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# *Overcoming Time and Space: Gregory of Nyssa's Anagogical Theology*

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This essay challenges the interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa that sees him as envisioning created life retaining its diastemic character also in the hereafter. To Gregory, it is most important to enter into the divine life, and although this ascent (or anagogy) makes use of time and space, these do not properly characterize human destiny. While taking into account Gregory's clear articulation of the creator-creature distinction as well as his insistence that the creator is beyond extension and thus beyond measurement, I make clear that Gregory is nonetheless impatient with the time and space that we inhabit; that the extension of time and space is not something that Gregory values for its own sake. Instead, what matters is the way in which we use every moment of our temporal lives to progress in our upward journey into the intelligible life of the heavenly kingdom—which, according to Nyssen, is both our origin and our final end.

Throughout his writings, Gregory of Nyssa struggles with the limitations that time and space impose on human beings. Bodies are subject to the limitations that their created environment imposes. Regardless of the genre he employs in his writings—whether he takes the biblical text as his starting-point (as in his commentaries and homilies), sets out to deal with theological anthropology (as most notably in *De anima et resurrectione* and in *De hominis opificio*), or polemically engages theological opponents in Trinitarian and christological controversy (particularly, of course, in the three books of *Contra Eunomium*)—Gregory consistently focuses on questions that deal with the measureable limits of time and space. In this essay, therefore, I want to raise the following question: does Gregory

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unequivocally affirm the measurements of created time and space—the extension (διάστημα) of created life—or does he insist that in some ways they are obstacles to be overcome?

One rather common—though not universally agreed upon—interpretation of Gregory sees him as holding that the diastemic character of creation extends to all created life, including angels and the human mind, since it is precisely διάστημα that distinguishes creation from creator. This sharp distinction would seem to entail that for human beings διάστημα continues also in the life hereafter. Since Gregory teaches that, for human beings, the afterlife is characterized by perpetual progress (ἐπέκτασις) of one's participation in the divine life,<sup>1</sup> it is commonly assumed that he must necessarily also hold that human life in the hereafter will continue to be diastemic in character.

David L. Balás, for example, maintains that, for Gregory, “also the life of the (blessed) angels and the future eternal life of (blessed) souls of men is subject to distension due to the category of participation.”<sup>2</sup> B. Otis has similarly argued that Gregory's theory of time “extends time—the *diastema*—to a period far beyond that of material or cosmic duration, that of the visible universe,”<sup>3</sup> and Otis argues explicitly that “Gregory . . .

1. Gregory's notion ἐπέκτασις is predicated on the understanding that God's infinity always immeasurably outstrips the progress of human ascent. See Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysses*, rev. ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 291–307; Everett Ferguson, “God's Infinity and Man's Mutability: Perpetual Progress According to Gregory of Nyssa,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 (1973): 59–78; Ferguson, “Progress in Perfection: Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita Moysis*,” *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976): 307–14; Catherine LeBlanc, “Naked and Unashamed: Epektasis in Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs” (M.A. thesis, University of St. Michael's College, 2007); Kristina Robb-Dover, “Gregory of Nyssa's ‘Perpetual Progress’,” *Theology Today* 65 (2008): 213–25; Paul M. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of ‘Perpetual Progress’,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151–71.

2. David L. Balás, “Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*,” in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie: Zweites internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa; Freckenhorst bei Münster 18.–23. September 1972*, ed. Heinrich Dörrie, Margarete Altenburger, and Uta Schramm (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 128–55, at 148. Balás (erroneously in my view) understands Gregory's “notion of participation as the foundation of temporality” (150). He speaks of this as “(quasi-)temporal distension” (148), and he argues that although the notion of perpetual progress means that for Gregory “man has to transcend the temporality of the material world,” his perfection “does not consist in escaping ‘distension’ but rather in a continuous ‘distension’ of a higher order.” While I appreciate Balás's nuance, it seems to me that he does not do justice to Gregory's explicit disavowal of διάστημα in the hereafter.

3. B. Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time,” *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976): 327–57, at 343.

does not conceive of the created spirits as eventually attaining a god-like freedom from the temporal *diastema*, an eternity without any past, present or [r] future.”<sup>4</sup> Alden A. Mosshammer argues that Gregory developed an increasingly robust distinction between creator and creature.<sup>5</sup> We can observe this development, according to Mosshammer, in Gregory’s changing application of the term “extension” (διάστημα). His early writings apply the term only to sensible creatures, but his later writings apply it also to intelligible creatures: “It is particularly noteworthy that the same terminology [Gregory] once used to differentiate the sensible from the intelligible—*diastêma*—becomes in the later works the distinguishing characteristic of the created from the uncreate[d].”<sup>6</sup> Paul Plass, while acknowledging that

4. Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 344. Otis is forced to acknowledge several passages in Gregory’s corpus that explicitly deny creaturely διάστημα and time, both in the first creation of man and in the hereafter (345 n. 1). Trying to do justice to Gregory’s obvious differentiation between this (fallen) existence and the state of human sinlessness (both before the fall and in the eschaton), Otis posits two “extensions”: “there are thus in effect two *diastemata*,—one corresponding to what we may call the normal or uninhibited movement of angelic or immaterial spirits toward the good; the other corresponding to the interval necessitated by sin, both angelic and human” (352). This solution suffers from the difficulty that Gregory nowhere suggests two distinct extensions.

5. Alden A. Mosshammer, “The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa *Contra Eunomium* 1,105–113,” in *El “Contra Eunomium I” en la Produccion Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa: VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa*, ed. Lucas F. Mateo-Seco and Juan L. Bastero (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A., 1988), 353–79; Mosshammer, “Historical Time and the Apokatastasis according to Gregory of Nyssa,” *Studia Patristica* 27 (1993): 70–93.

6. Mosshammer, “Created and the Uncreated,” 372. Mosshammer rightly rejects the notion of two kinds of διάστημα. He insists (“Historical Time,” 91), however, that the term carries many nuances in Gregory’s writings, and he suggests: “Rather than seeking to distinguish between two kinds of διάστημα, we should say that for Gregory interval is the common dimension of the created order, with somewhat different manifestations for intelligibles as compared with sensibles.” This distinction still does not do justice to the fact that Gregory never applies the term διάστημα either to angels or to sinless human existence and that (as we will see) he explicitly denies the diastemic character of the eschaton. Mosshammer, “Created and the Uncreated,” 364, and “Historical Time,” 83, bases his argument regarding Gregory’s increasingly expansive use of διάστημα on only one passage: *In Ecclesiasten homiliae* (hereafter *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.*; ed. Paul Alexander, GNO 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1962], 412; trans. George Hall and Rachel Moriarty, “Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (St Andrews, 5–10 September 1990)*, ed. Stuart George Hall [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993]). Here Gregory, *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:412; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 125) suggests that the human mind “is compelled to go beyond the concept of extension (διαστηματικῆν), yet it does not get beyond it. Together with every concept it thinks of,

there are no “temporal stages” of birth, growth, and age in heaven for Gregory,<sup>7</sup> nonetheless maintains that the perpetual progress of the “quasi-space” and “quasi-time” of the eschaton will still involve διάστημα, albeit a transformed διάστημα: “*Diastēma*, then, is the ontological ‘field’ for created being including both temporal and quasi-timeless regions.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, J. Warren Smith, while recognizing that for Gregory in the eschatological ecstatic enjoyment of God, “our life will be one eternal now” without any further need for future hope,<sup>9</sup> so that we will “lose self-consciousness and its corollary time-consciousness”<sup>10</sup> (seeing that we will be “lost in the love of the Beloved”<sup>11</sup>), nonetheless maintains that human beings remain inescapably diastemic: “As a creature marked by *diastēma*, man can never cross the ontological divide between ourselves and God, and so enter God’s eternity.”<sup>12</sup> Each of these authors maintains that for Nyssen, human existence in the eschaton will be characterized by διάστημα.

There is certainly value in these interpretations of Gregory. They rightly recognize that the creator-creature distinction is of utmost importance to Gregory. They also correctly hold that Nyssen looks to diastemic creaturely movement in time and space as something positive in that it allows

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it surely envisages, comprehended at the same time as the being of what is conceived, its extension (διάστημα); but extension (διάστημα) is nothing but a creature.” Gregory, *Hom. 1-8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:413; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 125) also suggests here that human understanding “finds no method of speeding past the concept of temporality (αἰῶνος), so as to stand outside itself and transcend the temporality (αἰῶνος) envisaged as prior to existing things.” Two observations need to be made. First, Gregory does not define “created nature as nothing other than διάστημα” (Mosshammer, “Historical Time,” 83); rather, he puts it the other way around: extension (unlike the Good) is only a creature. Furthermore, while Nyssen indeed often distinguishes creation as diastemic from creator as adiastric, this is always in the context of this-worldly existence; the eschaton inevitably complicates matters.

7. Paul Plass, “Transcendent Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 34 (1980): 180–92, at 183.

8. Plass, “Transcendent Time,” 186. Cf. Plass’s comment: “Instead of being abolished, time (and with it creation) is transformed into quasi-extension” (183). He suggests that when, in *De vita Moysis*, Moses sees God’s back, this becomes a “sign for an elusive intermediate region, a quasi-space and quasi-time between God’s totally transcendent face and the spatial/temporal creation” (186). Plass’s account is quite nuanced and in many ways helpful. Still, the expressions “quasi-space” and “quasi-time” are less than helpful, since for Gregory human beings will come to share in the eternal (ἄιδιος) character of divine infinity.

9. J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Herder & Herder-Crossroad, 2004), 199.

10. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 223.

11. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 224.

12. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 224.

the human person to participate more fully than before in the life of God. The diastemic nature of this-worldly existence is thus able to contribute to human growth in virtue. Indeed, Gregory significantly stops short of strictly identifying the eschatological state of human beings with divine infinity: continuous progress (ἐπέκτασις) is possible precisely because God always remains transcendent to human beings, so that they will never fully attain to his perfection. *De vita Moysis*, in particular, makes clear that human perfection will never reach the level of divine perfection.<sup>13</sup> The divine essence always remains out of reach for human beings, also in the hereafter.

Nonetheless, for Gregory, continuous progress in the eschaton is not characterized by διάστημα. L. G. Patterson and Ilaria Ramelli rightly point out that Gregory regards the final restoration of all things as a change for human beings from temporality into the eternity (ἄιδιότης) of God himself.<sup>14</sup> Patterson comments: “This present life . . . involves the temporality and mutability required by the slow completion of this plenitude. But both time and change will end with its completion.”<sup>15</sup> Robert Wilken similarly recognizes that while God uses the “intervals of time” in the creation and redemption of the world, the eschaton cannot be broken up

13. In the prologue to *De vita Moysis*, Gregory makes clear that he understands virtue as divine perfection (τελειότης), which is something that human beings cannot attain. Seeing that Jesus nonetheless calls us to perfection (Matt 5.48), Gregory defines human perfection—a gradually increasing participation in divine virtue—as follows: “[T]he perfection (τελειότης) of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth (ἄει ἐθέλειν ἐν τῷ καλῷ τὸ πλεόν) in goodness” (*De vita Moysis* [ed. H. Musurillo, GNO 7/1:4–5; trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, *The Life of Moses*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1978), 31]).

14. L. G. Patterson, “The Conversion of *Diastēma* in the Patristic View of Time,” in *Lux in Lumine: Essays to Honor W. Norman Pittenger*, ed. R. A. Norris (New York: Seabury, 1966), 93–111, 180–83, at 105, refers to *De hominis officio* (hereafter *Hom. opif.*; PG 44:205C; trans. NPNF2 5:22). Ilaria Ramelli, “Αἰώνος and Αἰών in Origen and in Gregory of Nyssa,” *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 57–62, at 58, mentions *De tridui spatio* (hereafter *Trid. spat.*, ed. Ernest Gebhardt, GNO 9 [Leiden: Brill, 1967], 278); *In Canticum canticorum* (hereafter *Cant.*; ed. Hermann Langerbeck, GNO 6 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 69). These examples could easily be multiplied.

