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## The Contagion: Sin and the Human Person From the Cappadocian Perspective

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THE CONTAGION: SIN AND THE HUMAN PERSON  
FROM THE CAPPADOCIAN PERSPECTIVE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE SEMINARY FACULTY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

BY  
BRICE JOHN TENNANT

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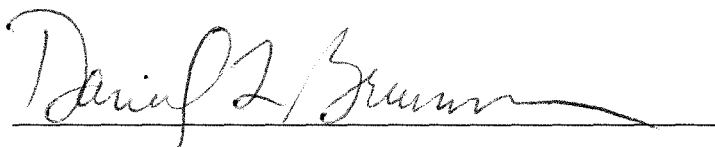
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CAPPADOCIAN PERSPECTIVE

**Presented by:** BRICE JOHN TENNANT

**Date:** April 30, 2004

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Daniel L. Brunner", written over a horizontal line.

*(Daniel L. Brunner)*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Thomas F. Johnson", written over a horizontal line.

*(Thomas F. Johnson)*

To My Beloved

gift:

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the nature of sin and its effects on human nature in the thought of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. In order to achieve this, it opens with an exploration of the original created state of human nature and the *telos* or purpose God established for it, then moves to a survey of the origin and ontology of evil, followed by a discussion of humanity in Paradise, and concludes with the state of human nature after the transgression. The human being is found to be a creature of composite nature, uniting soul and matter. It possesses the distinct characteristic of the image of God, and its goal is *theosis* or deification. Evil is considered to be a deprivation of goodness; therefore, it lacks actual ontology. It was introduced into the universe by Lucifer, and into the human realm through Adam. The first human pair dwelt in a spiritualized Paradise, shrouded by goodness and blessed with immortality. Empowered by the endowed gift of free will, humanity chose to turn against goodness, thus invoking evil into the human realm. As a result of the transgression, human nature was clothed in "coats of skin," which encompass death and moral incapacity. The effects of sin hinder divine understanding, as the image of God in humanity has been defaced. Humanity is not without hope, however, and its *telos* has not been terminated. Through a conjunction of the inherent grace of the divine image and human effort, the image of God can be renewed and preserved.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

It is generally known by anyone who has encountered Greek Orthodoxy that it bears traits that are markedly different from those found in the Western tradition. Much of this revolves around the enigmatic doctrine of *theosis*, i.e., the deification of humanity, but there is also some question regarding what the Western Church terms “Original Sin.” There is a sense that the Greek tradition has not taken the path of the West, yet the estimation is shrouded in vagueness. Humanity is not as depraved; the image of God is not as distorted; there seems to be less emphasis on grace, and sin seems to be less terminal; it is spoken of as a disease that one might get, and there appears to be less concern with the transmission of guilt to posterity.

This study moves beyond a cursory and intuitive glimpse into Greek Orthodoxy’s understanding of sin and the human being. It hopes to minimize the Western point of origin as much as possible and engage Orthodoxy on its own grounds. This thesis attempts to meet the conception of sin in its doctrinally incipient stages, which has led back to Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. The intention fueling this process seeks to uncover what specifically has been altered in respect to human ontology and capacity once evil converged with human existence. Through their writings, it is hoped that the veil of mystery may be lifted.

An investigation will be launched into the original composition and state of humanity, followed by an exploration into the cavernous origins and ontology of evil. Once these two explanations have been made, attention will turn to Paradise and the fall, which will inevitably produce a discussion on the direct impact sin has had on human nature. The author wishes presently to refrain from divulging the fruits of discovery in order to keep the excitement and mystery of exploration alive. Before we launch our maiden voyage, we shall christen the bow with a brief glimpse into the lives of the two Gregories who are respectfully called Saints.

### **The Life of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

Gregory was born to Gregory and Nonna sometime between 329-30 in Arianzus, Cappadocia.<sup>1</sup> Gregory the Elder was involved with a Greek-Jewish sect called the Hypsistarians prior to his conversion.<sup>2</sup> Nonna, on the other hand, had imbibed Christian belief and piety from birth.<sup>3</sup> Through modeling and prayer, she facilitated her husband's Orthodoxy, and he eventually became the bishop of Nazianzus.<sup>4</sup> Both were exemplars of virtue in practice, as they generously shared their means with the poor.<sup>5</sup>

After receiving a Christian upbringing, Gregory's studies moved from Nazianzus to Caesarea Cappadocia in ca. 345-46 where he met Basil.<sup>6</sup> After matriculating there, he

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher*, 18; and Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 40. For a recent and exhaustive study see John A. McGuckin's, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography*.

<sup>2</sup> Oration 18.5; cf. Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 39; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Denis Molaise Meehan, trans., *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: Three Poems; Concerning His Own Affairs; Concerning Himself and the Bishops; Concerning His Own Life*, 78; cf. Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 39; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Or. 18.7; cf. Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Three Poems*, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Or. 43.13; McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, vii, 36; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 18-19.

proceeded to Caesarea Palestine and studied under Thespesius.<sup>7</sup> Leaving Caesarea, Gregory studied at Alexandria and may have met Athanasius.<sup>8</sup> On the quest for still greater understanding, Gregory set sail for Athens in 348 where he received education in rhetoric and philosophy under the tutelage of Himerius and Prohaeresius.<sup>9</sup> Upon Basil's arrival in Athens, the friendship of the two intensified, as they shared a common table and a flaming quest for the virtuous life.<sup>10</sup> Gregory indicates Athens was a seedbed of paganism, yet he and Basil remained unsullied. They consciously refrained from pagan activities, remaining devoted to their faith and studies.<sup>11</sup> Sometime around 357-58 Gregory and Basil prepared to leave Athens.<sup>12</sup> However, being persuaded by a multifarious crowd of teachers and students and being offered a lecturing position, Gregory remained behind for a time.<sup>13</sup> He eventually left Athens, and upon arriving in Byzantium, he accidentally encountered his brother, Caesarius, and the two returned home together.<sup>14</sup>

Gregory practiced rhetoric momentarily in Nazianzus, yet he was divided between the desire for the contemplative and active life.<sup>15</sup> Weighing these contrary modes of life, he decided to choose a middle way that combined the strengths of both.<sup>16</sup> This decision against a purely contemplative life was heavily influenced by concern for his aging

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<sup>7</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 19; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 37, 41. McGuckin indicates this would have been Gregory's first encounter with Arianism and that he probably used Origen's library, whom he considered to be "the greatest mind in Christian history." Ibid. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 19; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 44. McGuckin notes Gregory may have heard Didymos the Blind lecture as well. Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 110; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 19; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, viii, 48. For information on Himerius and Prohaeresius see Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists*.

<sup>10</sup> *Three Poems*, 83; and Or. 43.14, 19; cf. McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Or. 43.21; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Three Poems*, 84; and Or. 43.24; cf. McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 79-80; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Or. 7.8; cf. McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Three Poems*, 84-5; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 86; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 32-33; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 87.

parents.<sup>17</sup> After following this course for a time, Gregory retired to Basil's retreat in Pontus around 358-59 and labored there until he was petitioned to return home in 362 where he was unwillingly ordained a presbyter.<sup>18</sup> Being averse to this, Gregory fled to the Pontic retreat and remained there for a short period.<sup>19</sup>

While aiding the Elder Gregory at Nazianzus, Basil, who was now the bishop of Caesarea Cappadocia, elevated Gregory to the bishopric, appointing him to the small see of Sasima.<sup>20</sup> Prompted by the political environment that sought to strengthen Arianism in the region, Basil tried to reinforce Orthodoxy with this move.<sup>21</sup> Being insulted by this repellent see, Gregory remained in Nazianzus and assumed the Elder's duties after his death in 374.<sup>22</sup> Gregory's inner desire for the philosophical life overwhelmed him a year into these duties, thus inciting him to flee to Seleucia in Isauria.<sup>23</sup>

While enjoying his seclusion, Gregory received a petition from Constantinople in 379 urging him to come and rescue the failing Orthodoxy from Arianism.<sup>24</sup> During two years of rigorous laboring, Gregory fostered the growth of Orthodoxy, which eventually culminated in his election to the bishopric of Constantinople during the Second Ecumenical Council.<sup>25</sup> This appointment was short-lived, though, as bishops from Egypt

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 87; Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 41; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 88, 101.

<sup>19</sup> *Three Poems*, 87; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 32; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 89; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 38; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 189.

<sup>21</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 35; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 187-89.

<sup>22</sup> *Three Poems*, 92; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 36, 38; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 197, 202.

<sup>23</sup> *Three Poems*, 91; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 41; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 226.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 93-94; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 42; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 236-37.

<sup>25</sup> *Three Poems*, 115; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 42, 46; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 350. Gregory was anointed bishop of Constantinople by the aged hands of Meletius of Antioch. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 46.

and Macedonia challenged it for canonical and personal reasons.<sup>26</sup> Frustrated by the antagonism, Gregory, speaking before the Council, resigned his post and returned to Nazianzus.<sup>27</sup> He maintained his father's office until 384 when he bestowed the duties on Eulalius.<sup>28</sup> Gregory's retirement was spent at the family estate in Arianzum, reflecting and writing until his death in 389-90.<sup>29</sup>

### The Life of Saint Gregory of Nyssa

Basil and Emmelia of Cappadocia gave birth to nine children, four of which increased the reputation of an already prominent Christian family.<sup>30</sup> Basil the Elder was a renowned sophist-rhetorician, and Emmelia was of noble Cappadocian parentage.<sup>31</sup> Both were esteemed for their acts of charity and piety.<sup>32</sup> Basil the Elder died ca. 345-6 leaving the widowed Emmelia who refrained from remarriage.<sup>33</sup> Through the persuasion and example of her firstborn daughter, Macrina, she abandoned "her customary mode of living and her more ostentatious existence" and embraced a lifestyle of simplicity that encompassed sharing a common life with her servants, whom she came to regard as equals.<sup>34</sup> Emmelia practiced this lifestyle to her death in 371.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 46; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 358. A bishop was not to hold more than one see, and they apparently felt slighted since Gregory's ordination occurred before their arrival. *Three Poems*, 127; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> *Three Poems*, 123; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 48; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 359.

<sup>28</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 49-50; and McGuckin, *Intellectual Biography*, 385.

<sup>29</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 50, 54.

<sup>30</sup> Emmelia bore a total of ten children, but one was stillborn. The other known siblings beside Basil, Macrina, and Gregory are Naucratus and Peter of Sebaste. Paul J. Fedwick, "A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea," 1:5; cf. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Fedwick, "Chronology," 1:5.

<sup>32</sup> Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory of Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Fedwick, "Chronology," 1:5.

<sup>34</sup> *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 167-68.

<sup>35</sup> Fedwick, "Chronology," 1:12.

Basil and Emmelia gave birth to their third son, Gregory, sometime around 335 while living in Caesarea.<sup>36</sup> Unlike his brother Basil, Gregory did not receive an urban education. This may have been caused by the death of their father that occurred when Gregory was still a youth, thus affecting the financial stability of the family. Nonetheless, Gregory received a solid education through the efforts of Macrina and Basil.<sup>37</sup> Alluding to his education in a letter to Libanius, Gregory refers to Basil as his “father and teacher.”<sup>38</sup> During this short matriculation, Gregory learned the rudimentary principles of rhetoric that he progressively developed independently.<sup>39</sup>

Gregory had become an ordained reader, but eventually abandoned this course, married, and became a professor of rhetoric. Deciding against the “philosophy” promoted by his siblings, Gregory appears to have married a woman named Theosebeia.<sup>40</sup> Little is known of her, but what is derived from a letter of consolation from Gregory of Nazianzus and indirectly from Gregory’s own comments in *On Virginity*. It appears she died younger than expected, and in a flowery eulogy, Gregory of Nazianzus describes her as being “the glory of the church, the adornment of Christ, the helper of our generation, [and] the hope of woman.”<sup>41</sup> Gregory bemoaned his marriage, though, even to a woman who could elicit such praise.<sup>42</sup> He felt he had bypassed the beauty of virginity only to now find himself a gazing bystander.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3; and Frederic W. Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*, 2:57.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Libanius, 10; cf. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:57-58.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2:59-60; and Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> GNaz, Letter to Gregory of Nyssa, 197.

<sup>42</sup> Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *On Virginity*, 3.

Gregory was castigated by Gregory of Nazianzus for leaving his post as an ordained reader in order to follow the professional path of his father.<sup>44</sup> Gregory could not understand why he had “cast away the sacred and delightful books,” preferring “to be called a Professor of Rhetoric rather than of Christianity.” Gregory felt his namesake could only be a thorough Christian if he remained within the priesthood since his choice was offensive to some. Threatening to disown him, Gregory implored that he renounce the chosen course and apologize “to the faithful, and to God, and to His Altars and Sacraments.”<sup>45</sup>

Abandoning his wife and occupation, Gregory escaped to a life of solitary contemplation.<sup>46</sup> He joined a monastic brotherhood established by Basil, which began a period of intense study. This monastic retirement came to an abrupt end approximately ten years after it began, however, when Basil recruited him for the bishopric of Nyssa in 372.<sup>47</sup> The Arian emperor Valens, by subdividing Cappadocia, truncated much of Basil’s authority, which he attempted to reinforce by assigning Gregory to the obscure see.<sup>48</sup> Gregory was faithful to his brother and to Orthodoxy, but Basil was not overly impressed with his skill as a bishop. In a letter to Eusebius of Samosata, Basil openly condemned Gregory for the “simplicity” reflected in his initiation of synods in Ancyra.<sup>49</sup>

In 376 Valens sent Gregory into exile and his see received an incompetent replacement.<sup>50</sup> Gregory deeply mourned his burden of exile, being expelled from “home,

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<sup>44</sup> Meredith indicates Gregory practiced rhetoric sometime between 362 and 371. *Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> GNaz, Letter to Gregory of Nyssa, 1; cf. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> This is prior to Theosebeia’s untimely death.

<sup>47</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:61-62.

<sup>48</sup> Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4. See Basil’s Letters 74-76 for the effects of the division.

<sup>49</sup> Basil, Letter to Eusebius, Bishop of Samosata, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:65; Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4; and Basil, Letter to Eusebius, Bishop of Samosata, 239.

brethren, kinsmen, companions, [and] intimate associates.”<sup>51</sup> Fortunately, it came to a swift end upon the death of Valens in 378. Rising to power, Gratian renounced the edicts of exile, and Gregory, among others, was able to return home.<sup>52</sup> After the death of Basil in 379, Gregory was co-appointed to the see of Caesarea in conjunction with Helladius, with whom he struggled bitterly.<sup>53</sup>

Gregory was one of the select 150 attendees at the Council of Constantinople in 381, yet nothing is known regarding his involvement.<sup>54</sup> Meredith indicates he must have received a level of respect, though, since he was selected to deliver the eulogy for Meletius, promote the ratified Orthodox teachings in Pontus after the close of the council, and orate the eulogies for the emperor’s daughter, Pulcheria, and wife, Flaccilla in 385.<sup>55</sup>

At some point, Gregory was assigned by the Council of Antioch to visit Arabia and to also undertake a mission of peace in Jerusalem. The emperor had facilitated the trip by providing the means for his travel.<sup>56</sup> Gregory was disconcerted by his visit to the holy city of Jerusalem and later wrote *On Pilgrimages* to discourage the practice. Scant details remain regarding the latter portion of Gregory’s life and the events surrounding his death in Constantinople in ca. 394.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> GNys, Letter to the Bishop of Melitene, 14. GNaz wrote letters 72-74 desiring to encourage Gregory during his exile.

<sup>52</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:66; and Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 118-119.

<sup>53</sup> William Moore, introduction to *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises*, 6; and Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 121-22. Gregory gives a vivid recount of this embroilment in his Letter to Flavian, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4; and Sozomenus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 382.

<sup>55</sup> Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 4-5.

<sup>56</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:71; and *On Pilgrimages*.

<sup>57</sup> Farrar, *Lives of the Fathers*, 2:73; and *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Gregory of Nyssa, St.”



## Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa: The Primary Texts (English)

Gregory of Nazianzus did not write a dogmatic treatise on the subject of this thesis. Therefore, his viewpoint on sin is reconstructed through a composite of applicable citations scattered about his Orations. Oration 38, *On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ* provides the broadest account of the entrance of sin into the human realm, and it was delivered sometime between 380-381. This has been described as “one of the best of Gregory’s discourses.”<sup>58</sup> The source from which Gregory’s Orations has been drawn is the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, volume seven.<sup>59</sup>

The key English translations of Gregory of Nyssa’s primary documentation employed for this project are listed below including dates and other pertinent information.

1. *On the Making of Man*: This piece was written by Gregory ca. 379 with the intention of completing Basil’s *Hexaemeron*. The translation referenced was Henry A. Wilson’s in volume five of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.<sup>60</sup>
2. *The Great Catechism*: Gregory finished this work around 385. It represents one of the earliest attempts at composing a pedagogical and polemic systematic

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<sup>58</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed., “Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Sometime Archbishop of Constantinople,” 344-45.

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that we are slightly disadvantaged with respect to Gregory of Nazianzus’ thought. Foundational secondary sources investigating his theology have not been translated into English. However, from the sources available, I have ascertained that the following are highly worthwhile studies for those who have the capacity to undertake such: H. Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz*, J. Danielou, *Platonisme et Theologie Mystique*, P. Gallay, *La vie de Saint Gregoire de Nazianze*, J. Plagnieux, *S. Gregoire de Nazianze Theologien: Etudes de science religieuse*, F. Portmann, *Die gottliche Paidagogia bei Gregor von Nazianz*, and Th. Spidlik, *Gregoire de Nazianze, Introduction a l’etude de sa doctrine spirituelle*. These were found in Anna-Stina Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher*; and Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*.

<sup>60</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, 263.

theology. Quasten indicates it displays the influences of Origen and Methodius.

