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Comparing the Incomparable:

Gregory of Nazianzus' use of Comparative Images for God

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2026

Abstract

This study is the first to offer a systematic, integrated account of Gregory of Nazianzus' comparative images for God as a coherent theological method by examining Gregory of paradoxical use of comparative images for God—images he simultaneously rejects as theologically inadequate yet repeatedly employs in his writings. Although Gregory is celebrated both for his rhetorical brilliance and for his decisive role in articulating pro-Nicene trinitarian theology, scholarship has tended to treat his images either as ornamental products of classical *paideia* or as incidental illustrations within his theological argumentation. This study argues that Gregory's use of comparative images for God is shaped by his theological concerns, grounded in his ontology, epistemology, Christology, and pastoral vocation.

Part I establishes the theoretical framework for interpreting Gregory's ambivalence toward comparison. Chapter 2 demonstrates that Gregory's warnings against images arise from a robust theological-ontological conviction: the triune God is simple, infinite, and utterly incomparable to the compounded, finite, and mutable created order. This ontological gulf renders all comparisons intrinsically inadequate. Chapter 3 then explains why, despite this conviction, Gregory nevertheless employs comparative images. Drawing on his Christology, his account of embodied human cognition, and his self-understanding as theologian, orator, shepherd, and inscriber, the chapter argues that Gregory views images as pastorally necessary tools that ignite the theological imagination and guide the ascent toward contemplation of the incomprehensible God.

Part II offers close readings of nine comparative images Gregory uses to articulate the Trinity. Chapter 4 analyses three "honour images" deployed against Eunomius, while Chapter 5 examines six relational images that express eternal generation, procession, and the unity-in-distinction of the divine persons. Part II shows how Gregory transforms the images he inherited from classical and biblical sources to safeguard the mystery of the Trinity.

The conclusion synthesises these findings, presenting a systematic account of Gregory's comparative images as coordinated, mutually corrective, and pedagogically oriented instruments that shape the theological imagination of his audience and illuminate the constructive logic of pro-Nicene trinitarian theology.

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Abbreviations

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CCL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CCG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CCLP	Corpus Christianorum Lingua Patrum
FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GNO	Jaeger, W. <i>Gregorii Nysseni opera</i> (Leiden: Brill, 1958-96)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, trans., <i>Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzen. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series</i> , ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 7 (1893; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 1995). Other volumes are mentioned in the citations.
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf)
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SP	Studia Patristica
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
PG	Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Graeca
PGL	G.W.H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)
PL	Patrologia Latina
PPS	Popular Patristics Series
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>

Declaration

This thesis is the product of my own work and does not include work that has been presented in any form for a degree at this or any other university. All quotations from, and references to, the work of persons other than myself have been properly acknowledged throughout.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent, and information derived should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

“It takes a village...” is true for this PhD project. Although this is my research, many named and unnamed ‘village people’ are behind the completion of this project, and I am grateful to them.

My deepest gratitude is first and foremost to my family, who have sacrificed so much during this season of study. To my beloved wife, Priya, whose hard work, love, patience, and strength carried me through the most demanding moments; and to my dear children, Rhesa and Jeremiah, whose many sacrifices have been a constant source of inspiration. To the extended family—my mother, my sister, and my in-laws—for supporting us in countless ways throughout this journey.

My supervisor, Prof. Lewis Ayres, has not only been an academic guide but also a true friend throughout this journey. Without his generous mentorship and unwavering confidence in this project—even when I myself had doubts—this dissertation would not have reached completion. Not only has he set high standards in patristic scholarship, but he has also demonstrated his enviable culinary skills and love for kitchen gadgets, which I hope to emulate. Big thanks to his wife Dr. Medi Volpe, and their children for their gracious hospitality and fellowship from the time we first arrived in Durham, especially for the many shared meals that sustained us in more ways than one.

I am grateful to the Methodist Church in India (MCI) for the study leave. My heartfelt thanks to the Christian family across India, Singapore, and the United Kingdom who generously supported my PhD studies through their prayers and financial assistance.

My sincere appreciation goes to the Centre for Catholic Studies (CCS) at Durham University for the bursaries provided over the past two years, and to the Lumen Christi Institute (Chicago) and the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (Toronto) for the invaluable opportunity to participate in their summer seminars in Canada over two consecutive years. These experiences significantly enriched my knowledge of the Church Fathers.

Special thanks to the Department of Classics—especially Prof. George Gazis and Prof. Sarah Miles—for warmly welcoming me into their classrooms and helping me to strengthen my Greek and Latin, both of which have been indispensable for this research. I am deeply indebted to my professors in the Department of Theology and Religion—Prof. Jane Heath, Prof. Jan Dochhorn, and Prof. Fr. Krastu Nikita Banev—who generously gave their time to

read Greek texts with me and who took a personal interest in my research and intellectual development. The weekly Greek reading groups run by Dr. Gazis and Dr. Dochhorn deserve special mention for encouraging me to read texts beyond my research.

I am grateful to the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University for various grants that enabled me to travel, participate in seminars and present papers. I cannot forget Rev. John Squares and Rev. Christopher Humble, Superintendents of Durham and Deerness Valley Circuit, and the West Durham Circuit of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, for offering ministry opportunities during our stay in the UK. As a minister, my weekly preachings deeply enriched my spiritual life and pastoral experience. The hospitality and generosity of all the Methodist churches in these circuits are gratefully acknowledged—thanks for embracing us into your church families with open arms.

I am sincerely thankful to Mrs. Michele Thorns and Rev. Dr. Alan Bartlett for taking the time to read this thesis and for offering valuable suggestions. My special thanks go to Dr. Pauline Watson and Rev. Rebecca Watts whose careful proofreading and insightful corrections greatly improved the quality of this dissertation.

To all who have walked alongside me in this journey—named and unnamed—I offer my deepest thanks. This dissertation is the fruit of a shared endeavour, and I remain ever grateful for the ‘village’ that made it possible.

For Priya, Rhesa, and Jerem — this is as much yours as it is mine.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The Problem of Comparative Images

Gregory of Nazianzus¹ is acclaimed by the Church as ‘Theologian’ for his contribution to the accurate formulation of the doctrine of God,² and is praised in the tradition for his literary style and elegant words: John of Sicily hailed him in the 9th century as one who “made Demosthenes seem a mere child.”³ As an Athenian-trained rhetor, Gregory used several literary devices, such as similes (εἰκῶν, εἰκασία), comparisons (ὁμοίωσις), and illustrations (παράδειγμα), which are commonly translated as analogies, in his corpus. This corpus consists of 45 orations,⁴ around 19,000 lines of poetry with varying metric styles,⁵ and around 240

¹ A comprehensive biography of Gregory in English is John A. McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001). But significant critical material on Gregory’s biography can be found in Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Lima: Academic Renewal Press, 2003), 18-54. Originally published by Oxford University Press in 1969; Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-62. For older biographies that are still useful but need to be corrected in light of the newer findings of the modern ones, see Carl Ullmann, *Gregorius von Nazianz der Theologe: Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen und Dogmengeschichte des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Darmstadt: Carl Wilhelm Leske, 1825), translation published as Carl Ullmann, *Gregory Nazianzum “the Divine”*: A Contribution to the Ecclesiastical History of the Fourth Century, trans. C.V. Cox (London: John W. Parker, 1851); Alphonse Benoit, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze sa vie, ses œuvres et son époque* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973).

² Oliver B. Langworthy, “Theodoret’s Theologian: Assessing the Origin and Significance of Gregory of Nazianzus’ Title,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70, no. 3 (2019): 455, accessed on November 11, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046918001951>.

³ George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 238; He was also called “Christian Demosthenes,” see, Alex Petkas, “The Reception of Greek Rhetoric in the Late Antique East,” in *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. Sophia Papaioannou, Andreas Serafim, and Michael Edwards (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 37; Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, trans. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), 347; McGuckin, *Gregory*, 402. For details of his influence on Byzantine Christian literature, see Jacques Noret, “Grégoire de Nazianze, l’auteur le plus cité, après la Bible, dans la littérature ecclésiastique byzantine,” in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums: Forschungen zu Gregor von Nazianz, II Symposium Nazianzenum*, ed. Justin Mossay (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1983), 259-66.

⁴ Though generally numbered as 45, *Oration 35* is now considered spurious. All of Gregory’s orations in Greek are available with Latin translation in PG 35 and 36; critical edition of Greek text of most of the orations with translation in French are found in SC 247, 309, 405, 270, 284, 250, 318, 358, and 384. All the orations are available in English, but scattered in different places: NPNF; Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2006), 62-161; C.W. King, *Julian the Emperor, containing Gregory Nazianzen’s Two Invectives and Libanius’ Monody with Julian’s Extant Theosophical Works* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), 1-218; Martha Vinson, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Select Orations*, FC 107 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). Gregory’s famous *Theological Orations* i.e. *Or. 27-31* has several editions. Greek text with comments can be found in A.J. Mason, *The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899); Joseph Barbel, *Gregor von Nazianz: Die Fünf Theologischen Reden* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1963); English translation by Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham with commentary by Frederick Norris in Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzen*, VCSup 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

⁵ John A. McGuckin, “Gregory: The Rhetorician as Poet,” in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, ed. Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 201; Greek version of Gregory’s poems with Latin translation are found in PG 37 and 38; For Greek with French translation, André

epistles.⁶ Despite using several literary devices in his writings, he struggles when he tries to employ them to talk about God. In his *Theological Orations*, he reveals his frustration when he talks about the inner life of God:

If there is one God, one supreme nature (μία φύσις ἡ ἀνωτάτω), where can I find a comparison (τὴν ὁμοίωσιν) to present to you? Are you looking for one from below and from around you (ἐκ τῶν κάτω καὶ τῶν περὶ σέ)? It is an exceedingly shameful, and not just shameful but generally futile notion, to get a representation or comparison (τὴν εἰκασίαν) of things above (τῶν ἄνω) from things below (ἐκ τῶν κάτω), of things of unaltered nature (τῶν ἀκινήτων) from things of unstable nature (ἐκ τῆς ῥευστῆς φύσεως).⁷

Gregory's argument is that, given the one nature of God and its concomitant uniqueness, no comparison can be made between God and any other entity. In order to undertake a comparison between two entities, it is necessary that there exists some degree of commonality between them. The unique nature of God means that no analogous being or object can be found with which God can be compared, nor which can be employed to illustrate the unique trinitarian being of God. Any attempt to compare God with anything else would be shameful, futile and would be like “seeking the living among the dead.”⁸ But this understanding does not stop Gregory from using images. By the time he finishes that oration, he explores the images of Adam-Eve-Seth, a source-spring-river, and sun-beam-light, and he is not fully satisfied with them. But across his entire corpus, including these three, he has a total of nine images or image clusters to talk about God. The issue of using any comparison for God is so crucial to Gregory that he devotes the closing sections of his famous *Theological Orations*, not to refuting his opponents or to summarising the doctrine of the Trinity, but to examining with his restless mind (διασκεψάμενος... τῇ φιλοπραγμοσύνῃ τοῦ νοῦ) the issue of using images

Tuilier, Guillaume Bady and Jean Bernardi, trans., *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Œuvres Poétiques*, Vols. 1 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004); Greek with English translation of poems related to scriptures in Brian Dunkle, trans., *St Gregory of Nazianzus: Poems on Scripture*, PPS 46 (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012); English translations are found in Daley, *Gregory*, 162-71; D.A. Sykes, trans., *St. Gregory of Nazianzus Poemata Arcana*, ed. C. Moreschini, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Carolinne White, ed. and trans., *Gregory of Nazianzus: Autobiographical Poems*, Cambridge Medieval Classics 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John McGuckin, trans., *Saint Gregory Nazianzen: Selected Poems* (Oxford: Sisters of the Love of God, 1995).

⁶ Gregory's Epistles in Greek with Latin translations are found in PG 37 and Greek with French translations in Paul Gallay, ed., *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres*, Vols. I & II (Paris: Société d'édition <Les Belles Lettres>, 1964/67); English translation of some letters in NPNF, 437-82; Daley, *Gregory*, 173-83; English translation of the complete collection in Bradley K. Storin, Trans. *Gregory of Nazianzus's Letter Collection* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). For studies on Gregory's letters, see, Paul Gallay, *Langue et style de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze dans sa correspondance*, Collection de Philologie Classique (Paris: Librairie J. Monnier, 1933).

⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; SC 250.292-94.

⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10.

for God.⁹ In these sections, Gregory weighs the advantages and the disadvantages of using the images of source-spring-river, and sun-beam-light to illustrate the Trinity. This dissertation explores the reasons for Gregory's frustration and yet his use of comparative images, such as similes, comparisons, illustrations, etc., to talk about God. I will use the term 'comparative image' to refer to these literary forms throughout this dissertation.¹⁰

As a rhetor trained in the best schools of his time in Cappadocian Caesarea, Palestinian Caesarea, Alexandria, and Athens, Gregory frequently employed comparative images. They made his orations and poems elegant and worthy of imitation by the later Byzantine writers.¹¹ But when it comes to God, Gregory hesitates to use comparative images, and when he does, he is frustrated by the lack of a perfect image to represent God and expresses that frustration throughout his writings. There has been a recent upsurge in interest in Gregory of Nazianzus, with new translations of his works and monographs being published. Still, the scholarship focuses either on Gregory's theological acumen¹² or his literary achievements and use of classical *paideia*.¹³ The theological works focus on different aspects of Gregory's theology, scarcely giving systematic attention to the literary figures he uses but considering them as mere stylistic elements of his writings. On the other hand, the literary works focus on Gregory's use

⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; SC 250.338; See also *Or.* 31.32-33.

¹⁰ The reason is explained in section 1.3.

¹¹ McGuckin, *Gregory*, 401-2; For information on various translations and the transmission of Gregory's work through the centuries, see Caroline Macé, ed. *Organising a Literary Corpus in the Middle Ages: The Corpus Nazianzenum and the Corpus Dionysiacum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024). For the popularity of his works, see, Noret, "Grégoire de Nazianze," 259-66.

¹² Some of the important works covering Gregory's theological contributions that will be cited more often in this dissertation, apart from the theological material present in the biographical works cited above, are Thomas Špidlík, *Grégoire de Nazianze: introduction à l'étude de sa doctrine spirituelle*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 189 (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1971); Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, *Patristic Monograph Series* 7 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd, 1979); Anna-Stina Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus*, *Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia* 21 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1981); Sigurd Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature*, *Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), this work is translation of *Geist der Natur befreit. Die trinitarische Kosmologie Gregors von Nazianz im Horizont einer ökologischen Theologies der Befreiung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1995); Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Andrew Hofer, *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus*, *OECS* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Anna Usacheva, *Knowledge, Language and Intellection from Origen to Gregory Nazianzen: A Selective Survey*, *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity* 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017); Gabrielle Thomas, *The Image of God in the Theology of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Oliver B. Langworthy, *Gregory of Nazianzus' Soteriological Pneumatology*, *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 117 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

¹³ Marcel Guignat, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze et la rhétorique* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et fils, 1911); Ruether, *Gregory*; Manfred Kertsch, *Bildersprache bei Gregor von Nazianz: Ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Rhetorik und Popularphilosophie* (Graz: Instituts für ökumenische Theologie und Patrologie an der Universität Graz, 1978); Kristoffel Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianze: A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*. CCLP 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996).

of classical education, rhetorical styles and literary devices in his writing, not connecting them intrinsically with his theology. Notably connected with the theme of this dissertation are the works of Guignet, Ruether, Kertsch and Demoen, which deal with the images in Gregory, but they all do so by treating them not as theological tools but as literary devices. Guignet analyses the images in Gregory by categories such as metaphor (Chapter 7) and comparison (Chapter 8).¹⁴ Ruether examines the images in their rhetorical context but fails to connect them to Gregory's cosmology and anthropology, which she examines in the last chapter of her book.¹⁵ Kertsch's work, though thorough, deals only with the images of water and sun in Gregory.¹⁶ Demoen deals with only the *exempla*—historical and mythological illustrations—in Gregory, and although comprehensive and exhaustive, again he deals with them only from a literary perspective.¹⁷ These works overlook the fact that Gregory uses these literary devices differently when referring to God than when using them generally as an embellishment, and how important this distinction is to him. Thus, these scholars fail to treat images for God as integral to Gregory's theological discourses and bring out the theological significance of these images in Gregory. In fact, Ayres comments on the reason for this neglect when he talks about the pro-Nicenes' practice of using analogies:

Pro-Nicenes assume that one can draw no analogies between God and creation that will either deliver knowledge of God's essence or that can involve us in grasping clearly where and why any analogy fails. That this is a virtually universal pro-Nicene position is in some ways easy to miss because of the variety of ways in which it is expressed: some pro-Nicenes argue against the applicability of strict analogy, others deploy the terminology of analogy while simultaneously insisting on its inadequacy.¹⁸

It is true that scholars often miss the theological aspect of analogy because it is expressed subtly or remains an unexpressed assumption, as Ayres suggests. As it remains a subtle assumption, no one in the fourth century has systematically spelt it out. Gregory is unique among his colleagues because he talks explicitly about the inadequacy of comparative images more than others and belongs to the second category of pro-Nicenes Ayres mentions. But even with his comments on comparative images in his famous *Theological Orations*, a work exploring this aspect of his theology with respect to comparative images has yet to appear. There is a need to connect Gregory's literary use of images with his theology, especially the

¹⁴ Guignet, *Grégoire*, 131-86.

¹⁵ Ruether, *Gregory*, 86-105.

¹⁶ Kertsch, *Bildersprache*.

¹⁷ Demoen, *Exempla*.

¹⁸ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 284.

trinitarian theology, which he strove to establish and for which he is acclaimed by the church as a Theologian. This dissertation aims to fill that gap by examining this overlooked aspect of Gregory's use of 'comparative images' in God-talk, arguing that the dilemma expressed in his attempts and the ultimate use of the images reveal his inner struggle to be a faithful theologian of the Church while remaining a man of classical letters. I will focus on the nine comparative images in Gregory that discuss Trinity or aspects of it, with some repeated several times.

In the fourth-century theological debates, the language used by theologians to talk about God and the way realities of God are imagined are at the heart of all the theological treatises, creeds and proceedings of the councils. Thus, exploring the theological language and theological imagination of a theologian opens up windows to the way God is understood through the scriptures and in worship, which, in turn, is reflected in the language used to talk about God by a theologian. They form a loop in which theological statements are created, understood and defended. Ayres, in his monumental work on the fourth-century theological trajectories, *Nicaea and its legacy*, talks of the "Christian imaginative universe" and how "pro-Nicenes mine a variety of 'analogical sites' in their accounts of the Trinity."¹⁹ He has related the whole of the fourth-century trinitarian controversy to theological language and says, "charges of using inappropriate language are, thus, at the heart of the matter."²⁰ To explore this further, he talks about "set of images, intellectual strategies, habits of thoughts" in a theologian.²¹ Vaggione, differentiating the imaginative and ontological frameworks in theology, says, "In antiquity most of the discussion centred on the latter. The former, though equally pervasive and certainly no less fundamental, were more often assumed than expressed."²² Thus, in order to effectively study the theological controversy between Eunomius and the Nicenes, Vaggione talks of identifying the "imaginative heart of these frameworks."²³ So, if the imaginative framework is the heart of the theology, then it is not what the theologian logically argues, but what vision of God he creates in the minds of the audience that matters. This vision is partly shaped by the comparative images used to think and talk about God. Exploring these 'comparative images' for God in Gregory, who is vocal about the dangers and ineffectiveness of using material images for the incorporeal God, and the way he uses them, will open up new ways to look at the fourth-century theological debates.

¹⁹ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 275 & 279.

²⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 42-3.

²¹ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 279.

²² Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 121

²³ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 121.

1.2. Research Questions

With the above discussion in mind, this dissertation aims to examine the seemingly paradoxical stance Gregory takes toward the use of comparative images for God. I aim to answer the following questions in this dissertation:

1. Why is Gregory negative about the use of comparison for God? Is it just a rhetorical ploy, or does he have any theological basis for this? I will argue that there is a theologically backed ontological reason for the negative comments in Gregory. Ayres says that “Pro-Nicenes assume that one can draw no analogies between God and creation.”²⁴ In his summary of the pro-Nicene deployment of analogies, he says that the analogies are used “often to illustrate aspects of Trinitarian theology.”²⁵ In other words, even if they are deployed, they are limited and cannot explain the whole of the Trinity or all its aspects. I agree with this statement, and I will demonstrate it by identifying the theological and ontological reasons in Gregory’s theology and in the way he uses comparative images for God in his writings.
2. If God cannot be compared with anything because of His uniqueness, then why does Gregory even attempt to compare God with different things and also express his frustration in not finding an adequate image? What necessitated using ineffective comparative images for God in Gregory? The Hanson brothers say that “we must be able to use some analogies to enable us to think about the Trinity, otherwise the doctrine becomes not a mystery but a puzzle.”²⁶ Building on this, I will argue that Gregory uses comparative images for God to facilitate contemplation of God by igniting the theological imagination of his congregation, and this practice can only be explained within the context of his understanding of Christology, theological epistemology and pastoral ministry. It is only when we interpret his images for God and his comments on them with these themes in mind that we gain a fuller picture of Gregory’s intentions.
3. When Gregory uses the comparative images for God reluctantly, where does he draw them from and how does he use them? Kertsch points out that Gregory has access to “einem bestimmten Repertoire” of images through “die breite Schultradition der Spätantike,” which he uses in his theology as he sees fit, making modifications as

²⁴ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 284.

²⁵ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 289.

²⁶ Anthony Hanson and Richard Hanson, *Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 184.

necessary.²⁷ In the context of the Eunomian controversy, Richard Hanson argues that a transformation of traditional images occurred in the hands of the Cappadocians to establish the pro-Nicene trinitarian theology, and this transformation undoubtedly reflects the development of the doctrine of God in the fourth century.²⁸ He links the transformation of images to the development of the doctrine. Ruether also identifies the transformation of classical images in Gregory, where Gregory brings Hellenism and Christianity together. When talking about the horse-racing image, she comments that Gregory uses it “in a typically Platonic way but mixed with Biblical typology.”²⁹ I will demonstrate this transformation in this dissertation. The changes Gregory made to the traditional images are necessitated by the doctrine of the triune God he was striving to establish against the Eunomian doctrines, and his desire to find a worthy image to think and talk about God. Therefore, an analysis of the genealogy of each image discloses the manner in which Gregory intends the doctrine to be imagined by his audience.

4. Juxtaposing the answers to the first two questions, I want to find why Gregory, like other pro-Nicene contemporaries, as Ayres says, deploys “the terminology of analogy while simultaneously insisting on its inadequacy.”³⁰ I will argue that despite the limitations, different comparative images coordinate and try to compensate for the failure of the others. Ultimately, as Ayres says “different analogies are used together or are displayed side by side; analogies are also displayed only in order to demonstrate the inadequacies of other analogies or to enable the reader to see where they themselves fail.”³¹ This research will demonstrate how they are limited and coordinated to help Gregory’s audiences to use the images to contemplate different aspects of God and, finally, to come to a ‘beatific vision.’

This study will not take a chronological approach to Gregory’s writing. Though chronological study of Gregory’s writing would bring some distinctive insights, I believe it is difficult to establish the original text based on the editing done by Gregory to his whole corpus in retirement after the Council of Constantinople.³² Daley comments about the orations that

²⁷ Manfred Kertsch, “Ergänzende Bemerkungen zum Aufsatz ‘Ein Bildhafter Vergleich bei Seneca, Themistios, Gregor von Nazianz und sein Kynisch-Stoischer Hintergrund,’” VC 31, no. 4 (1977): 303.

²⁸ R.P.C. Hanson, “The Transformation of Images in the Trinitarian Theology of the Fourth Century,” in *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T& T Clark Ltd, 1985), 274-78.

²⁹ Ruether, *Gregory*, 91.

³⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 284.

³¹ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 289.

³² More discussion on Gregory’s editing of his own work, McGuckin, “Poet,” in Børtnes, 205; Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 49 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 154n30.

though they were composed as speeches for live audiences, “their very complexity of style and thought suggests at least heavy reworking, and we have no way of knowing with certainty which, or which parts, were delivered orally in their present form.”³³ This issue has divided the Gregorian scholars in their approach to his work. Commenting on the suggestion that because of this later editing one cannot with certainty talk about Gregory’s theological positions prior to 380s, Elm says “I cannot, as a historian, find the courage to abandon all contextualization.”³⁴ But in this case, I believe that regardless of the changing context and theological nuances, Gregory’s fundamental stand on the use of comparative images for God did not change and thus we can treat this thematically. Though I will point to chronological developments in a few places, this study will be thematic.

1.3. Terminology and Scope

Gregory used nine individual images or image clusters to talk about God. When discussing these images, scholars usually use the terms ‘analogies’ or ‘metaphors,’ as we saw in Ayres’s citations above. Even in the translations of Gregory, even when the term ἀναλογία is not used, the term ‘analogy’ is inserted to make the meaning clear in English.³⁵ But I use the term ‘comparative images’ to refer to them. The primary reason is that these images are not technically analogies, because Gregory does not use the term ‘analogy’ (ἀναλογία) nor allude to any of the ancient theories of analogy. Moreover, Gregory, like Augustine, has theological reasons for avoiding analogies when speaking about God, as there can never be “the possibility of *analogia* in the technical sense of a proportion (*proportio*) between two things because no one can ever grasp the proportion between the analogates.”³⁶ Gregory uses the adverb ἀναλόγως only once in *Or.* 31.31, not in a technical sense, but only in passing. The images Gregory uses are also not metaphors in a technical sense. Gregory uses the terms εἰκόν (image) [appears twice in *Or.* 31.33], ὁμοίωσις and εἰκασία (translated variedly as simile, comparison or likeness) [*Or.* 31.10, 31], and παράδειγμα (illustration or example) [appears three times in *Or.* 31.31-33] to talk about the comparisons he uses for God. It is tempting to categorise them based on the literary devices he uses, but such attempts would miss the theological point Gregory is trying to make. If we analyse the images he uses for God, most of them are similes

³³ Daley, *Gregory*, 62.

³⁴ Susanna Elm, “Apollinarius of Laodicea and Gregory of Nazianzus: The Early Years,” in *Apollinarius und seine Folgen*, ed. Silke-Petra Bergjan, Benjamin Gleede and Martin Heimgartner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 6.

³⁵ Norris, *Faith*, 284.

³⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 284.

with their trademark opening with ὡς,³⁷ ὡσπερ³⁸ and ὅπερ.³⁹ In all other instances, Gregory casually introduces these comparisons without any clear markers to find which literary devices he is using. In some other places, he uses verbs εικάζω and παραβάλλω, which again convey the sense of comparing two objects. This demonstrates that Gregory does not intend the images to serve as an accurate technical literary device for describing God; rather, he wants them to stimulate the theological imagination of his audience. To bring out the theological connection that the theme of images has in Gregory, I will use the term ‘comparative images’, which will preserve the sense in which Gregory is trying to use ‘images’ for God. For the sake of brevity, I will use ‘image’, but when there is any confusion, I will use the term ‘comparative image.’ Moreover, the term ‘comparative image’ is neutral and does not carry any classical, philosophical baggage that might skew our understanding of what Gregory is trying to do.

Gregory’s writings are replete with comparative images. However, I have chosen images that refer to God, specifically the Trinity, and that present a substantial argument in support of establishing the trinitarian doctrine. Thus, I have eliminated the names of God and titles of Jesus that function as metaphors or similes in Gregory’s writings. After filtering these out, Gregory uses nine comparative images for God, mentioned either as a single image or a cluster of images, while explaining the orthodox understanding of God: Adam-Eve-Seth, father-son, Pearl, source-spring-river, mind-word-spirit, root, the sun, torch, and light. Gregory uses each to support and contribute to understanding particular aspects of the Trinity. In a few cases, the images contribute to only one argument, but in most cases, the images are multivalent, bringing out more than one aspect of the Trinity. One can also see an overlap in themes covered by each image, as different images can contribute to the same argument. I have categorised these images according to the broader themes they expound and support. The comparative images of pearl, the human father-son and Adam-Eve-Seth talk about the theme of equality in nature and honour in the Trinity, which I label as honour images. The rest of the images talk about the Father as the source of divine life and the individual distinctions of the persons within the Trinity and how one should imagine these distinctions and they contribute to the arguments about the relationship of each person within the Trinity. I call these relational images. This categorisation has been made for convenience and is not strictly exclusive. For example, the father-son image can also be considered a relational image, but I have categorised it as an honour image because that was Gregory's primary intention in using it, although

³⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; 42.17. In *Or.* 42.17, PG does not have ὡς, but SC does.

³⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.7.

³⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.1.

relationality is also present. In the same way, equal honour of all person is implicitly present in most of the relational images, but they predominantly talk about relationship within the Trinity.

1.4. Layout of the Project

After the introduction (Chapter 1), this project is divided into two parts. Part I answers two research questions raised: why Gregory hesitates and warns his audience while using comparative images for God (Chapter 2), and why he still uses them for God despite the hesitation (Chapter 3). Part I lays the theoretical foundation to understand Gregory's use of comparative images for God by proposing a framework and the themes that are connected with it. Part II, containing two chapters, explores in detail Gregory's use of three comparative images that argue for the coequal nature and honour of all three persons in the Trinity (Chapter 4) and six relational images that illustrate the relationships among the three persons in the Trinity (Chapter 5). Finally, Chapter 6 pulls together everything from Parts I and II to spell out how one should understand Gregory's use of comparative images for God systematically.

Chapter 1 of this study sets out the problem of comparison in Gregory of Nazianzus' thought and establishes the research questions that the project is designed to address. It also deals with the terminology and justifies the use of the term "comparative images" to include all the literary devices Gregory uses to compare God with the created order. The chapter closes with a short description of each chapter.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to comprehending Gregory's reservations concerning comparisons for God and addresses the underlying reasons for his reluctance to liken God to any creation of this world. The text provides a comprehensive examination of the ontological distinction perceived by Gregory between God and creation based on his theological understanding of the Divine and the creation. This is achieved by exploring Gregory's understanding of the triune, simple and infinite nature of God, in contrast to the material, compounded and finite nature of creation. This sets the unique and incomprehensible God against material creation and establishes a theological-ontological framework to interpret Gregory's negative comments about the use of comparative images.

Chapter 3 responds to the following question: despite the reluctance and warnings against the use of comparative images for God, why does Gregory still use them in his corpus? The chapter commences with the assertion that the utilisation of comparative images is due to embodied human existence. The subsequent discussions elaborate on how Gregory justifies and conceives of the use of the comparative image for God in three overlapping sections. First,

how Gregory conceptualises a bridge between the ontologically distinct God and creation in the incarnation, the sacraments, and human deification. Second, in theological epistemology, the way Gregory understands the necessity of relying on mental pictures formed from sensory inputs to form a conception of the incorporeal God. Finally, the manner in which Gregory considers himself as a theological orator, a shepherd and an inscriber, who employs the comparative images to shape his audience's understanding of God. These themes are explained using the dominant imagery of Moses ascending Mount Sinai to meet God. This imagery is used by Gregory to illustrate how human knowledge of God is acquired and to emphasise his own role as a bishop, similar to Moses, in facilitating that knowledge through sacramental duties.⁴⁰ Thus, this chapter establishes a christological, epistemological and pastoral context within which one should understand the rationale for Gregory's use of comparative images for God despite the reservations.

Chapter 4 deals with the importance of the concept of honour in Eunomian controversy and Eunomius's use of the image of the tool (τὸ ὄργανον). The rest of the chapter elaborates on the three honour images used by Gregory: Adam-Eve-Seth, Father-son and Pearl, to counter Eunomian understanding.

Chapter 5 explores the six relational images—root, source of water-spring-river, mind-word-spirit, torch, sun and light—that explain the Nicene understanding of affirming the Father as the cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit, passionless generation and procession, distinction of the persons in the Trinity without division.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by laying out the findings and the way Gregory's use of comparative images for God should be understood systematically.

⁴⁰ For more on this imagery of Moses, see Chapter 3, and Section 3.4.1 in particular.

Part I: The Theoretical Framework

Gregory's theological methodology cannot be reduced to simple propositions as both his personality and his theological method are equally multifaceted and complex. Therefore, it is important to begin by exploring the theological themes associated with the concept of images for God, prior to undertaking a detailed analysis of Gregory's use of images themselves. The majority of studies that refer to Gregory's utilisation of images merely examine his literary mastery within the framework of classical education, neglecting to contextualise it within a theological framework or to differentiate between the various types of images employed in his discourses.⁴¹ Therefore, Part I of the dissertation lays the theoretical foundation for analysing Gregory's use of comparative images for God and answers two research questions posed in 1.2. across two chapters. In Chapter 2, I delve into the reasons behind Gregory's hesitation to employ comparative images freely in his discourse on God, drawing upon his ontology and theological convictions concerning both the Divine and the created order. I call them the theological-ontological framework. In Chapter 3, I address the question of why Gregory persists in utilising such images despite apparent reservations, by considering his Christology, epistemology and pastoral assumptions. Emerging from this are three themes: the christological justification for using images of God, grounded in the convergence of two ontologically distinct realms in salvation history; an epistemological need to use images due to the human embodied condition; and a pastoral context shaped by the classical *paideia* that sees the use of images as a transformative tool. These three themes provide the context for understanding Gregory's use of images of God. Thus, the theological-ontological framework, alongside the christological, epistemological and pastoral contexts established across the two chapters, facilitates the interpretation of Gregory's remarks on comparative images of God and situates him systematically within historical, theological and cultural contexts of the later part of the fourth century.

⁴¹ See section 1.1.

Chapter 2: Comparative Images and God

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines Gregory of Nazianzus' understanding of God, as represented by the comparative images, and the created order from which these images are taken. In doing so, I will address the question of why Gregory hesitates and warns against using comparative images for God. I will argue that the answer lies in the ontological distinction Gregory perceives between these two distinct yet interconnected realities: the Creator and creation. In his commentaries on the use of comparative images for God, Gregory consistently emphasises the contrast between God and the comparative images. This is due to his understanding that God and creation are fundamentally distinct in nature. Gregory conceives God as unique and incomprehensible by the human mind. This is because he conceives God as an eternal Triad who is simple and infinite. This understanding of God stands in contrast to his understanding of the created order, which is distinct from God yet fully dependent on Him for its existence and subsistence.

Gregory has an understanding of two types of creation: the creation of the ideal, invisible world and the perceptible, visible world. If the comparative images are taken from the visible creation, then the comparative images are material, corporeal and compounded. Human beings who are part of this creation are limited as they are embodied and further constrained by the effects of the Fall. Thus, their ability to know God and talk about Him is also limited because of their limited nature. This leads Gregory to identify an ontological and epistemic gulf between God and the creation, and thus between God and the comparative images. This exploration leads us directly to the theological themes that form the background to Gregory's use of comparative images for God and points to the source of the paradoxical statements of Gregory. The opening section of the chapter will deal with Gregory's understanding of the distinction between God and the comparative images through the concept of the incomparability of God, and move on to deal with his understanding of God and creation, which will occupy most of the portion of this chapter. The final section will correlate Gregory's understanding of God and creation to bring out the implications for Gregory's use of comparative images for God.

2.2. The Incomparable Nature of God

The uniqueness of God and the question of whether God can be compared with anything are among the important issues in fourth-century theological debates. There is a clear ontological separation between God and the comparative images in Gregory's writings, and he repeatedly points to that when he uses them for God. These negative comments are attached to all his comparative images for God except for the images of 'pearl,' 'root,' and 'light.' The reason for these negative comments is the unique nature of God based on the ontological distinction between the nature of God and the created order. We will deal with the reason for this distinction in 2.6 of this chapter, but here I will point out the way Gregory conceives of this distinction, and how that gives rise to the understanding of God's incomparable nature.

For Gregory, God is first and unique (τῆς πρώτης καὶ μόνης) in essence and is above all things (ὕπερ ἅπαντα).⁴² There is a clear ontological distinction between God as the creator and the creation from which the comparative images are taken. Gregory affirms that there is an unbridgeable great gulf (χάσμα μέγα καὶ ἀδιάβατον) that exists between changeable created nature and immutable uncreated nature (τὴν δὲ γενητὴν φύσιν καὶ ῥέουσιν, τῆς ἀγενήτου καὶ ἔστηκυίας).⁴³ This distinction is not a superficial one in Gregory's thought, but points to the completely different essence of each reality. This becomes evident in Gregory's understanding of the human quest to reach God⁴⁴ and in theological imagination to understand God in a way that differs from our understanding of human life.⁴⁵ Thus, in Gregory's theology, this ontological gulf is also considered an existential and epistemic gulf. Despite sharing the pro-Nicene understanding that creation is "revelatory of the Triune God's infinite power,"⁴⁶ Gregory affirms the unbridgeable gulf and maintains a creative tension between the ontological distinction and the connections that unite the two.

His negative comments on the use of comparative images for God should be understood within the framework of the creator-creature divide. It is this ontological gulf that creates the problem Gregory is wrestling with when he employs comparative images for God, and this is the cause of Gregory's assertion that all the comparative images are inadequate to represent God at any level. In an important passage from the *Theological Oration*, which was quoted at the beginning of the dissertation in 1.1., he makes this very clear:

⁴² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.31; SC 250.174.

⁴³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 41.12; SC 358.342.

⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.1.1-3.

⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.13-26.

⁴⁶ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 317.

If there is one God, one supreme nature, where can I find a comparison (τὴν ὁμοίωσιν) to present to you? Are you looking for one from below and from around you (ἐκ τῶν κάτω καὶ τῶν περὶ σέ)? It is an exceedingly shameful, and not just shameful but generally futile, notion to get a representation or comparison (τὴν εἰκασίαν) of things above (τῶν ἄνω) from things below (ἐκ τῶν κάτω), of things of unaltered nature (τῶν ἀκινήτων) from things of unstable nature (ἐκ τῆς ῥευστῆς φύσεως).⁴⁷

The comparative images are from below (κάτω) and taken from an unstable created realm, but God, whom they try to represent, is above (ἄνω) and has a stable nature. Gregory makes this binary distinction whenever he refers to the comparative images for God. In *Oration 23*, Gregory draws a similar contrast after introducing the image of mind-word-spirit. He says that this comparison can hold “insofar as one can compare *ideal* things (τὰ νοητὰ) with *sensible* things (τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς) and *greatest things* (τὰ μέγιστα) with those that are small (τοῖς μικροῖς), for no comparison (εἰκόν) ever represents the true picture exactly.”⁴⁸ Here, Gregory highlights the dualism of ideal-sensible things and great-small things. God is on the side of the ideal world, which is much greater than the sensible, perceptible and material created order that is small. The same sentiment is echoed in the poem *De Filio*, when Gregory discusses the generation of the Son from the Father using the image of the sun. He comments that “all images (εἶδεα πάντα) fall short of the great God (μεγάλοιο Θεοῦ).”⁴⁹ In the poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, while discussing the image of Adam-Seth-Eve, he says that this image is taken from below (ἔνερθεν).⁵⁰ Thus, we observe the dualistic outlook in Gregory, as he juxtaposes God with comparative images: God is ideal, supreme, and the greatest Being above, while the comparative images used to describe Him in human language are sensible, small, from below and can never capture God.

In this juxtaposition, Gregory concludes that God cannot be compared with any being or anything in the universe, as He is unique. If God’s nature is one of a kind, you cannot logically compare it with anything, and that is why any comparative image fails to represent God. What makes God’s being unique? I will argue below that in Gregory, the uniqueness of God stems from God’s nature of existing as a triune, simple and infinite Being. While the intelligible creatures like the Angels and other heavenly beings have a simple nature like God, only God exists as an incorporeal, simple and triune Being. Thus, when these three concepts are put together, God can be called unique, without any parallel or resemblance: there is no

⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10; SC 250.292-94.

⁴⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 139, altered; SC 270.302.

⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.23; Sykes, *Poemata*, 6-7.

⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.41; PG 37.411A.

being on earth or in heaven that exists in Tri-unity with a simple and infinite nature apart from God. And for Gregory, because of this unique nature, God is incomparable (ἀνεΐκαστον).⁵¹

Surprisingly, Neo-Arians,⁵² the archenemies of Gregory, agreed with him in principle and made the incomparability of God the centre of their theology. However, they arrived at this conclusion through different logic. For Aëtius and Eunomius, the true God, i.e. the Father, is ‘ingenerate’ (ἀγέννητος) and this is not just a name, but points to the essence of the Father.⁵³ Anatolios describes this as “logocentrism” which “allows for the knower to grasp the essence of God through one concept.”⁵⁴ If ἀγέννητος describes the essence of the Father, then the Son whom the Father begets is different from Him in essence, as the Son is begotten. Keeping this logic as the basis for their subordinationist doctrine, they claimed that the distinct essences of the Father and the Son are not comparable. Aëtius argues that since the essence of the Father is ingenerate and unique, the Father’s essence *per se* is incomparable and unapproachable (ἀσύγκριτος καὶ ἀπρόσιτος).⁵⁵ Eunomius later elaborates on it by saying: “God of all things is one and he is unbegotten and incomparable,”⁵⁶ “We say that the one and only true God is the God of all things, unbegotten, beginningless, incomparable... incomparable with respect to essence, power, and authority.”⁵⁷ Both of them use the term ἀσύγκριτος, which they treat as a synonym for their (in)famous ἀγέννητος. Logically, if the Father is defined by the word ‘ingenerate,’ then he is unique, as everything else, including the Son, was caused by Him and cannot be named ‘ingenerate.’ This leads to the conclusion that the Father is incomparable.

For Eunomians, incomparability is not just an attribute or one of the characteristics of God, but the centre of their theology, and a logical conclusion based on their description of

⁵¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13.

⁵² The only surviving work of Aëtius is *Syntagmation*. The Greek text and the English translation are available in L.R. Wickham, “The ‘Syntagmation’ of Aëtius the Anomean,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 2 (Oct 1968): 532-49. Eunomius’ works are found in Greek and English in Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, OECT (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987), rendered *works* henceforth. Exhaustive scholarship on Eunomius’ life and theology is Vaggione, *Eunomius*. See also R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 598-636; Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 173-219; Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea’s Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names: Christian Theology and Late-Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*, VCSup 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 25-48; Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 157-240. For the history of the Neo-Arian movement, see Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, vol. 1 and II, Patristic Monograph Series 8 (Cambridge, MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd, 1979).

⁵³ Aët. *Synt.* 12; Eun. *Apol.* 8; cf. DelCogliano, *Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 25-134.

⁵⁴ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 161.

⁵⁵ Aët. *Synt.* 29; Wickham, “Syntagmation,” 543.

⁵⁶ Eun. *Apol.* 11; Vaggione, *Works*, 46: εἰς ὃ τῶν ἀπάντων θεός, ἀγέννητος καὶ ἀσύγκριτος.

⁵⁷ Eun. *Apol.* 26. Vaggione, *Works*, 68: φαμέν ἓνα καὶ μόνον ἀληθινὸν εἶναι τὸν τῶν πάντων θεόν, ἀγέννητον, ἀναρχον, ἀσύγκριτον... ἀσύγκριτον οὐσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ ἐξουσίας.

God's essence as ἀγέννητος. The fundamental reason for this position is their understanding of God's uniqueness. Eunomius claims that "comparison (σύγκρισις) cannot be made between things with nothing in common (ἀκοινώνητος)."⁵⁸ If there is any commonality to compare between two objects, then the uniqueness is lost. That is why he says, "God is free from comparison altogether."⁵⁹ If God can be compared, it also brings dishonour to God. It implies that God's greatness can be understood only by comparing Him to the things of the world, and if those things do not exist, then God's greatness cannot be established. He gives an example of notions formed using human comparison: "For if it is by comparison with the Aeons that God is without beginning, then, if the Aeons do not exist, neither does the one compared to them."⁶⁰ So, not only is God's essence incomparable per se, but any comparison dishonours God's self-existing essence.

To sum up, while Gregory and Eunomius shared similar ontological assumptions about the distinction between God and creation, they disagreed over the definition of God. In the rest of this chapter, I will explicate how Gregory explains this ontological divide and the incomparability of God, keeping Eunomius as a dialogue partner. I will do this by turning our attention to exploring Gregory's understanding of God and then to the created order.

2.3. God

The doctrine of God, theology proper, is infused throughout Gregory's writings. Of course, he does not distinguish between the theory and the practice of Christianity, but even if we judge him by modern standards, he is a theologian who discusses God more than any other issue of his time. This is not an accident, but rather a result of the theological debates that were occurring within the Church at large. It is precisely for this reason that the Church acclaimed Gregory as a 'Theologian,' next only to John the Evangelist, for his clear portrayal of God in his writings. He elaborates on his understanding of God as he counters the views of his opponents, including Homoians, Neo-Arians, and Pneumatomachians. If we examine his writings chronologically, his definitions and terminologies become more focused, bold, and sharp as he develops his own understanding of God in these theological battles, while remaining consistent in his fundamental beliefs about God throughout his theological and ecclesiastical career. He urged the Nicene theologians to boldly proclaim the trinitarian

⁵⁸ Eun. *Apol.* 9; Vaggione, *Works*, 44-45.

⁵⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 11; Vaggione, *Works*, 46: διὰ τὸ πάντα συνθήκης ἐλεύθερον εἶναι τὸν θεόν.

⁶⁰ Vaggione, *Works*, 111.

doctrine without mincing words, as he considered it to be the biblical doctrine.⁶¹ In his writings, he elaborated on different aspects of God. I will argue that, for Gregory, the unique nature of God stems from his understanding of God as a triune, simple, and infinite being, not from God's being ingenerate, as the Eunomians argued. I will delineate these concepts one by one. These conceptions of God are essential corollaries, just as Ayres claims that the concepts of divine simplicity and infinity are part of the 'grammar' of divinity, which helps pro-Nicenes to talk about the triune God.⁶²

2.3.1. The Triune God

Gregory placed the confession of, belief in, and worship of, the Holy Trinity—the co-equal nature and honour of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—at the centre of his personal life as a Christian, and public life as a preacher and an episcopal leader.⁶³ In his oration *On Holy Baptism*, he exhorts the catechumens by these words:

Keep I pray you the good deposit (τὴν καλὴν παρακαταθήκην), by which I live and work, and which I desire to have as the companion of my departure; with which I endure all that is so distressful, and despise all delights; the confession (ὁμολογίαν) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. This I commit unto you today; with this I will baptize you and make you grow. This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity...⁶⁴

Gregory calls the trinitarian confession and belief in the triune God the good deposit that he has guarded zealously. He designated himself as “worshipper” (λάτρης) and “herald” (κῆρυξ) of the Triad (τριάς).⁶⁵ Throughout his public ministry, he consistently taught the doctrine of the Trinity, as evidenced by his first three orations (*Orations 1-3*) preached in 362 at the beginning of his ordained ministry, his monumental Epiphany Trilogy (*Orations 38-40*) and *Theological Orations (Orations 27-31)* preached in Constantinople in 380, and later the theological poems (*carm.* 1.1.1-3) that were published during his retirement, to cite just the major works.⁶⁶ In all his references to the Trinity in his works, he “moves so easily between simple doxology and fine conceptual work.”⁶⁷ Thus, one could find examples both of simple

⁶¹ For example, see Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 58.7.

⁶² Ayres, *Nicaea*, 281, 287.

⁶³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.15; 31.3; 40.41; Beeley, *Trinity*, 187.

⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.41; NPNF, 375; SC 358.292.

⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.13; PG 35.1165B; But Mossay prefers the reading “servant” (λάτρις) in the place of λάτρης in SC 270.308.

⁶⁶ See section 1.2. But the later editing of Gregory's work might not have changed the content of the trinitarian belief dramatically. We can be sure of the consistency in this matter.

⁶⁷ Beeley, *Trinity*, 188; See pages 187-233 for analysis of significant trinitarian passages in Gregory.

confessional statements of the Trinity and highly complex arguments, framed and delivered to persuade his audience, as the polemic and rhetorical contexts of each oration, letter, or poem demanded. Even when Basil, as bishop, did not openly call the Holy Spirit God, Gregory boldly proclaims Him as God.⁶⁸ Not only in his theological work, but also in pastoral work, the Trinity occupied a central place, as the quote from his speech to the catechumens above demonstrated. He commits the confession of the Trinity to others through his priestly duties. His pastoral work and sacramental practices aim to inscribe the doctrine of the Trinity on the hearts of his catechumens as he baptises them in the triune name of God and makes them confessors and worshippers of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁹ When Gregory started his episcopal ministry as auxiliary bishop of Nazianzus in 372, he concludes his first public oration campaigning for public expression of co-equal persons in Godhead: “how long shall we hide the lamp under the bushel, and withhold from others the full knowledge of the Godhead, when it ought to be now put upon the lampstand and give light to all churches and souls and to the whole fulness of the world, no longer by means of metaphors (εἰκαζόμενον), or intellectual sketches (τῇ διανοίᾳ σκιαγραφούμενον), but by distinct declaration (φανερῶς ἐκλαλούμενον)?”⁷⁰

For Gregory, God is triune: “Whenever I speak of God (θεός), I mean Father and Son and Holy Spirit.”⁷¹ He never misses an opportunity to emphasise the triune aspect of God. At the beginning of his second *Theological Oration* he says: “Now let us go forward to discuss the doctrine of God, dedicating our sermon to our sermons’ subjects, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that the Father may approve, the Son aid, and the Holy Spirit inspire it—or rather that the single Godhead’s single radiance, by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its connectedness, may enlighten it.”⁷² While talking about God using the image of light, he says that God as light is always shining, i.e. eternally shining, and in order to emphasise the triune aspect, he adds immediately that God is ‘triple shining’ (τριλαμπής).⁷³ Throughout his life, he strives for a better definition of this triune aspect of God so that

⁶⁸ Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 58; *Or.* 31.5; Altaner, *Patrology*, 350; For more on Gregory’s Pneumatology, see T.A. Noble, “*The Deity of the Holy Spirit According to Gregory of Nazianzus*” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1989), accessed December 5, 2025, ProQuest Dissertations; T.A. Noble, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Use of Scripture in Defence of the Deity of the Spirit,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (December 1988): 101–23, accessed on December 5, 2025, EBSCOhost; Daniel G. Opperwall, “The Holy Spirit in the Life and Writings of Gregory of Nazianzus” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2012), accessed on January 10, 2026, <https://prod-ms-be.lib.mcmaster.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/93db5c52-71e1-448d-a90d-becbed790d3f/content>; Langworthy, *Soteriological Pneumatology*; Beeley, *Trinity*, 153-86; Eirini Artemi, “The Divine Personhood of the Holy Spirit in the Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzen,” *Vox Patrum* 37 no. 68 (2017): 179-92.

⁶⁹ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.45; 36.10 and 31.33.

⁷⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 12.6; SC 405.360

⁷¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.8; SC 358.118: Same theme is echoed in *Or.* 1.7; 2.36-38

⁷² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.1; Norris, *Faith*, 224.

⁷³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.3; PG 36.609B.

everyone would worship this Trinity in a meaningful way. He says that the ultimate aim of his life is to urge others to worship this triune God. He concludes his *Theological Orations* by saying, “To the best of my powers I will persuade all men to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the single Godhead and power.”⁷⁴ He invents vocabulary and forges images to explain the relationship each person in the Trinity has with the others. But ultimately, he falls back on the mystical language to emphasise the fact that the rational explanations are inadequate and we should acknowledge the triune God in a mystical way: “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One.”⁷⁵

Gregory’s trinitarian theology has several distinctive features that distinguish it from those of his opponents and other Nicene colleagues. Despite being a theologian defending the Nicene position, he rarely uses the term “essence” (οὐσία)—a key term in retrospect—and instead employs biblical terms to talk about God.⁷⁶ Gregory gives priority to the Father as the cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit, like Eunomius, but unlike Eunomius, affirms the equal nature and honour between them. He does not feel the priority of the Father conflicts with the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit, who were begotten and proceeded from Him.⁷⁷ He utilises the unique relationship they share with each other to define their individual characteristics, thereby making a pioneering contribution to trinitarian theology.⁷⁸

He frames his understanding of the triune God in the context of the two sets of extreme alternatives available at his time: pagan polytheism and Jewish monotheism, and Sabellian and Arian understandings of God.⁷⁹ Ruether identifies this type of framing of the argument with ‘antithesis,’ a figure of language which Gregory uses effectively to explain the trinitarian doctrine.⁸⁰ He not only frames his trinitarian understanding of God as a middle ground between these faulty and extreme understandings of God during his time, but also proposes the Trinity as the most sensible and logical understanding of God, consistent with the teachings of Scripture and the Holy Fathers.

Gregory talks of the pagan polytheism and Jewish poverty in Godhead: “Neither should we posit three first principles if we want to avoid the polytheism of the Greeks, nor a single

⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.33; Norris, *Faith*, 298-9.

⁷⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.41; NPNF, 375.

⁷⁶ Beeley, *Trinity*, 218.

⁷⁷ Beeley, *Trinity*, 210; Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 4th ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 257. This concept will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

⁷⁸ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol 3 (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960), 250. Again, this aspect will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.6; 18.16; 2.36-38; cf Ayres, *Nicaea*, 109.

⁸⁰ Ruether, *Gregory*, 67-8.

one, Judaic in its narrowness as well as grudging and ineffectual, where by positing a self-absorbing deity or by disallowing their natures and stripping them of Godhead, as our current experts like to do.”⁸¹ He wants his audience to avoid both extremes and seems to equate Judaic monotheism with the Eunomian understanding of God. Gregory emphasises his aversion to polytheistic ideas, as his trinitarianism was suspected as tritheism and branded as such by his opponents.⁸² He justified his stand by clearly elucidating his trinitarian understanding of God that has “three objects of belief” yet has one Godhead who “exists undivided in separate beings.”⁸³ On the other hand, against Judaic monotheism, Gregory says that the Father should be considered as the first principle, yet He should not be conceived as a ‘self-absorbing’ Being who would not have the power to bring forth Beings identical to him. The Father is eternally generative, and thus the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternally generated and spirated respectively. Yet, he insists that his understanding of God is not polytheism, as he is not proposing three first principles, but one God who exists in three eternally coequal persons while attributing the cause to the Father.⁸⁴ Apart from this eternal generation of co-equal Beings, the Father also, through His Will and through the Son, created Beings similar to Him and the universe, which is distinct from Him in nature. That is why in his creation narratives, Gregory portrays creation as an overflow of God’s goodness in which God displays His power to create beings similar to Himself, such as Angels, and utterly different from Him, such as the material world. Thus, Gregory shows that God’s nature has an inherently generative and creative aspect.

Gregory is also against Sabellianism and Arianism, which he considers as two extremes. Sabellianism contracts the three persons in the Trinity, and Arianism separates them.⁸⁵ He says, “nor were we arguing over which of two impieties we should choose, the one that contracts God, or the one that severs from the divine essence either the Spirit alone or the Son as well as the Spirit; in other words, a single or a double dose of impiety.”⁸⁶ Gregory wants everyone to avoid the Arian “mutilation of the Godhead” (ἡ κατατομή τῆς θεότητος)⁸⁷ and the Sabellian contraction. He praises Cyprian, as he restored the former glory of the Trinity, “which was being fragmented while some were even fusing it together.”⁸⁸

⁸¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16; Vinson, *Gregory*, 171.

⁸² cf. Eun. *Apol.* 21; *exp. fid.* 2; For a similar allegation in the Arian controversy, see Kopecek, *Neo-Arianism*, Vol .1, 8, 16.

⁸³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.14; Norris, *Faith*, 286.

⁸⁴ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.37; 20.6; 31.8, 30.

⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.16; 23.3, 6; 34.8.

⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.3.

⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.8; SC 284.174; cf. 18.12: The wickedness that is “dividing the Godhead” (τὴν θεότητα τέμνοντος).

⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.13; Vinson, *Gregory*, 151.

In contrast to Gregory's understanding of the triune God with coequal persons, Eunomius and his followers considered the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a hierarchical order and proposed a graded Trinity. We have already seen that the Father, as 'ingenerate', is unique and incomparable. The Son occupies the second position in the order (τάξις) as the only-begotten, followed by the Holy Spirit, who is third in dignity and order as He was made through the Son.⁸⁹ Eunomius clearly connects the order with their natures and claims that the nature of each is different and hierarchical, following the order in which they are presented in Scripture. Thus, for Eunomius, there is one true God, i.e. the Father, and the Son can be called God as long as one understands the difference between the 'ingenerate God' and the 'only-begotten' God. He does not use the term God for the Holy Spirit. Eunomius' Trinity is hierarchical in nature, order, dignity and honour. Gregory was against this hierarchical understanding of the Trinity.⁹⁰ He combats this in some of his comparative images, which we will see in Part II of this study.

Here, we can mention a few things generally about Gregory's arguments against the hierarchical understanding of the Trinity. He accuses the Eunomians of trying to exalt God the Father against the Son and the Holy Spirit, but ultimately ending up injuring all three persons. He says, "We who are of one soul, who mind the same thing, who in nothing injure the Trinity, neither by preferring One Person above another, nor by cutting off any: as those bad umpires and measurers of the Godhead do, who by magnifying One Person more than is fit, diminish and insult the whole."⁹¹ He accuses the Eunomians of not understanding the generative nature of the Father and of constricting the divinity by proposing a single divine nature and thereby ultimately dishonouring the Father to be the source of the Son and the Spirit. He says,

You posit not a single nor an uncompounded nature of divinity but either three that are alienated and disjoined from one another and, not surprisingly, in conflict by virtue of their being proportionately superior or inferior; or you posit a single nature, but one that is constricted and mean, and which is not in a position to be the source of anything significant precisely because it cannot or will not...⁹²

By pointing to their narrow definition and constricted view of God, Gregory is calling the Eunomians to conceive of God as a triune God in which each person has equal dignity and honour. Because God is the purest light who is contemplated in tri-unity (ἐν τῇ τρισότητι

⁸⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 25; *exp. fid.* 4.

⁹⁰ See the arguments of Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.4; cf. Stephen R Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downer Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 113.

⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 3.6; NPNF, 229.

⁹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.6; Vinson, *Gregory*, 135.

μονάδι).⁹³ Most of Gregory's comparative images for God aim to clarify different aspects of the Trinity and help his audiences to avoid the extremes of polytheism, Judaic monotheism, Sabellianism and Arianism. This delicately balanced understanding of God also makes the Trinity unique without any parallels. In this, Gregory portrays his opponents' view as an easy solution that reduces the complexity of God's being to simple logic understandable to the human mind. Now, we should turn our attention to the next characteristic of God that makes God's being unique, i.e. simplicity.

2.3.2. The Simple God

Gregory was able to maintain a trinitarian understanding of God, while claiming it to be monotheistic, due to his conception of God as incorporeal and simple. The claim that God is incorporeal differentiates God's being from the visible creation, which is categorised as material and composite. God is not made of parts like the material things, but His Being is simple. Gregory affirms that God is the first and uncompounded nature (τῆς πρώτης καὶ ἀσυνθέτου φύσεως) and immediately adds that simplicity is peaceful and without strife (ἀπλότης γὰρ εἰρηναία καὶ ἀστασίαστος).⁹⁴ Thus, Gregory links the non-composite nature of God with internal peace and lack of conflict. Gregory feels that all three persons are alienated and disjoined in the Eunomian hierarchical Trinity, but his understanding of divine simplicity enabled him to talk about Tri-unity, which does not involve confusion or conflict, unlike polytheism.⁹⁵ Except for Stoics who considered all reality to be material, everyone in this period accepted the notion that the Divine is incorporeal. Origen had already standardised the notion of incorporeality and simplicity in God's being in Christian theology. For him, "God is not a body (*non corpus*) and does not exist in a body (*in corpore esse*), but He is a simple intellectual nature (*intellectualis natura simplex*).⁹⁶ All theologians of various theological persuasions in the fourth century believed in this concept, but they disagreed on how to apply it in discussions about God.⁹⁷ While the pro-Nicenes employed this doctrine to talk about undivided distinction in the triune God, Neo-Arians use it to support their understanding of the indivisibility of the Father's essence.⁹⁸ Beeley does not think that the idea of divine simplicity is vital to Gregory:

⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 178; Gallay, *Lettres*, II, 68-69.

⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.7; SC 358.208.

⁹⁵ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.6.

⁹⁶ Or. *princ.* 1.1.6; SC 252.100.

⁹⁷ Bas. *Eun.* 1.7; For the Eunomian position, see below.

⁹⁸ See, Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

“Simplicity, then, serves as a kind of cipher for ideas like ‘greater than greatness’ and ‘better than goodness,’ rather than as a fundamental theological principle.”⁹⁹ But I agree with Ayres, who considers divine simplicity as an important concept in the fourth-century theological trajectory, which “should govern all our speech about God.”¹⁰⁰

One can find two strands of argument in Gregory: one discussing incorporeality and the other highlighting the simplicity of God. For Gregory, God is incorporeal (ἀσώματος) because he is not a body (οὐ σῶμα... ὁ θεός).¹⁰¹ If God has a body, then his being is limited, as anything existing in space and time has limitations. Pointing to the scriptural affirmations that God fills heaven and earth, Gregory argues that God doesn’t have a spatial existence like other material objects.¹⁰² If God has a body and still fills the earth, that would be absurd and a contradiction. It is unclear why Gregory makes this argument, since Aëtius and Eunomius clearly affirm that God is incorporeal. Norris suggests that it is possible that the low-level followers of Eunomius held this opinion and fell into the “corporeal trap.”¹⁰³ However, as we do not have any material witness for this allegation in Neo-Arian history, I can only conclude that Gregory is pointing to the implications of their belief: they are treating the generation of the Son as if it were a bodily generation. Because later, building on this accusation, he was able to tell the Neo-Arians: “Drop the habit of treating the incorporeal nature as if it were a body.”¹⁰⁴ And in *Oration 20*, he uses the same argument for the Son, and tells his audience not to compare “God and the human, the body and what is without body.”¹⁰⁵ This theme of comparing the incorporeal nature with the corporeal nature would be repeated when we analyse the comparative images used by Gregory for God.

