

Gregory of Nyssa *Contra Eunomium III*

*An English Translation with Commentary and
Supporting Studies*

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Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III 4

Johannes Zachhuber

1. The fourth tome of Gregory's third book against Eunomius is not a self-contained text. It continues a discussion Gregory had started in the previous tome, with which our current part forms a close thematic and structural unit. Its centrepiece is the exegesis of Acts 2, 36, a passage of which Eunomius had made heavy use in his *Apology* against Basil.¹ In the early part of *Contra Eunomium* III 3 Gregory offers a summary of Eunomius' exegesis and of the rather serious theological accusations against Basil's position resulting from it.² He then deals in varying detail with these objections throughout the latter part of the third and the early part of the fourth tome³ only to return eventually to Acts 2,36 for a conclusive interpretation of this verse demonstrating its full compatibility with Nicene orthodoxy and exposing at the same time the many errors, blasphemies, and outright contradictions entailed, Gregory wishes his readers to accept, in Eunomius' understanding of this biblical text.⁴

In view of this fact, I shall not offer a running commentary of Gregory's argument in this particular text, but rather try to consider some outlines of his elaboration in a more systematic manner. The topic is Christology—in response to Eunomius, Gregory for the first time has to cope with the specific theological challenges of the doctrine of the Incarnation. It was not to be his last time as he was drawn, subsequently, into the Apollinarian controversy; the *Catechetical Oration* too offers substantive reflections on the same issue. One might therefore expect that the *Contra Eunomium* III, while not necessarily providing the most considered Christological exposition Gregory was capable of (he may have improved on his arguments while considering them further), offers a glimpse of the specific point of departure Gregory adopted in his attempt to formulate an answer to the perennial question of the relationship between divine and human in Christ. In fact, I shall argue that this precisely is what we find in our text and what makes it worthy of intensive and sustained study.

1 Eunomius had already drawn on this verse in his first *Apology* (26,12–15 [Vaggione 70]) eliciting a rebuttal from Basil at *Adversus Eunomium* II 3 (PG 29, 576D–577A). See further below at n. 10.

2 Gregory of Nyssa, *CE* III 3,12–29 (GNO II 111,12–118,13).

3 *CE* III 3,30–4,35 (GNO II 118,14–147,24).

4 *CE* III 4,35b–64 (GNO II 147,24–159,6).

Generally, scholarly work on Gregory's Christology has not been extensive.⁵ And those scholars who have directed their attention to this area have usually found it wanting. Tixeront is a well-known example:

In several passages [Gregory]... seems to distinguish two persons in Jesus: the man, in the Savior, is a tabernacle where the Word dwells; the divinity is in Him who suffers. (*Contra Eunomium* III, 3, 51 (GNO II2 (Leiden, 1960), p. 126); *ibid.* 62 (130); *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* 54 (GNO III I (Leiden, 1958) 222f.)). However, the contrary tendency—the Monophysite tendency—is more striking and at times makes us feel somewhat uneasy.⁶

More recently, Brian Daley has attempted a more positive evaluation of Gregory's teaching on Jesus Christ—or this is at least what he announced at the outset of his article:

[...] if one considers Gregory of Nyssa's theological portrait of Christ in its own terms—within the characteristic features of his thought and style, and within the context of the controversies that exercised him in his own day—one will find it remarkably powerful and also remarkably consistent, both in itself and with the rest of his thought on God, creation, and the mystery of salvation.⁷

Daley's paper is important and helpful in many ways; yet note how he ends:

I suggest that he is not concerned with Christology in the same sense or to the same degree as Nestorius, Cyril, Theodoret and Leo would be, let alone Severus, Leontius of Byzantium and Maximus Confessor. He is concerned above all with Jesus Christ as the man in whom and through whom the infinite and saving reality of God touches us all: with preserving the transcendence of the God who is present in him, and with

5 J.-R. Bouchet, "Le vocabulaire de l'union et du rapport des natures chez saint Grégoire de Nysse", *Revue Thomiste* 8 (1968) 533–582; B. Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse. Étude systématique du Contre Eunome avec traduction inédite des extraits d'Eunome*, Namur 1994, esp. ch. 3; B. Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation. Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology", *Modern Theology* 18 (2002) 497–506.

6 J. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes dans l'antiquité chrétienne* II, Paris 1912, 128 (ET: *History of Dogmas* II, St. Louis 1914, 127). Quoted from Daley, *Divine Transcendence*, 497.

7 Daley, *Divine Transcendence*, 498.

emphasizing the transformation of that human reality which God, in the man Jesus, has made his own.⁸

I fear that the real point Daley wishes to make here is partly obscured by his choice of later theologians. If Gregory is merely concerned with the preservation of divine transcendence (that is, the full divinity of the Son) and his salvific presence with us, then he is not only far removed from the thought world of Cyril, Severus, or Leontius of Byzantium. He is then not either 'concerned with *Christology* in the same sense' as Athanasius, Apollinarius or probably even Irenaeus had been. In other words, what is at issue is not merely a kind of terminological refinement, which obviously cannot be presupposed in a fourth century author; the problem appears to be, according to Daley, that the more specifically Christological issue of the unity of God and man in Christ, the understanding of John 1,14 and its theoretical conceptualisation, seems largely absent from Gregory's writings. Gregory's overriding doctrinal concern, Daley suggests, is always theological (in the narrower sense of that word) and soteriological; he is therefore at pains to explain against Eunomius that human *salvation* depended chiefly on the presence in human nature of the second person of the Trinity. Christ's full and undiminished divinity is as absolutely indispensable for his salvific efficacy as his *real* presence in the flesh. It is for this reason that he considers Eunomius' (and later Apollinarian) charges against Basil's and his own Christological teaching at best merely technical pedantries and at worst malicious slander.

It is easy to reach such a conclusion; I have done so myself.⁹ Yet I think that careful attention to the development of the argument in Gregory's anti-Eunomian treatise demonstrates that the Cappadocian was more aware than is often perceived of the need to address the unity of divine and human in Christ. I shall seek to show in the following that and how key passages in our present tome indicate the kind of answer Gregory wished to give to that challenge. He does not, I think, offer a fully developed version of that answer, and even if one were to give him credit for implications of his position that he did not care further to work out, his theory would display some considerable weaknesses. This notwithstanding, his attempt is significant not only insofar as it evidences Gregory's perceptiveness and a willingness to face a substantial theological challenge on the basis of his own theological premises, but by providing, in

8 Daley, *Divine Transcendence*, 503 (emphasis in the original).

9 J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Theological Background and Theological Significance*, SVigChr 46, Leiden 2000, 192; 212–217; 222; 230f.

spite of its shortcomings, some concepts that were to become important for later developments of the doctrine.