15. Patterson, “Conversion,” 104. Several of the authors mentioned earlier also recognize that time, as such, will cease in the eschaton. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 198–202, is particularly insistent on this, and Balás, “Eternity and Time,” 148–50, and Plass, “Transcendent Time,” 186, both speak of “quasi-temporality” in connection with the hereafter. While I have no great difficulty with the term “quasi-temporality” as such (since Gregory does distinguish between God’s infinity and our progress in it), we do need to recognize that 1) for Gregory, human beings do participate in divine eternity (ἄιδιότης), and (2) he explicitly insists on the cessation of extension (διάστημα) in the eschaton.

into intervals. The characteristic of this “new time” will be precisely its adiaSTEMIC character.<sup>16</sup>

This essay challenges the interpretation that for Gregory created life will retain its diastemic character also in the hereafter. I will argue that what is most important to Gregory is to enter into the divine life and that, although the anagogical journey (or ascent) makes use of time and space, these do not properly characterize the human destiny. Although matter—in particular human bodies—will share in the resurrection, this is possible not because of its diastemic character but because matter, on Gregory’s understanding, is ontologically malleable and not essentially connected to the measurements of time and space. Thus, while Gregory is consistently unambiguous about the creator-creature distinction, his theology holds out the hope for an eschaton in which the temporal-spatial characteristics of our present life are overcome through an analogical sharing in the life of God. The fact is that Gregory nowhere indicates that perpetual progress in the hereafter requires διάστημα. We may feel that the former ought to lead to the latter, but for Gregory this is simply not the case. Instead, he holds to a paradoxical tension. On the one hand, he insists that human progress will be never-ending. This allows him to safeguard the radical difference between the infinite creator and the finite creature. On the other hand, he is equally intent on maintaining that this continuous progress will not involve the extension (διάστημα) of time and space. Gregory’s otherworldliness runs so deep that he cannot see human progress being without end as long as creation retains the measurements of extended existence.

According to Gregory, all embodied existence—every created object as we know it today—is subject to measurement. Extensions of time and space characterize everything we know. The first part of this essay deals with the diastemic character of time—its extension and thus its measured character. I will begin this section with a brief discussion of Gregory’s controversy with Eunomius. This Trinitarian debate allowed Gregory to articulate clearly the character of the creator-creature distinction by insisting that the creator is beyond extension and thus beyond measurement. The following sections will make clear that Gregory nonetheless is impatient with the time and space that we inhabit. In *Ecclesiasten homiliae* 6–8 show that the extension of time is not something that Gregory values for its own sake. Instead, what matters is the way in which we use every moment

16. Robert L. Wilken, “Liturgy, Bible and Theology in the Easter Homilies of Gregory of Nyssa,” in *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse: Actes du colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 septembre 1969)*, ed. Marguerite Harl (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 127–43, at 138–41.

of our temporal lives to progress in our upward journey. Gregory's Easter sermon, *De tridui spatio*, illustrates that for Gregory, the resurrection of Christ radically intervenes to undermine, already today, the chronological nature of time. The new reality of the eschaton, which Gregory describes as the "eighth day" (particularly in his sermon *In sextum Psalmum*), is one in which the life of virtue and upward ascent yields its ultimate fruit of eternal life—a mode of existence in which the measurements of time and space no longer apply. Gregory not only uses the temporal metaphor of the "eighth day," but also the spatial metaphors of heaven and paradise to describe this otherworldly reality. The intelligible life of the heavenly kingdom is, according to Nyssen, both our origin and our final end.

MEASURING THE CREATURE ONLY:  
*CONTRA EUNOMIUM*

Gregory was plunged into debate with Eunomius, bishop of Cyzicus, as a result of the death of his elder brother Basil in 379.<sup>17</sup> Basil had undertaken a systematic refutation of the neo-Arian theologian.<sup>18</sup> A student of Aetius, Eunomius presented a Trinitarian theology that distinguished three beings, of which the first was the highest and was properly or essentially named "unbegotten" (ἀγέννητος). The implication of this ontological hierarchical differentiation in the Trinity was a strong emphasis on the individuality of the divine Persons, each of which, so Eunomius believed, had its own simple essence. Furthermore, since unbegottenness constituted the Father's essence, the Son, as begotten (γέννημα) of the Father, had come into being through the Father's will. Like Arius earlier in the fourth century, Eunomius believed that the Son had not always been in existence. Since Eunomius and the other neo-Arians spoke of the relationship between the unbegotten (ἀγέννητος) Father and the begotten (γέννημα) Son as a relationship between two distinct essences, they regarded the Father and the Son as unlike (ἀνόμοιος) one another. As the theological party that most strongly emphasized the dissimilarity between Father and Son, the neo-Arians

17. Nyssen wrote *Contra Eunomium* 1 and 2 in 380 (see *Ep.* 29.2 [ed. Giorgio Pasquali, GNO 8/2 (Leiden: Brill, 1925), 87]). For Eunomius, see especially *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, ed. and trans. Richard Paul Vaggione (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

18. The expression "neo-Arian" should not be taken to imply that there were no differences between the theologies of Arius and Eunomius. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

became known as the Anomoians. Eunomius's confidence that it was possible to grasp the essence of God in human language—with ἀγέννητος describing this—lay anchored in a strongly essentialist epistemology.<sup>19</sup> Eunomius argued that while most of the names used for God were merely human concepts (ἐπίνοιαι), which as such could not properly describe the being of God, the notion of God's unbegottenness was different: according to Eunomius, it described God in his very essence.<sup>20</sup>

The three books of Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* constitute a lengthy defense of both the full divinity of the Son and the simplicity of the one essence of God's being. At a crucial juncture in Book 1, Gregory takes issue with the anomoian distinction between the Father as "senior" (πρεσβύτερον) and the Son as "junior" (νεώτερον). His main objection to this distinction is that it introduces an interval or gap (διάστημα) between the Father and the Son: "If one holds that the life of the Father is senior to that of the Son, one is surely separating the Only-Begotten from the God over all by a certain interval (διαστήματι τι)."<sup>21</sup> Gregory takes Eunomius's introduction of διάστημα in the divine life as a straightforward denial of divine infinity: interval and infinity simply do not go together. Once we introduce διάστημα into God's life, the unbegotten Father himself, too, is reduced to finitude, to measurement, to limits, and to boundaries.

Using an example to drive home his point, Gregory asks his reader to imagine two rods, of unequal length. By putting the two rods beside each other, it becomes possible to measure the difference in length: "By putting the end of the shorter one alongside we know from it how much longer the taller one is, and we discover how much the shorter one falls short by using some measurement to bring the smaller up to the size of the larger one, whether a cubit or whatever the length is by which the greater

19. Earlier scholarship has interpreted this essentialism as neoplatonic in origin (Jean Danielou, "Eunomie l'arien et l'exégèse néo-platonicienne du Cratyle," *Revue des études grecques* 69 (1959): 412–32; Paulos Mar Gregorios, "Theurgic Neoplatonism and the Eunomius-Gregory Debate: An Examination of the Background," in *El "Contra Eunomium I,"* ed. Mateo-Seco and Bastero, 217–35. Mark DelCogliano, however, has recently questioned the influence of Platonism on the Eunomian view of the origin of names (*Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names: Christian Theology and Late-Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy*, Supplements to *Virgiliae Christianae* 103 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 49–95).

20. Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus*, 249–64, makes clear that the Nicene party may well have misunderstood Eunomius on this score, since Eunomius did not claim to have discursive, natural knowledge of the divine essence.

21. *Contra Eunomium* 1 (ed. Werner Jaeger, GNO 1 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 344). Throughout, I use Stuart Hall's translation.

exceeds the less.”<sup>22</sup> Because the interval (διάστημα) between the two rods is fixed or finite, we can measure it. If we were to say that there is likewise a διάστημα between Father and Son, this would imply that not only the Son, but also even the Father himself can be measured and so is finite. By insisting on “seniority” for the Father, argues Gregory, “you will be setting a limited beginning to the existence of the Father too, defined by the supposed interval in between.”<sup>23</sup> In short, Gregory insists that if we hold that the Father was once without the Son, we cannot avoid introducing structures of measurement into the Godhead, including the unbegotten Father himself.

Nyssen then elaborates on the creator-creature distinction.<sup>24</sup> Here he faces the objection that if a “beginning point” for the Son really would undermine also the Father’s infinity, then would not the beginning of creation likewise undermine God’s infinity? Gregory is not impressed with the objection. He believes that there is a vast difference between saying that *creation* has a beginning and saying that the *Son* has a beginning. He is not arguing that the created order is like the smaller rod that we can measure by placing it alongside God as the longer rod. His point is that divine infinity does not allow for any measurement whatsoever, while creation is subject to time and space.<sup>25</sup> The creator is in no way to be connected to either interval (διάστημα) or sequence (ἀκολουθία).<sup>26</sup> These characteristics are the result of a creation that is bounded by beginning (ἀρχή) and end (πέρας). That is to say, the created order is made up of measured bodies, subject to time and measurement.<sup>27</sup> Unlike created life, Gregory explains, the life of God is entirely separate from temporal measurement: “That life is not in time, but time came from it.”<sup>28</sup> Time

22. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:351; trans. Hall, 86).

23. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:355; trans. Hall, 87).

24. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:359–85; trans. Hall, 88–91).

25. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:362–63; trans. Hall, 88).

26. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Concept of Spacing,” in *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Communio-Ignatius, 1995), 27–35, first pointed out the centrality of the term διάστημα for Gregory, while Jean Daniélou, “Akolouthia chez Grégoire de Nysse,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 27 (1953): 219–49, “The Development of History,” in *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, trans. Nigel Abercrombie, repr. (Cleveland, OH: Meridian-World, 1968), 241–52, and *L’Être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 18–50, has highlighted the broad range and importance of the term ἀκολουθία.

27. As we will see later, Gregory deals not only with created bodies, but also with the created intelligibles, both human and angelic.

28. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:365; trans. Hall, 89).

(χρόνος) is a characteristic of created reality only. Thus, Gregory contrasts God (Father and Son) as eternal (αἰδιος) with human beings who are in space (τόπος) and in time (χρόνος).<sup>29</sup> Gregory clearly works with a concept of timeless eternity, which does at least two things for him: it guarantees a radical creator-creature distinction, and it allows him to uphold divine infinity, with the Son unambiguously being on the side of divine infinity.<sup>30</sup> Only the creature is characterized by diastemic measurement.

VIRTUOUS PROGRESSION IN TIME:  
IN ECCLESIASTEN HOMILIAE

Although we cannot establish with any degree of certainty when Gregory preached his eight homilies on Ecclesiastes, they do display at least some interest in the issues that came to the fore around the time of the Eunomian controversy, which may be an indication as to when Gregory preached *In Ecclesiasten homiliae*.<sup>31</sup> Be this as it may, since the Ecclesiast's main theme is the futility or vanity of life "under the sun," the biblical text presented Gregory with ample opportunity to reflect on the significance of temporal existence. What is more, the monotonous but intriguing cadences of the third chapter gave him reason to reflect on the nature and the significance of time. Nyssen, we will see, did not use the poetic passage to underscore the significance of history or temporal life. Instead, he saw the chapter's references to time as allusions to the divinely given opportunity to live a life of virtue and thus to ascend to God.

Alluding to the identification of the Ecclesiast as "the Son of David, the King of Israel" (Eccl 1.1),<sup>32</sup> Gregory leaves no doubt whom he considers to be the author of the book: "For the true Ecclesiast, he who collects into one body what has been *scattered*, and assembles (ἐκκλησιάζων) *into one whole* those who have been led astray in many ways by various deceits

29. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:371; trans. Hall, 89).

