GREGORY OF NYSSA ON THE TRINITY

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Introduction

In the history of the development of Christian doctrine, a prominent place must be given to the life and thought of Gregory of Nyssa. One of the three great Cappadocians — Basil the Great, his elder brother, and Gregory of Nazianzus being the other two — Gregory shared with them the responsibility for the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy over Arianism in the Eastern Christian tradition. His accomplishments as an author and Bishop of the See of Nyssa were manifold. With respect to his work as an author, Johannes Quasten states:

Among the three great Cappadocians Gregory of Nyssa is by far the most versatile and successful author. His writings reveal a depth and breadth of thought which surpass that of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus.[1]

It has also been said, with some justification, that Gregory "accomplished for Eastern orthodoxy what Origen . . . had attempted and yet not fully succeeded in doing — to relate the faith to the Greek classical heritage."[2] While judgments such as these are difficult to prove, they at least render credible the Second Council of Nicea's praise of Gregory as "Father of Fathers" and "Star of Nyssa," or his friend Gregory of Nazianzus' statement that he was "the column supporting the whole Church."[3] Although the significance of Gregory's thought has often been overlooked in the study of the development of Christian doctrine, what has been done would seem to indicate that such contemporary praise was not unwarranted.[4]

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[1]Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: the Newman Press), Vol.III, 255.

[2]E.R. Hardy, editor, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Vol. III of *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 235. Hereafter cited as LCC.

[3]*LCC*, III, 235.

[4]For a brief summary of Gregory's life and work, see: *LCC*, III, 235-241; Quasten, *Patrology*, III, 254ff.; and "The Life and Writings of Gregory of Nyssa," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Schaff & Wace, editors, Second Series, Vol. V (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893), 1-32.

For the purposes of this article, I propose to set aside such general considerations of the significance of Gregory's life and work and concentrate upon an exposition of his doctrine of the Trinity. While there are many aspects of Gregory's thought which are deserving of study — such as his general relation to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, his development of a Christian mysticism and the influence of this aspect of his thought upon later tradition,[5] his relation to Platonism and the Greek classical tradition, including the rhetorical tradition,[6] and his development of a particular understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology — this doctrine was the focal point for all of his thought, just as it was for the other two Cappadocians. It is in his Trinitarian thought that Gregory, with the other Cappadocians, placed his stamp upon subsequent theological tradition; it is here that the most decisive influence of his thought is to be found. It will not be my purpose, therefore, to discuss Gregory's thought in general; nor will I be primarily concerned with tracing the influences that are extant in his thought. Rather, as much as is possible, this study will attempt a critical summary of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity. The historical context within which he developed this doctrine will be treated only insofar as it is of importance for the attainment of this end.

In order to achieve this objective, this study will consider first, Gregory's view of the incomprehensibility of God and of the limits of discursive thought with respect to God; second, Gregory's particular understanding of the common Cappadocian claim that the Trinity is to be understood as μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑπόστασεις ("one being/essence, three subsistences"); and third, the "Neo-Nicene" interpretation of this view which alleges that it is tri-theistic. After this summary exposition of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity, I should like to conclude with some comments of my own addressed to additional criticisms of Gregory's and the Cappadocian's doctrine of the Trinity.[7]

Hereafter the latter will be cited as LNPNF.

[5]See Jean Danielou, *Platonisme et theologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Gregoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

[6]See H.F. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1930).

[7]I shall be using the following works of Gregory in this summary: *An Answer to Abladius: That We Should Not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods* (c. 390); *On The Holy Spirit, Against the Followers of Macedonius,* (377); *On The Holy Trinity, to Eustathius,* (380); *Against Eunomius, Books I-XII,* (382-383); *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book,* (384); and *Epistle 38* in the collection of St. Basil's works. *Epistle 38* is disputed as to its authorship and has been included both with the works of Basil and of Gregory. I will proceed on the

The Incomprehensibility of God and the Limits of Discursive Thought

It is fitting that we begin our treatment of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity with an extended note on his view of the incomprehensibility of God, for much of his own discussion, particularly in his writings against the Arian, Eunomius, is devoted to this issue. At each stage in the development of his argument, Gregory is conscious of the limits of all theological and philosophical reflection upon the divine Trinity. With Origen and Athanasius, the two Eastern theologians other than the Cappadocians to whom Gregory was chiefly in debt, he is conscious of the boundaries which must be set to human thought in relation to God who transcends all human comprehension.

Thus, in the context of his discussion of God's eternity and of the creation of space and time, Gregory, in his first work against Eunomius, makes the following comment on the limits of discursive thought:

> Every discursive effort of thought to go back beyond the ages will ascend only so far as to see that that which it seeks can never be passed through: time and its contents seem the measure and the limit of the movement and the working of human thought, but that which lies beyond remains outside its reach.[8]

This comment is primarily directed against Eunomius' Arian assertion of a temporal precedence of the Father in relation to the Son, an assertion which, according to Gregory, subjects both Father and Son to a temporal category foreign to the divine nature. However, it also reflects a basic theme in Gregory's thought: the conscious recognition that our reflection upon the divine nature is subject to a temporal order of *before* and *after*, *precedence* and *subsequence*, which makes it impossible for us to reach a point from which God is able to be circumscribed. It is not possible for discursive thought to pass through or reach what it seeks to know, God, since the object of its search is not subject to the same limitations which hold for all such thought itself. There is an incommensurability between that which transcends time and space and

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assumption, shared by some recent authors, that it is likely one of Gregory's works and, even were this not the case, is not incompatible with Gregory's teaching elsewhere. On this last question, cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 264; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 285-286.

[8]*Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book I, 69.

that which is subject to the limits of the latter, as is the case with discursive thought. In this fundamental sense, then, we may and must say that God is incomprehensible. The comprehensibility of God follows from the difference which obtains between Creator and creature.

