spiritu Sancto, invenitur unde Pater et Filius possint dici connexi.” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 39, a. 8, c.)

¹²⁵ As in the Latin *unus Spirator*.

¹²⁶ Cfr. B. FORTE, *El Espíritu Santo y Jesús de Nazaret*, ScrTh 30 (1998) 814. The Christian salvation to which it is referred is: Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. (2 Cor 13.13).

¹²⁷ Further, the mentality of a Greek Father cannot but see a blasphemy and impiety in the predication of any passivity in God.

¹²⁸ Cfr. V. RODZIANKO, “*Filioque*” . . . , p. 306.

¹²⁹ Cfr. J.M. GARRIGUES, *La reciprocidad trinitaria del Espíritu Santo, con respecto al Padre y al Hijo*, ScrTh 30 (1998) 818–819.

¹³⁰ Cfr. p. 173.

Person of the Spirit, who is the union, the *συνδεδεικόν*, of the *duo spirantes*, united and distinct in their proper Paternity and Filiation by their mutual Spirit. *Spiratio* is, in fact, the unique respiration of love of the Father and Son: to be Son does not only mean to receive all from the Father—to be his perfect Image but also to give to the Father perfect glory, to give everything back to the Father. It is in this manner that the Son manifests the Spirit in his Filiation to the Father, who is in this way fully Father, receiving his own glory from his own Son. This is the circular dynamic of glory seen in the *AdMac* (see p. 176). But, at the same time, since it is the proper of the Son to give to the Father all glory, it is the Son who sends the Spirit in the economy, extending into time the eternal movement that characterizes him as Person, to attract all to the Father.¹³¹ The Spirit is then like the eternal ‘regard’ of the Son to the Father, which for love of the Father himself reposes on creation and is extended as the gaze of the Crucified Christ, that fascinates and conquers.¹³² Gregory’s equilibrium is, thus, perfect.¹³³

Therefore, while confronting Nyssian pneumatology with Latin doctrine, two considerations are necessary: on one side Gregory purifies the category of ‘cause’ of the temporal dimension and of substantial inferiority, transforming it into a notion that signifies fundamentally ‘origin’. Thus the Nyssian αἰτία is notably closer to the Latin *principium*.¹³⁴ On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider that Occidental pneumatology does not intend, with the *Filioque*, to introduce a second

¹³¹ Cfr. the second part of note n. 83, with reference to the work of P. Rodríguez.

¹³² Perhaps, one could hazard an exegesis of Jn 1.1: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. It is well known that John uses the term θεός without the article to signify the Divinity in its unity, while ὁ θεός is the Father (cfr. R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John, I: I–XII* (The Anchor Bible 29.1), Garden City 1986, p. 5 and F. BLASS—A. DEBRUNNER, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Göttingen 1984, § 254, 1). Thus, at the beginning of his Gospel the two divine persons appear face to face. Perhaps the preposition πρὸς can foreshadow the Spirit, the ‘gaze’ of love that unites the Son and the Father.

¹³³ Garrigues himself shows that the Trinitarian theology of Thomas Aquinas, when considered in its totality, also reaches an admirable equilibrium that gathers the principle contributions of both Latin and Greek patristics. (Cfr. J.M. GARRIGUES, *La reciprocidad...*, pp. 810–812).

¹³⁴ B. Pottier approaches the Nyssian διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ to the *a Patre per Filium* of Tertullian (*Adversus Praxean*, IV, 1; CCL 2, p. 1162), since the Latin *Filioque* would imply an *ex*, as the formula of the Credo witnesses to (cfr. B. POTTIER, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse*, Turnhout 1994, pp. 362–363). The discussion of pp. 159–162 on the absence in the Latin sphere of an equivalent to the Oriental ἐκπορεύεται, should be sufficient to at least raise some doubt on Pottier’s affirmation, which, on another note, does not cite the pneumatology of the *συνδεδεικόν*.

cause in the Trinity.¹³⁵ The key point is the consideration of the Spirit as bond of union in the Blessed Trinity.

V. Rodzianko suggests that the direct study of Augustine's texts is the only path to return to a full union;¹³⁶ therefore this succinct presentation of the pneumatology of Gregory of Nyssa wishes to show, in Gregory himself, a natural bridge in the heart of Greek patristics, to return to that unity whose true author is the Holy Spirit.

All of Nyssian pneumatology, as the treatise of the *AdAbl* itself, culminates in the affirmation that this unity, to which man and the whole of the economic dimension are called, is the unity of love, of the very intra-Trinitarian love itself. Often the critics of the *Filioque* dialectically oppose Christological, and thus historical, mediation to the pneumatological one.¹³⁷ However, in Gregory of Nyssa the $\delta\iota\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$ is precisely the manner to express the mediation of the Spirit that enters into history to lead back, in Christ, the sensible world and history itself to the Father.