30. The terminology in this section of *Contra Eunomium* is in line with Gregory's overall use, where the terms αἰών (age) and χρόνος (time) are restricted to created life, and where the term αἰδιότης (eternity) usually characterizes the life of God, even though Gregory uses the latter term also for human beings in their perfected state. See Balás, "Eternity and Time," 151–53; Ramelli, "Αἰώνιος and Αἰών."

31. See Pierre Maraval, "Chronology of Works," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherney (Leiden: Brill, 2009); hereafter cited as *BDGN*.

32. I take all Septuagint quotations from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford, 2007).

(John 11.52)—who else would he be but the true King of Israel, the Son of God, to whom Nathanael said, *You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel* (John 1.49)?”<sup>33</sup> Gregory defines “futility” (ματαιότης), the theme of Christ’s discourse in this book, as “either a meaningless word, or an unprofitable activity, or an unrealized plan, or unsuccessful effort, or in general what serves no useful purpose at all.”<sup>34</sup> The aim of the Ecclesiast’s discourse on “futility” is to lead readers away from it and to bring them to a life of virtue instead: “Now the teaching of this book looks exclusively to the conduct of the Church, and gives introduction in those things by which one would achieve the life of virtue.”<sup>35</sup> As a result, the homilies display a consistent concern with the dangers of worldly pleasure, while they encourage the reader to choose the virtuous life instead.

The last three homilies, dealing with the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, raise the issue of how one can live the virtuous life that the earlier chapters have described: “It remains to learn how one may live virtuously (κατ’ ἀρετήν), by obtaining from the text some art and method, so to speak, of successful living.”<sup>36</sup> In order to determine how one makes the virtuous life one’s own, Gregory discusses Eccl 3.1: “For everything there is a time, and a right time for every matter under heaven.” He explains the “time” (χρόνος) and “proper time” (καιρός) mentioned in Eccl 3.1 as references to “measure” (τὸ σύμμετρον) and “timeliness” (τὸ εὐκαιρον), respectively.<sup>37</sup> These two, he explains, are “the criteria for the good.”<sup>38</sup> Since the Aristotelian “mean” (τὸ μέσον) between two vices allows us to “measure” virtue, Gregory believes that the Ecclesiast’s mentioning of “time” (χρόνος)—which is the basic framework for measuring—must refer to our attempts to establish virtue as the proper mean. Virtuous acts are acts that are “measured” or moderate. The Aristotelian mean also applies, however, to our determination of the “proper time” (καιρός) of the virtuous action: “In the part which concerns timeliness (εὐκαιρίαν), too, we might give the same explanation, that neither anticipating the proper time (εὐκαιρίαν) nor being late is judged a good thing.”<sup>39</sup> Both the moderation of the virtuous act (to which Gregory believes χρόνος refers) and its propitious timing (which he sees in the mentioning of καιρός) contribute to

33. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:280; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 34). Cf. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:298–99; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 48–49).

34. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:282; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 35).

35. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:279; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 34).

36. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:373; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 99).

37. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:374; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 100).

38. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:375; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 100).

39. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:375; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 101).

the virtuous act. In short, virtue has to do both with rightly measuring the mean and with choosing the appropriate timing for the virtuous action, so that “neither the immoderate nor the untimely is good.”<sup>40</sup> The important thing, Gregory maintains, is that measurement (μέτρον) and timeliness (εὐκαιρία) should go hand in hand.

After he has explained the distinction between the moderation of χρόνος and the proper timing of καιρός, Nyssen expounds in some more detail on the significance of the former. To speak of virtue as the mean (τὸ μέσον), says Gregory, is simply another way of talking about proper “measurement” (μετρόν): “For who does not know that virtue is a measurement (μετρόν), determined (μετρούμενον) by the middle point (τῆ μεσότητι) between contrasting things?”<sup>41</sup> For those to whom the connection between χρόνος and μέσον is perhaps not immediately evident, Gregory explains that χρόνος measures all development (pregnancy, growth of crops, ripening of fruits, navigation, a journey, a person’s age, etc.). As such, χρόνος is the “standard of measurement common to all measured things (τῶν μετρούμενων μέτρον), as it embraces (περιέχων) everything within itself.”<sup>42</sup> In similar fashion, the proper means (μέσον) has everything to do with finding just the right nuance between two opposing vices. Gregory uses the example of the mean between youth and old age:

As in the course of human life advanced age is weak, while immaturity is undisciplined, and the mean (τὸ μέσον) between the two is the best, precisely because it avoids the undesirable features of both sides, and in it the strength of youth is displayed separated from its indiscipline, and the wisdom of age detached from its feebleness, so that strength is combined with wisdom, equally avoiding the weakness of age and the rashness of youth—in the same way the one who decrees a time (χρόνον) for all things by his words excludes on each side the evil resulting from lack of proportion (ἀμετρίας), repudiating what is beyond its time (χρόνον) and rejecting what falls short of it.<sup>43</sup>

For Gregory, to find the right proportionality between two opposing vices is to “measure” one’s action in just the right way. Thus, when he speaks of “time” (χρόνος), Nyssen does not have in mind the right moment or timing within chronologically extended time. That is something for which he instead uses the term “proper time” (καιρός). In the above quotation he is describing the need to determine the moderate or measured character of one’s virtuous action.

40. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:376; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 101).

41. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:375; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 100).

42. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:377; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 102).

43. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:377–78; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 102).

When Nyssen proceeds to explain the various pairs of opposites that the chapter mentions, the first criterion—that of proper measure or moderation—disappears from view, seeing that the text mentions “time” (χρόνος) only in 3.1, while it goes on to deal with timeliness (εὐκαιρία) in each subsequent verse. The virtues of 3.3–8 all have their “proper time” (καιρός) according to the repeated use of this term throughout the passage. The timeliness that Gregory consistently deals with in his exposition is not, however, what one might perhaps expect. Gregory shows remarkably little interest in determining the circumstances or situation that might render a particular point in time expedient for a certain virtuous action. In fact, when it comes to virtue, *any* time is a good time to pursue it. Gregory comments, for instance, that “if someone makes himself a child of God through virtue . . . that person knows the moment of the good birth,” while giving birth at the “wrong moment” refers to the possibility of turning into a child of the devil.<sup>44</sup> The stones that one must “throw” and “gather” (Eccl 3.5)—words from Scripture that we recall to destroy evil thoughts that come up in our minds—are weapons that should be continually in use, “so that we *always* cast good volleys of stones for the destruction of what is bad, and the supply of such weapons never runs out.”<sup>45</sup> “Do you want to learn, too, the right moment to seek the Lord? To put it briefly—all your life.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the “right time” for “keeping” (Eccl 3.6) is “the whole of life.”<sup>47</sup> One keeps “silent” whenever one approaches the essence of the God who is beyond speech (Eccl 3.7).<sup>48</sup> Love and hatred, properly understood, are both activities that one pursues all the time: “The whole life, then, is the moment for affection for God, and all one’s career the moment for estranging oneself from the Enemy.”<sup>49</sup> For Gregory, any time is a good time for virtuous action. The timeliness (εὐκαιρία) of virtue cannot be determined primarily by external circumstances. Timeliness, so it appears, loses its chronological grounding for Gregory, as the one moment becomes just as good as the next for engaging in virtuous action.

In the light of his overall theology, it is hardly surprising that for Gregory every moment in time is a “proper time” (καιρός) for a virtuous action. This gives a first indication that, although Gregory sharply demarcates creator from creature (as we have seen from his anti-Eunomian discourse),

44. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:380; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 104).

45. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:397; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 116; emphasis added).

46. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:401; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 118). The reference here is Eccl 3.6.

47. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:405; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 120).

48. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:414; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 126).

49. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:425; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 134).

he is nonetheless impatient with the diastemic character of time. Nyssen is an anagogical theologian for whom the διάστημα of time is an obstacle that we are to surpass. He is interested in the anagogical orientation, both of the text of Ecclesiastes and of the virtues of our lives. This anagogical drive is consistently present in Gregory's exposition of the passage. With regard to "giving birth" and "dying" (Eccl 3.2), Gregory first explains that the cycle of birth and death should serve "as a goad, to wake from sleep those who are sunk deep in fleshly existence and love the present life."<sup>50</sup> Then, appealing to a variety of biblical passages, Gregory maintains that the reference to birth and death may also be explained as a reference to spiritual birth and mortification.<sup>51</sup> When it comes to "tearing down" and "building" (Eccl 3.3), Gregory appeals to the divine charge to Jeremiah "to uproot and to pull down and to destroy," followed by the command "to rebuild and to plant" (Jer 1.10). Gregory insists: "We must first tear down the buildings of evil in us and then find a moment and a clear space for the construction of the temple of God which is built in our souls, whose fabric is virtue."<sup>52</sup> A "right time to embrace and a right time to be far from embracing" (Eccl 3.5) could either be read as an encouragement to embrace Zion as the "pinnacle of conduct" (in line with Ps 47.13[48.12] and Prov 4.8) and to loathe its opposite, or it could be viewed as an encouragement to escape the grip of earthly wealth and instead to embrace the treasure hidden in a field (Matt 13.44), seeing that "the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4.18).<sup>53</sup> Finally, the references to "love" and "hate," as well as to "war" and "peace" (Eccl 3.8), are, on Gregory's understanding, allusions to spiritual warfare; at some length, he traces this theme throughout the Scriptures. Gregory concludes from the text that, if "we have taken stock of the enemy's forces, this would be the right moment (καίρως) to make war on them."<sup>54</sup> The focus of these expositions is clearly on virtue as anagogical progress. The significance of temporality or historicity fades for Nyssen as he wants us to ascend to the purity and incorruptibility of the divine life. The upward character of the ascent of virtue implies that at every point in time one ought to take the opportunity to move yet higher. The vertical logic of Nyssen's exposition almost demands that we not wait

50. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:378; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 103).

51. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:379–91; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 103–11).

52. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:384–85; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 107).

53. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:397–400; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 117).

54. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:433; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 138).

till later to do what the text requires from us. For Gregory, temporality is something we are to overcome.

The journey of virtuous ascent away from time is, however, full of obstacles. After all, as human beings, we are tethered to this temporal existence with its diastemic character. Gregory alludes to this when he discusses God's gift of "time" (τὸν αἰῶνα) in people's hearts (Eccl 3.11): "Time, which is a dimensional (διαστηματικόν) idea, by itself signifies the whole creation which comes about in it. Therefore by referring to the container (τοῦ περιέχοντος) the sentence points to everything contained (περιεχόμενον) in it. Thus everything which exists in time God gave to the human heart for good, so that by the greatness and beauty of created things it may contemplate thereby the Creator (Wis [1]3.5)."<sup>55</sup> Gregory's "container" or "receptacle" likely alludes to Plato's notion of a space that opens up room for the world of becoming.<sup>56</sup> In our world, human beings are inescapably temporal, and that condition means, for Gregory, that they are limited to creaturely conditions.

For Gregory, the temporal condition of created existence implies that it is unable to escape its diastemic nature. His homilies show a keen awareness of this bounded character of measured bodies. When he discusses the Ecclesiast's comment that there is "a right time to keep silence, and a right time to speak" (Eccl 3.7), Gregory takes the former as an indication that God is beyond language. The reason for our inability to comprehend the infinite God is the fact that creation "cannot get outside itself" by means of thought and "always stays within itself, and sees itself, whatever it looks at."<sup>57</sup> The reason for our inability to escape the created order is the fact that time and space form a receptacle within which creaturely διάστημα has received its place. Thus, our understanding "finds no method of speeding past the concept of temporality (αἰῶνος), so as to stand outside itself and transcend the temporality (αἰῶνος) envisaged as prior to existing things."<sup>58</sup> As in his controversy with Eunomius, so also here Gregory directly ties

55. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:440; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 142–43). Cf. the priestess Diotima's advice in Plato's *Symposium* (210a–212a) that one should begin with falling in love with the physical beauty of someone's body in order to arrive ultimately at the knowledge of Beauty itself.