William Moore translated the employed text, and it is found in volume five of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.<sup>61</sup>

3. *On the Soul and the Resurrection*: This is a discourse held between Gregory and his sister Macrina in 379, which closely followed the death of Basil and immediately preceded her own. The format is reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo*, and Gregory credits Macrina with the theological insights presented. However, it is clearly visible that his thoughts are being portrayed. The translation relied upon was *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, volume 58, by Virginia Woods Callahan.<sup>62</sup>

Continuing the maritime analogy, let us take up the anchor, hoist the sails, bid farewell to land, and head toward the open sea.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3:262.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 3:261.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COMPOUND HUMAN BEING AND ITS ORIGINAL CHARACTERISTICS

When one seeks to understand the anthropology of influential Christian writers one is required to return to their point of departure. Since Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa assented to and practiced the Catholic faith, they possessed a starting point for the doctrine of humanity. The scriptures were authoritative and provided a crucial element—a boundary line for thought. Though the biblical tradition could be interpreted with allegorical flair or literal directness or a mixture of both, it established definite doctrines that could not be crossed. This chosen exploration bores to the bedrock of the aforesaid principles; namely, the origins of the cosmos, humanity, and evil. In order to explore the effects of sin on human nature, it is imperative that one begins with the origin and ontology of the human being. The scripture has provided the material for thought; now the perspectives of the two Cappadocians will be elucidated in turn.

The structure of the chapter will be fluid, opening with the views of Gregory of Nazianzus and moving to Gregory of Nyssa. Cosmological theories will be examined briefly, followed by the nature and attributes of the human body and soul. It will be shown that both Fathers prize the incorporeal soul over the body, deeming it to be the invaluable and gracious image of God. The goal of human existence will also be assessed since it is impossible to track progress when the target is unknown. In this vein, it will be

illustrated that deification or *theosis* is humanity's proper end. A comparison and contrast section will ensue once these elements have been presented.

### Gregory of Nazianzus: Body, Soul, and *Telos*

According to Gregory, God, motivated by an overflow of goodness, created two realms.<sup>1</sup> The first was spiritual in composition being invisible and intellectual.<sup>2</sup> It consisted of the "Heavenly and Angelic Powers," which Gregory also refers to as the "second Light" (God being the first Light).<sup>3</sup> By nature, this realm was similar to God having the characteristics of "unchangeableness and immortality, and absolute being."<sup>4</sup> Their motivation was toward God, and they operated as the agents of God.<sup>5</sup> These beings displayed little desire for evil, except for Lucifer and his companions, whom Gregory labels "creators of evil."<sup>6</sup>

In a second creative act, God brought forth the visible material realm.<sup>7</sup> It was an achievement not to be underestimated because it illustrates the immense capacity of God—God being wholly mind and incorporeal brought into existence something

<sup>1</sup> Or. 38.9; cf. Anna-Stina Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus*, 75; Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, 46; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 131. Gregory expounds his cosmology in 38.9-11 and the nearly identical passage of 45.5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 47. Though the spirit realm is invisible, it is not immaterial; only God is immaterial observes Ruether. *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; and 40.5; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 47; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Or. 18.42; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132. Even with respect to these similarities, Gregory indicates there is a considerable dislocation between angelic beings and God, for God's nature, in its central locus, is incomprehensible. Or. 28.3.

<sup>5</sup> Or. 28.31; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 47; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Or. 38.9; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 21; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory expresses the doctrine of *ex nihilo* in Or. 29.9; and 40.7, 45; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 48.

ontologically foreign and antithetical to God's nature.<sup>8</sup> It embodied a transitory, mutable, and finite nature.<sup>9</sup> Though this material realm was the opposite of God's nature, it still deserved high praise for its complex functioning unity.<sup>10</sup>

Two natures now existed, one of mind, the other sensory, and each operated within its prescribed limits. Both were testimonies of God's magnificence; however, the ultimate power and goodness of God had yet to be manifest. Desiring to "produce a single living being" God drew from each sphere.<sup>11</sup> From the world of matter God formed the body, and breathing into it, God provided "an intelligent soul."<sup>12</sup> The newly formed human being completely shared the attributes of the visible realm. The body was of the lowest form of existence since matter lacked spiritual vitality, and as noted above, it was mortal, earthly, and mutable.<sup>13</sup> In an unaided state, the body's due course would be decomposition owing to the laws that govern nature.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the body that was material and mutable, the soul imparted to humanity was commensurate with the angelic realm having the characteristics of loftiness, intelligence, and immortality.<sup>15</sup> Gregory often refers to the soul as being divine

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<sup>8</sup> Or. 38.10; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 33; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 133. In Or. 18.4 Gregory identifies God as the "prime and purest Mind."

<sup>9</sup> Or. 2.75; and 18.42; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Or. 38.10; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 50; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 28. Ruether accurately observes the tension between the two opposing worldviews Gregory attempts to unite. His Greek paradigm emphasizes the alien composition of matter, while his biblical conception presses him to embrace its goodness. *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 133. Winslow, on the other hand, asserts Gregory does not support an ontological dualism, citing as evidence his praise of matter. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 50. An argument will not commence on this issue presently, as the weakness of Winslow's assertion will become clear as the piece proceeds.

<sup>11</sup> Or. 38.11; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 50; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 21. Winslow makes a clear distinction here by drawing attention to the fact that Gregory claims God did not extract the spiritual nature imparted to humanity from the angelic realm, but from God's self. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 51. Since Gregory develops little distinction between God and the angelic realm it is possible for him to proclaim the soul came from the angelic realm.

<sup>13</sup> Or. 38:10-11, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Or. 2.16.

<sup>15</sup> Or. 38.11.

and having “heavenly nobility.”<sup>16</sup> It belonged to the “heavenly host” and was “God-beloved.”<sup>17</sup> However, having been united to the body, the soul only partook of the higher realm in part. It yearned to “fly upward,” yet it was constrained by its physical counterpart.<sup>18</sup> The soul was the conduit for communion with God, but even with its “godlike and divine” attributes of mind and reason, the soul, as with the angels, could not penetrate the depths of God’s essence.<sup>19</sup>

The breath of God imparted to the “mingled worshipper” was not only “an intelligent soul,” but also “the Image of God.”<sup>20</sup> The terms “soul” and “image of God” are used nearly synonymously by Gregory; therefore, they have comparable attributes.<sup>21</sup> Describing the theory of image, Gregory indicates it is “the reproduction of its Archetype.” The image of God in humanity was not a static reproduction, but an animated one that bears similar active characteristics.<sup>22</sup> Ellverson and Winslow indicate Gregory occasionally declares the divine image in humanity was fashioned “according to” Christ who was the image of God.<sup>23</sup> This does not mean, however, that humanity receives a secondarily removed image. If one accounts for Gregory’s Trinitarian

<sup>16</sup> Or. 2.17. Gregory explicitly rejects Origen’s doctrine of pre-existent souls in Or. 37.15.

<sup>17</sup> Or. 2.22; and 7.21.

<sup>18</sup> Or. 38.11; 16.15; and 2.17. Gregory refers to the body as “grossness” and “darkness” that hinders divine understanding. Or. 28.12; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 150.

<sup>19</sup> Or. 12.4; and 28.17. Ellverson notes Gregory views the mind as part of the soul; it is the ‘governing’ element. But in practice, he employs them synonymously. *Dual Nature of Man*, 23. Otis indicates Gregory has poignantly developed an element of Clement of Alexandria’s thought in respect to the infinite incomprehensibility of God. The journey toward God never ends and the distance between God and humanity does not lessen. However, as humanity experiences *theosis* it becomes increasingly satisfied with God. “Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System,” 108. This is in contrast to Origen who speculated souls fell from heaven once they became saturated with God, i.e., souls mistakenly believed they holistically knew God. *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Or. 38.11; cf. Frederick W. Norris, *Gregory Nazianzen’s Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 140. Gregory only identifies the soul as the divine image and not the body. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 25; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 51. When discoursing on the divine image, Gregory does not draw a distinction between “image” and “likeness” as many others had done. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Or. 30.20.

<sup>23</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 25; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 51-52.

perspective, the image stems directly from God, the Archetype. In Or. 30.20 Gregory explicitly identifies the Son as being in the image of God, and this image is "Identical." In Or. 38.11 Gregory ascribes the act of human creation to the "Creator-Word." With this evidence, it becomes clear that the Word, although an image, is *identical* to the Archetype; consequently, human beings are imbued with the direct image of God.

In the human being, God has wedded two conflicting ontological natures. One is mortal and corporeal, while the other is the exalted image of God. But Gregory's understanding of the human being, stresses Winslow, cannot be comprehended by analyzing the separate parts. Even though Gregory expresses dualistic natures, the "human being" can only be considered as the combination of both.<sup>24</sup> Human beings are "double-made" creatures with the soul being "bound" to the body.<sup>25</sup> Flowing naturally from the ontological incongruity is a hierarchy of operation with the intention of the body being governed by the soul.<sup>26</sup>

Why did God create such a combination? Gregory posits three reasons: First, "the glory above" should not be easily achieved or given as a gift from God, for God desired humanity to choose and "cultivate" goodness. The soul would achieve this goal by struggling against the flesh.<sup>27</sup> Due to the soul's lofty nature, suffering not only rarefied, but also humbled it.<sup>28</sup> Second, through the virtuosity of the soul, the body would be lifted from its lowliness to a heavenly position.<sup>29</sup> Third, by connecting the soul to the body,

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<sup>24</sup> Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> Or. 40.8; and 2.17.

<sup>26</sup> Or. 2.18.

<sup>27</sup> Or. 2.17; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Or. 38.11. This may be a reflection of the angelic fall as seen below. It could also be a specter of an "old Greek religious idea ... that only the pure can approach God." Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, 88. In order for one to participate in the grace of God, one had to prove oneself worthy. *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>29</sup> Or. 2.17; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 153.

humanity would not have direct access to the “light” of God, thus safeguarding it from the severe fall that Lucifer suffered. Lucifer, who received the “full light,” grew prideful thereby invoking immense consequences. Not desiring this for humanity, God provided the “darkness of the body” that would limit the possibility of becoming prideful.<sup>30</sup>

Once it is avowed that God is beneficent, it can be inferred that God acts with intention and purpose. Gregory praises humanity as the pinnacle of God’s creative goodness, and from that, one can likewise imagine humanity’s end is prestigious. Human beings, as composite creatures, were made for the purpose of worshiping and experiencing God.<sup>31</sup> They were to “be filled with the glory of God” and were to experience happiness, of which Gregory writes, “We were created that we might be made happy. We were made happy when we were created.”<sup>32</sup> The experience of God that Gregory propounds as humanity’s *telos* is quite intimate and magnificent. Humans are to be deified and become united with God; in effect, God will “converse with us as Gods.”<sup>33</sup> When speaking of deification and knowing God, Ellverson indicates Gregory’s word selections are not sterilized, cold, and removed, but are instead relational, encapsulating states of “community and nearness.”<sup>34</sup> Though human beings are to be “as Gods,” Gregory distinguishes between the two sharply—God is without beginning, and humans

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<sup>30</sup> Or. 28.12; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 55-56. Ellverson hypothesizes that God may be protecting humanity from a fall as severe as Lucifer’s. Ibid. The principle fueling this concept would be: the closer one is to God, the further one could fall away.

<sup>31</sup> Or. 38.11.

<sup>32</sup> Or. 39.13; and 45.28.

<sup>33</sup> Or. 38.11, 7. For an elucidation of Gregory’s conceptualization of *theosis*, see Winslow’s, chapter THEOSIS in *Dynamics of Salvation*. He designates three categories to Gregory’s understanding of *theosis*: 1. It is holistic, being both body and soul 2. It is individual: due to the retention of the body (though re-created), individuality is not assimilated 3. The human will be ‘entirely godlike.’

<sup>34</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 24, 27.



had “non-existence” as their “prior condition.”<sup>35</sup> Even though humans have as their *telos* to be “Gods,” they will never *be* God.<sup>36</sup>

Gregory, as noted above, perceives the journey toward this goal as a “training” process.<sup>37</sup> Goodness has to be cultivated, and to be cultivated it has to be chosen.<sup>38</sup> In order to accomplish this, God imparted to human beings the capacity of free will that was “free to act in either direction.”<sup>39</sup> It was accompanied by one law through which it could find operation.<sup>40</sup> The newly formed compound being had been equipped for its journey and by means of the divine decree it was prompted to embark.

### Gregory of Nyssa: Body, Soul, and *Telos*

Leaving behind Gregory of Nazianzus’ conception of origins, we now undertake an investigation into Gregory of Nyssa’s anthropology beginning with the creation of the human soul. Being motivated by an overflow of love, God created the human being in order that it might participate in the goodness of God.<sup>41</sup> For humanity to participate in God who is incorporeal, intellectual, and immortal, it was appropriate for humanity to

<sup>35</sup> Or. 42.17; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 76.

<sup>36</sup> The difference in origins is a canyon never bridged as Otis states, “The life of the Redeemed becomes the infinite pursuit of an ever pursuable God: the creature never overcomes his separation from the creator ... but achieves a constantly increasing satisfaction in the infinite process of approximation to God.” “Coherent System,” 108.

<sup>37</sup> Or. 38.11.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory felt strongly that that which is easily gained is too easily discarded, while that which is earned is highly esteemed. Or. 28.12.

<sup>39</sup> Or. 38.12; and 2.17.

<sup>40</sup> Or. 45.28; cf. Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Catechetical Oration, 5; cf. John P. Cavanaugh, *St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Human Soul: Its Nature, Origin, Relation to the Body, Faculties, and Destiny*, 23. In the construction of humanity, Gregory indicates the creation of the soul preceded that of the body. On Man, 16.9. This should not be confused with his remarks in On Man, 29.1-2 where he states the soul and body are formed simultaneously. In this passage Gregory is referring to human beings who are born in time, arguing that the soul and body enter existence simultaneously in a germane form.

possess an equivalent nature; hence, God created the soul.<sup>42</sup> The soul was a living, rational, and immaterial essence of stately stature.<sup>43</sup>

Gregory perceives the soul to be the divine image; hence, it possesses “purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil, and all those attributes of the like kind which help to form in men the likeness of God.”<sup>44</sup> As the nature of God is incomprehensible, so too is the soul or mind.<sup>45</sup> The vital attribute signifying the soul as the image of God is its endowment of free will.<sup>46</sup> Gregory proclaims, “For the soul immediately shows its royal and exalted character ... in that it owns no lord, and is self-governed, swayed autocratically by its own will; for to whom else does this belong than to a king?”<sup>47</sup> In order for the soul to truly be in the image of God, it had to possess an unimpeded will that could choose good or evil.<sup>48</sup> The soul is imbued with an inclination toward God, yet God did not establish a means within the soul to coerce it toward goodness, for in Gregory’s understanding “that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue.”<sup>49</sup>

The creation of the soul served as the key dissimilarity between it and God. God, being un-originate, is immutable; however, all created things are mutable and subject to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; cf. Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:277; and Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 25. Gregory rejects the pre-existent soul doctrine while summarizing its flaws in *On Man*, 28.1-8; cf. Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> *On Man*, 4.1; and *On the Soul*, 205; cf. Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 28.

<sup>44</sup> *On Man*, 4.1; 5.1; and *On the Soul*, 217; cf. Harold Fredrik Cherniss, “The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa,” 15. Gregory does not draw a distinction between “image” and “likeness.” Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” 63-64.

<sup>45</sup> *On Man*, 11.3-4; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 22. Meredith notes the terms “soul” and “mind” are practically synonymous for Gregory. “The Concept of Mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists,” 35.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Danielou, introduction to *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa’s Mystical Writings*, 12. He indicates Gregory was similar to Origen since he found the divine image residing in free will over intelligence. Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> *On Man*. 4.1.

<sup>48</sup> Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 84.

<sup>49</sup> *Cat. Or.* 5; and *On Man*, 16.11; cf. Meredith, “Concept of Mind,” 39-40.

change, which Gregory finds illustrated in creation itself, as it moved from non-existence to existence. In appearance, the soul is the image of God as a coin bearing the image of Caesar is the image of Caesar, but in its ontological substance, it differs from God since it was created. Without this difference the soul would not be the image of God, but the Archetype itself.<sup>50</sup>

God created the original body of humanity, from Gregory's perspective, in two stages. The first stage entailed the divine image, which corresponds to the above discussion.<sup>51</sup> Gregory vaguely describes the body that housed the divine image, but he equates it to angelic existence: being a "spiritual and sinless condition" that is "adorned with incorruptibility and other tokens befitting the divine."<sup>52</sup> No sexual distinction existed during this first stage of creation.<sup>53</sup> The original human had one body, and the soul of this being contained "the entire plenitude of humanity," i.e., every individual soul that God intended to exist, including Adam.<sup>54</sup> This human being was made in the image of the Archetype and was intended to have an angelic existence.<sup>55</sup> It was to numerically

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<sup>50</sup> On Man, 16.12-13; cf. Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 48; and Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study*, 271. See On the Soul, 212 for a similar argument on image.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271; and Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 48.

<sup>52</sup> On the Soul, 270; and On Man, 17.2; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 273. Harnack tersely explains Gregory's premise for a two-fold creation stating, "If man was, as Scripture says, created in the image of God, then he was a spiritual being," for God is purely incorporeal. *History of Dogma*, 3:277. He indicates Gregory must posit a two-fold creation in order to account for the human body that is antithetical to the image of God because of his presupposition that "the spiritual and the earthly and the sensuous resisted each other." Ibid. Meredith concurs while emphasizing the need to explain God's impassible nature compared to humanity's passionate existence. "Concept of Mind," 48.