This is magnificently expressed in the treatise *InIllud*, which offers a natural line of conclusion, not only for this chapter, but of the entire commentary: Gregory explicitly brings together, in this text, the $\sigma\upsilon\nu\delta\epsilon\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$, the *nexus*, to the love of the Father and Son, which opens into love for his Body, so that all be one, *in unitate Spiritus Sancti*.¹³⁸

The *InIllud*¹³⁹ also moves from a Trinitarian preoccupation, since it seeks to explain in a non subordinationist fashion 1 Cor 15:28: *when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, so that God be All in all*.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ This is a typical interpretive imprecision. See, for example, K. HOLL, *Amphilochius von Ikonium* . . . , pp. 214–215, for whom the observations of the preceding note apply.

¹³⁶ Cfr. V. RODZIANKO, "Filioque" . . . , p. 307.

¹³⁷ This is perhaps the central point of the whole question, as the hard commentary on the Clarification on the *Filioque* by J.C. Larchet manifests (cfr. J.C. LARCHET, *La question du Filioque*, Theol(A) 70 (1999) 761–812). In fact, other illustrious Orthodox authors have fully accepted the Clarification: B. Bobrinskoy («*Documentation catholique*» 2130, 21–I-1996, pp. 89–90) and O. Clément («*Contacts*» 48, 1996, pp. 2–4). The nexus of the question is the connection between economy and immanence and the essential role that this would confer to history and historical realities, the Papacy included (see V. SOLOV'EV, *La Russia e la Chiesa universale*, Milan 1989, p. 74).

¹³⁸ On the origin of this profound expression from the conclusion for the prayers of the Roman Missal, see B. BOTTE, *In unitate Spiritus Sancti*, MD 23 (1950) 49–63.

¹³⁹ For a brief presentation of the *InIllud* see A. PENATI BERNARDINI, *Gregorio di Nissa, Commento al Nuovo Testamento, traduzione e commento*, Rome 1992, pp. 20ss.

¹⁴⁰ Due to the improper use that the Arians made of it, this verse has been the object of attention of various authors: for a synthetic perspective J.T. LIENHARD, *The exegesis of 1 Co 15, 24–28 from Marcellus of Ancyra to Theodoret of Cyrus*, VigChr 37 (1983) 340–359;

The evident problem is the submission (ὑποταγή) of the Son. For this reason Gregory starts the treatise analyzing the different significations of the term ὑποταγή: there is the submission of slaves to their masters, of irrational animals to man, or that of the nations to Israel. But the ὑποταγή of Christ to the Father cannot be understood in this way.

Jesus lived in true submission to Mary and Joseph, as it is explicitly said in Lk 2.51, however this is not opposed to his divinity, since he became perfect man, similar to us in all things but sin. Thus, as any normal child, he was submitted to his parents. With age, this submission naturally ended, as can be seen in the wedding of Cana.¹⁴¹ But it is not in this sense either that the ὑποταγή of the Son in 1 Cor 15.28 is to be understood. Here the submission to God is nothing other than the complete separation from evil,¹⁴² that is to say the union with God. It is thus the submission of the body of Christ, that is of all men who become one in Christ with the Father. As already noted,¹⁴³ the Nyssian refers to the beautiful text of Jn 17.21–23:

The Lord is life,¹⁴⁴ and by means of him, according to the word of the Apostle, the whole Body is given access to the Father, when he consigns the kingdom to our God and Father.¹⁴⁵ And his Body, as has been often said, is the entire human nature to which he has indissolubly united (κατεμίχθη) himself. For this reason the Lord is called by Paul *Mediator* (Μεσίτης) *between God and men*.¹⁴⁶ In fact, he who is in the Father and has become man among men realizes mediation in uniting all in himself and by means of himself to the Father, as is said in the Gospel of the Lord, saying to the Father: *So that all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they be also one in us.* That clearly shows that in uniting us to himself, he who is in the Father, by means of himself realizes our union (συνάφειαν) with the Father. But also that which follows in the Gospel is in harmony with the explanation: *The glory that you gave me, I have given to them.* I maintain in fact that he here calls the Holy Spirit

also C. McCAMBLEY, *When (the Father) Will Subject All Things to (the Son), Then (the Son) Himself Will Be subjected to him (the Father) Who Subjects All Things to him (The Son). - A Treatise on First Corinthians, 15, 18 by Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, GOTR 28 (1983) 1–15.

¹⁴¹ Cfr. *In Illud*, GNO III/2, 7, 15–8, 18.

¹⁴² Cfr. *ibidem*, 16, 9–23.

¹⁴³ Part of this long text was already cited on p. 69 and on p. 74. Nevertheless, it can be interesting to propose a synthetic view, at the end of the commentary of the *Ad Abl.* For its study in Patristic thought, see: C. SCOUTERIS, *The People of God—Its Unity and Its Glory: A Discussion of John 17. 17–24 in the Light of Patristic Thought*, GOTR 30 (1985) 399–420.

¹⁴⁴ Cfr. Jn 14.6.

