

ON NOT THREE PEOPLE: THE FUNDAMENTAL THEMES OF GREGORY OF NYSSA'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY AS SEEN IN *TO ABLABIUS: ON NOT THREE GODS*

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[T]he sacred company of the prophets and Patriarchs ... from the names which express the manifold variety of his power, lead men, as by the hand, to the understanding of the divine nature, making known to them the bare grandeur of the thought of God; while the question of His essence, as one which it is impossible to grasp ... they dismiss without any attempt at its solution.¹

I: Introduction

There are two questions vital for those seeking to understand or appropriate the legacy of pro-Nicene theology: which themes in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology do we assert to be fundamental?; which texts do we take to provide paradigmatic instances of that theology? The purpose of this essay is to argue for an answer to these questions, based on a close reading of his short text *To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods*.² I will argue that we should not attempt to understand Gregory by reference primarily to the development of particular terminological formulations (such as one *ousia*, three *hypostases*). Nor should we attempt to understand Gregory by reading his thought against the background of a division of pro-Nicene theologians into

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general “eastern” and “western” groups according to their supposed preference for “beginning from” unity or diversity in the Godhead.³ I will suggest that Gregory’s Trinitarian theology is best approached by focusing on the ways in which he makes a particular contribution to the emergence of a pro-Nicene “grammar” of divinity through developing his complex account of divine power.

On the one hand, Gregory uses an account of God’s unitary power, activity and causality as the basis for approaching the paradox of the divine diversity and unity; it is here that we find Gregory’s fundamental understanding of the grammar of divinity. On the other hand, and also through his deployment of power terminology, Gregory also offers an ontological and epistemological foundation for human knowledge of God that he thinks fundamental to pro-Nicene theology and which sets the stage for any analogical description of the Godhead. These themes are the real core of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology. In this light Gregory’s statements about the irreducibility and yet unity of the divine persons can only be approached through first exploring his account of the nature of human speech about God and the cosmology that grounds that account. Only when we see how this account of divine creative power and ontological difference grounds a vision of human speech about God will we begin to see what it means for Gregory to confess the incomprehensible unity of the incomprehensible and yet irreducible distinct divine persons.

It may seem strange that I have chosen to focus on *On Not Three Gods*, given that this text is often taken in modern writing as a paradigm of Gregory’s supposed commitment to “beginning” with divine plurality rather than unity, or even as a paradigm of his supposed commitment to “social” Trinitarian analogies.⁴ However, I will argue that Gregory’s purpose in this text is actually to point the reader away from speculating about the “social” analogy and towards the very themes I outlined in the previous paragraph as the necessary context for exploring the divinity unity and diversity. Only in this context can any analogy serve a useful function and be properly deployed. Thus, I will argue, *On Not Three Gods* is paradigmatic only because it offers a summary of the positions advocated in Gregory’s extensive polemics against Eunomius and in the *Catechetical Oration*—and indeed I would want to argue that when a short summary of Gregory’s account of the divine nature is needed the latter text is probably the most useful. It is also noteworthy that despite the frequency with which *On Not Three Gods* has been anthologized there is no extended study of the text in its historical context; by offering something towards such a study I hope to bring out more clearly the necessity of reading it in conjunction with discussions of Trinitarian theology elsewhere in Gregory’s corpus.

Let me also anticipate my conclusions by noting that in *On Not Three Gods*, as elsewhere (including the frequently cited *Ad Petrum*—if it is Gregory’s), Gregory makes no extended attempt—and rarely any attempt—to explain

what the divine *prosopa* or *hypostases* are by attributing to each the sorts of mental and psychological characteristics we use to define a distinct human person. Thus, we must also be careful what we think we see in those passages where Gregory does offer some parallels between the divine *hypostases* and three people—how and for what purpose are “social” analogies being used? Often (as in *On Not Three Gods*) Gregory’s interest is only in exploring parallel or different logics of differentiation. Indeed, although this question will not receive any extended discussion here, it is noticeable that where we do find Gregory applying psychological categories to the Trinity we often find him happily doing so with reference to the Godhead as analogous to *one* person, the Father’s constitution of the Triune Godhead being treated as analogous to one who speaks an intelligible word on his breath or spirit (*Catechetical Oratio* 1–2 is paradigmatic here). In fact, in such places Gregory is sometimes willing to apply these categories both to God as one and to the individual persons: the living God speaks an intelligible word as do we, the word possesses its own will as do all living things (although his understanding of “will” for instance requires locating in a very careful historical context). But even here, it is noticeable that we find almost no direct discussion of the interactions between the three divine persons that relies on analogies of interaction between three distinct human agents. Once we realize that analogies with psychological terminologies are not used in the ways modern readings frequently suggest, then perhaps it becomes even clearer that we need to look in more detail at the suppositions of and foundations for Gregory’s actual usage.

II: *The Polemical Context of On Not Three Gods*

It is important first to get a sense of the polemical charge that Gregory faces, and thus the task he sees himself facing if he is to refute his opponents. This charge is that Gregory’s theology (and Cappadocian theology more widely⁵) implies the existence of “three Gods” because it was susceptible to the logical analogy of three people. That there is a polemical context for the discussion of this analogy in this text, and that many implications of such an analogy are felt as unacceptable to pro-Nicenes, is clear.⁶ Gregory talks initially of Ablabius bringing forward charges made by “opponents of the truth”, and elsewhere in the text he refers to those whose charges Ablabius brings forward as “adversaries”. It is these “opponents of the truth” who have deployed the analogy of three people to show what they take to be a logical implication of Cappadocian theology. Gregory’s opponents are alleging that the relationship between substance and person deployed by the Cappadocians is susceptible to the logic that applies in the case of three people. If so, their charge runs, just as the degree of individuation involved permits us to speak of three “men”, the same logic shows us that the Cappadocians are teaching

that there are three Gods. It does not seem that Ablabius is himself sympathetic towards the accusation, rather he seems to have been unable to answer their charge to his own satisfaction and has requested help. We need to be clear even here that the opponents in question are not asking whether or not Gregory thinks the divine persons are like three human persons in communion, they are interested only in the degree of individuation the analogy might seem to reveal in Cappadocian Trinitarianism.⁷

The charge that Gregory faces most immediately originates with the problematically named “Macedonians”, that is, with those who, most actively during the 360s to 380s, objected to the pro-Nicene inclusion of the Spirit within the Godhead.⁸ The Macedonians or “Pneumatomachoi” were a loose group who seem to have accepted the divinity of the Son but were unhappy about the extension of this theology to include the Spirit. They were less a concerted “party” than what Richard Hanson more accurately describes as a diverse “protest movement”, arguing against a particular theological move, but coming to that particular oppositional stance from a variety of backgrounds. The detailed structure and belief of those who are to be included in this group does not concern us here, but understanding this polemical context will be very helpful in understanding the direction of Gregory’s argument. Accordingly, I will rehearse two pieces of the evidence that demonstrates the origin of the charge and the character of the dispute with which we are concerned.

The text of *On Not Three Gods* itself does not provide us with many clues as to the origin of the charge. However, in Gregory’s *Refutation of Eunomius’s Confession*, Gregory speaks of “those who keep repeating against us the phrase ‘three Gods’.”⁹ Interestingly, Gregory does not here seem to be referring to Eunomius. Gregory is in the middle of a long exposition of Eunomius’s text, an exposition in which he frequently speaks of Eunomius by name, or at least in the singular. At this point in the course of his treatment he offers an extended account of the Spirit’s divinity. Gregory attempts to show that the traditional attribution of the work of sanctification to the Spirit alone is mistaken, and that such activity is that of the whole Trinity together. Then begins the short discussion of the anonymous group who charge that Gregory teaches “three Gods”. Such people—and suddenly Gregory speaks of his adversaries in the plural—would only have a point if it were first true that pro-Nicenes taught that God was a duality to which we then discussed whether another should be added. However, God is always and by definition one, even though we confess the names of Father, Son and Spirit. Gregory then says that it is time to *resume* his refutation of Eunomius’s text. In this short passage Gregory seems clearly to indicate that the charge originates with those who, despite a willingness to accept the divinity of the Son, doubt the divinity of the Spirit and, thus, seem not yet to have grasped the essential unity of the Godhead as pro-Nicene theology has come to present it.