2. The problem Eunomius had raised in his writing against Basil, by any measure, was a real and intricate one. We might call it the problem of the subject of the salvific dispensation. Who was the one of whom St Paul had said that he ‘emptied himself taking on the form of a servant’ (Phil. 2,7)? And again, of whom had St Peter declared that ‘God has *made* him Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2,36)? Eunomius’ own contention was that these and many similar statements throughout the Bible were necessarily said of the pre-existent Christ whom he calls, with John 1, 18, *μονογενῆς θεός*¹⁰ and the image and seal (*εἰκὼν, σφραγίς*) of God’s own power and energy.¹¹ Christ therefore must have been both different from, and subordinate to, the one and single God and, as far as Eunomius was concerned, this fact could only be expressed by relating him to God’s *ἐνέργεια* since all attempts to derive the being of the Son from the *ousia* of the Father led to a number of absurd and blasphemous consequences.¹²

While there is good reason to consider the latter link in Eunomius’ chain of arguments fairly idiosyncratic and, arguably, the cause of the wide and aggressive rejection his theology faced even in his own time, the same was not true of his initial premise. As it turned out, this was enough to put Basil and Gregory in an acutely embarrassing situation. For while tradition may not have supported Eunomius’ rather extreme version of subordinationism, it certainly did consider the evidently subordinationist language of the Bible one good argument against the charge that the mere idea of the Incarnation violated very nearly everything that was universally agreed about God.¹³ In other words, the fact that *kenosis* was predicated not of the supreme God himself, but of his Son,

10 I am not aware that scholars have as yet studied Eunomius’ understanding of this famous verse. That the original wording was deemed problematic from a post-Nicene position seems to be indicated by its replacement in the Byzantine text of the NT (and hence in most later translations) to the more familiar *μονογενῆς υἱός*, *unigenitus filius* etc. The fact that Eunomius connects his reference to Jn 1,18 with a use of *γεννήσας* would indicate that he reads the phrase as ‘begotten God’, which for him would have been equivalent, apparently, with an interpretation of Christ as ‘made’ (*ποίησας*) in the image of God’s power. For the difficult exegetical problems cf. from a NT perspective: D. A. Fennema, ‘John 1,18: ‘God the Only Son’’, *NTS* 31 (1985) 124–135.

11 Eunomius, *Apologia* 26, 8–15 (Vaggione 69–70).

12 M. R. Barnes, ‘Δύναμις and the Anti-Monistic Ontology of Nyssens’ *Contra Eunomium*’, in: R. C. Gregg (ed.), *Arianism. Historical and Theological Reassessment*, Patristic Monograph Series 11, Philadelphia 1985, 327–334, here: 228–230.

13 A paradigmatic case is that of Eusebius of Caesarea; cf. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, London 1975², 177–185.

removed at least some of the scandal aroused by incarnational teaching. This argumentative prop was taken from the Cappadocians once they adopted the view that *qua* divinity Father and Son were the same,¹⁴ and to replace it they employed the exegetical ‘trick’, originally invented by Marcellus of Ancyra, of applying to Christ’s humanity those biblical passages that seemingly emphasised the Son’s inferiority to the Father.¹⁵ This is how Basil in his anti-Eunomian writing had explained both Acts 2,36 and, implicitly, Philippians 2,6–10:

The Apostle’s word (Acts 2,36) does not refer us to the pre-temporal hypostasis of the Only-begotten, with which the current argument is concerned. Nor, evidently, does he deal with the very being of God the Word, who was in the beginning with God (Jn 1,1), but with the one who emptied himself in the form of a slave (Philippians 2,7), became similar to the body of our own lowliness, and was crucified out of weakness (cf. Philippians 2,8).¹⁶

With this answer Eunomius was not satisfied, and we can easily see why. The point he makes in his *Second Apology* seems reasonable enough: the subject of the *kenosis* mentioned in Philippians 2,7 cannot be the human being as this would make nonsense of the logic of Paul’s argument or, for that matter, of Peter’s statement in Acts 2,36:

For if it is not the Word who was in the beginning, and who is God, that the blessed Peter speaks of, but the visible one who has emptied himself, as Basil says, and the visible man emptied himself into the form of a slave, and the one who emptied himself into the form of a slave emptied himself into becoming man, then the visible man emptied himself into becoming man.¹⁷

14 Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature*, 53–55.

15 For the relationship between the Cappadocian position and Marcellus’ views cf. R. M. Hübnér, “Gregor von Nyssa und Markell von Ankyra”, in: M. Harl, (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nyssa*, Leiden 1971, 199–229.

16 Basil, *Adversus Eunomium* II 3 (PG 29, 576D–577A): ἔτι οὐδὲ ἡ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου διάνοια τὴν πρὸ αἰῶνος ὑπόστασιν τοῦ Μονογενοῦς ἡμῖν παρίστησι, περὶ ἧς ὁ λόγος ἐν τῷ παρόντι. Οὐδὲ γὰρ περὶ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου, τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντος πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ κενώσαντος ἑαυτὸν ἐν τῇ δούλου μορφῇ, καὶ γενομένου συμμόρφου τῷ σώματι τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν, καὶ σταυρωθέντος ἐξ ἀσθενείας, σαφῶς διαλέγεται.

17 *Apud* Gregory of Nyssa, *CE III* 4,39 (GNO II 149,10–23): Εἰ γὰρ μὴ περὶ τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντος λόγου καὶ θεοῦ ὄντος ὁ μακάριος διαλέγεται Πέτρος, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ βλεπομένου καὶ κενώσαντος ἑαυτὸν, καθὼς φησὶν ὁ Βασίλειος, ἐκένωσεν δὲ ὁ βλεπόμενος ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν εἰς δούλου μορφὴν, ὁ

It is this challenge Gregory seeks to address in much of tome four. He is in no uncertainty as to Eunomius' wrongness, whose objective, he repeatedly asserts, merely is to drive home his own theory of Christ's essential difference from the Father, which according to Gregory would make salvation utterly impossible.¹⁸ Yet Gregory struggles with an appropriate reply nonetheless.

Why is this so? It may help us appreciate Gregory's difficulties if we perceive that they result directly from a deep ambiguity within the biblical tradition itself. The New Testament presents its reader essentially with two parallel narratives of which one is historical relating the biography of a human individual, Jesus of Nazareth, who is born, brought up, teaches, gathers disciples, is tried, executed and then raised from the dead. The other one is the quasi-mythological, or in any case supra-historical, story about a pre-existent divine being, who 'comes down' in human form to effect the salvation of humanity and through his own suffering and dying brings about the eventual reconciliation between God and his creation. To be sure, these two narratives are never meant to be dealing with different subjects, but just how those two can really be one without collapsing one into the other is far from clear, and one might not go totally wrong in saying that the Church has never been able to offer a fully satisfactory answer to this question.¹⁹

The problem before Gregory then is not an imaginary but a real one. How does he address it? He is adamant, as we have seen, not to compromise the full divinity of the transcendent agent involved in the salvific process; he is equally clear that salvation requires a real contact between Christ's divinity and our humanity—hence this too cannot be played down. Right at the outset of the present tome, Gregory gives a concise summary of these two basic tenets:

When we hear that he is Light, Power, Righteousness and Life, and that all things were made by him, we regard all these and similar things as credible, attributing them to the Word as God; when on the other hand we hear of pain, sleep, want, distress, bonds, nails, spear, blood, wounds, burial, tomb, and other such things, even though they are contrary to the

δὲ κενώσας ἑαυτὸν εἰς δούλου μορφὴν εἰς ἀνθρώπου γένεσιν ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν, ὁ βλεπόμενος ἄνθρωπος εἰς ἀνθρώπου γένεσιν ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν.