In connection with this understanding of the limits of discursive thought, Gregory advocates the *via negativa* and a corresponding attitude of awe and silence in the presence of the divine οὐσία. We must learn, he says, to honor "in silence what transcends speech and thought,"[9] to approach God in an attitude of reverent awe before his majesty and goodness. Our apprehension of God begins, therefore, with a recognition of what he is *not*:

> The simplicity of the True Faith assumes God to be that which He is, viz., incapable of being grasped by any term, or any idea, or any other device of our apprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of human but of the angelic and of all supra-mundane intelligence, unthinkable, unutterable, above all expression in words, having but one name that can represent his proper nature, the single name of being "Above every name."[10]

The same emphasis upon the *via negativa* and the incomprehensibility of the divine οὐσία is reiterated by Gregory as follows:

> Now if anyone should ask for some interpretation, and description, and explanation of the divine essence, we are not going to deny that in this kind of wisdom we are unlearned, acknowledging only so much as this, that it is not possible that that which is by nature infinite should be comprehended in any conception expressed by words.[11]

For Gregory the Godhead is "invisible, incorporeal, intangible, and formless";[12] none of the ordinary categories of human thought are applicable to the divine οὐσία.

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[9] *Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book I, 147.

[10] *Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book I, 99. Gregory's language here certainly is reminiscent of a neo-Platonic conception of God as pure being, incapable of being named and thereby limited in any way. Gregory, however, rejects the agnosticism inherent to neo-Platonism and insists, as we shall see, that God can truly be known through his works.

[11] *Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book I, 146.

[12] *Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book I, 240.

It is important to be aware of the specific context for this discussion of the incomprehensibility of God in Gregory's writings. Gregory was concerned to answer the Arian, Eunomius, who taught that the term ἀγεννήτος ("unbegotten") was one which *circumscribed* the οὐσία of God. According to Eunomius this term was not merely a *privative*, that is to say, a term which denotes what God is not, but a term which tells us something positive about the οὐσία of God, what he is. It was the one term, according to Eunomius, which decisively distinguished the Father from the Son and the Spirit. Since neither the Son nor the Spirit were ἀγεννήτος ("unbegotten"), and since this term circumscribed the divine οὐσία, it was easy for Eunomius to advance his Arian claim that the Father alone was truly divine against the orthodox view of the consubstantiality of Father, Son and Spirit.

In his response to Eunomius, Gregory was concerned to argue against this distinction between the Father and the Son by stressing the incomprehensibility of the divine οὐσία. Nevertheless, in the course of this argument, he also presents an alternative to the position of Eunomius which affords a basis for applying terms to God without fallaciously *identifying* the denotation of these terms with their referent, the divine οὐσία. For this purpose Gregory distinguishes between the οὐσία and the ἐνέργεια ("energies") or "operations" of God, and argues that our "conceptions" (ἐπίνοια) of God are only applicable to the divine ἐνέργεια. Thus Gregory retains his emphasis upon the incomprehensibility of God, while protecting himself against a form of agnosticism by speaking of our knowledge of God as it is derived by reflection upon his ἐνέργεια.

Gregory summarizes the position of Eunomius, when he says, "he refuses to admit that ungenerate can be predicated of God by way of conception."[13] Eunomius and the Arians, in other words, "maintain that the divine nature is simply ungeneracy *per se*, and declaring this to be sovereign and supreme they make this word comprehend the whole greatness of Godhead."[14] This position, according to Gregory, does not recognize the distinction that must be drawn between God's οὐσία which is incomprehensible, and God's ἐνέργεια which we know by way of our conceptions:

> God is of Himself what also He is believed to be, but He is named by those who call upon Him, not what He is essentially

[13]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V, 255.
[14]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V, 251.

(for the nature of Him who alone is unspeakable), but He receives His appellations from what are believed to be His operations in regard to our life.[15]

The fallacy, then, in Eunomius' position is his failure to note that "to be, and to be called, are not convertible terms."[16] The names or terms that we use to speak of God are not convertible with the divine οὐσία, for they are "derived from His operations by the process of conception."[17] While Gregory, as the quote above indicates, refuses to separate or juxtapose the divine οὐσία and the divine ἐνέργεια — "God is of Himself what also He is believed to be"! — he resists any identification of the two and regards all human knowledge of the Godhead to be exhausted in our conceptions of the divine ἐνέργεια. It is only, therefore, as God makes himself known in these ἐνέργεια that human thought is able to come to some conception of the divine nature, assuming that God in his works *ad extra* is faithful to who he is of himself, *ad intra*.

Since our knowledge is of this sort, Gregory concludes his discussion of the incomprehensibility of God by introducing the idea of *accommodation* and *analogy*. In spite of the fact that our knowledge of God is limited to those conceptions which are derived by reflection upon his ἐνέργεια, Gregory wants to affirm that this knowledge is sufficient for our limited capacity. As he puts it, "we may apply terms to God by way of accommodation,"[18] recognizing that they are adequate in respect of

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[15]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, 265.

[16]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, 266.

[17]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, 285. Gregory defines conceptions or ἐπίνοια as: "an operation of the mind, which depends on the deliberate choice of those who speak, having no independent subsistence, but subsisting only in the fact of things said" (284). He thus refuses, unlike Eunomius who speaks of ἀγεννήτος as the name God himself has chosen and revealed as exhaustive of his οὐσία, to grant a status to our terms or conceptions which would deny the inadequacy of our thought to circumscribe the divine οὐσία.