<sup>53</sup> On Man, 16.9; cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:278.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 16.16-17; cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:278; Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 82; and David Balas, *Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa*, 121. Gregory refers to this stage as "universal humanity." Ibid., 22.3.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 16.7-8; 17.2; and Cat. Or. 5. John Behr argues against the intended angelic existence of humanity stating, "Human beings are not and never were, nor were ever meant to be, solely intellectual beings, as the angels." "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," 235. Behr's assertion is undermined by two viewpoints held by Gregory. One, he promotes a two-fold creation of humanity in order to account for the lack of divine likeness, and two, Gregory conceives of the resurrected

multiply by the ineffable means of the angelic realm until all the pre-ordained souls existed.<sup>56</sup>

God, “Who beholds the future equally with the present,” employing the power of foreknowledge, recognized that this human being, though in the image of God, was mutable and subject to weakness.<sup>57</sup> Knowing humanity’s tendency to neglect goodness, God devised a secondary course.<sup>58</sup> If the first stage of humanity had been retained and humanity turned away from God before the fullness of individual souls were brought into existence, humanity would have suffered a fall causing it to “acquire a fellowship with the lower nature” thereby instigating a perilous situation.<sup>59</sup> In order to prevent this occurrence, God added sexual distinction to the divine nature of humanity.<sup>60</sup> This distinction was not commensurate with the divine essence, however, for God’s nature knows no distinction.<sup>61</sup> To form the distinction God mixed the divine nature with the irrational material taken from the “dust of the ground.”<sup>62</sup> This physical material derived from the first creation of God—inanimate matter, which was completely opposite in composition and nature to God.<sup>63</sup> It was characterized by irrationality, temporality, and

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body as spiritualized, incorporeal, and angelic. Meredith, “Concept of Mind,” 48; and Cherniss, “Platonism,” 58.

<sup>56</sup> On Man, 17.2; cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:278; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 22.5; 16.14; 17.4; and Cat. Or. 5; cf. John J. O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom of the Will in Gregory of Nyssa,” 56; Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, 95; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271.

<sup>58</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 56; and Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 84.

<sup>59</sup> On Man, 22.4; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 84. Ladner describes this potential situation as a “spiritual aversion from God” that would have terminated humanity after Adam and Eve. Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 16.4; 17.4; 22.4; and Cat. Or. 5; cf. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 108; Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:278; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 272; Meredith, “Concept of Mind,” 48; and Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 84.

<sup>61</sup> On Man, 16.14; cf. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Rondet, *Original Sin*, 95; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 272; and Meredith, “Concept of Mind,” 48. The being first formed in this fashion was the individual, Adam. On Man, 22.3.

<sup>63</sup> On Man, 8.5; and Cat. Or. 6.

mutability.<sup>64</sup> Through sexual distinction, “a provision for reproduction” was introduced that would insure the birth of all the souls God had created.<sup>65</sup> The irrational body was prone to “passion and corruption,” but it was originally valued as good since it had not yet experienced passion.<sup>66</sup>

How did God create that which was opposite of God’s nature? Gregory theorizes that every material thing consists of “ideas” such as color and quantity that have converged; if these ideas were removed, it would cause the material thing to disintegrate.<sup>67</sup> Ideas are intelligible and God is intelligible; therefore God, though being immaterial, created the material.<sup>68</sup> How this processes actually occurred, Gregory claims, transcends human understanding.<sup>69</sup>

The actual shape of the body was specifically designed for the purposes of the soul. Gregory postulates, “Since the mind is a thing intelligible and incorporeal, its grace would have been incommunicable and isolated, if its motion were not manifested by some contrivance.”<sup>70</sup> The capacity to speak is of prime importance here, and Gregory illustrates that without hands, humans would not have been able to vocalize intelligently since the facial structure would have been elongated for ease in grazing.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On Man 8.5; and 16.1, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 16.9; and 17.4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 16.3; 18.1; and Cat. Or. 5, 6; cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:278. Sexual division has a soteriological aspect that is closely connected with Gregory’s conceptualization of universal humanity and the resurrection. In the beginning, God created the full number of individual souls that were to ever exist. Foreseeing humanity’s disposition, God created sexual division in order that these souls would be birthed, for Gregory asserts the resurrection only effects those who “come into existence through birth.” On the Soul, 266.

<sup>67</sup> On Man, 24.1-2; cf. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 103; John F. Callahan, “Greek Philosophy and the Cappadocian Cosmology,” 42; and Cherniss, “Platonism,” 26.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; and On the Soul, 254; cf. Callahan, “Cappadocian Cosmology,” 42; and Cherniss, “Platonism,” 26.

<sup>69</sup> On Man, 23.4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 9.1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 8.8.

Gregory indicates the human being functions as a unit even though there are two natures, one irrational and one divine, residing in the human form.<sup>72</sup> Through sense perception humanity enjoys the physical realm and through the soul, the divine. God intermingled the two realms “in order that nothing in creation may be thrown aside as worthless.” By combining them together, the material would have a “share in that superior world.”<sup>73</sup> The human being receives its greatness from the soul, and Gregory perceives the mind to be more dignified than the body.<sup>74</sup> In accordance with the hierarchy Gregory finds in creation, with inanimate matter being created first to humanity’s rational soul being the pinnacle, the composite human being is to be ruled by the mind.<sup>75</sup> In its complex unity the human being held a lofty position, and it experienced direct communion with God.<sup>76</sup>

When explicating the exact location of the soul within the body, Gregory states it is not confined to the physical space of the body due to its incorporeal nature.<sup>77</sup> The soul is “to be regarded as both in it and around it, neither implanted in it nor enfolded with it.”<sup>78</sup> It is infused with the whole body and does not reside in one specific area.<sup>79</sup> In function, the soul vitalizes the body and organizes and comprehends the information gathered by the senses.<sup>80</sup>

The soul enlivens the body in a three-fold fashion, which Gregory identifies as the three “powers” of the soul. He labels the first power “vegetative soul.” Through this

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<sup>72</sup> Alcuin A. Weiswurm, *The Nature of Human Knowledge According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, 51.

<sup>73</sup> On Man, 2.2; and Cat. Or. 6; cf. Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 25; Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:277; and Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> On Man, 16.2; and 15.3; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 83.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.7; and 14.1.

<sup>76</sup> Cat. Or. 6.

<sup>77</sup> On Man, 15.3; and Cat. Or. 10; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 24.

<sup>78</sup> On Man, 15.3; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 76.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 14.1; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 76; and Cherniss, “Platonism,” 23.

<sup>80</sup> On the Soul, 205; cf. Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 29.

power the body receives the nutrition that enables growth. The second is referred to as the “irrational” soul, and it represents sense perception. “Rationality” is the third power, which Gregory highly values calling it “perfect;” it “partakes of reason and is ordered by the mind.”<sup>81</sup> These powers are the effects of the soul on physical matter and are not to be mistaken for the soul or attributes of it, except the third, which is in essence, the soul in its natural state.<sup>82</sup>

From the beginning, the human being was a lofty creation set apart and above the rest. God formed the earth and its life in an “off-hand” manner compared to humanity whom God paused and deliberated over. In its greatness humanity had the task of ruling over the plethora of earthly life.<sup>83</sup> While operating as a sovereign, humanity was also to enjoy the beauty and bounty of the earth.<sup>84</sup> As noted above, humanity was “to be a partaker of the good things in God.”<sup>85</sup> Participating in such goodness is “nothing else than existing in God” because God’s self is ultimate goodness. Gregory envisions this as being not only the goal of humanity, but of all created things.<sup>86</sup>

### Comparable and Contrasting Elements of Thought

Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa assign the characteristics of mutability, irrationality, and finiteness to the inanimate material from which God formed the human body. Though they each view matter as essentially antithetical to the traits of God, it still possesses the value of goodness since God created it. They depart, however,

<sup>81</sup> On Man, 8.4; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 70-71; and Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 59. On the Soul, 218 describes these elements as well.

<sup>82</sup> On the Soul, 218; cf. Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 74; and Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 58-59.

<sup>83</sup> On Man, 3.1; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 30.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2.2; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 29; and Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 51.

<sup>85</sup> Cat. Or. 5; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 29; and Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 51.

<sup>86</sup> On the Soul, 267.

on the actual creation of matter. Recall, Gregory of Nazianzus perceives the creation of matter as a manifestation of God's immense power thereby illustrating that God could bring into existence something thoroughly alien to God's essence. Gregory does not ask "How?" God could achieve this, but remains satisfied with the "Why?," i.e., being motivated by an overflow of goodness. This omission establishes the distinction between him and Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory of Nyssa elucidates the "How?" beginning with his understanding of the composition of matter. Since matter consists of convergent "ideas" it is easy for God, who is intelligible, to create it. Gregory of Nazianzus propounds an awe-inspiring event, while Gregory of Nyssa witnesses a causal relationship that is still magnificent since non-existence was translated into existence.

Regarding the soul, the two Cappadocians view its attributes of immortality, unity, immutability, and incorporeal nature as ontologically analogous to God. It is a lofty animate substance that originated directly from God, and both reject any hint of the pre-existence of the soul.<sup>87</sup> The soul is the instrument enabling direct communion with God, and due to its affinity with the divine essence, it has an innate desire toward God. The two Fathers conceive the soul to be identical to God in every aspect except one—God alone is uncreated. In agreement, there is still distinction, for Gregory of Nyssa sees the capacity of free will as the locus of God's image since it directly expresses autonomy, while Gregory of Nazianzus primarily connects the divine image to the soul holistically, although he occasionally equates it with rationality.<sup>88</sup>

The human, for both Gregories, is a two-natured being that operates as one. The relationship between the two natures is hierarchical with the soul being the governing

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<sup>87</sup> GNaz, Or. 37.15; and GNys, On Man, 29.1-8.

<sup>88</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 24.



agent. In terms of ontological value, the soul is the worthier, although the whole is (ostensibly) called good. It has been seen that Gregory of Nyssa expounds upon the soul/body relationship beyond Gregory of Nazianzus when he describes the location and vitalizing powers of the soul.

These Fathers each put forward reasons for the combination of body and soul, but with slightly different nuances. Gregory of Nazianzus assigns a pedagogical role to the body, as it purifies and facilitates the growth of the soul, thus making it earn the glory of God, while Gregory of Nyssa proposes that God, foreseeing humanity's inclination to evil, provided a soteriological solution by means of the body and its sexual differentiation. However, both agree the union between body and soul was intended to elevate the material realm to participation with the divine. In spite of the slight distinctions, the original goal of humanity for Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa is comparable. They envision humanity living an impassible existence characterized by happiness and joy that is generated by contemplating, uniting with, and experiencing God. Its *telos* lay before it, but humanity had to cultivate its end, and free will was the tool for cultivating the unique vegetation of *theosis*.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE ENTRANCE OF EVIL IN THE UNIVERSE

A cosmological canvas has now been painted, yet it bears little resemblance to the world human beings actually inhabit. The state just described participated in peaceful union with divine goodness, but anyone observing the human situation will immediately find contrary data. The objective of this chapter is to elucidate the explanations provided by the two Cappadocian Fathers in their quest to comprehend the existence and nature of evil in the universe.

From the preceding chapter one can sense an underlying dynamic waiting to erupt. The Gregories announce there exists one God who is ultimate goodness, and this God created two realms, one angelic and similar to the divine nature and the other antithetical and irrational. In addition, God gave life to the human being who was a mixture of both realms. This creation held a special and unique position in the universe, for it had received the gift of the divine image, which entailed reason and autonomous will. Rational beings had been endowed with will due to the nature of virtue, and now the stage is set for freedom to be employed.

In the following pages it will be shown that Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa share complementary views on the origin and nature of evil. Both aver God is not the creator of evil, and furthermore, they declare evil lacks an independent ontological existence. Created will is solely responsible for the birth of evil and its ensuing effects.

Relying on the biblical tradition, each credits the angelic realm with the introduction of evil; however, it will be shown that their philosophical premises will not allow for a consistent logical explanation of the event.

### Gregory of Nazianzus on the Origin and Nature of Evil

In the quest for the origin of evil, it is natural for God to suffer scrutiny first. If God is the only infinite substance and matter is not eternal, there is nowhere or nothing else to investigate. Turning the eye of his mind toward God, Gregory of Nazianzus asserts God is the creator and sustainer of everything that exists, both the visible and invisible realms, but God is not the creator of evil.<sup>1</sup> It is not in God's nature to create evil, for God is ultimate goodness, goodness so beneficent that it could not be satisfied by "self-contemplation alone."<sup>2</sup> Having a unified nature, God is the only being that stands above evil.<sup>3</sup> Goodness and unity are key attributes contributing to impassibility, and since God's essence is "uncompounded nature," it is "peaceful and not subject to dissension."<sup>4</sup>

The question arises then, "If God did not create evil, yet surely evil exists, then what is its origin?" At this point, Gregory challenges the ontological intimation embedded within the question. He states, "Evil has no substance or kingdom, either unoriginate or self-existent."<sup>5</sup> Gregory does not deny evil's presence, but he does reject the conception that evil has being unto itself. Evil is not an operating power: it cannot and

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<sup>1</sup> Or. 40.45; cf. Otis, "Coherent System," 110.

<sup>2</sup> Or. 38.9.

<sup>3</sup> Or. 16.15.

<sup>4</sup> Or. 40.7.

<sup>5</sup> Or. 40.45. Winslow indicates Gregory employed a "popular explanation" for the origin of evil (as well as the one explicated below, which he used more frequently) perceiving it to be a necessary counterbalance to good thereby keeping the world from dissonance. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 62. I was not able to investigate Winslow's claim since his source is Gregory's Oration 14, which is not translated into English.

does not subsist independently. With this claim, Gregory eliminates the need to explore further the ontological origin of evil because evil does not have ontology.

Instead of an ontological beginning, evil finds its origin in the will of rational beings. Based on the biblical tradition, Gregory is informed that the angelic realm was responsible for inaugurating evil.<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is useful to explore Gregory's impression of it. The angelic realm, recall, was the first creation of God and was substantially comparable to God, being "intelligent" and "immaterial."<sup>7</sup> Gregory identifies two key characteristics in angels: for one, they are "spirit" because they belong to the intellectual realm; and second, they are "fire" which derives from their "purifying nature." In function, angels praise and eternally contemplate God, while also holding administrative tasks throughout the universe by which they dispense God's will. Angels are the closest to God in proximity, and using "light" as a metaphor, Gregory indicates they receive direct "illumination" from God.<sup>8</sup>

Gregory speaks highly of the nature of angels, identifying it as "pure" and "unalloyed." He often proclaims they are "immovable to evil," but is forced to qualify this statement.<sup>9</sup> Illustrating this, Gregory writes,

I should like to say that they were incapable of movement in the direction of evil, and susceptible only of the movement of good, as being about God, and illumined with the first rays from God ... but I am obliged to stop short ... and to conceive and speak of them only as difficult to move because of him, who for his splendour was called Lucifer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Or. 38.9; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Or. 28.31; and 40.5; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 21, 56; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Or. 28.31; 38.9; and 31.15; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132.

<sup>10</sup> Or. 38.9.

Here is the first occurrence of evil in existence. One who dwelt in the closest created realm to God was the first to wrought evil. The angels received the "full light," and in this position, Lucifer became prideful and thus experienced a great fall.<sup>11</sup> He and the other apostate angels fell from angelic glory to earth, and "by their revolt against good" became "creators of evil."<sup>12</sup>

Thus far it has been shown that Gregory emphatically asserts God did not create evil and that evil lacks an ontological existence. However, he acknowledges the presence of evil in the universe, and that it entered through the angelic realm. But the question remains, how did one so near to God fall? Gregory does not explicitly address this question; and, according to Otis, it could not be sufficiently explained within his theological framework.<sup>13</sup> By delineating a few guiding principles this shortcoming will become manifest.

A central element required for an occurrence of this type would be free will. This is necessary because only a rational being can choose or neglect goodness. Gregory does not directly assign the capacity of free will to angels, but in light of the affinity of angelic nature to the divine, it would be difficult to argue against its presence.<sup>14</sup> In order to establish a lucid relationship between will and evil, it is useful to undertake an

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<sup>11</sup> Or. 28.12; 38.9; and 40.10; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Or. 39.7; and 38.9. Winslow finds within Gregory's writing two reasons leading to Lucifer's fall; one is pride, as noted above, and the other is envy. Winslow argues envy was the product of Lucifer's pride and once it blossomed, he became antagonist toward God. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 63. The logical progression from pride to envy is sound because Lucifer would become envious of the worship God received once he elevated himself. However, I question the existence of a two-fold impetus in Gregory's thought. When speaking of Lucifer's envy, Gregory indicates it has become a characteristic of his nature through wickedness. Or. 40.6; and 39.7. It appears envy developed through experience. In these and other passages, Gregory assigns envy to Lucifer; however, it is not cited as the cause of the fall, but as a mindset directed toward humanity. See Or. 28.11, 15; 39.3, 7; and 40.6. When discussing Lucifer's fall explicitly, Gregory always states its cause was pride. Or. 38.9; and 40.10; see Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 55 who comes to the same conclusion. On account of this evidence, the primary cause of his fall should be seen as pride with envy becoming a byproduct.

<sup>13</sup> Otis, "Coherent System," 113.

<sup>14</sup> See 38.9-10; and 28.31. Otis claims this is an obvious assertion. "Coherent System," 110f.

exploration of the nature of free will. Since Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa have complementary views on the issue, a combination of their thoughts will be employed to present a holistic picture. As previously described, free will originates as a gift from God.<sup>15</sup> It is an autonomous and “self-determining power” that is “free to act in either direction.”<sup>16</sup> Will had to be free from necessity because of the nature of virtue. Virtue is the acquisition of goodness, and it must be chosen without compulsion or persuasion; otherwise, it is not virtue.<sup>17</sup> For the two Cappadocians, true freedom resides in the ability to choose what is desired without resistance.<sup>18</sup> However, the will is inclined to God because of the philosophical principle that things of similar nature are intrinsically attracted to one another.<sup>19</sup>

The will, bearing resemblance to the image of God, possesses an inventive facet. This is observable in its ability to create evil and “alter the structure of reality” constituted by God.<sup>20</sup> Just as the image and the Archetype are distinct from one another, so too are the divine and created will. The dissimilarity between endowed will and unoriginate will revolves around “being.” God’s nature, in itself, is true being, while created nature is not self-sustaining and thus depends upon God for its survival.<sup>21</sup> Since the will does not possess true being, but only participates in it, it is always in a situation requiring

<sup>15</sup> GNaz, Or. 38.12; GNys, Cat. Or. 31; and On Man, 4.1; cf. Cavarinos, *On the Human Soul*, 84; and Alden A. Mosshammer, “Non-Being and Evil in Gregory of Nyssa,” 144.