¹⁴⁵ Cfr. 1 Cor 15.28.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Tim 2.5.

glory, whom he gave to the disciples through the act of breathing (διὰ τοῦ προσφυσήματος),¹⁴⁷ since it is not possible that those who were found divided from each other be united, unless guided back to the unity of nature (συμφουμένους) by the unity (τῆ ἐνότητι) of the Spirit. For, *if someone has not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.*¹⁴⁸ But the Spirit is glory, as he says in another passage to the Father: *Glorify me near you, with the glory that I had near you before the world was.*¹⁴⁹ For the divine Word, who before the world was has the glory of the Father, in the last days became flesh;¹⁵⁰ and it was necessary that also the flesh became, due to the union (διὰ τῆς ἀνακράσεως) to the Word, that which the Word is. And it becomes it in receiving that which the Word had before the world was. And this was the Holy Spirit. Therefore he also says: *The glory that you gave me, I have given to them*, so that by means of it (δι' αὐτῆς) they be united (ἐνωθῶσιν) to me and by means of me (δι' ἐμοῦ) to You. And we see also the words proposed in the continuation of the Gospel: *So that they be as us one. I in them and you in me, so that they be perfect in unity.* I believe that these words need no explanation to harmonize them with the proposed signification, since the expression itself clearly presents this teaching. *So that they be one, as we are one.* For it is not possible that all become one as we are one, unless in the case that, liberated (χωρισθέντες) from all that divided them one from another, they unite to us who are one, *So that they be one, as we are one.* But how does this happen? Since I am in them. For it is not possible that only I be in them, but it is absolutely necessary that also you be in them, since You and I are one. And thus those who have come to be perfect in us will be perfect in unity. For we are one. But [the Lord] explains that gift (χάριτι) more openly with the words that follow, saying *you have loved them as you have loved me.* For if the Father loves the Son and we are all in the Son, as many of us who have become his body by faith in him (διὰ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως), consequently (ἀκολουθῶς) he who loves his own Son loves also the body of the Son, as the Son himself. And we are the body.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Cfr. Jn 20.22.

¹⁴⁸ Rm 8.9.

¹⁴⁹ Jn 17.5.

¹⁵⁰ Jn 1.14.

¹⁵¹ Ζωὴ δὲ ὁ κύριος, δι' οὗ γίνεται, κατὰ τὸν ἀποστολικὸν λόγον, παντὶ τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἢ προσαγωγή πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Ὅταν παραδιδῶ τὴν βασιλείαν ἡμῶν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ. σῶμα δὲ αὐτοῦ, καθὼς εἴρηται πολλάκις, πᾶσα ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις ἢ κατεμίχθη. Δι' αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο τὸ νόημα καὶ Μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ὀνομάσθη παρὰ τοῦ Παύλου ὁ κύριος. ὁ γὰρ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὦν καὶ ἐν ἀνθρώποις γενόμενος ἐν τούτῳ πληροῖ τὴν μεσιτείαν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῷ πάντας ἐνώσας καὶ δι' ἑαυτοῦ τῷ πατρὶ, καθὼς φησιν ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ ὁ κύριος, πρὸς τὸν πατέρα τὸν λόγον ποιούμενος· Ἴνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσι καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν σοὶ, ἵνα οὕτω καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσιν. σαφῶς γὰρ τοῦτο παρίστησιν ὅτι ἑαυτῷ ἡμᾶς ἐνώσας ὁ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὦν δι' ἑαυτοῦ τὴν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα συνάφειαν ἡμῶν ἀπεργάζεται. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου συνάδει τοῖς εἰρημένους· Τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκάς μοι αὐτοῖς· δόξαν γὰρ ἐνταῦθα λέγειν αὐτὸν οἶμαι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὃ ἔδωκε τοῖς μαθηταῖς διὰ τοῦ προσφυσήματος. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἄλλως ἐνωθῆναι

J. Daniélou's observation is an interesting one in saying that Gregory was interested in 1 Cor 15.28 above all at the end of his life,¹⁵² after having reached the full maturity of his thought.

The movement of thought in the *InIllud* is the same as the *AdAbl*: one starts from the universal nature to arrive at the Trinitarian intimacy, to which man is called in Christ.

The connection between Trinitarian economy and immanence is evident here: the Spirit, defined in the *InCant* as bond—*συνδεδεικτόν*—of the Father and Son, is *Glory*.¹⁵³ And it is properly the Spirit who reunites the dispersed human nature in Christ, since in Christ every man can be one with the Father.