[18]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, 263. Readers acquainted with John Calvin's doctrine of revelation, particularly his understanding of God's "accomodation" (*attemperans*) of his Word to our understanding, will recognize similarities between Gregory and Calvin's view. Both Gregory and Calvin employ the language of "accomodation" to affirm the *truthfulness* and *creaturely character* of our knowledge of God through revelation. We know God truly through his revelation, but we know him as creatures only could know him, in a manner accomodated to our creatureliness. In my judgment, when Gregory and Calvin declare that we cannot know God's essence or being, though we can know God as he reveals himself in his works, they do not mean to permit agnosticism. We truly know who God *is*. But this knowledge *does not*

our limited capacity, although in no wise exhaustive of God's οὐσία. For example, Gregory notes that we must apply diverse terms to God; this is a legitimate part of the process of conceptualization, even though we know that the diversity of terms which arises from our consideration of God's ἐνέργεια does not imply that the divine οὐσία is composite.[19] These terms are *analogies*, none of which may be substituted for that to which they refer: "For if we have learned any names expressive of the knowledge of God, all these are related and have analogy to such names as denote human characteristics."[20] Thus, after having argued for the incomprehensibility of God, and after having limited our knowledge of God to those conceptions which are derived from his ἐνέργεια toward us, Gregory acknowledges a real and sufficient knowledge of God. This knowledge is adequate, although it is dependent upon the use of analogy or the use of terms applied to God by way of accommodation.

Gregory's Doctrine of the Trinity: μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑπόστασις

It is with this awareness of the incomprehensibility of God and the limitations of our knowledge that Gregory develops his understanding of the Trinity. On the one hand, he recognizes that any attempt to understand the Trinity will never reach or exhaust the unutterable οὐσία of God; the *doctrine* of the Trinity is not to be substituted for the Subject of this doctrine — to be and to be called are not convertible. But on the other hand, as we have seen, Gregory is also convinced of the possibility and the need for human conceptualization on the basis of God's ἐνέργεια. It is in connection with this possibility and need that Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity must be understood.

In his doctrine of the Trinity, Gregory follows Basil in speaking of μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑπόστασεις, "one essence, three subsistences." This terminology and the fixing of its meaning was the common achievement of the three Cappadocians. Prior to this achievement, these terms, in

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comprehend him. On this, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. XX of *The Library of Christian Classics* (ed. by John T. McNeill; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I.xiii. 1-6.

[19]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V, 285. In the history of Christian theology, the doctrine of the *numeric oneness* and *simplicity* of the divine essence has often conflicted or been in tension with the doctrine of the Trinity. Something of this tension can be seen in Gregory's discussion at this point. Cf. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23/1 (April, 1988): 37-53.

[20]*Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V, 260.

addition to terms like φύσις and ὁμοούσιος which played an important role in Trinitarian and Christological discussions, were not clearly distinguished and covered a wide range of meanings. The most significant example of this fact was the originally synonymous meaning of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις themselves.[21] The great accomplishment, therefore, of the Cappadocians was the way in which they defined and distinguished οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in their conception of the Trinity, and in this way met the concern of the Western Church that their doctrine of τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις was tri-theistic, a concern which arose by virtue of the fact that the Latin equivalent for ὑποστάσεις could only sound tri-theistic to the West which had come to speak of the Trinity according to Tertullian's terminology, *una substantia, tres personae*. While the Cappadocians shared Athanasius' aversion to disputes about terms rather than the proper "sense" which was to be conveyed, their decision to use this terminology in the way they defined it was to prevail as the common Trinitarian terminology in the Greek-speaking theological tradition.[22]

The place to begin a treatment of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity and understanding of these terms is with his distinction between two types of terms. The first type, says Gregory, are those "predicated of subjects plural and numerically various," those which indicate "common nature" (κοινόν φύσις).[23] An instance of this type would be the term "man" predicated of Peter, James and John as plural and numerically distinct subjects. This term is common to all three insofar as they share

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[21]See G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952), 197; Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1977), who traces the history of the term *ousia* in the philosophical and theological tradition up to Nicea.

[22]The Eastern theologians regarded with some suspicion the preference of the Western church for the term πρόσωπον ("person"). Since this term originally meant "face," "expression," or "mask," it was liable to a modalist interpretation (the three divine "Persons" are only three different "faces" of the one divine Subject or Person). The Eastern theologians, including Gregory, wanted to protect the individual "subsistence" of each of the three Persons and, accordingly, preferred the term ὑπόστασις. This evoked the suspicion in the West that the Eastern theologians were tri-theists, since ὑπόστασις was virtually synonymous to them with οὐσία. Matters were further complicated, when in the later Christological controversies, this trinitarian usage was reversed. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Vol. III of *The Christian Tradition*, 81: "In the Trinity, 'nature' and 'ousia' referred to that which was one, 'hypostasis' or 'person' to that which was more than one; in the person of Christ 'nature' or 'ousia' referred to that which is more than one, 'hypostasis' or ' person' to that which was one."

[23]*Epistle 38, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. VIII, 137.

a common human nature. The second type of term has a more limited denotation; terms of this type are not common (κοινόν) but particular (ἴδιον, ἰδιαζον, ἰδίοματα).[24] In his discussion of this type, Gregory uses various expressions, of which the most important are: "identifying peculiarities of character" (τὰ τοῦ ἔθους γνωρίσματα), "identifying peculiarities" (γνωριστικαὶ ἰδιότητης), or simply the "particular" (τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον). Despite this diversity of terminology, the central distinction between these two types of terms seems to be that between the common (κοινόν) and the particular (ἴδιον).

It is in connection with this distinction between two types of terms that Gregory elaborates his view of the Trinity as μία οὐσία τρεῖς ὑπόστασεις. He writes:

> Those who are described by the same definition of essence or substance are of the same essence or substance (ὁμοούσιοι) when the enquirer has learned what is common, and turns his attention to the differentiating properties whereby the one is distinguished from another, the definition by which each is known will no longer tally in all particulars with the definition of another, even though in some points it be found to agree.[25]

When we speak of one οὐσία or φύσις, therefore, we are speaking of what is common to the three ὑπόστασεις of the Trinity; the three, Father, Son and Spirit, are of the same essence or substance. But when we speak of three ὑπόστασεις, we do so in respect of that which differentiates the one ὑπόστασις from another; the three are distinguished by their differentiating properties or that which is peculiar to the one and not the other. For this reason Gregory notes that "[t]hat which is spoken of in a special and peculiar manner is indicated by the name of hypostasis":

> This, then, is the hypostasis, or "understanding," not the indefinite conception of the essence or substance, which, because what is signified is general, finds no "standing," but the conception which by means of the expressed peculiarities gives *standing* and circumscription to the general and uncircumscribed.[26]

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[24]*Epistle 38, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. VIII, 137.