If God is incorporeal, then His Being is simple. Gregory uses terms such as ἀπλόος or ἀπλοῦς,¹⁰⁶ ἄπληκτος,¹⁰⁷ and ἀπλότης¹⁰⁸ to talk about the simplicity of God’s being. He does not explain simplicity in any detail, but the concept is constantly there in the background when he discusses God. It is especially explicit when Gregory warns about the misleading aspect of the comparative images. For him, angels are also ‘simple’ (ἀπλοῦς).¹⁰⁹ But he distinguishes the

⁹⁹ Beeley, *Trinity*, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 287.

¹⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.9; SC 250.116.

¹⁰² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.7-10.

¹⁰³ Norris, *Faith*, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.8.

¹⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.8; Daley, *Gregory*, 102.

¹⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.7; 37.2.

¹⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.2.16.

¹⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.7.

¹⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.4.40; 1.1.6.17.

simple nature of God from the simple nature of the angels by calling God alone ‘incorporeal’ (ἀσώματος). When he talks about the Angels, he refers to them as ‘fleshless’ (ἄσαρκοι), implying that Angels have an angelic body that is different from the material body of human beings, and thus, they cannot be called fully ‘incorporeal’ as God is.¹¹⁰ Thus, the concept of incorporeality and simplicity is combined in a nuanced way in Gregory’s understanding of God. Gregory also uses the term ἄπηκτος, which means ‘not solid,’ or ‘not compacted,’ implying ‘simple’ when referring to God¹¹¹ and ἀσύνθετος to talk about the ‘uncompounded’ nature of God.¹¹² One cannot imagine any division in God’s being. He does not even allow the ascription of time to God: “God always was and is and will be—or better, God always *is*. For ‘was’ and ‘will be’ are divisions of the time we experience.”¹¹³ Here, he distinguishes how our mind conceives God and how different God’s true existence is. With the doctrine of divine simplicity, Gregory was able to argue for the unity in God while maintaining the irreducibility of the three divine persons in his trinitarian theology. The doctrine of divine simplicity and incorporeality forms the background to many of the relational images, which we will deal with later as Gregory brings out the unity and distinction within Godhead.

His opponents, especially the Neo-Arians, also subscribed to the understanding of divine incorporeality and simplicity, but brought out different implications for their theology, as excellently demonstrated by Radde-Gallwitz.¹¹⁴ Aëtius’s syllogisms in *Syntagmation* assume that everyone would agree with the concept of divine incorporeality and simplicity.¹¹⁵ Eunomius also maintained the same view: “the Father is without parts (ἀμερές) and uncomposed (ἀσύνθετον)”¹¹⁶ and “He is simple (ἀπλοῦς) and uncomposed.”¹¹⁷ Both of them argued that if the Father’s essence is simple and if it is described by the term ‘ingenerate,’ then it cannot be shared with any other beings, including the Son. Because sharing is division and ingenerate Being generating another ingenerate being is absurd, the generated being cannot be ingenerate. Any affirmation that the Father shared his essence with the Son is equal to claiming that the Father’s nature is divisible, and logically, that leads to the denial of incorporeality and simplicity. In theological epistemology, Eunomius claimed that since the divine nature is simple, it can be known to us simply, i.e. directly through the term ‘ingenerate’, which Radde-

¹¹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.4.8; 1.2.10.892; For the discussion on this aspect, see, Sykes, *Poemata*, 199.

¹¹¹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.2.16; PGL, 185.

¹¹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13: τὸ ἐν τῇ φύσει ἀσύνθετον.

¹¹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.7; Daley, *Gregory*, 120.

¹¹⁴ Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, chap. 4; See also, Holmes, *Trinity*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Especially, Aët. *Synt.* 5-11; Kopecek, *Neo-Arianism*, vol. 1, 236.

¹¹⁶ Eun. *Apol.* 19; Vaggione, *Works*, 58.

¹¹⁷ Eun. *Apol.* 28; Vaggione, *Works*, 75.

Gallwitz calls ‘hyper-realism.’¹¹⁸

Both pro-Nicenes and Neo-Arians accused each other of denying incorporeality and simplicity to God. Gregory, like his Pro-Nicene colleagues, argues that Neo-Arians deny these doctrines as they could not imagine the Father sharing the divine essence without division in eternal begetting and procession, and accuses the Eunomians of understanding the inner life of God in a bodily way. They fail to understand the generation of the Son by the Father using the doctrine of divine simplicity and thereby consider it as a bodily act like human procreation with passion and division. Neo-Arians argue that the pro-Nicenes deny divine incorporeality and simplicity as they think of the generation of the Son by the Father as a bodily begetting of sharing of essence. In many of the relational images, Gregory will repeatedly reinforce his understanding of simplicity in understanding God’s Tri-unity.

2.3.3. The Infinite God

The understanding of God as infinite and boundless is the third characteristic that makes God unique in Gregory’s thought. He conceives the whole of the Trinity in terms of boundlessness by calling them “infinite cohesion of three infinite beings.”¹¹⁹ By calling all the persons in the Trinity infinite, Gregory is combating the heretics who “have separated these [three persons] from one another so completely as to make one of them infinite (ἄοριστος) both in essence and power, and the second in power but not in essence, and the third circumscribed in both.”¹²⁰ The attribution of infinity makes the triune God the greatest Being compared to all other existing beings. Beeley’s assertion that this ‘idea of greatness’ is an essential concept in Gregory’s understanding of God, even more so than the idea of divine simplicity, highlights the importance of this concept in Gregory’s theology.¹²¹ He uses terms such as ἄμετρος, ἄπειρος, ἀόριστος, ἀμερία and ἀχώρητος to designate God’s unbounded nature.¹²² These terms carry an echo of spatial connotation, but Gregory uses them in an incorporeal way, and they have implications for the theological epistemology and the use of comparative images for God. The debate about the infinite nature of God was important in the fourth-century context. At the beginning of the century, Arius considered the complete knowledge of the Father to be impossible even for the Son, as the divine nature of the Father is ontologically different and

¹¹⁸ Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, 112.

¹¹⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.41: SC 358.294: τριῶν ἀπείρων ἄπειρον συμφύαν.

¹²⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.5; NPNF, 319; SC 250.284.

¹²¹ Beeley, *Trinity*, 96.

¹²² Gr. Naz. Or. 28.29; 45.3,11; 38.8.

greater than the Son and other creatures. The Son could only know the Father “in proportion to his own measure” (ἀναλόγως τοῖς ἰδίους μέτροις).¹²³ However, in the second half of the century, Aëtius and Eunomius disagreed with the Arians on this point and claimed to know the essence of God through the term “unbegotten” (ἀγέννητος). The reason for this optimistic epistemology, according to Vaggione, is the concept of “boundaried” God.¹²⁴ Eunomius did not accept the common notion held by the fourth-century Fathers that the Divine is unboundaried or infinite (ἄπειρος).¹²⁵ Instead, Eunomius imagined God to be boundaried, yet great. In this way, human intellect could grasp God fully and know His essence. But for the pro-Nicenes, the infinite nature of God is the reason for God’s incomprehensibility.

The concept of divine infinity has a checkered history in antiquity. From the pre-Socratics up to the time of Plotinus, Greek philosophical thought considered infinity as imperfection and thus viewed the Divine as finite.¹²⁶ Aristotle has claimed that “nothing is complete (τέλειον) unless it has an end (τέλος); but an end is a limit (πέρας).”¹²⁷ This is because the term ἄπειρος also contains the meanings ‘undefined’ and ‘unordered’, which point to the chaotic nature of that particular thing.¹²⁸ If one attributes infinity to God, then they are attributing unorderliness to God. In theology, Origen talked about the connection between infinite and comprehension. In the context of God creating a finite number of intellectual beings, Origen says that it should be expected that God created a definite number of beings because “where there is no limit, neither can there be any comprehension or circumscription. . . . For, naturally, whatever is infinite will also be incomprehensible.”¹²⁹ But the same passage is found in Justinian’s epistle to Menas, the Patriarch of Constantinople: “it must be admitted that the power of God is finite and its circumscription must not be done away with under the pretext of praise. For if the divine power were infinite, of necessity it could not even understand itself, for the infinite is by nature incomprehensible.”¹³⁰ Hennessy thinks that Rufinus tones down Origen while transmitting the text and makes Origen say that the number of creatures is finite.¹³¹

¹²³ Ath. *Ar.* 1.6; PG 26.24A; Also in *syn.* 15.

¹²⁴ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 168-72.

¹²⁵ For the discussion on understanding of the infinite in the Fathers, see G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), 13-14.

¹²⁶ David Tracy, “God as infinite: Ethical Implications,” in *God and the Moral Life*, edited by Myriam Renaud and Joshua Daniel (London: Routledge, 2018), 136.

¹²⁷ Arist. *Phys.* 3.207A; LCL 228.252-53.

¹²⁸ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 170.

¹²⁹ Or. *princ.* 2.9.1; John Behr, ed. and trans., *Origen: On First Principles*, vol. 2, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 239.

¹³⁰ Behr, *Origen*, vol. 2, 237n3.

¹³¹ James E. Hennessy, *The Background, Sources, and Meaning of Divine Infinity in St. Gregory of Nyssa* (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1963), 162n3.

But it is clear that Origen linked infinite power with unknowability, and thus Hennessy concludes that he considered God's power as limited.¹³² This demonstrates that the idea of God's power being finite was present in the Christian tradition as in the philosophical tradition.

There is a debate about when Christians first began referring to their God as infinite in essence. Divine infinity is not explicitly stated in the scriptures, but only hinted at.¹³³ Mühlenberg claims that "Bei Gregor von Nyssa findet sich dieses Gottesprädikat zum ersten Male in der Geschichte des philosophischen und christlichen Denkens."¹³⁴ Geljon also follows Mühlenberg to say that in Gregory of Nyssa and through his writings, divine infinity becomes part of God's nature in Christian reflections thereafter.¹³⁵ Although Meredith casts doubt on Mühlenberg's assertion on Gregory's 'invention of infinity,' he does not offer any concrete period in which this concept becomes prominent in Christian discourse on God.¹³⁶ Kelly prefers an earlier period and says that Athanasius taught the understanding of God's infinity, but Hennessy considers this as confusing divine incomprehensibility with infinity.¹³⁷ Hennessy, in his dissertation, traces the changes in the understanding of divine infinity through Christian centuries up to the fourth century, where he finds that the theologians mostly used the words translated as 'infinity' to mean God's endless existence or greatness and only in the fourth century attributed infinity to God's being.¹³⁸ But Ayres has convincingly argued for earlier Christian adoption of 'infinity' to God by tracing it to the second-century theologian Irenaeus.¹³⁹ This explains the clear understanding of God's infinity in Athanasius, Basil¹⁴⁰ and Nazianzen, though an overt philosophical discussion is found only in Plotinus.

For Gregory and other pro-Nicenes, God is infinite and boundless. God is not circumscribed (περιγραπτός), and one cannot worship God if He is circumscribed and limited.¹⁴¹ Gregory insists that, as the source of all the existing things, God is beyond space and time. He says,

¹³² Hennessy, *Divine Infinity*, 162-66.

¹³³ Hennessy, *Divine Infinity*, 106-110.

¹³⁴ Ekkehard Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der klassischen Metaphysik*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Band 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 26.

¹³⁵ Albert-Kees Geljon, "Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria," VC 59, no. 2 (May 2005): 177.

¹³⁶ Anthony Meredith, 'The Idea of God in Gregory of Nyssa,' in *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, ed. H.R. Drobner and Christoph Klock (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 133.

¹³⁷ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 247; Hennessy, *Divine Infinity*, 178-9.

¹³⁸ Hennessy, *Divine Infinity*, 111-203.

¹³⁹ Lewis Ayres, *As it is Written: The Rise of Christian Argument* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming), chap. 4.

¹⁴⁰ Bas. *Eun.* 1.7; SC 299.192. Basil uses the terms ἀόριστος and ἄπειρος.

¹⁴¹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.1.25; *Or.* 28.7.

God always was and always is, and always will be; or rather, God always Is. For Was and Will Be are fragments of our time, and of changeable nature. But He is Eternal Being; and this is the Name He gives Himself when giving the Oracles to Moses in the Mount. For in Himself He sums up and contains all Being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future...like some great Sea of Being, limitless and unbounded (ἄπειρον καὶ ἀόριστον), transcending all conception of time and nature.¹⁴²

Gregory sets God in contrast to the created order and creaturely categories. God stands above all human conceptions of time and nature, yet he contains all beings. To emphasise the unboundaried nature of God, he uses a simile ‘like some sea of being’ (οἷόν τι πέλαγος οὐσίας). In his poem *De Providentia*, Gregory calls God the great infinite (ἄπειρος) mind and contrasts His being to the created universe, which is within Him, though God is above it.¹⁴³ Logically, Eunomius makes sense as our human mind can only know things that are finite, and this raises an epistemological dilemma for Gregory: How does the human mind even know that God is infinite? Is it simply a term which is derived from the privation of a positive quality? In *Oration 38*, he describes how the human mind conceives this boundless nature of God:

The boundless can be considered in two ways: with regard to beginning and with regard to end; for what is beyond these, and not contained within them, is boundless. So when the mind turns its gaze to the abyss above us, and finds no place to stand and settle down in its imaginings about God (ταῖς περὶ Θεοῦ φαντασίαις), it calls that boundless (ἄπειρον), inescapable realm “without beginning;” but when it turns its gaze below, to what comes after, it calls it “immortal” and “indestructible.”¹⁴⁴

Gregory’s explanation of ‘infinite’ in *Oration 38* holds the key to how human beings gain divine knowledge and points to the usefulness of the comparative images as our mind tries to grapple with different conceptions of the Divine, and yet, it also lays bare the limitations of the comparative images in God-talk. Thus, Gregory considers God as infinite and boundless, while Eunomius considers God as ‘boundaried.’

2.4. The Nature of God: Unique and Incomprehensible

Conceiving God as triune, simple, and infinite provides the background for understanding Gregory’s claim that God is unique and incomprehensible. In his analysis of Gregory’s conception of incomprehensibility, Beeley asserts,

¹⁴² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.3; NPNF, 423-4; the same argument is repeated verbatim in *Or.* 38.7.

¹⁴³ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.5.1-3.

¹⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.8; Daley, *Gregory*, 120; SC 358.118. For a similar description of how the human mind understands the ‘infinite’ nature of God, see Bas. *Eun.* 1.7.

His [Gregory's] basic argument is that, on account of God's infinite grandeur and magnitude, he cannot be fully known or mastered by any created being... For Gregory the incomprehensibility of God is the necessary result of the infinitude of God's being and the finitude of creaturely existence, including human thought.¹⁴⁵

However, as I have argued above, one cannot single out a single conception of God as contributing to His uniqueness and incomprehensibility; instead, as I will demonstrate below, at least for our study of comparative images, all three conceptions—triune, simple, and infinite—contribute to the uniqueness of God. If Gregory is elevating the 'infinite' nature of God above all other qualities, as Beeley claims,¹⁴⁶ then Gregory is not different from Eunomius, who picked 'unbegotten' as the defining characteristic of God. The entire argument of Gregory is that one conception or quality cannot define God, and all human conceptions about God, when pieced together properly, contribute to our understanding of God. What Anatolios comments about Gregory of Nyssa is true for Nazianzen: "Gregory insists on the value of multiple approaches to the mystery of God because Scripture itself does not present any single, all-encompassing notion of God. Scripture describes God in many different ways and presents multiple descriptions of his varied attributes."¹⁴⁷ Thus, God is unique and incomprehensible, not only because of His infinite nature, but also because of all the qualities that distinguish the created order from the divine nature, such as Tri-unity, simplicity, and infinity. This will become clearer as we later correlate these conceptions with Gregory's idea of comparative images in the course of our study.

Gregory affirms that God is "first (πρώτης) and unique (μόνης)."¹⁴⁸ This is because He is "one (εἷς) God, [and] one supreme nature (μία φύσις ἡ ἀνωτάτω)."¹⁴⁹ As I have demonstrated in 2.2, this makes him incomparable. But concerning the understanding of God's incomprehensibility, the uniqueness of God does not allow the human mind to conceive God in His entirety, as He is the greatest Being that exists. Gregory says, "God is the most beautiful and the loftiest being over all other existing beings."¹⁵⁰ In *Oration 2*, Gregory talks of the divine greatness (τοῦ θείου μεγέθους) and describes God as one "who alone is most glorious and illustrious (φανοτάτῳ καὶ λαμπροτάτῳ), and surpasses (ὑπερέχοντι) in purity every nature, material and immaterial alike."¹⁵¹ Later, when dealing with Gregory's theological

¹⁴⁵ Beeley, *Trinity*, 94. I will demonstrate the 'finitude of creaturely existence' after delineating Gregory's conception of creation later in the chapter. See 2.6.

¹⁴⁶ Beeley, *Trinity*, 96.

¹⁴⁷ Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 166.

¹⁴⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.31; SC 250.174.

¹⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; SC 250.292-94.

¹⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 6.12; SC 405.152: κάλλιστον μὲν τῶν ὄντων καὶ ὑψηλότατον Θεός.

¹⁵¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.5; NPNF, 206; SC 247.94.

epistemology, I will elaborate on how uniqueness affects the human endeavour to understand God. However, this elaboration can only be done after addressing Gregory's understanding of created nature, as described later in this chapter, and how he perceives the workings of the human mind in relation to understanding God in chapter 3. At this point in the argument, we can affirm that God's unique nature is the reason for His incomprehensible nature and elaborate on Gregory's understanding of the doctrine of incomprehensibility. If God is unique and if the human mind does not know anything that can even partially reflect the nature and characteristics of God, then, God cannot be comprehended by the human mind.

The doctrine of divine incomprehensibility maintains that God's essence is unknowable to created human minds and is affirmed by all the pro-Nicenes.¹⁵² Kochańczyk-Bonińska and Przyszychowska point out that the dual focus on an immanent God who is manifested in Jesus Christ and the transcendent God who is beyond the created order coexisted in the early church's thinking about God, but it was during the trinitarian controversy of the fourth century that theologians started to focus more on the latter concept.¹⁵³ The Eunomians' optimistic theological epistemology undoubtedly played a crucial role in that. Gregory fully utilised this doctrine of divine unknowability as he combatted Eunomians, as Ayres has pointed out that Gregory has established the "awareness of God's incomprehensibility as the highest form of human religiosity."¹⁵⁴

For Gregory, the triune God is "incomprehensible and beyond our conceptions" (ἀκατάληπτον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐπίνοιαν).¹⁵⁵ He affirms that no one can know God's essence fully or name the divine nature (τὸ θεῖον ἀκατονόμαστον), because "no man has yet breathed all the air; no mind has yet contained (νοῦς κεχώρηκεν) or language embraced God's essence in its fullness (οὐσίαν θεοῦ παντελῶς)."¹⁵⁶ In his poem *Hymnus ad Deum*, he asks, "How shall I name you, who cannot be named?"¹⁵⁷ However, Gregory is neither an absolute optimist, like Eunomius, nor an absolute pessimist, as it might first appear, but rather realistic, based on the nature of God elaborated earlier and the nature of the human being, which we will deal with later in this chapter. Beeley has convincingly argued that this unknowability of God in Gregory is not absolute, and he denies only complete and exact comprehension (κατάληψις)

¹⁵² Ayres, *Nicaea*, 282.

¹⁵³ Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska and Marta Przyszychowska, "Incomprehensibility of God and the Trinitarian Controversy of the Fourth Century," *Vox Patrum* 34 (2014): 239, accessed August 11, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.3621>.

¹⁵⁴ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 331.

¹⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.16; PG 35.1005A.

¹⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.17; Norris, *Faith*, 273; SC 250.262.

¹⁵⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.29.13.; McGuckin, *Poems*, 7; PG 37.507-8.

of God.¹⁵⁸ In his famous description of Moses' ascent to the mount to see God, Moses managed to see only the back parts of God, which is normally understood to mean the revelation of God in the incarnation.¹⁵⁹ Thus, Gregory asserts, like all other pro-Nicenes, that God's essence is unknowable, but God is known through His activities only to the extent the limited human mind can know him.

The first reason for the incomprehensibility of God is His infinite nature. Although God is simple, the depth of His Being cannot be fathomed by human beings because of His infinite nature. Connecting God's boundless nature and our comprehension of Him, Gregory says, "The Divine Nature, then, is boundless and hard to understand, and all that we can comprehend of Him is His boundlessness (ἀμειρία)."¹⁶⁰ If God can be known fully in this world, he cannot be unbound and infinite. For Gregory, any type of intellectual comprehension is a kind of limitation.¹⁶¹ He asks, "how can the immeasurable or boundless (ἄπειρον) be measured (μετρεῖται)?"¹⁶² In *Oration 45*, he uses the term ἀχώρητος for God, which, according to Lampe, has both spatial and epistemic connotations of infinite and incomprehensible.¹⁶³ Humans can mentally grasp something and know it fully only when it is limited, finite and manageable, but God is unlimited, infinite and unbound. But as mentioned earlier, this is not the only reason for the incomprehensibility of God, as Beeley has suggested, but nevertheless, it is an important reason.

The second reason is connected with the trinitarian life of God, which contributes to the uniqueness of God's being. As human knowledge depends on comparisons and analogical reasoning, as I will argue while elaborating Gregory's theological epistemology in the next chapter, that it is not possible to have direct access to God's essence. The trinitarian being of God—one divine essence existing in three undivided hypostases—has no parallels in the human world. That is the reason for the lack of comparison. Not only is the trinitarian life of God unique, but the Father's begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit are also unique and do not have parallels in the human world. Gregory accuses Eunomians of trying to understand the inner life of God, comparing it with human procreation in a materialistic way. Gregory struggles to come up with perfect comparative images to talk about the triune aspect of God. Talking about the begetting of the Son, Gregory says, "This begetting would be a

¹⁵⁸ Beeley, *Trinity*, 93-94.

¹⁵⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.3.

¹⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.3.

¹⁶¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.10; Norris, *Faith*, 115.

¹⁶² Gr. Naz. Or. 18.16; PG 35.1005A.

¹⁶³ PGL, 280.

triviality if it could be understood by you... The heavenly begetting is more incomprehensible than your own (τῆς σῆς γεννήσεως ἀληπτοτέρα ἢ ἄνω γέννησις), to the same extent that God is harder to trace out than Man.”¹⁶⁴ He challenges Eunomians to first explain the human phenomena that are yet to be described, and then they could proceed to think and talk about God’s nature. At the end of his first *Theological Oration*, he lists many things that they could investigate without the danger of blasphemy. He says, “Attack the silence of Pythagoras, or the Orphic beans, or the extraordinary pretentiousness of ‘Thus spake the Master.’ Attack Plato’s Ideas, and the Re-embodiments and Cycles of our souls, and their Recollections... Epicurus’ atheism... Aristotle’s mean conception of Providence... etc., In these questions to hit the mark is not useless, to miss it is not dangerous.”¹⁶⁵ But with God, if one misses the mark, there is a danger of blasphemy. God’s inner life is beyond our rationality and words. Even certain aspects of incarnation are off limits for human beings. Talking about the union of humanity and the divinity in the incarnation, in his poem *De Christi Incarnatione* he asks, “How could man’s mind ever grasp this union beyond all words?”¹⁶⁶

The third reason for God’s incomprehensibility is the creaturely condition of human beings, in contrast to God’s greatness. The present embodied human condition contributes to the ontological gulf that separates God, the creator, from the created order as I will demonstrate in 2.5.4 and 3.2. When this creaturely ontological condition is combined with God’s infinite greatness, the human condition makes comprehending God not only difficult but sometimes even dangerous. Here again, Gregory uses the image of the sun: looking at the sun with naked eyes will harm it, and in the same manner, trying to comprehend God in His entirety would harm our faculties.¹⁶⁷ I will elaborate on this later when I examine Gregory’s views of the created order in 2.5.

In many places, Gregory expresses his frustration with what eludes him when contemplating God. This passage in *Oration 2* brings together different themes expressed by Gregory on this subject. In the context of talking about the mixed nature of humans, Gregory says,

[Human beings are] able to *join* God (ἀπτόμενον Θεοῦ) but not to comprehend Him (οὐ περιδρασσόμενον), drawing near and yet afar off... For the joy of what we have discovered is no greater than the pain of what escapes us; a pain, I imagine, like that

¹⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.8; Norris, *Faith*, 249; SC 250.190-92.

¹⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 27.10; Norris, *Faith*, 223.

¹⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.11.11; McGuckin, *Poems*, 6; PG 37.471.

¹⁶⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.10; 27.3; 28.3. This will be elaborated later in section 5.5.2. when dealing with the image of the sun.

felt by those who are dragged, while yet thirsty, from the water, or are unable to retain what they think they hold, or are suddenly left in the dark by a flash of lightning.¹⁶⁸

This passage is important as Gregory distinguishes between the salvific union with God and grasping Him intellectually. There is a frustration in not knowing God fully, but this does not stop human beings from drawing closer to Him in a meaningful way and even sharing in His divine life. But, in the next chapter, we will see that this frustration contributes to a longing to know God more and thus leads to a theological epistemology that has progression through this lifetime and beyond built into it.

In the context of incomprehensibility, Gregory attacks the Eunomians for being illogical in their claims by saying that if something exists, it should be knowable, and if not, it does not exist. If something is not comprehensible, it does not mean that it does not exist. It simply means that we cannot understand it, or it is beyond our rationality. He says, “for dialectical, mischievous arguments, which, busying themselves illegitimately with the begetting of God and his ineffable origin, rashly attack the divinity, suggesting that what lies beyond reason (ὕπερ λόγον) must either be accessible to them alone or be non-existent, because they have not been able to comprehend it.”¹⁶⁹ The epistemological position is not one of either fully knowing God or having His existence in question; it is fully plausible to hold that God exists, and yet we cannot know Him fully.

Because of God’s incomprehensibility, Gregory proposes that everyone honours God by silence on matters which are beyond their intellectual ability.¹⁷⁰ He elevates reticence about the mystery of God as a theological virtue. In *Oration 3*, he says that piety (εὐσεβεία) consists not in talking about God but in silence (σιγάω) as “the tongue is a dangerous thing to men, if it be not governed by reason.”¹⁷¹ When he accuses the Eunomians of talking about what is beyond reason (ὕπερ λόγον), he says that he himself “shall dare anything rather than speak out rashly against God.”¹⁷² In his *Christology*, he says, “So much we have said of Christ; the greater part of what we might say shall be revered with silence.”¹⁷³ Gregory considers silence as the best guard against impious talk that dishonours God. This is one reason he prefers contemplating God over talking about Him. However, Gregory’s preference for honouring God through silence does not lead to a negative theological epistemology but rather to a cautiously

¹⁶⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.75; NPNF, 220, modified. For similar expressions of frustration, see *Or.* 2.76; 40.41; *Carm.* 1.1.29

¹⁶⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.18; Daley, *Gregory*, 149

¹⁷⁰ In this concept, he is joined by his contemporaries. See, Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 2.3.105; Bas. *Eun.* 1.1; Hil. *syn.* 71.

¹⁷¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 3.7; NPNF, 229; SC 247.250-52.

¹⁷² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.18; Daley, *Gregory*, 149

¹⁷³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.22; NPNF, 431.

optimistic one, as I will clarify in the next chapter.

2.5. The Comparative Images

Turning to the comparative images used to refer to God, Gregory acknowledges that they are derived from the created order. It is God who created everything that exists: “The Mind brought forth everything.”¹⁷⁴ Both Eunomius and Gregory stood against the prevalent Neoplatonic philosophy, which conceived reality as a chain of being trickling down to the material world with links on both sides.¹⁷⁵ But they disagreed on where to draw the line that distinguished God from the creation. Vaggione says that even though every Christian believed that “there was no continuum, no unbroken chain linking final shade to ultimate source” because of the creation narrative of Genesis, which “had created a gap in the chain of being which no mere creature could cross,” they differed in where to place that gap.¹⁷⁶ Eunomius placed this gap between the Father and all other creatures that includes the Son and the Holy Spirit, whereas Gregory placed that gap after the three persons in the Trinity. Gregory takes pains to establish this in his creation narratives. He also presents a complex picture of creation, encompassing the creation of the ideal world first, followed by the material world, and finally the creation of human beings—a three-stage creation—that extends beyond the biblical narratives of creation and taps into the Christian tradition and his own reflections on the subject. These themes are relevant to the discussions on the comparative images.

2.5.1. Creation

Gregory is very vivid and extensive in his creation narratives.¹⁷⁷ Although he incorporates a variety of Platonic and Neoplatonic cosmological themes into his creation narratives, he remains faithful to the biblical foundation and the Nicene tradition.¹⁷⁸ In contrast to other ancient Greek cosmologies that considered matter coexistent with God and creation as the ordering of that matter by the Divine, Gregory considers God to be the source, cause, and creator of all things that exist.¹⁷⁹ In his *Theological Orations*, Gregory calls God the efficient

¹⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.4.75; PG 37.421A: Νοῦς ὄδινεν ἅπαντα.

¹⁷⁵ cf. Plot. *Enn.* 5.1.3.

¹⁷⁶ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 123.

¹⁷⁷ Gregory’s exposition of creation is found in *Or.* 38.9-11; the same text is found verbatim in *Or.* 45.5-7.

¹⁷⁸ Susanna Elm, “‘O Paradoxical Fusion!’: Gregory of Nazianzus on Baptism and Cosmology (Orations 38-40),” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra’anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 310-15; Gabrielle Thomas, *Image of God*, 60; Ellverson, *Man*, 83-85; Bergmann, *Creation*, 73-75.

¹⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.7; *Carm.* 1.1.4.3-6.

and essential cause (τὴν πάντων ποιητικὴν τε καὶ συνεκτικὴν αἰτίαν), using the same terms used by Aristotle and Plotinus.¹⁸⁰ He makes it clear that God created everything out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) and that everything depends on God for its existence and sustenance.¹⁸¹ As Mason points out, the term συνεκτικὴν, translated as ‘essential’ or ‘sustaining,’ comes from the verbal form συνέχειν, which denotes the act of maintaining harmony.¹⁸² Thus, the creation depends on God for its harmony and sustenance.

In Gregory’s creation narrative, several essential features are present. Firstly, his cosmology can be confidently called trinitarian cosmology, where all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the act of creation, which Ellverson refers to as a three-step creation.¹⁸³ In the act of creation, instead of generically talking about God, Gregory distinguishes the role of each person in the Trinity and acknowledges the individual contribution towards the created order. In his narrative, the Father is the ‘initiating’ agent, the Son is the ‘creating agent’, and the Holy Spirit acts as the ‘perfecting agent’: “Firstly, [the Father] thought of the angelic and heavenly powers and that thought was an action, fulfilled by the Word and perfected by the Spirit.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, Gregory calls God “subsisting in three Greatest as the Cause, the Creator, and the Perfector.”¹⁸⁵ The creative action of God can be viewed as a movement which originates from the Father like a thought, and thus the Father is often termed as ‘the Mind’ (Νοῦς)¹⁸⁶ or even as ‘the world creating Mind’ (κοσμογόνος Νοῦς).¹⁸⁷ The Son, the lofty Word of the Mind, establishes the structure of the world following the intention of the Father.¹⁸⁸ The triune God is active in the ‘economy’ of the world, holding the diversity of the created order into unity by His sustaining providence. In this regard, Bergmann has brought out how Gregory’s thought has the whole of creation as interconnected relationships where God is the centre which holds everything together: “God is the subject of such interconnecting and is the agent of relationality... the triune God perpetually seeks to connect and bring life together into such relationships.”¹⁸⁹

Secondly and most importantly for our discussion of the comparative images, Gregory's

¹⁸⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.6; Norris, *Faith*, 111.

¹⁸¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.6; See also *Or.* 40.45; Thomas, *Image of God*, 59-61.

¹⁸² Mason, *Orations*, 29.

¹⁸³ Ellverson, *Man*, 76. She discerns a clear two-step creation, but also finds a third step.

¹⁸⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.9; SC 358.120: πρῶτον μὲν ἐννοεῖ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς δυνάμεις καὶ οὐρανίους· καὶ τὸ ἐννόημα ἔργον ἦν, Λόγῳ συμπληρούμενον, καὶ Πνεύματι τελειούμενον; cf. Ellverson, *Man*, 90.

¹⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 34.8; SC 318.212: καὶ ἐν τρισὶ τοῖς μεγίστοις ἴσταται, αἰτίῳ, καὶ δημιουργῶ, καὶ τελειοποιῶ.

¹⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 12.1; *Carm.* 1.1.1.29; 1.1.4.75; 1.1.5.2.

¹⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.4.68.

¹⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.8.55-56; PG 37.451A: κόσμον ἐπήξατο νοῦ Λόγος αἰτιῶς, Ἐσπόμενος μέγαλοιο νόῳ Πατρὸς; cf. *Or.* 32.10.

¹⁸⁹ Bergmann, *Creation*, 85-88.

cosmology has three stages of creation. Gregory talks of God creating the ideal or the spiritual world first, then the material world, and finally humans as a mixture of both worlds. Winslow says that though parts of this threefold creation account are found in Gregory’s predecessors, they are not found in any author before Gregory in their entirety.¹⁹⁰ When discussing creation, he juxtaposes two sets of dualistic concepts: creator-creature and visible/corporeal-invisible/incorporeal. Even the ideal world, which includes Angels and heavenly beings, is part of creation; despite their closeness to God, they are ontologically different from Him. Within the created order, Gregory makes the distinction between corporeal and incorporeal in line with the Scriptural and the Nicene tradition, which talks about God being “the creator of heaven and earth and of things visible (ὄρατῶν) and invisible (ἀοράτων).”¹⁹¹

Gregory, in his creation narratives, says that God created the intelligent world first, which is populated by creatures similar yet inferior to Him and is akin to God in nature.¹⁹² He calls them “angelic powers” (τὰς ἀγγελικὰς δυνάμεις), “secondary splendours” (λαμπρότητες δεύτεραι), “intelligent spirits” (νοερὰ πνεύματα), and “immaterial, bodiless fire” (πῦρ ἄυλον καὶ ἀσώματον).¹⁹³ In his *Oration on Holy Baptism*, Gregory describes God as Light and employs light language to depict this first creation. The angels are the second light (δεύτερον φῶς) which outflows (ἀπορροή) from and participates (μετουσία) in the first Light, i.e. God.¹⁹⁴ Although this description contains echoes of ‘emanation’ language, Winslow argues that this is not the Neoplatonic chain of being but that Gregory uses this language to demonstrate the closeness of the intellectual world to God, while maintaining the creaturely nature of the intellectual world.¹⁹⁵ As such, these angelic powers are servants of the primordial splendour (λειτουργοὶ τῆς πρώτης λαμπρότητος).¹⁹⁶ So, they are subordinated to God and they serve Him and praise him: they “hymn God’s majesty in everlasting contemplation of everlasting glory.”¹⁹⁷

Gregory uses the terms νοητός (intelligent) and ἀόρατος (invisible) to talk about this world.¹⁹⁸ He describes God’s relationship with the ideal world as the sun’s relationship to the visible world. He says, “For God is to intelligible things what the sun is to the things of sense. The one lightens the visible, the other the invisible, world. The one makes our bodily eyes to

¹⁹⁰ Winslow, *Salvation*, 46-47; cf. Gr. Naz. Or. 45.6.

¹⁹¹ Socr. h.e. 1.8.21; PG 67.68A; cf. Col. 1:16.

¹⁹² Gr. Naz. Or. 38.9; 45.5.

¹⁹³ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.9; 45.5.

¹⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.5.

¹⁹⁵ Winslow, *Salvation*, 48.

¹⁹⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.9.

¹⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.31; Norris, *Faith*, 244.

¹⁹⁸ For God as invisible, see 1 Tim. 1:17.

see the sun, the other makes our intellectual natures to see God.”¹⁹⁹ Gregory even holds the Angelic beings as the models for human salvation in the funeral oration for his father by saying that his father was promoted to the ranks of an angel.²⁰⁰ There is a longing for the simple nature of angels and their closeness to God; yet, in many places, Gregory argues for a greater status for human beings than angels.²⁰¹ This ideal world is separated from the Godhead by a veil (καταπέτασμα); thus, Gregory emphasises a distance between God and the angelic realm.²⁰² There is little description of the ideal world in Gregory, as he restrains himself, except to make a few statements about privileged position of the angels in relation to God. Gregory wonders whether they are not prone to sin. But he hesitates to affirm this as the biblical notion of the fall of Lucifer proves it wrong.²⁰³ Another aspect of this ideal world is that it is comprehended only by the mind.²⁰⁴ Talking about intellectual nature, he says, “for akin to Deity are those natures which are intellectual, and only to be comprehended by mind.”²⁰⁵ There is no intervening ‘matter’ and thus sensory perceptions, which usually help us see the visible world, cannot help in knowing the ideal world. Hence, Gregory describes his dead father as having a mind free of the clay (i.e. body or matter), and now having a direct interaction with “the prime and purest mind.”²⁰⁶

As the second stage of creation, God created the material world (κόσμον ύλικόν), which Gregory contrasts with the ideal world and describes as perceptible (αίσθητός) and visible (όρώμενον or όρατός).²⁰⁷ Gregory praises this material world for its harmony and orderliness. This world is entirely different from God in essence, and the intelligent world. It is alien (ξένος) to God’s nature²⁰⁸ and separated by a second veil (καταπέτασμα) which separates it from the Godhead and the heavenly realms.²⁰⁹ God created this material realm to demonstrate that He can create something entirely distinct from Himself.²¹⁰ The material world is not an accident but a demonstration of God’s power. Here Gregory emphasises the difference between God and the intelligible world on one hand and the material world on the other hand and says that the “intellectual natures, graspable by the mind alone, are clearly related to the Godhead; but

¹⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 21.1; NPNF, 269.

²⁰⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 18.4; Winslow, *Salvation*, 49.

²⁰¹ Winslow, *Salvation*, 49; A similar tension could be seen in Augustine’s *De correptione et gratia*, 27.

²⁰² Gr. Naz. Or. 6.22; cf. 28.3.

²⁰³ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.5.

²⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10.

²⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.6; NPNF, 424.

²⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 18.4; NPNF, 256.

²⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10.

²⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10.

²⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 6.22.

²¹⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10.

whatever is subject to sense is utterly alien, and things that are completely without soul or movement lie still further removed.”²¹¹ Thus, Gregory, while maintaining the creator-creature distinction, also emphasises the distinction between the invisible, intellectual world and the visible material world. The interpreters of Gregory agree that Gregory does not have absolute dualism of intellectual and material, but highlights the difference between the two based on their respective ontologies.²¹² Thus, the material world is not inherently evil but rather a good creation of God, a concept which will be clear when we talk about the Fall in 2.5.4.

After these two worlds were made, God created human beings as the third light.²¹³ In humans, God combined the two worlds and made them with a soul that belongs to the invisible world and a body that is part of the material world. Human beings are a mixture of the two different elements: matter and intellect. He uses verbs μίγνυμι,²¹⁴ ἐπιμείγνυμι,²¹⁵ συγκεράννυμι,²¹⁶ συνίστημι,²¹⁷ συζεύγνυμι;²¹⁸ nouns κρᾶμα,²¹⁹ μίξις²²⁰ and adjective μικτός²²¹ when talking about this mixture. God “formed man as a rational animal from a mixture of rational and irrational elements and bound dust to mind and mind to spirit in a mysterious and ineffable way.”²²² Thus, a human being is “visible yet intellectual.”²²³ He uses different combinations of words, such as ψυχή-δέμας; σῶμα-ψυχή and σάρξ-πνεῦμα, to refer to these two distinct elements in the human. Though he emphasises the mixture of the two realms in humans, he does not consistently hold to either a dichotomic or a trichotomic view of humans. He mixes up the vocabulary and even talks of a four-part division in humans.²²⁴ They became a compounded being who is a microcosm of the cosmos, “the little world (ὁ μικρὸς κόσμος)” containing both the intellectual and material aspects of the creation within themselves.²²⁵ The human beings are “another angel” (ἄγγελον ἄλλον), “a mixed worshipper” (προσκυνητὴν μικτὸν) who is different from the purely intellectual angels who worship.²²⁶ Winslow points out that in the mixture, the invisible aspect of man is not derived from the intellectual world

²¹¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10; Daley, *Gregory*, 121.

²¹² Winslow, *Salvation*, 50; Bergmann, *Creation*, 94; Ruether, *Gregory*, 98.

²¹³ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.5.

²¹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.4.92; 1.1.8.80; Or. 2.75.

²¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.8.79.

²¹⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.22.

²¹⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 32.9.

²¹⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.6.

²¹⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.7; 20.11; 28.3; 32.9.

²²⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.22; 38.11; 45.7.

²²¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.11; 45.7.

²²² Gr. Naz. Or. 32.9; Vinson, *Gregory*, 197.

²²³ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.7.

²²⁴ Ellverson, *Man*, 21; Winslow, *Salvation*, 51.

²²⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.22; Ellverson, *Man*, 37-39.

²²⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.7.

but is directly given by God in conformity with the biblical narrative, whereas the material aspect is derived from the material world.²²⁷ Thus, human beings are special and not simply a mixture of elements from the two worlds, but are “bearers of the divine within the created order.”²²⁸ They are more special because they are destined to be made ‘divine by the inclination towards God.’²²⁹

We can compare Gregory’s understanding with Eunomius’ to put everything in context. Eunomius, like Gregory, considers God as the source of everything that exists. But the ‘true God’ for him is the Father, and thus, the Father is the creator and cause of everything—including the Son. At the end of his *Apology*, Eunomius says, “He is God, creator and maker of all things, firstly and specially of the only begotten.”²³⁰ So, the first creation of the Father is that of the only begotten. As we have seen in the section on the Trinity, for Eunomius, the only way to preserve the monarchy of the Father is by maintaining the uniqueness of the Father and assigning different nature to all other beings. With this in mind, he says that the Father begot the Son through His Will, and through the Son, made (ἐποίησεν) the Holy Spirit, whom Eunomius describes as “the first and the greatest of all things.”²³¹ After this, the Father “created all the remaining things in heaven and earth, things that are visible and invisible, corporeal and incorporeal through the Son.”²³² Thus, he also affirms the understanding of dual creation, i.e. the creation of the ideal and the material world: the Son is “the maker of both immortals and mortals, maker of both spirits and of all flesh.”²³³ The Son is special in Eunomian theology because He was directly begotten by the Father with the creative power coexistentially, and through Him made all other things that exist.²³⁴ Thus, the Son “became the perfect servant to the whole creation and the Will of the Father.”²³⁵ Gregory would counter this title of ‘perfect servant’ given by Eunomius to the Son with his ‘honour images.’ Thus, Eunomius’ creation narrative is the opposite of the trinitarian cosmology which we saw in Gregory. There is a clear hierarchical structure with regards to nature of each created thing: the Father is ‘ingenerate,’

²²⁷ Winslow, *Salvation*, 51. cf. Ellverson, *Man*, 20.

²²⁸ Bergmann, *Creation*, 92.

²²⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.11: τῆ πρὸς Θεὸν νεύσει θεούμενον.

²³⁰ Eun. *Apol.* 28; Vaggione, *Works*, 74-75: πάντων ἐστὶ θεὸς καὶ κτίστης καὶ δημιουργός, πρώτως μὲν καὶ ἐξαιρέτως τοῦ μονογενοῦς.

²³¹ Eun. *Apol.* 28; Vaggione, *Works*, 74.

²³² Eun. *Apol.* 28; Vaggione, *Works*, 74: τὰ λοιπὰ πάντα τὰ ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς, ὁρατά τε καὶ ἀόρατα, καὶ σώματα τε καὶ ἀσώματα διὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ ἐποίησεν.

²³³ Eun. *exp. fid.* 3; Vaggione, *Works*, 152-154: δημιουργὸς ἀθανάτων καὶ θνητῶν, δημιουργὸς τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ πάσης σαρκός. cf. Eun. *Apol.* 28. Gregory also uses the adjective ‘mortal’ (θνητός) for the world in *Carm.* 1.1.4.97.

²³⁴ Eun. *Apol.* 15.

²³⁵ Eun. *Apol.* 15; Vaggione, *Works*, 52: τελειότατος γέγονεν ὑπουργὸς πρὸς πᾶσαν δημιουργίαν καὶ γνώμην τοῦ πατρὸς.

the Son is ‘begotten,’ the Holy Spirit is the ‘first and the greatest’ of the creation made through the Son, and all other existing things, both visible and invisible, are created through the Son, fulfilling the Will of the Father.

2.5.2. The Nature of the Created Order

While God’s nature is simple and uncompounded, the material creation, including the human body, is a composition (σύνθεσις).²³⁶ Challenging the faulty conception of the Divine in his opponents’ thought, in his second *Theological Oration*, Gregory asks his audience,

Is it [Divine] corporeal (σῶμα)? How then can it be boundless, limitless, formless, impalpable, invisible? Can bodies be such? The arrogance of it! This is not the nature of bodies. Or is it corporeal but without these properties? The grossness of it, to say that deity has no properties superior to ours! How could it be worth worship were it bounded? How could it escape elemental composition (τὸ ἐκ στοιχείων συγκεῖσθαι) and disintegration or even total dissolution? For composition (σύνθεσις) is cause of conflict (μάχη), conflict of division (διάστασις), division of dissolution (λύσις). But dissolution is utterly alien to God the prime nature.²³⁷

Material creation is the opposite of God’s nature, and here Gregory explains it in detail. The focus of the passage is on the composite nature of material things. This aspect of matter leads to conflict, division and ultimately dissolution. He understands the compounded nature to be the cause of sin in humans: “Sinning is human and belongs to the composite nature below. For composition is division.”²³⁸ But when it comes to Angels, who are also simple in nature, Gregory does not have any clear explanation as to why Lucifer sinned, and acknowledges this difficulty.²³⁹ He leans on the differences he insists on between God’s nature and the ideal nature of the ‘invisible’ creation. To solve this problem, Ellverson suggests that Gregory’s thought includes the idea that the angels might have some degree of materiality in their nature, which leaves Lucifer prone to pride and sin.²⁴⁰ In *Oration 28*, Gregory speculates that when we peer beyond the veil onto the ideal and heavenly realities, “not even this can we see in an incorporeal way (ἄσωμάτως), though it is incorporeal.”²⁴¹ The same type of speculation about the angelic nature is present in *Oration 38*: “Whether we are to conceive of them as intelligent Spirits

²³⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.7.

²³⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.7; Norris, *Faith*, 227; SC 250.114.

²³⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.7; SC 358.210: Τὸ δὲ ἀμαρτάνειν, ἀνθρώπινον, καὶ τῆς κάτω συνθέσεως - σύνθεσις γὰρ ἀρχὴ διαστάσεως.

²³⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.5.

²⁴⁰ Ellverson, *Man*, 60-61.

²⁴¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.31; NPNF, 300; SC 250.170: οὐκ ἔχομεν οὐδὲ ταύτην ἀσωμάτως ἰδεῖν, εἰ καὶ ἀσώματος...

(νοερὰ πνεύματα), or as Fire of an immaterial and incorruptible kind (ἄϋλον καὶ ἀσώματον), or as some other nature approaching this as near as (τινὰ φύσιν ἄλλην, ὅτι ἐγγυτάτω) may be.”²⁴² With this in mind, we can conclude that only God is fully immaterial and incorporeal, and the creation to different degrees contains material aspects that make it vulnerable to sin and corruption.

Secondly, compared to the trinitarian life of God, the material world and human beings, due to their composite nature, cannot demonstrate the perfect unity, which is only found in the simple nature of spiritual beings. The Holy Trinity exists as three persons without any division; thus, one needs to talk paradoxically and simultaneously of the One and the Three: “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One.”²⁴³ This paradoxical yet perfect unity is unique to the trinitarian life of God with no parallels in the world. A human being, however close he or she is in will and action to another, cannot show the perfect unity that exists in the inner life of God. Gregory clearly argues this point through the Father-son image, which we will see later. Thus, comparing these two distinct natures, he says, “you cannot find there [in the Trinity] any of the properties inherent in things divisible (μεριστός).”²⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, the composite nature of the material world inherently contains division and, because of that, is prone to dissolution. But as God is simple, he is free from division and dissolution: “Simplicity is peaceful and free from division.”²⁴⁵ This again shows that there is no similarity between the nature of God and the material world.

Thirdly, the material world is limited in both time and space. There is a clear beginning to it, and there will also be an end. Gregory clearly rejected the eternity of the world. God created the world at a particular time, and it will come to an end at a specific time. In the same way, the creation is not infinite, but limited. In his arguments for God’s infinite nature, he talks of the correlation between incorporeality and infinity. If God were a body, then he would be circumscribed. The background to this assertion is that any material thing or being occupies a space is circumscribed (περιγραφή).²⁴⁶ Thus, Gregory advocates both temporal and spatial limits to the created universe. Bergmann comments: “The cosmic structure is completely self-enclosed... delimited by the uncreated. Antiquity had absolutely no concept of an infinite cosmic All; the firmament of heaven represented the farthest, most extreme boundary of the

²⁴² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.9; NPNF, 347; SC 358.120.

²⁴³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.41; NPNF, 375.

²⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.14; Norris, *Faith*, 286.

²⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.7; SC 358.210: ἀπλότης γὰρ εἰρηναία καὶ ἀστασίαστος.

²⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.10.

world.”²⁴⁷

2.5.3. Attitude Toward the Material Creation

Having discussed the creation and its nature in general, we should now turn our attention to Gregory's attitude towards it. Gregory exhibits a double attitude towards the material world. So, we find both positive and negative comments about the created order, which often baffles the commentators. But here, I propose that Gregory's ideas on matter should be considered within the context of the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian distinctions. This framework will help us to interpret Gregory's thoughts on the subject.

For Gregory, the material world is twice removed from God and thus ranks lower than the spiritual world in terms of closeness to God. But he does not consider the material world as inherently evil; it was created by God for a purpose, and it exists solely because of His sustenance. It is precisely because of this reason, among others, that Gregory uses comparative images taken from the material order to talk about God. However, Gregory has an ambiguous attitude towards the material world, which needs explanation. On the one hand, he praises the creation: “The creation is “a silent praiser of the mighty work” of the Word,²⁴⁸ and is “praiseworthy” (ἐπαινετός and ἀξιευπαίνετος) for its beauty and harmony.²⁴⁹ God created the world with a purpose because God fashioned it “for the enjoyment of the human beings.”²⁵⁰ But on the other hand, Gregory calls the material world a ‘disorder’ (ταραχή),²⁵¹ ‘transitory’ (οὐχ ἑστῶτος) and uses the adjectives ‘deceptive’ (ἀπατηλός), disorderly (ἄτακτος) and ‘irregular’ (ἀνώμαλος) to describe it.²⁵² It is also prone to dissolution (ἀναλύεσθαι) and even to complete destruction (ὄλως λύεσθαι) because of its compounded nature.²⁵³ Compared to this material world, the spiritual world is firm (πάγιος), steady (σταθερός), divine (θεοειδής), free from all disorder (ταραχή) and confusion (σύγχυσις)²⁵⁴ and counted among the “things that stand firm and are not moved.”²⁵⁵ Ellverson calls this ‘double attitude,’ yet does not find evidence to deem matter evil or to be avoided.²⁵⁶ This assessment is based on Gregory's sense of the inherent value of the material world as God's creation. In Ellverson's opinion, Gregory

²⁴⁷ Bergmann, *Creation*, 94.

²⁴⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.11; SC 358.124: σιγῶντες ἐπαινέται τῆς μεγαλοουργίας. cf. *Or.* 28.6.

²⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.10.

²⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 16.5; PG 35.940C: ἡ εἰς ἀπόλαυσιν ἀνθρώπων δημιουργηθεῖσα κτίσις.

²⁵¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 7.19.

²⁵² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.3; PG 35.988C.

²⁵³ Gr. Naz. 28.7; SC 250.114.

²⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.3; PG 35.988C.

²⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 7.19; SC 405.228: τὰ ἐστῶτα καὶ μὴ κινούμενα.

²⁵⁶ Ellverson, *Man*, 34-37.

speaks positively about the material world when he considers it ontologically as a world created by God. But when he comments on it existentially, he is much more negative. For Gregory, it is the fallen world, not the world God created, that contains evil. Bergmann concludes his analysis of Gregory's attitude towards the spiritual and material world in a similar way by demonstrating that in Gregory's theology, despite the gulf that exists between the two worlds, they are open to each other: "What delimits the world as a whole is actually its boundary over against the uncreated... And while neither creatures nor even angels can penetrate that boundary, it does remain perpetually open for God."²⁵⁷ Thus, I believe viewing his comments on the material world in the light of a pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian distinction gives us clues to why he calls the material creation sometimes 'good' and sometimes 'bad.' Creation in itself was good and praised for its harmony, but after the Fall, it became disorderly and deceptive. However, as Bergmann claims, the material world remains open to God's intervention. This also demonstrates how Gregory broke away from his Platonic training to affirm that God does intervene in the material world and remains active in it. However, the spiritual is always superior to the material, and they cannot be compared with each other, as they are ontologically distinct when viewed in terms of the ideal-material duality. While this is true, we should never forget the creator-creation duality in Gregory. These two distinctions explain the hesitations to use comparative images taken from the created order to talk about and represent God.

This understanding is clearer when we explore Gregory's attitude toward the human body. I devote some space to examining Gregory's view on the human body here, as this provides insight into his understanding of the material world and is relevant to our comprehension of his theological epistemology, which I will elaborate on in 3.4. Gregory seems to have a dual, contradictory attitude towards the body, similar to the one we explored towards the material world. A passage from *Oration 14* will help us to understand this better. Talking about the body, Gregory says,

How I came to be joined to it, I do not know; nor how I am the image of God and concocted of clay (πηλῶ) at the same time, this body that both wars against me when it is healthy and when warred against, brings me pain, that I both cherish as my fellow-servant (σύνδουλον) and evade as my enemy (ἐχθρόν); that I both try to escape as my chain (δεσμόν) and respect as my fellow heir (συνκληρονόμον). If I struggle to suppress it, I lose the helper (συνεργῶ) I need to achieve my noble aims, knowing as I do why I was created and that it is through my actions that I am to ascend to God. I show it consideration as a co-worker (συνεργοῦ) but I do not know how to suppress its insurgency nor how I can help falling away from God when the weight of its

²⁵⁷ Bergmann, *Creation*, 94.

shackles (πέδαις) drags me down and keeps me pinioned to the ground. It is an affable enemy and a scheming friend. What an incompatible alliance (συζυγίας)!²⁵⁸

Gregory is not equivocally condemning the body as evil, but he praises it as ‘fellow servant,’ ‘fellow heir,’ and ‘helper,’ and at the same time describes the body as an enemy and a shackle that drags one down. However, a closer look again provides the framework to interpret this and similar passages. He clearly distinguishes the original, pre-lapsarian state of humans from the fallen, post-lapsarian state, when he discusses the human body, although at times he confusingly mixes both.

Gregory’s comments are surprisingly positive when he talks about the pre-lapsarian body. In the original state, the body is not a curse or a burden, but God’s providential provision to man, which has a specific function. He says, “For, even if I have denounced it as my enemy for the distress it causes, still, I also embrace it as a friend because of him who joined (τὸν συνδήσαντα) us together.”²⁵⁹ Just like the material creation, Gregory understands the human body as part of God’s plan, and it was good. God created human beings as a ‘single living being’ (ζῶον ἓν) that encompasses both visible and invisible realms, making them at the same time both spirit and flesh (πνεῦμα καὶ σάρκα).²⁶⁰ This creation was a perfect mix of both worlds without conflict or division. The body helps human beings to connect with the material world and the soul with the ideal world and God, yet remains as one being.²⁶¹ They had a mutually pedagogical relationship.²⁶² This understanding, along with the praise Gregory bestows on human beings in their created state—another angel, a mixed worshiper, and a little world—points to a positive understanding of human beings in their mixed condition. There was harmony between the body and the soul.

Along with these positive comments, Gregory also acknowledges that the composite nature of human beings makes them prone to sin and conflict, which leads to destruction.²⁶³ In this sense, the body is bad news for humankind. Nonetheless, it was not an accidental addition but a purposeful plan of God all along. As Ruether succinctly points out, “there is little trace in his thought that nature is evil, no matter how negative he may be about the material part of man’s nature”²⁶⁴ Gregory believes that the body also serves as a means to exercise one’s free will, so that by overcoming it, one might earn the reward of a higher spiritual life with God.

²⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.6-7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 43. PG 35.865A-B.

²⁵⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.8; Vinson, *Gregory*, 44.

²⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.22; SC 358.124-6.

²⁶¹ Bergmann, *Creation*, 92.

²⁶² Winslow, *Salvation*, 57.

²⁶³ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.7; see 2.5.2.

²⁶⁴ Ruether, *Gregory*, 98.

Gregory wonders,

Is it his will that we, who are a portion of God and have our source in heaven above, should always look to him as we wrestle and fight against the flesh and that the weakness to which we are harnessed should serve to impress upon us our true worth, lest we disdain our Creator out of pride and an inflated sense of our own importance? That we may know that we are at once most exalted and most humble, earthly and celestial, ephemeral and immortal, heirs of light and fire- or of darkness-depending on which way we turn?²⁶⁵

The original plan for the mixed creation of humans is clear: they should fight against the flesh and reach God. But why did God place this hurdle in the first place? Firstly, Gregory insists that the flesh was given so that humans would earn their reward of life with God through their effort. It had a purpose: “a possible reason is to avoid a too ready loss of the lightly gained. What is gained by effort is usually kept; what is lightly gained is quickly spurned because it can be gained anew.”²⁶⁶ In this way, using the body given to them, human beings would ascend to God through their actions (πρᾶξις).²⁶⁷ Secondly, the body also acts pedagogically, to correct humans if they become proud and to prevent a greater fall like Lucifer.²⁶⁸ In *Oration 38*, he says that the flesh is given to humans because of pride (ἔπαρσις), and says, “that he might suffer, and in his suffering come to his senses, and be corrected (παιδεύω) from his ambitions of grandeur (φιλοτιμούμενος).”²⁶⁹ In *Oration 14*, Gregory observes, “Such is our hybrid (κρᾶμα) nature which, in my view at least, takes this form so that whenever we feel exalted because of our likeness to God’s image, we may be brought down because of our clay (χοῦς).”²⁷⁰ Based on these passages, we can conclude that the pre-lapsarian body had a purpose and was intended by God to be a tool to reach Him.

This mixed nature and the destined goal for humanity to come closer to God definitely and naturally produce a tension and a paradox. But this tension should not be understood negatively in the pre-lapsarian state. The tension is created, firstly, by the ontological difference between the intellectual and material natures of humans, as seen above, and secondly, by the destiny set by God for human beings to join Him in *theosis*. By recounting the Genesis creation account of man, Gregory says that by breathing into the body, God created “a spectator of the visible creation and an initiate into the intelligible, king of the things on earth yet ruled from

²⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 14.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 43-44.

²⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.12; Norris, *Faith*, 230.

²⁶⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 14.6; PG 35.865B: δεῖ με πρὸς Θεὸν ἀναβῆναι διὰ τῶν πράξεων.

²⁶⁸ Ellverson, *Man*, 67-68; cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.12.

²⁶⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.11; SC 358.126; Daley, *Gregory*, 122.

²⁷⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 14.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 44; PG 35.865C.

above, earthly and heavenly, subject to time yet deathless, visible and knowable, standing halfway between greatness and lowliness.”²⁷¹ Here, the emphasis is on how humans are supposed to maintain a balance between the two created realms and serve as mediators between both worlds. In another passage which echoes the same sentiment, he says,

Who is it, Who made all things by His Word, and formed man by His Wisdom, and gathered into one things scattered abroad, and mingled dust with spirit, and compounded an animal visible (ὄρατός) and invisible (ἀόρατος), temporal and immortal, earthly and heavenly, able to attain to God but not to comprehend Him, drawing near and yet afar off...²⁷²

Gregory acknowledges the existential tension present in human beings due to this mixture. But says that the human person is “fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual.”²⁷³ When we systematise these statements, we can see Gregory’s version of the Irenaeian doctrine, which posits that man is created innocent and placed on earth to grow into maturity and eventually attain God. Human beings are at present grounded in the visible world. It is through struggle and Grace that they could reach the higher world. As the microcosm of creation, they bring the whole of creation in them together and move towards God. Here, ‘the idea of movement’ proposed by Bergmann to understand the trinitarian life of God, creation, and moral life, seems a suitable framework within which to talk about Gregory’s understanding of creation and final resolution.²⁷⁴ Human beings are able to work with their free will and attain the ultimate *theosis*. However, the fall intervened.

2.5.4. The Fall and its Implications: Worsening of Human Corporeality

According to Gregory, in the post-lapsarian world, the material world and the human body have lost their purpose. When discussing these realities in their present fallen state, Gregory is negative. Even in the description of the Fall, Gregory does not blame matter for sin, as the sin first originated in the spiritual realm. However, he insists that the Fall altered the reality of the world and human existence by introducing substantial changes to the nature of human beings, with epistemological and existential consequences.

Earlier, we noted how Gregory praises the material world for its beauty and harmony.²⁷⁵ But in the Fall, the material world lost its harmony. In *Oration 16*, talking to the citizens of

²⁷¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.11; Daley, *Gregory*, 122.

²⁷² Gr. Naz. Or. 2.75

²⁷³ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.7: ἐπόπτῃν τῆς ὀρατῆς κτίσεως, μύστην τῆς νοουμένης.

²⁷⁴ Bergmann, *Creation*, 116-29.