56. Cf. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:377), referred to in n. 42 above. Cf. Plato's *Timaeus* 49A. See Balthasar, "Concept of Spacing," 29–30; John F. Callahan, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Psychological View of Time," in *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia (Venezia, 12–18 Settembre 1958)*, Storia della filosofia antica e medievale 11 (Florence: Sansoni, 1960), 59–66, at 60.

57. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:412; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 125).

58. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:413; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 125).

the succession of time to the created order in which we find ourselves, and he uses it as a word of caution with regard to our lack of ability to name God properly. If the receptacle of time and space confines human understanding to the created order, this means that ascent to God is by no means an easy or straightforward matter.

To be sure, the diastemic limitations of creaturely existence are not something negative. Aware that the Ecclesiast's emphasis on "futility" may leave the wrong impression with his hearers, Gregory goes out of his way to make clear that creation itself is not "futile" and is not to be rejected in gnostic fashion. Thus, already when commenting on Eccl 1.2 ("Vanity of vanities, said the Ecclesiast, Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity"), Gregory feels compelled to explain: "Let no one suppose that the words are an indictment of creation. For surely the charge would also implicate him who has made all things, if the one who constructed all things from nothing were manifested to us as creator of things of this kind, if indeed all things were futility."<sup>59</sup> Gregory clarifies by distinguishing between the temporal and the eternal, and between the life of the senses and the "true life." The former, he insists, is not simply to be discarded but is meant for the pursuit of anagogy, so that "the knowledge of the visible world might become a guide to the soul for knowledge of things unseen, as Wisdom says that *by analogy from the greatness and beauty of his creatures* the originator of all things is perceived (Wis 13.5)."<sup>60</sup> He then mentions the possibility of "misjudgment" (ἄβουλία), which reveres the created order rather than the Good that really is and that shows itself through the physical order.<sup>61</sup> Gregory returns both to the goodness of the created order and to the possibility of misjudgment toward the end of his last homily, when he reflects on the "preoccupation" or "distraction" (περισπασμός) that the Ecclesiast mentions in 3.10. Again insisting that God "made all things for good" (Gen 1.4), Gregory explains: "But when the reason, perverted from what is right by evil counsel (Gen 3.1) fell away from correct judgment of reality, the reversing of the right moment turned what is useful in each case into the opposite experience."<sup>62</sup> Gregory thus echoes the Ecclesiast

59. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:283; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 36).

60. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:285; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 37).

61. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:285; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 37–38).

62. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:438; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 142). While I am unconvinced by the argument of Alden A. Mosshammer, "Time for All and a Moment for Each: The Sixth Homily of Gregory of Nyssa on Ecclesiastes," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Hall, 249–76, at 275, that Gregory's homilies on Ecclesiastes indicate a transitional stage from a more strictly vertical, Platonic approach to a more horizontal emphasis, he correctly points out that in these homilies, the

by acknowledging that “each thing comes from God for all good,” but by way of caveat he adds, “as long as use is made of it at the right moment for a proper purpose, but the perversion of right judgment about reality turns good things into the beginning of evils.”<sup>63</sup> Gregory acknowledges that the *διάστημα* of measured bodies can potentially serve the journey of virtuous ascent; whether or not it does so depends on one’s judgment and the use to which one puts the material object.

Acknowledgement of the goodness of creation does not mean, however, that Gregory permits us to linger with temporal or visible things. Nyssen is a thoroughly anagogical theologian. His reflections on the nature of temporal life, throughout the homilies, make clear that there is a great deal of futility here on earth. For instance, after a lengthy (and by no means atypical) exposition of the many evils of our temporal existence, Gregory concludes his list by referring to human nature as a “dung-heap.”<sup>64</sup> Realistic reflection on the temporal conditions of this life should make us eager to pursue the anagogical journey. Gregory’s conclusion is that we dare not focus on the temporal *διάστημα* for its own sake: “For if the use of God’s creatures at the right moment determines what is good in human life, there should be one good thing, the perpetual joy in good things, and that is the child of good deeds.”<sup>65</sup> In unambiguous fashion, Gregory puts the Ecclesiast’s notions of *χρόνος* and *καιρός* in the service of a life of virtue that is anagogical in character.

## CHRISTOLOGICAL REALIGNMENT OF TIME: *DE TRIDUI SPATIO*

Nyssen shows himself at his most creative in a lovely (but intricate) homily, entitled *De tridui spatio* (*On the Three-Day Period*), preached during an Easter vigil service.<sup>66</sup> Although the sermon deals with a variety of topics,

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misappropriation of the created order has to do with sin, not with the created order itself: “The character of man’s double life of body and soul is indeed miserable. It is miserable, however, not because of that conjunction in itself, but because of the distortion of nature caused by sin.”

63. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:439; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 142).

64. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:388; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 109).

65. *Hom. 1–8 in Eccl.* (GNO 5:441; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 143).

66. Cf. Stuart G. Hall, “The Interpretation of the Old Testament in the Opening Section of Gregory of Nyssa, *De Tridui Spatio* (De Tridui Spatio 273,5–277,9),” in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa: Translation and Commentary: Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa; Cambridge, England: 11–15 September, 1978*, ed. Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock, Patristic Monograph Series 9 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981), 139–52, at 139.

at the heart of each of them is the question of the nature of time. The liturgical setting for Gregory's reflections on time is deeply significant, for it is the liturgy that, on Nyssen's understanding, transfigures our measurable, chronological time into something far more significant, since through Word and sacrament the eschaton enters into earthly realities. Gregory begins with a reflection on the relationship between the Old Testament, the resurrection of Christ, and the faith of the neophytes who, presumably, are confessing their faith during this service and are entering into full membership of the church. Despite their temporal separation from one another, Gregory insists that the Old Testament, the resurrection of Christ, and the new believers at this Easter vigil are not, ultimately, divorced from one another through the inexorable measurable διάστημα of time.<sup>67</sup> According to Gregory, it is the newness of the Easter event—Christ's resurrection—that fundamentally puts into question the diastemic character of time. Gregory's opening sentence links the neophytes and their faith ("this present grace") to the blessings of the patriarchs, of the Law, of the historical narratives, and of the prophets.<sup>68</sup> This present grace of the Easter vigil is something of which each of these Old Testament witnesses spoke.

Alluding to the candles that the neophytes are holding in their hands, Gregory then links the many Old Testament passages, as well as the many neophytes, to the one, compounded blessing of Christ: "And just as in the scene before our eyes one light blazes about our vision, though constituted by a multitude of candles, so the whole blessing of Christ, shining by itself like a torch, produces for us this great light compounded from the many and varied rays of scripture."<sup>69</sup> Gregory's hearers see the neophytes' many candlelights uniting into one light. Similarly, Gregory insists,

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Opinions about the dating of the sermon differ. Daniélou has argued for 382, Drobner for a date between 386 and 394. See Maraval, "Chronology," in *BDGN*.

67. To be sure, Gregory does display an awareness of temporal intervals. One of the reasons for the temporal succession of the three days of the Paschal mystery is that it corresponds to the initial creation: "And do not be surprised if the creation of good is divided into intervals of time (χρονικοῖς διαστήμασιν), for at the first creation of the world also the divine power was not unable to complete all that is in a split second, but nevertheless produces along with the construction of existing things the intervals of time (τὰ χρονικὰ διαστήματα), so that one part of the creation was completed on the first day, on the second day another, and so on, until the things that exist were finished when God had fitted the whole creation together on stated days" (*Trid. spat.* [GNO 9:286; trans. Hall, 38]). Throughout, I use Stuart G. Hall's translation.

68. Gregory expands on each of these elements of the Old Testament witness to Christ at some length (*Trid. spat.* [GNO 9:274–80; trans. Hall, 31–35]), but since this is not my immediate concern here, I omit discussion of this section of the sermon.

69. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:273–74; trans. Hall, 31).

the many rays of the Old Testament Scriptures make up the one blessing of Christ. In other words, the Old Testament Scriptures not only speak of “this present grace” of the neophytes, but they also unite into the one blessing of Christ. And, while multiplicity marks the many candles preceding Christ (the “varied rays of scripture”) as well as those subsequent to Christ (the neophytes carrying “a multitude of candles”), the “whole blessing of Christ” is characterized by unity.<sup>70</sup>

The conclusion to the sermon draws attention to the implication of the connection between the Paschal mystery and the liturgical celebration of Easter. Nyssen draws his hearers into the gospel narratives by asking them to identify with the various characters and events surrounding Christ at the time of his resurrection. Gregory enjoins us to follow Joseph of Arimathea in his acceptance of the body of Christ. Alluding to the Eucharist, Gregory cautions us, “when we receive that gift of the body, not to handle it with the soiled linen of conscience, nor to lay it down in the tomb of the heart in the stench of dead men’s bones and all sorts of filth, but, as the apostle says, each one is to examine himself, so that the grace may not become judgment for the one who unworthily receives the grace.”<sup>71</sup> Gregory speaks of “that sweet earthquake” shaking his heart, “rolling away the heavy stone of the human tomb.”<sup>72</sup> He encourages us to run, “or we may arrive after the women.”<sup>73</sup> “Let the spices in our hands be faith and conscience,” he urges, “for this is the sweet savour of Christ.”<sup>74</sup> The women tell us the good news of Christ’s resurrection and of his return to the Father.<sup>75</sup> Having eaten the pre-paschal unleavened bread with its bitter herbs, we may now see the honeycomb with which the post-resurrection bread is sweetened: “As Peter fishes, you see bread and honeycomb in the Lord’s hand; consider what the bitterness of your life is transformed into. So let us also rise up from the fishing of words and make haste now to the bread, which is sweetened with the honeycomb of good hope in

70. Gregory’s skillful linking of the Old Testament Scriptures via Christ to the neophytes is far more than a playful connecting of various distinct lights. Gregory’s interpretation of Scripture—which follows the Origenist distinction between history and Spirit—regards the light of Old Testament history as full of types in which the light of Christ and subsequent ecclesial lights (such as the faith of the neophytes) are already present. Thus, Gregory’s spiritual exegesis and his understanding of liturgical time are both premised on a transposition from earthly history (or *χρόνος*) to heavenly eschaton (or *ἄιδιότης*).

71. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:303–4; trans. Hall, 48–49).

72. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:304; trans. Hall, 49).

73. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:304; trans. Hall, 49).

74. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:304; trans. Hall, 49).

75. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:304–05; trans. Hall, 49–50).

Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>76</sup> With the sermon (the “fishing of words”) coming to its conclusion, the Eucharist is about to be celebrated (the sweetened “bread”). While Gregory certainly uses great rhetorical skill to draw his hearers into the narrative, the rhetoric stands in the service of a realignment of time itself: the candles that constitute his hearers really do become contemporaneous with the Paschal mystery (as present in the Eucharist) and with the Old Testament saints who witnessed to this body of Christ.