[25]*Epistle 38, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. VIII, 137.

[26]*Epistle 38, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. VIII, 137-138.

It is with this understanding of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις that Gregory develops his doctrine of the Trinity.

In the elaboration of the distinguishing characteristics of Father, Son and Spirit, Gregory makes it clear that ὑπόστασις is to be understood as the "mode of existence" (τρόπος ὑπάρξις) peculiar to each. The distinction between the three ὑπόστασεις or Persons is a distinction between three modes of existence or three immanent, mutual relations within the Godhead. Gregory, in his elaboration of this point, asserts that these three modes of existence are known through the *causal* relation which obtains within the Godhead between Father, Son and Spirit:

> Although we acknowledge the nature is undifferentiated, we do not deny a distinction with respect to causality. That is the only way by which we distinguish one Person from the other, by believing, that is, that one is the cause and the other depends on the cause.[27]

Father, Son and Spirit are three modes of existence, each of whom is related and distinguished from the other, not in terms of their common nature or single οὐσία, but in terms of this causal relation that obtains between them.

Due to the occasional nature of Gregory's writings, the distinction that he draws between the three ὑπόστασεις is not always stated in precisely the same way. In his first work against Eunomius, he speaks of the Father as "uncreate and ungenerate," of the Son as "uncreate and only-begotten," and of the Spirit as "neither ungenerate, nor . . . only-begotten: this it is that constitutes His chief peculiarity."[28] His distinction between the three is, however, more elaborate in his *Answer to Abladius*:

> There is that which depends on the first cause and that which is derived from what immediately depends on the first cause. Thus the attribute of being only-begotten without doubt remains with the Son, and we do not question that the Spirit is derived from the Father. For the mediation of the Son, while it guards his prerogative of being only-begotten, does not exclude the relation which the Spirit has by nature to the Father.[29]

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[27]*An Answer to Abladius, LCC*, III, 266.
[28]*Against Eunomius*, Second Series, Vol. V. Book I, 61.
[29]*An Answer to Abladius, LCC*, III, 266.

Here Gregory distinguishes between the Father, Son and Spirit in terms of their respective modes of existence, and elaborates the causal relation that obtains between them: the Father is immediately the cause of the Son and mediately the cause of the Spirit, since the Spirit derives his existence from the Father not directly but indirectly, that is, through the Son who derives immediately from the Father as only-begotten. The same basic position is evident in Gregory's work *On The Holy Spirit*:

> We confess that, save His being contemplated as with peculiar attributes in regard of Person, the Holy Spirit is indeed from God, and of the Christ (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστί καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστί), according to Scripture, but that, while not to be confounded with the Father in being never originated, nor with the Son in being Only-begotten, and while to be regarded separately in certain distinctive properties, He has in all else, as I have just said, an exact identity with them.[30]

Thus the three ὑπόστασεις of the Trinity are causally related the one to the other, such that to speak of or differentiate the one is to speak of or differentiate the other. The three are indissolubly united within the one Godhead; one cannot speak of the Father without immediately speaking of the Son, and one cannot speak of the Father and the Son without speaking of the Spirit, who is *of* the Father *through* the Son.[31]

While we hope to treat further Gregory's argument for the unity of οὐσία between the three ὑπόστασεις in our next section in connection with a common criticism brought against his position, it is important that we note Gregory's concern both to differentiate, as we have just seen, between Father, Son and Spirit, and to establish their unity. For Gregory, Father, Son and Spirit are one in οὐσία; there is a "community of substance" (κατά τὴν οὐσίαν κοινότης) between them. This community is more than a mere "partnership"[32] between the ὑπόστασεις in the one Godhead: "the communion and distinction apprehended in Them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the continuity of nature

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[30]*On the Holy Spirit, LNPNF*, Second series, Vol. V, 315.

[31]Karl Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den grossen Kappadozieren* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlich Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 214, summarizes Gregory's view: "Dann fahrt Gregor fort: das eine (der Vater) sei *aition*, das andere (Sohn und Geist) *ek tou aitiou*. Innerhalb des letzeren sei jedoch wieder ein Unterschied: das eine (der Sohn) sei *prosekos ek tou protou*, das andere (der Geist) *dia tou prosekos ek tou protou* (durch den Sohn)."

[32]*Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book II, 107.

being never rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostases, nor the notes of distinction confounded in the community of essence."[33] The category of number, therefore, must not be introduced into the Trinity, as this would lead to polytheism:

the Church ... believes the Only-begotten to be verily God, and abhors the superstition of polytheism; and for this cause does not admit the difference of essences, in order that the Godheads may not by divergence of essence, fall under the conception of number (for this is nothing else than to introduce polytheism into our life).[34]

As we saw in our discussion above, one of the analogies which Gregory puts forward in illustration of the consubstantiality of Father, Son and Spirit, is that of three persons, Peter, James and John, who share the common term or predicate "man."[35]

For Gregory it is a "customary misuse" of language to speak of persons who do not differ in nature as "many men":

the nature is one, united in itself, a unit completely indivisible, which is neither increased by addition nor diminished by subtraction, being and remaining essentially one, inseparable even when appearing in plurality, continuous and entire, and not divided by the individuals who share in it.[36]

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[33]*Epistle 38, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. VIII, 139.