18 Gregory of Nyssa, *CE* III 4,3 (GNO II 134,21–135,6).

19 Cf. the interesting argument in J. Milbank, "The Name of Jesus. Incarnation, Atonement, Ecclesiology", in: *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture*, Oxford 1997, 145–168. One may also compare Maurice Wiles' account: "Christianity without Incarnation?", in: J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London 1977, 1–10, for a well-argued presentation of the aporiae entailed by classical Christology.

previous conclusions, we accept that these are no less credible and true, having regard to the flesh, which we have received in faith associated with the Word.²⁰

Yet a statement such as this only serves to underline the urgency of finding an appropriate reply to Eunomius' charge that the Cappadocian position implied the teaching of 'two Lords and two Christs'.²¹ Gregory's uncompromising emphasis on the undiminished divinity of the Logos and the equally complete humanity of the Incarnate only throws into sharp relief the apparent lack of a concept of unity that binds those two together in the person of the saviour. This was the problem Eunomius had identified in Basil's response to his original *Apology*; does Gregory have anything of a solution to offer?

3. I think that one can indeed identify in *Contra Eunomium* III 4 an attempt to address the issue of the saviour's divine-human unity, an attempt moreover that is broadly in keeping with the principles of Gregory's contemporary approach to the soul-body problem in his *De anima et resurrectione* and therefore, arguably, more than a mere *ad hoc* solution.²² In analysing it, it is significant, first of all, to note Gregory's exposition of the problem. For him the question of Christ's unity primarily is one of soteriological co-operation or collaboration between the divine and the human element in the saviour. In other words, given that neither Christ's full divinity nor his full humanity must be compromised in our reconstruction of his salvific work, how we can understand their joint contribution to it? It is important, I think, to perceive this as the specific angle of Gregory's approach. By contrast, he seems fairly blind to the issue of *personal* or *individual* unity of Christ; given that his explicitly and extensively developed theory of the latter explains it as the hypostatisation of a common nature, the mere recognition of this issue would have exposed theoretical problems it took later theologians centuries to solve.²³

20 CE III 4,7 (GNO II 136,1–10): ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ἀκούωμεν ὅτι φῶς ἐστὶ καὶ δύναμις καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ζωὴ καὶ ἀλήθεια καὶ ὅτι πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, πάντα ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πιστὰ ποιούμεθα εἰς τὸν λόγον [τὸν θεόν] ἀναφέροντες, ὅταν δὲ λύπην καὶ ὕπνον καὶ ἔνδειαν καὶ παραχρῆν καὶ δεσμὰ καὶ ἥλους καὶ λόγχην καὶ αἷμα καὶ τραύματα καὶ ταφήν καὶ μνημεῖον καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα, κἀν ὑπεναντίως ἔχη τοῖς προαποδοθεμένοις, οὐδὲν ἤττον πιστὰ τε καὶ ἀληθῆ εἶναι δεχόμεθα πρὸς τὴν σάρκα βλέποντες, ἣν τῇ πίστει μετὰ τοῦ λόγου παρεδεξάμεθα.

21 Eunomius, *AA*, cited in Gregory of Nyssa, *CE* III 3,15 (GNO II 112,14–16).

22 Cf. for the latter J. Zschücker, "Die Seele als Dynamis in Gregor von Nyssa. Überlegungen zur Schrift *De anima et resurrectione*", in: C. Sedmak – M. Bogaczyk-Vormayr (ed.), *Patristik und Resilienz. Frühchristliche Einsichten in die Seelenkraft*, Berlin 2012, 211–230.

23 Cf. J. Zschücker, "Universals in the Church Fathers", in: R. Chiaradonna/G. Galluzzo (eds.), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, Pisa 2013, 425–470.

Gregory's first and in a way chief reply, therefore, relates divine and human in Christ by associating them with the active and the passive aspect of the salvific process respectively:

And we say that, inasmuch as the Son is God, he is of course impassible and pure, but if any suffering is attributed to him in the Gospel, he carried out such an act through the humanity, which was of course susceptible to suffering. The Godhead quite certainly carried out the salvation of the world through the body he wore, so that the suffering belonged to the flesh, the action to God.²⁴

Gregory's point is easily missed in English given that we do not automatically perceive the link between 'suffering' and 'being passive', which becomes immediately evident in the Greek. Equally deceptive (although linguistically correct) is the rendering of *energeia* with action. What Gregory is trying to express here, I believe, is the complementarity in Christ between divine power as the energetic, active principle, and the human side as the receptive, passive one. If this is not perceived, it can easily appear as if Gregory was here merely restating the case he had made right from the beginning of his argument that, namely, in Christ divinity and humanity are to be kept apart and distinguished in their respective properties. He would then simply continue with the doomed effort of a 'divisive' Christology, as Grillmeier has called it.²⁵

Yet his emphasis on activity and passivity moves beyond a mere duality and indicates a relation between the two; both are needed insofar as their roles complement each other in salvation. The active works while the passive is worked upon. Twice in this brief passage he uses the verb *ἐνεργεῖν* with the preposition *διὰ* to express this relationship: the divine 'carried out' (*ἐνήργησεν*) the suffering 'through the humanity, which was of course susceptible to suffering' (*διὰ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου πάντως τοῦ δεχομένου τὸ πάθος*). Then again: 'The Godhead quite certainly carried out the salvation of the world through the body he wore' (*ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡ θεότης διὰ τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν σώματος τὴν τοῦ παντός σωτηρίαν*). The same idea is then appropriately summed up in

24 CE III 4,8–9 (GNO II 136,18–24): καὶ φαμεν ὅτι, καθὸ θεὸς ὁ υἱός, ἀπαθὴς πάντως ἐστὶ καὶ ἀκήρατος, εἰ δέ τι πάθος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοιτο, διὰ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου πάντως τοῦ δεχομένου τὸ πάθος τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐνήργησεν. ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡ θεότης διὰ τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν σώματος τὴν τοῦ παντός σωτηρίαν, ὡς εἶναι τῆς μὲν σαρκὸς τὸ πάθος, τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν.

25 Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 299 and passim (Grillmeier does not, however, apply the term to Gregory!).

a perfectly symmetrical statement: εἶναι τῆς μὲν σαρκὸς τὸ πάθος, τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τὴν ἐνέργειαν.

Elsewhere in the same tome, Gregory elaborates the same point further. Different predicates are employed by St Paul for the divine and human in Christ, Gregory argues, so Scripture ‘yields the human part to sufferings, while achieving through the divine power the resurrection of the one who had suffered.’²⁶ Once again the statement neatly expresses the equilibrium between the human element, which is associated with passivity and suffering, and the divine on the other hand, which is powerful and active in the compound. With this argument, then, Gregory arguable strikes a double-blow. On the one hand, he addresses the notorious issue of why and how Christ could have suffered while with and through his response to this criticism he also hinted at the rationale behind God’s choice to save us specifically through a divine-human compound.