The character of the debate is further revealed by references elsewhere in the Cappadocians. Most directly, at *Oration* 31:13–15, Gregory of Nazianzen attempts to argue against those who say that if the term “God” may be used three times of Father, Son and Spirit then are there not a plurality of powers and hence a plurality of Gods? Nazianzen carefully identifies this charge as originating primarily with those who are “fairly sound” on the Son but who doubt the Spirit’s divinity. He even tells us that such people press their charge by alleging that the unity of the pro-Nicene Trinity fails because it is *only* equivalent to the unity of three people. Nazianzen’s reply is too complex to explore at length here, but it will be helpful to set it out in summary form. Gregory argues that those who worship the Father and the Son but not the Spirit (his opponents) might be accused of ditheism. Of course, Gregory continues, if they were, then they could only respond by articulating an understanding of Father and Son as *together* constituting the one God whom Christians should worship. In effect their response would be to articulate an account of divinity in which unity is not disrupted by the distinctions of the *hypostases*. Thus, Nazianzen argues, the response of such people against those who might accuse them of ditheism is structurally identical to the response that these people should expect from those who worship Father, Son *and* Spirit: acknowledging commonality of substance does not necessarily involve admitting that the substance itself is divided. Thus there are not three Gods, and the analogy of three people does not apply. Even from this brief summary of Gregory’s argument it is clear that the point at issue concerns the very “grammar” of divinity itself.¹⁰

To understand what I mean by the “grammar” of divinity being at issue we need to note that the fourth century controversies are, in part, easily misunderstood if they are conceived as concentrating on the question “is the Son (and the Spirit) divine?”—some then answering “no” while the “orthodox” simply answer “yes”.¹¹ In this simple form the question already seems to presuppose a complex understanding of “divinity” that implies, for example, no possibility of degrees of divinity; in fact, dispute over the significance of the term and over the rules for talking about divinity was a constant (if sometimes hidden) factor in the debates. To understand the complexity of the questions involved here, it is more helpful to formulate the question offered in the first sentence of this paragraph in exegetical terms as “how can we speak of the Son as being ‘one’ with the Father (John 10:30; cf. John 1:3) and as being the ‘power and wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:24), while still asserting that the ‘King of kings and Lord of lords alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light’ (1 Tim. 6:16)?” In different measure anti-Nicene theologians took 1 Tim. 6:16 (and like verses) to be hermeneutically determinative and argued that too close a metaphysical association of the Father and the Son was exegetically mistaken.¹² The simplicity and uniqueness of the Father just would not fit with any direct assertions that Father and Son were truly of the *same* nature. Of course, these exegetical

presuppositions demanded of such theologians that they set out an understanding of the relationship between Word, Father and creation that would support this insistence while still being attentive to scriptural material which might seem to point in other directions. In part these questions were answered by subtle, if somewhat *ad hoc*, accounts of degrees of divinity or of hierarchy within the Godhead combined with a strong insistence on the distinct *hypostases* of the persons.¹³ Such language stemmed in large part from Origen's account and forms a background not simply for directly anti-Nicene thinkers, but for some whose theology seems in retrospect much closer to later "Nicene" thought. Thus these non- (and in some cases pre-) Nicene theologians possessed a series of implicit rules (a "grammar") for talking about divinity in which the possibility of different degrees of subordinate divinity was combined with an insistence that "true" divinity was simple and indivisible. This grammar provided for a flexible, detailed and persistent exegetical practice.

However, central to the "pro-Nicene" theology which developed in the latter decades of the fourth century was, on the one hand, an insistence that divinity *by definition* is unique and indivisible and, on the other hand, that the distinction between Creator and creation is an absolute one with no mediating degrees or stages.¹⁴ There was also an insistence that the combination of these themes provided the context for discussing the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit: all verses which seemed to indicate any commonality of existence between Father and Son could, in this context, only be taken to indicate the sharing of unique, simple and indivisible divinity.¹⁵ On the other hand, the skill of those theologians who determined the final shape of pro-Nicene theologies was to insist not only on the uniqueness and simplicity of the divine (which could so easily just have resulted in some form of modalist theology), but also on the importance and possibility of according eternal and yet non-materialistic or non-emanationist significance to the language of distinction, relationship and origination that is so central to the Scriptural accounts of the Son's nature. In other words, the tradition of strongly differentiating the *hypostases* and insisting on the importance of defining the Son and Spirit by their relations of origin was incorporated into a changed grammar of divinity which allowed *a priori* for no divine hierarchy or subordination. Origen's understanding of a *hypostasis* as an eternally distinct entity now finds a new home within a subtly but importantly different grammar of divinity. Thus, both Basil and Gregory insist strongly that the persons have "real" existence as individual *hypostases*, but they insist that the grammar of simple and indivisible divinity is the context for all talk of differentiation: it is this combination that marks the real if subtle advance of pro-Nicene theology.¹⁶ Only against the background of this broad shift in the "grammar of divinity" can we understand what it meant for pro-Nicene theologians to talk of the Son being *homoousios* with Father or as "sharing" the divine essence.¹⁷

However, not only is understanding this theological shift essential to understanding pro-Nicene thought, it is also at this point that pro-Nicene theology was most easily misunderstood. The conflict over the Spirit's divinity reflects both the complexities of resolving the fourth century controversies and the degree to which pro-Nicene theology could be misunderstood. As is clear from the two texts by Nyssa and Nazianzen discussed briefly above, while Macedonian polemic was concerned with the question of the Spirit's divinity, at a deep structural level the Macedonians were also resisting, or not yet grasping, the basic grammar of the Pro-Nicenes' understanding of divinity.

Thus, noting that the charge probably comes from Macedonian circles helps us to see the task that Gregory faces in *On Not Three Gods*. The problem that he faces is not most fundamentally one of explaining how the Spirit is also divine, where both sides in the dispute share a common account of divinity and of the nature of the union between Father and Son. Rather, it is the very character of divine being and unity that is at issue. From *On Not Three Gods* it seems that, while Gregory considers questions of terminological distinction between *ousia*, *phusis*, *hypostasis* or *prosopon* to be important, he understands the primary task for an orthodox Trinitarian theologian to be one of setting out an account of theological language and of the divine nature within which one can appropriately deploy the terms on which one settles and within which one can talk the Scriptural language of the Son and the Spirit coming from the Father and acting in the creation.¹⁸

III: *The Structure of On Not Three Gods*

We are now in a better position to understand Gregory's intentions in *On Not Three Gods*, and in the following sections I will offer a sequential reading of the text as a whole. In each of these sections my procedure will be to place the arguments of the text in the wider context of other relevant discussions in Gregory's corpus. Looking at the text in this way will help to show how Gregory not only fights on a number of polemical fronts simultaneously, but also how his general strategy is to shift the battle on to ground he has already made his own and away from just skirmishing around the division of universal and particular terminologies.

The text is short but surprisingly complex and a summary of the argument at this stage may be helpful.

At the beginning Gregory introduces the problem and almost immediately tells Ablabius that those who have raised this charge have failed to distinguish between strict linguistic use (in which natures are indivisible and that human nature is not divided between three human beings) and common usage (in which we use the phrase "three men" as if the nature of "man" could be divided). Because, strictly speaking, natures are

indivisible, speaking about three *hypostases* does not imply the existence of “three Gods” because the nature of divinity cannot actually be divided. Having given this answer Gregory admits that this is unlikely to be sufficient, given the persistence of the common usage.

Progress, he tells us, can only be made by exploring the name “Godhead”. Gregory then goes on to argue that names for the divine nature do not describe God directly, but each one describes the action of God: the divine nature remains unknown. “Godhead” itself (*theotes*) stems from our observation of God’s act of watching over, seeing or beholding (*thea*), and in our observation of this action we see all three persons engaged in the same action. If their action is one then the power which gives rise to that action is one, and the divine nature itself, although unknown, must be one (Gregory’s argument here invokes a technical philosophical terminology for talking about God’s nature, power and activity).

At this point, around halfway through the text, Gregory admits that the argument is not yet sufficient because, in created natures, we often see things involved in common operations that are appropriately spoken of as three: three orators or farmers, for instance. Gregory then argues at some length that the action of the three divine persons is shown to be one action not three distinct but similar actions and that, hence, the power that originates them must also be one. The one divine power is constituted by Father, Son and Spirit fulfilling their roles in every unitary divine action. The divine nature and power is thus shown to be undivided. Towards the end of the text Gregory tells us that, even if the main argument he has pursued is not accepted, his first argument was by itself sufficient. Gregory concludes by telling us that all divine attributes should be spoken of in the singular and that the persons may be differentiated by us only according to their causal relationships.

I suggest that this text offers two main arguments: the first takes up directly the charge reported to Gregory by Ablabius and argues simply that natures are strictly indivisible; the second attempts to show that the charge has no force when placed in the context of an appropriate theology of the divine action and power. It is the second argument that most directly gets us to the heart of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology. On this basis we can divide up the structure of the text by identifying how Gregory interweaves these two discussions. In the following diagram, the letters A and B indicate the two basic lines of argument I take Gregory to be pursuing, while the Arabic numerals indicate the different stages of those individual arguments through the course of the text:

A.1 We do not speak of three Gods because natures are not divisible: even “three men” is a loose and misleading usage.

B.1 Natures and their intrinsic powers are known by the operations of those powers, and the divine operation is always observed to be one. Therefore the divine power and nature is indivisibly one.

Question: but surely this doesn't really solve the problem? Three people performing the same operation are still distinct: for example, three people speaking in court are correctly called three orators.

B.2 True, but operations reveal also the ways in which natures and powers are individuated, and the divine nature is seen to be always one, with a threefold order, and not to be individuated in the same as individual people relate to their common substance.

A.2 Anyway, as we have already asserted, natures are not divisible.

Conclusion: The combination of B.1 and B.2 best supports our speech about both appropriate unity and appropriate distinction.

My argument will be that, while A.1 and A.2 take up most directly the charge that has been referred to Gregory, it is B.1 and B.2 (arguments originally developed through his controversy with Eunomius) that constitute the argument Gregory thinks conclusive and which we should treat as fundamental in his Trinitarian theology. These two threads of argument (A and B) are related and yet fundamentally distinct. In the following two sections I examine them in turn.