[34]*Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book IV, 163. Cf. R. Arnou, "Unité numerique et unite de nature chez les Peres, apres le Concile de Nice," *Gregorianum*, Vol. XV, No. 15, 242-254, for a discussion of the Father's including Gregory's understanding of the unity of the Godhead and the applicability of the category of quantity and number in this connection.

[35]See *An Answer to Abladius, LCC*, 257ff. In recent Trinitarian discussions, there has been a renewed interest in emphasizing the "threeness" rather than the "oneness" side of the classic Trinitarian formulations of the early church. Cf. e.g.: Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," 37-53; Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1952); Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: James Nisbet, 1943). Plantinga uses the analogy of three different, individual persons for the Trinity, though without, in my judgment, adequately protecting himself against tri-theism. As I shall argue, Gregory did seek carefully to guard himself against this misunderstanding.

[36]See *An Answer to Abladius, LCC*, 258.

While such an analogy has its limitations — Gregory also uses the analogy of several gold coins and one nature of gold[37] — it serves to indicate what it means to speak of three ὑπόστασεις and one οὐσία. If it is improper, for example, to speak of "many men" or "several golds," since this is to ignore the unity of οὐσία and common nature that obtains between them, how much more inappropriate is it to speak of several, numerically diverse essences or natures within the Godhead.

Tri-theism and the Neo-Nicene Interpretation of μία οὐσία

Although our summary of Gregory's position on the Trinity is an attenuated one, it at least provides a sketch of the most significant aspects of his doctrine. Our consideration of his position must now address itself to an oft-repeated criticism of Gregory's and the Cappadocian's doctrine of the Trinity, namely, that it is tri-theistic or at least insufficiently guarantees the unity of the Godhead.

This criticism has been voiced from several quarters. Pelikan, in his major work on the history of doctrine, argues that the Cappadocians, including Gregory, identified the Godhead or divine οὐσία with "a kind of Platonic universal," as is indicated by their illustration of three men who share a common human nature.[38] This identification created a need for the Cappadocians to defend themselves against the danger of tritheism. Reinhold Seeberg similarly charges that "[t]hese Fathers — in league with the world — framed orthodoxy in the Grecian mould," a development which led to "the doctrine of the *like-natured, triune* God" rather than of "the *one-natured, three-fold* God."[39] Behind these charges, both of which interpret the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity as at least susceptible of a tritheistic interpretation, is what has come to be called the "Neo-Nicene" interpretation of the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity.

According to J.F. Bethune-Baker, this interpretation disputes the conventional wisdom which had assumed that "the final decision at Constantinople was a complete victory for the Nicene Creed and the doctrine of which Athanasius is commonly regarded as the chief literary

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[37]See *An Answer to Abladius, LCC,* 265.

[38]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), Vol. I of *The Christian Tradition,* 221ff.

[39]Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), Vol. I, 232.

and controversial representative."[40] Against this traditional interpreta-
tion, Harnack and others have asserted that the Cappadocians attached
a sense like ὁμοιούσιος to the Nicene ὁμοούσιος, which is to say, their
position is not so much Nicene as it is "Neo-Nicene." Bethune-Baker
summarizes this interpretation as follows:

> Of old, it is argued, it had been the unity of the God-head that
> had stood out plain and clear; the plurality had been a mystery.
> But after the council of Alexandria in 362, it was permitted to
> make the unity the mystery — to start from the plurality and to
> reduce the unity to a matter of likeness; that is to say, to
> interpret Homo-ousios as Homoi-ousios, so changing the
> 'substantial' unity of being into mere likeness of being.[41]

On this interpretation, it is argued that the Cappadocians' position was,
if not tri-theistic, at least one where the unity of the Godhead is not
sufficiently articulated. In the elaboration of this view, it is assumed that
the term, οὐσία, stands either for a Platonic universal as Pelikan
suggests, or for an Aristotelian *genus* as others suggest;[42] this universal
or *genus* is then said to be that which the three ὑπόστασεις share, as
three men share a common human nature.

There are several ways in which this criticism might be considered.
One such way would be to consider the particular view of the Trinity
which informs this criticism of Gregory and the Cappadocians. In this
case it might be suggested that the critics are biased either by a Western
doctrine of the Trinity which has its own danger, namely, modalism, or
by an aversion to the doctrine of the Trinity *per se*, as it is judged to
conflict with the simplicity of the gospel (to echo Harnack's method-
ological presumption regarding the development of dogma).

Another possible way to answer this criticism would be to acknow-
ledge the particular historical context within which the Cappadocians
developed their view, that is, their battle against the Arian denial of the
Son's consubstantiality with the Father. With this context in view, it is
not difficult to understand why the Cappadocians began with the
distinction between the ὑπόστασεις rather than with their unity.

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[40]J.F. Bethune-Baker, *The Meaning of Homoousios in the "Constantinople" Creed*,
(Cambridge: At the University Press, 1901), 3.

[41]J.F. Bethune-Baker, *The Meaning of Homoousios in the "Constantinople" Creed*, 3-4.

[42]Cf. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 229.

But the most important way in which this criticism might be considered, and the way I propose to follow, is to see whether it holds true for Gregory's doctrine itself. Is there evidence that Gregory not only recognized the danger of tritheism but also guarded himself against it?

It seems to me that there are several ways, some of which we have already alluded to, by which Gregory successfully meets this criticism. Although there may be others as well, there are four aspects in particular of Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity which answer the charge of tri-theism and, I believe, sufficiently guard the unity of the Godhead: first, his distinction between the ineffable divine οὐσία and the divine ἐνέργεια; second, his understanding of the significance and limits of the analogy of three persons who share a common nature; third, his implicit doctrine of περιχώρησις (*perichoresis*) or *circuminsessio* whereby the unity of the three ὑπόστασεις in their activity *ad extra* is maintained;[43] and fourth, his understanding of the causal relations which exist within the Godhead.