²⁷⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.10.

Nazianzus about the natural disaster that had affected them, he asks,

Are the disturbances and changes of the universe, (which was originally constituted, blended, bound together, and set in motion in a harmony known only to Him Who gave it motion,) directed by reason and order under the guidance of the reins of Providence? Whence come famines and tornadoes and hailstorms, our present warning blow? Whence pestilences, diseases, earthquakes, tidal waves, and fearful things in the heavens? And how is the creation, once ordered for the enjoyment of men, their common and equal delight, changed for the punishment of the ungodly...²⁷⁶

This passage provides a clear balance of Gregory's view on the original creation and the post-lapsarian world. The harmony and enjoyment of the material world have become a scourge (μάστιξ).²⁷⁷ Like Paul, Gregory says that creation is now subject to corruption and groans because of the Fall, and eagerly anticipates its salvation.²⁷⁸ The changed status of the material world is very clear from these passages. Already twice removed, the material creation is further from its original purpose due to the Fall. Nevertheless, it is still a tool in God's hand to punish and to chastise human beings.

In *Oration 38* and *45*, Gregory explains the fall of human beings.²⁷⁹ God placed the first human beings—Adam and Eve—in paradise (παράδεισος), giving them free will so that they would follow God out of their choice and not because of compulsion. In the pre-lapsarian state, they were naked and lived in simplicity (γυμνὸν καὶ ἀπλότητι). God gave them the law (νόμος) so that it would be matter (ῥῆμα) for their self-determination or freedom (αὐτεξούσιος).²⁸⁰ One of the commandments was not to touch the tree of knowledge, which Gregory interprets as 'contemplation' (θεωρία). This prohibition is not out of jealousy or ill-will (φθονερῶς), but at the right time (εὐκαιρῶς), "only safely [contemplation may] be attempted by those who have reached perfection in an orderly way."²⁸¹ Human beings are created innocent like babies, and they are supposed to grow into maturity in this earthly life. At the right time, they were supposed to take part in the tree of knowledge. But due to the ill-will (φθόνος) of the devil, Eve was deceived, and humankind fell into disobedience.²⁸² We have seen that the compounded nature of humanity is prone to sin, but Gregory does not blame the flesh or body for the sin. Gregory is clear that the sin had its origin in the spiritual realm, beginning with the pride of

²⁷⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 16.5; NPNF, 248.

²⁷⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 16.5; PG 35.940B.

²⁷⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 4.15; cf. Rom. 8: 19-23.

²⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.12; SC 358.126-130 and 45.8; PG 36.631C-633B. All the Greek phrases quoted below in this and the following paragraphs are from these texts.

²⁸⁰ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 14.25.

²⁸¹ Daley, *Gregory*, 123.

²⁸² cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 22.13.

Lucifer.²⁸³ In the human fall, too, Gregory says that it is the ‘soul’ (ψυχή) that disobeyed, and the flesh (σάρξ) helped (ὑπουργέω).²⁸⁴

The fall has disrupted the original plan of God. In the words of Winslow, “both the direction of our progress [towards God] and the ‘time-table’ for this progress [i.e., the economy of gradual growth] was drastically altered.”²⁸⁵ One of the results of the Fall, according to Gregory, is that the flesh, which was given by God to humans, thickened. Gregory says that their flesh became thicker, both mortal and resistant (τὴν παχύτεραν σάρκα, καὶ θνητὴν, καὶ ἀντίτυπον), and it is as if they have put on a coat of skin on themselves (τοὺς δερματίνους ἀμφιέννυται χιτῶνας).²⁸⁶ In his poem, Gregory puts it tersely: “he tasted prematurely the sweet-flavoured fruit and clothed his now heavy flesh in coats of skin.”²⁸⁷ Here, he is ambiguous in his reference to the skin that one might pass off as the animal skin with which God clothed Adam and Eve in when they were sent out of the garden (Gen. 3: 21). There is a debate about when this grossness (παχύτης) was given to man, because Gregory’s comments in Or. 28.12 seems to suggest that it was given in the original creation itself, not just as a consequence of the Fall. Based on this passage, Ellverson comments: “Dealing with the ‘grossness’ of the flesh a certain problem at last imposes itself, namely whether Gregory regarded this ‘grossness’ as originally given to man or something resulting from the fall of the primal man, Adam. This is a question which we generally don’t find explicitly answered.”²⁸⁸ I argue that we do find clear evidence for post-lapsarian ‘thickening’ of the flesh in Gregory, and in the highly charged polemic context of Constantinople during the delivery of the *Theological Orations*, he mixes both up in order to make the point against the Eunomians that the knowledge of God is not possible because of this grossness, without separating the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian ideas.

But when we look at his writings as a whole, the meaning is clear. God created human beings as mixed creatures with both material and spiritual aspects. The original creation was good in spite of this mixture, but the scale is tilted towards the material side in the Fall. This resulted in humans getting tangled in the material realm more than intended. The body became a weight that pulled human beings down, and humans ultimately became the “captives of the flesh” (τοῖς σαρκὸς δεσμίοις).²⁸⁹ But they were bound to overcome their corporeality and move

²⁸³ Winslow, *Salvation*, 62.

²⁸⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.23; SC 247.120.

²⁸⁵ Winslow, *Salvation*, 66.

²⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.12; cf. Hofer, *Christ*, 108.

²⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.8.114-5; Sykes, *Poemata*, 41; cf. *Or.* 38.12; 19.14.

²⁸⁸ Ellverson, *Man*, 30.

²⁸⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.15; SC 284.94.

towards the ideal realm. Now, when it comes to knowing God, the body, i.e. their corporeality, becomes a liability. When he talks about knowing God as compared to ascending the mountain like Moses, he says that he ascends with hope but at the same time with anxiety about his weakness (ἀσθένεια).²⁹⁰ The weakness he points to here is the corporeality. While God is not a body, human beings are embodied, and this embodiment thickens due to the fall and becomes an obstacle.

He employs several terms to refer to this new aspect of the corporeality of fallen humans that prevents direct knowledge of God. He calls it “heavy compound below” (κάτω βριθοντος κράματος),²⁹¹ “gloom” (ζόφος),²⁹² “the dense flesh” (τὸ παχὺ σαρκίον),²⁹³ “the corporeal darkness” (ὁ σωματικὸς γνόφος),²⁹⁴ “thickness” (παχύτης),²⁹⁵ “heavy coat of skin” (τὸν βαρὺν χιτῶνα),²⁹⁶ and being “lowly and paired with darkness” (τοῦ ταπεινοῦ καὶ σκότῳ συνεζευγμένου).²⁹⁷ Though the intellectual soul is closer to God, the embodiment of human beings and its thickening due to fall, prevents them from knowing God directly. It acts as a barrier. He talks about our mind being a prisoner (δεσμίου νοῦ), in the context of referring to the embodiment in the material body (σώματος ὑλικοῦ).²⁹⁸ Thus he sums it up by saying, “Our minds and our human conditions are such that a knowledge of the relationship and disposition of these members with regard to one another is reserved for the Holy Trinity itself alone and those purified souls to whom the Trinity may make revelation either now or in the future.”²⁹⁹ In his soteriology, Gregory talks about the cleansing of the flesh and overcoming the materiality of our existence. He describes it as breaking off “the noble soul from that is lowly and paired with darkness which is the materiality that drags one below.”³⁰⁰ In this stage, it is difficult for human beings to break free and ascend towards an ideal world. But it is not impossible. Gregory proposes moral and ascetic life as a solution, which we will discuss in the theological epistemology in the next chapter.

²⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.2; SC 250.102.

²⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.3; SC 250.106.

²⁹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.4; SC 250.108; 29.11; SC 250.200.

²⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.4; SC 250.108; cf. 28.12.

²⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.12; SC 250.124.

²⁹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.11; SC 250.200.

²⁹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 26.14; SC 284.260.

²⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.1; SC 270.58.

²⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.11.

²⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 138.

³⁰⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.1; SC 270.58.

2.6. Implications for the Study of Comparative Images

There are several points we can draw from the above discussions about God and created order that have implications for our understanding of Gregory's use of comparative images for God. They provide us with clues to understand his hesitation and warnings while using comparative images for God. Gregory is clear about the theological basis on which he proposes the ontological distinction of God and comparative images. Using this theological and ontological framework, we can interpret the passages in which Gregory speaks negatively about the comparative images for God drawn from the created order.

Firstly, we should comment on the juxtaposition of God and the created order whenever Gregory uses comparative images for God, which provides the theological and ontological framework. Gregory never fails to remind his audience of this basic theological conviction about God and the created order and the distinction between them. That is why, when Gregory uses the comparative image of mind-word-spirit, he says that this comparison could be done "insofar as one can compare things spiritual (νοητός) with things perceptible (αἰσθητός) and things that are very great with those that are small, for no comparison (εἰκῶν) ever represents the true picture exactly."³⁰¹ When making comparisons to talk about God clearly, Gregory wants his audience to know that what he is doing is not natural but unnatural. This contrast stems from the ontological distinction between creator and creature outlined above. The triune, simple and infinite nature of God is distinct from the divided, compounded and finite nature of the creation and especially the material world. Thus, the comparative images taken from the material world are ontologically and essentially different from God. Hence, his comments on the comparative images as being from the sensible world 'below' should be read in this context of Gregory's attempt to show the distinction between these two ontological realities. One example of this is Gregory's understanding of Angels. Though Gregory marvels at the angelic nature for its closeness to God because of their intellectual and simple nature, he would not assign a higher position to angelic beings, as they are also part of the created order. When compared with God, Angels and the tiniest of creatures in this world are the same. The emphasis on this distinction is important to our understanding of Gregory's use of the comparative images. At this point, Ludlow's comment about the fourth-century authors' use of different rhetorical techniques is true, that they "encourage the hearer or reader to pause precisely on the material aspects of what is being described."³⁰² By teaching clearly about the

³⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 139; SC 270.302.

³⁰² Morwenna Ludlow, *Art, Craft, and Theology in Fourth-Century Christian Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 8.

theological conviction of the ontological distinction, Gregory is equipping his congregation to know the material aspect of theology and theological words. The words Ludlow uses for Nyssen could be said of Nazianzen, “Gregory does agree that composition is (partly) a material process” and not only accuses Eunomius of “defective theology,” but also as being “a craftsman who does not understand his materials — that is, the nature of language.”³⁰³

Secondly, the ontological distinction between God and creation, leads us to a hierarchical understanding of reality in Gregory. There is a clear distinction in nature between, on one hand, God as the creator and the created order as a whole, and, on the other hand, the ideal world and the material world. In this schema, there are three natures: the self-existing divine nature belonging to the Trinity, which is the highest; the ideal nature of the angels, heavenly beings, and the human soul; and, at the bottom of the hierarchy, the material nature. Because of this hierarchy, there is an underlying tension and a fine balance between the creator-creature distinction and the intellectual-material distinction in Gregory. When he talks about God, he highlights the uniqueness of God by contrasting the divine nature with created natures—that includes both spiritual and material or visible and invisible parts of the creation—presenting to his audience the creator-creature ontological distinction. But when he talks about the material world, he juxtaposes it with the ideal and invisible part of the creation, and the self-existing divine nature. Thus contrasting the ideal nature with the material nature. In such contexts, he uses ‘up’ to talk about heavenly realities and ‘down’ to talk about earthly and material realities, reflecting the biblical language.³⁰⁴ But human beings are mixed creatures belonging to both the visible and invisible world. And in the fallen state, man’s life on this earth is described as the soul being tied to ‘the matter that drags down’ (τῆς κατασπώσης ὕλης) and he is destined to overcome it by looking up (ἄνω βλέπειν).³⁰⁵ In his soteriology, he gives importance to this transition from the material world to the higher world. In his theological epistemology, we will encounter the language of ascent when Gregory talks of the human process of knowing God. This explains why Gregory refers to the comparative images as taken from below (κάτω and ἔνερθεν).³⁰⁶ Yet, they could lead us upwards toward God, because the mind “discovers God through the beauty and order of things seen, using sight as a guide to what transcends sight without losing God through the grandeur of what it sees.”³⁰⁷ In the hierarchical framework of existing natures, all the comparative images are from ‘below’ and thus cannot represent the

³⁰³ Ludlow, *Art*, 229.

³⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 6.14; cf. Is. 51:6.

³⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.1; cf. 2.91.

³⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10; *Carm.* 1.1.3.41.

³⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232.

realities of ‘above.’ This is one of the reasons for his hesitation to use comparative images for God. But again I should emphasise that it is not the hierarchical understanding *per se*, but it is the inability of the material images to reflect the spiritual reality that prevents Gregory from using material images for God. This also explains the longing on Gregory’s part to find an image that contain more ideal qualities that could reflect God’s nature.

Thirdly, adding to the ontological distinction and the hierarchical nature, the discussion of God in this chapter (2.3) has highlighted God’s unique nature, which bears no resemblance to the created order. Because there is no resemblance, Gregory finds it difficult to find any comparison for God, and thus, the comparative images taken from the created and material order cannot represent God fully. The unique characteristics of God, based on being infinite, triune and simple, are not found in the created order. The created order is the opposite of God’s nature. It is limited in space and time; thus, it cannot capture the infinity of God perfectly, except to stand as a contrast to God. There are no beings or relationships in the created order that reflect the perfect trinitarian relationship of three distinct persons in one essence. Most importantly, the comparative images and the created order are not simple but are composites and made of parts. Thus, they fail to capture the simple unified nature of God. Because of this uniqueness, Gregory asks, “since God is One and the Supreme Nature is One, how can I present to you the likeness (ὁμοίωσις)?”³⁰⁸ He declares after searching diligently for any ὁμοίωσις, he says, “I am unable to find anything from below with which to compare (παραβαλεῖν) the nature of the Godhead.”³⁰⁹ When asked how two different beings, one Son and another Spirit, could come out of the same Father and still be same substance and called God, Gregory answers, “you give me one more ‘God’ and grant me God’s nature, and I will present you with the same Trinity along with the same names and realities.”³¹⁰ Demonstrating the inner life of God through earthly examples fails precisely because one cannot find anything resembling God in this world. Therefore, Gregory says, “it is very shameful, and not only shameful, but very foolish, to take from things below a *comparison* (εἰκασία) at things above, and from a fluctuating nature at the things that are unchanging, and as Isaiah says, to seek the Living among the dead.”³¹¹ It is doomed to fail. This is another reason for his refrain that even an approximate comparison of God with comparative images taken from below is not possible.

Finally, because of the ontological distinction and the unique nature of God, Gregory

³⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; SC 250.292-94.

³⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 31. 31; SC 250.338.

³¹⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284.

³¹¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284, modified.

fears the misrepresentation of God when comparative images are used for God. Gregory fears that they could bring in the idea of material composition or any other alien conception into the Being of God. Gregory conveys this fear while employing images that could create such an impression, yet he insists that there is nothing inherently evil in the material reality. He fears that his audience would hold on to the material connotations of the comparative images and fail to raise above the materiality. There is a possibility that the mind would look “at things visible and makes of these a god—a gross mistake.”³¹² At the very end of the *Theological Orations*, talking about the images of source-spring-river and then the sun-beam-light, he warns the audience not to think about material qualities present in these images, and warns them of the danger of such thinking.³¹³ His stark warning to his opponents is: “Drop the habit of treating the incorporeal nature as if it were a body.”³¹⁴ In *Oration 30*, Gregory provides an example from the Jewish practice of not writing the divine name to emphasise the need to keep material thinking away from the Divine. He says, “The ancient Hebrews used special symbols to venerate the divine and did not allow anything inferior to God to be written with the same letters as the word “God,” on the ground that the divine should not be put on even this much of a level with things human.”³¹⁵ These passages show that Gregory does not want the Divine to be equated with the material world at any level to avoid the confusion of natures and misconstrued conception of God.

2.7. Conclusion

I have addressed the question of why Gregory hesitates and warns against using comparative images for God in this chapter by pointing to the ontological distinction between God, whom the comparative images represent, and the creation from which they are drawn. By elaborating on God’s nature as triune, incorporeal, simple, and infinite, which makes God’s being and nature unique and incomprehensible and the created nature that is material, composite, and limited, I have argued that Gregory’s negative comments about the comparative images for God should be interpreted within this framework of ontological distinction that is grounded in Gregory’s theological understanding of God and creation. I have also teased out the different dialectical opposites, such as ideal-material, creator-creature, and prelapsarian-postlapsarian distinctions, present in Gregory’s thought. One needs to be aware of them when

³¹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232.

³¹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31-33; These objections will be dealt when we explore these images in Chapter 5.

³¹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.8.

³¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.17; Norris, *Faith*, 274. For discussion on this practice, see Norris, *Faith*, 176-7.

dealing with comparative images in Gregory. These distinctions help us to navigate the complex theological thought of Gregory and interpret them coherently. This chapter has established the theological and ontological frameworks for understanding Gregory's use of comparative images for God and has interpreted the negative comments of Gregory within these frameworks. The creation narrative has also brought out some themes related to theological anthropology, such as an understanding of limited human nature and embodied existence, which we will pick up in the next chapter. The next chapter will further develop these conversations to deal with the implications of the distinction between the Divine and human nature in knowing God and deal with the question of why Gregory still uses the comparative images for God, despite his negative comments; it will also demonstrate how Gregory finds a way to bridge the gulf in Christology, theological epistemology and pastoral ministry, with their implications for his use of comparative images.

Chapter 3: Comparative Images and the Theologian

3.1. Introduction:

The previous chapter explained why Gregory was reluctant to use comparative images for God, emphasising the ontological gulf between the triune, simple and infinite God and the divided, compounded and limited created order, which moved further away from God because of the Fall. In this chapter, I aim to investigate why Gregory continues to use comparative images drawn from the material creation to talk about God. I will argue that the primary reason is the necessity imposed by the embodied state of human beings. But to justify and understand the use of images, I will explore three themes: the christological foundation in salvation history, the epistemological context, and the pastoral context. These help us understand how these two ontologically distinct realities converge and inform Gregory's use of comparative images for God, despite his assertion that no image can represent God. Despite the unbridgeable gulf that exists, the convergence can be seen in these three themes, without which we cannot understand Gregory's use of images for God.

Even in the original creation, and especially now after the Fall, human beings, as embodied creatures, need material aids to know and speak about God. However, the immediate difficulty one faces is how Gregory understands the meeting of the material and intelligible worlds. This chapter will explore this conundrum, offering three overlapping answers based on the three themes mentioned above. Firstly, Gregory sees this unbridgeable gulf bridged in the meeting of these two realms in the incarnation and through the sacramental ministry of the Church, culminating in the final deification of human beings. Since the incarnation and the dual nature of Christ are central to Gregory's conception of bridging this unbridgeable gulf, I will employ the nomenclature "christological foundation" by which Gregory justifies the use of images for God. Secondly, in the theological epistemology, Gregory argues that the embodied nature of human beings demands the use of comparative images to imagine, know, and talk about the Divine. This extends the conversation of the previous chapter about the mixed nature of human beings and the incomprehensibility of God. I will argue that Gregory draws on Aristotelian and Pauline epistemologies to justify the use of comparative images for God. This will also highlight the dynamic and conditional nature of Gregory's theological epistemology through the image of ascent and themes of embodied thinking, contemplation, and the idea of *phantasia*. And finally, Gregory's understanding of his role as a theologian,

orator, shepherd and a pious inscriber will help us to understand how he is trying to facilitate the convergence of these two distinct realms together in public ministry for the people. Gregory's self-understanding as a Christian and a leader who uses words in the service of the Divine helps us to understand why and how he uses comparative images in his speech about God in a pastoral context. After elaborating on these three themes, I will argue that it is at the intersection of these three broad areas that one can find answers to Gregory's use of comparative images for God, despite his strong aversion to them. As a whole, I will strive to place Gregory's use of comparative images in the context of his Christology, classical education and aspirations as a Christian leader.

3.2. Embodied Existence

For Gregory, the mixed creation of human beings and their embodied existence necessitate the use of comparative images, especially from the material creation, for God. As seen earlier, human beings are composite beings with both a material body and an ideal soul, spirit, or mind. Human beings require 'matter' to function as they cannot function ideally. Especially with regard to epistemology, Gregory emphasises the need for materiality as described by Beeley: "Gregory analyzes the epistemological dimension of incomprehensibility primarily in terms of human corporeality."³¹⁶ Thus, the incomprehensibility of God and human corporeality, as discussed in the previous chapter, act as the two key concepts within which Gregory frames his theological epistemology.

In the pre-lapsarian state, human beings existed as a single being, with harmony between the soul and the material body. But even in this state, because of their mixed nature, human beings needed material 'stuff' to work on. Describing the life of the first human beings in paradise, Gregory tells us that God gave them freedom so that they would choose God out of choice rather than compulsion, and gave the law (νόμος) so that it would be matter (ὕλη) for their self-determination or freedom (αὐτεξούσιος).³¹⁷ That law included the commandment not to partake of the tree of knowledge. Here, Gregory shows that the 'law' functioned as a material on which human beings could exercise their free will. Even though one could interpret ὕλη here metaphorically, in his broader understanding of embodied existence (as described below), it is clear that he believes the nature of human mixed existence requires them to function materially. To exercise their ideal or spiritual gifts, even in paradise, they needed matter (ὕλη).

³¹⁶ Beeley, *Trinity*, 99.

³¹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.12; 45.8; cf. 14.25.

This is a clear example of Gregory's use of the pre-lapsarian and post-lapsarian distinction, though when he generally talks about human need for materiality due to their embodiment, one cannot clearly see whether he is talking about the pre-lapsarian state or the post-lapsarian state. However, this reference to 'law' in the garden clearly shows that the mixed nature of human beings needed tangible things to exercise their free will even in the pre-lapsarian state.

The Fall aggravated this situation. We have seen how the body given to man became gross and thickened. This thickening altered the equilibrium between the soul and the material body. It brought in undue tension between these two elements because of the 'grossness' of the body. The body, instead of being a servant, became a burden and a shackle. Now, more than ever, human beings need material realities to aid their progress towards God. Even in the most intelligently inclined mind, one finds corporeal intrusion. He says,

Yet we 'prisoners of the earth,' in divine Jeremiah's phrase, pent in this gross portion of flesh, know this: you cannot cross your own shadow however much you haste—it is always exactly ahead of your grasp. Sight cannot approach its objects without the medium of light and atmosphere; fish cannot swim out of water; and no more can embodied beings keep incorporeal company with things ideal. Some corporeal factor of ours will always intrude itself, even if the mind be most fully detached from the visible world, and at its most recollected when it attempts to engage with its invisible kin³¹⁸

Gregory is not clear whether this condition is because of the Fall or it is the original condition of human beings. However, if it was true to some extent for the original condition, it is absolutely necessary for the fallen state of human beings. Gregory's verdict is clear: embodied human beings are not capable of disembodied conceptions and knowledge. He also gives some examples:

"Spirit," "fire," and "light," "love," "wisdom," and "righteousness," "mind," and "reason" and so forth, are titles of the prime reality, are they not? Can you think of wind without movement and dispersal? Of fire without matter, with no rising motion, no color and shape of its own? Or light unmixed with atmosphere, detached from what shines to give it birth, so to say. What of mind? Something else contains it, surely; its thoughts, silent or uttered, are movements. How can you think of reason other than our inner discourse, unspoken or expressed—I shrink from saying "dissolved"? As for wisdom, how can you think of it except as a state involved in investigations human or divine?³¹⁹

Even when the mind processes immaterial concepts like these, they are processed through

³¹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.12; Norris, *Faith*, 231.

³¹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 231.

tangible concepts. They are not just ideal concepts, but ‘titles of prime realities,’ thus names of God mentioned in the Scripture. Countering the Eunomian claim that the name ‘ingenerate’ reveals the essence, Gregory shows that these titles do not directly lead to God, but create material associations because of common experience in day-to-day life. These titles are given to God in Scripture, yet because of human inability to create ideal or incorporeal concepts, we cannot avoid material associations, but must always struggle to put them aside. That is why he says, “Scripture, too, often uses images (εἰκόν) such as this to spell things out more clearly.”³²⁰ This, then, is the primary reason Gregory uses material images when talking about God, despite vehemently condemning them as useless. Gregory believes that the comparative images are different from God and cannot represent him. Nevertheless, he uses them because human beings are unable to think in a purely ideal form, without material aid.

The rest of the chapter addresses one simple question: If, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the comparative images are ontologically distinct from God and totally ineffective in describing Him, what justifies Gregory in using them, even if the embodied human existence requires them? I will argue throughout this chapter that Gregory, notwithstanding his extensive discourse on the ontological distinction between the creator and creation, and the heavenly realm and the earthly realities, seen in the previous chapter, conceives of the convergence of these two ontologically distinct realms in three overlapping areas: salvation history, theological epistemology, and his own public ministry.

3.3. Bridging the Gulf

In the creation of humankind, the ontologically distinct intelligible and material worlds were brought together, described by Elm as the first “paradoxical fusion.”³²¹ As seen in the previous chapter, human beings are a mixture of both, yet the intelligible soul and the material body remain separated, though they are dependent on each other in this earthly life. Human beings were to be the mediators between the intelligible and material world and be a microcosm of creation, but the Fall aggravated this dualism in human beings, leading to the present embodied state discussed earlier. In this state, no natural convergence of the two realms is possible. If the convergence is not possible, yet, because of embodiment, human beings need material representations to understand the Divine, how did Gregory find a way to justify the use of material images for God theologically? The answer to this question is in his

³²⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 26.10; Vinson, *Gregory*, 182-83; SC 284.248.

³²¹ Elm, “*Paradoxical Fusion*,” 300.

understanding of incarnation and its effect. Gregory imagines the meeting of these two ontologically distinct realms in the person of Jesus Christ, who was both Divine and human. Incarnation is not a mere juxtaposition of the two natures, but a genuine mixture without confusion. This gives Gregory hope and serves as the basis for his use of comparative images for God. If these two ontologically distinct realms could be brought together in the incarnate Christ, then there is the possibility of using the material images to talk about God. Although Gregory explicitly mentions this link between incarnation and the use of human language and images only in two places (Or. 37. 2 and 4),³²² the idea is ubiquitous in his corpus. In discussions pertaining to positive discourse on God and the employment of comparative images to orient our thinking about the divine, Gregory operates under the unarticulated assumption of incarnation as the theological and metaphysical foundation upon which it is possible to utilise human, material, and finite language to speak about an infinite, corporeal God. In Gregory's theology, it is impossible to imagine any convergence between the ontologically distinct realities of the creator and the creature without Christ's condescension into the world. Later, we will encounter the same idea in Gregory in 3.4 where I will point out how incarnation forms the basis for Gregory's positive, yet limited, theological epistemology.

This convergence that began in the incarnation continues in the life of the church through sacraments and will culminate in the deification of human beings. The understanding of the incarnation, sacrament and deification justifies Gregory's use of comparative images, in which he employs material images to speak of the incorporeal God, and counters Eunomius, who proposed that the divine name—unbegotten—“brings us into contact with a really existing non-material essence” of the Divine.³²³

3.3.1. The Incarnation

The Incarnation is a pivotal moment in human history when the two distinct worlds came together as closely as possible and opened the way for a new possibility of their convergence. So, it becomes the foundational event in Gregory's thought in justifying his use of material images for God. Paralleling the language Gregory used to talk about the creation of humankind as a mixed being, he exclaims about the incarnation with a cry: “O new mingling!

³²² See 3.3.4. for more information on these passages.

³²³ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 254.

O paradoxical blending.”³²⁴ He calls the incarnate Christ “God on earth” (ὁ κάτω θεός).³²⁵ There is a mysterious change that happens when the two distinct natures—the uncreated nature of the Divine and the created nature—come together in the person of Jesus Christ. This is reflected in the language he uses to describe incarnation, especially when compared with the language he uses to describe the Divine and created nature, which we explored in the last chapter.

The language Gregory uses to describe the incarnate state of Christ strikingly echoes that used to describe the creator-creature distinction. He affirms that Christ, the Son, is God, and is infinite, simple and incomprehensible, as the other persons in the Trinity. But in the incarnate state, he became circumscribed, compounded and made Himself known. He uses the same vocabulary and categories as in his description of God and creation. For Gregory, the incarnation is infinite (ἀμερίγραπτος) mingling with measure (μέτρον),³²⁶ and being circumscribed by the visible nature (τῷ ὁρωμένῳ).³²⁷ In the *Theological Orations*, Gregory argues that one cannot even imagine composition (σύνθεσις) in God’s nature,³²⁸ but while talking about the incarnate state of Christ, he accepts that Christ became composite (σύνθετος).³²⁹ In other words, Christ became like one of the creatures, limiting Himself and becoming composite. Declaring the epistemological implications of this, Gregory says that Christ assumed the human nature so that “the uncomprehendable might be comprehended.”³³⁰ All these texts show how Gregory’s own distinction between the creator and the creature is bridged in incarnation.

In other places, Gregory becomes bolder when discussing the confluence of the two realms. In the beginning of *Oration 38*, he says, “the one without flesh becomes flesh (ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκούται), the Word becomes material (ὁ Λόγος παχύνεται), the invisible is seen (ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται), the intangible is touched (ὁ ἀναφής ψηλαφᾶται), the timeless one has a beginning (ὁ ἄχρονος ἄρχεται), and the Son of God becomes the Son of man (ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ Υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου γίνεται).³³¹ Later, he declares: “He who is (ὁ ὢν) has become (γίνεται), the uncreated (ὁ ἄκτιστος) is created (κτίζεται) and the infinite (ἀχώρητος) is contained

³²⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.13; SC 358.134: Ὁ τῆς καινῆς μίξεως! ὃ τῆς παραδόξου κράσεως! cf. 2.23: ἡ καινὴ μίξις and 34.10: τῆς καινῆς ἀνακράσεως.

³²⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.19; SC 250.218.

³²⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 39.13; SC 358.178.

³²⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.13; PG 36.641A.

³²⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.32; SC 250.338.

³²⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.18; SC 250.216. cf. 29.19: ‘Now he is a man, but he was incomposite’ (ὁ νῦν ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἀσύνθετος)

³³⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 39.13; SC 358.176: ἵνα χωρηθῇ ὁ ἀχώρητος.

³³¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.2; SC 358, 106; cf. 37.2: “invisible (ἀόρατος) is seen (ὁράται).

(χωρεῖται).³³² These passages reflect the connection between the divine and the created natures in the incarnation. Comparing the mutually exclusive language used for the Divine and the creature in creation, this is a complete reversal. Here Gregory imagines a convergence, which Elm calls second paradoxical fusion: “the meeting of two utterly incommensurable essences: that of the unknown realm of the immaterial, intelligible, unchanging, illuminated, and divine with that of the material or human, which is capable of change.”³³³

When discussing this mixture, Gregory uses confusing language. At times, he seems to be bold in using the verb γίγνομαι to suggest a genuine change in Christ’s nature in the incarnation as noted above. Christ became composite, flesh, material and created. It is not just a juxtaposition. Thus, there is a change in Christ during the incarnation, and the divine qualities are transformed into human ones. That is why he calls it “new mingling and a paradoxical mixture.” But at other times, he speaks of the divine and human natures as separate, and he uses this strategy in his exegesis of the Gospels. Gregory accuses Eunomians of thinking of the human aspects of the incarnation—such as Jesus being hungry, thirsty, crying, etc.—as evidence of His subordinated position to the Father. Because of the assumed human nature of Jesus Christ, Eunomians consider Jesus to be part of the creation. Gregory grieves for Christ, who is dishonoured by the Eunomians, and says, “Is He therefore a Creature, because He careth for the creature? Is He therefore subject to time, because He watches over those who are subject to time?”³³⁴ Gregory distinguishes between the eternal and the incarnational aspects of the Word. While Eunomians use human aspects of Jesus’ life described in the gospel as support for their subordinationalist view, Gregory points out the dual and often paradoxical aspects in these: “He hungered—yet he fed thousands. He is indeed ‘living, heavenly bread.’ He thirsted—yet he exclaimed: ‘Whosoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink.’”³³⁵ Because these two aspects of Christ existed side by side, in exegesis, one should “predicate the more sublime expressions of Godhead, of the nature which transcends bodily experiences, and the lowlier ones of the compound, of him who because of you was emptied, became incarnate and was ‘made man.’”³³⁶ Though here he portrays the two natures as distinct, he also insists that we do not have two sons but one.³³⁷ In another passage, Gregory suggests that the divine nature of

³³² Gr. Naz. Or. 38.13; SC 358.134.

³³³ Elm, “*Paradoxical Fusion*,” 299-300.

³³⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.4; NPNE, 339.

³³⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.20; Norris, *Faith*, 258; For more on the two natures of Christ operating paradoxically, see Or. 37.2.

³³⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.18; Norris, *Faith*, 257.

³³⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.2.

Christ dominated the human nature.³³⁸ But ultimately, he resorts to mystical language to speak of this union. He says, “This assumed flesh, this new mingling between God and human, one from both and both in one.”³³⁹ It is a new mixture that does not have any precedence; at the same time, it is paradoxical, in that it cannot be logically explained.³⁴⁰ There have been many studies attempting to identify the philosophical background to this ‘mixture’ language, but because of the fiercely polemical context of Gregory’s orations and its highly rhetorical nature, like Hofer, I doubt one philosophical model would easily explain Gregory’s usage.³⁴¹ But this ‘mixture’ language signifies that, as Elm notes, “Christ incarnate was the supreme *paradoxon*, signifying salvation, by mixing ontologically distinct, even contradictory, essences, divine and human, heaven and earth, God and man.”³⁴² Ultimately the aim of patristic theologians in using the mixture language, as Beeley suggests, is to “dramatically convey the dynamic, unifying action of the Incarnation and the mysteriously intimate union of God and humanity in Christ.”³⁴³

Following the mixture language, which has received more scholarly attention, Gregory also discusses how incarnation brought the divine nature into contact with the human embodied state. Apart from claiming Christ became composite (σύνθετος),³⁴⁴ Gregory also uses the ‘thickening’ language he used for the fall of human beings. Gregory points out that in the incarnation, the Word becomes material (ὁ Λόγος παχύνεται),³⁴⁵ and Christ received our thick materiality (τὴν παχύτητα κατεδέξατο).³⁴⁶ Gregory uses the term παχύτης and its cognates to refer to Christ’s incarnation, a term he had earlier applied to human beings’ fallen state, emphasising the fullness of humanity that Christ took on Himself. Christ, though sinless, has taken upon Himself the effects of sin. Gregory explains:

³³⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.19.

³³⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.23; SC 247.120: τοῦτο ἢ προσληφθεῖσα σὰρξ· τοῦτο ἢ καινὴ μίξις, Θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος, ἐν ἑξ ἄμφοιν, καὶ δι’ ἑνὸς ἀμφοτέρα.

³⁴⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.13.

³⁴¹ Hofer, *Christ*, 120. Hofer’s analysis of Gregory’s mixture language against the philosophical thoughts of Gregory’s time concludes that the usage “fit neatly into no single ancient model.” But recently, Harris has argued that the Neoplatonic model fits well with Gregory’s usage based on his two Christological passages. See Brendan A. Harris, “Gregory Nazianzen’s Christology of Mixture,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 73, no. 2 (October 2022): 755-77. For other possible ancient models, see Franz Xaver Portmann, *Die göttliche Paidagogia bei Gregor von Nazianz*, Kirchengeschichtliche Quellen und Studien 3 (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1954), 64 and Špidlík, *doctrine spirituelle*, 102. who argued for a Stoic background, and Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 397, who argued for an Aristotelian background. For other works discussing Gregory’s understanding of co-mixture, see Hofer, *Christ*, 96n16 and Harris, “Mixture,” 731.

³⁴² Elm, *Hellenism*, 421.

³⁴³ Christopher A. Beeley, “Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology,” *Pro Ecclesia* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2016):132.

³⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.18. cf. 29.19.

³⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.2; SC 358.106.

³⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.19

He has united with himself all that lay under condemnation (τὸ κατακριθὲν), in order to release it from condemnation (κατακρίματος). For all our sakes he became all that we are, sin apart—body, soul, mind, all that death pervades. The result is a man who, at the same time, is seen visibly (θεὸς ὁρώμενος), because spiritually discerned, as God.³⁴⁷

For Gregory, the end goal of incarnation is the bridging of these two worlds so that the ideal world is open to human beings, who are destined to inherit it. Already in the creation, he described how the first human was created with a mixed nature and how he was intended to move from the visible, material realm to the invisible, intellectual realm. In his account of incarnation, Gregory considers Christ as entering this visible world to draw human beings to the incorporeal world, thus bridging the gulf between the two, which is described by Portmann as “an infinite gulf” (eine unendliche Kluft).³⁴⁸ This is the beginning of a convergence. This leads to the salvation of human beings, understood in terms of deification, in which human nature is transformed and divinised. But before considering this, the examination of the bridge between the two realms, as seen in the sacramental acts of the Church, is considered.

3.3.2. Sacraments

The incarnation brought the Divine and the creation together, and the sacraments continue to connect the invisible world with the visible world. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, human beings still have access to the divine presence in this world. In Gregory’s thought and priestly ministry, sacraments hold an essential place as shown in his fear of perishing without Baptism on his way to Athens,³⁴⁹ his testament to the healing power of eucharistic elements in his sister’s life,³⁵⁰ and his description of his father’s piety in eucharistic settings, even in severe sickness.³⁵¹ He uses the word ‘mystery’ (μυστήριον) to represent sacrament.³⁵² The sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism use material or visible objects (bread, wine, and water) to make present the mysteries of the divine world and incarnation. Thus, every time these sacramental acts are performed in this world, the two ontologically distinct worlds converge by making material objects present spiritual realities and by bringing the divine presence to earth. This convergence in the sacramental acts has an

³⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.21; Norris, *Faith*, 277; SC 250.272.

³⁴⁸ Portmann, *Paidagogia*, 110.

³⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 2.1.11.158-69.

³⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 8.18.

³⁵¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.28-29.

³⁵² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.95; 18.29; cf. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 594.

end goal: the deification of human beings, just as the incarnation does. The role of the Holy Spirit is vital in bringing this convergence.

Baptism marks the beginning of a person's Christian life in the church. When Gregory discusses baptism, he portrays it as bringing together the two worlds, both symbolically and in reality. This results in the material element of the water acquiring the power to transform the catechumen through the presence of the Spirit. He says:

And since we are double-made, I mean of body and soul, and the one part is visible (ὄρατός), the other invisible (ἀόρατος), so the cleansing also is twofold, by water and the spirit; the one received visibly in the body, the other concurring with it invisibly and apart from the body; the one typical, the other real and cleansing the depths.³⁵³

In baptism, the water cleanses the body, but it symbolises the Spirit who is present in it to cleanse the soul. Thus, the visible water becomes an aid to bring the invisible transformation and symbolise it. That is why he calls the water used in baptism 'purifying waters'.³⁵⁴ Talking about his brother's baptism, he says that he received a regenerate soul "through water, transformed by the Spirit (τὸ Πνεῦμα δι' ὕδατος ἀνεμόρφωσεν).³⁵⁵ While describing his father's baptism, Gregory says that "he was approaching that regeneration (ἀναγεννήσει) by water and the Spirit, by which we confess to God the formation and completion of the Christlike man, and the transformation and reformation from earthly to the Spirit (τοῦ χοϊκοῦ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα)."³⁵⁶ When a person is baptised in water, the spirit works in that person, bringing spiritual transformation, thus drawing the two distinct realms together. The Spirit brings about rebirth and transformation, helping humans on their earthly to heavenly journey, and that is why Gregory calls baptism 'laver of regeneration' (λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας), 'Enlightenment' (φωτισμός) and 'the garment of immortality (ἀφθαρσίας ἔνδυμα).³⁵⁷ Highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in the Baptism also helps Gregory to emphasise the trinitarian aspect of the sacrament. When the divinity of the Holy Spirit was questioned by his opponents, by highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and illumination during baptism, Gregory was able to ask provoking questions about His deity:

Were the Spirit not to be worshipped, how could he deify me through baptism? If he is to be worshipped, why not adored? And if to be adored, how can he fail to be God?

³⁵³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.8.

³⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 2.1.11.165; PG 37.1041A: ὕδασι ξενοκτόνοις. ξενοκτόνος means slaying guests or strangers. But White renders it 'purifying waters' by taking this to mean that through baptism, the strangers of human self, i.e. sins, are slain, White, *Autobiographical Poems*, 23.

³⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 7.15.

³⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 18.13; NPNF, 258;

³⁵⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.4.

One links with the other, a truly golden chain of salvation. From the Spirit comes our rebirth, from rebirth comes a new creating, from new creating a recognition of the worth of him who effected it.³⁵⁸

By portraying the Holy Spirit as the agent of rebirth and deification, Gregory was able to affirm His deity and link it to the knowledge of God, as Beeley comments: “the sequence of theological knowledge is clear: the regeneration that Christians receive in baptism leads to the fuller knowledge of the Spirit who works these things.”³⁵⁹

This regenerative activity of the Spirit does not happen magically; it requires preparation through purification and illumination on the part of the one being baptised.³⁶⁰ I will explicate Gregory’s understanding of purification and illumination in 3.4.2. But here I will point out the dynamic character of the convergence of the two realms in the baptism and the human role in it through preparation. Elm points to the paradox of this: “baptism both demands purification and illumination and *is* also both.”³⁶¹ Thus, for Gregory, Baptism needs purification and illumination, and at the same time helps human beings in their efforts to overcome the materiality of the Fall by purifying and illuminating them. Advising the catechumens, Gregory says that after baptism, the tempter would come and assail them, just like he did to Christ, but he exhorts: “defend yourself with the Water; defend yourself with the Spirit.”³⁶² The spiritual strength gained during baptism by the convergence of the two realms helps the Christian to overcome temptations. Advising parents not to trust in the amulets or incantations to protect their children, he says, “Give your child the Trinity, the great and noble Guard.”³⁶³ Thus, emphasising the need to be baptised in the triune name in order for the baptism to be effective.

Gregory also uses the language of inscription to talk about baptism and its efficacy.³⁶⁴ He tells the catechumens that he would erase the old marks (οἱ παλαιοὶ χαρακτῆρες) on them and impose (ἐπιτέθειται) Christ on them in one form (μῆ μορφῆ).³⁶⁵ He would inscribe the trinitarian doctrine on their souls.³⁶⁶ Elm points to the significance of this ‘inscribing’ language in Gregory against the background of the historical significance of inscriptions in public places

³⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.28; Norris, *Faith*, 295. cf. *Carm.* 1.1.3.51.

³⁵⁹ Christopher A. Beeley, “The Holy Spirit in Gregory Nazianzen: The Pneumatology of *Oration* 31,” in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, eds. Andrew B. McGowan, Brian E. Daley and Timothy J. Gaden, VCSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 159; cf. Pablo Argárate, “Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Oration* 31 on the Holy Spirit,” in *The Ecumenical Legacy of the Cappadocians*, ed. Nicu Dumitrescu (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 185-98.

³⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.37-38.

³⁶¹ Elm, “*Paradoxical Fusion*,” 306.

³⁶² Gr. Naz. Or. 40.10; NPNF, 362.

³⁶³ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.17; NPNF, 365.

³⁶⁴ I will elaborate more on this in section 3.5.3.2.

³⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.27; SC 358.258.

³⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.44

and their permanence.³⁶⁷ Thus, baptism is a moment that reflects a change that occurs at the time of baptism, and also a process—a process of purification and righteous living that ultimately leads to deification. It declares to everyone the true allegiance of the person as a Christian to the triune God. Ultimately, for Elm, “in Gregory’s understanding, baptism is the actualization of the second fusion (i.e. the incarnation, see 3.3.1) in each human, the marker aligning the individual within this cosmological process.”³⁶⁸ To sum up, the preparation and the result of baptism connect human beings with the divine presence through the material element to bring about supernatural change, thereby bridging the gulf between these two ontologically distinct realms.

In a similar way, the Eucharist brings heaven to earth in Gregory. It is, for him, the ‘holy table’ (τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν)³⁶⁹, God-receiving table (ἡ θεηδόχος Τράπεζα)³⁷⁰ and ‘mystical table’ (τὴν μυστικὴν τράπεζαν).³⁷¹ It is the antitype of Christ’s body and blood and a visible symbol of salvation. In *Oration 17*, while appealing to the Prefect on behalf of the citizens of Nazianzus, Gregory says, “I give you the blood and the burial and the resurrection and the ascent, or even this table that we approach in common, and the visible symbols (τύπος) of my salvation, this holy liturgy that lifts us up to heaven (ἄνω φέρουσιν), which I perform with the same voice that makes this plea to you.”³⁷² Like the Baptism, the material realities of the elements in the Eucharist point to the spiritual truths and transformation that happens and aids in the heavenward journey of human beings. In *Oration 8*, Gregory discusses how the Eucharist brings divine healing. He narrates how his sister was very ill at one point in her life and how she came to the altar in secret. She applied the elements of Eucharist on her body and “O the wonder, she went away feeling at once that she was saved, and with the lightness of health in body, soul, and mind, having received, as the reward of her hope, that which she hoped for, and having gained bodily by means of spiritual strength.”³⁷³ This act, though sacrilegious, brought healing to her as she did it with faith and out of desperation. Here, Gregory calls the

³⁶⁷ Susanna Elm, “Inscriptions and Conversions: Gregory of Nazianzus on Baptism (*Or.* 38-40),” in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 7-14.

³⁶⁸ Elm, *Inscriptions*, 6.

³⁶⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 26.1; SC 284.226.

³⁷⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.2.34.226-7; PG 37.961-2A.

³⁷¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.31; SC 358.268 and 25.2; SC 284.160. In one of Newman’s collections of poems titled “The Priestly Office,” apparently translated from Gregory, Eucharist is described as ‘Mystic Feast.’ But Daley notes that this poem is not included in any print edition of the Gregorian corpus. John Henry Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (London: Burns, Oates & Co, 1874), 193; Beeley, *Gregory*, 207n222.

³⁷² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 17.12; Vinson, *Gregory*, 93.

³⁷³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 8.18; NPNF, Vol. 7, 243.

elements of eucharist as “the antitypes (ἀντίτυπος) of the Precious Body and Blood.”³⁷⁴

Like Baptism, the eucharist brings God into the midst of human beings. Gregory says,
The Temple is that sacred place that makes us holy;
Our gift to God, all purifying sacrifice;
The place for offering our gifts, the holy table
Where God comes down; our priesthood purifies the mind,
Brings us to God as reconciled, and God to us;
The Mystery is what we seek in wordless awe.³⁷⁵

This holy table brings God in the midst of people as it is a God-receiving table (ἡ θεηδόχος Τράπεζα).³⁷⁶ Here, Gregory is explicitly using the sacrificial language as he thinks of the Eucharist as a sacrifice.³⁷⁷ In the Eucharist, as a Priest, Gregory offers only “an external sacrifice (τὴν ἕξωθεν) which is an antitype of great mysteries (τὴν τῶν μεγάλων μυστηρίων ἀντίτυπον).”³⁷⁸ Gregory is referring to the mystery of the death of Christ and salvation here and considers the eucharist as the participation in the incarnational drama, especially of Christ’s death on the cross. To Amphilochius, he writes, “Do not hesitate, Most Godly One, to pray for me and intercede on my behalf when you draw down (καθέλκης) the Word with your own word, when you divide the lordly body and blood with the bloodless division (ἀναιμάκτω τομῇ), using a voice as the knife.”³⁷⁹ Here also Gregory emphasises the fact that the eucharistic prayers of the priest bring down Christ and thus draw humans close to God.

In Gregory’s understanding of the Eucharist, both as a symbol and a sacrifice, he imagines a bridge between the two realms. Thus, Stone comments, “St. Gregory of Nazianzus lays strong stress on the heavenly realities of which earthly rites are the figure, to share in which the earthly rites are designed to lead; and on the Eucharistic memorial of the whole life of the Lord.”³⁸⁰ This comment is true for both the sacraments. As a whole, if the incarnation inaugurated this convergence of the heavenly and earthly realms, the sacraments continue to shorten the wide gap that separates the visible and the invisible worlds. As mentioned before, both incarnation and the sacraments aim to bring the deification of human beings. Russell points out Gregory’s understanding of deification and the role of the sacraments by saying,

³⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 8.18; SC 405.286.

³⁷⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.2.34.223-9; Daley, *Gregory*, 52.

³⁷⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.2.34.226-7; PG 37.961-2A.

³⁷⁷ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.95; Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Greens, and Co, 1909), 112.

³⁷⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.95; SC 247.212-14.

³⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 171; Storin, *Letter Collection*, 164; Gallay, *Lettres*, II, 61.

³⁸⁰ Stone, *Eucharist*, 116.

“Together with the Son, the Spirit deifies human beings through baptism. The Eucharist is also said to lead them to deification.”³⁸¹

3.3.3 Deification

The convergence of the visible and invisible world, which was inaugurated in the incarnation and which continues in the sacraments, culminates in the deification of human beings.³⁸² As seen in the creation narrative, Gregory is very clear that even at the time of creation, human beings are destined to be deified (θεοούμενον).³⁸³ In the fallen state, because of the incarnation and through the sacraments and ascetic living, human beings participate in the divine nature. But in this ultimate convergence of the two realms, the ontological distinction would continue to exist. Thus, while maintaining the ontological distinction of creator-creature, Gregory insists that a real convergence between these two opposite realities is possible. In his exposition of the doctrine of deification, Gregory utilises Platonic idioms, yet remains faithful to the scriptural teachings.³⁸⁴ He coined the new word θέωσις from θεόω, which later became a standard word in the Byzantine theology for deification.³⁸⁵ But, as we will see later in this chapter, this process of deification, combined with theological epistemology, provides the basis for Gregory’s use of comparative images for God.

The foundation for Gregory’s understanding of deification is the person and the work of Christ in the incarnation. In the person of Christ, the new mixture of His incarnate reality, which we explored earlier, becomes the key to human deification. The way this new mixture became one person in Christ sets the pattern for human beings to be deified even while existing in the material body. Describing the incarnate Christ, Gregory says, “He came forth then as God with that which He had assumed, One Person in two Natures, Flesh (σάρξ) and Spirit, of which the latter deified (θεόω) the former.”³⁸⁶ In *Oration 39*, he mentions that the body (σῶμα)

³⁸¹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, OPCS (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 222.

³⁸² Exhaustive and systematic study of deification in Gregory is Winslow, *Salvation*. But other articles that deal with this theme in Gregory are Nonna Verna Harrison, “Some Aspects of Saint Gregory the Theologian’s Soteriology,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34, no. 1 (1989): 11–18. EBSCOhost; Nonna Verna Harrison, “Theosis as Salvation: An Orthodox Perspective,” *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 4 (1997): 429–43. EBSCOhost and J.A. McGuckin, “The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 95-114.

³⁸³ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.11.

³⁸⁴ Russell, *Deification*, 217-18. Russell identifies the Pauline and Platonic strands of thought in Gregory’s ideas.

³⁸⁵ Louis Bouyer, Jean Leclercq, François Vandenbroucke and Louis Cognet, *The History of Christian Spirituality I: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 419; Russell, *Deification*, 214.

³⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.13; NPNF, 349; SC 358.134; cf. 45.9.

of Christ was deified in the union.³⁸⁷ It is through the deification of the flesh that the person of Christ became one person and yet remained both human and Divine. This gives hope of deification to the entire human race. When one is joined with Christ, the person's flesh is deified just as it happened in the incarnation. This passage from *Oration 34* sums up this concept: "whatsoever is spoken of Him as to Incarnation for me a man, and for my salvation, that, taking of mine (τὸ ἐμὸν λαβὼν), He may impart (χαρίσῃται) His own (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ) by this new commingling (τῆς καινῆς ἀνακράσεως).³⁸⁸ Thus, as Elm says, "Christ's incarnation was the prototype of man's salvation and of his *theōsis*."³⁸⁹

With the incarnate Christ's assumption of the human body into his divinity, Gregory exhorts his congregation: "Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for His sake, since He for ours became man."³⁹⁰ The convergence that happened in the person of Christ continues in His work. His salvific work encompasses the entire creation. Talking about the resurrection of Christ, Gregory says, "Today is salvation (σωτηρία) come unto the world, to that which is visible (ὄρατός), and to that which is invisible (ἀόρατος)."³⁹¹ The incarnation brings healing to the whole created order. Thus, we see that the dualism of the visible and the invisible is bridged from the perspective of divine salvation, and the two distinct natures of the Creator and the creature are combined in the person of Christ through the deification of the body. Ultimately, as Russell comments, our ascent to God is "a *mimesis* of Christ's descent."³⁹²

Gregory also talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in deification. As mentioned earlier, he connects the Holy Spirit's activity in the sacrament with deification, and this connection becomes the argument for the deity of the Holy Spirit.³⁹³ It is the guidance of the Holy Spirit that leads human beings to Christ and to deification.³⁹⁴ Langworthy has argued for a greater understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in Gregory's soteriology by pointing to a network of metaphors in Gregory which discuss salvation beyond θέωσις, such as harmony, being made God (θεοποίησις), purification, and mystery.³⁹⁵ The christological echoes of θέωσις have obscured the Spirit's agency in guiding human behaviour toward virtue that leads to deification. But in *Oration 31*, Gregory explicitly connects the role of the Holy Spirit in baptism and

³⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.16; SC 358.184.

³⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 34.10; NPNF, 337; SC 318.216.

³⁸⁹ Elm, *Hellenism*, 421.

³⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 1.5; NPNF, 203.

³⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.1; NPNF, 422-3; PG 36.624A.

³⁹² Russell, *Deification*, 224.

³⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.28; cf. section 3.3.2.

³⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 6.3-4.

³⁹⁵ Langworthy, *Soteriological Pneumatology*, chap. 2.

deification, thus leading to a trinitarian understanding of salvation.³⁹⁶ The Father's will, the Son's incarnation and the Holy Spirit's guidance lead human beings to salvation, in which they are deified and become gods.

Although Gregory is bold in his language of deification, he still insists that the ontological divide between creator and creature persists, and that human beings become gods only by analogy.³⁹⁷ Human beings can join with the Divine only "so far as attainable by the human nature."³⁹⁸ In this process, ascetic and moral living helps. Gregory describes the solitude and ascetical living he had at Pontus with Basil as "coworker, and mother of divine ascent, and maker of god (θεοποιόν)."³⁹⁹ He mentions the ascent, which we will examine more deeply in his theological epistemology, and deification in several other passages within the context of ascetical living.⁴⁰⁰ The sacraments play a vital role in the process, as we have seen earlier. He even mentions the eucharist as a celebration of "the mystery of deification."⁴⁰¹ The priest has the responsibility to facilitate this in his congregation:

But the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides, to take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and in short, to deify (Θεὸν ποιῆσαι), and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to heavenly host.⁴⁰²

Ministers, through their pastoral and sacramental works, facilitate deification, which is initiated by the incarnation of Christ. Elm aptly summarises her analysis of baptism in Gregory and what it does in terms of deification by saying, "Baptism actualizes in each individual the two great moments of fusion—especially... the second great mingling of two incommensurables: namely, the Incarnation."⁴⁰³

3.3.4. Christological Foundation

The christological foundation, based on Gregory's understanding of the incarnation, sacramental presence, and the final salvation of human beings, justifies the use of material images for God, demanded by the embodied state of human beings. They draw together the

³⁹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.28.

³⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.17; Russell, *Deification*, 222.

³⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.2; SC 270.114: καθόσον ἐφικτὸν ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει.

³⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 3.1; SC 247.242.

⁴⁰⁰ See Gr. Naz. *Or.* 4.71; 21.2.

⁴⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.2; Vinson, *Gregory*, 158.

⁴⁰² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.22; NPNF, 209; SC 247.120.

⁴⁰³ Elm, "Paradoxical Fusion," 307.

ontologically distinct realms of heaven and earth while maintaining the distinction between the created and the creator. The material and the intelligible are indeed completely different, and the material is inadequate to represent God. Gregory acknowledges this limitation and compares using earthly language and concepts to talk about the incorporeal God to stoning Him. But also says that he does not have any other way to talk about God: “For to use corporeal names (σωματικοῖς ὀνόμασι) when discoursing of the incorporeal (περὶ ἀσωμάτου) is perhaps the part of those who deal despitely and stone Him; but pardon, I say again to our infirmity, for I do not willingly stone Him; but having no other words to use, we use what we have.”⁴⁰⁴ But if the embodied condition of human beings leads Gregory to use earthly language, the incarnation holds some hope. The very fact that, in the incarnation, the two incompatible elements were mixed in a new way and that Christ became flesh and deified the flesh, gives hope of using inadequate earthly language and material images to think and talk about God. Using this incarnational understanding, Gregory says, “if He condescended to Flesh (σάρκα), He will also endure such language (λόγον).”⁴⁰⁵ Thus, although Gregory feels that using material concepts to talk about God is equivalent to stoning God, because of Christ’s condescension and because of the necessity created by embodiment, he reluctantly uses the comparative images and human language to talk about God. Incarnation is the only justification for using material images to talk about the incorporeal God in Gregory. Based on the incarnation, in the sacrament, if material and visible elements of water, bread and wine could symbolise the higher truths and bring invisible change in a person, then there is hope that the Christian use of earthly language, images and symbols could represent God. In the same way, if the material part of human beings could be deified, then again, there is a way to use the earthly images to talk about God. Thus, the convergence in salvation history justifies the use of comparative images drawn from the material realm to talk about God. Having justified the use of comparative images, we should turn our attention to what happens when one uses the images for God and how these images help in knowing God. To put it in the theological-ontological framework of the last chapter, we can ask: how, even in their fallen state, limited, embodied, created human beings can know the infinite, ideal, creator God, we should examine Gregory’s theological epistemology.

⁴⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 37.4; NPNF, 339; SC 318, 278.

⁴⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 37.2

3.4. Theological Epistemology

The understanding of incarnation, sacraments, and deification in Gregory's writings demonstrates how Gregory understood the convergence of the ontologically distinct realms and justified the possibility of using comparative images from the material realm to describe God. This convergence also enables him to speak positively about the knowledge of God that human beings can possess. Although, because of the Fall, human beings are further away from God and trapped in the thickened skins of corporeality, they still can hope for the knowledge of God because of this convergence. Gregory conceives of theological epistemology dynamically, through the image of human noetic ascent from earthly to heavenly existence. This ascent also requires purification on the part of the knower and illumination that comes from God. This exploration also takes us into Gregory's understanding of embodied cognition, the use of contemplation and *phantasia* in theological knowledge.

Reversing a quote from *Corpus hermeticum*—"To know God is hard (χαλεπόν), to describe him impossible (ἀδύνατον)"—Gregory claims that "to tell of God is not possible (ἀδύνατον), so my argument runs, but to know him is even less possible (ἀδυνατώτερον)."⁴⁰⁶ It is evident that cognition and speech are closely linked, but Gregory is debating which is the more difficult. For Gregory, God-talk is difficult precisely because absolute divine knowledge is not possible for humans. Because of our limited and 'shadowy' knowledge of God, which will be detailed below, we cannot accurately describe God. In the polemic context of the *Theological Orations*, this is likely a counterattack on the Eunomians that absolute knowledge and description of the Divine is not possible.

3.4.1 Ascent (ἀνάβασις) and Progressive Knowledge of the Divine

Gregory describes his theological epistemology with reference to Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai. Although Ruether says that "this use of Moses' ascent of Sinai as the image of the contemplative ascent came into Christianity from Philo and received its fullest exposition in Gregory of Nyssa," Beeley says that Gregory is responsible for creating this

⁴⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.4; Norris, *Faith*, 226; SC 250.106-8; Gregory uses this quote, attributing it to 'a Greek theologian' (τις τῶν παρ' Ἑλλησι θεολόγων; here Norris' translation "a pagan philosopher" is entirely misleading). In the 19th century, Migne, Mason and NPNF series identified Plato's *Timaeus* 28C as the source of this quote. However, Barbel casted doubt on Gregory's use of Plato in 1963, as Plato uses 'to find' (εὑρεῖν) and not 'to conceive' (νοῆσαι) as Gregory did. Galloway notes in the SC edition in 1978 that the same quote is found in the *Corpus hermeticum*. Finally, Pépin demonstrated in 1982 that Gregory is most likely using the *Corpus hermeticum*, though this itself is an imitation and adaptation of Plato: Based on the words and Gregory's reference to 'theologian', the quote must be attributed "à l'auteur hermétique, et nullement à Platon." SC 250.108-9n1; Norris, *Faith*, 226; PG 36.30Cn5; Mason, *Orations*, 26; NPNF, 289nη; Barbel, *Reden*, 70 and Jean Pépin, "Grégoire de Nazianze, lecteur de la littérature hermétique," *Vigilae Christianae* 36, no.3 (1982): 252.

image, which later became a very influential one in the Christian tradition.⁴⁰⁷ In a passage that is quoted often while describing Gregory's theological epistemology, which is at the opening of his second *Theological Oration*, Gregory explains how he, like Moses, went to see God:

I eagerly ascend (ἀνιόντι) the mount—or, to speak truer, ascend in eager hope matched with anxiety for my frailty—that I may enter the cloud and company with God. Is any an Aaron? He shall come up with me. He shall stand hard by, should he be willing to wait, if need be, outside the cloud. Is any a Nadab, an Abihu, or an elder? He too shall ascend but stand further off, his place matching his purity (κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν τῆς καθάρσεως)... What experience of this have I had, you friends of truth, her initiates, her lovers as I am? I was running with a mind to see God (καταληψόμενος) and so it was that I ascended (ἀνῆλθον) the mount. I penetrated the cloud, became enclosed in it, detached from matter and material things (ἀπὸ τῆς ὕλης καὶ τῶν ὑλικῶν) and concentrated, so far as might be, in myself. But when I directed my gaze I scarcely saw the averted figure of God (τὰ ὀπίσθια), and this whilst sheltering in the rock, God the word incarnate for us. Peering in I saw not the nature prime (τὴν πρώτην τε καὶ ἀκήρατον φύσιν), self apprehended (by 'self' I mean the Trinity), the nature as it abides within the first veil and is hidden by the Cherubim, but as it reaches us at its furthest remove from God, being, so far as I can understand, the grandeur, or as divine David calls it the 'majesty' (μεγαλοπρέπεια) inherent in the created things he has brought forth and governs. All these indications of himself which he has left behind him are God's 'averted figure' (τὰ ὀπίσθια). They are, as it were, shadowy reflections (σκιαὶ καὶ εἰκόνες) of the Sun in water, reflections which display to eyes too weak, because too important to gaze at it, the Sun overmastering perception in the purity of its light.⁴⁰⁸

This passage is often quoted and famous, and rightly so, because it brings together many themes that are connected with Gregory's theological epistemology. Gregory talks about his quest for the knowledge of God in terms of ascent (ἀνάβασις). This language of ascent reflects not only the biblical narrative of Moses' literal ascent of the mount but also aligns with his conceptual framework of the heavenly realm above and earthly realities below, as well as the journey of human beings from the visible, material world to the invisible, ideal world.⁴⁰⁹ Gregory links this ascent to the deification of human beings. This ascent language helps him to highlight the discursive and progressive nature of divine knowledge. Human beings do not have direct knowledge of God as Eunomius claims, but only an indirect knowledge which grows as the journey towards the top of the mountain progresses. In this journey, moral actions

⁴⁰⁷ Ruether, *Gregory*, 104n2; Beeley, *Trinity*, 65.