IV: Argument A: Creation and the Indivisibility of Natures

The first and last sections of the argument pursue the strategy that has received most attention in the meager scholarship on this letter.¹⁹ At the beginning of the text Gregory argues that the everyday usage of "three men" to designate three instances of the generic "man" is technically mistaken (A.1). This is so because each "nature" (*phusis*) is uncompound and we should not allow common usage in serious philosophical argument. Indeed, says Gregory, we would run a great danger if we were to transfer such patterns of speech to God: for we know without doubt that God is one. This is so, continues Gregory, "even though the name of Godhead extends through the Holy Trinity". Gregory then uses this comment as a point of departure for turning to the first main section of the text, which considers the meaning of "Godhead" and the nature of theological language (B.1).²⁰ Towards the end of *On Not Three Gods* Gregory returns again to his opening argument (A.2). Once again Gregory tells us that "natures" are in themselves free from accidents and indivisible. Those whose charge has made its way to Gregory through Ablabius have failed to see that talk of the divine persons being distinct "Gods" as three human beings are three "men" is simply illogical given the character of the universal term "man" and the indivisibility of natures.

It is important to note that Gregory's argument in these sections of the text (A.1 & 2), whether or not it reveals a flawed confusion of logic and ontology to modern eyes, is not concerned with deriving an analogy from the inter-relatedness of human community. The argument he offers rests *not* on

an account specifically of human nature (let alone of human “community”), but on an ontological or cosmological conception of natures in general. This much is apparent when a similar statement about the indivisibility of natures occurs *en passant* at *Contra Eunomium* III, 4. There Gregory considers the parallel between, on the one hand, the generation of the Son by the Father and, on the other hand, the relationship between the moisture in the grape on the vine and the moisture in wine. Gregory’s argument focuses on what is involved in describing wine as a product of the vine. This is an appropriate description, Gregory argues, because there is true community of nature between the grape and the wine: the moisture found in the unpicked grape is essentially the same as that found in the wine.²¹ Gregory here offers logically the same argument, and he does so without any need to offer the particular example of three people sharing a common nature. Understanding the place of indivisible natures in Gregory’s thought will eventually help us understand many aspects of his argument in *On Not Three Gods*.

The same account of indivisible natures can be found at the heart of his homilies on the first days of creation, the *Hexameron*, and the discussion here begins to reveal to us the reason that the same account is so important throughout *On Not Three Gods*. Although Gregory only deploys one aspect of his understanding of natures (that they are indivisible) in his first argument (A.1–2), other aspects of the same account are central to the rest of the text (B.1–2), and hence a short diversion at this point will eventually pay dividends. In his *Hexameron* homilies Gregory insists that things may be changed from one nature into another, but that natures in themselves are fixed in the act of creation and are indivisible. He writes,

in the generation of countless animals we see differences according to types and bring them into general harmony by remarking that each one of them is “exceedingly” good ... each one by itself has a perfect nature. A horse is certainly not a cow; the nature and properties of each is conserved, not by a corruption of nature but by the power of their conservation.²²

Here Gregory deploys an understanding of the “power” (*dunamis*) inherent in each nature to explain their indivisibility: the creation is an act of God’s power and follows an ordered sequence in which God, after creating dark unformed matter, endows the dark matter with the light and fire of his own power. Then, through the delegated action of this power which has been given in the act of creation, individual natures come into being. The Word’s activity in creation appears here to be the infusion of a power into the creation which, in line with God’s will, and mirroring the divine power, diversifies into a variety of distinct and unitary natures each with its own “natural, divinely endowed power”. My presentation here simplifies a very complex text, but it does highlight the close links Gregory sees between natures and their intrinsic powers as well as between the indivisibility

of natures and God's ordering of creation. A nature has and expresses one intrinsic power: it is hence neither arbitrary nor divisible.

Thus, Gregory's insistence that natures are indivisible is a cosmological doctrine (although, as we shall see, one in turn shaped by his pro-Nicene concerns). For Gregory this account is necessary both for human knowledge of God to be possible, and for understanding the creation's dependence on and autonomy from the Creator. Because natures are the basic principles in which God contemplated the creation, they are indivisible. If they were divisible, then our contemplation could not provide knowledge of God's created activity and hence of God. As I explained above, in the first section of *On Not Three Gods* Gregory deploys only one of the most basic aspects of his account of natures, that they are by definition inseparable. However, in later sections of the argument Gregory uses the same understanding to build a more subtle refutation of the charge with which he is concerned. To those later sections we should now turn. As we leave this section of *On Not Three Gods*, it is important to note that I have not considered in detail how Gregory understands this indivisibility to apply in the particular case of human beings. The character of the individuation among human beings that Gregory envisages here has received a good deal of treatment in the scholarship (and is an extremely complex question²³). However, I have not dwelt on it here simply because Gregory quickly moves on from this particular argument to what I am arguing is the main theme of his text.

V: Argument B: Natures, Powers, Activities and Knowledge

... whosoever searches the whole of revelation will find therein no doctrine of the Divine nature, nor indeed of anything else that has a substantial existence, so that we pass our lives in ignorance of much, being ignorant first of all of ourselves as men, and then of all things besides. For who is there who has arrived at a comprehension of his own soul?²⁴

We can now move on to the middle, and, I suggest, main section of Gregory's argument in *On Not Three Gods* (B.1–2). This main section begins when Gregory insists that we cannot allow loose and misleading patterns of human speech—such as speaking as if human nature could be truly divided—to be transferred to the Godhead and that we can best clear up the charge he faces here by considering the nature of “Godhead” itself. This main section of the text may itself be divided into two related discussions separated by a short interlude.

The first discussion in this main section of the text (B.1) introduces the idea that terms used to describe God do not actually describe God's nature or essence, rather they describe things “around” (*peri*) the divine nature, things through which the divine nature may be known.²⁵ In a similar vein Gregory

says that such divine names enable the investigation of our ideas of the divine, but do not directly signify the divine nature. Gregory goes on to add the idea that all the terms human beings use for God work by creating a special or particular sense (*idian dianoian*). This particular sense takes as its point of departure some feature of our world that reflects the activity of God, and then negates or intensifies that core significance in the attempt to speak worthily of God. In so doing these terms do indicate something that may appropriately be thought or spoken of the divine, but they do not “reach” the divine nature. For example, calling God “giver of life” draws our attention to what is given, not directly to the nature of the giver. With these moves Gregory begins to outline an ontological and epistemological foundation for theological language. In this account of divine naming Gregory follows a course very similar to that set out by Basil and further developed in his own anti-Eunomian polemic. For both Gregory and Basil clarity on this point serves to identify a key difference between Eunomius and the Cappadocians: no term, not even any Scriptural term (let alone a term such as “unbegotten”) can be understood to signify the divine nature directly.²⁶

The character of human language about God is elsewhere in his corpus frequently discussed by deploying the terminology of *epinoia* (and in the passage of *On Not Three Gods* just discussed *idian dianoian* functions as a synonym for *epinoia*).²⁷ For Gregory we do not perceive God directly. Rather, as God is unknown to direct human perception we make use of the mental act of *epinoia*, which we can perhaps gloss as “abstracted conception”. By *epinoia*—a process more conscious and reflective than might be indicated by such English words as “intuition” or even “perception” in some of its senses—we reflect on things, actions, events and words to break them down into their constituent parts or assumptions. From this act of mental dissection we may come more accurately to focus our thoughts on the event or object under consideration, we move towards acquiring a sense of an object that remains hidden from direct perception. We call God “Giver of Life” and by abstraction we term God “Life”; by reading of God’s act of creating all things we learn to speak of God as uncreated. This mode of “knowing” God is, for Gregory, that most fitted to our weak human capacity. Thus by reflection on what Scripture relates to us about divine action we may slowly build up a series of terms, conceptions (*epinoiai*), which we think it appropriate to apply to God—and which are licensed by God’s self-revelation in creation and in Scripture—even while we know that in a fundamental sense God remains always unknown. There may be progress in the discipline of *epinoia*, but the hidden and infinite goal of one’s practice is never finally achieved. This terminology thus provides one of the most basic contexts for making sense of Gregory’s dual insistence that we know something of God, we somehow just manage to “touch” God with the understanding, and yet that God remains always unknown.

For Gregory it is vital that one builds up one's set of appellations for God in a way that preserves appropriate reverence and an appropriate sense of reserve: participating in the established practice of those who already undertake this discipline and sharing their assumptions about what may be reverently said of God is a prerequisite for the good use of *epinoia*. The process of *epinoia* is thus circular (but at its best virtuously so), each act of abstraction needing to enhance, change, and yet stay in conformity with the whole of one's set of appellations for God. Thus Gregory understands the good practice of *epinoia* to be part of a spiritual process, an *askesis* of heart and mind. God's activities and the text of Scripture enable a process of *epinoia* by which we can speak of the divine being, but, Gregory writes, "in applying such appellations to the divine essence, 'which passes all understanding', we do not seek to glory in it by the names we employ, but to guide our own selves by the aid of such terms towards the comprehension of the things which are hidden".²⁸ In other words, Gregory envisions the process of *epinoia* as part of an on-going shaping of our attention to and speech about something that, more austere than many commentators would have us imagine, remains always unknown and beyond our grasp. The mind that undertakes this *askesis* does not grasp its object, but is drawn towards the contemplative goal of Christian life.²⁹ Although this terminology is not a central part of *On Not Three Gods*, the conception of knowledge of God it embodies is central throughout Gregory's corpus and we see its echoes clearly in this text.