It is not necessary for us to develop in detail Gregory's distinction between the divine οὐσία and the divine ἐνέργεια, since we have treated it in our first section above. Here it is sufficient to note that those who interpret Gregory's position as tritheistic, assume that Gregory uses the terms οὐσία and φύσις or nature interchangeably or synonymously. When, therefore, Gregory speaks of three ὑπόστασεις which share a common nature, these interpreters assume that the unity of the three ὑπόστασεις is merely a unity of nature or unity in kind. That is to say, the unity of the three ὑπόστασεις is understood as a unity of likeness, and it is assumed that the unity of οὐσία (κατά οὐσίαν) which obtains between them *adds nothing* to this unity.

But this is to deny the significant sense in which Gregory distinguishes the divine οὐσία and the divine φύσις. For Gregory, Father, Son and Spirit *share* a common nature but are severally *one*, ineffable οὐσία or substance. Our knowledge of God is restricted to those conceptions which are derived from our apprehension of the divine ἐνέργεια; in this connection we are able to come to know something of the divine φύσις and attributes which the three ὑπόστασεις share. But while Gregory will

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[43]The language I am using here is anachronistic, since it was John of Damascus who later coined the terminology of περιχώρησις to describe the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a singular "life together" of perfect unity of will, purpose and love. Gregory, without using this terminology, certainly understood this aspect of the unity of being between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

speak of a common nature which the three ὑπόστασεις share, he will not speak of a common or shared οὐσία in precisely the same sense. His position is, rather, that the divine οὐσία is the one, ineffable "Subject" which Father, Son and Spirit do not share but are;[44] there is both a likeness or unity of nature between them and sameness or identity of οὐσία upon which this unity of nature is based. As Bethune-Baker puts it:

> The main idea of Basil, as of the other Cappadocians, is that the *ousia* of the Godhead cannot be understood, but that its attributes and nature may be known from revelation; and this being so they speak more readily of the *physis*, which can be known in some measure, as that in which the community of life in the Holy Trinity consists.[45]

This interpretation is required by Gregory's clear distinction between the one, ineffable Subject or divine οὐσία and those attributes which we conceive to be characteristic of the divine nature on the basis of our apprehension of the divine ἐνέργεια.

It is, however, Gregory's use of three persons who share a common nature that is most responsible for many attributing tri-theism to his position. The illustration of Peter, James and John who, according to Gregory, share a common nature and are, therefore, one, seems clearly to imply tri-theism to those who interpret this common nature in the sense either of a Platonic universal or Aristotelian *genus*. But this interpretation fails to acknowledge the force of Gregory's own claim and conviction that to speak of Peter, James and John as "many men" is a *misuse* of language, and that this is all the more true in respect of the Godhead for which this case is only an analogy. Gregory makes the point of this analogy clear in the statement which we quoted earlier:

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[44]*Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book VII, 198.

[45]Bethune-Baker, *The Meaning of Homoousios in the Constantinople' Creed*, 50. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 234, correctly says of the term *physis*: "It refers to much the same thing as ousia, but it is more descriptive, and bears rather on function, while ousia is metaphysical and bears on reality. The Persons of the Trinity have one physis because they have one energeia: their activity is in each case divine and that divine activity admits of no variation. Physis, therefore, more readily than ousia, supports a generic meaning." With respect to the term, *ousia*, he also rightly says, 242: "By ousia they (the Cappadocians) meant a single identical object, regarded from the standpoint of metaphysical reality, not merely similarity of being."

the nature is one, united in itself, a unit completely indivisible, which is neither increased by addition nor diminished by subtraction, being and remaining *essentially one*, inseparable even when appearing in plurality, continuous and entire, and not divided by the individuals who share in it.[46]

Whatever Gregory intends with this analogy, and whatever its limitations, it is evident that he is not only speaking of a unity in kind but also of a unity in οὐσία; according to substance (κατὰ οὐσίαν), they are and remain one. So interpreted, this analogy does not require a tritheistic interpretation of Gregory's doctrine; such a charge can only be sustained if Gregory's own interpretation of the analogy is slighted and the critic imposes a particular assumption upon Gregory's position. The latter seems to be the case when this unity is described as "merely" that of three particulars which share or participate in some such category as a Platonic universal or Aristotelian *genus*.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Gregory's answer to the question of tri-theism was his stress upon the unity of the three ὑπόστασεις in their ἐνέργεια or operations, a position which was later to be termed περιχώρησις (coinherence) or *circuminsessio*. Between the three ὑπόστασεις, Father, Son and Spirit, there is a community of will and operation:

We do not learn that the Father has something on his own, in which the Son does not co-operate. Or again, that the Son acts on his own without the Spirit. Rather does every operation which extends from God to creation and is designated according to our different conceptions of it have its origin in the Father, proceed through the Son, and reach its completion by the Holy Spirit.[47]

This community of will is based, according to Gregory, upon a unity of οὐσία: "For the community of nature gives us warrant that the will of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, and thus, if the Holy Spirit will that which seems good to the Son, the community of will clearly points to unity of essence."[48] Gregory describes this unity

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[46]*An Answer to Abladius, LCC,* 258. Emphasis is mine.

[47]*An Answer to Abladius, LCC,* 261-262. Cf. *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V., 272.: "If the Father will anything, the Son who is in the Father knows the Father's will, or rather He is Himself the Father's will."

[48]*On The Holy Spirit, LNPNF,* Second Series, Vol. V, 324.

of will and operation as being rooted in the *love* which the Father has for the Son, the Son for the Father, and the Spirit for the Father and the Son, a love which binds the three together in perfect community. This love is disclosed in the Father's giving the Son, the Son's perfect obedience to the Father, and the Spirit's completion of this work of self-giving and obedience. In the same fashion, Gregory speaks of the reciprocal glorification between Father, Son and Spirit: "The Son is glorified by the Spirit; the Father is glorified by the Son; again the Son has His glory from the Father; and the Only-begotten thus becomes the glory of the Spirit."[49] If the profound depth of this unity of will and operation between Father, Son and Spirit, as Gregory develops it, is given its due, then it is difficult to see how the charge of tri-theism is to be sustained.