<sup>16</sup> GNys, Cat. Or. 30; and GNaz, Or. 2.17; cf. Cavarinos, *On the Human Soul*, 84; and O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 57. O’Keefe indicates this conception of will is not an “introspective psychological reality,” but the power “to choose when presented with an option.” Ibid. Meaning, the will is not a faculty of evaluation, but a power of movement.

<sup>17</sup> GNaz, Or. 28.12; GNys, On Man, 16.11; and Cat. Or. 31; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 57. Jaeger maintains that Gregory has adopted the Platonic conception of goodness and applied it to the biblical doctrine. Goodness is equivalent to “being,” and the “Platonic scheme presupposes a hierarchy of being ... and of goods ... that culminates in God as the transcendent cause.” *Two Rediscovered Works*, 76-77.

<sup>18</sup> GNys, Cat. Or. 5; cf. Cavarinos, *On the Human Soul*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 80, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Mosshammer, “Non-Being and Evil,” 144. Although, the act of creating evil differs from the creative capacity of God since evil, even when introduced into the universe by will, still lacks ontology.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 146.

choice.<sup>22</sup> The will remains healthy by choosing the good, but if it rejects the good it moves toward deprivation.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the will cannot function independently and must collaborate with the intellect. The intellect provides the data from which a decision can then be made by the will.<sup>24</sup>

With the capacity of free will evidenced within the angelic realm, inquiry now must shift to motivation. Why would Lucifer vacillate and move toward pride? In the Greek framework, matter housed the “passions” that were responsible for occluding the mind’s view of goodness.<sup>25</sup> However, Gregory of Nazianzus immensely elevates the angelic realm by emphasizing its nearly incorporeal nature; by doing so, he removes irrational matter as a factor influencing the will.<sup>26</sup> With this removed, will is in its purest form, being without influence except for the continual showering of the “First Light.”<sup>27</sup>

Environment becomes crucial at this point since Gregory understands evil or sin to be the consequence of ignorance. Again, the two Cappadocian thinkers operate within a common paradigm, thus allowing the conversation to incorporate both. This conception of evil was the common Greek understanding that originated in Socrates and Plato.<sup>28</sup> For Socrates, right action flowed from a proper understanding of goodness.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the two Saints claimed comprehension was equal to action thereby illustrating an intimate connection between the intellect and the will.<sup>30</sup> Once something was believed to be true, the will would choose, and the moral agent would act. Two main presuppositions form

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; and Cat. Or. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Mosshammer, “Non-Being and Evil,” 147.

<sup>24</sup> Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 57.

<sup>26</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 110. See Or. 28.31.

<sup>27</sup> Or. 28.31.

<sup>28</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 110. See Or. 30.20; and 40.45.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 52.

the foundation of this Greek perspective. First, through reason, one could comprehend the world. Second, the world operates according to “predictable standards.”<sup>31</sup> From these suppositions, moral rectitude is the product of correct understanding.<sup>32</sup> Any moral deviation would indicate ignorance on behalf of the individual, for evil was never intentionally chosen.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to this position is the biblical tradition from which the story of the angelic fall originates.<sup>34</sup> It asserts the will of God is the foundation for reality. Under this construction, “God is completely free to create or to destroy,” and all existence is subject to the will of God. In direct opposition to the Greek mindset, reality is not grasped by cognition, and morality springs from obedience to the revealed laws of God. Therefore, virtue is not based on correct knowledge, but obedience, and error can be an intentional act of disobedience instead of a lack of true understanding.<sup>35</sup> Viewed from Gregory of Nazianzus’ Greek milieu, the angelic fall becomes dubious. There remains no avenue for explaining Lucifer’s movement away from the good when the angelic environment and the impossibility of evil being intentionally chosen are taken into account.

Gregory’s Platonic dualism and simultaneous commitment to the biblical tradition are at the core of the difficulty in establishing a logical explanation for the source of

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.; and Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 52.

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong, *Ancient Philosophy*, 30; cf. O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 52; Cherniss, “Platonism,” 53; Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 81; and Dihle, *Theory of Will*, 119. For a clear example of this in Gregory of Nyssa’s thought see *Life of Moses*, 2.23 where he plainly states falsehood is a “mistaken apprehension.”

<sup>34</sup> According to J. Turmel’s article, “Histoire de l’angelologie des temps apostoliques a la fin du Ve siecle,” cited in Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 63, GNaz finds the fall of Lucifer recorded in Is. 14:13-14. GNaz appears to be following Origen who connected this passage with Lucifer. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, 130-131. GNys relied upon the Wisd. of Sol. 2:24, “But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world” for the tradition of Lucifer’s fall. *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, s.v. “Demon,” and Douay Version.

<sup>35</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 53.



evil.<sup>36</sup> On the Platonic side, he perceives ultimate goodness to be immutable, immaterial, and mind.<sup>37</sup> Once the angelic realm is credited with the same qualities, he cannot attribute evil to it since doing so would create a direct link with that which is pure goodness.

Gregory was probably aware of this, as he appears hesitant to affirm the angelic realm is “moveable.”<sup>38</sup> The question of evil was solved within this tradition by placing it in the realm of eternal matter.<sup>39</sup> Gregory’s desire to do likewise is obvious, yet he refrains for one reason—his commitment to the biblical tradition.<sup>40</sup> Stemming from his solidarity with Christian doctrine, Gregory claims matter is admirable; but in contradiction, he attacks it and perceives it to be the bane of human existence.<sup>41</sup> As indicated above, Gregory views inanimate matter as holistically foreign to God resulting from its compound, finite, mutable, and corporeal nature, and the human body formed from matter as “grossness” and “darkness” that inhibits divine understanding.<sup>42</sup> In a telling comment, he claims compound nature is “a starting point of strife.”<sup>43</sup> The tension is evident when he speaks of the goodness of created matter. Even when asserting its praiseworthiness, Gregory does not do so on account of its ontology, but the harmony with which it functions.<sup>44</sup> Correspondingly, the human body derives its goodness from the service it provides the soul.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 114.

<sup>37</sup> Or. 28.31; and 38.9. Recall Gregory calls God the “purest Mind.” Or. 18.4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> See Armstrong, *Ancient Philosophy*, 49-52 where he describes Plato’s understanding of matter as the source of evil.

<sup>40</sup> Ruether contends Gregory “makes the cruder equation of matter with evil,” which I agree with. *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132. However, her tone seems to minimize the internal tension that, as Winslow illustrates, Gregory probably experienced while submitting himself to the biblical tradition. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 61.

<sup>41</sup> Or. 38.10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; 2.74-75; 18.42; and 28.12.

<sup>43</sup> Or. 28.7.

<sup>44</sup> Or. 38.9.

<sup>45</sup> Or. 2.17. The body provides a struggle for the soul, thus purifying it. See Chapter 1, Gregory of Nazianzus: Body, Soul, and *Telos*.

Gregory is at an impasse in this situation. The biblical tradition proclaims sin first entered the universe within the angelic realm, which he implicitly explains by a movement of the will. But, Gregory cannot explain why the will moved as it did, for the angels were in the closest possible relationship to God, being perennially shrouded by goodness.<sup>46</sup> If sin is only an act of ignorance, and not intentionally chosen while knowing an act is evil, there remains no explanation, but the silence of incomprehensibility.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Origin and Nature of Evil within Gregory of Nyssa**

Negation is the essence of evil, if it can be said to have an essence, for Gregory of Nyssa. The only existence it maintains is one of deprivation or absence.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, he declares evil is "the non-existence of the good," and "it exists not by itself, and cannot be contemplated as a subsistence."<sup>49</sup> Briefly, evil lacks an ontological existence.<sup>50</sup> Yet, evil is "not a complete void," but the "absence of what ought to be present," observes Mosshammer.<sup>51</sup> The term "evil" itself is a descriptor indicating absence; it is a "nonentity ... *logically* opposed to entity."<sup>52</sup> If evil is non-substantial then the obvious logical conclusion is that all existence is good, which Gregory boldly asserts saying, "Every creation of God is beautiful and not to be despised and whatever God has made is

<sup>46</sup> Otis, "Coherent System," 111.

<sup>47</sup> O'Keefe, "Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom," 58.

<sup>48</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Cat. Or. 5, 8; On the Soul, 239; Cherniss, "Platonism," 50; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 278; and Johannes Zachhuber, "Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance," 176.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 7; cf. Cherniss, "Platonism," 51; and Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil," 138.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6; cf. Cat. Or. 5, 7; On the Soul, 239; On Virginity, 12; Cherniss, "Platonism," 50; and Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Mosshammer, "Non-Being and Evil," 140. He claims this is the Aristotelian concept of 'steresis.' Ibid. Illustrating the reverse, Gregory states, "For where there is no evil there must necessarily be the good." Lord's Prayer, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 139; and Cat. Or. 6. Italics in the original.

exceedingly beautiful.”<sup>53</sup> By rejecting the ontological existence of evil, he relegates it to finite status: goodness bookends evil since only being is infinite.<sup>54</sup>

Once evil is conceived as non-existence, God is immediately exculpated based on Gregory’s theological system. Deprivation, by nature, implies movement and change of direction, hence only that which is capable of movement could introduce evil. God, “the uncreated nature,” could never achieve such since God is immutable and stable, having never known anything but being.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, God is not the creator of evil because God only created that which exists.<sup>56</sup> The only ontological existence having the power of movement is creation, being that its founding principle was change.<sup>57</sup>

With such declarations, Gregory must place the responsibility for the origin of evil within the created realm, but how was this realm capable of such a feat? It could only be accomplished by free will. Between evil and goodness is the chasm of existence, and the only means by which it is bridged is the will.<sup>58</sup> How does the will produce evil? Gregory answers, “Evil is, in some way or other, engendered from within, springing up in the will at the moment when there is retrocession of the soul from the beautiful.”<sup>59</sup> The will is the enigmatic source of evil in the universe. Gregory likens the movement of the will to the closing of one’s eyes. When the eyes are opened, the light is seen, and when they are closed, blindness results.<sup>60</sup> Though this action is automatic and natural, the

<sup>53</sup> On the Soul, 239; and On Virginité, 12; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 50; and Mosshammer, “Non-Being and Evil,” 139.

<sup>54</sup> On Man, 21.2.

<sup>55</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 53.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 7. Gregory announces that if God had created evil, “vice would have been blameless.” Ibid., 5; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 52; Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 83; Zachhuber, “Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa,” 176; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 278.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 6; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 53; and Mosshammer, “Non-Being and Evil,” 137.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 7; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 53; and Cavaros, *On the Human Soul*, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>60</sup> On Virginité, 12.

movement of the will away from goodness is the result of choice. As Gregory asserts, "It is the nature of evil not to exist apart from choice."<sup>61</sup> As elucidated earlier, the will does not intentionally choose evil when the path of goodness is known.<sup>62</sup> Evil is only selected unintentionally when that which is base is misapprehended to be that which is truly good.<sup>63</sup>

The presence of the will alone does not invoke evil; it only provides potentiality. A rational being possessing this capacity is needed. The first being to have such, and thus introduce evil into the universe, was Lucifer. He had been "created for no evil purpose" and was charged with "the administration of the earth."<sup>64</sup> Lucifer participated in the angelic realm of existence that was analogous in nature to the human soul (which it preceded in the order of creation), being incorporeal, intelligent, spiritual, and endowed with "autonomous free will."<sup>65</sup> Gregory of Nyssa describes the abode of angels as "light and ethereal" and "perfectly free from even the slightest stain of sin and evil."<sup>66</sup> In this realm, God's will reigns supreme, and the influential powers of evil do not have influence.<sup>67</sup>

Witnessing the formation of composite humanity and its prestigious state, Lucifer took it "ill" that such beings should have a "likeness to his transcendent dignity."<sup>68</sup> He deemed it inappropriate that a being united to matter should bear the image of God and

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<sup>61</sup> On the Soul, 242.

<sup>62</sup> O'Keefe, "Sin, ἁπαθεια, and Freedom," 54; and Cherniss, "Platonism," 53.

<sup>63</sup> On the Soul, 238; cf. On the Soul, 223-4; O'Keefe, "Sin, ἁπαθεια, and Freedom," 55; and Cherniss, "Platonism," 54.

<sup>64</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Cherniss, "Platonism," 54; Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 12; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 97.

<sup>65</sup> Lord's Prayer, 61; On the Soul, 227; and Life of Moses, 2.51.

<sup>66</sup> Lord's Prayer, 61, 62; cf. Otis, "Coherent System," 112.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>68</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 12; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 275; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 97.

experience the process of *theosis*. By harboring these feelings, he chose to turn against the good, thus giving birth to "Envy."<sup>69</sup> This began the angelic fall, which encompassed him and others who "defected from the good."<sup>70</sup> The consequence of this choice dramatically altered the nature of Lucifer and his company. The causal force of choice transformed his "original natural propension to goodness" into a nature that sought "the utmost limit of iniquity." Gregory labels this a "bias to evil," which seems to express a maxim that deprivation leads to increasing deprivation.<sup>71</sup>

Gregory now confronts the same logical incongruity that Gregory of Nazianzus encountered. Lucifer had the empowerment of free will that made the choice away from goodness possible, yet there is no reason to explain why his choice would be antagonistic toward God. It is tenuous to argue that Lucifer was incapable of perceiving the good clearly, for he was completely unimpeded, except for being a created nature. This alone seems insufficient to cause such a catastrophe. As with Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory is torn between two traditions. The Greek informs him that passions effect one's cognitive perception and such passions are attributes of the physical realm.<sup>72</sup> Yet, Lucifer lacks a material body. The biblical tradition proposes an episode fueled by willful disobedience and a positive perspective toward material creation, yet Gregory, being influenced by the Greek philosophical environment, is not able to detect the former. This does not mean Gregory lacked academic rigor or intelligence; it simply illustrates the saturating

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Gregory intimates the presence of intentionality in this choice by Lucifer's "unwillingness to perceive the good." Ibid. Yet, if evil does not exist, Lucifer would not have something to intentionally choose. He would only have had something not to choose.

<sup>70</sup> On the Soul, 227.

<sup>71</sup> Cat. Or. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Otis, "Coherent System," 114; and O'Keefe, "Sin, *ἀπάθεια*, and Freedom," 53. Gregory, expressing this opinion writes, "Every impulse or emotion connected with the passions resides in the life below, where human nature is at home." Lord's Prayer, 62.

influence of milieu.<sup>73</sup> The outcome of this struggle leaves Gregory without a sound explanation for the angelic fall and the entrance of the causal effects of evil.<sup>74</sup>

### **Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa Compared**

The exploration of both Fathers in respect to their understanding of the origin and ontology of evil leaves little to be contrasted. They are each motivated to repudiate the God of goodness as being the author of evil. Each credits created will with the “invention” of evil, an evil that is an aberration of the good, and each posits a will that chose ignorantly. The existential entrance of evil into the universe stemmed from the angelic realm, which Gregory of Nazianzus elucidates in greater detail, yet both are incapable of logically explaining this event. The Gregories share a common bond of trying to reconcile two opposing worldviews in conflict. And for both, the presuppositions of Greek philosophy were rooted too deeply, thus preventing a viable solution to arise. Their commitment to the biblical tradition is evident, as they refrain from drawing the logical conclusions from the proposed theories, but this left contradictory claims in the wake. The unified declaration of the freedom of will in relation to virtue is a striking element that will continue to find expression in the coming chapters.

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<sup>73</sup> O’Keefe, “Sin, ἀπαθεια, and Freedom,” 59.

<sup>74</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 113.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PARADISE AND THE FALL

From the excursion into the dark realm of non-existent evil we now return to pristine humanity and its lofty paradisaical abode. It has been shown that evil is devoid of actual substance and is birthed by the will of rational beings who have misconceived true goodness. Evil had come into existence by the instigation of Lucifer, but as of yet, it had not polluted human beings. Recognizing the extensive suffering of human existence, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa are keenly aware that the original state of humanity has experienced disruption. Disregarding the circulating conjecture that current existence was caused by the sin of pre-existent souls, the two Cappadocians rely upon the biblical tradition that informs them.

The content of the following pages will present their views of the nature of Paradise, the two trees, the pronounced law of God, Lucifer's involvement, and the pivotal choice of humanity. It will be made manifest that the previously illustrated impasse arising from the Gregories' philosophical paradigms remain problematic in the explication of human sin. The content herein will prove beneficial as it lays the foundation for the imminent investigation into the effects of evil on human nature.

## Paradise and Human Error in Gregory of Nazianzus

After the creation of composite humanity, God placed the newly formed beings in Paradise. For Gregory, the biblical description of Eden was a primordial spiritual, ethereal, and intelligible existence where humanity contemplated the divine goodness.<sup>1</sup> Humanity was to “till the immortal plants” that Gregory, with feigned rhetorical hesitancy, identifies as “the Divine Conceptions.”<sup>2</sup> The Divine Conceptions were not all of equal depth, for some were “simpler” and others “more perfect.”<sup>3</sup> Paradise then, was a school of philosophical contemplation having elementary and advanced stages of development.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Genesis account, Gregory finds two trees in Paradise. One, the Tree of Life, which bestowed immortality, was allowable for human consumption.<sup>5</sup> The other was the Tree of Knowledge. Gregory describes this tree as “Contemplation.” Its fruit coincided with the “more perfect” conceptions and was only suitable for those who were mature in “habit.” The Tree of Knowledge was not ontologically evil, and the law God issued was not an attempt to withhold goodness from humanity. The tree’s produce was meant for humanity when it had achieved the appropriate level of maturity, as Gregory signifies when stating, “It would have been good if partaken of at the proper time.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 285; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135.