The *InIllud* vision is clearly more eschatological; for this reason he can finish in affirming that the love of the Father for men is not distinct from that of the Father for the Son.¹⁵⁴ As we are images of the Image,

τοὺς ἀπ' ἀλλήλων διεστηκότας μὴ τῇ ἐνόητι τοῦ πνεύματος συμφουμένους· Εἰ γάρ τις πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ οὐκ ἔχει, οὗτος οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτοῦ. τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ἡ δόξα ἐστὶ, καθὼς φησιν ἐτέρωθι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· Δόξασόν με τῇ δόξῃ ἣ εἶχον ἀπ' ἀρχῆς παρὰ σοὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι. ὁ γὰρ θεὸς Λόγος ὁ πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου ἔχων τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς δόξαν, ἐπειδὴ ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν σὰρξ ἐγένετο, ἔδει [δὲ] καὶ τὴν σάρκα διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὸν Λόγον ἀνακράσεως ἐκεῖνο γενέσθαι ὅπερ ὁ Λόγος ἐστίν· γίνεται δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ἐκεῖνο λαβεῖν ὁ πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου εἶχεν ὁ Λόγος· τοῦτο δὲ ἦν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο προαιώνιον πλὴν πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου πνεύματος, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐνταυθὰ φησιν ὅτι τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα δι' αὐτῆς ἐμοὶ ἐνωθῶσιν καὶ δι' ἐμοῦ σοί. Ἴδωμεν δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ προσκείμενα· Ἴνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν ἔσμεν· σὺ ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅτι ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ ἐν ἔσμεν· ἵνα ὡσι τετελειωμένοι εἰς τὸ ἔν. ταῦτα γὰρ οὐδεμιᾶς ἐπεξηγήσεως οἶμαι χρῆζειν πρὸς τὸ συναρμοσθῆναι τῷ προκειμένῳ νοήματι, αὐτῆς φανερώς τῆς λέξεως τὸ περὶ τούτων δόγμα ἐκτιθεμένης. Ἴνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν ἔσμεν· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ δυνατόν ἄλλως τοὺς πάντας ἐν γενέσθαι καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν, εἰ μὴ πάντων τῶν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων αὐτοὺς διαμερίζόντων χωρισθέντες ἐνωθεῖεν ἡμῖν οἰτίνες ἐσμεν ἐν, Ἴνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν ἐν. τοῦτο δὲ πῶς γίνεται; ὅτι Ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ δυνατόν ἐμὲ γενέσθαι μόνον ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ πάντως καὶ σέ, ἐπειδὴ Ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ ἐν ἔσμεν. καὶ οὕτω γενήσονται Τετελειωμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐν οἱ ἐν ἡμῖν τελειωθέντες· ἡμεῖς γὰρ τὸ ἐν. τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην χάριν φανερότερον διασημαίνει τῷ ἐφεξῆς λόγῳ οὕτως εἰπὼν ὅτι Ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας. εἰ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν υἱόν, ἐν δὲ τῷ υἱῷ πάντες γινόμεθα οἱ διὰ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν πίστεως σώμα αὐτοῦ γινόμενοι, ἀκολούθως ὁ τὸν υἱὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγαπᾷ ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸ σῶμα ὡς αὐτὸν τὸν υἱόν· ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸ σῶμα. (*InIllud*, GNO III/2, 21, 7–23, 14)

¹⁵² Cf. J. DANIELOU, *L'être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse*, Leiden 1970, p. 202.

¹⁵³ Note that the circulation of glory represents the same dynamic of the intimate life of the three persons (cf. p. 176).

¹⁵⁴ A problem in Latin theology has been the recognition that divine filiation is filiation to the Father, and not only to God. This is due to a linguistic difficulty generated by the absence of the article in the Latin language. In fact, every Latin translation of the Gospel of John is doomed to eliminate the difference between ὁ θεός, that is the Father, and θεός, that is God, the divine nature. (See note 132 on p. 186).

so we are sons in the Son. The Trinity and the intimacy of love of the three Persons is our Homeland.

The strength of all Nyssian thought is thus continuously based upon two pillars: the first principle is the clear affirmation that only the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternal and uncreated. Thus the divine nature is clearly distinguished, in its transcendence, from every creature. But precisely this clear affirmation, which would seem to distance man from God, instead allows Gregory, once all subordinationist indecision has been refuted, to formulate a second fundamental principle for all of his thought: the connection between Trinitarian immanence and economy.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

*The name of activity is not divided in the multiplicity of
Those who act, since the care for something is not particular
and exclusive to someone.*

(*AdAbl*, GNO III/1, 48, 3–5)

In the *AdAbl*, Gregory must respond to those who object to him that, according to his Trinitarian doctrine, as he speaks of three men, who each have their own ὑπόστασις yet share the same φύσις, so he should speak of three *gods* and not of a unique God.

In Chapter I we started from the concept of universal nature, following the schema of the Nyssian reasoning, which moves from the premise that *man* properly indicates the entire human nature. The fact that the universal nature does not represent only a dialectical or rhetorical device, but constitutes, rather, a central concept of the whole of Nyssian thought¹ was shown.