4. The present interpretation of Gregory’s answer to Eunomius’ Christological challenge is further strengthened and substantiated, I should claim, when the Cappadocian’s frequent references in the current tome to Christ as the ‘power’ (δύναμις) of God are taken into account. Of course, Gregory is fond of using this particular epithet of the second Person of the Trinity throughout his works,²⁷ and yet there is a special emphasis on it in the present context. This emphasis indicates, I think, that Gregory saw the relationship between divine and human in the Incarnation as analogous to that observed in the world more general between God’s immanent, providential power and created reality, which is directed and governed by the former without affecting its very nature:

Observing his power penetrating (διήκουσαν δύναμιν) all things, in sky and air, on earth, and in the sea, and whatever is above the heaven and whatever is below the earth, we believe he pervades all things everywhere, but we do not say that he is any of those things, for the one who measures out the universe with all-embracing hand-span is not the sky, nor is the one who grips the circle of the earth, earth, nor water the one who contains all the liquid in existence. In just the same way, when he went through what are called the sufferings of the flesh, we do not say that he is passible, but as cause of all things and grasping the universe, and by

26 CE III 4, 15: διδόντος μὲν τοῖς παθήμασιν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον μέρος, ἐνεργούντος δὲ τὴν τοῦ πεπονθότος ἀνάστασιν διὰ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως.

27 Cf. M. R. Barnes, *The Power of God. Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology*, Washington D.C. 2001.

the indescribable power of his own majesty steering all that moves and keeping firm in its place what stands still.²⁸

It is interesting to recall here a strikingly similar passage from *De anima et resurrectione*, probably written shortly before the *Contra Eunomium* III:²⁹

Just, then, as we have no doubts, owing to the display of a Divine mysterious wisdom in the universe, about a divine nature and a divine power existing in it all which secures its continuance (though if you required a definition of that Nature you would therein find the deity completely sundered from every object in creation, whether of sense or thought, while in these last, too, natural distinctions are admitted), so, too, there is nothing strange in the soul's separate existence as a substance (whatever we may think that substance to be) being no hindrance to her actual existence, in spite of the elemental atoms of the world not harmonizing with her in the definition of her nature.³⁰

In the latter passage, Gregory seeks to exploit the well-known analogy of macrocosm and microcosm³¹ to urge his own conclusion that from the observation of life and sense perception in the human body we must infer the existence of a life principle effective in the body yet not identical with it in its ontological constitution.³² An analogous point, then, would seem to underlie the former

28 CE III 4,30 (GNO II 145,12–25): ὡσπερ τοίνυν τὴν διὰ πάντων αὐτοῦ διήκουσαν δύναμιν κατανοοῦντες ἐν οὐρανῷ τε καὶ ἀέρι καὶ γῆ καὶ θαλάσσει καὶ εἴ τι ἐπουράνιον καὶ εἴ τι καταχθόνιον, πανταχοῦ μὲν καὶ διὰ πάντων αὐτὸν εἶναι πιστεύομεν, οὐδὲν δὲ τούτων τῶν ἐν οἷς ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνον εἶναι φαμεν (οὐ γὰρ ὑρανός ἐστιν ὁ διειληφώς αὐτὸν τῆ περικρατητικῆ τοῦ παντός σπιθαμῆ οὐδὲ γῆ ὁ κατέχων τὸν γύρον τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὕδωρ πάλιν ὁ τὴν ὑγρὰν περιέχων φύσιν), οὕτως οὐδὲ διὰ τῶν λεγομένων τῆς σαρκὸς παθημάτων ἐλθόντα ἐμπαθῆ αὐτὸν εἶναι φαμεν, ἀλλ' ὡς τῶν ὄντων αἴτιον καὶ τοῦ παντός περιδεδραγμένον καὶ τῆ ἀφράστῳ δυνάμει τῆς ἰδίας μεγαλειότητος πᾶν τό τε κινούμενον οἰακίζοντα καὶ τὸ ἐστώς ἐν παγίᾳ συντηροῦντα τῆ βᾶσει.

29 On the date of *An et res* cf. I. L. E. Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa. Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, Milano 2007, 7.

30 *An. et res.* (PG 46, 44B–C): “Ὡσπερ οὖν διὰ τῆς ἀπορρήτου σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆς τῷ παντὶ ἐμφαινομένης τὴν θείαν φύσιν τε καὶ δύναμιν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσιν εἶναι οὐκ ἀμφιβάλλομεν, ὡς ἂν ἐν τῷ εἶναι τὰ πάντα μένοι: καὶ τοί γε εἰ τὸν τῆς φύσεως ἀπατοῆς λόγον, παμπλήθως ἀπέχει οὐσία Θεοῦ πρὸς τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐν τῇ κτίσει δεικνυμένα τε καὶ νοουμένα: ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐν τούτοις εἶναι τὸ διεστώδες κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ὁμολογεῖται: οὕτως οὐδὲν ἄπιστον καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς οὐσίαν, ἄλλο τι καθ' ἑαυτὴν οὐσαν, ὃ τίποτε καὶ εἶναι εἰκάζεται, μὴ ἐμποδίζεσθαι πρὸς τὸ εἶναι, τῶν στοιχειωδῶς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θεωρουμένων οὐ συμβαινόντων αὐτῇ κατὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς φύσεως.

31 Gregory cites it equally in *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 177D–180A).

32 Cf. *An. et res.* (PG 46, 25A–29B).

passage as well: from the observation of a certain kind of activity in Christ it follows that the power active in him must be divine and thus ontologically different from the object of our observation. Not only is this co-existence of different kinds of being in the same individual object possible, then, it is what we must conclude from a considered reflection of what we see and experience.

The significance of Christ's identity with the Father's wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 1,24) for Gregory's Christology is further confirmed by his (idiosyncratic)³³ exegesis of Psalm 77,10.³⁴ The 'change of the Right Hand of the Most High', according to Gregory, points to the Incarnation. The 'Right Hand of the Father' (as Gregory subsequently substitutes) is, he argues, 'the power that makes the universe, which means the Lord.'³⁵ With this phrase, the biblical writer denotes the Son who, 'while being from the [Father], is conceived of by himself as his own individuality (hypostasis)'.³⁶ That the text ascribes a 'change' (ἀλλοίωσις) to him, then, cannot mean that he undergoes a transformation in his divinity (any more than something like this would be possible in the Father himself), but merely that he became incarnate:

We claim that, as far as the definition of his nature is concerned, the Right Hand does not differ from him whose Right Hand he is, nor can any other variation be attributed to it than the fleshly economy. For the God manifested in the flesh was in truth himself the Right Hand of God, seen through the flesh itself by those of clear vision: as the one who did the works of the Father, he was, and was considered to be, the Right Hand of God; but inasmuch as he was robed in the veil of flesh in his visible form, he was perceived as varying from what by nature he was.³⁷

Once again the analogy with the argument encountered, for example, in the passage from *de anima et resurrectione* cited above is evident. The *dynamis*

33 The (near) lack of a parallel is noted in *NPNF* II/5, 298, n. 782.

34 *Ps* 76,10 in LXX: καὶ εἶπα Νῦν ἠρξάμην, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλλοίωσις τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ ὑψίστου.

35 *CE* III 4,24 (GNO II 143,6–8): τὴν ἀλλοίωσιν τῆς δεξιᾶς τοῦ ὑψίστου—δεξιᾶν δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λέγομεν δύναμιν τὴν ποιητικὴν τοῦ παντός, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὁ κύριος.

36 *CE* III 4,24 (GNO II 143,9–10): ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ ἐκείνου μὲν οὐσα, ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς δὲ κατ' ἰδίαν ὑπόστασιν θεωρούμενη.