⁴⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.2-3; Norris, *Fatih*, 224-26; SC 250.102-6; τὴν πρώτην τε καὶ ἀκήρατον φύσιν. The phrase "nature prime" in Greek has another adjective 'unmingled', which is missing in Wickham and Williams' translation. The phrase should read: "nature prime and unmingled"

⁴⁰⁹ See sections 2.6 and 3.3.3.

and ascetical practices play an important role, as they do in the process of deification. While explaining the importance of helping the poor to the citizens of Nazianzus, he says, “it is through my actions (πραξις) that I am to ascend to God.”⁴¹⁰ Fulfilling the moral obligations is necessary in order to reach God. Talking about his ascetical endeavours, he calls it “mother of divine ascent (τῆς θείας ἀναβάσεως), and maker of god (θεοποιόν),”⁴¹¹ and describes the ascetics as ones who “know no limit in ascending (ἀναβάσεως) or in being deified (θεώσεως).”⁴¹² Gregory understands ascetical endeavours to accelerate the progress of the ascent, and that is why he expresses his preference for asceticism over ecclesiastical leadership in his life. He also connects the ascent directly to deification.⁴¹³ The deified state leads to gazing “with pure mind upon the truth in its purity.”⁴¹⁴ The end of the ascent is reaching, seeing, and worshipping God. Thus, for Gregory, divine knowledge is a progress whose final goal is deification, and one can only move forward by moral living and ascetical practices.

3.4.2 Dynamic and Conditional Epistemology: Purity and Illumination

For Gregory, the knowledge of God is gained progressively as one fulfils the conditions involved. Trigg finds Origen’s influence in this outlook and comments, “For Gregory... as for Origen, the church’s understanding of God is not something perfect and static, given for all time, but a dynamic process by no means complete.”⁴¹⁵ An understanding of human frailty in the form of corporeality is necessary, which should prompt one to seek purification through moral actions and ascetical endeavours. These actions are met with divine illumination through the incarnate Christ and the sacraments. Only in these dynamics is anyone able to gain knowledge of God. However, even then, the content of the knowledge is not the essence of God, as Eunomius claims, but the activities or the averted figure of God. In order to explicate these themes, we turn again to the Sinai narrative in Gregory quoted above.

In his ascent on the mountain, Gregory is anxious about his frailty or weakness (ἀσθένεια).⁴¹⁶ This frailty prevents him from knowing God fully. As pointed out earlier, this frailty is the corporeality or the embodiment of human beings. It is a weakness for two reasons:

⁴¹⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.6; PG 35.865B: δεῖ με πρὸς Θεὸν ἀναβῆναι διὰ τῶν πράξεων.

⁴¹¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 3.1; SC 247.242.

⁴¹² Gr. Naz. Or. 4.71; SC 309.184.

⁴¹³ Gr. Naz. Or. 21.2; Ep. 6.3; Carm. 1.2.10.630; cf. Russell, *Deification*, 216. Russell points to Origen as the source of this understanding. cf. Or. Cels. 6.44.

⁴¹⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 7.17; NPNE, 235.

⁴¹⁵ Joseph W. Trigg, “Knowing God in the *Theological Orations* of Gregory of Nazianzus: The Heritage of Origen,” in *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, eds. Andrew B. McGowan, Brian E. Daley and Timothy J. Gaden, VCSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 104.

⁴¹⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.2; SC 250.102.

the ontological distinction between God and creature, which we will deal with here, and the noetic nature of the knowledge of God, which we will deal with in section 3.4.3. Human corporeality highlights the creator-creature distinction that produces the gulf between the two natures, and this gulf widened in the fall. When human corporeality is juxtaposed with divine reality, the contrast is obvious, and because of their embodiment and later because of the thickening of their skin, human beings are at a disadvantage. Because of this, they are not capable of receiving full divine revelation. He describes human beings as “prisoners of the flesh, who can receive only a faint emanation of the good.”⁴¹⁷ That is why he considers “all truth, all philosophy... human wisdom in the hunt for knowledge of reality” to be “like employing a small tool on big constructions” (οἷον ὀργάνῳ μικρῷ μεγάλα δημιουργοῦμεν).⁴¹⁸ Our earlier exploration of the uniqueness and the incomprehensibility of God, due to His triune, simple, and infinite nature, informs this understanding. Although the materiality of human nature hinders our ascent to God, the good news is that, as mixed creatures, human beings also possess an incorporeal mind or soul. Thus, Gregory believes that by using our minds properly, human beings can know God.

Gregory highlights the need for purity by emphasising the dynamic nature of knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is not a passive, neutral knowledge that is available to be appropriated by anyone who stumbles on it, but it is dynamic and depends on the condition of the knower and the relationship they have with God. Gregory distinguishes between those who are purified and those who are not, and the impact of their status on their encounter with God. Moses enters the cloud, but Aaron could only stand outside the cloud. The elders can stand far away at a place corresponding to their purity. Those in the crowd who are prepared can only hear the voice and the sound of the trumpet, and see the lightning flashes; whereas those unprepared and unfit for sublime contemplation, “utterly unhallowed,” Gregory says, “let him not come near, it is dangerous.”⁴¹⁹ The evil, untamed animals do not have any right to come close to the mountain at all or if they do, they would be stoned. There is a clear hierarchy in this process based on the level of purification, and the level of purification indicates where they are in their journey of ascent. Gregory explains this principle in *Oration 40*, God is “presenting Himself to our minds in proportion as we are cleansed; and loved in proportion as He is presented to our mind; and again, conceived in proportion as we love Him.”⁴²⁰ It is dangerous

⁴¹⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 24.15; Vinson, *Gregory*, 152.

⁴¹⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.21; Norris, *Faith*, 236.

⁴¹⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.2; Norris, *Faith*, 224.

⁴²⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.5; NPNF, 361.

for those who are not pure to approach the pure, as it is for the weak eyes to look at the bright sun.⁴²¹

Gregory says, “Ascend by the right way of life (διὰ πολιτείας); through purification (διὰ καθάρσεως), obtain the pure (τὸ καθαρὸν).”⁴²² When a person makes an effort to be purified, he counters the effects of the Fall and creates favourable conditions to receive the benefits promised in the incarnation and sacraments. Gregory thinks that an ascetically inclined Christian overcomes the materiality and the thickened skin that prevents human beings from knowing God. It is not clear how the thickened skin of human beings changes in the process of purification, but Gregory believes that some reversal of the effect of the fall is possible in this life. Paradoxically, human beings are to detach themselves from matter, while being embodied in it. In the narrative, when Gregory eventually enters the cloud, he says that he has detached “from matter and material things.” He claims that a person can hold communion with God only after detaching “from matter (τὴν ὕλην) and this fleshly (σαρκικὸν) cloud or veil... and by rising superior to the dualism of matter.”⁴²³ This is a paradox, as Gregory accepts that the embodied nature of human beings is part of God’s creation, and yet insists that human beings should detach from it while on this earth. He does this by employing Platonic dualistic language. How does one achieve this detachment? Gregory finds some hope in living according to the scriptures. He says, “where the commandments are observed, there is a cleansing of the flesh, that cloud that blocks the soul’s vision and keeps it from seeing clearly the rays of divine illumination...”⁴²⁴ He refers to this type of ethical living as philosophical living. Those who live a philosophical life live above their embodied self and can come closer to God by overcoming matter, in spite of being bound by it. Talking about the one who leads a philosophical life, Gregory says, “He is an immaterial (ἄυλος) being in matter (ἐν ὕλη), uncircumscribed while in a body (ἐν σώματι ἀπερίγραπτος), a citizen of heaven on earth, impassible in the midst of vulnerability, beaten in all things except his thoughts...”⁴²⁵ This thought is reflected in his exhortations to different people in his orations. He urges the Eunuchs in the royal court to overcome their flesh and says that they would get credit if they “receive wings from reason” while being drawn down by heaviness of flesh (τῆ μολίβδι τῆς σαρκὸς) and show themselves to be superior to flesh (ὑπὲρ σάρκα), “while chained down to the flesh.”⁴²⁶

⁴²¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.3.

⁴²² Gr. Naz. Or. 20.12; SC 270.80.

⁴²³ Gr. Naz. Or. 21.2; SC 270.112-4.

⁴²⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 39.8.

⁴²⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 26.13; Daley, *Gregory*, 113; SC 284.256.

⁴²⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.16; NPNF, 342; SC 318.304.

Talking about the life of virgins, he says, “The Flesh bound her to the world, but reason led her up to God. The flesh weighed her down, but reason gave her wings.”⁴²⁷ He also finds human reasoning to help in this process. He says in the same oration that some are cleansed by reason: “There are others whom reason cleanses, by cutting them off from the passions.”⁴²⁸ But he is not sure whether this freedom will be fully achieved by us in this lifetime. He says, “We count it a high thing that we may perhaps learn what it is in the time to come, when we are free of this dense gloom.”⁴²⁹ So, there is a tension in Gregory’s understanding of purification and its effect on flesh as to whether it is now or in the future, but he believes that this contributes to the reversal of the effects of Fall.

As the process of purification unfolds, divine help manifests itself in the form of illumination (τὸ φῶτισμα). Beeley calls it “a two-poled dialectic of purification and illumination, which constitutes the spiritual framework in which the knowledge of God takes place and the content of theology has its meaning.”⁴³⁰ Gregory is fond of using light imagery and terminology to talk about this process. Connecting the purification with illumination, he concludes *Oration 39* by saying, “Be purified, and you shall be clean... that you may stand as perfect lights beside That great light, and may learn the mystery of the illumination (φωταγωγίαν) of Heaven, enlightened (ἐλλαμπόμενοι) by the Trinity more purely and clearly...” As one is purified, one receives the light from God, which enlightens one. In the Sinai narrative, Gregory talks about the divine help he received through the incarnate Christ. When he was at the mount like Moses, he saw “the averted figure of God... whilst sheltering in the rock, God the word incarnate for us.”⁴³¹ Without the incarnate Word, human beings cannot know the Divine. He says in *Oration 6*, “for it is the Logos, he alone, who through our mind makes God accessible to us and through whom God is apprehended in his truth and is cherished and grows within us.”⁴³² In *Oration 37*, he categorically says that without Christ’s condescension in incarnation, no one would have followed Christ except Moses as he was the only one to see God. Gregory speculates on Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai, saying,

For He [Moses] penetrated the cloud, either being placed outside the weight of the body or being withdrawn from his senses; for how could he have gazed upon the

⁴²⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.11.

⁴²⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.20.

⁴²⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.11; Norris, *Faith*, 252.

⁴³⁰ Beeley, *Trinity*, 64.

⁴³¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.3; Norris, *Faith*, 225.

⁴³² Gr. Naz. Or. 6.5.

subtlety, or the incorporeity, or I know not how one should call it, of God, being incorporate and using material eyes? But inasmuch as He strips Himself for us, inasmuch as He comes down (and speak of an exinanition, as it were, a laying aside and a diminution of His glory), He becomes by this comprehensible.⁴³³

Here, he connects both incarnation and God's accommodation by diminishing his glory to how human beings can encounter God. He connects the illumination to the sacrament of baptism also. He calls the baptism simply 'illumination' and says, "illumination (τὸ φῶτισμα) is an aid to our weakness (ἀσθενείας), laying aside of the flesh."⁴³⁴ Thus, purification and illumination play a vital dynamic role in Gregory's theological epistemology.

In *Oration 21*, Gregory summarises this dynamic theological epistemology in a passage to which we will return in 3.4.4.:

Whoever has been permitted to escape by reason and contemplation (διὰ λόγου καὶ θεωρίας) from matter (τὴν ὕλην) and this fleshly (σαρκικὸν) cloud or veil (whichever it should be called) and to hold communion with God, and be associated, as far as man's nature can attain, with the purest Light, blessed is he, both from his ascent from hence, and for his deification there, which is conferred by true philosophy, and by rising superior to the dualism of matter, through the unity which is perceived in the Trinity.⁴³⁵

Even with the convergence of the Divine and human in the incarnation, sacraments, and deification, the knowledge of the Divine can only be as positive as is allowed by human and divine realities. Purification and divine illumination create the conditions for divine knowledge, but even if one is like Moses, one cannot expect full knowledge of God, as Eunomius did. After entering the cloud, Gregory was able to see only "the grandeur," "the majesty" (μεγαλοπρέπεια) or "the averted figure" (τὰ ὀπίσθια) of God. Contrary to the Eunomian claim, Gregory insists that the knowledge human beings can have of God is limited. One can only know God "very dimly and scantily...not by His Essentials (οὐκ ἐκ τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν) but by His Environment (ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν)"⁴³⁶ He distinguishes between the 'prime nature'—the essence of who God is—and the averted figure of God, i.e. the *energia*, the activities of God in creation and salvation. This theme is repeated in many places, and he also wonders whether we might gain full knowledge in the future: "but of God himself the knowledge we shall have in this life will be little (ὀλίγος), though soon after it will perhaps be

⁴³³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 37.3; NPNF, 339.

⁴³⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.3; SC 358.200.

⁴³⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.2; NPNF, 270; SC 270.112-4.

⁴³⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.3; NPNF, 423-4.

more perfect.”⁴³⁷ Both the passages above also point to the dim, scant and little knowledge one can have about God and set limitations to the content of the knowledge of God.

Gregory describes this limitation by using Pauline language and epistemology. He says that God is “only outlined/sketched roughly by the mind” (νῶ μόνῳ σκιαγραφούμενος).⁴³⁸ The use of the verb σκιαγραφέω is interesting as it connotes not a perfect painting with all minute details, but a rough sketch, a painting with shadows or an outline. Like Paul, Gregory likens our knowledge of God in this world to mirrors and enigmas.⁴³⁹ Talking about Paul’s experience of going to the third heaven, Gregory comments, “Let us give this much attention to Paul when he says: ‘We know in part and we prophesy in part.’”⁴⁴⁰ In the *Theological Oration*, Gregory mentions that the knowledge he gained while in the cloud is a “shadowy reflections (σκιὰ καὶ εἰκόνες) of the Sun in water.”⁴⁴¹ Gregory does not deny the reality of the knowledge but shows its limitations. He often speculates whether one could know fully when one is fully united with Christ after death. In his funeral oration to his father, he says about Gregory Senior that “since he is closer to God, now that he has shaken off his bodily fetters, and freed his mind from the clay which obscured it, and holds intercourse naked with the nakedness of the prime and purest mind.”⁴⁴² But he is hesitant in saying this. He thinks that God has a good reason for not revealing himself fully to us. He says that by this incomplete knowledge, God draws us to himself by the desire to know, and as he is the highest object of thought, our mind cannot resist it. Talking about the partial knowledge and becoming the object of wonder, he says,

by that part of it which we can comprehend to draw us to itself (for that which is altogether incomprehensible is outside the bounds of hope, and not within the compass of endeavour); and by that part of It which we cannot comprehend to move our wonder; and as an object of wonder to become more an object of desire; and being desired, to purify; and purifying to make us like God⁴⁴³

He finds a positive thing even here that by being an enigma God stirs up love in us to pursue Him more. This aspect, according to Otis contributes to the “infinitely progressive character of the spiritual life,” where “the life of the Redeemed becomes the infinite pursuit of an ever pursuable God: the creature never overcomes his separation from the creator, but

⁴³⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.10. SC 250.98.

⁴³⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.3; cf. 38.7.

⁴³⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 7.17; NPNF, 235; Beeley, *Trinity*, 105.

⁴⁴⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.20; 1 Cor. 13:9; cf. 28.3, 21; 34.15.

⁴⁴¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.3; Norris, *Faith*, 226.

⁴⁴² Gr. Naz. Or. 18.4.

⁴⁴³ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.3; NPNF, 423-4; cf. 38.7.

achieves a constantly increasing satisfaction in the infinite process of approximation to God.⁴⁴⁴ Thus, Gregory uses the Pauline epistemological framework to challenge the Eunomian theological epistemology and present his vision of progressive Christian life towards deification.

3.4.3 Embodied Cognition

Having explored Gregory's theological epistemology through his Sinai narrative, I want to connect it to the way he understands human thinking *vis-à-vis* embodied existence, which helps us to understand the need for comparative images. Even after purification and illumination, how does the human mind understand the Divine? Can human beings entirely detach themselves from the embodied flesh and think of God ideally? I will argue that while emphasising the noetic nature of the theological epistemology, Gregory also accepts the reality of embodied existence, which leads to embodied cognition. Embodied cognition is the result of embodied thinking, as mentioned in Section 3.2, in which embodied human beings think through embodied concepts and thus process knowledge in an embodied state. Here, he is influenced by the Aristotelian model.

The incorporeal world could only be accessed through the mind, and as God is incorporeal, he can be known only through the mind. Human beings are capable of knowing God as they are born rational (λογικοί γεγονότες).⁴⁴⁵ Rationality is part of the ideal side of human beings, which God bestowed on them, and thus they can use their minds to seek God. Gregory says that God is the one who creates the human beings as thinking beings, and at the same time God is the highest (ἀκρότατον) and the most exalted (ὑψηλότερον) object of thought for their thinking.⁴⁴⁶ He continues to talk about God by saying that beyond God, human thoughts “can no further go. For not even the most philosophic, the most piercing, the most curious intellect has, or can ever have, a more exalted object. For this is the utmost of things desirable, and they who arrive at it find an entire rest from speculation (πάσης θεωρίας).”⁴⁴⁷ In other words, for Gregory, God is the beginning and the end of our thinking.

But in this, as a consequence of embodiment, human beings cannot know God fully, as Eunomius claims. We can think about God in our embodied existence, but we cannot fully

⁴⁴⁴ Brooks Otis, “Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958): 108-10.

⁴⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.1; SC 284.156; cf. Ath. *inc.* 3. Athanasius says that God made human beings in His image and gave a share of His Λόγος and made them rational (λογικοί).

⁴⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.1; NPNF, 269-70; SC 270.112.

⁴⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.1; NPNF, 269-70; SC 270.112.

know Him. In the Sinai narrative, Gregory says that he ran to comprehend (καταλαμβάνειν) God, but in the end, he fails. Beeley points out that this distinction is missed in the English translations, as κατάληψις refers to ‘complete comprehension’ and not just knowing.⁴⁴⁸ Although God is a noble object of our thinking, human beings cannot conceive the incorporeal God without embodied conceptions. Thus, although God is different from the created order, human beings cannot think about God abstractly, but must fall back on embodied conceptions. Gregory does not like this material intrusion in the conception of God, but accepts it, under protest, as unavoidable. He describes the mind’s struggles to grasp the incorporeal and to go beyond its embodied conditions, but ultimately uses the embodied conception and visible objects. He says,

Either it [the human mind] looks at things visible (τὰ ὀρώμενα) and makes of these a god—a gross mistake, for what visible thing is more sublime, more godlike, than its observer, and to what degree, that it should be the object, be the subject, of worship?—or else it discovers God (θεὸν γνωρίσαι) through the beauty and order of things seen (διὰ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὀρωμένων καὶ τῆς εὐταξίας), using sight as a guide (ὁδηγῶ) to what transcends sight without losing God through the grandeur of what it sees.⁴⁴⁹

Gregory believes that human embodied thinking can lead to a reasonable understanding of God, even though it is fraught with danger. The human mind could easily make visible things as God. But it can also discover God, if the sense perceptions gained through the visible things of the world are carefully used. Gregory is endorsing natural theology. The statement about knowing God through the beauty and order of creation is an important connection for the comparative images.

We noted earlier that Gregory does not consider matter and the material world inherently evil, but rather ontologically different from God. Although he uses dualistic language, it is not because he considers matter evil, but rather because he longs for an unmediated knowledge of God, like the angels, without the impediment of bodily conditions. According to Clevenger, a chronological analysis of Gregory’s writing reveals that Gregory accepts the reality of human embodiment and the limitations of the human intellect to work beyond the material more during his tenure in Constantinople.⁴⁵⁰ This is the peak of his battle

⁴⁴⁸ Beeley, *Trinity*, 93.

⁴⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232; SC 250.128.

⁴⁵⁰ Ryan Clevenger, “‘Like a Swift Fleeting Flash of Lightning Shining in our Eyes’: The Role of Mental Images in Gregory of Nazianzus’s Account of Theological Language” (PhD Diss., Wheaton College, 2018), 154, accessed November 9, 2025, <http://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/like-swift-fleeting-flash-lightning-shining-our/docview/2029967168/se-2>.

against the Eunomians. Clevenger concludes by saying, “When speaking about contemplating God in general, Gregory is more apt to highlight the dangers of αἰσθησις as distractions that need to be overcome, but in the context of the Eunomian controversy, Gregory emphasises that matter cannot be overcome. These are not contradictory because they are eschatologically resolved.”⁴⁵¹ Gregory maintains a dialectical tension between despising materiality as a hindrance and considering matter as part of God’s creation. He longs for unmediated divine intellection but faces the reality of materially mediated knowledge of God.

As mentioned earlier in 3.2, Gregory considers embodied existence as something we need to accept as reality in this earthly life. Here, Gregory is following Aristotle, rather than Plato. Usacheva has demonstrated that Gregory is utilising the Aristotelian understanding of embodied intellection: “human intellection is severely restricted by bodily states and both external and internal conditions.”⁴⁵² As embodied beings, we cannot bypass our embodied state and embodied cognition. When Gregory talks about detaching oneself from the material world and using the mind to think about God, it is because God can only be approached through the mind. But he accepts that we can only think about God through embodied conceptions. What is the way for the embodied mind to know God? Gregory says that we should approach God through contemplation, by forming the right kind of mental images of God, without being misled in the wrong direction or getting stuck in our embodied thinking, and thus stopping our ascent.

3.4.4. Contemplation (θεωρία) and Mental Images (φαντασία)

How can embodied thinking truly lead to the understanding of the incorporeal God? Here, Gregory considers that, along with purification and illumination, one needs to rely on contemplation of God and the mental images that the contemplation on scriptures and nature creates in the mind. He says that only through “reason and contemplation (διὰ λόγου καὶ θεωρίας)” one can escape “from matter (τὴν ὕλην) and this fleshly (σαρκικὸν) cloud or veil” and “hold communion with God.”⁴⁵³ It is primarily through contemplation that one climbs up the ladder of the chain of being to know God better. In contemplating God, the mind receives impressions and mental images that help us form a conception of God. He talks about the mental image (τὸ φανταζόμενον) when he expresses his frustration on not being able to share

⁴⁵¹ Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 161.

⁴⁵² Usacheva, *Intellection*, 180.

⁴⁵³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.2; SC 270.112-4.

the image of God he has in his mind with others through the comparative images for God.⁴⁵⁴ Here, Gregory relies on the classical understanding of φαντασία to explain how the human mind, through embodied thinking, creates images of intangible things.

Θεωρία plays an important role in Gregory's spiritual theology and it is connected with the concept of purification.⁴⁵⁵ In simple terms, contemplation (Θεωρία) is "the observation of intellectual objects (σκέψιν νοητῶν)."⁴⁵⁶ In the context of theological epistemology, it is thinking about God and especially "travelling the entire titles and powers of Christ (πασῶν... τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ προσηγοριῶν καὶ δυνάμεων)."⁴⁵⁷ He asserts that even scripture does not present us with incorporeal realities directly, but rather paints (ἀνεξωγράφησεν) the powers or actions of God in bodily images (τι τῶν σωματικῶν) for us.⁴⁵⁸ That is why, according to Gregory, we have descriptions of God sleeping, getting angry, walking, and so on. In other words, even scriptural language is embodied. When we contemplate these embodied conceptions presented in the scriptures, we slowly glimpse God. Nature and life also teach human beings about spiritual truths. For example, Gregory talks of how he learned the spiritual truths of striving to be "a rock worthy of that Rock (πέτρα) on which we stand and worship" in the midst of temptations and troubles of stormy waves by observing the fierce waves hitting the unmoved rocks on the shores while on his evening walk.⁴⁵⁹ Thus, he defines contemplation as getting the light of the Spirit in the contemplation of the word (ἐν λόγῳ θεωρία).⁴⁶⁰ Ultimately, according to Gregory, contemplation "rises up from below (ἐντεῦθεν) and advances (χωρέω) to the Holy of Holies, and leads the mind upward (ἐπανάγω) towards its kin."⁴⁶¹ He acknowledges the difficulty of gaining mastery over the world of matter, but affirms that overcoming the flesh helps in effectively thinking about God.⁴⁶²

The contemplation is not easy and natural for human beings. It requires preparation through purification and action. The moral and ascetical action required for purification is the first step towards contemplation. Thus, he calls action (πρᾶξις) "the stepping stone"

⁴⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.33; SC 250.340.

⁴⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 39.8; Špidlík, *doctrine spirituelle*, 119-20; Constance Tsirpanlis, "The Doctrine of Katharsis, Contemplation, and Kenosis in Saint Gregory of Nazianzus," in *Greek Patristic Theology: Basic Doctrines in Eastern Church Fathers*, vol.2 (New York: EO Press, 1984), 211-23; Beeley, *Trinity*, 109.

⁴⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. Carm. I.2.34.130; PG 37.955A.

⁴⁵⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.98; SC 247.216.

⁴⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.22; SC 250.318.

⁴⁵⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 26.8-10.

⁴⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. Carm. 2.1.11.297; PG 37.1050A.

⁴⁶¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.4; PG 35.864A.

⁴⁶² Gr. Naz. Or. 20.1.

(ἐπίβασις)⁴⁶³ and “patron” (πρόξενος) of contemplation.⁴⁶⁴ Although he often longs for a contemplative life, he values both action and contemplation to be good things.⁴⁶⁵ Kertsch aptly summarises this aspect when he says that although in his personal life Gregory had a natural inclination to contemplation (“einen anlagebedingten Hang zur Kontemplation”), he never expressed absolute superiority of one over the other.⁴⁶⁶ In this way, Gregory seamlessly combines purification, and illumination with contemplation.

What happens when one thinks about God through the Scriptures and follows the commandments in the Bible? As the mind contemplates God through the scriptures, mental images (φαντασία) of God are formed. Scholars have recognised the importance of φαντασία in patristic theology only in recent years. Initially, the church fathers were suspicious of this concept, as ‘imagination’ gives the impression of a false or made up image, just as how the word ‘imagination’ can sound in the English language.⁴⁶⁷ Gregory has used φαντασία in a negative sense several times.⁴⁶⁸ But the positive use of φαντασία has acquired more attention now. Carruthers has argued for the central role of *phantasia* in the human memory by saying that “every sort of sense perception ends up in the form of a phantasm in memory.”⁴⁶⁹ Pizzione has done a survey on the importance of φαντασία in Greek fathers in which Gregory is included.⁴⁷⁰ Fulford has argued for the role of φαντασία in Gregory’s theological imagination, and Clevenger’s dissertation is a book-length analysis of φαντασία in Gregory’s theological language and epistemology.⁴⁷¹ Harrison’s work also touches on this aspect in the auditory culture of the patristic era.⁴⁷²

The positive use of φαντασία in Gregory’s theological epistemology make him unique among his contemporaries. In their arguments against Eunomian epistemology, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa extensively used the concept of ἔννοια and ἐπίνοια—“the activity of reflecting on and identifying the distinct qualities or properties of something—to describe how

⁴⁶³ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.12; SC 270.82.

⁴⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.37; SC 358.284.

⁴⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 14.4.

⁴⁶⁶ Manfred Kertsch, “Gregor von Nazianz’ Stellung zu Theoria und Praxis aus der sicht seiner Reden,” *Byzantion* 44, no. 2 (1974): 288.

⁴⁶⁷ Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 248.

⁴⁶⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 4.119; 5.2; 18.26; 16.18; *Carm.* 1.2.18.130; Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 191-95.

⁴⁶⁹ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19.

⁴⁷⁰ Aglae Pizzone, “Late Antique φαντασία and the Greek Fathers: A Survey,” in *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. David Hernández (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 416-32.

⁴⁷¹ Ben Fulford, “Divine Names and the Embodied Intellect: Imagination and Sanctification in Gregory of Nazianzus’ Account of Theological Language,” in SP, ed. Allen Brent and Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2011), 217-31; Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*.

⁴⁷² Harrison, *Listening*, chap.3.

human mind conceive God.⁴⁷³ This is in response to Eunomius denying the validity of ἐπίνοια, by saying “when we say ‘unbegotten,’ then, we do not imagine that we ought to honour God only in name, in conformity with human invention (οὐκ ὀνόματι μόνον κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην σεμνύνειν); rather, in conformity with reality (κατ’ ἀλήθειαν).⁴⁷⁴ But Gregory of Nazianzus adopts a different strategy. Instead of ἐπίνοια, he utilizes φαντασία to talk about theological imagination. As Clevenger comments, though Gregory uses less of ἐπίνοια, “his appeal to φαντασία... addresses the Eunomian controversy in a no less sophisticated way than the responses from Basil and Gregory of Nyssa to Eunomius.”⁴⁷⁵ While describing how the human mind arrives at the concept of ‘infinity,’ Basil uses the term ἐπίνοια, but as we saw in 2.3.3. Gregory uses φαντασία.⁴⁷⁶ This shows that Gregory wanted to replace ἐπίνοια with φαντασία in the way he responded to Eunomius. Though ἐπίνοια and φαντασία are two different terms, both of them point to reflecting on the impressions of God on the mind. While ἐπίνοια points to the rational thinking process and intellectual precision, φαντασία refers to the artistic and imaginative side of thinking about the Divine. But ultimately, for Gregory, God is above all conception (πᾶσαν ὑπερεκπίπτων ἔννοιαν).⁴⁷⁷ Because the end goal of both ἐπίνοια and φαντασία are to guide the human mind to understand God in a better way. Gregory’s emphasis on φαντασία is indicative of his persona as a theological orator, a role Gregory embodied, as I will explore in 3.5.

The idea of mental image (τὸ φανταζόμενον) is crucial to understanding Gregory’s theological imagination and epistemology.⁴⁷⁸ Images are the impressions the human mind receives about God when it thinks about Him and contemplates Him. When talking about the workings of the human mind, Gregory says that “the work of the mind is understanding (νόησις) and the embossing (ἐκτύωμα; can also mean impression), and the reasoning is inquiring those impressions (τύωμα) of the mind.”⁴⁷⁹ Connecting this understanding with his theological imagination, we can say that he considers reflection on God through the scriptures, producing impressions (τύπος) that ultimately form mental images of God as one reflects on them through their reasoning. This aligns with the prevailing view of how the mind and

⁴⁷³ Bas. *Eun.* 1.7; Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 2.182; Ayres, *Nicaea*, 191; cf. Kopecek, *Neo-Arianism*, vol. 2, 376; For more on Basil and Nyssen’s use of ἐπίνοια, see Kopecek, *Neo-Arianism*, vol. 2, 375-7; Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 241-6; Ayres, *Nicaea*, 191-98; DelCogliano, *Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 153-175; Radde-Gallwitz, *Divine Simplicity*, chap. 7.

⁴⁷⁴ Eun. *Apol.* 8; Vaggione, *Works*, 40.

⁴⁷⁵ Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Bas. *Eun.* 1.7; Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.8; Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 2n3.

⁴⁷⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.7; SC 358.114.

⁴⁷⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.33; SC 250.340; cf. 31.14.

⁴⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.34.28-29; PG 37.947A.

memory worked during Gregory’s time. Harrison says “the idea that images were imprinted upon the mind or memory as mental pictures, in the same way as a seal makes an impression upon wax, was the most common means of describing the way in which the mind either learnt something new or became aware of, and stored within itself, any sensation brought to it by the five senses of the body.”⁴⁸⁰ Gregory often uses *γράφω* and *τυπώω* to emphasise the image aspect of learning and memory when talking about teaching the right doctrine to the catechumens.⁴⁸¹ In the same way, a theologian, in contemplating God, gains impressions of God. These impressions come from scriptural accounts of God and also from nature and life. As the theologian reflects on these impressions, mental images (*φαντασία*) of God are formed. These impressions are based on embodied cognition, as Carruthers asserts, “this phantasm is the final product of the entire process of sense perception, whether its origin be visual or auditory, tactile or olfactory.”⁴⁸² This fits with Gregory’s account of embodied conceptions present in the scriptures, which produce embodied impressions of God, which, upon further reflection, form the mental image of God.

Connecting the workings of mind with *φαντασία*, Gregory says that God is

... only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily... not by His essentials, but by His environment; one image (*φαντασίας*) being got from one source and another from another, and combined (*συλλεγομένης*) into some sort of *image* of truth (*τῆς ἀληθείας ἵνδαλμα*), which escapes us before we have conceived it, and takes to flight before we have conceived it...⁴⁸³

He uses the same vocabulary in his *Theological Orations* also: “we use facts connected with him to outline (*σκιαγραφοῦντες*) qualities which correspond with him, collecting (*συλλέγομεν*) a faint and feeble mental image (*ἀμυδράν καὶ ἀσθενῆ φαντασίαν*) from various quarters.”⁴⁸⁴ Gregory affirms that it is not “the whole” picture, as our human corporeality do not permit this full knowledge: “Our noblest theologian is not one who has discovered the whole (*τὸ πᾶν*)—our earthly shackles do not permit us the whole—but one whose mental image is by comparison fuller (*φαντασθῆ πλέον*), who has gathered in his mind a richer picture (*ἐν ἑαυτῷ συναγάγη τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἵνδαλμα*)... of the truth.”⁴⁸⁵ The repetition of the terms *φαντασία*, *ἵνδαλμα* and *συλλέγω* is essential to our study. Mental images are formed and

⁴⁸⁰ Harrison, *Listening*, 62; this concept of impression will be explained in detail in section 3.5.3.2.

⁴⁸¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.45; See section 3.5.3.2.

⁴⁸² Carruthers, *Memory*, 19.

⁴⁸³ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.7; NPNF, 346, modified; SC 358.116.

⁴⁸⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 30.17; Norris, *Faith*, 274; SC 250.262.

⁴⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 30.17; Norris, *Faith*, 274; SC 250.262.

gathered to create a reasonable picture of God. Clevenger argues that the term συλλέγω points to the cognitive dimension of mental images as they are “an important feature of ancient accounts of cognition concept formation.”⁴⁸⁶

To narrate systematically what Gregory tries to say here, we can say that through contemplation of God, the human mind receives impressions or mental images of God. Gregory understands it as the normal functioning of the human mind, not just in knowing God. Images from different sources are gathered to form a coherent picture of God. That is why, as Clevenger argued, the verb συλλέγω plays a vital role in processing these images. Knowledge of God is like solving a puzzle: we gather different pieces from different places, and as we bring them together, we get a better picture.⁴⁸⁷ That is why Gregory claims that the noblest theologian is the one who has a fuller and truer picture of the truth compared to others. By gathering all the images about God, the theologian builds up “an inner world of images, constructed by the memory.”⁴⁸⁸ This is what creates the “Christian imaginative universe” that Ayres talks about.⁴⁸⁹ The only difference between the puzzle and this theological imagination is that no one can fully finish this puzzle on this earth, according to Gregory. One can only aim for a better picture of reality.

This process of knowing God like a puzzle could be illustrated by Gregory’s description of how the human mind conceives God’s infinity, in a passage which we referred in the 2.3.3. while talking about the infinity of God. Gregory says,

The boundless can be considered in two ways: with regard to beginning and with regard to end; for what is beyond these, and not contained within them, is boundless. So when the mind turns its gaze to the abyss above us, and finds no place to stand and settle down in its imaginings about God (ταῖς περὶ Θεοῦ φαντασίαις), it calls that boundless, inescapable realm “without beginning;” but when it turns its gaze below, to what comes after, it calls it “immortal” and “indestructible.”⁴⁹⁰

This passage is the clearest expression of Gregory’s account of theological imagination and epistemology. This is how the human mind understands God’s eternity. It is not direct knowledge, as Eunomius understands, but rather discursive knowledge. The mind, in its contemplative imagination, thinks about God through the human categories of limit and time. When it cannot find a beginning or an end, it attributes ‘eternity’ to God. This is also what it

⁴⁸⁶ Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 28.

⁴⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 30.17.

⁴⁸⁸ Harrison, *Listening*, 62.

⁴⁸⁹ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 275.

⁴⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.8; Daley, *Gregory*, 120; SC 358.118.

means when he says that our mind outlines (σκιαγραφοῦντες) the conception of God, it sketches a portrait of God from the outside.⁴⁹¹ Thus, the embodied thinking leads to theological imagination based on earthly categories, which in turn leads to the understanding of the Divine. Commenting on Gregory’s understanding, Pizzone says, “symbols, metaphors, images, which can all be described as φαντασία, help the believer’s soul to catch a glimpse of the divinity.”⁴⁹²

3.4.5. The Epistemological Context

How is the above discussion on Gregory’s theological epistemology connected with our understanding of comparative images in Gregory? The need for comparative images arises from Gregory’s understanding of human embodied cognition and the role of φαντασία in the human cognitive process. In thinking about God, this process needs to be managed carefully, as there is a fear that unworthy conceptions, such as materiality, may intrude on it, as described in 2.6. Now, we can bring together all his comments on the comparative images, use Gregory’s theological epistemology as described above to make sense of them, and build a systematic narrative.

Because of their embodied existence, human imagination always begins in the material world and works towards God. There is a danger that instead of processing these raw impressions into an image appropriate for God, the mind settles for the material image, and fails to go past the material realm to know God, who is fully ideal. That is why Gregory says the mind struggles to go past the embodied condition in thinking about God. It is easier for it to grasp the visible things (τὰ ὁρώμενα) that come its way and to make them God. This is the source of idolatry for Gregory.⁴⁹³ But a true theologian avoids that mistake by discovering “God (θεὸν γνωρίσαι) through the beauty and order of things seen (διὰ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ τῆς εὐταξίας), using sight as a guide (ὁδηγῶ) to what transcends sight without losing God through the grandeur of what it sees.”⁴⁹⁴ He uses images from life and the world to learn more about God. Gregory, while talking about the spiritual lessons he learnt through the walk by the sea shore, says, “Once I had formulated these thoughts for myself, I also came upon another image (εἰκόν), which fits my present circumstances perfectly... Perhaps you will consider me a garrulous old man, if I explain this to you, as well. But I must explain it, since I know that

⁴⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.17.

⁴⁹² Pizzone, *φαντασία*, 427.

⁴⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.14-15.

⁴⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232; SC 250.128.

Scripture, too, often uses images such as this to spell things out more clearly.”⁴⁹⁵

The use of material things as a means of reaching God is ubiquitous in Gregory. That is why he lauds Basil for using secular education and philosophy in the service of God by saying, “philosophy was his passion, to break from the world, and to unite with God, he laboured through the things below (τοῖς κάτω) to gain the things above (τὰ ἄνω), through things that are unstable and pass away, those that are stable and abide.”⁴⁹⁶ With regards to thinking about God, Gregory says, “Reason (λόγος) looked on the visible world (τοῖς ὁρωμένοις), lighted on things primeval yet did not make us stop at these but leads us on through them to what transcends them, the very means of their continued existence.”⁴⁹⁷ Human beings should use reason to process their mental images and what they receive from the visible world to reach God. One can use them as Gregory does, but it is important not to let any unworthy conception of God creep in. For example, Gregory says that we cannot think of material and corporeal conceptions in God. Thus, when talking about the Father being the cause of the Son and yet the Son being of the same essence as the Father, Gregory says, “I repeat the same argument as I fear your embodied and material thinking (τὸ παχύ σου καὶ ὑλικὸν τῆς διανοίας).”⁴⁹⁸ He fears that his opponents would understand his conception of God in a material way. We will come across this fear of material intrusion in the conception of God often in our analysis of his comparative images.

But in this embodied life, a theologian uses the embodied impressions he gains of God in contemplation and collects them to form the right image of God. It is a noetic ascent, moving from embodied thinking to a clear understanding of God devoid of material intrusion. As one moves towards the summit, i.e. as one moves closer to God and grows in the divine knowledge, one gains more images of God. When the theologian tries to convey his mental image of God, he uses similar images to those Gregory used to talk about God. Now, this epistemological context of Gregory helps us to understand his warnings that accompany the comparative images he uses for God. Now, we should turn to how Gregory imagines himself as an agent who facilitates a convergence of the two realms in his pastoral ministry.

3.5. Gregory: A Theologian, Orator, Shepherd and Inscriber

Having established the need for comparative images due to the embodied existence of

⁴⁹⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 26.10; Vinson, *Gregory*, 182-83; SC 284.248.

⁴⁹⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 43.13; SC 384.146.

⁴⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.16; Norris, *Faith*, 233.

⁴⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.10; SC 270.78.

human beings, justified their use based on Gregory's christological understanding, and demonstrated how comparative images work in his theological epistemology, we now turn to Gregory himself to establish a pastoral context based on his pastoral concerns. Why was Gregory interested in using comparative images for God, and why did this theme occupy his mind so much, even at the height of Eunomian controversy? Why, even his famous *Theological Orations* do not close with a summary of his trinitarian theology but with a reflection on which comparative image would be best suited to illustrate the Trinity and how they all fail at a certain point? The answer lies in Gregory's understanding of himself as a theological orator, and that is the subject of the next section, which will explore the pastoral context within which we can better understand Gregory's use of comparative images for God.

3.5.1. A Theological Orator

Gregory regards himself as a theological orator: a trinitarian theologian who adheres to the tradition of Nicaea and an orator trained in the classical tradition.⁴⁹⁹ Both are built into his identity, sometimes merging seamlessly, sometimes in deep conflict. And he is aware of it. While his rhetorical identity comes from his classical training (which this chapter refers to interchangeably as "Greek *paideia*," "classical education," "rhetoric," and "secular education"), his theological identity is shaped by his ascetic and philosophical inclinations. It is within this conflict of identities that we should understand his concern for the use of images in his discourse on God: as an orator, he was trained to paint pictures of reality with words, but as a theologian, he cannot misrepresent God by using inappropriate images. In his commentaries on the use of images for God, Gregory wrestles with this dilemma. Thus, understanding his identity provides us with clues to how he deals with it.

Gregory belongs to the first generation of Christian men and women who grew up in a Christian empire, carving out their identities as Christians through their religious beliefs and as Hellenes by sharing the Greek culture, education, and heritage.⁵⁰⁰ Rather than pitting his classical education against his Christian life, as Tertullian did, he seeks to combine the two in a meaningful way wherever possible. The fusion can be seen in Gregory's writings and throughout his ecclesiastical life. In several places, he affirms that he has subordinated his secular education to the service of Christ and that he has transformed it through the divine word. He effectively and seamlessly applies his rhetorical training in his ministry. As Guignet,

⁴⁹⁹ Ruether uses the term 'Christian rhetor,' but I believe 'theological orator' captures Gregory perfectly, as he considered himself a theologian and a church leader, not just a Christian. Ruether, *Gregory*, 16.

⁵⁰⁰ See Elm, *Hellenism*, for a thorough exposition of this aspect of Gregory's life.

Ruether, Demoen, and Norris have pointed out in their respective works, the influence of classical learning is evident in Gregory's writings. Throughout his life, Gregory attempts to reconcile these two identities, but when discussing God, the conflict between being eloquent as an orator and reticent as a theologian becomes apparent. However, for the most part, Gregory's rhetorical training has helped him to talk about God effectively. This will give us the background for understanding Gregory's use of comparative images for God, as talking about God in a rhetorical context involves employing images to refer to God.

Gregory is, undoubtedly, considered a great orator in the history of the Church, one of the Christian offspring of the Second Sophistic movement.⁵⁰¹ In his autobiographical poem *De vita sua*, Gregory recounts how his companions begged him to stay in Athens when he and Basil decided to return to Cappadocia, and how they wanted him to take up a teaching position there.⁵⁰² Persuaded by their pleas, he stayed for a while and later had to depart from Athens in secret. When he reaches Cappadocia, he was asked by his friends to give a sample of his eloquence, which he gives in order to satisfy them.⁵⁰³ In the *Panegyric on his brother*, Gregory opens his oration by saying that some have come to grieve with him and some others have come "to feast their ears (τὴν ἀκοὴν ἐστιάζοντες) in the enjoyment of my word. For they suppose that I must needs make my misfortune an occasion for display (ἐπίδειξις)."⁵⁰⁴ This points to the section of the audience who were there to hear Gregory's oratory on that occasion, rather than mourning his brother. Julian, the tax adjuster and his former classmate, demanded an oration from him as debt in lieu of the help he provided earlier towards Nazianzus and its inhabitants.⁵⁰⁵ In *Oration 19*, he lightheartedly chides Julian for extorting an oration from him like the payment of debt and "promising choicer benefits (χρηστότερα) and dangling great rewards (ἄθλα) for his words (τοῖς λόγοις)."⁵⁰⁶ In his retirement, he devoted attention to preserving his work by editing his orations and writing Christian poetry, thereby demonstrating his literary genius and "presenting a persona for posterity."⁵⁰⁷

He was not only an orator who could speak to commoners and to the rulers of his time, but he was also an excellent theologian who defined the trinitarian doctrine for the Church and defended it. He is the only one accorded with the title 'theologian' by the Eastern Church after the apostle John for "the loftiness of his teaching" and his powerful and clear "discussion of

⁵⁰¹ Ruether, *Gregory*, 6.

⁵⁰² White, *Autobiographical Poems*, 29; cf. Socr. *h.e.* 4.26.

⁵⁰³ White, *Autobiographical Poems*, 28-9.

⁵⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 7.1; NPNF, 230; SC 405.180.

⁵⁰⁵ McGuckin, *Gregory*, 221-22.

⁵⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 19.3; Vinson, *Gregory*, 96, modified; PG 35.1045C.

⁵⁰⁷ Clevenger, *Flash of Lightning*, 102.

God” as reported by Gregory the Presbyter.⁵⁰⁸ Daley sums up his contribution to theology and to the Church by saying, “Gregory is creative, even bold, in plotting out the semantic boundaries within which the Church’s faith may rightly and safely be articulated. Along with Gregory of Nyssa, he continually promotes a standardized terminology for speaking of what is one and what is three in the divine Mystery.”⁵⁰⁹

In Byzantium, commentaries on his work began to appear as early as the 6th century, with the first notable example being that of Nonnus. The very fact that the speeches in his corpus are called orations and not homilies, with only one exception of an exegetical homily (*Oration 37*), even that in the form of an oration, shows how his work was transmitted with his theologian-orator fused identity in mind.⁵¹⁰ This understanding of Gregory as a theological orator striving for orthodoxy and beautiful expression is reinforced by Ludlow, who has shown that Gregory and other fourth-century Christian writers had a sense of craftsmanship in their approach to theology, and that they used their rhetorical training in the service of theology like a craftsman who adapts and improves his craft to produce monumental works of art, in this case verbal compositions.⁵¹¹

How does Gregory manage to fuse these two aspects of himself as a theological orator? First, he is aware of his classical training and his spiritual inclinations, as well as the potential conflict that could arise from combining the two. Second, he consciously tries to make his learning and “rhetoric” subordinated to “faith,” thus giving rhetoric a subordinate, yet complementary role in theology. He finds it useful, but its principles cannot override his basic theological convictions. In describing this subordinate status of rhetoric, he sometimes speaks of a selective use of rhetoric, where one uses only certain features of rhetoric that are compatible with the Christian faith, and sometimes of a Christianisation of rhetoric, where one would transform the pagan “rhetoric” into a Christian one.

Gregory talks of the subordination of his learning to the service of God when he talks about how he gave up his rhetorical career in Athens to pursue a godly life. In *De vita sua*, he describes how the overwhelming desire to lead a philosophic life (φιλοσοφείν) finally made him to leave Athens and “to cast everything before God, including my attempts at oratory (πόνους λόγων), like those who gave up their land to be grazed by sheep, or who threw their

⁵⁰⁸ Gr. Presb. *Vit. Naz.* 16.46-51; Daley, *Gregory*, 41.

⁵⁰⁹ Daley, *Gregory*, 45.

⁵¹⁰ Andrew Dauntton-Fear, “Can We Hear the Spoken Words of Gregory of Nazianzus?,” *Scrinium* 13, 1 (2017): 73, accessed on November 11, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/18177565-00131p08>; Kennedy, *Christian Emperors*, 217; Demoen, *Exempla*, 285.

⁵¹¹ Ludlow, *Art*, 224-32.

gold into the depths of the sea.”⁵¹² In the *Panegyric on his brother*, talking about how he himself gave up his rhetorical career, Gregory claimed that he possessed “oratorical renown” (τὰ περὶ λόγους φιλότιμοι) before he looked up to God “who is the true and highest Word (πρὸς τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον καὶ ἀνωτάτω), and gave all up to God, from Whom all things come, and took God for all in all.”⁵¹³ He also uses the language of ‘faith’ versus ‘reason’ to reinforce this understanding. In his *Theological Orations*, Gregory says that ‘Faith rather than reason shall lead us’ (πίστις δὲ ἀγέτω πλέον ἡμᾶς ἢ λόγος)⁵¹⁴ and ‘faith is what gives fullness to our reasoning’ (ἡ γὰρ πίστις τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς λόγου πλήρωσις).⁵¹⁵ He considers his discourse (λόγον) as the best and most precious offering (τὸ κάλλιστόν τε καὶ τιμιώτατον) which he could give to God as a gift using words to sing praises of the Λόγον.⁵¹⁶ Talking about Cyprian of Carthage, who was a rhetorician before becoming a Christian, Gregory says, “he put his education (παίδευσίς) to better use and made unreason (ἄλογία) bow to reason (λόγος).”⁵¹⁷ All these passages make it clear that Gregory considers rhetoric and hellenistic reasoning as different from Christian thinking, yet if submitted to faith and reason (λόγος), they could be used for godly purposes. Thus, as Young says, Gregory regards all the skills of rhetoric and philosophical learning as “the auxiliaries of Christian doctrine.”⁵¹⁸

In some other passages, he talks of how he transformed his secular *paideia* through his divine inclinations. In his *Oration 36*, he says that though his tongue was “trained in words” (παιδευθεῖσαν λόγοις), which Vinson interprets as pagan words, yet he “ennobled it by divine words (τοῖς θείοις ἐξευγενίσασαμεν), sweetening the bitter and undrinkable water of Marah with the tree of life (τῷ τῆς ζωῆς ξύλῳ).”⁵¹⁹ By calling the Greek *paideia* Marah, he acknowledges that it contains elements that are incompatible with Christianity, but at the same time there are certain things that can be redeemed by Scriptures and used by the Christian theologian. This christianisation of Greek *paideia* enables him to use it profitably in theology.

He also at times talks of selective use of *paideia*. In one of his poems he talks about his ideal in using pagan learning: to “avoid the thorns and pluck the rose” (τὰς ἀκάνθας φεῦγε καὶ ῥόδον δρέπου).⁵²⁰ Classical learning has both good and bad things in it, and one must discern

⁵¹² White, *Autobiographical Poems*, 30-31.

⁵¹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 7.1; NPNF, 230; SC 405.180-82.

⁵¹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.28; Norris, *Faith*, 242; SC 250, 164.

⁵¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.21; Norris, *Faith*, 260; SC 250, 224.

⁵¹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.2; PG 36.625B.

⁵¹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 145; SC 284.52.

⁵¹⁸ Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 103.

⁵¹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 36.4; Vinson, *Gregory*, 223; SC 318.248.

⁵²⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* II.2.8; PG 37.1581.

and use only that which is beneficial. Because there are thorns, Christians do not have to throw away the roses:

from secular literature we have received principles (or capacity) for enquiry and speculation (τὸ ἐξεταστικὸν τε καὶ θεωρητικὸν ἐδεξάμεθα), while we have rejected their idolatry, terror, and pit of destruction. Nay, even these have aided us in our religion, by our perception of the contrast between what is worse and what is better, and by gaining strength for our doctrine from the weakness of theirs.⁵²¹

Instead of denying the validity of secular education to Christians, he and Basil sought to use the method of inquiry offered by Greek *paideia*, rejecting all that was incompatible with Christian principles. A Christian should use *paideia* carefully as there are dangers in it to faith. This is clear in the following passage. He says,

When we abandon faith to take the power of reason as our shield, when we use philosophical enquiry to destroy the credibility of the Spirit, then reason gives way in the face of the vastness of the realities. Give way it must, set going, as it is, by the frail organ of human understanding.⁵²²

Reason does not stand a chance alone when it comes to theology—the discourse about God. Because God's nature and being is so vast, our fragile human minds should give way to faith. Ultimately, it is faith which will validate and further human reason. Ruether concludes her observation on Gregory's attitude to Greek philosophy by saying that he stands with other Christian apologists in opposing it.⁵²³ But Norris counters this by arguing that “Gregory is selective, eclectic, in his acceptance of Greek metaphysical and ethical views. He chooses under the guidance of biblical or traditional principles and texts.”⁵²⁴ For Norris, Gregory is not oblivious to his classical training; rather, he uses it in a thoughtful way, criticising it while enjoying its benefit for his theology as explained above.

This discussion of Gregory's identity as a theological orator and the way he used Greek *paideia* helps us to see how his mind works when he uses comparative images for God. He is a good orator who can speak well about anything using images drawn from “*einem bestimmten Repertoire*” of images through “*die breite Schultradition der Spätantike*,” as Kertsch points out.⁵²⁵ But he is a careful theologian, who is measured in his talk about God. He does not use

⁵²¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 43.11; NPNF, 399; SC 384.138.

⁵²² Gr. Naz. Or. 29.21; Norris, *Faith*, 260;

⁵²³ Ruether, *Gregory*, 167-74.

⁵²⁴ Frederick W. Norris, “Of Thorns and Roses: The Logic of Belief in Gregory Nazianzen,” *Church History* 53, no. 4 (1984): 458, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3166116>.

⁵²⁵ Kertsch, “Ergänzende Bemerkungen,” 303.

images for God indiscriminately to adorn his speech about God, but carefully thinks about their appropriateness. The way he uses his *paideia* demonstrated above shows that Gregory does not compromise on his faith, but curates the secular education he had to benefit his faith and ministry. Thus, this answers the question of why Gregory takes pains to deliberate on this issue of using the images for God. But to convey the mental images of God he has, and because of the need for embodied conceptions by human beings, he had to find a compromise and figure out how he would use his rhetorical skills to talk about God. This brings us to his use of rhetoric in ministry.

3.5.2. Christian Use of Rhetoric

Gregory's subordinate, Christianised, and selective use of his classical learning leads to a complex understanding of the Christian use of rhetoric in his long public ministry. He often accuses Eunomius and his followers of being lovers of riddles (αἰνιγματισταί), logic-choppers (τεχνολόγοι),⁵²⁶ and word jugglers (κυβισταὶ λόγων).⁵²⁷ He addressed his *Theological Orations* to those who are clever with words (Πρὸς τοὺς ἐν λόγῳ κομψοὺς).⁵²⁸ But at the same time, he uses similar logic and rhetoric in his polemic against them. This reflects the classical debate between philosophy and rhetoric, where Socrates uses philosophical rhetoric to argue against the sophisticated rhetoric in *Gorgias*. Mirroring these arguments, and following Plato's lead, Gregory argues for a Christianised use of rhetoric in theological discourses. Gregory claims that he does not care about appearances (τὸ δοκεῖν), but about the truth.⁵²⁹ Praising Maximus, Gregory says, "Come, you who have exposed the sham wisdom (τῆς νόθου σοφίας) that is based on words and seeks to charm through fancy language (δι' εὐγλωττίας), unable or unwilling to go beyond."⁵³⁰

As a theologian and a Christian leader, Gregory is concerned about the accuracy of theological expression and vocabulary, but he recognises the value of simple faith. Thus he does not hesitate to distinguish between the faith and expression of a fisherman and that of an Aristotelian. He emphasises the distinction between using reason, *paideia* and rhetoric to express faith and its use for rhetorical showmanship. In his third *Oration on Peace*, after talking about the trinitarian doctrine, he says, "This brief discussion has been offered in the interests

⁵²⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.21; SC 250.222-4; Norris, *Faith*, 260-61.

⁵²⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.1.

⁵²⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.1.

⁵²⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 36.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 226; SC 318.258.

⁵³⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 25.2; Vinson, *Gregory*, 158; SC 284.158.

of doctrine, not of controversy; as a fisherman would, not some precious Aristotelian; with spiritual, not mischievous intent; in a manner suited to the Church, not the market place; as a benefit (ὠφελίμως) to others, not as a rhetorical show (ἐπιδεικτικῶς).”⁵³¹

He claims that if rhetoric is used in the wrong way, it will destroy the faith. As mentioned earlier, it should be used as subordinated to ‘faith.’ While talking to Maximus in *Oration 25*, he distinguishes between the rhetorical skill which cannot be attained by all and hope which can be achieved by everyone. What makes someone Christian is not the skill of rhetoric but faith in Christ. He tells Maximus, “Be our instructor in our learning to fear one thing alone: seeing our faith dissolve in sophistics (ἐν τοῖς σοφίσμασιν). It is not terrible to be bested in argument (λόγῳ), since skillful argumentation (ὁ λόγος) is not a universal attainment. What is terrible is experiencing the loss of one’s God (ζημιωθῆναι θεότητα), because hope is universal to all.”⁵³²

Gregory’s solution to this potential danger in using rhetoric in theology is purification. As a general rule, he urges his audience to prepare their minds to receive his discourse. At the beginning of *Oration 40*, where he expounds the theology of baptism, he says, “It will be worth your while to apply your minds to what we say, and to receive our discourse on so important a subject not perfunctorily, but with ready mind.”⁵³³ As he attempts to Christianise the *paideia*, he also urges his listeners to purify themselves so that they can listen to the discourse on God profitably. In *Oration 45*, he urges his audience, “Therefore I pray you, cleanse your mind and ears and thoughts, all you who delight in such subjects, since the discourse will be concerning God, and will be divine.”⁵³⁴ In *Oration 39*, he says that now that we have cleansed our theatre, we can speculate (philosophise) about God.⁵³⁵ Whenever he talks about God, he talks about the purification of the theologian/preacher and the listeners.⁵³⁶ He uses the analogy of Moses going upon the mountain as a classical example of the need for purification in the revelation of God as mentioned in his theological epistemology.⁵³⁷ Only according to one’s purification can one approach the presence of God.⁵³⁸

But with the preacher and the audience purified, the discourse becomes effective and it touches the hearts and the minds of the listeners. In this state, a Christian can profitably use

⁵³¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.12; Vinson, *Gregory*, 140; SC 270.306.

⁵³² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.18; Vinson, *Gregory*, 173; SC 284.200-2.

⁵³³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.1; NPNF, 360.

⁵³⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.2; NPNF, 423; cf. 38.6.

⁵³⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.11.

⁵³⁶ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 4.12; 28.1

⁵³⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.2; cf. section 3.4.1.

⁵³⁸ For a thorough treatment of this theme, see Beeley, *Trinity*, 65-90.

λόγος. Here Gregory plays with the varied meanings of the term λόγος (word, discourse, reason, and Christ) and theologically justifies the use of discourse in the Christian context. When Emperor Julian banned Christians from teaching positions, Gregory was outraged and argued that words are common to all rational creatures and Christians should honour the Word with words.⁵³⁹ It is Christians who are more qualified to teach pagan words as Christians worship the true Word. In many places he says that using words well like a classical rhetor is the perfect tribute to the Word. He describes himself and his congregation as those ‘who strive eagerly after the Word through the word (διὰ λόγου πρὸς Λόγον σπεύδοντες).⁵⁴⁰ In his oration *On Theophany*, he invites his congregation to “delight or luxuriate in the word” (Ἐν λόγῳ τρυφήσωμεν) as they worship the Word.⁵⁴¹ In his Oration *On Pentecost*, he says that different people keep festivals differently but “to the worshipper of the word, a discourse seems best; and of discourses, that which is best adapted to the occasion.”⁵⁴² In the context of Julian’s ban on Christian teaching of classical learning and rhetoric, he says, “For not merely are thanksgivings in words most suitable unto that ‘Word,’ who, of all the names delights in this appellation... words which, though the common property of all rational beings, he begrudged to the Christians, as though they were his own exclusively.”⁵⁴³

As a theological orator, he justifies the right use of rhetoric in a way that honours the true Word. Despite all its pitfalls, a purified theologian and a purified congregation will together benefit from the use of rhetoric in theology. Thus, Gregory makes purification central to the profitable use of words and images in Christian context, as with the process of coming to know God. A purified preacher and a purified congregation have more chances of being benefiting from the God-talk. This beneficial use is more evident when we consider Gregory’s use of rhetoric in his own pastoral ministry.