In the first part of the chapter it was shown how the Gregorian concept of φύσις is irreducible to any philosophical elaboration of the period, as it reunites in itself an intensive aspect, by which it encapsulates the ontological depth of the οὐσία, and an extensive aspect, which permits the φύσις to represent the whole of all men, manifesting in this way the real inseparability of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. Human unity is in itself perfect, in as much as image of the divine nature. The separation introduced by sin cannot hinder, then, that man, in Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit, can return to unity and the full communion for which he was created. This is possible since the created nature of man has a historical and dynamic dimension; it is essentially temporal and is manifested and perfected in activity. Thus time becomes profoundly positive, since Christ was incarnated, becoming one thing with man. The Nyssian coherently affirms that the incarnation reached its

¹ T. Ziegler writes: “La réflexion sur le concept même de nature divine apparaît ainsi comme un axe central de la pensée théologique de Grégoire de Nysse. Elle peut même être regardée comme l’un des fils conducteurs essentiels de son évolution” (T. ZIEGLER, *Les petits traités de Grégoire de Nysse*, Doctoral Thesis, Strasbourg 1987, p. 363).

fullness in the death and resurrection of Christ, when he had penetrated the totality of the temporal extension of human nature.

So ἐνέργεια—activity—is raised to a central category of Gregory's thought. He affirms, in the second passage of the reasoning of the treatise, that *God* is not a name of the divine nature, which in itself is unknowable and ineffable, but of his ἐνέργεια, that is of his *activity*. Throughout the second part of Chapter I, the value of the translation of ἐνέργεια by activity was maintained: it is adapted to the Nyssian use of the term and has the advantage of showing how ἐνέργεια is predicated of both God and man.

So the distinction, later developed by Palamas, between essence and ἐνέργεια should be understood as affirmation that every real being has an activity that is characteristic of its nature. The ontological depth of the essence cannot be reduced to a simple activity, since ontologically activity depends upon nature, without which it would have no subsistence. At the same time and for the same motive, essence and activity cannot be separated.

The Nyssian definition of ἐνέργεια as a *movement of nature* (φύσεως κίνησις) is surely central: it shows the dependence of the activity on nature, the motive for which there are two activities in Christ, but at the same time it explicitates the connection with the person, that is the subject that intervenes in the movement. It is on this level, in fact, that the concept of ἐνέργεια assumes an irreplaceable role for the connection between Trinitarian immanence and economy.

Thus in the third and last part of Chapter I, the Nyssian conception of the action of the three divine Persons was analyzed. For, once having reached this point, Gregory clarified that one should not properly speak of three men, since the nature is one and there is thus only the *man*. But at the same time he undermined his own argument, affirming that *God* is not a name of the divine nature, but of the divine activity.

Therefore the Nyssian must demonstrate that the divine action is in itself a unique movement of the unique divine nature, in which, however, the three divine Persons intervene, each according to his proper personal characteristic. The unity of action is Gregory's favourite argument and is situated in the context of intra-Trinitarian perichoresis.

Each Person intervenes according to the schema of ἐκ-διὰ-ἐν, in which the Father is always the one and only source of Trinitarian action, as he is also the one and only source of the Trinity itself; the Son is he through whom (δι' αὐτοῦ) the action progresses; and the Spirit is he who brings to completion and perfects, thus giving unity

to the Trinitarian action, as it is he who, in as much as *συνδευκόν* of the Father and Son, closes the movement of intra-Trinitarian love and leads dispersed man back to unity.

We thus come to the apex of the treatise. In fact, for the Arians the *μεσιτεία* of the Son, that is his central position in the intra-Trinitarian dynamic, by which he receives all from the Father and gives all, was the proof of his subordination to the first Person. Instead Gregory shows that it is precisely in this wanting to depend entirely on the Father to give everything back to him, that is exactly in the total gift of self and of all that is received, that the being of the Son, and thus also his mode of being God, consists, that is the mode of the divine subsistence of the second divine Person. In this sense the *AdAbl* and the social analogy of the Trinity show that the essence of Nyssian thought consists in a true and proper theology of filiation.

The *μεσιτεία* of the Son in the economy is the expression of that Trinitarian intimacy: the economic *διώ* is an extension of the immanent one. And only if this is true has Gregory given an authentic response to Eunomius (see p. 60).

Thus the action of the three divine Persons is unique, and for this reason it is necessary to speak of God in the singular, since the term indicates activity. On the other hand human activity is divided in the single individuals, since each man acts for himself: thus one can speak, even if improperly, of many men.

Nevertheless, if the difference between divine action and human action were radical, the logical development of the treatise would have no sense: one could not understand why Gregory went to the effort of demonstrating the unity of the human nature. One must remember that all of Nyssian theology moves from above to below, that is from the Trinity to man, since human nature is created at the image of the divine nature. For God the extensive and intensive dimensions of the *φύσις* coincide, while for human nature it is not so, since it develops and expands in time. It is in Christ, and thus in the eschatological anticipation, that one must seek the authentic realization and definition of human nature. As the passage of the *InIllud* proposed at the end of Chapter III clearly shows, the unity that awaits humanity at the end of time is the very Trinitarian unity itself, as is said in Jn 17.21–23. Reunited by the Spirit in the one Body of Christ, men will have access to the Father, to the love of the Father. One can thus speak of an analogous *human perichoresis*, realized by the third Person, since all men, in the Son, can have part in the intra-Trinitarian perichoresis.