In his discussion of the distinction between the three ὑπόστασεις, Father, Son and Spirit, Gregory speaks, as noted, of three modes of existence. Following Basil these three modes of existence are distinguished in terms of the mutual relation between them, a relation which is defined in terms of causality. For our purposes it is important to see that, for Gregory, one cannot speak of the Father without speaking of the Son, or of the Father and the Son, without speaking of the Spirit; the three ὑπόστασεις are *causally distinguished, but this distinction itself entails an indissoluble bond between them.* The Father guarantees the unity of the Godhead in his mode of existence as "first cause," immediately of the Only-begotten, and mediately of the Spirit through the Son. This priority of the Father, therefore, serves to underscore the unity of the Godhead, while retaining the distinction between the ὑπόστασεις.

While each of these aspects might have been elaborated further, collectively they serve to refute the charge of tri-theism brought against Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity. They also serve to answer the so-called Neo-Nicene interpretation of the Cappadocians. The distinction Gregory draws between the divine οὐσία and the divine ἐνέργεια and φύσις, his understanding of the customary misuse of language in respect of three persons who share a common nature, his anticipation of the later doctrine of περιχώρησις, and his treatment of the three ὑπόστασεις of the Trinity as three modes of existence — each of these argues against tri-theism and for a doctrine of *one* God, Father, Son and Spirit.

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[49]Cf. E. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970), 280-282; Stead, *Divine Substance*, 157ff., 267-280.

The fruit of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel?

It has been our primary purpose in this article to summarize Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of the Trinity. In doing so we have attempted to isolate the basic aspects of his position, without treating in any detail the historical and religious setting within which Gregory worked as Bishop of the See of Nyssa. As a result, our presentation has been a bit artificial and liable to give the impression that, for Gregory, the doctrine of the Trinity was *exclusively* a speculative problem. That impression is, of course, misguided, for Gregory's position was one which was forged in the fires of his struggle with the Arians, particularly Eunomius. It was, as far as Gregory was concerned, a struggle for a proper understanding of Christian revelation and the Christian faith derived from it.

But even were we to have treated Gregory's position in close connection with his own historical situation and religious concerns, there is a larger set of questions that a discussion of his and the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity raises. Is this doctrine not far removed from the simplicity of the Christian gospel? Is it not the fruit of a foreign spirit, the Greek, upon the soil of the gospel? Is this doctrine of the Trinity anything other than a speculative concern, an impious attempt to reduce the incomprehensible mystery of the Triune God to a set of manageable terms? May we even use such terms as οὐσία or ὑπόστασις with respect to God? Or have such terms been imported from Greek philosophy and imposed upon a biblical frame-work which is not so much interested in "what God is" as it is in "what God does"?[50] In order to understand this doctrine, are we not forced to accept a large number of assumptions that are no longer operative, assumptions which Christian theologians like Gregory inherited from their intellectual milieu?[51] These questions and others have been raised

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[50]Calvin faced similar questions in the context of the Reformation. During the period of his contention with Pierre Caroli in 1537 and 1540, he refused Caroli's challenge, though without heretical intention, to declare his acceptance of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds. Later, in his *Institutes* (I.xiii. 1-6), he acknowledged that the terminology of the Creed, though not explicitly drawn from the Scriptures, properly and indispensably expresses Scriptural teaching. By coming to this acknowledgment, Calvin endorsed the conviction of the Fathers: these terms are needed to expound Scriptural teaching and to guard against heresy.

[51]Cf. H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), Vol. I, 98.

ad nauseam by interpreters and critics of the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity.

It is not my purpose in this conclusion to answer all of these questions, as this would take us far afield of our initial intention to summarize Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity. But I should like to make several comments, based upon Gregory's own consideration of this doctrine (these questions were not unknown to Gregory!), which do address them in part.

With respect to the charge that Gregory's doctrine seeks to comprehend the incomprehensible, to apply terms to God which are inapplicable, it has been an underlying thesis of this article that Gregory's doctrine was a sophisticated attempt both to emphasize the incomprehensibility of God and to provide a basis for a limited form of human conceptualization of who God is based upon his revelation in his ἐνέργεια. His refutation of Eunomius is wholly based upon his acknowledgement of the ineffability of the divine οὐσία, coupled with a specific understanding of the use of analogy, of accommodation, and of human conception (ἐπίνοια) in that knowledge of God which is sufficient for our limited capacity as creatures. For Gregory, therefore, the use of such terms as οὐσία or ὑπόστασις is not an attempt to exhaust the inexhaustible; it is, rather, a refutation of an agnosticism that disallows any talk about God, for Gregory is convinced that God has made himself known in his ἐνέργεια and that God is of himself what he is believed to be on the basis of this revelation.

A more fundamental criticism is involved in these questions, however, and that is whether Gregory has not illegitimately subjected the gospel or the biblical witness to foreign categories, categories derived from a Greek philosophical tradition which is irreconcilable with Christianity.