3.5.3 Rhetoric and Pastoral Ministry

Gregory wanted to be an ascetic who would lead a truly philosophical life, but his ordination, which he hesitantly accepted under parental pressure, forced him into the very public ministry he wanted to avoid. But he did it, often complaining, in order to fulfil his obligations first to his father and later to the Church of Christ for the sake of defending and

⁵³⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 4.4-6. In a rhetorical wordplay, Gregory uses λόγος to refer to reason, the word, and Christ.

⁵⁴⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.1; SC 284.156.

⁵⁴¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.6; SC 358.112.

⁵⁴² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 41.1; NPNF, 378.

⁵⁴³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 4.4; King, *Julian*, 3.

establishing orthodoxy. In *Oration 1*, he reflects on the priesthood and justifies his temporary withdrawal to Pontus, as it was for self-examination and that this delay (βραδυτής) would be “more precious in God’s sight than the haste (ταχυτής) of others.”⁵⁴⁴ The first two chapters of *Oration 1* clearly illustrate how he was hesitant to accept the priesthood and how carefully he performed his duties.

Gregory’s hesitation stems from his superior understanding of the priesthood. He describes it in several words: it is a commission to ‘guide and govern souls (ψυχῶν ἡγεμονίαν καὶ προστασίαν),⁵⁴⁵ ‘guiding of man’ (ἄνθρωπον ἄγειν), described by Gregory as the ‘art of arts and science of sciences’ (τέχνη τεχνῶν, καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν),⁵⁴⁶ ‘providing soul with wings’ (περᾶσαι ψυχήν),⁵⁴⁷ ‘guarding that which is in His image’ (τὸ κατ’ εἰκόνα τηρῆσαι),⁵⁴⁸ ‘curing the souls’ (τὴν τῶν ψυχῶν ἰατροίαν),⁵⁴⁹ being ‘steward of the word’ (οἰκονόμος τοῦ λόγου)⁵⁵⁰, being ‘steward of the soul’ (τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς οἰκονόμου),⁵⁵¹ etc. By combining classical and biblical images, Gregory emphasises the immense responsibility that comes with ordination and the need to take it seriously. He confesses that “it is well... to shrink from causing, through our sin or suspicion, any offence (πρόσκομμα) or stumbling-block (σκάνδαλον) to the community” because God has placed him in a position of consequence through his ordination.⁵⁵² He knows that this should be taken seriously, as there will be punishment for those who slip in this responsibility. He condemns those who take up this ministry as “a means of livelihood, instead of a pattern of virtue, or an absolute authority, instead of a ministry of which we must give account.”⁵⁵³ This conviction did not change even after becoming a bishop; he believes that as bishop, his duties involve “the governance of souls, for teaching through word, deed, and example.”⁵⁵⁴

In this care for souls, teaching takes a significant role.⁵⁵⁵ Gregory takes his teaching ministry—primarily through preaching and public oration on festivals—seriously and considers “the distribution of the word (τὴν τοῦ λόγου διανομήν) as the foremost duty of a

⁵⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 1.1; NPNF, 203; SC 247.74.

⁵⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.78; SC 247.192.

⁵⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.16; SC 247.110.

⁵⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.22; SC 247.118.

⁵⁴⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.22; SC 247.118.

⁵⁴⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.16; SC 247.110.

⁵⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 3.6; NPNF, 229; SC 247.252.

⁵⁵¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.44; NPNF, 376.

⁵⁵² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.2; NPNF, 205; SC 247.88.

⁵⁵³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.8.

⁵⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 9.3; SC 405.306.

⁵⁵⁵ Dimitris Alexandrakis, “The Educational Philosophy of Saint Gregory the Theologian,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, nos. 3–4 (1994): 278–82, 285.

minister.”⁵⁵⁶ It is in this role that one can see the use of his *paideia* and oratorical skills in the service of God and his congregation. An essential aim in his teaching role is to encourage others to come closer to God, using words. He believes that “words are the most effective means of exhorting others to virtue.”⁵⁵⁷ He is concerned about the impact of the speech on his audience. In *Oration 32*, he asks rhetorically, “Now then, my brothers, how should I set about improving you? What words should I use to honor the martyrs whose festival we are celebrating today? What is the first thing I should say, or the most important? What would be most profitable to you spiritually?”⁵⁵⁸ It is evident from these passages that Gregory is concerned about spiritual growth and the doctrinal purity of the congregation. Furthermore, it is apparent that he perceives his words to be instruments with which to effect change in the character of the congregation.

In order to be effective in changing people, he wants his words to be infused with the power of the Spirit.⁵⁵⁹ In this respect, he differs from the classical orators. He knows that clever words will not have a lasting effect on the character of the people. He expresses this challenge by saying: “to me indeed it seems no slight task, and one requiring no little spiritual power, to give in due season to each his portion of the word, and to regulate with judgement the truth of our opinions.”⁵⁶⁰ That is why, as a Christian orator, he wants his words to be inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit. Only then will they have a clear impact on people and their lives. Talking about his repeated mention of the Trinity, he says,

I shall not only say the same words, but shall speak of the same things, trembling in tongue and in mind when I utter words about God, and praying that you, too, may experience this same laudable and blessed feeling. And when I speak of God, let yourselves be surrounded with a flash of that light which is both one and three...⁵⁶¹

The aim of his careful use of words is to make his congregation live a good Christian life. When he returns to his small congregation in Constantinople after Maximus attempted to be consecrated as a rival bishop, he asks the congregation what they were doing in his absence. He asks them specifically about their moral development and whether they were practising what he preached. He asks, “Have you lived so that ‘the tree may be known from its fruit,’ and the teacher recognised through his disciples.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.35.

⁵⁵⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 146.

⁵⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 32.2; Vinson, *Gregory*, 191-2.

⁵⁵⁹ Ludlow, *Art*, 238.

⁵⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.35.

⁵⁶¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.11.

⁵⁶² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 26. 5; Daley, *Gregory*, 108.

The whole idea is exemplified in the life of Cyprian, on whom Gregory delivered a panegyric. He describes him as an ideal pastor who shaped the character of his congregation through words. He says that Cyprian is someone who believed “that words play no small role in redoubling the courage of those who strip for competition in the arena of virtue.”⁵⁶³ Through words Cyprian “educated (παιδεύω) everyone’s character (ἦθος) and purified their ignorance of doctrines and embellished (κοσμέω) the lives of men and brought back the divinity of the royal and kingly Trinity to its original glory.”⁵⁶⁴ Talking about how Cyprian used words to guide his congregation even in exile, Gregory says that Cyprian “not being able to help with his spoken words (γλῶσση), helped them through his writings (γράμματι). How? He became a distant trainer (ἀλείπτῆς) who composed (συγγράφω) encouraging speeches and wrote stories (λογογραφέω) of piety.”⁵⁶⁵ Cyprian produced many martyrs through the words of his writings. Gregory says that “in this way equipping them to battle (ἄγών) with his words (λόγοι), he [Cyprian] raised many champions (ἀθληταί).”⁵⁶⁶

In Gregory’s theology and ministry, rhetoric or effective use of words is not just a convenient addition or ornamentation but fundamental to his task as a theologian and a bishop. We can further explore Gregory’s idea of teaching ministry through the two images he uses: a shepherd feeding his flock, which helps us to understand the role of preaching and thus rhetoric, and a craftsman moulding people into the image of God, which points to his purpose in using the comparative images for God specifically. Both of these aspects are important and indicate how his understanding of himself as a theological orator, which we saw in 3.5.1., was manifested in his pastoral context as he used words to honour the Word. This confirms the affirmation of Ludlow when she comments on the fourth-century authors in general:

Christ repaints or sculpts the soul through his words—that is, the words recorded in Scripture. These words are not just representational: they instruct, warn, comfort and persuade. Christian authors directly or indirectly present their own authorship as a continuation—the *mimesis*—of Christ’s salvific verbal work. In re-presenting the Gospel in their work, their purpose is to make the divine creative and re-creative work present to and alive in their audience. Their craft is both to craft words and—through those words—to shape souls.⁵⁶⁷

Gregory’s pastoral work, in this way, can be seen in the two images he uses to describe it: the shepherd and the pious inscriber. The image of the shepherd highlights how he viewed

⁵⁶³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.14; Vinson, *Gregory*, 152.

⁵⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.13; SC 284.68-70.

⁵⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.15; SC 284.72.

⁵⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 24.16; SC 284.74.

⁵⁶⁷ Ludlow, *Art*, 13.

the pastoral teaching office as feeding the flock, and the image of the pious inscriber highlights the use of comparative images in moulding the doctrine and character of the congregation.

3.5.3.1. Shepherd (ὁ ποιμήν)

The image of the shepherd, which is also a biblical image, represents pastoral ministry for Gregory in many ways. He uses the image of the shepherd to talk about Jesus,⁵⁶⁸ his father⁵⁶⁹, himself⁵⁷⁰ and other priests/bishops.⁵⁷¹ Describing his ordination by the hands of his father in terms of the shepherd image, he says to the congregation at Nazianzus, “He [Gregory’s father] offers you a Shepherd [ποιμένα referring to Gregory]; for this is what your Good Shepherd (Gregory’s father), who lays down his life for his sheep, is hoping and praying for, and he asks from you his subjects; and he gives you himself double instead of single, and makes the staff of his old age a staff for your spirit.”⁵⁷² He is also clear that his congregation are the sheep: “You will, I know, accept the candor of my observations because you are a sheep (πρόβατον) in my flock (ποίμνης), a holy sheep in a holy flock, a nursling (θρέμμα) of the great shepherd, guided aright from above by the Spirit, and basking in the same light of the holy and blessed Trinity that we do.”⁵⁷³ As a shepherd, he considers feeding his sheep as his primary duty, and this feeding is done primarily through teaching, i.e. using words.

He has clear boundaries when it comes to feeding the sheep. Talking about his small congregation in Constantinople, Gregory says, “My sheep hear my voice, which I have heard from the oracles of God, which I have been taught by the Holy Fathers, which I have taught alike on all occasions, not conforming myself to the opportune, and which I will never cease to teach; in which I was born, and in which I will depart.”⁵⁷⁴ Appreciating the merchants from Egypt for passing over many Arian churches in Constantinople to come to his little *Anastasia*, Gregory says, “you yourselves have come to be fed by us.”⁵⁷⁵ In *Oration 1*, he uses the image from *Psalms 23* and asks, “Do you on your side offer to God and to us obedience to your Pastors (τὸ ποιμαίνεσθαι), dwelling in a place of herbage, and being fed by water of refreshment?”⁵⁷⁶ At the end of his *Oration 2*, he prays that “God of peace... who is a shepherd to shepherds and

⁵⁶⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.98, 116.

⁵⁶⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 8.5; 16.2.

⁵⁷⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 26.2.

⁵⁷¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 26.4.

⁵⁷² Gr. Naz. Or. 1.6; NPNF, 204; SC 247.78. The reference to ‘good shepherd’ echoes Jesus’ title, but the text’s context points to Gregory’s father. cf. NPNF, 204na refers to Nicetas to justify this reading. See also PG 35.399n7.

⁵⁷³ Gr. Naz. Or. 17.8; Vinson, *Gregory*, 91; PG 35.975B.

⁵⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 33.15; NPNF, 333.

⁵⁷⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 34.7; NPNF, 336.

⁵⁷⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 1.7; NPNF, 204; SC 247.80. Note the singular ‘shepherd’, but NPNF translates it as plural.

a guide to guides (may guide us) that we may feed his flock with knowledge.”⁵⁷⁷ All these passages show that Gregory considered himself a shepherd and his congregation as sheep, while the preaching ministry is seen as feeding the flock.

He often admonishes the shepherds who take care of the flock for their own benefit. Talking to his congregation in Constantinople after Maximus’ attempt to be consecrated as bishop in Gregory’s absence, Gregory compares his shepherding ministry with other shepherds who only want position but not responsibility. He says, “I am not one of those shepherds who gulp down the milk and wrap themselves in the wool, who slaughter the sheep, oppress them with hardship and sell them off, saying, ‘Praise the Lord—we’re rich!’” They are shepherds for themselves, not for the sheep.”⁵⁷⁸

He also condemns those who feed the sheep but do not think about the character of the flock. He describes them as someone who wants a comfortable life while fulfilling only the minimum requirements of their responsibilities as shepherds. In a long, vivid passage admonishing his contemporaries, he says,

For in their case it is sufficient to render the herd or flock as stout and fat as possible; and with this object the neatherd and shepherd will look for well watered and rich pastures, and will drive his charge from pasture to pasture, and allow them to rest, or arouse, or recall them, sometimes with his staff, most often with his pipe; and with the exception of occasional struggles with wolves, or attention to the sickly, most of his time will be devoted to the oak and the shade and his pipes, while he reclines on the beautiful grass, and beside the cool water, and shakes down his couch in a breezy spot, and ever and anon sings a love ditty, with his cup by his side, and talks to his bullocks or his flock, the fattest of which supply his banquets or his pay. But no one ever has thought of the virtue of flocks or herds; for indeed of what virtue are they capable? Or who has regarded their advantage as more important than his own pleasure?⁵⁷⁹

For Gregory, the shepherds should have virtue and pass it on to the sheep. It is not enough to maintain the status quo, keep everyone comfortable, and benefit from it. In line with his understanding of the Christian use of rhetoric and his self-identity as a theological orator, he sees the aim of preaching—feeding the flock—as the production of virtue and character in the congregation. If this objective is not fulfilled, then the shepherd is not doing his duty properly.

⁵⁷⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.117.

⁵⁷⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 26. 4; Daley, *Gregory*, 107-8; For more on Maximus episode, see, Juana Torres and Ramón Teja, “A Dispute of Episcopal Legitimacy: Gregory Nazianzen and Maximus in Constantinople,” in *The Role of the Bishop in Late Antiquity: Conflict and Compromise*, eds. Andrew Fear, José Fernández Ubiña and Mar Marcos (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 13-30.

⁵⁷⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.9; NPNF, 207.

This shows that Gregory considers shepherds as those who help the congregation to reflect God through words, and to lead them to attain *theosis*, the union with God.

3.5.3.2. Pious Insciber (ὁ θεοσεβῆς καλλιγράφος)

Gregory's characterisation of the pastor as a pious inscriber, tasked with inscribing virtue and the true doctrine of God on minds, aligns with his overarching conception of the pastoral ministry as analogous to that of a craftsman engaged in his artistic endeavour. This aspect is directly relevant to our discussion of the images. Gregory uses several craftsman images, such as a sculptor (πλάστης in Or. 1.2), a carpenter (ὁ τεκτονικός in Or. 36.10), a painter (ζωγράφος in Or. 24.2 and ὁ γραφικός in Or. 36.10), and an inscriber (καλλιγράφος in Or. 40.44), to talk about his ministry and the pastoral ministry in general. He also calls his congregation a drawing tablet (πίναξ in Or. 24.2), the building (τὸ τεκτονηθέν in Or. 36.10), a painting (τὸ γραφέν in Or. 36.10) and a monument or inscription (στηλογραφία in Or.42.15). By using these images, Gregory aligns with other fourth-century writers who employ similar images to describe their ministries. As Ludlow has demonstrated, this usage is in line with their classical learning, which led them to consider themselves craftsmen in the tradition of classical craftsmanship; instead of a physical object, they worked on verbal compositions to give force to their theology and bring about change in their audience.⁵⁸⁰

Gregory highly values the craft of words and wanted them to have a permanent effect. Kennedy tells that some manuscripts of Gregory's invective against Julian contains the title *Stēliteutikoi* "as if they were to be inscribed on stone as a public indictment."⁵⁸¹ In fact, Gregory closes his invective with the same sentiment: "Here is a pillar (*stēle*) for you from me, higher and more visible than the Pillars (*stelai*) of Heracles... which will inevitably become known everywhere by everyone as it moves about... pillaring/pillorying (στηλιτεύειν) you and your deeds."⁵⁸² Putting this in context, Elm says, "the act of *stēliteuein* was a public proclamation of legal acts, and such public proclamations were the domain of those who ruled. On just such pillars in public places, Julian's edict and imperial letters had been posted, including... his famous decree excluding Christians from *logoi*."⁵⁸³ Here, Gregory is placing a "metaphorical

⁵⁸⁰ Ludlow, *Art*, 1.

⁵⁸¹ Kennedy, *Christian Emperors*, 221.

⁵⁸² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 5.42; Elm, "Inscriptions," 12.

⁵⁸³ Susanna Elm, "Gregory of Nazianzus's Life of Julian Revisited (*Or.* 4 and 5): the Art of Governance by Invective," in *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture, 284–450 CE*, eds. McGill, Scott, Cristiana Sogno, and Edward Watts, Yale Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 179.

counter-stele” proclaiming Julian’s anti-Christian deeds for posterity.⁵⁸⁴ Apart from this literary ambition and legacy, Gregory also longs for his words to have a permanent impact, particularly on his congregation. Returning to his congregation in Constantinople after his stay in the countryside, he says that he missed his congregation and confirmed his longing for their presence like a painter looking at his painting from a different vantage point.⁵⁸⁵ In *Oration 36*, he wants his congregation to be his ‘crown of boasting,’ reflecting the language of Paul in 1 Thess. 2: 19-20, and claims that they are the ‘product’ of his craftsmanship. He tells them: “be my defence against my inquisitors so that, just as craftsman (τεκτονικός) or painters (γραφικός) asked to explain their art can acquit themselves simply by pointing to what they have built or painted (τὸ τεκτονηθὲν ἢ γραφέν)—works are more powerful than words, as he [Paul] says—so I too by pointing to you shall rise above the calumnies.”⁵⁸⁶ He tells them that the mark of his ‘product’ is that they confess the Holy Trinity without adding or subtracting anything from it and that they conduct themselves in conformity with the true dogma.⁵⁸⁷ Later in his farewell address in *Oration 42*, he calls the people in his orthodox congregation of the *Anastasia στηλογραφία* (inscription/inscribed monument/painting) because they worship the Trinity, and tells them that they had become a symbol of Gregory’s theological achievement.⁵⁸⁸ All these artistic terms which Gregory used, when seen in the context of “inscriptions and tombstones” in late antiquity, point to his desire to shape his congregation into a lasting monument testifying to his achievements through his words.⁵⁸⁹

How does this craftsman go about his work? In a pastoral setting, the craftsman-minister works through teaching—crafting his words to have the right impact on his audience—and performing the sacraments so that they would be moulded into the image of God. Soon after his ordination, Gregory prays that God should renew him by the Holy Spirit and make him a good sculptor and a teacher (πλάστην ἀγαθὸν καὶ διδάσκαλον).⁵⁹⁰ Here, the office of teaching and that of a craftsman are joined together. In the oration *On Holy Baptism*, he talks at length about how the sacrament plays a role in this process. He compares the baptism with Moses receiving commandments from God, and compares the souls of his audience with tablets. He invites them to be formed into perfection by allowing him to write on their souls.

⁵⁸⁴ Elm, “Life of Julian,” 179.

⁵⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 24.2; Vinson, *Gregory*, 143.

⁵⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 36.10; Vinson, *Gregory*, 228.

⁵⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 36.10; Vinson, *Gregory*, 228.

⁵⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 42.15; for the association between the name of the church *Anastasia* and the trinitarian faith, see Soz. *h.e.* 7.5.

⁵⁸⁹ Elm, “Inscriptions,” 8.

⁵⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 1.2; NPNF, 203; SC 247.74.

He says, “Let us go within the cloud. Give me the tables of your heart; I will be your Moses, though this be a bold thing to say; I will write on them with the finger of God a new Decalogue. I will write on them a shorter method of salvation.”⁵⁹¹ Further, to those who have been wrongly indoctrinated, presumably not baptised in the triune name, he says,

If thy heart is written upon in some other way (ἄλλως ἐγγέγραψαι) than as my teaching demands, come and have the writing changed (μετεγγράφητι); I am not unskilled calligrapher (οὐκ ἀφύης καλλιγράφος) of these truths. I write that which is written upon my own heart (γράφων ἃ γέγραμμαι); and I teach that which I have been taught (διδάσκων ἃ καὶ μεμάθηκα), and have kept from the beginning up to these hoar hairs.⁵⁹²

In *Oration 2*, a passage we will look at a little later, Gregory compares this process to a seal making an impression on the wax.⁵⁹³ The self-understanding of Gregory as an inscriber, a skilled calligrapher who makes an impression on the souls of his audience, is very clear in this passage. This connects to his theological epistemology—in his contemplation and reflection, Gregory gains impressions of God as φαντασία, and in his ministry, he makes similar impressions on his congregation through teaching.⁵⁹⁴ The assumptions regarding the role of his words on the listeners are evident: Gregory doesn’t simply talk, but inscribes; the listeners don’t merely hear but are inscribed by what he speaks and are moulded as monuments who stand to proclaim the Trinity. We can see that he is conceptually and linguistically close to Plato here. Plato in *Theaetetus* writes about memory by comparing the mind to a block of wax and the gaining of knowledge to the impression made by a seal on the wax. Plato portrays Socrates talking to Theaetetus about this, saying,

Imagine, then, for the sake of argument, that our minds contain a block of wax, which in this or that individual may be larger or smaller, and composed of wax that is comparatively pure or muddy, and harder in some, softer in others, and sometimes of just the right consistency... whenever we wish to remember something we see or hear or conceive in our own minds, we hold this wax under the perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we might stamp the impression of a seal-ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image (εἶδωλον) remains; whatever is rubbed out (ἐξᾠλείφω) or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.45; NPNF, 376.

⁵⁹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.44; NPNF, 376; SC 358.300.

⁵⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.43.c.f. Ruether, *Gregory*, 92.

⁵⁹⁴ See section 3.4.4.

⁵⁹⁵ Pl. *Tht.* 191C-D; Francis M. Cornford, Trans., *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 2003), 121.

Here, Plato points to several themes which can be found in Gregory. Firstly, he talks about the condition of the mind in different individuals. The condition of the wax affects how the impressions are made. Gregory talks about the purity of the audience and wants them to cleanse their hearts before thinking and talking about God. Secondly, Plato talks about the impressions made through our sight, hearing and the activity of the mind. Gregory's attempts to use words, images and exhortations to contemplate on God seem to suggest that he also believes that good impression of God can be shaped in others. Similarly, Aristotle says in his *De Memoria* that memories are “produced by means of perception in the soul... as being like a sort of picture (ζωγράφημα)... for the change that occurs marks in a sort of imprint (τύπος), as it were, of the sense-image, as people do who seal things with signet rings (οἱ σφραγιζόμενοι τοῖς δακτυλίοις).”⁵⁹⁶ Summarising Aristotle's idea, Carruthers says, “This phantasm is the final product of the entire process of sense perception, whether its origin be visual or auditory, tactile or olfactory. Every sort of sense perception ends up in the form of a phantasm in memory.”⁵⁹⁷ This image of wax and impressions made by a seal is also found in Cicero and Quintilian.⁵⁹⁸

These classical examples with conceptual and linguistic echoes found in Gregory point to Gregory's adaptation of these ideas in his ministry. Gregory gets the original picture of God (φαντασία) through his contemplative and ascetic practices, and now, through his words and the use of images, he is impressing it on his audience so that they would have the right image and conception of God. In this process, the choice of words and images is vital. Carol Harrison also affirms that the spoken words are received by the listeners through sense perception and the impressions are encoded in the minds.⁵⁹⁹ For Carruthers, these images are primarily visual.⁶⁰⁰ In this context, Gregory's use of comparative images, despite their ineffectiveness to represent God, should be interpreted and understood.

Like Plato, Gregory not only discusses creating impressions on the mind but also the erasure of wrong ideas. He uses the exact word Plato used—ἐξάλειφω (to erase)—to talk about this. He considers that one part of the pastoral ministry consists of eliminating vice by erasing it and inscribing virtue. He says, a good pastor “must not only wipe out the traces of vice (τοὺς φαύλους ἐξάλειψαι) from his soul, but also inscribe better ones (τοὺς ἀμείνους ἐγγράψασθαι), so as to outstrip men further in virtue than he is superior to them in dignity.”⁶⁰¹ Later, he extends

⁵⁹⁶ Arist. *Mem.* 450A; Richard Sorabji, Trans., *Aristotle On Memory* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1972), 50.

⁵⁹⁷ Carruthers, *Memory*, 19.

⁵⁹⁸ Carruthers, *Memory*, 25.

⁵⁹⁹ Harrison, *Listening*, 69-72.

⁶⁰⁰ Carruthers, *Memory*, 32; Harrison, *Listening*, 77.

⁶⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.14; SC 247.108.

this analogy to doctrines and says in chapter 43 of *Oration 2*:

Accordingly, to impress the truth (καινοτομεῖν ἀλήθειαν) upon a soul when it is still fresh, like wax not yet subjected to the seal, is an easier task than inscribing (γράφειν) pious doctrine on the top of inscriptions—I mean wrong doctrines and dogmas—with the result that the former are confused and thrown into disorder by the latter... a soul to be written upon should be free from the inscription of harmful doctrines, or the deeply cut marks of vice: otherwise the pious inscriber would have a twofold task, the erasure (ἐξαλείφειν) of the former impressions and the substitution (μετεγγράφειν) of others which are more excellent, and more worthy to abide.⁶⁰²

Like Plato, Gregory thinks about the condition of the soul in which the inscription is made. A soul which is pure, free from heretical ideas, is like a clean wax that has not been inscribed. If it is untouched by heresy and wrong impressions about God, then it is easy to impress with the right doctrines. Gregory does not provide a clear idea of how this process works in his ministry, but he constantly points to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier, we noted that he prayed that the Holy Spirit should make him a good πλάστης (sculptor). He also has the understanding that only the Holy Spirit could make him a pious καλλιγράφος (calligrapher), just as only the Holy Spirit could bring about the permanent change that Gregory wants in his audience. He is also conscious that only the power of the Spirit can make his words effective. Addressing his father's congregation at Nazianzus after his ordination, he says that

the discourses which you were longing for; and of these not such as are vain and poured out into the air, and which reach no further than the outward ear; but those which the Spirit writes and engraves on tables of stone (γράφει τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ πλαξὶν ἐντυποῖ λιθίνας), or of flesh, not merely superficially graven, nor easily to be rubbed off, but marked very deep (εἰς βάθος ἐνσημαιομένους), not with ink, but with grace.⁶⁰³

Considering the spoken words as part of the temporal revelation of God, Harrison says that hearing of the sermon and orations are sensory inputs given to the souls. She interprets patristic homiletical practices and liturgy within this framework:

In order to restore and reform the image, early Christian theologians taught that God acted to address human beings in the realm into which they had fallen - the temporal, mutable realm of senses; that the images impressed upon the soul by His temporal revelation—the teaching and preaching of His Word, His apostles and preachers; the prayers, psalms, and sacraments of His church—could, in their turn, serve to impress,

⁶⁰² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.43; NPNF, 213-14; SC 247.146.

⁶⁰³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 1.6; NPNF, 204; SC 247.80.

inform, and reform the image of God, which has become obscured in the soul.⁶⁰⁴

This demonstrates that, as Ludlow claimed, Gregory also considered himself a craftsman moulding his congregation through his teachings and inscribing the right trinitarian doctrine on their hearts.⁶⁰⁵

3.5.4. A Wary Theologian

If pastoral ministry consists of erasing wrong doctrinal impressions and inscribing noble ones, then the inscriber ought to be trained and prepared. This training does not happen overnight, and the preparation doesn't end in a lifetime.⁶⁰⁶ Gregory contrasts the true theologian who has the correct ascetic inclinations and *paideia* with the “ready-made sages and chosen theologians” (τοὺς ἀθημερινοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τοὺς χειροτονητοὺς θεολόγους).⁶⁰⁷ A true theologian would be well-equipped (εὐσταλής), moderate (μέτριος), and so heavenly (οὐράνιος) that they proclaim the gospel more loudly by their character or way of life (διὰ τὸν τρόπον) than by their words.⁶⁰⁸ Because the character of the theologian is so vital to effective ministry, Gregory emphasises the need for long-term training in ascetical practices. Elm has pointed out that, in the historical context of noble men inheriting the episcopacy based on local patronage, Gregory establishes a new model of Christian leadership based on the classical “philosopher-physician” model.⁶⁰⁹ Gregory questions those who enter the priestly office in haste without much training. In a highly rhetorical passage, he asks,

Who can mould, as clay-figures are modelled in a single day, the defender of the truth, who is to take his stand with Angels, and give glory with Archangels, and cause the sacrifice to ascend to the altar on high, and share the priesthood of Christ, and renew the creature, and set forth the image, and create inhabitants for the world above, aye and, greatest of all, be God, and make others to be God?⁶¹⁰

In his first *Theological Oration*, he sarcastically asks the Eunomians, “why do you then try to mold (πλάσσω) other people into holiness overnight, appoint them theologians, and as it were, breathe learning into them and thus produce ready-made any number of Councils of

⁶⁰⁴ Harrison, *Listening*, 74.

⁶⁰⁵ Ludlow, *Art*, 1.

⁶⁰⁶ Alexandrakis, “*Educational Philosophy*,” 282-85.

⁶⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.1; SC 270.56.

⁶⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.69; SC 247.182.

⁶⁰⁹ Susanna Elm, “The Diagnostic Gaze: Gregory of Nazianzus’ Theory of Orthodox Priesthood in his *Orations 6 De Pace* and *2 Apologia de Fuga sua*,” in *Orthodoxy, Christianity, History/Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2000), 84-7.

⁶¹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 2.73; NPNF, 220.

ignorant intellectuals?”⁶¹¹ Ludlow considers that this passage illustrates Gregory’s self-understanding as a craftsman and his pastoral work.⁶¹²

In Gregory’s understanding, a person who desires to be a priest cannot do so easily and quickly. As Elm comments, the person desiring to be a priest needs a “period of training (*askesis*)” and “for Gregory, such a period of ascetic withdrawal is crucial since it alone permits full immersion into Scriptural exegesis, in its turn the sole basis for the priest as physician.”⁶¹³ Only after such prolonged preparation can one clean oneself of impurities and become holy, fully equipped to mould others. Ultimately, through moral living and contemplation, such a person gains divine impressions within him, reflecting God like a mirror. Only then could he inscribe that image in others’ souls. We have already dealt with Gregory’s use of the image of Moses ascending Mount Sinai to illustrate the purification needed by Christian leaders.⁶¹⁴ Using this image, Gregory illustrates that only Moses, because of his purity, was allowed to see the back parts of God. Talking about his desire in life, Gregory says that he wants “to live superior to visible things, ever preserving in myself the divine impressions pure (τὰς θείας ἐμφάσεις καθαρὰς) and unmixed with the erring tokens of this lower world, and both being, and constantly growing more and more to be, a real unspotted mirror of God and divine things.”⁶¹⁵ In another passage similar to this, he emphasises the need to shut off the impressions of the senses and allow godly impressions to be stamped. He says,

For nothing seems so important to me as for a person to shut off his senses (ἀσθησις; *impression of senses*), to take his place outside the flesh and the world—not to fasten on human realities unless it is completely necessary, and so, in conversation with himself and with God, to live above the level of the visible (ὕπερ τὰ ὁρώμενα), and always to bear the images (ἔμφασις) of divine things within himself in their pure state, free from the stamp (χαρακτήρ) of what is inferior and changeable (*misleading*).⁶¹⁶

Here we have seen that Gregory uses the same craftsman language to talk about the preparation of a theologian. Using the terms ἔμφασις and χαρακτήρ—the image language—Gregory points to the impression of God one gets when one moves beyond the sensible world to meditate on God without material intrusions. He is very much interested in the impressions one allows to shape the character of a person. This leads directly into his conversation about

⁶¹¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.9; Norris, *Faith*, 223.

⁶¹² Ludlow, *Art*, 225.

⁶¹³ Elm, “Diagnostic Gaze,” 86. cf. Susanna Elm, “Family Men: Masculinity and Philosophy in Late Antiquity,” in *Transformation of Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (London: Routledge, 2016), 282-84.

⁶¹⁴ cf. section 3.4.1.

⁶¹⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 2.7; NPNF, 206; SC 247.96.

⁶¹⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.1; SC 270. 56-58.

when and where one should do theology. Even if a theologian is purified and ready with the right impressions, he should consider other factors before embarking on his teaching. Here Gregory talks about the right time and the limits.

Gregory says that one cannot talk about God at any time and in any place. Again, this is similar to the craftsman preparing the conditions to suit the creation of artwork. In his first *Theological Oration*, where he explains this as his theological method, he asks,

What is the right time? Whenever we are free from the mire and noise without, and our commanding faculty is not confused by illusory, wandering images (τοῖς μοχθηροῖς τύποις καὶ πλανωμένοις), leading us, as it were, to mix fine script with ugly scrawling, or sweet-smelling scent with slime.⁶¹⁷

Because the goal of theology and pastoral ministry is to give the right impression of the doctrines and ultimately right understanding of the Divine, the theologian needs to work on it at the right time without other external distractions. Again, here also, the image language, points to the role of mental images on his mind and the rhetorical images he uses in his discourses. This idea strengthens the thesis of Ludlow that Gregory, along with other Cappadocians, considered his vocation as a craftsman and the space in which he worked as a workshop. Like a craftsman, he wants everyone to create the right time for talking about God, so that people will get the right impression and image of God. Here the theologian can convey the impressions he gained through his spiritual practices to others through words—preaching and teaching.

There is also a limit on what can be taught and discussed, because of the infinite nature of God as mentioned in the previous chapter.⁶¹⁸ Gregory says,

I do not trouble myself beyond this, lest I become just like those voices that go completely hoarse from shouting too loudly, or the eye that strains towards the rays of the sun. For the more fully, the more exactly one wishes to see, so much more one's sense-organs are damaged, and one is, in the end, deprived of the ability to see at all: the object of sight itself increasingly overcomes our ability to see, if we want to see everything, and not just what it is safe to see.⁶¹⁹

The two analogies—the voice going hoarse and eyes straining towards the sun—also point to the danger of trying to understand infinite God with our finite mind. It is not only possible but also not safe. He advises, “do you hear mention of a begetting? Do not trouble

⁶¹⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.3; Williams, *On God and Christ*, 27.

⁶¹⁸ cf. sections 2.4. and 2.6.

⁶¹⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.10; Daley, *Gregory*, 103-4.

yourself about how it occurs. Do you hear that the one who proceeds forth from the Father is the Spirit? Do not exercise your curiosity about the manner.”⁶²⁰

Gregory is cautious in his vocation. As a skilled inscriber, he knows the delicate nature of his work and how in wrong circumstances things can go wrong. He knows the high requirements and the danger lurking in his profession. He wants his colleagues and his congregation to know them clearly. That is why he describes himself as a wary theologian, or in his own words, “a not so rash or arrogant theologian” (τῷ μὴ θρασεῖ θεολόγῳ), and he asks others to rise up by their life and by purity to attain the Pure (διὰ πολιτείας, ἄνελθε· διὰ καθάρσεως, κτῆσαι τὸ καθαρὸν).⁶²¹

3.5.5. Limitations of Human Language

Though Gregory is a wary theologian who talks about God cautiously, talk he must, as talking about God is necessary to feed the flock and to inscribe the right doctrines in the hearts of the people. As a theological orator, he prefers to persuade people through his words rather than through coercion. It is words which should persuade others towards ascetic practices and contemplation of God. Here, too, Ludlow’s concept of a workshop gives a vivid picture. Gregory has gained a clear vision of God through his contemplation, and now he is trying to inscribe it on the hearts of the people, but he has to accomplish this task through language, using words and images. He claims that he could give persuasive speeches on any subject and use the language effectively to create the right impressions on the hearers. But when the subject matter is God, the limitations of language are obvious.

Speech about God is linked with how much one can comprehend God. As mentioned in 3.4, Gregory critiques the statement from Hermetic fragments which echoes the sentiment propounded by Plato in *Timaeus*: “to know God is hard (χαλεπός), to describe him impossible (ἀδύνατος).”⁶²² Gregory claims that this statement was used by pagan philosophers to cover up their ignorance, avoiding the test of whether or not a person knows about God by saying that it is impossible to describe God. By reversing the argument, he says, “No—to tell of God is not possible, so my argument runs, but to know him is even less possible. For language may show the known if not adequately (εἰ καὶ μὴ μετρίως), at least faintly (ἀμυδρῶς), to a person not totally deaf and dull of mind.”⁶²³ He categorically rules out describing God fully, making it

⁶²⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.10; Daley, *Gregory*, 104.

⁶²¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.12; SC 270.80.

⁶²² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.4; SC 250.106.

⁶²³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.4; Norris, *Faith*, 226; SC 250.108.

harder to know God. One can explain what one knows fully to some extent, but talking about what one does not know fully is impossible:

You are above all things and what other way can we rightly sing of you? How can words sing your praise when no word can speak of you? ... You alone are unutterable (ἄφραστος) from the time you created all things that can be spoken of. You alone are unknowable (ἄγνωστος) from the time you created all things that can be known. All things cry out about you...⁶²⁴

Countering Eunomius' construction of his theology based on the name of God, Gregory asks, "How shall I name you, the only nameless one (ἀκλήϊστον)?"⁶²⁵ In this context, we can only talk about certain aspects of God, i.e., the economy of salvation, not about the inner life of God. Talking about the incarnation and the impossibility of describing God becoming flesh in human words, he says that Christ is "above cause and language (ὑπὲρ αἰτίαν καὶ λόγον)—for there was no word higher than the Word (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦν τοῦ Λόγου λόγος ἀνώτερος)."⁶²⁶ Talking about the union of humanity and divinity in the incarnation, he asks, "How could man's mind ever grasp this union beyond all words?"⁶²⁷ Because of this, he considers that in speeches about God, he is "estimating great things in poor language" (μικρῷ λόγῳ τὰ μεγάλα σταθμώμενον).⁶²⁸ This understanding of God being above human language makes him call God ineffable. In *Oration 40*, describing God using the image light, he says, "God is Light: the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable (ἄρρητος), that can neither be conceived in mind (οὔτε νῶ καταληπτὸν) nor uttered with the lips (οὔτε λόγῳ ῥητὸν), that giveth life to every reasoning creation."⁶²⁹ This becomes more powerful and relatable when he uses it with the image of the sun. Clearly echoing the image of the sun, which we will explore more in 5.5.2, he says, God is the "light that cannot be gazed (ἀκατασκόπητον αὐγήν), yet overseeing all things, knowing everything from the earth to the abyss."⁶³⁰

This reflection on theological language leads him to extol silence as an ascetical virtue, as he does while explaining the unique and incomprehensible nature of God.⁶³¹ He claims that silence (σιωπή) is a gift from God and says that "for all speech is by nature loose and inadequate and, because it is open to challenge, vulnerable, and speech about God all the more so as the

⁶²⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.29.1-6; PG 37.507A; McGuckin, *Poems*, 7.

⁶²⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.29.13-14; PG 37.507A-8A.

⁶²⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.3; SC 358.108. cf. 37.4.

⁶²⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.11.11; PG 37.471A; McGuckin, *Poems*, 6.

⁶²⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.6; cf. 37.2.

⁶²⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.5; NPNF, 361.

⁶³⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.30.32-34; PG 37.510A.

⁶³¹ cf. section 2.4.

subject is more important and the emotion runs higher and the venture is more difficult.”⁶³² Talking about the Eunomians and their habit of introducing material elements into their discourse on the begetting of the Son, Gregory categorically insists that the begetting of God must be honoured by silence (θεοῦ γέννησις σιωπῇ τιμάσθω).⁶³³ Taking Paul as an example, Gregory says that since Paul went to the third heaven, he knew more about God, but yet Paul claimed that we only know in part (1 Cor. 13:9). It is because those heavenly mysteries “were ineffable (ἄρρητα) and let them be honoured by our silence (ἡμῖν σιωπῇ τιμάσθω).”⁶³⁴ Thus, Gregory says that even if we are like Moses or Paul who have heard ineffable mysteries of God, we can only speak of God (θεολογέω) with caution and hesitation due to our limited knowledge.⁶³⁵

Gregory recognises the humanness of language used in God-talk. So, when he talks about God, he does so with an apology. In a very vivid passage talking about the earthly ministry of Jesus, Gregory says apologetically,

I have fallen into human language (εἰς ἀνθρώπινα ῥήματα). For how can So Great be said of the Absolute, and how can That which is without quantity be called Such? But pardon the word, for I am speaking of the greatest things with a limited instrument (ὀργάνῳ βραχεῖ). And That great and long-suffering and formless and bodiless Nature will endure this, namely, my words as if of a body, and weaker than the truth. For if He condescended to Flesh (σάρκα), He will also endure such language (λόγον).⁶³⁶

Echoing the language of the parable, Gregory says that the sower could sow the Word in all kinds of mind but only the good and fertile mind will bear fruit (καρποφορεῖ δὲ ἡ καλή τε καὶ γόνιμος).⁶³⁷ This shows the importance of the status of mind and purity. The same theme recurs while speaking about God. In his oration *On Theophany*, he invites his congregation to purify themselves. He says,

That is where I shall begin; purify, I beg you, your mind and hearing and thinking, all of you who will enjoy luxuries such as these! For our discourse is about God, and therefore divine, and its purpose is that you may go on from here to share in true luxuries that will never come to an end. It will be at once both as full as possible and as concise as possible, so that it may not disappoint you by lacking substance, nor be distasteful through sheer excess.⁶³⁸

⁶³² Gr. Naz. Or. 32.14; Vinson, *Gregory*, 201.

⁶³³ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.8; SC 250.192.

⁶³⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.20; SC 250.140.

⁶³⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.3; SC 250.106.

⁶³⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.2; NPNF, 338; SC 318.274.

⁶³⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.2.

⁶³⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 38.6; Daley, *Gregory*, 119.

One can talk about God only in a purified state. Though Gregory can speak well as a rhetor, when the discourse is about God, he confesses that he is not in control of the oratorical process and seeks the audience's cooperation in preparing the ground. Gregory sums up the difficulty of a theologian in talking about God:

What shall we fear? And where then place our trust? Human reason? Speech? The things we hear? We oscillate precariously between three poles: the difficulty of forming a conception of him, the near impossibility of expressing it in words, and the still greater task of finding an ear to receive it in purity.⁶³⁹

This is why Gregory leans towards mystical contemplation of the Trinity rather than rational exposition of the doctrines. Norris says, "For him [Gregory] theology is fundamentally mysterious; it is not logical/propositional. Theology is a confessional endeavour best pursued through preaching and worship led by one who understands such things."⁶⁴⁰

3.5.6. *Phantasia* and Comparative Images

The immediate problem in Gregory's theology at this stage of the argument is whether to attempt to say anything at all about God, given the limitations of language and images because of its humanness and materiality. Here, Gregory's ideas should be understood in the context of 'negative theology,' which was developed in Greek thought: "the branch of epistemology which speculates on the value of negating the given as a means of grasping transcendent or hidden entities."⁶⁴¹ Gregory does use the alpha privatives, such as "unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτος),"⁶⁴² "ineffable (ἄρρητος),"⁶⁴³ "invisible (ἀόρατος),"⁶⁴⁴ "nameless (ἄκλήϊστον)"⁶⁴⁵ etc., to talk about God. However, he does not rely on them alone in his theology or in his polemic against Eunomius. He is very clear that the way of negation (*via negativa*) does not satisfy his theological curiosity. Therefore, despite the perceived limitations of the language, he demands positive statements about God alongside the use of negative theology. In the second *Theological Oration*, Gregory says, "It is much simpler, much briefer, to indicate all that something is not by indicating what it is, than to reveal what it is by denying

⁶³⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 32.14; Vinson, *Gregory*, 201.

⁶⁴⁰ Norris, *Faith*, 101.

⁶⁴¹ Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence II: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), 13.

⁶⁴² Gr. Naz. Or. 40.5.

⁶⁴³ Gr. Naz. Or. 28.20; 40.5; For more on the Platonic connection of this divine name, see, Mortley, *Silence II*, 16.

⁶⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 45.1; NPNF, 422-3; PG 36.624A.

⁶⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.29.13-14; PG 37.507A-8A.

what it is not.”⁶⁴⁶ Norris, in his commentary, connects this demand for positive statements about God to Gregory’s attempts at the end of the fifth *Theological Oration* “to find positive figures for the Trinity.”⁶⁴⁷ This leads us to the use of comparative images to talk about God and how they fill the gap that is left by the limitations of language. The comparative images are embedded in the discourses on God. As an orator, Gregory uses them frequently in his orations. As a theologian, he considers using them as the only way to create the right impressions in the minds of his listeners. Here, again, the concept of *phantasia* helps us understand how Gregory follows the classical rhetorical tradition in thinking and speaking about things that are not tangible.

Classical rhetorical tradition has the idea of the orator bringing the image he has in his mind through words to the minds of his hearers. Watson affirms that Cicero, Longinus and Quintilian are in agreement that a good orator possesses “the ability to present through words vivid images (which are also called *phantasiai*) to the mind’s eye.”⁶⁴⁸ Just like how *phantasia* helps in forming a mental conception of incorporeal things, as seen in 3.3.5, it is the bridge between what the orator has experienced or seen and the mental image developed in the hearers when the orator describes it. This fits Gregory’s theology very well, as he speaks of theological knowledge as a vision of God through contemplation and of his orations as a means to imprint that vision in his hearers’ minds. A passage from Cicero will show the similarity. Cicero, while talking about an ideal orator and how such an orator uses images to imprint the ideas, says,

the most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses (*sensu*), but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight (*sensum videndi*), and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes (*oculorum*), with the result that things not seen (*res caecae*) and not lying in the field of visual discernment are earmarked by a sort of outline (*conformatio quaedam*) and image (*imago*) and shape (*figura*) so that we keep hold of as it were by an act of sight things that we can scarcely embrace by an act of thought.⁶⁴⁹

Our mind can picture things which are conveyed through the senses, and images help the orator to convey invisible things to the minds of the hearers. Later, Neo-Platonism developed this idea of *phantasia* as a “middle between sense and intellect, and even a

⁶⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.9; Norris, *Faith*, 229.

⁶⁴⁷ Norris, *Faith*, 114.

⁶⁴⁸ Gerard Watson, *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (Galway: Galway University Press, 1988), 69; See also pages 64-70.

⁶⁴⁹ Cic. *De or.* 2.357-8; LCL 348.468-9.

welcoming of it as a possible help to a glimpse of a higher world.”⁶⁵⁰ Gregory adopts this idea, consciously or unconsciously, in his work as a theological orator. As a Theologian, he has the vision of God through contemplation, and as an orator, he conveys it through words and images to invoke a similar image in the minds of his hearers. In this way, as a pious inscriber, he imprints the right doctrine onto the minds of his congregation. Harrison captures this process well when she says, “An inward, silent, naked thought, or ‘word’, therefore assumes language as a sort of clothing, in order to appear outwardly, so that it might be seen or heard by the senses of another person, and then make an image in their mind, so that they, too, might be able to ‘see’ or ‘hear’ it.”⁶⁵¹

This is why, Gregory gives much attention to this process, as the use of the right image would stamp the correct impressions on the human mind. In his *Theological Orations*, he discusses the images at the end. He says, “For my part, though I have examined the question in private so busily and so often, searching from all points of view for an illustration (εἰκόν) of this profound matter, I have failed to find anything in this world with which I might compare the divine nature.”⁶⁵² But he can explain certain aspects of divinity through images, sometimes deliberately leaving others out: “There are, of course, many illustrations I could give (all of which I have resolved to leave out) drawn from natural history, about nature’s devices for the production of living things.”⁶⁵³

3.5.7. Pastoral context

In his pastoral ministry of teaching others about God, comparative images play a vital role for Gregory. Like the epistemological context, the pastoral context explains why Gregory thinks the comparative images for God are necessary even though they are inadequate. The comparative images are integral to the way human beings understand incorporeal things, and as a theologian, Gregory uses them to bring visible and tangible mental associations to the minds of his audience and aids them in their contemplation of God. It is through them that he stamps the right imprints on their soul and helps them to enlarge that vision of God. In this educational process, the theologian has a two-fold task: on the one hand, he tells people what they should not think about God, saying that one cannot conceive composition (σύνθεσις),

⁶⁵⁰ Watson, *Phantasia*, 96.

⁶⁵¹ Harrison, *Listening*, 75.

⁶⁵² Gr. Naz. Or. 31.31; Norris, *Faith*, 297-8; SC 250.338.

⁶⁵³ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284.

dispersion or diffusion (χύσις), or instability (ἄστατος).⁶⁵⁴ On the other hand, a theologian expands on the notion of God through *phantasia*. In this way, Gregory understood his task in the pastoral ministry as receiving a mental approximation of God through contemplation of scripture and nature, and conveying it through comparative images. Although he uses comparative images to imprint the right image of God in his congregation's minds, he confesses that none of the images captures the fullness of God he has in his mind. This is partly because of God's nature and partly because of the materiality of the images themselves as delineated in 2.6. But, as an embodied theologian, he has no other option but to use it in his pastoral ministry. Thus, the pastoral context helps us make sense of passages in which Gregory reluctantly employs comparative images for God.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Gregory uses comparative images to think and talk about God in response to the needs of embodied human existence and cognition. I also established a christological foundation—drawn from Gregory's understanding of incarnation, sacraments, and *theosis*—that justified the use of images for God, and epistemological and pastoral contexts that help us to understand it. Using these themes, I have demonstrated why Gregory uses comparative images for God drawn from the material realm, even though they are ontologically distinct and inadequate. These findings address the second research question posed in 1.2. The christological foundation in which Christ became flesh in the incarnation, in which material elements bring God's presence in the sacraments, and in which human beings are deified in salvation, justifies the use of comparative images of God. Though human embodiment needs material images, it is God who opens the way for a theologian to use them in God-talk. Gregory's epistemology and pastoral work show the necessity of comparative images for understanding the incorporeal God through sense impressions, both for a theologian and for those who listen to him when he conveys it through words. The underlying factor that connects all three themes is the embodied state of human beings. Human beings, as embodied creatures—unable to think in a purely ideal way—need material aid to know and speak about God. Comparative images help form those mental images about God by giving the human mind something to hold on to. In this way, the human mind can grapple with the mystery of the Trinity, which is beyond reasoning, through contemplation, without exhausting it.

⁶⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.33; SC 250.340.

Now that we have systematically explored the theoretical side of Gregory's use of comparative images for God through a theological-ontological framework, christological foundation, epistemological and pastoral contexts across the two chapters, and connected this issue with all the relevant theological themes, we can turn to the images Gregory uses for God and examine them in the light of these themes.

Part II: Comparative Images and Gregory of Nazianzus

Having explored the theoretical framework for understanding Gregory's use of comparative images for God, now we can turn to his actual use of the images. In the next two chapters, I will analyse the nine comparative images Gregory used for God, situating them within the theological controversies of Gregory's time and connecting them to other theological themes, to show how his treatment of comparative images is consistent with his broader theological concerns. Where necessary, I will juxtapose the ideas and images used by Gregory's opponents with Gregory's to show how these images became central to Gregory's theological imagination to counter his opponents' teachings. I will thus establish the function of these comparative images within his polemical, rhetorical, and theological context. In analysing each image, I will consider its use by earlier theologians, especially, but not exclusively, in the Arian controversy, to show how Gregory uses some comparative images already embedded in Christian theological and polemical discourse, but in his own distinctive way, as Hanson suggests.⁶⁵⁵ Ultimately, I will argue that Gregory uses comparative images as a theological tool to revive his audience's theological imagination. And this will set the stage for reconciling the theoretical framework I established in Part I and his actual use of comparative images for God. Chapter 4 will explore 'honour' images, while Chapter 5 will explore 'relational' images.

⁶⁵⁵ Hanson, "Transformation of Images," 274-78; See section 1.2.

Chapter 4: The Honour Images

4.1. Introduction

Gregory uses the images of ‘Adam-Eve-Seth,’ ‘father-son,’ and ‘pearl’ to emphasise the fact that each divine person in the Godhead should be accorded equal honour because of their identical nature. The Adam-Eve-Seth image addresses the question of how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit could be considered to have an identical nature and the same honour. The Father-Son image explores how cause and effect can be accorded the same honour without introducing hierarchy. The image of the pearl illustrates that the honour of each person in the Trinity is intertwined with that of the others. Dishonouring one would hurt the others, so they should be honoured together. These comparative images are used in response to the subordinationalist image of the tool employed by Eunomius in his Christology and the arguments of the Pneumatomachians, who did not accept the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

The theme of honour played an important role in the theology of Eunomius and his followers. This stemmed from Eunomius’ understanding of the distinct natures of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, based on their different origins and the consequent different names assigned to each. At the beginning of his *Liber Apologeticus*, he sets out the principle of hierarchy based on origin. He describes God as someone who was “brought into being neither by his own action nor by that of any other” and if anything else brought Him to existence, then that thing existed before God and thus it would deserve to have the dignity of Godhead (τὸ τῆς θεότητος ἔσχεν ἀξίωμα).⁶⁵⁶ In logical terms, the cause is superior in nature and honour compared to that which it has caused. Because God existed before all things, the proper name that designates the essence of the Father is unbegotten (ἀγέννητος). This term, unbegotten (ἀγέννητος), identifies Father as the pre-eminent uncaused Being. Naturally, the Son and the Holy Spirit are inferior to him. If this name ‘unbegotten’ accurately talks about God’s nature, then it is through this name that one could honour the Father. In his *Expositio Fidei*, Eunomius says that he believes in the one and only true God (εἰς τὸν ἕνα καὶ μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν).⁶⁵⁷ When he uses the term unbegotten (ἀγέννητος) for the Father, he does not honour God by a false name (οὐκ ἐψευσμένη φωνῇ),⁶⁵⁸ nor in name alone which is invented by human thinking

⁶⁵⁶ Eun. *Apol.* 7; Vaggione, *Works*, 40-1.

⁶⁵⁷ Eun. *exp. fid.* 2; Vaggione, *Works*, 150.

⁶⁵⁸ Eun. *exp. fid.* 2; Vaggione, *Works*, 150.

(ἐπίνοια), but in truth (κατ' ἀλήθειαν).⁶⁵⁹ He distinguishes between the names given to God by human conception through discursive reasoning and ἀγέννητος which is direct knowledge of who God is. Thus, ἀγέννητος refers to the reality and points to the essence of God accurately. Then Eunomius moves on to claim that the Son is begotten (γέννημα) and therefore different from the Father. The son can be called “the only begotten God” (ὁ μονογενὴς θεός) but he is different from “the one and only true God” (εἷς καὶ μόνος ἀληθινὸς θεός).⁶⁶⁰ The Father retains the preeminence (ὑπεροχή) as he is the cause (αἴτιον) of the Son. He also emphasises the order (τάξις) and the hierarchy of nature (φύσις).⁶⁶¹ In this way, Eunomius feels that the preeminence and the monarchy (μοναρχία) of the Father are preserved.

But for Gregory and the pro-Nicenes, honour should be accorded to all three persons of the Trinity as they are equal in nature and dignity. This theme is elaborated especially in the image of the pearl and when Gregory talks about the implications of the Eunomians' favorite image, which will be discussed in 4.2. and 4.6., the image of the tool. But here, just to demonstrate the importance of the theme of honour in the fourth-century theological context, a passage against Apollinarianism could be cited. Gregory in *Oration 22*, talking about the mixture of divine and human in Christ, says that Apollinarians have

brought dishonour (ἀτιμάζω) to both God and man. God is dishonoured by the view that he was not even born for us at all nor nailed to the cross, and, obviously, was neither buried nor arose, as some perverse ‘lovers of Christ’ have thought, but receives honor only here on earth, where honor is in reality dishonor. The result is that he is cut—or combined—into two sons. Man, on the other hand, is dishonored by the view that he was not fully assumed, or honored but was rejected and estranged in his greatest attribute, the greatest attribute in man’s nature being precisely his divine image and intellectual faculty.⁶⁶²

This passage demonstrates how Gregory, like Eunomius, is concerned about the proper honour that should be accorded to Christ. This chapter will demonstrate that honouring God in an appropriate way is important to all the parties involved in theological debate of the fourth century.

4.2. An Eunomian Subordinationist Image: the Tool (τὸ ὄργανον)

Eunomius uses the term ὑπουργὸν τελειότατον (perfect servant) to describe the Son and

⁶⁵⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 8; Vaggione, *Works*, 40.

⁶⁶⁰ Eun. *exp. fid.* 2-3; Vaggione, *Works*, 150-2.

⁶⁶¹ Eun. *Apol.* 25; Vaggione, *Works*, 66.

⁶⁶² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 22.13; Vinson, *Gregory*, 126-27.

describes the Holy Spirit as ὑπηρέτης (servant) of the Son.⁶⁶³ This echoes the conception of Arius, who, according to Alexander of Alexandria, had said that the Son “was made for us, so that through him we could be created as through an instrument” (δι’ ἡμᾶς γὰρ πεποιήται, ἵνα ἡμᾶς δι’ αὐτοῦ ὡς δι’ ὀργάνου κτίσῃ ὁ Θεός).⁶⁶⁴ For both Eunomius and Arius, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ‘instruments’ for fulfilling the Father’s will. Eunomius uses scriptural phrases to argue for the distinct natures of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He says that when the scripture says ‘through whom all things’ (δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα), it illustrates the instrumental capacity of the Son, and when it says ‘from whom all things’ (ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα), it points to the Father as the source.⁶⁶⁵ For Eunomius, these phrases not only show differences in function but also distinguish the nature of the Father and the Son. Basil explains the implication of this argument by saying that “for they wish ‘from whom’ (ἐξ οὗ) to designate the creator (τὸν δημιουργόν) and ‘through whom’ (δι’ οὗ) to designate the servant or the instrument (τὸν ὑπουργόν ἢ τὸ ὄργανον).⁶⁶⁶ Eunomius also argues that the phrase ‘in whom’ (ἐν ᾧ) describes the Holy Spirit as we are supposed to worship God ‘in spirit’ (ἐν πνεύματι).⁶⁶⁷ Basil comments that the Eunomians use the phrase ἐν ᾧ to indicate that the Holy Spirit is the place and time for the creation.⁶⁶⁸ Basil accuses Eunomians of using this way of reasoning to equate the Son with a lifeless instrument (ἄψυχον ὄργανον).⁶⁶⁹ Basil summarises the implications of this argument in Eunomians by saying,

What, then, does this logic-chopping come to? The nature of the cause (αἴτιον) is one thing, that of the instrument (ὄργανον), another, and that of the place (τόπος), still another. Therefore, the Son is different in nature from the Father, just as the instrument is from the craftsman (τὸ ὄργανον τῷ τεχνίτη), and the Holy Spirit is different insofar as place or time are different in nature from the instruments or those who use them.⁶⁷⁰

Gregory, in his *Theological Orations*, echoes the sentiment of Basil by writing of the Eunomians that they “make an artificial system of the divinity, saying that ‘from whom’ applies to the Father, ‘through whom’ applies to the Son and ‘in whom’ applies to the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷¹ Above all, this distinction leads to the discussion of honour and dishonour. Gregory accuses

⁶⁶³ Eun. *Apol.* 27; Vaggione, *Works*, 70.

⁶⁶⁴ Socr. *h.e.* 1.6.12; PG 67.48A.

⁶⁶⁵ Eun. *Apol.* 5; Vaggione, *Works*, 38.

⁶⁶⁶ Bas. *Spir.* 2.4; SC 17.262.

⁶⁶⁷ Eun. *Apol.* 25; Vaggione, *Works*, 68.

⁶⁶⁸ Bas. *Spir.* 3.5; SC 17.266.

⁶⁶⁹ Bas. *Spir.* 3.5; SC 17.266.

⁶⁷⁰ Bas. *Spir.* 4.6; Stephen Hildebrand, trans. *On the Holy Spirit* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 33; SC 17.270.

⁶⁷¹ Gr. *Naz. Or.* 31.20; Norris, *Faith*, 290.

them of dishonouring not only the Son and the Holy Spirit, but also, by logical necessity, the Father, whom they wish to honour above all existing beings. However, before we examine how Gregory countered the ὄργανον image in Eunomius, we should first consider the honour images which counter this Eunomian argument, but without mentioning it explicitly.

4.3. Adam, Eve and Seth

Gregory uses the Adam-Eve-Seth image to illustrate that differing originations do not affect the equal nature and honour of the three persons in the Trinity. In the fifth *Theological Oration*, he counters various questions raised by his opponents regarding the status of the Holy Spirit: Is the Holy Spirit ingenerate or begotten? If begotten, does the Father have two sons?⁶⁷² If the Holy Spirit is not the Son, then what does the Spirit fall short of compared to the Son to be different from the Son? What should be added to make the Spirit, the Son?⁶⁷³ Aside from these questions, the most important challenge of his opponents was this: “present [us]... with two things from the same source, one a Son, the other not a Son but, despite that, of the same substance, and I get God plus God.”⁶⁷⁴ In the fourth century, these questions were typically posed by the Pneumatomachians, but Norris links them to Eunomius.⁶⁷⁵ It is most likely that Gregory is countering the arguments of both groups. These questions make him launch into a discourse on how it is difficult to find comparative images to illustrate God’s life, but, at the end, he presents the image of Adam-Eve-Seth, the first human family, to explore how different persons with different origins could be considered equal. Adam’s creation by God’s hand, Eve from a portion of Adam, and the birth of their child, Seth, through sexual intercourse, provide Gregory with unique and rich material to prove this point.