<sup>2</sup> Or. 38.12; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99. Recall, Or. 38.9-12 and 40.5-8 are nearly identical; hence, I will refrain from citing both.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Or. 39.7; and 38.12; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Or. 38.12; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 285; Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64; Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99; Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 52; and Frederick W. Norris, *Gregory Nazianzen's Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 140-41.



According to Ellverson and Winslow, Gregory equates the fruit of Contemplation with *theosis*, i.e., humanity's ultimate state of unmediated experience with God.<sup>7</sup>

The law forbidding the fruit of Contemplation was a "light" guiding the burgeoning intellect of humanity.<sup>8</sup> It served a dual purpose in this respect: the law directed humanity toward the proper stage of illumination by explicitly indicating where not to begin, and it provided material for humanity's free will to engage. In the garden humanity was "naked in ... simplicity," its faculties for philosophical ascent being uninhibited, but Gregory contends its original state was infantile. Humanity was "somewhat simple and greedy" in practice, and comparing it to a baby, it was in "need of milk."<sup>9</sup> This is reminiscent of Irenaeus' understanding of the original human condition.<sup>10</sup> Humanity, just entering existence, was like a newborn babe when judged against the unoriginate God.<sup>11</sup> It was not ready for immediate perfection; it had to grow into adulthood. However, Gregory departs from Irenaeus because he considers humanity's infancy to be a direct result of its two-fold composition. Humanity was only "partially [initiated] into the intellectual" realm, and since Contemplation is purely intellectual, humanity was in the early stages of development.<sup>12</sup> Yet, immaturity is an inexpensive cost to pay for protection against a fall as severe as Lucifer's.<sup>13</sup>

Humanity suffered another form of immaturity as well. It was in a condition of "moral 'mobility.'" The law provided the curriculum, and the gift of free will provided the power of learning. Through uninfluenced choice, humanity had the potential to

<sup>7</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 52; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> Or. 40.6.

<sup>9</sup> Or. 38.12; cf. Peter C. Phan, *Grace and the Human Condition*, 169; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 285; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianus*, 135; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 11; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 286.

<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.1.

<sup>12</sup> Or. 38.11; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 53.

cultivate goodness and ascend the ladder of illumination. It was capable of choosing or rejecting goodness, and it did not have a previous history of either. At this point, humanity was immature, innocent, and naïve.<sup>14</sup> It had the latent potential for greatness or for failure, and all rested on a will that had yet to be tested.

With the commandment in place and the faculty to engage it, humanity made its choice. By partaking of the fruit of Contemplation before it had reached the appropriate spiritual maturity, humanity turned away from goodness and birthed evil into the realm of human existence.<sup>15</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus could not account for what motivated the angelic fall, but contrastingly, he is able to locate numerous influences leading to the inclement decision of Adam.

To no surprise and in accordance with the biblical tradition, the role of Lucifer, the apostate one, was paramount. Embittered by his own fall from glory and inflamed by humanity's destiny, Lucifer turned his hatred toward humanity.<sup>16</sup> Gregory identifies this feeling as "envy."<sup>17</sup> Fueled by envy, he approached Eve seeking to distort humanity's inclination toward God by shifting it to himself.<sup>18</sup> Eve became the primary target because she was "more tender" and capricious.<sup>19</sup> Continuing in this vein, Lucifer accosted Eve

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. See Chapter 2 for an elucidation of the nature of free will.

<sup>15</sup> Or. 2.25; 38.12; and 39.7; cf. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135; Phan, *Grace and the Human Condition*, 170; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 285; Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 57; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64. See Chapter 2 regarding the non-existent nature of evil. Williams and Otis observe that Gregory's understanding of the fall differs drastically from Origen's. Briefly, Origen postulated a spiritual fall, which in turn, birthed material creation. The fall was the result of "satiation," i.e., spiritual beings who had "become literally so satiated and bored with God" that they turned away. Otis, "Coherent System," 102; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 285. For a more detailed summary of this hypothesis, see the Otis article.

<sup>16</sup> Or. 39.7, 13; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 63; and Phan, *Grace and the Human Condition*, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.; and 45.28.

<sup>18</sup> Or. 39.7; and 28.15; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Or. 38.12; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64; and Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 141. Harrison argues that Gregory did not view Eve as being weaker than Adam based on Or. 37.7 where he writes, "The Woman Sinned, and so did Adam. The serpent deceived them both; and one was not found to be the stronger and the other weaker." "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," 461. It seems this text

because she was more apt to capture Adam than he, himself, would have been.<sup>20</sup> Falling prey to these enticements, Adam “forgot the Commandment which had been given to him; he yielded to the baleful fruit; and for his sin he was banished.”<sup>21</sup> Winslow perceptively draws a parallel between the nature of the human fall and Lucifer’s. He fell due to his desire to become like God, and using the same formula, humanity succumbed as it tried to achieve *theosis* without experiencing the journey of purification.<sup>22</sup>

Gregory firmly attributes the creation of evil to the will, yet it is clear that the environment surrounding this vital choice was turbulent. The turbulence is indicative of Gregory’s desire to ascribe evil to the passions springing from matter. He appears hesitant to blame Adam for the act of ignorance, wishing instead to assign the failure to Lucifer, Eve, and finally, humanity’s material compound.<sup>23</sup>

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assumes an “after the fact” assessment of the situation where neither proved capable, while Or. 38.12 describes the initial situation in which Gregory does assign greater weakness to Eve. Harrison challenges her own evidence when she states, “Eve is generally a negative figure for Gregory,” Ibid., 465.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. In a personal conversation concerning this issue, Dr. Brunner insightfully observed the irony of Eve being potentially more successful than Lucifer in deceiving Adam. March 8, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. It is interesting to observe how all revolved around Adam, thus subordinating Eve. Adam received the commandment from God, and sin and banishment did not occur until after he transgressed. Gregory highlights Eve’s weakness only in respect to its effect on Adam, in essence, relegating her actions to the inconsequential. Logically, I suppose, if Adam alone received the commandment, she did not violate it; yet, I doubt Gregory would affirm this.

<sup>22</sup> Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64; cf. Or. 39.13; and 28.12. Winslow adds another aspect to the fall, which he draws from other secondary sources. Unfortunately, I am unable to engage these texts due to the language barrier, yet I add them here for the sake of awareness. Winslow cites A. Luneau’s article, “L’histoire du salut chez les Peres de l’Eglise” that indicates Gregory thought Adam failed to submit to the ‘constructive nature of time’ and its influence on philosophical growth. Hence, Adam tried to circumvent the natural process God intended. The other, by J. Plagnieux, supports this argument noting Adam ‘transgressed against the law of his gradual development.’ *Saint Gregoire de Nazianze Theologien*, 426, quoted in Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> Winslow argues Gregory is “unwilling to lay the blame for the fall upon our lower or material nature,” and he cites three points to verify this conclusion: 1. Gregory never explicitly faults matter for the fall 2. “Gregory refused to locate the origin of evil safely outside the angelic cosmos” 3. Gregory firmly asserts free will is the cause of evil. *Dynamics of Salvation*, 64-65. Winslow’s points are accurate, yet they are all undermined by the difficulty elucidated in Chapter 2. If the influence of matter is removed, Adam is in the same situation as Lucifer; hence, he would have nothing impeding his sight of true goodness. Even a tempter’s efforts would fail with clear vision. Gregory does state the will is culpable (and in the end it truly is since it finalizes choice), but tacitly and logically, he is aware that matter is the perpetrator.

When speaking of the Apostate's involvement, Gregory continually uses active terms for Lucifer and passive terms for Adam. The fallen angels were "our inciters" who "drove us away from the Tree of Life," "cheated us with the hope of becoming gods," and "led [us] astray."<sup>24</sup> Gregory states, "We were deceived because we were the objects of envy."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the fall resulted from the "Devil's malice and the woman's caprice."<sup>26</sup> Based on the premise that the will is the final authority, Lucifer cannot be completely responsible for Adam's fall. However, such statements seem to imply that the infantile Adam was driven by forces beyond his control. Adam's reason was persuasively informed that taking the fruit of Contemplation was a logical step. It can be seen how Adam still maintained an element of free will, since Lucifer simply provided an option that Adam could weigh against the one proffered by God; yet, one can also witness how Lucifer exploited Adam's weakness of partial initiation on account of the flesh.

As noted above, Eve also had a role to play. Eve was tender and capricious; she was "given to Adam as a helper ... [but] ... proved to be an enemy rather than a helpmate and an opponent rather than a consort."<sup>27</sup> She was the "mother of our race and our sin," who tricked Adam "by pleasure" thereby "alienating him through the tree of knowledge from the tree of life."<sup>28</sup> The Devil employed Eve, and she employed her sexuality to convince Adam.<sup>29</sup> Gregory cries, "Alas for my weakness."<sup>30</sup> The line of thought, though unspoken by Gregory, starts to become illumined. Adam was not turned to ignorance

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<sup>24</sup> Or. 38.9; 39.7, 13; and 33.9.

<sup>25</sup> Or. 45.28.

<sup>26</sup> Or. 38.12.

<sup>27</sup> Or. 18.8, 124 (The Fathers of the Church Translation).

<sup>28</sup> Or. 8.14, 111; and 18.8, 124 (Fathers Translation).

<sup>29</sup> Harrison, "Male and Female," 463.

<sup>30</sup> Or. 38.12.

through the soul; he was influenced by the passions of the flesh that clouded the clear faculty of the mind.<sup>31</sup>

Gregory cannot escape this connection. He views the body as “grossness” that is a “fleshly cloud or veil” that must be shed to perceive God clearly.<sup>32</sup> Granted, the veil has grown denser, as will be outlined in the next chapter, but even in the beginning he recognizes it as a liability. Humanity is considered compound because of the body, and “to sin is human and belongs to the Compound on earth (for composition is the beginning of separation).”<sup>33</sup> Continuing, “Every compound is a starting point of strife, and strife of separation.”<sup>34</sup> Created nature already suffers weakness due to its original non-existent state, yet this is not the true source of evil. The key ingredient operating on humanity’s divine gift of free will is matter and its inherent multiplicity.<sup>35</sup> Though Gregory tries to uphold the goodness of material existence, his loathing toward it still remains. The soul and the will, if not connected to matter, would not have been swayed to choose evil.<sup>36</sup> His elevation of the angelic realm removes any plausible explanation for the origin of evil, and the soul’s commensurate affinity to this realm generates the same tension. Ultimately, Gregory cites Adam as being responsible for the fall,<sup>37</sup> but as the argument has shown, matter is the real culprit because it severely handicaps the will.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 114.

<sup>32</sup> Or. 2.17; and 21.2.

<sup>33</sup> Or. 40.7.

<sup>34</sup> Or. 28.7.

<sup>35</sup> This claim is also held by H. Althaus and F. Portmann as summarized by Ellverson, my only avenue to their thought. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 63, 66. Ellverson is referring to Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz*, 22f; and Portmann’s, *Die gottliche Paidagogia bei Gregor von Nazianz*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> H. Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz*, 41, 81, as recapitulated by Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Or. 2.23; 40.45; 45.28; and *Three Poems*, 95. Gregory’s thought experienced some crystallization when confronting the Apollinarian controversy, as he began to affirm the role of the mind in the fall. He declares the mind received the commandment and was the first human element that “failed to keep it.” Letter to Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius, 101; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 59; and Norris, *Doctrine*

## Gregory of Nyssa on Paradise and the Fall

In the beginning, the human beings God created dwelt in the blissful and angelic life of Paradise.<sup>39</sup> Humanity was clothed in "luminous and aerial garments," and it reflected the divine image clearly.<sup>40</sup> Passion was absent, and life was peaceful.<sup>41</sup> It communed with the divine nature and partook of spiritual fruits.<sup>42</sup> Being a spiritual existence, the fruit planted by God provided nourishment for the soul.<sup>43</sup> The Tree of Life bore the fruit of "knowledge and eternity of life."<sup>44</sup> Humanity participated in the full goodness of God by consuming this fruit.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa postulates the beginning of humanity was perfected and capable of full participation in divine goodness, and in allegorical fashion, Gregory identifies the fruit of the Tree of Life as this full participation. This fruit was "the very actual Good, which in

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*of Jesus Christ*, 186. Yet, it must be remembered that Gregory was not addressing the causes of the fall, only its occurrence.

<sup>38</sup> Ruether tersely agrees citing, "He rather makes the cruder equation of matter with evil and the disembodied state with good, and thus deprives himself of the explanatory principle for the fall of angels." *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 132. The cause of angelic sin is problematic, yet it provides an explanation for human sin. I do disagree with Ruether's tone however. I sense Gregory is honestly trying to follow the biblical tradition, but his environmental paradigm saturates his work.

<sup>39</sup> Lord's Prayer, 77; and *On Man*, 17.2; cf. Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 91; Frederick R. Tennant, *The Sources of the Doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin*, 321; Ernest V. McClear, "The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa," 185; and John Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," 241. Harnack asserts the historical state of humanity in Paradise "was not the highest" since it possessed the sexual differentiated corporeal body added to the archetypal human. *History of Dogma*, 3:278. Ladner disagrees with Harnack stating the pre-fall body of humanity was commensurate with Gregory's resurrected ideal. He concedes humanity possessed sexual division in Paradise, but "the body was originally spirit-like as it will be again in the end." "Philosophical Anthropology," 89-90. In one sense Harnack is correct, for Gregory theorizes a return to the non-differentiated archetypal state after the resurrection, but in regards to the physicality of the body Ladner seems to be closer to Gregory's thought. See *On the Soul*, 270.

<sup>40</sup> Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 90; McClear, "Fall of Man," 182; and Behr, "Rational Animal," 232.

<sup>41</sup> *Beatitudes*, 139; and *On the Soul*, 233; cf. Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 89; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271; McClear, "Fall of Man," 184; and Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 48-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Beatitudes*, 113; and *On Virginity*, 12; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 184; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 275.

<sup>43</sup> *Cat. Or.* 5; and *On Man*, 19.2; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 184.

<sup>44</sup> *Cat. Or.* 5; cf. Rondet, *Original Sin*, 97; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74.

<sup>45</sup> *On Man*, 19.4.

truth is 'every good.'"<sup>46</sup> Since all truth has unity for its nature, similarly, the fruit of life possessed such unity.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast to the Tree of Life was the Tree of Knowledge. Embodying a philosophical principle, this fruit was opposed to the fruit of life because it was a mixture of "opposite qualities."<sup>48</sup> If truth is unity, falsehood is multifarious. This principle explains why God, being good, prohibited the consuming of its fruit. It was not on account of the fruit being wholly good or wholly evil, but because it was a combination of both. The fruit of knowledge presented a unique danger due to its mixed quality. On the outside it looked like goodness, but its inner core was evil. This posed a serious threat to humanity, more potent than stark evil itself. Gregory claims, "For wickedness would surely fail of its effect were it not decked with some fair colour," and humanity "would not have been deceived by manifest evil."<sup>49</sup>

As previously recorded, Gregory inferred the image of God had been united to the material body since God foresaw the potential for sin. To this point, humanity's compound nature was functioning properly with the rational soul governing the irrational passions of the body, thus keeping it free from evil.<sup>50</sup> The naturally latent power of passion within the material body was being subdued by the soul.<sup>51</sup> This situation was threatened, however, when Lucifer actively sought to make humanity its "own murderer with ... [its] ... own hands." Gregory explains that Lucifer was not powerful enough to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 19.3. Gregory expresses this conception stating, "For in the universal and transcendent saying every form of good is in harmony with itself, and the whole is one." Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.5; and 20. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 20.2-4. Gregory also asserts God issued the command to protect humanity, not to withhold some goodness from it. Ibid., 19.3.

<sup>50</sup> Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 93.

<sup>51</sup> On Man, 18.1; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 185; Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 272; and Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 82.

force humanity to choose evil because "God's blessing over-mastered his own force."<sup>52</sup>

That is, humanity's desire and clarity of reason were strong enough to choose goodness if presented with "manifest evil." In order for Lucifer to accomplish his envy, guile was the only weapon with potential.<sup>53</sup>

Trickery found its material in the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. According to Gregory of Nyssa, Lucifer covered "the fruit with a fair appearance and the show of pleasure, that it might be pleasant to the eyes and stimulate the desire to taste."<sup>54</sup> He attempted to trap humanity by appealing to its bodily passions, which once inflamed, would cloud the rational soul. With the bait prepared, Lucifer offered it to Eve.<sup>55</sup> Seeing the delightful fruit, she tasted it and "became the mother of death to men."<sup>56</sup> Following the Genesis account, Gregory declares Eve was the first to be approached by Lucifer, but he does not emphasize this.<sup>57</sup> He does not differentiate between Eve and Adam's actual consuming of the fruit. Just as Eve is called the mother of death, Adam is identified as "the begetter of evil among men." Describing the woeful situation, Gregory writes, "The first man on earth ... had the beautiful and the good naturally at hand in his power everywhere, but he deliberately estranged himself from them and created the experience of evil by choosing to turn away from virtue."<sup>58</sup> Gregory can emphasize the deliberate tenor of Adam's act because of the decisive nature of the will. Once the will has decided,

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<sup>52</sup> Cat. Or. 6; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 275. God's blessing is the divine image.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 275.

<sup>54</sup> On Man, 19.5; cf. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 20.4. It is possible to clearly perceive Gregory's philosophical paradigm at this point. Will cannot intentionally neglect the good, but it can create evil if it mistakenly misapprehends what is truly good. Transposing this over the fall account, Lucifer creates an environment that promotes misapprehension.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 20.4; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 186.

<sup>57</sup> McClear, "Fall of Man," 186.