The christological reconfiguration of time comes to the fore also in the way in which Gregory interprets the three days that Christ spent in the grave. First, Nyssen links the three days to the threefold genesis of evil, whose disease spread from the serpent via the woman to the man. Gregory explains that all three are healed, since one day in the grave was “allotted to the healing of each kind of those infected with evil.”<sup>77</sup> More significantly, Gregory raises the difficulty that the chronology recorded by the gospels does not seem to add up to Christ being in the grave three days and three nights as required by Matt 12.40. Gregory engages in a creative readjustment of the data. He explains that if we begin our calculation on Thursday night, the evening of the Last Supper, and if we split the Friday into two days and one night (because of the three-hour darkness that interrupted the day of the crucifixion), we end up with three days and three nights by late Saturday (referred to in Matt 28.1 as the time of the resurrection). Thus, the three nights are Thursday night, Friday’s three-hour darkness, and Friday night; the three days are Friday morning, Friday afternoon, and Saturday.<sup>78</sup>

The two “creative” moments in this exegesis both hinge on a reordering of time. First, Gregory justifies beginning his calculation on the Thursday evening by insisting that Christ, who voluntarily laid down his life (John 10.18), did not wait for the betrayal and crucifixion but already offered himself in an “ineffable manner” when he gave his body to the disciples as sacrificial food during the Last Supper.<sup>79</sup> Comments Gregory:

For the body of the victim would not be suitable for eating if it were still alive. So when he made his disciples share in eating his body and drinking his blood, already in secret by the power of the one who ordained the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον) his body had been ineffably and invisibly sacrificed and his soul was in those regions in which the authority of the ordainer had

76. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:306; trans. Hall, 50).

77. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:285; trans. Hall, 37–38).

78. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:286–90; trans. Hall, 38–41).

79. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:287; trans. Hall, 39).

stored it, traversing that place in the “Heart” along with the divine power infusing it.<sup>80</sup>

According to Gregory, in some “ineffable manner” Christ’s body entered Hades already on Thursday night, so that during the final meal with his disciples his sacrifice was really present.<sup>81</sup> Second, when he explains the intervention of a “night” splitting the day of the crucifixion in two, Nyssen insists that Christ rules the “temporal order,” so that “his works should not necessarily be forced to fit set measures of time (τοῦ χρόνου μέτροις), but that the measures of time (τοῦ χρόνου τὰ μέτρα) should be newly contrived for what his works required.”<sup>82</sup> After all, Gregory rhetorically adds, “the one who had power both to lay down his life of his own accord and to take it up again had power when he wished as creator of the temporal orders (τῶν αἰώνων) not to be bound by time (τῷ χρόνῳ) for his actions, but to create time (τὸν χρόνον) to fit his actions.”<sup>83</sup> The Paschal mystery implies a reconfiguring of time. And in the case of the eucharistic celebration of Christ’s sacrifice prior to his death on the cross, the realignment was such that a chronologically later event was made present at an earlier point in time. Although Gregory does not elaborate on the implications, it appears he believes that the diastemic limits of time were unable to contain the newness of the Christ event.

That, according to Nyssen, Christ’s death and resurrection affected the temporal order becomes evident particularly when he reflects on the eschatological reality that breaks into the liturgical celebration during the Easter vigil. The eschatological day in which his congregation shares—even during the night of their celebration—is quite different from any other day. In this vein, Zechariah wondered what name he should give to the “present grace.” Zechariah called it “not a day and not a night” (Zech 14.10) because in this vesper service there is neither sun (“not a day”) nor darkness (“not a night”), the latter as a result of the candle light. This, then, is “the day which the Lord made,” insists Gregory with reference to Ps 117(118).24, a day that is “different from the days made at the beginning of creation, by which time is measured, this is the beginning of another creation.”<sup>84</sup> As Robert Wilken puts it, “Gregory . . . sees Easter as a day which is unlike the other ‘days which were made at the creation’. Easter is a new day which only God could make for only God is

80. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:287–88; trans. Hall, 39–40).

81. Cf. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Eucharist,” in *BDGN*.

82. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:290; trans. Hall, 40–41).

83. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:290; trans. Hall, 40–41).

84. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:279; trans. Hall, 34–35).

free of the bondage of time.”<sup>85</sup> It is this newness of the invading eschaton that justifies for Gregory the celebration of Easter on the fourteenth of Nisan, the traditional Jewish date for celebrating Passover, despite the fact that Christians have abandoned the Jewish custom of eating unleavened bread with bitter herbs.<sup>86</sup> One might wonder why Christians would keep the Jewish date for celebrating Easter, while abandoning other customs associated with it. According to Gregory, however, there is no inconsistency in this. The unleavened bread spoke of the need to stay away from the “relics of yesterday’s evil, lest the admixture of stale evil should generate sourness and acidity in today’s dough,”<sup>87</sup> while the “bitter food gets rid of what is slack and uncontrolled in behaviour.”<sup>88</sup> Now that the newness of life anticipated by the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs has arrived, one no longer needs to eat them. The fourteenth of Nisan, however, should be kept, Nyssen insists, since the newness of life is precisely what the fourteenth day of the lunar cycle signifies, during which “the succession of the heavenly bodies” guarantees uninterrupted “continuity of light.”<sup>89</sup> Gregory concludes that through the perceptible and material light of the fourteenth of Nisan, Christians obtain an impression of the immaterial and intelligible light.<sup>90</sup>

*De tridui spatio* illustrates that for Gregory the diastemic character of time and the sharp distinction between creator and creature need to be qualified. This does not mean that Gregory intends to dispute the fact that the temporal order of creation is subject to διάστημα or that the creator-creature distinction need not be taken seriously. Both aspects pervade his entire corpus, and the Eunomian controversy made clear to Gregory how important both aspects were for the upholding of genuinely Trinitarian thought. At the same time, however, Nyssen recognizes the futility of the diastemic order of time, so that human beings can never be satisfied with

85. Wilken, “Liturgy, Bible and Theology,” 141–42.

86. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:294–95; trans. Hall, 43–44).

87. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:296; trans. Hall, 44–45).

88. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:296; trans. Hall, 44–45).

89. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:297; trans. Hall, 45). It is not easy to see how exactly Gregory means to refute the Jewish objection of inconsistency in the Christian celebration of Easter. After all, one would think that unleavened bread and bitter herbs point to the resurrection life no less than does the light-filled fourteenth of Nisan. Anthony Meredith, “The Answer to Jewish Objections (*De Tridui Spatio* p. 294.14–298.18),” in *Easter Sermons*, ed. Spira and Klock, 293–303, at 298, 300–301, suggests that perhaps Gregory sees the fourteenth day as a summary of the other two regulations, so that only the latter no longer need to be observed by Christians.

90. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:298; trans. Hall, 45–46).

the emptiness that characterizes it. Gregory's homilies on Ecclesiastes—and almost all his other writings as well—demand that we not linger with the here and now, but that we take seriously the ascetic and anagogical quest for things unseen. Gregory locates the possibility for this ascent in Christ's Paschal mystery. In a variety of ways, Gregory explains that in the Paschal mystery the eschaton intrudes upon time itself. It is this mystery, therefore, in which we need to participate if we are to join in the transformed, eschatological life; it is by participation in this Paschal mystery that we share in the newness of the resurrection life.

#### THE EIGHTH DAY AS UPWARD FUTURE: IN *SEXTUM PSALMUM*

One of Gregory's favorite ways of speaking about the resurrection life is by terming it the "eighth day." Gregory often reads the number "eight" in biblical passages as a reference to the eschaton, in contrast with our earthly lives, which he understands as a seven-day week.<sup>91</sup> While the contrast between the seven days of earthly existence and the eighth day of the eschaton is by no means Gregory's own invention, he does use it a great deal and also shapes it in line with his own distinct emphases.<sup>92</sup>

Gregory alludes to the eighth day when in *De tridui spatio* he mentions "the day which the Lord made" (Ps 117[118].24). As we have already seen, Gregory interprets this day as a day that is "different from the days made at the beginning of creation, by which time is measured, this is the beginning of another creation."<sup>93</sup> It is clear from the context of this sermon

91. For studies on Gregory's understanding of the eighth day, see Jean Daniélou, "La Typologie de la semaine au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 382–411; Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Liturgical Studies 3 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 262–86; A. J. Visser, "De zesde en de achtste: Gregorius van Nyssa over de zesde psalm," *Homiletica en Biblica* 20 (1963): 126–31; Hans Christian Knuth, *Zur Auslegungsgeschichte von Psalm 6*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese, 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), 36–41; Casimir McCambley, "On the Sixth Psalm, Concerning the Octave by Saint Gregory of Nyssa," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987): 39–50; Brian E. Daley, "Training for 'the Good Ascent': Gregory of Nyssa's Homily on the Sixth Psalm," in *In Dominico eloquio: In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 185–217.

92. The use of the Ogdoad as salvific reference goes back at least to Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.18.3). Both Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus also make reference to the "eighth day," as do many other church fathers. See McCambley, "On the Sixth Psalm," 45–46.

93. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:279; trans. Hall, 34–35).

that Gregory believes the eighth day already to have arrived in some way, since he speaks of the virtues of the neophytes as important elements of this new creation: “In this creation pure living is the sun, the virtues are stars, transparent conduct is the air, the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge is the sea, good teaching and divine doctrines are herbage and plants, which the people of his pasture, that is God’s flock, grazes on, the performance of the commandments is trees bearing fruit.”<sup>94</sup> It appears that the believers’ faith links them with Christ, which in turn implies that his resurrection is theirs, so that in both instances, resurrection constitutes the inauguration of the eschatological eighth day.

Gregory’s homily on Psalm 6 (*In sextum Psalmum*) is particularly instructive.<sup>95</sup> The homily takes its starting-point in the Septuagint inscription above the Psalm, which reads “Over the eighth” (ὕπὲρ τῆς ὀγδόης). Along with other church fathers, Nyssen sees here a reference to the “eighth day,” an allusion made particularly attractive since the feminine ending of the adjective “eighth” (ὀγδόης) makes it easy to supply the feminine noun “day” (ἡμέρας).<sup>96</sup> Gregory recognizes here a reference to circumcision and to purification rites after childbirth, since the Law connects both to the eighth day (Leviticus 12).<sup>97</sup> Since Paul declares the Law to be “spiritual” (Rom 7.14), Gregory maintains that we should look for the spiritual meaning of circumcision and purification. Accordingly, he alludes to the “true circumcision,” which was realized “through the stone knife” (cf. Josh 5.2), and he sees in this stone knife a reference to the “rock which is itself Christ.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the promise of purification is that the “flow of this life’s affairs, which makes us unclean, will cease at the time when human life is transformed (μεταστοιχειωθείσης), in its elementary character, into something more divine.”<sup>99</sup> A spiritual understanding of circumci-

94. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:279–80; trans. Hall, 34–35).

95. Most scholars follow Daniélou in dating Gregory’s writings on the Psalms to the years between 376 and 378.

96. Daley, “Training,” 195.

97. *In sextum Psalmum* (hereafter *Sext. ps.*; ed. Jacob McDonough, GNO 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1962], 187–88). Throughout, I use the translation in Daley, “Training for ‘the Good Ascent’,” 185–217.

98. Origen, too, discusses the reference in Josh 5.2 to a “second” circumcision, with a knife made out of “rock” (*Hom. in. Jo.*, ad loc.). He sees here a move from the Law (the first circumcision) to the gospel (the second circumcision), since Paul calls Christ the “rock” (1 Cor 10.4). This reference must have appeared particularly fitting since the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land as they received their “second” circumcision.

99. *Sext. ps.* (GNO 5:188; trans. Daley, 212).

sion and purification implies, for Gregory, a spiritual interpretation also of the eighth day.