The use of Adam to talk about Christ is in the scripture. Luke calls Adam the Son of God (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), echoing the designation previously given to Jesus to emphasise that he was the first human being formed by God, not through normal human procreative processes.⁶⁷⁶ Paul contrasts Adam with Christ by calling Christ the last Adam (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ), together with an extended discussion of the works of Christ.⁶⁷⁷ We find examples of 'Adam' or 'Adam-Seth' used as a christological image in patristic literature, based on the reference to the birth of Seth in Genesis, where it is said that Adam had Seth in his own likeness and image (κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν

⁶⁷² Gr. Naz. Or. 31.7.

⁶⁷³ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.8.

⁶⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 283.

⁶⁷⁵ Norris, *Faith*, 191.

⁶⁷⁶ Luke 1:35; 3:38.

⁶⁷⁷ 1 Cor 15:45.

αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ), which is echoed later in the description of the Son as Father’s image in the New Testament.⁶⁷⁸ Athanasius used this Adam image in his polemics against the Arians to illustrate the equality of humans and, by extension, the equality of the Father and the Son. He says, “Adam was created alone by God alone through the Word; yet no one would say that Adam had any prerogative over other men.”⁶⁷⁹ Soon after this positive comparison, Athanasius uses the same image to show its negative side, discussing the difference between human and divine generation. Explaining the reason for the use of the word ‘*homoousios*’ in the council, Athanasius says that although the scripture says that Seth had the likeness of Adam, Seth was separated physically from Adam as they were two different individuals. But in the case of Christ, the Council declared the Son to be “one in essence” with the Father because “the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but also inseparable from the essence of the Father.”⁶⁸⁰ Thus, in Athanasius, there are arguments for the right and wrong use of the same image. Gregory’s contemporaries, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, use the image of Adam as a christological image, as we will see a little later.⁶⁸¹ However, only Gregory offers a fully developed trinitarian illustration using Adam. Although Golitzin claims that the reason for this trinitarian image’s neglect in scholarly discussions is that it appears only once in the patristic literature (i.e., in Gregory), we find it in Pseudo-Athanasius and John of Damascus, probably due to Gregory’s influence.⁶⁸²

In the *Theological Orations*, Gregory uses this image to demonstrate that, despite their different names and origins—the Father is unoriginate, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father—the same nature could exist by positing the image of the first human family. He says,

Indeed two things of the same substance, one an offspring, the other not an offspring, can be from the same source—an example which is rather more to the point at issue. I will mention one case, well known to everybody, from human history, before passing on to another subject. What was Adam? Something molded by God. What was Eve? A portion of that molded creation. Seth? He was the offspring of the pair. Are they not, in your view, the same thing—the molded creation, the portion, and the offspring? Yes,

⁶⁷⁸ Gen 5:3; Col. 1:15; cf. Ath. *decr.* 20.

⁶⁷⁹ Ath. *decr.* 8; NPNF, II, Vol. 4, 155.

⁶⁸⁰ Ath. *decr.* 20; NPNF, II, Vol. 4, 164.

⁶⁸¹ Bas. *Eun.* 1.15; FC 122.114-5; Gr. Nyss. *fid.*

⁶⁸² Alexander Golitzin, “Adam, Eve, and Seth: Pneumatological Reflections on an Unusual Image in Gregory of Nazianzus’s ‘Fifth Theological Oration,’” *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 3 (Summer, 2001): 539; Ps. Ath. *qu. al.* 15; PG 28.785C; Jo. D. *f.o.* 8.

of course they are. Were they of the same substance? Yes, of course they were.⁶⁸³

This argument is repeated, along with this image, in *Oration 39* and in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*. By using this image to argue especially for the divinity of the Holy Spirit, Gregory is making a traditionally christological image into a trinitarian one.

With respect to the Holy Spirit, Eunomius' arguments echo the ones Gregory is countering in using this image. Eunomius affirms that the Son is the 'only begotten' and he 'has no brother begotten like him.'⁶⁸⁴ Thus, the Holy Spirit is not "identical with the only begotten."⁶⁸⁵ This distinction between the Son and the Spirit helps him to argue for a different nature and rank for the Holy Spirit. Eunomius' argument for the subordinationalistic position stems from his view on his categorisation of beings according to their origination.⁶⁸⁶ Because the Father is unoriginate and unbegotten, he is superior and at the top of the hierarchy, and because the Son is begotten, he is inferior to the Father. The Holy Spirit "was brought forth by the Only God through the Only-begotten...being the first and most mighty work of the Only-begotten."⁶⁸⁷ If we use the image of the tool, then the Father begot the Son to be a servant and the Holy Spirit through the Son to be a servant of the Son. As he defined 'unbegotten,' 'begotten,' and 'procession' as different essences, Eunomius was able to present his hierarchical view of these realities. If one equates the 'begotten' and 'procession' as the same thing, that would lead to a ridiculous situation of God having two Sons or if one claims that the Son begets the Holy Spirit, then the Father would be a grandfather.

Gregory responds to this Eunomian idea, arguing that different modes of origination do not imply different essences or substances of being, but only the ways in which they came into being. In *Oration 39*, he was very explicit about this,

And those who suggest that "unbegottenness" and "begetting" designate natures of those who are called "God" in an equivocal sense—perhaps they will argue that Adam and Seth are different in nature from each other, for the one is not from flesh, but was a formation of God, while the other was from Adam and Eve! There is one God, then, in three, and the three are one, as we have said.⁶⁸⁸

Here, Gregory uses only Adam and Seth, but shows the different ways they came into being to make his point. This is a common argument among the Cappadocian fathers. Gregory of

⁶⁸³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10-11; Norris, *Faith*, 284.

⁶⁸⁴ Eun. *exp. fid.* 4; Vaggione, *Works*, 157.

⁶⁸⁵ Eun. *Apol.* 25; Vaggione, *Works*, 69.

⁶⁸⁶ See section 2.3.1.

⁶⁸⁷ Eun. *exp. fid.* 4; Vaggione, *Works*, 157.

⁶⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.12; Daley, *Gregory*, 133.

Nyssa uses ‘Adam’ and ‘Abel’ as an example to point out the common humanity they share, just like Gregory of Nazianzus. He says,

As for those who say that the begotten is in its nature unlike the unbegotten, let them learn from the example of Adam and Abel not to talk nonsense. For Adam himself was not begotten according to the natural generation of men; but Abel was begotten of Adam. Now, surely, he who was never begotten is called unbegotten, and he who came into being by generation is called begotten; yet the fact that he was not begotten did not hinder Adam from being a man, nor did the generation of Abel make him at all different from man's nature, but both the one and the other were men, although the one existed by being begotten, and the other without generation. So in the case of our statements as to the Divine nature, the fact of not being begotten, and that of being begotten, produce no diversity of nature, but, just as in the case of Adam and Abel the manhood is one, so is the Godhead one in the case of the Father and the Son.⁶⁸⁹

Nyssen clearly spells out the implication of the Adam-Abel image for the natures of the Father and the Son. Similarly, Basil argues that different origins do not point to the essence of any being. It only points to the manner in which things came to be. He asks whether that points to the manner Adam was formed or his substance and further elaborates his argument by using ‘Adam’ as an example:

Whoever says that being ‘without origin’ is the substance equates himself with someone who, when asked, “What is the substance of Adam? What is his nature?” replies that he is not formed from the copulation of a man and a woman, but rather by the divine hand. The recipient of such reply might object: “I am not seeking the manner of his subsistence but rather the material substrate of the man himself.”⁶⁹⁰

The common Cappadocian argument is that by connecting the origins and the essence, Eunomians are being illogical and show their ignorance, as Norris says that this demonstrates “lack of learning among the Eunomians.”⁶⁹¹

In Gregory of Nazianzus, this difference in origins becomes a theological argument for the distinction of persons. He considers the ‘ungenerate,’ ‘begotten,’ and ‘procession’ to become the distinct properties (ἴδιος) of each person in the Trinity.⁶⁹² Thus, the way the Father is unoriginate and the way the other two persons are originated become their unique characteristics, despite being the same in nature. I will return to this later in detail in Chapter 5.

⁶⁸⁹ Gr. Nyss. *fid.*; NPNF, II, vol. 5, 338.

⁶⁹⁰ Bas. *Eun.* 1.15; FC 122.114-5.

⁶⁹¹ Norris, *Faith*, 195.

⁶⁹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16.

The ultimate aim of this image is to encourage his audience not to dishonour the Trinity by differentiating them based on their origins. In his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, he says,

His wife and Seth came into existence from Adam, the one progenitor, she cut from Adam's side and he the offspring of a couple joined by the laws of marriage. Eve was not begotten, while Seth was, yet both were equally human. With these in mind, refrain from dishonouring God in anyway, bearing in front of you this analogy drawn from below.⁶⁹³

Here, Gregory offers this illustration as guidance for thinking about God in an honourable way. Then, in the following lines of the poem, he continues to talk about God's single nature, which is to be worshipped equally.

Golitzin considers this image "explicitly related to the question of the Spirit's origin" and connects it to the filioque controversy by equating Adam with the Father, Eve with the Spirit, and Seth with the Son.⁶⁹⁴ Thus, he changes the Western *taxis* of the Father, Son and Spirit to the Father, Spirit and the Son, which he claims is based on ancient Syriac tradition that gives greater importance to the Spirit. Although he is correct in arguing that the role of the Spirit in begetting the Son is not as frequently discussed as the role of the Son in the procession of the Spirit in scholarly and ecclesiastical discussions, Gregory is not using this image to discuss the origins of the Spirit. Bergmann counters this type of argument in this image when he says, "An inappropriate understanding of Gregory's metaphor here might ask whether he is not saying that the Son is begotten by both the Father *and* the Spirit, or whether he is not trying to say something about the origins of hypostases. Such was not his intention, however, since he was concerned only with adducing a biblical example demonstrating that a diversity of origins does *not* preclude coessentiality among human beings."⁶⁹⁵ Gregory is also not assigning any gendered role for any persons of the Trinity as Golitzin alludes. Again, as Bergmann comments, "That Eve functions in this analogy as the Spirit and the child Seth as the Son does not bother Gregory. He rejects the charge that he is saying something about gender-specific characteristics within the Godhead by insisting that he is *not* applying material or physical characteristics to God."⁶⁹⁶ The way Gregory uses this image in all three places in his corpus suggests an argument for equal nature and honour for three distinct beings, despite their different origins and does not support Golitzin's argument.

Several points emerge in linking this comparative image with the discussion in Part I.

⁶⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.37-41; Sykes, *Poemata*, 12-13.

⁶⁹⁴ Golitzin, "Adam," 544.

⁶⁹⁵ Bergmann, *Creation*, 84.

⁶⁹⁶ Bergmann, *Creation*, 85.

Gregory's warnings to his audience of the unworthiness of this image because it is taken from the created order, and it may introduce material thinking into the theological imaginations, are linked to the theological and ontological framework discussed in Chapter 2. In the poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, he points out that this analogy is drawn from below and thus is inadequate.⁶⁹⁷ He also fears that material thinking could distort the point he is trying to make, and like all other images, this too cannot be stretched beyond a certain point. After explaining the image, in *Oration 31*, he says, "I say this without implying molding or division or anything bodily as regards the Godhead—no quibbler shall get a grip on me again here."⁶⁹⁸ Because of this danger of the intrusion of materiality, though the scripture says Seth was begotten in the likeness and image of Adam, Gregory affirms that the Son, as image of the Father, is "indistinguishable from its original to a higher degree than Seth from Adam and any earthly offspring from its parent."⁶⁹⁹ Sykes points to another defect of this image. He says that one cannot apply this analogy slavishly to the Trinity, because "Adam, for instance, is anterior to Eve and both are anterior to Seth. Such temporal distinctions are meaningless and totally misleading if applied to the Godhead."⁷⁰⁰ The implied temporal gap should not be imagined when talking about the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit.

The usage of this image also shows Gregory's concern to validate the arguments used for the trinitarian doctrine. When he introduces this image in *Theological Orations*, it was preceded by a discussion of the futility of using images from the world to speak of God, as God's nature is unique and unparalleled, and this endeavour is like "seeking the living among the dead."⁷⁰¹ Yet, Gregory offers this image as he wants to counter the allegation that there is no illustrative support for his arguments expressed at the beginning of the chapter. The demand for illustrations from Gregory's opponents to prove his theology shows how the use of images in discourses were viewed in the fourth-century context: it is the sign of good education. After denying the possibility of any comparison, Gregory offers a few examples drawn from mythology and Aristotle to demonstrate that there is not only one way of producing offspring in the world. He says, for example, "identical offspring can also result from different parents."⁷⁰² Mason thinks of it as alluding to Frogs, "some of which are offspring of frogs, and others the spontaneous product of the marsh, and yet equally frogs," as suggested by Elias.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.40-41.

⁶⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.11; Norris, *Faith*, 284.

⁶⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.20; Norris, *Faith*, 276.

⁷⁰⁰ Sykes, *Poemata*, 126.

⁷⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10.

⁷⁰² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284.

⁷⁰³ Mason, *Orations*, 157n16.

Gregory also talks about Phoenix from the myths, which is “spontaneously consumed and reproduced.”⁷⁰⁴ And another allusion to plants that can reproduce through seed and also by ‘cuttings.’⁷⁰⁵ Norris says that though Gregory obviously does not believe in all these allusions, they are used to prove that Gregory is covering all the bases and showing his erudition and the “lack of scientific interest or knowledge among his adversaries.”⁷⁰⁶ In addition to Norris’ claim, I believe Gregory’s catalogue of images appears to do something more: he is showing his audience how they should be mindful when they talk about God, and sift through the available images in order to choose the one which would help them to think and talk about God better. By enumerating other illustrations from Greek literature which might help him make the same argument, Gregory shows that he could possibly utilise them, but they would not be suitable for God. Thus, for Gregory, the struggle to use images to talk about God is not due to their lack, but to their unworthiness to represent God. When Gregory finally introduces and settles for Adam-Eve-Seth image, still he comments that even this image is from below and therefore inadequate. This also shows his preference for talking about God using biblical images, as much as possible, and avoiding hellenistic images that could bring pagan or mythological baggage. As the passage from his poem shows, Gregory wants his audience to be mindful of this image (μνωόμενος) and not to dishonour God.⁷⁰⁷ One cannot use the images randomly, but it is necessary to think through all the aspects of the image before using it for God. In this way, Gregory shores up the credibility of his education, showing it to be vast and thorough, and wants his audience to think about the worthiness of the images they use to reflect and talk about God. Although there are possible comparisons that can be made to make a point about God from mythology and philosophers, not all of them are true or worthy. This image, even though not perfect, can still be used with reservations because it is attested by the Scriptures. Thus both rhetorically and theologically Gregory validates his theology by the use of this image.

To sum up, we can say that Gregory is selective in his use of images when it comes to God. The discussions above shows how that process works for Gregory, and his preference for biblical images. By listing the alternate images he has at his disposal for the argument, Gregory is parading his *paideia* and is exposing the ignorance of his opponents, who claim that there is no illustration for his argument. But as a whole, Gregory transforms the traditionally christological image into a trinitarian one and shows that he is creating new images to think

⁷⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284; Barbel, *Reden*, 238n20; Mason, *Orations*, 157n19.

⁷⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10; Norris, *Faith*, 284; Barbel, *Reden*, 238-39n20; Mason, *Orations*, 158n2.

⁷⁰⁶ Norris, *Faith*, 195.

⁷⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.40; PG 37.411A.

and talk about God.

4.4. Father-Son

Gregory uses the illustration of a human father and son to discuss God's fatherhood and the Son's equality in honour with the Father. With a pedagogical tone, in his *Oration on Peace*, Gregory introduces the image:

Your own son is to you a great, indeed, a very great, cause for honor, and all the more so if he takes after his father in all respects (ἄν τὰ πάντα πατρῶζη), and bears the true stamp of his sire (χαρακτήρ γνήσιος), and you would prefer to be the parent of a single child (ἐνὸς γεννήτωρ παιδός) rather than the master of countless slaves. Similarly, is there any greater cause for honor in God's case than being the Father of his Son? This adds to his glory, not detracts from it, as does the fact that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from him.⁷⁰⁸

A human father sharing his nature and features when begetting a son illustrates the divine begetting, where the divine essence is shared. Moreover, while using this as a comparative image, Gregory argues that a human father would be proud to have a son who is the same as the father in all aspects, and that does not bring dishonour to any father. Williams, commenting on the use of father-son image, says that “the Father/Son imagery simply does not fit into a trinitarian structure. If the Father/Son imagery is the *only* way to see relations within God, who or what is the Spirit?”⁷⁰⁹ This awkwardness is also evident in Gregory's illustration: though it is trinitarian, the Holy Spirit is tacked on as an appendix.

The father-son image is a biblical image grounded in the language Scripture uses to speak of the Father and Christ. But here, Gregory is moving from what he has observed in his society about the relationship between a father and a son to how one should think about the divine Father and the Son. Widdicombe, in his study of the fatherhood of God in the fourth century, finds that the interpretation which views the sociological aspect of human fatherhood as a reflection of the eternal divine Fatherhood is absent from Origen to Athanasius and is unique to Gregory.⁷¹⁰ We encounter this comparison—using the human father-son relationship to speak of the heavenly Father and Son—frequently in the writings of the Fathers because it is grounded in the Scriptures. But these references often talk about the human and divine

⁷⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 136; SC 270.296.

⁷⁰⁹ Jane Williams, “The Fatherhood of God,” in *The Forgotten Trinity: A Selection of Papers presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, ed. Alasdair I.C. Heron (London: BCC/CCBI, 1991), 99.

⁷¹⁰ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*. Reprint (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 256.

generation, its differences and similarities. Gregory also considers this comparison as we will see below, but here, when he uses this as a distinctive comparative image, Gregory emphasises honour over generation. But the argument for divine generation using the father-son relationship is implicitly in the background of this image, which we will deal with now.

Everyone, even Eunomius, agreed that human begetting involves sharing the human essence with the offspring to some extent, but they disagreed on whether this could be used to illustrate the divine begetting.⁷¹¹ This was because of the passion and materiality attached to the process of begetting. Origen recognised that the human offspring correspond to the seed, but warned of the danger of material thinking: “it is abominable and unlawful to equate the God and Father, in the begetting of his only-begotten Son and in his given subsistence, with any generation of humans or other animals; but it must be something exceptional and worthy of God.”⁷¹² Athanasius employed the father-son image in his polemics against the Arians, with a note of caution against materialistic thinking about human procreation that involves bodily separation and could distort its meaning.⁷¹³ Similarly, Gregory employs this image, issuing warnings about the dangers of material thinking and emphasising that divine generation differs from human procreation. He says, “We should believe that the Father is truly (ἀληθῶς) a father, far more truly father, in fact, than we humans are, in that he is uniquely (μόνως), that is, distinctively (ἰδιοτρόπως) so, unlike corporal beings (οὐχ ὡς τὰ σώματα).”⁷¹⁴ In short, every theologian agreed that this image should be used in a manner worthy of God (θεοπρεπῶς) and used in an ‘odd’ sense (καταχρηστικῶς).⁷¹⁵

Though all the theologians in the fourth century recognise that the word ‘beget,’ when related to God, did not have sexual and bodily connotations, they could not agree on what it means exactly. Eunomius agrees with the Pro-Nicene theologians that the terms ‘father’ and ‘son’ should not be considered humanly, and one should focus on the meaning that is appropriate to God.⁷¹⁶ Eunomius compares these terms to the use of the word ‘eye’ in relation to God and humans. In humans, it is a physical body part, but in God, it signifies care, protection, and knowledge. Thus, for him, ‘unbegotten’ (ἀγέννητος) is the only term that could signify the essence of God, and the Father cannot share this ‘unbegotten’ essence with the Son

⁷¹¹ Eun. *Apol.* 16, 18; Gr. Nyssa. *Eun.* 3.2.1-15; see also Ath. *Ar.* 1.27; Eus. *Marcell.* 1.4.20.

⁷¹² Or. *princ.* 1.2.4; Behr, *Origen*, vol. 1, 45.

⁷¹³ Ath. *ep. Serap.* 2.3.; C.R.B. Shapland, trans., *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), 154-55. In *decr.* 11-12, he finds this illustration inadequate. cf. *syn.* 53; See Hanson, “Transformation of Images,” 259-60.

⁷¹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16; Vinson, *Gregory*, 171; SC 284.196.

⁷¹⁵ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 240.

⁷¹⁶ Eun. *Apol.* 16, 18.

as the Son is begotten.⁷¹⁷ He reasons that the Father “could never undergo a generation which involved the sharing of his own distinctive nature with the offspring (τῆς ἰδίας μεταδοῦναι τῷ γεννωμένῳ φύσεως).⁷¹⁸ When the pro-Nicenes say that the Father shared the divine essence in begetting the Son, they are comparing God’s generation with human generation. That is why, though one calls the Son the ‘offspring’ (γέννημα), they should also refer to Him as ‘a thing made’ (ποίημα).⁷¹⁹ In this way, the real meaning of ‘begetting’ could be understood, and one can clarify that essence is not shared in the same way as it is in human begetting. For Eunomius, neither the act of begetting nor the act of creating involves the sharing of the divine essence, which is incorruptible. This leads to the conclusion that the Son was created by the will of the Father, and not by sharing the essence. In this way, the Eunomians “rarefy the Father/Son image into the most remote and nominal of metaphors.”⁷²⁰

However, for Gregory and other pro-Nicenes, the concept of begetting naturally implies a sharing of essence, similar to human begetting, but without the bodily and material connotations.⁷²¹ So, they suggested that one should not discard the essence-sharing aspect of the illustration, but only the material overtones. Gregory does this by distinguishing between creation and begetting. He agrees with Eunomius that the act of creation does not involve the sharing of the essence but the production of something different from the creator. But begetting is sharing of nature, and in this respect, human procreation is similar to the divine generation. He affirms that the offspring shares the exact nature of the parent, and that is why the Scripture uses the language of father-son for the first and the second persons of the Trinity. He says,

If you had said uncreated and created (τὸ μὴ ἐκτισμένον καὶ ἐκτισμένον), I should agree—what has no origin (ἄναρχον) and what is created cannot be identical in nature. But if you are talking about begetter (τὸ γεγεννηκὸς) and begotten (τὸ γεγεννημένον), this is a false statement—these must be same; it is in the nature of an offspring to have a nature identical with its parent’s.⁷²²

While Eunomius claims that the unbegotten can never share his nature with anyone, Gregory affirms that the Father not only shares the divine essence but that doing so is inherent to God’s nature. The Father is eternal, and did not become a Father at one point in time by begetting the Son, as Eunomius claims.⁷²³ He defines the Trinity as the relationship among

⁷¹⁷ Eun. *Apol.* 18.

⁷¹⁸ Eun. *Apol.* 9; Vaggione, *Works*, 42-3.

⁷¹⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 12; Vaggione, *Works*, 47-8.

⁷²⁰ Hanson, *God*, 623.

⁷²¹ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 238.

⁷²² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.10; Norris, *Faith*, 251; SC 250.196.

⁷²³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16; 29.5.

persons held in equal honour.⁷²⁴ The relational images will explore this aspect of the Trinity more, but the emphasis on the Father begetting the Son and generating the Holy Spirit, who share the same essence, is important here. Even when he explores the creation, Gregory divides the creation between the ideal world and the material world to emphasise that God first creates the ideal world, which is closer to His nature and then creates the material world to show that “He is capable of bringing into existence something wholly other. For intellectual natures, graspable by the mind alone, are clearly related to the godhead; but whatever is subject to sense is utterly alien, and things that are completely without soul or movement lie still further removed.”⁷²⁵ He distinguishes between different types of creation to demonstrate that God has the power to create different beings, as God created ideal and material nature, and most importantly, to point out that the Father has the ability to beget and generate entities that are equal to him eternally. Thinking about the Father in this way brings more honour to him than considering the Father as someone who cannot share his essence in begetting.

By using this illustration, Gregory not only refutes the allegation that it diminishes the glory of the Father but also taps into the rich Alexandrian tradition of the Fatherhood of God, the eternal generative divine nature, and the relational aspect of trinitarian doctrine.⁷²⁶ In this passage, Gregory constructs a logical argument that it is an honour to have a son, and that this honour is greater if the son has taken on all of the father’s characteristics and bears the genuine stamp of the parent, as any earthly father would desire. In this image, he also implicitly points to the difference between human begetting and divine begetting. Though children bear the humanity of the parents, the parents can only hope for their sons to have most of their characteristics. But in divine begetting, the whole of the essence is shared without any confusion or division, and that is why Christ becomes the perfect image of the Father.

Just before introducing this image in *Oration 23*, Gregory accuses his opponents of having a restricted view of divinity. They cannot accept three beings with equal nature and honour. He says,

You posit not a single nor an uncompounded nature of divinity but either three that are alienated and disjointed from one another and, not surprisingly, in conflict by virtue of their being proportionately superior or inferior; or you posit a single nature, but one that is constricted and mean, and which is not in a position to be the source of anything significant precisely because it cannot or will not, and this for two reasons, either envy

⁷²⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.10.

⁷²⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 38.10; Daley, *Gregory*, 121.

⁷²⁶ Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 2; For this theme in Gregory, also see Blair Smith, “The Fatherhood of God in Fourth-Century Pro-Nicene Theology” (PhD Diss., Durham University, 2019), chap. 4, accessed on December 13, 2025. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/13246/>

or fear: envy, because it wishes to avoid the introduction of something that is of equal importance; fear, lest it take on a hostile and belligerent element.⁷²⁷

He blames his opponents for proposing a disjointed hierarchical divinity or a single entity that can not bring forth something identical to its nature. Their restricted understanding means they cannot imagine a God who exists in three persons. In his *Theological Orations*, he explains that in Greek the term ‘λόγος’ (word) also means ‘definition’ (ὄρος), and that is why one can claim that “the Son is the concise and simple demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) of the Father’s nature. For the offspring (γέννημα) is a silent definition of its parent (τοῦ γεγεννηκότος).”⁷²⁸ Because of this, one should honour Christ as he reflects the Father accurately: “Your Word is God the Son, of the same being as yourself, of the same honour as his parent.”⁷²⁹ At the end of this argument, he contrasts the image of the father-son with the image of the tool, thereby contrasting the vision of the Father and the Son provided by both the images and argues that the Son is a true heir who shares in the Father’s essence and is not just a tool created for a particular purpose. The whole point of this image is found in the advice he gives in *Oration 20*:

The right thing is that we should neither be such partisans of the Father (φιλοπάτωρ) that we end up cancelling his Fatherhood (for whose Father would he be, if the Son’s nature is alienated from him, and made into something else, through this talk of creation?), nor such partisans of Christ (φιλόχριστος) that we no longer even preserve his Sonship (for whose Son would he be, if he does not look towards the Father as his cause?)⁷³⁰

In the image of the pearl, Gregory will extend this argument to explicitly warn against honouring the Father at the expense of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Here, using this father-son comparative image, Gregory argues that by denying the Son's equality with the Father, his opponents fail to accord the Father the due honour.

McGuckin connects Gregory’s arguments for the equality of the Son and the Father to his life and to his relationship with his father. He says that in Gregory’s theological methodology, ‘psychological introspection’ is present:

Gregory made it his theological life’s work to stand against the theological monism which had been his father’s ancestral tradition. He defends his mother’s Christological tradition. Moreover, in his opposition to Arianism he argues passionately that the Son’s

⁷²⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.6; Vinson, *Gregory*, 135-6.

⁷²⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.20; SC 250.268.

⁷²⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.1.30.17-19.; PG 37, 508A-10A; McGuckin, *Poems*, 8.

⁷³⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.6; Daley, *Gregory*, 101; SC 270.70.

relation to the Father is not one of power over inferiority, but ought to be conceived as a freedom based on mutual love... His Trinitarian doctrine insists that the Son is not inferior to the Father solely because he is caused by the Father and that the ‘coming after’ the Father cannot be taken as an excuse for the former’s superiority of status. His is a doctrine that teaches the full co-equal glory of the Son, in the face of hierarchical conceptions of paternal dignity and power.⁷³¹

Gregory’s father indeed looms large in Gregory’s life, especially in his ecclesiastical career. But I do not think this background provided any impetus for Gregory, as McGuckin alleges, to propose the co-equal persons in the Trinity. There is an interesting connection here, but interpreting this as a theological method stretches Gregory’s biography a bit too much. Like McGuckin, Awad also argues for a “relation between Gregory Nazianzen’s personal character and his trinitarian logic,” but he does not go so far as to call this relationship a theological method, which I feel is preferable.⁷³² As the discussion of the comparative images for God in Part I and the Adam-Eve-Seth image demonstrates, Gregory is always careful not to attribute any material or unnecessary conception to God. On this point, I agree with the general conclusion of Widdicombe: “The language and approach of the Fathers do not give any indication that they even unwittingly drew on contemporary discussions of fatherhood in the larger Greek culture to help them in their thinking about the fatherhood of God.”⁷³³ If the fourth-century theologians were not drawing their inferences from general knowledge of fatherhood, Gregory is most unlikely to draw from his relationship with his father in this matter.

In using this image, Gregory acknowledges that it is not perfect in several places. The fear of the intrusion of incorporeality is constantly present, as in the image of Adam-Eve-Seth. Gregory also points to other fears expressed by Origen and Athanasius. Origen, in his *Commentarii in Genesim*, argued that God’s fatherhood has no beginning, but in humans, there is a time when they cannot be fathers and a time when they become fathers.⁷³⁴ Athanasius also pointed out how, after birth, the human parent and the offspring are “separated and become far from each other” (δίστασθαι καὶ μακρὰν ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων γίνεσθαι) because they are embodied (τὰ τῶν σωμάτων).⁷³⁵ Gregory combines these previous objections and points to the differences between Father’s eternal begetting and human begetting in his third *Theological Oration*. He argues that God is the Father in a true sense (κυριώως), as He did not begin to be a Father at a

⁷³¹ McGuckin, *Gregory*, 9.

⁷³² Najeeb Awad, “‘Through You, Men Live Endowed with Reason’: Gregory Nazianzen’s Trinitarian Thinking as a Window to his Personal Character,” *SJT* 68, no.2 (2015): 128, accessed August 12, 2025, doi: 10.1017/S0036930613000203

⁷³³ Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 258.

⁷³⁴ Origen quoted in Eus. *Marcell*, 1.4; FC 135.103. Also see Widdicombe, *Fatherhood*, 70.

⁷³⁵ Ath. *decr.* 20; PG 25.452B.

point in time.⁷³⁶ Humans are not truly fathers, as they are both father and son, but the divine Father is only a Father, as He was not a Son at any point.⁷³⁷ Thus, though some comparisons are possible here between human and divine begetting, the Son's divine begetting is still unique.⁷³⁸ Gregory also points to another difference: human beings stem from a pair, unlike the eternal begetting, in which the Father alone begets the Son.⁷³⁹ Like Athanasius, he also points out the separation of bodies. The ties can be dissolved by either side, presumably due to death, then only the relationship (in memory) remains devoid of reality (πρᾶγμα).⁷⁴⁰ For Gregory, the human begetting is completely different from it as the Son is "indistinguishable from its original to a higher degree than... earthly offspring from its parent."⁷⁴¹ That is why he fears that if one stretches this image further with materialistic thinking, it would become ridiculous and would involve all the corporeal things like mating, gestation period, miscarriage, etc.⁷⁴² Thus, Gregory's treatment of this image shows that the distinction between the human procreation and divine begetting points to the fact that no image can perfectly help us to talk about God. Understanding these arguments and the debates about this image in Gregory's predecessors, help us to understand why Gregory is not using this image as a relational image but as a honour image. He wants to redeem this image from its misleading aspect and use it in a positive way to talk about God.

We can summarise the insights gained by the discussion above. Firstly, although in the broader discussion of father-son, Gregory talks about the generation of the Son by the Father, in *Oration 23*, while using this image for a substantial argument, he brings only the honour aspect of it. He avoids explicit mention of generation and how that generation could be compared to the divine generation. As we have seen in the above discussion on the usage of the father-son image, talk of generation is wrought with materialistic suggestion that might become misleading, if one is not cautious. This also shows the limitation of any image to adequately represent God. If an image succeeds in illustrating one aspect, it might fail in another. Thus, before using any image to talk about God, one should consider which aspect one wants to emphasise and carefully select it. Here, Gregory is emphasising the equal honour. This is one way, Gregory transforms the traditional images. When his predecessors use an

⁷³⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.5; SC 250.184.

⁷³⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.5; cf. 25.16.

⁷³⁸ Christopher A. Hall, "Gregory of Nazianzus and the Mysterious Wonder of the Trinity," *The Spirit & Church* 4, no.1 (May 2002): 85.

⁷³⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.5.

⁷⁴⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 29.5; SC 250.184.

⁷⁴¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 30.20; Norris, *Faith*, 276.

⁷⁴² Gr. Naz. Or. 29.4.

image in one way, Gregory finds an innovative use for the same image and also makes it as trinitarian as possible. Secondly, even though there are material implications in an image, one cannot bypass an image provided in the Scriptures. Eunomius selected the term ‘ingenerate’ to talk about God, but Gregory emphasises the language of father-son, even though it is imperfect, it is biblical. One needs to put in place sufficient safeguards to understand it correctly, as the Scriptures intended. In this way, Gregory demonstrates his commonsense approach to the biblical text.⁷⁴³ Thirdly, the epistemological value of this image is immense as introduces the familiar concept of parental desire to have children with the same characteristics as themselves and builds on it. Thus, Gregory moves from a familiar familial and social image to a spiritual lesson to be learned from it, as he did in his reflection on God during his evening walk.⁷⁴⁴ The personal and intimate nature of the image would have resonated with his audience, as they would have understood it immediately and it opened a new way to think about the relationship within the Trinity. The pedagogical value of this image is invaluable.

4.5. Pearl (μαργαρίτης)

The third honour image, the image of the pearl, is a unique comparative image, not only because it appears only once in Gregory’s corpus, but also because, just as with the image of Adam-Eve-Seth, it is Gregory who uses it for the first time as a trinitarian image in theological literature up to this point. The pearl was indeed a popular Christian image of Christ because of two parables in the Gospel of Matthew (7:6 and 13:46), and of hellenistic fables about the formation of pearls from dewdrops or lightning, which Alexandrian theologians associated with the virginal birth of Christ.⁷⁴⁵ Apart from Christ, the image of the pearl was used to represent the apostles, prophets, monks, catechumens, Christian teachings, Christian fellowship and soul at different points of time.⁷⁴⁶ Gregory’s contemporary in Syria, Ephrem, used the pearl image to argue for an undivided faith that cannot be compromised, mirroring Gregory’s trinitarian argument. In the 4th Hymn in the collection of *Hymns of the Pearl*, Ephrem says, “That pearl is a single substance that is full of light... If someone wished to break off and take a little piece from you, you would be like the faith that perished at the hands of

⁷⁴³ Paul S. Russell, “Saint Gregory’s Exegeses Against the Arians, Still a Viable Christian Tool,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, no. 2 (1994): 123.

⁷⁴⁴ See section 3.4.4.

⁷⁴⁵ Richard Delbrueck, “Notes on the Wooden Doors of Santa Sabina,” *The Art Bulletin* 34, no.2 (June 1952): 142. For other patristic works that compare the pearl with Christ, see *A. Jo.* 109; *Acts Pet. 12 Apos.* 2.10-9.29; *Acts Thom.* 108-113; *Clem. Paed.* 2.8; *Or. Comm in Mt.* 10.7; *Ephr. fide.* IV; *Gr. Naz. Or.* 2.98; 17.7; 39.16.

⁷⁴⁶ PGL, 827; Delbrueck, “Santa Sabina,” 142.

those apostates who broke it and tore it up.”⁷⁴⁷ However, Gregory was the first to utilise this recurring and popular Christian image to argue for the Trinity, thereby repurposing a common Christian image and endowing it with new significance within fourth-century theological debates. Although this image appears only once in his corpus, the argument associated with it is repeated in several places, and also echoes the argument of the previous two honour images.

In *Oration 37*, exhorting the Eunuchs to honour Christ and the Holy Spirit, Gregory draws out the implication of their subordinationalist theology for worship by invoking the image of the pearl to argue for equal honour for all the persons in the Trinity. He says,

Imagine one pearl (μαργαρίτην ἓνα) to be the Trinity, same on all sides (πανταχόθεν ὅμοιον) and equally glistening (ἴσον στίβοντα). If any part of the pearl is damaged, the whole beauty of the stone is gone. So when you dishonour the Son in order to honour the Father, He does not accept your honour.⁷⁴⁸

The use of ἓνα alongside the pearl evokes the image of the pearl mentioned in Matt. 13:46, where Jesus compares the highly priced pearl (ἓνα πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην) to the kingdom of God. Two observations about the way this passage is translated. Firstly, ἓνα is translated by Migne as *quamdam* in the place of biblical *una*, failing to echo the biblical image of the ONE highly-priced pearl. Secondly, the word order in the sentence: Ὑπόθου μαργαρίτην ἓνα εἶναι τὴν Τριάδα, is very effective, rhetorically, and points to the epistemological context discussed in chapter 3. Here, Gregory uses the imperative of ὑποτίθημι (to set before) to ask for deliberate imagination on the part of the audience. The imperative is immediately followed by μαργαρίτην, suggesting that the image he wants to invoke is the pearl itself. And then he moves on to talk about the Trinity. Here, the translations by Migne, Gallay, Browne, and Swallow fail to capture the rhetorical nuance of the word order, as they bring the reference to the Trinity first, then the pearl, thus changing the order in which the image would have sequenced in the minds of the original audience. Migne renders it: “*Finge Trinitatem esse margaritam quamdam*,”⁷⁴⁹ Gallay translates this sentence as “*Suppose que la Trinité soit un joyau semblable*,”⁷⁵⁰ and Browne and Swallow in NPNF render it as “*imagine the Trinity to be a single pearl...*”⁷⁵¹ All these translations fail to capture what Gregory is doing rhetorically, i.e. invoking the image of the pearl in the minds of the listeners and readers and asking them to set

⁷⁴⁷ Edward G. Matthews, Jr, “St. Ephrem, Madrašê On Faith, 81–85. Hymns of the Pearl, I–V,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994): 68.

⁷⁴⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.18; SC 318.308.

⁷⁴⁹ PG 36.303A.

⁷⁵⁰ SC 318.308.

⁷⁵¹ NPNF, 343.

it before their eyes as he moves on from that image to the conception of the Trinity. This is consistent with the epistemological principles discussed in 3.4, which establish the need for embodied human beings to have concrete images to think about the incorporeal God. By invoking the image of the pearl first, then moving on to discuss God, Gregory deliberately uses epistemological principles to teach his audience.

The image of the Pearl attacks the Eunomian conception of the hierarchical chain of being and their concern to preserve the honour of the Father at the expense of the Son and the Spirit. For Gregory, the Father is not honoured alone, but the Father's honour is inseparably bound with the honour of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Any attempt to honour the Father by reducing the status of the Son or the Holy Spirit is not scriptural, and it only damages the honour of the Father. Gregory does not want his audience to be partisans of the Father (φιλοπάτωρ), nor partisans of Christ (φιλόχριστος).⁷⁵² For him, we either honour God as the Trinity or we dishonour God completely. He says, "For us, circumscribing or dissociating any one of its members is tantamount to destroying the whole and to making a barefaced assault on all of Divinity."⁷⁵³ This is because all three persons in the Trinity share a perichoretic relationship with each other and are mutually integral due to the dynamically shared divinity; any dishonour done to one of the persons in the Trinity is a dishonour to the other two. In his *Theological Orations*, he asks, "What is the use of incomplete deity? Or rather, what is godhead if it is not perfect?"⁷⁵⁴ He calls those who disagree bad arbitrators and measurers of Godhead. Talking to his congregation in Nazianzus, he says, "We who are of one soul, who mind the same thing, who in nothing injure the Trinity, neither by preferring One Person above another, nor by cutting off any: as those bad umpires and measurers of the God-head (οἱ κακοὶ διαιτηταὶ καὶ μετρηταὶ τῆς θεότητος) do, who by magnifying One Person more than is fit, diminish and insult the whole."⁷⁵⁵

Gregory considers this honour-dishonour debate to be tied not only to the doctrine of God, but to the practical Christian life. Just before his presentation of the image of the pearl, Gregory advises the Eunuchs not to prostitute in matters of Godhead: "Do not go a whoring in respect to the Godhead. Having been wedded to Christ, do not dishonour Christ. Being perfected by the spirit, do not make the Spirit your own equal."⁷⁵⁶ In the same chapter, he continues to argue that if Christ is a mere creature, then they cannot be called Christians

⁷⁵² Gr. Naz. Or. 20.6.

⁷⁵³ Gr. Naz. Or. 6.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 11.

⁷⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.4; Norris, *Faith*, 280.

⁷⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 3.6; NPNF, 229; SC 247.250.

⁷⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. Or. 37.17; NPNF, 342.

(χριστιανός). Gregory says that though he honours Peter and Paul, he is not called their follower, but a Christian, a follower of Christ. Having been born of God, Gregory categorically states that he would not follow a human being and urges his audience to remain Christian by believing that Christ is God. It is not only in the nomenclature, but also connected to sanctification and salvation. How can they be baptised into the name of a creature? If the Holy Spirit is a creature, then their baptism was in vain. He asks how they can make the Spirit their peer, having only equal honour to them (ὁμότιμος) by calling him a creature when he perfected them? When they dishonour the Holy Spirit, they effectively destroy their own perfection. In the oration *In sanctum baptisma*, he affirms, “For whatever you may subtract from the deity of the Three, you will have overthrown the whole, and destroyed your own being made perfect.”⁷⁵⁷ In the *Theological Orations*, he links this debate with *theosis* and asks, “If he has the same rank as I have, how can He make me God, how can he link me with deity?”⁷⁵⁸ Ultimately, by dishonouring one member of the Trinity, a Christian destroys all the spiritual things he hoped for. In *Oration 23*, Gregory affirms faith and rebirth in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to his audience and says, “to dishonor or separate any one of the three is to dishonor our confession of faith, that is, our rebirth, our Godhead, our deification, our hope.”⁷⁵⁹

Using this image, Gregory demonstrated that as the honour of each person in the Trinity is bound to the others, damage to one person’s honour affects the Trinity as a whole. Dishonouring the single member of the Trinity not only destroys the whole of the Trinity but also endangers salvation. Interestingly, with the exception of the image of light and root, this imagery does not include any other warnings or qualifications, which are typically attached to the comparative images. It is hard to pinpoint why Gregory does not have a warning about the use of this material image. But two things can be observed. Firstly, he uses only one aspect of the image, i.e. the beauty and the perfect shape of the pearl, to point to the oneness of honour enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity. It does not have any other distracting material intrusions of human procreation found in the other two honour images. Secondly, Gregory is comfortable using this image because of the echo of biblical usage, and already has traction among patristic writers in discussing Christ and faith positively, and there are no bad uses of this image to counter. If we compare this image with the father-son image, Gregory is more cautious in using the latter, as there is a history of debate over its significance, so that one could easily miss the point and be misled. But because ‘pearl image’ is a positive image in the

⁷⁵⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 40.44; NPNF, 376.

⁷⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.4; Norris, *Faith*, 280.

⁷⁵⁹ Gr. Naz. Or. 23.12; Vinson, *Gregory*, 140.

Scriptures and in patristic literature, it does not have the other negative connotations which could be invoked while using it.

But the way Gregory presented this image highlights how he employs images in his theological discourses. The word order I mentioned is significant here. Gregory uses the ‘pearl’ to point to the divine aspect. The deliberate demand for imagination shows that he uses the material object of a pearl as an aid to think about God. It is not the other way around. The use of comparative images for God is not mere embellishment to beautify the speech to convey the theologian’s knowledge of God. But it helps him ascend in contemplation of God as he uses material images to raise towards a better understanding of God. As a theological orator, he uses these images to invoke the right images in the minds of his audience, so that they would imagine the Divine in the right way. As noted in the comments on the translations, if the word order is reversed, we lose what Gregory is trying to convey. Now these arguments used for the equal honour of all the persons in the Trinity are extended in his discussion on the implications of the image of the tool, which I narrated earlier.

4.6. Gregory's Counter to Eunomian ὄργανον

Gregory employs the image of a craftsman’s tool three times in his corpus to draw out the implications of the Eunomian understanding of God and to counter it. Of the three, two instances are trinitarian arguments that involve all three persons of the Trinity, and the remaining one is about the Son. They are all embedded within the arguments regarding the mode of thinking that honours and dishonours God. In *Oration 23.7*, Gregory uses the general term ὄργανον, but in his poem *De Filio*, he uses ὄργανον along with the specific tool, hammer (ῥαιστήρ) and in *Oration 42.17*, he mentions specific tools such as a pair of fire-tongs (πυράγγρα) and a saw (πίριον) without the term ὄργανον. When he employs this image, Gregory argues that the anti-Nicene theologians fail to grasp its logical implications for their theology. By labelling the Son as a tool, they dishonour the Father, whom they claim to honour. Logically, this also implies that the Son and the Holy Spirit are placed below human beings in the order of dignity, despite their claims that both are above all creation in dignity and honour. In invoking this image, Gregory builds upon the arguments of Basil (which we saw in 4.2) and Gregory of Nyssa (below) in their dispute with Eunomius and also extends the arguments he made in the honour images, especially the image of the pearl.

4.6.1. The ὄργανον Image Dishonours the Father

Gregory accuses the Eunomians of trying to strike an empty terror (κενεόν τε δέος)

towards the Godhead of the Father by relegating the Son among the creatures (βάλους δ' ἐς κτίσματα Χριστὸν).⁷⁶⁰ For Gregory, this is just a rhetorical ploy with empty words, and not real honour paid to the Father. It is a 'mean honour' (κακή τιμή) that honours the Father badly (κακῶς τιμῶν) by robbing him of the Son.⁷⁶¹ For Gregory, this Eunomian strategy does the opposite of what it intends to do by minimising the Father's power. Eunomian logic assumes the Father cannot share his essence in begetting the Son and in the procession of the Holy Spirit. But to keep the Son and the Holy Spirit above the rest of the creation, they claim that they were created out of nothing before all the creation. In *Oration 23*, Gregory argues that for the Father, being a source to those who are of similar essence and equal glory (ὁμοίων τὴν φύσιν, καὶ ὁμοδόξων) is the greatest honour and not dishonour.⁷⁶² This echoes the arguments of the images of the father-son and the pearl. So, one dishonours (ἀτιμάζω) God, if one claims that the Son and the Holy Spirit are either sourceless (ἄναρχος) or of a different source (ἑτέραν ἀρχὴν) from the Father.⁷⁶³ Eunomians, by ranking the Son and the Holy Spirit among the creatures, dishonour the Father who is the source (οὔτε τὴν ἀρχὴν τιμᾶς). For Gregory, "the lowering of those who are from Him is no glory to the Source."⁷⁶⁴

Arguing that the Father created the Son and the Spirit to create the world also separates God's will from his action in the Eunomian theology. Eunomius conceived the monarchy of God (μοναρχία) as belonging to the Father alone and thus preserved the dignity of the Father. In his *Expositio Fidei*, he says, "He has none to partake of his Godhead, none to divide his glory, none to inherit his authority with him, none to share the throne of his kingdom."⁷⁶⁵ But for Gregory, the monarchy of God is not circumscribed to one person. It belongs to all three persons who exercise a single rule by "equal honour of nature" (φύσεως ὁμοτιμία), "harmony of will" (γνώμης σύμπνοια), and "identity of motion" (ταυτότης κινήσεως) and ultimately converges to the source.⁷⁶⁶ Gregory also does not imagine the separation of the Will of the Father from the Will of the Son, nor the Will of the Father and the action of the Son in creation. For Eunomius, when the scripture says 'through him everything was created' (Col. 1.16), he imagines that the will of God and the action of creation of the world through Christ are two separate events. However, Gregory says that this is tantamount to saying that the Father's sheer Will was not enough to create; he needed something else, i.e. the Son, to do his creative work.

⁷⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.40-42; PG 37.404A-405A.

⁷⁶¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.12; Norris, *Faith*, 285.

⁷⁶² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.7

⁷⁶³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.7

⁷⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.43; NPNF, 376.

⁷⁶⁵ Eun. *exp. fid.* 2; Vaggione, *Works*, 151.

⁷⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.2; SC 250.178.

To make his point vivid, he uses the image of the ὄργανον and says,

If in fact it was for the sake of these creatures that the Son and the Spirit came into existence at some point in time, like a craftsman's tools (ὡσπερ ὄργανα τεχνίτη) that do not exist before the craftsman has made them, their only reason for being would be that God chose to use them to create something, on the grounds that his will was not enough (ὡς οὐκ ἀρκοῦντος τοῦ βούλεσθαι).⁷⁶⁷

For Gregory, this is a fallacy in thinking. In his own theology, this problem does not arise as the Will of God and the creative action through Christ are one and the same. By accepting the equal nature of the Son and the Father, Gregory, thus, acknowledges that the Father has power to bring forth a Being out of His essence, and also that when both act together, in this context of creation, they do it harmoniously without any division in their being or power.

4.6.2. The ὄργανον Image Dishonours the Son and the Holy Spirit

Eunomian hierarchy keeps the Son and the Spirit as intermediaries between the Father and the rest of the creation. The Father occupies the highest place as the unbegotten, and in the second place, the Son was begotten and created before everything else (γεννήσαντα καὶ ποιήσαντα πρὸ πάντων), and in the third place, the Holy Spirit was made through the Son, who is less than him as a thing being made (τοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἐλάττων ἐστὶν ὡς ποίημα).⁷⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, through this τάξις, Eunomius hopes to preserve the pre-eminence (ὑπεροχή) and the unique nature (φύσις) of the Father.⁷⁶⁹ Regarding the Holy Spirit, he says that he was created by the Son as the first and mighty work of the only begotten (ὡς πρῶτον ἔργον καὶ κράτιστον τοῦ μονογενοῦς) and that he is superior to all the Son's creation in essence and nature with respect to dignity (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὴν φυσικὴν ἀξίαν).⁷⁷⁰

Gregory says that despite this τάξις, the Eunomians are placing the Son and the Spirit not above the rest of creation but below it. By logical extension, the Eunomians have dishonoured both of them by making the material creation more important than Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷¹ And worse, as the passage below suggests, the material world and human beings are the cause of the Son and the Spirit. In a polemical context, these allegations are shocking and rhetorically effective. Eunomius has maintained that the Son, though not equal in essence with the Father, is higher than human beings and the material creation both in nature and in dignity by being their cause. Having reversed the argument of the Eunomians, Gregory uses the image of

⁷⁶⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 23.7; Vinson, *Gregory*, 137.

⁷⁶⁸ Eun. *Apol.* 26; PG 30.864A.

⁷⁶⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 25.

⁷⁷⁰ Eun. *exp. fid.* 4; Vaggione, *Works*, 156.

⁷⁷¹ Gr. Naz. Or. 23.7

ὄργανον to explain how the Eunomians who value ἀκρίβεια in God-talk have missed this implication:

For if I exist for God’s glory, but this one has come into being for my sake—as the blacksmith’s tongs exist for the sake of the wagon, and the saw for the sake of the door—then I am superior (νικῶ), by being the cause. And to the degree that God is higher than creatures, so much is what has come to be for my sake less worthy than I am (ἐμοῦ... ἀτιμότερον), who exist for God’s sake.⁷⁷²

By repurposing the image used by Arius,⁷⁷³ Gregory vividly brought out the implications of Eunomian theology. Gregory of Nyssa also uses a similar argument. He says that Theognostos, the student of Origen, had a similar thought when he said, “God, intending to construct this universe, first brought into existence the Son, ‘as a measure for the design.’”⁷⁷⁴ But for Gregory of Nyssa, this argument fails in both Theognostos and Eunomius. Gregory explains,

[If] it was not for his own sake, but for something else that he comes to be, and is therefore surely inferior to that for the sake of which he comes to be; we need the agricultural implement for living, yet the plough is not reckoned as of equal value with life. In the same way therefore, if the Lord were for the universe, and not all things for his sake, the universe would be superior to the Lord...⁷⁷⁵

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the three honour images in Gregory that he uses to make a coherent argument for the honour of all three persons in the Trinity and to counter the faulty image of ὄργανον proposed by Eunomius. First, Gregory carefully curates the images he uses for God. Though several images are available, he looks for worthy ones. Secondly, he transforms the traditional images into trinitarian images for his purposes: The christological image of Adam-Seth and the pearl are turned into trinitarian ones. Even in the father-son image, by focusing on the honour he was able to keep it trinitarian, despite the awkwardness. The contentious aspect of the father-son image is downplayed to emphasise the aspect of honour that is easier to accept. Thirdly, in *Oration 23*, Gregory is clearly juxtaposing the image of the father-son and the tool to show the different ways the Father and the Son could be imagined

⁷⁷² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 42.17; Daley, *Gregory*, 148.

⁷⁷³ Socr. *h.e.* 1.6.12; See 4.2.

⁷⁷⁴ Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 3.2.121; Stuart G. Hall, trans., *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III*, VCSup 124, edited by Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 96.

⁷⁷⁵ Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 3.2.121-2; Hall, *Contra Eunomium III*, 96.

and honoured. This and other honour images show how the battle to shape the theological imagination of fourth-century Christians took place through the effective use of images by theologians on both sides. Fourthly, by deliberately countering the Eunomian image, Gregory is trying to erase the faulty image and inscribe the right image in the minds of the audience, as asserted in his identity as a theological orator.⁷⁷⁶ Fifthly, the way Gregory boldly introduces the social aspect into the father-son image and demands that his audience deliberately imagine the pearl shows that he is teaching them to think about God in certain ways. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the fourth research question in 1.2. Three different images coordinate to form a compelling argument for the coequal nature and honour of the Trinity. Though they emphasise different aspects of the Trinity and make different arguments, they ultimately lead to the same conclusion: one should honour all three persons of the Trinity. In the image of Adam-Eve-Seth, Gregory demonstrates that equality is possible in nature despite varying origins, and in the father-son image, he highlights how a father delights in a son who is identical to him. In the image of the pearl, Gregory argues that the damage done to one member of the Trinity is damage done to all. It is not logically possible for someone to honour one member of the Trinity and reduce the honour of another member. When we put these images together, we can see how they become a network of images to make an argument. The analysis of these images also shows how Gregory thinks that these images are not worthy to reflect God, yet, because of necessity, either on the part of his audience or by the challenge posed by his opponents in the case of Adam-Eve-Seth, Gregory uses them with hesitation and caution, as they might be misunderstood and misinterpreted by his audience.

⁷⁷⁶ See section 3.5.

Chapter 5: Relational Images

5.1. Introduction

Gregory uses six relational images—root, water source-spring-river, mind-word-spirit, torch, sun and light—to illustrate the relationships between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through these images, he makes the following arguments: that the Father is the cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit; that all three persons are equal despite the Father being the cause; that the persons within the Trinity have individual distinctions. Gregory’s use of these images should be understood again within the Eunomian polemical context, and the Eunomian use of the image of the tool to discuss the relationship between the Father and the Son.⁷⁷⁷ In the Eunomian theological imagination, the Son and the Spirit are merely tools created by the Father to fulfil His Will in creation. So, the relationship of the Father towards the Son and the Spirit is hierarchical and functional. Even when the Nicenes point out that all three persons in the Scriptures share the same divine titles, Eunomius insists that they should be interpreted hierarchically. For example, as previously described, he claims that the 'eye' has different meanings in the human and divine realms: in the human realm, it refers to a physical organ, whereas in the divine realm, it represents the care God shows to his creatures. The same applies to 'light' when referring to the Father and the Son: it means 'unbegotten light' when referring to the Father and 'begotten light' when referring to the Son.⁷⁷⁸ Eunomius calls this preserving the proportionality in the relationships (τὸ ἀνάλογον σώζοντας).⁷⁷⁹

Eunomius, while arguing for the primacy of ἀγέννητος, claimed that the term ‘Father,’ though biblical, cannot designate the substance of God, as the Father became a father only when the Son was begotten. The term ‘Father’ must designate activity, the activity of begetting, when the unbegotten God willed and created the begotten Son: “God’s will is an action, and... this action is not essence (οὐκ οὐσίαν δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν).”⁷⁸⁰ But Gregory counters it by saying, “‘Father’ designates neither the substance nor the activity, but the relationship (σχέσις), the manner of being, which holds good between the Father and the Son.”⁷⁸¹ In *Oration 25*, he extends this relational understanding further by saying that the relationship determines the

⁷⁷⁷ See section 4.2.

⁷⁷⁸ Eun. *Apol.* 16, 19.

⁷⁷⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 17; Vaggione, *Works*, 54-55.

⁷⁸⁰ Eun. *Apol.* 24; Vaggione, *Works*, 64-65.

⁷⁸¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.16; Norris, *Faith*, 255; SC 250.210.

unique property each person in the Trinity has, which distinguishes them from the other despite their identical nature: “In this way, the divinity of each will be defined in terms of the property that is unique to each, in the case of the Son, his Sonship (υιότης), in the case of the Holy Spirit, its procession (πρόοδος) and not sonship.”⁷⁸² Gregory continues to argue that the Father is truly (ἀληθῶς) a Father and the Son is truly a Son and that the Holy Spirit is truly and inherently holy. At the end of this argument, he again reiterates the unique characteristics (ἴδιος) of each individual in the Trinity using different terms. The ἴδιος of the Father is ingenerateness (ἀγεννησία), of the Son is generation (γέννησις), and of the Holy Spirit is procession (ἐκπεμψις).⁷⁸³ Thus, the images in this chapter illustrate this relational aspect of Gregory's trinitarian teaching. Quasten identifies this as Gregory's unique contribution to the fourth-century trinitarian debate.⁷⁸⁴

Before we turn to the images themselves, it will be helpful to say a little about the role of the Father in Gregory's trinitarian account. Firstly, the image of the root becomes a foundational image as it contributes to the assumption underlying all these images, i.e. the Father is the cause and source of the Son and the Spirit. Although Gregory acknowledges the validity of the various configurations of these images adopted by different theologians in their discourses, he believes that any image that obscures the Father as the true cause of the Son and the Spirit would misrepresent the Trinity. Therefore, the root image is the key to determining the authenticity of any image depicting the trinitarian relationship. For example, in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, he discusses several configurations of relational images, such as underground passage-spring-river; torch from pyre; word remaining within the mind; sun's rays moving off the water, but rejects them as distorted images, because they obscure the Father who is the cause or ρίζα.⁷⁸⁵

Gregory also responds to the Eunomian claim that there is division within the simple being of God, especially when the Father is recognised as the source in the Nicene manner. Eunomius felt that if one concedes that the Father shared his essence with the Son, then this violates the simplicity of God's essence. He says, “He [God] did not, however, share out anything of his own substance with the one begotten (for God is *incorruptible* (ἄφθρατος), undivided (ἀδιαίρετος), and indivisible (ἀμέριστος), and what is *incorruptible* cannot share out its own essence.”⁷⁸⁶ If one accepts the sharing of essence and the division, “the name will be

⁷⁸² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16; Vinson, *Gregory*, 171; SC 284.196.

⁷⁸³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.16; Vinson, *Gregory*, 172; SC 284.198.

⁷⁸⁴ Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3, 250.

⁷⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.60-69.

⁷⁸⁶ Eun. *Apol.* 28; Vaggione, *Works*, 74-75; Altered: Vaggione renders ἄφθρατος immortal, but considering the

made common as well.”⁷⁸⁷ According to this description, the Son whom the Scriptures describe as the only begotten would also be called unbegotten. But Gregory counters these arguments. I will demonstrate, while analysing the relational images in this chapter, how Gregory seeks to explain how one could preserve the simple nature of God while also affirming that the Son and the Spirit are from the essence of the Father without any division through passionless generation, as the mind produces words (5.4).

5.2. Root (ρίζα)

Acknowledging the Father as the primal cause (ἡ πρώτη αἰτία) is one of the key concepts in Gregory’s trinitarian theology.⁷⁸⁸ Eunomius has the same understanding of the Father. He says that the Father is “superior to all cause (πάσης αἰτίας κρείττονα), himself the cause of the existence of all existing things.”⁷⁸⁹ But Eunomius and Gregory disagree on what type of beings the Father can cause. Eunomius believes that all the beings the Father caused are inferior to the Father, based on two logical premises: the cause is superior to the effect, and the Father cannot communicate His essence.⁷⁹⁰ However, for Gregory, the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, who are equal to the Father in essence, separate from the ideal and the material creation which we saw in chapter 2. To illustrate this point vividly, Gregory uses the image of the root (ρίζα). He does not explain how this image relates to the life of the Trinity or establish a clear comparison, as he does with other images. He mentions it only in passing several times, referring to the Father as the unoriginate root (ρίζα ἀναρχος),⁷⁹¹ the root from which the Son comes,⁷⁹² the root of good (ρίζα... καλῶν).⁷⁹³ But a clear use of this image is in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, where, in the context of discussing the orthodoxy of different configurations of images—underground passage-spring-river; torch from pyre; word remaining within the mind; sun’s rays moving off the water—Gregory says that though the Son and the Spirit are from the Father, the unoriginate root, the Godhead is not divided because the Son and the Spirit go back to the root.⁷⁹⁴ Even in this passage, the usage is peculiar, as he does not use ‘root’ as a proper comparison but instead uses it metaphorically to support his

context of the sentence, I prefer to render it as incorruptible.

⁷⁸⁷ Eun. *Apol.* 9; Vaggione, *Works*, 45.

⁷⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.14; cf. 20.7.

⁷⁸⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 26; Vaggione, *Works*, 68-69.

⁷⁹⁰ Barnes, *The Power of God*, 199; Michel René Barnes, “Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Casuality,” VC 52, no. 1 (February 1998): 61-62.

⁷⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.58; Sykes, *Poemata*, 12.

⁷⁹² Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.31; Sykes, *Poemata*, 6.