<sup>58</sup> On Virginit, 12; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 186.



the action is done. By means of this principle, he is able to place full responsibility on Adam.<sup>59</sup> Yes, Lucifer was deceptive, but the ultimate choice was humanity's alone.<sup>60</sup>

Having free will, humanity was responsible for its own judgments.<sup>61</sup> Recall, the will possesses the power of choice and not the power of evaluation, for the mind is the faculty responsible for critical assessment. In humanity's initial state, the mind was inclined toward the good. It governed the physical body by subjecting its inherent chaotic forces, thus allowing the body to participate in goodness. But, this was reversed once the temptation occurred. Instead of the mind ruling the body, the chaotic forces of the body saturated the mind, thus turning it from the good.<sup>62</sup> The faculty responsible for informing the will provided faulty information, and once the will chose what it perceived to be good, it removed its gaze from the truly good and begot evil.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike the angelic fall, Gregory can account for the entrance of evil into the human realm. It was officially inaugurated by the will, but now there are explainable reasons why the will moved as it did.<sup>64</sup> As noted above, the lure of temptation was a sensual one.<sup>65</sup> This proved the most dangerous since "the senses have a close connection with what is gross and earthly." Once the sensual element of humanity was inflamed, the desire that was normally inclined toward the good was reversed, turning into a desire for

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<sup>59</sup> Gregory writes, "Man of his own accord and of his own free will, gave up his lot unmixed with evil, and took for himself a life which is a mixture of opposites." *On the Soul*, 233; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 186; Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 48; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74.

<sup>60</sup> Cat. Or. 21; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 186; and Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 48.

<sup>61</sup> On Virginité, 12.

<sup>62</sup> On Man, 12.9-10; cf. Behr, "Rational Animal," 231-32.

<sup>63</sup> Cat. Or. 5; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 186; Behr, "Rational Animal," 232; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74.

<sup>64</sup> This exploration is necessary for the same reasons motivating the investigation into the fall of Lucifer. In Paradise humanity had a perfect existence as it held direct communion with God. Cat. Or. 6. Gregory asserts created will had to choose either for or against good since its nature was chiefly characterized by movement. Cat. Or. 21. Now the questions become, why did the being who had such close communion with God turn away? and what motivated it to do so?

<sup>65</sup> Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74.

“sensual gratification.”<sup>66</sup> This contributed to “an erroneous judgment as to what ... [was] ... morally good” thereby “substantiating a contrary condition” within humanity.<sup>67</sup>

Humanity could not have been tempted in this way without the irrational nature. The soul would have naturally continued in the path of goodness since like is attracted to like. This is illustrated when Gregory proclaims humanity would not have been deceived by overt evil. The soul, though a created entity prone to movement, would have continued to gaze upon the goodness of God.<sup>68</sup>

Gregory cannot escape the tension his philosophical paradigm produces. The temptation succeeded only because of the material compound of the human being.<sup>69</sup> He implicitly asserts matter is the cause of evil, while explicitly attempting to refute this. The fulcrum of this friction is his thoroughly Greek understanding of sin. Since sin is ignorance, the only viable reason ignorance becomes a factor stems from the passions inherent in matter. Gregory elevates the soul to the point that it does not have the latent capacity to commit evil.<sup>70</sup> He maintains it does because it has free will and is a created being prone to movement, but due to its kinship to God, there is nothing within it to cloud its judgment. The soul’s capacity of will would infinitely choose the good. The will may be the final cause of evil, but within Gregory’s system, matter is logically the only true source.

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<sup>66</sup> Cat. Or. 8; and On Man, 12.12.

<sup>67</sup> Cat. Or. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Otis, “Coherent System,” 113.

<sup>70</sup> Supporting this Otis states, “Strictly spiritual sin is impossible on Gregory of Nyssa’s premises.” Ibid.

## The Two Cappadocians Compared

Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa engage the paradise and fall account with a similar methodology: allegorical. This does not minimize the seriousness of the Genesis story because it still intimates concrete realities. Their method is equivalent, and it ultimately produces the same conclusion, but it allows for variation in respect to specific details.

Regarding the abode of Paradise, each perceives it to be a spiritualized existence where humanity enjoyed direct contact with God. For Gregory of Nazianzus, it is a philosophical school for the budding intellect of humanity, while Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, understands it to be the perfected state of human existence. The Saint from Nazianzus asserts the immaturity and infancy of humanity, in contrast to the fully developed humans of the Father of Nyssa. On the surface, this appears to be a drastic difference, but in light of the outcome, only similarity remains. The distinction within Gregory of Nazianzus stems from an attempt to explain the ignorance of Adam, but as we have seen both eventually find the leading antagonist to be matter.

The Tree of Knowledge receives two divergent interpretations springing from their converse conceptions of Paradise. Gregory of Nazianzus believes it to be humanity's proper "food" once the appropriate level of maturity is attained, which indicates the ontological goodness of the tree, and Gregory of Nyssa theorizes the tree's produce is actually sour since it is ontologically compounded. Each perspective nuances the violation: humanity, in Gregory of Nazianzus' view, tries to circumvent the ordained growth process, while Gregory of Nyssa contends humanity has ingested an ontological pollutant. Nonetheless, both are in agreement when addressing the law of God; God did

not establish the law for the purpose of depriving humanity of goodness, but as an attempt to protect its best interest.

Following the biblical account, both explicate the contribution of Lucifer. He dramatically influenced the pristine environment being motivated by his hatred for humanity. Gregory of Nazianzus assigns an active role to Lucifer, while Gregory of Nyssa, a more passive one. From the first standpoint, Lucifer is leading the infantile humans into error, and in the second, he is the guileful counselor who advises humanity. One exploits, while the other entices, but the same weakness underlies both. The body contributed to humanity's infantile state, and it provided the latent desire that could be inflamed. Lucifer's involvement in the fall of humanity is reviled, yet neither Cappadocian holds him responsible. He was a factor, but the final decision belonged to the will of humanity. Ultimately, the will was completely responsible because it possessed the decisive faculty.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON HUMAN CAPACITY

The good has been forsaken and humanity now hides in shame. Being instigated by the Apostate One, the minds of the incipient pair suffered occlusion leading them to a catastrophic error couched in delusion. Employing its divinely endowed faculty, humanity unknowingly beckoned evil to saturate its realm. The Cappadocians and their contemporaries witnessed this intrusion as we do today. With the preliminary pieces of human ontology and the non-being of evil in hand, the wasteland of the human condition awaits investigation.

The following subject matter will probe the repercussions of evil on human nature. It shall be proposed that Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa suppose the image of God has been lost and that death has overtaken human immortality. The passions that were governed by the will now roam unrestrained. Although the landscape is bleak, their hope has not been destroyed. The Gregories maintain the freedom of the will and the potential to reinstate the divine gift of grace through a lifestyle of virtue. The path of *theosis* has been detoured, but the Author of Life has not forsaken humanity.

#### **Gregory of Nazianzus on Sin and Human Ability**

Once humanity's will chose against the goodness of God, the consequences became immediately manifest. Gregory describes the tragedy thus,

He yielded to the baleful fruit; and for his sin he was banished, at once from the Tree of Life, and from Paradise, and from God; and put on the coats of skins ... that is, perhaps, the coarser flesh, both mortal and contradictory.<sup>1</sup>

Humanity suffered the loss of immortality and the intimate dwelling with God and gained “coarser flesh” by transgressing the commandment. This new flesh that Gregory calls “coats of skin” possessed the capacity of death and hindered clear contemplation of God. These garments are the physical bodies humanity now knows, but this does not imply humanity lacked a body prior to the fall.<sup>2</sup> Humanity’s original body grew denser from its infection of wickedness.<sup>3</sup> The once beneficial struggle between the body and soul has now intensified to open warfare.<sup>4</sup> This bleak confrontation stems from the detonation of the body’s latent passions. It became “a den of all sorts of passions, which cruelly devour and consume the inner man.”<sup>5</sup> Streams of anger, pride, “unchastened pleasure,” “unreasonable grief,” “meretricious laughter,” wandering eyes, and “insatiable ears” flooded the shores of the soul.<sup>6</sup> This turbulence has upset the proper operation of the human being resulting in the overthrow of the ruling soul and the inauguration of the body’s reign.<sup>7</sup>

The new state of affairs finds the soul held captive by “fettters.”<sup>8</sup> The image of God that Gregory equates with the soul has become marred and lost by the usurping

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<sup>1</sup> Or. 38.12.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 286. Ruether and Williams indicate Gregory’s understanding of “coats of skin” reflect the thought of Origen. *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135; and *Ideas of the Fall*, 286.

<sup>3</sup> Or. 16.15; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 30-31; Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99; and Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Or. 2.91; Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 68.

<sup>5</sup> Or. 39.7.

<sup>6</sup> Or. 27.7.

<sup>7</sup> Or. 39.7; 2.18; and 30.20; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> Or. 7.21; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 68; and Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 30.

passions.<sup>9</sup> Conceived metaphorically, the soul is a mirror that can reflect the image of God more or less clearly. The longer passions hold sway, the greater the mirror is defaced. Even when Gregory speaks of the image being lost, he still maintains hope that it can be renewed and preserved. This finds expression in an oration explaining his hesitancy to accept a clerical appointment. Gregory cites his tentativeness ensued from a desire for the philosophical monastic life through which he could “preserve in ... [himself] ... the divine impressions pure and unmixed.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, when offering a eulogy for his sister Gorgonia, he described her as nurturing the divine image by means of “reason and virtue and pure desire.”<sup>11</sup> When using the term “lost,” it seems Gregory does not envision such concepts as “destroyed” or “removed,” but instead, perceives the image to misplaced, mishandled, yet still extant and capable of reform.

In Paradise humanity was naked and able to contemplate the divine light clearly, but now the “great impediment” of the body “presseth down the upward flight of the soul,” thus encumbering humanity’s efforts to perceive God.<sup>12</sup> This is a crippling catastrophe, as it drastically impedes the process of *theosis*. As the body has grown dense, the power of the will and mind has correspondingly atrophied leaving it “weaker than before” and more vulnerable to demonic deception.<sup>13</sup> The disruption of clear comprehension translates into moral illness since Gregory does not create a division between knowledge and action.<sup>14</sup> When the mind cannot perceive goodness unambiguously, it becomes prone to liability and misapprehension. In this state, Gregory

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<sup>9</sup> Or. 7.23; and 38.13.

<sup>10</sup> Or. 2.7.

<sup>11</sup> Or. 8.6.

<sup>12</sup> Or. 16.15; cf. Ellverson, *Dual Nature of Man*, 29-30; and Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Or. 39.7; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 288, 291.

<sup>14</sup> Recall that evil is never intentional, but is the result of a poorly informed will.

asserts, some grow weary of the quest for God. He still believes "every rational nature longs for God," but the exertion required to shed the corporeal weakness causes dismay that leads these fatigued souls to abandon the quest for the incorporeal and make gods out of visible things.<sup>15</sup> The pinnacle of such depravity is found in those who "deified their passions" and "honoured them among their gods."<sup>16</sup> Such development represents the deprivation of goodness: when the eyes turn away from the light, the vacuum of darkness awakens.

Partaking of the Tree of Knowledge in an untimely fashion led to the expulsion of humanity from Paradise and the Tree of Life. This latter fruit provided the nourishment of immortality, but humanity was severed from its benefits as a result of the transgression. Giving voice to lamentation through poetry, Gregory of Nazianzus writes, "Mourning the fatal Tree, and the fruit bringing ruin to mortals, Taste whereof setteth man e'en for the gates of the grave."<sup>17</sup> The body has become subject to death and "dissolution," and the soul, which is by nature immortal, also experiences death.<sup>18</sup> Our bodies are "the tombs we bear about with us."<sup>19</sup> What once experienced peace now endures perpetual "flux" and change.<sup>20</sup> Death was the punishment legislated by God for humanity's crime, yet it was not simply punishment, but also mercy.<sup>21</sup> Death initiates healing since it creates a point of termination for evil. By means of death, evil remains

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<sup>15</sup> Or. 28.13.

<sup>16</sup> Or. 28.15; and 39.7; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> *carmina*, ii. (*poemata historica*), sect. i. 45, lines 95-107, quoted in and translated by Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 287-88.

<sup>18</sup> Or. 18.42; and 30.21; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 66. It suffers death, yet not in the same manner as the body. The body disintegrates and returns to the earth, while the soul moves upward; hence, the soul experiences, as a participant, something that is contradictory to its nature. See Or. 7.21.

<sup>19</sup> Or. 7.22.

<sup>20</sup> Or. 18.42.

<sup>21</sup> Or. 38.12; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 66-67; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99. If God punishes with merciful intent, it may be inferred that Gregory understands God to be less concerned with retribution and more with healing.



mortal, thus “preventing sin from perpetuating itself.”<sup>22</sup> In light of the new human condition, Gregory praises death because it releases humanity from “the vicissitudes, the agitation, the disgust, and all the vile tribute we must pay to this life.”<sup>23</sup> That which appears detrimental to life, in actuality, ultimately preserves it.

When Gregory conceives of Adam in Paradise, he recognizes the presence of all humanity. In Adam’s violation of the law all participated, and the inclusive disposition of death only supports this.<sup>24</sup> However, he does not perceive the guilt of Adam as the inheritance of future generations.<sup>25</sup> This is exemplified in his understanding of infant baptism.<sup>26</sup> In a poem concerning baptism Gregory writes, “Here is the Seal of God our defender, *for innocent infants Only a Seal*, but for grown men a Seal *and a Remedy potent*.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in Or. 40.28 while establishing guidelines for infant baptism, he proposes that infants are innocent and incapable of knowing if they have lost the image of God. He advises that baptism be delayed until “they begin to be responsible for their lives, when reason is matured,” which is based on his philosophical and theological

<sup>22</sup> Or. 38.12; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 67; and Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 141. Winslow, relying on the work of M. Aubineau, recognizes that Gregory’s thought is identical to Irenaeus’, *Against Heresies*, 3.23.6 where, speaking of the God-Adam relationship, he writes, “Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise . . . because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.”

<sup>23</sup> Or. 18.42.

<sup>24</sup> Or. 16.12; 33.9; 38.12; and 45.12; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 289; Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 69; and Rondet, *Original Sin*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 289-291; Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, 351; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 69. Oddly, Winslow claims Gregory refrains from positing the reception of guilt out of pastoral concern. Ibid. Its absence seems to be the logical outcome of Gregory’s conception of virtue and sin. Virtue must be knowingly chosen, and it would be fair to assume infants are incapable of extensive rational capacity.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 290; Altaner, *Patrology*, 351; and Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> *carmina*, i. (*poemata theologica*), sect. i. 9 (*de testamentis et adventu Christi*), lines 87-92, quoted in and translated by Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 290. The italics appear to be his emphasis.

construction that supposes knowledge leads to virtue and sin results from ignorance.<sup>28</sup>

Infants are only responsible for their own sin, and they do not inherit Adam's guilt;

however, infants do receive the "physiological heredity" that resulted from the fall.<sup>29</sup>

Their bodies reflect the dense nature of the coats of skin and the "weakness of the will" that accompanies it.<sup>30</sup> Regarding the specific details of how all of humanity was in Adam and how the effects of sin are transmitted to posterity, Gregory does not venture an in-depth explanation.<sup>31</sup>

Thus far it has been shown that the shockwave of Adam's violation has had far-reaching effects. Humanity now has a body imbued with intense passions that wage war against the authority of the soul. As these passions subdue the soul, the reflection of the divine image becomes marred, and it dimly perceives the light of God. The lack of perception precipitates vice, as the mind lacks the capacity to apprehend goodness clearly. In order to check evil, God ordained death for humanity, which at first appears to be a curse, but in reality, is a blessing since it terminates the passions. Posterity not only suffers from death, but also the inherited coats of skin. With these bleak consequence in view, it is now appropriate to address humanity's current standing in relation to its *telos* of *theosis*.

The introduction of evil into the human person has saturated its being and effected its capacity to reason, thus giving rise to "error and delusion."<sup>32</sup> But, as Ruether has observed, the journey toward *theosis* has not been terminated; it has only become more

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<sup>28</sup> Or. 40.28.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 291; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Rondet, *Original Sin*, 99; and Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 291.

treacherous.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the quandary still needing clarification is, what capacity do human beings, within themselves, still possess to bring this process to fruition? Again, Ruether, having a secure grasp of the situation, indicates this introduces a false dichotomy within Gregory's thought. The question assumes an either/or proposition pitting God's grace against humanity's efforts while Gregory of Nazianzus promotes a dynamic relationship.<sup>34</sup> In apparent contradiction, Gregory holds humanity cannot return to the state of Paradise by its own impetus; however, it is not so bankrupt that the personal responsibility for choice is removed.<sup>35</sup> This reveals that he still supports the interconnectedness of will and virtue: goodness inherent in nature is excellent, but is not worthy of merit and praise, while in contrast, that which is intentionally chosen and fostered when facing diversity is worthy.<sup>36</sup> Even after the fall of humanity, God values the freedom of the will by choosing not to force it toward goodness.

For the Western mind these claims thrust the nature of grace to the forefront. Yet, grace is not an absent element of Gregory's thought; ironically, it is central to his viewpoint. He believes it is a fallacy to claim that some, in nature, are completely depraved, completely saved, or motivated by a stronger than usual inclination toward goodness or evil. It is inappropriate to proclaim the process of *theosis* is undertaken independently, for "even to wish well needs help from God ... [and] ... even to choose what is right is divine and a gift of the mercy of God."<sup>37</sup> The grace of God is embedded in humanity from the beginning because of the image of God.<sup>38</sup> Operating within the image

<sup>33</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 136; see Or. 2.91.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 137; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 140; see Or. 37.13, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Or. 37.16; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Or. 37.13; cf. Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 141. Gregory does acknowledge that some have different levels of aptitude, but he claims this alone does not suffice for the journey of perfection. Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 137; cf. Winslow, *Dynamics of Salvation*, 159.

is humanity's proper state of existence, and a marred image is alien to its nature.<sup>39</sup>

Gregory assumes the image is never utterly annihilated because every extant human is animated. Hence, the journey of *theosis* is enabled by God, but also seized by oneself.<sup>40</sup>

The task of humanity after the fall becomes recovering and preserving the image. Ruether describes this course as follows, "Philosophy and grace ... are not mutually exclusive ...