37 *CE* III 4,24 (GNO II 143,10–9): τοῦτό φαμεν ὅτι οὔτε ἡ δεξιὰ κατὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς φύσεως ἐκείνου παρήλλακται, οὐδ' ἐστὶ δεξιὰ, οὔτε ἀλλοίωσις αὐτῆς ἄλλη τις παρὰ τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς οἰκονομίαν λέγεσθαι δύναται. ἦν γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡ δεξιὰ τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτὸς ὁ ἐν σαρκὶ φανερωθεὶς θεός, δι' αὐτῆς τῆς σαρκὸς τοῖς διορατικοῖς καθορώμενος, καθὼ μὲν ἐποίει τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς, δεξιὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὦν καὶ νοούμενος, ἐν ᾧ δὲ περιείχετο τῷ τῆς σαρκὸς προκαλύμματι κατὰ τὸ βλεπόμενον, ἀλλοίως παρ' ὃ τῆ φύσει ἦν θεωρούμενος.

that becomes visible in and through the flesh permits the perception of his divine nature in the ‘veil of flesh’ (τῷ τῆς σαρκὸς καλύμματι) within which he was robed (περιείχετο) in his ‘visible form’ (κατὰ τὸ βλεπόμενον). Christ as the ‘right hand’ of God, the Father, is his consubstantial power and, as such, the active element in the incarnational compound.

The same line of reasoning, finally, leads Gregory to a specific use of John 14,9.³⁸ Jesus’ word to Philip (‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’) is expounded by the Nyssen as follows:

Look through what varies to the invariable, and if you look at that, you will see the Father himself, whom you seek to see; for he who has seen me, has seen, not the one who appears in the variation, but the true me, who am in the Father, his very self, in whom I am, for he will perceive the same stamp of Godhead in us both.³⁹

Once again, the significance of this exegesis for Gregory’s Christological argument comes out fully only by linking the concept of the divine-human relationship as active and passive aspects in the person of the saviour, which he develops in the present context, with his wider idea of *dynamis* as the experiential foundation of transcendence. As the world becomes transparent for God on account of the presence and immanence of his power in it, and the human body by its display of vital and sentient functions points the observer to the existence of a soul, so the one who properly ‘sees’ Jesus penetrates the material surface and discovers the divine within it. Yet as in the other cases, this discovery does not invalidate the original, sensual perception so much as it transforms and enriches it. This is why Gregory believed that the same model could be applied to Christology; the *dynamis* perceived in visible reality is strictly immanent in that reality even though, according to the Cappadocian, it must be understood ontologically and axiologically to be of a different kind.

At the same time, nothing proves as distinctly as this particular passage how little Gregory is aware of some of the most controversial issues in future Christological debate. He can only perceive John 14,9 as a handy proof-text for his argument because he does not even remotely realise the severe consequences potentially following from his argument. For Gregory, nature

³⁸ CE III 4,25 (GNO II 143,19–26).

³⁹ CE III 4,25 (GNO II 143,20–6): βλέπε διὰ τοῦ ἀλλοιωθέντος τὸ ἀναλλοίωτον, κἄν τοῦτο ἴδῃς, αὐτὸν τὸν πατέρα, ὃν ζητεῖς ἰδεῖν, ἑωρακῶς ἔση: ὁ γὰρ ἑωρακῶς ἐμέ, οὐ τὸν ἐν τῇ ἀλλοιώσει φαινόμενον, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀληθῶς ἐμέ τὸν ἐν τῷ πατρὶ ὄντα, αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον ἑωρακῶς ἔσται τὸν ἐν ᾧ εἰμι, τῷ τὸν αὐτὸν χαρακτῆρα τῆς θεότητος ἐπ’ ἀμφοῖν καθοράσθαι.

is universal and hence to say that the Incarnate partakes of divine nature is tantamount to saying that he participates in those properties which all three Persons share, ‘the same stamp of Godhead’ as he calls it here. Yet if this is true, what prevents us from predicating the Incarnation of Father and Spirit as well? Of course, Gregory had made it clear a little earlier that the Incarnation precisely was the one ‘change’ (ἀλλοίωσις) setting the Son apart from the Father,⁴⁰ but his willingness to illustrate his point by reference to John 14,9 without feeling the need to qualify this exegesis, is in itself telling.

5. It may be helpful for the purpose of further elucidation and clarification of Gregory’s Christological argument to recall at this point that a time-honoured philosophical tradition had given complementary roles to active and passive principles in the functioning of the world. Already Aristotle’s dualism of matter and form could be read in such a way, but it was in particular stoicism that had introduced τὸ ποιοῦν and τὸ πάσχον as fundamental principles (ἀρχαί) of natural philosophy:

They [the Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts [τὸ ποιοῦν] and that which is acted upon [τὸ πάσχον]. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason [λόγος] in it, i.e. god. For this, since it is everlasting, constructs [δημιουργεῖν] every single thing throughout all matter . . .⁴¹

The active principle is ‘constructing’ or creating everything by virtue of its immanence in matter. I leave aside Gregory’s view of the latter; it is a separate topic that would need full consideration within the context of Gregory’s overall (ontological as well as cosmological) appropriation of these theories.⁴²

⁴⁰ CE III 4,24 (GNO II 143,12–3).

⁴¹ SVF I 85 (p. 24,5–8); English translation: A. A. Long – D. N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* I, Cambridge 1987, 268: δοκεῖ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ἔλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν τὴν ὕλην· τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον τὸν θεόν. τοῦτον γὰρ ἀίδιον ὄντα διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα.

⁴² As is well known, Gregory in a number of places denies the existence of matter: *An. et res.* (PG 46, 124C–D); *Hex.* (PG 44, 69B–C); *Op. hom.* 24 (PG 44, 212D–213C). In this he *prima facie* follows Basil: *Hom. in hex.* (PG 29, 21A–D). Cf. also Plotinus, *Enn.* II 4,11,1–13; Origen, *Princ.* IV 4,7 (Koetschau 357,29ff). The problem is discussed by A. H. Armstrong, “The Theory of the Non-Existence of Matter in Plotinus and the Cappadocians”, *StPatr.* 5 (1962) 427–429 (= A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, London 1979); R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, London 1983, 290–294; J. Zachhuber, “Stoic substance, non-existent matter? Some passages in Basil of Caesarea reconsidered”, *StPatr.* 41 (2006) 425–431.

Be this as it may, as for τὸ ποιῶν the parallel becomes even more distinct and impressive when other texts are taken into account, which equate this principle not only with the terms God and logos (as we have here seen), but also with dynamis.⁴³ Gregory's preferred phrase for its immanence, διήκειν, is also a Stoic favourite;⁴⁴ expressions typical for the Nyssen, such as 'the power of God that pervades the universe'⁴⁵ definitely have a Stoic ring to them. It is significant, then, that he explicitly identifies this kind of item with the divine element in the saviour.

Why such a concept would appeal to Gregory in the present context becomes immediately clear when one recalls that, as John Rist writes, 'the two principles [are] physically inseparable, so that this duality is reached by a logical, or conceptual, distinction'.⁴⁶ In other words, we would here have an analogy for a real unity which, however, still allows for, even requires, analysis into two radically different yet complementary, components. Precisely this, of course, had been the challenge Eunomius had presented to Basil's affirmation of Christ's full divinity alongside his real participation in human nature. In order to meet this challenge, I had argued, Gregory had to address the problem of the saviour's divine-human unity, and it appears now that the duality of active and passive principles offered him a model for the explanation of the latter. Given that, moreover, Gregory had availed himself of the same or at least a similar model in a variety of other contexts, we cannot be surprised to find him using it in the present context as well.