⁷⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* II.1.14.39; PG 37.1248A.

⁷⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.60-69.

argument. But the context of the usage in which the idea of root is used to validate or reject other images, qualifies it to be considered as an image on its own.⁷⁹⁵

The image of the ‘root’ has a long christological heritage. Sykes traces this image to Origen.⁷⁹⁶ However, prior to Origen, Tertullian had used this image to describe the generation of the Son by saying that the Father brought forth the Word “like a root bringing forth the shoot” (*sicut radix fruticem*).⁷⁹⁷ This image played an essential role in the Arian controversy. In the Council of Nicaea, the bishops who did not sign the creed objected to the word *homoousios* by saying that it invokes the image of germination as a shoot from the root (κατὰ προβολὴν μὲν ὡς ἐκ ῥιζῶν βλαστήματα).⁷⁹⁸ Thus, the Arian-leaning bishops understood the implication of using the image of the root to be *homoousios*. Dionysius of Alexandria took pains to clarify his theology by using this image in his letter to his namesake in Rome, when he was accused of tritheism. He says that the image of “a plant (φυτόν) coming from a seed or a root (ρίζη) was different from that whence it sprang and yet was absolutely of one nature (ὁμοφυές) with it.”⁷⁹⁹ The image of a root does not depict a separate thing emerging from the parent, but rather something intrinsic to the parent, while remaining distinct. Athanasius used this image to distinguish between the act of creation and the act of generation. In creation, God creates things and beings that are different in essence from Him, but in generation, he brings forth the Word who is of the same essence. Contrasting the creation and generation, Athanasius says that the created things are not equal (ἴσος) or similar to (ὅμοιος) the creator, but Christ, being an offspring (γέννημα) and not a creature (κτίσμα), was begotten by the Father as a branch from a root (ὡς βλαστὸν ἀπὸ ῥιζῆς).⁸⁰⁰ The relationship between the root and the branch helps him to demonstrate the individual distinction and the shared essence in the Father-Son relationship. By using this image, Gregory is tapping into a longstanding theological use of this image which defended the use of *homoousios* in discussing the Father and the Son and making it a trinitarian image.⁸⁰¹ He acknowledges that the Son and the Holy Spirit have the Father as their cause, but their generation and procession ought to be imagined differently from the

⁷⁹⁵ cf. Sykes, *Poemata*, 133. Sykes discusses this as one of the “trinitarian analogies.”

⁷⁹⁶ Sykes, *Poemata*, 133; cf. *Or. fr.* 69. in *Jo*.

⁷⁹⁷ Tert. *Adv. Prax.* 8; Ernest Evans, ed and trans., *Tertullian’s Treatise Against Praxeas* (London: S.P.C.K. 1948), 97.

⁷⁹⁸ Socr. *h.e.* 1.8.22; PG 67.68C.

⁷⁹⁹ Dion. Al. *Ep.can.*; J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2002), 254; C.L. Feltoe, ed., *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria*, Cambridge Patristic Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 189.

⁸⁰⁰ Ath. *exp. fid.* 4; NPNF, II, vol. 4, 85; PG 25.208A.

⁸⁰¹ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.6.

creation as it is eternal and not temporal.⁸⁰²

Aëtius and Eunomius objected to the Nicene understanding of the Trinity for three reasons. Gregory counters these by using the image of root. Aëtius and Eunomius claim that the Father, as an ingenerate Being, cannot generate another Being i.e. the Son substantially.⁸⁰³ Thus, the Son must have been created through the will and the power of God, not by sharing of the essence of the Father. Aëtius says that “if he [Deity] is ingenerate in his entirety, he was not sundered essentially in origination but posited the offspring by his power.”⁸⁰⁴ For Eunomius, the Father alone is the only God “beginninglessly, everlastingly, unendingly (ἀνάρχως, ἀϊδίως, ἀτελευτήτως μόνον).”⁸⁰⁵ If the Father had shared his essence, he would no longer be the only God, and cease to be unique. Thus, they claim that the Father can only cause things that are different from Him in the act of creation, and that is why the Father is incomparable. They argue that the hierarchy and the order in the chain of being comprises different beings at each level. These are distinct from the source and from each other. Therefore, at each level, the beings are ontologically distinct from one another.⁸⁰⁶ Thus, the Father is completely different from the Son, and the Eunomians define this by the use of the word “ἀνόμοιος” (unlike). The Father could not share his essence with anyone, as the Nicenes claim, and instead, the Son was created and given the first place by the authority and will of the Father. The same can be said about the Spirit. But for Gregory, confessing the Father to be without cause (ἀνάιτιος) and simultaneously, the cause of the Son and the Spirit, who are co-eternal and co-equal with Him in nature, is essential. He says, “we [should not] minimize the Father’s rank as ultimate cause, insofar as he is Father and begetter (for he would be the cause of minor and unworthy beings, if he were not cause of the divinity that we recognize in the Son and the Spirit).”⁸⁰⁷ As pointed out in the honour images, denying the equality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father undermines the power of the Father as the cause and brings dishonour to the Father.⁸⁰⁸ This mirrors the argument Gregory used in the father-son image: “As for us, we can confidently affirm that if it is a high thing for the Father to have no origin, it is no lesser thing for the Son to stem from such a Father. He must share in the glory of the uncaused, because he stems from the uncaused.”⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰² See the arguments in section 4.4.

⁸⁰³ Eun. *Apol.* 9; cf. Didym. *Trin.* 10; Hanson, *God*, 603.

⁸⁰⁴ Aët, *Synt.* 7; Wickham, “*Syntagmation*,” 545.

⁸⁰⁵ Eun. *exp. fid.* 2; Vaggione, *Works*, 150-51.

⁸⁰⁶ Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 174.

⁸⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.6; Daley, *Gregory*, 101.

⁸⁰⁸ See section 4.6.

⁸⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.11; Norris, *Faith*, 252.

Secondly, if the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit in the Nicene way, Eunomius contends, then they are inferior to the cause. Eunomius argues that the cause is superior to the effect, and therefore he affords the Son “that same pre-eminence (ὑπεροχὴν) which the maker (ποιητὴν) must necessarily have of his own products (ποιημάτων).”⁸¹⁰ Gregory is in agreement with the Eunomian argument that the Father is without cause.⁸¹¹ But he disagrees with Eunomius’ understanding that this cause is superior to the things that it produced, and that the cause does not associate with any other thing by sharing its essence. Meijering considers this position of balancing between Father as cause (αἴτιος) and the proclamation that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same essence as the Father to be “logically untenable” because, in other places, Gregory argues that Father does not have a cause and if he had one, the cause would be superior to him.⁸¹² Though this position is logically untenable, Gregory considers that maintaining this paradoxical and dialectical tension to be vital to preserving the mystery of God.

Thirdly, Gregory refers to and considers this allegation in his *Theological Orations*: if the Father is the cause, then the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be called co-eternal, as it is clear that they were caused subsequently by the Father.⁸¹³ Though this allegation was not directly from Aëtius or Eunomius, Norris believes that Gregory is responding to the basic arguments of both.⁸¹⁴ Explaining that the temporal aspect should not be introduced in thinking about God, Gregory says, ‘Being unoriginate’ (ἀναρχος) necessarily implies ‘being eternal’ (αἰδιος), but ‘being eternal’ does not entail ‘being unoriginate,’ so long as the origin referred to is the Father. So because they [the Son and the Spirit] have a cause they are not unoriginate.’⁸¹⁵ Moreover, even though the Father is the cause of the Son, because this generation is eternal, without any time lapse, the Son is equal to the Father in essence. As the father-son and pearl images demonstrate, denying the identical nature of both the cause and the offspring does not make the Father honoured but instead leaves Him dishonoured. In his theological poem *De Filio*, Gregory says, “if it is a great thing for the Father to have no point of origin for his noble Godhead, it is no lesser glory for the revered offspring of the great Father to come from such a root (ρίζα).”⁸¹⁶ Keeping this in mind, Gregory makes the root (ρίζα) a

⁸¹⁰ Eun. *Apol.* 15; Vaggione, *Works*, 52-53.

⁸¹¹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.1.25; Sykes, *Poemata*, 2; *Or.* 29.3.

⁸¹² E.P. Meijering, “The Doctrine of the Will and of the Trinity in the Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus,” in *God Being History* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 111.

⁸¹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.3.

⁸¹⁴ Norris, *Faith*, 135; for the discussion on this time aspect, see pages 135-37.

⁸¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.3; Norris, *Faith*, 246; SC 250.182.

⁸¹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.28-31; Sykes, *Poemata*, 6-7.

touchstone image that validates and acts as a guide to understanding all other relational images, which we will explore in this chapter.

As in Athanasius, this image helps Gregory to maintain the theological affirmations that the Father is the origin and cause for the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁸¹⁷ At the same time both are of equal essence just like the root and the branches. Though Gregory does not explain this image with the similar words used by Athanasius, this becomes the foundational image as Gregory makes this a touchstone to check the authenticity of other images. No image can be used to think and talk about God if it does not demonstrate that the Father is the source and cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As with the image of the pearl, Gregory does not comment negatively on this image. Firstly, this may be because the image is not a complicated one. This lack of complication is what the image of the root shares with the image of pearl. In both of them, there is a focused singular argument without any ambiguity about one aspect of God. Secondly, it could be because Gregory does not elaborate the material side of the image i.e. the shoot or the branches that come out of the root. We see such elaboration in Athanasius, but Gregory avoids such discussion as it might lead to material thinking. This shows how Gregory uses the traditional image differently. By keeping this image abstract and focused on one aspect, Gregory utilises the image of root, without connecting it concretely with other material elements associated with root.

5.3. Source of Water, Spring and River (ὄφθαλμός, πηγή, ποταμός)

The image of water source-spring-river extends the argument of the image of root and reinforces the eternal originations of the Son and the Spirit, and shows how a common bond exists even after the generation and the procession happened.⁸¹⁸ Gregory introduces this image at the end of the *Theological Orations* where he explores the capacity of different comparative images to refer to God. While using this image, he also explores different ways it could be configured and uses the theme of the root image as a touchstone to assess its orthodoxy. Introducing this image, he says,

I had the idea, indeed others have had it too, of a source (ὄφθαλμόν), a spring (πηγήν), and a river (ποταμόν), and asked myself whether there were not something here corresponding (ἀναλόγως) with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁷ cf. Ath. *exp. fid.* 4.

⁸¹⁸ For discussion on this image in Gregory, see Sykes, *Poemata*, 133-35.

⁸¹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; Norris, *Faith*, 298; SC 250.338.

Each term Gregory uses for the persons of the Trinity—source, spring and a river—and the configuration in which he uses them shows how he transformed this traditional image. Gregory’s unique combination of terms in the image immediately stands out. He uses the term ὀφθαλμός to denote the source, which is unusual. In patristic literature, the term πηγή is often used by theologians to represent the Father as the source. For example, Origen calls the Father as πηγή,⁸²⁰ Basil says that the Son came forth from the life-giving source (ἐκ τῆς ζωοποιοῦ πηγῆς)⁸²¹ and even Gregory of Nazianzus calls the Father a πηγή⁸²², ἡ πηγή τῶν ἀπαυγασμάτων⁸²³ and a πηγή καλῶν.⁸²⁴ But in this configuration, Gregory uses πηγή for the Son. The term ‘river’ for the Spirit is a familiar biblical image found in John 7:38 where Jesus says that a river of living water (ποταμοὶ... ὕδατος ζῶντος), i.e. the Holy Spirit, will flow out of the one who believes in Him. Use of ὀφθαλμός is interesting. It commonly means ‘an eye,’ but here ὀφθαλμός is taken as the ‘mouth’ of the spring. Mason notes that Elias associates and interprets this term according to James 3:11, which refers to ἡ πηγή ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ὀπῆς, where it clearly reflects the image of a spring and an opening from which water gushes out, and says that “it is possible that Gr. [Gregory] was aware that an ‘eye’ is the ordinary word in Hebrew for a spring.”⁸²⁵ A reference to James is plausible, as Gregory Thaumaturgus also uses the term ὀφθαλμός when he speaks of how the sun pours out “a river of rays onto the universe” through ὀφθαλμός on its circle (κύκλος), which, in this context, also means the spring, source, or mouth.⁸²⁶ Both the choice of words and the way Gregory has combined them make this image unique.

In patristic literature, this image, with differing words and configuration, is used to emphasise both unity and distinction within the Godhead. Many theologians, such as Hippolytus,⁸²⁷ Tertullian,⁸²⁸ Dionysius of Alexandria,⁸²⁹ Lactantius,⁸³⁰ Athanasius⁸³¹ and Gregory of Thaumaturgus,⁸³² used this image. It played a prominent role as a christological image and later developed as a trinitarian one. Hippolytus had argued for the unity of Godhead

⁸²⁰ Or. fr. 69 in Jo.

⁸²¹ Bas. Eun. 2.25; SC 305.104.

⁸²² Gr. Naz. Or. 20.7; SC 270.72.

⁸²³ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.1; SC 270.58.

⁸²⁴ Gr. Naz. Carm. II.1.14.39; PG 37.1248A.

⁸²⁵ Mason, *Orations*, 187.

⁸²⁶ Gr. Thaum. ep. *Philagr.* 7; FC 98.177; PG 46.1105C.

⁸²⁷ Hipp. *Noët.* 11.

⁸²⁸ Tert. *Adv. Prax.* 8.

⁸²⁹ Dion. Al. *Ep. can.*; Stevenson, *A New Eusebius*, 254; Feltoe, *Dionysius of Alexandria*, 189.

⁸³⁰ Lactant. *Div. Inst.*, 4.29.

⁸³¹ Ath. *Ar.* 1.14; *ad Serap.* 1.19; 2.2.

⁸³² Gr. Thaum. ep. *Philagr.* 7.

using this image in *Against Noetus*, by saying “when I say ‘another’ (ἕτερον), I do not mean two Gods, but... as water is from a fountain (ὡς ὕδωρ ἐκ πηγῆς).”⁸³³ These two are distinct, yet have common substance. Against the Arian argument that ‘there was once he was not,’ Athanasius used this image to argue for the Father’s generative nature. When the Arians argue that the Son did not exist at one point in time, they rob God of his Word, Wisdom, and radiance and argue that the fountain was once barren and dry (ἄγονος ἦν ἡ πηγὴ καὶ ξηρά).⁸³⁴ Here, one can note the variety of ways this image was utilised in different contexts. Tertullian and Athanasius have used it as a trinitarian one. Tertullian, in his work *Against Praxeas*, critiques Valentinian theology by using the images of spring (*fons*), river (*flumen*), and irrigation canal (*rivus*).⁸³⁵ He says that the river coming out of the spring has the same substance and though the spring and the river are two manifestations (*duae species*), they are indivisible (*indivisae*).⁸³⁶ In his *Letters to Serapion*, Athanasius presents a trinitarian argument by positing the Father as πηγὴ, the Son as ποταμός and the Spirit from whom we are called to drink (πίνειν λεγόμεθα τὸ πνεῦμα).⁸³⁷ Though Athanasius does not mention the term “water,” the context makes it clear. Shapland does not consider this a developed trinitarian image, as the part of the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned: “Athanasius does not try to develop this simile until it corresponds with the whole life of the Trinity.”⁸³⁸ But I believe that Athanasius is giving a proper trinitarian image that reflects the reference to the living water in John 7:38. Though he did not explain it, it is implicit. Gregory is sharpening this argument in his usage of this image but at the same time clearly transforms it to suit his trinitarian purpose.

Gregory introduces ὀφθαλμός as the Father and source, and keeps πηγὴ second, representing the Son and ποταμός third for the Holy Spirit. Though the use of ποταμός echoes the Johannine usage, and is understood as an implicit reference to the Holy Spirit, Gregory does not explain the reason for associating πηγὴ with the Son. If we look for an exact correlation between each person and the elements in this image, we will miss the point Gregory is trying to make. He is not trying to equate each thing perfectly with a person in the Trinity; instead, he is transforming the traditional image to make a point that supports his trinitarian argument for timeless origination and connected existence of all the three persons in the Trinity. In the *Theological Orations*, he makes two explicit points we can illustrate from this

⁸³³ Hipp. *Noët.* 11; PG 10.817C.

⁸³⁴ Ath. *Ar.* 1.14; Same argument in *ad Serap.* 2.2.

⁸³⁵ Tert. *Adv. Prax.* 8; Evans, *Against Praxeas*, 97.

⁸³⁶ Tert. *Adv. Prax.* 8; Evans, *Against Praxeas*, 97.

⁸³⁷ Ath. *ad Serap.* 1.19; PG 26.574C.

⁸³⁸ Shapland, *Athanasius*, 110n11.

image but adds some warnings regarding the image.

5.3.1 Timeless and Connected

This image of water source-spring-river corresponds (ἀναλόγως; proportionately) with the Trinity, firstly, because it does not show any separation by time (χρόνῳ διέστηκεν).⁸³⁹ This is the only image for which Gregory uses a cognate of ἀνάλογος. However, the context is clear that he uses it not in technical sense of proportion but casually as an adverb. When the water comes out from the opening of the source, the spring is formed and the river flows. If we interpret this image with Athanasius' argument in mind, a source cannot be called a source without water. A spring ought to gush with water. These things happen simultaneously, without any time lapse. This highlights the Father's generative nature: the Father cannot be a Father without the Son. No one can clearly show the temporal sequence in the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Basil accuses Eunomius of introducing temporal separation between the Father and the Son. He says,

For they fail to realize that when they say that the Son is from nothing, they not only proclaim that he is posterior to the Father, but also that he is posterior to that by which they separate the Only-Begotten from the Father. If there is anything between the Father and the Son, this must be prior to the existence of the Son. So, then, what could this be? What else could this be besides an age (αἰών) or a time (χρόνος)?⁸⁴⁰

In this polemical context, Gregory feels that the image of the source, spring and the river could demonstrate that one thing can cause another thing to be without any temporal gap. Although all the things that exist in this world are subject to time and space, this image, along with light images, helps one to imagine the eternal generation and procession to some extent.

Secondly, Gregory thinks that this image points to the common bond that exists between all three persons, though each possesses unique characteristics. There is a bond of continuity (συνεχία).⁸⁴¹ The water from the source which gushes out of the spring and flows in the river are the same, but still one can't call the 'source' a 'river,' nor call 'spring,' a 'source.' While the Nicene theologians argued that the Father is the cause and the Son is begotten, eternally sharing in the essence of the Father as seen in the image of the root, Eunomius questioned it by saying, "they certainly cannot say this, that while the essence is common to both, it is in order, and in the superiority based on time that the one is first and the other second, for after all, the cause of pre-eminence must surely be an inherent property of the things which are pre-

⁸³⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; SC 250.338.

⁸⁴⁰ Bas. *Eun.* 2.13; SC 305.48; FC 122.146.

⁸⁴¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; SC 250.338.

eminent.”⁸⁴² Against this Eunomian opinion, Gregory feels that this image could be used to maintain both the pre-eminence of the source (the Father) and the commonality of the essence. Dionysius of Alexandria used this image in a similar way by saying, “the river which flows from the fountain is something distinct from the fountain. For we cannot call either the river a fountain, or the fountain a river. Nevertheless, we allow that they are both one according to nature, and also one in substance; and we admit that the fountain may be conceived of as father, and that the river is what is begotten of the fountain.”⁸⁴³ In this way this image acted as a corrective image against Sabellianism by insisting on the individual distinction while maintaining the relational connection that exists between the three persons.

5.3.2 Objections to the Image

Although the eternal existence of the three persons and the distinction without division are important for understanding the Trinity, Gregory points out three objections that can be made to this image. They are found both in the *Theological Orations* and in his theological poems. They serve as a warning to his audience about the faulty way God could be imagined as a result of flawed interpretation. These comments are vital to understanding the way Gregory thinks about the comparative images, and how he wants them to be understood when talking about God.

Firstly, he says that this image might bring in the idea of “a stream or flow of Deity without stability” (ρύσιν τινὰ θεότητος).⁸⁴⁴ Gregory might have the Neo-platonic comparison of νοῦς to πηγή in mind, where Plotinus says that the πηγή pours itself into the river without exhausting itself.⁸⁴⁵ Gregory is worried that the picture of movement (the spring of water and the flow of river) which this image evokes might lead to an idea of instability in the Godhead. In the poem, *De Spiritu Sancto*, he insists that God’s nature is not unstable (ἄστατός) nor a flux (ρέουσα), and he declares “the stability is of God” (τὸ δ’ ἔμπεδόν ἐστι Θεοῖο).⁸⁴⁶ Gregory acknowledges the neoplatonic idea which this image evokes and believes it could lead to a misunderstanding of God as being in constant flow, despite its the Johannine use in the Scriptures.

Secondly, Gregory thinks that this image might lead people to believe that, even though the source, the spring and the river are different, they are essentially the same thing. This could lead to a modalistic interpretation, in which different persons of the Trinity are merely different

⁸⁴² Eun. *Apol.* 10; Vaggione, *Works*, 45.

⁸⁴³ Dion. Al., *fr. 6 in Lc. 22*; ANF, Vol. 6, 120.

⁸⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; SC 250.338.

⁸⁴⁵ Plot., *Enn.* 3.8.10; LCL 442.395.

⁸⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.68-9; PG 37.413A.

forms of the same God. Presenting a different configuration of this image, in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, Gregory warns that one should not consider the Trinity to be one current (ἓν τε ῥέεθρον) in three forms (ἐν τρισσοῖσι τύποισιν).⁸⁴⁷ Later, Augustine also warns against a similar modalistic misuse of this image: “Therefore it is possible here that the same water may be in view at one time under the appellation of the fountain and at another under that of the river, and at a third under that of the draught. But in the case of that Trinity, we have affirmed it to be impossible that the Father should be sometime the Son, and sometime the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁴⁸ But it is this modalistic understanding of God Tertullian was combating when he used this image, and as Sykes remarks, “the analogy is accused... of that very Sabellianism which Tertullian intended it to combat.”⁸⁴⁹ Or, another possible misinterpretation is that this image could lead to the understanding of a common divine substance—a Godhead outside the three persons—from which each person emerged.

The third objection is also found in Gregory’s poem *De Spiritu Sancto*. Gregory brings up this image in another configuration and points out a potential danger. He says, “It [Trinity] is not a case of an underground passage (πόρος), a spring (πηγή), and a great river (ποταμὸς μέγας).⁸⁵⁰ He replaces the term ὀφθαλμὸς with πόρος. This is significant as it changes the whole nature of the image. With the slightly changed image in his poem, Gregory is removing the Father as the cause from the equation. Πόρος is not the source, but one of the conduits through which the water flows. If the Father is not acknowledged as the eternal cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit, this could lead to a modalistic view of Godhead. That is why correcting this misleading aspect with the image of the root is important, as Gregory argues.⁸⁵¹ Evans, in his commentary on Tertullian’s *Against Praxeas*, points to a related misuse of this image in the context of Valentinianism, which speaks of an unconscious overflow of divinity in creation. He says, “the spring is ignorant of its act of producing a river, and the river is ignorant of its source in the spring.”⁸⁵² For Gregory, this unconscious overflow cannot be part of the Trinity.

When we analyse this image within the framework and themes discussed in chapters 2 and 3, we find all the elements of Gregory’s use of comparative images here. Before introducing this particular image, Gregory says about the images in general: “If some small comparison (μικρά τις ὁμοίωσις) is found, the greater thing (τὸ πλέον) escapes me, leaving me below with

⁸⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.61-2; PG 37.413A.

⁸⁴⁸ Aug. *f. et symb.* 9.17; Timothy George, ed., *Augustine: On Christian Doctrine and Selected Introductory Works* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2022), 207, accessed January 22, 2026, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁴⁹ Sykes, *Poemata*, 134.

⁸⁵⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.61; PG 37.413A.

⁸⁵¹ See Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.58; cf. 5.2.

⁸⁵² Evans, *Against Praxeas*, 238.

the illustration (μετὰ τοῦ ὑποδείγματος).⁸⁵³ This statement points to the partial nature of images. No image can represent God. Even when Gregory uses them, he is aware that it is partial—a small comparison might be found—and if not careful, it would leave him below without helping him to come closer to God. He uses the image of the source, spring and river to demonstrate his point. He points out what this ὑπόδειγμα can and cannot do; how this image shows the resemblance to some aspects of the Trinity while failing to show other aspects and at times being misleading. Gregory’s enumeration of positives and negatives of this image shows the way comparative images operate in his theology: sometimes they are helpful and sometimes a hindrance. Despite the hazards, Gregory explores how best this image can be used to understand the particular aspects of God. This is the only image where Gregory is using the term ἀναλόγως, which is stronger than ὁμοίωσις, as it refers to its being equivalent and to resembling something. It is not merely the comparison of two dissimilar things. Although he is indeed confident in using this image, yet he spells out clearly its deficiencies. As a whole, this is a powerful image of the Trinity. Gregory was able to argue for the eternal existence of all three persons and the unity of the Godhead. By pointing to the apparent dangers in stretching this image, he cautions his audience about their theological imagination and the limitations of this image and draws obvious boundaries within which it should be understood. His warnings also remind us of the loaded meanings this image could evoke in the minds of his contemporaries because of its association with Greek philosophy. Its intended use with the image of the root shows that images are not to be treated in isolation, but they are to be used together, helping to correct the shortcomings of individual images. Thus, one image is correcting the other and acting as a safeguard.

5.4. Mind, Word and Spirit

The image of mind-word-spirit extends the arguments of the images of root and the water source-spring-river, and adds to them. Gregory uses this image to address the Eunomian fear of division in God’s being and the loss of the doctrine of divine simplicity if generation and procession are understood in the Nicene way. Some Platonists see an equivalence between the ‘mind’ (νοῦς) and the Divine.⁸⁵⁴ In the Christian tradition, the way the human mind gives rise to the word without any materiality or diminution is a perfect illustration of the divine passionless generation. This is not a new image, as illustrating the generation of the Son using

⁸⁵³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.31; SC 250.338.

⁸⁵⁴ Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 137.

the generation of word or thought from the mind is an image frequently used by theologians and implied in John 1.⁸⁵⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa use the mind-word image as a christological image to talk about the relationship between the Father and the Son.⁸⁵⁶ In Gregory of Thaumaturgus, we find the mind-word-soul as a trinitarian image.⁸⁵⁷ Although in Gregory of Nazianzus this image is trinitarian, with the three elements—mind, word and spirit—corresponding to three persons in the Trinity, it is not fully developed. Nazianzen explains the relationship between mind and word, but he does not explain why ‘spirit’ is included in this image, nor how it is related to the mind. While the comparison of the human spirit to the Holy Spirit is mentioned in 1 Cor. 2:11, in the context of the mind generating the word, the inclusion of ‘spirit’ in Gregory seems out of place.⁸⁵⁸ In addition, unlike other images where he takes pains to explain the arguments, he offers very little commentary on this image, and one has to read between the lines. But he does comment on the theological-ontological distinction by pointing to the dangers of comparing spiritual things with perceptible things while introducing this image.⁸⁵⁹ He also briefly mentions the misuse of this image in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*.⁸⁶⁰

Gregory discusses the relationship between mind and word in several places.⁸⁶¹ After agreeing to his father’s plea to assist him in the episcopal responsibilities of Nazianzus, he proclaimed in the short discourse delivered at the installation that he would be moved only by the direction of God, and open and close his door “to mind and word and spirit, who is one cohesion (συμφυῖα; lit. continuity of substance) and one divinity.”⁸⁶² He conceives the triune God to be the mind, word and spirit, which are connected to each other through the sharing of the substance. In this instance, he does not elaborate on this image, but the mention of *συμφυῖα* and a single divinity point to the unity he is trying to demonstrate in the divinity. This will be explored below. Here, the casual mention of the Trinity as ‘mind-word-spirit’ without any further explanation suggests that this was a well-known image for Gregory’s audience.

In *Oration 23*, he uses this image in the same way but with a little more explanation of how this works in the theological imagination. While talking about generation, Gregory clarifies that the Father does not experience passion as “bodies (σωματικός) and material substances

⁸⁵⁵ Stead, *Philosophy*, 138.

⁸⁵⁶ Eus. *e.th.* 2.17.4-6; FC 135.252; Gr. Nyssa. *ref.* 90; *Eun.* 2.9.

⁸⁵⁷ Gr. Thaum. *ep. Philagr.* 7.

⁸⁵⁸ cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 214.

⁸⁵⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11.

⁸⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.64.

⁸⁶¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 12.1; 20.9; 23.11; 30.20; *Carm.* I.1.3.64.

⁸⁶² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 12.1; SC 405.350: Νῶ, καὶ Λόγῳ, καὶ Πνεύματι, τῇ μιᾷ συμφυῖα τε καὶ θεότητι.

(ὕλικός) do.”⁸⁶³ Explaining that the human condition prevents human beings from knowing the relationship (σχέσις) and disposition (τάξις) of the members of the Trinity to each other, he says,

The nature of divinity is one and the same, characterized by lack of source, generation, and procession (these correspond to mind, word, and spirit in humans, at least insofar as one can compare (εἰκόσαι) things spiritual with things perceptible and things that are very great with those that are small, for no comparison (εἰκῶν) ever represents the true picture exactly.⁸⁶⁴

This is a trinitarian image as Gregory connects three persons with the three elements of the image. But because he does not elaborate on this further, we do not know how each element corresponds with each person. The idea of the mind generating the word clearly corresponds to the generation of the Son from the Father. However, the question of how the Spirit is related to the Mind and whether Gregory believes the Mind to be the source of the Spirit remains unanswered. Nevertheless, the message he intended to convey through this image is that the nature of divinity is one and the same, and that each is characterised by its relationship with the others.

In the *Theological Orations*, Gregory develops a substantial christological image using mind-word to illustrate the passionless generation and to demonstrate the indivisible relationship between the Father and the Son. In the context of talking about the unique (μονοτρόπως) generation of the Son, which is entirely different from corporeal begetting, he says,

He is ‘Word,’ because he is related to the Father as word is to mind, not only by reason of the undisturbed character of his birth (τὸ ἀπαθὲς τῆς γεννήσεως), but also through the connection (τὸ συναφές) and declaratory function (τὸ ἐξαγγελτικόν) involved in the relationship. One could say too, perhaps, that this relationship is that of definition to term defined (ὄρος πρὸς τὸ ὀριζόμενον), since ‘word’ has the meaning in Greek of ‘definition.’”⁸⁶⁵

Here, he compares the passionless, connected, and expressive nature of the Son's generation to the relationship between the mind and word. This comparison takes the audience through different aspects of the trinitarian doctrine, such as passionless generation, connectedness and declaratory function.

⁸⁶³ Gr. Naz. Or. 23.9; Vinson, *Gregory*, 137; SC 270.298.

⁸⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. Or. 23.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 139; SC 270.302.

⁸⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. Or. 30.20; Norris, *Faith*, 275.

5.4.1. Arguments Relating to this Image

The mind generates words, but no materiality or passion is involved in the process, and there is no diminution of the mind when words are generated. For Gregory, this image is a fitting illustration of the passionless generation of the Son. Describing this generation as unique (μονοτρόπως) to distinguish it from corporeal birth, he says that divine generation is not like human bodily generation (οὐχ ὡς τὰ σώματα), in which various physical processes over a long period of time result in the birth of a child.⁸⁶⁶ It is difficult to capture the meaning of μονοτρόπως in English. Fulford translates μονοτρόπως as ‘single movement of divine generation,’⁸⁶⁷ and Mason suggests “by a single process.”⁸⁶⁸

Eunomius, on the other hand, argues about generation in a material way. He claims that God is simple and uncompounded (ἀπλοῦς γὰρ καὶ ἀσύνθετος).⁸⁶⁹ He then goes on to argue for the Father’s superiority by saying,

If God is unbegotten... he could never undergo a generation which involved the sharing of his own distinctive nature with the offspring of that generation, and could never admit of any comparison or association with the thing begotten. Still, if anyone did want to make this essence a common property with some other or give something else a share in it, he would have to argue either on the basis of separation (διάστασις) and division (μερισμός) or on the basis of comparison... If he proceeds on the basis of separation and division, then God cannot be unbegotten already (what he was not before is precisely what he becomes as a result of separation).⁸⁷⁰

For Eunomius, if God is simple, he cannot share his essence because it would imply separation and division. Further, if the Father has shared the essence with another being in begetting, he cannot be called unbegotten. In Eunomian logic, the superiority of the Father is based on the Father being unique by not sharing the essence with anyone else. Had the Father shared his essence with any other being, then that would have compromised the Father’s superiority. But using the image of the mind and word, Gregory is making his case for passionless generation, which is different from the type of generation Eunomius is talking about. Gregory wants his audience to differentiate between human and divine generation. Gregory of Nyssa makes this point more clear. Contrary to the corporeal generation that human

⁸⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.20; SC 250.266.

⁸⁶⁷ Ben Fulford, “‘One Commixture of Light’: Rethinking Some Modern Uses and Critiques of Gregory of Nazianzus on the Unity and Equality of the Divine Persons.” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 2009): 178, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://doi-org.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2008.00381.x>

⁸⁶⁸ Mason, *Orations*, 139.

⁸⁶⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 8; Vaggione, *Works*, 42-43.

⁸⁷⁰ Eun. *Apol.* 8; Vaggione, *Works*, 42-43.

beings are familiar with, he says, there are other types of generation where the source remains undiminished (ἀμείωτα μένοντα) like the sun and its rays, the lamp and its radiance, and perfume and its fragrance, and then he moves on to use mind and word as an example:

There is also another kind of generation besides these, where the cause is immaterial and incorporeal, but the generation is sensible and takes place through the instrumentality of the body; I mean the generation of the word by the mind (τὸν ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ γεννώμενον λόγον). For the mind being in itself incorporeal begets the word by means of sensible instruments.⁸⁷¹

For Gregory of Nyssa, words are produced through physical organs, and thus, they are material, but the mind that produces the words is immaterial. Gregory Nazianzus does not make this distinction, but he also makes the same point that there is no diminution of mind in the production of the words. They both point to a different kind of generation which Eunomius is failing to take into account when he considers the divine generation.

The second argument is for commonality within the Trinity. Gregory uses the terms συμφυῖα⁸⁷² and τὸ συναφές.⁸⁷³ While Eunomius talks about the division in generation if the essence is shared, Gregory points to the connection and continuity of substance in the divine passionless generation. The division and separation occur only in human corporeal generation, not in the incorporeal one. He says, “How, then can the process of begetting not involve subjection to change? Because a body is not involved. If corporeal begetting implies subjection to change, an incorporeal one must be free of it.”⁸⁷⁴ Here he echoes the argument of Gregory of Thaumaturgus who used mind-word-soul, and argued for the mutual connection and indivisibility of the simple being of God. Gregory of Thaumaturgus says, “for as no division or cleft is conceived of between mind and word and soul, so neither is cleft or division conceived of between the Holy Spirit and the Savior and the Father; since, as we said before, the nature of intelligibles is indivisible, so is that of divine things.”⁸⁷⁵ Though the configuration of the image differs—soul in the place of spirit—the argument is the same. Although the connection between the mind as the source and the word as the issue is undeniable, this does not answer the question of how the mind becomes the source of the soul.

The third argument for the declaratory function (τὸ ἐξαγγελτικόν) is christological. This extends the biblical understanding that the Son reveals the Father. Just as words are expressions

⁸⁷¹ Gr. Nyss. *ref.* 90; GNO, vol. 2, 349; NPNF, II, vol. 5, 204.

⁸⁷² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 12.1.

⁸⁷³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.20.

⁸⁷⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.4; Norris, *Faith*, 247.

⁸⁷⁵ Gr. Thaum. *ep. Philagr.* 7; FC 98.176-7.

of the mind and thinking, the Son expresses who the Father is. It is not simply that the Son talks about the Father and declares him; rather, the Son becomes the very definition (ὅρος) of who the Father is.⁸⁷⁶ The connection between the mind and word helps Gregory to talk about the revelatory nature of the second person in the Trinity. This argument can be extended to show that the Son eternally existed with the Father as His definition. Just as with wisdom, the Father cannot be imagined to exist without his word or definition.

5.4.2. Warnings Concerning the Use of this Image

Although this image is a fitting illustration to demonstrate passionless generation, the connected nature of divine persons and the revelatory nature of the Son, Gregory is aware of its potential misuse, as with any other image. First, he points to the theological and ontological distinction between the image and the realities of God. In the context of explaining this image, Gregory adds a note that in using mind-word-spirit, he is comparing things spiritual (νοητός) with things perceptible (αἰσθητός) and great things (μέγας) with small things (μικρός), and no εἰκόν could reveal truth accurately.⁸⁷⁷ This is a general comment on the use of any comparative image to represent a spiritual reality. In this context, he does not explain how this image falls short, except to reiterate his general objection to using any image to represent God, based on the ontologically dualistic idea that one aspect is sensible and small, while the other is intellectual and great as discussed in chapter 2. Even when a good illustration that can throw light on an aspect of God is used to talk about God, one should bear in mind the ontological distinction. In this way, Gregory is training the theological imaginations of his audience to be aware of material thinking and to avoid it when thinking about God.

Secondly, in different places in his corpus, Gregory talks of misunderstandings that might develop when this image is imagined in different ways. But these misunderstandings are largely related to Christology. In his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, he says one should not imagine this image as “the word proceeding from the mind while remaining within it (ἔνδοθι μίμνων).”⁸⁷⁸ Here, he refers to the misuse of this image in Marcellus’s theology, where the Word proceeds out as an expansion of the monad, only for the purpose of incarnation, without becoming an eternal second individual being. Sykes has demonstrated the linguistic similarities between Gregory’s objection to this image here and in Marcellus’ writings.⁸⁷⁹ The Word which proceeds from the mind, in Gregory’s theology, has eternal individual existence. However, Marcellus,

⁸⁷⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.20.

⁸⁷⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; SC 270.302.

⁸⁷⁸ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.64; PG 37.413A; Sykes, *Poemata*, 15.

⁸⁷⁹ Sykes, *Poemata*, 136.

in order to counter the Arian subordinationalism, went too far in emphasising the unity of the Father and the Son. There is also another minor variation to this Marcellian conception which Gregory objects to in the context of talking about generation. In *Oration 20*, he says, “For I am not saying that the Son has come into being from the Father in this way, that he first was in the Father, and after that made his way towards being—he was not, after all, first incomplete and then complete, as is the law of our own process of generation.”⁸⁸⁰ This imagines a lag between the Son coming to existence as an individual person in incarnation and the conception in the Father’s mind. This understanding denies the eternal generation. Here, the warning of Athanasius about the corporeal thinking in this image sounds true. Athanasius said, “Though He is Word, He is not, as we said, after the likeness of human words, composed of syllables; but He is the unchanging Image of the Father” and warns of thinking of the Second Person in the Trinity as similar to the human word which is “composite and divisible.”⁸⁸¹ Although this image is used to explain the eternal divine generation, it should not be understood literally, as we would understand human words, but rather as something worthy of deity, without the material conceptions that do not belong to God’s nature. So, like Athanasius, Gregory trains his audience to use material images that are familiar to them to represent God, but encourages them to do so appropriately.

Although this image in Gregory contributes positively to trinitarian understanding, it also leaves some questions unanswered, particularly regarding the third element: the spirit or soul, and its relationship to the mind.

5.5. The Light Images

The images of torch/lamp (λαμπάς), sun (ἥλιος) and light (φῶς, φάος) form a cluster of images that revolve around ‘light’ and illustrate the relational aspect of the persons in the Trinity. All three images discussed in the following pages have a rich background in Greek religion, philosophy, and theology. Light, in general, has fascinated humankind since the beginning of recorded history. As light enables human vision and sunlight is a source of life on earth, light has become a symbol of Divinity.⁸⁸² The worship of the sun and the use of lamps

⁸⁸⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.9; Daley, *Gregory*, 103

⁸⁸¹ Ath. gen. 41: NPNF, II, vol. 4, 26.

⁸⁸² Ian Walmsley, *Light: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-3; cf. Isidoros Katsos, “Chasing the Light: What Happened to the Ancient Theories?” *Isis* 110, no. 2 (2019): 270, accessed April 15, 2026. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26858843>; Katsos, *The Metaphysics of Light in Hexaemeral Literature: From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 1-3. Katsos draws from Baeumker’s and points to classical examples of identifying the divinity with the light in a literal way and using light as analogy to talk about God.

and torches in the religious ceremonies are part of Greek religious practises.⁸⁸³ Light became a standard part of philosophical vocabulary to represent knowledge through Plato's allegory of the cave where human beings are called to move from seeking mere shadows to the life in light.⁸⁸⁴ Plotinus' delineation of the nature of the Good's relationship with all existing entities, and the relationship between the One and the Intellect, along with his utilisation of the image of the sun and its light, played a pivotal role in the evolution of trinitarian imagery associated with light.⁸⁸⁵ Light has a prominent place in theology for talking about God because it is one of the prominent biblical images for God.⁸⁸⁶ In Gregory, when he discusses the torch and the sun, light, rays, and radiance feature prominently as products of both. Thus, Gregory relies more on the aspect of light itself than on the material aspects of the torch and the sun. In this section, I will deal with the images of the sun and the torch, before discussing 'light' as an independent image. It is important to note that, as Gregory considers 'light' as incorporeal, he considers it a useful image, but when considering 'light' as in the sun and the torch, he fears their material implication.

5.5.1. Torch/Lamp (λαμπάς)

The comparative image of the torch or lamp (λαμπάς) is used by Gregory both as a christological image to speak of the generation of the Son from the Father and as a trinitarian image to illustrate the unity of the Trinity. But the torch is not used in isolation, but always with light (φῶς) to make sure Gregory's audience does not misunderstand its function in a material way. As a christological image, the torch is not new; it has been used in the Christian tradition to speak of the Father's generation of the Son without diminution or division. But Gregory uses it in a different way because of the pitfalls of the material overtone this image brings to the understanding of the Trinity, and also because of its use by Eunomius.

Using the image of the torch to talk about the undiminished source in divine generation is found in Tatian and Gregory of Nyssa. Justin Martyr uses the image of fire (πῦρ) lighting other fires without diminishing itself to talk about the generation of the Son by the Father without division and loss of anything in Him.⁸⁸⁷ We see a variation of this argument in Tatian. In his

⁸⁸³ See Eva Parisinou, *The Light of the Gods: The Role of Light in Archaic and Classical Greek Cult* (London: Duckworth, 2000) and Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakantza and Olga Levaniouk, eds, *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010). cf. 5.5.2.

⁸⁸⁴ Pl. *Rep.* 514a-520a.

⁸⁸⁵ Plot. *Enn.* 1.7.1; 5.1.7. cf. 5.3.12.

⁸⁸⁶ cf. 1 Jn 1:5; Jn 8:12.

⁸⁸⁷ Just. *dial.* 61; cf. 128.

Oratio adversus Graecos, he had used the torch as a christological image and said that the begetting of the Son happened “just as many fires (πυρά) are kindled from one torch (ἀπὸ μιᾶς δαδός) and the first torch does not diminish because it lightened many torches, in the same way also λόγος coming out of the power of the Father does not make the begetter ἄλογος.”⁸⁸⁸ Gregory of Nyssa also uses this image to emphasise that there are different types of generation in the world, other than human procreation, as seen in 5.3.1. He says that there is one type of generation where the source remains undiminished (ἀμείωτα μένοντα) and produces things which are naturally unique (ἐκδιδομένην φυσικὴν ιδιότητα) like the lamp and its radiance (ἐπὶ τῆς λαμπάδος καὶ τῆς ἀγῆς).⁸⁸⁹ These examples show that the image of a torch is a traditional one for describing the undiminished and undivided source, i.e., the Father.

Gregory of Nazianzus transforms this image for his polemical purposes. This is because of its use by Eunomius and its role in the Arian controversy. He is cautious and makes only a few references to this image, mostly to warn about its misuse. The positive example is in his oration *In sancta baptisma*, where Gregory reminds those who are being baptised that they are baptised in the name of the triune God. He uses his usual rhetorical flourish to talk about the mystery of the Holy Trinity and summarises it for them while portraying his struggle to talk about the unity and the distinctiveness of persons within the Godhead. At the end, he presents this image:

This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia. No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One... when I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch (μίαν ὀρῶ λαμπάδα), and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light (τὸ φῶς).⁸⁹⁰

For Gregory, the image of the torch becomes a source of reflection on the unity of the Godhead in its distinction of personality. He invites his audience to reflect on the light produced by the λαμπάς. This brief reference does not explain how this image is to be understood, and whether the λαμπάς corresponds to the Father and the light to the Son, or whether he is speaking of λαμπάς as a Godhead which contains the undivided φῶς, as he says in some other places.

⁸⁸⁸ Tat. *orat.* 5; PG 6.817.

⁸⁸⁹ Gr. Nyss. *ref.* 89-90; GNO, vol. 2, 349; NPNF, II, vol. 5, 114.

⁸⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.41; NPNF, 375; SC 358.294.

However, given other references which point out the misuse of this image, it is clear that Gregory wants the torch and the light to be understood as source and issue, intrinsically related. It is in the movement of going back to the source and the relationship that one can see the unity of the Trinity. This becomes clearer when we look at Eunomius' misuse of this image. In an Eunomian fragment, embedded in the writings of Cyril of Alexandria, Eunomius argues that the light or fire shining from the lamp (λύχνος) is external and thus different. Eunomius says,

Answer this, you who say the Son is the reflection of the Father: Light or fire in a lamp shines outward but does not itself fill everything. If the Father is the light and the Son his reflection, the Father's essence cannot fill everything, for there must be a place for the reflection. If the Father does fill everything, where is there a place for the essence of the begotten?⁸⁹¹

For Eunomius, the light shining out of the lamp differs from the lamp itself. He considers the light as external to the source, but Gregory argues that the light is integral to it. Gregory is probably following Origen here, who had already argued for internal sharing of essence when he is talking of the eternal begetting of the Son. He says that "this is an eternal and everlasting begetting, just as brightness is begotten from light. For he does not become Son, in an external manner, through adoption in the Spirit, but is Son by nature."⁸⁹² Gregory of Nyssa argues similarly, using the same image (λύχνος), to counter the Eunomian argument that the Son did not exist before his own begetting. Resembling the argument of a water source not being a water source without water, as seen earlier, Nyssen says,

In saying there was no radiance, he surely argues at the same time there is no radiating power either, as is the case, for example, with a lamp. If one mentions the light from the lamp, one shows also that the lamp is shining, and if one says there is no light, one indicates that the source of light is extinguished too. So when the Son is said not to exist, the non-existence also of the father is in strict logical deduction argued at the same time by these words.⁸⁹³

Gregory of Nyssa interprets this image in a way that intrinsically links the source and the issue by demonstrating that if one is non-existent, the other is, too. He also touches upon the argument that if there was a time when light was not there in the lamp, then there must be no lamp, as a lamp is defined by the light it gives. But he does not elaborate on this a great deal. This is a clear rebuttal of the Eunomian argument that the light is external to the lamp.

Gregory of Nazianzus' use of this image by combining the λαμπάς with φῶς is significant,

⁸⁹¹ Cyr. *thes.* vii; Vaggione, *Works*, 182; cf. PG 75.100BC.

⁸⁹² Or. *princ.* 1.2.4; Behr, *Origen*, vol.1, 47.

⁸⁹³ Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 3.6.49-50; Hall, *Contra Eunomius III*, 163.

considering the genealogy of the image of λαμπάς in the Arian controversy. Arius rejected this image, and so did the pro-Nicenes. While writing to explain his position to bishop Alexander of Alexandria, Arius mentioned Hieracas, who used a similar image and rejected it vehemently as heretical. Arius says that Hieracas talked about the relationship between the Father and the Son as “a lamp from another lamp (λύχνον ἀπο λύχνου), or, as a lamp [divided] into two (λαμπάδα εἰς δύο).”⁸⁹⁴ Arius rejects this image as it denotes division in God’s simple being. Hilary has a different reason to reject this image. Expounding this image, Hilary says that Hieracas

taught that there were two lights from one lamp (*unius lucernae duo lumina praedicavit*), so that the twofold division of the lights resembled the substance of the Father and the Son, which has been enkindled into light by the oil of one vessel, just as if there were an external substance of oil in a lamp which contained the essence of two kinds of lights, or as if it were indeed a candle which had the same wick throughout and which was burning at both ends, and as if there were some matter between them from which a twofold light was diffused.⁸⁹⁵

Hilary rejects this as it seems to point to a common substance from which both the Father and the Son came into being, and has material overtones. Hilary prefers the image of light from light, which does not have these problems.⁸⁹⁶ In light of this issue, Gregory’s use of φῶς along with λαμπάς and the avoidance of any further details about the λαμπάς point to the danger of conceiving this image in a materialistic way, which had previously occurred. He merely points to the undivided light (φῶς) produced by the λαμπάς. Because he wants to draw attention to the unity of the Trinity in its distinction as shown in the unity of the light, not to the material aspect of λαμπάς. Thus, Gregory, in training the theological imagination of his audience, guides them away from material intrusions. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Adversus Macedonianos de spiritu sancto*, points out that this image works better if the focus is on the flame rather than the torch. He argues that one cannot separate flame (τὴν φλόγα) burning on three torches (ἐν τρισὶ λαμπάσι), even if the third torch was kindled by the first one.⁸⁹⁷ Maintaining the connection between the source and the light, but focusing on the light to understand the unity, makes this image useful in trinitarian discourse. I believe Gregory of Nazianzus has the same objective as Gregory of Nyssa, directing the focus to the unity of the light rather than the materiality of the torch.

⁸⁹⁴ Ath. *syn.* 16; PG 26.709A.

⁸⁹⁵ Hil. *Trin.* 6.12; FC 25.179; SC 448.190.

⁸⁹⁶ Hanson, *God*, 481.

⁸⁹⁷ Gr. Nyss. *Maced.* GNO 3.1, 93.

As seen above, the explanation of the image in Gregory of Nazianzus is minimal. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret this image through the lens of how others have interpreted it before and during his lifetime and also by looking at Gregory's discussion on the misuse of the image in understanding the Trinity. In the poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, Gregory elaborates on the misuse of this image while talking about the relationship between μονάς and τριάς. He says, one should not imagine it to be like “a torch (λαμπάς) from the pyre (πυρκαϊά) returning to its point of origin.”⁸⁹⁸ There are two elements of the image to which Gregory objects. Firstly, it gives the impression of hierarchy, i.e. the pyre, which has more firepower, is superior to the torch, which comes from the pyre. In *Oration 30*, while talking about the misuse of this image in Sabellian thinking, he refers to the source as “a great flame (πυρὰν μεγάλην)”⁸⁹⁹; a bigger fire lighting the smaller fires. Both passages highlight the fact that the Father should not be thought of as the only true existing independent source, and the Son as an inferior being without independent existence. As seen in the honour images and other relational images, Gregory wants to acknowledge the Father as the source and, at the same time, maintain that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of equal nature with equal honour.

And secondly, the misuse of this image denies independent subsistence to the Son, as the light of the torch is only temporary. Gregory touches on this issue in his fourth *Theological Oration*, while countering the modalist and subordinationist interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:28 that the Son would be subjected to the Father (αὐτὸς ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται) and God would be all in all (ἵνα ἧ ὁ θεὸς πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν), Gregory invokes the image of λαμπάς to point to its misuse.⁹⁰⁰ Before using this image, Gregory refutes the Eunomian arguments based on biblical texts 1 Cor. 15:25, Acts 3:21, and Ps. 110:1, which are interpreted to mean that Christ's reign ceases at some point in history. For example, Paul says “For he must reign until (ἄχρι) he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). Gregory argues that the term ‘until’ (ἄχρι and ἕως in other passages) in these passages should be interpreted in a different way: “it states the point up to which something happens but does not deny what goes beyond that point.”⁹⁰¹ Norris mentions that Gregory “operates much as a twentieth-century linguistic analyst by pointing out how context, not root meanings, must determine the sense of the word.”⁹⁰² Following this argument on ‘until,’ Gregory tackles the interpretation of 1 Cor. 15: 28 which

⁸⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.63; Sykes, *Poemata*, 14-15.

⁸⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.6.

⁹⁰⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.6.

⁹⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.4.

⁹⁰² Norris, *Faith*, 163.

features as a prominent Eunomian subordinationistic proof text.⁹⁰³ After pointing out the fact that the scripture mentions that God, not the Father, will be all in all, Gregory says, that the passage should not be interpreted in a Sabellian way because “the Son will not revert to disappear completely in the Father, like a torch (λαμπάδος) temporarily withdrawn from a great flame (πυρὰν μεγάλην) and then joined up again with it.”⁹⁰⁴ Here, Gregory is trying to balance the individual subsistence of the three persons with the unity of the Trinity. Norris explains that this is a puzzling issue for Nicene theologians as they have to answer the question about the ‘primal cause’ within the three co-eternal and co-equal beings while maintaining the unity of the Godhead.⁹⁰⁵ As in the poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, here too Gregory maintains the balance and warns against the misuse of the image of the torch.

Looking at this image through the theological and ontological framework we have established in chapter 2, Gregory is consistent in trying to use it appropriately and avoid misuse. As the image of the torch featured prominently in the Arian controversy as a material image, and also featured in Eunomius as a subordinating image, Gregory is careful in how he uses it. Compared to the details of comparison Gregory gives, here he does not elaborate much. The details about the materiality of the torch could lead his audience to think in a material way. But by showing how not to think about the generation and the independent personality of the Son through this image, Gregory believes that this image can help in a small way to think and talk about God. The short positive reference in *Oration 40*, highlights the positive value this image has in God-talk. Another issue with this image in Gregory is that, although he discusses it in the context of the Trinity, he does not develop it as a fully formed trinitarian image. He wants his audience to apply the christological lesson of the divisionless generation to the procession of the Holy Spirit and fill in the gaps themselves. Nevertheless, Gregory’s discussion of this image provides insight into his approach to comparative images in God-talk.

5.5.2. Sun (ἥλιος) with its Ray (ἄκτις) and Light (φῶς)

The sun is one of Gregory’s favourite and frequently used images for God, and is employed in various ways. The frequent use of this image in Gregory is not only because of the pattern set by the earlier writers, but also because of Gregory’s high opinion about the sun. Among the things of visible creation, the sun occupies an important place for Gregory. He calls it a “beacon

⁹⁰³ Eun. *Apol.* 27; Vaggione, *Works*, 72.

⁹⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.6; Norris, *Faith*, 266.

⁹⁰⁵ Norris, *Faith*, 198.

for the whole world,” and a “chorus leader.”⁹⁰⁶ He considers the sun as the noblest thing (κάλλιστος) which can be seen by our physical eyes, and compares it with the noblest thing in the ideal world, i.e. God.⁹⁰⁷ That is why he comments that “the sun has the same place in things of sense (αἰσθητός) as God has in things ideal (νοητός).”⁹⁰⁸ Just as the sun helps human beings see the visible world, God helps the mind see ideal things. Gregory says that the light was disembodied first in creation, and that the sun was created only later as the source of light on Earth.⁹⁰⁹ Thus, for him, light is immaterial, and the sun has material attributes. That is why, as in the image of the torch, he combines the sun with non-material elements of light, such as rays (ἄκτις; ἀύγή) and light (φῶς). The use of this image for God has biblical precedents. In Psalm 84:11, God is the sun who bestows favour and honour, and Malachi 4:2 mentions the Sun of righteousness (ὁ δικαιοσύνης ἥλιος), which was usually interpreted by the church fathers as Jesus Christ.⁹¹⁰ Most importantly for patristic Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, reference to Christ in Hebrews 1:3 as the brilliance of the Father’s glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης) became the standard vocabulary to talk about the relationship between the Father and the Son. These biblical precedents had encouraged the patristic writers, including Gregory, to use the image of the sun for God. That is why Gregory frequently uses this image and explores its different implications.

This image was important in the context of the fourth century and, on a personal level, to Gregory. The worship of the Persian sun god Mithras was prevalent in the empire, and Gregory’s Athenian classmate and the emperor Julian the apostate called himself the follower (ὀπαδός) of King Helios.⁹¹¹ He also described himself as Helios’ son (τουτὶ τὸ παιδίον) and offspring (ἔκγονον).⁹¹² Libanius describes how Julian even built a temple to the sun god (τῷ τὴν ἡμέραν ἄγοντι θεῷ, i.e. ‘to the god who rules the day’) in the middle of his palace.⁹¹³ Julian wanted the worship of the sun to replace Christianity, with the sun as the new mediator, like Christ, between Zeus and the human beings.⁹¹⁴ As Emperor Julian’s edict banning Christians

⁹⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.29; Norris, *Faith*, 242.

⁹⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.30.

⁹⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.30; Norris, *Faith*, 243; SC 250.168; Same statement is found in *Or.* 21.1 and 40.5; cf. *Or. Cels.* 4.45.

⁹⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.4; PG 36.609D.

⁹¹⁰ cf. *Or. Cels.* 6.79; 7.31; *Or. Comm. in Rom.* 5.1.40; 9.32.3; *Cypr. De Orat.* 35; *Gr. Thaum. annunt.* 1, 3, 4; *Gr. Naz. Or.* 45.16.

⁹¹¹ *Juln. Imp. Or.* 4.130B; LCL 13.352.; cf. Elm, *Hellenism*, 114-6.

⁹¹² *Juln. Imp. Or.* 7.229C; LCL 29.136. Hilton notes that Julian’s claim to be the son of Helios could be because of his albinian features and nystagmus signs, which many ancient witnesses point to: John Hilton, “Nature and the Supernatural: the Hereditary Allegiance of the Emperor Julian to Helios,” *Acta Classica* 66 (2023): 94.

⁹¹³ *Gr. Nyss. Eun.* 3.6.49-50; Hall, *Contra Eunomius III*, 163.

⁹¹⁴ LCT 13.350.

from teaching classics was always in the background of Gregory’s theological and literary endeavours, we can assume that Gregory was aware of Julian’s devotion to the sun as god. But this personal connection and the background do not stop him from using this image but made him careful in using it. In the sections below, I will deal with Gregory’s use of the sun as an image to talk about God in his theological epistemology, and move on to his christological and trinitarian usages.

God and the Sun:

As mentioned earlier, Gregory compares God to the sun many times: “the sun has the same place in realm of sense as God has in the ideal realm.”⁹¹⁵ Gregory uses the sun to illustrate the incomprehensibility of God, highlighting the limitations of the human mind in understanding the infinite God. In several places Gregory talks about the effect of the sun’s light (φῶς) or ray (ἄκτις; ἀύγή) upon weak or diseased vision or eyes (ὄψις or ὀφθαλμός).⁹¹⁶ Just as the sun is too powerful for the normal eye to look at, God is too big for the human mind to grasp. In some passages, he uses the noun ἀτονία and adjectives ἀσθενής and σαθρός to denote the inability of the human mind to understand God.

Using the image of the sun in this way is an important feature of patristic discourse on the human knowledge of God. Origen, in his *De Principiis*, correlates human inability and divine transcendence by saying,

Our eyes frequently cannot look upon the nature of light itself (*naturam lucis*)—that is, upon the substance of the sun (*substantiam solis*); but when we behold his splendour (*splendorem*) or his rays (*radios*) pouring in, perhaps, through windows or some small openings to admit the light, we can reflect how great is the supply and source of the light of the body.⁹¹⁷

For Origen, one cannot look at the sun directly but can think about the sun through the rays that come in through the window. Our human ability allow us only this much. Similar arguments pointing to the human inability to know God by comparing God to the sun can be found in Novatian⁹¹⁸ and Gregory of Nyssa.⁹¹⁹ Nyssen gives a new spin to this argument by saying that children, when playing in the sun, see

a sunbeam streaming upon them through a window, they are delighted by its beauty and pounce on what they see, and try to take the sunbeam in their hand, and compete

⁹¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.30; Also found in *Or.* 21.1 and 40.5.

⁹¹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 9.2; 20.10, 27.3, 28.3, 31.26 and 41.6.

⁹¹⁷ *Or. princ.* 1.6; SC 252.98; ANF, vol. 4, 243.

⁹¹⁸ Novat. *Trin.* 2.10; FC 67.28.

⁹¹⁹ Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 2.3.80.

with each other, and grasp the light, catching the ray, as they suppose, in clasped fingers; but when the clasped fingers are opened, the handful of sunbeam makes the children laugh and clap because it has slipped from their hands.⁹²⁰

Gregory, in his theological epistemology, uses this common trope to talk about the infinite nature of the Divine. God is like the sun, powerful and far from us, yet all-knowing. This is not only a biblical and patristic understanding of God but also embedded in the classical tradition. Homer considers the sun the god who sees everything (πάντ' ἐφορᾷς) and who hears everything (πάντ' ἐπακούεις).⁹²¹ Gregory echoes this when he calls God a “light that cannot be gazed (ἀκατασκόπητον αὐγήν), yet overseeing all things, knowing everything from the earth to the abyss.”⁹²² Like Nyssen, Gregory compares human knowledge of God to the rays that reach us in a small way. In his funeral oration for his sister, Gregory talks about the “rays (αὐγή) now illumine us in a small degree, but from whom we still live at a distance (κεχωρίσμεθα), as far as full knowledge is concerned.”⁹²³ Though we cannot see the sun, we can enjoy the rays which reach us. This leads him to wonder whether we will know God fully when we reach closer to him.