The first Chapter concludes with some essential observations on the concept of *apokatastasis*. Some interpreters, who tend to privilege synchronic analysis over diachronic analysis, have seen in this movement towards the unity of nature a necessary and almost automatic process. Nevertheless the opinion of other authoritative and authorized interpreters places this conception seriously in doubt. Certainly Gregory hoped in the salvation not only of each individual man, but also of all of creation, for which one can see a profound and sincere love in his writings. However he explicitly affirms the possibility of eternal condemnation, which can take no other form than the end of being human, in the knowledge deprived of participation. The damned would simply have renounced Christ, who is the Model of every man, and for this could no longer be a man.

In Chapter II attention was centered on the affirmation of the ineffability of the divine nature. In the first place the Nyssian philosophy of language was briefly presented, which always gives primacy of being over words. The ontological depth of every being renders its nature inexpressible, a nature that, even if created, cannot be fully expressed by the dynamics of language. In the case of the divine nature this impossibility is radicalized, since the limit is not only due to the passage from being to words, but is fixed by the infinity itself of the divine nature. Thus in the second part of the *AdAbl*, Gregory moves the discourse from *being* to *mode of being*, that is from nature to Person. Nyssian *apophatism* thus presents a double aspect, which is manifested even on the terminological level: on one hand it is a definite *no* to whoever would like to reach God directly through nature, and on the other hand it is a full *yes* to the Person, here understood in all of its ontological profundity. The only possibility to reach God is Christ, thus the path is the Person; the way is history.

For this reason the role of the Nyssian in the formation of the concept of person was treated. From the Trinitarian foundation of person the argument moved to the theology of name and to the accomplishment of apophatism in its eminently positive aspect in the μίμησις of Christ, perfect in his humanity and in his divinity. Thanks to him—thanks to the mysteries of his life—Christianity is the imitation of the divine nature. It in fact consists in the imitation of the perfect Model, in the imitation of his βίος, which includes also a sacramental aspect, to reach the participation of the unique and authentic ζωή.

However as one cannot contemplate the Father except in the Son, in the same way, one cannot contemplate the Son except in the Holy

Spirit, the Glory, who identifies us with him, making of us his Body. For this reason the more Christological Chapter II naturally opens into Chapter III, which is more pneumatological.

In the last part of the *AdAbl* the Nyssian concentrates on the Trinitarian immanence and discusses the personal distinction of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The theme of the procession of the third Person is particularly interesting, and of great importance for ecumenical dialogue. This is also due to the role of the Nyssian in the Council of Constantinople I.

Gregory expresses the personal distinction introducing the principle of the cause (αἰτία), which is unique in the Trinity and is identified with the Father. Then the Nyssian moves on to consider the Persons of the Son and the Spirit, introducing a further distinction between that which is directly caused, that is the second Person, and that which is caused through the Son (διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ), that is the third Person.

Despite the fact that the text and logical development of the *AdAbl* leave no doubts on the immanent sense of this role of the Son in the procession of the Spirit, the economic reduction of the *Filioque*, maintained by some protagonists of the ecumenical dialogue, has suggested an extended analysis of the proper personal characteristic of the third Person himself. For the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ can be understood only if one realizes that the Spirit is the συνδετικόν, the bond of intra-Trinitarian κοινωνία.² His mode of being God, his mode of containing the unique divine essence, is the ὅλως εἶναι: that is, to carry to unity and to constitute a whole. He is that Glory (δόξα) that the Son possessed before all time. And this Glory precisely, by the incarnation of the Son, is communicated to every man that is thus re-established in the unity of the Body of Christ, that leads to the Father.

In this way, the theology of light and glory, so dear to Gregory, is absolutely irreducible to the economic level. Rather it is found to be an irreplaceable instrument to show the connection and continuity between economy and immanence.

It is thus impossible to oppose Christological, and thus historical, mediation to the pneumatological one, as at times is suggested. For in

² One thinks of the Thomistic affirmation: "Praeterea, ad amorem tria requiruntur, scilicet amans, id quod amatur, et ipse amor, ut Augustinus dicit in VIII de Trinitate. Duo autem mutuo se amantes, sunt Pater et Filius; amor autem qui est eorum nexus est Spiritus Sanctus. Sunt ergo tres personae in divinis." (THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 9, a. 9, s.c. 4).

Gregory of Nyssa the διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ is precisely the manner of expressing the mediation of the Spirit who enters into history to lead the sensible world and history itself, in Christ, back to the Father.

The fundamental category to understand the relation between nature and person, in both God and man, is thus the κοινωνία in as much as communion of love; in fact: “the universe of persons is a world into which one does not truly enter except by love”.³

To conclude this commentary on the *Ad Abl* in the context of the Nyssian work, one can note that Gregory manages to lay the foundations for a true theology of history, understood as history and life of each man. E. Cavalcanti has already observed that this theme is extremely tied to the problem of the divinity of the Holy Spirit.⁴ The theological clarity that the Nyssian showed during the Council of Constantinople I permitted him to deepen the role of the third Person in the history of men in passage towards perfect identification with Christ.