However, to understand the main argument of *On Not Three Gods*, to which Gregory is beginning to turn here, we need also to note two aspects of the philosophical traditions from which Gregory draws his nature and power terminology. First, the important link between natures and intrinsic powers in Gregory's cosmology is of great importance for his Trinitarian theology and in his account of human knowledge of God. In a book and two very helpful recent articles, Michel Barnes has gone some way to providing us with the key elements we need to understand Gregory's arguments here. In the first article Barnes has set out the differing traditions of "transcendental causality" that are operative in Gregory and Eunomius's account of the relations between the three divine persons. In Gregory, we find a strong adherence to the idea that the divine nature is inherently productive. One of the fundamental ways in which this is expressed is through the doctrine that the unitary and simple divine power is intrinsic to the indivisible divine nature. Gregory of course insists that such natural productivity and expression is willed not necessary, but his account makes a great deal of use of natural metaphors, such as the fundamental example of a fire and its heat, to emphasize the reality of the ontological union between a nature and its power (a union we have already seen in Gregory's *Hexameron*). In offering this model of "transcendent causality" Gregory demonstrates his debts to a long philosophical and medical tradition which intimately associates the

nature or reality of an existent and its power. Gregory's most immediate "intellectual precedent and authority" (to use Barnes' words) for the deployment of this tradition of power terminology in a transcendent context is Plotinus, especially as evident in *Ennead* V.4 (the ancient traditions of medical writing are also important in developing the terminology with which we are concerned here).³⁰

In Gregory's account of how theological language reaches only what is "around" the Godhead, and in his account of God's ordering of creation in terms of natures and powers, we see him making use of another facet of this philosophical tradition. Indeed, Gregory again seems to be following Plotinus's lead: both writers not only talk of a power as being intrinsic to a nature, but also metaphorically present a power as being "around" a nature. In *Ennead* V.1, a text which makes a frequent appearance in Cappadocian theology, Plotinus describes the power that each thing exhibits as "a surrounding reality directed to what is outside".³¹ In *Ennead* V.4 Plotinus uses this very same language about both *nous* and *psyche* to indicate how their generative nature expresses itself in creation. Here, the talk of powers being "around" natures serves as a way of indicating that although powers are the cause of the activity of *nous* and *psyche* outside themselves, the natures themselves remain somehow unknown and distinct.³² Similarly Gregory too speaks of theological language as reaching that which is "around" the divine nature, that is, the divine nature's power which gives rise to divine activity in the world. This metaphorically spatial language nicely indicates the distinction between knowing the power of a nature and knowing a nature directly, and is often reinforced, as at *Ennead* V.1, by means of the analogy of the sun and its rays. In both Gregory and Plotinus we know the rays but not directly the sun: in Gregory we may grow in knowledge of the divine power through its operations even while the divine nature remains unknown.

However, and second, Gregory talks not only of nature and power, but also of activity (*energeia*), and here we come to the second article by Michel Barnes to which I wish to draw attention. In distinguishing these three terms Gregory is employing a technical sequence of causal language in which, as we have seen, a nature has an intrinsic power which contains or expresses the causal capacity of a nature whether or not it is actually operative.³³ Activities *ad extra* are set in motion by a nature's power and it is by observing activities that we may reason back to the character of the power that is operative. In *On Not Three Gods* Gregory hints at the connection between, on the one hand, natures and their intrinsic powers (a connection which he elsewhere draws out more fully), and he also very clearly links, on the other hand, activities with the powers that they reveal. For example, Gregory speaks of "the various activities of the transcendent power" through which the power is known directly after he has indicated that natures remain unknowable except through activities.³⁴ At this point nature seems almost

interchangeable with power, an interchangeability best explained by placing the reference in the context of the causal sequence discussed here.

While it is, I think, a mistake to paint Gregory too quickly as the architect of an unprecedented and revolutionary theological ontology, Gregory's theology incorporates ontological and cosmological doctrines into a complex system of thought which provides the constant foundation for his articulation of pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology. It is also important to note the flexibility of the traditions with which Gregory is here engaged. The flexibility of this language is a key point in its favor when it is being used not only to describe the character of created reality, but also to shape and provide an account of the Creator, who is conceived as both creating a world in His own image and yet as being truly distinct from it. Thus, when it suits his purpose Gregory deploys different aspects of nature, power and activity terminology in an attempt to characterize human knowledge and speech of God. We must watch carefully to spot the allusions that Gregory makes to this terminology, but we should beware of mistaking his complex and *ad hoc* allusion for simple incoherence. It is time now to return to the course of the first main section of the argument (B.1).

Having insisted that we know only the power of a thing not its nature, Gregory goes on to argue that "Godhead" (*theotes*) is itself a term which originates in observation of the divine activity of seeing or contemplating. Gregory asserts that the name "Godhead" has originated from observing that God sees and comprehends all. However, Father, Son and Spirit all seem to be engaged in the *same* activity of seeing and contemplating. Thus, says Gregory, if the activities are the same, then the power which gave rise to them is the same and the ineffable divine nature in which that power is inherent must also be one.³⁵ There is, then, no basis on which to speak of a divided divine nature, because the divine operation that has given rise to our conception of Godhead itself is not divided. If the operation is one, then the power that gave rise to that operation must be one. The divine nature remains unknown but its power is revealed to be one.³⁶ Gregory has thus offered a refutation of the charge that his teaching implies three Gods, but one considerably more sophisticated than his first attempt (in section A.1) concentrating solely on the logic of differentiation. However, the force of this second refutation will only be felt by someone who first accepts the significance of knowledge following observation of activity and then accepts Gregory's account of how divine activity is described in Scripture.

Gregory's intention seems to be one of showing that the "three Gods" charge is best faced by opening a discussion about two fundamental questions: what do we mean by "divine nature"?; how it is possible for us to speak of divine nature? As Gregory knows well, these two questions are inseparable: he sets up a foundation for our speaking of God, but only by also beginning to offer an account of the divine nature and its activity. The epistemological question must receive an ontological and a cosmological answer, but the

cosmology is already shaped by a consideration of how God creates and of how the creation imitates that divine nature. Of course, Gregory's answers to these questions already also contain an answer to the question of whether the divine nature can be divided. Nevertheless, his purpose should not be understood solely as one of fixing the cards so that the "Macedonian" will lose. Rather, we should understand him as indicating that questions about the divine nature can only be faced once one has in place appropriate conceptions of the relations between Creator and creation and of the character of human knowledge of God. In other words, articulating the pro-Nicene grammar of divinity (as with all grammars of divinity) necessarily involves articulating an account of the relationship between Creator and creation. Major arguments *in* Trinitarian theology can only be conducted by also arguing about the character *of* Trinitarian theology. Such an argument involves deploying cosmological and epistemological principles within which we may come to understand the texture of theological language. We will return to the significance of Gregory's attempt to answer the specific question he faces by raising these more general questions later: for the moment I want to return to the course of his argument.

Having introduced the text's central argument, Gregory now offers a rhetorically sophisticated short interlude, admitting that his main argument seems so far to have offered no reason why we should not speak of three Gods.³⁷ In fact, he argues, the attempt to argue only from the nature of operations or activities might seem to make pro-Nicene theology even more susceptible to the charge that has been raised. This is so because there seem to be plenty of cases where we admit common operation but are also clear that distinct individuals are involved. Thus, for example, we speak of many orators or farmers purely on the basis of common operation and without reference to a shared nature at all. On the other hand, says Gregory in a quick aside, if we *did* suppose that we could actually know the divine nature, then the observation of the unified divine action in creation would seem to emphasize the importance of subsuming the persons under a unitary Godhead. But, he continues, since that course is forbidden to us because we want to argue only from operations, it really does seem that the argument so far has only strengthened the case of those who want to say that pro-Nicene theology implies three Gods. The interlude ends by Gregory saying that he has tried to highlight the possible response of his adversaries so that the direction of his argument may be clearer.

This short passage of *On Not Three Gods* serves a number of purposes. On the one hand, it cleverly serves to put off the charge that the question actually posed is simply not being faced; on the other hand, it serves to highlight what has so far been missing from Gregory's account. While he has indicated the importance of distinguishing nature and operations as the referent of theological language, and while he has indicated the unity of the persons in their activity, Gregory has not yet offered a fully convincing account of

the link between the common actions of the divine persons and the indivisibility of the divine nature that he sees as central to pro-Nicene theology. That answer comes in the second half of the work's main section (B.2) where Gregory offers a more extensive account of the link between inner-divine causality and operation *ad extra*.