Building on this, Gregory claims that any ambitious attempts to know God despite human limitations could endanger or confound the whole faculty of vision or understanding. It is not safe (οὐδὲ ἀσφαλές) for human beings.⁹²⁴ The unmixed (ἀκραιφνής) light will conquer the senses.⁹²⁵ This is similar to the argument Novatian made about the gradual revelation of God to humankind. He says that if great things happen suddenly, they are dangerous just as “the light of the sun, striking suddenly with excessive brilliance upon eyes accustomed to the darkness, will not manifest the light of day but rather will cause blindness.”⁹²⁶ So it is not just the inability of humankind to gaze at God directly, it is also dangerous for them to do so. Arguing against his opponents in *Oration 20*, Gregory says that he is content to call Christ the Son, and that Christ is from the Father, and he refuses to speculate beyond this point, warning:

I have no wish to be like the man who loses his voice from overuse or his eyesight from staring directly into the sun: the more fully and sharply one wants to see, the more he damages his eyes and is blinded altogether, for his vision is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the sight if he insist on taking in the whole instead of only that portion

⁹²⁰ Gr. Nyss. *Eun.* 2.3.80.

⁹²¹ Hom. *Il.* 3.277; cf. *Od.* 12.176.

⁹²² Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.30.32-34; PG 37.510A.

⁹²³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 8.19.

⁹²⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 27.3; cf. 45.11.

⁹²⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.3.

⁹²⁶ Novat. *Trin.* 2.10; FC 67.28.

that is without risk.⁹²⁷

This is why Gregory argues for moderation and limits in doing theology.⁹²⁸ In our enthusiasm to know God, we might lose everything.

Co-eternity of the Son:

Apart from using the image of the sun to discuss God and the knowledge of God, Gregory also uses it in christological arguments to discuss the co-eternity of the Son, which is later expanded into a trinitarian argument. Arguing for the eternal generation and co-eternity of the Son with the Father, Gregory writes that Christ exists as “the Son of the Father, having that Father as his timeless beginning, as light (φάος) originates from that beautiful great circle of the sun (ἡελίοιο μέγαν περικαλλέα κύκλον).”⁹²⁹ As one cannot separate the sun from its light, Gregory’s use of this image to argue for the eternal generation of the Son is effective and vivid and demonstrates the co-eternity of the Son with the Father. This is a standard christological argument found in patristic literature which was later developed into a trinitarian image, just as Barbel says, “Im Anfang waren die Vergleiche noch vielfach zweigliedrig. Später wurden sie mit drei Gliedern ausgestattet” (In the beginning, the comparisons were still often twofold. Later they were equipped with three limbs).⁹³⁰ The use of this image for Christ is based on Heb. 1:3 where Christ is portrayed as the brilliance of Father’s glory (ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης; *splendor gloriae*).

The sun-image was used in similar arguments to defend and explain different aspects of Christology in Hippolytus of Rome,⁹³¹ Origen,⁹³² Dionysius of Alexandria,⁹³³ Theognostus of Alexandria,⁹³⁴ and Athanasius.⁹³⁵ Origen calls Christ’s generation “as eternal and perpetual (*aeterna ac sempiterna generatio*), just as the brilliance (*splendor*) is produced from the light (*ex luce*).”⁹³⁶ Later, he describes Christ as the brilliance of eternal light (*splendor lucis aeternae*) and explains this by comparison with the sun (*cum solis similitudinem*) to argue that the perpetual and eternal neither has beginning (*initium*) nor does it cease to exist (*cessare*).⁹³⁷ Although the image of light and its brilliance, and the image of the sun and its brilliance are

⁹²⁷ Gr. Naz. Or. 20.10; Vinson, *Gregory*, 114.

⁹²⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 27.3.

⁹²⁹ Gr. Naz. Carm. I.2; PG 37.403; Sykes, *Poemata*, 7.

⁹³⁰ Barbel, *Reden*, 274n63.

⁹³¹ Hipp. *Noët*. 11.

⁹³² Or. *princ.* 2.4; 2.11.

⁹³³ Dion. Al. *Ep.can.*; Feltoe, *Dionysius of Alexandria*, 186.

⁹³⁴ Ath. *decr.* 25.

⁹³⁵ Ath. *Ar.* 3.15; *syn.* 520; *exp. fid.* 4.

⁹³⁶ Or. *princ.* 2.4; SC 252.118.

⁹³⁷ Or. *princ.* 2.11; SC 252.138.

intertwined in Origen's illustration, the argument for the eternal origination of the Son from the Father is evident.

A profound explanation of co-eternity of Christ using the sun-image is found in Dionysius of Alexandria. Writing to his namesake in Rome, Dionysius of Alexandria starts his argument with a clear echo of Heb. 1:3 and then moves on to use the image of the sun. He says that there cannot be light without radiance: "for when light exists, the radiance (τὸ ἀπαύγασμα) must always exist."⁹³⁸ Expanding this premise further with the παράδειγμα of the sun, he says, "if there is the sun, there is the ray and there is the day" (εἰ ἔστιν ἥλιος, ἔστιν ἀνὰ γῆ, ἔστιν ἡμέρα) and concludes his argument by saying, "if the sun is eternal (αἰδῖος ὁ ἥλιος), then the day also would be unending (ἄπανστος ἂν ἦν καὶ ἡ ἡμέρα)."⁹³⁹ Athanasius uses this image several times, but one passage gives clear idea of his usage. In *De Synodis*, he says,

let a man venture to make the distinction, that the sun and the radiance (τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα) are two lights (δύο φῶτα εἶναι), or different essences (ἢ ἑτέραν τινὰ εἶναι οὐσίαν); or to say that the radiance accrued to it over and above, and is not a simple pure offspring (καθαρὸν γέννημα) from the sun; such, that sun and radiance are two, but the light one, because the radiance is an offspring from the Sun.⁹⁴⁰

In his third *Oration against Arius*, Athanasius uses the terms 'radiance' and 'light' to make the same argument and demonstrates that "the Son's existence is intrinsic to the Father's nature and flows from the Father's existence."⁹⁴¹

Gregory of Nazianzus is probably aware of many of these christological usages and employs the image of the sun in the same way. He calls God the fountain of radiance (ἡ πηγή τῶν ἀπαυγασμάτων).⁹⁴² But in the passage arguing for the co-eternity of the Son, he uses the term φῶς instead of the biblical ἀπαύγασμα.⁹⁴³ This could be because he always had the trinitarian usage in mind, in which the Holy Spirit also needed to be included in the argument, and using ἀπαύγασμα would restrict the usage of this image within his Christology. In his trinitarian theology, Gregory further develops this argument by including the Holy Spirit and explaining the unity of essence and the co-eternity of the three persons in the Trinity.

Gregory's argument again highlights the Father as the source, thus corroborating the message of the root image. The son has the "Father as his timeless beginning (ἄχρονον ἀρχὴν),

⁹³⁸ Dion. Al. *Ep. can.*; Feltoe, *Dionysius of Alexandria*, 186.

⁹³⁹ Dion. Al. *Ep. can.*; Feltoe, *Dionysius of Alexandria*, 187.

⁹⁴⁰ Ath. *syn.* 52; PG 26:788A; NPNF, vol. 4, 478.

⁹⁴¹ Ath. *Ar.* 3.3-4; Ayres, *Nicaea*, 116.

⁹⁴² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.1; SC 270.58.

⁹⁴³ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.22.

as light originates from that beautiful great circle of the sun.”⁹⁴⁴ The sun’s nature is to shine forth, and just as the source of water cannot be without water and the torch without light, one cannot call it a sun if it does not have light. In his *Theological Orations*, Gregory repeatedly argues for this timeless, eternal beginning. He says,

being begotten in a non-temporal way that transcends explanation. We cannot, though, explain the meaning of ‘supra-temporal’ and deliberately keep clear of any suggestion of time. Expressions like ‘when’...No, we cannot explain it, except possibly by taking the world-era as the period coinciding with eternal things.⁹⁴⁵

This is in opposition to the popular Arian argument that there was a time when the Son was not. In the last *Theological Oration*, Gregory gives the summary of this argument: “If there was when the Father did not exist, there was when the Son did not exist. If there was when the Son did not exist, there was when the Holy Spirit did not exist. If one existed from the beginning, so did all three.”⁹⁴⁶ One should not think of time—before and after—when we talk about the generation. Eunomius’ argument that the Son is subsequent to the Father is countered by Gregory using the image of the sun: “clearly a cause (αἴτιος) is not necessarily prior to its effects—the Sun is not prior to its light.”⁹⁴⁷

Arguing for the Trinity

Gregory extends the christological image of the sun to talk about the Trinity. Like the image of the father-son, this image shows that begetting and procession are integral to the nature of God, just as the nature of the sun is to bring out its rays.⁹⁴⁸ But the major trinitarian argument, which uses the sun in Gregory, is a discussion of the relational aspect of the Trinity. The image of the sun is not used frequently for trinitarian arguments in the patristic literature before Gregory. We find the first trinitarian argument using the image of the sun in Gregory Thaumaturgus, who has elaborated on the implications of this image with a clear explanation. He says,

For as no division or cleft is conceived of between mind and idea and soul, so neither is cleft or division conceived of between the Holy Spirit and the Savior and the Father; since, as we said before, the nature of intelligibles is indivisible, so is that of divine things. Or again, just as the relation between sun and ray (ἐν μέσῳ κύκλου καὶ τῆς ἀκτίνος) is not such that division is found, because it is impassible and

⁹⁴⁴ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* 1.2.21-22; Sykes, *Poemata*, 6-7.

⁹⁴⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.3; Norris, *Faith*, 246.

⁹⁴⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.4; Norris, *Faith*, 280.

⁹⁴⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.3; Norris, *Faith*, 246-7; SC 250.182.

⁹⁴⁸ Hall, “Gregory of Nazianzus,” 84.

bodiless, simple and undivided (διὰ τὸ ἀπαθὲς καὶ ἀσώματον ἀπλοῦν τε καὶ ἀμερὲς); but the ray is joined to the sun while on its side the sun, like a kind of eye, pours out a river of rays onto the universe, making as it were floods of light for us, and making an ocean for the cosmos generally; in just such a way a kind of “rays” of the Father have been sent upon us, the resplendent Jesus and the Holy Spirit. For as the rays of light are naturally related to each other without division (“Ὡσπερ γὰρ αἱ τοῦ φωτὸς ἀκτῖνες ἀμέριστον ἔχουσαι κατὰ φύσιν), neither separated (χωρίζονται) from the light nor cut off (ἀποτέμνονται) from each other, and transmit the grace of the light even unto us — in the same manner too, our Savior and the Holy Spirit, the twofold ray of the Father (ἡ δίδυμος τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀκτίς), ministers even unto us the light of the truth and also is united to the Father.⁹⁴⁹

Note that Gregory Thaumaturgus considers the sun producing rays as impassible and bodiless, and clearly makes a trinitarian argument from it. Nazianzen’s contemporary, Gregory of Nyssa, also makes a similar trinitarian argument using the image of the sun by saying that “like a sunray coexisting with the sun (ἀκτῖνά τινα τῷ ἡλίῳ συνυφισταμένην), which gets its cause of being from the sun, but has its existence simultaneous, not being added to it later in time, but shining from it as soon as the sun appears.”⁹⁵⁰ These examples show that the trinitarian argument using the sun-image is a transformation of the christological one.

Gregory of Nazianzus uses this image in a similar way. In the *Theological Orations*, while exploring different images with which to compare God, he says, “another illustration I pondered over was the Sun, beam (ἀκτίς) and light (φῶς).”⁹⁵¹ He considers this image worthy of representing God, though later he warns about certain misunderstandings that might arise through this image. In *Oration 25*, in discussing the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, Gregory says, “they are indeed from God although they are not subsequent to him (ἐκ Θεοῦ γὰρ, εἰ καὶ μὴ μετ’ αὐτὸν), just as light is not subsequent to the sun (ὡς ἐξ ἡλίου φῶς), but they are without beginning in terms of time.”⁹⁵² This is the extension of the christological argument, incorporating the Holy Spirit to transform it into a trinitarian argument. These arguments are a response to Eunomius’ argument that cause and effect must involve some temporal division, and that as the cause, the Father is always superior, and the Son is undoubtedly inferior to the Father and separated from him in time, as discussed in the image of the root (5.2). Eunomius explains that the Son was “genuinely ‘begotten’ before all ages, so not without an act of begetting prior to his own existence to be called ‘Son’; ‘born’

⁹⁴⁹ Gr. Thaum. *ep. Philagr.* 7; PG 46.1105C; FC 98.176-7.

⁹⁵⁰ Gr. Nyssa. *Eun.* 1.36.532; Stuart G. Hall, trans., *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium I*, VCSup 148, edited by Miguel Brugarolas (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 96; SC 524.258.

⁹⁵¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.32; Norris, *Faith*, 298; SC 250, 338-40.

⁹⁵² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 25.15; FC 107.171; SC 284.194.

before ‘all creation’, so not uncreated.”⁹⁵³ But using the image of the sun, Gregory was able to refute the heart of this Eunomian argument and explain the orthodox doctrine. He demonstrates that the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, just as the sun is the cause of the light. At the same time, the Son and the Spirit exist eternally with the Father, just as light exists along with the sun without any temporal sequence separating them. He rhetorically asks, “How is it, then that these latter are not like the Father in having no origin, if they are co-eternal with him?” and then answers this by saying,

Because they are from him, though not after him. ‘Being unoriginate’ (ἀναρχος) necessarily implies ‘being eternal,’ (ἄϊδιος) but ‘being eternal’ does not entail ‘being unoriginate,’ so long as the origin referred to is the Father. So because they have a cause they are not unoriginate.⁹⁵⁴

As we have seen, the theme of how being eternal differs from being unoriginate has been explored in detail in the root-image. But along with Nyssen, Nazianzen also uses this image to argue for the co-eternal existence of the Son and the Spirit. In addition, he also makes another reference to the sun in one of his trinitarian statements, which is rather confusing and paradoxical. Here, he compares the three persons to three interconnected suns and a single light that comes out of them as divinity. He says,

The Godhead exists undivided in separate beings. It is as if there were a single intermingling of light, which existed in three mutually connected suns. When we look at the Godhead, the primal cause, the sole sovereignty, we have a mental picture (τὸ φανταζόμενον) of the single whole, certainly. But when we look at the three in whom the Godhead exists, who derive their timeless and equally glorious being from the primal cause, we have three objects of worship.⁹⁵⁵

Here, he appears to assign the cause of the divinity to the Godhead (θεότης), not to the Father. In this, he seems to imply that Godhead is the source of divinity outside the three persons of the Trinity. But in other places, when he talks about the Godhead, there is no confusion. For example: “single Godhead’s single radiance, by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its connectedness.”⁹⁵⁶ Thus, Norris labels the statement in *Oration 31* by Gregory as “neither consistent nor ontologically penetrating.”⁹⁵⁷ But there is no denying that comparing God to the sun in God-talk provides a rich mental image through which to talk

⁹⁵³ Eun. *exp. fid.* 3; Vaggione, *Works*, 153.

⁹⁵⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.3; Norris, *Faith*, 246; SC 250.182.

⁹⁵⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.14; Norris, *Faith*, 286; SC 250.302-4.

⁹⁵⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.1.

⁹⁵⁷ Norris, *Faith*, 199.

about the relationship of distinct persons in the Trinity.

The reference to the mental images (τὸ φανταζόμενον) here points to how Gregory uses a particular image to shape his audience's theological imagination. He makes a trinitarian statement: "the Godhead exists undivided in separate beings." And then reinforces his statement by offering them an image that they can easily understand: "a single intermingling of light" and "three mutually connected suns." This is a reversal of what he did in the image of the pearl, where he asked the audience to deliberately imagine the pearl first and then moved on to make his point. Here, Gregory reinforces his doctrinal statement with an image and then guides his audience to think of the Trinity. He wants them to learn about the single divine nature by looking at the single light and their separate beings in three connected suns. This passage is a good example of how Gregory develops patterns of theological imagination and thinking in his audience. But Gregory does not merely stop with this; he also presents his audience with adequate warnings about the misuse of this image.

Objections to the Image of the Sun

Although Gregory frequently uses the sun-image in his christological and trinitarian arguments, he also warns of its misuse if misinterpreted. In his *Theological Orations*, he says that in this image

there was the danger, first of imagining (ἐπινοῆται) in the incomposite nature (τῆς ἀσυνθέτου φύσεως) the sort of composition (σύνθεσις) which belongs to the Sun and its inherent properties, second, of making the Father a substance but the others potentialities inherent in him, attributes of God not individual beings. Beam and light are not extra Suns (οὔτε γὰρ ἀκτίς, οὔτε φῶς, ἄλλος ἥλιος), but emanations from the sun (ἀλλ' ἡλιακαὶ τινες ἀπόρροιαι), qualities of its substance.⁹⁵⁸

First, he points to the composition of the sun, which leads to a consideration of its material nature, as described in the theological and ontological framework discussed in chapter 2. Here, he differs from Gregory Thaumaturgus, who posited the sun and its rays as "impassible and bodiless" (τὸ ἀπαθὲς καὶ ἀσώματον) without referring to materiality.⁹⁵⁹ But for Gregory, light is immaterial but the sun is material, as mentioned in the creation narrative.⁹⁶⁰ In *Oration 31*, Nazianzen uses ἐπινοέω to express his fear that some might conceive of God in a composite way. This aligns with his view of God as ideal and incomposite. We have already noted his fear of materiality in his use of the image of the torch. If someone focuses on the material

⁹⁵⁸ Gr. Naz. Or. 31.32; Norris, *Faith*, 298; SC 250.338-40.

⁹⁵⁹ Gr. Thaum. ep. *Philagr.* 7; PG 46.1105C.

⁹⁶⁰ Gr. Naz. Or. 44.4.

aspects and the mechanics of the torch rather than the light it radiates, the whole image collapses. Similarly, one who focuses on the physical aspect of the sun would imagine a composite nature in the incomposite nature of God. Though the scientific understanding of the sun at the time of Gregory was not well advanced, still Gregory was able to point out that someone might misuse this image in this way. This is why in his usage, Gregory combines the sun and the torch with ‘light’ or ‘ray.’

The second objection he has is more serious as it introduces ‘non-being’ to the Son and the Holy Spirit, as in the image of the torch. He says that there is a danger “of making the Father a substance but the Son and the Holy Spirit potentialities inherent in him, attributes of God not individual beings. Beam and light are not extra suns (οὔτε γὰρ ἀκτίς, οὔτε φῶς, ἄλλος ἥλιος), but emanations from the sun (ἀλλ’ ἠλιακαὶ τινες ἀπόρροιαί), qualities of its substance.”⁹⁶¹ So far examples in other theologians’ writings show that they had used this image to substantiate the argument that three persons could be one substance. However, by stretching the image, it would be possible to argue that the Father has the real being. Also, that the sunbeam and the light are different from the sun and that they exist only because of the sun without independent existence. In fact, Justin Martyr had pointed out how Monarchians used the sun-image in this way in the second century itself. According to Justin,

[They] teach that this power is indivisible (ἄτμητος) and inseparable (ἀχώριστος) from the Father, just as the light of the sun on earth is indivisible and inseparable from the sun in the skies; for, when the sun sets, its light disappears from the earth. So, they claim, the Father by his will can cause his power to go forth, and, whenever he wishes, to return again.⁹⁶²

So, Justin prefers the image of “fires kindled from a fire” as it shows that without any division or loss, one fire kindles another fire, just as the Father begets the Son without any division.⁹⁶³

Thirdly, Gregory objects to a different configuration of the image of the sun, which, according to him, was used by another person. He says,

I once heard a man describe it in terms of a sunbeam which throws its radiance on to a wall; its trembling results from the movement of water, a movement transmitted through the intervening air and caught by the beam. The beam is then checked by the resistance of the wall and becomes a quivering that surprises one with its rapidity of oscillation. It is just as much a manifold as it is in a unity; it joins and parts so quickly

⁹⁶¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.32; Norris, *Faith*, 298; SC 250.338-40.

⁹⁶² Just. *Dial.* 128.3; FC 6.347; PG 6.776 A.

⁹⁶³ Just. *Dial.* 128.4; PG 6.776 B-C; FC 6.348.

that it is away before the eye can catch hold of it.⁹⁶⁴

This illustration of a sunbeam reflecting in the water and on the wall quickly, without any temporal separation points to the unity and manifoldness of the sun's reflection. But in *Oration 31* quoted above, and in his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, Gregory points out the misleading aspect of this particular configuration of the sun image in that it introduces motion and a lack of stability. He points out that God's nature is neither unstable nor in flux.⁹⁶⁵ Only after warning his audience of these dangers, he uses this image.

The image of the sun is surely one of the most frequently used images in Gregory, which sheds great light onto his theological epistemology, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. As with the torch, Gregory uses it well, while pointing to the areas in which it might be misleading. His use of the sun combined with biblical ἀπαύγασμα and other words such as light (φῶς) or ray (ἀκτίς; ἀύγή), keeps us focused on the incorporeal aspect of the image and not on the materiality. The usage of this image shows that Gregory fears the intrusion of materiality in thinking about God, but he still uses it because it gives a rich mental picture to contemplate God.

5.5.3. Light (φῶς, φάος)

Having analysed all of Gregory's uses of comparative images for God, except light, we can say that the image of light is his favourite and most frequently used.⁹⁶⁶ In his poem *De Spiritu Sancto*, he dismisses various comparative images, such as underground passage, spring and river; torch and pyre; and sun rays reflected in water, as they could lead to misconceptions about the Trinity. But, later, he moves on to use the image of light to talk about God, and declares that God's "one nature is fixed firmly in triple lights."⁹⁶⁷ Commenting on Gregory's preference for light image, MacKenzie suggests that it is because, despite Gregory's warning that all created images are useless, "Light is the most appropriate analogy, as it is in its swiftness, its constancy, its purity and its precision, that which, in the created order, most closely corresponds to the nature of God as uncreated light."⁹⁶⁸ The major reason we find in Gregory's writings is his belief that light is immaterial (ἄσώματον).⁹⁶⁹ In this, he follows the

⁹⁶⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.32; Norris, *Faith*, 298.

⁹⁶⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.68-9; Sykes, *Poemata*, 14-5.

⁹⁶⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 6.12; 9.2; 20.7; 21.2; 28.1; 31.3, 14; 32.15; 39.2, 9, 11, 20; 40.5, 34; 44.3; 45.2.

⁹⁶⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.71; PG 37.413A.

⁹⁶⁸ Iain M. MacKenzie, *The 'Obscurism' of Light: A Theological Study into the Nature of Light* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996), 131.

⁹⁶⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.4; PG 36.609D.

Neo-Platonic pattern of thinking about light, which is categorised by Katsos as a mixed model, where the “‘divine light’ was not a mere figure of speech but light properly speaking. The intelligible world was truly light (prior or original sense), while the light of the senses (like the light of the sun, the moon etc.) could only be called ‘light’ in virtue of a relation of participation to an intelligible archetype (posterior or derivative sense).”⁹⁷⁰ Because of its immaterial quality, for Gregory, the light image lacks any misleading aspects or material overtones that plague other images. Light language allows him to describe the different aspects of God while retaining its sense of mystery. That is why Špidlík and Egan term the image of light in Gregory ‘mystical,’ and Elm calls it “foundational to his entire cosmological construct.”⁹⁷¹ As seen in 5.5.1 and 5.5.2, the ‘light’ feature is frequently associated with images of the sun and the torch, as the element of ‘light’ is integral to them. However, his use of ‘light’ as an image on its own also occurs frequently, and he uses this image to describe the individual persons in the Trinity and, most importantly, to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity.

We see a preference in patristic literature for the image of light to speak of God, as this image is rooted in scripture—1 John 1:5: “God is light” (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν).⁹⁷² The Nicene council expressed the consubstantial nature of the Father and the Son using the word ὁμοούσιος and the phrase Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός in the creed.⁹⁷³ Athanasius, in discussing this phrase of the creed, compares the language of ‘light’ to the image of Adam and Seth.⁹⁷⁴ He says that, though it is written that Seth was like Adam after his own pattern (ὅς ἦν ὅμοιος αὐτῷ κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ), human bodies (τό σῶμα) are separated from one another. But the generation of the Son is not like human procreation because the Son is inseparable from the essence of the Father (ἀδιαίρετός ἐστι τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς οὐσίας).⁹⁷⁵ In this context, he prefers the images of radiance and the light (ὡς ἔστι τὸ ἀπαύγασμα πρὸς τὸ φῶς) as they illustrate the incorporeal aspect of generation better.⁹⁷⁶ Hilary too prefers the image of light over the image of fire, because ‘light’ does not contain any material overtones.⁹⁷⁷ The prominence of the image of light over other images is obvious in Gregory’s writings.⁹⁷⁸

Eunomius, in his *Apology*, talks about light being used commonly for the Father and the

⁹⁷⁰ Katsos, *Metaphysics of Light*, 3.

⁹⁷¹ Špidlík, *doctrine spirituelle*, 119-22; John P. Egan, “Towards a Mysticism of Light in Gregory Nazianzen’s *Oration 32.15*,” SP 18, no. 3 (1989): 473; Elm, “Paradoxical Fusion,” 305.

⁹⁷² See Jesus’ claim to be “the light” in John 8:12 and 9:5.

⁹⁷³ Socr. *h.e.* 1.8.21; PG 67.68A.

⁹⁷⁴ Ath. *decr.* 20; PG 25.452C.

⁹⁷⁵ Ath. *decr.* 20; PG 25.452C.

⁹⁷⁶ Ath. *decr.* 20; PG 25.452C.

⁹⁷⁷ Hil. *Trin.* 7.29; Hanson, *God*, 481.

⁹⁷⁸ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 248-9.

Son and says, “just as the unbegotten differs from the begotten, so ‘the light’ must differ from ‘the light.’”⁹⁷⁹ He makes this argument to emphasise that though the same appellation ‘light’ is given to both the Father and the Son, they are the same only in name and not in nature. This aspect of Eunomian theology and the pro-Nicene stance are clearly seen in Basil’s rebuttal: “For the one who confesses that the Father is light and that the Son is light will spontaneously be led, because the notion of light is one and the same, to the confession of their affinity in substance.”⁹⁸⁰ Eunomius challenges Basil: “If Basil can show that it was ‘the unapproachable light’ which was made flesh and was crucified, etc., then he can say that ‘light’ = ‘light.’”⁹⁸¹ Eunomius considers two lights as different and calls the Father, ‘unapproachable light,’ and the Son, the ‘light made flesh.’ He considers that Basil’s assertion would lead to the conception of a composite God: “Basil’s God is composite in that, while ‘light’ is property common to both persons, one ‘light’ is separated from the other by individual characteristics.”⁹⁸² Eunomius concludes that “if the Begotten is contrasted with the Unbegotten, the begotten Light will be equally inferior to the Unbegotten Light.”⁹⁸³ But like Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus considers the division in the light as an incorporeal one which does not involve division as in a material object, thus clarifying the logical confusion Eunomius created.

Gregory, using the terms φῶς and φάος along with the related terms like ἀπαύγασμα, ἔλλαμψις and ἀὐγή, refers to the Godhead/θεότης (28.1; *Carm.*I.1.4), God in general (6.12; 9.2; 21.2; 40.34; 44.3; *Carm.*I.1.30), the Father (20.7), the Son (39.2; 40.37; *Carm.*I.1.32), and the Holy Spirit (31.3) in his corpus. He also uses different adjectives along with the term ‘light’ to reinforce the supremacy and the perfection of these realities. For him, Godhead is the “first and the pure (ἀκραιφνής) light” (40.37). God is described as “the first light” (6.12), “the perfect light” (6.12), “the supreme light” (32.15; *Carm.* I.1.3), “the great light” (44.3) and “the purest light” (21.2; *Ep.* 178). Gregory describes the Father as “the eternal light” (20.7). Jesus is mentioned as “the great light” (40.37; 45.2) and “the perfect light” (39.2). In many places, he extends these concepts to talk positively about other aspects of God. He declares that “God is Light: the highest, the inaccessible, the ineffable,”⁹⁸⁴ “perpetual (ἀδιάδοχον), neither having a beginning, nor an end, not measured, ever-shining, triply shining.”⁹⁸⁵ Clearly echoing the image of the sun discussed earlier, he explains the incomprehensibility of God by saying that God is

⁹⁷⁹ Eun. *Apol.* 19; Vaggione, *Works*, 59.

⁹⁸⁰ Bas. *Eun.* 2.25; Delcogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 169.

⁹⁸¹ Vaggione, *Works*, 127.

⁹⁸² Vaggione, *Works*, 127.

⁹⁸³ Vaggione, *Works*, 127.

⁹⁸⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.5; SC 358.204.

⁹⁸⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.3; PG 36.609B.

“light that cannot be gazed upon (ἀκατασκόπητον ἀύγη), yet overseeing all things, knowing everything from the earth to the abyss.”⁹⁸⁶

The Trinity: Threefold and Undivided Light

In Gregory’s works, the image of light describes different aspects of the Trinity better than any other image. It helps him to talk about the Trinity mystically. In one of his epistles, he calls God the purest light, “who is contemplated in tri-unity (ἐν τῇ τρισσῇ μονάδι).⁹⁸⁷ In the beginning of the second *Theological Oration*, he says,

Now let us go forward to discuss the doctrine of God, dedicating our sermon to our sermons’s subjects, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that the Father may approve, the Son aid, and the Holy Spirit inspire it—or rather that the single Godhead’s single radiance (ἑλλαμψις), by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its connectedness, may enlighten it.⁹⁸⁸

Gregory also talks about the tri-unity using the biblical phrase “he was the true light that lightens every man coming into the world” for each person of the Trinity.⁹⁸⁹ Thus, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all individually ‘true light that enlightens every man.’ Then he adds: “there are three subjects and three verbs—he was and he was and he was. But a single reality was. There are three predicates—light, and light and light. But the light is one, God is one.”⁹⁹⁰ For Gregory, the identical expression requires the acknowledgement of the same substance. However, as seen earlier, Eunomius was against this as he thought it might lead to a mixing up of the identities of the Father and the Son and lead to a belief that the Father died on the cross. However, Gregory declares that God’s “one nature is fixed firmly in triple lights.”⁹⁹¹ He uses ‘light’ to talk seamlessly about the unity and distinction in the Trinity. He calls God a “threefold and undivided light” (τὸ τρισσὸν φῶς καὶ ἀμέριστον).⁹⁹² He is looking to maintain the distinction in the oneness and the unity in the threeness of the divinity, just as one cannot divide the light, yet can think of distinction. Talking about the distinction, Gregory says that the division should be thought of as being “divided internally from the undivided light (ἐξ ἀμερίστου φωτὸς μεριζόμενον).”⁹⁹³ In discussing the Trinity, Gregory uses the image of light, drawing on its non-material nature. That is why even in the images like the sun and the

⁹⁸⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.30.32-34; PG 37.510A.

⁹⁸⁷ Gr. Naz. *Ep.* 178; Gallay, *Lettres*, II, 68-69.

⁹⁸⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.1; Norris, *Faith*, 224; SC 250.100-102.

⁹⁸⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.3.

⁹⁹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.3; Norris, *Faith*, 280.

⁹⁹¹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.71; PG 37.413A.

⁹⁹² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.34; SC 358.276.

⁹⁹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.2; PG 36.625A.

torch, his focus is more on light and its cognates than the material sources of light i.e. the sun and the torch. As one contemplates light, one can understand this aspect of the divinity. But unfortunately, Gregory asserts that very few are capable of contemplating (θεωρούμενον) upon the “triply shining” light, as this would more spiritual preparation.⁹⁹⁴

Gregory uses the image of light to expand on the relational aspect of his trinitarian theology. He speaks of the Father as the eternal light (ἀϊδίου φωτός)⁹⁹⁵ and unoriginate light (φωτὸς ἀνάρχου).⁹⁹⁶ He emphasises that the Father is without any origin, and is the originator or the ‘cause’ of the Son. From this assertion, he is able to use the Nicene phrase Φῶς ἐκ Φωτός to talk about Christ. Echoing the creed, he calls Christ the light from the light without source (Φῶς ἐκ φωτὸς ἀνάρχου).⁹⁹⁷ But this begetting happens internally without any division or separation. He says that the Son was “divided internally from the undivided light (ἐξ ἀμερίστου φωτὸς μεριζόμενον).”⁹⁹⁸ According to Gregory, there is a movement within the Trinity—in the begetting and the procession, and in the unity which is through the *monarchia* of the Father. According to Gregory, the Son plays a vital role in this trinitarian movement. It is Christ who gathers “the threefold light into one glory.”⁹⁹⁹

Having defined the Trinity in terms of relationships (σχέσις), and the manner of being,¹⁰⁰⁰ Gregory considers them expressed well in the inseparable operation of the Trinity. He gives the example of the way human beings come to know God: “we receive the Son’s light from the Father’s light in the light of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁰¹ It is in the activity of the Spirit and through the Son that the Father is revealed. In another passage, he uses the verbal cognate of φῶς to convey the meaning of how all three persons are involved in the illumination of human beings: “In the light of the Lord see light, and in the Spirit of God be enlightened (αὐγάσθητι) by the Son.”¹⁰⁰² It is also clear in the passage previously cited where he begins the oration by praying that “the Father may approve, the Son aid, and the Holy Spirit inspire it—or rather that the single Godhead’s single radiance (ἐλλαμψις), by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its connectedness, may enlighten it.”¹⁰⁰³ Through this image, Gregory was able to talk about the relationship between each person in the Trinity in enlightening human beings.

⁹⁹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.3; PG 36.609B.

⁹⁹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 20.7.

⁹⁹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.32.3; PG 37.512A.

⁹⁹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.32.3; PG 37.512A; cf. Socr. *h.e.* 1.8.21; PG 67.68A.

⁹⁹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.2; PG 36.625A.

⁹⁹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.32.5-6; PG 37.512A.

¹⁰⁰⁰ cf. Gr. Naz. *Or.* 29.16; SC 250.210.

¹⁰⁰¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.3.

¹⁰⁰² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.34; SC 358.276.

¹⁰⁰³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.1; Norris, *Faith*, 224; SC 250.100-102.

Becoming Perfect Lights

Gregory extends the language of light to talk about the creation and human beings' *theosis*. He says that the Trinity is the source of all existing things as it is "from which all light derives its being."¹⁰⁰⁴ Talking of the creation of the angels, he calls them "the secondary lights" (φῶτα δεύτερα) that were derived from the primal light.¹⁰⁰⁵ The angels are outflow of the first light and depend on it for their existence,¹⁰⁰⁶ and they are the "brilliance (ἀπαύγασμα) of the perfect light."¹⁰⁰⁷ On the visible side of creation, God, the great light, began creation with the creation of light.¹⁰⁰⁸ At first, reflecting the nature of the source, the light was disembodied and not connected to any physical object, such as the sun (ἄσώματον καὶ ἀνήλιον).¹⁰⁰⁹ Only later was the material sun created to take on the role of distributing light on the Earth.

Gregory calls man the 'third light,'¹⁰¹⁰ who in this world exists like a momentary emanation (βραχεῖά ἀπορροή) with a dark nature (σκοτεινὴ φύσις) compared to God, who is exceedingly bright.¹⁰¹¹ Here, God is portrayed as the supreme light to highlight the divine causality and demonstrate human beings' dependence on God for life.¹⁰¹² Compared with God, who is the purest light, human beings are chained to materiality. Gregory says it is necessary to rise above the dualism of materiality and recognise the unity in the Trinity: "whosoever has been depraved by being knit to the flesh", and "oppressed by the clay," cannot look at "the rays of truth."¹⁰¹³ For him, the second person of the Trinity incarnated in order that human beings might put off darkness and come closer to the light and become perfect light begotten of the perfect light.¹⁰¹⁴ So, he describes Christ as the light giver (φωτοδότης).¹⁰¹⁵ Recalling the words of Jesus, "you are the light of the world," Gregory calls his hearers to become luminaries (φωστήρ).¹⁰¹⁶ It is by imitating the light of Christ and becoming united with that light, as light, that one can attain salvation. Christ enlightens the mind so that man "could see light in light and become fully light (φῶς)."¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰⁰⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.2; NPNF, 423.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.4; PG 36.609B.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.5.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 6.12; SC 405.152-4.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.5; 44.3.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 44.4; PG 36.609D.

¹⁰¹⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.5.

¹⁰¹¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 32.15; SC 318.116.

¹⁰¹² Egan, *Mysticism*, 475; John P. Egan, "The Knowledge and Vision of God according to Gregory Nazianzen: A Study of the Images of Mirror and Light," (PhD diss., Institut Catholique de Paris, 1971), 139.

¹⁰¹³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 21.2; NPNF, 270.

¹⁰¹⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.2; SC 358.152; cf. 39.20.

¹⁰¹⁵ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.8.93; PG 37.464.

¹⁰¹⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 40.37.

¹⁰¹⁷ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.32.17-18; PG 37.512A.

As a theologian and a priest, Gregory feels that he has a role to play in the process of human beings becoming light. He considers himself the bearer of light (φαισφόρος)¹⁰¹⁸ and wants his audience to be surrounded by light when he speaks about God: “Whenever I talk of God, let yourself be surrounded by the flash of light that is one and three.”¹⁰¹⁹ Through his ministry, he initiates people into the mystery of God in sacraments. He uses the term φωταγωγία (one who leads into the light), with which, according to Daley, Gregory intentionally parallels μυσταγωγία, the one who leads into mystery in Greek religion.¹⁰²⁰ According to Gregory, through this initiation, they will be illumined (ἐλλάμπω) more purely and brightly by the Trinity.¹⁰²¹ Thus, Gregory’s use of the image of light begins with God as light and ends with human beings becoming fully light like God.

Unlike other comparative images, except for the images of pearl and root, the image of light in Gregory lacks any warning. Gregory is comfortable using the image of light frequently for God, as he considers it to have no material qualities and because it is a biblical image for God. The difference between the image of light and the images of pearl and root is that the latter describe only one aspect of God, whereas the former describes many aspects, making it unique. Because of the immaterial quality of light, Gregory was able to use it freely without the fear of materiality.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the comparative images that contribute to the relational aspects of the Trinity. I have demonstrated that the arguments put forward by the image of the root, i.e., the Father as the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit, serve as the touchstone for validating all other relational images. Gregory rejects any configuration of the image that does not explicitly talk about this causal aspect of the Father. Analysis of other images shows that Gregory argues for distinction within the Trinity without distinction, a passionless generation of the Son and passionless procession of the Holy Spirit, and for a common divine nature among all three persons. In this way, relational images combat Eunomian theology at every point and help Gregory’s audience imagine the relational aspects of the Trinity more clearly. The analysis of the individual images validates the findings of chapters 2 and 3. Gregory’s fear

¹⁰¹⁸ Gr. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.3.46; PG 37.411A.

¹⁰¹⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.11; SC 358.170.

¹⁰²⁰ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.20; SC 358.196; Daley, *Gregory*, 236n578; Daley says that Gregory is coining this new word, but this is already found in *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.

¹⁰²¹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 39.20; SC 358.196.

of using the comparative images for God based on the ontological distinction between God and the creation is present in all the relational images, except the image of light. Especially, the fear of material intrusion in thinking about God is taken seriously by Gregory. That is why he warns his audience of it at every instance. The analysis of the images also revealed how Gregory transformed traditional Christian images (despite their potential hazard) into effective trinitarian images with safeguards. The way he warns about these images provides clues as to how he intended them to be used in theology. Overall, this chapter has demonstrated that these images counter Eunomian theology by providing the audience with an imaginative framework for understanding Nicene trinitarian theology.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

In this dissertation, I have explored Gregory of Nazianzus' seemingly paradoxical use of comparative images for God—images he simultaneously deems necessary yet inadequate, useful yet potentially misleading. In Part I, this is shown through a systematic analysis of the theological themes that are connected with Gregory's use of comparative images, such as the ontology of God and creature, theological epistemology, embodied human nature, the human need for materiality and Gregory's own pastoral identity. In Part II, a detailed examination of nine specific comparative images is presented. This study has demonstrated that Gregory's approach to the use of comparative images is neither inconsistent nor arbitrary, but rather reflects a sophisticated integration of theological conviction, rhetorical skill, and pastoral concern for the people under his care. In this final chapter, I will bring together the results of Parts I and II and show how Gregory's use of comparative images should be understood systematically. I will also reflect on what this research means for our understanding of fourth-century trinitarian theology and the relationship between language and theology.

6.2. Summary of Findings

Summary of Part I

Part I of this dissertation established the theological-ontological framework based on the creator-creature distinction, the christological foundation to justify the use of material images for God, and the epistemological-pastoral context, which helps us to understand Gregory's use of comparative images. By doing that, I have answered the first two questions raised in 1.2: why Gregory hesitates and comments negatively on the use of comparative images for God, and why, despite his hesitations, he ultimately uses them. Chapter 2 demonstrated that Gregory's hesitation regarding comparative images stems from his robust doctrine of God and his understanding of the ontological gulf between Creator and creation. Gregory conceives of God as triune, simple, and infinite—a unique Being whose nature differs fundamentally from the created order, which is characterised by composition, division, and limitation. This ontological distinction creates an epistemic problem: how can finite, embodied human beings, who are further trapped in materiality due to the Fall, adequately conceive of and speak about

the infinite, simple, triune God? The analysis revealed that Gregory is realistic about the creaturely limitations, God's incomprehensibility due to His infinity, and the ontological distinction between God and creatures, leading him to express reservations about using images drawn from the creaturely realms to think and talk about God.

Chapter 3 addressed the question of why Gregory uses comparative images despite his reservations. The answer lies in the intersection of three overlapping areas: the convergence of the Divine and human in salvation history, theological epistemology, and Gregory's self-understanding as a theological orator in his pastoral and episcopal ministry.

First, the incarnation provides theological justification for using material images for God. In Christ, the two ontologically distinct realms of divinity and humanity converge in a "new mixture" (καινή μίξις) and a "paradoxical fusion." This convergence continues in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, where material elements mediate divine grace, and culminates in human deification (θέωσις). If God condescends to unite with matter in the incarnation, uses water, bread, and wine in the sacraments, and ultimately allows human beings to take part in the divine nature to some extent, then the use of material images to speak about God finds theological warrant. As Gregory declares, "if He condescended to Flesh (σάρκα), He will also endure such language (λόγον)."¹⁰²²

Second, Gregory's theological epistemology reveals the necessity of comparative images for embodied human cognition. Drawing on both Pauline and Aristotelian epistemological frameworks, Gregory demonstrates that, even after purification and illumination, human beings cannot think about God in purely incorporeal terms. The mind inevitably forms mental images (φαντασία) through sense perception and uses these to conceptualise incorporeal realities. Using the Sinai narrative, Gregory illustrates his dynamic and progressive understanding of divine knowledge. The comparative images serve as aids in this noetic ascent, helping the mind to gather impressions (ἐκτύμωμα) that form a mental picture of divine realities.

Third, Gregory's self-understanding as a theological orator, shepherd, and pious inscriber explains his practical use of comparative images in pastoral ministry. As a theological orator, he uses his rhetorical skills to serve God and the Church: the good use of words is a perfect tribute to the Word! As a shepherd, Gregory feeds his flock through teaching; as an inscriber, he seeks to imprint orthodox trinitarian doctrine on the souls of his congregation. The comparative images become tools for shaping theological imagination, helping his audience to conceptualise the Trinity correctly while avoiding heretical misconceptions. Gregory's

¹⁰²² Gr. Naz. *Or.* 37.2

classical rhetorical training in Athens combined with his theological convictions produces a unique synthesis where rhetoric serves theology, and material images become vehicles for spiritual truth—but only when carefully controlled and qualified.

In this way, Part I has provided us with an ontological framework that helps us to distinguish between God and the comparative images; a christological foundation to justify the use of comparative images for God, though they are inadequate; an epistemological context that helps to understand the necessity of comparative images in knowing God, and a pastoral context to understand how Gregory uses it in his ministry.

Summary of Part II

Part II of this dissertation analysed in two chapters the nine images Gregory used for God to establish and explain the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter 4 analysed three honour images—Adam-Eve-Seth, father-son, and pearl—which argue for the coequal nature and honour of the three persons in the Trinity. These images directly counter Eunomius' hierarchical subordinationism and his use of the "tool" (ὄργανον) image. The Adam-Eve-Seth image demonstrates that beings with different origins—Adam formed by God's hand, Eve from Adam's side, and Seth born through procreation—can share identical human nature. Gregory uses this scriptural example to argue that the Father's being unoriginate, the Son's being begotten, and the Spirit's procession are modes of origin rather than indications of different essences. The father-son image explores the sociological reality that a human father is honoured by having a son who perfectly reflects his characteristics. Gregory extends this to argue that the Father's glory is enhanced, not diminished, by eternally generating a Son who is His perfect image and by spirating the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Him. This counters the Eunomian claim that sharing essence would compromise the Father's unique status. The pearl image uniquely addresses the interconnectedness of honour within the Trinity. Like a perfect pearl where damage to any part destroys the whole's beauty, dishonour done to the Son or Spirit dishonours the Father and endangers salvation.

Chapter 5 examined six relational images—root, source-spring-river, mind-word-spirit, and the three light images (torch, sun, and light)—which illustrate relationships within the Trinity. The root image serves as the foundational touchstone: the Father is the unoriginate root from whom the Son and Spirit eternally derive their Beings. The source-spring-river image extends the root's argument, demonstrating both the eternal co-existence of the three persons (no temporal gap separates the source of a spring from the spring itself and the river) and their common bond in continuity (συνεχσία). The mind-word-spirit image addresses the crucial

problem of passionless generation. Just as the mind generates words immaterially and without diminution, the Father generates the Son and spirates the Spirit without passion (ἀπαθῶς) or division. The connected nature (τὸ συναφές) of mind and word, and the declaratory function (τὸ ἐξαγγελτικόν) of words, further illuminate aspects of the Son's relationship to the Father. The light images—torch, sun, and light—form a cluster that employs light's incorporeal nature to speak about divine generation and relationships. The torch and sun images argue for co-eternity of the Father and the Son. The sun image proved particularly rich, serving in Gregory's theological epistemology (human inability to look directly at the sun illustrates divine incomprehensibility), Christology (Christ as light from light), and trinitarian theology (the three persons as “triply shining” τριλαμπής). The image of light on its own, because of its incorporeal nature, makes it ideal for speaking about God: it allows discussion of both unity and distinction in the Godhead. The absence of warnings suggests that Gregory considers light the most appropriate comparative image available, though it remains inadequate to fully illustrate the divine reality.

6.3. Systematic Understanding of Gregory's Use of Comparative Images for God

In this section, I synthesise the findings of Parts I and II to provide a systematic understanding of Gregory's use of comparative images for God, thereby fulfilling the objectives of this dissertation mentioned in 1.2.

Firstly, in answer to the first research question, chapter 2 shows that Gregory's use of comparative images proves what Ayres has said about the comparative images: “Pro-Nicenes assume that one can draw no analogies between God and creation.”¹⁰²³ In other words, there is no image that can be used to talk about God. It demonstrates this based on the ontological distinction between God, whom the comparative images try to represent, and creation, from which they are drawn. For Gregory, to compare God with anything would be shameful, futile and would be like “seeking the living among the dead.”¹⁰²⁴ Gregory is categorical about it. Ayres continues by suggesting that even if pro-Nicenes use them, the analogies are used to “illustrate *aspects* of Trinitarian theology.”¹⁰²⁵ In other words, an image can only illustrate a part of reality and not the whole. Gregory demonstrates this in his writings, pointing out that, even if comparison is deployed, “no comparison (εἰκόν) ever represents the true picture

¹⁰²³ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 284.

¹⁰²⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10.

¹⁰²⁵ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 289, emphasis added.

exactly.”¹⁰²⁶ The idea of the uniqueness of God in Chapter 2 demonstrates this aspect: God is infinite, and the images are finite, so they can never represent God fully and perfectly. At the end of the *Theological Orations*, Gregory says that as he can not find any image to satisfy his mind when he tries to illustrate his mental picture (τὸ φανταζόμενον) of God, he would be “taking part of the image (τι λαβὼν τῆς εἰκόνοϛ) and wisely discarding the rest (τὰ λοιπὰ ῥίψει).”¹⁰²⁷ In the analysis of images, we have seen that all the images illustrate some aspects of the Trinity, but could fail in others. For example, the father’s desire for his son to be the same as him in the father-son image points to the honour of the Father in having an identical Son, but if other aspects connected with human procreation are considered, this would lead to absurd conclusions about God. But when an image like the pearl or the root is used to illustrate only one aspect, it does it well. That is why Gregory does not attach explicit warnings about materiality, misleading concepts, or wrong concepts that are alien to God to the images of the pearl and the root, as he does with other images. This dissertation has shown that Gregory consistently says that there is no image with which we can compare God, and even if we use one, it is inadequate, as it can never represent the entirety of God. These assertions are based on Gregory’s theological and ontological convictions about God and the created order.

Secondly, the second research question asks why Gregory uses comparative images for God even after asserting that they are inadequate to portray God. Chapter 3 answers that question building on the comment by the Hanson brothers, who say, “we must be able to use some analogies to enable us to think about the Trinity.”¹⁰²⁸ Gregory offers a reason: human embodied existence and cognition necessitate the use of comparative images when talking about the incorporeal God. The human mind cannot handle ideal content without some material connection because of its embodiment. So, in order to know God and to talk about Him, one must use human language and material images, which facilitate the understanding. Otherwise, the alternative is to accept Eunomius’ idea which fails to grasp the mystery of God by proposing one can know God fully, or not know God at all because of our material nature. Thus Gregory uses the images to illustrate the life of God and to ignite the theological imagination of his audience. So, he uses these comparative images as illustrations and not as logical proofs. Before introducing the Adam-Eve-Seth image in *Oration 31*, Gregory says that though the comparisons are futile, he will continue to find a comparison as support (βοήθεια) for the

¹⁰²⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 23.11; Vinson, *Gregory*, 139.

¹⁰²⁷ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.33; SC 250.340.

¹⁰²⁸ Hanson, *Reasonable Belief*, 184.

argument.¹⁰²⁹ The images are integral to the argument, but their use cannot be stretched beyond a certain point. They merely point in the right direction in thinking about God, and they cannot be used as mathematical formulas to prove a theological point. All the warnings he adds to the images points to this. For example, source-spring-river can illustrate the common bond between these three elements and the sun-ray can help in thinking about the three-in-one aspect of the Trinity, but if stretched beyond these specific aspect they try to illustrate, they become absurd by pointing to instability and materiality respectively. In Gregory, the comparative images are used to support an argument to help the theological imagination to go in the right direction. They point to the truth but do not prove the truth. They should be treated as useful, yet inadequate.

Thirdly, with regards to the third research question of how Gregory uses these images, the study as a whole demonstrates Hanson's thesis that the images used in theological discourse form part of the history of doctrine. Although they are not proofs, these images are integral to Gregory's theology rather than mere embellishments. Part I of the dissertation illustrates this by addressing various themes connected to comparative images, including all the aspects covered by modern systematic theology books: God, creation, fall, incarnation, theological anthropology, theological epistemology, soteriology, pastoral ministry, and sacraments. Part II also demonstrates that the way Gregory uses the nine images in his writings is not as peripheral to his theological argumentation but integral to it. They are intended to spark the theological imagination of his audience so that they can contemplate and have an orthodox image of God in their minds. Gregory draws these images from the classical training he had from hellenistic *paideia* (as Kertsch points out), the Scriptures, the Fathers and his own experience (as father-son), as Part II demonstrates. But Gregory always transforms them to suit his trinitarian purposes. In this, he brings together the hellenistic and biblical worlds, as we have seen in the image of the sun. He also tweaks traditional christological images so they do not invoke the misleading aspects they have inherited, but are used without those defects. For example, when he uses the torch, he avoids talking about its material side, as it had that connotation in the Arian controversy. Also in the father-son image, he avoids talking about generation, as it will drag the image into ambiguous territory. He also makes all the images trinitarian—to suit his theological situation—though not successfully all the time. For example, the images of father-son and mind-word-spirit point to the awkwardness of the Spirit being tacked on to the image as consolation. But it is acceptable, as most of the trinitarian images were once christological

¹⁰²⁹ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.10.

and the argument for the equality of the Son could be applied seamlessly to the co-equality of the Spirit. He also forges new images, such as Adam-Eve-Seth and pearl, to talk about the Trinity for the first time in the history of Christian literature. Thus, this dissertation has demonstrated that examining the comparative images embedded in the theological works is not merely a literary or linguistic study of patristic literature but a window into their theological imagination which takes us to the heart of their theology. The way a theologian changes the images used for God shows how he/she wants to shape the imagination of the audience. Here, in Gregory, it shows his commitment to Nicene trinitarian theology.

Fourthly, this dissertation demonstrates the statement of Ayres: “different analogies are used together or are displayed side by side; analogies are also displayed only in order to demonstrate the inadequacies of other analogies or to enable the reader to see where they themselves fail.”¹⁰³⁰ If each image can only illustrate a particular aspect of God, then different images in coordination can help us to think about different aspects of God. The honour images explored in Chapter 4 illustrate this aspect. It is evident that the three honour images—Adam, Eve and Seth; Father and Son; and Pearl—collectively present a cogent argument for the co-equal honour of the Son with the Father, while concurrently countering the Eunomian image of the tool. They have their own arguments when considered separately,¹⁰³¹ but together they refute the idea that the Son is merely an instrument. The relational images indicate this coordinating aspect as well. As previously stated in Section 5.2, the root image serves as the touchstone for all relational images. This is due to Gregory’s emphasis on acknowledging the Father as the source, a belief that is central to his trinitarian theology, while maintaining the co-equal nature of all three persons. In light of this understanding, Gregory rejects the concept of an underground passage-spring-river, which is merely another iteration of his water source-spring-river image, as it obscures the Father as the root.¹⁰³² Therefore, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of any relational image, it is essential to acknowledge the role of the Father as the root. Thus, the individual images in Gregory are mutually corrective and coordinate with each other.

In essence, Gregory employs comparative images as a theological tool to facilitate positive discourse on the subject of God, while simultaneously preserving the element of mystery surrounding the Divine. Despite the fact that they do not disclose the nature of God, they do nevertheless guide human thought and discourse regarding the Divine in the right

¹⁰³⁰ Ayres, *Nicaea*, 289.

¹⁰³¹ See 4.7.

¹⁰³² See 5.3.2.

direction, thereby progressively contributing to the development of a more nuanced understanding of the Godhead. The comparative images are not literal speech about God, as the Eunomian "unbegotten" claimed to do; rather, they are a guide pointing in the right direction and a guardrail that prevents missteps. How does Gregory, as a theologian and priest, help his congregation by using comparative images? He does it in several ways. Gregory sometimes introduces the image first and then asks his audience to think about God in one particular way, as he does in the image of pearl. At other times, he asks them to think about a doctrinal statement about God and then to imagine the comparison, as he does in the image of three interconnected suns. But ultimately, he wants to create a mental picture in the minds of his audience to help them think about God as he conceives of Him. In talking about theological epistemology, Gregory says that our mind works in the following way with images: "one image being got from one source and another from another (ἄλλης ἐξ ἄλλου φαντασίας συλλεγομένης) and combined into some sort of presentation (ἴνδαλμα) of the truth."¹⁰³³ That is why, he says that the noblest theologian is one "whose mental image is by comparison fuller (φαντασθῆ πλέον), who has gathered in his mind a richer picture (ἐν ἑαυτῷ συναγάγη τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἴνδαλμα)... of the truth."¹⁰³⁴ This theologian can never have a full picture of God but he or she would have richer picture of God. Gregory encourages his audience to gather different mental images of God and contemplate on them and to arrive at a better understanding of God. Helping them to discover: "God (θεὸν γνωρίσαι) through the beauty and order of things seen (διὰ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ὁρῶμένων καὶ τῆς εὐταξίας), using sight as a guide (ὁδηγῶ) to what transcends sight without losing God through the grandeur of what it sees."¹⁰³⁵ He also offers them safeguards by explicitly identifying where each image succeeds and where it fails, so that one can understand how to use the set of images to talk about God without misrepresenting God and avoid looking "at things visible (τὰ ὁρώμενα) and makes of these a god—a gross mistake."¹⁰³⁶

To summarise, the whole dissertation demonstrates that in Gregory's writings comparative images for God are ontologically inadequate, christologically permitted, epistemologically necessary, and pastorally effective in creating the mental images that can help the embodied human being to a truer and richer understanding God.

¹⁰³³ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 45.3; NPNF, 423; PG 36.625C.

¹⁰³⁴ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 30.17; Norris, *Faith*, 274; SC 250.262.

¹⁰³⁵ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232; SC 250.128.

¹⁰³⁶ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 28.13; Norris, *Faith*, 232; SC 250.128.

6.4. Contributions to Fourth-Century Theology

This study contributes to the fourth-century theology and to Gregorian studies in different ways.

Firstly, this research contributes methodologically to patristic and theological studies. By taking Gregory's use of images seriously as a theological method rather than merely a stylistic ornament, it demonstrates the need for approaches that integrate literary, rhetorical, and theological analysis in patristic studies. Gregory did not naively employ images, but he has given careful thought to how to use them and in which ways they should be understood and not understood. Gregory cannot be fully understood through purely doctrinal analysis that ignores his rhetorical context, nor through purely literary analysis that neglects his theological convictions. The fusion of these dimensions in his identity as a theological orator requires equally integrated scholarly methods. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the value of examining the entire network of images rather than isolated examples. Gregory's comparative images function as a coordinated system where each image finds its meaning partly through its relationships to other images. Studying images in isolation misses this systemic dimension and the ways in which images mutually correct and complement one another. Part II has shown how Gregory uses different images to convey the equal honour of the three persons in the Trinity and how he explains aspects of their relationship through relational images. When we combine them fully, they explain Gregory's theology better.

Secondly, it demonstrates that the fourth-century trinitarian debates were not merely about abstract doctrinal formulations but fundamentally about theological imagination. The Eunomian controversy was concerned with how Christians would conceive of and imagine God. Eunomius' tool (ὄργανον) image created a theological imagination of divine hierarchy and functional subordination. Gregory's honour and relational images created an alternative imagination of tri-unity, co-equality, and perichoretic communion. The struggle for orthodoxy is about the theologian conveying the mental picture he has formed of God through scripture and contemplation to the people, so that they can also share in that vision of God. The victory of Nicene theology was ultimately a victory of one imaginative framework over another, as Vaggione suggested.¹⁰³⁷ Thus, focusing on the imaginative framework gives us more depth in understanding Gregory's and his contemporaries' theology than analysing their propositional formulae.

Thirdly, the dissertation illuminates Gregory's unique contribution to fourth-century

¹⁰³⁷ cf. Vaggione, *Eunomius*, 121.

theology and his standing among his colleagues. While Basil and Gregory of Nyssa developed and defended trinitarian theology through their philosophical treatises, with careful refutation of anti-Nicenes through point-by-point philosophical argumentation, as evidenced by their *Against Eunomius*, and with their use of ἐπίνοια, Gregory of Nazianzus contributed through his mastery of rhetorical imagery and his concern for shaping theological imagination (φαντασία). Gregory was not concerned with refuting Eunomius line by line, but rather with painting a picture of God through his words that would inflame his audience's theological imagination. In this way, this study reveals how Gregory bridges the gap between theology and pastoral practice. His comparative images are not mere rhetorical flourishes in otherwise theological discourse but integral to his pastoral strategy of inscribing orthodox doctrine on souls. This integration of theology, rhetoric, and pastoral care offers a model of theological method that resists modern tendencies to separate doctrinal formulation from practical ministry and rhetorical expression from theological content.

6.5. Final Reflections

Gregory of Nazianzus stands before us as a theological orator whose sophisticated use of comparative images reveals both deep theological conviction and pastoral wisdom. His paradoxical stance—images are necessary yet inadequate, useful yet capable of misleading—reflects not inconsistency but a dialectical tension that pays careful attention to the complexities of embodied human knowledge of the infinite God. In an age of theological controversy when different visions of God competed for Christians' hearts and minds, Gregory wielded images as tools for shaping orthodox theological imagination. The comparative images Gregory employs all point beyond themselves to some aspects of the ineffable mystery of the Trinity. They do so not by capturing divine reality in human concepts but by orienting the mind toward realities that exceed comprehension. Like signposts pointing to a destination far beyond themselves, the images guide without reaching, illumine without exhausting, support without proving. Gregory's greatest contribution may lie not in any single image but in his demonstration of how theological language should be used—confidently yet humbly, boldly yet carefully, creatively yet in keeping with the tradition and Scripture. He shows that faithful theology requires both speaking and qualifying our speech, both affirming and negating, both using images and acknowledging their limitations. This dynamic approach guards against the twin dangers of presumption that we could capture God in our words and despair that God remains utterly unknowable and inexpressible.

This is Gregory's legacy: not a system of doctrine independent of its imaginative expression, but a way of doing theology that is both bold and reserved, confident and humble, above all that leads to knowing and worshipping the triune God. Thus, in the end, Gregory's use of comparative images embodies his conviction that theology is fundamentally doxology—speech about God that aims ultimately at worship of God. The images serve not merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity or win theological debates but to lead the soul toward the vision of God. Gregory's own conclusion to the *Theological Orations* encapsulates the very dynamic I have traced throughout this study:

In the end, I resolved that it was best to have done with images (τὰς εἰκόνας) and shadows (τὰς σκιὰς), deceptive and utterly inadequate as they are to express the reality. I resolved to keep close to the more truly religious view and rest content with few words, taking the Spirit as my guide and, in his company and in partnership with him, safeguarding to the end the genuine illumination (ἔλλαμψιν) I had received from him, as I strike out a path through this world. To the best of my powers I will persuade all men to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the single Godhead and power, because to him belong all glory, honour, and might for every and ever. Amen.¹⁰³⁸

¹⁰³⁸ Gr. Naz. *Or.* 31.33; Norris, *Faith*, 298-99; SC 250.340-42.

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All primary texts quoted in this thesis without reference to translations are my own translations. I have included the critical texts and translations I have consulted for this research in the bibliography. Each text is presented in the following order under each author: an abbreviation of the work, the Latin name of the work, the source of the Greek or Latin text, and then the source of translation, if used.

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