Interestingly, Gregory himself makes the point about the physical inseparability of the two principles explicitly with regard to two parts of the divine-human compound in Christ:

The mind separates what out of love for humanity is taken into unity, but kept distinct in thought.⁴⁷

It is mind (ἐπινόια) and thought (λόγος) that separate the two; otherwise they form a complete unity. This statement of principle is followed by a list of phrases used by St Paul for the divine aspect of Christ on the one hand, for the

43 SVF II 1047 (p. 308,37–40).

44 SVF I 153 (p. 41,22–24); II 473 (p. 155,24–30).

45 CE III 4, 30 (GNO II 145,13): τὴν διὰ πάντων αὐτοῦ διήκουσαν δύναμιν.

46 J. M. Rist, *The Stoics*, Berkeley, London 1978, 139.

47 CE III 4,15 (GNO II 139,6–8): τῆς οὖν ἐπινοίας διαιρούσης τὸ κατὰ φιλανθρωπίαν μὲν ἠνωμένον, τῷ δὲ λόγῳ διακρινόμενον.

human on the other⁴⁸ only to lead to a reaffirmation of Gregory's fundamental idea of the relational duality of an active divinity and a passive, suffering humanity within the salvific work accomplished by Christ:

[...] yielding the human part to sufferings (τοῖς παθήμασιν), while achieving (ἐνεργούντος) through the divine power (διὰ τῆς θείας δυνάμεως) the resurrection of the one who had suffered (τὴν τοῦ πεπονθότος ἀνάστασιν).⁴⁹

Even Gregory's occasional use of the term 'mixture',⁵⁰ which has sometimes been taken as indication for his weak notion of divine-human unity,⁵¹ points to the same intellectual background: the Stoics were happy to describe the relationship between soul and body as mixture while in the same context using many of the terms Gregory has been drawing on in his present discussion of Christology.⁵² While it is true that their philosophical opponents denied that mixture could produce actual unity,⁵³ and while it is also true that this kind of terminology later on became associated with Nestorianism, it would appear that for Gregory it was acceptable and unproblematic insofar as it conveyed the same general notion of unity he had been developing throughout his discussion. Given the way he employs it in the present context, it seems hardly justified to suspect that he believed it to weaken the unity of divine and human in Christ let alone that he used it for that very reason.



I take it then that Gregory under the condition, in which he found himself, was attracted to an application to Christology of the Stoic model of a unified world made up of an active and a passive principle. It is not difficult to see why: he believed that this model neatly fit the twin challenge he perceived: that neither

48 CE III 4,15 (GNO II 139,8–15).

49 CE III 4,15 (GNO II 139,19–21).

50 CE III 4,13 (GNO II 138,18): ἀνάκρασις.

51 See n. 6.

52 SVF II 473 (p. 155,25–28).

53 Cf. Nemesius of Emesa, *De natura hominis* 3 (Morani 38,12–39,11), which Heinrich Dörrie has argued draws on Porphyry (*Porphyrios' Symmikta Zetemata: Ihre Stellung in Geschichte und System des Neuplatonismus, nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten, Zetemata 20*, Munich 1959). Cf. the copious references to philosophical parallels in: *Nemesius, On the Nature of Man*, transl. with and introduction and notes by R. W. Sharples – P. J. van der Eijk, Liverpool 2008, 78–80.

one nor the other side in the compound should be compromised, but at the same time their unity be maintained.

Perhaps the biblical passage Gregory struggled to explain also played its part. Peter, after all, says that God ‘made’ the crucified Jesus Lord and Christ. The use of the term ποιῆν had evidently been crucial for Eunomius’ exegesis;⁵⁴ it would not perhaps be far-fetched to see it as important for Gregory’s argument as well; in other words, his insistence on the dialectics between God’s active power and energy and the passive and receptive human nature might well reflect his reading that, according to St Peter God ‘made’ Jesus something, that is Lord and Christ. The divine thus is ποιῶν in the Incarnation according to the very words of the apostle.

The question of course is whether this model does not take Gregory way too far in the direction of what would later be called miaphysitism. The Stoic theory presupposes, as we have seen, that the passive principle is what it is because it is unqualified matter (ἄποιος ὕλη). Within this model it makes sense to identify the thing itself with the active principle—all that can be said about it is what God has made of it; the passive principle has to be presumed there but is otherwise nothing. In his exegesis of John 14,9, which has been discussed above, Gregory seems to come close to this point of view as he calls Jesus’ divinity his ‘true me’.⁵⁵ Yet how can this be a legitimate explanation of God’s Incarnation? Can Jesus’ humanity be fully affirmed if it is treated as mere passivity? Obviously, from either a Stoic or an Aristotelian point of view it makes little or no sense to identify an item such as humanity *per se* with the passive principle. Gregory would have to argue that in relation to the immense power of God humanity is reduced to something like quasi-passivity (the famous drop of vinegar in the vast ocean),⁵⁶ yet it ought to be noted that he operates with more than one notion of ‘passivity’: the passions Jesus undergoes as part of his human life, suffering, and death may involve the possibility of passivity, but are not identical with it. On the contrary, they can only be understood if the subject that experiences them is in some ways an active agent. Quite how,

54 Cf. Eunomius, *Apologia* 26,13–14 (Vaggione 70): τοῦ μὲν οὖν πεποιῆσθαι μάρτυς ἀξιόπιστος ὁ παρ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μαρτυρηθεὶς ἐκ θεοῦ τὴν γνῶσιν ἔχειν Πέτρος...

55 *CE* III 4,25 (GNO II 143,23): τὸν ἀληθῶς ἐμέ.

56 *Theoph.* (GNO III 1, 126,17–21). Or again, one may be reminded of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s argument that in relation to God man is ‘absolutely dependent’ (*The Christian Faith*, tr. H. R. Mackintosh – J. S. Stewart, Edinburgh 1999, § 4, p. 12). I note only in passing that for Schleiermacher’s Christology it is central to assume that Christ is God-man because he was fully dominated by this absolute dependency (op. cit. pp. 377–424 and cf. esp. § 97)—surely more than a passing influence of the later Greek tradition.

then, the relationship between active and passive principles can meaningfully be applied to Christology is far from clear in our present text.

Still, Gregory does offer an intuition that was to become highly influential in later Christological debate. Giulio Maspero has, in a recent paper, rightly drawn attention to the fact that and how the Christology developed in the present tome was used by Justinian in the context of the Second Council of Constantinople (553).⁵⁷ Yet much further work was needed to explain what this particular model could explain, and with which qualifications, with regard to the divine-human relationship in the person of Christ.

6. The analysis of Gregory's Christological argument in the fourth tome of *Contra Eunomium* III cannot, however, end here yet. For the Cappadocian evidently did not think that the interpretation of the Incarnation in terms of a mixture (ἀνάκρασις)⁵⁸ of active and passive principles was sufficient for his present purpose. After all, he had to explain Peter's word that God *made* Jesus Lord and Christ; evidently this referred to some kind of change or transformation. Eunomius had argued that this was the transformation from non-being to being, the initial creation of the pre-existent.⁵⁹ Gregory, I think rightly, sees that this makes little sense exegetically. After all, the verse does not use the word 'to make' (ποιεῖν) just with an object (i.e. 'God made Christ') but uses a predicative construction, 'God made this Jesus Christ and Lord.' Yet while his close attention to the text supports his claims against Eunomius, it adds a further element to be considered for his own solution. The unity of divine and human in Christ, Gregory believes, cannot simply be considered in static terms, but has a dynamic dimension as well.