After this interlude, then, Gregory resumes his main argument (B.2). His next step is to indicate the distinction between the inseparable union of the divine persons in their activity and the accidental or coincidental activity of human persons undertaking some common project or business. Different human persons may undertake the same task but they do not directly participate in the action of others and each one possesses his or her own special sphere of activity.³⁸ In other terms, terms hinted at here but developed in more detail in the *Ad Graecos*, the actions of human beings demonstrate an interrelated causal matrix which reveals human beings to have a substance that may be individuated in a way characteristic of the created order. Not only do individual persons possess their own activity, they also reveal themselves to be impermanent and to be caused by previous generations of human beings.³⁹ Operations thus reveal the character of the powers and natures with which they are connected. However, in the case of the Father we find no activity in which the Son does not also work. Similarly, the Son has no "special activity" without the Spirit. The point is a fairly subtle one: whatever sort of individuality and difference exists between the three divine persons it is not the sort of individuality we observe in an existent that has its own self-caused and distinct activity.

The divine persons, thus, do not simply act together, they function inseparably to constitute any and every divine activity towards the creation. Gregory goes on to articulate his position further by developing his account of inner divine causality. He talks of the power or action of God "issuing from the Father as from a spring, [being] brought into operation by the Son, and perfecting its grace by the power of the Spirit".⁴⁰ This phrase, and others like it, have sometimes been taken to indicate the "personal" character of Gregory's Trinitarian theology, as if Gregory were telling us that the divine persons co-operated, at the Father's initiative, to bring to fruition every divine action. Unfortunately, although such a reading correctly highlights the position of the Father in this sequence, such a reading also misses key elements of Gregory's argument. Gregory, of course, does not want to deny that the divine persons possess their own distinct and irreducible hypostatic existence. However, his account of divine action uses a philosophical model of causality to present the three not as possessing distinct actions towards a common goal, but as together constituting *just one distinct action* (because they are one power). Gregory here makes no attempt to apply psychological categories to explain what it means for the persons to be distinct within the unitary divine power and deploys no language that obviously relies on metaphors of co-operation.⁴¹

On the basis of this argument Gregory can now present his second answer to the critique of pro-Nicene theology in a more sophisticated and powerful form. The activity of divine persons, as seen in creation and described in Scripture, is of a character that shows God's power (and hence the divine nature) not to be individuated as is human nature. Here it may help to call to mind some aspects of Gregory's theology that are only partially alluded to in *On Not Three Gods*: God has created a world whose order and structure is (at infinite remove) a reflection of God's own power.⁴² Because God has created the world in this way, the logic of power and activity that we see in God's creation should reveal to us something of God's activity and power.⁴³ On this basis Gregory can assert that through observing God's activity—which should be seen in creation and is narrated in Scripture—we can see that God's one power works always by a unitary causal sequenced activity of the three persons. The divine action does not reveal to us individuated natures parallel to those revealed by human activity. The divine action or will is the will of the Father that proceeds through the Son to the Spirit, and yet without that will being only the action of the Father, nor being the action of three together. It is, thus simply inappropriate to speak of three Gods, because we do not observe three distinct actions in the divine activity.

However, this observation does not serve only the purpose of indicating that the three have a unitary power, and a unitary "motion and disposition of the good will",⁴⁴ it also serves to emphasize the unique and incomprehensible nature of the divine power. This is so because Gregory does not allow us to argue that what we observe in the divine activity is just one acting power (I hesitate to say "one existent" acting—although this is the analogy on which Gregory relies): the divine power is one, and yet Scripture and the consequent confession of the Church insist that the persons are three. Gregory's ontology is intrinsic to his argument, but the argument serves to indicate the uniqueness of the God revealed in the Scriptural account and even something of the character of the ineffability that is the Creator. This last sentence is explored more fully in my conclusion, but it is important to note here that in these themes Gregory provides us with an archetypal example of the context in which he deploys analogical accounts of the divine unity or distinction, and it is only by placing those analogies in this context that we can grasp the degree to which we should rest in any one analogy or even in any particular combination of analogies.

In the final few pages of the text (my section A.2), Gregory both turns back to the initial answer he had given to Ablabius's question based on his understanding of the indivisibility of natures, and offers a few more hints about the importance of grasping the unitary divine causality. That Gregory is willing to revert to his initial argument at this stage—and that he even hints at a third argument which would argue that "Godhead" cannot be the name

of a nature because God is above every name—may be taken simply to be evidence of Gregory's willingness to provide Ablabius with a variety of polemical resources. However, one might also argue that in pursuing this multi-pronged tactic Gregory demonstrates a keen awareness of how his theology is attempting to argue for a context to knowledge of God that many of his contemporaries may have found too strongly insistent on the inability of humans to talk of the divine nature. Gregory adds to his argument that natures are by definition indivisible that, while Scripture itself deploys this common convention in a number of places, Scripture never speaks of God in the plural: "The Father is God: the Son is God: and yet, by the same proclamation God is One, because no difference either of nature or of operation is contemplated in the Godhead."⁴⁵

Gregory here also turns to those who might think that his insistence on the unity of the divine nature serves to confuse the distinctions of the persons. It is, he insists, only in the structure of the causal relationships between the persons that we can make any real distinctions. The sequence of the one divine action *ad extra* reflects the nature and order of God's *internal* generation, and in both the same sequence of causality is operative. Nevertheless, this internal structure does not describe the nature of the persons, but their mode of having or exercising that which remains ineffable. Because persons and essence are identical, that in which the persons consist also remains unknown:

... when we learn that He is unbegotten, we are taught in what mode he exists, and how it is fit that we should conceive Him as existing, but what He is we do not hear in that phrase.⁴⁶

Gregory's deployment of the language of individuation here (as elsewhere) is notoriously difficult to interpret, and I do not intend to enter that technical discussion in detail. However, it is not usually noted how Gregory's talk of a *hypostasis* having a "manner of existence" is clearly set within his distinction between the unknowability of the divine nature and the knowability of the divine power's operations. The manner of existence is known, the language that we should confess about the divine person is known, but the nature of the person is always unknown. Whether or not Gregory's deployment of this sort of individuation language is at all helpful in itself, it is important to note how his placing of that language in this particular context helps him further to elucidate his account of appropriate human talk of God. We may speak of the way in which a person contributes to the divine activity—and thereby we understand something more of the divine power—but the nature itself remains ineffable. Thus, the language of individuation is itself partly deployed in order to emphasize that the nature of which we speak remains ineffable and hence we may fairly conclude that Gregory thinks that even the manner of individuation itself remains ineffable.

VI: *Conclusion*

... for we, who are initiated into the mystery of godliness by the divinely inspired words of the Scripture do not see between the Father and the Son a partnership of Godhead, but a unity ...⁴⁷

On Not Three Gods does not offer an account of an analogy between three human persons and the three divine “persons” dependent on a psychologically dense account of what it is to be a person. The text does not focus its argument on a particular explanation of the terminology of *ousia* and *hypostasis*, and it does not even treat that very particular logic of unity and differentiation which Gregory understands to exist between three people as important for Trinitarian theology unless it is understood against the background of his discussion of the unity of the divine nature, power and activity. In not doing these various things, and in what it does actually do, I would argue that this text plays out for us, in a particular polemical context, the fundamental themes of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology.

At the beginning and end of the text Gregory is indeed directly concerned with whether his account of the Godhead falls prey to the same logic of differentiation that operates between three people. However, the bulk of *On Not Three Gods* is taken up with drawing out a related but distinct argument that does not begin with a particular understanding of differentiation or individuation in the Godhead (although it does *result* in such an account). Rather, this main argument of the text begins by establishing an account of the character of human knowledge of God and an account of the ontological principles on which our speech of the Trinity should be founded. This account provides, for Gregory, the necessary background against which we should offer any account of the logic of differentiation of the divine *hypostases*, and against which we should offer any analogy for the character of their communion. In this light perhaps we should begin to teach and read Gregory assuming different texts to be paradigmatic. Rather than turning first to *On Not Three Gods* I suggest we make far more use of three texts: *Catechetical Oration*, *Refutation of Eunomius’ Confession* and *Contra Eunomium II*.⁴⁸

At the end of this rather extended investigation let me set out three observations about the wider character of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology that follow from my discussion. These three points overlap, but they do so in treating some of the central themes of this paper as the point of departure for sketching an agenda for the study of Gregory’s Trinitarian theology.

1. Gregory’s various deployments of the sequence nature-power-activity, and his insistence that, while operations reveal their originating powers, natures remain unknown and ineffable, is the cosmological and ontological foundation on which his account of Trinitarian theology is built. However, these reflections deliver not simply Gregory’s account of God’s ineffability, but his account of what we might term the *character* of God’s ineffability.

In the first of his homilies on *The Song of Songs* Gregory writes in general terms,

the unlimited [divine] nature cannot be accurately contained by a name; rather, every capacity for concepts, and every form of words and names, even if they seem to contain something great and befitting God's glory, are unable to grasp his reality. But starting from certain traces and sparks, as it were, our words aim at the unknown, and from what we can grasp we make conjectures by a kind of analogy about the ungraspable ... the wonders visible in the universe give material for the theological terms by which we call God wise, powerful, good, holy, blessed, eternal, judge, savior, and so forth ... the human mind is unable to find any description, example, or adequate expression of that beauty ...⁴⁹

In this passage, Gregory's well known insistence on the divine infinity finds a complex account of theological analogy. On the one hand, the creation seems to provide points of departure for our talk of God (and here Gregory should not be thought of as conceiving of creation as a separate source from Scripture: Scriptural narrative and terminology are taken to direct our attention appropriately to the ways in which creation mirrors the divine existence through the presence of delegated power). On the other hand, Gregory insists that God remains at infinite remove from our understanding; the divine creator creates a context in which human beings may move in trust and in truth towards God, but God is not comprehended.