Man receives in the proportion that he strives, and strives through the power of God that he receives."<sup>41</sup> Cleansing and healing the image is humanity's choice, and the clearer the

Archetypal reflection, the greater the infusion of divine strength.<sup>42</sup> Illustrating the

importance of human works and divine grace, Gregory states, "It is necessary both that we should be our own masters and also that our salvation should be of God."<sup>43</sup>

In essence, the paradise event is reduplicated in perennial human experience.

Humanity still maintains the gift of free will and is confronted with the need to choose.<sup>44</sup>

The drastic difference derives from the coats of skin and the ensuing inverted order of body/soul hierarchy. The will maintains the ability to choose freely, either for or against good, but now the mind must exert more effort as it battles the passions of the body.

Gregory's development of the soul's movement toward *theosis* cannot be discussed in detail due to the scope of this thesis, but the process of purification is similar to the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Or. 37.15.

<sup>41</sup> Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 138.

<sup>42</sup> Or. 40.12; cf. Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 142.

<sup>43</sup> Or. 37.13. A human being could hypothetically traverse the path of *theosis* a considerable distance during life, but it is important to note that the original state of humanity would never be re-instated because of death. Humanity by itself cannot conquer this consequence of the fall.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 142.

training principle of Paradise: it begins with the “elementary” teachings and gradually advances as the soul matures.<sup>45</sup>

### Gregory of Nyssa on Human Capacity after Sin

After suffering delusion in Paradise, Adam and Eve were ejected from the bountiful garden of communion with God. The choice to partake of the mixed fruit of knowledge brought severe consequences for human nature. It received a grave blow by having the coats of skin added to its original state of immortality. Gregory’s description of these garments has a dual nuance in his writing. In the works *On Virginity*, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, and implicitly within *On the Making of Man*<sup>46</sup> he perceives the coats of skin to be the production of humanity, while in the *Catechetical Oration* he affirms the Genesis account that indicates they were given by God.<sup>47</sup> In the first set Gregory intimately connects the garments with irrational nature and its passions, while in the latter he equates them with death. However, his overall understanding bears more resemblance than dissimilarity.

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<sup>45</sup> Or. 39.10. Purification follows a three-fold pattern. In order to re-establish the appropriate body/soul relationship and purge the influence of passion, one must begin with fear. Fear is manifested in the keeping of the commandments. Upholding the commandments allows for the elimination of vice that “covers the soul and suffers it not to see the Divine Ray.” As passions lose their sway over the mind, clarity and illumination ensue. Gregory ecstatically describes this stating, “Illumination is the satisfying of desire to those who long for the greatest things, or the Greatest Thing, or That Which surpasses all greatness.” Or. 39.8; cf. Norris, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 142. Useful sources for exploring the process of salvation and the role of Christ within Gregory’s thought are Winslow’s *Dynamics of Salvation* and Norris’ *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*.

<sup>46</sup> In his article exploring the anthropology of *On Man*, Behr informatively declares the term “coats of skin” is not found in the text. “Rational Animal,” 223. He encourages caution when transporting concepts from one piece to another thereby allowing a text to speak independently, and this admonition has been noted.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory also elucidates this concept in *On the Dead*, which, unfortunately, has not been translated into English.

Turning to the first expression, Gregory finds the coats of skin are garments that humanity has donned of its own accord.<sup>48</sup> By violating the command of God, humanity embraced sensual pleasures over incorporeal goodness. Experiencing shame and fear, humanity metaphorically hid itself from God.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the coats of skin encompass everything earthly, irrational, passable, and opposite of the divine nature.<sup>50</sup> They are the attractions of “taste and sight” and “the aspects of the animal nature with which we clothe ourselves when we become accustomed to sin.”<sup>51</sup> These vulgar garments represent current transitory existence and anything that was not present in original created human nature; specific examples include “sexual intercourse, conception ... the process of growing up ... growing old, disease, and death.”<sup>52</sup> Gregory, employing simile, likens evil to a stream that has turned into a flood that now engulfs humanity.<sup>53</sup> When it chose against God, humanity unleashed the cause and effect principle of evil.

In order to understand the consequences of evil, Gregory contends it is necessary to return the point of divergence from blessedness. In general, humanity’s fall centered on pleasure, but when closely scrutinized, it revolved around marriage.<sup>54</sup> Recapitulating the creation of humanity will shed light on this assertion. Through foreknowledge God perceived humanity’s sin and thus added sexual distinction to the archetypal human being in order that the plentitude of humanity would come into existence.<sup>55</sup> Sexual distinction

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<sup>48</sup> On Virginity, 12; and On the Soul, 266.

<sup>49</sup> On Virginity, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 11; McClear, “Fall of Man,” 183-84; Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 89; Harrison, “Male and Female,” 467; and Lawrence R. Hennessey, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrine of the Resurrected Body,” 32.

<sup>51</sup> On Virginity, 13; and On the Soul, 266; cf. Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> On the Soul, 266; cf. Harrison, “Male and Female,” 467; and Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> On Man, 18.1; cf. McClear, “Fall of Man,” 190.

<sup>54</sup> On Virginity, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ladner, “Philosophical Anthropology,” 84; Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 78; and Harrison, “Male and Female,” 468. In God’s cosmic scheme “gender plays a temporary and instrumental role” and is not a

was a vital attribute of irrational nature because it served self-preservation, but in respect to humanity, it was a departure from the image of God.<sup>56</sup> Sexual function, however, was not operative or necessary in paradisaical existence due to humanity's angelic resemblance.<sup>57</sup> The plentitude would have been fulfilled through enigmatic and unimpassioned angelic propagation.<sup>58</sup> Stemming from its affinity with the lower animal nature, sexual distinction inherited the liability of latent passion.<sup>59</sup> Once humanity released this energy by turning away from God, it lost the capacity for angelic reproduction and commenced with animalistic propagation within the confines of marriage.<sup>60</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa appears to view marriage and sexual intercourse in two ways. First, he denigrates the activity itself due to its ontological physicality, and, second, the apparition of immortality that reproduction provides.<sup>61</sup> This latter position is the core of Gregory's disparagement of marriage, though it does not lessen his actual revulsion

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"fundamental cosmic, ontological, or spiritual reality built into the structure of the universe," observes Harrison. *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> On Man, 16.14; and 17.4; cf. Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 84; and Harrison, "Male and Female," 467.

<sup>57</sup> Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 89-90; and McClear, "Fall of Man," 183.

<sup>58</sup> On Man, 17.3; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271; Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 85, 91; McClear, "Fall of Man," 184; and Tennant, *Doctrines of the Fall*, 320.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.1-2; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 271-72.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.2; cf. Tennant, *Doctrines of the Fall*, 320. Behr insists that copulation was not the fruit of knowledge, but "the irrational, bestial use of this and other faculties." He argues that Gregory believed original humanity could have multiplied through its created sexual orientation, in contrast to the asexual angelic propagation, if it had refrained from passion. "Rational Animal," 224. I disagree based on the evidence provided in On Man, 17.2 where Gregory explicitly claims the employment of sexual orientation is the result of sin, stating, "If there had not come upon us as the result of sin a change for the worse, and removal from equality with the angels, neither should we have needed marriage that we might multiply; but whatever the mode of increase in the angelic nature is ... it would have operated also in the case of men." Behr interprets this passage as an attack against procreation that seeks false immortality, yet his evidence is not convincing. "Rational Animal," 240-241. From my reading of the section, I gather Gregory is concerned with the "fullness of humanity" and not rational or irrational intercourse.

<sup>61</sup> On the Soul, 266; On Virginité, 12; and On Man, 18.2; cf. Behr, "Rational Animal," 240. Behr's recognition of this concept stems from his exploration of On Man, 17. However, it is not found in that section, yet it is present in the document.

toward the former.<sup>62</sup> Childbearing is the human attempt to regain immortality when employed in a sensual mindset. Sensuality, in this sense, is an inappropriate concern for material existence.<sup>63</sup> It reflects a mind that has been saturated by passions and led to conclude that material existence is true goodness.<sup>64</sup> It is mistaken desire that is actually seeking incorporeal goodness.

This situation represents the effects of an inverted body/soul relationship. Humanity's soul was endowed with the capacity to control the passions, yet humanity chose not to exercise it.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the soul became subservient to the rule of bodily passions.<sup>66</sup> Now that the levee is breached, it is onerous to reinforce, for Gregory asserts the passions, which are earthly and weightier than the spiritual soul, drag the soul down.<sup>67</sup> This again illustrates the causal principle inherent in evil; once motion has begun, it gains momentum making it more difficult to harness.<sup>68</sup>

The extent of evil found in the world is not due to the passions alone.<sup>69</sup> Once the mind became deluded, it devised worse horrors than irrational nature could have achieved

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<sup>62</sup> Harrison notes Gregory does not differentiate between male and female sexuality; he views it as holistically impure. "Male and Female," 466. Hart adds another aspect to the quest for immortality. The marriage relationship can provide false *relational* security. He writes, "The permanence, security, and immortality one finds in such a fashion exists only in the mistaken judgment of what human relationships are and what they can be legitimately expected to bring." "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," 456. Marriage, therefore, is a mistaken attempt to restore lost communion with God.

<sup>63</sup> See *On Virginity*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Hart, "Theology of Marriage," 461; see *On Man*, 18.3. Behr and I concur on an issue directly related to this, i.e., human beings were not bestial in the beginning even though they contained a compound nature. Only after the will turned toward material interests did humanity then become irrational. "Rational Animal," 239-40.

<sup>65</sup> *On Man*, 18.5; *On Virginity*, 13; and *Cat. Or.* 5; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 272; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 74-75.

<sup>66</sup> *On Man*, 18.3; and 12.3, 9-11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.6; cf. Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 83.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.4; and *Cat. Or.* 6. Gregory finds this principle operating in Lucifer who became "like a rock, torn asunder from a mountain ridge, which is driven down headlong by its own weight." *Cat. Or.* 6.

<sup>69</sup> Behr asserts Gregory never disparaged the irrational nature as being evil and subject to passion. Irrational nature only becomes passionate and evil once it is driven by the mind. "Rational Animal," 238. Again, I disagree with his reading of Gregory. In *On Man*, 18.1 Gregory specifically claims the passions found in



independently.<sup>70</sup> Passions are raw material for the will. The will can sculpt them into goodness (Gregory cites love as an example, if turned toward goodness, it motivates an unquenchable desire for God), or it can create atrocities; either way, the will is free to choose.<sup>71</sup>

When humanity chose the path of pleasure, it received a flood of evil. The coats of skin humanity wrapped itself with radically altered the existential environment. In light of this, Gregory's antagonists inquire, how is humanity in the image of God if God is one and immutable? In response, Gregory proffers the coats of skin hypothesis, which asserts sexual distinction is the source of contemporary suffering. He stresses that sexuality does not reflect the divine image; *however*, it is a product of divine foreknowledge that serves a divine purpose. *And* Gregory utilizes the categories of sexuality and marriage to symbolize humanity's misguided desire for ultimate goodness.<sup>72</sup>

Gregory's first conception of the coats of skin addresses the rise of suffering, while his second perspective explores the termination of suffering. In this approach, coats of skin are defined as death. After humanity disregarded the ordained law, God gave them the coats of skin. These garments represent physicality and corporeality, which is the dense material that death seizes. Gregory understands this addition to be a

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human nature derive from the irrational nature that was added to the divine image. Weight is further added to this argument when one refers to Gregory's belief that matter is the opposite of God's nature—if God's nature is impassible, then irrational nature (as the term proclaims) is subject to passion.

<sup>70</sup> On Man, 18.3–4.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 18.5; cf. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 272; Hennessey, "Resurrected Body," 31; Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 49; and Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Hart, "Theology of Marriage," 461.

punishment, but it is necessary since the end goal is healing.<sup>73</sup> The delineated concepts of passion, the causal nature of evil, and the effects of an inverted body/soul relationship remain the same, but when Gregory equates these tunics with death, his intuitive power has shifted toward purification. As a result of sin humanity now suffers a two-fold death, one attacking the body, the other the soul.<sup>74</sup> The body no longer retains immortality once the coats of skin are added; thus, it is once again subjected to dissolution and disorder.<sup>75</sup> Since the body suffers the direct effects of unruly passion, death is the only medicine capable of curing it.<sup>76</sup>

The body does not suffer in isolation however. The human is a compound being that functions as a unit; therefore, the soul is culpable as well. Although, the soul, being of a disparate nature, is not internally effected by evil as the body is.<sup>77</sup> Evil corrupts the soul like a virus by becoming parasitically attached to it, yet it does not destroy the cellular composition of the soul. Once humanity contracted the disease of evil through choice, the divine image became distorted and lost. A true image bears the exact reflection of its archetype, and once humanity awakened the sensual passions, it lost the image of God, since God is impassible.<sup>78</sup> In the garden humanity participated in pure communion with God. Once ejected, the spiritual goodness that nourished the soul was interrupted leading to its metaphorical death.<sup>79</sup> The image of God is in a perilous position,

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<sup>73</sup> Cat. Or. 8; cf. Ladner, "Philosophical Anthropology," 88; Tennant, *Doctrines of the Fall*, 320; Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 79; Danielou, *From Glory to Glory*, 12; and Hennessey, "Resurrected Body," 30-31. Danielou and Hennessey note Gregory's reliance upon Origen for the medicinal perspective of death.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 183, 187.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; and 7.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> On Man, 12.10; and On Virginity, 12; cf. Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 126; and Meredith, "Concept of Mind," 39.

<sup>79</sup> Cat. Or. 8; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 183; and Cherniss, "Platonism," 54. One could say it suffers something worse than death—the loss of an intimate loved one.

but it is not destroyed.<sup>80</sup> Gregory likens the situation to rust on iron and dirt on the body.<sup>81</sup> Rust and dirt only covers that which is underneath. Using another striking image, Gregory states, “The misery that encompasses us often causes the Divine gift to be forgotten, and spreads the passions of the flesh, like some ugly mask, over the beauty of the image.”<sup>82</sup> The passions that now pervade existence conceal the inner beauty of humanity with a grotesque mask. The coats of skin cloaked the incorporeal communion between the human mind and God, thus initiating a pernicious moral atmosphere—being unable to contemplate true goodness, humanity becomes subject to delusion and moral error.<sup>83</sup>

Through Gregory of Nyssa’s dual understanding of the coats of skin a picture of evil’s effect on the compound human being becomes evident. By inverting the body/soul relationship, what once participated in immortality now suffers dissolution, and what once governed the passions now multiplies them. The image of God has been banished to the recesses of the human mind and forgotten. The servant has become the master, resulting in the chaotic management of the estate.

Unlike the body, the soul cannot be purified through death due to its uncompounded nature; hence, it requires another means. Its medication is the practice of virtue. Virtuous habits eliminate evil in the soul thereby reestablishing the image of

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<sup>80</sup> Beatitudes, 6; and On Virginity, 12; cf. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 56, 58; and Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, 126. For those who have difficulty accepting the claim that the divine image still remains, Gregory writes, “For if the man who is subject to passion ... makes it incredible that man was adorned ... with Divine beauty, surely the man of lofty virtue and pure from pollution will confirm you in the better conception of human nature.” On Man, 18.7.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 18.6.

<sup>83</sup> Humanity now suffers from the inverted order addressed above. See McClear, “Fall of Man,” 188.

God.<sup>84</sup> This coincides with another principle of evil held by Gregory. Good and evil are, in a sense, opposite sides of the same coin; when one turns away from evil, one has turned toward the good. The course of virtue includes rejecting “the deceptions of taste and sight ... no longer have[ing] as their guide the poisonous serpent, but only the commandment of God.”<sup>85</sup> Humanity must set aside concern for the corporeal and return to the contemplation of ultimate goodness. Gregory admits this is a painful process because the soul has become intimately attached to pleasure, having “grow up together with these attachments.”<sup>86</sup> However, he acknowledges the appropriateness of suffering in purification since it originated from participation in pleasure.<sup>87</sup>

Recognizing the prevalence of vice, Gregory understands the attainment of virtuous habits is a process of growth. The motivation to adopt a virtuous lifestyle is derived from a two-fold source. For one, Gregory points back to the image of God within humanity. Since like is attracted to like, every human being has an inner desire for divine communion.<sup>88</sup> Second, evil that is not purged in life will be removed in the afterlife.<sup>89</sup> For Gregory, purification is not optional, for God seeks the perfection of the universe.<sup>90</sup>

Humanity possesses the motivation and the power to undertake this journey. Because of the divine image, humanity has the capacity to conquer evil.<sup>91</sup> Passions may

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<sup>84</sup> Cat. Or. 8; and 6; cf. Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 198; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 102.

<sup>85</sup> On Virginité, 13; and On the Soul, 267-68; cf. Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 198-99.

<sup>86</sup> Beatitudes, 8; and Cat. Or. 8; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 56.

<sup>87</sup> Beatitudes, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6; cf. Meredith, “Concept of Mind,” 39.

<sup>89</sup> Cat. Or. 8; and Beatitudes, 6; cf. Cherniss, “Platonism,” 55; and McClear, “Fall of Man,” 206. It seems Gregory believes the purging in the afterlife is much more painful than earthly suffering. See Beatitudes, 6, 3.