These reflections set the stage for a brief but fascinating reflection on the transformation of the temporal order. After mentioning the various days of creation, Gregory continues:

The seventh day, which came to define in itself the limit (πέρας) of creation, set the boundary (περιέγραψε) for the time (χρόνον) that is co-extensive with all the furnishings of the world. As a result, no other heaven has come to be from this one, nor has any other part of the world been added to those that exist from the beginning; creation has come to rest in what it is, remaining complete and undiminished within its own boundaries (μέτροις). So, too, no other time (χρόνος ἄλλος) has come into existence alongside that time that was revealed along with the formation of the world, but the nature of time (χρόνου) has rather been circumscribed (περιωρίσθη) by the week of seven days. For this reason, when we measure (ἐκμετρῶμεν) time (χρόνον) in days, we begin with day one and close the number with day seven, returning then to the first day of a new week; so we continue to measure (ἀναμετροῦντες) the whole extension of time (χρόνου διάστημα) by the cycle of weeks, until—when the things that are in motion (κινουμένων) pass away and the flux of the world's movement (κινήσεως) comes to an end—“those things” come to be, as the apostle says, “which shall never be shaken,” things that change (μεταβολή) and alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) will no longer touch. This [new] creation will always (ἀεὶ) remain unchanged, for the ages to follow (πρὸς τοὺς ἐφεξῆς αἰῶνας); in it, the true circumcision of human nature will come to reality, in the removal of our bodily life (τῆς σωματικῆς ζωῆς περιαιρέσει) and the true purgation of our true uncleanness.<sup>100</sup>

Gregory contrasts the creation of the seven days of this life with the creation of the eighth day. The former is characterized by time (χρόνος); the latter is described as ages (αἰῶνες) to follow. The seven days of time are characterized by διάστημα, which implies that they are subject to measurement, boundaries, movement, and change,<sup>101</sup> while there is no change in

100. *Sext. ps.* (GNO 5:188–89; trans. Daley, 213; square brackets in original).

101. For Gregory's understanding of “movement” (κίνησις) as typical of the created order, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Becoming and the Immanent Infinite,” in *Presence and Thought*, 37–45; Tina Dolidze, “Der κίνησις-Begriff der griechischen Philosophie bei Gregor von Nyssa,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14–18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 421–45; Scot Douglass, *Theology of the Gap: Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy*, *Theology and Religion* 235 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 45–56.

the eighth day, in which we will attain the spiritual reality of circumcision and purification, which Gregory here metaphorically describes as the removal or stripping off (περαιρέσις) of bodily life.<sup>102</sup> While Gregory does not, at this point, describe the unchanging “ages” to come by using the term “eternity” (ἀιδιότης), he nonetheless explicitly asserts that he believes the eighth day is not subject to διάστημα and therefore also not to measurement and change.

Nyssen’s language is similar in *In inscriptiones Psalmorum*.<sup>103</sup> Commenting also here on the inscription of Psalm 6, he explains:

The inscription, “for the octave,” advises, therefore, that we not look to the present time (χρόνον), but that we look toward the octave. For whenever this transitory and fleeting time (χρόνος) ceases, in which one thing comes to be and another is dissolved, and the necessity of coming to be has passed away, and that which is dissolved no longer exists, and the anticipated resurrection transforms (μεταστοιχειούσης) our nature into another condition of life, and the fleeting nature of time (χρόνου) ceases, and the activity related to generation and corruption no longer exists, the hebdomad too, which measures time (ἡ ἐκμετροῦσα τὸν χρόνον), will by all means halt. Then that octave, which is the next age, will succeed it. The whole of the latter becomes one day, as one of the prophets says when he calls the life which is anticipated the great day (Mal 3.22[4.5]). For this reason the perceptible sun does not enlighten that day, but the true light (John 1.9), the sun of righteousness (Mal 3.20[4.2]), who is designated “rising” (Zech 6.12) by the prophecy because he is never veiled by settings.<sup>104</sup>

Also in this passage, Gregory explicitly mentions a ceasing of the measurement of time (χρόνος) in the eighth day, and here he adds that in line with this change, activities connected to generation and corruption will no longer pertain. The resurrection involves a far-reaching “transformation,” insists Gregory. The absence of boundaries, measurements, and hence διάστημα from the eighth day is important; it means that despite Gregory’s keen sense of divine transcendence, creaturely διάστημα does not ultimately characterize the creature. This conclusion is corroborated by

102. Implicit in Gregory’s description is a clothing metaphor: the body—Gregory’s “tunics of hide”—is removed like a piece of clothing. Cf. *De beatitudinibus* (hereafter *Beat.* 1–8; ed. John F. Callahan, GNO 7/2 [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 161). Throughout, I use Stuart G. Hall’s translation as found in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, ed. Drobner and Viciano.

103. Most scholars follow Daniélou in dating *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* to the years of Gregory’s exile from Nyssa, between 376 and 378.

104. *In inscriptiones Psalmorum* (hereafter *Inscr.*; ed. Jacob McDonough, GNO 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1962], 83–84; trans. Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995]).

the fact that in *De anima et resurrectione*, Gregory is quite emphatic that hope and memory—both characteristics of διάστημα in the debate with Eunomius<sup>105</sup>—will disappear in the resurrection life: “Once the soul has divested itself of all the varied emotions of its nature and become deiform, and has mounted above desire to that towards which it was once elevated by desire, it offers no more occupation in itself for either hope or memory.”<sup>106</sup> The absence of hope and memory, too, indicate the disappearance of διάστημα in the eighth day.

Although we are headed toward the eighth day of the new creation, Gregory does not mean to give us the impression of an unhindered forward movement or horizontal progression. After all, unlike the seven days, the eighth day is not set apart by any kind of boundaries and is thus not diastemic in nature. We saw something similar in the debate with Eunomius. There Gregory rejected the possibility of measuring the created order alongside the infinity of God: creation is not like a small rod beside which God would be a taller rod, as it were. It is not possible to move in univocal fashion from creature to creator. Likewise here, it is only the seven days of this creation to which διάστημα applies. It is therefore impossible to conceive of the eighth day as simply the “end point,” as it were—marked off by, or comparable to, the other seven days. While Gregory does believe that it is at the end of history that the eighth day will be inaugurated, he regards the ages (αἰῶνες) of the eighth day as so markedly different from the time (χρόνος) that characterizes the seven days that it is impossible to move from here to there in a univocal fashion as if on a linear timeline.

The result of this impossibility is that the sermon describes our entry into the eighth day not only as a linear or horizontal progression, but also—and primarily so—as a vertical progression. Gregory begins his sermon *In sextum Psalmum* as follows:

Those who are “progressing from strength to strength” (Ps 83.8[84.7]), according to the prophet’s words of blessing, and who are accomplishing good “ascents (ἀναβάσεις) in their own hearts” (Ps 83.6[84.5]) first grasp

105. *Eun.* 1 (GNO 1:372; trans. Hall, 89); *Eun.* 2 (ed. Werner Jaeger, GNO 1 [Leiden: Brill, 1960], 459). For *Eun.* 2, I am using Stuart George Hall’s translation in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II: An English Version with Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Olomouc, September 15–18, 2004)*, ed. Lenka Karfíková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zacherhuber, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

106. *De anima et resurrectione* (hereafter *Anim. et res.*; PG 46:93A–C; trans. Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* 22 [Turnhout: Brepols, 2008], 210).

hold of a good thought and then are led along by it towards a thought that is higher (ὕψηλότερον) still; in this way, the ascent to the very summit (ἐπὶ τὸ ὕψος ἀνάβασις) takes place in the soul. So, “reaching out always to what lies ahead” (Phil 3.13), a person never ceases to travel the good road upwards (ἀνόδου), always journeying through his lofty (ὕψηλῶν) thoughts towards an apprehension of the things that are above (ὑπερκειμένων).<sup>107</sup>

One might think that language of ascent (ἀνάβασις) is less than suitable to introduce a Psalm that deals with the final eighth day, which we are anticipating in the future. Gregory nonetheless employs this discourse not only at the beginning, but also in the homily’s conclusion: “This, then, is the sequence of the good ascent (τῆς ἀγαθῆς ἀναβάσεως ἢ ἀκολουθία): the Fourth Psalm distinguishes the immaterial Good from bodily and fleshly goods; the Fifth prays to inherit such a good; the Sixth hints at the moment (καιρὸν) of inheritance, by recalling the Eighth Day.”<sup>108</sup> According to Nysen, the sequence of the three psalms is devised in such a way as to allow for ascent into the inheritance of the eighth day.<sup>109</sup> The eighth day represents a drastic break from the regular pattern of time (χρόνος).

For Gregory, the way to reach the eighth day (horizontally) and so to ascend to God (vertically) is by way of a life of virtue. Thus, while the homily’s “bookends” speak of ascent, much of its contents deal with the need for repentance—the life of virtue. Brian Daley points out that the inscription “Over the eighth” (ὑπὲρ τῆς ὀγδόης) caused difficulties for ancient interpreters such as Gregory: the Psalm itself seemed to Gregory to be dealing with repentance and judgment, rather than with the eschatological promise of the eighth day as suggested by the inscription. “Christian exegetes,” explains Daley, “almost without exception, solved the problem as Gregory does: by seeing the confession expressed in the psalm as an anticipation of the last judgment of Christ, and its confidence in God’s mercy as a foretaste of eschatological salvation.”<sup>110</sup> The prospect of the

107. *Sext. ps.* (GNO 5:187; trans. Daley, 211–12).

108. *Sext. ps.* (GNO 5:188; trans. Daley, 216).

109. The same theme of ascent comes up again when in *De beatitudinibus* Gregory links the eighth Beatitude with the eighth day. Referring to the “eighth day” in the inscriptions above Psalms 6 and 11(12), Gregory comments: “This number may perhaps have something to do with the eighth blessedness, which like a pinnacle (κορυφή) of all the Beatitudes stands at the highest point (ἀκροτάτου) of the good ascent (τῆς ἀγαθῆς ἀναβάσεως). It is there that the prophet points to the day of the resurrection by the figure of the eighth day . . . .” *Beat. 1–8* (GNO 7/2:161; trans. Hall, 84). Also in this passage, the ascent language is unmistakable, and in this context, too, Gregory connects the eighth day to purification and circumcision.

110. Daley, “Training,” 199.

eighth day presented an occasion for Nyssen to reflect on the need for repentance, so that the hearer might be induced to travel upward by way of the virtuous life. “Surely,” insists Gregory, “when one considers the exactitude of that judgment, in which even the most insignificant of our sins of omission will be subjected to investigation, he will be frightened by such a dreadful prospect, uncertain where the process of judgment, in his case, will reach its end.”<sup>111</sup> Entry into the eighth day, for Gregory, is predicated on repentance and a life of virtue.

If, as Gregory emphasizes in his polemic against Eunomius, διάστημα sets the creature apart from the creator, this raises the question how the ascent of which Gregory speaks is at all possible. After all, experience teaches that creatures are subject to time and space with its measurements and limitations. One of the ways in which Gregory deals with this dilemma is by bracketing the diastemic character of the eschatological eighth day. Repeatedly, as he deals with this theme, he suggests that the measurements of diastemic existence apply only to the seven days; they no longer obtain in the eighth day. This is not to say that the eighth day is identical to divine infinity. Gregory’s doctrine of continuous progress (ἐπέκτασις) implies that, also on the eighth day, God’s being will infinitely outdistance human ascent. While human beings may, in some way, come to participate in God himself, this participation never grasps the essence of the divine life.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, the newness of the eschaton does suggest

111. *Sext. ps.* (GNO 5:190; trans. Daley, 217). Gregory makes a similar interpretive move (though with a different emphasis) in his fifteenth homily on the Song of Songs, when he comments on the words, “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines” (*Cant.* 6.8). He alludes to the inscription of Psalm 6 and then comments that “the soul that ranks behind the queenly soul—that is, the one that works the good out of fear and not out of love—will be increased in number until she achieves eighty, as she manifests in her own life, unconfusedly and distinctly, every single species of good thing that fear accomplishes. The result is that in the case of this soul too the number of the eighth day is multiplied in virtue of the soul’s tenfold increase; and in this way—by drawing near to the good through servile fear rather than through a bride’s love—she becomes a concubine rather than a queen because of her fear of the eighth day, a fear that she increases tenfold by her righteous deeds, attaining the number eighty” (*Cant.* 465; trans. Richard A. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 13 [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming]). I thank Prof. David Konstan for putting this manuscript at my disposal.