Elsewhere in Gregory's theology, beyond this brief section of his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, we find the logic of natures, powers, and activities enabling a more concrete account of the relationship between the activities we observe and the realities initiating them. But note that Gregory constantly uses his schema to force upon us a deliberate and focused *askesis* of the imagination, insisting that the logic of ineffable natures known through the activity of their intrinsic powers is fundamental to the structure of the creation itself. If we are to make progress in knowledge of God, we must develop appropriate attention to the character of *all* our knowledge. The particular discipline of epistemological reserve and cultivated attention to Scripture (and to the creation in Scripture's light) that Gregory shapes is thus founded on a developed theology of the divine infinity and power and a developed account of the created order and ontological difference.⁵⁰ From these themes flows a developing reflection on the very character and "texture" of Christian faith. And thus, for Gregory, careful development of these themes is intrinsic and fundamental to the good practice of Trinitarian theology.

2. In the last sentence of his summary of Gregory's Trinitarian theology Richard Hanson reports, but makes little of, Karl Holl's 1904 description of Gregory's God as a life-imparting power (*zoopoios dunamis*) in three forms.⁵¹

In fact, Holl's brief account is both extremely perceptive and provides a good basis for discussing the general conception of Gregory's Trinitarian theology that I think shines through the complex argument of *On Not Three Gods*. Holl both saw Gregory's account of the simple and ineffable divine power prefigured in Basil and (to a lesser extent) Gregory Nazianzen, and, in its particular and extensive development, as the theme which distinguished Gregory's account from that of the other "Cappadocian" theologies. For Holl, Gregory makes his own a theme that the other Cappadocians treat as one among many themes. Holl also sees Gregory's vision of what is revealed in—and active in—the scriptural account of salvation history as revolving around the revelation of a three-fold divine power. This theme is the site for Gregory's development of a remarkably complex and fruitful account of the distinction between creation and the distinct, un-mediate present Creator, an account that is fundamental to the whole of his thought world.⁵² This account of God as life-imparting power also provides Gregory with the basis for a soteriology which draws together an understanding of God's salvific divine power restoring the creation and a theology of creation in which God has shown himself in creation as the one whose inexhaustible power sustains and exists always in an economy of infinite plenitude. In this theology of redemption Christ's being one with the divine power, being *the* divine power, is the basis for the incorporation of all into the life and power of Christ.⁵³

Importantly, Holl also treats Gregory's account of the divine power which is the threefold being of Father, Son and Spirit as the point of departure for his brief treatment of the ways in which the persons are differentiated.⁵⁴ As I indicated towards the end of the last main section, Gregory's talk of the individuation of the persons is itself not intended to result in one account of the difference between them. Rather he is primarily concerned to give an account of the conditions under which we must speak of difference and the conditions under which we speak of unity. At the same time he seeks to rule out conceptions of either unity or differentiation that he takes to be incompatible with these basic conditions for speech about God. Throughout, the actual mode of the persons' individuation remains hidden from us even as Gregory continually insists that only confession of the reality and eternity of the hypostatic distinctions can do justice to the account of God's activity with which Scripture presents us.

I would, however, argue that Holl fails to follow through on his own logic where he assumes in Gregory the presence of a subtle subordinationism of Son and Spirit, and suggests that he has not sufficiently followed his own logic. This is, however, a large topic, and here I want to draw attention to just two relevant areas of discussion. In the first case, I suggest that the basic logic of the unity of the divine nature and power discussed here should be understood to govern statements about the causal order Gregory sees as distinguishable in the Trinity just as much as it is understood to govern the

logic of distinction Gregory describes between the three persons. In the latter case, as I have just suggested, Gregory insists that the distinctions between the persons are real, and yet the mode of existence of the persons as distinct and yet one is beyond our comprehension. Similarly, in the former case, Gregory insists that the order we perceive in Scriptural discussion of the Trinity does not involve spatial or temporal separation or sequence because of the unity and simplicity of the divine existence. Thus, once again, Gregory's account of the divine unity is intended to render inappropriate a whole range of consequences we might see as following any account of divine hierarchy, consequences necessary in created reality. But, just as Gregory's deployment of divine unity serves to render the divine distinctions confessed in faith ultimately incomprehensible (they cannot be understood as identical to the sort of distinctions we observe in *any* created example), so too the same deployment renders ultimately incomprehensible the mode of activity which the Scriptures allow us to narrate as inseparable and as occurring through the Son and being completed in the Spirit.

Of course, even if I am right about the structure of Gregory's argumentation, this does not necessarily mean that there is no hierarchy in Gregory's account. It means that we cannot assume an implicit ontological subordinationism to be present without much further work. It is just such an ontological subordinationism that Holl's account assumed, following the line of interpretation that all "Cappadocian" Trinitarianism was forever marked by Basil's early association with "Homoiousian" theology. Even if this thesis is no longer seen as viable—as the vast majority of recent scholarship has agreed—there may well be some sorts of acceptable hierarchy in our narrations of Trinitarian theology. The priority of the Father—even if it is the priority of one who eternally gives rise to a mutuality of loving exchange—is in some sense a priority.

3. As a number of recent studies have argued, Gregory accepts and makes use of a variety of terminologies for describing the relationship between the divine unity and the divine persons; *ousia*, *phusis*, *hypostasis* and *prosopon* are all brought into service when it is deemed necessary.⁵⁵ The agreement that it was possible to acknowledge three *hypostases* without implying that God was more than one ultimate principle was indeed central to the latter stages of the fourth century controversies. However, as I have shown, Gregory's theology demonstrates that making such a move occurred within a wider reshaping of the very grammar of divinity: Gregory's theology of the infinite and simple divine power is the context within which he can articulate the possibility of eternally distinct *hypostases* within the one divine power. Here I have argued, with reference to *On Not Three Gods*, that Gregory does not himself bring forward the analogy of three people and that he is concerned primarily with the logic of individuation that this analogy implies. Elsewhere in his corpus he consistently discusses the analogy in the same

context, using this analogy to focus on the logical relationships between the Trinitarian persons. This does not mean that psychological categories play no role in his thought, as the paper in this collection by Michel Barnes so well demonstrates. But his use of psychological analogies and the assumptions with which he uses those analogies differ markedly from the concerns of modern “social” Trinitarians.

Some readers will no doubt be puzzled by my lack of discussion of Gregory’s short *Ad Graecos* and the text that survives among Basil’s corpus as *Letter 38* but which is frequently now assumed to be by Gregory and has become known as the *Ad Petrum*. Again, a few remarks will indicate the directions in which I would wish to push discussion of the place of these texts. First, it is clear in the concluding sections of the *Ad Petrum* that the author insists on the importance of placing any such terminological discussions in the context of an overall account of the relations between Creator and creation and in the context of an account of the divine unity virtually identical to the accounts found in *On Not Three Gods*. Hence, at least one of these texts presents its arguments as needing not just some supplementation but the vital context of the wider themes more strongly apparent elsewhere in Gregory’s corpus. Thus arguments built on the concerns of these texts, I would argue, need to be constructed with overt reference to the ways in which they represent the wider corpus of Gregory’s Trinitarian writing. Second, the use of the logic of differentiation between three people in those texts is substantially the same as that found in *On Not Three Gods*: the discussion focuses around the logic of differentiation not around the communion shared between three persons understood in psychologically dense terms. Thus, while these texts provide much useful material for the scholar exploring Gregory’s understanding of unity and differentiation among human beings, I do not think they could serve as useful introductions to his Trinitarianism as a whole, and in the areas they do cover, the account offered is broadly the same as that found throughout Gregory’s corpus.

In *On Not Three Gods* and elsewhere Gregory does tell us, of course, that we can distinguish the persons with causal language. Now, given the structure of modern readings of Gregory, it is only to be expected that mention of this argument will result in the question being posed “what degree of distinction does this causal language involve?” I suspect that the clearest we can come to the answer that Gregory might give to this question is to say “we do not know”. Scripture demands that we confess a logic of eternal distinction which insists that insofar as we can talk of God as an eternal and distinct reality, so too we can speak of Father and Son and Spirit as eternally distinct realities. At the same time Scripture demands that we speak of a unitary divine power and nature, *and*, for Gregory, it demands of us analogical talk that attempts to explore the resonances and implications of the character of God’s action as narrated in Scripture. For those modern commentators who accept the account of east and west as differentiated by

a preference for social or mental analogies, failure to deploy some sort of social analogy of necessity implies a failure to distinguish the three persons appropriately. However, such an equation is not a necessary one and its deployment reveals a lack of understanding of the peculiarly modern preoccupation that makes it seem plausible.

To describe how Gregory does consider that we should analogically talk about the distinction between the persons and their unity, we would need to see how he combines together distinct analogical fields in particular texts, adapting analogical traditions to serve within his overall grammar of the divine and of theological language. Demonstrating how this is so—and thus coming to provide a more detailed answer to particular ways of presenting Gregory's analogical preferences—is the subject for much other work. Indeed, I suggest that such research should be seen as an urgent need in the study of classical Trinitarian theology. However, on the basis of my argument here I can say that in every case we will only read Gregory well if we constantly bear in mind how those analogical discussions are intended to play a part within a particular *askesis* of the soul and of the imagination, and in every case we would need to bear in mind the ontological foundations for such talk. Only if we learn to do this would we really learn, at last, to appreciate Gregory as a pro-Nicene theologian.