<sup>90</sup> On the Soul, 267; cf. McClear, “Fall of Man,” 206; and David Balas, *Plenitudo Humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa*, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Beatitudes, 6; On Virginité, 12; and On the Soul, 270. Gregory’s conception that ignorance equals evil provides the foundation for his doctrine of purification. Humanity has forgotten about the image of God; once it is informed, it will remember and act accordingly.

have weakened this ability and caused humanity to forget, but the power still remains.<sup>92</sup> Solidifying this claim, Gregory writes, "If, therefore, you wash off by a good life the filth that has been stuck on your heart like plaster, the Divine Beauty will again shine forth in you."<sup>93</sup> The one who exterminates vice removes the coats of skin inhibiting divine communion and understanding.<sup>94</sup> As with Gregory of Nazianzus, the dichotomy between grace and human effort is lacking. Humanity is endowed with the divine gift; consequently, any good it attains is the product of divine grace.<sup>95</sup> If this gift were absent, humanity would not be able to move toward good or evil since it would lack the rational capacity and will necessary for choice.<sup>96</sup>

The necessity for reason and will to be present in order for virtue or vice to exist is quintessential for understanding the transmission of sinfulness. From Gregory's piece *On Infants' Early Deaths* an atypical standpoint regarding the entrance of sin into the human life is found. Discoursing on whether infants will receive blessedness or painful purification after death, Gregory asserts they will enter upon blessedness because they have "never caught the disease of evil at all."<sup>97</sup> Infants retain the natural state of purity of soul and clarity of vision even though humanity has been alienated from true participation with God. But, Gregory does not perceive this to be a prime state of being

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<sup>92</sup> Beatitudes, 6; and On Virginity, 12; cf. McClear, "Fall of Man," 198; and Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3:279. Reflecting on Gregory's stance, Williams writes, "Whatever the strength of our innate propension towards evil, it is not so strong that we cannot overcome it if we choose." *Ideas of the Fall*, 281.

<sup>93</sup> Beatitudes, 6. Jaeger keenly states, "Gregory's attempt at reconciling grace and nature ... would have to be classified as Semipelagianism. But such a classification would be anachronistic." He also indicates Gregory's "zeal for self-perfection" was indicative of the period's focus on monasticism. *Two Rediscovered Works*, 89-90.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.; and Cat. Or. 8.

<sup>95</sup> See On Virginity, 12; cf. Weiswurm, *Nature of Human Knowledge*, 198; McClear, "Fall of Man," 198; and Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works*, 86, 92, 106. Jaeger writes, "It is not man who cooperates with God but the grace of God that cooperates with the moral effort of man." Ibid., 92.

<sup>96</sup> Gregory's conception of virtue must also be remembered—there is little praise for that which is not chosen or earned.

<sup>97</sup> On Infants. However, the blessedness they enter will only be the introductory stage, or milk, of the infinite progression of goodness. Ibid.

since infants lack the rational capacity to engage the divine light they receive. It is better for humanity to mature and develop the capacity for reason because “the acquisition of the Kingdom comes to those who are deemed worthy of it.” In the life of an infant there is nothing to be rewarded or condemned since they lack the aptitude to reason and will. Infants may experience a state of innocence, yet it cannot be said that they possess virtue, “for virtue is achieved by its seekers not without a struggle.”<sup>98</sup>

Why is this excursus relevant? It is significant because it illustrates the individual human situation in respect to moral capacity and culpability after the fall. Resulting from Adam’s ignorance was the acute effect of death and the addition of the coats of skin. In the case of infants, death is clearly evident and the inherited moral weakness would eventually be expressed since, as Gregory notes, those who attain to an average age of life are likely to fall prey to passion.<sup>99</sup> However, he does not attribute moral guilt to newborns.<sup>100</sup> On a philosophical level he acknowledges that all owe a debt to God on account of the universality of human nature in Adam, but in actualized existence human beings are only judged upon their own contraction of “the plague of ignorance.”<sup>101</sup> Holistically, Adam typified the outcome of every human being. Adam was accountable for his guilt, but the concrete effects rippled forth. Every human being suffers the effects of Adam’s sin: the defaced image and exile from true participation in life; but each one bears the existential responsibility of becoming a creator of evil. By emphasizing the inherent gift of free will, every excuse is removed—human choice is absolute and so are its effects.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; cf. McClear, “Fall of Man,” 208. Gregory does not eliminate the possibility of one living a perfect life, yet he asserts to do so would be “at the price of much painful effort.” Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Ideas of the Fall*, 278.

<sup>101</sup> Lord’s Prayer, 75; and On Infants; cf. Zachhuber, “Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa,” 183-84.

### The Two Gregories in Conversation

As the investigation into the theologies of these two Fathers of Cappadocia has unfolded, it has become apparent that there is less disagreement and more resemblance. There are nuances that add flavor to their individual perspectives, but in respect to the agenda of this thesis, these distinctions do not equate to incongruity. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa spiritualize humanity's original state of existence in Paradise, which then translates into a concretized corporeality after the fall. The physical bodies humans now possess represent this radical dislocation. Each Father employs the term "coats of skin" to refer to the quantity and quality of this new existence.

The existential environment of humanity's chosen disposition is lamentable when compared to its former state in Paradise. The body molded from irrational finite matter momentarily experienced an alien state of immortality, but as the result of human desire, its nature was reinstated. Its passable impulses were released, and the inherent characteristics of chaos and dissolution returned. These passions quickly subjugated the soul, thus marring the gracious gift of the divine image. Reason and will were not lost, but were no longer their own masters. Being captivated by sensual desire, they multiplied the effects of evil. Humanity awoke from its fall and found itself in a dismal chasm of darkness; it once contemplated true goodness, but now that light has grown dim.

Possessing the same philosophical paradigm, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa perceive humanity's newfound state to be one of ignorance. Humanity had suffered a severe setback in the fall. It had been created for participation in God, which meant knowing and acting in accordance with goodness, but this interaction has been interrupted. In order to be good, humanity had to cultivate the good. By choosing evil,

humanity subverted God's intention. The Gregories may have differed on humanity's starting point, but the destination was, and remains, the same: humanity shall become deified.<sup>102</sup> With a similar understanding of *telos* the characteristics of dislocation become comparable. Humanity's ability to apprehend goodness had become gravely impaired resulting in the propagation of ignorance and moral failure. God's plan for humanity had not been terminated however. Humanity now bore the consequences of evil, but the power for reinstatement still remained.

To return to the full state of Paradise was beyond the reach of human endeavor, but both Saints believed the darkness produced by the coats of skin could be lessened. Through a lifestyle of virtue humanity could undergo the painful process of purification from evil. It could forcibly reassert the proper hierarchy of the body/soul relationship. A comprehensive examination of the purification process has not been attempted in this work, but the principles of operation have been established. Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa assumed humanity possessed the power to overcome vice solely because of God's grace that was made manifest in the endowment of the divine image. The exact image of the impassible God has been lost due to the invoked presence of passion, yet the faculty remains. By employing these, humanity can cleanse the image and restore its vision. Even though such a contention is couched in humanistic terms, the underlying foundation is grace, for without God, goodness would not be possible.

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<sup>102</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus asserts humanity was infantile and just entering upon the journey toward *theosis*, while Gregory of Nyssa posits a perfected humanity who, however, was in the midst of an infinite quest. From my limited reading, I have not been able to discern if Gregory of Nazianzus promotes universalism, yet he may since he conceives evil as finite. If he does not, it would stand to reason that he held to annihilationism. In contrast, Gregory of Nyssa is unquestionably a proponent. Cf. Cherniss, "Platonism," 58.



Humanity's natural state exactly resembles the divine, and through the process of painful purgation the state of sensual alienation can be minimized.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

From the start, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa assume God, who is ultimate goodness, created all existence. The pinnacle of God's creative goodness was manifest in the compound human being to whom God imparted the gift of the divine image, which entailed all the divine characteristics, especially the power of reason and autonomous will. Will was a vital component because of its interconnectedness to virtue. The prescribed *telos* for this creature was *theosis*, with the only eventual difference between it and God being one of origin.

The harmony of creation was disrupted when Lucifer turned away from the good and birthed evil. Lacking ontological existence, evil depends upon the ignorance of a rational being to make its non-presence felt. It operates according to causality, and the two Fathers cannot logically account for its existence due to the two differing traditions they seek to reconcile and the philosophical principle that like is attracted to like. By the prompting of Lucifer and the inflammation of the passions, evil was introduced into human existence. Misapprehending true goodness, humanity chose to violate the ordained decree, thus condemning itself.

When humanity disregarded the good, it lost the image of God, for to be an image necessitates accurate representation. Punishing the transgression, God issued the remedial sentence of death, and humanity was cloaked with the coats of skin that included an inverted body/soul hierarchy and the darkening of divine perception, which amplify

moral failure. The guilt stemming from this transgression remained with the original offenders, yet posterity inherited biological death and the coats of skin. However, through the gift of grace, in combination with the human effort of purification, the image of God can be restored.

### **Contemporary Analysis of Some Strengths and Weaknesses**

Now that the foundational concepts have been refreshed the concluding analysis may commence. This analysis will explore some strengths and weaknesses of the Cappadocian system through the lens of contemporary usefulness. The areas of weakness identified include the dualistic worldview and the belief that sin is caused by ignorance. As for strengths, they are couched in the Gregories' development of the image of God in humanity. The specific concepts of the pursuit of truth, the power of free will, and habit formation will be discussed. With this being said, let us turn to the last leg of the journey.

The strict dualistic paradigm of matter versus spirit promoted by Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa has lost support in much of contemporary society that the author has witnessed.<sup>1</sup> They perceived the soul vivified the body, which was of secondary importance, but modern science declares that the body enables consciousness. This reversal has reduced the applicability of ontological dualistic expression. The body that was once a baleful container is now the vital source for continued existence. But, this

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<sup>1</sup> The contemporary thought I have encountered retains an essence of dualism when it creates a hierarchy of value that places the spirit over the flesh, but this construction is rather spiritualized in comparison to the Gregories' conceptualization. The flesh metaphorically resembles the seat of passions, yet not in the fashion of these two Fathers. This dualism expresses itself in moralistic tones, with passions being conscious thoughts that improperly inflame the natural physiological impulses. For example, copulation is a natural occurrence established by God, but lust begins in the mind and is then manifest through the body. It does not arise from the body itself. The belief that matter is genuinely ontologically inferior has diminished. Some may claim matter inhibits the spiritual quest, but it is not the bane of the soul that the Cappadocians conceived it to be.

may not be the loss that it appears to be. The two Fathers had a tremendous difficulty upholding the resurrection of the body, but once the dualism is removed, the tension diminishes. When the body is viewed as integral to human existence, i.e., a major factor of personality development and the means by which the external world is encountered, instead of being detrimental to existence, it becomes plausible that God would resurrect the body since it and the soul are not divisible. If the body intimately participates in the formation of individual personhood, the body becomes necessary (if one preserves the belief that individuality remains after the resurrection). Within a dualistic framework, the true self is at war with the anti-self, and this creates an internal psychological division that can be represented as, "I despise my flesh, and my true essence is spirit, but alas, I am flesh!" A unified understanding minimizes this subsequent weakness of dualism because it discards the ontological antagonism, thus eliminating hostility toward one's physicality.

The dualism presented by the two Fathers also gives rise to a lack of concern for the environment. Once matter is perceived to be ontologically opposed to spirit, it is immediately devalued. If matter is antithetical to God, one has to wonder why God would care for it at all? The Cappadocians rejected the Greek proposition that matter was eternal for the biblical tradition that proclaimed God created it. However, the ontological animosity remained, which created a contradictory paradigm. These two Fathers assert the goodness of matter, but when weighed against the statements deriding it, these claims ring hollow. Consequently, matter becomes a necessary evil. Dualism, in this respect, directly challenges the Genesis contention that God created matter and deemed it to be good. When matter is devalued, it initiates a perilous situation for modern society. What

is the loss if the earth becomes polluted since it is ontologically polluted anyway? If matter is the seedbed of evil, why should humanity seek to protect it? A dualistic construction that denigrates matter cannot, with consistency, answer questions like these.

As this thesis illustrates, the Gregories run aground when they attempt to read certain aspects of the biblical tradition through Greek presuppositions. Citing ignorance as the prime cause of evil left them without a coherent explanation for its inception.<sup>2</sup> This tension creates a fundamental shift in respect to sin. When sin is attributed to ignorance, the moral agent is responsible for the failure in terms of perception, which hints at naiveté. On the other hand, when sin is conceived as willful disobedience, the failure does not lie in capacity, but in motive. Within one framework, the acting agent is misguided, and in the other, the agent operates intentionally. This cannot but effect responsibility; both agents would be responsible, but the level of responsibility differs, for how can knowing intention be equivalent to ignorance?

In converse terms, obedience and knowledge seem to be opposites in the realm of decisive moral action. One whose correct moral action results from obedience functions within a structure of submission. This structure is based on the assumption that the one submitted to is greater. The greater purposely informs the lesser of the proper course of action, and the lesser follows. This submission does not discount understanding, for the one who acts obediently may well comprehend the goodness of the decree, yet the decree is not followed because it is understood to be good, but on account of the allegiance to the one who issued it, which is an expression of a hierarchical relationship. Knowledge,

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<sup>2</sup> The following statements are not intended to criticize the epistemological theory that wrongdoing results from ignorance. They revolve around the application of the aforesaid theory to a tradition built upon a different foundation. Since sin is a central issue, the introduction of a foreign supposition disrupts the inner consistency of the tradition.

contrarily, assumes a state of independence. A teacher may inform the moral agent about the path of goodness, but the agent cannot choose to follow on this recommendation alone. Goodness must be chosen because one comprehends for oneself what is truly good. When applied to the biblical tradition, the shortcomings of such a perspective become evident, for if a number of angels and original humanity could not understand true goodness, how can posterity that suffers the effects of evil?

Not only does such a perspective influence morality, but also directly effects atonement. If evil is overcome by knowledge, then increasing the capacity of comprehension could eliminate error. Christ, then, becomes the Enlightened One who teaches in word and deed (since action and knowledge are intimately linked) thereby exposing to humanity its inherent divine image. Once humanity recognizes this truth, it will awaken and act accordingly. This is in opposition to the Obedient One who follows a course of action established by God, which models submission.

The strengths of the Cappadocian perspective spring from the emphasis on the image of God. The claim that it is defaced, but not destroyed, is an empowering standpoint because it imbues hope. It asserts humans are capable of knowing truth; it affirms the potency and potential of human choice; and it presents the path for overcoming sin.

In a time when truth is perceived to be fleet-footed, the message of the Gregories provides a critique. By no means do they claim truth is easily perceived, but they firmly proclaim that it exists. The quest for truth and the questions that fuel it are not in vain. There are answers to be had.<sup>3</sup> This declaration is tempered by the hindrance vice causes

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<sup>3</sup> The bond between knowledge and action is vital because truth is not an abstract quality that is only known; it is also lived.

however. With the principle that like is attracted to like, human beings have the faculty to comprehend truth, but dissimilarity diminishes this and misdirects the quest. In order to contemplate the truth, one's life must reflect the nature of truth. This is a poignant doctrine because it proclaims that those whose lives are less saturated with vice apprehend truth more clearly than others. Thus, truth is removed from the wholesale rack.<sup>4</sup> This institutes a hierarchy of lifestyle that asserts a life of virtue is rewarding, for one gains lasting goodness over the chimera of goodness drawn from vice.

When the two Fathers associate free will with the gift of the divine image, human choice is affirmed. This provides a lifeline for nihilistic determinism since human beings can actually effect their environment. When the power to choose is invested with value, so too are the outcomes. If one is capable of impacting the universe, concern for the decision-making process increases. Who gives attention to something that has little impact? On the other hand, that which is serious and terminal receives great attention. Such a grand endowment is not without cost, however, for responsibility accompanies this investment of power. When cause is real, effect is real. Through the example of Adam and Eve, the Cappadocians illustrate that the consequences of poor personal decisions are palpable. They drastically alter reality like a rock tossed into a calm pond. The ripples are real, and they radiate beyond imagination.

Promoting the presence of the image of God, even in a dilapidated state, provides a spark of hope. Evil has been birthed into the world through choice, thus marring the image, but it can be recovered. The proclamation that evil does not have to exist begins to diminish its oppressive tenor. It institutes the belief that humans were made for goodness,

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<sup>4</sup> This does not necessitate a mindset of elitism. Instead, it is a reassertion of value, i.e., truth is a precious metal that some lifestyles are more advantageous at mining. Elitism is destroyed when Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa claim everybody has the aptitude to live a pure life.

and that sin is a self-inflicted alien state. Through the grace of the divine image already inherent in humanity life can be changed. Humans do not have to be slaves to the stagnation of vice. They do not have to wait for a special dispensation of grace to begin the journey of recovery since it has already been given. But, is this exaltation of the will and human ability tenable? What of those who suffer from addiction or depression? Is the will strong enough to recover health in these and other similar situations? It seems Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa would answer both “Yes” and “No.” Yes, in the sense that every human being inherently has the divine gift of grace and power to overcome any affliction of the will and appetite; and No, in terms of immediate transformation. The Cappadocian focus on momentum is crucial in this regard. The “bias toward evil” in human life is conquered only through habit formation. Those with serious afflictions must begin with manageable alterations in habit, even if such a change is seemingly inconsequential. Through habit one builds strength and endurance that eventually compounds. It must be remembered that they never indicate the war against evil is painless. It is a continually strenuous battle; nonetheless, it is one worth waging. In some respects, the conflict becomes easier once the habit of virtue is adopted since one’s exposure to vice is minimized; but in life, the war never ends.<sup>5</sup>

On the surface, the anthropology of these Fathers appears idealistic and overly optimistic, yet neither Gregory fails to recognize the severe plight of the human condition as witnessed by their extensive exploration of the presence and influence of vice.

Therefore, it may come down to a matter of perspective. Instead of focusing on the power

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<sup>5</sup> Through habit formation one’s environment changes, and when surrounded by virtue it would seem less onerous to choose goodness; especially when one remembers the painful consequences of vice. The concept of memory is key for the Cappadocian understanding of *theosis*, but unfortunately it lies outside the scope of this piece.



and effects of evil, they choose to emphasize recovery and preservation of the divine image.<sup>6</sup> When compared to God's intention, evil becomes inconsequential; a finite burden cast aside by infinite goodness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From a psychological standpoint this perspective may be healthier since it empowers, instead of disparages, human capacity. This terminology must retain its nuance however. The two Fathers never credit the inherent ability of humanity; the power it has flows from the gift of the divine image. Without this, humanity would be bestial and never capable of transcending irrationality and necessity.

<sup>7</sup> More so in Gregory of Nyssa than Gregory of Nazianzus due to his expressed universalism. Although, it must be remembered that both view evil as finite, and in respect to the infinite, it is minute.

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