This development is required by the very conception of humanity as universal nature,⁵ the foundation for the social analogy of the Trinity. Activity—ἐνέργεια—, understood as a bridge between person and nature, is a central theological instrument: the imitation of activity, that is μίμησις, is a path for the imitation of the divine nature, the essence of Christianity. Through the Person of Christ, through the events of his βίος, the *acta et passa Christi*, we have access to ζωή. The very development of the concept of person leads into the limelight the responsibility of man in history. The principle of Nyssian ἀκολουθία and the connection between protology and eschatology contribute to give a foundation to the theological conception of history. Finally, the divine action understood as model of human action leads to regard daily life with the eyes of eternity, thinking radically of our neighbour. The connection between Trinitarian economy and immanence should, then, be translated into the connection between the economy

³ “L’univers des personnes est un monde où l’on n’entre vraiment que par l’amour” (J. MOURoux, *Je crois en Toi*, Paris 1966, p. 56).

⁴ Cfr. E. CAVALCANTI, *Teologia trinitaria e teologia della storia in alcuni testi di Gregorio di Nissa*. Aug. 16 (1976) 117–124.

⁵ H. de Lubac has demonstrated it clearly. One thinks of the affirmations: “Si notre salut est d’essence sociale, l’histoire tout entière devient, entre Dieu et chacun d’entre nous, le truchement obligé” (H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicisme*, Paris 1952, p. 108); “Si, en effet, le salut que Dieu nous offre est le salut du genre humain, puisque ce genre humain vit et se développe dans le temps, l’exposé de ce salut prendra naturellement la forme d’une histoire: ce sera l’histoire de la pénétration de l’humanité par le Christ.” (*Ibidem*, p. 92).

and immanence of every single man, whose activity cannot negate the divine image that he carries in his heart.

In this way, in synthesis, as J. Daniélou has already noted well: “Next to the philosophy of being, the thought of Gregory is a philosophy of time. And it is perhaps the union of these two aspects, *Zeit und Sein*, which is the fundamental mark of his synthesis”.⁶ In the development of Nyssian thought time ceases to be a fruit of the fall, to become, in Christ, an eminently positive element.⁷ This is so since the foundation of all of Gregory’s theological construction is the connection between economy and immanence.

This attention of the Nyssian on time and history is founded, in fact, on the affirmation of the distinction without separation of *θεολογία* and *οικονομία*, which permits to understand the relation of *θεολογία* and *οικονομία* with the linked sphere of *ιστορία*.⁸

The general picture presented here obviously depends upon the reading of the social analogy of the Trinity in the context of the whole of Nyssian thought. It must be situated inside the relationship of correspondence between *ἀρχή* and *τέλος*, inseparable from Nyssian Christology and eschatology.

The results of the research group directed by S. Coakley are quite interesting and offer a useful *pars destruens* to the scholar of Gregory, one that moves the reading of the social analogy from the merely psychological level to the more properly ontological one. Nevertheless the greatness of Nyssian thought pushes one not to stop, but to continue the work and unfold a necessary *pars construens*, moving from the ontological level to the theological one.

The authentic signification of the social analogy of the Trinity is to be sought in the connection between Trinitarian doctrine, Christology and anthropology. In a certain sense it could be said that it says nothing on God, but everything on man: the application of the categories

⁶ “A côté d’une philosophie de l’Être, la pensée de Grégoire est une philosophie du temps. Et c’est peut-être l’union de ces deux traits, *Zeit und Sein*, qu’est le trait fondamental de sa synthèse” (J. DANIELOU, *L’Être et le Temps chez Grégoire de Nyssse*, Leiden 1970, p. viii–ix).

⁷ In reference to this attention to temporal development, J. Daniélou comments: “la parenté ici de Grégoire et d’Irénee peut poser le problème d’une tradition asiatic propre.” (*Ibidem*, p. vii). See, for Irenaeus and the theology of history: J. DANIELOU, *Saint Irénée et les origines de la théologie de l’histoire*, RSR 34 (1947) 227–231.

⁸ Cf. G. MASPERO, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ ε ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ: La teologia della storia di Gregorio di Nissa*, «Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia» 45 (2003) 383–451.

of ὑπόστασις and φύσις to both, read in the schema of *exitus-reditus* on the basis of the theology of the image, manifests the unique vocation of man, called in Christ to be loved by the Father as the Body of the Son, founding in the Trinity itself the dignity of every man, of his history and of his life.

Even if it is true that the activity of each human person is radically different than the unique activity of the three divine Persons, one cannot forget that for Gregory every man is called to the voluntary imitation (μίμησις) of the very life and activity of Christ, which permits to reach, in the now of history as an eschatological anticipation, the unity of his Body and the intimacy of the Trinitarian love.