NOTES

- 1 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* (hereafter *CE*) II (GNO I/1, 256; NPNF V, 260). Note: all references to works of Gregory are accompanied both by references both to the appropriate GNO volume (where possible) (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, W. Jaeger *et al.*, ed [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960ff.]) and to a published English translation (where possible). The most frequently cited translation is that of NPNF (Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880ff.]).
- 2 I would like to thank Michel Barnes, John Behr, Sarah Coakley, Andrew Louth, Medi Ann Volpe and Robert Wilken for their comments on an earlier version of this paper which was read as a "Master Theme" at the Thirteenth International Patristics Conference, Oxford, August 1999. I also wish to thank the editors of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Profs. Elizabeth Clark and Patout Burns (and two anonymous readers for that journal) for releasing this paper from their publication schedule to appear here.
- 3 By "pro-Nicene" theologians I refer to those who, from a variety of different but related perspectives, came, in the latter half of the fourth century, to shape theologies which argued for a particular interpretation of Nicaea's terminology and which offered a wider theological context for that interpretation. These theologies went on to provide the foundation for the orthodoxy defined in the early 380s. As recent scholarship has increasingly made clear these, theologies share foundational principles across a number of supposed traditional linguistic or geographical divisions. See for examples the literature cited in note 11 and, on western themes, my "'Remember that you are Catholic' (*serm.* 52,2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 39–82; Michel Rene Barnes, "Re-reading Augustine's theology of the Trinity", in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (eds), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 56–71.
- 4 In my *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), I offer a more extensive (but still brief) discussion of modern readings of Gregory's supposed "pluralism", especially insofar as these readings are an excellent example of the ways in which modern

theological summaries and textbook presentations are often primarily expressions of only half-conscious commitment to late nineteenth century narratives of early Christian doctrine rather than expressions of in-depth engagement with the texts themselves and with ongoing scholarship on those texts. Indeed, it is noticeable that Nyssa—or the “Cappadocians” in general—is frequently cited but almost entirely without any detailed attempt at reading his texts. Two exceptions to this rule—whether or not I agree with the result—are Robert Jenson and Cornelius Plantinga.

- 5 Although in general it is important to distinguish the theologians of Basil and the two Gregorians, here Gregory is encountering a charge first faced by Basil, and now being faced by the two Gregorians. The charge, as I hope to show, goes to the heart of a concern shared by all three thinkers.
- 6 It is fascinating (but the question must probably remain unanswered in any determinate way) to ask whether we might extend my point about *On Not Three Gods* here and say that even the extended discussions of the analogy between three people and the three divine persons in Cappadocian discussions were stimulated not by their wishing to offer the analogy but by opponents bringing it forward. Of course there is some material in previous tradition—and in the fourth century controversies—that makes *ad hoc* use of such an analogy in some form, but not what precisely stimulated Cappadocian attempts to be precise about the logic of individuality using this parallel. It is not intrinsically connected to the emergence of a careful distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, although those discussions—in Cappadocian theology—do sometimes coincide.
- 7 An earlier article by Lucian Turcescu demonstrates the problem of discussing Gregory’s understanding of “person” with reference to the *Ad Petrum* (previously treated as Basil’s *ep.* 38). In “The Concept of Divine Persons in Gregory of Nyssa’s *To His Brother Peter, On the Difference Between Ousia and Hypostasis*”, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42 (1997), pp. 63–82, Turcescu clearly shows that the language of *hypostasis* is not used primarily to identify something which is then filled with individual psychological content, but he then insists, largely on the weak grounds that the hypostases are described with terms that may be translated as “relational” and “perichoretic”, that the Cappadocians *do* mean something like a community of persons! Turcescu’s essay in this volume seems to pursue the best lines of his earlier article in carefully distinguishing Nyssa’s discussion of persons from the concerns of some modern theologians.
- 8 For a brief outline of the nature of “Macedonian” theology and the problems of using the term see Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 760–772. More extensively see Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), esp. chps. 3, 4 and the very useful bibliography; W.-D. Hauschild, *Die Pneumatomachen. Eine Untersuchung zur Dogmengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts*, Diss. University of Hamburg, 1967. Unfortunately Haykin offers no discussion of *On Not Three Gods*, his account focusing primarily on Athanasius’s encounter with the *Tropici* and on Basil’s pneumatology. I say that the charge “most immediately” originated with this group because, of course, treating Father and Son as co-eternal was viewed as implying two ultimate principles from the earliest stages of the fourth century controversies and before.
- 9 Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutation of Eunomius’s Confession* (hereafter *Ref.*), 14 (GNO II/2, 394–395; NPNF V, 129–130).
- 10 This account of the polemical context of *On Not Three Gods* may be further reinforced by Basil’s insistence at *On the Holy Spirit*, 18, 45 that “we do not say ‘one, two, three’, or ‘first, second, and third’” and by his strong insistence that ranking the Spirit with Father and Son does not mean that the divine nature and power is now threefold. The sections where Basil argues that the three persons are not to be enumerated as if they were divided objects is most likely not to be an abstract treatment of the paradox of number in the Trinity, but a specific response to the sort of polemical charge Gregory faces a few years later.
- 11 The fourth century Christological and Trinitarian controversies have undergone much reinterpretation in recent decades, and that process of reinterpretation continues. For recent accounts of the latter half of the fourth century and of the significance of Cappadocian Trinitarianism see Michel René Barnes, “The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon”, in Lewis Ayres & Gareth Jones (eds) *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 47–67; Andre de Halleux, “‘Hypostase’ et ‘Personne’ dans

- la formation du dogme trinitaire (ca. 375–381)”, *Revue d’Histoire Ecclesiastique* 79 (1984), pp. 313–369; 625–670; idem, “Personalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Peres cappadociens”, *Revue theologique de Louvain* 17 (1986): pp. 129–155; 265–292; Joseph T. Lienhard, “The Arian Controversy: Some Categories Reconsidered,” *Theological Studies* 48 (1987), pp. 415–436; idem, “Ousia and hypostasis: the Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of ‘One hypostasis’”, in Stephen T. Davis, David Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (eds), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). The best introduction to the controversies available in English is currently Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, trans. Marius Westerhoff, edited by Andrew Louth (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), chps. 9–14. See also my *Nicaea and Its Legacy, passim*.
- 12 E.g., Arius, *Letter to Alexander*, 2; Eunomius, *Apology*, 21. The appearance of the verse in both these texts should not be taken as evidence of a direct connection between the two, but rather a common interest in an exegetical *topos* that served both their theologies and which had a history extending back beyond its significance in the fourth century.
 - 13 Within such a grammar many moves are possible. Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Letter to his Church concerning the Synod at Nicaea* provides ample evidence for the truth of this statement. Eusebius is able to assent to the *homoousion* in some form while still differentiating Father and Son in a basically hierarchical manner. For a very useful introduction to Eusebius’s theology, see J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 90–99; 106–123.
 - 14 E.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *De Spiritu Sancto* (GNO III/1, 91; NPNF V, 316): “Deity, in fact, exhibits perfection in every line in which the good can be found. If it fails and comes short of perfection in any single point, in that point the conception of deity will be impaired, so that it cannot, therein, be called Deity at all.”
 - 15 These themes then served as a key polemical tool against the varieties of subordinationist language deployed by very different anti-Nicene theologians in the latter stages of the controversy.
 - 16 It is because the language of differentiation and relation is incorporated within this revised grammar of the divine that Harnack’s old charge that Cappadocian Trinitarianism is “semi-Arian” just misses the point. I return to this point in the conclusion to the paper.
 - 17 One piece of evidence for this view of the shifts involved is the very lack of attention paid to the term *homoousios* by some of the key players in the latter stage of the controversy. See Barnes, “The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon”, pp. 58–62.
 - 18 Much twentieth century Trinitarianism has taken any text that begins by discussing the “unity” of God to be offering this term as the fundamental point of reference for describing God in a way that serves only to deny the Trinitarian character of the divine for Christians. Some writers have, however, taken a more subtle approach and noted that such discussions actually function to introduce Trinitarian theology by first arguing some basic points about the rules for discussion of divinity (and for the relationship between Creator and creation), rules that are intrinsic to Christian Trinitarianism and which in no way reduce the possibility of articulating a fully Trinitarian perspective (the work of David Burrell on Aquinas is here particularly noteworthy). These rules do not so much result in a prioritizing of the unity of God understood as prior to the persons, but rather shape the whole of Trinitarian theology. Gregory offers a fascinating example of how well a fourth century author could grasp the fundamental importance of such a move to the good practice of theology.
 - 19 On this letter see, most recently, G. Christopher Stead, “Why not Three Gods?: The Logic of Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Doctrine”, in Hubertus R. Drobner and Christoph Klock (eds) *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und Die Christlichen Spätantike* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 149–163. Stead’s article considers only the logic of differentiation (almost entirely what I have designated argument A). Stead notes that the argument is a logical one applicable to the differentiation of material things and angels, but then insists—on the weak grounds that Gregory argues his logical point from the example of three humans and usually about three biblical saints that (p. 160)—“underlying Gregory’s confusion is the thought that ideal humanity, the human race at its best, would provide an analogy for the Holy Trinity”. Unlike many modern commentators Stead thinks Gregory is deeply confused, and he refrains from endorsing his understanding of the project as a whole. Stead exemplifies