Arguably, Gregory did not need much to be persuaded of such a reading. After all, we know from many other contexts not least his theory of creation, how fond he was of a 'dynamic' understanding of divine agency in the world.⁶⁰ Given the specific constituency of created being, Gregory thought, it was proper for God to execute his eternal and immutable will in creation through a regular, evolutionary development, for which Gregory famously employed the term

57 G. Maspero, "La cristología de Gregorio de Nisa desde la perspectiva del II Concilio de Constantinopla", *Scripta Theologica* 36 (2004) 385–410, esp. 389–90.

58 *CE* III 4,13 (GNO II 138,18).

59 Eunomius, *Apologia* 26,7–10 (Vaggione 68).

60 Cf. J. C. M. Van Winden, "Notiz über ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ bei Gregor von Nyssa", in: H. Eisenberger (ed.), *ΕΡΜΗΝΕΥΜΑΤΑ. Festschrift für Hadwig Hörner zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, Frankfurt 1991, 147–150.

ἀκολουθία.⁶¹ In a way, this principle makes its reappearance as a Christological concept in the present context. Gregory, in other words, thinks of the unity of divine and human in Christ in such a way that the divine progressively works on and transforms the human element.

In this sense he comments that the ‘creation’ St Peter refers to really is a ‘re-creation’ as it refers to the gradual transformation of human nature in the Incarnation,

[. . .] the mutation and remaking of the human into divinity; [this remaking] the apostle calls ‘making’.⁶²

Elsewhere the same point is made again:

So just as he who knew no sin is made sin (2 Corinthians 5,21), so that he may take away the sin of the world (John 1.29), so conversely the flesh, which received the Lord, is made Christ and Lord, which by nature it was not, transformed [= ‘recreated’] into it by the mixing. By this we learn that the God would not have appeared in the flesh (1 Timothy 3.16), if the Word had not been made flesh (John 1,14), nor would the human flesh he wore have been transformed [‘recreated’] into the divine, if the visible had not been made Christ and Lord.⁶³

In passages such as this, it could be argued that Gregory does no more than use the terminology of divinization, which Athanasius had put into the classical formula that God became man so that we might become gods⁶⁴ and which by Gregory’s time had become fairly conventional. The Nyssen clearly is aware of this theological tradition, which he uses extensively across a variety of his writings.⁶⁵

61 Cf. the classical paper by J. Daniélou, “Akolouthia chez Grégoire de Nysse”, *RevSR* 27 (1953) 219–249.

62 *CE* III 4,20 (GNO II 141,9–10): τὸ δὲ διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου μεταβολὴν τε καὶ μεταποίησιν. ποιήσιν γὰρ ὁ ἀπόστολος λέγει τὴν μεταποίησιν.

63 *CE* III 4,46 (GNO II 151,1–9): ὡσπερ οὖν ὁ μὴ γνοὺς ἁμαρτίαν ἁμαρτία γίνεται, ἵνα ἄρη τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, οὕτως πάλιν ἡ δεξαμένη τὸν κύριον σὰρξ Χριστὸς καὶ κύριος γίνεται, ὃ μὴ ἦν τῇ φύσει, εἰς τοῦτο μεταποιουμένη διὰ τῆς ἀνακράσεως. δι’ ὧν μανθάνομεν ὅτι οὐτ’ ἂν ἐν σαρκὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐφανερῶθη, εἰ μὴ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, οὐτ’ ἂν μετεποιήθη πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἢ περὶ αὐτὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σὰρξ, εἰ μὴ τὸ φαινόμενον ἐγένετο Χριστὸς τε καὶ κύριος.

64 Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 54,3 (PG 25, 192B).

65 The classical and most elaborate example is *Perf.*

And yet, the context of his argument here makes it evident that Gregory's reference to the logic of the divine-human reciprocity in the Incarnation is merely auxiliary to his main interest, which is quite different. Notable is his use, twice in the present passage, of cognates of the word 'recreation' (μεταποιουμένη, μετεποιήθη). Gregory, as we noted a moment ago, argues that this is precisely how St Peter meant the word 'to make' in Acts 2,36. Gregory then is still very much concerned with his interpretation of this very verse! What he is aiming at, then, through the use of the Athanasian deification-language is an emphasis on the character of the Incarnation as a process in the course of which human nature is *gradually* transformed into something more divine:

When therefore I learn from Peter that this one has been made, I do not hesitate to say that the one before our eyes has become Lord and Christ, since the saints agree with one another especially about this part; for just as he says that the crucified has been made Lord, so Paul also says that he was highly exalted after the passion and resurrection, not exalted insofar as he is God—for what is exalted above the height of God, so that one could say that God is exalted to it?—but he is saying that the lowly aspect of the human nature is highly exalted, the text indicating, I think, the assimilation and union of the man assumed with the exaltation of the divine nature.⁶⁶

It is not difficult at this point to perceive quite what made Gregory so interested in the step-by-step transformation of human nature in the Incarnation. It is the specific mention in Acts 2,36 of 'this Jesus whom ye crucified'. Gregory is quite explicit: 'the crucified has been made Lord', he writes, and brings in Philippians 2,9, which mentions the exaltation after (and as a consequence of) Christ's obedient suffering.

66 CE III 4,55–56 (GNO II 155,12–23): τοῦτον οὖν μαθὼν πεποιήσθαι παρὰ τοῦ Πέτρου κύριον καὶ Χριστὸν τὸν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν γεγενημένον λέγειν οὐκ ἀμφιβάλλω, ἐπειδὴ καὶ συμφωνοῦσι πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ ἄγιοι τοῖς τε ἄλλοις πάσι καὶ περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος. ὡς γὰρ αὐτὸς τὸν σταυρωμένον κύριον πεποιήσθαι λέγει, οὕτω καὶ Παῦλός φησιν αὐτὸν ὑπερψῶσθαι μετὰ τὸ πάθος καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν, οὐ καθὼς θεὸς ἐστὶ, κατ' ἐκείνο ὑψούμενον (τί γὰρ ὑπέγκριται τοῦ θεοῦ ὕψους ἀνώτερον, ὥστε πρὸς ἐκεῖνο λέγειν τὸν θεὸν ὑψοῦσθαι;) ἀλλὰ τὸ ταπεινὸν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ὑπερψοῦσθαι λέγει, δεικνύντος οἶμαι τοῦ λόγου τὴν τοῦ ἀναληφθέντος ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸ ὕψος τῆς θείας φύσεως ἕξομοίωσιν τε καὶ ἔνωσιν.

Two ideas, then, are combined in Gregory's argument: on the one hand, his interpretation of Christ's salvific work in the Incarnation in terms of the deification of human nature; on the other hand, the notion that the exaltation of Christ's humanity reaches its climax only with his resurrection.⁶⁷ It is the latter more than the former that deserves attention in the present context. For while few would perhaps deny that such a view has solid biblical support, by the standards of fourth-century orthodoxy it clearly smacked of adoptianism. As we shall see in an instant, Gregory was quickly taken up on this problem.