112. For Gregory, participation in God’s life is a participation in his energies or activities, never a comprehension of his essence. See Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa (ca 330 to 395 A.D.)*, repr. (New York: Paragon, 1988), 110–23; Elie D. Moutsoulas, “‘Essence’ et ‘énergies’ de Dieu selon St. Grégoire de Nyse,” *Studia Patristica* 18 (1989): 517–28;

to Gregory that the *διάστημα* of time and space will no longer apply. The resurrection of Christ has already inaugurated an initial participation in the blessedness of this eighth day. And Gregory is convinced that a life of virtue will allow us, already today, to ascend so as to participate more fully in this new mode of life.

#### HEAVENLY PARADISE: DIASTEMIC SPACE AND TIME?

One might be tempted to accuse Nyssen of radical inconsistency: on the one hand, over against Eunomius, he insists that *διάστημα* characterizes the creature rather than the creator; on the other, his sermons give ample evidence that *διάστημα* does not constitute our final prospect. It seems to me, however, that, although there is a tension in Gregory's thought at this point, it hardly constitutes a blatant inconsistency. We will see that the tension is something of which Nyssen is well aware, an issue that in some way he addresses, but that he ultimately believes is theologically necessary. Up to this point, I have mostly discussed the temporal *διάστημα* to which we are subject in this life. And we have seen that with regard to time, Gregory believes that the eighth day will no longer be subject to the measurements of *διάστημα*. This, of course, still leaves unanswered two additional questions. First, can materiality—and the body, in particular—ascend so as to participate in a non-diastemic eschaton? And if so, how is this possible? Second, since for Gregory human beings are made up of both intelligible and sensible elements, how does this distinction function in relationship to the creator-creature distinction? As we will see, while Nyssen never logically resolves this issue, he nonetheless makes room for humanity's epektatic ascent both by downplaying the distinct material substratum of created existence and by excluding diastemic differentiation from our heavenly future.

The question of the relationship between matter and the eschaton is particularly acute. The Christian confession holds both to the goodness of creation and to the resurrection of the body. But if in the eschaton material existence will no longer be subject to *διάστημα* it would seem difficult to uphold either the inherent goodness of created materiality or the resur-

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Verna E. F. Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom According to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity* 30 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992), 24–60, 88–131; Giulio Maspero, *Trinity and Man: Gregory of Nyssa's Ad Ablabium*, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 86 (Leiden: Boston, 2007), 27–52; Alexis Torrance, "Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers," *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009): 47–70.

rection of the body. Perhaps the best way to approach the issue is by first probing what exactly Gregory understands created matter to be. So far, we have seen that he closely links διάστημα with time (χρόνος). But the link between διάστημα and matter is much less immediate. The reason for this much more tenuous connection is precisely Gregory's conviction that while matter (including the body) had a place in paradise and will have a place also in heaven, διάστημα is absent from both "locations." Gregory's acceptance of the presence of matter in the eighth day does not mean the inclusion also of διάστημα. Instead, we will see that Gregory chooses to define matter in such a way that it is, potentially at least, capable of the adiaستمic life of the eschaton (and, by implication, of the original paradisaal state).

Both the first and the last of the Beatitudes promise the happiness of the kingdom of heaven. The exposition on the kingdom of heaven in *De beatitudinibus* weaves back and forth between talk of "paradise" and of "heaven."<sup>113</sup> The reason is that Nyssen believes our entry into the kingdom of heaven will be a return to paradise.<sup>114</sup> For Gregory, we once lived in paradise and one day will return to it. It is in our current location, here on earth, that we are out of place and away from home:

The high has been brought low, that made in the image of the heavenly is turned to earth (cf. 1 Cor 15.39), that ranked as royal is enslaved, what was created for immortality is destroyed by death, what lived in the luxury of the Garden is banished to this place of disease and toil, what was reared in passionlessness has exchanged it for a life of suffering and mortality, the independent and self-determining is now dominated by such great evils that one could scarcely count our oppressors.<sup>115</sup>

113. *De beatitudinibus* is usually dated between 376 and 378.

114. Cf. Monique Alexandre, "Protologie et eschatologie chez Grégoire de Nysse," in *Arché e Telos: L'antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa: Analisi storico-religiosa*, ed. U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel, *Studia Patristica mediolanensia* 12 (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1981), 122–59, at 122–25.

115. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:105–6; trans. Hall, 44). In line with this language, Gregory repeatedly speaks of the current conditions of our earthly existence by using the Platonic metaphor of the "cave" (σπήλαιον) (see Plato's *Republic* 514A–517A). See, for example, *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:77, 103–4; trans. Hall, 23, 44); *Inscr.* (GNO 5:151–54; trans. Heine, 193–95); *De mortuis* (GNO 9:37–39). Cf. Jean Daniélou, "Le symbole de la caverne chez Grégoire de Nysse," in *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser*, ed. Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsbände* 1 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1964), 43–51; Wilhelm Blum, "Eine Verbindung der zwei Höhlengleichnisse der heidnischen Antike bei Gregor von Nyssa," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974): 43–49; A. Meredith, "Plato's 'Cave' (*Republic* vii 514a–517e) in Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa," *Studia Patristica* 27 (1993): 49–61; Giulio Maspero, "Cavern," in *BDGN*.

Gregory here comes close to suggesting that the “luxury of the Garden” is identical to “heaven,” from which we have been exiled because of sin.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly, when in his final homily he discusses the saying, “Blessed are the merciful,” Nyssen reads this as a requirement to have pity on ourselves because of our exilic condition:

What could be more pitiful than this imprisonment? Instead of luxuriating in paradise this disease-ridden and irksome place is our inheritance in life; instead of that pain-free existence we have suffered a million plagues of pain; instead of that sublime regime and a life among the angels we have been condemned to share a home with the beasts of the earth, exchanging the angelic and painless for the way of life of cattle.<sup>117</sup>

As a result of the Fall, Gregory insists, we have exchanged the angelic life for a beastly existence.<sup>118</sup> Accordingly, in his sermons on the Lord’s Prayer, he maintains that the prodigal would not have confessed, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee” (Luke 15.21), “if he had not been convinced that the country he had left when he sinned was heaven.”<sup>119</sup> The paradisaic sin was a sin against heaven and as such resulted in exile from heaven.

The eschatological hope that Gregory holds out is, accordingly, a return to paradise, which in his mind is the same as a return to heaven. By fleeing the evils of the world, human nature can find its way from earth up to heaven.<sup>120</sup> It is “to the heavenly fatherland” (τῆ οὐρανίῳ πατρίδι) that God will “restore” (ἀποκαταστήσει) us as prodigal sons.<sup>121</sup> In the Beatitudes,

116. This exile from Heaven is not to be confused with Origen’s notion of a pre-temporal fall into sin or with a cyclical view of history.

117. *Beat. 1–8* (GNO 7/2:132; trans. Hall, 62–63).

118. We need to keep in mind that according to Gregory, both pre-lapsarian existence in Paradise and life in the eschaton are closely related to the life of the angels. Had it not been for the Fall, human beings would have procreated according to the “unspeakable and inconceivable” angelic mode of increase (*Hom. opif.* 17.2–3; PG 44:188C–189D).

119. *De oratione dominica* (*Or. dom.*; ed. John F. Callahan, GNO 7/2 [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 27). (GNO 7/2:27; trans. Hilda C. Graef, *The Lord’s Prayer, The Beatitudes*, Ancient Christian Writers 18 [New York: Paulist, 1954], 41). The dating of *De oratione dominica* ranges from 374–376 (Daniélou) to 385 (Caldarelli). See Maraval, “Chronology,” in *BDGN*.

120. *Or. dom.* 28 (GNO 7/2:24; trans. Graef, 42).

121. *Or. dom.* 30 (GNO 7/2:24; trans. Graef, 44). Cf. the nearly identical language in *Beat. 1–8* 162. For Gregory’s understanding of the eschaton as man’s “restoration” (ἀποκατάστασις) to his original state, see E. Michaud, “St. Grégoire de Nysse et l’apocatastase,” *Revue internationale de théologie* 10 (1902): 37–52; Jean Daniélou, “L’Apocatastase chez saint Grégoire de Nysse,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 30 (1940): 328–47; John R. Sachs, “Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 617–40; Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Christian Soteriology and Christian

the sequencing of the promise of the “kingdom of the heavens” (the first Beatitude) and of the inheritance of the “land” (the second Beatitude) may at first seem to contradict the proper order of ascent. Nyssen clarifies, however, that when he speaks of the future promise as “land,” the “Word condescends to the lowliness of our hearing.”<sup>122</sup> Gregory explains that “if our thought could take wing, and we could stand above the vaults of heaven, we should find there the supercelestial land (τὴν ὑπερουράνιον γῆν) which is in store as the inheritance of those who have lived virtuous lives.”<sup>123</sup> The word “land,” therefore, should not “drag you back down to the land below.”<sup>124</sup> Instead, Gregory unambiguously calls his hearers to an otherworldly hope:

If indeed we have in mind the land above (ἡ ὑψηλὴ γῆ), the one envisaged as higher than the heavens (ὑπεράνω τῶν οὐρανῶν), on which is built the city of the great King (cf. Ps 47[48].3), of which “glorious things are spoken,” as the prophet says (Ps 86[8].3), then we might perhaps no longer be disconcerted by the order in which the Beatitudes follow one another. It would be rather improbable, I think, that this earthly land would be put forward in benedictions as a hope for those who are to be snatched up, as the Apostle says, in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and will thus be ever with the Lord (1 Thess 4.17). In that case what further need is there of the lower land (τῆς κάτω γῆς) for those who have life above (μετάρσιος) in prospect?<sup>125</sup>

For Gregory, the inheritance of the land is identical both to the kingdom of heaven and to paradise. One needs to go upward, past the angels with their flaming sword, in order to reach this heavenly paradise.<sup>126</sup>

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Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 313–56; Giulio Maspero, “Apocatastasis,” in *BDGN*.

122. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:90; trans. Graef, 32–33).

123. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:90; trans. Graef, 32–33).

124. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:91; trans. Graef, 33).

125. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:92–93; trans. Graef, 33–35). In his *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, Gregory distinguishes three heavens, identifying the first as the heaven that contains clouds and birds, the second as a fixed circle in which the planets move, and the third (mentioned in 2 Cor 12.2) as the very edge of the visible world leading to the intellectual creation. Gregory maintains that it is this intellectual creation—Paradise itself—that lies beyond the three heavens and in which Paul was caught up according to 2 Cor 12.4. See *Apologia in Hexaemeron* (*Hex.*; ed. Hubertus R. Drobner, GNO 4/1 [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 81–83; German trans. Franz Xaver Risch, *Über das Sechstageswerk: Verteidigungsschrift an seinen Bruder Petrus*, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 49 [Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1999], 99–101). Cf. *Cant.* (GNO 6:40; trans. Norris, 87), and the detailed discussion of the “third heaven” in Daniélou, *Platonisme*, 151–61.

126. See *In XL Martyres 1b* (*Mart Ib*; ed. Otto Lendle, GNO 10/1 [Leiden, Brill, 1990], 155–56; trans. Johan Leemans et al., “*Let Us Die That We May Live*”: Greek

Since paradise is for Gregory a purely intelligible location, there are no animals, trees, rivers, or luminaries in heaven for which we are hoping, at least not in any literal sense.<sup>127</sup> When the Psalmist expresses his hope for the “land of the living,” he is speaking of a land “which grows no caltrops or thorns (cf. Gen 3.8), wherein are the water of refreshment and the green pasture (cf. Ps 22[23].2) and the four-fold divided spring (cf. Gen 2.10) and the Vine tended by the God of the universe (cf. John 15.1) and all the other things we hear of in riddles (δι’ αἰνιγμάτων) from the divinely inspired teaching.”<sup>128</sup> Reflecting on the physical impossibility of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil both being in the middle of the Garden (Gen 2.9), Gregory explains this as indicating that evil exists only by way of privation and that it does not have existence on its own: “Life, then, stands at the midpoint of the divine plantings, while death exists as the result of a falling away from life.”<sup>129</sup> And when he describes Paul’s hunger and thirst for justice, which Nyssen argues is nothing else but the desire for God himself, he explains: “So I believe great Paul too, who has enjoyed a taste of those secret fruits of paradise, and is full of what he had tasted, is also ever hungry.”<sup>130</sup> Gregory’s well-known teaching that the “tunics of hide” (Gen 3.21) refer to humanity’s fallen condition<sup>131</sup> implies not just an allegorical reading of Genesis 3, but it also

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*Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria* (c. AD 350–AD 450) [London: Routledge, 2003], 106–7).