- the same problem as the earlier article by Turcescu considered in n. 7: he presents us with the evidence for concluding that Gregory does not intend to draw any detailed or dense analogy between three people and the triune God, but still insists that this is precisely Gregory's intention.
- 20 GNO III/1, 42; NPNF V, 332: "'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord', even though the name of Godhead extends through the Holy Trinity. This I say according to the account we have given in the case of human nature, in which we have learnt that it is improper to extend the name of the nature by the mark of plurality. We must, however, more carefully examine the name of 'Godhead'."
- 21 CE III, 4 (GNO II/2, 36ff.; NPNF V, 146).
- 22 Gregory of Nyssa, *Apology on the Hexameron* (PG 44, 92). On this understudied text see Eugenio Corsini, "Nouvelles perspectives sur le probleme des sources de l'Hexaëmeron de Grégoire de Nysse", *Studia Patristica*, II:I (1957), pp. 94–103; John F. Callahan, "Greek Philosophy and the Cappadocian Cosmology", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* XII (1958), pp. 29–58.
- 23 For the moment Stead, "Why Not Three Gods?" remains the basis for future discussion.
- 24 CE II, 106 (GNO I/1, 256; NPNF V, 261).
- 25 GNO III/1, 43; NPNF V, 332.
- 26 E.g., Basil, CE I, 14–15; II, 32 (SC 299, 220ff.; SC 305, 132ff); Gregory of Nyssa, C.E. VII, 4–5 (GNO I/2, 178–184; NPNF V, 197–199).
- 27 A paradigmatic text in Gregory discussing this theme is *Contra Eunomium* II (GNO I/1, 256ff.; NPNF V, 260ff.). Here I have simply outlined some key aspects of Gregory's use in this context, the term itself has a long history even if we think only of Greek Christian writing. Foundational for Gregory's usage is Origen's in his *Comm. in Joh. I*.
- 28 Gregory of Nyssa, CE II (GNO I/1 270; NPNF V, 265).
- 29 See also *In Cant. I* (GNO VI, 36–38); trans. C. McCambley OCSO, Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Brookline MA: Hellenic College Press, 1987), pp. 53–54.
- 30 See Michel René Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two traditions of Transcendental Causality", *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998), pp. 59–87, here p. 81. See also Michel René Barnes *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 297–305. Here Barnes notes that in *On Not Three Gods* Gregory makes significant use of *energeia* (energy) language to supplement his use of *dunamis*—the persons are one in *energeia* as well as *dunamis*. On the one hand, Barnes attributes this to the significance of *energeia* in debates over the Spirit: treating the Spirit as an *energeia* indicated to some a subordinate ontological status while, for pro-Nicenes an *energeia* was an expression of a *dunamis* and thus appeal to the same language could help to bolster a theology of the Spirit's full divinity. On the other hand, Barnes notes that this shift involves no fundamental change to Gregory's basic metaphysical or theological picture and thus I do no more than note it here.
- 31 Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.1.6.
- 32 Plotinus, *Ennead*, V.4.2.
- 33 See Michel René Barnes, "The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language", in Michel Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds) *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), pp. 217–236. Barnes's paper is concerned primarily with the presence of the sequence essence, activity, product in Eunomius and its precedents. However, *en passant* he remarks on the significance that stems from Gregory's retention of "power" in the sequence between essence and activity. This different sequence helps to shape a very different account of divine causality. In Eunomius's sequence and tradition the link between essence and activity is not a necessary one and thus, deploying such a sequence to describe the Son as "product" of the Father's activity serves to indicate the necessary subordination (and lack of co-eternity) that the Son must possess. Gregory, on the other hand, retains "power" in the sequence and, because a power is intrinsic to a nature and necessarily contains the causal capacity of that nature, speaking of the Son as the Father's power helps to shape a very different account of the divine generation.
- 34 GNO III/1, 44; NPNF V, 333. Cf. Origen, *Peri Archon* I, 2, 12, 411–416 (SC 252, 138) (cited by Barnes, "Background and Use", p. 231) for a direct precedent. Cf. CE I, 30–32 (GNO I/1, 152ff.; NPNF V, 75–76), where the same threefold sequence and the same virtual equivalence of power and nature is to be found.

- 35 GNO III/1, 44; NPNF V, 332–333: “Hence it is clear that by any of the terms we use the Divine Nature is not itself signified, but some one of its surroundings is made known ... Since, then, as we perceive the varied operations of the power above us, we fashion our appellations from the several operations that are known to us ... He surveys all things and overlooks them all, discerning our thoughts, and even entering by His power of contemplation those things that are not visible, [hence] we suppose that Godhead (*theotes*) is so called from beholding (*thea*) ... Now ... let him consider this operation, and judge whether it belongs to one of the persons whom we believe in the Holy Trinity, or whether the power extends throughout the Three Persons ... For Scripture attributes the act of seeing equally to Father, Son and Spirit.” This text illustrates Gregory’s deployment of the sequence nature-power-activity. Power and nature are, on the one hand, virtually synonymous and, on the other hand, it is the power that is the cause of actions *ad extra*.
- 36 It is frequently asserted that a fundamental “Cappadocian” theme is that natures are known by their operations. One of the purposes of the last few pages is to show that, in the specific case of Gregory of Nyssa, this account is not quite accurate. For Gregory operations reveal powers, natures remain unknown.
- 37 GNO III/1, 46; NPNF V, 333.
- 38 GNO III/1, 47; NPNF V, 334: “Thus, since among men the action of each in the same pursuits is discriminated, they are properly called many, since each of them is separated from the others within his own environment, according to the special character of his operation.”
- 39 For the discussion in *Ad Graecos* see esp. GNO III/1, 23–24; trans. Daniel F. Stramara, Jr., *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 41 (1996), pp. 381–391, here 384–385.
- 40 GNO III/1, 50; NPNF V, 334.
- 41 Unless we take the mere ascription of a distinct role and a distinct name within the divine action to indicate psychological content. If we do so, our language has become so general that we might just as well attribute “psychological” content to the discrete parts of the computer on which this paper is being written. However, just to repeat, my point is not that Gregory does not conceive of the persons as truly distinct, but that ascribing true distinctness to the Trinitarian persons is not necessarily equivalent to ascribing autonomous “personal” or “psychological” content to each of them.
- 42 This we have already seen in discussion of Gregory’s *Hexameron*.
- 43 E.g., GNO III/1, 48; NPNF V, 334: “From Him, I say, who is the chief source of gifts, all things which have shared in this grace have obtained their life. When we inquire, then, whence this good gift came to us, we find, *by the guidance of the Scriptures* that it was from the Father, the Son and the Spirit.” (italics added)
- 44 GNO III/1, 48; NPNF V, 334.
- 45 GNO III/1, 55; NPNF V, 336.
- 46 GNO III/1, 57; NPNF V, 336 (italics added by NPNF translator).
- 47 Gregory of Nyssa, *Ref.*, 6 (GNO I/2, 328; NPNF V, 107).
- 48 Non Patristic specialists should note that the CE II which appears as NPNF V, 101ff. is actually *Refutation of Eunomius’s Confession*; the true CE II appears as NPNF V, 250ff.
- 49 *In Cant.* I (GNO VI, 36–38; McCambley, 53–54).
- 50 Although I have hinted at most relevant themes for understanding the links between Gregory’s account of divine power, ontological difference and the *askesis* of Christian thinking in this paper, a more extended discussion would need also to explore Gregory’s account of how created powers (and the power of human life and thought) participate in the divine power—the Word—both now and through the process of salvation and sanctification.
- 51 Hanson, *The Search*, p. 730.
- 52 One unexplored theme in twentieth (and twenty-first) century appropriation of early Christian thought is the way in which the articulation of a theology of creation and of the distinction between Creator and creation is central to the articulation of the nature of salvation itself. Here one might compare the structure of Nyssa’s thought with that of Augustine. For both it is the discourse of faith that begins to provide and begins to enable description of the order of things and God. The seduction of modern theologians into a post-Kantian and post-Barthian discussion whose parameters are “natural theology” or “revelation” have for sometime severely hampered engagement with the sorts of theological options seen in Nyssa or Augustine.

- 53 These themes may be particularly clearly seen in Gregory's homily on 1 Cor. 15:28 (PG 44, 1304–26). There is a detailed discussion of the text in Reinhard M. Hübner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 27–66. Part of the significance of this text lies in the way that it shows particularly clearly how the polemical conflict around the Son's status and what I have termed the grammar of divinity had, for Gregory, clearly soteriological consequences. See also *CE V*, 5 where Gregory discusses the transformation of the Christian through the indwelling of God's power: this discussion nicely opens a number of avenues for investigating distinct technical backgrounds to the *theosis* theme that has so fascinated modern writers.
- 54 Karl Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadoziern* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904), p. 209ff.
- 55 Most succinctly, Lienhard, "Ousia and hypostasis".