As far as the *Contra Eunomium* III 4 is concerned, however, Gregory evidently is unconcerned about any such risk. On the contrary, it appears that he finds the idea of such a gradual divinisation of humanity in Christ attractive beyond the need to interpret Acts 2,36:

We should therefore consider what is more devout and logical: of which is it religiously correct to say that by advancement he shares some exalted status, the God, or the Man? Whose mind is so infantile that he thinks the divinity progresses towards perfection? It is not unreasonable to think such a thing of the human nature, when the gospel text attests his growth as a human being: 'Jesus advanced,' it says, 'in stature, wisdom and grace' (Luke 2,52). Which then is it more reasonable to suppose is meant by the apostle's word, that the God who is in the beginning became Lord by advancement, or that the lowly status of human nature was taken up by its fellowship with the divine into the highest rank?⁶⁸

That Gregory here moves a step beyond the exegesis of Acts 2,36 is clear above all by his use of the word *προκοπή*. Gregory, in other words, does not content himself with the observation that somehow the divinisation of human nature

67 Cf. on this K. Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den großen Kappadoziern*, Tübingen, Leipzig 1904, 229. Different: J. Lenz, *Jesus Christus nach der Lehre des hl. Gregor von Nyssa*, Trier 1925, 117. Cf. the summary in: R. J. Kees, *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes in der Oratio Catechetica des Gregor von Nyssa*, SVigChr 30, Leiden 1995, 285.

68 *CE* III 4,59–60 (GNO II 157,8–20): οὐκοῦν ἐπισκεψώμεθα τὸ μᾶλλον εὐσεβῆς καὶ ἀκόλουθον. τίνα κατὰ προκοπὴν μετέχειν τινὸς τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων εὐαγῆς ἐστὶ λέγειν, τὸν θεὸν ἢ τὸν ἄνθρωπον; τίς οὕτω παῖς τὴν διάνοιαν ὡς οἶσθαι τὸ θεῖον ἐκ προσθήκης ἐπὶ τὸ τέλειον φέρεσθαι; περὶ δὲ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως τὸ τοιοῦτον ὑπονοεῖν οὐκ ἔξω τοῦ εἰκότος ἐστὶ, σαφῶς τῷ κυρίῳ τῆς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου φωνῆς τὴν κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον αὔξησιν προσμαρτυρούσης· Ἰησοῦς γὰρ πρόεκοπτεν, φησὶν, ἡλικία καὶ σοφία καὶ χάριτι. τί τοῖνυν εὐλογώτερόν ἐστιν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ἀποστόλου φωνῆς ὑποτίθεσθαι, τὸν ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντα θεὸν ἐκ προκοπῆς κύριον γενέσθαι ἢ τὸ ταπεινὸν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ἐκ τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον κοινωνίας εἰς τὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀξίας ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι;

lasted for a certain number of years, which would explain the duration of the Incarnation; rather he brings in here a reference to the moral and religious *improvement* Jesus underwent throughout his earthly life. Characteristic is his reference to the famous verse Luke 2, 52 (Ἰησοῦς προέκοπτεν...). Given Gregory's interest in his ascetic writings in establishing Christ as the exemplar of human ascetic virtue, one should not, perhaps, be too surprised about such a move though it also proves, if proof be needed, that Gregory was perfectly capable, when energised by his speculative *eros*, of overlooking a great many warning signs that were posted by his time along the road of theological reflection. Epiphanius ascribes the notion of Jesus' ethical 'advancement' to the Ebionites⁶⁹ while other fourth-century bishops condemn this as a view held by the followers of Paul of Samosata.⁷⁰ Gregory's own *Epistle* 3 shows how he himself was challenged over this issue by angry opponents in Jerusalem, probably only slightly after writing the *Contra Eunomium* III, who forced him into a humiliating recantation.⁷¹

7. Be this, however, as it may, the outlines of Gregory's argument in *Contra Eunomium* III 4 should by now have become reasonably clear. In order to disprove not only Eunomius' own exegesis of Acts 2,36, but also his charge against Basil of teaching 'two Lords and two Christs', Gregory offers a very specific interpretation of the Incarnation. By drawing on his favourite view of Christ as the 'power' of God as well as Stoic notions of the ontologically complementary nature of active and passive principles, he conceptualises the Incarnation as the unity of God and man in precisely this sense. This helps him defend Basil against the charge of a divisive Christology without having to give up either the anti-Eunomian commitment to Christ's full divinity nor the corresponding need to maintain his humanity.

Furthermore, in line with ideas about the dynamic character of God's agency in creation developed elsewhere, Gregory thinks of this divine-human unity within an evolutionary framework. Hence, the transformation of human nature, worked through the Incarnation, which Gregory thinks very much analogous to Athanasius, progresses gradually and is only complete, as both Peter and Paul intimate, in his resurrected state. This notion of a progressive divinisation of humanity in the Incarnation, apparently, appeals to Gregory

69 Epiphanius, *haer.* 30,18 (Holl I 358,3–6).

70 *Ekthesis Macrostichos* IV (Hahn 111–112).

71 J. Zachhuber, "Gegen welchen Vorwurf muss Gregor von Nyssa sich in seinem Dritten Brief verteidigen? Neuerliche Gedanken zu einer viel diskutierten Frage", in: *Ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς τὴν θεολογίαν τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης. Πρακτικὰ θ' διεθνοῦς συνεδρίου περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης* (Ἀθήναι 7–12 Σεπτεμβρίου 2000), Ἀθήναι 2005, 385–396.

not only in view of his exegesis of Acts 2,36, but also allows at least a glimpse on the significance of Jesus' own spiritual and ascetic life, whose theological relevance Gregory develops in some other writings.

It is when viewed in its complete form that strength and weaknesses of this conception become strikingly obvious. I think the charge often levelled against Gregory's Christology that he has no notion of the unity of human and divine in Christ, cannot be upheld. It is evident that he quite understands the challenge to Basil's teaching from Eunomius' polemic and that he seeks to counter it. His model, if its reconstruction as presented in my paper has any claim to accuracy, addressed this point by understanding the unity of divine and human in analogy to that of the active and the passive principle in Stoic philosophy.

However, by the same token the inadequacy of Gregory's approach is seen in full light as well. It is not by coincidence that the Stoic model of active and passive principle is, in Stoic philosophy, part of physics. It is geared towards explaining the physical universe. It is not, in other words, meant to explain human, personal existence. Now, one might argue that Stoic parallels do not indicate that Gregory's own reasoning is necessarily Stoic, but I should argue that even if one allowed this qualification, the problem in Gregory's thought would still be the same. His approach to Christology is conceived in terms of 'natures'—Christ's divine nature must be seen as being fully part of the trinitarian Godhead, whereas his human nature is of one being with us (to use the later phrase, for which Gregory paves the way). Their unity, again, is seen as the 'physical' problem of how two different principles can make one unified being. The question, however, how all this produces Christ as one individual person is completely absent from Gregory's reasoning. In a sense, neither the divine nor the human are conceptualised in his argument as something like personal agents; this I think is the failure from which his Christology really cannot be acquitted and which, I believe, gives it the unsatisfactory character which most readers have, for different reasons, felt and acknowledged over time.