127. Cf. E. F. Sutcliffe, “St. Gregory of Nyssa and Paradise,” *Ecclesiastical Review*, NS 4 (1931): 337–51, at 342–44.

128. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:92; trans. Graef, 33–34). Cf. the allegorical explanation of the paradisaical “water” nourishing the human race (Gen 2.10) in *Cant.* (GNO 6:152–53).

129. *Cant.* (GNO 6:350; trans. Norris, 371). Cf. *Cant.* (GNO 6:10–11; trans. Norris, 9); *Oratio catechetica magna* (*Or. cat.*; ed. Ekkehard Mühlenberg, GNO 3/4 [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 18; trans. J. H. Srawley, *The Catechetical Oration of St. Gregory of Nyssa*, Early Church Classics [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917], 36): “For that Paradise of which he speaks and the special character of the fruits, the eating of which bestows upon those who taste them, not the satisfaction of the bodily organs, but knowledge and eternity of life, all agrees with what we have previously observed with regard to man, showing that our nature in its origin was good and surrounded by good.”

130. *Beat.* 1–8 (GNO 7/2:122; trans. Graef, 55–56). Cf. Robert Louis Wilken’s careful analysis in “Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, Oratio 8: ‘Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake, For Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Mt 5,10),” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, ed. Drobner and Viciano, 243–54.

131. For discussion of Gregory’s understanding of the “tunics of hide,” see Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie*, 25–30, 55–60; Daniélou, “Les Tuniques de peau chez Grégoire de Nyse,” in *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz zum 60. Geburt-*

means that there were no animals in paradise: “For what kind of animals were they, which, when slain and flayed, supplied the covering which was devised for them?”<sup>132</sup> And, as we have already seen, Gregory interprets the paradisaical luminaries, too, in allegorical fashion.<sup>133</sup> In line with this understanding, his commentary on the Song of Songs states explicitly that in the beginning, the origin and full actualization of each of the creatures were adiaSTEMICALLY (ἀδιαστάτως) achieved together, “since for all that were brought from nonexistence to existence their perfection coincided with their beginning.”<sup>134</sup> For Nyssen, paradise is the intelligible reality for which we aim by way of anagogy and to which we will be restored after death.<sup>135</sup> The obviously adiaSTEMIC condition of this paradisaical existence makes clear that for Gregory it is only after the Fall that human beings became subject to the diastemic conditions of measured bodies.<sup>136</sup>

The fallen condition of material existence does not mean, however, that we are unable to ascend into paradise; nor does it imply that bodily resurrection is impossible, according to Gregory. He accounts philosophically for this possibility by insisting that materiality itself is simply the sum of the various intelligible properties that make up the material reality of creation. Richard Sorabji points to three passages in Gregory’s corpus, each of which argues that it is simply the “convergence” (συνδρομή) of various intelligible properties that result in a material object.<sup>137</sup> In the context of

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*stage am 17. November 1967*, ed. Gerhard Müller and Winfried Zeller (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 355–67; Daniélou, *Être et le temps*, 154–64; Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Tunics of Hide,” in *BDGN*; Hans Boersma, “Saving Bodies: St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Song of Songs,” *Ex Auditu* 26 (2010): 168–200, at 191–200.

132. *Or. cat.* (GNO 3/4:30; trans. Srawley, 46). Cf. Sutcliffe, “St. Gregory of Nyssa,” 343.

133. *Trid. spat.* (GNO 9:279–80); *Inscr.* 83–84 (cf. above, n. 104).

134. *Cant.* (GNO 6:458; trans. Norris, 487).

135. Interestingly, at *Anim. et res.* (PG 46:45B–C, 48A–B; Silvas, 186–87), Gregory repeatedly appeals to the “non-dimensional nature” (ἀδιάστατος φύσις) of the soul to account for its ability to remain attached to the various elements of the body as they dissolve after death.

136. This is not to say that Gregory sees embodiment itself (or even gender) as the result of the fall. Gregory regards human embodiment and gender both as preceding the fall. With the post-lapsarian situation, however, human embodiment takes on a different (diastemic) character (which Gregory characterizes as “tunics of hide”). This raises an obvious point of tension: how it is possible to have gendered bodies in an adiaSTEMIC angelic-like existence in Paradise? To my knowledge, Gregory never deals with this question.

137. Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, repr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 290–91. Cf. also David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 541–61, at 548.

each of these passages, Gregory deals with the question of how the visible can come from the invisible, the material from the immaterial. And he links this question with the creator-creature divide.<sup>138</sup> While Gregory here articulates the difficulty in terms of the origin of the visible and material world, the question is of course closely linked to the difficulty that we are struggling with in this essay, namely, how to account for the possibility of material bodies ascending into paradisaal bliss.

In *De hominis opificio*, Nyssen first appeals simply to the divine will as sufficient cause for material created objects to come out of nothing.<sup>139</sup> Next, however, he proceeds to argue that the relationship between the intelligible God and the material creation is philosophically plausible, too:

If, then, colour is a thing intelligible, and resistance also is intelligible, and so with quantity and the rest of the properties, while if each of these should be withdrawn from the substratum, the whole idea of the body is dissolved; it would seem to follow that we may suppose the concurrence (συνδρομὴν) of those things, the absence of which we found to be the cause of the dissolution of the body, to produce the material nature.<sup>140</sup>

Gregory maintains that material bodies are simply the convergence of intelligible properties. Apart from these properties there are, in his opinion, no material elements. Furthermore, since our perception of these properties is also intelligible, Gregory concludes that it is not incongruous to posit a link between the intelligible nature of God and the created material objects.<sup>141</sup>

This understanding of materiality as simply the convergence of intelligible properties allows Gregory to posit a link between the spatio-temporal order of creation and the heavenly, paradisaal existence of the eighth day. Nyssen regards materiality—including the human body—as fluid in character, since the convergence of properties is subject to a variety of configurations. This fluidity allows the body either to become heavy through association with the passions and so to be dragged down to earth or to become light through a life of virtue and so to ascend to the heavenly paradise. Peter Bouteneff rightly concludes that for Gregory, “the difference between the body’s coarseness in the present life, and the ‘lighter fibres’ with which our body will be spun in the resurrection again rests within the moral realm. For Gregory conceives of matter itself as essentially formless, not to say immaterial.”<sup>142</sup> For Gregory, human ascent is possible in part

138. *Hex.* (GNO 4/1:15–16; trans. Risch, 63); *Anim. et res.* (PG 46:124B–D; trans. Silvas, 226–27); *Hom. opif.* 23.5–24.2 (PG 44:212C–213B; trans. Wilson, 414).

139. *Hom. opif.* 23.5 (PG 44:212C; trans. Wilson, 414).

140. *Hom. opif.* 24.2 (PG 44:213A; trans. Wilson, 414).

141. *Hom. opif.* 24.2 (PG 44:213B; trans. Wilson, 414).

142. Peter C. Bouteneff, “The Problem of the Body in the Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa,” in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitude*, ed. Drobner and

because of the ultimately intelligible character of matter. It would appear that the moral (virtuous) and the ontological (bodily) transformations go hand in hand.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that most readers of Gregory seem to agree that *διόστημα* continues also in the life hereafter is hardly surprising. This reading of Gregory is driven by the correct insight that Gregory is primarily a Christian thinker, for whom the creator-creature distinction is crucially important. This insight also implies that for Gregory our desire for God and our progress into the infinite divine life will never be satiated. This doctrine of eternal progress (*ἐπέκτασις*) should not be confused, however, with the assumption of diastemic, measurable movement. It is certainly correct, it seems to me, that for Gregory the creator-creature distinction is always the most significant one, no matter how much he may dichotomize the intelligible and the sensible.<sup>143</sup> After all, even the future paradisaal dwelling place of intelligible creatures does not imply that intelligible creatures will somehow outstrip divine infinity. The importance of divine transcendence over all created being is particularly clear in *Contra Eunomium*. Read in isolation, Gregory's debate with Eunomius might well tempt one to conclude that *διόστημα* characterizes all created being, including intelligibles. After all, here Gregory is deeply concerned to oppose any gradation between the uncreated and the created; he wants to locate the eternal Word of God unambiguously on the uncreated side of the divide. Nyssen always retains this deep awareness of divine transcendence.<sup>144</sup>

Nonetheless, the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible is also of great significance to Gregory, and he never sacrifices it in the face of

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Viciano, 409–19, at 418. Bouteneff's use of the word "immaterial" is not quite to the point, since for Gregory it is precisely *matter* that is made up of intelligible properties.

143. To be sure, in several passages Gregory divides being between intelligible and sensible being, and then subdivides intelligible being between uncreated and created being (*Eun.* 1 [GNO 1:270; trans. Hall, 74]; *Cant.* [GNO 6:173; trans. Norris, 185]). This approach classifies angelic life and the human soul, along with God, in one and same category, and it also regards being as an overarching category, to which even God is subject. Cf. David L. Balás, *Μετουσιω Θεου: Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, *Studia Anselmiana* 55 (Rome: Herder, 1966), 43–44.

144. Hart, "Mirror of the Infinite," 555, puts it well: "Gregory's is not a metaphysics of identity, that would dissolve the divine and human into a bare unity of essence, but a metaphysics of 'analogy': of, that is, divine self-sufficiency and its entirely gratuitous reflection in a created likeness. Between God and the soul the proportion of the analogy remains infinite."

the demands either of divine transcendence or of the goodness of created material bodies. Although Gregory carefully guards against a denigration of the physicality of the created order in general and of the human body in particular, there is little doubt that he has much higher regard for intelligible creatures than for sensible creatures. The reason is that only intelligible creatures can ascend by way of virtue into the life of God. Thus, Gregory needs the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible in order to allow for the moral and ontological ascent of the human person, both in this life and in the eschaton. Gregory thus has a definite theological interest in articulating also the distinction between intelligible and sensible being.<sup>145</sup> Accordingly, when he discusses the implications of the eschaton for time and space, he makes quite clear that the measurements of δῶστημα do not apply to the intelligible reality of the heavenly eighth day or of paradise. The “good ascent” implies for Gregory an end to time and space. In the resurrection life, the ordinary boundaries and measurements of life on earth will no longer apply. As a result, Gregory struggles to describe this paradisaic life. After all, how does one give expression to an existence that will be drastically different from the sensible objects characterized by the spatial and temporal dimensions of this life? As his frequent use of paradox makes clear, however, for Nyssen this struggle is an exhilarating joy rather than a burden.<sup>146</sup> The joy lies in the otherness of the eschatological future. The otherness is such that it escapes the grasp of measurement and thus the diastemic realities of time and space. Nyssen, therefore, cannot accept that the temporal and spatial characteristics of this life would belong also to our final destiny. The anagogical journey into a significantly other mode of existence—the infinite life of God—is the ultimate goal that Gregory asks us to pursue.

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145. That is to say, while Gregory obviously borrows heavily from Platonic categories, his deepest motivation for retaining the spirit-matter distinction is a Christian one. The distinction is indispensable for an articulation of human participation in the divine life by conforming oneself to divine virtue.

146. I have in mind expressions such as “sober inebriation,” “luminous darkness,” “watchful sleep,” “learned ignorance,” and “stationary movement,” which characterize especially *De vita Moysis* and *In Canticum canticorum*.