This criticism is many-sided and we clearly cannot do it justice here. But it is based upon an assumption that Gregory would be unwilling to grant, namely, that Christian theology's use of these terms compromised the gospel and the teaching of Scripture. Though Gregory, preferring to speak of philosophy as the "handmaiden" of Christian theology, may have succumbed to the temptation to distort Scriptural teaching in other areas, this is not the case with his doctrine of the Trinity.[52]

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[52]Aloys Grillmeier, in his *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. I, *From theApostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (2nd rev. ed.; London: A. R. Mowbray & Co, Ltd., 1975), 555-556, answers the charge that the church Fathers "hellen-

Although Gregory was aware of points where the philosophical tradition with which he was acquainted differed from Christian doctrine, this never became the occasion for him to repudiate secular learning as such; such learning he regarded as an indispensable ancillary to Christian theology. If such learning were despised, then Christian theology would in fact be no longer possible as an intellectual enterprise. For the alternative to this critical use of the Greek philosophical tradition could only be a form of biblicism which eschewed any attempt to reflect upon and formulate theological positions upon the basis of the Scripture's witness and message. While Gregory insisted upon the normativity of Scripture in his formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, he nowhere countenances a biblicism which would rule out the use of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, for example, simply because they were not biblical terms. Gregory frankly acknowledges that his doctrine of the Trinity is not biblical in anything like *this* sense, although he is equally insistent in his claim that it is, with the aid of the philosophical tradition of which he was a part, a biblically warranted and demanded elaboration of the Christian doctrine of God. This criticism, therefore, unless it wants to follow the path of biblicism, must establish that this philosophical tradition in particular, as Gregory understood and critically used it, is incompatible with a Christian theology and doctrine of God. Thus far this claim has more often been assumed than established.

Perhaps the most popular criticism, however, of the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity is the one which alleges that the biblical authors

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ized" the doctrine of Christ's person in a way that could equally well apply to Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity: "They [the technical formulas of the Christological Creeds] are intended to preserve the Christ of the gospels and the apostolic age for the faith of posterity. In all the christological formulas of the ancient church there is a manifest concern not to allow the total demand made on man's faith by the person of Jesus to be weakened by pseudo-solutions. It must be handed on undiminished to all generations of Christendom. On a closer inspection, the christological 'heresies' turn out to be a compromise between the original message of the Bible and the understanding of it in Hellenism and paganism. It is here that we have the real Hellenization of Christianity. . . . Now these formulas clarify only one, albeit the decisive point of belief in Christ: that in Jesus Christ God really entered into human history and thus achieved our salvation. If the picture of Christ is to be illuminated fully, these formulas must always be seen against the whole background of the biblical belief in Christ. They prove the church's desire for an ever more profound *intellectus fidei*, which is not to be a resolution of the *mysterium Christi*. None of the formulas, once framed, should be given up."

were not so much interested in "what God is" as they were in "what God does." Specifically, it is said that talk about the οὐσία of God is inappropriate and speculative.

It is difficult, of course, to respond to this criticism, for it is not always clear what it supposes the alternative is to any such talk about God's οὐσία or what it presumes the Cappadocian's view of this term to be. Without attempting to address these last two matters, it is evident that, for Gregory at least, talk about the οὐσία of God plays an important role.

On the one hand, he uses οὐσία in distinction from ἐνέργεια in order to speak of the *Subject* who is operative in these ἐνέργεια. The divine ἐνέργεια, thus, are not exhaustive of the οὐσία of God. In fact, these ἐνέργεια depend for their possibility upon the reality of a Subject who is at work through them. The significance of Gregory's use of οὐσία is, therefore to make this necessary distinction between being and doing, actor and his acts.[53] While Gregory is convinced that God is of himself what he is believed to be on the basis of his works, his use of οὐσία serves to indicate that our knowledge of God not only does not exhaust the ineffable but also presupposes that God is the Subject of his revelation and works. This categorical distinction between being and doing is not the fruit of some speculative interest as to "what God is" rather than "what God does"; it is simply a reflective use of language that the authors of this criticism often choose to ignore.

On the other hand, and this is but a corollary of what has just been said, Gregory's use of οὐσία serves an additional purpose. One of the significant senses of this term, a sense which Gregory and his contemporaries were aware of and shared, is that of a reality which exists in its own right. More precisely, Gregory's use of οὐσία not only makes the claim that "God exists" but also that his existence is of a particular kind: it is "more real" or more basic than that of any other form of existence.[54] By speaking of the divine οὐσία in this sense, Gregory

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[53]Cf. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 157, who makes much the same point in arguing for the importance of "substance language" in theology.

[54]In *Against Eunomius, LNPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, Book IV, 172-173, Gregory speaks of two "forms of being," "that which really *is*" (God) and "that which came into being" (the creature). Stead, *Divine Substance*, 271, makes a similar point: "By saying that God is a substance, we may be claiming that God is a reality in his own right, and not just the creation of our fancy; he is not the projection of a mood, or a mythical focus of religious aspirations."

wants to affirm that God alone, in contradistinction to the creature, is not dependent for his existence upon something external to himself.[55]

As I have admitted, these comments do not in themselves answer fully the questions cited above, nor do they anticipate every other question that might be raised. But they do illustrate that many of these questions were anticipated by Gregory himself, and that in this sense they should not be treated as if they were unknown to him and the early church fathers, especially the Cappadocians. Although Gregory's doctrine of the Trinity is not the last word on the subject, acknowledgement of the fact that not all these questions are new or even persuasive, may serve to illustrate how his position remains a significant touchstone for theological reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity, even though it is by no means the end of such reflection.

In his doctrine of the Trinity, Gregory assiduously sought to avoid the errors of undifferentiated monotheism on the one hand, and of tritheism on the other. He sought rather to speak, on the basis of the Triune God's revelation of himself in his works, of the mystery of the true and living God, *who is in himself as he has revealed himself to us — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.* Employing all the analytical and rhetorical skills at his command, Gregory sought to echo in his doctrine of the Trinity the revelation of God as the Father of the Son, the Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son.

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[55]I suspect that many of the more recent criticisms directed against the "substantialist" rather than "functional" categories of the patristic doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ are rooted in an unbiblical denial of God's freedom and independence from the creation. Doctrines of God and of the Trinity which reduce God's "being" to "what God does," which insist upon functional rather than ontological categories, deny God's reality *apart from and before* the creation and his dealings with the world. They are unable to say that God *is* eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, though he reveals himself to us in his works. At stake in the distinction between God's *being* and his *acts* is the distinction between God as Creator and the creation.