The attention dedicated here to the concept of universal nature and social analogy of the Trinity is dictated by the hope that in this way the actuality of Nyssian thought can once again be shown, according to the words with which J. Daniélou finished the introduction to *L'Être et le Temps*: "we would like to say in closing that we wish that this historical work be also a contribution to the renewal of philosophical thought in Christianity. It unites the solidity of research and the fidelity of faith. It is in contact with the thought of his time, but is not the slave of it. It carries at once the sense of being and that of history. It unites confidence in the capacity of the intelligence to grasp the real and the sense of the inexhaustible mystery that the real represents in reference to all that the intelligence can grasp. Now, this responds to what we seek today".⁹

⁹ "Nous voudrions dire en terminant que nous souhaitons que ce travail historique soit aussi une contribution au renouveau de la pensée philosophique dans le Christianisme. Elle unit la hardiesse de la recherche et la fidélité de la foi. Elle est au contact de la pensée de son temps, mais elle n'en est pas esclave. Elle comporte à la fois le sens de l'être et celui de l'histoire. Elle unit la confiance dans l'aptitude de l'intelligence à saisir le réel et le sens du mystère inépuisable que le réel représente à l'égard de tout ce qu'en peut saisir l'intelligence. Or tout ceci répond à ce que nous cherchons aujourd' hui". (J. DANIELOU, *L'Être et le Temps...*, p. x).

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The works are listed in Alphabetical order of titles, which corresponds to the alphabetical order of the abbreviations. The GNO was used as much as possible, except for in the case of *De Vita Mo*, where the edition of J. Daniélou in SC 1 was preferred.

- AdAbl* = *Ad Ablabium, Quod Non Sint Tres Dei*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 37–57.
- AdArium* = *Adversus Arium et Sabellium, De Patre et Filio*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 71–85.
- AdEust* = *Ad Eustathium, De Sancta Trinitate*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 3–16.
- AdGraec* = *Ad Graecos (Ex Communibus Notionibus)*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 19–33.
- AdSimp* = *Ad Simplicium, De Fide*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 61–67.
- AdTheo* = *Ad Theophilum, Adversus Apolinaristas*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 119–128.
- AdMac* = *Adversus Macedonianos, De Spiritu Sancto*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 89–115.
- Antir* = *Antirreticus Adversus Apolinarium*, ed. Fridericus Mueller: GNO III/1, pp. 131–233.
- ApHex* = *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, PG 44, 61–124.
- CE I* = *Contra Eunomium Libri, I*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO I, pp. 22–225.
- CE II* = *Contra Eunomium Libri, II*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO I, pp. 226–409.
- CE III* = *Contra Eunomium Libri, III*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO II, pp. 3–311.
- ConFa* = *Contra Fatum*, ed. Jacobus McDonough: GNO III/2, pp. 31–63.
- DeAn* = *De Anima et Resurrectione*, PG 46.12–160.
- DeBeat* = *De Beatitudinibus*, ed. Johannes F. Callahan: GNO VII/2, pp. 75–170.
- DeDeit* = *De Deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, ed. Ernestus Rhein: GNO X/2, pp. 115–144.
- DeDeitEv* = *De Deitate Adversus Euagrium (vulgo, In Suam Ordinationem Oratio)*, ed. Ernestus Gebhardt: GNO IX, pp. 331–341.
- DeHom* = *De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 125–256.
- DeInfant* = *De Infantibus Praemature Abreptis*, ed. Hadwiga Horner: GNO III/2, pp. 67–97.
- DeInst* = *De Instituto Christiano*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO VIII/1, pp. 40–89.
- DeMort* = *De Mortuis Oratio*, ed. Gunterus Heil: GNO IX, pp. 28–68.
- DeOrDom* = *De Oratione Dominica*, ed. Johannes F. Callahan: GNO VII/2, pp. 1–74.
- DePerf* = *De Perfectione*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO VIII/1, pp. 173–214.
- DeProf* = *De Professione Christiana*, ed. Wernerus Jaeger: GNO VIII/1, pp. 129–142.
- DeSpir* = *De Spiritu Sancto sive in Pentecosten*, ed. Margarete Altenburger: GNO X/2, pp. 285–292.
- DeTrid* = *De Tridui Inter Mortem et Resurrectionem Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Spatio (vulgo, In Christi Resurrectionem Oratio I)*, ed. Ernestus Gebhardt: GNO IX, pp. 273–306.
- DeVirg* = *De Virginitate*, ed. Johannes P. Cavanaugh: GNO VIII/1, pp. 247–343.
- DeVita* = *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, ed. Gunterus Heil: GNO X/1, pp. 3–57.
- DeVitaMo* = *De Vita Moysis*, ed. J. Daniélou, *Grégoire de Nyssse. La vie de Moïse*, SC 1, Paris³ 1968, pp. 44–326.
- Ep* = *Epistulae*, ed. Georgius Pasquali: GNO VIII/2.
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